

# **MENARY MONITOR**

## ***THE STATE OF YOUTH IN THE MENA REGION***

### **2021: END OF YEAR REVIEW**



**MENAACTION**

For Youth By Youth

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In mid-March 2021, MENAACTION launched the Middle East and North Africa Region Youth Monitor (MENARY Monitor). MENARY Monitor, which been running for 47 straight weeks, provides weekly overview of all youth-related news and updates from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region within 7 categories: (a) politics and political engagement; (b) economics and entrepreneurship; (c) conflict; (d) development; (e) education; (f) environment; and (g) COVID-19. In analyzing each of the 7 categories, this report provides in-depth analysis of the state of youth in the region over the second half of 2021, with emphasis on the challenges and opportunities along with short-term recommendations for government and nongovernment organizations to address the challenges and leverage the opportunities.

## POLITICS AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the reporting period, citizens across the MENA Region erupted in various political movements and protests, as socioeconomic conditions continue to worsen across the region.

Demonstrations across the region ranged in purpose, including: 1) denouncing the use of force by security forces; 2) digital suppression of the Palestinian cause; 3) declining economic conditions; 4) increase of political repression; and most notably, 5) lack of effective and structural governments.

These protests, while vary in focus, are tied to the main underlying issue of lack of government responsiveness to the needs of citizens. In parallel, the demonstrations also represent a political investment by youth to create constructive change within, in many cases, nonfunctional governments.

In countries like Iraq, Libya and Lebanon, where government corruption is rampant, youth protest to demand the dismissal of corrupt politicians.

Meanwhile, Sudanese and Palestinian youth protested against their respective security forces that continued to meet civil movements with violence against citizens.

To address regional concerns and demonstrate their ability to play a central role in their countries' decision-making processes, youth across the Middle East led various efforts that aim to address local concerns.

Tunisian youth for example developed a social media platform where citizens can address their concerns over the country's youth unemployment rates and, by doing so, providing a platform where citizens and decision-makers can connect.



Tunisian, Lebanese and Egyptian youth activists discussed with and urged their local governments to develop an open space for youth political engagement.

Morocco and Iraq both held elections in 2021. Iraq's elections, which were held several months early in response to the mass anti-government protests that began in October 2019, marked the lowest turnout in Iraq's history, with only 41% of eligible voters participating, according to Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC).

The final results, announced more than a month later due to calls for a recount and intensified rejection from losing parties, showed that Iraq's populist Muqtada al-Sadr won the most seats—73 out of the 329 seats in the incoming parliament—followed by Taqadum with 37 seats, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) with 31 seats, State of Law with 33 seats, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) with 18 seats and Alfatah alliance with a

low 17 seats. Election results triggered an animus response from Iran-backed militias in Iraq, where on November 7, 2021, Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi survived an assassination attempt after drones laden with explosives targeted his residence in Baghdad.

In Morocco, as the government began to finalize election results, many newly elected youth representatives began entering office, untrained and lacking the knowledge to effectively meet the needs of the government and their constituents.

In October 2021, the new government began addressing some of its priorities, including boosting youth employment, improving the health and education sectors.

While the government did select a large number of youth within its ranks, many of them are first-time candidates that need training to effectively meet the needs of citizens.

## ECONOMICS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Governments across the Middle East have continued to attempt and address the economic decline caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic. While governments made various promises in expanding the labor market—with a focus on the employment of youth in the regions—unemployment rates

nevertheless continued to increase throughout the reporting period, leading to a stagnant economic decline and deterioration of living conditions in the region. The economic conditions in Lebanon especially have dramatically declined, pushing many Lebanese youth to leave the country.

Most notably, in the year of 2021, 70% of Moroccan youth and 45 percent of Jordanian youth have seriously considered emigrating abroad, mainly linked to the high unemployment rates in the country.

Several regional initiatives were launched in 2021 to address respective countries' economic concerns, including: the development of youth programs in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt

and Jordan to address youth unemployment, launch of several courses to improve youth entrepreneurship, organization of grant-based opportunities to support youth employment in the region, and launching a youth dialogue series to increase youth employment in diverse sectors. Some programs were launched to focus on vulnerable communities, such as women and persons with disabilities.

## CONFLICT

The withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan in 2021 has exacerbated the security situation in the country, as it enabled the Taliban to advance its nation-wide control. The withdrawal was met with various negative impacts, including the digression of women's' rights, democracy building, and a collapse in the education, freedom of expression, and financial/social independence.

The war in Yemen between the Houthi forces and Saudi-led coalition continues to be ongoing in its seventh year, with no end in sight as fighting intensifies and casualties grow among the Houthi and general Yemeni population. At least 10,000 children have been killed or maimed since the conflict's beginnings in 2014, and thousands more have been recruited into the fighting.

An estimated 2 million children are internally displaced. The trend of youth being entrapped and losing lives within this conflict will unfortunately continue into 2022 as neither side of the conflict – the Houthis or the Saudi-led coalition is willing to give up an inch. Saudi-led bombings continue to wreak devastation and loss of life among Yemeni youth.

The impact that the conflict in Syria has had on girls includes a rise in cases of child marriage as consequence of a lack of education and job market opportunities. Libya ended 2021 on a slightly more stable note that is heading towards a positive step in 2022. After almost 10 years of fragmentation and civil war, a Ceasefire Agreement between the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army of the



General Command of the Armed Forces was signed on 23 October 2020. The resulting creation in March 2021 of the Libyan Government of National Unity (GNU) established a provisional governmental structure while striking a delicate balance between regional power brokers and stakeholders throughout the nation.

One of the most remarkable conflicts of 2021 was an escalation of violence

occurring between the Palestinian parties and Israel which resulted in war in Gaza in addition to weeks of violence in the West Bank and Jerusalem, beginning in May. This was the deadliest eruption of violence between the Israeli–Palestinian fronts since 2014. 113,000 Palestinians were displaced from their destroyed homes at the peak of the conflict, and already precarious livelihoods and infrastructure decimated.

## DEVELOPMENT

Throughout 2021, regional leaders and youth have made several notable efforts to address development in the sectors of health, sustainability and training, capacity building, innovation and technology, and cultural preservation. Youth have led efforts to create structural change through a gendered lens by publishing a guide on the struggles women face in the fight for gender equality and preventing violence against women in all sectors.

Several stakeholders such as the African Development Bank, Germany, and the UAE have also launched funding initiatives that aim to address social stability and opportunity for youth in the region. Training opportunities also played a critical role in shaping youth engagement in 2021.

Over the second half of 2021, there were approximately 71 reported

activities providing training and capacity building for youth in the MENA region, many of which aimed to develop youth's employment and entrepreneurship skills. Because of COVID–19 restrictions, youth began developing engagement opportunities via social media and online campaigns. For example, Moroccan youth launched an online campaign called "Click and Protect", which aimed to mitigate cyberbullying and provide youth with the tools necessary to combat this issue.

To further develop technological opportunities in the region, several countries have implemented youth-oriented workshops that aim to expand youth's knowledge on various technological developments. This included engagement with artificial intelligence, discussions on the future of social media, and STEM awards.



## EDUCATION

COVID-19 has had a dramatic impact on the education sectors in the region. While the shift to online education was effective in different parts of the world, in the Middle East internet connection remains to be a looming issue that has led to the decrease of educational development in the region.

Access to both the internet and the devices necessary to participate in online education was determined by a family's financial situation, as highlighted in the featured article "An 'Illiterate Generation'—One of Iraq's

Untold Pandemic Stories."

Meanwhile, the battle for gender equality in education remained at the forefront for the region.

Youth-led initiatives in Universities addressed various concerns, including civic education training and environmental advocacy. Various research-focused initiatives were conducted to address supporting young writers and novelists in the development of their writing skills.

## ENVIRONMENT

The MENA region has faced several environmental concerns that were addressed by government and youth initiatives throughout the year.

The impact of climate change on the region has negatively impacted citizens in Jordan for example, which is ranked the second water poorest country in the world.

The low water levels have affected children's hygiene, student enrolment, attendance, and performance.

Food scarcity was highlighted as one of the main concerns in 2021's International Youth Day. The region's dependence on food imports continues to negatively impact the development of the agricultural sector.

Youth across the region led several online initiatives to address environmental concerns, including the "Be Positive and Support Your Climate" campaign; "Supportives" campaign; "Say No to Climate Change" campaign; and "Climate Health" campaign.

With concern over the impact that climate concerns will have on children in the region, states began taking initiatives to address challenges that vulnerable households face. This included a \$250 million project in Morocco to support the economic

inclusion of youth in rural areas and improve the marketing efficiency and environmental sustainability of agri-food value chains and \$300 million for cash transfers for vulnerable communities in Tunisia.

## COVID-19

In 2021, governments across the region continued to enforce COVID-19 restrictions. And while youth in the Middle East continued to launch awareness-raising campaigns to prevent the spread of the new Omicron variant, restaurants, hotels and other public sectors have taken steps to breach protocols. Restaurants in Iraq breached COVID-19 restrictions by paying bribes to security officials. Mandatory vaccination policies in Morocco were met with protests due to the lack of clear messaging on government protocols.

Youth in the region have launched several campaign initiatives to address citizen concerns over vaccine skepticism. By highlighting the negative impacts and side effects of COVID-19, online campaigns in Morocco pushed for citizens to get vaccinated. In Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, a group of youth launched an initiative to increase the number of oxygen generators in their respective local hospitals. Several education campaigns were launched in Egypt and Iraq to raise awareness on COVID-19 precautions.





# INTRODUCTION



## ABOUT MENARY MONITOR

On March 19, MENAACTION launched a new program to shed light on the conditions of youth in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This program, the Middle East and North Africa Youth Monitor (MENARY Monitor), is a weekly newsletter, a compilation of English, Arabic, French, Farsi, and Turkish news items from trusted sources.

MENARY Monitor is distributed on weekly basis to government institutions and policy makers, international organizations, researchers, and other relevant stakeholders. The main objective is to provide these

stakeholders with trusted, accurate, and accessible updates on all matters concerning youth in the MENA region to save them time and effort and provide them with the points of concern requiring action. MENARY Monitor aims to become the main source of all updates concerning youth of the MENA Region.

In doing so, it looks to provide policy makers, international and local organizations, and researchers with accessible, accurate, and timely updates, news items, commentary, and analysis to guide them towards the needs requiring action.

## OBJECTIVES

- ❖ An increase in youth specific policies across the region which are relevant to the needs of and issues facing youth.

MENARY Monitor will be delivered to policy makers of the region on weekly basis. Policy makers include government organizations, legislative institutions, judicial institutions, and other local government bodies. The Monitor will provide them with updates and policy implications to guide them towards addressing these implications and improve the conditions of young men and women.

MENAACTION and MENARY Monitor will keep track of all youth-relevant policies and produce commentaries and analysis along with policy recommendations and assess the extent to which they are adopted.

- ❖ An increase in relevant, efficient, and effective programs targeting youth in the region.

MENARY Monitor will also be delivered to a list of local and international nongovernment organizations along with major donors. The Monitor will include news items, updates, and

Policy analyses, providing them with entry points for their programs. MENAACTION will keep track of programs conducted following the establishment of MENARY Monitor and assess the extent to which these programs respond to the challenges discussed in the Monitor. Then, MENAACTION will revert to the organizations with recommendations on how to enhance the relevance of their programs.

- ❖ An increase in news reports on youth of the region, as more stories get covered, and more implications policies on youth are examined

MENARY Monitor will also be shared with the sources it will rely on. These sources will see that their news pieces are reaching, consolidated, to important actors. They are, thus, expected to enhance their coverage of youth-related issues.

## BENEFITS

MENARY Monitor looks to become one of the main resources of all youth-related news, updates, and policy issues in the MENA Region. The more widespread it gets, the more it will be able to bring its desired benefits. These benefits are as follows:

- ❖ Policy makers are provided with updates and policy implications to guide them towards addressing these implications and improve the conditions of young men and women. Their policies will be monitored weekly, and they will be provided with recommendations to improve the relevance and efficacy of such policies.
- ❖ International and local nongovernment organizations will be provided with information that can support their needs assessments, thus, improving the relevance and efficacy of their programs. MENARY Monitor will provide them with recommendations on the areas requiring action along with recommendations on improving their ongoing programs.
- ❖ MENARY Monitor will benefit news agencies and sources by bringing them more eyes to their products, and in turn, they are expected to continue and enhance their coverage of youth-related issues.

## THIS REPORT

This report reviews 25 editions of MENARY Monitor, starting with the first week of July up to the end of 2021. For this report, MENAACTION reviewed a total of 641 news sources and items ranging from Arabic, English, French, and Persian.

The report is divided into the following sections: (a) politics and political engagement; (b) economics and entrepreneurship; (c) conflict; (d) development; (e) education; (f) environment; and (g) COVID-19. Within each section, the report outlines the major updates and policy implications in addition to analyzing the implications on youth.

Each section also features articles (Spotlights) contributed by experts, researchers, and analysts examining one major challenge facing youth in the region and providing practical solutions. At the end of each section, the report provides a set of recommendations aiming at addressing the challenges discussed throughout the section, in the short-term.

The countries covered in this report include Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, UAE, and Yemen.

Section	Number of Sources Reviewed
Politics and Political Engagement	129
Economics and Entrepreneurship	148
Conflict	109
Development	119
Education	47
Environment	55
COVID-19	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>641</b>

*Figure 1: Number of Sources Reviewed for each Section*



A person wearing a black hooded garment is shown from the back, sitting against a blue textured background. They are holding a string of dark prayer beads in their hands. A semi-transparent white box with a thin green border is positioned at the bottom center of the image, containing the text "POLITICS AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT".

# POLITICS AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

## Political and Civil Unrest and Protests

Over the second half of 2021, civil and political unrest continued in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, driven by public dissatisfaction with economic conditions, unemployment, and crackdowns on rights and freedoms. 15 countries in the region witnessed notable protests and other forms of dissent.

In early July, thousands of Palestinians marched in Hebron in protest of the death of anti-corruption activist Nizar Banat, who was beaten by Palestinian Authority security officers before he died. Youth demonstrators chanted slogans calling on the Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas and his prime minister, Mohammad Shtayyeh, to step down, accusing Abbas of responsibility for the violent death of Banat, and they denounced the PA security forces for assaulting demonstrators, including the sexual harassment of several female journalists.

In addition to that, Salem Barahmeh of the Generation for Democratic Renewal spoke about young Palestinians' demands for political change and the state of repression in Palestine, and he addressed the killing of Nizar Banat and its emboldening of Palestinians to speak out against injustice.

Later that week, Palestinian youth and political groups also organized the "Palestine Flag March" in Umm Al-Fahm, where Hundreds of Palestinian citizens participated in the protest in response to Israel continued aggression in Jerusalem. This shows the continued struggles Palestinians face, as they have to endure repression by the Israelis as well as the PA. In fact, young Palestinians continued protests against the blockade, leading to dozens of injuries and one died after occupation forces used live fire against the demonstrators. Protesters demanded that Israel eases its restrictions under the blockade imposed back in 2007. In addition to that, the Palestinian Youth Movement protested in front of the White House in Washington in late August, calling for sanctions against Israel.

Palestinians also face major repression on the global scene. In fact, social media websites have been censoring Palestinian content and any content that shows any support for Palestine and the Palestinians. In response, Palestinians were using the watermelon emoji as a symbol for the Palestinian flag on social media to circumvent online censorship and content moderation. For years, Palestinians have used the watermelon in images and artwork as a metaphor for the Palestinian flag. Young Palestinians are now using it in their social media posts to spread the word about the Palestinian cause and challenge digital suppression.



The Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM) issued a statement urging PayPal to scrap working with the Anti-Defamation league (ADL) for its anti-Palestinian and Islamophobic track record. The statement added that the ADL has “a long and uninterrupted track record of working to censor and punish Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims for speaking out or organizing for Palestinian liberation.” PayPal had recently announced a partnership with ADL to investigate how extremist and hate movements use its financial platforms. However, PYM believes that such investigations are likely to result in the targeting of pro-Palestinian spaces, given ADL’s track record of doing exactly that.

Additionally, Palestinian youth, among other groups, came together to protest the recent Israeli decision to classify six Palestinian NGOs as terrorist groups, citing violations to international law and freedom of speech. The group called out to the UN to pressure the Israeli government to revoke its decision.

Looking at Lebanon, the country has been going through one of the worst economic crises the region has ever seen, coupled with stagnant political reform, culminating in civil unrest in the country. It is estimated that almost half of all Lebanese people now live under the poverty line, and a UNICEF assessment found that 77% of Lebanese households do not have enough food or enough money to buy food.

This ongoing economic crisis placed Lebanese people in unfortunate conditions. Several demonstrations, protests, and marches took place in Lebanon – encompassing various groups, showing the level of sociopolitical disunity in the country. For instance, the Progressive Youth Organization held a march from Mouseitbeh to Martyr's Square to protest the continued governmental block and calling for the government to convene and play its part.

On the other hand, many Lebanese people protested the visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian. Supported by the Lebanese Forces Party, the National Liberal party, and the Guardians of the Cedar, the protest strongly condemned Iran's influence through Hezbollah. Similarly, the Qurayyat Youth Gathering in Syria issued a statement that it is working for community peace and refuses any escalations with armed oppositions in Daraa – that they would not accept any Iranian project in the region nor any project of any of its arms.

Similar to many other countries in the region, rallying behind security institutions was also prevalent in Lebanon. In fact, the Tripoli Coordinator of the “Youth of Lebanon” Movement issued a statement calling for “the people of Tripoli of all affiliations and sects to adhere to the Lebanese army and all official security institutions as one sole guarantor of the security and stability of Lebanon in general and Tripoli and the north in particular.”



The statement also added that the state has underperformed and underdelivered for all Lebanese people, especially in the north of Lebanon, but that should not affect people's relations with the Lebanese army and the security services.

This statement coincided with the Tayounneh Massacre, which took place in mid-October 2021, taking the lives of 7 people. In what started as a peaceful protest (led by members of Hezbollah and AMAL Movement) against Tarek Bitar – the judge in charge of the Beirut Port explosion investigations – ended in bloody scenes.

In Iraq, the conditions have not been much better, with the ongoing economic challenges, political corruption, and repression of activists being most prevalent over the second half of 2021. For instance, Hundreds of Iraqis demonstrated across southern Iraq in early July, in protest against power cuts, in continued demands for better public services. One day later, young Iraqi activist and journalist, Ali al-Mikdam, was kidnapped in Baghdad and was later found with signs of abuse on his body. Al-Mikdam is a prominent activist in the anti-government protest movement.

While Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, opted for early elections in response to the October 2019 mass protests, Iraqis did not relent in their demands for accountability, calling on the government to hold accountable those responsible for the death, kidnapping, and abuse of young activists. The 2019 protests saw the death of 600 individuals along with 30,000 injured and 70 assassination attempts, but the government has not yet taken any action.

In the fall of 2021, hundreds of Iraqis demonstrated in Baghdad ahead of the parliamentary elections and in commemoration of the second anniversary of the 2019 protests. They held pictures of youth who were killed in the protests as well as signs that read “when will we see the killers behind bars” and “we want a home, we want change”, among others.

The Tishreen Movement, which was prominent in the 2019 mass protests, has become a political force in the south, as a 44-year-old teacher who is a member of Imtidad – a political party that emerged from the Tishreen protests, obtained the highest number of votes in her constituency. The Imtidad party won 10 seats in parliament, as well as 20 by independent candidates. Iraqi youth, who have been protesting for reforms for the past 2 years, became more encouraged to participate in politics, whether through actively nominating themselves or by simply being more involved.

The parliamentary elections, which gave rise to a strong political bloc of pro-October protest demands, showed the possibility of change in Iraqi society and politics ahead of the upcoming Provincial Councils elections.

The second half of 2021 saw significant developments in Tunisia, as President Kais Saied issued a number of decisions, suspending – then sacking – the Parliament and dismissing the government, in a major political power grab. Perhaps in an attempt to derail dissent, Saied spoke in late July that an official in one of the political parties distributed money, in an oblique manner, to a number of young people to carry out looting, theft, and assault on private and public properties.

Noureddine Taboubi, the Secretary General of the Tunisian General Labor Union, criticized Saied, stating “On July 25, there was awareness of the people and the youth, but you cannot guarantee the same results next time. If the people lose trust on all sides, the state will be absent.”



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Saied reiterated that “agents opposed to democracy were paying young Tunisians to leave the country to embark on dangerous migrations.” He clarified that youth are being paid to leave the country irregularly to move to Europe, and he added that this is essentially to create a repeat of the mass migration movement that occurred after the Tunisian revolution ten years ago. Further, Al-Sharq Strategic Research claimed it discovered a Facebook campaign encouraging youth to support President Saied in the two weeks before his “coup”. The report said a series of Facebook pages and accounts used disinformation and popular hashtags to boost the president and target his opponents from July 12–25.

The Ennahda Council urged for a speedy return to constitutional order in Tunisia, calling the President’s actions a “coup against the constitution and a paralysis of state institutions.” The council also affirmed its understanding of the growing popular anger, particularly among Tunisian youth, as a result of economic and social shortcomings a decade after the revolution.



Youth of Ennahda pointed the blame toward the party leadership and parliamentary representatives who failed to manage crises and meet the demands of Tunisians over their 10-year reign. About 200 young party members, including 5 MPs, launched a petition in which they said “this is due to the ineffectiveness of Ennahda's options and the way it manages alliances and political crises.”

Further, Tunisian youth formed the Youth Alliance for Democracy in an attempt to resolve the political crisis in the country. While most parties opposed Saied’s power grab, supporters believed this it was the right course of action to resolve the issues in Tunisia. Yassine Fathali of the Sidi Hussein Youth Association, which helped form the new alliance, expressed concerns of the oppression of protestors and attacks on expression and freedom of press, and warned that the actions of the president threatens democracy. He also expressed that all the parties that have participated in the government since the revolution in 2011 should step down and let new, younger parties attempt to change the situation.

Additionally, several hundred demonstrators gathered in Tunis to protest against President Saied’s seizure of governing powers. The protest, accompanied by a heavy police presence, was the first since the Saied declaration. Such protests were not without mishaps, as many reports highlighted police violence in Tunisia and challenges for marginalized communities, especially working class youth and activists demanding change. Protests took place in June after police violently beat two young men from Sidi Hassine, one of whom died. Activists say the incidents are part of a culture of abuse and police impunity.

Repression transcended the streets and engulfed social media. The Tunisian General Student Union announced that it was keeping track of the case of Ali Saidi, who was arrested due to posts made on his Facebook account. The union denounced the arrest as a violation of human rights and individual and public freedoms. The union stated its support for all those suffering from persecution due to their practicing of freedom of expression.

Over the second half of 2021, Sudanese activists saw their multi-year efforts to lead a democratic transition in Sudan derailed in a military seizure of power. Sudan's Military seized power, placing the prime minister, Abdalla Hamdok, under arrest in an undisclosed location.

Sudanese youth took to the streets to protest the military coup, barricading streets and chanting in support of civilian rule. This came as a huge blow to Sudanese youth who hoped for a better future after the fall of Bashir. Sudanese youth continued their protests calling for civilian rule, but they were faced with strong security measures.



In November, security forces fired live ammunition and tear gas to disperse protesters denouncing the military's tightening grip on the country, killing at least five and wounding several other pro-democracy protestors who protested against the military coup. During the protests, youth activists said, "youth will not give up and will not stop this revolution until we achieve its goals."



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The vice president for military affairs of the Sudanese Alliance, Said Yousef Mahel stated in late October that the decision taken by Abdelfattah Burhan "are correct and are not to be considered a coup, instead, they are to put things back on the right track." He added that the next government and its officials will all be civilians, any criticisms whether coming from internal or external sources represent attacks on Sudan, and that protesting youth in the streets are "reckless and do not know their way."

In Algeria, Ammar Belhimer, the Minister of Information stated that "Africans, especially youth, are committed to the demand that France takes its hands off their continent." These comments were made amidst a period of diplomatic tensions between both countries, due to visa cuts made by the French government as well as questionable comments made by the French president, Emmanuel Macron. According to Belhimer, Africa is experiencing a "resurgence of African nationalism" based on the willingness to enforce respect for the sovereignty of African states.

Also in Algeria, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune ordered the release of young people detained for participating in the Hirak protests on the anniversary of Algeria's independence on July 5. The president said he is determined to implement his political program following legislative elections last month that saw low voter turnout.

Hirak activists rejected the elections and continue to demand democratic reforms. Despite that, a notable Algerian activist called Chems Eddine Laalami was sentenced to two years in prison, as two cases were brought against him for his leading role in protests against the previous President Bouteflika.

The vice-president of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights argued that such legal cases had a negative effect on Algeria's youth and drove them to political disillusionment and despair. Large numbers of young Algerians had been leaving the country and burning their identity papers once they arrived to avoid being sent back.

Similarly, an Egyptian-Turkish rapprochement is instilling fear among Egyptian political exiles living in Turkey. Several family members of Egyptian political exiles living in Turkey were told that Turkey would deport them. Many political activists were imprisoned in different Egyptian prisons, and upon their releases, they sought protection in countries like Turkey.

It is estimated that there are around 33,000 Egyptians living in exile in Turkey, all of whom are facing the fear of deportation as part of a deal with Turkey, and then they are very likely to face an inevitable fate of execution.



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In response, a group of Muslim American groups called on US President Joe Biden to intervene to stop a mass execution of political dissidents in Egypt. The efforts include calling on Biden to suspend US military aid to Egypt to pressure the government to improve its human rights record and to especially put a halt to the executions.



It is worth noting that Egyptian activists in support of former president Morsi were convicted of harsh sentences such as “arming criminal gangs”, “possessing firearms”, “killing policemen”, and “resisting authorities” and the legal proceedings have been described as “sham” trials.

There were more notable protests that took place in the region over the second half of 2021, including – but not limited to, the following:

- ❖ In Jordan, hundreds of Jordanians marched in downtown Amman in protest of rising prices and defense laws that have granted the government extra-constitutional powers.
- ❖ A number of young Libyans gathered in front of the municipal council in Bani Walid, protesting against what they described as rampant corruption in the state political and economic sectors and called for the dismissal of city officials.
- ❖ A youth group in Hadramout Valley, Yemen, announced that they intend to escalate popularly, in refusal to hold the sessions of the outgoing Yemeni parliament in Seiyun. The youth group also protested the current livelihood and economic conditions along with the lack of public services.
- ❖ Two angry marches took place in Bahrain against the normalization of ties between the Bahraini kingdom and Israel. The protesters re-affirmed their political rights. Many of those who protested had been arrest prior for participating in an anti-Zionist march.
- ❖ 2 young Iranians died in demonstrations over water shortages in Khuzestan to increase the tally to 5 people who lost their lives in demonstrations. The two individuals were killed by security forces’ gunfire. Many of the injured protestors refused to go to hospitals to receive treatment in fears of getting arrested.
- ❖ The governor of Koubeni in Mauritania refused to license a demonstration planned by young Mauritians to protest shortages in water and electricity in the city. A parliamentarian spoke that as a member of the parliament representing the city of Koubeni, he will be working with the authorities to address these shortages. He also spoke that “youth have the full right to aspire to improve the conditions of their country, but that should not be on the expense of security, peace, and tranquility,” as he urged youth to be patient and to “search for information from officials to be aware of facts.”



# Political Engagement and Empowerment

Youth in the region have proven their capabilities of taking a central role in their countries' decision-making processes. Their political aspirations do require more efforts from stakeholders to support their capacity building on one hand, and – more importantly, to provide them with the access needed to amplify their voices. As such, there were numerous initiatives over the second half of 2021 to empower youth and support their political inclusion.

With the MENA region being home to one of the youngest populations on the planet, it is important to leverage this human capital. Switzerland hosted the Middle East–Mediterranean Youth Forum in Lugano to discuss the importance of supporting youth in the region. Thirty young men and women attended the summit in person and hundreds of others participated online.

Youth in the region led numerous efforts in their countries' political contexts. In Tunisia, youth members in Ennahda political party issued a statement urging their party leadership to dissolve the executive office for their failure to meet the demands of Tunisians. The statement made five key points:

- ❖ Maintaining the values of the Tunisian Revolution, utilizing dialogue as the only option to overcome the crisis by returning to the elected constitutional institutions;
- ❖ Urging the Ennahda leadership to take responsibility in failing to meet the demands of the Tunisian people;
- ❖ Calling on the National Consultative Council to assume its responsibility and to immediately dissolve the party's executive office and assign a crisis committee to ensure a speedy return to the activity of constitutional institutions;
- ❖ Calling on the Speaker of the Parliament to give priority to the national interest and take the necessary measures to ensure that the Parliament returns to its normal functions; and
- ❖ Demanding that the party interacts positively with any political initiative that will bring the country out of its stifling crisis.

Further, the National Youth Council in Tunisia held a meeting with 120 personnel who oversee the youth sector of Ennahda to assess the political rift and provide a number of recommendations to the authorities, party leadership, and civil society.

Among these recommendations, the meeting urged Ennahda to form a national rescue command, including youth groups, to be “the beginning of the path of renewal in the executive leadership within the movement, with the aim of saving the political path in the country.”

Additionally, the Tunisian association “Tafkir Thaqafi” has developed an initiative called the “expression platform”, and it has gained popularity in the country. This social initiative was launched through social media and its main objective is to raise awareness around the issues of youth unemployment in the country. This platform allows the youth from more disadvantaged regions to express their aspirations as well as their apprehensions, which the founders of the initiative will communicate to policymakers. This platform is meant to build a bridge between the people and decision makers.



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In Palestine, the mayor of Gaza met with members of the municipal council and local youth activists to discuss methods of improving youth engagement in the municipality's decision-making process. During the discussion session, youth participants discussed municipal council elections, women's representation in the municipal council, establishment of youth centers and ways to support youth initiatives in the community.

Also in Palestine, 11 youth organizations from Palestine, Turkey, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen held a virtual conference titled “Occupied Palestine” organized by the World Anti-Imperialist Youth Union (WAYU). During the conference, participants affirmed their stance in support of the Palestinian cause, adding that the Palestinian cause is a collective cause for everyone around the world who advocates against exploitation and imperialism.



In Jordan, three main activities were held over the second half of 2021. First, the Politics and Society Institute, in collaboration with Friedrich Ebert, concluded a workshop titled “youth and elections, a roadmap following the royal commission for the modernization of the political system’s recommendations”. The workshop, attended by commission members and youth activists, discussed the role of youth in the Jordanian political sphere as well as the importance of youth empowerment and activating their role in political participation and policy making. Youth participants also highlighted the importance of lowering the candidacy age for parliamentary elections and providing them with assurances for local administration.

Second, the Royal Committee to Modernize Political System met with youth, represented by the All Jordan Youth Committee, with recommendations involving lowering the age of political participation in terms of nominations and such.

Third, the 13th edition of the Amman Security Colloquium was held in mid- November, with participants from Arab and international figures and a group of senior speakers. The forum discussed the role of women and youth, their inclusion in security and disarmament issues, and security challenges in the region.



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In Egypt, the Coordination’s Committee of Party’s Youth Leaders and Politicians (CPYP) in Egypt presented to parliament a new proposal aimed at improving the role youth play nationally. Additionally, President El Sisi announced the end of the state of emergency the country had been in since April 2017. Observers highlighted that this decision would likely create more safe spaces and provide more stability for youth to engage politically.

In Lebanon, the Minister of Youth and Sports, George Klass, emphasized the importance of restoring the confidence of young people in Lebanon. Regarding the youth policy, he said that he would present it to the Cabinet for approval, and that "young people will be at the center of it, in relation to economic policy to support youth and motivate them to stay in Lebanon."



Klass also announced his intention to create a youth card that includes obligatory contributions from the state for young people in a way that preserves their dignity.

Looking at Yemen, the Director General of Abyan Governorate Media, Yasser Baazeb, discussed with the Youth Alliance of Abyan the involvement of youth and women in decision-making and working to rehabilitate youth and women and empower them in decision-making at the level of the governorate. Baazeb stressed the importance of building the skills and capabilities of youth and women in various fields and working to integrate them into society as active and influential elements and to benefit from their creativity and energies in society. He noted that the Abyan Governorate Information Office strives "to develop the skills of young people and qualify them in various journalistic and radio arts."

Not all remarks, statements, efforts, and initiatives were empowering for youth. Some were rather discouraging. In fact, Turkish President Erdogan has again attacked social networking sites, describing them as "the most dangerous means of provocation and incitement." Erdogan called on his country's youth not to use social media, accusing various social media channels of "manipulating the minds of young people." Erdogan said the government's steps against social media were aimed at "making our youth more peaceful and protecting them from distorted currents."

## Elections

The second half of 2021 witnessed numerous positive as well as negative developments concerning youth's political participation along with the implications of political reform in their countries on their political aspirations. The World Inequalities Report 2022 was published toward the end of the year, and it showed that the MENA region has the highest level of inequality in the world. Rami Khour explains that this is a result of "inefficient, inequitable and often incompetent" management of regional societies and economies, as "these trends paint a stark picture of the hard years ahead".

In efforts to perhaps alter the realities of such an oblique future, Iraq held its parliamentary elections two years ahead of what was originally scheduled. However, Many young activists, notably in the town of Nasiriyah, choose to boycott these elections, claiming corruption within the country will prevent the elections from being fair. Over the past years, Iraqi youth has protested against the corruption of the state, its inefficiencies, and the great influence they believe Iran has been exerting over the country. Such public frustration propelled several parties and activists – who participated in the October 2019 – protests to boycott of the elections.

Further, Atheer Alshara' discussed the reasons behind Iraqi youth's reluctance to participate in the elections. He stressed on the role partisan media plays in trying to undermine the democratic process in Iraq and implant concepts and convictions that the elections in their entirety are politicized and that quotas are settled before the elections, let alone that the Parliament had not done anything of sort to persuade youth to engage in elections.

Amid a series of challenges, most notably the difficult economic crisis, the growing influence of armed factions, and chronic corruption that controls the joints of the state in a country that has suffered decades of wars and violence, in which 40% of the youth are unemployed, and poverty has been exacerbated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, early elections did not necessarily raise much interest and enthusiasm among the 25 million voters, as observers expected low participation rates. The head of the Iraqi Political Thinking Center, Ihsan Al-Shammari, believes that "at a time when Iraqis are heading for elections, the country is still mired in corruption in all of its institutions, which contributes significantly to weakening confidence in the state."

Dilan Sirwan questioned whether Iraq could run a fair, free, and safe elections, especially in an environment where armed militias operate with impunity outside of government control, Daesh militants carry out frequent attacks, and fears of electoral fraud coupled with disillusionment over the political system is threatening to keep many voters away. While the government tried to assure Iraqis by placing strict security measures and enlisting a record-large international monitoring mission, public skepticism remained high, especially when it comes to vote buying, electronic voting, influence of militias, and bad memories from the 2018 elections.

In the wake of the elections, there were mixed reactions – scattered between delight, frustration, skepticism, and regret. It was reported that several youth activists regret their decision to boycott the elections, as new blocs achieved notable success. It was reported that the overall voter turnout stood at 59%, with most of the Iraqi youth stating that their apprehension to vote was caused by political corruption.



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Those who abstained also attributed their decision to boycott the elections to the control of traditional political parties over the state along with the prevalence of weapons in the streets, and to the fact that the elections law restricted Iraqis to vote in the district where they were born.

If the results were to persuade such activists to vote in the next elections, or even the upcoming municipal elections, such persuasion is likely to have faded quickly amidst major politicking from sectarian factions who contested the results. For instance, supporters of Fatah Alliance – a pro-Iran Shiite faction – have engaged in a sit-in near Baghdad's Green Zone, heightening tensions in the country and further dividing its political landscape.

To that end, the head of Alliance of Iraqi State Forces, Ammar Al-Hakim, warned of the collapse of the political system in Iraq, calling for the existence of two sides, one of the loyalists and the other of the opposition, stressing on the need of Prime Minister Al-Kazemi and his government for popular and political support to implement its reforms. Al-Hakim proposed seven points to respond to the challenges facing the Iraqi political system and to work on reforming it, as follows:

- ❖ Announcing the results of the elections within 24 hours of the end of the general voting process to enhance transparency and limit suspicions;
- ❖ Expedite the government forming process and forming an electoral alliance that takes upon itself the responsibility of implementing the government program within clear time periods;
- ❖ Ensuring the presence of two sides: the government's side and its oppositions;
- ❖ Formalizing a social and political contract through constitutional reforms;
- ❖ Ending the polemic of accusing Iraqi security institutions;
- ❖ Implementing service priorities such as health, electricity, education, and employment; and
- ❖ A new international policy in complete accordance with domestic policy to formulate foreign relations based on Iraqi priorities.

Morocco also held its elections during the second half of 2021. Moroccan youth worked to increase their participation in the election cycle, which encompassed parliamentary and municipal elections together. Political observers recorded a noticeable increase in the number of youth nominated for

benefits, in connection with some partisan trends that opened the way for youth mostly for political marketing and the link between public support laws for political parties with the size of youth representation in local regulations.

Regardless of the means, some young Moroccans decided to run for elections. In fact, 24-year-old Farouk Mahdawi looked to improve the political dynamics by running for local elections, under the Federal Left Alliance. He looked to encourage youth to participate in all capacities in the elections. He highlighted that, because of the political environment in Morocco, it has been very difficult to encourage youth participation. However, his campaigning efforts have unified local youth to work along with his campaign and help encourage citizens to participate.

Another candidate, Maryam Benkhoulia, previously also ran for elections but was pushed out due to the political environment. She also continued to emphasize the importance of the role of youth in government. She stressed that youth do not only represent the future, but they also represent the present, saying that “giving the youth the opportunity today will create a better tomorrow.”



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The “Yes, We Can” Initiative in Al-Nathour City managed to acquire over 1,200 signatures in two days to be able to engage in the general elections in the city. The independent youth initiative worked tirelessly during the government mandated lockdown to counter the spread of the Coronavirus. The initiative sought to stand for elections, and its members looked to contribute to the development of their city and to respond to the needs of its residents.

While the security, economic, and political conditions in Morocco – along with the context with which the elections arrived – are vastly different from that of Iraq’s, public apathy – particularly among youth in the elections and their outcomes were albeit prevalent.

Youth’s enthusiasm to run for elections were not reciprocated by political parties’ efforts to engage them. Youth believe that political parties have been unable to address or even acknowledge the challenges they experience, which are reasons behind their reluctance to participate.



Political parties and government institutions tried to encourage youth to participate in the parliamentary and municipal elections, a public opinion poll found that 45% of Moroccan youth do not trust political parties. Youth in the country lacked hope for their future in Morocco and continued to seek opportunities outside of its borders. In late August, a boat that carried nearly 20 youth capsized.

“The death of these young people in this tragic way is a cry in the face of these rusty and calcified faces, a death that exposes their false and misleading slogans and promises,”

– Mohamed El-Glousi, President of the Moroccan Association for the Protection of Public Funds.

Moroccan youth also feel that their issues are only addressed in speeches, yielding a prevalent feeling of mistrust among Moroccan youth in political parties. Political parties have marginalized youth for years, and they do not communicate with them except to acquire their votes during electoral campaigns.

Political parties were racing to urge youth to register to vote while youth felt expelled out of political parties and that translates into their apathy toward political participation. Youth also believed that calls from political parties to engage youth in elections are empty and will disappear following the elections to go back to marginalizing youth.

Several media reports tended to exaggerate youth’s involvement with political parties. Some young volunteers clarified that, while handing out leaflets, that they were only working because of the pay rather than truly believing in the politicians. Other campaign participants highlighted that politicians continued to make empty promises rather than create effective change.

Official statistics show that only 1% of Moroccan youth are involved in political parties while only 4% attend party activities. As such, researchers argue that youth engagement in political parties in Morocco has become a luxury and an occasional meaningless discourse, only for media consumption. He asserts that their engagement in political parties has not been realized, thus diminishing their true value and their role in any political process.

Despite the lack of effective engagement, a number of young men and women under the age of twenty won seats in their local councils. This sparked debates in the legal and political circles in the country, whereby some praised the achievement while others questioned the extent to which they could handle the responsibility entrusted to them and their ability to manage public affairs. On top of that, rivals protested and refused the idea of youth holding positions of power. Political blocs submitted appeals against these results.

In fact, the administrative judiciary decided on these appeals, including the decision to cancel the election of Najia Seddik (19 years old), a counselor for the Mostakmar community in the eastern district of Laayoune in Taourirt, who was elected president of the communal council. The Administrative Court accepted the appeal and annulled the election result. Article 41 of the elections law stipulates that candidates must be aged 21 or older at the time of elections, which entails that those under 21 who won seats will automatically lose their spots. Activists added that elites did not necessarily want youth engagement despite their colorful slogans for youth engagement in elections.

In Palestine, Municipal elections were held in the occupied territories in the West Bank. Hamas boycotted the elections in retaliation to the Palestinian Authority administering the elections, which entailed possible biases towards Fatah. Palestinian youth in the West Bank stated that while these elections were democratic, they do not replace legislative elections which are "a horizon for the youth". It is worth noting that Palestine was set to have its first parliamentary elections in 15 years, which were scheduled for May 2021, but the solid plans were abruptly abandoned.

Iran's presidential elections were held in mid-June 2021. The elections' 48.8% voter turnout are not only the lowest in history, but they may be an indication that Iranian youth are starting to erupt. Former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani received a majority of 24 million votes in 2017 before the elections were repeated while Raisi received only 18 million votes, but the elections were not repeated. An American report said that there is popular dissatisfaction with the election of old candidates, who use a petrified ideology to protect their power and privileges. It added that this difficult political situation and the deteriorating economy do not bode well at all, but rather threaten a broader uprising of a large group of young people who have been denied opportunities.

Looking at Libya, in the months leading to the scheduled date for the national elections, there was strong national and international commitment to hold the elections. Libyan youth were very enthusiastic for the elections. In fact, over 90% of youth in Libya acquired their voter registration cards, coupled with decent youth representation among the candidates.

Additionally, the UN Security Council had asked the Libyan transitional government to finish preparing the necessary legal and constitutional frameworks to hold national elections in December, due to public concerns that elections could be postponed. The Security Council emphasized the need for free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections that are democratic, transparent, and inclusive of women and youth. With that, youth in Benghazi held a demonstration on July 10 to express support for presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for December 24. The demonstrators warned against manipulation or postponement of the elections.



It is worth noting that Libya was scheduled to hold its national elections on December 24, 2021; however, the elections were indefinitely postponed. At the time of this report, there was no clear indication as to when the elections would be held.

The second half of 2021 saw Qatar's first ever legislative elections, held on October 2. Given it is the first in the country's history, the results were not particularly promising, as none of the 26 women candidates were voted in. The elections determine 30 members of the 45-seat advisory Shura Council, whereas the remaining 15 seats are appointed by the Emir. Most female candidates sought to reflect positive change onto Qatar's guardianship and citizenship laws, for which they received some pushback from men.



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## Political Participation and Reform

Looking at political reform efforts in Jordan, the Elections Sub-Committee of the Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System discussed lowering the candidacy age for Parliamentary Elections from 30 to 25. Members of the Committee along with Senators and experts had mixed opinions on the matter. While some were in support of the idea, others opposed it. One Senator spoke that he was against lowering the age of candidacy since youth aged 25 are not politically or economically mature, let alone the absence of political parties to trump personal considerations.



Other opponents added that lowering the age of candidacy would have a negative impact on the performance of the Parliament, youth under 30 would have minimal chances to win in elections, and that “real empowerment for youth should be economic and that demands for lowering the candidacy age for parliament are not useful at the national level.”

Supporters for this potential motion reasoned that “since the voting age is 18, there would be no harm in lowering the candidacy age to 25, which is implemented in many countries around the world.” Mohammed Abu Dalhoum from MENAACTION argued for lowering the age of candidacy, indicating that youth have always turned out to vote, and they would be appealing candidates to voters due to their inherent politically selfless approach, which could entail prioritizing resolving the country’s corruption and economic struggles.

Additionally, in a poll conducted by the Center of Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, it was revealed that 68% of Jordanians do not trust the Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System and its expected outcomes. The poll adds that 32% of Jordanians believe that the committee will be able to formulate a fair electoral law that represents all segments of society.



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This lack of public support propelled the Committee to enhance its discussions. Members of the Committee met with political party leaders, civil society representatives, and academics to discuss the commission’s agenda, chief of which was reforming the electoral law and empowering youth and women. The commission stressed that there will be a clear decision to politically engage youth in Jordan, hand in hand with economic empowerment, to enable youth to become stakeholders in decisions affecting their future, adding that their empowerment begins in schools and curricula, then with universities, and finally with the political party law.



At the end of its designated work plan, the Committee delivered its outcomes and recommendations concerning youth in public life, including draft electoral and political party laws as well as constitutional amendments and administrative reforms. Its youth-specific recommendations were divided into four age groups:

- ❖ Upbringing stage (ages 12–15), focusing on the quality of education and increasing the number of vocational and technical educational institutions;
- ❖ The preparatory stage (age 16–18), focusing on creating municipal councils of youth, with a school representative in each council, increasing awareness of digital culture and entrepreneurship;
- ❖ Youth empowerment (ages 19–22), creating elected student unions or councils within each university with dedicated budgets to enhance their participation in public life; and
- ❖ Community, political, and economic participation (ages 23–35), the commission recommended enacting a national program to empower youth candidates for elected councils as well as engaging youth in government committees and local government administrations and councils.

The youth-specific recommendations received positive feedback, as Daoud Kuttab highlighted, in an article, that the 92-person Committee prepared a 10-year road map for democratization for Jordan. The Committee stated that it is working on creating a parliament that is “friendly to women, political parties, and youth – as university students will be able to participate politically in efforts to increase their voter turnout.

Apart from the Committee and its work, there were three notable initiatives aimed at amplifying youth’s participation in the political process in the country:

First, the Opinions without Borders for Sustainable Development Center conducted a training program on “Democracy, Civic Participation, and Needs Identification Tools” in Jarash. The training delved into topics such as civic participation, identification and analysis of stakeholders, democracy and citizenship, and needs assessment.

Second, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) conducted a 6-week-training of the Naumann School of Politics in Jordan, graduating 35 participants. The training looked to promote political participation and enhance youth’s activism and involvement in public life.

Third, the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs (MOPPA) and UN Women held a panel discussion on the outcomes of the royal commission to

modernize the political system, emphasizing the criteria for empowering women and enhancing their participation in political and public life.

Similar to Jordan, Lebanon has been having debates over youth inclusion in the electoral processes. In this case, the discussion revolved around lowering the voting age to 18 instead of 21. Lebanon is set to hold its Parliamentary Elections in May 2022.

The Progressive Youth Organization in Lebanon indicated in a statement, “with the approaching dates for the parliamentary elections, there is an absolute necessity to involve young people in this entitlement at all its stages, as this constitutes an essential part of their role in building the future of the country and stresses the need for their involvement in political and social life.”

The organization renewed its “demand to lower the voting age to include those who are 18 years old” and called on “all youth forces to pressure the parliamentary blocs to proceed with the proposed law submitted by the Democratic Gathering to reduce the age of voting.”

Tunisia saw major changes, as illustrated earlier. President Saied’s decisions caused turbulence within Ennahda whose members were divided between those who wanted drastic changes to its executive office and Shura Council and others who opposed any changes. Youth members had earlier sent a letter to the head of the Ennahda Movement to correct the course and dissolve the executive office.

A representative indicated that the Herak movement within Ennahda has existed for some time, but it has emerged on the scene more and has become public, noting that one of their most prominent demands is to conduct radical reviews and real reforms within the party.



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By the end of September, President Saied appointed Najla Boden as prime minister. Boden became the first female prime minister in the country’s history. She announced that the new line-up of her cabinet will include women and youth. She revealed that the government will consist of women and youth who are able to make a difference in this difficult period that the country is going through. Boden stressed that the priority is to advance the economy, improve living and health conditions, and reduce unemployment.



Another country that witnessed major turbulence over the second half of 2021 was Sudan. Sudanese youth were optimistic about the future and were eager to support their nation's transition. However, they believe there are shortcomings when it comes to meeting their expectations in relation to the government's progress and the available opportunities for youth involvement.

This is especially problematic given that the Sudanese revolution was led by youth, and they ought to be given their fair share in the outcome of the transition. In a recent survey, only 4% of youth stated that the goals of the revolution had been achieved "to a great extent" and 40% felt they had little influence on the course of the transition.



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Sudan's democratic transition ought to begin with the building of political parties and enhancing their ability to establish and sustain democracy. Sudanese youth feel that political parties are not able to present a solid program to contribute to the transition, a young Sudanese spoke "I do not see any party befitting the status of the revolution and the strength of the revolution." At the same time, the commander of the Sudanese army, Lieutenant-General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, who was at the forefront of the recent coup, made statements explaining the military coup and stated that the army will ensure that the newly formed parliament will be mainly from the youth that led the revolution.

Looking at Egypt, a number of efforts were enacted to enhance youth involvement in public life. In early July, the Ministry of Youth and Sports launched the National Project to Rehabilitate Youth for Localities and Political Participation as part of the Youth Initiative "Youth of Egypt 2030".



The project looks to support Egyptian youth cadres in all governorates and to prepare them to join local councils and to enhance their political capacities to understand Egypt's dynamics and its political orientation.

Additionally, the General Secretariat of the Humat Alwatan Party, Ahmad Al-Atifi, stated that youth empowerment is a top priority for the political party. He added that the local councils' elections are yet to be clarified because an electoral law is not finalized, yet the party has been working on training youth to be prepared to run for elections as part of their capacity building to ultimately stand for parliamentary elections.

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Not all efforts were as positively impactful. In fact, Egypt established the “New Republic Youth Federation” and while politicians praised this decision, believing that the Federation will contribute to developing youth capacities at the national level and engage youth in national work, across various sectors, this remains a top-down institution that rivals grassroots youth-led civil society efforts and co-opts their opportunities. In other words, in this context, the state decides who earns a place in this Federation, and it will have a direct vehicle with the government for opportunities, leaving behind young Egyptians who worked tirelessly for years on enhancing civic space for their fellow peers.

In the UAE, the Ministry of State for Federal National Council Affairs (MFNCA) launched a number of youth-oriented initiatives targeting more than 19,000 young Emirati men and women. These initiatives looked to enhance youth's political awareness and create effective channels of communication to listen to their ideas and use their insights to develop and improve parliamentary procedures. The initiatives also looked to provide youth with interactive content through MFNCA's website and social media pages along with organizing Youth Circles to prepare a generation that is knowledgeable and capable in the parliamentary sector.



## Spotlight: Alienation and Inclusion of Youth

\*Note: This article was originally published on Jordan News, and can be found [here](#).

While we celebrate successful Jordanian youth entrepreneurs, like Zeid Y. Al Husban and Sahar Barqawi, a substantial segment of our youth is still facing multiple layers of alienation and exclusion from public as well as social life. The alienated youth, just like their successful peers, seek an opportunity for more active inclusion in the economy and the political process.



Moreover, their alienation is not the only serious problem we should be addressing in the political reform efforts under way. There are other important issues. An equally important and related issue is the mass exodus, across all age groups, out of the electoral process. Empirical evidence from the 2016 and 2020 parliamentary elections demonstrates that the older a voter is, the more likely he/she is to abandon the electoral process.

This mass departure causes structural deficiencies ranging from institutional imperfections to dysfunctional representation of socio-economic interests. Furthermore, such distortions often lead to unhealthy polarization over dominance of competing narratives; one outside the electoral process, often tinted with apathy, and one, inside it, overwhelmed with frustration with parliament performance and dissatisfaction with outcomes that go beyond parliament.

Here is the empirical set of evidence. With the exception of the age group 17–25, who had a higher voter turnout in 2020, namely 38.2%, than in the 2016 elections (37.4%), participation rates of all older age groups declined by an average of: –5.5% for 26–30 years old; –7.1% for 31–40 years old; –8.8% for 41–50 years old; –9.5% for 51–60 years old; and –12.1% for 60 + years old. This means that the national decline average from the 2016 to the 2020 parliamentary elections stood at –6.%. These rates were recorded notwithstanding the impact of COVID–19, which was the cause for abstention of roughly 325,293 voters, according to a post elections survey by NAMA Strategic Intelligence Solutions.

The number of actual voters in the 2020 elections was 1,387,711 out of 4,640,643 eligible voters. This means 3,252,932 did not vote for various reasons. Those who cited COVID–19 as a reason for not voting were 10 percent of the non–voters.

When added to the actual voters, the figure comes to 1,713,004, which 36.9 percent of eligible voters. The increase over the 2016 voting rate would be 0.8 percent, which comes from the increase in the number of voters in the age group 17–25.

The absence of youth from the electoral process is a very important issue. Although the 17–25 years old were the highest participating group in the 2020 elections, at 38.2 percent, the participations rate of the next age group, 26–30, declines significantly to 25.1%, i.e., a decline of 13.1 percentage points. This decline is double that of the 2016 elections when these two age groups recorded 37.4% and 30.6% participation rates, respectively.

This is a clear sign that the excitement of first-time voters quickly fades away, at an alarmingly high rate as well, and that is attributed partially to the Parliament’s inability to maintain their confidence, let alone the fact that the only social groups that do accept them – those associated with universities and local neighborhoods – celebrate electoral boycott.

The other significant issue is young female participation. Females in the 17–25-year-old age group are less likely to participate than males by some –10.5%, –6.3% for the 26–30 age group, –4.4% for 31–40 age groups, –5.8% for 41–50 age group, –7.8% for 51–60 age group, and –12.4% for the 60+ age group. Overall, women are less likely to vote by –8.0 percent nationally.

The issues we must address are: (a) a substantial portion of youth is migrating out of the political system; (b) youth integration in the economic system has been insufficient; and (c) they continue to be socially alienated, bullied, suppressed, and ignored.

The implications are severe, and range from widening the breeding ground for all sorts of radicalization, to indifference to public affairs, and possible withdrawal from ordinary life to other manner of living, with all the ills of such pathways. It is important to assert that those who choose alienation are not necessarily making a choice, but are most likely being pushed to do so since the economic system is not being responsive enough to their needs, thus leading to withdrawal and alienation.

While surgical economic interventions to expand the private sector to accommodate the demand on jobs cannot wait any longer, we ought to design pathways for alienated youth to feel a “sense of ownership” in the political system.

Reducing the candidacy age for parliamentary elections from 30 to 25 is a small progressive step, given the severity of youth absence from the electoral process, but we should work to reduce it to 18, with serious incentives, especially for young women, to engage politically, including offering financial incentives in the form of reducing candidacy fees and required bonds. Since they are not too young to vote, carry weapons, have a family, guard the borders, drive cars, pilot planes, they are certainly not too young to run for elections when they are 18.



## Conclusions and Recommendations

There is a clear decrease among MENA youth's level of confidence in their country's reform prospects. Such a decline is also coupled with a deteriorating trust in democratic institutions (political parties, elections and parliaments). Overall political and socioeconomic conditions are now worse in the region than they were in 2011 in the months leading up to the Arab Spring. The continuity of these conditions could spark a new wave of public uprisings in the region. There are some immediate steps needed at this point:

- ❖ Government and civil society stakeholders should strengthen initiatives aimed at youth inclusion, empowerment, and participation in the political space to address apathy among the youth and push for policies that legitimately improve their situation.
- ❖ Regional governments ought to work harder on youth's engagement in the political decision-making processes. Voting and candidacy ages should be lowered to 18 across all countries in the region. This is because youth are generally politically active when provided with space and opportunities, and they tend to demand for policies that are beneficial for the greater good.
- ❖ There are a number of other elections scheduled to take place across the MENA region over the next couple of years. As such, civil society organizations should be organizing initiatives now to prepare youth for the votes and ensure political candidates are prioritizing youth in campaigns.



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- ❖ Youth inclusion is merely the beginning, as there are other hindrances that need to be addressed, chief among which is removing financial barriers to their political participation, including alleviating any candidacy fees and providing some support, technical and/or financial to aid them in administering their campaigns.
- ❖ Regional governments should start thinking long-term and refrain from scheduling, or rescheduling, elections to appease public dissent. Such policies diminish the essence of democracy and render it unpopular, let alone the implications that may have on the already impatient and apathetic youth. Instead, decision-makers ought to engage in clear and transparent national dialogues to understand the core challenges facing youth and think of approaches that are yet to be tested but have proven success rate, in the context of the region.
- ❖ Additionally, the United States' recent Summit for Democracy excluded key democratic and semi-democratic MENA states. The exclusion of Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco, Turkey, Libya, and others demonstrated a negative image that the West is no longer interested in advocating for democratic change, along with its associated tenets – such as human rights and social justice – in the region. To that end, it is essential for the MENA region to alter this message and ensure that activists' civic rights and freedoms are safeguarded.

The second half of 2021 saw more repression of youth activists and co-optation of youth-led grassroots efforts, coupled with top-down initiatives that do not necessarily satisfy youth's prospects.

- ❖ It is critical for governments to widen the civic space for youth to allow them to voice their opinions, demands, suggestions, and concerns. The persistence in suppression of their voices, or the looming fear casted on young activists, leads to socio-political exclusion and even expulsion, which could result in mass emigration, often times illegal and irregular.
- ❖ Youth need to practice their civil rights and personal freedoms in an environment that safeguards toward fulfilling their potential. The current dynamics, in fact, are very short-sighted. Countries in the region could very soon find themselves without vanguards of progress, regardless of the direction – as younger voices are curtailed while the current generation may not have a successor.





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# ECONOMICS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

# Economic Challenges, Unemployment, and Implications

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the already fragile economies of the MENA region. Years of economic decline, coupled with governments' inability to create jobs to satisfy the growing number of new labor market entrants was only made much worse amid the ongoing global pandemic. Over the second half of 2021, three main economic challenges were observed the region: unemployment, deteriorating livelihood conditions, and migration.

The inability of the labor market in the region to provide fair and adequate job opportunities is due to demographic changes, political instability, and a decline in financial and monetary stability.

– An ESCWA–ILO Report



Looking at youth unemployment in the MENA region, a report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Regional Office for Arab States of the International Labor Organization (ILO) finds that Arab youth rank first in the world in the number of unemployed people (14.3 million), recording the highest level of unemployment in the world, especially among women and youth.

Further, Tom Isherwood of McKinsey indicates that “over the next 20 years, 127 million young people will enter the labor force in the MENA region, but face an unemployment rate of 23%.” He added that, in addition to that, 29 million jobs are at risk of being displaced by 2030 due to automation.

In terms of significant unemployment-related changes in the region, the Palestinian Ministry of Labor indicated that unemployment is connected with the ability of the economy to create job opportunities, and with the Palestinian economy's limited ability to create jobs (stands at about 15,000 jobs annually), unemployment among Palestinian youth is still on the rise. Similarly, unemployment rates in Tunisia have increased to reach 17.8% while youth unemployment is estimated at 36% as of the end of 2020, worsened by the government's inability to create new jobs.



In Turkey, the overall unemployment rate increased to 12% by July 2021, compared to 21.5% among youth, with sources indicating that such increases are attributed to the ban on layoffs and the end of government wage support policies.

The Turkish government looked to address this challenge, and it produced the National Youth Employment Strategy, featuring a program that aims to alleviate the youth unemployment challenges and to ultimately bring down the rate to 17.8% by 2023.

Moreover, Turkish youth with university degrees are drowning in unemployment, regardless of their high qualifications. Many young Turks cannot find jobs to establish a stable life, and those who do find jobs, they have to be content with minimum wage or very low salaries.

In Iraq, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs announced that the number of registered unemployed persons in its database reached one million and 700 thousand individuals, with other unregistered numbers.

Further, youth in Iraqi Kurdistan are faced with one of two choices: unemployment and corruption or illegal immigration, which comes with its own perils. Protests have taken place across different cities in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), having been met with tear gas and batons, demanding the reinstatement of student stipends, which were discontinued in 2014.

Looking at potential solutions to the pressing unemployment issue, McKinsey published a report discussing five steps that could resolve the issue of youth unemployment in the MENA region. These steps include:

- ❖ The region must increase its share of home-grown global companies;
- ❖ Expanding education to prepare youth for the realities of the ever-changing job market;
- ❖ Providing an environment that enables research and entrepreneurship for youth and for government employees;
- ❖ Closing the gender gap in the economy; and
- ❖ Rebuilding conflict zones

Unemployment, as terrible as it has been, is unfortunately only one of many economic challenges facing youth in the MENA region. Economic decline and deterioration of livelihood conditions have been almost universal in the region.

Looking at Tunisia, for instance, Patricia Sabga states that there are some economic factors in Tunisia that could ignite the ongoing political unrest, including lack of opportunities for youth, debt, a broken social contract, and the pressures accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Tunisian economy shrank 8.6% in 2020 along with another 3% in the first 3 months of 2021, hitting tourism and manufacturing sectors terribly. With government debt at 88% of its GDP, Tunisia could have benefited from an IMF bailout; however, the negotiations stalled.

The delayed negotiations is attributed to Tunisia's recent political turmoil, which is also destabilizing the economy. The lack of progress to resolve the political issues risks delaying a long-awaited deal with the IMF and plans to sell debt overseas in October, raising fears among some analysts of a tumultuous Lebanon-style default.



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Looking at Lebanon, in early August, many vital state facilities in Lebanon were warning of a full suspension of operations, as the nationwide diesel fuel crisis hit a catastrophic level. The petroleum importing companies were unable to deliver gasoline and diesel to stations given confusion over prices, as the Central Bank stated it will adopt the black market exchange rate (20,000 Lebanese pounds to the dollar) while the Ministry of Energy is still adopting the rate of 3,900 Lebanese pounds to the dollar. In the midst of all of that, the Central Bank announced it would not tap into the mandatory reserve to subsidize fuel unless parliament legislates the matter. Similar to Tunisia, political turmoil delayed any local solution or international support.



Many young Lebanese believe that the current economic conditions are unbearable and that leaving the country altogether is the only choice. They were divided on the notion of whether international financial support can take Lebanon out of its current struggles, especially that the state is failing and requires foreign support.

Lebanese are forced to withdraw money in pounds at a massive loss or take out US dollar-denominated cheques which are then sold for a fraction of their price – currently about 20%. A recovery plan proposed by the government to the International Monetary Fund in 2020 estimated the losses in Lebanon's financial system at about \$83 billion.

In response to the challenges they are facing, young Lebanese are driving a crypto revolution after banks go bust. The bankrupt country's tech-savvy youth are increasingly turning to cryptocurrency to shield themselves from currency depreciation, get money in and out of the country, and try to make up for the losses they have suffered.

Yemen also witnessed a financial crisis with the Riyal losing massive chunks of its value. Yemenis staged a protest in Taiz in October to express their frustration after a plunge in the local currency which led to a surge in prices and shop closures. The angry protesters chanted slogans calling for urgent government intervention to stop the currency's collapse and to provide oil derivatives and basic materials.

Similar to MENAACTION's Semiannual Report 2021, youth emigration was still a prevalent byproduct of deteriorating economic conditions and unemployment in the region. In fact, a Gallup poll shows that 52% of youth from the MENA region prefer emigrating indefinitely, as an Arab Barometer-BBC joint poll showed alarmingly high percentages of youth who were willing to emigrate without documentation.

Over the second half of 2021, thousands of immigrants from the MENA region are stuck between Poland and Belarus, many of whom are from KRI. Iraqi Kurdish youth have been progressively leaving the region, for North America or Europe, with hopes of a better future. According to non-official sources, an estimated 27 thousand people fled to Europe in 2020. A Kurdish MP explained that the region's resources are being monopolized by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, propelling hundreds of young Kurds to risk their lives and emigrate to Europe.

The political turmoil in Tunisia, coupled with a deteriorating economy, is pushing Tunisian youth to think about emigration, especially among university graduates. In fact, it is estimated that over 4,000 Tunisians with PhD degrees are currently unemployed and live in poverty.



The Tunisian National Institute for Statistics stated that there are currently around 742,000 unemployed Tunisian youth. Many young Tunisians tried to start entrepreneurial projects, but they were faced with lengthy, corrupt, and vague processes, stating that Ennahda had a major say in public sector appointments, thus leading to increasing emigration attempts.

Similarly, a new poll published by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in Jordan shows that many young people in Jordan have decided to leave the country with hopes of bettering their future and improving their living conditions. The survey reported that 45% of young Jordanians are seriously considering emigrating abroad, and only 35 percent believe that young people can have a good future in Jordan.

Moreover, according to a recent study led by the National Human Development Observatory in Morocco, 70% of Moroccan youth stated that they would be happier if they lived abroad, the highest rate in the Arab world. This can be linked to the high rates of unemployment: while the overall rate of unemployment is that of 12%, that of the youth is 31%. The survey also revealed that 2.3 million youth are without education and without work.



Youth migration from the Gaza Strip has also become a pressing problem, endangering the lives of many young people who seek a better life in Europe. According to the Ministry of Interior in Gaza, out of the 74,000 people who have traveled outside of the Gaza Strip since the beginning of 2021, only 57,000 returned. Most people leaving are young graduates, who hold degrees and seek better job opportunities abroad.

According to a 2019 study, Iran is the country who is suffering from the second largest brain drain in the world. It is estimated that around 180,000 educated individuals left the country, usually in favor of Europe. As for young Iranians who remained in the country, resources observed show that substance abuse has become more prominent over the past years.



## Resource Economies

In addition to the challenges discussed earlier, there were other challenges related to resources, which have had direct implications on youth in the region.

Lebanon is one of these countries that faced tremendous resource challenges. Youth groups organized a campaign, which distributed brochures calling for the preservation of the state's gold resources.

The youth also spoke with citizens about the living crisis experienced by the Lebanese citizen in the absence of any effective role for the state, bearing responsibility for “the authority of incompetence and corruption that seeks to plunder more of Lebanon's wealth, by setting their eyes on gold.”

Lebanon has also faced tremendous fuel shortages. In early August, a number of university graduates in the south launched digital platforms to refuel cars with the aim of reducing the suffering of citizens standing in queues for long hours. The platforms coordinate with the municipalities and gas stations to facilitate the process for citizens and reduce the congestion and chaos at gas stations.

Further, a group of young Lebanese won the Nestlé Research & Development Accelerator's Swiss-Middle East Circular Economy for Youth Initiative (SMECEYI) competition, with the goal of coming up with executable projects that can address the issues of electronic, water, food, plastic, and construction waste.

In Morocco, youth of Souss-Massa believe that the recent discovery of “Europa Oil and Gas” company of a huge oil reserve in the shores of Inzkan city can be the beginning for the advancement and development they hope for. Youth are also concerned that the discovery of natural gas and oil can follow the same fate of phosphate and gold which do not have any direct impact on citizens.

Challenges related to resources were not exclusive to the economically challenged countries. In fact, even oil rich countries were attempting to preemptively act through diversification.

For instance, Saudi Arabia has been preparing itself for the youth bulge approaching it in the next few years. With 60% of its population below the age of 30, KSA is attempting to diversify its economy, especially after the drop in oil prices in recent years, to create job opportunities for emerging youth. Their attempts at preparing the country for the upcoming youth bulge also included work on infrastructure and transportation.

# Capacity Building & Employment Opportunities

In response to the aforementioned challenges facing youth in the MENA region, governments and nongovernment organizations have sought to conduct capacity building and training initiatives and to prepare youth to become more competitive in the job market. Such initiatives are thereafter divided into regional and country-specific.

Looking at the regional initiatives, there were various projects working on enhancing youth skills for entrepreneurship and scaling their skills for the job market, including, most notably:

- ❖ The Participation and Employment for Youth Program in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan, which aim to provide youth with employment opportunities and/or equip them with the necessary skills to create their own projects in an attempt to improve their conditions on one hand, and to limit the increasing phenomenon of youth emigration, on the other hand.
- ❖ INJAZ Al-Arab launched the 2021 Entrepreneurship Ecosystem, with courses geared to prepare students from all around the area for the employment market of today. This program seeks to provide youth with the tools they need to grow and sustain their businesses while also planting the seeds for future enterprises.
- ❖ Google.org announced that it would give grants to 3 nonprofit organizations in the MENA region: Helm, IDARE for Sustainable Development, and SPARK to allow these organizations to help the youth find employment, by acquiring digital skills and promoting entrepreneurship in the region.
- ❖ Silatech launched a youth dialogue series to help turn youth challenges into opportunities within an economic development context and through employment creation in the MENA region.
  - ❖ Within the event framework, a partnership agreement has been announced between Silatech and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), which looks to further create socio-economic opportunities for unemployed youth in the MENA region. It will also launch a program together with the Education for Employment Foundation (EFE) in Morocco, aiming to connect youth with decent employment. A key component of the initiative is highlighting the importance and urgency of promoting youth re-skilling and capacity building to achieve decent employment for young men and women among diverse industry sectors.



Looking at country-specific initiatives and interventions, the Iraqi Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) launched a program to develop their skills and prepare them for the labor market. MOLSA also announced that it intends to focus on implementing fixed steps for a modern work policy that can be applied on the ground for unemployed youth and make it an outlet for them to rely on instead of relying on social protection subsidies.

Additionally, UNICEF and ILO collaborated to assist Iraqi youth in transitioning from training to decent employment. Participants of the supported life skills and entrepreneurship training programme were directed towards ILO's employment-intensive investment programme, which focuses on infrastructure improvement and Green Works.

In Jordan, Orange and the German Development Cooperation inaugurated its 8th digital center in the region in Amman, Jordan, which includes a coding school, a solidarity FabLab – one of the Orange Foundation's digital manufacturing workshops, and an Orange Fab (BIG by Orange) start-up accelerator, supported by Orange Ventures Africa, the investment fund. The plan is to open two more centers, one in al-Zarqa and another in collaboration with the German Jordanian University. The goal of these centers is to improve youth employability in a sustainable manner.

Additionally, the Irbid branch of the All Jordan Youth Committee announced that they would host a series of training courses in cooperation with the Ministry of Digital Economy to prepare youth for integrating into the job market.

As for Egypt, the “Egypt is more beautiful with you” initiative was launched in Almanoufia to provide job opportunities for youth with disabilities, with about 320 young Egyptians signing up for the program with different disabilities. The program aims to empower them, train them, and provide them with adequate job opportunities.

In addition to that, there are several vocational training programs in Qalyubia, targeting young people to provide them with skills for professions ranging from programming and artificial intelligence to the food and beverages industry.

For example, Rami Shaaban, Community Development Officer at Qalyubiya Projects Agency, said that “130 young men and girls in the village of Qanatar have been trained in the assembly and maintenance of LED bulbs and mobile devices and 170 others in the packaging and leather industries will be provided for the establishment of their small projects.”

Furthermore, the Egyptian Youth and Sports Directorate in the Menoufia governorate carried out a workshop to train young people on small projects and how to integrate into the labor market.

The Regional Director of the Enterprise Development Authority in Menoufia stated that the agency provides financial services, such as granting loans to young graduates starting from 500 Egyptian pounds to 10 million Egyptian pounds, with a low financial interest and large grace periods, in order to support youth in getting started after finishing their studies.

Similarly, the mayor of the Sharqiya governorate announced that the national project for social and human and local development labelled “Mashrou'ak” gave loans worth 2,704,747 Egyptian pounds to 17,038 projects to provide 51,254 direct and indirect job opportunities for the governorate’s youth.

As for Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development launched the human capacity development program which looks to prepare youth for the current and future labor markets. The program provides hands-on training for its participants, as part of Saudi Arabia’s goal of localizing 40% of high-skilled jobs and reducing waithood among 80% of university degree holders within 12 months of their graduation. Furthermore, the Nitaqat program, which is the name for the Saudization initiative, aims at reducing unemployment and engaging the Saudi human capital.

Moreover, the Human Resources Development Fund of Saudi Arabia (HDF) revealed that it has supported the recruitment of more than 200,000 young men and women who have joined work in private sector facilities since the beginning of 2021 until the end of its third quarter, through employment support services and programs targeted to national cadres, according to data from the National Labor Observatory. UNFPA indicated that around 81,000 of the beneficiaries of employment support services were men, while 120,000 were women.

In the UAE, NYUAD runs the Strategic Philanthropy Initiative, in partnership with an Emirati businessman and social entrepreneur, which looks to create a “golden age of philanthropy in the region.” This partnership sets impact as its main target, as it looks to equip youth with tools, resources, and the infrastructure needed to boost impact.

The initiative focuses on three areas: (a) research to understand the past, present, and possible future of philanthropy in the UAE and region; (b) education for existing and aspiring philanthropists; and (c) bringing people together to share ideas about the practice.

In contrast, multiple youth and job seekers attended a job conference in Abu Dhabi only to find a limited number of job opportunities in the private sector, and mostly in two ministries. Youth asked authorities to limit such job fairs that are not subject to government monitoring, as young Emiratis often travel long distances to attend only to not find any opportunities.



Zain Bahrain has empowered over 2000 young Bahrainis as part of its Zain Youth (ZY) Program, which is a development program that provides Bahraini youth with practical learning experiences. As part of the program, participants are exposed to real business world challenges that sharpen their skills and prepare them for the labor market following their graduation.

Additionally, the Foras program looks to provide Bahraini youth with practical skills needed for the workforce. The program collaborates with over 10 international organizations and offers training at said organizations to give the youth a push in their employment endeavors. The most recent company to join was Yokogawa and has hosted 10 female youth interns.



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Other notable interventions over the second half of 2021 include, but not limited to, the following:

- ❖ In Kuwait – the Youth Public Authority, in cooperation with Limak, launched the training program for Kuwaiti female engineers to build their capacities to work in the private sector. The program works on refining the leadership and management skills of the participants in the field of engineering.
- ❖ In Lebanon – the unemployed are turning to tech. Codi, a free programming school for underprivileged youth, indicates that 85% of their developer graduates are employed within 3 months of graduation and earn an average of \$1,050 per month.

- ❖ In Mauritania – the Diplomatic Academy in Nouakchott held a meeting on the youth employment project, which looks to provide 60 thousand unemployed young Mauritians with skills to enable them to enter the job market.
- ❖ In Turkey – there are many workshops and courses to prepare Arab youth for the labor market, organized by Al-Fateh Academy in Istanbul.
- ❖ In Libya – Prime Minister announced a project aimed at providing youth formerly (or currently) part of armed militias with jobs in the public sector.

## Economic Engagement and Financial Inclusion

The second half of 2021 witnessed a number of initiatives with the goal of enhancing economic engagement and financial inclusion, albeit there was more emphasis on these important facets in the first half of the year. Various researchers and experts believe that the MENA region should progressively turn to a new form of economic development, one that is based around creative economy, which has become important to accelerate growth and to achieve a better future for the region's youth. At the same time, there is a need for enhancing the use of technology, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI), in increasing financial inclusion and facilitating financial services for the region's young population.

Economic integration is an essential intervention, especially with the presence of many vulnerable populations in the region, including Syrian refugees. In fact, of the 3.6 million Syrians living in Turkey, less than 50 thousand live in camps while the rest have to provide for themselves with minimal support. Researchers believe that Syrian youth in Turkey can reflect positively on the Turkish economy if they are provided with more space, particularly in the agriculture, service, industry, and trade sectors given their connections with merchants in Syria as well as their experience in the service sector.

Youth economic inclusion was also one of the main aspects of a forum organized by the Emirati Ministry of Foreign Trade and the Ministry of Culture and Youth. In the forum, attendees emphasized the importance of investing in youth through social development programs along with increased access to private sector activities.

Further, Saudi Arabia announced the establishment of the first nonprofit city in the world, to be a model for the development of the sector and an incubator for youth and volunteer groups as well as local and international nonprofit institutions. The city will also look to support innovation, entrepreneurship, and to qualify future leaders through the programs it will provide.



Looking at Egypt, there were three notable initiatives to discuss:

- ❖ First, Al-Dakahlia governorate approved the disbursement of the 155th installment of interest-free loan account of the youth employment service in September, benefitting 19 young men and 21 young women, allowing them to start professional projects.
- ❖ Second, the National Council for Women's branch in the Red Sea Governorate held an awareness session on financial inclusion, especially for women, in terms of opening accounts, credit cards, electronic wallets, lending, financing, and money transfer services, with the aim of empowering and supporting women economically and financially through financial education.
- ❖ Third, Injaz Al-Arab and HSBC bank launched a joint initiative, Saving for Good, to upskill 1,950 low-income workers through financial literacy efforts aimed at alleviating job market challenges. The initiative looks to instill saving habits and learn how to manage savings.

Libya has also been enhancing its efforts in advancing the engagement of youth in its rehabilitating economy. For instance, the Prime Minister announced that the government wants to dedicate near \$3.3 million to support youth and development projects along with granting them housing loans. Additionally, the Ministry of Youth has been working on addressing the restrictions on job creation for young people and their ability to compete in the labor market.

Looking at Jordan, according to a UNICEF study, youth's transition to adulthood has not met expectations, regardless of the increase in education. The study found that the youth reach financial independence later than expected, due to unemployment, lack of job opportunities, and other major economic challenges.



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## Start-up, Incubate, Scale-up

There are over 21,000 startups across the MENA region, employing thousands of people. Start-ups have allowed youth to experience hands-on employment as well as give some the ability to own their work. While over 60% of people in the region favor corporate and government work, start-ups are shaping to be the new future of employment in the region.

Over the second half of 2021, there were numerous initiatives aimed at supporting youth in starting up their entrepreneurial initiatives and helping them scale up to reach growth and sustainability. In a report published by Forbes magazine, Shamma Haider says that one of the keys to success in business projects is to employ an expert to manage the financial affairs to obtain the necessary advice and support in order to achieve financial stability.

Haidar adds that many young entrepreneurs do not give enough attention to the importance of financial advice, instead, they make critical financial decisions without taking the necessary steps to achieve the hoped-for financial success.

Given the importance of guidance, or incubation, the UAE launched multiple projects to encourage startups and attract youth, including the Skill-Up Academy and Scale-Up Platform to enable young entrepreneurs to be an integral part of the economy and to guide economic growth.

Additionally, Dubai Startup Ventures launched the Dubai Smart Entrepreneurs competition with a focus on sustainability, opportunity. The competition looks to empower young entrepreneurs and provide them with the knowledge and tools they need to promote the growth of their businesses and to be part of the strategy of smart transformation and thinking outside the traditional pattern of business projects.

Coupled with the competition, Dubai Startups, in collaboration with the Dubai Technology Entrepreneurship Center (Dtec), selected 30 young Emirati entrepreneurs to participate in their Youth Citizen Skills Development Program. The selected cohort engaged in specialized training on entrepreneurship, how to establish and promote the growth of businesses, and the importance of sales to emerging entrepreneurs.

There were two other main, government-led, initiatives in the UAE. First, the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry Youth Council organized an interactive meeting with young entrepreneurs. The meeting discussed how to make a project pioneer, the characteristics of entrepreneurs, their ability to analyze the market, planning, management and business organization, factors of success, and prepare feasibility studies.



Second, the government announced two packages to support the young entrepreneurs in establishing their own projects and developing their businesses.

In Egypt, there were several initiatives looking to support young entrepreneurs. Most of these initiatives were planned, implemented, and overseen by government institutions with minimal effective presence of the private sector. For instance, the Ministry of Social Solidarity launched a caravan for its opportunity program for economic empowerment in Assuit.

The caravan looks to support young and female entrepreneurs with limited income. Another key government-led project is Mashrou'ak, which provides youth entrepreneurs with low interest loans and expedited licenses. This is similar to another government project, Lifeboats, which also provides training and support services for youth in establishing their medium and small businesses.

Elsewhere in the region, there were other notable initiatives that aim to support youth in establishing and scaling their entrepreneurial ideas. Some of these initiatives include the following:

- ❖ In Morocco – the Youth Platform of Sidi Slimane was launched, as part of the “Improving the Income and Economic Inclusion of Youth” Program. The program includes two components, the first is concerned with preparing youth aged 18–45 before establishing their projects while the second component looks to scale up their established projects 12 months later.
- ❖ In Jordan – the All Jordan Youth Commission (AJYC) in Irbid governorate announced the start of registration for a free training course on entrepreneurship, in cooperation with Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Group (TAG). The course targeted youth and women aged 22–35 years, and it selected 20 participants who had pioneering ideas.
- ❖ In Turkey – a group of young Arabs in Istanbul launched the Istanbul Entrepreneurship Core to support entrepreneurship with the sponsorship of businessmen and international organizations. Core Istanbul also launched an incubation program targeting 40 Arab startups a year with full advisory support and a free workspace, in addition to connecting them to a network of investors.

# Technology and Digital Economy

Entrepreneurship goes hand in hand with innovation and technological advancements, as digital transformation is important in opening new horizons for employment; it provides the prerequisites for entrepreneurial and digital works contributing to job creation, especially during the ongoing pandemic.

In addition to that, technology could help provide opportunities to combat youth unemployment and improve private sector development. Modern financial technologies, or fintech, is a viable option for an Arab youth struggling with economic hardships. These technologies allow youth to manage their savings and investment expenses.

Since the importance of technology for entrepreneurship is well-known, it is essential for policymakers to act on that. The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States recently called for the need to develop tight and practical policies to advance the digital economy.

Investing in the digital economy will allow achieving high and sustainable growth rates that will absorb large numbers of young people looking for job opportunities in the region.

– Ahmed About Gheit,  
Secretary-General of the  
League of Arab States



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The digital economy currently represents an important resource in the global economy, and its importance is proven to be constantly increasing, as data indicates an acceleration in the growth of the digital economy at rates that exceed other traditional sectors of the economy, where the contribution of the digital sector is equivalent to 22% of the total global gross output.

As the global economy shifts from cash to digital, youth of the MENA region are being left behind from the conversation. The lack of financial literacy education in the region places youth at a disadvantage, especially since bank accounts are not allowed for those under 18 and in some places 21.



As such, raising awareness and ensuring the inclusion of youth can be a good place to start:

- ❖ Two teachers and residents of the UAE are releasing an app aiming at teaching kids how to manage their money intelligently to incorporate youth into the growing digital economy.
- ❖ The Arab Monetary Fund issued a series of brochures on e-commerce, with the objective of increasing the economic and financial awareness of young Arabs. These publications are meant to familiarize the public with important notions, such as financial inclusion and the fundamentals of finance or digital currencies. The main theme of these brochures is to spread awareness among the youth of the importance of the digital economy and its related developments.
- ❖ Microsoft and Injaz Al-Arab announced a partnership to empower 200,000 North Africans. The aim of the initiative is to teach youth the needed digital skills to raise their chances of employment. The project will target children as young as middle school and covering post-graduates and female-led start-ups, age range 12–24.
- ❖ General Motors Africa and Middle East partnered with Arab Youth Center to empower STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) leaders in the region. The collaboration will enhance the Technology Fellowship Program which has benefited over 22,000 individuals in the region. The Technology Fellowship Program provides aspiring STEM youth with the opportunity to gain knowledge and guidance from experts within the diverse spheres of technology and digital.



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The second half of 2021 witnessed a variety of youth-led and youth-focused technology-driven initiatives. A group of young Emiratis launched the Ghalib satellite in early July, as part of efforts to accelerate the development of space technology and empower youth. The satellite will track wildlife and study migration patterns of animals in remote areas.

Also in the UAE, the Youth Capacity Building and Knowledge Economy Summit was held in September. In it, participating entities addressed various issues, such as qualifying young people to shape the future through innovation and technology, the government's role in supporting and qualifying young minds and talents, and the importance of science, technology, and innovation to transform the UAE's economy into a knowledge economy.

Furthermore, the Dubai Youth Council, in collaboration with Gitex Unipreneur, launched the youth X platform during the GITEX Technology Week, which looks to empower young entrepreneurs toward technical innovation. This platform also looks to prepare and qualify aspiring entrepreneurs who contribute to the integration of academic, industrial, and technological sectors.

Bahrain held the first edition of the "Tech Expo Youth Technology and Innovation" project, organized by the Muharraq Youth Model Center. The program serves youth in the field of technology and innovation and looks to create a creative environment for them, as it supports them to promote their ideas and projects. As such, youth can exchange successful experiences among themselves and acquire more skills that help them develop their technological innovations.

There were also some notable training programs in the region, focusing on employing technology and innovation in entrepreneurship, including:

IBM established a training academy in Saudi, aimed at improving the digital skills of 100,000 young Saudis.

The Arab Bank launched its corporate accelerator program "AB Accelerator" in Egypt, focusing on supporting innovation and using emerging technologies within the finance sector to support entrepreneurs, especially youth.

In partnership with the World bank, the Jordanian Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship held a webinar, during which, the Ministry launched Jordan Source Program to facilitate new investments into the country's digital outsourcing economy. This program looks to encourage new investments into Jordan's digital outsourcing economy. This initiative is set to create jobs for digital talents, further boosting the ICT sector in the country.





## Spotlight: Migration and Forced Displacement Trends in the MENA Region

The economic conditions in the region, along with the deteriorating security dynamics have been forcing youth into two paths: voluntary migration (whether regular or irregular) and forced migration in its various forms.

Migration encompasses a variety of types; it includes economic migrants, internal displacement, asylum seeking, refugees, and smuggled and trafficked persons. Migrants can also be grouped in terms of direction/destination, whereby migrating within one's countries is internal migration and migrating out of one's country is external migration, or emigration.

### Voluntary Migration

MENAACTION studied migration trends in the Middle East and North Africa region, whereby we analyzed the "Migration Stock Database" produced by United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs – Population Division, which monitors global population trends periodically.

According to the Dictionary of Human Geography, emigration is a form of migration that occurs when a person leaves a place. Emigration is also a basic human right under Article 12 of the 1966 UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Immigration, on the other hand, is entering a new place and is considered one of the most significant causes of social change in the world (Clark, 1986; Sassen, 1996).

Looking at the overall trend in the MENA region, we find that there are more immigrants than there are emigrants. In fact, there is a total of 34.5m emigrants incoming into the 21 countries in the region, and there is a total of 48.7m immigrants, leaving their individual countries in the region.

#### ❖ North Africa Sub-Region

Looking more specifically at the states in North Africa, we find that Sudan has seen the most incoming immigrants with over 1.2m immigrants, 63% of whom immigrated from South Sudan. Secondly, Libya has about 818,216 immigrants, with 37% of whom came from Palestine. Egypt has about 504,053 total immigrants, 27% of whom immigrated from Palestine. Moreover, Algeria came in fourth with approximately 249,075 total immigrants, 13% of whom also came from Palestine, a heavily featured state in this report. Mauritania welcomed about 172,967 immigrants with the vast majority immigrated from Mali (63%).

As for Morocco, 103,958 immigrated into the North African state, with 36% came from France. Tunisia was the country that welcomed the least immigrants, with 57,455 in total, 18% of whom came from Algeria.

For youth specifically, we find that 43% of immigrants into Egypt are youth, followed by 38% incoming into Mauritania, 37% for Libya, 33% for Morocco, 32% into Algeria, 30% into Tunisia, and 26% incoming into Sudan.

Moreover, for emigration, we find that the numbers are much higher than they are for immigration, as residents of the region are leaving more. Egypt produced the most emigrants with 3.5m, 27% of whom emigrated to Saudi Arabia, a place where many Egyptians go to for work opportunities.

Secondly, Morocco exported about 3.3m in emigrants, with France being a popular destination. Sudan exported over 2m emigrants, with 28% of whom emigrated to South Sudan. The transfer of population between Sudan and South Sudan is evident in these figures amid the partition.

Algeria exported 1.9m in emigrants with a staggering 81% emigrated to France. Similarly, 52% of Tunisia's 831,634 emigrants left to France, a popular destination among North Africans. As for Libya, 180,611 emigrated outwards with about 20% to Italy, as 36% of Mauritania's 126,509 left to Senegal.

#### ❖ The Gulf Sub-Region

For the Gulf region, immigration is a far more prevalent trend than emigration. Given the attractive economic opportunities present in this region, a large number of economic migrants turn to these states for opportunities, many of whom come from neighboring states as well as from Southeast Asian states, primarily India. With that, Saudi welcomed the highest number of immigrants, not just among the gulf region, but among the entire MENA region with 13.1m immigrants, 19% of whom immigrated from India. The UAE came in second with 8.5m immigrants, 40% from India as well.

Kuwait came in third with about 3m immigrants, 37% also came from India. Qatar welcomed 2.29m immigrants, 31% of whom immigrated from India, as Oman's 2.28m immigrants featured 58% from India. Bahrain welcomed 741,161 immigrants, 40% of whom immigrated from India too. Yemen came in last with 385,628 immigrants, 73% of whom immigrated from Somalia, migrating from one conflict impacted nation to another. 48% of Oman's immigrants are youth, followed by 46% incoming into the UAE, 45% for Qatar, 40% for Bahrain, 31% into Yemen, 30% for Kuwait, and Saudi came in last with 29% of its immigrants are youth.



As for emigration, with the exception of 1.2m Yemeni emigrants (60% of whom emigrated to Saudi), this region features moderate numbers of outward migration. Saudi Arabia exported 303,904 emigrants, with 31% leaving to the United States, a popular destination for education and work opportunities.

For Kuwait, 205,411 migrated out of the nation, 32% of whom went to the UAE, which in turn exported 162,747 emigrants, 16% of whom went to Kuwait. Bahrain produced 60,163 emigrants, 51% of whom went to Bangladesh. Qatar exported about 26,312 emigrants, 38% of whom went to Palestine, a similar destination to which 41% of Oman's 22,461 emigrants left.

#### ❖ West Asia Sub-Region

For West Asia, a region where conflicts are more prevalent, we find large numbers of migration. Looking at incoming migration, immigration, Turkey welcomed the highest number of immigrants with 5.8m, 64% immigrated into Turkey from Syria.

Jordan came in second with 3.3m immigrants, 63% of whom migrated from neighboring state Palestine. Iran came in third with 2.6m immigrants, with a staggering 86% of whom coming from war torn Afghanistan.

Lebanon welcomed 1.8m immigrants, 62% of whom migrated from Syria, which in turn welcomed 867,848 immigrants, 69% of whom came from Palestine. Iraq welcomed 368,062 immigrants, 70% of whom also came from Syria. Palestine ranked last with 253,735, 25% of whom came from Israel.

Youth immigration is also a featured trend in this region. For that, Palestine immigrants featured 48% youth, followed by 42% into Iraq, 41% into Iran, 40% into Turkey, 38% into Syria, 37% into Lebanon, and 29% into Jordan.

As for emigration, Syria's ongoing civil war resulted in 8.2m emigrants, 45% of whom emigrated into Turkey. Palestine came in second with 3.8m emigrants, 55% of whom migrated to Jordan. Turkey came in third with 3.4m emigrants, 44% of whom moved to neighboring Germany.

Additionally, there are also about 2m immigrants from Iraq, 11% of whom migrated to the United States. Similarly, of Iran's 1.3m immigrants, 31% migrated to the United States.

As for Lebanon, 844,503 immigrated outwards, with 18% of whom moved to Saudi Arabia, a popular destination for Jordanians, as 30% of the nation's 784,428 immigrants moved to their southern neighbors.

Country	Emigrants		Immigrants	
	Number	Most population Destination	Number	Most population Origin
Algeria	1,945,035	France	169,035	Palestine
Bahrain	60,163	Bangladesh	444,354	India
Egypt	3,547,877	Saudi Arabia	290,077	Palestine
Iraq	2,033,789	United States	212,081	Syria
Iran	1,302,576	United States	1,591,071	Afghanistan
Jordan	784,428	Saudi Arabia	2,381,277	Palestine
Kuwait	205,441	UAE	2,131,416	India
Lebanon	844,503	Saudi Arabia	1,183,006	Syria
Libya	180,611	Italy	516,012	Palestine
Morocco	3,331,912	France	69,323	France
Mauritania	128,509	Senegal	107,769	Mali
Oman	22,461	Palestine	1,196,861	India
Palestine	3,854,370	Jordan	132,350	Israel
Qatar	26,312	Palestine	1,218,424	India
Saudi Arabia	303,904	United States	9,297,527	India
Sudan	2,040,783	South Sudan	899,874	South Sudan
Syria	8,274,868	Turkey	535,255	Palestine
Tunisia	831,634	France	40,343	Algeria
Turkey	3,452,507	Germany	3,540,528	Syria
UAE	162,747	Kuwait	4,621,176	India
Yemen	1,248,711	Saudi Arabia	267,506	Somalia

Figure 2: Number of migrants by country of departure and country of arrival. Source: UNHCR

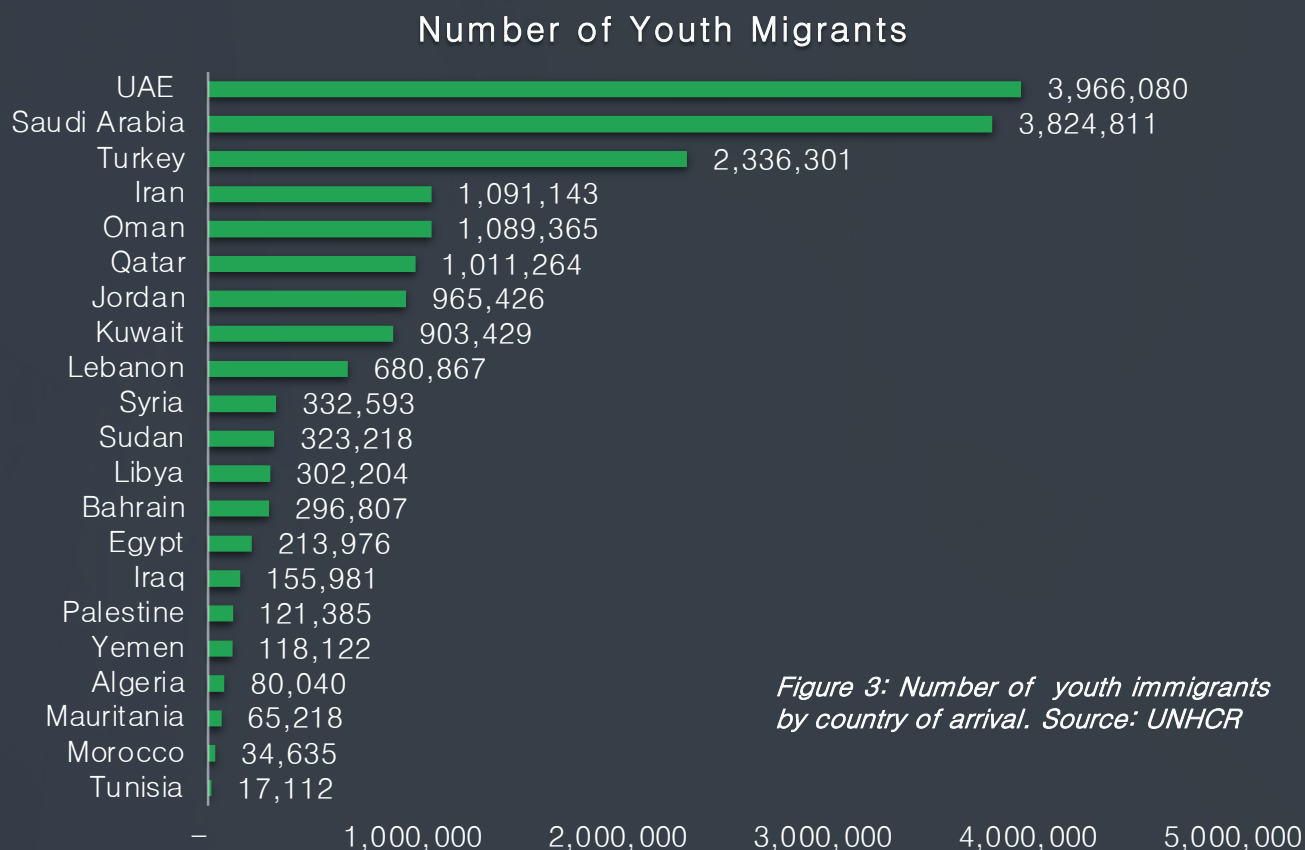


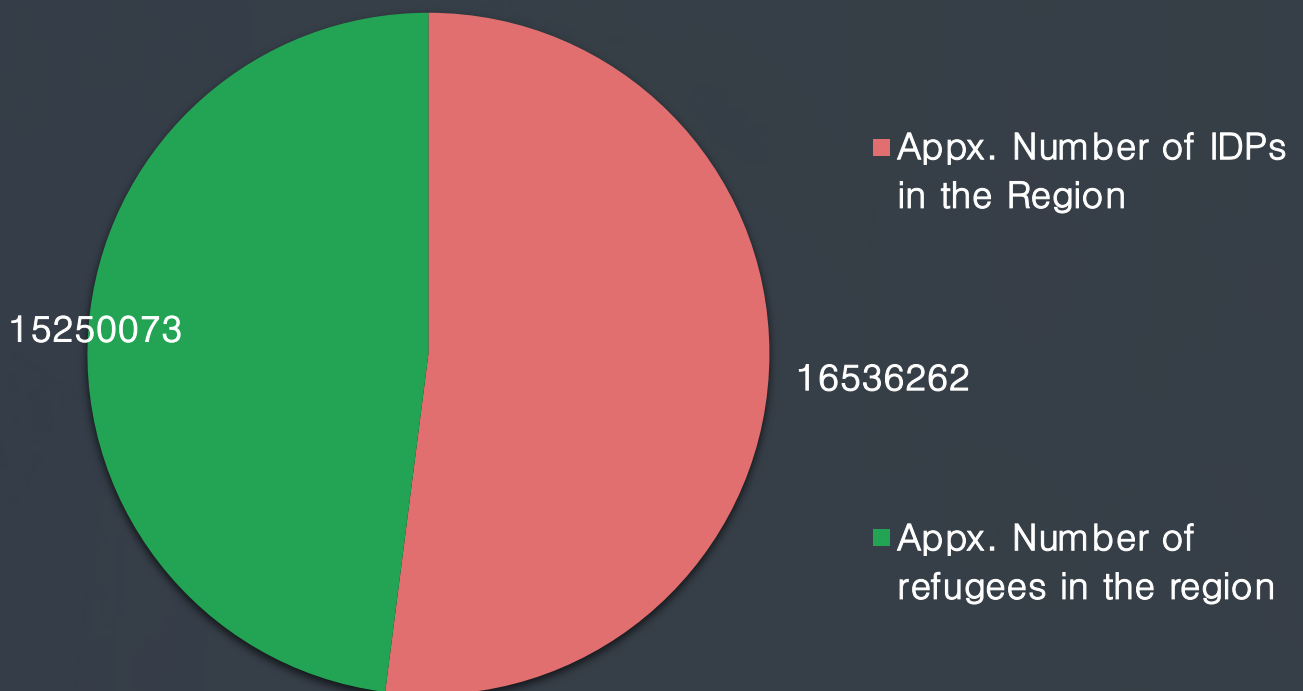
Figure 3: Number of youth immigrants by country of arrival. Source: UNHCR



## Forced Displacement

The MENA region produces 32.5 million displaced persons, divided between 16.5 million IDPs and 15.2 million refugees under the mandate of UNHCR and UNRWA, in addition to other categories of displaced persons. Forced displacement includes a number of categories such as refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and stateless persons, among others. This issue is not new in the region, with protracted displacement (meaning displacement for three consecutive years) being a common issue. Today, the region is home to some of the most pressing and protracted displacement issues in the world, affecting Palestinians, Syrians, Iraqis, Yemenis, and others.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a refugee is “Someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. They a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so.” Furthermore, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center at the UNHCR, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are “Persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.”



*Figure 4: Total number of forced displaced persons in the MENA region*

Countries in the MENA region do host a large number of refugees and displaced persons. More specifically, they host about 25.6 million displaced persons in total. Despite this large number, MENA countries remain somewhat unable to fulfill the even-more pressing supply of displaced person in the region, which is currently at 32.6 million refugees, displaced persons, asylum seekers, and stateless persons, who are displaced due to wars, conflicts, and disasters. Meaning, MENA states continue to struggle in terms of providing services along with the economic pressure accompanying hosting displaced persons.

Furthermore, despite their tremendous capacities, the Gulf countries with the exception of Yemen, only host 0.7% of all displaced person in the region, with a large number of this percentage is in fact, stateless persons. A stateless person is defined, according to UNHCR, as a “person who is not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law.”

### Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and IDPs by Country of Origin

#### ❖ West Asia Sub-Region:

Home to the region’s most protracted conflicts, the West Asia subregion currently has produced approximately 25 million persons in displacement. Syria, alone, has produced 13.2 million persons currently in displacement, divided between 6.6 million refugees, 118,435 asylum seekers, and 6.5 million IDPs, 29% of those IDPs have been displaced in 2019 alone.

Palestine came second with 7.45 million persons currently in forced migration from Palestine. Of those 7.45 million, 7.2 million are refugees currently under direct UNRWA mandate, 11,523 asylum seekers, and 243,000 IDPs.

It is also worth noting that more Palestinian houses were demolished in East Jerusalem in 2019 than in any of the past 15 years. Iraq ranked third highest, as it produced 2.3 million persons currently in forced migration, divided between 344,460 refugees, 302,721 asylum seekers, and 1.6 million IDPs, 6.5% of whom were displaced in 2019.

Turkey currently has produced approximately 1.3 million persons in forced migration, whereby 83,271 are refugees, 46,934 asylum seekers, and 1.1 million IDPs. Then, Iran produced 736,168 persons currently in forced migration, divided between 129,676 refugees, 86,087 asylum seekers, and 520,000 IDPs, the majority of whom are disaster induced.

Furthermore, Lebanon produced 26,055 persons currently in forced migration, whereby 5,801 are refugees, 8,024 are asylum seekers, and 7,200 are IDPs, 60% of whom were displaced in 2019 alone.



Jordan came last with the least number of persons in forced migration, 9,095 persons currently in displacement coming from Jordan, whereby 2,384 are refugees, 4,711 are asylum seekers, and 46 are disaster induced IDPs.

West Asia has witnessed a number of pressing conflicts, including the ongoing war in Syria, the occupation in Palestine, the various armed conflicts in Iraq, and the migration of Afghanis fleeing armed conflict into Iran.

#### ❖ North Africa Sub-Region:

North Africa subregion currently has produced approximately 3.9 million persons currently in forced migration, with Sudan, alone is the origin country for 82% of those currently in forced migration. As such, there are currently 3.2 million Sudanese in forced migration, divided between 734,947 refugees, 71,959 asylum seekers, and 2.4 million IDPs, 15% of those have been displaced in 2019 alone.

Libya has produced 473,050 persons currently in forced migration, whereby 16,033 are refugees, 5,975 are asylum seekers, and 451,000 IDPs, 48% of whom have been displaced in 2019 alone. Egypt ranked third highest, producing 109,299 persons currently in forced migration, divided between 27,506 refugees, 16,370 asylum seekers, and 65,004 IDPs. Mauritania currently has produced approximately 52,603 persons in forced migration, whereby 37,423 are refugees, 8,580 are asylum seekers, and 6,600 IDPs.

Then, Algeria produced 15,284 persons currently in forced migration, divided between 4,514 refugees, 7,463 asylum seekers, 3,200 IDPs, the majority of whom are disaster induced. Furthermore, Morocco produced 13,410 persons currently in forced migration, whereby 4,637 are refugees, 8,313 are asylum seekers, and 200 are IDPs. Lastly, Tunisia has produced 4,778 persons currently in forced migration, whereby 2,068 are refugees, 2,664 are asylum seekers, and 32 are IDPs.

Ultimately, North Africa has witnessed a number of conflicts contributing to forced migration, including the armed conflict in Libya, the partition of Sudan, the Arab Spring movements in the region, and the issues in the countries in the Sahara.

#### ❖ Gulf Sub-Region:

With the exception of Yemen, the Gulf region enjoys a rather safe and secure setting, culminating in a low number of displaced persons. In fact, only 11.4% of the total number of displaced persons in the MENA were displaced from the Gulf region, with Yemen, alone producing 99.8% of those currently in forced migration from the Gulf region.

Moreover, there are currently 3.7 million Yemenis in forced migration, divided between 36,518 refugees, 34,312 asylum seekers, and 3.6 million IDPs, 11% of whom were displaced in 2019 alone. Saudi Arabia came in second with 3,461 total persons in forced migration from the Kingdom, whereby 1,762 are refugees, 1,413 are asylum seekers, and 260 disaster induced IDPs.

Kuwait came in third, producing 2,715 total persons currently in forced migration, divided between 1,300 refugees and 1,405 asylum seekers. Oman currently has produced approximately 2,174 persons in forced migration, whereby only 42 are refugees, 58 are asylum seekers, and 1,100 are IDPs.

Bahrain produced a total of 701 persons currently in forced migration, divided between 557 refugees and 144 asylum seekers. Furthermore, The UAE produced 559 persons currently in forced migration, whereby 155 are refugees, 184 are asylum seekers, and 220 are IDPs. Lastly, Qatar has produced 73 persons currently in forced migration, whereby 36 are refugees and 37 are asylum seekers.

### Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and IDPs by Country of Asylum

#### ❖ West-Asia Sub-Region:

In terms of hosting displaced persons, West Asia hosts 74.7% of all displaced persons in the MENA region. Syria, which produced the highest number of displaced persons is also the host country to the largest number of persons. In fact, Syria currently hosts 6.6 million displaced persons within its borders, with a large percentage of which attributed to IDPs in addition to 18,817 refugees, 18,654 asylum seekers, and 160,000 stateless persons.

Turkey hosts close to 4 million displaced persons currently, with 3.7 million of whom are refugees couple with 311,719 asylum seekers, in addition to IDPs. Iraq ranked third highest, hosting 3.1 million displaced persons, whereby 283,022 are refugees and 14,035 are asylum seekers in addition to about 1.8 million IDPs.

In fourth, Jordan hosts approximately 3 million displaced persons, whereby 2.95 million are refugees and 52,562 are displaced persons.

Lebanon, moreover, hosts 1.44 million displaced persons, 1.42 million of whom are refugees coupled with 16,423 asylum seekers. Additionally, Iran hosts 979,476 displaced persons, the vast majority of whom are refugees, mostly from Afghanistan.



#### ❖ North Africa Sub-Region:

North Africa hosts 14.3% of all displaced persons in the MENA region. Similar to West Asia, Sudan in North Africa hosts the largest number of displaced persons just as it has produced the largest number of displaced persons too.

Currently, Sudan hosts about 2.96 million displaced persons, 1.07 million are refugees and 17,622 are asylum seekers. Egypt ranked second highest with 314,937 displaced persons currently hosted in Egypt, 246,749 of whom are refugees coupled with 68,184 asylum seekers.

Libya currently hosts about 270,379 displaced persons, 8,794 of whom are refugees and 47,414 are asylum seekers. Moreover, Algeria hosts currently 103,276 displaced persons, the majority of whom are refugees (94,350) coupled with 8,926 asylum seekers.

Moreover, Mauritania hosts 84,322 displaced persons, 83,919 are refugees and 1,131 are asylum seekers. Then, Morocco hosts 7,775 displaced persons divided between 5,940 refugees and 1,835 asylum seekers. Finally, Tunisia came in last with 1,330 displaced persons hosted within its borders, 1,066 of whom are refugees and 256 are asylum seekers.

#### ❖ The Gulf Sub-Region:

The Gulf region hosts 10.6% of the total number of displaced persons in the MENA region. Discounting Yemen, the six other states only host 0.7% of the total displaced persons in the region despite their financial capabilities to host more.

Yemen hosts 2.5 million displaced persons divided between 264,369 refugees and 8,814 asylum seekers in addition to a large number of IDPs. Kuwait hosts 93,670 displaced persons, 673 are refugees, 981 are asylum seekers, and 92,000 are stateless persons. Saudi Arabia hosts 72,436 displaced persons, 266 of whom are refugees and 2,170 are asylum seekers in addition to 70,000 stateless persons.

Further, UAE hosts 7,782 total displaced persons divided between 1,184 refugees and 6,506 asylum seekers. Qatar hosts 1,482 displaced persons whereby only 190 are refugees and 92 are asylum seekers in addition to 1,200 stateless persons. Oman hosts 564 displaced persons divided between 308 refugees and 256 asylum seekers.

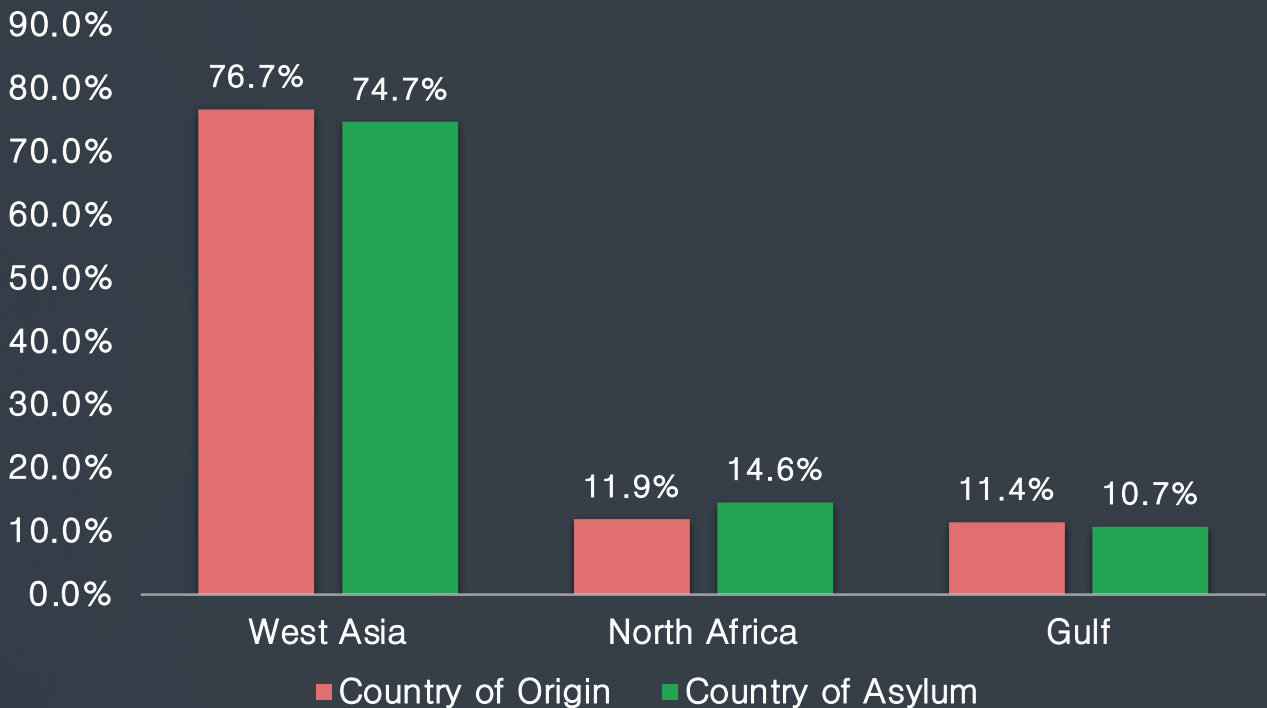
Finally, Bahrain hosts 319 displaced persons, 263 of whom are refugees and 56 are asylum seekers.

It is worth mentioning that GCC countries, including Qatar, have relaxed the rules for existing expats who do not have the means of renewing travel documents / passports to prevent them from further displacement.

### Conclusions and Broad Trends

In analyzing raw UNHCR, UNRWA, and IDMC data, we find that forced displacement in the MENA region is localized per sub-region. Meaning, most displaced persons either remain within the borders of their countries or flee to the most neighboring states. West Asia is the sub-region where the vast majority of forced displacement occurs and hosted. In fact, we find that the region produces 76.7% of all displacement in the region and also hosts and welcomes 74.7% of all displacement in the region. North Africa produces 11.9% and hosts 14.6% of all displaced persons in the MENA region while the gulf region produces 11.4% and hosts 10.7% of all displaced persons in the region. Furthermore, Yemen is the country where the majority of displacement occurs in the gulf region. Without Yemen, the remaining 6 states in the sub-region produce only 0.03% of displaced persons and welcome only 0.7%.

Such an analysis shows a disproportionate action between the individual states when factoring their overall economic wellbeing, as states such as Jordan and Lebanon host far more displaced persons than their Gulf counterparts. At the same time, it is worth noting that many GCC states do provide sizeable financial aid to those hosting displaced person to further enable them to provide better services.



*Figure 5: Percent of Forced Displaced Persons According to Origin and Destination*



## Conclusions and Recommendations

Economic backsliding, unemployment, rising poverty rates, and migration were identified as some of the main challenges facing the MENA region. Neither the fiscal space nor the safety nets are available to soften the blow felt by the people in the region when the pandemic hit.

- ❖ Governments in the region could explore increasing social security safety net policies to address the needs of those living in poverty and those who were heavily impacted by the pandemic.
- ❖ Governments should work on increasing their share of home-grown global companies. They should also expand education to prepare youth for the realities of the ever-changing job market.
- ❖ Governments in the region need to provide an environment that enables research and entrepreneurship for youth and for government employees;

The recent A'sdaa BCW Arab youth Survey revealed Arab youth indicated three main solutions for combating unemployment: tackling corruption, sharing more information on job opportunities, as well as improving the education system. Addressing the prevalent economic challenges begins with reforming the education systems, raising public awareness on the needs of the job market, investing heavily in entrepreneurship, and revitalizing the legal framework and economic policies.

- ❖ Education and the labor market need to be made more aligned, especially that the region's education systems are sufficient for producing bureaucrats, not private sector professions or innovators and entrepreneurs. With a job market that requires critical thinking and problem-solving skills and is leaning more in the direction of technology, education curricula ought to be realigned with the private sector and produce young people who possess these skills.
- ❖ Governments and the private sector need to conduct holistic market research in their countries to understand the needs of the labor market. Such reports should be available to the public and relayed to schools to inform their graduates in order to support their decisions in selecting university fields of study.

There are two issues to be addressed with current local level entrepreneurial training efforts. They do not offer adequate post-training support, and they do not provide trainees with proper access to financial support.

- ❖ Youth entrepreneurs should be provided with more training on fundraising and on successful mechanisms for accessing financial support and investment opportunities.
- ❖ Governments can provide incentives to banks and other financial institutions to lend small and new entrepreneurial projects to support their growth.
- ❖ There also needs to be effective legal frameworks that are adaptable to new realities in the world. They should include bankruptcy laws; they should remove barriers that prevent or delay registration processes; and overall, they ought to be more welcoming for youth innovators.
- ❖ Governments in the MENA region should work towards better economic integration in the region, including reducing tariffs, issuing work permits for people to look for jobs across the region, and facilitating a systematic acknowledgment of degrees.

Financial literacy remains low in the region, and it is impacting economic inclusion on one hand and youth's entrepreneurial prospects on the other.

- ❖ It is vital that public institutions work towards increasing financial literacy in the region. A cooperation between the private and public sectors could be very beneficial to youth.
- ❖ It is also important to distinguish the various needs within the region: there must be adapted and somewhat "customized" approaches to improving financial literacy in each country or subregion of the MENA.





CONFLICT



The drastic increase of total forced displacement as well as a halt in developmental progress — both within countries and across borders — as of the end of 2021 can be attributed to several crises — some already existed, some are new, and some resurfaced after new geopolitical developments. These includes the Syrian crisis which stretched into its tenth year. A majority of refugees and those displaced came from the broader MENA region, from nations such as Syria, Afghanistan, Palestine, Yemen, and Libya where crises either continued to move steadily or flared within 2021.

## The Conflict in Yemen

The war in Yemen between the Houthi forces and the Saudi-led Coalition continues to be ongoing in its seventh year, with no end in sight, as fighting intensifies and casualties grow among the Houthi and general Yemeni population. 2021 saw the Arabian peninsula itself face growing security dilemmas as the Houthi forces gain increased capabilities to launch remote attacks via drones and cruise/ballistic missiles within Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, with several notable attacks occurring this year on strategic sites such as oil fields, military bases, and production sites within the two nations and surrounding waters.



At least 10,000 children have been killed or maimed since the conflict's beginnings in 2014, and thousands more have been recruited into the fighting. An estimated 2 million children are internally displaced. The damage and closure of schools and hospitals has also disrupted access to education and health services. More than two million children are out of school, leaving them even more vulnerable.

Meanwhile, Yemen has been plagued by one of the world's worst food crises, with nearly 2.3 million children under the age of five suffering from acute malnutrition. Of these, 400,000 are expected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition and could die if they do not receive urgent treatment.



The impact of war on youth has been detrimental due to high rates of malnourishment, disease, civilian casualties. and youth recruitment into war as child soldiers.

This last point is evident by a recent United Nations study which noted that nearly 2,000 children (aged 10–17) – turned into child soldiers by the Houthi rebel forces have died on the battlefield since 2020. Recruitment of child-soldiers within the conflict has occurred en-masse, with children being influenced and ultimately recruited from mosques, schools, and summer camps.

The trend of youth being entrapped and losing lives within this conflict will unfortunately continue into 2022 as neither side of the conflict – the Houthis or the Saudi-led Coalition is willing to give up an inch. Saudi-led bombings continue to wreak devastation and loss of life among Yemeni youth.

## The Conflict in Syria

The civil war and complex infighting within Syria, largely between President Assad and the Syrian Democratic Forces, in addition to jihadist and opposition groups, has continued over the span of 2021 with many casualties and internal displacement. This is evident among Syrian youth, in which Since the start of the war in 2011, has resulted in at least 12,000 children being verified as killed or injured. This is approximated as “one child every eight hours over the past ten years,” as stated by UNICEF Representative in Syria, Bo Viktor Nylund in March of 2021.

Nylund notes that this figure may only be the tip of the iceberg, as these are only children that the UN was able to verify as having been killed or injured, with the real number of youth casualties being much higher. Child soldiers continue to be a theme in conflict in the region, with Syria being no exception, as verified data from UNICEF shows that from the start of the conflict in 2011 to 2020, at least 5,700 children (as young as seven years old) – were influenced and recruited into joining the conflict as child soldiers.

A noteworthy consequence of the conflict in Syria is the impact on education services, formerly robust in pre-civil war Syria. The impact of conflict on education is showcased by the fact that at least 1,300 education and medical facilities have become targets since the start of the conflict, which also includes the personnel who are educating and providing medical services. UNICEF figures further show that at least 3.5 million Syrian children are currently out of school, of which 40% are girls.

Furthering the impact that conflict has had on girls in Syria is the issue of child marriage which has increased as consequence of a lack of education and job market opportunities, resulting in child marriage becoming increasingly utilized as a financial coping mechanism for families. The civil war has shown that despite the humanitarian toll of the conflict and fighting continuing between all the involved parties, that President Assad has cemented his rule within his portion of Syria and will continue the conflict as he receives backing from powerful actors such as Russia and Iran.



## The Conflict in Libya

Libya ended 2021 on a slightly more stable note that is heading towards a positive step in 2022. After almost 10 years of fragmentation and civil war, a Ceasefire Agreement between the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army of the General Command of the Armed Forces was signed on October 23rd, 2020.

The resulting creation in March 2021 of the Libyan Government of National Unity (GNU) established a provisional governmental structure while striking a delicate balance between regional power brokers and stakeholders throughout the nation.



Although there has been an end to large-scale infighting and civil-war, portions of the October 2020 ceasefire agreement remain unimplemented, namely the withdrawal of foreign armed forces – largely mercenaries from Sudan, Chad, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Russia.

Additionally, the shuffling and subsequent delay of the proposed December 24th, 2021 election date and who is eligible to stand as a candidate has resulted in risks and doubts among the Libyan people as to what the future holds in 2022 as the new election has been most likely delayed until June of 2022 according to senior United Nations officials.

These recent developments occurred against the longer running backdrop of general insecurity caused by the proliferation of Libyan armed groups, divided political classes and the resulting competition and occasional flares in violence that resultantly occur. The future election results themselves may spark additional violence that stems from armed forces backing rival candidates on the basis of voter fraud or intimidation.

Libyan youth have grown up as a generation who have experienced conflict for most of their lives for the past decade, and as result have borne development, economic, and livelihood challenges on top of being potentially victim to violence by armed militias, terrorism, and criminal rampancy. An unfortunate consequence of the conflict as well is vulnerable youth becoming targets of recruitment into militias and armed groups to serve as child soldiers.

## The Conflict in Palestine

One of the most remarkable conflicts of 2021 was the large flare up in violence occurring between the Palestinian parties and Israel which resulted in war in Gaza in addition to weeks of violence in the West Bank and Jerusalem, beginning in May 2021. This was the deadliest eruption of violence between the Israeli-Palestinian fronts since 2014. The ignition for this conflict, on top of longstanding grievances, stemming from evictions of Palestinian families by Israeli police supported by extremist settlers from the predominantly Palestinian Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem, in early 2021.

Last May's war in Gaza resulted in the deaths of 261 Palestinians, and 13 Israelis over a period of 11 days (May 10 – May 21, 2021), according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The violence ultimately culminated into all-out conflict between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups in the Gaza Strip – a largely one-sided conflict given the resources and military power of the Israeli military.

This one-sidedness of the power dynamic is noted by the stark difference in death toll, with the overwhelming casualties, injuries, and destruction among Palestinians In Gaza shown by the nearly 2,200 Palestinians who were injured, including 685 children and 480 women, as a result of Israeli missile strikes and operations. Further, over 113,000 Palestinians were displaced from their destroyed homes at the peak of the conflict, and already precarious livelihoods and infrastructure decimated.



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The making of this humanitarian context in Gaza is also the result of conflict severely impacting the supply of basic services throughout the blockaded territory. The scars of the May conflict continue to remain going into 2022, and the livelihood conditions will continue to be at critical levels for Palestinians.

## The Conflict in Afghanistan

Most remarkable was the crisis in Afghanistan resulting from the U.S. troop withdrawal in the summer of 2021 resulted in a very destructive and violent situation within the country as the Taliban advanced and hundreds of thousands of Afghans attempted to escape from an incoming Taliban rule, being reminiscent of the not so distant past in the 1990s rule of the Taliban.

This was notable given the relative surface-level stability of Afghanistan under the U.S. troop presence and billions in development funding that had been allocated towards the nation, under the guise of “democracy building”.



The Taliban advancement to nation-wide control resulted in the numerous deaths of many minority groups and those affiliated with the previous U.S. presence as well as the Karzai and Ghani Administrations. Internal displacement is fresh and on a nation-wide scale with at least 5.5 million Afghans internally displaced by the recent conflict and take over by the Taliban.

The gendered impact of the Taliban coming to power was evident, especially on women and girls. Women and girls ultimately lost many rights and a way of life that they had been afforded under the previous administrations and U.S. presence. Education, freedom of expression, and financial and social independence were all reduced under the new Taliban regime, resulting in detrimental impacts especially on the Afghan youth who had grown up largely under a completely different set of societal-government relations.



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It is expected that progress in many areas engaging youth will be stalled, due to a lack and/or stall of long-term developmental funding going towards a Taliban-led Afghanistan in addition to narrower parameters for youth to be able to develop further in.

While the conflict in Afghanistan was beyond the scope of weekly MENARY Monitor editions, the magnitude of these developments and the importance of the conflict entail grand implications on the MENA region as a whole.



## Thematic Analysis

Conflict within the region can also be broken down into further sub-categories from MENA nations into markers of conflict such as migration, human rights violations, and drug-related crimes.

## Conflict-Induced Migration

2021 saw the continuation of migration trends that utilize the Mediterranean Sea crossing route, in which mainly Sub-Saharan Africans (in addition to smaller pockets of MENA and South Asian country nationals) are fleeing either conflict or economic hardships within their own nations attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach European states via treacherous irregular migration routes through North African nations such as Libya and Tunisia.

Maritime crossings launching from the coasts of both nations, especially a conflict-ridden Libya, saw a rise this past year in the number of irregular migration maritime operations from both coasts towards Italy were intercepted by a combination of Tunisian and Italian naval units.



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Cementing this rise is UNHCR's annual data from Mid-December that showed that over the span of 2021, 32,917 migrants reached Italy, and noting that 38.4% of them are Tunisians – a near 16 percentage points increase compared to the 24% recorded in 2020.



UNHCR noted that it is not just Tunisians leaving their homelands. In fact, 14,039 people have left from Tunisian ports this year and arrived in Italy, slightly less than those leaving from Libya 12,862 and a lot less than Algeria, 1,31.

In an additional noteworthy incident in mid–August, 287 people of mixed African nationalities were rescued by the Tunisian Navy in an irregular maritime crossing encompassing 17 boats. Similarly, in mid–December, the Tunisian Navy rescued 93 African migrants during an attempted Mediterranean crossing to Europe.

Tunisian Defense Ministry provided an official statement, stating that one of its navy patrol boats had intercepted “93 migrants of various African nationalities,” including three Tunisians on a boat about 42 kilometers northeast of the coastal city of Sfax. Overall, UNHCR estimates that 1,645 people have drowned in the Mediterranean over the span of 2021.

Complementing the maritime migration route is the land–crossing route largely originating from Iraq, Iran, and Syria and mainly leading into Eastern and Central Europe via Turkey. This route ballooned over the course of 2021, with the influx of Afghan refugees fleeing conflict in the summer in addition to Syrians fleeing the ongoing civil war.

However, as migratory routes from Turkey to the nearby Greek islands are staunchly defended by the Turkish and Greek coastguards, smugglers in Turkey have developed a long–range route to Italy. In late December, three separate sailing boats overfilled with refugees capsized in three different parts of the Aegean Sea, leading to at least 31 deaths and dozens of people missing.

The Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq, from which hundreds of migrants flow to the border between Belarus and Poland, notably announced in November that it would seek to address the root causes of migration within its borders by attempting to pursue a different approach than the rest of its MENA neighbors by focusing on job creation and alleviating economic stressors.

Many Eastern European states such as Belarus have been accused by Western governments of fueling the crisis by issuing visas to these economic migrants and encouraging them to transit into Poland as a pressure tactic in retaliation for EU sanctions.

The overall rise in irregular migration to Europe via the maritime route from North African countries as well as the land route through Iraq, Syria, and Iran is a combination of both localized and regional conflicts, economic hardships (also exacerbated by the economic toll of COVID–19), as well as a lack of livelihood opportunities in the countries of origin.

# Human Rights Violations

Over the span of 2021, human rights in the region were marked by an increase in international human rights violations in several contexts namely within Palestine/Israel, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen due to ongoing conflicts and new ignitions in tensions between factions.

At the beginning of the year, Israeli occupation forces launched a campaign of raids and searches in various areas of the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem, during which a number of Palestinians were arrested, in addition to agricultural equipment being confiscated within the Jordan Valley area.

What ignited a 2021 firestorm of human rights violations in Palestine was the increase in tensions marked by the Gaza-Israel War in May of 2021. This has resulted in notable human rights events concerning human rights infractions against Palestinians in occupied territories and even culminated in violence at the revered Al-Asqa mosque complex in Jerusalem's Old City.



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In a notable statement to the UN Security Council in October 2021, the UAE called for the continuation of the ceasefire between Israel and Palestine, stressing the importance of de-escalation throughout the occupied Palestinian territories. The UAE also called for the end of all illegal measures and practices in the occupied territories that undermines the potential for a two-state solution, including the construction and expansion of settlements, the confiscation and demolition of Palestinian property, and the forced displacement of residents, especially in East Jerusalem.



The UAE statement stressed the need for Israel to assume its responsibilities in accordance with international law and relevant UN resolutions, including providing the necessary protections for Palestinian civilians. The UAE highlighted the need to preserve the legal and historical status quo of the city of Jerusalem and to ensure Palestinians are able to practice their religious traditions freely without worry of harm or retaliation. In the same month, contradicting the UAE statement, is the continuing trend of extreme Israeli forces desecrating Palestinian cemeteries through exhumations and excavation works to make way for construction projects.

This was notable in October of 2021, as plans to build a biblical-themed park atop al-Yusufiya cemetery has increased tensions among Palestinians leading to confrontations with Israeli forces and its subsequent partners. The resulting protests by Palestinians, especially those with family ties to the cemetery, has resulted in forcible removal by Israeli authorities in a sad growing trend of displacement.

In an unprecedented move within the UAE, The Emirates Human Rights Organization (EHRO) said that, in cooperation with a number of international human rights organizations, it intends to sue the state security advisor, Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed, and a number of companies and managers affiliated with him, on charges of supporting and financing mercenary militias within Libya that are responsible for a number of human rights violations and extrajudicial killings of civilians.

The EHRO confirmed that it had received dozens of reports that companies and personalities affiliated with the security service advisor were involved in the recruitment of mercenaries, and the financing and arming of militias involved in war crimes in several Arab countries.

While the mercenaries themselves carry out human rights violations within contexts such as Libya and Yemen, they are also victim to human rights violations through forceful pressure and legal threats by their UAE affiliated contractors if they refuse to engage in these contexts.

Saudi Arabia continued its trend in 2021 of increasing human rights violations with several notable instances and enduring the global of its assassination of Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 against a backdrop of surface-level modernizing reforms in order to draw tourism to diversify its economy.

2021 within the Kingdom was marked by arbitrary arrests, trials, and convictions of peaceful dissidents. Dozens of human rights defenders and activists continued to serve long prison sentences for criticizing authorities or advocating for political and rights reforms.

In the spring of 2021, the Kingdom's terrorism court sentenced a Red Crescent employee, Abdulrahman al-Sadhan, detained in 2018, to 20 years in prison accompanied with a 20-year travel ban on unsubstantiated charges related to running two satirical Twitter accounts, accusations of terrorism financing, supporting or sympathizing with ISIS, and preparing, storing and sending messages that "would prejudice public order and religious values".

Shortly after, the same court sentenced a human rights activist, Mohammed al-Rabea, to six years in prison on bogus charges related to peace activism. Sources in close contact to both cases say that Saudi authorities tortured both al-Sadhan and al-Rabea in detention and coerced them to sign false confessions.

Later in June, A Saudi court sentenced Sudanese journalist Ahmad Ali Abdelkader, 31, to four years in prison on unsubstantiated charges based on tweets and media interviews he shared to Twitter in which he expressed support for Sudan's 2018-19 revolution while criticizing Saudi human rights violations and encroachment within Sudan and Yemen.

Saudi royal family members continued to be detained throughout 2021 since Prince Muhammad bin Salman's 2020 purge, which includes former Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef and former Saudi Red Crescent head Faisal bin Abdullah.

Since 2015, Yemen continues to serve as the proxy battleground and therefore the site of multiple human rights violations caught between the Saudi-led Coalition with the UAE's backing against the Houthi forces supported by Iran largely controlling western-Yemen. As of August 2021, a low estimate of 8,773 civilians had been killed in the conflict and 9,841 wounded since 2015 according to the Yemen Data Project. Most of these casualties were a result of Saudi-led airstrikes hitting homes, markets, hospitals, schools, and mosques resulting in many of the dead being women and children – amounting to war crimes in the majority of cases.

In September of 2021, the UN Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen stated that it had "reasonable grounds" to believe that parties to the conflict in Yemen such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Iran, among other smaller actors, were responsible for human rights violations and war crimes and reaffirming its call to the UN Security Council to defer these violations to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Saudi Arabia campaigned vigorously to end the mandate of the Group of Eminent Experts, which was not renewed at the September 2021 session of the UN Human Rights Council.



The severity of conflict in Yemen has exacerbated an already ongoing humanitarian crisis since the beginnings of the civil war. Aerial and naval blockades by the Saudi-led Coalition since 2015 has restricted the flow of life-saving goods and the ability for Yemenis to travel into and out of the country to varying degrees throughout the war.

Unfortunately, humanitarian aid has also been cut to Yemen, especially in areas of Houthi influence due to government aid agencies such as the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) and USAID not wanting aid and development funds going towards any Houthi resources.

While many of these human rights violations stemming from conflict are not new developments, 2021 saw the flaring of tensions and violence amidst growing international multilateral calls for peace and humanitarian intervention. Many of these human rights issues among innocent civilians are under the curtain of proxy wars and competing powers each seeking to slowly edge each other.

Additionally, the growing usage of state actors to hire mercenary forces to promote their influence and will within other territories has caused human rights violations to increase as many states can claim that they are not affiliated with the actions of the mercenary forces they covertly end up hiring.



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# Drugs: Trafficking, Smuggling, Addiction

2021 saw several countries in the region – most notably Syria, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia continuing to battle with intensifying drug problems encompassing increased use, spread of drug-related communicable diseases, and increased linkages between drug production, smuggling, and the resulting violent conflict and the financing of terrorism.

Three noteworthy drug busts back to back in December 2021 revealed the extent of the drug-usage and importation problem Saudi Arabia is facing with the drug Captagon – an increasingly popular and addictive amphetamine.

- ❖ In the first bust, the Syrian government confiscated over 500 kilograms of Captagon stashed within a pasta shipment intended for Riyadh.
- ❖ Several days later the Saudi authorities seized over 30 million tablets of the amphetamine hidden within a cardamom import.
- ❖ Later, in mid-December, Lebanon's Internal Security Forces stopped an attempt to smuggle four million Captagon pills to Riyadh via Jordan, this time hidden in coffee bags.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime from 2015 to 2019 over 50% of all the seized Captagon in the Middle East region was within Saudi Arabia. Captagon busts have become a regular occurrence within Saudi Arabia, with increasing demand fueling the production within Syria and Lebanon to become imported into the Kingdom via clever smuggling routes. Essentially, Saudi Arabia has become the number one drug consumer within the Middle East as the scale of 2021 importation and subsequent drug busts has shown.

Over the span of 2021, Syria has become largely synonymous with the label of “narco-state” as the higher-up powers of Syria's social, political, and military elite seek to come out of the smoldering of war wealthier. Amongst the poverty, the Syrian elite are earning hard currency and bypassing U.S. sanctions by taking advantage of the new drug industry that has taken place amongst the ruins of Syria.

According to a 2021 New York Times investigation, the majority of the production and distribution of drugs sourced in Syria, especially Captagon, is overseen by the Fourth Armored Division of the Syrian Army, an elite unit commanded by President Bashar al-Assad's younger brother Maher al-Assad.



According to the Centre for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR), between all international authorities in 2020, Syrian drugs with a street value of about \$3.4 billion dollars were seized. The production of drugs such as Captagon are essentially financing the Assad government and its related oligarchs.

Lebanon has been one of the forefronts of drug use as its number of drug users has been found to increase yearly, and as a result the numbers of promoters and dealers rose. There are no clear statistics about the number of drug users, but the Lebanese authorities publish almost daily news of the arrest of people who either trade and promote drugs, or use them in various Lebanese regions.

Socially, the Lebanese crisis affects the increase in the rate of abuse, despite the increase in prices, since it was originally priced in dollars. In the past ten years, the cultivation and smuggling of cannabis has declined relatively due to several factors, most notably the operations of plant damage and security restrictions on its manufacturers, promoters and smugglers, and its low prices compared to the prices of narcotic pills and the low cost of manufacturing them. Cultivation of marijuana takes place during one season a year, but narcotic pills can be manufactured around the clock. Therefore, the manufacturing and smuggling of these pills became active, and marijuana fell to the second place in terms of smuggling abroad.

As for the Lebanese crisis, it naturally weighed heavily on all Lebanese, some of them lost their jobs, some of them lost their loved ones, and others whose conditions changed until they found themselves in front of a single solution to believe that they are fine, and unfortunately this solution was drug abuse to escape the reality in which they live.

Looking forward there is a growing sense that the repressive policies against illicit drugs long-applied in the region have not been effective in counteracting these negative trends. There needs to be a monitoring and evaluation-based approach that emphasizes the root causes of drug-usage such as economic, societal, and regional security factors that empower the drug trade.



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# Spotlight: Urgent action required to prevent a new wave of terrorism

\*Note: This article was originally published on Arab News, and can be found [here](#).

In October, Daesh carried out an attack on a small village in Diyala, Iraq, killing 11 defenseless civilians. This is yet more proof of the inability of Iraq's security forces to protect its citizens and, even more problematically, it entails that Daesh is anything but gone.



Mohammed Abu Dalhoum  
President, MENAACTION

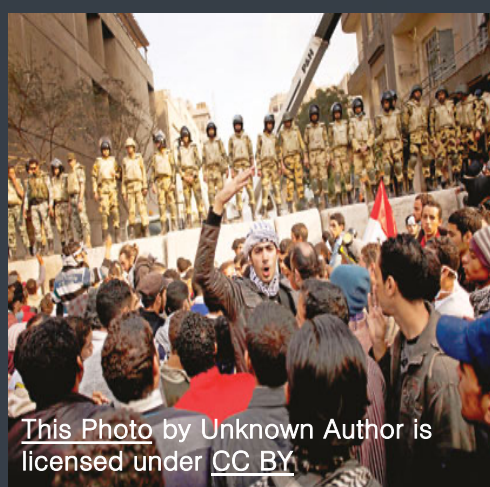
Several scholars have put forth arguments to examine the life cycle of violent extremist groups.

They agree that terrorist groups come and go; they will exert their control for a few years, lose out, break into dormant cells, recruit, regroup, and come back in a different shape. This life cycle is centered on a scramble for popular support between them and governments.

At the peak of its control, Daesh recruited more than 40,000 foreign fighters from 120 countries. Such individuals were targeted through social media and face-to-face interactions, and many of them were disenfranchised with conditions in their own countries.

Unemployment, poverty, a lack of opportunities and social marginalization contributed to their decisions to join. Grievances were a main driver. Many of them were not necessarily indoctrinated, but child and adolescent recruits were. Those who defected, in addition to those who were captured upon Daesh's defeat, underwent certain rehabilitation and deradicalization programs, mostly in prisons in their native countries. Such programs are overly securitized and work on re-educating returnees with counternarratives.

They are also mostly ineffective, as many of those who were captured still retain much of their radical ideology upon their graduation/release. These programs have existed for years, yet more people joined terrorist groups than for any of the previous waves of violent extremism.



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*"The conditions are now ripe for a Daesh 2.0 that may be as destructive as its predecessor."*



Looking at the situation today, it is quite evident that socioeconomic conditions in the Middle East and North Africa are worse than they were in 2011. When evaluating MENA states' ability to have a monopoly on the means of violence, composite data curated from the Global Peace Index, World Values Survey, Arab Barometer and Transparency International reveals an average score of 49.5 out of 100, whereby 100 means the states can fully protect people, such protection is entirely legitimate, and security spending is transparent.

As such, political and economic disenfranchisement, as well as apathy and social marginalization, are still persistent. Governments are unable to create jobs and the COVID-19 pandemic has been economically disastrous. Further, there are more armed conflicts than before. Power vacuums are still there. Released returnees are still indoctrinated and the formerly adolescent recruits are now vengeful.

Over the past decade, governments and international organizations have focused on countering violent extremism projects, as they reasoned they could not have anticipated such levels of recruitment. Today, the early warning signs are crystal clear; thus, their efforts ought to be centered on preventing violent extremism projects. Millions of dollars have been spent on countering violent extremism projects, yet the conditions are now ripe for a Daesh 2.0 that may be as destructive as its predecessor.

Our young people are more at risk of falling into the vicious hands of terrorist groups. With record high unemployment and rising drug addiction rates and suicide cases, governments and international organizations need to act preemptively. Youths in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Sudan are particularly susceptible, given the security situation in these countries.

With the danger of another wave of terrorism in the region looming on the horizon, there must be comprehensive, holistic and consistent preventive strategies. These strategies ought to encompass non-security actors and they need to address the underlying causes contributing to the susceptibility of our youth. It is the responsibility of decision-makers to find whichever means necessary to address the issues of unemployment, political and economic disenfranchisement, and social marginalization.

We cannot ignore the clear signs pointing toward another catastrophic wave of terrorist activity in the region. It is imperative to intercept it before it starts. The Global Coalition Against Daesh was successful last time, but we cannot afford to hope for the same political will and the presence of adequate technical and financial capabilities this time around. Resources are better spent on prevention, while international cooperation is a must if we are to avoid an inherently international disaster.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Given the current security landscape that is marked by a multitude of long-lasting and evolving security dilemmas:

There needs to be a prioritization by larger powers such as the United States and the EU to directly address steps to de-escalate tensions, heal rifts, and build new bridges.

While we do see multilateral and economic developments such as the Abraham Accords as a tripartite between Israel and the UAE, the Israel-UAE peace deal that occurred in 2020 and the November 2021 energy deal between Israel, Jordan, and the UAE – these serve as instruments to create a security buffer against Iran and its proxies as well as Islamic fundamentalist groups that seek to topple the stable regional powers. This may either increase tensions leading to more violence or place more roadblocks on the potential for these stakeholders to pursue conflict.

The security landscape continued to grow more complicated and fragmented in 2021, with an increasing number of state and non-state actors deploying and using unmanned weapons including aerial systems. The trend toward using armed drones that began before 2021 continued and accelerated — the attempted assassination of Iraq's prime minister by militia groups and attacks on U.S. military bases in Syria and Iraq were just two prominent examples in the past year in addition to Houthi drone strikes into the heart of both Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The lower barriers to entry in this arms race complicate regional security dynamics by introducing new threats and increasing the overall uncertainty in the broader environment.

Libya is most likely continuing down the path of fragmentation as each stakeholder group within the country seeks to take advantage of chaotic and uncertain elections after a consistent delay in national elections in 2021. Almost 3 million Libyans signed up to vote in the December election, and the subsequent delays and political infighting has infuriated and created a lack of confidence in a competent central government.

The unity government of the U.N. recognized Government of National Accord may face parallel administrations as the Libyan parliament and the interim government clash over the method of forming a new government that can win majority support within parliament.



Bashar al-Assad has seemingly defied the odds from the brink of his government's collapse in the ongoing Syrian civil war with the backing of powers such as Russia, Iran, and now states such as Jordan and the UAE who are pursuing degrees of normalization and legitimization of the Assad regime. This against the backdrop of an economic wasteland where 80% of Syrians live in poverty amidst high inflation as well as facing health issues and drought-based climate crises impacting livelihoods.

Many Syrians are now only safe if they are able to abide within Assad's Syria territory with many who are now refugees refusing to or even unable to return to Syria in fear of their lives while attempting to make deadly migratory crossings in the unlikely hopes of finding new livelihoods and safety in Europe.



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Within Palestine, and more specifically Gaza, the Israeli blockade has to be lifted, the internal Palestinian political divide has to coordinate with a bottom-up approach in order to address issues of corruption and lack of leadership at the levels of the PLO and Hamas, and International Human Rights Law and Humanitarian Law to be respected by Israel as it continues to promote illegal settlerism and occupation.

A fair, lasting, and comprehensive solution between all stakeholders that results in the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state based on 4th June 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions, the Madrid references, the Arab Peace Initiative, and other agreed international references, needs to continue to be promoted for equitable Palestinian rights.

Yemen continues to be a humanitarian disaster and civilians continue to be caught between the Houthi onslaught and the Saudi-led Coalition bombings and mercenary forces on the ground in a battle of attrition where no side seems to be able to get the upper-hand.

Saudi and UAE blockades of Houthi influenced areas and the lack of development funding and aid from government donor agencies has only exacerbated the ongoing humanitarian crisis. Climate change continues to play an impact as well within the Yemen Civil War as the conflict touches upon resource-based conflict in one of the deadliest regions of the Middle East.

Drug usage and rise in the region can be seen as an indicator of poor economic conditions, lower livelihood opportunities, as well as conflict facing the nations' youth.

As younger people face and grow-up with these issues, they end up turning to drugs as a coping mechanism in addition to viewing it as a lucrative option due to it being their only livelihood option in many cases. While the youth become entangled with drugs, the MENA governments and leadership themselves have largely not taken a proactive role in promoting meaningful drug discussions to counter the rising issue.

Essentially ignoring the issue, many governments in the region do not collect or disclose data on levels of drug production, trafficking, and use this purposeful ignorance as a sort of way to not acknowledge that there is a problem within their borders in the first place. Drugs are a social taboo, with little public or government attention to the problem. In fact, the region's drug policies are most notable for extraordinarily high levels of executions of accused drug traffickers.

Saudi Arabia announced important and necessary reforms in 2020 and 2021, but ongoing repression and contempt for basic rights are major barriers to progress. The near-total repression of independent civil society and critical voices impedes the chances that reform efforts will succeed.



## Support our Work

MENAACTION is a nonprofit organization, EIN 85-3884888 all donations will be used solely for the projects that MENAACTION implements for the development of youth of the MENA region. To learn more about our mission, goals, and work, please visit our website [www.menaaction.org](http://www.menaaction.org)

MENAACTION is currently working on two major programs:

### ❖ MENARY Monitor

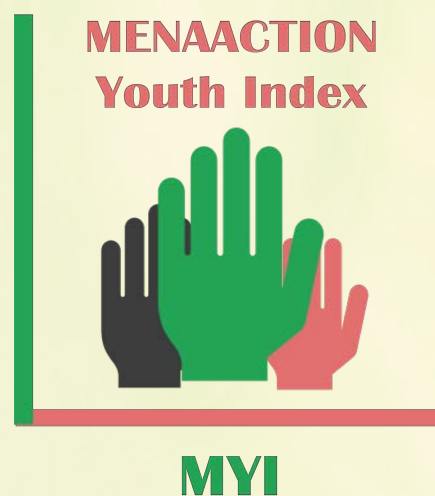
MENARY Monitor is a weekly newsletter, a compilation of English, Arabic, French, Farsi, and Turkish news items from trusted sources, distributed weekly to government institutions and policy makers, international organizations, and researchers.

The main objective is to provide stakeholders with trusted, accurate, and accessible updates on all matters concerning youth in the region, including points of concern requiring action.



### ❖ MENAACTION Youth Index (MYI)

The MENAACTION Youth Index (MYI) seeks to compile all youth-related data into one index. It comprises of sub-indicators, including economic inclusion, educational opportunities, freedoms, equality, political engagement, cultural engagement, health, technology, and environment.



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# DEVELOPMENT



## Civil Society

Civil society is an integral and an inseparable part of youth development. In fact, Ashraf Sobhy, the Egyptian Minister of Youth and Sports, emphasized the importance of cooperation among government agencies, private institutions, and civil society institutions in reaching the sustainable development goals.

However, the second half of 2021 featured major challenges when it comes to enabling civil society to operate effectively toward achieving their developmental goals. According to Iman Al-Shaarawi, a researcher specialized in African Affairs, the concept of civil society is one of the most controversial in Africa. She explains that the lack of financial resources as well as hostile legal structures have held back the establishment of effective civil society. She states that the existence of a real civil society, independent from the state, is important to reach integration at national, regional, and continental levels.



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The challenges faced by civil society were especially amplified given the restrictions imposed by the ongoing global pandemic. A working paper by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace titled “Civil Society and the Global Pandemic: Building Back Different?” highlighted the specific challenges civil society organizations and civil society activists had to encounter during the pandemic, including challenges related to government crackdowns on their voices under the cover of emergency laws passed to help manage the crisis.

The pandemic is expected to leave a lasting impact on the nature of civil society in the region, as they have been engaging in thinking about measures to reshape policy and the economy. The report highlights numerous efforts carried out by MENA CSOs. For instance, CSOs in Libya are focused on advancing a fragile peace accord; in Lebanon, protests against lockdowns became part of a wider campaign against the costs of elite corruption made even more evident by the pandemic; and in Tunisia, CSOs organized in 2020 around the country's ongoing financial and political crises before intensifying efforts in mid-2021 due to soaring COVID-19 death rates and the government's botched vaccine rollout.

## Empowerment in Sustainable Development

When looking at youth development, empowerment, and capacity building, statements, talk, and lectures remain quite prevalent. For instance, the assistant Secretary-General of the Arab League, Ahmed Rashid Khattabi, emphasized the vital role of youth as an influential force in achieving the sustainable development in the region, stating that development can be reached by mobilizing the energies of the youth and fully integrating them to the economy.

The Yemen Youth Assembly and the Aden Foundation for Arts held meetings titled “the Role of Youth in Change” and “the Role of Youth in Peace and Social Security”, which did not transcend discussions, nor did they institutionalize active efforts on the ground post these events.

As for initiatives that looked to achieve impact on the grounds, the African Development Bank approved eight project proposals in June and July as part of its Jobs for Youth in Africa Strategy that will provide more than \$7.3 million in funding and create an estimated 20,000 jobs across the continent. Projects to create jobs will include Egypt and Morocco, among other African countries.

Similarly, Germany signed a joint cooperation agreement with the Palestinian Authority (PA) – pledging support €100 million (\$117.8 million) in support for the government over the next two years to finance vital projects in the country. This agreement hopes to address the concerns of the demographic group that constitutes 22% of the Palestinian population.

Youth also led efforts on the grounds to achieve notable change. For instance, a group of young Moroccans published a guide to “Gender and Feminist Issues in Morocco” in August, to “simplify the concepts related to gender and to present the most important legal gains achieved by the struggles of the feminist movement in Morocco and to identify the shortcomings and deficiencies that prevent the achievement of full equality between the sexes.



It also aims to identify all forms of violence against women or gender-based violence (GBV) and to empower victimized women with the mechanisms and steps to be taken under the law.

Another gender related initiative was held in Bani Suef, Egypt, whereby the National Council for Women organized a 4-day initiative on sexism, misogyny, gender discrimination, and violence against women for youth of the male gender only. The initiative will be held in multiple locations, hosting 50 people each, in the presence of human development specialists and priests and sheikhs to promote the message of the event.

Since July 2021, the MENA region has witnessed several initiatives, agreements, and events aimed at empowering youth, with a notable level of cooperation between the private and public sectors. In Jordan, the Ministry of Youth enhanced its efforts over the past few years in empowering the country's youth, as several programs were launched to provide support, training, and guidance – along with opening 201 youth centers.



There were more activities within the United Arab Emirates than other countries. In fact, for the 13th year in a row, the UAE has emerged from the A'sdaa BCW Arab Youth Survey as the top destination to live in. The UAE was viewed as a place with stability and opportunity, and some people see this new ranking as a push for leaders in the region to take lessons and better themselves.

This can be seen through active efforts on the grounds. For example, the Zayed Higher Organization for People of Determination partnered with the Abu Dhabi Youth Council in conducting the Youth Determination event, in celebration of the International Youth Day. While most of the event was dedicated to highlighting the importance of investing in youth development skills and empowering them, a youth seminar titled "Between Reality and Ambition, Employment Laws for People of Determination" was also held.

The UAE's Ministry of Interior organized a stakeholder meeting featuring the Possible Youth Forum in late August to discuss youth development opportunities. Further in terms of youth development, the Emirati Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Shabba bint Suhail bin Faris, launched the Youth Empowerment Model at the youth pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, signifying the country's efforts to institutionalize youth empowerment.

Also, within the youth pavilion, Emirates News Agency and the Arab Youth Center signed an MOU to empower young media talents, as 15 young men and women will be delegated from the fourth edition of the Young Arab Media Leaders Program to create media stories to inspire the Expo's visitors toward better solutions for humanity in different areas of life.

Similarly, The Arab Youth Council for Integrated Development announced that 30 young people from 9 Arab countries, namely Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine. and Algeria, won the Council's Award for Distinguished Arab Youth in its 12th edition, titled "Empowering Arab Youth Toward Positive Movement Action." The award is granted to distinguished Arab youth in the fields of media and culture, invention, innovation, entrepreneurship, volunteer and service work, scientific research, sports, humanitarian and relief work, and institutional work.

In addition to that, the Arab Youth Centre (AYC), in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Regional Bureau for Arab States, concluded the first cohort of the "Youth Development Delegates in the Arab Region" Programme. This programme has provided 11 youth delegates in 10 Arab countries with a yearlong leadership development experience in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals in their countries. Throughout the programme, delegates learned more about development assistance activities and worked closely with local development agencies and organizations. Further, under this programme, youth delegates engaged over 9,000 young people in training sessions, webinars, and awareness activities.

Conditions for youth in the region remain difficult and do not enable strong sustainable development, as around 30% of youth in the Levant region feel optimistic about their future, according to the Asdaa BCW Arab Youth Survey. Iraq, for example, ranked extremely poorly in the Global Youth Development Report 2020 (168th out of a total of 181 countries), scoring at the lowest level in youth development.

Further, the Youth Progress Index 2021, produced by Social Progress Imperative, ranked Jordan 79th globally, with 65.39 points calculated from 58 social and environmental indicators. Jordan scored 85.16 in basic human needs, 62.09 in the basis of luxury, and 48.91 in providing opportunities for young people.



Over the second half of 2021, there were numerous activities and initiatives with the aim of discussion and responding to the livelihood conditions of youth in the MENA region. The Egyptian government launched the Dignified Life initiative with the goal of improving the economic and social life within the Egyptian villages and countryside in all governorates.

In addition to that, Egypt's Assiut governorate worked on fulfilling the initiative's objectives, which essentially falls under Egypt's sustainable development 2030 vision and aims to rehabilitate, establish, and develop youth centers across the province to provide equal access for youth development.

The Governor of Assiut and other directors met to discuss cooperation efforts and improve accessibility and urge participation of youth in their communities. He highlighted that the initiative would continue in targeting seven youth centers during its first phase and will expand on their development efforts to other villages.

Also in Egypt, the Ministry of Youth and Sports hosted more than 100 youth across different governorates for the country's first ever Mediterranean Youth Academy program. The program, directed by the Central Administration of Parliament and Civic Education in the Ministry, in partnership with the Mediterranean Youth Foundation for Development, addressed the importance of developing Egypt's youth population in the academic and social sphere.

The program also provided a list of recommendations to support youth in developing innovative solutions and contribute to the improvement of the youth's access to development programs. Additionally, this particular department held discussion sessions delving into the lack of education and health services for youth in the city of Tamm al-Umaid.

Egypt's Deputy Minister of Planning and Economic Development also announced the "Kun Safiran" initiative, which targets journalists and looks to promote social awareness of sustainable development. Egypt has also released 27 reports on the localization of the SDGs on the municipal level, becoming the only country in the region to release such a report.

Other discussions include the 17th Arab Capitals' Youth meeting, which took place in early October. The focus of the discussions centered around health and community environment, as participants looked to promote intercultural exchange through the development of creative youth-led projects in the region.

Additionally, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in the MENA held two workshops in collaboration with the League of Arab States in mid-October.

These workshops were focused on humanitarian action. Presented by OCHA representatives, it focused on the various aspects of humanitarian action such as its history, legal framework, or basic humanitarian standards. Mohamed Khater, the Regional Director for the OCHA has stated that it was important that "young people in the Arab region recognize the various aspects of humanitarian action".

Along with these various workshops, discussions, and activities, there were several celebratory events that took place over the second half of 2021. These events included, but not limited to, the following:

- ❖ The Qatar Ministry of Culture and Sports celebrated Arab Youth Day on July 5 with a number of activities hosted by youth centers and committees across the country. The celebration is part of an initiative with the Council of Arab Ministers for Youth and Sports to promote the youth sector.
- ❖ The Tunisian Minister of Youth, Sport and Vocational Integration and other officials inaugurated the Center of Excellence for Arab Youth on July 8. The center will serve as a place of knowledge, communication and sharing expertise for Arab youth.
- ❖ Oman celebrated the National Youth Day on October 26. The Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth stated the importance of youth in the progress Oman has made, as well as being the pillar towards betterment of the country. He also emphasized Oman's focus on ensuring the future of Omani youth.

In addition to that, toward the final quarter of 2021, Egypt enhanced its preparations for hosting the fourth World Youth Forum (WYF), which was scheduled to take place in the second week of January 2022.

Egypt also announced that the main objective of the forum was to build common spaces for collective action among young people of different nationalities, beyond the borders of countries, cultures, and ethnicities, and to achieve the highest level of understanding of others, with the hope of ending conflicts in different regions of the world.

The Forum was also set to raise topics such as climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, how it affected the whole world, and the mechanisms that can be followed to counter these crises. The Forum was also planned to deal with the digital transformation that is taking place recently at a local level. To that end, Egyptian sources indicated that half a million young people registered for Forum, representing 196 countries.



# Training and Capacity Building

Over the second half of 2021, there were approximately 71 reported activities providing training and capacity building for youth in the MENA region. These efforts were centered around developing important skills for work, raising awareness, harnessing creativity and enhancing leadership skills, and highlighting safety precautions, among others.

First, looking at the training sessions that aim to provide employable skills, the Arab Youth Center is implementing its “Podcast Training Program for Arab Youth” to train young men and women with the latest professional skills they need to produce audio digital content and to benefit from the continuous rise of podcasts in the Arab region and the world.

The first phase, which was launched on August 1, included all 100 participants distributed into 20 groups to be trained on 3 main components: (a) the characteristics of a successful podcast producer, (b) the establishment of a recording studio at home, and (c) the arts of voiceover, to end with about 100 podcast episodes produced by the participants in the program, which will be evaluated to determine who will pass to the next phase.

In Egypt, the Media College at Cairo University held the “Arab Media Youth Forum” in early October. It focused on documentaries, print and electronic press, and advertisements, with the aim of building future media professionals, raising youth awareness of Arab media issues, and qualifying them for the needs of the labor market and international participation.



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Also in Egypt, the General Secretary of the Eradet Jeel Political held various training sessions to prepare youth for the job market, the first of which was launched on July 31, and it included training on personal interviews, resume writing, the job market, how to start a project, strategic planning, advocacy, negotiation, dialogue and persuasion, problem solving, and research.

Several training courses were organized across Egypt, aiming to educate business owners of the importance of e-marketing and e-commerce, while teaching them marketing methods, to help enhance their businesses. These free training courses were organized by Egyptian Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (MSMEDA).

In Jordan, the Salt Female Youth Center in Jordan conducted the “employment camp and qualifying young people to enter the labor market.” The camp, which was attended by 16 young Jordanians, aimed to empower youth with the necessary skills and tools to enable them to enter the job market, learn about the market’s requirements, and to guide youth toward vocational training and raising their awareness of the opportunities available within this sector.

Additionally, the Jerash youth directorate and youth center launched several activities to integrate youth into the labor market. One workshop was focused on managing small projects in cooperation with Irada, a program launched by the Ministry of Planning to enhance economic development and productivity. The target population was quite young, with 15 people between the ages of 14 and 17 participating in the workshop.

Additionally, the All Jordan Youth Committee carried out the training course titled "Principles of translation in English", which took place over 5 days, with 22 participants benefitting from the course. Trainees learned how to translate different texts using a clear methodology, considering important elements, including the different language structures between Arabic and English.

The Committee also conducted the "Programming Smartphone Applications" training, whereby participants were trained on Android and IOS smartphone systems and were taught how to use software as well as how to create applications and upload the platforms for user downloads. The Committee's coordinator, Othman Al-Abadi, said that these trainings aim to raise the capabilities of the participants with a set of technical skills for both employment and self-employment opportunities. A similar training was held in Al-Balqa, titled "Digital Skills for youth and the establishment of websites."

Two notable programs were held in the UAE – both of which focused on female youth, as two Emirati young women have launched an internal training program called "Tamkeen", with the aim of leveraging the energies of young people and helping them acquire professional experiences that qualify them to enter the labor market.



Moreover, the Future Skills program launched by the Government Development and the Future Office, in partnership with LinkedIn, looked to provide young Emirati women with skills to enhance their professional and personal development.

With the aim of alleviating generational differences in the workplace, Zain Bahrain partnered with the Rotary Club of Adliya (RCA) to host the '7ewar 3.0 Forum' youth initiative in early October to support youth in understanding and managing generational differences at the workplace to create a more productive work environment. The '7ewar 3.0 Forum' initiative consisted of a series of discussions and presentations with the purpose of facilitating meaningful dialogue between young professionals and senior management.

Second, looking at sessions that looked to raise youth's awareness on a variety of aspects, Rafaa Organization for Development and Child Rights concluded a panel discussion for 70 participants in Al-Ma'afer district, west of Taiz in Yemen, to raise the level of community awareness about the importance of involving youth and women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The project is part of the "Stronger Together" Yemeni Communities Program, and it aims to create an environment of that is free of conflicts, domestic violence, gender-based violence, hate speech and sectarianism, as well as creating community initiatives of youth and women that work to resolve conflicts and to establish peace building initiatives.

In Egypt, the Youth and Sports Directorate in Alexandria, in collaboration with GIZ, conducted a TOT and capacity building exercises under the project "Youth against Harassment," which looked to train 30 young men and women and raise their awareness about harassment cases and GBV.

Third, there were several training sessions focused on harnessing creativity and enhancing leadership skills among youth. For that, the Sakhra Youth Center in Ajloun, Jordan organized a workshop titled "creativity and excellence: a right for everyone." This workshop is part of the Hussein Camps for Work and Building, and it was attended by 20 young Jordanians over Zoom.

Moreover, the Jarash Youth Directorate launched its activities under the Hussein Camps, starting with the activities of the scouts, counselors, and voluntary works camps, with the participation of 47 young men and women. These activities aim to instate the values of voluntary work and enhance their skills and knowledge. Other centers in Jordan conducted, as part of the Hussein Camps, seminars on healthy lifestyle, media training, peer-to-peer communication, enhancing ties between youth and decision-makers, social cohesion, and community violence.

In Palestine, the Ummah Youth Center launched its specialized summer camp “Leaders of Jerusalem,” which looked to provide the participants with qualitative skills and experiences in various fields. The camp, which took place in early August, featured a lecture on youth initiatives in terms of their importance, objectives, how to write and market them, and choose the appropriate place and time for their implementation.



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In Egypt, the Ministry of Youth and Sports continued to implement the first community innovation camps with the participation of 50 young men and women, under the Youth Leadership Program, implemented by the ministry in cooperation with the United Nations Development Program in Egypt (UNDP), and in partnership with the Soriana Foundation and the Dandara Cultural Center, in light of achieving the sustainable development goals and Egypt’s Vision 2030.

The activities included introducing the importance of the sustainable development goals and the role of innovation in solving societal problems and achieving sustainable development goals, by implementing the design atonement steps. The activities also included discussing the challenges facing Egyptian society and coming up with many effective innovative ideas to meet these challenges.

Moreover, the Egyptian Presidential Program for Qualifying Youth for Leadership announced the opening of applications for a new batch of trainees. Launched in 2016, this program aims to promote youth leadership, while giving them the skills and knowledge necessary to take on administrative tasks.

Elsewhere in the region, the Al-Jouf Youth center in Saudi Arabia concluded the “Creative Empowerment for Individuals” program. The program stemmed from the belief that creative thinking among individuals builds the culture of creativity in entrepreneurship and is concerned with strategic planning.



The Libyan Youth Forum held a training course on leadership in Benghazi to help young people develop their leadership, administrative, and technical skills. The course is part of efforts to focus on the role of youth in building the state.

The fourth category of trainings focused on safety and security at the personal and community levels. Numerous youth centers all around Jordan conducted various activities under the Hussein Camps for Work and Building, as hundreds of young Jordanians participated in various trainings, including on societal security, social distancing and avoiding contracting the Coronavirus, and on first aid and emergency response, among others.

Further, the Balqa Youth Center in Jordan concluded on July 29 a rescue training camp for 16 young men aged 15–17, which looked to enhance youth's skills in public safety, first aid, and response to emergencies. In addition to that, the Directorate of Information and Community Policing and the Public Security Directorate launched the second phase of the Conscious Youth Program. This program looked to build youth capacities and raise their security and social awareness to respond to societal issues. The most prominent priorities of the initiative included creating security-conscious youth through training on community peace, drug control, and cybercrimes.

Elsewhere, the Ministry of Youth and Sports' directorate in Al-Sharqiyah, Egypt, implemented a training program to raise the awareness of youth on the dangers of fire and how to respond quickly. Additionally, dozens of young Egyptians participated in a simulation model organized by the Administrative Control Authority in coordination with Cairo University, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Instagram and Moroccan organization "Ibtisama Reda" launched an online campaign called "Click and Protect" to shed light on the increased cyberbullying and equip youth and teenagers with the tools necessary to combat this phenomenon. The campaign is coupled with a help-line for anyone involved, bully, bullied, or witness, called "Stop Silence" to assist youth in the process of dealing with the incident.



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# Innovation and Technological Advancements

Over the second half of 2021, several youth-oriented and youth-led innovative and technology-centered efforts were implemented, suggesting the importance of this sector in the development of youth and their employability skills.

In Jordan, the Hartha Youth Center in Irbid Jordan held a workshop on July 4 on the topic of artificial intelligence, which reviewed the technological developments that occur annually and rapidly, including the use of chatbots in international companies and banks, in order to understand customer problems and provide quick solutions to them with high efficiency. The workshop looked to provide participants with the necessary skills through the use of modern technology and using technical tools.

Further, the Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Knowledge Forum (TAG-KF), in cooperation with Jordan Media Institute (JMI), organized a digital panel session titled “Digital Media and Youth on Social Media” which was attended by several young Jordanian content creators and producers of digital programs on social media platforms, providing them with the opportunity to discuss digital media challenges and to come up with youth-centered recommendations.

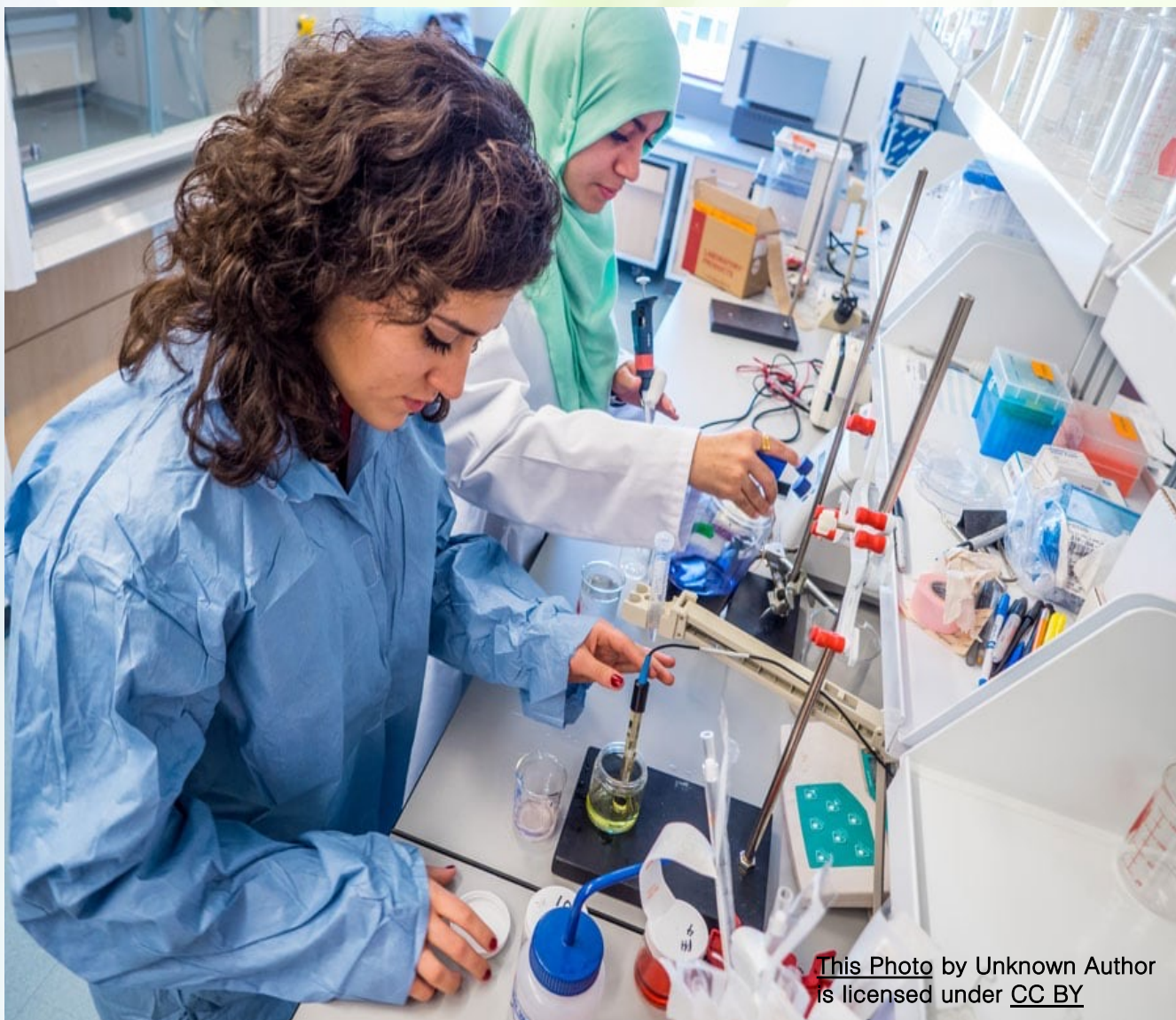
In the UAE, the Emirati government announced its plans to use local and international talent to expand its computing sector by signing a deal with Google, Microsoft, Amazon, Facebook and LinkedIn, among others to train and attract 100,000 programmers and coders in the country to equip Emirati youth with the necessary skills for a better future.

Additionally, the Arab Youth Center organized a special forum for members of the Technical Fellowship Program for Arab Youth at the Youth Pavilion at Expo Dubai, after 100 young men and women from 15 Arab countries completed the first version of the program. The forum looked to provide youth with advanced skills in the paths of transformation. Digital, Innovation, Emerging Technologies, Interactive Technologies, and ICT.

The Egyptian National Institute for Communication, in collaboration with the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, announced the Egyptian Youth Digital Grant, with the aim of preparing graduates for jobs in the digital sector. The Minister also announced the completion of the ministry's plan to deploy innovation centers, and the opening of 3 new ones at Sultan Hussein Palace in Heliopolis, the Amiri factory in Giza, and King Fouad Palace in Kafr el Sheikh, after developing, restoring, and re-running them into a center for digital creativity.



The centers aim to provide technical training to young people in communication sciences and all disciplines of Information Technology, nurture digital creativity, encourage entrepreneurs and establish incubators for entrepreneurship.



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In Saudi Arabia, UNESCO, in collaboration with the Abdullah Al-Fawzan Foundation, launched the first Saudi international award to encourage young scientists in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). This award aims to promote the development of these fields and promote a work ethic to the youth, while providing them with the skills necessary in STEM.

Additionally in Saudi, the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) held a ceremony for the first graduating students of the Virtual Presence Data Science Camp, which was launched last July. During this ceremony, it was also announced which teams were qualified for the artathon, a global summit that unites artists with AI experts.



## Voluntary Work

Similar to the first part of 2021, there were several youth-led developmental initiatives in the MENA region over the second half of the year, most notably in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Iraq.

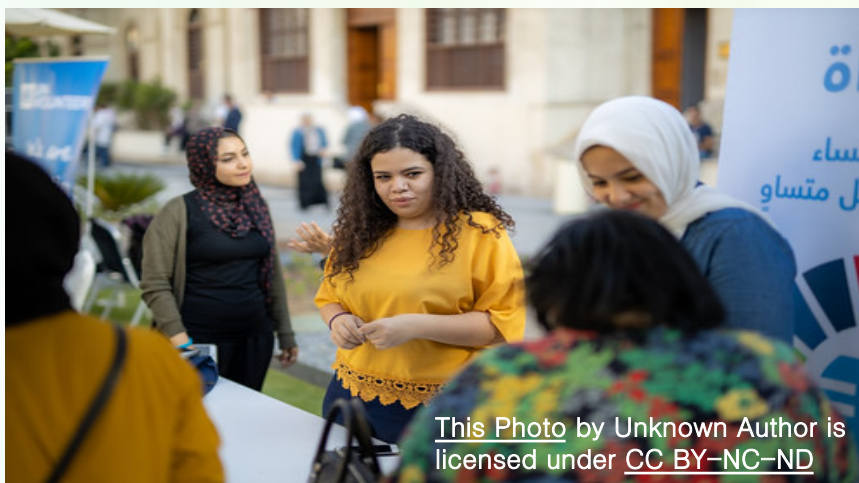
As such, the Saudi Arabian governorate of Hafr Al-Baten launched a 3-day initiative called “Volunteer for the Good”, as part of a program that looks to spread the culture of youth voluntary work in the governorate. The program included a training session that looked to raise the awareness of the participants on the importance of volunteering at the community level.

In Jordan, the Al-Rusaifa youth centers launched the Voluntary Work Program within the Hussein Camps for Work and Construction with the participation of numerous young Jordanian men and women. The participants engaged in voluntary work in Al-Rusaifa sports complex. These activities aim to instill the tenets of voluntary work among youth and raise their awareness on the importance of serving their communities and contributing to the sustainable development efforts.

Additionally, volunteers in the Southern Jordan Valley area said that the launch of several volunteer initiatives over the past year contributed to enhancing youth capabilities and skills to serve the local community. The coordinator of the initiative said that this initiative came to empower young people and activate their role in decision-making, adding that it was launched with youth efforts that took upon themselves to help poor families and alleviate them, especially in light of the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Iraq, youth from Wassit governorate launched an initiative to establish housing complexes for the poor who do not have homes to accommodate them, by collecting donations.

Another group of young Iraqis from Karbala created a shaded cart to support street cleaning workers who spend long hours under the sun. The cart includes a trash bin, cleaning supplies, a small area to keep water and refreshments cold, and it is easy to use.



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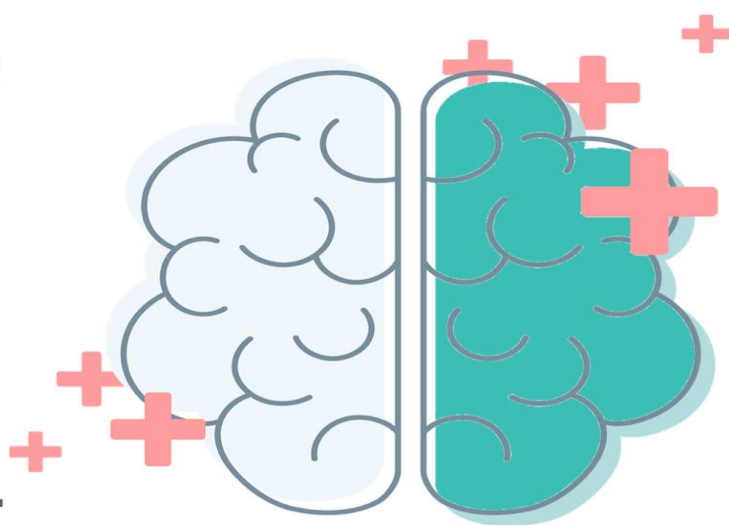
## Mental and Psychological Health

The current security and socioeconomic conditions in the MENA region have had major negative impacts on mental and psychological health. In fact, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the psychological conditions of the Palestinian people have been worsening, stating that the incidence of mental disorders in the Gaza Strip has reached around 22%.

Various organizations worked tirelessly on addressing such impacts over the second half of 2021. For instance, the Umma Youth Center in Palestine, in collaboration with the General Commission for Youth and Culture, implemented a discussion session in Khan Younes Governorate titled “Psychological Support and its Role in the Midst of Conflicts”. The session looked to provide psychological support to mothers and alleviate psychological pressures and accumulations in times of crises, especially in wars, and to provide attendees with the correct methods of dealing with their children when they are exposed to psychological pressures.

Another effort was conducted by the Kayan Cultural Center, which implemented a treatment based on music therapy, which has been gaining popularity with the youth. According to Taghreed Shafout, the CEO of the center, “This has led to a remarkable shift in Gazan attitudes towards this type of therapy and helped many overcome their personal struggles.”

**75%**  
**OF JORDANIANS  
FEEL THAT THE  
CORONAVIRUS  
HAS IMPACTED  
THEIR  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
WELLBEING**



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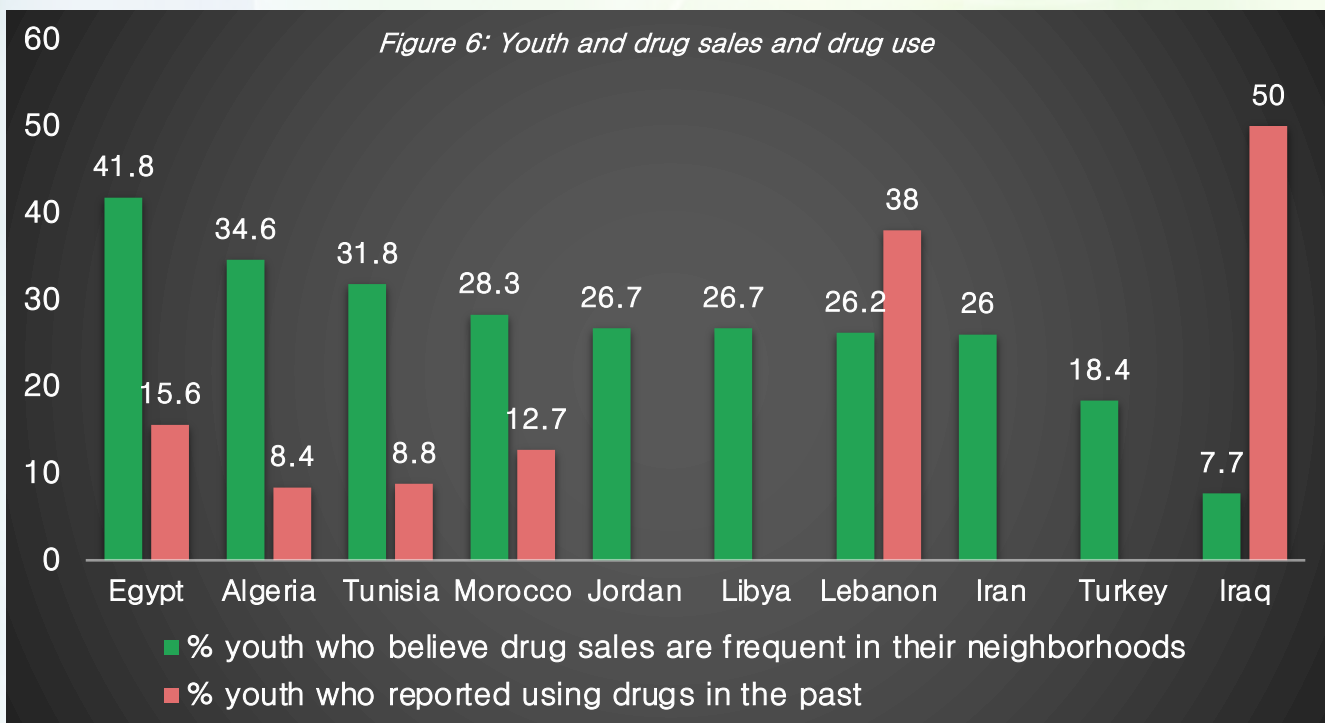
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## Rehabilitation and Anti-Drug Campaigns

Drug use and addiction remained a major challenge facing youth in the MENA region in the second half of 2021. News of arrests, confiscations, and smuggling were widely prevalent throughout the year. Several initiatives were implemented to address this growing challenge.

In Yemen, the Police of Aden launched a creative campaign to warn youth of the dangers of drugs, amid an increase in drug use in the city. The campaign included organizing a marathon for the first time in years, targeting hundreds of young people, on the occasion of the International Day for Awareness of the dangers of drugs. The marathon held the title of “I will not give in for Drug.. My Country Needs Me.”

A program by Youth Peer titled “immunization initiative for drug prevention” was implemented in Jordan. It aimed to raise awareness on the dangers of drugs and to prevent youth from drug use. This initiative falls under the fifth, sixth, and seventh components of the National Youth Strategy 2019–2025, namely Youth, Peace, and Security and Youth, Health, and Physical Exercise.



In the UAE, the Anti-Drugs Directorate, in collaboration with the Abu Dhabi Police Youth Council, held a brainstorming session to discuss the future challenges to combating drugs titled “We are Committed.. Drugs are a Scourge”. The session highlighted the importance of the role that social media could play in limiting drug use and in raising awareness on the dangers and implications of drugs.



The session also delved into the various methods used by dealers to lure in susceptible youth. It concluded by discussing various potential rehabilitation initiatives and projects.

In Egypt, the General Secretariat of the Egyptian Republican People's Party held an awareness workshop titled "No to Addiction" in Qana governorate. The workshop discussed the mental, psychological, and physical dangers of addiction in addition to the importance of the role played by families in raising resilient young people as well as providing alternatives for recreational activities in public spaces.

Similarly, the Minister of Social Solidarity, announced that 32,000 volunteers helped carry out activities at 120 public and community universities with the objective of educating people on the dangers of drug abuse. These interventions were also meant to deconstruct the misconceptions people have about drug abuse. For instance, Ain Shams University organized a conference to raise awareness of drug addiction among the youth, titled "You are stronger than drugs." The conference demonstrated the dangers of drug addiction and the diseases that it can cause, as well emphasized the role of friends and family in helping prevent it.



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In late September, a delegation from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) visited Egypt's Fund for Drug Control and Treatment of Addiction (FDCTA) to study Egypt's efforts in treating and rehabilitating drug addicts and to look to simulate the model in Iraq. The report indicates that the emphasis will be on awareness campaigns to try to reduce the demand on narcotics. UNODC is said to be working on an Iraqi national strategy to combat and prevent drug abuse.

Despite the pressing challenge posed by the phenomenon of rising drug use, there was minimal mention of rehabilitation efforts, including investment in affordable rehabilitation services – to essentially support young people who suffer from drug abuse and require immediate support.

## Preservation of Culture and Storytelling

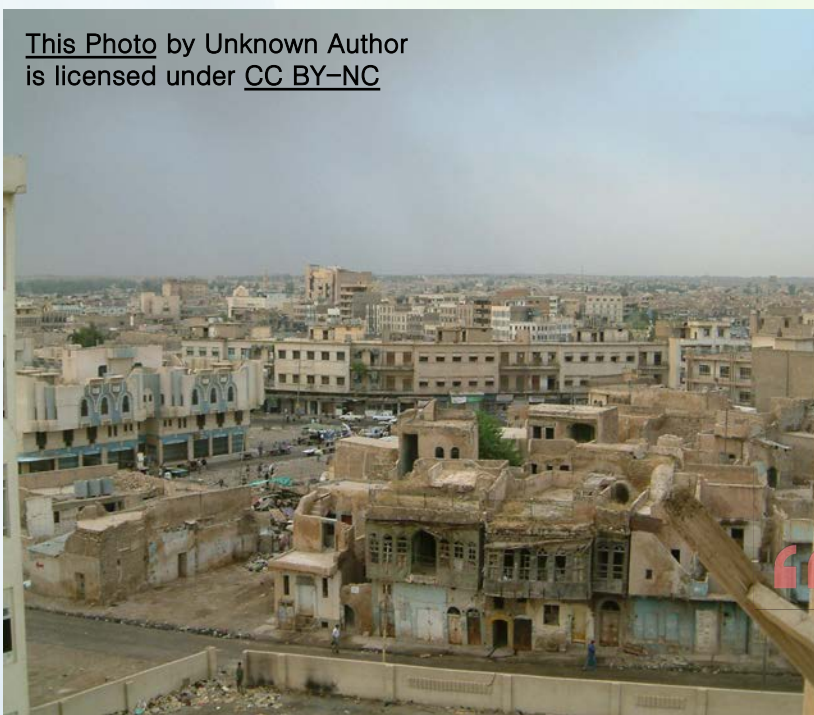
There were numerous activities, initiatives, and programs conducted over the second half of 2021 with the aim to highlight youth's stories and showcase cultural values in the region.

For instance, The Arab Research and Studies Institute of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) awarded the Arab Youth Award 2021 to Egyptian, Kuwaiti, and Algerian researchers for their works: "The Future of Joint Arab action institutions", "The future of the Arab world" and "Education of the future in the Arab world and the requirements of its promotion in light of crises and global developments: a study of reality and future aspirations". The overarching theme of the award was the future of the Arab world, as well as its relations with major powers and the future of economic transformations, globalization, and education in the Arab world.

A group of 48 young Kurdish musicians and vocalists (named Em) from the northeast of Iran are working to preserve hundreds of years' worth of oral history through traditional music and poetry. Due to government opposition of solo female artists, Em has to make sure that their leading singers are accompanied by a male voice.

This is not the only opposition, as the report adds, many Iranian governments have tried to crack down on Khorasan's music history. But Em has been taught by Khorasan's prominent artists and are also teaching their children and younger siblings to keep the legacy alive.

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We live in Mosul,  
we know  
everything that  
happened. We  
want to show it all  
to the world  
through cinema.

– Mohammed Fawaz,  
one of the students



UNESCO, in collaboration with the Mosul fine arts academy and the Belgian NGent theater company, have given 19 Iraqi film students the opportunity to take part in a four-month program, during which they get to produce short films. They chose to film their hometown, Mosul, which was partly destroyed during Daesh's presence in the region.

Similarly, in Yemen, a young woman has been creating short films to tell the stories of her country. She aims to address humanitarian issues in her films, while implementing inspiring messages that talk about the story of human beings as individuals and their circumstances. She said, "the exercises that we did in the past serve as laying the foundation stone for this project and motivating young people to document everything that is worth documenting in order to build the current memory of Yemen, which will be a visual reference for future generations."

"Stories from youth in times of crisis: a collaboration between research and art" is a project led by the Lebanese Studies Center at the Lebanese American University (LAU) and Al Jana Center. It consists of eight theatre scenes that are meant to reflect the lives of young people in the Levant and the difficulties they face day to day. The presentations were later followed by open discussions between the audience and performers, which allow to raise awareness about the issues that the youth face these days.

Such efforts are important, as the Sharjah International Film Festival for Children and Youth was held in mid-October, featuring more than 80 films.

Additionally, young activists are standing in the face of Houthi militias who are banning music and songs at social events. The activists have received support from Yemen's Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism who has announced that July 1st of each year will be referred to as Yemen's Song Day.

In Morocco, the World Youth Orchestra Foundation brought their WYO4CHILDREN project to Morocco with the support of the Culture and Art Foundation based in Rome. The intercultural and interreligious project is aimed at girls from the Childhood Protection Center for Girls in Fez, Morocco, brings these youth together to create music. The 27 girls will be followed from March 2021 to March 2022 in a long journey that includes 160 hours of singing and musical preparatory lessons and 240 hours of guitar.

As for Egypt, the Arab Atelier for Culture and Arts in Cairo opened the "Forsan Day" exhibition, which includes about 100 works by the winners of the Third Arab Youth Festival in the fields of photography, drawing, sculpture, graphics, photography, and conceptual work. The festival, which is held every 2 years, is not bound by a specific theme.

Similarly, the Fezzan Youth Forum was held in Libya whereby youth participants indicated that the forum allowed them to meet and exchange ideas and that the forum was "a step to bring together the Fezzan diaspora in one place."



Not all efforts were welcomed by youth. In fact, Iran has launched an Islamic dating application called Hamdam that promotes marriages for its youth. The application is the only state-sanctioned platform, and all other platforms are illegal. Hamdam uses artificial intelligence to find matches and requires users to verify their identity and undertake a psychology test. Once matched, the application introduces the families to one another with the presence of service consultants to oversee the matched couple for four years after the marriage.

However, Iranian youth are "swiping left" on the application, stating their disagreement with the questions that ask youth about their "ideal match", including height, weight, and whether a woman should wear a chador. Further, observers predict that the application will not succeed amid the restrictions that Iranian youth face in terms of personal freedoms.



## Conclusions and Recommendations

Civil society and young civil society activists have been facing major challenges in the region – amplified by the ongoing global pandemic, which reshuffled financial resources, let alone the continued presence of certain political and legal restrictions and government crackdown on their efforts.

- ❖ For that, it is important for regional governments and major international organizations to reinvest their resources in strengthening civil society organizations, especially those led by youth, to enable them toward fulfilling their efforts – including social accountability.
- ❖ Despite depleting resources, civil society actors led tremendous efforts in the region, spanning a variety of fields. Their efforts ought to be highlighted, celebrated, and supported. As such, it is also important to ensure proper active inclusion of civil society actors in the design and implementation of local and national programs and policies, and that includes peacebuilding efforts.

When it comes to youth empowerment and sustainable development, the sources reviewed shed light on an observation that such efforts come in two forms: top-down policies or trainings that do not necessarily transcend into any further steps. As such:

- ❖ Youth empowerment within the scheme of development requires a reimagination to ensure that they have an active stake in providing inputs in their nations' policies and partnership prospects.
- ❖ At the same time, it is also essential to enhance the region's capacity building approach, which does not currently go beyond lectures, seminars, and instructive-style trainings. Such efforts ought to not only enable hands-on involvement of youth, but more importantly, they also must provide a clear layout for a roadmap to assess progress within the field discussed during the sessions.

The region has scored alarmingly poorly in the Youth Progress Index 2021, produced by Social Progress Imperative, specifically when it comes to the “providing opportunities for young people” indicator. In addition to that, only 30% of youth in the Levant region feel optimistic about their future. Further, the pandemic highlighted and exacerbated the fact that there remains a sizable portion of extremely vulnerable populations who are not well-catered for.

- ❖ There is an immediate required action in which benefactors reach out directly to youth – as the targeted population – to ensure their interventions comply explicitly with their needs.
- ❖ The MENA region should engage in multilateral cooperation, whether regionally or internationally, to enhance their efforts in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, especially Goals 1, 2, 3, and 10.

The second half of 2021 featured a good emphasis on efforts related specifically to young women in the region. This is an important aspect to continue to improve on. To that end:

- ❖ It is important that women-specific development efforts engage young females in their design, by conducting proper research to be carried out by female researchers to ensure favorable interviewing dynamics.
- ❖ Development efforts in the region that focus on women can emphasize aspects such as female entrepreneurship, home-based enterprises, and developing tech skills such as programming.

Mental health remains a critical aspect to address in the region. Societal stigma continues to prevent those in need from seeking help. In fact, over the second half of 2021, stories of youth committing suicide were a daily occurrence in the region. Only 2 interventions were recorded in the region over the reporting period, which is a monumentally low number.

- ❖ Implementing programs that raise public awareness on mental health must be a top priority in the MENA region. Such programs should target youth, especially males, who are less likely to speak out. Additionally, any programs that look to address the mental health of youth should be integrated and comprehensive, whereby they include the following aspects:
  - ❖ The individual: young people with mental health challenges should be provided with the environment that can facilitate their recovery. There must be free and advertised national hotlines in every country in the region, staffed by experienced professionals. They should also be provided with affordable services, which could be subsidized by the state and included in their insurance plans
  - ❖ Society: public awareness campaigns have to be enhanced. Society must be educated on how to deal with individuals who may be facing mental health challenges, and they must be made aware of the ramifications of the responses to such individuals.



- ❖ **Institutions:** public mental and psychological health institutions remain understaffed and underdeveloped in the region. Private centers are extremely costly for the public. For that, it is important for government and nongovernment stakeholders to invest in this sector by strengthening university programs, continuously training the facilities' staff, and providing support for individuals to be able to access such facilities.

The challenges apply to drug use. In fact, there was minimal investment efforts in affordable rehabilitation services to support young people who suffer from drug abuse and require immediate support.

- ❖ An integrated approach is needed, which consists of (a) responding to the challenge of current addicts; (b) responding to the challenge presented by the underlying factors that push youth toward drugs; and (c) addressing the supply side.
- ❖ State laws should be revised to ensure that they do not necessarily prevent addicts from seeking rehabilitation services.
- ❖ There should be better investments in state-funded rehabilitation programs to offer high quality rehabilitation services for current addicts.



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EDUCATION



# The Impact of the Pandemic on Education

The COVID-19 global pandemic has had a disastrous impact on the education sector in the MENA region, with students shouldering the biggest burden, especially with the challenges associated with remote learning given the inequality of resources and unequal access to the means of connectivity.

Hezha Barzani wrote an article for the Atlantic Council titled “An “Illiterate Generation”— One of Iraq’s Untold Pandemic Stories.” In this article, Barzani highlights major implications of the COVID-19 crisis in Iraq, but he shifts the discussion to focus on youth education as one of several untold stories.

Barzani indicates that school closures have had a direct negative impact on approximately 7 million Iraqi children, and when taking in consideration the years of violent conflicts students had to endure, the issue requires immediate attention – especially given the potential for “an entire illiterate generation.” Barzani concludes that there are several necessary measures to be taken, including increasing spending in the sector.



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Towards the second half of 2021, many schools throughout the region began reopening and welcoming back students to their facilities. By the end of August, students across Saudi Arabia returned to school for the first time in 18 months. The Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health are cooperating to ensure the safety of students, who must be vaccinated against COVID-19 to attend in person. Many parents welcomed the return to in-person learning, but still expressed concerns over the virus.

Such a debate was prevalent in the region, as parents and students alike asserted the importance of returning to in-person learning yet being wary of the increasing COVID-19 cases, including the new Omicron variant.

In Egypt, the General Authority for Health Care of Egypt announced the screening of 45,000 students as part of the “Atman 'ala ibnak (Check on your Children)” campaign for free medical examination on school students, which exceeded the target of 92% in Port Said governorate.

The campaign includes a complete health assessment of the child, starting with measuring weight, height, and vital signs, passing through the rest of the tests, leading to a complete diagnosis of the health status of all children at all different educational levels, and those with mental, audio, and visual disabilities, in particular. Any health problem is referred to a specialized hospital and is followed up on during the treatment journey.

## Education Needs, Development, and Innovation

COVID-19 is not the only challenge facing education in the MENA region. The Qatar Education Above All Foundation held a conference in celebration of the International Day for the Protection of Education from Attacks. The UN Secretary-General pointed out that between 2015 and 2020, the Global Alliance to Protect Schools submitted 13,000 reports on attacks and attacks against children and educational institutions in various regions of the world.

Lack of resources is another major challenge. The representatives of Aden Youth Consultations in Yemen met with the representative of the governor of Hadramout to discuss the necessary steps needed for the establishment of the educational support fund, with the aim of promoting better education in the city. Further, Al-Safwa Youth Forum launched the Charitable Fund to Support Education Aden.

During the inauguration, the head of the Forum said that this fund collects donations and charitable support to support volunteer teachers, adding that this project will contribute to supporting the educational process and increasing the number of teachers in schools to sustain the educational process.

Another important challenge is improving gender equality in education to employment efforts. Arab News published a report titled “How more women can be encouraged to take up STEM careers in the Middle East.” The report highlights that in the MENA region, there is a lot of work needed to shift education patterns for youth, especially young women. In fact, 38% of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Medicine (STEM) graduates in Saudi Arabia are women, but only 17% of those who go on to work in the sector are women.



Experts highlighted that awareness of the career paths and opportunities available within this sector is needed. Additionally, tech companies in the region need to establish a gender-equal culture to increase women representation.

Despite these challenges, there were various notable initiatives and remarkable steps taken to advance education for youth and children in the region. For instance, Technology was a recurrent theme within education throughout the latter half of the year. The Arab Youth Center and Rochester University of Technology of Dubai signed a memorandum of understanding with the goal of empowering young people by providing them advanced academic knowledge in advanced technology disciplines and practical training opportunities.

In Jordan, TSME (Technology Strategies Middle East) in collaboration with Automation Anywhere announced an initiative to launch Robotic Process Automation training to five universities in Jordan: Yarmouk University, Mutah University, Tafila Technical University, Princess Sumaya University for Technology, and Jordan University of Science and Technology, as part of Jordan's 2021–2025 National Strategy for Digital Transformation to promote the development of a digitally savvy economy and workforce.

Under this initiative, students will be trained and certified internationally to secure specialized skills needed for employment throughout the country. In addition to that, Princess Sumayyah University for Technology ranked first in the Middle East qualifying round in the Rochester Institute of Technology's competition in the field of cybersecurity and intrusion detection.

In Egypt, the Second World Forum on higher education and scientific research, "Vision of the Future," organized by the Egyptian Ministry of higher education and scientific research, was held in early December. The forum focused on the necessity of harmonizing educational outcomes with the requirements of the labor market.

The Director of Public Relations at the Arab Youth Platform at the League of Arab States stated that many jobs are likely to be lost considering technological changes and digital transformation, pointing out that in 25 years, 45% of current jobs will disappear, which requires careful planning.



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## Student Activism

One important facet which educational institutions ought to work further on is providing the space for youth empowerment. The youth sub-committee at the Royal Committee for the Modernization of the Political System indicated that Jordanian universities are an appropriate incubator to provide youth empowerment through a scientific and qualifying curriculum in the various fields of life, including political life, which allows them to participate in decision-making related to their future, and the future of Jordan.

Participants also added that it is important to reform educational curricula in both schools and universities to cope with the requirements of sustainable development while ensuring the presence of components that institutionalize political awareness and urge youth to participate politically.

In Lebanon, U.S. ambassador Dorothy Shea and speaker of the Parliamentary Education Committee Bahia Hariri participated in the launch of Civic Education STEAM and Cultural Entrepreneurship program U.S PopUp Spaces for the students at Rafik Hariri High School in Sidon. The program looks to empower youth and young professionals in the South, North, and Beqaa through civic education training, social entrepreneurship, practical activities, individual initiative, capacity building and innovation.

In the second half of 2021, there was a nationwide debate in Lebanon concerning the Official Intermediate Certificate Exams.

The “Youth of Lebanon Movement”, the “Student Committee in Lebanon”, the “Student Unit Assembly in Lebanon”, and “the Student Union of Lebanon” decided to postpone their scheduled demonstrations set to take place in front of the Ministry of Education. The groups started a petition early on and managed to acquire over 150,000 signatures against the Official Intermediate Certificate Exams.



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Despite the petition, the Ministry of Education affirmed its decision to hold the exams. The President of the Youth Movement Lebanon, Elie Saliba, said that the decision of the Minister of Education to commit to holding the official exams despite all the demands from students and families that rejected them and despite the ongoing health conditions in the country can only be described as stubborn and that the Ministry committed “the worst act in its history, morally, and organizationally.”

Saliba added that the additional incentives (35%–60% increase) for supervisors, center directors, and correctors was only to gain their support despite the fact that this increase will not even be sufficient to cover their transportation costs to the examination centers. Saliba also highlighted that the money spent on holding the exams in person could have been better spent on medications, medical supplies, and fuel rather than spending it so that “the minister does not go back on word.”

One notable youth-led initiative was held at the Beni Suef University in Egypt. In cooperation with the Waste Management Regulatory Agency of the Ministry of Environment, students organized a campaign that aims to implement a safe disposal program for electronic waste. Organized by the Egypt Youth Association for Development and Environment, program participants aim to effectively train students across ten universities on the dangers of electronic waste and methods to effectively dispose of devices. University youth aim to increase awareness on the environmental issues that electronic waste creates, as it increases pollution rates.



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## Youth and Research

Over the second half of 2021, many research-focused initiatives were held in the region, with the aim of providing youth with the skills and opportunity to learn and contribute in the field of research. One of these initiatives was the Al Ain Book Fair 2021 in the UAE. It looked to support young writers, publishers, and innovators, and attract them to work in one of the prominent sectors that support the transition to a knowledge economy.

The exhibition also witnessed the launch of projects to support the digital book industry and give young people the opportunity to participate in it through the initiatives of the Department of Culture and Tourism in Abu Dhabi, as well as the launch of 27,000 books through the exhibition's online store and providing young literary works the opportunity to reach readers on local and global level.

Additionally, the Sharjah Book Fair, held in November, was a greatly anticipated event by young writers in the region, who saw it as a great opportunity for exchange of both knowledge and skill in the art of book writing.

Similarly, "Young Arab novelist" was an initiative started by the digital media, radio, and television departments at the faculty of media at Middle East University, in Amman. The main goal was to initiate a group of young university students to the art of writing. Sixty young men and women were trained to write a novel and around 10 of them were able to sign contracts with the Turkish publishing house Akyol.

Also in the UAE, Trends for Research and Consulting spoke ahead of the International Youth Day that the center looks to be an incubator for youth researchers. The director spoke that Trends strives to empower young people around the world in the field of scientific research and to launch many innovative and unique initiatives aimed at enhancing their capabilities and developing their research talents.

At the youth Pavilion of the Expo 2020 Dubai, the Arab Youth Center signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Majarra, with the goal of encouraging and highlighting research led by Arab youth. This MOU is expected to disseminate the works of youth, in Arabic on several sites such as the Harvard Business Review or the MIT technology review.



## Trainings, Workshops, Summits

Over the second half of 2021, there were over 20 notable training sessions, workshops, seminars, and summits focused on educating youth and enhancing the capacities of students in the region.

For the region as a whole, around a thousand university students in the MENA region signed up for the second annual “Day@Nestle – MENA,” a careers event held online giving the youth the opportunity to learn about working life in international firms while also honing the skills they'll need to find work post-graduation. The topic is “Skills of the Future,” which aligns with Nestlé's strong focus on sustainability and e-business. Participants were also given advice on how to improve their personal branding and job-hunting skills. The virtual sessions, which took place in November, enabled fresh graduates from 19 countries the chance to interact with Nestlé via an interactive online platform.

Another region-wide initiative is “Forward” project, organized by McKinsey and Company. The project aimed at teaching MENA youth entering the work field skills they would need in their professional work. The project is targeted towards self-employed and employed individuals, spanning over 6 months.



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Looking at each different country specifically, the Forum for Alternatives to Morocco and the Deutsche Welle Academy announced a new project in Casablanca to improve the integration of youth and women in Morocco through the media. The organizations plan to train 200 young men and women across six regions in the country to enable them to obtain job opportunities.

Orange Jordan and the German Jordan University held a training for the first cohort of the Orange Digital Center Club students (ODC), aiming at acquiring youth with the needed skills to enhance their employability opportunities and launch their businesses successfully. Additionally, Al-Wasatiyah Female Youth Center conducted a workshop titled “Harnessing university education for the requirements of work in the service of society.” The focus of the session was about the criteria for choosing a major, its importance, future job opportunities, and the advantages of university studies in achieving goals.

In Palestine, the Ummah Youth Center in Ramallah launched a new training program called "Cybersecurity" at the Nation Youth Center to help youth develop cybersecurity skills and secure users' safety and protection of their personal information. Participants learned about different aspects of digital security, including ways to secure personal devices, methods of protecting political communication platforms, and how to avoid programs that could infiltrate digital security.

In Saudi Arabia, the Mohammed Bin Salman Foundation (MiSK) launched an educational program called "Leaders of Tomorrow". This program is meant to promote leadership among the youth and improve their problem-solving skills. Destined for high school and university students, this program will teach them how to face challenges in the workplace, with a team of mentors. The "Leaders of Tomorrow" is part of the foundation's agenda to help young people prepare for their professional future.

Science and technology were prevalent in Saudi Arabia's trainings. University students from the College of Technology in Al Jouf collaborated with the Sakaka Solar Energy Station to launch a project where youth learn about the importance of the renewable energy sector and learn how to develop their skills and work on supporting projects in their areas. Additionally, Mawhiba granted 3,000 scholarships for youth, covering various scientific fields. The grantees underwent training sessions and participated in an exhibition to showcase their talents.

In Qatar, Carnegie Mellon University offered a new program in the summer for pre-college students where they learned how to code. During the month-long course, nearly 200 students aged 13 to 18 learned basic programming skills using CMU's Alice educational software. The online program brought together volunteer teachers and students from a total of 25 countries.

Also in Qatar, the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) was held in Doha in early December, under the banner "Generation Unmute: Reclaiming our Future Through Education". One of the sessions addressed the gap between education and employment among youth in the MENA region, which has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world.

In Egypt, the Genetic Engineering Research Institute (GERI) is conducting an educational training course at the national level for university students in efforts to prepare cadres of young Egyptian universities in the use of modern biotechnology applications to find non-traditional solutions to some of the problems facing Egyptian agriculture. The institute trained 479 students from the biotechnology programs of the Egyptian universities in the fields of plant tissue culture, molecular markers, genetic transfer of plants, bioinformatics, and microbial genetics.



The courses aim to contribute effectively to developing the skills of Egyptian university graduates and raise their efficiency and practical ability, which will help them in applying for jobs in the private sector.

Also in Egypt, digital security expert Amr Othman explained how it is possible for electronic pirates to obtain sensitive information, such as bank account details. For this reason, he decided to launch the “I was hacked” campaign to raise awareness of electronic piracy among the youth, in schools and universities.

The Egyptian Ministry of State for Emigration and Egyptian Expatriate Affairs launched a summit for Egyptian students studying abroad in early August. The summit aims to exchange experiences of students studying abroad with students who are about to begin their studies.

The Summit resulted in a controversial output. The Minister said that the Ministry established the Immigration Youth Center to train students abroad to deal with all the questions they face about their country. She added “Egypt’s youth studying abroad must have information to respond to any news told to them about their country, especially since the Muslim Brotherhood works in universities. It attracts students to extremist and anti-state ideas.” The center was said to focus on essentially training Egyptian expatriate students on how to defend their state, its decisions, and the ideologies with which it operates.





## Special Education

Educational facilities, resources, and even attention towards special education remain rather insufficient in the region. Madeleine Youngblood discussed the challenges people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) face in Turkey, especially when it comes to educational resources, tools, and support. She highlights the role played by local NGOs who are calling on the government to pass more extensive and protective legislation.



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Currently, Turkey has one legislation that encompasses people with ASD, the 2005 Turkish Disability Act, which offers basic protections, but it “lacks the cultural responsiveness of other standardized policies around the world,” according to a 2016 study. Youngblood adds that when it comes to education, people with ASD in Turkey face clear disadvantages.

First, special education teachers were not properly prepared with courses in autism. Second, preschool teachers, primary school teachers, and school counselors only receive a one-to-two-week course on autism in preparatory courses. Third, 80% of children with ASD in Turkey drop out of primary school and rely on their families for support, as many schools see children and youth with ASD as a burden.

Despite the inadequate resources, a young Moroccan with ASD earned his PhD from Mohammed V University in Rabat, a monumental achievement from a highly reputable university.”



## Conclusions and Recommendations

The ongoing global pandemic has revealed the existing inequalities in access to education and certain areas' ability to cope and turn to remote learning. With a spike in cases, including Omicron, and the low vaccination rates of many countries, it is important that:

- ❖ States, non-government organizations, and the private sector must prioritize investing financial and technical resources in the education sector to essentially ensure minimal disruptions to student learning. This may include telecommunication companies working with governments and CSOs to provide internet connection rates to vulnerable families and to teachers.
- ❖ Governments also ought to enhance their vaccine rollout strategies and prioritize schools and universities, and that includes the booster shot.

There remains major challenges in degree to employment ratio in the region, particularly among women. With high unemployment rates of university degree holders, this is especially worse when it comes to female university graduates.

- ❖ Investing in practical training programs and subsidized internships can be a viable solution to provide university students with applied professional training during their education. This can focus on soft skills, and equally important, critical thinking skills.
- ❖ Women in STEM majors require special attention, as data shows a low employment rate of female STEM degree holders. As such, tech companies in the region should establish a gender-equal culture to increase women representation.
- ❖ There is a major need for a fundamental realignment between education and the labor market. This is because the current education systems are excellent for producing bureaucrats, but with a job market that requires critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital skills, education curricula ought to be realigned with the private sector and produce young people who possess these skills.
- ❖ Governments and the private sector need to conduct holistic market research in their countries to understand the needs of the labor market, which sectors are saturated, which sectors have vacancies, and which sectors are expected to be needed in the near future.

- ❖ Such research can be updated every 4 years and the reports should be available to the public and relayed to schools to inform their graduates in selecting relevant university fields of study.
- ❖ For that, academic curricula should be improved to build and develop such capacities for young students to become vanguards for sustainable development in their countries. Most civics courses in schools, across the region, do not transcend beyond teaching history and important facts about their country's political systems. However, such courses ought to be reimagined to empower young people toward taking a leading role in the political and social life, which allows them to participate in decision-making related to their future, and the future of their countries .

Throughout the second half of 2021, various sources highlight that youth in the region hve the drive and the aptitude for research and writing.

- ❖ These skills should be nourished and enhanced by providing youth with the opportunity to engage in competitions, training programs, and internship opportunities at research centers, whether private or university-affiliated.

Special education is also an integral area that requires proper intervention. Facilities and personnel need enhancements.

- ❖ School teachers should be provided with special training on how to deal and interact with students with special needs and developmental challenges.
- ❖ Governments should facilitate for vulnerable families an equitable access to centers that provide special education, especially for children and young people with ASD.





ENVIRONMENT



# Environmental Impact and Subsequent Concern

“If there is one cause for events that will profoundly affect all human beings in all parts of the globe in the coming decades, it will be climate change. The consequences of this change will affect each of us, young or old, rich or poor. Maybe not at the same time or with the same intensity, but it will catch up with us all eventually.”

” – Dr. Rula Tabbash, Specialist in Theoretical Physics of Elementary Particles.

The words of Dr. Rula Tabbash, Specialist in Theoretical Physics of Elementary Particles, have been resonating in the MENA region recently, as highlighting and acknowledging the environmental impact and subsequent concern of climate change is the first step toward collective action to face this inevitability. Over the second half of 2021, there have been various reports focusing on illustrating the magnitude of the impact the region is going to face if the current conditions remain the same.

A UN report warned of the implications of climate change on the environment, asserting that millions of people are displaced annually due to climate change. Another report by UNICEF indicated that the impact of global warming is imminent and that almost all the world's 2.2 billion children are exposed to at least one climate or environmental risk, from catastrophic floods to toxic air. The report warned nearly 90% of children in the MENA region live in areas of high or extremely high-water stress which severely affects their health, nutrition, and development. The Middle East and North Africa is the most water scarce region in the world. Conflict plays a role in worsening water scarcity, in addition to migration, population growth, poor water management, infrastructure problems, and bad governance.

When it comes to water scarcity, Jordan is ranked the second water poorest country in the world. UNICEF expressed its concerns of water scarcity in Jordan, which impacts several aspects of life and directly affects children's health, development and well-being. Jordan's water resources are below the internationally recognized water scarcity level. The low water levels have affected children's hygiene, student enrolment, attendance, and performance. Climate change and rising water demand has put extra stress on Jordan's limited water levels. The MENA region has the highest chance of all regions for economic loss due to climate related water scarcity, which is expected to be between 6–14% of GDP by 2050.



Jordan is not alone in this, as unprecedented drought — driven by climate change and exacerbated by upstream irrigation — is wreaking havoc on some of the world's oldest river-fed farmlands in Iraq and Syria. A dry winter has pushed water levels on the Tigris and Euphrates to record lows, disrupting hydroelectric power facilities and concentrating pollution to undrinkable levels.

Aid groups estimate that 12 million people are affected, in a crisis that could tip the balance of the food system and livelihoods for the region. This transcends the two countries, as protests emerged in the Iranian city of Isfahan after the Zayandeh Rud River dried up causing water shortages in the city.

In addition to that, Sea snout, droughts, dead animals including flamingos, and burning plastic waste has threatened several cities across Turkey, with experts warning of impending droughts as 60% of Turkey does not receive sufficient rainfall. Unfortunately, the Turkish government has displayed little concern in the face of opposition criticism. In fact, the government has not ratified the Paris climate deal because it believes in its right to be exempt from carbon emissions as a developing nation to develop economically.

Another major impact of climate change is food security. 2021's International Youth Day was concerned with food security, and the United Nations asserted that over the next 30 years, the global population will increase by 2 billion, which will exacerbate challenges related to climate change and food scarcity.

Moreover, Ferid Belhaj indicates that prior to the pandemic, 12% of the region's population was undernourished, as per UN agencies, yet the pandemic along with the protracted conflicts have exacerbated these numbers. Belhaj adds that in 2020, MENA's share of the world's acutely food insecure people was 20%, disproportionately high compared to its 6% share of the population. Belhaj illustrates three key challenges:

- ❖ Climate change – an increase in the frequency of extreme weather and high temperatures is affecting local agriculture;
- ❖ Population growth rates in the region – the highest worldwide, especially in urban areas; and
- ❖ Diet and nutrition – the region is massively dependent on food imports.

Belhaj believes that reducing the MENA's dependence on food imports is one intervention to consider, coupled with improving the efficiency of importing and storing food. He also adds that it is important to reinvigorate the agricultural sector in the region as well as investing in practices and technologies that could respond to climate change, such as hydroponics, conservation agriculture, and the safe use of treated water.

Additionally, the UN report highlights that countries in the region must begin planning for these shifts and channel their resources towards practical solutions that will yield positive results and safeguard our future, with the engagement of youth in development as the cornerstone for the region to cope.

In addition to water and food security, wildfires were prevalent in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco over the second half of 2021, with observers questioning whether this will be the new reality of North Africa. Wildfires in Algeria resulted in the death of tens of individuals and forced others to leave their homes, let alone the losses in forests.

Morocco and Tunisia have also seen similar events due to a heat wave that engulfed the area. Experts are warning that climate change could make wildfires more common. Sofi Dosmedt of the European Center for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) spoke to BBC that Algeria witnessed a wildfire incident in 2012, yet with climate change we can expect more extensive, more intensive, and more widespread wildfires due to longer droughts and rising temperatures.

## Institutional Response

In response to these imminent impacts, there have been numerous positive responses at the national and international institutional levels over the second half of 2021. At the regional level, the World Bank announced that its support to the MENA region has exceeded US\$4.75 billion in fiscal year 2021, as part of its global response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of its operations, the World Bank as dedicated \$200 million in Egypt for initiatives to reduce air pollution in Greater Cairo; a \$500 million operation in Jordan to spur climate-smart public and private investment and help accelerate recovery, create more jobs, and strengthen green growth opportunities; a \$250 million in Morocco to support the economic inclusion of youth in rural areas and improve the marketing efficiency and environmental sustainability of agri-food value chains; and \$300 million for cash transfers for vulnerable households in Tunisia.

Looking at the national level, the Egyptian Youth Business Association emphasized the importance of climate action after COP26 and reiterated the importance of abiding by the Paris Convention of 2016 to help limit climate change, citing it as law for climate action. According to the UN Environment Programme, real estate is responsible for 38% of all CO2 emissions while consuming around 40% of global energy.



The Association's director stated that it would take 8 trillion USD to transform all current living spaces, buildings, and houses, to sustainable energy. He urged lawmakers to begin taking the necessary decisions to achieve the goal.

Jordan is also said to be making substantial efforts in the environmental field. The Kingdom sent a delegation of 80 people to the COP26 in Glasgow, composed of youth and environmental activists, as well as experts on the matter. While Jordan's carbon footprint is reportedly less than 1%, it is still making efforts, as "all countries are affected in one way or another".

The Gulf region has also been active in this context. In fact, Riyadh has taken a step in the right direction in addressing climate change, with its promise to reach zero emission by 2060. Saudi Arabia hosted the Green Middle East Summit in Riyadh, with over 30 heads of states (or their representatives) participating in hopes of influencing its neighbors to partake in its initiative.

In the UAE, Emirates Environmental Group hosted a virtual panel discussion titled "Effective & Sustainable Partnerships: A Door for the Next Decade", which is its fourth and last session of the year. It highlighted the need to revitalize partnerships. Strengthening multidimensional and global partnerships are more important than ever before if we are to solve the world's problems.

The 2030 Agenda, with its 17 goals, is universal and calls for actions by all countries to ensure that we all move forward together sustainably. With 9 years left to achieve all the targets set for Agenda 2030, it is the need of the hour to discuss the role and impact partnerships, and probe into the implications of leading a sustainable recovery from the pandemic, and in stimulating a decade of action.

Further, a UAE-based enterprise, FortyGuard looks to make use of cutting-edge technology to tackle some of the MENA region's most pressing climate-related challenges. Launched in 2020 with the aim to reduce the risk of extreme heat waves caused by the UHI effect, this cleantech startup has built an urban cooling system that uses state-of-the-art proprietary sensing services, software platforms, and advanced industrial materials to mitigate expanding heat emergencies at local levels in a cost-effective manner.

With a mission thus to essentially cool cities, FortyGuard's founder, Sadiq, says that its urban cooling system operates as a "turn-key solution with a heat reduction capability" that's able to mitigate expanding heat emergencies at local levels.

## Youth–Led Initiatives and Action

A beacon of hope in the midst of this all have been youth of the MENA region. According to the 13th Annual ASDA´A BCW Arab Youth Survey, around 56% of young Arabs have expressed concern about climate change and have expressed the willingness to boycott brands that are harmful to the environment.

The survey, conducted across 17 countries in the region and composed of 3,400 interviews, has demonstrated the rising concern for climate change in the region. Indeed, according to the founder of ASDA´A BCW, only 11% of people interviewed in 2008 had expressed concern for climate change.

A study conducted by Electrolux found that young people across the Middle East and North Africa trust in themselves to lead the change towards a sustainable future. Youth now see themselves as sustainable advocates and leaders towards a more sustainable future, as the study revealed the thoughts of almost 14,000 young people around the world including the MENA region.

Youth respondents also indicated their trust in scientists and influences to lead the change toward a sustainable future. The study also found that young people want to produce their own food (30%), compost or recycle all food waste (34%), and cook tasty plant-based food (29%).

As such, many youth activists in the MENA region have been utilizing social media and their online communication savviness to advocate for serious efforts to tackle this critical challenge. They have also established related campaigns such as “Be Positive and Support Your Climate”; “Supportives”; “Say No to Climate Change”; and “Climate Health”, among others.

Youth activists said the aforementioned UNICEF index confirmed children would be the worst affected, and when world leaders meet for environmental summits, such as for COP26, they needed to act rather than just talk.

Moreover, members of THIMUN Qatar – a Model United Nations initiative under Qatar Foundation (QF) Pre–University Education met with climate activists in Glasgow, Scotland and discussed the lack of actions regarding their active participation in the climate change discussion. They voiced that they no longer want to just be “heard” but wish to see action.

They emphasized the importance of including climate change issues in education curricula to educate youth on issues that affect their countries, so that they would be more motivated to speak up.



President of COP26, Alok Sharma, recently emphasized the important role young people play when dealing with climate change: "wherever I go, anywhere in the world, I was struck by the passion and commitment of young people to climate action." For young people, commitments are not enough, action must be taken, especially when considering increasing global greenhouse emissions over the next ten years.

Unfortunately, there remains a fallible perception of the reasons why youth should be leaders of climate action. According to Carlos Duarte, Professor at the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Jordan, youth are the solution to climate change, and they should be empowered – yet he explains that this is merely because the younger generations are the ones who will be living longer on this planet.

Although he clarified that youth are the ones who should set the parameters when it comes to dealing with climate change, his explanation remains rather lazy. Youth should be leading climate action for their merit, energy, and experience, not merely because they will be the ones to experience the long-term ramifications.

Youth are and have been quite ready and active when it comes to leading climate action efforts. They have also been doing much more than online activism. In fact, The European Union Mission to Libya said that there are initiatives with youth leaders in several Libyan cities on the occasion of the International Day for Cleaning Earth in September.

The mission, in a statement, added: "we are proud of these young leaders who volunteered to clean the streets and beaches of their cities in Tripoli, Benghazi, and Zuwara in an important gesture to encourage positive behavioral change for the environment in their communities."



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– Alok Sharma, President  
of COP26

Some important youth-led initiatives responded to wildfires. Young Algerians participated in an emergency initiative in the East to put out the wildfires in Al-Wahsh Mountain forests, causing tremendous losses in tens of hectares of trees and many animals. It is worth noting that many young Algerians went from different areas to offer their support, having participated in putting out various wildfires in the past.

Similarly, and following the widespread spread of fires in Lebanon and their expansion and destruction of large areas of forests and agricultural lands, the East Youth Movement, supported by volunteers from the Civil Defense and the Municipality of Zahle, enacted an awareness campaign to reduce the dangers of fires and to support the Civil Defense in serving the area. The campaign looked to raise awareness of the residents on the importance of stopping activities that could cause fire such as lighting fireworks.

Algerian youth also helped in planting 1.5 million trees in areas affected by the wildfires, as part of an initiative called "The Martyr's Tree". Youth worked with local farmers in several provinces to plant fruit trees, pine trees, and other types to lift the spirit of the "lung of Algeria," the forest regions affected by the fires. Similarly, the "Zira'a" initiative, organized by the youth board of Ha'el in Saudi Arabia, was launched with the aim of planting over 3,000 trees by its second year, to increase flora coverage, and halt deforestation and desertification.

In Jordan, many volunteers from the All Jordan Youth Commission in Jarash participated in a national campaign to preserve the forests, under the title of "With our Efforts, We Can Protect our Environment." Many civil society organizations, along with private and public sector institutions participated in the campaign as well.

Additionally, the "AR-ENA" team from the College of Business at the Middle East University (MEU) won the first place in the competition of Jordanian university students/ Queen Rania Center for Entrepreneurship for their project related to smart agricultural irrigation based on hydrogel to absorb clean water from the air.

Also in Egypt, Al-Azhar University hosted the annual induction meeting for environmental activities. Dr. Mostafa El Sherbini, president of the Million Young Volunteers Climate Adaptation Initiative, emphasized the importance of the initiative in mobilizing the capacities of young university students towards climate issues.

Perhaps more notably, young Egyptian Engineer, Ahmed Diab who was nominated for the Stephen Hawking International Prize in Science, said that he is working on developing thermal energy cells as an alternative to solar energy.



He added that he searched inside plants for the substance responsible for absorbing light energy and extracted it to conduct experiments on it to produce energy such as solar energy.

## Building Young Environmental Leaders

These youth-led initiatives and climate action efforts were coupled with notable capacity building and training programs aimed at building young environmental leaders. It is worth highlighting the role played by government and nongovernment organizations in the UAE, which had the lion's share of such capacity building programs.

Looking at government efforts, the Abu Dhabi Energy signed a partnership with the Youth for Sustainability Platform, with the aim of investing in young people, working to develop their skills, and providing them with a basic culture to become leaders of sustainability. This partnership contributes to the Department's goals of consolidating sustainable environmental concepts and rationalizing energy consumption.

It also looks to empower youth to advance the sustainability agenda, particularly when it comes to renewable and clean energy. 4,500 young people benefited from all activities carried out within the scope of the program. The department also provided intellectual leadership workshops through which it inspired 100 young members to become effective ambassadors in the field of energy and water efficiency.

Further, the Global Summit for Green Economy was held in Dubai in early October, with major emphasis on youth active participation in high level discussions related to climate change and green economy. The interactive environment of the Summit contributed to helping young people develop a deeper understanding of current and future challenges, enhance their knowledge and experiences, and present innovative and sustainable economic visions that contribute effectively to creating the future and achieving sustainable development.

The summit included youth seminars to encourage them to engage in sustainable development and the green economy before they enter the labor market. An elite group of pioneers, officials, specialists, speakers, experts, and global and local investors will participate in the discussions, with the aim of encouraging the contribution of the younger generation to efforts to achieve sustainability. During the Summit, notable attendees stated that youth are the main driving force for global efforts in the field of climate action. They described youth as being "creative and possessing the values of sustainability and environmental preservation."

The Solar Decathlon Middle East (SDME) in the UAE is a collegiate competition that challenges students to design, build, operate solar powered houses, organized by Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA). SDME has been supporting Dubai's 2040 Urban Master Plan to achieve and maintain the first place globally in sustainability, limiting carbon emissions, and preserving the environment. The second edition of the SDME was held in Dubai in mid-November, and it brought teams from 12 different universities, who were tasked with designing and building sustainable houses, using solar power.



Further, the Innovation Center at the Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA) held a virtual workshop in August, attended by 3,488 young Emiratis. The workshop discussed the best practices to preserve the environment and natural resources. It also delved into the importance of youth empowerment into this sector and to engage them in various programs and initiatives in that regard.

The Initiatives Center of DEWA also launched the “Youth of Clean Energy” Program to attract talents and young energy leaders from various fields and to expand their knowledge and technical and practical experience in the field of clean and renewable energy, and entrepreneurship skills. The program includes a variety of training workshops, specialized educational sessions, and field visits, with the participation of a group of academics, experts, and specialists. The program attracted more than 100 participation requests from various universities in the UAE.

DEWA also collaborated with the Arab Youth Center (AYC) on preparing youth leaders specialized in clean technology innovation.



The partnership aims to provide a platform for training Arab youth in clean and renewable energy technology, especially solar energy. Young people affiliated with AYC will have internship opportunities at DEWA's Innovation Center to develop their skills to lead the future of clean technology in the region and promote innovation in this significant sector.

Moreover, the Arab Youth Center launched the Arab Youth Council for Climate Change, which is expected to be a regional platform that enhances the interaction of Arab youth with environmental issues, and supports Arab strategies related to the environment and climate change. The initiative seeks to find young opinion leaders and innovators in the field of climate action to accompany the UAE's bid to host the COP28 climate summit in 2023.

The launch of the Arab Youth Council on Climate Change coincides with the rise in Arab and global interest in climate action efforts. The council sets several strategic goals, the most important of which are empowering Arab youth with the skills required to face climate challenges, representing their voice in Arab and international forums in the field of environment, supporting Arab countries in enhancing their efforts for climate action, and making strategic recommendations to decision-makers in the Arab world.

The goals include proposing effective solutions in partnership with the public and private sectors and encouraging investment in small projects in the field of environmental protection, facing climate change, and achieving sustainability.

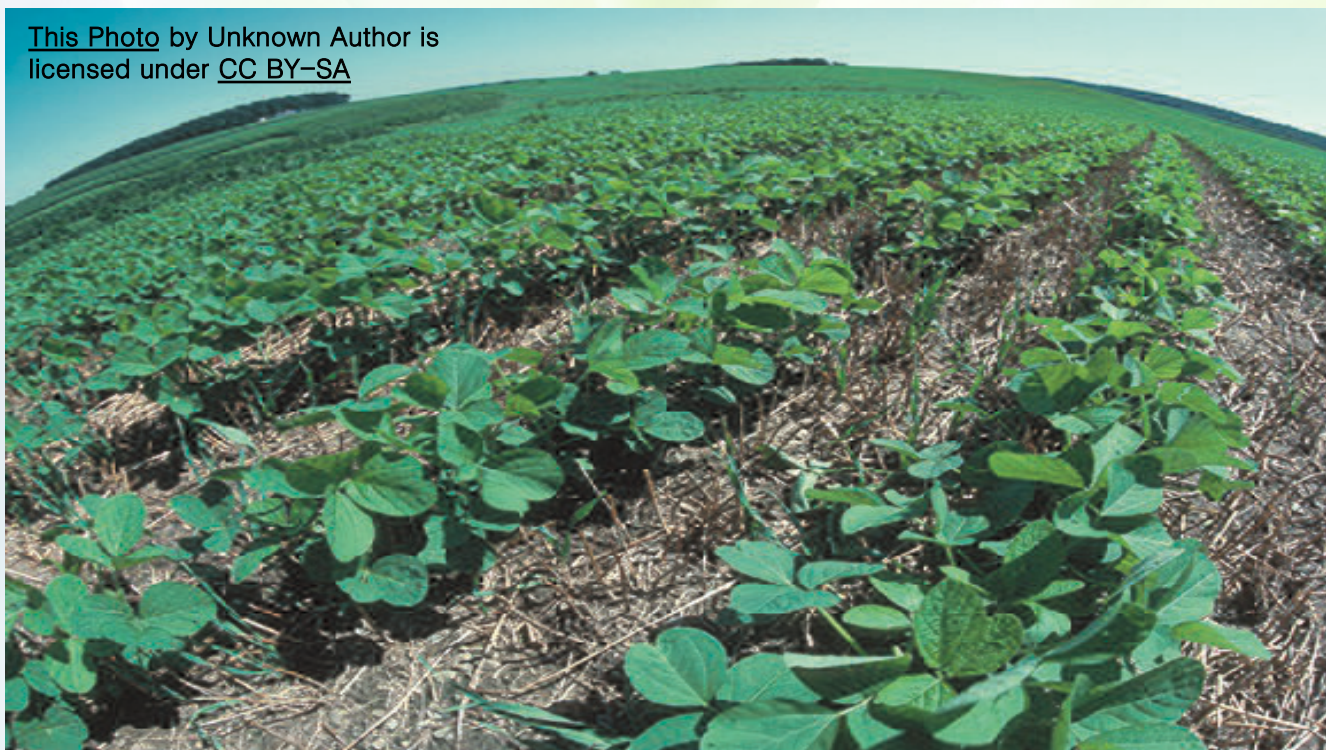
Elsewhere in the region, the Saudi Green Initiative took place in October in Riyadh to present the Kingdom's plans for environmental issues. The Youth Green Summit featured interactive workshops and panels with young activists, and it looked to empower the youth in the country and involve them in environmental issues.

In Egypt, the second phase of the training program "Environmental Pioneers Program" was launched. It was organized by the association "Youth Love Egypt", and it looked to form a core of young people capable of contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and Egypt's Vision 2030. Additionally, the One Million Youth Volunteers for Climate Adaptation initiative is meant to spread awareness of the challenges posed by climate change, with the objective of assisting Egypt in adapting to climate change.

Moreover, as part of the Green University initiative, the Egyptian Ministry of Environment organized a seminar at the Faculty of Pharmacy at Helwan University, on the importance of waste recycling for several professors, auxiliary bodies and students in preparation for the establishment of the Waste Management Unit at the University.

In Syria, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) launched the Nabta Program, which is meant to encourage youth to start agricultural businesses, with the help of digital agriculture. Digital agriculture refers to the use of technology to help increase profits when engaging in agricultural practices. This program will help fill the gaps in knowledge that youth may have through training activities, which will “introduce the concept of digital agriculture and the use of IT within the agricultural value chain.”

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As for Jordan, the Kafr Elma Youth Center organized a workshop on the importance of agriculture and environmental care, with the participation of 20 male and female members of the center. The workshop discussed agriculture and its importance for the environment, the benefits of planting trees in improving physical and psychological health, purifying the air, and how to preserve trees in terms of fertilizing, taking care of them and irrigating them constantly.



## Conclusions and Recommendations

Food security remains a tremendous challenge in the MENA region. Prior to the pandemic, 12% of the region's population was undernourished, as per UN agencies, but the pandemic – along with protracted conflicts have had a major negative impact. In fact, in 2020, MENA's share of the world's acutely food insecure people was 20%, disproportionately high compared to its 6% share of the population. To address this immediate challenge:

- ❖ It is important for the region to reduce its dependence on food imports, coupled with improving the efficiency of importing and storing food. It is also important to reinvigorate the agricultural sector in the region as well as investing in practices and technologies that could respond to climate change, such as hydroponics, conservation agriculture, and the safe use of treated water.
- ❖ Countries in the region must begin better planning and channel their resources towards practical solutions that will yield positive results and safeguard our future, with the engagement of youth in development is the cornerstone for the region to cope with these challenges.



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Wildfires were prevalent in North Africa over the second half of 2021. Experts believe these natural disasters may become the norm in that part of the world. Youth were influential in responding to wildfires, whether by participating in emergency missions or by carrying out relief initiatives.

- ❖ It is important to channel youth's drive and energy to that end. Governments and non-governmental organizations may invest training resources to provide youth with proper emergency response training to (a) ensure their safety when they take initiative and (b) benefit from their willingness to offer support.

The second half of 2021 witnessed a positive increase in international attention towards supporting the MENA region in facing the challenges associated with climate change. For instance, the World Bank announced a US\$4.75 billion support package to the region, as part of its global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, about 25% of which is dedicated toward climate change response.

- ❖ It is essential to prioritize the region's poorest countries and most vulnerable populations and minorities in such packages, as they require immediate support, especially when it comes to food and water security – such as the case in Yemen.
- ❖ It is important that such support packages provide youth with a key role, as major stakeholders, when it comes to the design and implementation and especially leading the projects and activities related to climate action.
- ❖ The sources reviewed over the second half of 2021 featured some instances in which certain programs, training sessions, or seminars which were initially dedicated for climate change discussions end up covering different topics. For that, institutional monitoring associated with support packages must be activated and realized to ensure that the region enhances its efforts in fighting for the sustainability of our environment.

The research found that youth in the MENA region tend to be more concerned about the impact of climate change, and they also see themselves as some of the most viable leaders and sustainable advocates in leading climate action.

- ❖ These leadership tenets ought to be mirrored by institutional efforts, as youth must be placed at the center when it comes to leading climate action. To that end, institutions should be sincere in their youth engagement efforts, realizing that youth involvement in this context should not be viewed only because they are young and will live through the implications; instead, it should be because of youth's merit, drive, capacity, and experience. They should be involved in discussions, planning, strategizing, implementation, oversight, and assessment.





COVID-19

## COVID-19 Restrictions and Corruption

Over the second half of 2021, government enforced COVID-19 restrictions and the corruption that came with them continued in the MENA region, driven by public dissatisfaction with how regional governments handled the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic.

In early July, it was reported that there was a high number of Iraqi restaurants breaching COVID-19 restrictions and curfew instructions through paying bribes to security officials to turn a blind eye.

The report highlights that many security forces deployed in Karrada district in Baghdad have been soliciting bribes in exchange for allowing establishments to stay open during the nightly curfew hours of 9:00 pm to 5:00 am. These practices only worsened the situation in Iraq which, at the time, reported over 1.3 million cases of COVID and more than 17,000 deaths.

In late July, it was reported that there was an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in Khanaqin, one of the disputed areas between Baghdad and Erbil – administratively affiliated with the Diyala governorate, along with a severe shortage in oxygen in the hospitals. In the absence of government provided supplemental oxygen, locals resorted to doing so themselves.

## COVID-19 and Vaccine Skepticism

In July it was reported that Iraq was witnessing widespread public skepticism in COVID-19 vaccines as thousands of new cases emerge daily, which raised concerns of an epidemiological catastrophe. The public has demonstrated reluctance in wearing masks and taking vaccines due to misinformation campaigns and mistrust in the government. Iraq has only been able to fully vaccinate 1% of its 40 million population, with 1.4 million recorded cases and 17,000 deaths in total.

In late September, the IGCF 2021 took place in Sharjah which saw journalists, young Arabs and social media influencers discussing the public's perception of influencers and the rise of misinformation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The forum featured a range of interactive sessions, including 'The Fifth Generation of Ideas'; a debate on influencers' role in society titled 'Infodemic'; 'Misleading news in the time of coronavirus'; and a session for journalists titled 'Journalism's prospects'.



The discussions seek to promote critical thinking as a key factor of effective communication, both generally and in the government sector, and focus on several key areas of concern, including the young generation's perception of societies of the future and their role in strengthening them, among others.

## Government COVID-19 Policies

In late July, Moroccan youth aged 25–29 became eligible to receive their COVID-19 vaccination. The report by Lomazoma stated that there has not been any official statement on the matter, but many young Moroccans within this age group received short messages (SMS) with their appointment dates, generally between July 28 and 31, at their nearest vaccination stations.

In September, Mona Abdou wrote an article titled, “Egypt’s Vaccination Program: Failing?” where she reiterates that Egypt did not create a clear and cohesive national strategy for vaccine rollouts, and she highlights that an Elsevier research journal indicates that many of Egypt’s COVID-19 cases were largely unreported in 2020.

She states that despite upwards of 11.9 million vaccine doses administered, and around 4.2% of Egypt’s population vaccinated, many have criticized the number as indicative of slow progress, a lack of public awareness, and a redolent distrust of health officials. This includes a number of Egyptian health professionals who have voiced their hesitation to get vaccinated.

Around the same time, the governor of Aswan, Egypt instructed to provide all facilities, coinciding with the arrival of the awareness bus to launch the “Together We Reassure... Register Now” initiative to encourage citizens to register on the website to receive the COVID-19 vaccine and help them in the registration process and to receive the vaccine on the same day.

The bus included a team of community outreach in the directorate, who wear customized uniforms, and are equipped with “tablet” devices to record citizens’ data on the website to receive the vaccine and respond to all their inquiries and questions about vaccines.

In October the Egyptian Ministry of Health and Population presented a map of youth centers designated as places to receive the Coronavirus vaccine for students of universities and higher institutes. The Ministry had also announced that students may begin receiving their vaccines at youth centers, among 270 centers that were equipped to register and vaccinate university students, without pre-registration, before the start of the new academic year.



The Ministry advised students to receive the vaccine before the current academic year, so that universities can allow them to enter their headquarters.

In October, the Dubai health authority, in partnership with Gems for Education, launched a state-wide vaccination campaign targeting kids aged 12 to 18, as well as their parents, at Gems schools, and school staff, with the aim of increasing vaccination rates amongst the youth.



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In late October, Morocco received a new shipment of 270,000 Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine doses, as per Hespress. This came nearly 2 months after the latest shipment, which included 950,000 doses. The Moroccan Ministry of Health issued a statement at the beginning of October, confirming that it would start giving a third dose of vaccines (booster shot), as part of the national vaccination campaign. While the ministry explained that the decision comes in accordance with the recommendations of the National Scientific Committee and international scientific community, it pointed out that citizens will be informed of the procedures as well as the target groups.

However, Ezzedine Brahimi, a member of the Scientific Committee to combat the Coronavirus in Morocco, stated that between 5 and 6 million young people between the ages of 17 and 26, and a million people over the age of forty have not received the vaccine, calling for the need to “target them because they are people who do not only represent a danger to themselves, but also to the health system.”



## Youth-Led Initiatives

In July, a number of youth volunteers in Sidi Hcine, Tunisia, were successful in gathering 23 oxygen concentrators, as part of their campaign “Support your Brother to Breathe, Support your Brother to Live.” The campaign sourced 13 concentrators while the government of Tunis supported the initiative by providing 10 concentrators to address the severe shortage of oxygen for patients in intensive care units in local hospitals.

In late July, Moroccan youth actively encouraged their peers to get vaccinated against the Coronavirus following the government’s announcement to begin the vaccination process for those under the age of 30. Moroccan youth are posting pictures of themselves receiving their shots with the hashtag (#nimshyo\_nilqaho “let’s get vaccinated”).

In August, a group of young Algerians in Bab Alwadi in the capital city launched an initiative to purchase oxygen generators and concentrators to the hospitals in the city. The initiative aimed to rescue as many COVID-19 patients as possible, who are suffering from the severe deficiency of oxygen in the hospitals of the city.

It is worth noting that the initiative managed to collect enough donations to buy an oxygen generator (at \$280,000) for the University Hospital while the rest of the money will be used to buy oxygen concentrators (\$900 a piece).

In the same month, a group of Moroccan youth launched a humanitarian initiative to secure oxygen for those infected with the Coronavirus. The group secured 7 artificial respiration devices in Souss-Massa, equipped with oxygen masks, and placed them at the disposal of those infected with Coronavirus, who suffer from shortness of breath. The initiative team clarified that patients who cannot afford it will be provided with the devices for free.

In Egypt, Egyptian youth continued efforts to contain and reduce COVID-19 infections, with youth from the "Will of the People" initiative conducting field visits in the governorate of Ash Sharqia, Egypt to educate citizens on the importance of complying with precautions such as social distancing, constant sanitation, and wearing of face masks to limit the spread of COVID-19.

These awareness campaigns were initially launched during Ramadan, where youth camped in a large parking lot and discussed with passersby the importance of wearing masks and taking precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

A group of Saudi youth created a new platform called Helpline which was launched in Saudi Arabia, meant to help the youth with their mental health. It allows for young people who have questions or doubts about various topics, ranging from mental health to more broad things such as social issues with people their age.

Founded by a group of teenagers, this represents a great step forward. Mental health can often be considered a taboo topic in the region, and this platform can serve as a support system for many young people, especially in times of COVID. The founders of Helpline spoke of how their own struggles inspired them to take action. Their main objective is to “spread mental health awareness in the Middle East” and “break the stigma” surrounding mental health issues.

Following the repression of peaceful protests against mandatory vaccination in Morocco, the Moroccan Association of Young Lawyers condemned authorities, on the basis that they infringed upon freedom of expression as well as the right to protest. The statement called on young lawyers to form committees and provide support to all the detainees.

Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence, Commissioner General of Expo 2020 Dubai, and Dr. Nayef Al-Hajraf, Secretary-General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, attended the opening of the Gulf Youth Forum hosted by the Arab Youth Center and the Federal Youth Foundation under the slogan “Our youth is one, our vision is one” at the youth pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, in cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf and the ministries of youth and sports in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

The Forum discussed the trends and vision of youth in the post-Corona pandemic, with the participation of official delegations from the Arab Gulf countries and speakers who shed light on issues of concern to youth in the Gulf region.

## Vaccination and Infection Rates

In July, Rudaw reported that 15 Iraqis died due to the coronavirus in Al-Karkh, Baghdad, most of whom were youth. The director of the Al-Karkh Health Directorate highlighted that, in Al-Karkh alone, there are more than 500 patients in critical situations fighting for their lives along with 15,000 others who are receiving treatments in their homes. The director added that the situation is complicated since preventive measures are not followed properly by Iraqis.



Shortly after, Alquds reported that over 160,000 Iraqis contracted COVID-19 in its third wave in the country. The Iraqi government sent a distress call to civil organizations to educate citizens about adhering to the measures to prevent the spread of the virus, after the increasing numbers, warning of a “dangerous epidemiological juncture” that threatens everyone, while a specialized parliamentary committee revealed that more than 160,000 critical cases have been registered in the country's hospitals, caused by the virus’ third wave.



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At the end of the month, the Iraqi Ministry of Health warned of an “epidemic disaster” in the event that Iraqis continue to fail to abide by the preventive measures to avoid contracting the Coronavirus and refrain from receiving the vaccines. A member of the support team for the Ministry of Health said, in a statement, that “the continuing high rates of infections and deaths, represent a rapid and unprecedented increase resulting from the rapid spread of the third wave.” He added that Iraqi hospitals are filled with critical cases, many of whom are youth.

In August, VDL News reported that the Delta variant of the Coronavirus was spreading alarmingly in Lebanon and that hospitals were completely overfilled. One doctor spoke to VDL News and stated that youth, in specific, constituted the vast majority of the patients. He indicated that those who received the Sinopharm vaccine are especially susceptible to the Delta variant’s symptoms.

In Algeria, Dr. Kamel Janouhat, the director of the Central Laboratories and the National Society of Immunology, indicated that 30% of COVID-19 patients in Algerian hospitals and 25% of deaths are youth under 45 years old, as reported by Ennahar Online on August 5.

Janouhat added that there is a weakness in early diagnosis due to the varying symptoms accompanying the Delta variant along with misinformation which causes people to refrain from going to the hospitals, thus worsening their health conditions.

Additionally, cases of depression and anxiety among youth have doubled since the COVID-19 pandemic began, according to a study from the University of Calgary. The university based their analysis on 29 separate studies from around the world, including the Middle East.

In late August, weeks after a spike in coronavirus cases overwhelmed intensive care units across North Africa (Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, Algeria) with severe oxygen shortages sparking public anger, case numbers began sharply declining.

In late September, Sputnik reported that a member of the Moroccan scientific committee to combat the Coronavirus confirmed that the lack of young people's demand for vaccination was caused by their lack of conviction of the efficacy of the vaccines.

Sources confirmed that Morocco had obtained nearly 54 million doses of different vaccines since the beginning of the crisis, including the Chinese Sinopharma, Pfizer, and Johnson and Johnson. The member explained that about 8 million of the target groups did not receive the vaccination and that 54% of students received the Pfizer vaccine while the rest received Sinopharma.

In November, Maha Talaat, Regional Adviser to the World Health Organization, stated that thus far the omicron variant, which first appeared in South Africa on November 11, seemed to be infecting youth disproportionately.



## Conclusions and Recommendations

Youth in the region seemed to be disproportionately impacted by the various strains of the COVID-19 virus than they were previously, which was only exacerbated by misinformation, unwillingness of many to trust vaccines and social distancing guidelines, and, arguably most of all, regional governments' inefficiency in rolling out vaccine programs and proper COVID-19 treatment resources.

- ❖ It is important that regional governments continue to employ educational campaigns in order to explain to their citizenry that the vaccines are safe and effective, as well as continuously attempt to dispel any misinformation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing guidelines, and the vaccines themselves.
- ❖ Regional governments must also implement much more efficient vaccination campaigns, including increasing the amount of COVID-19 vaccines they procure for their countries.
- ❖ These governments must also procure the proper resources and equipment to treat those impacted by the pandemic that seemingly are unable to access things such as oxygen machines and hospital beds.

Regarding youth movements in the region concerning the pandemic, they should continue to engage in pro-vaccine campaigns and continue with their resource procurement efforts where their governments' are lacking.

- ❖ For that, it is important for governments and nongovernment organizations to support youth where possible in a way that leverages their capacities and voluntary spirit in awareness raising campaigns or other national or targeted campaigns with the aim of enhancing vaccination.

In order to address corruption regarding COVID-19 policies and business owners and civilians not following social distancing guidelines:

- ❖ Governments must address these business owners and corrupt politicians and officers that are accepting bribes, while also addressing the financial burden placed upon these businesses due to their drop in income because of the pandemic.

## ABOUT MENAACTION

MENAACTION, established by a group of young professionals from the MENA region, is a nonprofit organization designed to advocate for the rights of MENA youth. MENAACTION is for youth by youth, focusing on issues of policy, advocacy, democracy, and human rights. MENAACTION looks to build a vast network of young people in the region and MENA youth around the world. Our beneficiaries are primarily MENA youth, policy makers, relevant international organizations, and local civil society organizations. Our team brings a wide range of backgrounds including research, policy, advocacy, and media and journalism, and are fluent in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Amazigh, French, and English.

MENAACTION believes in the meaningful engagement of youth as stakeholders and active agents. As such, we utilize our network of peers around the world as our network of advocates, experts, and activists. They are provided with the space and opportunity to contribute our programs and activities through our online and offline presence. We compile their contributions and utilize them under our programs of policy, advocacy, democracy, and human rights. Such contributions will also inform our campaigns, and we will ultimately produce white papers and reports to be delivered to the relevant stakeholders, including decision makers.

MENAACTION is rooted in empowering voices in and from the Middle East and North Africa to lead efforts to incorporate youth in the region into policy and decision making, while expanding opportunities for youth involvement across society. Through a focus on youth and a combination of policy, advocacy, democracy, and human rights programs, MENAACTION provides a unique and distinct approach to addressing issues in the region. Our platform empowers not only young experts on the region, but also young experts from the region. Under our focus on policy, advocacy, democracy, and human rights.

شباب

Youth

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# **MENARY MONITOR**

## ***THE STATE OF YOUTH IN THE MENA REGION***

### **2021: END OF YEAR REVIEW**

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