

2022 END OF YEAR REVIEW:

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



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MENAACTION would like to thank, first and foremost, the youth of the Middle East and North Africa region who continue to inspire, year after year, with their perseverance, resolve, strength, activism, and tremendous initiatives. Not only would this report not have been possible without them, but MENAACTION as an organization would not be the entity it is today without them.

MENAACTION would also like to thank all the journalists, media outlets, and other news websites for continuing to provide timely, trusted news and commentary about the challenges facing youth in the region. MENAACTION especially acknowledges the difficulty of working on many of the countries in the region, given the ongoing conflicts and human rights risks. For that, MENAACTION, its board, staff, and volunteers are thankful for the efforts carried out by journalists and media outlets.

Finally, MENAACTION would like to thank everyone who have followed or read all or any of the weekly editions of MENARY Monitor. We are humbled and grateful to have reached thousands of readers over the past couple of years.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MENAACTION's Middle East and North Africa Region Youth Monitor (MENARY Monitor) has been running for nearly two years.

It provides weekly overview of all youth-related news and updates from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region within 6 categories: (a) politics and political engagement; (b) economics and entrepreneurship; (c) conflict; (d) development; (e) education; and (f) environment.

In analyzing each of the 6 categories, this report provides in-depth analysis of the state of youth in the region over the course of 2022, with emphasis on the challenges and opportunities along with short-term recommendations for needed interventions.

Politics and Political Engagement

When it comes to youth political engagement, 2022 saw more challenges than successes for youth. As COVID-19 related movement restrictions were mostly lifted, protests broke around the region, particularly in Iran, sparked by the murder of young Mahsa Amini on the hands of the morality police. The still ongoing protests are led by Iranian women and vouth who are facing existential crackdown from the Iranian regime, manifested in arbitrary detentions at best, and murky trials leading to executions at worst. Hundreds of protesters have been killed thus far while tens of thousands have been arrested, with tens facing imminent executions.

The protests in Iran, and elsewhere in the region for that matter, are a culmination of years of marginalizing policies, and in some contexts, such policies are worsening.

The democratic backsliding in Tunisia is marginalizing and alienating youth groups, as the new constitution provides the president with consolidated powers not seen after 2011's Arab Spring uprisings.

In Sudan, the military coup coopted years of hard work by youth activists who had not had the chance to celebrate the ousting of former president Omar Al-Bashir.

There are two important statements that demonstrate the current state of youth marginalization in the region.

The Iranian chief investigator who is in charge of interrogating youth detainees said "I have spent my life interrogating great political figures, but these days, I am doing the most difficult interrogations in my life, as I do not understand what they are saying, and they do not understand what I am saying."

As for Sudanese youth, observers believe that youth have become "instrumentalized but not trusted to lead."

These two statements demonstrate a major gap between youth and decision-makers, grounded in (a) inability to understand their needs; (b) unwillingness to provide them with their rightful space within the political sphere; and (c) utilizing youth as an instrument to achieve certain gains within larger political competitions.

Economics and Entrepreneurship

Much like 2021, this past year brought continued economic challenges for youth across the region, with unemployment among youth still stagnant and government ability to create jobs is still subpar.

These economic difficulties are placing the region's young assets at risk of migration at best, or worsened mental health struggles, with education dropouts also on the rise in many countries, including Lebanon and Syria.

While there were indeed tens of government initiatives aimed at addressing the scourge of unemployment, they are yet to prove effective. This is due to a number of reasons, including a skills mismatch, challenges related to education, and a weak level of cooperation between the public and private sectors.

Governments, nongovernment organizations, and economists are increasingly encouraging youth to turn more to the entrepreneurship track. A certainly viable solution for many, entrepreneurship in the MENA region, however, also comes with its own sets of challenges. Many young Algerian entrepreneurs, for example, complain about government bureaucracy and delays in processing their paperwork, whether to register their enterprises or to acquire funding.

Financial literacy and financial inclusion are also aspects hindering the progress of entrepreneurship in the region. For example, only 17% of young Moroccans use digital payments while only 1.6% buy products or services online. To that end, the Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) emphasized the importance of financial inclusion to foster economic growth in the region and called on Arab governments and banking institutions to improve upon social responsibility and to resort to sustainable finance to empower the more vulnerable communities, such as the youth and women.

In addition to that, the UAE announced a monumental decision in the form of a visa designed for job seekers. The job exploration entry visa, as it is called, is 60-day entry permit that offers a variety of incentives, such as the ability to acquire the visa without the need for a host or sponsor.

This visa provides youth, who have been facing the challenge of unemployment in their countries, with a much needed shimmer of hope.

Conflict

Most of the conflicts around the region continued to witness escalations and youth were constantly exploited as fuel for the fights or targeted and primarily victimized.

They also continue to be targeted by armed violent extremist, terrorist, and sectarian factions. Youth also continued to fall victim to a number of human rights restrictions and violations along with a spike in the prevalence of drugs across the region.

At the forefront of these conflicts is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in which Israeli occupation forces continued to systematically target young Palestinians, killing, wounding, and detaining Palestinian youth and children on a daily basis.

MENAACTION reported on the death of at least 60 young Palestinians on the hands of the occupation forces throughout 2022, but ffficial reports from the United Nations indicate that the death toll of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces over 2022 is at least 200, 43 of whom are children, coupled with the arrest of about 7,000 Palestinians, 882 of whom were children and 172 were women.

In addition to that, at least 488 Iranians were killed during the ongoing protests, 60 of whom were children, which sheds further light on the authorities' deadly resolve to crush the widespread, ongoing protests.

The Iranian Human Rights (IHR) group said that more than half had been killed in areas with high Kurdish and Baloch populations.

Additionally, a report by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies in early December suggests that at least 500 individuals were executed in Iran throughout the year, excluding nearly 450 who were killed during the protests.

In addition to that, irregular migration, violent extremism, and drug addiction remain other dangers facing youth around the region.

Throughout the year, hundreds fell victims to recruitment by violent extremist groups, as thousands engaged in irregular migration, mostly toward Europe, and drug addiction became more prevalent throughout the region despite enhanced government policies.

Development

Over the course of 2022, hundreds of youth development initiatives and programs were held with the aim of empowering youth capabilities in line with the needs of the region.

Despite some successes, such efforts can be characterized as mostly traditional and seldom coherent with the actual needs of youth, perhaps due to the absence of efforts to solicit inputs from youth regarding their own needs and priorities.

For example. An Egyptian journalist clarified that 60% of the Ministry of Youth's allocations went to construction, 30% to support youth centers, and 8% for workers' wages, leaving 1% for activities.

Throughout the year, youth led a number of grassroots, voluntary initiatives aimed at addressing different local challenges.

At the same time, government and nongovernment organizations looked to build and sustain the culture of voluntary work among youth, which in fact proved effective. Given the importance of volunteer work in the world, the United Nations designated the fifth of December of each year as a date for celebrating International Volunteer Day.

There were also several workshops and initiatives that addressed issues related to wellness, COVID-19 pandemic, and countering the scourge of drugs. This is important given the global pandemic, rising challenges related to mental health, let alone the increase in drug addiction, use, abuse, and related offenses among youth across the region.

Technology and media – whether traditional, digital, or modern – were heavily featured throughout youth-specific development efforts across the region over 2022.

The stories monitored included youth efforts to preserve the culture and heritage of their traditions and countries along with several media training efforts, and an emphasis on newer approaches in media.

Education

MENAACTION's 2022 "What IF Youth Led the MENA Region" Survey found that 57.1% of the respondents stated that the education system should be the highest priority for public spending, 25.8% believe that reforming the education system should be the main focus for their governments, and 13.5% believe that the deteriorating education systems were the most pressing issue facing them in their countries.

Palestinians faced the most pressing challenges related to education over 2022. There are approximately 1.6 million young men and women in refugee and IDP camps, which lack educational rehabilitation centers to work on helping young people to build their capacities. According to the UN's 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview, an estimated 678,000 children are in need of child protection services.

About 25% of children aged 16-17 are out of school, and young people face multiple obstacles securing a job once they do leave education. Moreover, university graduates in Gaza suffer from unemployment following their graduation.

Lebanese students also face a number of education-related challenges. A UNICEF report revealed 3 out of every 10 young men and women in Lebanon have dropped out of education to find job opportunities. UNICEF also reported that many young Lebanese have been cutting back on healthcare.

With challenges in education to employment transition, the region is also suffering from brain drain among its youth, as a report by Majid Al Futtaim business group and McKinsey highlights that higher education investment is direly needed to halt student brain drain.

It indicates that the relative scarcity of top facilities to meet the needs of the region's brightest has led to many "leaving to study abroad, and in many cases, not returning home."

More investment in higher education in the region, particularly in a way that promotes the necessary skills for the region's labor market, can limit brain drain.

Environment

MENAACTION's "What IF Youth Led the MENA Region" 2022 Survey found that 49.8% of youth surveyed believe that protecting the environment should be given priority, even if it causes slower economic growth and some loss of jobs, which signifies an important ripe environment for the engagement of youth in climate action.

Government institutions and nongovernment organizations should widen the level and type of youth engagement in such efforts to leverage youth's leadership traits and interest in leading climate action. This is because 2022 featured more emphasis on holding environment-oriented conferences and less interventions on the ground than expected. Supporting youth-led local efforts ought to be prioritized, as they proved effective in raising public awareness and achieving tremendous impacts on the ground.

MENAACTION's Survey also found that 31.2% of the respondents reported that they have taken or regularly take actions out of concern for climate change.

49.6% of the respondents stated that they are becoming more interested in taking actions, which shows a tremendous level of civic responsibility,

especially when combined with those who stated that they do take regular action.

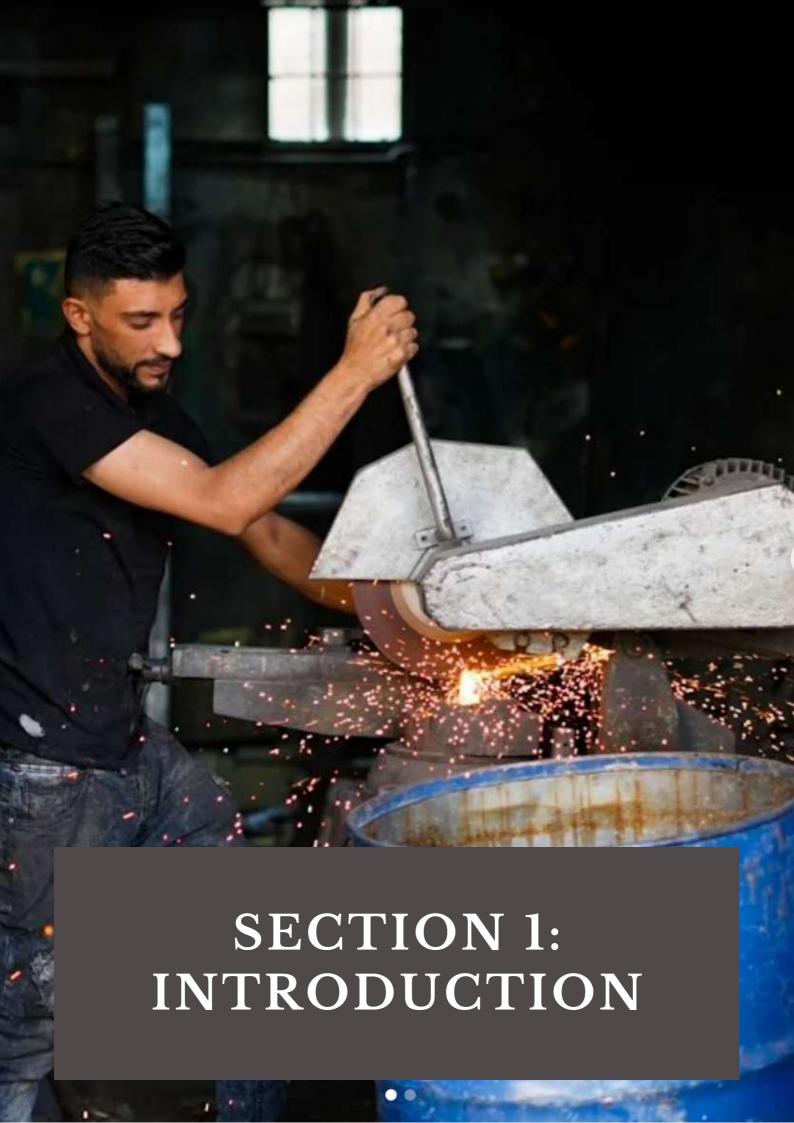
While civic responsibility is not entirely prevalent across the region, when given the chance, youth demonstrated that they are prepared and willing to take action on matters of interest for the general population.

UNICEF's Regional Office for the MENA region and the UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States developed the Young Climate Activists Toolkit, which looks to equip youth with the tools, knowledge, and resources to enhance their engagement in climate action.

The toolkit was developed in consultation with young climate activists from around the region to ensure an inclusive and a well-informed framework.

The Toolkit is tailored to offer clear, concise, and easily understandable information on climate action to prepare youth for improved participation in climate action and debate.

Additionally, Egypt held the 27th edition of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) in November, which featured numerous initiatives leading up to the event, a number of efforts on the sidelines of the conference, and some endeavors post the summit.



ABOUT MENARY MONITOR



On March 19, 2021 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 in addition to insightful comments.

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.

ABOUT MENARY MONITOR

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.

MENARY Monitor looks to enhance the conditions of youth under the age of 30 in the MENA Region. They face a number of issues including lack of agency in the political process, socioeconomic disenfranchisement, restrictions on human rights and personal freedoms. This is documented by many global indicators, including Freedom House. Additionally, young people in the Middle East are generally perceived as a burden on society, perpetrators or victims of violence, rather than an opportunity and agents for change and development.

Through MENARY Monitor, 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.

Further, 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.



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.

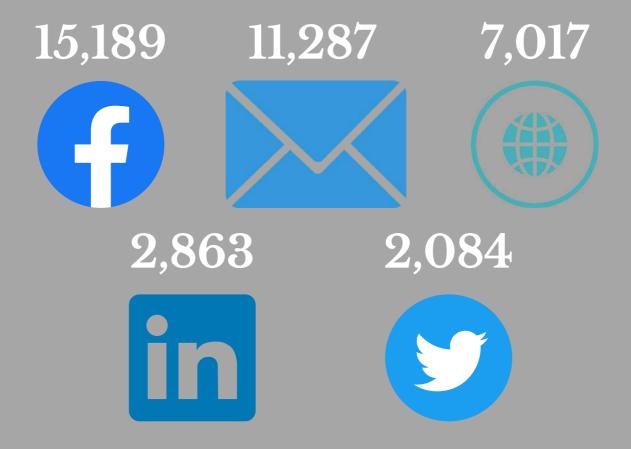
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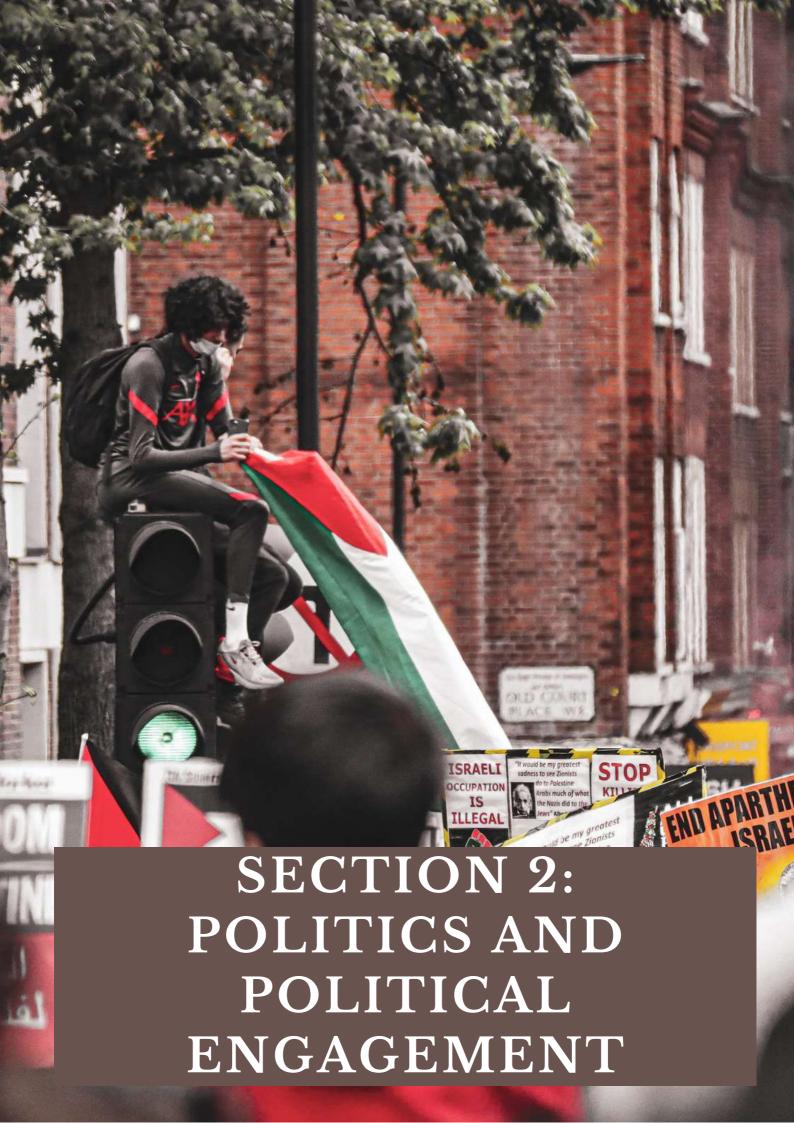
This report reviews 51 editions of MENARY Monitor, starting with the first week of January up to the end of 2022. For this report, MENAACTION reviewed a total of 803 news sources and updates ranging from Arabic, English, French, Kurdish and Persian. The report is divided into the following sections: (a) politics and political engagement; (b) economics and entrepreneurship; (c) conflict; (d) development; (e) education; and (f) environment. Within each section, the report outlines the major updates and policy implications in addition to analyzing the implications on youth.

Each section also features "Spotlights" highlighting a noteworthy challenge, achievement, or area that are relevant to youth in the region. 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.

Throughout 2022, MENARY Monitor's weekly editions reached 38,440 readers around the world, most of whom were targeted through MENAACTION's Facebook Page. The below table illustrates the number of readers per platform:







INTRODUCTION

Over the span of 2022, the MENA region has witnessed substantial developments, turbulences, and overall zigzags in terms of youth politics and youth political engagement.

A TOTAL OF

174

SOURCES WERE REVIEWED

A total of 180 separate, noteworthy incidents were monitored, categorized into protests, advocacy, and activism; marginalization of youth; youth as victims of political competition and violence; political inclusion, engagement, and empowerment of youth; and peacebuilding and human rights.

While there were numerous positive attempts at widening the space for youth in the political processes, across the region, there were equally powerful counterproductive actions that diminished youth's prospects to influence the decisions of their own nations. Even initiatives characterized as positive have also had some, perhaps unintended, negative consequences.



PROTESTS, ADVOCACY, AND ACTIVISM

Over the duration of 2022, youth continued to explore multiple avenues to ensure their voices were heard. Not only did they protest in the streets of their towns and cities, but they also utilized social media platforms, as civic spaces were becoming increasingly closed for them. At the same time, online activism faces its own challenges, primarily government censorship.

However, this is not stopping youth from advocating for their rights, as youth are following trends, hashtags, and joining open and closed online groups to discuss topics of interest for them. They are clamoring to have their voices heard and are determined to let others know that there is no longer a "deafening silence"; instead, youth found their voices, and social media is an effective medium.

When discussing protests in 2022, Iranian women and youth were brave champions in the face of oppression. Protest movements in Iran can be characterized by those before September and those after.

In early February, youth protested the repressive nature of the Iranian regime, in front of buildings where torture was allegedly practiced, on the eve of the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Sporadic protests continued throughout the winter, spring, and summer, and the authorities resorted to arrests.

In May, at least 37 young demonstrators were arrested and at least five were killed, as they protested the sudden price hikes of subsidized staple foods, which had risen by as much as 300%, chanting: "the clerics must get lost," "no progress, no recreation, our youth was wasted," and "down with rising prices." To further suppress the demonstrations, Iranian authorities cut off the internet connection in many cities, after newly elected president Ebrahim Raisi declared an end to wheat and flour subsidies, calling it a "necessary economic surgery."

September represented the breaking point for Iranian youth who could no longer bear what had been long bubbling under the surface. In mid-September, an Iranian 22-year-old woman of Kurdish origins, Jina "Mahsa" Amini, was arrested by Iran's Morality Police for "improperly" wearing her hijab. Amini was severely beaten and died three days later while still in police custody. This human rights violation ignited (the still ongoing) nationwide protests, led by women and youth, in at least 140 cities across all provinces.

Unlike previous protests, the current unrest is more widespread, and anger has gathered various segments of society. Social and political issues converged, and what had started as anger against the hijab mandate has evolved into criticism against the ruling regime. "Women, Life, Freedom" has been the battle cry of young men and women in the streets, universities, and schools in Iran, with the ultimate goal is to overthrow the Islamic Republic in favor of a secular, democratic system.



Since September, constant calls for protests, demonstrations, strikes, and sit-ins were constantly advocated for by Iranian youth. Youth and women, primarily, and other proponents of the protests, periodically protested in front of government buildings, in towns, major cities, and university campuses. The "Youth of Tehran Neighborhoods" group was one of the major advocates for and organizers of the protests, disseminating weekly schedules and agendas for the protests. The group urged protesters to chant "Death to the Dictator", "We will not stop until complete victory," and "We will remain in the streets until the regime of the Islamic Republic is overthrown."

This group also championed previous protest movements and continuously called for reviving their memories. Their peaceful activism also transcended protests and included calls for boycotts. In a November statement, the "Young Neighborhoods of Tehran" called on citizens not to pay water, electricity and gas bills, in a manner similar to civil disobedience. It also urged Iranians to abstain, for three days, from engaging in banking transactions.

The young protesters represent a serious warning to Iran's rulers, given a massive ideological gap on the one hand, and the authorities' repressive policies on the other. Many of Iran's youth and women do not adhere to the regime's ideology and are angry at being denied the daily freedoms and opportunities of their peers in other countries. Their movement has the potential to inspire more demonstrations and strikes as the cost of living crisis deepens, one of the most significant threats to the Islamic Republic's 43-year dominance.

Iran's youth, especially those born in 2000 and later, are what can be called "freedom seekers". They appear agnostic to the consequences of an insurrection against the regime in Tehran, even with a violent repression which has resulted in 500 deaths and some 15,000 arrests thus far, according to the Human Rights Activists' News Agency (HRANA). Youth are disenchanted with the regime, do not feel much affinity to the ideology, and are very much interconnected with other ways of living. Why do Iranian youth so boldly and valiantly object to and avoid conservatism?



"this generation grew up in the era of sustainable awareness and learned how to deal with its demands. This generation is ready to play until it wins. This new generation did not play any role in the current system, it is only a victim."

- Journalist Shahindokht Kharazmi



Further, a report by the Middle East Institute highlighted that while protests in Iran are not new, this current wave has been characterized by a prominent role played by the country's Generation Z, also known as "Zoomers". Iranian Zoomers have been generally indifferent to politics, religion, customs, and traditions, like many others their age around the world. While Iranian Zoomers make up a relatively small proportion of the country's population, they are extremely skeptical and are "digital natives." Iran's Zoomers have had greater access to information and the outside world. Their active presence on and access to online social media has given them better analytical skills, a platform to voice their concerns, and the courage to speak out.

These demonstrations were faced by massive and bloody backlash from the Iranian regime and authorities, backed by massive institutions, such as the elite Revolutionary Guards and a multi-layered network of loyalists and businessmen whose interests depend on the continuation of the status quo.

The regime has responded with hard repression: shutting down internet access and mobilizing nearly all its security forces. Iranian authorities deployed thousands of security forces in armored vehicles, including riot police, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and its paramilitary wing Basij into the streets of the Kurdish city of Sanandaj in western Iran, launching a violent assault. Security fired heavy machine guns into civilian houses on multiple occasions and shot at protesters.

Additionally, in the Kurdish town of Sandanj, the regime declared martial law and suppressed the movement. The demonstrators also received death threats through phone calls and messages from "unknown" numbers, with messages such as "we saw you in the demonstrations, and if we see you again, there will be a problem, this is the first and last warning."

In Iraq – and in addition to solidarity protests with women and youth in Iran's Kurdish cities, Iraqi youth made it clear that they want a secular civil system. A poll conducted by the Center for Peace Empowerment in Iraq indicated that a large segment of Iraqi youth support reducing the role of clerics in public life. The most important thing for them is to limit the control and influence of religious political parties who have long exploited religion, religious sentiments, and youth to achieve personal and partisan gains.

As for Palestine, protest movements were also prevalent, as many Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and other occupied Palestinian cities participated in a protest against the increasing violence against Palestinians. The Israeli occupation has been destroying Palestinian crops and the demolition of homes with the aim of ultimately expelling the Palestinians.



In addition to Palestinian protests against Israeli occupation, many young Palestinians also protested Palestinian factions. Hundreds of Palestinians participated in an online event criticizing Hamas' approach to governance in Gaza, as discontent has risen considerably among the youth, leading an audio chat on Twitter titled "They Kidnapped Gaza", which kickstarted protests.

Looking at youth activism in Sudan, thousands of pro-democracy protesters marched in Khartoum and other cities against the ruling military. The protesters chanted against the army and demanded that military generals step, stating "we want full civilian rule... We see the military is maneuvering to gain time while the country is deteriorating in all aspects of life."

Further, thousands of Sudanese parents took to the streets in support of their children who have been actively protesting against the repressive regime in the country, in order to "show the youth that they are not alone." In response, police forces used tear gas and batons to disperse protesters in different areas, leaving at least 83 protestors dead, including tens of young people, as of October.

Social media accounts of those killed in the protests have become a destination for their comrades looking to revive their legacy, comments, and tweets, especially those written shortly before their death – with phrases such as "we are tired, my friend, but no one can lie down during the battle," written by Abdel Azim Babiker, who was killed at the beginning of the revolution against the ousted President Omar al-Bashir.

Other notable protest movements during 2022 include, but not limited to:

- In Libya, protesters stated that they will continue to protest until all the ruling elites quit power, after protests in most major cities culminated in a crowd storming the parliament building, similar to what had happened in Iraq in the summer of 2022. They stated they would step up their campaign urging protestors to camp in city squares and practice civil disobedience until they achieve their goal, stating "We affirm our determination to continue the path of peaceful demonstration until the last breath to achieve our goals."
- In Mauritania, security forces arrested young activists, following a protest against the rise in fuel prices. Security personnel dispersed the demonstration called by the opposition "Kafana" movement, and arrested its leader, Yacoub Ould Lamrabet, along with activists in the movement. The sit-in denounced the Mauritanian government's raising of fuel prices, as "unfair to the Mauritanian people and will be reflected in the prices of foodstuffs."
- In Bahrain, the 14th February Coalition, condemned the visit of Israeli President Benny Gantz to Bahrain, and condemned the al-Khalifa, and reiterated their solidarity with Palestinians. They also issued a statement that addressed the international community to take urgent action to prevent the execution of two Bahraini youth.
- In Qatar, the "Qatar Youth Against Normalization" campaign invited the Qatar Medical Association, and all Qatari doctors and workers in Qatar, to boycott the Emirates International Dental Conference and the Arab Dental Exhibition "Aidak Dubai", due to the participation of several Zionist doctors and companies. The campaign also expressed its shock after the Qatari authorities announced direct flights with "Israel" a few days before the start of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable incidents in 2022 was when a young Tunisian man set himself on fire after his father's sheep were confiscated by police who demanded that the father gives proof of purchase of the sheep and a license for rearing and trading. This act of protest mirrored Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation in 2010, which ignited the Arab Spring protests.

MARGINALIZATION OF YOUTH

A common denominator across all the youth-led protest movements in the MENA region has been a widely stagnant marginalization of youth. With the failure of many governments to address challenges such as economic recession, high unemployment rates, high cost of living, and internal instability, it is leaving young people feeling dysthymic.

Data analyzed by MENAACTION shows that the region's composite score for the level of investment in youth human capital stands at 43.2%, which is comprised of political inclusion, economic inclusion, social inclusion, and investment in tertiary education. Such a percentage has been dwindling with a decrease in state spending on the youth sector between 2020 and 2022.

LEVEL OF INVESTMENT IN YOUTH HUMAN CAPITAL

43.2%

INCLUDES POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL INCLUSION AND INVESTMENT IN TERRITRIARY EDUCATION

Policymakers need to place proper investment in these avenues, which contribute directly to the development of youth as active players and stakeholders in the political, economic, and social systems of their countries.

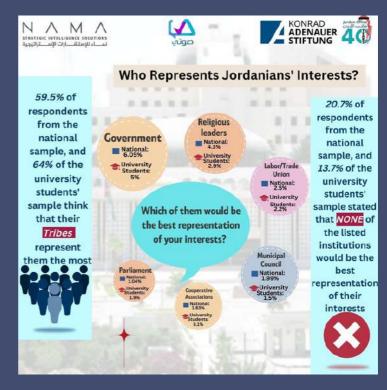
Over 2022, women and youth became increasingly marginalized in Tunisia. What was once highly regarded as the region's beacon of hope for democratization, plurality, and inclusion, fizzled badly, as president Kaïs Saïed hijacked the street's anger with bad policies to consolidate his role as a de-facto totalitarian leader. This marginalization of Tunisian women and youth from politics is proven by low interest in politics, as the Arab Barometer's fifth wave suggests that only 17% of young Tunisians have an interest in politics, and more recently, an 11.2% voter turnout in the parliamentary elections, as a result of the referendum for the new constitution that essentially solidified Saïed's plan.

A group of women's rights organizations have expressed their fear and apprehension about the results of the new electoral law, which reduces the chances of Tunisian women entering the new parliament. it excludes vulnerable groups, women, and youth. Activists called the new law "anti-democratic", as it undermined the advances made in recent years for women and youth.



In Egypt, rights groups demonstrated skepticism to an announcement by the Egyptian government that it would be receiving online applications for early release of detainees. Personal Rights and the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression noted that the online form only applied to "the release of young people detained in pending cases, with no judicial rulings having been issued against them" and said the committee was only focusing on "imprisoned youth" and people imprisoned for unpaid debts. The significance of this announcement centers around the many Egyptian activists detained with murky charges, many of whom embarked on hunger strikes in prisons for maltreatment and negligence, as many of them had in fact competed the maximum period of detention without trial but continue to be detained and receive new charges despite the fact that they are in jail.

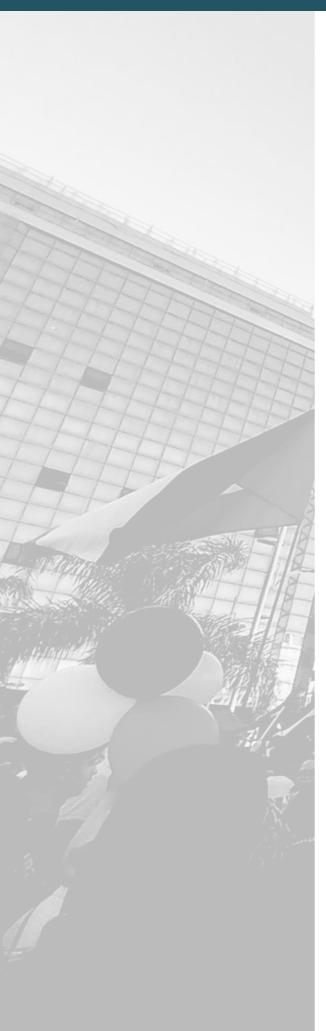
In Jordan, many young Jordanians are becoming increasingly frustrated with what they see as limits being placed on the country's democracy, and the harassment of political party activists, despite a new law that criminalizes any such harassments. Some observers asserted that efforts of existing parties, or those in the process of formation, to mobilize youth will not achieve the intended goal of political participation because they are failing to connect with youth. Instead, they only view youth as an age group, to tick a check-box, rather than ensuring their meaningful participation and engagement.



Similarly, according to a study by Prometheus Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, 86% of the Moroccan youth interviewed are dissatisfied with the performance of parties who do not bother to engage youth.

When explaining youth marginalization across the region, two attention-grabbing statements are worth noting. First, the Iranian chief investigator who is in charge of interrogating youth detainees said "I have spent my life interrogating great political figures, but these days, I am doing the most difficult interrogations in my life, as I do not understand what they are saying, and they do not understand what I am saying." Second, political observers have described the marginalization of youth in Sudan despite their valiant efforts in leading the uprising that ousted al-Bashir, saying that youth in Sudan are "instrumentalized but not trusted to lead."

These two statements demonstrate a major gap between youth and decision-makers, grounded in (a) inability to understand their needs; (b) unwillingness to provide them with their rightful space within the political sphere; and (c) utilizing youth as an instrument to achieve certain gains within larger political competitions.



YOUTH AS VICTIMS OF POLITICAL COMPETITION AND VIOLENCE

Much of the discourse over youth in politics in the past has been between them being perpetrators or victims of violence. There have been many instances in 2022 where youth were thrown in the middle of political competition and violence and were victimized as a result. In many cases, that resulted in physical harm, and in many other cases, youth's prospects for better future was hindered.

Much of the transformation of youth from agents of change toward a better future to apathetic individuals trying to merely make their ends meet has been due to the terrible livelihood conditions induced by the economic challenges and exacerbated by the global pandemic.

For example, Egyptian young activists who held prominent roles in the Egyptian revolution last decade have seen their dreams shattered and are now living in terrible conditions – including being in indefinite detention and/or exhibiting major mental health repercussions.

In cases where youth were physically harmed, the uprisings in Iran provide numerus examples. Security forces in Iran constantly arrested, killed, or injured young protesters over the last quarter of 2022.

Iranian youth and minors are facing an "existential catastrophe", as hundreds of them have been arrested for joining the demonstrations, which led to the death of many in a "brutal" crackdown launched by the authorities.

Iranian lawyers and activists confirmed that a 14-year-old girl was imprisoned in an adult prison alongside drug addicts, and a 16-year-old had his nose broken during detention after being beaten by security men, while a 13-year-old girl was physically assaulted by a militia who raided her school. The authorities have targeted thousands of minors 18 for their participation in the protests.

Since the start of those protests, Iranian authorities have subjected young detainees to psychological torture that push youth toward suicide. Researchers explained that Iranian youth resorted to suicide because of the psychological pressures they were subjected to in Iranian prisons after their arrest, where the police and the Basij practiced various types of psychological and physical torture against the detainees.

Further, Activist group 1500Tasvir indicated that at least 43 people, including Nasr Azadani (an Iranian football player), may face imminent execution. State media quoted the city's chief justice, Assadullah Jafari, as saying that Nasr Azadani was accused of rioting against the authorities. Under Iran's penal code, the sentence is punishable by death. Previous CNN investigations found that prisoners were tortured and sexually assaulted. Human rights groups say torture-tainted "confessions" were used against defendants in show trials. Five Iranians are facing execution, including the karate champion of Kurdish origins, Muhammad Mahdi Karami.



In Iran's neighbors, Iraq, the conditions for youth are not much better. Iran's influence in Iraq has alienated youth from leading the development path for their country. Iraqi youth's dissatisfaction with Iran's influence has become well documented, with many young Iraqis accusing Qasem Soleimani of intervening in Iraqi domestic policy since 2003 and being responsible for the deaths and disappearances of many Iraqi dissidents who split from the Iranian influence through armed militias.



In Iraqi Kurdistan, thousands of protesters, many of them students, took to the streets to demand the return of the salaries that local authorities have stopped paying since 2014. During the protests, security forces used water cannons and fired tear gas and then live bullets to disperse the increasingly angry crowds. With many Iraqi Kurds immigrating, disappearing, and drowning, it is demonstrating a clear indicator of the extent to which they feel their prospects for a better future vanish before their eyes. Iraqis in general are living in a flaming atmosphere at a time when all successive governments have failed to provide stable electricity, clean water, or health services.

In Sudan, youth's valiant efforts in toppling the al-Bashir regime was then hijacked by many political and military groups, who all claim to speak on behalf of the youth of Sudan. Such cooptation of youth movements has been a prevalent trend throughout the region. Egypt's "Youth of the New Republic" is another example of the state coopting any grassroot youth movements. Tunisian President Saïed also coopted any prospects for youth movements in the country, he disenfranchised women and youth, and overrode a decade-long democratic transition process.

In mid-2022, Saïed held a referendum seeking to formalize his remaking of the country's political institutions. The draft of the new constitution would create a system in which the president has virtually unchecked power, with control over the government and the judiciary. An article by Tunisian Hala bin Yousef indicates that the term "youth" has become commercialized and used to decorate electoral programs and furnish propaganda speeches. She states that the disregard with which the authorities deal with youth's needs heralds a dangerous social explosion, especially in light of the continued absence of any evidence or step towards finding the required solutions to the concerns of the youth.



POLITICAL INCLUSION, ENGAGEMENT, EMPOWERMENT, AND REFORM

The engagement of youth in political life has been a struggle for many years in the region. This is a sentiment shared by many activists. For example, Razan Al Aquel represented Arab youth and delivered a speech to the United Nations Security Council, during which she stressed the importance of integrating the youth in decision making.

"Young people are the owners of new and effective ideas, so we must support them and facilitate the way for them to spread these ideas at the local and global levels." - Kasapoglu; at the Al-Sharq Youth Forum, held in Istanbul, Turkey.

While there have been a number of terrible challenges facing youth political engagement across the region, there were also many noteworthy initiatives to engage youth politically and widen their space in the public sphere.

However, such initiatives were not always reciprocated with enthusiasm from youth who became rather agnostic and apathetic toward empty promises, and more importantly, increasingly aware of their governments' cognitive dissonance.

For example – and despite the challenges that accompanied it, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) held its Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians in mid-June in Egypt, bringing together 200 young parliamentarians from 60 countries to coordinate action on many aspects.

One major story out of this conference was the prevalence of contradictory messages sent to young Egyptians whose political freedoms remain minimal despite being told time and time again that their engagement in decision-making is at the top of government priorities.

Similarly, the Libyan Prime Minister, Abdel Hamid al-Dabaiba, said that caring for the youth is a primary goal of his government. Dabaiba stressed the importance of the role of youth in shaping the features of the new Libya that aims to build and renounce war and division. However, the country remains without a clear roadmap for political development, let alone youth engagement, albeit youth have continued to play an integral advocate role for reform. 40 young men and women from different regions of Libya stressed the importance of finding a way out of the blockage which the legislative and executive tracks reached in order to hold the elections.

Another country where the future remains oblique is Palestine. The country was poised for its first national elections in years but were then canceled without a clear plan. The absence of a plan for rescheduling the elections has been depressing for young Palestinians, whose excitement was resonated by their tremendous interest whether in registering as candidates or as voters. The Central Elections Committee had revealed that candidates who are younger than 45 years of age constituted 59% of the total number of candidates.

In Jordan, the situation was slightly more optimistic, as various government and nongovernment sought to keep up the momentum of the advancements made by the Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System, which included major constitutional amendments, chief among which was lowering the age of candidacy to the Parliament to 25. Such a monumental reform does open more space for youth political participation, albeit many other challenges ought to be addressed, such as campaign financing.



50% of Jordanian youth under the age of 30 (63% of the population) are currently unemployment, and they have become tired of waiting, as problems of drug abuse, depression, and suicide are increasing. With that, youth in Jordan are developing a positive sentiment that only they can address the issues their peers face. Further, many Jordanian observers believe the upcoming Parliamentary elections of 2024 will witness an influx of young candidates, which is likely to draw the attention of young voters. Despite facing resistance from their communities, which are ruled by tribalism, youth activists believe they can change voter habits to essentially balance between the experience of candidates and offering a new perspective.

There also remains an intention among Jordanian policymakers to reconcile between youth political participation and reforming political parties by facilitating proper space for political parties to hold events in university campuses, , especially that 41 seats have been allocated to political parties in the next parliament at the level of the national list. Policymakers believe that Jordanian universities are the most appropriate environment for enhancing political parties' recruitment of youth. They also point out that a parliamentary quota system for youth is needed. There were tens of other notable initiatives and activities held across the region throughout the year, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Egypt implemented a number of initiatives and activities such as (a) the fourth edition of the World Youth Forum; (b) the first meeting of the Arab Youth Union; (c) the Arab-African Forum; and (d) a symposium titled "the Role of Youth in Political Participation" held by the General Assembly of the Kafr Al-Salahat Youth Center.
- In Jordan, three initiatives were held to encourage youth to engage in the municipal elections:
 - First, the Minister of Political and Parliamentary affairs inaugurated the National Campaign of the Ministry to promote participation in municipal and governorate elections.
 - Second, the All Jordan Youth Commission organized a panel discussion in Madaba in cooperation with the Independent Election Commission to encourage youth participation in the upcoming municipal elections.
 - The Mayor of Greater Irbid Municipality met a group of young people with the aim of involving them in the local decision-making process. During the meeting, Al-Kofahi announced the establishment of a special fund to support youth initiatives, which will be fully funded by the private sector, including the establishment of an incubator for entrepreneurial ideas.
- Also in Jordan, the King Abdullah II Fund for Development launched the partisan culture project with the aim of activating channels of communication between parties and youth group as a practical step to contribute to motivating young people to participate in partisan work. The Independent Election Commission and the Jerusalem Center for Political Studies, in cooperation with the German Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung, trained 110 young men and women, from 28 existing and "under construction" political parties, to prepare youth party leaders.
- In Libya, the Ministry of Youth announced the reopening of candidacy for the Libyan Youth Parliament in its first edition. The Libyan Youth Parliament is a simulation of the legislative authority, which will comprise of 200 young men and women from various regions and cities of Libya. Similarly, the UAE Cabinet approved the restructuring of the Emirates Youth Council, tasked with reviewing proposed strategies and policies related to youth affairs.
- In Qatar, the state is about to launch its new National Youth Policy, which relied on a survey involving 5,000 young people to determine its axes. The policy will focus on seven main areas, including training, business, health and environment, among others. The aim of the policy is to integrate youth in the process of achieving development, as well as guide state officials in the orientation of young people.



PEACE BUILDING AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The inclusion of youth in peacebuilding and conflict resolutions efforts is not only an underutilized opportunity in the region, but it is also a proven mechanism toward finding sustainable solutions. Protracted conflicts across the region have had terrible negative impacts on youth particularly, including on their education and livelihoods.

The inclusion of youth on the dialogue tables would give a better chance of a long-lasting success, strengthening a society's ability to avoid a relapse into armed violence, as it would lead to positive peace hand-in-hand with social justice.

When provided a chance, youth were able to demonstrate positive results. In 2022 for instance, youth played a major role in establishing civil society organizations within the framework of the Shusha Agreement. Further, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) Youth Group delivered a statement at the 10th Meeting of the Friends of the CTBT in New York with the major objective of stopping nuclear testing.

Another engagement was when a delegation from the Arab Parliament participated in the eighth session of the International Parliament for tolerance and peace and the international forum for youth and Peace, held in the Republic of Comoros, in which the delegation spoke about consolidating peace, the rejection of intolerance and hatred, and the fight against terrorism.

Over the span of 2022, multiple grassroots and top-down initiatives were enacted to enhance youth's role in peacebuilding and address the human rights challenges they face.

In Morocco, a report by Amnesty International called on the authorities to stop their increased harassment of human rights advocates and activists, as at least four defenders are facing criminal investigations and prosecution over social media posts that criticizes the authorities. Further, the International Youth Camp of Amnesty 22 called on young people to engage in a unified international struggle for freedom of expression and opinion, the right to peaceful protest, and the release of all prisoners of expression. The Camp also called for "the immediate and unconditional release of prisoners of conscience in all countries of the world" and "to write off all laws that criminalize people who dare to speak or protest peacefully."



In Palestine, the Executive Office of the European Palestinian Youth Federation "Shabab" discussed the escalations of the fierce attacks launched by the Israeli occupation forces and settlers against Palestinians. In the West Bank and inside the occupied city of Jerusalem and its neighborhoods, the attacks affect Palestinian prisoners in the occupation's prisons, let alone the continued imposition of an unjust siege on Gaza.

SPOTLIGHTWHAT IF YOUTH LED THE MENA REGION?





Since the mid-2010s, there have been numerous initiatives aimed at engaging youth in the decision-making processes. This includes the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2250 and 2419 on Youth, Peace and Security. While these resolutions were unanimously adopted, only 2.2 percent of the near 47,000 Parliamentarians worldwide are under the age of 30, and just 0.9 percent in the Middle East and North Africa.

There also remains many countries that do not allow those under 30 from standing for elections, as the average candidacy age stands at 27 years and 4 months across the Arab world. Since these two resolutions were enacted, only Jordan lowered its required candidacy age from 30 to 25, which happened only a few months ago. Nevertheless, 25 is still somewhat high and essentially signals to youth that politics is not their place.

Despite the exclusion they face across the region, youth do retain the characteristics sought after in electoral candidates, chief among which is their desire to address issues that concern society in general, rather than those of concern for a singular group.

Many opponents tend to highlight that youth are just too young while casual proponents believe youth should be given the opportunity solely because they will reap the implications of current policies in the future, a minimalistic viewpoint that does not scratch the surface of benefits brought about with a greater youth inclusion in political life.

To examine such benefits, MENAACTION conducted an online survey of 1,324 respondents from 14 countries around the Arab world in which it looked to illustrate how the region would look like politically and economically if youth were to hold leadership positions.

There is no doubt that the vast majority of Arab states face tremendous economic challenges, so much so that a staggering 78.3 percent of the survey respondents believe that their countries are headed in the wrong direction.

As such, when asked about the main issues facing them as young people today, about two thirds of the survey respondents highlighted a number of economic issues, including unemployment, lack of job opportunities, lack of support for young entrepreneurs, and the difficulty to fulfill their aspirations, as 14.4 percent believe they are being actively excluded from public life, and that their attempts to improve their countries' conditions are usually suppressed.

With such emphasis on economic challenges, the respondents were asked to indicate how their countries' economies should be run. For that, the majority of respondent believe that there should be greater incentives for individual effort, as opposed to making incomes more equal. They also believe that governments should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for, in comparison to people taking more responsibility to provide for themselves.

On the surface such responses may appear contradictory – since the former emphasizes the essence of capitalism while the latter falls within the socialist paradigm, yet they do signify that most youth across the Arab world believe in a certain social welfare baseline in which the poor are provided for, while maintaining and providing proper incentives for individual effort.

Youth do want to see more effort from governments when it comes to public services to essentially safeguard human security and social welfare, while acting as an invisible hand within an economic module that promotes entrepreneurship and individual effort.

This is perhaps best described as social democracy, which featured heavily within the results. For instance, when the respondents were asked to indicate which characteristics of good governance they value the most, the tenets of social democracy ranked highly, only preceded by greater political and social rights and the pervasiveness of the rule of law.

Looking at foreign relations, the respondents indicated that they would like to see closer political, economic, and security relations between their countries and other Arab states. For economic alliances, specifically, the GCC was particularly prevalent among the responses as a sub-region they would economically cooperate more with.

The survey results also found that while youth face a number of imminent challenges, the majority of the respondents maintained that calculated and intricate reform should take precedence over rushed reform, which is a testament to the value youth place on stability even though the challenges are imminent and require immediate intervention

Perhaps the most essential finding of this survey is youth's focus on directly addressing the economic challenges their countries face. For the past two decades, many Arab countries resorted to holding elections or implementing some political reforms to appeare public dissent.

Not only have these reactionary efforts not address the very (economic) issues behind dissent, but they have also had an intended byproduct of rendering democracy, elections, and even political reform ineffective and unfavorable.

If youth were to lead the Arab world, addressing the economic crises would be much more prioritized, with an emphasis on creating a balanced economic module that facilitates an adequate social welfare baseline and promotes increased productivity in addition to enhanced regional political, economic, and security alliances.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With the exception of lowering the candidacy age for the Jordanian Parliament to 25, youth politics has had a difficult 2022 across the MENA region. Characterized by a decreasing interest in politics at best, and increased marginalization and exclusion at worst, youth experienced closing civic spaces in their countries, strong retaliation against their activism, and overall shrinking prospects for their engagement in political decision making. Between Kaïs Saïed's revisionist policies and Iran's human rights violations against youth and women protesters and with the persisting economic hurdles across the region, there are some important, immediate steps needed in the short term to improve political engagement for youth:

- The Iranian authorities must stop its systemic targeting of women, youth, and children leading the protests. They must release all detainees arrested during the 2022 demonstrations and drop all bogus charges made against them. Further, the authorities must ensure that any trials held are transparent for monitors and documenters.
- Government and civil society stakeholders should implement more initiatives aimed at youth political inclusion, empowerment, and participation in the political space to address apathy among the youth. Voting and candidacy ages should be lowered to 18 across all countries in the region. This should be coupled with initiatives to enhance youth's capacities in preparation for elections.
- Governments need 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 sociopolitical exclusion and even expulsion.
- Youth need to be able 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.
- Regional governments need to refrain from holding rushed elections as a solution to the challenges they face or just 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. Decision-makers ought to engage in clear and transparent national dialogues, in an inclusive manner, to understand the core challenges facing youth.



INTRODUCTION

Most countries around the region continued to experience the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Youth unemployment and lack of job opportunities along with other major economic challenges remained on the rise throughout 2022.

A TOTAL OF

174

SOURCES WERE REVIEWED

A total of 174 noteworthy news items were monitored, categorized into Increasingly Difficult Economic Challenges; Addressing the Challenge of Youth Unemployment; Youth Entrepreneurship as an Alternative to Traditional Employment; Youth and the Digital Economy; and Economic Empowerment and Capacity Building Efforts.

INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

While governments were, rightfully, focused with addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, youth and women in the region were left in an increasingly more desperate situation. Hafed Al-Ghwell states that with new challenges piling on top of older ones, including unemployment, youth and women are in troubled waters.

The rising prospects of social unrest, stagnant economies, and worsening poverty often leave regional states at the mercy a political class, who are rather more concerned with their own survival than the wellbeing of their citizens.

14th annual Arab youth survey conducted by ASDA'A BCW reaffirms that, as it finds that the high cost of living and unemployment are among the biggest obstacles facing youth in the region.

More than a third of Arab youth, 41%, say they have difficulty making ends meet (63% in Eastern Mediterranean countries), and more than half say they receive financial support from their families. Career pessimism was particularly prevalent in Arab countries, with 49% of all Arab youth surveyed saying that it is difficult to find a new job in their country. 24% of young people are in debt, with student loans, car loans, and medical care bills being the most prominent causes of this debt.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has been detrimental to the region's food security. For example, the Algerian Ministry of Commerce banned the sale of cooking oil to minors amidst food shortages. It was revealed that suspicious parties have been recruiting children to buy staple products in bulk and selling them at inflated prices.

While Algeria was unable to leverage the increased demand for natural gas in Europe, it did manage to sustain an increased revenue in 2021 and 2022, allowing the state to avoid unpopular tax increase plans, introduce unemployment benefits.

Further, the Jordanian finance minister said that the government had already prepared 13 months' worth of wheat reserves and "locked long-term fuel contracts" to help reduce the country's import bill. However, an alarming one in every two Jordanian youth is unemployed, a major challenge that remains stagnant. A Jordanian journalist stated "a young man who finishes university can earn 200-300 dinars (\$280-\$422) a month if they work overtime, which is not enough for living expenses. "Even those who work find it difficult to stay in the workplace over time, and they have no stability. Employers take advantage of people's attachment to work as a source of livelihood, and allow themselves to treat workers inhumanely at times," explains the same journalist.

With the absence of vacancies and low salaries, emigration has become the destination of young people, because they do not see a future. In fact, the Arab Barometer reports that nearly 50% of Jordanians (65% among Jordanian youth) wish to immigrate, 93% of whom are motivated by economic reasons. 56% of Jordanians who wish to immigrate hold a bachelor's degree or higher.

Similarly, inflation in Lebanon has reached new highs, pushing the youth out of the country. An article on Sawt Beirut focuses on a specific consequence of this mass emigration: the impact it has on familial and social relationships. Youth in Lebanon feel like they must choose between a life at home with their loved ones, but without any prospects of an adequate quality of life, or a life full of economic possibilities but lacking in close relationships with family and loved ones. Lebanon's middle class thins out as skilled professionals head for the exits.



A young Lebanese cardiologist says "I started losing money because of the banking system, the corruption and a decline in income. Financially and professionally, I was doing worse than ever." The absence of solutions to the multi-sector crisis is leading to an increase in Lebanon's demographic upheaval, as young Lebanese, including highly skilled labor, are leaving the country at high levels.

In addition to that, UNICEF in Lebanon indicated that Lebanese youth have increasingly been leaving school to join the informal economy. The enrollment rate in the country dropped from 60% in 2021 to 43% in 2022. Similar conditions are endured by Palestinians, especially in Gaza, where youth have been going through difficult economic conditions due to the siege imposed by the Israeli occupation faces. Young people in Gaza are struggling to make their ends meet, pushing the majority of youth to search for simple jobs away from completing their studies.

A report by the United Nations Office for Human Rights Affairs' (UNOCHA) reveals that Israel's land, sea, and air blockade "has significantly exacerbated previous restrictions, limiting the number and specified categories of people and goods allowed in and out through the Israeli-controlled crossings." On top of that, unemployment levels in Gaza are amongst the highest in the world, as 62.5% of youth aged 15-29 are unemployed. Unemployment is not Palestinians' only economic struggle, as poverty is far more detrimental. In fact, many young Palestinians attempt suicide to escape poverty, hunger, and humiliation.

Difficult economic conditions are forcing young people to take tough measures. In March, at least 11 young Syrians died due to a fire inside of a shopping market in Damascus. These young Syrians had chosen to sleep at their workplace to save up on transportation costs. Syrian activists highlighted the tragedy saying "besides security guards, those who sleep at their workplace have no choice but to do that because of the terrible economic conditions we live in."





ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

As indicated earlier, unemployment has been youth's biggest challenge in the MENA region over the past few years, and especially in the post-pandemic era where governments, burdened with economic declines, have been broadly unable to create jobs for their young citizens. In fact, MENAACTION's 2022 "What IF Youth Led the MENA Region" Survey found that 44.4% of youth surveyed indicated that unemployment was the biggest and most important challenge facing them.

Further, and according to a joint report by the ILO and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), even before the pandemic, the region needed to create as many as 33.3 million new jobs by 2030 to bring the regional unemployment rate down to 5% and absorb the large number of young people who will enter the labor market.

However, and according to a 2022 report by the International Labour Organization, Arab states "have the highest and the fastest growing unemployment rate of young people worldwide, projected at 24.8%" for people aged between 15 and 24, compared with the global average of 15.6%. Reflected in this figure is a much higher unemployment rate among young women (42.5%).

Young women continue to face serious obstacles in accessing decent and productive jobs when they do participate, driven by discriminatory practices, gender stereotypes and insufficient family-friendly policies. They bear the double burden of being both young and female.

- Ruba Jaradat, ILO regional director for Arab States

There are relatively five main challenges that face youth searching for job opportunities, namely (a) the low salaries in the private sector; (b) the difficulty of appointment in government agencies; (c) the inadequacy of the job available for experiences or desire; (d) being ignored by prospective employers; and which the requirement of experience for recent graduates.

Such a challenge is somewhat more imminent for countries whose youth populations are large and growing, such as the case in Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, and Lebanon. For Iraq, it is estimated that around 7 million people are aged 14-29 and that by the year 2030, this number is expected to reach to 10 million. A UNICEF report revealed that about 60% of Iraq's youth lack the skills necessary for employment and social cohesion. Further, 59.2% of Iraq youth are said to be lacking the digital skills that would enable them to perform basic computer-related activities. They also lack access to life skills-based education, employability, and entrepreneurial skills that will enable them to have a smooth transition into the labor market.



For Jordan, the unemployment rate among young people is estimated at 48.5%. There is a relative consensus among Jordanian decision-makers that reforming the education sector is a major area to address the issue of unemployment. To that end, the Jordanian Civil Service Bureau released a list of idle academic majors considered "not useful" for the labor market. The list included fields such as political science, philosophy, economics, special education, and computer science, among others. Such an announcement was met with mixed reactions, especially that these areas equip students with important labor market skills, chief among which are problem solving, critical thinking, and analytical skills.

It is also worth noting that throughout the pandemic, and beyond, the Jordanian government enacted and operated under several "Defense Orders". Among many different provisions, these defense orders prohibited the dismissal of employees during the pandemic. Jordanian NGOs, and INGOs working in Jordan, exerted pressure on the government to allow them to bypass the law to dismiss Jordanian staff members. They reasoned that they are forced to pay employees on fixed-term contracts who would be released when their projects end.

NGOs provide for an important source of employment for youth people in the region. In Raqqa, Syria, for example, there are about 200 officially registered organizations. Many young Syrians work for such organizations on a volunteering basis, permanent employment, or as daily wage workers. According to a report from REACH, 77% of the population of northeastern Syria depends on daily wages to obtain food, and workers need 84 days to earn the monthly cost of securing basic foodstuffs.

For Morocco, despite the decrease in the national unemployment rate throughout 2022, unemployment among Moroccan youth remained high, exceeding 30%. It was evident from the data of the High Commission for Planning (HCP) that the national economy created 133 thousand job opportunities in the second quarter of this year. However, while 285,000 jobs were created in the cities, 152,000 jobs were lost in the countryside, which had created 405,000 in the same period in 2021. This was attributed to the severe droughts as a result of climate change. Further, it is estimated that around 29% of Moroccan youth do not benefit from education, employment, or training. According to the degree level, the unemployment rate among young people aged between 15 and 24 years who hold a high-level degree is 61.2%.

Nearly three-quarters of the unemployed youth live in urban centers. This is mostly attributed to the absence of major development and economic projects that would provide job opportunities to guarantee the dignity of young people. Further, the fragile social conditions push the majority of young people living in such areas, much like the rest of the country, to migrate elsewhere in search of a job opportunity that protects them from unemployment and poverty.



Similarly, it is estimated that 90% of Lebanese university degree holders want to emigrate due to the economic and financial crises, as 67.5% has already decided to emigrate without any return to their country. Such an issue is in fact not new, as a study by the World Bank from 2010, there were approximately 50,000 job seekers in Lebanon annually, competing for just 3,000 new jobs. Over the past decade, there have been more entrants into the labor market, more university degree holders, and increasing unemployment rates – particularly among youth, yet the governments' ability to create jobs has stayed the same.

To address these issues, there were several initiatives throughout 2022, ranging from government responses to programs and activities implemented by nongovernment organizations and advocacy efforts.

Jordan launched the Economic Modernization Vision in 2022, with experts believing that it constitutes an important step for investing youth capabilities to build the economic future and promote the concepts of comprehensive and sustainable development. This Vision was complemented by several initiatives, including the National Unemployment Programme "Tashgheel", which looks to provide 60,000 job opportunities for Jordanians in the private sector through government subsidized salaries. Jordanian youth's level of apathy can be clearly seen here, as only 13,000 had registered by mid-2022.

Another notable initiative is in Algeria, where President Abdelmadjid Tebboune announced that Algerian youth will start receiving unemployment benefits in March 2022. Unemployed youth aged 19-40 would receive 13,000 dinars (\$92) a month – equivalent to two-thirds of the minimum wage in Algeria. They will also be eligible for medical benefits and tax breaks on certain products.



However, a report by Amel Boubekeur for the Middle East Institute highlights numerous challenges within this policy. She questions the government's ability to ensure that workers in the informal market, which is the main employer of youth, do not commit fraud by declaring they are unemployed. She raises other questions such as "will the policy really allow recipients to "meet their basic needs," given the current inflation rate of 7.7%? More broadly, how financially sustainable is the new scheme, as candidates who do not find a new job can still expect to receive benefits for two years?" She asserts that these policies, at their core, aim to "buy social peace" given the increase in oil prices and the government's increasing suppression of the Hirak movement.

Looking at nongovernment efforts, Education for Employment (EFE) and Citi Foundation launched the "Providing Opportunities for Work and Empowering Resilience" Project to create opportunities for unemployed youth in the MENA region, which looks to provide young trainees with necessary skills for a successful job search, writing CVs, performing well in interviews, and developing soft and technical skills such as communication and sales techniques.

Other notable efforts include, but not limited to, the below:

- In Egypt, the Arab African International Bank partnered with the Information Technology Institute to provide specialized trainings for young people, to give them the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the qualifications of the markets of information and communications technology.
- In Jordan, the Business Development Center signed agreements with a number of young people who benefited from the Kiosk Project in Salt, in cooperation with the Greater Salt Municipality and UNICEF. The signing of the agreements aims to contribute to creating self-employment opportunities for young people in Salt through the establishment of small incomegenerating projects that contribute to alleviating unemployment rates.



- In Saudi Arabia, the World Tourism Organization agreed with the Saudi Ministry of Tourism to establish an international tourism academy to help boost the tourism sector of the region, with emphasis on targeting youth to join the sector. Additionally, the Citi Foundation and Education for Employment partnered to launch the "Work Readiness Program" to prepare young Saudis for the labor market.
- In Yemen, Silatech launched a new project to economically support more than 41,000 young people, under the "Your Future" Project, by providing them with the necessary financing to establish and sustain their income-generating projects and companies. The project relies on technological solutions to enhance the financial inclusion of youth-led start-ups and micro-businesses in the trade and services sectors.

Finally, a World Bank report indicates that it is vital for the MENA region to ensure the private sector can gain access to markets and compete equally with government-run businesses. The report offers policy recommendations for how MENA governments can overcome continuing labor market stagnation that undermines economic development and social progress. It indicates that governments must reshape their relationships toward the private sector, toward workers, and, equally important, toward women.

The World Youth Forum affirmed this stance, as it stated "women are strong engines and rising economic stars in developing countries with their wonderful initiatives and projects," noting that there is also a growing recognition that women entrepreneurs are the new engines of sustainable economic growth.



"Instead of being active in economic sectors, the state must enable a well-regulated competitive private sector. Instead of controlling worker transitions through an outdated labor code, the state must re-think its social protection and labor market programs. Instead of guarding the legacy of some historical and social norms, the state in the MENA region must be the faithful guardian of gender equity."

- The World Bank Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa.



Much like last year, 2022 demonstrated governments' inabilities to create an adequate number of jobs to sustain the number of youth labor market entrants, let alone the unemployed. Self-employment and entrepreneurship continue to appear more appealing as effective alternatives, stipulating a major need for government and nongovernment efforts to support young entrepreneurs with capacity building, access to finance, and ongoing mentorship.



"Promoting entrepreneurship in the MENA region could be the path towards the economic empowerment of women and the youth, who paradoxically hold the greatest potential but the least capital."

- Bessma Momani

Supporting entrepreneurial efforts among youth and women is the cornerstone of economic and social development."

- Dr. Sidi Ould Eltah, the Director General of the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa.

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The Algerian government announced that it would support youth entrepreneurial projects. According to official figures, the first three months of 2022 witnessed the creation of 2,500 micro-enterprises owned by young people and financed by the National Agency for Entrepreneurship Support and Development. By mid-2022, the government has approved 15,000 institutions to be supported by the ministry with training and mentoring programs.

Further, there were three notable efforts in Egypt. First, the Ministry of Immigration and Egyptian Expatriates Affairs launched the "Egyptian and African Youth Expats Entrepreneurship" Initiative, which aims to link Egypt's young entrepreneurs from abroad and at home. Second, Egypt announced its plan to establish an incubator for entrepreneurs with disabilities, as the first of its kind in Egypt to empower Egyptians with disabilities to become effective players in the economy. Third, the Egyptian Medium, Small, and Micro Enterprises Development Agency participated in the activities of the "Biznix" International Exhibition for Investment and Commercial Agencies to present investment opportunities for young Entrepreneurs.



For Jordan, the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, in collaboration with UNICEF and Digital Opportunity Trust Jordan launched the Bridge, Outsource, Transform (B.O.T.) Impact Sourcing Platform to give Jordanian youth access to economic opportunities in the digital economy. This platform, which is said to be adapted to the necessities of the Jordanian labor market, will provide the youth with trainings to develop their digital skills and access to various types of employment.

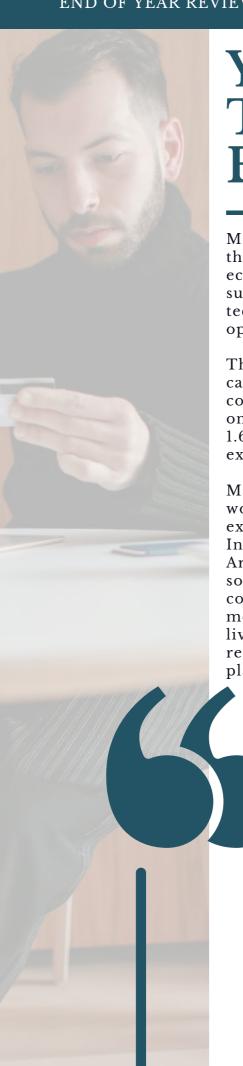
In addition to that, Orange Jordan launched a number of efforts to support youth entrepreneurship. Of those, Orange held the first edition of the Orange Summer Challenge to support passionate, talented students in tech majors to create innovative solutions for sustainable development in cooperation with Ernest and Young (EY), Giz, and Google. The five participating teams pitched their projects at the event, which hosted more than 150 experts and professionals from academia, communications and information technology, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

Orange has also been active elsewhere, including in Morocco, where the "Orange Digital Center" was inaugurated in late March, making it the tenth digital center in the region. The Orange Digital Center is an innovative concept which brings together four strategic programs of the Orange group, namely; a coding school, a solidarity FabLab, an orange Fab start-up accelerator, supported by Orange Ventures Africa, the investment fund. Access to these programs will be free of charge and will provide digital training for young people. These centers allow youth to work as a network by sharing expertise and experiences through different centers across the world to enhance participants employability, encourage innovative entrepreneurship and promote the local digital ecosystem.

Entrepreneurship projects for Emirati youth have become a goal and ambition sought by many, to reach broader horizons of excellence, taking advantage of the many facilities provided by state institutions. To that end, the Federal Youth Foundation has worked to gather the most important young Emirati entrepreneurs to pass on their experiences, challenges, and lessons learned to those getting started. Moreover, 66 young men and women participate in the activities of the Youth Lab, which was launched by the Ajman Youth Council and the Ajman Creative Center. The activities of the lab include discussion sessions that reflect on the experiences of young people, as well as an exhibition of the products of small business owners and young entrepreneurs. The lab looks to provide a complete experience for young people to communicate and enrich their experiences through training workshops, awareness lectures and discussion panels that shed light on youth issues.

Sometimes, support initiatives may not be enough. For instance, Algerian youth who benefited from the national fund for unemployment insurance looked to utilize their benefits toward starting their own projects, yet they face lack of funds, and many reported that they do not hear any updates back from the Ministry of Micro Enterprises, which is in charge of facilitating support. In fact, more than a 1,000 young Algerians have been facing blockages on their projects for over 6 months.





YOUTH AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

MENA's youth, at least those who are employed, are among the region's most productive assets. At the same time, economists believe that a technology-driven growth is more sustainable compared to labor or capital. Given youth's technological savviness, the region has a tremendous opportunity to leverage.

There are certainly some challenges hindering youth's full capacity to contribute to the digital economies of their countries. For instance, a World Bank report indicates that only 17% of adult Moroccans use digital payment while only 1.6% buy products and services online, which are lower than expected.

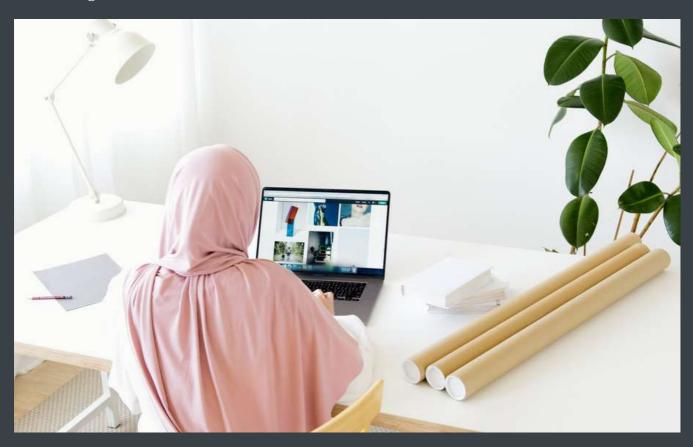
Many major corporations and regional countries have been working to leverage this important opportunity. For example, Huawei' 2022 edition of the Huawei Global App Innovation Contest (Apps UP) featured a new category, "Best Arabic App", encouraging regional developers to create app solutions that address the region's needs and enrich Arabic content. Huawei has set aside more than \$1 million as prize money for the global contest. Another example is Uplive, a live video social entertainment platform, which focused on reaching out to youth to market their skills using the platform.

"The gig economy is an important resource that needs to be supported through innovation. As the youth population continues to grow and the scarcity of jobs also continues to rise, we need to encourage the local youth to tap into their talents and use Uplive to market themselves to a global audience and in the process make a decent living out of it."

Andy Tan, the CEO
 and Co-founder of Asia
 Innovations Group

The Gulf region saw a number of efforts aiming at engaging youth in the digital economy, including, but not limited to the following:

- The Saudi Federation for Cybersecurity, Programming, and Drones (SAFCSP), signed a partnership with Spire Solutions through which it will offer short courses for youth on some of the latest cybersecurity technologies.
- The Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA) Youth Council in the UAE held a discussion session on "Youth Power and the Future of Energy" to highlight the capabilities of young people to establish start-up energy companies.
- The 13th Emirates Skills National Competition was won by a team of 60 Emirati youths who were announced as the winners, who provided the best solution in utilizing technical and technological skills of youth to embrace careers in technology.
- UAE's "One Million Arab Coders" initiative has thus far allowed thousands of young Arabs to explore their interests in technology and entrepreneurship through conducting over 76,000 workshops and resulting in 100,000 projects since 2017. In 2022, the initiative announced a competition for a prize of \$1 million to be awarded to the graduating trainees who presented the best project idea.
- The project office of the first robotics park in the Middle East was opened in Al Rusayl Industrial City in Oman. The park is expected to generate 15,000 jobs, and will include workshops for manufacturing robots. The park will also have a research and development center for robotics and artificial intelligence.



In Jordan, The Minister of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship stressed on the government's keenness to develop digital skills among Jordanian youth that are compatible with the requirements of the future labor market through a number of programs and projects supervised by the Ministry by empowering them intellectually and training them on global practices in the field of information and communication technology. One of those initiatives was held in partnership with the We Are All Jordan Youth Authority, which was an integrated training package concerned with digital knowledge through 13 knowledge stations and 6 business incubators, which were equipped with computers and support training aids provided by the Ministry.

Jordanian universities have also played an important role. For example, the Digital Cooperation Organization and Al Hussein Technical University announced that they would collaborate on a program that will help university graduates in Jordan boost their employability, by giving them the skills needed to meet the requirements of the job market, notably in the field of digital economy. Further, Orange Jordan launched a new Orange Digital Center in the German Jordanian University in collaboration with GIZ with the goal of developing the skills necessary for youth for employment.



In Egypt, major global tech corporations have launched and led several efforts. First, the US government and Google announced the expansion of a skills training program for Egyptian women, youth, and entrepreneurs to equip them with the digital skills needed to take their careers and businesses to the next level. Second, Ericsson established and is operating an Artificial Intelligence Innovation Lab at Sultan Hussein Kamel Palace in collaboration with Information Technology Industry Development Agency (ITIDA).

Further, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology signed cooperation agreements with 22 major international and local companies, with the aim of developing the skills of about 2,000 young people who joined the Digital Egypt Youth Initiative in areas such as embedded systems, advanced networks, cybersecurity, fifth generation technologies, fiber-optic networks, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence.

In Palestine, the UNRWA Information Technology Service Center looks to empower the digital generation of Palestinians by providing advanced information technology services. The center provides young people with the necessary training and professional development, through which job opportunities are provided on different contracts.



ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING EFFORTS

Throughout 2022, there were several efforts aimed at economically empowering the region's youth to facilitate enhanced capacities, increased knowledge and awareness levels, and overall improve their employability, coupled with some efforts, whether policies or programs, that looked to create job opportunities. Social media platforms were prevalently utilized; in fact, Injaz Al-Arab teamed up with TikTok to use social media to open pathways to promoting job opportunities of some of the world's biggest companies in fast-emerging fields such as artificial intelligence. The 'Are you Future Ready?' campaign features 10 videos on the popular platform.

Looking more specifically at country-specific efforts, Egypt's Enterprise Development Agency reached out to young Egyptians to obtain funding for their entrepreneurial projects along with training to learn how to start implementing their project ideas before receiving funding. Moreover, the National Bank of Egypt announced the Youth Business Program (YiB), in cooperation with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The program is designed to support and assist youth to establish their small and medium enterprises. The program offers training workshops in various fields in addition to individual advisory packages covering specialized administrative and technical aspects. The training aims to introduce youth of micro, small, and medium enterprises to the concept of business management and development in a sustainable manner.

In Jordan, a number of training and capacity building efforts were held. For example, fhe Injaz Foundation announced the Youth Participation and Employment Project "My Work Begins with a Step," implemented in Balqa, Madaba, Tafileh and Karak governorates, which looks to enhance youth's technical skills to facilitate their involvement in the labor market, through specialized trainings that help them to finding job opportunities or starting their own business. Further, the Ministry of Youth launched its Job Search Clubs across the country. These training camps aimed to assist and empower young people in developing their skills and abilities to search and access career opportunities that suit their aspirations. In addition to that, the Torra Youth Center implemented a workshop on financing small projects in which participants were taught about how to build projects and what conditions should be set at the beginning of the project.

Tourism has been booming over the past few years in Saudi Arabia. To that end, the Red Sea Development Co. partnered with the Saudi Human Resources Development Fund to provide vocational training for 1,000 young Saudis to encourage a thriving tourism industry in the region, focusing on hospitality management, culinary arts, airport services, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering and renewable energy.

The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief) launched vocational training courses to support youth empowerment to improve livelihoods in Yemen. The project is set to train 1,250 young men and women in eight Yemeni governorates in several fields, such as mobile phone maintenance, photography, and video editing. The goal is support youth's entrance into the labor market and to launch their own projects.



The United Arab Emirates featured heavily in terms of youth capacity building efforts throughout MENAACTION's weekly MENARY Monitor editions. For example, the Abu Dhabi Center for Technical and Vocational Education and Training organized the 21st session of its national program "Yes to Work", to train and empower youth with the skills that qualify them to work in several vital disciplines in the private sector labor market. Further, Education For Employment (EFE), in partnership with Citi Foundation and Ras Al Khaimah Human Resources Department (RAK HR), trained five cohorts under its work readiness training program for young Emiratis. Trainees underwent rigorous training designed to equip them with essential life skills needed to enter the UAE job market.

A number of capacity building and awareness raising efforts emphasized financial awareness and financial inclusion. The Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) emphasized the importance of financial inclusion to foster economic growth in the region and called on Arab governments and banking institutions to improve upon social responsibility and to resort to sustainable finance to empower the more vulnerable communities, such as the youth and women. Moreover, AMF published a series of brochures, as part of its Vision 2040 that aims to raise youth's knowledge of basic concepts of finance and economics. The latest brochure focused on basic terms related to the stock market.

Consequently, the number of new registrants in the Egyptian Stock Exchange of young people under 21 years old rose to about 5,000 young people during the year, continuing its upward trajectory recorded over the past 5 years. This is because the Financial Supervisory Authority amended regulations for dealing with young people in the age group of 16-21 old who wish to invest in securities.

For Jordan, the Central Bank encouraged banks and financial institutions to leverage their corporate social responsibility efforts toward raising financial awareness among Jordanian youth. Through the Central Bank's awareness campaigns "Towards Financially Educated Youth", a number of banks contributed to the campaign whether by financing the campaign or through leading efforts at various universities.



Similarly, National Bonds, a savings and investment company owned by the Investment Corporation of Dubai, announced the launch of an intensive professional development program aimed at spreading financial awareness among young people in the UAE. Through this program, National Bonds entered into a partnership with universities and educational institutions to build financial awareness skills among young people through seminars, mentorship, and job training opportunities.

Since unemployment has been one of the most important and most pressing challenges facing youth in the region, it was imperative that capacity building efforts attempted to address this challenge.

The University of Mosul in Iraq organized a job fair attended by 40 local and foreign companies, which offered hope to Ninewa's unemployed youth, where the unemployment rate stands at around 40%. Attendees hoped that the job fair would lead to employment opportunities. The job fair is part of a project called Yanhad, financed by France and the European Union. Yanhad had already supported a business incubator, which has trained about 320 young people in entrepreneurship and financed a dozen start-ups.



In Palestine, the European Union partnered with the Belgian development agency (ENABLE), the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA), and Sharek Youth Forum and launched the Youth Empowerment Program, expected to reach 8,000 young Palestinians across the West Bank and Gaza. The aim of the project to create a stronger connection between skilled youth and the labor market, and to promote socioeconomic engagement of youth in the society. Similarly, the EU partnered with UNESCO to increase support to Yemen's cultural sector, which aims at creating 8,000 new job opportunities.

In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Tourism launched a new program to equip 100,000 young Saudis with the key hospitality skills needed to pursue careers in the tourism sector. The program, named Tourism Trailblazers, will provide indepth global experience to the tourism industry's future leaders.

In Egypt, the Small Enterprises Development Authority confirmed its cooperation with various state agencies to provide support for projects operating in the informal sector such as technical and financial support opportunities. The agency announced that it has succeeded in incorporating more than 7,000 projects in various governorates within the formal sector. Similarly, the Moroccan government launched the "Forsa" Program to encourage young people to work in startups, as the program partners with 10,000 entrepreneurs.

SPOTLIGHT

TEMPORARY JOB SEEKER VISAS – RESOLVING THE IRREGULAR MIGRATION CRISIS





The United Arab Emirates has recently announced a new visa designed specifically for job seekers. The job exploration entry visa, as it is called, is 60-day entry permit that offers a variety of incentives, such as the ability to acquire the visa without the need for a host or a sponsor.

The job exploration visa has certain restrictions. For instance, it requires the individual to be classified in the first, second, or third skill level per the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization, as there is also little information available online on how individuals can classify their skills level. It also requires the individual to be a fresh graduate with a bachelor's degree from one of the top 500 universities in the world.

Nevertheless, this program has been needed in the region for a long time. This is because it provides youth, who have been facing the challenge of unemployment in their countries, with a much needed shimmer of hope. Youth unemployment rate in the region is estimated at 31 percent, coupled with a job loss rate of 1 in 6 people due to the pandemic, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO).

With regional governments unable to create job opportunities for the unemployed and for the thousands of new labor market entrants, youth should not be blamed for looking outwards. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 37 percent of migrants in the Arab world are under the age of 30, amounting to over 15 million individuals.

That is the case for regular, legal migration, including displacement. As for irregular migration, there is little data available on undocumented migrants across the Arab world given the nature of the issue. However, it has also been on the rise, and its sources, travel routes, destinations, and even drivers are well known.

The IOM indicates that, since 2014, there are over 26,000 missing irregular migrants in Europe and the Mediterranean, constituting more than half of the total number worldwide, many of whom come from the Arab world. The Maghreb region along with Egypt, Syria, and Iraq are some of the countries that export the most undocumented migrants.

Since 2018, the Syrian regime has placed a number of restrictions on youth living in opposition-held areas. They were given an ultimatum of either enlisting in the Syrian military to serve out their conscription, or they had to leave the country. Since the Syrian authorities do not issue identification documents for individuals who have not yet served their term, young people were left with no other choice but to seek out irregular migration.

In Iraq, lack of opportunities for youth have led them to think in a similar manner. The terrible economic conditions, subsequent armed conflicts, and political corruption left very little hope for Iraqi youth to contribute to their country's development.

Throughout the 2010s, irregular migration was becoming alarmingly popular among Iraqis, many of whom would agree with smugglers to facilitate their journeys out of the country and into Europe, mostly through Turkey.

In a 2021 research study conducted by the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and the Iraqi Research Foundation for Analysis and Development (IRFAD), many returnees who survived failed and atrocious irregular migration experiences reported that they were planning to migrate undocumented through smugglers, once again.

The study found that potential Iraqi migrants' awareness and knowledge of the dangers and risks associated with irregular migration was high, including human trafficking. They highlighted that it would not stop them from migrating without legal documents, asserting that they would rather "die in the middle of the sea than to live in Iraq."

It is dangerous that individuals are willing to precariously risk their lives while being fully aware of the ramifications. Yet, when people are dysthymic with their prospects for the future, they become far more susceptible to risks.

There are a number of factors that could push individuals toward risks, including political, economic, and social marginalization; cultural desertification; prevalence of hate speech in public spaces; low trust in public institutions; and purposelessness – to name a few.

Such factors do not only lead to a higher risk of irregular migration, but they also constitute an incubating environment for other risks such as radicalization, drug abuse, community violence, and even suicide – all of which have been prevalent across the region over the past decade. Irregular migration ought to be approached from the same lens as radicalization has been addressed. Meaning, it must be prioritized as a major threat that requires regional collaboration to counter this issue and to benefit from the tremendous capacities retained by the region's youth should they be provided with the option to legally, and safely, explore job prospects in neighboring countries.

The UAE job exploration entry visa is a tremendous example that should be replicated in other countries in the region. There is also some potential for an inter-state entry visa to provide youth with more opportunities and options.

The region's youth are more educated than before; they are more resilient; and they are more interconnected and aware. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that we benefit from their positive attributes and ensure their protection from the many risks they could face, including irregular migration.





Economic struggles continued in 2022, much like the previous year, with unemployment, rising poverty rates, and migration being some of the main challenges facing youth in the MENA region. Despite the many efforts that aimed to address these challenges and facilitate economic empowerment and employment opportunities for youth, it appears as though these efforts are not sufficient or effective in overriding this existential issue. A number of recommendations include:

- Working towards a green MENA region by reducing carbon emissions;
- Broadening the Fourth Industrial Revolution with technology as its cornerstone toward addressing youth unemployment;
- Increasing the region's share of home-grown global companies;
- Governments should expand education to prepare youth for the realities of the ever-changing job market; and
- Increasing government support for the private sector in order to boost competitiveness and create more job opportunities for the youth.

There are two major issues that should 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.



Since youth generally do not enjoy a strong social safety net to encourage them to pursue their entrepreneurial opportunities, it is important for efforts focusing on encouraging youth to seek the entrepreneurship path to consider the following:

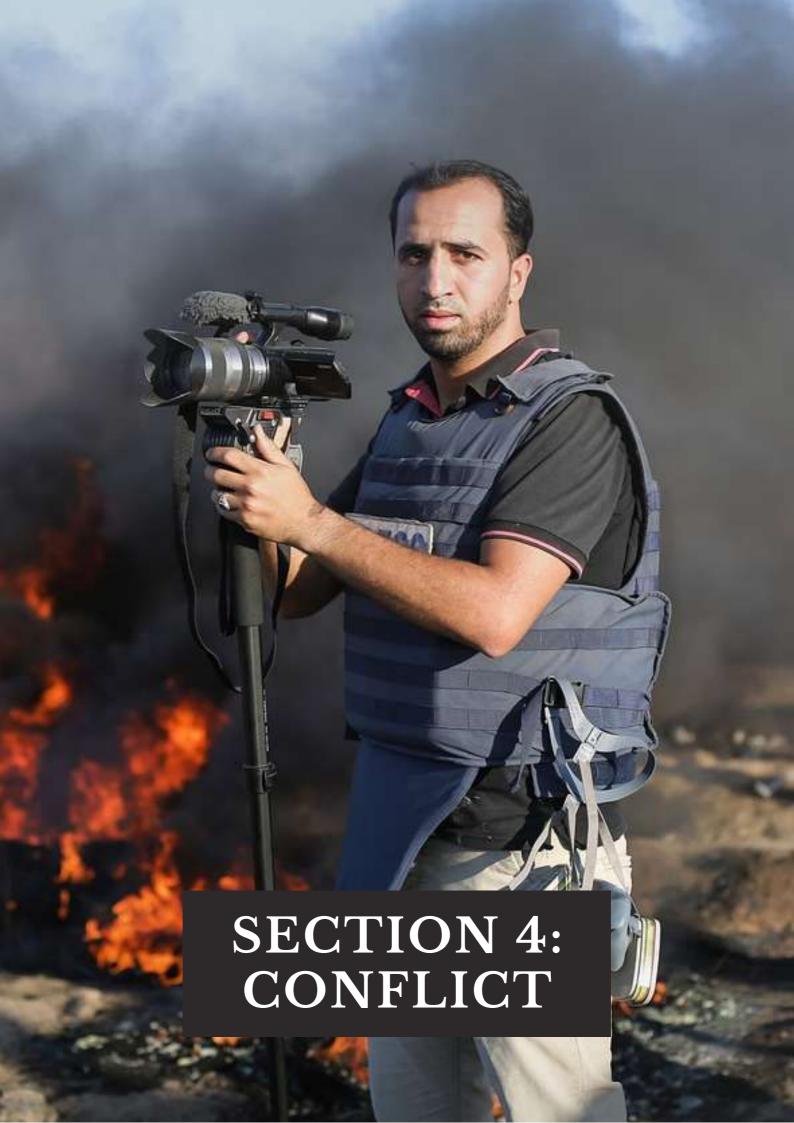
- Governments in the region could explore increasing social security safety net policies to address the needs of those living in poverty and those who were heavily impacted by the pandemic.
- Governments in the region need to provide an environment that enables research and entrepreneurship for youth and for government employees;

Much of the current economic challenges are the result of years of outdated policies and missed opportunities. To that end, it is as important now to consider long-term interventions to complement short-term policies and programs. This could take the shape of:

- 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.

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.





INTRODUCTION

Throughout 2022, the MENA region continued to witness escalations to its many protracted conflicts, as youth were constantly exploited as fuel for the fights or primarily victimized. They also continue to be targeted by armed violent extremist, terrorist, and sectarian factions, and have been used as scapegoats to be perpetrators or victims of these organizations' heinous actions. In addition to that, youth continued to fall victim to a number of human rights restrictions and violations, let alone the spike in the prevalence of drugs across the region.

A report published by the Texas A&M Today website of Texas A&M University warned of the impact of economic and political pressures on the behavior of young people. The report confirmed that these pressures, along with water shortages and conflicts, have the ability to spread international tension, indicating that youth in the MENA region do not trust a prosperous future at home.

A TOTAL OF

137

SOURCES WERE REVIEWED

Overall, MENAACTION reviewed a total of 137 sources throughout the year, and generally, themes such as conflict escalations; deliberate killing of youth; human rights restrictions and violations; recruitment and violent extremism; youth inclusion in conflict resolution efforts; migration; and drugs and narcotics were most prevalent.



CONFLICT ESCALATIONS

The Israeli occupation of Palestine saw the most reported cases of escalations and provocative activities. In early March, continuous clashes between Palestinians in Nablus and Jenin over attempted settlement buildings, resulting in hundreds of Palestinians injured and 9 killed. Then, in early April, there was heavy presence of Israeli occupation forces every night outside the Old City's Damascus Gate in Jerusalem, with many of them wearing riot gear, which is reminiscent of the violence that erupted last year.

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"Palestinians wanted the Ramadan month to pass peacefully and for people to feel safe and secure. Israel is looking to stoke tensions, which is apparent in the behavior of its forces and its police"

- Palestinian activist, Ahed Al-Risheq

Later in April, the occupation forces raided many villages and several Palestinians were wounded by the Israeli occupation live bullets, and dozens suffered from suffocation. For example, in Hebron, a young man was injured by live bullets, and dozens suffocated with poisonous and tear gas, as the occupation suppressed a peaceful march on the occasion of the Palestinian Prisoner's Day.

The occupation forces stormed a mosque east of Hebron and severely beat a child. In Jenin, Israeli forces pounded a house with missiles and injured a Palestinian youth on the outskirts of Jenin refugee camp. Then, in August, several confrontations erupted between young Palestinians and the Israeli occupation forces, resulting in 15 wounded Palestinian civilians by live bullets, also following the suppression of a march condemning the assassination of three martyrs in Nablus.

Also in August, the Palestinian Shabab FM radio came under fire during clashes with the Israeli occupation forces in Nablus. The director of Shabab FM radio said that violent confrontations took place during the Israeli occupation forces' storming of the Old City in Nablus. Local sources reported that the station stopped broadcasting live after its studios came under fire during the clashes that took place in Nablus.

It is worth noting that while civilians were being exploited as scapegoats, several Palestinian factions and Israeli groups continued their provocative activities.

The Israeli army also fired two stun grenades at a group of young men on the Lebanese side after they approached the technical fence at the Abbad site in the outskirts of the town of Houla - Marjayoun District (south). On August 28, the Israeli army fired at Lebanese youths who were near the border area in southern Lebanon. Israel still occupies part of the territory of Lebanon, estimated at more than 200 square kilometers, after its withdrawal in 2000 from the south, which it occupied for 22 years. Beirut and Tel Aviv were also in a long dispute over a maritime border area of 860 square kilometers, which is rich in oil and gas.

In the Western Sahara area, the Tindouf camps saw social congestions, amid human rights demands to isolate the leaders of the "Polisario" Front, which has become absent from the internal scene, in light of the exacerbation of the fierce conflicts between them to take over the leadership of the separatist entity. The Forum for Supporting Self-Government in the Tindouf Camps, known for its acronym "Forsatin", pointed to the discontent among the Sahrawi youth about the leadership, stressing that the collective anger transcended the stage of hypothetical criticism and reached the point of spontaneous action in the field. The Forum called for "the renunciation of the ideological armament of youth that characterized the Sahrawi Liberation Movement."





DELIBERATE KILLING OF YOUTH

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics said that young people between aged 18 to 29, who constitute more than one-fifth of Palestinian society, are the most exposed to Israeli violations, in a report on the occasion of the International Youth Day.

Throughout 2021, the Israeli army has killed 357 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, according to data from the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Around 22% of Palestinian martyrs of 2021 were children. It is also worth noting that since 2000, 40 Palestinian journalists were killed by Israeli occupation forces, 34 of whom are youth.

Unfortunately, the situation during 2022 was not better. MENAACTION reported on the death of at least 60 young Palestinians on the hands of the occupation forces throughout 2022.

Official reports from the United Nations indicate that the death toll of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces over 2022 is at least 200, 43 of whom are children. They also arrested 7,000 Palestinians, including 882 children and 172 women from the West Bank and Gaza during 2022.

Many of the deliberate killing of Palestinian youth on the hands of the Israeli occupation forces came during peaceful protests, let alone the fact that many young Palestinians were executed publicly.

- In January, a Palestinian youth was shot dead by the Israeli forces during a protest in al-Fawwar refugee camp in solidarity with Hisham Abu Hawwash, a Palestinian prisoner in Israeli detention centers who was on hunger strike to protest his arrest. Israeli occupation forces shot dead two more Palestinians in the West Bank.
- In March, the occupation forces killed three Palestinians, one near Beit Lahm and two more in the north of the west bank aged 22 and 18. They also killed a 19-year-old Palestinian youth in Jerusalem's Old City. Then, in late March, Occupation forces invaded Jenin camp and were met with resistance from armed Palestinians, resulting in killing two Palestinians, aged 27 and 17, among other injuries.
- In April, Israel's Shin Bet killed a Palestinian youth who allegedly carried out a shooting attack in Tel Aviv. Occupation forces also killed a Palestinian youth from the town of Al-Khader, south of Bethlehem while another died from serious injuries.
- Another Palestinian citizen from the town of Beita died of wounds sustained by the Israeli occupation forces. Another Palestinian youth was killed in Jenin after sustaining serious injuries. Over the duration of the month, 25 Palestinians were been killed by Israeli forces.
- In May, three young Palestinians were shot and killed by Israeli soldiers in three separate incidents. A 16 year old boy was also shot dead due by occupation forces in Nablus. The Palestinian Red Crescent also announced that they had treated 19 injuries and 67 cases of suffocation from tear gas.
- A 29-year-old man was also shot dead by the occupation army, during an incursion into the Dheisheh refugee camp in the south of Bethlehem. A 24-year-old young man was shot dead in Yabad in Jenin, hours after another 31-year-old woman was shot dead by the occupation at the entrance to Al-Aroub refugee camp, north of Hebron.
- In June, a Palestinian was shot dead by the Israeli army in the occupied West Bank, a day after the Israeli army launched airstrikes on Gaza.
- In August, a 16-year-old Palestinian teenager was shot dead by Israeli soldiers. Then, at least ten people, including four children aged between 9 and 11, were killed in Israeli air strikes in Gaza, which also left about 40 others wounded. Israeli occupation forces executed a Palestinian youth in front of his family at 3 o'clock in the morning in the Kafr Aqab neighborhood of occupied Jerusalem. Israel's occupation forces shot dead a Palestinian youth and wounded at least 31 others during a raid in Nablus.

- In September, the Israeli occupation forces shot dead a 21-year-old Palestinian in Tubas. Local sources said that the occupation soldiers broke into several houses and fired sound and tear gas bombs as well as live bullets to break resistance. Another young Palestinian succumbed to injuries he had sustained from Israeli army fire in Jenin, as the 24-year-old died days later. Israeli occupation forces executed a Palestinian youth in Jerusalem and detained his body.
- In October, Israeli forces killed two young Palestinian during raids in Jenin, one of whom was a doctor. Five other Palestinians were wounded in the raid on Jenin's refugee camp. 5 other young Palestinians were killed in late October by the Israeli occupation forces in Nablus.
- In November, a young Palestinian man was shot by the Israeli occupation forces in Hebron, as the Israeli occupation forces renewed the military order issued to close the headquarters of the "Youth Gathering Against Settlements" in the Old City of Hebron. A 15-year-old Palestinian youth was killed later in the month during an army-protected incursion by far-right Israeli lawmakers at a religious site in Nablus, hours before another Palestinian man was shot dead near Jenin. The occupation forces also killed another Palestinian boy who was on his way to school in Jenin.
- In December, the occupation forces executed a young Palestinian in cold blood in Nablus. They also killed a 16-year-old Palestinian girl during a tactical strike on Jenin. Then, a 23-year-old youth was shot dead by Israeli forces during a recent confrontation in the occupied West Bank



2022 saw the deliberate assassination of Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh by Israeli occupation snipers, as she was covering a dawn raid in Jenin in the occupied West Bank. There was a formal complaint filed with the International Criminal Court (ICC) alleging that Israel's "systematic targeting" of Palestinian journalists and its failure to investigate their killings amounted to war crimes. Tahseen al-Astal, the deputy head of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, stated that Israel's "aim is to silence and prevent the factual press image from being conveyed to the world."

In the midst of these heinous, deliberate killings and executions of young Palestinians by the Israeli occupation forces, murky trials of those responsible remain prevalent. The Times of Israel newspaper indicated in a report that "police investigations rarely end with indictments against Israeli soldiers. Israeli military prosecutors decide whether to close the case, recommend internal disciplinary measures, or Indictments.

If an indictment is filed, the soldiers are brought before a military court before judges from the Israeli army." While about 200 investigations into incidents in which Palestinians were shot dead between 2011 and 2019, only two soldiers were convicted, according to official data provided by a human rights organization.

Elsewhere in the region, a young Syrian man from Deir ez-Zor governorate, in Syria, died under torture in the "Sednaya Slaughterhouse" affiliated with the Assad forces. The young man was baited into returning to his hometown after receiving reassurances from the Syrian regime and its aides under the pretext of reconciliation. The man is the third victim in Deir ez-Zor who died under torture in Assad's prisons in January of 2022 alone.

In Yemen, Sanaa, Ibb, and Amran, which are under the control of the Houthi militia, recorded a significant increase in the rates of domestic murders. Sociologists confirm that the wrong mobilization of youth and children carried out by the militias is behind the transformation of many children into criminals and murderers who are incited against their families and society.

Psychological analysts believe that one of the main reasons for the high rate of children committing crimes stems from the wrong patterns of socialization practiced by the militia with children by indoctrinating them and encouraging killing and bloodshed.

During the Iranian protests, at least 488 people were killed, 60 of whom were children, which sheds further light on the authorities' deadly resolve to crush the widespread, ongoing protests, Amnesty International said. The Iranian Human Rights (IHR) group said that more than half had been killed in areas with high Kurdish and Baloch populations.



HUMAN RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS AND VIOLATIONS

Over 2022, youth were subjected to a number of human rights violations, including arbitrary detention and suppression of personal freedoms and rights to demonstrate, among many others. Palestinian youth were subjected to the most human rights violations, much like they have for over 70 years.

In a report published on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the start of the Israeli siege on the Gaza Strip, Save the Children warned that 80% of the children of the Palestinian Strip suffer from psychological distress.

Since 2018, the number of Gaza children suffering from symptoms of "depression, sadness and fear" has risen from 55% to 80%. The organization stated 800,000 young people in Gaza have not experienced life without the Israeli siege on their governorate.

Additionally, a poll conducted by the International Committee of the Red Cross shows that 9 out of 10 young people in Gaza believe that their lives are abnormal. 40% of the respondents said that they have no hope of finding a job during the upcoming 15 years.

In the Negev desert, for example, the Israeli police raided Palestinian protesters with tear gas canisters, sound grenades, and skunk water, with about 130 Palestinians were arrested, including several minors. Protestors told reporters that "they want to deter us from protesting again. They want to displace us from our villages to planned housing projects elsewhere. We want full recognition of our villages, of our ownership before any other services."

In March, dozens of young Palestinians participated in confrontations with Israeli forces in several cities, resulting in several injuries. Occupation forces used metal bullets and gas against youth protesting the illegal Israeli settlement in the West Bank. In April, the occupation forces clashed with students in the vicinity of Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, as dozens of students suffocated from tear gas fired inside and around the university campus. This occupation forces were suppressing a peaceful student-led demonstration against the transgressions carried out by the occupation forces in the Al-Aqsa Mosque Complex.

Also, in April – during Ramadan, Israeli forces invaded Al-Aqsa Mosque Complex in the early hours of dawn to break marches and fired tear gas prior to Friday prayer and after just because Palestinians were raising Palestinian flags. Witnesses of the raid stated that Israeli forces aimed their guns, armed with rubberized bullets, at mosque guards, disregarding the presence of women, children, and elderly. The Palestinian Red Crescent in Jerusalem stated that 26 cases of choking occurred due to the tear gas, 9 of whom were children. A total of 57 injuries came from the clashes.

In October, clashes erupted between Palestinian youth in Jerusalem and the Israeli occupation forces who stormed the Shuafat refugee camp, firing rubber-coated metal bullets, tear gas canisters, and sound bombs. As a result, a general strike took place in Nablus and schools in Jerusalem, in solidarity with the residents of Shuafat camp, rejecting the imposed siege on the camp. Later in the month, a Palestinian journalist documented a scene of Israeli occupation forces brutally attacking a young man in the center of Hebron until blood ran out of his face, and the forces threw him on the ground and continued to assault him before arresting him, in addition to three other young men.

In addition to suppressing protests and firing live bullets, rubber bullets, tear gas, and skunk water, Israeli occupation forces went on an arresting spree throughout the year. In February, they launched a campaign of arrests in Al-Amari camp, near Ramallah, in which they arrested 35 men and one injured by police dogs. They also arrested a young man from Al-Fawwar camp, and searched several houses in Tarqumiya town in Hebron.

In March, the occupation forces invaded Al-Qabatieh town and arrested four young Palestinians, before arresting three others in the town of Barqeen. The youngest of the arrested is a 16-year old from al-Khalil. These arrests are used as intimidation tactics against Palestinians in attempt of expelling them from their homes, by arresting them and their kids.

In April, Four Palestinian youth were arrested from the village of Kafr Qaddoum, east of Kulayliyah. Later in the month, 12 young Palestinians were arrested as an intimidation attempt for wearing the Palestinian keffiyeh.

In September, the Israeli occupation forces arrested an administrator from Balata Youth Center, after detaining the center's football team, at the "Za'tara Military" checkpoint, south of Nablus. The occupation forces detained the bus that the players and team management were traveling in for more than an hour, during their return from the Martyr Faisal Al-Husseini Stadium in the town of Al-Ram.

In December, the occupation forces arrested the founder of the "Youth Against Settlements" group, the human rights advocate, Issa Amro, after he was summoned for an interview at the "Ja'bara" police station near the "Kiryat Arba" settlement in Hebron. The group held the occupation responsible for Amro's safety, as the group and Issa have recently been subjected to all kinds of attacks, harassment, and threats by settlers and the occupation army.

One notable arrest happened seven years ago when a 13-year-old Palestinian Ahmad Manasra was arrested and charged with two counts of attempted murder. This case prompted the Knesset to reduce the age of criminal responsibility to 12, as it is under military law in the West Bank, and brought international attention to the detention of minors on both sides of the Green Line. In the West Bank, the age of criminal responsibility is 12. As his case dragged through the long legal process, Manasra turned 14 and became eligible for a sentence, if convicted, that could include imprisonment.

Nareman Shehadeh-Zoabi, an attorney working for Adalah Organization said that the organization has found severe violations of the rights of many of the arrested minors, including intimidation tactics and cruel practices used by Israeli security forces. This also includes arresting minors in the middle of the night and conducting interrogations without the presence of a lawyer or parent. Israel has detained more than 3,000 children each year in the West Bank and that 3,000 to 5,000 minors are detained annually in Israel. The Center for the Defense of the Individual in Israel filed a complaint against Israeli forces use of nightly arrests of minors as a scare tactic.



Moreover, the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Prisoners Affairs in Palestine published a video clip documenting the intention of the Israeli occupation army to let a police dog maim a Palestinian youth while he was working as a night guard in an industrial facility in Ramallah. The Commission clarified the circumstances of the arrest of the 19-year-old Palestinian, Malik Maalla, in which large forces of the occupation army stormed an industrial facility in the city of Al-Bireh, and the soldiers surrounded the facility's walls before raiding it. By virtue of his work as a night watchman, Ma'alla was surprised by the presence of the soldiers in front of him, and then they started to shine laser lights towards him, and then they released a police dog towards him, which began to bite him without stopping. Then, the occupation army took him to an unknown destination, and no one knows his whereabouts.



Palestinians also faced a winter Coronavirus surge driven by the omicron variant, with over 70,000 active cases in Palestine, more than twice the number at the height of previous surges. The real figure is likely much higher, as omicron tends to cause milder symptoms, especially in vaccinated patients, and many people are testing at home. Vaccination remained a major problem in Palestine, as the occupation made access to vaccines difficult. Rights groups said Israel was obliged to provide vaccines as an occupying power, but Israel denied having any obligation.

The situations in Yemen were not much better. Sources revealed a noticeable spike in suicide cases within all age groups in Houthi-controlled cities due to the continuous inhumane methods used by the Houthis against the inhabitants of those cities. Witnesses from the cities stated that those who do not die from arrest and torture or guns, die from starvation and suicide. Overall, the Houthi militia imposed more restrictions on the travel of young men to the city of Aden, for fear that they would join the government forces. It also arrested dozens at checkpoints between their areas of control and government-controlled areas on the outskirts of Taiz. Residents indicated that the militia removed the young men from cars or public transport buses to interrogate them, with many of them getting detained as a result.

Elsewhere in the region a report by U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres indicated that Iran has executed more than 100 people, including minors and women, within the first three months of 2022. The numbers were on the rise and the reasons for executions were becoming more arbitrary. 260 individuals were executed in 2020 and at least 310 individuals were executed in 2021, yet with the arbitrary executions amid the ongoing protests in Iran, the numbers as of the end of 2022 are expected to be much higher. In fact, a report by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies in early December suggests that at least 500 individuals were executed throughout the year, excluding nearly 450 who were killed during the protests.

Abuses against protests remained an unresolved case in Iraq as well, where Human Rights Watch criticized the Iraqi government for breaking its promises that it was going to hold accountable those responsible for abuses against protesters, activists, journalists, and critics of political elites and the Popular Mobilization Forces. HRW said that the violations included arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings.



In Egypt, Ramy Kamel, one of the founding members of the Maspero Youth Union, which was born after the 2011 uprising, was released in January 2022 after two-years in pre-trial detention. Multiple international communities protested his detainment and treatment after it was proven that there was no case or trial against him. In July, the Egyptian authorities re-arrested a young female activist for the third time, calling into question the government's newly launched "national dialogue" political initiative. Aya Kamal el-Din was initially arrested in 2013 among a group known as "The girls of seven in the morning." She was arrested again in 2020 following a Facebook post criticizing the military for its handling of personal protective equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Saudi Arabia's authorities placed a young Saudi who was arrested as a minor on death row. Abdullah el-Howaiti was only 14 years old when he was sentenced to execution for armed robbery and murder. The verdict was overturned in 2020, and he was sentenced again. HRW and Reprieve US have stated that el-Howaiti and five other's confessions were extracted with torture or threats of torture.



RECRUITMENT AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

In June, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) convened young civil society leaders from the MENA region in an intergenerational dialogue with key stakeholders to discuss mechanisms to prevent violent extremism (PVE) in the region through sport-based activities.

In this context, UNAOC provided a platform for young leaders from Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Qatar to lend their voices to conversations on PVE policymaking, grassroots sports for development as well as the role of athletes and sporting events in promoting inclusive and diverse societies.

This came at a time when recruitment by the terrorist group known as Daesh was resurfacing. In early January, many Lebanese youth were leaving their homes and joining Daesh in Iraq. Youth, most of whom are below the age of 20, were increasingly disappearing from Tripoli, only to be found weeks later, as part of the terrorist group in Iraq, with reports suggesting that about 150 young Lebanese from Tripoli joined the terrorist group at the start of the year.

Many observers reason that the economic crisis in Lebanon was the main reason behind this exodus. While the number of Lebanese youth leaving their town and heading to Iraq decreased throughout the year, Daesh recruiters continued to circle, hoping to attract a new intake of disenfranchised Lebanese youth, as government gridlock and economic challenges persisted.

Other observers blame the Lebanese state which has for years targeted Sunni Muslim youth, charging many with suspicion of terrorism, but leaving them without trial. As of 2022, thousands sit in prison with no charge or trial, and those released have their civil rights stripped of them.

This led over the years for a rise in recruitment towards groups such as Daesh, but those joining Daesh are much less than the ones who joined the rebellion in Syria. According to the security chief of the Kurdish-led region of Syria, Daesh was once again a threat in the region and action must be taken immediately to prevent it from gaining momentum.



Iranian militias also took advantage of the crisis in Syria to attract and recruit young people. In Aleppo, recruitment operations were ongoing by Iranian militias, who worked on exploiting the catastrophic living conditions of residents of the area. They provided material temptations and other privileges in exchange for recruitment operations, according to what was announced by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights sources in February, who highlighted that over 2,605 young Syrians were recruited for the past year.

Moreover, Russia began recruiting young men from Syria to fight in its war in Ukraine by offering salaries reaching \$3,000 a month. Many considered this to be a bait, especially after the same happened for Venezuela last year, but still many signed up through the available channels because of the hefty pay.

In addition to that, Houthi militias began in October a new recruitment process for young men over the age of twenty, seeking to attract and recruit 4,000 young men under the pretext of helping them get married, a behavior that the militias have used over the past years. Residents in Sanaa said that Houthi militias seek to push the young men targeted for marriage to recruitment camps and distribute them to the battle fronts.



YOUTH INCLUSION IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION EFFORTS

Despite sustained calls for the inclusion of youth at the helm of conflict resolution efforts, this has yet to come to fruition. The inclusion of youth in discussions over their countries' conflict resolutions is a must, for a number of reasons.

Young people tend to subscribe to what is known as the citizen frame, whereby they advocate for matters of concern for the general public, rather than a singular group. Their solutions tend to be forward looking, progressive, and sustainable.

They also tend to adhere to the principles of post-materialism, particularly autonomy and self-expression. Together with their inclination to advocate for issues of concern to the general public, the conditions that youth would probably place on the negotiation table would generally ensure more space for dialogue and autonomy for all.

Despite that, MENAACTION was not able to monitor many notable efforts. In fact, most of youth inclusion in resolution efforts were in the form of speeches.

For instance, UN Secretary-General António Guterres spoke to the Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly for the Announcement of Voluntary Contributions to the UNRWA. He reiterated that UNRWA is vital in supporting those in need and supporting UNRWA is important to ensure it delivers on its mandate to the Palestinian refugees.



He also added that investing in UNRWA means investing in stability for the region; it means investing in the economic and social well-being of Palestine refugees and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals; it means investing in the future through education of children and youth, girls and boys, young women and men; and it means honoring the commitment of the international community to Palestine refugees and their rights until a just and durable political solution is found.

Similarly, the President of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Abdulla Shahid, stressed on the importance of centering youth in decision-making, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding is a necessity, during the Conference on "Palestinian Youth in East Jerusalem under Occupation", organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, with the support of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Shahid added that the theme of the discussion aligns with his belief in the necessity of centering youth in decision-making, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding.



MIGRATION

Irregular migration continued to be a major challenge for youth throughout 2022. It was expected that there would be a spike in irregular migration cases compared to 2021 since most countries had lifted their pandemic-related lockdowns. But one thing has not changed, and that is the fact the irregular migration remains one of the most dangerous challenges facing youth.

Infomigrants published a report discussing the rising number of deaths among youth migrating illegally due to smugglers' greed. The report signals out the Evros River between Turkey and Greece, as it is usually the starting point for death journeys to "European Paradise". Victims of smuggling between the two banks of the river have become countless. While some survive, others disappear or are eventually found dead.

The International Commission for Supporting the Rights of the Palestinian People (Hashd) spoke about the repeated drowning of young migrants from Gaza to European countries in search of a decent life. Hashd clarified that the last drowning case was the death of 7 people off the Tunisian coast during an attempt to migrate to Europe on October 23.

Hashd held the Israeli military occupation authorities and their illegal measures fully responsible for the issue due to its transformation of the Gaza Strip into the largest open prison in the world, according to UN statements, which led to the absence of the slightest manifestations of human life for the population.

Similarly, dozens of young Moroccans tried to illegally seek refuge in the Spanish city of Melilla to avoid military service in Morocco. Security forces in Melilla faced a large influx of migrants last Wednesday, stressing that 80 young Moroccans, between 17 and 20 years old, who tried to climb the wall separating the city and Morocco.

Additionally, irregular migratory boats from Morocco to the Canary Islands continued to record a number of deaths. The rate of the flow of migrants from southern Morocco to the Canary Islands decreased during 2022, due to increased surveillance by the authorities.

However, the trip remains one of the bloodiest, as between 53 and 56 people who were sailing on a rubber boat disappeared or drowned. It is noteworthy that the security investigations of 2022 in combating networks organizing illegal immigration revealed the arrest of 32,733 individuals, among them, 28,146 were of different foreign nationalities, 92 criminal networks were dismantled, and 566 organizers and mediators were arrested, an increase of more than 36% compared to the previous year.

There was also a growing trend of illegal emigration out of Egypt over the past three years, driven by poverty, unemployment, and failed policies of the praetorian regime. In fact, over 3,500 young Egyptians sailed toward Europe in the first five months of 2022, about three times more in comparison of the same period last year. Official statistics reveal that 58% of illegal Egyptian migrants are children under the age of 18, many of whom are exploited and victimized by human traffickers and smugglers.

There remains areas in Daraa and As-Suwayda, in southern Syria, that are still outside the effective control of the regime forces. This is effectively encouraging Syrian youth to move to these areas, in escape from the compulsory conscription imposed by the Syrian authorities. In April 2021, the regime issued a law specific to the Daraa governorate, according to which it gives young people who refuse compulsory service a period of one year in which they will receive an "administrative postponement" starting from the date of registration with the relevant authorities.

Conflicting decisions followed, such as a decision banning travel – merely a month later, followed by a new decision allowing obtaining a "travel permit" from recruitment centers. A member of the negotiation committees in Daraa believes that this decision (issuing travel permits) is merely for financial reasons. With the massive demand for travel documents, black market arose.

Young men wishing to obtain a passport resorted to paying millions of Syrian pounds to obtain it as soon as possible in order to catch up with immigrants or travelers abroad. Young people who do not wish to serve their compulsory service have only two options: fleeing outside the country whether through legal or illegal means, or fleeing to areas outside the control of the regime.



Captagon has become a menace in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, especially considering the lack of de-addiction infrastructure.

According to a Newlines Institute study, Captagon trade is a rapidly growing illicit economy in MENA and the Mediterranean regions.

The drug's production patterns in Syria have shifted from smaller, fragmented operations in rebel-held areas to industrial, containerized operations.

Captagon has even been described as a new Syrian-Iranian weapon that threatens the region. The lack of a functioning regional mechanism to deal with the challenge collectively makes it difficult to disrupt the criminal networks involved in the drug trade.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that approximately 36.3 million people need treatment for drug use disorders (DUDs) globally, yet only one in eight in need has access to treatment. Jordan and Syria cannot see eye-to-eye on the subject of drug smuggling.

The two sides have no choice but to pool their resources, use negotiation skills, find collective solutions, and address the flow of funds because drugs and terror seem to be feeding off each other.

Over the past decade, Jordan has faced a worsening drug abuse problem, as it is at the center of a booming narcotics trade between Lebanon, Syria, and the Gulf states. Official figures show that drug-related crimes rose from just 2,041 in 2005 to 20,055 in 2020. Drug offences are now the most common type of crime committed in Jordan, according to a recent study by the Ministry of Justice.



In the past, patients used one, or max, two drugs; now, they are trying three or four different drugs at once."

- A Jordanian nurse interviewed as part of a report by the Middle East Eye



Similarly, "Paula Hamra", "Al-Kala", "Flitoxa" and "Shakelita" are names among others for several types of drugs that many Moroccan youth are addicted to, but the drug "Bufa" remains the most dangerous. Moroccans call "Bufa" the "drug of the poor" or the "cocaine of the poor" in view of its cheapness compared to cocaine, but its risks and repercussions on the health of its consumers make it the subject of many warnings.

It is worth noting that throughout 2022, regional governments stepped up their drug seizure operations. For instance, the Saudi authorities announced the largest seizure of illicit drugs in the country's history after nearly 47 million amphetamine pills were hidden in a flour shipment and seized at a warehouse in the capital Riyadh. Captagon was originally the brand name for a medicinal product containing the synthetic stimulant fenethylline. Though it is no longer produced legally, counterfeit drugs carrying the Captagon name are regularly seized in the Middle East, according to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. One of the reasons Captagon is spreading in use is arguably because there is a supply flood now coming mostly from Syria.

Similarly, the Lebanese authorities intercepted and confiscated nine million pills of the fenethylline drug Captagon inside a shipment of fruit, expected to be delivered to the Gulf region. The Lebanese customs arrested several perpetrators and started the investigation at the Beirut port. The Lebanese authorities are enhancing their oversight efforts to resolve Lebanon's diplomatic rift with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Kuwait.

SPOTLIGHT CROSSROADS IN THE MENA REGION





The political conditions in the Arab World are currently at a critical point. The future of democracy in the region is rather oblique. The failed – or failing transitions into democratic systems were replaced by stronger, and more resilient, unitary consolidation of powers. The once bright prospects for pluralism that came about with the Arab Spring in many countries are now either back to square one or are headed toward stronger authoritarian rule.

Turning the page on the Arab Spring is easier said than done. The socioeconomic conditions that led to the uprisings are still there to this very day, if not worse. Unemployment, lack of job opportunities, lack of confidence in public institutions, and especially arbitrary and targeted political detention – inter alia, are at a worse point nowadays than they were last decade.

The other side of the coin – that is the incubating conditions for unitary control – do not look bright either. Data from the Arab Barometer shows that there is a decrease among individuals in the region who believe that political leaders are concerned with the needs of ordinary citizens. That is a 3.4% points decline among youth and a 2 point decline among adults between 2011 and 2018, as more than 52% of both groups believe that leaders are not concerned at all with their needs.

Further, if we were to assess citizens' overall confidence in their governments, there is about 14.2 percentage points decline among youth in the region from an average of 67.7% in 2007 to 53.5% in 2020, according to data from the World Values Survey.

All of these dynamics can provide an indication that dissent is anything but gone, albeit its foundations and drivers are immensely different. Early warning signs entail that any uprising will be characterized by poverty and unemployment, as opposed to democracy and human rights, as was the case last decade.

Protestors may still call for democratic change, but they will be more concerned about the protracted economic decline in their countries. Elongated poor conditions produce desperation and business as usual would not suffice, especially amid the neighborhood effect whereby a protest in one country in the region can be echoed in another.

How might policy makers react if they were to preempt mass uprisings? There are generally three possible outcomes. The first and most probable is top-down reform. Tunisia and Iraq are two recent examples, as they announced, and in the case of Iraq, held early elections. The second and least probable outcome is bottom-up, civil society-led change. Sudan is a recent example. The third outcome, which is somewhere in the middle, is a coup d'état, also ala Sudan.

The first two outcomes can coincide, and the past decade has seen multiple failed attempts toward actualizing either of them. This stems from various push factors such as the absence of civic space and lack of checks and balances, along with a stark mismatch in the frequencies between the top-down policies and the bottom-up demands.

The third outcome can be a hit or miss. On the one hand, data from the World Values Survey show a near 8 percentage points increase in confidence in the armed forces between 2007 and 2020.

On the other hand, the coup in Egypt has had mixed responses – between proponents who praise the developments in infrastructure and opponents who emphasize the absence of citizen input and lack of civic space. The neighborhood effect is key in this context, as the increasing trust level in armed forces and potential infrastructural developments may in fact outweigh its negatives.

Nevertheless, even the positives of this third outcome can only serve for short-term purposes. Inglehart and Welzel's theory of intergenerational value change stipulates that once economic and physical security are met consistently for some time, it is very likely for one's priorities to change, mostly toward post-materialism, where autonomy and self-expression are essential.

What could be done in light of these realities? There ought to be a calculated mix of short- and long-term strategies, encompassing economic, political, and educational reforms. Economic growth must be the main short-term objective, rapid growth, to be more precise, and equally important, job creation.

Governments in the region are indeed at an unenvious position given the terrible economic implications of the ongoing global pandemic. However, limited resources can only be offset with increased productivity. An IMF research of China's rapid growth in 1980s-1990s found that productivity gains were responsible for 42 percent of the country's growth. Productivity-led growth is also more likely to be sustained.

That alone would certainly not be sufficient. Education reform is also needed. Current educational systems in the region do not produce problem solvers and critical thinkers; instead, they raise bureaucrats. To that end, if a sustained productivity-led economic growth is achieved, then in a decade, a new generation can reap these gains toward technological advancements, improved way of life, and self-expression. Such reforms, ultimately, must go hand in hand with serious and tangible cracking down on corruption.





CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current security landscape in the region is marked by a multitude of long-lasting and evolving security dilemmas. The security landscape continued to grow more complicated and fragmented in 2022, with an increasing number of state and non-state actors deploying and using unmanned weapons including aerial systems.

- There needs to be a prioritization by larger powers such as the United States and the EU to directly address steps to deescalate tensions, heal rifts, and build new bridges.
- There must be proper inclusion of youth and women in Track I and Track II conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts, as the constant exclusion of the region's youth manifests a missed opportunity.

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.

• The Syrian regime needs to stop its deliberate targeting of youth in areas outside of its control. Youth, who are only provided with two choices: join the Syrian military or illegally migrate out of the country, are facing heinous human rights violations that must be stopped.

Within Palestine the Israeli violations need to stop. Thousands of Palestinians were detained throughout the year and hundreds were killed, many of whom are youth, women, and children.

- The Israeli occupation forces ought to uphold the standard international human rights laws and frameworks; meaning, it ought to stop its deliberate targeting of youth and children, including refraining from nighttime raids as well as the use of live bullets, tear gas, and skunk water to stop peaceful protests.
- 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 settlership and occupation.

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.

• Donor organizations and countries should increase their local funding to Yemeni civil society organizations for conflict resolution, peacebuilding, relief, and development efforts.

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.

• Regional governments need to collect and disclose data on levels of drug production, trafficking, and use to aid preventive and countering measures. This purposeful ignorance as a sort of way to not acknowledge that there is a problem within their borders in the first place.



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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.



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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INTRODUCTION

When it comes implementing efforts on the ground, development work tends to be the most cognizant of youth's needs.

Despite some positive progress, there remains more work to be done in relation to the inclusion of youth and effectively responding to their needs and priorities.

Throughout 2022, MENAACTION monitored a total of 155 different stories concerning youth and development.

The common themes were youth empowerment and sustainable development; training and capacity building efforts; youth, culture, and new media; voluntary work; health, wellness, and counter-drugs campaigns; and supporting youth in countering violence and exclusion.

A TOTAL OF

155

SOURCES WERE REVIEWED



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2022 started positively for youth and development, as Egypt hosted the fourth edition of the World Youth Forum (WYF) on January 10-13, 2022 in Sharm El Sheikh. Around half a million participants from 196 countries registered to virtually attend the sessions. Among the sessions, a model simulation of the international human rights council of the United Nations (MUN) took place, which saw over 5,000 young men and women register to attend the simulation that focused primarily on the implications of COVID-19 on human rights.

Other efforts during the WYF included the "Youth of the Country" initiative, which aimed to develop the skills of and connect youth with employment, entrepreneurship, and social impact opportunities.

Similarly, Silatech launched a Ramadan campaign aiming to provide jobs for millions of young people in the region. The program is expected to benefit youth in more than 18 countries. Silatech has thus far provided over 2 million job opportunities through its partnerships, as its goal is to empower 5 million young men and women.

In addition to that, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace published a report titled "The Arab Youth: Aspirations for the New Year" which explored youth priorities in relation to improving political, economic, and social conditions in their countries.

The main priorities included guaranteeing civil and political rights; developing the economy and reducing unemployment; improving education and promoting technological advancement; ending wars and division/ peace and stability; respecting women's rights; and supporting culture and arts.

There were also a number of youth empowerment initiatives in Egypt, some were government led and others were led by international organizations. For example, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development implemented the "Youth for Development" initiative. The initiative consisted of two main components: (a) to introduce university youth to human development and link it to the state's strategic plan and development projects through seminars, conferences, and workshops; and (b) student competitions aimed at preparing a generation of experts, practitioners, and trainers to raise awareness of human development issues and goals and how to link them to the state's strategy and programs.

While there were several other small scale initiatives in Egypt, it is also wroth highlighting the challenges pertaining to the youth sector in Egypt. One journalist clarified that Ministry of Youth is more interested in sports than in youth. Although the budget of the National Youth Council reached 1.375 billion Egyptian pounds in the fiscal year 2020/2021, 60% of these allocations went to construction, 30% to support youth centers, and 8% for workers' wages, leaving 1% for activities. He indicated that 37% of Egyptian villages do not currently have youth centers, let alone the absence of accurate and trusted data to identify the needs of Egyptian youth.



In the absence of accurate and trusted data, the inclusion of youth in needs assessments, outreach efforts, and dialogue sessions become more important. For instance, the "Ibtna" initiative in Jordan held a needs discussion session in cooperation with the Balcona Society for Human Development to identify the needs of youth and women of the Sahab area. One outcome indicated that there was an urgent need to involve the young men and women of the local community in initiatives and dialogue sessions that work to develop and refine their skills and experiences.

Similarly, in Libya, the "Youth Dialogue Forum" revealed an initiative to solve the long-standing crises afflicting the country, as it seeks to draw a roadmap for a stable state. The Libyan National Youth Foundation announced that it will hold first Libyan Youth Summit in February of 2023, with the aim of crystallizing a vision for a stable, democratic Libya and establishing peace and community participation.

Moreover, a Youth Forum was held in Al-Hasakah Governorate, northeastern Syria, which featured a large participation of the area's youth who discussed the means through which they could counter hate speech and achieve a much more effective community reconciliation.

There were two similar initiatives held in Syria and Palestine that looked to empower youth with better economic opportunities. SPARK and the Dutch Postcode Lottery launched a program in Syria to match refugees and vulnerable Iraqi and Syrian youth with remote work opportunities with national and international companies while UNRWA launched its IT Service Center in Gaza to become the largest IT employer in the governorate, as it facilitates opportunities to tap into the potential of youth in Gaza.

Maintaining the strong momentum from 2021, the Gulf countries continued to invest well in empowering youth with opportunities. Bahrain, for example, is offering over 900 programs through its 36 youth centers to develop youth capacities in various fields, including arts and sciences. Bahrain also launched the Youth City 2030, which featured various activities in several fields such as arts and science.

In the UAE, the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation organized the "Youth Knowledge Forum", in partnership with the United Nations Development Program. The forum included more than 20 dialogue and knowledge sessions on youth knowledge empowerment and to enhance their role in leading the paths of knowledge development; the role of innovation and technology in making the world more equitable; reducing the financial knowledge gap between young generations; and the role of youth in supporting progress in implementing the sustainable development plan.

In Saudi Arabia, the Eastern Region Youth Council revealed a number of achievements such as the establishment of 15 development programs targeting more than 27,000 young men and women in 12 governorates, with the aim of empowering youth capabilities in line with the needs of the region. The Council also strengthened community participation in all governorates, as the number of participants reached more than 28 different communities, aimed at enhancing the role of youth in building pioneering models in all fields. The Eastern Region Youth Council is keen to promote positive dialogue, which aims to transfer experiences and build relationships through the "Darwaza" program, which targeted more than 3,800 young men and women in 6 governorates.

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING EFFORTS

Much of the youth empowerment efforts focused on enhancing their capacities through trainings and workshops. The Egyptian Ministry of Youth and Sports announced the change of the civil education centers to bear the name of "Youth Innovation and Learning Centers" in an effort to create spaces for innovation, learning, skills development for young people and youth, and optimal investment in youth.

Jordanian youth centers organized numerous training activities throughout the year. In Karak governorate in the south, several centers held training workshops building the capacities of youth in relation to entrepreneurship, project management, Innovation, and creativity.

Similarly, in the north, many training efforts were held focusing on skilling for the labor market. In the capital, many youth centers implemented training workshops under the "My Skills" Program implemented by the Ministry in partnership with UNICEF and Generations for Peace. The training sessions focused on cognitive skills, financial and digital skills, social innovation, and leadership and teamwork through joint work skills.

Similarly, Friedrich Ebert Foundation delivered a training activity for 30 young men and women in Aden, Yemen. The training camp aimed to enhance the capabilities of young men and women in the political, economic, and social fields as well as building their leadership capabilities.

Further, AlMabarrah AlKhalifia Foundation in Bahrain launched of the fourth edition of Ithra Youth Program, which looks to hone participants' personal and life skills and create vibrant Bahraini youth who possess the necessary skills and knowledge to add value and make a positive change to Bahraini society.



YOUTH, CULTURE, AND NEW MEDIA

Technology and media – whether traditional, digital, or modern – were heavily featured throughout youth-specific development efforts across the region over 2022.

The stories monitored included youth efforts to preserve the culture and heritage of their traditions and countries along with several media training efforts, and an emphasis on newer approaches in media.

Looking at youth efforts to preserve their countries' culture and heritage, a young Yemeni filmmaker attempts to catch glimpses of life in the country, aside from the horrors of war, through her film that focuses on a small Yemeni family that produces Khawlani coffee, an important part of Yemeni culture.

In Palestine, a group of Palestinian youth have taken initiative to support the Bedouin communities of the region, specifically youth and women.

Additionally, youth in Egypt have been making efforts to learn the Nubian language through music. Nobig Koro is an initiative founded by young Egyptians wishing to prevent the ancient language from being completely extinct.

Similarly, the 51st edition of the Marrakech National Festival of Popular was held in July for the first time in two years. About 53 traditional music troupes sang at the Badi Palace and other parts of the city in a festive carnival.

There was certainly space for modern arts. For example, Baghdad, which was voted the capital of Arab youth hosted the street theater festival, which held the title "Our Youth Awareness and empowerment". This festival was meant to present the various artistic and cultural feats of youth across the Arab region.

When it comes to training efforts, the "Pillars" program, implemented by the Jordanian Ministry of Youth in cooperation with UNICEF, organized a training course for a number of young people from Tafila governorate on filmmaking – with emphasis on field photography, scriptwriting, cinematography, and the production of short films.

In Palestine, the Ummah Youth Center launched a training program entitled "Digital Media and Content Creation", which looked to provide the trainees with the skills of creating digital content and refine their media skills to invest their efforts and energies to serve the Palestinian cause by promoting Palestinian content on social media.



In Lebanon, UNDP, in partnership with Dawar Association, launched a network of 51 young fact-checkers with the aim of raising awareness about the impact of fake news and hate speech on society at the local and national levels. The project aimed to popularize the culture of news verification and create a network of young fact-checkers to be a source of trust in their communities. 51 students from several media colleges participated in trainings on media education, how to combat hate speech, capacity building to combat fake news, in addition to launching campaigns on social media. The training was followed by the launch of an awareness campaign on social media under the slogan "Count to Ten", inspired by young people, to spread awareness about the dangers of fake news on social stability.

In addition to that, Emirati youth affirmed that "metaverse" provides equal opportunities for young people to unleash their projects and innovations, noting that entering and investing in the metaverses is not limited to wealthy people, but it is open to anyone. Youth attendees pointed that many Emirati youth are curious to understand the components of this world, stressing that the Dubai Metaverse Forum helped them in identifying the opportunities that the metaverses holds in the coming period as well as in determining how to leverage the metaverse for professional interests.



VOLUNTARY WORK

Throughout the year, youth led a number of grassroots, voluntary initiatives aimed at addressing different local challenges.

At the same time, government and nongovernment organizations looked to build and sustain the culture of voluntary work among youth, which in fact proved effective.

Given the importance of volunteer work in the world, the United Nations designated the fifth of December of each year as a date for celebrating International Volunteer Day, in honor of every person who works from their heart and supports others in all forms, without waiting for anything in return; "aid for the purpose of aid".

The Asir Youth Council in Saudi conducted 167 programs and events in various governorates, benefiting 25,000 young men and women, with many volunteer opportunities offered through the volunteer work platform, as a total of 3,690 volunteers registered in the council's database.

In Egypt, the Directorate of Youth and Sports in Kafr El-Sheikh Governorate organized training courses to prepare young leaders for voluntary work, as the training highlighting its importance, different forms, and the role of volunteers within youth centers in spreading the culture of volunteering.

Similarly, the Bahraini association "Al Kalima Al Taiba" launched the second edition of an initiative meant to prepare young volunteers who can address developmental challenges in Bahrain as well as promote the culture of voluntary work. More specifically, in Egypt, the Directorate of Youth and Sports carried out a 3-day training course on crises and disasters at the Shalateen Youth Center, which looked to create a new generation of young volunteers who can deal with crises of all kinds and in a timely manner.



"Being a cause of change in someone's life, a cause of their happiness and joy, is a great blessing in life and has a lot of reward."

- Young Jordanian volunteer Karam Qadara.



Looking at youth led voluntary initiatives, several of those were primarily dedicated toward building or rehabilitating public spaces, thus shedding light on both the importance and absence of free, public, and green spaces for youth and recreational activities. For instance, a group of young Iraqi volunteers worked for the past three years on rehabilitating an old prison that was used by Daesh in the Ramadi area and turned it into a public recreational center for young boys and girls in the city. Similarly, in Jordan, 105 young men and women from Zarqa governorate planted forest seedlings in the Phosphate Hills area to help transform untapped spaces into green spaces to build a safe and beautiful environment.

Also in Jordan, 7Hills for Social Development worked with young volunteers to build a public park for skaters in the capital. The park is run by a group of volunteers who provide space for skaters and deprived children and young adults. Those aged 10 to 25 from refugee camps and Syrian, Iraqi, and other communities now have access to the park. The park also launched a youth leaderships programme to teach crafts and other skills to young people. Similarly, young Libyans established the first skateboard park in Tripoli, sparking excitement among youth deprived of entertainment. This recreational park in Tripoli includes a bike path, riding space, mini football pitches and green spaces, with funding from the US Embassy in Tripoli.





HEALTH, WELLNESS, AND COUNTERDRUGS CAMPAIGNS

Over the span of 2022, there were also several workshops and initiatives that addressed issues related to wellness, COVID-19 pandemic, and drugs. This is important given the global pandemic, rising challenges related to mental health, let alone the increase in drug addiction, use, abuse, and related offenses among youth across the region.

In the UAE, Sharjah Capability Development (Tatweer) and EMPWR launched Wathba to support mental wellbeing across the MENA region. The joint initiative includes 12 wellness workshops for youth aged 18-31 from corporates, universities, schools, and government institutions.

The initiative looks to offer safe spaces for discussions and opportunities for personalized learning. Further, the Innovation Team, in cooperation with the Youth Council of the Emirates Foundation for Health Services, the Federal Youth Authority, and Etisalat, organized a workshop that focused on how to use design thinking in health care, as part of activities of the UAE Innovation Month.

While COVID-19 may not be viewed in the same vein as it was perceived over the past few years, young people still ensured they were active to support initiatives to ease its implications. For example, a group of 15 young Egyptians embarked on a humanitarian project in which they provide free oxygen bottles to COVID-19 patients, cover hospitalization costs, and provide monthly food items to vulnerable patients.

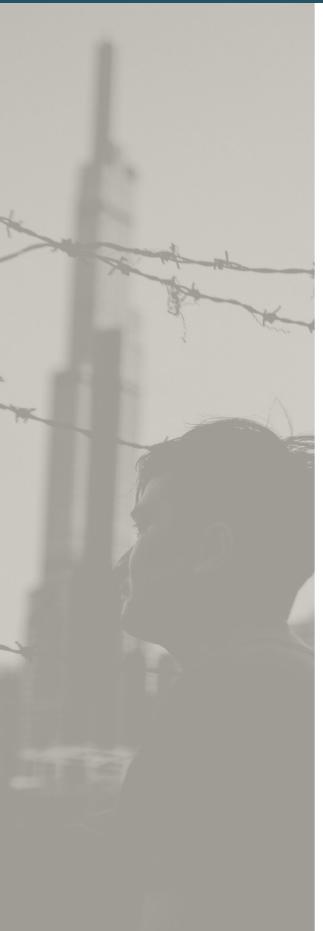
At the same time, it is difficult to overlook the severe implications of the pandemic on the region. A survey from Jordan found that the pandemic has resulted in "severe economic and service disruptions with far-reaching and heterogeneous effects on adolescent well-being." These effects include loss of employment, loss of income, inability to buy essential food items, and experiencing food insecurity, coupled with psychological impacts such as increased stress.

Moreover, International Alert in Tunisia also conducted a research study on the mental health of young people from 3 neighborhoods across the country, the results of which show that 30% of youth were either fired from their work, or a member of their families was expelled. Additionally, 27% of youth said that their psychological conditions were bad or very bad, and almost the same percentage expressed the need to visit a psychiatrist or obtain psychological support, noting that only one person out of every eight young people managed to do so.



When it comes to raising awareness of or countering the scourge of drugs, most of the efforts monitored came from Jordan, as youth centers played a major role in line with the National Youth Strategy and the Al-Hussein Camps for Work and Construction Project and with technical support from the Public Security Directorate. Of those efforts:

- The Sakhrah Youth Center organized a lecture on combating drugs, discussing drug abuse, the types of drugs, methods of treatment, and the psychological, health, and economic effects of this scourge along with the damage inflicted on society
- The Ibin Iblin Youth Center organized a workshop discussing drug abuse, types of drugs, and its psychological effects. The workshop also delved into the role of the family in preventing its spread in society.
- The All Jordan Youth Authority in Aqaba Governorate organized a dialogue session discussing the harms of drugs and narcotics, their serious health consequences, and the psychological, physical and health problems. An extensive dialogue was held with participants focusing on family and community awareness, strengthening the role of civil society institutions, strengthening the provisions of the law, and strengthening the role of the media in community awareness.



SUPPORTING YOUTH IN COUNTERING VIOLENCE AND EXCLUSION

As discussed in Section 4: Conflict, violent extremism remains a challenge facing youth in the region, as they continue to be both targeted for recruitment and victimized in attacks.

To address that, there were some notable interventions that looked to address this issue. The International Festival of Creative Youth, organized by the Moroccan Arts and Creativity Forum, looked to promote the concepts peace and coexistence through culture and creativity and fortifying youth against reasons of extremism and violence.

In Jordan, the Tafila Women's Charitable Association launched a youth project for positive change to reduce societal extremism to build the capacity of young people in the governorate to find various ways to eliminate extremism, and open channels of communication between them as leaders in their community.

Similarly, the Danabiq Youth Center in Egypt organized a symposium on combating terrorism, extremism, and accepting the other.

In Iraq, a group of young people in Diyala worked on spreading the culture of music as an alternative to the culture of violence and extremism, after the province suffered from terrorism that affected people's lives. Ahmed Shehab and Hassan Abada established a team to teach young people music and opened courses to teach amateurs. The work of these young people is not without challenges, as they complained about the lack of support and the difficulty of obtaining places to teach young people.



At the same time, there were some endeavors that looked to address gender-based violence and, more broadly, violence against women. This was important because online gender-based violence has increased in the MENA region during the pandemic. The Salamat Programme for Digital Safety for Women and Youth looked to reduce this violence and protect women in the cyberspace, as it launched a campaign to help women take the necessary steps to protect themselves, and avoid the dangers of the Internet, such as hacking or electronic harassment.

Further, the Meet Tarif Youth Center in Egypt carried out an awareness seminar on "bullying and violence against women and the danger of social media", which discussed violence against women as a violent act that is motivated by gender bias and which results in harm and suffering to women, whether in terms of physical, sexual, or psychological terms. The session emphasized social media, which is one of the incubators of violence against women and in various forms that may succeed in concealing aspects of violence against women.

SPOTLIGHT

CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPMENT - IRAQ AS AN EXAMPLE





In a developing country such as Iraq, there are a number of obstacles that hinder its progress, development, and stability. The social, political, and economic crises that engulfed Iraq over the past two decades have had a negative impact on generations of young people, which created many obstacles that prevented them from playing an active role in contributing to the development of their country.

Although the security situation today is better than it was 4 years ago when Daesh took control of several large cities in Iraq, the effects of the extremist organization have negative repercussions in the country that will require years to overturn. Infrastructures were completely destroyed, thousands of young people were displaced and went missing, and thousands of others lost their lives.

Today's generation of young Iraqis, aged 18-30, have lived through 3 different wars from their childhood to adulthood, namely the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the sectarian war between 2006 and 2008, and then the war against Daesh From 2014 to 2017.

Perhaps the most prominent development problems in Iraq lie in the neglect of successive Iraqi governments in paying attention to youth and their mental health and utilizing their skills in improving the security and economic conditions in the country.

Data shows that 50% of university degree holders are currently unemployed. With the population of Iraq increasing - ranging from 850,000 to one million people annually - there are many concerns that cast a dark shadow over the country if the government does not act on this matter seriously.

What made matters worse is the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic since the beginning of 2020, particularly its psychological and economic effects that negatively affected young Iraqis.

Further, the rampant financial and administrative corruption in state institutions has left most Iraqis living in bad conditions. This is mostly attributed to poor quality of health, education, and security services, and consequently the lack of a suitable environment for young people to work, innovate, and contribute to achieving development.

A World Bank report indicates that 13 million Iraqis earn less than two dollars a day. The poverty rate in Iraq, according to the Iraqi Ministry of Planning, has reached 25%. With the growing population, such numbers entail an uncertain future awaiting Iraqis.

Therefore, the role of youth today is very important. The government and organizations must support them to save the country from a possible economic and humanitarian disaster. Iraq has one of the youngest populations in the world, as an estimated 50% of Iraqis are aged 19 or young. Youth are able to change Iraq for the better if they are given opportunities and space. They are an unprecedented opportunity for their country, and they are its real wealth. If youth do not change Iraq for the better, who will?

It is integral for the Iraqi government and civil society organizations to work more seriously to solve the problems that stand in the way of achieving development. As such, they ought to start with two aspects.

The first step is allocating huge budgets to support youth by rehabilitating them psychologically and supporting those with university degrees, skills and ideas, by holding workshops, training programs, and financial support for them to start their own projects.

If such projects are established, young people will be more motivated to learn and participate in new projects that serve the country. This will positively affect all dimensions of development, whether social, psychological, economic, security and environmental.

The second aspect is to operate the stalled factories in the country and to provide more job opportunities for young people. With job creation being a major challenge for the government, the private sector can play a major role in responding to the economic and financial challenges facing youth, especially unemployment.



Young civil society activists have been facing major challenges in the region – amplified by the global pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which reshuffled financial resources, let alone the continued presence of certain political and legal restrictions and government pressure on their efforts:

- For that, it is important for regional governments and major international organizations to reinvest resources in strengthening civil society organizations, especially those led by youth along with local actors, to enable them toward fulfilling their efforts including social accountability
- 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: Goals 1, 2, 3, and 10.

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:

• It 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



Given the prevalence of impactful efforts dedicated specifically to young women in the region, this is an important aspect to continue to improve on:

- 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. Stories of youth committing suicide were more prevalent this past year, yet MENAACTION did not find any notable interventions to report on:

- Implementing programs that raise public awareness on mental health must be a top priority in the MENA region. Such programs should target youth and look to address their mental health. Such efforts ought to focus on (a) 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; (b) 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; and (c) 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.

These issues also apply to drug use. There were minimal efforts apart from raising awareness, leaving those in need for rehabilitation services unattended:

- 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.



INTRODUCTION

In MENAACTION's 2022 "What IF Youth Led the MENA Region" Survey Report, 57.1% of the respondents stated that the education system should be the highest priority for public spending, as 25.8% believe that reforming the education system should be the main focus for their governments.

To that end, MENAACTION monitored a total of 76 notable education-related updates over the duration of 2023. These updates are grouped into challenges in education; innovation and capacity building efforts; inclusive education; and student activism.

A TOTAL OF

76

SOURCES WERE REVIEWED



CHALLENGES IN EDUCATION

MENAACTION's aforementioned survey also found that 13.5% of the respondents believe that the deteriorating education systems were the most pressing issue facing them in their countries.

Further, UNESCO's "Youth as Researchers" project surveyed around 10,000 young people around the world, found that 41% of Arab respondents stated that their understanding of the coursework declined and 38% that their overall class attendance and participation declined following the pandemic.

Moreover, the region is suffering from brain drain among its young populations, and a report by Majid Al Futtaim business group and McKinsey highlights that higher education investment is direly needed to halt student brain drain.

It indicates that the relative scarcity of top facilities to meet the needs of the region's brightest has led to many "leaving to study abroad, and in many cases, not returning home."

More investment in higher education in the region, particularly in a way that promotes the necessary skills for the region's labor market, can effectively respond to the challenge of brain drain.

Palestinians faced the most pressing challenges related to education over 2022. There are approximately 1.6 million young men and women in refugee and IDP camps, over 100,000 of whom are in the West Bank's 19 refugee camps. Camps in the West Bank lack educational rehabilitation centers to work on helping young people to build their capacities.

The majority of young people work in settlements to support their families at the expense of developing and refining their personalities in line with their psychological and future needs. The scarcity of resources in the camps compel them to resort to any available opportunities to help themselves and their families.

Further, according to the UN's 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview, an estimated 678,000 children are in need of child protection services, about 25% of children aged 16-17 are out of school, and young people face multiple obstacles securing a job once they do leave education. Moreover, university graduates in Gaza suffer from unemployment following their graduation. In fact, over 50% of university graduates in Gaza are unemployed, as the absence of professional and practical experience is one of the most challenging obstacles contributing to this issue.

In addition to the lack of opportunities and resources, Palestinian students face the grim nature of the occupation, having to constantly dodge obstacles ranging from harassment, to limitations on mobility, to death. The UN office in Palestine said that by the fall of 2022, there were 56 outstanding demolition orders against schools where at least 6,400 children are taught in the West Bank. The UN also recorded 115 education-related violations against schools and children in the first half of 2022 in the West Bank, affecting nearly 8,000 students, forcing many to drop out of schools.



Lebanese students also face a number of education-related challenges. A UNICEF report revealed frightening numbers describing the educational reality of Lebanon's youth, indicating that Lebanese youth are struggling to find hope. Lebanese youth have been left with no other option but to bear terrible conditions due to the collapse of the Lebanese pound, COVID-19, and the damage that devastated Beirut and its suburbs due to the explosion of Beirut Port in 2020. The educational sector witnessed a large drop out to engage in informal or even low-paid work. If this educational dropout is not stopped, there will be grave social and psychological consequences for young people.

It is reported that 3 out of every 10 young men and women in Lebanon have dropped out of education to find job opportunities. UNICEF also reported that many young Lebanese have been cutting back on healthcare. This however creates a vicious cycle: as many drop out of school to work, they do not acquire the skills necessary for reconstruction and relieve the effects of the crisis.

Looking at Morocco, a study revealed the negative effects of arrest on young people who commit minor misdemeanors, as it leads to dropping out of schools. The study, which was carried out by the Adalah Association for the Right to a Fair Trial, revealed that the youth convicted of minor misdemeanors find it difficult to find work after their release. The same study indicates that the possibility of education and training inside prisons remains limited, especially that more than half of the detainees are young people.



INNOVATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING EFFORTS

A number of capacity building efforts were carried out throughout the year that aimed to prepare youth for employment, enhance their skills, facilitate innovation, and increase knowledge and awareness.

A new education initiative led by Nestlé and L'Oréal launched in 2022 to tackle youth unemployment in the MENA region. Titled Next Level, the training initiative will target more than 1,000 university students and fresh graduates from 50 universities in the region.

This initiative includes the Graduate Trainee, a 6-12 months full-time program for fresh graduates and candidates with up to two years of experience. There is also a Management Trainee, a 12-24 months full-time rotational program, designed to develop future business leaders.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia invested substantially in building the capacities of young STEM professionals, with clear career paths in some of the country's biggest companies in addition to promising careers in the aerospace sector. To that end, Boeing set up the Boeing Research and Technology office at the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology.

Also in Saudi, the King Saud University (KSU) collaborated IBM to advance skills development through AI. The partnership is expected to launch upskilling initiatives to promote AI education and awareness and leverage collaborations with academia and the public and private sectors.

Similarly, the Cyber Security Council in the UAE partnered with Hewlett-Packard Company (HP) to train school and university students in electronic and technological skills and prepare them for jobs in the field of advanced technology.

Hilton partnered with Bunyan for Training, a Saudi affiliate of Swiss hospitality management school Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne, to train young Saudis to prepare them for jobs in the tourism sector, particularly across Hilton Hotels. The program will provide its graduates with advanced theoretical and practical curricula certified and accredited by Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne.

Also in the UAE, the Emirati Ministry of Economy announced the launch of a tourism hackathon, a training program and competition aimed at developing innovative solutions around the tourism industry. The hackathon – open to university students and graduates – will help participants develop and expand their knowledge of the industry and understand the role tourism plays in supporting the economy. It will also support participants with entrepreneurial skills, focusing on areas such as innovation and creativity, marketing, and leadership.

In addition to that, the Dubai College of Tourism (DCT) launched, in collaboration with Hilton, YouthX, which is a platform that will allow young Emirati chefs to develop their skills, with mentorships and scholarships. Further, the healthcare and education investment company Amanat has been working on integrating experiential learning and virtual reality into its curricula. The company's main idea is to integrate gaming with education, turning youth's non-productive time and channeling it into something increased learning. Further, Visa implemented several workshops in Emirati schools, in collaboration with Cashee, a teen banking and ed-tech platform in the MENA region. These workshops looked to increase financial literacy among the students.

At the start of the year, HSBC and the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management launched an initiative to promote the development of sustainable finance skills for university students in the MENA region. For that, teams of four students from 42 universities from the UAE, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Egypt, and Algeria participated in two competitions: (1) Rotman Portfolio Management Competition @ HSBC (RPMC@HSBC) and (2) Rotman International Trading Competition @ HSBC (RITC@HSBC).

Another competition was the international Robotics competition (ARC), which was held in Egypt - organized by the Academy of Scientific Research and Technology, in cooperation with the Innovation Complex in Borg El Arab represented by the Etisal Association, the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, the Egyptian-Japanese University of Science and Technology, and the International University of El Alamein. This competition featured 74 teams and looked to spread robot building technology to professionals in the region.

Al-Arish University in North Sinai, Egypt, held its first Young Researchers Conference under the title of "Sustainable Development in Sinai - Reality and Hope". At the same time, the Suez Canal University announced that it will hold its tenth version of the conference, titled "Horizons of Scientific Research and the New Republic", to be held in early March 2023. The conference will be dedicated for topics such as sustainable development, climate change, green economy, global food security challenges, efficient resource management, innovation and entrepreneurship, digital transformation, Healthcare Quality Management, Women's Empowerment, and Humanities.



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

There were also a number of initiatives aimed at enhancing the level of inclusiveness in education. For that, UN Women launched a game application called "WeRise", developed by more than a 100 young volunteers from six regional countries.

WeRise, available in English and Arabic, is an "edutainment" app, featuring many games that will allow players to learn about gender equality in various fields, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. They can also access interactive blogs and engage in discussions about gender equality.

Tadamon facilitated the implementation of a number of education-related projects, supported by the Islamic Development Bank Group (IsDB). The programs contributed to mitigating the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth in Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq by supporting vulnerable youth, including refugees and women, with higher education scholarships, promoting entrepreneurship, matching young people to jobs, and supporting SMEs.

In Palestine, the Fahmawi Youth Movement organized a book exchange project for the second year in a row to help families ahead of the new academic year. The "My Book is Your Book 2" Project, based on the exchange of books and various academic supplies, received donations from people in the community center.

There were also two notable endeavors in Egypt. For example, the Youth Leaders and Technical Education Foundation launched an initiative to support girls and young women in receiving access to technical education. Further, the Ministry of Youth and Sports established a center for speech and skills development within the Sohag Youth Center. This center is meant to help people with autism, speech delay and challenges, and ADHD.



STUDENT ACTIVISM

While some efforts looking to widen the inclusivity of education, Taliban is preventing girls in Afghanistan from acquiring university education.

In response to this discriminatory decision, young people in Iraq and in Tunisia condemned this decision and demonstrated their support for Afghani women in the face of the oppressive regime.

A number of students in Iraq and in Tunisia criticized the decision, stressing that it does not only target education, but it also targets the role of Afghan women in general. It is an attempt to marginalize the role of women and ignore society. The students emphasized the necessity of continuing the protests, strikes, and demands to reverse this unjust decision.

In Lebanon, the Progressive Youth Organization and the Progressive Meeting of University Professors protested the state's failure to carry out its duties towards the Lebanese university's budget, which became unable to meet its logistical needs.

The protest called on the government to save the Mutual Fund, which secures health care and adequate social benefits for all university professors, in light of the worsening economic and financial situation. Several efforts in Jordan looked to raise youth's awareness of their political rights, in line with the Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System. Such efforts signify importance of the involvement of young men and women in the political reform process as a basis for its success and progress, as the country is moving steadily into its second centenary.

Academics and students affirmed their complete commitment to the system for regulating the practice of student partisan activities in higher education institutions for the year 2022, which aims to encourage students to engage in political parties. They indicated that they will abide by the provisions of the system in terms of raising awareness, educating, and defining the electoral process, and encouraging each other to participate in the elections of student councils, unions, associations and student clubs.

They indicated their commitment to holding partisan activity in the places and times approved by the provisions of this system, and to obtain written approval from the Deanship of Student Affairs before announcing or holding any partisan activity, stressing the importance of preserving the safety of the facilities of higher education institutions. At the same time, since the regulation grants full powers to the deans of student affairs to approve student activities on campus, it may hinder the goals of youth political engagement.

Many partisan and political parties have called for the need to develop common concepts and understandings between university administrations, student groups, and partisan activists about the next stages.



SPOTLIGHT CHALLENGES IN EDUCATION IN THE MENA REGION





Educating youth in the MENA region in a manner that facilitates positive transformation is rather lacking. Developing proper systems that nurture and develop well-rounded individuals will allow the MENA region to witness what has been seen by many as impossible: proper inclusion and realization of youth in political, social, and economic life.

While this could be seen as a long-term endeavor, a lot of short-term actions can be taken to ensure that the process is on the right track. Enhancing the educational system should come first.

After all, education can be considered as the basis of everything. Not just school-level education, but the entire educational ecosystem including media, laws, and culture require immediate attention. What comes with steady education reform will yield the small, short-term wins that will allow for the continuation of development.

The current educational systems in the region can only be described as ineffective and outdated, as it prepares task-oriented workers who are presumably good at following tasks, given the emphasis on memorization in the current education systems.

A study conducted by WeForum concludes that that 65% of current elementary school students will be working in jobs that do not exist now and 85 million jobs will be replaced by robots in the next 5 years. The sad reality is that our schools and universities are oblivious to such a major change in the job market. A report by Aljazeera suggests that many universities in the MENA region have in fact canceled programs over the past 20 years that proved to be massively important nowadays.

Career guidance as part of the educational system is of utmost importance. Education should be an ever-evolving sector that allows for the adaptation to the market requirements as well as the expansion to meet the ever-changing technologies. This system should allow students to learn how to think and not what to think. They need to be exposed to a variety of career options as early as middle school so that they are able to develop their capacities in the certain directions they prefer throughout high school and then university or vocational schools.

When it comes to reforming the educational sector, it is important to maintain that such changes reflect positively on all. Governments need to stop looking at the problem as a class problem. Media, laws, and culture make up a stark percentage of what an education reform should be universally concerned with.

Addressing this as a class problem, assuming that the rich needs less attention when it comes to educational reforms will simply weaken the attempt at change. Policymakers addressing this effort ought to view the educational system as requiring complete overhaul – including both private and public schools, starting with financial access and the curricula, simultaneously.

When it comes to the curricula, the reform must be normative in a way that teachers are transformed into instructors rather than lecturers. Instruction, rather than lecturing, will develop generations of young individuals who are critical thinkers, problem solvers, team workers, and time managers – which are all integral skills for the job market, and entrepreneurship.

At the same time, curricula reform should not disregard social values that have long been a part of the cultures in the region, but it should rather seek to reform, enhance, and employ them toward build generations of socially responsible individuals – those who support one another and believe in the benefit of the many over the benefit of the one.

As such, finding that perfect balance between maintaining the strong value systems while simultaneously employing aspects to create positive social change will be no easy feat. However, it can reflect positively on society as a whole.

Finally, media literacy should become a part of the educational and political system. Adding media classes to all educational levels especially social media is of utmost importance. With the world being a click away, youth across the MENA region need to learn how to utilize such privilege as compared to previous generations. Knowledge is at the tip of their fingers, and with that comes great responsibility.

This is only the beginning, for there are numerous challenges to reforming the education sector. Nevertheless, in order to ensure the effective realization of our young people's capacities, governments and multilateral organizations ought to turn their attention to this matter.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Inequalities in access to education was somewhat prevalent in some countries around the region, particularly in Palestine, where young Palestinians continue to suffer from the occupation's restrictions on opportunities and on mobility.

There also 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.



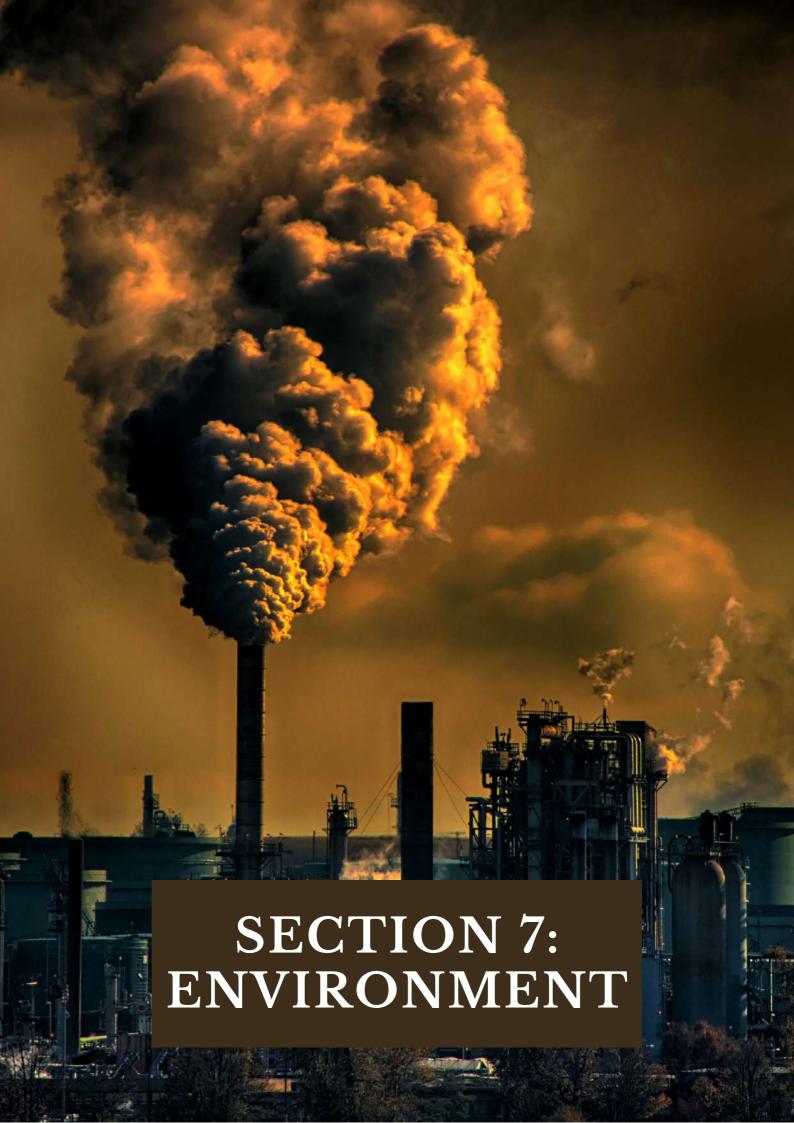
The sources reviewed indicate that students in the MENA region have the interest in and the capacity to assume a central role in social accountability efforts:

• 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.

Special education is an integral area that requires proper intervention. Facilities and personnel need enhancements. Unfortunately, there was a decline in coverage on special education in 2022 compared to 2021, which could entail that this important area may not be deemed a priority by governments and nongovernment organizations. However, there are some important interventions that are needed in the short term:

- 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.





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INTRODUCTION

Coverage of the youth role within environment-related efforts declined over the duration of 2022, compared to 2021. That is not to say that youth did not play an important role because they certainly carried through their tremendous efforts from the previous year. MENAACTION's "What IF Youth Led the MENA Region" 2022 Survey found that 49.8% of youth surveyed believe that protecting the environment should be given priority, even if it causes slower economic growth and some loss of jobs, which signifies an important ripe environment for the engagement of youth in climate action.

To maximize on this opportunity, government institutions and nongovernment organizations ought to widen the level and type of youth engagement in such efforts. This is because 2022 featured more emphasis on holding environment-oriented conferences and less interventions on the ground than expected. As such, supporting youth-led local efforts ought to be prioritized, as they proved effective in raising public awareness and achieving tremendous impacts on the ground.

Throughout 2022, MENAACTION monitored and reviewed a total of 81 sources, which discussed aspects pertaining to environmental risks; institutional responses; COP27; and Youth-Led Initiatives and Climate Action.

A TOTAL OF

81

SOURCES WERE REVIEWED

ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS

Unlike 2021, this past year featured minimal discussions on major environmental risks such as droughts, wildfires, and more surprisingly – food insecurity, especially given the growing concerns of the implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the global food supply chains.

In fact, expert Hafed Al-Ghwell indicates that implications of global warming in the Arab world have been mostly dismissed, in a problematic response, particularly that widespread zones of the region are becoming increasingly uninhabitable.

Al-Ghwell discusses the various negative impacts that will continue to worsen amid policymakers failure to acknowledge and act on this imminent challenge. He also indicates the region must implement holistic policies that include empowered citizens, an engaged civil society, and local institutions, rather than simply throwing money at a looming crisis.

Further, Brookings published a report discussing how governments in the MENA region can respond to the challenges of climate change, indicating that such challenges may lead to armed conflicts, migration movements, and rising poverty rates. The report suggests that governments need to rethink how they tackle climate change, including turning more to digitalization which could cut global emissions by 15%.

Moreover, according to a global poll conducted by UNICEF, 44% of youth in the region say the impacts of climate change are changing their views on starting a family, as 31% said they had less food to eat and 35% said they were finding it increasingly difficult to access clean water. Further, 70% said they have considered moving to another country or city because of the effects of climate change.

In eastern Algeria, wildfires were becoming more frequent. In response, the Algerian Medical Network's (AMN) Facebook page posted about the urgency of the situation and identify the needs, especially in medicines for severe burns. AMN uses social networks to ask Algerian associations based in Paris and other regions of France to provide logistical assistance for the centralization of donations before their transport to Algeria.



INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

Governments and local and international organizations carried out several initiatives and implemented many activities that served to raise awareness, involve individuals in climate action, and find durable sustainable solutions to the environmental risks facing the region.

When it comes to region-wide efforts, UNICEF's Regional Office for the MENA region and the UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States developed the Young Climate Activists Toolkit, which aims to equip young people with the knowledge, tools, and resources that enables their participation in regional and global youth climate action.

The toolkit was developed in consultation with young climate activists from around the region to ensure an inclusive and a well-informed framework. The Toolkit is tailored to offer clear, concise, and easily understandable information on climate action to prepare youth for improved participation in climate action and debate.

In addition to that, the UN Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN), SAFEEM, and Seedstars held the Youth Climate Innovation Lab, a fast-paced three-day event, during which youth innovators with the support of climate technology, entrepreneurship, and business experts, explored design thinking tools to ideate and validate innovative solutions for climate mitigation and adaptation within selected sectors and technology fields.

Further, the Global Land Forum was held in the MENA region for the first time, bearing the title "Towards Solutions to Climate Change Crises" and featured over 800 participants and speakers from 78 countries who discussed critical issues related to climate change, land and government, and food security. Young climate activists also participated in the first ever Middle East and North Africa Climate Week, MENACW 2022, in Dubai, to discuss ways to enhance meaningful youth engagement and participation in climate policy making and action in the region.

Another notable event was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Arab Youth Council on Climate Change and HSBC to implement a "Sustainability Education" initiative. This initiative is aimed to train higher education students in the region on climate action and develop their capacities and skills in relation to sustainability and innovative climate solutions.

Under this partnership, the two parties cooperate to implement an interactive curriculum project available to all students of universities, colleges and higher institutes to support the mechanisms for creating qualitative solutions to confront these challenges and advance the UN sustainability goals and the Paris Agreement and the COP26 climate summit.



Zooming in on country-specific efforts, Egyptian government and local organizations carried out several efforts in anticipation of and stemming from hosting the 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27). Such efforts included, but not limited to, the following:

- The first ever Middle East and North Africa Humanitarian Leadership Conference was held in Egypt in March. The conference, organized by International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS), addressed key humanitarian concerns in the region and discussed enhanced collaboration to alleviate human suffering and support those affected by climate change and related disasters, conflicts and health emergencies.
- The College of Agriculture organized the fourth student conference "Agriculture Youth and Future Challenges", which discussed 5 areas: agriculture, nanotechnology, food security, wastewater treatment, the New Delta project, and renewable energy its production and rationalization of consumption. Mansoura University also organized the eleventh Young Researchers Forum entitled "The Role of Scientific Research in Achieving Sustainable Development" The forum featured 42 research papers presented by a number of researchers discussing climate challenges, sustainability of water resources, renewable energy, and agriculture, among others.

- The Climate Change Festival was held in May. The activities aimed to spread environmental awareness and climate issues among youth, with the participation of 853 young men and women, who were urged to carry out climate-related activities.
- The Youth Directorate in Beheira launched a training camp for youth in September under the title "Green Future", and it looked to empower the role of youth toward achieving the sustainable development goals.
- The Ministry of Youth and Sports and UNICEF launched the Climate and Environment Caravan, which looked to empower young people to lead climate change issues through raising their awareness and encouraging them to participate in discussing climate change issues and proposing innovative solutions.
- The American University in Cairo hosted the Egyptian version of the Youth Conference in October. It discussed topics related to the environment, climate justice, climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation, climate change and agriculture, climate change and health, climate change and gender, climate policy and advocacy, sustainable development goals, and environmental policy.

In the UAE, the Youth Council of the Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA), in cooperation with the Federal Youth Authority, organized a workshop titled "The Role of Youth in Achieving Carbon Neutrality." The workshop discussed the role of youth in climate action and the future skills they need to be able to address climate change issues. Further, DEWA's Innovation Center trained 25 young leaders within its "Clean Energy Youth Program", to develop their knowledge and expertise in the field of clean and renewable energy. Upon completion, the graduates presented innovative projects in 15 different fields, including engineering and science.





CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES (COP27)

Egypt held the 27th edition of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) in November 2022. Ahead of the conference, government and nongovernment groups implemented several initiatives, as the conference was seen as a monumental step in Egypt's role in combatting climate change.

Looking at some of these initiatives, Egyptian Youth Council launched MENA's first agenda on climate change in cooperation with Friedrich Naumann Foundation. Titled "Dealing and Adapting to Climate Change and Mitigating its Negative Effects", it featured topics on energy efficiency, eco-friendly technologies, measures to mitigate the effects of global warming, and applications of environmental standards and laws.

Many efforts included young Egyptian expatriates abroad. For example, the Ministry of State for Immigration and Egyptians Abroad Affairs met with young Egyptians studying abroad, who specialize in the field of renewable and green energy and green hydrogen to discuss their participation in COP27.

The Ministry acquired ideas from the students, particularly in relation to clean and renewable energy and green hydrogen.

Youth also played an important role in planning the conference, as the government stakeholders relied on young volunteers. The Ministry of Environment worked closely with the Ministry of Youth to recruit an adequate number of youth volunteers to facilitate the event.

In the UAE, on the sidelines of the MENA Climate Week 2022, the Federal Youth Authority, the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, and the Arab Youth Council for Climate Change organized a youth circle titled "The Road to COP27 and COP28", which discussed approaches to empower young people and enhance their participation in shaping and implementing future directions as a strategic priority for the UAE.

The Arab Youth Center also announced the launch of its training program "The Training Forum of the Arab Youth Council on Climate Change." The training looked to develop qualitative climate initiatives and projects to enhance the contribution of Arab climate action to international efforts.



Many efforts were also carried out during the conference itself and on its sidelines. For example, a panel discussion titled "the importance of climate action" was held as part of the second day of the Saudi Green Initiative Forum, organized on the sidelines of COP27. The session covered the importance of increasing mobility to decarbonize the region, the role of finance in enhancing climate action, and the necessity of joint regional and international cooperation to address the challenge of climate change.

Further, the Youth for Sustainability initiative "Masdar" hosted a series of events on the sidelines of COP27, which brought together elite sector leaders and decision-makers as well as students and young professionals, with the aim of enabling youth to participate in climate action. Through a workshop organized by COP27, a group of young people from the UAE, Africa, and Europe gathered to work on developing sustainable and innovative solutions that serve communities.

Young people were praised by many leaders, as their efforts made COP27 a success. There were also some efforts that aimed to sustain the momentum emanating from the conference. One of those efforts was a reforestation project implemented by the Volunteering Club at the Kafr Ghannam Youth Center, to combat climate changes and environmental pollution.



YOUTH-LED INITIATIVES AND CLIMATE ACTION

MENAACTION's 2022 "What IF Youth Led the MENA Region" Survey found that 31.2% of the respondents reported that they have taken or regularly take actions out of concern for climate change.

Further, 49.6% of the respondents stated that they are becoming more interested in taking actions, which shows a tremendous level of civic responsibility, especially when combined with those who stated that they do take regular action.

While civic responsibility is not entirely prevalent across the region, when given the chance, youth demonstrated that they are prepared and willing to take action on matters of interest for the general population.

Over the duration of 2022, MENAACTION monitored a number of youth-led environment-focused initiatives. the Youth for Sustainability Platform announced the launch of the "SkillUp" mobile application with the aim of providing one million young people with the knowledge and skills needed to support efforts to combat climate change within their communities, schools, and workplaces by 2030.

It looks to enable such efforts through providing flexible, self-manageable tools to develop the necessary skills that support the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

Additionally, the European Union's Clymethon Youth Initiative honored a number of youth climate projects and innovations. The first-place winning team was honored for the project to convert gasoline-powered cars into electricity in order to reduce carbon emissions.

The team was able to reduce the costs associated with converting traditional cars into electric cars in attempt to design an environmentally friendly project by using reused tools to modify traditional cars into hybrid electric cars.

Also in Egypt, a group of young Egyptians launched the Trees without Disasters initiative, in line with a national campaign that seeks to plant 100 million trees. It is worth noting that the initiative includes pruning and recycling waste along with educating citizens about the importance of the trees planted. Similarly, a group of young people in Misan organized an afforestation campaign entitled "We Make it Green", with the aim of increasing green spaces in the governorate. The campaign included the cultivation of more than 40 different plants in a school in Misan to increase green spaces and eliminate desertification.



Along the same lines, a young Jordanian managed to grow vegetables without water, as he resorts instead to the use of volcanic stones, which are able to keep moisture and are used as an alternative to soil. The initiative's significance is massive for Jordan, the third poorest country in water. Yet, the young man explains that he still needs government support in order to continue his project.

Further, the Sheikh Hussein Youth Center in the Northern Jordan Valley organized an agricultural environmental camp to raise awareness of the importance of agriculture as one of the tools of food security and self-sufficiency. The participants also learned about the importance of agriculture and its economic, social, and environmental outcomes. Further, the Qafqafa Youth Center implemented the Cleaner Forests initiative in the de Gaulle forests in the Asfour area.

Moreover, the Ma'an Youth Society for the Conservation of the Environment celebrated the "World Wetlands Day 2022", mobilizing its efforts to enhance public awareness of the importance of wetlands for the environment and their vital functions for the planet. The celebration included participants from universities and schools, who engaged in voluntary campaigns to preserve the environment, manage natural resources sustainably, and take urgent action on climate change to support the needs of the present and future generations.

In Morocco, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group praised the efforts of Moroccan youth in issues of environment, development, and climate, highlighting "the ambitious Moroccan program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and implement sectoral adaptation strategies to conserve natural resources." This is because Moroccan youth have been playing an increasingly big role in climate advocacy in the country. The UN initiative named "From Milan to Glasgow: Moroccan Youth Leaders in the Spotlight" celebrated 5 initiatives led by the youth in Morocco.

SPOTLIGHT

MIDDLE EAST'S RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS TREADING BACKWARDS





Tensions flared on the eve of the World Environment Day 2022, as Hezbollah's deputy leader Naim Qassem proclaimed their readiness to use force against Israel if the Lebanese government said that Israel is violating Lebanon's water rights.

Reports over the weekend suggest that the Israeli Navy was preparing for a potential Hezbollah attack in the Karish gas field.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the World Environment Day, there is no doubt that the MENA region is at a much worse environmental reality than ever before. With a 1.5 degrees Celsius increase since the 1950s, according to EcoPeace, the prevalent challenges of mal-governance and socioeconomic inequalities are likely to be exacerbated by climate change.

Droughts and wildfires are two of some natural disasters that are slowly yet unfortunately becoming a norm in the region, amplifying critical concerns over water and food security.

The European Center for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) believes North Africa in particular is expected to witness more intensive and more widespread wildfires amid rising temperatures and longer droughts.

On the other side of the region, Iraqi pastoralists are forced to leave behind their traditions in search for a more sustainable livelihood.

Severe droughts have affected near 18% of the Iraqi population, resulting in decreased water supply and quality and plummeting crop and livestock production, according to a report by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in late 2021.

Iraq's western neighbor, Jordan, also faces a grim water security crisis. Long reliant on rainfall and groundwater, the influx of Syrian refugees over the past decade has been depleting Jordan's already fragile water infrastructure.

Nevertheless, Jordan's bilateral agreement with Israel, brokered by the UAE, has not resonated well with Jordanians. The agreement, which would see Jordan exchange 200 megawatts of electricity to Israel for 200 million cubic meters of desalinated water every year, has generally been presented as a breakthrough for Jordan's water crisis yet failed to fall in tune with Jordanians' interests – heavily influenced by their supranational pan-Arab and pro-Palestine identities.



It was a déjà vu for Jordanians who saw their government sign a natural gas agreement with Israel a few years prior despite massive public scrutiny. They now see both their water and power bills become more expensive in spite of government assurances that both deals, separately, were in fact brokered to provide better quality services, at lower rates.

Was Israel Jordan's only choice in both cases? Perhaps it was, but probably it was not. Why would Jordan, then, risk public dissent, especially considering that Israel is known for extracting water from Palestinian territories, the Dead Sea, and the Jordan River?

Finances and geography might have played a massive role. But if prices were not going to decrease as is the case nowadays, then such agreements could have, potentially, been better positioned with Iraq, Egypt, and the Gulf States, where Jordanians would have probably been less dissatisfied with price hikes.

Regardless of the second party, such agreements are anything but sustainable. These nearsighted agreements can only address immediate need without much consideration for the future, as the resources are either scarce or depleting. As such, there are several measures to be taken immediately.

First and foremost, these agreements must be replaced with – or at least accompanied by – much more sustainable measures, including reusing, recycling, and desalination measures and infrastructural development to make use of every cubic meter of rainfall the region receives.

At the same time, both public and private sectors must move toward much more environmentally friendly production schemes. Governments should also provide incentives for businesses and households that utilize greener and renewable energy sources, as opposed to penalizing them with unnecessary levies.

Second, environmental public policy making needs to be much more inclusive of youth, who tend to be more vigilant, concerned, and action-oriented when it comes to climate action. In a survey conducted by MENAACTION in the spring of 2022, 91 percent of youth surveyed from 14 Arab states indicated that climate change was an important issue to them personally and 31 percent have taken or regularly take action out of concern for climate change – coupled with 50 percent who are becoming increasingly interested.

Third, as the world proceeds toward the post-coronavirus era, it is important that we learn from the positive lessons presented by multilateral and cross-sectoral cooperation. For that to be a success, though, it is important to place all cards on the table and ensure that spoilers cease to inhibit mutual benefits, whether by extraction of scarce and depleting resources or by threatening use of violence.

Scarce resources can incite new conflicts and exacerbate current ones – with the involvement of state and nonstate actors alike. This can possibly go beyond competition over the depleting resources and more likely center itself over strategic areas that can give the upper hand. Ultimately, we should certainly be concerned over continued destabilizing behavior in the Levantine Sea, which can slowly turn into the South China Sea.

* This article was originally written by Mohammed Abu Dalhoum and published on Arab News





Despite the lack of emphasis on food security in the region even with the implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this remains a major challenge that governments and nongovernment organizations have to address.

- 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.

Wildfires remained prevalent in North Africa and experts still 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

International support to the region remained at a good level throughout 2022, but it seems that such support was decreasing to grassroots organizations and instead focused toward governments. Given the success of youth-led initiatives and local civil society organizations:

• Regional governments should rethink how they tackle climate change, with emphasis on countering measures such as turning more to digitalization which could cut global emissions by 15%.

- 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, workshops, 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.
- Youth should be placed at the center when it comes to leading climate action. 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.
- Youth should not be left alone, for climate action must be a collective effort, involving governments, civil society, international organizations, academics and experts, and private sector the latter, especially big businesses, ought to revitalize their efforts by upholding their end of the collective action through increasing their sustainable development efforts in the form of corporate social responsibility projects, partnerships, and commitment to green energy.





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