

Highlights

Youth at the Centre of Government Action

A Review of the Middle East and North Africa

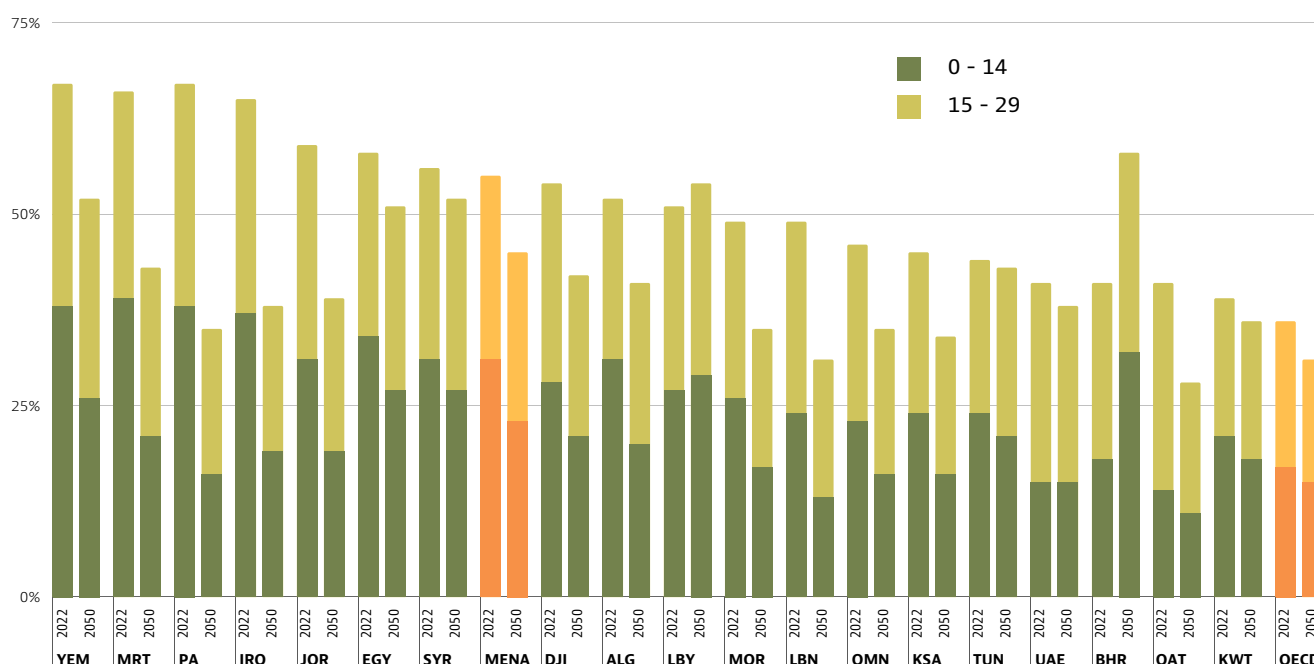
Highlights

Young people (aged under 30) constitute more than half (55%) of the population across MENA, compared with 36% of the population across OECD countries, and have demonstrated resilience to shocks and led positive change in their communities. However, while challenges vary significantly across the region, youth unemployment rates are among the highest in the world, young people tend to express low trust in public institutions, and nearly four in ten live in fragile and conflicted-affected areas. The COVID-19 crisis has further laid bare the structural challenges young people across the MENA region face in their transition to an autonomous life. Youth employment declined by 7.5% in 2020, access to education was disrupted for 110

million pupils and students, and – as in other regions – spaces for young people to form social connections and skills were no longer accessible due to lockdown and confinement measures.

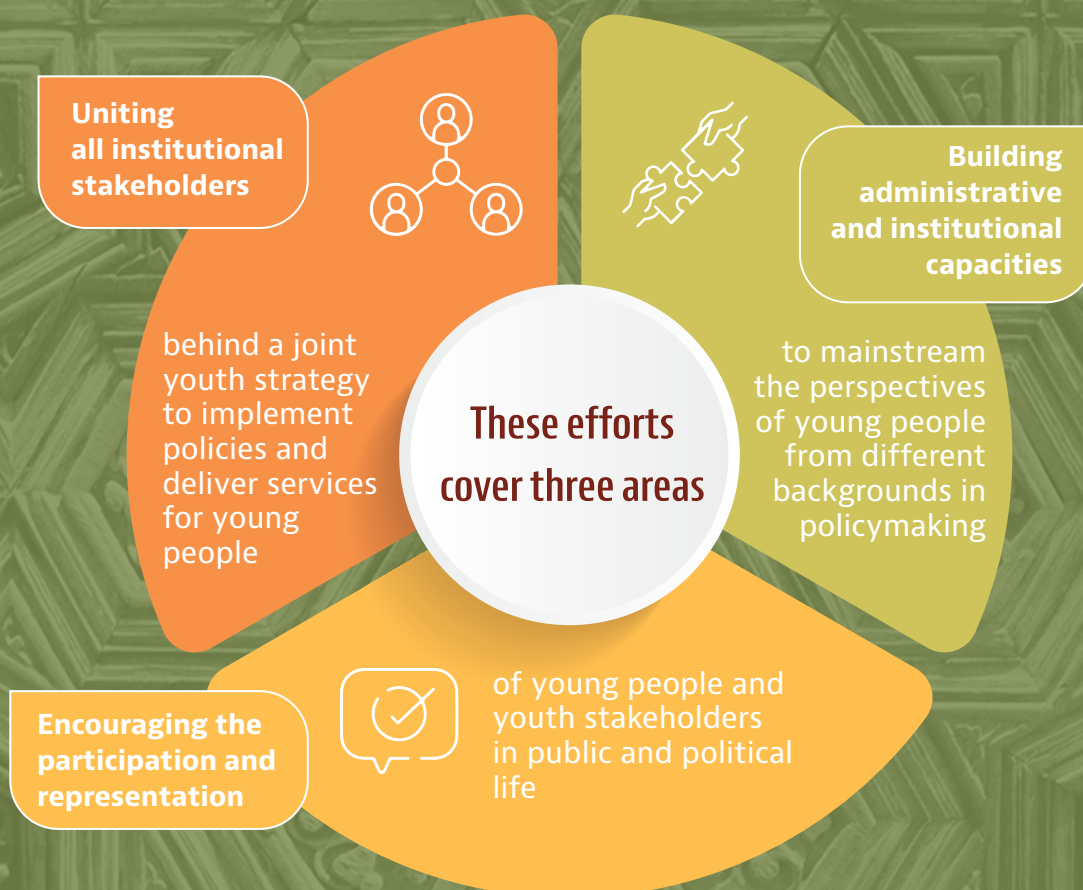
In a context of already low levels of trust in government among young people, the implications of the crisis may undermine not only young people's future aspirations and opportunities, but also societal and economic progress across the region more broadly. These challenges have underscored the need to place the needs of young people at the centre of an inclusive and resilient recovery.

Figure 1. Share of young people as part of the total population, 2022 and 2050 (projections)



Source: OECD calculations based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, custom data acquired via website.

This highlights document presents key policy insights and recommendations from the OECD report *Youth at the Centre of Government Action: A Review of the Middle East and North Africa*. The report analyses the current governance arrangements and practices across 10 public administrations in the MENA region to deliver more integrated, participatory and inclusive policies and services to young people and build their trust in public institutions.



The report presents findings from responses to the *OECD Youth Governance Survey* of the public administrations of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. The report is part of the Programme of Work 2021-2022 of the OECD and of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme in support of public sector efficiency in the MENA region. In line with the strategic priorities of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme and

the OECD Public Governance Committee, it helps identify key issues and lessons learnt to strengthen governance arrangements to create better opportunities for young people in the MENA region. The report is informed by the *OECD Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People* (2022). It is delivered in the context of the regional project *COVID-19 Response and Recovery in the MENA region*, financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in Italy.

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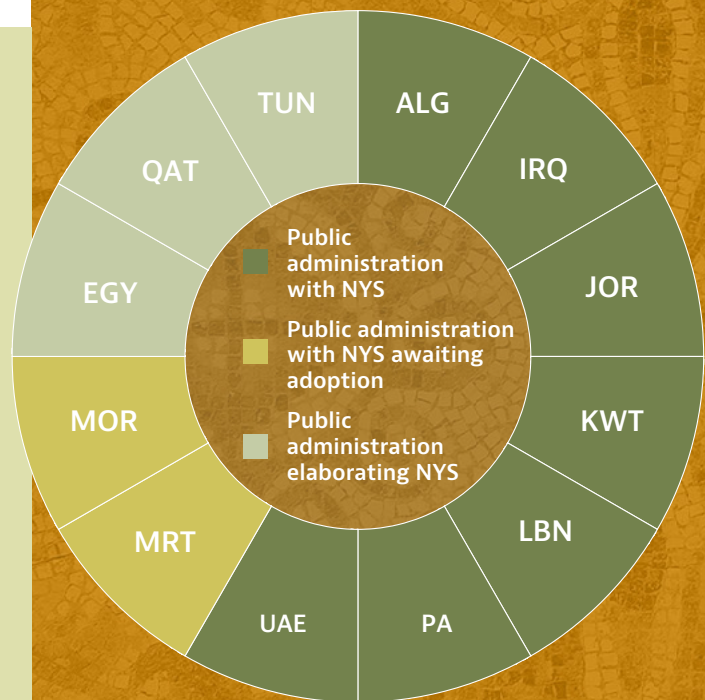
A joint vision for policies and services for young people of all backgrounds

At least seven administrations in the MENA region have adopted national youth strategies to promote a cross-sectoral approach in support of young people. While national youth strategies have become more common, implementation challenges risk limiting their impact. There remains a need for more participatory approaches in policy design and implementation, strengthening administrative capacities in the lead government entity and providing sufficient funding to support their implementation at central and subnational levels.

To support the design and implementation of an integrated and cross-sectoral approach to youth policy, administrations could consider:

- Clearly defining the responsibilities and mandates of state and non-state stakeholders working with and for young people;
- Developing youth policy that is evidence-based, transparent, participatory, inclusive and cross-sectoral, supported by political commitment, adequate resources, and effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms;
- Consider designing youth strategies at the appropriate level(s) of administration that take a comprehensive and integrated approach to improving young people's social and economic outcomes, as well as their civic and public participation;
- Creating mechanisms for young people and youth-led organisations to support the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of youth policy; and
- Systematically gathering data and indicators disaggregated by age, gender and all other relevant characteristics across all policy and service areas to provide services and support to young people living in vulnerable and marginalised circumstances.

Figure 2. Public administrations in the MENA region with a national youth strategy or elaborating one



Source: OECD Youth Governance Survey, interviews and desk research (updated as of June 2022).

Figure 3. Share of young people (aged 18-34) working in the entity in charge of youth affairs in selected MENA administrations and OECD average, 2021 or latest available

*Note: The table shows the share of young people aged between 18 and 34, working in the ministry in charge of youth affairs as a percentage of total staff, disaggregated by sex.
Source: OECD Youth Governance Survey*



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Ensuring public administrations deliver for young people from different backgrounds

Although most public administrations in the MENA region have created a ministry of youth (often combined with the sports portfolio), limited institutional and administrative capacities at national and sub-national levels are a key challenge to implement more integrated and inclusive measures. In terms of the budget allocated to the ministries in charge of youth affairs, survey results suggest that these resources constitute a small portion of the overall public budget, remaining at or significantly below 1% for the majority of administrations for which information is available. Moreover, co-ordination across different institutional and non-institutional stakeholders is often weak. There is also potential to apply public management tools to mainstream the perspectives of young people across all policy areas, based on age-disaggregated evidence, such as in rulemaking and the allocation of public resources.

The report also finds that the share of young people working in the entity in charge of youth affairs differs widely across the region, suggesting that internship, graduate and mentorship programmes in the public sector are not yet systematically used to attract and retain young talent.

To mainstream the perspectives of young people from different backgrounds in policy making, administrations could consider:

- Providing adequate human and financial resources to institutional stakeholders at all levels to design and deliver youth policies, services and programmes;
- Establishing institutional mechanisms and incentives for horizontal and vertical co-ordination to ensure the coherent delivery of youth policies, services and programmes;
- Mainstreaming the perspectives of young people and monitoring and evaluating policy outcomes on young people more systematically by collecting and using age-disaggregated data and consider applying public management tools, including regulatory impact assessments and public budgeting tools; and
- Promoting the representation of young people in the public sector workforce, as well as inter-generational learning, by systematically monitoring age diversity and inclusion in the public sector workforce; adopting measures to proactively attract, develop and retain young talent including through effective on-boarding opportunities and dedicated graduate programmes; and implementing strategies to harness the benefits of a multigenerational workforce.

Regaining and retaining young people's trust through more inclusive participation and representation

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Across the MENA economies¹ surveyed in 2021 by the Arab Barometer, only 28% of young people aged 18-29 trusted their government and public institutions on average and, across the MENA economies² surveyed in the 2021 ASDA'A BCW Arab Youth Survey, only 49% of young people aged 18-24 think their public institutions have in place the right policies to address the issues most important to young people. Moreover, the participation of young people in public policy and their representation in state institutions remain limited: people aged under 40 represent only 16% of members of parliament in the MENA region on average compared to 22% across OECD countries, most of which have a significantly older population.

Most administrations in the MENA region set the voting at 18 years of age, similar to OECD countries. However, the age to run for public office varies more significantly across the MENA region, from 18 years of age to 35 years of age, compared to an average of 19.8 years across OECD governments. At the same time, young people in MENA participate in the public debate through non-institutionalised channels and contribute to community life, via civil society and volunteering activities, both online and offline.

¹ Survey responses collected across Algeria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia.

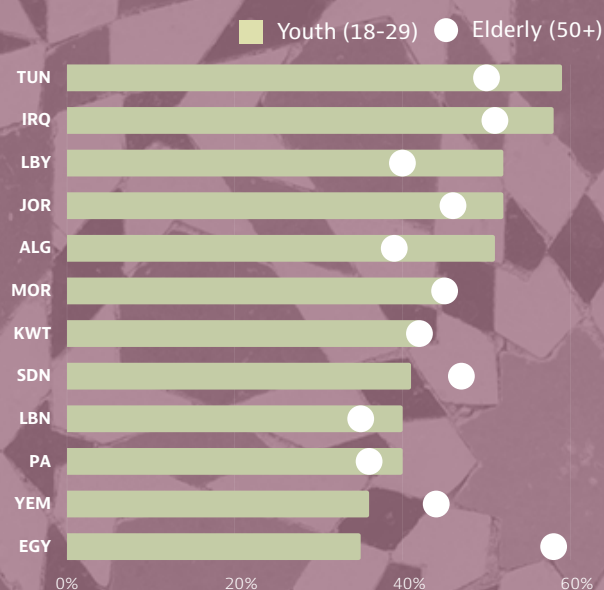
² Survey responses collected across Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Authority, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

To promote the participation and representation of young people and youth stakeholders in public life, in particular of young people from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, administrations could consider:

- Recognising and safeguarding youth rights and ensuring that young people are aware of them and exercise them, among others by building legal literacy, promoting civic and citizenship literacy and protecting civic space for young people;
- Delivering relevant, clear and accessible public communications targeted to young people, based on active listening and understanding of their concerns and interests, including through digital channels;
- Reviewing, where appropriate, voter registration rules and minimum age requirements for the participation in public and political life;
- Increasing age diversity in legislative and executive bodies, through regulatory or voluntary measures, such as youth quotas in legislative and/or executive bodies and through voluntary targets in political party lists as appropriate;

Figure 4. Interest in politics in the MENA region by age group, 2018-2019

Percentage of respondents reporting they are not interested at all in politics, by age, 2018-2019



Note: "SDN" refers to Sudan.

Source: Arab Barometer (2018), Arab Barometer Wave V, <https://www.arabbarometer.org/surveys/arab-barometer-wave-v/>. OECD (2019), *Society at a Glance 2019: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/soc_glance-2019-en.

Addressing ageism and stereotypes against young people in public and political life by running or supporting awareness-raising programmes;

- Engaging youth stakeholders in all stages of the policy-making cycle on all policy areas that are relevant for young people (including global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss and digital technology policy) both in-person and digitally, by creating or strengthening institutions such as youth advisory bodies, sharing information, conducting consultations and engaging youth councils at national and sub-national levels with methods tailored to their availability, needs and interests; and
- Encouraging civic engagement and participation among young people, including by promoting meaningful volunteer service and youth work through laws, strategies and programmes, at the appropriate level(s) of administration and adequate resources.



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