

Chapter 2

A glance at youth in the MENA region

This chapter takes a snapshot of the conditions for MENA youth to shape their future. It finds that the region's largest youth cohort of all times is unsatisfied with the delivery of public services and policies that do not adequately address their needs. Today, exclusive public governance arrangements present a major impediment, which, in the case they remain unaddressed, risk slowing down young people's transition to adulthood and active citizenship. With unemployment levels exceeding 30% in most countries and an even greater share of discouraged young men and women not in employment, education or training (NEET), MENA countries are deprived of a key source for their future social and economic development. Low levels of traditional forms of participation suggest that MENA youth are disappointed with the existing mechanisms to drive change.

Young men and women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region face considerable obstacles to participate in public, social and economic life. While some of these impediments are unique to the MENA region, others occur in the context of global transitions affecting the younger generation world wide (e.g. urbanisation; individualisation; knowledge society; digital media; increasing mobility). In principle, these transitions offer great opportunities to advance youth interests, in the absence of an enabling environment, however, youth are likely to be among the first who will be left behind.

Youth population and demographic development

This report will use the United Nations definition of “youth” covering those between 15 and 24 years of age. For some purposes, particularly the analysis of the school-to-work transition, this age range may be extended to include the 24-29 age group.

Table 2.1 presents the estimated youth population in the MENA countries involved in this study. It illustrates that the youth population in Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Tunisia, and Yemen exceeds 32 million using the 15-24 years of age definition. Under the broader definition, the population approaches 48 million. The table further shows that the youth shares in MENA countries are typically higher than the global averages, both as share among the total population and the working-age population. For instance, Yemen and the Palestinian Authority have much higher youth shares in the latter category, with more than 26% of the working-age population between the ages of 15 and 24, compared to a global average of 19%. Using the broader definition, young men and women present almost one-third of the working-age population in MENA countries.

Table 2.1. **The youth population in selected MENA countries, 2015**

Major area, region, country or area	Population in millions		Share of working-age population (15-64, %)		Share of total population (%)	
	15-24	15-29	15-24	15-29	15-24	15-29
Egypt	15.04	22.76	20.7	31.3	13.5	20.5
Libya	1.06	1.61	19.5	29.4	13.0	19.7
Morocco	6.03	8.94	19.8	29.4	13.5	20.1
Tunisia	1.77	2.78	17.5	27.5	12.3	19.3
Jordan	1.43	2.12	21.5	31.9	14.0	20.8
Palestinian Authority	1.02	1.38	26.3	35.8	16.2	22.0
Yemen	5.80	8.14	26.5	37.2	16.4	22.9
Total, study countries	32.15	47.73	21.3	31.6	14.0	20.7
World	1 190 548	1 803 003	18.7	28.4	13.4	20.3

Source: United Nations (2013), *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, DVD edition.

Figure 2.1 brings together the population pyramids for 1950, 2010 and 2050 projections. It illustrates that all study countries have experienced rapid population growth since 1950. Some countries are projected to see continued high rates of demographic expansion in the coming decades.

Figure 2.1. Population pyramids for selected MENA countries, 1950, 2010, and 2050

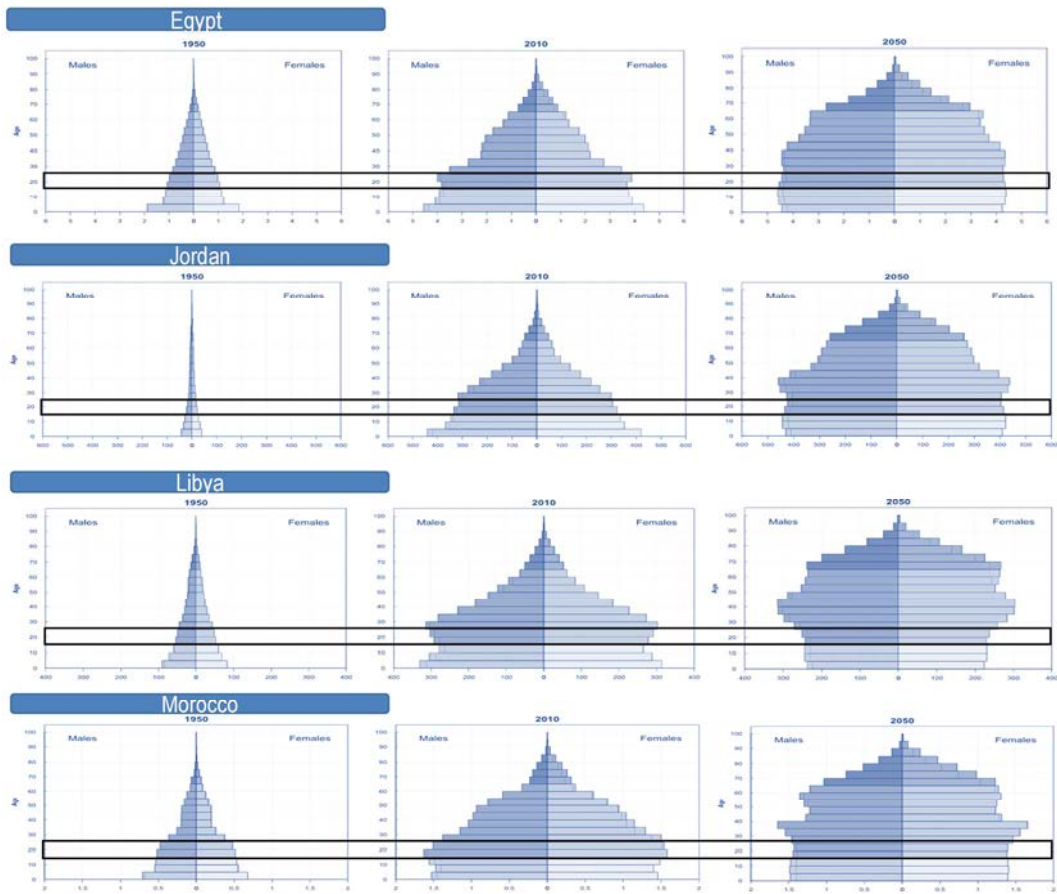
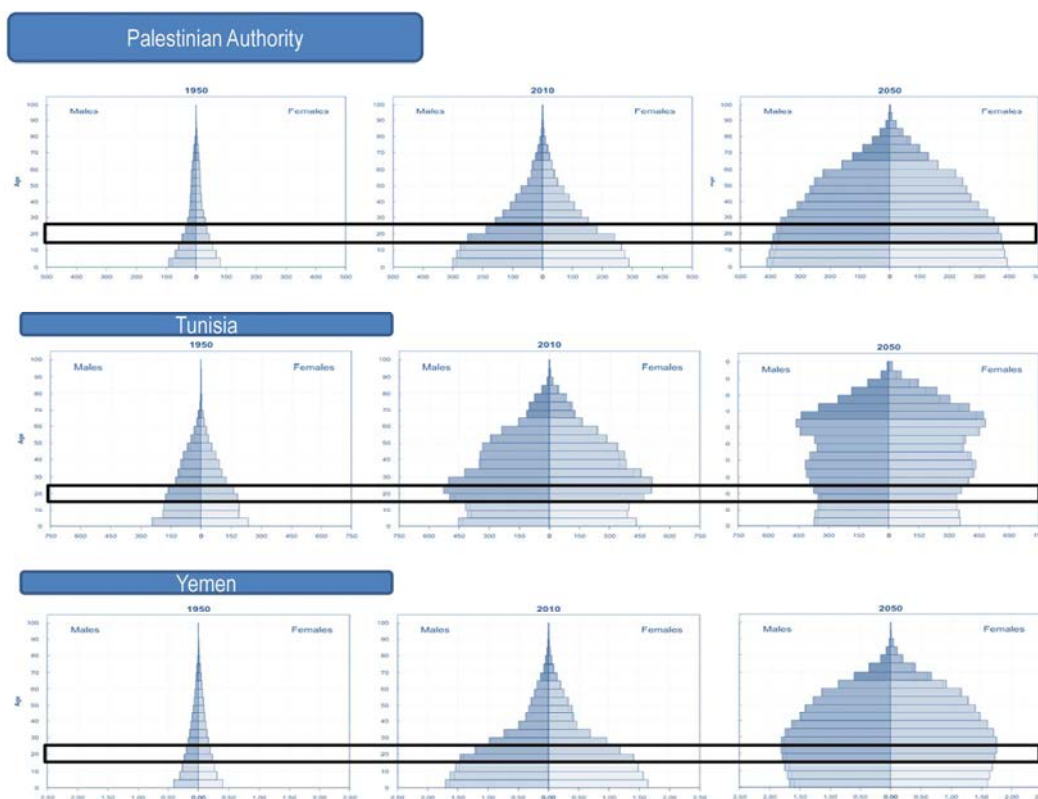


Figure 2.1. Population pyramids for selected MENA countries, 1950, 2010, and 2050 (*continued*)

Source: United Nations (2013), *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, DVD edition.

In OECD countries, rapid demographic changes have required an adaptation of government institutions and processes. The demographic situation in the MENA region calls for a thorough analysis of today's and the anticipated future demand of young people for public services, especially in areas such as education, health and finance, and eventually a more innovative approach to the design and delivery of public policies and services. Indeed, good public governance will be essential to meet the needs of the youth population who will shape the future of the region over the coming decades.

Challenges impeding young people's transition to adulthood

Governance affects all aspects of young people's life. The methods and routines used in the formulation of legal texts, the working of public institutions and the implementation of policies impact the opportunities in the social, economic and political sphere. Governance frameworks can drive or impede the well-being of youth.

In the MENA region, governance challenges are placing heavy burdens on the development of young men and women. These deficiencies result in such diverse drawbacks as heavy administrative burdens discouraging youth entrepreneurs from launching a start-up or the lack of public spaces dedicated to youth, however, this report suggests that they share a common root cause: exclusive public governance arrangements. A more detailed diagnosis of how exclusive governance frameworks lock out young men

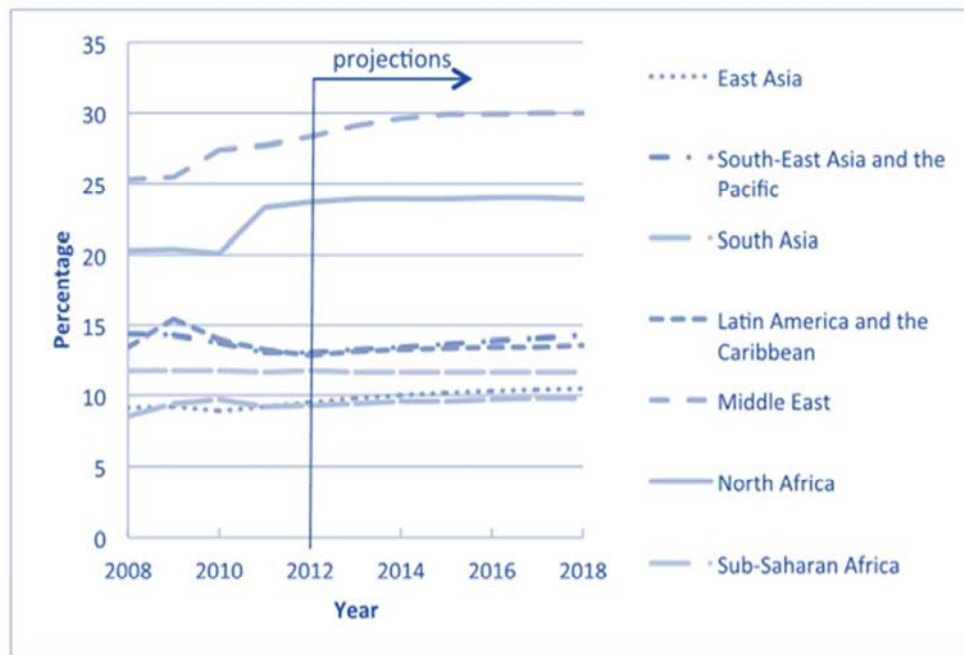
and women from engagement in different spheres of public life will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

High levels of youth unemployment and economic inactivity

Unemployment among MENA youth hits young women with a punch as found nowhere else in the world. This finding points to governance failures and traditional social norms which impede their economic integration. While shortcomings in the governance frameworks of MENA countries are certainly not the only factor causing high levels of youth unemployment, they are rather neglected in the public discourse about how to create a healthy environment for job creation. Figure 2.2 shows that the MENA youth are facing the highest youth unemployment levels in the world with the younger generation in the Middle East facing an even tougher situation compared to their peers in North Africa.

Figure 2.2. Youth unemployment rates by region, 2008-18

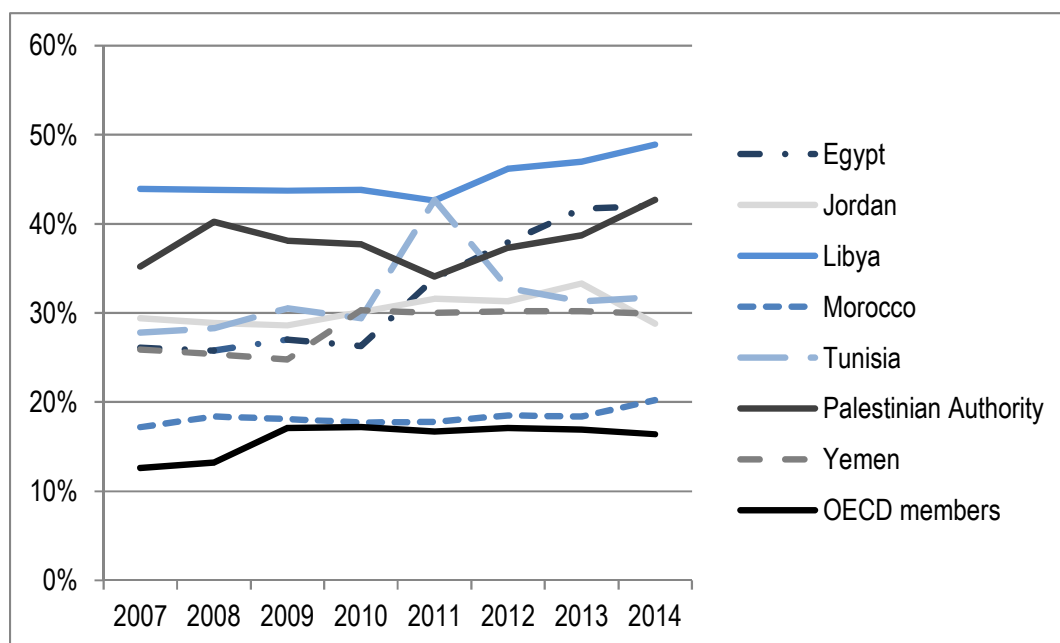
15-24 year-olds



Source: Assaad, Ragui and Deborah Levison (2013), “Employment for youth – A growing challenge for the global economy,” background research paper submitted to the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, May www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Assaad-Levison-Global-Youth-Employment-Challenge-Edited-June-5.pdf; ILO (2013), “Global employment trends: Recovering from a second jobs dip”, ILO, Geneva, Switzerland, www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_212423.pdf (accessed on 1 April 2016).

Figure 2.3 points to an upward trend in youth unemployment for most countries in recent years, in particular in Libya, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority. For Tunisia, the trend is more positive. After youth unemployment peaked at 43% in 2011, it decreased to 32% in 2014.

Figure 2.3. Youth unemployment in selected MENA countries, 2014



Source: OECD's own work based on World Bank (n.d.a), "Unemployment, youth total (percent of total labour force ages 15-24)", modeled ILO estimate (accessed on 10 April 2016).

While the youth unemployment rate is an important indicator to assess the economic activity of youth, it is not the most exact. Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) offers better insights into how well countries manage the transition between school and work as it takes into account the proportion of youth studying (OECD, 2015). It captures the percentage of discouraged young men and women who either lack the motivation or the opportunity to find a job or improve their skills. However, NEET data for MENA countries is still scarce. While around 15% of young people (aged 15-29) in OECD countries are not in education, employment or training (NEET), the Moroccan Ministry of Youth and Sports estimates that more than half of all young Moroccans are neither employed nor in education or training. Available statistics from the International Labour Organization (ILO) for NEET youth (aged 15-24) in 2013 suggests that massive differences exist in the activity levels of young men and women. In Egypt, 17% of young men, but nearly 41% of young women are considered NEET while in the Palestinian Authority, around 25% of young men, but 38% of young females are considered economically inactive. Evidence from a survey conducted in Morocco suggests that the main reason for the staggering number of inactive young females in the country is opposition of their husband or parents (EuroMed, 2015). The structural and cultural barriers to equal opportunities for young women in the MENA region will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Difficult transition from education into the job market

Formal education systems in MENA countries have been facing criticism for being unable to equip university graduates with the skills the private sector demands. In fact, well-educated graduates oftentimes face more difficulties in finding decent jobs than their peers without formal educational degrees. This finding highlights the mismatch between

the supply and demand of skills as well as the fact that MENA countries have been unable to create jobs for a new generation of highly skilled young graduates who expect a fair return on their investment in long periods of education.

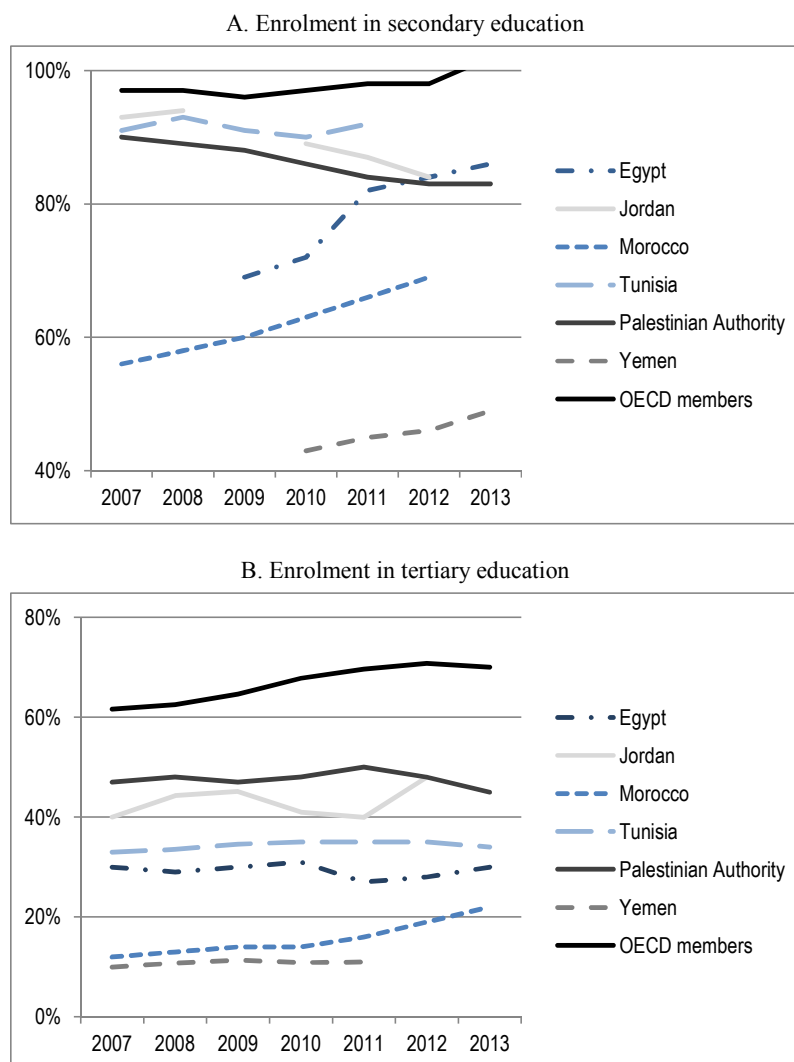
Figure 2.4 demonstrates that enrolment rates in all selected MENA countries are lagging behind those in OECD countries. Enrolment rates in secondary education vary between 83% and 91% in Tunisia, Jordan, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority, outnumbering Morocco (69%) and Yemen (47%). Despite significant progress in increasing the enrolment rates in Morocco over the last decade, 1.6 million young people in Morocco are still considered illiterate, of whom 70% live in rural areas, and the majority are women (EuroMed, 2015). With a view to enrolment in tertiary education, the figure shows similar results while the gap is considerably larger, both between MENA and OECD and among MENA countries. Recent years provide an uneven picture as enrolment rates for both secondary and tertiary education have fallen in some MENA countries while they have increased in others. These findings suggest that despite efforts to make education systems more inclusive, a significant share of young men and women still lacks access to basic education leaving them unprepared for participation in the labour market while highly skilled university graduates queue for economic opportunities.

Little weight in the political discourse and decision-making processes

In the selected MENA countries, the participation of young men and women in formal institutional political processes remains low. Indeed, their prominent role in the civil uprisings at the beginning of this decade did not result in greater involvement in forms of conventional participation, partly due to a lack of systematic efforts by governments to make them more accessible and appealing. Party affiliation is weak and low turnout levels for potential first-time voters reflect a disappointment with the existing structures and processes as they offer little prospect to drive change. Despite a pleasant engagement of MENA youth in civic activities and civil society organisations in some countries, youth representation in public consultations and fora with actual political weight tends to be marginal at best. The limited space for youth to raise their voice and shape political decisions is of even greater concern for vulnerable sub-groups such as young women or youth from rural areas and less fortunate socio-economic backgrounds. The marginalisation of youth and their concerns has resulted in youth attitudes towards political engagement that show little faith in politics and political institutions. This phenomenon will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

While some of the above presented phenomena are not unique to youth in the MENA region but challenge policy makers and youth alike around the globe, they weigh heavier in a context in which resources are scarce. In this context, an inadequate representation of youth needs may result in fewer public investments being channelled into critical pro-youth services.

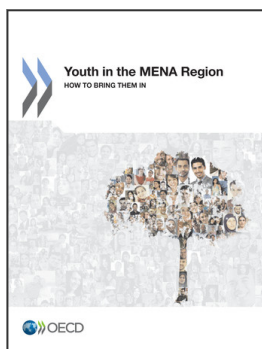
Figure 2.4. **Enrolment in secondary and tertiary education in selected MENA countries, 2007-13**



Source: World Bank (n.d. b), “School enrolment, secondary (% gross)”, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.SEC.ENRR> (accessed on 1 April 2016); World Bank (n.d. c), “School enrolment, tertiary (% gross)”, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR> (accessed on 1 April 2016).

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