

# Executive Summary

The COVID-19 crisis has 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.

This 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 covers three areas:

- uniting all institutional stakeholders behind a joint youth strategy to implement policies and deliver services for young people;
- building administrative and institutional capacities to mainstream the perspectives of young people from different backgrounds in policymaking;
- encouraging the participation and representation of young people and youth stakeholders in public and political life.

## 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.

## 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 in public entities in charge of youth affairs at national and sub-national levels are a key challenge the report identifies to implement more integrated and inclusive measures. 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.

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

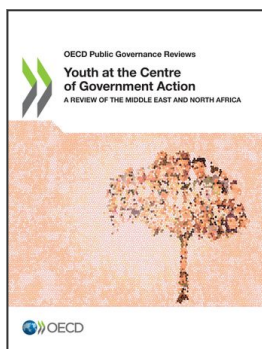
- **providing adequate human and financial resources to institutional stakeholders** at all levels to design and deliver youth policies, services and programmes;
- **establishing institutional mechanisms** and incentives for horizontal and vertical co-ordination to ensure the coherent delivery of youth 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

Across the MENA region, young people's trust in public institutions is low. 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. 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.

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;
- **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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