

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COUNCIL**

Distr.  
LIMITED  
E/ESCWA/SDD/2011/WG.1/6/Report  
6 March 2012  
ENGLISH  
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

**REPORT****EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON THE POSITIONS OF ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES  
TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL POLICY FOR YOUTH  
BEIRUT, 29-30 MARCH 2011****Summary**

The Population and Social Development Section of the Social Development Division at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) convened the Expert Group Meeting on the Positions of ESCWA Member Countries towards the Development of a National Policy for Youth at the United Nations House in Beirut on 29 and 30 March 2011. The meeting was held to facilitate the sharing experiences in connection with the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, by reviewing experiences at the national and regional levels, and by highlighting technical and institutional factors that impede the development and implementation of youth policies and programmes. The meeting also aimed to provide an opportunity to identify and evaluate lessons learned and best practices that could be replicated in other countries in the region, and to formulate procedural and practical recommendations that could serve as the basis of national programmes to be implemented by ESCWA in cooperation with the country concerned.

In addition to the organizers' opening and closing addresses, the meeting included five main sessions that focused on the following: (1) The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond and the response of member countries; (2) A review of the positions of member countries with regard to developing national youth policies and integrating those policies in the development planning process; (3) The various aspects of national youth policies: comparing the experiences of member countries; (4) A presentation of the experiences of member countries when developing a national youth policy; (5) A project on strengthening capacities of policymakers in the ESCWA region to formulate national youth policies and plans of action: responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY).

The participants made a series of recommendations, some of which were addressed to the Governments of member countries and others to the secretariat of ESCWA, in connection with ensuring adherence to the World Programme of Action for Youth, drawing up national youth policies, and the call by ESCWA for stakeholders to begin implementation of its proposed regional project. The current report reviews the topics that were discussed at the meeting and the recommendations that were made.

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## **Introduction**

1. The Social Development Division, Population and Social Development Section at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized the Expert Group Meeting on the Positions of ESCWA Member Countries towards the Development of a National Policy for Youth, in Beirut on 29 and 30 March 2011. The meeting was convened pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/2 of 6 October 2005 on policies and programmes involving youth, in accordance with which, the General Assembly requested the United Nations regional commissions to organize, within their existing resources, regional consultations with member countries and youth organizations in order to evaluate the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. The meeting was also held pursuant to recommendations by ESCWA that member countries must devote sufficient attention to demographic changes and, in particular, the “youth bulge” when formulating development policies and programmes.

2. In that connection, it should be noted that ESCWA has recently organized a series of meetings that have focused on the importance of developing a national policy for youth. These have included the following:

(a) The Workshop on Reinforcing National Capacities in Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth: National Reports and Systematic Documentation of Accomplishments, which was convened by ESCWA in Beirut on 17 and 18 December 2008. That workshop underlined the importance of strengthening national capacities with regard to designing youth policies in Arab countries. The Workshop presented the outcome of the regional survey on member countries’ responses to the World Programme of Action for Youth. That survey had been carried out by ESCWA in 2008 and highlighted the general framework adopted for approaching youth issues and in formulating a national policy for youth. At the conclusion of the Workshop, agreement was reached on a general framework for preparing national reports on responses to the World Programme of Action for Youth;

(b) The Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process, which was convened by ESCWA in collaboration with the Family Development Foundation, United Arab Emirates, and held in Abu Dhabi from 29 to 31 March 2009. The Meeting addressed the demographic, social, economic and cultural specificities of young people in Arab countries and considered a number of national reports on the progress that had been achieved in responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth. The Meeting concluded with a discussion on a proposed regional project on strengthening national capacities with regard to formulating national policies for youth;

(c) A ministerial round table on national youth policies within the framework of the World Programme of Action for Youth. That round table, which focused on dialogue and mutual understanding, was convened by ESCWA at its twenty-sixth session, held in Beirut from 17 to 20 May 2010, and took place within the context of the United Nations proclamation of 2010 as the International Year of Youth. The round table opened with the presentation of a paper on “National youth policies within the framework of the World Programme of Action for Youth”. A group of young Arabs who had been selected from different schools and universities in Lebanon and ministers participating in the session then engaged in dialogue, with discussions focusing on six key areas: education, employment, health, participation in decision-making and public life, globalization, and exceptional issues. At the conclusion of the round table, ESCWA awarded certificates of appreciation to those countries that had developed and taken steps to implement strategies on youth, namely Bahrain, Jordan and Palestine. A booklet that had been prepared by ESCWA entitled “Youth Development in the ESCWA Region: Statistical Profiles, National Strategies, and Success Stories”. The discussions concluded with the adoption of the “Guiding Declaration of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on giving greater attention to Youth Policies: An Opportunity for Development”.

3. The objectives of the meeting included the following:

(a) Sharing experiences of implementing the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond by reviewing experiences at the national and regional levels;

(b) Highlighting technical and institutional factors that impede the development and implementation of policies and programmes for youth;

(c) Providing an opportunity to identify and evaluate lessons learned and best practices that can be replicated in other countries in the region;

(d) Formulating procedural and practical recommendations that can serve as the basis of national programmes to be implemented by ESCWA in cooperation with the country concerned.

4. The participants made a number of recommendations that focused on the importance of adhering to the World Programme of Action for Youth, the formulation of national youth policies and the call by ESCWA for stakeholders to begin implementation of its proposed regional project. The current report includes those recommendations and reviews the topics that were discussed.

## **I. RECOMMENDATIONS**

5. The experts who participated in the meeting agreed on a number of recommendations concerning the development of national youth policies in the West Asia region. Some of those recommendations were addressed to Governments of member countries and others to the secretariat of ESCWA.

### **A. RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED TO GOVERNMENTS OF MEMBER COUNTRIES**

6. The experts who participated in the meeting called upon the Governments of member countries to undertake the following:

(a) Support efforts by ESCWA to implement the proposed regional project on “Strengthening capacities of policymakers in the ESCWA region to formulate national youth policies and plans of action: responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)”, inter alia, by providing technical, logistic and institutional support, and working to ensure that all relevant civil society organizations and governmental and non-governmental agencies participate in project activities and benefit from the project’s outcomes;

(b) Adopt a modern, scientific methodology when addressing youth issues in view of the fact that young people constitute a social and demographic group that faces its own particular challenges, and ensure that this methodology remains distinct from the previous framework established with a view to achieving the targets and indicators relevant to the Millennium Development Goals;

(c) Adopt a national strategic vision for youth on the basis of citizenship, rights and duties, the elements of which draw upon the fact that human beings constitute both the focus and the goal of development;

(d) Adopt an effective approach to planning so that national youth policies are comprehensive, integrated, practical and enforceable and provide for monitoring and evaluation, with a view to securing funding from donors, in light of the fact that providing financial support to youth policies is to finance investment rather than to finance consumption;

(e) Promote cooperation and coordination between governmental and non-governmental organizations, relevant civil society organizations, United Nations agencies, the League of Arab States and other relevant regional authorities, and call upon the expertise of national and regional research institutions involved with youth issues and development with a view to finalizing a regional agenda for youth development;

(f) Ensure that there is appropriate institutional input in approaches to youth issues and when formulating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating national youth policy, by establishing a national institution, such as a higher council for youth, that is in direct contact with the cabinet to coordinate the various sectoral ministries including, inter alia, the ministries of education, labour and employment;

(g) Implement specialized surveys with a view to obtaining detailed, accurate, reliable, up-to-date and comparable data on the lives of young people and the challenges they face;

(h) In view of the prevailing social, cultural, political and economic realities in the countries of the region, ensure that gender issues and differences between the lives led by young men and young women are taken into account in national youth policies;

(i) Work with all social institutions, including media and educational institutions and the family, to promote a culture in which participation in society is considered a fundamental element of citizenship.

## B. RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARIAT OF ESCWA

7. The experts who participated in the meeting called upon the secretariat of ESCWA to undertake the following:

(a) Continue its efforts, in collaboration with teams at the national level to promote the methodology adopted by the World Programme of Action for Youth and to monitor and evaluate implementation of that Programme at the regional level;

(b) Initiate the implementation of the project on “Strengthening capacities of policymakers in the ESCWA region to formulate national youth policies and plans of action: responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)”. Moreover, in 2011, ESCWA should seek to convene a meeting to draw up a plan of action for implementing that project.

## II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

8. In addition to the opening speeches, the meeting included five sessions. The first session addressed the World Programme of Action for Youth and the response of member countries, and included presentations on the general framework, principles and priorities of the Programme, as well as prerequisites for its success. The session also sought to analyse the responses of ESCWA member countries to the Programme, the current situation and lessons learned.

9. The second session included a review of the positions of member countries with regard to formulating national youth policies and integrating those policies in the development planning process. In that connection, the session analysed the positions of member countries vis-à-vis the development of a national policy for young people within the framework of the World Programme of Action for Youth, analysed the positions of Governments with regard to the integration of youth policies in social and economic development plans, and focused on the achievements of those countries and the obstacles they face.

10. The third session focused on the various aspects of national youth policies and included presentations in which the experiences of member countries were compared. The meeting discussed institutional, gender and political aspects, including with regard to Youth Parliaments. Discussions also took place on technical aspects and the importance of definitions pertaining to youth issues when collecting statistical data with a view to formulating a national policy for youth and when monitoring youth development.

11. In the fourth session, a number of representatives of member countries participating in the meeting, namely Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, gave presentations on their countries’ experiences in the development of a national youth policy. Those experiences were then discussed by the participants.

12. The fifth session included a presentation on the ESCWA project on “Strengthening capacities of policymakers in the ESCWA region to formulate national youth policies and plans of action: responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)”. Participants discussed the key outcomes of the meeting and its recommendations, which they undertook to communicate to the Governments of member countries and the secretariat of ESCWA.

#### A. WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH: THE RESPONSE OF MEMBER COUNTRIES

##### 1. *The general framework, principles and priorities of the World Programme of Action for Youth and prerequisites for its success*

13. Mr. Frederico Neto, Director of the Social Development Division at ESCWA, gave a visual presentation on the “General framework, principles and priorities of the Global Programme of Action for Youth and prerequisites for its success”. Mr. Neto began his presentation by reviewing trends and projections with regard to the numbers and percentages of young people (persons between 15 and 24 years of age), which highlighted the existence of a “youth bulge” that, in 2005, constituted approximately 21 per cent of the total population in the Arab region. The presentation addressed the challenges faced by young people in the region, including social, economic and political exclusion, unemployment, and outputs of education systems that failed to meet the needs of the labour market.

14. In that connection, Mr. Neto underlined the importance of the World Programme of Action for Youth, which provided guidelines for action to promote youth development, and of acknowledging the value of young people as a human resource and a key element that fostered change and economic and social development. Mr. Neto also addressed youth priorities, as identified by the Programme, which fell into three areas, namely young people in the global economy, young people in civil society, and young people and youth welfare. He noted that young people needed to be viewed as a demographic group with several sub-categories each with its own particular requirements including, inter alia, males and females, adolescents and young adults, and those living in urban or in rural environments. He also stressed the importance of taking action in two thematic areas, namely strengthening the capacities of young people, and working to ensure that they can make the most of their abilities in the labour market and in public life.

15. Mr. Neto concluded his presentation by calling upon member countries to ensure that all stakeholders took part in the formulation of a national youth policy, to take action to identify national youth priorities and relevant goals and objectives, and to provide an appropriate institutional framework for formulating, monitoring the implementation of, and evaluating a national youth policy; in that connection he emphasized the importance of formulating a specific policy on young people with a view to creating a unified national vision on youth, and of setting national-level targets on youth that the governmental, non-governmental and private sectors could help to achieve.

##### 2. *The response of ESCWA member countries to the Global Programme of Action for Youth: the current situation and lessons for the future*

16. Mr. Abdul Hussein Shaaban, managing director of the Documentation Centre for International Humanitarian Law, presented a paper entitled “Youth, Development and Change”, in which he discussed the popular movements that had emerged in Egypt and Tunisia, as well as those movements now active in many countries in North Africa and Asia. He discussed the role of young people in those movements and drew attention to the fact that, in addition to becoming involved in resistance and implementation, they had taken on oversight and leadership roles. Mr. Shaaban predicted that change would not take the same form in each country because of each country’s particular cultural, social, economic, political and historical circumstances. Turning to the factors that had led to the emergence of those movements, he drew attention to several overlapping political, economic, social and historical elements.

17. Mr. Shaaban stressed that young people had played a key role in the changes that had occurred, especially in terms of overturning the entrenched belief that young people were uninterested in key issues affecting the future. Indeed, in their involvement in those movements, young people had demonstrated their capacity, their vitality and their willingness to make sacrifices, drawing on their faith in freedom and social justice while rejecting fanaticism and extremism. There were four key attributes to those movements: firstly, young people's need to participate in all aspects of life and development, and their need to enjoy freedom of expression and the right to engage in the political sphere; secondly, young people's expanding knowledge, including in connection with information technology and communications; thirdly, the use in the past of inappropriate development methodologies in efforts to invest in young people and strengthen their capacities, and; fourthly, improved communication between young people at the global level, occurring as part of the globalization of culture and rights.

18. He concluded his speech by stressing that those movements would not have emerged had governments engaged with young people as a socio-demographic group for which specific policies were needed and a human resource that would deliver a return on investment at both the social and economic levels. He also stressed that countries that failed to invest in that group would, in all probability, pay a high social price.

### *3. Summary of discussions at the first session*

19. The key issues that arose in discussions at the first session may be summarized as follows:

(a) Young people are a specific sociodemographic group and, as is the case with children and the elderly, constitute a sociodemographic segment of the population. Young people form a demographic group based on the fact that they belong to a specific age group; they also form a separate social group in view of the fact that they have their own specific needs and face their own specific challenges as they pass through a transitional phase in their lives: from members of a sector of the population that depends on others and consumes resources to members of an economically productive sector. This is also a phase in life in which people are establishing their own personalities, are becoming increasingly self-aware, and in which they form their own families;

(b) The opportunities associated with the "youth bulge" must not be wasted: demographic transition in the Arab region is accompanied by a shift in the age structure of populations: the proportion of children (0-14 years old) decreases while the proportion of the population that is of working age (15-64 years old) increases. Moreover, the proportion of the population aged 65 years and older stabilizes temporarily. In parallel, a "youth bulge" and a demographic window result from lower dependency rates. This provides an opportunity for savings and investment to increase, and, as a result, causes average per capita income and standards of living to rise. It is not a foregone conclusion, however, that all will be able to reap the benefits of this demographic dividend: countries must take action to ensure that qualitative and quantitative changes in their populations are taken into account, and must demonstrate commitment at the political level. They must also strive to improve the labour and financial environments and afford due attention to human resources;

(c) The "youth bulge" also poses challenges that must be overcome: in tandem with unemployment, exclusion, deprivation and lack of social and economic equity, the emergence of a large youth segment, constituting 20 to 30 per cent of the total population, could push young people towards social upheaval and revolution in order to assert their rights to education, employment, health, and to participate in public and political life. The youth revolutions currently taking place in Arab countries should be viewed within that context; they constitute a challenge that governments must address by formulating policies that focus on two themes, namely youth empowerment and providing young people with the opportunity to reach their full potential. Arab countries have witnessed significant growth in enrolment rates in secondary and university education, but young people are not given the opportunity to benefit from their education by entering the labour market, participating in public life and, more broadly, by becoming involved in and reaping the benefits of the development process;

(d) The World Programme of Action for Youth is an unprecedented initiative by the international community: it recognizes young people's value as a human resource and a key element for change and economic and social development. The Programme provides a framework for a general policy that identifies priorities with a view to fostering youth development and minimizing young people's social exclusion. That policy also seeks to accommodate youth dynamics in a positive manner, and to provide a framework for public policy and guidelines for national action and international support with a view to improving the situation of young people;

(e) Popular youth movements have emerged because youth issues have been ignored for decades. Young people have thus mobilized to assert their rights, particularly against a background of widespread unemployment and when there are few opportunities to enter the labour market and public and political life. It is therefore important that the United Nations should adopt a new approach, and should engage with all stakeholders at the national level, including young people, in a more direct and relevant manner.

**B. REVIEW OF THE POSITIONS OF MEMBER COUNTRIES WITH REGARD TO DEVELOPING  
NATIONAL YOUTH POLICIES AND INTEGRATING THOSE POLICIES  
IN THE DEVELOPMENT PLANNING PROCESS**

*1. The positions of member countries with regard to formulating a national youth policy  
within the framework of the World Programme of Action for Youth*

20. Ms. Batool Shakoori, Chief of Population and Social Development Section of the Social Development Division of ESCWA presented a working paper and gave a visual presentation on "the positions of Governments with regard to national youth policies in selected countries in western Asia". She reviewed quantitative aspects of youth in the region and the "youth bulge" and then discussed qualitative aspects related to low levels and standards in education, and the fact that a high proportion of young people do not participate in public life. She described national youth policy as setting forth a series of interventions and measures to achieve quantitative and qualitative targets in line with youth priorities, and drew attention to a new paradigm for policies on youth; in those policies, which must remain distinct from the Millennium Development Goals, the key stages of people's lives must be taken into account, and a dynamic, cross-sectoral approach must be adopted. She stressed the importance of incorporating those policies in a country's national development plan.

21. In her presentation, Ms. Shakoori discussed the regional survey conducted by ESCWA in 2008 on the response of member countries to the World Programme of Action for Youth, which analysed factors that resulted in slow progress being achieved, namely problems with methodology, including the continued use of traditional approaches that were based on the assumption that a country's human resources were homogeneous, and technical problems, including inadequate frameworks, expertise and methodologies, insufficient numbers of specialized staff, and insufficient data and research on youth.

22. Ms. Shakoori also reviewed the current situation with regard to national youth policies in ESCWA member countries, and classified those countries as follows: (a) countries with a national policy for youth; (b) countries working to develop a national policy for youth; (c) countries that address youth issues within the framework of development plans and; (d) countries that are establishing projects for young people. For those countries that have a national policy for youth, namely Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Yemen, the analysis covered the definition of youth adopted in that policy, how those countries viewed young people in terms of their rights and duties, what sub-categories had been established to classify young people, how young people were involved in policy development, what statistical data and analytical research was available, whether an appropriate coordinating body had been established, whether an adequate implementing budget had been allocated, and whether a general and cross-sectoral framework had been adopted.

23. Lastly, Ms. Shakoori drew attention to the fact that both opportunities and challenges existed; although member countries were devoting increased attention to formulating national policies for youth and integrating those policies in the development planning process, those countries' efforts were still not commensurate with current and emerging challenges. Furthermore, those countries had failed to take advantage of opportunities emerging from economic, social and demographic change.

*2. The positions of Governments with regard to integrating youth policies in plans for social and economic development: achievements and constraints*

24. Ms. Khairiya Kadouh, a professor and researcher at the Faculty of Pedagogy at the Lebanese University, gave a visual presentation on the results of a study commissioned by ESCWA on "positions of Governments with regard to integrating youth policies in plans for social and economic development: achievements and constraints". The study included four priorities for young people, namely education, health, employment and participation in public life, and consisted of three parts. Part one of the study dealt with the specificities of formulating and integrating a national policy for youth, part two examined the specificities of youth policies in selected ESCWA member countries, namely Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Palestine and Yemen, while part three set forth suggestions on how to promote the integration of national youth policies in development plans.

25. Ms. Kadouh identified the following outcomes of the study:

(a) All the countries surveyed were concerned with youth issues; five of those countries had adopted a strategic document on young people. However, the problem they had in common was that they had failed to adopt a methodology that was based on the various stages of life in order to identify the targeted section of the population, namely young people;

(b) Most of the countries promoted a perspective on youth that was nearly fully articulated, although that perspective was only articulated in declarations they had made;

(c) Certain countries, including Bahrain and Jordan, had established a national entity with formal responsibility for formulating and developing national youth policy, while the other countries had so far only put forward plans in that regard to be implemented in the future;

(d) Most of the countries had set forth themes for action or priorities for youth. Problems emerged, however, because of a lack of detailed statistical data.

26. At the end of her presentation, Ms. Kadouh put forward suggestions on how countries could overcome the difficulties they faced, including, first and foremost, that they must uphold the World Programme of Action for Youth. Inter alia they must also review strategic documents in that subject area, adopt a standard definition of youth, establish institutions, adopt legislation and provide necessary funding, and gather detailed data, on youth.

*3. Summary of discussions at the second session*

27. Participants in the meeting commended the efforts exerted by ESCWA to review the positions of member countries with regard to formulating national policies for youth and integrating those policies in the development planning process. The key issues that arose in discussions at the second session may be summarized as follows:

(a) Definition of youth: The United Nations defines "youth" as persons between the ages of 15 and 24. That age group include older teenagers (15-19 years old) and young adults (20-24 years old). Experts participating in the meeting underlined the fact that this definition does not imply any bias against other definitions that may be adopted by United Nations Member States on the basis of a number of social,

cultural, economic, institutional and political factors. The adoption of a standard definition was preferable, however, in order to facilitate comparisons between and within countries over time: ESCWA member countries had adopted several definitions of youth;

(b) Although political commitment to youth issues is extremely important, that is insufficient to achieve tangible results in terms of youth development unless it is accompanied by technical capacity-building programmes that target those responsible for formulating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating national action plans for youth in the context of the World Programme of Action for Youth;

(c) Targeting young people as a socio-demographic group entails formulating youth-centred policies rather than addressing youth issues within the framework of sectoral policies, such as policies on education, employment and health, or as part of comprehensive national development plans that may overlook youth issues and priorities. In that connection, it should be noted in particular that, as the majority of the unemployed are young people seeking employment for the first time, employment policies must target young people, including by monitoring trends in youth unemployment in parallel with general unemployment rates;

(d) The session highlighted the need for a clear strategic vision within the context of a national youth policy that recognizes young people as active elements in society, seeks to empower them, and offers them adequate opportunities to participate in, and reap the benefits of the development process;

(e) A cross-sectoral approach is most appropriate framework to adopt when addressing youth issues and integrating them into development plans;

(f) With regard to planning, a bottom-up approach is most appropriate when addressing youth issues and integrating them into development plans;

(g) The session highlighted the importance of involving young people themselves, (females and males, the employed and unemployed, residents of rural and urban areas, etc. ...) in planning actions to address youth issues, including in connection with identifying priorities and formulating, monitoring and evaluating national youth policy and action plans.

28. On the basis of the above, participants in the meeting agreed that it was important that ESCWA should endeavour to strengthen the capacities of those drawing up policy and national action plans for youth so that they can adopt contemporary methodologies, including the World Programme of Action for Youth, that facilitate policy design and the integration of such policies into national development plans.

### C. THE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF NATIONAL YOUTH POLICIES: COMPARING THE EXPERIENCES OF MEMBER COUNTRIES

#### 1. *Institutional aspects and their role in national youth policy formulation*

29. Mr. Ahmed al-Masarwa, President of the Higher Council for Youth, Jordan, gave a visual presentation on "Jordanian policy for youth - Institutional aspects and their role in national youth policy formulation". He began by emphasizing that young people constituted the wealth of the nation and its future, and Jordan's most profitable investment both now and moving forward. He addressed quantitative and qualitative factors that justified making youth a national priority and discussed empowering Jordanian youth by concentrating on two key themes, namely what Jordanian young people want from their country, and what Jordan wants for its young people. He identified a number of factors that facilitated the empowerment of Jordanian youth, including, inter alia, political support, a base to the economy that ensured that young people enjoyed a standard of living that allowed them to move forward and develop, and a technological environment that facilitated communication and freedom of expression.

30. Mr. al-Masarwa also discussed the foundations, features and objectives of Jordanian youth policies, and discussed in detail those policies' key themes and aspects, namely social and cultural aspects, economic aspects and factors driving forward change, political aspects and managing change, security aspects and technical/technological aspects. Lastly, Mr. al-Masarwa discussed a method for formulating national strategies for youth: firstly the status quo must be reviewed and strengths and weaknesses identified. Stakeholders must then identify future goals, establish why these are necessary, and decide how they are to be achieved. They must also identify constraints and opportunities at the local, regional and international levels. On that basis, the strategic objective is "Jordanian young people who are educated and empowered both intellectually and in terms of their security" in order to achieve a "secure and stable Jordanian society".

## *2. The Gender aspect in youth policy*

31. Ms. Henrietta Aswad, an expert in communication and the development of youth national strategies in Member States, had prepared a paper entitled "Gender mainstreaming in national youth strategies: the situation in Palestine and in the Kingdom of Bahrain". The objectives of the paper were:

(a) To review the Bahraini National Youth Strategy (2005-2009), and the Palestinian Cross-Sectoral National Strategy for Youth (2011-2013) and assess the extent to which gender has been taken into consideration in analyses, objectives and topics for which action has been proposed;

(b) To formulate recommendations to help raise awareness of gender and promote its integration in national policies and relevant indicators, and to highlight best practices and lessons learned for the benefit of Governments in the ESCWA region and other relevant actors.

32. The paper put forward a set of recommendations to be implemented at the institutional and programme levels on how to systematically organize the gender integration process. Those recommendations included: that high-level administrations needed to take on a leadership role, that institutions must underline their commitment to integrating gender within their structures, policies and youth programmes in a systematic fashion, and that gender-based communication and language must be enhanced in order to raise awareness of the concept of gender integration in youth programmes.

## *3. Political aspects and the Youth Parliament*

33. Mr. Melhem Mansour, Project Director, Syrian Youth Parliament gave a visual presentation on "Political aspects and the Youth Parliament", in which he explained that the Parliament was "for young people and consisted of young people"; the Parliament highlighted the concerns of young people and made proposals on how to follow up on those concerns with the competent authorities by engaging in direct dialogue with decision makers. Mr. Mansour identified the overall objectives of the Youth Parliament, namely to ensure that young people had a space in which to express their ideas on the challenges they faced, to provide young people with the skills they needed to participate actively and positively in public life and in the volunteer and community work fields, to deepen young people's sense of citizenship and community, and to open channels for direct dialogue between young people and decision makers. The Youth Parliament also aimed to reflect the views of young people from different parts of the country.

34. Mr. Mansour explained that the Youth Parliament, which brought together 60 young men and women between 18 and 29 years of age from every Syrian governorate who had been selected on the basis of their ages, levels of community activism and voluntary activity, leadership skills, commitment, vision, dynamism and effectiveness. He noted that the Parliament collaborated with relevant national institutions and upheld the principle of transparency and authentication. It included seven specialized committees, including, inter alia, the Education and Scientific Research Committee and the Law Committee. However, the Youth Parliament faced a number of challenges: inter alia, it needed to secure necessary funding, and ensure its sustainability and effectiveness.

*4. Technical aspects and the importance of definitions on youth in the collection of statistical data with a view to formulating a national policy for young people and monitoring their development*

35. Mr. Ahmed Abdel Monem, Director of the Pan Arab Project for Family Health, gave a visual presentation on “Technical aspects and the importance of definitions on youth in the collection of statistical data with a view to formulating a national policy for young people and monitoring their development”. He began by setting forth the objectives of the Pan Arab Project for Family Health. These included: developing an Arab database on family and reproductive health; providing ministries of health and social affairs, national councils on childhood and motherhood, research centres, and relevant civil society, local and international organizations with the accurate and up-to-date information they needed to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate programmes, and; providing a set of indicators to facilitate efforts to monitor progress, achieve national development goals and the objectives recommended by the world conferences held in the 1990s. He explained that the Pan Arab Project had adopted a strategy that was flexible, that drew upon experiences at the Arab-world and international levels, promoted results-based policymaking, strengthened national capacities and the capacities of local staff members, and guaranteed expenditures.

36. Mr. Monem said that the Pan Arab Project had made use of a number of questionnaires, including a questionnaire for young people between the ages of 15 and 24 who had never been married. That questionnaire provided information on the backgrounds, resources and employment of young men and women. It also provided information on certain aspects of family life, attitudes, young people’s health status, knowledge of sexually transmitted diseases, and knowledge of and attitudes towards family planning. It also shed light on how boys and girls were prepared for parenthood. Between 2001 and 2008, surveys on young people were carried out in several Arab countries. That allowed for several key indicators on youth development to be calculated, including, inter alia, information on demographics, education, labour and employment, hunger and poverty, health, the environment, drugs, girls and young women, HIV/AIDS, and cross-generational relationships. At the end of his presentation, Mr. Monem discussed the results of some of those indicators in the countries concerned.

*5. Summary of discussions at the third session*

37. In the discussions on institutional, political, technical and gender aspects of national policies on youth, the following issues were raised in the presentations comparing the experiences of member countries:

(a) In order to target young people as a socio-demographic group, a national entity must be established to address youth affairs. It is recommended that this entity should take the form of a higher council for young people that communicates directly with the council of ministers. It should, moreover, play a coordinating role between various administrative authorities, sectoral ministries, NGOs and the private sector. Coordinating youth issues has become particularly important in Arab countries where many governmental, non-governmental and private-sector organizations and programmes addressed youth. Participants noted that, due to the fact that particular circumstances and conditions were present in each country, a single formula could not be applied to all countries;

(b) Young men and women have different needs and faced different challenges in areas of their lives, including in relation to education, work, health, family life and their involvement in public life. This is because men and women adopt different social roles within the social, cultural and legal contexts, which tend to reinforce stereotypical roles for women, namely as home makers and wives, and for men, namely as family providers and decision makers. The participants therefore stressed the fact that gender aspects must be taken into account when formulating national policies for youth. For example, illiteracy and unemployment rates among young women are higher than among young men; an approach is therefore called for that addresses the reasons why girls are not sent to attend school or drop out of education early and thus become only semi-literate;

(c) The establishment of youth parliaments helps to promote young people's involvement in public and political life. Certain participants noted that it was important to strengthen the mandates of the parliaments and their legislative character in order to encourage youth participation in decision-making;

(d) Since asking detailed questions on youth in census forms and family surveys is problematic, it is important to carry out specialized surveys on youth issues that contain detailed questions on their particular circumstances, inter alia, in connection with education, health, employment, family life and participation in the public and political sphere. Those surveys facilitate the collection of accurate, reliable and up-to-date data that constitute a sound statistical basis for identifying problems and challenges faces by young people and formulating appropriate strategies in that regard;

(e) Young people should not be dealt with as a homogenous group; they constitute a broad category that comprises numerous subgroups rather than a single demographic entity. The participants highlighted the fact that data needed to be disaggregated by age, namely older teenagers, (15 to 19 years old) and young adults (20 to 24 years old), by gender (male or female) and by residential area (rural or urban).

#### D. THE EXPERIENCES OF MEMBER COUNTRIES WHEN DEVELOPING A NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY

38. The fourth session of the meeting included a presentation of the experiences of member countries in approaching youth issues and developing a national policy for youth. Representatives from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen each made a presentation and/or submitted reports on the methodology adopted when addressing youth issues and when formulating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating national youth policy.

39. Those presentations and reports addressed a number of issues in detail, including the following:

(a) The definition of youth in the country concerned in cases where that definition is different from the definition adopted by the United Nations, namely persons between 15 and 24 years of age;

(b) The demographic features of the general population and how that population is distributed in terms of broad age categories. Particular focus was placed on young people and the "youth bulge" and, in that connection, the representatives of certain countries highlighted trends and predictions with regard to youth numbers and percentages in relation to the general and working-age populations;

(c) The situation of young people with regard to education, employment, health and participation in public and political life. The country representatives highlighted the challenges faced by young people in connection with education quality, unemployment, low-wage employment, how the education system fails to meet the needs of the labour market, unhealthy lifestyles (smoking, lack of regular exercise, malnutrition, etc.), and limited opportunities to participate in public life and decision-making;

(d) Political commitment to youth issues and recognizing the importance of investing in that socio-demographic group, in the light of the fact that the positive impact of such an investment extends far beyond young people themselves and affects families and the nation as a whole;

(e) Targeting young people through national policies for youth; representatives of those countries that have already adopted a national policy for youth, including Jordan and Palestine, discussed the reasons for targeting young people through a specific youth policy, the importance of establishing partnerships between the public, non-governmental and private sectors in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of such a policy, and the importance of involving young people themselves in that process. Those representatives also reviewed the methodology adopted in drawing up that policy, the challenges they faced, the vision, message and strategic objectives of that policy and the key issues it addressed. They also reviewed the extent to which that policy was in line with the priorities of the World Programme of Action for Youth, the budget available, and the methodology adopted with a view to implementing strategy and assigning responsibilities. On the other hand, representatives of countries that are currently striving to

formulate a national policy for youth, including Iraq and Lebanon, discussed the methodology that had been adopted, including, for example, with regard to establishing a detailed database on young people by carrying out a survey targeting that particular age group, and when carrying out in-depth studies to identify the priorities of young people in the country in question and the issues that the national policy on youth should focus on;

(f) Addressing youth issues through sectoral and general national development plans. Representatives of countries that do not currently have a national policy for youth discussed how to integrate various issues pertaining to youth, including education, employment, health and participation in public and political life in various ministerial and institutional sectoral plans, as well as in general national development plans;

(g) Successful experiences and lessons learned from countries' experiences. In their presentations, country representatives highlighted the challenges they faced in responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth. They spoke about the general framework for approaching youth issues and formulating a national policy for youth. The issues raised included, inter alia, adopting an appropriate definition, creating an up-to-date, detailed, accurate, reliable and comparable database on youth, a specialist institution to address youth issues that can coordinate actions in that connection at the national level, and the impact of wars and conflicts in the region.

#### *Summary of discussions at the fourth session*

40. Following the presentation on country experiences, the participants in the meeting discussed a systematic approach to youth issues, formulating a national policy for youth, and integrating youth issues in sectoral and general national development plans. The key issues that arose in connection with the presentations and reports submitted may be summarized as follows:

(a) The participants emphasized the importance of adopting the methodology set forth in the World Programme of Action for Youth when addressing youth issues and formulating national youth policies. In that regard, they commended the fact that ESCWA member countries have deepened their understanding of the Programme in recent years;

(b) With regard to the definition of youth in the strategy, the representatives of countries that have adopted a definition that differs from the one adopted by the United Nations, namely persons between 15 and 24 years of age, explained the reasons for those differences: those reasons were related to particular social, cultural, economic, institutional and political factors in the country concerned. Some participants drew attention to potential legal and political implications of considering members of the population between 15 and 18 years of age to be youths rather than children. Some participants also stressed that extending the definition to 29 years of age provided an opportunity to target a larger segment of the population and to enable them to benefit from programmes being implemented within the framework of the strategy;

(c) With regard to making available detailed data on young people with a view to formulating national policy for youth, the participants at the meeting discussed the importance of cooperation between the producers and users of data, and of adopting standard definitions for certain indicators, such as unemployment. They also stressed that it was important that the data collected was disaggregated by youth subgroup, including, inter alia, males and females, teenagers and young adults, and residents of rural and urban areas. They also highlighted the need for quantitative data collection to complement qualitative data to help highlight certain sensitive issues that quantitative data may not reveal fully. On the other hand, there was consensus among the participants that specialized surveys on youth must be carried out on a regular basis, (for example every five years) to follow up on changes that have occurred and on the impact of policies. The participants also indicated that, with a view to ensuring that efforts and resources were not wasted, stakeholders must make use of existing data before new data were collected;

(d) With regard to political commitment to youth issues and recognizing the importance of investing in that socio-demographic group, some participants noted that this must go hand in hand with programmes to

develop the technical capacity of those responsible for formulating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies and national action plans for youth in the context of the World Programme of Action for Youth;

(e) The participants discussed the benefits associated with targeting young people as a socio-demographic group by drawing up a specific national policy on youth rather than addressing youth issues in sectoral and national development plans. In that connection, most participants drew attention to the fact that targeted actions ensured that youth issues were not overlooked within a confusing range of plans. Examples of this given by the participants included labour and job-creation policies that could fail to target young people when they constituted more than half the number of unemployed;

(f) The participants discussed the impact of social, economic and political exclusion of young people in certain countries of the region in connection with the emergence of protest movements in those countries; young people were, moreover, the key planners and catalysts within those movements. They also pointed out that those movements were one of the challenges that stemmed from a “youth bulge” occurring in a context that was characterized by exclusion and unemployment; this encouraged young people to assert their rights and to bring about change.

E. A PROJECT ON STRENGTHENING CAPACITIES OF POLICYMAKERS IN THE ESCWA REGION  
TO FORMULATE NATIONAL YOUTH POLICIES AND PLANS OF ACTION: RESPONDING  
TO THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH (WPAY)

1. *The readiness of ESCWA member countries to respond to the World Programme  
of Action for Youth: Analysis and Lessons Learned*

41. Mr. Abdulaziz Farah, a counsellor on strategic planning at the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, Qatar, gave a visual presentation entitled: “The readiness of ESCWA member countries to respond to the World Programme of Action for Youth: Analysis and Lessons Learned”. Mr. Farah began the presentation by defining the meaning of countries’ “readiness” to respond to the Programme, and defined that term as a country’s conviction that a national policy for young people must be formulated within the framework of the Programme, that country’s technical and institutional capacities, its enthusiasm for that policy, and the legislative and political support that that policy enjoys. In that connection, Mr. Farah addressed four influential factors: (a) Knowledge-based perspectives and the conviction that the World Programme of Action for Youth provides a comparative advantage for stakeholders designing methodologies for researching and analysing youth issues and formulating and monitoring the implementation of youth policies; (b) Incentives and preparations at the institutional level for taking action within the framework of the Programme, the Programme’s requirements in terms of methodology and coordination, and its conceptual foundations, namely its basis in partnerships and trust at all levels; (c) Creating a supportive and empowering environment, including by fostering political commitment and a positive cultural climate, and expanding the financial and human resources available; (d) Advanced technical capacities to meet the requirements of all stages of research and in the development of national policies for youth, and designing and implementing results-based monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Results Based Management).

42. Mr. Farah also analysed the lessons learned in the region, and focused on five main points: (a) Pressure exerted by domestic and foreign actors calling for or encouraging the formulation of national and regional policies and strategies on youth; (b) The characteristics of the agency or agencies calling for the formulation and implementation of national and regional policies on youth; (c) The national-level institution that enjoys ownership rights over those policies; (d) Adequate background knowledge for formulating and implementing national youth policies; (e) Effective participation of young people in the design and evaluation of those policies. In conclusion, Mr. Farah proposed the following practical steps: (a) Disseminating and raising awareness of the right of young people to have policies and programmes formulated to address their rights and aspirations, in line with the vision embodied in the World Programme of Action for Youth, and of their right to participate in drafting and following up on those policies and programmes and to benefit from their outcomes; (b) Strengthening technical capacities vis-à-vis data

collection and analysis and the design of strategic plans and oversight, follow-up and evaluation systems, so that desired results are achieved; (c) Adopting national policies for youth on the basis of national terms of reference and international standards that are directly relevant to youth development issues; (d) Entrusting the design and coordination of activities to monitor the implementation of national policies for youth to a central institution at the national level with cross-sectoral influence and influence across relevant organizations at all levels.

## *2. Rationale behind the project*

43. Ms. Tania Faour, Social Affairs Officer, Population and Social Development Section, Social Development Division, gave a visual presentation on the rationale behind the project on “strengthening capacities of policymakers in the ESCWA region to formulate national youth policies and plans of action: responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)”, in which she identified three key justifications:

(a) The project is a response to the status quo experienced by young people in the ESCWA region. One out of every five people in that region is a youth; this has caused what is known as a “youth bulge”. Although that phenomenon presents opportunities to be grasped, it also presents challenges that must be overcome. Ms. Faour spoke briefly about the realities for young people in terms of education, employment, health and participation in public life, concluding that young people are often unable to participate in and reap the benefits of development;

(b) The project is, moreover, a response to the outcomes of a regional survey conducted by ESCWA in late 2008 on the responses of member countries of the World Programme of Action for Youth. The survey questionnaire was completed by national-level partners and highlighted the structural, institutional and circumstantial difficulties that countries encountered when striving to formulate national policies for youth;

(c) The project also comes pursuant to the recommendations of member countries that participated in previous ESCWA meetings on youth issues and policy; the most recent of those meetings was the ministerial round table on national youth policies within the framework of the World Programme of Action for Youth, which was convened by ESCWA from 17 to 20 May 2010, within the framework of its twenty-sixth session.

44. Ms. Faour noted that the Population and Social Development Section, Social Development Division at ESCWA has undertaken to implement the project, which will last two and a half years.

45. Ms. Lara El Khoury, Research Assistant at the Population and Social Development Section then gave a visual presentation on project and target-country stakeholders, project activities and its expected accomplishments. Ms. Khoury explained that ESCWA will cooperate with the Pan Arab Project for Family Health at the League of Arab States, United Nations Population Fund country offices in certain member countries, and with ministries and national institutions concerned with policies and plans of action on youth. Ms. El Khoury said that the project would benefit those designing policies for young people, experts on youth issues and policies, national bodies working in the field of youth issues, and young people themselves (persons between 15 and 24 years of age) in addition to young families and society as a whole.

46. Ms. El Khoury noted that ESCWA has chosen five countries for the project, namely Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, because they currently have, or are working on drafting a national policy for youth. She then set forth the logical framework of the project, which aims to facilitate the work of ESCWA member countries and assist them in the development and implementation of national youth policies and action plans within the context of the World Programme of Action for Youth, which provides for two expected accomplishments:

(a) Strengthening the capacities of policymakers with regard to formulating national policies for youth, or amending and developing existing policies in line with identified youth priorities;

(b) Strengthening the capacities of policy designers with regard to formulating a national plan of action for youth, or revising and developing the existing plan of action so that it includes a list of national indicators that enable stakeholders to monitor the implementation of priorities under the World Programme of Action for Youth.

### **III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK**

#### **A. DATE AND VENUE OF THE MEETING**

47. The Expert Group Meeting on the Positions of ESCWA Member Countries towards the Development of a National Policy for Youth was held at the United Nations House in Beirut, Lebanon on 29 and 30 March 2011.

#### **B. OPENING**

48. Ms. Anhar Hegazi, Acting Deputy Executive Secretary, gave the opening address for the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) on behalf of Ms. Rima Khalaf, Executive Secretary of ESCWA. Ms. Hegazi began her speech by welcoming the attendees and explained that this meeting was being held with a view to implementing the resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly that call upon member countries to develop comprehensive and integrated policies on youth, and in the context of the United Nations proclamation of the year that began on 12 August 2010 as the International Year of Youth, under the slogan “Dialogue and mutual understanding”. Ms. Hegazi said that the meeting was also being held at a time when the Arab region was undergoing a period of historic and accelerating social and political upheaval in which young people played an influential and leading role.

49. Ms. Hegazi underlined the fact that, despite the fact that Governments of member countries sought to involve young people in all aspects of life, most of the initiatives they undertook had only limited success due to insufficient available expertise on formulating and implementing policies on youth, and because the projects that are implemented are unsustainable, are too sectorally and geographically diffuse, and fail to address all needs of young people.

50. Ms. Mariana Al-Khayat Al-Sabbouri, Head of the Office for Public Relations and Conferences and a liaison officer on youth issues between the Ministry of Social Affairs in Lebanon and the Population and Social Development Section at ESCWA, gave a speech on behalf of member countries in which she affirmed the importance of adopting integrated national policies on youth, involving young people themselves in the process to draft those policies, addressing all their priorities, and striving to ensure that they participated in and enjoyed the benefits of human development, in order to strengthen their sense of citizenship. Ms. Al-Sabbouri added that youth development had a positive effect on young people themselves, on their families and on society as a whole; young people were instruments of change and a key element in the human development process. She also underlined that ESCWA played a key role in youth development by carrying out research, convening conferences and providing support to member countries.

#### **C. PARTICIPANTS**

51. In addition to United Nations experts, the participants in the meeting included government officials, heads of youth national councils in ESCWA member countries, experts active in the field of national youth strategies and programmes, leading experts in social sciences and economics, and researchers from national and regional centers focusing on population and development. The participants also included representatives of national offices of United Nations bodies, the League of Arab States and experts from non-governmental organizations specializing in youth issues and policies. It should be noted that the experts participated in the meeting in their personal capacities, with the exception of those experts who were nominated by their ministries and official entities. The list of participants is annexed to this report.

Annex\*

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