

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)

**POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT REPORT
ISSUE NO. 4
YOUTH IN THE ESCWA REGION:
SITUATION ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS
FOR DEVELOPMENT POLICIES**

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Introduction

The Population and Development Report is one of a series of analytical reports issued by the Population and Social Development Section of the Social Development Division at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). It aims to deepen knowledge of the interrelation between population and development issues. The fourth edition of this report is issued as one of the work programme activities of the Population and Social Development Section for the 2008-2009 biennium. These activities stress the need to treat youth as a distinct socio-demographic group that needs to be targeted by specific national policies.

This report is entitled *Youth in the ESCWA Region: Situation Analysis and Implications for Development Policies*. It was prepared with valuable contribution from Mr. Abdul-Aziz Farah, regional expert on population and development strategies, primarily on the basis of papers presented to and discussed at the two following meetings organized by the Population and Social Development Section in 2008 and 2009:

1. Workshop on Reinforcing National Capacities in Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth: National Reports and Systematic Documentation of Accomplishments, which was held in Beirut on 17 and 18 December 2008. This workshop adopted an interactive and participatory approach to reinforce the capacities of the national counterparts to prepare national reports to monitor the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. The working papers reviewed focused on the issue of responding to the Programme of Action for Youth from the perspective of ESCWA and on the importance and role of institutional capacity-building in responding to this programme, as well as on the supportive environment for the planning and formulation of national policies for youth. Participants discussed the results of the questionnaire prepared by ESCWA on the response of Arab countries to the World Programme of Action for Youth, which highlighted the general, structural, institutional and situational framework of the approach to youth issues and to the formulation of national youth policies adopted by member countries. The workshop ended with a discussion of the methodology for the preparation of national reports on youth within the framework of the fifteen priorities set out in World Programme of Action for Youth. The participants agreed on adopting a standard, three-section outline for writing national reports. The first section introduces the general features of youth under the three clusters and fifteen priorities identified in the World Programme of Action for Youth. Such priorities were considered by participants to be the minimum package to be adopted, even if they are not pressing issues in the country concerned, and even if detailed data on them are not available. The second section contains the followed and proposed methodologies for approaching youth issues in the country concerned, while the third section focuses on the challenges that countries are facing in responding to the Programme of Action for Youth within the general, structural, institutional, and situational framework.¹

2. The Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth Issues into the Development Process was held in collaboration with the Family Development Foundation in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, from 29 to 31 March 2009. The meeting sought to mobilize and direct decision makers towards integrating youth issues into the development process, as a strategy that could contribute to lessening all forms of social and economic inequality. The meeting began with a discussion on the demographic, economic, social and cultural characteristic of youth in the Arab region. Working papers dealt with the current demographic situation and future trends of Arab youth, social exclusion and its repercussions on youth employment, the gender gap among youth, youth culture, and political implications of the “youth bulge” in the Arab region, in addition to emigration of Arab youth in a globalized world. Participants then discussed nine national reports related to monitoring the World Programme of Action for Youth, prepared by Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, the Syrian Arab Republic, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia,

¹ United Nations, ESCWA, Report of the Workshop on Reinforcing National Capacities in Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth: National Reports and Systematic Documentation of Accomplishments, Beirut, 17-18 December 2008 (E/ESCWA/SDD/2009/2).

and the United Arab Emirates. These reports had been prepared by the national counterparts of ESCWA, on the basis of the outline proposed by the aforementioned workshop. Experiences and activities undertaken by some regional and United Nations organizations concerned with youth were also reviewed. The participants concluded with a discussion of a project proposal prepared by the Population and Social Development Section of the Social Development Division at ESCWA on strengthening capacities to formulate national youth Policies.²

This report consists of three chapters. The first chapter deals with the theoretical framework. It introduces the definition of “youth” and reviews contemporary methodological approaches to youth issues, with a focus on the United Nations approach centred on the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

The second chapter analyses the situation of youth in the ESCWA region with regard to education, employment, health and participation in public life using key indicators for each of these areas, identifying the main challenges facing young people in each one of them, and shedding light on the causes and roots of these challenges.

The third chapter deals with the implications of development policies, beginning with a review of youth policies currently followed in ESCWA member countries, some of which have formulated, or are currently working on formulating national youth policies and strategies, while most countries still deal with youth issues within such sectoral policies as education, employment and health, or within national development plans. Hence, this chapter focuses on the importance of targeting youth as a distinct socio-demographic group with specific needs and specific challenges. The chapter also stresses the importance of working along two main lines: the empowerment of youth; and providing youth with opportunities to realize their full potential. Finally, the chapter concludes with a review of the goals, targets and indicators published recently by the United Nations within the World Programme of Action for Youth in three clusters: youth and the global economy; youth and civil society; and youth and their well-being.

² Information Note, Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 29-31 March 2009.

I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. DEFINITION OF “YOUTH”

The United Nations defines youth as people aged between 15 and 24 years.³ This working definition was adopted for practical statistical reasons, since, in most cases, available country data involves distribution of population over five-year age groups. As such, this definition does not imply any prejudice to other definitions adopted by member countries of the United Nations based on social, cultural, economic, institutional and political factors. However, it is preferable to adopt a common definition to facilitate comparison among countries and within the same country over time.

Box 1. Definition of youth

“In 1995, the world’s youth population, defined by the United Nations as the 15-24 age cohort, was estimated to be 1.03 billion, or 18 per cent of total world population. (...)”

Apart from the statistical definition of “youth” mentioned above, the meaning of the term “youth” varies in different societies around the world. Definitions of youth have changed continuously in response to fluctuating political economic and socio-cultural circumstances.”

Source: United Nations, General Assembly, World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, Resolution A/RES/50/81, 1996.

The results of the survey conducted by ESCWA on the response of member countries to the World Programme of Action for Youth showed that only seven out of the thirteen member countries that completed the questionnaire define youth as the 15-24 year age cohort, while the others give definitions in which ages range from 10 to 35 (table 1).⁴

Hence, it can be said that youth is a socio-demographic group. Within this group, it is useful to distinguish between “adolescents”, whose ages range from 15 to 19 years, and “young adults” whose ages range from 20 to 24 years, since these two subgroups have distinct needs and face distinct challenges.

TABLE 1. DEFINITION OF THE YOUTH POPULATION GROUP IN ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES, 2008

| | 15-24 years | Other definitions |
|--|---|--|
| What is the age definition of youth in your country? | Bahrain Lebanon Oman Palestine Qatar Saudi Arabia Yemen | Egypt (18-35 years) Iraq (10-24 years) Jordan (12-30 years) The Sudan (18-29 years) Syrian Arab Republic (15-29 years) United Arab Emirates (15-30 years) |

Source: Detailed tables of results of the survey conducted by ESCWA on the response of member countries to the World Programme of Action for Youth.

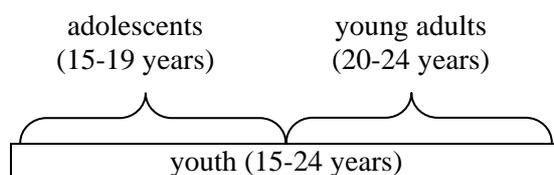
Note: Kuwait did not respond to the survey.

³ United Nations. *Youth and the United Nations: Frequently Asked Questions*. Available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/qanda.htm>.

⁴ For the results of the survey conducted by ESCWA on the response of member countries to the World Programme of Action for Youth, see the report on the Workshop on Reinforcing National Capacities in Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth: National Reports and Systematic Documentation of Accomplishments, Beirut, 17-18 December 2008, (E/ESCWA/SDD/2009/2) (in Arabic).

Figure I. Distinction between “adolescents” and “young adults”

Youth = adolescents (15-19 years) + young adults (20-24 years)



Note: Adolescence extends from 10 to 19 years, and can be divided into “early adolescence”, from 10 to 14 years, and “late adolescence”, from 15 to 19 years.

Youth is a very important phase in the human life cycle, with features that distinguish it from other phases (childhood, adulthood and old age). Economically, youth are in transition from being consumers of resources to becoming producers of wealth. In other words, they are in transition from economic dependency to economic productivity. In terms of family formation, youth are often at the stage of identifying a partner, marriage, childbearing, and establishment of an autonomous family. Mostly, youth is the stage of personality formation and self-realization.

B. REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO YOUTH

Four basic methodological approaches to youth may be distinguished (see also figure II), as follows:⁵

1. *First approach: youth as a phase in the human life cycle*

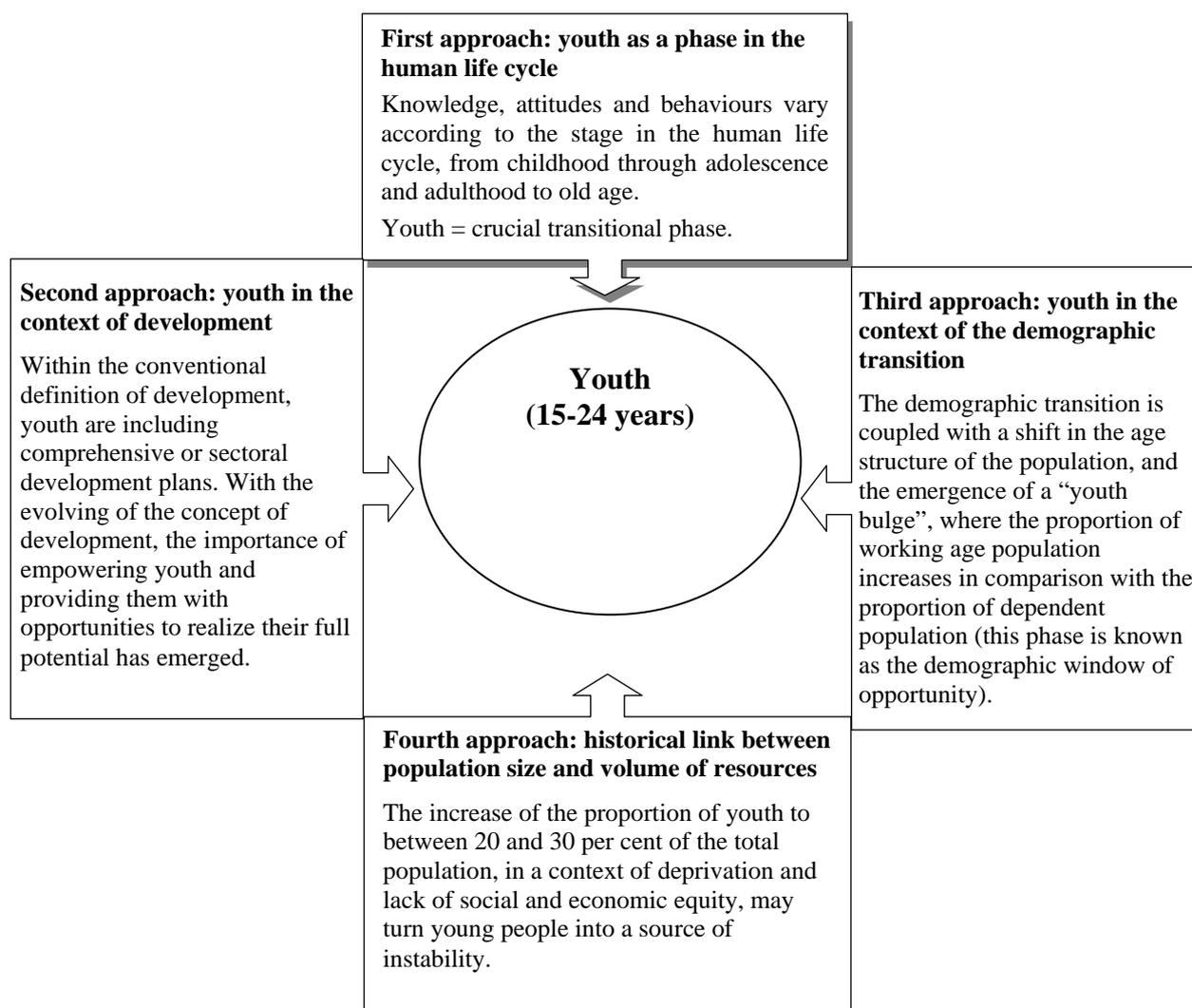
This approach considers that knowledge, attitudes and behaviours vary while human beings progress through the human life cycle, from childhood, through adolescence and adulthood, to old age. As mentioned above, youth covers late teenage and early adult years. A review of the most important characteristics of each of the stages of the human life cycle shows that childhood is the stage of physical growth and mental development, followed by adolescence, which is characterized by puberty, physiological changes, and the attempt to cope with them, creating a psychological condition typified by independence and rejection. Adulthood follows, with its early years characterized by the formation of personality and the building of an autonomous family. Finally, old age is the phase when physical and sometimes mental capacities diminish, with a reversion to the consumption of resources, rather than the production of wealth.

2. *Second approach: youth in the context of development philosophy*

Within the framework of the conventional definition of development, youth are not targeted as direct participants in and beneficiaries of the development process, but covered by such comprehensive or sectoral development plans as education, health, labour, etc. With the evolution of the concept of development and the recognition that man is at the centre of human development, emphasis shifted towards improving the quality of human life. Investing in youth within the context of development gained importance due to its positive impact in breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. This approach stresses the importance of empowering young people in the areas of education and health, and of providing them with opportunities to engage in employment and participate in decision-making in public and political life.

⁵ Shakoori, B., Response to the World Programme of Action for Youth and the Formulation of National Policies for Youth (in Arabic) prepared for workshop on Reinforcing National Capacities in Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth: National Reports and Systematic Documentation of Accomplishments, Beirut, 17-18 December 2008.

Figure II. Contemporary methodological approaches to youth



Source: Shakoori, B., Response to the World Programme of Action for Youth and the Formulation of National Policies for Youth (in Arabic) prepared for workshop on Reinforcing National Capacities in Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth: National Reports and Systematic Documentation of Accomplishments, Beirut, 17-18 December 2008.

3. *Third approach: youth in the context of demographic transformation*

This approach is based on the principles and hypotheses of demographic analysis. It considers that the demographic shift involves challenges that need to be addressed and opportunities that could be utilized. The shift from high to low rates of fertility and mortality is coupled with a shift in the age structure of the population. As the proportion of youth to total population rises, the "youth bulge" emerges. This change in the age structure opens up a demographic window of opportunity due to the decline in the proportion of children (0-14 years), the increase in the proportion of the working age population (15-64 years), and the stabilization or slight increase in the proportion of the elderly (65 years and above). The demographic window of opportunity appears when the working-age population grows at a rate exceeding that of the dependent population (children and the elderly), allowing the accumulation of personal and public savings. To take advantage of this opportunity, economic and social policies to transform savings into investment in development should be pursued.

4. *Fourth approach: historical link between the size of population and the size of natural resources*

This approach is based on the historical experiences of some countries in Europe and Asia. It builds on the idea that rapid population growth eventually leads to insufficiency of available resources and inability of Governments to meet the needs of youth. This situation could lead to young people creating problems and committing violence while demanding their rights. In this context, Batoool Shakoori indicates that the increase in the number of youth to 20 to 30 per cent of the total population, in a context of deprivation and lack of social and economic equity, may make young people a source of instability and violence, leading to terrorism.⁶ Cincotta and other researchers⁷ maintain that countries where those aged between 15 and 29 years constituted 40 per cent or more of all adults (15 years and above) were in the nineties of last century twice as vulnerable to the outbreak of conflicts than other countries. The majority of the countries experiencing a “youth bulge” are developing countries, where the rate of youth unemployment is three to five times the rate of unemployment among adults in general.

C. UNITED NATIONS APPROACH: WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH TO THE YEAR 2000 AND BEYOND

For decades, the United Nations has been giving priority to youth issues. In 1965, the General Assembly approved the Declaration on the Promotion Among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding Between Peoples.⁸ In the ten years following the Declaration (1965-1975), it focused on three key themes for young people, namely: (a) participation; (b) development; and (c) peace. The General Assembly proclaimed the year 1985 “International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace”, during which the international community stressed on the importance of fair distribution, public participation and quality of life for youth. Also, in that year, the General Assembly endorsed, in its resolution 40/14,⁹ the “guidelines for further planning and suitable follow-up in the field of youth”.

Since 1990, the United Nations has shown an increasing interest in youth issues, by including them in its global conferences and by adopting the World Programme of Action for Youth in 1995. The following are the major international conferences held by the United Nations on youth issues:¹⁰

1. *World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990)*

Article III of the World Declaration on Education for All¹¹ stipulates the following: “basic education should be provided to all children, youth and adults. (...) Youth and adults must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning”. The World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000, reaffirmed the commitment to the Jomtien Declaration.

⁶ Shakoori, B., op. cit.

⁷ Cincotta, R. P, Engelman, R. and Anastasion, D., *The Security Demographic: Population and Civil Conflict After the Cold War*, Population Action International, 2003.

⁸ General Assembly resolution 2037(XX), A/RES/20/2037, 7 December 1965.

⁹ United Nations, General Assembly resolution 40/14, *International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace*, 18 November 1985.

¹⁰ United Nations, ESCWA, *The youth bulge: Social implications and future vision*, Social Development Bulletin, Volume 2, Issue 1, June 2008.

¹¹ United Nations, UNESCO, *World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs*, World Conference on Education for All, 1990.

2. *International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994)*

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development¹² addresses issues of children and youth, stating the following: “The ongoing and future demands created by large young populations, particularly in terms of health, education and employment, represent major challenges and responsibilities for families, local communities, countries and the international community. First and foremost among these responsibilities is to ensure that every child is a wanted child. The second responsibility is to recognize that children are the most important resource for the future and that greater investment in them by parents and societies is essential to the achievement of sustained economic growth and development.”

3. *World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995)*

The World Summit for Social Development¹³ indirectly targeted youth through commitments, with actions for implementation. These include: (a) eradication of poverty, by focusing efforts on meeting the basic needs of all, where children, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and individuals are given particular priority, and by promoting programmes that target the poor among youth, and break the cycle of poverty that passes on from generation to generation; (b) promotion of the goal of full employment as a basic priority for economic and social policy, and empowerment of all men and women to attain secure sustainable livelihoods, through productive employment and work that are freely chosen; and (c) achievement of social integration, promotion and protection of all human rights, participation of all disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and individuals, provision of access by all people to education and information technology, participation of all age groups, encouragement of dialogue among generations in all segments of society, and provision of equal educational opportunities at all levels for children and young people with disabilities.

4. *The Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995)*

The Beijing Platform for Action, which resulted from the Fourth World Conference on Women,¹⁴ addresses issues of young girls through the provisions of the Beijing Declaration, which allocated a section to the girl child. The Declaration, and the section on the girl child, includes such strategic objectives and actions as: taking all measures necessary to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and the girl child, including discrimination against girls in education, skills development, training, health, and nutrition; eliminating negative attitudes and cultural practices against girls; promoting the role of families in improving the status of the girl child; and developing the full potential of girls and women and ensuring their full and equal participation in building a better world for all, and promoting their role in the development process.

5. *World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002)*

The World Summit on Sustainable Development adopted a declaration renewing commitment to the implementation of Agenda 21 emanating from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.¹⁵ It noted that the involvement of young people in the formulation and implementation of decisions and programmes on environment and development is vital to the success of Agenda 21 in the long term and devoted a chapter to the role of children and youth in development, in which it addressed the importance of promoting the role and active involvement of youth in the protection of the environment and the support of economic and social development, and the importance of the role of children in sustainable development.

¹² United Nations, *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development*, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994 (A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1).

¹³ United Nations, *Report of the World Summit for Social Development*, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995 (A/CONF.166/9).

¹⁴ United Nations, *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1).

¹⁵ United Nations, Economic and Social Council, Commission on Sustainable Development, Report of the Secretary-General, *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development: application and implementation* (E/CN.17/1997/8), 1997.

6. Millennium Development Goals (New York, 2000)

In September 2000, 189 nations signed the United Nations Millennium Declaration,¹⁶ which includes a set of goals, targets and indicators to be achieved by 2015. In the context of examining the progress made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), some of the goals and indicators were amended. The following are indicators that address the youth category:

(a) Goal 2

Achieve universal primary education. This goal includes an indicator for monitoring progress in the literacy rate among females and males aged between 15 and 24 years.

(b) Goal 3

Promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. This goal includes an indicator to monitor progress made in the ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and higher education.

(c) Goal 6

Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. This goal includes an indicator on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among the population aged between 15 and 24 years, in addition to the indicator on the proportion of people aged between 15 and 24 years with comprehensive correct knowledge on HIV/AIDS.

7. World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (New York, 1995)

In 1995, the United Nations adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond,¹⁷ which is derived from the former general and special international instruments mentioned above.

The programme is an unprecedented initiative by the international community to recognize the value of young people. It provides a framework for general policy and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of young people. The programme involves ten priority areas, with an additional five areas added in 2003 in the course of monitoring and evaluating the Programme of Action. In 2005, the World Youth Report 2005¹⁸ suggested the compilation of the fifteen priority areas into three main clusters, namely: youth and the global economy, youth and civil society, and youth at risk. In a subsequent report of the Secretary-General,¹⁹ these three groups were re-defined, and the name of the “youth at risk” cluster was replaced by “youth and their well-being”. The General Assembly, in its resolution 60/3 on the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010,²⁰ took note of these three clusters, and called for their use in future analyses of the implementation programme.

Hence, the World Programme of Action for Youth focuses on the fifteen priority areas that fall within the three clusters (see table 2).

¹⁶ United Nations, Millennium Development Goals, available at: www.un.org/millenniumgoals.

¹⁷ United Nations, General Assembly resolution 50/81, *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond* (A/RES/50/81), 13 March 1996.

¹⁸ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), *World Youth Report 2005 – Young People, Today, and in 2015*, United Nations: New York.

¹⁹ United Nations, General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, *World Youth Report 2005*, Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/61-E/2005/7).

²⁰ United Nations, General Assembly, *International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010* (A/RES/60/3), 2005.

TABLE 2. CLUSTERS AND PRIORITIES OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH TO THE YEAR 2000 AND BEYOND

| Priorities within the cluster “Youth and the global economy” | Priorities within the cluster “Youth and civil society” | Priorities within the cluster “Youth and their well-being” |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Globalization; - Poverty and hunger; - Education; - Employment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environment; - Leisure-time activities; - Full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making; - Intergenerational issues; - Information and communications technology. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health; - HIV/AIDS; - Substance abuse; - Juvenile delinquency; - Girls and young women; - Armed conflict. |

Sources: United Nations, General Assembly, *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond* (A/RES/50/81), 1996.

United Nations, General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, *Goals and targets for monitoring the progress of youth in the global economy*, Report of the Secretary-General, Addendum (A/62/61/Add.1-E/2007/7/Add.1), 2007.

United Nations, General Assembly, *Implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth: progress and constraints with respect to the well-being of youth and their role in civil society*, Report of the Secretary-General (A/64/61-E/2009/3), 2008.

On means of implementation, the World Programme of Action for Youth²¹ had the following to say:

“Effective implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond will require a significant expression of commitment by organizations and institutions responsible for its adoption and implementation and the involvement of such organizations and especially of youth from all sectors of society. Without such commitment by governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental entities at the national, regional and international levels, the Programme of Action will remain little more than a global statement of intent and general standard for action.

Therefore, the development of an overall system of enabling mechanisms is necessary in order for the Programme of Action to be implemented. Such mechanisms should engage, on a continuing basis, the human, political, economic, financial and socio-cultural resources necessary to ensure that the Programme is implemented efficiently and effectively.

Implementation of the Programme of Action is ultimately the responsibility of Governments with the support of the international community and in cooperation, as appropriate, with the non-governmental and private sectors. Translation of the Programme’s proposals for action into specific plans, targets and law will be influenced by national priorities, resources and historical experience. In this process, Governments can be assisted, at their request, by regional and international organizations.”

²¹ United Nations, *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond*, op. cit.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION OF YOUTH IN THE ESCWA REGION

This chapter aims to analyse the situation of youth in the ESCWA region with regard to education, employment, health and participation in public life. It reviews key indicators, trends and priorities, identifies main challenges facing youth, and sheds light on the causes and roots of these challenges, the understanding of which requires a review of regional and international indicators of youth development, as well as national indicators at the level of ESCWA member countries. Hence, this chapter summarizes the analyses provided in the used references and in the national reports on the situation of youth and the response to the World Programme of Action for Youth submitted by delegates of ESCWA member countries to the Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process, Abu Dhabi, 29-31 March 2009.²²

The importance of analysing the situation of youth stems from the necessity to highlight demographic, social and economic characteristics that reflect their capacities and the physical and cultural potentials that motivate and renew them. It has become clear to researchers that the 15-24 years age cohort is the largest demographic group in the Arab region, and is growing at an unprecedented rate. The number of youth reached 66 million in 2005, representing 21 per cent of the total population, while in 1980, it was about 33 million, which is equivalent to 19.5 per cent of the total population. Projections indicate that in 2020, the number will reach 78 million, which amounts to 18.2 per cent of the total population.²³

The rapid growth of the youth population presents opportunities for, but also challenges to, the achievement of the goals, objectives and sustainability of overall national development. In addition to the demographic characteristics that distinguish the youth age group, the present youth population would represent a promising development force if given access to good education, skills and opportunities to enable them to participate effectively in the development of society, and to enhance their behaviour and attitude in matters of health. Other conditions include the provision of adequate employment opportunities as well as freedom from all forms of social marginalization and exclusion, from all that distorts their identity, and all impediments to their full participation in decision-making.

Ample research evidence shows that investment in young people who are in their productive and reproductive years will have a deep, positive impact on the economic cycle, as well as on family planning thereby balancing human needs with material resources. Simultaneously, it will provide youth with more opportunities to innovate, acquire skills, produce, actively participate in society, and develop laws that promote appropriate frameworks for strategies and policies to support young people, protect their participation and enable them to break the cycle of poverty, exclusion and marginalization.

Hence, it was necessary for the present report to address youth issues in terms of opportunities and challenges and efforts exerted by Governments to meet the needs of the large numbers of young people through the promotion of education, employment, social and health services, and a culture of civic engagement and political participation.

A. YOUTH AND EDUCATION

Education is a fundamental human right. It promotes fulfilment of human potential, provides the knowledge and skills that enhance the contribution of youth to the global economy, and allows youth to benefit from globalization. Providing universal education, especially secondary education, is an indicator of youth participation in the development process and their equal and equitable benefit from it. Furthermore, education helps mobilize youth as a major force in shaping the present and the future of their societies, in addition to providing them with the information, capabilities, resources and opportunities needed for

²² United Nations, ESCWA and the Family Development Foundation, *Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integration Youth to the Development Phases*, Abu Dhabi, 29-31 March 2009 (E/ESCWA/SDD/2009/3).

²³ United Nations Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision*.

participation; for gaining their rights, including rights of citizenship; and for contributing to the advancement of their communities.

Since 1995, there has been a remarkable increase worldwide in the number of children completing primary education, while enrolment rates in secondary education increased from 56 to 78 per cent over the last decade.²⁴ Moreover, the number of students enrolled in higher education increased from 69 million in 1990 to 88 million in 1997, with the biggest progress taking place in developing countries.²⁵ Indeed, between 1990 and 2000, some countries succeeded in doubling net rates of enrolment in education as a whole. All of this is proof that the current generation of youth has the highest educational attainment.

Notwithstanding this progress in the number of learners worldwide, children of primary-school age who remained without education in 2002 numbered 115 million.²⁶ Moreover, a significant proportion of primary school graduates in most developing countries does not move to post-primary education. It also seems that the gap in literacy rates between males and females is large, particularly in Asian and African countries. Educational disparity between genders is the largest in Western Asia and North Africa, with the number of girls deprived of education exceeding the number of deprived boys by almost three to one.²⁷

Furthermore, the World Youth Report 2007²⁸ indicates that educational opportunities for young people, if available, are often of low quality, and do not prepare them for work requirements in the global economy. Across the world, overcrowding of classrooms, poor infrastructure, lack of teaching materials, and shortage of teachers and well-trained staff lead to depriving youth of adequate good-standard education. Inability to cover costs of equipment and qualified teachers may result in limiting the academic options and skills that may be acquired by students in school. Ability to use computers and the Internet are becoming increasingly important in education. Yet, 86 per cent of young people live in developing countries where computers and the Internet are scarce. Thus, the majority of young people are not adequately prepared for further education and work.²⁹

Over the last two decades, notwithstanding rapid population growth and the unprecedented youth bulge, the Arab region has achieved remarkable progress in all educational indicators. From the period 1990/1991 to 2004/2005, the average rate of inclusion in primary education for the Arab region increased from 70.5 per cent to 80.6 per cent, while the proportion of literate young people between 15 and 24 years of age increased from around two thirds to 83.4 per cent. Moreover, the gender parity index for literacy increased from 0.81 in 1991 to 0.92 in 2005.

However, despite the progress made, the goal of universal education has not been achieved, nor has the standard of achievement been uniform across subregions and countries in the Arab region. Around 16.6 per cent of young people are still illiterate and deprived of opportunities to learn how to read and write.³⁰ In 2005, around 7.5 million children in the primary education age group were out of school, nearly one third of them in least developed Arab countries. Furthermore, significant proportions of children are still unable to

²⁴ UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005: Education for All – The Quality Imperative*, available at: www.unesco.org/education/gmr/download/chapter3.pdf.

²⁵ UNESCO, *Gender and Education for All. The Leap to Equality: EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4*, Paris, 2003.

²⁶ UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005*, op. cit.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ United Nations, DESA, *World Youth Report 2007. Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Progress and Challenges*, United Nations: New York.

²⁹ United Nations, General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, *Goals and targets for monitoring the progress of youth in the global economy*, Report of the Secretary-General, Addendum (A/62/61/Add.1-E/2007/7/Add.1), 2007.

³⁰ Najib, K. *Development of Arab Education Systems to Empower Youth: Challenges and Future Prospects* (in Arabic), Series of *Population and Development Studies*, Department of Population and Migration Policies, Secretariat-General of the League of Arab States, 2005, p. 98.

complete primary school education. This may occur as a result of greater focus on the quantity rather than quality of education on the one hand, and the high costs of schooling for families and society on the other.

In comparison with primary education, secondary education is still less prevalent in the Arab countries. Data issued by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in 2002 show a decrease in the rates of transition to secondary school in the Arab countries, especially the least developed ones, and to a lesser degree in other countries, including Algeria, Kuwait, Morocco and Tunisia, while in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, the two stages, primary and secondary, are on par.³¹

Generally, university education is still limited in the Arab countries, because admissions are associated with the scores for secondary education. Statistics show that in 2000, the percentage of Arab youth in the 18-24 years age group enrolled in university education did not exceed 39 per cent, compared with at least 60 per cent in Japan. University education enrolment ratio is the highest in Lebanon (42 per cent), followed by Egypt and Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (39 per cent) and Jordan (29 per cent). At the other end is Mauritania (4 per cent), the Syrian Arab Republic (6 per cent), the Sudan (7 per cent), Oman (8 per cent), and Iraq (14 per cent).³²

Furthermore, suffering from a range of quality deficiencies, education in the Arab region is far from meeting the requirements of Arab development. Indeed, it is one of the most crucial challenges to youth empowerment in terms of building their knowledge, information, skills, sense of citizenship, and capacity for individual, collective and self-education.³³

Dropout rates from primary education in the Arab countries for which data are available vary. The rate is the highest in Djibouti (66.1 per cent), followed by Mauritania (27.4 per cent), United Arab Emirates (24 per cent) and Oman (22.3 per cent). At the other end, the rates are low in Algeria (1 per cent), Bahrain and the Syrian Arab Republic (1.7 per cent), and Tunisia (1.9 per cent). They reached 2.8 per cent in Egypt, 5.7 per cent in Lebanon, 7.4 per cent in Jordan and 12.3 per cent in Iraq.³⁴

The Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity was an opportunity to learn about the accomplishments and failures of youth education in the ESCWA member countries. The national report on Yemen's experience, which was reviewed at this meeting,³⁵ noted an increase in the rate of primary enrolment from around 51 per cent in 1991 to 55.2 per cent in 1994, and then to 74.7 per cent in 2005. The 1991 rates showed a discrepancy between enrolment of males (73 per cent) and enrolment of females (27.6 per cent) in basic education. In 2005, these figures rose to 74.7 per cent for males and 53.3 per cent for females. In 2005, the enrolment rate in secondary education for both genders was 40.5 per cent (52.6 per cent for males and 20.3 per cent for females). For university education, the ratio of females to males is still low (36.3 per cent in 2005).

The national report of Saudi Arabia³⁶ noted that the enrolment rates in education for the 15-19 age group was 88.7 per cent for males and 84.0 per cent for females. The data in the report point to higher enrolment rates among young males compared with young females, except for university education, where

³¹ Ibid., p. 35.

³² World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003*.

³³ Abdul Almutti, A. B., Arab Youth: Present situation, and social implications, (in Arabic), Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process, op. cit.

³⁴ UNESCO-IBE database, (Databases on education systems) 2006.

³⁵ Al-Bashairi, M. A., *National report on responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth, Yemen's experience* (in Arabic), Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process, op. cit.

³⁶ Al-Tayyar, A., *National report on responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth, Saudi Arabia's experience* (in Arabic), Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process, op. cit.

enrolment of females (33 per cent) is higher than that of males (24.2 per cent). In the age group 20-24, the percentage of enrolment in education is around 42 per cent for males and 45.5 per cent for females.

The indicators cited by the national report of Jordan³⁷ show rapid advancement in all stages of youth education, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Net primary school enrolment increased from 91.4 per cent in 1990 to 96 per cent in 2007. In 1990, the percentage of students who started first grade and completed the fifth was 91.4 per cent, but rose to 99 per cent in 2007. Nonetheless, the report argues that volume increases are not sufficient in themselves. The education sector still suffers from centralization and bureaucracy, low levels of enrolment in pre-school, and curriculum deficiencies. Moreover, vocational education suffers from low enrolment rates, and lack of funding and variety, while the higher education sector tends to focus on academic, rather than technical, education.

Thus, education in the Arab region suffers quantitative and qualitative deficiencies, which pose enormous challenges for planners and policymakers impeding the achievement of universal primary education, as well as the attainment of the desired progress towards national objectives in secondary and university education. According to national reports and discussions on them, these challenges are manifested in deficiencies in educational infrastructure and institutions and financial and human resource allocated to them, as well as low demand, especially among the poor and in areas vulnerable to conflicts and disasters.

Shortcomings in educational infrastructure are manifested in inadequate educational institutions (such as shortage of classrooms, halls, libraries, and buildings), and weak managerial competencies in public schools. A further challenge is the lack of qualified teachers, compounded by continual increase in student-teacher ratios in the classroom, whereas low demand ensues primarily from the lack of incentives to enrol and persist in education.

These challenges have for long haunted strategic thinking into qualitative and quantitative development of education at all levels in the Arab region, and, indeed, there needs to be public recognition of such challenges with the detection of their root causes. In this regard, it is important to refer to the summary of the report presented by the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States to the Summit of Arab Kings and Presidents, held in Riyadh in March 2007, which stressed the seriousness of educational problems in Arab countries.

Box 2. Development of education in the Arab countries

- According to the Shanghai League Table of 2006, not a single Arab university is among the top five hundred;
- The schooling index, indicating the average number of years a learner spends in education, is 7.7 years in Arab countries as a whole, but falls to 2.7 years in some of the least developed Arab countries;
- Traditional curricula are based on memorization, merely testing learners' ability to recall information;
- The distribution of students over disciplines is uneven, (low enrolment in science and technology disciplines);
- The knowledge structure and institutional relationships are based on domination, coercion and unilateralism;
- Most stages of education suffer from dualities that give rise to contradictions such as those existing between public and private education, education that follows foreign systems and education that adopts an Arab system, technical and general education, religious and non-religious education, sex-segregated education, and other divisions within the educational system;
- Educational gaps between male and female, rich and poor, and urban and rural areas persist.

Source: League of Arab States, the Secretary-General's report on development of education in the Arab countries, March 2007, pp. 84-94.

³⁷ Al-Sarhan, M., *National report on responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth, Jordan's experience* (in Arabic), Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process, op. cit

B. YOUTH AND WORK

Employment is an important phase in the life cycle of youth, for it enables them to achieve economic independence and transit from dependence on family to self-reliance. For this transition to be made safely, conditions for providing decent work opportunities for young people should be in place. However, these conditions will not arise without the integration of the relevant sectors and the coherence of social, economic and population policies, and the participation of the various decision makers concerned with development of youth capacities in setting overall national policies and programmes.

The global economy is undergoing rapid changes that impact labour-market conditions negatively, with their effect being felt by young people wishing to enter this market. Enterprises are recruiting high-yield, knowledge-intensive labour and resorting to new forms of temporary employment.³⁸ While globalization offers opportunities for youth participation in the global economy, it also narrows down possibilities of participation by laying down difficult, complex conditions that reduce movement across professional and geographical boundaries.

Active participation of youth in the global economic market is contingent upon possession of a legal identity, which may be difficult to obtain by many young people, particularly the weakest, most marginalized, and vulnerable to exclusion by the national systems of registration. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports estimate that 55 per cent of those born in the developing world each year, excluding China, remain unregistered, without a legal identity.³⁹

Provision of various such instruments of social protection for young people as unemployment insurance, income support, pensions, and health care are most important for mitigating the negative impact of globalization. However, studies show that social protection systems and institutions in most developing countries are weak and lack resources, which exacerbates exclusion and deprivation of the young and causes the high rates of migration amongst those looking for better opportunities. Moreover, although social protection services in industrialized countries cover larger numbers of people than in developing countries, they are often not comprehensive, leaving out informal and rural economies, women, and other marginalized groups.⁴⁰

In a study presented at the Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity, Samir Radwan⁴¹ addresses the factors contributing to the exclusion of youth from economic participation. Economic growth alone is not sufficient to explain the size of employment; rather, other social and institutional factors contribute to the spread of youth unemployment. While economic growth has a major impact on job creation, it is not the sole determinant of youth unemployment rates. In the Arab countries, a set of economic, social and institutional factors limit employment opportunities and constrain participation in the labour market. The study provides a definition of exclusion, with the aim of explaining its relevance to youth unemployment and exclusion of youth from economic and social life. The study also considers both supply and demand factors that influence exclusion, and concludes with a set of general guidelines for short- and long-term policies.

Worldwide, youth increasingly find it difficult to enter the labour market. Youth amount to 25 per cent of people of working age. However, unemployment amongst them reaches 43.7 per cent of total unemployment, which means that one in every two unemployed people is in the 15-24 years age group. Moreover, the world is suffering from lack of decent living opportunities, with one out of every three young

³⁸ United Nations, General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, Report of the Secretary-General, *World Youth Report 2005*, op. cit.

³⁹ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2006: Excluded and Invisible*, UNICEF: New York.

⁴⁰ World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization (WCS DG), *A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All*, ILO: Geneva, 2004.

⁴¹ Radwan, S., *Arab Youth Employment: Economic, Social and Institutional Exclusion and Its Impact on Employment*, Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process, op. cit.

people in the world either being unsuccessfully looking for work, or having completely abandoned the search for work, or working, but still living on less than two dollars a day.⁴² In the past decade, youth unemployment rates increased in various parts of the world. This can largely be attributed to the increase in the number of those who remain in full-time education for longer periods. Nonetheless, a significant part of this increase concerns frustrated young people who have given up looking for work. Furthermore, youth unemployment may be due to disability, or to having to participate in shouldering family responsibilities. In 2005, the number of poor young workers was estimated at 125 million. In effect, more than 20 per cent of young workers belong to households that live on less than one dollar per day per person. It is also estimated that more than half of all young workers live on two dollars per day,⁴³ and that the likelihood of unemployment among young people is three times as high as among adults.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that halving the youth unemployment rate, end making it more consistent with the adult unemployment rate, while allowing some natural differences, would have added between 2.2 and 3.5 trillion US dollars⁴⁴ to the global gross domestic product (GDP) in 2003, which is equivalent to 4.4 and 7 per cent respectively. Transition from school to work is one of the most important stages of life, for it determines the future economic and social well-being. However, this transition is gradual. Data from 60 developing countries indicate that young people engage in temporary or intermittent work for an average of 1.4 years after completing their education along with periods of unemployment before acquiring a permanent stable job. In some cases, the period extends to more than four years.

Repercussions of the global economy on youth employment are more severe on young people in developing countries, especially since the economies of those countries are being transformed by economic liberalization policies. Government support for employment and basic services has diminished considerably, and most of the GDP and the national economic surplus have moved to the private sector, mainly to multinational companies. As a result, employment opportunities have declined and periods of forced unemployment lengthened.⁴⁵

Globalization has faced Arab youth with an immense array of challenges, most notably those resulting from the mismatch between outputs of education and skills needed in the labour market. Developments in knowledge and technology, imposed by rapid globalization, have lead to lowering the demand for university and higher-institute graduates in Arab countries. In addition, there is a clear imbalance in the distribution over disciplines, with students tending to specialize in humanities, and social and educational sciences, rather than in natural sciences such as physics and engineering and others. The percentage of students enrolled in scientific disciplines such as natural sciences does not exceed 30 per cent of overall university enrolment.⁴⁶ Arab youth have to reconsider their acquired skills, and make every effort to acquire new skills, especially in information and communications technology. However, only rich young people have been able to do so.⁴⁷

The most outstanding manifestations of globalization associated with conditions in the labour market in the Arab region are the rapid changes in skills that have not been matched by appropriate changes in education, (the increase of the foreign component in Arab projects), and the establishment of branches of multinational companies that tend to employ cheap foreign labour, often from Asia. Those developments have led to instability of employment of young people, since many enterprises prefer temporary work,

⁴² United Nations, General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, *Goals and targets for monitoring the progress of youth in the global economy*, Report of the Secretary-General, op. cit.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Al-Hemish, M., *Economic globalization: Concept, features and local and Arab implications* (in Arabic), Centre for Arab Unity Studies, *Journal of Buhouth Iktesadiyah Arabiah*, Beirut, 2008, volume 41, pp. 89-110.

⁴⁶ Assaad, R. and Roudi-Fahimi, F., *Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: Demographic Opportunity or Challenge?* Population Reference Bureau, *MENA Policy Briefs*, April 2007, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Abdul Almutti, A. B., op. cit.

which, in turn, has ended or limited such aims and plans of young people as starting a family or participating in community life.

In 2005 unemployment among young people of both genders (15-24 years) was estimated at about 30 per cent in the Arab region as a whole, but varied from one country to another. For instance, it reached 6.3 per cent in the United Arab Emirates, 15.7 per cent in Morocco, 17 per cent in Qatar, 18.7 per cent in Yemen, 19.7 per cent in Oman, 21.34 per cent in Lebanon, 25.8 per cent in Egypt, and 38.9 per cent in Jordan.⁴⁸

National reports presented at the Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity have shown various indicators, levels, variations and influencing factors of unemployment in Arab countries. The national report that dealt with the experience of Iraq⁴⁹ explained that signs of recession in the Iraqi economy emerged in 1991, with employment opportunities declining and purchasing power of wages diminishing. The 1997 census showed that the unemployment rate in the 15 years and above age group was 16.7 per cent, rising to 28.1 per cent in 2003, then declining to 17.5 per cent in 2006.

Data on the situation of young people in Iraq, used for the five-year plan 2010-2014, show that unemployment rates are high among young people, particularly females. Young men and women account for about 28 per cent of the labour force, with the share of young women being 17 per cent. Economic activity of young people in rural areas was higher than in the cities (33.1 per cent versus 25.2 per cent). In 2006, the unemployment rate of the 15-64 years age group was about 50 per cent, with the total unemployment of young women accounting for 63 per cent of total youth unemployment.⁵⁰

The national report of Lebanon⁵¹ showed that, in 2004, 12.5 per cent of young people aged between 15 and 19 years were working, 70.8 per cent were enrolled in education, while 13.5 per cent were in neither group. For the 20-24 years age group, the corresponding numbers were 40 per cent, 34 per cent, and 23.4 per cent, respectively. The unemployment rate was 27.2 per cent in the 15-19 years age group and 17.3 per cent in the 20-24 years age group. Notably, unemployment has worsened compared with 1996, when it was 21.9 per cent in the 15-19 years age group, and 16.3 per cent in the 20-24 years age group.

The national report of the United Arab Emirates⁵² stated that, according to data compiled by the Ministry of Economy for 2005, there were 43,798 young Emiratis (15-24 years) in the labour force (83.2 per cent males and 16.8 per cent females). In contrast, females accounted for three quarters of the total number of students in university education. This inconsistency is due to several factors. First, young males join the labour force at an early age as governmental laws allow them to be recruited in military and police colleges as officer cadets. Secondly, there are appropriate job opportunities for young males that allow them to enter the labour market, rather than to continue their university studies as females do. Thirdly, the proportion of male students who choose to pursue their studies abroad is high.

⁴⁸ Arab Labour Organization, estimates are based on Arab and international statistical resources, 2006.

⁴⁹ Al-Mahdi, N. A., *National report on responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth, the experience of Iraq* (in Arabic), Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process, op. cit.

⁵⁰ Human Resource Development Division, The Iraqi Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation (MoPDC), July 2009.

⁵¹ Kadouh, K. and Al-Sabouri, M., *National report on responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth, the experience of Lebanon* (in Arabic), Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process, op. cit.

⁵² Al-Hamadi, J. M., Al-Shehhi, A., Al-Marzouqi, N., Al-Thabahi, A. S. and Dowar, A., *National report on responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth, the experience of the United Arab Emirates* (in Arabic), Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process, op. cit.

The national report of the Syrian Arab Republic⁵³ showed that, in 2006, the unemployment rate among young people aged between 15 and 24 years was about 18.3 per cent: 46.1 per cent among females, compared with 12.7 per cent among males. Unemployed young people constituted 58.1 per cent of all unemployed aged between 15 and 64 years. The report identified three main characteristics of unemployment in the Syrian Arab Republic, as follows: (a) unemployment is more acute in rural areas than in the cities; (b) unemployment is concentrated among young people; and (c) the rate of unemployment among females is nearly four times that among males.

The national report of Oman⁵⁴ stated that, according to the 2003 census data, the rate of economic participation of youth between 15 and 24 years is about 32.5 per cent (44 per cent for males and 21 per cent for females). The public sector employs the majority of young workers. In 1996, the proportion of Omanis with a diploma or university degree working in the public sector exceeded 80 per cent. This is due to the high wages, good benefits, job security, and social status enjoyed by public-sector employees.

Important conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing on the main challenges for policies and plans aimed at expanding youth employment in Arab countries. Clearly, Arab labour markets are experiencing a decline in rates of economic activity and a rise in unemployment rates among youth, especially females. Moreover, youth unemployment rates are high in countries that suffer from occupation and conflict where they were estimated at 27 per cent in 2004 and 17.5 per cent in 2006 in Iraq; and, at approximately 29.8 per cent in 2006 and 28 per cent in 2008 in Palestine.

Unemployment in Arab countries is concentrated among secondary-school and university graduates, in comparison with primary-school graduates and the illiterate. This situation is caused by the gap between labour market requirement and educational outputs. In Tunisia, for example, the unemployment rate was estimated at about 40 per cent or more among those with higher education, compared with 25 per cent among those with primary education.⁵⁵ The national report of Jordan stated that the unemployment rate is around 30 per cent among secondary-school graduates and 15 per cent among university graduates, compared with 8 per cent among those with only primary education. High rates of youth unemployment have contributed to the very high migration rates among young males looking for work.

C. YOUTH AND HEALTH

Perceived holistically, health is not merely freedom from disease and disability, but, according to the definition agreed upon internationally, is also enjoyment of physical, psychological, and social aspects of health, including reproductive health and reproductive rights. On the basis of such a broad concept, the world has, especially since the fifties of the last century, made significant development, albeit to varying degrees, in most health indicators of individuals and society in developed and developing countries alike.

As a large group of the world population and as essential stakeholders, young people have become major beneficiaries of the progress of health and medical systems, and of the improved health services in all regions of the world.⁵⁶

The improved provision of services was due to investment in the health sector, better access to potable water and sanitation and to child nutrition programmes, the inclusion of health education in school curricula, and the expansion of coverage of immunization programmes. Progress has also been made in reproductive

⁵³ Al-Khalifah, Y. and Al-Rakkad, W., *National report on responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth, the experience of Syria* (in Arabic), Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process, op. cit.

⁵⁴ Bin Hamad Al-Farsi, Q. *National report on responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth, the experience of Oman* (in Arabic), Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process, op. cit.

⁵⁵ World Bank. *World Development Report 2006: Equity and Development*, World Bank: Washington, D.C., 2006. Available at: <http://publications.org>.

⁵⁶ United Nations, DESA, *World Youth Report 2007*, op. cit.

health, with rates of unwanted childbirth and maternal mortality declining among young women, and the number of young people having comprehensive, accurate knowledge of how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, increasing considerably⁵⁷ as compared to past years.

However, notwithstanding these developments, major risks still threaten the health of young people in the world of today, due to problematic complications in various aspects of life, related to inequalities and disparities in gender rights, between rural and urban areas, rich and poor, educated and illiterate. Youth is a relatively safe stage of life. Nevertheless, it remains a critical period, given the health dangers and risky behaviour patterns threatening the lives of the young. Worldwide, youth (15-24 years) constitute 45 per cent of those newly infected with HIV,⁵⁸ and the incidence of AIDS among young women is no less than double that among young men.

Generally, incidental disease is the leading cause of death among young people in almost all regions of the world, while road accidents are the foremost cause of death among young people in the 15-19 years age group, and the second leading cause in the 20-24 years age group.⁵⁹ Moreover, changing lifestyles represent new risks to the physical and mental health of young people.

Changing consumption patterns and new entertainment habits are linked to increasing obesity, which is now becoming a major threat to young people in developed and developing countries alike. In many countries, obesity is among the top ten causes of preventable disease and death.⁶⁰

The health of young people in the Arab region is affected by a set of social, environmental, economic and political conditions, as well as by the quality and quantity of available services and the distribution pattern of these services over various social groups and geographical areas, be it rural and urban. Behaviour which is considered risky from health, physical, psychological and social perspectives is the most significant health problem for adolescents. Moreover, the proportion of underweight children is still high. It declined from 17.3 per cent in 1995 to 12.7 per cent in 2000 in the region as a whole, but is still elevated for a quarter of all children in the least developed Arab countries (27.4 per cent in 2000).⁶¹

The Arab region is the least afflicted with HIV/AIDS, with a 0.3 per cent incidence rate among adults in 2004. However, it is worth noting that the recorded incidence rate may be lower than the actual rate since people might hesitate to disclose their illness because of social stigma.

The national report of Yemen⁶² stated that the number of reported HIV/AIDS cases increased significantly in 2007 compared to previous years, where it reached 530 cases, compared to 123 cases in 2006 and 228 cases in 2005. The total number of cases recorded from 1990 to 2007 was 2,075, which calls for strengthened coordination among Government, civil society, and regional and international organizations to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and practical methods of prevention.

The national report of Jordan⁶³ indicated a significant reduction in the mortality rates of infants, children and mothers, as well as a remarkable increase in life expectancy. The report pointed out widespread awareness among members of society, including young people, of ways in which HIV/AIDS is transmitted

⁵⁷ Demographic and Health Surveys, MEASURE DHS Home, available at: <http://www.measuredhs.com>.

⁵⁸ 2008 UNAIDS Annual Report: *Towards Universal Access*, UNAIDS: Geneva.

⁵⁹ World Health Organization (WHO), *Youth and Road Safety*, Geneva, 2007.

⁶⁰ WHO, Regional Office for Europe, *Prevalence of excess body weight and obesity in children and adolescents*, Fact Sheet No. 2.3, May 2007.

⁶¹ WHO, *Youth and Road Safety*, 2007, op. cit. Available at: <http://whqlidoc.who.int/publications/2007/9241595116-eng.pdf>.

⁶² Al-Bashiri, M. A., op. cit.

⁶³ Al-Sarhan, M., op. cit.

and how to prevent it. Data showed that 89 per cent of Jordanian youth aged between 15 and 24 years and 80 per cent of those who received basic education are aware of sexually transmitted diseases.⁶⁴ However, awareness of young people of public health issues and reproductive health is still below the required level. In 2000, the Department of Statistics in Jordan conducted a survey of trends and practices among Jordanian youth in relation to reproductive health and planning.⁶⁵ It showed that 37 per cent of adolescents and young people do not know the meaning of reproductive health; 11 per cent link reproductive health to family planning, 11 per cent to safe motherhood, 14 per cent to safe delivery, 16 per cent to pre-natal care, and 14 per cent to post-natal care.

The national report of Saudi Arabia⁶⁶ showed that patterns of life and such harmful practices as smoking adversely affect the health of young people. Data of the 1996 Family Health Survey indicate that 3 per cent of those aged between 15 and 19 years and 12.8 per cent of those aged between 20 and 29 years are smokers. The health of many young women is affected immensely by the age at which they start reproducing, since early childbearing may cause health complications. Data of the 2004 Census of Population and Households indicates that disability rates among young men are higher than among women. The difference may be due to changes in lifestyle, especially in relation to disabilities caused by accidents.

Moreover, data of the 1996 Family Health Survey of Saudi Arabia shows that about 5 per cent of girls in the 15-19 years age group had begun their reproductive lives, with the percentage varying according to age, place of residence and level of education. On the other hand, studies have shown a link between early childbearing and the deterioration of health of mothers and children. In fact, the survey found that more than a quarter of mothers (27.6 per cent) who had given birth when less than twenty years old suffered from difficult labour and about 8 per cent had pre-term birth.

In the light of the foregoing, the following are some problems and challenges that hinder attempts to promote the development of health of young people in the Arab countries:

(a) Young people face health hazards arising from social conditions, beliefs and traditions, as well as from harmful personal behaviours, such as smoking, consumption of alcohol, drug taking and unhealthy overeating. Each one of the harmful habits mentioned carries a certain degree of risk to the health of youth;

(b) Young people lack sufficient knowledge of the consequences of their actions and deeds, such as the lack of information on preventive and curative reproductive health services from such reliable sources as health institutions and traditional knowledge channels;

(c) Young people lack a healthy environment, support systems to promote specific patterns of behaviour in daily life that enhance health and nutrition, and services that meet their special needs;

(d) Many Arab groups suffer from a severe lack of information and services to help them understand their own reproductive and sexual health, and protect them from early childbearing and unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and female genital mutilation, as well as other practices;

(e) Young people do not participate in setting the policies and programmes related to their health and that of society. Hence, services aimed at developing the health of youth turn out to be deficient or short of priority inputs.

⁶⁴ Jordan, Department of Statistics (DOS).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Al-Tayyar, A., op. cit.

D. YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE

Under “full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making”, the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond stipulates the following: “The capacity for progress of our societies is based, among other elements, on their capacity to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of youth in the building and designing of the future”, and added “conditioned by (...) enabling the economic, social and political participation of youth, as a matter of critical importance”.⁶⁷

Youth who have the opportunity to participate in the life of their communities have a better chance of successful transition to adulthood. In cases where youth participated more fully, and where countries benefited from the large youth work force, youth formed a positive motivating force for the development of their communities. Participation of youth in national youth councils and in preparing poverty-reduction strategy papers are the result of active global efforts to promote youth participation in decision-making. In Africa, for example, there are various examples of how keen young people are to participate in addressing deep-rooted economic and social problems.⁶⁸ Such activities promote social integration and provide young people with the skills necessary for the labour market and for participation in national and community development.

Nevertheless, there are still obstacles to full participation of youth in society. In the Arab region, such participation is limited. A report on the participation of Arab youth in planning the Millennium Development Goals,⁶⁹ issued by the United Nations Development Programme, showed that Arab youth are excluded from participation in Arab legislatures or parliaments; they have no young members (15 to 24 or even to 30 years old), and, indeed, the majority of their members is of advanced age.

Moreover, Arab parliaments do not have separate committees for youth issues; instead, these are dealt with by committees concerned with sport, culture or family affairs as part of their wider scope of work. Some studies on the involvement of Arab youth in civil societies have shown that young people are employed for special tasks, their participation in boards of directors is limited and often on the basis of appointment and selection, and they participate in activities that are not commensurate with their experience and skills. Furthermore, older people control the process and mechanisms of youth participation in those societies.⁷⁰ Young people are aware of the importance of participation and its relevance to them and their communities. However, they are averse to political participation as they lack confidence in its procedures, results and the winners, who may only serve their own personal interests.⁷¹

The national report of Yemen⁷² showed that, notwithstanding some improvement over the past years, participation of Yemeni youth in decision-making is still low. A number of organizations and youth associations have been established to address youth issues, represent youth in talks with Government and external parties, and provide them with various political, economic and cultural services.

⁶⁷ United Nations, *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond*, op. cit.

⁶⁸ Maira, S. *Expert Group Meeting on Goals and Targets for the World Programme of Action for Youth: “Youth in Civil Society” and “Youth and their Well-being”*, 19-21 May 2008, United Nations: New York.

⁶⁹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), DESA, Regional Bureau for Arab States, *Arab Youth Strategizing for the MDGs*, 2006.

⁷⁰ Ameen Fareed, A., *Arab youth in civil societies – opportunities and obstacles* (in Arabic), *Report of Arab youth and participation*, chapter 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, chapter 5.

⁷² Al-Bashiri, M. A., op. cit.

The national report of Qatar⁷³ showed that participation of youth in the political life of the country began with the enactment of Law No. 12 of 1998, which organized Central Municipal Council election. This law gave young people the right to stand for election and vote, regardless of gender. The University of Qatar, the Doha Youth Centre and the Arab Cultural Centre for Training and Consultation launched initiatives and training courses designed to raise awareness among young people and citizens of the importance of participation in political life, to strengthen their capabilities, and to support efforts of women to stand for election.

The report of Oman⁷⁴ stated that the energies of young people are channeled through voluntary work that complements Government work and supports Government agencies offering direct services to the community. The Government pays those young people wages, to encourage youth, particularly job seekers, to invest their leisure time in useful activities that benefit them and their community. The most important form of voluntary social service carried out by youth is exemplified by the groups working on community health under the auspices of the Department of Community Initiatives in the Ministry of Health. Aiming to help health institutions in promoting and disseminating health awareness in society, these groups act as channels of communication between health services and society. In 2008, the number of volunteers exceeded 3,000, distributed all over the Sultanate, of whom the majority are job-seeking young people. In addition, an initiative was launched to benefit from youth energies in teaching literacy classes. The Scout Movement is also an example of the voluntary work of young people with programmes directly related to the environment. Moreover, the young play a major role in such tourist festivals as the Muscat Festival and the Autumn Festival in Salalah. A most impressive example of voluntary youth service was their work in the aftermath of Hurricane Gono, which hit Oman in June 2007. Cooperating in helping and aiding victims and rebuilding towns, young people proved at that time to be exemplars of solidarity.

⁷³ Al-Hamadi, National report on responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth, the experience of Qatar (in Arabic), Expert Group Meeting Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process, op. cit.

⁷⁴ Bin Hamad Al-Farsi, Q., op. cit

III. IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

A. REVIEW OF CURRENT YOUTH POLICIES IN ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

National youth policy may be defined as the provisions issued by official bodies on the position of the country vis-à-vis youth issues. Such a policy is built upon an in-depth study of the situation of young people in the country concerned, in order to identify the problems they face and their education, employment, health and participation in public life priorities. As a result, goals and objectives for improving the lot of young people and enabling them to participate in and benefit from the development process are set, and quantitative and qualitative indicators are developed to help track progress in implementation.

The most important benefit of a national youth policy is that it provides a framework within which governmental and non-governmental organizations and the private sector can work on youth issues. However, it is also necessary to ensure consistency between the national youth policy and sectoral policies (education, employment and health), and integrate the national youth policy into the overall national development plans.

The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond stated that “Governments which have not already done so are urged to formulate and adopt an integrated national youth policy as a means of addressing youth-related concerns. This should be done as part of a continuing process of review and assessment of the situation of youth, formulation of a cross-sectoral national youth programme of action in terms of specific, time-bound objectives and a systematic evaluation of progress achieved and obstacles encountered.”⁷⁵

In 2005, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted resolution 60/2 on Policies and Programmes Involving Youth, in which it reaffirmed the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond and urged “Governments in consultation with youth organizations, to develop holistic and integrated youth policies based on the World Programme of Action, and to evaluate them regularly as part of the follow-up action on and the implementation of the Programme of Action”.⁷⁶

Furthermore, the United Nations stressed in its resolutions, reports and various publications the following points regarding the mechanism for formulating a national youth policy:

- (a) Importance of developing the national youth policy in cooperation between the various relevant national governmental and non-governmental organizations;
- (b) Importance of involving young people in identifying their needs and priorities and developing the national policies that relate to them;
- (c) Importance of Government cooperation with the regional commissions of the United Nations.

The above-mentioned resolution stated the following:

“(…) The General Assembly recognizes that the implementation of the World Programme of Action and the achievement of the internationally agreed upon goals, in particular those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, require the full and effective participation of young people and youth organizations and other civil society organizations at the local, national, regional and international levels;

⁷⁵ United Nations, *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond*, op. cit., p. 31.

⁷⁶ United Nations, General Assembly resolution, *Policies and Programmes Involving Youth* (A/RES/60/2), 27 October 2005.

(...) Calls upon Governments, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations to develop strong partnerships to scale up investments in youth and to encourage youth-led contributions to achieving the internationally agreed upon goals, in particular those contained in the Millennium Declaration;

(...) Requests the United Nations regional commissions to organize, within their existing resources, regional consultations with Member States and youth organizations in order to evaluate the implementation of the World Programme of Action.”⁷⁷

As far back as 1995, the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond⁷⁸ stressed the importance of coordination among national stakeholders on youth issues:

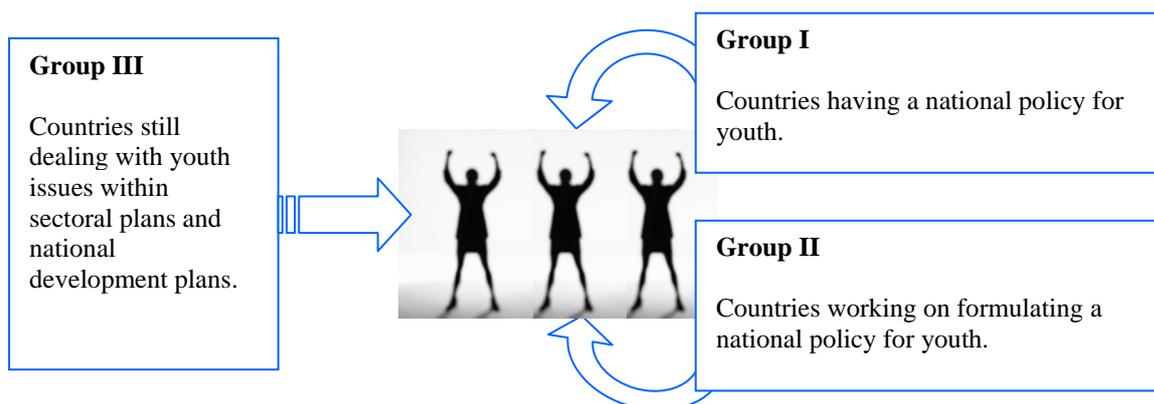
“Reinforcing youth-related concerns in development activities can be facilitated through the existence of multilevel mechanisms for consultation, dissemination of information, coordination, monitoring and evaluation. These should be cross-sectoral in nature and multidisciplinary in approach and should include the participation of youth-related departments and ministries, national and non-governmental youth organizations and the private sector.

Special and additional efforts may be required to develop and disseminate model frameworks for integrated policies and to identify and organize an appropriate division of responsibilities among both governmental and non-governmental entities concerned with youth-related issues. Special and additional efforts could also be directed towards strengthening national capacities for data collection and dissemination of information, research and policy studies, planning, implementation and coordination and training and advisory services.

National coordinating mechanisms should be appropriately strengthened for integrated youth policies and programmes. Where such mechanisms do not exist, Governments are urged to promote their establishment on a multilevel and cross-sectoral basis.”

In accordance with the methodology adopted for planning for youth, ESCWA member countries may be divided into three groups (figure III below).

Figure III. Methodology of planning for youth in ESCWA member countries



Within the first group of countries, having a national policy for youth, this report addresses below the experience of Jordan and Bahrain.

⁷⁷ United Nations, General Assembly resolution (A/RES/60/2), op. cit.

⁷⁸ United Nations, *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond*, op. cit., pp. 31 and 32.

1. *The experience of Jordan*

The National Youth Strategy for Jordan 2005-2009⁷⁹ came about as a response to directives from His Majesty King Abdullah II on the need to put youth atop national priorities. In the preparation of this strategy, a scientific participatory methodology was used, with the cooperation of governmental, non-governmental and international organizations. Mr. Atef Odibat, President of the Supreme Council for Youth, explains that the Strategy is a written document, to which institutions of the State and the country are committed. It analyses the current situation of young people in Jordan, defines a common vision for the future, and identifies the mechanisms and action plans required to achieve it.

The Strategy identifies youth as the population aged between 12 and 30 years. Its main vision is to raise and develop “Jordanian youth men and women who are aware of themselves and their abilities, loyal to their country and pro-actively take part in its progress and development, able to deal with the variables and developments of this age in a confident aware and steadfast manner, within a secure and supporting environment”.⁸⁰

The strategy document consists of three main parts, with the first part consisting of two chapters. The first chapter outlines the main features of Jordan and the basic indicators of its human development; the concept and conditions of youth in national human development; the country’s view of youth and their image of themselves in terms of rights, duties and priorities; the policies for caring for them, and the most important governmental and civil institutions working in this field. The second chapter introduces the importance of the strategy; its rationale, concepts, perspectives, principles, vision, mission, policies, preparation methodology, work phases, participants, and cost estimates; and the strategic objectives and how to achieve them.

The second part consists of three chapters. The first chapter deals with the nine strategic themes (youth and participation, youth and recreational activities and leisure time, youth and civil rights and citizenship, youth and culture and information, youth and information technology and globalization, youth and education and training, youth and employment, youth and health, and youth and the environment), and explains the importance of each theme to young men and women, how they perceive it, and how the country views them in relation to it. The second chapter analyses the current situation of youth in relation to each theme; in light of which the strategic objectives and policies described in the third chapter were identified.

The third part of the strategy document consists of two chapters. The first chapter presents the work plan for each theme, including objectives, programmes, interventions and activities, while the second chapter cites the recommendations for promoting youth participation and the institutions and organizations involved.⁸¹

Box 3. Excerpts from speeches by His Majesty King Abdullah II, Jordan

Jordan’s young people are “its greatest asset and hope for the future. We must tap our young people’s intellectual, creative, and reproductive potential in order for Jordan to keep up with new developments in global scientific, economic and social factors.”

(...) Care and assistance have to be provided to them, as well as programmes and plans to qualify, train and enable them to assume responsibility, direct their creativity towards building and progress, and create job opportunities for them through organizing and managing the labour market as to create job opportunities for Jordanians first, and through expansion of education and vocational training. Homeland can only be built by its children.

Source: National Youth Strategy for Jordan 2005-2009, 2004, p. 3.

⁷⁹ Odibat, A., Jordan, Higher Council of Youth, Vision, Prospects, Achievements, and Aspirations (in Arabic), United Nations, ESCWA, Workshop on Reinforcing National Capacities in Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth: National reports and systematic documentation of accomplishments, Beirut, 17-18 December 2008.

⁸⁰ Jordan, Higher Council for Youth, in cooperation with UNDP and UNICEF, *National Youth Strategy for Jordan 2005-2009*, 2004, p. 9.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, pp. 10-11.

2. The experience of Bahrain

Bahrain accords youth development special priority. The General Organization for Youth and Sports and the Bahrain office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP-Bahrain) signed an agreement in August 2003 to assess the existing national strategy for young people and develop a new National Youth Strategy for the next five years that includes the following nine themes: (a) education; (b) health; (c) employment; (d) culture; (e) information and communications technology (ICT); (f) social security; (g) environment; (h) sports and leisure; and (i) civil rights and human rights. The Strategy, which defines youth as the 15-30 years age group, focuses on enhancing the skills of young people and improving the opportunities available to them to participate in and benefit from development.^{82, 83}

The General Organization for Youth and Sports in Bahrain coordinates this strategy between ministries and non-governmental organizations concerned with youth. Through it, Bahrain is seeking to integrate sports, education and training, health, and employment into the productive sectors⁸⁴ as they represent vital dimensions for the development of Bahraini youth, and has taken practical steps to implement it, including the establishment of a Youth Parliament.⁸⁵

Within the second group of countries currently formulating a national policy for youth, the experience of the Syrian Arab Republic is presented here. In October 2006, the Syrian Government and the United Nations Fund Population Fund (UNFPA) signed a project to support the National Strategy for Young People in the Syrian Arab Republic. The State Planning Commission and the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs are implementing this project. To date, the following stages of strategy formulation have been achieved:

(a) Collection of up-to-date detailed data on young people in relation to education; employment; living conditions; public, reproductive and psychological health; and participation in public life. The quantitative data was collected through a field survey on empowerment and community participation of young people in order to secure an accurate, reliable, comprehensive, up-to-date database on various youth issues, allowing comparisons to be made across provinces.⁸⁶ The questionnaire included the following six sections: (i) general information on young men and women and their families; (ii) educational empowerment of young people; (iii) employment empowerment of young people; (iv) health empowerment of young people; (v) attitudes to and trends in family life; and (vi) attitudes to and trends in self-awareness and community participation. Furthermore, qualitative data was collected through 30 focus groups; ten in the southern region; ten in the central, coastal and northern region; and ten in the eastern region. The goals of convening the focus groups were to get the views of young people on constraints and empowerment mechanisms in education, employment, health, and community participation; and the views of families and opinion leaders of the nature of obstacles impeding empowerment of young people, as well as of how best to take advantage of the energies and capacities of youth in realizing their own potential and participating actively in building their homeland;⁸⁷

⁸² UNDP-Bahrain, *Bahrain National Youth Strategy. Assessment Report*, September 2005.

⁸³ UNDP-Bahrain and the General Organization for Youth and Sports, *Operations Manual for the Formulation of the Bahraini National Youth Strategy and Action Plan*, January 2004.

⁸⁴ Middle East Youth Directory, Governmental Organizations, and National Policy in Bahrain, 2004 (in Arabic), available at: www.infoyouth.org/cd_rmed/Arabic/countrygov_ar/bahrgov_ar.htm.

⁸⁵ United Nations, ESCWA, *The Youth Bulge: Social Implications and Future Vision*, op. cit.

⁸⁶ Al-Qash, M. A., Follow-up and supervision of Ahmad, A., The State Planning Commission, Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Empowerment and social participation of youth-quantitative report; the project to support the national strategy for young people in Syria (in Arabic), Damascus, 2007.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

(b) Research into and studies to highlight the problems that should be addressed by a National Strategy for Young People. The results of the field survey on youth empowerment and community participation were compiled in a quantitative report, and the findings of the focus groups in a qualitative report. Furthermore, in-depth analytical studies were undertaken of five priority areas: (i) public and reproductive health; (ii) education; (iii) living conditions; (iv) gender; and (v) community participation, all of which offered recommendations for the National Strategy.

B. IMPORTANCE OF ADDRESSING YOUNG PEOPLE AS A DISTINCT SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP

Like children and the elderly, youth form a socio-demographic group; demographic because they belong to a particular age group (15-24 years), and social because their needs, the challenges they face and their role in society differ from those of other groups. Moreover, they are in a transitional stage of the life cycle; moving from being consumers of resources to producers of wealth, from economic dependency to economic production, as well as passing through the stage of personality and self-knowledge formation and starting families of their own.

Addressing young people as a socio-demographic group entails formulating a special youth policy, establishing a special governmental institution for them, and conducting special surveys of youth issues.

1. *Formulation of a specific policy for youth*

Rather than addressing youth issues within sectoral policies (education, employment and health) or overall national development plans that may not give them priority, a national policy for youth should be developed. In particular, employment policies should target young people, following trends of youth unemployment in relation to general unemployment rates, since the majority of the unemployed are young people looking for their first job.

2. *Establishment of a specific Government institution for young people*

A common formula may not be applicable to all countries since each has its own specificities. Yet, consideration ought to be given to the establishment of a Government institution dealing with youth issues, preferably in the form of a higher council for young people that acts as a coordinator among various departments, sectoral ministries, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. In place of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Jordan, in 2001, established a Higher Council for Youth, entrusted with implementing programmes, initiatives and projects designed to achieve State objectives related to youth. The President of the Council, Mr. Atef Odibat, explains that this course of action was taken because serving youth is a national responsibility; not the responsibility of a single ministry, but, rather, of all ministries, departments and organizations. Besides, the institutional framework of the Council facilitates the coordination, organization and leadership of the national effort on youth.⁸⁸

Coordination of youth issues is particularly important in the Arab countries, where there is a plethora of governmental, non-governmental and private organizations and programmes dealing with young people. According to the Middle East Youth Directory,⁸⁹ the total number of organizations, programmes and ministries dealing with youth in 10 Arab countries was 221 in 2004 (table 3).

The methodology used to gather the information was multifold. An initial desk research was undertaken to locate the relevant organizations in each country, focusing on the identification of governmental and non-governmental organizations, research centres, and other organizations that include youth programmes as part of their activities. Information was gathered by internet search, inquiries to ministries and embassies and other sources. The statistics show that Lebanon ranks at the top of the list, followed by Jordan and Palestine.

⁸⁸ Odibat, A., op. cit.

⁸⁹ Middle East Youth Directory, 2004, available at: www.infoyouth.org/cd_rmed/mains/main_ar.htm.

TABLE 3. TOTAL NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS, PROGRAMMES AND MINISTRIES CONCERNED WITH YOUTH IN SELECTED ARAB COUNTRIES, 2004

| Country | Total number of organizations, programmes and ministries |
|----------------------|--|
| Regional | 13 |
| Bahrain | 8 |
| Jordan | 38 |
| Kuwait | 12 |
| Lebanon | 89 |
| Oman | 2 |
| Palestine | 34 |
| Qatar | 5 |
| Saudi Arabia | 1 |
| Syrian Arab Republic | 14 |
| United Arab Emirates | 5 |
| Total | 221 |

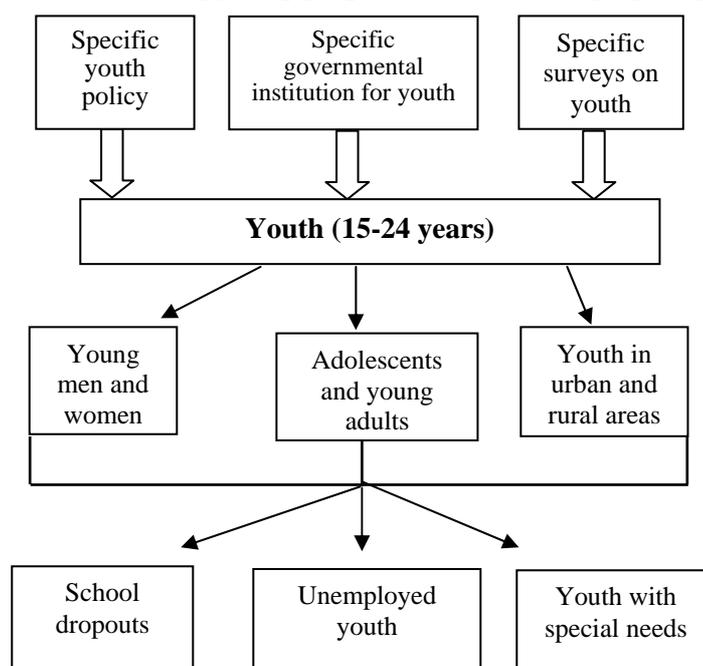
Source: Middle East Youth Directory, 2004, op. cit.

3. Preparation of specific surveys of youth issues

To provide regular up-to-date data on youth education, employment, health, and participation in public life and politics, surveys need to be conducted, with the data disaggregated, inter alia, by gender, age (adolescents 15-19 years, young adults 20-24 years, due to differences in abilities, needs, and challenges between the two subgroups), and by place of residence (rural or urban).

However, young people should not be considered a single homogeneous demographic category, but, rather, a broad group comprising various subgroups, with national youth policy focusing on such subgroups that face greater challenges as young people with special needs, rural youth, school dropouts, and unemployed youth. In 1985, the International Youth Year: Participation, Development and Peace, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed in resolution 40/14, “the guidelines for further planning and suitable follow-up in the field of youth”, which focused on the importance of addressing specific youth groups. This was reaffirmed in the 1995 Work Programme of Action for Youth.

Figure IV. Addressing young people as a socio-demographic group



C. IMPORTANCE OF WORKING ON BOTH EMPOWERMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND PROVIDING THEM WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO REALIZE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

Often, national policies focus on youth empowerment, which is a gradual process through which young people acquire the education and health that enable them to make life decisions. Hence, policies generally focus on providing education at the secondary and tertiary levels and ensuring that students do not drop out, as well as on improving health to ensure that youth follow a healthy lifestyle (practicing sports, eating a balanced diet, and refraining from smoking and alcohol intake) and have enhanced reproductive health.

Chapter II of this report cited the significant youth-empowerment advances made by Arab countries through higher enrolment rates in secondary and university education. However, young people do not have the opportunity to use the tools acquired in the labour market and public and political life. Having attained a high standard of education, they cannot find appropriate jobs to make use of their education, improve their standard of living, and contribute to and benefit from development. Hence, work should proceed along two lines: empowerment of youth and providing them with opportunities to realize their full potential.

D. WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH TO THE YEAR 2000 AND BEYOND: GOALS, TARGETS AND INDICATORS

In 2007, the report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond⁹⁰ was issued, followed by an addendum on goals and targets for monitoring progress of youth in the global economy, in relation to four priority areas of the Programme, namely globalization, poverty and hunger, education, and employment. The use of effective benchmark indicators, in the form of specific goals and time-bound targets, can facilitate setting a youth development agenda, nationally and internationally, as well as assessing progress made in youth development at the national level. The report of the Secretary-General states the following:

“The goals and targets presented in the Millennium Development Goals framework are a good starting point for identifying goals and targets for youth development. However, while the issues addressed by the Millennium Development Goals relate to the entire population, including youth, they do not focus specifically on many of the issues that impinge directly on youth development. Youth, as a part of the general population, clearly benefit from society-wide improvements in the context of the Millennium Development Goals. However, youth represent a specific socio-demographic group with its own, and sometimes unique, challenges. Addressing a range of acute issues on the youth development agenda and assessing results of policy interventions is an opportunity to improve policy making, making it more relevant and effective. To seize this opportunity, there is a need for a concerted effort to lay out a vision for youth development, including identifying concrete goals and measurable objectives.”⁹¹

In 2009, the Secretary-General issued a report on the Implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth: progress and constraints with respect to the well-being of youth and their role in civil society (A/64/61-E/2009/3).⁹² The report examined progress made in the role of youth in civil society and in the well-being of youth, as well as the pressures impeding such progress. It also proposed selected goals and targets for monitoring progress arrived at through consultations with member countries, and the programmes, regional commissions, and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, as well as organizations led by

⁹⁰ United Nations, *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond*, op. cit.

⁹¹ United Nations, General Assembly, Addendum to the Report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, *Goals and targets for monitoring the progress of youth in the global economy*, Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/61/Add.1-E/2007/7/Add.1), 2007.

⁹² United Nations, General Assembly, *Implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth: progress and constraints with respect to the well-being of youth and their role in civil society*, Sixty fourth session, (A/64/61-E/2009/3), 2008.

youth and other non-governmental organizations. Experts and representatives from these organizations met at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 19 to 21 May 2008 in the context of the expert group meeting to identify and propose goals and objectives related to youth in civil society and youth and their well-being.⁹³ The meeting also took account of the proposals received from stakeholders who were unable to attend. Additional assessment of the amenability to measure all selected goals and targets was made. To overcome the difficulty of monitoring the large number of goals and targets established by the expert group meeting, each priority area was assigned two goals, with a set of related targets for each.

Along the lines of the Millennium Development Goals, youth now have their own set of goals and targets. As an example, table 4 cites the goal and targets included under the education priority area within the youth in the global economy cluster.

TABLE 4. WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH TO THE YEAR 2000 AND BEYOND:
THE GOAL AND TARGETS UNDER THE EDUCATION PRIORITY AREA

| Priority: Education | |
|---|---|
| Goal 5: promote access to quality education and ensure that formal and non-formal education of youth supports lifelong learning and skills development | <p>Target 5.1: achieve universal access to quality basic education and ensure gender equality in education by 2015</p> <p>Target 5.2: between 2005 and 2015, increase by 50 per cent the proportion of students completing secondary education</p> <p>Target 5.3: by 2015, develop and implement policies to promote the transition to quality post-secondary education, including vocational education and non-formal programmes, and other skill-building opportunities</p> <p>Target 5.4: ensure that opportunities for technical and vocational education and skills training are available to all youth by 2015</p> <p>Target 5.5: by 2015, develop and implement national systems of quality assurance in education based on internationally agreed upon standards and tools</p> <p>Target 5.6: by 2015, increase by two thirds the proportion of young women and men with the ability to use computers and the Internet as a tool for learning and knowledge acquisition</p> |

Source: United Nations, Goals and targets for monitoring the progress of youth in the global economy, 2007, op. cit., p. 7.

Commission for Social Development resolution 47/1 on Policies and Programmes Involving Youth called upon “member states to consider using the goals and targets proposed in the report of the Secretary-General at the national level as a means of facilitating the monitoring of the progress in ensuring young people’s well-being and their engagement with civil society and the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth”, and called upon “the Secretary-General to intensify efforts to further develop and propose a set of possible indicators linked to the World Programme of Action for Youth and the proposed goals and targets, in order to assist States in assessing the situation of youth”.⁹⁴

In response, the United Nations has developed a preliminary list of indicators to monitor progress within each of the fifteen priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth, providing for each indicator a definition, the data source and how to interpret its value.⁹⁵ As an example, table 5 cites the indicators included under the education priority area within the youth in the global economy cluster.

⁹³ Expert Group Meeting on Goals and Targets for the World Programme of Action for Youth: “Youth in Civil Society” and “Youth and their Well-being”, op. cit.

⁹⁴ United Nations, Economic and Social Council, Commission for Social Development, final report of the forty-seventh version (22 February 2008 and 4-13 February 2009), (E/2009/26-E/CN.5/2009/9).

⁹⁵ United Nations (2009). *Youth Development Indicators* (work in progress), *Youth and the United Nations*. Available at: www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/youthindicators2.htm.

TABLE 5. WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH TO THE YEAR 2000 AND BEYOND:
INDICATORS UNDER THE EDUCATION PRIORITY AREA

| Priority: Education |
|--|
| Indicator 4. Youth literacy rates |
| Indicator 5. Gross enrolment ratio for secondary education |
| Indicator 6. Net enrolment rate for secondary education |
| Indicator 7. Gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education |
| Indicator 8. Transition rate to general secondary education |

These quantitative indicators provide accurate and reliable means for measuring progress towards the goals and targets of the Programme of Action, shed light on the situation of youth, and enable identification of flaws to be addressed through policies and strategies and comparisons among countries, as well as within the same country. However, they may be considered as the minimum necessary, while observing the need to further break up each indicator by gender and age (15-19 and 20-24 years) and geographical and administrative area (rural, urban; provinces, districts; and so on).⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Farah, A., *Outputs of the project to strengthen national capacities in the formulation of national policies for youth: on the response of member countries to the World Programme of Action for Youth - list of indicators* (in Arabic), Expert Group Meeting on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process, op. cit.

CONCLUSION

Young people aged between 15 and 24 years constitute a broad demographic group in the ESCWA region; one out of every five is a young person. This group is growing at unprecedented rates, making it vitally necessary to study its condition, in terms of education, employment, health and participation in public life, in addition to analysing the implications for development policies. Youth is no longer a burden on development, but an active group that participates in production and social, economic and political development. Youth policies seek to build the capabilities of youth and provide them with opportunities, including those brought about by demographic changes intrinsic in what is known as the demographic window. These policies call for investing in development and directing such investment towards priority issues that benefit young people, enabling them to become agents of change and actors in key areas necessitated by the demographic transition and development processes.

This fourth issue of the Population and Development Report has shown a marked improvement in the situation of young people compared with past decades. However, some segments of youth are still vulnerable to social exclusion, unemployment, ill health, and sometimes delinquency. The report concluded the following:

Youth and education

Over the past two decades, the region has achieved remarkable progress in enrolment rates of youth in secondary and higher education. The percentage of young people who can read and write increased from about two thirds in 1990-1991 to 83.4 per cent in 2004-2005. The youth gender parity index for literacy increased from 0.81 in 1991 to 0.92 in 2005. However, in contrast, curricula are, in many cases, still traditional, relying on memorization and recall. In addition, generally, the region is still unable to bridge the educational gaps between rich and poor, and urban and rural. Notably, in most ESCWA member countries, outputs of the educational system, namely the disciplines studied by students, are incompatible with the needs of the labour market.

Youth and work

With an unemployment rate among the young of about 30 per cent, approximately one out of every three young people is unemployed. Notably, unemployment is concentrated among secondary-school graduates and university graduates, compared with primary-school graduates and illiterate. This is attributable to the incompatibility of educational system outputs with labour market needs. High unemployment rates have led to a significant rise in the emigration of young people, particularly males, looking for work.

Youth and health

The health of youth in the region has improved over past decades. However, such changes in youth lifestyles as not exercising regularly, spread of unhealthy diets, and spread of smoking, are exposing them to various health hazards, most notably, obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes. There is also an increase in the incidence of HIV/AIDS, with data tending to be underestimated due to infected young people being reluctant to disclose their illness for fear of social stigma. With regard to reproductive health, some young women, particularly illiterates living in rural areas, still marry at an early age and give birth to a large number of children, disregarding the importance of spacing pregnancies.

Youth and participation in public life

Generally, the region suffers from exclusion of youth from participation in social, economic and political decision-making. Often, young people cannot participate in nor benefit from the development

process, resulting in feelings of frustration and exclusion that occasionally lead youth to attempt introducing change.

In this context, the youth bulge in the ESCWA region may have both positive and negative implications. Indeed, it may provide opportunities that should be utilized, but may also impose challenges to be faced.

1. *Opportunities to benefit from*

The youth bulge caused by demographic transitions in the region, resulting from the low proportion of children (0-14 years) and the high proportion of people of working age (15-64 years) and the relative stability of the proportion of the elderly (65 years and above) may open a demographic window for ESCWA member countries to benefit from increased savings and investment, and in the long term, from improvement in the quality of life of the population.

2. *Challenges to be faced*

The growth in the number of young people suffering from unemployment and social exclusion within some segments of the population may lead young people to aspire to change, sometimes by non-peaceful methods, leading to instability.

ESCWA member countries have become aware, though unevenly, of the importance of addressing youth issues with specific policies. However, a number of obstacles impede their capacity to formulate appropriate national youth policies. Such obstacles may be of a structural nature (insufficient knowledge of modern approaches to youth issues and of the priorities of the World Programme of Action for Youth) or institutional (lack of an effective coordinating institution) or, in some instances, circumstantial (eruption of wars and lack of stability and security). As a regional commission of the United Nations, ESCWA can play a role in enhancing the capacity of these countries to formulate a national youth policy, follow up its implementation, and evaluate it.

In line with the Programme of Action for Youth, ESCWA recommends that member countries work on three key areas:

(a) *Technical development*

Technical aspects of a youth policy formulation need to be developed, which requires building competent national capacities to develop youth policies and implement them, as to activate empowerment, integration and provision of development opportunities.

(b) *Institutional enhancement*

Institutional aspects of a youth policy formulation need to be developed, which requires establishing institutions that deal specifically with youth issues and issues of coordination among various sectors addressing the economic, social and political development of young people, as to encourage investment in human resources, most notably youth.

(c) *Funding*

The necessary funding should be provided for the implementation of national youth policies and plans designed to accelerate economic, social and political integration of youth. Such funding could be provided through specifically allotted investment funds, with priorities identified within the framework of national development plans. Requirements of human development cannot be ignored in development plans. Rather, national investment programmes ought to meet the needs of specific socio-demographic groups, most notably youth, for youth are the future.