



**UNDG ARAB STATES
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH
AFRICA REGION (MENA)**

**STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN ON
YOUNG PEOPLE**

June 2010

Actions for Accelerating & Strengthening the UN Response

The **Regional Strategic Action Plan on Young People** aims to provide a framework to guide United Nations' regional and country level action in the area of young people, ensuring that the requisite leadership and teamwork exists to respond to the needs of young people throughout the Arab States / Middle East and North Africa region.

The Regional Strategic Action Plan on Young People is a set of leadership commitments and core actions for the UNDG, which contains the essential elements and priorities for an effective and comprehensive response. It provides a common approach and a tool for continuous improvement and refinement of the strategic response necessary to address the myriad needs of young people in the region.

In the context of the new round of CCAs and UNDAFs for 2010-11, it is hoped that these regional strategic youth priorities will translate into concrete actions at country level that would contribute to accelerating the achievement of the MDGs. This will ensure that national development plans and strategies reflect adequate and comprehensive attention to youth concerns and with emphasis on youth participation, provide them the opportunities to influence development processes that will shape their future.

Aim of the Regional Strategic Action Plan on Young People

- *Scaling up regional evidence-based responses in the Arab States/ MENA* by concerting efforts to assist countries in the Region to achieve the goals and targets of the World Programme of Action on Youth and other key related UN Commitments;
- *Ensure harmonization and synergy of the UNDG's* technical and financial cooperation to better support country efforts;
- *Launch an intensified and concerted action* to strengthen national policies and programs in favor of young people;
- *Strengthen programming among the most at-risk and marginalized young people* guaranteeing special attention to vulnerable groups, such as young people living in conflict areas, refugees, out-of-school young people, orphans, young people with disabilities, and adolescent girls, among others.

Leadership Commitments and Core Actions

This **Regional Strategic Action Plan on Young People** provides some overall guidance for joint UN action in the region, keeping in mind that such action may vary depending on the local context in each country. The **Strategic Action Plan** brings together some key elements resulting from the accumulated experience in programming for young people in the Region. The **Regional Strategic Action Plan on Young People** proposes some specific commitments together with a set of essential actions by which the UNDG Arab States/ MENA can harmonize their support to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their actions.

The **Plan** also proposes some deliverables that together can provide a basis for a coordinated UN action in support of successful responses.

Commitment 1.- To ensure **leadership** for an extraordinary and immediate response to the needs and challenges facing young people in the Arab States/ MENA Region.

Core actions:

1. Provide leadership and strengthen policy dialogue on young people with governments in the region to increase political commitment to establish young people as a priority issue for their respective national development agendas.
2. Strengthen national commitment to young people by intensifying support to the development and implementation of national policies that will be able to achieve a broad-based multisectoral mandate in favor of young people.

Commitment 2.- To **mobilize the necessary technical and financial resources** in support of the development and implementation of National Policies and/or Strategies on Young People, as well as sectoral policies and strategies addressing the needs of young people.

Core actions:

1. Advocate for, and mobilize, national and international technical and financial resources in support of policies and programming for young people.
2. Position young people as a cross cutting priority and mainstream programming for young people at all institutional levels of the UNDG agencies, and boost the availability of human resources and the institutional capacities of the UN and key partners required to address issues related to young people in the Arab States/ MENA region.

3. Ensure harmonization and coordination within and among the UNDG organizations, particularly at the country level, through the mechanism of UN Theme Groups on Young People and/or the UNCT.

Commitment 3. - To promote the **full and meaningful participation of young people** in the development, implementation and evaluation of relevant national policies and programs.

Core actions:

1. Provide opportunities for young people to speak out and have their voices heard in policy making and implementation processes;
2. Affirm and strengthen the capacity of young people at the local level to be assertively involved in all aspects of the responses.

Commitment 4. - To actively seek out and establish **partnerships** required to address issues facing young people among the public sector and civil society, including the private sector, media, faith-based organizations, and young people themselves.

Core actions:

1. Strengthen partnerships among UNDG members and with other strategic organizations and institutions, including those not traditionally engaged in youth-related issues.
2. Foster alliances required to improve access to essential information, services and commodities for young people.

Commitment 5. - To support countries in the region in establishing and strengthening a **data collection** and **monitoring and evaluation** system.

Core actions:

1. Facilitate the establishment of a regional data collection and monitoring and evaluation systems that would serve overall national and regional monitoring and evaluation needs, including the needs linked to monitoring progress towards the realization of UN and MDG goals and commitments related to young people, in particular the WPAY.

2. Support the collection of relevant monitoring and evaluation data that would provide strategic information to guide policies and actions, and serve to monitor progress in the implementation of international and regional commitments.

Commitment 6.- To meet the special needs of most-at-risk young people, including young people living in conflict areas, refugees, out-of-school young people, young people in juvenile detention / correctional institutions, orphans, young people with disabilities, adolescent girls and youth who engage in HIV-risk behaviours.

Core actions:

1. Strengthen advocacy efforts to raise awareness of the situation of most-at-risk young people and stimulate increased investments for programming targeting these populations.
2. Enhance the abilities of most-at-risk young people to effectively contribute their knowledge, skills and voices as a force for change.
3. Promote the development of outreach strategies, including information, education, commodities and services for most-at-risk young people.
4. Address gender-based inequalities in access to information and services and promote the rights of the adolescent girl.

NB: Deliverables included below do not represent bilateral actions from independent agencies or partnerships between a few, but a true collaborative process to enhance programming and advocacy efforts in favour of young people.

Outputs	Deliverables	Lead Agency	Timeline
Advocacy & Communication <i>Effective policy dialogue on young people in all countries of the region</i>	Take stock of the current level of UN- supported programming in the area of young people in the Arab States / MENA Region.	UNDG	Nov 2010 – March 2011
	Develop and disseminate a set of common key messages (Advocacy Kit) to guide joint advocacy efforts across all UNDG agencies in the Arab States / MENA Region.	Co-Chairs UNICEF, UNFPA	Aug-Nov 2010
	Develop, disseminate and regularly update a calendar of events, trainings, country visits and reports of the UNDG Members related to young people.	UNDG	September 2010
	Select countries in the region for intensified action including joint visits of Regional Directors and technical staff to promote the agenda for, and the common advocacy messages on, young people.	UNDG	On-going
	Establish a Regional IATT on YP to serve as an advisory mechanism to the UNDG on issues related to young people as defined and requested by the Regional Directors. The Regional IATTT on YP would be flexible in nature and bring together relevant partners and key stakeholders to be consulted as appropriate.	UNDG	On-going

	Organize periodic (three) annual meetings of the Regional Interagency Technical Task Team on Young People to drive the alignment of all partners and to intensify dialogue and facilitate partnerships between governments and civil society, private sector and social partners and young people.	Co-Chairs UNICEF, UNFPA	On-going
	Collect and consolidate information on each agency's partnerships in the area of young people and develop a strategy for joint work with the League of Arab States (LAS).	Co-Chairs UNICEF, UNFPA	Oct-Dec 2010
UN Harmonization and Capacity Strengthening <i>Coordination within and among UN agencies, in particular at the country level, through the mechanism of the UNCT/UN Theme Groups on Young People, to make optimal use of existing human, financial and technical resources, and to support the development and implementation of National Strategies and Policies related to Young People.</i>	<p>Launch an intensified and concerted action to strengthen national responses on young people in countries in the UNDAF process in the 2010-11 biennium.</p> <p>Support the development of broad strategies for country support and priority actions for key UNCT.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake joint missions for intensified technical support and assessment of UNCT performance in the area of young people, including joint missions to priority CCA/UNDAF countries 	UNICEF/ UNFPA with IATTT	July-Dec 2010
	Harmonize the delivery of technical support and foster better coordination among existing technical support providers as well as strengthen exchanges among country responses as well as across the region.	UNDG	On-going

	Hold a regular annual meeting of the undg to assess the situation, establish strategies and examine progress in UN joint programming on young people in the Arab States/ MENA Region.	UNDG	On-going
Monitoring and Evaluation	Support the strengthening of national data collection and monitoring and evaluation systems on young people in the Arab States/ MENA region.	ESCWA	On-going
	Produce a baseline Arab States/ MENA region situation analysis and assessment on young people and periodic reports on progress towards global goals and commitments.	ESCWA/ UNICEF/UNFPA with IATTT	Dec 2010-April 2011

Prioritization of Sectoral Support

At the level of sectoral inputs, the UNDG has identified six aspects of young people’s development (health, education, protection, participation, labour and emergencies) as key technical areas of intervention to prioritise action on a regional level by the UNDG for the Arab States / MENA region, noting also the framework of the World Programme Action on Youth (WPAY) and the simultaneous and mutually reinforcing mechanism of engagement by UN ESCWA with member countries on the development of national policies on youth as per UN General Assembly Resolution.ⁱ

Health

Challenges to young peoples’ health in MENA are primarily the result of exposure to risky behaviours often the result of a lack of access to information and/or services to help inform and facilitate the adoption of healthy behaviours. Many young people underestimate their risk of disease, injury and vulnerability to risk factors such as smoking and obesity. Behavioural patterns expose young people to greater risk from nutritional, lifestyle, and sexual choices, among others, that amplify their risk of adverse outcomes.ⁱⁱ The lack of resonant and accessible preventive and restorative health information available to young people limits their ability to make informed decisions, leading to excess mortality and morbidity in the MENA region.ⁱⁱⁱ Compounding these challenges is the dearth of youth- and adolescent-specific health data, denying decision-makers the evidence to guide effective and efficient health policy.

Objective	Activity	Level of action	Responsible agency	Time period
Establish a mechanism for the strengthening and harmonization of young people health-related data collection processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Initiate and support young people health Situation Analysis applying WHO/EMRO standardized approaches and tools (SARA) for data collection in all countries in the region. ➤ Develop young people health fact sheets using the agreed upon indicators and analysis. 	Technical, with support from RDs	WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF	6 months

To develop regional guidance on youth friendly health services (YFHS), identifying good practices for the adaption of basic service and intervention packages for young people, to include life skills education, HIV prevention and care promotion, nutrition, physical activity, etc.	➤ Validate the existing assessments of YFHS and establish common standards and guidance (including joint mission to 5 CCA/UNDAF countries).	Technical	UNFPA & WHO	1 year
---	---	-----------	-------------	--------

Emergencies

In conflict and emergency situations, young people are likely to suffer severe risks to their personal safety and well-being. Their vulnerability exacerbates these risks. Threats of death, injury and disability, psychological and social distress, loss of education and economic opportunities, sexual exploitation and abuse, and recruitment by armed groups affect adolescents and youth in many ways that are distinct from very young children and adults. Young people, in addition to suffering the effects of conflict and emergency, are also potential agents for positive change. Engaging them in the dialogue of peace helps protect states against instability. Ensuring social conditions conducive to the gainful enjoyment of rights diminishes the threat of resurgent insecurity. Young people are not only victims of conflict, but also a potential catalyst for restitution and prevention.

Objective	Activity	Level of action	Responsible agency	Time period
To establish baselines and take stock of what has been done and what needs to be done	➤ Joint mission of UNDG Youth Advisors to priority countries, namely: oPt, Sudan, Yemen and Iraq to assess and strengthen response for young people in emergency contexts.	Technical	UNICEF	6 months (2010-11)

To enhance technical capacity of UNCTs to respond to the needs of young people in emergency settings, and include young people in preparedness plans.	➤ Identify existing tools and adapt them to address young people	Technical	TBD	TBD
	➤ Identify and monitor emerging trends/potential causes of conflict and impact on youth	Technical	ESCWA	Ongoing 2010-11
	➤ Develop and implement activities to promote civic values and good governance as a preventive mechanism for youth as a positive impact for development	Technical	ESCWA	Ongoing 2010-11

Employment and decent work

Although young people in the Arab States / MENA region comprise approximately one-third of the working-age population, they account for almost 50 per cent of the region's total unemployment. The ILO estimated youth unemployment in the region at 22 percent in 2007. Many young people and parents in the region prefer public sector employment. As private sector growth has not kept pace with the rapid expansion of the labour force, informal jobs are often the only choice. Young women face additional barriers to obtaining decent employment.

By motivating industry to provide productive, decent work, policy-makers can ensure that the rights of workers are upheld while promoting a dynamic economy that responds to the needs of its customers and community. Growing productive economies create job opportunities reducing both the unemployment rate and the demand on resources it creates, allowing individuals to claim income with dignity.

Objective	Activity	Level of action	Responsible agency	Time period
To incorporate analyses of employment and labour market on youth into the UNDAF process	➤ Analyze UNDAF and ensure that UN Country Teams include impact of national and regional employment trends on youth.	UNDG	ILO	TBD
Increase opportunities for youth employment	➤ Enhance efforts with Member Countries to develop strategies on youth employment in the region ^{iv}	Technical	ESCWA	TBD

Education

According to the 2006 Follow-up to the World Programme of Action for Youth, education is a basic human right that should also provide the necessary knowledge and skills to boost young people's involvement in the global economy and further improve their livelihoods and well-being. The Arab States / MENA must address the educational needs of its young people and especially girls and young people living in rural areas now in order to safeguard their future livelihoods and potential contributions to the region's economic growth, national development and stability.

Objective	Activity	Level of action	Responsible agency	Time period
To ensure cross-cutting topics reflected in educational reform	➤ Strategically support education reform requests specifically in relation to environment, approaches, services, content, capacities (of both the providers and young people)	UNDG	UNESCO	TBD

To establish baseline and ensure evidence-informed programming related to violence and gender in educational settings	➤ Conduct a joint study of violence and gender (together and separately) in educational (formal and informal) settings	Technical	UNESCO and others	TBD
---	--	-----------	-------------------	-----

Protection

Protection strategies for young people aim to prevent and respond to violence, exploitation and abuse, to ensure young people's rights to survival, development and well-being.^v By promoting young people's protection strategies, communities can break the negative cycle in which children victimized by violence, neglect and abuse risk perpetuating these practices in later life. Promoting a culture of rights protection towards young people advances the future establishment of a more just society, as these children become leaders and instil respect for human rights in future generations.

Objective	Activity	Level of action	Responsible agency	Time period
To establish partnerships with global networks adapting them to regional context	➤ Set up a regional working mechanism, task force on Adolescent Girl, on regional level (potentially Egypt, Sudan and Yemen) – working both on boys and girls	Technical	UNFPA & UNICEF	TBD
To provide political and technical assistance to civil society	➤ Enhance civil society's monitoring and report on violence by supporting the civil society infrastructure	UNDG and Technical	UNDP	TBD

Participation

Decision-making structures and chains of authority in the region are typically vertical, where decisions are made at an executive level and passed down to those the decisions are attempting to serve without much participation, especially from young people. Reverence for higher authority extends through political, social, educational, religious and familial structures, often disenfranchising young people from making decisions about their lives.

Available data indicate that civic and political participation among young people in the Arab States / MENA region remains weak, yet there are two indications that this may be changing. The first is an increased focus on young people at the national level and an associated increase in young people-specific NGOs and programs. The second is the spread of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) which allow youth to engage in their communities in non-traditional ways.

Objective	Activity	Level of action	Responsible agency	Time period
Fully and meaningfully engaged young people as partners of UN agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Coordinate participation of young people in regional and global events according to set of pre-defined criteria ➤ Encourage establishment of joint UNCT Youth Advisory Panels 	Technical	UNFPA	1 year
Increased number of measures/policy provisions adopted by member countries to integrate the youth bulge and migration in development plans and programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Assess current status of youth participation (considering both facilitating and inhibiting factors) in the region in governments, the civil society, and throughout the UN system 	Technical	UNFPA & UNESCO	1 year December 2011
Formulated youth-focused national policies that respond to the WPAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Establish Youth Committees in Member Countries in line with the 	UNDG & Technical	ESCWA	

	<p>WPAY objectives to develop National Youth Policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Work with member countries to develop follow up measures and increase understanding of development challenges related to youth through workshops, expert groups meetings and regional reports and studies 	<p>UNDG & Technical &</p>	<p>ESCWA</p>	
--	---	-----------------------------------	--------------	--

References

ⁱ UNGA Resolution 60/2

ⁱⁱ Roudi-Fahimi, F. and Ashford, L. *Sexual and Reproductive Health in the Middle East and North Africa: A Guide for Reporters*. Population Reference Bureau, 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ UN ESCWA and the League of Arab States. *The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region 2007: A Youth Lens*. 2007.

^{iv} UN Economic and Social Council Resolutions 272 (XXIV), and 2006/15.

^v UN Economic and Social Council, *UNICEF Child Protection Strategy*, UNESA, New York, 2008.