



MENA - OECD  
Governance Programme

# Seven key findings from the Youth Governance Survey



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The MENA-OECD Governance Programme is a strategic partnership between MENA and OECD countries to share knowledge and expertise, with a view of disseminating standards and principles of good governance that support the ongoing process of reform in the MENA region. The Programme strengthens collaboration with the most relevant multilateral initiatives currently underway in the region. In particular, the Programme supports the implementation of the G7 Deauville Partnership and assists governments in meeting the eligibility criteria to become a member of the Open Government Partnership. Through these initiatives, the Programme acts as a leading advocate of managing ongoing public governance reforms in the MENA region. The Programme provides a sustainable structure for regional policy dialogue as well as for country specific projects. These projects correspond to the commitment of MENA governments to implement public sector reforms in view of unlocking social and economic development and of meeting citizens' growing expectations in terms of quality services, inclusive policymaking and transparency.

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**MENA countries  
acknowledge the need  
to address existing  
shortcomings which  
exclude young people  
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services.**



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## ABOUT THE PROJECT

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The project “Youth in Public Life: Towards open and inclusive youth engagement”, implemented by the MENA-OECD Governance Programme, supports Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia in strengthening public governance arrangements for young men and women to engage in public life. Based on comprehensive country assessments, it provides technical assistance and implementation support in the following areas:

1. Formulating and implementing national youth strategies/policies;
2. Scaling up the institutional and legal framework to foster youth engagement and representation in public life at the central and sub-national level;
3. Promoting innovative forms to engage young men and women in decision-making and help mainstream young people’s demands in the formulation and design of public policies and services.

The project is financed by the MENA Transition Fund of the G7 Deauville Partnership. The Deauville Partnership was launched in May 2011 as a long-term global initiative that provides Arab countries in transition with a framework based on technical support to strengthen governance for transparent, accountable governments and to provide an economic framework for sustainable and inclusive growth. The MENA-OECD Governance Programme is currently implementing MENA Transition Fund Projects in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE HIGHLIGHT BROCHURE

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This paper presents the preliminary findings from a large-scale survey which was sent to nine countries in the MENA region<sup>1</sup>. The surveys explore the opportunities for young people to engage in public life and analyses the efforts undertaken by governments and public administrations to deliver policies and services that are responsive to their specific needs from a public governance perspective.

The analysis builds on OECD well-established data collection methods, building on:

- Whole-of-government approach to youth policy
- Institutional capacities and coordination
- Tools to mainstream youth concerns in policy making and service delivery
- Youth engagement in public life and representation in state institutions
- Legal frameworks and minimum age requirements

By taking a comparative approach across MENA countries, the paper identifies common trends in the governance of youth policy and youth engagement across the region. For each finding, it presents good practices and lessons learned from OECD countries based on the OECD Youth Stocktaking report “Engaging and empowering youth in OECD countries – How to bridge the ‘governance gap’” and presents a number of strategic policy recommendations<sup>2</sup>.

Based on the feedback received and the expected replies by other MENA countries and line ministries, as well as a series of fact-clearing missions across the participating countries, the OECD expects to present the final *MENA Youth Governance Review* in 2019.

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1. Surveys were sent both to Ministries of Youth (MoY)/ministries hosting the youth portfolio inside the Cabinet and line ministries. This preliminary analysis builds on the replies received from MoYs/ministries hosting the youth portfolio by Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Qatar and Tunisia.

2. <http://www.oecd.org/gov/youth-stocktaking-report.pdf>





## Why thinking about “youth as the future” is outdated

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is today witnessing its largest youth cohort. With approximately 60 percent of the overall MENA population under the age of 30, more than 105 million people are transitioning to adulthood<sup>3</sup>. Young people, however, have been facing significant challenges in contributing to the social and economic development in their countries.

The MENA region has the highest youth unemployment rate compared to any other region in the world, exceeding 27% on average (15-24 years)<sup>4</sup>. While around 15% of young people aged 15-29 in OECD countries are not in education, employment or training (NEET), inactivity levels are as high as in 33.9%, 28.7%, 32.8% and 32.2% percent in Egypt, Jordan, Palestinian Authority and Tunisia, respectively (all 15-24 years)<sup>5</sup>. On average, the rate of young women outside formal education, training or education in the region is 26 percentage points higher than for young men, ranging from 54.5% in Egypt to 22.8% in Lebanon<sup>6</sup>. This has a direct impact on poverty and inequality, as NEET youth are particularly vulnerable to live a

life below the poverty line. According to a study conducted by UNICEF (2017), poverty affects at least 29 million or one in four children in the MENA region. In some countries, young people in the MENA region are subject to a highly volatile political environment, external shocks and violent conflicts. According to the Arab Human Development Report 2016, 47% of all internally displaced persons globally and 58% of the refugees in the world, many of which are young people, are located in the MENA region. Displaced youth, in turn, face a high risk of continuous exclusion and dependence on support. Countries experiencing the spill over effects from war and fragility are challenged by high pressure on public resources and capacities<sup>7</sup>.

3. Arab Human Development Report (2016). <http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/report/AHDR%20Reports/AHDR%202016/AHDR%20Final%202016/AHDR2016En.pdf>

4. ILO (2017) ILOSTAT database, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=ZQ>

5. ILO (2016) Labour market transitions of young women and men in the Middle East and North Africa [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_536067.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_536067.pdf)

6. ILO (2016) Labour market transitions of young women and men in the Middle East and North Africa [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_536067.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_536067.pdf)

7. OECD (2016), *Youth in the MENA Region: How to Bring Them In*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264265721-en>.



Young men and women in the region also often express lower levels of trust in government than their parents do and the majority of young adults have largely disengaged from formal political participation. On the other hand, young people often favour engagement through civil society organisations and community-based projects that present pathways towards a more equitable development as they help building stronger social and civic values that are essential foundations for good governance, peaceful co-existence, and youth's employability<sup>8</sup>. At the global level, international frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security acknowledge the positive role young people can and should play in this regard.

However, the above mentioned challenges present considerable obstacles for adolescents and young adults in their development to autonomy and a self-determined life style.

MENA countries acknowledge the need to address existing shortcomings which exclude young people from a fair share of the economic development and access to public services. When asked how their Ministry intends to improve the delivery of youth policy, programmes and services, the adoption and implementation of a joint vision, such as in the form of a national youth strategy, appears to be their top priority (see Figure 1).

Moreover, ministries in charge of the youth portfolio emphasise the need to improve the skills of public officials, improve communication with youth and transparency, and, with the exception of Qatar, to decentralise the delivery of programmes and services. On the other hand, countries take a rather different view on the need to institutionalise youth engagement, such as in the form of youth councils or youth-led advisory committees, and to strengthen age-disaggregated evidence and monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

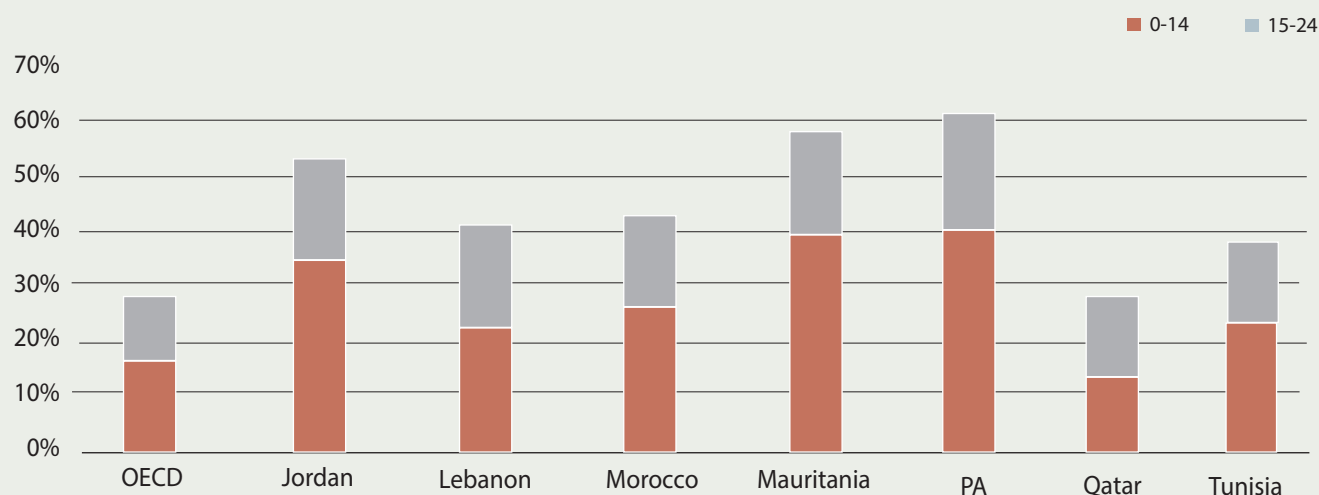
8. Mercy Corps (2012), *Civic Engagement of Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analysis of Key Drivers and Outcomes*, [www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/mena\\_youth\\_civic\\_engagement\\_study\\_-\\_final.pdf](http://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/mena_youth_civic_engagement_study_-_final.pdf).

FIGURE 1. TOP 3 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR MINISTRIES OF YOUTH

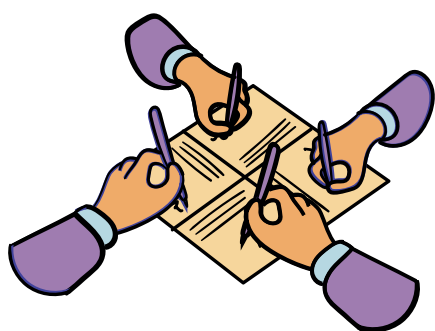


Source: Based on OECD survey

FIGURE 2. SHARE OF YOUNG PEOPLE AS PART OF THE TOTAL POPULATION, 2017







## Finding 1. National youth strategies are trending but suffer from weak funding

Youth as a policy field cuts across various areas including employment, education, health, housing, mobility, justice and sports, among others. National youth strategies (NYS) can provide a guiding framework to unite youth stakeholders from government and civil society behind a number of strategic priorities for young people and deliver public services in a coherent manner across administrative boundaries. When young people are involved in the formulation and implementation and solid indicators exist to back up commitments, NYS can increase young people's ownership, transparency and accountability.

Figure 3 shows that, among the surveyed countries, four are in the process of elaborating a national youth strategy and three countries have a strategy in place. This compares to an average of 40% of OECD countries with an operational strategy as of March 2018<sup>9</sup>. Tunisia, for instance, has adopted a Vision for Youth 2016-2030 which is expected to serve as a foundation to elaborate a comprehensive national youth strategy.

### **Thematic focus: Improving outcomes in the education, employment, health and participation field**

The preliminary analysis of the thematic areas covered reveals that almost all strategies feature commitments in the area of “education/training”, “employment/economic participation and empowerment”, “health” and “citizenship/social and political participation”. With the exception of Lebanon, “culture, leisure and sports” is also an integral part of NYS among MENA countries. Notably, some strategies acknowledge the importance to improve the governance context, for instance by creating a legal environment that is conducive to the organisation of youth and sports activities (Palestinian Authority), upgrading institutional capacities (Mauritania) and putting in place sound arrangements for planning, programming and monitoring and evaluation (Qatar). The draft strategy in Morocco appears to be most explicit in linking objectives in the youth field to national development goals (i.e. reduction of territorial disparities, support advanced regionalisation).

FIGURE 3. NATIONAL YOUTH STRATEGIES IN MENA COUNTRIES



Source: Based on OECD survey

9. OECD (2018), Youth Stocktaking report – Engaging and empowering youth in OECD countries – How to bridge the ‘governance gap’, <http://www.oecd.org/gov/youth-stocktaking-report.pdf>.



### Stakeholders involved: A combined effort of national and international stakeholders

In all surveyed countries, line ministries, organised and non-organised youth and NGOs participated in elaborating the NYS in collaboration with inter-governmental organisations. In Mauritania, the Palestinian Authority and Qatar, education institutions and international NGOs also played a significant role. In Lebanon, the creation of sectoral working groups culminated in the creation of the Youth Forum for Youth Policies; a dedicated body composed of youth-led associations and youth wings of political parties that was one of the main drivers of the strategy.

### Vulnerable sub groups: Many but not all vulnerable young people appear to be involved

All countries confirm that specific efforts were undertaken to integrate young women, rural youth, youth lacking basic education, young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) and youth with disabilities into the process. On the other hand, only the Palestinian Authority reached out to young refugees and only Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority consulted youth from minorities.

### Evidence: The local level is often neglected in gathering age-disaggregated data

MENA countries have used various sources to collect evidence in the preparation of the NYS, most notably information from the National Statistics Department or equivalent, line ministries and academic institutions. All countries report that organised or non-organised youth groups and national NGOs (except for the Palestinian Authority) were consulted. It is noteworthy that only Mauritania and Tunisia engaged the subnational level of government for age-disaggregated information and data.

### Adoption of the Strategy: Legitimacy from the legislative level

In none of the surveyed countries, the parliament has adopted the national youth strategy. While this is expected to take place in Mauritania, Qatar and Tunisia, it is not planned in Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority (which does not have a functioning parliament since 2006).

### Budget: Limited or lack of dedicated resources present a key concern

The lack of or limited dedicated funding presents a major shortcoming to the effective implementation of NYS. Preliminary results suggest that Lebanon and Mauritania have not dedicated resources to the NYS and that a sound implementation of the NYS in other countries is put at risk due to weak funding, most notably in the case of the Palestinian Authority (total budget: 30,000 USD).

### Monitoring and evaluation: National youth strategies have yet to prove their impact

Sound monitoring and evaluation (M&E) arrangements are critical to assess whether the implementation of NYS is successful, reveal potential bottlenecks and encourage policy makers to respond appropriately. For instance, 67% of OECD countries with a NYS in place provide explicit information about the way M&E shall be done. Mauritania and the Palestinian Authority report that they have put in place mechanisms to monitor their NYS (i.e. Mauritania: trimestral/annual activity reports; Palestinian Authority: follow up mechanisms with departments and ministries and evaluation meetings). Only Mauritania and Tunisia express their intention to make the results of this undertaking available to the public. At the time of writing, only Mauritania appears to have evaluated its Strategy.

40%

of OECD countries  
have an operational  
National Youth Strategy  
in March 2018

67%

of strategies in  
OECD countries  
provide information  
on monitoring and  
evaluation mechanisms

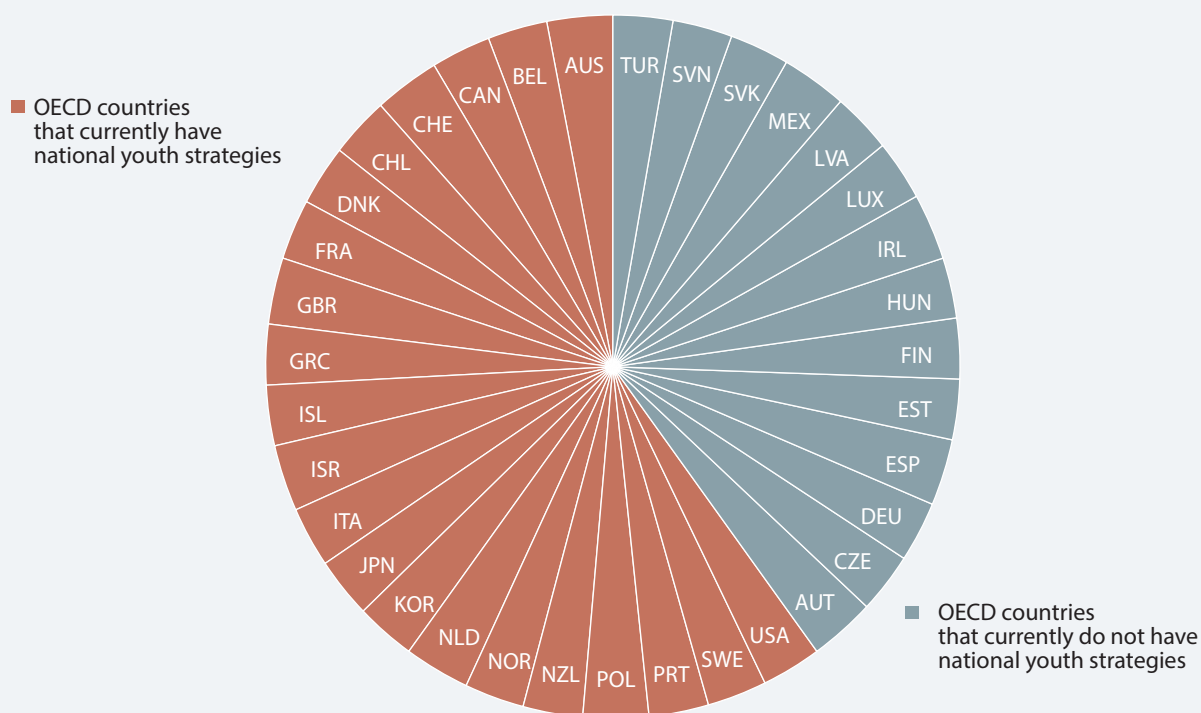
52%

of National Youth Strategies  
in OECD countries  
provide gender-disaggregated data and

89%

set gender specific objectives

FIGURE 4. OECD COUNTRIES WITH AN OPERATIONAL NATIONAL YOUTH STRATEGY, 2018



Source: OECD Youth Stocktaking report

### EVIDENCE FROM OECD COUNTRIES



**Slovak Republic's** National Youth Strategy (2014-2020) provides a cross-sectorial approach and focuses on 9 policy areas including education, employment, participation, health, entrepreneurship, social inclusion and volunteering. the strategy is monitored and evaluated through consultations at the national and the regional level with the participation of young people together with representatives of the state administration, regional government and non-governmental organisations.



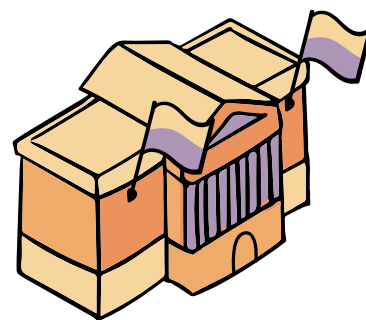
The youth strategy of the **United Kingdom** establishes a concrete monitoring mechanism with detailed information on how to report on the progress made in achieving set objectives. It highlights that data to measure progress should be disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, disability and socio-economic background, and provides for mechanisms to involve young people in monitoring and evaluating the strategy.

### 3 DO'S TO HARNESS THE POTENTIAL OF NATIONAL YOUTH STRATEGIES

- 1 Link objectives in the youth field to the broader national development objectives and planning and seek alignment with sectoral strategies
- 2 Make available dedicated and sufficient financial resources to deliver on the commitments as outlined in the NYS
- 3 Publish the M&E results to increase transparency and accountability, for instance with the support of youth associations and NGOs



## Finding 2. High turn-over and lack of institutional mechanisms present key challenges for inter-ministerial coordination on youth affairs



In their role as students, members of associations or first-time voters, young people are heavy demanders of public services. The different dynamics of these transitions and the diversity of the youth cohort call for multi-sectoral planning and coordination and the active engagement of all sectors.

Silo-based approaches to youth policy increase the likelihood of delivering fragmented youth policy and programmes. Fragmentation, in turn, can hamper young people from accessing important services. Inter-institutional coordination, both across different ministries and between the central and subnational levels of government, is essential to ensure a clear division of roles and responsibilities and align the objectives set out in national youth strategies and sectoral strategies. Governments in OECD and MENA countries have chosen different ways to address this task; from ad hoc meetings on specific issues to more institutionalised forms of cooperation on youth affairs with various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

Preliminary results suggest that ministries of youth value the current scope and depth of coordination on youth affairs across line ministries while the top challenges identified point to a number of obstacles. The main challenges for inter-ministerial coordination identified by ministries of youth are the high-turnover of leadership positions, the lack of institutional

mechanisms and the lack of or insufficient capacities in youth ministries (see Figure 5).

The rather low scores come as a surprise, in particular in light of the frequent leadership changes in the ministries of youth in some of the surveyed countries. Feedback throughout the fact-finding process also suggests that the quality of coordination on youth affairs is a concern to many line ministries. And yet, the replies point to room for improvement in coordinating youth affairs across ministerial departments and portfolios.

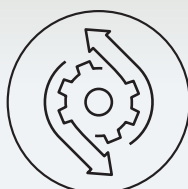
Strong political leadership can encourage the creation of trust and a culture of cooperation between different ministries over the long term. Establishing inter-ministerial committees or designated focal persons for youth affairs can have advantages by designating clear responsibilities and accountability mechanisms, however, especially in the case of designating focal points, this task should not simply be added on top of existing responsibilities but be mindful of the capacities of staff. This is of equal importance in the ministries of youth as highlighted by the survey results.

### ESTABLISHING CONCRETE MECHANISMS FOR INTER-MINISTERIAL COOPERATION ON YOUTH AFFAIRS CAN HELP:

Identify clear roles and responsibilities for relevant ministries and other government bodies



Develop clear action plans for each level of government (national, regional, and local)



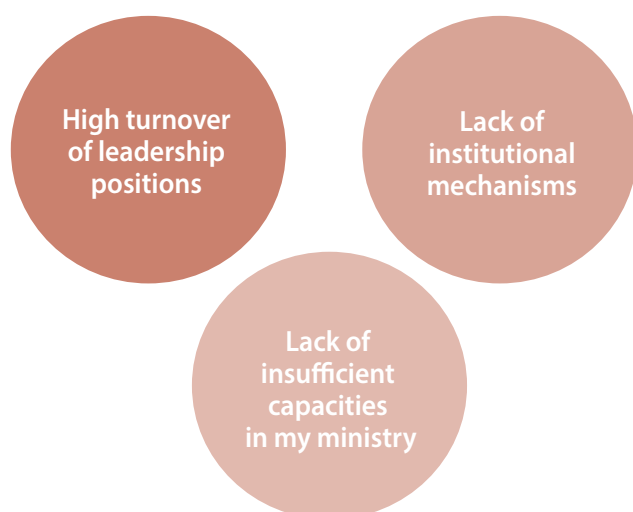
Establish that all levels of governments understand their responsibilities to promote ownership



Improve engagement and coordination with CSOs, youth networks and other partners



FIGURE 5. KEY CHALLENGES  
FOR INTER-MINISTERIAL COORDINATION ON YOUTH AFFAIRS



Source: Based on OECD survey

FIGURE 6. ORGANISATION OF FORMAL RESPONSIBILITY  
FOR YOUTH AFFAIRS



■ At the Centre of Government    ■ Within a ministry of youth  
■ Within a ministry of youth with combined portfolios    ■ Within a department inside a ministry

Source: Based on OECD survey

## EVIDENCE FROM OECD COUNTRIES

OECD countries have chosen various ways to address the coordination task.



**France, Portugal** and others have created inter-ministerial or inter-departmental committees, which are chaired by the Prime Minister in some countries. The ministries with formal responsibility for youth affairs participate in these bodies, for instance as chairs or by assuming the function of their Secretariat.



**Austria** has opted for establishing working groups for specific topics (e.g. National Youth Strategy, social inclusion) which involve ministries with corresponding portfolios.



In **Slovenia**, each Ministry has assigned one focal points for youth affairs in the respective line ministries to act as information accelerators. Moreover, the Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth gathering youth representatives and staff from different ministries meets at least twice a year to discuss issues of joint interest.



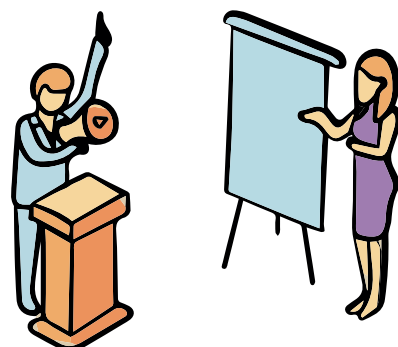
In **Canada**, the Prime Minister and Head of Government is also the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Youth. The Head of Government is supported by the Prime Minister's Youth Council (PMYC) which serves as advisory body on matters pertaining to Canada's youth.

## 3 DO'S TO IMPROVE INTER-MINISTERIAL COORDINATION ON YOUTH AFFAIRS:

- 1 Ensure high-level political leadership and consider creating a well-resourced secretariat in the ministry responsible for coordinating youth affairs to avoid that this task will be added on top of the existing responsibilities exercised by civil servants
- 2 Consider designing a joint action plan to clarify mandates, ensure ownership and monitor the work of the coordination mechanism based on clear objectives and targets
- 3 Use templates and joint standards to promote a common approach to monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of government action for young people



## Finding 3. Serving young people outside the capital city requires additional capacities and coordination



Subnational levels of government are indispensable partners of the central government in rolling out youth policies and delivering relevant services across the territory. It is typically at municipal or district level that a young person interacts with public administration for the first time and most frequently. In turn, the interaction of a young person with local authorities will influence his or her perception of government performance. In the MENA region, calls for positive change, led by young people, have often emerged outside of the capital city.

The approach chosen by countries to coordinate between the central and subnational level on youth affairs varies greatly and is shaped by the general distribution of tasks and responsibilities across the different levels. Historically, many MENA countries are highly centralised with limited authority for subnational government entities to make independent decisions. However, in the last years, some countries have engaged in a process to transfer competencies and resources to subnational level in an effort to bring policies and services closer to citizens' needs and address territorial disparities and the shortage of public services outside the main cities.

Preliminary survey results suggest significant differences between MENA countries. While Mauritania and the Palestinian Authority identify a number of important barriers in reaching out to youth at subnational level, this is perceived to be less of a challenge for Jordan, Qatar and Tunisia. In Mauritania, the lack of capacities at subnational levels and inside the Ministry of Youth along with insufficient mandate for the Ministry are key concerns whereas in the Palestinian Authority, the lack of interest and insufficient capacities among subnational stakeholders and lack of institutional mechanisms for coordination are identified as major challenges. Overall, these challenges appear also among the most prominent and urgent ones across the region.

FIGURE 7. KEY CHALLENGES FOR COORDINATION OF YOUTH AFFAIRS ACROSS LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT



## EVIDENCE FROM OECD COUNTRIES

OECD countries have chosen different forms to coordinate youth affairs across different levels of government. For instance, various governments have created institutional channels for joint decision-making with sub-national government entities.



In **Finland**, youth law clarifies that the Ministry of Education must adopt performance targets together with provincial state offices. Meanwhile, other countries have designated authorities to enforce vertical coordination.



In **Switzerland**, the Federal Social Insurance Office (OFAS) has the mandate to strengthen both horizontal and vertical coordination across all Swiss cantons to ensure the delivery of youth policies and services in a coherent manner.



In **Austria**, the heads of provincial youth departments and representatives of the Federal Chancellery meet annually at the conference of provincial youth departments to coordinate youth-related interventions.



The youth law in **Estonia** stipulates that county governorates shall analyse, co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of national programmes for youth work. In turn, rural municipalities and city councils have the mandate to determine the priorities of youth work in their administrative territories.

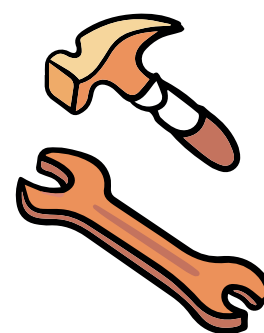
## 3 DO'S TO DELIVER BETTER RESULTS FOR YOUTH IN COOPERATION WITH SUB-NATIONAL GOVERNMENT ENTITIES

- 1 Assign clear responsibilities to government entities at central and subnational level in the implementation of youth policy and the delivery of public services
- 2 Provide opportunities and mechanisms for regular upward (local to central) and downward (central to local) exchanges to involve subnational stakeholders systematically in the identification of local priorities and unite them in working towards joint national objectives for youth
- 3 Make available sufficient human, financial and technical resources for subnational government entities to deliver programmes and initiatives for young people based on regular performance and needs assessments





## Finding 4. More and better tools are needed for policy makers to “think youth”



Depending on their concrete living conditions, young people in the MENA region are facing very different challenges. While a significant share of adolescents and young adults in the region is at risk of poverty, thriving for access to basic services, others may be concerned about how to move from secondary to tertiary education and find decent job opportunities. In some countries, violent conflicts risk excluding young men and women from the very basic services needed to take responsibility over their lives. As the concrete circumstances in which young people are living are highly diverse, their concerns cannot and should not be reduced to a narrow definition of “youth interests”.

“Youth mainstreaming” is a concept that tries to assess the implications for young people of any planned policy action: the impact of a new law on health, the effects of a new policy on housing, the consequences of a new programme on education. In other words, it is about:

“making youth concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that inequality is not perpetuated.”<sup>10</sup>

Preliminary evidence suggests that none of the surveyed countries has put in place ex ante regulatory impact assessments (RIAs) to anticipate how young people will be affected by new regulations. On the other hand, Lebanon, Palestinian Authority and Qatar report that they have involved young people in allocating a share of the financial resources of the ministry in charge of the youth portfolio to concrete projects and initiatives, such as with the support of youth NGOs in the case of Lebanon.

Budgets are a powerful tool to align broader economic and social objectives with the concerns and expectations of young people and bear the chance for youth to hold government to account. their transition to adult life.

Participatory budgeting schemes targeting young people provide a direct form of engagement in the allocation of resources and have been set up before in Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority and Qatar according to the survey results. In Jordan, with the support of international partners, the budgets of eight ministries were reviewed to analyse its impact on the rights and development opportunities of children.

### 3 DO'S TO MAINSTREAM YOUTH CONCERNS IN POLICY MAKING AND SERVICE DELIVERY

- 1 Encourage policy makers across ministerial departments to consider the expected impact of new regulation on young people and their development opportunities, for instance based on joint standards and incentive structures
- 2 Provide opportunities for young people throughout the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of public policies and services to make suggestions and provide comments and feedback in all areas affecting their lives
- 3 Invite young people to participate in participatory budgeting, including the submission of self-designed projects, selection based on voting and the implementation and monitoring of outcomes and impact.

10. <http://www.oecd.org/gov/youth-stocktaking-report.pdf>

## EVIDENCE FROM OECD COUNTRIES

Some OECD countries have started recently to apply tools to mainstream youth concerns in policymaking and service delivery using participatory budgeting schemes and regulatory impact assessments (RIA), among others. For instance, five OECD countries have put in place “youth checks” to assess the impact of new regulations on young people and hence broaden the default “adult” perspective in regulatory policymaking.<sup>11</sup>

Some OECD countries have also started to publish Citizens Budgets to communicate budget priorities and indicators in a less technical way.



In **Ireland**, “Budget 2018” is a website that allows citizens to follow the evolution of the budget. The National Youth Council in Ireland used this data to extract relevant information and disseminate it via social media to raise awareness among youth.



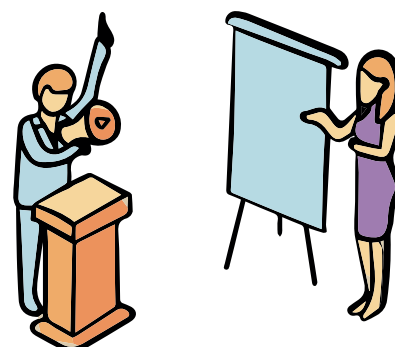
**Portugal** developed the first youth participatory budget initiative at national level. Young people aged 14 to 30, were able to present proposals and vote online or during “face-to-face meetings organised throughout the country (2017). The initiative allowed Young people to allocate 300,000 Euros in areas such as inclusive sport, social innovation, education for the sciences and environmental sustainability.

11. Austria, Flanders/Belgium, France, Germany and Ireland





## Finding 5. Lack of interest vs. lack of institutional opportunities – Perceptions about the main challenge for youth to participate in public life vary



Young people in the MENA region have repeatedly expressed the urgency that policy makers should listen to their concerns and take them seriously. Despite initiatives undertaken by some countries to acknowledge the role of young people in national constitutions (e.g. in Morocco and Tunisia) and new opportunities for volunteering and civic engagement, young people often express their disappointment with the pace of change. Especially vulnerable sub-groups deplore a lack of genuine opportunities to shape the public discourse and participate in public life.

Young people can engage in very different ways in public life, for instance as volunteers for a social or cultural project, participants in a public consultation or as voters or candidates in an election at central or subnational level. Schools and universities also provide a crucial space for young people to engage in decision-making, such as through school councils. Moreover, youth associations and organisations represent important intermediaries between public authorities and young people and can provide a safe space for youth to acquire skills.

Survey results suggest that the majority of ministries of youth provides financial, organisational and technical support for youth organisations. Moreover, all surveyed countries appear to run programmes for young people to volunteer and engage in civic life (e.g. Camps for Youth in Lebanon; a National Programme on “Volontariat et Education civique chez les jeunes” in Morocco; Al Hussein Youth Camps in Jordan and similar programmes in the Palestinian Authority). Qatar hosts a Center for volunteer work.

**FIGURE 8. KEY CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC LIFE ACCORDING TO MINISTRIES OF YOUTH**



When asked for the main obstacles for young people to participate in public life, ministries of youth chiefly refer to the lack of youth stakeholders' interest (Figure 8), followed by the lack of financial and human resources inside their ministry and the lack of coordination among non-governmental youth stakeholders.

On the other hand, factors at their responsibility, such as incentives for civil servants or communication about participation opportunities, are considered less of an obstacle.

This perception also somewhat contradicts the frequent argument made by young people that formal ways to engage are often lacking. For instance, currently, only the Palestinian Authority has a national youth council (NYC) in place (see Figure 9). However, three other countries are in the process of establishing a youth council at national level while three have not yet developed an official body. When set up based on an inclusive approach, youth councils can help address the third major challenge identified by ministries of youth that is the lack of coordination among non-governmental youth stakeholders.



# 25%

On average,  
of 15-29 years old  
are reporting to be  
“not at all interested”  
in politics across OECD  
countries (2012-2014)

Yet, overwhelming evidence demonstrates that young men and women are not apathetic. Young people constantly invent new forms of engagement such as by using digital technologies and taking the lead in social movements and single-issue campaigns such as the Fridays for Future movement. Therefore, a high share of young people expressing disinterest in politics and low trust in government rather signals frustration with the performance of public institutions and government to deliver on their concerns, in particular among those who have completely turned their back to government action.

## EVIDENCE FROM OECD COUNTRIES

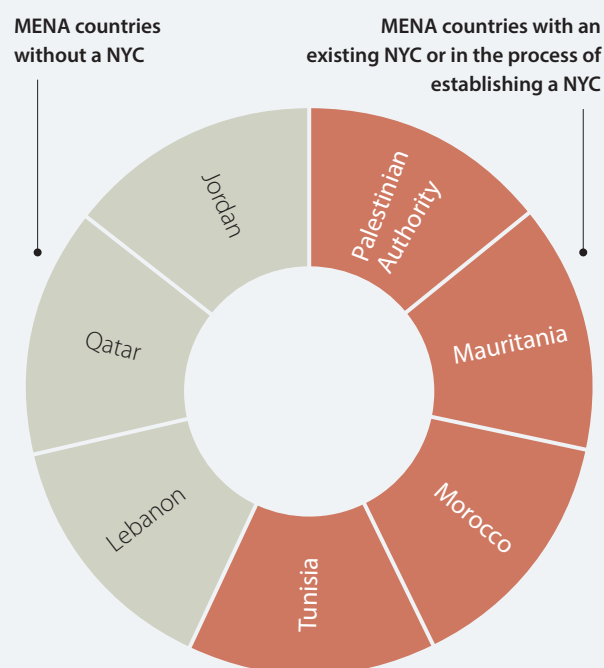
As of March 2018, 27 out of 36 OECD countries have a NYC in place. In some countries, local youth councils provide an additional platform for youth associations and youth-led organisation to advocate for their needs.

Acknowledging that youth volunteering can address the root causes of marginalisation and foster social cohesion, OECD countries have adopted “volunteering acts” or “associations acts” to ensure a rights-based approach to volunteering, regulate the status of volunteers and enable youth organisations to receive grants from the government to support voluntary programmes and activities.

**Estonia and Australia** developed a national strategy on youth volunteering to support, encourage and officially recognise volunteering in society.



FIGURE 9. OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCILS IN MENA COUNTRIES

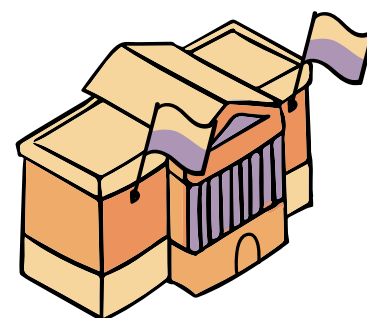


Source: Based on OECD survey

## 3 DO'S TO PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE

- 1 Support programmes and initiatives addressing young people which are disenchanted from public life, in particular vulnerable sub-groups (e.g. school drop-outs, disabled youth, minorities), in collaboration with community-based organisations and youth associations.
- 2 Provide clear information for youth associations who seek financial, organisational and technical support in the implementation of their activities and provide sustainable support structures for volunteering amongst young people;
- 3 Encourage the creation of youth councils at national and subnational levels or equivalent bodies, based on an inclusive and participatory approach, clear mandates and adequate resources.

## Finding 6. Young men and women: A yet untapped partner of governments in shaping public policies and services



Young people know best about their needs. As such, they can partner with government and public administrations in finding solutions to the challenges they are facing, for instance by shaping the public policies and services that are important for their transition to adult life. Digital technologies present an important but not the only means to involve young people in these processes. Young people's participation in policy and service cycle does not take place in a vacuum though. Strong guarantees of their civil rights and liberties such as access to information, freedom of speech and expression and freedom of association and assembly are indispensable as preconditions for youth to participate in a safe space.

The OECD Recommendation on Open Government defines three (escalating) stages of stakeholder participation: information, consultation and engagement<sup>12</sup>. Currently, among the surveyed countries, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia have an access to information law in place. In addition to providing information, communication efforts by governments in general and ministries of youth in particular should be tailored to language and channels used most frequently by youth. Results from the survey indicate that all countries use specific channels to inform young people about relevant programmes, policies and services in the form of official websites along with electronic (radio, tv) and online media. In the case of Tunisia and Morocco, an associated entity (i.e. National Youth Observatory in Tunisia; Youth Democratic Institute in Morocco) facilitates communication with young people. Preliminary evidence suggests that specific arrangements exist in some but not all countries to include vulnerable sub-groups, most notably for young women, rural youth and young people not in education, employment or training. Only in some selected countries, this appears to be the case for young people from minorities, orphans and youth below the poverty line.

Beyond the provision of information, involving young people in consultations and collaborating with them in designing, implementing and monitoring and evaluating policies and services continues to be the exception across MENA countries. The main challenge identified by ministries of youth in this regard varies considerably across countries. For instance, while

the lack of financial and human resources appears to be the main challenge in Jordan, Lebanon and Mauritania, Tunisia and Qatar refer to the lack of capacities of youth stakeholders to participate and the lack of requirements for public officials to involve youth in these processes. In a regional perspective, the absence of specific requirements of public officials as well as the lack of interest among youth stakeholders and awareness of the value added among public officials appear to be key impediments. These findings are supported by the absence of a formal mechanism in most countries that would allow youth to provide feedback regarding the quality of programmes and services.



12. <https://www.oecd.org/gov/Recommendation-Open-Government-Approved-Council-141217.pdf>.

FIGURE 10. KEY CHALLENGES FOR YOUTH TO PARTICIPATE IN THE POLICY/SERVICE CYCLE  
ACCORDING TO MINISTRIES OF YOUTH

Lack of requirements  
for public officials  
to implement  
youth participation  
initiatives

Lack of interest  
among  
youth stakeholders

Lack of  
awareness  
among public officials  
of the value added  
of youth participation  
initiatives

Source: Based on OECD Survey

### EVIDENCE FROM OECD COUNTRIES

Evidence from OECD countries demonstrates that youth occasionally participate in the policy cycle but less systematically than other groups such as experts and NGOs.



Some countries such as **France** have created dedicated bodies to involve youth more systematically in the policy cycle. The Conseil d'Orientation des Politiques de la Jeunesse, composed of government stakeholders from central and subnational level, youth associations, experts and social partners, can be consulted on legislative proposals and can examine any question of general interest in the field of youth policy. It can also present proposals to the government.



In **Germany**, the online portal "Ich mache Politik" (I do politics), run by the German Federal Youth Council, invites young people to participate in shaping youth policy and political decision-making processes at federal level. There is a clear process to show how their contributions were taken into consideration.

### 3 DO'S TO PROVIDE GENUINE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH TO SHAPE THE POLICY/SERVICE CYCLE

- 1 Use various channels, both online and offline, and a youth-friendly style to inform young people about opportunities to participate in public consultations and create spaces for dialogue between officials and youth.
- 2 Increase awareness among public officials across line ministries for the value added of engaging young people in public consultations, build capacities and provide incentives to foster cultural change in the public administration.
- 3 Support youth and youth-led start-up companies to provide feedback on the access to and quality of public services in order to map existing (service) gaps across the territory and consider publishing the results to increase transparency and accountability



## Finding 7. Legal barriers may discourage young people from becoming engaged



### DEFINING YOUTH: “15-29 YEARS” CHOSEN IN MOST COUNTRIES

Defining youth appears to be a prerequisite for analysing youth participation and representation. Yet, the definition of youth itself as a category in the form of specific age brackets bears consequences on the way young people are included in the policy-making cycle, and ultimately, on the role young people can play in society. The conceptual uncertainty of defining “youth” is a concern shared by OECD and MENA countries.

Countries in the MENA region, similarly to the majority of OECD countries, are defining youth within a fixed age range, usually set between 15-29 years. Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestinian Authority use a definition adopted by the Government, which sets the lower age limit at 15 and the upper age limit at 29. Only Qatar sets the upper limit at 25. Mauritania has adopted the definition of youth contained in the African Youth Charter, which adopts a broader age range of 15-35.

While useful to identify the beneficiaries of government action in some areas, fixed age ranges alone fall short of reflecting the different life situations for young people in their transition from child- to adulthood.

### INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS TO ADVANCE YOUTH OBJECTIVES EXIST

A strong legal basis to empower and protect youth and foster their development is essential to mobilise capacities and increase government accountability. To date, there is no binding legal framework dedicated to “youth” at the international level. The most relevant legislation in this area is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), stipulating measures to protect and promote the rights of children and adolescents until the age of 18.

All surveyed countries have signed and ratified the CRC, yet, reservations adopted by States can limit the scope of protection provided<sup>13</sup>. In addition, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania and Tunisia have ratified the African Youth Charter, which entered into force in 2009. It recognises the right of young people to participate in all spheres of society (Art. 11), and obliges State parties to take active measures to promote youth participation in society<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, all countries have endorsed the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security which provide international frameworks in which youth objectives can be advanced.

ON AVERAGE, A MINISTER IN AN OECD COUNTRY IS

# 53

YEARS OLD (2018)

13. For more information on CRC status and reservations: [https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=ind&mtdsg\\_no=iv-11&chapter=4&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=ind&mtdsg_no=iv-11&chapter=4&clang=_en)  
4 ILO (2017) ILOSTAT database, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=ZQ>

14. <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-youth-charter>



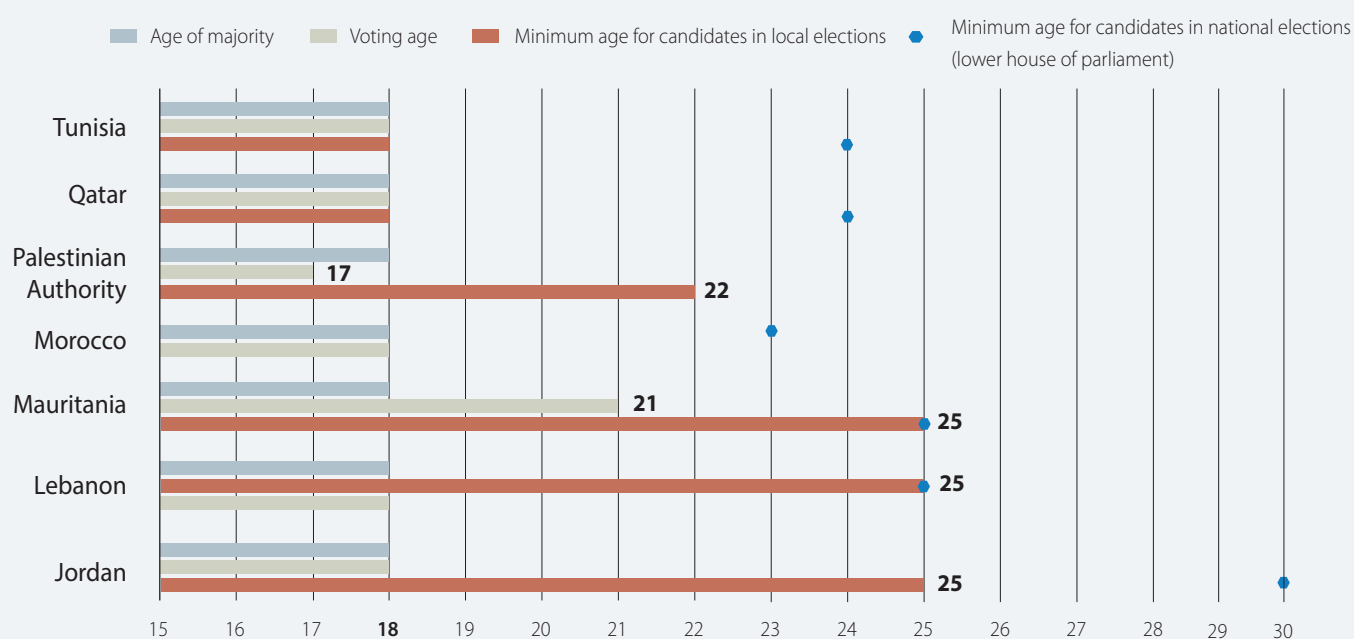
## HIGH MINIMUM AGE TO RUN AS CANDIDATES IN SOME COUNTRIES MAY DISCOURAGE YOUTH

The definition of age limits or minimum age requirements in regulations may directly affect the lives of young people. If chosen arbitrarily, minimum age requirements may limit their opportunities to access public services needed for their transition to adult life and ultimately, take decisions affecting their life. Age limits can determine the opportunities for youth to vote and stand as candidate in elections, access financial credit and receive information, among others, and hence affects their opportunities to participate in public, social and economic life.

Legal minimum ages are not always consistent across all policy fields (i.e. one may be considered old enough for enrolment in military service, but not to run as a candidate in elections). Moreover, there is an increasing recognition that a person's capacity to make decisions should not only depend on the age criteria but a range of factors including experience, ability and context such as the availability of information.

In most countries in the world, and in all the MENA countries surveyed, the majority age is 18 years. In 4 out of 6 countries surveyed, voting age is aligned with the majority age (see Figure 11). The exceptions are Lebanon where voting is only possible at the age of 21 and Palestinian Authority where the minimum voting age stands at 17 and hence below the majority age. Most notably, the minimum age to run as candidate (at local, national or parliamentary level) exceeds majority age significantly in Lebanon, Mauritania and Palestinian Authority. This risks excluding a significant share of young men and women from becoming active in political life and shape decision making in state institutions. Simply lowering the minimum age to run in elections, however, might not automatically results in a higher number of young candidates. Civic and citizenship education should be anchored solidly in the curriculum of schools to ensure young people have the necessary skills, knowledge and information about opportunities to participate in public life, including politics.

FIGURE 11. MINIMUM AGE REQUIREMENTS



Source: Based on OECD Survey

The average age of public officials working in the public administration usually exceeds the average age of the population across MENA countries by far. This is a challenge the region shares with many OECD member countries (see Figure 12). Challenges for young people to present themselves in election across MENA countries include high minimum age requirements in some countries and the financial burden of campaigning which are often aggravated by the internal dynamics of political parties or social structures, norms and perception (e.g. the widely held perception that young people lack the experience to be active in political life).

**20%**

of members of Parliament  
are under 40 years  
in OECD member countries  
on average (2016)

## IN THE ABSENCE OF YOUTH LAWS, MENA COUNTRIES ADVANCE YOUTH-RELATED OBJECTIVES THROUGH SECTORAL LEGISLATION

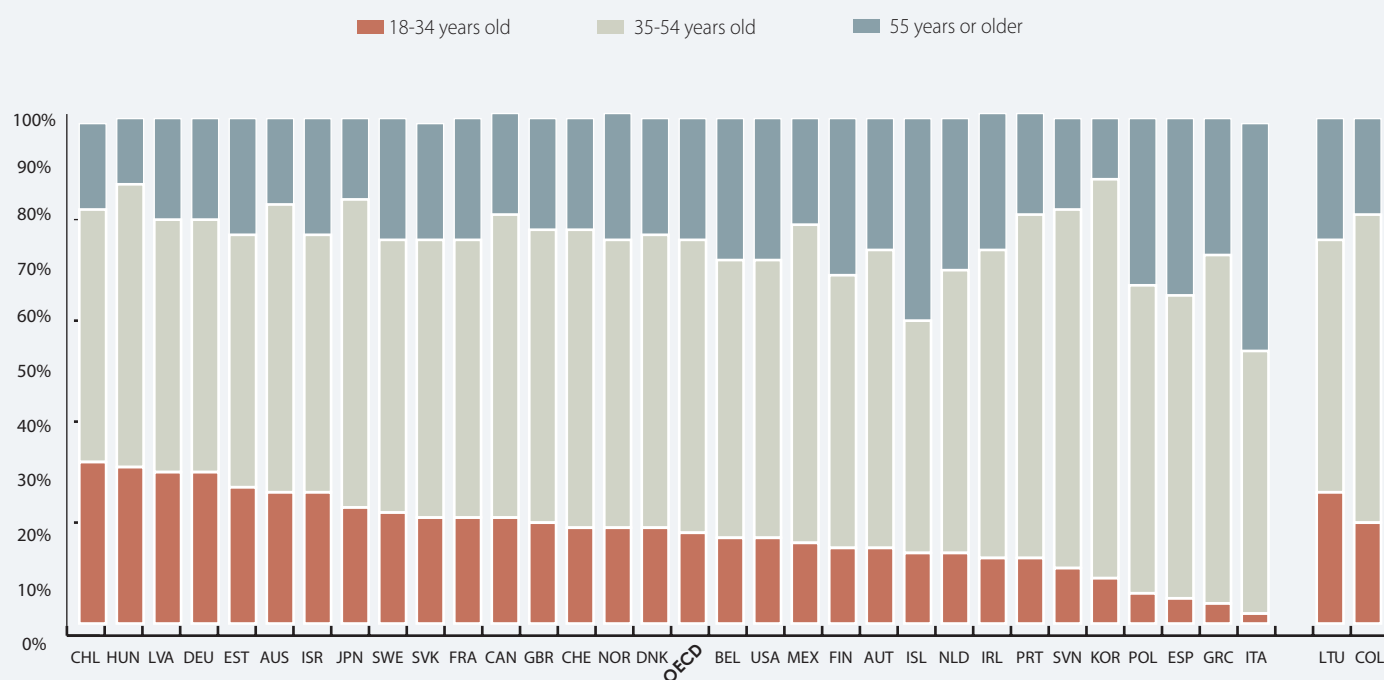
Some countries acknowledge the constructive role young people can and should play in their constitutions. In Tunisia, public institutions are compelled to provide young people with the necessary conditions to achieve their full potential and ensure their participation to the social, economic, political and cultural development of the country (Article 8). It refers to young people as “active force in the construction of the country”. The constitution in Morocco foresees the creation of a national youth council.

On the other hand, none of the surveyed MENA countries has a youth law in force in comparison to 8 out of 36 OECD countries. In these countries, youth laws generally identify main stakeholders and fields of action both for state institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with and for young people (e.g. definition of youth and youth institutions, youth age limits, actions to be taken by the state, financial and budgetary considerations). In MENA countries, youth commitments appear to be integrated in a wide range of sectoral legislation (i.e. in legislations related to social services, health care, employment acts and education, criminal justice). Among others, this is the case in the electoral laws which, in the case of Tunisia and



Morocco, provide for youth quotas to reinforce the representation of young people in Parliament (Morocco) and at the local level (Tunisia). The recent adoption of the new electoral law (loi organique n°2017-7) in Tunisia resulted in 52% of candidates being under 35 years in the last local election.

FIGURE 12. SHARE OF PEOPLE EMPLOYED IN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT BY AGE GROUP, 2015





## EVIDENCE FROM OECD COUNTRIES

8 out of 36 OECD member countries have a general youth law. These laws include stipulations on young people's representation and participation in policy-making, instructing that youth must have access to political power and outlining the necessity of political consultations with youth councils.



**Luxembourg's** youth law establishes a body in charge of monitoring youth issues with the mission to prepare, coordinate and initiate surveys, recommendations, analyses, studies, and reports on the different aspects of the situation of young people in Luxembourg. It also institutes a National Assembly of Young People with the mission to give young people and youth organisations the possibility to participate in the examination of all issues related to youth policy at the national and European level.



**Sweden** is the only OECD country that applies a quota to guarantee a minimum share for young candidates on party lists (25% of the candidates must be 35 years or younger).

## 3 DO'S TO CREATE A SOUND LEGAL ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

- 1** Recognise the heterogeneity of youth: A legal definition of "youth" should recognise them as a highly heterogeneous group with different identity factors (e.g. gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity, religion) which is not exclusively defined by strict age brackets.
- 2** Adopt youth-friendly legal framework: Review the stock of existing regulations to ensure that youth-related objectives are advanced and sufficient capacities and resources for this purpose are mobilised.
- 3** Remove arbitrary age limits: Where minimum ages present a barrier for greater youth participation and representation, they should be removed. For instance, aligning the minimum age to vote with the minimum age to run as a candidate may encourage youth to present themselves in elections. Reform in this area should be accompanied by efforts to strengthen civic and citizenship education in the curriculum.





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to follow the project activities and to tweet your thoughts and ideas about youth engagement in the MENA region.

Information about the Project is available at  
**[www.oecd.org/mena/governance/promoting-youthinclusion-and-empowerment.htm](http://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/promoting-youthinclusion-and-empowerment.htm)**