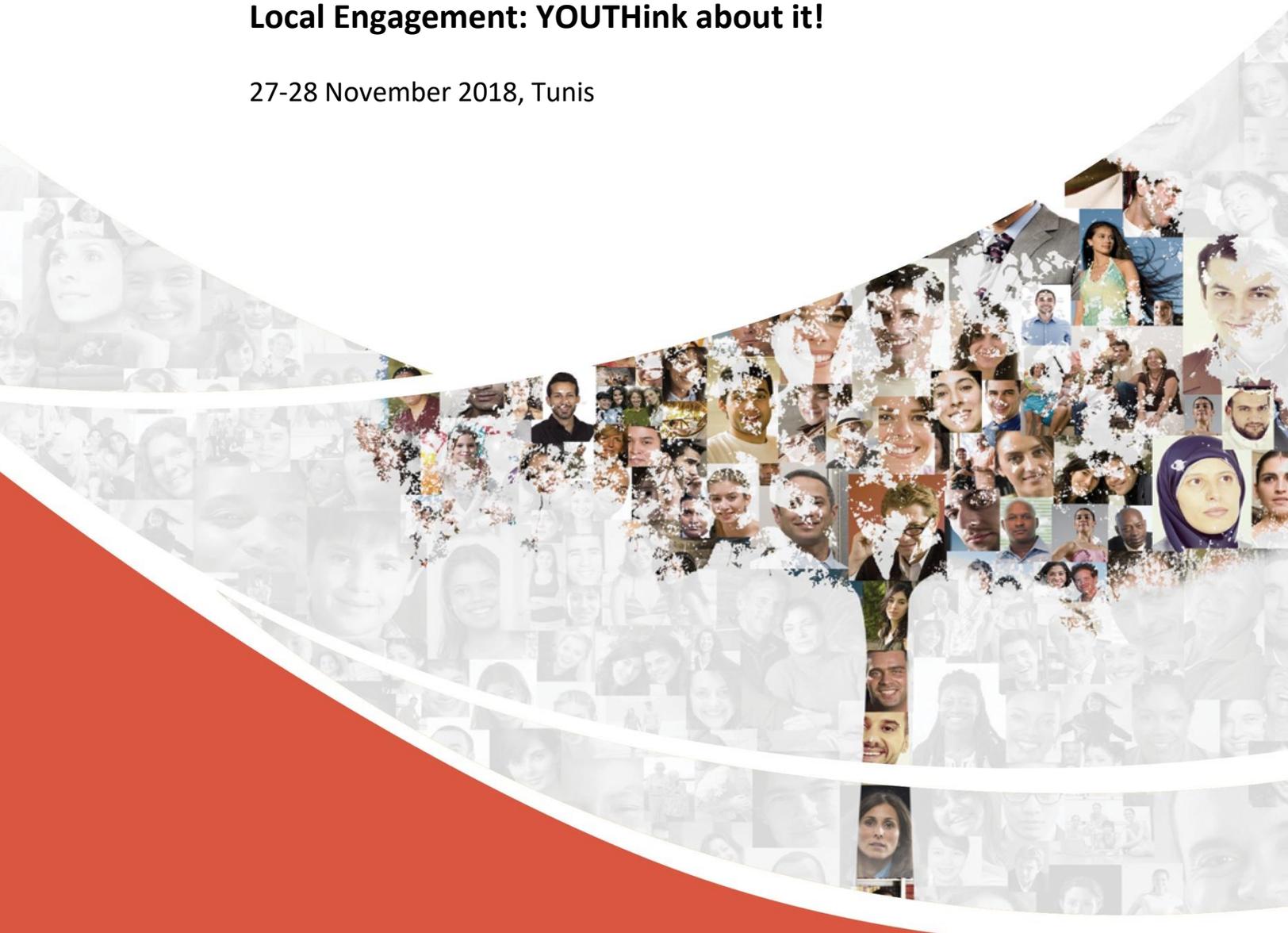


TUNIS CONCLUSIONS

**Regional Conference –
Local Engagement: YOUTHink about it!**

27-28 November 2018, Tunis



MENA - OECD
Governance Programme



OECD

BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this second regional conference was to continue the exchange of good practices that allow the tailoring of policies and youth services to the needs of young men and women in the MENA region. Under the auspices of the Presidency of the Government and the Tunisian Ministry of Youth and Sport, this conference brought together young men and women, senior officials of Ministries of Youth and other ministries working on youth, as well as youth associations and other non-governmental organizations from MENA and OECD countries.

Building on the outcomes of the Regional Youth Conference in Rabat, Morocco, in 2017, the Regional conference provided an opportunity to consolidate the exchange of good practices and experiences to empower MENA's youth to play a greater role in policymaking, especially at the local level. It also discussed ways in which tools of Open Government can be leveraged to ease and foster youth participation.

PARTICIPATION

The meeting was opened by high-level representatives of the countries involved in the project and the OECD Secretariat:

- Ms. Sonia Ben Cheikh, Minister of Youth affairs and Sport, Tunisia
- Mr. Abdelkaddous Saadaoui, Secretary of State for Youth, Tunisia
- Mr. Chokri Terzi, Advisor to the Head of the Government, in charge of youth affairs, Tunisia
- Mr. Thabet Al Nabulsi, Secretary General of Youth, Jordan
- Ms. Carole McQueen, Ambassador of Canada to Tunisia
- Ms. Irène Hors, Deputy Director, Public Governance Directorate, OECD

CONCLUSIONS

The discussions demonstrated a strong commitment to encouraging young people to be more active in public life. Participants of the Regional Conference on youth engagement at the local level on 27-28 November 2018:

- Recalled that **regional instability, slow pace of economic growth and of political reforms, rising debt levels, high unemployment rates and low levels of trust in government** remain major challenges in the MENA region, which must be addressed within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and guided by principles of cooperation and collaboration in the region as a whole.
- Highlighted that young men and women are particularly affected by these challenges. The MENA region has the highest **youth unemployment** rate compared to any other region in the world, exceeding 27% on average (15-24 years). 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**. Frequent changes in government and the complex challenges faced to implement profound structural reforms have contributed to decreasing levels of trust and disengagement of young citizens.
- Insisted that the **involvement of young men and women in public life** is a **positive driver of change** and an essential element to build resilient societies and economies. In this regard, participants also underlined the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security, sponsored by Jordan, which highlights the important and positive role young people play in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security.
- Recognised that major reforms undertaken in the region to adequately address youth needs and strengthen the involvement of young people have to be continued and effectively implemented, with a special attention to ensure inclusion of particularly **vulnerable youth groups**, such as young people not in employment, education or training, women from rural areas, youth with disabilities and mental health issues.

Regarding the development and implementation of national youth policies, participants:

- Highlighted the importance to establish a **cross-sectional youth policy** (including various areas such as employment, education, health, housing, mobility, justice and sports), which provides 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.
- Noted that, given the cross-cutting nature of youth policies, effective **horizontal and vertical coordination across all actors involved** - including ministries, public and private agencies, youth organisations, and civil society organisations as well as schools, universities and local public

authorities - is essential. **Sufficient human and financial resources** need to be allocated to the public authorities in charge of developing, implementing, and evaluating youth programmes and services.

- Recognised the importance to **integrate a “youth perspective”** in legislation, policies and programmes in order to assess appropriately the implications of any planned action on young people.
- Emphasised how a strong **legal basis to empower and protect youth and foster their development** is essential to mobilise capacities and increase government accountability.
- Highlighted that these combined efforts serve the objective to foster **youth engagement**, offer young people opportunities and means for **participation in public life**, address risks of exclusion and radicalisation, and **design public policies that better respond to the actual needs** and demands of youth in all its diversity.

Regarding the participation of young people at the **local level** and the **leveraging of open government tools**, participants:

- Welcomed ongoing **decentralisation reforms in the region**, acknowledging that it offers new opportunities for young people to interact with public officials and the administration, effectively participate to public decision-making and see an immediate impact of their engagement.
- Underlined the importance to reinforce **inter-institutional coordination across central and subnational levels and actors** to ensure effective implementation of youth policies. At the local level, the coordination between the various governmental, civil society and private sector stakeholders is particularly essential for the good use and distribution of resources to local youth initiatives, such as youth houses, youth councils, schools or sport facilities.
- Encouraged the **reliance and strengthening of existing networks of youth councils, youth houses and youth associations**, as well as **civil society organisations and the private sector** at the local level. They encourage different forms of young people’s engagement in public life ranging from formal channels to involve youth in political decision-making to socio-cultural activities and space for exchange and learning, which facilitate social integration.
- Acknowledged ongoing **open government initiatives in the MENA region**, including access to information laws, citizen consultation and participatory budgets and their role in enabling young people to better understand public action, participate in public decision-making, and ensure a wiser delivery of services. Increasing the use of open government tools, especially at the local level, is instrumental to improve the relationship between public administration and citizens.
- Recognised that in a rapidly evolving cultural context where **new technologies** enable new forms of collaboration, governments and public authorities need to rethink and adapt communication means by increasing their use of digital platforms and social media, which, combined with direct

in-person interactions, allow for greater government reach and accountability vis-à-vis young people.

Regarding the **way forward**, participants:

- Welcomed the **OECD-MENA Youth Governance Survey** and the presentation of key findings of the survey presented at the occasion of the regional conference highlighting common trends on governance of youth policy and youth engagement across the region, good practices from OECD countries and strategic policy recommendations.
- Encouraged the preparation of a **MENA Youth Governance Review** based on the survey results and fact-clearing missions, and its presentation at the annual regional youth conference in 2019 in Jordan.
- Encouraged the MENA-OECD Governance Programme to explore opportunities to strengthen the evidence-base on **mechanisms to prevent racist language, hate speech and discrimination** from public spaces, including social media.
- Encouraged the MENA-OECD Governance Programme to analyse **good governance responses to foster inclusion of young refugees and migrants**, provide access to basic public services, and fight violence, exploitation and harassment of refugees and migrants in order to allow them to become positive actors and productive members of society.
- Encouraged countries in the MENA region to streamline **youth-specific commitments in Open Government strategies and action plans**. Participants furthermore welcomed that the discussion on tailored communication approaches and the use of new technologies will be moved forward at the occasion of the regional **Working Group Meeting on Open Government** in Portugal in 2019. In this context, the MENA-OECD Governance Programme is pleased to launch a regional video competition on digital tools created or used by young people to participate in public decision-making and raise awareness among citizens.
- Recalled the importance of **civic education and youth literacy**, which must be leveraged to develop youth leadership skills, enhance their understanding of the political system and civil rights, and improve their knowledge on the diverse ways (e.g. traditional and non-formal ways) to engage and become responsible citizens and agents of positive change.
- Welcomed the initiative to explore innovative ways for young people to cooperate with their governments, improve services and enhance their participation in policy-making in the context of the discussions at the **2019 World Government Summit in Dubai**.

- Recognised the MENA-OECD Governance Programme's initiatives to highlight and share good practices of youth engagement in public life on the **International Youth Day**.
 - Encouraged **countries in the MENA region** to take into account the importance of continuing this work on a demand-driven approach, combined with **enhanced coordination with donors such as the G7, the European Union and UN agencies working on youth issues** (UNDP, OHCR, UNFPA, UNESCO). Participants thanked the G7 Deauville Partnership and the MENA Transition Fund for their financial commitment for youth inclusion in public life.
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