



Kingdom of the Netherlands

Read-out of Regional Level No Lost Generation Donor Briefing on Adolescents and Youth¹, 2018

The **No Lost Generation initiative** is a concerted effort by humanitarians, donors, governments and other partners to secure the safety and futures of a whole generation of children and young people in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Egypt whose safety, wellbeing, education and opportunities are jeopardized by conflict and displacement. The initiative comprises programming and advocacy under three pillars – Education, Child Protection and Adolescents & Youth – all of which are embedded in existing humanitarian plans. Overall, it is a powerful call, made together with children and young people, to invest in their rights, capacities, resilience, and potential – since these are the building blocks of a peaceful and prosperous future.

On 26 September, 2018 the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Beirut hosted a regional level discussion under the auspices of the No Lost Generation (NLG) initiative on Adolescents and Youth in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA). The event brought together young people affected by conflict, humanitarians, development experts and representatives of the international donor community, including: Australia, Canada, Denmark, EU, France, Germany, Italy Norway, Sweden, the UK and the US. Also present was a representative from the American University of Beirut

Conveying the highlights of a regional level Evidence Symposium on Adolescents and Youth in MENA on 25 and 26 September, and organised by a regional UN:NGO group on adolescents & youth and the NLG partnership, the agenda of the Donor Briefing included presentations on the current evidence on and solutions for adolescents and youth in the region. The two specific areas of focus for evidence and solutions were: 1) the prevention of and response to violence; and 2) Easing the transition from education to employment.

The donor briefing was unique in providing ten young people, including young refugees, the opportunity to directly share their aspirations, expertise and recommendations with a community of senior donor representatives, UN agencies and INGO partners.

Highlights from presenters²:

His Excellency Mr. Jan Waltmans, Ambassador for the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Beirut, opened the discussion by extending a special welcome to the many young people in the room. He underlined the commitment that his country has made towards supporting and engaging with young people – evidenced by Dutch support to innovative, youth-led programming in the region and the development of mechanisms to consult with young people worldwide on Dutch

¹ *Adolescents* are in the age range 10-19 inclusive; *Youth* are in the age range of 15-24 inclusive; *Young People* refers to both groups.

² All presentations are available at <https://esay2018.wordpress.com/>

policy – and urged all stakeholders to promote partnership with young people in development and humanitarian situations.

Speaking on behalf of the No Lost Generation partners, Bertrand Bainvel, Deputy Regional Director for UNICEF described the importance of grounding efforts to build the evidence base in local and national institutions, and thanked the American University of Beirut for their role in hosting the Evidence Symposium. He then outlined the important role of the donor community in promoting adolescent and youth engagement, supporting research, and promoting the use of evidence in policy-making. Finally, he described how the Evidence Symposium – the second in an annual series where young people, including some of the most vulnerable, play a leading role in the design, implementation and follow up of solution-oriented discussions – had demonstrated the feasibility and value of genuine partnership with young people. Other NLG partners in the room who echoed and built on Mr. Bainvel’s remarks in subsequent discussions included Plan International, Save the Children, UNHCR and UNRWA.



Benan Ahmad Ibrahim Al Alawneh, 15, from Jordan, presents her winning research on smoking amongst young males and females during the 2018 Evidence Symposium on Adolescents and Youth in MENA.

Presenters from the Evidence Symposium (including adolescents and youth whose research submissions or proposed solutions had been selected as winners by a panel of youth and experts) then shared key points including the following:

1. Adolescence offers three windows of opportunity: firstly, it’s a period which sees unique biological, endocrinal, neurological and psychological changes in the individual; secondly, it’s an opportunity to ‘catch up’ and redress earlier life vulnerabilities; and lastly, it’s an opportunity to influence inter and intra generational life outcomes – including those of the subsequent generation, of whom today’s adolescents will be the parents.
2. The MENA region is experiencing significant demographic changes, producing a unique window of opportunity to reap a demographic dividend as a result of an increasing ratio of working age population to dependent population (i.e. children and elderly). This can create greater national wealth, which can spur consumption, production and investment. However, three key pre-requisites must be met in order to reap that dividend, namely:

- Political and social stability –as violence and conflict deter investors and decreases human capital;
- Inclusive and equitable economic and social policies – leaving no one behind and preventing continued marginalization of adolescents and youth, especially young women; and
- Decent employment opportunities – ensuring that quality education systems build the skills required by the labour market and that markets generate decent jobs – to absorb the working age population.

3. A review of current evidence reveals that the priority issues for youth include:

- Lack of access to relevant, quality education;
- Unemployment and socio-economic exclusion;
- Limited spaces for voice and accountability;
- Increasing rates of disability as a result of violence and conflict; and
- An increasing desire to migrate – as a result of frustrations and limited opportunities.

4. Despite the frustration, there is persisting hopefulness among adolescents and youth. Evidence reveals they are optimistic that their reality will change and keen to engage positively to affect change. Data shows a number of adolescent and youth led engagement interventions are being implemented in the region and an increased engagement of adolescents and youth through digital communication

5. Policy and programme solutions showcased during the symposium that work sustainably and at scale to ease the transition from education employment include: the comprehensive roll out of the Life Skills and Citizenship Education in Morocco; the revamped market driven Technical and Vocational policy in Lebanon; the Work Based Learning experience in 8 MENA countries and a dual learning system from Lebanon.

6. There were no sustainable and scalable solutions for violence mitigation and response presented, although young people continue to innovate in this area, including through the use of technology to identify issues of concern for young people and to mitigate risks and address the affects of violence. More financial and technical support is needed to measure the effectiveness of promising solutions and ensure research to test and adapt solutions from outside the region.

Adolescents and Youth in MENA: some statistics

- **There are 124 million adolescents and youth in MENA.**
- **The MENA region is the most dangerous in the world for adolescents** today. More than 70% of adolescents who died in 2015 due to collective violence globally were living in MENA.
- **1 in 5 girls in MENA are married before the age of 18** and the rate of child marriage is increasing in conflict affected settings. 95% of Syrian refugee families in Lebanon rely on a negative coping mechanism such as child marriage or child labour.
- At 22.2% for the Arab states and 29.3% in North Africa, **MENA has the highest youth unemployment rates in the world.** The youth unemployment rate is particularly dire for young females in the region whose unemployment is almost twice that of young men 36.5 in Arab States and 40.3 in North Africa (ILOSTAT, 2017). This trend is exacerbated in conflict affected settings.
- **Young people in MENA experience amongst the highest rates of NEET** (not in employment, education or training) worldwide. Examples are: Jordan: males – 14.5%; females – 43.8%; Egypt: males – 14.8%; females – 54.5%. Young men in MENA usually take between 2-3 years to make the education to employment transition. For young women it is significantly more, and they are often discouraged from continuing their search for work and drop out of the labour market altogether.

Key takeaways from the discussion following presentations:

1. **Evidence is an essential basis for effective policies and programmes.** The MENA Evidence and Youth Symposium, which is an annual event, provides an opportunity to consolidate the evidence base – now maintained in an online,

interagency adolescent and youth hub – and identify gaps. The process of reviewing and analyzing existing evidence has revealed gap – for example in the area of sustainable solutions for violence prevention and response, or to promote female employment and entrepreneurship.

It was agreed that practitioners and researchers need to take the following strategic actions to address these gaps:

- Advocate and ensure all programme data is collected and presented as age and sex disaggregated data.
- Disseminate widely and translate into Arabic existing and any new evidence generated.
- Promote the use of the evidence in supporting scaling up of good practices and solutions that are proven to address key issues for adolescents and youth in MENA (for example: Promote widely the Life Skills and Citizenship Education Initiative; the market driven Technical and Vocational policy reform; Work Based Learning and the dual learning system for skilling young people in MENA).
- Actively support and promote research and solutions for the following critical areas for adolescents and youth in MENA: violence prevention and response; and promotion of female employment and entrepreneurship.



2. **It's time to stop talking about young people and start talking with young people.** Although the prevailing narrative about young people in the region can be quite negative, the adolescents and youth in the MENA region are its most precious resource. Recommended strategic actions here include:
 - Make use of a recently established Regional Adolescent and Youth Advisory Majlis (RAYAM) to purposefully and systematically engage young people – especially the most vulnerable - in decision-making at regional and national level, especially in decisions that will affect their future;
 - Link young researchers and solution-makers to support, including technical assistance and funding - and build mechanisms to research, develop and promote scale up of successful solutions; and

- Together with young people in the RAYAM, elevate their voices as an important contribution to the global conversation and a counternarrative to those who portray youth as a source of risk.

3. **The right moment to start working with and supporting young people is now.**

If the countries in the MENA region fail to invest in their adolescents and youth; prepare them for productive adult life; absorb young labour market entrants; restore peace; and address gender inequality and marginalization, the unique opportunity of the demographic dividend will slip through their fingers. A large proportion of the region's working age population will be either outside the labour force or unemployed. They are likely to be disenfranchised and will put a considerable demand on public resources.

If this bleak prospect is to be avoided and the demographic transition turned into a boost for prosperity in the region, the time to act is now.

Commitments and follow up actions:

Donors and practitioners in the room committed to:

- **Promoting and implementing disaggregation of data** wherever possible, to enable more effective analysis of the situation for male and female adolescents (10-19); and male and female youth (15-24).
- **Supporting the generation, sharing and use of evidence** to inform policy-making and programming to address the priorities and needs of youth, including in relation to easing the transition from education to employment, and prevention and response to violence. AUB committed to continue playing a key role in this work, including through making Arabic language resources more widely available.
- **Supporting efforts to fill the gaps in evidence and solutions**, notably in the area of prevention and response to the many forms of violence experienced by young people in MENA, including Gender Based Violence – noting that technology and innovations have the potential to play an important role in tackling violence and the discrimination that underpins it.
- **Supporting and making the space for the perspectives, opinions and voices of young people to be heard** in discussions and decision-making processes affecting their future.
- **Building the systematic participation of adolescents and youth into programming.**

In immediate follow up, the Embassy of the Netherlands committed to working with the No Lost Generation partners to facilitate consultation with the RAYAM on the new global level Dutch policy on youth. Other meeting participants committed to disseminating the key points of the Donor Briefing to relevant colleagues and partners, underlining the inspiring nature of the conversation with young people and the importance of living up to our commitments to them.

Going forward, further key asks for the donor community from the young people and the organisational partners involved in the Evidence Symposium are as follows:

- **Promote the solutions identified in the Evidence Symposium** to ease the transition from education to employment,
- **Explore mechanisms to link young solution-builders with funding** and other support (such as mentoring) in order to generate, test and, where appropriate, scale up further solutions; and
- **Contribute to addressing the recommendations from the Evidence Symposium** which will be documented in a final report and which will guide the work of partners during the year until the 2019 Symposium. Many of these will align directly with the commitments listed above, but are likely to give more detail and, in some cases, may require budgetary support or influence from the donor community in order to maintain progress and achieve results.