



Youth Employment in the Middle East and North Africa: Revisiting and Reframing the Challenge

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Youth unemployment rates in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have been the highest in the world for over a quarter century.² This has been a source of frustration and social unrest for the region's youth. Over the past fifteen years, MENA governments and development organizations have responded to this challenge, launching a plethora of youth employment policies and programs across the region. This policy briefing reviews the MENA youth employment challenge, documenting previous policy

and programmatic attempts to address it and analyzing why they failed. It contends that program and policy failures have largely been the result of weak implementation and governance structures. Furthermore, it argues that boosting employment should remain a top priority and calls for renewed efforts to do so.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Renew the Call to Action:** Policymakers and youth-serving organizations within the wider development community must redouble their efforts to address the challenge, despite the previous lack of success in improving youth employment outcomes in the MENA region.
- **Focus on Job Creation:** Policymakers must address structural impediments to improving the business and regulatory environments in order to unlock the job creation potential of the formal private sector. This will require new policy approaches, such as establishing a public authority reporting to the highest levels of government.
- **Monitor & Evaluate Impact:** Youth-serving organizations must do a better job of designing their programs and initiatives. They must also incorporate more effective monitoring and evaluation tools to ensure that their programs are effective and reach disadvantaged and marginalized groups.
- **Improve Coordination:** Policymakers and the development community must improve coordination among organizations serving youth, bringing together government agencies, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), research centers, the private sector, and donors.

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INTRODUCTION

In the early 2000s, youth in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region became a focus of intense research and policy discussion. At the time, the region had the highest youth population shares in the world, as well as the highest rates of youth unemployment.^{3,4} These two factors generated a sense of urgency among policymakers regarding the need to create enough jobs to absorb the incoming flux of young workers.⁵ However, despite concerted policy efforts, by 2010, the region had failed to improve employment outcomes for its youthful population. Youth frustration grew over their social, economic, and political exclusion, exploding in 2011 into protests across the region.

Today, MENA countries have reduced their focus on youth employment, prioritizing security concerns over political and economic reforms. Although the demographic “youth bulge” that underpinned the call to action a decade ago persists and the window of opportunity it created remains open,⁶ the crest of the demographic wave has passed in most MENA countries. International attention has shifted to Sub-Saharan Africa as the region with the largest population share of youth. Indeed, the policy response to the 2016 Arab Human Development Report, which focused on youth, was remarkably weak.⁷ Yet, the challenges facing MENA youth today are as stark as ever, exacerbated by low rates of economic growth, curtailed political freedoms, and diminished opportunities for migration.⁸ There is an urgent need to assess past policy failures and to reenergize efforts to address the youth employment challenge.

This policy briefing provides a regional analysis of youth employment in the MENA region. It highlights the challenges facing young people and reviews key youth employment research, policy, and programmatic initiatives launched over the past two decades. While every MENA

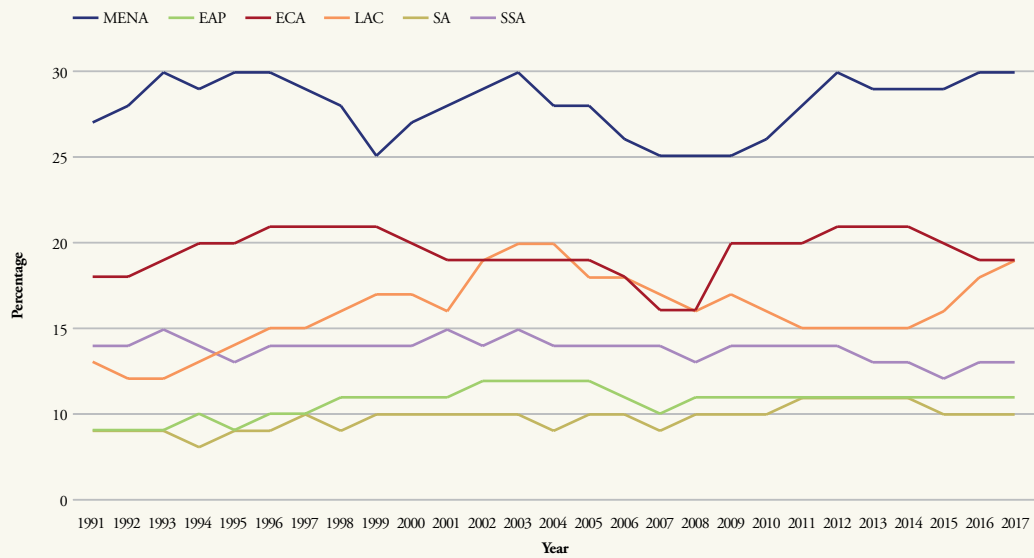
country has its own unique circumstances, this policy briefing notes that youth employment is a key issue shared by countries across the region. Prescribed policy and programmatic solutions also have been similar across MENA countries, along with sources of failure.⁹ This policy briefing highlights areas where these efforts fell short in order to formulate a renewed regional call to action.

DEFINING THE CHALLENGE

Youth unemployment rates in the MENA region have been the highest in the world for over 25 years,¹⁰ reaching 30 percent in 2017 (Figure 1).^{11,12,13} Moreover, MENA youth often search for years before finding work.¹⁴ This delayed transition to work affects other pathways to adulthood, including marriage, homeownership, and civic participation. This delay in transition to adulthood has been termed “wait-hood,” a term reflecting the waste of youthful energy and potential.¹⁵ Over the past decade, youth unemployment in the MENA region has been elevated by a series of crises, including the 2008 financial crisis, the 2011 uprisings, armed conflict, and the 2014 fall in oil prices, which affected remittances and migration to the Gulf. However, structural factors continue to be the main reason behind the region’s high youth unemployment rates.

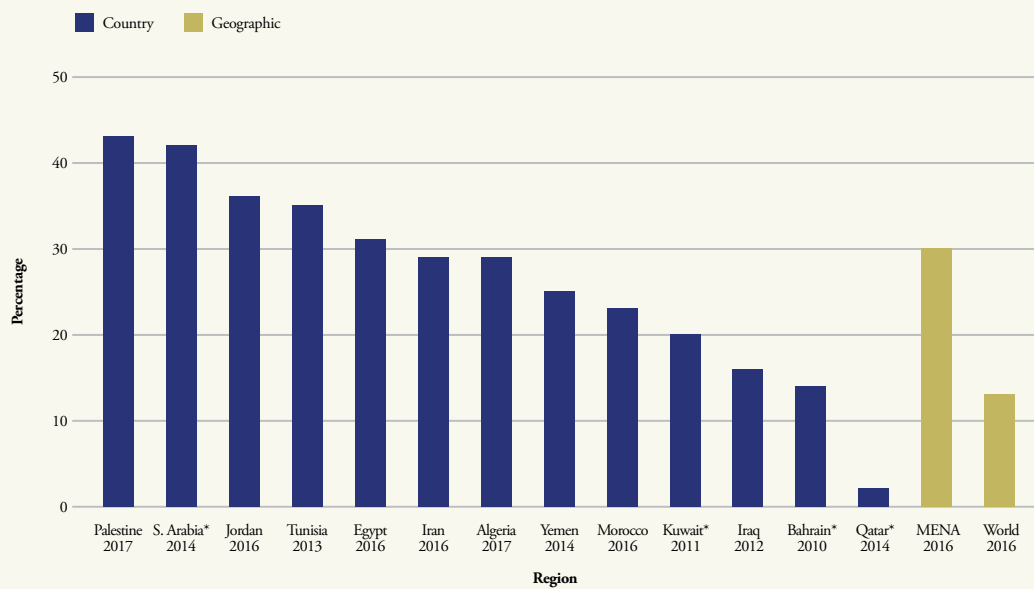
Even though there are substantial differences in political, social, and economic conditions across MENA countries, youth unemployment is a challenge across the region. This motivates our undertaking of a regional overview that highlights shared trends and features, while also considering country-level variations. Indeed, in all MENA countries with available data, youth unemployment rates are higher than the world average of 13 percent (Figure 2).^{16,17} The highest rates are in countries as diverse as Palestine (43 percent), Saudi Arabia (42 percent among nationals), Jordan (36 percent), and Tunisia (36 percent). Only in Qatar are youth unem-

Figure 1: Youth Unemployment Rates by Region



Source: World Bank, "World Development Indicators," accessed March 2018, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/source/world-development-indicators>.

Figure 2: Youth Unemployment Rates by Country



*GCC nationals only

Sources: ILOSTAT Database, accessed May 2018. Unemployment rates for MENA and the world are from ILO modeled estimates. Rates for individual countries are from national estimates. For Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar, rates are reported or calculated by the author using data from each country's national statistical agency.

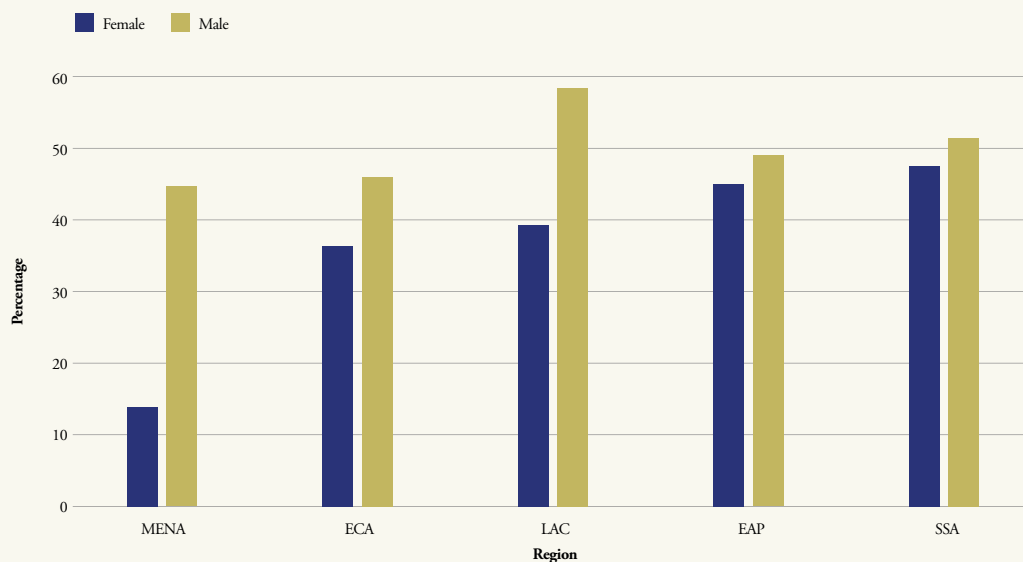
ployment rates lower than the world average, due to its capacity to absorb young nationals into public sector jobs.

Youth employment in the MENA region also has a gendered dimension. While young women have achieved remarkable gains in educational attainment over the past five decades, these have not translated into comparable increases in labor force participation (Figure 3). In 2017, only 15 percent of young women in the MENA region were active in the labor force, as compared to 36 percent in the next lowest-ranked region.¹⁸ Furthermore, unemployment rates among young women in the region are 80 percent higher than those among young men, compared to an average gender differential of 20 percent globally.¹⁹ This means that young women in the MENA region are far less likely to enter the workforce than their peers elsewhere and, when they do

want to work, they have a more difficult time finding suitable employment.

Much research has gone into studying the factors behind the phenomenon of high youth unemployment and waithood in the MENA region.²⁰ On the supply side, researchers have identified a number of factors, including: a demographic wave that increased labor supply pressures across the region in the early 1990s and 2000s;²¹ weak educational systems that did not adequately prepare youth for the world of work;²² a lack of labor market information systems and career guidance resources for job seekers;²³ and a mismatch between the expectations of educated job seekers and the wages and prestige of available jobs.²⁴ Young women in the region faced an additional set of factors that contributed to their economic exclusion, including discrimination and conservative social norms.²⁵

Figure 3: Labor Force Participation Rates (2017)



Source: ILOSTAT Database, accessed September 2018.

On the demand side, relatively high wages, benefits, and job security in the public sector have continued to attract young people and encourage job queuing for increasingly scarce positions.²⁶ Meanwhile, over-regulation of the formal private sector has hampered its ability to create decent jobs,²⁷ and inflexible labor laws²⁸ have supported existing workers at the expense of new entrants and stifled job creation.²⁹ Finally, large-scale cronyism has created inefficient large companies that do not need to worry about hiring the best workers to remain profitable.³⁰ In 2018, the average rank of Arab countries on the World Bank's Doing Business Survey was a woeful 115 out of 190 economies.³¹ The inability of MENA economies to create enough decent employment opportunities is arguably the most important factor behind the high rates of youth unemployment and joblessness in the region.

The limited number of opportunities in the formal sector has led to the expansion of informal sector jobs, which generally offer fewer benefits or protections. Furthermore, firms that operate in the informal sector are less able to grow and create new jobs, as this would place pressure on them to formalize. Youth employment rates in the informal sector are as high as 80 percent in Palestine, Egypt, and Tunisia.³² Faced with a lack of decent job opportunities, some youth turn to entrepreneurship and self-employment. Yet, at 9.3 percent, the average share of MENA youth engaged in early stage entrepreneurial activity in countries with available data is lower than the world average.³³ One major barrier for youth entrepreneurs is a lack of access to finance. The average rank of Arab countries in terms of access to credit was 130 out of 190 economies; youth, especially, have limited credit histories and collateral.³⁴

In the absence of decent employment opportunities, many youth in the MENA region have chosen to leave their communities in search of work. This is particularly evident in rural areas, where youth are leaving to cities in search of better opportunities. However, rural-urban migration has not resolved the issue; youth unemployment rates

are actually higher in urban areas in all MENA countries with available data.³⁵ Large numbers of youth are also leaving the region altogether. Between 2000 and 2015, net migration from MENA countries (excluding Gulf countries) was estimated to be 8.4 million, among the highest population shares in the world.³⁶ Migration within the region is also high, mainly involving young people from labor-abundant countries seeking economic opportunities in the Gulf or refugee populations fleeing conflict.

RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE (2000–2016)

Two decades ago, researchers and policymakers began to focus intensely on youth in the MENA region. In 2004, a World Bank report estimated that MENA economies would have to create 97 million jobs from 2000 to 2020 in order to address the employment needs of their rapidly growing populations.³⁷ The 2007 World Development Report, *Development and the Next Generation*, argued that investments in youth contribute to economic growth.³⁸ Nowhere was this more salient than in the MENA region, which had the highest youth population share and the highest youth unemployment rates in the world.

Upon leaving his position as president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn founded the Wolfensohn Center for Development at the Brookings Institution, which prioritized research on youth in the MENA region.³⁹ In 2007, the Wolfensohn Center and the Dubai School of Government jointly established the Middle East Youth Initiative (MEYI), which produced a substantial body of original research on youth social-economic exclusion.⁴⁰ MEYI's work ended in 2011, just as the Arab uprisings were unfolding. Indeed, one issue that MEYI failed to tackle meaningfully was the issue of youth political exclusion.

One of the challenges facing researchers at the time of the World Bank 2004 flagship report was that there was little data or analysis on MENA youth.⁴¹

Over the following decade, a substantial amount of data on youth was collected. In 2005, the International Labor Organization (ILO) conducted school-to-work transition surveys in Egypt, Iran, and Syria. The ILO followed this in 2012 with a second round of surveys in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Tunisia.⁴² National youth surveys were undertaken in Iraq (2009),⁴³ Morocco (2009),⁴⁴ and Tunisia (2012).⁴⁵ The region's first longitudinal survey of youth was conducted in Egypt (2009–2014).⁴⁶ Even the private sector got involved: Communications agency ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller has conducted an Arab youth opinion survey annually since 2008.⁴⁷

The international community has also responded to the issue of youth employment in the MENA region. The World Bank and the ILO launched several initiatives, including the Global Partner-

ship for Youth Employment, which ran from 2008 until 2014 in partnership with the International Youth Foundation and the Arab Urban Development Institute, and focused mainly on the Middle East and Africa. In 2009, the Youth Employment Network, another initiative by the World Bank and the ILO, launched the Taqeem Initiative to help build program evaluation capacity in the region.⁴⁸ In 2009, UNICEF and the American University of Beirut collaborated on the “Youth in the Arab World” initiative.⁴⁹

MENA governments also focused heavily on youth issues between 2000 and 2015. Several developed national youth strategies that covered multiple dimensions of youth policy, including migration, health, education, employment, culture, and civic and political participation (Table 1). National youth strategies are currently active in Lebanon

Table 1: National Youth Policies/Strategies and Public Institutions Focused on Youth by Country

Country	National Policy or Strategy	Public Institution
Lebanon	National Youth Policy (2012–present)	Ministry of Youth and Sports
Morocco	National Youth Policy (2003–present)	Ministry of Youth and Sports
Yemen	National Youth Strategy (2006–present)	Ministry of Youth and Sports
Djibouti	National Youth Policy (2001–2005)	Secretariat of State for Youth and Sports
Jordan	National Youth Strategy (2005–2009)	Higher Council for Youth
Palestine	Youth Cross-cutting Strategy (2011–2013)	Higher Council for Youth and Sports
Bahrain	Draft (2011)	General Organization for Youth and Sports
Egypt	Draft (2009)	Ministry of State for Youth Affairs
Iraq	Draft (2013)	Ministry of Youth and Sports
Kuwait	Draft (2013)	Ministry of State for Youth Affairs
Sudan	Draft (2007)	Ministry of Youth and Sports
Saudi Arabia	In development (2009–2013)	General Presidency for Youth Welfare
Syria	In development (2008–2011)	Commission for Family Affairs
Algeria	No	Ministry of Youth and Sports
Iran	No	Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports
Libya	No	Ministry of Youth and Sports
Oman	No	None; National Youth Commission ⁵²
Qatar	No	Ministry of Youth and Sports
Tunisia	No	Ministry of Youth and Sports
UAE	No	General Authority of Youth & Sports Welfare

Source: National Youth Policy database, accessed September 3, 2018, Youthpolicy.org.

(2012), Morocco (2003), and Yemen (2006). They were previously adopted in Djibouti (2001–2005), Jordan (2005–2009), and Palestine (2011–2013), and were in development, but not formally adopted, in Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Syria.⁵⁰ Only Yemen adopted a National Action Plan that focused specifically on youth employment.⁵¹

Youth programming proliferated during this period, with MENA countries developing a wide range of employment and entrepreneurship initiatives. Between 2007 and 2014, Egypt alone implemented over 180 projects related to youth employment.⁵³ The NGO sector became heavily involved in these programs. INJAZ Al-Arab, founded in 2004, provided youth training in workforce readiness and entrepreneurship across the Arab World, expanding to 14 countries by 2018. In 2008, Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser of Qatar launched the Silatech Foundation to connect Arab youth to the necessary jobs and resources to start their own businesses. A review of youth employment programming in the region found that the majority focused only on technical skills training, followed by soft skills training. Entrepreneurship training, employment services, and other youth employment programming combined made up less than 10 percent of the programs in the inventory.⁵⁴

There are many promising small-scale youth programs and policy alternatives in the region that are proving to be successful and have the potential for replication and scale. Know About Business (KAB), an entrepreneurship education program developed by the ILO, has been found to increase knowledge of business concepts and interest in starting a business among participants.⁵⁵ University students in Tunisia who were given the opportunity to graduate with a business plan instead of following the standard curriculum were more likely to become self-employed.⁵⁶ Well-designed, youth-dedicated microfinance products have been found to increase financial access for young micro-entrepreneurs, while maintaining high repayment rates comparable to those for adults.⁵⁷

THE FAILED POLICY RESPONSE

The challenges articulated by the World Bank, the ILO, and other development actors in the early 2000s emphasized the need to create employment solutions for the region's youth. Subsequent surveys and research provided insights into the underlying factors contributing to the youth employment challenge and identified potential policy responses. MENA governments and development actors responded by introducing youth policies and programs aimed at improving youth employment outcomes. Unfortunately, these policy and programmatic efforts failed to reduce the high levels of youth unemployment and absorb new cohorts into the labor force. So, what happened?

Policymakers and development actors in the MENA region understood *why* youth employment was an important issue. Based on extensive research that emerged from the region during this time, they also knew *what* needed to be done. The policy and program solutions that were proposed, and in many cases adopted, included: reforming education systems to improve technical, cognitive, and non-cognitive skills; reducing labor market distortions caused by labor regulations and public sector employment policies; nurturing a more dynamic and competitive private sector to create jobs; providing resources for young entrepreneurs, including access to finance, mentorship, and assets; supporting social innovation and social entrepreneurship; providing early employment experiences and opportunities for youth; and improving labor market information systems and career guidance.

Indeed, much research has gone into identifying policy and program solutions that work. There is evidence linking improvements in the business climate to job creation, including enhanced access to finance, better business regulation,⁵⁸ and reduced corruption.⁵⁹ In terms of youth employment interventions, a recent review of evidence from impact evaluations identified skills training and entrepreneurship promotion as having

a positive effect on employment and earnings.⁶⁰ The ILO's What Works in Youth Employment program notes that country context and design features matter.⁶¹ Skills training should be done in consultation with the private sector to identify the relevant skills gaps and should ideally be combined with on-the-job training. In all cases, participants must be vetted to ensure that they have the necessary prerequisites to benefit from the interventions.

Where countries fell short was in figuring out *how* to ensure that youth employment policies and programs were being implemented effectively, including *how* to introduce effective feedback mechanisms that would prompt course corrections when they were not. Thus, the “policy failures” were failures of governance. While each country introduced a mix of policies and programs that addressed its own unique circumstances, the inability to implement these policies and programs effectively and learn from mistakes has been a common failing across the region. Three impediments to successful implementation stand out across the region: (1) the political economy, especially as it relates to job creation; (2) weak implementation mechanisms and coordination among development actors; and (3) insufficient use of evidence in designing and implementing policies and programs.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND JOB CREATION

It is not possible to substantially improve youth employment outcomes if there are too few jobs available, and MENA economies have simply not been able to create enough jobs. Improving education and workforce development without creating jobs simply leads to educated youth who are unemployed, underemployed, or migrate in search of better opportunities.⁶² In Tunisia, for example, efforts to expand university enrollment translated into unemployment rates among young university graduates estimated at an incredible 68 percent in 2013.⁶³

Job creation requires governments to allow the formal private sector to grow and thrive. Yet, most MENA countries have restricted and over-regulated private sector growth. Many have also turned to promoting entrepreneurship among their youth as a way of encouraging them to create their own employment opportunities.⁶⁴ However, these youth-led startups have difficulty thriving; they face the same restrictive business environments as established firms and have even less access to credit. MENA governments are aware of the importance of stimulating the private sector to create jobs. However, few have been able to implement the necessary regulatory changes.⁶⁵ The United Arab Emirates is the only MENA country to be ranked among the top 50 in the world in ease of doing business.

Creating a healthy ecosystem requires managing and limiting unhealthy legal, regulatory, and bureaucratic practices. This is easier said than done. MENA governments have no shortage of business development strategies. The problem remains in implementing them successfully and overcoming ingrained interests. One of the main issues is cronyism. Overregulation allows companies with ties to regimes to navigate the system and gain an advantage. Other issues include petty corruption and abuse of bureaucratic authority. Indeed, most MENA governments have created programs to support youth-led enterprises. However, these programs have an embedded interest in limiting the creation of truly disruptive firms that can catalyze economic growth and job creation.

WEAK IMPLEMENTATION AND LACK OF COORDINATION

Despite an interest in formulating national youth strategies, most MENA governments have taken a piecemeal approach to implementing youth policies and programs. A wide range of policy actors are responsible for different aspects of the school-to-work transition, requiring a high level of coordination between ministries, agencies, and service providers that seldom hap-

pens. For example, one inventory of youth employment programs in MENA found that less than 5 percent of training providers coordinate their efforts with the public employment offices, which are the agencies most responsible for youth employment.⁶⁶ To improve coordination, many MENA countries have created ministries of youth and sports (Table 1). However, while these ministries may coordinate policy formulation, they play minimal roles in policy or program *implementation* and their efforts are often ignored by other agencies.

National youth strategies in MENA do not appear to be correlated with improved youth employment outcomes. Furthermore, several have lapsed and are no longer in effect.⁶⁷ In contrast, countries of the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region also have introduced youth employment strategies and have achieved better results in reducing their own high youth unemployment rates (Figure 1 above). One difference is that many ECA countries have passed legal frameworks for their strategies, affording a higher status to youth issues and ensuring continuity beyond the limited timeframe of the strategies. In addition, many ECA countries have adopted action plans to operationalize their strategies. MENA governments should augment their youth strategies within a legal framework and operationalize them through national action plans that clearly identify roles, responsibilities, and outcome targets. In addition, youth strategies should be better aligned with national employment policies and enterprise development strategies, providing a more holistic effort aimed at improving job creation.

WEAK USE OF EVIDENCE IN DESIGNING, IMPLEMENTING, AND EVALUATING PROGRAMS

Youth-serving organizations in the MENA region, both public and private, typically fail to consult available evidence when designing individual programs. For example, research suggests

that skills training is more effective when combined with internships and that entrepreneurship services are more effective when combined with access to finance.⁶⁸ However, one study of youth interventions found that over 70 percent of skills training programs in MENA were in-class and focused only on the provision of hard skills. They did not provide access to practical experience, soft skills training, information, or labor market intermediation.⁶⁹ Indeed, the MENA region is less likely than any other to integrate services into comprehensive youth employment programming.⁷⁰ Lack of attention to program design extends to targeting: Most MENA youth programs were implemented in urban areas with limited outreach and inflexible schedules.⁷¹ As a result, they were less likely to benefit rural populations, women, and less educated, low-income groups. Discussions with youth employment program managers suggest that they rarely take evidence into account, even when it does exist.

In addition to failing to integrate evidence into the design and implementation of their programs, youth-serving organizations across the region rarely evaluate the impact of their interventions. As one executive put it, “There’s no need for an impact evaluation of this program. If the program didn’t work, we wouldn’t be doing it.” Indeed, the region lacks a culture of collecting evidence on program outcomes and impact (such as number of successful job placements), preferring to focus instead on measures of output (such as numbers of trainees). In 2004, a global review of active youth labor market programs could identify no published impact evaluations from the MENA region.⁷² The Youth Employment Network’s Taaqeeem Initiative was launched in 2009 to try to bridge this evidence gap. However, by 2014, only 2 percent of MENA programs listed in the Youth Employment Inventory had undergone an impact evaluation—far below the 10 to 35 percent range in other regions.⁷³ This gap in evidence leads to a failure to improve existing programs and allows ineffective programs to continue.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The employment challenges facing MENA youth today are as stark and as relevant as ever. In a global survey undertaken as part of the post-2015 development agenda, MENA youth (ages 16 to 30) identified a good education, better job opportunities, and an honest and responsive government as the top three of sixteen development priorities that would make the most difference to their lives.⁷⁴ All three reflect barriers that youth face as part of the school-to-work transition discussed in this policy briefing.⁷⁵ To address these challenges, the development community must mobilize a new generation of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. To succeed, they must (1) address the contributing factors behind weak youth employment outcomes and (2) overcome the implementation failures of the past.

This policy briefing argues that both policymakers and youth-serving organizations need to improve their governance structures and processes. In order to do so, they should focus on the following recommendations:

- **Getting the basics right:** Many youth employment policies and programs are aimed mainly at compensating for structural failures in institutions that support the school-to-work transition. Training programs compensate for gaps in education systems that fail to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and experience they need to succeed in the labor market. Entrepreneurship support programs compensate for an unsupportive and unhealthy business ecosystem. Just as an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, before initiating a new youth employment policy or program, policymakers should consider what changes to existing public programs, policies, and systems might be introduced to achieve desired outcomes. Institutionalizing this process would require enabling government “decision support units” that exist in most MENA countries to examine such alternatives as standard practice.

- **Institutionalizing policy innovation:** MENA governments must introduce real innovation into the policymaking process. One way of addressing intractable policy issues is by enabling a group of key stakeholders to tackle them using innovative approaches. Essentially, such a group would lead a process of change, often with the support of a key policymaker, to ensure buy-in and improve take-up. Policy labs gather data and pursue evidence-based changes, often in small, manageable increments, which can have a large cumulative impact over time. Pilot examples from the region include the Forsati Acceleration Lab within the Tunisian Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training, the Policy Clinic in Oman’s Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada), and the Government Innovation Lab within the Mohammed Bin Rashid Centre for Government Innovation in Dubai.

- **Overseeing the overseers:** MENA governments must remove impediments to business growth in order to unlock job creation in the private sector. This has proven to be difficult in a region where governments insist on running their own enterprises that compete with the private sector, where they play favorites and do not apply the rules equally, and where the exercise of bureaucratic authority is considered a perk of public service. What is needed is a public agency at the highest level of government that reviews the rules, streamlines them, and ensures that they are applied transparently and fairly. It is especially important for limiting the amount of spurious information required of businesses, which impedes business activity. An example from the United States is the Office of Management and Budget, the largest office within the Executive Office of the President. In addition to producing the President’s budget, it monitors the quality of federal programs, policies, and procedures, as well as requiring that federal agencies obtain approval before requesting any information from the public.

- **Integrating evidence into the design of program and policy solutions:** Policymakers and youth-serving organizations need to make better use of evidence in designing programs and policy alternatives. They must also incorporate more effective monitoring and evaluation tools, including feedback loops, to ensure that lessons learned are incorporated into program and policy design. Finally, policymakers and youth-serving organizations need to ensure that their programs and policies adequately and effectively target disadvantaged and marginalized groups, including young women and youth living in rural areas. These outcomes can be achieved by incorporating simple templates and toolkits into the design of approval and review processes for youth employment programs and policies.
- **Improving coordination among key actors:** Finally, government agencies, international organizations, NGOs, research institutions, the private sector, unions, donors, and other actors must all work together more effectively to tackle the issue of youth unemployment, with leadership allowed to come from any direction. MENA governments have attempted to formulate national youth strategies, often through ministries of youth and sports with little authority to implement them. These strategies need to be combined with national action plans that delineate clear roles and responsibilities for government agencies and other development actors.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Nader Kabbani is a senior fellow with the Brookings Global Economy and Development program. The author would like to thank the Brookings Doha Center (BDC) research and communications teams for their helpful feedback and support and two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions.
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- 9 Our analysis focuses on national youth populations. The employment prospects of migrant workers and refugees are complicated by social and legal barriers that are beyond the scope of this briefing.
- 10 Statistics from international organizations typically classify youth as being between the ages of 15 and 24 years old. Unless otherwise noted, the statistics on youth referenced in this proposal refer to this age group.
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