

## Youth creating change from inside out

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the youth in the Arab region have continued their journey to becoming changemakers, leaders and a powerful force for development and change in their communities. With more than 28,600 alumni and 80 partners in 18 countries since 2015, this year UNDP's Youth Leadership Programme (YLP) launches its seventh edition to support youth to develop solutions to challenges in their communities and use their passion to contribute to the

achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). YLP7 will pave the way for a new approach to support youth in the region on their changemakers' journey.

During the launch event of YLP7, UNDP gathered more than 450 YLP alumni, partners and youth across the Arab region to discuss the role of youth in development and the kind of support needed for youth to become changemakers in their societies.

*"I feel that the youth in the Arab region have more responsibility for changing their societies for the better than youth in other parts of the world, because we face so many challenges",* said Abdullah AlFakhrey, representing YLP partners, reflecting on the role of youth in the Arab region.

Abdullah Al Fakhrey is a mechatronics engineer and the co-founder of Mosul Space, the first innovation hub for youth in Mosul, Iraq. Since 2014, Mosul Space has improved youth skills in technology, entrepreneurship, innovation, leadership, and education through training while offering a 'makerspace' for youth to work, network, and test their projects. After joining YLP4 as a participant, Abdullah and Mosul Space became a partner to UNDP to implement YLP in 2019. Since then, Mosul Space has trained more than 60 youth in design thinking and entrepreneurship as part of YLP. More than 35 youth participants have since gotten jobs or have become volunteers and mentors for YLP or other programmes.

When asked what kind of support makes youth succeed as changemakers, the audience identified the change of mindset towards youth as the most important one. The second was better education, and the third priority was building 21st-century skills. Asmaa Serhan, YLP5 alumna from Lebanon, agreed with the participants' priorities:

*"From the youth's perspective, we need this order: first, to change mindsets, then get a better education, and then really get policies that support youth. After that we can build our skills and networks and eventually get funding. So, all these things are linked together as a sequence."*

Asmaa Serhan is a Lebanese biomedical engineer passionate about innovation and combining engineering and health technology to advance health research and facilities. She is the founder of Salamati, a startup that aims to enhance the accuracy and reliability of patient data. Throughout the years, Salamati has received eight awards and medals from local and international competitions. She participated in YLP5 during 2019 and developed her project further with YLP

*"YLP offers our youth more than skills. It also gives them a way of thinking, a mindset, and a lifestyle. With the support of YLP, our youth can create positive global change, and we have loads of examples of our alumni making the positive change already!"*

**Abdullah Al Fakhrey**  
Mosul Space,  
YLP partner, Iraq



Inc, a social innovation incubator supporting YLP alumni in Lebanon. During the Covid-19 pandemic, she has also used her skills to co-develop a ventilator Nafas for Covid-19 patients. As emerged during the discussion, there is a need to see youth as credible and capable actors and support them in building skills needed to become forces of positive change in their communities. UNDP sees youth as vital partners in the development of their countries and communities.

*"We have a long road ahead of us in ensuring that youth's vital role as partners in development is realized. Development is not possible without youth",* said Khaled Abdel Shafi, Manager of the UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States in Amman.

Linda Haddad, who manages the UNDP Regional Youth Project, emphasized the need to widen the support to young people to become effective changemakers in their societies: *"Harnessing the growing youth population and enabling young people to become agents for positive social, political, and economic change is a critical cross-cutting strategy for building forward and enhancing resilience to future shocks. It requires a whole-of-society approach that strengthens the social contract and widens participation and inclusion",* she said.

Creating an enabling environment for youth through strong partnerships, supporting youth-friendly policies and regulations, building networks, and offering access to resources and capacity-building, increases young people's potential for impact. UNDP is looking forward to ensuring that young people's journey is supported at multiple levels through four pathways for youth in the Arab region to become entrepreneurs, community builders, policy shapers and job seekers. This broader approach is carried out together, with youth in the driver's seat.

Read more about YLP here, and watch the recording of the event on YLP Facebook page.

## Mental health & demotivation: bringing hope to youth amid the Covid-19 crisis

As the Covid-19 pandemic continued to its second year, many people around the world have struggled in their daily lives. Young people, for instance, are facing obstacles such as interruptions in education and employment, while many of them are actively contributing to tackle the pandemic in their communities. Taking care of mental health and finding strength in our communities has become more vital than ever.

*"Youth in the region are currently living in very challenging and exceptional situations. They have started to lose their enthusiasm and passion during these difficult times. Spreading positivity and discussing motivation and hope is a necessity to enable youth to deal with day-to-day challenges that have been multiplied since the hit of the COVID-19 pandemic",* said Aya Albitar, Youth Development Delegate in Syria.

The pandemic has opened up the discussion on mental health across the globe, and need for information, connection and safe places for discussion has become more evident. In this framework, UNDP RBAS Regional Youth Team and the Youth Development Delegates from 11 countries in the Arab States region developed a regional online campaign in 2021 to share tips and stories related to moments of demotivation and finding hope. The campaign encouraged youth to discuss mental health and coping mechanisms, a topic that is not usually openly



discussed in the region. It combined fact-based information with sharing of personal experiences. The Youth Development Delegates shared their experiences and insights through video messages to encourage discussion and reflections.

At the end of the campaign, a live session on the 1st of March brought together more than 150 people across the region. The speakers included UNDP Youth Leadership Programme (YLP) alumni, as well as guest speaker Sereen Abu Maizar, emotional intelligence expert.

Rana Naja, YLP alumna and psychologist from Lebanon, shared her story on surviving depression, and highlighted the importance of taking care of one's mental health and reaching out to others when in need.

Nada Hamdan from Palestine, the founder of AWN initiative, which supports people with disabilities, said: *"The human power is endless, and the nature of humans is to never give up. We go through some circumstances thinking that we can never overcome them, but in the end we will pass them and continue living our lives."*

Hasan Khazem from Syria spoke to the audience in sign language and shared his story on how he has tackled various challenges. Hasan is part of the Creadeaf project, which supports people with disabilities in Syria through educational and professional development. The team won the Generation Unlimited Youth Challenge in the Equity & Empowerment category last year. The Youth Challenge calls on young innovators to design solutions to improve education, employment and civic engagement across the globe.

Finally, sharing useful insights from the field of emotional intelligence, Sereen Abu Maizar concluded that while we cannot control our environment, there are skills that everyone can learn in order to cope with the challenges we are facing: *"Emotions are signals and messages we receive to change our behaviors. We cannot control the way we feel. However, we can control the way we behave"*, she said.

The campaign opened up a discussion around mental health and emotional intelligence skills, which will continue during 2021. With the aim of increasing inclusion among youth participants, the session was also translated into sign language.

You can watch the recording of the live event [here](#).

*Youth Development Delegates in the Arab Region is a joint initiative between UNDP and the Arab Youth Center, through which 11 youth from the region are deployed in UNDP country offices to contribute to sustainable development and youth empowerment.*

*The Youth Leadership Programme is part of UNDP's regional youth project aiming to support youth from the Arab region to unleash their potential and become social innovators, leaders, and a force for development in their communities.*

*You can follow YLP on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).*

## SDGs-Climate Security Nexus in the Arab States: A special session at the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2021

On 30 March, UNDP participated in the 2021 edition of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD), the regions' primary mechanism for follow up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The aim of UNDP's interactive special session titled 'SDG-



Climate Security Nexus in the Arab States' was to shed light on the impact of climate-security risks on the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in the region. While the session presented the potential setbacks in the achievement of the SDGs, it also provided examples of two countries that have started integrating climate-security nexus considerations into national planning processes, to support the achievement of the SDGs in a durable and risk-resilient manner. Around 100 participants from different Arab countries attended the session, including representatives of international organizations, public and private institutions, academia, NGOs, and the media.

The session was opened by Khaled Abdel Shafi, Director of the UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States, who highlighted the power of climate change in exacerbating existing tensions in the region. "Water scarcity is just one example but many more exist that show how climate change can exacerbate existing socio-economic tensions and trigger conflict and forced displacement, and threaten to reverse important gains in sustainable development", said the UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States Director.

In her opening remarks, Her Excellency Nada El Agizy, Director of Sustainable Development and International Development Department of the League of Arab States, stressed the importance of developing and implementing climate security programmes in the Arab states to ensure the delivery on the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The special session revolved around three main thematic questions. The first question addressed the manifestations of climate security in different countries of the region, with panelists providing examples of country-level response plans to climate security risks.

Under this segment, the Secretary-General of the Jordanian Ministry of Environment presented the impact of climate change in the Kingdom, including increased water scarcity, droughts, flash floods, dust storms, heatwaves and significant changes in land use as the key challenges that affect the welfare of communities. The Secretary-General also highlighted that Jordan has started integrating climate change considerations in immediate and long-term recovery plans through available tools such as, the national climate change policy, national climate change committee, and an early warning system for droughts and flash floods among others.

Another country example was presented by the Director General of the Department of Environment in Somalia, who stressed that poverty, climate shocks, conflict over natural resources, limited data and institutional capacities are the drivers of environmental degradation, and climate security risks in Somalia.

The second thematic question highlighted regional responses to address climate security. In this segment, the Arab Water Council (AWC) pointed out that by 2100 a rise in temperature of 4 °C is predicted in most Arab countries, while a 2°C rise will cause up to 40% of species in the region to go extinct. AWC also invited interested parties to join the Regional Climate Security Network, which was founded in 2020 by AWC, UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States, and the League of Arab States under the SDG-Climate Facility project. The network works towards creating an integrated, cross-sectoral, collaborative and proactive regional approach to climate security. It also works on advancing knowledge about climate security by supporting research and information gathering and sharing.

The final thematic question revolved around the necessary resources required for an integrated approach in addressing climate security, and an identification of the main players. Under this segment, the UN Environment Programme's Finance Initiative (UNEP FI) presented a recent report on Promoting Sustainable Finance and Climate Finance in the Arab region, the first in-depth analysis of sustainable financing practices in the region on climate-related issues and how to build resilient economies through adopting sustainable and climate finance models. The report provides an assessment of the readiness of the financial sector framework in the Arab region to integrate

and promote sustainable finance in general, and climate finance in particular. This was followed by a presentation by UNDP SDG-Climate Facility project on the Arab Climate and Resilience Investment Forum which is planned to take place in the last quarter of 2021, and aims to provide an open platform for bankable projects and companies in the Arab states to pitch their business models and investment opportunities, meet potential investors, and exchange new ideas with peers and stakeholders. The forum targets sectors such as water resource management, waste management, climate-smart agriculture, centralized renewable energy, small scale off-grid renewable energy, sustainable housing for refugees and internally displaced persons, among other sectors.

The special session ended with four main takeaways:

- Climate Security is a new concept used to describe and understand the combined impacts of climate-related change as a risk multiplier on natural resources, ecosystems, socio-economic development, and political stability.
- A climate-security perspective and approach help to analyse the effects of converging factors such as food-security, water scarcity, conflict, gender, loss of livelihoods, and displacement on human security in an integrated manner.
- A multi-stakeholder solution is essential for this to benefit from the comparative advantages that each entity brings, while at the same time enabling coherence among the different types of knowledge, expertise, and data. Partnerships are therefore at the core of the response.
- Partnerships must also include integrated financing solutions, with investments in research and data development and uptake enabling innovative and business-oriented solutions. Public and private resources and investments are necessary to enable a comprehensive response to climate-security challenges in urban and rural settings.

Follow the SDG Climate Facility on Twitter for more information.