



Youth Declaration

Sixth Regional Review of the International Conference on Population and Development in the Arab Region

Ten years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration

Regional Consultation for Adolescents and Youth¹

Tunis, 22–23 June 2023

Foreword

We, young people from the Arab region, gathered at the Regional Consultation for Adolescents and Youth on the Sixth Regional Review of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in the Arab Region to mobilize our efforts and join our voices in support of the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action (PoA) as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda).²

Affirming that ICPD constituted a qualitative leap in the approach to the interrelation between population and development issues within a comprehensive and integrated framework that enshrines the reproductive rights of the individual as a fundamental human right, and that ICPD underlined women and girls' empowerment as a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development, and called on Governments to invest in young people, eradicate poverty and protect vulnerable groups.

We affirm that several achievements have been made in this regard, notably the expansion of the provision of family planning services, the integration of sexual and reproductive health services by some countries into the primary health care system, the decrease in mortality rates, especially among infants and children, and in maternal mortality, as a result of improved quality of services related to maternal health, family planning, prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, as well as the provision of youth-friendly health services in the field of sexual and reproductive health, the inclusion of sex education in school programmes, and the implementation of regional programmes and projects that aim to promote youth empowerment in the Arab region and their access to their rights, such as the establishment of the Regional Centre of Excellence for Youth and the launch of the Arab Youth Charter.

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- 1 The Regional Consultation for Adolescents and Youth was organized in collaboration between the United Nations Population Fund-Regional Office for Arab States and the League of Arab States, in partnership with the International Planned Parenthood Federation- Arab World Region, the Arab Institute for Human Rights and the Youth Peer Network.
 - 2 All groups of young people, without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, ethnic origin, age, language, religion, political and other opinion, national or social origin, disability, property, place of birth or other status.

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However, the Arab region continues to face several challenges. These include high youth unemployment; low quality education; weak economic and political participation of women and young people; persistence of gender inequality, gender discrimination, harmful social norms and barriers that prevent women and girls from achieving their full potential, limiting their autonomy and decision-making, as well as increasing their risk of violence, forced marriage and other harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage, and the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence; lack of opportunities for young people to make decisions that affect their lives; legal barriers and gaps in the field of protecting human rights, dignity and equality, in addition to the lack of data on the situation of different youth groups and the negative repercussions of climate change and conflict on youth development and empowerment, and other emerging challenges.

The current review is particularly important amid the prevailing political instability and successive crises in the Arab region, the latest of which was the COVID-19 pandemic and its widespread negative repercussions on the lives and well-being of the population.

We are all concerned with population issues, sustainable development, human rights, and with contributing to improving people's lives. We contribute our expertise, potential, experience and innovation to accelerate the implementation of the ICPD PoA. Therefore, we cite this declaration, which contains our commitments and then our recommendations.

Commitments

We, young men and women from the Arab region, undertake to dedicate our capabilities, efforts, and determination to:

1. Strive to accelerate the implementation of the ICPD PoA and the 2030 Agenda.
2. Promote volunteerism and entrepreneurship in development efforts at the national and local levels, and promote peace, social cohesion, and protection against gender-based violence.
3. Combat gender-based violence, including by engaging women and men influencers, strengthening our role through peer education networks and social media to achieve gender equality, and develop and implement policies, programmes and laws to end gender-based violence.
4. Advocate for active participation in political and civic life by engaging in local, regional and international dynamics, in order to amplify the voices of young people and adolescents, especially in the most vulnerable communities.
5. Engage in volunteering activities to promote sexual and reproductive health services, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups.
6. Mobilize support and advocate for the access of young people to accurate and up-to-date information about their sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, including gender equality.
7. Call on decision makers to develop and enact policies and programmes that are friendly to young people, including people with disabilities.
8. Promote intergenerational dialogue, solidarity, and collaboration.
9. Share experiences and best practices while harnessing all possibilities, including digital ones, to find innovative solutions to support access to sexual and reproductive health services that respond to the needs of young people and adolescents.
10. Create, develop and facilitate access to reliable media content made for young persons on sexual and reproductive health concepts and questions, while respecting cultural and national specificities.

Recommendations

We, young people from the Arab region, call on member States, Governments, civil society, international organizations, the United Nations, and other decision makers, to strive to implement the following recommendations:

1. Develop targeted policies and programmes that are friendly to young people, including persons with disabilities and those from vulnerable groups, as well as policies and programmes promoting positive discrimination, and support the political participation of women, young men and women, and their access to decision-making positions.
2. Develop the statistical and data collection system and conduct periodic and up-to-date studies on gender-based violence, its effects and types, while ensuring the privacy and protection of the collected information.
3. Improve the services provided for men and women survivors of violence, and ensure protection and the right to access the minimum package of services for victims of sexual violence.
4. Enhance the oversight and follow-up of programmes aimed at protecting against gender-based violence, and ensure the autonomy of the oversight and accountability system.
5. Advocate for comprehensive survivor care laws that provide for prevention, protection, and integrated and adapted services for women with disabilities and working women survivors of violence, including migrants and refugees.
6. Strengthen coordination between relevant Governments, decision makers and civil society at the national and regional levels to enact laws that deter gender-based violence and support survivors' access to services and protection and restore their dignity.
7. Ensure international follow-up on and accountability over the pledges and commitments made by States at the national, regional, continental and international levels.
8. Require that the provision of international financial support and allocation of resources be conditioned on the extent to which Governments undertake to implement their commitments and pledges.
9. Promote awareness-raising campaigns about the rights of different groups, including persons with disabilities, as well as their environment and methods of communication, and respect these rights.
10. Support family and parental education programmes on non-discrimination, equality and healthy relationships.
11. Enhance censorship over traditional and digital media that promote gender-based violence and negative female stereotypes.
12. Adopt a media charter that identifies the responsibility and duty of the media to renounce gender-based violence and promote a culture of gender equality.
13. Support the participation and targeting of men and boys in awareness-raising and education programmes on harmful practices and gender-based violence.
14. Work with community leaders, especially religious leaders, to clarify misconceptions and reject violence against women.
15. Integrate comprehensive sex education into school curricula and programmes, starting at the early school stages.
16. Develop policies, laws and procedures that ensure the safe access of everyone, especially the most vulnerable, to sexual and reproductive health services, including people in marginalized and hard-to-reach areas, as well as prisoners, girls, persons with disabilities, displaced and refugee populations, stateless people, people with mental health conditions and the elderly.
17. Ensure safe and dignified access to family planning for all and the access of girls and women to menstrual hygiene.
18. Integrate mental health and psychosocial support services with sexual and reproductive health services.
19. Take measures to ensure the meaningful and effective participation of adolescents and young people in national bodies working in the field of youth health.

20. Strengthen coordination, networking and organization between government agencies, civil society institutions, the private sector and the United Nations, and establish new partnerships to create a map of sexual and reproductive health services for Arab countries, to prevent dispersion of effort and duplication of services, and to achieve complementarity.
21. Work on the rehabilitation and training of sexual and reproductive health workers to ensure the dignity and rights of girls, women, persons with disabilities and the most vulnerable groups and provide them with appropriate service.
22. Provide financial and technical support to civil society organizations working in the field of sexual and reproductive health to ensure and enhance the continuity of their interventions.
23. Promote the role of young people in devising creative ways to access reliable information about sexual and reproductive health using electronic platforms, artificial intelligence, interactive theater, therapy through drama and other methods, taking into account local laws governing the use of such tools.
24. Promote intergenerational dialogue on reproductive rights and sexual and reproductive health by creating safe real and virtual platforms and spaces.
25. Raise awareness about legal rights related to sexual and reproductive health, including for persons with disabilities, by harnessing all available capabilities and involving all actors.
26. Provide and disseminate up-to-date official data and statistics on youth in sexual and reproductive health areas, involving academic actors from universities and research centres, and give young researchers the opportunity to participate in such initiatives, while ensuring the privacy and protection of the information collected.
27. Develop youth programmes and schemes based on field research and studies.
28. Establish accountability procedures to ensure that women are not subjected to violence while receiving sexual and reproductive health services, especially during childbirth.
29. Create a unified action strategy for the various government agencies, while ensuring the adoption of integrated public policies to promote the role of young people and ensure their sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.
30. Develop and enact policies and procedures to ensure women's access to safe abortion services, wherever legal, and provide post-abortion care services to ensure maternal health and well-being.
31. Develop and enact practical policies and procedures to reduce the prevalence of female genital mutilation in Arab countries.
32. Develop policies that ensure that young people and adolescents are represented as partners in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies that concern them.
33. Increase the efficiency of employees in state institutions and departments to better respond to the evolving needs of youth.
34. Ensure the existence/implementation of advocacy projects, initiatives and campaigns under the supervision of state ministries, especially ministries of women, youth and education, with the involvement of local, national, Arab and international associations and organizations to reduce and pass legislation on child marriage, female genital mutilation and other harmful practices, including by raising the legal age for marriage.
35. Enact/implement a law on compulsory free education, especially in remote areas.
36. Raise awareness regarding girls' physical and sexual health, and the awareness of boys, by creating joint programmes involving young men and women as beneficiary groups wherever possible and raise the awareness of parents as well.
37. Establish funds and provide microloans to support youth projects, entrepreneurship and youth employment.
38. Change female stereotypes and negative images, and develop programmes to protect and empower girls, including those with disabilities.
39. Establish advisory committees for girls and by girls, as a means to increase their involvement in the design of interventions and decision-making processes, by establishing girls' parliaments and setting a specific quota for girls as young parliamentarians.

40. Include the terms "girls" and "women" in national policies, which already exist, and which are still in the process of developing, such as national youth strategies.

