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THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM IN THE MENA

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
1.1	BACKGROUND	4
1.2	OBJECTIVES	4
1.3	METHODOLOGY	5
1.4	CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS	5
2	YOUTH AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE MENA	6
1.1	THE RIGHTS AND CONDITIONS OF YOUTH	6
1.2	THE POLITICAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OF YOUTH	7
1.3	THE ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT OF YOUTH	9
1.4	THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION	10
3	NATIONAL STRATEGIES AND ENGAGEMENT	13
3.1	YOUTH STRATEGIES AND ENGAGEMENT IN ALGERIA	13
3.1.1	State and non-State actors working with youth	14
3.1.2	Youth engagement in Algeria	15
3.2	YOUTH STRATEGIES AND ENGAGEMENT IN JORDAN	17
3.1.1	State and non-State actors working with youth	18
3.1.2	Youth engagement in Jordan	19
3.3	YOUTH STRATEGIES AND ENGAGEMENT IN MOROCCO	20
3.1.1	State and non-State actors working with youth	22
3.1.2	Youth engagement in Morocco	23
3.4	YOUTH STRATEGIES AND ENGAGEMENT IN TUNISIA	24
3.1.1	State and non-State actors working with youth	25
3.1.2	Youth engagement in Tunisia	26
4	THE CHALLENGES OF YOUTH INTEGRATION	28
5	CONCLUDING REMARKS	30
6	ENDNOTES	32
7	ANNEXES	37

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) has undergone dramatic changes since the upheavals of the Arab Spring. Today, the region is often associated with adversity: protracted civil wars as in Syria and Yemen; refugees and migration flow from Syria and the Maghreb; religious divides in Iraq; resurgent state authoritarianism in Egypt, Jordan and the Gulf countries; and the rise of extremist movements, all of which have undermined the already fragile trust among citizens, especially towards national authorities. These factors have resulted in serious modest progress for human rights, especially with respect to freedom and integrity rights. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the human rights situation and the economic and structural inequalities.

Nonetheless, the political transition that the MENA had witnessed led to the recognition of the importance of human rights, equality, and economic reforms, especially amongst youth. The unified slogan “freedom, dignity, and social Justice” across social and political demonstrations over the last decade unveils the significance attached to human rights. The role of youth in the political and social transformations in the region is well-established, and youth are recognized as important social actors and drivers of change. Thus, actors working in the field of human rights are compelled to identify new forms of work to support the potential of youth in advocating for human rights.

Recognising and working with youth as rights holders entail new processes and responses. At the same time, state actors, including National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), have limited experience engaging with youth in the MENA. The question remains about what role state actors have in keeping pace with these political developments by including young people in their mandate to promote human rights. The current situation in most MENA countries reveals that many youths still face great obstacles. Youth in the MENA experience significant stress levels because of limited opportunities for social mobility and restrictions on full participation in social, cultural, economic and political life. This situation has resulted in social and political unrest.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

Based on the premise that young people are the main beneficiary of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this study sheds light on the role of youth in the national human rights systems in four MENA countries: Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. In this context, the study explores how state actors (e.g., NHRIs, Governmental Human Rights Focal Points and Ministries of Youth) can engage with youth inclusively and collaboratively.

The main purpose of the study is to construct an overview that helps understand how state actors can provide a favourable climate that enables youth to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms and overcome the challenges they face, including

the rights of the economic, social and cultural field. The study also seeks to understand how youth can contribute inclusively to the UN charter and treaty reporting and devising national policies and strategies.

The study explores the challenges and conditions facing young people in the MENA region. It analyses the youth policies in the countries under review and highlights some of the main issues related to their formulation and implementation. Youth economic and political engagement is examined subsequently in the context of broader civil society mobilization. The study offers some relevant recommendations as a preliminary outline to engage youth in the MENA's national human rights systems.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

The Danish Institute for Human Rights applies a systematic approach to state actors responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights. A national human rights system embraces legislation, institutions, procedures and actors, including the relations between actors and institutions.¹ However, the system approach does not reflect how State institutions engage with particular groups except if such groups are given mandates of the institutions. Although recognized as important by actors and analysts, the youth groups are not a subject captured easily while taking a systems approach.

Although the UN defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 24, this study conceptualizes 'youth' as a social category whereby age is conceived according to the definitions provided by the countries under review. The definition of youth is, therefore, expanded to encompass those persons between the ages of 15 to 29 years. The rationale behind this methodological choice lies in the attempt to consider the cultural and political particularities of the countries under review. The definition also provides ground to conduct a coherent and consistent study incorporating various local data and statistics.

The study is based on surveys, scholarly work and qualitative studies conducted between 2016 and 2021. Although the context retains many similarities across the countries under review, attention is also given to the particularities of each country, especially with respect to the political system and socioeconomic conditions.

1.4 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The variations and apparent overlapping of youth definitions between countries may result from political and social culture differences. However, they may also be due to issues such as the fundamental differences in the civil and criminal law derived from diverse sources. These differences challenge the study in providing a coherent analysis applicable to all cases. This study considers contextual factors and highlights the points of commonalities and differences between the countries under review to overcome this challenge. Although it is not the purpose of this study, a comparative analysis between the countries is employed as a methodology to distinguish the cases on an analytical level. In addition, the study is substantiated by various data and statistics such as the Arab Barometer or the Arab Youth Survey. However, the limited availability of national (local) data and resources represents a constraint to including the perspective of the national stakeholders in a manner warranted in a comparative analysis.

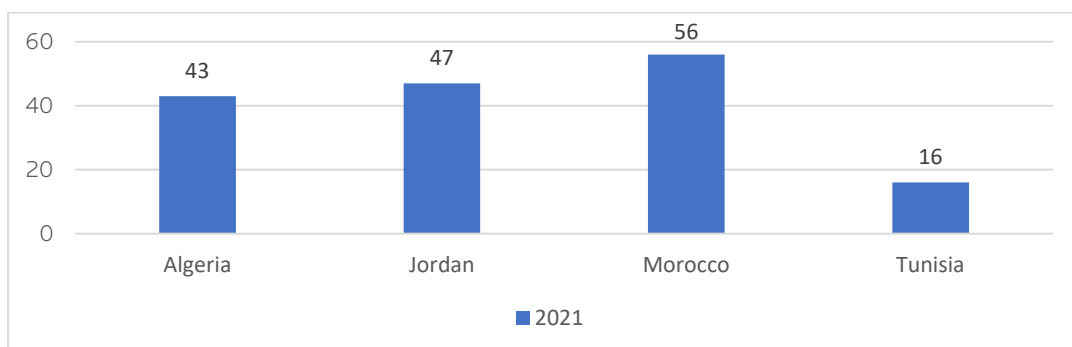
2 YOUTH AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE MENA

2.1 THE RIGHTS AND CONDITIONS OF YOUTH

The MENA region is in a state of upheaval characterised by political unrest and social-economic problems. The ramifications are felt most by young people who find themselves facing various challenges and dealing with fear-filled insecurities daily. However, presenting such a pessimistic view of youth in the MENA leads to a distortion of reality and replicates the perception of MENA as burdened by conflict and fundamental crises. Youth in the MENA have hopeful visions for the future and mobilise in various ways to reach the solutions to the problems they face despite the increasingly difficult circumstances. The Arab Youth Survey 2021 indicates that despite the pandemic, ongoing conflicts, and record economic decline, most youths in the MENA believe their best days lie ahead of them.² The Survey also claims that in 2021 hope for the future witness its most dramatic growth in the MENA.³ With this being said, young people's political and economic engagement remains limited and has deteriorated in recent years. The dynamics of social and economic polarisation, state repression, and human rights abuses have constrained and hindered youth from being engaged politically and economically.

Income inequality remains a very important feature of the regional context. According to a Carnegie Middle East Center study, 64 % of the total regional income went to 10 % of the income earners in the MENA.⁴ Perceptions among significant population groups indicate that particular elite groups prevail as the predominant beneficiaries of inequality upheld through corrupt governance.⁵ Although the middle class represents the largest segment of society, the self-perception of young people is that social mobility is difficult, resulting in many economic worries, reliance on family, and migration to seek new opportunities (see Chart 1).

CHART 1: PERCENTAGE SHARE OF YOUNG PEOPLE INDICATING THAT THEY ARE 'ACTIVELY TRYING' OR HAVE 'CONSIDERED' EMIGRATING TO ANOTHER COUNTRY



The unemployment levels increased in all four countries during 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic (See Box 1). The lockdown has left an enduring impact on the stability in the region. The economic deterioration has been in the order of 5-9 % in most countries. Young people, who suffer from pre-existing structural inequalities,

have particularly been affected. Some recovery seems underway according to the most recent data but based on public rather than private sector development. A continued and solid health and social protection support is warranted to safeguard vulnerable populations whose perspectives are not likely to be appeased by the persistence of strong inequality.

Religion is another factor that alters the extent of engagement of youth in politics. The role of religion was contested during the uprisings of 2011 and resulted in the rise of Islamist movements to power in many countries (i.e., Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt). The reconfiguration of religion allowed an Islamic discourse to gain a foothold amongst youth in the MENA. Religious movements have provided ground for civic engagement and tools for political mobilization. Religious groups possess an extended network and have established a tradition of engaging actively in local politics.

2.2 THE POLITICAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OF YOUTH

In past years, the uprisings in various MENA countries put youth at the forefront and showed that they are an important and necessary social actor for democratic governance.⁶ However, the Youth Development Index 2020 noted a significant deterioration of 4.02 index points in political participation in MENA between 2010-2018.⁷ The assessment of the political engagement of youth in the MENA is complex, especially since the interest in politics does not necessarily imply political or civic engagement.⁸ According to a study by the Arab Barometer, only 20 % of youth in the MENA region express interest in politics, half asserting that they have no interest.⁹ It is noteworthy that young people's interest in politics (or lack thereof) often pertains only to “‘high’ formal, institutional, or party politics”¹⁰, from which they are often excluded.

BOX 4: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON YOUTH

The pandemic has significantly affected youth. In terms of economic opportunities, 57% of young people in Jordan have either lost their jobs or had a temporary eruption of their employment. The same goes for Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria with 54 %, 40 % and 47 % respectively*. Youth have particularly been affected by the political unrest and economic cutbacks resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the Global Youth Development Index** that measures progress across various domains of youth development, MENA deteriorated by 0.49 index points between 2010-2018. Amongst the concerned countries, Jordan was ranked the 5th most deteriorated country by 4.3. index points.

*The data is retrieved from AB Wave VI: July 2021 – April 2021

While most countries in the region have set the minimum age for voting in parliamentary elections at 18 years old, it is noteworthy to mention that in many of those same countries, the minimum age of eligibility to become a member of parliament or run for parliamentary elections is much higher, as high as 30 years

old,¹¹ which falls outside this report's definition of youth. Such is the case in Jordan, where despite young people making up over a third of the population¹², they are barred from running for parliament with the minimum age of eligibility set at 30 years old. This is a trend in the region, where despite a large youth population, 6 States have the minimum age of eligibility at 30 years old, and another 7 States have it between 25 and 29 years of age.¹³ This significant and legislated gap in representation can be seen as compromising the integrity of the democratic process through the direct exclusion of a large section of society.

Political engagement also takes a gendered dimension, as interest in politics is higher among young men than young women in the countries of the MENA.¹⁴ This situation is by no means related only to structural constraints in the political systems. Some countries under review have legislated gender quotas to increase women's political representation, participation and engagement.¹⁵ The extent of interest in politics is multifaceted. In the case of the MENA region, it is, for instance, significantly related to variables such as the level of education (the more educated, the more interested and the more engaged in politics). However, in some cases, the data shows that the gender divide is less pronounced among younger parliamentarians. For example, in Morocco and Jordan, two countries with a gender quota, the disparity between female and male parliamentarians is lower among the younger age ranges, with six females to nine males in the 31-40 age category in Jordan (compared with 5 to 37 in the 41-50 age category)¹⁶ and 15 female to 3 male in the 21-30 age category, then 24 to 25 in the 31-40 age category in Morocco (compared with 25 to 86 in the 41-50 age category)¹⁷.

Youth in the countries of the MENA are drawn to new forms of mobilisation as a reaction to the restrictions put by the states, the crackdown on activism, repression of protests, and the unavailability of resources or new opportunities. Community and grassroots activism are important types of political mobilisation and participation among youth, where young people who endure the same difficulties mobilise for the same causes.¹⁸ Young people are generally willing to work for the interest of others as well as help attain social objectives and assist their social environment.¹⁹ The interest in civic engagement comes from the distrust in the political systems, governments and political parties.²⁰ In addition, establishing youth initiatives and business start-ups is also observed across the MENA countries.²¹ A report of the GIZ notes an exceptional number of civil society organisations, NGOs, associations, and networks providing new opportunities for young people.²²

The lack of recognition largely explains the orientation to new means of mobilisation and, at times, the outright exclusion by the states of the meaningful participation of youth and their absence in decision-making processes at the local, regional or national levels.²³ Youth in the MENA are much more engaged in CSOs, youth movements, and new forms of expression such as art than party politics.²⁴ In this context, COVID-19 posed an additional barrier to youth participation as lockdowns in recent years. Other emergency measures stopped their preferred means of informal engagement and collective mobilization, thus stalling their momentum.

BOX 5: THE TRUST OF YOUTH IN CENTRAL GOVERNMENTS

On average, 70 % of youth in the countries under review have 'very bad' to 'bad' trust in their governments. Indeed, the Arab Barometer surveys show that young people largely and across all MENA countries lack trust in national institutions. *

*The data is retrieved from AB Wave VI: July 2021 – April 2021

The new media technology also created a space for youth to be politically engaged outside the conventional confines of the state. Although the crackdown on activists over the past years included social media, it still greatly impacted the extent of political engagement of young people in the region.²⁵ Youth in the MENA are no exception to the global trend toward digital media. Social media has become the most common news source among young people in the MENA.²⁶ However, some scholars have also argued that mistrust in media and the decreased political engagement has caused a "thorough shift in the social media use; media now increasingly serve as private communication and to sustain existing social networks."²⁷ The prominence of the state monitoring of the political debates on social media is becoming an obstacle to the engagement of young people, even on social media.

2.3 THE ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT OF YOUTH

The economic situation in the countries of the MENA has deteriorated during the last years, especially since the uprisings in 2011.²⁸ The weakening of the economy is not only linked to internal and domestic issues; external influence and forces have been major factors in determining the economic trajectories of the MENA countries. The growing global inequality has furthered social fragmentation and led to major changes in the living conditions of young people in the MENA.²⁹ Youth in the MENA will also face challenges re-entering the job market due to the prolonged Covid-19 pandemic. The projected increase in youth unemployment is further intensified by an estimated 2.8 million young people who join the workforce in the region annually.³⁰ The MENA is particularly hit hard by youth unemployment. The ILO's Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013 identified the Middle East as having the highest

BOX 6: THE ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF YOUTH

According to the 2021 Arab Barometer Survey, 36 % of young people in the region describe their personal financial situation as pretty bad, 36 % as average, and 30 % as pretty good, with youth in the levant and north Africa struggling the most financially. In addition, only 46 % of the young people in the MENA say that they manage their own budget while 40 % of youth evaluate the current economic situation in 2021 as very bad.*

*The data is retrieved from AB Wave VI: July 2021 – April 2021

youth unemployment rate of all regions (28.3 per cent in 2012 and expected to rise to 30.0 per cent in 2018). In North Africa, the corresponding rates were 23.7 and 24.0 per cent).³¹ The economic situation of youth in the MENA is shaped greatly by a grave loss of employment security, increased uncertainty, and the failure of education to ensure social mobility.

Although young people in the MENA are far more educated than the previous generations, securing a job remains a major challenge and constraint to their economic engagement. In addition, the structural adjustment measures have limited public jobs, rendering the pursuit of permanent positions with the state not viable.³² As a result, there is a widespread belief that education does not guarantee social mobility amongst young people.

Gender is a major determinant of the economic predicament of young people in the MENA. Generally, the economic differentiation between young men and women has been levelled to a certain degree.³³ Nearly two-thirds of young Arab women say they have the same rights as men in their country, with the majority of women also saying they have the same access to education and employment opportunities.³⁴ The YDI 2020 notes a slight improvement in Equality and Inclusion in the region by +1.64 index points from 2010-2018.³⁵ Nevertheless, young women struggle to integrate into the economy due to persistent structural obstacles and social norms.

Besides gender, financial dependency on the family constitutes another layer that constrains the economic as well as political engagement of youth (see Box 3). The reliance on older generations has created a high dependency and has put the family as the most important socio-economic unit of financial support for youth. Families remain central and intrinsic in the lives of young people in the MENA and represent a major support system alongside kinship networks.³⁶ Accessing institutions that buffer economic insecurities makes it difficult for young people to liberate themselves financially from family bonds.³⁷ Such conditions cause young people to be too preoccupied with securing employment and adequate living standards to prioritize their political participation even if they are dissatisfied with their current political representation.

The poor economic conditions endured by youth exacerbate socio-economic rifts in many countries of the MENA, raising the risk of widespread poverty. The World Bank's biennial Poverty and Shared Prosperity report found that the rate of extreme poverty in the MENA region rose from 3.8 % in 2015 to 7.2 % in 2018.³⁸

2.4 THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

The human rights situation has deteriorated in the MENA since the outbreak of the popular uprisings in 2011.³⁹ The prevalence of corruption and the low levels of respect for the rule of law prevents genuine reforms in the region. In its regional assessment of human rights, Amnesty International emphasizes various recurrent problems cutting across the respective countries, such as the use of the state of emergency during the Covid-19 pandemic to restrict freedom of expression; the high risk of imprisonment, prosecution, travel bans or other reprisals facing human rights defenders; war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law; and the repression of the rights of LGBTI people.⁴⁰

In **Algeria**, one governmental strategy on human rights is to focus attention and support on the softer issues, e.g., children, health, education, and disability rights, while avoiding dealing with harder issues like freedoms and integrity rights (disappearances, torture, arbitrary arrests, and interference in privacy). Arguments such as defence against terrorism and efforts to protect national borders are marketed as an excuse for persevering in past practices of repression of freedom and integrity rights.⁴¹ There is no formally appointed governmental focal point which coordinates inter-ministerial work on human rights in Algeria. Currently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinates State reporting to the treaty bodies and the UPR.⁴² In line with the defensive strategy, the government has allowed visits of UN Special Rapporteurs on health and education since 2015. A key challenge observed by the rapporteur on the right to education apart from overcrowding and low levels of learning is the lack of incorporation in learning processes of citizenship, non-violence, and tolerance. A culture of democracy is not a strong element in Algerian education.⁴³ The 2017 Universal Periodic Review recommendations accepted by all parties emphasize youth employment, quality of education, juvenile justice reform, and the protection of youth from “societal dangers”.⁴⁴

In **Tunisia**, the current political situation has prevented the effective institutionalization of the Human Rights Instance, which could otherwise play a key role in coordinating and strengthening State human rights engagement. The members were to be appointed by the Tunisian Assembly of Representatives of the People. However, due to the suspension of the Parliament after 2019, the Human Rights Instance exists only on paper.⁴⁵ However, Tunisia’s commitment to democratic values and the protection of human rights are more explicit and more promising than any other regional powers. No breakthrough has been achieved, for instance, with respect for civil liberties. However, compared to the three other countries under review in this study, Tunisia is assessed at a higher level of civil liberties respect (Annex 6). Nevertheless, the fact that respect for political freedoms and civil liberties remains fairly low is due to limitations of freedoms inherited from the past regime and only changing slowly because of COVID-19 implications.

Jordan is committed to protecting human rights and implementing the rule of law. According to the recent 2021 DIHR Context Analysis of Jordan, despite all the challenges, Jordan is still working to implement and modernise the rule of law and introduce positive, gradual, and modest changes to the socio-economic and, to some extent, political arena.⁴⁶ Jordan has implemented different steps towards the inclusion of the human rights culture at both the state institutions and societal levels by the creation of the National Centre for Human Rights, the establishment of the Comprehensive National Human Rights Plan 2016-2025, the creation of Government Coordinator Office for human rights, and the introduction of human rights culture to the educational system and national laws. According to international observers, human rights challenges prevail, not least due to the recent emergency measures. Significant human rights issues include: cases of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest and detention, including of activists and journalists; infringements on citizens’ privacy rights; serious restrictions on free expression and the press, including criminalization of libel, censorship, and internet site blocking; substantial restrictions on freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly; serious incidents of official corruption; “honour” killings of women; trafficking in persons; and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons.⁴⁷

Progress on human rights in **Morocco** has yet to be guaranteed in law and practice and is subject to worrying restrictions.⁴⁸ In a report by Amnesty International, the law on public gatherings has been used to sentence peaceful protestors to harsh prison terms. Although the law prohibits arbitrary arrest, the authorities have not always respected these provisions, particularly during protests.⁴⁹ In July 2021, Mary Lawlor, the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, said that “Not only do human rights defenders working on issues related to human rights in Morocco and Western Sahara continue to be wrongfully criminalised for their legitimate activities, they receive disproportionately long prison sentences and whilst imprisoned, but they are also subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and torture”⁵⁰ In the absence of prison sentences in the press code, the authorities resort to the penal code with charges including sex outside of wedlock and threatening the internal security of the state.⁵¹ The adoption of the “Charter for the reform of the Judicial System” in 2013 represented a progressive step toward a substantial and comprehensive judicial system reform. Reforms ranged from the establishment of the Superior Council of the Judicial Power, the modernization of the judicial administration, the development of the draft Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure, to the revision of the penal system.⁵² The newly appointed Minister of Justice has also voiced, in November 2021, his intention to review the penal code and the code of criminal procedure as well as the personal status code, known as the family code.⁵³

3 NATIONAL STRATEGIES AND ENGAGEMENT

The national youth strategies in respectively Algeria, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia are imbedded in a tradition of centralized and mostly conservative policy and in a lack of willingness or inability of the regimes to establish trust while addressing in earnest the demands of youth populations for democracy, transparency, equality and economic progress.⁵⁴ The motivation for reform among the regimes in power is contingent on the nature of the intra-elite struggles and on the capacities and willingness of governments to engage in dialogues with youth and civil society actors. Regimes appear mostly defensive, reacting opportunistically to the pressures of the moment.

Among the governmental actors involved in youth politics, the Ministries of Youth⁵⁵ implement all the national youth policies in the countries under review. The responsible ministries are involved in the softer elements of youth policy, such as education and infrastructure reforms. The reforms indicating structural changes in participation and local governance are either lagging or are left to higher political levels than the ministries. In the sections below, we outline the State and non-State actors that work with youth and examine the national youth strategies and youth engagement in the respective countries.

3.1 YOUTH STRATEGIES AND ENGAGEMENT IN ALGERIA

In Algeria, the immediate political reforms after 2011 were restricted to electoral rules and a new law of associations, but observers have considered these reforms toothless.⁵⁶ The constitutional amendment of 2016 was insignificant as the President only retained one of the 32 proposals presented to him by the presidentially appointed consultant. The constitutional process was never a people-driven process during 2014-16, and it remained an elite project even from 2019-20.⁵⁷ The Ministry of Youth and Sports aimed to meet young people's expectations in 2016 when the government addressed the risks of social upheavals in the wake of the mobilization after 2011. Progress was planned to happen through dialogue, initiatives from below and socio-professional integration to counteract marginalization.⁵⁸ However, no real change was realized; the current perception among the youth is disillusionment and political fragmentation. Up to today, no national youth strategy can be found in Algeria.⁵⁹

There is also a rift between the goals and desires of youth and the goals of officials representing youth. Regarding youth policy or the work of the ministry of youth, the government sees fit to meet the needs of sports activities while ignoring youth participation in formulating, implementing and evaluating policies and programs.⁶⁰ The ramifications of not having youth integral to the policy implementation in a safe political environment have been felt across the country.

The motivation for political reform in Algeria has so far borne the imprint of being opportunistic, based on intra-elite power struggles among the President and his supporters, the military, the Islamists, and parts of the economic elite benefitting from the patrimonial selective network policy of President Bouteflika's 10-year

regime. No genuine dialogue exists between youth groups and the ruling elite.⁶¹

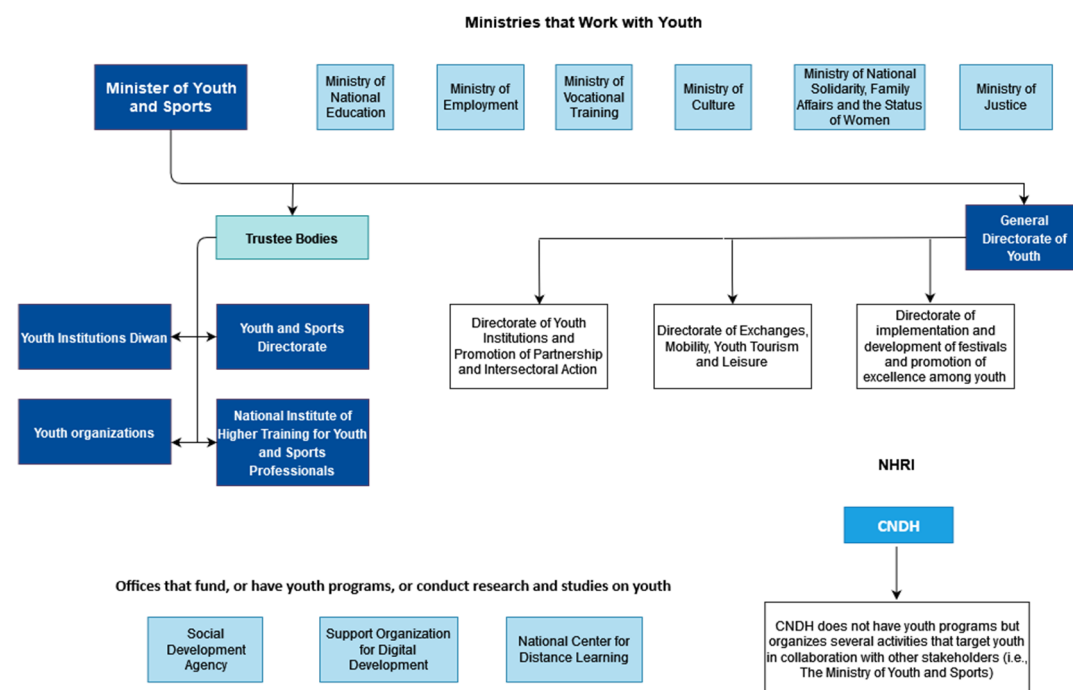
3.1.1 State and non-State actors working with youth

The State actor that dominates youth policies in Algeria is the Ministry of Youth and Sports and its Youth infrastructure section reaching out to provinces organizing, f.e., youth hostels (see figure below). Several other public actors are involved, like the ministries of education, national solidarity, vocational training and justice. No single coordinating unit exists between these actors. In addition to ministries, the Social Development Agency, the Support Organization for Digital Development, and the National Center For Distance Learning are also state institutions that work with youth. The Algerian government's focus on youth employment has overlooked other cultural and civil participation dimensions.⁶² The lack of objectives for improving youth's political and social rights can be observed in the limited number of State actors that work exclusively on youth.

Following the 2019 Hirak movement⁶³, the government was receptive to youth demands and hurried to establish a Higher Youth Council. The Algerian president has also ordered, in 2021, the implementation of the National Civil Society Observatory and re-examines the Higher Youth Council organisation as soon as possible.⁶⁴

According to a Presidential decree in October 2021, the Higher Youth Council will undertake a number of tasks, including “contributing to the promotion of national values, national conscience, civic sense and social solidarity among young people” and “consolidating their democratic culture and strengthening their capabilities to assume responsibilities.”⁶⁵ Further, the Algerian President announced, in early 2020, that the government would introduce youth unemployment benefits. The president said that unemployed youth would be offered a monthly grant of 13,000 dinars (around \$100) to preserve their dignity.⁶⁶

FIGURE 1: MAPPING OF ACTORS THAT WORK WITH YOUTH IN ALGERIA



Besides the State actors that work with and on youth, the National Council for Human Rights (CNDH) organizes several activities to engage with youth. According to its 2019 annual report, CNDH contributed to the organization of the National Youth Symposium, the Estates-General of Youth, and the celebration of International Human Rights Day, under the slogan "Young people defend human rights". CNDH also emphasized, in its report, the role of the youth movement and CSO associations as essential partners in the promotion, modernization, development and awareness, all prerequisites for democratizing the social, political and social life of citizens.⁶⁷

BOX 7: THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN ALGERIA

The establishment of the National Human Rights Council (CNDH) in 2016 while Algeria was a member of the UN Human Rights Council could herald new human rights policies responding to demands of the youth. However, the CNDH exists under the tutelage of the president who appoints key members of CNDH, so the element of authoritarian control prevails.*

* See the debate during 2018 in the Human Rights Committee when Algeria's country report was examined. See also DIHR Context Analysis – Algeria 2021.

CNDH indicated in its 2019 annual report that youth in the country face a legal vacuum for expressive means of communication such as various means of expression. The CNDH also illustrated in its report the importance of the Hirak movement in stimulating youth involvement and democratic freedoms. However, during 2020-21 silence rather than new freedoms prevailed. So far, there are no public indications that CNDH will return to its more vocal role in 2019. This situation is also aggravated because most political parties have been unable to attract the energies of young people.⁶⁸

The government has retained strong control over civil society activities. National-level organizations must apply to the Ministry of Interior for permission to operate. Registered organizations must inform the government about their activities, funding sources, and staff. A preapproval must be obtained in order to receive foreign funding. During the pandemic, the restrictions on NGOs operating within the health sector were relaxed, as they were better positioned locally to assist, resulting in the establishment of more than 1000 new local charity associations. However, the ministry did not renew the accreditations of NGOs like SOS Disparus, Djazairouna, the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights, the National Association for the Fight against Corruption, and the Youth Action Movement. All of these organizations had submitted their renewal applications during the prior years.⁶⁹

3.1.2 Youth engagement in Algeria

Algeria has one of the region's highest youth populations, with an estimated 30 % of the Algerian population between 15-29 years of age and 70 % under 30.⁷⁰ The country has been suffering from unemployment increasingly for the last ten years.

Although it affects all segments of society, youth remain the most affected by unemployment and the failure of integration policies. According to Youth Policy, young people below 30 are the main victims of unemployment, representing 72 % of all unemployed people. These facts have significantly and directly affected the engagement of young people in politics not only due to the question of resources but also because of a lack of trust in the government policies and promises. The reluctance of youth to engage in politics in Algeria is not so different from what is observed in the North African region. This fact is evident in the low numbers of participation in meetings, courses, conferences, and youth activities other than sports.

Around 75 % of youth have never attended a meeting to discuss a subject or sign a petition, nor have they participated in a protest, march, or sit-in.⁷¹ The lack of trust in government by Algerian youth is high as 81 % of young Algerians have ranked their trust in the government at a very low level, while 84 % state that they are interested in politics (highest amongst the concerned countries).⁷² In the political landscape, most Algerian youths are reluctant to participate in politics and live in a situation of tension with it, as they sense that politics is outside their concerns and endeavours. In addition, the absence of channels of dialogue and expression that allows them to have their voices heard creates a political vacuum whereby linkages to the ruling establishment are lacking. Most Algerian youths bear a negative image of the political reality and practice, which makes them reluctant to engage in any political camp, whatever its nature and objectives. The latest parliamentary elections in the country unveiled the acute reluctance to participate in the political process, for it exhibited the lowest turnout ever recorded. Only 23.09 per cent of the 24,454 million registered voters took part in the elections, with a fifth having torn their ballots in protest.⁷³

A reluctance to engage in political practice and associative activity prompted many associations to close their doors, and even the parties did not find an engine for their base, which explains the absence of youth from political parties and the widely present generational difference between the ruling establishment and the proportion of youth in society.⁷⁴ The freedom of expression or mobilization in Algeria is more or less similar to that of the countries under review, for around 60 % of young Algerians believe that their freedom to participate in peaceful protests and demonstrations and express opinions is guaranteed to at least a medium extent. The detachment from politics by youth, however, overlaps with the unwillingness of the Algerian people, in general, to participate politically, and the phenomenon is more acute among young people for several reasons, the most important of which is the estrangement that exists between generations in Algeria. The historical reality also provides a fair explanation as the political elite currently are the revolutionary youth from the mid-20th century. Young people are alienated from what symbolizes that generation deemed to have taken over everything in the name of politics and revolution.⁷⁵

Therefore, the prevailing absence of youth political engagement is premised on fragmented and ad hoc social mobilisation strategies like the recent *Hirak*. Important premises were also lack of trust, political experience of youth groups, and fear.⁷⁶ The *Hirak* protests of 2019 and early 2020 were heralded as a process of modernization and citizenship⁷⁷. However, the prevalence of Covid-19 during 2020, preventing street protests, largely undermined the movement. As noted in the previous section, the most specific and significant change of the *Hirak* has been to force President

Bouteflika to resign.

It is also safe to say that the attempts at collective mobilization on digital media in Algeria faced at least a circumstantial context that produced a set of obstacles. Some of them relate to technical aspects, such as the weak structure of the internet in Algeria and its uses, which are delayed compared to other countries. At the same time, others relate to the widespread distrust in information online or the fear of a government crackdown on activism online. Therefore, attempts to call for protests or political mobilization remains confined within the traditional methods and structures.

3.2 YOUTH STRATEGIES AND ENGAGEMENT IN JORDAN

In Jordan, a national strategy and development plan was formulated in 2014 in response to protests against the regime evolving during 2011-12 to create a stable and less fragmented society: "*Jordan 2025: A National Vision and Strategy (2015-2025)*". The strategy outlined a comprehensive and long-term national strategy and identified a set of social and economic goals to better respond to the social and economic challenges. The strategy's focus includes promoting the rule of law, providing equal opportunities for all, enhancing participatory policy-making, achieving fiscal sustainability, boosting growth, and strengthening institutions.⁷⁸

The National Youth Policy 2019-2025 seeks to implement the national strategy in the youth domain. It is an attempt to give flavour to a youth-targeted policy thinking based on a national youth survey in 2017. The strategy seeks to respond to the concerns raised by youth groups in the survey while simultaneously addressing value sentiments of extremism, violence and religious discourses. The strategy is, in its own words, preventative and precautionary. It seeks to respond to welfare demands in health, training, and education while emphasizing entrepreneurship, technological development and security. The rule of law and effective citizenship are components of the strategy. However, these sections tend to be fairly short and are hardly convincing as efforts to overcome the prevalence of distrust in government and the State apparatus.⁷⁹

The strategy is described as a "youth cultivation strategy", i.e., satisfying broad-based grievances by unifying youth cohorts, incorporating their preferences into state institutions, and generating positive support for the monarchy.⁸⁰ Therefore, the youth strategy is co-optation aiming toward economic growth and political stability. According to its critics, the strategy hardly earns its target group's trust. The social policies of the strategy convey the impression of a responsive State, but alongside two parallel objectives are discernible, both explicitly political: the youth movements are invited in multiple, sometimes parochial aims that overlap and essentially result in undermining youth unity. At the same time, the governing elite fundamentally distrusts the youth, who are perceived by the elites to constitute a social catalyst of democracy while also being a collective agent of instability.⁸¹

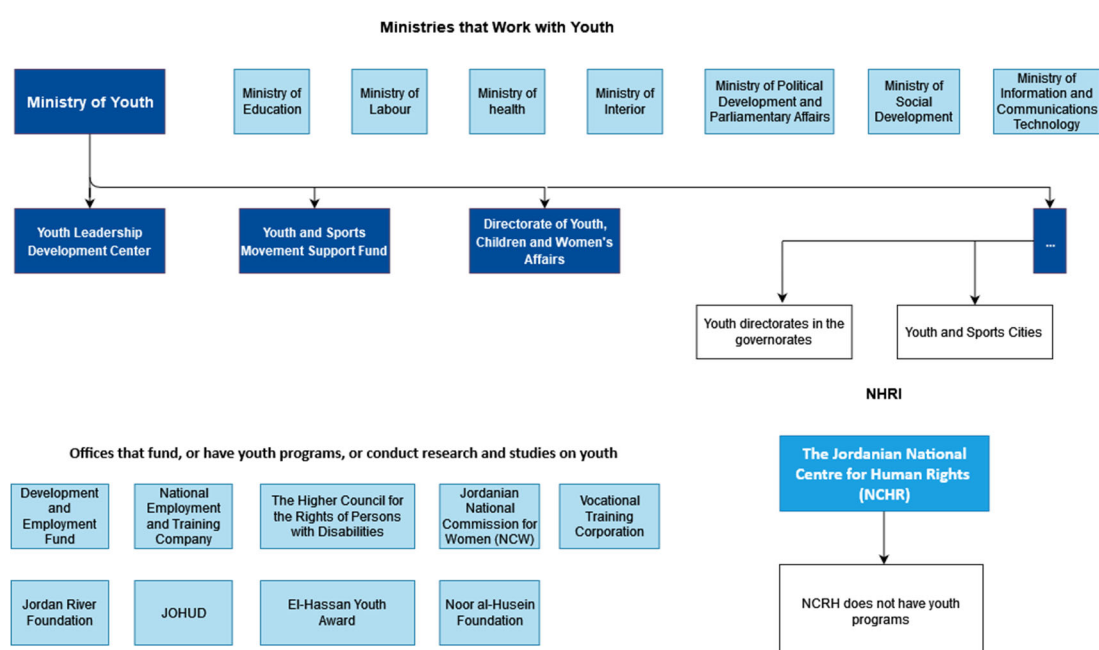
In this context, it is worth noting that the definition of youth is outlined in the National Youth Strategy for Jordan and comprises males and females between 12 to 30 years of age. The definition of youth in Jordan is slightly different from the other countries under review as it covers the whole process of moving from childhood to adulthood. The Legislative enactments in Jordan conform with the text of article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in which a child is defined as every human

being below the age of 18 years, rendering the definition and category of youth in the country subject to various interpretations depending on the context.

3.2.1 State and non-state actors working with youth

The Ministry of Youth in Jordan is the state actor that is mandated to work on youth and is designated to follow up on the implementation of the national youth strategy. Various Ministries such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Works and Housing, and Ministry of Information and Communications Technology are also involved in implementing various objectives of the National Youth Strategy (see figure below).

FIGURE 2: MAPPING OF ACTORS THAT WORK WITH YOUTH IN JORDAN



Other governmental and non-governmental organizations work with youth in Jordan. This work mainly consists of national funds and royal foundations on various thematic areas such as gender and disability. It remains unclear whether the Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs integrates youth into its work plans, especially concerning preparing reports for international mechanisms.

The National Centre for Human Rights (NCHR) in Jordan does not engage with youth. The Centre's strategic plan 2021-2023 does not indicate any plan to integrate youth into their work. However, it states that the mandate and strategy of the Centre intersect with the national goals and priorities of Jordan Vision 2025, including maximizing the use of the outputs of training and rehabilitation programs to ensure the creation of job opportunities that meet the needs of the market, focusing on women, youth and people with disabilities.⁸² Following several constitutional reforms intended to revitalize the country's stagnant political life and the increasing attention to youth economic opportunities in the post-Covid-19 context, it is expected that various state actors will work on and with youth.

BOX 8: THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (NCHR) IN JORDAN

The National Centre for Human Rights was established in 2002 under Article 94 (12) of the Constitution of Jordan. A subsequent law made the NCHR permanent. The Centre obtained an “A” status during 2007 accredited by the International Coordination Committee of the national human rights institutions, i.e. a recognition by the international human rights system of the Jordanian institution as independent and legitimate.*

* See DIHR Context Analysis – Jordan 2021.

3.2.2 Youth engagement in Jordan

Jordan's youth make up more than a third of the population. It is a young country and will remain so in the coming years.⁸³ In addition, it is the highest youth population that Jordan has ever seen, providing a unique opportunity for social and economic development. However, youth in the country face challenges on multiple fronts. Attention to youth occupies a high place in the country's political agenda, especially if we consider that Jordan is one of the few countries in the MENA region that has implemented a youth policy.⁸⁴ The minimum voting age is set at 18 years old, but the minimum age of eligibility for parliament remains 30⁸⁵. However, the scenes of anticipation, fear and frustration have become one of the most visible and influential scenes of the Jordanian youth movement.

According to World Bank data, the Jordanian economy contracted by 1.6 per cent in 2020, and the unemployment rate rose to 24.7 per cent in the last quarter of that year. However, it reached an unprecedented high among young people in particular, at 50 per cent.⁸⁶ The economic situation has rearranged youth priorities and has particularly shifted their attention towards seeking economic opportunities and basic living conditions. The Covid-19 pandemic has also deepened the crisis as 57 % of Jordanian youth have either lost their job or experienced a temporary interruption.⁸⁷ In addition to the high unemployment rates among young men and women, young people's weak civic and political participation remains a major challenge to Jordanian youth. The reluctance of young people to engage in political and public work in its wide sense is a worrying phenomenon as formal youth integration keeps on declining in the country despite the efforts by the governments to get youth on board. Over the past years, official policies and international programs have tried to build the capacities of young people, whether in communication and life skills, entrepreneurial projects, and small and medium enterprises.⁸⁸ However, as the economic conditions worsened and the unemployment rate jumped to terrifying levels, in parallel with the feeling of marginalization among a large segment of young people, the country is experiencing a visible disintegration of youth from the political landscape.

In light of the current political and economic conditions, young people's disengagement and marginalisation find roots in Jordan's political history, which has partly shaped the concept of active citizenship and participation patterns among young people.⁸⁹ The interest in the politics of young people in Jordan remains low as only 24 % of youth indicate an interest.⁹⁰ In addition, political participation is the

lowest among all the concerned countries, as 92 % of Jordanian youth have never participated in a protest, march or sit-in, nor have they attended a meeting to discuss a subject or sign a petition. The numbers are not surprising considering the political culture amongst youth, which is characterized by tribalism and polarization, especially across generations and between what is supposed to be formal and informal politics.

The political history delivers important elements that explain the current political reality since successive governments have built and supported a "national" trend that relied on clan and tribal weight to confront the growth of the Islamic movement in universities and its political activities.⁹¹ This background has emerged as a defining factor for the youth movement in the country. The phenomenon of clan and tribal bigotry and isolation has created various fractions that distorted the coherence of a national youth movement and left youth out of the traditional political scene immersed in issues of identity and belonging. The weak role of the traditional political party, the weakness of the legislative system, which is the main lever for political action, and the lack of seriousness in developing youth empowerment and political education also play an important role in the reluctance of youth from political engagement.⁹² Around 55 % of Jordanian youth have bad trust in their government, while about half are unsatisfied with government performance.⁹³

The youth movement in Jordan has been distinguished by its relatively slow progress and multiple forms and methods. In any case, it does not occupy substantial space in the Jordanian political landscape. It does not penetrate the foundational aspects of political affairs due to the lack of a solid and cohesive structure as a reference through which the voices and initiatives of youth can be highlighted. Politics in Jordan remains within the confines of the old generation. At the same time, youth in their various roles, activities and events did not rise to the level of organized movement, as most youth centres and institutions base their activities on aspects other than organized youth political and civic participation. However, to discount the interest and capacity of young people in Jordan would dismiss the effort that they have made despite institutional barriers; for example, a coalition of youth in Jordan, under the name of Iradat Shabab Coalition (Will of the Youth Coalition), was the first in the region to submit a youth-led stakeholder report to the Universal Periodic Review during Jordan's third cycle review⁹⁴.

3.3 YOUTH STRATEGIES AND ENGAGEMENT IN MOROCCO

In Morocco, the National Integrated Strategy for Youth 2015-2030 was formulated and conceived in 2014 by the Ministry of youth and sports⁹⁵ and the General Direction of Local Communities, with support from international organisations.⁹⁶ The national youth strategy was established following the constitutional reforms of 2011, which responded to the youth revolts in 2010-2011 since young people in the country have been excluded from economic growth since the early 2000s.⁹⁷

The national youth strategy remains "part of a general ambition to place young people at the heart of public policies" and to address the relevant provisions in the new 2011 Constitution.⁹⁸ It aims to consolidate youth-related policies in Morocco to promote better coherence and coordination.⁹⁹ It is noteworthy that the youth strategy is the first national framework for youth policies.

The National Integrated Strategy for Youth defines five strategic axes (62 priority measures by 2020 and 75 complementary measures by 2030): “1. Increase economic opportunities for young people and promote their employability; 2. Increase access to and quality of basic services for youth and reduce geographical disparities; 3. Promote the active participation of young people in social and civic life and decision-making; 4. Promote respect for human rights; 5. Strengthen institutional arrangements for communication, information, evaluation and governance.”¹⁰⁰ These axes, nonetheless, remain broadly defined.

In terms of priorities, a policy paper on the youth strategy outlined issues like ‘entrepreneurship’ as a major concern for policy makers, emphasizing the role economic integration occupies in the national discourse as opposed to civic engagement and political participation.¹⁰¹ The dominant discourse indicates that youth well-being represents the focus and goal of the new strategies and programmes.¹⁰² As far as the areas of intervention are concerned, Morocco’s priorities differ from other countries, for achieving literacy and balancing the regional development constitute major challenges.¹⁰³ This context translates into attributing civic involvement and political participation as a lesser priority. The changes in government and developments in the political and economic situation have further created a need to update the national youth strategy.

Generally, drawing up and implementing youth policies in Morocco recognizes young people and youth NGOs as important stakeholders.¹⁰⁴ The recently drafted constitution in Morocco in 2011 is the most progressive in terms of assigning rights and freedoms to youth.¹⁰⁵ For example, the Constitution requests local authorities to consider the concerns of young people whose active participation shall be facilitated through associations and municipal youth councils.¹⁰⁶ Yet, the implementation of policies and strategies that target young people lag, which the non-established Advisory Council further illustrates for Youth and Community Action, posited to voice the concerns of young people and provide legitimate representation within the scope of democratic participation.

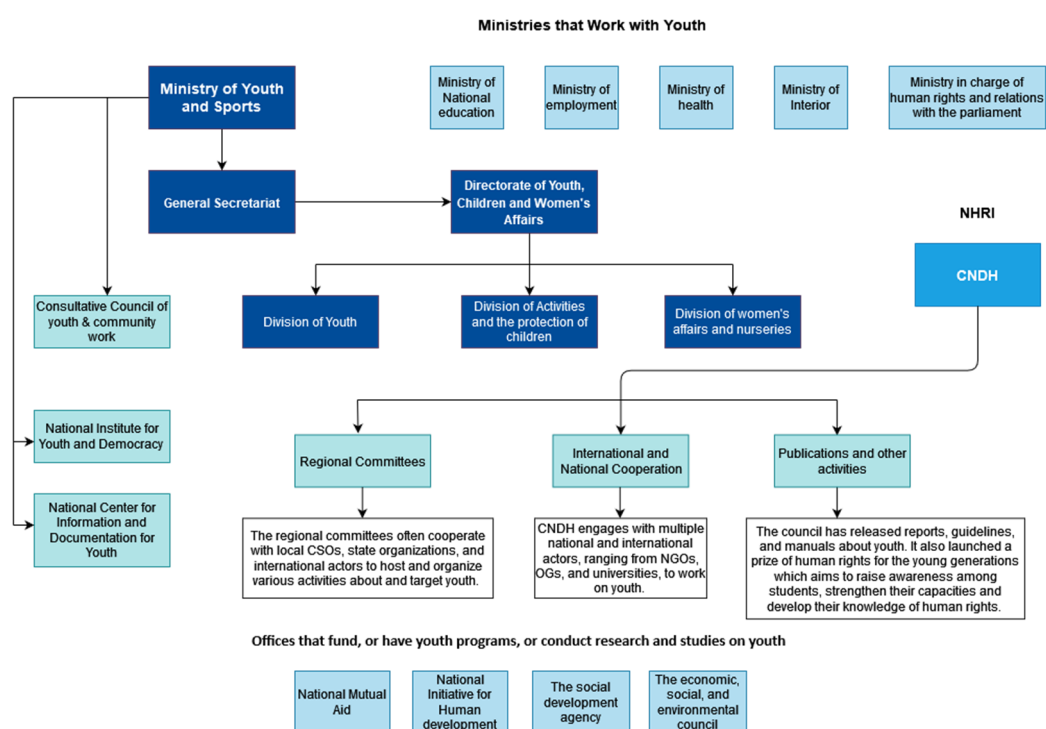
3.3.1 State and non-State actors working with youth

The Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Communication in Morocco is the responsible governmental unit for implementing the youth policies. Although the ministry formulated the strategy, it remains integrated and involves a range of government sectors.¹⁰⁷ The Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Communication was recently restructured, ridding itself of the sports sector that had overwhelmed its work for the last decade. The newly formed government in 2021 also appointed the youngest minister in the government to lead the Ministry. Commentators have suggested that the move implies a new government direction, signalling and stressing that youth is a substantial actor in its strategy.

In addition to the Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Sports, various ministries are involved in the work on youth, namely the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Employment (see figure below). The National Initiative for Human Development, the Economic, Social, and Environmental Council, and the Social Development Agency are also recognized as important actors that work on youth in Morocco.

The 2011 Constitution also established an Advisory Council for Youth and Community Action. The Council is expected to institutionalize the participation of youth in formal terms¹⁰⁸. It is “charged with studying and monitoring issues related to youth, making proposals on any topic of economic, social and cultural interest aimed directly at youth and community action, and encouraging participation in national life, in a spirit of responsible citizenship”.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, a new committee or institution reporting to the head of government was proposed to take over the responsibility of youth issues (in addition to the ministry of youth, culture, and communication) as a coordinating body, but it was also never realized.¹¹⁰ Such a Committee was envisaged, according to OECD, to “enable the heads of all relevant ministries to meet quarterly to ensure interdepartmental, sectoral and interdisciplinary co-operation with regards to the monitoring and execution of the strategy and plan of action”.¹¹¹

FIGURE 3: MAPPING OF ACTORS THAT WORK WITH YOUTH IN MOROCCO



On a more decentralized level, 50 (as of 2015) local youth councils act as hubs for youth and liaisons with the ministry of youth and sports and other governmental units. However, the number of these councils remains low to cover all the provinces and is exclusive to urban and metropolitan cities. They also lack the legal framework to function.¹¹² In line with the vast project of advanced regionalisation, the organic law on regions No 111-14 further provides the creation of three advisory bodies, including one specific to youth interests: “an advisory body responsible for studying issues relating to youth interests.”¹¹³

The National Council for Human Rights (CNDH) in Morocco has also incorporated youth in its various activities at the national and regional levels. The last of which is a workshop for youth in collaboration with UPRINFO. The workshop is a consultative mechanism to include youth in the UPR by incorporating their feedback into the reporting process. In addition, CNDH also works with various CSOs and young

individuals (politically active youth), where they organize activities to increase awareness and promote human rights culture. The CNDH has partnered with the Prometheus Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, bringing together young Moroccans from different experiences.

3.3.2 Youth engagement in Morocco

Young people between the ages of 15 and 24 represent nearly a fifth of Morocco's population, reaching about 3.6 million people.¹¹⁴ For decades, the engagement of Moroccan youth politically constituted a real question, especially since there are very limited statistics on youth and political engagement in Morocco.¹¹⁵ Despite the minimum voting age and the minimum age of eligibility for parliament being aligned at 18 years of age¹¹⁶. There is a reluctance to engage politically amongst the youth due to a lack of confidence in association and union organizations and party institutions and as an expression of dissatisfaction with their performance. In addition, Moroccan youth are frustrated because the social and political system did not enable them to realize their expectations and aspirations.¹¹⁷ They live in a state of contradiction between what they hear from official speeches and slogans about their role and importance in building society, development and economic renaissance and a frustrating reality in which they lack real sponsors who contribute to the realization of these slogans, which has resulted in a state of distrust and loss of credibility between the new generation and successive governments.¹¹⁸ The majority, 69 %, think that politicians pay too little attention to issues of relevance to them.¹¹⁹

Thinking about youth political engagement, whether structured or unstructured, is not a new reality in Moroccan society. Civil society and associative movements, in particular, are not new. The engagement of youth in politics is affected by at least three determinants: “the influence of the family and the social environment”, the degree of “the presence of some young people’s willingness to work collectively”, and “the desire to search for a distinct space.”¹²⁰ The idea of political participation, or belonging to a party or a union, is not rejected in principle by Moroccan youth. However, the priority areas for young Moroccans are not political but economic. Living standards and employment were reported to be the top concerns for young Morocco.¹²¹

Young people in Morocco are not mobilised for political engagement. Only 16 % of young men and 9 % of young women are members of at least one organization. In comparison, 38 % of men and 20 % of women have participated in “less formal ways and been part of a group of people who have “done well” or tried to solve a problem in their own community.”¹²² In addition, a 2012 survey by the High Commission for Planning (HCP) revealed that only 1.3 % of young people are affiliated with a political party or trade union.¹²³ Indeed, the 2011 uprisings contributed to the growing interest in political work among Moroccan youth, but this interest did not turn into a founding, organized and permanent political engagement. This interest remained limited to certain groups of young people and did not turn into a general interest for them.

The political representation of young women in Morocco also remains relatively low. Women are often limited in their ability to exercise their rights as voters and candidates because of social, economic and political barriers.¹²⁴ In a survey by the

HCP, a third of young Moroccan people express no confidence in their government; 42 % express no trust in Parliament, and 55 % have no confidence in political parties. At the local level, 60 % of young Moroccans do not trust local authorities.¹²⁵ The lack of trust in formal politics does not translate into the absence of other forms of engagement among youth in the country. However, it undermines the willingness of youth to involve themselves in public policies.

According to Nadine Sika, since the uprisings in 2011, many young people have resorted to informal and unconventional forms of participation, including “protests and marches, sit-ins, online blogs, and Facebook groups. Moroccan youth utilize these methods to address individual and personal freedoms issues.”¹²⁶ The scholar adds that young people who participate in contentious activism claim that their motivations are mainly because of “bad governance.”¹²⁷ Civil society organizations in Morocco still face multiple constraints in achieving their mission despite the political discourse on their importance. The lack of equipment for operation and access to finance renders many CSOs inactive, considering that Morocco has more than two hundred thousand registered civil society organizations.¹²⁸

Although 62 % of Moroccan youth express that the freedom to participate in peaceful protests and demonstrations is guaranteed to a medium extent at least, and 71 % say that the freedom to express opinions is also guaranteed to a medium extent,¹²⁹ they remain reluctant to actively participate in political life, especially joining parties and unions, due to subjective reasons related to the sociocultural situation of young people. Objective ones related to institutions that could not break with traditional practices contribute to alienating young people and their inability to attract them. On the other hand, young people are increasingly accepting associative and communitarian work, given its possibilities for active participation in local affairs. However, this, in addition to the unconventional means of engagement, did not evolve yet to engage with democratic development, enabling youth to participate in real, local development at the economic and political levels.

3.4 YOUTH STRATEGIES AND ENGAGEMENT IN TUNISIA

Tunisia has no National Youth Strategy. However, the Ministry of Youth and Sports developed a strategic sectoral vision for youth 2018-2020, aiming to better direct various youth institutions and enhance their performance. The strategy also discusses building youth hostels in various regions of the country, especially in marginalized and border areas and densely populated neighbourhoods. The Ministry emphasizes, in the strategy, the importance of supporting youth initiatives and highlighting their potential to encourage them to work and take the initiative and to create a leadership generation and an active partner in the development process. Tunisia's constitutional reform of 2014 affirmed the democratic aspirations that emerged after 2011, ensuring political freedoms and a semi-presidential system where the president was to be appointed by popular vote. The Ennahda party, which had dominated the political settlements since the 2011 Spring, was finally losing control in the 2019 elections, bringing President Kais Saïed into power. Observers state that this was when the transactional, intra-elite power-sharing forged by Ennahda was finally ended.¹³⁰

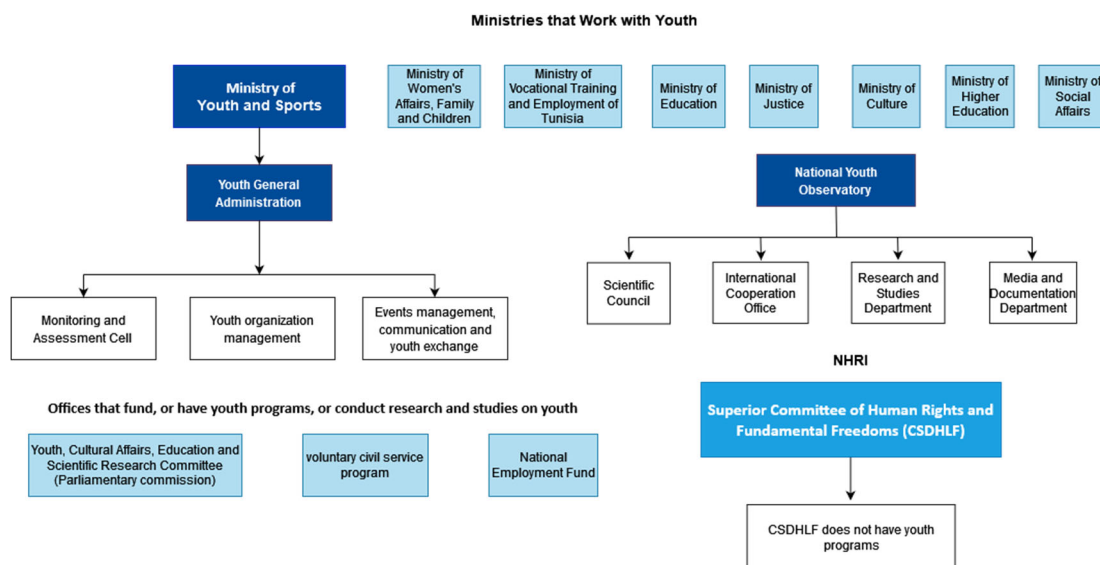
The motivation for a new social contract and reforms that would strengthen the economy while also reaching out to an increasingly frustrated public were prominent

within the respective government during 2019-21, as indicated by efforts on the economic front and regarding social protection policies. However, the new presidential regime was stalemated by disputes between the President, the Prime Minister and the Speaker of Parliament. The political crisis affected the implementation of the 2014 constitutional vision radically while also prohibiting the appointment of members to the Constitutional Court.¹³¹ The political crisis was accompanied by the withdrawal of President Saïed's first Prime Minister, Mr Fakhfakh, and by the president's dismissal of the second, Mr Mechichi, due to disagreements about the cabinet members as and as a result of strong popular protests. On 25 July 2021, the President suspended the Parliament and dismissed the Prime Minister. Observers see these moves, especially the suspension of Parliament, as a constitutional breach.¹³²

3.4.1 State and non-State actors working with youth

The Ministry of Youth and Sports is in charge of implementing youth policies, with assistance from various other ministries, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, etc. (see figure below). Under the Ministry of Youth and Sports, a National Youth Observatory aims to listen to young people, monitor their concerns and aspirations, follow up on them, conduct research and prospective studies on the youth sector, and organize consultations for their use in preparing development plans.

FIGURE 4: MAPPING OF ACTORS THAT WORK WITH YOUTH IN TUNISIA



The ongoing political crisis in the country and the prolonged delay in institutionalizing the Human Rights Instance represent a big challenge to achieving any substantial work on youth by the NHRI. Nonetheless, other important national mechanisms, such as the National Committee for Coordination, Preparation, Reporting, and Follow-up of Recommendations in the Field of Human Rights, organise a number of consultations with youth organizations and associations, producing several recommendations that incorporate the input of youth.

BOX 9: THE HIGHER COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS (CSDHLF)

A complex regime prevails with respect to the National Human Rights Institution. The Higher Committee on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms was created during 2003 but bore the imprint and the reputation of an institution being established during the Ben Ali regime. Even after 2011, challenges remained concerning leadership and visibility. At the international level, however, even presently, the Committee is considered as a national human rights institution, endorsed with a B status. However, parallel to the existence of the Committee whose members were appointed by presidential decree in 2016, the Human Rights Instance was instituted as part of the constitutional reforms of 2016.*

* See DIHR Context Analysis – Tunisia 2021.

3.4.2 Youth engagement in Tunisia

Youth in Tunisia represent up to 29 per cent of the general population and about half of the working-age population.¹³³ In Tunisia, the minimum voting age is set at 18 years old, but the minimum age of eligibility for parliament is 23 years¹³⁴. Tunisian youth are no different from other youth in the MENA region in terms of the observed reluctance to engage in politics. Youth abstaining from political life dates back to the era prior to the 2011 uprisings since the young people who initiated the revolution did not possess any means or formal structure for political mobilization. The Arab Barometer Survey, in its 2018 survey, demonstrates that only about 17 per cent of Tunisian youth are interested in politics (second lowest¹³⁵) and that 90 % have never participated in a protest, march, sit-in or attended a meeting to discuss a subject or sign a petition.¹³⁶ The disappointment and frustration largely explain the reluctance to transition due to challenges such as corruption.¹³⁷ In addition, the political forces established in the post-Ben Ali era do not represent the interests of the youth.¹³⁸

The Tunisian youth do not constitute a homogenous actor, and their advocacy is manifested in different forms.¹³⁹ Due to the increasing economic challenges the country has faced since 2011, the priority areas for young Tunisians do not take a political outlook. In a survey by Power to Youth about what should be the first and second most important issues to be tackled for Tunisia in the time ahead, 32 % and 23 % of young Tunisians listed raising living standards as their first and second most important issue, respectively. Furthermore, given the nature of the political system in place before 2011, which restricted political freedoms, it is comprehensible that a political environment whereby engagement is low has become entrenched in the country's political culture. To put it into numbers, only 7 % of all young Tunisian men and women are members of at least one organization. A slightly higher proportion concerns civic engagement, as 10 % of men and women have participated in less formal ways and been part of a group of people who have “done well” or tried to solve a problem in their community.¹⁴⁰ The numbers remain one of the lowest in the whole region.

It can be said that the democratic climate witnessed in Tunisia after 2011 has liberated society generally and the youth, particularly from fear of authoritarian regimes. It has strengthened public and private freedoms, established a culture of pluralism and allowed the phenomenon of self-organization to flourish among young people. However, the post-2011 era period did not bring promising changes concerning youth participation. The numbers remain very weak compared to the promises during the transitional justice period. Amongst the selected countries for the study, Tunisia comes third concerning the freedom to participate in peaceful protests and demonstration¹⁴¹

Nonetheless, before and after 2011, this segment does not play the leading and vital role corresponding to its demographic size in Tunisian society. It does not enjoy wide representation in the ruling or opposition political parties, and youth are rarely nominated to lead the electoral lists.¹⁴² A significant group of young Tunisians after 2011 opted for self-organization by forming spontaneous organizations or forms of assembly, representing Tunisia's youth force and a trend that could be seen across other MENA countries to different degrees.¹⁴³ What is meant by self-organization is directing a segment of youth to search for alternative channels from official bodies, political parties and traditional trade union organizations to express their presence and their positions on the policies of the ruling governments.

The lack of investment in youth as a political force and the marginalization of their voices is a tangible reality resulting from the decline of state resources and the shrinking of budgets in various sectors that concern youth, in addition to the growing social demands from an increase in wages and employment in the public sector, a reality that deprived this segment of its rights, which pushed them to discontent with the political class. This point is evident, considering that the vast majority, 84 %, believe politicians pay too little attention to issues relevant to young people.¹⁴⁴

4 THE CHALLENGES OF YOUTH INTEGRATION

Perhaps the percentage of young people in Algeria represents the most apparent opportunity for the country, as it could be seen as a driving force of change. However, the economic hurdles and crises the country has been facing render youth integration challenging in markets and politics. With high unemployment rates, the government faces increasing pressure from young people to create new opportunities. The situation has resulted in waves of emigration, anger, and frustration amongst young people. As shown above, the inter-generational conflicts have limited the participation of youth in the processes of decision-making. The political elite in the country has been disconnected from the needs of young people. The successive governments have not created space for young people and CSOs to organize for political and civic action. The CSOs, traditionally seen as platforms and channels for youth to voice their concerns, are not playing a significant role in the political landscape in Algeria, especially with the continuous crackdowns and restrictions.

The legislation in **Algeria** has been reformed several times to accommodate the youth and their needs, illustrated by the elections quotas to allow a culture of youth representation to thrive. This type of legislation could be extended to the work of the National Council for Human Rights, which has worked with the Ministry of Youth and Sports on many activities, laying the ground for partnerships between state actors and indicating an interest in furthering the agenda on youth issues. The lack of real reforms, which especially aim at attributing youth a substantial role, is lacking in Algeria. The president has approved minor suggestions following the Hirak movement, with commentators observing no significant improvement in terms of the approach of the state to youth. Algeria has an important human capital resource, but it does not invest in the interest of the youth. The shortage of trust further exacerbates the underemployment of the human capital resource among young people on the one hand and the distrust between official bodies and civil society organizations on the other hand. In early 2022, some changes have been observed in the country, including introducing unemployment benefits for youth and installing a new general secretary at the head of the National Council for Human Rights. The latter also stated their plan to accelerate the establishment of the National Youth Council during the same year.

The problem of corruption in **Jordan**, due to the conflicts between political camps, factions, and ethnic groups, deprives the Jordanian youth of opportunities to advance and access their rights. This problem also results in a lack of continuity of governments in implementing the action plans, programmes, and strategies of previous governments, thus hindering the implementation of the human rights and development agendas. Despite the opportunities and promises that the national constitution and legislation bring forward (i.e., national youth strategy), the stipulated guarantees and practical mechanisms are not activated and, in many cases, remain linked to political will or other constraints. Jordan remains, nonetheless, one of the few countries in the MENA with an established national youth strategy. A participatory approach whereby youth take part in the decision-making process as a consultative body is seen to be a priority for the Jordanian government, especially following the

various uprisings and demands by young people in the country. In addition, Jordan has various state actors and GHRFPs that work exclusively on youth, especially initiatives taken by the royal family. National coordination between the different stakeholders on issues concerning youth is still missing.

The 2011 constitution in **Morocco** represents progress legislation that enables youth to occupy a prominent position in the political landscape. It grants them various means and channels to voice their needs directly and participate in decision-making, especially on topics that concern them. The establishment of different advisory councils, either at the national or regional level, are important and well-regarded mechanisms to tackle the various issues with youth engagement. In addition, the direction towards advanced regionalization as a form of political and economic organization also represents the introduction of new channels to integrate youth locally, allowing new spaces to emerge outside the realms of the metropolitan cities. However, the lack of implementation of these various constitutional and legislative mechanisms remains a major constraint to advancing the agenda on youth in Morocco. CNDH has put forward two advisory notes to bring the Advisory Council and the Parity and Equality authority into action. The priorities of the previous governments have been reoriented to emphasize the role of economic integration at the national level, hoping that political engagement will follow suit in a new direction that can be perceived across the MENA.

The newly formed government has conveyed a message to be more attentive and concerned with youth issues. The restructuring of the ministry of youth and sports into a ministry of youth, culture, and communication was one of the very first steps to stress and highlight the role of youth in the new government's agenda. The ministry also put forward various promises, including creating economic opportunities, supporting youth initiatives, and establishing new channels to connect with youth, especially through digital media. The digitalization of services in Morocco has attributed a high priority for the new government, creating space for the young generation to prosper. Services to access and retrieve information and report and complain are expected to reshape the approach of youth towards political representation. Civil society in Morocco also continues to play a significant role. Although CSOs face many constraints, they remain a hub for young people to be politically engaged and active and to organize and mobilize for various national causes.

In **Tunisia**, the political developments in 2021 have stalled the progress the country observed in the wake of the constitutional changes of 2014. Human rights state actors face many difficulties and challenges in the current political context. The situation of youth is also exacerbated due to the economic crisis the country is enduring. It is unclear how the country's politics will unfold, but the youth situation represents a major concern.

5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The surge of protests starting in Tunisia but spreading, albeit unevenly, to significant parts of the MENA region during and after 2011 inspired political and constitutional reforms and marked the beginning of youth strategies in the four countries under review.

The youth remains a constrained force; stronger here, weaker there. Most consistent across the four countries is the lack of significant achievement that would bring a level of hope to the civil society groups and to the engaged communities of youth which sustained, for instance, the Hirak protests. So far, the governing elites have proved unable to engage in a trust-worthy dialogue with the forces demanding freedom, dignity and social justice. As a result of this lack of motivation for reform, corruption prevails in all the countries, and the improvements in the rule of law are unimpressive. The result is disillusionment among the youth, in particular, and generally in the population.

In debating youth engagement and involvement, the point is that those distinctions can be traced between the Levant part of MENA and the North African part. It is unlikely that Hirak would have occurred in Jordan due to the substantial differences in social and political organisation. Yet, similar patterns and trends concerning youth mobilisation and activism can be seen.

The suppression of human rights respect remains a feature in all countries. Softer human rights issues, e.g. children's rights and, to some extent, women's rights, are given some positive attention. At the same time, suppression of freedoms and respect for personal integrity, including the prevalence of torture or inhuman treatment, remains features that threaten journalists, human rights defenders, and actors seeking justice in a system where even judges fail to act independently. In Tunisia, there were gains concerning specific civil and political rights after 2011, but the improvements stabilized at a low level.

However, these bleak observations may underestimate the longer-term impact of the processes at work during the last decade. A significant achievement after 2011 is reinforcing the institutional domain of human rights. All four countries have established national human rights institutions, either on paper as in Tunisia or in reality as in Algeria, Morocco and Jordan. Human rights reporting to the UN continues to occur, while human rights rapporteurs seek to monitor critical situations through visits. Although they are routinely discouraged from visiting, their pressure is likely to be important.

Similarly, the existing human rights instances and national institutions may force the regimes to pay attention to human rights differently than the situations before the mid-2010 decade. The human rights institutions are not passive; they have a voice which is also heard outside the countries. They may not bring instant changes, but they may force governments to observe social reality from a perspective that brings echoes of democratic demands. The establishment of advisory councils, either at the

national level or the regional one, is an important and well-regarded mechanism to tackle various youth engagement issues, for instance, in Morocco.

A recent human rights study¹⁴⁵ emphasises the joint factors of *capacity* and *willingness* among States involved in human rights change. Enabling support strategies may build on the easier strategy of building institutional capacity, capacitating national human rights institutions or seeking to strengthen the capacities of human rights focal points. The fact that this is the easier strategy does not mean that it is ineffective. However, according to the same study, the combination of strategies of institutional capacity-building and commitment/willingness is the most effective. Certainly, commitment to human rights reform is a public good in short supply in the MENA region, at least among the countries studied here. At the same time, recognizing the challenges of generating commitment, the authors of the study point to innovative ways for social influence.

Our concluding observations turn around four issues, in particular, that may be relevant in reflecting on innovation and enabling strategies in the youth domain:

- The persistent need for human rights institutional capacity building
- The potential for closer collaboration with youth-responsible ministries
- The potential of giving space to a governance focus coupled with a human rights-based strategy, i.e. a focus addressing efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, and participation
- Dialogue and consultation sessions among/between youth groups and with youth groups on social rights issues, e.g., health and social protection

The latter two could entail work at the level of state institutions and alliances with groups outside state governance, be it local governance actors or CSO-based ones. Youth's tendencies to trust CSOs and non-governmental actors prompt us to expand partnerships and collaborations beyond State actors. Furthermore, exploring other participation structures that interest youth, including informal structures, is pivotal. Youth inclusion should be seen as process-oriented, breaking with the top-down approach. Young people should participate in the whole process before, during, and after practice. This point is more pertinent concerning youth-focused matters, where their input remains crucial and imperative.

6 ENDNOTES

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6 ANNEXES

Annexe 1: Recent UPR Recommendations

Algeria, 2017 (Cycle 3)
Take further measures to encourage and facilitate self-employment among the youth, enabling them to play a greater role in national development
Intensify efforts to provide appropriate vocational training and employment for youths
Strengthen ongoing schemes to reduce unemployment, particularly among the youth
Strengthen the introduction of various mechanisms for promoting employment among young people through entrepreneurship in different areas
Devote more efforts and resources to programmes aimed at promoting youth employment, notably through education and vocational training of youth
Take concrete measures in order to reduce the number of school dropouts by establishing a quality educational and pedagogical system which will also include all children and adolescents
Continue the process of juvenile justice reform by taking further measures in line with the nature of children and their needs
Reform the juvenile justice system and ensure the separation of children from adults in detention places, including by taking measures to reduce prison overcrowding
Intensify efforts to reform the judicial system, including the juvenile justice system
Continue to invest in policies and programmes aimed at enhancement of youth development and education
Protect the youth from societal dangers
Continue strengthening its educational system, guaranteeing the right to education to children and adolescents with disabilities
1701918 (un.org)
Jordan, 2019 (Cycle 2)
Accelerate efforts to adopt alternative measures to deprivation of liberty in the juvenile justice system (Saudi Arabia);
Organize specialized training courses for public prosecutors and sensitize them to other practices in other countries, implement human rights standards and make use of them in referring cases involving torture, juveniles and human trafficking to the specialized courts
Continue implementing the system of aftercare for juveniles to ensure that there is no return to or repetition of offending
A/HRC/WG.6/31/JOR/1 (un.org)
Morocco, 2017 (Cycle 3)
Consolidate the experience of regionalization and continue the participation of youths and

women in all the regions of the Kingdom, including the southern provinces
Accelerate the implementation of the advanced regionalization as a means to promote further the participation of citizens, especially women and youths, from the 12 regions of the Kingdom in the political and economic governance of the country
Continue the socioeconomic programmes for detainees with their post-detention socio-professional reinsertion, in particular in favour of women and youths
Continue efforts to reduce unemployment rates among youths, including by strengthening vocational training programmes
Establish dialogues to engage in cooperation that will allow for the application of best practices and plans to reduce unemployment, underemployment and informal work, and strengthen the policies for the generation of employment and youth employment
Continue to implement policies and develop infrastructure that increases access to employment, particularly for youths
Strengthen the promotion of political participation of women and youth
Continue efforts to ensure vulnerable children and adolescents in rural communities access quality education and healthcare services
1701923 (un.org)
Tunisia, 2017 (Cycle 3)
Further intensify the Government's activities to boost youth employment
Ensure broad access to health services, including reproductive health services, especially to young people
Repeal articles 227 bis and 239 of the Criminal Code to prevent perpetrators of rape and abduction from avoiding prosecution by marrying their adolescent victims
1701925 (un.org)

Annex 2 (a) and (b): Economic growth

GDP growth, two a. (annual %)										
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Algeria	2,90	3,40	2,80	3,80	3,70	3,20	1,30	1,20	0,80	-5,48
Jordan	2,74	2,43	2,61	3,38	2,50	1,99	2,09	1,93	1,96	-1,55
Morocco	5,25	3,01	4,54	2,67	4,54	1,06	4,25	3,15	2,48	-7,12
Tunisia	-1,92	4,09	2,82	2,87	1,17	1,25	1,92	2,66	1,04	-8,60

Source: World Development Indicators. World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files.

GDP per capita growth, 2.b.(annual %)										
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Algeria	0,98	1,40	0,76	1,71	1,60	1,10	-	0,75	-0,81	-1,13
Jordan	-2,64	-2,98	-2,56	-1,25	-1,35	-1,08	-	0,10	0,58	-2,53

							0,33			
Morocco	3,84	1,58	3,06	1,23	3,10	-0,29	2,90	1,84	1,22	-8,24
Tunisia	-2,89	3,08	1,83	1,85	0,11	0,14	0,76	1,49	-0,08	-9,56

Source: World Development Indicators. World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files.

Annexe 3: Unemployment

Table ILO					
Country	Indicator	Latest year	Total	Men	Women
Jordan	Unemployment rate, youth (%)	2019	37.3	34.8	49.4
Algeria	Unemployment rate, youth (%)	2017	39.3	33.1	82
Morocco	Unemployment rate, youth (%)	2016	22.2	22	22.8
Tunisia	Unemployment rate, youth (%)	2017	34.9	33.8	37.2

Source: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/>

Annexe 4: Public Health and Social Protection Expenditure 2020

Public health and social protection expenditure, 2020 or the latest available year (per centage of GDP)							
Country/ Territory	Total expenditure on social protection (excluding health) ^a	Expenditure on social protection systems, including floors, by broad age group. ^c				Sector	Domestic general government health expenditure (GGHE-D), WHO
		Children	Working-age population	Old age			
Algeria	8.9	0.2	0.8	7.9	General government	4.1	
Morocco	4.5	0.1	0.1	2.7	General government	2.1	
Tunisia	7.5	-	0.6	6.9	Central governments ^b	4.2	
Jordan	9.0	0.1	1.2	7.6	Budgetary central government	3.8	

Source: International Labour Organization 2021: "World Social Protection Report 2020-22. Social protection at the crossroads – in pursuit of a better future". [World Social Protection Report 2020-22 \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/2021/05/World-Social-Protection-Report-2020-22-ilo.org), pp. 279f.

Notes

a. Total social protection expenditure (excluding health) does not always correspond to the sum of expenditures by age group, depending on data availability, source and year, and inclusion of non-age-group-specific expenditures.

b. Including social security funds.

c. Sources expenditure on social protection systems:

Algeria and Tunisia: ILO World Social Protection Database, based on the Social Security Inquiry (SSI). Available at: <https://wspdb.social-protection.org>; National sources: respective Ministry of Finance.

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GDP weights global and regional aggregates. Estimates are not strictly comparable to 2016 regional estimates due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions.

For a detailed definition of the indicators, please see Annex 2, available at: <https://wspr.social-protection.org>.

Annexe 5: The rule of law assessment

ALGERIA RANKINGS *WJP Rule of Law Index 2020* performance (1 is best)

	GLOBAL RANK	REGIONAL RANK*
Constraints on Government Powers	83/128	6/8
Absence of Corruption	67/128	4/8
Open Government	117/128	6/8
Fundamental Rights	93/128	4/8
Order and Security	59/128	3/8
Regulatory Enforcement	85/128	5/8
Civil Justice	53/128	3/8
Criminal Justice	69/128	3/8

JORDAN RANKINGS. *WJP Rule of Law Index 2020* performance (1 is best)

	GLOBAL RANK	REGIONAL RANK*
Constraints on Government Powers	80/128	5/8
Absence of Corruption	39/128	2/8
Open Government	98/128	3/8
Fundamental Rights	91/128	3/8
Order and Security	49/128	2/8
Regulatory Enforcement	34/128	2/8
Civil Justice	37/128	2/8
Criminal Justice	32/128	2/8

Morocco. WJP Rule of Law Index 2020 performance (1 is best)

	GLOBAL RANK	REGIONAL RANK*
Constraints on Government Powers	74/128	3/8
Absence of Corruption	73/128	5/8
Open Government	86/128	2/8
Fundamental Rights	103/128	6/8
Order and Security	83/128	6/8
Regulatory Enforcement	46/128	3/8
Civil Justice	60/128	5/8
Criminal Justice	83/128	5/8

Tunisia. WJP Rule of Law Index 2020 performance (1 is best)

	GLOBAL RANK	REGIONAL RANK*
Constraints on Government Powers	42/128	1/8
Absence of Corruption	56/128	3/8
Open Government	63/128	1/8
Fundamental Rights	63/128	1/8
Order and Security	80/128	5/8
Regulatory Enforcement	52/128	4/8
Civil Justice	74/128	6/8
Criminal Justice	74/128	4/8

*Countries and jurisdictions measured in the Middle East and North Africa region: Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates
Source: The World Justice Project, 2021.

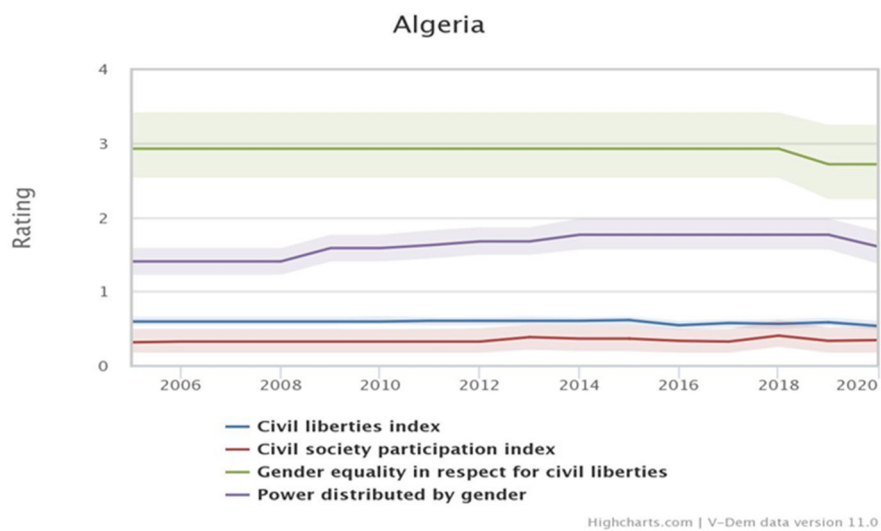
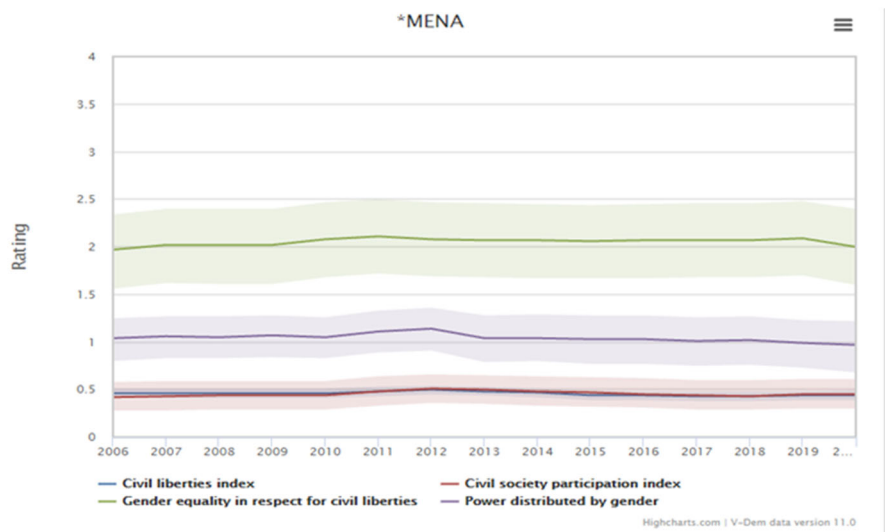
Rank from Transparency International, 2020

	Score*	Rank	Score change
Algeria	36/100	104/180	+2 since 2012
Morocco	40/100	86/180	+3 since 2012
Tunisia	44/100	69/180	+3 since 2012
Jordan	49/100	60/180	+1 since 2012

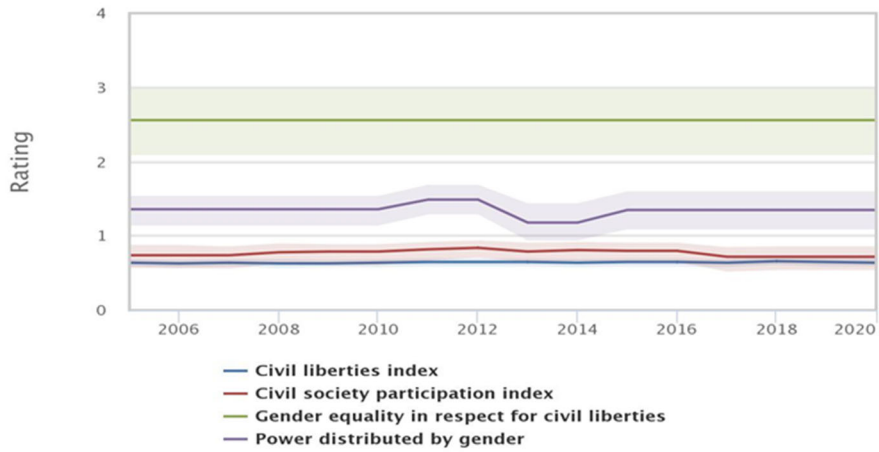
Source: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/dza>

*Note: The index, which ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and businesspeople, uses a scale of zero to 100, where zero is highly corrupt, and 100 is very clean.

Annexe 6: Human Rights Trends

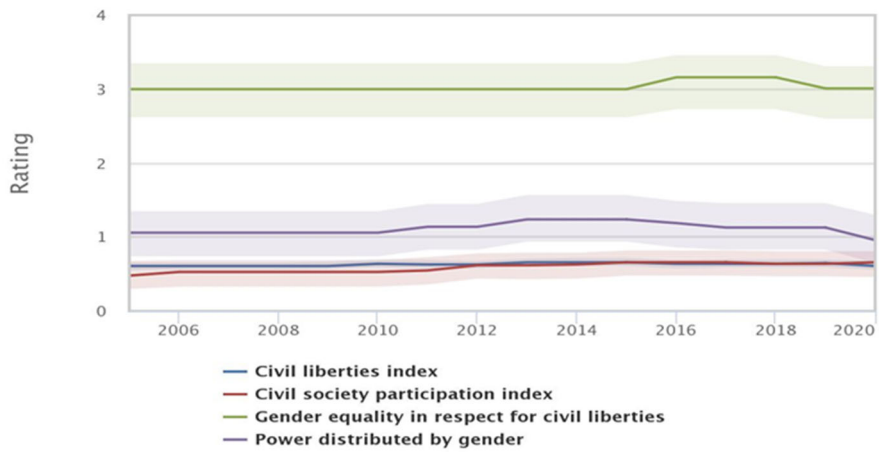


Morocco



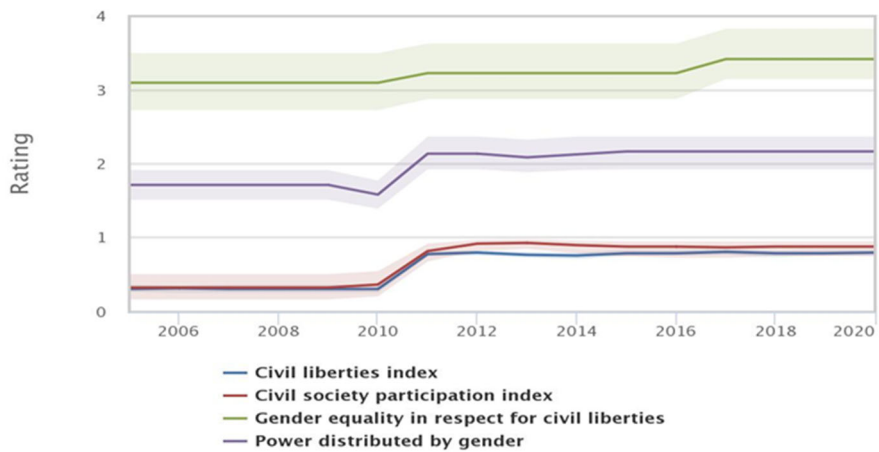
Highcharts.com | V-Dem data version 11.0

Jordan



Highcharts.com | V-Dem data version 11.0

Tunisia



Highcharts.com | V-Dem data version 11.0