# Young People: A Priority for the UN’s RDT MENA and Arab States: Reaching a Common 2 Year Strategic Plan on Young People

Kempinski Hotel Ishtar Dead Sea, Jordan

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## Background

The Regional Directors Team (RDT) team in its annual workplan for the Arab States and the MENA region agreed to ‘develop a framework of joint strategic activities within the area of young people’. Young people were identified as one of the three priority areas of the UN system in MENA and the Arab States at the RDT/RCM meeting held November 2009 primarily because:

* The current demographic situation suggests an unprecedented “youth bulge” that significantly impacts progress towards MDG attainment. Focusing on young people is therefore central to reaching the MDGs at country level and for the Arab States and Middle East and North Africa Region,
* Young people must be seen in the broader socio-political context and prospects of progress in the light of the current financial crisis and economic slowdown on the region
* Young people are an opportunity for further national development and nation/state building in the Arab States and MENA region, yet they are in a vulnerable position and confront a number of challenges in the region. At the heart of these is their preparation, or lack of it, for a responsible adult life largely fostered by quality education and family support. A second major challenge is their ability to participate both economically and civically in their communities and societies.
* Many UN Agencies have a mandate to focus on young people, population strata that embraces ages 10-24, a diverse group with different needs according to their age, sex, socio-economic status, cultural context etc. Many agencies have specific Youth Strategies and it is important to tap into this resource, improve coordination and strengthen the program and policy guidance to countries.
* Despite the commitment of many policy makers in the region to addressing increasing health, including reproductive health needs and concerns of young people, comprehensive young people health, development and protection programmes remain largely underfunded.

In follow up to the workplan, the RDT agreed to develop a regional strategic plan on young people to guide interagency work in this area. UNICEF and UNFPA are co-leading the development of the strategy on behalf of the RDT, leading to this consultation.

A consultant has been hired to develop the document outlining the key areas of added value with recommendations for a joint regional strategic plan of action for 2010 - 2011. The document will include key strategic priorities and broad areas of interventions, as well as an assessment of key regional partnerships to move this agenda forward. **Meeting in Jordan will provide initial input and building block for development of the joint plan**.

## Goal

Address the needs of Young People in the region in the most effective ways to contribute to Young People’s Health, Development, Participation and Civic Engagement in the MENA and Arab State Region.

## Overall Objective

UN agencies in the region to develop a Common UN Regional Directors Team 2 Year Strategic Plan on young people, ages 10-24 for MENA and Arab States Region 2010-2011

## Expected Overall Outcome

At least 7 UN agencies in the MENA and Arab States region develop, agree on and implement a Common United Nations Regional Director’s Team 2 Year Strategic Plan on young people for MENA and Arab States 2010-2011

## Participants

Estimated 20. A cross section of senior technical and program staff involved in adolescent and youth programming and related work from across the UN Agencies. A small number of external invitees will attend as key-note speakers and/or expert participants. Meeting will be facilitated by external facilitator.

## Timeline

* March 2010: The process of the development of the strategic plan, including this consultation 21-22 March in which at least 7 agencies participate at technical and DRD levels.
* By early April 2010: The outcomes of the workshop feed into finalization of a Common Strategic Plan on Young People for MENA and Arab States 2010-2011.
* By end April 2010: The RDT Common Strategic Plan on Young People for MENA and Arab States 2010-2011 approved by RDs and implementation starts.
* Early 2011: Mid-Term Review of the Strategic Plan as part of RD coordination meeting.
* End 2011: Documented improved coordination and synergies in programming among UN organizations resulting in improved support to UNCTs and programmes directed towards young people by the UN and its partners in the MENA and Arab States region.

Note: The Strategic Plan itself will indicate results-activities-indicators of more specific coordinated efforts that are expected to have a direct positive impact on young people in the region, through improved UN coordination and support to its implementing partners.

## Background: Young people in the MENA / Arab States Region

Young people are agents of change whose rights need to be protected and fulfilled. Globally and in the Arab States / MENA region, there is an increased recognition and focus on young people. This is also seen in the revision of the MDGs in early 2008, which added specific indicators related to youth.

The current regional demographic situation suggests an unprecedented “youth bulge” that significantly impacts progress towards MDG attainment. The Arab region has experienced an unparalleled increase in the number of youth. The age group 15-24 numbered around 66 million in 2005, the equivalent of 20.6 per cent of the total population; while in 1980, they numbered 33 million, or 19.5 per cent of the total population. Youth are projected to reach 78 million in 2020, the equivalent of 18.2 per cent of the total population in the Arab region.

A holistic and positive framework applied to the development of young people is a key step in enabling young people to develop their capacities – physical, psychological, spiritual, social, emotional, cognitive and cultural – within a safe and favourable environment, thus guaranteeing fulfilment of their rights. This paradigm shifts the traditional focus on policy and intervention from avoidance of problems and illness to enhancing the protective factors that enable healthy development, and to recognizing the rights and potential of young people. Public policies with a positive outlook on young people recognise the importance of the family, school and community environments, which actively remove barriers to holistic development and provide opportunities enabling full development of the skills, capacities and assets of young people. They take an integrated approach which links fulfilment of rights to health, education, protection and participation. These policies also involve young people as active participants in policies and programs that affect them.

Adopting such positive approach to young people’s development is a key strategy in the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals, the Millennium Declaration and other international commitments. Not only do all eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) impact on young people but young people, themselves, need to be recognised as having a key role to play in their attainment. To date, too little attention has been paid by the international community to building the capacities of young people and creating sustained partnerships with them to strengthen their contribution to the process of achieving the MDGs.

## Proposed outline of the strategy document

### Introduction

This segment will present a narrative justification for designing a regional inter-agency strategic plan on young people in the MENA / Arab States region.

### Methodology

This section will review the process through which the strategic plan was developed to ensure transparency and replicability.

### Strategy definition, purpose and benefits

In order to ensure full comprehension of the document and activities outlined within it, this section will set the stage by defining meaning and purpose of a strategy.

### Situation analysis

As a background to the document, situation analysis from literature review of documents provided to the consultant will be summarized here. This section will include an assessment of key regional partnerships.

### UN agency key strategic priorities (by agency)

From the consultant’s literature review and presentations in the planning meeting, the UN agency priorities will be outlined and clarified.

### Synergies in agency priorities

In order to establish collective strategy for numerous UN agencies, synergies or overlaps in agency priorities will be examined and highlighted

### Potential challenges to implementing the strategy

The strategy document will include a workplan. Here, potential challenges to implementing it will be outlined.

### Strategy outline

This section will outline the actual strategy

### Workplan

This section will outline the workplan, inclusive of activities, outputs/deliverables, responsible parties, resources and the timeline.

### Next steps and conclusions

Finally, this section will present next steps and overall conclusions.

## Select reference documents

UNICEF MENA Adolescent Operational Strategy and Regional Programme – Towards Broader Alliances and Enhanced Interagency Collaboration

UNICEF draft desk review of data on current trends and emerging issues among adolescents and young people in the MENA region

UNFPA draft Mapping of young people programmes in the region of Arab States

UNFPA’s Framework for Action on Adolescent and Young people

Mid-Term Evaluation of UNFPA Regional Programme on Young People