



شبكة الشباب العربي للتنمية المستدامة  
Arab Youth Sustainable Development Network

POLICY PAPER | 2024

# The Role of Youth in Advancing Climate Action in the MENA Region

Contributing to SDG 4 | SDG 7 | SDG 8 | SDG 13 | SDG 16 | SDG 17

## MENA YOUTH & CLIMATE — KEY STATISTICS AT A GLANCE

**355M**

Youth under 30  
in MENA

**60%**

MENA population  
under age 30

**28%**

Youth unemployment  
rate (world's highest)

**14/20**

Most water-stressed  
nations are in MENA

**4°C+**

Projected temp rise  
by 2100 (high scenario)

**267 GW**

Renewable capacity  
target by 2030

**<2%**

Climate finance  
reaching youth orgs

**<8%**

NDCs with formal  
youth mechanisms

Sources: UNFPA 2023 | ILO 2023 | World Bank 2023 | IRENA 2022 | AYS DN Analysis 2023



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Arab Youth Sustainable Development Network

*Advancing Intergenerational Climate Justice Across 22 Arab Nations*

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## About AYSDN

The Arab Youth Sustainable Development Network (AYSDN) is a regional platform dedicated to amplifying youth voices and advancing sustainable development across the Middle East and North Africa. AYSDN engages young people as active agents of change in climate policy, environmental governance, and innovation.

## Disclaimer

*The views expressed in this policy paper are those of AYSDN and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of any government, international organization, or affiliated institution. Data and statistics are sourced from publicly available reports by UNDP, UNEP, World Bank, IPCC, Arab League, IEA, IRENA, FAO, UNFPA, and other credible bodies.*

# 1. Executive Summary

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region confronts an escalating climate emergency of historic proportions. Rising temperatures projected to exceed 4°C by 2100 under high-emission scenarios (IPCC AR6, 2021), intensifying water scarcity afflicting fourteen of the world's twenty most water-stressed nations, accelerating desertification, and surging frequency of extreme heat events collectively threaten the region's economic stability, food security, and social cohesion.

Against this backdrop, MENA's extraordinary youth demographic — with approximately 60% of its total population under 30 years of age (UNFPA, 2023) — represents both the cohort most vulnerable to climate impacts and the region's most promising engine of transformative climate action. Young people are not merely beneficiaries of climate policy; they are innovators, advocates, entrepreneurs, and future decision-makers who must be placed at the center of the region's climate governance architecture.

This policy paper, published by the Arab Youth Sustainable Development Network (AYSDN), presents a comprehensive analysis of youth's current and potential role in advancing climate action across the

MENA region. It identifies five critical barriers, documents six transformative youth-led case studies, and advances actionable policy recommendations across four actor domains.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Over 100 million young people in MENA are directly exposed to compound climate risks including water stress, extreme heat, and food insecurity.
- Youth climate entrepreneurship is growing rapidly, yet fewer than 8% of MENA National Determined Contributions (NDCs) formally incorporate youth participation mechanisms (AYSND, 2023).
- Less than 2% of dedicated climate finance in the MENA region reaches youth-led organizations — a critical and persistent gap.
- 76% of MENA youth environmental organizations report having never been formally consulted by their national government on climate policy (AYSND Survey, 2023).
- Documented youth-led initiatives demonstrate measurable impact when supported by enabling policy environments, as evidenced by case studies from six MENA countries.
- Digital connectivity and informal climate networks are emerging as powerful channels for regional youth mobilization and advocacy.

## PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS AT A GLANCE

- Establish mandatory Youth Climate Advisory Councils with formal consultation rights in all MENA national climate ministries.
- Allocate a minimum 15% of national green fund disbursements to youth-led climate initiatives, with simplified access procedures.
- Integrate comprehensive climate literacy as a core competency in national curricula from secondary level across all Arab states.
- Create a MENA Regional Youth Climate Fund with USD 500 million initial capitalization under the Arab League framework.
- Establish transparent minimum youth quotas of 30% in all national delegations to the UNFCCC COP process.

- Launch a regional Youth Green Economy Accelerator to scale climate startups and social enterprises across the region.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Overview of Climate Challenges in the MENA Region

The MENA region is among the most climate-vulnerable zones on Earth. The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6, 2021) identifies the region as a climate change hotspot, where warming trends are occurring at approximately twice the global average rate. Mean annual temperatures have already risen by approximately 1.5°C relative to pre-industrial levels across significant parts of the region, with projections indicating increases of 3–5°C by 2100 under high-emission trajectories.

This trajectory is illustrated in Figure 1 below, which contrasts historical observed warming with projected pathways under different emission scenarios. The stark divergence between the Paris-aligned pathway and the high-emission scenario underscores the urgency of accelerated climate action — and the existential stakes for young people who will live with these outcomes for decades.

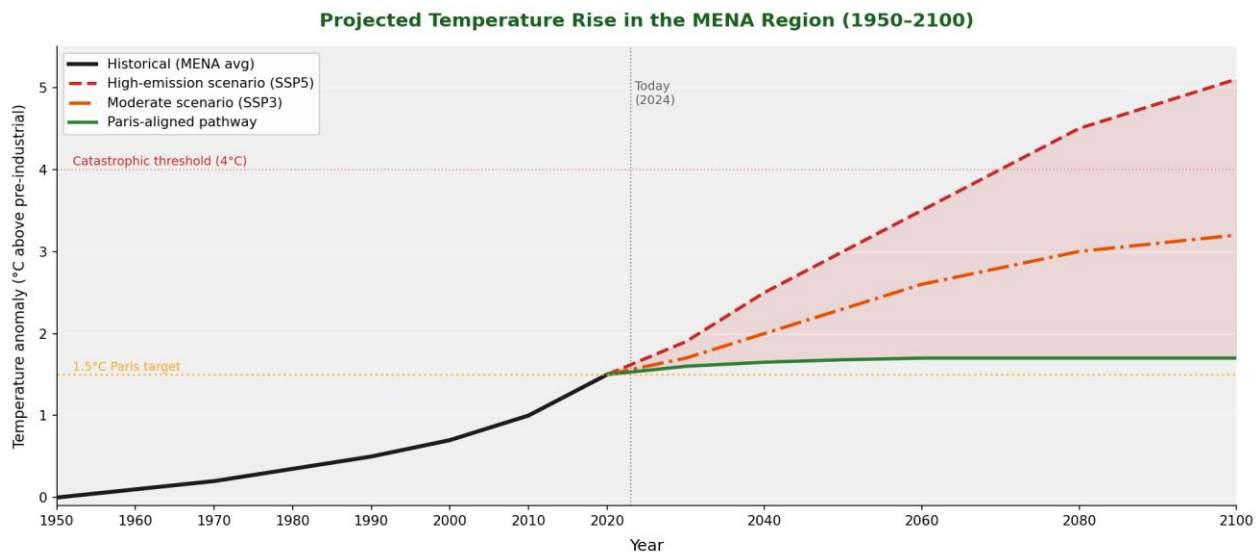


Figure: Figure 1: Projected Temperature Rise in MENA (1950–2100) — Historical vs. Emission Scenarios | Source: IPCC AR6 (2021)

### 2.2 Water Scarcity: The Region's Defining Resource Crisis

Water scarcity represents arguably the most acute environmental security challenge facing MENA. Per capita water availability averages approximately 736 cubic meters per year — well below the internationally recognized water poverty threshold of 1,000 cubic meters (UNDP, 2023). As shown in Figure 2, the region's water stress scores are among the highest on Earth, with Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, and Qatar scoring at or near 100% — effectively at the extreme limit of physical water stress.

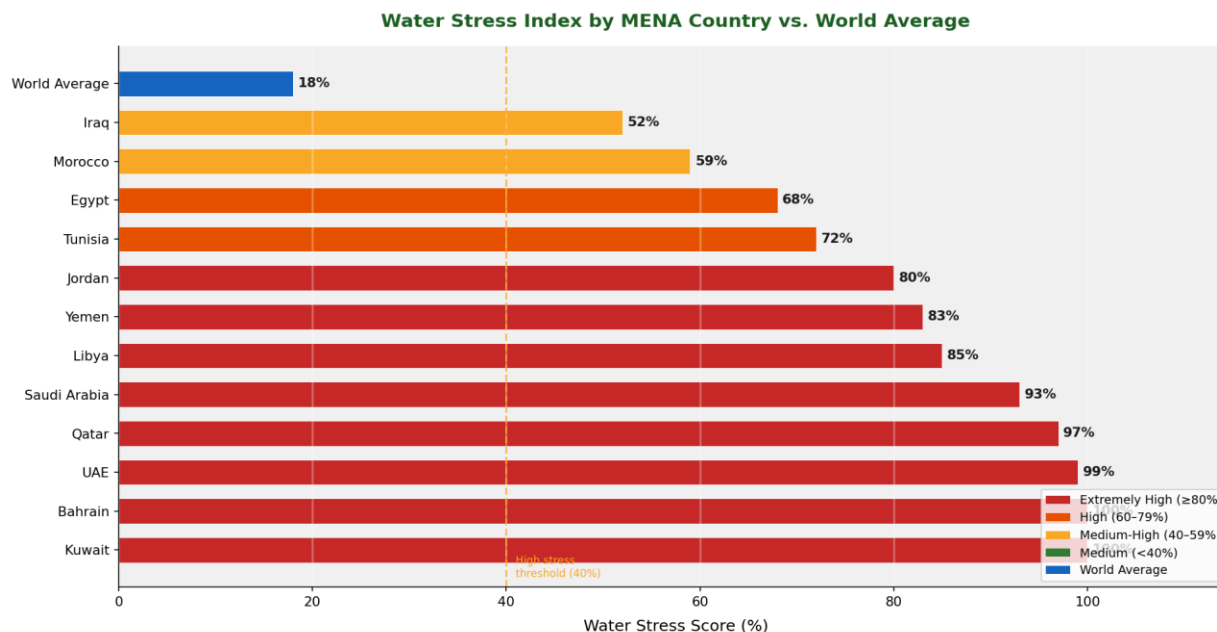
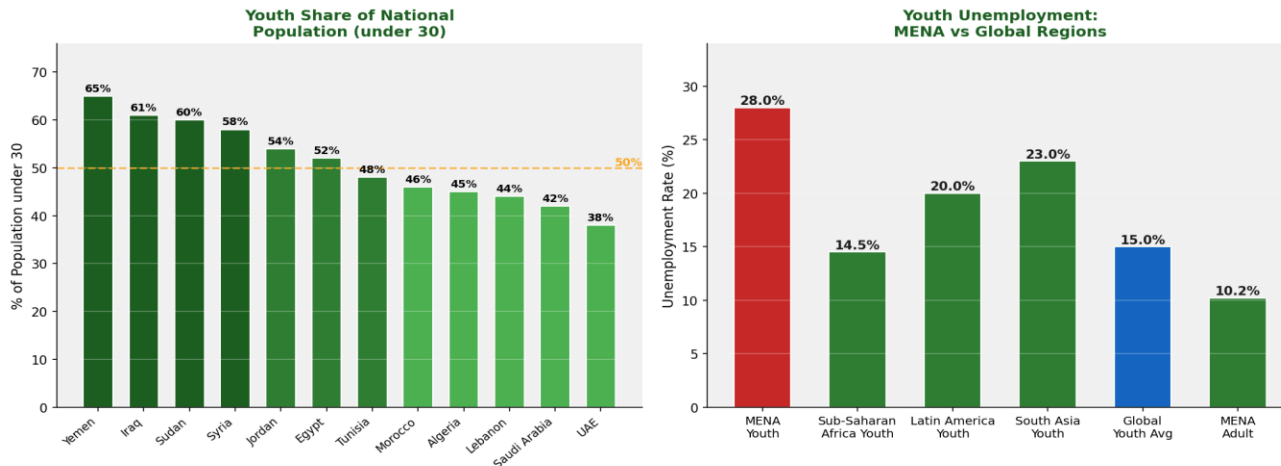


Figure: Figure 2: Water Stress Index Across MENA vs. World Average | Source: World Resources Institute Aqueduct (2023)

## 2.3 The Importance of Youth Demographics

MENA is in the midst of a profound demographic transition. Approximately 355 million people — roughly 60% of the total regional population — are under 30 years of age (UNFPA, 2023). This youth cohort possesses the energy, creativity, and technological fluency to generate transformative climate solutions. However, youth unemployment across MENA stands at approximately 28% — the world's highest regional rate (ILO, 2023) — highlighting that the green economy transition represents not just an environmental imperative but an economic one.

### MENA Youth Demographics Overview



Sources: UNFPA (2023); ILO World Employment and Social Outlook (2023)

Figure: Figure 3: MENA Youth Demographics — Population Shares and Unemployment Comparisons | Sources: UNFPA 2023; ILO 2023

## 2.4 Rationale for Youth Engagement in Climate Governance

Intergenerational equity is a foundational principle of sustainable development governance, enshrined in the 1987 Brundtland Commission definition and embedded throughout the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement, and the 2030 Agenda. SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) collectively create a normative framework demanding youth inclusion. Despite this consensus, fewer than 8% of MENA NDCs contain explicit youth participation mechanisms — a governance deficit this paper directly addresses.

## 3. Climate Challenges in the MENA Region

### 3.1 Key Environmental Threats

#### 3.1.1 Water Scarcity and Groundwater Depletion

Fourteen of the world's twenty most water-stressed nations are located in MENA (World Resources Institute, 2023). The region receives less than 2% of global annual renewable freshwater yet hosts approximately 6% of the global population. The Arab Water Council projects a 25–40% reduction in renewable freshwater resources by 2050 under moderate warming scenarios. Agricultural water demand — accounting for approximately 85% of total water withdrawals in the region — faces mounting pressure, threatening food security across countries already heavily dependent on food imports.

#### 3.1.2 Desertification and Land Degradation

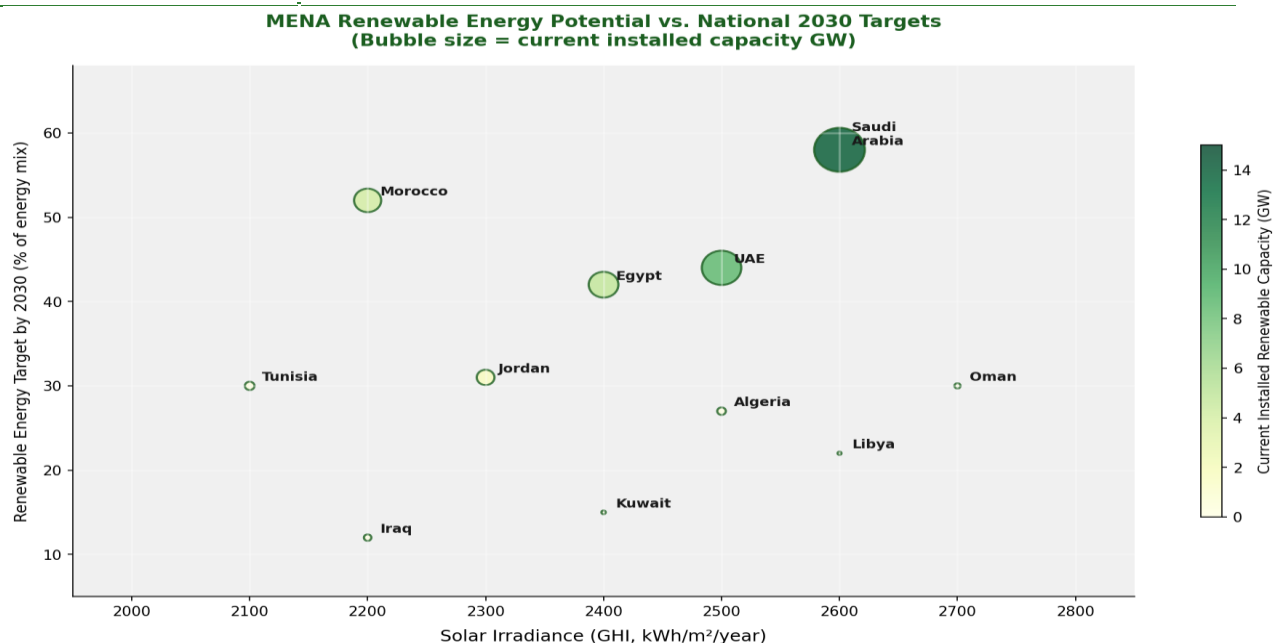
Land degradation and desertification affect approximately 65% of MENA's total land area, with an estimated 12 million hectares of productive agricultural land lost annually across Arab states (UNCCD, 2022). The economic costs of land degradation in MENA are estimated at USD 9 billion annually (World Bank, 2022). In countries such as Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, desertification has directly contributed to rural displacement and conflict over diminishing natural resources.

#### 3.1.3 Extreme Heat Events

A study published in *Nature Climate Change* (2022) found that lethal heat stress events — defined as wet-bulb temperatures exceeding human physiological tolerance thresholds — could become annual occurrences in the Persian Gulf region by 2050 under current emission trajectories. Urban heat islands compound regional temperature increases in rapidly growing cities. The public health burden of heat stress is projected to cost MENA economies an estimated 5–6% of GDP by 2050 (World Bank, 2023).

#### 3.1.4 Energy Transition Imperatives

MENA is home to approximately 48% of proven global oil reserves and 40% of natural gas reserves (IEA, 2023), making it central to both the fossil fuel economy and the energy transition. Simultaneously, the region possesses extraordinary renewable energy potential — parts of North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula receive over 2,500 kWh/m<sup>2</sup> per year in solar irradiance (IRENA, 2023). Figure 4 maps this dual reality: countries with the highest solar resource and the most ambitious renewable targets alongside critically low current installed capacity.



Sources: IRENA Renewable Energy Statistics (2022); IRENA Regional Collaboration Centre MENA (2023)

Figure: Figure 4: MENA Renewable Energy Potential vs. National 2030 Targets | Sources: IRENA 2022; IRENA Regional Collaboration Centre 2023

## 3.2 Socioeconomic Impacts

The World Bank estimates that without sustained climate action, MENA could lose 6–14% of GDP annually by 2050 due to agricultural losses, health costs, infrastructure damage, and reduced labor productivity. Climate-induced food insecurity already affects an estimated 137 million people across Arab states, with import dependency making regional food systems acutely vulnerable to global climate shocks (FAO-WFP, 2023). The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2023) recorded over 4 million climate-related displacements in MENA in 2022 alone.

## 4. Youth Demographics and Climate Engagement

### 4.1 Youth Population Trends in MENA

The Arab world alone has roughly 200 million young people aged 15–29, constituting approximately 30% of the Arab population — more than double the global average proportion. Youth urbanization is a significant trend: approximately 64% of MENA's youth now live in urban areas (UN-Habitat, 2022), where they are exposed to urban heat islands, air pollution, and climate-related flooding. Rural youth, however, experience the most direct impacts of climate change and remain systematically underrepresented in climate governance structures.

**YOUTH POPULATION HIGHLIGHTS**  
Approx. 355 million people under 30 in MENA region (UNFPA, 2023). 60% of total MENA population is under age 30. 72% of MENA youth identify climate change as their top concern in regional surveys. Youth aged 18–29 show 78% digital connectivity in urban MENA settings.

**PROJECTED TRENDS TO 2050 MENA**  
population projected to reach 800 million by 2050, with youth demographics remaining the dominant cohort. 300 million new jobs needed by 2050 to absorb labor market entrants. Green economy sectors projected to generate 24 million jobs globally by 2030 (ILO), offering significant MENA opportunity.

### 4.2 Current Youth Participation in Climate Action

#### 4.2.1 Climate Activism and Digital Advocacy

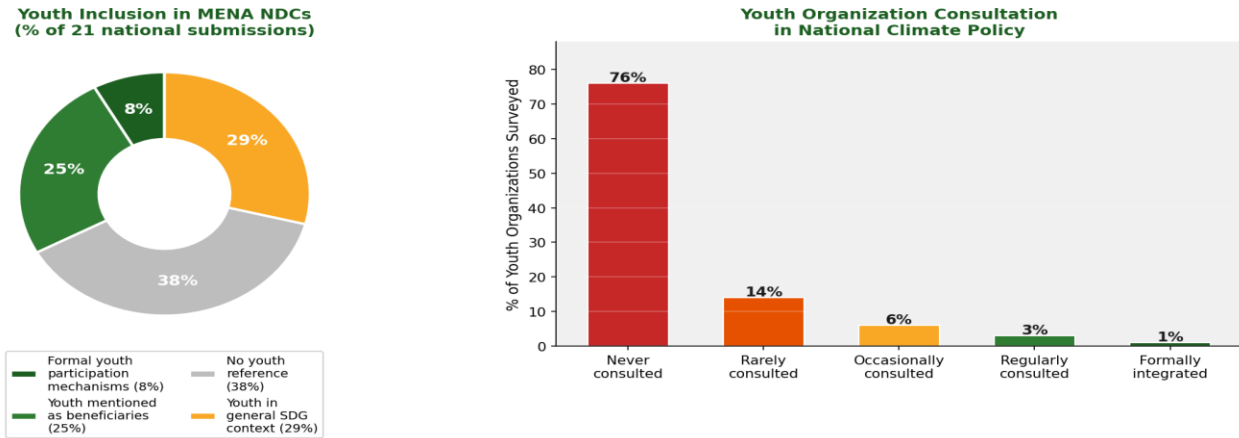
Youth-led environmental groups have proliferated across Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Jordan, organizing around plastic pollution, renewable energy advocacy, climate justice, and biodiversity protection. Social media has become a primary mobilization tool: climate hashtag campaigns in Arabic have reached hundreds of millions of users, demonstrating the scale of youth digital engagement. Instagram, TikTok, X, and YouTube enable MENA youth to amplify climate messaging and coordinate collective action, often circumventing traditional institutional barriers to participation.

#### 4.2.2 Policy Advocacy and COP Engagement

MENA youth are increasingly seeking formal influence in climate policy processes. At COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh (2022) and COP28 in Dubai (2023), MENA youth delegations participated in formal negotiations for the first time at scale. The Arab Youth Climate Movement, formally recognized by the Arab League in 2020, provides a regional institutional framework for youth advocacy at

intergovernmental level. However, as shown in Figure 5, youth organizational access to national policy processes remains critically limited.

#### Youth Voice in MENA Climate Governance: A Participation Audit



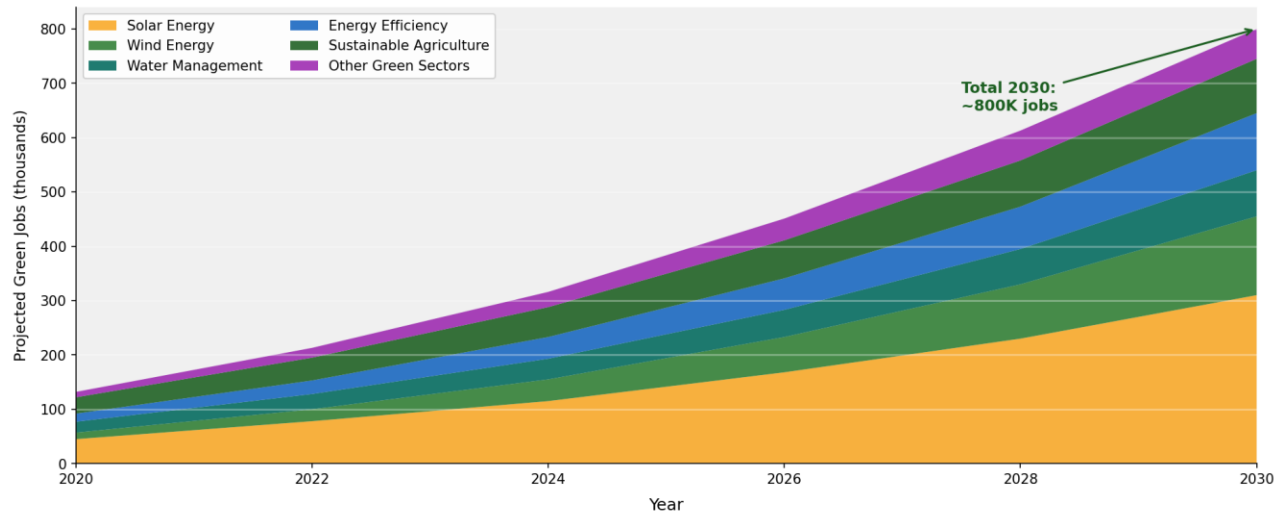
Sources: AYS DN Survey of MENA Youth Climate Organizations (2023, n=184); UNFCCC NDC Registry analysis

Figure: Figure 5: Youth Voice in MENA Climate Governance — NDC Audit & Consultation Survey | Sources: AYS DN Survey 2023; UNFCCC NDC Registry

#### 4.2.3 Youth Climate Entrepreneurship

The MENA cleantech startup ecosystem attracted approximately USD 1.2 billion in venture investment in 2022 (MAGNiTT, 2023), with youth founders playing a significant and growing role. Incubators including the MIT Enterprise Forum Arab World, Wamda, and Masdar Institute's entrepreneurship programs are actively supporting youth climate ventures. Successful youth-led enterprises span solar micro-grid installation, precision irrigation technology, urban vertical farming, and circular economy waste management. Figure 6 illustrates the significant projected growth in green economy employment opportunities across all sectors.

**Projected Green Economy Jobs for MENA Youth (2020–2030)  
By Sector**



Sources: IRENA Renewable Energy and Jobs Annual Review (2023); ILO Green Jobs Assessment (2022); AYSND projections

Figure: Figure 6: Projected Green Economy Jobs for MENA Youth by Sector (2020–2030) | Sources: IRENA 2023; ILO 2022; AYSND Projections

## 5. Barriers to Youth Participation

Despite growing awareness of youth's transformative potential, systemic barriers across institutional, political, financial, and educational domains continue to limit meaningful participation. Figure 7 presents a radar analysis of barrier severity across eight dimensions, comparing current conditions against projected post-reform scenarios based on implementation of this paper's recommendations.

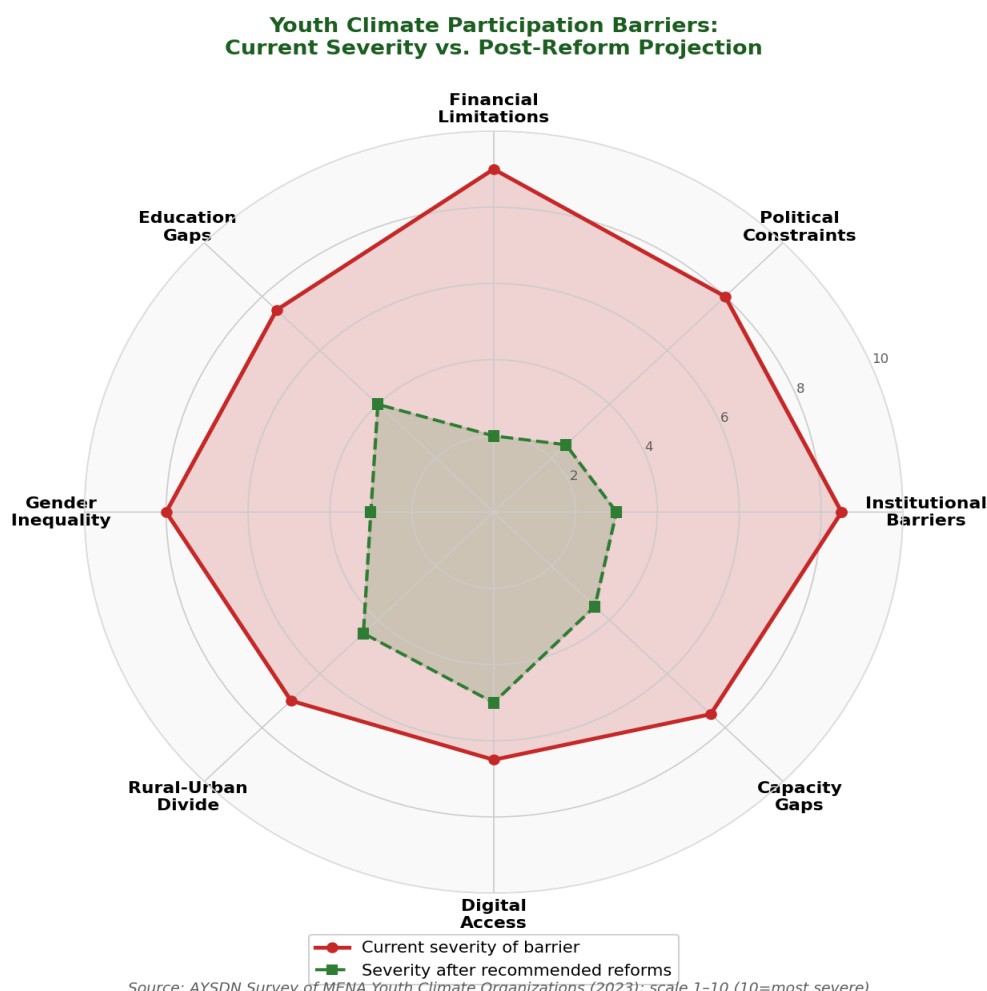


Figure: Figure 7: Youth Climate Participation Barriers — Current Severity vs. Post-Reform Projection | Source: AYSDN Expert Assessment (2023)

### 5.1 Institutional Barriers

The most pervasive barrier is the simple absence of formal mechanisms for youth inclusion in decision-making processes. A review of NDCs submitted by MENA states under the Paris Agreement reveals that fewer than 8% contain explicit references to youth participation mechanisms (AYSDN analysis, 2023). National environmental councils, water resource management boards, and climate advisory

committees are overwhelmingly dominated by senior officials, with minimal youth representation. Parliamentary age requirements for candidacy effectively exclude young people from formal representation during the most consequential decades for climate legislation.

## 5.2 Political and Governance Constraints

Political environments in much of MENA present significant constraints on youth civil society activism. Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2023 report classified 17 of 21 MENA states as 'Not Free' or 'Partly Free.' Restrictions on freedom of assembly, association, and expression — combined with mandatory government registration requirements for civil society organizations — create a chilling effect on independent youth climate organizing. Youth climate activism frequently intersects with politically sensitive issues including energy policy, hydrocarbon revenue management, and water rights, areas where open policy debate is constrained.

Gender dimensions are significant: young women climate advocates face compounded barriers arising from patriarchal social norms, mobility restrictions, and limited professional network access. Despite this, young women are disproportionately represented in the MENA youth climate movement — a testament to their resilience and a reflection of the urgent need for gender-responsive youth climate policies.

## 5.3 Financial and Resource Limitations

Access to financial resources is among the most critical barriers. As shown in Figure 8, less than 2% of climate finance in MENA is directed to youth-led organizations — a persistent and widening gap relative to total climate finance flows. Mainstream climate finance mechanisms apply due diligence and reporting requirements disproportionately burdensome for small youth-led organizations. Venture capital markets remain relatively immature for early-stage climate ventures, with investors preferring established organizations with proven track records. Youth entrepreneurs frequently lack the collateral, credit history, and networks required to access commercial financing.

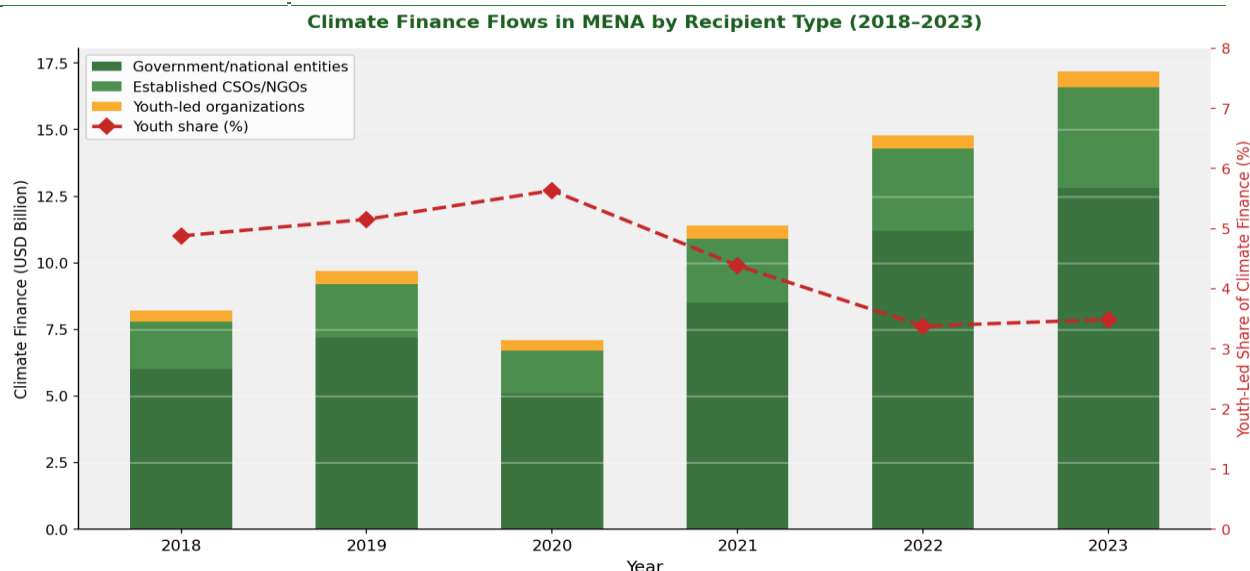


Figure: Figure 8: Climate Finance Flows in MENA by Recipient Type (2018–2023) | Sources: AYSDN-ODI Analysis 2023; Climate Policy Initiative 2023

## 5.4 Capacity and Education Gaps

Climate literacy remains inadequate across MENA's formal education systems. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2022) found that fewer than 40% of MENA countries had formally integrated climate change education into national secondary school curricula. A AYSDN survey found that only 23% of MENA universities offer dedicated postgraduate programs in climate or environmental studies. Beyond formal education, capacity gaps in project management, policy advocacy, data analysis, grant writing, and social enterprise development constrain the organizational effectiveness of youth climate initiatives.

## 6. Case Studies of Youth-Led Climate Action

The following six case studies illustrate the diversity and dynamism of youth-led climate action across the MENA region. They demonstrate that when appropriately supported, young people can design and implement impactful climate solutions at local, national, and regional scales. Figure 9 provides a comparative impact overview across all six cases.

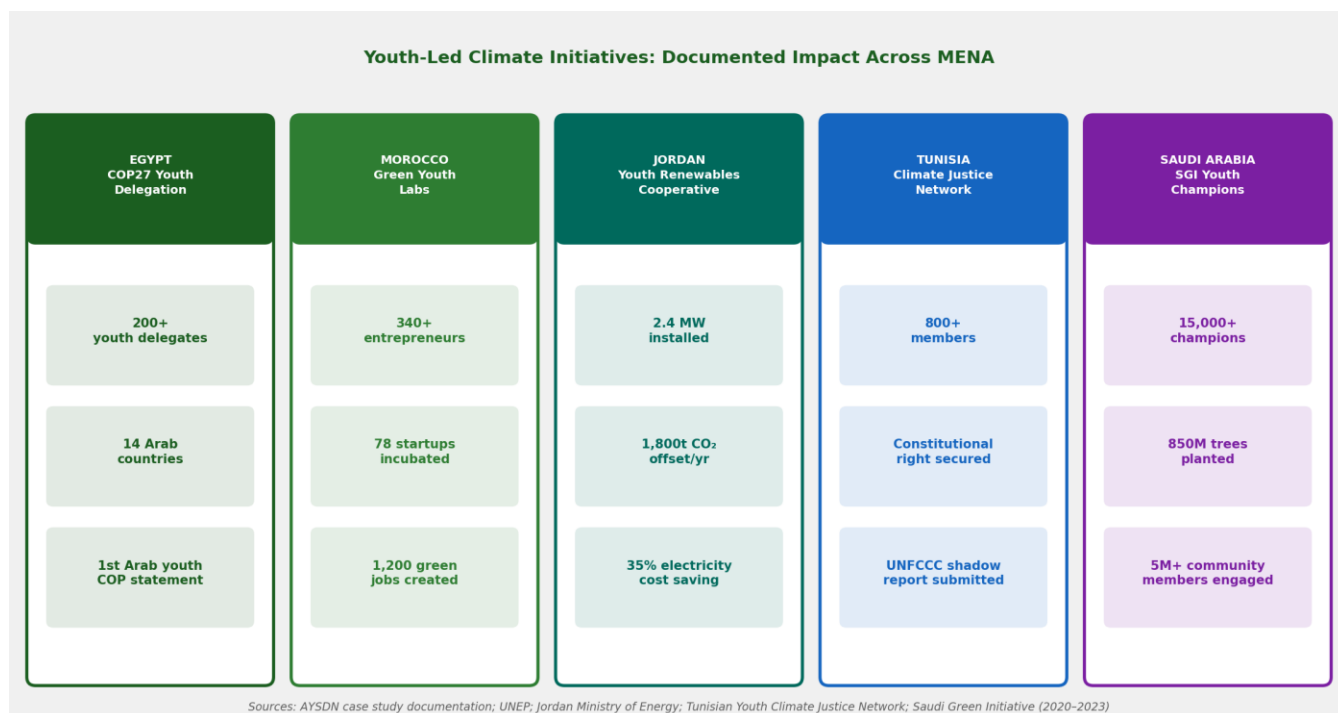


Figure: Figure 9: Youth-Led Climate Initiatives — Comparative Impact Dashboard | Sources: AYSDN Case Documentation; UNEP; SGI; JYREC; TYCJN (2020–2023)

### EGYPT | Youth Delegation at COP27, Sharm el-Sheikh (2022)

Egypt's hosting of COP27 created an unprecedented opportunity for Arab youth engagement in the UNFCCC process. The Egyptian Ministry of Environment, in partnership with AYSDN, facilitated the largest-ever Arab youth delegation to a COP event — over 200 young climate advocates from 14 Arab countries. Youth delegates participated in formal negotiations, hosted side events on climate finance and loss and damage, and led a dedicated Arab Youth Climate Forum. The delegation successfully secured inclusion of youth-specific language in Egypt's COP27 Presidency statement, marking the first time Arab youth voices had been formally reflected in a COP Presidency outcome. This initiative demonstrated the potential of government-youth co-design in international climate diplomacy and established a precedent that was built upon at COP28.

### **MOROCCO | Green Youth Labs — Youth Climate Innovation Hubs (2021–Present)**

Launched in 2021 by a coalition of Moroccan youth organizations with support from UNEP and GIZ, the Green Youth Labs established eight climate innovation hubs across Casablanca, Marrakech, Rabat, Fez, and Agadir. Each hub provides co-working space, technical mentorship, seed funding averaging USD 25,000 per venture, and market linkage support. By 2023, the initiative had supported over 340 young entrepreneurs, incubated 78 climate-focused startups, and generated an estimated 1,200 green jobs. Successful ventures include solar micro-grid cooperatives serving rural communities, precision irrigation technology firms, and urban vertical farming enterprises. Morocco's model is now being replicated in Tunisia and Senegal with UNEP support.

### **JORDAN | Youth Renewable Energy Cooperative Initiative (JYREC, 2020–Present)**

In response to Jordan's acute energy import dependency (approximately 93% of energy imported), students and young engineers launched the Jordan Youth Renewable Energy Cooperative (JYREC) in 2020. Operating across Amman, Irbid, and Zarqa, JYREC develops community-owned solar installations on public buildings, schools, and mosques. By 2023, JYREC had installed 2.4 MW of solar capacity across 47 installations, reducing community electricity bills by an average of 35% and offsetting 1,800 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> annually. Over 2,000 young Jordanians were empowered as clean energy technicians and project managers. JYREC received official recognition from Jordan's Ministry of Energy and was awarded the 2023 Arab Sustainable Energy Award.

### **TUNISIA | Youth Climate Justice Network — Legal Advocacy (2019–Present)**

Tunisia's relatively open civil society environment created space for an innovative youth-led climate justice movement. The Tunisian Youth Climate Justice Network (TYCJN), established in 2019 and comprising over 800 members, has pioneered legal and regulatory mechanisms including administrative complaints against environmental permit violations, formal petitions to media regulatory authorities regarding climate misinformation, and submission of a landmark Shadow Report on Tunisia's climate policy implementation to the UNFCCC. Most significantly, TYCJN successfully campaigned for the inclusion of a constitutional right to a healthy environment in Tunisia's 2022 Constitution — one of the first MENA countries to enshrine this right at constitutional level.

## **UAE / REGIONAL | Arab Youth Climate Movement at COP28, Dubai (2023)**

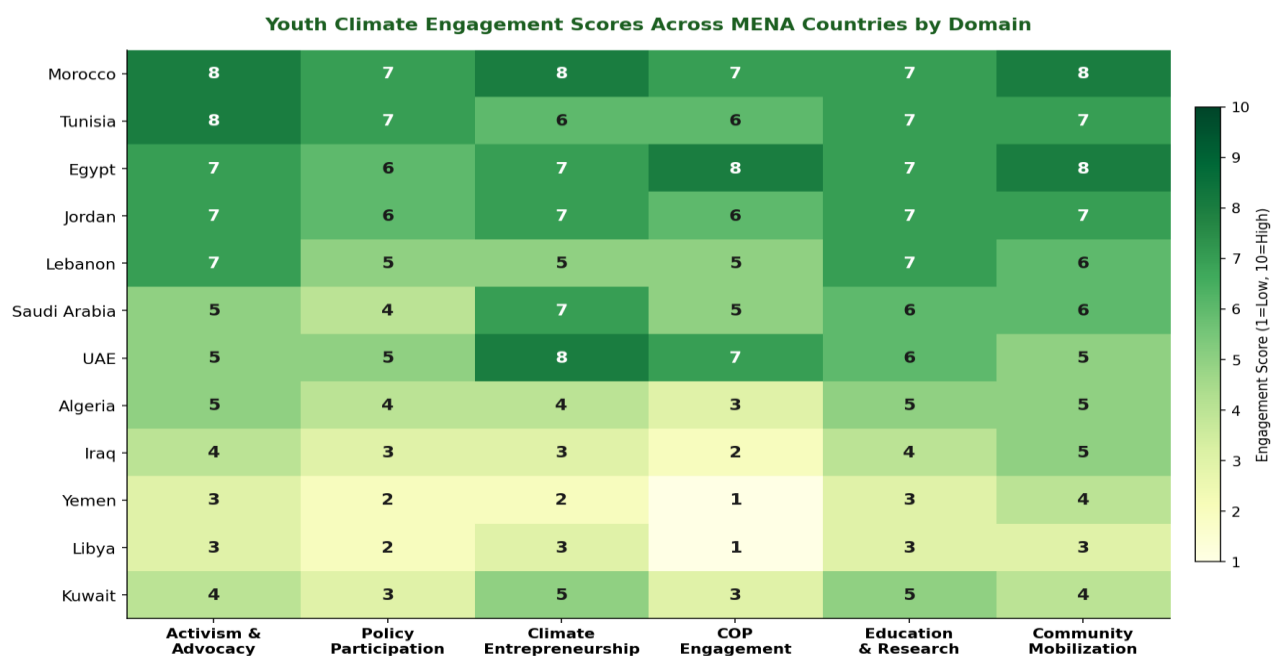
The UAE's hosting of COP28 represented the most significant engagement of Arab youth in global climate governance to date. The Arab Youth Climate Movement (AYCM) mobilized over 500 youth representatives from across MENA and secured recognition as a formal observer constituency in the UNFCCC process — a major institutional breakthrough. AYCM participated in ministerial dialogues on fossil fuel phase-out, climate finance, and the Global Stocktake. The AYCM Dubai Declaration, endorsed by youth representatives from 18 Arab states, was formally transmitted to the Arab League Council where it received official intergovernmental consideration — the first formal consideration of an Arab youth climate document at this level.

## **SAUDI ARABIA | Saudi Green Initiative Youth Champions Program (2021–Present)**

Launched as part of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 sustainability agenda, the SGI Youth Champions Program recruits and trains young Saudis aged 18–30 as volunteer environmental ambassadors for programs including the 10 billion trees planting initiative. By 2023, the program had engaged over 15,000 Youth Champions across all Saudi regions, contributing to 850 million trees planted, organizing 2,400 environmental awareness events, and engaging more than 5 million community members. The program has created structured pathways for young Saudis to influence SGI program design through formal consultation mechanisms — a notable example of government-institutionalized youth engagement in climate action at national scale.

## 7. Policy Opportunities

A convergence of global normative frameworks, regional institutional developments, and growing youth mobilization creates a historically significant window of opportunity. Figure 10 illustrates the current variation in youth climate engagement across MENA countries and domains, revealing both leading practitioners and countries with significant development potential.



Source: AYSDN Expert Assessment (2023); scores based on documented organizational activity, policy access, and funding flows

Figure: Figure 10: Youth Climate Engagement Scores Across MENA Countries by Domain | Source: AYSDN Expert Assessment (2023)

### 7.1 National Climate Governance Reform

NDC revision cycles under the Paris Agreement's five-year ratchet mechanism provide a structured opportunity for MENA governments to institutionalize youth participation. The next round of NDC revisions, due by 2025, should include mandatory youth consultation processes and explicit youth-specific targets across mitigation, adaptation, and just transition dimensions. Countries including Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan — which have already engaged youth organizations in informal NDC review processes — can serve as regional champions.

National Green Growth and Just Transition strategies offer additional integration points. Several MENA governments are actively developing comprehensive green economy roadmaps — including Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 sustainability pillar, Egypt's Vision 2030, and Morocco's New Development Model — that explicitly reference youth as target beneficiaries. The opportunity exists to convert these

mentions from aspirational to operational, with specific institutional mechanisms, funding allocations, and monitoring frameworks.

## 7.2 Green Economy and Youth Employment

IRENA's Renewable Energy and Jobs Annual Review (2023) projects that transitioning to a predominantly renewable energy system in MENA could generate over 800,000 direct jobs by 2030. Governments that proactively align technical and vocational education programs with green economy skill requirements will position their youth cohorts competitively in the emerging clean energy labor market. Figure 11 maps the SDG alignment of youth climate action — illustrating the breadth of sustainable development goals that can be advanced through focused youth climate engagement.

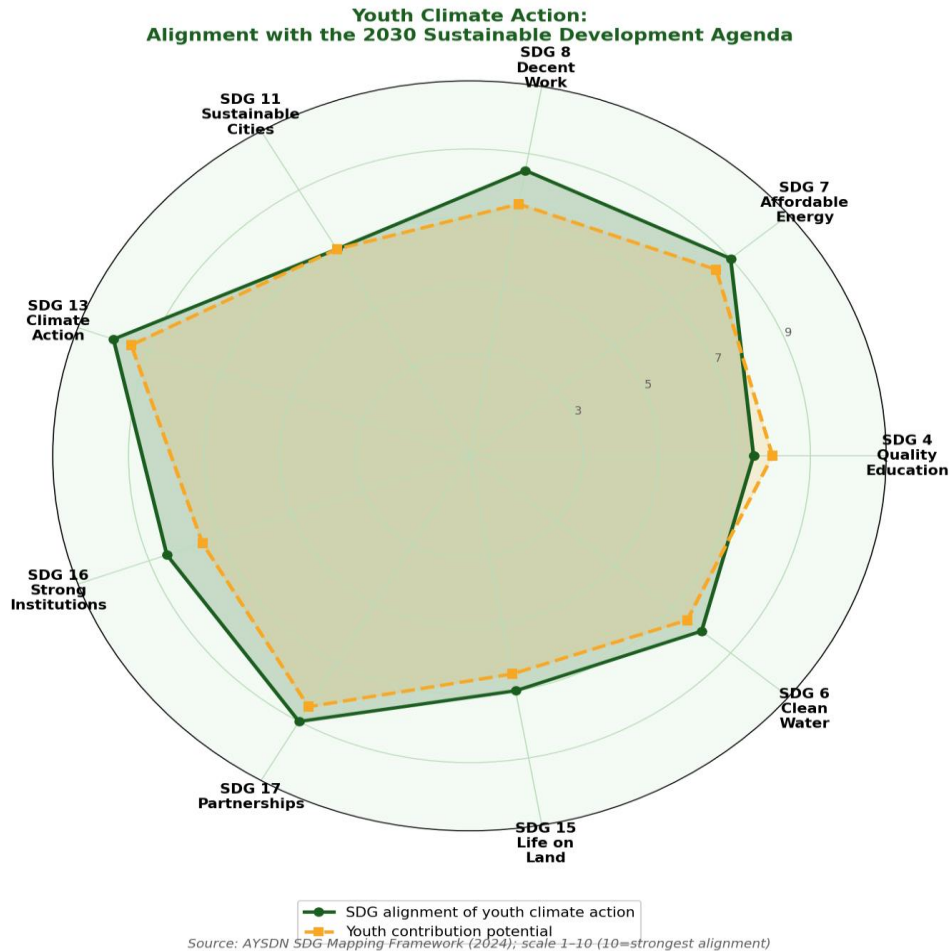


Figure: Figure 11: Youth Climate Action — Alignment with the 2030 SDG Agenda | Source: AYSDN SDG Mapping Framework (2024)

## 7.3 Climate Finance Accessibility

Reforming climate finance architecture to improve youth access requires coordinated action across national, regional, and international levels. At national level, dedicated youth climate financing windows

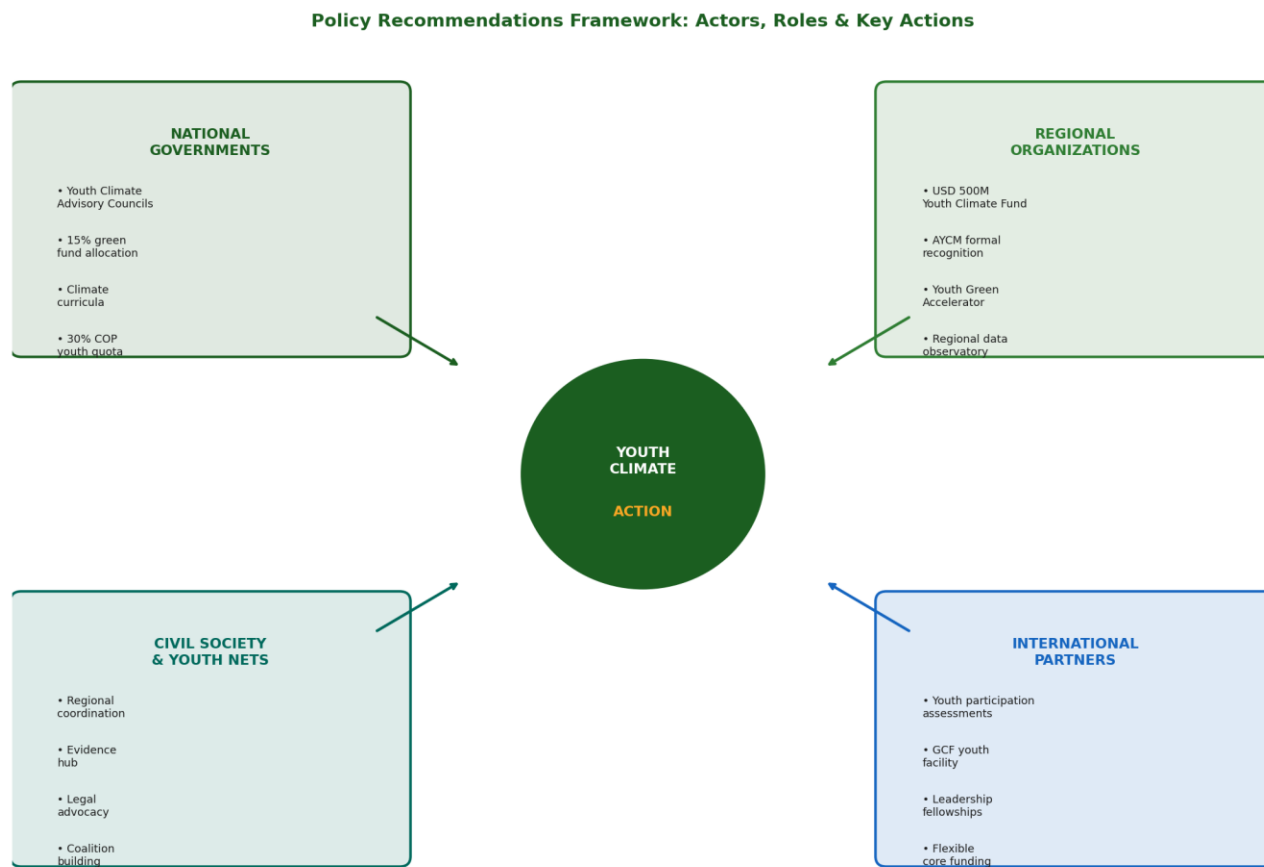
within existing green funds — with simplified application procedures, smaller minimum grant sizes (USD 5,000–50,000), mentored application support, and flexible reporting requirements — can dramatically improve youth access to resources. The Green Climate Fund's Enhanced Direct Access modality offers a mechanism for introducing youth-accessible sub-windows within nationally owned fund architectures.

## 7.4 Digital Technology and Innovation

Artificial intelligence, precision data analytics, and digital platform technologies present unprecedented opportunities for scaling youth-led climate innovation. Open data initiatives on environmental monitoring — including air quality, water quality, and land use change — can enable youth researchers and advocates to conduct independent climate accountability work. Several MENA countries including Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia have made significant progress on environmental data transparency; extending these models across the region would empower youth-led climate monitoring networks.

## 8. Policy Recommendations

Based on the analysis presented in this paper, AYSDN advances the following evidence-based policy recommendations, organized by actor and designed to be mutually reinforcing. Figure 12 summarizes the overall framework.



Source: AYSDN Policy Analysis (2024)

Figure: Figure 12: Policy Recommendations Framework — Actors, Roles & Key Actions | Source: AYSDN Policy Analysis (2024)

### 8.1 NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

**1.** Establish mandatory Youth Climate Advisory Councils attached to each country's primary climate ministry, with formal consultation rights on NDC development, climate budget allocations, and major environmental policy decisions. Councils should meet at minimum quarterly with their respective ministers, with agendas and response documents publicly published.

2. Allocate a minimum 15% of annual national green fund disbursements to youth-led climate initiatives, with simplified procurement and reporting requirements. Establish dedicated Youth Climate Grant windows with maximum 10-page applications and 60-day response times.
3. Integrate comprehensive climate literacy across secondary and tertiary education curricula by 2026, including systems thinking, climate science, policy analysis, green economy skills, and environmental ethics. Develop dedicated green economy vocational training pathways aligned with projected labor market demand in solar, water management, and sustainable construction sectors.
4. Establish transparent minimum youth quotas of 30% in official national delegations to the UNFCCC COP process, with financial support for youth delegates from lower-income countries provided through national budgets or dedicated donor partnerships.
5. Create National Youth Green Economy Fellowships — competitive, paid fellowship programs placing young graduates in government ministries, national energy agencies, and environmental regulatory bodies for 12–24 month periods, building a pipeline of youth with direct climate governance experience.
6. Revise civil society registration requirements to create a streamlined, reduced-burden category for youth environmental organizations, with online registration processes, reduced minimum membership requirements, and explicit legal protections for climate advocacy activities.

## 8.2 REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS (ARAB LEAGUE, ISDB, AFESD, IRENA)

1. Establish a MENA Regional Youth Climate Fund with an initial capitalization target of USD 500 million, co-financed by Arab League member states, Gulf development funds, and international climate finance sources. The fund should prioritize youth-led mitigation, adaptation, and innovation projects, with minimum ticket size of USD 10,000 and maximum of USD 2 million.
2. Formalize the Arab Youth Climate Movement as a permanent advisory body to the Committee of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment, with dedicated agenda time at annual ministerial meetings and the right to submit formal policy positions on regional climate issues.
3. Launch a MENA Youth Green Economy Accelerator under IRENA's Regional Collaboration Centre framework, providing 12-month intensive support — including technical assistance, market access, seed funding, and mentorship — to 100 youth-led climate startups per annual cohort.

4. Develop a MENA Regional Climate Education Framework establishing common learning outcomes, pedagogical standards, and assessment tools for climate education across Arab school systems, enabling knowledge sharing across 22 member states.

5. Establish a MENA Youth Climate Data Observatory — an open-access regional platform providing environmental monitoring data, climate vulnerability indices, and green economy investment flows — managed jointly by youth research networks and regional scientific institutions.

### 8.3 INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS (UN, WORLD BANK, GCF, BILATERAL DONORS)

1. Require youth participation assessments as a mandatory component of all climate-related development programming in MENA, establishing minimum standards for youth consultation, co-design, and implementation partnership in projects above USD 10 million. Link these requirements to project performance ratings and fund renewal decisions.

2. Establish a dedicated MENA Youth Climate Finance Facility within the Green Climate Fund's Enhanced Direct Access modality, channeling grant and concessional loan financing through accredited national entities to youth-led sub-projects, with a minimum 20% allocation from MENA country envelopes.

3. Substantially increase investment in youth climate leadership development, including expanded regional fellowship programs, south-south exchange programs connecting MENA youth with Global South climate innovators, and structured mentorship programs pairing senior professionals with youth climate leaders.

4. Provide flexible, multi-year core funding to independent civil society and youth organizations in MENA that covers operating costs — not just project costs — with harmonized reporting requirements across major donors to reduce administrative burden on youth organizations.

5. Support collection and public dissemination of gender-disaggregated data on youth climate participation, entrepreneurship, and employment across MENA, enabling evidence-based monitoring of progress and identification of persistent equity gaps.

### 8.4 CIVIL SOCIETY AND YOUTH NETWORKS

1. Strengthen regional coordination and knowledge exchange through a MENA Youth Climate Action Alliance — a formal network enabling organizations across the region to share

evidence of impact, coordinate joint advocacy positions, and present a unified voice in regional and international climate governance forums.

**2.** Invest in organizational capacity building for youth-led climate organizations, including governance structures, financial management, monitoring and evaluation, and communications — capacities that are prerequisites for accessing formal funding streams and government consultation processes.

**3.** Develop and maintain a MENA Youth Climate Evidence Hub — a publicly accessible database of case studies, impact data, and lessons learned from youth-led initiatives — to strengthen advocacy with evidence and reduce duplicated effort across the movement.

**4.** Pursue strategic litigation and legal advocacy as a complement to political advocacy, working with international legal support organizations to develop climate constitutionalism and environmental rights jurisprudence across MENA legal systems — building on the precedent of Tunisia's 2022 constitutional climate provisions.

**5.** Actively cultivate intergenerational dialogue and collaboration with established environmental civil society organizations, private sector sustainability champions, and sympathetic government officials — recognizing that systemic change requires broad coalitions that extend beyond youth constituencies.

## 9. Conclusion

The climate crisis confronting the MENA region is not a distant threat — it is an accelerating present reality reshaping livelihoods, displacing communities, straining water and food systems, and complicating economic development trajectories across 22 countries. The decisions made in the next decade — on energy transition, climate adaptation, environmental governance, and green economy investment — will determine whether MENA's young people inherit a region of climate-driven fragility or a region that successfully navigates the transition to sustainable prosperity.

The evidence presented in this policy paper firmly establishes that youth are not peripheral to this challenge: they are central to its resolution. MENA's 355 million young people bring energy, creativity, technological fluency, and a direct long-term stake in climate outcomes that no other demographic can replicate. The youth-led initiatives documented in these pages — from Egypt's COP27 delegation, to Morocco's Green Youth Labs, to Jordan's renewable energy cooperatives, to Tunisia's constitutional climate advocacy — demonstrate that when empowered, MENA youth are capable of driving systemic change at national and regional levels.

Yet empowerment is not charity — it is architecture. Transforming youth from peripheral stakeholders to central actors in MENA climate governance requires deliberate, sustained, and coordinated action across the institutional, financial, educational, and political domains analyzed in this paper. It requires governments to open decision-making structures and resource streams to young people. It requires regional organizations to create dedicated mechanisms for youth engagement and youth-oriented financing. It requires international partners to demand and support youth participation as a standard of quality in climate programming. And it requires youth networks themselves to build the organizational capacity, evidentiary base, and strategic coalitions needed to translate advocacy into policy change.

### FUTURE OUTLOOK

The trajectory of youth engagement in MENA climate action will be shaped by several critical variables over the next decade: the pace of democratic governance reform and civil society space; the scale of green economy investment and its accessibility to youth entrepreneurs; the quality of climate education reaching the next generation; and the evolution of global climate finance architecture toward youth-inclusive models.

AYSND is cautiously optimistic about this trajectory. The growing momentum of youth climate organizing, the increasing recognition by governments and international bodies of youth's strategic importance, and the demonstrated impact of youth-led initiatives across the region all suggest that the conditions for transformative change are forming.

The question is whether the institutions of power — national governments, regional bodies, international development partners — will act with sufficient urgency, ambition, and structural commitment to match the moment. The recommendations in this paper offer a roadmap. AYSDN calls on all stakeholders to implement them without delay, in genuine partnership with the young people who have the most to contribute — and the most to gain — in the urgent work of advancing climate action across the MENA region.

*“The youth of today are not the leaders of tomorrow — they are the leaders of today.”*

— Arab Youth Climate Movement, Dubai Declaration, COP28, 2023

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*Empowering Arab Youth for a Sustainable Future*

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