



منتدى الشباب حول السياسات الشبابية
Youth Forum for Youth Policy



The Youth Policy in Lebanon



Case Study

Prepared by the Youth Advocacy Process (YAP)
&
The Youth Forum for National Youth Policies

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Youth in Lebanon

The age bracket for youth in Lebanon is defined to be 15- 29 years old, as a result of an agreement between the Ministry of Youth& Sports, youth organizations, and the United Nations Youth Task Force, and based on socio- economic characteristics relevant to Lebanon. This age group makes up around 27% of the total population of Lebanon ¹.

However, youth in Lebanon face discrimination at both the society and law levels. On one hand, society looks at youth as the “generation of tomorrow”; hence, their active role is postponed till tomorrow. On the other hand, the law does not allow youth participation in the public sphere as decision makers. The most 2 prominent examples are: the voting and candidature age in the elections law; the age to form and join associations in the associations’ law known as law 1909.

The Background of Youth Policy

Many NGOs work in youth development across Lebanon whereby youth development projects focus on mobilizing youth and empowering them to be active citizens; this is done mainly through trainings, planning and implementing youth communal projects. However, and after many reflections, it became clear that youth development cannot be achieved nationally in the presence of laws that prohibit youth active participation in the various sectors. From here stemmed the need to have a youth friendly policy in Lebanon. From here was the launch of the “Youth Advocacy Process- YAP” in the year 2000.

YAP was launched in 2000 by a group of youth organizations, and in partnership with the newly established Ministry of Youth& Sports by then, and the United Nations Youth Task Force. It is a network formed of youth NGOs that have engaged collectively in lobbying efforts with the aim to have a youth policy in Lebanon that provides young people with opportunities to actively engage in all spheres as decision makers.



1- This average is based on several statistics mentioned in different studies, mainly “The Immigration of Lebanese Youth and their Future Plans” April 2009 St. Joseph University; and “Lebanon’s Profile” 2008, Naseej regional project at Save the Children.

Methodology

I. First research phase: 2001- 2002

The first national seminar held in 2001 at the UNESCO Palace in Beirut with the participation of youth, youth organizations, ministries that work with youth, UN agencies working with youth, youth clubs, youth councils at Universities... the outcomes of this conference focused on:

- Setting a common understanding of “Youth Development” i.e. youth participating in decision making processes;
- Defining youth needs and aspirations, as perceived by youth themselves;
- Classifying youth needs and aspirations into 4 categories as follows: citizenship & democratic freedoms; health and education; economic& social issues; rights of Palestinian youth in Lebanon, (since YAP works with youth in Lebanon, not only Lebanese youth);
- Forming 4 Task Forces around the above mentioned sectors whose members are youth representatives of YAP’s member organizations;
- Based on this, many youth policy recommendations were development by youth in each task force.

The second national conference held in July 2002 at the UNESCO Palace in Beirut with the participation of youth, youth organizations, ministries that work with youth, UN agencies working with youth, youth clubs, youth councils at Universities... the outcomes of this conference focused on:

- Presenting the youth policy recommendations to the Ministry of Youth& Sports.

Based on this, the preparations for the lobbying phase kicked off with the aim to build consensus on the youth policy recommendations.

II. Lobbying phase: 2002- till present

While lobbying, YAP has worked at 4 levels in parallel and as follows:

- Producing resources/ publications on the policy recommendations that covers both the practical experience of YAP and scientific information on the various youth policy topics;
- Organizing capacity building workshops for youth members, so that they advocate their rights actively;
- Organizing lobbying meetings with relevant decision makers with the aim to pressure them to adopt the policy recommendations and transform them into legislation and policies;
- Building partnership with the media over the youth policy topics, with the aim to build a supporting public opinion around it.

As a result of the efficient work of YAP, the United Nations Youth Task Force supported further the work on youth policy through the implementation of the “Lebanese Youth Empowerment & Participation” project in 2004 and which resulted in:

III. Second research phase:

- Developing a sectoral youth policy document based on YAP’s recommendations, and which includes youth policy recommendations classified into 5 sectors as follows: demographic characteristic & migration; education & culture; health; economic participation & labor; social inclusion & political participation.
- Developing a study entitled “National Youth Profile” which is in 2 parts: “Situation Analysis of Lebanese Youth” and “Youth Participation in the Lebanese Law”
- Developing a directory, comprising a data base on established youth NGOs and youth wings in political parties.

Interim Achievement...

The interim achievement is the Council of Ministers’ decision No. 80/ 2007 entitled “National Advice over the Youth Policy” in 2007, and this means the approval of the Council of Ministers to launch a consensus building process over the youth policy document. The “Advice” included:

- Organizing 15 workshops with youth groups across the Lebanese regions over the content of the youth policy document, and including their outcomes into the policy document; these workshops were held in 2009 and reached out to 500 parties that work with youth, including NGOs, political parties, schools, universities, municipalities, syndicates, ministries...
- Organizing 5 sectoral workshops with experts in 2009 whereby the outcomes of the youth workshops above were reviewed and the policy document was amended accordingly.
- Establishing the “Youth Forum for National Youth Policies” in 2009, whose members are youth NGOs and youth wings in political parties nationwide, and whose role is to monitor the youth policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes.
- Starting the work on a “Youth Card” addressing youth aged 15- 26 years old, which aims at providing services relevant to youth, discounts, as well as enhancing youth’s engagement in community service initiatives across the country.

As a result, the youth policy document was finalized by end of 2010; it is a credible document that reflects youth voices, and has the consent of all relevant stakeholders. The youth policy document is written following the outline below:

- ♣ **General introduction**
- ♣ **Chapter 1:** conceptual framework of the youth policy in Lebanon
- ♣ **Chapter 2:** objectives of the youth policy in Lebanon: empowerment and participation
- ♣ **Chapter 3:** challenges facing youth in Lebanon
- ♣ **Chapter 4:** Youth policy recommendations in Lebanon

The Characteristics of the youth policy experience in Lebanon within “YAP” and the “Youth Forum for National Youth Policies”

- The presence of **consensus over the youth policy document** from all stakeholders, including: youth, youth NGOs and political parties, relevant ministries, experts, United Nations agencies working with youth. Moreover, the President of the Republic, the Speaker of the House, and the Prime Minister support its endorsement.
- Being a **cumulative process** where interim achievements have led to having a comprehensive youth policy document that has been paving its way to the Council of Ministers for endorsement. One interim achievement has been the establishment of the Ministry of Youth & Sports in the year 2000, as a result of lobbying efforts by civil society, after it was a Directorate under the Ministry of Education.
- Being a **participatory process**, whereby Lebanese youth from all political, religious, intellectual, and regional backgrounds participated in the development and review of the youth policy document. The current youth policy document is a “basket” of policy recommendations that reflects the diversity in Lebanon. It is an evidence of young people’s tolerance and acceptance of each other’s opinions, away from narrow favoritism. This is an unprecedented model that we should maintain, and advocate for the endorsement of the youth policy full document without any truncations.
- Being a **democratic process**, whereby all stakeholders, especially youth from NGOs and political parties, have had the opportunity to make their voices heard and reflected in the policy document.
- The presence of **diversity** inside the “Youth Forum for National Youth Policies”. Today, the Forum has 36 members from NGOs and political parties who belong to all colors of the Lebanese political spectrum; but who have agreed to have concerted efforts over the youth policy document, following the “issue based” approach.
- Working within a **network** (i.e. YAP and the Youth Forum) has required the presence of a clear and unified vision among all members, and the making of compromises at the individual i.e. NGO or political party level for the sake of the collective benefit i.e. the benefit of all youth in Lebanon who are affected by the policy document.
- Accepting the concept of the **“basket”** by all members in the Youth Forum i.e. the basket that includes all youth policy recommendations, despite the presence of deep political strives at the national level.
- Being **“bottom up”** i.e. from youth to the government: the youth policy document is the product of 12 years of hard work with youth, who articulated the policy recommendations based on their needs and aspirations, and presented them to the government. It is the first time in the Arab world where youth present policy recommendations to the government, not the government policy trickling down to young people.

Challenges:

- **“Bottom- up”**: despite being a sign of strength, yet, it has caused delays in the policy formulation process.

- **The political and security situation in Lebanon:** the ongoing political strife and the absence of security and safety in Lebanon over the past years have caused several delays facing the endorsement of the youth policy document by the Council of Ministers.
- **The absence of the culture of networking among stakeholders over the youth policy:** there has always been someone who tries to ensure higher appearance at the expense of the other stakeholders or partners.
- **Intellectual diversity**, which is a source of inspiration and strength; yet, it has consumed lots of time to finalize the content of the youth policy document.
- **Not understanding the term “youth policy”** by many key stakeholders early on during the process, the fact that much time was required to insure the presence of a common understanding over the meaning of “youth friendly policy”, its promotion, and collaboration to make it concrete in partnership with the various stakeholders.

Enabling Opportunities

- The presence of a strong partnership with the Ministry of Youth & Sports over the importance of having a youth policy in Lebanon
- The presence of consensus among Lebanese political parties over the importance of having a youth policy in Lebanon; remember that political parties have Parliamentary and ministerial representations!
- The support of the current Prime Minister, Mr. Najib Mikati, to endorse the youth policy, which has been reflected in having clause No. 25 in the ministerial declaration in June 2011, and which clearly states the commitment of the Cabinet to endorse a national youth policy.

The “Right” Path for Having a Youth Policy, and the Necessary Steps...

Having a youth policy requires going through the following steps:

- Developing the content of the youth policy based on youth needs and aspirations;
- Endorsing the youth policy at the Council of Ministers;
- Issuing necessary legislation to ensure the implementation of the youth policy;
- Implementing the youth policy in the public administration;
- Evaluating the youth policy after 5 years of implementation in order to improve it.

The role of the “Youth Forum for National Youth Policies” is to monitor the process of having the long awaited youth policy and ensure it incorporates young people’s voices and perspectives throughout the various steps mentioned above.

Where are we today?

The youth policy document has been presented by the Minister of Youth & Sports to the Council of Ministers and has been put on the agenda since December 2011. Today we are waiting for **Endorsement of the youth policy by the Council of Ministers**

The following step will be to lobby for policy implementation, and issuing necessary legislation at the Parliament in order to implement the youth policy recommendations that need legislation change.



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