

With reference to: Call for input: OHCHR study on youth and human rights

Country: Lebanon, Middle East

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▪ **Challenges faced by young people in your country;**

Challenges faced by young people in our country are associated both directly and indirectly with the political, social, and cultural tensions in the region. These tensions pose major threats upon the livelihoods of young people, as well as their abilities to secure their futures and their careers in that regard.

These challenges, along with the basic challenges faces by all members of society (social security, financial security, etc.) are evidently:

- Securing a job after graduation
- Securing a stable income and social security
- Resisting the temptation to move abroad (The country has a major brain drain issue, especially among educated youth and educated elite in the country. Young people from Lebanon either study abroad and do not return due to the fact that they believe they do not have any job prospects, or travel abroad immediately after graduation even if they studied in Lebanon.)

▪ **Examples of discrimination against young people in the exercise of their rights;**

Discrimination against people of all ages is prevalent in Lebanon, and this indeed includes young people in every respect. Young people in Lebanon are discriminated against based on:

- Gender
- Sexual Orientation
- Religious belief
- Family
- Race (foreigners in Lebanon such as Syrians, Palestinians, Kurds, etc.)

This discrimination not only prohibits young people from exercising their basic rights, such as the freedom of expression, the right to privacy, the right to non-bias personal status laws, etc., but is also prevalent in the job selection process in both the public and private sectors.

Youth currently faces a major obstacle in the areas of their personal affairs in Lebanon, mostly due to the Personal Status Laws falling immediately under the authority of their religious denomination. Issues such as inheritance, adoption, marriage, divorce, access to services, etc. are all controlled by religion – a matter which makes discrimination on the foundation of gender hugely prevalent and quite a cultural “norm.”

▪ **Are you aware of policies and programs aimed at supporting young people to realize their rights? If so, please describe them;**

Yes. Lebanon has many flaws in the areas of its public policies; however, Lebanon's strong point is its quality education as well as its vibrant and quite “liberal” civil and grassroots society.

Awareness campaigns, workshops, trainings and seminars are oriented towards the realization of young peoples' rights as “youth” as well as “citizens.” These campaigns include orientation in schools,

universities, workplaces, and also extend to lobbying governments and policy makers to shift outdated laws, realities and even cultural norms which are seen as violations of young peoples' basic rights and their basic freedoms. These campaigns have also been wildly successful in the areas of:

- Young women's rights
 - LGBTQI youth rights
 - Freedom of expression and demonstration
 - Freedom of association
 - Rights to education, etc.
- **How are youth organizations or youth-led structures involved in developing, implementing, monitoring and/or evaluating policies and programs on youth in your country?**

In Lebanon, organizations on the ground (Non-Governmental Organization, International Non-Governmental Organizations, UN agencies, etc.), are highly involved in pushing for policy reforms and for the insurance of their implementation once these policies are amended or reinforced.

As stated previously, Lebanon currently possesses a highly vibrant civil and grassroots movement, as well as one strongly founded on a large youth force, whether as employees or as volunteers, which are not only the face of these organizations, but also their driving force in the areas of new ideas, modernization, as well as reform.

Organizations and youth-led structures have been successful in lobbying for the reform of laws and policies in Lebanon in the areas of:

- Women's rights
 - LGBTQI rights
 - Refugee rights
 - Access to education
 - Economic and social reform
 - Sanitation and sustainability
 - Animal rights
 - Nationality rights, etc.
- **What measures at international level would facilitate/support the realization of young people's rights;**

Measures at the international level which would facilitate the realization of the rights of youth must predominantly revolve around the active participation of youth in the decision making process within their countries – mainly due to the fact that they are the ones who have the ability to “make or break it”. The strength of a society is deeply rooted in an educated, employed, and satisfied youth which may drive a country towards prosperity and evolution in all respects.

Moving from this statement, it is highly important to establish an international entity, most effectively a United Nations agency which tackles youth separately, and looks into their matters independent from larger titles such as their “refugee status”, their “gender” or their “minority rights”, and rather looks at youth as a homogeneous group of individuals who are the up-and-coming force of the future. Allowing for the establishment of a youth-led international initiative of this caliber will not only allow for these small groups lobbying for youth rights on the ground to gain support and orientation, but will also give them the legitimacy they need in order to face their local governments and lobby for policies which strengthen the security of young peoples' rights – in turn making them want to stay within their country and feel secure within its borders.