



THE OIC YOUTH STRATEGY

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FOREWORD

The Islamic world today is home to more than 500 million young people. This tremendous and invaluable youth capital in Member States should be harnessed and developed to drive political, economic, and social change. However, youth in the Islamic world are facing enormous challenges among them are radicalization, violent extremism, forced displacement, asylum and migration, resulting from conflicts, economic deprivation, exclusion, marginalization, poor governance, weak institutions and family disintegration. These challenges hamper their ability to contribute to the development and prosperity of their countries.



Conscious of these challenges facing youth in the Islamic world, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has been of the strong belief that it is necessary to consolidate further our efforts to empower young people and strengthen their role in the development of our communities and societies. Hence, our conviction for the urgent need to adopt a common inclusive framework of an OIC Youth Strategy.

The way forward is to benefit from the incredible demographic youth asset through engaging them, working with them, standing up for their rights and involving them in the decision making process. Today, young people are effective users of information and communication technologies including social media, and are connected to each other and up-to-date like never before.

This OIC Youth Strategy was adopted by the 4th Session of the Islamic Conference of Youth and Sports Ministers held in Baku, the Republic of Azerbaijan, and endorsed by the 45th Council of Foreign Ministers held in Dhaka, People's Republic of Bangladesh, in 2018. This strategy is a result of the close cooperation between the OIC General Secretariat and the OIC relevant institutions, to implement the vision of the Heads of States and Governments, and the Councils of Foreign Ministers and Ministers of Youth.

This strategy provides broad guidelines to facilitate the meaningful participation and engagement of youth in the overall national and international development efforts. It aims to respond to the needs, concerns and problems of youth in Member States.

I sincerely hope that this document would contribute to assisting governments and the public in general, in their collective endeavor to build a better future for young men and women particularly in our Member States.

Yousef Al-Othaimeen

Secretary General of the OIC

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1. INTRODUCTION

1. The OIC Member States together account for one-fourth (27 per cent) of young population in the world. By 2050, OIC Member States are projected to have more than one-third (35 per cent) of the world's young population.¹
2. With such a remarkable demographic composition, there is considerable youth potential for development and state building in the OIC Member States. However, the same demographics also present deep concerns. The youth in the OIC Member States are met by constantly evolving challenges in the areas of education, employment, access to health services as well as personal development opportunities. In a number of societies, youth are being threatened, on the one hand by globalizing processes, and on the other, by the rapid rise of marginalization, extremism, and radicalization
3. The OIC Member States need to respond rapidly to these challenges facing youth, especially in today's context where young citizens are active in the global digital world and increasingly seeking to take part in decision-making processes.
4. Effective youth empowerment would not only improve life conditions of young people, but would also reinforce core values as human rights, dignity, and progress underpinning socioeconomic growth; effectively placing youth issues as one of the main priorities of the OIC Member States.
5. To act upon this priority, it is necessary to have a common guiding framework; namely, an OIC Youth Strategy. Such a common framework would enable the OIC Member States to engage with peer support mechanisms, utilizing tools and instruments to respond to national youth needs. For this purpose, stakeholders with competencies and responsibilities in the field of youth are to work together to develop clear objectives, define sets of actions, and identify timelines and implementation procedures.
6. In this regard, the Strategy should define what constitutes youth segments of populations. Universally, youth is understood as a transitional period where a person transits from childhood into adulthood and from dependency to independency. For policymaking, this conceptualization implies that youth can no longer benefit from protection assured for children and at the same time, they are not yet able to enjoy the range of opportunities available to adults. When translated into actual age brackets, however, this conceptual definition becomes fragmented and diverse. Across OIC Member States, some define youth at the 15-24 range while some use a broader range at 15-35. Despite this variation, a youth age bracket has to be defined for practical purposes of policy-making and data-collection. Considering these key practical aspects, the strategy suggests adopting the UN definition of 15-24 as the common

¹ UN World Population Prospects.

young age bracket. Any other age bracket used by Member States in accordance with their national policies will be respected and taken into account in the implementation of activities pertaining to this Strategy.

7. The present OIC Youth Strategy is a proposed guideline for OIC Member States to implement in the context of their own national priorities and youth policies in accordance with their own national and sovereign will to do so.

1.1 General Overview of Youth Status in the OIC Member States

8. Youth are surrounded with unique cultural, economic and political environments and hence diverse challenges in different OIC Member States. Nevertheless, a general overview of the status of youth in the OIC Member States demonstrates that there are common challenges facing youth. These challenges are generally interrelated and are found across key areas of society. These areas, most notably, include education (ranging from low literacy rates to gender disparity), economy (including but not limited to high levels of unemployment, underdeveloped entrepreneurial environments, weak skills and education-skill mismatch), migration including brain drain, limited civic and political participation (including social isolation and exclusion), health and wellbeing (covering a wide range of issues such as forced marriage, violence, malnutrition, and limited access to health services), extremism and deviant political rhetoric and, cultural and social changes triggered by globalization.
9. These common challenges are further exacerbated for young people in OIC Member States that are struck by on-going conflict and war undermining the well-being of youth at a greater extent and with greater implications.
10. While these problems are commonly experienced by the youth in OIC Member States to varying degrees, whether a sound national policy exists or not, largely determines how well governments and communities can address and respond to such challenges. An appropriate national youth policy framework is necessary not only to cater to today's needs, but also to effectively address emerging and upcoming challenges.
11. It is unfortunate that not all OIC Member States have national youth policies. A joint framework would offer an opportunity to exchange practices and benefits among Member States on youth policies, best practices and sharing of expertise.

1.2 General Overview of OIC Efforts in Building Coordinated Youth Policies

12. Youth populations affect all aspects of socio-economic growth and development with a direct bearing on unemployment rates, violence, political participation, innovation, research, industry, job creation, and entrepreneurship. Effective youth empowerment would actualize youth potential, while reinforcing central values and core ideals underpinning socioeconomic growth.

13. In this spirit, the First Session of the Islamic Conference of Youth and Sports Ministers (ICYSM) was held in Jeddah. The conference recognized the need for complementarity and unified efforts, while emphasizing the intellectual, spiritual and physical empowerment of youth (OIC/ICMYS/1-2005/FC.FINAL).
14. The Second ICYSM adopted Res No. OIC/ISSF/ICYSM-2/2014/R-6 on the Broad *Lines of the Draft Strategy for Promoting Youth Issues in the Islamic World* and called on ISSF and ISESCO to develop the Strategy and to include it on the agenda of the third ICYSM.
15. As per the 42nd Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) held in Kuwait in May 2015, the OIC Member States emphasized the need to develop educational methods in light of needs and future challenges facing youth, affirmed the need for combatting drug abuse, the provision of capacity building programs for youth, and for safeguarding youth from disenfranchisement and extremism; by coordinating and organizing activities through Member States and participating institutions, including an MoU between the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation (ISSF), the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (ICYFDC), the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), SESRIC, and the International Union of Muslims Scouts (IUMS), as OIC institutions active in the field of youth with a view to facilitating their cooperation and coordination. In the light of the resolutions of this session, the ISSF became the ICYSM Secretariat on sports issues and the ICYF-DC on youth issues.
16. It is important to note that the 43rd CFM held a special brainstorming session on “Widening Opportunities and Promoting Creative Potentials of Younger Generations”, which resulted in a set of recommendations to enhance the conditions of youth in Member States and secure their future, as well adopting the resolution no. 11/43-ORG on the Establishment of a New Unit in Charge of Youth Issues within the OIC General Secretariat.
17. Moreover, as per the Final Communiqué of the 13th Session of the Islamic Summit Conference held in Istanbul in April 2016, the OIC reasserted its resolve to advance the capacity building of youth as a means to peace and security in the OIC Member States, and further underlined the importance of enhancing the role of youth in the development of societies in the OIC Member States (OIC/13TH SUMMIT 2016/FC/FINAL, Res 188 and 189). In fact, for the first time, a pre-Summit event, the “Young Leaders Summit”, was held by ICYF-DC, and culminated in the recommendations entitled “10 Goals in 10 Years”.
18. In addition, as per the OIC-2025 Plan of Action that was adopted during the Summit, emphasis was made on the need for youth capacity building and guided engagement in critical sectors of economic growth, peace and security, human rights and entrepreneurship.

19. The third and most recent session of the Islamic Conference of the Ministers of Youth and Sports was held in Istanbul 2016, an initial discussion took place regarding the OIC Youth Strategy. The resolution on the OIC Youth Strategy indicated that an Expert Group Meeting would consider the Strategy (OIC/ICYSM-3/2016/R1-Y).
20. The ICYF-DC and the Permanent Joint Committee on Youth Affairs were mandated with cooperating and coordinating with the OIC Member States to achieve the goals set forward in the Joint Youth Action Plan, as well as in implementing the Strategy, in cooperation with the OIC General Secretariat and in reviewing progress of implementation among other initiatives (OIC/ICYSM-3/2016/R1-Y and OIC/ICYSM-3/2016/R3-Y). The General Secretariat “shall adequately participate in the Organization and coordinate all the meetings of sectoral Ministerial Councils” including the meetings of the Ministers of Youth and Sports Ministers (ICYSM) in accordance with CFM resolutions in this regard (Res. 5/36-ORG).

1.2.1 Efforts of OIC Institutions Active in the Field of Youth

21. The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) launched numerous youth-oriented development initiatives throughout the OIC Member States. Benefiting from the annual Youth Development Seminars (YDS) presenting forward thinkers on youth issues, a number of IDB programs have been designed and launched. These include the Youth Employment Support (YES) Program, the Islamic Financial Services Department’s (IFSD) Microfinance Development Program (MDP), as well as the provision of scholarships on the bachelors, masters and PhD levels. Other noteworthy IDB initiatives in this regard include the Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development’s (ISFD) Vocational Literacy Program (VOLIP) and the Microfinance Support Program (MFSP), the Investment Promotion Technical Assistance Program (ITAP) for capacity building for enterprise and entrepreneurship development, and the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector’s (ICD) SME funds in both Tunisia and Saudi Arabia.
22. The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) has developed a Triennial Action Plan (2016-2018) in the field of Youth, focusing mainly on the following three areas:
 - a) Education: through projects aiming at the development of technical and vocational education to enhance youth employment opportunities; promoting the role of youth education in achieving coexistence and addressing contemporary international issues; and promoting joint-educational efforts for development of educational systems in Member States.
 - b) Science and technology: through projects set to build a sustainable system for scientific development; explore social transformation to build cohesive and prosperous societies; support research strategies based on science, technology and innovation as well as efforts

to support research and development through the transfer of knowledge to enhance youth employment opportunities

- c) Culture and communication: through projects to provide care for youth, children and women in the Islamic world.

23. The Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (ICYF-DC) was established at its Founding General Assembly held in Baku, Azerbaijan on 1–3 December 2004 in accordance with the resolution N 15/31-C adopted by the 31st Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers held on 14-16 June 2004 in Istanbul. The Forum was granted the status of affiliated institution to the OIC by the virtue of the resolution N3/32-C adopted by the 32nd Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers held in Sana'a, Yemen on 28-30 June 2005. ICYF-DC is an Istanbul-based international organization. The Forum is a member driven organization and consists of 44 national and 6 international youth organizations. Through different type of activities ICYF-DC aims at carrying out advocacy for youth interests, promoting formal and non-formal education, strengthening moral values of young generations, fighting islamophobia, strengthening the spirit of solidarity among the Muslim youth and engaging in the dialogue among different cultures and civilizations. The “OIC Youth Capital”, “Model OIC”, “OIC Start-Up Platform”, “OIC Memorial Day”, “ICYF-DC Summer Camps” and “OIC Young Leaders Summit” are examples of the programs and activities implemented by ICYF-DC on a regular basis. ICYF-DC has established cooperation with other OIC institutions, particularly IDB, ISESCO, SESRIC, IIUM, ICCIA and ISSF as well as with numerous international organizations such as UNDP, UNAOC, UNOSSC, the Council of Europe, and the European Youth Forum. In its capacity as the Secretariat of the Islamic Conference of Youth and Sports Ministers (ICYSM) on youth issues and Executive Office of the ICYSM Permanent Ministerial Council on Youth, in accordance with the resolutions of the 3rd ICYSM (2016-2016), ICYF-DC acts as the main partner of the General Secretariat to coordinate the implementation of the youth-related OIC resolutions. According to its mandate, ICYF-DC was also the agency that implemented the Joint Youth Action Plan adopted by the 3rd Session of the ICYSM in cooperation with Member States and the OIC General Secretariat.
24. The Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation (ISSF) submitted the OIC Sports Strategy to the third ICYSM (OIC/ICYSM-3/2016/Strategy). The Sports Strategy was adopted at the same time as the launch of the Executive Office of OIC Sports Strategy for implementation, coordination and evaluation of the adopted Strategy.
25. The International Union of Muslim Scouts (IUMS), an Affiliated Organ of the OIC, has undertaken numerous activities. These include participation in the meetings of Muslim Scouts with the European Regional Scout Office in Turkey in 2016, participation in the Ceremony of Tradition of Wood Badge for Muslim Leaders in Saudi Arabia, 2016 and the ongoing organization of the International Medal Project, dubbed “I am a Collaborator Scout”. The

IUMS is also engaged in organizing Forums on Dialogue and Moderation (10 Forums in 10 Countries) as well as an International Congress of Muslim Youth in Saudi Arabia.

26. The Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) prepared and submitted the State of Youth Report 2016 to the Third Session of the Islamic Conference of Youth and Sports Ministers (ICYSM). In 2017, by virtue of a resolution (OIC/ICYSM-3/2016/R7-Y) adopted at the Third ICYSM, SESRIC prepared the State of Youth Report 2017 in collaboration with ICYF-DC and submitted to the OIC General Secretariat. The report developed the OIC Youth Policy Score Indicator that aims to reveal the state of youth policies and governance in OIC Member States. SESRIC launched the OIC International Internship Program (OIC Intern) with the aim of facilitating the entry of students into the labour market by contributing to the development of their knowledge and skills about the working environment. SESRIC has also recently initiated Syrian Palestinian Employment and Entrepreneurship Development (SPEED Project) and Skills, Employment and Entrepreneurship Development (SEED) for Inclusive Growth for improving skills and capacities of certain segments of youth in OIC Member States.

2. THE YOUTH STRATEGY: NECESSITY AND MAIN AREAS OF PRIORITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH IN OIC MEMBER STATES

2.A The Concept and Necessity for an OIC Youth Strategy

27. Millions of youth in OIC Member States face a broad range of challenges in all spheres of life, ranging from economic hardship to social barriers. Although country-specific root causes may differ from one country to another, there are a significant number of commonalities amongst the OIC Member States in terms of problems faced by youth that hinder their development and affect their quality of life. In this context, the preparation of an OIC Youth Strategy has become essential to achieve the following objectives:
- a) Creating a joint framework that would enable cooperation and support among Member States in identifying economic, cultural, and policy-related challenges that undermine youth's overall well-being;
 - b) Creating a joint framework that would enable cooperation and support among Member States in identifying economic, cultural, and policy-related opportunities that can improve the quality of life for young people;
 - c) Establishing sustainable policies in the areas of economy, culture, politics, health and technology to support young people's effort to build and lead satisfactory and meaningful lives;
 - d) Developing new frameworks to enable young people's political and social participation and integration in their journey toward becoming responsible citizens, and;

- e) Carving out new mechanisms that would allow young people to produce scalable and innovative solutions for the socio-economic development of their societies and the Muslim Ummah.
28. These five main objectives of the OIC Youth Strategy cuts across Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and constitute the necessary steps towards achieving the SDGs, especially in regards to Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 8 (Good Jobs and Economic Growth), Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), Goal 16 (Peace and Justice). Having an OIC Youth Strategy, moreover, will be a concrete effort towards achieving Goal 17 (Partnership for the Goals).
29. The objectives of the OIC Youth Strategy are also in line with the *OIC 2025 Plan of Action* and would contribute to the implementation of the Plan, in particular on:
- a) Goal 2.2: Counter-terrorism, Extremism, Extremism leading to terrorism, Radicalization, Sectarianism, & Islamophobia;
 - b) Goal 2.6: Poverty Alleviation;
 - c) Goal 2.9: Employment, Infrastructure and Industrialization;
 - d) Goal 2.11: Education; and
 - e) Goal 2.13: Advancement and Empowerment of Women, Family Welfare, and Social Security.
30. Equally importantly, these objectives are in line with the following 10 Goals agreed upon at the 1st OIC Young Leaders' Summit (Istanbul, April 2016):
- a) To upscale the educational level and extend proper training;
 - b) To ensure well-being and economic prospects of youth;
 - c) To ensure greater participation of youth;
 - d) To prevent youth radicalization;
 - e) To achieve real cooperation and closer solidarity of Muslim youth;
 - f) To empower the peaceful voice of youth in Muslim communities;
 - g) To strengthen Muslim youth involvement in global peace;
 - h) To bridge gender gap by lifting institutional barriers for women;
 - i) To empower Muslim youth input in global efforts; and
 - j) To build a comprehensive and coordinated OIC Joint Youth policy.
31. The vision of the OIC Youth Strategy is to improve well-being of youth in OIC Member States and eradicate socio-economic developmental challenges that they face through joint-action. As each strategy requires a set of policy actions to reach its broad objectives and sub-targets, the OIC Youth Strategy envisages investing in a set of policy options in OIC Member States. The policies in the OIC Youth Strategy can be grouped under ten main areas that need attention, namely: education, youth employment, social inclusion, extremism, entrepreneurship, health

services, marriage, participation, youth organizations and volunteering, cultural challenges resulting from globalization, and migration and integration.

32. The success of the OIC Youth Strategy depends not only on the identification of the main areas of priorities but also on the full commitment on the part of the OIC Member States in observing the following factors:
- a) **Identification of target groups:** Demographic characteristics of youth including age brackets and gender aspects need to be identified.
 - b) **Mapping the roles of stakeholders:** The potential role of public entities, private sector, civil society, regional and international organizations need to be assessed for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the youth policy.
 - c) **Developing a Plan of Action and reporting mechanism:** A Plan of Action needs to be designed for the effective implementation of the Youth Strategy that will include timeframes, budgetary allocations, key performance indicators (KPIs) as well as specific roles of OIC Member States, the General Secretariat and relevant OIC Institutions. Moreover, developing a reporting mechanism would be necessary to monitor progress in the implementation of the Youth Strategy.
 - d) **Having a holistic approach:** It is essential to develop an integrated approach in order to make sure that youth policy actions are connected to other policy domains in an effective manner. Moreover, in order to prevent duplication or eliminate any potential clashes with other policy domains, the Youth Strategy needs to be implemented while ensuring horizontal with other ministries such as health and education as well as vertical cooperation with local entities and national institutions.
 - e) **Having a knowledge-based policy:** The formulation and the development of the youth policy should be based on research processes with a view to documenting the situation of youth as well as youth policies being implemented at local, national, regional, and the OIC levels.
 - f) **Developing research tools and indicators:** In order to come up with an evidence-based Youth Strategy and monitor the recorded progress over time, it is essential to develop a set of relevant research tools (e.g. structured surveys, questionnaires and indicators) (e.g. the OIC Youth Development Index). In this context, relevant OIC Institutions are requested to develop these tools under the coordination of the OIC General Secretariat once the Strategy is adopted. A useful example is the Youth Policy Score Indicator for OIC Countries (YPSI) developed by SESRIC in the *State of Youth in OIC Member States Report (2017)*. The YPSI provides a tool not only for national monitoring on youth policy development but also for developing new and effective channels of intra-OIC collaboration.

2.B Main Fields of Priorities for Development of Youth in OIC Member States

2.B.1 EDUCATION

2.B.1.1 Current status:

33. Through quality education, youth can play a transformative role in the development of society. Average youth literacy rates are better than the average adult literacy rates in the OIC Member States. On average, 85.3% of youth are literate, which is below the world average (91.0%). The average of non-OIC developing countries was 93.0% in 2015. On average, the gap between male youth (87.4%) and female youth literacy rates (83.2%) in the OIC Member States is 4.2%, which is higher than the gap observed in non-OIC developing countries (0.6%) and the world average (1.8%) in 2015 (SESRIC, 2016a; SESRIC, 2016c). The total number of tertiary school students in the OIC Member States has increased more than two-fold from 14.2 million to 33.6 million between 2000 and 2015. More tertiary school graduates means a better qualified and a better skilled workforce. This is a promising development. However, a look at figures on tertiary school gross enrolment rates (GERs) reveals that the OIC Member States, with an average enrolment rate of 28.9% in 2015, lagged behind non-OIC developing countries (34.8%) and far behind developed countries (70.8%). In the same year, the world average GER was 41.7%.

34. At primary and secondary education, the gender disparity index (GPI) score of the OIC Member States was measured at 0.96 and 0.91, respectively. This implies a small disparity in favour of boys in 2015. On other hand, at tertiary education, the GPI score of the OIC Member States was found to be around 1.1 where girls are in a more favorable condition compared to boys.

2.B.1.2 Challenges:

2.B.1.2.1 Low literacy and enrolment rates

35. Illiteracy and low levels of participation in educational institutions among youth population constitute important challenges in a number of OIC Member States, in particular those located in Sub-Saharan Africa and in South Asia.

2.B.1.2.2 Poor quality of education

36. Poor quality of education stemming from factors such as crowded classrooms and low student-teacher ratios has been jeopardizing the future of millions of children and youth across the OIC Member States. Therefore, it is important for the OIC Member States to not only focus on improving education indicators of youth populations such as literacy and enrolment rates, but also on implementing policies to enhance the quality of youth education, and to further direct education programs towards technology and practical education and review university admission policies.

2.B.1.2.3 Existing gender disparity

37. Existing disparities seen in the domain of education between male and female youth populations constitute a challenge for the development of youth in the OIC Member States. School dropouts and gender disparity have several negative effects on the development of youth. In particular, early girls' school dropouts is usually associated with early marriage. Girls and boys with limited education have difficulty finding decent jobs, thereby reducing participation rates in the labour force.

2.B.1.3 Policy Options:

38. Improving literacy and enrolment rates

- a) Promote the importance of schooling among youth both in urban and rural areas;
- b) Invest in education infrastructure at all levels (primary, secondary and tertiary education);
- c) Support and invest in all types of education (vocational, formal, and evening education) with a view to catering to different needs of youth;
- d) Develop policies to attract socially excluded youth into educational institutions and design policies to sustain them in such institutions;
- e) Devise specific education policies for youth with disadvantages (e.g. refugees, displaced youth, youth with special needs, extremely poor youth);
- f) Design education policies to enable youth with disabilities to participate in education institutions.

39. Investing into quality of education

- a) Increase student-teacher ratio by investing in education of teachers and building up new classrooms;
- b) Invest in the infrastructure of education institutions and internet access;
- c) Utilize ICT and other modern technologies to enhance education tools in schools;
- d) Develop nation-wide monitoring mechanisms to measure and track the quality of all educational services;
- e) Provide teachers with regular training with a view to improving their skills and knowledge;
- f) Develop performance-based systems to measure the quality of teaching instruction.

40. Addressing gender disparities

- a) Raise awareness among parents about the significance of the returns of education;
- b) Cooperate with cultural leaders and religious authorities to spread the right message of Islam on education, especially on education rights of boys and girls;
- c) Cooperate with civil society organizations in order to design and implement effective campaigns, particularly to reduce gender disparity;
- d) Recognize gender disparity among other major challenges and identify specific targets with a timeline in order to measure progress.

41. Developing science and innovation capacity

- a) Open secondary and tertiary education institutions where youth can specialize in science and technology programs, and further equip those institutions with skilled teachers and the required equipment;
- b) Promote awareness on the importance of science and technology through organizing fairs and contests for youth;
- c) Conduct a situation analysis in order to find out strengths and weaknesses of education programs in the domain of science and technology with a view of improving quality of education in these programs;
- d) Cooperate with international education institutions through agreements to enhance student and teaching staff mobility;
- e) Consider designing bonus and promotion schemes for teaching staff in science and technology programs to attract highly educated and talented teachers into these programs.

2.B.2 YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

2.B.2.1 Current status:

42. The OIC Member States are largely characterized by low labour force participation and high unemployment rates in particular among the young. Youth labour force participation in the OIC Member States decreased from 45.9% in 2000 to 43.4% in 2015, and decreased even more significantly in comparison to other groups, from 52.8% to 47.1% in developed countries and from 56.1% to 46.8% in other non-OIC developing countries. The world average has accordingly declined to 45.8% in 2015 compared to its level of 53.3% in 2000. A slight decrease in youth labour force participation was observed in young female population in the OIC Member States, which decreased from 32.2% to 31.3% between 2000 and 2015.
43. As of 2015, youth unemployment in the OIC Member States estimated at 16%, in developed countries at 14.3% and in other non-OIC developing countries at 11.7%. In particular, female unemployment among youth is highest in the OIC Member States when compared to other groups, although it fell to 18.3% in 2015 from its level of 22.9% in 2005. With respect to male unemployment among youth, it was 14.6% in the OIC Member States and 19.3% in the other non-OIC developing countries.
44. Unemployment presents a considerable challenge to the OIC Member States, particularly given the large number of issues it generates. The brain drain of vital human capital due to unemployment is a serious challenge confronting the OIC Member States. This is by no means a phenomenon limited to the OIC Member States. In 2013 alone, youth (15-24) constituted 12% of all migrants.² The challenge this poses to the OIC Member States is perhaps more significant given the critical role the youth human capital plays in development and growth.

² UN Inter-Agency Network on Migration and Youth Report, 2014.

The OIC Member States have the highest brain drain compared to any other groups, at 7.41% of all skilled workers emigrating for employment.³

2.B.2.2 Challenges:

2.B.2.2.1 Poor basic skills, knowledge and skills mismatch

45. Relatively poor education negatively affects the skills of the labor force and unplanned supply of workers in different sectors are two important challenges for the labour markets in the OIC Member States. These two challenges lead to an education-skill mismatch in many OIC Member States where desired skills in the labour market do not match supplied skills and education.

2.B.2.2.2 Labour market structures and rigidities

46. The vast majority of developed countries have certain flexibilities and mechanisms (e.g. part-time working, teleworking, unemployment benefits) in their labour markets to ease transition of youth from one job to another. Only a few OIC Member States provide such options. Therefore, in many OIC Member States, it is costly and difficult for youth to find a job due to labour market structures and rigidities.

2.B.2.2.3 Weak macro-economic outlook and lack of stability

47. The overall macroeconomic outlook and stability in the economy affect the state of youth in the labour market. At the time of an economic recession or instability, the available job opportunities vanish and youth are particularly affected due to their lower level of skills and experience.

2.B.2.2.4 Discouraged youth and lack of enabling environment for being an entrepreneur

48. If labour market prospects are not optimistic and there are market rigidities, it is likely that many youth will stop searching for jobs. This translates into low labour force participation rates. In general, both for young men and women, there is an alternative way of coping with labour market challenges by being an entrepreneur. However, the success as an entrepreneur depends heavily on the existing enabling environment that nourishes their growth. In many OIC Member States, neither the educational system nor the labour markets provide an enabling environment for young entrepreneurs.

49. Encourage financing of entrepreneurship projects and linking them to policies focused on support of young entrepreneurs and protection of small and medium enterprises (SMEs); building partnerships between the private sector and recognized organizations of to meet the challenges associated with youth unemployment.

³ SESRIC Report, "The Plight of Human Capital Flight in OIC Countries", 2014.

2.B.2.3 Policy Options:

50. Investing into formal education and vocational education and training (VET) programs

- a) Devise effective strategies and policies to promote both formal education and vocational education and training (VET) programs;
- b) Carry out labour market research to identify demanding sectors as well as to understand the most needed skills in the market with a view to identifying which education program investments yield the most in the present and future;
- c) Consider reviewing the length of compulsory education in light of prevailing labour market conditions.

51. Making effective labour market reforms

- a) Identify challenges for youth unemployment and factors that discourage youth to be active in labour markets;
- b) Implement labour market reforms to increase labour market flexibility targeting youth population;
- c) Design specific incentives for employers to encourage youth employment with a specific focus on youth newly entering the job market;
- d) Promote female employment and their participation in the labour force through various educational and training programs and activities with a view to addressing challenges stemming from local norms and traditions;
- e) Devise labour market policies and set out specific targets aiming to encourage participation of female youth in the labour force;
- f) Cooperate actively with the private sector and civil society organizations with a view to bringing up youth unemployment issues on the agenda of different stakeholders.

52. Ensuring macro-economic stability and implementing pro-growth policies

- a) Develop policies to ensure macroeconomic stability and sustainable economic growth paying special attention to youth unemployment;
- b) Improve macro-level coordination among different public authorities to reduce youth unemployment and encourage youth to be active in labour markets.

53. Encouraging entrepreneurship

- a) Improve access to finance for youth entrepreneurs;
- b) Develop specific incentives for youth entrepreneurs, including tax and social security premiums;
- c) Organize training programs targeting the youth population with a view to equipping them with basic skills and knowledge about entrepreneurship;
- d) Consider building up designated techno-parks, incubators and economic zones for youth entrepreneur development.

2.B.3 SOCIAL INCLUSION

2.B.3.1 Current status:

54. Social inclusion is a process through which individuals or entire communities gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, cultural and political life of their societies. One of the most effective policies to reduce youth exclusion is to maximize youth participation in education and in the labour force. Nevertheless, 22.1% of youth in the OIC Member States in 2014 were excluded from education, employment and training (NEET). The NEET rate (youth who are not in education, employment and training) for the OIC Member States in 2014 was higher than that observed in other non-OIC developing countries (6.3%), developed countries (7.1%) and the world (11.8%). Moreover, the NEET rate for young women in the OIC Member States (31.4%) was 2.6 times higher than that for young men (12.2%).⁴

2.B.3.2 Challenges:

2.B.3.2.1 High rates of youth not in education, employment and training (NEET)

55. Youth living in the OIC Member States, on average, have significant problems in equal access to education. This manifested itself in several indicators from literacy rates to NEET rates. In particular, inequalities widen across different segments of youth, such as male versus female, and rural versus urban development disparities; which further exacerbate social exclusion among youth.

2.B.3.2.2 Exclusion of youth from decision-making and policy-making circles

56. Youth living in the OIC Member States not only cope with challenges such as access to education or health services but also have limited opportunities to take part in decision-making and policy-making processes mainly stemming from underdeveloped civil society organizations and highly centralized decision-making systems.

2.B.3.2.3 Addictions including drugs, tobacco, alcohol and technology

57. Addictions such as tobacco, drugs, alcohol and technology are major factors that both stem from and lead to social exclusion of youth. Given its psychological and physical adverse effects as well as the stigmas associated with addictions, risky behaviour associated with addiction prevents youth from effectively participating in educational institutions and in the labour market. Exclusion from educational institutions and labour markets may in turn lead youth to adopt more risky behaviour (e.g. crime, suicide) and increase the possibility of engagement with illegal groups, including extremist groups and crime networks.

⁴ "Not in Education, Employment, or Training" Indicator, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UIS Data Centre. 2016

2.B.3.3 Policy Options:

58. Improving access to education, employment, and training

- a) Set targets and devise policies to reduce dropout rates from educational institutions;
- b) Develop inclusive policies to assist failed students and guide them with a view to keeping them in educational institutions by providing them with alternative routes such as vocational education and training;
- c) Monitoring the NEET rate (youth who are not in education, employment and training) and identifying annual targets to measure progress;
- d) Raise public awareness about the consequences of social exclusion of youth with a view to improving public knowledge;
- e) Open up a national call center comprising of professionals to provide assistance and guidance socially excluded youth and their families;
- f) Build up multifunctional public consultancy centres in cities to provide assistance, guidance and rehabilitation services for socially excluded youth and train their families.

59. Integrate youth into decision-making and policy-making processes both in private and public sectors

- a) Organize public campaigns to raise awareness and highlight the potential value of the contribution of youth in decision-making and policy-making processes to a society;
- b) Consider setting quotas for employers in private and public sectors to appoint a number of youth in their management;
- c) Promote the nomination of youth in elections with a view to increasing the interest of youth in public life and benefit from their potential in policy-making, in accordance with the national rules and regulations.

60. Assist youth with addictions to integrate them into society

- a) Provide specific health and educational services for youth with addictions in close collaboration with their families;
- b) Open up health and training centres for youth with addictions in order to ensure that they receive the necessary services under professional oversight;
- c) Develop programs such as internships or on the job training through cooperation with the private sector to integrate youth with addictions into social life.

61. Coping with addictions that affect youth

- a) Review existing laws with a view to minimize access of youth to tobacco, alcohol and other harmful practices;
- b) Consider partnering with international institutions such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) in fighting addictions;
- c) Raise awareness about the right uses of technology through public campaigns, organizing seminars and training courses at educational institutions;

- d) Review educational curriculums with a view to designing more comprehensive and informative courses targeting youth about addictions and harmful practices.

2.B.4 YOUTH AND EXTREMISM

2.B.4.1 Current status:

62. Extremism and violence create an environment that prevents positive youth development. Current recruitment demographics of extremist groups show a growing trend towards recruitment at younger ages and an expansion towards young females. This is of high relevance to the OIC Member States as they have the youngest demographic structure worldwide and the highest growth rates of youth population. By 2030, the OIC Member States will be home to 30.9% of the youth in the world (SESRIC, 2017a). Furthermore, the OIC Member States, compared to the world, are particularly affected by socio-economic and political factors driving extremism. This necessitates an action-oriented policy framework that can identify both the root causes and routes towards youth radicalism, address both prevention and rehabilitation, and include both short- and long-term actionable plans.

2.B.4.2 Challenges:

63. In the fight against youth extremism, the OIC Member States are met by macro- and micro-challenges, namely:

2.B.4.2.1 The presence of push and pull factors leading youth towards extremism

64. The evidence on youth radicalization suggests that factors for radicalism can be categorized as a combination of "push" and "pull" factors.
65. Push factors, which push vulnerable groups to the path of violence, can be both socio-economic and political in nature. Socio-economic push factors primarily include unemployment, lack of education or illiteracy, and relative poverty or deprivation. These factors lead to a delay or 'waithood' in transition to adulthood and to the achievement of full adult rights and responsibilities. 'Waithood' is understood to be both 'a symptom and driver of armed conflict' in the MENA region (Commonwealth, 2016). Primary political push factors of radicalism include state corruption and ineffectiveness. These perceptions are notably high in the OIC Member States and may increase the legitimacy and necessity of violence in the eyes of youth, while providing extremist groups with grievances and thus allows them to recruit young people.
66. Pull factors that attract vulnerable individuals to Extremism leading to terrorism, on the other hand, typically involve youth's quest for power and material gain that can be accredited to becoming a fighter, the quest for social recognition and status, identity and belonging, a desire to satisfy religious longing, and the urge to implement change against perceived injustice.

67. Push and pull factors together present the OIC Member States with challenges that need to be addressed and combatted.

2.B.4.2.2 The reduction of youth either to troublemakers or to victims

68. According to SESRIC staff calculations (2017b) based on World Value Surveys (2010-2012 Wave), within national contexts of OIC Member States, youth are sometimes perceived in a negative manner. This view particularly informs the discourse on violence and Extremism leading to terrorism, which frames youth as potential perpetrators of violence or simply as victims. This general view ignores youth's potential capacity in violence prevention as well as in the rehabilitation of young ex-recruits and the potent agency of young men and women in positive development and change. In practical terms, this reductive approach prevents policymakers and communities from building effective partnerships with youth and benefit from their unique insights in terms of identification of problems as well as of innovative solutions to those problems.

2.B.4.2.3 Online recruitment and networks

69. One new component contemporary extremism uses is the Internet. In 1998, there were 12 active terrorist-related websites. By 2009, 6940 active terrorist-related websites existed (Weimann, 2009). Some terrorist groups established websites designed specifically for youth. The internet presents policy makers with a unique challenge; it provides an uncontrolled and anonymous tool to spread content in a matter of moments and to reach out to recruits that may not otherwise be accessible.

2.B.4.3 Policy Options:

70. **Develop a thorough understanding of both 'root causes' and 'routes towards' extremism**

- a) Thoroughly study both push and pull motivations in specific country contexts and develop policies both for prevention and rehabilitation attuned to recruitment motivations;
- b) Thoroughly examine routes towards extremism, including mapping of networks as well as identifying physical points of radicalization and recruitment;
- c) Open and support existing centers in universities or think tanks that study and research extremism.

71. **Tap into Education for Public Opinion Making and enhance educational policies:**

- a) Develop new curriculum focusing on character building with an emphasis on tolerance, peace, multiculturalism as values to be promoted against radical discourse and deviant ideologies.
- b) Develop curriculum and programs that capitalize the peaceful message of Islam and expose extremist religious discourse and practices.

72. Facilitate and utilize Youths' Positive Role and Input

- a) Facilitate involvement of youth in their communities; capitalize on their role in peace making and combatting extremism; create and encourage role models and raise awareness about success stories; involve youth in developing counter policies and programs to ensure that they are relevant and effective.

73. Provide alternative spaces for self-expression and socializing

- a) Create new platforms to enable youth to express their grievances, to respond to their need to have a sense of belonging, and desire to make meaningful change;
- b) Create new physical spaces for civic engagement and leisure that can attract youth and become a hub for social networks for positive support.

74. Produce and amplify new narratives

- a) Recognize the need to work both virtually and on the ground;
- b) Use media and social media to counter extremist narratives especially by focusing on exposing illusions and false information propagated through the discourse of extremists.

75. Build effective and meaningful partnerships from sectors of society to develop a multi-faceted approach policy-making.

- a) Develop partnerships with government to:
 - i. Ensure prioritization of youth development in social and public policies;
 - ii. Identify policies that are counterproductive and alienating towards youth;
 - iii. Develop instruments for youth participation in designing local, national, and international preventive and rehabilitative strategies;
 - iv. Provide private sector with incentives to invest in fragile contexts to empower youth and communities;
 - v. Compile data on the *Youth Development Index* and use it as a yardstick to measure future progress.
- b) Develop partnerships with the media to:
 - i. Highlight alternative and constructive counter narratives;
 - ii. Develop mechanisms to monitor hate speech and compliance with general ethics of the media regarding extremism;
- c) Develop partnerships with the private sector to:
 - i. Encourage and facilitate social responsibility projects related to the empowerment of young men and women;
- d) Develop partnerships with local communities to:
 - i. Facilitate support from parents and communities for youth involvement in efforts to address extremist violence;
 - ii. Educate families on how to recognize signs of youth radicalization, how to deal with it, and how to prevent it.

76. Across each policy option, an overarching gender awareness approach should be taken and best country practices that can work in other OIC Member States should be identified.

2.B.5 ENTREPRENEURSHIP

2.B.5.1 Current status:

77. The OIC Member States host one of the world's youngest workforces, but they are also facing a 16% average unemployment rate for youth, a rate that exceeds the averages of both non-OIC developing and developed countries. One key channel to fight youth unemployment is fostering an entrepreneurial environment. The 2017 Global Entrepreneurship and Development Index (GEDI) report on the 2015 Global Entrepreneurship Index (GEI) reveals that the OIC Member States are clustered towards the bottom among 138 countries. However, entrepreneurship has actually grown in some OIC Member States, particularly in the MENA region, in the last decade: 40% of fresh graduates in the region are actively considering opening their own business (Bayt.com, 2014) and since 2000, the pace at which new initiatives are launched has sharply risen from 1.5 per year to 10 per year.

78. While this growth rate is stunning, the total number of initiatives that encourages entrepreneurial activity in the MENA region, about 150, are considerably lower than the number of those found in the developed and non-OIC developing countries. Furthermore, government contribution to such initiatives remains at 25%, again notably lower than other regions (WEF 2011).

79. Social entrepreneurship; the process of coming up with a new idea or adapting an existing one to overcome a certain social challenge in a sustainable and entrepreneurial manner (Abdou et al., 2010) is a new category of entrepreneurship that has also been slowly flourishing in the OIC Member States. Social entrepreneurship can play an important role to capitalize on the youth bulge by creating new job opportunities as well as allowing youth to channel their civic engagement towards social problem solving through entrepreneurship. An overall picture of youth entrepreneurship in the OIC Member States suggests a great potential, yet is in need of comprehensive and aggressive reform to utilize this potential.

2.B.5.2 Challenges:

2.B.5.2.1 An unbalanced and underdeveloped ecosystem

80. Entrepreneurial activity in the OIC Member States in general is hampered by a regulatory framework that is unable to cater to the needs of entrepreneurship (taxing systems, bankruptcy and labour laws, etc.), an underdeveloped infrastructure (access to electricity, internet, and transportation), limited access to financial resources (both for early enterprises as well as for those looking for growth), mentorship, networks, and a limited number of incubators and accelerators. These structural difficulties make it 5 to 10 times more difficult for a new

entrepreneur to maintain solvency in the OIC Member States than their counterparts in the US or the UK discouraging youth from entrepreneurial activity.

2.B.5.2.2 The need for precise measurement of policy impact

81. The OIC Member States need to enhance their capability to more precisely measure policy impact and benchmarks of what works for young entrepreneurs and what does not such as a measurement of effects of different types of capital investments (loans vs. angel investing), mentorship models, and networks (accelerators, incubators, etc.) on business longevity, profitability, growth, and return on investment.

2.B.5.2.3 Lack of skills and a weak entrepreneurial culture

82. The OIC Member States also need to encourage the discovery of talents and invest in human capital that can tackle the unique challenges of being an entrepreneur. Additionally, the broader culture has yet to encourage and support entrepreneurship. In fact, the region is short on success stories of self-made young entrepreneurs; rather, success is viewed as quite difficult if not impossible unless one is born into a privileged family with existing networks and connections. This results in cultural reluctance to risk-taking and prevents approaching risk and failure as a step towards growth. Similarly, the concept of social entrepreneurship is still vague in most OIC Member States, there are only a small number of networks, market facilitators, and incubators designed for social enterprises, even though social entrepreneurship could serve in a unique way given the abundant presence of social problems that require innovative solutions.

2.B.5.3 Policy Options:

83. Build a fertile and balanced entrepreneurial ecosystem

a) Develop appropriate regulatory framework, infrastructure, financial capital, and human capital. The regulatory framework should address not only traditional needs of entrepreneurship but also emerging ones, including those of the lean start-up business model and social entrepreneurship. Reforms such as adopting crowd funding convertible notes will be necessary to be able to connect with international ecosystems and investor networks.

84. Understand what works and what does not and map entrepreneurial activity across OIC Member States

- a) Enhance knowledge about the most effective use of human, technical and financial resources for stimulating youth entrepreneurship in the OIC Member States. This will provide a broad picture of the entrepreneurial ecosystem and a general understanding of what works and what does not.
- b) Map entrepreneurial initiatives in each country; identify best practices and the most vibrant local eco-systems. Identify least developed ecosystems and what hampers entrepreneurial activity in these contexts to develop tailored and effective policies.

85. Promote a culture of entrepreneurship and invest into human capital

- a) An equal focus should be given to developing necessary human capital and skills and cultural mindset for entrepreneurship. For that;
 - i. Create and glamorize young entrepreneurs as heroes: Generate regular content on entrepreneurship and market success stories of self-made young entrepreneurs. Use high-profile public opinion makers and influencers to promote entrepreneurship, its personal benefits as well as how it benefits communities, societies and the Islamic world at large;
- b) Modernize the educational system to make it more relevant and encouraging to entrepreneurship:
 - i. Identify what is outdated and counterproductive in educational systems and curriculums;
 - ii. Bring entrepreneurship to the classroom; develop a system and curriculum that facilitates critical and creative thinking, self-confidence, and a sense of responsibility towards society and nation.

86. Promote social entrepreneurship

- a) Develop investment networks, market facilitators, incubators, and mentorship specifically designed for social enterprises in the OIC Member States;
- b) Support the study and practice of social entrepreneurship through competitions, academic programs and incubators.

2.B.6 HEALTH SERVICES

2.B.6.1 Current status:

87. The provision of health services for youth is critical to the future of any society. In the OIC Member States, on average, skilled health staff attend about 73.2% of all births in 2015 whereas the world average was at 81.6% (SESRIC, 2016a). About 33% of children under the age of five in the OIC Member States were stunted in 2009-2013 compared to 29% in non-OIC developing countries. In the period 2009-2013, 20.1% or 120 million children under five years of age in the world were found to be underweight. Among developing countries, non-OIC developing countries accounted for the highest share of underweight children (65%) followed by the OIC Member States (35%). The OIC Member States accounted for 32% of the world total overweight children with an overweight prevalence rate of 7.4% compared to 4.6% in other developing countries (SESRIC, 2015).

88. On the mental health services for youth, the performance of the OIC Member States, on average, is not promising. There is a mental health policy in 58% of the OIC Member States. This percentage is comparable to other non-OIC developing countries (58.5%) but lower than the average of developed countries where 100% of countries have a mental health policy. In the OIC Member States, on average, the number of psychiatrists working in the mental health

sector was around 6 (per million population) where the world average was found to be about 18 (SESRIC, 2016b).

2.B.6.2 Challenges:

2.B.6.2.1 Under-nutrition and Malnutrition

89. Despite recording significant progress over the last two decades, millions of youth in the OIC Member States still have to cope with under-nutrition and malnutrition beginning from their childhood due to poverty, lack of access to foods and protein sources as well as limited parental knowledge on nutrition. In particular, limited intake of protein and vitamins negatively affects both the physical and mental health of youth.

2.B.6.2.2 Obesity and limited regular physical activity

90. Childhood overweightness and obesity is on the rise across the globe especially in the developing world and the OIC Member States, usually continuing during youth and adulthood. In the OIC Member States, the prevalence of obesity increased from 15.2% in 2010 to 17% in 2014, although obesity is preventable through individual activity as well as public policies.

2.B.6.2.3 Weak mental health services and depression among youth

91. The weak state of mental health policies, facilities, human resources and services in the OIC Member States leaves youth with little chance for rehabilitation and social integration in a number of OIC Member States. This in turn leads to depression. The ignorance of depression and lack of treatment at its early stages among youth usually trigger developments of other serious mental problems as well as behavioral risks such as substance abuse and violence.

2.B.6.2.4 Limited reproductive health services and lack of knowledge

92. HIV/AIDS is a dangerous disease that affects youth and adult populations living in the OIC Member States in particular those in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to the prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS, 28 OIC Member States could not reduce the prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS between 1990 and 2014 due to limited reproductive health services. In particular, youth populations in a number of OIC Member States do not have the required knowledge on reproductive health and preventive measures that in turn make them vulnerable to communicable diseases including HIV/AIDS.

2.B.6.3 Policy Options:

93. Addressing under-nutrition and malnutrition

- a) Ensure access and availability of nutritious foods and vitamins for all children and youth;
- b) Equip health care workers with skills to provide counseling to parents on child and youth development;

- c) Improve public health programs and services to provide education and resources to women of child bearing age so as to promote healthy nutrition prior to conception and during pregnancy, and also improve the health and nutrition status of adolescents;
- d) Advocate for more resources, effective nutrition programs, and help coordinate nutrition programs with other health and development priorities.

94. Fighting obesity and promoting an active daily life

- a) Streamline operational policies, strategies and action plans for the prevention and control of overweight and obesity as well as insufficient physical activity among youth;
- b) Integrate health courses in educational curricula for youth on healthy nutrition and preventative care practices;
- c) Initiate public awareness campaigns to promote healthier lifestyles for youth in conventional and social media;
- d) Cooperate with the food industry to limit supplies of unhealthy foods and drinks at schools, gyms and libraries where youth spend most of their time;
- e) Organize training courses on the importance of regular physical activity to raise awareness among youth;
- f) Support regular physical activity practice in schools through increasing the percentage of sports instruction classes as well as making necessary sports infrastructure available in schools;
- g) Build youth centers with available infrastructure for exercising physical activities and promote them among youth through organizing various activities such as local contests and tournaments.

95. Improving mental health policies and facilities

- a) Devise a national mental health strategy and action plan for youth to prevent and address mental health problems among youth in consultation with stakeholders;
- b) Increase the number of mental health facilities and professional staff who are specialized on mental health problems of youth;
- c) Organize training programs for parents, teachers and medical doctors in order to provide better services and guidance especially for youth with depression;
- d) Provide mental health services and rehabilitation at youth centers and work in close collaboration with parents to promote regular attendance of youth in such centers.

96. Train youth on reproductive health issues and associated risks

- a) Increase the knowledge and awareness of youth on diseases such as HIV/AIDS through benefiting from conventional and social media;
- b) Provide separate compulsory formal courses at schools about reproductive health and prevention measures for girls and boys;

- c) Design specific course curriculum on reproductive health issues for secondary and tertiary education institutions with the involvement of the Ministries of Health and Education.

2.B.7 MARRIAGE AND EARLY MARRIAGE

2.B.7.1 Current status:

97. The prevalence of early marriage in the OIC Member States was found to be relatively higher when compared to other country groups. In the OIC Member States, on average, 7.2% of marriages were before 15 years old and 25.8% of marriages were performed before 18 years old based on a dataset covering the period 2005-2014. In the same period, the global average prevalence of marriages before 15 years old was 5.8% whereas the average for marriages before 18 years old was 23.9% (SESRIC, 2016a). In non-OIC developing countries, early marriage is less common than in the OIC Member States and their average was 4.8% and 22.6% for marriages before 15 and 18 years old respectively.

98. While early marriage constitutes a long-running challenge, new demographic challenges that face young people and marital union have been emerging across OIC Member States; namely, the decline in marriage rate and increase in the age at first marriage (AFM). According to 2006-2014 data, in developed countries, AFM has increased to 32 for males and 30 for females. The world average of AFM average is 29 for males and 25 for females. In OIC Member States, on average, AFM for males and females are 28 and 23 respectively. AFM average in OIC member states is lower than the world average, however, AFM can be expected to go up along with increased urbanization, industrialization, and educational enrolment.

2.B.7.2 Challenges:

2.B.7.2.1 Early marriage

99. Marriage at a very young age may lead to health problems for both men and women who are not ready for marriage mentally and physically. Early marriage is usually associated with early child bearing that adversely affect the mental and physical health of young parents.

2.B.7.2.2 Limited knowledge on reproductive health issues

100. Young couples who marry before 18 years old usually have limited knowledge on reproductive health issues. The limited knowledge and misperceptions not only threaten the health of young couples but also constitute a factor of risk for infants both during and after pregnancy.

2.B.7.2.3 Social pressure and mental health problems

101. Many early marriages take place as a result of family pressure or the social environment. Such unintended or forced decisions on marriage usually affect the mental health

conditions of young men and women, and may trigger depression and other mental illnesses.

2.B.7.2.4 Violence against young women due to early marriage

102. The violence that young women suffer from intimate partners carries particularly serious and potentially long-lasting consequences and may stem from early marriage.

2.B.7.2.5 AFM and Marriage Rate

103. Marital union is the main institution that morally regulates generative behavior of young people and adults and preserves individual and public health. Various studies have shown the connection between decay in marital union and values and an increase in STI (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) prevalence. The demographic shifts of declining marriage rate and increasing AFM challenge marital union and its moral and public health functions across the world, including OIC Member States. There is indeed evidence that risky generative behavior in some OIC Member States has been on the rise as reflected in increasing HIV and STI incidences in the younger age groups. This in part can be explained through the decrease in marriage rate and an increase in AFM.

2.B.7.3 Policy Options:

104. Preventing early and forced marriage

- a) Promote programs and policies to prevent early and forced marriage as well as adolescence pregnancy;
- b) Engage civil society organizations in organizing activities on early marriage with a view to raising awareness on early and forced marriage;
- c) Organize training programs and awareness raising campaigns for parents on the consequences of early marriage;
- d) Consider enacting legislation to discourage and prevent early and forced marriage;
- e) Improve coordination among different public entities to prevent early and forced marriage such as the Ministries of Interior and of Family Affairs particularly in rural areas;
- f) Open a dedicated call center for youth who are forced to marry at early ages with a view to providing guidance and assistance to them.

105. Increasing knowledge on reproductive health issues for young couples and parents

- a) Provide compulsory training courses on reproductive health issues for young couples;
- b) Include compulsory courses in secondary and tertiary education institutions on reproductive health issues for girls and boys separately;
- c) Organize training courses for parents on how to approach and teach their children about reproductive health issues, and its potential consequences.

106. Coping with social pressure and addressing mental health problems

- a) Provide legal assistance, counseling services and psychological support for couples that are forced to get married or stay married;

- b) Design psychological support programs and services for youth couples that are divorced with a view to assisting them as well as preventing development of any mental health problem;
- c) Organize awareness-raising campaigns to discourage social pressure for early marriage.

107. Fighting violence against women

- a) Develop effective policies and legislation in order to protect young women against violence and abuse both before and after marriage;
- b) Engage with relevant stakeholders with a view to developing cooperative paths for promoting young women's rights and protection;
- c) Pay special attention to young couples while coping with violence against women and develop an effective monitoring mechanism for domestic violence as it may stay unreported;
- d) Enhance institutional capacity of public institutions and civil society organizations to reduce and eradicate violence against women;
- e) Contribute to the eradication of all harmful practices against young females with strong political support and involvement of religious and community leaders.

108. Addressing challenges in the way of marital union

- a) Identify both structural and cultural challenges that delay young people's entrance to marriage and family formation;
- b) Establish new economic and social support mechanisms to encourage marital union and family formation among marriage eligible young men and women, with a focus on policies that would help young people to balance work and life demands at early stages of career formation or through higher education;
- c) Promote a positive image of marital union and the institution family as spaces where young people can find emotional satisfaction, joy, and trust;
- d) Promote gender egalitarianism among young people as ways to encourage young females to enter marital union and to form families.

2.B.8 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

2.B.8.1 Current status:

109. Lack of Civil Society Engagement

Civil participation constitutes a fundamental right. Youth civil participation constitutes a key tool for effective and sustainable development. More critically, youth engagement offers the OIC Member States increased access to untapped human capital, while providing the youth with a constructive engagement experience in civic action, and a thorough understanding of positive means and mediums of engagement and change. Currently, youth are not engaged as key stakeholders to development and state growth; representing a significant waste of human capital potential.

110. **Absence of Youth Decision-Making Mechanisms**

When youth engage in civil action through legitimate channels, resorting to violence to bring about social change becomes less appealing, thereby enhancing national security and public welfare in the OIC Member States. However, the absence of mediums of engagement and the growing gaps between civil society and public policy reinforce youth apathy and disenfranchisement, with their inevitable consequences.

111. **Weak Civic Culture**

While providing mediums and platforms for engagement is critical to developing youth engagement and building a strong civil society, the alternate side to this challenge is the role of social activities and education in defining the role of youth in their respective societies. In this context, the current role of schools and families may not be effective in advancing social activities for youth to engage in public service and political participation. Rather, the common narrative is one of apathy, combined with a weak political culture.

2.B.8.2 Challenges:

112. While a marked shift evolved that calls for youth participation and is often seen and heard, the implementation of such calls are not manifested to the fullest. A number of challenges continue to stand in the way of extensive youth participation and engagement. For instance, programs that engage youth by providing them with sources of income may neglect other factors that provide reasons for Extremism leading to terrorism, among others. More critically, there remains a gap between civil society and public policy, in that the majority of civil society initiatives may have no bearing or immediate effect on government policy. This in turn generates discontent and helplessness, given that civil society represents the first means of engagement available to youth. Engaging youth as stakeholders in the development of their societies requires a multi-pronged approach that begins with civic education, ensuring the means for engagement and lowering access barriers to socio-political engagement. If these are not provided, youth are inclined to disenfranchisement and socio-political apathy.

2.B.8.3 Policy Options:

113. **Establishing a Civic Culture of Engagement through Education**

- a) Provide mediums for schools and youth groups to visit national parliaments;
- b) Include educational curricula on governance and systems of governance in schools;
- c) Facilitate school-based national parliament models.

114. **Offering Mediums of Meaningful Engagement to Youth Populations**

- a) Implementation of ad-hoc structures and mechanisms that institutionalize youth participation and civic society engagement through mediums and platforms for policy and planning involvement;

- b) Facilitation of youth and civic society engagement through consultative processes during law-making, and contributions to ongoing policy debates;
- c) Invest into effective platforms and support structures for government-based two-way social engagement.

115. Developing Youth Engagement through Empowered Socio-Political Participation

a) Legal Framework Reform

- i. Studying and minimizing contextual legal barriers to youth political participation in accordance with the extant procedures.

b) Civil Society

- i. Encourage youth engagement and civic education in educational institutions;
- ii. Support civil society training programs as incubators for new projects;
- iii. Support youth-led community development and community service organizations;
- iv. Provide ease of access to small-scale youth projects for civil society organizations.

c) Youth Participation

- i. Strengthening political and cultural awareness among the youth.
- ii. Promoting youth activity at the local level.

2.B.9 NEW CULTURAL CHALLENGES AND GLOBALIZATION

2.B.9.1 Current status:

116. Globalization, a process whereby capital, goods and services, technology, information, and culture flow beyond national boundaries, has been a source of substantial change transforming not only economy and production, but also culture and values. Although this flow is supposed to be cross-cultural, globalization has so far been marked by the spread of western culture and values, and this process of westernization has affected a number of OIC Member States, in particular young people.
117. By the turn of the new Millennium, along with easier and cheaper travel as well as major advances in communication technology, globalization has assumed an unprecedented level of intensity. It is therefore unsurprising that the millennial youth, so-called the ‘Generation Y’ born into the current globalized and digitalized era (born between 1980 and 2000), is, among the most globally connected generations and most affected by globalizing cultural trends and communication technologies. In fact, studies on Generation Y have shown that those from this generation are more similar to one another as compared to any older generation (Shediak et al. 2013). This demonstrates the extent to which globalization shapes the cultural values of youth.

2.B.9.2 Challenges:

118. Through triggering change, globalization ushers in new opportunities, but it also signals new challenges especially in regards to the preservation of commonly cherished cultural values and identity of OIC Member States among young people.

2.B.9.2.1 The rise and spread of western lifestyles marked by individualism, consumerism, and materialism

119. Historically, the OIC Member States have been marked by a communitarian and a family-oriented culture, which honors community and family needs over narrow self-interest and endorses close intergenerational relations and support. One key consequence of globalization has been the spread of a new individualist lifestyle, which gives priority to atomistic individualism. This new lifestyle falsely views family and perhaps even community commitments, to be contrary to their individual happiness, well-being, and development. Communication technologies have become the main tool for the spread of individualism: TV series popular among the youth, for example, promote individualism as a way to freedom, wealth, and self-actualization, while depicting family and community as a source of limitations and oppressive tradition.

2.B.9.2.2 A generation of youth in cultural clash: community versus self

120. Studies show that Generation Y is the most exposed to these emerging values. According to various surveys (ASDAA 2010; Shediak et al. 2013), Generation Y is identified, on the one hand, with individualism, materialism, low levels of personal trust, a desire for self-expression, and independence. However, while being more individualistic and materialistic than their parents and grandparents, this generation also endorses the institution of marriage, believes religion is important and that traditions should be safeguarded. There is, as such, a seeming clash pulling youth in opposite directions: one towards commitment to self-interest and another towards family and community. The youth are not fully alienated from the common cultural heritage and traditional values; however, they are still being pulled towards less social cohesion.

2.B.9.2.3 The potential of Gen Y is curtailed

121. While individualist lifestyles that influence the new generation threaten family values, Generation Y can also be a potential source of positive development and change. A SESRIC analysis (2007b) based on World Value Surveys (2010-2010 wave) show that OIC Millennials capitalize self-expression, self-identity, creativity and imagination, and speaking one's mind. They are also concerned about gender equality and the role and place of women in society. These values are typically cherished as cultural values leading to entrepreneurship and a dynamic society. Yet, analysis also shows that the wider culture in the OIC Member States does not endorse such values and instead endorses discipline, tradition, obedience, and hierarchy, revealing a gap between these emerging values and the

wider values in OIC societies. This hampers the potential of this generation in bringing about positive change to their communities.

2.B.9.2.4 Limited access to regional and global opportunities

122. While Generation Y is the most globally connected generation, and looking across cultures more alike than previous generations, when it comes to access to, participation in, and benefiting from global and regional opportunities, youth in the OIC Member States lag behind the youth of the developed world. This is particularly the case in areas of technological innovation, global and regional institutions and public debate, cultural interaction, educational advances, or quality of life. The OIC Youth Strategy should serve as a main instrument that can offer young citizens new opportunities to take part in and shape global and regional decision-making, public debate, and policy-making especially regarding intercultural dialogue, peace, human rights, and the discourse on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), community voluntarism, and cultural and technological innovation.

2.9.3 Policy Options:

123. Understand the Millennials, their cultural and political leanings

- a) Encourage universities and think tanks to study the attitudes and values of Generation Y both through qualitative and quantitative surveys;

124. Fight against the false separation of ‘family versus individual’ and balance out social cohesion and individual expression

- a) Promote alternative narratives and images of community and family as institutions that are not in conflict with individual development, but on the contrary, complement and facilitate individual progress, quality of life, and happiness;
- b) Develop award programs for youth community involvement.

125. Promote Inter-generational relationship building and strengthen family bonds

- a) Increase efforts in gerontology and family studies towards developing an understanding of youth relationship to parents, larger family and the elderly;
- b) Develop programs and projects to foster mutual understandings between parents and the youth;
- c) Involve schools, nursing homes, universities, and community centers to enable intergenerational understanding and cohesion;
- d) Utilize public spaces like parks and malls to stimulate intergenerational dialogue and interaction.

126. Facilitate youth’s participation in global and regional process and policymaking

- a) Generate opportunities for youth to get involved in exchange processes with their peers from different regions in the OIC and beyond;
Develop a grant scheme for projects that would invest in creating learning activities for youth, contributing to their global awareness and to their active participation;

- b) Invest in the development of instruments that would encourage youth to volunteer and be active in the community at a global, regional, and OIC level.
Invest in the development of cooperation frameworks with other stakeholders from other regions. For this purpose, regional and international programs are to be designed aiming to invest in exchange of good practices;
- c) Raise young citizens' awareness on global, regional, and OIC-level issues and support them in engaging with their causes;
Support local and international stakeholders with responsibilities in the youth field in developing bilateral and international events (such as regional and global youth forums, youth events, youth fairs, etc.).

2.B.10 MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

2.B.10.1 Current status:

127. Economic factors, political instability or social marginalization are among the factors pushing populations to migrate including youth. Migration could be life threatening, but the process of migration can be equally dangerous due to smuggling, trafficking and exploitation. As young people have dreams and ambitions, they can be easily motivated to leave their home countries. As most OIC Member States can be classified as “developing”, each year increasing numbers of youth start their journey both through legal and illegal channels. There are Member States that constitute a source of migrants; some are transit countries and a number are also considered possible final destinations.

2.B.10.2 Challenges:

2.B.10.2.1 Illegal migration

128. High unemployment, lack of education and skills among youth and political instability drive illegal migration. Ongoing crises and wars are also among the prime reasons of forced displacement and illegal migration. Throughout the migration routes, young people are vulnerable for abuse and exploitation and endanger their lives through embarking on unsafe journeys. The abuse and exploitation may not end even at the final destination. Increasing number of families and youth suffer from illegal migration in OIC Member States particularly in Africa and South Asia.

2.B.10.2.2 Brain drain

129. In search of new opportunities and better living conditions, well-educated and promising young people leave their home countries. Emigration of highly-skilled youth, is posing a serious brain drain adding to the development challenge for Member States as they lose some of their most valuable asset, human capital.

2.B.10.3 Policy Options:

130. Coping with illegal migration

1. Work with Member States, regional and international organisations to neutralize illegal migration routes and human trafficking;

2. Educate young people and their parents on risks of illegal migration;
3. Organise national awareness campaigns and effectively use traditional and social media to reach out to youth;
4. Develop a national strategy with the involvement of all stakeholders to fight illegal migration.

131. Fighting the root-causes of illegal migration

1. Provide better education and vocational training to youth with a view to improving their skills;
2. Improve social safety nets for unemployed youth;
3. Design policies to attract youth who are in neither education nor employment into education institutions and labour market;
4. Devise and implement a national youth strategy with a view to improving prospects of youth;
5. Cooperate with international and regional organisations including exchanging best practices and successful initiatives in fighting the root-causes of illegal migration.

132. Reversing brain drain

1. Devise a policy environment that improves job prospects for educated and trained youth;
2. Design and implement incentive mechanisms to increase employability of educated youth;
3. Develop a strategy to attract young people who went abroad for education purposes back to their countries;
4. Improve the entrepreneurship environment where innovative young people can establish and develop start-ups.

2.B.11 YOUTH AND ENVIRONMENT

2.B.11.1 Current status:

133. The deterioration of the environment is one of the chief concerns of youth worldwide, as it affects their present and future well-being. To this end, maintaining and protecting the environment for current and future generations is a necessity requiring addressing key challenges of environmental degradation.
134. In this respect, the optimum use of natural resources and pursuing sustainable economic growth must serve as an essential development policy all over the world. Youth are clear stakeholders in this regard.
135. Youth constitute a significant portion of the world's population exposed and vulnerable to environmental risk. Youth and children are most at risk of the lack of access to clean and safe drinking water, and will be challenged with environmental risk that is a result of present policies. This includes toxicity, falling biodiversity, depleted resources and climate change. The need to engage youth in sustainable action is challenged by political cycles that find it easier to address short term and immediate concerns over future challenges.

2.B.11.2 Policy Option:

136. The OIC 2025 Programme of Action assigns priority to ‘Environment, Climate Change and Sustainability (1.5)’. In this respect, the ten year plan of action recognizes the necessity to address the impending security concerns associated with sustainability, while further addressing the issue of biodiversity, water and sanitation in its priority on ‘Agriculture and Food Security (1.8)’, and ‘Health (1.12)’. The OIC has developed the OIC Water Vision that emphasizes access to improved water and sanitation as a critical priority area for OIC countries, and emphasized the need to address urban-rural disparities. Furthermore, the Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers in its forth meeting in Tunisia in 2010 issued a declaration on “Enhancing the Efforts of the Islamic World towards Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development” and agreed on promoting cooperation between the Islamic countries on issues pertaining to the environment and sustainable development, within the framework of Islamic solidarity and joint Islamic action.

2.B.11.3. Environmental Challenges:

a) Deforestation

137. Nearly 30% of world land area is forested, with a minimum of 1.6 billion people reliant on forests. Forests are also responsible for ensuring survival of fauna and flora, air purification, and nearly three-fourths of fresh water collection. This is significant as Member States are home to 22.6% of the world’s precipitation. From 1990 to 2015, Member States lost a total of 702,457 square kilometers of forest area, which makes up nearly 53% of the total forest area lost in the world during the same period.

b) Carbon Emissions

138. With increased greenhouse gas emission, world temperatures are expected to continue to rise, with grave implications for OIC Member States given their geographical predominance in temperate and arid regions, and close proximity to rivers and oceans. The rise in temperature as a result of carbon dioxide emissions threaten permanent consequences for the continued sustainability of OIC Member States, and the world at large. Impacts may include extreme weather, droughts, rising sea levels, and damaged food chains to name but a few. Global average surface temperatures have increased at double their usual rate over the last 50 years, going from 0.6 to 0.9 degrees Celsius from 1906 to 2005. Land surface air temperatures also show clear signs of nearly doubling over the last century. This results in increased heat waves, droughts, and other repercussions. Meanwhile, ocean temperatures also exhibit near doubling over the last century, which correlates clearly with melting polar ice, thereby raising water levels. This would be catastrophic to a large group of OIC Member States given the reliance on river irrigation, and close proximity of major cities near coasts. A number of Member States already face challenges in this respect with potential mass displacement.

c) Loss of Biodiversity

139. Biodiversity is an issue directly linked to CO₂ emission rates, forest area loss and species survival, and is critical given the sensitive nature of food chains and ecological balance. Nearly 52% of biodiversity loss took place since 1970, and projections reaching 26% for the next 20 years. Already fragile ecosystems are undergoing changes through fish exploitation, global warming and environmental degradation with clear impacts on human life.

d) Water Scarcity

140. Given rising populations among OIC Member States, existing issues of water scarcity and security are only made more serious. Sustainable policies governing renewable water withdrawal are required to prevent water shortages, or consumption of non-renewable sources of water. A number of Member States from North Africa and the Gulf have withdrawn more than 100% of total renewable water resources, which poses critical threats not only to sustainability, but to agriculture and to avoiding water scarcity which acts against sustainable development in other sectors. In 2015, 82% of OIC member country populations have access to improved water, compared to the norm of 89% in developing countries inclusive of the OIC, as opposed to the developed country grouping population with 99% having access to improved drinking water.

2.B.11.4 Proposed Action:

- a) To integrate environmental education into curricula and ensure training of teachers on environmental issues.
- b) To engage youth groups on environmental issues.
- c) To facilitate international dissemination of information, data, success stories and best practices on facing environmental challenges and sustainability.
- d) To encourage technologically advanced Member States to develop capacity of other Member States in the use of environment-friendly technologies and practices, in addition to the utilization of youth for their use and development.
- e) To initiate government-civil society joint programmes promoting active citizenship in combatting deforestation, desertification, and promoting tree planting, waste reduction, recycling and water preservation.
- f) To involve youth in decision-making on matters of environmental concern, with a view to the implementation of sustainable development policies.
- g) To utilize media as a means of spreading awareness on environmental issues for youth.
- h) To involve youth in the implementation of sustainability projects, to further qualify them for further decision-making in environmental policy.

3. MODALITIES FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OIC YOUTH STRATEGY

3.1 The Role of intra-OIC and International Cooperation in Achieving the Objectives of the Strategy

141. The OIC Member States constitute a substantial part of the developing world and reflect high levels of heterogeneity and divergence in terms of socio-economic development. This heterogeneity in development profiles could also be seen in their performance towards addressing challenges of youth. The OIC Member States, as a group, have witnessed significant progress in improving the living conditions of youth through increasing school enrolment rates and reducing early marriage over the last two decades. However, this progress has been uneven and widespread inequalities persist between and within countries. The situation is particularly alarming in low income and least developed Member States. The majority of these countries are characterized by slow economic growth, limited resources, widespread income inequality, inadequate capacity development, insufficient coverage of social services, fragile peace and security situation and lack of an enabling environment to attract investment and encourage active participation of private sector in socio-economic development. On the other hand, a number of middle-income OIC Member States have challenges particularly related to youth entrepreneurship, threat of youth extremism and weak political participation of youth. This picture necessitates increased intra-OIC cooperation in the domain of youth to address a wide spectrum of challenges.
142. As the second largest intergovernmental organization, the OIC has a unique strength where one third of its population are represented by youth, which is the most innovative and dynamic group of a society. Nevertheless, the needs and challenges of youth have been changing rapidly. Consequently, the OIC Member States need to respond to these challenges on a timely basis in order to enable youth to reach their full personal and professional potential. For this purpose, having a common framework, the OIC Youth Strategy, is instrumental for Member States to address the major challenges facing youth.
143. The existing heterogeneity across OIC Member States in terms of the state of youth and youth policies constitutes a window of opportunity to enhance intra-OIC cooperation with a view to achieving the targets of the OIC Youth Strategy. Intra-OIC cooperation would facilitate the implementation of the Strategy as well as enable OIC Member States to achieve its targets through:
 - a) **Taking stock of national experiences:** As a number of OIC Member States are well advanced in terms of youth policies, they managed to reduce both the number and depth of challenges faced by youth. These OIC Member States addressed the challenges of youth by cooperating with all national stakeholders and allocating sufficient financial as well as

human resources. In this regard, mapping national best practices in the OIC Member States in the domain of youth policy would help in identifying successful policy interventions that improved the state of youth. Identification of successful youth policies would be used to develop experience-sharing programs among the OIC Member States where interested OIC Member States would learn from others. This approach would not only reduce the possibility of repeating the same mistakes but could also help to shorten the length of policy-design process at the national level. In other words, enhancing intra-OIC cooperation through identifying and transferring best practices in the domain of youth policies could improve the well-being of youth.

- b) **Benefiting from the experience of the OIC and its institutions:** The OIC, as an intergovernmental organization, has developed several policy documents, action plans (e.g. The OIC Strategic Health Programme of Action 2014-2023, The OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women-OPA AW) to address development issues in its Member States on varying subjects. Moreover, the OIC regularly organizes ministerial and high-level meetings in around 20 different areas. Furthermore, the existing subsidiary, affiliated and specialized organs of the OIC may be useful institutional mechanisms in the implementation of the Youth Strategy and in achieving its objectives. The OIC, as an intergovernmental organization, also plays an active role in prevention and resolution of conflict in the OIC Member States. As conflicts have had a considerable impact on vulnerable groups including youth and women, enhancing intra-OIC cooperation would help to reduce the repercussions of conflicts on youth.
- c) **Leveraging partnership with the United Nations:** Given the prominent position of the OIC in the international arena and the role of its Member States, there is much advantage to engaging with the UN to offer support to the OIC Member States. This would offer the benefit of enhanced policy coherence, broadening stakeholder pools, and developing inter-linkages for cooperation on mutual policy priorities and opportunities. In this regard, critical UN nodes in the field of youth with potential for the OIC Member States include the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development and the United Nations Development Programme.
- d) **Capacity building:** Many OIC Member States suffer from underdeveloped national capacity to address problems of youth. A few Member States have well-structured education and training programs that enable their policy makers, experts and civil society to address the challenges of youth. In this context, enhancing intra-OIC cooperation would help many OIC Member States to learn from others through developing and delivering joint capacity building programs. In this context, relevant OIC institutions such as ICYF-DC and SESRIC could play a catalytic role in organizing such capacity building programs

designed for public officials, national experts, and civil society organizations working in the domain of youth.

- e) **Addressing financial constraints:** In many OIC Member States, limited financial resources allocated for youth policies and programs constitute an important challenge for policy makers. However, existing frameworks within the OIC system could facilitate fundraising for projects related to youth. Moreover, enhancing intra-OIC cooperation would increase knowledge of financial constraints of some OIC Member States in executing youth related projects that may facilitate matching between a donor and recipient country/institution. Finally, enhancing intra-OIC cooperation would motivate a group of OIC Member States to join their financial resources to implement youth projects and programs in a number of beneficiary OIC Member States.

3.2 Institutional Structures on Youth Policy Coordination

- 144. In order to follow-up of the implementation of the Strategy, foster greater youth participation, exchange good practices in this domain and ensure coordination, a mechanism should be developed to achieve this objective. The mechanism would ensure effective consultation among the OIC Member States; in particular, representatives of the Ministries of Youth and Sports responsible at the national level for the planning, implementing and evaluation of youth policies, as well as ensure cooperation with youth representatives, and youth non-governmental organizations, in coordination with Member States. The said mechanism should, as much as possible take advantage of existing OIC structures for the elaboration and implementation of the OIC strategies and programmes.
- 145. The Islamic Conference of Youth and Sports Minister (ICYSM) shall adopt the Strategy and submit the same for endorsement by the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM). ICYSM shall also appraise CFM its programmes and implementation plan. For this purpose, ICYSM shall be assisted by its consultative organs, namely: The Permanent Ministerial Council on Youth (PMCY), and the Steering Committee for Youth (SCY).
- 146. The OIC Secretary- General shall follow-up the implementation of the Strategy, in collaboration with Member States and in coordination with all relevant OIC institutions working in the domain of Youth and Sports, including ICYF-DC, ISESCO, Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation (ISSF) among others, through the Permanent OIC Joint Committee on Youth Affairs (PJCY) However, the PJCY shall continue to coordinate its activities with the Thematic Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs of the Annual Coordination Meeting of OIC Institutions (ACMOI)...
- 147. **Four institutional structures are foreseen:** Four institutional structures are relevant to this strategy:

- a) The Islamic Conference of Youth and Sport Ministers (ICYSM): The Islamic Conference of Youth and Sport Ministers (ICYSM): It is a sectoral ministerial conference convened, biennially, at the instance of CFM, in accordance with Article 10 of the OIC Charter. It shall submit the outcome of this session, including the Strategy and its implementation programmes and plans to the CFM for endorsement and review the implementation of the Strategy on the basis of the follow up reports by the OIC Secretary General in coordination with relevant OIC institutions.
- b) Permanent Ministerial Council on Youth and Sports (PMCYS): The Council will continue to function between the sessions of the ICYSM and will ensure the follow-up of the implementation of the ICYSM resolutions.
- c) The Permanent OIC Joint Committee on Youth Affairs: It shall assist in the coordination of the various implementation activities of relevant OIC institutions with the support of the OIC Secretary- General.
- d) The Steering Committee for Youth (SCY): It shall be comprised of Senior Experts of all Member States and shall assist ICYSM in discharging its set tasks and shall meet annually or when necessary upon the invitation of its chairman in coordination with the General Secretariat.

3.3. Programmes of the Strategy

148. The following programmes shall be accorded priority in the implementation of the Strategy, subject to the approval of CFM:

a) The OIC Youth Waqf

149. In order to partly address the financial requirements for the implementation of the Strategy an OIC Youth Waqf will be established to encourage and facilitate the development of youth in the OIC Member States in accordance with the most effective frameworks and initiatives established by the Islamic Development Bank. Within this broad objective. The Youth Waqf will be designed to provide financial support for both local actions and international exchange projects. The operational procedures of the Waqf will be adopted by the ICYSM and endorsed by the CFM.

b) OIC Youth Centers

150. In order to support youth activities, the OIC Member States will create a network of OIC Youth Centers in Member States, through official channels, to contribute to the implementation of the Strategy.

c) Research on youth issues

151. A coherent and coordinated youth policy need to be developed in the light of evidence that reflects the current trends and realities as well as emerging ones relating to challenges and opportunities facing youth. The OIC Member States will therefore invest in the development of youth research.

152. Research on youth issues should:
- a. Be based on national youth reports;
 - b. Be coordinated with the Steering Committee in a manner that covers the different dimensions of the Youth Strategy;
 - c. Evaluate the overall progress towards the achievement of the objectives of the Youth Strategy;
 - d. Design a dashboard of indicators concerning youth (i.e. OIC Youth Development Index).
 - e. Identify best practices in terms of youth policies and youth programs;
 - f. Involve youth in the Member States in the research process.
- d) OIC Young Leaders' Summit
153. The OIC Young Leader' s Summit represents a keystone ICYF- DC' s initiative to provide a platform for youth leaders throughout the OIC Member States to discuss priorities of youth. The 1st OIC Young Leaders Summit was convened from 14-15 as a pre-Summit to the 13th Session of Islamic Summit Conference held on 14-15 April 2016 in Istanbul. Over 200 young leaders from the OIC Member States and Muslim minorities from across the world discussed 37 possible recommendations to the Islamic Summit. Their efforts culminated in the “10 Goals in 10 Years” presented to the Islamic Summit (Ref No.: Annex I, ICYSM Res. N. OIC/ ICYSM- 3/ 2016/ R2-Y). The OIC Member States are urged to support the continuation of this initiative.
- e) Youth Day and Award
154. Extending an award of recognition to youth who have distinguished themselves in service to the collective well-being in the OIC Member States would contribute in recognizing the significant role of youth leadership and engagement in the process of development in Member States. The award combined with the launch of an OIC Youth Day, which in accordance with relevant CFM Resolution will be celebrated annually on the third of September would have a considerable role in advancing youth solidarity and awareness of challenges and ongoing efforts to resolve them by varying individuals, civil society organizations. To this end, through the use of effective campaigning and communicative media action the OIC Youth Day and Award may contribute in developing a culture of public engagement and service among the OIC Member States substantial youth populations for constructive ends while offering an effective counter- narrative to the existing alternative ones of disenfranchisement or radicalism.
155. The Award should be presented at the future meetings of the ICYSM. The OIC Member States and relevant OIC Institutions are encouraged to mark the third of September as the OIC Youth Day with appropriate celebratory initiatives. The award procedures will be adopted by the ICYSM and endorsed by the CFM.

f) Communication and Visibility Plan

156. The impact of a strategy is commensurate with the level of engagement it elicits from its stakeholders. In this respect, visibility and a communication strategy maximizes synergy, cultivates possibilities. A communication and visibility plan will be prepared to ensure maximum impact in youth fields of priority, and to broaden public engagement in the OIC Member States to enhance awareness and generate support for existing initiatives, and invite new initiatives in the domain of youth development.
157. The communication strategy will focus on Member States most in need of visibility or youth engagement and mobilization. It will define mediums of engagement and metrics for assessment of effectiveness, and will be reviewed periodically by the institutional follow up mechanisms.

4 THE WAY FORWARD

158. Once the Youth Strategy is adopted by the ICYSM and presented to the CFM for endorsement, the OIC General Secretariat, in coordination with relevant OIC institutions including ICYF-DC, SESRIC, IDB, ISESCO, ISSF, IUMS and ISF should prepare a Plan of Action for the implementation of this Strategy which will propose and clarify timeframes, budgetary allocations, key performance indicators (KPIs) as well as specific roles of OIC Member States and relevant national and OIC Institutions.
159. The OIC Member States are expected to demonstrate high-level commitment and take significant steps in the implementation of the OIC Youth Strategy.



Employment

The OIC Member States are largely characterized by low labour force participation and high unemployment rates, in particular among the young. As of 2015, youth unemployment in the OIC Member States estimated at 16%. Female unemployment among youth is highest in the OIC Member States. Unemployment presents a considerable challenge to the OIC Member States, particularly given the large number of issues it generates.



Education

Average youth literacy rates are better than the average adult literacy rates in the OIC Member States. The total number of tertiary school students in the OIC Member States has increased more than two-fold from 14.2 million to 33.6 million between 2000 and 2015. Illiteracy and low levels of participation in educational institutions among youth population constitute important challenges in a number of OIC Member States, in particular those located in Sub-Saharan Africa and in South Asia.



Marriage and Early Marriage

The prevalence of early marriage in the OIC Member States was found to be relatively higher when compared to other country groups. While early marriage constitutes a long-running challenge, new demographic challenges that face young people and marital union have been emerging across OIC Member States; namely, the decline in marriage rate and increase in the age at first marriage (AFM).



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