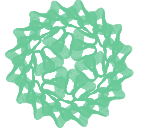


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ARAB YOUTH COUNCIL
FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

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Arab Youth Council for Climate Change: Mobilising Youth for a Sustainable Future

THE FUTURE BORROWERS OF THE EARTH

The oft-cited quote about our planet is that we have not inherited the land from our parents, we are borrowing it from our children, and they are, in turn, the future borrowers of this earth. Today more than any other time, the social and economic inclusion of youth is central to both the growth and the stability of the Middle East and North African region.

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Half of the population in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is under 25 years old, and two-thirds are under the age of 35. They have a challenging time ahead in our region, facing multiple challenges. **The most immediate and tangible challenge is employment.** A report by the ILO (August 2021) noted that the Arab region registered the highest unemployment levels worldwide. Employment and economic inclusion are, surely, the foremost pressing issues for today's youth. However, this should not divert attention from an equally pressing, and arguably more complex, issue which is climate change.

For the youth in MENA, there is a critical need to acknowledge that they are inheriting the hottest and driest region in the world.¹ As the climate clock is ticking, MENA is already recognized as the "hottest and driest" region on earth by the World Bank, as it warns that the effects of climate degradation are only making things worse. Today's youth face a future that is already threatened by worsening conditions due to climate degradation,

increasing temperatures, rising sea levels, floods, changing patterns of rainfalls, and shrinking arable lands. These factors could lead to food insecurity and water conflicts, which will further exacerbate current conflicts and instability in the region.²



The impact of climate change on the livelihood of young Arabs is also significant from an economic aspect. According to the World Bank, the MENA region's GDP is estimated to lose around 6-14% by 2050 from climate-related water issues on agriculture, health, and incomes, rendering it the region with the greatest economic loss in the face of climate change. This corresponds to recent data stating that air pollution has already cost the MENA region roughly 2.2% of GDP (\$80 billion) in 2019. Given that MENA youth unemployment rates have been the highest in the world for the last 25 years, reaching 23% in 2020 and up to 42% for young women, climate change is an intermediate and real threat.³

1. Abu Mezied, Asmaa. "This Is How We Inspire Young People in the Middle East to Join the Fight against Climate Change." World Economic Forum, 8 Feb. 2020. www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/04/how-can-more-youth-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-join-climate-change-movements
2. Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 2017. Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition. www.fao.org/3/8336EN/8336en.pdf
3. MENA OECD Government - Business Summit, 2021. An Eco-System for Youth Economic Empowerment. www.oecd.org/mena/competitiveness/issue-paper-session-3.pdf

The burden young Arabs are inheriting needs immediate action against climate change and concrete steps towards building more climate-resilient societies. According to research, without urgent action to curb global emissions, cities in the region may become uninhabitable before 2100. Trying to tackle and mitigate this coming crisis facing future generations in the context of present policymaking is going to be a major challenge. However, it can also be an opportunity.

This requires greater, and more inclusive, efforts to ensure that young Arabs' voices are being heard, that the youth are engaged in future policy, and that they

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are taking action to shape their own future. They should not only become part of the solution, they should lead it.

Addressing climate threats needs transformative efforts that are characterized by innovation, speed, and scale. If anything, the evolving technologies and platforms in the last couple of decades have proven that young people have the talent to innovate, cooperate and and develop new solutions to tackle many of our global, social, and economic issues.

Being young today in the Middle East and North Africa is a superpower. It is the youth in the region who have sparked social change, led their countries to adopt bold policies, and made history. It is time we put them at the heart of our response to climate change.

In addition to being the future borrowers of the earth, these young people are the consumers, employees, and leaders of the future. Involving them in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs will increase their ownership, transparency, and accountability.



So where do young Arabs stand when it comes to climate change? And how can they be engaged in policy making and solution design to enable a better, sustainable, and more inclusive future for all?





YOUTH CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION IN MENA

The last decade has witnessed a rise in <bottom-up> environmental awareness among the youth in the region. In one survey, around 85% of young Arabs believed that their countries should better address their environmental needs.⁴ Experts are predicting that in the future, the Arab youth will increasingly influence the discussion of environmental issues. Yet, their participation in climate action and policymaking remains low, ad-hoc, and not at scale.

To understand how the region's youth are engaged in the climate agenda and the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focusing on the environment and climate change, a regional study was conducted to review current initiatives in terms of scale and impact. The study reviewed initiatives in 22 countries in the MENA region covering climate change, sustainable development and public policy, water management, and waste management.

There are notable regional initiatives like the AYCM (Arab Youth Climate Movement) which involves youth who spread awareness, educate their communities, and lead the change towards a more sustainable future. Others include the Arab Youth Sustainable Development Network which mobilizes the youth to raise awareness on sustainability issues with the aim of influencing public policies. Most other initiatives are local in nature like Connect with Nature (UAE) and the Youth Water Dialogue (Tunisia).

However, the overall finding from the study was that there is a limited number of initiatives engaging the youth, and the majority of those have achieved limited impact to date. Where there has been an impact, there has been an increased interest in environmental protection and an increased sense of ownership in a sense that youth felt that their voice was being heard. However, there was little to no influence on public policy and no evidence of any notable resource mobilisation, let alone implemented solutions. Having noted that, the impact was also difficult to assess due to the lack of reliable data.

It is also worth noting that only 20% of the reviewed initiatives leveraged technology, only 10% were based on public and private sector cooperation, and virtually all relied on small charity donations and government support.

These limitations are caused by several barriers that hinder youth participation in climate change policymaking and action. Overall, there is a low level of awareness on the issue, despite the massive rise in focus over the past few years. According to a 2020 survey, while 71% percent of respondents in the GCC know what climate change is and are aware of its negative impact on the environment, 28% believe that climate change will have a positive impact on the planet.^{5,6} Findings from the Arab Barometer show that more than 57% of Arabs agree to an extent that climate change is a serious problem.⁷ Nonetheless, this still means that more than 2 in 5 Arabs do not agree

4. ASD&A Burson-Masteller. 2017. Arab Youth Survey 2017. www.arabyouthsurvey.com/pdf/whitepaper/en/2017-AYS-White-Paper.pdf

5. Note: While all respondents are adults and not necessarily youth, the majority of Arab countries are young people.

6. Hildebrandt, Joerg et al. «Are Consumers In The Gulf States Ready To Go Green?». BCG Global. 2021. <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2021/gulf-state-consumer-sentiment-toward-green-agenda>. Accessed 21 Sept 2021.

7. Raz, Daniella. «Climate Change: A Tertiary Concern For Arab Citizens». Arab Barometer. 2020. <https://www.arabbarometer.org/2020/04/climate-change-a-tertiary-concern-for-arab-citizens/>

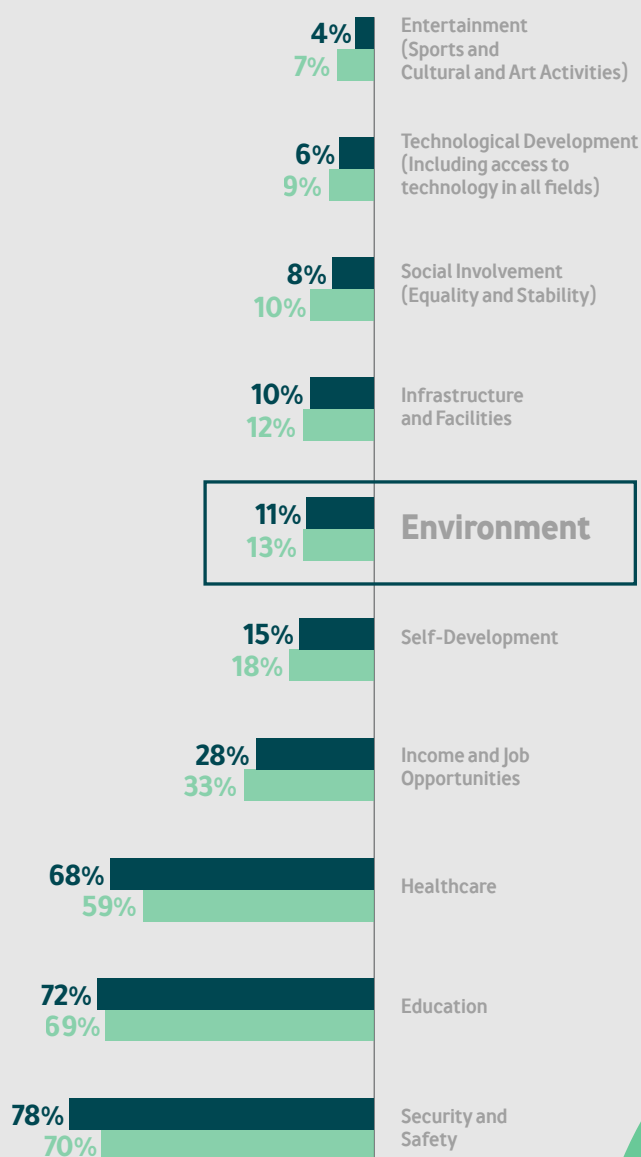
that climate change is a serious problem. A more recent survey conducted by the Arab Youth Center found that around 40% of young people, only, say they are ready to adopt sustainable behaviours that can protect and preserve the environment and contribute to mitigating the causes of climate change, especially if these behaviours become easier to embrace.⁸

In addition to this low awareness level, there are four general barriers that impact meaningful youth engagement in climate change issues. Most of these are global observations, but some are particularly acute in the region.

1. Climate change is not a priority, yet: no social group feels more affected by climate change than young people. Therefore, it is unsurprising that young climate activists globally led movements in more than 150 countries around the world to push for prioritising climate change in national and global agendas. This was not the case in MENA countries where the majority of youth are being overwhelmed with their respective countries' immense political and socio-economic challenges. The Arab Youth Priority Survey, conducted by AYC and published in August 2020, indicates that the environment hardly represents a priority for Arab youth (only 12 percent thought it is).⁹ The 2016 Arab Youth Survey found that climate change ranks second to last in the list of concerns for young Arabs.¹⁰ Since then, despite being an annual survey, the issue of climate change did not appear in the top 10 concerns for youth who are preoccupied -and overwhelmed- with other socio-economic issues that impact their current livelihood and very near future. In a region where youth unemployment surpasses that of other parts of the world, the youth's perspective on climate change is best characterised by the words of high school students in Gaza, who said: "climate change is important, but it is hard for me to consider it a priority".¹¹

One of the reasons Arab youth ranked climate change as a low priority is the fact that they have a vague understanding of environmental sustainability and governance issues. In addition to that, Arab youth don't fully appreciate the consequences of climate change and lack robust awareness levels of the realm of sustainability as a whole.

Environmental issues are somehow important for the Arab Youth, but they are not a top priority for them.

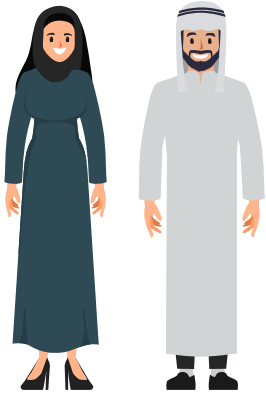


8. Emirates News Agency. Arab Youth Centre Launches Arab Youth Council For Climate Change. 2021. <https://www.wam.ae/en/details/1395202986f>

9. Arab Youth Center. 2020. Arab Youth Priorities Survey. <https://priorities.arabyouthcenter.org>

10. ClimaSouth. «Climate Change Is Not A Priority For Young Arabs». 2016. <http://www.climasouth.eu/en/code/225>

11. Abu Meziad, Asmaa. «This Is How We Inspire Young People In The Middle East To Join The Fight Against Climate Change». World Economic Forum, 2019. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/04/how-can-more-youth-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-join-climate-change-movements/>



2. Government approaches to youth engagement are fragmented: the youth are not usually included in policy conversations and typically feel side-lined by governments due to perceptions based on gender and age. Overall, the low level of their involvement in decision and policymaking processes renders their role as "observers". While there are variations from one country to another, these perceptions are more likely to impact youth in conflict and rural areas and young women. This low engagement holds true for both involving them in policy processes, as well as for highlighting their roles in strategies and policies. Youth is a key segment of our society and should be seen as a cross-cutting policy area. The current lack of a strategically coordinated approach in the region is delivering policies and programs that are fragmented, less comprehensive, and less impactful.

3. International policy frameworks: according to a 2021 report by the International Peace Institute, apart from the three Security Council resolutions on Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS), there is no recent international policy framework on youth. The last such framework dates back to 1995.¹² In 2018, with the support and leadership of the UN envoy on youth, the UN Youth 2030 Strategy was launched providing an umbrella framework focusing on three pillars peace and security; human rights; and sustainable development. That strategy did mention the role of youth in climate change, the Paris Agreement did not. This is considered a step forward towards a more youth-inclusive decision-making process, but more efforts are needed to transform the youth's role in the global climate change agenda, away from being solely symbolic.



4. Youth strategies and programs are underfunded: several factors impact funding youth initiatives. For a start, there is an expectation across all stakeholders that young people's activism should be voluntary. Secondly, youth-led initiatives lack the technical skills and experience to pursue and apply for major funding from donors. This is compounded by the lack of a whole-government approach towards youth policies as noted earlier. This fragmentation renders the available and limited financial resources insufficient. Added to that is the fact that young people (globally) are not involved in allocating public resources, neither by voting nor by any other methods of policy engagement.

¹² Roesch, Leiva & Rahmaty, Masooma. Issue Brief: Youth Participation In Global Governance For Sustaining Peace And Climate Action. International Peace Institute, 2021. <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/202104/IFI-E-RPT-Youth-Participation-3.pdf>.

THE POWER OF YOUTH: RE-IMAGINE A BETTER TOMORROW

While Arab youth find climate change a low priority, they show a great desire for active civic participation in social and environmental development. For example, nearly two-thirds (65%) of young people in the UAE want to take action to protect the environment.¹³ In Masdar's Global Survey, 79% of MENA youth respondents stated either 'strongly agree' or 'somewhat agree' that 'governments need to listen more to young people on sustainability issues. Nearly a third (29%) said they have boycotted a company because it did not act sustainability. Whilst this might seem as a contradiction, the light at the end of the tunnel is visible through programs that engage youth and continuously invest in tools that strengthen their climate change perceptions and actions.

Youth are eager to tackle climate change and environmental challenges



People believe that business and government share equal responsibility for developing clean technology and renewable energy



79%

of youth believe that governments need to innovate and take risks if they are to make a difference on the environment

8 in 10

MENA youth want governments to listen more to young people on sustainability



76%

Say current leaders have not done enough to protect the environment



57%

of MENA youth are interested in working on studying in a field related to sustainability



MENA youth believe their generation have the biggest responsibility to find solutions to sustainability problems.

Young people can be the catalyst for the change needed in our region. Greta Thunberg, a 16-year-old Swedish climate activist who made headlines all around the globe, is only one example of what youth voices can achieve. Her voice mobilised around 4 million people in 2,500 events in more than 160 countries.¹⁴ Isra Hirsi, an 18-year-old American environmental justice organiser co-founded the U.S. Youth Climate Strike in 2019 where 100,000 young people marched for climate justice.¹⁵

¹³ Emirates Nature - World Wide Fund for Nature. Survey Finds UAE Youth Want to Protect Our Environment And Take Part In More Nature Based Activities & Events. 2019. <https://www.emiratesnatureworf.ae/en/press-release/598-survey-finds-uae-youth-want-to-protect-our-environment-and-take-part-in-more-nature-based-activities>. Accessed 21 Sept 2021

¹⁴ McGrath, Maggie. «Why Greta Thunberg Is One Of The World'S Most Powerful Women». Forbes. 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maggiemcgrath/2019/12/why-greta-thunberg-is-one-of-the-worlds-most-powerful-women/?sh=51ea38512e>

¹⁵ «40 Under 40». 2021. <https://fortune.com/40-under-402021/isra-hirsi/>

Youth climate action goes beyond individual efforts and is indeed much more than organising strikes. Many youth-led groups and organisations are trying to combat climate change and make their communities more climate-resilient. For example, **Zero Hour** is a youth-led movement that aims to center the voices of diverse youth on the conversation around climate and environmental justice. It was founded by four teenagers in 2017 to create entry points, training, and resources for new young activists and organisers wanting to take concrete action around climate change.¹⁶ Another example is **Connect With Nature**, a UAE environmental organisation that aims to reach and inspire 500,000 young adults, through digital and physical experiences, and plans to raise awareness and knowledge, plus provide the necessary skills for young people to become future sustainability leaders. **The Arab Youth Climate Movement (AYMC)** is another initiative that was established after COP18 in 2012 and is considered the largest climate change awareness and advocacy group in the MENA region with chapters in more than 15 Arab countries.

In Morocco, the **El Moudda** adaptation initiative has managed to engage all community members in their climate change adaptation activities.

The project, which was managed by people under the age of 30 with the guidance of elders, aimed at increasing the wellbeing of the local community through the protection of critical village infrastructure and strengthening local food security. This project won the Equator Prize in 2012 for Community-Based Adaptation.

In Egypt, many small and grassroots initiatives are trying to tackle the issue of climate change. An example is **Cairo Climate Talks**, a monthly Egyptian-German forum, which hosts environmental discussions with policy makers around the world.

Today, our region has a golden opportunity. There is a 'sweet spot' in which tackling climate change and creating jobs and economic growth do not have to be an either / or decision. In fact, tackling climate change should be at the heart of our regional plans to grow our economies and create jobs.



¹⁶ «Zero Hour», Thisiszerohour.Org, 2021, <http://thisiszerohour.org/>.



INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The fight against climate change has already created new economic sectors including electric vehicles, solar systems, and more. Many see the opportunity now to build back better, and greener.

Promises of creating new job opportunities to support green economic growth are being made by many nations. The Global Commission on the Economy and Climate has estimated that countries' taking strong climate actions between 2018 and 2030 could generate over 65 million new low-carbon jobs and deliver at least \$26 trillion in net global economic benefits.¹⁷ The World Economic Forum's 2020 report on the Future of Nature and Business estimates that the sector can generate 395 million jobs worldwide by 2030 along with \$10 trillion in annual business opportunities. This is our decade of 'green jobs', and we must capitalise on it in the region.

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In the USA, through President Biden's economic plan, employment within the clean sector will increase from 3 million jobs to 10 million jobs. The Australian government has created more than 10,000 new jobs related to the waste recycling sector alone in the country. More than 13% of Italy's workers are already employed in green jobs which include

engineers, lawyers, and even cooks. Germany today employs 40,000 solar-energy technicians; a figure that is still not meeting the increasing demand for these technicians. A report by the Energy Efficiency Infrastructure Group suggests that decarbonising the UK's housing stock will create 100,000 jobs annually over the next decade. The UK Prime Minister has also created a ten-point plan for a green industrial revolution to create 250,000 jobs. He went a step further and organized a week for green skills where around 5,000 young children aged 11+ will be placed in work opportunities in the green sector. Needless to say, greening economies will have transformational effects in the world of work and skills. The green transition will not happen if people do not have the awareness, knowledge and skills to drive it forward. And that means big changes in education, training and lifelong learning.

The youth population in the MENA region is projected to reach 100 million in 2030 which puts more pressure on governments to create job opportunities. The Green Economy will be a crucial sector to create these jobs, which in turn require heavy investments in skilling, re-skilling, and up-skilling current and future generations.

In addition to addressing unemployment in the region through greening our economies, women's participation in the labor market could be re-balanced. Jobs in renewables are more gender balanced than in the broader energy field, with women holding 32% of the total workforce in 2019. In the field of fossil fuels, they account for 21% of the workers.¹⁸

Simply put, encouraging Arab youth engagement in climate change will be more effective when it relates to the challenges they are facing today, especially youth unemployment. Leveraging the green economy could be the region's way out to lower unemployment rates and provide a better and more sustainable life for all coming future generations.

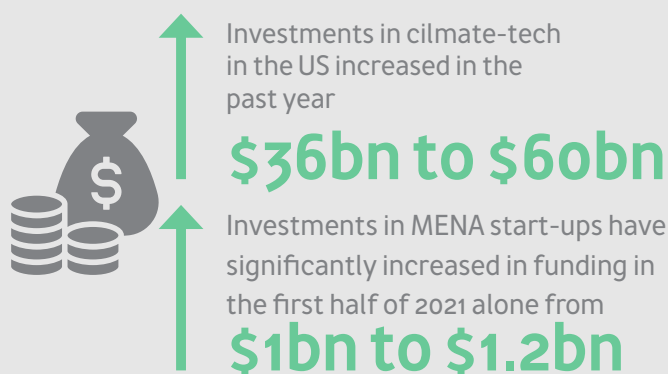
¹⁷ Asian Development Bank. A green economic reset will deliver an inclusive, lasting recovery for Asia and the Pacific. 2021. A green economic reset will deliver an inclusive, lasting recovery for Asia and the Pacific | Asian Development Bank (adb.org)
¹⁸ "Climate Action Fast Facts." United Nations. United Nations. www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/key-findings

THE "NETSCAPE-LIKE" MOMENT

Between 2013 and 2020, investments in technology focused on climate change (Climate-tech) grew at a rate that is five times higher than the overall global start-up funding rate. In the US alone, investments increased from \$36bn to \$60bn in just one year.

In a recent speech at the California Institute of Technology, venture capitalist Vinod Khosla urged future engineers and scientists to pursue climate-tech innovation and replicate what The Economist, a newspaper, called the "Netscape-like" moment the world witnessed in the mid 1990's, a moment that ushered in the consumer internet.

Today, it is estimated that investments in climate-tech start-ups are growing exponentially in value. Tesla, the most prominent example, is currently valued at around \$700bn compared to \$1.7bn in 2010 when it went public. Another example is Beyond Meat which was valued at \$1.5bn when it went public in 2019. The S&P Global Clean Index has generated annualised total returns of more than 40% over the past three years, more than double those of the benchmark S&P 500 index of big American firms. It is also predicted that green energy could crown the world's first trillionaire.¹⁹



Investments in MENA start-ups have significantly increased from \$1 billion in all of 2020 to \$1.2 billion in funding in the first half of 2021 alone.²⁰ A part of these will start filtering through to green start-ups. Youth in MENA have a golden opportunity today to be engaged in climate action through start-ups focusing on green tech. Changelabs, in collaboration with Green for Growth Fund (GGF), a €600 million+ investment fund, has launched a green-tech accelerator "Scale Up To Green," targeting Egypt-based scaleups.

Other entrepreneurial youth efforts in the region include Jordan's new smartphone application "Greenjo"

is gaining popularity as a way of both generating a source of income for households and protecting the environment by allowing households to sell their recyclable wastes.

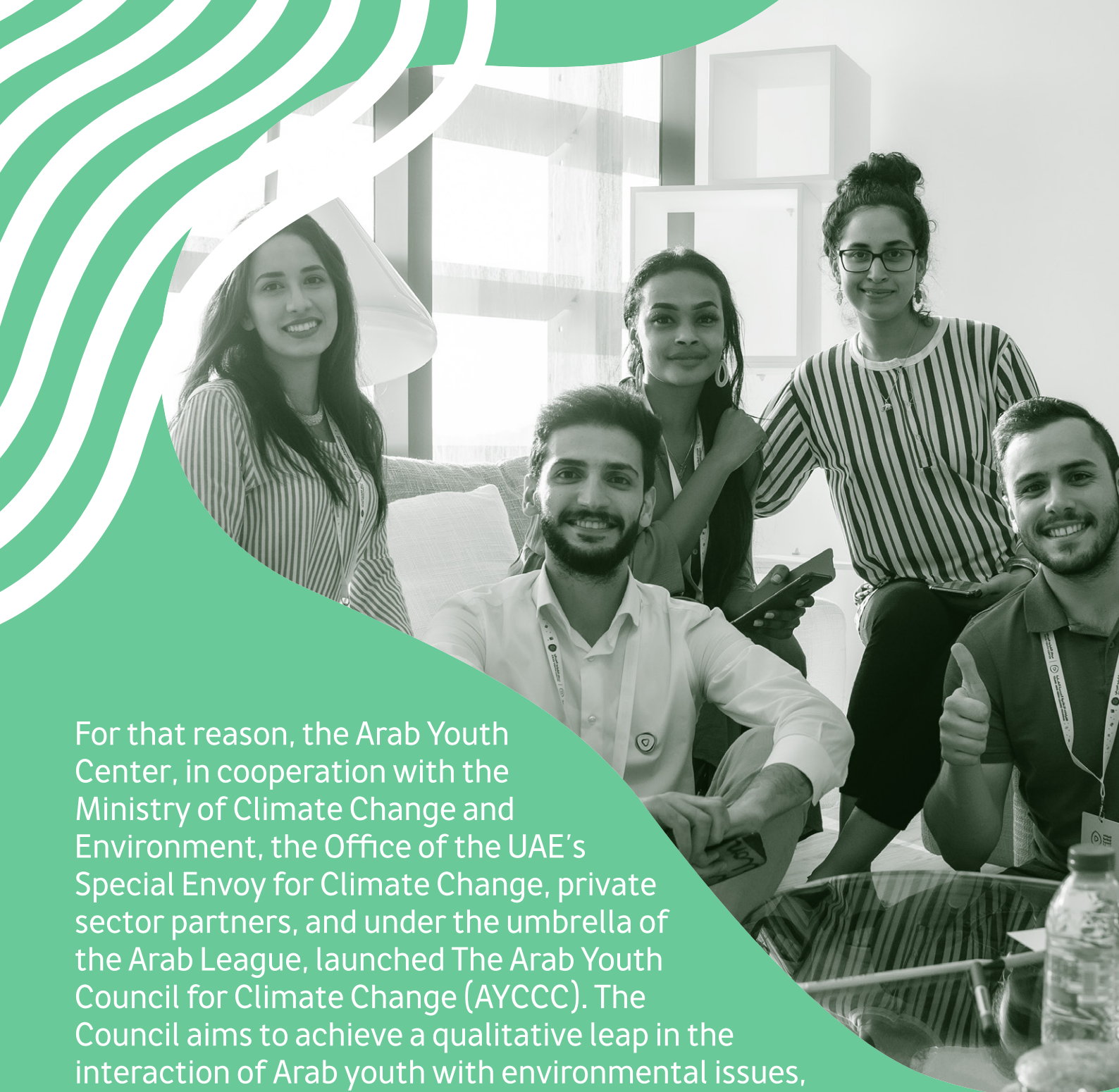
UAE's **Ehfaaz** is a high-tech company that aspires to "revolutionise the recycling landscape" by using food and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) waste to produce organic fertiliser and cleaning products.

Many other MENA start-ups contribute to the sustainability agenda and fighting climate change. Tunisia's **Saphon Energy** harnesses wind power without blades and without creating noise pollution. **Raye7** is an Egyptian App for enterprise-level carpooling for corporates. The platform helps people, through matching riders and drivers for their daily commute, find convenient and affordable rides while reducing traffic and ultimately reducing CO2 emissions. Annual savings for every 100 people using Raye7 are estimated to be 72,000 hours for riders, USD\$ 130,000, and 262 tons of CO2.

In 2020, the UAE government has launched the **Abu Dhabi Climate Initiative** which includes the **Climate Lab** incubator which will assist climate and water tech entrepreneurs and startups.

Preparing future generations for the green economy goes beyond providing them with the right technical skills. It requires increasing their environmental awareness, providing them with core skills such as analytical skills, innovation, and entrepreneurship, and increasing the attraction of new rising sectors amongst youth. It also requires involving them in shaping future policy.

19. The Economist. «Billions Are Pouring Into The Business Of Decarbonisation». 2021. <https://www.economist.com/business/billions-are-pouring-into-the-business-of-decarbonisation/21805649>.
20. Trade Arabia. «Mena Startups Attract Record \$1.2Bn In Funding In H1». 2021. http://www.tradearabia.com/news/BANK_185658.html.



For that reason, the Arab Youth Center, in cooperation with the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, the Office of the UAE's Special Envoy for Climate Change, private sector partners, and under the umbrella of the Arab League, launched The Arab Youth Council for Climate Change (AYCCC). The Council aims to achieve a qualitative leap in the interaction of Arab youth with environmental issues, support youth climate action, and engage young Arabs in developing innovative and sustainable solutions to the climate change challenges.

The Council will work towards equipping young Arabs with much needed green skills, involving them in the policy making process, and encouraging them to pursue investments in start-ups and small and medium enterprises in the field of environmental protection and combating climate change.

Today's growing attention to climate change could be the silver-bullet and the ideal opportunity for a more inclusive, just, and sustainable future.

ABOUT THE ARAB YOUTH CENTER

The Arab Youth Center (AYC) was established to realize the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Presidential Affairs, to empower young Arabs and address their needs. The Center offers a unique platform to develop youth capabilities and support innovation and creativity among youth. AYC implements purposeful initiatives across diverse sectors. In addition, AYC conducts research amongst young Arabs to help decision-makers shape youth-friendly policies in the Arab region.

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ABOUT THE POSTERITY INSTITUTE



Posterity is a noun meaning "future generations". The Posterity Institute is an independent, mission-driven and nonpartisan think tank. We work for a better tomorrow, and a more sustainable shared future. Our work focuses on the two of the foremost challenges facing our shared future: climate change and economic inclusion.

We aim to shape shared future for all upcoming generations through policy research, offering world-class educational programs, enabling pioneers, and building public-private partnerships. We focus on leveraging technology for navigating, and solving for, today's global uncertainties and enabling bold ideas to come to life.