



The General Assembly proclaimed the year commencing 12 August 2010 as the International Year of Youth under the theme: "Dialogue and Mutual Understanding." As 12 August is the International Youth Day, the Year will be launched on this significant day for young people.

Iraq is one of the most youthful countries in the world—nearly half of its population is less than 19 years old.¹ Iraq's surplus in youth can be a great bounty: with the right investments, it can harness the energy, enthusiasm and creativity of youth. With education, meaningful employment, social activities and prospects to effectively participate in their community—for both young men and women—youth can be a driving force towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals and the diffusion of dialogue and mutual understanding in Iraq. Without intensive effort, however, Iraqi youth, born under sanctions, raised in violence, will inherit Iraq without opportunities, education and hope.

The following figures, highlighting the challenges and opportunities facing Iraqi youth, are taken from the Iraq National Youth and Adolescent Survey, conducted last year.

Challenges

By many measures, Iraq's youth face a daunting future. Surrounded by turmoil and conflict for nearly three decades, many youth exhibit symptoms of acute stress. 24% suffer from nervousness. 17% have permanent headaches. 32% cry easily.

Many Iraqi youth have intolerant and conservative attitudes and their happiness, optimism and satisfaction also seem to dim with age.



62% Agree a family member can kill a girl for profaning the family honour.



32% Agree a family member can kill a boy for profaning the family honour.



92% Agree a woman should get permission before seeking work.



80% Agree a woman can only travel with a chaperone.



30% Do not talk to persons of different opinions.

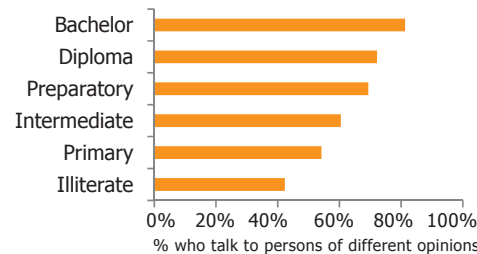


50% Do not have friends of different religions and sects.

Education

Increased education is a counter-balance to intolerance and conservatism. In general, youth with higher educational levels talk more to those with different opinions than their peers with less education.

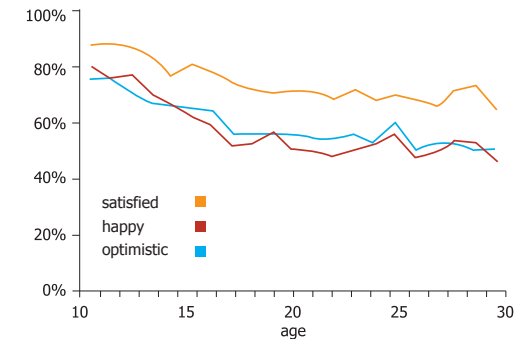
Attitudes of Tolerance by Education Level



Iraq is not keeping its youth in school. Attendance rates begin a steep decline after primary school. Critically, at every age, girl's attendance falls five to ten percent below that of boys. Some reasons for drop out differ: boys cite finance as a major cause of dropping out while girls cite parental refusal. A large percentage of both boys and girls leave school because they do not see a need for further education. Slightly more than 300,000 Iraqi youth aged 10-18 have never attended school.²

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Satisfaction, Happiness and Optimism by Age



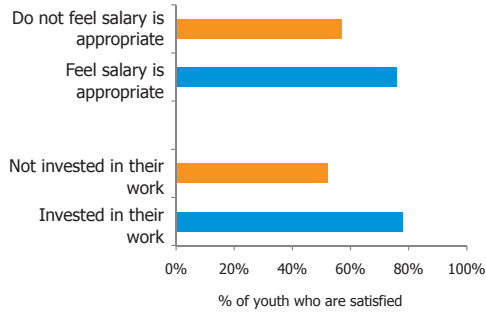
While Millennium Development Goal 2: Achieving Universal Primary Education focuses on primary school enrolment, Iraqi youth are suffering from the lack of ability to take their education further.

Employment

When asked what could improve social and political participation, the single most popular answer from youth was solving unemployment. For youth, positive perceptions of employment are strongly correlated with overall levels of satisfaction, happiness and optimism.

Iraq is not on target to meet Millennium Development Goal 1: Eradicating Extreme Poverty and Hunger, partly due to its high unemployment rate for youth (30%), double the national average (15%).³ At the time of interview, only half (50%) of

Levels of Satisfaction and Attitudes Towards Employment



At the time of interview, only half (50%) of young males, aged 19 - 24, worked in the previous week

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Even when they do find work, many are not satisfied. Almost half (47%) are not fully satisfied with their current work, citing inadequate salaries and the type of work.

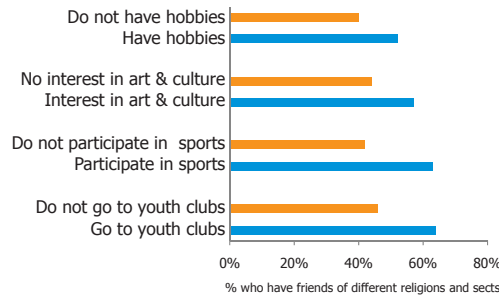
Iraq is also struggling to equip its youth for work in the modern global economy. An important indicator of progress towards Millennium Development Goal 8: Creating a Global Partnership for Development, is utilization of technology. 65% of Iraqi youth do not know how to use a computer. Only 13% of youth use the internet - a considerably

lower rate than in neighbouring countries.⁴

Sports, Arts and Activities

Activities for youth can help build inter-personal relationships, teamwork skills and foster attitudes of tolerance. In Iraq, youths engaged in clubs, sports, art or hobbies are more likely to associate with those who differ from themselves than those who are not engaged in these activities.

Tolerance and Inclusion by Engagement in Activities



Many youth are not engaged in these activities. 70% state they have no

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interest in cultural and art activities. 87% do not attend youth clubs. 68% do not practice sports. 37% do not have any hobbies.

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Social and Political Participation

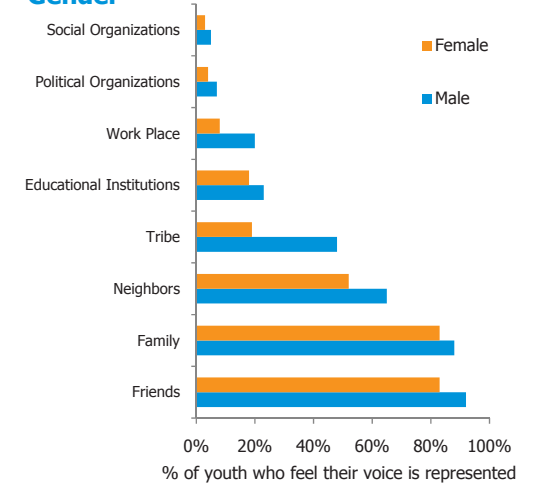
With their large numbers and high turnout rates, Iraqi youth represent a substantial proportion of the voting block and play a pivotal role in determining their country's future. 70% of eligible youth participated in elections. 86% plan to participate in the next elections.

But, looking beyond voting, youth and young women, in particular, feel their voice less heard in tribal, work, political and social institutions. In fulfilling Millennium Development Goal 3: Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Women, Iraq will need to exert extra attention on increasing the role of young women in social and political forums.

The United Nations' response

Several UN agencies including UN HABITAT, UNHCR, UNESCO, UNOPS, WHO and UNFPA have carried out projects to aid and assist youth in multiple areas. From training youth in conflict mediation, providing technical and vocational training, increasing literacy programs,

Social and Political Participation by Gender



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educating youth in life skills to raising health awareness, the UN continues to be committed to youth in Iraq. Looking toward the future, the UN is working with the Government of Iraq to develop a national youth strategy to integrate youth issues into the national development agenda.

Endnotes

- 1 U.S. Census, International Database, 2010
 - 2 Government of Iraq, Labor Force Survey 2008
 - 3 Extrapolated from Iraq National Youth and Adolescent Survey and 2010 population estimates from the Government of Iraq
 - 4 MDG Indicator Database: <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx>
- All other information taken from Government of Iraq, Iraq National Youth and Adolescent Survey, 2009

