

STATE OF YOUTH IN OIC MEMBER STATES 2025



Employment
Economic
Participation
Teacher
Skills
Technology

State of Youth in OIC Member States 2025



Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
**Statistical, Economic and Social Research
and Training Centre for Islamic Countries**



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ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
COMCEC	Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
ESALA	East and South Asia and Latin America
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Viruses
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMR	Inbound Mobility Rate
IsDB	Islamic Development Bank
ISFD	Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development
LDMCs	Least Developed Member Countries
LFPR	Labour Force Participation Rate
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MMR	Maternal Mortality Ratio
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NEET	Not in Employment, Education, or Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
OIC-SHPA	OIC Strategic Health Programme of Action
OIC-POA	OIC Programme of Action
OMR	Outbound Mobility Ratio
OPAAW	OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SESRIC	Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries
SET-CAB	SESRIC Emerging Talents Capacity Building Programme
SPMC	Scholarship Program for Muslim Communities
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
STDs	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TQS	Tobacco Questions for Surveys

TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UN IGME	United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UN-DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNFPA-WCARO	UNFPA-West and Central Africa Regional Office
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNPD	United Nations Population Division
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WHO	World Health Organization
WHO FCTC	WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control
YTB	Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities of The Republic of Türkiye

FOREWORD



Youth represent the cornerstone of our future, embodying the potential for innovation, growth, and positive societal change. They represent a vital demographic whose potential, if harnessed, can drive socio-economic and cultural advancements across nations. Their role is pivotal in shaping the socio-economic and cultural landscapes within their communities and beyond. This is particularly significant for the member countries of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), whose youth population constitutes a substantial proportion of the total population and the global youth population.

The OIC has long recognised the importance of empowering its youth. Besides regularly holding a ministerial conference on youth – the Islamic Conference of Youth and Sports Ministers (ICYSM) – significant strides have been made towards addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by young people through concerted efforts such as the OIC Youth Strategy, the OIC 2025 Programme of Action, and the OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW). These strategic frameworks focus on enhancing education, promoting employment, and encouraging active participation in social and political spheres. They also emphasise improving health services, advocating for holistic development, and fostering an inclusive environment that supports young individuals in contributing effectively to their communities.

In the field of education, significant progress has been made in improving youth literacy rates, boosting enrolment in tertiary education, and increasing access to quality education across the OIC countries. Initiatives aimed at aligning educational curricula with market demands and promoting vocational training have been instrumental in improving the employability of our youth. However, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring equitable access to education and addressing disparities in educational quality.

Health and well-being are critical components of youth development. While we have seen improvements in healthcare services and initiatives promoting physical and mental health, persistent issues such as high adolescent fertility rates and maternal mortality and substance abuse continue to pose significant challenges. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies and concerted efforts from all stakeholders.

Economic participation is another area where youth empowerment has seen both achievements and challenges. Efforts to reduce youth unemployment and promote

entrepreneurship have yielded positive results in many OIC countries. However, barriers to entry into the labour market, particularly for young females, and the high proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET) remain among the pressing issues that need to be addressed to support youth's economic empowerment, highlighting the need for youth-oriented national policies aligned with the OIC Youth Strategy and other strategic frameworks.

The "State of Youth in the OIC Member States 2025" report offers a comprehensive exploration of the current status, challenges, and opportunities facing youth in the OIC countries. It delves into demographic trends, health and well-being, education and skills development, and economic participation, providing a holistic understanding of the factors that shape the lives of our young people. The report serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders, offering insights and strategic recommendations to enhance the contributions of youth to national and regional growth.

I would like to emphasise that SESRIC remains committed to supporting the OIC Member States in their endeavours to improve the state of youth in every possible domain. As we move forward, I wish for continued progress in empowering our youth, harnessing their potential for the betterment of our societies. May this report inspire and guide our efforts, fostering a brighter future where every young individual in the OIC countries has the opportunity to thrive, contribute, and achieve their fullest potential.

Zehra Zümürüt SELÇUK
Director General
SESRIC

FOREWORD



As we stand on the threshold of a new era, characterized by rapid advancements in technology, shifting global dynamics, and emerging challenges, the role of youth has never been more pivotal in shaping the future of our societies. The “State of Youth in the OIC Member States 2024” report offers a comprehensive examination of the current landscape, providing invaluable insights into the status, challenges, and opportunities facing young people across the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Member States.

In an increasingly interconnected world, where borders are blurred by digital connectivity and economic interdependence, the youth demographic emerges as a dynamic force driving innovation, social change, and economic growth. As such, understanding their needs, aspirations, and circumstances is essential for formulating effective policies and strategies that foster inclusive development and prosperity. This report serves as a beacon of knowledge, illuminating the myriad dimensions of youth development within the OIC Member States. From demographic trends to health outcomes, education systems to economic participation, each chapter offers a nuanced perspective on the various challenges and opportunities confronting our youth population. At the heart of this endeavour lies a commitment to empowering youth and amplifying their voices in decision-making processes.

Through important analysis and data-driven insights, the report not only identifies key areas for intervention but also celebrates the resilience, creativity, and innovation exhibited by young people in overcoming obstacles and driving positive change within their communities. In recognizing the profound impact of external factors on youth development, the report underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions and policy responses to address the evolving needs of young people. By leveraging our collective knowledge, resources, and partnerships, we can navigate these turbulent waters and chart a course towards a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

As the Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF), we strive to make invaluable contributions and foster collaboration throughout the process. Our insights and perspectives have enriched our understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing youth within the OIC Member States, paving the way for informed decision-making and meaningful action. As we embark on the journey outlined in this report, let us remain steadfast in our commitment to empowering youth, amplifying their voices, and forging pathways to a brighter, more prosperous future.

Together, we can harness the transformative potential of our youth demographic and build societies that are inclusive, resilient, and poised for sustainable growth.

We aim for this report and its future versions to keep providing valuable predictions and understanding about the situation of young people in OIC Member States, helping their development and progress. We also hope it sheds light on the potential of our Member States, bringing us closer to a better world for everyone.

Taha AYHAN
President
ICYF

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth Population

The United Nations (UN) defines youth as individuals aged 15-24, a period marked by transitions into adulthood. Understanding the demographic trends of youth is crucial for policy-making and sustainable development. In 2023, the OIC countries hosted 367 million youth, representing 29.5% of the world's youth population, with an expected increase to 380 million and 30.0% by 2025. Notably, the OIC countries have a higher proportion of youth under 20 years old compared to the global average, indicating a younger median age. The OIC countries have experienced a solid annual growth rate in their youth population, with an average of 1.2% between 2019 and 2023 that is higher than the global averages. In addition, the OIC countries have a higher share of youth in their total population than other country groups do. At a time when ageing population turns out to be an increasingly prominent concern in developed countries, the OIC countries can create enormous dynamism in their development efforts by effectively utilising the potential opportunities presented by this demographic dividend.

Health and Well-being

In the domain of health, life expectancy at age 15 increased modestly in OIC countries by 0.7 years between 2015 and 2023, reaching 56.2 years. Females tend to have a higher life expectancy at age 15 (58.1 years) as compared to males (54.4 years). The mortality rate among youth remains notably higher in the OIC countries at 14.8 deaths per 1000 adolescents in 2021, compared to the global average of 10.7, although there was a reduction of 4.9 deaths per 1000 adolescents aged 15 within the OIC countries between 2015 and 2021.

Substance abuse and behavioural addictions, including tobacco use and technology-related dependencies, are prevalent among youth across the world, including in the OIC countries. However, progress has been made, with eight OIC countries implementing bans on tobacco companies funding or contributing to smoking prevention media campaigns aimed at youth.

In 2022, the prevalence of HIV among young people aged 15 to 24 was 0.31% in the OIC countries, showing a significant decline of 0.06 percentage points from 2015. Young females are the most affected by HIV, with a prevalence rate of 0.41% compared to 0.22% among young males.

Reproductive health services are crucial for women from adolescence through their reproductive years. Adolescent fertility rates across the OIC countries declined from 70.6 to 62.2 births per 1000 adolescent girls in the 2015-2023 period. Despite this decline, the OIC

countries collectively exhibited a higher adolescent fertility rate in 2023 compared to other country groups and the global average. Maternal deaths also decreased from 368 to 344 deaths per 100,000 live births between 2015 and 2020, indicating progress in ensuring safe maternal health in the OIC countries.

Mental health problems pose a significant burden on young people worldwide, including in the OIC countries. Mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety, often lead to high-risk behaviours and are identified as leading causes of death and disability among young people. In OIC countries, suicide rates among young people are 5.5 per 100,000 population, with 7.7 among young males and 2.9 among young females. Recently the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic also exacerbated existing mental health challenges among young people.

Education and Skills Development

In the OIC countries, 84% of youth are literate, with a notable gap between male and female literacy rates, 86.8% and 81.1%, respectively. In half of the OIC countries, youth literacy rates exceed 90%, while only three countries have youth literacy rates below 50%. As of 2022, approximately 55 million youth in the OIC countries are estimated to be illiterate, of whom 58% are female.

Tertiary education enrolment in the OIC countries rose from 31.9 million in 2013 to 43.7 million in 2023, marking a 37.1% increase, with female enrolment climbing from 15.5 million to 21.7 million (a 40.5% increase) and male enrolment from 16.4 million to 21.9 million (a 33.7% increase). The gross enrolment ratio surpasses the global average in 16 OIC countries but falls below 10% in 11 others, highlighting limited involvement in tertiary education. In addition, there is a great variation among the OIC countries with respect to enrolment ratios of males and females. On the one hand, there are countries significantly favouring male participation in tertiary education, while on the other hand, there are countries favouring female participation even to a larger extent.

Many OIC countries have made significant strides in prioritizing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education, which is crucial for driving technological innovation and maintaining competitiveness in the global economy. STEM graduates are essential for developing cutting-edge technologies and solutions, and the substantial proportions of STEM graduates in a few member countries highlight the strategic emphasis placed on these disciplines to fuel their national growth.

In tertiary education institutions within the OIC countries, the student-teacher ratio averages at around 25 students per teacher, which is higher than the global average, signalling underfunded schools or school systems. Between 2017 and 2021, there was a significant surge in the number of students from the OIC countries pursuing tertiary education abroad, with the number of outbound students increasing from 1.34 million in 2017 to over 1.62 million by 2021, the highest level ever seen. Türkiye, hosting 224 thousand students from all around the world, is the most attractive destination among the OIC countries for international students.

Vocational education and training is crucial in preparing youth for the workforce. The proportion of youth enrolled in vocational education stands at 6.4% in the OIC region, a higher

rate than the global average of 5.7%. In addition, the number of vocational students in secondary education showed a much greater increase over the 2009-2019 period in the OIC region (72.9%) than in the world (20.8%).

The bilateral recognition of diplomas across borders is essential for young people, allowing them to pursue education and career opportunities internationally. This recognition promotes educational mobility by granting access to high-quality educational institutions and training programs globally, thereby enhancing global career prospects and employability. It supports personal development and contributes to a competitive global workforce, promoting inclusivity, diversity, and international cooperation for a prosperous future. Thus, effective bilateral recognition can lead to a more integrated OIC community, promoting economic collaboration, cultural understanding, and collective progress. Similarly, scholarships are essential for empowering youth by granting access to quality education and fostering personal and professional growth, particularly for those facing financial challenges. To drive meaningful progress and further enhance educational equity, it is essential to expand scholarship opportunities across the OIC region and strengthen collaboration among the member countries, enabling more students to benefit from these programs.

As for ICT infrastructure in schools, across the OIC countries, access to electricity in upper secondary schools varies significantly, with 19 out of 44 countries boasting full access at 100%, while in some others, the proportion falls below 50%. Similarly, among the 34 OIC countries with available data, eight countries demonstrate commendable 100% provision of internet access in upper secondary schools, while in nine others, this figure falls below 50%. Considering the provision of computer technology for educational purposes in upper secondary schools, 11 out of 40 OIC countries have a full coverage, 11 more countries report at least 90% of their schools have access to computers, while in 6 other countries, less than half of the schools have such access.

Overall, the state of education and skills development among youth in the OIC countries presents both significant achievements and critical challenges. While strides have been made in increasing literacy rates and tertiary education enrolment, significant disparities persist across the OIC countries and between males and females. The emphasis on STEM education, the expansion of technical and vocational training, and the increased mobility of students across borders are positive trends that need to be further reinforced. However, challenges such as high student-teacher ratios, uneven access to technology, and infrastructural deficits hinder the potential of youth to fully contribute to socio-economic development.

Economic Participation

The total youth labour force in the OIC countries has consistently increased over the past five years, from 126.5 million in 2019 to 132.6 million in 2023 and projected to further rise to 134.8 million in 2024. In addition, its share in the global youth labour force has also increased, from 25.5% in 2019 to 26.5% in 2023, and is expected to reach 26.9% in 2024. However, there is a persistent disparity against females in the youth labour force, with males consistently representing a larger portion of the workforce compared to females.

The share of youth labour force in the overall labour force in the OIC countries declined from 17.9% in 2019 to 17.4% in 2023, but remained above the global average. The youth labour force participation rate slightly decreased from 36.7% in 2019 to 36.3% in 2023 and continued to be lower than the global average. There is also a huge gap between the participation rates of young males and females, with a male youth labour force participation rate of 46.6% compared to 25.5% for females as of 2023. Moreover, youth employment in OIC countries increased by 6.7 million between 2019 and 2023 to 115.6 million, originating mostly from the increase in young male employment. As of 2023, the share of females in youth employment averaged at 34.1% in the OIC countries, compared to the global average of 39.1%. This suggests that while progress is being made, significant barriers to entry for young women in the workforce still exist.

Youth unemployment in the OIC countries, which peaked at 18.6 million in 2020, decreased to 16.8 million in 2022 but rose again to 16.9 million in 2023 and is projected to reach 17.3 million in 2024. As of 2023, the number of unemployed young males was 1.7 times the number of unemployed young females – 10.7 million and 6.3 million, respectively. Nevertheless, the OIC countries, on average, compare well with the global average in terms of the proportion of females in youth unemployment. In 2023, the percentage of young females in youth unemployment was 37.9% worldwide and 37.0% in OIC countries. However, the share of youth in total unemployment remains higher in the group of OIC countries than the global average, for both males and females.

Youth unemployment rate has been on a declining trend worldwide and in the OIC group since its peak in the pandemic-hit year of 2020. In the OIC group, the average youth unemployment rate fell from 14.8% in 2020 to 12.8% in 2023, remaining slightly below the global average. For females, however, the OIC group continues to have a higher unemployment rate than the global average. Moreover, while youth unemployment rate for females is lower than that for males at the global level, there is an opposite situation in the group of OIC countries.

Youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET) continue to pose a major challenge for the OIC countries. The number of youth NEET is estimated to have reached 106.1 million in 2023, with projections signalling a further rise to 108.2 million in 2024. Young females accounted for 68.3% of the youth NEET in OIC countries in 2023, slightly above the global average of 66.5%.

Despite the increase in their number, the proportion of youth NEET relative to the total youth population has been on a declining trend since 2020. At the global level, youth NEET rate decreased from 23.8% in 2020 to 21.7% in 2023, which was even below its pre-pandemic 2019 level. In the OIC countries, however, this rate decreased only slightly from 29.9% to 29.0% over the same period, remaining above the pre-pandemic level. Additionally, in the OIC countries, 40.4% of young females were NEET in 2023, more than double the rate of male youth NEET of 18.1%. Moreover, both of those rates were significantly higher than the corresponding global average.

It is estimated that, as of 2023, about 16.3% of employed young people in the OIC countries, compared to 12.2% worldwide, were living below the recognized international poverty line of \$2.15 per day. This persistent high working poverty rate in the OIC countries highlights the

urgent need for effective policy interventions to address structural issues and promote inclusive economic growth.

Entrepreneurship is emerging as a critical avenue for economic empowerment among youth in the OIC countries. With concerted efforts to address challenges, seize opportunities, and foster an enabling environment for entrepreneurship, the OIC countries can emerge as global centres of innovation and economic vitality. In the dynamic landscape of OIC countries, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is particularly witnessing a remarkable surge in startup investments, prominently in the fintech sector. Numerous incubation centres, accelerators, and technoparks that act as hubs of collaboration are bringing together entrepreneurs, researchers, investors, and industry experts. The establishment of the OIC Startup Ecosystem Index, which would provide a comprehensive dashboard of the startup ecosystems within OIC countries, offering valuable insights and data-driven analysis, could serve as a platform that encourages countries to participate and track the overall status of their startup ecosystems.

Concluding Remarks and Policy Recommendations

The detailed examination of youth demographics, health, education, and economic participation throughout the report highlights the critical importance of adopting youth-centric policies that address the multifaceted challenges facing young people in the OIC countries. In this context, the report offers several strategic recommendations for enhancing the well-being and development of youth. The recommendations include:

Health and Well-being: Educating youth about healthy lifestyles and active living, providing comprehensive solutions for youth on substance abuse, addiction, tobacco use, and digital wellbeing, and prioritising investments in health system resilience to prepare for future pandemics or uncertainties, as well as allocating resources towards enhancing mental health services in the post-COVID-19 era.

Education and Skills Development: Promoting a comprehensive approach to youth literacy, integrating life skills and vocational education initiatives, and increasing access to education through infrastructure and technology development.

Economic Participation: Promoting youth entrepreneurship and improve the public sector to support youth employment, aligning educational curricula with labour market demands for reducing structural youth unemployment, and conducting extensive research to oversee youth employment and entrepreneurship initiatives emphasised in OIC strategy documents.

Overall, these recommendations aim to create an environment where youth can succeed, ultimately contributing to the overall development and stability of the OIC region. To effectively implement these recommendations, there is a need for sustained coordinated efforts among the OIC member states. Prioritising youth development in national policy agendas in line with the OIC strategic frameworks is essential for harnessing the potential of young populations, driving sustainable economic growth, and fostering social progress.

INTRODUCTION

The youth population in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member countries represents a critical demographic, accounting for a substantial proportion of the total OIC population and the global youth population. This underscores the immense potential and pivotal role that young people play in shaping the socio-economic and cultural landscapes of not only their own regions but also the world at large.

As the next generation of leaders, innovators, and workforce, the youth in OIC nations are crucial drivers of economic growth, technological advancement, and social progress. Their active participation in various sectors can lead to significant improvements in productivity, creativity, and competitiveness on a global scale. Moreover, addressing the challenges faced by the youth, such as unemployment, inadequate education, and health disparities, is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fostering inclusive societies. On a broader scale, the youth in the OIC countries contribute to global demographics, influencing international trends in migration, labour markets, and cultural exchanges.

Recognizing the strategic importance of this critical segment of population, the OIC has launched several initiatives aimed at harnessing the potential of its young populace. The OIC Youth Strategy,¹ the OIC 2025 Programme of Action,² and the OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW)³ are some pivotal frameworks guiding these efforts. Together, these strategic frameworks provide a robust roadmap for

The OIC Youth Strategy is a comprehensive policy framework designed to address the multifaceted challenges encountered by the youth in the OIC countries. It emphasizes enhancing education, promoting employment, and encouraging active participation in social and political spheres. This strategy also focuses on improving health services for youth, advocating for holistic development to empower young individuals to contribute effectively to their communities.

The OIC 2025 Programme of Action outlines ambitious targets across various sectors, including education, employment, health, and social inclusion. This programme underscores the importance of building youth capacities, promoting youth exchange programmes, and improving strategies for youth employment, provision of quality education, entrepreneurship and vocational skills development.

Complementing these initiatives, the OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) specifically addresses disparities against women and focuses on empowering young women. This plan advocates for equal opportunities in education and employment, aiming to bridge the gap between males and females and ensure that the progress made in youth development is inclusive and equitable.

¹ See OIC Youth Strategy [<https://www.sesric.org/files/Youth-Strategy.pdf>]

² See OIC Programme of Action [<https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=16&refID=5>]

³ See OPAAW [https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/documents/opaaw/opaaw_en.pdf]

improving the state of youth in the OIC countries. They call for coordinated efforts among the member states to implement policies that not only address immediate needs but also lay the foundation for sustainable development.

The State of Youth in the OIC Member States report is prepared by SESRIC in cooperation with the Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF) as mandated by the Third Session of the Islamic Conference of Youth and Sports Ministers (ICYSM), held in Istanbul in October 2016, and it serves as the main technical background document for the biennial sessions of the ICYSM. It delves into the status, challenges, and opportunities facing the youth in the OIC countries, offering insights and recommendations to enhance their contributions to national and regional growth.

This 2025 edition of the report is the fourth in series. It provides a comprehensive exploration of the state of youth in the OIC countries, a foundation for understanding the demographic, health, educational, and economic dimensions that shape their lives. Accordingly, the report is structured around five chapters.

The first chapter on ‘Youth Population’ provides a detailed analysis of the demographic profile of youth in the OIC countries. It examines the size, distribution, and trends of the youth population, highlighting the significant share they represent globally. Understanding these demographic patterns is crucial for effective policy-making and strategic planning aimed at leveraging the potential of youth for sustainable development.

Focusing on the ‘Health and Well-being’ of the youth, the second chapter explores various aspects such as access to healthcare services, prevalence of health issues, and initiatives aimed at promoting physical and mental well-being. It underscores the importance of a healthy youth population as a foundation for a productive society and discusses the challenges and opportunities in improving health outcomes.

The third chapter examines the state of ‘Education and Skills Development’ among youth in the OIC countries. It highlights the critical role of education in empowering youth, discussing issues related to access, quality, and relevance of education. The chapter also addresses vocational training and the alignment of educational programs with market needs and technological advancement to enhance employability and economic participation of young people.

The ‘Economic Participation’ of youth, addressed in the fourth chapter, is a critical indicator of a country’s future economic stability and growth potential. This chapter investigates various aspects of youth involvement in the labour market, providing a comprehensive analysis of their contribution, challenges, and opportunities. It discusses youth employment, unemployment, and entrepreneurship, emphasizing the need for policies that support economic empowerment and reduce barriers to entry into the labour market.

The final chapter synthesizes the findings from the previous chapters and provides strategic recommendations for policymakers. It emphasizes the importance of implementing youth-centric policies that address the identified challenges and leverage opportunities for development. The recommendations focus on enhancing education, health, and economic participation of youth, with particular attention to promoting the advancement of women, and fostering an inclusive environment that supports the overall well-being and empowerment of young people in OIC countries.

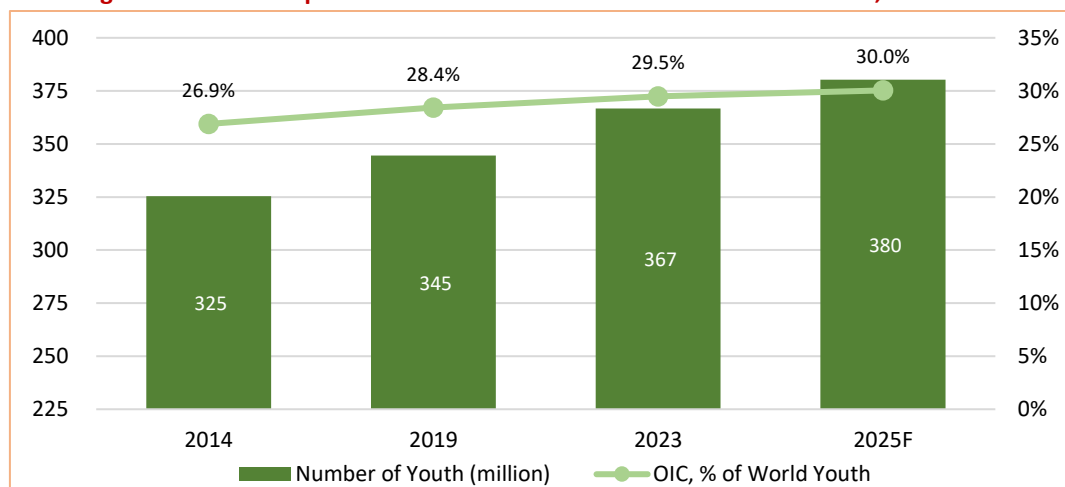
1. Youth Population

Youth population is one of the most critical strengths of the OIC countries. It is projected that almost one-third of the youth population worldwide will be living in OIC countries by 2025. A precise understanding of the demographic trends of youth is necessary for policy-making, programming and decision-making processes for sustainable development in a region. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the demographic profile of youth in the OIC countries using a holistic approach, examining the literature and the relevant statistical datasets. It uses a combination of indicators for a comparative assessment of the state of youth in the OIC countries and the world.

1.1. Youth Population in Numbers

There is no universally agreed international definition of the youth age group. For statistical purposes, the United Nations (UN) defines youth as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24.⁴ Between the ages of 15-24 represent a period in life when one transitions from the dependence of childhood to the independence of adulthood. This period possesses several social, economic, biological, and demographic events that set the stage for adult life, such as education, marriage, and entrance into the job market.

Figure 1.1: Youth Population of OIC Countries and Share in World Youth, 2014-2025



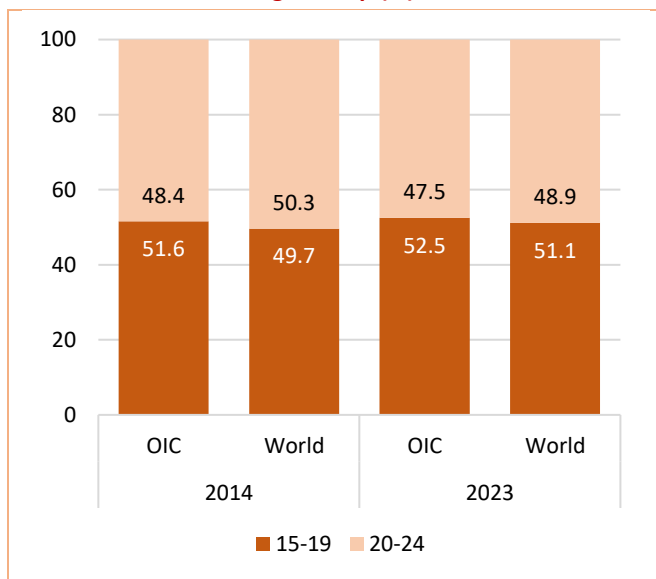
Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UN DESA's World Population Prospects 2022. "F" denotes forecasted values.

⁴ This report adopts the UN definition of 15-24 as the common young age bracket.

Worldwide, youth make up a substantial part of the total world population. According to the latest projections of the UN, the youth population worldwide has increased by 2.6% between 2019 and 2023, from 1.21 billion to 1.24 billion, accounting for 15.5% of the world population in 2023. The youth population in OIC countries has increased by 6.4%, from 345 million in 2019 to 367 million in 2023, which accounts for 29.5% of the world’s youth population. It is expected that, by 2025, the youth population of OIC countries will increase to 380 million, accounting for 30% of the world’s youth population (Figure 1.1). The size of the youth population matters significantly in the context of sustainable development because it serves as a determining factor in the growth of the labour force and pressures on the economy in terms of job creation.

As of 2023, 192.5 million (52.5%) of the youth population in the OIC countries are under 20 years old, and 174.2 million (47.5%) are aged 20 and above. The share of youth under 20 years old increased from 51.6% in 2014 to 52.5% in 2023 (Figure 1.2). Compared with the world average, the OIC countries have a higher proportion of youth under 20 years old. This implies that the median age of youth in OIC countries is lower than the median age of the world youth population. Proper utilisation of youth potential could help the OIC countries generate substantial dynamism in their growth and catching-up process at a time when ageing populations are becoming a severe problem for developed countries.

Figure 1.2: Distribution of Youth Population by Age Group (%)

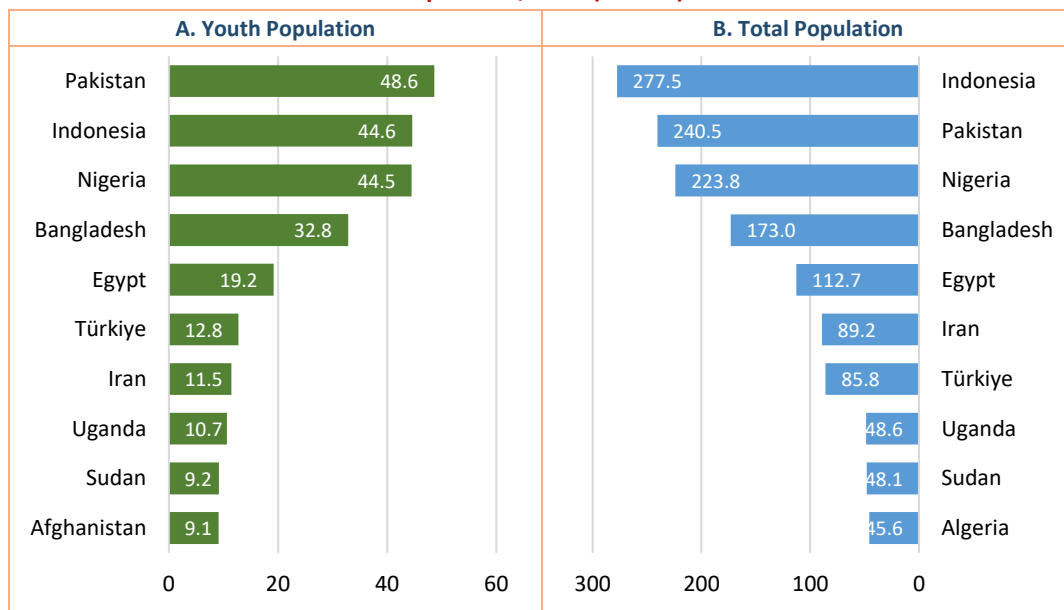


Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UN DESA’s World Population Prospects 2022.

The total number of youth (15-24 years) remains highly concentrated in a handful of OIC countries. As of 2023, Pakistan has the largest youth population at 48.6 million, accounting for 13.3% of the OIC total youth population. It was closely followed by Indonesia (44.6 million), and Nigeria (44.5 million). These three countries together makes up more than a third (37.6%) of the OIC total youth population, while this ratio reaches as high as 66.3% for the top ten countries that also included Bangladesh, Egypt, Türkiye, Iran, Uganda, Sudan, and Afghanistan (Figure 1.3.A).

Although these are the most populous OIC countries, it is not always the case that a country with a larger population also has a larger young population. Indeed, when these countries with the highest youth population are compared with respect to their total population (Figure 1.3.B), the countries remain the same, but their ranking changes, except that Afghanistan is replaced

Figure 1.3: Top 10 OIC Countries with the Highest Youth Population and Total Population, 2023 (million)



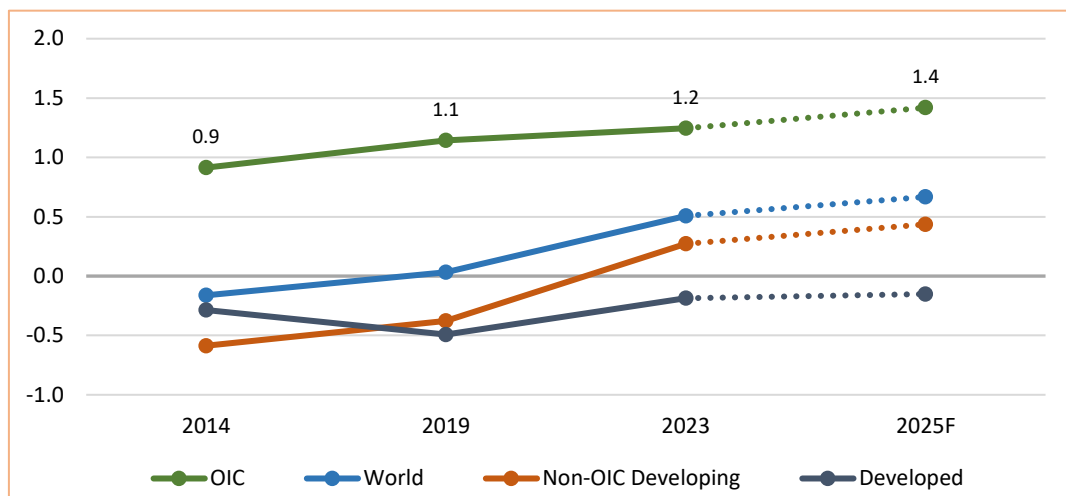
Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UN DESA's World Population Prospects 2022.

by Algeria. For example, Indonesia has a larger population than Pakistan, but youth population size is larger in Pakistan. Similarly, Iran has a larger population than Türkiye, and Algeria has a larger population than Afghanistan, but Türkiye has a larger youth population than Iran, and Afghanistan has a larger youth population than Algeria. According to the forecasts, all but nine OIC countries (Albania, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Guyana, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Suriname, and Türkiye) are expected to see their youth populations increase further by 2025 compared to 2023.

1.2. Growth Rate of Youth Population

Despite the instabilities in the annual growth rates of the youth population all around the world over the past decade, the OIC countries have had solid annual growth rates. Between 2019 and 2023, the OIC countries registered an average annual growth rate of 1.2% in their youth population, compared to the global average of 0.5%. Growth of the youth population in the OIC countries is estimated to continue to be higher than the global averages. According to projections, between 2021 and 2025, the youth population in the OIC countries are expected to experience an average annual growth rate of 1.4%. In the same period, while the trend of contraction in the group of developed countries is expected to continue, the average annual growth rate of the youth population in the group of non-OIC developing countries and the world is expected to be 0.4% and 0.7%, respectively (Figure 1.4).

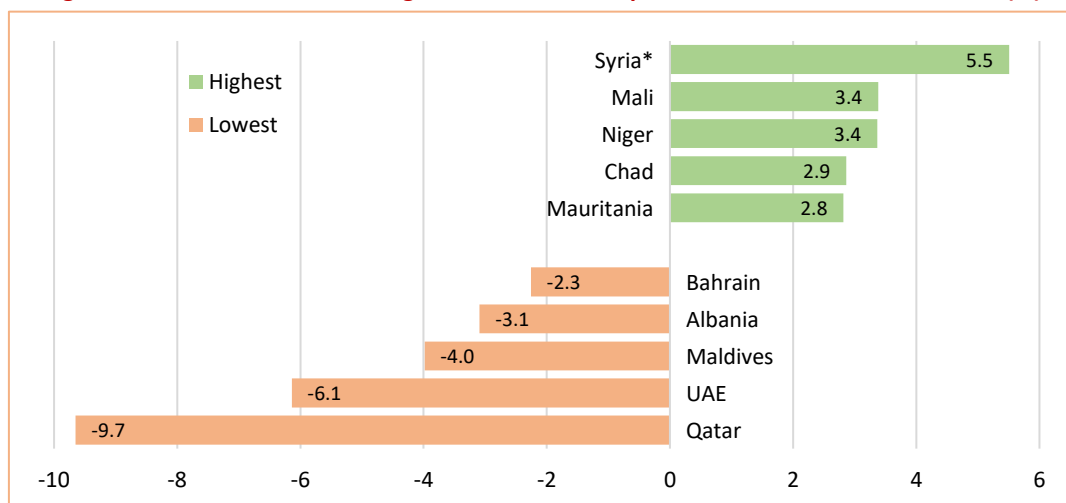
Figure 1.4: Average Annual Growth Rate of Youth Population (%)



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UN DESA’s World Population Prospects 2022. “F” denotes forecasted values.
Note: 5-year average annual growth rates.

Among the OIC countries, Syria has the highest average annual growth in youth population between 2019 and 2023, estimated at 5.5%. It is followed by Mali (3.4%), Niger (3.4%), Chad (2.9%), and Mauritania (2.8%). On the other hand, 15 OIC countries⁵ recorded a negative growth rate over the same period, indicating a contraction in the youth population. Qatar is the country with the biggest contraction in its young population with -9.7%, followed by the United Arab Emirates (-6.1%), Maldives (-4%), Albania (-3.1%), and Bahrain (-2.3%) (Figure 1.5).

Figure 1.5: OIC Countries with Highest and Lowest Population Growth Rate, 2019-2023 (%)



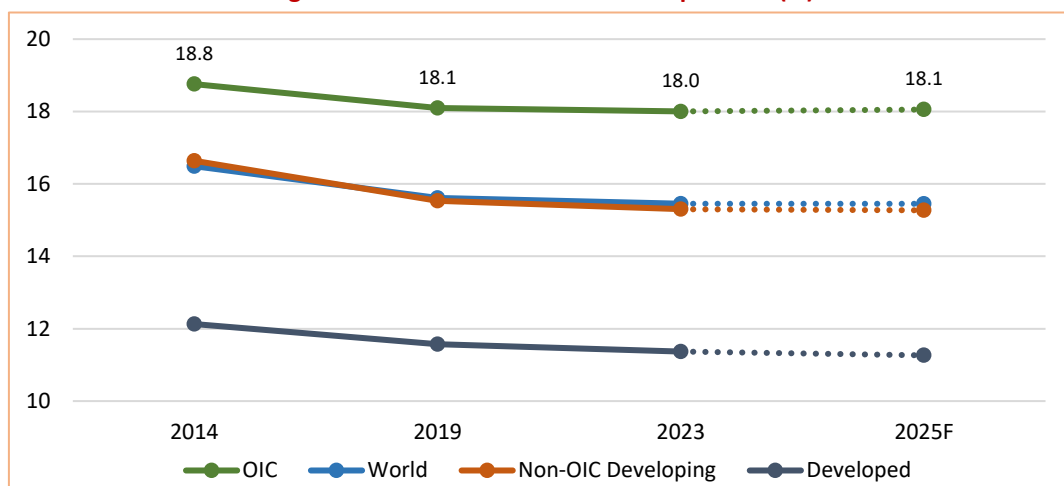
Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UN DESA’s World Population Prospects 2022.
 *Membership of Syria to the OIC is currently suspended.

⁵ Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Maldives, Albania, Bahrain, Lebanon, Guyana, Türkiye, Oman, Kuwait, Uzbekistan, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Brunei Darussalam, and Turkmenistan.

1.3. Share of Youth in Total Population

With the ageing population, the share of youth in total population has been on a declining trend over the past decade all over the world, including in the OIC countries. As of 2023, the youth population constitutes 18% of the total population in OIC countries, down from 18.1% in 2019. Still, the group of OIC countries has a higher share of youth in their total population than other country groups and the world. According to projections, this share will reach 18.1% in 2025 in the group of OIC countries, decrease in the group of developed countries and remain stable in the group of non-OIC developing countries and the world (Figure 1.6).

Figure 1.6: Share of Youth in Total Population (%)

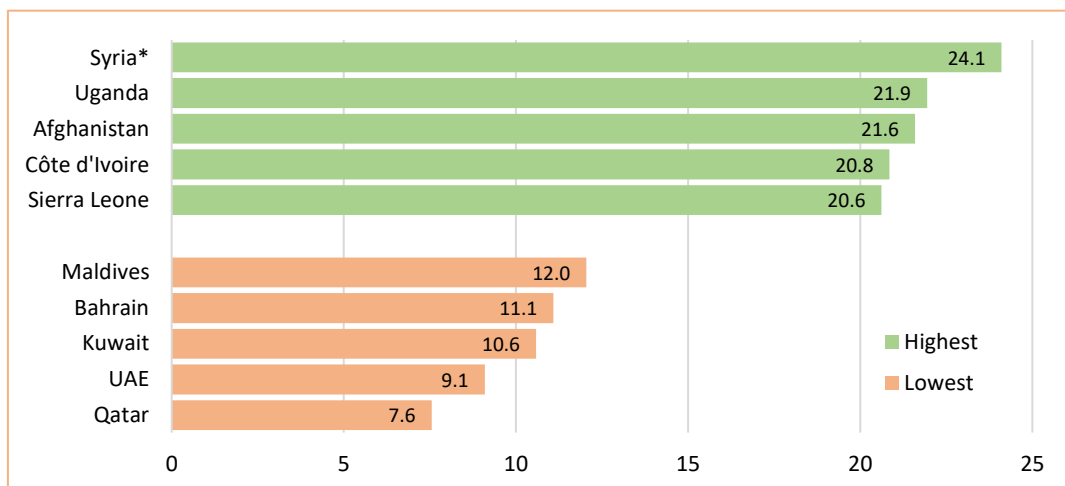


Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UN DESA's World Population Prospects 2022. "F" denotes forecasted values.

Regarding the relative share of youth in a country's total population, three OIC countries from the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region ranked among the top five youngest countries in the OIC. Syria ranked first with 24.1% of the total population aged between 15-24 as of 2023, followed by Uganda (21.9%), Afghanistan (21.6%), Côte d'Ivoire (20.8%), and Sierra Leone (20.6%). High fertility rates and increased survivals, with mortality declining more quickly than fertility, are key contributors to population growth in SSA (Bongaarts, 2020; UNFPA, 2023). In contrast, four of the bottom five countries with the lowest share of youth in the total population are from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Qatar registered the lowest share of youth (7.6%), followed by the United Arab Emirates (9.1%), Kuwait (10.6%), Bahrain (11.1%), and Maldives (12%) (Figure 1.7).

While MENA countries vary widely in terms of demographic trends and dynamics, the majority of the countries are still in a phase of medium to high fertility and population growth (UNICEF, 2019). However, Gulf countries, such as Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Bahrain, represent demographically unique phenomena concerning their population composition. Immigration trends heavily drive the population growth in these countries. The demand for labour force in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries has increased rapidly due to economic development over the past few decades, driven mainly by oil and gas production (Al Abri et al., 2023). Thus, migrant workers became a predominant component in GCC demographics. In 2020, the migrants constituted more than 50% of the total population in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Bahrain (Nazir, 2022).

Figure 1.7: OIC Countries with Highest and Lowest Share of Youth in Total Population, 2023 (%)

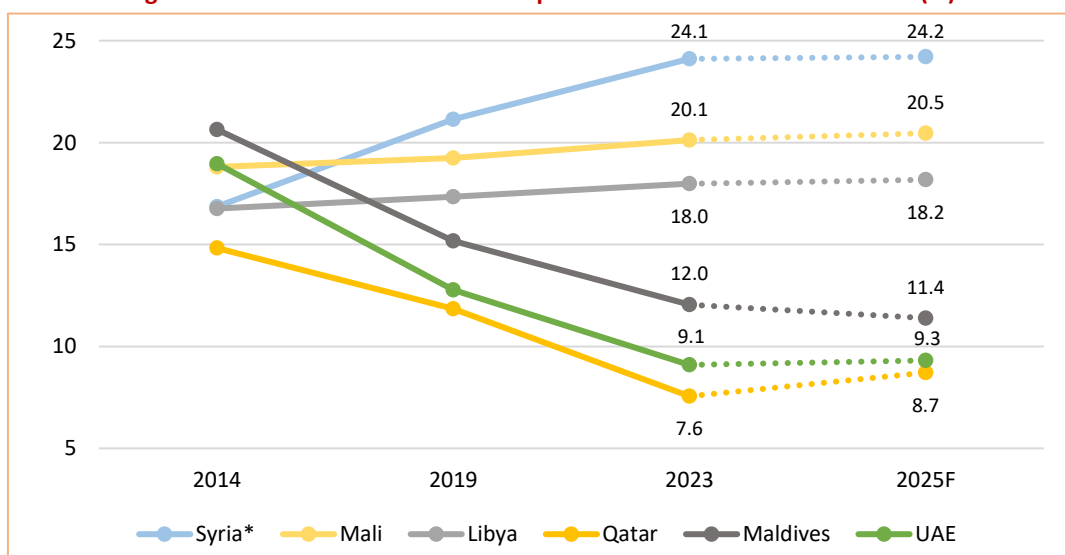


Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UN DESA’s World Population Prospects 2022.

*Membership of Syria to the OIC is currently suspended.

The changes in the share of youth population in the total population by country reveal that the highest increase between 2014 and 2023 was registered in Syria, from 16.9% to 24.1%, followed by Mali, from 18.8% to 20.1%, and Libya, from 16.8% to 18.0%. While Syria’s youth population is expected to reach 24.2% in 2025, Mali and Libya are expected to reach 20.5% and 18.2%, respectively. The United Arab Emirates registered the highest decline in the share of youth population, from 19% in 2014 to 9.1% in 2023, followed by Maldives, from 20.6% to 12.0%, and Qatar, from 14.8% to 7.6%. It is estimated that the share of youth population will continue its downward trend in the Maldives to 11.4% in 2025 and will increase to 9.3% in the United Arab Emirates and 8.7% in Qatar.

Figure 1.8: Share of Youth in Total Population in Selected OIC Countries (%)



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UN DESA’s World Population Prospects 2022. “F” denotes forecasted values.

*Membership of Syria to the OIC is currently suspended.

Box 1.1: Youth as Demographic Dividend

As countries progress toward increased industrialisation, urbanisation, and skill-based economic activity, they undergo a demographic transition. The rise in the share of ages 15-24 in the total population, referred to as youth bulge, is not just a demographic trend but a critical concept in thinking about the future of a country and understanding emerging age-cohorts patterns (Inayatullah, 2016). It is essential to turn the youth bulge into a demographic dividend, a window of opportunity for rapid economic growth that may result from a country's mortality and fertility decline and the subsequent change in the population's age structure. With fewer births each year, a country's young dependent population grows smaller in relation to the working-age population. With fewer people to support, a country has a window of opportunity for rapid economic growth if the right social and economic policies are developed and investments are made (Gribble & Bremner, 2012).

Youth can be seen as a window of opportunity for the OIC countries. There is considerable youth potential for development and state-building in the OIC countries. A large number of youth may be able to secure future labour, open up a variety of new employment prospects for themselves, and contribute to an expanding tax base when they join the workforce. More youth entering the workforce could lead to an expansion of the consumer-based economy. Also, a youth population that is more likely to embrace new technology innovations quickly could prove advantageous for the economy. Successful engagement of youth in the labour market and society is crucial not only for their personal well-being and economic prospects but also for overall economic growth and social cohesion (OECD, 2021).

In the context of sustainable development, the size of youth population plays an essential role in determining the growth of labour force and the pressures on the economy in terms of job creation. Investing in youth and adolescents who will be youth of upcoming years and expanding their opportunities for proper education, social engagement, and work could potentially procure social and economic advantages (Box 1.1). Therefore, investing in youth population must be recognised as a priority since the investment will provide youth with the means to improve not only their own lives but also the lives of future generations.

2. Health and Well-being

Youth is the future of society. However, this unique stage of human development is also an important time for laying the foundations of good health. Despite being considered as a healthy stage of life, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) estimates that more than a million young people aged 15 to 24 die each year due to illnesses, unwarranted risk-taking, and destructive activities, resulting in unintentional injuries. Furthermore, a significant number of young people engage in behaviours that not only jeopardize their current state of health but also have long-term consequences. According to the UN DESA (n.d), approximately two-thirds of premature deaths and one-third of the total disease burden in adults are associated with conditions or behaviours that began in their youth, such as tobacco use, lack of physical activity, unprotected sex, and exposure to violence.

However, these health problems are preventable or treatable during this phase of life. Young people can establish behaviour patterns related to diet, physical activity, substance use, and sexual activity that promote their own health and the well-being of those around them. Given the strength of the OIC countries in youth population, where around half of the population is below the age of 24 (SESRIC, 2023a), prioritising and enhancing the health of young people is crucial for fostering a brighter future for the society. Good health and well-being of the youth will help to ensure the development of a vibrant generation capable of reaching their full potential and making positive contributions to their communities.

This chapter provides an overview of the health situation of youth in the OIC countries, examining the significant health challenges faced by this energetic group within the context of local and global developments. The assessment is based on key socio-economic indicators and best practices from member countries, addressing specific issues and areas of concern in order to propose solutions that ensure programs, policies, and health services meet their needs, as outlined in the OIC - 2025 Programme of Action (OIC-POA)⁶ and the OIC Youth Strategy⁷.

2.1 Life Expectancy and Mortality

Life Expectancy at Age 15 Years

Life expectancy measures the average remaining lifespan for a hypothetical group of individuals if they were to experience the same age-specific mortality rates for the rest of their lives as those observed in that particular year. It is an indicator of the overall health status of a

⁶ See OIC Programme of Action [<https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=16&refID=5>]

⁷ See OIC Youth Strategy [<https://www.sesric.org/files/Youth-Strategy.pdf>]

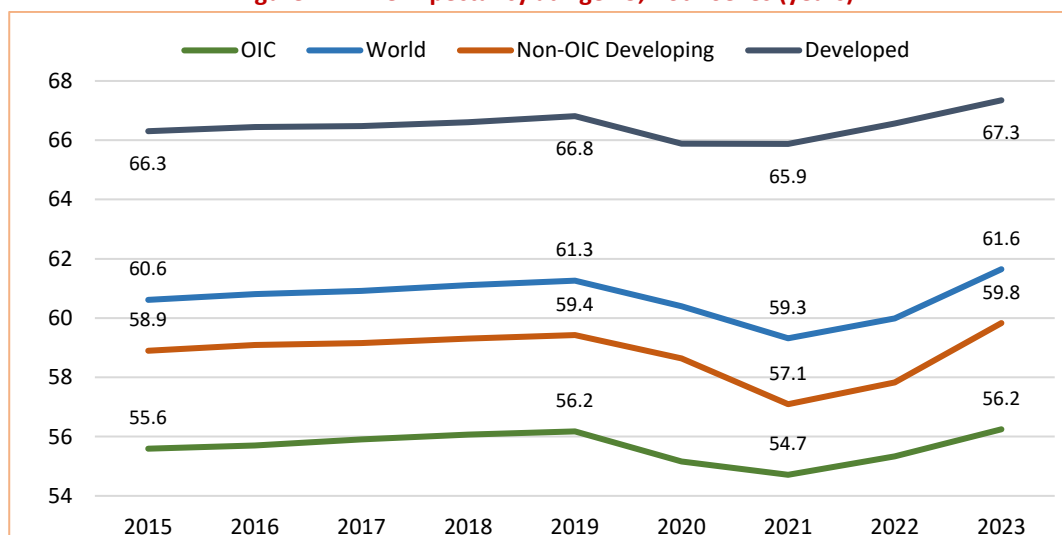
population in a country and, to some extent, the quality of healthcare services available to them. Life expectancy is commonly influenced by factors such as poverty, malnutrition, conflicts, limited access to water, sanitation, and hygiene services, as well as inadequate access to critical healthcare services like immunization coverage.

For young individuals, factors affecting life expectancy can determine their ability to lead fulfilling and successful lives, pursue prosperous careers, and start families. Life expectancy at age 15 serves as a crucial indicator in this regard.⁸ By understanding and improving life expectancy at this critical age, policymakers can address disparities, implement targeted interventions, and create supportive environments that foster long-term success and happiness for future generations.

Despite the global improvement in life expectancy over the years, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on this progress. The pandemic has led to a substantial increase in mortality, resulting in declines in life expectancy worldwide (Schöley et al., 2022; Sanderson & Scherbov, 2023). As shown in Figures 2.1 and 2.2, life expectancy at age 15 exhibited a declining trend for both sexes during the three-year period of the pandemic from 2020 to 2022.

In 2023, life expectancy at age 15 returned to – and actually slightly exceeded – the pre-pandemic 2019 level all over the world. As such, a young person at age 15 is expected to live for about 62 years at the global level, while in the OIC countries, the average remaining lifespan is shorter; about 56 years (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Life Expectancy at Age 15, Both Sexes (years)



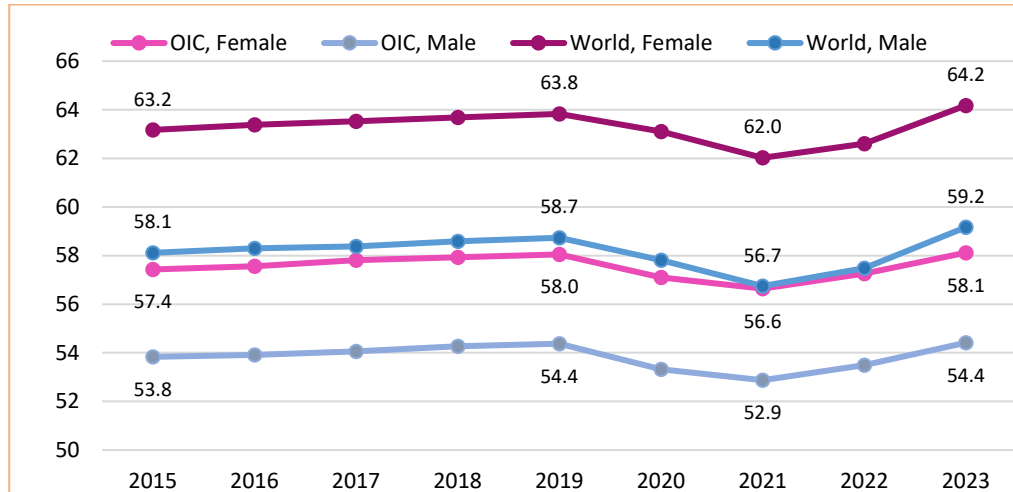
Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UN DESA's World Population Prospects 2022.

Among the OIC countries, Qatar stands out with a life expectancy of 67.3 years at age 15 in 2023, boasting the highest life expectancy at this specific age, equivalent to the average of developed countries. Overall, life expectancy at age 15 is above the global average in 14 OIC

⁸ Life expectancy at age 15 refers to the average number of years that a person who is currently 15 years old can expect to live, based on the prevailing mortality rates at that time.

countries, namely Qatar, Maldives, Bahrain, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Türkiye, Algeria, Albania, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Iran, Malaysia, and Lebanon. On the other hand, the five countries with the lowest life expectancy at age 15 are Chad, Nigeria, Somalia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea-Bissau, with estimates of 51.2 years or less.

Figure 2.2: Life Expectancy at Age 15, by Gender (years)



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UN DESA's World Population Prospects 2022.

It is observed that females have higher life expectancy at age 15 compared to males, both globally and in the OIC countries. In 2023, the average life expectancy at age 15 for females and males was 64.2 years and 59.2 years, respectively, at the global level. In the OIC countries, it was 58.1 years for females and 54.4 years for males. The difference in life expectancy at this age between females and males was observed as 5 years in the world and 3.7 years in the OIC countries.

Studies have mainly attributed females' longer life expectancy to some behavioural and biological aspects. Researchers have explained that, behaviourally, males are more likely to smoke than females and are more inclined to take risks, rendering them more susceptible to life-threatening injuries. On the biological aspect, science has demonstrated that oestrogen in women combats conditions such as heart disease by aiding in the reduction of circulatory levels of harmful cholesterol and as compared to men; they again possess stronger immune systems (Population Reference Bureau, 2001; Dattani, Rodés-Guirao, & Roser, 2023).

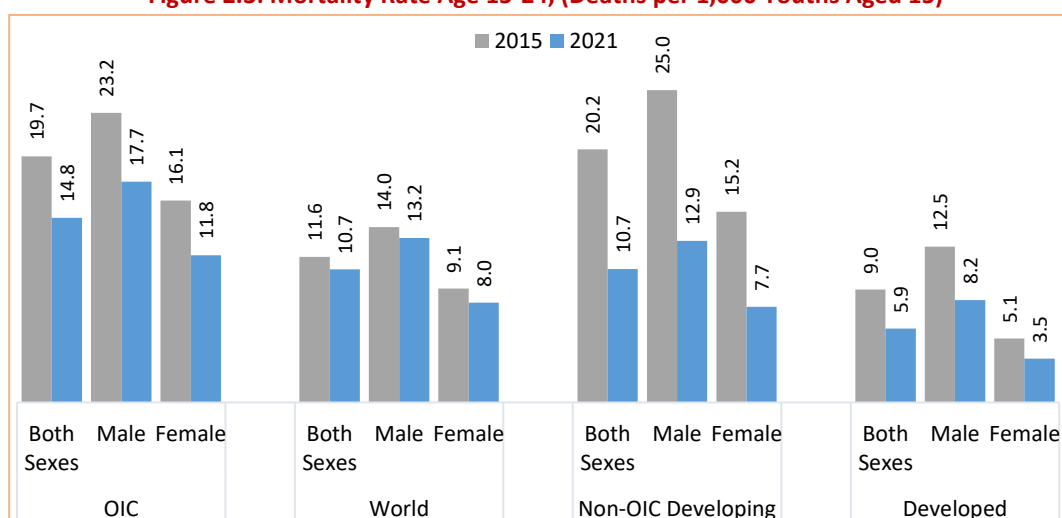
Youth Mortality

With the dynamic energy of young people, the matter of their mortality persists as a crucial reality, necessitating immediate attention and intervention. To address this concern, the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME) has been tasked with sharing data on such mortality and enhancing the methods used to estimate it. The available dataset from UN IGME indicates a downward trend in the mortality rate of young people aged 15–24 years at the global, regional, and national levels. A report by the World Health Organization (WHO) has shown that in 2020, approximately 1.3 million adolescents and young

adults aged 15 to 24 died due to various causes such as injuries (including road traffic accidents and drowning), violence, self-harm, infectious diseases like respiratory infections, and maternal conditions (complications related to pregnancy) (WHO, 2022a).

The data indicate that globally, the probability of dying between the ages of 15 and 24 years was 10.7 deaths per 1000 youths aged 15 in 2021, down from 11.6 in 2015. It is noteworthy that the OIC and Non-OIC developing countries had comparable youth mortality rates in 2015, but the reduction was slower in the OIC group, such that, as of 2021, the OIC had much higher rates. Indeed, the average youth mortality rate for both sexes declined from 19.7 to 14.8 in the OIC group during the 2015-2021 period, while it almost halved in Non-OIC Developing Countries, from 20.2 to 10.7, over the same period (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3: Mortality Rate Age 15-24, (Deaths per 1,000 Youths Aged 15)



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation.

During the period from 2015 to 2021, the probability of young people dying at age 15 increased in seven OIC countries, including Palestine, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritania, Yemen, Lebanon, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan. Moreover, youth mortality rate varied significantly across OIC countries as of 2021, ranging from 3.1 to 40.4 deaths per 1000 adolescents aged 15. With the exception of Afghanistan, the OIC countries with the highest youth mortality rates were located in Sub-Saharan Africa: Somalia, Sierra Leone, Chad, and Guinea. On the other hand, youth mortality rate was less than 5 in Brunei Darussalam, Qatar, Maldives, Türkiye, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait.

During adolescence, sex differences in mortality rates become apparent. As depicted in Figure 2.3, worldwide, young females have lower mortality rates than young males, and that explains their longevity of life as mentioned above. On a global scale, as of 2021, the mortality rate among males aged 15-24 is 13.2 deaths per 1,000 aged 15, while for females, it is 8.0 deaths per 1,000 individuals of the same age group. By comparison, in the OIC countries, youth mortality rate for males stands at 17.7, whereas for females, it is lower at 11.8.

2.2 Substance Abuse and Behavioural Addictions

Substance addiction, also known as drug addiction, is a neuropsychiatric disorder characterized by an ongoing compulsion to use drugs despite negative consequences. In contrast, behavioural addiction, or non-substance addiction, includes uncontrolled gambling, food addiction, internet addiction, and mobile phone addiction (Zou et al., 2017). The abuse of substances and non-substances, such as alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, prescription medications, the internet, mobile phones, social media, and others, can result in health issues and serious problems in various aspects of life, including family, friends, co-workers, jobs, money, and the law. However, despite these problems, substance abuse and behavioural addictions remain prevalent across the world.

The OIC Youth Strategy highlights that youth addiction, including substance abuse like drugs, tobacco, alcohol, and technology, plays a substantial role in the social exclusion of young people. The strategy also mentions that such exclusions pose psychological and physical risks to youth and it hinders their ability to participate effectively in education and employment. Marginalisation from these opportunities may push young people towards more dangerous behaviours, such as criminality and suicide, potentially exposing them to illegal and extremist organisations.

Substance Addictions: Tobacco Use

Tobacco use, a pervasive form of substance addiction, poses significant health risks and remains one of the leading causes of preventable disease and death worldwide. This includes use of tobacco products such as cigarettes, cigars, pipes, chewing tobacco, or snuff, and quickly leading to nicotine addiction, especially when initiated at early stage of life especially from adolescence (CDC, 2023). It should be noted that the use of any form of tobacco products by youth is unsafe, and preventing tobacco product use among young people is crucial in reducing overall tobacco consumption.

Based on a dataset on adolescent smokers from 133 countries worldwide, a study by Nazir et al. (2019) indicated that the global prevalence of tobacco use among adolescents was 19.3% in 2018, with 23.29% among male adolescents and 15.35% among female adolescents. Considering the OIC countries, the most recent data from the WHO database indicates that prevalence of tobacco use among adolescents aged 13–19 years was more than 30% in three countries, namely Maldives, Lebanon, and Palestine. On the other hand, seven countries including Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Côte d'Ivoire, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Togo have the lowest (below 4%) prevalence rates of current tobacco use among adolescents.

In addition to the traditional tobacco products, electronic cigarettes, commonly known as e-cigarettes, have become a prevalent issue among youth globally. The availability of flavours, peer influence, and the misconception that e-cigarettes are less harmful than traditional tobacco products are key factors driving youth towards e-cigarette use. This trend raises concerns about nicotine addiction, negative health effects, and the need for comprehensive

strategies to prevent and reduce youth initiation and usage of tobacco products, including e-cigarettes.

In fact, a wide range of measures has been proposed and introduced to prevent and reduce the use of tobacco products. The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), which is widely embraced as one of the most significant treaties in the history of the United Nations, currently with 182 Parties, entered into force on 27 February 2005 (see WHO, 2005). The Treaty emphasises the significance of strategies aimed at reducing both the demand for and supply of tobacco, by providing a framework for implementing tobacco control measures at national, regional, and international levels (WHO, 2020).

Being party to this Convention, a substantial number of countries are taking up measures to safeguard children from initiating smoking and other tobacco-related harm. As per the available WHO dataset⁹, 30 OIC countries have implemented *"ban on tobacco companies funding or making contributions (including in-kind contributions) to smoking prevention media campaigns, including those directed at youth."* These countries include Algeria, Bahrain, Benin, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guyana, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Palestine, Senegal, Sudan, Suriname, Togo, Turkmenistan, and Uganda.

Within the last two decades, the response of the OIC to tobacco use has also been very effective and comprehensive. The process started in 2007 with the launch of "Tobacco Free OIC" initiative¹⁰ by SESRIC in response to the spread of tobacco epidemic in the OIC countries. It aims to foster an OIC-wide coordinated approach to curb and control the spread of tobacco epidemic in the OIC countries. This initiative focuses on training and capacity building programs¹¹ to facilitate the development and implementation of sustainable national tobacco control strategies in the OIC countries.

Currently, SESRIC also collaborates with the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and CDC Foundation in implementing the Tobacco Questions for Surveys (TQS)¹² in national surveys across OIC countries. The objective of this project is to harmonise and standardise the regular monitoring of important tobacco control indicators, while also promoting sustainability and integration with other risk factor surveillance initiatives. Additionally, the TQS-Youth¹³ component has been included in the survey to assist in monitoring youth tobacco use, provide guidance for the implementation and evaluation of tobacco prevention, and control programs in OIC countries.

⁹ WHO Database accessible on <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/gho-tobacco-control-enforce-bans-e18-csr-anti-tobacco-media> [accessed on 7 March 2024]

¹⁰ For further information, see [What is "Tobacco Free OIC"? \[https://www.sesric.org/tfo/introduction.php\]](https://www.sesric.org/tfo/introduction.php).

¹¹ [Tobacco Free OIC Capacity Building Programme \(TF-CaB\) \[https://www.sesric.org/cbp-tfo.php\]](https://www.sesric.org/cbp-tfo.php)

¹² See Tobacco Questions for Surveys (TQS) for further information [<https://www.oicstatcom.org/tqs.php>]

¹³ See TQS-Youth for further information [<https://www.oicstatcom.org/tqs.php#tab=tab2>]

The OIC-Strategic Health Programme of Action (OIC-SHPA) 2014-2023¹⁴ also lists actions that need to be taken in relation with the fight against tobacco use under several thematic areas. To this end, both at the global and at the OIC level, there are initiatives and mechanisms to cope with tobacco use. In cooperation with international organisations, the OIC countries can effectively reduce tobacco use and can save many lives.

Non-substance Addictions: Technology and Social Media

Non-substance addictions, such as gambling, food, internet usage, mobile devices, shopping, and others, occur when an individual engages excessively in these activities and cannot control their behaviour. Despite the harms, there has been a significant increase in the number of individuals involved in the use of digital technologies, with over 5.3 billion individuals accessing the internet in 2023 (United Nations, 2023). While the internet and technology serve various purposes such as information dissemination, communication, entertainment, and social networking, they have also resulted in digital addiction, particularly among young people, leading to global health challenges. Moreover, the excessive use of the internet and technology can disrupt personal and professional lives, and potentially cause physical, emotional, and financial harm.

To address the adverse effects of digital addiction on the physical and mental well-being of young people, some countries have begun implementing a ban on smartphones in educational institutions, unless they are being used for educational purposes. According to the UNESCO's most recent *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023*, one in four countries globally have enforced laws or policies prohibiting mobile phone usage in schools. In addition, such bans are observed to be more common in Central and Southern Asia. For example, Bangladesh banned mobile phone use by teachers in classrooms in 2011, later extending it to students and teachers in schools and colleges in 2017. Similarly, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have similar prohibitions in place for students, while Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea have also implemented bans or restrictions on mobile phone use in educational institutions to address the growing concern of technology or internet addiction among young people (UNESCO, 2023).

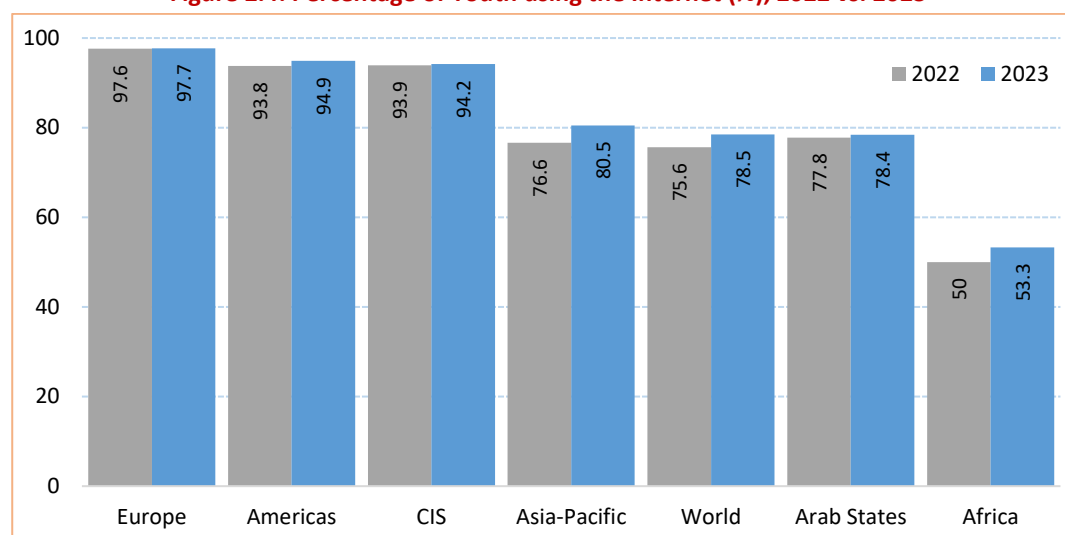
Between 2022 and 2023 alone, there was a 2.9 percentage point increase worldwide in the number of young individuals using the internet. As compared to the other regions, the usage of the internet among young people rose highly by 3.9 percentage points in Asia-Pacific countries, followed by 3.3 percentage points in Africa although the region still has the lowest percentage of youth using the internet. It increased by 1.1 percentage points in the Americas, 0.6 percentage points in the Arab States, 0.3 percentage points in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and 0.1 percentage point in Europe (Figure 2.4).

The most recent data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) shows that, in the 22 OIC countries with available data, more than half of population ages 15 - 24 use the internet.

¹⁴ See OIC-SHPA for further information [https://www.oic-oci.org/subweb/ichm/4/en/docs/1_OICSHPA-draft-1-v3.pdf]

Among these countries, the percentage of internet users aged 15–24 is relatively high in United Arab Emirates (100), Bahrain (100), Qatar (99.8), Morocco (99.5), Malaysia (99.4), Saudi Arabia (98.9), Kazakhstan (98.8), Oman (97.1), Türkiye (96.6), Albania (96.5), Iran (95.4), Uzbekistan (93.9), Indonesia (93.2), Egypt (92.7), and Brunei Darussalam (90). In comparison, the proportion of young people using internet was as low as 8.8% in Pakistan and 11.7% in Mozambique.

Figure 2.4: Percentage of Youth using the Internet (%), 2022 vs. 2023



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database.

Numerous studies have shed light on the detrimental impacts of internet addiction among young people. For instance, a study involving 267 college students in Malaysia revealed a significant correlation between internet addiction and depression and anxiety levels (Othman & Lee, 2017). Similarly, research conducted among junior high school students in Türkiye demonstrated that internet addiction contributes to the deterioration of social skills and feelings of loneliness among students (Ökkeş & Karşıdağ, 2021). Moreover, investigations into internet usage patterns in Saudi Arabia have uncovered adverse consequences, including disrupted sleep patterns, unhealthy lifestyles, and diminished academic performance (Alosaimi et al., 2016; Alotaibi et al., 2022).

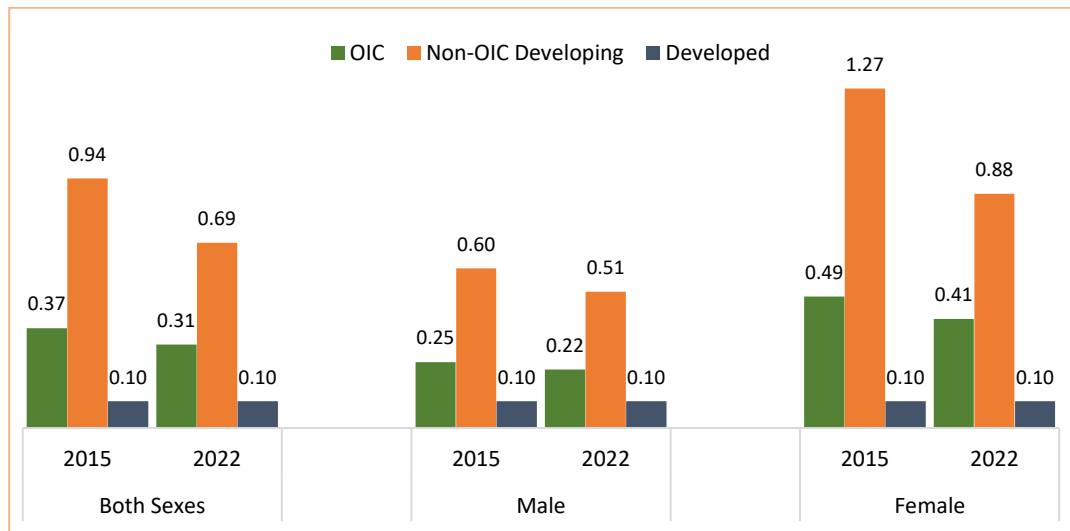
During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of smartphones and the internet became apparently unavoidable for students due to lockdowns and restrictions that limited in-person interactions. Schools and universities shifted to online learning platforms to ensure continuity in education during lockdowns, and students used smartphones and the internet to access online classes, submit assignments, and communicate with teachers. This has exacerbated internet addiction in the recent times as the amount of time spent on smartphones has increased. A study on smartphone usage duration in Iran during the pandemic revealed that 57.2% of individuals spent more than 5 hours a day on their smartphones (Mokhtarinia et al., 2024). In Jordan, students' internet usage increased for platforms like Netflix and YouTube during the pandemic

(Saadeh et al., 2021). Furthermore, during this period, students who extensively used the internet and smartphones spent more than 5 hours a day online, posing potential problems (Hosen et al., 2021)

2.3 HIV/AIDS Prevalence

HIV and AIDS has become a major public health problem in many countries, and monitoring the course of the epidemic and impact of interventions is crucial. Both the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2021 United Nations Political Declaration have set goals for reducing new HIV infections and HIV-related mortality. However, according to the UNAIDS epidemiological estimates, around 39 million people globally were living with HIV in 2022 and over 6 million of them were from OIC countries. Considering the youth, 3.2 million young people globally were living with HIV in 2022, of which 776 thousand were from OIC countries (UNAIDS, 2023).

Figure 2.5: HIV Prevalence among Young People (15–24 years) (%), 2015 vs. 2022



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

The HIV epidemic affects people of all ages; including young people aged 15–24, and particularly in developing countries. However, available data shows that the prevalence of the HIV epidemic among young people is declining as fewer youth are acquiring HIV than a decade ago. As shown in Figure 2.5, the prevalence of HIV among youth aged 15 to 24 decreased in OIC countries by 0.06 percentage point, from 0.37% to 0.31% between 2015 and 2022. By comparison, in non-OIC developing countries, the prevalence declined by 0.24 percentage points, from 0.94% to 0.69%, during the same period.

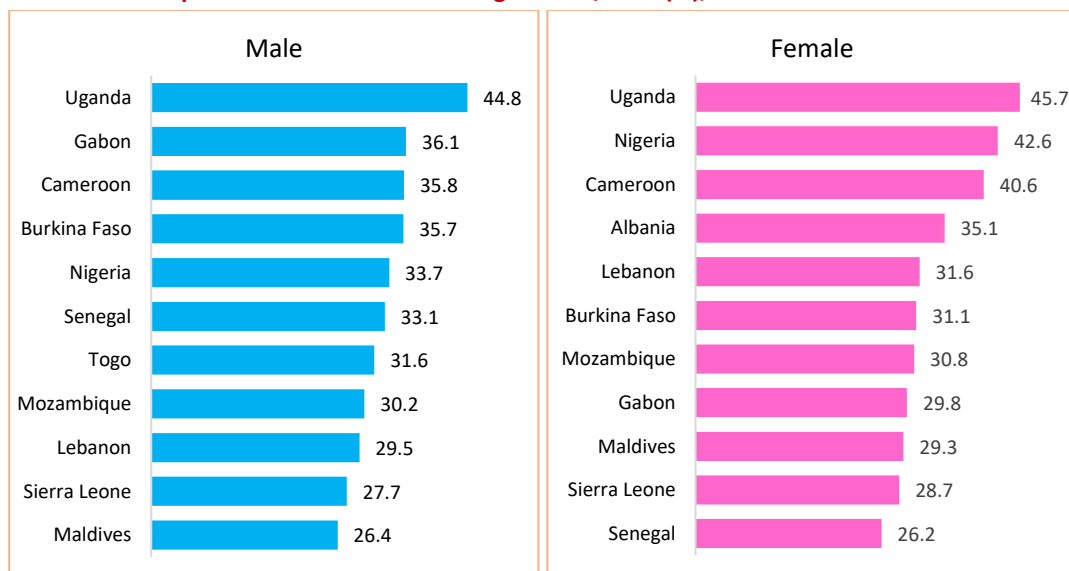
Figure 2.5 further shows that the prevalence of the HIV epidemic remains higher among young women as compared to young men. In OIC countries, approximately 0.41% of adolescent girls and young women aged 15 to 24 were living with HIV in 2022, compared to a prevalence rate of 0.22% among adolescent boys and young men. The prevalence was even higher in non-OIC

developing countries, as the data indicates that 0.88% of adolescent girls and young women in these countries were living with HIV, along with 0.51% of their adolescent boys and young men.

According to the 2022 UNAIDS estimates, among the OIC countries, Mozambique, Uganda, Gabon, Cameroon, and Sierra Leone have the highest HIV prevalence rates among adolescent girls and young women. The countries with the highest prevalence rates among adolescent boys and young men include Mozambique, Uganda, Guinea-Bissau, Cameroon, and Côte d'Ivoire. It is noteworthy that all of those countries are located in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In recent years, the global community has increased efforts towards preventing HIV infections among young people. For instance, such efforts have been echoed in the SDGs and the OIC-2025 POA. It is important to note that the HIV epidemic primarily spreads through sexual transmission to generations of young people, and equipping the youth with a comprehensive correct knowledge about HIV and AIDS is essential. This is through teaching them on correctly identifying the two major ways of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV, and rejecting the most common misconceptions about HIV transmission.

Figure 2.6: OIC Countries with More Than a Quarter of Population Aged 15-24 Years Having Comprehensive Correct Knowledge of HIV/AIDS (%), 2021 or Last Year data



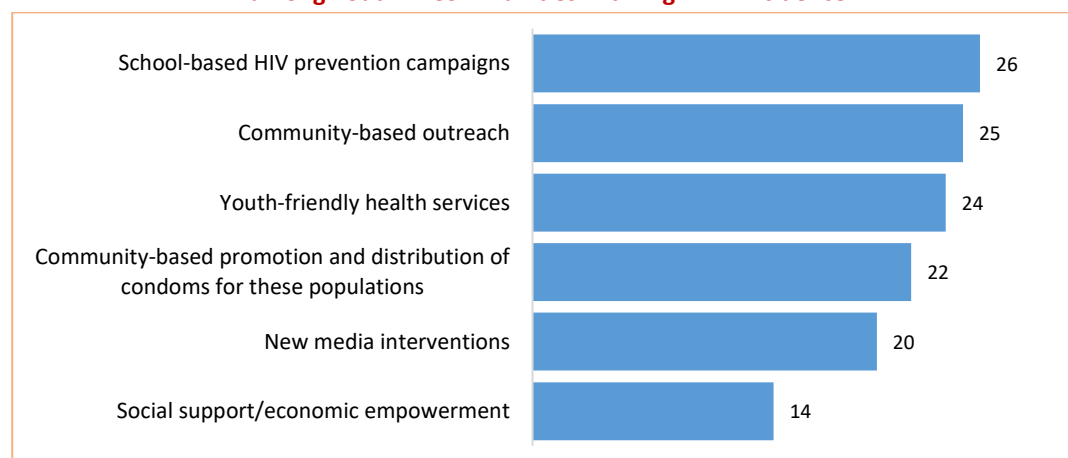
Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UNICEF HIV/AIDS Data.

Note: Latest year with available data between 2010 and 2021.

Regarding the assessment of the progress towards universal knowledge of HIV transmission, available data show that more than a third of young males in Uganda, Gabon, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria are equipped with comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS (Figure 2.6, left). Similarly, more than a third of young females in Uganda, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Albania are also equipped with the same comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS (Figure 2.6, right).

The sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescent girls and young women in Sub-Saharan African region is concerning. To effectively reduce HIV incidence among youth in this region, prevention strategies must be used alongside conventional biomedical approaches, and meaningfully address the social and structural dimensions affecting young people (Ferguson, Mathur & Armstrong, 2021). The countries in this region need to achieve this by integrating HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, and care strategies into existing national, regional, and community healthcare systems to reach the maximum number of young people (UNICEF, n.d). This will provide a long-term solution to prevent future HIV transmission while ensuring proper care for those living with the virus. The UNICEF approaches towards this solution include education on prevention, increased access to self-testing, and pre-exposure prophylaxis in high HIV prevalence areas among young people.

Figure 2.7: Number of OIC Countries with National Prevention Strategy to Reduce New Infection among Youth in Communities with High HIV Incidence



Source: SESRIC staff compilation based on Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

Available data show that 28 OIC countries have a national prevention strategy to reduce new infection among adolescent girls, young women, and their male partners in communities with high HIV incidence. Importantly, these countries account for over 95% of youth people living with HIV in the OIC countries. The strategies mostly include school-based HIV prevention campaigns, community-based outreach programmes, and youth-friendly health services (Figure 2.7). Widespread implementation and coverage of these strategies provides significant potential for a substantial reduction in new HIV infections among the most vulnerable populations in the OIC countries.

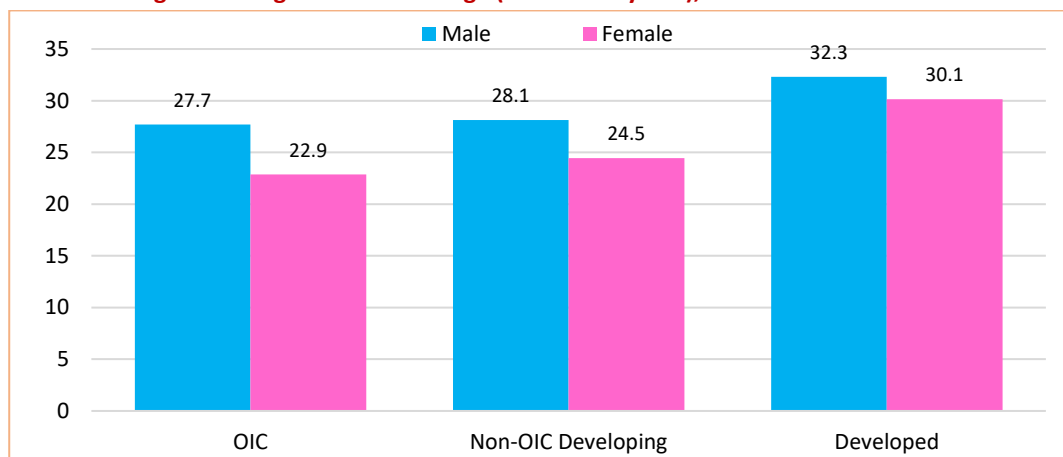
2.4 Reproductive Health

Age at First Marriage

The mean age at marriage is the average number of years individuals remain single before getting married, among those who marry before the age of 50 (World Bank Metadata). The median age at first marriage, according to the latest available data as of 2019, varies significantly across country groups and between males and females, as shown in Figure 2.8.

In OIC countries, the median age at first marriage stands at 27.7 years among males, while for females, it is particularly lower, at 22.9 years. This translates into a gap of 4.8 years between men and women before their first marriage. In contrast, in non-OIC developing countries and developed countries, the median age at first marriage is noticeably higher for both males and females compared to that in the OIC countries (Figure 2.8).

Figure 2.8: Age at First Marriage (number of years), 2019 or Last Year Data



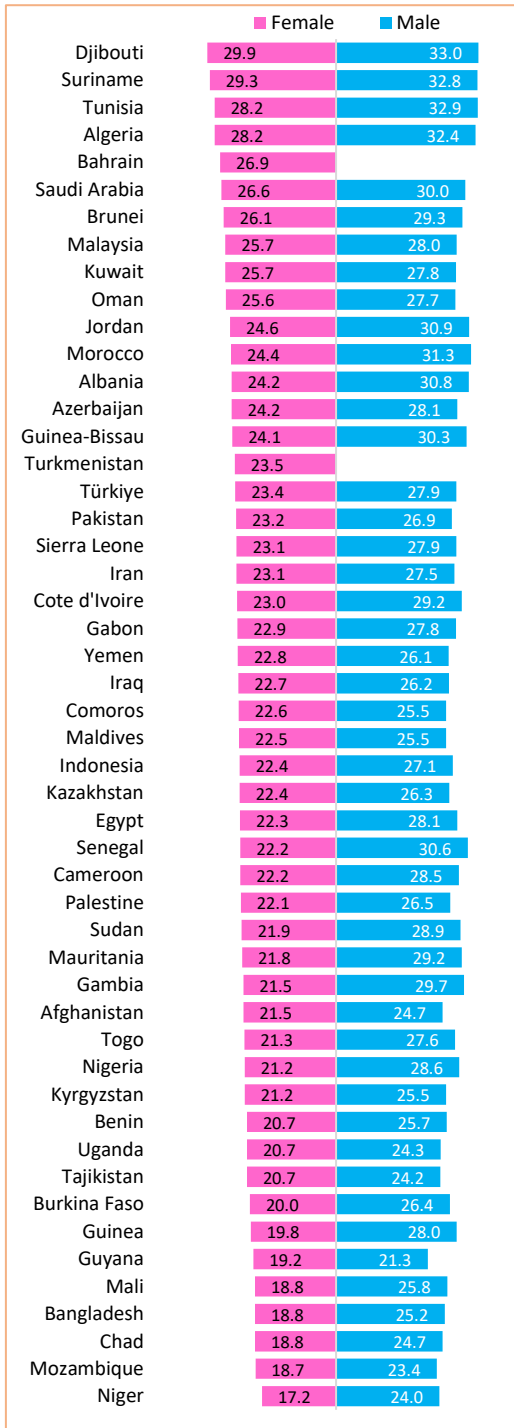
Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on World Bank's Gender Statistics Database. Note: * Data for last year available between 2010 and 2019.

These differences reflect variations in socio-cultural norms, economic factors, and access to education and healthcare services, which influence marriage patterns and age preferences globally. From a policy perspective, a continued increase in age at first marriage has implications for family formation, such as a decline in the fertility rates of women as their age at first marriage increases (Haloi and Limbu, 2013, as cited in SESRIC, 2023b).

Child Marriage

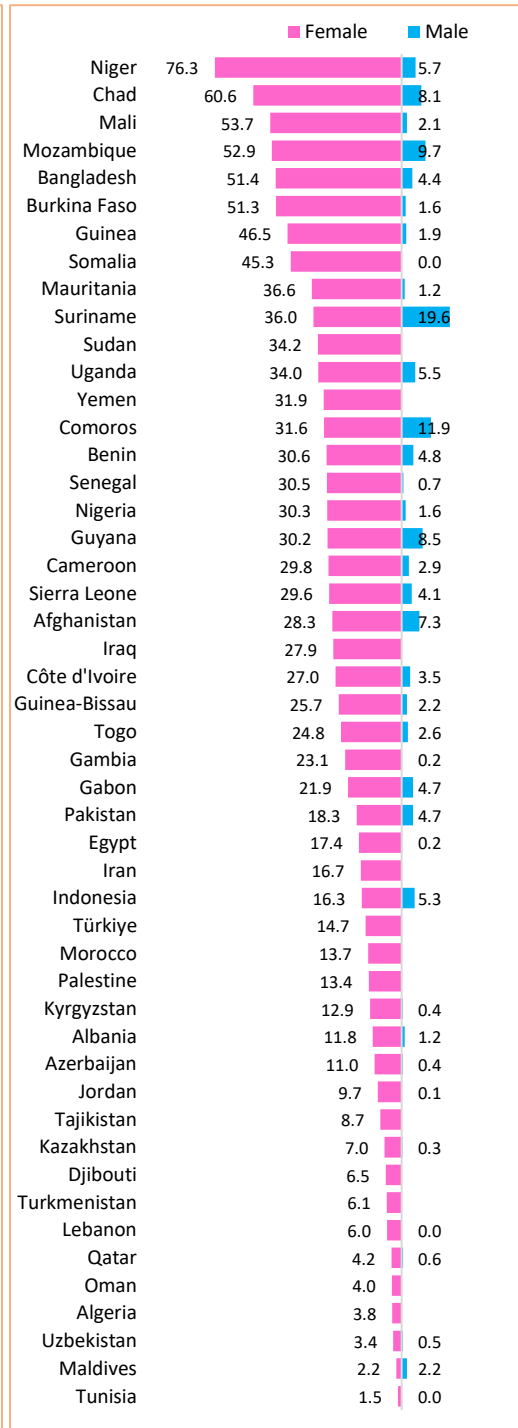
Child marriage refers to a formal or informal union of individuals before the age of 18 and it is widely acknowledged as a violation of human rights and a barrier to national development (UNICEF, 2023). Such marriages are often caused by socio-economic factors, including poverty, notions of family honour, dowry practices, girls' limited access to education and employment opportunities, social obligations, and more. Alarmingly, about 650 million girls and women worldwide were married before their 18th birthday, according to a UNICEF report (UNICEF, 2021). The report further indicates that child marriage has detrimental effects on adolescents, such as lower levels of education, early pregnancies, intimate partner violence, higher rates of maternal and child mortality, increased incidence of sexually transmitted infections, perpetuation of intergenerational poverty, and the disempowerment of married girls. In response, the OIC countries have made commitments or are party to various international frameworks, such as the United Nations 2030 Agenda of SDGs namely (SDG 5.3.1), the OIC POA 2025, the OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW), and other initiatives to prevent child and forced marriages.

Figure 2.9: Age at First Marriage (number of years), by Gender, 2019*



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on World Bank's Gender Statistics Database. Note: * Data for the latest year available between 2010 and 2019.

Figure 2.10: Percentage of Youths (ages 20-24) who were Married by Age of 18, 2022*



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UNICEF Global Databases. Note: * Data for the latest year available between 2015 and 2022.

According to the UNICEF dataset, marriage by age 18 years is more prevalent among females (ages 20–24) than males in the same age group. Globally, 18.7% of females (ages 20–24) were married by the age of 18, compared to 2.8% of males (ages 20–24). Nonetheless, child marriage remains prevalent particularly in the least developed countries, mostly in West and Central Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa. In these regions, the percentages of young women married by age 15 years were 10.4%, 11%, and 9.9%, respectively.

Although the OIC countries have adopted some policies preventing child and forced marriage as mentioned in the OPAAW, the proportion of young women and men marrying within the youth age bracket remains high. As of 2022, more than half of female youths (ages 20–24) were married by age of 18 years in Niger, Chad, Mali, Mozambique, Bangladesh, and Burkina Faso. As for male youths, the proportion of early marriage was relatively high in Suriname, Comoros, Mozambique, Guyana, Chad, and Afghanistan, though to a smaller extent as compared to early marriages among females (Figure 2.10).

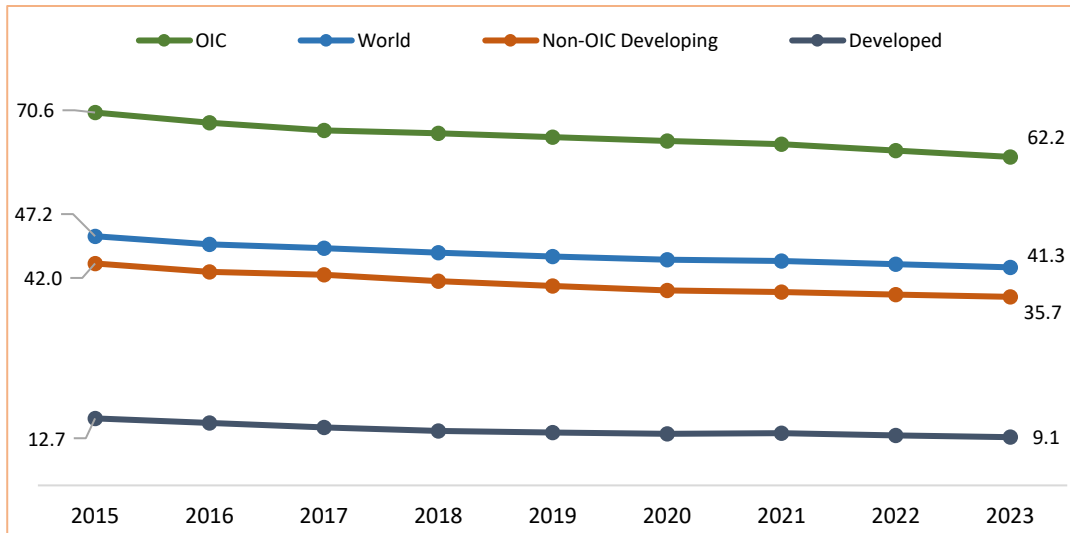
Importantly, several OIC countries have low rates of marriage among youths by age 18. The proportion of female youths (ages 20–24) who were married by age of 18 was less than 10% in Tunisia, Maldives, Uzbekistan, Algeria, Oman, Qatar, Lebanon, Turkmenistan, Djibouti, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Jordan. Similarly, less than 1% of male youths (ages 20–24) were married by age of 18 in Tunisia, Jordan, Gambia, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Qatar, and Senegal (Figure 2.10).

In most cases, countries with some of the highest fertility rates also have some of the highest child marriage rates in the world. Child marriage is therefore a significant factor contributing to adolescent pregnancies and childbearing and contributes to the high fertility rates (UNFPA-WCARO, n.d).

Adolescent Fertility Rate

Adolescent pregnancy is a global phenomenon with well-defined causes and profound health, social, and economic consequences. It poses heightened health risks for adolescent mothers and hinders their educational and employment opportunities, as they are most likely to discontinue their education and employment (World Bank, 2022a). Additionally, adolescent fertility can lead to health complications for both the mother and child, such as low birth weight, reduced life expectancy, and maternal mortality (WHO, 2024). Therefore, efforts to prevent adolescent pregnancies and reduce pregnancy-related risks are crucial for achieving better health outcomes for both adolescent mothers and their babies globally. Adolescent fertility rate, or adolescent birth rate, measured as births per 1000 adolescent girls aged 15-19 years, is on a downward trend globally. Data show that there was a decline from 47.2 in 2015 to 41.3 in 2023, which is attributed to various factors such as improvements in contraceptive use, education, and the empowerment of women in society. Despite this positive trend, challenges remain, especially in the OIC countries. Indeed, during the same period, adolescent fertility rate also decreased in the OIC countries, from 70.6 to 62.2, but it continued to be higher than that of non-OIC developing countries, developed countries, and the world (Figure 2.11).

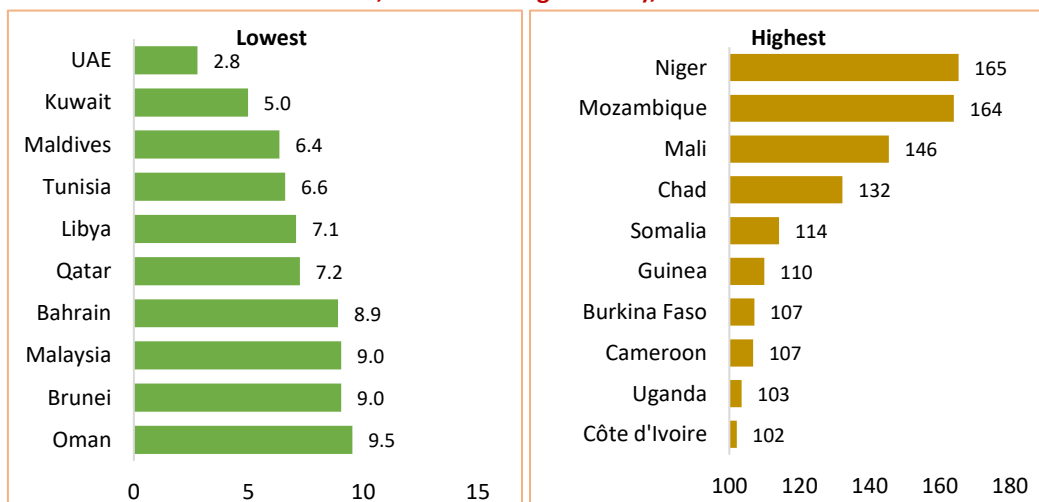
Figure 2.11: Adolescent Fertility Rate (births per 1,000 girls ages 15-19), 2015-2023



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UN DESA’s World Population Prospects 2022.

Among the OIC countries, the United Arab Emirates has the lowest adolescent fertility rate as of 2023, followed by Kuwait, Maldives, Tunisia, Libya, Qatar, Bahrain, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Oman (Figure 2.12, left). At the other side of the spectrum, Niger and Mozambique have the highest rates, followed by Mali, Chad, Somalia, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Uganda, and Côte d'Ivoire, all from Sub-Saharan Africa (Figure 2.12, right). The persistence of high adolescent fertility rates in many countries, particularly in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, can be attributed to factors such as early child marriages, high levels of poverty among adolescents, high rates of school dropout (especially among girls), and low utilization of reproductive health services (UNICEF-WCARO, 2015).

Figure 2.12: OIC Countries with the Lowest and Highest Adolescent Fertility Rates (births per 1,000 females ages 15-19), 2023

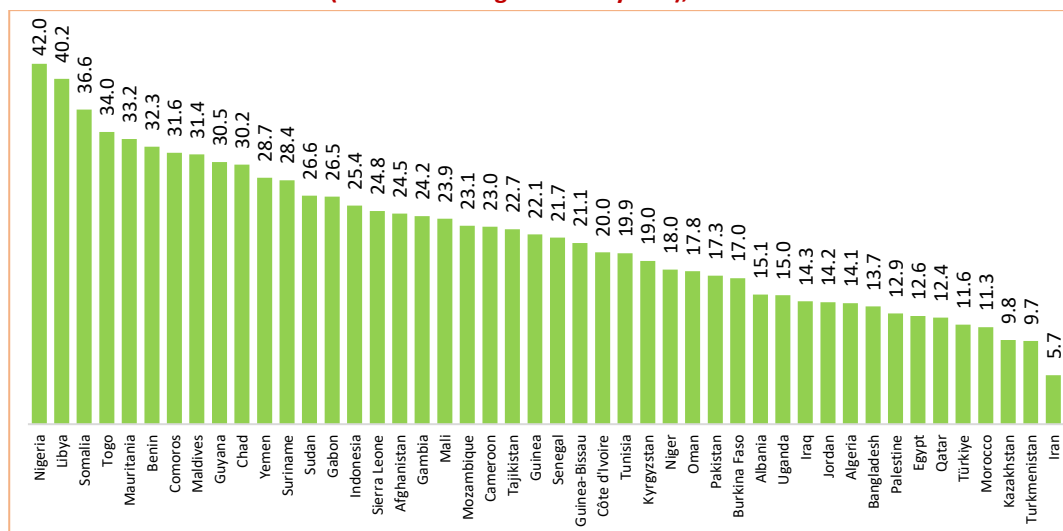


Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UN DESA’s World Population Prospects 2022.

In one way or the other, adolescent fertility and maternal mortality are interlinked. Implementing policies that encourage girls’ access to education, healthcare services, and socio-economic opportunities can contribute to lessening the prevalence of pregnancy during adolescence and subsequently reducing cases related to maternal mortality during this stage. Women’s deprivation of services such as education on sexual and reproductive health and rights can result in a range of harmful practices such as early and child marriages and unwanted pregnancies. Family planning plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges by empowering women to make informed decisions about their reproductive health.

However, in several OIC countries, women still face these challenges, particularly in accessing essential family planning services. As shown in Figure 2.13, more than one-quarter of reproductive-age women in 15 OIC countries find themselves in this situation, as they desire to prevent or delay pregnancy but do not have access to contraception. Consequently, this lack of access exposes them to the high risk of unintended pregnancies, highlighting the urgency of the matter and the pressing need for improved access to family planning services and education on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Figure 2.13: Unmet Need for Family Planning in OIC Countries
 (% of women aged 15–49 years), 2021*



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UN DESA’s 2022 World Contraceptive Use Dataset. Note: *Latest year available data in 2011-2021.

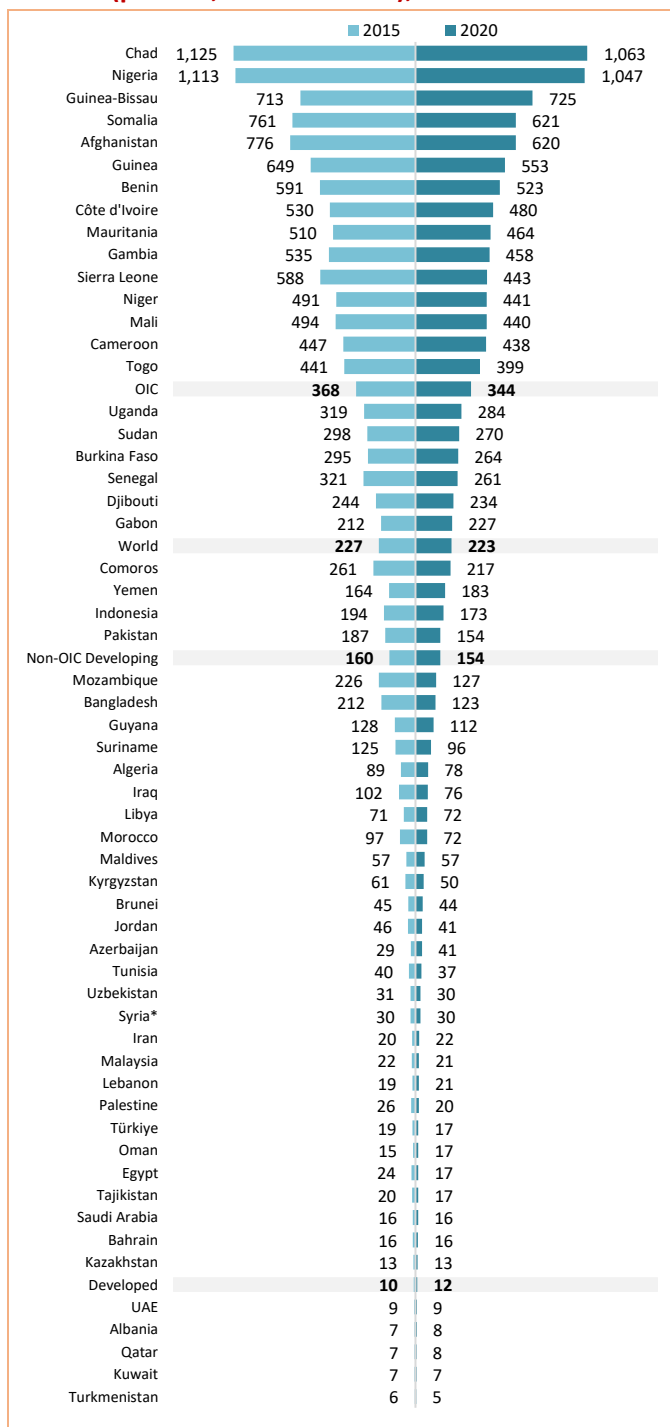
Youth and Maternal Mortality

According to the World Bank (2022a), there is a significant correlation between maternal age and maternal mortality, with adolescent mother facing greater health risks such as death as compared to adult mothers. As indicated in Figure 2.11, global adolescent fertility rates remain notably high, especially within the OIC. Such high fertility rates among adolescents remain a challenge in many developing countries as it increases the risk of having high maternal deaths. Factors pushing these deaths include complications during pregnancy and delivery, as well as high rates of unsafe abortions among adolescent mothers.

Globally, Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR), measured as the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, showed a declining trend over the 2015-2020 period. However, the fall from 227 to 223 over that period shows that it remains unacceptably high above the SDG target of less than 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. Similarly, in the OIC countries, MMR decreased from 368 to 344 over the same period but remained high as compared to the averages of the world, non-OIC developing, and developed countries (Figure 2.14).

Between 2015 and 2020, MMR decreased by at least 50 in 14 OIC countries, namely Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Mozambique, Guinea, Bangladesh, Gambia, Benin, Nigeria, Chad, Senegal, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, and Niger. Nevertheless, there were substantial variations in MMR among the OIC countries. As of 2020, MMR was significantly below the SDG threshold in 24 OIC countries, the lowest being in Turkmenistan, Kuwait, Qatar, Albania, and the United Arab Emirates – all with less than 10 deaths per 100,000 live births. However, in the same year, MMR exceeded the world average of 223 deaths per 100,000 live births in 21 OIC countries, the highest being in Chad and Nigeria, each with over a thousand maternal deaths per 100,000 live births (see Figure 2.14).

Figure 2.14: Maternal Mortality Ratio (per 100,000 Live Births), 2015 vs 2020



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on UN DESA's World Population Prospects 2022. * Membership of Syria to the OIC is currently suspended.

2.5 Mental Health

Mental health is a key component of overall health and well-being of people, as echoed in the WHO’s Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2030, which defines health as “*a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*” (WHO, 2021). This Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan asserts that mental health is influenced by various factors, such as access to services, living conditions, and employment status, and has implications not only for individuals but also for their families.

According to the *World Mental Health Report* by WHO (2022b), approximately 970 million people worldwide were living with a mental disorder in 2019. The people affected by mental health conditions experience significantly higher rates of disability and mortality. The mental disorders such as anxiety and depressive disorders rank among the top 10 leading causes of global health loss, and they affect individuals of all age groups and locations. It is estimated that one in seven young people aged 10–19 experiences a mental disorder worldwide. Depression, anxiety, and behavioural disorders are the leading causes of illness and disability among young people. However, the prevalence rates differ by sex, with anxiety and depressive disorders being more prevalent among young females, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and anxiety disorders being more prevalent among young males (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Global Prevalence of Mental Disorders among Youth (Age 10-24 years) (%), 2019

Mental Disorders Cause	Both Sexes	Male	Female
Anxiety disorders	4.3	3.4	5.2
Depressive disorders	2.6	2.0	3.2
Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder	2.4	3.5	1.3
Idiopathic developmental intellectual disability	2.0	2.1	1.9
Conduct disorder	1.9	2.5	1.3
Other mental disorders	0.5	0.6	0.4
Bipolar disorder	0.5	0.5	0.5
Autism spectrum disorders	0.4	0.6	0.2
Eating disorders	0.3	0.2	0.4
Schizophrenia	0.1	0.1	0.1

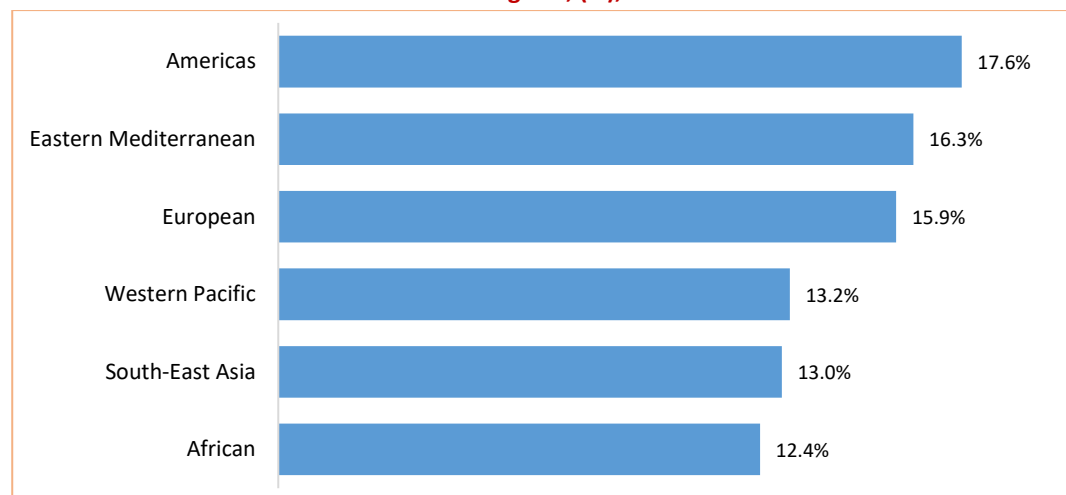
Source: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Data.

Mental health issues in youth have wide-ranging impacts on various aspects of their lives. Poor mental health can hinder academic performance, decision-making abilities, and overall health. The mental health conditions among youth are often associated with other health and behavioural risks, such as substance abuse, violence, and risky sexual behaviour leading to HIV, STDs, and unintended pregnancy (CDC, 2019). It is vital to promote good mental health in youth to set the foundation for their well-being in adulthood.

The prevalence of mental disorders among young people aged 10–24 years is significant across all countries and WHO regions. According to the latest data for 2019, it ranges from as low as 12.4% in the WHO African Region to as high as 17.6% in the WHO Region of the Americas (Figure 2.15). WHO (2022b) suggests that regional differences in the prevalence of mental disorders in

young people across WHO regions could be attributed to three factors: demographic factors, such as age distribution of the population; occurrence of war and conflict, leading to higher rates in certain regions; and sociocultural factors that influence individuals' willingness to disclose symptoms.

Figure 2.15: Prevalence of Mental Disorders among Youth People (Aged 10-24 years) across WHO Regions, (%), 2019



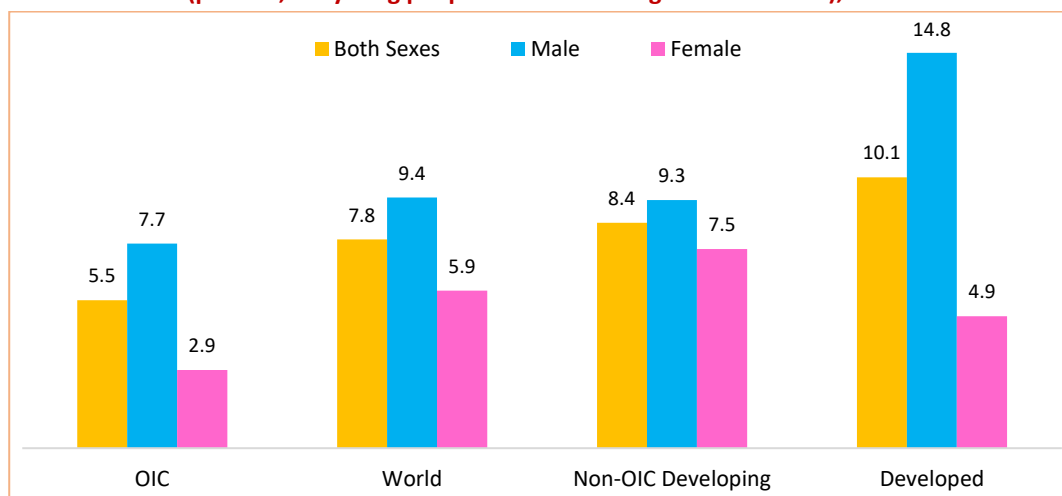
Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on IHME, GBD Data.

For example, in low-income countries, which are mostly located in regions like Africa and Southeast Asia, populations often have a higher proportion of children under ten, among whom mental disorders are less common, so when these children transition into the 10-24 age group, they contribute to a larger number of youth without mental disorders. Additionally, the occurrence of war and conflict contributes to higher rates of mental disorders in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Lastly, socio-cultural factors also play a role, such as variations in cultural understandings and conceptualisations of mental health and conditions, which may affect individuals' willingness to disclose symptoms in survey responses.

Mental Health Governance

According to WHO (2019), one of the important aspects with regard to mental health governance is the management of suicide, which has become a serious global public health concern, ranking among the top twenty leading causes of death worldwide, surpassing fatalities from malaria, breast cancer, or war and homicide, with close to 800,000 lives lost annually. Particular attention has been drawn to young people aged 15 to 29, for whom suicide stands as the fourth leading cause of death. Such suicide cases often stem from mental disorders, especially depression and alcohol use disorders, and are prevalent in high-income countries. Additionally, suicide among youth especially can occur during moments of crisis, including life stresses such as financial problems, relationship breakups, and the burden of chronic pain and illness (WHO, 2023).

**Figure 2.16: Youth Crude Suicide Rate
(per 100,000 young people between the ages of 15 and 24), 2019**



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on IHME, GBD Data.

Figure 2.16 shows that the crude suicide rate among youth (per 100,000 young people between the ages of 15 and 24) was 5.5 in the OIC countries, compared to 7.8 in the world, 8.4 in non-OIC developing countries, and 10.1 in developed countries. It is noteworthy that there is a higher suicide rate among male young people as compared to their female counterparts in all of the country groups under consideration.

Youth Mental Health Threats during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the biggest global crises in recent times and has had severe and far-reaching consequences, majorly service disruptions in the health system, economies, and societies. The emergency response policies such as lockdowns and school closures aimed at limiting the number of infections and deaths amplified the negative sexual and reproductive health of vulnerable adolescents (Zulaika et al., 2022), coupled with this exacerbated early marriages and teenage pregnancies during the pandemic (Masaba et al., 2022). In the pandemic, youth were reported to have experienced higher rates of anxiety, depression, and stress due to the pandemic (Jones, Mitra, & Bhuiyan, 2021). Similarly, a comprehensive new study on the mental health of youth during the COVID-19 has revealed that the mental health of young people deteriorated during the pandemic, with higher levels of depression and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties than before the pandemic hit (Oxford University, 2023). Young people reported to have experienced emotional and physical abuses during this period, hence creating traumatic stressors that further erode mental well-being (CDC, 2022). During the pandemic, the global prevalence of anxiety and depression increased by a massive 25%, which led to more widespread suicidal thoughts and behaviours (WHO, 2022c). Thus, it is also anticipated that in the post the pandemic, the global health systems will experience increased demands for mental health care (Costa et al., 2022).

3. Education and Skills Development

Education is a critical factor in developing and improving the lives of youth worldwide. Greater investment in youth education is needed to exploit their human capital where the growth rate of the youth population is high, like in the OIC countries. Educated and skilled youth are vital for eradicating poverty and hunger, fostering inclusive and equitable growth, and ensuring sustainability. Progresses and achievements made in the realms of quality education contribute to attaining the OIC Youth Strategy and the Sustainable Development Goals. This section offers an overview of the current status of education and skill development among youth in the OIC countries and identifies areas where policymakers should focus their efforts in crafting innovative and effective policies.

3.1. Youth Literacy

Literacy is the cornerstone of academic knowledge and competencies. In this regard, literacy rate is one of the most important indicators of learning outcomes that evaluates educational attainment, and it is an essential sign of social development as well. A high literacy rate suggests that a well-educated workforce with higher productivity and innovation potential can add value to the economy.

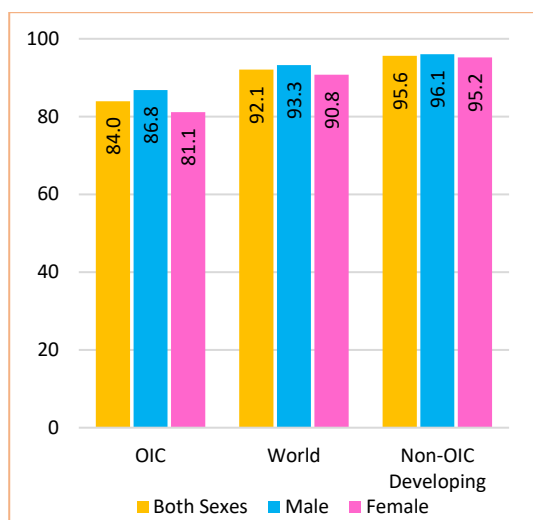
According to the most recent available data on 51 OIC countries,¹⁵ 84% of youth in the OIC region are literate, a rate that is below the world average (92.1%) and the average of non-OIC developing countries (95.6%). Male literacy rate stands at 86.8%, while the female literacy rate is lower at 81.1%, both of which fall below the world average (Figure 3.1). The literacy gap between males and females varies across the OIC countries. Among the countries favouring female literacy rate, Algeria leads with a significant difference, where the female literacy rate (84.2%) surpasses that of males (64.8%) by 19.4 percentage points. After Algeria, Palestine shows a gap of 12.5 percentage points, and the Gambia follows with a difference of 10.2 percentage points. On the contrary, Afghanistan exhibits the widest disparity in literacy rates in favour of males, with females at 41.6% and males at 71.2%, a difference of 29.7 percentage points. Guinea follows closely behind with a 22.2 percentage points difference, followed by Mali with a 16.8 percentage points gap.

In half of the OIC countries with available data, youth literacy rate is above 90%, with only three countries (Niger, Mali and Chad) having a rate below 50%. Uzbekistan, with a youth literacy rate of 100%, is the best-performing OIC country, closely followed by Azerbaijan (99.9%), Türkiye

¹⁵ Excluding Bahrain, Djibouti, Libya, Malaysia, Turkmenistan, and Yemen.

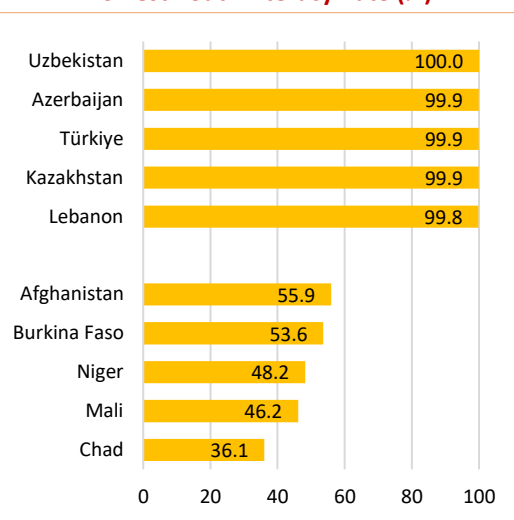
(99.9%), Kazakhstan (99.9%), and Lebanon (99.8%). Chad, with a rate of 36.1%, is the country with the lowest youth literacy rate in the OIC. It is followed by Mali (46.2%), Niger (48.2%), Burkina Faso (53.6%) and Afghanistan (55.9%) (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.1: Youth Literacy Rate (%)



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on data from UNESCO-UIS.Stat. Note: Weighted average. Country-level data are for 2022 or the nearest year available in the last decade.

Figure 3.2: OIC Countries with Highest and Lowest Youth Literacy Rate (%)



Source: UNESCO-UIS.Stat. Note: Data for 2022 or the nearest year available in the last decade.

As of 2022, approximately 55 million youths, 58% of whom are female, are estimated to be illiterate across the 51 OIC countries for which data is available. Without action, illiteracy will continue to hinder opportunities and possibly the future success of the youth population.

3.2. Enrolment in Tertiary Education

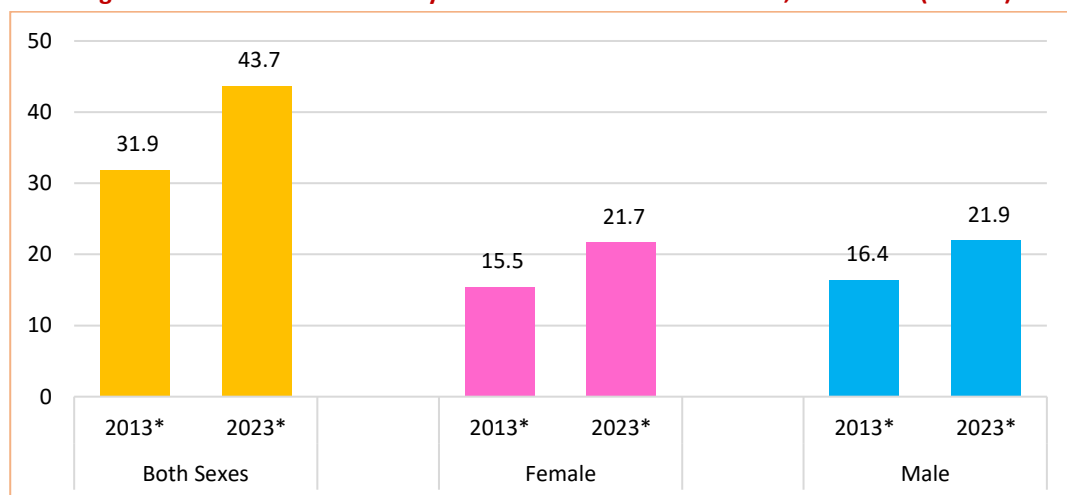
One of the indications of a region's potential for a skilled labour force is the number of students enrolled at the tertiary level. According to the UNESCO, the number of students attending all types of higher education institutions in a region, such as public, private or any other institution offering an organised training programme for university degrees, shall be defined as total student enrolment regardless of age. Poverty, crisis and emergency, high tuition fees, exclusive entrance tests, geographical mobility or some forms of discrimination are among the many obstacles to achieving universal access to higher education (UNESCO-IESALC, 2020).

Enrolment in tertiary education has experienced significant growth in the OIC countries over the past decade. Available data on 44 OIC countries¹⁶ show that the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions surged from 31.9 million in 2013 to 43.7 million in 2023, reflecting a robust increase of 37.1%. Notably, this expansion was more pronounced

¹⁶ Excluding Djibouti, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Suriname, Turkmenistan, and Yemen.

among female students. Female enrolment soared from 15.5 million to 21.7 million, marking an impressive rise of 40.5%. In comparison, male enrolment grew from 16.4 million to 21.9 million, an increase of 33.7% (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Enrolment in Tertiary Education in the OIC Countries, 2013-2023 (million)



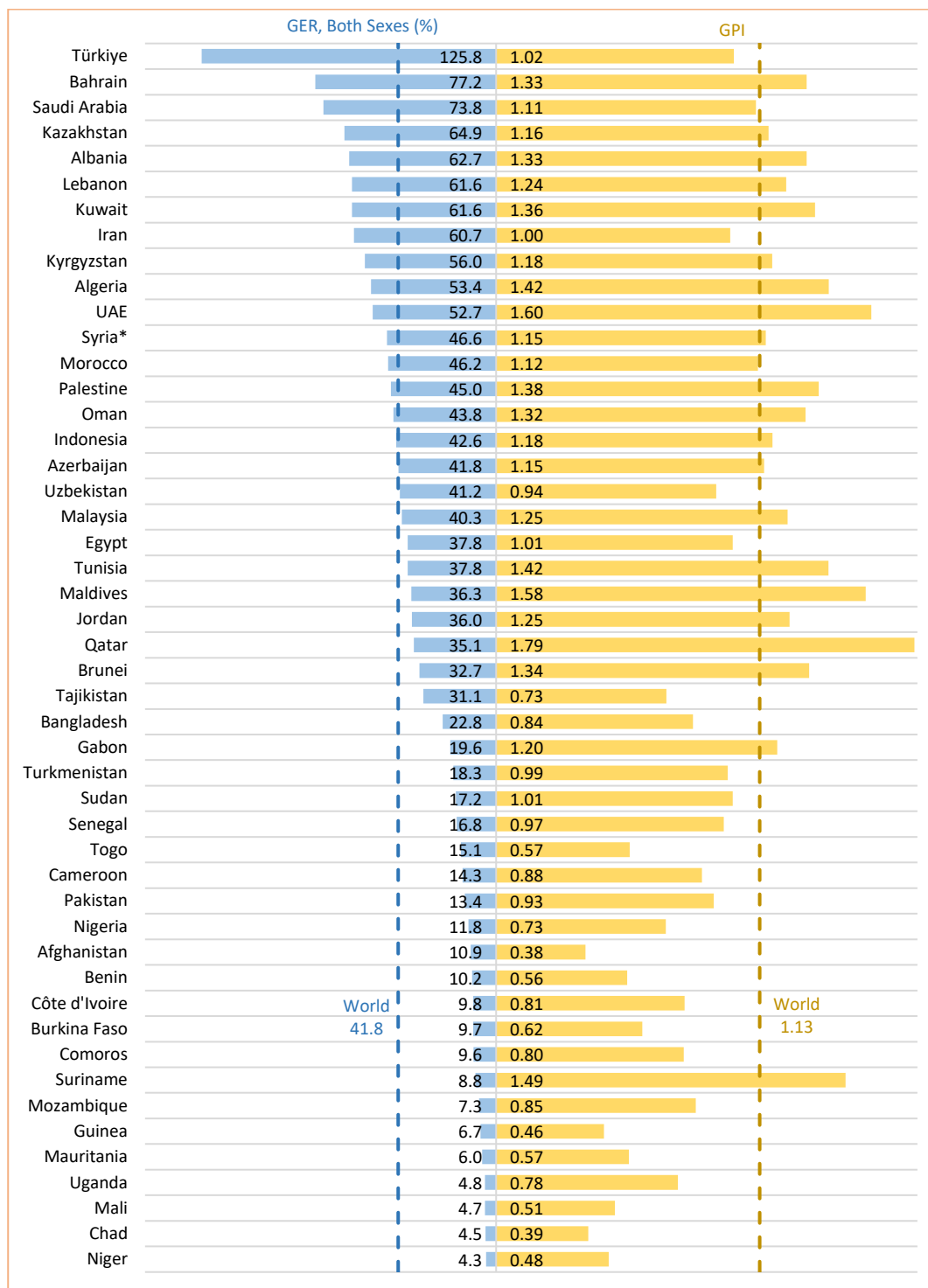
Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on data from UNESCO-UIS.Stat. Note: *Based on available data of the nearest year within the past decade for 44 OIC countries.

This trend indicates a positive shift towards male-female parity in higher education within the OIC countries. The higher rate of increase in female enrolment suggests improving access to educational opportunities for women, which could have far-reaching implications for socio-economic development. Enhanced female participation in higher education can lead to a more skilled and diverse workforce, fostering innovation and economic growth. Additionally, it can contribute to social progress by promoting equality and empowering women to take on leadership roles in various sectors.

Globally, the gross enrolment ratio (GER) in tertiary education, which measures the number of students enrolled in tertiary education as a percentage of the population of the official age group for this level of education, averages at 41.8% as of 2023. This metric is below 100% in all OIC countries with available data except Türkiye (125.8%). In other 15 OIC countries, the GER is above the world average, ranging from 42.6% in Indonesia to 77.2% in Bahrain. On the other hand, it is as low as 4.3% in Niger, 4.5% in Chad, 4.7% in Mali, 4.8% in Uganda, and below 10% in other 7 OIC countries, indicating meagre participation rates in tertiary education. Overall, disparities remain across the OIC region, with countries in Sub-Saharan Africa showing lower enrolment rates.

Tertiary education has a disparity in GER in favour of females, with a gender parity index (GPI) value of 1.13 at the global level. In the OIC group, there is a great variation in GPI for tertiary education at the country level. On the one hand, there are countries significantly favouring male participation, such as Afghanistan (0.38), Chad (0.39), and Guinea (0.46). On the other hand, there are countries favouring female participation even to a larger extent, such as Qatar (1.79), the United Arab Emirates (1.60), and Maldives (1.58) (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: Gross Enrolment Ratio and Gender Parity in Tertiary Education, 2023



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on data from UNESCO-UIS.Stat. Note: Data for 2023 or the nearest year available in the last decade. * Membership of Syria to the OIC is currently suspended.

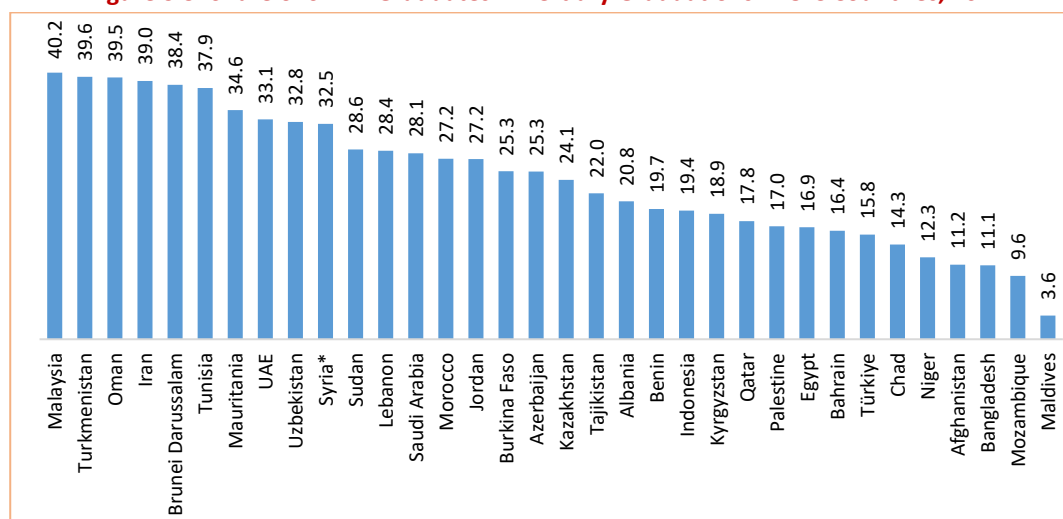
The significant disparities in GER across the OIC countries and between males and females require comprehensive policy interventions. Efforts to bridge these gaps should continue both at the national level and at the OIC level, focusing on addressing economic, social, and infrastructural barriers to ensure more inclusive and equitable access to higher education within the region. To address these imbalances, policymakers must prioritise inclusive and equitable education reforms. For countries with low GER, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, there is a need for targeted interventions to improve access to tertiary education. This can include expanding financial support, enhancing infrastructure, and implementing outreach programs to encourage enrolment.

Additionally, addressing the disparities between males and females requires a multifaceted approach that involves implementing inclusive policies, providing scholarships for the underrepresented group, and creating safe and supportive educational environments. Countries with high female GER, such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, should continue to support these trends while ensuring that male participation is not neglected. Overall, these policies should aim to create a balanced and inclusive educational landscape, recognising the unique socio-economic contexts of each region to effectively bridge the existing gaps in tertiary education enrolment.

3.3. STEM Graduates

Graduates in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM in short), are essential for countries in order to stay in the race in the global economy, which is driven by technology, innovation and digitalisation. STEM not only improves the quality of education but also meets business needs when developing an interdisciplinary approach, teaching how to use theory in real-world practice, fostering creativity, and building skills for dealing with complex problems.

Figure 3.5: Share of STEM Graduates in Tertiary Graduations in OIC Countries, 2022



Source: UNESCO-UIS.Stat. Note: Data for the latest year available in 2017-2022.

* Membership of Syria to the OIC is currently suspended.

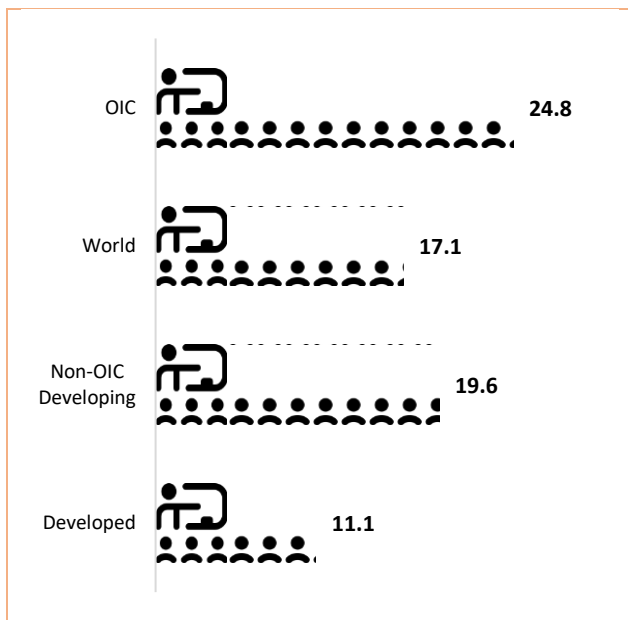
Among the OIC countries, Malaysia takes the lead with respect to the number of STEM graduates in proportion to the total number of tertiary graduations. Figure 3.5 shows that 40.2% of tertiary school students in Malaysia graduated from STEM programs in 2022. Relatively high proportions of STEM graduates were also observed in Turkmenistan (39.6%), Oman (39.5%), Iran (38.9%), and Brunei Darussalam (38.4%). The significant proportions of STEM graduates in such countries highlight the strategic emphasis placed on these disciplines to drive national growth and competitiveness.

To harness the full potential of STEM education, several key initiatives could be considered by policymakers in the OIC countries. These include enhancing educational facilities with state-of-the-art laboratories and technology to provide hands-on learning experiences, designing curricula that integrate real-world problem-solving, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary learning to better prepare students for the workforce, and investing in ongoing professional development for educators to keep pace with advancements in STEM fields and innovative teaching methodologies. Additionally, fostering partnerships between educational institutions and industries to ensure that the skills taught are aligned with the needs of the job market and allocating funds for research and development in STEM fields to spur innovation and maintain global competitiveness are crucial. By adopting such policies, the OIC countries can create a robust STEM education framework that not only supports economic growth but also contributes to the overall development of a knowledgeable and skilled society.

3.4. Student-Teacher Ratio in Tertiary Education

Student-teacher ratios give the number of students enrolled in a school per teacher working at that school. While a low student-teacher ratio is a sign of better educational quality, a high ratio frequently indicates that schools or school systems are substantially underfunded. The student-teacher ratio is considered one of the most vital indicators of student success and engagement. A teacher can better tailor their instruction to the unique learning styles of their students when they work with a smaller class size. In a smaller class, students are more likely to feel comfortable voicing their opinions, asking questions, and making their needs known.

Figure 3.6: Student-Teacher Ratio in Tertiary Education, 2023



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on data from UNESCO-UIS.Stat. Note: Weighted average. *Country-level data are for 2023 or the nearest year available in the last decade.

Globally, the student-teacher ratio in tertiary schools averages at about 17 students per teacher. Given the available data on 42 OIC countries, there are about 25 students per teacher in tertiary education in the OIC region. This ratio is lower in non-OIC developing countries, averaging at 19.6, and even much lower in developed countries, averaging as low as 11.1, reflecting a greater number of academicians and instructors at the tertiary level relative to the number of students (Figure 3.6). The higher number in the OIC region indicates that the number of teachers entering the education sector is insufficient to keep up with the increasing number of students.

At the country level, two OIC countries have a student-teacher ratio that is smaller than the average of developed countries: Lebanon (5.0) and Suriname (9.2). However, this ratio is as high as 64.4 in Syria, 49.8 in Sudan, and 49.6 in Benin, reflecting the existence of significant shortages of teachers at the higher level of education.

To address these disparities and improve educational outcomes, it is crucial for the OIC countries to invest in the education sector by recruiting and training more teachers, enhancing educational infrastructure, and implementing policies that prioritise educational funding. By reducing student-teacher ratios at tertiary education, the OIC countries can ensure a higher quality of education for youth, fostering their engagement, success, and overall development.

3.5. International Student Mobility

Studying abroad, which involves crossing borders and continents to attain a better quality education, enables students to immerse themselves in a foreign country and meet the culture and charm of that country. International recognition of qualifications, the availability of scholarships, and the demand from both sides are the leading motivations for increasing mobility.

According to the data available at the UNESCO UIS database, approximately 6.4 million tertiary students were studying abroad in 2021, up from 5.4 million in 2017. China accounted for 16% of all internationally mobile students, with approximately 1 million Chinese students studying abroad, followed by India with 508 thousand students (8%) and Vietnam with 137 thousand students (2.1%). From the OIC countries, Uzbekistan, Syria, and Kazakhstan were among the top 10 countries in the world in terms of outbound student mobility.

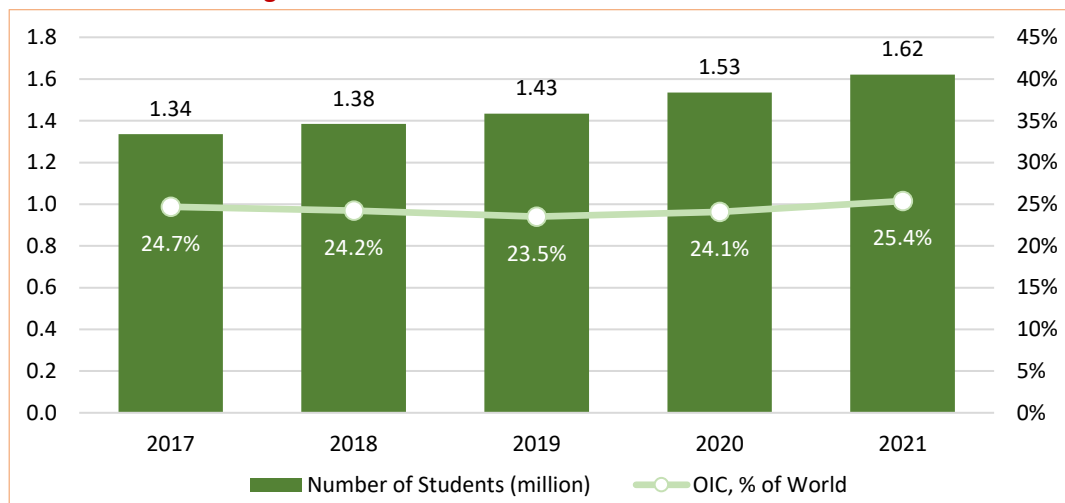
Inbound mobility primarily reflects the development level of a country's education industry. In 2021, five destination countries hosted almost 40% of total mobile students: the United States (13%), the United Kingdom (9.4%), Australia (5.9%), Germany (5.9%), and the Russian Federation (5%). In developed countries, tertiary education has evolved from a government-subsidized institution into one of the most profitable private sectors of the economy.

Outbound Student Mobility

Outbound student mobility reflects the number of students from a given country studying abroad. The number of students from the OIC countries pursuing tertiary education abroad significantly increased between 2017 and 2021 (Figure 3.7). While 1.34 million students were enrolled in tertiary schools outside their country of origin in 2017, this number exceeded 1.62

million by 2021, marking the highest level ever recorded. The notable increases can be attributed to the growing youth population and high economic growth in the OIC countries, enabling students to pursue education at international institutions.

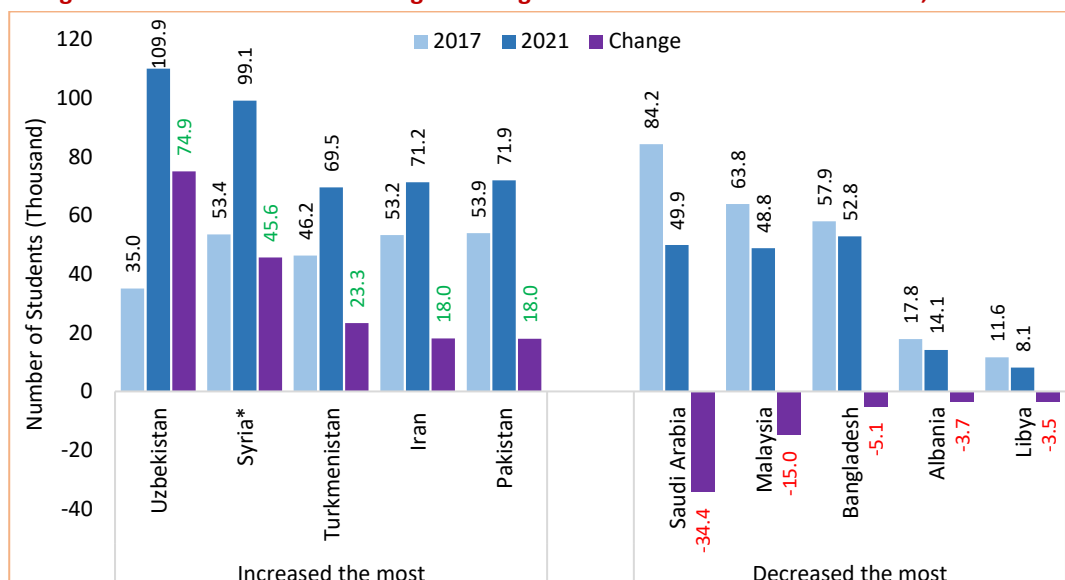
Figure 3.7: Outbound Students from the OIC Countries



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on data from UNESCO-UIS.Stat.

The OIC countries, collectively, continue to account for about a quarter of the internally mobile students, though there has been a slight increase in this share in the recent years. Similar to the considerable increase in the total number of their outbound students, the percentage share of the OIC countries in total outbound student mobility in the world increased from 24.7% in 2017 to 25.4% in 2021.

Figure 3.8: OIC Countries with Largest Change in Number of Outbound Students, 2017-2021

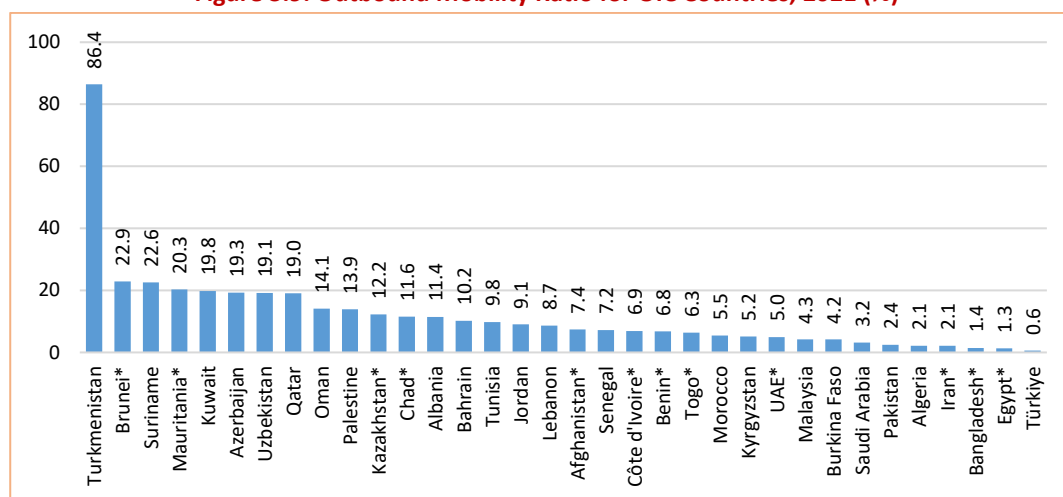


Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on data from UNESCO-UIS.Stat.

*Membership of Syria to the OIC is currently suspended.

During this 5-year period under consideration, the total number of outbound students worldwide increased by 18.1%, while the total number of outbound students from the OIC countries increased by 21.4%. The most influential in the latter were the increases from Uzbekistan, Syria, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Pakistan and the decreases from Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Albania, and Libya (Figure 3.8). Overall, 12 OIC countries witnessed a decline in the number of outbound students in the period under consideration.¹⁷ As of 2021, from the OIC countries, Uzbekistan (109.9 thousand) has the largest number of outbound students, followed by Syria (99.1 thousand), Kazakhstan (91.9 thousand), Nigeria (84.8 thousand), and Pakistan (71.9 thousand). Collectively, they made up more than one quarter (28.2%) of all outgoing students from the OIC countries.

Figure 3.9: Outbound Mobility Ratio for OIC Countries, 2021 (%)



Source: UNESCO-UIS.Stat. Note: *Data for the year 2020.

Considering the number of outbound students in proportion to the total number of tertiary enrolment, Turkmenistan takes the lead among the OIC countries with available data, with an Outbound Mobility Ratio¹⁸ (OMR) of as high as 86.4%. According to this ratio, the country has almost as many students abroad as it does domestically. In 13 other OIC countries, OMR ranges between 10% and 25%. The ratio is as low as 0.6% in Türkiye and less than 2% in Egypt and Bangladesh (Figure 3.9).

Inbound Student Mobility

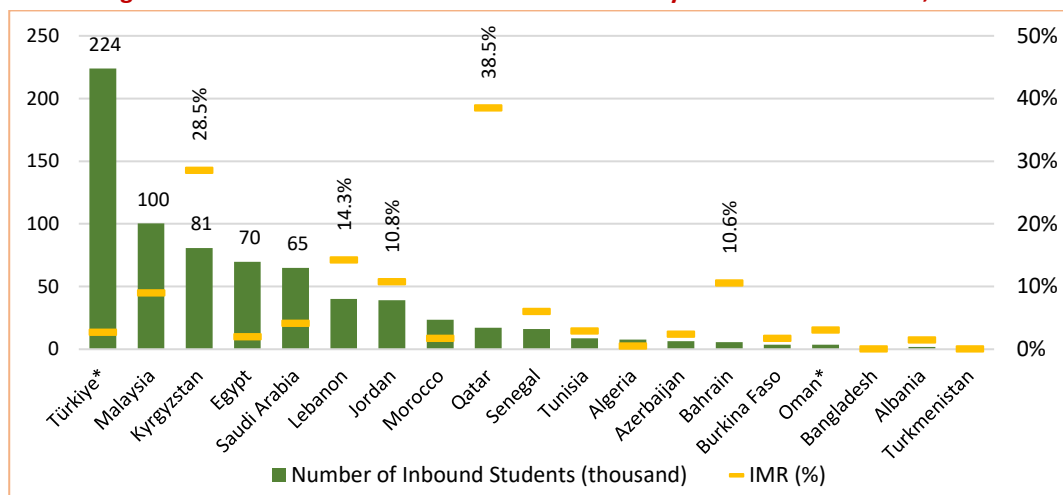
Inbound student mobility refers to the number of students coming from other countries to study within a specific country. Data on inbound student mobility are not as extensively available as the data on outbound student mobility. According to the latest available data, Türkiye, hosting 224 thousand students from around the world, is the most attractive

¹⁷ These include Nigeria, Brunei Darussalam, Comoros, Bahrain, Guinea, Oman, and Maldives in addition to those five countries listed on Figure 3.8 (right).

¹⁸ Outbound Mobility Ratio (OMR): Number of students from a given country studying abroad, expressed as a percentage of total tertiary enrolment in that country.

destination among the OIC countries for international students (Figure 3.10). Malaysia (100 thousand), Kyrgyzstan (81 thousand), Egypt (70 thousand), and Saudi Arabia (65 thousand) follow it. Among the key factors contributing to a country’s popularity as an educational destination are its quality of life, academic excellence, and economic factors such as salary and benefits (Nikou et al., 2023).

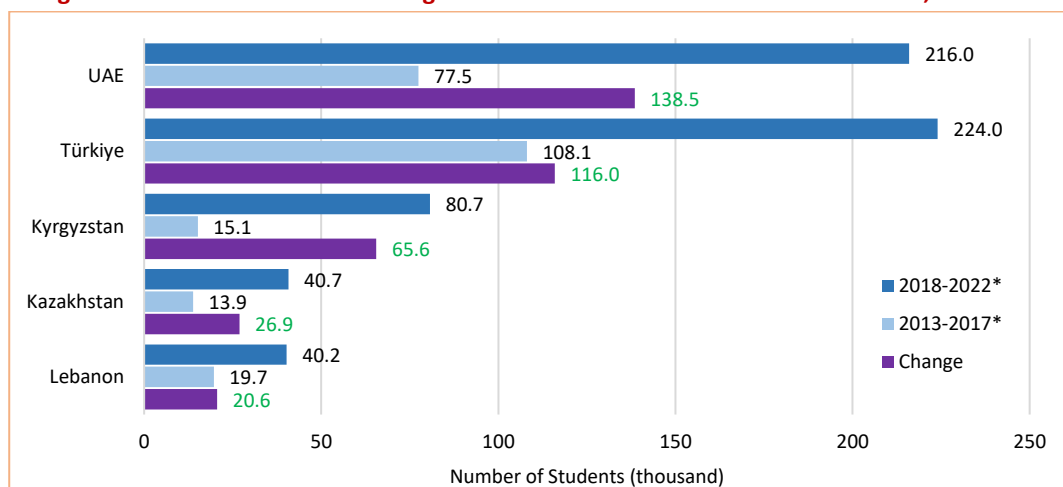
Figure 3.10: Inbound Students and Inbound Mobility Rate in OIC Countries, 2022



Source: UNESCO-UIS.Stat. Note: *Data for the year 2021.

Despite hosting a large number of international students, Türkiye has a quite low Inbound Mobility Rate¹⁹ (IMR), at 2.7%. The OIC countries with relatively high IMR include Qatar (38.5%), Kyrgyzstan (28.5%), Lebanon (14.3%), Jordan (10.8%), and Bahrain (10.6%) (Figure 3.10).

Figure 3.11: OIC Countries with Largest Increase in Number of Inbound Students, 2017-2022



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on data from UNESCO-UIS.Stat. Note: * Latest year available in the period.

¹⁹ Inbound Mobility Rate (IMR): Number of students from abroad studying in a given country, expressed as a percentage of total tertiary enrolment in that country.

Among the 29 OIC countries with available data, the United Arab Emirates has emerged as a regional hub for international students, with the number of inbound students increasing from 77.5 thousand in 2013-2017 to 216 thousand in 2018-2022. Inbound mobility increased greatly also in Türkiye, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Lebanon over the same period (Figure 3.11).

Empirical evidence suggests that open migration policies and labour markets, which allow students to remain in the host country after studying, as well as high-quality higher education institutions, are essential for successfully attracting international students (Chevalier, 2022). Given the substantial investment and reforms in education, which have resulted in an increased level of education quality as well as opportunities for both local and international students, the OIC countries are becoming popular destinations among youth for tertiary education.

3.6. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is a modality of education, training, and skills development that relates to a wide range of occupational fields, production, services, and livelihoods. As an essential component of lifelong learning, the purpose of TVET is to empower individuals and make a difference in the sustainability of development by promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth and competitiveness, with a view to social equity and environmental sustainability. TVET is designed to facilitate entry into the labour market for young people and adults and advance their careers.

Table 3.1: Types of TVET

Formal TVET	Non-Formal TVET	Informal TVET
Obtained within the formal education system	Provided by public and private institutions outside the formal system	Acquired within households or firms
Secondary and tertiary programmes	Large variety of programs with different course durations	Learning-by-doing
Leads to degrees and diplomas	Potential to acquire certification	Typically skills acquired through work, may be specific or non-specific

Source: Hanni (2019).

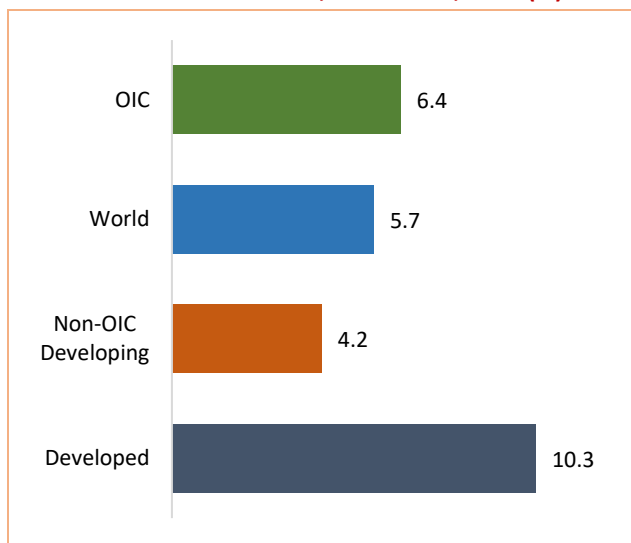
TVET can be attained at secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary education levels, as well as in the fields of work-based learning, continuing studies, and professional training. Various types of TVET exist within a lifelong learning framework, such as formal, non-formal, and informal (Table 3.1). Formal TVET includes technical and professional courses within the education system, leading to various certifications, starting from secondary school tracks, continuing through post-secondary non-tertiary programs, to tertiary degrees equivalent to bachelor's degrees. Non-formal TVET encompasses training outside formal schooling, not requiring formal education completion for entry. It is offered by various entities like national training institutes, private institutes, and companies that offer in-house training. While formal TVET typically

awards diplomas or certifications, non-formal programs enhance skills and employability without always certifying the education provided. Informal TVET primarily entails acquiring practical skills through hands-on experience, commonly found in entry-level and low-skilled jobs, posing significant challenges in evaluation and quantification (Hanni, 2019).

Nevertheless, TVET is not only related to education but also to economic and labour market policy. It improves the knowledge, skills, and competencies of individuals for their employment, careers, livelihoods, and lifelong learning with broad skills development opportunities, as well as contributing to the efficiency of organisations, the competitiveness of enterprises, and the development of communities. Vocational training is considered a key factor in improving or maintaining the competitiveness of businesses and national economies. Through its specialised emphasis on cultivating the workforce, it plays a pivotal role in improving the job prospects of both young people and adults while tackling skills limitations (World Bank, UNESCO, and ILO, 2023).

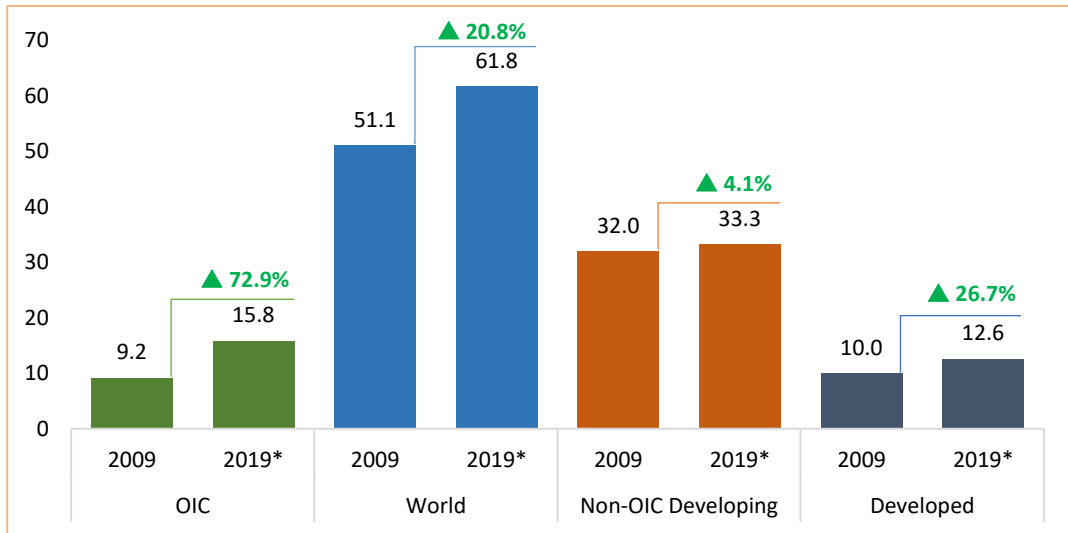
Given the importance of vocational education and training in preparing youth for the workforce, it is crucial to understand the global landscape of vocational education enrolment rates among youth. Considering the latest data from UNESCO, the proportion of youth enrolled in vocational education stands at 6.4% in the OIC region, a higher rate than the global average of 5.7%, but lower than the average for developed countries that reaches as high as 10.3% (Figure 3.12). These variations highlight the diverse approaches and priorities regarding vocational education, influenced by factors such as economic development, education policies, and cultural attitudes towards vocational training.

Figure 3.12: Share of Youth Enrolled in Vocational Education, Both Sexes, 2023 (%)



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on data from UNESCO-UIS.Stat. Note: Weighted average. Country-level data are for 2023 or the nearest year available in the last decade.

Globally, the number of vocational pupils in secondary education was 61.8 million in 2019, up 20.8% from 51.1 million in 2009. In the OIC countries, this number showed a much greater increase of 72.9% over the same period, rising from 9.2 million to 15.8 million (Figure 3.13). The spreading recognition of the importance of vocational education in preparing youth for specific or demanded careers and addressing the needs of different industries are evidenced by the increase in vocational pupils. This trend not only leads to better employment opportunities but also contributes to the economic development of the countries.

Figure 3.13: Secondary Education, Vocational Pupils, 2009-2019 (million)

Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on data from the World Bank. Note: * Country-level data are for 2019 or the nearest year available in the last decade.

Considering the importance of TVET, in 2009, the Vocational Education and Training Programme for OIC Member Countries (OIC-VET Programme) was launched at the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC) Economic Summit in Istanbul, Türkiye, with the aim of supporting the activities of the OIC countries, improving the competencies and skills of the people according to the needs and priorities of labour markets through intra-OIC partnerships at institutional level. The Programme aims to boost vocational education and training (VET) across the OIC countries by facilitating exchanges among VET professionals to increase job placements, improving the quality and innovation of vocational training systems, and increasing cooperation among training institutions, businesses, and other stakeholders. It also seeks to enhance the transparency and recognition of qualifications gained through formal and informal learning while supporting the development of innovative ICT-based learning tools and practices for lifelong learning (SESRIC, 2019). Within the framework of the Programme, SESRIC is organising various training courses, workshops, and study visits for the benefit of the OIC countries.

As a new phase of the Programme, SESRIC developed the OIC-TVET Strategic Roadmap 2020-2025 in close collaboration with the national focal points of the OIC-VET Programme and the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO, formerly ISESCO). The Roadmap is part of the OIC 2025 Programme of Action and contributes to the implementation of the goals of poverty alleviation, employment, infrastructure, industrialisation, education, advancement and empowerment of women, family welfare and social security (SESRIC, 2019).

In addition, SESRIC has launched its Emerging Talents Capacity Building Programme (SET-CAB) as another youth-oriented initiative to support young professionals from the OIC countries. The Programme aims to contribute to the professional growth of individuals by offering a comprehensive learning environment in the areas of statistics, economics, and social research. SET-CAB provides motivated young individuals with an opportunity to delve into the economic

and social issues that affect the Islamic world while gaining practical experience in an international setting (SESRIC, 2023c).

3.7. Bilateral Recognition of Diplomas/Certificates

Bilateral recognition of diplomas and certificates is especially vital for youth since it opens up avenues for educational and professional opportunities beyond national borders. For young people who are eager to explore diverse learning experiences and pursue career prospects internationally, the ability to have their qualifications recognised abroad is of paramount importance. By facilitating educational mobility, bilateral recognition allows young people to access higher-quality education institutions and training programs in different countries, widening their horizons and enriching their education process. Moreover, it allows them to pursue job opportunities in global markets, thereby enhancing their employability and competitiveness around the world. This not only supports their personal and professional growth but also contributes to the development of a skilled and globally engaged workforce in the countries. Ultimately, bilateral recognition of diplomas and certificates for youth promotes inclusivity, diversity, and international cooperation, laying the foundation for a more prosperous future.

In light of the above, there is vast potential for enhanced educational and professional mobility among the OIC countries. This recognition can enable students to access leading educational institutions across the member countries, fostering a rich exchange of knowledge and skills. Additionally, professionals can explore diverse job markets, contributing to economic growth and innovation across the OIC region. Nevertheless, challenges such as varying educational standards, regulatory differences, and political dynamics can hinder seamless implementation. Ensuring consistency in the quality of education and addressing legal and bureaucratic hurdles are critical for success. Despite these challenges, the implications are profound. Effective bilateral recognition can lead to a more integrated OIC community, promoting economic collaboration, cultural understanding, and collective progress. As the member countries work towards harmonising their educational systems and policies, they benefit not only the youth but also the entire OIC region.

3.8. Scholarships

Scholarships are crucial in empowering youth by providing them access to quality education and personal and professional growth opportunities. For many young individuals, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, scholarships serve as a pathway to higher education that might otherwise be financially out of reach. Scholarships mitigate the financial burdens of pursuing a degree, such as covering tuition fees, living expenses, and the cost of supportive books and materials. Scholarships pave the way for youth to focus on their studies, explore their interest, and develop their skills without worrying about financial issues. After all, scholarships empower the youth population to realise their potential, break the cycle of poverty, and contribute to their country and society.

The OIC promotes various scholarly initiatives with the purpose of fostering collaboration, research activities, and educational development among the member countries. Numerous nations, both within and outside the Organization, are providing scholarships via the OIC Scholarships Programme for undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate studies. The OIC plays a coordinating role by sharing scholarship information on its website, making it easier for interested individuals from all OIC countries to access. The OIC assists by disseminating scholarship details on its website, simplifying access for interested individuals across all OIC countries.

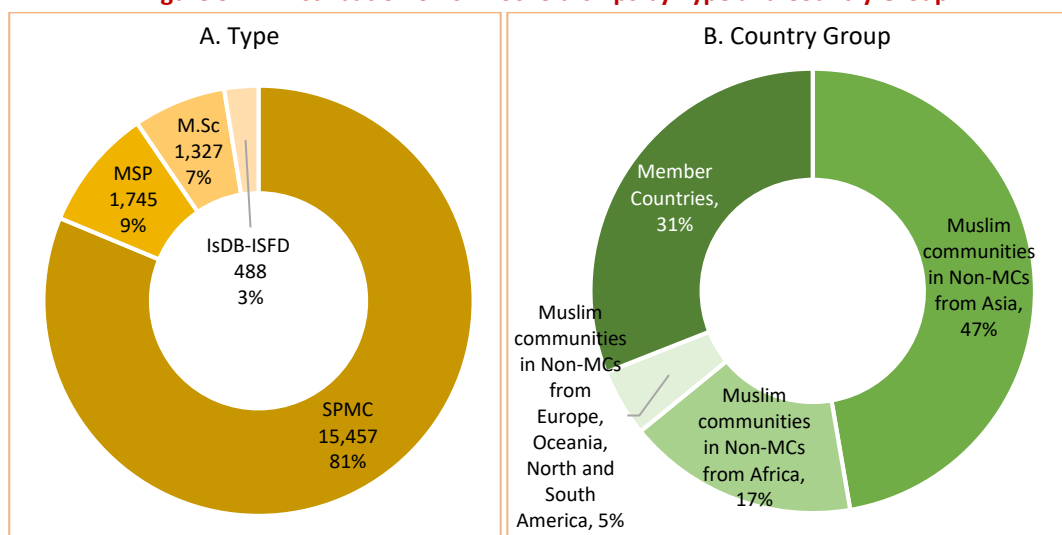
The initiatives of the OIC extend beyond the scholarship program to include enhancing networks with the member states to ensure efficient educational standards for students. In 2012, the OIC announced a higher Educational Exchange Programme aimed at facilitating scholarships, faculty exchanges, collaboration on distance learning methods, and research projects among the member countries. The initiative began implementation with an offer of ten special scholarships from the University of Kuala Lumpur (Khan, 2012). By 2019, the number of scholarships extended through the OIC Educational Exchange Programme had risen to 650, including 100 specifically allocated to 15 low-income countries (OIC, 2019).

In 2022, the OIC General Secretariat and the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities of The Republic of Türkiye (YTB) agreed on a framework for collaboration aimed at providing scholarships to enhance and elevate the standards of higher education and scientific research across OIC countries and to offer scholarships to researchers and students from OIC countries through the OIC Educational Exchange Programme. Additionally, they agreed to collaborate on conducting joint studies to evaluate the higher education and scientific research needs of OIC countries, especially the least developed nations (OIC, 2022). Likewise, in 2024, the OIC General Secretariat and the University of Management and Technology (UMT) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) not only to outline the provision of scholarships by the UMT to students from OIC countries but also to establish a comprehensive framework for long-term collaboration (OIC, 2024).

In the same way, the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) supports various scholarship programs with the aim of enhancing human resources within its member countries and among Muslim communities in nations outside its membership. In 1983, IsDB launched its undergraduate scholarship program under the title Scholarship Program for Muslim Communities (SPMC). Drawing on the knowledge gained from a decade of the SPMC, IsDB opted to create the Merit Scholarship Program (MSP) for PhD studies and post-doctoral research in applied science and high technology. This initiative aims to improve the scientific, technological, and research capacities of institutions in member countries, commencing in 1992. Subsequently, in 1997, the Master of Science Scholarship Program (M.Sc.) was introduced as a precursor to the MSP. This decision stemmed from the recognition that 20 of the Least Developed Member Countries (LDMCs) were unable to participate in the MSP. In 2019, the IsDB-ISFD Scholarship Program for Bachelor's and Technical Diplomas, aimed at LDMCs, was initiated with the backing of the Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development (ISFD). IsDB has established collaborative initiatives with prominent universities, governmental bodies within member nations, and global organisations, aiming to broaden the scope of scholarships offered to exceptional students and

researchers. Aligned with the objective of supporting member countries and Muslim communities outside member countries in attaining sustainable development, IsDB has granted scholarships to more than 19 thousand students and scholars from 56 member countries and 66 non-member Muslim communities since the initiation of the programs. While the dominant type of scholarship was SPMC, with 15,457 students, the distribution between male and female recipients stands at a ratio of 70:30 (Figure 3.14A).

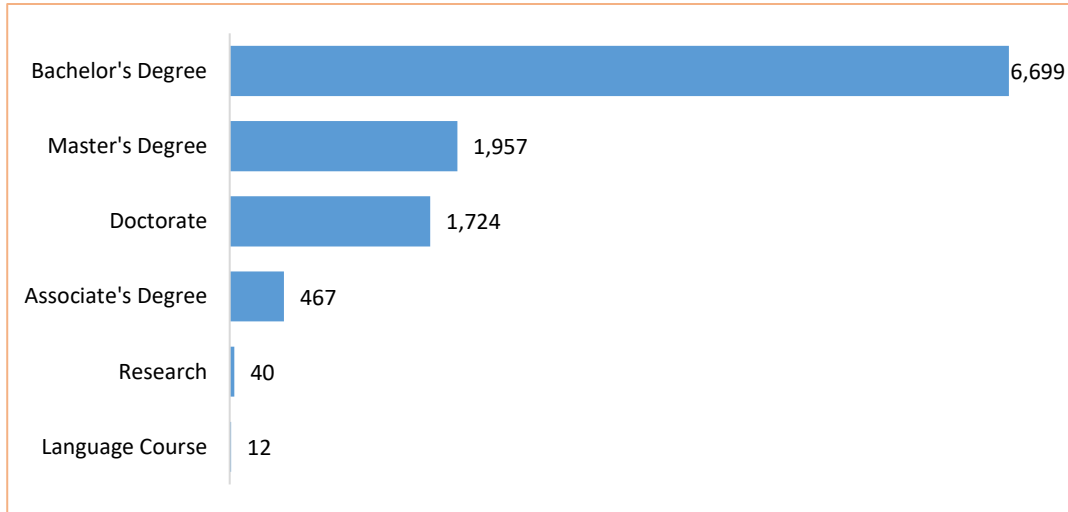
Figure 3.14: Distribution of IsDB Scholarships by Type and Country Group



Source: IsDB (2024).

Of the total 19,017 beneficiaries of the IsDB scholarship programs, 8,995 (47%) were from Muslim communities in non-member Asian countries. The member countries collectively received 5,892 scholarships (31%). Furthermore, 3,198 scholarships (17%) were allocated to Muslim communities in non-member African countries. The remaining 932 scholarships (5%) were distributed to Muslim communities in non-member countries across Europe, Oceania, and North and South America (Figure 3.14B).

Türkiye is one of the leading OIC member states providing scholarships to international students from all around the world. 'Türkiye Scholarship' is a government-funded, competitive scholarship program for international students, funded by the Turkish government's Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB). The scholarship program not only includes financial support, tuition fees, accommodation, and health insurance, but also provides university placement and academic, social, and cultural facilities to its awardees at all levels of higher education. While the scholarship program received around 42,000 applications in 2012, it has experienced a rapid increase in the number of applications over the years, reaching 165,500 applications from 171 different countries in 2022. Scholarships are awarded to approximately 5,000 international students each year. There are about 15,000 scholarship recipients who are currently continuing their education under the Türkiye Scholarships Program (YTB, 2024). From the OIC countries, there were nearly 11 thousand students benefiting from YTB scholarships while receiving different types of education in Türkiye as of 2023 (Figure 3.15).

Figure 3.15: Türkiye's YTB Scholarships to Students from OIC Countries by Education Type, 2023

Source: YTB.

Overall, scholarships play a pivotal role in shaping the future of young individuals from the OIC countries and elsewhere, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds, by making higher education accessible and reducing financial barriers. The collaborative efforts of the OIC and its member countries, alongside institutions like the Islamic Development Bank and Türkiye's YTB, significantly contribute to this cause. By offering various scholarship programs, they not only support educational attainment but also promote scientific research, technological advancement, and sustainable development. The extensive reach of these initiatives, benefiting thousands of students globally, underscores the profound impact scholarships have in empowering the youth to realise their potential and contribute meaningfully to their societies. To drive meaningful progress and further enhance educational equity, it is essential to expand scholarship opportunities across the OIC region and strengthen collaboration among the member countries, enabling more students to benefit from these programs and fostering regional development through education.

3.9. Implications of Advancement in Technology for Education

Technological advancements are transforming the world. Rapidly changing and developing technology closely affects social and economic aspects of human life, and it is almost impossible for education not to be affected by this change. The integration and widespread use of technology in education are anticipated to lead the path for enhancing teaching and learning within educational institutions while also addressing common challenges in the field of education.

Technology plays a pivotal role in education by providing innovative tools and platforms that enhance learning experiences, facilitate access to information, and promote collaboration among students and educators. The proliferation of Internet connectivity, coupled with the rise of mobile devices, has facilitated the expansion of e-learning platforms, which enable learners to access education anytime, anywhere. Digital education applications have become even more

indispensable in education systems during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahsan et al., 2023), along with remote learning solutions, to ensure continuity of education amidst social distancing measures and school closures. While online education offers flexibility and personalised learning opportunities, advanced technological tools, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, have made significant strides in education with adaptive learning systems that match the needs of students.

Technology has the potential to enhance the equity and inclusion of education by providing access to quality learning resources, improving the efficiency of the educational process, and fostering a more equitable, inclusive, and effective learning environment. Information and communication technology (ICT) benefits disadvantaged people who live in remote areas, don't have enough time to learn, are displaced, or have missed out on past education opportunities by reducing the cost of access to education. In times of crisis situations, where girls are more vulnerable than boys, ICT can offer an education lifeline through online learning platforms and personalised learning experiences (UNESCO, 2024). Technology can affect the quality of education depending on the availability of technological structure, the technology that teachers use in classrooms, and the integration of digital literacy into the curriculum. Also, technology is emphasised as saving time spent on unimportant tasks (UNESCO, 2023).

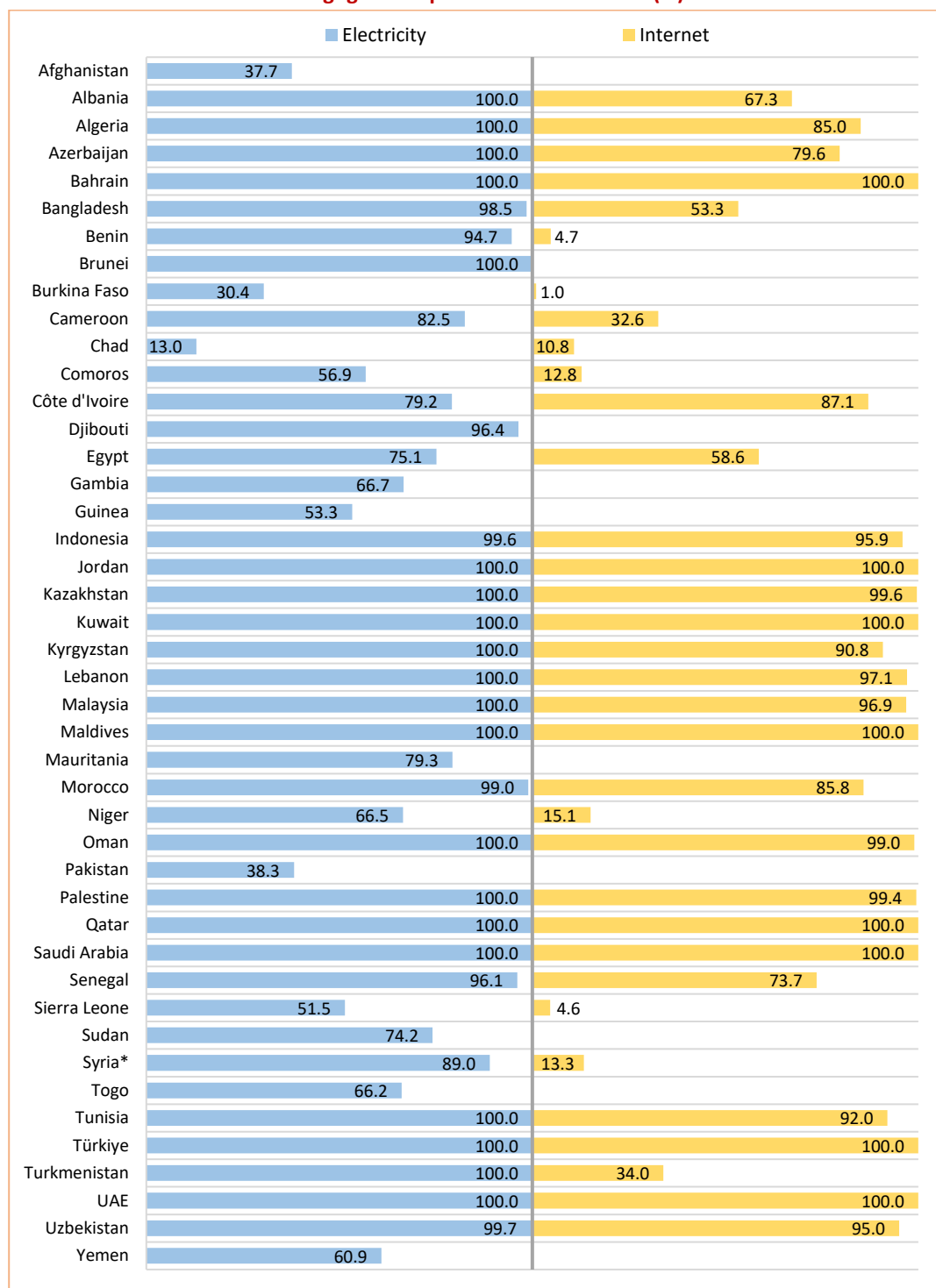
The youth of today, comprising primary and high school pupils along with undergraduate university students, recognised as Gen Z, mark the first generation to come of age in a world shaped by Internet-connected technology (Cilliers, 2017; Szymkowiak et al., 2021). Young individuals raised in the digital age, unfamiliar with life before the Internet, bypass traditional learning methods and opt for self-directed learning outside the classroom, utilising modern technologies like mobile apps (Szymkowiak et al., 2021).

Technological Infrastructure in Schools

In an era where digitalisation is paramount, the technological structure within schools plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape for today's youth population, often termed digital natives (Prensky, 2001). These young individuals have grown up surrounded by technology, seamlessly integrating digital devices and online platforms into their daily lives. Thus, the integration of technology into educational institutions has become an inevitable and essential component of modern pedagogy, reshaping traditional teaching methods and enhancing learning outcomes.

Technology integration means the incorporation of digital tools and resources into educational practices to ameliorate teaching and learning experiences. It involves utilising technology to support and enrich curriculum objectives, instructional strategies, and student engagement. However, efficient integration of technology entails more than simply employing digital tools to deliver existing content through traditional methods. Instead, it involves leveraging technology to accomplish intended learning outcomes or creating avenues for fostering novel learning paradigms, such as facilitating collaborative environments where students can actively participate in knowledge construction (Protheroe, 2005; Summak et al., 2010; Achor, 2022).

Figure 3.16: Proportion of Upper Secondary Schools with Access to Electricity and Internet for Pedagogical Purposes in OIC Countries (%)



Source: UNESCO-UIS.Stat. Note:* Membership of Syria to the OIC is currently suspended. Data for 2023 or the nearest year available in the last decade.

Nonetheless, adapting technology in education and learning presents challenges such as the unavailability of policy on technology, technophobia, insufficient resources, a lack of teachers qualified in technology integration, maintenance and technical problems, risk and security issues, poor parental environment, inadequate time, and the complexity of computer jargon (Ramorola, 2013). Access to electricity and the internet are considered basic indicators of technology integration since they provide the fundamental infrastructure necessary for utilising modern technological tools and resources in various sectors, including education, healthcare, communication, and commerce.

Looking into the situation in the OIC region reveals that education infrastructure varies significantly across the OIC countries, with access to electricity and internet in upper secondary schools highlighting stark disparities. The proportion of upper secondary schools with access to electricity is 100% in 19 OIC countries, according to the latest available data. While this proportion is above 50% in an additional 21 OIC countries, Chad (13.0%), Burkina Faso (30.4%), Afghanistan (37.7%), and Pakistan (38.3%) are the countries with the lowest proportions (Figure 3.16). Likewise, the proportion of upper secondary schools with access to the internet for pedagogical purposes varies across the OIC countries. According to the available data, in 8 OIC countries, all upper secondary schools have internet access. While this proportion is above 50% in an additional 17 countries, Burkina Faso (1.0%), Sierra Leone (4.6%), and Benin (4.7%) have the lowest share of upper secondary schools with internet access (Figure 3.16).

These statistics underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve educational infrastructure in under-resourced OIC countries. Enhancing access to electricity and the internet is crucial for providing quality education and equipping students with the skills needed in a digital world. Addressing these disparities will not only promote educational equity but also foster socioeconomic development across the OIC member states. Collaborative efforts, increased funding, and strategic policies are essential to bridge these gaps and ensure that all students have the opportunity to benefit from a modern and inclusive educational environment.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Usage in Schools

Information and communication technologies have become integral to daily lives, impacting work, communication, information access, government services, and education by offering new learning opportunities for students beyond traditional classrooms and reshaping teaching methods and student learning experiences. Additionally, education systems are integrating digital skills into curricula to keep up with technological advancements.

Schools incorporate ICT into education through three primary methods. The first one is the interaction of students with ICT, both within and outside the educational environment, which can influence their cognitive functions, overall welfare, and academic outcomes. The second method, which involves teachers' utilisation of ICT for instruction, administrative tasks, and communication, carries various implications for classroom management, teaching methods, pedagogical strategies, and time allocation. Teachers incorporating modern technologies like mobile apps and online videos into the classroom can inspire students to adopt similar practices (Szymkowiak et al., 2021). The final method involves acknowledging ICT proficiency and digital literacy as crucial skills for students to develop in order to thrive in the digital era (OECD, 2023).

As technology develops, the methods and approaches used in education also change. Advanced technologies at the start of the 21st century are setting up the groundwork for a new higher education system that is better suited to address the demands of a fast-changing society. With the help of technology, it is easier to access education with educational networking and web-based learning platforms. These platforms, along with mobile learning opportunities, remove the barriers of clock and geography for the learners and make education available for everyone. Additionally, it is considered cost-effective since it affects the labour-intensive aspect of higher education and paves the way for competition (Achor, 2022).

Different types of ICT tools play significant roles in modern education. Major types of ICT resources for learning include educational networking tools, web-based learning tools, mobile learning tools, and classroom equipment (Lou & Lei, 2012). Educational networking tools involve online learning platforms that connect learners using social networking technologies, providing functions similar to social media sites. Web-based learning tools encompass a set of online applications or services that enhance the abilities of learners to interact, collaborate, and generate educational content. Mobile learning tools refer to using mobile devices or technologies for educational purposes, supporting different aspects of instruction or enabling new educational activities. Classroom equipment includes stand-alone devices used in traditional classrooms to facilitate interaction between teachers and students during class activities (Table 3.2). These ICT resources significantly contribute to the evolution and effectiveness of educational practices. They can promote interaction, collaboration, and content creation among learners, collectively advancing modern education.

Table 3.2: Major Types of ICT Resources for Learning

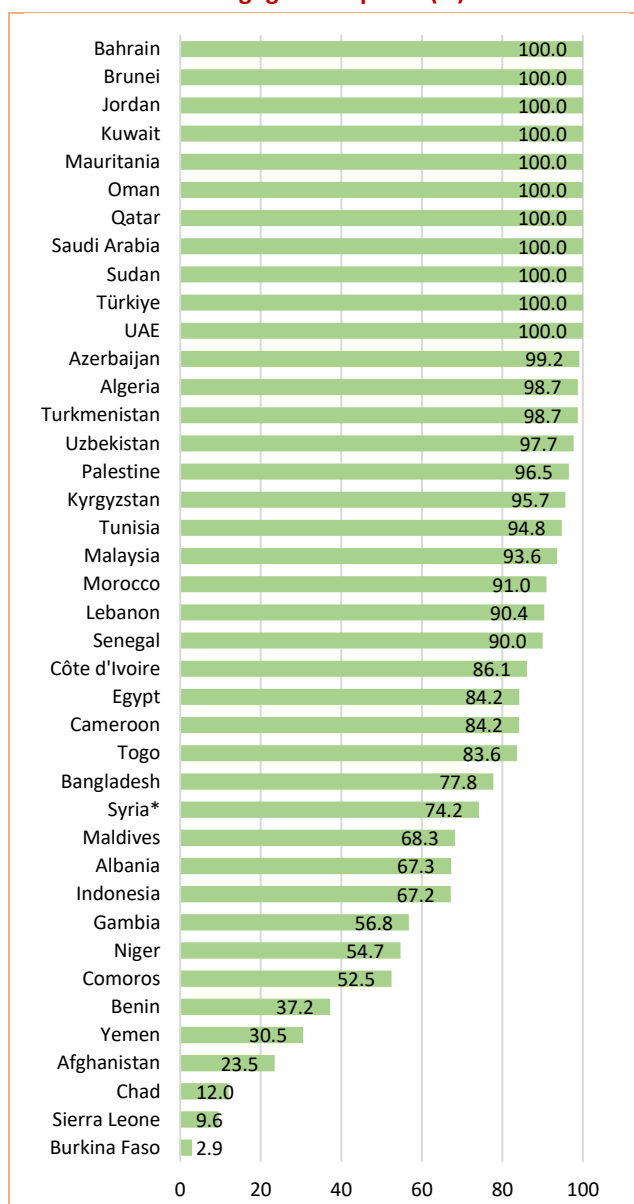
Type of ICT Tools	Definition
Educational Networking	Online learning platforms that connect learners using social networking technologies, exhibiting similar functions to sites.
Web-Based Learning	A set of online applications or services that expand learners' abilities to interact and collaborate with each other in the process of searching, receiving, organising, and generating educational content.
Mobile Learning	Mobile devices or technologies used for educational purposes that support different aspects of instruction or make new educational activities available.
Classroom Equipment	Stand-alone devices that are used in traditional classrooms to facilitate the interaction between teachers and students in different class activities.

Source: Lou & Lei (2012).

The availability, accessibility and quality of ICT resources partly shape the practices of teachers and students, both in and outside the classroom. In addition, the effectiveness of ICT resources for learning, including technical capability, usability for both teachers and students, adaptability, and practicality, significantly influences the range and applicability of educational activities. Issues like slow Internet connections or outdated hardware can hinder access and utilisation, while educational software may lack flexibility or alignment with curricular objectives, with similar constraints applying to ICT use outside of school for learning or leisure activities (OECD, 2023).

ICT usage in schools can be associated with student outcomes through three primary avenues. The initial avenue involves students utilising ICT resources to study conventional subjects like math, literacy, or science. Students might use educational software, interactive simulations, online research tools, or multimedia presentations to deepen their understanding of these subjects. Secondly, students can gain from targeted instruction on ICT, either through a

Figure 3.17: Proportion of Upper Secondary Schools with Access to Computers for Pedagogical Purposes (%)



Source: UNESCO-UIS.Stat. Note:* Membership of Syria to the OIC is currently suspended. Data for 2023 or the nearest year available in the last decade.

dedicated course or designated time frame, focusing on enhancing their ICT-related skills. It may include teaching basic computer skills, digital literacy, coding, using productivity software, internet safety, and other relevant competencies. As a final avenue, ICT can serve to bolster the endeavours of teachers beyond the classroom, such as facilitating communication among colleagues and contributing to the advancement of comprehensive and interdisciplinary pedagogical methods (OECD, 2023).

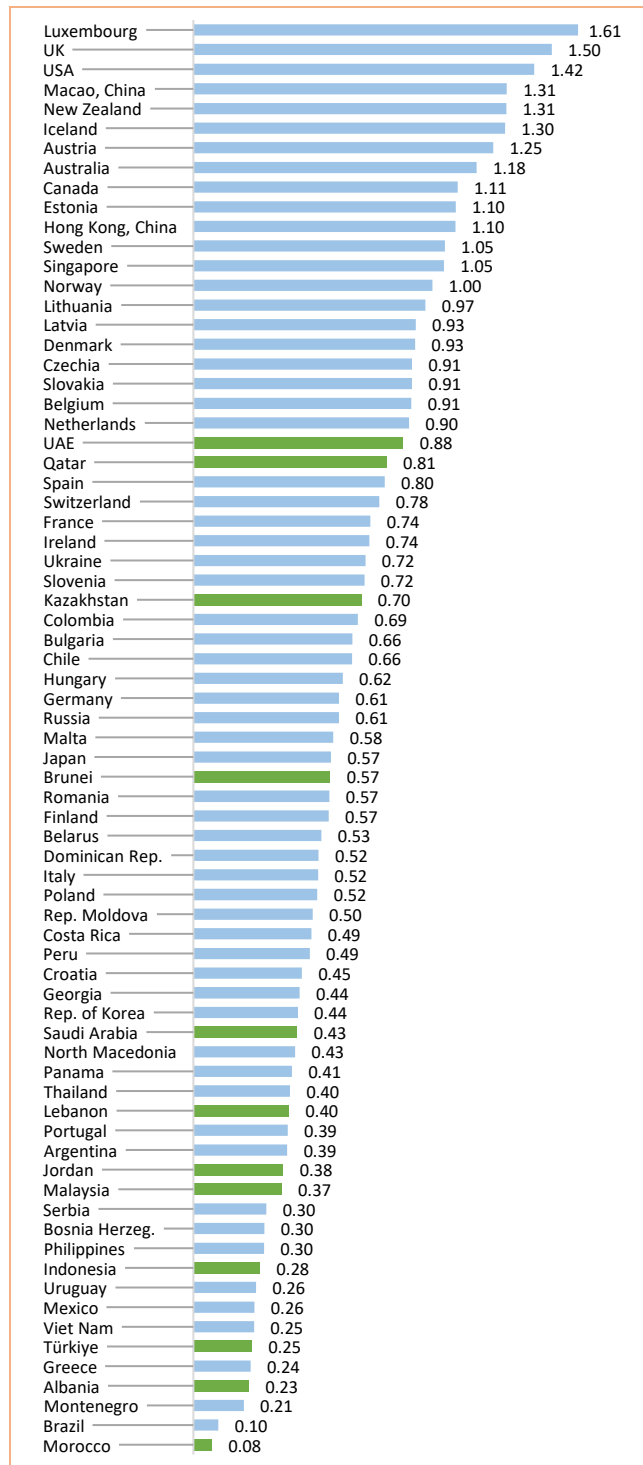
In the OIC countries, there exists a notable disparity in the provision of computer technology for educational purposes across upper secondary schools (Figure 3.17). While 11 out of 40 countries with available data have achieved a full coverage, with every school equipped with computers, the majority presents a more varied landscape. Specifically, 11 more countries report that at least 90% of their schools possess such technology. On the other hand, the proportion falls below 50% in six countries, signalling a significant deficit in technological setup within their educational systems. This emphasises the urgent need for collaborative initiatives directed towards bridging the digital gap and guaranteeing fair access to academic resources across all OIC countries.

Based on OECD data, Luxembourg, the United Kingdom, and the United States lead globally in terms of computer availability per student, with ratios ranging between 1.4 and 1.6 computers per student. Among the 12 middle- and high-income OIC countries appearing on the rankings, the United Arab Emirates (0.88) and Qatar (0.81) stand out with the highest ratios. In contrast, Türkiye, Albania, and Morocco are placed at the bottom of the rankings, where the ratios plummet to levels as low as one computer for every four students (with a ratio of 0.25) or even lower (Figure 3.18).

On the other hand, the nearly irresistible appeal of technology can pose significant challenges to higher education. The swift evolution of technology presents challenges while integrating systematic changes into education. In the process of adaptation of new technologies, education institutions require considerable resources and new budgeting strategies to pay for new technologies.

In addition, staff at colleges and universities need comprehensive training to effectively utilise technology. While there is a growing number of studies looking for how students interact with ICT and its effects on education, there is no agreement on how much ICT contributes to students' academic achievement or cognitive abilities in general.

Figure 3.18: Computers per Student, 15-year-old Students, Selected Middle- and High-income Countries, 2018



Source: OECD (2020).

Curriculum Update/Development

The curriculum, which is a microcosm of the wider society outside school (Williamson, 2013), plays a crucial role in fostering innovation in education by outlining what students should learn in terms of knowledge, skills, and values, thus reflecting the educational vision since it indicates not only what should be taught to students, but also how the students should be taught. Along with serving as the intellectual hub of education and functioning as the primary means of communication, the curriculum integrates academic and practical expertise with individual identity and societal ethos, outlining subjects of study and the methodologies for exploration (Williamson, 2013).

The inevitability of curriculum evolution within societies stems from the absence of a flawless curriculum, necessitating adaptation to economic, technological, social, political, and ideological shifts, exemplified by the adjustments made in response to challenges such as those posed by the COVID-19 (Achor, 2022). Ultimately, the continual evolution of the curriculum mirrors the ongoing progression of society, requiring constant adaptation to effectively prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

The OIC countries face a pressing need to update and develop their educational curricula to keep pace with rapid technological advancements shaping the global landscape. As technological innovation drives global economic and social transformations, educational systems in the OIC countries must evolve to equip their youth with the relevant skills and knowledge necessary for the modern economy of the 21st century. This includes integrating technology-centric subjects into the curriculum and enhancing digital literacy, ensuring students are not only consumers of technology but also innovators and creators.

Furthermore, the alignment of curriculum development with technological advancements can significantly contribute to the socio-economic development. By fostering an education system that is responsive to technological changes, the OIC countries can enhance their competitiveness in the global market, drive innovation, and address local and regional challenges through home-grown solutions. Emphasising STEM education, promoting research and development, and encouraging collaboration between educational institutions and the tech industry are crucial steps towards building a future-ready workforce and fostering sustainable development within the OIC region.

Balancing Benefits and Risks: Mitigating the Negative Impacts of Technology Use in Education

While integration of ICT into education offers numerous benefits, ranging from enhanced learning experiences to increased accessibility, it also brings forth a spectrum of risks and potential side effects that require careful consideration and management. Excessive daily technology use is associated with lower academic performance and decreased school connectedness in both male and female secondary school students, indicating a critical need for intervention efforts targeting technology usage habits (Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., 2022).

The adverse impacts of technology typically manifest across commonly four main categories: physical, cognitive, emotional, and social effects (Gezgin, 2023). The physical effects of technology can involve difficulties with sleep disturbance, health problems, poor posture, and

obesity. Extensive use of technology, especially late at night, could disrupt sleep patterns or delay the natural sleep-wake cycle of the body, resulting in daytime tiredness and diminished alertness (Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., 2022). The inactive lifestyle associated with prolonged technology usage can negatively affect physical health, leading to problems such as discomfort due to poor posture and obesity. Cognitive effects encompass diminished attention span, hindered learning, excessive stimulation, reduced creativity, and speech disorders. Excessive technology use, especially during daytime hours, might replace the time allocated for educational endeavours like studying, reading, or completing homework, potentially leading to a decline in academic performance (Wentworth & Middleton, 2014; Tang & Patrick, 2018). Increasing usage of technology, especially among the young generation, improves media literacy, but some studies show that growing media literacy deteriorates the reading ability of students (Tan et al., 2013; Spitzer, 2014; UNESCO, 2024). Emotional impacts consist of addiction,²⁰ mental health issues, and diminished self-esteem. Extensive technology engagement might serve as a significant stressor and provoke negative emotions stemming from exposure to distressing or harmful content and unfavourable social comparisons, which could ultimately impede academic success and feelings of connection to the school. Health concerns and the fear of missing out have been recognised as key factors contributing to problematic technology usage among individuals who heavily engage with technology (Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., 2022). Social impacts encompass diminished social skills, feelings of isolation, exposure to inappropriate content, instances of cyberbullying, and encounters with violence. Worries regarding data privacy, safety, and the welfare of students are central to discussions surrounding the integration of technology in schools, particularly when it involves younger students (UNESCO, 2024).

The solution to problematic technology use in youth can vary depending on their age, interests, and how they use technology. Youth often look to individuals, parents, or others in their surroundings as role models, and excessive technology usage by these figures can set a negative example for them. The need to limit the screen time of youth is crucial, but it is equally essential for the set limits to be fair and feasible. Parents should primarily monitor which applications and platforms the young population spend their time on screen. Likewise, educators should focus on creating spaces for hobbies that keep students away from screens within schools and encourage spending time independent of technology. Creating social awareness and establishing a common approach across society are crucial in combating the adverse effects of technology. Similar to restrictions placed on smoking and alcohol to prevent addiction, norms limiting technology use at certain ages, times, and places for children and youth can be considered (Ertemel & Aydın, 2018).

²⁰ See “Non-substance Addictions: Technology and Social Media” under Section 2.2 of this report.

4. Economic Participation

The economic participation of youth is a critical indicator of a country's future economic stability and growth potential. This chapter delves into various aspects of youth involvement in the labour market, providing a comprehensive analysis of their contribution, challenges, and opportunities. It begins by examining the youth labour force, segregating the data for males and females to highlight any disparities in participation. Understanding the number and characteristics of young people in the labour force sets the stage for deeper insights into their economic engagement. Following this, it explores the youth labour force participation rate, which measures the active engagement of young individuals in the labour market, offering a lens through which to view their economic vitality.

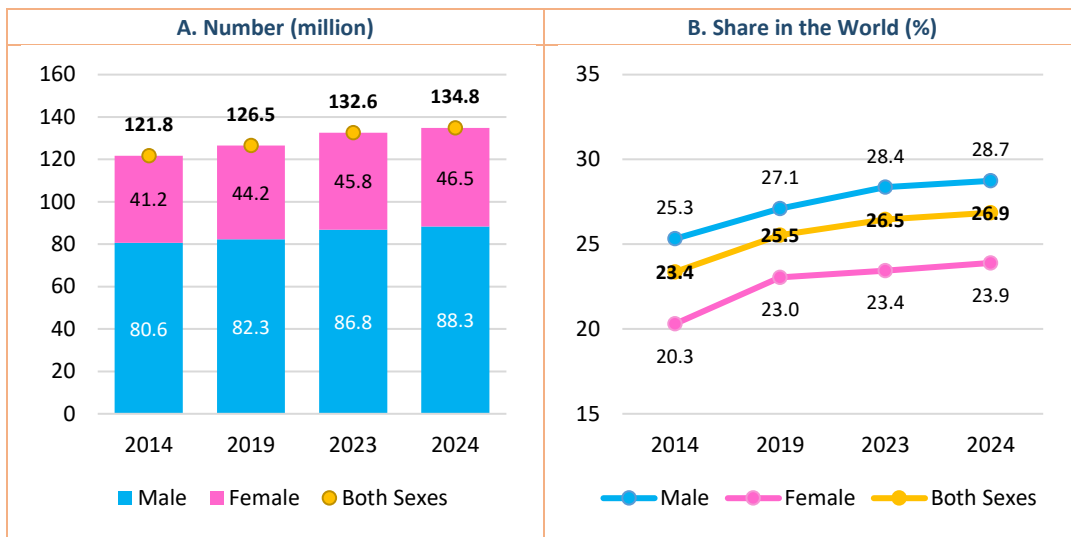
Furthermore, this chapter thoroughly addresses youth employment and unemployment, providing context on how young people are integrated into the overall workforce. Additionally, it examines the prevalence of youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET), and the working youth living in poverty to underscore the socioeconomic challenges faced by young people. Moreover, the chapter analyses the role of entrepreneurship as a potential avenue for economic empowerment. Through this detailed exploration, this chapter aims to shed light on the multifaceted dimensions of youth economic participation and its implications for future development.

4.1. Youth Labour Force

The total youth labour force (age 15-24) in the OIC countries has consistently increased over the past decade. Figure 4.1A displays the total number of youths in the labour force and its male-female composition. For males, the numbers have shown a steady increase: from 82.3 million in 2019 to 86.8 million in 2023, and projected to be 88.3 million in 2024. Similarly, the female labour force has grown from 44.2 million to 45.8 million over the same five-year period, and is expected to reach 46.5 million in 2024. When considering both sexes, the combined youth labour force rose from 126.5 million in 2019 to 132.6 million in 2023 and is projected to further rise to 134.8 million in 2024.

This consistent upward trend suggests significant demographic growth and possibly increasing economic opportunities within the OIC countries. However, the data also reveals a persistent disparity between males and females, with the male labour force consistently being nearly double that of the female labour force. This disparity indicates socio-economic and cultural barriers that continue to limit female labour force participation in these countries. The observed trends emphasise the need for targeted policies to support female employment and to fully utilise the potential of the growing youth population in OIC countries.

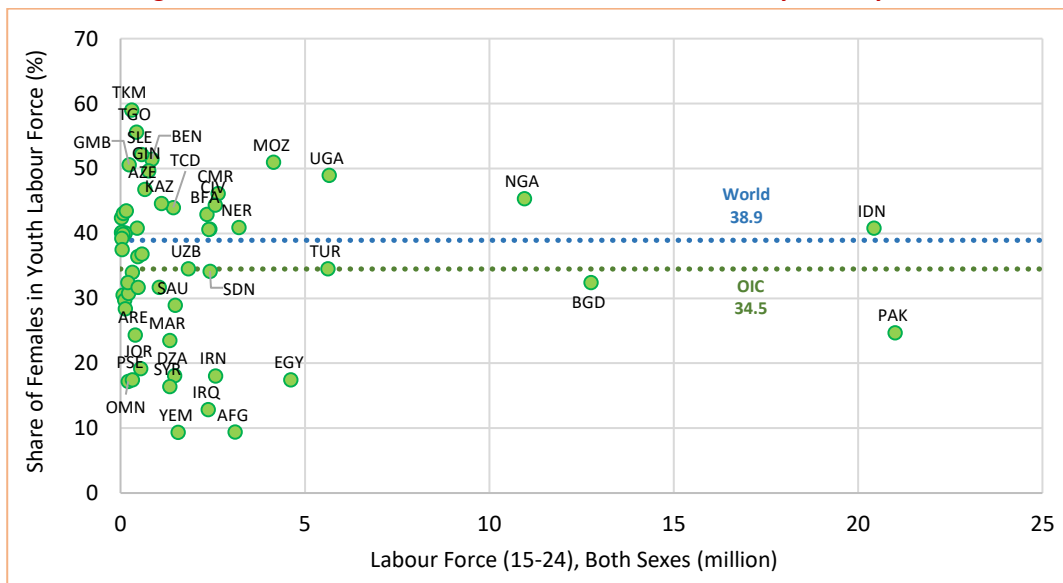
Figure 4.1: OIC Youth Labour Force



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.
 Note: Data excludes Palestine for 2023 and 2024.

In addition to the growth in OIC youth labour force, its share in the global youth labour force has also increased (Figure 4.1B). For both sexes, this share increased from 25.5% in 2019 to 26.5% in 2023, and is expected to reach 26.9% in 2024. Males’ share of the world youth labour force grew from 27.1% to 28.4% in this five-year period, and is projected to be 28.7% in 2024. Meanwhile, the female share rose from 23.0% to 23.4%, and is expected to be 23.9% in 2024. This increasing global share underscores the growing importance of the OIC youth labour force within the global labour market.

Figure 4.2: Youth Labour Force and the Share of Females by Country, 2023

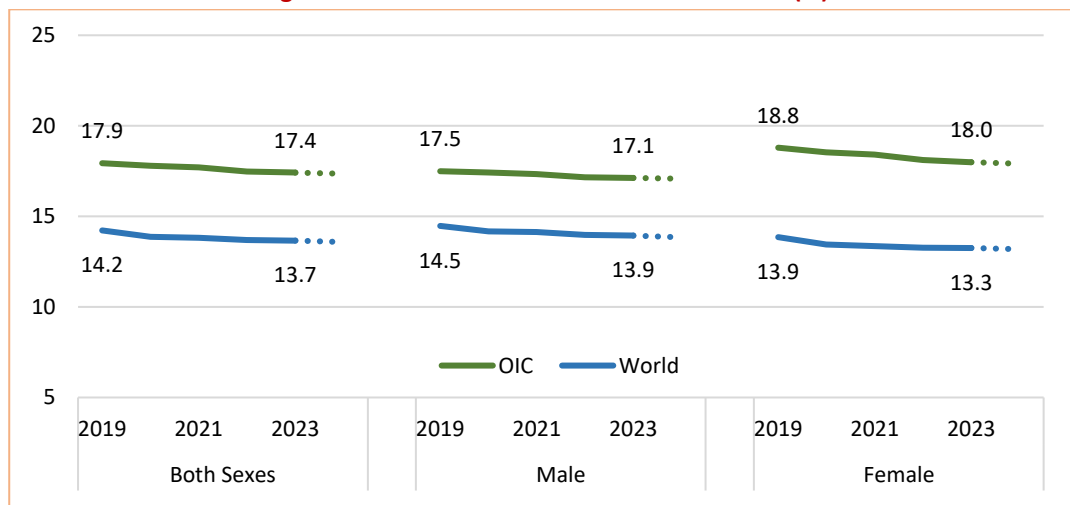


Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.
 Note: Palestine data is for 2022.

Given their large population, Pakistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Nigeria have the highest numbers of youth labour force among the OIC countries (Figure 4.2), collectively representing about half (49.1%) of the total OIC youth labour force as of 2023. On the other hand, small countries like Comoros, Brunei Darussalam, Maldives, Djibouti, Suriname, Guyana, Bahrain, and Gabon each have a youth labour force of less than 100 thousand.

Whether big or small, the OIC countries vary a lot with respect to the share of females in the youth labour force (Figure 4.2). On average, female youths constitute 34.5% of the OIC youth labour force, which is somewhat below the global average of 38.9% as of 2023. While 33 out of 57 OIC countries have a higher figure than the global average, Turkmenistan takes the lead with a share of 59%, followed by Togo, Sierra Leone, Benin, Mozambique, and The Gambia, all with more than half of the youth labour force comprised of females. At the other side of the spectrum are Yemen and Afghanistan, where the share of females in youth labour force is less than 10%. This disparity underscores the need for targeted policies and initiatives to empower young women and enhance their participation in the labour market, particularly in countries with alarmingly low female representation.

Figure 4.3: Share of Youth in Total Labour Force (%)

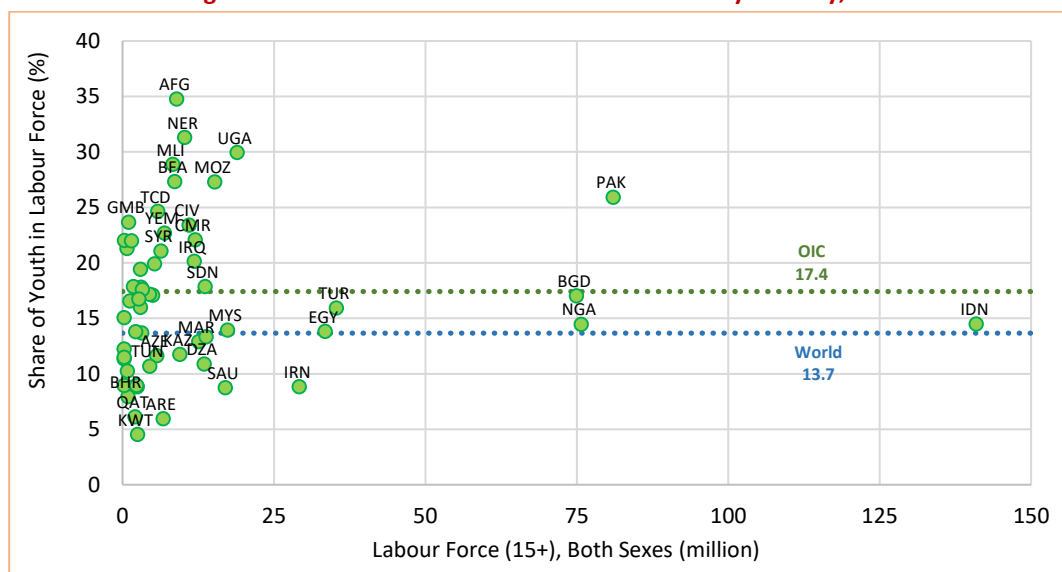


Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.

Considering the share of young people in total labour force, Figure 4.3 highlights a concerning decline over the recent years. Globally, this share – for both sexes – decreased from 14.2% in 2019 to 13.7% in 2023. A similar trend was also observed for the OIC countries, where the youth component of labour force decreased from 17.9% to 17.4% over the same period. While the decrease was observed for both males and females, it was more evident for females, particularly in the OIC countries. Indeed, globally, the share of male youth in male total labour force showed a decline from 14.5% in 2019 to 13.9% in 2023. This trend is mirrored in the OIC countries where the share dropped from 17.5% to 17.1% over the same period. Similarly, the share of female youth in female total labour force fell from 13.9% in 2019 to 13.3% in 2023 at the global level, with the share in the OIC countries decreasing more dramatically from 18.8% to 18.0% over the same period under consideration. The declining trend might suggest potential

challenges hindering youth labour force participation, which calls for an assessment of factors such as economic conditions, educational opportunities, and demographic shifts within the OIC countries and the world.

Figure 4.4: Labour Force and the Share of Youth by Country, 2023



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.

Note: Palestine data is for 2022.

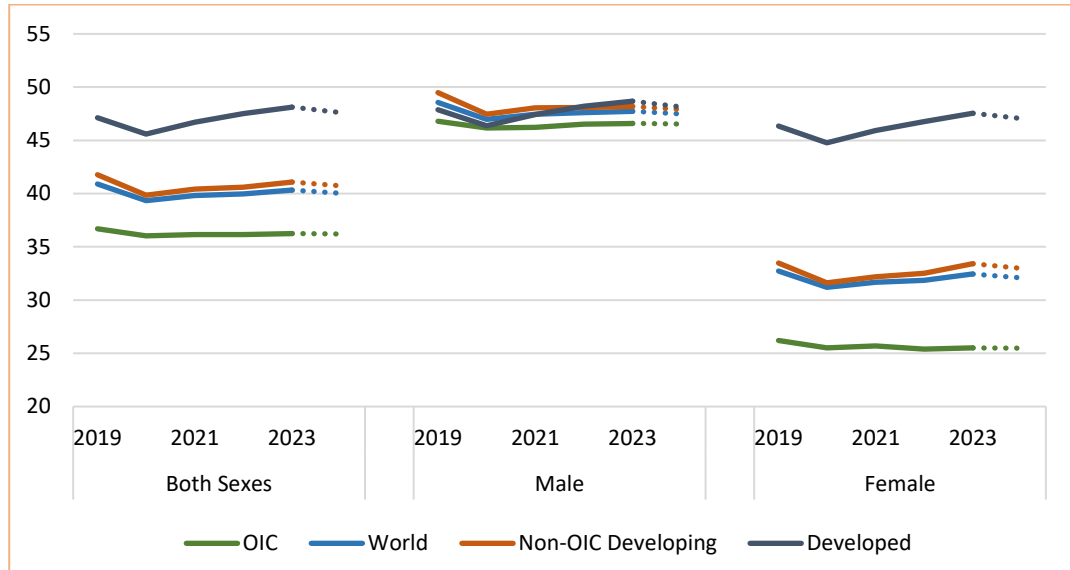
Despite the decreasing trend worldwide, the group of OIC countries continues to have a higher share of youth in labour force than the global average, for both males and females. As of 2023, 38 OIC countries have a share that exceeds the global average of 13.7% for both sexes (Figure 4.4). Afghanistan has the highest share of youth in total labour force, at 34.8%, followed by Niger, Uganda, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mozambique, and Pakistan, all with more than a quarter of total labour force comprised of youths. Remarkably, in addition to Pakistan, other OIC countries with a comparatively large labour force, such as Indonesia, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Türkiye, and Egypt, also have a higher figure than the global average. On the other hand, in ten OIC countries, including Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Albania, Iran, Libya, Comoros, and Oman, the youth share of labour force is less than 10%.

4.2. Participation in Labour Market

The integration of youth into the labour market is crucial for OIC countries, given their abundant youth population. This is also critical for leveraging the potential of the youth population to drive economic growth and development. Figure 4.5 shows that labour force participation rate (LFPR) for youth continues to recover at the global scale from the economic downturns and crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, though the recovery is largely driven by developed economies that already have LFPR figures surpassing the pre-pandemic levels. As of 2023, youth LFPR was measured at 40.3% worldwide, 0.6 percentage points below the 2019 level, yet. While the decline in youth LFPR in 2020 was relatively smaller in the OIC group (0.7 percentage points)

than that observed at the global level (1.6 percentage points), the recovery in youth LFPR remained trivial in the group, resulting in a rate of 36.3% in 2023, which was 0.5 percentage points below the 2019 level. Overall, the labour force participation rate (LFPR) for youth continued to be lower in the OIC countries than the global averages, particularly for females.

Figure 4.5: Youth Labour Force Participation Rate (%)



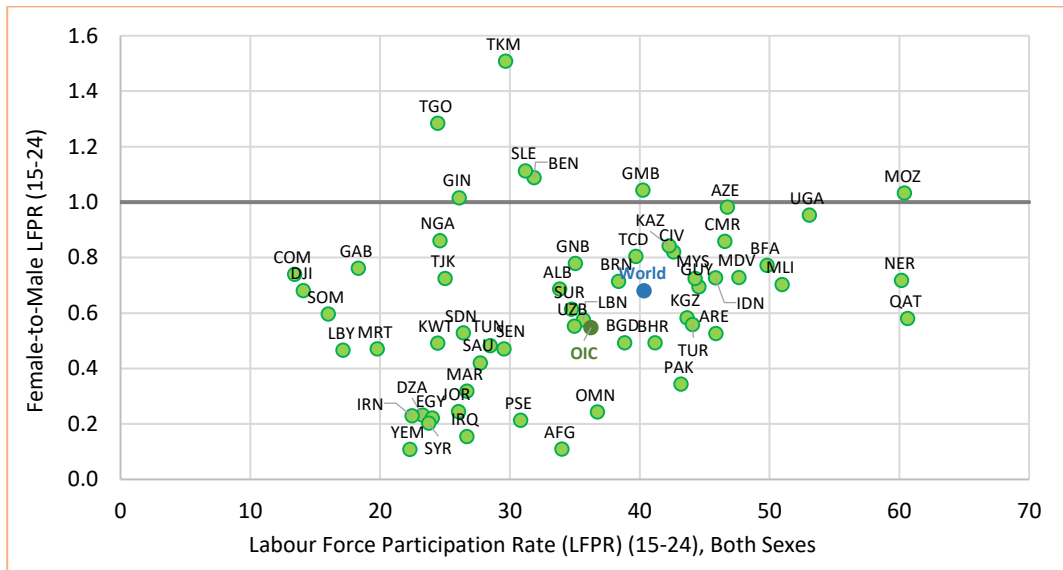
Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.

It is noteworthy that the comparatively lower figures of and the stagnant recovery in youth LFPR in the OIC countries is resulting largely from the persistent underrepresentation and limited participation of female youth in the labour force. As displayed on Figure 4.5, while female youth LFPR has consistently remained lower than the male youth LFPR all over the world, the gap was as high as 21.1 percentage points in the OIC group in 2023, compared to 15.3 percentage points in the world; 14.8 percentage points in non-OIC developing countries and only 1.1 percentage points in developed countries. Additionally, there is less variation among the country groups with respect to male youth LFPR. In consequence, the group of OIC countries compares better with the world average in male LFPR than in female LFPR, for the discrepancy was as low as 1.1 percentage points in the former and as high as 6.9 percentage points in the latter in 2023. It should also be noted that there seems to be no recovery in female youth LFPR in the OIC group in the post-pandemic period, signalling a widening gap.

Differences in youth LFPR often stem from various factors, including institutional factors such as norms and preferences, youth mobility, the value assigned to female youth's work, discrimination based on age/experience, economic factors such as comparing net earnings with the benefits of unpaid work, and finally social and demographic factors, namely age, gender, and employable skills (Karimli et al., 2016). In addition, women face inferior income opportunities compared to men, with lower labour force participation rates, fewer formal employment opportunities, limited business and career advancement prospects, and lower earnings, and recently these gaps have been heightened due to the COVID-19 pandemic (World

Bank, 2022b). Moreover, women in some developing countries may enter relatively less regulated sectors such as agriculture or services, hence resulting in such gaps. In fact, one of the main deterrents for young women to participate in the labour force is the likelihood of facing discrimination and violence in informal or unregulated employment, leading to unequal wages or unpaid labour and restrictions on mobility (SESRIC, 2021 and 2022).

Figure 4.6: Youth Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) by Country, 2023



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.

Note: Palestine data is for 2022.

Looking into youth LFPR at the individual country level, the differences remain stark (Figure 4.6). On one hand, Qatar, Mozambique, Niger, Uganda, and Mali were the top OIC countries with a youth LFPR of above 50%, and 14 other countries exceeded the world average of 40.3% as of 2023. On the other hand, Comoros, Djibouti, Somalia, Libya, Gabon, and Mauritania recorded a youth LFPR of below 20%. Differences also existed among the OIC countries with respect to male/female LFPR. Female youth LFPR was higher than male LFPR only in seven countries including Turkmenistan, Togo, Sierra Leone, Benin, The Gambia, Mozambique, and Guinea, as portrayed on Figure 4.6 above the parity line for female-to-male LFPR ratio. This indicates that, in those countries, young women are more likely to participate in the labour force than young men are. In the rest of the countries, the disparity was in favour of males, with the largest being in Yemen and Afghanistan, where female youth LFPR was only about one tenth of the corresponding rate for males. On average, female youth LFPR was about half (0.55) of male youth LFPR across the OIC countries, compared to the world average of 0.68, indicating a comparatively larger disparity in youth LFPR against females in the OIC countries.

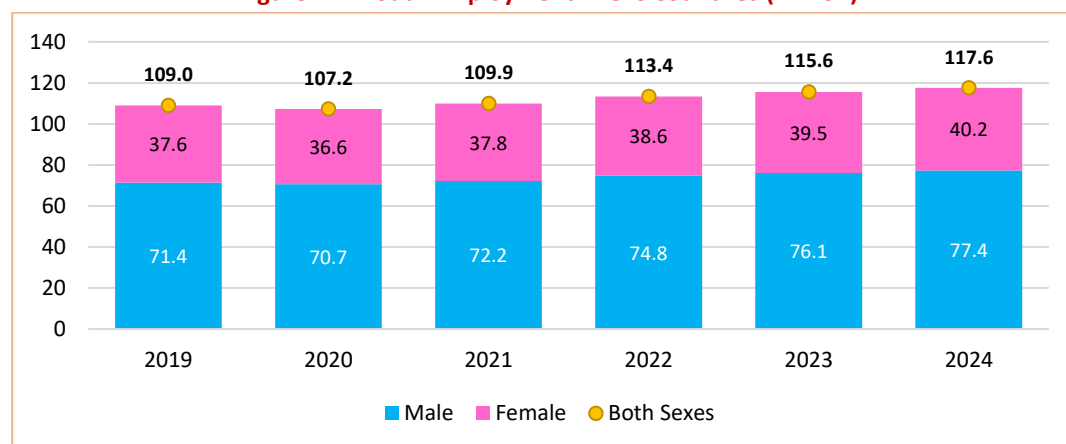
4.3. Employment

Youth employment is a critical indicator of economic stability and growth potential. It provides insights into the future labour force, potential for innovation, and overall economic health. The

data indicates a steady increase in youth employment within the OIC countries from 2019 to 2023, with projections continuing this trend into 2024. In 2019, the total number of employed youth was 109 million, rising to 115.6 million by 2023 and projected to reach 117.6 million by 2024 (Figure 4.7).²¹ Overall, youth employment in OIC countries increased by 6.7 million between 2019 and 2023, originating mostly from the increase in young male employment, about 4.8 million compared to 1.9 million among female youths.

Indeed, there is a significant disparity between male and female youth employment. In 2019, male youth employment was 71.4 million, while female youth employment was 37.6 million. By 2023, these numbers increased to 76.1 million for males and 39.5 million for females, with projections for 2024 indicating 77.4 million for males and 40.2 million for females. Although both male and female employment show upward trends, the gap remains substantial. This suggests that while progress is being made, significant barriers to entry for young women in the workforce still exist.

Figure 4.7: Youth Employment in OIC Countries (million)



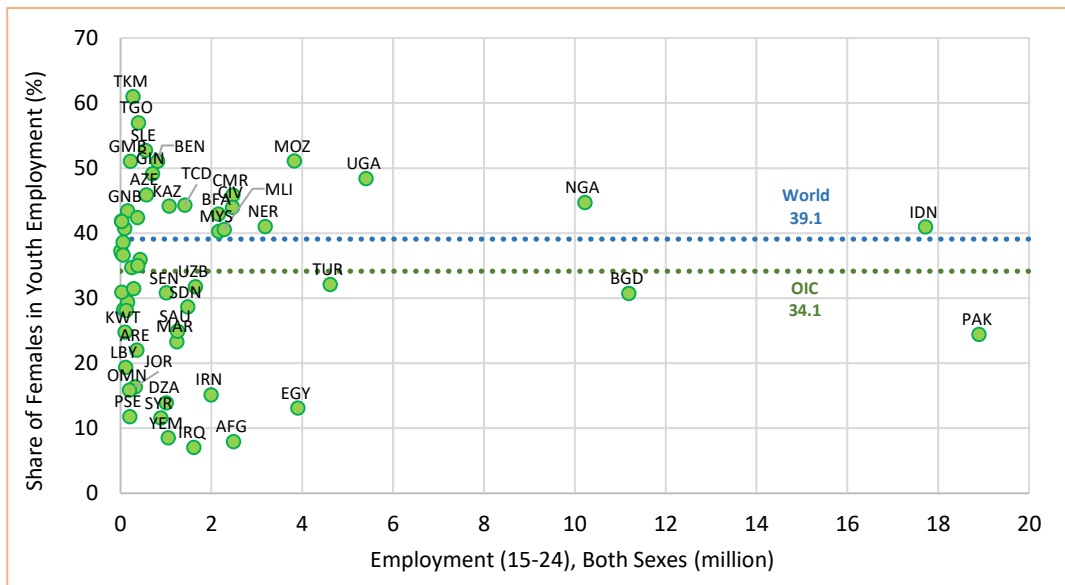
Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.

As of 2023, the share of females in youth employment averaged at 34.1% in the OIC countries, compared to the global average of 39.1%. Of the major OIC countries with a relatively high number of youth employment, Uganda (48.4%), Nigeria (44.7%), and Indonesia (41.0%) exceeded the world average, while Pakistan (24.4%), Bangladesh (30.7%), and Türkiye (32.1%) remained even below the OIC average.²² In total, 24 OIC countries exceeded the world average, and in six of them (Turkmenistan, Togo, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Gambia, and Benin) females accounted for more than half of total youth employment. At the other side of the spectrum, the share of females in youth employment was less than 10% in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yemen (Figure 4.8).

²¹ The pandemic-induced economic recession led to a decline in youth employment in 2020, with the total number of employed youth falling to 107.2 million. However, the numbers rebounded in subsequent years, indicating resilience and recovery in the labour market.

²² Pakistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Nigeria collectively accounted for about half of the total number of employed youths in the OIC countries in 2023.

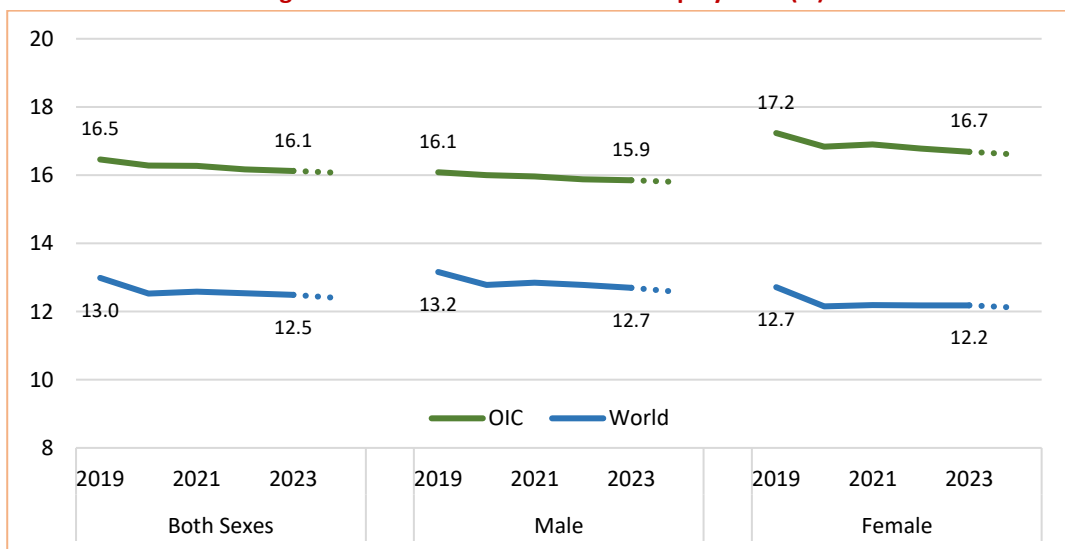
Figure 4.8: Share of Females in Youth Employment by Country, 2023



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.
 Note: Palestine data is for 2022.

Despite the continued recovery and growth in youth employment in the OIC countries, there remains a need for targeted strategies to address the disadvantaged status of females and ensure inclusive access to employment opportunities for all young people. At the intra-OIC level, some strategies have already been echoed in the OPAAW, the OIC Youth Strategy and the OIC 2025 Programme of Action, which include an emphasis on the advancement and empowerment of women, bridging the gap between males and females, and lifting institutional barriers that hinder women’s participation in the labour force.

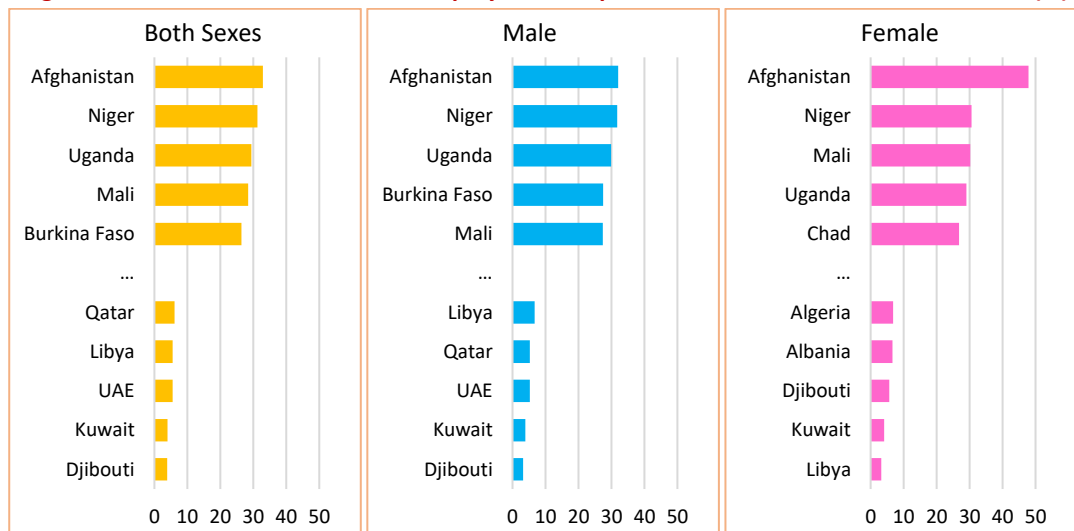
Figure 4.9: Share of Youth in Total Employment (%)



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.

Considering the share of youth in total employment, there has been a slight decline worldwide in the recent years, for both males and females (Figure 4.9). Globally, this share declined from 13.0% in 2019 to 12.5% in 2023, representing a decrease of 0.5 percentage points. Similarly, in the OIC countries, it declined from 16.5% to 16.1% over the same period. When distinguishing between young males and females, it is worth noting that the decrease in the share of youth employment was more evident for females in the OIC countries. There was a decrease of 0.5 percentage points in the share of female youth in total female employment, compared to a decrease of 0.2 percentage points in the share of male youth in total male employment. Nevertheless, the OIC countries, on average, continued to have a higher proportion of youth in their total employment as compared to the global average as of 2023, and the gap was even wider in the case of female employment.

Figure 4.10: Share of Youth in Total Employment: Top and Bottom Five OIC Countries, 2023 (%)



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.

As of 2023, 35 OIC countries had a higher share of youth in total employment than the global average. The top five countries by the proportion of youth in total employment were Afghanistan, Niger, Uganda, Mali, and Burkina Faso. On the other hand, the countries with the lowest proportion of youth in total employment were Djibouti, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Libya, and Qatar. These lists of countries slightly differed in the case of female employment: While Afghanistan continued to top the list, with almost half of female employment consisting of young women, it was followed by Niger, Mali, Uganda, and Chad. The countries with the lowest share of youths in female employment were Libya, Kuwait, Djibouti, Albania, and Algeria (Figure 4.10).

It is worth noting that the share of youth in total employment has significant economic and social implications. A high proportion of youth employment can drive economic growth by injecting energy, innovation, and new skills into the workforce. However, it also requires robust support systems for education, training, and job placement to ensure that young workers can transition smoothly into stable, productive careers. Conversely, low youth employment rates

may signal challenges in the labour market, such as skill mismatches, economic barriers, or insufficient opportunities, potentially leading to higher rates of youth unemployment and social discontent.

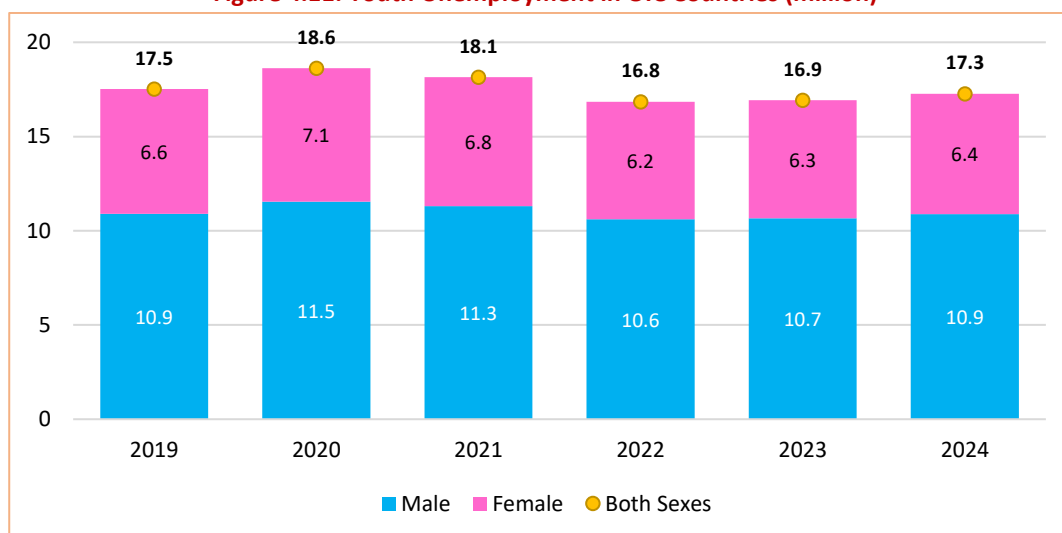
4.4. Unemployment

Having a large number of young people comes with consequences, and one of them is youth unemployment. Unemployed young persons are those who report that they are without work, that they are available for work and that they have taken active steps to find work in the last four weeks (OECD, 2024).

Youth unemployment can adversely affect the quality of life and developmental trajectory of young people. It also poses a challenge to economic development due to its negative impact on labour market productivity and government expenditure on public services. Therefore, addressing youth unemployment is a longstanding but increasingly urgent challenge for OIC countries.

Within the OIC countries, the number of unemployed youth, which peaked at 18.6 million in 2020 under the pandemic conditions, declined to 16.8 million in 2022. However, it rebounded to 16.9 million in 2023 and is expected to further rise to 17.3 million in 2024 (Figure 4.11). Moreover, it is observed that unemployment prevails more among young males than young females. As of 2023, the number of unemployed young males was 1.7 times the number of unemployed young females – 10.7 million and 6.3 million, respectively.

Figure 4.11: Youth Unemployment in OIC Countries (million)



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.

The number of unemployed youths was one million and above in four OIC countries in 2023. Indonesia had 2.7 million unemployed youths, Pakistan 2.1 million, Bangladesh 1.6 million, and Türkiye 1.0 million (Figure 4.12). Qatar, on the other hand, had the lowest number of unemployed youths, only about two thousand. Comoros, Bahrain, Brunei Darussalam,

Maldives, and Guinea-Bissau also had less than 10 thousand unemployed youth. Expectedly, these countries have the lowest youth populations, which explains the low number of unemployed youth.

The OIC countries, on average, compare well with the global average in terms of the proportion of females in youth unemployment. In 2023, the percentage of young females in youth unemployment was 37.9% worldwide and 37.0% in OIC countries. In fact, two thirds of the OIC countries surpassed the world average, but they mostly consisted of countries with the lowest number of unemployed youths. Among them, Qatar, Bahrain, Benin, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Kuwait, Brunei Darussalam, Guinea, Suriname, Kazakhstan, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Azerbaijan, Senegal, Guyana, Gabon, Saudi Arabia, and Cameroon all had more than a 50% share of females in youth unemployment. By comparison, more than 80% of youth unemployment consisted of males in Yemen and Afghanistan (Figure 4.12).

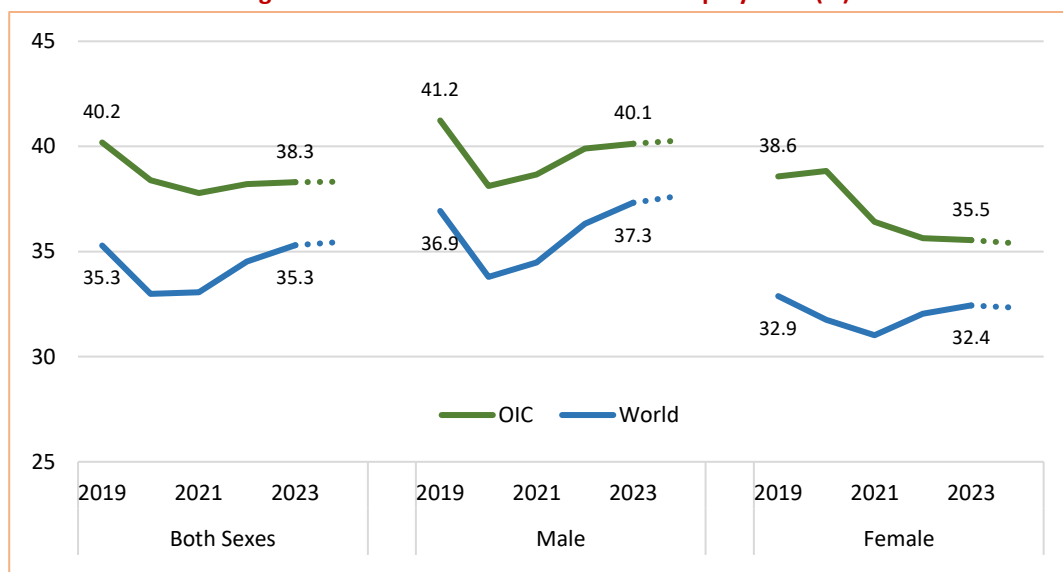
Figure 4.12: Share of Females in Youth Unemployment by Country, 2023



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023. Note: Palestine data is for 2022.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the share of youth in total unemployment sharply declined worldwide, though it has been on the rise in recent years. Falling from 35.3% in 2019 to 33.0% in 2020 at the global level, it increased continuously in the following years, reaching its pre-pandemic level in 2023, and is projected to rise further to 35.5% in 2024. In OIC countries, this share was 40.2% in 2019, just before the pandemic. It fell through two consecutive years to 37.8% in 2021 and rebounded to 38.3% in 2023, remaining below its pre-pandemic level. Overall, the share of youth in total unemployment remains higher in the group of OIC countries than the global average, for both males and females. As of 2023, young males represented as high as 40.1% of total male unemployment, compared to the world average of 37.3%. For females, this share was lower than that of males both in the OIC group and in the world – 35.5% and 32.4%, respectively (Figure 4.13).

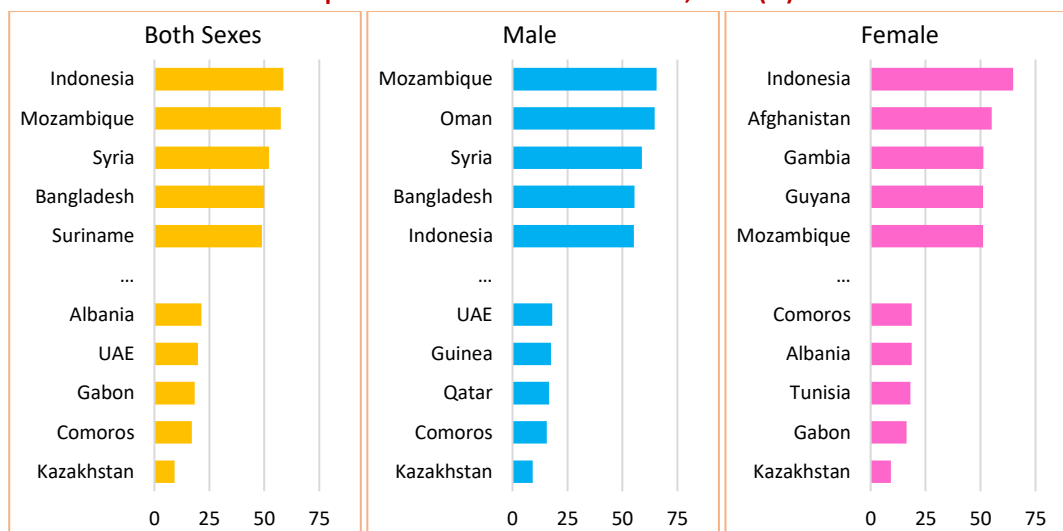
Figure 4.13: Share of Youth in Total Unemployment (%)



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.

At the country level, the share of youth in total unemployment varied significantly among the OIC countries in 2023, with notable differences between males and females (Figure 4.14). On the one hand, youth accounted for more than half of the unemployed in Indonesia, Mozambique, and Syria, suggesting significant youth unemployment challenges. On the other hand, less than 10% of the unemployed were youth in Kazakhstan and less than 20% in Comoros, Gabon, and the United Arab Emirates, reflecting relatively better conditions for youth employment. This data underscores the diverse economic landscapes and labour market challenges within the OIC region.

Figure 4.14: Share of Youth in Total Unemployment: Top and Bottom Five OIC Countries, 2023 (%)

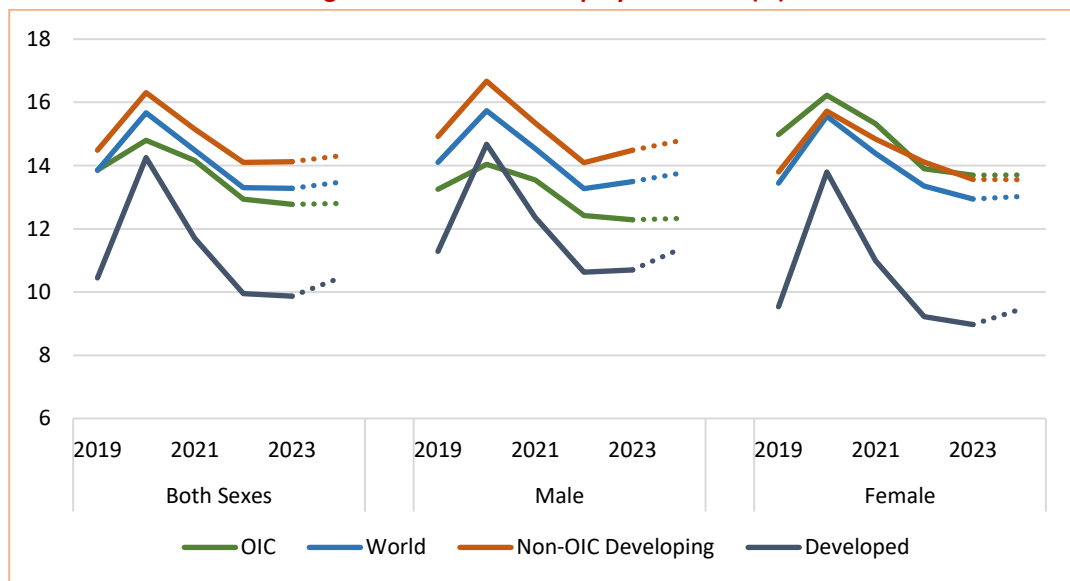


Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.

4.5. Unemployment Rate

Globally, youth unemployment rate²³ has been on a declining trend since its peak in the pandemic-hit year of 2020. As of 2023, it stood at 13.3%, compared to 15.7% in 2020. A similar trend was also observed in the OIC group, where the average youth unemployment rate fell from 14.8% to 12.8% over the same period, remaining slightly below the global average. Notably, as shown in Figure 4.15, young men across the world typically experience higher unemployment rates compared to young women. This, however, contrasts with the situation in the OIC countries. As of 2023, youth unemployment rate in the OIC group averaged at 13.7% for females and 12.3% for males, compared to the global averages of 12.9% and 13.5%, respectively. Consequently, although the youth unemployment rate in OIC countries is lower than the global average for males, it surpasses the world average for females.

Figure 4.15: Youth Unemployment Rate (%)

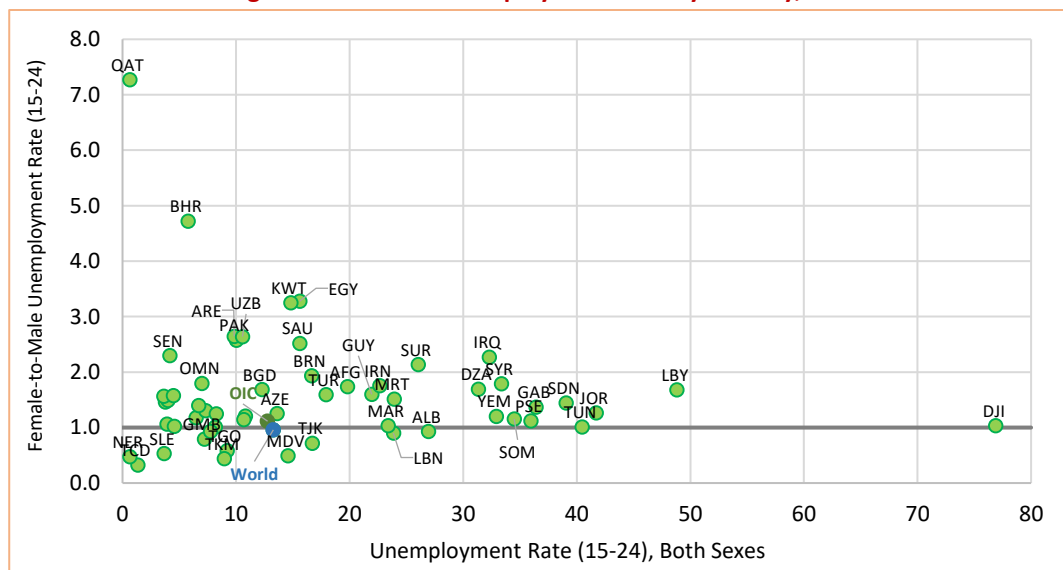


Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.

Several factors may explain the high unemployment rates among young people, including a lack of labour market information, limited job experience, relatively high turnover rates among youth, and the impact of economic, political, and health crises (SESRIC, 2023d). Unemployment among young people may also be caused by a lack of job opportunities, poor basic skills, knowledge, and skills mismatch. The skills and abilities of the workforce and the requirements of employers sometime may not match; hence, it may lead to structural unemployment (SESRIC, 2015 and COMCEC, 2018). The skills mismatch reveals a crucial problem where the education and training provided do not align with the demands of the market. As a result, a significant number of young people are unable to find suitable employment.

²³ The youth unemployment rate is the number of unemployed 15-24 year-olds expressed as a percentage of the youth labour force (OECD, 2024).

Figure 4.16: Youth Unemployment Rate by Country, 2023



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023. Note: Palestine data is for 2022.

Youth unemployment rates differed across the OIC countries and between males and females (Figure 4.16). In 2023, half of the OIC countries had a youth unemployment rate that was higher than the global average. Djibouti topped the list with a rate of 76.9%, followed by Libya with 48.8%, Jordan with 41.7%, Tunisia with 40.5%, and Sudan with 39.0%. By comparison, Qatar and Niger had the lowest youth unemployment rate, both with 0.6%, followed by Chad with 1.3%, and Kazakhstan and Sierra Leone, both with 3.6%.

As mentioned above, youth unemployment rate for females is lower than that for males at the global level, corresponding to a ratio of 0.96 in 2023. Due to the contrast situation in the OIC region, the ratio of female-to-male youth unemployment rate was 1.11 in the region. Notably, only in 12 OIC countries was the ratio less than 1, indicating a disparity in favour of females, i.e. a lower youth unemployment rate for females than for males. These countries were Chad, Turkmenistan, Niger, Maldives, Sierra Leone, Togo, Tajikistan, The Gambia, Lebanon, Albania, Mozambique, and Indonesia. Among the other countries with a comparatively higher youth unemployment rate for males, Qatar stood out with a female youth unemployment rate being 7.27 times the male youth unemployment rate. However, it is noteworthy to recall that the country – along with Niger – has the lowest youth unemployment rate among the OIC countries. In addition, female-to-male unemployment rate for youth ranged between 2 and 5 in ten OIC countries, including Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Iraq, and Suriname (Figure 4.16).

Monitoring such disparities between young males and females in the labour market is crucial. Across the globe, young women are progressively pursuing higher education, with recent estimates showing a slight edge in tertiary enrolment over young men in many countries, which calls for the employment of those who have acquired the necessary skills. However, this advancement in education and better learning outcomes are not translating into better work

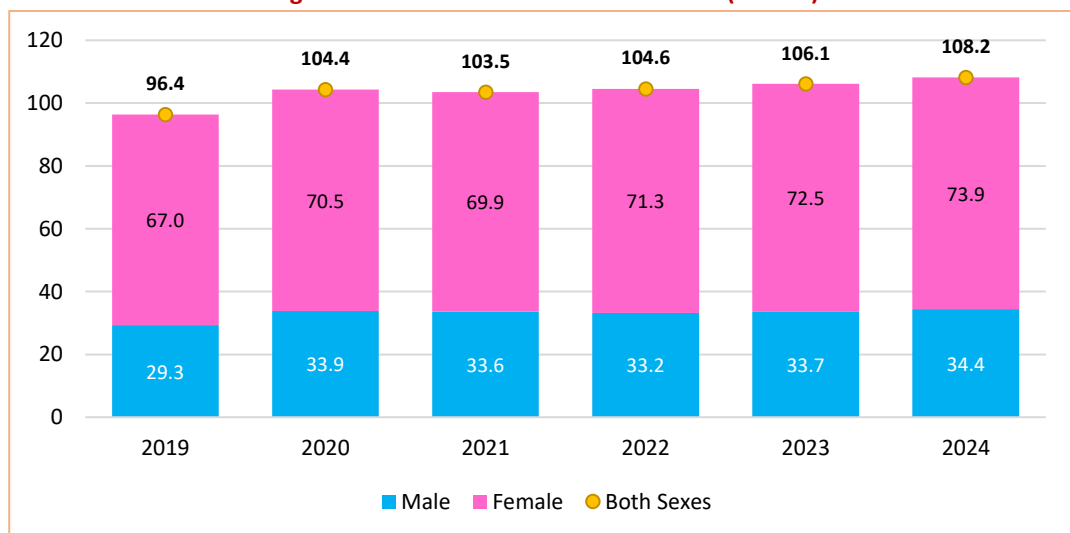
and life outcomes for women (World Bank, 2021). As such, the unemployment rate for women remains higher than for men, and this may be due to the fact that access to well-paying occupations for women remains unequal and female job seekers encounter greater challenges compared to men (ILO, 2022).

4.6. Youth Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET)

One way young people who cannot find work can improve their labour market prospects is to acquire skills via education and training, and those skills which employers are known to value. However, one group of young people is of special concern: those who are neither in employment nor in education, or training. Youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET) are uniquely disadvantaged because they are unable to access employment, education, as well as training. Young people who are in such circumstances face an increased risk of becoming disconnected from the labour market and social exclusion.

Within a span of five years, the number of youth NEET in OIC countries increased by 9.8 million, from 96.4 million in 2019 to 106.1 million in 2023, though most of this increase actually occurred in 2020. It is projected that, in 2024, the number of youth NEET in OIC countries will further rise by 2.1 million to reach 108.2 million. Moreover, there is a significant disparity in the number of youth NEET between males and females. In 2023, the number of female youth NEET was more than double that of males. Indeed, out of the total youth NEET in OIC countries, approximately 33.7 million were males and 72.5 million were females (Figure 4.17).

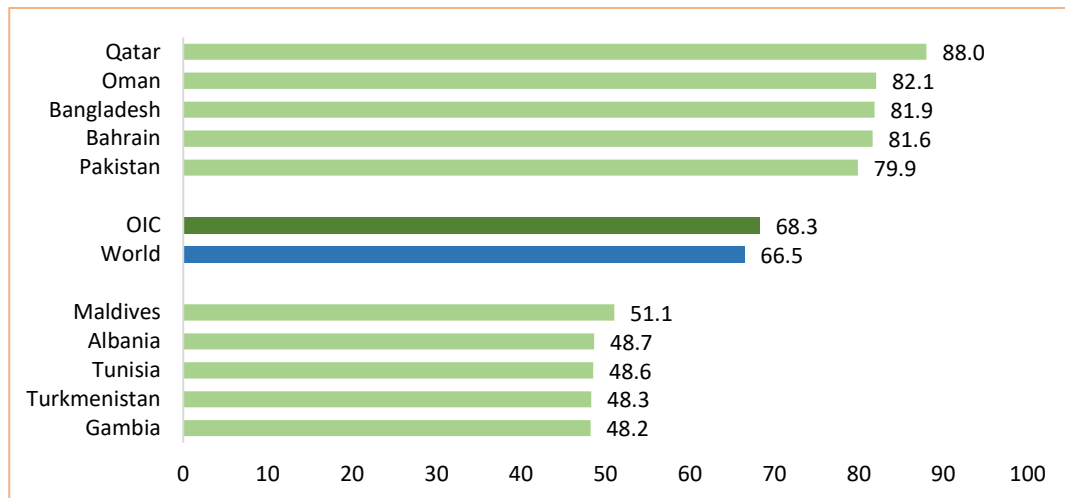
Figure 4.17: Youth NEET in OIC Countries (million)



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.

Proportionally, young females accounted for 68.3% of the youth NEET in OIC countries in 2023, slightly above the global average of 66.5%. Remarkably, more than 80% of youth NEET were female in Qatar, Oman, Bangladesh, and Bahrain. Only in The Gambia, Turkmenistan, Tunisia, and Albania did young females account for less than 50% of youth NEET (Figure 4.18).

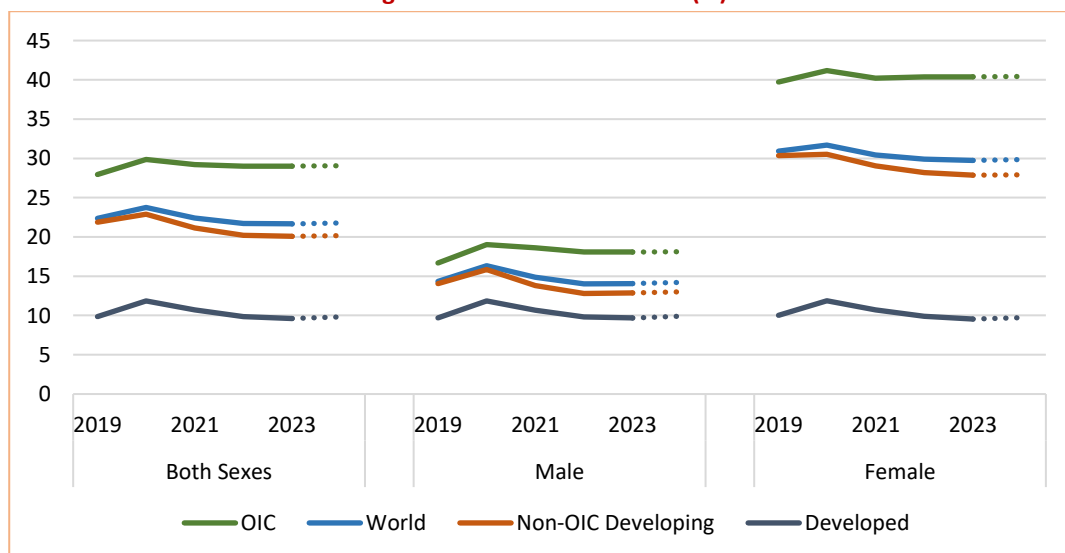
Figure 4.18: Share of Females in Youth NEET: Top and Bottom Five OIC Countries, 2023 (%)



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.

Compared to the number of youth NEET, youth NEET rate provides a clearer picture of the situation and offers more meaningful insights for policymakers and stakeholders as it reflects the proportion of young people not in education, employment, or training relative to the total youth population. Figure 4.19 shows that countries around the world experienced a sharp increase in youth NEET rates in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic was at its peak; however, the NEET rates began to decrease immediately following the reopening of economies, especially in 2022 and 2023. At the global level, youth NEET rate decreased from its peak at 23.8% in 2020 down to 21.7% in 2023, which was even below its pre-pandemic 2019 level of 22.4%. In the OIC countries, however, this rate decreased only slightly from 29.9% to 29.0% over the same period, remaining above the pre-pandemic level of 28.0%.

Figure 4.19: Youth NEET Rate (%)

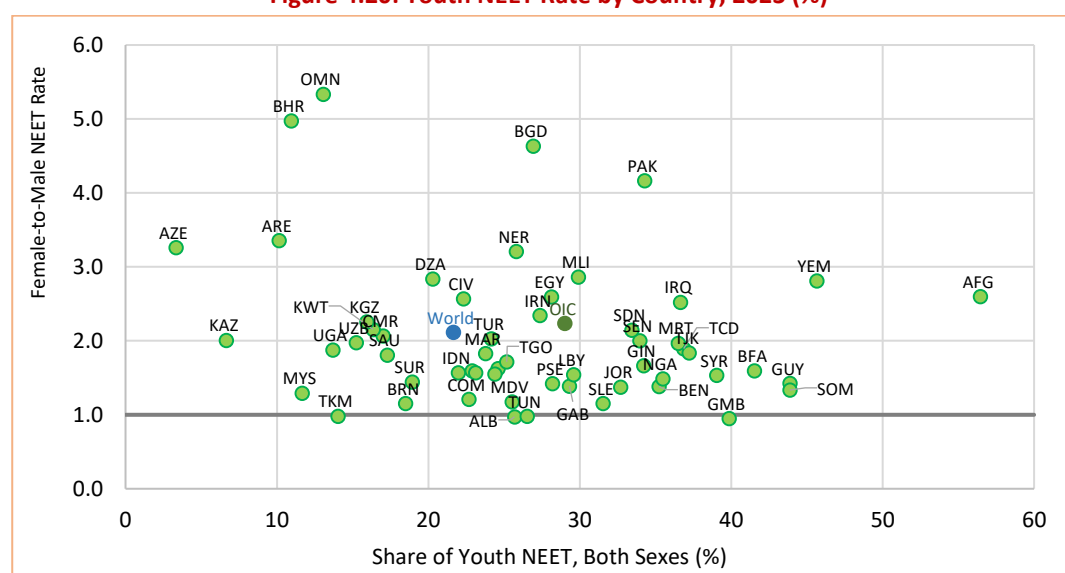


Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023.

The youth NEET rate also highlights wider gaps between male and female youth in terms of economic participation. In the OIC countries, 40.4% of young females were NEET in 2023, more than double the rate of male youth NEET of 18.1%. Moreover, both of those rates were significantly higher than the corresponding global average: 29.7% for females and 14.1% for males (Figure 4.19).

As shown in Figure 4.20, more than one-third of young people were NEET in 17 OIC countries in 2023, and in 23 more OIC countries, the share of youth NEET exceeded the global average of 21.7%. Afghanistan stood out with more than half (56.5%) of its youth being NEET. In addition, with a more than 40% of youth NEET rate, Yemen, Guyana, Somalia, and Burkina Faso were also among the OIC countries with the highest shares of youth NEET. By comparison, countries like Azerbaijan, Qatar, and Kazakhstan, with a youth NEET rate of less than 10%, had the lowest proportions of youth NEET among the OIC countries.

Figure 4.20: Youth NEET Rate by Country, 2023 (%)



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023. Note: Palestine data is for 2022. Qatar not shown on the chart (youth NEET: 5.7%; female-to-male NEET rate: 10.7).

Young females are particularly at a disadvantaged position and more likely to fall into the NEET category, both globally and within the OIC region, as the figures showed above. In almost all OIC countries – with the exception of The Gambia, Albania, Tunisia, and Turkmenistan – the share of youth NEET was higher for females than for males in 2023, represented on Figure 4.20 by the ratio of female-to-male NEET rate of above 1. This ratio reached as high as 10.7 in Qatar, although the country had one of the lowest youth NEET rates among the OIC countries. Similarly, significant disparity in youth NEET existed in Oman, Bahrain, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, where female youth NEET rate was about 4-5 times that of males.

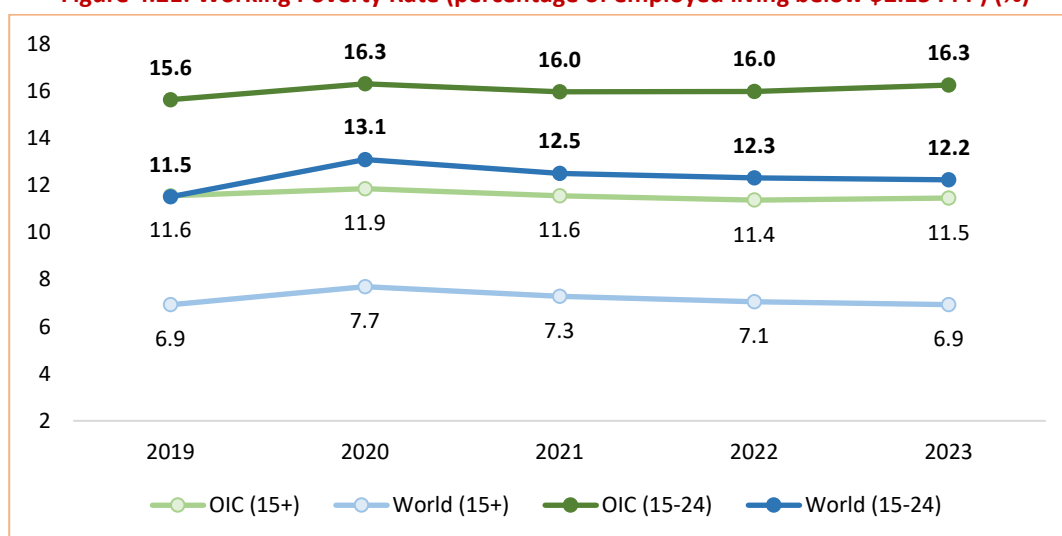
The higher likelihood of female youth being NEET could be attributed to various socio-economic factors such as gender-based discrimination, early marriage, and childbearing responsibilities. This increased likelihood can lead to long-term economic disadvantages for women,

perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting their potential contributions to the economy. Additionally, being NEET can affect women’s mental health and social well-being, further exacerbating inequalities against women. Addressing these issues requires targeted policies that promote equality, support work-life balance, and provide access to education and employment opportunities tailored to the unique challenges faced by women.

4.7. Youth Living in Poverty

The term working poverty rate refers to the proportion of employed people living in households with per-capita consumption or income below the recognised international poverty line of \$2.15 per day (UNSD, SDG metadata). For these poor workers, the problem is typically one of employment quality, as they are employed but still unable to lift themselves and their families above the poverty threshold. Factors contributing to this phenomenon include low pay, household characteristics, quality of employment, gender, and other individual characteristics (ILO, 2019).

Figure 4.21: Working Poverty Rate (percentage of employed living below \$2.15 PPP) (%)



Source: SESRIC staff calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO - Modelled Estimates, November 2023. Note: ILO estimates of working poverty for youth (15-24) are available up to the year 2019. Estimates for the subsequent years were generated based on the annual growth rate of overall working poverty (15+), i.e. on the assumption that the number of extremely poor working youth grew at the same rate as the number of extremely poor working population did throughout 2020-2023.

According to the ILO estimates, 6.9% of employed persons (age 15+) lived in households with an income below the international poverty line of US\$ 2.15 per day in 2023. Compared to this global working poverty rate, the OIC average was higher by 4.5 percentage points, with 11.5% of employed people in OIC countries living below the poverty line. The working poverty rate has remained around 11% in OIC countries since 2019, with negligible changes, while it followed a downward trend globally since 2020. Interestingly, working poverty rates for youth are more prevalent and significant compared to those for the overall working-age population, both at the global level and in the OIC region. As shown on Figure 2.21, about 16.3% of employed young

people in the OIC countries are estimated to be living below the poverty line as of 2023, compared to 12.2% worldwide. These persistent high working poverty rates in the OIC countries highlight the urgent need for effective policy interventions to address structural issues and promote inclusive economic growth.

4.8. Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship in the OIC member states is undergoing a dynamic transformation, fuelled by demographic shifts, technological advancements, and evolving market dynamics. With an increasing youth population and rapid technological progress, the entrepreneurial field is rich with opportunities for innovation and expansion. However, alongside these promising prospects, entrepreneurs struggle with persistent challenges such as limited funding and regulatory complexities (World Bank, 2024).

To fully capitalise on the potential of entrepreneurship in the region, it is imperative to overcome these obstacles and cultivate an environment conducive to startup success. This involves not only improving access to financial resources but also nurturing supportive policies and regulatory frameworks that stimulate innovation and business growth. Additionally, investments in education and skills development programs are essential to empower aspiring entrepreneurs with the tools and knowledge needed to thrive in a competitive landscape.

Furthermore, enhancing infrastructure and digital connectivity plays a vital role in facilitating business growth and broadening market access. Through collaborative endeavours and knowledge-sharing initiatives among entrepreneurs, industry stakeholders, and government agencies, the region can cultivate a sustainable ecosystem that fuels entrepreneurship and drives economic development. In essence, by leveraging demographic advantages, embracing technological innovations, and implementing conducive policies, the OIC member states can lead in a new era of entrepreneurial dynamism and prosperity (Wamda, 2023).

With concerted efforts to address challenges, seize opportunities, and foster an enabling environment for entrepreneurship, the OIC countries can emerge as global centres of innovation and economic vitality. Through collaborative endeavours and strategic initiatives, they can chart a course towards inclusive prosperity and collective advancement in the years ahead.

In the dynamic landscape of OIC countries, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the first quarter of 2023 witnessed a remarkable surge in startup investments. MENA startups raised an impressive \$1.1 billion during this period, highlighting the growing investor confidence in the region's entrepreneurial potential (Wamda, 2023).

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt emerged as frontrunners in attracting investment, with notable startups achieving unicorn status. For instance, Egypt-based fintech startup MNT-Halan raised \$400 million in February 2023, catapulting it into the unicorn club. Similarly, Saudi Arabia-based fintech startups Tabby and Tamara achieved unicorn status, with valuations of \$1.5 billion and \$1 billion, respectively (Inc. Arabia, 2024; Wired Middle East, 2024).

As of February 2024, Türkiye boasts a growing list of unicorns, demonstrating its thriving entrepreneurial landscape. The current unicorns include Trendyol, with a total funding of \$1.5 billion, Dream with \$468 million, Getir with \$2.3 billion, Peak with \$18 million, Insider with \$272 million, Papara with \$2 million, and Hepsiburada with undisclosed funding (Anadolu Agency, 2023). These unicorns exemplify Türkiye's commitment to fostering innovation and attracting investment, contributing to its goal of becoming a prominent global centre for entrepreneurship by 2030.

Despite these advancements, the region has seen only a limited number of unicorns emerge to date. However, the outlook remains promising, with STV projecting the emergence of around 45 unicorns by 2030, indicative of the region's hidden entrepreneurial power (MAGNiTT, n.d.). Moreover, Türkiye aims to position Istanbul among the top 20 centres of entrepreneurship globally by 2030, with the ambitious target of nurturing 100 unicorns and fostering the growth of 100,000 technology startups within the country.

One of the defining trends in the OIC entrepreneurial landscape is the rapid ascent of the fintech sector. Startups such as MNT-Halan, Tabby, Tamara, Papara, Colendi, Figopara, and Iyzico have leveraged innovative financial solutions to address the evolving needs of consumers. These ventures epitomise the region's potential to drive disruptive innovation and reshape traditional industries (Wired Middle East, 2024).

Furthermore, initiatives aimed at promoting women's participation in the workforce are gaining momentum across the OIC countries. Jordan, for instance, has embarked on ambitious reforms to double women's labour force participation by 2033, reflecting a concerted effort to harness the untapped talent pool and foster inclusive economic growth. Additionally, four of Türkiye's seven unicorns were founded by women, indicating a growing trend for female involvement (Anadolu Agency, 2023).

Despite the strides made in fostering entrepreneurship, the OIC countries face several challenges that warrant attention. Geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainties, and regulatory complexities pose hurdles to the entrepreneurial ecosystem's growth trajectory. Moreover, disparities against women persist, hindering women's full participation in the entrepreneurial landscape.

Technoparks, Incubators, Accelerators

Incubation centres, accelerators, and technoparks act as hubs of collaboration, bringing together entrepreneurs, researchers, investors, and industry experts. This convergence of talent and expertise fosters a culture of innovation and knowledge-sharing, driving continuous advancement within the startup ecosystem. Additionally, the proximity of startups to research institutions and universities within technoparks facilitates technology transfer and partnership opportunities, further fuelling entrepreneurship and innovation. By creating a supportive ecosystem and providing access to essential support services, these facilities empower entrepreneurs to overcome challenges, seize opportunities, and contribute to economic development and job creation within the OIC countries.

- **Technopark Casablanca (Morocco):** Technopark Casablanca is one of the largest technoparks in the MENA region, offering state-of-the-art infrastructure and support services to technology-based startups and companies. It provides incubation services, office spaces, laboratories, and access to funding and networking opportunities. Technopark Casablanca focuses on fostering innovation and supporting entrepreneurship in sectors such as IT, telecommunications, biotechnology, and renewable energy (Technopark Morocco, 2024).
- **QSTP (Qatar Science & Technology Park):** QSTP is a leading hub for technology innovation and entrepreneurship in Qatar. It provides a conducive environment for startups, research institutions, and technology companies to collaborate and commercialise their innovations. QSTP offers access to world-class laboratories, funding opportunities, mentorship programs, and business support services. It focuses on key sectors such as energy, environment, healthcare, and information and communication technology (ICT) (Qatar Science & Technology Park, 2024).
- **Flat6Labs (Various Countries):** Flat6Labs is a prominent startup accelerator with operations in several OIC countries, including Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. It provides early-stage startups with seed funding, mentorship, training, and access to a vast network of investors and industry experts. Flat6Labs focuses on various sectors, including technology, e-commerce, fintech, and healthcare, and has played a significant role in supporting entrepreneurship and innovation across the MENA region (Flat6Labs, 2024).
- **The Cribb (United Arab Emirates):** The Cribb is a leading startup incubator and co-working space located in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. It offers entrepreneurs a supportive ecosystem, including mentorship, networking events, workshops, and access to funding opportunities. The Cribb focuses on fostering innovation and supporting startups in sectors such as technology, digital media, e-commerce, and fintech. It has been instrumental in nurturing the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the United Arab Emirates and beyond (Forbes Middle East, 2024).
- **Terminal Istanbul:** Atatürk Airport terminal buildings are transforming into one of the world's largest entrepreneurship centres with the Terminal Istanbul Technology and Entrepreneurship Center project. The centre will be Türkiye's largest technopark, which will serve thousands of technology companies and startups on an area of 210,000 square meters of indoor space and will have the capacity to organise dozens of events every year. This new generation technopark will include modern work offices, incubation centres, accelerator programs, co-working spaces, joint prototyping and production centres, and research and development laboratories that will enable innovative projects to be realised. The centre will be a meeting point for global technology companies, investors, angels, investment funds, and startups (Launch Ceremony of Terminal Istanbul, 2024).

- **Bilişim Vadisi Technology Development Zone (Türkiye):** IT Valley performs its activities with the goal of letting Türkiye become fully independent in terms of economy and technology within the framework of the vision of National Technology Move. In this respect, IT Valley acts as a bridge to allow Türkiye to transfer its achievements in the defence industry to civilian technologies. IT Valley is a platform where science turns into technology and technology turns into a product. Studies aimed at enhancing the ecosystem are performed on Mobility, Communication Technologies, Cyber Security, Design Technologies, Smart Cities, and Game Technologies, each of which has its specific clusters. IT Valley aims to empower Türkiye and produce new technologies and products with high added value within the framework of the goals included in the 2023 Vision (Bilisim Vadisi, 2024).
- **Technopark Istanbul:** Technopark Istanbul is a technology development zone and innovation ecosystem located in Istanbul, Türkiye. It serves as a hub for research, development, and innovation activities, fostering collaboration between academia, industry, and government. Technopark Istanbul acts as a bridge to allow Türkiye to transfer its achievements in the DeepTech industry to civilian technologies and provides infrastructure and support services to technology-based companies, startups, and entrepreneurs, helping them accelerate their growth and commercialisation efforts. With state-of-the-art facilities and a vibrant network of partners, Technopark Istanbul plays a crucial role in driving Türkiye’s innovation economy forward (Technopark Istanbul, 2024).
- **BTM (Idea to Business):** BTM is one of the leading incubators in the Turkish Startup Ecosystem established by the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce as a foundation to commercialise innovative business ideas. BTM offers services such as training and seminars, mentor support, investor matching, demo day events, 24/7 office facilities, and one-on-one consultancy completely free of charge. UBI Global ranks BTM as one of the world’s top five public-private business incubators (Business Technology Management (BTM) Istanbul, 2024).

OIC Startup Ecosystem Index

The establishment of the OIC Startup Ecosystem Index holds significant importance for the OIC countries in their pursuit of cultivating robust startup ecosystems. The index serves as a platform that encourages countries to participate and track the overall status of their startup ecosystems. It provides a comprehensive dashboard of the startup ecosystems within OIC countries, offering valuable insights and data-driven analysis.

By facilitating participation in the index, the OIC countries gain access to vital information that aids in fostering regional economic integration and reducing dependency on traditional methods. Through the insights provided by the index, countries can identify areas for improvement and implement targeted strategies to enhance their startup ecosystems. This, in turn, promotes diversification of economies, encourages innovation, creates a talented workforce, and reduces unemployment rates.

Furthermore, the OIC Startup Ecosystem Index will play a pivotal role in harnessing the demographic dividend prevalent in many OIC member countries. With a significant portion of their populations comprising young people, these nations possess immense entrepreneurial potential. By participating in the index, the OIC countries can gain valuable resources and opportunities to nurture this potential, driving innovation and economic growth. Additionally, the index promotes the integration of marginalised groups, such as women and youth, into the entrepreneurial ecosystem, fostering social inclusion and empowerment (Wamda, 2023).

Moreover, the creation of the OIC Startup Ecosystem Index demonstrates a commitment to global competitiveness and sustainability. By benchmarking against international standards and best practices, OIC countries can position their startup ecosystems for global success and attract investment from around the world. Additionally, the collaborative nature of the index encourages knowledge-sharing and mutual learning among OIC nations, contributing to the overall prosperity and development of the region (MAGNiTT, 2024).

5. Concluding Remarks and Policy Recommendations

As of 2023, the OIC countries are home to 367 million youth, which represents a share of 18% of the total OIC population and accounts for 29.5% of the world's youth population. Projections show that the share of OIC countries in the world total young population will continue to increase in the foreseeable future. In addition, the median age of youth in the OIC countries is smaller than the median age of the world youth population, which implies that the OIC countries are in a stronger position regarding their younger populations. Despite the instabilities in the annual growth rates of the youth population over the past decade all over the world, the OIC countries have had solid annual growth rates.

In the context of sustainable development, the size of the youth population is crucial for shaping the growth of the labour force and the economic demands for job creation. Investing in young people and adolescents, who will become the youth of the future, and enhancing their access to quality education, social engagement, and employment opportunities can yield significant social and economic benefits. Therefore, prioritising investment in the youth population is imperative, as it empowers them to enhance their own lives and positively impact future generations.

Given that the OIC countries boast a significant young population, the potential of this powerful asset for fostering a brighter future for the society could only be realised by prioritising and enhancing the health of young people. Ensuring physical and mental well-being of the youth empowers them to reach their full potential and become vibrant contributors to their communities. However, the findings of this report reveal significant and persistent health challenges faced by this energetic group within the OIC countries despite the progress made in the past decade. These challenges include high mortality rates and low life expectancy, high adolescent fertility rates and maternal deaths, and prevalence of substance abuse and behavioural addictions. In this regard, the following policy recommendations could provide guidance for policy makers at the national and OIC cooperation level:

Educate youth about healthy lifestyles and active living. Life expectancy at age 15 is lower in OIC countries as compared to other country groups and the world. Although there are no guaranteed ways to increase life expectancy, research has shown that people who embrace certain lifestyle changes tend to live longer than those who do not. These include things like adjusting diet, turning off the TV and getting outdoors, and increasing social interactions. As a matter of fact, healthy eating matters, and what one eats and drinks can also help them live well and live longer. Eating well, exercising regularly, and not smoking can prevent 80 percent of heart attacks, 90 percent of type 2 diabetes, and 70 percent of colorectal cancer (Willett, Skerrett, & Giovannucci, 2017). Therefore, life

expectancy at age 15 can also be influenced by adherence to a healthy lifestyle. For example, adhering to anti-smoking policies or never smoking, physical activity, healthy eating habits, and maintaining a healthy body shape have been associated with increased life expectancy (Ma et al., 2023). OIC countries need to scale up their efforts to promote healthy eating and lifestyles to improve life expectancy and overall health outcomes, especially among younger individuals.

Provision of comprehensive solutions for youth on substance abuse, addiction, tobacco use, and digital wellbeing. This needs to be achieved by providing evidence-based solutions, which requires conducting system assessments to allow policymakers to plan concrete delivery of evidence-based prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation programs and services for youth faced with substance abuse, addiction, and tobacco use in the member countries. The key principles of the UNODC-WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders, as well as the framework of the UNODC International Standards on Drug Use Prevention, can be valuable tools in this effort. Technology and social media addiction is not only a concern for youth, but individuals of all ages and backgrounds are also affected by the widespread growth in technology addiction, which has become a noticeable social problem. It is crucial to recognise the effects of the increasing dependence on digital devices on the overall well-being, interpersonal connections, and mental health of youth. Raising awareness and implementing educational programs at various levels, including businesses and schools, can help prevent and combat technology addiction. Ultimately, addressing technology addiction in the OIC countries requires collective efforts at the intra-OIC level through enacting legislation on the usage of digital devices as well as international collaborations with the International Telecommunication Union, which is a specialised agency of the United Nations responsible for many matters related to information and communication technologies.

Prioritise investments in health system resilience to prepare for future pandemics, as well as allocate resources towards enhancing mental health services in the post-COVID-19 era. During the pandemic, there was a rise in depression, anxiety, stress, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, somatic symptoms, sleep disorders, delirium, psychosis, self-mutilation, and suicide among the general public inclusive of youth. Consequently, the prevalence of these disorders may place a greater burden on mental health care systems (Costa et al., 2022). Therefore, urgent measures need to be taken to address this issue, and it is crucial to improve the mental health governance system in the OIC countries. This involves increasing government expenditures on mental health, implementing rights-based policies and laws for mental health, and increasing the number of mental health improving facilities such as mental hospitals, mental health units in general hospitals, mental health outpatient facilities, mental health treatment facilities, and community residential facilities. Additionally, there should be an adequate number of beds for mental health in general hospitals and community residential facilities. In a nutshell, mental health care should be strengthened and given the same value and priority as physical health.

As in the case of health and well-being, the state of education and skills development among youth in the OIC countries presents both significant achievements and critical challenges. The progress made in certain areas highlights the potential for growth and development, while the persistent disparities underscore the need for targeted interventions and sustained efforts.

Many OIC countries have made considerable progress in improving literacy rates among the youth. This progress is crucial as literacy forms the foundation for further education and skill development. Furthermore, there has been a significant increase in the number of students enrolling in tertiary education. This growth indicates an increased value placed on higher education and its role in socio-economic development. The rise in enrolment rates, particularly among female students, signifies a positive shift towards women's empowerment in higher education, which can lead to a more diverse and skilled workforce.

The prioritisation of STEM education in many OIC countries is another noteworthy achievement. STEM graduates are essential for driving technological innovation and maintaining competitiveness in the global economy. The substantial proportions of STEM graduates in some countries highlight the strategic emphasis placed on these disciplines to fuel national growth.

The growth of TVET programs and the increase in vocational pupils in secondary education across OIC countries are also positive developments. TVET plays a critical role in preparing youth for the workforce by providing practical skills and training aligned with market demands. Additionally, the rise in both outbound and inbound student mobility is a promising trend. The increase in the number of students from OIC countries pursuing education abroad, as well as the growing number of international students studying within OIC countries, fosters global collaboration and enhances the exchange of knowledge and skills.

Despite these positive trends, significant challenges remain in youth's education and skills development. Disparities against females in education are a persistent issue. Literacy rates and enrolment in higher education are lower for females than for males in many OIC countries. Addressing these disparities requires targeted policies and programs to promote equality and empower women through education. Access to quality education is also uneven across the OIC region. While some countries boast high literacy rates and robust educational infrastructures, others, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, face significant barriers. These include economic constraints, lack of educational facilities, and socio-cultural factors that impede access to education for all.

High student-teacher ratios in many OIC countries negatively influence the quality of education. Overcrowded classrooms limit teachers' ability to provide individual attention and support to students, which can affect learning outcomes and overall educational quality. Moreover, the integration of technology in education is crucial for modern learning, yet access to digital tools and resources remains uneven. While some OIC countries have made significant strides in incorporating technology into their education systems, others struggle with limited access to electricity as well as computers, internet connectivity, and digital literacy programs.

Consequently, while the OIC countries have made commendable progress in certain areas of youth education and skills development, substantial work remains to address the existing challenges. By building on the achievements and addressing the disparities, the OIC countries can create a more inclusive, equitable, and effective educational landscape that empowers youth and drives sustainable socio-economic development. In this framework, the following recommendations could be considered:

Promoting a comprehensive approach to youth literacy. The presence of over 55 million illiterate youths across the OIC countries underscores the urgent need for policymakers to prioritise efforts to improve youth literacy. Continuing and growing investment and financial support in the education sectors by OIC countries is crucial. Additionally, advocating for policies that assess literacy development and supporting initiatives aimed at improving literacy rates at local, national, and international levels are essential steps. Policymakers should collaborate with educational institutions, private sector partners, and community organisations to develop and implement comprehensive outreach programs that ensure a coordinated and effective approach to increasing access to STEM education and career opportunities for youth. Education authorities should take proactive measures to alleviate high student-teacher ratios for better quality education, such as hiring more teachers and providing incentives for teachers to work in rural areas.

Integrating life skills and vocational education initiatives. Using the skills and talents of young people to their fullest potential provides contributions to economic development and eradicating poverty, which ally with the objectives of the OIC Youth Strategy and the Sustainable Development Goals. Bringing a wide range of stakeholders such as governmental, non-governmental and international organisations together to form policies, programs and actions in order to ensure that youth are better placed to safeguard and retain their skills, targeted vocational training programmes can be beneficial. The quality and accessibility of TVET education need to be increased not only for the future of youth but also for potential contribution to the economies of the member countries. Further collaboration among member countries, such as providing scholarships to students, facilitating their ability to study in different countries and ensuring diploma equivalence among member countries, fills the gaps and offers more opportunities to obtain more qualified education and job-relevant knowledge.

Increasing access to education through infrastructure and technology development. Increasing digitalisation in today's world is inevitable, and young people are more familiar with digital technologies than older generations. It is imperative to allocate resources to enhance technological infrastructure within educational institutions. Additionally, leveraging technology as a catalyst for educational advancement is recommended, alongside the implementation of proactive measures to address and mitigate any potential adverse consequences.

The economic participation of youth in the OIC countries is pivotal for ensuring sustainable economic growth and stability. Over the past decade, the youth labour force in these countries has demonstrated a consistent upward trend, with an increasing share in the global youth

labour force, indicating potential economic opportunities. However, this positive outlook is tempered by significant disparities against females and various socio-economic challenges that hinder full participation. Addressing these issues is essential for harnessing the demographic dividend and fostering inclusive economic growth.

Several key findings from this report highlight the complex landscape of youth economic participation in the OIC countries. These include the disadvantaged position of young women in the labour market, high unemployment and NEET rates, and persistent challenges in the entrepreneurial field. The unrelenting gap between males and females in labour force participation, employment, and unemployment rates underscores the socio-economic and cultural barriers that limit female participation. Despite progress, the male youth labour force remains nearly double that of females, necessitating targeted policies to support female employment and bridge this gap.

The OIC countries have successfully reduced youth unemployment rate in the recent years, maintaining the group average even slightly below the global average. Nevertheless, the high rates of youth unemployment, particularly for females, continue to pose significant challenges. While some countries have made strides in reducing unemployment rates, others continue to struggle with high levels of youth unemployment, with an estimated current youth unemployment of about 17 million across the OIC countries. More and effective interventions are required to create job opportunities and improve the employability of young people, especially females.

The increasing number of youth NEET is alarming, though there has been a slight reduction in the share of this group in the total youth population. This group is at a higher risk of social exclusion and facing economic disadvantages. The situation of females requires particular attention, with every two of five girls and young women are NEET. Strategies to engage NEET youth in productive activities are crucial for their integration into the labour market and overall economic development.

Promoting entrepreneurship among youth is a promising avenue for economic empowerment. Various initiatives have shown positive impacts on youth livelihoods and business expansion, notably in the startup investments in the fintech sector across the MENA region. However, challenges remain in ensuring access to financing and support for young entrepreneurs. By proactively tackling challenges, exploiting emerging opportunities, and fostering a suitable ecosystem for entrepreneurship, the OIC countries have the potential to become powerhouses of global innovation and economic dynamism.

In light of the above, to address the challenges and leverage opportunities to improve youth's economic participation and empowerment, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

Promote youth entrepreneurship and improve the public sector to support youth employment. The population of OIC countries is largely young and growing, which calls for policymakers to embark on creating more jobs for those reaching working age through entrepreneurship and improving the business climate. Member countries can

achieve this by implementing capacity-building programs on entrepreneurship, helping youth understand the new market dynamics and rapidly changing ecosystems and teaching them on how to navigate the challenges associated with entrepreneurship. It is also of paramount importance to strengthen support systems for young entrepreneurs by improving access to finance, providing business development services, and creating enabling environments for startups. Success stories from the Middle Eastern member countries can serve as models for other OIC countries. Additionally, the public sector could be improved to boost youth employment by creating strategic actions and policies aimed at providing more opportunities for young people within government roles, public services, and state-owned enterprises. The policies can include allocating employment quotas for young people, establishing local agencies that promote youth self-employment, suggesting supportive legislation, and reducing bureaucratic barriers for young entrepreneurs and investors.

Aligning educational curricula with labour market demands is essential for reducing structural youth unemployment. Sometimes labour market mismatches occur due to a scarcity of highly skilled job opportunities and inadequacies in educational systems. To address this issue, it is vital to reform admission policies in high learning institutions such as universities, technical institutions, and other tertiary institutions, enhance educational quality, and ensure that curricula are aligned with employer needs. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) also plays a crucial role in equipping young people with essential skills for the labour market, enabling them to compete effectively. At the Intra-OIC level, the OIC-TVET Strategic Roadmap 2020-2025 was introduced to enhance the quality of TVET programs in the OIC countries. This roadmap introduces innovative, effective, and efficient measures for teaching and learning in both formal and informal TVET sectors. To underscore the importance of resourceful young people for the labour market, member countries need to absorb this road into their individual national policies for implementation. Such collaborative efforts will contribute to equipping youths with the required skills in many sectors and reduce the increasing number of unemployed youth in the OIC countries.

Conduct extensive research to oversee youth employment and entrepreneurship initiatives emphasised in OIC strategy documents, namely the OIC Youth Strategy, the OIC 2025 Programme of Action, and the OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW). Policymakers in the OIC member states are urged to carry out comprehensive national diagnostic studies to evaluate the efficacy of the policies set in these documents, with a particular focus on the youth and their labour market achievements. Regular data collection and analysis will help in understanding the impact of interventions and making necessary adjustments. It is equally vital for member countries to establish their own national-level documents to support potential policies on youth employment, focusing on creating quality jobs for youth, particularly in high-growth sectors.

A. Major Country Groups used in the Report

OIC Countries (57)*					
Code	Name	Code	Name	Code	Name
AFG	Afghanistan	GUY	Guyana	PAK	Pakistan
ALB	Albania	IDN	Indonesia	PSE	Palestine
DZA	Algeria	IRN	Iran	QAT	Qatar
AZE	Azerbaijan	IRQ	Iraq	SAU	Saudi Arabia
BHR	Bahrain	JOR	Jordan	SEN	Senegal
BGD	Bangladesh	KAZ	Kazakhstan	SLE	Sierra Leone
BEN	Benin	KWT	Kuwait	SOM	Somalia
BRN	Brunei Darussalam	KGZ	Kyrgyz Republic	SDN	Sudan
BFA	Burkina Faso	LBN	Lebanon	SUR	Suriname
CMR	Cameroon	LBY	Libya	SYR	Syria*
TCD	Chad	MYS	Malaysia	TJK	Tajikistan
COM	Comoros	MDV	Maldives	TGO	Togo
CIV	Cote d'Ivoire	MLI	Mali	TUN	Tunisia
DJI	Djibouti	MRT	Mauritania	TUR	Türkiye
EGY	Egypt	MAR	Morocco	TKM	Turkmenistan
GAB	Gabon	MOZ	Mozambique	UGA	Uganda
GMB	Gambia	NER	Niger	ARE	United Arab Emirates
GIN	Guinea	NGA	Nigeria	UZB	Uzbekistan
GNB	Guinea-Bissau	OMN	Oman	YEM	Yemen

* Membership of Syria to the OIC is currently suspended.

Developed Countries* (41)			
Andorra	France	Lithuania	Slovak Republic
Australia	Germany	Luxembourg	Slovenia
Austria	Greece	Macao SAR	Spain
Belgium	Hong Kong SAR	Malta	Sweden
Canada	Iceland	Netherlands	Switzerland
Croatia	Ireland	New Zealand	Taiwan Province of China
Cyprus	Israel	Norway	United Kingdom
Czech Republic	Italy	Portugal	United States
Denmark	Japan	Puerto Rico	
Estonia	Korea	San Marino	
Finland	Latvia	Singapore	

* Refers to "advanced economies" as classified by the IMF. Last update April 2024.

Developing Countries

Includes all countries other than those classified as developed countries.

B. OIC Countries by Income Group

High Income* (8)

Bahrain	Guyana	Oman	Saudi Arabia
Brunei Darussalam	Kuwait	Qatar	United Arab Emirates

Upper Middle Income* (14)

Albania	Indonesia	Libya	Türkiye
Algeria	Iraq	Malaysia	Turkmenistan
Azerbaijan	Iran	Maldives	
Gabon	Kazakhstan	Suriname	

Lower Middle Income* (20)

Bangladesh	Egypt	Morocco	Tunisia
Benin	Guinea	Nigeria	Uzbekistan
Cameroon	Jordan	Pakistan	
Comoros	Kyrgyz Republic	Palestine	
Côte d'Ivoire	Lebanon	Senegal	
Djibouti	Mauritania	Tajikistan	

Low Income* (15)**

Afghanistan	Guinea-Bissau	Sierra Leone	Togo
Burkina Faso	Mali	Somalia	Uganda
Chad	Mozambique	Sudan	Yemen
Gambia	Niger	Syria**	

* Country grouping by income level is based on World Bank classification by GNI per capita in 2023. Accordingly;

- Low-income countries: with a GNI per capita of \$1,145 or less,
- Lower middle-income countries: with a GNI per capita between \$1,146 and \$4,515,
- Upper middle-income countries: with a GNI per capita between \$4,516 and \$14,005, and
- High-income countries: with a GNI per capita of \$14,005 or more.

** Membership of Syria to the OIC is currently suspended.

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