
Youth Perspective - 2023

09-07-2023

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Summary : According to the survey findings, young people in the Kurdistan Region have a significant financial, social, and even safety bond with their families. A remarkable 90% of young people do not want to leave their families, and 52% rely on them for financial support. When faced with difficulties, 66% said they would seek assistance from family and relatives, while just 33% would turn to formal government organizations.

The widespread assumption is that today's youngsters can be a "seismograph" for predicting societal futures. By observing the behaviors and actions of young individuals, we can acquire valuable insights that offer glimpses into the future trajectory of society. In the Kurdistan Region, 28% of the population, or 1,727,903 people, are between the ages of 15 and 29. Furthermore, 35% of the region's population accounting for 2,159,879 people, is under the age of 15. These figures indicate that the dynamics of the young population in the region will wield significant influence over the course of the next two decades and beyond. These numbers show that the region's young population dynamics will be crucial for at least the next two decades.

From an economic standpoint, this implies the formation of a new workforce, assuming that social and economic policies are put in place to encourage their development. If the contrary occurs, the region's expanding young population could lead to political and social transformations. Younger people have more expectations for resource allocation, employment possibilities, and political participation. As a result, it is critical to comprehend young people's perspectives on economic, social, and political concerns. In this regard, the Rudaw Research Center conducted a survey in June titled "Youth Perspective in the Kurdistan Region 2023," which provides us with valuable insights.

Youth transformation and Youth Culture

According to the survey findings, young people in the Kurdistan Region have a significant financial, social, and even safety bond with their families. A remarkable 90% of young people do not want to leave their families, and 52% rely on them for financial support. When faced with difficulties, 66% said they would seek assistance from family and relatives, while just 33% would turn to formal government organizations.

These findings suggest that the family has a considerable influence on forming young people's perceptions in Kurdistan. However, it is crucial to highlight that many parents in the region are illiterate. According to the poll, 67.3% of respondents' mothers and 45.8% of respondents' fathers are illiterate. Furthermore, 39.8% of fathers have less than a high school diploma, and only 4.7% have a high school diploma. As a result, traditional cultural conventions heavily influence the ideas passed down to youth from their families. Concepts like youth sub-culture or resistance to societal values alone cannot fully explain the behavior of young people in the Kurdistan Region. Instead, social influence and other structural elements must be considered, with the family at the forefront. Kurdistan's youth scene is comparable to Iraq as a whole, according to a December 2022 study performed by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung; while 86% of Iraqi youngsters trust their family, only 28% trust the government, army, and police together. Young people tend to perceive the family as the most trustworthy unit due to past uncertainties such as the 2003 war, the fight against ISIS, and political, economic, and security instability.

According to the Rudaw Research Center survey, 83.9% of young people prioritise personal liberty. However, 85.5% believe that girls and women should not travel alone. Concerns about religion, culture, and gossip from people drive this belief, with a lesser fraction concerned about safety and the availability of public transportation. Young people favour individual liberties despite being impacted by the globalization of neoliberal values. On the other hand, they reject broader support for all liberties influenced by tradition.

As a result, the remark "you can no longer predict the behaviour of young people straightforwardly; transitions can be complex and unexpected" also applies to the Kurdistan Region.

Gender gap in the Workforce and the Economy

According to the poll results, most young people in the region work in the private sector. They do, however, see this as a

significant obstacle. Unfortunately, the private sector has not provided attractive possibilities for young people, prompting many to seek employment in the public sector due to concerns about the future, inequality in private sector opportunities, and low wages. The government should pay more attention to this issue. The challenge to be addressed is how the private sector may be expanded and recognized in a way that provides certainty to young people.

When asked why it is difficult for young people to find work, 39.9% said it is because of difficult working conditions, 30.5% said it is because of a lack of foreign language proficiency, 23% said it is because of a lack of experience, 13% said it is because of a lack of current skills required for specific occupations, 11.9% said the available positions are unsuitable for them, and 13% said they have no idea how to look for work. These results show that the most critical issue is determining how to improve the abilities and talents of the younger generation, particularly in the fast-increasing field of artificial intelligence, which has the potential to impact the labour market dramatically.

What do young people in the Kurdistan Region do in their leisure time? According to the poll results, their weekly activities, such as going to the market, sleeping, and visiting mosques and religious places, do not contribute to their economic preparation for the labour market. Furthermore, 79.9% of young people use social media in their free time.

Another primary concern is the gender gap in the labour market. According to the poll, only 43.9% of young people are employed, with 61.5% of men and only 16.1% of women working. This illustrates that women and girls are underrepresented in the labour force, as they are increasingly involved in unpaid work, complicating development strategies.

Youth and Politics

There has been a minor increase in young people's interest in political participation. The survey indicates that over 72% of eligible individuals expressed their willingness to vote if granted the opportunity. This figure is higher than the total turnout of 59% in the most recent Kurdistan parliamentary elections and approximately 30% higher than in the Iraqi parliamentary elections in 2021. The combination of low overall turnout rates and an increasing young people in the Kurdistan Region makes their role in the next elections crucial.

According to the survey, 466,533 young people out of 1,727,903 do not want to vote, accounting for approximately 27%. Approximately 1,244,090 people said they would vote if given the chance, accounting for almost 72%. Furthermore, 33% of those who stated a willingness to vote, or around 410,549 persons, decided not to share their voting preference. Those who said they would not vote cited mistrust in political parties, lack of transparency in elections, and lack of suitable candidates. Of course, these preferences are subject to change until the election is over. As a result, the combined number of those who say they will not vote and those who do not publicly announce their voting preference may result in surprises in the upcoming election.

Conclusion

We may deduce from the Youth Perspective Survey 2023 findings, which directly questioned 1,122 people in the Kurdistan Region, that young people confront substantial economic instability and reliance on their families. Because of their tremendous commitment to family and narrow social networks, they frequently embrace conservative viewpoints about social issues. Comprehensive socioeconomic strategies are required to alter the weekly activities that young people engage in with their families and friends to encourage them to focus on their health, economic prospects, and personal growth rather than being constrained to specific daily activities.