



Concept note

Regional Meeting on Youth Employment

24-25 November 2017

Rabat, Morocco

Background:

Arab societies are young. Youth of ages 15–29 make up around 30 percent of the population in the region and are forecasted to be in a speedy proliferation given that the region hosts the highest population growth rates in the world. As the 2016 Arab Human Development Report points out, this demographic mass of youth that are at the prime of their working and productive abilities, is a huge potential and thus can be a major mean of change towards sustainable development, only if the right policies are put in place to empower them.

Empowering youth starts initially with recognizing their needs and protecting and fulfilling their rights and freedoms. In return, responding to their needs requires adapted capacity-building opportunities and the implementation of policies providing future possibilities. To be effectively hearing the voices of youth and engaging them directly in shaping their own future is vital. Furthermore, empowering youth necessitates moving beyond isolated youth programmes and projects towards a comprehensive look at the issue of sustainable development and adopting reforms to address structural challenges faced at diverse levels, being economic, social or political.

Nevertheless taking into consideration the role of youth, particularly their eagerness to engage and mobilize during the protests in the Arab region, one can conclude that for years long, social and economic policies implemented have not necessarily empowered but rather disempowered the youth. Their voices, thus needs, remained 'ignored' and sometimes silenced with a restricted civic participation. However, it is important to note that diverse youth-specific initiatives were taken in the region as well but were still unable to address key challenges for empowering youth. For instance, there has been national surveys undertaken on youth (in Egypt and Iraq), a Ministry for Youth was established (Kuwait), some national youth development strategies or actions plans



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were adopted in some other countries (Lebanon and Morocco)¹, etc. Though, the efficiency of such initiatives turned out to be only limited. Therefore as the AHDR 2016 survey reflects, the youth continue to have worrisome perspectives for development in the region. They identify economic situation (poverty, unemployment and price increases) as the top challenge (75.77%), followed with corruption (14.78%), stability and security (2.99%), and democracy at (2.35%)².

The youth in the region was chanting, *Bread, Dignity and Social Justice* during the numerous protests in several countries and were calling for reforms on social and economic policies. Their calls reflected all the marginalization they have been facing, despite the high educational levels they acquired. They remained with no opportunities to engage in the labor market, with the lack of employment generation policies in productive sectors in many countries of the region. As the statistics reveal, the labor force participation of youth remains low, around 24% and worse for women standing at 18% only, with high unemployment rates at around 30%. In turn, faced with this massive unemployment, young Arabs are mostly forced to take up jobs in the informal sector with “low wages, precarious work conditions and lack of social protection”³. The lack of stability and job security also force them to immigrate and have their brains drain out of their home country, negatively impacting the level and quality of human capital in the region. The estimated loss of 10-15% of young Arabs in 2012 has even increased following the protests in the region to 20-25%, as the youth look for ‘better prospects’⁴ in other countries.

The States in the Arab region bear the primarily responsibility to create decent work conditions for the youth and to ensure that the right to work, alongside other human rights (i.e. the rights to education, health and freedom of association, expression and assembly, etc.) are guaranteed for the youth without any discrimination. However, the challenges faced in this regard require a comprehensive response to address them, including revising national policies and ensuring regional and international partnerships that serve the common interests rooted in peoples’ rights. This necessitates questioning the content and mechanisms of cooperation and partnership

¹ ESCWA Policy Brief, Reaping the Rewards of Demographic Transitions: Investing in Arab Youth, Social Policy Brief, No. 7 available at <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/reaping-rewards-demographic-transitions-investing-arab-youth>

² <http://www.arab-hdr.org/reports/2016/english/ExecutiveENG.pdf?download>

³ ESCWA (2012). Integrated Social Policy Report IV: Labour Markets and Labour Market Policy in the ESCWA Region (E/ESCWA/SDD/2011/3), p. 23. New York and Geneva: United Nations

⁴ <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/un-arab-brain-drain-accelerates-after-arab-spring-1752815577>





between Arab countries and the European Union as well. The revision of the European Neighborhood policy in 2011 and later in 2015 took all these calls into consideration. Actually, the European Union, with the adoption of the revised European Neighborhood Policy put a clear emphasis on the need to engage with young people and on the important role of the “prospects for youth”, as this is key to stabilizing societies in the neighborhood. Particularly on employment and employability the new policy had a strong focus on youth, noting that the EU can help improve the employability of the local workforce, and help to focus efforts on the development of skills and competences and to create opportunities particularly for young men and women. Initiatives on education and trainings in this regard are many.

Nevertheless, as the AHDR summarizes, the region needs a more comprehensive approach; a new development model that focuses on enhancing the capabilities of young people, unleashing their energy and expanding the opportunities available to them, thus allowing them more freedom to shape their own futures and actively contributing to their development in their societies and countries.”⁵ This, in turn, envisages revising the macro-economic policies to enhance inclusiveness and equal opportunities and to ensure availability and quality of policies in education, health and employment in order to strengthen the capacities of the youth, empower them, and foster their participation⁶.

Objectives

Within the framework of a project on *“Decent Work, Social Protection and Freedom of Association in the Middle East and North Africa: Mobilizing for Social Justice by strengthening and promoting CSOs, social movements and the (independent) trade unions’ role in reforms and democratic changes”*, a two-day regional meeting will be organized in Rabat, Morocco on November 24 and 25, 2017.

Following the Steering Group meeting held in 2016, the main theme of the workshop is defined as ‘Youth and Decent Work’.

The workshop will bring together civil society representatives and the partners of the project to discuss key issues pertaining to youth in the region and the EU policies’ impacts on youth

⁵ <http://www.arab-hdr.org/reports/2016/english/AHDR2016En.pdf?download>

⁶ <http://www.arab-hdr.org/reports/2016/english/AHDR2016En.pdf?download>





empowerment. The conference will consider youth as key mediators of change in the region and will discuss policy recommendations to tackle the challenges faced by the youth and towards achieving sustainable development. An advocacy session will be allocated to share experiences and best practices on advocacy but also to plan towards advocating on youth and decent work at an EU level.

Participants

A steering group has been established for organizing the event; composed of the following organizations: SOLIDAR, ANND (Regional partner), MPDL (Focal point in Morocco), ESPACE ASSOCIATIF (Member of ANND in Morocco), BADESS, REMAJEC (Moroccan members of the program). The Steering Group will be planning the conference and will nominate a list of participants. Participants will be selected based on specific criteria, respecting age, gender and geographical representation. Expertise and experience on the theme, namely Youth and Decent work, including research, analysis, monitoring and advocacy will be an essential determinant as well.



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