

# Report of the Regional Meeting on Youth Employment 24-25 November 2017 Rabat, Morocco





## Day I: 24 November 2017 Training on Advocacy

The Regional Meeting on Youth Employment organized within the framework of the project entitled *“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”*, started with a half-day training on advocacy on November 24, 2017. This training was organized in response to the need identified by project partners during the last Steering Group meeting that took place in 2016 in Brussels, Belgium. The training was delivered by Mr. Hassane Machhour, from ENPI Civil Society Facility- South.

The trainer started welcoming all participants and acknowledging that each of the project partners have a different level of experience on advocacy; the training provides an occasion mainly for experience-sharing, identifying challenges for advocacy and listening best-cases/success stories.

With a group exercise, the trainer first let the participants discuss different definitions of advocacy and identify the most relevant for them. Each group had roundtable discussions on advocacy, their organization’s approach and agreed on one of the options given to them. This exercise led groups elaborate on issues that advocacy needs a cause, a target and an objective which is mainly to achieve change in policies for public interest.

In a follow-up exercise groups categorized steps of advocacy. It was commonly raised by the participants that identifying problems and formulating the issue to be tackled during the advocacy is the initial step and should be supported with research and data collection. Identification of targets is equally important, for formulating key messages to be delivered and changes to be advocated for. With this exercise groups exchanged opinions on common challenges faced during advocacy. They have raised the lack of financial support for advocacy work, donor conditionality, and lack of coherency among civil society on key issues as challenges faced.

The training included experience sharing from groups on their successful campaigning and advocacy as well. Women’s groups’ efforts from Lebanon were presented, particularly in relation to the abolishment of Penal Code Article 522 and child marriage. The use of contradictory images and engaging social media were presented as tools contributing to the success of the advocacy.

The training closed by a brief discussion on the need for regional advocacy and issues to be elaborated. In relation to the main theme of the regional meeting, namely youth and employment, groups raised the importance of linking project partners’ national level work to regional level and the necessity to do advocacy at EU level given the policy impacts on employment and youth.





## Day II: 25 November 2017 Regional Meeting on Youth Employment

### **Session I: Opening**

The opening session included presentations from the Steering Group members established to organize the Regional meeting. This included SOLIDAR, ANND, ESPACE Associatif, BADES and REMAJEC.

SOLIDAR representative Oonagh Aitken after welcoming all project partners from seven Southern Neighborhood countries (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine), noted that the meeting provides an occasion to build synergies among civil society organizations and exchanging views. She noted that youth employment but also youth mobilization are major challenges, with youth employment being challenged both qualitatively (no decent work) and quantitatively speaking (high level of unemployment). Bihter Moschini from ANND stressed that job creation is a priority in the region, including by the engagement of EU and European development bank. However she noted that although shifting from focusing only on growth to include job creation is welcome, the types of jobs created and sectors that are prioritized and invested should be well assessed for addressing unemployment. The strong push on privatization; public-private partnerships should be also considered. Ms. Houdna doss Benanin from Espace Associatif recalled the key role of youth in ensuring democratic changes and the importance of such meeting to share experiences and views. Mr. Faissal Aoussar, Vice President of BADES, focused on the profound change within Morocco and that it is the time to start a new social dialogue to enable young people to express their full potential. The transition to democracy can only succeed by working in partnership for inclusive development to ensure fundamental rights (civil and political, economic and social rights) and to encourage active citizenship that gives the least favored opportunity to express their ideas and participate in the development of projects. He listed several factors that hamper promotion of sustainable and decent work in Morocco, including the absence of a consultation framework between the different actors (Administration, Private Sector, Civil Society, etc.); lack of a unified information/data system on the labor market; the plurality of institutional actors in charge of the public service of youth employment and insufficient incentives to promote employment (tax, property, financial, regulatory...etc.). Abdellah Ahjam from REMAJEC gave a brief introduction about his organization, which is established to deal with youth issues and aims at ensuring that young people are a key player in sustainable human development. Stressing the importance of youth councils, Mr. Ahjam highlighted the need for establishing a youth policy that will make young people at the center and consider their issues as a top priority. He pointed the importance of consultation at national level, but as well between both shores of the Mediterranean on this critical issue.





## **Session II: Defining decent work for youth: Understanding global context and formulating what works for youth in the region**

The session moderated by Zahra Bazzi from ANND focused on the global context on decent work and development. In light of the ILO and Agenda 2030 framework, the needs for national policies promoting youth employment were elaborated mainly focusing on the need for revising social and economic policies implemented.

As a first intervention, Samia Ouzgane, ILO Morocco representative, presented the regional context noting that after the Arab Spring there have been strong focus on employment, social protection, labor rights particularly for the young generation. She added that the adoption of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals is key and should be considered when understanding regional context, as now with SDG 8 there is a universal commitment to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”. She then introduced the ILO Road Map on youth employment that was adopted on September 17, 2017. This initiative includes Morocco, Algeria, Sudan, Tunisia, Egypt and Mauritania and aims at prioritizing youth employment in the next five years adopting a systematic approach to:

- ensure the commitment of social partners and other stakeholders throughout the youth employment strategy cycle,
- Reinforce information systems (age, sex, etc.)
- Examine each of the available policy options and ensure balance in the economic, social and environmental levels
- Promote and establish partnerships and regional integration
- Develop employment strategies for global and coherent youth, (taking into account new and emerging issues in the world of work).

Mrs. Ouzgane then elaborated different components within the road map, namely economic policies, employment policy and social protection (including the matching between job market and social protection measures), employability enhancing the transition from school to work and entrepreneurship. She has stressed the importance of participation and respect, protection and fulfilment of the rights of the youth. Encouraging youth participation in unions, considering youth as a component within social dialogue, and promotion of equity, non-discrimination at work, equal work- equal pay, and maternity protection were raised for the successful implementation of policies for youth employment.





Mr. Ahmad Awad (Phenix Center, Jordan) presented the situation in Jordan. He noted that whereas laws and regulations exist the main challenge is the lack of implementation, therefore for addressing unemployment we would need political solutions for decent work. Based on a recent study done by Phenix Center he has presented that the youth, at least 25% of 20-30 years old, would like to leave the country facing unemployment. With regard to the education policy and labor market needs, there remains the mismatch and the lack of quality education. He has also pointed that the situation is worse for young women, as discriminative labor conditions force them leave the labor market. He concluded stressing the importance of ensuring the rights of people, particularly for participation, freedom of association, expression and assembly to formulate policies that correspond to the needs of the youth.

Mr. Hasan Barghouti (Democracy and Workers' Rights Center, Palestine) focused on the fragile context in Palestine and the high unemployment rate. He presented statistics with regard to youth unemployment noting that around 39% is unemployed, with a 56% unemployment level for graduate students. He pointed that whereas each year around 41000 graduates join the labor market, the market can create only around 8000 jobs. This shows the mismatch between the social and economic policies implemented for job creation and education system. Mr. Amjad Shawa (PNGO, Gaza) joined the session through Skype and raised particularly the situation in Gaza. He noted that the Israeli occupation remains as the key challenge for youth in Palestine and in Gaza specifically where the infrastructure is totally destroyed and the young generation needs to cope with this harsh reality. The occupation violates their right to development as well as the right to nationality, having an ID (blocked in Gaza) and the right to move. Under such a context the youth remains desperate and try to move out of Gaza (through scholarships gained). However the blockage prevents their right to education as well. On the other hand, restrictions imposed on industrial materials and for productive sector destroy the economy. Mr. Shawa recalled the immediate need for ending the Israeli occupation for ensuring the rights of Palestinian, as well as Palestinian youth.

Imed Zouaoui (Tunisian Forum for Youth Empowerment) covered the Tunisian case. In Tunisia, like in other Arab countries, high unemployment exists, standing at 50.2%. He listed the key challenges in the labor sector in Tunisia including lack of social dialogue, and empowerment, the absence of adequate social security, sexual harassment and verbal violence (even more when it comes to women). He noted that vocational trainings, as a solution are not effective given that they do not match the market needs. He noted series of policy changes needed in order to address unemployment. In this regard, he recalled the importance of creating opportunities and investment for job creation. This should take into account the needs for job in remote areas and in productive sectors. In relation Mr. Zouaoui noted that SMEs





play a role but the social security of the self-employed people should be addressed through social protection policies implemented.

During the open discussion, participants elaborated on the role of private sector and its impact on employment conditions at national level. Whereas public-private partnerships are promoted in the region at national level and by international actors, it has severe impacts on the rights of citizens, as it turns out to be privatization of public sector mainly. Furthermore without enough safeguards, PPP projects, especially in sectors like health, education hamper their equal access and thus violate their economic and social rights. Furthermore, the PPPs bring together contractual employment approach which do not have decent work conditions and social security. Participants called for effective implementation of the already existing ILO framework on decent work and the need that the countries in the region should adopt and implement related ILO Conventions. The need for social dialogue, enhancing the bargaining power of trade and labor unions was raised as well in order to ensure revision of the current employment policies implemented. Private sector, offered as a panacea for job creation and liberalization of the job market was criticized by the participants noting as well the lack of decent work conditions in the private sector. Furthermore, they have noted that Self-entrepreneurship for youth has to be assessed cautiously, given that without capacity-building on entrepreneurship/management/financing...etc. as well as on sectorial analysis, youth cannot come up with their innovative solutions/ideas and start-up businesses that create sustainable jobs for them.

### **Session III: Understanding regional development challenges and youth employment:**

The session was moderated by Elvira Giraldez Casal del Rey- NPA and discussed a key issue in relation to youth employment in the region, namely informal labor. Dr. Faouzi Boukhreiss from Morocco, and author of the ANND Arab Watch Report 2016 on Informal Labor Morocco session, first focused on the need to identify youth, for addressing youth employment issue. He noted that definition of youth changes from country to country, and if we need to adopt policies addressing youth employment, we need to define what constitutes youth in our country. For example, given long-years of education possibilities in Morocco, a person around 40 can be considered still young and integrated into the labor sector accordingly. Nevertheless, he raised that the approach to conceptualization of youth should not be problem-oriented, as it would be limited. Dr. Boukhreiss elaborated on the informal labor as a key challenge for youth in the region. Most of the jobs available for young generation is precarious and not stable. Lack of sustainable and decent employment generation in the region leads young generation to focus on informal labor despite low wages and lack of social protection.





Mahmoud Hishmah (West and East Center for Sustainable Development) tackled the informal labor for youth in Jordan, noting as well that when there are no jobs, informal labor is the only option for young generation; that occupies around 26%. In addition he tackled the role of intermediaries/nepotism and corruption in the labor market, and noted that without the intermediaries you cannot get a job, thus informal labor remains as the only option. He raised that despite the huge youth population in the region and in Jordan, we cannot benefit from their potential. He noted the importance of volunteering- in order to engage youth, and that civil society plays an important role in this regard.

Mona Ezzat (New Women Foundation, Egypt) provided a gender-perspective on informal labor in Egypt. She noted that given that public sector is knocked down in Egypt and private sector is not capable of generating decent and sustainable work conditions, informal labor becomes an option for youth. Although there is a discussion ongoing in order to regulate informal labor, particular issues with regard to women's rights should be considered. First of all, unemployment rate of women is higher in Egypt, and increases with higher education levels. Traditional conceptualization of women, for housecare/mother only becomes another issue, where their unpaid labor is not taken into consideration. Similarly women is considered to be a cheap labor, and violations of their rights with regard to equal pay is not considered. In this respect, Mrs. Ezzat pointed the need for a comprehensive employment policy revision that addresses all these concerns. She noted that initiatives encouraging self-employment (i.e. banks/financial support given to women etc.) would not bring solutions unless organized in coordination with all relevant stakeholders (i.e. Ministry of Labor, civil society etc.). These initiatives would not be successful for women's rights and addressing inequalities and poverty if they omit social security component.

Miriam Jaballah (ADO+, Tunisia) shared ADO+ experience in Tunisia, a country where before the revolutions unemployment levels were high, including among qualified youth but even after the revolutions no radical shift has occurred. She has noted that vocational training initiatives do not address the youth needs. On the other hand, with high school dropout rates, informal labor has an absorption power not only for illiterate population, but also for qualified young generation as well, for the sake of generating income. Given the particular case of Tunisia Mrs. Jaballah focused on the issue of illegal migration to European Union and pointed the decline of economic indicators, political stagnation, increasing unemployment, poverty and inequalities as a push factor for many in the country for illegal migration. Youth and young women constitute an important portion of those illegally immigrating. Nevertheless, she noted that the remedies provided by the government are not specific, they do not address the root causes but bring only quick remedies. Undertaking reforms, starting with the education





sector is key for addressing youth unemployment and enhancing social dialogue with all relevant stakeholders - principally youth is needed in order to adopt a comprehensive strategy.

Mr. Mohammed Elfeel (Ibn Roshd) presented his personal experience as a youth from Egypt, who had a high education level, yet had to change several times his carrier, faced challenges during his professional life and chose the civil society work at the end, engaging and contributing to have positive results. He introduced the Ibn Roshd project that focuses on the need for a non-formal education to fill the gap between the labor market and education. The project focused on creating youth as a change maker and enabling platforms for discussions between the youth. Participants agreed on the need to share success stories of youth engagement projects, and the need for ensuring youth engaging in dialogue.

During the open discussion, participants raised the need for advocacy at a regional level, as most of the challenges identified are similar and reflect the necessity to revise social and economic policies implemented. Given the lack of integration of youth in policies and youth being excluded in societies, sharing youth success stories should be considered by civil society, as well as engaging them directly in civil society work. In response to illegal migration, security and terrorism, participants discussed if there was a direct correlation between extremism and unemployment. Whereas there were diverse opinions, it was agreed that unemployment should be at the core of response to ensure stability in the region.

#### **Session IV: Trade and investment and privatization policies and the impact on decent work:**

The session moderated by Maurice Claassens focused on the impact of trade, investment and privatization policies on decent work in the region and particularly on the youth employment.

Hassan Sherry (ANND Expert) started the session with a key presentation on neoliberalism policies impacts in the region. He noted that the region has a high growth rate, which creates pressure on societies and represents a heavy burden on state institutions and basic infrastructure. Around 60 percent of the population in Arab countries is under 30 years of, that face widening income disparities, increasing inequality of opportunity, slowing inclusive growth and shrinking job opportunities. In many Arab countries, they receive poor education, do not find suitable employment, or have appropriate health care. In this context youth unemployment is a pressing challenge for the region, whereby at least 60 million new jobs should be created by 2020. In light of this regional analysis, Mr. Sherry focused on understanding the underlying determinants of the poor employment records in the Arab region, particularly among the youth and the necessary remedies to overturn the trend of soaring youth unemployment. He presented the shift towards neoliberal policy choices, noting that from post-independence years during which the state delivered social welfare packages, we moved to mid-1980s







and together with declining global oil prices, shrinking investment in job-generating activities and together with slowdown in growth. As a consequence, Arab countries started to face serious foreign debt and balance of payment crises. This brought together inability to sustain redistributive commitments (including public employment) and series of economic reform (proposed by IMF and World Bank) were implemented.

Mr. Sherry listed key components of this reform packages that include:

- Macroeconomic stabilization (massive cuts in government expenditures, including subsidies and wages; new and broader taxes, including indirect taxes);
- Trade liberalization (including elimination of Non-tariff barriers) + large currency devaluations;
- Investment liberalization (ownership laws, particularly in real estate, finance and telecommunications)
- Labor market deregulation (including flexible labor contracts);
- Privatization of state owned enterprises

Accordingly these reform packages fostered a socio-economic chasm across the population and increased inequalities. Whereas they encouraged consumerism they led to decrease in productivity and long-term investment in human capabilities and productive capital. This neo-liberal shift in the Arab economies failed to reverse the dominant trends of declining productivity growth, rising poverty and inequality, as well as increasing unemployment, particularly among the youth. In relation, Mr. Sherry focused on the need to adopt an alternative development model that incorporates several aspects as follows:

- Monetary and Exchange Rate policy: Should play an accommodative role to less tight fiscal policies, with a strong focus on investments and strengthening of productive capacities. The monetary and exchange policy should also ensure the availability of liquidity at affordable rates to stimulate private investment in order to create more employment. An exchange rate management strategy should be in place in order to attain a stable and relatively competitive exchange rate in order to foster export competitiveness and economic diversification.
- Fiscal Policy: Reversing 'pro-cyclical' fiscal policy (containing fiscal deficits during recessions): This can be made possible by increasing in the tax base through progressive direct taxation, and fairer indirect taxation
- Structural Policy: Sectoral/activity industrial policy to unleash potential for productivity enhancement in order to ensure employment generation. Furthermore an institutionalized





process of negotiation among the different stakeholders should be established in a way that balances the economic, social and political components of the proposed agenda, and allows for better capturing

Asaad Sammour (The Lebanese Observatory for the Rights of Workers and Employees) presented the case of Lebanon and stated that the neoliberal economic system is unable to generate jobs. The Lebanese economy creates about 3,000 jobs per year whereas graduates of educational institutions reach about 45,000 graduates annually, creating a big gap between supply and demand. The inability of the labor market to produce adequate regular employment opportunities to balance supply and demand drives a large proportion of young people to engage in informal markets. The informal market is characterized by lack of skill and low productivity. The worker is denied entry into the National Social Security Fund and is paid a low wage and does not benefit from the gains stipulated in the Lebanese Labor Law. Paradoxically, the informal nature of Lebanon is not limited to the private sector but also to the public sector. Mr. Sammour noted that the phenomenon of informal labor in the public sector came as a result of two decisions taken by successive Lebanese governments: the first decision is to stop employment in the public sector, and this decision is based on the directives of the World Bank, rejecting any role of the public sector. The second is the implementation of privatization.

Hoda Kamel (ECESR, Egypt) initially introduced the documentary done by the ECESR, as part of the project implementation. The documentation filmed workers and their calls against privatization policies in Egypt. Mrs. Hoda noted that whereas public-private partnerships is commonly implemented in the region, in practice it means the ownership from public to private. She noted that this approach is based on consuming the assets that were achieved from previous generation. Mrs. Kamel, referring to several cases in the documentary demonstrated the negative impact of privatization on labor market, and how systematically privatization violated the rights of workers. She noted that in many cases corporatization of companies turned them from skilled labor to unskilled labor with limited compensation provided. She highlighted that the discourse on privatization for job generation should be correctly assessed and there should be rights-based impact studies on the privatization before and after. Participants were invited to watch the ECESR documentary at the end of the session as well as receiving its link to further disseminate.

Mrs. Rahma from CTUWS joined the discussion, to share further information on the Egyptian context. She highlighted the lack of employment generating investments in the country, whereas the focus remains on cheap labor. She elaborated as well on the trade union law in Egypt that limits collective bargaining, undermine independence of trade unions. Further interventions noted that many states





chose and implement neo-liberal policies and that we should focus on the impacts of these policies on employment, mainly to assess what kind of jobs (quality) are created.

### **Session V: Empowering youth: Youth mobilization, participation**

Rosalind Duignan-Pearson (Volonteuropé) moderated the session, which focused on the level of youth engagement in national policy making spaces as an enabling factor to raise their concerns and ensure that their needs are met. She has invited the panelists to share their experiences and best practices of youth mobilization.

Safieh Khaled (Starts of Hope) in her intervention shared a video with the participants. The video displayed demonstrated empowerment of a young disabled Palestinian woman, through a project implemented by the Starts of Hope. The project was shared as a success story engaging youth and empowering them, whereas Mrs. Safieh noted that as in many countries, in Palestine disabled young women face discrimination and are discriminated in the labor market as considered as unskilled labor. Nevertheless, as the project proved, when given opportunities and supported disabled youth can be very productive and contribute to development. This empowerment should be supported with policies and regulations (i.e. labor code) and enhancing unionizing for disabled youth groups.

Mr. Salvatore Marra (CGIL, Italy) shared his experience as an activist and trade unionist from the European side. He noted that freedom of associations and assembly are freedoms that he could enjoy—without being fired or harassed – and are key for ensuring youth empowerment. Nevertheless, with the European crisis, youth unemployment levels remained high, whereas Europe started to witness increasing young people not in education and in poverty. In respect, there was an increase for short-term precarious work conditions and lack of trust by young generation to any institution. After presenting the European context, he then shared his success and failure for youth empowerment. He noted that the big success was that youth could obtain a voting within the European Trade Union Confederation, thus ensuring that trade unions actually reflect the diversity of the workforce (youth being a key component of this workforce). This is important also because any social dialogue process should represent the voice of young Europeans, thus enabling them platforms to formulate/engage is important. Nevertheless, he also noted that a related failure is the lack of engaging non-organized youth movements.

Tamam Mroue (Mouvement Social, Lebanon) focused on the necessary elements to mobilize youth and challenges faced in this regard. She noted that volunteering is key for mobilization of youth and young





generation to be more involved and active in their communities. Yet to ensure this, and to enhance volunteering, we need to ensure preconditions including:

- Respecting desires and abilities of the youth, and always starting from issues that concern them directly
- Always do the link between their roles and the public sphere
- Adopt participatory / cross cutting approach to empower the youth, in different methods with main focus on two topics: active citizenship and critical thinking

Furthermore she identified challenges for engaging youth. She noted that volunteering/ mobilizing youth is not a project or set of activities, it is a political decision at organization level, an internal dynamic and approach. She underlined the importance of transparency and flexibility as the most attractive elements for youth to attend the CSOs but as well as challenges faced. In relation, corruption and lack of freedom of speech are the main reasons of the elimination of youth from the CSOs. She noted as well the difference age approach in voting and joining the CSOs, (21 for former and 18 for the latter) as a challenge to be addressed.

Lastly, Ahmet Dakir (REMAJEC, Morocco) shared Moroccan experience and REMAJEC success stories on youth mobilization. As previous speakers, he noted the need to reinforce the participation of young people into the political life. He shared one of the key priority work of REMAJEC, namely the youth councils which aim to reinforce youth participation, capacities, personal development, expression, synergies, and communications.

### **Wrap-up and conclusions**

Moroccan steering group partners (REMAJEC, BADESS and ESPACE Associatif) closed the Regional meeting noting that the regional work in follow up of the main issues raised in the meeting would be key. They have acknowledged that youth employment is relevant for both shores of the Mediterranean, a common denominator that should be addressed within the partnership as well. In this regard, they recalled the importance of continuous advocacy on the key recommendations formulated during the discussions. They recommended to follow up, ensure the continuity of the work done at regional level as well to plan for 2018 EU advocacy, organize side meetings at EP on the subject and to ensure wide dissemination of the outcomes of this meeting (i.e. press release....etc.). Alice Tawil from SOLIDAR invited all project partners to contribute to Social Rights Monitor tool (shared previously with all participants) and online Working Group discussions in order to continue exchange between project partners but as well to identify key messages that would be used during the 2018 advocacy work.





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