



International Labour Office

YOUTH
Employment Programme

Regional Report: National Events on Youth Employment in the Arab States



1. Introduction

The Regional report is the main input to the global report that summarizes the national events that have taken place in the regions. It highlights the region's youth employment challenges affecting both quantity and quality of jobs for young people and channels the voices of young people concerning the current youth employment crisis and their aspirations in the pursuit of decent work.

The Report should provide information on how the following questions were reflected in the events:

- i) What are the main challenges young people face in the labour market in the region?
- ii) How were the challenges discussed during the national events?
- iii) What action was identified to improve decent work prospects of young people?
- iv) What partnerships were proposed?
- v) What were young people's views on the above-mentioned points?

2. Regional context

This section should characterize the youth employment challenge in the region and highlight countries policies and programmes to tackle youth employment.

2.1 Characteristics of the youth employment challenge

The self-immolation of twenty-six-year-old Mohammad Bouazizi in the Tunisian countryside unleashed a wave of popular uprisings across the Arab world in 2011. This lone and desperate act of protest at the hardships Bouazizi faced in his own life resonated with millions of Arabs longing for dignity, freedom and social justice.

In many ways the trials of this young man echo those of an entire generation of young Arabs who have courageously taken action against the lack of social and economic rights, and against dismal job prospects. Hierarchical power structures and patron-client relationships that have perpetuated inequalities since many of the countries' independence, have also contributed to marginalize youths in Arab societies. This marginalization is also reflected in the labour market: the Middle East and North Africa have very high levels of youth to adult unemployment ratios (4.1 per cent and 3.8 per cent, respectively in 2010).¹ Both figures are actually higher if the GCC economies are excluded.²

While Arab governments have made great strides in improving access to quality education and addressing gender imbalances at school levels,³ learning outcomes in schools remain below international averages.⁴ Families increasingly rely on private education, especially at secondary and university levels, which renders career chances dependent on income and exacerbates inequality.

Education and skills development is one way to improve the employability of young people but it does not guarantee jobs, and provide even less assurance for accessing *decent* jobs. Quantitative successes in the education system have had insufficient impact on increasing productivity and reducing unemployment. Employment creation did accelerate following economic reforms initiated in the 1990s, but many of the new jobs created have been of low quality.

Indeed, while the ever expanding and unsustainable public sector of some countries have created jobs,

¹ ILO (2011). *Global Employment Trends for Youth: 2011 Update*. October 2011. Geneva: ILO

² ILO *Global Economic Trends 2011*. H. Assaf and Z. Tzannatos, *Selected Demographic, Education and Labour Statistics in the Arab Region*, ILO, ROAS, 2011.

³ UNICEF (2005). *Gender Parity and Primary Education*. Retrieved on 8.01.2012 from <http://www.unicef.org/progressforchildren/2005n2/mideastafrica.php>

⁴ See 2007 *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)*, 2006 *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)*, and the 2009 *Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) Test on Reading, Mathematics, and Science*.

more were created by few high end monopolies often related to the oil industry, and the main bulk have been produced by a struggling private sector, often at the low end of value chains. Informal employment has turned into a key challenge in the region that locks the young working poor into a vicious cycle of poverty.

In this context, young Arab jobseekers are too often faced with a choice between (a) unemployment if they can afford it, (b) low wage low quality work that does not meet their aspirations, (c) opening a business if they have access to sources of capital and support services, (d) migration for better jobs. Low labour participation, underemployment, and unemployment have negative social consequences for the Arab youth. Young Arab men are expected to earn a decent income before being able to marry and they increasingly find themselves unable to start a family. Arab women have closed the gender gap in education in many countries.⁵ This has had far-reaching impacts on social relations, as women become more educated than men but are still expected to be content with traditional gender roles of mothers and housewives and unable to make the transition to work. Their labour force participation has improved in some countries but they are often limited in their choice of occupations.

In this bleak context, Arab uprising have opened a window of hope for political changes towards more democracy, improved representation, and policies that contribute to more and better jobs for youth. This hope now needs to be sustained through strategies to ensure that economic dividends can materialize for young Arabs without further extended delays. While the Arab uprisings were significantly driven by the positive and progressive force of youth, continued upheavals demonstrate how quickly the pent-up frustration and anger caused by economic and political marginalization may linger during the challenging transitions underway.

2.2 What are countries doing on youth employment?

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:

The Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC) has set up a formal process to decide with employers on competency standards, through a step based approach. Initial consultations are mainly to list all skills that are needed for a given task. These tasks are then graded by employers as per their importance, and their frequency. The selected tasks are clustered in units of competencies, before being submitted to a higher board, for adoption.

The entire process is employer led with minimum involvement of the Government. 240 occupational skill standards have been designed and adopted so far; they are available online, at <http://tvtc.gov.sa/English/Pages/default.aspx> . There is also an agreement signed by the Ministers of the Arab Labour Conference to use these standards.

This structured approach to employers' participation in skills definition has contributed to attract major investors, and has also allowed for a sustainable collaboration between these major companies and the TVTC, for adaptation of curricula to the particular training needs of the companies. A systematic skills development policy not only contributed to the supply of relevant skills, but also to increase the demand for skills, by attracting investors.

The Nitaqat program is a Saudization initiative announced by the Ministry of Labour in May 2011, under which private sector establishments are classified under four zones (Premium Zone, Green Zone, Red Zone and Yellow Zone) depending on their compliance with applicable Saudization requirements. The Nitaqat system benchmarks companies on the basis of achieved Saudization rates (% of workforce

⁵ University enrolment rates for women exceed those of men by 20 per cent in the Mashreq, 40 per cent in the Maghreb and 120 per cent in the GCC UNESCO cited in S. Sulieman "Education and Skills Development" in ILO/UNDP (2012) *A Review of the Determinants of Decent Job Creation and Policy Options for a New Inclusive Development Model in the Arab Economies* (forthcoming).

who are nationals) in relation to their peers of the same size and the same economic activity.

Unemployment benefit scheme (Hafiz programme) :

In February 2011, the Ministry of Labour and the Human Resources Development Fund was charged - through a Royal Decree - with the introduction of a preliminary unemployment assistance scheme (Hafiz Programme) for Saudi Nationals (to be operated from Nov. 2011 to Nov. 2012). The main argument for the establishment of an unemployment assistance scheme in Saudi Arabia is supporting decent income in case of first time job search (in the form of a financial assistance) while promoting integration of first time job seekers into the labour market, enhancing their social inclusion and advancing Saudization. One of the eligibility criteria is for the applicant to be in the age range 20 to 35 years old.

Jordan:

There has been massive investment in Jordan for the improvements of the TVET system. However, there are remaining issues related to (a) legal and policy contradictions, (b) lack of meaningful involvement of employers, (c) lack of capacity to upscale good practices. The creation of the TVET Council should provide a platform for greater coordination between main skill providers, a common quality assurance framework including common assessment and certification standards and procedures.

Morocco:

Despite economic development, not enough job opportunities are being generated. The informal sector provides 37.3 per cent of total employment. Education does not meet the needs of the labour market. The European crisis has also affected the country mainly with the return of some Moroccan migrants. In this context, the National Agency for Job and Competency promotion supports both employers and job seekers in order to ensure that all skilled Moroccans find a productive and fair job. It also provides counselling to the job seeker to improve his/her job search skills, and refers him/her to skills training programmes, when needed. In addition, three programmes, Idmaj, Taehil (skills training) and Moukawalti (entrepreneurship) aim at facilitating the entry on the labour market of 250,000 youth per year.

Cooperatives also play an important role in employment creation for youth in Morocco with the promotion of traditional products through group based activities (handicrafts, textiles, honey..) supported by a grant making project executed by civil society organizations for the most vulnerable population (quasi illiterate). The Micro Project initiative is targeting individual graduates with support services. It is coupled to a loan guarantee fund whereby young beneficiaries are expected to secure 20% of the required capital and the government guarantees the remaining 80%. A Culture of entrepreneurship needs to be further developed in Morocco and youth need to have access to support services throughout the starting phase of their businesses to ensure their success. The importance of market studies and feasibility studies was also highlighted as critical requirements of a business success.

Occupied Palestinian Territories:

The National Development Plan 2011-2013 has a number of objectives that specifically focus on youth, including enhancing their participation in the social, economic, and political life; reforming the educational system (higher education and TVET) in close consultation with the private sector in order to match the outputs of education with the needs of the labour market; and establishing a national fund to support scientific research.

Oman:

The Sanad programme was established by the Ministry of Power in 2001 with a key objective of providing job seekers, particularly youth with self-employment opportunities and support to entrepreneurship projects. So far, this program has assisted more than 13,000 emerging start-ups and businesses, and helped in creating around 29,000 job opportunities.

Yemen:

The national agency to promote small and micro enterprises (SMEPS) – established in 2005 - benefited many young people who either wanted to start new businesses or improve their existing businesses. This has been achieved through the provision of a wide range of non-financial and business development services to SMEs, particularly in marketing, new line development, market access, and technical fields.

Iraq:

The National Employment Policy that was launched in 2011 pays special attention to youth and women. In particular, it encompasses a number of programmes and projects that i) integrate entrepreneurship and business management training within existing high school and university curricula; hence promoting entrepreneurship as a potential career path for young people; and ii) support young people in starting their own business through providing financial and non-financial services. In addition, the strategy has specific objectives that aim to extend career counselling services to young people.

Tunisia:

- Easing entry into entrepreneurship among job seekers by extending loans under preferential conditions and providing state guarantee and other fiscal incentives are the key components of labor market policies in Tunisia. All groups of young people can profit from this support, however the acceptance was relatively limited. Also, the assistance stopped once the enterprises were established, Coaching of young enterprises was rarely done which led to a high rate of enterprise closures after one year.
- To encourage private firms to hire graduates of post-secondary institutions, the Tunisian government introduced a wage subsidy scheme in 2005. Unfortunately this instrument was often misused by firms that did not keep the young people once subsidies stopped. It is mainly designed as a kind of subsidized internship programme. It was introduced in 2005.
- AMAL (“hope”, implemented since March 2011) is a labour market programme introduced shortly after the revolution to assist first time job seekers (graduates of higher education) in finding jobs. It provides an allowance of 200 dinars (150 USD), in addition to medical coverage, as compensation for active job search for up to one year. Additional employment services to unemployed university graduates for a maximum are provided such as career coaching and training (on life skills, technical skills, re-training, on the job training). The Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment (MoVTE) oversees AMAL, while ANETI is in charge of its implementation An AMAL II programme focuses more on non-qualified young people.

3. Young people as agents of change

This section should mainly provide a summary of the key issues discussed during the national events and the views expressed by young participants. The structure below should be followed:

3.1 Key issues discussed during the national events

The right policy mix - The overall capacity of the economy to create decent jobs for youth in the Arab world is limited by the relatively small productive base and the important share of low skill/low productivity jobs. Distinct strategies are needed to (a) reform the oversized public sector, (b) diversify the private sector and to upgrade the production of MSMEs where most of the private jobs are, and (c) formalize the informal economy and improve job quality. One size fits all youth employment policies have however limited effects and a mix of broader macro-policies to improve the business environment (including taxation and incentives for private firms) coupled with targeted flexible interventions for young persons are more likely to have an impact.

A conducive macroeconomic environment is largely missing. There is a dearth of supportive policies and programmes targeting business growth and productivity through economies of scale and technology. Even when there are efforts to encourage high-growth businesses, these are directed towards higher-income urban youth who already have access to the necessary networks and capital in order to succeed.

To progress towards decent work, we need:

- Waged employment and self employment to be made less vulnerable.
- Universal social protection that will benefit the youth, especially low-income youth in order to be protected from economic shocks.
- Public authorities to actively engage in lessening the burdens of women's care duties eg. by establishing and supporting the establishment of affordable, accessible, quality facilities (public, workplace, private) such as kindergartens for working women and paid paternity leave.
- Youth and especially young women workers to be encouraged to organize themselves in workers' unions, cooperatives and other types of associations in order to gain collective voice and increase their bargaining power. Trade unions ought to be more responsive to youth and women issues in the world of work.
- Policies and measures to ensure pay equity between men and women and equal pay for jobs of equal value.

Needed: private sector jobs - In many Arab countries, the public sector has been the most prominent job provider, with little impact on the level of public services offered to its citizens. However, this option is increasingly saturated, and the size of Government payroll is now an issue in practically all Arab countries. Private sector development and real value-added employment are urgently needed.

The role of monopolies and their relations with political powers in place are also a primary concern, as they greatly affect competition and employment outcomes. They marginalize SMEs that have limited ability to compete in such an environment. In Lebanon, for example, a review of 7,000 companies shows that in two-thirds of those markets only three companies control two-thirds of sales. Further, most SMEs in Lebanon sell their production / services to end users, and are not integrated in value chains. This highlights the need for a level playing field in the business sector and the promotion of market competition to address employment, including youth employment.

Self employment: how to make it an option for decent work? - Young entrepreneurs may face specific challenges on the market but they are also more creative and less risk adverse than their elders. Encouraging youth to opt for self-employment should not lead to greater informality and greater vulnerability. Most of the time entrepreneurs who own SMEs as well as their employees lack social protection, job security and a secure income.

Governments should exert every effort to create a conducive environment for the promotion of youth entrepreneurship leading to decent work. Entrepreneurship courses and job orientation should be mainstreamed in school curricula in order to guide and also manage early youth expectations in line with the realities of the world of work. These subjects can also improve the work readiness of the youth – in close collaboration with private sector companies - and develop their entrepreneurial culture (not limited to starting up a business, but also to have a more pro-active attitude to their careers).

Furthermore, there is a need to address the lack of support services that are either not sufficient, not widely know, not easy to access / youth friendly. Business Development Service providers should make their services more demand driven, affordable and they should promote them more effectively to a wider market that includes young entrepreneurs.

Skills development in the context of low labour demand - Youth who graduate often do not find decent jobs, and there is an overall low return on education in the region. Young women and men are in

fact faced with the question “is it worth the efforts to gain additional skills when jobs are so scarce, and recruitment often based on personal connections rather than competencies?”

The education system in the Arab region was originally designed to prepare youth for work in the public sector, leaving employers in the private sector unable to find employees with market relevant skills. While the public sector will no longer be able absorb new entrants on the market (at least on the same scale), the skills development systems have experienced difficulties reforming themselves for providing skills that match the demand. In addition, the capacity to forecast the skills for even the near future is still low, and the lack of responsiveness of training providers contrasts with the rapidly evolving skills sets required on the market.

There is also a contradiction in the attitude of employers that identify the lack of skills as an issue, but are providing less on the job training than in other regions of the world⁶. More generally, the participation of employers within the skills development system is inadequate, be it for curricula design, apprenticeships, assessment, or training of trainers. The participation of SMEs is even lower, focusing primarily on informal apprenticeships. This can be inputted in some cases to rigid skill development systems that make little efforts to align with market needs, but in countries that take active steps to reform their TVET systems, for instance, employers often do not make the most of the opportunities they have to contribute.

In addition, while the current formal TVET system can target young people who have already gained some education through school, it needs to be complemented with community based interventions targeting groups with reduced literacy for lower end skills that still contribute to ensure they access an income.

Gender as a major fault line on the labour market - In many countries of the region, unemployment among young women is much higher than that of young men. Young women’s exclusion from training and education in labour market relevant skills is also a serious concern. They are being tracked into traditional “home-making skills” with little returns in the labour market, or into undervalued jobs that are an extension to their care roles. This is largely result of preferences of parents, teachers, school administrators and employers that see women’s places in the job market as secondary to men and only where it is “appropriate”.

On the other hand, high-income jobs often requires long hours of overtime, usually not compensated by the sharing of domestic work with the husband at home, which adds to the burdens of women having to choose between family and work. There are no appropriate, identified policies to push towards sharing household care duties between men and women. Many households opt instead for hiring domestic workers, transferring discrimination practices to under-paid and sometimes abused migrant women.

Moreover, there is a worrying phenomenon of young women missing from public life. They are not in school, they are not married (as marriage age is going up) and they are not in the labour market. They do not even show up in unemployment numbers because they are discouraged workers who have given up looking for a job - a huge potential of youth in general and young, educated women in particular being lost.

The double edged sword of Migration - Migration of youth is a policy choice and can be resolved only through the creation of decent jobs.

GCC states serve almost exclusively as destinations, with few nationals leaving to seek employment elsewhere. The Mashreq states however, in particular Lebanon and Jordan, face both emigration and immigration. The highly-skilled leave these countries which see a considerable influx of migrant

⁶ See Enterprise Surveys (<http://www.enterprisesurveys.org>), The World Bank

domestic workers, mainly from East Asia and Africa. The Maghreb states face in- and outflows as well, with North African Arabs travelling to Europe and the GCC to work, and sub-Saharan migrants entering the country, either as a transit station before Europe or - increasingly - as final destination.

Some governments may promote emigration, knowing that they cannot provide sufficient employment for the huge number of job seekers, though this would not apply so much to the highly-skilled. The benefits from emigration include remittances which support migrants' families and occupational skills acquired by emigrants who eventually return to their home-country's workforce. The long-term hurdles however far outweigh the short-term benefits of emigration.

Although governments should try to keep their most-skilled workers in their country, especially when they have invested in their education, the lack of income-earning opportunities and low returns on education in the home country spur an out-country flow. Moreover, the dependency on remittances may lead to a consumption-only society that is neither productive nor innovative, if enabling conditions for investment for a more development oriented strategy(ies) are not forthcoming.

Europe's problems can be seen as an opportunity for Arab states to nurture their workforce and provide them with decent jobs, and mitigate tendencies to emigrate out of necessity.

Towards a green economy? - The Arab region historically suffers from serious environmental challenges that are being aggravated further by climate change. According to the 2011 Report "Arab Environment for Green Economy" published by the Arab Forum for Environment and Development, the average annual cost of environmental degradation in the MENA region is currently estimated at USD 95 billion; equivalent to 5% of GDP. Furthermore, the combined greenhouse gas emissions in the MENA region is 5% of global emissions; increasing at a rate that is one of the fastest in the world (4.5%/year).

Despite the severity of the environmental challenges in the region, Arab governments have taken little action. The region is indeed marked by limited investments in green solutions, including in the areas of renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable agriculture, recycling and ecological aware construction. Currently less than 1% of the labour force in the MENA region is employed in green sectors. The jobs are mainly found in renewable energies, recycling and organic agriculture, in occupations such as architects and engineers, electricians and technicians, and low-skilled jobs in construction, agriculture and waste collection.

A shift towards a green economy in the region would provide a win-win solution by helping Arab countries reconcile their efforts to achieve environmental sustainability, as well as create jobs and alleviate poverty. There is a potential for creating green jobs in the energy (both renewable energy and energy efficiency), waste management, agriculture, and sustainable / responsible tourism.

However, in order for the green economy to yield its employment benefits, a number of obstacles have to be overcome first, including limited knowledge and awareness of "green jobs" among the general public and policy makers, policy and legislative gaps, limited financial incentives to support green initiatives, as well as skill shortages. On the positive side, there is an increased level of awareness among young people in the region on green businesses and their contribution to sustainable development.

Unions should advocate for youth - Social media platforms were important channels for youth. It allowed for the uprisings to reach critical numbers in the absence of freedoms of assembly, association and expression in most of the Arab countries. It also allowed isolated women to get in touch with each other and raise their demands. Social media role can be crucial for youth participation, as it facilitates the access to information and contribute to good governance. It can also create new forms of social identity.

Nonetheless, many questioned whether social media as such can substantially contribute to social movements. In Egypt for example, one participant noted that Facebook served more as a symbol than as an actual information and mobilization platform, as the denial of access to the web by the authorities increased the massive demonstrations.

The reasons behind the weak role of unions in organizing, representing and promoting youth issues lies in the fact the Arab Trade-Union Movement in the best cases only represent segments of the public sector workers or the private sector workers – Lebanon, Syria, Jordan as an example - while the workers in the informal economy where the majority of youth are employed have no representation at all.

Similarly, the deplorable situation of migrant workers in many Arab countries was highlighted as an issue not sufficiently reflected in the work or statements of trade unions. More generally, the fact that the Arab Trade Union Movement is dominated by authorities and ruling parties and suffers from a lack of democracy, independence and representativeness, thereby transforming it into an empty shell union, was also a concern discussed.

There are some exceptions, in Tunisia, for instance, the trade union movement played a leading role in the revolution. It led all the demonstrations against Bin Ali’s regime including the famous one on January 14. UGTT was able to negotiate on social and economic policies. The absence of other reliable and trusted political structures increased the importance of the trade union movement among the young workers all over the country. Since the beginning of 2011, unions witnessed a remarkable increase in membership of about 60 per cent.

3.2 Youth voices

- Egypt participants said youth employment problem is mainly one of non conducive policies that need to be reframed. Employment policies alone cannot fix the problem. Macro-policies must be developed that take into account the representation of youth, preservation of agricultural land, development of the educational system to meet labour market demands, creation of a conducive environment for SME development and promotion of self-employment among youth.
- While many university graduates say they do not find jobs at home that match their expectations and emigrate, the low-quality of some secondary education and TVET is viewed as a growth constraint by many employers. On the other hand, low salaries and limited access to social protection do not provide an incentive for youth to get more skilled.
- KSA participants said that the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC) has set up a formal process to decide with employers on competency standards, through a step based approach. Initial consultations are mainly to list all skills that are needed for a given task. These tasks are then graded by employers as per their importance, and their frequency. The selected tasks are clustered in units of competencies, before being submitted to a higher board, for adoption. This structured approach to employers’ participation in skills definition has contributed to attract major investors, and has also allowed for a sustainable collaboration between these major companies and the TVTC, for adaptation of curricula to the particular training needs of the companies. On their end, Jordan participants stressed that the creation of a TVET Council should provide a platform for greater coordination between main skill providers, a common quality assurance framework including common assessment and certification standards and procedures.
- Lebanese participants insisted that the main challenges that are generally faced by young people to start their private businesses include the difficulty to access finance, the lack of “angel investors” type of programmes⁷, the absence of venture capital, lack of infrastructure and IT, absence

⁷ See http://www.middleeastinvestmentnetwork.com/home?gclid=CP-Ou_HRjg8CFc4LtAodDEGg0A

of incubators and the prevailing high level of corruption. They further highlighted that there is always a *missing-middle* where neither small business with growth potential nor middle income entrepreneurs (who are a large group of business owners in Lebanon) are targeted in order to achieve productive medium and large businesses that can employ specialized and skilful youth. Moreover, the main trend is towards encouraging individual entrepreneurship neglecting collective forms of entrepreneurship such as business groups and cooperatives that allow pooling of resources, learning and an increase in bargaining power. Despite all that, real entrepreneurship should be born out of choice, not necessity, according to Injaz which for example, nurtures youth to start their own companies, by identifying potential challenges and related solutions.

- Cooperatives are important for the economic and social empowerment of youth and women. The Palestinian Savings & Credit Association has thus far distributed loans of 19 million dinars in 197 locations and it has enabled poor women in Bethlehem to have access to grants. There are around 361 cooperatives in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Cooperatives targeting youth should help to decrease the reliance on jobs in Israel. Cooperatives also play an important role in employment creation for youth in Morocco with the promotion of traditional products through group based activities (handicrafts, textiles, honey..) supported by a grant making project executed by civil society organizations for the most vulnerable population (quasi illiterate). The Micro Project initiative has been described in the above sections.

- A recurring question throughout the panel discussion was 'Is migration without alternative?' The ultimate consensus was that migration of youth is a policy choice and can be resolved only through the creation of decent jobs. A problem highlighted by Maghreb participants is the difficulty emigrants face in acclimatising to their home country after being forced to leave the host country in which they were working. This problem has likely escalated in recent years following the financial crisis in Europe. Europe's problems can be seen as an opportunity for Arab states to nurture their workforce and provide them with decent jobs, and mitigate tendencies to emigrate out of necessity. Jordan participants explained that emigration streams are mainly destined for the GCC states. Those leaving the country are first and foremost high-skilled workers with 81 per cent having obtained at least secondary education and 45 per cent holding a university degree. Lack of decent employment opportunities is the prevalent cause for migration. On the other hand in Morocco, the share of migrants with low education is higher in Morocco than in the Mashreq states.

- Lebanon participants stressed that trade union freedoms are limited in Lebanon as unions must be authorized by the government and are represented by the CGTL. As such, union principles of independence, democracy and representativeness are only partially implemented. The absence of decent work pushes young workers to migrate outside the country, and those who stay have no voice at all and are not represented so they tend to protest on their own, away from the trade union structures. Also of concern is the nature of trade unions in the region which have in some cases strong links with the government, and may not always defend young workers rights. Participants indicated that the conflict between Jordanian workers and existing unions is an example of this problem. The role of the unions in discussions on minimum wages in Lebanon is another one.

- Panellists highlighted the need for more accurate data to get an evidence-based understanding of the relationships between: youth and adult attitudes; tangible and intangible needs; employment opportunities and incomes; social justice and revolutions. They also called for an integrated analysis of the rights of citizens, constitutional reforms and the rule of law as well as equity. They called as well for Governments to exert every effort to create a conducive environment for the promotion of youth entrepreneurship, and invest in entrepreneurship education and training as part of formal and vocational education - which would increase the capacity of young people to forecast market opportunities, to innovate, and to contribute to the future profitability and sustainability of their enterprises.

3.3 Learning from the events

Some participants of the youth employment regional consultation wished that roundtables panelists had presented more focused, straight to the point oral interventions during the formal sessions and follow up discussions. A few invitees also advised that all (PowerPoint) presentations be distributed as hands-out.

Many participants indicated that substantial time should be allocated to (spontaneous) youth discussions – which, when they occurred, were overall evaluated as rich and diversified despite the (assessed) uneven quality of all interventions. Some participants also recommended that 1) more ‘lessons learnt’ or case studies/success stories from countries they could learn from be shared; 2) more concrete policy (or other initiative) solutions be offered, together with the display of facts and challenges.

As a response to these some of these remarks, it was emphasized during the conclusion of the regional meeting that the event had been mainly designed as a preliminary, kick-off consultation aimed at identifying key, common challenges and launching effective communities of practice.

4. Conclusions

This meeting was the first step of a strengthened collaboration ROAS is hoping to build on youth employment with the organizations represented. An ILO Youth Employment report for the MENA region is in the making. Good practices on youth employment are being documented. In addition, an electronic platform on youth employment in Arabic will be set up, on the ILO Youth Employment Knowledge Sharing Platform (see <https://papyrus.ilo.org/YE/YEKSP/homepage>).