

## MAJALAT - Brussels Civil Society Forum CONCEPT NOTE & RECOMMENDATIONS Youth

The European Union (EU) began to pay particular attention to young people in the Euro-Mediterranean region in the mid-1990s, and placed the youth dimension on its political agenda, taking into account the increasing demographic weight of young people and the important role they play in economic, social and cultural development and in the political change in their respective territories.

The EU started in the mid-2000s to set up and/or financially support several cooperation programs targeting young people in the field of vocational training, employment, culture, mobility and the fight against violence and despite the fact that many EU policy documents<sup>1</sup> stress the importance of the role of youth and the challenges they face there is no specific policy for young people in the South Mediterranean<sup>2</sup>. Eventually, youth in the region doesn't seem enough involved in the discussions on EU strategic orientations. It is essential that they participate in existing or future forums for dialogue between CSOs and institutions, and that they have their own spaces in which to express their priorities.

The challenge for Majalat is twofold: mainstream the youth perspective in all other thematic areas and identify youth-specific priorities that could be addressed by the EU at the regional level. Majalat youth representatives from the South and North of the Mediterranean identified 5 main entry points of discussion, that should be considered in the economic development and social dialogue, security and migration themes.

1. Support Employment and Vocational Training
2. Focus on Education
3. Social protection of vulnerable groups, on the issue of Sexual & Reproductive Health
4. Towards a new approach on youth and fight against all forms of violence
5. Promote freedom of movement for young people (workers, students, travelers) and focus on mobility programs for Youth

This concept note is the result of the discussions that took place during the youth workshops held in Amman (Jordan) in September 2018 and Tunis (Tunisia) in April 2019. Then, in order to refine the recommendations resulted from these activities, an independent expert active in the civil society sector in the Southern Neighborhood countries, has been recruited. The main objective of the work done by the expert was to better specify and develop the recommendations using specific provisions, policies, EU instruments, mechanisms and actions in order to make the recommendations operationalizable and actionable specifying the targeted EU institution - and, therefore, place recommendations in perspective with EU policies in the specific thematic area discussed.

*The content and political message of the report and the recommendations have not been altered. Additional points will be validated with the discussions with the participants during the Brussels Civil Forum.*

<sup>1</sup> European Neighborhood Policy and its review, Global Strategy of the European Union for Foreign and Security Policy, Report on the implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy, European Consensus on Development...

<sup>2</sup> A EU-Youth strategy (2019-2027) has been recently adopted and developed through a EU-wide consultation involving young people, researchers and decision-makers. It only applies to European countries. A "Youth Structured Dialogue" is also being implemented in UE Member States in the Framework of Erasmus+ program.



**General Recommendations directed to DG NEAR, EEAS and National Authorities:**

- Effective European policies reaching out Youth in the Southern Neighborhood: highlighting youth-related expenditures, assessing the policy-impact and making the results of these assessments available to the public
- Empowerment of young people's civic participation for longer term impact: leading to greater participation of young men and women in the policy-making in South-Mediterranean countries also by strengthening advocacy skills of youth and youth-led organizations

**General Recommendations addressed to EUDs, DG NEAR, EEAS:**

- Recognition of youth diversity: reaching a larger number and a wider range of young men and women, including those involved in informal groups and social movements.
- Tailor-made financial support: putting in place alternative and more flexible means of funding, able to support new forms of mobilization of youth

## Entry points

### 1. Support Employment and Vocational Training

The majority of the population in the MENA region is under the age of 35 while youth unemployment in the region is still among the highest in the world. Currently, little labor migration channels are available in Europe for workers without special qualifications and slightly more for skilled workers.

**Recommendations directed EU delegations, DG NEAR, EEAS**

- Support youth entrepreneurship by contributing to creating an enabling environment in terms of available funding and training in particular
- Facilitate access to Southern Mediterranean labor markets for vulnerable groups of young people (women, people with disabilities, refugees) through appropriate devices drawn from the experiences of cooperation between the EU and partner governments in the South Mediterranean.

### 2. Focus on Education

The importance of non-formal education is acknowledged as a leverage for individual and collective empowerment even, and especially when, formal educational system is failing to provide good quality standards or to address labor market needs. According to Arab Youth Survey 2019, three in four Arabs are unhappy with the quality of education in their own country; youth in the Levant feel that the education system is not preparing them for their future. In addition, participants in the Youth workshops pointed the excessive focus put on fighting against unemployment rather than on lifelong learning policies and job creation.

**Recommendations directed to EU delegations, DG NEAR, EEAS**

- Increase political, financial and administrative support to non-formal education programs as a way to enhance young people's personal and professional skills and competences as well as their employability.
- Involve young people and CSOs in the design and evaluation of EU employability and education programs at national and regional level.



### 3. Social protection of vulnerable groups, on the issue of Sexual & Reproductive Health

The question of SRHR had never been discussed during the structured dialogue process but it is quite self-evident that both risks and consequences of poor sexual and reproductive health services not only affect young people directly, but they can only be prevented at an early age. In sum, youth is the victim and should be the main target of any intervention on this matter. The consequences include a large number of cases, like Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), HIV/AIDS, women's health, contraception, reproductive health, abortion. Majalat could tackle it as a health issue, responsible for psychological traumas and social exclusion.

#### Recommendations directed to DG NEAR

Acknowledge the challenge that SRHR represent for younger generations providing increased financial support to the already engaged civil society and to encourage new organizations to address this issue

#### Recommendations to EEAS

Call on the EEAS to encourage governments of Southern Neighborhood countries to implement SDGs regarding SHR in all their bilateral dialogues

### 4. Towards a new approach on youth and fight against all forms of violence

Radicalization manifests itself as a phenomenon affecting only young people on the one hand and, on the other hand, policies do not take account of the complexity of the root causes behind the use of violence. For instance: the absence of Rule of Law; absence of sufficient public space devoted to the expression of youth, lack of access to decision-making and positions of power; absence of strategies and policies aimed at the real and effective empowerment of young people, outside the electoral propaganda; economic policies generating high employment rates, trivializing hate speech and normalizing violence.

#### Recommendation directed to EEAS and DG Home

Fully integrate the respect of human rights and democratic values as a fundamental component of all EU external policies and all forms of cooperation with third countries related to security and fight against terrorism

#### Recommendation directed to National Authorities

Include youth in decision-making related to security and fight against all forms of violence when it comes to revise the EU Neighborhood Policy (ENP)

#### Recommendation directed to National Authorities, DG Near, DEVCO (for financial support), EEAS (for political support)

To increase political and financial support to youth-led initiatives for the promotion of peace and the prevention of violent extremism



## 5. Promote freedom of movement for young people (workers, students, travelers) and focus on mobility programs for Youth

Existing positive programs like Erasmus+, the European Voluntary Service or others are welcomed but they are also pointed out as limited compared to the negative consequences that EU migration and security policies have on the life of young people in the South Mediterranean. Participants in the Youth workshops identified these policies as being part of the problem rather than the solution, as they contribute in particular to: creating *de facto* inequalities consequently affecting the rights to freedom of movement of those who see their mobility project rejected ; increasing brain drain effect; stimulating a demand for risky irregular migration paths, eventually profitable to smuggling networks, that already costed thousands of lives.

Though extensively used in EU official documents, mobility remains an abstract concept for most of the people while volunteering, professional trainings, university twinning programs, cultural exchange, non-formal education initiatives are more concrete terms. Building on Majalat members' experience, any good example of existing initiative that may worth duplicate or improved can be useful to reinforce joint recommendations.

### Recommendations directed to DG NEAR, EUDs and National Authorities

- Increase financial, political and administrative support to South-South mobility partnerships like volunteering, professional training, non-formal education initiatives, cultural exchanges, university twinning projects
- Widen the scope and the available budget for Erasmus+ VET Mobility in all the MENA countries, taking into consideration inclusive social and geographical criteria then facilitating visas for selected participants.

