



This Research Project is co-funded by the European Union under the 7th Framework Programme

Youth Unemployment in the Arab Mediterranean Countries: Matching labour supply and demand

EuropEFE (Felipe IV, 9 – 2014, Madrid, Spain) – 29 September 2016

This event has been organised under the SAHWA Project (www.sahwa.eu), funded by the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme FP7/2007-2013 under grant agreement n° 613174

The roundtable will be held in English, under the Chatham House Rule

BACKGROUND NOTE AND AGENDA

Youth unemployment has become a matter of major concern worldwide. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) comprises the world's most youthful region, but also the one with the highest youth unemployment. The majority of these MENA youth are in the Arab Mediterranean countries (AMCs), where nearly one in five people is between 15 and 24 years old and 50% of the population is under 25. While such a "youth bulge" should give a competitive edge to the area, millions of young men and women in these countries are either unemployed or underemployed, with youth unemployment rates more than double the global average. Plus, a growing percentage of young people are not in education, employment or training (NEETs), which hinders economic growth, development and stability.

Regions with such large youth populations should be well placed to become highly technologically advanced and economically stable areas. But to reap the benefits of such an enormous human resource, young people must be well educated and prepared to compete in the global job market. In the AMCs, there are several factors contributing to youth unemployment, including growing demographics, fast urbanisation, and political, economic and social issues. Strikingly, in many countries unemployment is highest among the more educated. Despite many improvements in education in recent years, evidence still points to a skills mismatch between what employers want and what jobseekers can offer. The situation is particularly acute among young people from marginalised socioeconomic backgrounds, and among women.

In addition, the intensification of several conflicts in the region, but also in neighbouring areas such as Afghanistan, the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and northern Nigeria, has resulted in a sudden increase of refugees settling in many AMCs or using them as platforms to pursue their journey towards Europe, putting further pressure on the region's already strained economies.

All this has generated a severe youth unemployment crisis with which the region's economies are struggling to cope. While several measures at national and international level are underway to try to address the problem, they are not having the necessary impact, whether because they are not sufficiently adequate or because they are not sufficiently far-reaching. Beyond economic, political and social reforms, deep changes and serious investment in more tailored training and education are needed to match the AMCs' youth labour supply with the demand from companies for qualified candidates. This can only be achieved through enhanced, sustained coordination and cooperation among all stakeholders.

A young, well-prepared population has the potential to spur sustainable growth and development. This roundtable will analyse the youth unemployment crisis in five AMCs – Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia – to find ways that EU policymakers, governments in the region, businesses and NGOs can actively cooperate to harness all of the region’s potential and give youth the opportunities to succeed.

AGENDA

Thursday, 29 September 2016

9:30 **Welcome & Introduction**

Aldo Olcese, Chairman, EuropEFE, Madrid

Elena Sánchez-Montijano, SAHWA Scientific Coordinator; Senior Research Fellow, CIDOB, Barcelona

Moderator: **Salvatore Nigro**, Vice-president, EFE-Global; CEO, EuropEFE, Madrid

10:00 **Education as a problem not a solution?**

Özgehan Şenyuva, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Middle East Technical University (METU), Ankara

Education in the AMCs not only does not guarantee employment, but in many countries could be increasing the chances of being unemployed. In some places, unemployment among female diploma-holders surpasses 90%. While companies are reportedly struggling to find skilled workers to fill vacancies, students themselves also find that their education is not in line with market needs. How can we solve this major skills gap?

10: 15 **The hiring challenge**

Slim Zeghal, CEO, Altea Packaging, Tunis

As the AMCs become more involved in the global economy, new skills are demanded, but regional educational systems are failing to prepare students to successfully find and maintain a decent job. Employability remains a challenge. Companies are reportedly struggling to find skilled workers to fill vacancies. A 2010 PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) survey reveals that 87% of Arab CEOs believe that the limited supply of candidates with the right skills is one of the biggest challenges for businesses in the AMCs today. What are the most demanded skills? What can be done to match AMCs’ vast labour supply with labour demand?

10: 30 **Unemployment and human flows across the Mediterranean**

Elena Sánchez-Montijano, SAHWA Scientific Coordinator; Senior Research Fellow, CIDOB, Barcelona

According to UNHCR, we are witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. An unprecedented 65.3 million people around the world have been forced from home. Among them are nearly 21.3 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18. This is due mainly to persecution, conflict, generalised violence, but there are also many that decide to leave to look for better opportunities



elsewhere. This has resulted in a sudden increase of refugees settling in many AMCs or using them as platforms to pursue their journey towards Europe. How is youth unemployment in the AMCs affecting migration patterns worldwide?

10:45 **Debate & Questions**

12:00 **Conclusions and Closure**

Salvatore Nigro, Vice-president, EFE-Global; CEO, EuropEFE, Madrid

12: 00 END OF SESSIONS