



# POWER2YOUTH

## Marginalization, Young People in the South and East Mediterranean, and Policy

### An Analysis of Young People's Experiences of Marginalization across Six SEM Countries, and Guidelines for Policy-makers

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### Abstract

*This document is the report for Work Package 7 (WP7) of the EU-funded project Power2Youth (P2Y). WP7 provides an overview of the key policy messages for the EU that arise from the research conducted as part of Work Packages 1-6. These key messages are: (1) young people face multiple forms of marginalization, with the exact nature and combination depending on their social circumstances (including but not exclusively nationality, place of residence, socio-economic class, religion, sect, gender and clan); (2) the problems faced by young people in the South and East Mediterranean (SEM) countries are reminiscent of those faced by young people in the EU; however, they are often faced in more extreme form (e.g., rates of graduate unemployment) and some are quite different (e.g., the extreme levels of political and personal insecurity endured by SEM young people); (3) although young people are particularly vulnerable to processes of marginalization, these processes are not exclusive to them and are indicative of deeper structural problems (political and economic) affecting populations as a whole; (4) the processes that do most to marginalize young people (and people more generally) are not currently addressed by national policies; in fact, national policies can exacerbate young people's problems; and (5) policy-making, or interventions in support of national policy-making, by external actors can also exacerbate the problems when they inadvertently endorse government policies that perpetuate deep structural problems such as authoritarianism, corruption or over-reliance on a weak private sector to create demand for labour. This report also offers a set of guiding principles for EU policy-makers based on conclusions drawn from across the Power2Youth projects. To be aligned with these principles, all policies should: (1) ensure that they "do no harm"; (2) recognize that, predominantly, young people's problems are not "problems with young people" but reflect deep-seated structural weaknesses of SEM states; and (3) be helpful to young people - which means tackling these problems.*

**Keywords:** Youth | South Mediterranean | East Mediterranean | Education | Employment

### INTRODUCTION

In the period 2010-13 a wave of youth-led protests swept across North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. In some cases the protests had remarkable results, leading to the ousting of long-time authoritarian leaders Zine el Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt

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and Muammar Ghaddafi in Libya. Since that time young people have remained of key interest to policy-makers, both inside these countries and in the international community; they have proved themselves to be active and dynamic agents in a region which is experiencing profound political, economic and social upheaval. Yet, in European popular (and political) culture, young people from North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean countries are more commonly associated with the alleged “tide” of informal migrants seeking political freedom and economic security in Europe, or with the efforts of violent Islamist extremist groups. Indeed, these representations have come to form a central plank in the various resurgent, right-wing populist political parties seeking electoral power - see for instance the National Front in France and United Kingdom Independence Party in the UK. What is less visible in European public and political representations is the ongoing efforts of young people in SEM countries to contribute to political reforms, to generate a lively and robust civil society, to volunteer and to be social entrepreneurs in their own countries - and importantly, their day-to-day struggles with social, economic and political marginalization. Given the relative size of the youth population in SEM countries and the scale of the challenges facing those countries it is clear, as is evidenced through protests and activism, that public policy, whether on the part of regional governments or their international interlocutors, is currently failing to adequately address youth needs. Revising public policy requires first and foremost a better understanding of the status, conditions, needs and perspectives of young people themselves.

Power2Youth is an EU-funded project which offers an interdisciplinary, gender-sensitive analysis of the economic, political and socio-cultural conditions of young people. It explores the root causes and complex dynamics of youth exclusion and inclusion in the labour market and civil/political life, and investigates the potentially transformative effect of youth agency. Power2Youth examines the structural determinants on the lives of young people, and how youth might become active agents in society and in their own well-being. The gender-sensitive approach has allowed the project to capture differences in the ways in which young men and young women experience political, economic and social life, and how they might approach adulthood. The project analysed the status, conditions and perspectives of young people at three levels: the *macro* (or national state and institutional) level, the *meso* (organizational) level and the *micro* (individual) level; and developed progressive and youth-informed guidelines for national and supranational policy-makers.<sup>2</sup>

This report provides a summary of the major findings of Power2Youth that are pertinent to policy development. It is important to highlight that the descriptions of young people’s lives contained within this report are derived from an analysis of the reports and data produced across Work Packages 1-6. The validity of these descriptions (along with the policy guidelines that are the subject of this report) were triangulated with young people in a series of in-depth, qualitative focus groups conducted in three of the case study countries.

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<sup>2</sup> The project ran from March 2014 to May 2017, and received 2.5 million Euro under the Framework 7 scheme. It comprised 9 work packages, each responsible for different aspects of the project, and engaged 13 partner institutions from Europe and the SEM region, including 6 case study countries (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territories and Turkey) where original qualitative and quantitative data was collected from a range of sources (including: public statistics, public documents and academic studies; focus groups and interviews with relevant stakeholders and key informants (including young people and youth-based CSOs); and large-scale nation-wide surveys (including a total of 7,573 young people between the ages of 15 and 29).

This report recommends guidelines for developing progressive and youth-informed national and supranational policy for dealing with young people's marginalization in the SEM countries examined. Before doing so this report addresses the key definitional challenge of the research (what is "youth"?) and then describes the approach taken to by the Power2Youth consortia. The report also describes the demographic challenges facing SEM countries and, drawing on the country-specific analyses, provides an overview of how the issue of "youth" has been addressed in national policies so far. The next section of the report offers a definition of "social exclusion" before describing what have been identified as the six most common forms of marginalization experienced by young people with regard to policy. Given that marginalization is shaped by and within socially, historically, ideologically, economically and politically specific contexts, and by and within the specificities of each country, this report does not provide a set of policy recommendations to cover all SEM countries. Nor is the analysis of the drivers of marginalization exhaustive. In approaching the voluminous data produced by Power2Youth and in listening to the various presentations, seminars and discussions with partner organizations and colleagues, we have tried to distil both 1) the common experiences that SEM young people report, and 2) those common experiences that are (or ought to be) of central concern to those involved in policy-making. The final section of this report concludes by outlining a set of guidelines for developing youth-informed or "youth-wise" policies, that is to say, policies that address the social conditions that give rise to young people's marginalization, and that do not further exacerbate their problems.

## **1. WHO ARE "YOUTH"?**

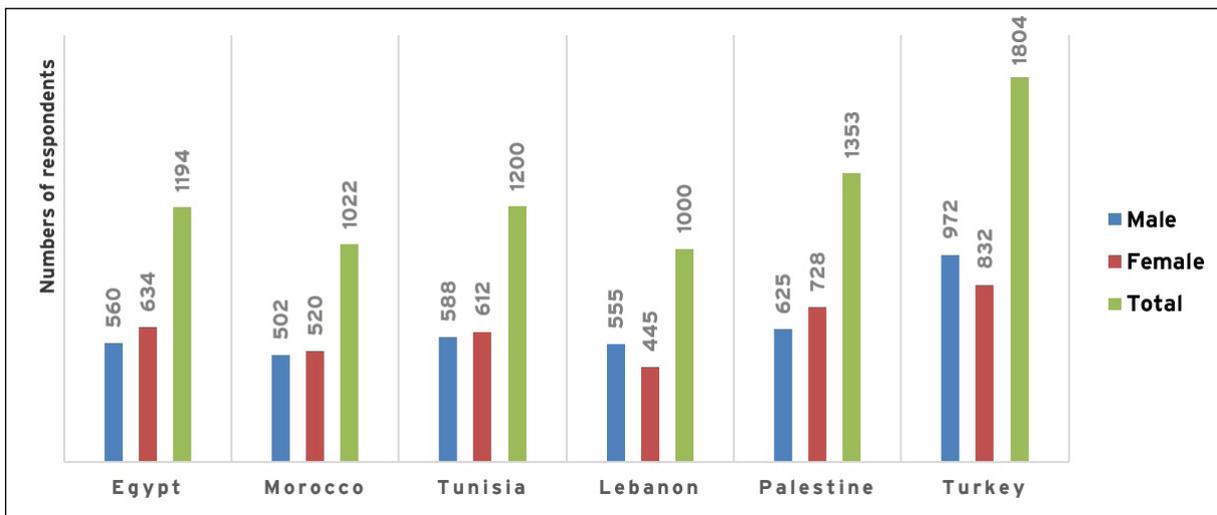
An issue faced by most researchers when studying youth is to decide who to include, and why. The category of "youth" is socially constructed. It depends on a range of social, cultural and political factors which together determine when a society considers someone to be somewhere between the status of a child and a full adult. For policy-makers, who need to be able to identify a clearly demarcated target group for policies, youth has usually been an age-based category, the upper and lower boundaries of which depend on narratives formulated by policy-makers themselves (Coles 1995). In Europe youth is often defined as being between the ages of 15 and 29, a period when young people are making what is known as the "school-to-work" transition. Not surprisingly then, youth policy tends to revolve around issues of education and employment, or lack thereof.

For young people in SEM countries defining youth by their biological age is especially problematic as research has clearly shown that a range of political, economic and social factors lead to delayed transitions to adulthood, defined as the achievement of material independence and personal autonomy (Dhillion and Yousef 2009). In other words, biological age has little to do with when or how adulthood is achieved. To make matters more complicated the research demonstrated that both between and within national contexts, the biological age-based boundaries used by policy-makers varied enormously depending on the political and social considerations behind specific policy agendas. Thus a young Moroccan female could be deemed to have achieved a principal marker of adulthood - the legal age at which she might marry - at just nine years of age, but she cannot vote in national elections until she is 18. She can, however, access youth-specific micro-finance loans from local World Bank schemes until she is 29 and youth-targeted government-sourced loans until she is 45

(Catusse and Destremau 2016: 8). The contours of the “youth” category vary enormously and are subject constantly to political and institutional manipulations which have less to do with the real lives of young people and more to do with how regimes and powerful social groups construct a social order.

Power2Youth took a flexible approach overall to data collection, and allowed the voices of young people who considered themselves to fall within the category of “youth” to define the boundaries of the category where possible. However, for the purposes of determining sample selection in focus groups young people were nonetheless defined as being between 18 and 30 years of age and for the large-scale survey between the ages of 18 and 29. This enabled Power2Youth to generate very detailed new data from young people across six countries. The young people differed by nationality, social class, ethnicity, gender, religion and other factors. In this report we focus on some of these differences, and particularly gender, but necessarily we are presenting overall, aggregated findings to give a picture of the shared conditions and experiences of marginalization of SEM young people.

**Figure 1 |** Respondents surveyed by Power2Youth by country and gender



**2. DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES IN SOUTH AND EAST MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES**

The existence of a significant “youth bulge” was well known before the events of the Arab Spring and can clearly be seen in the demographic pyramid data presented for the six case study countries (see Figure 2). The bulge derives from the combination of declining infant mortality rates despite largely sustained female fertility rates (births per woman) which marked the second half of the twentieth century. Rapid economic development and modernization brought advances in health care, while extensive welfarist regimes negated the costs of maintaining high birth rates. Indeed, nationalist state ideologists resulted in pro-natalist public policies which had high levels of cultural and religious resonance. By 1980 the SEM region’s population growth rate had peaked at 3 percent per annum, but as oil rents receded and national economies stagnated, governments woke up to the expanding

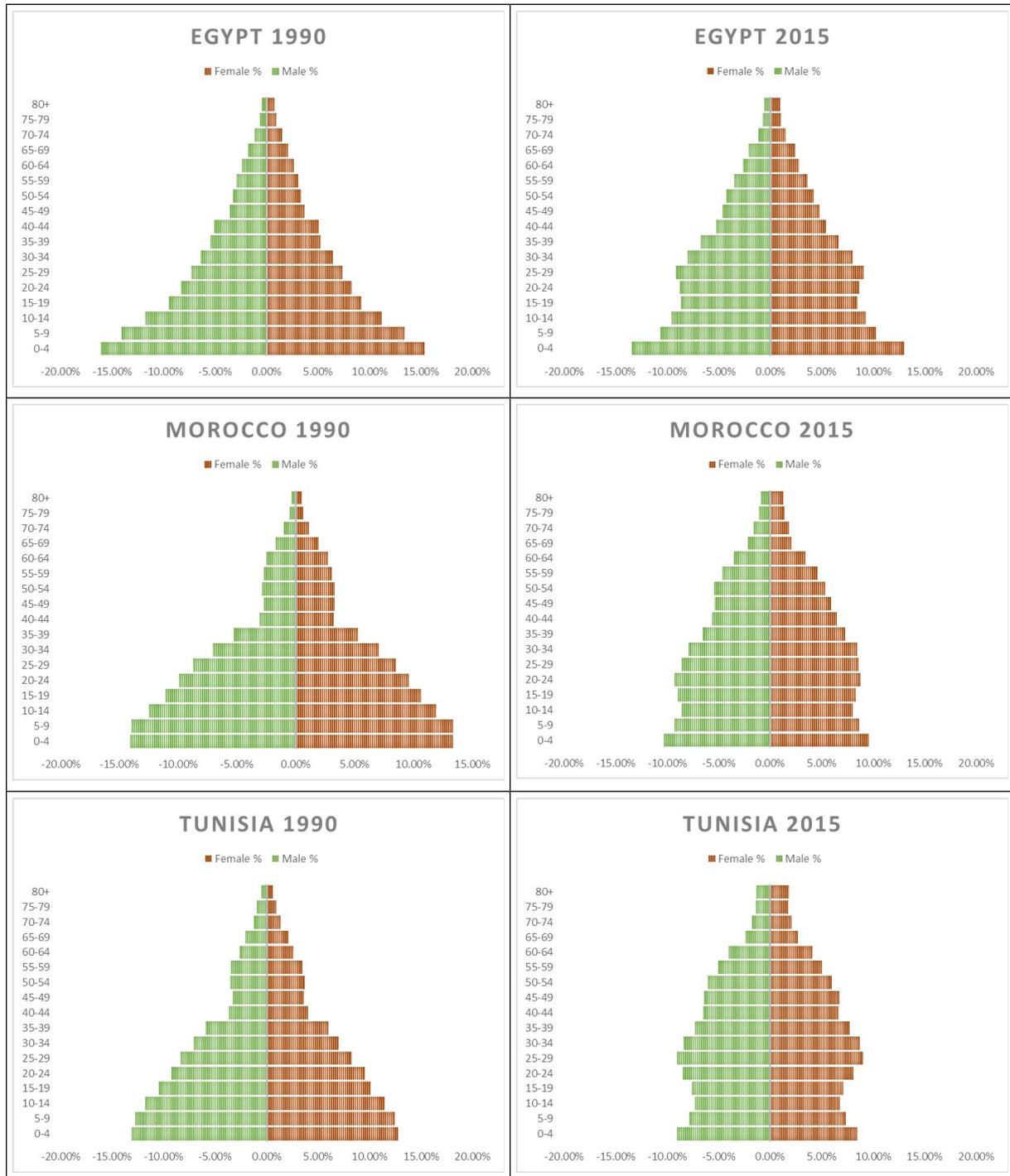
costs of social provision for rapid population growth (which included not just health care but education, housing, public utility provision, urban development, transport and food subsidies, among others). Low-key, culturally sensitive family planning programmes were introduced in some countries (Tunisia being among the forerunners here) but although fertility rates subsequently declined, the SEM average (at 2 percent per annum) was still significantly above a global average of just 1.2 percent (Assaad and Roudi-Fahimi 2009: 1) (see Figure 3).

A youth bulge brings with it specific political and economic challenges for governments (Murphy 2012) as well as potential opportunities. South Korea, for example, was able to capitalize on a demographic bulge as a “gift” which created a large work force at a specific moment in time when the country was embarking on low-cost, labour-fuelled export-oriented growth. In the SEM countries, however, the context is different. The youth bulge takes place against high university enrolment rates and decades of welfarist provision which have raised wages and employment expectations while the economies lack the vibrant private sector which might mobilize the expanding potential labour force for growth. The resulting high unemployment rates, coupled with cultural preferences which have suppressed female participation in the labour force, mean the SEM region now has one of the highest dependency ratios in the world. This is at a time when governments, in line with neo-liberal economic formulations, are withdrawing the welfare provision of past decades. The region is experiencing rising poverty rates, growing inequality and the rupture of social contracts which had provided the thin veil of legitimacy for increasingly autocratic regimes.

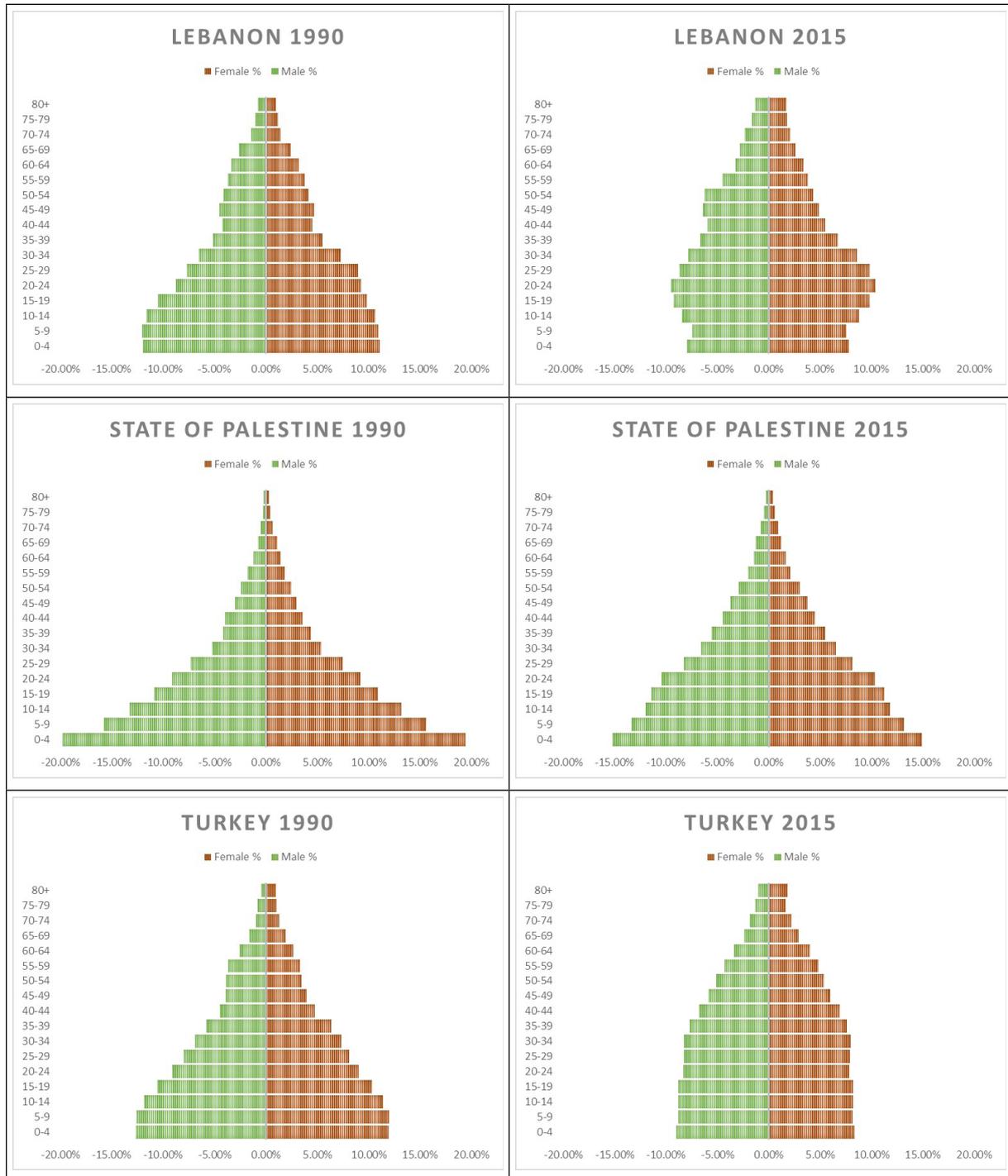
SEM young people are exceptionally vulnerable to the evolution of the social and political processes outlined above because they lack political, economic or social power which might enable them to defend their interests. This has led to a characterization of young people as having been held back from achieving the social, economic and political markers of adulthood, being trapped in “stalled transition” and becoming a so called “generation in waiting” - both across the SEM and in Europe. The failure to “progress” is seen primarily in relation to a “moment of transfer between activity categories” (education to employment, family of birth to family of choice) (Fergusson 2016: 37). What is often overlooked though is the way in which such “failure to progress” is shaped by broader political and policy decisions (see also MacDonald et al. 2001, Raffe 2003).

Young people are too often unable to earn the income needed to progress to the next stage of material independence which would allow them to leave the family home, marry, and become parents. They struggle to develop the range of educational and soft skills needed to find employment in an increasingly competitive labour market that itself provides too few opportunities for good quality employment. Forced to remain dependent on the family, they also remain subordinated to kinship structures and social institutions which privilege elders and males and which constrain the personal autonomy of younger people, females in particular. Alongside state authoritarianism, this comprises a *disabling* environment in which individuals' ability to pursue alternatives to given social, economic and political roles is greatly limited - all of which has led to assertions within policy circles at both national and international levels that SEM young people are increasingly socially excluded.

**Figure 2 | Demographic pyramid data across six case study countries**

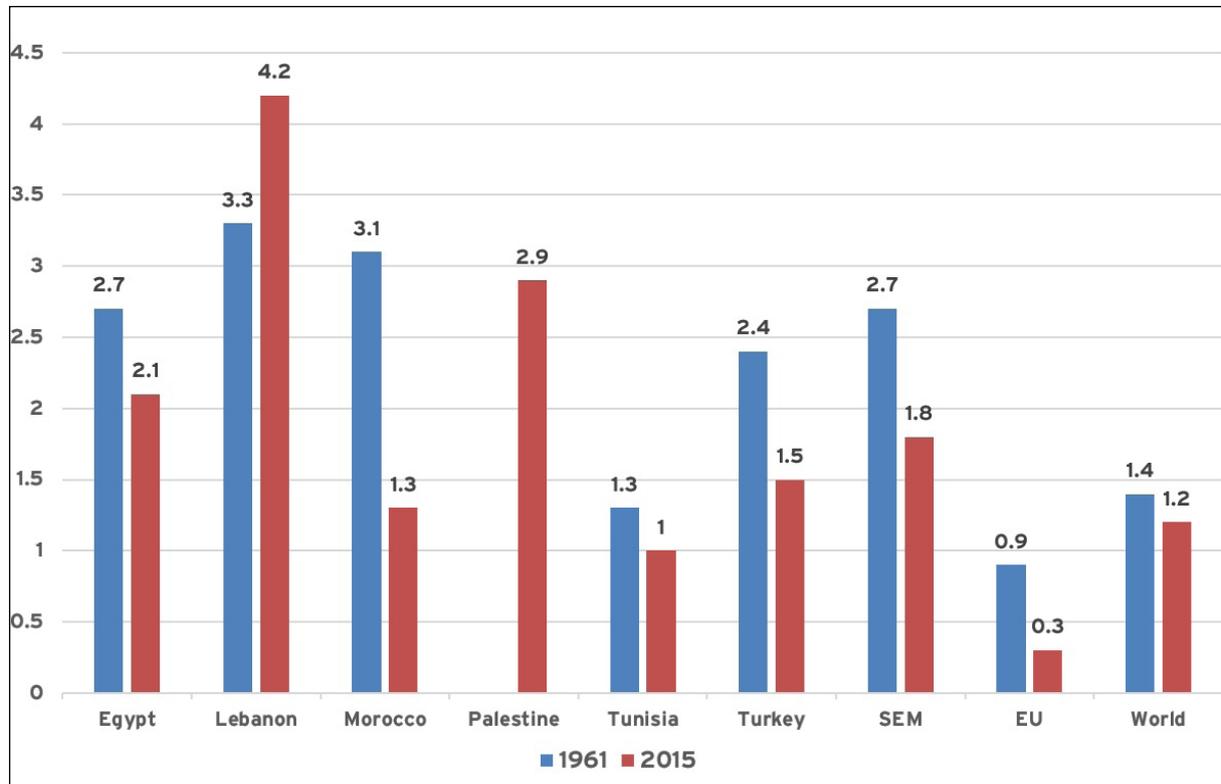


**Figure 2 | Demographic pyramid data across six case study countries (continued)**



Source: UNDESA 2015.

**Figure 3 | Annual population growth rates (percentage)**



Source: World Bank Open Data, <http://data.worldbank.org>.

### 3. HOW DO EXISTING PUBLIC POLICIES IN SEM COUNTRIES ADDRESS YOUNG PEOPLE?

As well as examining the lives of young people, Power2Youth interrogated existing public action, specifically the policies of the state and institutional structures in individual SEM countries in relation to the ways in which they addressed “youth” as a category and/or dealt with issues arising from the youth bulge. This part of the project aimed to understand how public policies impact upon youth, and whether these are youth-specific or the by-product of policies in other domains. As well as examining national youth policy, the project therefore also examined four other inter-related public action domains: employment, family, migration and spatial planning.

In what follows, we describe the dominant policy context within which young people across the SEM experienced their lives. State policies, and those of the state’s institutions, are never neutral but are rather the outcomes of mobilization by a plurality of actors with influence over the state. In the SEM countries, key considerations include the “weakness” of the state, by which we refer to the high insulation from, and low responsiveness to, the wider society. As a result, weak states frequently have low levels of popular legitimacy, are reliant on coercive apparatuses and exhibit inefficient administrations. SEM states are also engaged to greater or lesser degrees in compliance with neo-liberal economic approaches which encourage a

retreat of the state from social protection and publicly funded welfare promotion. This acts as an overarching framework for public policy which impacts on youth across policy domains.

Power2Youth's examination of national youth policy in six SEM countries, and of policies in the four associated policy domains, revealed that policy is constructed around *narratives of youth* which have less to do with youth interests and needs and more to do with government and institutional needs to control or contain young people. Similar processes occur in European countries (albeit that the dominant narratives of youth are different; see Griffin 1993).

Youth are typically portrayed in one of two ways, or often in both ways simultaneously: either as the "hope of the nation" or as a problem, even a "threat to the nation". Studies of national youth and youth-relevant policies and strategies show that archetypes of young people are created and promoted by the state institutions and within social groups. "Good youth" are those whose social, economic and political activity conforms to practices actively promoted by governments (which are largely authoritarian, patriarchal and neo-liberal). Included in the "good" practices of young people are membership in regime political parties and conformity to conservative social behavioural norms which reproduce political passivity. "Bad" youth are those who do not conform, and who actively challenge or abstain from mainstream political participation. Framed in this way, political activism which rejects state discourses, or behaviour which challenges traditional social norms, is equated with delinquency, social deviancy or even potential drug abuse or violence.<sup>3</sup> This way of designating young people occurs in both authoritarian and non-authoritarian SEM states and results in rejecting or even criminalizing the efforts of young people to define their own needs, interests and perspectives. On the extreme end of the scale, authoritarian regimes employ violent means (including assault, arbitrary arrest, detention and human rights abuses) to contain young people's dissent and free expression. State control, violent or otherwise, is authorized by conservative social values, a situation which leaves young people powerless and disenfranchised as they are unable to address the other problems they face in their everyday lives. International partners are collaborators in the projection of these narratives, as they work with and through national governments and all too often uncritically accept these categorizations of young people. As international policy-makers are increasingly concerned with the two "threats" of Islamic violent extremism and informal migration, both of which draw heavily on youth cohorts, the narratives of "good" and "bad" youth have become heavily securitized, drawing SEM regimes and external actors into common alliances which reinforce (or at least fail to challenge) these narratives of control and governance. Too often, the policy-focused interventions of international partners may actively reproduce these narratives and damage the ability of young people to change their world.

For example, prior to the turn of the millennium, all SEM governments supported national ministries and institutions which targeted youth specifically but which were largely confined to supporting sporting, leisure, popular educational and cultural activities which were politically co-opted by ruling regimes and which privileged young men as their key constituency. The range of public agencies explicitly adopting youth as their target group multiplied around the turn of the century as the impact of the youth bulge on education budgets and

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<sup>3</sup> For detailed information on the various ways in which this happens, please see Power2Youth publications, <http://www.power2youth.eu/publications>.

unemployment figures began to be felt. In short, the agenda become an economic one rather than just a matter of political incorporation and subordination. With the youth-led protests of 2011, the institutionalization of a “youth problem” became visible, not least as international organizations and partners became interested in supporting the youth policy initiatives of national governments. However, the Power2Youth research showed that many of the new or apparently re-invigorated public institutions in the six countries are little more than shells, lacking proper data and information about youth, remaining heavily politicized and lacking serious resources to address priority areas.

At the same time, many other public institutions with agendas such as education, health, housing, employment, urban or rural development, transportation and citizenship rights pursue agendas which impact heavily and often very negatively on young people. Public policy, beyond that concerned explicitly with youth, orders space and society, and young people’s place in both; therefore, we cannot understand the relevance of impact of youth policy in the SEM countries without locating it relative to other arenas of public policy: employment; migration; family and personal status; and spatial planning and management.

### 3.1 Employment Policies: An Overemphasis on the Supply-side

Across the SEM countries and in common with many EU countries, public employment policy has been dramatically transformed over the life-course of the current youth cohort. Whilst their parents enjoyed the benefits of expanding public sectors, offering white collar employment opportunities with substantial accompanying employment-related benefits, policy today assumes the private sector to be the necessary engine of the economy and has led to the retrenchment of social insurance and workers’ rights accordingly. Employment policy is no longer about public provision of employment but about equipping potential employees with the skills, capacities and attributes said to be required by the private sector: it focuses on developing the *supply* of labour rather than ensuring adequate *demand* for labour. However, SEM economies remain weak and local private sectors have too often proved themselves uncompetitive, unable to attract the necessary investment, and unable to offer either the quantity or quality of job opportunities needed to absorb new entrants into the labour market. A similar argument has been made about the failure of youth policies to tackle the structural, underlying causes of youth unemployment and underemployment in the EU (e.g., MacDonald 2011). In this context, when “employability programmes strive to enhance self-employment or auto-entrepreneurship rather than acting upon labour markets structures” (Catusse and Destremau 2016: 16), employment policy tends to simply enhance competition for jobs in an overcrowded market. As older workers defer retirement and hang on to expensive employment-related privileges already won, young people who lack social and political capital are more vulnerable to unemployment or underemployment. Youth-specific policies which focus on capacity building and entrepreneurship, and which benefit the most educated (and often males), can pacify the potential for dissent from the most capable constituency and can work well for some individuals, but they cannot resolve the long-term structural inability of national economies to provide sufficient job opportunities for the whole youth cohort.

Moreover, strategies and policies which place the onus on young people to be adaptive and resilient are at risk of exacerbating problems by ignoring the structural realities. For example,

young people may be encouraged to develop entrepreneurial skills, borrow capital and start their own small businesses. But in environments where those businesses cannot succeed (due to corruption, over-regulation, poor risk assessment by lenders, absence of follow-up support, lack of access to markets, etc.), the young person can find him or herself badly in debt and without assistance during the experience of business failure. Although much of this is familiar across the SEM and the EU (e.g., see MacDonald and Coffield 1991), as will be seen below, it has a particularly negative effect on SEM young people when combined with other forms of marginalization.

### 3.2 Migration Policies: Conflicting Needs and Old Economies

Migration policies manage often conflicting needs. On the one hand, SEM governments are mindful of the economic benefits generated by the money sent home by emigrants, as well as the political gains to be had from exporting unemployment and the dissent which accompanies it. On the other hand, recipient countries of SEM migrants have legitimate security and border-control needs of their own which must be accommodated by SEM public policy. Power2Youth found that resulting migration policies compounded existing inequalities among SEM youth - the limited opportunities for formal or legal migration were ones that privileged educated migrants (who already had access to language skills and contacts or educational opportunities abroad), as well as some nationalities or confessions. Less educated young people and those from working-class or economically marginalized communities were more likely to be propelled into informal or illegal migration (with all the accompanying risks). Male youth were also more likely to feel confident to undertake migration, although young women are increasingly likely to consider it.

### 3.3 Family and Personal Status Policies: Entrenching Gender Inequality

Since the turn of the millennium, case study countries have borne witness to an increasingly socially conservative approach to family and personal status policies. These have been described as

strengthen[ing] the heterosexual family norm, based on radical gender differences [...] Sometimes accompanied by a natalist policy to defend nationalist interests, attacks have multiplied on females' reproductive rights, while age at marriage and ensuing earlier start in fertility tend to decrease. These tendencies are "fraught with paradoxes" (Catusse and Destremau 2016: 19).

State policies have enabled ever-greater legal restrictions on women (such as their right to pass on their nationality in Lebanon), or have endorsed patriarchal social norms, for example by the provision of financial support to women to stay at home and take care of children in Turkey. Family law is heavily influenced by religious law (if not entirely subordinate to it as in Lebanon) and sexual behaviour is generally subject to legal as well as social constraints which treat any alternative to the heterosexual "norm" as deviant, dangerous and criminal. Restrictions and uncertainties abound as economic insecurity and government policies propel women into education and the labour force while at the same time drawing them more tightly under the normative and institutional control of patriarchal structures. In practice this often means that women's experiences of marginalization across SEM countries are qualitatively different to those of men, particularly in relation to issues of insecurity and safety, as will be

described below.

### 3.4 Spatial Planning and Management Policies: Fear and Immobility

Despite governments' showcasing the modernist "globalized" urban hubs and glittering gated-community spaces which have fronted their development planning across the SEM region, the reality of social space experienced by many young people is very different: large cities have expanded so rapidly and with such poor and underprovisioned planning that they are more accurately described as impoverished slums where utilities and services are often informal, irregular and/or non-existent. Young people find themselves "peripheralized" in university campuses located far from the shiny heart of the showcase cities (for example, in Egypt and Morocco), unable to travel freely due to the absence of safe, functioning or affordable public transport, denied affordable decent housing, and without any kind of safe public space for leisure. As Mona Harb points out, in Lebanon as elsewhere in the region, "Young people in the cities thus have very few freely accessible open spaces they can go to, hang out in, socialize and interact within" (Harb 2016: 7). Beyond the cities, young people often find themselves cut off from economic opportunity, living in neglected, poorly serviced and underdeveloped rural areas. In relation to spatial planning, a key finding of the policy analyses of Power2Youth is that as far as young people are considered in policy-making within any specific SEM country, the emphasis tends to be on "containment", restricting them spatially to areas where they are invisible, where they can "do no harm" or excluding them from spaces where their presence is not required for business to progress. There is little or no effort made to include young people in decisions about urban or spatial planning, and young people's interests do not feature in planning priorities. Public space has become unfriendly and unsafe for many young people. Even in countries where protest movements initially saw youth "recapturing" public spaces, the reality today is more often that old inequalities (especially between genders) have been reinforced, and that the contest to reclaim public space has resulted in greater violence and insecurity within it. Women lose out. So, for instance, young women across the region report facing regular physical and/or sexual harassment on public transport (where it exists) or in the streets. One Lebanese young woman who was part of a focus group recounted that it is simply not possible to get on public transport in her town without being touched or harassed. As will be shown later in this report, these issues take on new meanings for the lives of young people when placed within an analysis of their wider and multiple experiences of marginalization.

In summary, the impact on young people of all these areas of public policy will vary depending on young people's socio-economic status, gender, educational level, religious or sectarian identity, place of residence and so on. What Power2Youth analyses showed, however, is that regardless of the impact, these policies *as a whole* are not youth-friendly. They do little to address youth-specific issues and, as will be seen below, often make matters worse. Young people have little or no capacity to shape public policies to specifically advance their interests. Instead, they and their interests are marginalized from the policy-making process. Resulting policies reinforce the other forms of marginalization which young people face. In this policy context, the idea that regime-managed "youth policies" or "youth strategies" can offset broader processes of marginalization in any meaningful way is unlikely to be convincing for young people themselves. Instead, youth policy is better understood as *part of* the marginalization process - as well as a technology for controlling and managing youth dissent and resistance.

#### 4. TALKING ABOUT SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND MARGINALIZATION

The term “social exclusion” originally referred to the processes of marginalization and deprivation which occur as social welfare and protection systems are dismantled or diminished in Europe. More recently, it has been used to describe the process in which individuals or groups are progressively and systematically blocked from rights, opportunities and resources, preventing them from being fully participant in society, “implying a break in the social bonds that tie the excluded individual or group to the larger society” (Paciello and Pioppi 2014: 6). Power2Youth found the term useful in that it expresses the relational aspect of how young people’s lives compare to older cohorts in the countries studied. The concept, however, is far from perfect and has several problems, both in terms of how it can be operationalized in data collection and analysis as well as its utility in thinking about policy.

Firstly, it implies that to be “included” is an ideal outcome. However, many SEM young people live in authoritarian and patriarchal states that contribute to inequality by privileging supporters and criminalizing opponents. Being “included” in this context means being subjected to systemic inequality. “Inclusion” can result in being disempowered rather than empowered. If a young person has to belong to a ruling political party in order to have access to resources, or if a young woman can access the labour market but is still expected to bear the burden of household work alone, they remain subject to embedded unequal power relationships. This limitation in the utility of the concept of social exclusion echoes research on young people from the UK which has argued that the concept of social exclusion can potentially mask inequalities *between* those who are “included” in the labour market and those who are restricted to low quality, low paid jobs (MacDonald and Marsh 2005). In other words, the concept potentially obscures more than it illuminates.

Secondly, the either/or nature of the inclusion/exclusion distinction does not adequately describe or help us understand the ways in which young people are marginalized, deprived of some of the benefits of full social participation in relation to the distribution and allocation of resources to maximize one’s potential for prosperity, economic and otherwise. Whereas exclusion tends to refer to the totality of an individual’s social existence (they are either excluded or included), marginalization offers a subtler way to understand the relational dynamics between groups. It is infinitely varied and depends on how social class, gender, area of residence, nationality, religious identity, tribal or family connections, party membership and a host of other aspects of contemporary life intersect. Logically, individuals can be simultaneously excluded in one domain, for example, lacking employment and economic security, but included within a safe, trusted family or local community where opinions can be voiced and listened to and individuals experience well-being. Few people in Europe or the SEM are absolutely excluded from, or totally included within a specific society. We all experience greater or lesser degrees of marginalization across the various political, economic and social dimensions of our lives, and those experiences of marginalization will, by definition, vary over time.

Thirdly, Power2Youth found that in the SEM region, the social and political forces that impel marginalization disproportionately affect youth, but they are not in and of themselves specifically “youth problems”. Rather, young people encounter these forces more consistently and immediately than older age groups due to a relative lack of power. This shapes young

people's "front-line" exposure to forces of marginalization. Youth are often disconnected from both political power and more everyday means of advancing their own interests, such as the freedom to make social and economic choices, recognition of individual merit and dwelling in enabling environments. This disparity of power is observed through the *multiple everyday marginalizations* experienced by young people in SEM countries and is key to understanding why they might pursue other forms of action, including migration, criminality or violent extremism.

Fourthly, discourses of social exclusion and social inclusion have emanated from the EU policy context. Here, the dominant policy "solution" has been to improve the human capital of "the excluded" through re-integrating them into extended education and training to improve skills and qualifications. That, it is suggested, helps people move "from welfare to work", from unemployment to labour market participation, thus signifying social inclusion. There are problems with this policy thinking in the European context (Levitas 1998) that are highlighted in sharp relief in the SEM countries. Here it is sometimes the *most* educated and qualified who face the greatest chances of unemployment. Additionally, and in relation to the UK policy context, the concept of "social exclusion" has within it a series of embedded assumptions about its causes as inhering in the individual. Hence, the policy solution becomes one that targets the individual, his/her deficits and his/her pathologies, rather than the social structural context in which young people make choices (see also Fergusson 2016).

Finally, the concept of marginalization allows us to foreground the subjective experiences of *relative deprivation*, that is the experience of being deprived of something to which one believes oneself to be entitled. In the SEM countries, this has a particular importance as decades of post-independence populist and welfarist policies fostered expectations among today's young people based on how their parents' lives were transformed by an interventionist state. Regimes embarked on prolonged educational enrolment, creating expectations of ever-rising living standards supported by high-quality employment opportunities and state-provided social insurance and workers' benefits systems. However, the embrace of neo-liberal economic development policies in the 1980s, themselves frustrated by continuing bureaucratic and self-interested regime apparatuses, and the continuing weakness of regional growth rates, have led instead to wage depression, high unemployment rates and the rolling-back of public provision. Too many of today's young people find little in the public, national and political discourses that resonates with their own life experiences, while their access to any form of formal power that might enable them to challenge those discourses is truly marginal.

Power2Youth found, then, that the concept of "*multiple marginalizations*" better expressed the status of SEM youth than did "social exclusion". Nonetheless, the project used the concepts of inclusion/exclusion to recognize exclusionary power relationships, institutions and practices where they exist and to explore how these impacted in different ways on young people. Trying to work with the "either/ or" concept of social exclusion/inclusion also helped the researchers to see *exactly how diverse* young people's experiences were (by nationality, gender and all the other sources of individual difference that matter in shaping the lives of SEM youth). Youth is not a homogeneous category, and nor can their interests simply be subsumed by policy makers to a biological age category. Additionally, working with the concept of social exclusion highlighted that the problems that young people in SEM countries face are not unique to that region; young people's multiple marginalizations are not a function

of any presumed pathology of SEM countries. Rather, and importantly, the experiences facing young people in SEM countries are in many ways reminiscent of the problems of young people in the EU; however, they are faced in more intense and extreme forms (rates of graduate unemployment are one example, as we show below) and some experiences are quite different (such as the frightening levels of political and personal insecurity endured by SEM youth, that we describe shortly).

The next section of the report provides a description of what we see as being the main forms, modes or spheres of marginalization that were experienced across the six case study countries and that are most relevant to policy development.

## 5. THE MULTIPLE MARGINALIZATIONS OF YOUTH

In analysing the data produced as part of Power2Youth, we identified six forms, or spheres, of marginalization that affected young people. At the risk of repetition, the experiences of marginalization within each sphere and across each of the respective SEM countries will be variegated by a host of other forms of social differentiation. Hence, not only are there multiple spheres of marginalization, there are multiple experiences of specific spheres of marginalization. What is presented here is, therefore, necessarily more of a characterization of the experiences, than a detailed description of the everyday lives of young people across the SEM. Whilst these characterizations enabled us to think about guidelines for policy, they do not - nor are they intended to - reflect the full complexity or heterogeneity of experiences of young people across the region or within any specific country. They are perhaps more accurately described as heuristic devices. The six forms we identified are: insecure school-to-work transition; unemployment and precarious living; unsafe environments, corruption and lack of trust in public institutions; political participation; and subjective insecurity.

### 5.1 Insecure School-to-Work Transitions

Young people in SEM countries do not lack education. In the last 30 years, there has been a large increase in school attendance (both male and female), the completion of high school, and university education. However, education has not yielded solutions to the exceptionally high rates of youth unemployment and underemployment in the region. This is despite the fact that, across all case study countries, individual governments have framed the problem of youth unemployment as an educational problem. National governments, international partners and organizations base their policies on the assumption that local education systems have poorly prepared young people for the labour market. Whilst this *may* be the case (see World Bank 2008), the relationships between education systems and labour markets are much more complex. Primary, secondary and tertiary educational systems are not always able to anticipate labour market needs and one might debate whether this should be their sole or even main function. Moreover, except for vocational and professional qualifying degree programmes, most university education is organized around disciplinary subjects rather than specific employment and labour market requirements.

In contrast to young people in the EU, unemployment in the SEM countries is often particularly marked among university graduates. For instance in Lebanon, 51 percent of those with completed (as opposed to those who had yet to complete) higher educational qualification

had had no work or employment in the preceding 12 months. In Morocco and Egypt, it was 49 and 47 percent respectively. Seventy percent of Palestinian young people with completed higher educational qualifications had had no work or employment in the previous 12 months. Turkish university-educated young people did marginally better in that only 37 percent reported having had no work in the preceding 12 months.

Critics suggest that students lack critical and transferable skills, and are overly concentrated in the arts and humanities rather than STEM and business-friendly subjects. In general, schools and universities are poorly resourced and curricula heavily controlled; educational institutions are bureaucratic and inefficient; learning styles are dependent on rote learning and deference to authority; and university enrolment itself is used principally as a means of disguising the lack of job opportunities. Educational reform processes, often funded by international partners, have been stymied by political resistance of the state, bureaucratic inertia and vested interests. In many of the focus groups that we undertook, young people were very aware of the limitations of their education and of the inequalities created by better quality, privately funded alternative educational opportunities, and were profoundly critical of the governments which oversee such flawed systems.

Whatever the problems of the education and training systems of the SEM countries, we cannot hope to understand problems in young people's school-to-work transitions - such as high rates of unemployment - without understanding *both* sides of the labour market: the demand for workers as well as their supply. Even if there are flaws in university education systems, the striking rates of un- and underemployment for graduates in SEM countries is evidence of problems in labour demand and of deep, structural flaws in national economies. There are simply insufficient good quality jobs to go around. In practice, this means that, in this context of the over-supply of graduates to an already saturated labour market, attempts to increase the level or quality of individuals' education achievement can result, paradoxically, in intensified competition for scarce employment opportunities and, consequently, an increase in individuals' subjective experiences of marginalization.

## 5.2 Unemployment and Precarious Living

A second aspect of the marginalization faced by young people related to issues of unemployment and precarious living. The region, in common with parts of Europe, suffers from high rates of unemployment and underemployment (that is, people working in jobs for which they are overqualified and people wanting more hours of work than they can find). Labour markets are increasingly characterized by precarious forms of employment and a reliance on the informal economy. In SEM countries and elsewhere, young people are exceptionally vulnerable to these economic trends because they are the most recent entrants to the labour market. Young people's economic precarity is made worse within the SEM, however, because neo-liberal economic policies are enacted alongside regionally specific and enduring patrimonial modes of behaviour. So, for instance, of those who took part in the surveys in the case study countries, between half and three-quarters had had no work or employment in the preceding 12 months.

Neo-liberal economic policies, endorsed by international partners and organizations, are transforming national economies from statist models which assume a leading role for the

public sector in production, employment, exchange and trade, towards a model in which it is presumed that the private sector will assume primary responsibility for these activities. Against this ideal, the reality is that the private sector in SEM countries remains weak and unable to compete effectively in international markets, and in some cases - such as Egypt - because of its *capture* by various state extensions. As part of the shift away from statist economic models, public sector employment opportunities have been frozen or reduced and subsequently competition for the limited jobs available in the private sector is fierce. Such competition benefits older, more experienced applicants or those young people who already enjoy relative advantages (better education, bilingualism, proximity to urban hubs, international connections, etc.), all of which exacerbates the extant inequalities between and among young people and adults.

In keeping with neo-liberal economic ideology and since the 1970s many governments across the EU as well as other Franco- and Anglophone countries have supported the private sector by reducing the regulatory burdens associated with labour protections. SEM countries have been encouraged via international and partner organizations to do the same. What this means in practice is that those older workers already in employment in SEM countries retire later and hold on fiercely to their employment-related privileges while young new entrants have no bargaining power relative to employers, must wait longer for posts to become available and suffer qualification inflation as competition for jobs increases. Compared to older cohorts in the SEM, young people enjoy lower wages, less or no job security, and fewer work-related benefits. These are aspects of intergenerational inequality that have similarly been remarked upon in respect of younger and older generations in Europe (Roberts 2012). In SEM countries, young adults also now have fewer alternative public sector opportunities than previously. Informal employment, often supplementing underemployment, is increasingly the norm for young people, as is the phenomenon of “churning” between formal and informal employment. Similar trends are noticed in EU countries (see MacDonald 2017). While SEM and EU young people may be enduring similar processes, SEM young people’s experiences in this regard are intensified by the fact that their access to any employment (precarious or otherwise) is often also dependent on *wasta* (that is, personal connections) or formal political affiliation. Crucially, the Power2Youth survey revealed that young people perceive *wasta* to be by far the single most important factor in accessing employment, with over 90 percent of survey respondents in every country surveyed believing it to be either “very” or “fairly important”. In this environment, there is little faith in either education or formal government-run employment programmes as secure routes into employment.

Meanwhile, the relative deprivation - or disconnect between aspirations fostered by longer periods in education and qualification inflation on the one hand, and the strictly limited opportunities for work, income, savings and future security on the other - experienced by young people in the SEM countries intensifies and becomes more widespread. Of the employed young people surveyed by Power2Youth, only between 17 percent (Palestine) and 40 percent (Lebanon) had a formal contract for their employment, and between 53 percent (Morocco and Lebanon) and 72 percent (Egypt) were “very” or “somewhat afraid” of losing their job: these are clear indications that even when people are in standard employment this is often very precarious.

Attempts by national governments to create employment opportunities for SEM young people have reproduced policy interventions imported from international financial organizations and partners (including the EU). These often seek to fix both youth unemployment and the precarious nature of employment through individualizing strategies that encourage “entrepreneurialism”, offer vocational training programmes and active labour market programmes and are often based on the belief that unemployment and precarity are the result of young people’s deficient skills, approach, attitude or education. The data collected for Power2Youth demonstrated that young people often accept these prescriptions (which, of course, does not mean they are accurate) but at the same time are highly sceptical that the limited opportunities will be equally available to all young people. Whilst there are broad similarities in the interventions designed to deal with unemployment and precarious living between EU and SEM countries, a problem for the latter is that in promoting entrepreneurialism, these programmes can reproduce existing inequalities by privileging those young people who possess personal connections, political party membership, elite educations and bilingualism. These problems are recognized by SEM young people and they are aware that programmes do little to counter the structural weaknesses of local economies, cannot produce employment opportunities in sufficient quantity, and often result in subsidizing already corrupt and inefficient employers. For these reasons, and as was demonstrated time and again in our focus groups, they are eager for international partners to be more robust in their monitoring of externally funded programmes and to impose conditions which promote equality of access. Those who took part in the focus groups endorsed more even distribution of the benefits of programmes to include poorer, rural and previously neglected regions.

A significant difference in the experiences of marginalization in relation to unemployment and precarious living between SEM and EU young people is that, for young people in the SEM countries, there is no equivalent of job-seekers’ allowances or income support payments. Even if they find work, they are highly unlikely to receive the social insurance, pension and other work-related benefits that their parents enjoyed. They understand their economic future as insecure at best. They are more likely to experience material dependence on family - or indeed poverty - for longer, and if they are ill or disabled, they can rarely afford anything but the most basic medical treatment. Food subsidies and anti-poverty interventions are increasingly targeted towards the very poorest, resulting in a large precarious middle class which can slip into poverty at any moment and which is increasingly mired in private debt.

### 5.3 Unsafe Environments

The third sphere of marginalization - noted across all the country reports and data collected as part of the Power2Youth project - was that created through unsafe environments. The research demonstrated that problems of unsafe environment are particularly acute for young people in rapidly expanding but poorly serviced urban areas and in the largely neglected rural communities which lack public investment, transport and communications connections, or appropriate public educational and health provision.<sup>4</sup> Interview and focus group data demonstrated that young people, who lack employment and independent incomes, expressed the view that there is little hope for a future in rural areas, and young men (but increasingly young women too) feel impelled to migrate to the cities or abroad, despite the accompanying

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<sup>4</sup> Please see Power2Youth publications: <http://www.power2youth.eu/publications>.

dangers. Because of existing gender-based ideologies, young women are more likely to be obliged into marriage as a means of reducing the burden they place on the family home. Noticeable in greater or lesser extents across all surveyed countries, increased internal migration has led to rapid urbanization, the process of which has been subject to embedded corruption and poor planning. The results have been the growth of frequently dangerous banlieues, offering insufficient appropriate and affordable housing, inadequate public transport and very limited and often unsafe pedestrian spaces. It was regularly reported that municipal services like waste collection were limited and of low quality, as was the poor provision of utilities such as water and electricity. In this environment, young people talked about the difficulty of finding safe youth-friendly spaces to engage in social and leisure activities, or to simply move around safely, affordably and without anxiety. For some young people, urban spaces felt like little more than prisons, daily physical manifestations of their own restricted opportunities. They reported an irony: even as the Internet and satellite TV tell them more about the world beyond their immediate context, the worlds in which they live their day-to-day lives are becoming smaller. For young women this was particularly acute with physical safety in public spaces now an urgent issue. As one young woman from Tunis explained: "We have to always think about where we go, what time we go and with who we go. We cannot go freely". Few young people felt safe even in youth-oriented spaces such as university campuses.

Many young people in SEM countries feel that that national police and security forces offer them little or no protection but actively conspire to exacerbate their physical insecurity. Not surprisingly then, the Power2Youth survey found that between 55 percent (Morocco) and 73 percent (Palestine) of young people spent most of their free time in the family home. One young Lebanese woman participant stated that she and her friends would only go out in groups of four or more, and described the lengthy psychological preparations they engaged in to deal with the perceived and actual insecurity and lack of safety that confronts them in public places. These feelings were echoed by a young woman from Nablus City who, in addition to noting issues of neighbourhood, said: "My neighbours make me feel secure. The Israeli soldiers come to the home and we do not feel safe. Girls on the street also do not always feel safe in the street, I mean at night because of harassment. Girls cannot go freely anywhere at night".

For young Palestinians, and because of the Israeli occupation, the problem of physical safety is particularly acute: "Indeed, feeling unsafe, afraid and threatened is very much part of daily life, more so in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank, but relevant to both" (Giacaman et al. 2017: 27). Palestinian security institutions are unable to defend the physical safety of the population and have been effectively co-opted into the structures which deny it to them, creating an intensified form of layered insecurity.

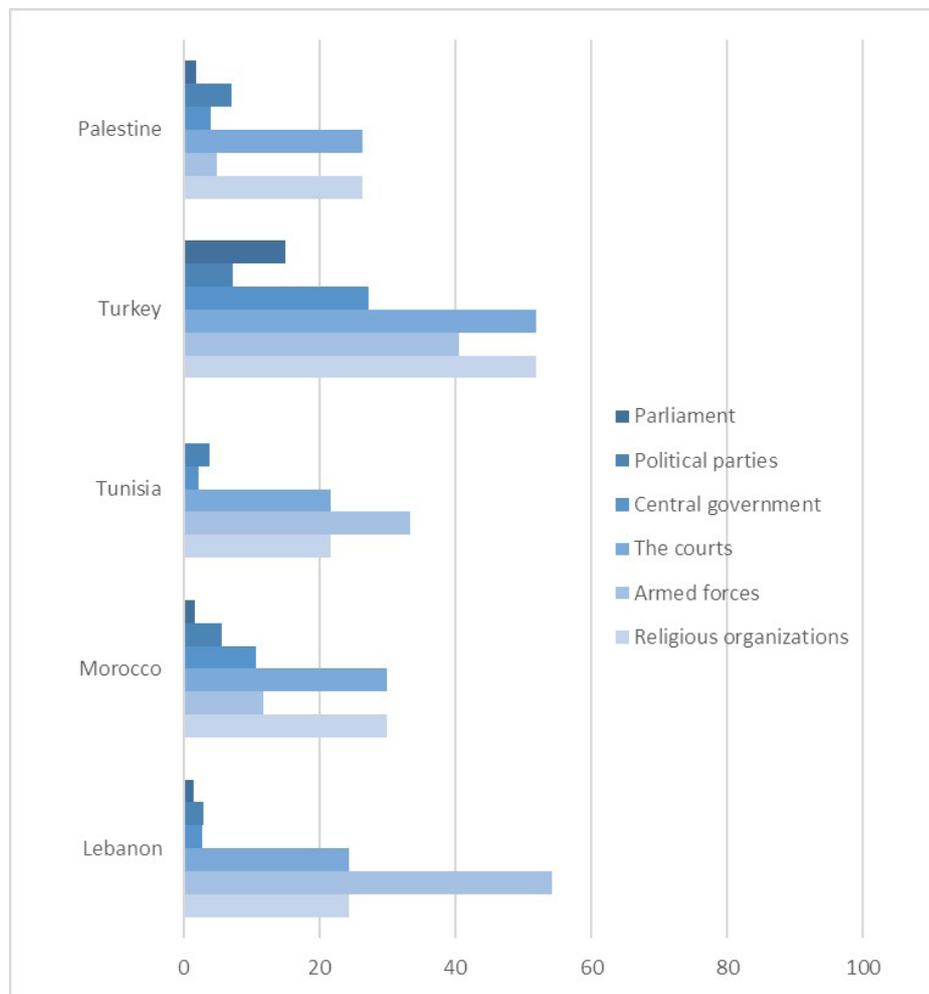
#### **5.4 Corruption and Lack of Trust**

A fourth sphere of marginalization is that associated with corruption and the lack of trust in public institutions. In common with other spheres of marginalization, the intensity and effects depend on other forms of social differentiation. Corruption is endemic across the SEM countries. Its impact is immeasurable. The survey data demonstrated - and the focus groups corroborated - that young people are profoundly conscious that any progression and

advancement for them (e.g., in employment, education or access to services) is dependent on *wasta*. They resent it as generally bad for social and economic life, but also use it when necessary to improve their own lives. As a young woman from Nablus City explained in a focus group, “I feel pessimistic about jobs. I graduated. Everyone needs an intermediary, for every opportunity, for work, you need *wasta* in these times. No *wasta*, no work. Even for training”. One of the young men from a Beirut focus group put it even more succinctly: “Without *wasta*, it would not make it better [because of the lack of infrastructure], it would make it fairer”.

However, relying on *wasta* means that young people are even more subordinated to older people who are already in positions of power. The systemic corruption in SEM states leaves young people vulnerable, forcing them to engage in unfair competition for jobs or access to opportunities and representation and marginalizing them as less powerful, even when they *do* have access to personal connections. These views were regularly corroborated in the focus group interviews. For instance, one young man from Beirut explained: “We need to change the system and the culture because we are doing everything to make ourselves better, but inefficiencies and corruption don’t change”.

**Figure 4 |** Percentage of respondents who felt confidence in public institutions



Note: Egyptian data is missing for this question.  
 Source: Power2Youth, Aggregated National Survey Data.

One of the key and crucial differences between the types of marginalizing experiences endured by the young people in the EU and SEM young people, is that for the latter the state's role as an arbiter of fair and equal practices is missing. This, even though most SEM countries have legal institutions defending individuals from arbitrary practices and discrimination based on age (see Figure 4). In their daily lives and to varying degrees, many SEM young people experience the absence of the rule of law, and the inability or unwillingness of public judicial or other bodies to enforce relevant regulations. Political and legal institutions are often themselves riddled with patrimonial modes of behaviour at best, and outright corruption at worst, and young people have little or no trust in them, leading to low political participation rates and a high degree of political abstinence. Formal state institutions are seen as belonging to, and privileging, older generations, undermining notions of citizenship and national "belonging". In this environment, it is hardly surprising that many SEM young people see those closest to them - their family - as being the most trustworthy.

### 5.5 Political (Non)participation

A fifth sphere in which the marginalizing experiences of young people in SEM countries are shaped is that associated with political participation. What this means in practice will vary across countries and across the social differences of young people within any particular country. The Power2Youth project demonstrates the links between the coercive behaviour of authoritarian states and young people's awareness of their everyday vulnerability to arbitrary state violence (i.e., imprisonment, beatings, and in some states, rape and torture). It is this aspect of young people's lives in SEM countries which is perhaps most specific to the region and different from that of many Europeans: the absence of expectations of personal or physical security and the role of the state and its security institutions in reproducing, rather than protecting them from this. Young people are constantly aware of implicit and explicit "red lines", which if crossed, can result in violence even in everyday settings. Examples include: young women, who are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence; Palestinian youth travelling to university, having to face armed soldiers at an Israeli check-point; or Egyptian bloggers arrested and tortured in prison. The "Arab Spring" protests have so far led to renewed authoritarianism (Egypt and Turkey), civil war (Libya and Syria) and at best, a still extraordinarily fragile transition (Tunisia). In these conditions of physical uncertainty, young people often doubt promises of an improved future or a political role for themselves therein.

Despite this, many young people in the SEM region are politically active, although the evidence suggests that their preference is for informal and alternative modes of activism and participation rather than participation through conventional political institutions such as parties or government-run youth initiatives. They engage in protests, single-issue campaigning, cultural politics, social entrepreneurship and social media activism, preferring youth-friendly spaces and behaviours. Conventional political spaces are often avoided, either because older cohorts dominate institutions and make little space for young people, or because they are considered corrupt and co-opted by authoritarian regimes with no legitimacy in the eyes of young people. As two young Tunisians put it:

I can't be a member in a political party, I can't be a prisoner to a rigid hierarchy waiting for a leader's orders to participate in a mobilization and waiting for their orders to take a decision or an attitude concerning such and such an event happening in the

country. I want to be free. [...] We don't need anyone to help us circulate our demands, we are able to do it without any mediators. (Hamdi 2017)

Referring to political parties as being mainly concerned with their own image rather than effectively representing the interests of members or contributing to the national good, one Palestinian member of a focus group said: "There are no political parties except during their festivals/ commemorations" (Giacaman et al. 2017: 21).

Power2Youth survey data shows that young people are twice as likely to participate in group activities designed to address specific problems as they are to become members of formal organizations, showing a preference for issue-based activism which does not require formal membership or adherence to an organization. By abstaining or being excluded from formal political spaces, young people are usually unable to make substantive changes. Being excluded from the corridors of power increases their marginalization, although the evidence suggests that this is more likely to be the case in national political institutions than in regional or local government institutions. Many young people find that local political spaces are more open, receptive to youth-led initiatives and generally "safer" than national political spaces. For example, in the focus groups in Palestine "some participants noted having had positive experiences with their local municipalities and governorates, and having generally found them to be receptive to and interested in the needs of youth volunteers" (Giacaman et al. 2017: 22). In Lebanon too, some local mayors have involved youth in decision-making regarding spatial planning (Harb 2016: 4). Being themselves often neglected by national governments, and often relatively autonomous from them, local authorities are then often more receptive to and dependent on citizen-led initiatives, including those of young people.

Notably, in Palestine young people continued to be particularly active in their protests against Israeli occupation and in sustaining the "Third Uprising", insisting in acting independently of political institutions.

## 5.6 Subjective Insecurities

The sixth and final form of marginalization experienced to a greater or lesser extent by the SEM young people we surveyed was associated with the subjective insecurities that can result from blocked or delayed transition to the social status of adulthood. Financial independence, personal autonomy, marriage and parenthood are all taking place later for SEM young people than for their parents' generation - something that is shared between SEM and EU young people (MacDonald 2011). The young people surveyed by Power2Youth frequently expressed their frustration at their prolonged dependence on, and residence with, family. One of the key differences with some of the northern European countries, however, is that this prolonged dependence takes place in a patriarchal context where seniority brings privileges and young people, especially young women, are expected to defer to their seniors. It is worth noting that of those surveyed, between 66.8 percent (Palestine) and 85.2 percent (Tunisia) of young people still lived in the maternal home. As one of the young men in a focus group in Beirut said: "Even if you wanted to be independent, you can't because rent costs too much and the housing is all for families". It is worth noting that this particular respondent was in his late twenties.

Young people's delayed attainment of the social status of "adult" is not matched by a delay in physical maturity. The issues that arise from this are complex and profound when celibacy is an issue of (family) honour. As Power2Youth data demonstrated, young SEM people frequently find their pursuit of a social life beyond the family controversial and their thoughts and opinions unvalued. The survey data revealed that only 29 percent (Tunisia) and 50 percent (Lebanon) of young people felt their opinions were taken seriously by their families, with a significantly lower percentage of young women feeling this compared to young men (e.g., in Egypt 51 percent of young men felt their opinions were taken seriously compared to just 24 percent of young women). As their transitions are extended well into the age of physical and emotional maturity, and as they develop cultural, political and sexual identities of their own, they become increasingly frustrated and experience deep social marginalization in both public and private spheres.

Having been exposed to more education than their forebears and enjoying new forms of global popular youth culture and communications, young people often have a split sense of social self - one relevant to being in the family and one belonging to the social world outside their family - thus switching from youth to adult in a constant process of navigation between multiple identities. The narratives of nation and citizen propounded by the state have little resonance for them as they are vulnerable to its arbitrary actions and its withdrawal from economic and social provision. Meanwhile, the norms and cultures of conservative patriarchal society which offer some degree of material shelter are at odds with their evolving and globally connected identities and their need to move beyond the confines of the family. Thus, young people suffer from a subjective insecurity, a sense of not belonging, and of being separate from the rules and structures within which they live their everyday lives.

The process can be particularly complex for young women, with established norms of social control over their bodies being in sharp contrast to their need for opportunities to express their adult identities. Research across the SEM region indicates that young women continue to suffer more consistently and to a greater degree across all the areas of marginalization mentioned above. Despite national commitments to international conventions protecting women and promoting their equality, the reality for young women is that - despite being more likely to achieve a higher level of education than their mothers - they continue to be under-represented in the labour force, to be subordinated to patriarchal norms and practices in both home and the public sphere, to be vulnerable to emotional and physical abuse, to face sexual harassment in employment or public social spaces, to be poor and to lack financial and bodily security. One of the focus group interviewees in Beirut summed up this dynamic when she stated: "I would like to have a job and be independent but the truth is my family will pressure me to get married and have children. Then I will pressure my children and everything will begin all over again". The irony is that this respondent was approaching completion of her degree at a prestigious university and was reflecting on what was likely to happen when she completed her education.

Marginalization affects people of all ages, and intersects with class, race, ethnicity, religion and other forms of social differentiation and inequality. However, and regardless of important differences between young people, youth as a social group suffer more acutely than do older cohorts in part because their lack of (access to) power in either public or domestic spaces means they can do little to counter the uncertainties, insecurities and multiple forms of

marginalization that they face.

## 6. GUIDELINES FOR YOUTH-RELEVANT POLICY

The preceding sections of this report provide the context for thinking about what type of policies and interventions might help address the complex, variegated and multiple marginalizations that SEM young people experience. As has been demonstrated, aspects of these experiences are shared between SEM and EU young people. Where they are shared, SEM young people often experience them in ways that are more intense by order of magnitude. Thus, for instance, some EU and young people experience insecurity and lack of safety in public places and recognize that the policing of those spaces is not always about securing *their* safety, but rather securing the space against the perceived threat they pose. This is particularly the case in large urban centres and in relation to young ethnic minority men.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it is the recognition that security can and does mean very different things for the excluded and marginalized that underlies the US Black Lives Matter campaign which has sought to highlight the disproportionate, punitive and occasionally fatal policing of black communities (see <http://blacklivesmatter.com/>). The insecurity faced by some SEM young people is different from that faced by their European peers - and can include threats to their existential safety and security. This is particularly the case in those countries that are in conflict or are moving away from conflict (see particularly Occupied Palestine Territory or Lebanon). As one young Lebanese man said: "You don't know if a bomb will explode in the road and kill you".

Many of the experiences of marginalization described above are *not* shared with EU young people, and not equally shared across the SEM region. Whatever the case, the evidence collected by Power2Youth indicates that young people in the SEM countries face profound and multiple marginalizations in their political, economic and social lives which are produced and reproduced through both formal and informal institutions. This marginalization is not simply or just a result of being young (although this applies in some contexts) but rather occurs because the causes of marginalization are most concentrated in the physical, social, economic and political spaces which young people fill, making them most vulnerable. It is possible to draw two very clear policy implications from the evidence produced by Power2Youth.

The first key conclusion is that policy-makers need to recognise that *"youth problems" in SEM countries are, in fact, problems that affect the wider population as well but which hit young people particularly hard - and that these result from the profound structural, political and economic weaknesses of SEM states*. Youth-targeted policy interventions cannot have a meaningful impact for most young people unless larger problems are addressed first (these are problems associated with authoritarian and patriarchal states, corruption and absence of the rule of law, and reliance on a weak, under-performing private sector for job creation).

The second key conclusion is that *young people experience these marginalizing forces differently*, depending on their nationality, class, religion or sect, gender, place of residence or other identifying characteristics. Youth is not a homogeneous category and what improves

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<sup>5</sup> For an introductory exploration of policing and race and ethnicities, see Phillips and Bowling 2012.

life for one young person will not necessarily be relevant to another. Interventions that might benefit some young people (e.g., women, people from deprived backgrounds) might work against the interests of other young people (e.g., men, more privileged young people). There is therefore no policy panacea that will address all the multiple forms of marginalization that affect young people, and policy interventions that *specifically* and only target youth are unlikely to resolve the underlying political and economic issues that cause these experiences of marginalization.

The research conducted by Power2Youth has indicated that the best approach might be to articulate a number of principles for policy interventions which seek to ameliorate some of the difficulties faced by SEM young people. These are outlined below and are based on the evidence that young people in the countries studied are, despite everything, active and willing to be engaged. They are able to navigate their difficult surroundings to make the best of what they have - indeed their adaptive capabilities have become a necessity of everyday life. One of their biggest frustrations is their inability to positively change the world around them. Therefore, it is vital that policy-makers, either nationally or from external partners and organizations, do not reinforce the systems of control that suppress young people's ability to positively affect their environment. As a result, policy-makers are encouraged to start with the *basic principle of do no harm*: that is, assess the risk that interventions will actually work against young people's interests and do not enact policies to address one field of action which have secondary, negative impacts in another. The guidelines that follow are intended to provide a framework within which it is possible to imagine and create policy interventions in specific contexts that will ensure that, whatever else may be the case, those specific interventions will not harm or further erode SEM young people's social conditions of existence. Thus, the guidelines articulate a set of principles rather than any formulaic or "off-the-shelf" solution to the complex issues described in this report. Specifically:

- Policies should not reinforce the narratives of "Youth as Hope of the Nation" vs. "Youth as Threat" or see youth as somehow set apart from the rest of society - or assume a homogeneity to the category "youth" that does not exist. In practice this means not creating, or encouraging, "youth policies" which are isolated from broader strategies to address structural inequalities and injustices. External actors, in particular, might usefully review how their own "narratives of youth" support or impede this objective, or where their interventions inadvertently endorse and reproduce such narratives.
- It is essential that policy-making recognizes the diversity of interests and experiences among young people, as well as their differential capacities to progress to full adulthood dependent on a range of factors such as class, ethnicity, gender, religion or sect, etc.
- Identifying the most vulnerable and most marginalized in any given context, as well as the root and case-specific causes of that marginalization, is important. Too often, policy *misdiagnoses* the problem or addresses only the symptoms (e.g., "active labour market programmes" that aim to move unemployed or NEET young people into jobs) without addressing the causes (the structural lack of demand for young workers). For example, policies that lead to the recurrent oversupply of graduates to an already saturated labour market are likely to amplify rather than solve social and economic problems. So, without a broader context of economic reform, such interventions become mere sticking-plasters and can actually disguise the

more problematic aspects of national economic policies. Similarly, lowering the voting age or introducing youth quotas in political institutions cannot resolve the problem of low youth participation if young people feel excluded by gerontocratic informal political practices, and unsafe when they challenge the prevailing political discourses.

Young people in our focus groups actively requested that we highlight the following: that when external actors work with SEM states, it is crucial to create and support systems for strong monitoring and evaluation of funded projects, programmes and interventions, where possible making EU support conditional upon demonstrably increasing transparency, accountability and fairness in delivery, so that confidence can be built in state institutions and in the application of the rule of law. Self-conscious and consistent review of accountability mechanisms in policy interventions would help avoid inadvertent endorsement of corrupt practices or exclusionary regime practices. A young man from one of the focus groups in Lebanon put it like this: “The EU should stop funding programmes and projects that further legitimize corrupt systems and should focus on rebuilding trust in public institutions and public transport”. Of course, detailed financial and other reporting is usually already required, but youth populations know little of these mechanisms and have little confidence in the institutions which receive and distribute programme support. It is worth considering whether resources can usefully be spent as part of each intervention to try to improve public awareness of existing monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

- There is merit in the idea of establishing a guiding principle for all interventions of fair and equal access for all potential beneficiaries of youth-targeted, capacity-building programmes and that these should reach into rural areas, poorer urban areas, and monolingual communities.<sup>6</sup> Here we are distinguishing between corruption through illegal diversion of funds (which can be averted through the detailed accounting processes already often in place) and more subtle forms of patronage and *wasta* which are unlikely to be made visible through paper-trails of financial accounting but which can equally undermine confidence and engagement in youth-targeted interventions. Increasing and spreading opportunities equally to all would require interventions that reduce intra-urban and urban/rural divides, for example by supporting efficient, safe public transport, supporting the provision of affordable public housing, and public utility provision. In this way, policy interventions which reproduce inequality and exclusion such as the urban/rural divide (i.e., by only being available in relatively safe, familiar capital cities), language divides (effectively requiring applicants to speak a European language, for example) and gender divides (e.g., requiring participants to travel to and from events at night) might be avoided.

- Policy interventions in other areas (e.g., counter-radicalization or management of informal migration) should not be allowed to reduce meaningful and legitimate opportunities for young people such as travel exchanges and educational opportunities in Europe and elsewhere. Here, it is helpful to refer back to the earlier point regarding not endorsing “youth as problem” narratives which homogenize all young people into being either potential informal migrants or violent Islamists.

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<sup>6</sup> In this context projects such as Young Arab Voices (<http://www.youngarabvoices.org>) may serve as a model.

- It is important to cultivate genuinely enabling environments, local and national, in which SEM young people can safely participate in the political life of their country and have an impact on their own future. Policies should be avoided which assume that political stability is necessarily good for young people - all too often supporting current configurations of political stability means supporting the marginalization and disenfranchisement of young people. Policies should avoid endorsing authoritarian means of securing stability or countering radicalization which simultaneously act to exclude and repress all young people. It is important to support interventions which give young people a meaningful role in formal institutions rather than endorsing youth-specific institutions which have no impact on formal decision-making. Supporting and enabling meaningful youth participation in formal "adult" political institutions is likely to be more useful than sponsoring parallel but ineffective "youth" institutions. *It is worth remembering that the rather fashionable objective of giving young people a "voice" is not helpful if no-one is interested in listening, and if one young person's voice is not reflective of all.* Supporting existing institutions in learning to listen to, and to be inclusive of, young people may be more productive. It is also important to recognize that young people need secure, safe access to public spaces where they (especially women) can engage in civic discourse.

- Youth-targeted interventions work best when they enable young people to define for themselves how to develop their social capital. Top-down, government-led initiatives and interventions are often beset by the problems of corruption, cronyism, political capture and lack of trust that constitute much of the marginalization that young people face. Young people often have a proven capacity to adapt, but - like adults - they also typically want to have more say about their own future. Interventions which enable them to do this are the most likely to gain their trust and engagement and to have sustainable outcomes. Power2Youth research showed that projects initiated at the local, often municipal level, and in which young people were actively engaged in the design and implementation stages, were most likely to result in positive outcomes. External policy makers may legitimately be concerned that sub-national actors are unlikely to have the technical or financial capacity to manage funded projects and interventions, in which case technical partnerships with third parties who can offer that capacity might be desirable and part of the trade-off needed to secure the effectiveness of interventions, or at least the confidence of young people in the integrity of the institutions/ organizations involved. Securing this confidence, which is needed both for youth engagement but also to improve the perceived environment which young people inhabit, may be viewed as a crucial determining factor for successful policy-making in itself.

- Policy interventions should recognize the fundamental role played by personal and physical insecurity in inhibiting young people's engagement, activism and participation in social, economic, cultural and political life. Interventions that provide safe physical or virtual spaces and means of access, in which young people can meet, deliberate, network and exchange knowledge and skills are invaluable. Such spaces enable young people to experience a feeling of inclusion and of personal empowerment, unimpeded by relative age-defined status. Similarly, interventions which challenge the normative acceptance of violence in everyday life and promote the possibilities for young people, especially young women, to be safe, active citizens are crucially important. Defence of human rights, the appropriate training of security and police forces, and support for civil society organizations working in these fields should remain high on the agenda of international partners.

## **7. SEM YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE FUTURE**

The future for the young people of the SEM countries is very uncertain and insecure. Indeed, insecurity - physical, political, economic and social - was the dominant motif that emerged from the research across these countries. One young woman in Beirut put it succinctly: "We think about our futures all the time. We cannot waste time by having fun. For everything we do, there is an opportunity cost".

Yet despite this, it was also clear that not all young people are pessimistic about their future and that many of them are willing and able to participate in finding solutions to the political, economic and social difficulties that beset them and their countries. The challenge for policy-makers is to capture the energy, skills, imagination and enthusiasm of young people and to do so in a manner which allows them to shape their own futures. Policy-making which excludes the preferences and visions of young people themselves, or which imposes preconceived wisdoms upon young people through corrupt, failing and exclusionary institutions, will only marginalize young people - and their potential contribution - still further.

Perhaps the key challenge for policy makers is to rethink, through dialogue with young people, the relative roles of the State and the market. Young people have inherited expectations of the State which current neo-liberal prescriptions cannot fulfil. Moreover, authoritarian models of government, which are perhaps inadvertently supported by international partners in the shared "war on terror", cannot incorporate the aspirations and demands of young people for more and a better quality of political and civil freedom. As long as policy is made through - or subject to - the preferences of existing State models, it cannot be inclusive of the interests, aspirations and identities of young people.

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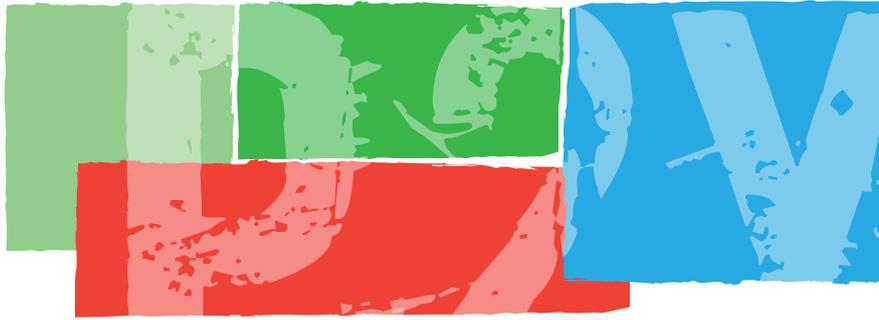
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*POWER2YOUTH is a research project aimed at offering a critical understanding of youth in the South East Mediterranean (SEM) region through a comprehensive interdisciplinary, multi-level and gender sensitive approach. By combining the economic, political and socio-cultural spheres and a macro (policy/institutional), meso (organizational) and micro (individual) level analysis, POWER2YOUTH explores the root causes and complex dynamics of the processes of youth exclusion and inclusion in the labour market and civic/political life, while investigating the potentially transformative effect of youth collective and individual agency. The project has a cross-national comparative design with the case studies of Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territories and Turkey. POWER2YOUTH's participants are 13 research and academic institutions based in the EU member states, Norway, Switzerland and South East Mediterranean (SEM) countries. The project is mainly funded under the European Union's 7th Framework Programme.*

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