



POWER2YOUTH

An Intersectional Analysis of the Micro-level Factors of Youth Economic and Political Exclusion/Inclusion in the South and East Mediterranean (SEM) Region

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Abstract

This report contains a discussion of how an analysis of the interplay of gender, class and other individual and social differences can shed a light on the micro-level dynamics of youth civic and political engagement in the countries of the South-Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) region which are part of the Power2Youth project. It is based on the data analysed in the country reports prepared by Power2Youth partners, which were taken from a broader survey on youth socioeconomic and political inclusion and exclusion that they themselves undertook in 2016 in partnership with, or under the technical guidance of, FAFO. To analyse dynamics of youth un/employment and political participation (or lack thereof), each country team selected the sections of the questionnaire which they deemed to be peculiarly interesting, telling and/or relevant for their context, and discussed results based on their theoretical frameworks and approaches.

Keywords: Youth | Women | Employment | Family | Migration | Egypt | Lebanon | Morocco | Palestine | Tunisia | Turkey

INTRODUCTION

This report contains a discussion of how an analysis of the interplay of gender, class and other individual and social differences can shed a light on the micro-level dynamics of youth civic and political engagement in the countries of the South-Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) region which are part of the Power2Youth project.² It is based on the data analysed in the country reports prepared by Power2Youth partners, which were taken from a broader survey on youth socioeconomic and political inclusion and exclusion that they themselves undertook in 2016 in partnership with, or under the technical guidance of, FAFO. To analyse dynamics of youth un/employment and political participation (or lack thereof), each country team selected the sections of the questionnaire which they deemed to be peculiarly interesting, telling and/or relevant for their context, and discussed results based on their theoretical frameworks and approaches.

The focus on micro-level dynamics best enabled Power2Youth researchers to unpack the “youth” category and foreground the role that salient individual and social differences play in shaping the attitudes of young women and men towards employment and/or the polity, as well as their experiences (or lack thereof) in this realm. Drawing from these researchers’

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² Notably, in alphabetical order: Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, Turkey.

findings and analysis, in Section 1 we will trace threads shared across countries, while in Section 2 we will report a synthesis of country-specific findings which highlight the interplay of gender and social class in shaping young women and men's perception and experiences of inclusion/exclusion differently.

1. CROSS-COUNTRY FINDINGS

Power2Youth country reports confirm the high rates of unemployment of young women and men in the SEM country analysed, as well as low levels of political engagement and/or trust. In particular, as we will show in detail in Section 2, all reports highlight that gender and class markedly affect opportunities for active engagement in both the economic and political sphere, which are lower for women and for both women and men from lower income households. The Turkish (Erdoğan et al. 2017) and the Lebanese (Diab et al. 2017) reports further highlight ethnic- and sect-based patterns of inclusion/exclusion respectively. Moreover, while most country papers reported that youth considered *wasta* to be very important in finding a job,³ some further observed that this perception of relevance was affected by respondents' social class, and was lower among individuals from higher income households (Boubakri 2017: 20-21). Poignantly, the Palestinian country report reported that during a focus group in which youth were called to comment on preliminary research findings, two youth noted: "If they don't think *wasta* exists, they're benefitting from it" (Giacaman et al. 2017: 24).

As we will show in detail in Section 2, most reports contain a section dedicated to attitudes towards gender equality, which often encompass contradictions between young women and men's generally supportive attitudes towards abstract values (e.g., equal right to work) and gender-based preferences or constraints in specific circumstances (e.g., prioritizing men's employment in case of job scarcity). In many reports, researchers stressed that young women themselves supported views that reproduced their subordinate status vis-à-vis men (Akesbi 2017, Giacaman et al. 2017, Diab et al. 2017). A few highlighted that some young women perceive danger in using certain public spaces, especially at night.⁴

Some reports also provide evidence that youth attitudes towards migration are heavily gendered. In Lebanon, over one third of young men but only around 10 percent of young women expressed that they were likely "to migrate in the coming 5 years to seek work or permanent residence" (Diab et al. 2017: 28), and in Egypt these rates were approximately 24 percent and 4 percent respectively (Sika 2017: 11).

³ The Palestinian report observed that "78 percent reported that *wasta* was very important, 13 percent important, 5 percent not so important and 4 percent not important at all" (Giacaman et al. 2017: 15-16). The Egyptian report found that "81 percent of young men and 69 percent of young women believed it [*wasta*] is very important" (Sika 2017: 10). The Moroccan report observed that "54 percent of the respondents stated that *wasta* is very important as opposed to the 36 percent of respondents who found it important enough" (Akesbi 2017: 4). The Tunisian report found that 87 percent of youth considered the importance of 'intermediation' to be high across gender, education and region of residence (Boubakri 2017: 20-21).

⁴ During the qualitative fieldwork that was conducted to discuss the survey results, researchers in Egypt found that young women respondents were highly concerned with their "feeling of insecurity on the street and the problem of harassment" (Sika 2017: 16). In Lebanon, survey findings indicate that women are "slightly more likely than [men] to feel unsafe at night", and were "much more likely to be harassed" (Diab et al. 2017: 18, 20).

2. COUNTRY-SPECIFIC FINDINGS

The Turkish report (Erdoğan et al. 2017) focuses on a specific group of young people (18-29 years old) who are “not in employment, education or training” (NEET), and discusses the roots of their marginalization as well as its effects in terms of trust, political participation and political efficacy. Turkey, in fact, has the highest NEET rate among OECD countries, with the rate for women having consistently been more than double that of men since 2000 (Erdoğan et al. 2017: 5). Data collected for Power2Youth report an even wider gender gap, with men having a NEET rate corresponding to one third of women’s, and an employment rate twice that of women.⁵ The report indicates that gender constitutes “the most important determinant of being a NEET” in Turkey (Erdoğan et al. 2017: 10). Marriage is also relevant, as a married young person’s probability of NEET status is three times higher than for those who are not married (Erdoğan et al. 2017: 11). The adverse impact of marriage on employment and education is more severe for women due to their ensuing disproportionate burden of care work. Race and class interplay in shaping the patterns of marginalization observed: indeed, the report observes that NEET rates decrease with higher household income, and are significantly lower for Turkish youth vis-à-vis Kurdish and Zaza youth (22.1 percent, 45.3 percent and 50 percent respectively) (Erdoğan et al. 2017: 8). Being a NEET youth bears adverse consequences on subjective feelings of political efficacy, levels of participation, confidence and trust, and these consequences are more severe for young women. For women being in employment or in education significantly contributes to their level of political participation, feeling of political efficacy, and “tendency to trust in other people” (Erdoğan et al. 2017: 15).

The Palestinian report (Giacaman et al. 2017) discusses youth feelings of exclusion/inclusion through the lenses of the concept of “linking social capital”, which the report applies to its analysis of the quality of the relationships bonding people who hold formal positions of authority (and/or relative power) and their subjects. In particular, the paper discusses youth feelings of trust/confidence towards different branches (administrative, legislative, judicial) of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and political parties, and highlights “a generalized dissatisfaction” with and “alienation” of young people from them, and “a strong sense of exclusion and low linking social capital” (Giacaman et al. 2017: 25). These feelings are inflected by youth class positioning, with lower economic status correlated to lower levels of trust, but not by gender⁶ - a finding that youth did not see as surprising during subsequent focus groups discussions, in light of Palestinian women’s active participation in politics and work. Nevertheless, the data also reveal that almost all respondents considered that young women have a markedly lower decision making power vis-à-vis their male peers in relation to “family decisions”, education, employment and choice of spouse. Age also affects youth trust, which decreases as they grow older⁷ and have to face difficulties in finding employment. Younger participants may have had less experience in looking for work and not finding it; they may have been still studying, and not yet at the age where it is expected of them to earn income, get married and form their own families (Giacaman et al. 2017: 22). In conclusion, the report

⁵ The total rate for NEET status, 26.8 percent, comprises a rate of 41.4 percent for women, and only 14.2 percent for men (Erdoğan et al. 2017: 8). Meanwhile, women’s employment rate is half the rate for men (26 percent and 54 percent respectively).

⁶ Gender was found to be “insignificantly associated with political confidence” (Giacaman et al. 2017: 16).

⁷ Younger respondents (18-22 years old) had higher confidence in institutions and parties than their older peers (23-29 years old).

underlines that these findings need to be read also as a result of the PA's "ineffectiveness in finding solutions to the main obstacle facing Palestinians: Israeli military occupation and colonization of Palestinian land, [...and] the divisions between Fatah and Hamas and the power dynamics behind such divisions" (Giacaman et al. 2017: 28).

The Egyptian paper (Sika 2017) discusses the impact of gender, educational attainments, area of residence and income level on young people's life opportunities, and in particular on employment, levels of civic and political engagement, and trust in formal and informal institutions. Key findings emerging from the analysis are that a young person's family income level is a crucial factor in determining his/her chances to continue education and find a decent job, and that "[t]he most disenfranchised young people are those who left school prematurely, a large majority of them young women" (Sika 2017: 5). In fact, survey findings indicate that school dropout rates are higher among young people from low-income families, and that young women "who reported being unemployed and staying at home, are also the most likely to have dropped out of primary education" (Sika 2017: 8). In a context where unemployment rates are higher among urban educated youth, the report finds that highly educated young men from low-income families are worst off. Conversely, educated youth with higher income levels are more likely to participate in civil society organizations. Findings on youth attitudes towards gender equality present us with a contradictory picture: almost three quarters of the respondents support equality in employment, education and pay, but roughly as many believe that men "make better political leaders than women" and that they should "have a priority for employment" (Sika 2017: 15) - although women and young people with secondary and post-secondary education, those from families that are better off economically, and those who reside in the urban governorates are less likely to express these views.

The Tunisian report (Boubakri 2017) focuses on young people's un/employment, and begins by contextualizing Power2Youth survey data within the country's broader economic and political outlook from 2007 onwards. Hence, it relates women's increased unemployment to the growth of "a movement of social retraction closely related to the wave of religious conservatism that followed the revolt" (Boubakri 2017: 5), and the higher rate of unemployment among tertiary and university graduates, which is even higher for women, with a mismatch between the educational system and the labour market (Boubakri 2017: 7). Moving on to the analysis of the Power2Youth data, two thirds of young people reported that they did work during the last 12 months, with women's unemployment rate being approximately one quarter higher than men's.⁸ Unemployment rates were higher among youth living in low-income households and in inland regions (Boubakri 2017: 13), as well as for youth with secondary education and above (Boubakri 2017: 14). For women, by contrast, education did not seem to affect the likelihood of getting a job,⁹ although their unemployment rates increased with spatial marginalization, notably with distance from the coastal, more economically developed regions. The level of precarity reflected respondents' social class positioning, and was lower among individuals from higher income households (Boubakri 2017: 18).

⁸ Unemployed women outnumber men: the female unemployment rate is 1/4 higher than that of young men (75 versus 56 percent) (Boubakri 2017: 13).

⁹ Seventy-seven percent of those with a high school-to-preparatory level of education have not worked in the last 12 months, whereas 72-73 percent of those with lower, basic school education or those with a higher diploma are unemployed.

The analysis of the survey undertaken in Morocco is contained in two different reports: one discusses education and employment (Akesbi 2017) and the other political participation (Zerhouni 2017). For economic participation, findings indicate very high rates of early school dropout driven by economic constraints,¹⁰ with boys disproportionately bearing the responsibility to work.¹¹ Rates of labour market participation are more than twice as high for men as for women (respectively 70 percent and 31 percent): although partially related to job scarcity (Akesbi 2017: 5), these data also reflect the social construction of men as their family's breadwinners, hence their preferential route to employment. Job insecurity is high¹² and more severe for "younger age groups and girls", although the overall workforce experiences precarity (Akesbi 2017: 8). For youth experiences and perception of the importance of gender in their daily lives, findings indicate that young women felt more constrained than their male peers in their freedom to dress and move as they liked.¹³ As observed earlier for the Palestinian and Egyptian reports, youth attitudes towards gender equality were contradictory. On employment in particular, over three quarters of the respondents strongly supported the view that there should be equal opportunities for men and women, and considered that a job is a woman's best route to independence (Akesbi 2017: 11). Yet, only one quarter of respondents strongly supported equality in remuneration, and 55 percent strongly supported the view that men should have the priority when jobs are scarce - an opinion which 51 percent of young women themselves supported (Akesbi 2017: 11). In regard to political participation, the Moroccan survey data report that more than half of the respondents are neither interested nor engaged in any form of political participation - a finding which is related to the scant space open to youth influence in a country where governance is highly centralized and institutions discredited (Zerhouni 2017). Interest in politics is significantly higher among men¹⁴ and increases with education. Rather than through engagement in political parties or trade unions, it mainly finds expression through informal channels. Recourse to these informal means of participation was higher for young men,¹⁵ and individuals from higher income households and/or with higher levels of formal educational attainment.

The Lebanese report (Diab et al. 2017) brings in a broader analytical focus, as it aims to deconstruct the category of "youth" by showing young men and women's "multifaceted and intersectional realities", evinced by their "characteristics and attitudes towards politics, religion and women's rights" (Diab et al. 2017: 42). Similarly to other Power2Youth country reports, the authors observe that class plays a crucial role in explaining youth levels of inclusion/exclusion as they find a positive correlation between youth levels of satisfaction with their jobs, lives and politics, and their household's income level.¹⁶ Civic and political

¹⁰ "Not being able to pay for education" (26 percent), "need to start work" (25 percent) (Akesbi 2017: 3).

¹¹ "Boys (36 percent) are expected to work more than girls (14 percent)" (Akesbi 2017: 3).

¹² Only 38 percent of respondents had a permanent job (Akesbi 2017: 8).

¹³ It finds that "While 68 percent of the boys reported they feel completely free in the way they dress, only 38 percent of girls did so. The situation is almost similar in the case of freedom of movement" (Akesbi 2017: 2).

¹⁴ Fifty-two percent of men are "very" or "somewhat" interested, versus 33 percent of women (Zerhouni 2017: 8).

¹⁵ Out of the 29 percent of respondents who said they "have participated in less formal ways and were part of a group of people who have 'done good' or tried to solve a problem in their own local community", 38 percent were men and 20 percent were women (Zerhouni 2017: 12).

¹⁶ "Three quarters of the youth are satisfied with the money they make. Having higher education correlates with higher economic satisfaction, while youth who live in low-income households are mostly dissatisfied with their

participation is inflected by gender, as young men are more likely to be members of (religious, political, communal or professional) organizations, and to participate in “a group of people to solve a problem or ‘do good’ in the local community” (Diab et al. 2017: 12), while interest in politics is segmented by sect of affiliation.¹⁷ Similarly to the picture presented by most Power2Youth country reports, Lebanese youth express mixed attitudes towards gender equality. Hence, while “[y]outh agree that men and women should receive equal pay for equal work”, over 20 percent object to equality in inheritance, although with marked sect-based variations (Diab et al. 2017: 37-38), and three quarters of the respondents considered that men should have a higher decision-making power within the family - an opinion expressed by 90 percent of the young men and 60 percent of the young women surveyed (Diab et al. 2017: 40).

earnings” (Diab et al. 2017: 7). “Overall, over 80 percent of the youth are satisfied with their life as a whole. Individuals from average and above-average income households are much more likely to be satisfied than those who live in low-income households” (Diab et al. 2017: 10). “Youth who live in average-income households are significantly more likely to be satisfied [with the way the country is governed] than those who are either above or below average income” (Diab et al. 2017: 24).

¹⁷ “A young person’s sect is a major determinant of their interest in politics: over 40 percent of Shiite youth, as opposed to around 20 percent of Sunni and Christian minority youth are interested in politics” (Diab et al. 2017: 14).

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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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