



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

POWER2YOUTH
FREEDOM, DIGNITY AND JUSTICE

TOWARDS YOUTH-INCLUSIVE POLICIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

This is summary of final policy recommendation report of the FP7 POWER2YOUTH project, delivering the main findings, the causes of 'exclusion' of young people in SEM countries and the key policy messages.

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INTRODUCTION

POWER2YOUTH <http://www.power2youth.eu/> is a 2.5 million euro EU-funded project running from March 2014 to May 2017, examining 6 countries (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Turkey). POWER2YOUTH incorporated 13 institutional partners who took a comprehensive multi-level, interdisciplinary and gender-sensitive approach to the understanding of youth in the South and East Mediterranean (SEM) region, in a research project with a cross-national comparative design.

POWER2YOUTH (P2Y) combined nation-wide surveys, interviews and in-depth analysis of the socio-economic, political and cultural life spheres of youth on three levels: the macro (policy/institutional), the meso (organizational) and the micro (individual) level, to provide a critical understanding of youth in the SEM. This summary brief details the key findings stemming from the research and the implications for European policy making. The full report can be obtained here: <http://www.power2youth.eu/>

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Youth 'Problems' and Youth 'Exclusion'

Policy-makers in both Europe and the SEM have targeted youth as a key constituency for policy intervention, developing agendas and implementing programmes that seek to address the 'problems of youth'. Inherent in these programmes has been the dissection of youth policy from wider public policy and need to reach those deemed to be 'excluded'. However, research conducted by POWER2YOUTH suggests that this is a problematic approach for two reasons:

1. The problems that affect young people are rarely exclusive to youth but are the result of structural economic and political deficiencies which also affect the wider society as a whole.

Unless these larger issues are addressed, policies targeting young people are likely to be ineffective and can even harm young people by further marginalizing them from society.

2. The concepts and language of the inclusion/exclusion binary do not adequately describe, or help us understand the multiple and diverse ways in which young people can be *marginalized*. Youth is not a homogeneous social category and young people's experiences of marginalization can be infinitely different depending on a range of factors such as nationality, class, location, education status, religion or gender.

Youth as 'Problem' or 'Hope of the Nation'

Prevailing policy discourses in SEM countries characterize youth as either 'good' or 'bad', as the 'hope of the nation' or as a 'problem' to be solved. These narratives have little to do with solving the difficulties faced by young people but are instruments used to control young people and to ensure their submission to authoritarian political systems, failing economic policies and patriarchal social structures.

Education and the Labour Market

SEM countries have some of the highest rates of youth unemployment and underemployment in the world. International organizations and partners have identified poor provision of education as a root cause of the mismatch between supply of and demand for labour. However, while education systems are indeed in dire need of very significant reform, the focus on the education system and limited active labour market programmes designed to enhance skills and training has disguised profound structural weaknesses in national economies which are unable to offer either the quantity or quality of employment opportunities needed. 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. 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. Young people therefore embrace opportunities for training and qualification enhancement, but find access not just severely limited but also inequitable and very unlikely to result in the pay and conditions enjoyed by previous generations. The labour market is increasingly characterized by precarious forms of work, a reliance on the growing informal economy and a lack of opportunity for material self-sufficiency or security.

Corruption

Many aspects of young people's daily lives are shaped and limited by corruption in official institutions and the culture of *wasta* (influence/having connections) in society as whole. Without *wasta* the ability to access jobs, services and opportunities is limited, undermining young people's trust in institutions while at the same time forcing them to engage in the system if they want to progress. Those without *wasta* are particularly vulnerable, although even those who use it become yet more subordinated to older people already in positions of power.

The Arbitrary State

Formal state institutions in SEM countries fail to protect the rule of law and are themselves arbitrary and often violent. Young people in SEM countries do not trust officials or institutions. They experience the arbitrary and unpredictable imposition of law, are excluded from meaningful participation in formal politics, and often experience the denial of their civil and human rights by the agents of the state. Their political insecurity as citizens is frequently compounded by a very real sense of physical insecurity and vulnerability.

Political Activism

Young people in SEM countries are trying to positively change their surroundings through engagement in a wide range of activities, including social entrepreneurship, political activism, cultural engagement and social media. However, their efforts to challenge the constraints on their

lives are all too often countered by robust authoritarian security apparatuses that limit their effectiveness and disincentivize engagement in formal politics, further eroding the opportunity to change their lives.

Stalled Transitions and Fear for the Future

The combination of severely limited economic opportunities and political marginalization has forced young people to fall back on the resources of families and social networks. These in turn exert patriarchal control over young people, especially over young women who are subject to conservative concepts of family honour and shame. Unable to achieve either material or social independence, young people experience extended or stalled transition to full adulthood. Their lives are frequently marked by a complex set of economic, political, social and physical insecurities which express themselves as a sense of the lack of a future, fear of the future, or embrace of alternative and potentially more 'risky' futures such as migration or enrolment with radical groups.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no existing panacea that will address the multiple marginalizations of young people. Nor will policies which segregate the difficulties faced by young people from the broader structural problems resolve their difficulties. However young people exhibit remarkable adaptive capabilities in how they navigate the difficulties of their daily lives. Effective policies are likely to be those which a) do not compound the structural sources of their marginalization and b) empower young people to be the authors of their own futures, building their trust and engagement and circumventing the deleterious influences of authoritarianism, corruption and patriarchy. Specifically, policy-makers should:

- Not reproduce or reinforce narratives of 'youth as problem or threat' or 'youth as hope of the nation', or indeed narratives which homogenize youth and segregate them from wider populations.
- Create and support meaningful educational engagements such as vocational, exchange, digital and internship programmes which develop critical thinking functions, not just for the benefit of the labour market but also for their fundamental social value.
- Ensure strong monitoring and evaluation/conditionality of funded projects, programmes and interventions, placing a primary focus on accountability and transparency.
- Support and ensure fair and equal access to capacity-building programmes, reaching into rural areas, poorer urban areas, mono-lingual communities, and particularly to young women. In-country partners should be scrutinized for their capacity to engage all young people and not just those resident in central areas, competent in European languages or with previous affiliations.
- Assist enhanced mobility of young people in both local and international contexts, enlarging the spaces within which young people can safely develop their capacities and expand their social capital. This can include assisting projects that provide safe and affordable public transport, leisure facilities and affordable housing in safe, clean locations with appropriate utility provision.
- Help create fair and enabling environments where young people can safely participate in the political life of their state, free from coercion and violence and confident that their participation can result in substantive changes to national and local policy-making rather than satisfying tokenistic gestures by exclusionary regimes. POWER2YOUTH research noted that programmes initiated at the local, often municipal level, in which young people were actively engaged in the design and implementation stages, were most likely to result in positive outcomes.
- Recognize the importance of enhancing the political, material, social and physical security of young people in supporting them to align their adaptive capabilities with realistic prospects for positive futures.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

POWER2YOUTH aimed to advance theory and extend knowledge on the root causes and dynamics of youth marginalization as well as on the variety of collective responses provided by young people to deal with existing political economy constraints.

POWER2YOUTH adopted an interdisciplinary and gender-sensitive approach to analyse the macro, meso and micro levels of marginalization of young people in the SEM. The data was captured by combining qualitative and quantitative methods:

- Intense in-depth analysis of several types of source for each case study (e.g., quantitative and qualitative sources such as statistics, various kinds of public documents, academic studies and interviews with relevant stakeholders and key informants) to investigate the macro institutional/policy factors of youth marginalization (Work Package 2)
- Interviews and focus groups with young people to analyse the meso-level organizational factors of youth marginalization and their collective efforts to deal with the structural constraints on their life (30 semi-structured interviews and five focus groups with organized young people aged 18–30 for each case study) (Work Package 3)
- Nation-wide surveys on young people conducted in the six countries to analyse the micro-level factors of youth marginalization (total sample: 7,573) (Work Package 4)

P2Y provides a critical understanding of the different political, socio-economic and cultural structures that contribute to the *multiple marginalizations* of young people as well as of the variety of collective responses provided by them to cope with such structural constraints. This briefing presents the key findings from the research and the implications for European policy making. It draws on the entirety of the research project but highlights the key results of the large-scale survey-based study. POWER2YOUTH welcomes opportunities to work with interested policy makers. Please contact: Professor Emma C. Murphy, Durham University (emma.murphy@durham.ac.uk).

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	A Comprehensive Approach to the Understanding of Youth Exclusion and the Prospects for Youth-led Change in the South and East Mediterranean (POWER2YOUTH)
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WEBSITE <http://www.Power2Youth.eu/>

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FURTHER READING

The full set of reports and publications from P2Y can be obtained from:
<http://www.power2youth.eu/>