



HET GROTE  
MIDDEN OOSTEN  
PLATFORM



# **YOUTH EMPLOYMENT & PARTICIPATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA**

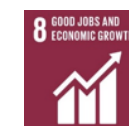
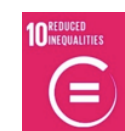
This booklet offers recommendations for the new Dutch policy on International Trade and Cooperation currently in development. They are formulated by a diverse group of over 40 experts on youth employment and participation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Young participants from the MENA region (entrepreneurs, activists and innovators) took part in the gathering as we consider it essential to talk with them instead of about them. On the 15th of February 2018, they came together on invitation of Het Grote Midden Oosten Platform, with the financial support of Oxfam Novib, International Democratic Initiative (D66), Perspectivity, FMO, Cordaid, the Embassy of Belgium in The Hague and Middenoostenreizen.com and under patronage of UNESCO.

60% of the Arab population is under 30 years old. In some countries, youth unemployment levels are higher than 30%. Challenges facing youth, however, are not merely economic. Arab youngsters live in a political, educational and social system which generally does not allow for them to participate actively as citizens. As a consequence, many young people in the MENA region feel disempowered and often frustrated. The sheer size of this generation signifies that, to quote the Arab Human Development Report 2016, it is critical “to empower (young people) to engage in development processes [...] and it is a prerequisite for achieving tangible and sustainable progress on development and stability for the entire region.”

There is an urgent need among Dutch actors working with or in the Arab world to understand developments in the MENA region, and in particular how these challenges affect the young generation. What happens in one region inevitably affects the other region. Although problems in the MENA region need to be solved as much as possible locally and by societies and governments in the region, European governments, businesses and civil society have an important role to play in supporting their MENA counterparts in building inclusive societies with opportunities for youth.

How can Dutch policies help youth in the MENA region to find meaningful and sustainable employment and how can Dutch policies and actions support the development of opportunities for participation of MENA youth in their societies, in local and central governments and in civil society institutions, and help them shape their own future?

With this booklet we hope to contribute to the Dutch strategy for development co-operation and trade with the Middle East and North Africa for the coming years.









# Recommendations and concrete measures for Dutch policies on the Middle East and North Africa

**1.** Develop a long-term strategy for human prosperity in the MENA region. The changes that need to happen require not only a long-term perspective but essentially a long-term vision on society. This involves building trust on multiple levels, developing different attitudes towards youth and on labor, proactively involving various layers in society and experimenting with different forms of participation. It requires perseverance, commitment and courage to experiment and take risks. No important complex issue in this time and age can still be analyzed or solved from a single discipline. What is needed is a holistic perspective with humans at its core. Particular attention can be given to rural and semi-urbanized parts of the MENA region, where there is ample opportunity to stimulate youth participation and market development.

- Support think tanks and organizations that scan horizons and develop strategies to anticipate the future of work and/or (post) work societies, including the effects of technology, water shortage and climate change;
- Engage with, defend and strengthen space for civil society to hold their governments to account and promote civic engagement where young people can directly influence their own lives and societies;
- Invest in hubs and (cultural) spaces (especially in rural places) to stimulate dialogue and the exchange of ideas;
- Support existing youth groups and networks that operate independently of the establishment and – making use of technological opportunities – connect and listen to them directly. Support governments in the region in engaging directly with young women and men;
- Invest in demobilization programming for youth participating in armed groups in post-conflict areas and include economic alternatives.

**2.** Support positive and diverse role models in the region. Young people, young women in particular, lack positive role models to motivate and inspire them, and to help earn the support from families and society for untraditional paths.

- Identify and assist women and youth to be or become role models for their peers and for the next generation, especially in rural areas;
- Support media outlets to give a platform to positive and diverse role models, and to raise awareness on issues like citizenship and participation;
- Invest in future leaders and work with young and youth-led organizations.

**3.** Invest in education throughout the region. The Arab world faces significant educational challenges, including a decline in public funding. In general, education and training systems are outdated, do not connect to the labor market and exclude a focus on citizenship. It focuses on knowledge transfer, instead of critical thinking and (self) reflection and reinforce traditional social norms and values. Innovation and differentiation at all levels of learning should lead to a better equipped generation.

- Support innovative and disruptive education initiatives in Arabic, building on technological possibilities (like virtual classrooms, Barefoot College, Tahrir Academy and different MOOC providers). Promote the diversification of educational systems, going beyond age and state borders;
- Stimulate partnerships between Dutch institutes of higher education and institutes of higher education in the MENA region (especially outside capital cities), with the aim of exchanging knowledge and creativity;
- Enhance employability of youth by investing in relevant technical and vocational education and training, with involvement from the local and regional private sector;
- Include trauma healing, psycho-social support and peace-building in education and training programs.



4. Decrease socio-political, economic and legal barriers to promote youth employment. Young entrepreneurs within the MENA region are very mobile and many of the start-ups need to expand beyond the local market to grow. Young start-ups in particular, experience many obstacles in expanding to other countries in the region. This requires cooperation with the European Union, the International Labour Organization, the Arab League and other multilateral institutions, to reconcile trade and investment policies within the region.

- Invest in a solid financial infrastructure that facilitates economic activity and acts as a multiplier. Supported by technological solutions including, develop and stimulate new, innovative forms of financing;
- Call upon governments in the region and multilateral institutions to promote access and a transparent climate for entrepreneurs;
- Help sustain networks for young people and women, through local NGOs, to connect with SMEs, shift towards a marketing approach, and to invite them to discuss issues of local policy making; Stimulate creative solutions for reducing the heavy insider-outsider dichotomy on the labour market which particularly harms young people finding a decent and secure job.



5. Maximize business development in and trade with countries in the MENA region. The region offers one of the fastest-growing consumer markets in the world and it has a large labour pool. Despite the multitude of international economic relations of Dutch companies and entrepreneurs, only a limited proportion of Dutch exports go to this region: the largest five destination countries (United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Egypt and Algeria) account for only 2.5% of total Dutch exports (2015).

- Stimulate Dutch companies to open offices in the MENA region, especially outside the capital cities, hire local youth and women, and offer traineeship and mentorship programs for local youth. Partner with local governments and stakeholders;
- Call upon Dutch companies working in the MENA region to practice meritocracy and promote gender equality in their trading process and business culture;
- Stimulate trade and investment in different sectors (agriculture, water management, technology, ICT, sustainability, design) to diversify options for youth and move away from the monolithic oil and arms sector;
- Stimulate cooperation and entrepreneurship with and within the art sectors, such as graphic designers, fashion designers, photographers, visual artists, game developers, musicians, filmmakers and writers.







# Youth in the Middle East in perspective

## The Arab World houses 5% of the World Population

- It buries 68.5% of the world's battle-related deaths;
- It hosts 47% of world's internally displaced people;
- By 2020 the region will need over 60 million new jobs;
- By 2050, ¾ of the population will be living in high conflict risk countries
- Military expenditure per capital is 65% higher than the global average

Statistics by prof. Linda Herrera, University of Illinois, presented in The Hague 15 February 2018

## POPULATION AGE GROUPS MENA REGION

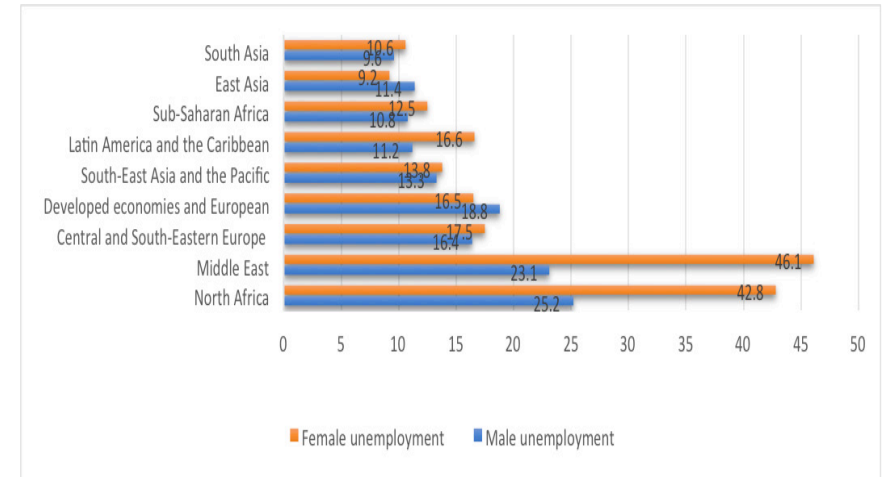
TOTAL 0-29 YEARS 198,822,000  
AS % OF TOTAL POPULATION 58,4%

TOTAL 0-14 YEARS 107,896,000  
AS % OF TOTAL POPULATION 31,7%

TOTAL 15-29 YEARS 90,926,000  
AS % OF TOTAL POPULATION 26,7%

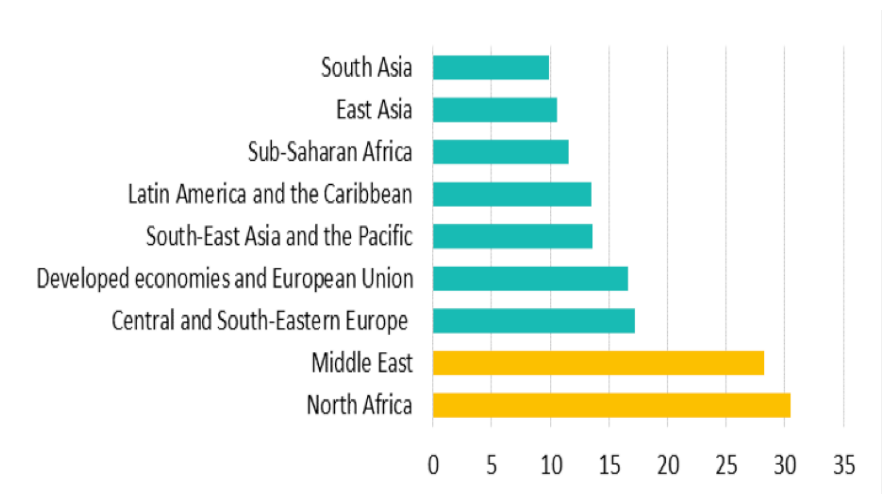
Source: World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, June 2017 - Copyright © 2017 by United Nations

Male and female youth unemployment rates (%) by world regions (youth 15-24)



Source: ILO Global Employment Trends, 2015

Youth unemployment rate by world regions (%) (youth 15-24)



Source: ILO Global Employment Trends, 2015









## DEVELOPED IN THE PRESENCE AND WITH THE INPUT OF

Paul Aarts - University of Amsterdam  
Dalia Abd alHameed - Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, Egypt  
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Jeroen Harteveld - FMO  
Anders Hastrup - Danish Arab Partnership Program  
Linda Herrera - Professor, University of Illinois  
Mirjam Horstmeier – Oxfam Novib Work in Progress!  
Noha Hussein – Sekem, Egypt  
Asma Khalifa - Tamazight Women Network, Libya  
Herman Klijnsma - Dutch Libyan Cooperation Council  
Vanessa Lambrecht - organiser, GMOP  
Leonie Linke – note taker  
Ronald van Moorten - Oxfam Novib  
Camille Offerein – D66  
Jana de Poorter - note taker  
Chloe Pottinger-Glass - note taker  
Sjoerd Rooijakkers – Nederlandse Jeugd Raad  
Olloriak Sawade - Oxfam Novib Youth  
Mark Snijder - facilitator, GMOP  
Aurora Sottimano - University Leiden  
Mohammed Taha - The Hague Peace Projects  
Paul Tia - GPI Outsourcing Palestine  
Dafne van Baarle - facilitator, GMOP  
Ellen van de Bovenkamp - Independent  
Esseline van de Sande - facilitator, GMOP  
Robbert van de Waerdt - organiser, Oxfam Novib  
Nina van der Meer - PAX  
Erica van Eeghen - FMO  
Sylva van Rosse - organiser, GMOP  
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Nicolien Zuijdgeest - facilitator, GMOP



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#### Colophon

Het Grote Midden Oosten Platform  
[www.hetgrotemiddenoostenplatform.nl](http://www.hetgrotemiddenoostenplatform.nl)  
[info@hetgrotemiddenoostenplatform.nl](mailto:info@hetgrotemiddenoostenplatform.nl)



These recommendations are the outcome of the working-conference Opportunities and Choices in Dutch policies for the Middle East – Youth, organised by het Grote Midden Oosten Platform on 15 February 2018 in The Hague.

The Greater Middle East Platform (Het Grote Midden Oosten Platform - GMOP) is an independent foundation that aims to bridge the gap between the Netherlands and countries in the Middle East. It offers a nuanced and human perspective of societies and citizens in the wider Middle East region. The Platform is independent and brings together a diverse range of Dutch Middle East experts, who are often freelancers and self-employed in several different sectors. The platform offers advice and expertise, and it initiates and facilitates debates.

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