



REX/583
Euromed Juventud

DOCUMENTO DE TRABAJO

Sección de Relaciones Exteriores

Participación de la juventud en el diálogo social y civil en la región euromediterránea

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A la atención de los miembros del Grupo de Estudio

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Pleno n.º	...
Resultado de la votación (a favor/en contra/abstenciones)	.../.../...

1. Conclusiones y recomendaciones

2. Contexto general

- 2.1 No existe una definición de juventud acordada internacionalmente. A efectos estadísticos, la mayoría de las instituciones definen a los «jóvenes» como personas con edades comprendidas entre los quince y los veinticuatro a treinta años. El CESE señala que la juventud constituye un colectivo heterogéneo desde el punto de vista cultural, económico y político. Una visión interseccional de la juventud es fundamental para evitar pasar por alto la diversidad de sus opiniones, intereses y problemas.
- 2.2 La región euromediterránea se caracteriza por el creciente descontento de la ciudadanía con las instituciones políticas, que se ve agravado por la percepción de insuficiencias de los responsables políticos a la hora de abordar preocupaciones sociales acuciantes como el cambio climático, la cohesión social y el desempleo.
- 2.3 Mientras que muchas instituciones y organizaciones políticas se construyen de arriba abajo y presentan estructuras de poder muy concentradas, la juventud tiende a participar en estructuras locales de abajo arriba, sobre todo en torno a cuestiones consideradas «ligeras» (por ejemplo, justicia climática y social, participación política, derechos de las minorías, derechos de los animales) y subordinadas en la agenda política¹.
- 2.4 La situación socioeconómica de la juventud en la región mediterránea (en lo sucesivo, «la región») se caracteriza por elevadas tasas de desempleo y de empleo informal, así como por salarios bajos y una falta de puestos de trabajo de calidad. La región sufre porcentajes relativamente elevados de jóvenes que ni estudian, ni trabajan, ni reciben formación (ninis), que llegan a alcanzar un tercio de la población juvenil.
- 2.5 El alto índice de abandono escolar, en especial de mujeres jóvenes, y las elevadas tasas de desempleo de los titulados en la región indican la escasa calidad de los sistemas educativos públicos, en especial en las zonas rurales, que no enseñan las competencias necesarias para el mercado laboral. Además, la proporción de personas altamente cualificadas entre la población migrante del sur del Mediterráneo ha aumentado en estos países, alcanzando el 20 % entre los jóvenes migrantes en 2017, apuntando a una fuga de cerebros².
- 2.6 Los colectivos marginados, incluidas las mujeres, las personas con discapacidad, la juventud de las zonas rurales y los miembros de la comunidad LGBTQ+, se enfrentan a retos adicionales en términos de representación, acceso a oportunidades, mercado laboral y otros ámbitos.
- 2.7 La situación de los representantes de la juventud en la región adolece de múltiples problemas de seguridad, entre otros obstáculos. El CESE señala que, para permitir que los representantes de la

¹ Sobre la base de las contribuciones de los representantes de la juventud durante la primera reunión del Grupo de Estudio y el Foro de la Juventud de la Fundación Anna Lindh.

² [Trade, investment and employment in the Southern Mediterranean Countries. Informe temático del proyecto «Mainstreaming Employment into Trade and Investment in the Southern Neighbourhood», Organización Internacional del Trabajo - Ginebra: OIT, 2022 \(p. xvi\).](#)

juventud se involucren de manera estructural, debe garantizarse la seguridad de los participantes, en especial en los ámbitos de los derechos humanos, la justicia climática y los derechos de los trabajadores.

3. Participación de la juventud en los procesos participativos de diálogo social y civil

3.1 Diálogo social

3.1.1 La Organización Internacional del Trabajo (OIT) define el diálogo social como todos los tipos de negociación, consulta o intercambio de información entre los representantes de los gobiernos, la patronal y los trabajadores sobre cuestiones de interés común relacionadas con la política económica o social (véase anexo).

3.1.2 El diálogo social desempeña un papel fundamental a la hora de influir en las políticas económicas, laborales y sociales y de promover la convergencia en las condiciones de vida y de trabajo. Se trata de un valioso instrumento para fomentar la resiliencia económica y social, la competitividad y el crecimiento sostenible e integrador, como subraya el CESE en su Dictamen SOC/764³. Por consiguiente, el CESE hace hincapié en la necesidad de reforzar el diálogo social tripartito y bipartito con el fin de promover democracias resilientes, el trabajo digno y la justicia social.

3.1.3 El proceso de negociación colectiva es una herramienta esencial del diálogo social que tiene por objeto garantizar unas condiciones de trabajo dignas y la justicia en el lugar de trabajo. Sin embargo, la necesidad de hacer frente a nuevos retos, como la transición justa, el cambio climático y la capacitación de la juventud, sitúa el diálogo social en una posición política fundamental, más allá de la negociación salarial. Dado que estos retos afectan en especial a la juventud, es vital garantizar que los jóvenes desempeñen un papel importante en el diálogo social. Por consiguiente, animar a los jóvenes a adherirse a las organizaciones de interlocutores sociales constituye una prioridad a la hora de establecer estructuras de diálogo social inclusivas.

3.2 Diálogo social en la región euromediterránea

3.2.1 En la región, las organizaciones de trabajadores, como los sindicatos, se enfrentan a dificultades [...] específicas en relación con la afiliación, la libertad de asociación y la eficacia para defender sus derechos y hacer valer sus reivindicaciones. Muchos gobiernos de la región MENA⁴ imponen restricciones a la libertad de asociación⁵. Mientras que los marcos nacionales de diálogo social suelen garantizar la existencia de un diálogo social tripartito, las estructuras de diálogo sectorial y bipartito a nivel de empresa son muy limitadas. La densidad sindical y la cobertura de la negociación colectiva siguen siendo relativamente bajas.

³ [Dictamen del CESE SOC/764 – Refuerzo del diálogo social.](#)

⁴ Oriente Próximo y África del Norte.

⁵ [«The future of work: Trade unions in transformation» \(El futuro del trabajo: sindicatos en transformación\), *International Journal of Labour Research*, 2019, vol. 9, n.º 1-2 \(p. 226\).](#)

3.2.2 El CESE subraya la importancia de llevar plenamente a la práctica los convenios clave de la OIT sobre el diálogo social, en particular el C098⁶, el C135⁷, el C087⁸ y el C154⁹.

3.2.3 A fin de construir estructuras de diálogo social resilientes y exitosas, es esencial promover el diálogo social como piedra angular del marco social. El CESE acoge favorablemente iniciativas como el Diálogo Social del Sur del Mediterráneo ([SOLiD](#)), que promueve intercambios interregionales de buenas prácticas y marcos jurídicos y estructurales de diálogo social.

3.3 Diálogo civil

3.3.1 Aunque ninguna institución europea o internacional ha adoptado una definición universal de diálogo civil, está ampliamente reconocido como un componente clave de la labor de las organizaciones de la sociedad civil (OSC) a la hora de garantizar que se escuche la voz de los ciudadanos en los procesos de toma de decisiones.

3.3.2 El declive de los mecanismos participativos tradicionales, que afecta en particular a la juventud, señala la urgente necesidad de invertir más en el diálogo civil con vistas a modernizar y mejorar los instrumentos de participación.

3.3.3 El diálogo civil fomenta el compromiso cívico y la colaboración entre diversas partes interesadas a través de dos dimensiones interrelacionadas: 1) el diálogo entre organizaciones representativas de la sociedad civil. Esto sirve de plataforma para intercambiar opiniones y compartir conocimientos especializados sobre las políticas y su impacto social; 2) el diálogo estructurado entre las OSC y las instituciones gubernamentales e intergubernamentales. Esto garantiza que las voces de diversos colectivos sociales sean escuchadas y tenidas en cuenta en los procesos de elaboración de políticas.

3.3.4 El diálogo civil es clave para fomentar la transparencia, la rendición de cuentas y la inclusividad en la gobernanza pública, mejorando la legitimidad y la eficacia de las políticas y las iniciativas legislativas.

3.4 Diálogo civil en la región euromediterránea

3.4.1 El diálogo civil es vital para abordar las frustraciones de la ciudadanía al tiempo que se legitiman las políticas, ya que puede ser un mecanismo eficaz para salvar la brecha entre la población y los responsables de la toma de decisiones.

3.4.2 Las prácticas de diálogo civil varían mucho entre países, reflejando distintos contextos políticos, legados históricos, normas culturales y estructuras sociales. La ausencia de normas comunes para las prácticas de diálogo civil y de un marco regulador global contribuye a una

⁶ [OIT C098 – Convenio sobre el derecho de sindicación y de negociación colectiva, 1949 \(n.º 98\).](#)

⁷ [OIT C135 – Convenio sobre los representantes de los trabajadores, 1971 \(n.º 135\).](#)

⁸ [OIT C087 – Convenio sobre la libertad sindical y la protección del derecho de sindicación, 1948 \(n.º 87\).](#)

⁹ [OIT C154 – Convenio sobre la negociación colectiva, 1981 \(n.º 154\).](#)

variación significativa de las prácticas de participación entre las distintas instituciones. Esto da lugar a la fragmentación, la incoherencia y la informalidad en el diálogo civil.

- 3.4.3 Los enfoques históricos de la participación de la sociedad civil se han centrado sobre todo en la consulta, más que en fomentar un verdadero diálogo, suscitando preocupación por la inclusividad, la rendición de cuentas y la transparencia. Muchas oportunidades de diálogo siguen siendo episodios puntuales, y acarrear por tanto discontinuidad e incoherencia. Aunque el diálogo sectorial se produce con cierta frecuencia, el diálogo transversal es irregular y carece de procesos estructurados.
- 3.4.4 El contexto general de reducción del espacio de acción para la sociedad civil está socavando la autonomía y la eficacia de las OSC, restringiendo su capacidad para abogar por cambios¹⁰. Los mecanismos de diálogo civil se enfrentan a obstáculos para su aplicación efectiva, ya que los marcos jurídicos que regulan la sociedad civil a menudo imponen restricciones a la libertad de asociación, expresión y asamblea.
- 3.4.5 La proliferación de las tecnologías digitales, en particular entre las generaciones más jóvenes, está transformando el panorama del diálogo civil en la región. Las plataformas de medios sociales, los foros en línea y las herramientas de comunicación digital han proporcionado nuevas vías a la juventud, pero también plantean retos relacionados con la desinformación, el acoso en línea y las brechas digitales, que deben abordarse para garantizar unas estructuras de diálogo integradoras y constructivas¹¹.

4. **Requisitos y retos actuales en la región mediterránea para los procesos de participación institucional desde la perspectiva de los jóvenes**

- 4.1 Las estructuras de diálogo social y civil son una piedra angular de la participación democrática. Las OSC, incluidos los interlocutores sociales, se enfrentan a dificultades para acceder a los procesos de toma de decisiones y participar en ellos. El CESE recalca la necesidad de fomentar la buena gobernanza mediante una administración pública eficaz, justa y transparente, una lucha más decidida contra la corrupción, y la igualdad de acceso a la justicia¹². Además, es necesario apoyar procesos democráticos que vayan más allá de las elecciones, así como un entorno propicio caracterizado por la libertad cívica, la transparencia, la accesibilidad a la información y las oportunidades para que los procesos participativos sean significativos.
- 4.2 El CESE señala que, pese a su enorme potencial, la juventud a menudo afronta importantes obstáculos y sigue excluida de los procesos participativos. Las bajas tasas de participación de la juventud y la falta de líderes jóvenes en puestos de responsabilidad constituyen obstáculos adicionales para la integración de los intereses de la juventud en los procesos de toma de decisiones. Siguen produciéndose fenómenos de tokenismo, lo que crea una situación en la que

¹⁰ Parlamento Europeo, «[Informe sobre la reducción del espacio de acción de la sociedad civil en Europa](#)» (2022).

¹¹ Véase el documento de orientación de Euromesco [Youth deliberation and participation in the Euro-Mediterranean region](#) (2023).

¹² [CESE REX/540 – Asociación renovada con los países vecinos meridionales – Una nueva Agenda para el Mediterráneo](#).

se invita a los jóvenes como agentes secundarios, con un impacto mínimo en el proceso de toma de decisiones.

- 4.3 A menudo, las personas jóvenes perciben las estructuras de diálogo social y civil como demasiado institucionalizadas. Las percepciones de agendas institucionales preformuladas y la falta de capacidad para integrar estructuralmente a los jóvenes en los marcos organizativos y reflejar de forma adecuada los intereses de la juventud impiden la participación activa de personas jóvenes.
- 4.4 Los marcos y prácticas socioculturales pueden ser un obstáculo para la participación activa de los jóvenes en las estructuras de diálogo participativo. Las percepciones de las estructuras tradicionales de poder y liderazgo y los prejuicios contra la juventud, en especial contra las mujeres jóvenes, constituyen obstáculos importantes para la participación de los jóvenes en la región.
- 4.5 Una investigación adecuada sobre la juventud es un requisito previo importante para identificar los retos e incluir sus intereses en los procesos participativos. La actual falta de datos sobre cuestiones relacionadas con la juventud en la región es un reto importante que perpetúa la infrarrepresentación de los intereses de la juventud en diversos ámbitos políticos.
- 4.6 La participación de los jóvenes en iniciativas de diálogo social y civil también se ve limitada por factores logísticos y de movilidad: la escasez de transporte y de infraestructuras. Disponer de recursos económicos, sociales y educativos suficientes constituye un requisito previo de la participación estructural de los jóvenes. Habida cuenta de la situación a menudo precaria de la juventud en la región, el CESE subraya la necesidad de contar con mecanismos eficaces de apoyo para ellos.
- 4.7 El CESE llama especialmente la atención sobre las necesidades específicas de las mujeres y hombres jóvenes marginados (por ejemplo, los ninis, las mujeres jóvenes, las personas LGBTQ+ y los jóvenes con discapacidad) y hace hincapié en la importancia de la igualdad de oportunidades para los jóvenes en las zonas rurales y urbanas.

5. **Recomendaciones**

5.1 Recomendaciones generales

- 5.1.1 La participación de la juventud en todas las fases del proceso de elaboración de políticas, desde la toma de decisiones hasta la ejecución de las políticas, es un elemento fundamental para unas políticas de juventud eficaces y requiere el establecimiento de marcos de diálogo rotatorios y a largo plazo en la elaboración de políticas. El CESE solicita procedimientos de selección equilibrados e inclusivos para evitar la sobrerrepresentación de colectivos privilegiados. Resulta esencial implantar mecanismos eficaces de seguimiento, evaluación y retroalimentación. La aplicación por parte del CESE de la evaluación de la UE desde el punto de vista de los jóvenes puede proporcionar orientación.

- 5.1.2 Las medidas de desarrollo de capacidades para la inclusión de los jóvenes en las estructuras de diálogo social y civil son un paso importante para situarlos en el núcleo de los contextos organizativos. Esto incluye la promoción de una cultura de cooperación en lugar de la competencia, la adopción de conflictos respetuosos y la gestión de posibles desacuerdos. Además, el CESE recomienda que se reconozca a los jóvenes como expertos en sus respectivos ámbitos.
- 5.1.3 El uso de nuevas formas de comunicación, en particular herramientas digitales, y la creación de nuevas narrativas son cruciales para llegar a los jóvenes. Involucrar a los jóvenes en el diseño de espacios, entornos y marcos institucionales de diálogo es esencial para la creación de estructuras basadas en la igualdad intergeneracional. Deben utilizarse formas no convencionales de comunicación presencial, como actos artísticos o deportivos y estructuras comunitarias, para implicar a la juventud en el discurso político.
- 5.1.4 La interconexión del trabajo en el ámbito de la juventud es un paso importante para promover el intercambio (inter)regional de ideas, culturas y prácticas de cooperación en esta región diversa y entre este colectivo heterogéneo. Al apoyar las redes juveniles regionales, las OSC, incluidos los interlocutores sociales, pueden beneficiarse de la búsqueda de nuevos socios de cooperación y la contratación de miembros jóvenes. Como afirma el CESE en su Dictamen REX/566¹³, es de suma importancia reforzar la participación de la juventud en las relaciones exteriores de la UE. Por consiguiente, el CESE reitera su recomendación de promover la cooperación entre las organizaciones juveniles y las delegaciones de la UE y de sensibilizar sobre las políticas de juventud en su trabajo diario. Además, debe abordarse el problema de las cuestiones relativas a los visados.
- 5.1.5 El CESE subraya la necesidad de implicar a los representantes de los colectivos vulnerables en los procesos participativos (mujeres jóvenes, personas LGBTQ+, jóvenes con discapacidad, niñas) y pide esfuerzos adicionales para establecer estructuras accesibles con objeto de permitir una representación diversa en el diálogo social y civil. También es necesario diseñar programas de apoyo especiales que lleguen a los grupos vulnerables. Una posibilidad es aumentar los presupuestos para la juventud a nivel local, apoyar a las comunidades locales y proporcionar apoyo financiero a la movilidad de la juventud.
- 5.1.6 El CESE señala que los sistemas educativos públicos deben reforzar la promoción del compromiso participativo y crear ecosistemas de apoyo para la adquisición de conjuntos de capacidades adecuados (por ejemplo, alfabetización política y digital), de modo que las personas jóvenes puedan participar con confianza en los procesos participativos institucionales. La sociedad civil y las organizaciones de interlocutores sociales pueden ayudar a los jóvenes ofreciendo talleres de desarrollo de capacidades como parte de sus programas educativo, y creando así puntos de contacto fácilmente accesibles para ellos.

¹³ [CESE REX/566 – Plan de Acción para la Juventud en la Acción Exterior de la UE.](#)

5.2 Recomendaciones relativas a la juventud en el diálogo social

- 5.2.1 El CESE recomienda que las organizaciones nacionales de interlocutores sociales establezcan planes de acción para la juventud. Estos planes de acción deben servir de hojas de ruta, con medidas específicas para crear un marco organizativo más inclusivo para la participación de los jóvenes en las organizaciones de diálogo social.
- 5.2.2 El CESE subraya la importancia de las estructuras de diálogo social a nivel empresarial. Los comités de empresa son una herramienta necesaria para que las empresas sean más resilientes, prósperas y capaces de crear empleos dignos, así como para promover la democracia en el mundo del trabajo (véase el Dictamen SOC/746¹⁴).
- 5.2.3 La inclusión de los trabajadores jóvenes en las estructuras de diálogo social a nivel empresarial es fundamental. Animar a las personas jóvenes a participar en los procesos democráticos en el lugar de trabajo respalda su participación y les ayuda a adquirir capacidades y experiencia en la representación de sus intereses. Los programas de tutoría brindan la oportunidad de adaptar las políticas de participación de la juventud y apoyar el desarrollo de líderes jóvenes.
- 5.2.4 El establecimiento de estructuras representativas orientadas a la juventud a nivel empresarial es una forma eficaz de integrar la participación de los jóvenes en las estructuras de diálogo social. El CESE destaca el Consejo Fiduciario de la Juventud (CFJ)¹⁵ en Austria. El CFJ representa los intereses económicos, sociales, sanitarios y culturales de las persona jóvenes que figuran en plantilla o como aprendices de las empresas. Todas las empresas con cinco o más trabajadores jóvenes están obligadas a facilitar la elección democrática del CFJ por parte de la Asamblea de la Juventud. Los miembros del CFJ ostentan derechos especiales (libertad de instrucción, prohibición de restricciones y discriminación, protección contra el despido, exención educativa) y les incumben deberes especiales (deber de confidencialidad) garantizados por la Ley para representar con eficacia los intereses de los trabajadores jóvenes. La legitimación de los trabajadores jóvenes a través de las elecciones refuerza su credibilidad en el entorno laboral.
- 5.2.5 El CESE hace hincapié en la importancia de las medidas para promover la participación activa en el mercado laboral y la prestación de servicios públicos de calidad, como la atención a la infancia y los cuidados de larga duración de calidad y asequibles, a fin de fomentar el empleo femenino joven. El CESE también recomienda dar prioridad a los derechos sociales mediante el desarrollo de cartas nacionales de derechos sociales.
- 5.2.6 El CESE subraya la importancia de las actividades de investigación centradas en los jóvenes en el mercado laboral. Debe reforzarse la cooperación entre universidades, centros de investigación y programas de educación y formación profesionales (EFP) en la región. La investigación sobre el terreno local, a largo plazo y rotatoria para aprender sobre las estructuras juveniles locales y a partir de ellas puede ser útil para reunir los conocimientos necesarios para integrar con éxito los intereses de los jóvenes en las estructuras de diálogo social.

¹⁴ [CESE SOC/746 – Democracia en el trabajo.](#)

¹⁵ <https://www.oegi.at/content/dam/oegi/downloads/dokumente/20220915%20H2JVR%20Brosch%C3%BCre%20WEB.pdf> (disponible solo en alemán).

5.3 Recomendaciones relativas a la juventud en el diálogo civil

- 5.3.1 Es necesario establecer normas comunes para las prácticas de diálogo civil y un marco regulador global, a fin de proporcionar mecanismos estructurados de participación. También hay que establecer estructuras de apoyo específicas, equipos específicos y puntos de contacto dentro de las instituciones que puedan facilitar un diálogo periódico y estructurado con las OSC.
- 5.3.2 Invertir en iniciativas de mejora de las capacidades que permitan a los funcionarios y a los responsables políticos aumentar su capacidad para gestionar el diálogo civil con la sociedad civil.
- 5.3.3 Aumentar la inversión en infraestructuras digitales, pues las tecnologías digitales pueden brindar nuevas vías para el diálogo cívico, y abordar el limitado acceso a internet que sufren los jóvenes. Aumentar la inversión en alfabetización digital con el fin de reforzar las competencias digitales de los jóvenes, de modo que puedan expresar sus opiniones, organizar campañas y conectarse con personas afines a través de las fronteras.
- 5.3.4 Reforzar los programas de desarrollo de capacidades para los jóvenes representantes de las OSC, centrándose en la alfabetización política, la defensa de intereses y los procesos democráticos para que los agentes de la sociedad civil puedan influir de manera más eficaz en los resultados de las políticas. Promover reformas estructuradas que garanticen la protección jurídica de la sociedad civil y mejoren los espacios seguros para el diálogo.
- 5.3.5 Aumentar la inversión en el cultivo de una cultura de diálogo civil y participación en escuelas y universidades, en particular racionalizando el proceso para que las OSC ejecuten proyectos cívicos en las escuelas y reduciendo la intervención y el control gubernamentales.
- 5.3.6 La creación de comités de asesores locales con representantes de la juventud o consejos de juventud puede aumentar el discurso civil a nivel local.
- 5.3.7 Facilitar criterios de selección más claros y transparentes sobre la manera en que las autoridades estatales seleccionan a los jóvenes para participar en los procesos de diálogo civil, ofreciendo tanto a los líderes de asociaciones juveniles reconocidas como a los jóvenes representantes de movimientos de base igualdad de oportunidades para participar en procesos de diálogo cívico.
- 5.3.8 Fomentar un diálogo intergeneracional que permita cambiar la narrativa sobre la juventud, proporcionando más espacio y legitimidad para sus contribuciones en pie de igualdad con las generaciones más mayores.

This annex for the opinion REX/583 provides additional information regarding youth involvement in social and civil dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The focus of the opinion shall be the youth involvement in social and civil dialogue in the Southern Neighbourhood of the EU (Southern and Eastern Mediterranean). The examples of social and civil dialogue structures in the EU member states serve as an important input in the analysis this topic. Nevertheless, the output of the opinion shall remain focused on the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean region.

1. Background information

- 1.1 Youth engagement is increasingly recognised as a crucial component of participatory dialogue structures, as young people are a significant demographic group (around 45% of the population in the Southern Mediterranean is under the age of 25; more than half (55%) of the population in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is under the age of 30) with unique perspectives, energy and innovative ideas.
- 1.2 The involvement of young people and the strengthening of dialogue structures and cooperation with civil society organisations, including social partners, abroad, are among the priorities of EESC President Röpke's manifesto¹⁶. The EESC is committed to structurally involving young people, their representatives and interests in its work, as evidenced by the adoption of several youth-related opinions. This own-initiative opinion is being drawn up in a process with the active participation of youth representatives from the EUROMED region, paving the way for the future work of the EESC and, in particular, the EUROMED Follow-up Committee.
- 1.3 The EESC supports the EU's commitment to promote the development of effective youth policies, facilitating young people's access to vocational training and their participation in democratic processes. In recent years, youth has been at the centre of EU policy-making with the adoption of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027¹⁷, the European Year of Youth 2022¹⁸, the European Year of Skills 2023¹⁹, the Youth Action Plan (YAP) in EU External Action 2022 – 2027²⁰ to name the most prominent ones.
- 1.4 The Euro-Mediterranean region faces a number of challenges, including the climate crisis, high unemployment (particularly among young people), as well as a just-, digital- and energy transition to a sustainable and inclusive economy. In 2021, the European Union adopted a new strategy for the cooperation with the Southern Neighbourhood in form of the Joint Statement 'New Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A New Agenda for the Mediterranean'²¹ focusing on the rule of law, human and fundamental rights, equality, democracy and good

¹⁶ [EESC President, STAND UP FOR DEMOCRACY / SPEAK UP FOR EUROPE.](#)

¹⁷ [European Union, 'Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy'.](#)

¹⁸ [European Union, 'The European Year of Youth 2022'.](#)

¹⁹ [European Union, 'European Year of Skills 2023'.](#)

²⁰ [European Union, 'Youth Action Plan \(YAP\) in EU external action 2022 – 2027'.](#)

²¹ [European Union, 'Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A new Agenda for the Mediterranean'.](#)

governance as cornerstones of inclusive and prosperous societies. The strategy also focuses on young people, women and disadvantaged groups and underlines the importance of civil society organisations and social partners, emphasising the importance of empowering young people and the strong involvement of social partners and civil society organisations in laying the foundations for decent jobs, respect for social and labour rights, fair and inclusive growth and long-term sustainability.

- 1.5 The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) has committed to fostering cooperation on the regional level in accordance with the ‘5th Ministerial Declaration on Employment and Labour’²² from 2022. The Declaration and the corresponding Joint Statement²³ of the social partners of the UfM place a particular focus on the employment and employability of the most vulnerable groups, with a particular emphasis on youth and women. Furthermore, the ministers promote social dialogue, both tripartite and bipartite, freedom of association and collective bargaining, including the involvement of social partners in the design, implementation and monitoring of economic and social policies. They also highlight the importance of the civil society.
- 1.6 The ‘UfM Youth Strategy 2030: Euro-Mediterranean Youth Towards a Common Goal’²⁴ brings together 42 UfM Member States with different horizons to agree on common actions for youth in the Euro-Mediterranean region. It is also a clear response to the urgent needs and obstacles faced by youth in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The strategy identifies six priority areas (climate and energy; environment and water; urban and rural development; economic development; education and training; social inclusion and participation) and key actions. In 2023, the UfM launched the ‘UfM Youth Agenda: Call for Action’²⁵ as part of the implementation of the ‘UfM Youth Strategy’, reflecting consultation processes involving the UfM National Youth Focal Points and Working Groups. The aim of the UfM Youth Agenda is to provide a flexible tool for addressing youth-related issues and implementing youth policies among UfM Member States and other entities at regional level. Once published, the UfM will organise virtual meetings with youth-led and youth-oriented civil society organisations (CSOs) on participation in decision-making processes, as well as capacity-building workshops.

2. **Requirements and current challenges in the Mediterranean region for institutional participatory processes from a youth perspective**

- 2.1 Youth engagement frequently occurs in informal structures within communities. Public institutions frequently overlook these structures, and this kind of youth work is often underfunded and underappreciated. EU institutions lack the necessary instruments to reach local levels, especially in the Southern Mediterranean region. Furthermore, it should be noted that the

22 [Union for the Mediterranean, '5th Ministerial Declaration on Employment and Labour' \(2022\).](#)

23 [Social partners of the Union for the Mediterranean, 'JOINT STATEMENT - Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Union for the Mediterranean on employment and labour'.](#)

24 [Union for the Mediterranean, 'UfM Youth Strategy 2030'.](#)

25 [Union for the Mediterranean, 'UfM Youth Agenda'.](#)

widespread distrust of communities regarding institutions perceived as ‘foreign’ represents an additional obstacle.²⁶

- 2.2 It is of the utmost importance to acknowledge the various modes of communication and forms of political activism commonly employed by young people, including disengagement and boycott of institutionalised structures, as well as rejection of formal forms of political activism. However, it is crucial to differentiate between political apathy and political disillusionment.²⁷
- 2.3 The region is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The development of vocational training and education programmes that facilitate rapid and effective upskilling to enable communities to adapt to environmental changes is of paramount importance. This is in line with the recommendations set out in EESC REX/540²⁸ and the 5th UfM Social Dialogue Forum²⁹. With regard to the digital transition, the region is facing a number of challenges, including the emergence of new forms of work (in particular, platform work), a lack of digital literacy and potential inaccessibility to adequate technology.
- 2.4 An ILO study³⁰ about the socio-economic situation in the Southern Mediterranean Neighbourhood. concludes that, overall, economic growth in the region has been lower than its potential over the past decade. The Southern Mediterranean Countries’ labour market outcomes are characterized by a low labour force participation rate, especially for women and youth, high levels of unemployment and informality, and low levels of quality job creation. Moreover, the female labour force participation rate is one of the lowest globally, on average lower than other countries within the same or a lower income category. Similarly, for youth (15–29 years), the labour force participation rate is much lower than the rate for their older peers. The significant share of women and youth not participating in economic activities and not looking to be economically active hints at the difficulties that women and youth face to participate fully in their countries’ economies. The region suffers from relatively high shares of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET). Youth unemployment rates in the region are one of the highest globally. The unemployment rate has increased with the increase in levels of educational attainment, suggesting significant skill mismatches in the countries in the region. Unemployment has increased in particular for graduates and educated youth in the region, including for Tunisia and Jordan. The tertiary graduates’ unemployment is particularly problematic for the region indicating low returns of investment in education which might influence future generations’ choices. Graduate unemployment reflects the absence of structural transformation and therefore the incapacity of the economies to create quality jobs for its educated youth. The high levels of youth unemployment and the lack of economic dynamism led to significant migration, including an undocumented one, and brain drain levels in most countries in the region.

²⁶ Based on the contributions of youth representatives during the 1st study group and the Anna Lindh Foundation Youth Forum.

²⁷ Based on the contributions of youth representatives during the 1st study group and the Anna Lindh Foundation Youth Forum.

²⁸ [EESC REX/540 – Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A new Agenda for the Mediterranean.](#)

²⁹ [Union for the Mediterranean, 'Social Partners of the Mediterranean region discuss regional social dialogue realities and prospects' \(2023\).](#)

³⁰ [International Labour Organisation, 'Trade, investment and employment in the Southern Mediterranean Countries. Thematic Report of the "Mainstreaming Employment into Trade and Investment in the Southern Neighbourhood" project' \(2022\).](#)

2.5 According to the SAHWE project³¹ and their Youth Survey from 2016, the most significant issues perceived by young people in the Southern Mediterranean are employment, living standards and the economic situation. The paper from Leonie Backeberg & Jochen Tholen (2017)³² provides further insights, analysing the insecurities and lack of opportunities that have prevented young people from becoming independent and fully integrated members of society. This process, commonly referred to as social exclusion, is the focus of the paper, which offers insights into the challenges faced by youth in Arab Mediterranean countries.

The paper identifies three interlinked types of exclusion:

a) Economic Exclusion:

In the dominant public sector, which offers the most employment opportunities, positions are predominantly held by older individuals. Consequently, young people are unable to gain access to these roles, leading to employment in the informal sector. This sector is particularly significant in the Southern Mediterranean. While it provides a source of income for many, it is a vulnerable form of employment that lacks social security services and representation through workers' representatives (social dialogue). The high formal female unemployment rate is a particularly problematic issue, and it appears to be a structural problem in the region. The reasons for this are numerous, including the highly segmented nature of the labour market, the limited mobility of female workers, and the reluctance of companies to compensate maternity leave.

b) Exclusion from social services:

Due to the prevalence of informal employment in the region, access to social security services is severely limited. Historically, social security was provided by family structures. However, with the rural exodus and fast urbanisation, the current system of state provision is insufficient to cover social security, excepting countries with high access to raw materials, such as Algeria. Therefore, the establishment of an efficient state protection system is necessary.

c) Exclusion from civil/political life:

Most regional policy regimes are characterised by a lack of transparency, a weak judiciary, a powerful security apparatus and a lack of opportunities to influence political decision-making. This ultimately results in a lack of confidence in political institutions, employers, the education system and the legal system, which in turn leads to the exclusion of young people from political life.

³¹ [Researching Arab Mediterranean Youth: Towards a New Social Contract \(SAHWA\) | SAHWA | Project | News & Multimedia | FP7 | CORDIS | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

³² "The Frustrated Generation: Youth Exclusion in Arab Mediterranean Societies," published in the Journal of Youth Studies.

3. Involving youth in participatory processes of social and civil dialogue

The basis for a thriving and stable democracy, open and inclusive society, just and prosperous economy is a strong participatory democracy covering strong social and civil dialogue structures.

3.1 Social Dialogue

3.1.1 Social dialogue is defined by the ILO³³ as all types of negotiation, consultation or simply exchange of information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers and workers, on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy. It can exist as a tripartite process, with the government as an official party to the dialogue or it may consist of bipartite relations between workers and management (or trade unions and employers' organizations), with or without indirect government involvement. Social dialogue processes can be informal or institutionalised, and often it is a combination of the two. It can take place at the national, regional or at enterprise level. It can be inter-professional, sectoral or a combination of these.

3.1.2 The primary objectives of social dialogue are to discuss significant economic and social matters, to encourage effective governance, to stimulate economic growth and to maintain social and industrial harmony, by establishing balanced power relations between employees and employers. Social dialogue facilitates the formation of consensus and encourages democratic involvement. It is noteworthy that social dialogue is not a "right" in itself, but rather a process that occurs when fundamental rights to organise and collectively bargain are exercised including Article 12 "Freedom of assembly and of association" and Article 28 "Right of collective bargaining and action" of the Charter of Fundamental rights of the EU³⁴. One of the main functions of social dialogue, in particular collective bargaining, is to contribute to shaping the business environment and managing changes in working life. This is achieved by providing information, anticipation, participation and facilitation, which in turn builds up mutual trust between social partners.

3.1.3 Studies suggest that social dialogue has contributed over a number of years to economic stability, prosperity and the long-run success of businesses, as well as plays a key role in supporting the transition to democratic, more equitable and sustainable political and economic systems in low- and middle-income countries³⁵.

3.2 Social dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region

Social dialogue in EU

3.2.1 A common characteristic of countries with strong social dialogue and high collective bargaining coverage is the dominance of sectoral collective bargaining agreements, as well as the effective

33 [ILO, Social Dialogue definition.](#)

34 [European Union, Charter of Fundamental Right of the European Union.](#)

35 [Social Dialogue and Economic Performance in CONDITIONS OF WORK AND EMPLOYMENT SERIES 2017.](#)

recognition of the role of social partners by the state through the institutional inclusion of social partners in policymaking.

3.2.2 There are currently eight EU countries where collective bargaining coverage exceeds 80%. Two different systems predominate. On the one hand, the **Gent system** in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden) and Belgium, which is based on state-subsidised voluntary unemployment insurance administered by the trade unions, which acts as a strong incentive to join trade unions and strengthens social dialogue. On the other hand, the **chamber system** in Austria has the second highest collective bargaining coverage at 98%. This system is based on compulsory membership of all companies in the Chamber of Commerce, which ensures that all sectoral agreements signed by the Chamber cover all employees.

Social dialogue in Southern Mediterranean

3.2.3 According to the European Commission's Communication 'Strengthening Social Dialogue'³⁶, the promotion of international social dialogue is a key objective for the EU. the promotion of the international social dialogue is a core objective for the EU. *There are two main international social dialogue organisations in the region. BUSINESSMED³⁷ is the main regional representative of the private sector, representing the interests of 25 business confederations from countries that are members of the Union for the Mediterranean. The Arab Trade Union Confederation (ATUC)³⁸ represents the interests of workers in the region. Its main objectives include defending the rights and interests of the Arab working class and its trade union movement; securing the right to work and creating equal opportunities for all Arab workers; ensuring the right to organise and collective bargaining and strengthening tripartite dialogue; strengthening the right of working women to employment and equal rights and encouraging their participation in trade union work.*

3.2.4 Social dialogue in the Southern Mediterranean faces many challenges. While national institutions often ensure the provision of tripartite social dialogue at national level, sectoral or bipartite dialogue structures at company level are often very limited.

3.2.5 In Morocco, the backbone of the social dialogue is the tripartite social dialogue on the national level, with institutions such as the Council on Collective Bargaining, the Superior Council on the Promotion of Employment, and the Regional Council on the Promotion of Employment. Most of these bodies are under the leadership of public officials (such as the Ministry of Employment or regional governors), which is often criticized by trade unions. The level of unionisation is relatively low, with less than 10% of the workforce belonging to a union. This figure is higher in urban areas and in the public sector and public companies. There are five main trade unions. Sectoral social dialogue remains weak. At the company level, there is the possibility of electing employee delegates to represent workers' interests. For companies with at least 50 employees, the establishment of an enterprise committee with employer representatives and two employee representatives is mandatory. The economic structure, comprising a high

36 [European Union, 'Strengthening social dialogue in the European Union: harnessing its full potential for managing fair transitions'.](#)

37 <https://www.businessmed-umce.org/en/about>.

38 <https://www.arabtradeunion.org/about-us>.

percentage of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and a strong informal economy, which accounts for 14% to 34% of the GDP. Consequently, social dialogue on a company level remains an exception, and collective agreements remain at a low level.

- 3.2.6 In Tunisia, the tripartite social dialogue is organised by the National Council for Social Dialogue. The scope of its activities is extensive, yet it lacks objective criteria to evaluate its efficiency, which makes it difficult to work effectively. Another criticism is that it is financed and administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Moreover, the council lacks legal personhood, thereby undermining its independence. With regard to the bipartite social dialogue, a system of dual employee representation is in place, comprising elected employee delegates (regulated by the Labour Code) and union organisations on company level (not included in the Labour Code). For companies with more than 40 permanent employees, the establishment of a Company Advisory Committee is mandatory. The committee is composed of representatives from both employers and employee representatives. Due to the prevalence of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the lack of clarity regarding the jurisdiction of the bipartite social dialogue, as well as the limited resources available, social dialogue at the company level remains relatively underdeveloped. Trade unions, which are the primary contact points for workers, are relatively strong at the national level, but remain weak at the company level. The proportion of employees covered by collective bargaining agreements is relatively high in comparison to other countries in the region. However, these agreements are primarily focused on wage issues, with other aspects of work life being largely overlooked.
- 3.2.7 In Jordan, tripartite social dialogue is organised within the Tripartite Committee, whose main purpose is to discuss minimum wages at the national level and which has no official consultative role in other areas. The establishment of workers' organisations is controlled by the Labour Law, which regulates the establishment of new trade unions. A new union requires 50 founding members with Jordanian citizenship (40% of the workforce are foreign workers) and the approval of the tripartite committee. The General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions is the main union in Jordan, with 17 sectoral unions. Its independence is questioned because it does not hold serious elections. Public sector unions are run as government departments, another sign of the lack of independence of workers' representation. The Federation of Independent Trade Unions is trying to gain recognition, but has been denied official recognition.
- 3.2.8 The situation for workers' rights in Egypt has deteriorated to such an extent that it was labelled one of the world's worst countries for workers in 2018 by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)³⁹. This was due to the intensification of state repression against independent trade unions, which included crackdowns on peaceful strikes and arbitrary arrests of union leaders.

³⁹ [ILO, "The future of work - Trade unions in transformation"](#).

3.3 Figures and Data

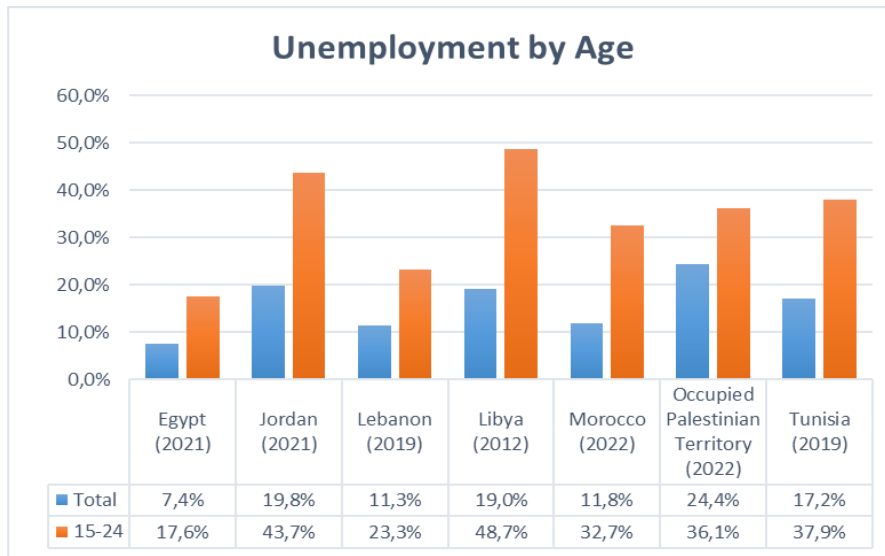


Figure 2: Unemployment rate in the Mediterranean region by age (Source: ILOSTAT)

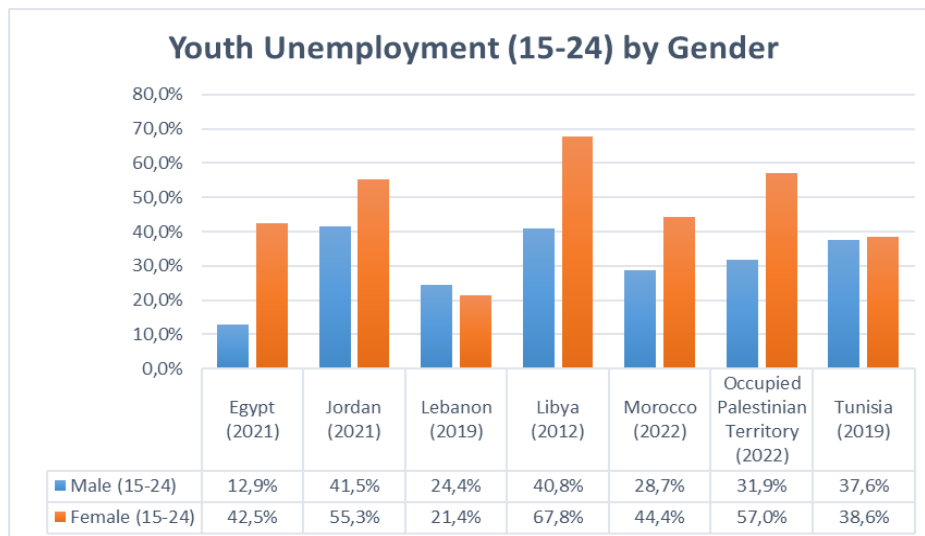
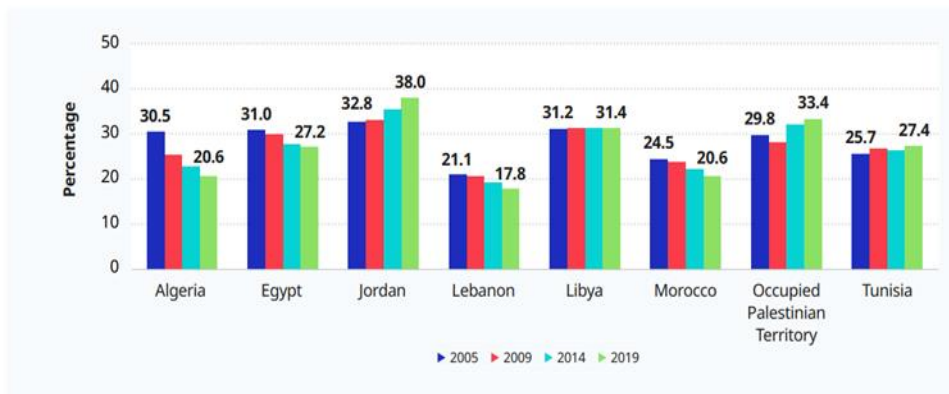


Figure 1: Youth Unemployment rate (15-24) in the Mediterranean region by gender (Source: ILOSTAT)



Source: ILOSTAT.

Figure 3: Level of youth NEET in countries in the region between 2005 and 2019 (percentage)

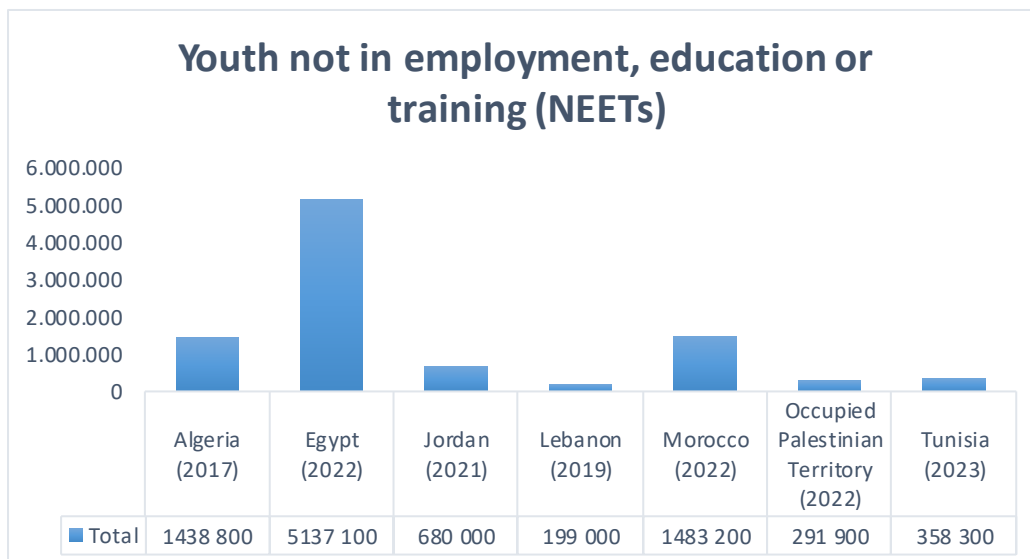


Figure 4: Total number of youth not in employment, education or training (NEETs) by country (Source: ILOSTAT)

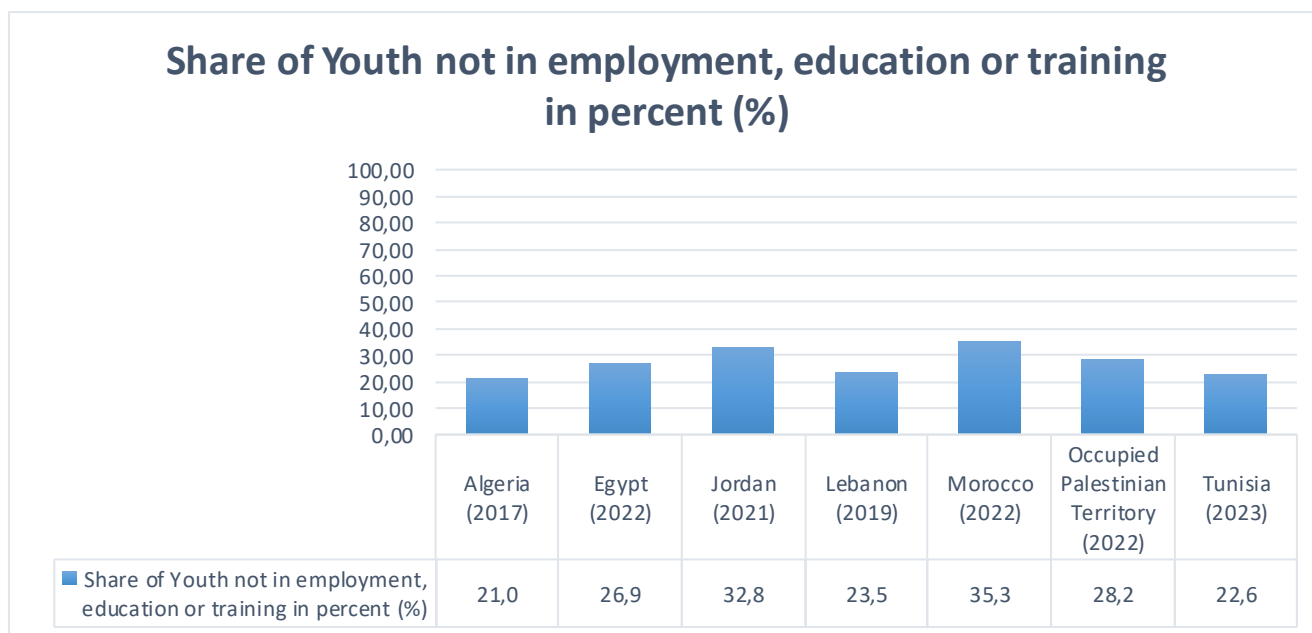


Figure 4: Share of youth not in employment, education or training (NEETs) in percent (%) by country (Source: ILOSTAT)

Data regarding social dialogue in the Mediterranean region

	Trade Union Density⁴⁰	Bargaining Coverage Rate⁴¹	ILO C098⁴²	ILO C135⁴³	ILO C087⁴⁴	ILO C154⁴⁵
Cyprus	43,3% (2016)	43,3% (2016)				
Malta	41,9% (2020)	41,8% (2012)				X
Tunisia	38,1% (2019)	62,9% (2019)				
Italy	32,5% (2019)	99,0% (2019)				X
Israel	25,1% (2017)	28,0% (2016)		X		X
Egypt	23,8% (2010)	3,5% (2008)				X
Occupied Palestinian Territory	21,3% (2018)	----				
Greece	19,0% (2014)	25,8% (2018)				
Portugal	15,3% (2016)	76,5% (2018)				X
Spain	12,4% (2019)	80,1% (2018)				
Morocco	10,9% (2019)	3,0% (2020)			X	
Turkey	9,8% (2019)	7,4% (2019)				X
Algeria	----	----				X
Jordan	----	----			X	X
Libya	----	----		X		X
Lebanon	----	----		X	X	X

Source: [ILOSTAT](#) Industrial Relations Data (IRdata)

40 Trade union density rate = Number of employee union members / Total number of employees.

41 Collective bargaining coverage rate = Number of employees covered by collective bargaining / Number of employees with the right to collective bargaining.

42 [ILO C098 - Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 \(No. 98\)](#).

43 [ILO C135 - Workers' Representatives Convention, 1971 \(No. 135\)](#).

44 [ILO C087 - Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 \(No. 87\)](#).

45 [ILO C154 - Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 \(No. 154\)](#).

3.4 Civil dialogue

3.4.1 Though no universal definition of civil society has been adopted by any European or international institution, CSOs are widely recognized as pivotal for ensuring that citizens' voices are heard in decision-making processes across the various dimension of the civil dialogue. Data shows that citizens have a high level of trust in civil society organisations: 87% of Europeans consider it important that civil society can operate freely and hold those in power accountable⁴⁶. Findings of the recent Eurobarometer also confirm that civil society participation is increasingly seen as an effective way to make citizens' voices heard by decision makers⁴⁷. Finally, the decline of traditional participative mechanisms, impacting in particular the youth, points to the urgency to invest more in civil dialogue with a view to modernise and enhance participation tools.⁴⁸

3.4.2 Civil dialogue is widely recognized as the cornerstone of participatory democracy, facilitating inclusive decision-making processes. In the perspective of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), civil dialogue encompasses two interrelated dimensions. The **dialogue among organizations** representing civil society and the **structured dialogue**⁴⁹ between civil society organizations and Governmental and intergovernmental institutions. The two-fold framework of civil dialogue reflects the EESC's recognition that: i) "Civil society organisations are the expression and result of a society's power to self-organise distinctly and independently from public institutions and the state"⁵⁰; ii) Trade unions and employers' organisations form an integral part of civil society; however, they are distinct from civil society organisations in their capacity as social partners"⁵¹.

3.4.3 Civil dialogue ensures that policies are informed by the perspectives and needs of diverse stakeholders by: i) providing a platform for stakeholders to identify emerging challenges and explore innovative solutions to address them; ii) fostering coordination and leveraging collective expertise to assess the impact of policies on different societal groups.

3.4.4 EESC delineates three essential components of EU civil dialogue:

a) Sectoral Dialogue:

- This component involves dialogue between civil society organizations (CSOs) and relevant authorities within both EU and national levels on specific policy areas. It aims to address issues pertinent to particular sectors such as environment, labour rights, consumer protection, and education.

⁴⁶ Civil Society Europe, [The impact of civil society organisations in Europe](#) (2019).

⁴⁷ Special Eurobarometer 500 (October-November 2020), [Future of Europe](#), p. 19.

⁴⁸ See for example European Commission, [Political Participation and EU Citizenship: Perceptions and Behaviours of Young People](#) (2016) and European Citizen Action Service (June 2015), [Co-deciding with Citizens: Towards Digital Democracy at EU Level](#).

⁴⁹ Structured Dialogue, as conceptualized by the EU, is an approach to engaging in a two-way communication with stakeholders in a planned, regular, and transparent manner. It goes beyond mere consultations ensuring a follow-up with continued feedback.

⁵⁰ European Economic and Social Committee, Opinion "[SOC/782 – Strengthening civil dialogue and participatory democracy in the EU: a path forward](#)" (2024).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

- Sectoral dialogue allows CSOs to engage with policymakers, share expertise, provide input on legislative proposals, and contribute to policy-making processes. It facilitates collaboration and ensures that policies are informed by the perspectives and needs of diverse stakeholders.
 - Sectoral dialogue provides a platform for stakeholders to identify emerging challenges, explore innovative solutions, and assess the impact of policies on different societal groups. It enables stakeholders to work together towards the development of effective and equitable policies that address sector-specific needs
- b) Transversal Dialogue:
- Transversal dialogue refers to structured and regular exchanges between EU institutions or their national counterparts and civil society organizations on broader issues related to the development of the EU and its crosscutting policies.
 - Unlike sectoral dialogue, transversal dialogue focuses on overarching themes and policies that affect multiple sectors and have implications for various aspects of society. Examples include discussions on EU budget priorities, climate change mitigation strategies, and social inclusion initiatives.
 - This form of dialogue allows for comprehensive discussions on issues of common interest, fosters coordination among different stakeholders, and promotes coherence in EU policies across different policy areas.
- c) Horizontal Dialogue:
- Horizontal dialogue involves interactions among civil society organizations themselves regarding the development of EU policies and their crosscutting implications.
 - It provides a platform for CSOs to exchange information, coordinate actions, build alliances, and develop joint advocacy strategies. Horizontal dialogue enables CSOs to amplify their voices, leverage collective expertise and resources, and enhance their effectiveness in influencing EU decision-making processes.
 - This component emphasizes the importance of collaboration and solidarity among civil society actors to address shared challenges and advance common objectives within the European context.

3.4.5 These three components of civil dialogue serve two main purposes. Firstly, they facilitate engagement and collaboration among diverse groups, which fosters social cohesion and solidarity. Secondly, they provide opportunities for individuals and organizations to offer feedback and recommendations on policy proposals and their implementation strategies. This fosters transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in public governance, ultimately enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of policies and legislative initiatives.

3.5 Civil dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region

Civil dialogue in the EU

3.5.1 Article 11 of the TEU emphasizes the need for an open, transparent, and regular dialogue between EU institutions and organized civil society. Especially in the current a context of growing disconnect between people and political institutions, exacerbated by perceived inadequacies in addressing pressing societal concerns such as climate change, social cohesion, and unemployment, civil dialogue emerges as a crucial mechanism for addressing citizen frustrations while legitimizing policies, bridging the gap between citizens and decision-makers.

3.5.2 However, for EU civil dialogue to be meaningful, an enabling environment characterized by civic

freedom, transparency ensuring and accessibility to information and opportunities is paramount⁵². Few key challenges and related recommendation can be highlighted on this regards⁵³:

- a) The absence of common standards for civil dialogue practices and a comprehensive regulatory framework, coupled with the lack of dedicated support structures, contributes to significant variation in engagement practices across institutions. This leads to fragmentation, inconsistency, and informality in civil dialogue, notably with institutions like the Council of the EU and the European Parliament.
 - Implementing civil dialogue frameworks, like the one for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), can provide structured mechanisms for engagement.
- b) Historical approaches to civil society participation have predominantly been instrumental, lacking inclusivity and fostering concerns regarding accountability and transparency. These approaches have primarily focused on consultation rather than fostering genuine dialogue.
 - Establishing dedicated teams or contact points within EU institutions, such as the Directorate-General TRADE's Transparency, Civil Society, and Communication team, can facilitate regular and structured dialogue with CSOs.
- c) While sectoral dialogue occurs with some frequency, transversal dialogue lacks regularity and structured processes. Many dialogue opportunities are one-off events, resulting in discontinuity and inconsistency. There has been a limited investment in cultivating a culture of civil dialogue and participation, both at the EU and national levels.
 - Regular evaluations of civil dialogue processes can help identify shortcomings and areas for improvement, leading to more effective and inclusive engagement practices.
- d) Civil society organizations (CSOs) encounter challenges in accessing and participating in decision-making processes, particularly concerning EU policies and legislation. This is exacerbated by a perceived imbalance between CSOs and private lobbies, wherein the latter often possess superior outreach and influence.
 - Formal or informal coalitions can enhance the collective impact of civil society engagement.

3.5.3 Despite the challenges faced in civil dialogue practices, there are promising opportunities emerging to enhance the situation. Among these opportunities are:

⁵² [The Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process](#) adopted by the Council of Europe (2009) summarises key principles and conditions which can act as a guide.

⁵³ European CivicForum "[Towards an open, transparent, and structured EU civil dialogue](#)" (2021).

- a) EU-UK Civil Society Forum: as part of the [Brexit Trade and Cooperation Agreement](#), efforts are being made to set up a structure that can permanently facilitate and coordinate civil dialogue at national level on EU issues
- b) EU Recovery Package: as explicitly mentioned in the [Regulation](#), CSOs' had the opportunity to participate in the drafting and implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (though some deficiencies and gaps within the process has been [reported](#))
- c) Malta Civil Society Fund: as initiatives promoted by Malta Council for the Volunteer Sector in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Employment, a [programme](#) has been launched in 2020 offering financial assistance and training opportunities for CSOs to strengthen their capacity and engagement in EU policymaking processes.

Civil dialogue in Southern Mediterranean

3.5.4 The Southern Mediterranean region presents a more complex and dynamic landscape for civil dialogue, marked by a combination of opportunities and challenges. Civil dialogue practices vary widely across countries in the Southern Mediterranean, reflecting diverse political contexts, historical legacies, and levels of civic development. Civic dialogue in the Mediterranean region is influenced also by cultural norms and social dynamics. Traditional values, religious beliefs, and societal structures influence the willingness of individuals and groups to engage in public discourse. In some cases, cultural factors may either facilitate or hinder open dialogue and collaboration between different segments of society. While some nations have established robust mechanisms for dialogue and engagement, others struggle with bureaucratic hurdles and limited space for civil society. Legal frameworks regulating civil society often impose arbitrary restrictions on freedom of association, expression, and assembly, constraining the ability of CSOs to operate independently and advocate for change. State-led co-optation of CSOs, selective funding, and censorship of independent voices undermine the autonomy and effectiveness of civil society organizations.

3.5.5 Efforts to promote regional cooperation and collaboration among CSOs in the Southern Mediterranean have faced challenges due to political tensions, security concerns, and resource constraints. Despite challenges, civil society in the Southern Mediterranean demonstrates resilience, creativity, and a strong commitment to democratic values and social change. New trends and emerging spaces represents promising elements for the development of the civil dialogue:

- a) The establishment of many grassroots movements leading initiatives such as multilateral forums, civil society networks, and cross-border partnerships are fostering dialogue, collaboration, and mutual understanding among countries in the region⁵⁴.
- b) Youth engagement is increasingly recognized as a crucial component of civic dialogue in the Mediterranean region. Young people represent a significant demographic group (around 45 % of the population in the region is below the age of 25) with unique perspectives, energy, and innovative ideas. Efforts to empower youth, promote their participation in decision-making processes, and address their concerns are being deployed ⁵⁵.

⁵⁴ See the research "[Bridging the sea: a Review of Mediterranean Civil Society](#)" (2021) developed within the framework of the EU-funded initiative "Med Dialogue".

⁵⁵ See the research "[Mapping Youth Civil Society Actors in Euro-Med](#)" (2021) developed within the framework of the EU-funded initiative "Majalat II".

- c) The proliferation of digital technologies has transformed the landscape of civic dialogue in the Mediterranean region. Social media platforms, online forums, and digital communication tools have provided new avenues for citizens to express their views, organize campaigns, and connect with like-minded individuals across borders. However, digital spaces also present challenges related to misinformation, online harassment, and digital divides that need to be addressed to ensure inclusive and constructive civic dialogue⁵⁶.

3.5.6 Structured reforms enhancing legal protections for civil society, robust investment in funding and a comprehensive capacity building scheme could effectively enable civil society actors to influence policy outcomes and address pressing social issues through civil dialogue. Those measures to support and empower civil society actors require sustained efforts from governments, regional organizations, and international partners. Two examples of the joint efforts between Institutions and CSOs to enhance civil dialogue in the region are:

- a) [The Med Dialogue for Rights and Equality](#) (MDRE) II is the second phase of an EU funded initiative that aims to increase the participation of civil society groups in policy-making processes in the South Mediterranean and facilitate constructive dialogues between the Southern Neighbourhood and EU institutions. The project seeks to improve the skills of civil society leaders, support EU-CSO structured dialogue processes, and improve the DG NEAR HQ's and EU Delegations' capacities to work with civil society. By providing technical coordination, facilitating synergies, and offering methodological support, the MDRE enhances the efficacy of regional dialogues.
- b) "[Majalat](#)": a regional platform launched in 2018 for civil society structured dialogue in the Arab region, enabling CSOs involvement also in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). With the support of the EU, a consortium of six Civil Society Organisations from the Euro-Mediterranean region created spaces for dialogue between CSOs, trade unions, social movements and academics from both shores of the Mediterranean and the EU. A second phase "Majalat-II" is currently running until 2025 as part of the Civil Society Facility for the Mediterranean and consist also of a sub-granting programme supporting actions to:
- develop policy papers, studies, reports that inform evidence-based recommendations to decision-makers in the region;
 - organise workshops/conferences/seminars/to increase the CSO participation in local/national/regional/ EU policy dialogues;
 - develop platforms and coalitions that can amplify advocacy messages and policy inputs as well as stimulate multi-stakeholder engagement.

3.5.7 Overall, the majority of CSOs in the Southern Mediterranean region envision the need for building the Mediterranean as an integrated common space. In this regard, many organisations are working in a transnational way to foster rights and influence common Mediterranean policies through advocating for common interests, rule of law, human rights, youth participation and the consolidation of CSO networks across the region⁵⁷.

Questions for the workshops in the first study group:

⁵⁶ See the Euromesco policy brief "[Youth deliberation and participation in the euro-mediterranean region](#)" (2023).

⁵⁷ "[Bridging the sea: a Review of Mediterranean Civil Society](#)" (2021).

3.6 Social dialogue workshop

These questions were the basis for the workshop in the first study group in which youth representatives from the Anna Lindh Foundation, Business Europe and ETUC, as well as a part of the EESC study group members have discussed the topic of the opinion and gave their input. The output was the basis for the first draft of the opinion.

- (1) What are the main challenges faced by the youth of the Euro-Mediterranean region when they try to get involved in the existing social dialogue structures?
- (2) What are the main challenges faced by the youth of the Euro-Mediterranean region when they try to get involved in the existing civil dialogue structures?
- (3) What actions should be taken to strengthen the voice of young people in existing social dialogue structures?
- (4) What can be done to include young people who are not participating in/are excluded from existing social dialogue structures?

3.7 Civil dialogue workshop

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