

MAJALAT - Webinar Series
CONCEPT NOTE
Youth in the context of COVID-19

Summary:

In May 2020, the MAJALAT Consortium launched a series of webinars which will span to the end of September and cover 6 thematic areas as part of 3 rounds. They include Governance and the Rule of Law, Economic Development and Social Dialogue, Migration and Mobility, Security and Countering Violence, Climate Justice, and the cross-cutting thematic of Youth. The objective of the webinars varies depending on the round. The first round aimed at reflecting on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in the specific area in the Euro-Mediterranean region and to follow up on the recommendations which have been made during the 2019 MAJALAT activity cycle. The second round focused on capacity-building in order to deepen civil society's knowledge of relevant EU policies. Finally, the third round of webinars, taking place throughout the month of September, will be held with the objective of discussing the recommendations of MAJALAT and the impact of the crisis on the thematic areas in question, in the presence of representatives of the EU.

Youth - main points resulted from the discussions:

As for the thematic area of youth, the first webinar was held on 9 June while the second one took place on 9 July. The following paragraphs summarize the conclusions of the webinar held with youth CSO representatives from the Southern Neighbourhood, region on different topics that are relevant for young people.

The fight against violence, especially gender-based violence

The Covid-19 pandemic showed that women were particularly affected during crises. There was an increase in domestic violence against women. The latter had to adapt the way in which they reported violence during confinement. The precariousness of women also increased, mainly due to: the increase in divorces, the very limited access to reproductive and sexual care; the lack of family support (Syrian refugees women can sometimes be the only members of the family to have an income). The pandemic generated psychological violence, which has affected many young people, resulting in emotional distress and anxiety.

Youth employment and the economy

Most States in the MENA region, with young populations and endemic unemployment did not have sufficient financial resources to implement large-scale emergency plans and protect jobs during and after the pandemic. Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco have been particularly hit (freeze on tourism, a vital source of jobs and foreign exchange earnings).

Workers in certain areas of work did not have the ability to work remotely. Teleworking also raised the issue of job insecurity, inequalities in technical means, and data protection.

Young people have been an important resource in mitigating the economic risks associated with the pandemic. Their capacities for resistance, social and technical innovation and creativity have been put to work. Diasporas have mobilized to raise funds from local solidarity networks.

Youth education

Educational institutions in 20 MENA countries remained closed, meaning that more than 110 million children, adolescents, and youth were out of school for a long period of time. Despite the fact that many e-learning solutions have been implemented in the region, notably through ministries of education in partnership with UNESCO, unequal access to digital portals and lack of mastery of certain tools (software,

applications) have been obstacles to the continuity of learning. Along with containment measures, the closure of many sectors of the economy makes it particularly difficult for young people to enter the labor market.

Youth migration and mobility

In many countries, the pandemic has generated discrimination and stigmatization particularly against people in migration situations. The latter, mainly from Sub-Saharan Africa, have encountered problems related to language barriers, isolation (physical and social), and lack of access to basic health services. Detention and arrests have also been exacerbated under the pretext of the fight against the pandemic. Young people were particularly affected by the effects of Covid-19 in terms of displacement. Many people found themselves stranded (students, travelers, workers). In some countries, Internal Displaced People faced even more difficulties and a more precarious situation.

Youth and expression of citizenship

The situation has a political impact in the region far beyond what can be expected in other parts of the world. The pandemic has emptied the streets of demonstrators in Algeria and Lebanon, and the army was largely deployed in the name of compliance with containment measures. Autocratic regimes used the pandemic to reinforce social control. Cyber-surveillance increased. However, there has been a development of online citizenship.

Recommendations:

One of the objectives of the first webinar was to draft new recommendations for the European Union on youth-related issues based on those which had already been agreed on during the Brussels Civil Society Forum held in 2019.

The following recommendations from the 2019 Brussels Civil Forum were agreed on by participants during the webinar.

General recommendations

➔ Recommendations to DG NEAR, EEAS and National Authorities

1. The EU needs to respond to the challenges faced by young people and youth organisations in the Southern Neighbourhood in a clearer and more transparent way:
 - by systematically inserting in bilateral agreements between the EU and the Southern Neighbourhood countries a special chapter on priority issues for young people and youth organisations. This chapter should:
 - clearly identify youth-related budgets in these bilateral agreements, as well as in the overall EU frameworks and in particular the MFF
 - indicate the means of assessing the impact of these bilateral agreements on policies and programmes on young people and make their results easily accessible to the public
 - by creating favourable conditions for the funding of youth organisations in the region by, for example:
 - increasing the number of calls for projects dedicated to youth and/or open to youth organisations in the region and adapting the dedicated budgets (possibility of funding micro and meso projects)
 - Simplifying of the response procedures for these calls

- opening calls for proposals to unregistered entities [informal collectives, specific social movements, etc.] in the region.
2. Support the strengthening of youth civic participation that has a long-term impact and leads to greater involvement of young men and women in policy making in the Southern Neighborhood, including building the advocacy capacity of youth and youth organizations.
- ➔ Recommendation to UEDs, DG NEAR, EEAS
3. Recognize the youth diversity and reach a larger number and a wider range of young men and women, including those involved in informal groups and social movements

Supporting employment and vocational training

- ➔ Recommendations addressed to DUE, DG NEAR, EEAS
1. Support youth entrepreneurship by contributing to creating an enabling environment in terms of available funding and training in particular
 2. Facilitate access to Southern Mediterranean labour markets for vulnerable groups of young people (people in situation of disabilities, and in migration)

Education

- ➔ Recommendations to UEDs, DG NEAR, EEAS
1. Increase political, financial and administrative support to non-formal education programmes as a way to enhance young people's personal and professional skills and competences as well as their employability
 2. Involve young people from different backgrounds and CSOs in the design and evaluation of EU employability and education programmes at national and regional level
 3. Expand programmes facilitating youth mobility in the Southern Neighbourhood and call for education and capacity building to include disadvantaged groups (such as women, rural residents and people with disabilities).

Social protection of vulnerable groups in particular on the issue of Sexual and Reproductive Health

- ➔ Recommendation to DG NEAR and EEAS
1. Call on DG NEAR and EEAS to acknowledge the challenge that SRHR represent for younger generations by:
 - providing increased financial support to civil society already engaged in this issue and encouraging new organizations to address the issue
 - systematically including SRH in bilateral dialogues with the Southern Neighborhood States

Security: Towards a new approach on youth and fight against all forms of violence

- Recommendation to EEAS and DG HOME
 1. Fully integrate the respect of human rights and democratic values as a fundamental component of all EU external policies and all forms of cooperation with third countries related to security and fight against terrorism
- Recommendation to National Authorities
 2. Include youth in decision making related to security and fight against all forms of violence when it comes to revise the EU Neighborhood Policy (consultations, evaluation of existing programs)
- Recommendation addressed to DG Near, DEVCO (for financial support), EEAS (for political support)
 3. To increase political and financial support to youth led initiatives for the promotion of peace and the prevention of violent extremism

Mobility and migration

- Recommendations to DG NEAR, EUDs and National Authorities
 1. Increase financial, political and administrative support to South South and North-South mobility partnerships like volunteering, professional training, non-formal education initiatives, cultural exchanges, university twinning projects.
 2. Widen the budget for Erasmus+ VET Mobility in all the MENA countries, taking into consideration inclusive social and geographical criteria then facilitating visas for selected participants and by:
 - o facilitating the obtaining of visas for selected participants (administrative and political support)
 - o increasing the number of participants from the Southern Neighborhood who are eligible to participate each year.

Recommendations added as a result of the webinar:

General and financing

- Recommendations to DG NEAR, UEDs and national authorities
 1. Support local organizations financially so that they can be more effective in responding to the consequences of the crisis, given the restrictions imposed by some governments (money transfers, currency exchange, etc.).
- Recommendations to donors (including the EU)
 2. In coordination with donors, in the case of certain projects, reallocate unused funds to small businesses and organizations that can provide essential health assistance.

3. Identify and capitalize on the new practices of collective youth action under Covid-19 in the countries of the region in order to feed and adapt public policies for youth, financing mechanisms and South-South, South-North and North-South mobility.

→ Recommendations addressed to the national authorities

4. To promote the development of an alternative economic model resulting from the practices set up during Covid-19 which is sustainable, social and solidarity-based, generates income for young people and favours local development.
5. To encourage and support the development of socio-cultural action centers of proximity and/or to reinforce the already existing devices in the countries and this mainly in rural areas.

Sexual and reproductive health

→ Recommendation to DG NEAR, EUDs and national authorities

1. Promote new ways to provide information and support to adolescents and young people on sexual and reproductive health and rights, such as supporting the implementation of outreach programs in community youth facilities.

Security

→ Recommendations to DG NEAR, DG ECHO and national authorities

1. Conduct qualitative research that aims to highlight the effects of crises on women, girls and other marginalized groups to enable the development of appropriate responses.
2. In the event of a health crisis, systematically take a gender approach in order to best guarantee women's access to information (available support and resources, etc.).

Migration and mobility

→ Recommendation to national authorities

1. Favour inter-country mobility to promote exchange between peers.

Education

→ Recommendations to DG NEAR, UEDs and national authorities

1. Faced with the challenge of adapting distance education, support the training of teachers/teachers by multiplying examples of initiatives involving CSOs, foundations or companies, and promote access to adequate equipment (material, connection) for students and teachers.

→ Recommendation to national authorities

2. To centralize, on the same portal, reliable and specific information during health crisis situations in a country, in languages accessible to all inhabitants (nationals and foreigners).

Digital

→ Recommendation to national authorities

1. Support the virtual engagement of youth in:
 - o Making resources available in all local languages
 - o Fighting misinformation and xenophobia around the pandemic
2. Ensure that any use of digital technologies, including applications and artificial intelligence, to monitor the spread of the virus and the behavior of human beings is legal, ethical and strictly temporary.

→ Recommendation to DG NEAR

3. To set up a study of the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the youth of the region using data:
 - o Statistics
 - o Testimonials in order to understand the immediate and future needs of young people.