

Mapping Youth Civil Society Actors in Euro-Med

For a space for dialogues within and across
the Mediterranean Institutions



Abdeslam Badre

Septembre 2021

Youth Civil Society Actors in Euro-Med

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Key Resources

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Table of Content

<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	4
<i>List of Graphs</i>	4
<i>Executive Summary</i>	5
Introduction	7
I. Contextualizing the work youth CSAs	8
<i>I.1. What is & why space for dialogue?</i>	8
<i>I.2. CSAs' fields of action & milestones</i>	9
<i>I.3. Youth CSAs and gender landscapes</i>	12
<i>I.4. Youth CSAs in Covid-19 context</i>	13
<i>I.5. Place of Youth CSAs in the EU renewed Agenda for the Mediterranean</i>	13
<i>I.6. Case Study: MAJALAT Project</i>	15
II. The study	15
<i>II.1 Methodology</i>	16
<i>II.2. Results</i>	17
III. Recommendations	25
<i>III.1 Implications & suggested operational actions</i>	26
<i>III.2. Action Plan: Conceptualizing Space for Youth Dialogue</i>	31
Conclusion	32
<i>References</i>	
<i>Appendices</i>	
<i>About the Author</i>	

List of abbreviation

Acronym	Meaning
AA	<i>Association Agreement</i>
CEDAW	<i>The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</i>
CPTs	<i>Capacity Building Trainings</i>
CSAs	<i>Civil Society Actors</i>
CSOs	<i>Civil Society Organizations</i>
Euro-Med	<i>Euro-Mediterranean</i>
EU	<i>European Union</i>
EU4PSL	<i>European Union for Private Sector Libya</i>
MENA	<i>Middle East and North Africa</i>
NAM	<i>New Agenda for the Mediterranean</i>
NGOs	<i>Non-Governmental Organizations</i>
NYS	<i>National Youth Strategies</i>
OECD	<i>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development</i>
REF	<i>Reseau Euromed France</i>
SDGs	<i>Sustainable Development Goals</i>
SN	<i>Southern Mediterranean</i>
TC	<i>Theory of Change</i>
UNDP	<i>United Nations Development Program</i>
UNFPA	<i>United Nations Fund for Population Activities</i>
UNICEF	<i>United Nations Children's Fund</i>
WB	<i>World Bank</i>
YRs	<i>Youth Representatives</i>

List of Charts & Graphs

Charts	Page
Graph 1: Distribution of the youth CSAs of the research	18
Chart 1: Distribution of sample organization's legal status	18
Chart 2: Distribution of the youth organizations in terms of field of operations / expertise	19
Chart 3: Distribution of youth CSAs main collaborators / partners	20
Chart 4: Sources of main challenges facing youth CSAs	21
Chart 5: Impacts of Covid-19 youth CSAs' field	22
Chart 6: Surmounting COVID-19 challenges	23
Chart 7: Youth CSAs perceptions of a new space for dialogue for the youth	25
Chart 8: Proposed Operational actions	29

Executive Summary

2021 has been marked by two major events the outcomes of which will have lasting impacts on the youth representatives (YRs) and the youth civil society actors (CSAs) in the Southern Neighborhood (SN) for the years to come. On the one hand, there was the development of the Covid-19 vaccines, which restored young people's hope, after over a year of unforeseen hardships that intensified the already existing challenges the youth sectors has historically struggled with. On the other hand, there was the EU renewed Agenda for Mediterranean (2021-2027).

In this context, MAJALAT Consortium decided to undertake a regional study with the aim to explore the dynamics of YRs as well as youth CSAs and organization in the SN. The objectives of this regional research were twofold. First, it sought to map the current state of operations and pending challenges facing the youth CSAs in the region, taking the two contexts into consideration. Second, it aimed at actualizing MAJALAT's previously developed recommendations by proposing a feasibly clear action plan for designing and implementing a space for dialogue between the youth and youth CSAs with national and European institutions.

In so doing, the research sought to investigate at least three problematic points that MAJALAT consortium has identified through the series of webinars and South Policy Seminar it held with various youth actors and EU representatives as well as regional partners throughout the year 2020. Hence, the first point was to diagnose the underlying institutional, collaborative and thematic frameworks within which YRs and CSAs in the SN operate. Second, it attempted to explore how Covid-19 has impacted the priorities and mode of productivity of these structures. Third and finally, it proactively sought to tap some preliminary feedback and perceptions of CSAs vis-a-vis the future of their partnership with the EU in light of the "new Agenda for the Mediterranean". The goal behind tackling these central problematic points was to propose a design along with a feasibility action plan for a youth space for dialogue mechanism. We believe that creating such a space can unite the organizations that work with youth, including from ethnic and religious minorities, and different other disadvantaged groups including women and migrants. It would also help youth CSAs work more effectively to realize common goals, undertake joint advocacy projects and work on regional challenges, with young people as active participants not simply beneficiaries.

This research adopted a purely scientific mixed-method design in terms of methodology and implementation, using a) an in-depth deskwork 2) a survey and 3) a structured interview directed to youth CSAs in 7 SN countries. 488 youth CSAs completed the survey and 13 others took an in-depth interview, all from 6 SN countries. Data underwent systematic procedures of collecting, coding and analyzing. Given the scope, objectives, and target audience of the study, the analysis opted for a more policy-oriented approach and theoretical

framework. This approach served to generate a rather transferable policy brief and operational action plan.

The findings of the research yielded several significant results. First, the sectors of education, training and capacity building seems to be the one that preoccupies most of the field of actions of the CSAs participated in the study: 72.2 % (N = 352). This indicator aligns with an alarming figure highlighted by the 2020 World Bank report, saying that “*youth in the Southern Mediterranean region is the only group worldwide that faces increasing unemployment risks as the level of education increases* », (WB 2020). Therefore, future international cooperation and programs launched jointly with the EU and the SN CSAs needs to allocate more resources and attention to this sector as well as to these types of organizations.

The second finding is related to the pending challenges that continue to obstacle the work of youth CSAs in SN. They are summarized in three burning barriers: 1) the lack of pedagogical and financial resources; 2) restrictive legal frameworks which govern the work of associations; 3) the non-consideration of the possibility of cascading funding from the large and old associations, in particular the ones that land on projects funded by the EU and other Embassies. The third revealing indicator is related to the agility and responsiveness of the youth CSAs. Fourth, it was revealed that these organizations welcome the EU renewed Agenda for the Mediterranean (2021-2027), and maintain high hopes in its objectives, actions and expected outcomes, especially on the future of the youth. Surprisingly, although all of the study’s participants reported being aware of the renewal of the AA, the majority, if not all, of them did not actually know its content, objectives or proposed actions. Furthermore, some organizations, especially the small entities and the ones located in rural areas or off metropolis cities, are worried that the new agenda would not be any different than the previous one in the sense that it would keep the same elitist approach in program selections, partnership forging, and fund allocations, which tend to go mostly to the “close circle” of the EU partners in the SN.

Therefore, the EU is requested to consider these voices by putting in place mechanisms that ensure the inclusion of new and small associations, especially in rural areas, and which do not meet the conditions of the call for projects and / or does not have the capacity to manage the EU complex calls for project. There is a need for a wide regional promotion and media-campaigns about the agenda in the region through the EU regional delegations and national offices’ representatives.

Additionally, the results have revealed an informative snapshot about the dynamics, aspirations and constant challenges that characterize the profile of most youth CSAs in the SN. While some of the findings can serve as an informative cartographic map on the state of youth civic work in the region, a substantial part offers a valuable contextual ground that now call young people, youth CSAs, policy makers, practitioners, and researchers in the region and

beyond to ponder about and launch further investigations especially with regards to how to joint effort in order to address the questions of legal status and how can the regional governments develop harmonized, simplified, and transparent procedures of legal status acquisition, especially that over 12% of the CSAs in the region are unregistered, or exist under low-key profile, which restrains their activities.

There is also the need for probing into the factors behind the scarcity of organizations and programs that are vested in the themes of rule of law and fight against all forms of violence; and exploring new venues by developing attractive outlooks that can motivate more private sectors partnerships with the youth CSAs. This can only happen if the latter are provided by standardized and tailored CPTs on developing sustainable and diversified organizational strategies for the establishments of partnerships. The last part of the findings in this research pave the way for urgent implications that we propose as alternative operational actions, in addition to a tangibly feasible action plan for the establishment of a youth space for dialogue between youth CSAs and the national and the European institutions.

The outcomes and deliverables of this research will be disseminated through two main channels. On the one hand, it will be presented during two already-scheduled regional events, organized by MAJALAT Consortium and its partners. The first one is a Round Table entitled “*Youth, Economic Development, and Social Dialogue*”, taking place in Beirut, Lebanon on 30th of June 2021. Various youth representatives, youth CSAs representatives, EU delegation representatives are invited to interact and share their feedback about the outcomes of the research. The second one is the “Civil Society Forum”, which will follow the round table. Equally important stakeholders will attend it. On the other hand, the second channel will be an online dissemination of the final report through REF online platforms to all associated partners, stakeholders, and practitioners in the fields of youth in the region and in the EU zone.

This report comprises three main parts. The first part (*Contextualizing the Work of Youth CSAs in SN*) establishes comprehensive backgrounds for understanding the fields of actions and within which CSAs operate, along with their highlighted accomplishments. Because gender perspective remains always a crosscutting theme in the youth field, this part allocates a substantial section discussing the major regional characteristics. Given its timeliness, it was also deemed necessary to discuss the gains and gaps foreseen in the EU-Euro-Med renewed partnership from the point of view of the YRs and CSAs in the SN. The part concluded with a summary of MAJALAT’s project as well as the previously developed and proposed Recommendations upon which the present research was based. The second part (Methodology) is dedicated to the research, laying down the adopted research design, and an in-depth presentation and analysis of the results. Finally, the third part (*Recommendations*) is geared toward discussing the implications drawn from the findings and proposes a list of tangible recommendations and operational action plan for conceptualizing a space for youth and youth actors’ dialogue with national and European institutions.

Introduction

Young people in Southern Neighborhood (SN) are in rarely occurring appointment with history for the coming ten years, as an unprecedentedly large proportion of them will transition into their most productive years, opening up the potential for a demographic dividend – “*economic growth spurred by demographic changes*”, as stated the UNICEF MENA Generation 2030 Report. In order not to miss this appointment, national governments in the region have no other option but to joint synergies with the CSAs and private sectors nationally, internationally and regionally, and devise responsive policies as well as tangible actions in order to respond to the pressing barriers facing the youth. We are talking here about political and social instability, inequitable economic and social policies and limited employment opportunities, which have further worsened during the year 2020.

Indeed, 2020 will remain the year when youth sector, like any other sectors, was forced to navigate new realities due to the sudden overspread of Covid-19; and the strict preventive sanitary measures imposed by national and local authorities. Hard as they were, these circumstances have ironically revealed the immense level of flexibility, readiness and resilience characterizing young people and youth CSAs in the SN. We have seen how they have engaged in various solidary and civic activities to alleviate the impacts of the pandemic on the livelihood of their communities and minority groups: such as women, ethnic groups, migrants and people with disabilities. These engagements were obviously witnessed in the swift and efficient manners in which youth organizations have reshuffled their priorities, activities, and modes of intervention. For instance, organizations in Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt, to sate a few, have remodeled their structures, rearranged their agendas and designed context-specific programs, and created numerous crisis-managements units in response to the pandemic.

Young people also have proved to be 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. International collaborations have also restored faith in the associative lives. The EU has allocated substantial budget support and grants to the strengthening the resilience of SN countries (over 280 million euros); and it launched a number of capacity buildings and cooperation projects with the youth through entities such as EU4PSL, UNDP, UNICEF, and UNFPA.

Conversely, 2021 will be remembered as the year of hope and looking forwardness by the youth and youth CSAs in the SN, as it underscores two major events: the development of Covid-19 vaccines, and the renewal of the EU Association Agreement (AA) with the SN (2021-2027). These two major temporalities represented significant collaborative momentum for reflection and moving forward for MAJALAT consortium. To do so, and building up on its work for the last couple years, the latter has decided to undertake a regional research with two major aims: 1) to map the current states, working conditions and priorities of the youth

and youth CSAs in the SN, taking into consideration specific variables such the gender dimension, the impacts of Covid-19, the EU renewed Agenda for the Mediterranean. 2) To take the recommendations previously generated by into the implementation stage, by proposing a conceptual design and an action plan for the establishment of youth and youth actors' space for dialogue with national and European institutions.

This report sums up the context motivating the research, the adopted methodology as well as obtained results. It comprises three main parts. The first part (*Contextualizing the Work of Youth CSAs in SN*) establishes comprehensive backgrounds for understanding the fields of actions and within which YRs and CSAs operate, along with their highlighted accomplishments. Because gender perspective remains always a crosscutting theme in the youth field, this part allocates a substantial section discussing the major regional characteristics. Given its timeliness, it was also deemed necessary to discuss the gains and gaps foreseen in the EU renewed AA from the point of you the YRs and CSAs in the SN. The part concluded with a summary of MAJALAT's project as well as the previously developed and proposed Recommendations upon which the present research was based. The second part (Methodology) is dedicated to the research, laying down the adopted research design, and an in-depth presentation and analysis of the results. Finally, the third part (*Recommendations*) is geared toward discussing the implications drawn from the findings and proposes a list of tangible recommendations and operational action plan for conceptualizing a space for youth and youth actors' dialogue with national and European institutions.

I. Contextualizing the work youth CSAs

This part provides a descriptive map of the major fields of actions, milestones, challenges and aspirations of youth CSAs and organizations in SN, putting into perspective the question of gender, impacts of Covid-19, and the EU renewed AA. We will also showcase MAJALAT Project as a case study. However, since one of the aims of this research project is to explore and propose a feasibility action plan for a space for youth dialogue in the region, it is worthwhile addressing a basic question: what do we mean by “a space for dialogue”? And why is it important?

I.1. What is & why space for dialogue?

A space for youth dialogue with national and European institutions is a mechanism that would enable young people's voice to be heard in the national and international policy-making processes and interfaces, through their local civil society actors. The roots of the concept dates back in 2005 within the EU, and took shape in 2009 under what used to be called the “Structured Dialogue”¹, when the EU Council Resolution recognized young people as key actors in society, and stressed at involving them in the elaboration of policies that affect them through a permanent structured dialogue between decision makers, young people and youth organizations.

1. European Youth Forum: The EU Youth Dialogue. Consulted on June 4th 2021, at: <https://www.youthforum.org/eu-youth-dialogue>

With the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field and the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027), the so-called “Structured Dialogue” evolved into what is called today the EU Youth Dialogue, which was adopted in 2018 through the Council Resolution, putting more emphasis on including more decision makers and young people, especially from marginalized and disadvantaged groups, into the EU Youth Dialogue process. Today, the EU Youth Dialogue has completed 7 cycles, having established 11 EU Youth Goals², organized 21 EU Youth Conferences hosted by 21 EU Member States, and engaging over 300,000 young people. As of July 2021, Cycle 8, under the theme “Europe for YOUth – YOUth for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation” will be concluded.

Notably, the concept of “youth space for dialogue” has gained a wide recognition within OECD countries in recent years, as there have been numerous individual initiatives by European NGOs that tried to promote the concept or even test its implementation. A case in point is a study published by Berghof Foundation (Mubashir et al 2018) titled: *The Youth Space of Dialogue and Mediation: An Exploration*. The study sketches out the characteristics, dimensions, peripheries, dynamics, the challenges and potential of the space in harboring youth agency and motivation for transforming conflict. It offers some overall reflections on the insights and deliberates on how to further evolve the youth space.

In this context, the EU Youth Dialogue “success story” has indeed inspired the youth representatives as well as youth CSAs in SN. More than ever, these entities believe that establishing such a mechanism will not only boost the impacts of their work, but will also empower the youth of the region. This aspiration started taking shape during the series of workshops, webinars, debates, and consultations, policy makers, and stakeholders organized by MAJALAT throughout 2018-2020. Thus, during the *Thematic Workshop on Youth*, which took place in November 2020, the participants developed a fully-fledged list of recommendations, calling for an establishment of a mechanism for a sustainable dialogue in benefits of the youth and youth CSAs in order to facilitate talks and interactions with the national and European institutions.

Today, no two would disagree on the premise that young people in region have their own visions, expectations, hopes and worries about their present and future educational, political, social, economic and environmental lives. Their internal perceptions and external projections of their lives are shaped not only by their close geographies to Europe, but also by the virtual world wherein they spend substantial time on daily basis. This helps them understand better what currently works and what adversity they face, and more importantly how things can change for the better. However, many of them feel completely detached from their physical

2. In 2018, over 50,000 young people from all over the EU states took part in a Europe-wide survey upon which 11 Youth Goals were formulated and included in the EU Youth Strategy. The Goals summarize the issues that affect young people in Europe and the political priorities that are important to them. The Youth Goals show in which areas change still has to happen so that young people in Europe can use their full potential. The EU Youth Dialogue works with the Youth Goals to shape policy in the interests of young people At European, national and regional levels. The Goals are: 1 Connecting EU with Youth; 2 Equality of All Genders; 3 Inclusive Societies; 4 Information & Constructive Dialogue; 5 Mental Health & Wellbeing; 6 Moving Rural Youth Forward; 7 Quality Employment for All; 8 Quality Learning; 9 Space and Participation for All; 10 Sustainable Green Europe; and 11 Youth Organizations & European Programs.

realities due to existing gaps between them and their decision-makers. These gaps make it difficult for their ideas to be heard. Therefore, establishing a space for youth dialogue between young people and youth CSAs with policy and decision makers, as well as experts, researchers and other members of civil society should bridge these gaps and restore young people's hopes.

It is important to distinguish here between a youth space for dialogue between national and European institutions and the already existing Euro-Arab Youth Forum³. The former is foreseen as a mechanism, which does not exist in the region, with medium and long-term goals, structure, and governing body. Conversely, the latter has existed since 2008, and it is rather a bi-annual event that aims at fostering mutual cooperation and dialogue among European and Arab youth leaders and representatives of youth associations on topics of shared concern within a framework of commitment to a culture of universal human rights and intercultural dialogue.

I.2. CSAs' fields of action & milestones

According to the World Bank data (WB, 2020), youth in the Southern Mediterranean region is *“the only group worldwide that faces increasing unemployment risks as the level of education increases.”* Although, the region's median spending on public education is significantly higher than OECD average, the human capital development factor remains a major challenge, with two third (around 110 million) of the MENA population is under 35, and youth unemployment is over 25% of which 40% are women including those with tertiary degrees (WB, 2020), compared to 14% globally.

This demographic development puts the youth at the forefront of many of the most pressing structural, security and socio-economic challenges. Furthermore, political corruption continues to feed distrust of young people toward political life. It limits their potential to assume increased responsibilities in society in order to improve their leadership skills and emerge as the leaders of the future. Furthermore, the growing gaps between the national youth strategies of governments and the actual needs and aspirations of this demographic group relegate the latter's roles as the main agents for change in society.

Recognizing the increasing youth bulge and their power of social activism since the so-called “Arab Spring”, SN national governments have started allocating more policies and logistics that serve national youth agendas. Today, over half of the countries have developed or even started implementing National Youth Strategies (NYS), with clear medium and long-term goals. To state few examples, Morocco developed the Integrated National Youth Strategy 2015-2030; followed by Tunisia's National Youth Council since 2016; Lebanon's National

3. Established in 2008, the Euro-Arab Youth Forum is a bi-annual 4-day event inviting around 80 young Arab and European leaders, youth workers, representatives of youth associations and decision-makers. Hosting of the Youth Forum rotates between countries from the Arab and European Region. More information is available on <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-peace-dialogue/euro-arab-youth-forums>

Youth Development since 2012; then Egypt's National Youth Strategy for Egypt, 2021-2026; and Jordan's National Youth Strategy for Jordan renewed since 2005. This regional development has paved the way for a skyrocketing increase in the number and nature of newly established youth CSAs that are now impacting the lives of millions of young people in the SN.

They comprise a variety of structures, including family associations, non-for-profit organizations, trade unions, cooperatives, associations, confessional and patron-founded organizations, political groups, and few other forms of unregistered entities (Natil et al. 2019). There are also militia that are not necessarily interested neither in promoting youth empowerment nor the emergence of a civic state, *"because empowerment does not necessarily coincide with the empowerment of the majority of the people since these groups often strive towards the realization of parochial interests that do not necessarily match those of the wider strata of society"* (Ibid).

While the youth associational landscape has flourished during the last decade, many voices believe that this expansion has failed to yield an autonomous sphere from the Member State, and could not foster democratization in the region. Holders of this view asserts that most youth CSAs depend solely on the State's funding through which local governments infiltrate and influence the sector's agenda, and its players into State's agents who safeguard the political and socio-economic status quo by extending the State's control over its citizens and reinforcing the existing societal power structure as well as hegemonic discourse. On the other side of the spectrum, independent CSAs with a neoliberal vision have to put up with the State's systemic marginalization, harassment; thus, their capacity to advance democratization is curtailed.

The political narratives and the identity politics carried out are very often used to legitimize violence against particular actors, preventing the construction of inclusive participatory democracies (Haerdig, 2020), which induces the structural fragmentation in the work and unity of CSAs in the region. Yet, despite the non-conducive environment in which they operate and the political, financial, and cultural challenges they face, the engagement and contribution of the youth CSAs civil society actors in promoting peace, combating and raising awareness to corruption, fostering change, and sustaining socio-economic development cannot be denied.

The region is now characterized by high levels of membership in community-based organizations as well as social networks outside the State's framework. Due to recurrent weak governments' presence and the various political as well as socio-economic fluctuations, youth CSAs have become significant players in the youth development scenery, especially for the provision of social services and implementation of development programs, as a complement to governments' actions. Their struggle to intact change by influencing policy-making process while reshaping the general public interests and specific constituencies and improving the living conditions, while thriving for a more equitable and just world, has granted them the

trust of the young people in their respective communities.

The 8th edition of Civil Society Organization (CSOs) Sustainability Index for Middle East and North Africa (December 2020) revealed that CSAs in Egypt and Libya have improved their organizational capacity, thanks to advances in constituency building. At the infrastructure supporting level, countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco have made significant improvement, allowing CSOs more access to various support services, increasingly developing coalitions, and inter-sectorial partnerships. Besides this progress, the recent Sustainability Index report highlighted pending setbacks in seven dimensions of the sustainability of civil society sectors.

While youth CSAs are gaining more and more trust as a second resort to the youth during the last decade in the region; national governments are still reluctant to fully engage youth CSAs in the development of the transformation process towards a sustainable development pathway for the youth. The report highlighted an appearing deterioration in the legal environments governing CSOs, which is *“marked by public discontent, conflict, and limited civic freedoms.”* Countries such as Morocco wherein 130,000 CSOs exist or Tunisia with over 13,000 entities reported increasing *“problems with registration and government harassment, in addition to violations of the freedom of assembly”*.

The problems with registration are indeed one of the contributing factors in the declining legal environments, as stated in Index report. Youth CSAs in both Jordan and Tunisia suffer bureaucratic snags and delays justified by the fact that various government entities impose different requirements for the registration process. Lebanon is also no exception, where the issuance of registration receipts is increasingly perceived to require personal relationships with relevant authorities. This hindrance pushes several organizations to register as nonprofit civil companies, which involves an easier process. CSOs in armed conflicts region face further complicated registration requirements, especially those that work on the national level, as they have to register under both authorities. This situation aroused particularly in Tripoli Libya, after fighting broke out between different groups.

Due to its centrality as prerequisite for any CSA to exist, the question of “registration and obtaining a legal status” has preoccupied a substantial attention of MAJALAT project, and it has been allocated ample and extensive discussions with the project’s regional partners, CSAs and the EU representatives in various events. These discussions have culminated into a concrete and a fully-fledged recommendation during the November 2020’s Youth Workshop in which there was an agreement among all the participants to schedule this point of a high priority to be discussed between the EU Commission and the region’s national governments. In response, the Consortium decided to list this question as one of the important recommendations in its latest report (Badre, December 2020).

Another challenge is related to the freedom of the press, which has drastically deteriorated by means of new restrictive regulations and punitive measures. The new regulations seem to be

synchronously adopted by almost all the governments of the region. For instance, Jordanian authorities were reported to have blocked access to a news website that covers political affairs and documents the arrests of activists, and the Jordan Open Source Association reported that Facebook's live-streaming function was blocked during large protests. Likewise, a state of emergency that was extended repeatedly throughout 2020 in Egypt gave the authorities greater power to censor the press.

In Lebanon, the authorities used various provisions of the penal code to stifle criticism of public figures, institutions and bodies, or religion. Similarly, in Morocco, several internet-based activists, journalists and other people were arrested and sentenced to harsh penalties for *"freely expressing their opinions, and daring to openly criticize the authorities and central government entities on the Internet."* According to Freedom House, Tunisia is the only country of the eight that is considered "Free." In line with this assessment, the inaugural report for Tunisia indicates that *"CSOs operated in a stable environment that was free of conflict and mass protests, although there were reports of arbitrary arrests and the disproportionate use of force during protests."* (FH)

In Morocco, since the rise of the Rif region's protests in October 2016, tens of thousands of young people and activists (including more than 100 organizations and bodies), have been taking to the streets of Morocco's main cities calling for more developmental projects in the region, demanding the improvement of social and human rights conditions and putting an end to its marginalization. These demonstrations were later fueled by the imprisonment of the leaders of the protest movement in the predominantly Berber region of Rif. The tension escalated the young people and youth CSAs anger and frustration. It could have swiped the national stability of the whole country had the king not intervened by dismissing three ministers and various other officials over a lack of progress in a development plan for the Rif; and granting his pardon to most of the jailed activists.

Likewise, young Jordanian marched in Amman and other cities to protest the government's economic policies and demand more job opportunities, in early 2019. The protests resulted in a meeting between the protesters and the Royal Hashemite Court Chief, *"who pledged to address the protesters' demands and work to provide them with employment opportunities. In response, the Ministry of Labor promised to create 3,300 jobs in tourism, industry, construction, health, and agriculture"*. In Lebanon, and for the first time, young people from all sects and regions pioneered a protest expressing the people's discontent with the country's struggling economy, ultimately forcing the government to resign at the end of October 2020. The same year underscored a major economic and humanitarian crisis provoked by armed conflict between rival authorities broke out in the capital Tripoli in Libya, resulting in profound repercussions on financial, legal and advocacy environments in the country.

In all these crises, youth CSAs, especially women's groupings, have played prominent roles not only in provoking or leading demonstrations, but also in monitoring and accompanying young protesters; mediating between protesters and local authorities, proposing alternative

solutions to both the States and people, and also ensuring that young people's voices were heard through various local and international media outlets. Thanks to their ongoing militarism, these entities have infiltrated unconventional sectors for advocating young people's changing needs and expectations, including areas of productive health and sexual education, climate change and climate justice, renewable energy, water diplomacy, digital leadership, fight against extremism, educational and capacity building, interfaith dialogue, gender and minority equity, asylum, migration and human trafficking, cultural and alternative diplomacy, and urbanism and the ecosystem, among many other fields.

Until recently, many of these sectors were State-controlled domains; and it seems that CSAs are determined to continue their associational engagements for the years to come despite the political and institutional ills characterizing the environment within which many of them operate. In this regard, youth CSAs in the region ought to join national and regional synergies with their sisters and develop shared visions. Their unity will represent a considerable pressure on national governments to comply with international conventions and agreements, recognizing the right to free civil action. International partners such as the EU should exercise more pressure on SN governments into abolishing restrictive laws that prevent the progress, freedom, and effectiveness of civil society, because a powerful youth CSAs can flourish and be efficient only if inductive political environment is ensured.

I.3. Youth CSAs and gender landscapes

Gender equity and women empowerment are probably the two domains that preoccupy most youth CSAs and relevant similar dispositions in region. Besides the considerable number of organizations that work exclusively in the field of gender, many others consider the question as a crosscutting theme that intersects with many other social, political, economic and human right rights domains and social groups. More importantly, the questions are also among the very few points that seem to align most of the CSAs on the same vision and agenda. As such, associative endeavors invest specific emphasis on women human rights, notably how to secure gender equality in youth participation and how participatory approaches can enable better gender equity in all public and institutional domains through the development and implementation of youth policy practices that support meaningful forms of gender egalitarianism.

This civic mobility has gained young women exposure and access to numerous social domains during the last decades. Thanks to the continuous synergies of youth CSAs, especially in “post-Arab Spring” transitions, women's visibility has increased, leading to an extraordinary amount of commentary on and analysis of the gender dimensions. The transformations have also resulted in popular movements to reform and transform governments. Part of these reforms has been the desire for gender equality and the implementation of gender justice through policy and legislation. This aspiration is embodied in the most recent gender-sensitive policy initiatives adopted by most member states of the region is the Cairo Declaration for Arab Women: The Post-2015 Agenda, which also informs

the recent Executive Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security of 31 October 2000 and the forthcoming Charter to Combat Violence against Women in the Arab Region.

The Cairo Declaration provides a comprehensive framework for promoting the rights and status of women and girls in the Arab region, particularly with regard to eliminating all forms of gender-based discrimination, achieving gender equality, mainstreaming gender, and increasing women's political and economic participation. The proposed policies present an opportunity not only to improve the status of women in the region, but also to engage with international, regional and local human rights organizations and civil society in a constructive and transformative manner. Now, youth CSAs need to double efforts in order to ensure that national governments in the region will assume their responsibility for translating these policies into concrete action that could potentially result in significant transition or even transformation.

Despite the progress, young SN women continue to put up with many losses and deficits in many levels. Thus, their status remains contested. For instance, although the Member States of the League of Arab States have adopted international and regional frameworks that promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Yet, the translation of these frameworks into domestic policy has been uneven. Despite the fact that many measures have been taken by the majority of the countries to enhance women's representation in decision-making positions, women's participation in public life and positions of power have not been achieved the desired level. The region ranks the lowest in the world in terms of women's participation in parliaments. In addition, violence against women, female economic empowerment and political participation, and reproductive health continues to be sensitive issues in the institutional and public spheres in several countries. Finally, the sanitary crisis imposed by Covid-19 has debunked the fragility of the legal and institutional agencies, along with all claimed safety-net that are meant to protect young women's rights and dignity.

I.4. Youth CSAs in Covid-19 context

The challenges youth and youth CSAs face have been accentuated by the global Covid-19 pandemic. Given that the sanitary crisis has unleashed significant interruptions in young people's lives, the impacts of which are yet to be analyzed and understood. This new transition impacted the youth field actors, policy-makers, practitioners, youth organizations and platforms for young people's participation. While there was a clear emergence of the digital youth work and increasing use of digital tools in working with young people within both formal and non-formal sectors, many youth groups were left on their own to face issues related to social exclusion, discrimination and a redefinition of social and safety nets. Adding to that the rise of Teleworking, which raised the issue of job insecurity, inequalities in technical means, and data protection. Youth field sector, for instance, in Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco have been particularly hit. In some countries, important

measures to support people and businesses were put in place. However, financial assistance to families has been uneven or delayed (Badre, 2020).

There were also questions about changing relationships and behaviors, changing perspectives on connection to community, impact on well-being and mental health, employment, participation, activism, youth organizations and many other areas of young people's lives. Women were particularly affected given the increase in domestic violence, and the increase in divorces, the very limited access to reproductive and sexual care, and the lack of family support. This led to the emergence of numerous helpline services (legal, psychological as well as social counseling, and the provision of relevant information for protection and human security) for women and girls.

Education sector too was hardly hit by the pandemic. More than 110 million children, adolescents, and youth were out of school for a long period of time across 20 MENA countries. Despite the fact that many e-learning solutions have been implemented, unequal access to digital portals and lack of mastery of certain tools have been obstacles to the continuity of learning. The closure of many sectors of the economy has made it particularly difficult for young people to transition from school to labor market. Likewise, migrants, especially young students, travelers and workers found themselves stranded, facing various forms of discrimination and stigmatization, as they had to deal with language barriers, isolation and lack of access to basic health services.

On a positive note, the crisis has highlighted unprecedented development of transnational solidarity and networking between actors on both shores of the Mediterranean, putting the concept of solidarity into action. In an alleviating response and solidary action to its southern neighborhood, the EU has allocated substantial budget support and grants to strengthen the resilience of neighboring countries (over 280 million euros); and it launched a number of capacity buildings and cooperation projects with the youth, especially the ones that focus on employment and education.

Notably, 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. Social networks helped to overcome geographical obstacles, discover new activists, set up campaigns against misinformation and fake news, development of online citizenship and a renewed mobilization of youth. Diasporas have mobilized to raise funds from local solidarity networks. Indeed, the youth CSAs have done a tremendous work to help bridge the gap where the governments' efforts were inadequate, and the best case is Lebanon wherein civil society organizations launched creative initiatives to help bridge the gap and provide urgent aid to families in need and curb the economic backlash triggered by the pandemic.

I.5. Place of Youth CSAs in the EU renewed Agenda for the Mediterranean

After celebrating its 25th anniversary of the launch of the Southern Mediterranean regions partnership in November 2020, the EU launched a Joint Communication on the renewed partnership with the Southern Neighborhood” in February 2021 for the period of 2021-2027. This decision was partially motivated by the achievements made since the establishment of the Association Agreements (AA) (Barcelona Process) that has deepened trade integration, encouraged political and technical dialogue and promoted cultural, economic, financial and social cooperation between EU and Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia.

The AA has helped transfer administrative good practices and approximation to EU laws and norms to southern partner countries’ public administrations through over 230 institutional twinning (EU, 2020). Over 40,000 students, researchers and university staff moved between Europe and the Mediterranean region between 2015 and 2019, participating in 3,951 projects in the framework of Erasmus+. Thanks to the EU SANAD Fund for micro, small, and medium enterprises, 215,000 loans worth €570 million were distributed to support entrepreneurs in the region, creating over 60,000 jobs. Additionally, €500 million in grants have leveraged €6 billion in loans from European and International Financing Institutions for energy and climate change infrastructure projects in the region. Finally, in response to the Covid-19 outbreak’s impacts on socio-economic and immediate health-related needs more than €2.3 billion have been mobilized thanks to regular dialogue and cooperation channels with partner countries.

Building up on these achievements, the New Agenda for the Mediterranean (2021-2027) promises to address some of the region’s underlying challenges and adapt their cooperation to today’s realities, help people of the region enjoy their rights fully and meet their aspirations for the future. It is set to help “*seize opportunities together, making the most out of the green and digital transition, and creating inclusive societies and economies for all, especially for women and the youth. Respect for human rights and the rule of law is an integral part of our partnership,*” (EU, 2021). To meet this principal goal, the Agenda has identified four Key themes: 1) Human development, good governance and the rule of law; 2) Resilience, prosperity and the digital transition; 3) Peace and security, migration and mobility; and 4) Green transition: climate resilience, energy, and environment.

These themes will be operationalized through six proposed action plans. First, an “*Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbors*” which will include flagship initiatives in priority sectors, covering human development and good governance, economic development, energy, environment, climate change, migration and mobility, to strengthen resilience, build prosperity and seize the digital transition, as well as increase trade and investment to support competitiveness and inclusive growth. Second, “*Human development, good governance and the rule of law*” will seek to strengthen preparedness and response capacities of healthcare systems; support a renewed commitment to human rights, the rule of law, democracy and good governance to strengthen governance systems, boost transparency and accountability, and build trust in institutions; empower young people and civil society, and foster gender equality; and encourage research, innovation, culture and education through closer participation in EU programs.

Third, “*Resilience, prosperity and the digital transition*” will seek to build inclusive, resilient, sustainable and connected economies by restoring trust in the business climate, encouraging economic diversification and improving interconnectivity”. The action will also endeavor to support the leap to the digital transition, both for the public and the private sectors; support access to finance for Small and Medium Enterprises; and take advantage of the benefits of women economic empowerment. “*Peace and security*” is the fourth proposed action. It seeks to reaffirm EU’s role as an actor for peace, conflict resolution and prevention as part of a revitalized multilateral system with the UN at its heart. It steps up security cooperation to better counter terrorism, cyber and hybrid threats as well as organized crime.

Fifth, through “*Migration and mobility action*”, the proposed agenda aims at enhancing cooperation on migration on the basis of comprehensive, balanced, tailored and mutually beneficial partnerships, in line with the new Pact on Migration and Asylum. It will also address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement through conflict resolution and a targeted response to socio-economic challenges providing economic opportunities, especially for the youth; and seize the benefits of legal migration and mobility in line with EU and Member States’ competences. Sixth, and finally, “*Green transition: climate resilience, energy, and environment plan*” will support countries in meeting their climate commitments, drive energy transition and ensure energy security, encourage resource efficiency and biodiversity, and achieve transition to sustainable food systems.

I.6. Case Study: MAJALAT Project

Since its establishment in 2019, MAJALAT Consortium along its partners has played a valuable role for promoting the work of youth CSAs in the southern neighborhood. Thanks to the series of regional meetings, workshops, conferences and webinars, ample data and knowledge have been accumulated. To maintain continuity of the project's lifecycle and to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, the program launched webinar series between May and December 2020, developed as an alternative communication tool in response to the mobility restrictions. These events constituted valuable platforms for CSAs to interact and exchange knowledge and expertise with the EU representatives in order to forge potential venues of collaborations that would optimize the visibility and participation of youth organizations in the policy making and implementation processes both at the regional level and in their respective countries.

The three youth webinars organized in 2020 aimed at: a) following up on the recommendations generated during the 2019 activity cycle; b) reflecting collectively on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis in specific areas in the Euro-Mediterranean region; and c) identifying new avenues for recommendations addressed to the European Union and national institutions on the basis of the recommendations suggested by young people previously. Then, in November 2020, the project wrapped up its annual cycle with two online thematic workshops on "Youth", which set the scene for the South Policy Seminar. These meetings culminated in the development of fully-fledged recommendations, and policy advice that were published in the events' proceedings.

Finally, the November 2020 Youth Workshop brought together youth and youth CSOs from Euro-Med countries to actively engage with the EU representatives in order to concretize the aforementioned recommendations. More precisely, it provided an update on the new developments in EU policies on the topic of youth as crosscutting edge in the contexts of socio-economic developments and inclusion, migration and mobility, education and employability, health and security, and rule of law. Additionally, it invited the participants to consolidate the previously generated recommendations and enlarge their scopes. Finally, building on the CSOs own advocacy experiences as well as propositions, the workshop organizers sought to generate tangible and result-oriented operationalization mechanisms and implementation tools on how the regional and bilateral agreements with the EU could improve advocacy on youth issues, along with its crosscutting fields of action on the southern shore.

Among the outputs of the meeting was a proposition for a solidarity-based model of assistance for the youth, urging youth policy developers, decision makers, CSOs and the youth themselves to collectively explore new possibilities for collaboration and operational actions. The meeting was also an opportunity to discuss the interest of strengthening the dialogue between the EU institutions and the youth civil society actors. Therefore, it was

suggested that it was high time MAJALAT's Consortium moved forward from theorizing the debate over establishing and strengthening regional and bilateral cooperation dialogue between the EU partners and their counterparts, since all concerned actors agreed on its importance. To move forward, a road map was pitched, based on four principles:

- Structuring the MAJALAT network under a harmonized entity;
- Optimizing southern neighborhood CSAs visibility regionally and among the European partners;
- Up-scaling the Consortium profile by moving from a technical constituent into an active negotiator & policy-development consultative body; and
- Streamlining CSAs work, synergies and advocacy efforts nationally and regionally

On this ground, the need for conducting the present research came as a follow up on this previous work, with the intention to translate the aforementioned recommendations into tangible deliverable.

II. The study

This research adopted a purely scientific mixed-method design in terms of methodology and implementation. It followed systematic procedures of data collection, coding and analysis. Yet, given its scope, objectives, and target audience, the analysis opted for a more policy-oriented approach and theoretical framework. This approach served to generate a rather transferable policy brief and operational action plan. This part of the report comprises two main sections: methodology and presentation of the results.

II.1 Methodology

This section describes five components related to the methodology adopted for this research. These are: a) the general aim of the research and intended objectives; b) addressed questions; c) analytical approach as well as the data collection instrument; d) the scopes of the research; and e) dissemination strategy.

A. Aim & Objectives

The research builds up on previously achieved outcomes and the generated recommendations by MAJALAT Consortium, specifically in relation to the “Theme of Youth”. One of the underlying recommendations that was developed and finalized during the Thematic Workshop on Youth in December 2020 was the call for “*a multi-stakeholders’ permanent cooperation channel for bilateral EU-Euro-Med youth structured dialogue with a long-term agenda*”. In order to concretize this consensual recommendation, the research, thus, aimed at

exploring the possible venues for conceptualizing and proposing an action plan for the establishment of a youth space for dialogue between youth CSAs in SN and the national and European institutions. To achieve this aim, the research identified 3 specific objectives:

- a) To map the institutional, collaborative and thematic characteristics as well as pending challenges that impact the dynamics of youth representatives and youth CSAs in the SN, especially in the context of Covid-19.
- b) To identify and analyze the youth representatives and youth CSAs reflections on the EU new Agenda for the Mediterranean (NAM).
- c) To explore the feasibility for the establishment of a space for dialogues for youth between youth CSAs and national and European institutions, as a new mechanism in the context of the “new Agenda for the Mediterranean”.

B. Questions

The research objectives were translated into four operational questions:

1. Under what underlying institutional, collaborative and thematic frameworks do the youth CSAs in the southern Mediterranean operate?
2. How has Covid-19 impacted the mode and productivity of these youth CSAs?
3. How do the youth CSAs see the future of their partnership with the EU in light of the “new Agenda for the Mediterranean”?
4. How do CSOs perceive the feasibility of a youth space for dialogue between national and European institutions?

C. Instruments & Analytical Approach

The questions were answered through data collected from in-depth deskwork document analyses, an online survey and a structured interview, directed to CSAs in the region. On one hand, in-depth desk research and analyses included all relevant reports and publications produced by MAJALAT Consortium and its partners during the last two years and which are pertinent to the theme of youth, including 4 reports of previously held webinars throughout 2020, and the proceeding of the South Seminar (December 2020); besides existing literature from other projects and CSAs in the region. Analysed also were the documents generated by the EU and which are related to a) the youth; b) the youth CSAs, and c) the EU-Southern Mediterranean partnership, including the “Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee of the Region” (February 2021), along with its accompanying documents. Given its specific scope and nature, the deskwork study was rather selective.

On the other hand, primary data was collected by virtue of an online respondent-tailored survey and a structured interview. The two tools were available in English and French

versions, and were conducted virtually given the mobility restrictions imposed by Covid-19 States' measures. The survey contained 7 questions with 60 close-ended items (See appendices 1 & 2); whereas the interview comprised 12 open-ended questions (see appendices 3 & 4). An interview protocol was designed and speculated to all identified respondents. The latter were CSAs that were involved either directly or indirectly in youth work, and which were based in the region. Through personalized emails, the target sample was reached out by means of CSAs and CSOs' mailing lists available on various online platforms, and through MAJALAT's network. In addition, firsthand dataset was also collected via continuous discussion with the REF task force.

The survey data was analyzed by means of numerical "descriptives" and presented in visual charts. To probe into the depth of the interview data, the latter was qualitatively analyzed by means of Theory of Change (TC). This allowed a thorough diagnosis of the current state and work of the youth CSAs, mapping the current state; and helped identify the gaps and challenges. In other words, by analyzing the current state and identifying the pending gaps, it was possible to suggest medium-term alternatives for change.

D. Scopes of the research

The research is tied by specific geographical, thematic, and temporal scopes. Geographically, throughout this research, the terms Southern Neighborhood (SN) and south Euro-Med region are being used interchangeably, unless otherwise mentioned, in reference to the 9 countries⁴ in the region and which are targeted by MAJALAT program and most of which are members of the EU-southern Association Agreement (AA). Thematically, it is centered over the theme of youth civil organizations, and knowing that the latter exist under different entities, names, and institutional status in SN, the term civil society actors (CSAs) is being used in this report in reference to all nongovernmental entities that work directly or indirectly in the youth field. Finally, the research is undertaken under two major temporalities, namely Covid-19 and the renewed EU partnership agreement with SN.

E. Dissemination

The outcomes and deliverables of this research will be disseminated through two main channels. On the one hand, it will be presented during two already-scheduled regional events, organized by MAJALAT Consortium and its partners. The first one is a Round Table entitled "*Youth, Economic Development, and Social Dialogue*", taking place in Beirut, Lebanon on 30th of June 2021. Various youth representatives, youth CSAs representatives and the EU delegation representatives are invited to interact and share their feedback about the outcomes of the research. The second one is the "Civil Society Forum", which will follow the round table. Equally important stakeholders will attend it. On the other hand, the second channel will be an online dissemination of the final report through REF online platforms to all

4. The 9 countries are Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, and Syria.

associated partners, stakeholders, and practitioners in the fields of youth in the region and in the EU zone. The next section is devoted to the presentation and analysis of the results.

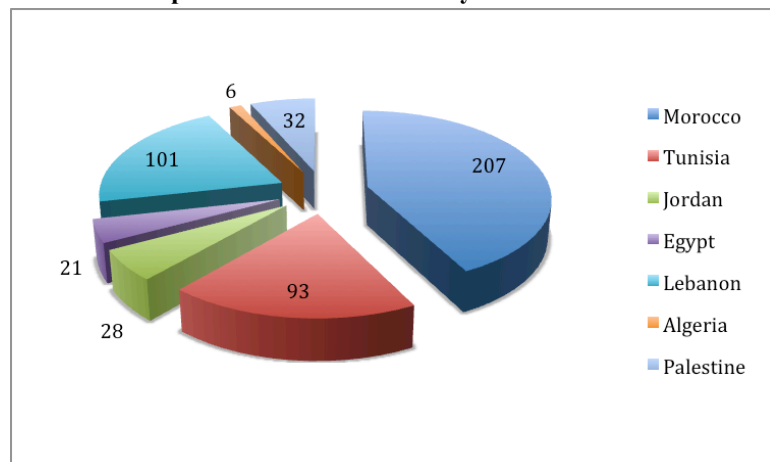
II.2. Results

This section summarizes the obtained finding of the research. It integrates the presentation of the interview data with the quantitative analysis of the survey data, which is clustered under 7 categories : a) organization status ; b) field of operation ; c) collaboration ; d) challenges ; e) Covid-19 impacts ; f) surmounting the sanitary crisis ; and g) impacts of a new space for dialogue for youth and youth CSAs. This way, the results from the interviews were interactively used to support the quantitative results, and add depth and breadth in forms of testimonies quoted from the interviewees.

A) Participants

The online survey (both English and French versions) was distributed to a total of 2289 targeted organizations in seven of the AA countries, besides, advertising online links on the REF social media platforms. Initially 506 surveys were completed, however 18 were discarded because they contained a number of unanswered questions. So the final retained sample for the research was 488 organizations, distributed on seven countries, as demonstrated in the graph below :

Graph 1 : Distribution of the youth CSAs of the research

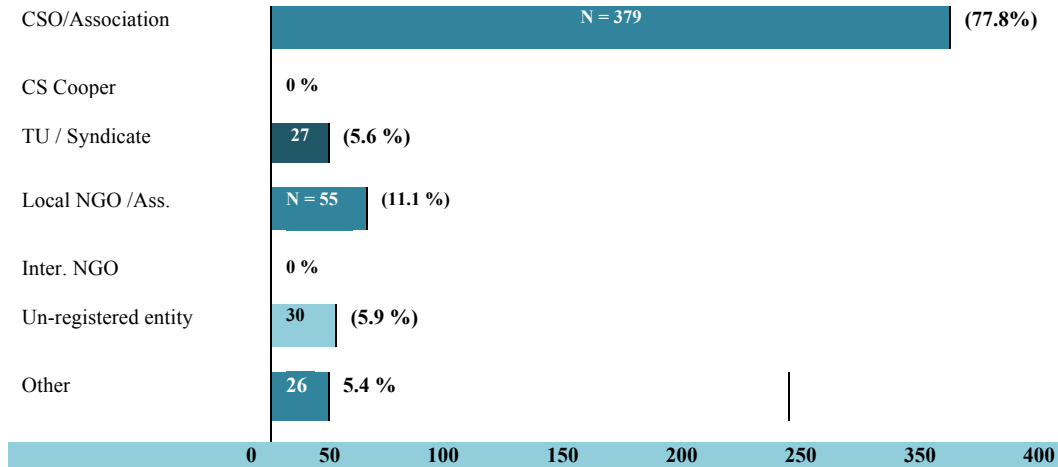


With Exception of Libya which had zero participant, all the other countries had a decent representation, with the highest number from Morocco (N = 207), followed by Lebanon (N = 101), Tunisia (N = 93), Palestine (N = 32); Jordan (N = 28) ; and finally Egypt (N = 21). In addition, 13 organizations took the in-depth semi-structured interview.

B) Organizations legal status

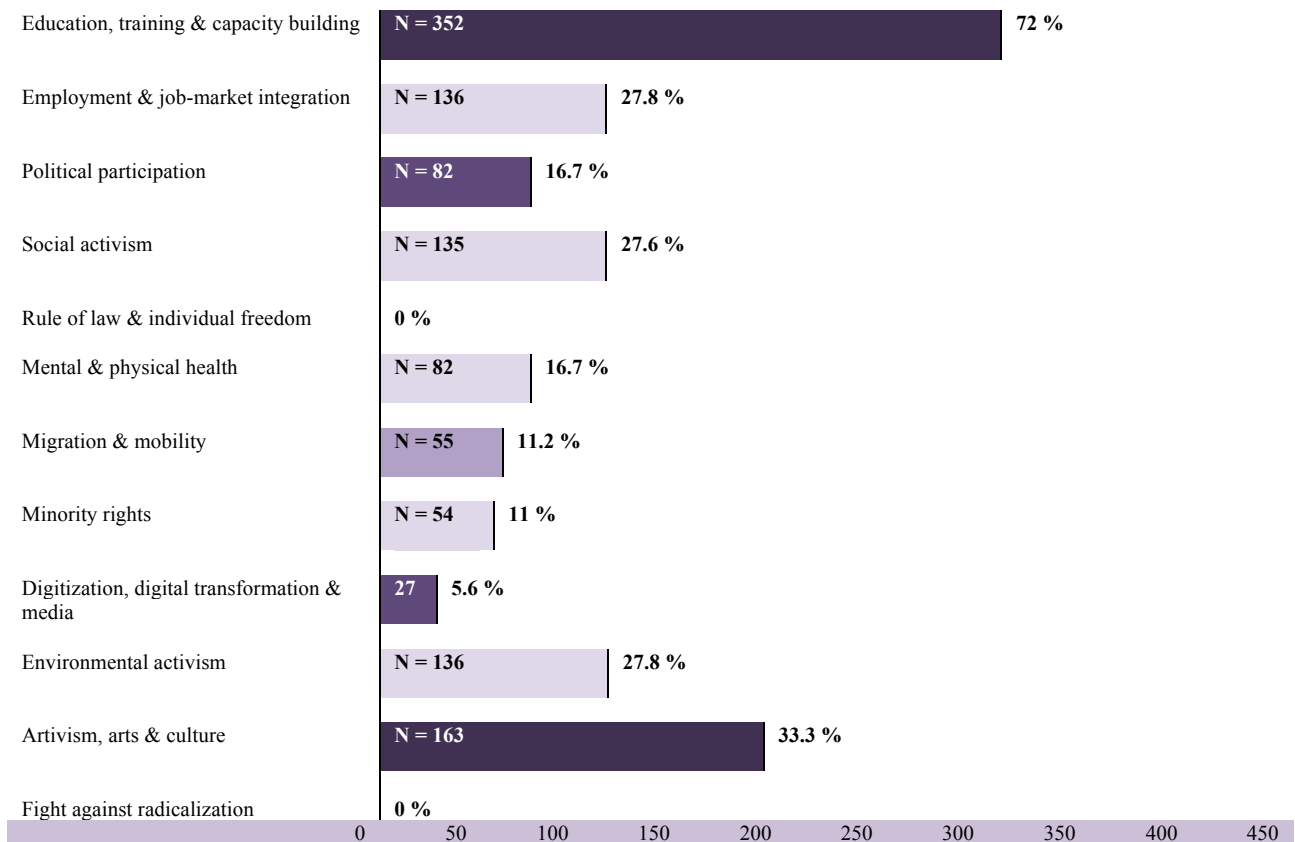
As demonstrated in chart 1, the majority of the respondents (77.8 %, N = 379) reported being registered under either an association or a civil society organization (CSO), followed by 11.1% (N = 55) under a local association status. While none of the participants' entities were registered under a cooperative or an international NGO. Additionally, 5.9 % (N = 30) reported to be non-registered entities; 5.6 % (N = 27) under syndicate status ; and 5.4 % (N = 26) under 'other' status.

Chart 1 : Distribution of the sample organization's legal status



C) Field of operations & expertise

Chart 2: Distribution of the youth organizations in terms of field of operations / expertise



As to the field of expertise and operation, the sector of “*education, training and capacity building*” seems to be the one that preoccupies most of the respondents’ operations, followed by youth CSAs that work in the field of arts and culture: 72.2 % (N = 352), and 33.3 % (N = 163), respectively. In the third position come the organizations that focus on youth

employments and environmental activism, together representing 55.6 % (N = 272) of the total number of the respondents. A considerable number of respondents reported working on youth migration and minority rights with 22.2 % (N = 109). The fields of political participation and youth mental and physical health occupy a relatively lower representation: only 16.7 (N = 82). Surprisingly, none of the respondents seemed to be engaged in the sectors of rules of law or fight against terrorisms, (see chart 2).

The interview data also confirmed the statistics and gave in-depth insights on the field of work of these organizations. Because it could be that a given organization's official papers state the main field is "education", however, this does not restrict the entity's activity exclusively to education sector. For instance, one of the interviewees reported that:

"Our agro-ecological cooperative operates at several levels: a) environmental education and awareness of food agro-ecology and reception of young trainees; b) creation of seasonal jobs; c) beekeeping training and protection of the Saharan bee; d) disseminate the techniques of permaculture and intensive agriculture on a small surface; and e) participation and support of farmer organizations and structures working with young people."

Another important indicator revealed that most organizations put into perspective of their programs the gender dimension, and tailor gender-specific programs and advocacy campaigns, as stated by a Jordanian cooperative:

"Our main target groups are migrants, and young people without jobs and in training. We are working on the creation of 3 autonomous women's cooperatives within the cooperative."

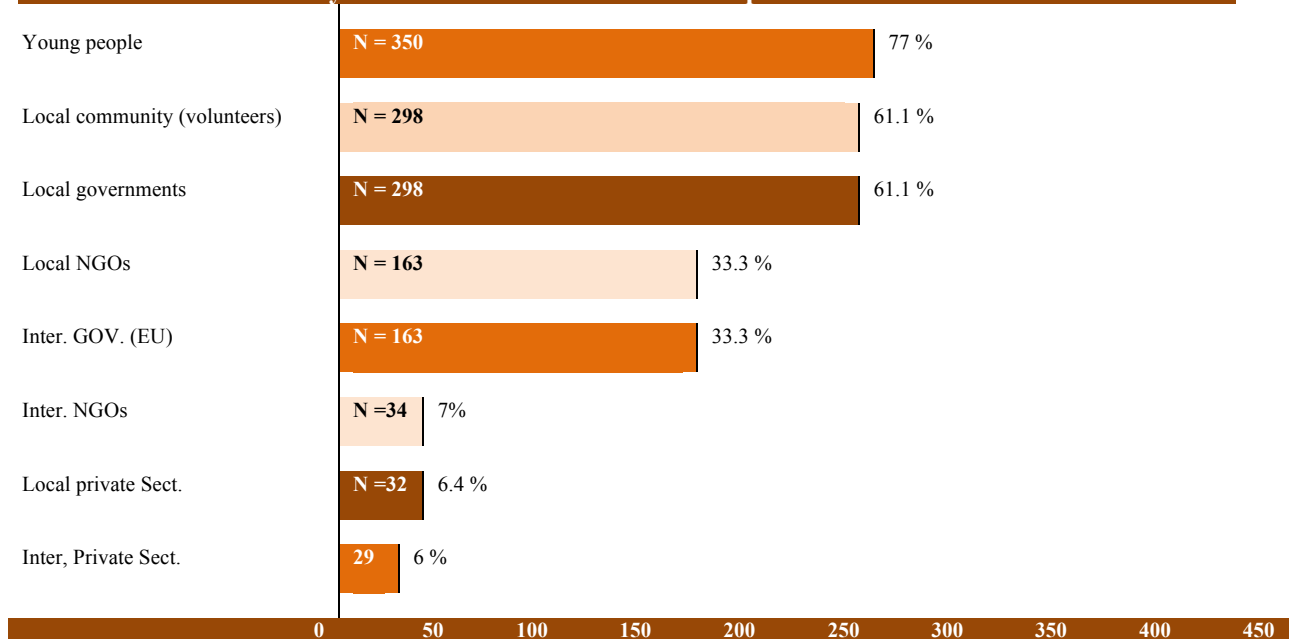
D) Collaboration and partnerships

Collaboration and partnerships with diverse stakeholders stand to be the backbone that makes the work of CSAs possible. As shown in chart 3, the results revealed that a) young people (77 %, N = 350); b) local community and volunteers (61.1 %, N = 298), and local governments (61.1 %, N = 298) are the three main collaborators of the majority of the respondents. The second partners are either other local NGOs (33.3 %, N = 163) and / or international governments - mainly the European Union Commission - (33.3 %, N = 163). Partnerships with both national and international private sectors remain relatively weak, as they together represented only 12.4 % (N = 61).

These figures are emphasized by the testimonies of all the interviewees who confirmed to have established several collaborations with local and international partners. For instance, a Moroccan organization stated that:

“Our association has opted for the work of proximity and at the territorial level of the region of Grand Casablanca. It managed to coordinate well with the main interlocutors, namely the prison administration, the regional delegations, Ministry of Youth and Culture, the Municipality of the Prefecture of Ain Sebaa -Hay Mohammadi and a whole network of youth associations at national and local levels.”

Chart 3: Distribution of youth CSAs main collaborators / partners



Likewise, this one stated: *“we can cite here Solidarité Laïque, the Education League, Cotravaux, the CEMEA, the SGDF on the French side.”* In Egypt, organization are *“currently trying to set up a Maghreb network for the exchange of experiences and networking in the field of entrepreneurship and employability of young people.”*

Interesting, most of the testimonies did not mentioned any significant collaborations with the private sector. When asked about the organizational strategy for developing new and diverse partnerships, all the interviewees reported following different methods. For instance, some admitted that their partnerships are *“developed according to the objective to be achieved as well as for the choice of partners”*.

While others built partnerships on the basis of the projects developed and the theme: *“we are looking for suitable partners in the field and internationally as needed”*; others *“try to follow all the activities organized by other youth associations and what is topical in public policies”*, or *“work with other networks that support groups of young people towards as much autonomy as possible in their projects and structures, and sharing a renewed vision of citizenship and solidarity.”*

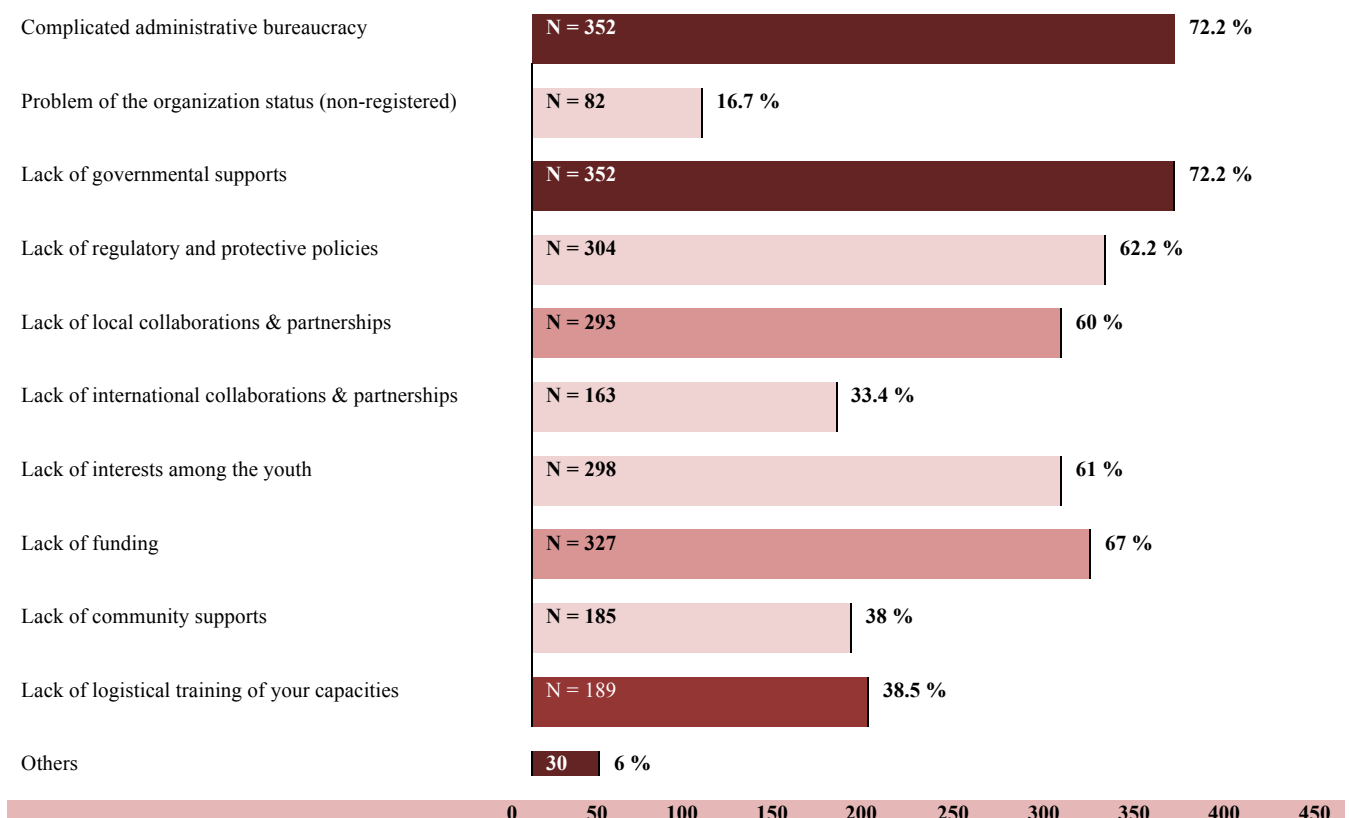
These testimonies reveal an underling weakness in their strategy. It seems that many of the research participants did not have clear and long-term strategies for partnership-establishments. Most, if not all, of them follow short-term collaborations that are rather governed by the nature of the proposed programs or available funds, not on the basis of their defined visions, and medium and long-term objectives and goals. This might also explain why there is a shortage in partnerships with national and international private sectors.

E) Challenges

Globally, the work of youth CSAs is faced with constant challenges, and the SN is no exceptions. In this study, the participants reported to be facing myriads of barriers. But the ones that negatively impact their work are directly linked to the complicated bureaucracy, married to the lack of the government support, and lack of funding. 72% (N = 352) of the respondents identified these as the three main challenges that handicap their work.

Additionally, 62% (N = 304) said that the lack of regulatory and protective policies, along with poor local collaborations and disinterest among the youth represent perpetual challenges that have their tolls on the provisions of services these organizations are set to deliver. Finally, the lack of community support and sometimes inadequacies of logistical trainings of the organizations' personnel hinder the proceedings of these organizations. 38 % (N = 185) of the respondent identified this existing lacks as worrying challenges.

Chart 4: Sources of main challenges facing youth CSAs



Probing deeper into these figures, the interviews did not only confirm the above results, but also unveiled many others as is the case with this Algeria-based association:

“It is not easy to work in the Algerian context (political, social and economic hardships), which is very difficult and complicated. We have fought to survive and continue the good and remarkable work so far. We are struggling to face the difficult and complicated circumstances, under the pressure from the government towards associations.”

Lebanon is no exceptions. The financial and juridical challenges seem pressing, as reported by another organization:

“We suffer a lot from the lack of resources - all categories included - in addition the legal framework which governs the work of associations is rigid and restrictive. There is the disinterest of certain young people towards the activities that we organize. The non-consideration of the possibility of cascading funding from the large and old associations, in particular the ones that land on projects funded by the EU and other Embassies. We also suffer from a significant lack of pedagogical and financial resources.”

Conversely, a France based organization that operate in Lebanon, Tunisia and Morocco seemed to be facing less challenges, as it:

“benefits from support from the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs and is present in the Mediterranean in Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon while having an interregional branch in Marseille.”

The case above reveals the contrasting conditions under which SN-based CSAs are working compared to their counter parts in the EU zone.

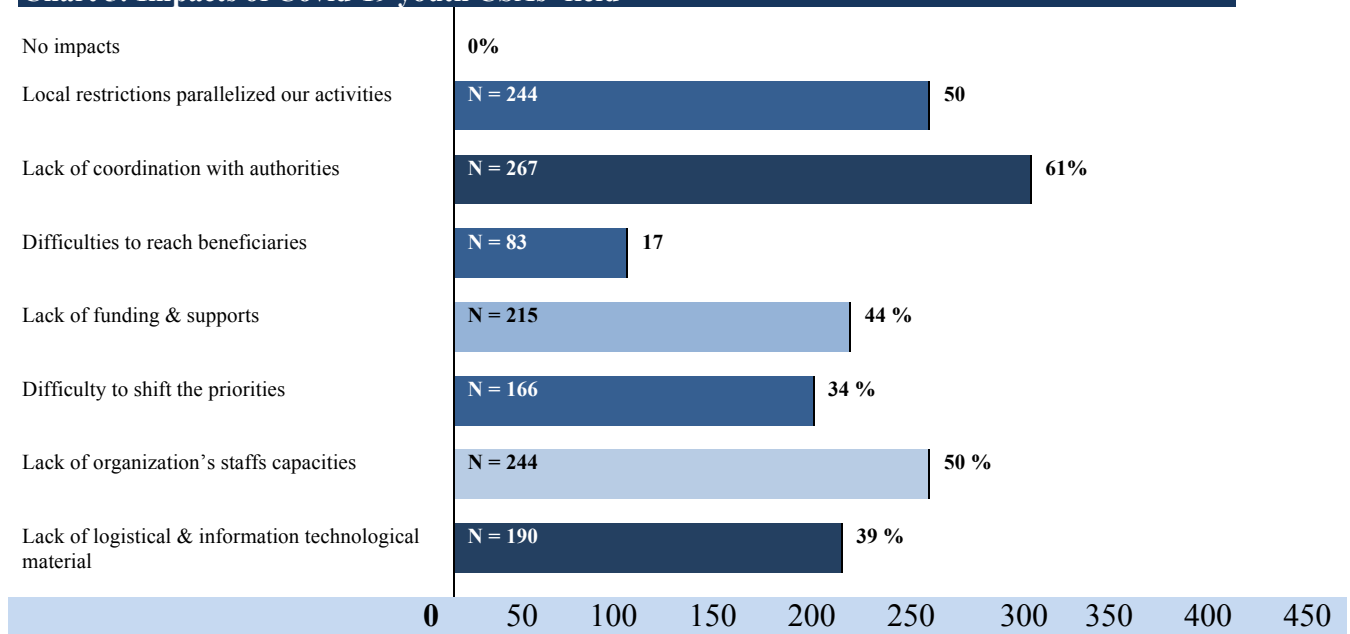
F) Impacts of Covid-19 on youth CSAs' field

As far as the impacts Covid-19 pandemic had on the work of the CSAs in the region, the first indicator shown in the finding highlights that all the participants admitted that their operations suffered from the sudden and strict sanitary measures imposed by local governments. 61 % (N = 267) found the lack of coordination on part of the local authorities had disturbing repercussions on the work of CSAs. Similarly, 50 % (N = 244) reported that the local restrictions on mobility as well as the lack in staff trainings and capacities paralyzed their organizations' activities. Over one third of the respondents (39 %, N = 190) said that they suffered a serious lack of funding, lack of logistical and information technology material to shift their mode of operations, and faced difficulties in rearrange or shifting their priorities. (See chart 5).

The interviews also echoed the same impressions, highlighting many other challenges. All the interviewees described how the lockdown constraints had negative impacts on the progress of projects in general and have created many difficulties for local actions, although remote work has brought improvement in the management of administrative and financial affairs:

“The vulnerability of our beneficiaries has greatly impacted our work in the field, in particular the difficulty of accessing the target group, given the restrictions imposed, the imposition of not exceeding the grouping of ten people per activity also impacted the conduct of activities within the association's premises.”

Chart 5: Impacts of Covid-19 youth CSAs' field



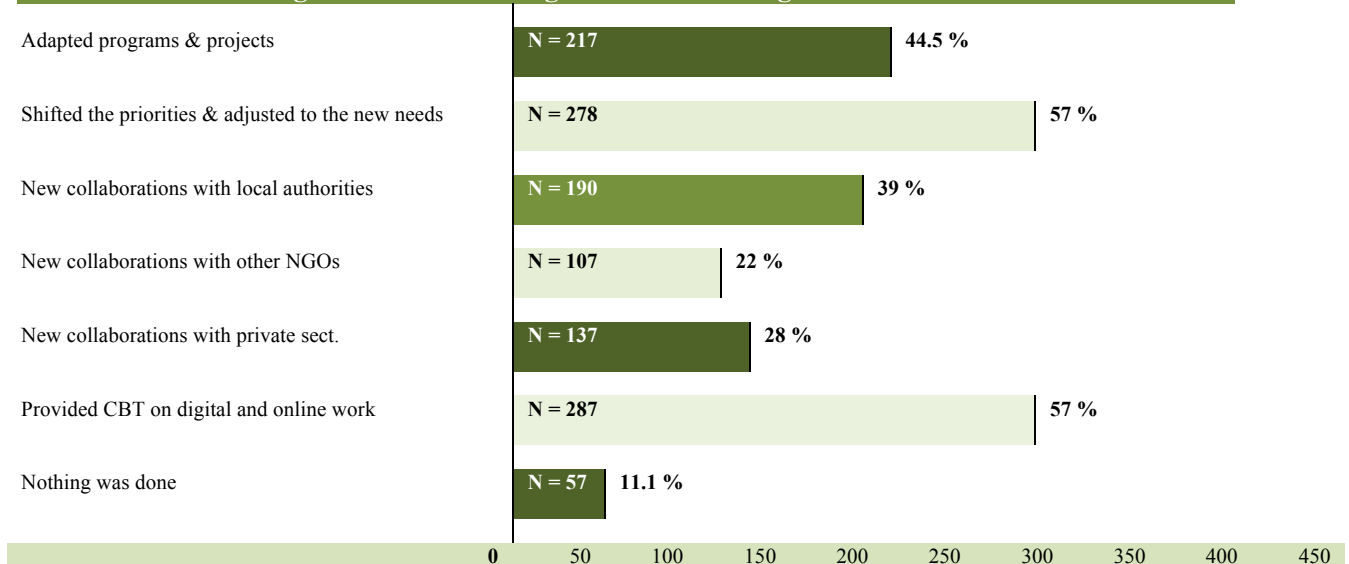
Furthermore, “associations, carrying out programs in prison, suffered enormously from the state of the ban on all activity within the prison and the inmates were the first victims of this rupture concerning the freezing of all activity for more than one year”, said another interviewee. Coupled to these problems were also challenges related to shortage in material and knowledge related to digitization as well as loss of momentum in youth projects and enthusiasm.

G) Surmounting Covid-19 sanitary crisis

To alleviate the negative impacts of Covid-19 pandemic, 57 % (N = 278) of the responding organizations said that they provided capacity building trainings on digital and online work to their employees and staff members, and adjusted the activities and programs of their organizations to new priorities in order to respond to the new emerging needs of the young people in the local communities.

As demonstrated in chart 6, One third of the participants (over 35 %, N = 190) engaged in forging new collaborations and partnerships either with local authorities, other local NGOs, or/and local private sectors. However, 11,1 % (N = 57) participating CSAs in the study said that they had done nothing to surmount the challenges.

Chart 6: CSAs strategies for Surmounting Covid-19 challenges



Furthermore, the sanitary crisis has put too much pressure on the organization that delivered health-related services, which put tremendous efforts to continue serving young people, as stated by this Lebanon based organization:

“One of the most important axis of our NGO is health promotion. So during Covid-19, we worked and we have not stopped working until now. We have created a crisis unit with an emergency number. And an awareness commission started accompanying the local authorities during the confinement to sensitize the vulnerable population and distribute protective materials (bibs, alcoholic gel, visors, and gloves...) and the food basket and protective materials to the general public and the vulnerable population.”

In the same kind of civic spirit, associations in Morocco, reportedly, had to rethink their activities and method of support, using digital tools to continue working remotely: *“We have also opened new emergency programs in the context of the Covid-19 crisis in order to meet the growing needs of the most vulnerable migrant and Moroccan populations.”*

In Egypt, some organizations had *“to adapt and create a remote support program for 6 months (closure of the reception area required by the authorities) and also review its programming after the resumption of reception to manage the impacts of the crisis on the children and young people we support, as well as their families”*.

H) Responses to the New Agenda for the Mediterranean (NAM)

The interview data highlighted some insightful ideas and suggestions from the participants, regarding their reaction to the new Agenda for the Mediterranean. There were also clear contrasts in opinions between CSAs based in Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia, and the ones based in Algeria and Palestine. For instance, a participant reported that:

“High Representative and Vice-President J. B. said: *“We are determined to work with our southern partners on a new agenda that will focus on people, especially women and men young people”*;

These, among others, youth CSAs remain positively hopeful that the EU would honor the promises made through its representatives to the youth actors in the region. Conversely, youth CSAs in Algeria did not seem to hold high expectations about the New Agenda, as was bluntly put by an Algeria-based association:

“For the case of Algeria, we do not think that will be the case, because the EU prioritizes the traditionally privileged partners: like Tunisia, Jordan and Morocco and internally: it prefers to work with large organizations strongest, and does not put in place mechanisms to include new and small associations, especially in rural and urban areas, which are far from the big cities of the country and which do not meet the conditions of the call for projects and / or does not have the capacity to manage this type of project. In addition, the pillar of youth and civil society, is not among the priorities of partnership between Algeria and the EU to the limit of our knowledge, in addition, the EU delegation always prefers to work with 'a closed circle' of civil society organizations, within the framework of these consultations and meetings as well as communication can be effective in these relations with associations.”

There are other voices that complained about the conditionality imposed indirectly by the EU in the financing of development projects in general and those intended for Algerian civil society, in specific, such as the gender aspect, which does not allow an equitable sharing of the benefits of these projects between different components of society.

No less important of point yielded from the interviews was that two third of the participants who expressed their positive feedback when they learned about the launching of NAM, they actually admitted that they were not well informed about its content, objectives or action plans.

I) Reflections on the establishment of youth space for dialogue mechanism

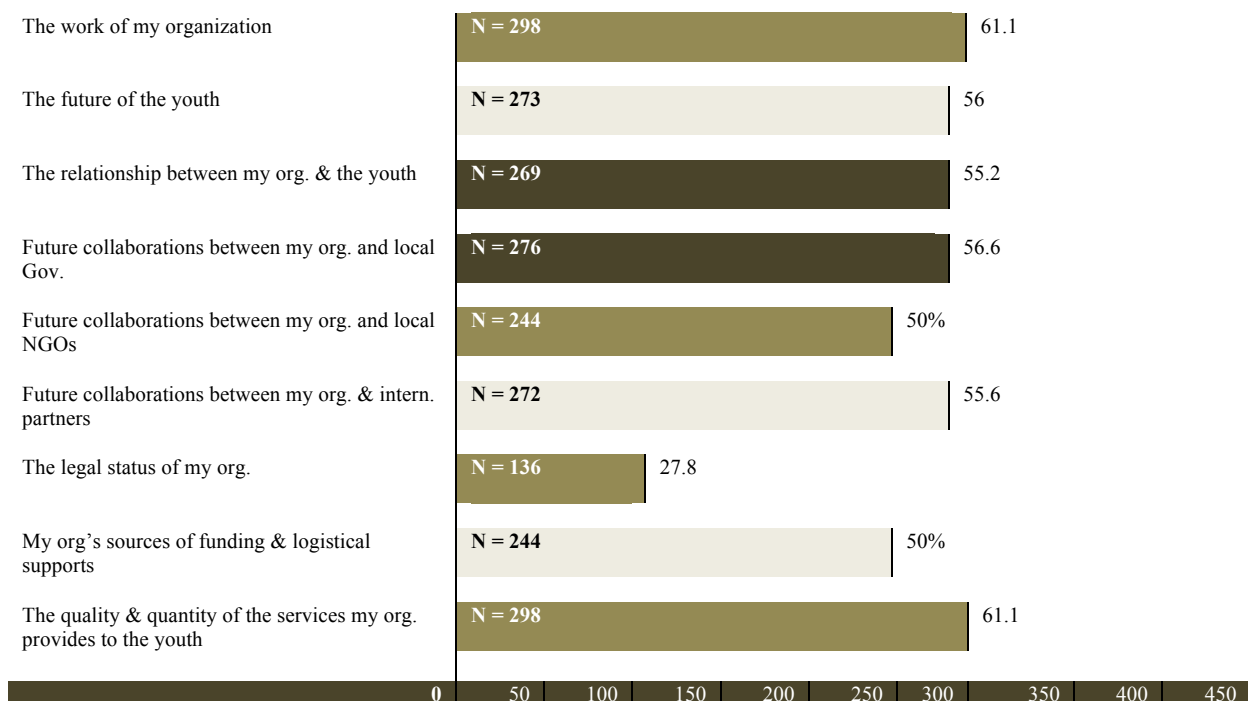
Finally, the question of how would the creation of a new space for youth dialogue with national and European institutions impact the work of youth CSAs gained a positive

consensus of all the participants. 61 % (N = 298) of the respondents claimed that having such a mechanism would have direct positive impacts on their organizations. Additionally, an average of 55% (N = 269) of the respondents believed that a space for youth dialogue would have significant impacts on the future of the SN youth groups, foster the relationship between their organizations and the youth group as well as the future of collaborations between other youth local and international partners. Lastly, 27.8 % (N = 136) also believed that the mechanism would yield results on the legal status of their originations.

Similarly, all the interviews confirmed the need for having such a mechanism created, reiterating that:

“Young people today suffer from extreme marginalization and exclusion from the majority of public dialogue fields. At best, we speak for them and we exercise guardianship over their voices, which only excludes them further.”

Chart 7: Youth CSAs perceptions of a new space for dialogue for the youth



Furthermore, they added:

“Today's young people tend to identify with the rupture of certain logics belonging to the older generations and strongly claim the right to communicate and negotiate with their own voice and ask only to be listened to, because they have opinions and messages worth listening to.”

Many other interviewees went on the same line of thoughts, assuming that the efficiency of a youth space for dialogue has its contingencies:

“If the realities on the ground are found in the exchanges and collaborations around common projects, the impacts will certainly be positive.”

“Yes, making young people an actor by making them participate in this type of body is important in order to promote the empowerment of these populations as well as the vision of youth both at the level of civil society and government.”

Other participants seemed worried about the idea of creating a space with the same old mindsets that govern the region, without creating any concrete impacts on the lives of young people. They necessitated *“strengthening communication and advocacy capacities among young people and the organizations that represent them before thinking about this a space for dialogue, which remains essential and very important.”*

In conclusion, the results of this first-hand data unveiled rich and authentic insights that will definitely inform literary contents and operationalized actions, which are the subject of analysis in the coming parts.

III. Recommendations

This part opens door for discussing the implications and tentative recommendations elucidated from the research. Hence, the first section concisely elaborates on the burning operational actions and gauges their feasibility by designated stakeholders involved in the youth work. The second section proposes a design and feasibility plan of youth space for dialogue in the SN.

III.1 Implications & proposed operational actions

The obtained results have revealed an informative snapshot about the dynamics, aspirations and constant challenges that characterize the profile of most youth CSAs in the SN. While some of the findings can serve as a cartographic map on the state of youth civic work, a substantial part offers a valuable contextual background that now calls up young people, youth CSAs, policy makers, practitioners, and researchers in the region and beyond to ponder about and launch further investigations. Furthermore, the results unleash numerous points that urge NS governments as well as the EU institutions' reflections and actions in accordance with the needs and gaps identified in the research. The implications are summarized below in 10 points.

First, the sector of “education, training and capacity building” seems to be the one that preoccupies most activities of the youth CSAs participated in the study: 72.2 % (N = 352). This indicator shows the prominence of this sector to the youth of the region. It also aligns

with an alarming figure highlighted by the 2020 World Bank report, saying that “*youth in the Southern Mediterranean region is the only group worldwide that faces increasing unemployment risks as the level of education increases* », (WB 2020). Although, the region’s median spending on public education is significantly higher than OECD average, the human capital development factor remains a major challenge, with two third (around 110 million) of the MENA population is under 35, and youth unemployment is over 25% of which 40% are women including those with tertiary degrees, compared to 14% globally, (WB, 2020).

One of explanations behind the high number of CSAs that work in capacity building action could be that this sector does not represent any threats against the political establishments nor does it question the socio-economic status quo. On the contrary, a few governments consider the sector of education as a non-productive field that simply drains their nations’ financial resources. Hence, they allow more space for CSOs to help share the burdens associated with the sector. This assumption finds some intriguing plausibility, and pushes as to ask a legitimate question as to why none of the respondents seemed to be engaged in the sectors of rules of law or fight against terrorisms. As mentioned earlier, it could be that the research sample simply failed to capture this type of association in the research. But it is also possible that some organizations in certain countries cannot claim that they work on these issues as being considered the State’s exclusive affairs that CSAs are not allowed to engage with.

Another assumption could be that the youth of the region are more preoccupied with issues that have direct impacts on their daily lives, such as employment, international mobility, and migration or individual freedom, more than politics. Therefore, future international cooperation and programs launched jointly with the EU and the SN governments needs to allocate more resources and attention to these sectors as well as to these types of organizations. Local governments, in this regard, are invited to promote and facilitate the work of youth CSAs by engaging as key partners in multi-stakeholders and multi-sectoral programs and youth advocacy campaigns. States’ restrictions and harassment of organizations that operate in the political and fight violence should come to an end. This could only happen if international funders, such as the EU, condition their regional collaborations with the SN governments to the establishment of free and inclusive working environments for youth CSAs.

Second, it is reassuring that there is an ample number of youth CSAs that invest in the sectors of education, training, employment, and culture. Equally assuring was the fact that the question of gender equity represents a crosscutting topic in the work of most of these organizations, and that the gender dimension is often taken into consideration in the programs designed. However, more research is required to probe into the factors behind the scarcity of organizations and programs that are vested in the themes of rule of law and fight against radicalism. There is also an urgent need for exploring new venues by developing attractive outlooks that can motivate more private sector partnerships with the youth CSAs, which can

only happen if the latter are provided by standardized and tailored CPTs on developing sustainable and diversified organizational strategies for the establishments of partnerships.

The third finding is related to the pending challenges that continue to obstacle the work of youth CSAs in SN. They are summarized in three burning barriers. There is a lucid lack of pedagogical and financial resources that hinders the quality and quantity of youth-driven programs and services.

Additionally, the restrictive legal framework which governs the work of associations seems to be a regional one, especially that over 12% of the CSAs in the region are unregistered, or exist under low-key profile, which restrains their activities. To respond to these barriers, we propose triangular synchronized debates with outcome-oriented solutions between national, regional and European governments and youth CSAs. At the national levels, local governments (represented by directorates of ministries of youth and civil society governance) should open transparent discussions with representatives of all the non-registered youth CSOs and the ones that work under shady statuses in order to agree on forging laws and legal frameworks that ensure the existence and work of such entities with fear of legal or institutional threats.

At the intra-regional level, these debates should be carried out with national governments and youth representative networks with the intent to unify their visions and operational parameters for recognizing the existence and work of such marginalized entities, and agree on developing a harmonized, simplified, and transparent procedures of legal status acquisition. At the European level, consortiums and regional networks of youth CSAs, such as MAJALAT, should voice out and advocate the right of small, marginalized and non-registered entities with the EU institutions, and make appeals to the EU managing structures to schedule this points in each and every debates, projects or funding programs regarding the youth and youth CSA they would have with the regional or national governments of SN.

The fourth revealing indicator is related to the agility and responsiveness of the youth CSAs of the SN. Despite the challenges, these organizations are characterized by a discernible flexibility and adaptation to abrupt conditions, as was witnessed with how they swiftly and efficiently adapted their work and mode of operation during the Covid-19 pandemic, and to the uncoordinated restrictive measures imposed by local authorities.

Fifth, as long as the gender dimension goes, CSAs are invited to leverage further advocacy campaigns to urge governments and political parties to promote and enact women's human rights, socio-economic and political participation. Women's unions need to invest more work, in particular, to secure women's meaningful participation in peace and security processes by engaging them in national and local dialogues and initiatives through synchronized youth advocacy campaigns. Furthermore, young women CSAs require tailored technical support and capacity building so that they can better integrate international commitments into national development plans and strategies. Resources to facilitate the collection of sex-disaggregated

statistics are also needed to monitor policy and programs implementation; and thus, gain a better sense of progress related to women's empowerment. Regional human rights organizations lack a substantial focus and thus could similarly benefit from training in gender instruments and analysis.

Sixth, financial resources from donors could help support various regional projects, especially the implementation of pilot projects and the exchange of experiences and lessons from across the region. These kinds of services and capacity building training could be collaboratively designed and provided by the EU partners, given their expertise and historical precedence in this domain. Moreover, local and regional CSAs mechanisms should be established to compel national governments to implement SDGs 5 and 6 nationally and locally. Similar efforts are needed to translate CEDAW provisions and the Beijing Platform for Action into plans and strategies at the municipal level. Finally, more partnerships should be forged among various stakeholders in these debates in order to better coordinate efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the SN region.

Seventh, the research revealed that most youth CSAs in the SN welcome the EU renewed Agenda for the Mediterranean (2021-2027), and maintain high hopes in its objectives, actions and expected outcomes, especially on the future of the youth. Surprisingly, although all of the study's participants reported being aware of the renewal of the AA, the majority, if not all, of them actually did not know its content, objectives or proposed actions. Therefore, there is a need for a wide regional promotion and media-campaigns about the agenda in the region through the EU regional delegation and national offices' representatives.

Eighth, some organizations, especially the small entities and the ones located in rural areas or off metropolis cities, are worried that the new agenda would not be any different than the previous one in the sense that it would keep the same elitist approach in program selections, partnership forging, and fund allocations, which tend to go mostly to the "close circle" of the EU partners in the SN. This concern is echoed in one of the recommendations previously proposed by the region's youth CSAs during MAJALAT Youth Thematic workshops, requesting the EU partners to facilitate the participation of non-registered entities in the various EU funded projects and programs. As we all know, the restrictive political and regulatory environment in certain countries does not allow youth CSOs that work on sensitive topics (such as freedom of expression, religious freedom, fight against violence) to exist either under registered or non-registered status. Therefore, it was recommended that the EU ought to put in place a mechanism that would allow such a type of organizations to be included in the various action plans and funding programs from the EU allocated to the SN.

Against these contexts, the EU is requested to consider these voices by putting in place mechanisms that ensure the inclusion of new and small associations, and non-registered entities, especially in rural areas, and which neither meet the conditions of the call for projects and / or have the capacity to manage the EU complex calls for project, nor do they qualify or

are willing to work under a legally recognized status due to the States' harassments and restrictive measures. Since the new Agenda is at the stage of designing action and implementation strategies and plans, the EU has now the power and opportunity to address all these fundamental concerns of the youth CSAs and turn them into concrete gains by incorporating corresponding and remedial measures in the implementation of the six action plans identified in the Agenda. There is no need to stress fact that the fast demographic growth of the youth population in the region entails the existence of enabled and diversified civil society body; and one of the roles the EU could play in this regard is to contribute in empowering those entities that are being excluded or silenced by their local governments, because their presence is central in responding to the needs of the youth as well as bridging the gaps created by the States' actors.

Ninth, speaking of the New Agenda, The principal goal as stated therein is to *“seize opportunities together, making the most out of the green and digital transition, and creating inclusive societies and economies for all, especially for women and **the youth**. Respect for human rights and the rule of law is an integral part of our partnership,”* (EU, 2021). To operationalize this goal, accordingly, the EU proposes 6 Action Plans one of which is *“Human development, good governance and the rule of law”*. Through this action plan the EU aims at *“strengthening preparedness and response capacities of healthcare systems; support a renewed commitment to human rights, the rule of law, democracy and good governance to strengthen governance systems, boost transparency and accountability, and build trust in institutions; **empower young people and civil society**, and foster gender equality; and encourage research, innovation, culture and education through closer participation in EU programs.”*

Therefore, the goal and action plan 2 of the agenda concretely mention its interest in empowering young people and civil society, as highlighted above. Therefore, the EU must live up to the spirit of these promises and restore the regions' youth CSAs' trust in the EU partnership by; on one hand, maintaining clear and responsible discourse with the youth CSAs in the SN. On the other hand, the EU should designate a visible position for young people and youth CSAs in the structural dialogue in which young people and their representative bodies and youth regional networks and consortium; namely MAJALAT and similar arrangements, as prominent interlocutors, advisors and, more importantly, designers of youth goals and working agendas that response to the direct needs of the youth. The EU must capitalize on the knowledge and expertise projects, such as MAJALAT, have accumulated in the field of youth work in SN; and build stronger and more sustainable cooperation with them. The fact that MAJALAL and its partners have been calling for institutionalizing a North-South Mediterranean youth dialogue, and launching a regional youth policy dialogue need to be foreseen in the implementation phase of action plan 2 of the new Agenda.

If so, the EU will have materialized a substantial component of the action plan 2 of the agenda. Finally, another dimension that has to be considered in action plan 2 is launching a

youth-tailored framework for the theme of youth and youth CSAs, with policy-dialogue oriented programs and projects. We believe that institutionalizing a regional dialogue and establishing youth-oriented policy mechanisms in partnerships with regional youth networks will pave the way for prioritizing the

question of youth within a thematic framework, not just a sidewalk topic. As shown in the study, youth CSAs expressed recurring concerns about marginalizing the theme of youth in the actual interpretation of the new agenda. Therefore, the EU is invited to bring these actors on board of the debate over youth issues, and allocate them at least one-third representation share in the governing structure of the proposed policy mechanism.

Tenth, and finally, the results showed a general consensus of all the participants for the need for establishing a youth space for dialogue between youth CSAs and related institutions nationally and regionally and with the European counterparts. In fact, testimonies from the interviews revealed that this idea of youth space for dialogue has been the hope of many of the region's youth actors since the start of the Structural Dialogue within the EU back in 2005. Many meetings, debates and appeals have been made officially, nationally and internationally for facilitating the establishment of such a mechanism. However, all the promises made, and recommendations proposed in the past have been unsuccessful in materializing this "dream". With the renewed Agenda for the Mediterranean, the SN youth actors are reviving their expectations that the new AA will help actualize this mechanism, and bring "the space" into reality. However, they foresee the success of such a mechanism to be contingent upon the roles and priorities it will allocate to the young people.

Given the relevance of all these generated recommendations, we believe that they need to be translated into a tangible operational action plan, the chart below clusters the recommendations in six proposed operational actions.

Chart 8 : Proposed Operational actions

Rubrics	Proposed operational actions
Youth CSAs Fields of operation	The sector of "education, training and capacity building" preoccupies most activities of the youth CSAs. Therefore, future international cooperation and programs launched jointly with the EU and the SN CSOs needs to allocate more resources and attention to this sector as well as to these types of organizations.
	There is a need for further investigation to understand, at least, the reason behind the scarcity or the shy interest of organizations on the themes of rules of law and fight against violence, especially when knowing that radicalism is one of the major threats facing the youth, and the rule of law and political participation remain topics of secondary importance to young people in SN.
	Over 12% of the CSAs in the region are unregistered, or exist under low-key profile, which restrains their activities. To alternate this disabling bureaucratic snag, we propose triangular synchronized

Harmonizing the legal status acquisition	debates with outcome-oriented solutions between national, regional and European governments and youth CSAs.
	Nationally local governments should open transparent discussions with representatives of all the non-registered youth CSOs and the ones that work under shady statuses in order to agree on forging laws and legal frameworks that ensure the existence and work of such entities without fear of legal or institutional threats.
	Regionally, national governments and youth representative networks need to work on unifying their visions and operational parameters for recognizing the existence and work of such marginalized entities, and agree on developing harmonized, simplified, and transparent procedures of legal status acquisition.
	At the European level, consortiums and regional networks of youth CSAs, such as MAJALAT, should voice out and advocate the right of small, marginalized and non-registered entities with the EU institutions, and make appeals to the EU managing structures to schedule this points in each and every debates, projects or funding programs regarding the youth and youth CSAs they would have with the regional or national governments of SN.
Strategy for Partnership Establishment	In order to create diversified partnerships with national and international private sectors, the youth CSAs need to develop a well-studied strategy for partnership development. Furthermore, they need to ensure that their organization's staff members are trained on ensuring that the strategy is implemented with conformity to the origination's vision and highlighted goals and objectives. To bridge this gap, capacity building training programs and workshops on strengthening the youth CSAs' skills and knowledge in developing and implementing partnerships strategies need to be made available in the region and in collaboration with international partners (EU) that have more expertise in organization management.
	There is a need for developing new strategies of establishing partnership in order to attract new and more partnerships with the private sector and the national governments. The philosophy of corporate social responsibility is very common in the region's private sector as it is rooted to the historically established practice of "Zakat". Therefore, CSAs can play a significant role and benefit a lot from the private sectors' CSRs' practices, if they know how to streamline their youth advocacy programs with the private sectors' fields of action.
	Young women CSAs require tailored technical support and capacity building so that they can better integrate international commitments into national development plans and strategies. Resources to facilitate the collection of sex-disaggregated statistics are also needed to monitor policy and programs implementation; and thus, gain a better sense of progress related to women's empowerment. Regional human rights organizations lack a substantial focus and thus could similarly benefit from training in gender instruments and analysis.

Gender Dimension	<p>Financial resources from donors could help support various regional projects, especially the implementation of pilot projects and the exchange of experiences and lessons from across the region. These kinds of services and capacity building training could be collaboratively designed and provided by the EU partners, given their expertise and historical precedence in this domain.</p> <p>Local and regional CSAs mechanisms should be established to compel national governments to implement SDGs 5 and 6 nationally and locally. Similar efforts are needed to translate CEDAW provisions and the Beijing Platform for Action into plans and strategies at the municipal level. Finally, more partnerships should be forged among various stakeholders in these debates in order to better coordinate efforts to promote gender equity and women's empowerment in the SN region.</p>
Mediating the New Agenda for the Mediterranean	<p>During MAJALAT Youth Thematic workshops, youth CSAs had repeatedly requested the EU partners to facilitate the participation of non-registered entities in the various EU funded projects and programs. The finding of the research also revealed that the restrictive political and regulatory environments in certain countries do not allow youth CSOs that work on sensitive topics (such as freedom of expression, religious freedom, fight against violence) to exist neither under registered or non-registered status. Therefore, the EU ought to put in place a mechanism that ensures the inclusion of new and small associations, and non-registered entities, especially in rural areas, and which neither meet the conditions of the call for projects and / or have the capacity to manage the EU complex calls for project, nor do they qualify or are willing to work under a legally recognized status due to the States' harassments and restrictive measures.</p> <p>Awareness also needs to be raised towards the non-registered entities (about 12% in the region) and their central role in responding to the needs of the youth as well as bridging the gaps created by the States' actors in the SN.</p> <p>Since the new Agenda is at the stage of designing action and implementation strategies and plans, the EU has now the power and opportunity to address all these fundamental concerns and turn them into concrete gains by incorporating corresponding and remedial measures in the implementation of the six action plans identified in the Agenda.</p> <p>The principal Goal of the New Agenda along with its Action Plan 2 clearly mention both "Youth" and "Civil society" as targets of the plan. Therefore, the EU must live up to the spirit of these promises and restore the regions' youth CSAs' trust in the EU partnership by; on one hand, maintaining clear and responsible discourse with the youth CSAs in the SN; On the other hand, designating a visible position for young people and youth CSAs in the structural dialogue in which young people and their representative bodies and youth regional networks and consortium; namely MAJALAT and similar</p>

Establishment of a youth space for dialogue mechanism	arrangements, as prominent interlocutors, advisors and, more importantly, designers of youth goals and working agendas that response to the direct needs of the youth.
	The EU must capitalize on the knowledge and expertise projects, such as MAJALAT, have accumulated in the field of youth work in SN; and build stronger and more sustainable cooperation with them. The fact that MAJALAT and its partners have been calling for institutionalizing a North-South Mediterranean youth dialogue, and launching a regional youth policy dialogue need to be foreseen in the implementation phase of action plan 2 of the new Agenda.
	A partial translation of Action Plan 2 in the New Agenda for the Mediterranean could be materialized through the launching a youth-tailored framework for the theme of youth and youth CSAs, with policy-dialogue oriented programs and projects. We believe that institutionalizing a regional dialogue and establishing a youth-oriented policy mechanism in partnerships with regional youth networks, such as MAJALAT consortium and similar entities, can pave the way for prioritizing the question of youth within a thematic framework, not just a sidewalk topic. As shown in the study, youth CSAs expressed recurring concerns about marginalizing the theme of youth in the actual interpretation of the new agenda. Therefore, the EU is invited to bring these actors on board of the debate over youth issues, and allocate them at least one-third representation share in the governing structure of the proposed policy mechanism.
	The efficiency of an established youth space for dialogue mechanism is contingent upon the roles and priorities it will allocate to the young people. Therefore, the structure and governing body of such a space must be built on an equitable tripartite dialogue which brings together: a) young people along with youth actors of south-Mediterranean, b) national government agencies of south-Mediterranean countries; and c) representatives of the European institutions.
	A space for youth dialogue will also be a bridge between the young people from two shores of the Mediterranean to network, collaborate, and exchange knowledge and expertise about myriad ranges of topics and questions of common concern to the youth and their respective communities and governments.

III.2. Action Plan: Conceptualization a specific Space for Youth Dialogue

Based on the outcome of the research and its generated recommendations, an action plan for designing and implementing a youth space for dialogue as a regional mechanism for the youth representatives and youth CSAs in the SN with national and European institutions is proposed. This mechanism shall be based on six main principles:

a) Legal Entity: the youth space for dialogue ought to be recognized as an independent non-governmental regional mechanism, recognized by the National Ministries of Youth of the SN countries.

b) Governances: the Governance of the space should be led by the youth representatives and the youth CSAs of all the southern neighborhood countries; these representatives could be nominated / elected by the national youth working groups, or the national youth agency, or the council in each country following an fix-dated national youth representatives general assembly. A steering committee shall also be designated to ensure the communication of the youth space for dialogues agenda to the national decision makers.

c) Structure: The space shall be a tripartite structure, composed of 1) youth representatives and youth CSAs, 2) national decision-maker representatives of the SN countries, and 3) representatives of the European Institutions. The presence of these three entities shall be mandatory in every discussions and debates that entail ratification of decisions.

d) Roles: The roles of the mechanism are twofold. One one hand, it shall ensure that the political and socio-economic, and environmental concerns, propositions along with participation of young people in the decision-making are taken into consideration. On the other hand, it will coordinate and disseminate the regional and national developments of specific life cycles of youth goals.

e) Agenda: the elected governing body of the space will task youth representatives and youth CSAs with developing and proposing specific life cycle youth goals that would culminate from formerly organized national and regional meetings and exchanges. The finalized agenda shall be discussed, finalized, and ratified by the tripartite structure. It shall reflect the voice of young people in the region and serve their needs with periodically specific goals and objectives, clear implementation agenda, and identified stakeholders; and in which the youth group will be active participants in forging its directives as well as priorities in a way that would have direct and imminent impacts on their livelihood.

f) Life-cycle: Life cycle shall define the lifespan of the youth goal as well as the mandate of the elected steering committee of the space. To ensure a democratic and inclusive participation of the youth in each country of the region, the mandated governing structure shall be renewed through general assembly elections, say, every three years.

While these principles are tentative and could be elaborated, adapted or replaced by more relevant ones, they represent starting ground for kicking off a debate about actualizing the youth space mechanism. Concerned stakeholders could also take into consideration already existing similar mechanisms such us the EU youth dialogue, discussed earlier in this report. There are also some existing mechanisms that operate at a smaller scale level, but could also be taken as inspiring cases, such as the Youth Sounding Board. This is an international

partnership that involves motivated young people from the Middle East, Africa, the Pacific, Europe and Latin America who aim at creating a real and fundamental change in how the EU engages with young people in the development cooperation. Important as it is, this cooperation remains limited in both scope and impacts, and does not focus mainly on the SN youth. However, we could build on their model as well as the EU youth dialogue model and design a context-tied model for youth space dialogue for the southern Mediterranean youth.

Conclusion

To conclude, young people in Southern Neighborhood are in rarely occurring appointment with history for the coming ten years, as an unprecedentedly large proportion of them will transition into their most productive years, opening up the potential for a demographic dividend – economic growth spurred by demographic changes, as stated the UNICEF MENA Generation 2030 Report. In order not to miss this appointment, national governments in the region have no other option but to joint synergies with the CSAs and private sectors nationally, internationally, and regionally, and devise responsive policies as well as tangible actions in order to respond to the pressing barriers facing the young. We are talking here about political and social instability, inequitable economic and social policies, and limited employment opportunities, which have worsened further during the year 2020. In this regard, youth CSAs can play a central role alongside national governments in helping young people achieve their full potential, which will return with societal benefits to the whole region. Therefore, more attention and support are needed from national and international government and private sectors in favor of youth CSAs.

At another level, youth CSAs have constructively involved themselves in socio-political development and change, peace building, peacemaking and conflict transformation during the last two decades. Their constructive involvements need to be instrumentalized in an officially recognized mechanism embodied within a multi-dimensional space dialogue within the socio-political context that young people create, shape and sustain. As actors and partners to this population segment, we need to ensure that all young people in the southern Mediterranean countries have access to their right to participate in democracy and this means removing barriers and creating equal opportunity: the same opportunities offered to their peers in the northern Mediterranean neighborhood. The European Union through its designated institutions can play a decisive role in actualizing and helping implement the proposed mechanism, especially in light of the promising Agenda of the Mediterranean (2021-2027), which allocates a discernible role and importance to the youth of the region.

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Appendix

Annex 1: Survey (English Version)

Link to online version: <https://forms.gle/1mA5fSZ6DNCf3C7x6>

1. Organization Status

Under what legal/institutional status is your organization registered?	
Civil Society organization/Association	
Civil Society Cooperative	
Trade Union	
Local non-governmental organization/association	
International non-governmental organization	
Un-registered body/organization/opinion	
Other, please specify	.....

2. Field of operations / expertise

What is the youth-related field of expertise of your organization?	
Education, training & capacity building	
Youth employment & job-market integration	
Youth political participation	
Youth social activism	
Youth & rule of law & individual freedom	
Youth mental & physical health	
Youth migration & mobility	
Youth & minority rights: gender, ethnicity & people with special needs	
Youth & digitization & digital transformation & media	
Youth environmental activism	
Youth activism, arts & culture	
Youth & Fight against radicalization and terrorism	
Other, please specify:	.....

3. Collaboration

Who are the main partners / collaborators of your organization's youth related projects?	
Young people	
Local community (citizens & volunteers)	
Local governments (institutions & administrations)	
Local non-governmental organizations/associations	
International governments (EU & European Commission)	
International non-governmental organizations/associations	
Local businesses & companies	
International businesses & companies	
Other, please specify:	.....

4. Challenges

What challenges does your organization face regarding its youth related projects?	
Complicated administrative bureaucracy	
Problem of the organization status (non-registered)	
Lack of governmental supports	
Lack of regulatory and protective policies	
Lack of local collaborations & partnerships	
Lack of international collaborations & partnerships	
Lack of interests among the youth	
Lack of funding	
Lack of community supports	
Lack of logistical and training of your organization's capacities	
Other, please specify:	.....

5. COVID-19 Impacts

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your organization's work, especially with regards to youth-oriented projects ?	
No impacts	
Local restrictions & lockdowns have parallelized our activities	
Lack of coordination with the official & governmental authorities	
Difficulties to reach out your beneficiaries	
Lack of funding & supports	
Difficulty to shift the priorities & difficulty to adjust your organization's services to the new emerging needs of the youth	
Lack of your organization's staffs capacities in dealing online & distance work	
Lack of logistical & information technological material has made it difficult to continue working from distance (online)	
Other, please specify:	.....

6. Surmounting COVID-19 challenges

How has your organization tried to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic impacts on your work, especially with regards to youth-oriented projects?	
Adapted the organization programs & projects for the youth to the new situation imposed by COVID-19 pandemic	
Shifted the priorities & adjusted your organization's services to the new emerging needs of the youth	
Developed new collaborations with local authorities on emerging services	
Developed new collaborations with other non-governmental youth organizations	
Developed new collaborations with local businesses & companies	
Provided capacity building training to the staff of your organization on digital and online work	
Nothing was done	
Other, please specify:	.....

6. Impacts of a new space for youth and youth actors' dialogues

Do you think that establishing a new space for youth and youth actors' dialogues with national and European institutions will have any positive impacts on:	
The work your organization tries to accomplish in benefit of the youth	
The future of the youth	
The relationship between your organization and the youth you work with	
The future collaborations between your organization and local government	
The future collaborations between your organization and local non governmental youth organizations / partners	
The future collaborations between your organization international youth organizations / partners	
The legal status of your organization	
Your organization's sources of funding & logistical supports	
The quality & quantity of the services your organization provide to the youth	
Other, please specify:	.....

Annex 2: Survey (French Version)

Lien pour la version online : <https://forms.gle/7BLzvFEYmZNbb6t3A>

1. Statut

Sous quel statut juridique / institutionnel votre organisation est-elle enregistrée?	
Association / Organisation (ONG)	
Coopérative de la société civile	
Syndicat	
ONG locale	
ONG internationale	
Non enregistré	
Autre, veuillez préciser?	.....

2. Domaines de travail

Dans quels domaines de travail liés à la jeunesse votre organisation travaille-t-elle?	
Éducation, formation et renforcement des capacités	
Jeunesse & Emploi et intégration dans le marché du travail	
Jeunesse & participation politique	
Jeunesse & activisme social	
Jeunesse & état de droit et liberté individuelle	
Jeunesse & santé (mentale & physique)	
Jeunesse & Migration & mobilité	
Jeunesse & Droits des minorités: genre, appartenance ethnique & personnes handicapées	
Jeunesse Digitalisation et transformation digitale et médias	
Jeunesse et environnement	
Jeunesse & arts et culture	
Jeunesse & Lutte contre la radicalisation et le terrorisme	
Autre, veuillez préciser?	.....

3. Collaboration

Qui sont les principaux partenaires / collaborateurs de votre organisation en ce qui concerne les projets liés à la jeunesse ?	
Les jeunes	
Communauté locale (citoyens et bénévoles)	
Gouvernements locaux (institutions et administrations)	
ONGs locales	
ONGs internationaux	
Gouvernements internationaux (EU & Commission européenne)	
Entreprises locales	
Entreprises internationales	
Autre, veuillez préciser?	.....

4. Défis

Quels sont les défis auxquels votre organisation est confrontée concernant les projets liés aux jeunes ?	

Complications liées à la bureaucratie administrative	
Problème du statut de l'organisation (non enregistré)	
Manque de soutien gouvernemental	
Absence de politiques réglementaires et protectrices	
Manque de collaborations et de partenariats locaux	
Manque de collaborations et de partenariats internationaux	
Manque d'intérêt chez les jeunes	
Manque de fonds	
Manque de soutien communautaire	
Manque de logistique et de formation des capacités de votre organisation	
Autre, veuillez préciser?	.....

5. Impacts du COVID-19

Comment la pandémie de COVID-19 a-t-elle eu un impact sur le travail de votre organisation, en particulier en ce qui concerne les projets axés sur les jeunes ?

Aucun impact	
Les mesures de restriction locales ont parallélisé nos activités	
Manque de coordination avec les autorités	
Difficultés à communiquer avec et à identifier les bénéficiaires potentiels	
Manque de financement et de soutien	
Difficulté à changer les priorités et à ajuster les services de votre organisation aux nouveaux besoins émergents des jeunes	
Manque de capacités du personnel de votre organisation à gérer le travail en ligne et à distance	
Manque / l'insuffisance de matériel technologique de logistique et d'information a rendu difficile la poursuite du travail à distance (en ligne)	
Autre, veuillez préciser?	.....

6. Surmonter les défis du COVID-19

Comment votre organisation a-t-elle essayé de surmonter les impacts de la pandémie de COVID-19 sur le travail, en particulier en ce qui concerne les projets axés sur les jeunes ?

Adaptations des programmes et projets pour les jeunes à la nouvelle situation imposée par la pandémie COVID-19	
Changements dans les priorités et ajusté les services de votre organisation aux nouveaux besoins émergents des jeunes	
Développement de nouvelles collaborations avec les autorités locales sur les services émergents	
Développement de nouvelles collaborations avec d'autres organisations non gouvernementales de jeunesse	
Développement de nouvelles collaborations avec des entreprises et entreprises locales	
Assurer une formation de renforcement des capacités au personnel de votre organisation sur le travail numérique et en ligne	
Rien n'a été fait	
Autre, veuillez préciser?	.....

7. Un nouvel espace de dialogue entre les jeunes et les acteurs de la jeunesse

Pensez-vous que la création d'un nouvel espace de dialogue entre les acteurs de la société civile pour les jeunes ainsi que les jeunes et avec les institutions nationales et européennes aura des effets positifs sur:

Le travail que votre organisation essaie d'accomplir au profit des jeunes	
La future des jeunes	
La relation entre votre organisation et les jeunes avec lesquels vous travaillez	
Les futures collaborations entre votre organisation et le gouvernement local	
Les collaborations futures entre votre organisation et autres ONGs locaux	
Les futures collaborations entre votre organisation et autres ONGs internationaux	
Le statut juridique de votre organisation	
Sources de financement et soutien logistique pour votre organisation	
La qualité et quantité des services que votre organisation fournit aux jeunes	
Autre, veuillez préciser?	.....

Annex 3: Interview (English Version)

Dear Participant:

These interview questions are part of a regional study undertaken by Réseau Euromed France (REF), and it seeks to analyze the dynamics of youth and youth civil society actors and organization in the Southern Mediterranean Region. Your participating in answering all the questions is highly appreciated. We assure you that the interview is anonymous and all your answers will be used solely for the purpose of the study

Thank you very much for your collaboration!

1. In what kind of projects/programs does your organization work with the youth?

.....

2.	What youth group categories does your organization target (students; young professionals; girls; young migrants; special needs youth? Others?)? And how important the question of gender to the youth projects of your organization?
.....	
3.	Under what social, political and financial conditions does your organization work? What does your organization do to overcome those challenges?
.....	
4.	Does your organization collaborate with other local, national and international youth organizations as well as governments? If so, could you give some examples?
.....	
5.	What strategies does your organization follow to establish new partnerships with local, national, and international NGOs and governments?
.....	
6.	What are the main challenges that face the work of your organization?
.....	
7.	What solutions do you suggest for facilitating the work of your organization in a way that could benefit the youth group you work for?
.....	
8.	How has COVID-19 pandemic affected the work of your organization?
.....	
9.	What alternatives has your organization resorted to in order to overcome the challenges COVID-19 has imposed on the work of your organization?
.....	
10.	How familiar are you with the EU renewed partnership with the South Mediterranean region (2021-2021)?
.....	
11.	Do you find that the EU renewed partnership unfolds promising future to livelihood of the South Mediterranean region youth and youth CSOs?
.....	
Link to the EU joint communication: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/joint_communication_renewed_partnership_southern_neighbourhood.pdf	
.....	
12.	Do you think that establishing a new space for youth and youth actors' dialogue with national and European institutions will create any positive impacts on the youth and the work of youth CSOs in your region? How?
.....	

Annex 4: Interview (French Version)

Chère/cher participant(e):

Ces questions d'entretien font partie d'une étude régionale menée par le Réseau Euromed France (REF), et vise à analyser la dynamique des jeunes et des jeunes acteurs et organisations de la société civile dans la région sud de la Méditerranée. Votre participation est nécessaire et appréciée. Nous vous assurons que l'entretien est anonyme et que toutes vos réponses seront utilisées uniquement aux fins de l'étude.

Merci beaucoup pour votre collaboration !

1.	Quels types de projets / programmes votre organisation mène-elle avec les jeunes ?
.....	
2.	Quel groupe de jeunes votre organisation cible-t-elle (étudiants, jeunes professionnels, filles, jeunes migrants, jeunes ayant des besoins spéciaux? Autres?)? et quelle est l'importance de la question du genre dans vos projets ?
.....	
3.	Dans quelles conditions sociales, politiques et financières votre organisation évolue-t-elle ? Que fait votre organisation pour surmonter ces défis?
.....	
4.	Votre organisation collabore-t-elle avec d'autres organisations de jeunesse locales, nationales et internationales ainsi qu'avec des gouvernements ? Si oui, pouvez-vous en nommer quelques-uns ?
.....	
5.	Quelles stratégies votre organisation adopte-t-elle pour établir de nouveaux partenariats avec des ONG et des gouvernements locaux, nationaux et internationaux ?
.....	
6.	Quels sont les principaux défis auxquels est confronté le travail de votre organisation ?
.....	
7.	Quelles solutions proposez-vous pour faciliter le travail de votre organisation d'une manière qui pourrait profiter au groupe de jeunes pour lequel vous travaillez ?
.....	
8.	Comment la pandémie du COVID-19 a-t-elle affecté le travail de votre organisation ?
.....	
9.	À quelles alternatives votre organisation a-t-elle eu recours pour surmonter les défis que le COVID-19 a imposés votre travail ?

10. Dans quelle mesure connaissez-vous le partenariat renouvelé de l'UE avec la région sud de la Méditerranée (2021-2027) ?

Communication conjointe sur un partenariat renouvelé avec le voisinage méridional, 9 février 2021

11. Pensez-vous que ce partenariat ouvre un avenir prometteur pour les jeunes et des OSCs de la région sud-méditerranéenne ?

12. Pensez-vous que la création d'un nouvel espace de dialogue entre les jeunes et les acteurs société civile et avec les institutions nationales et européennes aura un impact positif sur la jeunesse et le travail de la société civile dans votre région?

Annex 5: Interview Protocol

Dear Partners:

We are very pleased to invite you to take part on a regional research project on Youth and Youth CSOs in the South Mediterranean Region!

About the Research

Réseau Euromed France (REF), which is one of the six founding networks of MAJALAT Consortium, is undertaking a study on the dynamics of Youth and Youth Civil Society Actors and Organization in the Southern Mediterranean Region. The objectives of this regional research are twofold. First, it seeks to map out the current state of operations and pending challenges facing the youth and youth CS actors in the region. Second, the research aims at actualizing MAJALAT's previously developed recommendations by proposing a feasibly clear action plan for designing and implementing a space for youth and youth actors' dialogue with national and European institutions.

Your Participation

Knowing that your organization is very active nationally and regionally, REF believes that sharing your experience in and insights will be of great importance for the realization of the research's objectives. Therefore, we kindly invite you to a very short virtual interview.

Time & Modality of the Interview

We will be happy to accommodate the interview on any date and time of choice between 16th and 22nd May 2021, either via Zoom, WhatsApp or any other online platform you prefer; and it will be conducted by the project researcher, Mr. Abdeslam Badre.

Language of the Interview

We will be happy to conduct the interview with you in any of the three languages you choose: Arabic, French or English.

Anonymity

The interview will be anonymous, and neither your identity nor the identity of your organization will be revealed; and your input will be used solely for supporting the results of the research.

Contact Us:

Should you have any questions, you are welcome to contact either the researcher or the REF program officer:

- **REF Project Officer:** Ms. Nathalie Mehdi: n.mehdi@euromed-france.org / Tel: (+33) 1 48 37 07 73
- **Researcher:** Mr. Abdeslam Badre: a.badre@um5s.net.ma / +212621607314

Next Step

Should you accept our invitation, we kindly request you to communicate with us your date and time preference for the interview as well as your email address & WhatAspp Number, so that we proceed with arrangement of the interview. In case your time and conditions do not allow you to take the interview, we are sharing with you the interview questions which you can answer in writing, and send it back to Mr. Abdeslam Badre: a.badre@um5s.net.ma at your earlier convenience. Kindly see the interview questions attached for your consideration.

Thank you very much, in advance, for your time and kind contribution to this research project; and we look forward to interacting with you and receiving your feedback!

Sincerely

Research Team

About the Author



Abdeslam Badre is an expert of policy development and a professor of social sciences at Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco. His research focuses on youth, women and migration policy development; and it seeks to analyze current norms to generate evidence-based recommendations that could inform national and regional decision makers, providing comparable data across borders on key countries in MENA and Southern Mediterranean regions, while addressing the causes of entrenched marginalization. He has worked with a number of international organizations, including Fulbright; EU-JRC; ERASMUS+, InterAcademy Partnership (IAP); Konrad-Adenauer Foundation (KAS); Global Young Academy (GYA); Next Einstein Forum (NEF); African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS); Institute for

Cultural Diplomacy (ICD); ECSA Global; Arab Council for Social Sciences (ACSS); American Political Sciences Association (APSA); and EDU4U many among others on various projects. He also served visiting professor positions at Alfred University in New York, Monterey Institute for International Studies in California, University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill; Aalborg University in Denmark, Institute for Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin, and Babes Bolyai University in Romania. He is an Editor of Social Science Section for ELSAVIEER & Scientific African Journal. His recent publications include: North-South Economic Diplomacy: EU-Morocco Free Trade Negotiation (Germany November 2020); Enjeux Culturelles (Morocco, September 2020); Voices of Early Career Researchers in and out of the Academy: A Pan- African Perspective (coauthored book, Germany May 2020). He has been invited to collaborate with REF as an expert and researcher for MAJALAT project since 2020. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8582-2892>

Septembre 2021

