In need of a future: Causes and Consequences of high youth unemployment - the case of North Africa

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“Whereas universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice; And whereas conditions of labour exist involving such injustice hardship and privation to large numbers of people as to produce unrest so great that the peace and harmony of the world are imperilled.”

Preamble of the International Labour Organization Constitution 1919

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The world was taken by surprise when at the end of 2010 the suicide of a young Tunisian brought thousands of young people on to the streets of Tunis who all of a sudden started to call for their rights. All at once these people were willing to defend their rights and put an end to the regime that for years had been acting without having to face any major opposition – or rather, suppressing those who opposed them and keeping their people quiet. This Tunisian uprising was the starting point of what is now called the ‘Arab Spring’.

In January 2011 Egyptians, mainly the young from various backgrounds, started “their” revolution. Other Arab countries quickly followed including Syria, Yemen and Libya. Under this newly emerging pressure, the governments of other countries in the region immediately acted to improve the situation of young people in an attempt to avoid revolutionary developments and social up rise. Morocco for example implemented a new constitution that introduced more freedoms and gender equality. Constitutional changes were similarly approved by Jordan’s King Abdallah. Meanwhile other countries in the region used violence and power to try to suppress those who opposed their regime.¹

Why did the Arab Spring happen now? Why are young people in the region suddenly speaking out and defending their rights, even with their lives? Why did two particular countries embark on a revolution in North Africa? The answers to these questions are manifold within many contributing factors. But one common feature in the Arab world and particularly in North Africa is that young people’s futures looked increasingly grim with decent job opportunities being (and continue to be) very limited.

This article tries to make the case that a bleak looking future frustrated young people and triggered the revolutions and uprisings in North Africa and other regions. Part of this frustration is due to the lack of decent work opportunities for young people. Despite the fact that today’s young people received more education than their parents and grandparents, job opportunities remain limited and their chances to live an economically independent life are very small. It is argued in the article that having a decent job is important because it not only ensures economic independence, it also provides personal satisfaction and allows for a life in dignity and freedom. Finally the article argues that labour markets that are well organized provide space through social dialogue for people to express their opinion and act as socially responsible people which in turn minimizes the risk of violent social uprises.

Chapter 2: The labour market situation of young people in North Africa

In the past two decades, the region of North Africa has seen considerable progress in some human development indicators. Education and health have vastly improved, and extreme poverty has declined. Despite these progresses, some challenges remain, most importantly inequality and exclusion. Gender discrimination, disparities in economic development within countries, and unequal access to services

¹ This wave, however, did not stop at the boarders of the Arab world. 2011 saw young people in Spain demonstrating for their rights, England had to cope with a wave of violence, and in Chile and Bangladesh young people went on the street fighting for their right for free education.
and education are all expressions of this. The challenges of both increasing inequality and continuous exclusion were amongst the driving forces behind the demonstrations in the streets of all countries in the region, most importantly in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. Besides these issues, limited freedom, lack of social justice, undemocratic regimes, weak civil society, and the lack of transparent decision processes were claimed to be missing, turning societies into places people did not feel safe and good to live in. In one way or another, many of the deficiencies in these societies are related to labour markets and the limited access to, and availability of, decent work for many people, particularly young people, in the region. Therefore addressing labour market issues through the provision of decent jobs can help to respond to the aspirations of people and will add to building the basis for democratic, peaceful regimes.

What are the challenges faced by labour markets in the region, and why are they so persistent? At least before the financial and economic crisis, most countries in the region saw solid growth rates and successful economic reform processes in some areas. But this growth did not translate into enough job creation and the type of jobs created where often low productivity jobs which for the increasing share of well educated young people did not provide a real option. In addition, contrary to global population trends, the share of young people in the North Africa has actually significantly grown in the past few decades. Since 1990 employment growth in the region has failed to keep up with the working age population, making it increasingly difficult for young people to find a decent job.

Looking at some labour market indicators indicates the magnitude of the challenges:

- **Low employment-to-population ratios and high unemployment rates especially for young people and women and across all levels of education**

Youth in the Middle East and North African region currently face the highest unemployment rates in the world at 23.6 percent for young people. General levels of unemployment are also high in the region (9.8 per cent in 2010), especially for women (15 per cent). You are considered to be unemployed if you do not have a job but are looking for one. If you are not searching, and you do not have a job, you are outside the labour force (which is also called being economically inactive). Having these definitions in mind, the high unemployment rates for women and youth are particularly worrisome given that they have low labour force participation rates (36.5 per cent for young people and 28 per cent for females). This means that even though very few young people and women are looking for a job they find it hard to get one. Young people’s risk to be unemployed is four times higher than adults’ risk.

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2 It is widely recognized that labour market challenges in the region are structural in nature rather than cyclical. However, with the ongoing political transformation processes that will hopefully lay the ground for finding solutions in the future, the destruction of production sites, the damage done to infrastructure especially in the case of Libya, the losses following serious disruptions in production and exports that are still ongoing, stock market turbulences, capital flights, as well as migration flows caused through the changes could will very likely lead to further deterioration of the situation on labour markets in the short run.

Unemployment appears across all income groups. Given that educational levels and income per household are closely linked, it also indicates that those who are highly educated are affected by unemployment just as much as those who with lower levels of education – a phenomenon which is unique in the world. In some countries in the region, unemployment amongst the high skilled is even higher than those of the lower skilled.

Taking the high unemployment rates together with the low participation rates one finds that North Africa has one of the lowest employment-to-population ratios in the world. Employment-to-population ratios\(^4\) are a good indicator on how effective a country uses its productive potential. The overall ratio stood at 46.6 per cent in 2010 (compared to a world average of 61.1 per cent). This means that out of 100 people that could potentially work, not even half of them do so. And even though some of the non-working people might be engaged in education, this share is still too high and creates an unnaturally high employment dependency ratio, where too many people without work depend on very few people with a job.

- **Insufficient number of high quality jobs and the link to the limited growth in productivity**

Unemployment is one of the best known indicators and is often referred to as the main indicator for the analysis of labour markets. However, it is only the tip of the iceberg as many people who have a job do

\(^4\) The employment-to-population ratio represents the share of people at working who actually work.
not have a good job – or what the international community calls a decent job (see box on decent jobs). The informal economy has been quickly expanding in recent years. It expanded as a result of limited job opportunities in the public and private formal sectors. The informal economy is characterized through its existence outside of regulated and legal formal work, and thus is mainly characterized by poor job quality, no benefits or social protection, no social dialogue and low wages.

More than four out of ten people working in North Africa in 2009 had a vulnerable job which means that they were working either as own-account workers or as unpaid contributing family workers. In all countries in North Africa the share of vulnerable workers is considerably higher for women than for men. Wage and salary work – the type of job with a higher likelihood of being decent and being found in the formal sector – has not increased considerably over time. This lack of good quality jobs is one of the reasons why so many people are still poor, despite the fact that they work. This is reflected in the high share of the working poor who earn less than two US Dollars a day, which account for 40 per cent of the total population. Although these people are working, they are not able to escape poverty. Most of these people who despite their work live with their families in poverty work in the informal economy, far removed from decent and productive employment.

**Decent jobs**

The 87th Session of the *International Labour Conference* defined decent work as “opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity”. A person with a decent job would earn enough to live with his or her family outside of poverty, would be part of a social protection system to be protected in times of economic insecurity, their basic labour rights would be respected at the workplace, and they would have a voice at work. It is the conviction of the International Labour Organization and the international community as a whole that only through the provision of such opportunities to all, poverty can be decreased permanently.

In absolute numbers, the challenge of vulnerable employment far outreaches the number of unemployment in North Africa, with roughly 30 million people in vulnerable employment and 8.5 million unemployed. This shows again that a focus on unemployment alone would not cover the whole extend of the decent work deficit.

One of the reasons behind the high and increasing level of low quality jobs is the lack of increases of productivity. The increase in productivity levels (measured as output per worker employed based on how much each worker on average produces during one year) has been minimal in recent years in the
region, especially when compared to other regions in the world. Also the starting level has been relatively low (see figure 2a and b).

Increases in productivity in the region are usually achieved through investments in technology, often accompanied by shedding of labour. Increasing productivity through better working conditions has seldom been the path taken in the region which fails to provide organizational innovations, pro-workers policies and practices, respect for workers’ rights, an improved and enabling environment for sustainable enterprises, gender equality, social dialogue and fundamental investments in health and physical infrastructure. Also, achievements in education across the countries have not led to satisfactory growth in productivity. Low productivity growth is particularly ominous because it is productivity growth that provides the possibility for improved wages and living standards.

**Figure 2a:** Productivity levels measured as output (in total US Dollars) per person employed, world regions 2000 to 2010

![Productivity levels graph](image)

**Figure 2b:** Productivity index, 2000=100

![Productivity index graph](image)
Using an index means that one pretends that in the base year (here 2000) all regions had the same level of productivity. The lines then show, which region saw the fastest growth. East Asia for example more than doubled what each worker produced, whereas North Africa saw almost no increase.

**High share of government jobs at all education levels**

A long standing feature in North Africa is the role of the public sector in job creation. The government is seen as the employer of first choice as well as that of last resort, mainly due to its job stability, non-wage benefits and stronger implementation of labour laws in the workplace. In several countries in the region during the early 1990s the public sector witnessed some downsizing as a result of public sector reforms and policies to encourage privatization and to support private sector development. Nevertheless, young people continue to queue for government jobs. Despite the private sector being the growing job engine in the region, young people are still not convinced about the attractiveness of the private sector even in cases where the private sector is paying higher wages and providing additional social security. This is even more the case for women than for men.

**Slow structural shifts**

Traditional economic theory foresees that during their development process countries move from agriculture as the main source of production to manufacturing, and after that to the service sector. Labour force movements of course reflect this pattern and also this change goes hand in hand with increasing productivity levels and income levels. However, in recent centuries, this model of change does not reflect the reality in many countries, and especially not in North Africa. Here, sectoral shifts have been relatively small in the recent past. Agriculture continues to play a strong role, accounting for almost one third of all employed people in 2009. The largest sector is the service sector which accounts for almost 50 per cent of overall employment. For the majority of countries working in this sector is not at all a guarantee for decent employment as many jobs here are of very poor quality combined with low salaries. Many jobs in the tourism sector and domestic work, for example, are in the informal economy which is outside the sphere of regulated and protected employment. Also, other service sector jobs such as teaching, nursing and other education and healthcare jobs are very poorly paid compared to international standards. Given that these jobs are predominately occupied by women this becomes another area of discrimination.

**Non-conducive environment for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises**

Creating their own business is often the only option young people are left with. But it is also too often not a feasible option. In all countries in the region the entrepreneurship culture is very weak. Also, governments do not ensure a very conducive business environment. In addition, most young people in the region do not have the skills to open a business because the education system fails to provide them with the necessary knowledge to do so. Creating a business is considered risky because of the difficulties most entrepreneurs face in obtaining credits and being able to pay them back. Gaining access to finance is also a major obstacle, with most crediting institutions often reluctant to provide loans to small and
medium sized firms of young people. In addition many young people are not able to provide the guarantees that are needed to get financing. Finally, the cost of starting up a business in the MENA region in compliance with official requirements is estimated to be 6.4 times greater than in OECD countries.

- **Labour legislation not in accordance with ILO international labour standards and/or international labour standards are not implemented**

Since 1919, the International Labour Organization has maintained and developed a system of international labour standards aimed at promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity. In today's globalized economy, international labour standards are an essential component in the international framework for ensuring that growth of the global economy provides benefits to all. Starting with only a few, the international labour standards have grown into a comprehensive system of instruments on work and social policy, backed by a supervisory system designed to address all sorts of problems in their application at the national level.

Labour codes and labour legislation in the region are often not in accordance with ILO labour standards which can explain some of the labour market deficiencies observed. Ratification of ILO labour standards has been very slow and implementation is sometimes weak. This is particularly the case for those labour standards relating to social dialogue, social protection systems, labour market governance and employment policy. Problems with implementing these standards have been accentuated in the region by the financial crisis and halted altogether by a subsequent freeze in application due to uprisings in some countries. The fallout had most likely a strong impact on workers whose rights are most precarious or vulnerable, such as women, youth, migrant workers, the disabled and others.

- **Limited social protection**

Social protection schemes (including social security, (social assistance as well as social insurances), wages, working conditions, and occupational safety and health regulations) exist in all countries in the region in different forms and with different scopes. The level is much higher than in the rest of Africa (especially regarding working conditions and occupational safety and health conditions in the Maghreb countries) and progress has been observed in the past years – one of the primary reasons behind the improved human development indicators in the region. One of the main challenges which remains is that often social protection does not cover the most vulnerable to an extent that they are in a position to escape their vulnerable situation. Young people often fall down the crack of social protection schemes as the assumption is made that their parents will continue to look after them, which they often cannot.

Regarding social security, the region of North Africa spends around 11 per cent of GDP on social security, the third highest share of GDP of all world regions (excluding spending on health security systems which is relatively small compared to other regions with 2.5 per cent of GDP). However, the challenges are particularly high for social security schemes as a result of the political transformation process but also as a result of demographic developments: the demands on the systems have increased to a level that systems risk being overburdened. Besides this, social security in the North African region faces a series
of other common concerns, including the increased migration of workers, the expansion of informal economies, the future of health-care coverage, governance, investment strategies and fiscal space limitations, especially in the “revolution” countries of Egypt and Tunisia.

One important part of social protection is wages. Wages only increase when productivity increases. Given the low increases in productivity, there has been very little room for wage increases in the past decade in all of the countries where data is available. As mentioned above, most of the jobs created were in the informal economy, where wages are too low to even guarantee that workers and their families can live outside of poverty. Wage gaps between men and women are also observed in all countries. This disparity between wage earnings of men and women is another indication that women are discriminated against in employment in these countries. Minimum wage legislation exists in most countries but is only implemented in Tunisia. In Egypt - prior to the revolution - due to a court decision, the minimum wage was increased after 25 years of being far below a level that would ensure people to live outside of poverty. A serious increase of the minimum wage took place after the revolution but so far implementation of the new minimum wage has not taken place.

- **Mismanaged migration flows**
  Migration in the region could offer possibilities for many young people who are unable to find jobs in their homeland and wish to offer their potential in another country. However this opportunity is often not used or when used leads to unfortunate situations for the migrants. Many migrants end up with poor quality jobs, no social protection and no respect for their rights. This is mainly the result of bad management of migration policies and management systems.

- **Weak performance of public employment services, absence of a regulated framework for private employment agencies and lack of effective labour market programmes**
  In Western systems there are a set of institutions that help people to find jobs, in case they do not manage themselves. Such employment services and employment programmes are an important part of the strategies of these countries to especially handle the most vulnerable parts of their societies. This system is not effective in North Africa. Public employment services are chronically understaffed and do not have the means and the knowledge to provide good services. Having an insufficient matching system increases the difficulties for people to find jobs and for employers to find good workers. The absence of a regulatory framework for private employment services increases on the one hand the risk of abuses and fraudulent practices. On the other hand it unnecessarily limits the labour market intermediation to underperforming private services and to informal networks. Other active labour market policies⁵ exist mainly on paper, but their implementation remains weak. This adds to another level of frustration as young people get informed about all these measures but cannot profit from them in the end.

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⁵ Active labour market policies are government programmes that get involved in the labour market to assist the unemployed in finding work. Active labour market policies typically include public employment services, training schemes, and employment subsidies.
• Limited existence of solid analysis of labour markets and of labour market policies

The ability to design effective labour market policies greatly suffers from the fact that very little information is actually available, making the analysis of labour markets very difficult in the region. Governments, workers, employers and the wider public simply have no information about what is happening in labour markets, and what measures have or have not worked in the past. This is why policies are often not based on facts. It is more of a trial and error process, most of the time ending as an expensive failure.

Chapter 3: The linkages between the lack of decent employment opportunities and social upraises

“Frustration is an emotion that occurs in situations where a person is blocked from reaching a desired outcome. In general, whenever we reach one of our goals, we feel pleased and whenever we are prevented from reaching our goals, we may succumb to frustration and feel irritable, annoyed and angry. Typically, the more important the goal, the greater the frustration and resultant anger or loss of confidence.”

http://www.psychologistanywhereanytime.com/emotional_problems_psychologist/pyschologist_frustration.htm

Can the point be made that the lack of decent employment opportunities identified above drives young people into frustration? And does this frustration potentially lead to social unrest? For the first question, the answer is certainly yes. Not finding a decent job frustrates you, especially when you are willing to work and when you have invested heavily into your education. Having analyzed the labour market situation in detail above, one must assume that the level of frustration amongst young people is extremely high as they have so few options to find a decent job.

For the second question, the answer is not so straightforward. There are countries with small decent work deficits in the world but still young people are protesting as they for example lack social acceptance, and representation. And there are many countries in the world (and even in the region) where enormous decent work deficits exist, and still people do not protest. Egypt, Tunisia and Libya were such countries for a long period of time. The most remarkable example for the fact that the lack of decent work does not necessarily lead into protests is the one of women in the region. As shown above, their labour market situation is much worse than the situation of men, still they did not dominate the protests and in the aftermath of the revolution, their protests have become even less articulated. Of course cultural norms and roles play an important role in this, aside other additional factors.

It is hence obvious that it is indeed not the case that the lack of decent work opportunities alone would automatically start protests, and it would usually entail a combination of factors. In Egypt for example, the use of modern communication techniques to organize the protests was something that helped the revolution by turning what was originally a spark into a prairie fire⁶, which in the end made it so

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⁶ For details see Arne Klau, Socio-economic ripple effects, in Al-Ahram online, No 1039 2011.
effective. People in the streets were mainly calling for a change in the political regime and political practices, but the call for good jobs followed immediately after this. The lack of decent work can certainly become one important part of the set of catalysts especially at this point in time when young people face a more challenging future than their parents. In recent years young people in the region had to increasingly realize the financial struggles ahead of them. With the increasing costs of marriage, education, food and property, it is highly unlikely that the current generation of young people will be able to financially provide for their children at the same level that their parents were able to. As a result of increasing prices and poor wages, many young people face the inability to maintain their living standards, and will inevitably have to drop in socio-economic status. It is evident for these young people that a decent job is the only way out of their situation, which is why the call for such a job became so strong.

Chapter 4: The role of education, participation and social dialogue

“Frustration is not necessarily bad since it can be a useful indicator of the problems in a person's life and, as a result, it can act as a motivator to change. However, when it results in anger, irritability, stress, resentment, depression, or a spiral downward where we have a feeling of resignation or giving up, frustration can be destructive.”

http://www.psychologistanywhereanytime.com/emotional_problems_psychologist/pyschologist_frustration.htm

The maturing of North Africa’s age structure has placed the region in a unique position at the beginning of the 21st century. Between 1990 and 2020, the growth of the economically active population (ages 15-64) will exceed that of the economically dependent population by a much greater amount than in any other region. This so-called demographic gift provides the region with an opportunity to accelerate economic growth.

This window of opportunity is even more important, given that the young generation is the best educated ever. Primary education is now almost completely universal in the region; enrollment gaps between girls and boys in secondary school have nearly diminished and; higher education rates are on a steady increase. But as we have seen, because of the lack of decent jobs, this opportunity is turning into a burden, with a smaller share of older people having to support the increasing share of young people who do not find a job, leading to an increasing share of young people becoming more frustrated. This is also happening after the older generation has heavily invested into the education of this younger generation in the strong believe that education would pay off. Across all countries in the region, such a

A key milestone in young people's lives in North Africa is marriage. Marriage is seen as the transition when one enters adulthood and is able to form one's own family. With cultural norms making it inappropriate for single people to live on their own, marriage symbolizes a great independence. Due to economic hardships in the MENA region as a whole and in North Africa in particular, it has been increasingly difficult for young people to get married due to the financial burdens associated with a wedding, bride's jewelry, dowry, housing, and furniture. This added to their frustration.
pay off was not the case. Again, there are many factors involved in the low educational returns of the region, but one of the most important is the quality of education provided through the education systems.

There is a large discrepancy regarding the quality of education in countries of North Africa. However, in all countries the most common complaint is that at all levels of education, including vocational and technical education, the type of knowledge and skills needed in competitive labour markets is not produced. Also, diplomas are often not recognized internationally which makes migration rather difficult, especially for highly educated young people. Across the region, employers often identified the lack of the right skills as a barrier to expanding business and employment, however, this level of concern did not appear to be matched by a similar level of commitment to provide on-the-job learning opportunities. The region continues to have the lowest incidence of formal training in the workplace.

Vocational training in the region was already at significantly lower shares if compared to secondary education. Of young people enrolled in education, vocational training is currently only attended by 27 per cent of students in Egypt, 22 per cent in Libya, 12 per cent in Algeria, 8 per cent in Tunisia, and 6 per cent in Morocco. The relatively large share of academic secondary education reflects social preferences for academic pathways but also indicates the low quality of vocational training. In addition, high education institutions continue to prepare young people for government careers, not teaching them subjects that the private sector seeks such as excellent language skills and IT skills. One has to keep in mind though, that most countries in the region see many young people migrate, which is an indication that their skills are good enough for other labour markets but not for those at home. Finally, education systems at all levels do not prepare their students with any type of soft skills, such as team work, presentation skills, etc. However, these are the skills strongly needed in modern labour markets.

Adding to the frustration of the education system, an additional trigger of the revolutions and uprisings is the lack of opportunities to freely express your opinion. As explained above, decent work contains the important component of social dialogue. Social dialogue means that you have the right to express your opinion, and that you have the right to negotiate with your employer your working conditions in a process of dialogue – not fighting. It is through this social dialogue that workers and employers can come to commonly accepted solutions regarding challenges in the workplace. Being heard and recognized in such a way contributes to one’s feeling of dignity and reduces the likelihood of frustration. But it is not only a win for the worker, the employer also profits from such dialogue as it will increase the productivity of the workforce and have a positive impact on the investment climate in the long run.

Social dialogue, based on freedom of association and collective bargaining, is under strong investigation in most countries in the region and is (or at least was prior to the revolutions) very weak. Even though all countries in North Africa have ratified all or at least some conventions relating to social dialogue, freedom of association and collective bargaining, implementation and enforcement is often lacking. The right to organize was in the past exposed to several violations as sometimes employers reject the principle of negotiation. In these cases trade union activists risk being harassed and even sued. In all countries in the past, some Workers and Employers organisations – usually the most influential - were close to the governments. Social dialogue is still today often largely limited and not practiced on a
regular, institutionalized basis. Governments in the past often tried to limit social dialogue and restrict it to negotiations on salary or working condition demands with little regards to larger socio-economic development goals and other issues such as employment, education and the state’s relationship with society and the economy. Young people and women were almost entirely excluded from social dialogue and had thereby no impact on their work life or in shaping their country.

The situation regarding social dialogue has dramatically changed since the revolution in both Egypt and Tunisia. In the case of Egypt the old state trade union no longer exists, and independent trade unions are being formed. However, the case of Egypt shows clearly that social dialogue, if not embedded in the tradition and culture of a country, is something that needs to be learned. The pure will to have an independent trade union does not mean that you automatically create social dialogue. Many of these young trade unions turned to the ILO for assistance on how to form such unions, but more importantly, how to communicate with employers and governments, how to solve conflicts, and how to reach out, etc. Of course, these unions also need to build their knowledge-base to better understand how labour markets function, and what can be done to create decent jobs, etc. Such knowledge also needs to be built on the employers’ and also at the government side. Only if all three social partners have such a basis, a balanced dialogue can take place. This is of course not a process that can be achieved over night, but without this building of balanced and equally capable and strong forces, social dialogue will not be possible, which means social stability too will not be possible. This is also a process, which in the future needs to be embedded in education systems. Students Unions, more emphasis on participatory teaching methodologies, more respect for students’ concerns need to become an essential part of all curricula across all levels of education. It will finally be important that social dialogue does not only function for the formal sector. It is just as crucial to develop dialogue mechanisms within the informal economy, as otherwise the likelihood of this part of the society to start fighting for their rights will increase — and they are much larger in number.

Chapter 5: Perspectives ahead

As argued above, building social dialogue is a process that will take some time. Although it will not solve all problems, it continues to be part of the parcel towards the development of democracy, freedom and dignity of people. Likewise, the labour market is also only a piece of the puzzle. If economies do not create jobs for the huge cohort of young people entering labour markets, even the best social dialogue will not help to decrease frustration. Also other factors need to be corrected: Quality education needs to

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8 Comparing the situation in the Maghreb countries (excluding Libya) to the situation in Egypt clearly shows differences regarding the role of social dialogue. The Maghreb countries were strongly influenced by the French system of social dialogue. Laws derived from the French legislation guarantee the right to organize, to strike and to negotiation. In Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, trade unions therefore had some more independence that enabled them to play a fundamental role in the battle against the occupation and after that in the building of State institutions and labour legislation whereby basic rights for workers were ensured. Also, Employers’ organizations are relatively developed and active. Maghreb Countries ratified the convention 87 & 98, except for Morocco that did not ratify convention 87 but intends to do so soon.
be made available for more young people, social protection systems that reach out to all need to be established, youth participation at all levels of social life needs to be ensured, and respect towards international labour standards needs to become an automatically respected part in labour legislation and labour contracts. A good set of labour market policies and labour market institutions can help to bring more young people into good jobs.

Governments alone will not be able to tackle the challenge. The international community has to assist countries in creating decent employment opportunities for young people through technical assistance but also through moral as well as financial assistance. Most importantly, the international community has to watch carefully that the process of democratization will continue. Should a return to old structures take place, this would put an end to efforts carried out by young people in the region to move forward by raising their voices and concerns, and demonstrating that there is a solution to end their frustration: decent work opportunities.