



## Youth Involvement in social and civil dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region

This background paper is the basis for the preparation of the participants of the 1st study group meeting, especially for the workshop part. The focus of the paper will be on youth participation in social and civil dialogue in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood (Southern and Eastern Mediterranean). The examples of social and civil dialogue structures in the EU Member States serve as important input for the analysis of this topic. However, the focus of the opinion is on the southern and eastern Mediterranean region.

### **1. Relevant current challenges in the Mediterranean region**

The Euro-Mediterranean region faces a number of challenges, including the climate crisis, high unemployment (particularly among young people), as well as a just-, digital- and energy transition to a sustainable and inclusive economy.

In 2021, the European Union adopted a new strategy for the cooperation with the Southern Neighbourhood in form of the joint statement "[New Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A New Agenda for the Mediterranean](#)". This joint statement forms the backbone of the partnership and focuses on the rule of law, human and fundamental rights, equality, democracy and good governance as cornerstone of inclusive and prosperous societies. Moreover, the strategy focuses on young people, women and disadvantaged groups and highlights the importance of civil society organisations and social partners.

The new agenda highlights the importance of an empowered youth as well as the strong involvement of social partners and civil society organisations in laying the foundations for decent jobs, respect for social and workers' rights, fair and inclusive growth and long-term sustainability.

Regarding education and the economic situation of young people the region suffers from school dropouts, brain drain, high numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), skills mismatches, lack of opportunities, high activities in the informal economy, high and persistent unemployment (particularly among university graduates) and the poor efficiency and insufficient investment in technical vocational education and training (TVET).

The region is one, which suffers the most under the impact of climate change. The development of vocational trainings and education programs that allow a rapid and effective up/reskilling to cope with environmental changes are crucial. (REX/540 + 5<sup>th</sup> UfM Social Dialogue Forum)

Regarding the digital transition, the region faces challenges like new forms of work (especially platform work), lacking digital literacy and potential inaccessibility to adequate technology.

The Union for the Mediterranean's (UfM) [5<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Declaration on Employment and Labour](#) from 2022 sets a focus on the employment and employability of the most vulnerable groups, especially among youth and women. Furthermore, the ministers promote social dialogue, both tripartite and bipartite, freedom of association and collective bargaining - including the involvement of social partners in the design, implementation and monitoring of economic and social policies and highlight the importance of the civil society.

The ILO study: [Trade, investment and employment in the Southern Mediterranean Countries – Thematic Report of the “Mainstreaming Employment into Trade and Investment in the Southern Neighbourhood” project](#) is an extensive analysis of the socio-economic situation in the Southern Mediterranean Neighbourhood.

The analysis concludes that, overall, economic growth in the region has been lower than its potential over the past decade. The Southern Mediterranean Countries' labour market outcomes are characterized by a low labour force participation rate, especially for women and youth, high levels of unemployment and informality, and low levels of quality job creation. Moreover, the female labour force participation rate is one of the lowest globally, on average lower than other countries within the same or a lower income category. Similarly, for youth (15–29 years), the labour force participation rate is much lower than the rate for their older peers. The significant share of women and youth not participating in economic activities and not looking to be economically active hints at the difficulties that women and youth face to participate fully in their countries' economies.

Youth in the Southern Mediterranean Countries struggle to secure quality jobs and develop their economic potential. The labour force participation rate in the region is lower than 40 per cent for youth and the region suffers from relatively high shares of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET). Youth unemployment rates in the region are one of the highest globally. The unemployment rate has increased with the increase in levels of educational attainment, suggesting significant skill mismatches in the countries in the region. Unemployment has increased in particular for graduates and educated youth in the region, including for Tunisia and Jordan. The tertiary graduates' unemployment is particularly problematic for the region indicating low returns of investment in education which might influence future generations' choices. Graduate unemployment reflects the absence of structural transformation and therefore the incapacity of the economies to create quality jobs for its educated youth. The high levels of youth unemployment and the lack of economic dynamism led to significant migration, including an undocumented one, and brain drain levels in most countries in the region. The share of highly skilled individuals among the migrant population has increased in these countries, reaching 20 per cent among migrant youth in 2017, suggesting a brain drain.

### **1.1 Current challenges in the Mediterranean region from a youth perspective**

The youth in the Southern Mediterranean is facing multiple challenges. The paper from Leonie Backeberg & Jochen Tholen (2017): “The frustrated generation youth exclusion in Arab Mediterranean societies” published in the Journal of Youth Studies, analyses the insecurities and the lack of opportunities that have kept young people from becoming independent and being full, active, and integrated members of society; a process commonly referred to as social exclusion. Focusing on three interlinked types of exclusion the paper gives some insights about the processes that challenge the youth in Arab Mediterranean countries.

#### 1) Economic Exclusion:

In the dominant Public Sector with the most employment, predominantly seniors hold positions. Therefore, young people are denied access, this leads to employment in the informal sector. The informal sector is very significant in Southern Mediterranean. This kind of employment, while often being the only possibility for any work is a vulnerable type of employment without any social security services and no representation through workers representatives (social dialogue). The high formal female unemployment rate is especially problematic and seems to be a structural problem in the region. The reasons for that are among others the strictly segmented labour market, limited mobility of female workers and the unwillingness of companies to compensate maternity leave.

#### 2) Exclusion from social services:

With high rates of informal employment, the access to social security services in the region is very limited. As social security was historically provided by family structures, through the rural exodus and fast urbanisation, the current system of state are insufficient to cover social security (excepting countries with high access to raw materials like Algeria). The establishment of efficient state protection system is needed.

#### 3) Exclusion from civil/political life:

Most regional policy regimes characterized by lack of transparency, weak judiciary, powerful security apparatus and lack of opportunities to influence political decision-making. This leads to low confidence in political institutions, employers, education and legal system resulting in the exclusion of youth from political life.

According to SAHWE Youth Survey 2016 the biggest problems perceived are jobs, people’s standard of living and economic situation.

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## **Questions for the workshop:**

- (1) What are the main challenges faced by the youth of the Euro-Mediterranean region when they try to get involved in the existing social dialogue structures?
- (2) What are the main challenges faced by the youth of the Euro-Mediterranean region when they try to get involved in the existing civil dialogue structures?

## **2. Social and civil dialogue**

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

### **2.1 Social Dialogue**

#### Definition of social dialogue

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

Social dialogue plays a key role in shaping economic, labour and social policies that promote the upward convergence of living and working conditions and can be a beneficial tool to drive economic and social resilience, competitiveness, and sustainable and inclusive growth as underlined in opinion [SOC/764 – Strengthening social dialogue](#). The main objectives of social dialogue are to discuss important economic and social issues, to encourage good governance, to boost economic progress and to maintain social and industrial peace, by establishing balanced power relations between employees and employers.

Social Dialogue helps in this connection by promoting consensus building and democratic involvement. It is notable that, Social Dialogue is not a “right”, but a process that takes place when fundamental rights to organise and collectively bargain are exercised, like Article 12 “Freedom of assembly and of association” and Article 28 “Right of collective bargaining and action” of the Charter of Fundamental rights of the EU.

One of the main functions of social dialogue, notably collective bargaining, is to contribute to shaping the business environment and managing changes in working life, by providing information, anticipation, participation and facilitation to build up mutual trust between social partners.

### 2.1.1 Social Dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region

This chapter shall focus on different models of social dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region and give examples of best practises, as well as cover some examples and challenges of the current systems in the southern Mediterranean countries.

Common characteristic for EU countries with strong social dialogue and high collective bargaining coverage are on one hand the dominance of sectoral collective bargaining agreements and on the other hand the effective recognition of the role of social partners by the state through the institutional inclusion in policy making.

Currently, eight EU countries are reaching a collective bargaining coverage of over 80%.

Among those, two different systems are predominant:

- The **Ghent-system** in Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden) and Belgium, which relies on state-subsidised voluntary unemployment insurance administered by unions, which serve as a strong incentive to join unions and strengthens social dialogue.
- And, the **Chamber system** in Austria with the second highest collective bargaining coverage of 98%. This system relies on the compulsory membership of all companies in the Chamber of Economy ensuring that all sectoral agreements signed by the Chamber cover all employees.

According to the European Commission's communication "[strengthening social dialogue](#)", the promotion of the international social dialogue is a core objective for the EU. Projects South Med Social Dialogue [SOLiD](#), which is now in its second phase (SOLiD II) are fundamental to build an inclusive and structured Social Dialogue in the Southern Mediterranean neighbourhood.

There two main representatives on the international level in the Mediterranean region regarding social dialogue:

- [BUSINESSMED](#) is the main regional representative of the Private Sector that reflects the interest of 25 Confederations of Enterprises from States members of the Union for the Mediterranean - UfM.
- The Arab Trade Union Confederation (ATUC) is representing workers' interests in the region. Its main objectives include:
  - (a) Defending the rights and interests of the Arab working class and its trade union movement;
  - (b) Securing the right to work; creating equal opportunities for all Arab workers;
  - (c) Ensuring the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining and strengthening the tripartite dialogue;
  - (d) Reinforcing working women's right to employment and equality of all rights and encouraging their involvement in union work.

In the region, workers' organizations such as trade unions face difficulties dealing either with globalization or with local factors. These difficulties arise especially in connection with membership, freedom of association, and effectiveness in defending their rights and asserting their demands. Many governments in the region impose restrictions on the freedom of association.

The social dialogue in the countries of Southern Mediterranean is facing multiple challenges. While national institutions often secure the provision of tripartite social dialogue on national level, sectoral or bipartite dialogue structures on company level are often very limited.

In **Morocco**, the focus lies on tripartite social dialogue on national level with institutions like the Council on collective bargaining, Superior council on the promotion of employment, Regional Council on the promotion of employment. Most of these bodies are under the leadership public officials (like the Ministry of Employment or regional governors) which is often topic of critique by trade unions. The level of unionization is quite low with under 10% concentrated in urban centres and mainly the public sector and public companies. There are 5 main trade unions. Sectoral social dialogue remains weak. On the company level there is a possibility to elect Employee delegates representing workers' interests. For companies with at least 50 employees the establishment of an Enterprise Committee with employer's representatives and two employee representatives is mandatory. Because of the economic structure with a high percentage of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and a strong informal economy accounting for 14%-34% of the GDP social dialogue on company level and collective agreements remain at a low level.

In **Tunisia**, the tripartite social dialogue is organized in the National Council for Social Dialogue. It has an extensive scope of activity, while lacking objective criteria to evaluate efficiency, which makes it difficult to work effectively. Another critique point is that it is financed and administered by the ministry of social affairs and lacking legal personhood, which undermines its independence. Regarding the bipartite social dialogue, there is a system of dual employee representation, which consists of elected employee delegates (regulated by the Labour Code) and union organisations on company level (not included in the Labour Code). For companies with more than 40 permanent employees the establishment of a Company Advisory Committee is mandatory. This committee consist of representatives from employers and employee representatives. Because of the economic structure with a high percentage of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and vague jurisdiction regarding the bipartite social dialogue, as well as limited resources social dialogue on company level remains quite weak. Trade unions as primary contact points for workers are string at national level, but remain weak at company level. Collective bargaining coverage is relatively high, compared to other countries in the region, but is focused mainly on wages, leaving other aspects of work life out.

In **Jordan**, the tripartite social dialogue is organized in the Tripartite Committee with the main objective of discussing the minimum wages on national level und lacking an official advisory role in other aspects. The establishment of workers' organizations is controlled by the Labour Law, which regulates the establishment of new trade unions. To establish a new trade union there is a need for 50 founding members holding a Jordan citizenship (40% of the workforce are foreign workers) and the approval by the Tripartite Committee. The General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions with 17 sector unions is the main trade union in Jordan. With no serious elections, its independence is being questioned. Unions in the public sector are managed as governmental units, which is another sign for lacking independence of workers representation. The Federation of Independent Trade Unions is trying to be approved, but has been denied official approval.

The situation for workers' rights in **Egypt** has deteriorated to such an extent that it was labelled one of the world's worst countries for workers in 2018 by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), as state repression against independent trade unions intensified with crackdowns on peaceful strikes and arbitrary arrests of union leaders. ([ILO: The future of work - Trade unions in transformation](#))

### 2.1.2 Figures and Data

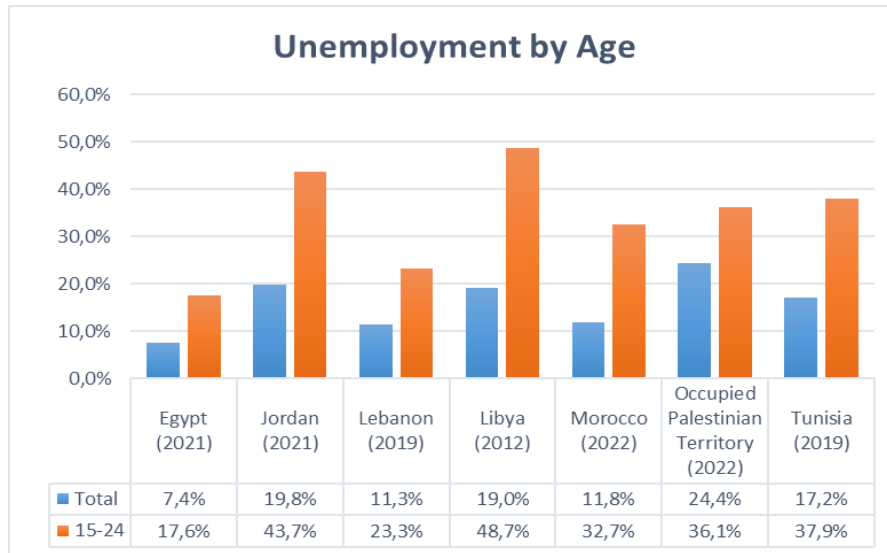
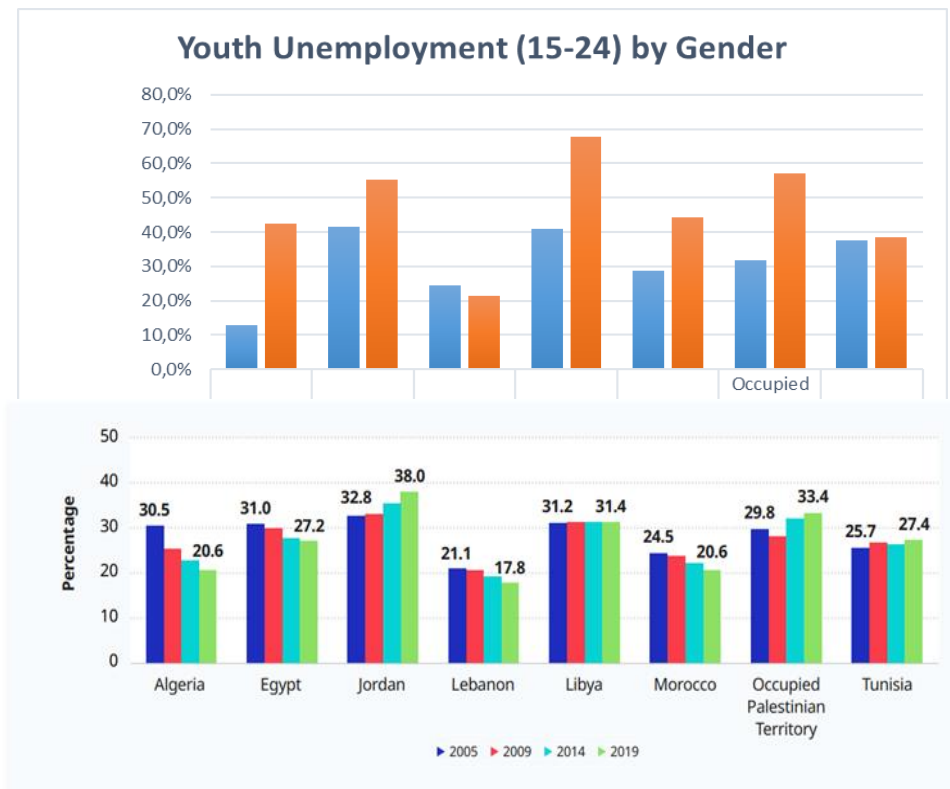


Figure 2: Unemployment rate in the Mediterranean region by age (Source: ILOSTAT)



Source: ILOSTAT.

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

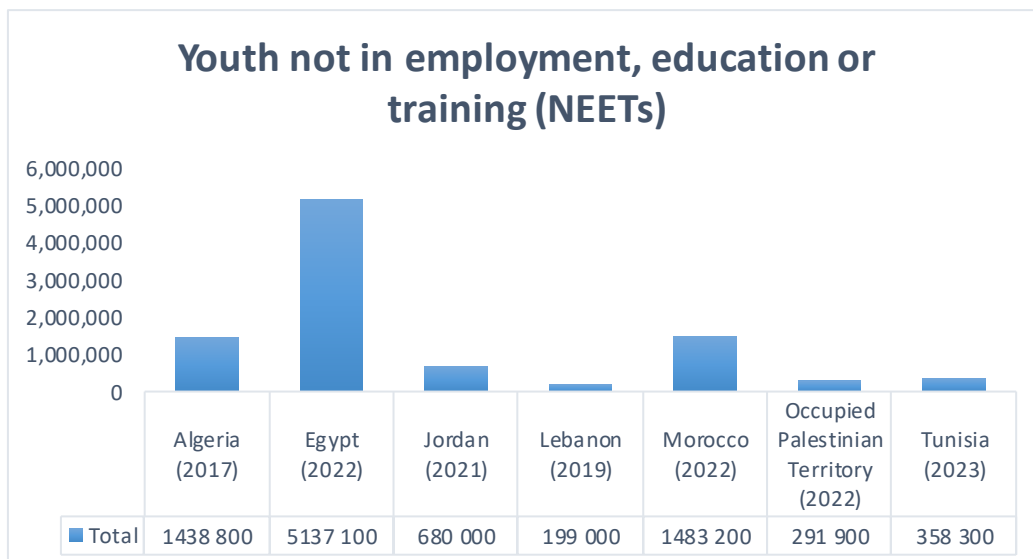


Figure 4: Total number of youth not in employment, education or training (NEETs) by country (Source: ILOSTAT)

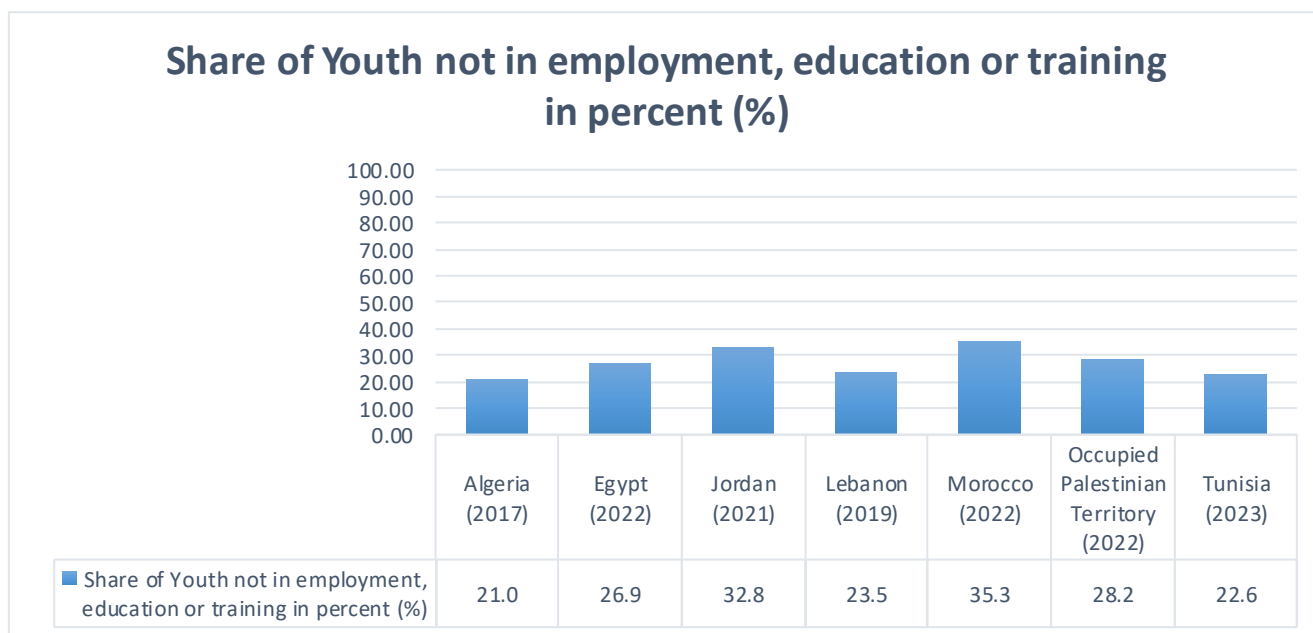


Figure 4: Share of youth not in employment, education or training (NEETs) in percent (%) by country (Source: ILOSTAT)



Data regarding social dialogue in the Mediterranean region

	Trade Union Density <sup>1</sup>	Bargaining Coverage Rate <sup>2</sup>	ILO C098 <sup>3</sup>	ILO C135 <sup>4</sup>	ILO C087 <sup>5</sup>	ILO C154 <sup>6</sup>
<b>Cyprus</b>	43,3% (2016)	43,3% (2016)				
<b>Malta</b>	41,9% (2020)	41,8% (2012)				X
<b>Tunisia</b>	38,1% (2019)	62,9% (2019)				
<b>Italy</b>	32,5% (2019)	99,0% (2019)				X
<b>Israel</b>	25,1% (2017)	28,0% (2016)		X		X
<b>Egypt</b>	23,8% (2010)	3,5% (2008)				X
<b>Occupied Palestinian Territory</b>	21,3% (2018)	----				
<b>Greece</b>	19,0% (2014)	25,8% (2018)				
<b>Portugal</b>	15,3% (2016)	76,5% (2018)				X
<b>Spain</b>	12,4% (2019)	80,1% (2018)				
<b>Morocco</b>	10,9% (2019)	3,0% (2020)			X	
<b>Turkey</b>	9,8% (2019)	7,4% (2019)				X
<b>Algeria</b>	----	----				X
<b>Jordan</b>	----	----			X	X
<b>Libya</b>	----	----		X		X
<b>Lebanon</b>	----	----		X	X	X

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

<sup>1</sup> Trade union density rate = Number of employee union members / Total number of employees

<sup>2</sup> Collective bargaining coverage rate = Number of employees covered by collective bargaining / Number of employees with the right to collective bargaining

<sup>3</sup> [ILO C098 - Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 \(No. 98\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [ILO C135 - Workers' Representatives Convention, 1971 \(No. 135\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [ILO C087 - Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 \(No. 87\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [ILO C154 - Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 \(No. 154\)](#)

## 2.2 Civil Dialogue

Though no universal definition of civil society has been adopted by any European or international institution, CSOs are widely recognized as pivotal for ensuring that citizens' voices are heard in decision-making processes across the various dimension of the civil dialogue.

Data shows that citizens have a high level of trust in civil society organisations: 87% of Europeans consider it important that civil society can operate freely and hold those in power accountable<sup>7</sup>. Findings of the recent Eurobarometer also confirm that civil society participation is increasingly seen as an effective way to make citizens' voices heard by decisionmakers<sup>8</sup>. Finally, the decline of traditional participative mechanisms, impacting in particular the youth, points to the urgency to invest more in civil dialogue with a view to modernise and enhance participation tools.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, civil dialogue is widely recognized as the cornerstone of participatory democracy, facilitating inclusive decision-making processes and fostering civic engagement and collaboration among diverse stakeholders.

In the perspective of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), civil dialogue encompasses two interrelated dimensions.

- The dialogue among organizations representing civil society, which serves as a platform for exchanging views, sharing expertise, and addressing societal needs and aspirations concerning policies and their societal impact.
- The structured<sup>10</sup> dialogue between civil society organizations and Governmental and intergovernmental institutions, which aims to ensure that the voices of various societal groups are heard and considered in policymaking processes.

This two-fold framework reflects the EESC's recognition that "Civil society organisations are the expression and result of a society's power to self-organise distinctly and independently from public institutions and the state"<sup>11</sup>.

EESC delineates three essential components of EU civil dialogue:

### a) Sectoral Dialogue:

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

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<sup>7</sup> Civil Society Europe, [The impact of civil society organisations in Europe](#) (2019).

<sup>8</sup> Special Eurobarometer 500 (October-November 2020), [Future of Europe](#), p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> See for example European Commission, [Political Participation and EU Citizenship: Perceptions and Behaviours of Young People](#) (2016) and European Citizen Action Service (June 2015), [Co-deciding with Citizens: Towards Digital Democracy at EU Level](#).

<sup>10</sup> Structured Dialogue, as conceptualized by the EU, is an approach to engaging in a two-way communication with stakeholders in a planned, regular, and transparent manner. It goes beyond mere consultations ensuring a follow-up with continued feedback.

<sup>11</sup> European Economic and Social Committee, Opinion "[SOC/782 – Strengthening civil dialogue and participatory democracy in the EU: a path forward](#)" (2024)

- Sectoral dialogue allows CSOs to engage with policymakers, share expertise, provide input on legislative proposals, and contribute to policy-making processes. It facilitates collaboration and ensures that policies are informed by the perspectives and needs of diverse stakeholders.
- sectoral dialogue provides a platform for stakeholders to identify emerging challenges, explore innovative solutions, and assess the impact of policies on different societal groups. It enables stakeholders to work together towards the development of effective and equitable policies that address sector-specific needs

b) Transversal Dialogue:

- Transversal dialogue refers to structured and regular exchanges between EU institutions or their national counterparts and civil society organizations on broader issues related to the development of the EU and its cross-cutting policies.
- Unlike sectoral dialogue, transversal dialogue focuses on overarching themes and policies that affect multiple sectors and have implications for various aspects of society. Examples include discussions on EU budget priorities, climate change mitigation strategies, and social inclusion initiatives.
- This form of dialogue allows for comprehensive discussions on issues of common interest, fosters coordination among different stakeholders, and promotes coherence in EU policies across different policy areas.

c) Horizontal Dialogue:

- Horizontal dialogue involves interactions among civil society organizations themselves regarding the development of EU policies and their cross-cutting implications.
- It provides a platform for CSOs to exchange information, coordinate actions, build alliances, and develop joint advocacy strategies. Horizontal dialogue enables CSOs to amplify their voices, leverage collective expertise and resources, and enhance their effectiveness in influencing EU decision-making processes.
- This component emphasizes the importance of collaboration and solidarity among civil society actors to address shared challenges and advance common objectives within the European context.

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

## 2.2.1 Civil Dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region

Article 11 of the TEU emphasizes the need for an open, transparent, and regular dialogue between EU institutions and organized civil society.

Especially in the current a context of growing disconnect between people and political institutions, exacerbated by perceived inadequacies in addressing pressing societal concerns such as climate change, social cohesion, and unemployment, civil dialogue emerges as a crucial mechanism for addressing citizen frustrations while legitimizing policies, bridging the gap between citizens and decision-makers.

However, for EU civil dialogue to be meaningful, an enabling environment characterized by civic freedom, transparency ensuring and accessibility to information and opportunities is paramount<sup>12</sup>.

Few key challenges and related recommendation can be highlighted on this regards<sup>13</sup>:

1. The absence of common standards for civil dialogue practices and a comprehensive regulatory framework, coupled with the lack of dedicated support structures, contributes to significant variation in engagement practices across institutions. This leads to fragmentation, inconsistency, and informality in civil dialogue, notably with institutions like the Council of the EU and the European Parliament.
  - Implementing civil dialogue frameworks, like the one for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), can provide structured mechanisms for engagement.
2. Historical approaches to civil society participation have predominantly been instrumental, lacking inclusivity and fostering concerns regarding accountability and transparency. These approaches have primarily focused on consultation rather than fostering genuine dialogue.
  - Establishing dedicated teams or contact points within EU institutions, such as the Directorate-General TRADE's Transparency, Civil Society, and Communication team, can facilitate regular and structured dialogue with CSOs.
3. While sectoral dialogue occurs with some frequency, transversal dialogue lacks regularity and structured processes. Many dialogue opportunities are one-off events, resulting in discontinuity and inconsistency. There has been a limited investment in cultivating a culture of civil dialogue and participation, both at the EU and national levels.
  - Regular evaluations of civil dialogue processes can help identify shortcomings and areas for improvement, leading to more effective and inclusive engagement practices.

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<sup>12</sup> [The Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process](#) adopted by the Council of Europe (2009) summarises key principles and conditions which can act as a guide.

<sup>13</sup> European Civic Forum "[Towards an open, transparent, and structured EU civil dialogue](#)" (2021)

4. Civil society organizations (CSOs) encounter challenges in accessing and participating in decision-making processes, particularly concerning EU policies and legislation. This is exacerbated by a perceived imbalance between CSOs and private lobbies, wherein the latter often possess superior outreach and influence.
  - Formal or informal coalitions can enhance the collective impact of civil society engagement.

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

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

The Southern Mediterranean region presents a more complex and dynamic landscape for civil dialogue, marked by a combination of opportunities and challenges.

Civil dialogue practices vary widely across countries in the Southern Mediterranean, reflecting diverse political contexts, historical legacies, and levels of civic development.

Civic dialogue in the Mediterranean region is influenced also by cultural norms and social dynamics. Traditional values, religious beliefs, and societal structures influence the willingness of individuals and groups to engage in public discourse. In some cases, cultural factors may either facilitate or hinder open dialogue and collaboration between different segments of society.

While some nations have established robust mechanisms for dialogue and engagement, others struggle with bureaucratic hurdles and limited space for civil society. Legal frameworks regulating civil society often impose arbitrary restrictions on freedom of association, expression, and assembly, constraining the ability of CSOs to operate independently and advocate for change. State-led co-optation of CSOs, selective funding, and censorship of independent voices undermine the autonomy and effectiveness of civil society organizations.

Efforts to promote regional cooperation and collaboration among CSOs in the Southern Mediterranean have faced challenges due to political tensions, security concerns, and resource constraints.

Despite challenges, civil society in the Southern Mediterranean demonstrates resilience, creativity, and a strong commitment to democratic values and social change.

New trends and emerging spaces represents promising elements for the development of the civil dialogue:

1. The establishment of many grassroots movements leading initiatives such as multilateral forums, civil society networks, and cross-border partnerships are fostering dialogue, collaboration, and mutual understanding among countries in the region<sup>14</sup>.
2. Youth engagement is increasingly recognized as a crucial component of civic dialogue in the Mediterranean region. Young people represent a significant demographic group (around 45 % of the population in the region is below the age of 25) with unique perspectives, energy, and innovative ideas. Efforts to empower youth, promote their participation in decision-making processes, and address their concerns are being deployed<sup>15</sup>.
3. The proliferation of digital technologies has transformed the landscape of civic dialogue in the Mediterranean region. Social media platforms, online forums, and digital communication tools have provided new avenues for citizens to express their views, organize campaigns, and connect with like-minded individuals across borders. However, digital spaces also present challenges related to misinformation, online harassment, and digital divides that need to be addressed to ensure inclusive and constructive civic dialogue<sup>16</sup>.

Structured reforms reform enhancing legal protections for civil society, robust investment in funding and a comprehensive capacity building scheme could effectively enable civil society actors to influence policy outcomes and address pressing social issues through civil dialogue. Those measures to support and empower civil society actors require sustained efforts from governments, regional organizations, and international partners.

Two examples of the joint efforts between Institutions and CSOs to enhance civil dialogue in the region are:

[The Med Dialogue for Rights and Equality](#) (MDRE) II is the second phase of a EU funded initiative that aims to increase the participation of civil society groups in policy-making processes in the South Mediterranean and facilitate constructive dialogues between the Southern Neighbourhood and EU institutions. The project seeks to improve the skills of civil society leaders, support EU-CSO structured dialogue processes, and improve the DG NEAR HQ's and EU Delegations' capacities to work with civil society. By providing technical coordination, facilitating synergies, and offering methodological support, the MDRE enhances the efficacy of regional dialogues.

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<sup>14</sup> See the research "[Bridging the sea: a Review of Mediterranean Civil Society](#)" (2021) developed within the framework of the EU-funded initiative "Med Dialogue"

<sup>15</sup> See the research "[Mapping Youth Civil Society Actors in Euro-Med](#)" (2021) developed within the framework of the EU-funded initiative "Majalat II."

<sup>16</sup> See the Euromesco policy brief "[Youth deliberation and participation in the euro-mediterranean region](#)" (2023)

"[Majalat](#)": a regional platform launched in 2018 for civil society structured dialogue in the Arab region, enabling CSOs involvement also in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)

With the support of the EU, a consortium of six Civil Society Organisations from the Euro-Mediterranean region created spaces for dialogue between CSOs, trade unions, social movements and academics from both shores of the Mediterranean and the EU. A second phase "Majalat-II" is currently running until 2025 as part of the Civil Society Facility for the Mediterranean and consist also of a sub-granting programme supporting actions to:

- develop policy papers, studies, reports that inform evidence-based recommendations to decision-makers in the region;
- organise workshops/conferences/seminars/to increase the CSO participation in local/national/regional/ EU policy dialogues;
- develop platforms and coalitions that can amplify advocacy messages and policy inputs as well as stimulate multi-stakeholder engagement.

Overall, the majority of CSOs in the Southern Mediterranean region envision the need for building the Mediterranean as an integrated common space. In this regard, many organisations are working in a transnational way to foster rights and influence common Mediterranean policies through advocating for common interests, rule of law, human rights, youth participation and the consolidation of CSO networks across the region<sup>17</sup>.

### **3.Youth involvement in Social and Civil Dialogue** (*Draft after the input and discussion during the 1<sup>st</sup> study group*)

*This part of the opinion shall especially focus on the input of the youth representatives from the Anna Lindh Foundation, Business Europe and ETUC. The youth representatives shall get questions for the preparation for the discussion in the first study group meeting. The discussion shall focus on sharing on their own experiences as well as try to represent perspectives from underrepresented young people.*

#### **Questions for the workshop:**

##### **3.1 Youth involvement in Social Dialogue** (*Draft after the input and discussion during the 1<sup>st</sup> study group*)

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- (1) **What actions should be taken to strengthen the voice of young people in existing social dialogue structures?**

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<sup>17</sup> ["Bridging the sea: a Review of Mediterranean Civil Society"](#) (2021)

- (2) What can be done to include young people who are not participating in/are excluded from existing social dialogue structures?

**3.2 Youth involvement in Civil Dialogue** (*Draft after the input and discussion during the 1<sup>st</sup> study group*)

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- (1) What actions should be taken to strengthen the voice of young people in existing civil dialogue structures?
- (2) What can be done to include young people who are not participating in/are excluded from existing civil dialogue structures?