

JOINT POLICY REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Erasmus Global Partnerships

Fostering EU-MENA Cooperation through Youth Empowerment and Innovation to advance the Sustainable Development Goals





Co-signatories: African Student and Alumni Forum | International Young Catholic Students | OCEANS Network | Mediterranean Youth Foundation | Erasmus Student Network | Erasmus Mundus Association | Global Opportunities | Project Humanity | Atlas for Development | National Erasmus+ Office Morocco | Search for Common Ground | Soliya | Global Mindset Development (GMD Malta) | Humanity Consulting | Erasmus Morocco Network | UNITED for Intercultural Action | Eurobug International | MindLab | Youth Centre Perspektiva | PeaceMentors | ACIMCOM | Israel Palestine Center for Regional Initiatives | VisualMind | Med Baltic Organization

Institutional partners: African Union | European Union | Union for the Mediterranean | International University of Rabat | Policy Center for the New South | Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe |

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Fostering EU-MENA Cooperation through Youth Empowerment and Innovation to advance the Sustainable Development Goals

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1. INTRODUCTION

A core theme in the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is the need for knowledge co-creation and revitalised global solidarity to drive sustainable development and peace-building. A key role here can be played by young innovators and social entrepreneurs, who are supported by international programmes and exchanges to facilitate youth mobility and engagement across borders, and are looking for mentors, funders, and partnerships with other potential youth change-makers around the world. This has also become urgent given the current COVID-19 pandemic which the youth are projected to bear the brunt of its impact.

To support such enterprising young people, it is prudent for the decision makers to redirect focus to alternative models of development cooperation, which support entrepreneurship, economic development and human well-being through community-lead actions and strategies, with a special emphasis on youth engagement on a local,

regional, national, and international levels. Although the current status quo is still largely based on limited and/or symbolic inclusion of young people within policies on Education and Development within the mainstream international institutions – evidence proves that investing in young people and education has long term effects in the societal and human evolution, thus increasing the support for their development and projects has the potential to create grassroots level impact and long-lasting social change. There are multiple effective approaches to empower young people, and one of them is through international cooperation in the field of education and youth.

When it comes to cooperation between the European Union and MENA , there have been great achievements made with the support of **Erasmus+**, which facilitates youth capacity building, and student and staff mobility. Global mobility through Erasmus+ and similar programs offered by Marie Skłodowska Curie, DAAD and the like have contributed to the knowledge exchange and development of education as well as soft and hard skills for young people. In addition, new initiatives such as **Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange** use innovative ICT tools to bring young people from Europe and the MENA region together in meaningful intercultural exchange programmes, through formal and non-formal education. Overall, such efforts have contributed to an enhanced soft and hard skills development, socio-economic opportunities, entrepreneurship and finally



employability¹, which are especially important in ensuring the overall well-being of societies.

To adequately facilitate such global partnerships, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation’s (UNESCO) key objectives for **Global Citizenship Education (GCE)**², seem to offer some direction:

- **Knowledge Exchange:** Developing an understanding of global governance structures, rights and responsibilities, global issues and connections between global, national and local systems and processes;

- **Building Empathy:** Recognising and appreciating differences and multiple identities, e.g. culture, language, religion, gender, and our common humanity, and develop skills for living in an increasingly diverse world.

Under the GCE umbrella, **ERASMUS Global Partnerships (EGP)**³ espouse the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Agenda and its Goal 17 (Partnership for Goals) to “strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development” with a special focus on youth empowerment. EGP embraces the role of partnerships and promotes avenues of knowledge exchange and collaboration

¹ Erasmus Student Network. Erasmus Impact Study.

² UNESCO. (2015). Global Citizenship Education: topics and learning objectives.

³ <https://www.erasmuspartnerships.org/>



in a north-south, south-south and triangulation cooperation. The platform engages a diverse group of stakeholders – youth activists, entrepreneurs, academics, institutions, and policy makers – to promote inter-cultural dialogue and knowledge exchange using interdisciplinary methods to foster cross-border partnerships for Employability and Peace.

With a successful debut in May 2019, the first **EGP Asia** brought together 60 young leaders within Erasmus+ alumni, youth organisations, start-ups, and academia from Europe and Asia in an interdisciplinary setting, and facilitated an exchange of ideas and experiential knowledge to develop sustainable grassroots solutions for some of the youngest populations in the world.

Moving steadily into 2020, the **EGP MENA** aimed to engage an even broader range of stakeholders

to facilitate dialogue between the EU and MENA regions and further explore the role of global citizenship education in facilitating knowledge exchange and collaboration across borders.

As one of its main outcomes, EGP MENA remained tethered to a list of recommendations which were developed over broad consultations between 4 working groups comprising a total of 52 youth experts from the region.

Moving forward, this **Joint Policy Report** will firstly set the stage by presenting a summary of the ongoing cooperation between Europe and MENA in the field of youth and (higher) education. It will then give a brief overview of the EGP MENA Youth Forum and then finally introduce the **recommendations** developed by the participants vis à vis the current policy climate. Finally, the paper will also highlight the potential



project ideas in line with the final policy recommendations.

2. EUROPE & COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH POLICY

The **European Union (EU)** and the **Council of Europe (CoE)** have been among the key lead European actors in youth empowerment and promotion of global citizenship and international education. A successful example can be found in the Council of Europe's co-management system through the Joint Council on Youth, which is the supreme policy-making body for youth issues, and is composed of youth leaders and government officials working in a shared decision making system. One of its supported initiatives is the Euro-Arab Youth Forum, which creates space to

share practices and experiences in peace-building for mutual learning and promotes dialogue on Youth, Peace and Security. Furthermore, the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity of the CoE – more commonly known as the "North-South Centre" – has also been championing global citizenship education and intercultural dialogue to foster cooperation and empower civil society, in particular youth and women.

Increased engagement of young people through the AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub co-launched with the **African Union (AU)** has also empowered young people and contributed to an inclusive engagement in international cooperation and development. It is important to take note of the

African Youth Charter (2006)⁴ of the AU which has so far has been signed by over 43 out of the 55 member states. Under its Article 10 for youth development, state parties are mandated to encourage and support youth organizations and enterprises, promote international cooperation in training and education of young people, and encourage learning in global citizenship education – further substantiating the need and scope for south-south and triangulation cooperation within the (higher) education sector.

Parallel to this, the EuroMed Youth Programme in the Mediterranean region is an EU-funded project that aims to promote intercultural dialogue among young people within the Euro-Mediterranean region, motivate active citizenship as well as contributing to the development of youth policy. **Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)**, one of the key institutional stakeholders emerging out of the EuroMed cooperation, has gone further ahead to label a Global Initiative on innovative employment services for youth - YouMatch⁵ in 2019 in partnership with the African Union Commission (AUC), the AU Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), the World Association of Public Employment Services (WAPES), European Training Foundation (ETF) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). YouMatch is a partnership between 25 African and MENA countries with 9 interregional Communities of Practice (CoPs), which bring together experts to address such topics as career guidance, setting up effective job

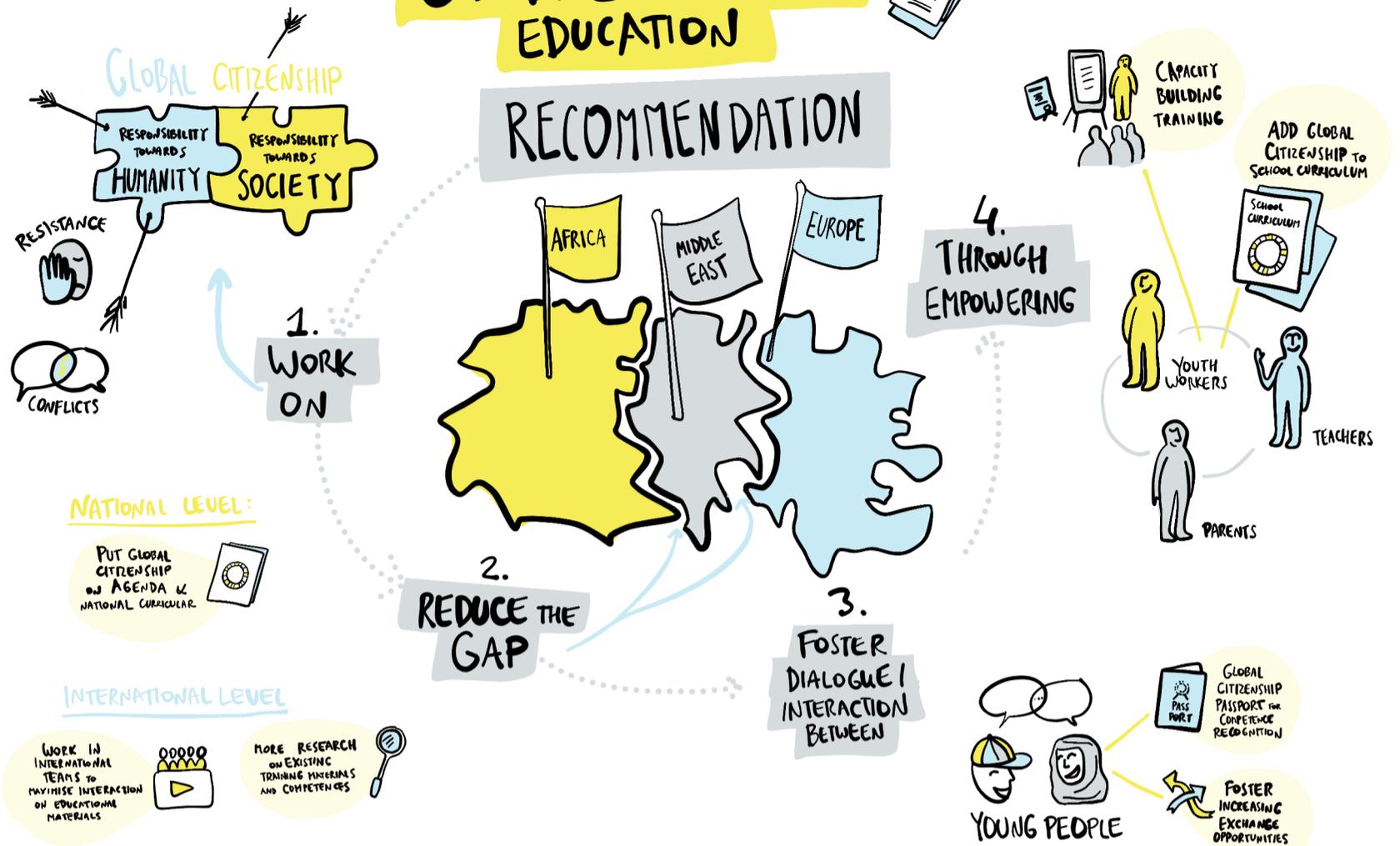
centres, labour market information systems, and public private partnerships in the field of employment services as well as employment services for rural youth. As one of its most recent outcomes YouMatch, in consultation with the AU, was able to ensure the integration of the network into the African Skills Portal for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship (ASPYEE). Currently, the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean is actively preparing “UfM Youth Strategy 2030”, which will involve 43 Member States to enact a coordinated Regional vision for the actions for youth empowerment, and has proposed to host, on a periodic basis, UfM Ministerial Meetings on Youth.

Young people in MENA and the Mediterranean hold the key to the sustainable and peaceful development of their societies based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law in their region. Understanding and taking into account their expectations and needs is crucial for all the institutional stakeholders, national youth policy authorities and youth organisations and leaders. The experience of young people from the diasporas in Europe and their role in and perception of recent developments can also positively contribute to this process.

⁴ African Youth Charter: https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7789-treaty-0033_-_african_youth_charter_e.pdf

⁵ Global Initiative on innovative Employment Services for Youth - YouMatch II: <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/79783.html>

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION



Society Organisations and Entrepreneurs from MENA and Europe; (c) addressed some of the pressing issues affecting the youth of the region and the globe from their unique perspective; (d) prepared and presented policy recommendations⁷ on how governments and international donors could support cooperation between Europe and MENA in the fields of Education and Entrepreneurship with a lens of global citizenship education, inclusion, knowledge exchange, and skills for the jobs of the XXIst century.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

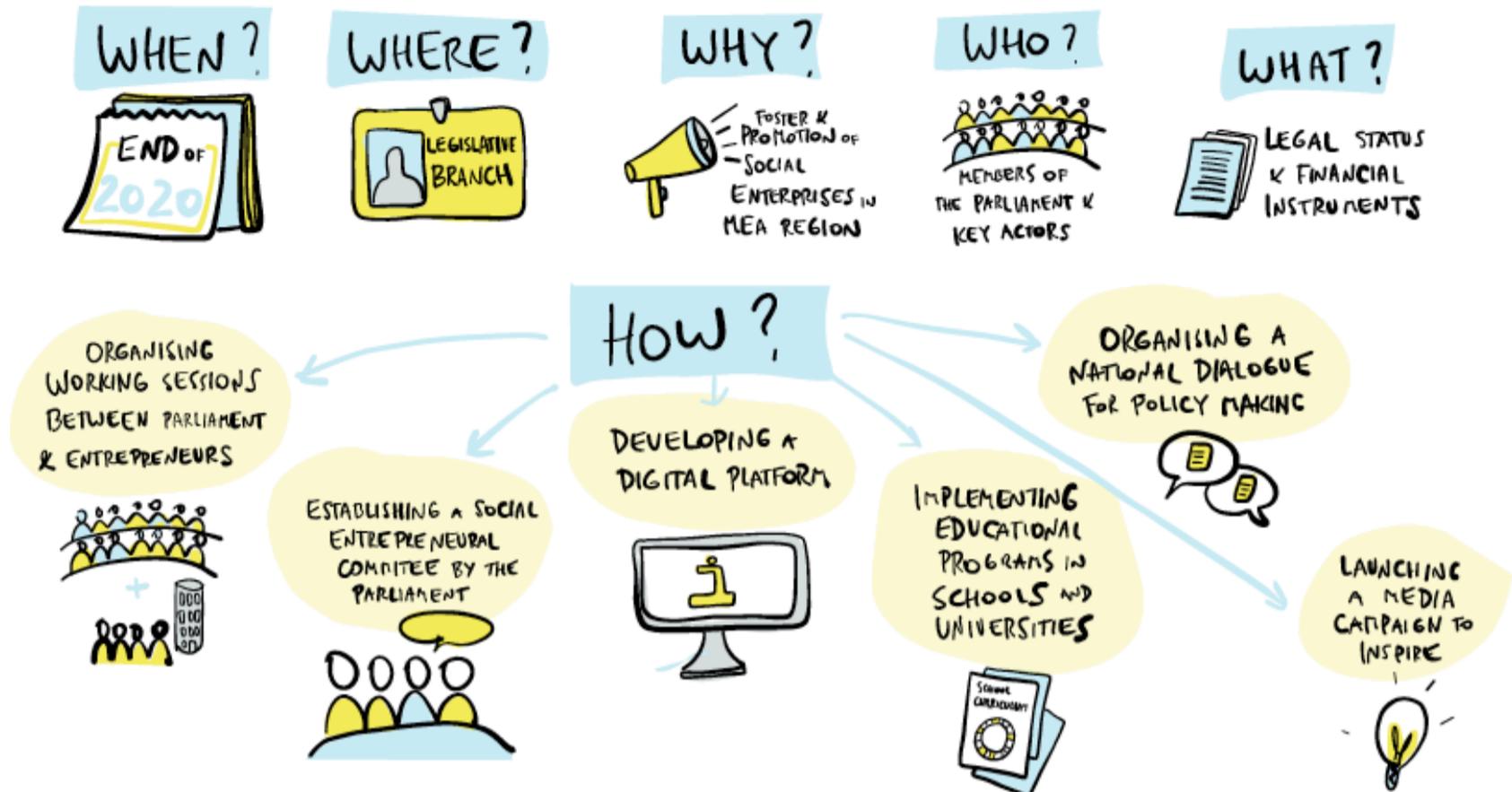
4.1 Empowering Young People Across Borders through Global Citizenship Education

European Union's Erasmus+ programme has allocated 1.68 euro billion 2014-2020 actions⁸ with non-EU/partner countries, allowing a number of young people from the MENA and Europe to take part in exchanges between the regions. However, initiatives to encourage exchange from Europe to MENA, or within the MENA region, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Mediterranean remain infrequent, while young people from

⁷ As per (c), the policy recommendations are drafted by the participants who are entrepreneurs and civil society representatives from MENA, Europe and Mediterranean. These recommendations have developed during the interactions in the Forum, drawn from their local realities for an overall global cooperation. These recommendations have first been presented during the Policy Dialogue on March 2, 2020 hosted at the Policy Centre for the New South in Rabat, Morocco, which aimed to gather feedback and expand partnerships and cooperation with a variety of institutions concerned by the empowerment of young people in the MENA region.

⁸ Erasmus+ Key Figures: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/key-figures_en

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP



disadvantaged backgrounds face barriers in accessing these opportunities.

- **Recommendation 1:** Foster understanding around the barriers that prevent young people from participating in exchange opportunities, both within and across MENA and Europe; advocate for resources and policies that will help ease cross-border mobility, and ensure a balanced and diverse participation.
- **Recommendation 2:** Provide further support for regional structures and frameworks. It is essential to incentivise and provide support and funding for cross-border partnerships across the Mediterranean region.
- **Recommendation 3:** In parallel, invest to enhance technological infrastructure to

bridge the digital divide (especially in rural areas) and raise awareness of technology enabled innovative programmes such as Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange.

- **Recommendation 4:** Ensure meaningful and equal participation of marginalised communities in non-formal education and youth exchanges, including internally and externally displaced young people with or without any affiliation to a higher education institutions.
- **Recommendation 5:** At an institutional level, provide the relevant entities, such as universities, from the MENA region and Sub-Saharan Africa with the expertise the EU has in project management to help them successfully apply for funding to enable the



international mobility of students from diverse backgrounds.

- **Recommendation 6:** Ensure that young people are actively engaged and involved in all post-Covid decision making and recovery initiatives. This comes from past experiences with the 2008 financial crisis where the poor representation of the youth further led to their marginalisation and precarious job prospects. The unparalleled scale and magnitude of the current pandemic and its consequences for vulnerable groups such as the youth is such that the importance of youth engagement cannot be overemphasised.

It is possible to strive for a more equitable geographical representation through virtual exchanges, as well as to scale initiatives that enable access to young people in greater numbers, as well from a larger number of

countries. Furthermore it is important that education in the MENA region has a shift towards being more competency-driven. Having an international mindset in a continuously increasing global connected society and economy should be one of the cornerstones to the new skill set and attitudes of young people in MENA and Europe.

- **Recommendation 7:** Create a skills passport that would showcase the Global Citizenship, Media literacy and Entrepreneurship competencies students have at the end of their graduation. Also, ensure the passport's wide acceptability and usefulness in various aspects including but not limited to career development and civil society activism.

In order to reach these goals, it is important to work with the Educators in the region, both youth workers and teachers should receive adequate training in order to act as multipliers for Global

Citizenship Education. The Education sector needs to focus on teaching skills for the 21st century by supporting new pedagogies for youth education and inclusion such as virtual exchange and experienced based learning to introduce the concept of Global Citizenship. This has further been highlighted by the disruptions caused to conventional teaching methods by the COVID-19 pandemic, thus making novel and resilient education systems imperative. Moreover, in order to mainstream the concept of Global Citizenship, it is important to put Global Citizenship Education on the agenda of the countries in the Mediterranean region in order to change the guidelines for the curricula set by the national ministries of education.

- **Recommendation 8:** Provide Training of trainers (ToT) for youth workers and teachers through introducing more non-formal education and ensuring they receive certification after their training in GCE.
- **Recommendation 9:** Education should have a rights-based approach anchored in society, curricula should introduce the concept of Global Citizenship, Media Literacy and Social Entrepreneurship in the learning objectives.
- **Recommendation 10:** Further enhance collaboration and knowledge exchange through co-creation and sharing of curriculum on Global Citizenship Education across the Mediterranean.

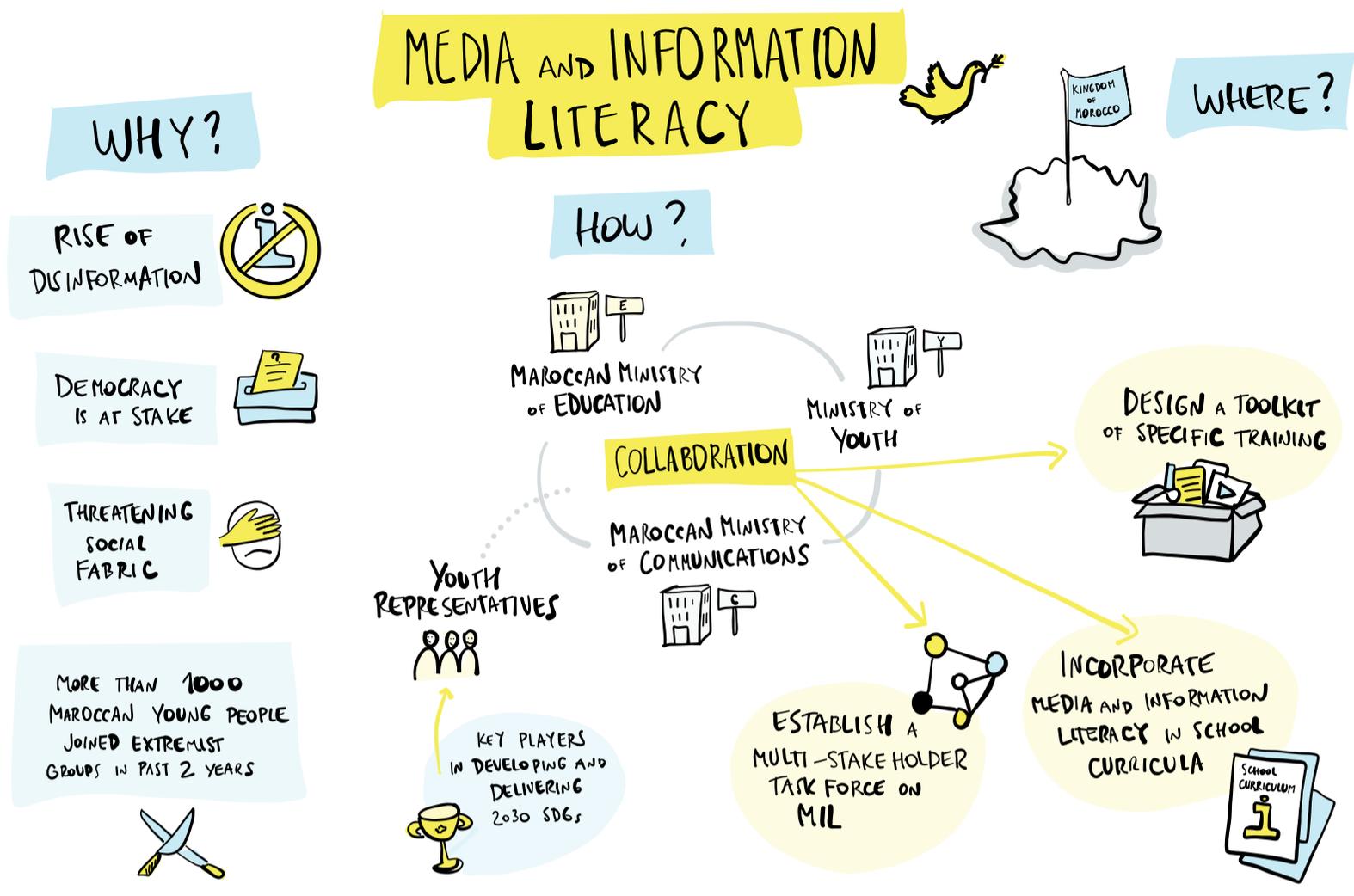


4.2 Social Entrepreneurship and Jobs for the 21st Century

The participants of the MENA Forum indicated there is a high skills mismatch between the education skills taught in their national educational systems and the skills required by the labour market. Pissarides and Végonzonès-Varoudakis (2007) also highlight the problem of labor skill mismatches and shortages, they argue that education systems in the MENA region are geared to the needs of the public sector, with the result that acquired skills do not match those required in growth-enhancing activities in the private sector⁹.

- **Recommendation 11:** Adopt a needs-based approach on the development of the curriculum in high schools and universities in order to match the skills required by the labor market, geared towards critical thinking, technology awareness, emotional

⁹ Bhattacharya, R., & Wolde, H. (2010). "Constraints on Growth in the MENA Region". In Constraints on Growth in the MENA Region. USA: INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND. doi: <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781451962574.001>



intelligence, leadership and intercultural competences.

Participants of the MENA Forum further expressed that the current legal and financial framework for Social Entrepreneurship in the MENA region is insufficient to support young people and students to engage with entrepreneurship during or after their studies, in order to ease the transition from education into employment. This is supported by the overall research available in the region. According to the OECD it is important to support SMEs as vehicles for job creation in a region striving to boost economic diversification, employment creation and the inclusion of youth and women in the economy¹⁰.

Youth employability remains a top priority for the region. Improving the employability of young people and promoting entrepreneurship through education is one of the possible solutions to the problem of high youth unemployment (between 25% and 40%) and the growing phenomenon of young people “not in education, employment or training” (NEETs) (OECD 2018).

Addressing this challenge is essential in building the culture of peace. For example, based on the British Council’s study “Building Young People’s Resilience to Violent Extremism in the Middle East and North Africa” (2017), investing in and addressing such social and economic factors also

¹⁰ ECD/European Union/ETF (2018), The Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa 2018: Interim Assessment of Key SME Reforms, SME Policy Index, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264304161-en>.

supports enhancing young people's resilience to **violent extremism**¹¹.

- [Recommendation 12](#): Foster entrepreneurial skills and supporting tracks for student-entrepreneurs alongside their education.
- [Recommendation 13](#): Develop a digital platform that contains information and online training opportunities relevant to the social entrepreneurship sector.
- [Recommendation 14](#): Empower Erasmus+ alumni to mentor new graduates in their transition from education to employment.

4.3 Youth Empowerment & Active Citizenship

As per Council of Europe's definition, participation and active citizenship is about "having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society"¹². It is therefore essential to ensure the inclusion of young people in the creation and implementation of policies which affect them, accompanied by enhanced efforts to empower entrepreneurs and civil societies worldwide.

- [Recommendation 15](#): Increased focus on young peoples' democratic participation in electoral processes, policymaking, national youth councils, and new regional cross-border structures necessary for fostering a future of cooperation.

- [Recommendation 16](#): Stimulate the exchange of knowledge and encourage intercultural dialogue to instil the value of collaboration. (I.e. Governments could support or organise national dialogues in the MENA region to involve youth in policy making on the topics of GCE, Media Literacy and Social Entrepreneurship.)
- [Recommendation 17](#): Enhance the participation of young people in promoting the rule of law in their countries including access to timely and effective justice services as an accelerator for the 2030 Agenda.

5. PROJECT INNOVATION LAB

On the 2nd day of the Young Leaders Forum the participants took part in a Project Innovation Lab, where they used all their collected input to come up with possible projects that could be implemented in the region.

One of the project concepts developed by the participants was the idea to initiate a **pilot project with 10 schools in countries across Europe, the MENA region and Africa** to introduce Global Citizenship Education, setting up an International Coordination team that would coordinate the desk research and train the teachers. This team would be responsible for the introduction of Global Citizenship Education in the schools, while organising short mobility programs (physical or

¹¹ All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for the British Council. 2017. Building Young People's Resilience to Violent Extremism in the Middle East and North Africa.

¹² Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life.

virtual) for students of these schools to create ambassadors for the programme. The goal of the project is to reach institutional partners in each country who take up the responsibility to support local schools in the redesign of their curricula, *in line with recommendation 10*.

Another project arising from the Project Innovation Lab was an initiative to improve young people's access to information in Morocco to prevent young Moroccans from joining extremist groups. This would be achieved by establishing a multi-stakeholder task-force on education and media literacy, including representatives of the Education, Media and Youth sector and engaging experts from other countries in the MENA region and Europe in order to co-design a toolkit on media and information literacy that would be distributed and taught in schools and youth organisations across Morocco. This project idea is *in line with recommendations 9 and 16*.

6. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Whereas there have been in the context of international cooperation between Europe and MENA, young people in both areas represent a largely untapped potential as peace-builders, social entrepreneurs and active agents of change. It is high time for development cooperation, in its efforts to support economic development and building a culture of peace, shifts its focus towards empowerment of youth and youth-lead organisations.

To successfully empower the next generation of leaders to advance the Sustainable Development Goals, it is essential that education provides them with the requisite technological capacity and awareness, emotional intelligence, and intercultural competences; that governments ensure adequate investment to support youth NGOs and social entrepreneurs; and that youth are actively engaged in the policy and decision-making processes which affect them.

This Joint Policy Paper, co-signed by entrepreneurs and NGOs from MENA and Europe, offers our own contribution to the policy dialogues, in an effort to co-create a new environment where young people from all backgrounds are supported to achieve their full potential as leaders, entrepreneurs and peace-builders.

