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Youth and Mobility in the Maghreb: *An Assessment of Youth Aspirations in Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia*





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Executive Summary

This study examines expert knowledge and survey data on youth aspirations in Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia to see how the EU's Talent Partnerships might be used to increase youth employment and mobility within and from these countries.

According to the data analysed for this research, young people's aspirations encompass a variety of factors, but the desire for job security is at the top of the list. Employment allows young people to earn a wage, which is the foundation for reaching higher life objectives such as personal autonomy, housing, starting a family, and living a decent life. Another essential concern for the four countries' youth is high-quality education as a lever for social mobility. This may be inferred from high enrolment rates in higher education institutions, a preference for the perceived superior private education, and a lack of quality education being claimed as one of the driving factors in emigration. As education levels rise, so do expectations, which are frequently disappointed owing to a lack of opportunities, very low salary levels, and poor career progression. A number of study results reveal a mismatch between youth expectations and what employers offer. The gap between career aspirations and labour-market reality is especially wide among the tertiary-educated youth. Although Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia perform well in terms of the overall proportion of STEM (Science, technology, engineering and mathematics) graduates compared to OECD countries, humanities remain the most popular study subjects.

Little is known about the specific professions that highly qualified young people in the Maghreb are seeking, and their country's difficult labour market conditions are likely to limit their ability to imagine or define their career aspirations. Securing a solid job with a decent salary remains the primary goal of the tertiary educated, which is why the vast majority want to work in the public sector. For some, however, entrepreneurship is also regarded as a viable option to securing employment. Administrative services (particularly for young women), sales, and technical jobs are mentioned as preferred employment sectors for intermediate-skilled workers.¹ There appears to be little interest in trades or crafts, which are thought to offer a lower standing in society. Entrepreneurship and self-employment by choice, on the other hand, would be appealing to a considerable proportion of young people – both men and women – if the business environment were more conducive. This is compatible with the desire for autonomy, which has emerged as a sort of leitmotiv in the reviewed literature and expert interviews.

In terms of non-financial aspirations, it should be noted that employment is more than simply a means of meeting one's material needs for the young in the examined countries. It provides individuals a feeling of purpose and dignity and is ultimately the key to long-term social integration and societal acknowledgment. The 2011 uprisings have instilled a sense of agency into youth in Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia underlying their wish to be included in their country's political and social processes.² With corruption and clientelism listed as a key driver of emigration, the latter must also be seen as a reflection of the growing state-citizen antagonism in the Maghreb countries, in addition to the region's tough labour market conditions.

¹ Stakeholder interviews.

² Gaub, F. (2021, September). Arab youth futures. No lost generation. EU Institute for Security Studies.

<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/arab-youth-futures>

Recommendations

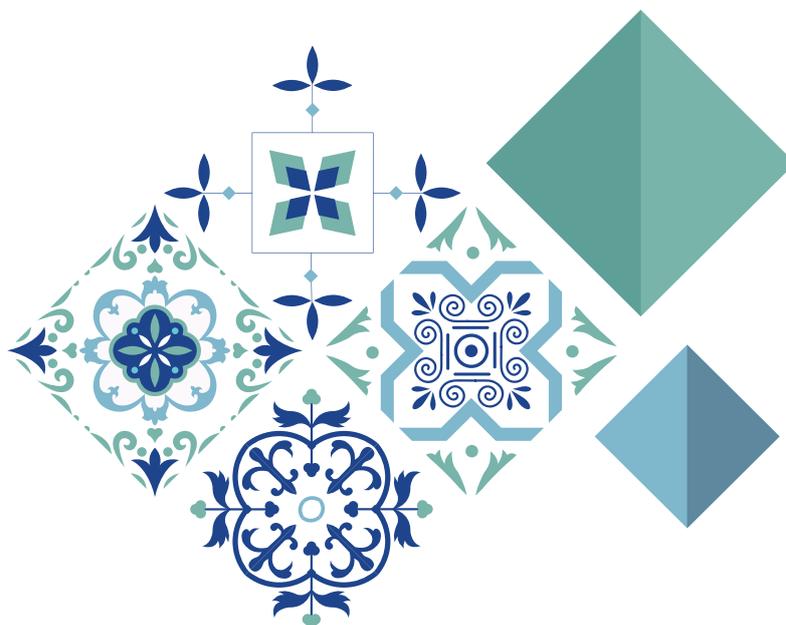
1- More research is needed to understand the social interactions and encounters, as well as the everyday life, that shape or alter aspirations. Beyond macro trends that frame ambitions and surveys about academic and career goals, the diversity of youth aspirations must be researched in qualitative studies that consider all factors that may influence individual choices, including the socioeconomic background of the studied subjects.

2- Young people have little knowledge of the variety of professions and professional opportunities available to them. This emphasises the need of counselling to guide career choices, which could be promoted in the framework of the Talent Partnership initiative.

3- Temporary and circular migration programmes may be more appealing than long-term choices for young people who regard emigration as a last resort option and have strong links to their family and local society. For them, short-term mobility can be a means to find employment and career opportunities at home once they have gained some experience abroad. Temporary and circular migration programmes offer the extra benefit of enhancing the educational system's relationship to business realities, as well as allaying concerns about brain drain and preventing the development of local labour shortages.

4- A prominent topic that emerged from the analysed surveys and stakeholder interviews was the **strong interest that young people have in investigating entrepreneurship as a possible career option.** Talent Partnerships could contain components that encourage start-ups and provide young people with strong entrepreneurial potential with the skills they need to thrive.

5- According to polls that research employer perceptions, **employers in North Africa and Europe have very high expectations of graduates. With the exception of the ICT industry, which has a more international outlook on recruitments, employers in Europe are also frequently cautious to hire graduates from outside Europe.** This is due, in part, to scepticism about foreign credentials. Companies will need to be encouraged to adopt more flexible standards for evaluating job experience, education, and training in order to engage in any programmes under the Talent Partnership initiative.





List of Acronyms

BAYF	Building Algerian Youth's Future
CREAD	Centre de Recherche en Économie Appliquée pour le Développement
EFE	Education for Employment
HIMS	Household International Migration Survey
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
ICM	International credit mobility
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NEET	Not in employment, education, or training
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
STEM	Science, technology engineering and mathematics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

Introduction

This report explores how the EU's Talent Partnerships can be leveraged for youth employment and mobility in Algeria, Morocco, Libya and Tunisia. With unemployment rates among the highest in the world, today's youth in North Africa confront significant barriers to entering and remaining in the labour market. According to ILO modelled projections for 2019, the percentage of youth aged 15-24 who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET) ranges from 20.6 per cent in Algeria and Morocco to 27.4 per cent in Tunisia and 31.4 per cent in Libya.³ These findings are concerning given the large proportion of young people who are not only not employed but are not investing in building their capacities for the future either. Although the long-term implications of the pandemic on the labour force are yet unknown, COVID-19 and the associated recovery efforts are expected to further aggravate worldwide youth employment, including in the four countries surveyed.⁴ At the same time, the pandemic has worsened labour shortages in a number of European industries⁵ and there is a growing realisation among some EU member States that third-country migration may assist to address skills gaps and enhance the EU labour market.⁶ In June 2021, the EU launched its Talent Partnerships initiative that integrates worker and student mobility programmes with relevant capacity-building support in African, Eastern European, and Western Balkan countries. As such, it intends to open up new avenues for the EU and third countries to collaborate in addressing migratory difficulties and developing and recruiting talent.

Much of the discussion about how to effectively match people from third countries with openings in Europe centres on employer viewpoints and challenges connected to training compatibility.⁷ Similarly, the debate on the region's unemployment problem in North Africa focuses on employment solutions from the perspective of companies. The current study departs from this approach by taking a youth-centred perspective that puts young people's aspirations and life goals at the centre of the design of Talent Partnerships. It synthesises expert knowledge and survey data on youth aspirations in Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia to provide insight into the problems that young people encounter when joining the labour market. Understanding youth aspirations will be critical in the context of the Talent Partnerships to guarantee that they assist young people attain a better life and enrol their engagement in the initiative's planned schemes.

While definitions vary, the academic literature often depicts aspirations as encompassing a person's objectives and ideas about his or her possibilities in society, as well as expectations about what can be attained. An individual's goals, and indeed potential to strive, are formed not just by his or her choices, but also by the economic and social conditions that surround him or her. This report is therefore divided into two parts. The first part provides context by giving a short overview of the labour market circumstances in the four surveyed countries and the issues they confront in terms of youth employability. It also discusses young people's entry into the labour market, shedding

3 International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020), Youth labour statistics, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/youth/#> (retrieved on 23.12.2021). The NEET figures are provided here because they more fully describe youth inactivity, which is often overlooked in typical unemployment data. Unemployment figures are provided in section 1.1.

4 ILO (2021), *An update on the youth labour market impact of the COVID-19 crisis*, Statistical Brief, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/briefingnote/wcms_795479.pdf

5 Eurofound (2021), *Tackling labour shortages in EU Member States*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2021/tackling-labour-shortages-in-eu-member-states> (accessed 27 December 2021)

6 Hooper, K. (2021), *How Can Europe Deliver on the Potential of Talent Partnerships?*, Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/europe-talent-partnerships> (accessed 27.12.2021)

7 see *Ibid.*

light on their employment prospects and the barriers they face in accessing decent jobs. The second part outlines young people's aspirations in Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia. To detect these aspirations, it draws mostly from surveys related to values, educational choices and information on migration desires, with the premise that they provide indications about young people's life goals.

8 Appadurai, A. (2004). The capacity to aspire: Culture and the terms of recognition. In *Culture and public action*, ed. V. Rao and M. Walton, 59–84. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Methodology

The study relies on a thorough literature review and primary data collected through qualitative research. The literature review focused predominantly on sources and information collected from 2014 onwards. This inclusion criterion was previously identified as important in ensuring not only the relevance of the study and subsequent recommendations developed but also to help contextualise the findings from the interviews conducted. The sources consulted range from official documents, such as census data from statistics institutes to multi-country studies covering the Maghreb region, to official documents mapping the strategic economic sectors in the countries and bilateral mobility agreements. These sources were in Arabic, French, and English.

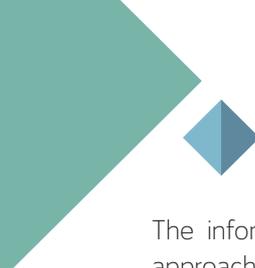
In addition to the literature review, 22 semi-structured interviews were held with stakeholders in Algeria (5), Libya (4), Morocco (6) and Tunisia (7). The following table summarises the interviews by country and by type of stakeholder.

Table 1. Breakdown of interviews by country and type of stakeholder

Country	Total number of interviews	Number of Government stakeholders	Number of CSO representatives	Experts (such as academics, consultants)
Algeria	5	3	1	1
Libya	4	0	2	2
Morocco	6	1	2	3
Tunisia	7	2	1	4
Total	22	6	6	10

The interviews were conducted by local experts and followed a modular format, covering a wide range of issues at varied depths based on the stakeholders' areas of expertise. The modules developed for the research instruments explored broadly youth's aspirations in each country, specifically, their personal, educational and professional aspirations. The modules also covered youth's access to work and their integration in the respective labour markets, the strategic and political frameworks governing youth employment, the existing partnerships in the area of skills, talent and employment and recommendations to improve existing partnerships. This modular approach allowed for a deeper dive into each of these topics depending on the stakeholders' areas of expertise as well as ensuring the comparativeness of the results across the countries under study. Given the geographic scope of the study, the interviews were held in French and Arabic, and lasted on average around one hour.

The recruitment of stakeholders was done following an initial screening of the relevant institutions and the identification of the relevant departments and individuals. 4-6 interviews were conducted in each country, with a wide range of stakeholders including policymakers, civil society experts, academics, and NGO representatives. The majority of the interviews took place online or over the phone rather than in person, given the geographical dispersion of the research participants and the experts conducting the initial phase of the research.



The information collected, analysed and extracted from the interviews was the result of a discourse analysis approach. This approach refers to the use and development of language and the underlying meanings beyond the spoken language. The findings from the interviews conducted were incorporated in individual country reports and interpreted in the social context in which the interviews took place as well as the underlying theoretical interpretations given to the different topics discussed. A comparative method of literature analysis was used to capture the emergence of recurring and common themes.

Limitations and caveats

Several limitations should be highlighted in the context of this investigation. Some were country-specific, while others were cross-cutting.

The findings of this study are based on youth's perspectives expressed through surveys, including nationally representative and comparative surveys including the Arab Barometer, which represents the largest repository of publicly available data on citizens' views in the MENA region. The study is also based on findings from the latest HIMS Survey in Tunisia, and several studies commissioned by the World Bank, UNESCO, government data and other entities, in addition to other sources and stakeholders' view on youth. The former are largely quantitative polls regarding values, educational choices, and migratory desires, which can provide indications about young people's life objectives. One-time research methods such as youth surveys, however, make it difficult to track temporal changes in aspirations and analyse the extent to which research findings reflect prevalent norms. Similarly, stakeholder interviews run the danger of being influenced by the interviewers' norms rather than those of young people. Longer-term, qualitative research that has directly consulted young people on their professional objectives and experiences is limited. Furthermore, the diversity of youth aspirations has not yet been systematically researched, particularly in light of their various socioeconomic circumstances, which influence their abilities to strive and achieve their objectives. This should be kept in mind when considering the findings presented below.

Data looking at gender differences in the populations of interest were also not available across the four countries under research, which limits the study's specificity and the development of gender-specific recommendations based on quantitative data. In some instances, the breakdown of youth's inclusion in specific economic sectors, that is the share of youth in a specific sector, were not available either.

It is important to also highlight the ongoing developments in several countries under research during the time of the interviews, which has had an impact on the types of stakeholders interviewed. In Morocco, the recent government changes meant that government stakeholders were more difficult to contact within the timeframe of the study. Stakeholders working in civil society and other experts were interviewed instead.

Because the study employs a comparative approach to identifying patterns and trends in Maghreb youth aspirations, it has tried to draw on comparable sources for each country to the greatest degree feasible to ensure data comparability. However, there are numerous restrictions to secondary research in Libya. Given the volatile context of the country over the last decade, the availability of robust and recent studies focusing on the themes explored in this study were hard to come across. In order to mitigate this, studies dating before 2014 were consulted for reference, with a higher reliance on the findings from the interviews.

⁹ See ICMPD (2022), *Rapport de l'enquête nationale sur la migration internationale Tunisia- HIMS*, <https://www.icmpd.org/our-work/projects/progres-migration-tunisia>.

1. Youth and the labour markets in North Africa

1.1 Youth unemployment and its causes

Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia are attempting to capitalise on their growing working-age population, which has the potential to be a significant engine of economic growth and development, but they are struggling to create more and better employment. A range of structural barriers impede the private sector from providing economically efficient employment results. Private businesses mention issues with informal sector competition, restrictions, corruption and onerous bureaucracy. A lack of skilled labour, or, more precisely, a mismatch between available skills and labour demands, is also commonly mentioned.¹⁰ There are public and private organisations that act as intermediaries between labour demand and supply, but their services are not always effective. Efforts to implement job-led growth policies have been delayed further by the coronavirus pandemic, which has operated as a game changer in the last two years. The measures taken to halt the spread of COVID-19 have exacerbated the challenges faced by enterprises, resulting in severe employment losses. The added value of all sectors has decreased, but the services industry has been particularly badly impacted.¹¹ This is especially concerning, considering that the service industry has led the way in terms of employment growth in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, employing more than 60 percent of all employees in Algeria¹² and over 45 percent of the entire working population in Morocco¹³. Companies in the service industry are among the most important employers for young people in Tunisia, employing 39.3 percent of the country's youth (42.2 percent of young women and 38.6 percent of young men).¹⁴ Construction and public works are growing sectors in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, accounting for 17¹⁵, 11¹⁶, and 14¹⁷ percent of the working population, respectively. However, it is an industry associated with a non-permanent and male workforce with little or no qualifications. Although the oil and gas sector does not require a huge workforce, the disruption

¹⁰ See for example UNDP (2016), Arab Human Development Report, Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality, UNDP New York, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/arab-human-development-report-2016-youth-and-prospects-human-development-changing-reality> (accessed 10.01.2022); ICMPD (2020), *Linking human capital, labour markets and international mobility: an assessment of challenges in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia*, <https://www.icmpd.org/news/import-news-september/linking-human-capital-labour-markets-and-international-mobility-an-assessment-of-challenges-in-egypt-jordan-morocco-and-tunisia> (accessed 2.2.2022); Lorenceau A., Rim J-Y., Savitki T. (2021), Youth Aspirations and the reality of jobs in Africa, OECD Development Policy Papers N:38, OECD, Paris, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/youth-aspirations-and-the-reality-of-jobs-in-africa_2d089001-en (accessed 10.01.2022)

¹¹ See ICMPD (2022), *Rapport de l'enquête nationale sur la migration internationale Tunisia- HIMS*, <https://www.icmpd.org/our-work/projects/progres-migration-tunisia>; Bank Al-Maghrib (2021), *Rapport annuel de l'exercice 2020*, <https://www.bkam.ma/Communiqués/Communiqué/2021/Rapport-annuel-de-bank-al-maghrib-au-titre-de-l-année-2020> (accessed 10.01.2022); Lopez-Acevedo, G.; Betcherman, G. Khellaf, A.; Molini, V. (2021), *Morocco's Jobs Landscape: Identifying Constraints to an Inclusive Labor Market*, International Development in Focus, Washington, DC: World Bank, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35075> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO (accessed 10.01.2022); World Bank (2021), *Algeria Economic Monitor- Restoring the Algerian Economy after the Pandemic*, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/algeria/publication/algeria-economic-update-fall-2021> (accessed 10.01.2022)

¹² Statista Research Department (2021), Distribution of employment in Algeria 2010-2019, by sector, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1178481/employment-in-algeria-by-sector/> (accessed 28.12.2021)

¹³ Haut-Commissariat au Plan (2020), *Activité, emploi et chômage. Premiers résultats*, Division des enquêtes sur l'emploi, Direction de la statistique, Rabat

¹⁴ The ILO conducted a survey in 2014 on the transition of young people to the labour market in Tunisia.

¹⁵ Statista Research Department (2021)

¹⁶ Haut-Commissariat au Plan (2020)

¹⁷ RETF, 2019

to the hydrocarbon processing industry caused by the pandemic has had a negative impact on the economies of the affected countries. This is especially true for Libya, which is virtually totally reliant on income from oil and gas exports.¹⁸

North Africa has the world's greatest proportion of young people, as well as the highest rates of youth unemployment. According to the ILO, youth unemployment in 2019 ranged from 22.3 per cent in Morocco to 29.7 per cent in Algeria, 35.8 per cent in Tunisia, and as high as 49.5 per cent in Libya.¹⁹ In the four surveyed countries, the labour market situation for the young is characterised by:

- a lack of jobs, particularly for the better educated,
- geographical unemployment, which disproportionately affects young people living in rural locations,
- structural unemployment caused by a mismatch of skills between the unemployed and available jobs,
- precarious employment,
- and cultural and social factors that negatively affect young women seeking employment.

The long-term effects of the pandemic on the labour force are still uncertain but the ILO reports that youth have lost more jobs than any other age group. Lockdown measures interrupted education and training while also limiting people's capacity to obtain work, increasing the number of young people confined to inactivity and leaving them worse off in the long term.²⁰

Box 1: Youth, the ICT sector and the digital economy

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) industry in North Africa has grown over the previous decade as part of the expanding tertiary sector²¹. Tunisia is ranked first in this branch on a continental scale with a telephone network comprising 15 million lines and 8.3 million internet subscribers in 2017 (EFT, 2019). It has 30,000 students enrolled in higher education specialties and training related to this sector offering the job market in the 8,000 graduates per year (EFT, 2019). In Morocco, the Special Commission on the Development Model sees the digital sector as a transformation and development lever and the ICT industry is increasingly offering opportunities to workers with a high certification (Bac + 5).²² According to a Rekrute.com poll done in 2021 with a focus on the IT business, young Moroccans with an IT background particularly are in high demand by other countries. It found that 49 percent had been approached at least once by a foreign business in the preceding six months, a proportion that climbs with the number of years of study but also with the number of years of experience.²³

18 Groupe de la Banque Africaine de Développement (2021). Perspectives économiques en Libye, <https://www.afdb.org/fr/countries/north-africa/libya/libya-economic-outlook> (accessed 28.12.2021)

19 International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database. Data retrieved on June 15, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SLUEM1524.ZS?locations=ZQ> (accessed 28.12.2021)

20 ILO (2021), *An update on the youth labour market impact of the COVID-19 crisis*, ILO brief, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/briefingnote/wcms_795479.pdf

21 The tertiary sector comprises several fields of activity such as commerce, administration, transport, financial and real estate activities, services to businesses and individuals, education, health and social action.

22 Rekrute.com, 2021, most searched profiles in 2020.

23 Rekrute.com, 2021, zoom on the IT sector in Morocco. The sample interviewed included 582 persons, mostly young and male. The level of training was variable, but 63 percent had at least BAC + 3 level.

Libya has for its part been investing in large projects in ICT infrastructures and equipment with a vision to continue these investments in the future. This represents an important shift in the economic vision for the country and provides important opportunities in the field of internet, computer science and digitalisation with promising markets. These investments come following an effort to rebuild the damaged ICT infrastructure after the civil war and several partnerships with foreign companies are established²⁴. The fact remains, however, that the four surveyed countries have not yet managed to generate decent work opportunities for their young ICT graduates. According to World Bank analysts, ICT professionals only accounted for 0.1 percent of total employment in low-income countries in 2018 compared to 2.1 percent in high-income nations. According to the same analysts, outward migration of North African ICT workers is spurred by large wage disparities between North African and European countries and is aimed towards countries with a more developed digital sector.²⁵

The digital economy, which has the potential to provide appealing opportunities for today's tech-savvy young,²⁶ is also still in its infancy in the region. According to an EFE study, youth in Algeria are quite interested in working in the digital economy, with 25 percent stating that they are highly interested and 40 percent indicating that they are somewhat interested in working at a company operating in the digital economy. There were no statistically significant differences in the results between men and women. At the same time, understanding of the digital economy among youth must be increased. Indeed, two out of every three young participants were unable to identify a single Algerian firm active in the digital economy.²⁷

1.2 Job entry challenges

A number of studies have been done on the difficult transition from education to employment in North Africa. Young people in Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia face a number of difficulties in finding work. The tertiary educated have a particularly tough time breaking into the labour market: Graduate jobs are short in supply and academic training is not necessarily related to labour market demands. The so-called skills gap is a common topic in the literature and expert interviews, and it is regarded as one of the primary reasons of youth unemployment in the region. While young people are concerned about a lack of suitable job options, recruiting managers are struggling to fill vacant positions. This mismatch is caused by a divide between educational and employment systems. Aside from the skills gap, numerous companies see a lack of work experience among young people as a major barrier to employment.²⁸ Because internships at businesses are few, addressing this lack of experience is challenging.²⁹

24 <https://www.financialafrik.com/2021/07/29/libye-hatif-libya-sallie-a-infinera-pour-ameliorer-son-reseau-de-fibre-optique/>

25 World Bank Group (2021), Data for Better Lives, World Development Report 2021, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/ The World Bank, Washington, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2021> (accessed 10.01.2022)

26 Internet use among young people is 93 percent in Algeria and Morocco, 91 percent in Tunisia, and 88 percent in Libya. 94 to 96 percent of youth in the four countries use social media daily. Raz D. (2019), Youth in Middle East and North Africa, Arab Barometer, University of Michigan

27 The sample comprised of 118 young persons aged 20 to 35, 63 percent of whom were male and 37 percent of whom were female, and the majority of them were from Algiers (88 percent). A. Barry and D. Dandachli (2020), *Youth and women's employment in Algeria. Barriers and opportunities*, Education for Employment (EFE), Washington DC.

28 Ibid.

29 Bourquia, R. (2019), *Efficacité et efficacité du système universitaire à accès régulé*, Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, de la formation et de la recherche scientifique, Rabat, https://liseofrance-education-international.fr/index.php?lvl=notice_display&id=45758

It also appears from the stakeholder interviews that young people often lack soft skills that would help them pitch their knowledge and know-how to recruiters. Furthermore, graduates are not always completely aware of their potential and employment options, and they are believed to be unfamiliar with job search strategies. It is also important to note the lack of transparency in recruitment procedures and overreliance on personal networks to fill jobs. The great majority of young Arab citizens feel that having good contacts is necessary for finding work. Approximately nine out of ten Tunisian youth (94 percent), Libyan youth (91 percent), Algerian youth (91 percent), and Moroccan youth (88 percent) believe that getting a job through personal ties occurs frequently or sometimes based on recent experience.³⁰ The reliance on connections to get employment adds another layer of inequality to the labour market, since young people from less privileged backgrounds or from remote regions frequently lack the social network that may aid them in finding employment in larger cities where most opportunities exist. Young women in those locations confront a double vulnerability due to gender-related societal restrictions as well as a lack of opportunity due to their remoteness.³¹

Finally, and most crucially, young people's access to job opportunities is hampered by a lack of (regular and safe) public transportation, requiring them to move to locations with a high concentration of enterprises. Because these places have higher living expenses, relocation usually comes at the expense of their standard of living.

The aforementioned challenges are likely to shape young people's perceptions of what is doable in the current conditions, thereby limiting the scope of their aspirations. According to research, many young people in North Africa are demotivated, which has a negative influence on both their educational route and training, as well as their integration into the labour market. Focus group sessions with young jobless people done as part of the Building Algerian Youth's Future (BAYF) initiative, for example, indicated a vicious circle of societal pressure to find employment, poor self-confidence, and a pessimistic attitude on their chances of finding work.³²

³⁰ Raz D. (2019)

³¹ Omrane M. (2016), Youth in Algeria: Actors, policies and impact of international cooperation, Centre de Recherche en Économie Appliquée pour le Développement (CREAD), Alger

³² Building Algerian Youth's Future (BAYF) (2019), Labour market report - Socio-economic labour market study, <https://www.bayf.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/BAYF-FINAL-Labour-Market-Report-ENG.pdf>



2. The professional aspirations of youth in Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia

2.1 Job security, the quest for personal autonomy and societal inclusion

Finding secure employment is the main aspiration of the young generation in the four surveyed countries. The significance of work for North African youth is noteworthy when seen in the light of a wider generational context. According to the World Values Survey 2010-2014, an average of 81 percent of young people in Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia believe that work is very important in their lives. In comparison, just 51 percent of young people in the EU member countries included in the poll³³ place the same value on work³⁴ Furthermore, an average of 44 percent of youth in Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia believe that “in the long run, hard work usually brings a better life”. In comparison, only 15 percent of young Europeans believe that that is the case.³⁵ Also, while it is commonly stated that Millennials and Generation Z³⁶ prioritise work-life balance over all other elements of work³⁷, this does not seem to apply to young people in the surveyed countries who value leisure time less than their European peers (average 33 percent versus 42 percent).

The desire for a decent and meaningful job must be seen not just considering high youth unemployment rates, but also in light of the informality and precarious employment that continue to be an unfortunate reality for the majority of employed young people in North Africa. Accordingly, only a minority of young people have employment-related health insurance or participate in a pension plan.³⁸ The short employee tenure among young people has been noted by the interviewed stakeholders and employers cited in the literature, as well as the ease with which employees may be laid off. Furthermore, graduates are usually pushed into lower-wage positions, moving from job to job to make ends meet and gain some recognition and dignity, as youth in pertinent surveys have emphasised.³⁹ Because of the frequent changes in occupation, this generation has earned a reputation as faultfinders and job hoppers.⁴⁰ Youth without a diploma, on the other hand, cannot afford to remain jobless and must accept any job offered rather than looking for more meaningful and productive employment.⁴¹

33 These include Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

34 World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-2014. Although a more current study for the period 2017-2020 is available, it only covers data for Tunisia and excludes Algeria, Libya, and Morocco, which prevents data comparison. In 2020, 79.7 percent of Tunisian youth stated that work was very important in their lives.

35 Ibid.

36 Although there is no agreed-upon age category for the two, Millennials are understood to span the birth years of 1981-1997, while anyone born between 1997 and today is considered a member of Gen-Z.

37 Deloitte (2017). *The 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey- Winning over the next generation of leaders*. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/gx-millennial-survey-2016-exec-summary.pdf>

38 Omrane M. (2016); Lopez-Acevedo, G.; Betcherman, G. Khellaf, A.; Molini, V. (2021).

39 A. Barry and D. Dandachli (2020)

40 Ibid.

41 IFAD/ ILO (2018). Morocco- Young women's employment and empowerment in the rural economy. Country brief. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_622767.pdf (accessed 10.01.2022)

Financial reward is especially important in achieving larger life goals such as a decent living, a suitable home, starting a family, and personal autonomy. The yearning for more independence, in particular, must be seen against the reality that the vast majority of young people live with their parents. "Young people have varied aspirations, which may vary from region to region," said one stakeholder in Algeria, "however, I've discovered that among our country's youth, a recurrent theme is a desire for independence."

The public sector is by far the most sought-after employer because it combines the attributes of work stability and social security that young employees want. The public sector employs a significant portion of the workforce in all four countries studied and is especially appealing to tertiary educated recruits. Libya is somewhat of an outlier, however, in that its state salaries are extremely low. Despite the fact that public job prospects are dwindling, the choice for state employment is likely to influence how young North African women and men choose their study subjects (see section 2.3). In the private sector, young people aspire to work in foreign companies, which are believed to offer better working conditions than domestic enterprises.

In addition to personal autonomy through employment, research about youth aspirations shows that young people have a strong wish for greater societal inclusion and participation in decision-making. Work is therefore not only seen as satisfying material needs but also as a source of dignity and meaning and an important factor in integrating society. According to surveys, youth in North Africa are indifferent to politics, both generally and when contrasted to older generations. Only 23 percent of young Moroccans, 21 percent of young Libyans, 17 percent of Tunisian youth, and 15 percent of Algerian youth are interested in politics. This lack of interest may be a result of dissatisfaction with their country's political system.⁴² After all, youth played a central role in shifting the social and political dynamics in their country following the 2011 uprisings. However, youth participation in formal and institutional political processes is relatively low compared to the participation of older citizens. Young people are more likely to participate in informal political processes such as activism and protests and more generally a driving force for reform movements.⁴³ This was echoed through the interviews conducted with experts on Libya, who highlighted that many young people in the MENA region wish for the establishment of efficient and effective governance, the fight against corruption, better access to information, and greater respect for political freedoms, including freedom of expression, and the rule of law.⁴⁴ According to the Arab Barometer, Tunisia's youth are the only ones in the region who believe in their civil liberties, with more than 63 percent trusting that freedom of expression is guaranteed to a great or medium extent in the country and nearly half believing that they are free to participate in peaceful protests for example.⁴⁵

2.2 Entrepreneurship and self-employment by choice

While secure employment is the preferred career option for most young people in North Africa, several youth polls have showed that there is also a share of youth that have a significant degree of enthusiasm in becoming self-employed through entrepreneurship. In Algeria, a BAYF study of 1,500 young jobless people (ages 18-34) discovered that around one-third wanted to start their own businesses or be self-employed. This figure was even higher among young women (37 percent versus 24 percent among men). The conclusion is consistent with the fact that more than 60 percent of the projects funded by Algeria's National Microcredit Management Agency in 2018 were led by women—mainly in the micro-business industries, services, and crafts. Self-employment is expected to provide young women with more flexibility in balancing work and care duties, and it can be a means to avoid workplace gender

⁴² Raz D. (2019), Youth in Middle East and North Africa, Arab Barometer, University of Michigan

⁴³ Centre de Recherche en Économie Appliquée pour le Développement (CREAD) (2016), National Case Study Algeria, SAHWA project, Alger, <http://www.sahwa.eu/OUTPUTS/Other-publications/National-Case-Study-ALGERIA>; UNDP (2016) ;

⁴⁴ Stakeholder interviews Algeria, Morocco and Libya

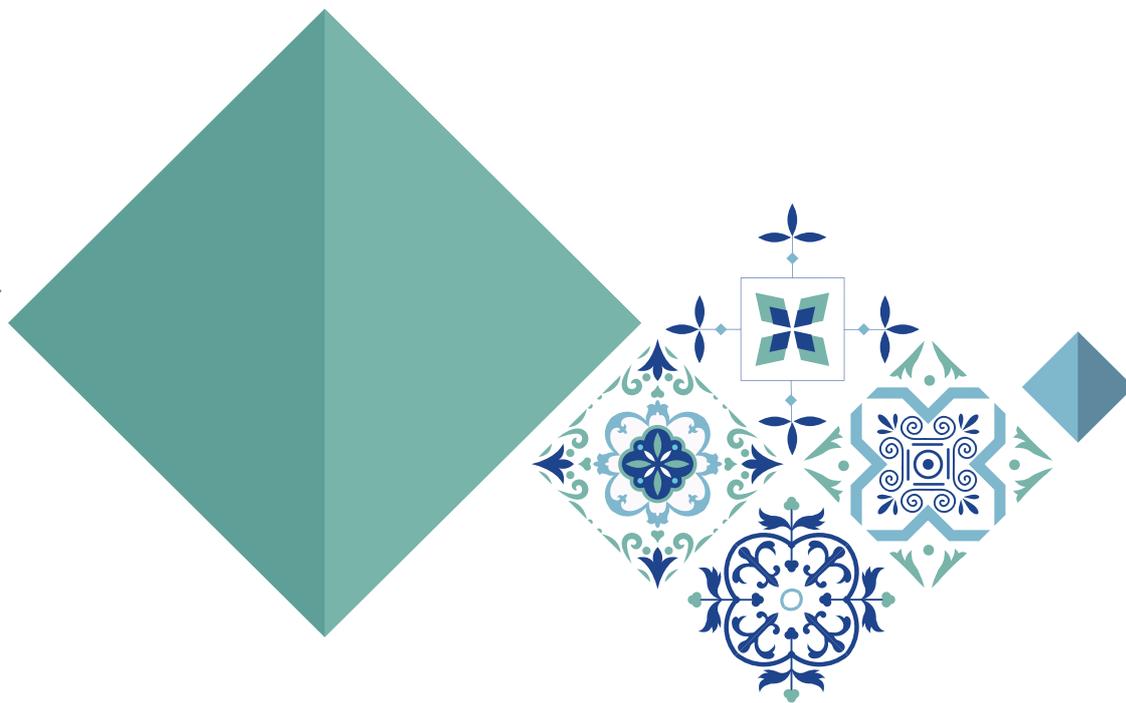
⁴⁵ Raz D. (2019)

discrimination.⁴⁶ Self-employment in Algeria has been gradually expanding, reaching 32.4 percent in 2019.⁴⁷ According to qualitative research conducted in Tunisia on 46 women and 51 men with an average age of 23 years, young Tunisians mainly aspire to start their own initiatives and establish their own employment in order to earn autonomy and responsibility, which would help them fulfil their personal objectives and ambitions. Such initiatives are frequently associated with the sectors of services, catering, and information and communication technology.

According to ethnographic research conducted in Morocco, there is a growing desire among young Moroccans too to become entrepreneurs. However, the proportion of entrepreneurs among the highly qualified in Morocco has remained low, at 9.7 percent, with the majority of them being males. According to the same study, young entrepreneurs from public schools believe that the education system is incapable of empowering future young entrepreneurs owing to outmoded teaching techniques and a lack of nurturing innovation.⁴⁹

In Libya, entrepreneurship indicators remain low despite the private sector's expansion since the 2011 revolution. According to statistics and the population census from 2013, the proportion of self-employed workers does not exceed 8 percent, not least due to a lack of policies encouraging young people to innovate and create their own projects.

More generally, entrepreneurship in all four surveyed countries is contending with many challenges, including a complex regulatory framework and limited access to funding. The four countries rank low on their ease of doing business: Morocco has improved its rating from 69th in 2018 to 53rd in 2020; Tunisia ranks 78th; Algeria improved its score but remains in the last tiers moving from 166th to 157th in 2018; and Libya ranks 186th.⁵⁰ Bureaucracy, according to several of the interviewed experts, is a significant impediment to entrepreneurship and has a particularly discouraging effect on young people.



⁴⁶ BAYF (2019)

⁴⁷ European Training Foundation (ETF) (2020), Algeria. Education, training and employment developments 2020, ETF, Turin

⁴⁸ The survey was carried out by BJK consulting under the title of "Study on young people and their visions of the labor market, 2019" in partnership with the ILO, the UGTT and the MFPI.

⁴⁹ Institut des Hautes Études de Management (HEM) (2016), National Case Study, Morocco, Rabat

⁵⁰ The ranking includes 190 countries overall. World Bank, Doing Business - measuring business regulations, <https://www.doingbusiness.org/en/data/exploreconomies/algeria> (accessed 29.12.2021)

Box 2: Career aspirations in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) – passion or pragmatism?

The desire to pursue a career in STEM is certainly linked to the student's performance in science and mathematics⁵¹ but equally, the premise that career aspirations are at least somewhat socially formed is widely supported by aspiration research⁵². In this sense, the phenomenon of high enrolment in STEM programmes in the MENA area is intriguing. According to UNESCO, Tunisia was rated first in the world in 2018 in terms of the proportion of STEM graduates, with 43.3 percent of students getting a diploma in these areas among all graduates. Interestingly, although men continue to make up the majority of STEM graduates overall, UNESCO estimates that women account for 34 to 57 percent of STEM graduates in Arab countries⁵³, which is higher than in OECD countries.⁵⁴ In the engineering field, for example, women make up 48.5 percent of graduates in Algeria, 42.2 percent in Morocco, and 44.2 percent in Tunisia. In comparison, the average percentage of female engineering graduates in the EU is 25 percent. In the field of ICT studies, the gender disparity is considerably larger, with women accounting for 48 percent of graduates on average in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, compared to only 20 percent in EU member states.⁵⁵

The literature presents several explanations for the region's higher numbers of enrolment in STEM studies. In the case of young women's representation in the ICT field, one difference is that, because the Arab world's tech economy is still relatively new, there is no legacy of it being a male-dominated field. Many STEM vocations, on the other hand, have been assigned a male gender identity in the majority of European nations. There is also the notion that digital work for example frees women from cultural restraints or safety concerns, and reduces the challenges of mobility, childcare, workplace discrimination in North African countries.⁵⁶ Others have argued that pursuing a STEM job is mainly motivated by pragmatic economic concerns: while women in North Africa continue to face structural disadvantages in the labour market and in entrepreneurship, female STEM graduates tend to have an easier path into the workforce than their peers who majored in education or the humanities.⁵⁷

Interviewed stakeholders in Algeria have ventured that the preference for STEM courses is related to the wish to emigrate. STEM occupations are typically in high demand across the world. Thus, the choice to pursue these programmes is sometimes linked to the emigration goals [of STEM graduates] and the professional opportunities presented to them.⁵⁸

51 PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education.

52 See for example Appadurai, A. (2004); Dalton, P.; Ghosal, S.; Mani, A. (2016), Poverty and aspirations failure, in *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 126, No. 590, pp. 165–188; Stahl, G., Wallace, D., Burke, C., & Threadgold, S. (2018). Introduction: Using Bourdieu to Theorize Aspirations. In G. Stahl, D. Wallace, C. Burke & S. Threadgold (Authors), *International Perspectives on Theorizing Aspirations: Applying Bourdieu's Tools* (pp. 1–18). London: Bloomsbury Academic, <https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/international-perspectives-on-theorizing-aspirations-applying-bourdieu-tools/introduction-using-bourdieu-to-theorize-aspirations> (accessed 10.01.2022)

53 In 2016, more than 37 percent of all female tertiary-education graduates Tunisia had a STEM degree.

54 OECD (2018), CO32: *Gender differences in university graduates by fields of study*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://www.oecd.org/els/CO3_2_Gender_differences_in_university_graduates.pdf; UNESCO (2018), *How women are transforming the Arab world's start-up scene*, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/07/start-up-middle-east-arab-women-transforming-entrepreneurship/> (accessed 31.12.2021).

55 UNESCO (2021), To be smart, the digital revolution will need to be inclusive: excerpt from the UNESCO science report, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375429>, (accessed 11.2022). Comparable, recent data on Libya is not available.

56 UNESCO (2018), *How women are transforming the Arab world's start-up scene*, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/07/start-up-middle-east-arab-women-transforming-entrepreneurship/> (accessed 31.12.2021).

57 Weingarten, E. (2017), *The STEM Paradox: Why Are Muslim-Majority Countries Producing So Many Female Engineers?*, *The STEM paradox. Why are Muslim-majority countries producing so many female engineers?* (slate.com) (accessed 28.12.2021). See also <http://womeninengineeringpmcs.org/> Dimova, R., S. Elder and K. Stephan (2016), *Labour Market Transitions of Young Women and Men in the Middle East and North Africa*, Work4Youth Publication Series 44, https://www.wilo.org/wcmsps5/groups/public/--ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_536067pdf.

58 Expert interview EMP

The socioeconomic background is also said to play a role – for both young men and women – because educational achievements are heavily influenced by the family background. Young individuals from more privileged families have a greater chance of pursuing a scientific career as a qualified scientist or technician in academia or in the private sector industries. Also, according to the literature⁵⁹ and interviews with stakeholders, young people heed their parents' recommendations when it comes to pursuing a profession in STEM. Parental advice is important for a generation that places a high value on family relationships. Indeed, the combined average percentage of young people in Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia reporting that "one of my primary aims in life has been to make my parents proud" is 77 percent, compared to 26 percent for youth in European nations.⁶⁰

Finally, educational policies are likely to influence the job paths of young people. In Tunisia, for example, a combination of limiting curricular options by tying study areas to results on a national test after high school⁶¹ and investing in training possibilities in developing sectors related to technical businesses has boosted the number of STEM graduates.⁶² In general, Tunisia has opted for an increase in the number of people studying computer sciences, technical and engineering sciences, and focused on the development of new short courses in the field of technology with high employability through the "Instituts Supérieurs d'Enseignement Technologique." This has increased the total number of students in this field from 26 percent to 68.5 percent between 2005 and 2012 (OIT, 2012). Similarly, the number of engineering and architecture graduates increased significantly between 2009 and 2014, rising from 4,086 to 5,208 (ITCEQ, 2016).

The above-mentioned arguments all agree that passion for STEM does not appear to be the primary incentive for wanting to pursue a career in this subject. The socio-economic background, culture, parental guidance, rational considerations, as well as educational policies all affect young people's career aspirations.

2.3 Social mobility through education

The search for personal autonomy and agency on the part of young North Africans becomes manifest in the substantial levels of their educational aspirations. Educational attainment is frequently viewed as an important driver of social mobility, which translates into increasing enrolment levels in higher education institutions. Notably Algeria and Morocco have had considerable gains in the tertiary education gross enrolment ratio: in Algeria, it climbed from 31.2 percent in 2011 to 52.6 percent in 2019 (of whom 66.4 percent women and 39.7 percent men). The gross enrolment ratio in Morocco increased from 16.4 percent in 2011 to 38.5 percent in 2019 (with 39.1 percent women and 38.1 percent men). Only Tunisia's gross enrolment percentage for postsecondary education has decreased somewhat from 2011, falling from 35.2 percent in 2011 to 31.9 percent in 2019. (41.7 percent women and 22.6 percent men).⁶³ The most recent data for Libya date back to 2011-2012, and it shows that around 375,000 students were enrolled in a bachelor programme, with a significantly higher proportion of female students compared to male students.⁶⁴ At the master's degree level for the same period, around 13,000 students were enrolled with a slightly

59 Weingarten, E. (2017)

60 World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-2014.

61 Weingarten, E. (2017))

62 Ibid

63 UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Data for Sustainable Development, <http://uis.unesco.org/> (accessed 11.2022). Comparable, recent data on Libya is not available.

64 Département de planification et de développement au ministère de l'éducation



higher male enrolment compared to the female⁶⁵. These figures are rather limited and although most disciplines are represented at the bachelor level, very few are available at the master's level, with the doctorate level barely existent in Libyan universities.

The choice of study subjects gives some insight into the relationship between schooling and young people's ideas about their future. MENA countries outperform their European equivalents in terms of STEM enrolments, with Tunisia leading the way (see box 2). Humanities and social sciences are popular among students in Algeria and Morocco, and there is anecdotal evidence that this is also true in Libya. The preference for humanities and social sciences in enrolment is consistent with young people's desire to work in government. In Morocco, these fields have historically led to careers as civil servants.⁶⁶ In Algeria, education in humanities and social sciences is said to be designed to develop graduates with the skills necessary for public sector employment and pass the requisite entrance exams.⁶⁷ The public services in Morocco⁶⁸ and Tunisia too recruit through recruitment competitions, which are primarily based on educational qualifications.⁶⁹ Because opportunities in the public sector are finite and their skills do not match the needs of the private sector, many young people with advanced degrees in humanities and social sciences remain unemployed.

Table 2. Distribution of tertiary graduates by field of study

Country	Educ.	Human.	Social sc.	Business admin/ law	Natural sc.	ICT	Engin.	Agric./ fisheries	Health	STEM
Algeria	302	202	1627	2249	1284	303	1371	191	289	2011
Libya	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Morocco	129	1398	889	2490	1034	494	511	012	194	2039
Tunisia	045	1329	6	2257	991	1385	1949	151	873	4325

Distribution of both sexes in percent according to most recent data available (2020 for Algeria and Morocco; 2018 for Tunisia). Data on Libya is not available. Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

66 Brahim Boudarbat And Aziz Ajbilou (2009), Moroccan Youth in an Era of Volatile Growth, Urbanization, and Poverty, In Dhillon, N., & Yousef, T. (Eds). *Generation in Waiting: The Unfulfilled Promise of Young People in the Middle East*, pp. 166-188, Brookings Institution Press.

67 European Training Foundation (ETF) (2020); IMF Middle East and Central Asia Department (2014), *Algeria. Selected Issues Paper in IMF Staff Country Reports Volume 2014 Issue 342 (2014)*

68 In Morocco, the introduction of entry exams for public employment in 2006 led to periodic protests by the "diplômés chômeurs", which led to a temporary suspension of the exams and the direct recruitment of some 4,000 graduates into public service jobs in 2011 and 2012. El Baoune, Nadia (2019). The resurrection of the "diplômés chômeurs" protests in Morocco, Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis, <https://mipa.institute/6823> (accessed 11.01.2022)

69 World Bank (2016), Middle East and North Africa Public employment and governance in MENA, Report No: ACS18501, Washington, <https://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/339381472236811833/pdf/ACS18501-WP-OUO-g-Final-Output-Documents-has-been-approved-P147520.pdf> (accessed 11.01.2022)

Table 3. Share of female tertiary graduates by field, 2018 (in percent)

Country	Human.	Social sc.	Business admin/ law	Natural sc.	ICT	Engin.	Agric./ fisheries	Health
Algeria	80.2	68.4	57.7	83.1	48.9	48.5	76.8	70.5
Libya	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Morocco	47.9	55.8	48.7	48.7	41.3	42.2	44.2	72.3
Tunisia	74.4	77.3	71.3	77.2	55.6	44.2	73.9	75.3

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics cited in UNESCO (2021)

This study can only speculate on the motivations that drive students' educational decisions. Variables such as selecting a larger degree due to ambivalence about the professional path to follow, social influence, or genuine interest in the subject area are all likely to have an impact. Previous research has pointed to a lack of information about labour market realities and a lack of understanding about the "market worth" of specific educational qualifications to explain the so-called skills mismatch.⁷⁰ It is worth emphasising that young people in North Africa are not the only ones who do not always fit their educational choices to the demands of the labour market. In the United Kingdom for example, research by Education and Employers found a gap between young people's career goals and jobs in the UK, whether existing openings or expected demand.⁷¹ In another study at the European level (Henriksen et al., 2015), researchers noticed that high school students, as well as STEM students, seldom grasp the employment prospects accessible to them.⁷² The effect, however, is more harmful in the North African setting, since it aggravates an already stressful labour market situation for youth.

At the level of intermediate vocational education, occupational training preferences reveal that young Moroccans appear to want to work in the mechanical and electromechanical metallurgical industries (19.4 percent), administration, management, and commerce (17.9 percent), and construction (16.7 percent).⁷³ In Tunisia, the focus is on the electricity and electronics sector (29 percent of total graduates), general mechanics and metal construction, transport and maintenance of vehicles and buildings and public works – all of which are dominated by male students. Women are better represented in textile and clothing training, which ranks second in terms of the number of degrees and certificates issued. For Algeria, there is anecdotal evidence that the digital, graphic arts, and audio-visual training are quite popular among young people.⁷⁴

However, overall, vocational training rates remain low. Vocational training has a poor reputation in the Arab world, as it is regarded as less desirable than other educational possibilities.⁷⁵ According to SAHWA project data, 23.6 percent of Algerian young people (aged 15 to 29) chose vocational training in 2015. This is more than in the other nations

⁷⁰ ICMPD (2020)

⁷¹ Education and Employers (2020), *Disconnected: Career aspirations and jobs in the UK* <https://www.educationandemployers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Disconnected-Career-aspirations-and-jobs-in-the-UK-1.pdf> (accessed 2.2.2022)

⁷² Henriksen, K. E., Dillon, J., Ryder, J. & (eds), 2015, *Understanding Student Participation and Choice in Science and Technology Education*. s.l.: Springer Verlag.

⁷³ ICMPD (2020)

⁷⁴ Stakeholder interview

surveyed, although it is a very small proportionate percentage.⁷⁶ Since 2013, Tunisia's proportionate enrolment in vocational training has been declining to less than 10 percent, and while Morocco's proportional enrolment in technical education has improved, it still falls short of the 10 percent level.⁷⁷ Women, in particular, continue to be underrepresented in apprenticeship training. This is especially troubling given data from 2017 research conducted by ONEQ, Tunisia's Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment, and the ETF that reveals that graduates of vocational training are less affected by unemployment than those of higher education. In reality, the jobless rate for higher education graduates reached 30.5 percent in 2016, whereas it was roughly 23.2 percent for vocational training graduates.⁷⁸ A combination of societal aspiration and a lack of awareness of labour market dynamics is likely to be at the root of youth's low interest in pursuing vocational training. In general, young people do not want to pursue manual and craft employment because they believe it is undervalued and provides a lesser social standing than for example a university degree.⁷⁹

Box 3: Public tertiary education: high enrolments but little trust

The link of education with social standing, as well as the role it is seen to play in employment attainment, particularly in government jobs, is driving rising university enrolment statistics in Algeria, Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia. Furthermore, the four countries have implemented a policy of universal open access at the majority of higher education institutions in order to enhance tertiary education participation. However, the exponential expansion in student enrolment has not always been matched by an increase in teaching personnel or facilities, advancements in pedagogical approaches, or curriculum adaptation to labour demands. As a result, both students and businesses have low faith in the public education system's quality or relevance for the labour market.⁸⁰ Looking at perceived corruption in the education system as one possible cause for low levels of satisfaction, many young people feel that bribes are necessary in order to obtain greater access to school services. This is the belief of 54% of young Moroccans, 53% of Algeria's young people, and 50% of Tunisian youth.⁸¹ Dissatisfaction with public education leads to a strong demand for private education and a rise in the number of private schools, and it has affected young North Africans' emigration aspirations (see section 2.4). The four countries have started to implement educational reforms, such as reforming university curricula, ensuring quality tertiary education, and increasing vocational training programmes. The pandemic-related containment measures are likely to have disrupted new training and education initiatives, such as for example Algeria's new Action Plan⁸², which had to be suspended due to the coronavirus situation.⁸³

75 UNDP (2016)

76 Omrane M. (2016); SAHWA(2017), *Rapport principal de l'enquête algérienne sur la jeunesse*, SAHWA project, <http://www.sahwa.eu/OUTPUTS/Other-publications/Rapport-principal-de-l-enquete-algerienne-sur-la-jeunesse> (accessed 21.2022)

77 ICMPD (2020)

78 World Bank Indicator (2019) <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>

79 A. Barry and D. Dandachli (2020); BAYF (2019); Centre de Recherche en Économie Appliquée pour le Développement (CREAD) (2016), National Case Study Algeria, SAHWA project, Alger, <http://www.sahwa.eu/OUTPUTS/Other-publications/National-Case-Study-ALGERIA> (accessed 10.01.2022)

80 HEM (2016); Kamal A. (2017), National Youth Policies. The case of Morocco, Policy Paper, SAHWA papers, https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/project_papers/sahwa_papers/policy_paper/sahwa_papers_national_youth_policies_the_case_of_morocco; International Credit Mobility, ICMED project, https://www.icmedproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/WP4_POLICY-BRIEF_ALGERIA.pdf

81 Raz D. (2019)

82 See Plan d'Action du Gouvernement pour la Mise en Œuvre du Programme du Président de la République, <http://www.cg.gov.dz/ressources/front/files/pdf/plans-d-actions/plan-d-action-du-gouvernement-2020-fr.pdf>. Launched in February 2020, the Action Plan aims at better synchronising higher education and the practical needs of the labour market to reduce youth unemployment. It foresees measures to modernise vocational education and training through the development of apprenticeships, training, and distance learning, the establishment of centres of excellence in key economic sectors, and the creation of the 'baccalauréat professionnel'.

83 ETF (2020)

2.4 Emigration aspirations

There is a direct link between the life aspirations expressed by youth and their stated emigration motives. The stakeholder interviews conducted for this study confirmed survey findings that examined young people's emigration ambitions in Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia and found that the lack of professional opportunities is one of the main emigration drivers for youth, even though other factors such as attraction by way of life, affordability, or family ties may be cited as reasons for the choice of destination.⁸⁴ The desire to leave is further deepened by negative perceptions of the quality of the education, particularly in tertiary education (see box 3). In the case of Libya, many young people pursue higher education in neighbouring countries, as well as in North America and Europe, which allows them to pursue careers that are better suited for their professional aspirations. According to a 2018 research that polled 2,813 young people in Libya, half of the young women and men who participated desired to emigrate for intellectual reasons.⁸⁵ These findings back up similar views expressed by professionals interviewed concerning the shifting beliefs and ambitions of Libyan youth in comparison to earlier generations. In a country where 40 percent of the population is between the ages of 15 and 29, this perspective is critical in terms of establishing a new vision for the country and the economy, as well as harnessing the potential of a young population.

Another factor pushing emigration is the political environment. The political and security settings of the country drive ambitions to leave, particularly among young Libyans. According to an Arab Barometer study, corruption is another factor driving emigration in Algeria and Morocco, particularly among the young and educated.⁸⁶

According to the Arab Barometer, one in every three young Algerians and Moroccans considers emigrating.⁸⁷ According to UNFPA research, 44 percent of young Tunisians aged 15 to 24 years had considered leaving (2016). According to the above-mentioned Libyan study of 2,813 young people, 71 percent of those polled reported a desire to move, while 29 percent stated a desire not to leave. There was no discernible difference between men and women.⁸⁸ Emigration desires are particularly high among those with higher education degrees who seek professional fulfilment. A Rekrute.com poll of 2018 examined the reasons for prospective labour emigration among Moroccan executives with at least a bachelor's degree level and discovered that greater professional advancement (66 percent), a better quality of life (56 percent), and a better working environment were among the top emigration motivators. Similarly, a large share of Libyan migrants in the OECD countries have acquired a higher education diploma prior to leaving. Over half were holders of a bachelor's, master's, or a PhD degree, and were employed in highly qualified positions in the aeronautic industry, architecture, trade, dentistry, ICT, law, medicine, as well as former parliamentarians, highly ranked state representatives and other professionals.⁸⁹ For Tunisians too, the emigration rate among higher graduates is higher (126 percent) than among young people without a diploma (6.4 percent).⁹⁰

It is crucial to note at this point that the expressed intention to emigrate does not always translate into reality. According to studies on real migration propensities in Morocco, only a small percentage of persons (between 9 to 14 percent) who stated a desire to emigrate⁹¹ had concrete emigration plans or had taken meaningful steps toward leaving their country. According to the AMERM-ETF research, persons with a high and medium level of education

84 See for example Omrane M. (2016); SAHWA (2017)

85 <https://www.defendercenter.org/ar/2416>

86 Arab Barometer (2019), Migration in the Middle East and North Africa, Michael Robbins, Princeton University.

87 *ibid*

88 <https://www.defendercenter.org/ar/2416>

89 Base de données DIOC-E, OECD

90 UNFPA

91 Haut-Commissariat au Plan (HCP) (2020), *Résultats de l'enquête nationale sur la migration internationale 2018-2019*, Rabat, https://www.hcp.ma/Le-Haut-Commissariat-au-Plan-met-en-ligne-le-rapport-des-resultats-detaillés-de-l-enquete-sur-la-migration_a2571.html (accessed 10.01.2022). The sample size in the HCP study to measure emigration intentions was 2,860 households; Rekrute.com (2014), Dossier de presse, Global talent survey, https://www.rekrute.com/files-press-media/Dossier_de_presse_GTS_Network_Rekrute_BCG-DEF.pdf (accessed 10.01.2022)



have a higher potential to emigrate since they have better access to information, travel papers, and financial means to complete their migration project. For the Libyan youth surveyed, among those who mentioned their desire to migrate, only half have mentioned that they took active steps towards their journey and that it was only a matter of time before they left the country. Equally worth mentioning, a third of the respondents replied that their plans entailed undertaking an irregular path through the Central Mediterranean route by boat. Those who did not express their explicit intention to migrate mentioned that their desire was hampered by several factors including societal factors, as well as economic factors, gender factors, their financial inability to migrate, their fear of the unknown and their family attachments.⁹² These factors are particularly interesting in the Libyan context given the role family and tribal attachments play in individuals' lives and life decisions, including decisions to migrate for youth.

Ethnographic fieldwork in Algeria also suggests that most of the young unskilled persons in particular do not desire to migrate as a first option. It is more of a last resort following multiple failed job applications. A shortage of work possibilities encourages young individuals who have lost hope to contemplate a migratory endeavour, even if it is illegal.⁹³

Box 4: Student mobility – opportunities and challenges

Student mobility contributes greatly to the enrichment of education systems, the flow of talent, and the creation of a highly trained workforce. The vast majority of Algeria's international students (almost 79 percent) choose to study in France.⁹⁴ With a significant distance Canada (2.21 percent) and Turkey (2 percent) rank second and third in terms of the number of scholars from Algeria studying at their universities, according to UNESCO.⁹⁵ Increasingly, universities in China offer scholarships for Algerian students although data on the number of Algerian students in China does not seem to be available.⁹⁶ Algeria has been a participant in ERASMUS+ and its predecessor programmes since their establishment, although to a lesser extent than the other Maghreb countries. Just over 2150 Algerian students went to Europe to study, and the country received only 7 percent of the related funding for the southern Mediterranean.⁹⁷ Algerian higher education institutions, particularly those in more rural places, do not appear to have a comprehensive understanding of international mobility matters.⁹⁸ Algeria has therefore increased its public awareness efforts. Other difficulties include heavy bureaucratic administrative obstacles, such as time-consuming visa applications and unclear health insurance coverage, which are worsened by a shortage of people who understand how to deal with them. Furthermore, due to a shortage of English-taught courses and a lack of information for foreign students, Algerian higher education institutions have limited capacity to welcome incoming mobility. Algeria has also taken part in the Horizon 2020 research framework programme, notably in agriculture and researcher mobility. However, its participation rate in the programme accounts for only 7 percent of all southern Mediterranean nations' involvement.⁹⁹ Within the scope of the European Union's Pan-African initiative, the intra-Africa university mobility programme offers funding allowing for the movement of African students and professors. This covers Algerian scholarships for students from Sub-Saharan Africa and Palestine.

92 SAHWA (2017); HCP (2020)

93 Omrane M. (2016)

94 UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow> (accessed 10.01.2022)

95 Ibid.

96 Stakeholder interview

97 European Commission (2019), Erasmus+ for higher education in Algeria, https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/factsheets/neighbourhood/algeria_erasmusplus_2019.pdf (accessed 10.01.2022)

98 ICMED (2020a), Policy Brief Algeria - How can Algeria benefit the most from Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility, ICMED project, https://www.icmedproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/WP4_POLICY-BRIEF_ALGERIA.pdf (accessed 10.01.2022)

99 European Commission (2019)

There are several cooperation agreements between Libyan and foreign universities in several disciplines¹⁰⁰, many of which have been signed with North African and European counterparts. It is noteworthy that over 20,000 Libyans receive government scholarships to pursue studies abroad, of which 5,700 are students enrolled in universities and professional certification programs in the UK, United States of America and elsewhere¹⁰¹. Given the specificity of the Libyan context over the last 10 years, special programmes were created to benefit specific subgroups. The Government of Libya participates in sponsorship programs to enable former soldiers to pursue education abroad¹⁰². Indeed, the Libyan Programme for Reintegration and Development (previously Warriors Affairs Commission) was founded with the aim of providing learning opportunities to people who fought during the war and to facilitate their transition to civic life. The decree of March 2014 created this opportunity for 5,000 veterans, with an earlier pledge to send up to 18,000 of them to pursue studies abroad¹⁰³. Similarly, the government of Libya had a very active international student programme managed by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE). More than 1,400 Libyan students have graduated from educational institutions in North America. As of September 2015, 2,000 Libyan students were studying in the United States and Canada through the Libya-North America Scholarship Programme. CBIE is in charge of managing the scholarship programme in collaboration with the Libyan Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research¹⁰⁴.

Morocco's higher education institutions have traditionally been particularly active in international student mobility programmes. They have, for example, taken an active role in past Tempus and Erasmus Mundus programmes, as well as the present Erasmus+ programme.¹⁰⁵ Between 2015 and 2019, almost 4,600 Moroccan students and staff moved to Europe through Erasmus+, ranking among the top among the EU's Southern Neighbourhood nations.¹⁰⁶ Challenges do remain, however. Among the hurdles which seem to hamper ICM management and implementation the most, are limited easily accessible information available to students and educational staff, high a bureaucratic burden in particular during the application phase and lack of staff aware of the procedures and intricacies of the programmes, lack of transparency in the selection process, and a lack of preparation for the exchange (intercultural training, information on practical aspects of mobility such as health insurance).¹⁰⁷

In the framework of Erasmus+, student and staff mobility was enhanced and allowed a total of 3158 Tunisian students and university staff to move to European universities between 2015 and 2018. Tunisia has an important share of the overall international credit mobility (ICM)¹⁰⁸ Budget for the South Med region, with 18 percent of the total budget allocated to Tunisia, coming in third behind Israel (25 percent) and Morocco (18 percent)¹⁰⁹. In addition, 153 Joint Masters Degrees were awarded to Tunisian students between 2015 and 2018 under the same scheme.

100 University websites

101 Al-Fanar Media. July 9, 2014. John Dyer, Mohamed Elmeshad and Reda Fhelboom. "Libyan Scholarship Program Is Chaotic at Times"

102 Al-Fanar Media Jul 9 2014 ; Libya-Business News Sep 2, 2013; PIE May 13, 2013

103 The Professionals in International Education (PIE) News. May 13, 2013. Sara Custer. "Libya Scholarship to Send 40,000 Abroad".

104 Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE). September 30, 2015. "Libyan-North American Scholarship Program Update Libya. May 17, 2016.

105 ICMED (2020b), Policy Brief for Moroccan Authorities, ICMED project, <https://www.icmedproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/D4.4-Policy-Brief-for-Moroccan-Authorities.pdf> (accessed 10.01.2022)

106 https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/factsheets/neighbourhood/morocco_erasmusplus_2019.pdf

107 ICMED (2020a); ICMED (2020b)

108 ICM allows short-term mobility to Europe from other parts of the world to students, researchers and staff.

109 European Commission (2018), Erasmus+ for higher education in Tunisia, https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/default/files/erasmusplus_tunisia_2018.pdf (accessed 10.01.2022)

3. Conclusion and recommendations

According to the findings of this research, youth aspirations in Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia are centred on securing personal autonomy, social advancement, and societal integration through stable employment. They become discernible in young people's educational choices as well as their emigration intentions, which are influenced by the same goals. The reality of the labour markets in the four countries studied, as well as a lack of knowledge about the job opportunities available to them, however, are likely to have a chilling effect on young people's capacity to imagine their professional future.

In keeping with the objective of this report, the recommendations focus on youth perspectives and needs. The recommendations are also limited to what may be expected to fall within the Talent Partnership initiative's scope. The following are recommendations for the Talent Partnership initiative that consider both the interests of EU member states in attracting new talent for their labour markets and the interests of Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia in benefiting from the skills they have trained and seeing a return on investment.

Research and data collection

A few references in this report have been made to studies that consider aspirations to be socially created. More research is needed to understand the social interactions and encounters, as well as the everyday life, that shape or alter aspirations. Beyond macrotrends that frame ambitions and surveys about academic and career goals, the diversity of youth aspirations must be researched in qualitative studies that consider all factors that may influence individual choices, including the socioeconomic background of the studied subjects. Indeed, initiatives targeting youth in North Africa need to consider the inequalities that limit the opportunities of young women and young people with less privileged backgrounds and from remote areas and the greater efforts they must exert to achieve the same result as their more privileged, urban peers. There is also a significant data gap about the specific careers that young people envision for themselves.

The study did not examine the compatibility of young North African talents with labour market demands in EU member states, but the desk research indicated a scarcity of systematic and comparative data on the skill profiles of Algeria's, Libya's, Morocco's, and Tunisia's young workforce. Talent Partnerships might contain a component that improves data gathering capacities in North African countries. Such information would be valuable for the countries of origin in assessing their youth's training needs to get entry to both local and European labour markets, as well as for businesses in EU member states in analysing North African labour markets.¹¹⁰

Building the talent pipeline - career orientation and role models

According to the literature review, young people have little knowledge of the variety of professions and professional opportunities available to them. This emphasises the need of counselling to guide career choices, which could be promoted in the framework of the Talent Partnership initiative. To meet the needs of the young and prevent having too many students study the same handful of fields, the following factors should be considered:

¹¹⁰ See Hooper, K. (2021)

- The stakeholders interviewed emphasised the need of giving career orientation to students beginning in high school. This is consistent with research indicating that career counselling should be provided to early teens in order for them to make informed decisions about their future.¹¹¹ Because aspirations are essential sources of motivation throughout a person's life, career coaching programmes can, however, also be directed towards older youth.¹¹²
- Given the lack of information presently available to young people, raising awareness of a sector's full spectrum of job and career development opportunities beyond post-secondary education and public sector employment will be crucial. A special emphasis should be placed on reaching out to young people in distant locations.
- The preference of young North Africans for university education over vocational pathways contributes to the skills mismatch and inhibits them from joining both domestic and foreign labour markets. Because there is a comparable tendency among European youth, certain EU member states have developed image campaigns and initiatives to improve vocational training enrolment rates.¹¹³ This experience might be applied to comparable initiatives in Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia, with an emphasis on targeted social media and internet advertising, which are more likely to reach the young demographic than traditional media.
- Professional counselling activities and image campaigns can capitalise on the fact that role models play an important role in steering young people toward certain career paths.¹¹⁴ These role models should be as diverse as possible in terms of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background and other identity categories. Seeing and hearing experiences from people with whom young people can identify may broaden perspectives and help young people picture prospective paths they were not aware of or would not have considered otherwise.

Circular migration

Temporary and circular migration programmes may be more appealing than long-term choices for young people who regard emigration as a last resort option and have strong links to their family and local society. For them, short-term mobility can be a means to find employment and career opportunities at home once they have gained some experience abroad. Temporary and circular migration programmes offer the extra benefit of enhancing the educational system's relationship to business realities, as well as allaying concerns about brain drain and preventing the development of local labour shortages. The following schemes could be considered:

- Given the limited availability of internships, Talent Partnerships could establish opportunities for paid professional internships across EU member states, providing young people with the professional experience they will need to find work after graduation. The internship scheme would have to rely on a network of partnering universities, training institutions, European host companies, and employers in Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. Financial incentives should be included in the programmes to assist participating firms with the expense of hiring a new employee or trainee. Wage subsidies provided over a longer period of time, followed by other incentives such as tax exemptions for firms in North Africa that hire young people,

¹¹¹ Gardiner D., Goedhuys M. (2020), Youth Aspirations and the Future of Work - A Review of the Literature and Evidence, ILO Working Paper 8 International Labour Organization, Geneva, https://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/working-papers/WCMS_755248/lang-en/index.htm (accessed 21.2.2021)

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Eurofound (2021), Tackling labour shortages in EU Member States, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

¹¹⁴ Gardiner D., Goedhuys M. (2020), Youth Aspirations and the Future of Work - A Review of the Literature and Evidence, ILO Working Paper 8 International Labour Organization, Geneva, https://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/working-papers/WCMS_755248/lang-en/index.htm (accessed 21.2.2021)



should provide young hires with a minimal degree of employment stability. One successful example of this is the IOM-led initiative aimed at enhancing Tunisian youth employability through internships in Belgian companies¹¹⁵.

- Employers in Europe will be hesitant to join in and invest in training young migrants through temporary mobility programmes if they do not see a long-term advantage. As a result, the Talent Partnership programme might assist and subsidise multinational corporations and SMEs considering expanding their business in North Africa. The plans would include young talented North Africans receiving language training and on-the-job training in Europe (including familiarisation with their principles and values) before returning to their native country to implement the company's activities on the ground. The scheme would be particularly relevant for businesses that provide remote services.
- Despite the numerous closures caused by the pandemic, the hospitality sector is experiencing acute labour shortages in some EU member States.¹¹⁶ Seasonal work, lengthy working hours, and poor salaries make it an especially unappealing industry for young people. As a result, a few European governments have begun to increase the sector's attractiveness by raising pay and implementing re-employment obligations for seasonal workers.¹¹⁷ These contracts might be extended to young Algerians, Moroccans, and Tunisians who would profit from the experience for employment in their home country's tourist sector, provided there is cooperation in designing joint training content. Again, the Talent Partnerships programme might encourage and subsidise collaboration between enterprises in the hospitality sector on both sides of the Mediterranean in order to create a pool of well-trained young personnel.
- Enhancing existing and implementing new joint vocational training programmes with EU Member States, which would allow young people to acquire vocational training and certificates that would be valid in selected EU Member States.

Entrepreneurship

A prominent topic that emerged from the analysed surveys and stakeholder interviews was the strong interest that young people have in investigating entrepreneurship as a possible career option. Talent Partnerships could contain components that encourage start-ups and provide young people with strong entrepreneurial potential with the skills they need to thrive. This might involve experienced entrepreneur coaching as well as initial money to facilitate business creation and development.

Managing Expectations

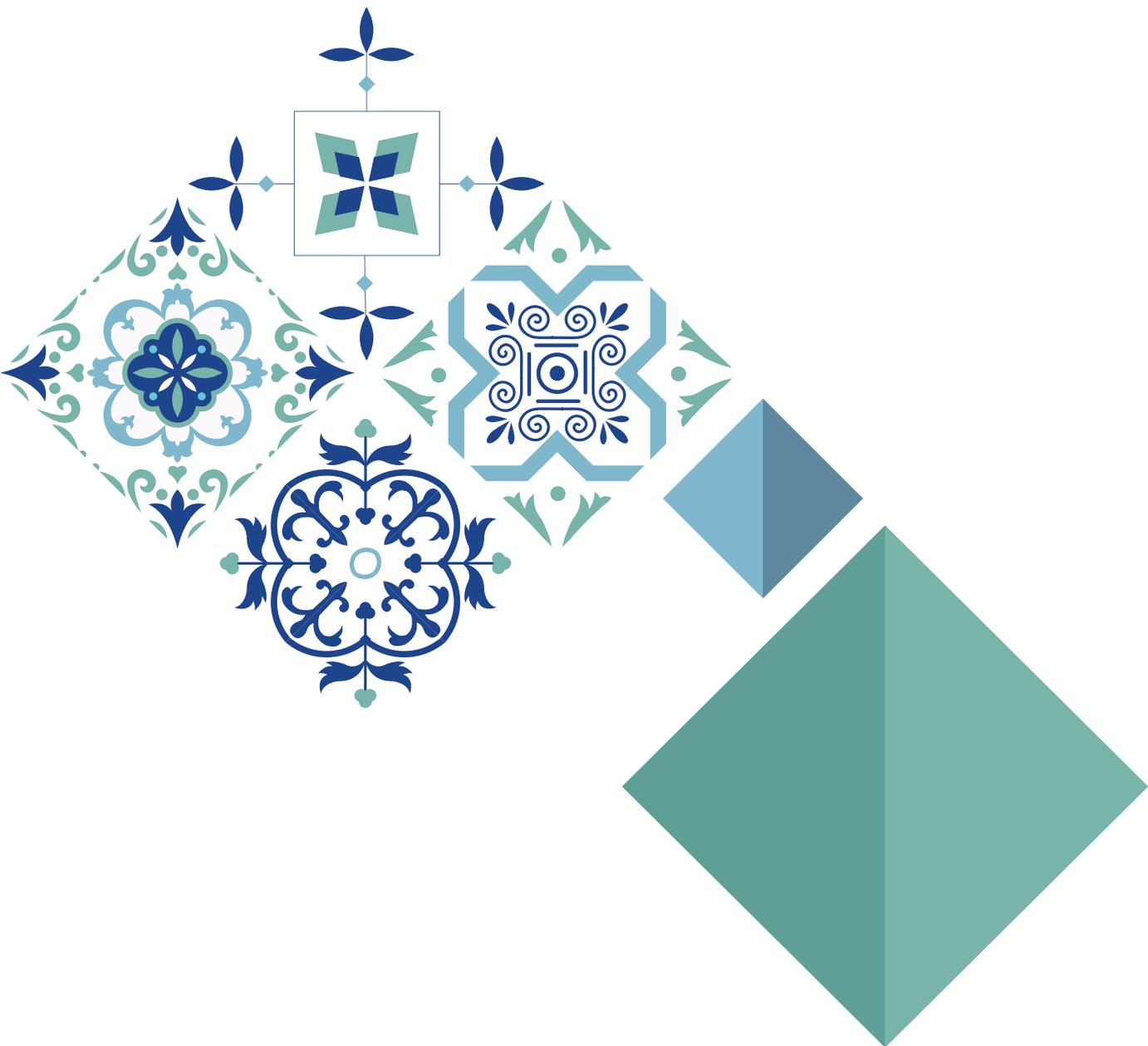
According to polls that research employer perceptions, employers in North Africa and Europe have very high expectations of graduates. With the exception of the ICT industry, which has a more international outlook on recruitments, employers in Europe are also frequently cautious to hire graduates from outside Europe. This is due, in part, to scepticism about foreign credentials. Companies will need to be encouraged to adopt more flexible standards for evaluating job experience, education, and training in order to engage in any programmes under the Talent Partnership initiative. Indeed, higher education institutions may undoubtedly endeavour to better connect their graduates' skills to the demands of the labour market, but graduates cannot be expected to have the

¹¹⁵ Di Salvo, M., Mallè Ndoye, N. (2020) Paving the way for future labour migration: A Belgian-Tunisian Skills Mobility Partnership https://www.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Pl2020-24_Paving-the-way-for-future-labour-migration.pdf (accessed 11.01.2021)

¹¹⁶ Eurofound (2021), Tackling labour shortages in EU Member States, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

whole spectrum of necessary abilities on day one. Skills and values, such as social awareness, collaboration, and communication skills, can be developed in the job. Similarly, specialized and technical abilities, may be taught after school completion in a variety of methods, including on-the-job training, with an appropriate incentive scheme for employers. North African graduates on the other hand appear to have very high expectations when it comes to the level of skills applied in entry level jobs. If university graduates' expectations are not managed, they are unlikely to find fulfilment in their initial jobs. Furthermore, because job security is key driver of job satisfaction among young North Africans, work opportunities must offer more solid contractual arrangements in order to engage young people's commitment to the proposed programmes.



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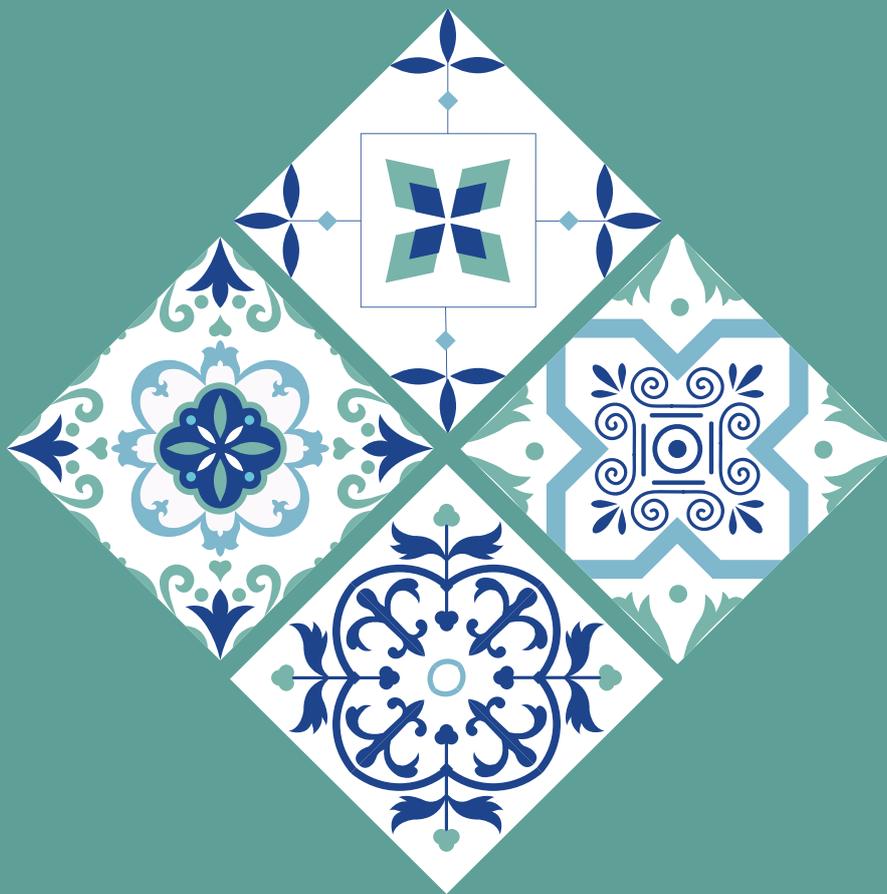
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