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**Reconfirming commitment to youth employment
promotion in North Africa –
the YENA Roadmap (2017-2022)**

Following the social and political upheavals in some North African countries in the early 2010s, national development frameworks in the region have reinforced their focus on jobs, social protection and rights at work, especially for young people. Further momentum was gained with the international adoption of the Sustainable Development Agenda in 2015, and in particular SDG 8 on inclusive growth, full employment and decent work.

Algeria adopted in 2016 a “New Growth Model” to diversify the economy, reach growth of 6.5% per year, and reduce unemployment to 7%, by 2030. The National Economic and Social Pact of 2014, that succeeded the 2006 Pact, had established the key principles and priorities for an inclusive, job-rich development model. In its Sustainable Development Strategy (“Vision 2030”), *Egypt* has set a target of achieving 5% unemployment by 2030, more than halving the current rate, in an effort that would focus in particular on the youth, who represent 90% of the unemployed. *Mauritania’s* National Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity (SCAPP) for 2016-2030 aims at ‘promotion strong, inclusive and sustainable growth’, the creation of over 120,000 jobs during 2016-2020 and a reduction of unemployment to 9.9% by 2030. *Morocco’s* “National employment strategy” foresees an increase in the employed population and a reduction in unemployment to 3.9% by 2025. Youth employment is central to *Sudan’s* National Development Strategy (2007-2031), which provides for broad skills training programmes, formalisation, developing a labour market information base, and strengthening social dialogue. The same goals are also articulated in Sudan’s latest Five Year Plan. *Tunisia’s* Development Plan (2016-2020) aims at a sustained growth rate of 3.5% and a reduction of unemployment to 12% by 2020. Tunisia’s Social Contract (2013) and the “Tunisian Declaration” on Employment (2016) outline key tripartite orientations for policy reform in these areas.

A decade of relatively high real GDP growth in the 2000s, averaging 5%, had not dented youth unemployment rates, which remained above 25% in 2010. Since then, youth have borne the brunt of the economic slump in North Africa that followed the global financial crisis and political transitions. While economic growth has been making a comeback since 2014-15 in most countries in the region, job growth continues to lag behind the demographic curve. Today, one third of youth in the region are unemployed, and another third is estimated to be in vulnerable employment. The implications of such a job crisis on political stability, security, or intensifying irregular migration flows are all too clear. A new wave of technological progress is fast transforming the world of work, generating new opportunities but also compounding risks for the prospects of young persons (aged 15 to 29) in the world of work.

On the occasion of its 101st session in 2012, the International Labour Conference adopted the Resolution on “The youth employment crisis: A Call for action”, followed by the endorsement of its 2012-2019 follow-up plan. The *Call for action* provides specific recommendations for national stakeholders to implement integrated and well-coordinated strategies encompassing employment and economic policies, measures to enhance employability, labour market policies, youth entrepreneurship and the protection of rights at work for young people. Since 2012, ILO support to Member States has aligned with the guidance provided by the Call for action, an instrument which remains relevant to the current youth employment situation. Meanwhile, the promotion of decent work for young women and men is amongst the objectives of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, and a focus of the ILO’s Centenary Initiative on the Future of work.

The protracted youth employment crisis requires broad, bold and concerted efforts by national stakeholders in North Africa, with continued support from the ILO and the international community. Now that windows of opportunity have opened for reforms in favour of more inclusive and job-rich growth, time has come to move beyond short-term responses towards durable solutions at the scale of the youth employment challenge.

The YENA Roadmap solidifies intentions of all stakeholders to move in this direction in the coming five years, through renewed, collaborative efforts guided by the following key priorities.

A systemic approach to youth employment

- Ensure the engagement of the social partners and other stakeholders throughout the youth employment policy cycle, from situational analysis to impact assessment;
- Strengthen information systems to include age and gender-disaggregated labour market information for evidence-based policy design;
- Consider each available policy option and ensure balance and policy coherence across the economic, social and environmental spheres, with due consideration given to the likely positive or negative impact on youth employment;
- Promote and establish innovative and multi-stakeholder partnerships through information sharing, mutual learning and collaborative policy and project making.
- Develop comprehensive and coherent national youth employment strategies, exploiting complementarities and synergies across individual programmes and policies, taking into consideration new and emerging issues in the world of work.

1. Economic policies

- Devise comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable macro-economic policies that support aggregate demand and encourage productive transformation and job creation, making good use of one of the North Africa’s key asset - its young workforce. Adopt employment generation and inflation targets as twin objectives of Central Banks’ policies, in order to ensure price stability while boosting productive investment. Reduce the fiscal burden on labour and productive investment, and promote fair wage policies in both the public and private sectors.

- Adopt well-designed industrial and sectoral policies that target sectors and value chains with a high potential to absorb young workers. Action in this area should capitalise on the region's competitive advantage including its proximity to Europe, the world's largest consumer market, as well as on the resurgence of growth in the African continent. Ensure social protection and policies for training and retraining are in place to accompany sectorial restructuring. Look at opportunities for job creation in green industries and the social economy.
- Strengthen the employment dimension of investment laws and trade agreements. Fiscal and other incentives to international investors and foreign buyers should be tied to local content and local employment. Introduce government guarantee schemes and venture capital support for SMEs, young firms and startups. A stable political environment and respect for workers right are prerequisite for sustainable investment from both national and international actors.
- Align macroeconomic, industrial and investment policies to national development plans, to ensure coherence and contribute to long term development objectives in line with the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. In doing so, ensure that comprehensive efforts are made to facilitate the transition from informal to formal economic activities and employment.
- Explore opportunities for stronger regional cooperation in sharing knowledge and good practice, in tackling environmental issues and water management, in managing workers mobility, in developing a regional vision for employment creation and a common position in international discussions.

2. Labour market policies and social protection

- Develop and improve comprehensive, integrated active and passive labour market policy measures that address the key disadvantages and vulnerabilities the labour market, as well as exploiting opportunities arising from technological change in order to facilitate young people's entry and re-entry into labour markets. These measures should build on, complement and strengthen existing schemes. Emphasis should be placed on integrating young women and men who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET), and in removing the specific barriers which obstruct the access to decent work for young women, rural youth, and conflict-affected young people. Concerted action across ministerial mandates and a wide range of organisations will have to rely on commonly defined goals and specific targets, with the engagement of the social partners. Attention is due to the potential interactions and complementarities between labour market and social protection measures that are effected.
- Establish/reinforce a floor of social protection, including access to health care and social security, to guarantee young people's income security particularly in cases of unemployment, work injury, maternity and sickness, taking into account the specific vulnerabilities of the youth, so as to ensure their effective access to a set of services deemed essential in each national context. Social protection systems should be integrated with active labour market policies so as to promote the (re)integration of jobless young people.
- Ensure public and private capacities to deliver labour market and social protection services are adequate to the mission and functions expected of them. This includes the development of tailored services; appropriate targeting of young programme

beneficiaries and the development of profiling as a means to deliver effective support to young people seeking decent work.

- Systematically develop and extend knowledge-building and dissemination efforts which are the key to designing effective labour market policies and social protection systems.

3. Employability

- Upgrade training and skills development systems to facilitate school-to-work transitions, by dealing with the associated regulatory and institutional aspects. Skills anticipation mechanisms that regularly review the relevance of training programs through dialogue between employers and training providers among others, are instrumental in this respect, as systemic reform must serve both current and future labour market requirements. In this respect, training strategies should align with sectoral policies, trade, industry, investment and environmental policies, which can promote productive and quality jobs for young women and men. Employers and workers must engage at all levels with TVET reforms, with a view to better align the type and quality of skills imparted and the requirements of transforming economies, including considering potential job losses.
- Improve training delivery through effective training methods that strengthen core employability skills, strong links to the labour market and both comprehensive and modular training programs, also allowing access to training for school dropouts and young people in rural areas. Among others, this will require more opportunities for work-based learning, including quality apprenticeships and internships, the upgrading of informal apprenticeships, setting and harmonizing skill standards, nationally recognized qualifications and better quality assurance modalities. Tripartite engagement is essential also in this respect, as well as incentivizing private sector participation in collaborative forms of training such as apprenticeships, and the establishment of public-private partnerships. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be systematised, including with regular tracer studies.
- Strengthen labour market information, availability of career guidance services, and capacities of career counselors to help young people make informed educational and career decisions, and improve their job search and core employability skills. A positive image of skilled manual jobs, including for traditional trades, will increase the attractiveness of technical and vocational education and training. This should be accompanied by better profiling of job seekers and transparent labour market intermediation through IT-based job matching platforms.

4. Entrepreneurship and self-employment

- Enhance entrepreneurial literacy, through awareness campaigns, school curricula and proper training to empower a broad base of youth to do business. This should include opportunities for practical business experience and on-the-job training. An entrepreneurial mindset is particularly important in contexts where young people have been rather inclined to search for work in the public sector.
- Support the development of comprehensive entrepreneurship policies, developed in consultation with social partners and young people themselves, for a more enabling

regulatory environment, making it easier to organise, register and operate youth-led enterprises.

- Promote the development of market-based business development services (BDS), including and where appropriate through public financial and technical support and public-private partnerships, to meet the demand for quality services. Foster networks, peer-to-peer support, and access to information, training, and technology to address the constraints of youth to succeed in business. Encourage business innovation and financial literacy among young people.
- Facilitate the growth of the financial “middle market” for increased access to market-based lending and financial services that address the SME segment. Enable the financial inclusion of women and rural communities including through loan guarantee funds, crowd-funding and impact investing. Reduce the credit and collateral requirements for young entrepreneurs.

5. Participation and rights

- Promote and encourage the greater participation and representation of young people in workers’ and employers’ organisations, and increase their voice in social dialogue, including through new models of social engagement;
- Promote and protect the labour rights of young persons in the workplace, through national labour legislation and supervisory mechanisms, in accordance with international labour standards. Effective action should be taken by national labour inspection systems and related administrative and judicial authorities to eliminate unacceptable forms of work, in collaboration with employers’ and workers’ organizations, and other civil society stakeholders. National stakeholders need to be supported in their initiatives aimed at raising awareness of the labour rights of young persons at work.
- Strengthen ongoing efforts to promote equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of employment and occupation, with particular attention to young women and men. The effective application of the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value should be pursued. Other appropriate measures include maternity protection, larger availability of affordable services for children and the elderly, and measures to prevent and prohibit all forms of sexual harassment against both male and female workers in employment and occupation.
- Support the formalization of youth employment and promote the transition of young workers from temporary to sustainable jobs.