

Policy Paper

Perspectives from the field: European youth cooperation schemes through the lenses of young people in the Arab Mediterranean countries

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Executive summary

An earlier SAHWA Policy Report entitled “European Youth Cooperation Schemes in the Southern Mediterranean Context: One for all, all for one?” analysed three European youth cooperation schemes for the southern Mediterranean region, namely the Euro-Med Youth Programme, the Youth Partnership between the European Union and the Council of Europe, and the youth-related initiatives of the Anna Lindh Foundation. All three cooperation schemes have three common characteristics: they directly and exclusively target young people; they are developed for southern Mediterranean countries, including all five SAHWA countries, namely, Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia; and they are all fully or partially funded by the European Union. Although these youth cooperation schemes provide valuable opportunities for the participating young people, the comparative analysis of those schemes shows that information and evidence on the impact of the European youth cooperation schemes on the young people in the southern Mediterranean is rather limited. Compared to the financial investments made in those schemes, the lack of an elaborative evaluation, assessment or impact analysis using systematic qualitative and quantitative indicators for these schemes is a major shortcoming.

Given such considerations, this paper presents the key findings of an initial attempt to analyse the impact of the above-mentioned cooperation schemes on the personal and professional development of participating young people. Depending on the findings of the data collected through an online survey of the Arab Mediterranean former participants of the European youth cooperation schemes, the opportunities provided by the youth schemes and programmes are discussed under the headings of: development and society; impact on the future; employment opportunities; non-formal learning and competence development; and, needs and expectations. Following the analysis of the findings, the policy paper concludes with a number of policy recommendations.

Introduction: What international opportunities are available for young people in the AMCs?

An earlier SAHWA Policy Report entitled “European Youth Cooperation Schemes in the Southern Mediterranean Context: One for all, all for one?” and prepared by Göksel and Şenyuva analysed three European youth cooperation schemes for the southern Mediterranean region, namely the Euro-Med Youth Programme, the Youth Partnership between the European Union and the Council of Europe, and the youth-related initiatives of the Anna Lindh Foundation. All three cooperation schemes have three common characteristics: they directly and exclusively target young people; they are developed for the southern Mediterranean countries, including all five SAHWA countries, namely, Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia; and they are all fully or partially funded by the European Union.

The comparative analysis of these three European youth cooperation schemes has shown that the three schemes target young people as the final beneficiaries, and young people are to be reached through civil society and their involvement in youth work. That is why there is a particular emphasis on *mobility* in such a way as to increase the quality of youth work. In all schemes, there is no specific focus on the participants’ educational backgrounds, which means that young people are considered in a rather broad understanding that goes beyond merely being students. However, the analysis also concludes that information and evidence on the impact of the European youth cooperation schemes on the young people in the southern Mediterranean is rather limited, and calls for further research focusing on the experiences of young people and their youth organisations. Furthermore, compared to the financial investments made in those schemes, the lack of an elaborative evaluation, assessment or impact analysis using systematic qualitative and quantitative indicators for these schemes is a major shortcoming. The general evaluations conducted at the end of different phases or stages fall short of providing evidence of the impact of the activities.

Given such considerations, this paper presents the key findings of an initial attempt to analyse the impact of the above-mentioned cooperation schemes on the personal and professional development of participating young people. Accordingly, the following questions guide this policy paper: What is the impact of participating in European

cooperation schemes in the field of youth (Euro-Med Youth Programme, EC-CoE Youth Partnership projects in the Euro-Med region and Anna Lindh Foundation projects in the field of youth) on the young people in the Mediterranean region? What is the impact on the personal and professional development of the participants? Does such an experience change the opinion and attitude of participating young people? Do they use this experience at later stages of their lives, particularly in the fields of employment, empowerment and youth participation? Do they continue participating in such activities and programmes? Do they transform from participants to leaders, trainers or organisers of such activities themselves?

These are among the multiple questions on which SAHWA Project WP8 – Public Policy and International Cooperation – has sought to find answers and produce evidence through a wide range of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The present policy paper summarises results from the policy-relevant aspects and aims to emphasise the link between “evidence and analysis” and “policy implications and recommendations”.

A note on methodology

This policy paper brings together and summarises the findings of two strands of research: desk research and original data collection.

The desk research culminated in an extensive review and analysis of the evaluations conducted by the three cooperation schemes investigated. Each of them carried out different evaluations at different stages of their implementations over time. The reports and analysis of such evaluations have been carefully reviewed. For the purposes of brevity, their findings are summarised in this policy paper.

As part of the SAHWA Project, a quantitative online survey (non-representative, targeted at former participants of all three European youth cooperation schemes in the Arab Mediterranean countries) was carried out in three languages (English, French and Arabic) between September and November 2016. It received a total of 161 responses out of which 77 respondents completed all questions. After data cleaning, a total of 81 responses were used in the analysis. Table 1 shows the number of former participants according to country of residence from the five countries covered by the SAHWA Project. The remaining 36

respondents are from *other* countries that participate in the programmes for youth in the region.

Table 1: Number of respondents from the five countries covered by the SAHWA Project

| Morocco | Algeria | Tunisia | Egypt | Lebanon | Total |
|---------|---------|---------|-------|---------|-------|
| 9 | 9 | 17 | 7 | 3 | 45 |

It should be recognised that the overall sample is completely non-probabilistic, and the findings are only indicative. However, it still provides valuable insights, as it is the first attempt to collect comparative responses from former participants in all these three youth cooperation schemes as well as covering a large time span in terms of participation in an activity. The survey is also comparable to the findings of the representative SAHWA youth survey, as certain questions were repeated.

Learning mobility works: Findings from the desk research

The added value of youth mobility, in particular the skills-developing benefits of international mobility, is well documented. Rigorous research – as conducted for instance by the RAY Network (Research Based Analysis of Youth in Action)¹ – provides sufficient evidence that young people develop various competences through their participation in learning mobility schemes at European level. They gain valuable skills (especially soft skills), develop their attitudes and improve their knowledge. They achieve all this in a foreign country, which also gives them extra flexibility and adaptability.

In the Arab Mediterranean context, different mobility and cooperation schemes also conduct their own evaluations, and their findings also point in the same direction: participation in such activities, projects and trainings contribute to the personal and professional development of the young people.

For instance, in the Salto EuroMed trainings impact study (2015)², the findings confirm that SALTO-Youth EuroMed training activities result in a positive socio-professional impact on participants in terms of strengthening professional and practical skills, as well as encouraging the organisations to implement a wider range of activities. The evaluations of the Youth Partnership between the European Commission and Council of Europe also

stresses the importance of the skills gained by the participants. In the findings section of the survey on the evaluation and follow-up of the Euro-Mediterranean Youth Policy Cooperation activities organised in the framework of the Youth Partnership, it is argued that they had been successful by contributing huge benefits and responding to the interests of all actors on all levels within the Euro-Mediterranean context. The meetings have created a new, equal dialogue between Arab countries and European countries through the exchange of experiences from both sides of the Mediterranean.

The perspectives of the young people: Evidence from the SAHWA online former participants survey

In line with the earlier findings, learning mobility and other related activities organised by the European youth cooperation schemes and programmes have an important impact on the lives of young people in the region. They provide opportunities for self-discovery, awareness of different opportunities and contribute positively to the personal and professional lives of the participants through competence development and information provision.

There is no doubt that participation in an organised learning mobility experience goes beyond a leisure and fun activity. It provides valuable opportunities and information that are rather scarce for the young people in the region when compared with the young people in the north of the Mediterranean. Those opportunities can be discussed under the headings of: development and society; impact on the future; employment opportunities; non-formal learning and competence development; and, needs and expectations.

It is about development and society

As the findings of the online survey reveal, the main motivation for young people in the region to participate in European youth projects is the opportunity for *self-development*. Out of a list of motivations for participating in a project, many respondents marked *personal and social development* (61%) and *professional development* (20%). The social responsibility aspect also appears to be a strong motivator, hence, the second most popular option on the motivation list was *to contribute to the society I live in* (36%).

Figure 1: Motivation for participating in the projects

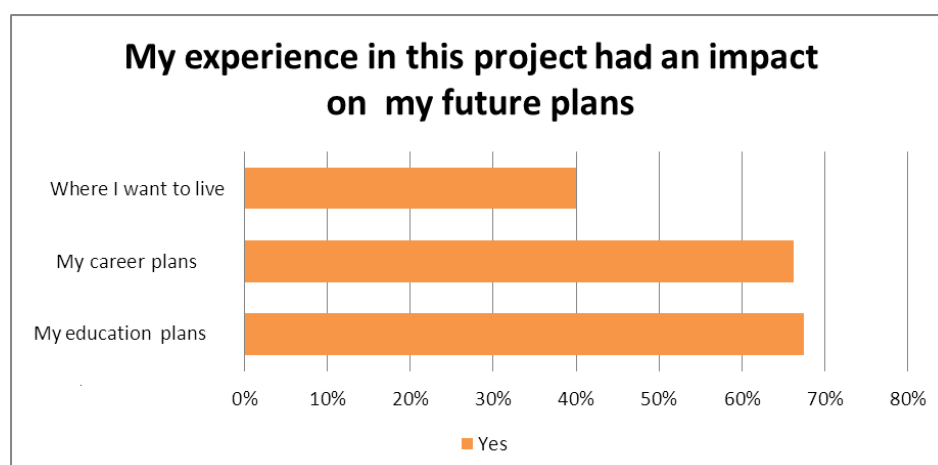
| What was your primary motivation for participating in this project? | |
|---|---|
| | Percentage (multiple selections possible) |
| Education (language, further education opportunities) | 15% |
| To contribute to the society I live in | 36% |
| Employment opportunities | 1% |
| Mobility & travel | 14% |
| Personal and social development | 61% |
| Professional development | 20% |
| Other | 5% |

(n = 81; source: SAHWA online former participants survey).

While the European youth projects and activities offer a possibility for individual and personal development, another major motivation is to contribute to society.

Impact on the future

The data shows that the experience of participating in a European project has a major impact on the future plans of an individual from the Arab Mediterranean countries. Considering the fact that most of these projects are for young people below 35 years of age – generally formative years – such an impact is very significant. As Figure 2 shows, the biggest impact observed is on education and career plans. Almost seven out of ten respondents stated that their plans for education and career have changed following their project experience.

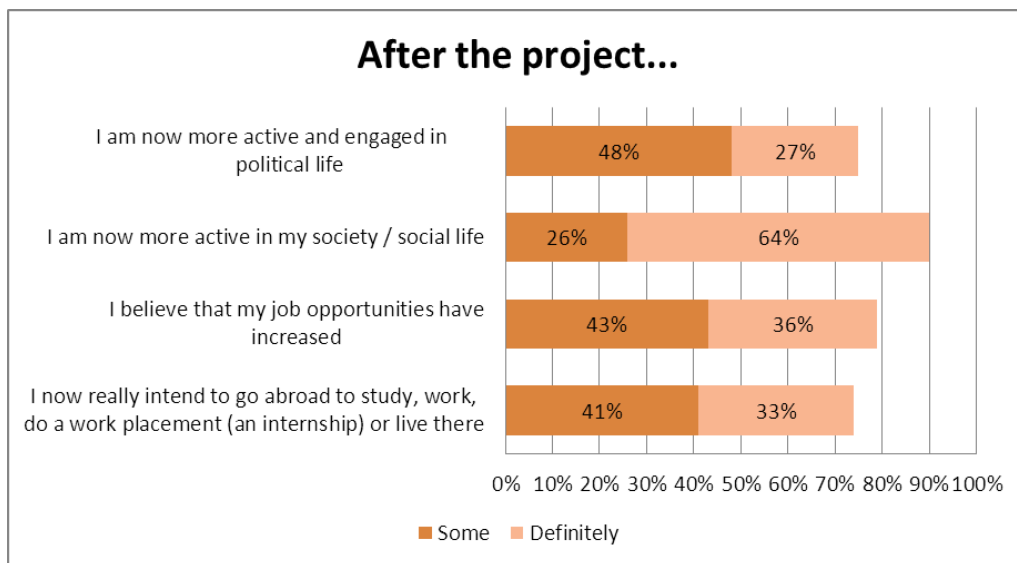
Figure 2: Future plans

(n = 81; source: SAHWA online former participants survey).

The changes in plans are also reflected in everyday life. The participants in projects indicate that the experience had a direct impact on their daily lives and social and political activities. SAHWA’s online former participants survey findings suggest that being part of a European youth project enables and encourages young people to become more active in their social and political life. As shown in Figure 3, nine out of ten respondents stated that they are more engaged in social life/society since the project, and 75 % indicated that they are more active in political life.

It is also significant that almost eight out of ten respondents believed that the project experience increased their chances of finding a job. Unemployment being one of the major problems in the region, such an unexpected outcome (as the youth projects are not particularly designed for increasing employability) is a welcome surprise. Thus, the link between employment and European youth projects deserve further analysis.

Figure 3. Impact on sociopolitical life and engagement



(n = 81; source: SAHWA online former participants survey).

Addressing employment

The SAHWA Project reveals that participating in a learning mobility and related activity has an impact on the employment of the individuals as well. The majority of former participants stated that following the activity/project, they reviewed their employment opportunities. The results indicate that the project experience acts as an important motivator for improving

education and training as well as acting as an important variable influencing the future employment decisions of the participants.

Figure 4: Impact on employment opportunities

| My project experience had an impact on my EMPLOYMENT opportunities in the following manner | |
|--|-----|
| | Yes |
| I decided to work in a particular field related to my project experience | 43% |
| I decided to work in the country where I did my project | 7% |
| I decided to work in a different country | 8% |
| I decided to get education or training in a particular field | 41% |
| I decided to change my work | 5% |
| Project experience did not affect my employment plans | 24% |

(n = 81; source: SAHWA online former participants survey).

The first and most important aspect is that *three out of four* respondents believe that European youth project experience affected their employment plans. Similar to the European cases (see: RAY findings), learning mobility and non-formal learning in the region play an important role in helping young people decide on their future careers and employment plans.

The research indicates that project experience is particularly correlated with education and training. As shown earlier, the projects motivate participants into further education and training, and this is valid for employment as well. In addition, the participants also get motivated to merge the project experience with employment and career plans: 43% stated that after the project they decided to merge their project field with their career plans and to work in a particular field that is related to the theme of their project.

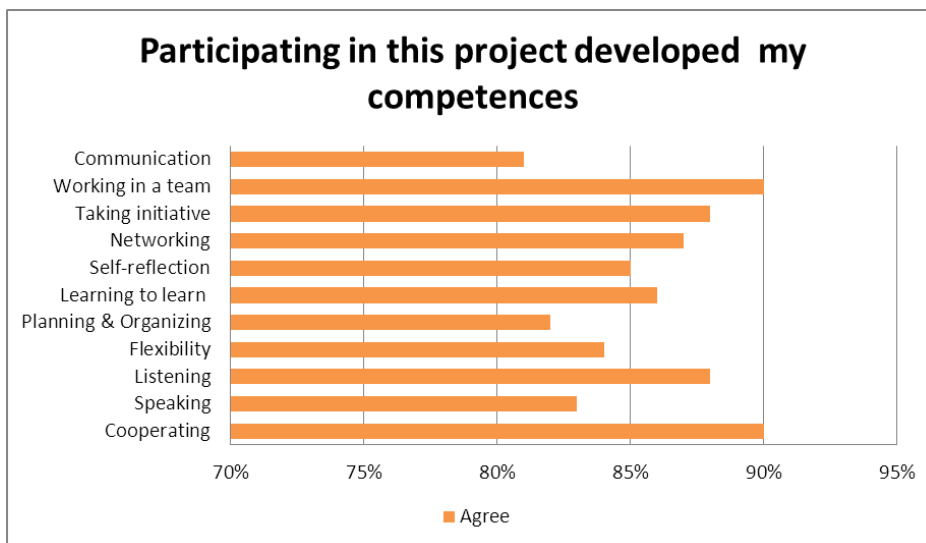
This connection of European youth projects with employability and career planning is important from the perspective of the active labour market policies in place in the countries in the region. As elaborated in detail in an earlier SAHWA policy paper titled, “Redefining and Tackling (Youth) Unemployment in the Arab Mediterranean Context”, the young people in the region are under increasing pressure to make themselves more attractive to employers. The labour market places the main responsibility on the young people in terms of employability and career planning. Thus, the projects giving ideas to young people and motivating them in their employment decisions in a very tight and competitive environment make a very valuable contribution.

Non-formal learning and competence development

The underlying principle of youth work is to contribute to the competence development of participating young people through non-formal and informal learning. As the traditional school curriculum alone is no longer considered capable of tackling current challenges such as digitalisation and technology, the media, environmental crisis, economic uncertainty and inequality and dealing with their consequences, cooperation between different educational sectors (non-formal/informal) becomes an important priority.³ Thus, non-formal education is considered to be complementary to formal education, taking place in a “learning continuum” along the axis of informal and formal, providing more learning opportunities for young people.⁴

In this regard, especially considering the perceived limited quality of the formal education opportunities in Arab Mediterranean countries, the projects and activities of the European youth cooperation schemes provide the participants with a unique opportunity to develop their competences through these projects. This is an opportunity that is often not offered in schools and other forms of formal education structures. Such competence development in the region is important not only for the personal and professional lives of the young people, but contributes to the overall development of the society as well. *96% of the online survey respondents believe that their participation in the project was a personally enriching experience.*

Figure 5. Competence development



(n=81 / source: SAHWA online former participants survey).

Needs and expectations

In general, peer advice is the most efficient and effective means of spreading information about learning mobility and youth opportunities. Young people mainly rely on informal information networks to learn about the different possibilities available to them. Thus, participants in different projects also act as multipliers. This appears to be true for the countries and programmes investigated: *98% of SAHWA online former participants survey respondents stated that after their participation in a project they have recommended participating in such a project to other people.*

The multiplier effect is highly related with personal satisfaction. A young person recommends participation only if they are satisfied with the experience. The online survey results show that *90% of the respondents found that the project they participated in was relevant to their needs as a young person. Similarly, 85% indicated that their expectations had been met by the project in which they participated.* As another indicator of the level of satisfaction, *69% of the ex-participants have participated in similar projects in the years since their initial project.*

Participating in a project organised within the framework of a European youth programme or cooperation scheme has an important impact on the image of Europe as well. Participants in such projects, both through interaction with European participants and interaction with the European institution representatives, become more engaged and informed about the notion of Europe. According to the online survey results, the image of Europe *became better* for *54% of the respondents* through their participation in the project, while for 42% it did not change.

Policy implications and recommendations

Young people in Arab Mediterranean countries lack opportunities for learning mobility and non-formal learning. The European youth cooperation schemes and programme, such as the three investigated in the SAHWA Project, offer such rare and valuable opportunities. In line with these findings, some conclusions can be drawn and the following policy recommendations can be made.

On motivation:

- Young people in the region participate in European projects and programmes with complex motivations, both personal and social. It is important that the participants in such projects act not only for selfish purposes, but use the experience and information gained to make a difference in their societies. Therefore, the complexity of motivations should be taken into consideration by the institutions managing the programmes in the design, implementation and evaluation phases of the programmes.

On the impact on the future:

- The youth projects have an impact on the future plans of the participants. This impact is particularly true for their education, career and training plans for the future. The projects should always take this dimension into consideration and make sure that they provide the necessary information, motivation and guidance for the participants in terms of covering all possibilities and opportunities available to them.
- The projects also encourage and motivate the participants to become more active in their social and political lives, and to become more engaged. Programmes aimed at active citizenship, social engagement and other related issues should be promoted and prioritised. Best practices, trainings, contact making-related activities and programmes should be increased in order to support the social and political engagement of the participants.

On employment and competence development:

- Participants in European youth cooperation schemes and programmes believe that through their project experience they develop important competences, and such experiences contribute to their employability. The link between projects and competence development should be strongly established. The participants should be given sufficient guidance and support to reflect and self-recognise the competences they have developed through these projects. Similarly, necessary support should be given to participants to ensure that their competence development is recognised in their societies.

- Awareness of competence development through non-formal and informal learning in the region should be raised, and the institutions that are running programmes and schemes for young people should strive to raise awareness at social, political and institutional levels for the recognition of the competences developed in their programmes.

On needs and expectations:

- The level of satisfaction from participating in European programmes and schemes seems to be very high according to the SAHWA online survey. This finding is very much in line with other evaluations and studies done by different institutions. Such high levels of satisfaction should be maintained. Therefore, the implementing agencies should develop and maintain efficient evaluation schemes of the programmes they are running. Evaluation should be an integral part of all programmes, not only at the end of a project, but also as part of the planning, design and implementation.
- The programmes should conduct sufficient needs analyses before running their projects. There should be a link between the needs and expectations of the young people in the region and the available programmes and projects. European institutions should not act on *what they think they should do in the region*, but develop their programmes and projects based on the evidence coming from the region. Therefore, research on young people in the region, such as the SAHWA Project, should be supported and the findings should be taken into consideration in the design and implementation of programmes for young people in the region.
- Efficient channels of communication should be established between *research*, *practice* and *policy* in the field of youth in the region and Europe. Policies related to youth in the region, similar to other parts of the world, should be based on evidence generated through research and on the expectations and reality of the field, transmitted through practitioners.

Endnotes

1. See: <http://www.researchyouth.net/publications/>.
2. <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/euromed/emeducpub/reportscollection/impactstudy2013/>
3. Doris Bammer, Andreas Karsten and Helmut Fennes. “RAY Research Project on competence development and capacity building in Erasmus+: Youth in Action; Conceptual framework for youth work within E+/YiA focused on competences, training and learning [draft version]”, 18 April 2016.
4. Chisholm, L., Hoskins, B., Søgaaard Sorensen, M., Moos, L., and Jensen, I. *Advanced Training for Trainers in Europe (ATTE). Pilot course under the Council of Europe and the European Commission. Youth Worker Training Partnership Programme 2001-2003. Vol. 2, External Evaluation, Final Report*, 2006. <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/atte-training>. Otten, H. *Ten Theses on the Correlation between European Youth Work, Intercultural Learning and the Qualification and Professionalisation Demands on Full and Part-time Staff Working in such Contexts*, 2009. <http://www.nonformality.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/ten.pdf>.



Researching
Arab Mediterranean Youth:
Towards a New Social Contract



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The SAHWA Project ("Researching Arab Mediterranean Youth: Towards a New Social Contract") is a FP-7 interdisciplinary cooperative research project led by the Barcelona Center for International Affairs (CIDOB) and funded by the European Commission. It brings together fifteen partners from Europe and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries to research youth prospects and perspectives in a context of multiple social, economic and political transitions in five Arab countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Lebanon). The project expands over 2014-2016 and has a total budget of €3.1 million. The thematic axis around which the project will revolve are education, employment and social inclusion, political mobilisation and participation, culture and values, international migration and mobility, gender, comparative experiences in other transition contexts and public policies and international cooperation.

