

MENA-OECD BUSINESS ADVISORY BOARD

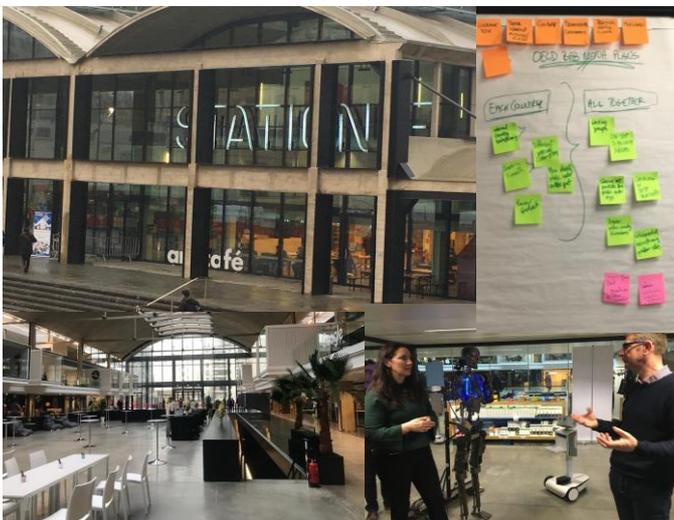
Youth Business Associations First Meeting – Conclusions

Involving Youth Business Associations in Public and Private Dialogue

The first meeting of the **MENA-OECD Youth Business Associations** platform took place on 24-25 January, 2019, in Paris. The meeting was co-chaired by the youth business organisations of Spain and Tunisia: the *Confederación Española de Asociaciones de Jóvenes Empresarios (CEAJE)* and the *Centre des Jeunes Dirigeants de Tunisie (CJD Tunisie)*.

This platform is part of the MENA-OECD Business Advisory Board (BAB), launched in 2018, which aims to promote Public-Private Dialogue (PPD) and better engage the private sector in policy-making. Given the high level of youth unemployment in the MENA region, and the need to create jobs for them, it is more necessary than ever to hear the voice of young entrepreneurs and businesspeople in the quest to look for solutions.

Participants visited Station F, one of the biggest start-up campuses in the world



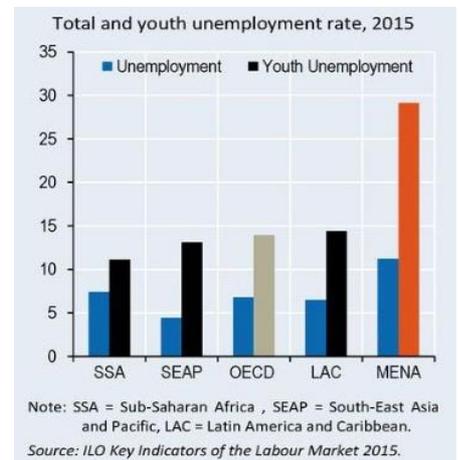
The meeting in Paris gathered 30 participants, including youth business associations and other experts from 16 MENA and OECD countries: Algeria, Egypt, France, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia.

The goal of this platform is to support youth business associations in their policy advocacy mission to contribute to better policies and more inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Participants discussed the objectives and vision of the MENA-OECD Youth Business Associations platform, sharing their experience in similar initiatives to build on lessons learned.

Key messages

- **Youth businesses need to have a bigger influence on policy:** With 27% youth unemployment, job creation is an urgent policy objective across the MENA region and beyond. Entrepreneurship is commonly referred to as the solution, but this will only be so if barriers are lifted. Youth business leaders can help unleash the untapped potential and contribute to job creation. Policy-makers have to hear their voice.
- **Cooperation is needed and sharing experiences can help countries move faster:** Youth business associations are actively contributing to the development of new policies and laws and they look to other countries for inspiration. Algeria's *Jill Forum des Chefs d'Entreprise* has been consulting Tunisia and Morocco in their efforts to develop a crowdfunding law. Morocco's *Centre des Jeunes Dirigeants* has been heavily involved in the development of the "self-entrepreneur" statute and in the simplification of start-up procedures and can share the lessons learned from these reforms. The Egyptian Junior Business Association is playing an important role in the country's rising entrepreneurship ecosystem as well as in recent initiatives within the renewables sector. All these valuable experiences can be shared and steepen the learning curve across the region. Participants agreed on the power of peer learning and called for this new platform to foster exchanges region between its members.
- **Informality has to be tackled through incentives and enforcement, but the political sensitivity around it cannot be ignored:** Informality – understood as economic activities not covered or insufficiently covered by regulation – is a prevalent issue in the MENA region, and it is deeply connected with the wave of social dissatisfaction that led to the Arab Spring in 2011. Informality is also threatening to increase in OECD countries as alternative forms of work are becoming more prevalent, especially in the "shared economy". Although its negative effects are well recognised, it is less clear how to tackle it. To some extent, governments fear creating social discontent and are reluctant to provoke informal business owners. Some paths to formalisation seem to be the improvement of government's services, awareness campaigns about benefits of formalisation, tax incentives and simplification of procedures. Policy dialogue can set the basis to develop action-based strategies to identify solutions built on the experience of the private sector.



Next Steps

- Reflect discussions about the objectives, governance and membership of the MENA-OECD Youth Business Associations platform in the **Strategic Note** and prepare for official launch of the platform at the next event of the Business Advisory Board planned to take place in June 2019.
- Draft a **Policy Brief** on the key insights from the discussions in Paris to present to policymakers and to the broader Business Advisory Board building on the three priority topics addressed: the role of youth business associations in policy-making, mechanisms to spread the culture of entrepreneurship, understanding informality and finding solutions.
- Develop a **Work-plan** and activities for the next two years to take place within the MENA-OECD Youth Business Associations platform.

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