Maat for Peace’ submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on “the Impact of the Covid-19 on the Human Rights of Youth in the Arab World”

* **Introduction:**

The adverse effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the rights of young people across the world can no longer be denied. With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, many youths have got their jobs lost and education disrupted. Thus, their future became vague and completely unclear. In the same regard, the prolonged closure triggered by the Covid-19-related measures has undeniably impacted the youth psychologically and physically. These factors have placed the youth in precarious conditions that threaten their economic and social rights, in particular the right to work, education, and health. Arab youth were not spared from these serious effects. More than 110 million young people (aged 15 to 29) continue to suffer from the consequence of the Covid-19 throughout the Arab states. In addition to the pandemic, the unresolved problems such as the spread of armed conflicts and civil wars in many parts of the country, as well as the rampant corruption and the difficult economic conditions have exacerbated the situation.

On the other hand, in cooperation with specialized international organizations, many Arab Governments are making strenuous efforts to reduce the negative effects of the pandemic on the rights of Arab youth, particularly the right to work. Youth have also played a vital role in combating the pandemic in many Arab countries; they voluntarily provided medical services to citizens, and tried to control and correct covid-19-related misinformation and fake news to debunk myths surrounding the proliferation of the pandemic, particularly on the Internet. Despite the efforts of States to contain the negative effects of the pandemic, it is undeniable that the pandemic’s devastating impacts on the youth are remarkable. Therefore, **Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights** presents this intervention to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to highlight the adverse impact of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic on the rights of youth in the Arab states the efforts of various States to reduce these effects, as well as the role of young people in containing the pandemic. Finally, Maat for Peace made a set of recommendations to help overcome the negative effects found after examining the situation of young people in the Arab world under the covid-19 pandemic, which undermines the promotion of their economic and social rights.

* **Key challenges facing youth in the Arab states with regard to the Covid-19 pandemic:**

Several evidences point to the negative effects of the covid-19 pandemic on the economic and social rights of youth in the Arab states such as the loss of job and the inability to access various educational services, as well as the prolonged closure resulting from the pandemic, which has ultimately contributed to the impact on the mental and mental health of many of them. The pandemic has therefore caused a three-dimensional shock for young people that may also have implications for them in the future through obstacles related to their ability to re-enter the labor market or recover from the adverse psychological effects of the pandemic, as well as the restoration of learning skills.

In the meantime, human rights estimates reveal that the high unemployment rates among Arab youth during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic have reached 26% of the total number in the Arab world. The Arab world lost the equivalent of 15 million jobs in the last quarter of 2020 only because of the pandemic and its repercussions, which not only increased labor market pressure and unemployment rate, but also deepened gender inequality in labor and prevented access to jobs for persons with disabilities is almost impossible.[[1]](#footnote-1) In the same context, human rights estimates suggest that the economic slowdown caused by the crisis leads to a weakening of the participation of young people in the labor market in the future, owing to the fact that they do not have the skills necessary to perform many jobs. [[2]](#footnote-2)This is even exacerbated by the employment of 85.1% of Arab youth in the informal sector that is most vulnerable and affected by global events.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In this context, figures indicate that unemployment among young people in the Arab world has risen alarmingly, with alarming future consequences, against the background of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic as a major factor, in addition to other factors. In Iraq, the unemployment rate for the 15-29 age group has risen to 30.5%, according to official government estimates which is a very high rate and confirms that the covid-19 pandemic is eliminating young people's dreams of finding suitable jobs.[[4]](#footnote-4) In Morocco, the unemployment rate for those with higher degrees has risen to 23.9% recorded a significant increase for university degree holders at a rate of 26.And then 1 percent of the certificate holders of excellent and specialized technicians as the highest rate at 30.0.This is due to the effects of the Covid- 19 pandemic on the labor market, the main cause of which is the disruption of the tourism sector, which employs a large number of young people[[5]](#footnote-5). However, Tunisia continues to suffer from the phenomenon of migration of young doctors to France, Germany and the Gulf countries, given the low salary levels compared to those countries, and the alarming increase in the suffering of young people in the medical sector.[[6]](#footnote-6)

On the other hand, the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Arab youth is not limited to the labor market, but rather extends to the educational side. The pandemic has deepened the already existing education crisis. Many young people have not been able to access educational services or develop their various skills[[7]](#footnote-7). The main reason for this is the weakness of Internet-related infrastructure in the Arab states, particularly in the most vulnerable places and in the loss of services, particularly in rural areas and refugee camps. With the global reliance on Internet services for distance education, owing to the spread of the pandemic, educational services are becoming difficult for many students, affirming that only 51.6 per cent of households in the Arab States have access to the Internet[[8]](#footnote-8) .For example, most Syrian refugees in Jordanian camps have expressed disappointment in completing education because they either do not have the necessary equipment to practice distance learning, such as smart devices or computers, and that they cannot afford the costs of Internet access.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Meanwhile, the prolonged closure caused by Covid-19 pandemic has caused many Arab youth to suffer from psychological disorders. The closure of entertainment, sports and social spaces has depressed many of them. The best example of this is in Tunisia, where social constraints imposed in response to the pandemic and the loss of jobs caused by the economic downturn have caused many young people to suffer from chronic psychiatric illness, so that the proportion of young people aged between 18 and 29 years with 14.78% depression in total Tunisian youth is extremely high and confirms the psychological and physical damage caused by Covid-19 pandemic.[[10]](#footnote-10)

* **Measures taken by Arab countries to support youth during and after the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic:**

Many States have begun to implement long-term initiatives or policies that reduce the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people, sometimes in cooperation with specialized international organizations. In Egypt, the Government worked to establish in January 2022 the Government. The Balad Youth Initiative, the first partnership between the public and private sectors, civil society and youth aimed at developing skills and linking all 1.8 billion young people between 10 and 24 years of age in the world to share experiences and work, in order to overcome the global problem of unemployment that the Covid-19 pandemic has recently been facing.[[11]](#footnote-11) On the other hand, my school initiative, held between the Jordanian Ministry of Education and the International Labor Organization and supported by the Dutch Government in providing educational support to about 3,000 students, half of whom are female, some of whom are Syrian refugees and the most marginalized and vulnerable Jordanian groups, in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused the closure of schools all over Jordan.[[12]](#footnote-12)

On the other hand, in March 2021, the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Central Bank of Iraq collaborated to implement a financial initiative to support small-scale projects for displaced persons in Iraq with the support of the Dutch government. The initiative also provides young women, men, and small enterprises with access to the most essential financial services that will help them establish and develop their own businesses, in the light of overcoming the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on Iraqi youth[[13]](#footnote-13), Despite all these programs being implemented by Governments in cooperation with international organizations, there is an urgent case for addressing the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people in comprehensive and long-term programs, as called for by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights.

* **The role of youth in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic in the Arab world:**

Many Arab youths have taken the initiative to combat the Covid-19 pandemic by voluntarily providing medical services to citizens, in addition to combating misinformation related to the Covid-19 pandemic. In Morocco, young people began to manufacture local medical equipment needed to combat the pandemic, such as the manufacture of medical masks as well as distributing food baskets to the most vulnerable groups.[[14]](#footnote-14) In Egypt, the youth has started using various technological tools to combat the spread of misinformation about the Covid-19 pandemic, which contributes in reducing the spread of the disease, in addition to providing psychological support to women affected by family violence exacerbated by the Covid-19 related measures.[[15]](#footnote-15) In Jordan young people have participated in supporting their communities in response to the Coronavirus pandemic along with combating misinformation.[[16]](#footnote-16) In Iraq, a group of youth has voluntarily offered activities to support citizens and strengthen their capacity to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic.[[17]](#footnote-17)

* **Recommendations:**

Finally, it can be said that the youth continue to suffer from the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in the Arab world. Many of them need rehabilitation to re-enter the labor market, where as some need psychological treatment because of the prolonged closure caused by the pandemic and the need to strengthen their different educational capacities. The efforts made by states to improve the situation of young people under the Covid-19 are not sufficient; therefore, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights recommends the following:

* The need to expand the participation of civil society organizations in promoting the situation of youth through employment initiatives as well as their various educational efforts and the organization of specialized programs to eliminate the effects of the depression caused by the closure period.
* The need to enhance Internet access to all places in the Arab world, particularly in remote and marginalized areas for displaced people.
* The need to address the negative psychological effects of youth caused by the prolonged closure period.
* The need for serious cooperation to rehabilitate young people to become widely involved in the labor market.

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