



Report

Assessing civil society initiatives in the field of economic and social rights



EuroMed Rights

Brussels – December 2016

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Bibliographic information

Title:

Report: Advancing economic and social rights in the EuroMed region.
Assessing civil society initiatives in the field of economic and social rights.

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Publisher: EuroMed Rights

Date of publication: January 2017

Pages: 31

Original language: English

Layout design: Jean-Yves Leblon

Index terms:

Economic and social rights / Civil society / Free trade agreements / European Neighbourhood Policy / Multinational Corporations / International Financial Institutions

Geographical terms:

European Union / Southern Mediterranean Countries

EuroMed Rights is grateful to Ford Foundation and CCFD- Terre Solidaire for their financial support to the research and publication of the report.

EuroMed Rights core donors: Danish-Arab Partnership Programme (DAPP), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), OSI, Sigrid Rausing Trust, Swedish Churches.



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List of Abbreviations

| | | | |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ADFM | Democratic Association of Women of Morocco (Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc) | CNDDC | National Committee for the Defence of the Unemployed (Comité Nationale pour la Défense des Droits de Chômeurs) |
| AFTURD | Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development (Association des femmes Tunisiennes pour la recherche sur le développement) | CNLC | National Coalition for Citizen Liberties (Collectif National pour les Libertés Citoyens) |
| AITEC | Association Internationale des Techniciens, Experts et Chercheurs | CRTD.A | Collective for Research and Training on Development-Action in Lebanon |
| ALCI | Alternative Citizen Movement (Alternatives citoyennes) | CSOs | Civil society organisations |
| AMDH | Moroccan Association of human rights (Association Marocaine des Droits Humains) | DCFTA | Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement |
| ANMR | Arab Network for Migrant Rights | EBRD | European Bank for Reconstruction and Development |
| ANND | Arab NGO Network for Development | ECESR | Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights |
| ARCI | Italian Cultural and Recreational Association (Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana) | ESCR-NET | International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights |
| ATFD | Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (Association Tunisienne des femmes démocratiques) | EIB | European Investment Bank |
| ATMDAS | Association Third Millennium for Development of Associative Action to the South- East (Association troisième millénaire pour le développement de l'action associative au sud-est) | EIPR | Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights |
| ATTAC | Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions and Aid to Citizens (Association pour la Taxation des Transactions et pour l'action citoyenne) | ESRs | Economic and social rights |
| BIC-USA | Bank Information Center United States of America | EU | European Union |
| BLACD | Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development | FA | Free trade agreements |
| CBAs | Community based associations | FARD | Femmes Algériennes Revendiquant leurs Droits |
| CCFD | Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement, CCFD-Terre Solidaire | FEMIP | Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership |
| CEE | Central and Eastern European Bankwatch Network | FENASOL | National Federation of workers and employees trade unions in Lebanon |
| CGATA | General Autonomous Confederation for Algerian Workers (Confédération générale autonome des travailleurs algériens) | FMAS | Moroccan Forum for Alternatives (Forum des Alternatives Maroc) |
| CLTD | Coordination for Liberties and Transitional Democracy (Coordination pour les libertés et la transition démocratique) | FTAs | Free Trade Agreements |
| | | FTDES | Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (Forum Tunisien de droits économiques et sociaux) |
| | | GADEM | Groupe antiraciste de défense et d'accompagnement des étrangers et migrants |
| | | HIC-MENA | Habitat International Coalition for Middle East and North Africa |
| | | ICESCR | International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights |
| | | IFC | International Finance Corporation |
| | | IFI | International Financial Institutions |
| | | ILO | International Labour Organization |
| | | IMF | International Monetary Fund |

| | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| LADDH | Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme) |
| LTDH | Tunisian League for Human Rights (Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme) |
| MENA | Middle East and North Africa |
| MNCs | Multinational corporations |
| NGOs | Non-governmental organisations |
| OMDH | Moroccan Organisation for Human Rights (Organisation Marocaine des Droits Humains) |
| OpT | Occupied Palestinian Territories |
| OTE | Observatoire tunisien de l'économie |
| RAJ | Youth Action Rally (Rassemblement Jeunesse Action) |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SMCs | Southern Mediterranean Countries |
| SNAPAP | Autonomous National Union of Public Administration Staff (Syndicat National Autonome des personnels de l'administration publique) |
| UGTT | General Union of Tunisian Workers (Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail) |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UN | United Nations |
| UPR | Universal Periodic Review |
| US | United States |
| UTICA | Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat) |
| WB | World Bank |

Introduction

Economic and social rights (ESRs) have gained attention relatively recently in the development of human rights organisations. Human rights organisations in the South have historically been established within a context of fighting for political and civil rights rather than for economic and social rights, while development organisations in both the North and the South only fairly recently started integrating rights perspectives into their work in a number of countries, as shown in this report. Also, trade unions and human rights associations in the region have worked along separate institutional tracks for political and historical reasons.

Although a number of civil society initiatives and political, social and economic studies have come into being within the context of EuroMed economic and social relations and dynamics¹, cooperation and solidarity links between civil society organisations in Europe and the South and East Mediterranean could arguably be further strengthened. The development of a 'Euro-Mediterranean civil society' could have been initially driven by the geopolitical and governmental framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, which included specific initiatives on regional civil society exchanges. However over time the Barcelona process, and later the Union for the Mediterranean, was significantly weakened. Despite recent efforts by the EU Commission to establish a 'regional structured dialogue of civil society'², today it is largely up to civil society associations to shape these regional relations.

The Arab spring uprising has triggered the start of different community actions in the countries under study, expressed through lobbying efforts or street pressure. Though much subsided, especially in Egypt due to the crackdown on civil society activists and new stringent laws, a base has been established from which small groups have been able to grow and demand such rights as enshrined in international conventions or national laws.

The report shows that there is room for stronger action on the whole, and for more cross-regional cooperation and networking. It offers a review of the existing strategic networking initiatives on those topics that are addressed by civil society on both sides of the Mediterranean in terms of economic and social rights, given the fact that societies in both Europe and in the South are impacted to a large extent by the same neo-liberal policies and austerity measures.

In sum, the report examines interactions among civil society actors at the domestic, regional and international level ([chapter 1](#)); existing initiatives of civil society groups targeting International Financial Institutions (IFIs), ([chapter 2](#)) multinational corporations (MNCs) and free trade agreements. Finally, the report describes obstacles and challenges faced by CSOs in the Euro-Mediterranean region ([chapter 3](#)).

Although mentioned, the research does not seek to cover the work of trade unions in the region. This is due to the need to restrict an already sizeable field of research. What is covered to a certain extent are the potential synergies and cooperation between CSOs and trade unions on economic and social rights.

The report does not address CSO initiatives dealing with war economies and situations of occupation such as in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) and the situation in Western Sahara. Said initiatives provide a good illustration of possible approaches to be used to push private businesses and economic or trade relations towards respecting international humanitarian law, UN resolutions and EU or individual European state rules. However, dealing with these issues would significantly increase the scope of the research to the point of overburdening the report. We have chosen instead to focus on countries where the level of civil society activities in the field of economic and social rights was relatively new or limited, and in need of attention.

Finally, and for the same reason cited earlier, the report does not include a review of private and political foundations active in the field of economic and social rights in the region.

Methodology

This report examines the initiatives and types of civil society organisations in the Euro Mediterranean region that work on economic and social issues using a rights-based approach derived from the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)³.

The range of economic and social rights covered by the report focuses on the right to decent work, the right to join and form trade unions, and the right to an adequate standard of living, including access to housing, healthcare, education, employment, water, and a clean environment. The South Mediterranean Countries considered in the report are: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon⁴. In the EU, the focus lies on the countries where the most significant civil society initiatives regarding EU-SMC relations in terms of economic and social rights were identified.

The methodology used includes desk research and a series of semi-structured interviews conducted between July 2015 and July 2016 with a sample of around 60 CSOs, networks, donor partners, trade unions, and think tanks that accepted to take part in the study. The selection of CSOs was based on a core group of established organisations as well as nascent groups recommended by the latter according to the significance and impact of their activities on economic and social rights, including how these rights are affected by international and European economic and trade accords. The study therefore also took into account small and emerging civic actions or community-based organisations in addition to the larger, more established CSOs. As a result, it provides a non-exhaustive mapping of civil society initiatives existing in 2016 in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Euromed Rights may consider updating the mapping and including other initiatives as they gain importance and whenever relevant in the future.

Migration is a topic that is of paramount importance to the economies in the southern Mediterranean and the North. The topic is relevant in terms of its link to CSO economic and social rights-based activities. The report has sought to take the gender perspective into account throughout, in terms of its relevance to economic as well as social rights activities.

Chapter 1:

Classification and activities

The CSOs addressing economic and social rights can be classified into several groups, all of which have some overlapping features regarding their action at the local or international level, their networking or interaction with regional or European organisations or their focus on government policy, external financial or trade relations.

For the sake of clarity, the CSOs in this sample are placed into two major categories – one working on local activities, and a second enjoying links within the region and with the northern Mediterranean.

In both categories much of the focus is on how government policies affect social and economic rights, with some groups addressing the impact of EU policies and association agreements and of trade relations with European banks or the

World Bank. In addition, some human rights organisations working mainly on political and civil rights now also address certain economic and social rights including the right to water, decent work and adequate housing, and a clean environment.

Among the more prominent issues in the countries under study are: labour rights and access to employment in particular for the youth; the right to an adequate housing and clean environment; poverty and the large disparities in standards of living between regions; the environmental impact of oil and gas exploitation and exploration; degree of corruption; the question of migrants and migrant workers notably.

In addition, most CSOs interviewed said they addressed women and men equally regarding migrant labour issues, industrial workers, farm workers, fishing communities, and in domestic worker rights. A number of these organisations also achieved gender equity on their boards, or were in the process of doing so.

Feminist CSOs have worked on legal reform and addressing cultural norms, some of which are based on Islamic law, generally considered to be untouchable, such as the inheritance law. Initiatives to push for reform in this regard are promoted by feminist groups in Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. Islamic Sharia law grants a woman half the inheritance of her male peers and members of the Maghreb Equality Coalition (Collectif Maghreb Egalité) among other have started a debate in the media and among academics and religious clerics, breaking a hitherto taboo subject.⁵

The tools CSOs use range from production of studies and reports through awareness-raising actions and the dissemination of information; training workshops; campaigning; lobbying stake-holders; strategic litigation and in some countries, street pressure - usually as a last resort.

Emerging community-based associations, new trade unions and issue-based ad hoc coalitions have increasingly resorted to social media as an outreach tool.

1.1. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Local Action

1.1.1. From Developmental to Rights-based

Under the first category of CSO's, a few started out as development or charity organisations that evolved into rights-based groups after the Arab Spring. Many of them coordinated with established groups to pursue a range of economic rights.

This is especially clear in Egypt; in the southern Egyptian province of Minya, Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development (BLACD), an NGO that was formed in 1995 to work on local development, has supported the formation of independent unions and associations of male and female farm workers, fishermen and women, and quarry workers.⁶ Similarly, another CSO, the South Foundation for Economic, Social Studies in Aswan addresses economic and social rights, budget analysis and public policy participation while continuing to provide developmental health and education services.⁷

In Tunisia, the Amal Association for the Environment (Association Amal pour l'Environment) an NGO based in the Gafsa region⁸ that organises educational workshops, joined a campaign with other CSOs against the disposal of industrial and hospital waste near residential areas, particularly from the area's phosphate company.

A local environmental and development organisation in Algeria, the Chams Association (Association Chams) was at the forefront of large public protests in the southern town of Ain Salah against fracking for shale gas by the oil company, Halliburton. The action gained the support of established human rights organisations, such as the Algerian League for the defense of human rights (LADDH), the Youth Action Rally (Rassemblement Jeunesse Action, RAJ), the National Coalition for Citizen Liberties (Collectif National pour les Libertés

Citoyens, CNLC), the National Committee for the Defence of the Unemployed (Comité Nationale pour la Defence des Droits de Chomeurs CNDDC) and the Coordination for Liberties and Transitional Democracy (Coordination pour les libertés et la transition démocratique CLTD). Chams plans to strengthen cooperation with other community movements in Oran and Tizi Ouzou and has continued sharing information from the field with them.⁹

1.1.2. CSOs Networking with Community-based Associations, Social Movements

A number of tenant and neighbourhood movements have emerged in the MENA region to campaign against eviction threats or rental increases accompanying urban and agricultural redevelopment schemes.

Issues surrounding adequate housing and land tenure are common to the six countries under study, often due to a scarcity of affordable housing, complexity in the laws governing land tenure, poor enforcement of laws, and corruption.¹⁰

In Algeria, a case of 2015 concerning residents of a building in Oran who fight against an impending eviction has received support from the LADDH.¹¹ The case was still in the courts at the time of writing this report.

In Morocco, it is worth noting a ground-breaking initiative launched in 2007 by the Democratic Association of Women of Morocco (Association Democratique des Femmes du Maroc, ADFM) regarding the issue of communal land, an ancient Moroccan land tenure regime that applies to nearly 15 million hectares of land. That particular legal framework, a mixture of tribal customs, Islamic rules and modern substantive law, has been developing to the detriment of women, called soulaliyates, who live on those lands. They continue to be excluded from the full enjoyment and usufruct of their land as well as, more recently, from the right to compensation when their land is expropriated for a public or private purpose. This exclusion goes back to a 1919 law which provides that only men

belonging to tribal groups (nouabs) possess legal rights to communal lands, under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior. In order to further the cause of the soulaliyates, the ADMF had to change its traditional advocacy methods by adjusting them to those rural, generally illiterate women. Their strategy has been to train them to advocate for their own case effectively. For that purpose, these women have been attending capacity building workshops focussing on leadership and communication. In parallel, the ADMF has been undertaking action to mobilise civil society and public opinion and has engaged decision-makers. These long-term efforts have prompted the Ministry of the Interior to send out three administrative circulars between 2009 and 2012 which recognized women as right holders and urged the local authorities to ensure that women are on the lists of land usufruct beneficiaries and any other compensations. The soulalyates are continuing their struggle for a law that would guarantee and protect their rights with regard to the communal land regime. While full and effective equality is still a long way, these first successes suggest that it might be worthwhile to broaden these types of initiatives to other countries of the region, such as Tunisia, Algeria and Palestine, where rural women might face the similar forms of discrimination.¹²

Across the region, particularly in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, urban restructuring has threatened housing rights by means of the forceful eviction of informal residents, or by pushing out small traders and entire markets in favour of project developers.¹³

In a relatively new development, CSOs in Egypt, including 10 Tooba, the Egyptian Centre for Legal and Civil Reform, and others have formed an initiative to support local community based associations (CBAs) by providing legal aid and innovative ways to end the forceful eviction from informally inhabited areas by developers.¹⁴

An example of success was noted when by 2015, and following civil society efforts, an initial agreement was reached between real estate developers, some 5,000 tenant families and the government in the Maspero area of Cairo that

would allow all parties a share in the land.¹⁵ However, the final outcome of the agreement remained unclear as some house demolitions started in early 2016.¹⁶

In Lebanon, a group called the Tenants Movement campaigns against rent increases in old buildings, particularly in parts of the capital Beirut slated for redevelopment and conversion into recreational or retail facilities. The movement has joined communal committees in different parts of the country pressing for legal reform to protect public spaces and beaches.¹⁷ In addition, a law passed in 2014 that allowed for a gradual liberalisation of rents, has come under renewed discussion in parliament following tenant complaints.¹⁸

These issues gained political prominence in Lebanon and featured in recent local elections when a group of activists campaigned under the slogan “Beirut my City” (Beirut madinati).¹⁹ Their programme called for affordable housing, better public transport, more green spaces and a solution to the solid waste problem. The group failed to win any seats in the municipal council.²⁰

1.1.3. Networking among CSOs: International treaty mechanisms

Formal networking on national issues is often conducted on an ad-hoc basis, such as for the preparation of the civil society report to the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic review (UPR), or to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, or other UN treaty body mechanisms.

In Egypt, a coalition of 19 human rights organisations, the Forum of Independent Human Rights Organisations, submitted a joint report to the UN Universal Periodic Review of Egypt in 2014.²¹ They continue to coordinate on monitoring the government’s compliance with its recommendations, and include CSOs that focus on ESRs, such as the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights; and feminist organisations, such as the New Woman Foundation, and Nazra for Feminist Studies.²²

Similarly, coalitions of CSOs in Jordan that included organisations working on economic and social rights, a think-tank, trade unions, women's rights and migrant rights presented a joint report to the UPR in 2013.²³ A few have formed a loose coalition to monitor the government's response to the UPR recommendations, including the Phenix Center for Economic Studies, Tamkeen for Human Rights and Legal Aid, Jordanian Women's Union, and the Jordanian Federation of independent trade unions. The Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) has participated in these networking initiatives and supported several of these CSOs in Jordan as well as in Lebanon.

Algerian NGOs, including the LADDH, submitted a joint report for the 2010 session at the UN Economic and Social Rights Committee²⁴, as did an alliance of Moroccan women's rights organisations. A coalition on education reform, coordinated by the ADFM with the participation of 32 national and local CSOs submitted a report on the worsening situation in Morocco to the committee in 2015.²⁵

In Tunisia, more than 15 organisations including FTDES, UGTT, ATFD, AFTURD, LTDH, the Tunisian Observer of the Economy, in coordination with EuroMed Rights, have drafted a report, as an alternative to the Tunisian government's periodic report to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which it had last done in 1999.

In order to facilitate the writing process, four thematic sub-groups were set up to monitor each category of the Covenant: General Economic Issues, Labour rights, Women's rights, and Education. Upon publication of the report, a group of civil society organizations sent a series of questions to the Committee. After reviewing both the State report and civil society questions, the Committee issued a List of Issues, asking the State to clarify certain claims, which it did in July of 2016.

1.1.4. Thematic Networking among CSOs: Environmental issues

Environment and climate change were among the top issues that CSOs worked on, most of which were linked to the impact of multinational company projects, some of which are funded by the World Bank or EU financial institutions ([see also Chapter 2](#)).

CSOs in Egypt have campaigned against the use of coal in particular. Nine CSOs presented complaints to the official Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency against the use of coal by the Lafarge and Suez Company for cement²⁶, to which Lafarge responded with a justification of its position, signalling the importance of the civil society movement.

A new coalition of experts, Egyptians against Coal, with some 15 individual activists were pushing for an end to the use of coal as an energy source. They used social media and community-based groups to raise public awareness of the dangers of coal, and proposing alternative solutions.²⁷

Several organisations in Tunisia, including the FTDES, the Tunisian Observatory of Economic Rights (Observatoire Tunisien de l'Economie, OTE)²⁸, as well as local environmental protection associations from the regions of Tataouine, Faouar and Dhehiba among others, initiated the first meeting of the so-called Mediterranean Forum against Fracking and Shale Gas that took place in Bizerte (Tunisia) in May 2015.²⁹

In Lebanon, a significant number of spontaneous movements have grown around government inaction affecting public health and environment, in particular problems surrounding the collection and disposal of solid waste.³⁰ Large demonstrations focusing on the failure of garbage collection services were organised in 2015 by a group named the "You Stink Movement"³¹ that included civil society activists and other initiatives, such as "We Want Accountability (Badna n'haseb).³²" The latter has campaigned more broadly against political

corruption and poor public services using social media and street protests, most recently protesting government misappropriation of public funds³³, and the ongoing privatisation of public beaches.³⁴ These issues have also been taken up by the political movement Beirut Madinati (see above).

1.1.5. Thematic Networking: Budget Transparency, anti-corruption, tax justice

The International Budget Partnership that produces annual ratings, has placed Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia among the countries with limited and weak transparency and public participation, while Egypt, Algeria and Lebanon have even weaker ratings.³⁵ CSOs in the region have pushed for more transparency and better interaction with civil society on preparing budgets, and have produced budget analyses. Some have been engaged in consultations with the government and lobbying parliament.

A number of Tunisian CSOs that evolved after the Arab Spring have created short-term coalitions in order to monitor authorities' action and so to press the government or parliament on ensuring transparency and civil society consultation in the framework of an inclusive and institutionalised dialogue. They include the OTE, which makes technical and financial information publicly accessible in a reader-friendly manner; Touensa, which works on access to information and transparency with an emphasis on citizenship³⁶; and the Compass (Al-Bawsala), which monitors parliament, as well as municipalities (marsad baladiya project)³⁷. Another CSO: Doustourna, monitors parliament members' accountability on election campaign promises regarding economic and social rights and offers programmes on accountability.

In Egypt, government dialogue with CSOs in preparation of the budget was weak, but more data has been provided than before, with the finance ministry setting up a blog with "citizen budget" information, and monthly economic and financial outlooks³⁸.

CSOs such as the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) held consultations with the finance ministry for over a year and ran regular awareness-raising campaigns on budget participation. The EIPR has issued a series of budget analyses in a social media campaign termed "Where Does our Money Go," using government data.

Some emerging CSOs worked on budget analysis at the local, municipal level – such as the South Foundation for Economic and Social Studies, with offices in the southern Egyptian cities of Sohag and Aswan.

In addition, the New Woman Foundation has worked on gender budgeting, published a number of papers, organised meetings with government agencies and civil society organisations and integrated this issue into discussions and activities involving different groups at local level.

The ANND has published a number of studies regarding tax policies and their impact on the socioeconomic environment in Arab countries. Efforts on budget analysis and monitoring were otherwise mostly conducted by national chapters of Transparency International, as in Lebanon and Morocco, or more specialised organisations, such as I Watch in Tunisia, Phenix Center in Jordan that conduct budget analysis, and produce reports on government spending. The Moroccan Network for the Protection of Public Funds monitored the use of public funds at the local level and in public service, using social media for outreach.

1.1.6. Thematic Networking: Labour Rights

There have been recent CSO efforts to develop links with independent trade unions, most of which were formed in the years preceding the Arab Spring or right after it. Some of these trade unions remain unrecognized, benefiting from CSO support, and vice versa, in organising to demand rights and denounce abuses. Other more or less formal rights-based organisations were formed in the past years, in particular those advocating for migrant workers' rights and those fighting for the right to work for the unemployed. According to the Global

Employment Trends for Youth published by ILO in 2015, “the Middle East and North Africa regions continue to show by far the highest youth unemployment rates – 28.2 and 30.5 per cent, respectively, in 2014 – and rates have continued to worsen since 2012, particularly for young women”.³⁹

All organisations interviewed mention that they have adopted a gender perspective in their trade union work, particularly as women form a significant portion of the informal work force and are frequently discriminated against. Gender discrimination against female agricultural workers has been addressed by several CSOs by means of reports and conducting training on the issue – such as the New Woman Foundation in Egypt, the ADFM, the Phenix Centre in Jordan, and the Better Life Foundation in Egypt.

In Morocco, Junction (Jonction) was set up by the Moroccan Association for Human Rights, in 2013 as an initiative for providing support for the right to decent work through lobbying the government, private businesses and the judiciary. It aims to bridge the gap between trade unions, human rights organisations and associations for unemployed persons and workers in particular in the agriculture and textile industries, which include informal women workers.⁴⁰

The Algerian Autonomous National Union of Public Administration Staff (Syndicat National Autonome des personnels de l’administration publique, SNAPAP) has worked on the protection of labour rights, in particular those who are not yet unionised, both in the public and private sectors. They have addressed worker problems and supported demands of unemployed youths in the oil-rich south, the wealth of which has not improved the situation of the local population. SNAPAP cooperates with several human rights organisations in Algeria and in the region, becoming a member of Euromed Rights in 2015. In 2013, the SNAPAP formed a confederation including autonomous trade unions from the private sector, the General Autonomous Confederation for Algerian Workers (Confédération générale autonome des travailleurs algériens – CGATA). CGATA documents many cases of harassment of autonomous unionists in Algeria and regularly submits these cases to the ILO. The Confederation is part along with other Algerian organisations of the Maghreb Social Forum.

In Tunisia, sections of the General Union of Tunisian Workers (Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail, UGTT) interacted with opposition-aligned human rights organisations before the revolution through partnerships and joint advocacy. After the revolution and the transition to democracy, it has continued to engage with a number of human rights organisations in the framework of a national dialogue with the government on public policies and democratic consolidation. Unlike most of the trade unions in the region, and favoured by the specific context of political transition that Tunisia is experiencing since 2011, the UGTT has been able to play a significant role in this transition. In 2013, UGTT led the setting-up of a peaceful political dialogue gathering the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), LTDH, the Tunisian Order of Lawyers, and other leading actors of the Tunisian civil society with the aim of removing the political blockages threatening at that time the democratic transition. The success of this dialogue, which led to the adoption of the constitution in 2014 and the organization of the parliamentary elections, culminated in the award of the Nobel Peace Prize on 9 October 2015.⁴¹

In other countries, such as Egypt and Jordan, female or male farmers, fishers and quarry workers who are not unionised have organised into trade union-like associations, campaigning for rights based on international standards. They are supported by a number of CSOs, including the New Woman Foundation, which has promoted policies to ensure gender equality in labour policies and laws, particularly targeting discrimination against female informal workers in the manufacturing industry, agriculture, or as domestic workers or street vendors including by strengthening the capacity of trade unionists to adopt and integrate gender equality programmes in the workplace as well as into trade union action plans. The New Woman Foundation aims in particular at strengthening leadership skills and capacities of formal and informal workers to organise collectively in various fields such as agriculture, manufacturing or domestic work.⁴² Similarly, the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (Association Tunisienne des femmes démocratiques, ATFD) has campaigned for a gender perspective in new Tunisian legislation, and is working with trade unions to promote gender equality in agriculture and in the manufacturing

industry, especially the textile industry that relies significantly on female informal workers.

In Jordan, Tamkeen Field for Aid documented and provided support as well as legal aid to men and women migrant workers including domestic workers, in particular Asian domestic workers and Egyptian agricultural workers. The think tank, Phenix Center for Economic and Informatic Studies, focuses on labour rights and the right to decent work, including among agricultural men and women workers. It monitors Jordan's compliance with ILO standards and provides technical support to new, independent trade unions. Partly thanks to civil society mobilisation, a new law against human trafficking entered into force in 2009 although its implementation remains weak, according to NGOs⁴³. Recently, migrant workers set up their own association and received legal assistance from a local human rights organisation, the Adalah Centre for Human Rights Studies, in cooperation with the US-based Solidarity Center.

The Lebanese National Federation of Employees and Workers (FENASOL) has set up a union for domestic and migrant workers, still excluded from Lebanon's work code⁴⁴. FENASOL, a recognized body separate from the official General Confederation of Lebanese Workers, focuses on raising awareness of ILO standards applying to domestic and migrant workers which are victims of discrimination and trafficking.

1.2. Regional activity

A number of challenges facing economic and social rights are common to the whole MENA region, such as water supply and sanitation, unemployment, land rights, access to clean air, regional inequalities and disparities, budget transparency, and the rights of migrants and asylum-seekers. Coalitions and partnerships among CSOs working on these issues seem to form separately and sporadically within each of the Maghreb and the Mashrek sub-regions, with occasional links between the two.

Across the region, the UGTT, the OTE and the FTDES from Tunisia and the ECESR in Egypt have focused on tax justice, raising awareness of its importance, and coordinating on campaigning in general. The last two published a comparative study on the tax systems in Egypt and Tunisia, coordinated by ANND.⁴⁵

Activities mostly focused on conferences, joint advocacy efforts, training workshops, with some organisations being more active than others. Regional interaction may be limited by insufficient funding, or the political situation in countries such as Egypt that makes it difficult for some activists to travel.⁴⁶ Travel is also tied to available funding and visa restrictions in some countries of the MENA region, requiring lengthy security procedures ([see chapter 3](#)).

The only formalised network relevant to economic and social rights is the ANND, which covers a large number of NGOs in 12 different Arab countries. It has focused on trade and investment policies, public-private partnerships, and examined their impact on society, in what pertains to economic and social rights.⁴⁷ The ANND conducts numerous workshops and trainings aimed at enhancing the ability of regional CSOs to analyse the impact of public policy on economic, social and human rights. It has published analyses of the European Neighbourhood Policy revision exercise in Arab countries, centred on expanding existing free-trade agreements and ensuring mobility, and has held joint advocacy visits with EU institutions. Since its inception, the ANND has, in cooperation with regional and international human rights networks, through their members and experts, been striving to design a new developmental model.

A number of feminist and development organisations, whose work is based on a gender perspective, seek to achieve a certain level of coordination and joint action around the theme of women's economic empowerment. These initiatives include the "Sustainable Economic Opportunities for Women" project, implemented in seven Arab countries and coordinated by the Collective for Research and Training on Development-Action (CRTD.A) in Lebanon. In Egypt, the New Woman Foundation is part of it via its "Women and Work" programme.

1.2.1. Coalitions on Migrant Issues

All the six countries under study face the challenge of migrations including transit migration from sub-Saharan Africa (in particular to Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco), or labour migration like in Morocco, Lebanon, Algeria and Jordan, as well as immigrants working in Europe, mainly in France, Italy, Belgium and Spain.⁴⁸

Migrant rights are part of the priorities of economic and social rights-based organisations, in the Mashrek and more recently in the Maghreb. A first regional observatory has been established during the World Social Forum in Tunisia in 2014. At the time of writing, the secretariat of the Maghreb Observatory for Migration is led by the Moroccan Forum for Alternatives (Forum des Alternatives Maroc, FMAS) and the FTDES and is composed of associations and trade unions in North Africa and Europe. Its aim is to monitor abuses by security forces and administrative authorities, and incidents of racism against migrants in Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria and Tunisia.⁴⁹

A Morocco-based anti-racist and migrant rights organisation, GADEM, operates in partnership with NGOs from Mali, Nigeria, Senegal as well as with France-based La Cimade and the Euro-African network, Migreurop.⁵⁰ It provides legal aid to migrant workers and undocumented migrants, and conducts awareness-raising in conjunction with human rights organisations.

The regularisation campaign launched by Morocco and implemented in 2014 allowed for some associations created by migrants to register.⁵¹ Today a Moroccan platform for migrants associations bringing together seventeen associations made up of non-Moroccan nationals who live in Morocco are involved in the defence of migrant rights. The platform was set up following the announcement of a new migration policy in Morocco in September 2013 and the lobbying carried out by civil society actors and the National Human Rights Council (NHRC) - making it possible to obtain legal recognition of 25 associations in addition to the fact that the State took steps towards ratification of the International Labour Organization Conventions n° 143, 189 and 97.

Externalization of the borders between Spain and Morocco aimed at limiting irregular migration has in the past ten years resulted in massive human rights abuses against migrants and refugees, especially by border guards and the police, in addition to rampant racism targeting Sub-Saharan migrant communities. GADEM, the migrant associations and a number of Moroccan and Tunisian Human Rights organisations, including the AMDH, OMDH, ATFD, and international organisations have jointly issued a declaration critical of European migration policies pushing for Morocco to harshly enforce its border at the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, a practice that has resulted in violent incidents.⁵²

In December 2015, an Algerian Migration Platform was created. It is composed of about ten member associations working at the local, national and international level on migration issues in Algeria. The Platform's aim is to be a forum for discussion, reflexion and action around the issue of migration. The Platform includes Algerian organisations such as RAJ, LADDH, FARD (Femmes Algériennes Revendiquant leurs Droits) as well as international players present in Algeria such as Médecins du Monde or Caritas.

On a larger scale, independent trade union organisations from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Egypt and from Italy, Spain, Portugal and France have formed a Trade Union Network on Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Migration.⁵³ The organisation is to act as a focal point, using

social media to promote respect for labour rights for migrants in compliance with international standards for labour and to facilitate transnational mobilization on these issues. It is also partner of CSOs in Europe, such as SOLIDAR and ARCI, but also in Africa. The Network promotes a rights-based and coherent migration and integration policy.

In the Mashrek, the Arab Network for Migrant Rights (ANMR) was established in 2013 at the initiative of Tamkeen in order to protect the rights of marginalised or migrant workers and refugee populations.⁵⁴ According to interviews held with Tamkeen and Phenix Center in Jordan and FENASOL in Lebanon⁵⁵, the role of member organisations is to provide legal assistance to abused workers. It includes mediation when possible, or strategic litigation to press for compensation for low pay, virtual slave-like conditions, restricted freedom of movement and unsafe working and living conditions. ANMR has members from UAE, Kuwait, Lebanon (Insan, Kafa, Caritas and FENASOL), Jordan (Tamkeen, Phenix Center and the Jordanian Women's Union), Egypt (EIPR), Libya and Bahrain.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that following the February 2016 London Conference on Supporting Syria & the Region, a potentially new regional field of work is emerging on economic and social rights. Both Jordan and Lebanon⁵⁶ have pledged to give Syrian refugees increased access to work and education, conditioned however on international support to cover the related costs including to local populations. The international community, not the least EU member states, have supported strengthening the resilience of Syrian refugees and local populations, closely linked to policies of stopping asylum seekers from entering Europe.

1.2.2. Environmental Rights

Environmental issues in the SMCs, based on the interviews conducted for the study, include poor water quality and short supply, the harmful environmental impact of oil and gas exploration (including fracking), the use of coal by cement

companies, phosphate pollution, the dumping of industrial chemical waste and the degradation of agricultural land.

CSOs from Morocco, including the AMDH and ATTAC Maroc⁵⁷, and from Egypt, the El-Shehab Institution for Comprehensive Development, and the Egyptian Association for Collective Rights⁵⁸ are coordinated loosely in the Morocco-based Right to Water Forum in the Arab Region.⁵⁹ As a regional forum, its activities have slowed down because of a lack of funding, but its members continue to share information and coordinate on international action.⁶⁰

The initiators of the Mediterranean Forum against Fracking and Shale Gas in Tunisia have expressed their ambition to enlarge this Forum to membership from other CSOs in the Mediterranean region in the near future ([see under paragraph 1.1.1](#)).

1.3. International interaction

There has been a slow growth in networking between CSOs in the North and in the South, helped especially by two recent World Social Forums, in 2013 and 2015, held in Tunisia, which mobilised large numbers of organisations focused on the access to social and economic rights. Similarly, the recession in the West has triggered activities by CSOs and local trade unions to monitor government expenditure, demanding social justice in their own region as well as globally. As a consequence, a number of international and European organisations and trade unions have shared experiences and provided technical and financial support to CSOs in the southern Mediterranean, in particular regarding projects financed by the EU and international financial institutions. The ones cited below are the most active in terms of links and partnering with CSOs in the southern Mediterranean.

They include the Europe-based SOLIDAR network, consisting of European organisation many of which have partners in the SMC. The network has expanded

its activities to include support to alliances between regional civil society, think tanks, social movements and independent trade unions through its programme “Social Justice in the Middle East and North Africa.”⁶¹ It has also established an online platform to communicate with its partners in the MENA region⁶², advocating with the European Parliament and the EU for a rights based approach to the European Neighbourhood Policy. According to SOLIDAR, cooperation between CSOs and trade unions in the MENA region tends to be inconsistent, sometimes hampered by governments’ non-recognition of independent trade unions, as in Egypt, and Jordan; or by tense relations with the government, as was the case for Algeria’s SNAPAP.⁶³

A monitoring body that started as a Central and Eastern European network based in the Czech Republic, CEE Bank Watch extended its mandate to cover the Middle East and North Africa three years ago, after an increase of the EBRD’s activities in the region. It has assisted CSOs, such as the Phenix Center in Jordan, in using EBRD and EIB complaint mechanisms at an early stage. It campaigns at the EU level to ensure its external aid projects meet environmental and social standards. Bank Watch identified difficulties in the MENA region for CSOs to access public documents, resulting in weak claims based on circumstantial evidence, unlike CSO experience in Eastern and Central Europe.

In the field of land and housing rights, the international NGO Habitat International Coalition for the MENA (HIC-MENA) has provided capacity-building support to CSOs such as the Cairo-based Egyptian Coalition for Collective Rights, and in rural areas, such as BLACD in Upper Egypt. It has also provided training to small farmers facing land confiscation at the behest of large agribusinesses in Morocco and Egypt.⁶⁴

Oxfam, has supported CSOs in the region, focusing among other issues on gender justice and on social and economic rights. The latter is supported by Oxfam’s global “Even it Up” campaign that addresses economic inequalities and will be declined in both Tunisia and Morocco, focusing on disparities among less developed and wealthier regions, monitoring budgets and fiscal policies. Oxfam partners in governance and inequalities include the FTDES, Al-Bawsa-

la, Doustourna and the OTE, among others.⁶⁵ Oxfam’s gender programme in Tunisia works with over 10 partners at the central level and in the regions, focusing on political participation, economic empowerment and eliminating violence against women and girls. In Morocco, Oxfam focuses on access to decent work and social protection of women in the agricultural sector though work on the value chain of the red fruit sector, working with a series of actors including CSOs, private sector and local authorities as well as through the international ‘Behind the Brands’ campaign targeting companies in Europe, while its governance program focuses on social justice through fiscal accountability, budget monitoring and access to basic services (partners include Transparency Morocco, ADFM, ALCI, ATMDAS and Espace Associatif).⁶⁶

In the US, a number of non-governmental organisations have been equally active in supporting civil society work on ESR in the MENA region.

The New-York based Center for Economic and Social Rights supports CSO advocacy at the UN level, and assisted in the drafting of reports to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and to the UN Council Universal Periodic review. It works with Egyptian CSOs in a loose affiliation, designing online tools to monitor and campaign on international treaty body recommendations.⁶⁷

The International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net), with members across 76 countries – including Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine and Tunisia – and its primary secretariat office in New York City, connects CSOs, social movements and individual advocates in the northern and southern Mediterranean, as well as across all regions. Members build shared analysis and coordinate collective advocacy foremost through working groups focused on corporate accountability, economic policy, strategic litigation, women and ESR, monitoring, and social movements.⁶⁸

The Washington DC-based Bank Information Center (BIC-USA) has played an important role in supporting civil society communication with the World Bank (see below) through its partners in Egypt and Tunisia, and CSOs in Jordan

(Phenix Center), ANND in Lebanon and the Moroccan Network of Public Wealth Protection.⁶⁹

The Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, a non-profit research organisation registered in the US and UK, tracks the human rights policies and performance of companies.⁷⁰ The Centre has supported several local CSOs in different ways, including by informing them about different cases related to corporate accountability, communicating directly with the companies concerned, like in the case of Titan Cement, and it publishes relevant briefings and bulletins on these themes.⁷¹

The Solidarity Center is a non-profit organization that works with unions, non-governmental organizations and community groups worldwide to reinforce economic and political power of workers around the world through effective, independent and democratic unions. Solidarity Center implements programmes in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan where it mainly assists workers, including migrant workers, in forming unions and networks; it also supports trade unionists in integrating gender equality in their organisations and train working women.

The work of AITEC, an organisation that works on social, economic and environmental justice⁷², focuses in the southern Mediterranean on the impact of free trade agreements on the economy and the environment. It has partnered with Egyptian NGOs in monitoring multinational corporations, and with the FTDES in Tunisia. AITEC campaigns with European CSOs to shed light on issues linked to EU Free Trade agreements. A French development organisation, CCFD-Terre Solidaire, supports civil society actors in the South and conducts advocacy actions on various subjects, including corporate social responsibility.

Chapter 2: CSOs, IFIs and European Financial Agreements

As financial and trade agreements are often run by different players (World Bank, EBRD, other IFI), and as a range of ESRs may be affected by the same project, this chapter looks at the larger picture, and defines the actions of CSOs and the cooperation among them on both sides of the Mediterranean, where it exists.

Some common features are CSOs addressing workers' rights, including informal women labour; land tenure and environmental issues, many of which connected to multinational corporations and trade liberalisation.

2.1 EU Free Trade Agreements

The EU has free trade agreements (FTA) in place with the six countries under study, and discussions for an expansion into a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) are at different stages with Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan respectively. Such deeper trade agreements would introduce further tariff reductions on industrial and agricultural products, services, and liberalise conditions for foreign investment.⁷³

In the Maghreb, Tunisian CSOs, have been most active on this topic, and have asked for a human rights impact assessment of the agreement as well as for more transparency in the negotiations including through consultations of civil society. In February 2016, 20 Tunisian organisations along with French NGOs and Euromed Rights signed a joint letter addressed to the European Parliament on the eve of the openings of the negotiations.⁷⁴

The OTE has lobbied parliament over the social and economic impact of EU free trade agreements and of government plans to partly privatise the public health sector.⁷⁵ An effort entitled "They Didn't Tell us" ("magaloulnash"), pushed for government transparency in its dealings with both the IMF and the EU, and for accountability to parliament. A coalition called "Alliance Article 32" (named after the article in the 2014 Constitution that guarantees the right to information)⁷⁶ has demanded the right to access information.

ATTAC Morocco has been active in calling for open debate over the DCFTA talks with the EU. Together with academics, it publishes policy papers pointing out the non-inclusive nature of the negotiations carried out so far.

2.2 The Multinational Corporations

CSOs interviewed for this study have pointed to links between FTAs and multinational projects such as those that negatively impact the environment or water supply, due to fracking in shale gas exploration, or to large agribusiness ventures that result in farmer and resident displacement from land, as well as those resulting from large infrastructure projects such as power plants.

The impact in Egypt of multinational corporations (MNCs) on the right to decent work is discussed in detail in a report by the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights. It illustrates the pitfalls of Egypt's investment and taxation laws favouring foreign investors, and other financial agreements that allow MNCs to disregard minimum wage regulations, offer temporary employment with no contract, use foreign labour, and resort to external tribunals to settle disputes with the state.⁷⁷

The impact was highlighted by the case of Veolia⁷⁸, a French waste management service that sued Egypt over a government increase in the minimum wage of workers.

Protests have also mounted against oil extraction companies in Algeria, the proceeds of which don't directly benefit the local population, and planned shale gas fracking operations ([see also under paragraph 1.1.1.](#)).

2.3 The European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

The stated aims of EU Investment Bank programs in the Mediterranean, under the Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership (FEMIP), which supports small and medium-size private sector ventures, are to promote the private sector, improve infrastructure and integrate the Mediterranean partner countries in the global economy. New Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) aimed at ending poverty and protecting the environment have been adopted in 2015 by the EBRD, the EIB, the World Bank and the IMF.

The above-mentioned institutions have very similar complaints mechanisms regarding the social and economic impact of a project; arrangements for the engagement of affected communities, minorities and vulnerable group; and access to information. That leaves room for CSOs to push for the protection of ESRs based on international and European standards, which they have used with support from partners including ANND, CEE Bank Watch, and Bank on Human Rights, as mentioned above.

In 2015 CEE Bank Watch issued a report on the EBRD-funded Serinus gas and oil project in the Tunisian provinces of Kébilli and Tataouine, documenting labour strikes over the hiring of staff through private agencies and by-passing national obligations for worker protection and social benefits.⁷⁹ Two years earlier, the OTE, FTDES, Touensa, Doustourna, and other Tunisian, regional and European CSOs wrote to the EBRD urging it to suspend the loan to the project because of evidence that it was planning to engage in fracking to extract shale gas.

The economic and social rights concerns highlighted by civil society mobilisation around the Serinus Energy case are in fact common to other parts of the MENA region, like in free-trade zones from Morocco to Jordan that resort to fixed-term, or informal labour contracts, and improper land acquisition.

In cooperation with the CEE Bank Watch, the ANND has worked to monitor the impact of EBRD activities on socioeconomic human rights in the Arab region. Moreover, it has conducted several workshops aimed at enhancing the capacity of regional CSOs in undertaking this type of monitoring and analysis. Since its official start of operations in 2013 the Phenix Centre in Jordan has focused on specific EBRD projects. The organisation published a series of position papers examining to which extent the projects met local needs, criticising private sector participation in infrastructure projects for their lack of respect for workers rights, flouting of renewable energy environmental standards, and other irregularities.⁸⁰ The ANND produces informative research papers on the EIB and the EBRD in the energy sector, its impact on climate change, and on agribusiness in the Arab world.

2.4 World Bank projects

CSOs have taken advantage of the WB Safeguard Policies Revision, an ongoing consultation mechanism on the impact of its investment projects on people and the environment; and its ongoing consultation on country strategies.

For instance, Egyptian NGOs have submitted their development priorities to the WB office in Cairo, as part of consultations with civil society for the Bank's Country Partnership Framework for 2015-2019.⁸¹ Six CSO, with the support of BIC-USA, have urged integrated development, guarantees for labour rights and for protection against environmental harm.⁸² Consultations were ongoing in late 2015.⁸³

In a separate action, Egyptian rights groups and trade unionists supported citizens in filing a complaint against a cement plant in a residential area west of Alexandria financed by the World Bank's private lending arm, the IFC. Their grievances covered a short-term hiring system, plans to relocate residents, air pollution and increased use of coal as energy. The IFC's compliance ombudsman has found the complaint eligible for the grievance process. If successful,

this would oblige the client company, Alexandria Portland Cement (Titan) to comply with the WB's Environmental and Social Performance Standards – the case was still ongoing in mid-2016.⁸⁴

In cooperation with regional CSOs, and their experts, the ANND has participated in numerous of the World Bank and the IMF's Spring and annual meetings, in a push to promote its members' vision on these international institutions' economic and financial policies but also to present a number of studies and research papers on this issue.

In Tunisia, the World Bank consulted with CSOs and academics over its analysis on the main opportunities and obstacles to eliminate poverty (Systemic Country Diagnostic). This was apparently in response to a request by 13 Tunisian CSOs to participate in consultations with the Bank over this procedure.⁸⁵ The CSO signatories, Touensa, I Watch and others, reflected the diversity of issues in Tunisia, including transparency, decentralisation, unemployed graduates, and the mining industry.

Chapter 3: Challenges and Needs Common to CSOs in the SMCs

3.1 Policy and security measures

The space for civil society action varies from one country to another in the MENA region after the Arab Spring, as some governments passed laws to open up political life and allow for more civil society freedoms, while others imposed more restrictions. With the possible exception of Tunisia and Morocco, most interviewed CSOs pointed to a range of challenges, from a low degree of consultation with their own governments to legal restrictions limiting the right to freedom of association, international funding and more severely, instances of raids and threats from security services.

These problems are common to all human rights organisations, but it's worth noting that in countries such as Algeria and Egypt, they particularly affect economic and social rights activists by providing obstacles to field work and to foreign funding, and by banning labour strikes and protest demonstrations of any kind.

Some activists in Egypt found that authorities are keener to tolerate independent civil society work on economic issues than on political or civil rights, allowing for consultation with the government on for instance participatory budgeting. However, the situation in Egypt has continued to worsen since the beginning of this study: CSOs continue to be subjected to the restrictive 2002 associations law and other new laws limiting the scope for CSO activity and funding on the whole.⁸⁶ A growing number of domestic and international NGOs have been prosecuted in recent years, and rights activists have been arrested, received threats, or were barred from travel.⁸⁷ More recently, Egyptian courts ordered the freezing of the personal assets of a number of activists and organisations. A number of CSOs in the Northern Mediterranean, such as AITEC, SOLIDAR, also found the situation complicated their partnerships with certain CSOs in Egypt.

Similarly, there is little space for CSOs in Algeria, where the penal code and the new association law in 2012⁸⁸ give the government wide-ranging control over the registration, life and funding of NGOs. Civil society action on economic rights, reflected in the arrest in early 2015 of scores of protestors in demonstrations organized by the National Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Unemployed Workers.⁸⁹ As a result of the restrictions, there is little interaction among independent Algerian organisations and CSOs in the region or in Northern Europe.

To a lesser degree, security measures in Jordan also negatively impacted the ability of activists to operate, limiting the possibility of public campaigning or slowing down their activities by restricting funding approval, including registration of independent trade unions. In 2011, Jordan allowed for more freedom of assembly by requiring groups to notify ahead of a planned gathering instead of obtaining approval. Since then however, human rights NGOs have reported increased restrictions on civil society, including tight control over their public activities and funding. Lebanon's association law, which requires simple notification, has remained unchanged. Public assemblies are not subject to previous authorization but in practice the exercise of this right is subject to a prior notification procedure.

Morocco introduced constitutional reforms that expanded parliamentary authority; formation of associations was by simple notification. Popular demands for political, social and economic reforms grew under new movements following the uprisings in the Arab world, for example the 20 February Movement whose demonstrations were nonetheless often dispersed by security forces. In general, Morocco witness a large number of public protests each year linked to local issues such as housing, water access, etc.⁹⁰, most of which are tolerated by the authorities. Several such protests have met the support of the AMDH.

By contrast Tunisia, which provided the so-called “spark” for the Arab uprisings, has witnessed a dramatic swing from a repressive system that banned all but pro-government groups to one with radical changes liberalising civil society organisations. In Tunisia CSO’s in general are gaining strength, enjoying access to information and to consultation with the government and parliament over economic policies.⁹¹ A number of international foundations and CSOs have opened offices in Tunisia, including EuroMed Rights which is providing support to its members and to new organisations, organizes capacity building through networking and acts as interface between CSOs and the EU. EuroMed Rights has set-up a working group on economic and social rights and held different seminars in 2013 and 2014, as part of a project on the mobilisation of civil society in the monitoring of EU-Tunisian relations.

3.2 Challenges in Access to Information

According to the Global Integrity Report 2011, MENA countries showed the lowest scores in the world in terms of accountability.⁹² Difficulty in accessing information or a lack of transparency on government websites was an often-mentioned challenge in interviews across the board. For instance, Tunisian and Egyptian CSOs found that while more information was available on government websites, pertaining to the state budget or auditing agencies the information was not detailed enough, thus hardly allowing for significant public

participation. CSOs in both countries have campaigned and lobbied for more transparency, as described above.

Insufficient awareness among CSOs of the kind of mechanisms available for campaigning at international institutions was commonly cited, such as at the UN IESCR committee, and at IFIs, in particular the EIB and the EBRD, which have only recently increased their activities in the MENA region. The last two were mentioned as being difficult to follow up on, with insufficient indicators for the environmental impact of projects, and offering limited interaction with civil society. However, access to EBRD or EIB complaints mechanisms and campaigning has been supported by CEE Bank Watch, and Bank on Human Rights. This has provided a small but growing number of CSOs in the South Mediterranean with the expertise to monitor IFIs from a rights-based perspective.⁹³

Despite poor Publish What You Fund rankings, the World Bank’s consultation and complaints mechanisms⁹⁴ have been cited by CSOs as the most comprehensive, and responsive compared to those of the EBRD or the EIB. As a result, there has been greater interaction among CSOs, in particular in Egypt and Tunisia, with the World Bank, facilitated by international organisations, such as BIC-USA.

3.3 Technical Challenges and Capacity building needs

CSOs and their donor partners have identified the need for capacity building in management skills, economic analysis skills, outreach, proposal writing, fund raising, improved research and communication skills. This applied especially to the younger and nascent or community-based associations, in particular in Egypt and Tunisia where a significant number of small CSOs working on economic rights have emerged.

Additionally, training is needed on various consultation or complaints mechanisms at the international and EU levels. Similarly, a number of MENA and international CSOs have identified a language barrier problem. Although most established CSOs use English or French, this was not the case with emerging associations or communal movements in the South Mediterranean whose members are Arabic speakers who experience difficulties in accessing international documents or websites needed for their activities.

Although a certain degree of interaction and networking exists, CSOs working on ESR in the South and North Mediterranean mention the language barrier as well as an information gap as partly hampering their ability to engage in networking. Similarly, an information gap exists between trade unions in Europe and those in the region under study, hindering the provision of much-needed support for emerging independent trade unions in the MENA region.

Conclusion

The focus on economic and social rights within civil society is relatively new, and has picked up strength following the Arab uprisings that were triggered as much by social inequality as by civil and political issues.

CSO activities on ESR were highest in Tunisia and Egypt in terms of the number of groups and of the impact of their activities. From 2011, for the first time CSOs in Tunisia have been able time to organise openly, and they continue to grow in their push for regional equality and the protection of ESRs. Conversely, organisations in Egypt have again come pressure from repressive government policies, but managed nonetheless to lay the groundwork for the emergence of small, local groups and independent trade unions.

The impact of the Arab Spring has also led to some political reform in Morocco, allowing CSOs to have a greater impact, unlike Algeria, which however has witnessed some increased grass roots activity. In Lebanon, the political and sectarian divisions have not deterred the many existing CSOs from acting, but most of the growth in social movements has been on an ad-hoc basis in protest over a lack of government services, while in Jordan, more CSOs were addressing economic and social rights as well as those of migrant workers.

Networks at the regional level in general are few and mostly consist of occasional coordination, apart from one or two permanent ones. Local ad hoc networking, loosely structured and geared toward specific issues, have continued to operate, focused on environmental issues, workers' rights, migrant rights and budget transparency, to name a few. The two annual World Social Forums, held in Tunisia and Morocco over the last three years, have helped create and renew contacts among CSOs across the region as well as with the northern Mediterranean.

The Arab Spring and the role that "civil society" played in leading to the overthrow of despotic regimes have also triggered initiatives among the international and European financial institutions providing development funds to the southern Mediterranean. They set in place procedures for consultation with civil society, defining democratic transition and prioritising the rule of law. In light of recent developments in the Arab World, including security issues and wars, these lofty aspirations have faded but continue to provide CSOs with a useful framework and working mechanism.

The global financial crisis in the late 2000s spawned a new set of ESR issues in parts of the North Mediterranean caused by government policies adopting new austerity measures. The mapping showed that while common challenges exist across the MENA region, to some extent are shared with European countries, there is plenty of scope for more and better interaction on these issues.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the Syrian refugee crisis, and the EU and SMC response in terms of securing livelihoods in the countries surrounding Syria like Jordan and Lebanon, has led to a new regional field of concern in terms of the size of the affected population and the level of civil society mobilisation. The ability to address the impact of regional relations on local economic and social rights holders in these countries will certainly be another major challenge for civil society in the near future.

Reference

- 1 See for example, EuroMed: “Seeds of a raw deal?” Oxfam Briefing Note 2004, Sustainability Impact Assessment of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area, SIA-EMFTA Project, 2007; 20+10: 30 Proposals to develop a genuine social dimension to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Martín), Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2010; ANND: Arab Watch on Economic and Social Rights (2013); Fundamentals of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and its Role in Southern Mediterranean Arab Countries: introduction to civil society organizations (2012); CEE Bank Watch Network.
- 2 Launched by the EU in April 2014, the initiative aims at “improving dialogue between civil society, the EU and the authorities, and promoting reform at a regional level”. See EU press release of 30 April 2014: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-506_en.htm
- 3 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, entered into force 3 January 1976: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>
- 4 The research is narrowed down amongst other factors by excluding countries in situations of civil war, i.e. the question of war economies and the role of international trade in this regard. Also excluded are countries/ regions under occupation, as well as the role of regional economic and financial relations and private business with regard to the respect of international humanitarian law. However, specific workshops were organised during the regional seminar aimed at discussing how CSOs dealt with in the current research could benefit from the experience of NGOs addressing war economies and situations of occupation such as in the oPt and the situation in Western Sahara.
- 5 Interview with the ADFM, October 2015. The Coalition includes among other the ADFM, the Algerian Centre for Information and Documentation on the Rights of Child and Woman (Centre d’information et de documentation sur les droits de l’enfant et de la femme, CIDEF) and the ATFD, as well as the Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development (Association des femmes Tunisiennes pour la recherche sur le developpement, AFTURD).
- 6 <http://www.blacd.org/>
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