



Arab Reform Initiative

Conference Report, 28th April 2021

Youth Employment and Livelihood in Syria: Assessing the Impact of Conflict and Preparing for Recovery



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The Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) and the Brookings Doha Center (BDC) jointly organized a policy dialogue on April 28, 2021 about the impact of conflict on youth employment and livelihood in Syria. Taking a whole of Syria approach, the panelists discussed how various international organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are addressing the needs of youth in Syria through programming and interventions, as well as insights that can be gained and applied from youth livelihood programming in other conflict contexts. The dialogue included a group of distinguished scholars and practitioners and was held under the Chatham House Rule.

The dialogue's introductory session provided an overview of the pre-2011 situation in Syria and outlined the factors affecting youth livelihood and employment today. The speaker underscored the human tragedy of the Syrian case, noting that the conflict had resulted in half a million deaths and six million refugees. They also discussed the country's dire economic situation, stating that the unemployment rate had reached around 78 percent for youth. The speaker emphasized that policymakers and NGOs must think about policy and governance issues facing youth before the conflict ends so that they can move quickly to create jobs and opportunities when the time comes.

During the first session, the panelists discussed the youth programming being conducted by international organizations and NGOs across Syria. The first panelist argued that livelihood recovery and employment stimulation cannot wait until some indefinite political end to the conflict and that these are essential to advance inclusivity, address the root causes of conflict, and avoid future instability. The second panelist remarked that policy actors in Syria tend to be either focused on violent conflict and United Nations-style "peace narratives" or on positive peace and "job narratives," but that to be successful, projects should combine both. The third panelist emphasized the importance of understanding local needs and capacities in addition to creating national solutions, saying that it is on the ground and among the people that organizations come up with the best ideas.

During the second session, the panelists addressed the issue of youth livelihood programming in other conflict and post-conflict settings and offered their insights and recommendations. The first panelist delved into research conducted by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, noting that, even after a conflict has



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ended, affected individuals continue to experience fragility and uncertainty, which can make economic recovery difficult. The second panelist discussed youth projects in conflict contexts, arguing that, before focusing on livelihood, organizations should think about integrating youth into economic and social life. The third panelist said that organizations aiming to tackle the issue of youth unemployment should focus on policies (not just programs) and that efforts must be made to provide more employment opportunities for youth.

The dialogue concluded with an open discussion of the Syrian case among the panelists and other attendees, with topics ranging from the psycho-social needs of youth, to the need to invest in entrepreneurship, to the importance of economic empowerment for ultra-poor families.



About Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is the leading independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality and social justice.

- We produce original research informed by local experiences and partner with institutions to achieve impact across the Arab world and globally
- We empower individuals and institutions to develop their own concept of policy solutions
- We mobilize stakeholders to build coalitions for positive change

Our aim is to see vibrant democratic societies emerge and grow in the region.

Founded in 2005, the Arab Reform Initiative is governed by a Plenary of its members and an Executive Committee.

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