

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction



*What is a revolution? Why did we take it to the streets? Employment, freedom, and national dignity! But if we were to dissect these slogans, what would they show? We want an equal distribution of wealth, a fair development plan between the regions—[in] the inland regions, between first-class Tunisia and the other Tunisia. University student, Tunis<sup>1</sup>*

### 1.1 Background and Objective

Prior to the revolution, Tunisia had been praised by international institutions for its substantial progress in economic growth and poverty reduction. It enjoyed an annual average gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of 5 percent between 1997 and 2007, placing itself among the leading performers in the Middle East and North Africa Region (average 4.3 percent). In 2009, the per capita income of Tunisians worsened slightly and stood at US\$7,200, close to the level it had been in 2005. Yet the overall decline was not dramatic, and the level still remained higher than any neighboring country except Libya, surpassing Algeria (US\$6,600), Morocco (US\$3,800), and Egypt (US\$4,900). Tunisia's life expectancy and literacy rates compared very favorably with other Arab countries.

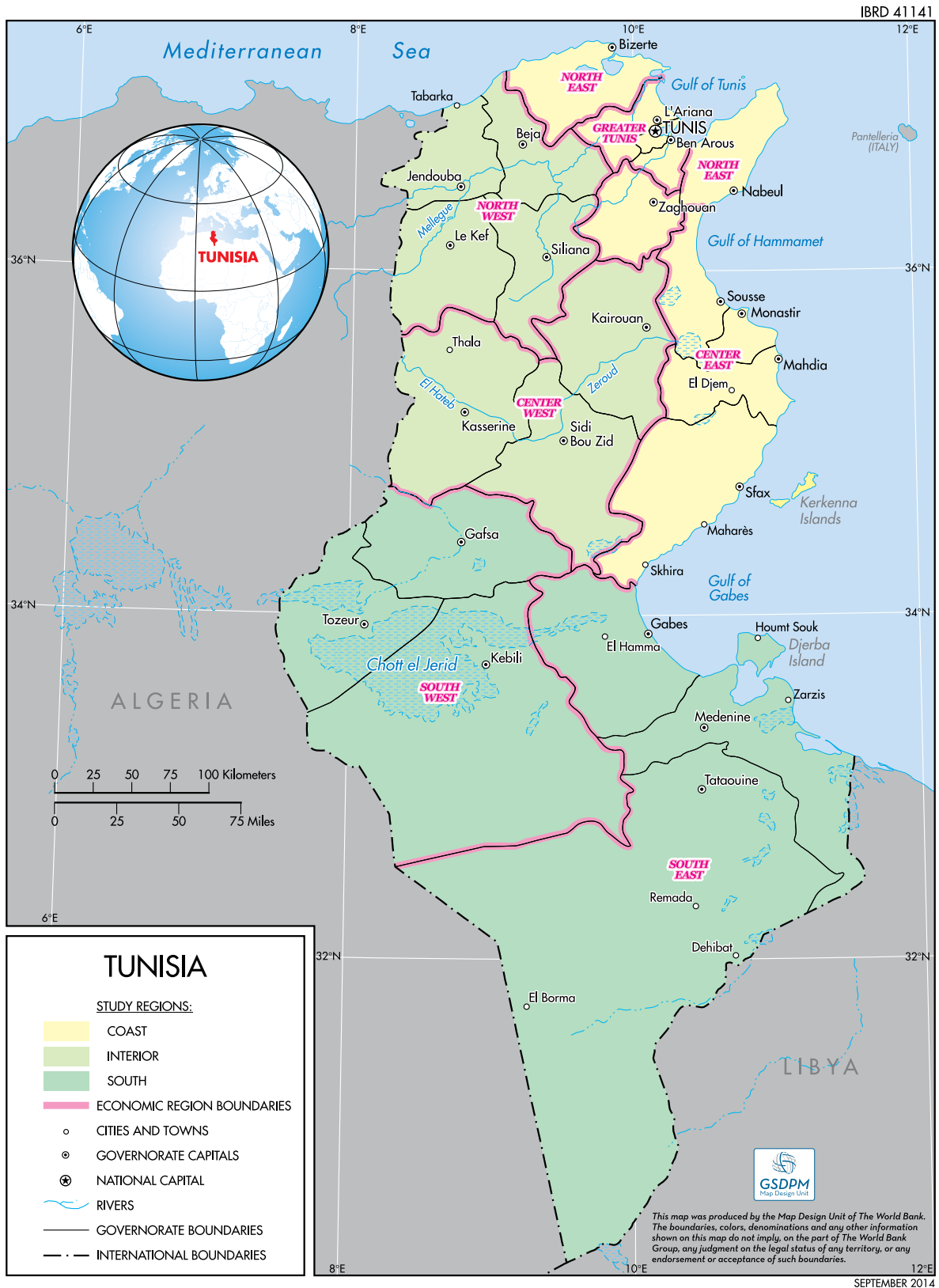
Nevertheless, Tunisia experienced a revolution in January 2011 driven in large measure by longstanding grievances about social, economic, and political exclusion. Significantly, the revolutionary movement was ignited by the anger and despair of a 26-year-old unemployed vegetable vendor in one of Tunisia's most underserved governorates, Sidi Bouzid. It resonated with the many Tunisians who faced similar day-to-day challenges and triggered waves of protests (Saleh 2010). Such protests were not new: as early as 2008, unemployed youth had been involved in demonstrations in Gafsa, a poor mining area which still suffers from one of the highest unemployment rates in the country (Filiu 2011).

One of the root causes of this disaffection can be traced back to the lack of opportunities available to young people. Tunisia's youth unemployment rate was particularly high at 30.7 percent (for ages 15–24), while the overall unemployment rate was 14 percent, making the ratio of youth-to-adult unemployment ratio 3.2 (World Bank

2010b). The 2005–09 Labor Force Survey data showed that 85 percent of the unemployed were between 15 and 35 years of age (Angel-Urdinola 2012). The Labor Force Survey also revealed that unemployment among younger aged groups had increased between 2005 and 2009, while for older cohorts, the rate actually decreased. In particular, unemployment among 15- to 24-year-olds rose from 28 to 31 percent, and that of 25- to 34-year-olds increased from 17 to 19 percent. Public opinion surveys highlighted the political significance of these trends. In a poll conducted after the revolution in January 2011, the majority of the respondents believed that the revolution was induced by young people (96 percent), the unemployed (85.3 percent), and the disadvantaged (87.3 percent) (SIGMA Group 2011).

However, unemployment was by no means the only factor. Arab observers viewed the youth uprising in Tunisia as a response to a sense of closed possibilities, given that young Tunisians had been excluded from expressing their voice and exercising active citizenship (Bamyeh 2011). The 2005 National Youth Observatory's survey, covering 10,000 young people (aged 15–29), revealed a low rate of participation by young people in decisions affecting their lives, limited youth membership in associations and a dearth of structures through which they could articulate their opinions. It also showed that young people were generally less optimistic about the future than they had been in 2000. Similarly, in 2007, a United Nations report pointed out the lack of active youth participation in decision making at community, municipal, regional, and national levels; a lack of youth engagement in the design, implementation, and evaluation of youth-targeted services and programs; limited opportunities for volunteering or community service; and lack of consultations (United Nations 2007). Therefore, youth demands for dignity should be understood in the

Figure 1.1. Map of Tunisia



broader context of an absence of opportunities for voice regarding the direction of the country as well as a lack of accountability on the part of public authorities.

In this context, the objective of this policy study, conducted in 2012/2013, is threefold: (1) to identify and analyze key barriers to youth inclusion encountered by young Tunisian men and women (aged 15–29) with a special emphasis on participation, active citizenship, and economic opportunities; (2) to assess the access, quality, and impact of various public services and programs for young people, including Active Labor Market Programs; and (3) to provide recommendations for policy and programming on how to address such barriers.

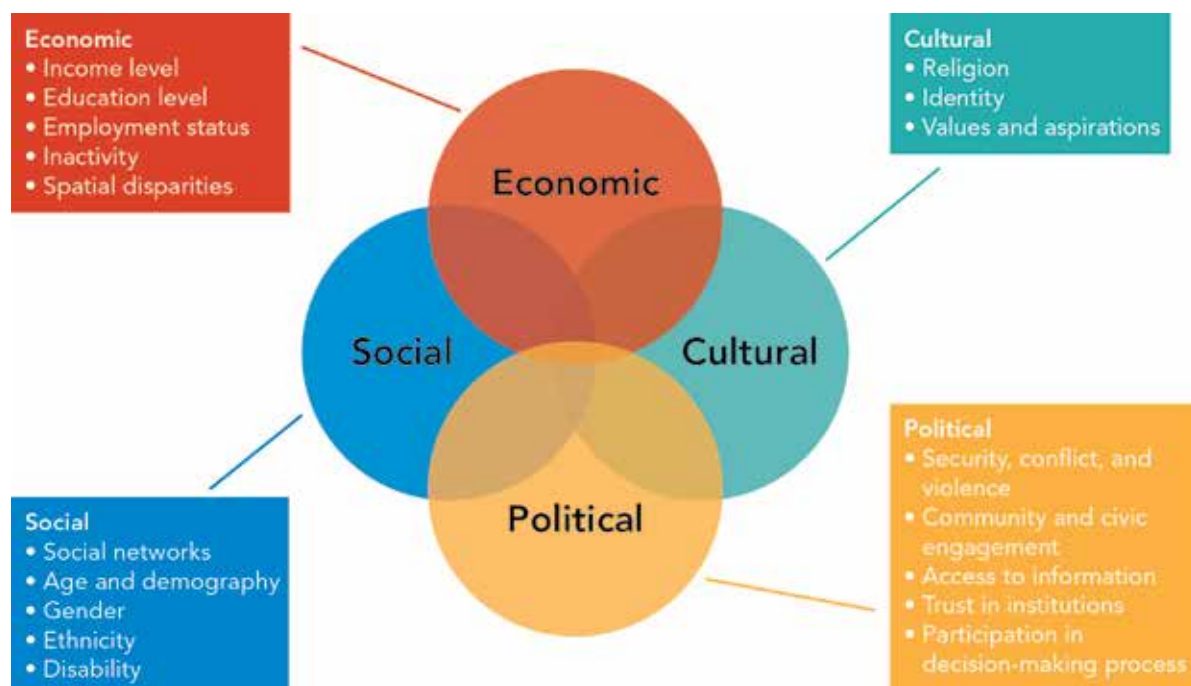
The study provides an analysis of the aspirations and needs of young Tunisians, taking into account essential noneconomic and economic measures of exclusion that were at the root of the revolution. In particular, it highlights:

- the continuing rise of youth activism outside the formally established political institutions as well as the need to support the transition of Tunisian youth from protest to active citizenship; and
- young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) as the category most affected by economic exclusion, and the need to ensure their socioeconomic integration through tailored policies and programming.

### 1.2 What is Youth Inclusion?

This report uses a multidimensional approach to identify and address the social, economic, political, and cultural barriers encountered by young Tunisians. A variety of paradigms have been used to define and explain Arab youth, ranging from a demographic “bulge” and “dividend;” to frameworks of human capital formation, including educational and employment failures; to a state

Figure 1.2. Dimensions of Exclusion

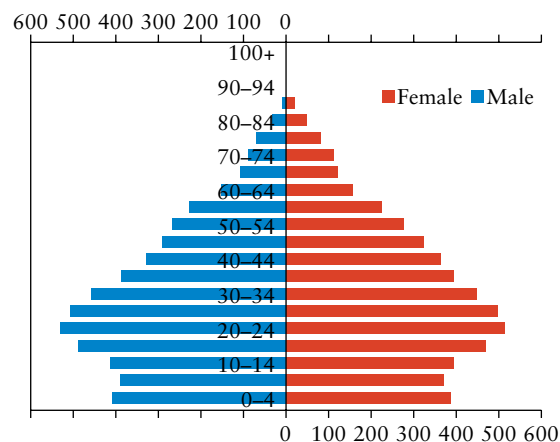


of transition to adulthood, when Arab youth are depicted as being in a stage of “waiting;” to a set of youth identities and subcultures.<sup>2</sup> Taken individually, these paradigms present some analytic limitations, as marginalization associated with social exclusion tends to occur simultaneously along multiple axes (see figure 1.2). According to a compelling interpretation of the Arab youth’s uprisings, young people share as an experience “a generational narrative of exclusion, which traverses public and private life and results from the political, economic and social failures of authoritarian regimes” (Murphy 2012). As a result, policies that address only one aspect of marginalization—such as improved access to education—may be too narrow to overcome exclusion more generally (World Bank 2013f).<sup>3</sup>

This study uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods—as well as an assessment of current youth programs and services—to ask a range of questions, such as: Why do young people continue to be primarily active outside formal institutional venues? What channels are needed to increase their voice in decision making? Why are certain groups of youth over represented among the inactive and unemployed or among those working in the informal sector? How effectively is public policy addressing the constraints that youth face? While drawing on quantified measures, the report also heavily weights interpretations and solutions from young respondents themselves in an attempt to avoid technocratic prescriptions that do not resonate with the discourse of the youth.

Fostering youth inclusion requires recognizing the multiple dimensions of exclusion. The range of exclusionary dynamics that affect young Tunisians is set out in figure 1.2. Not all young people are subject to all exclusionary dynamics, but some young people suffer exclusion across many or all political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. For example, young people who are not in education, employment, or training may be simultaneously disengaged from community life, originate from a poor household, and lack social networks, which in turn preclude their access to opportunities in the labor market. These may be the most marginalized and disempowered youth. It is important to identify and recognize the heterogeneity of experiences to most effectively target interventions to those who are most excluded. Nonetheless,

Figure 1.3. Population of Tunisia by Age Group



Source: United Nations 2010.

Note: Measured in ‘000, year 2010, medium variant.

the amelioration of one source of exclusion will not necessarily lead to inclusion if exclusionary dynamics persist in other spheres. Fostering youth inclusion requires interventions that simultaneously address a range of exclusionary dynamics, specifically in ways that enable greater youth voice and participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. The evidence presented in this report indicates that interventions are needed to rebuild trust between youth and public institutions to foster a sense of agency and ownership among young people. The report therefore highlights the importance of fostering voice, participation, and active citizenship for addressing socioeconomic youth exclusion.

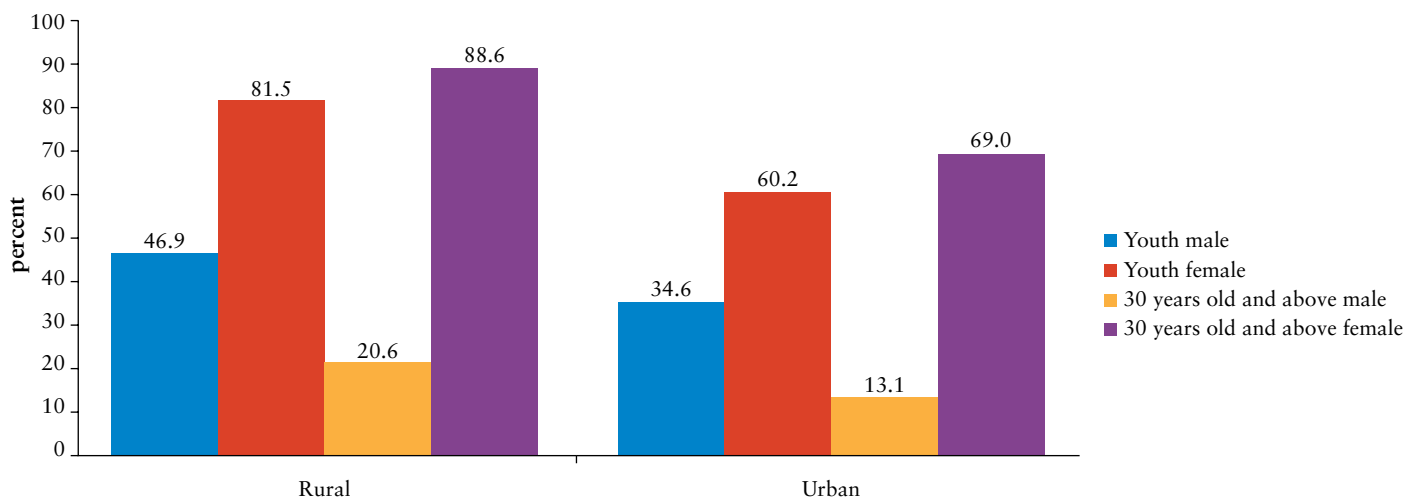
In this report, young Tunisians are considered those aged 15–29. This broader age segment better captures issues of exclusion and delayed transition to socioeconomic autonomy than the 15- to 24-year-old grouping used in other studies and surveys (see, for example, World Bank. 2012c). According to recent population estimates, youth aged 15–29 make up 29 percent of Tunisia’s total population and 43 percent of the working age population—aged 15–59 (see figure 1.3).<sup>4</sup> Today’s youth represent one of the largest social cohorts of Tunisia, facing very distinct social, economic, cultural, and policy challenges, many of which have yet to be addressed.

**Young Tunisians are not a homogeneous group.** While the situation of unemployed university graduates has often dominated national discourse and policy, other socioeconomic groups of youth face distinct challenges to inclusion. This report identifies specific categories of excluded young people and characterizes them according to regional disparities, gender differences, access and opportunities, employment and education status, and educational attainment. This analysis helps to identify crucial barriers to inclusion faced by young women and men from different backgrounds. It also contributes to an understanding of youth frustration with and perception of exclusion from social, economic, and political opportunities, which drove the Tunisian Revolution. It was, after all, a young street vendor from the interior region of Sidi Bouzid whose self-immolation catalyzed the revolt by the younger generation from marginalized regions (Ayeub 2011).

**The analysis introduces a more comprehensive indicator of youth economic exclusion.** The indicator is the share of NEETs, which is consistent with the goals of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. This measure goes beyond the narrow definition of youth unemployment, which does not include young people who have been

discouraged from looking for work. The NEET indicator ensures a more accurate assessment of inactivity that includes discouraged and disengaged youth who have given up looking for formal sector (or other) employment (United Nations 2013). Tunisia currently has one of the highest NEET rates in the Middle East and North Africa Region, estimated at approximately 33 percent of the total number of young people aged 15–29 years, according to calculations from the European Training Foundation (ETF 2014). Highly educated youth, although still suffering exclusion, are less likely to become NEET than those with less education. Youth who leave school early are the most highly represented NEET subgroup and, according to a recent analysis by the National Employment and Training Observatory and the ILO, there are very few policy instruments currently addressing NEETs (*Observatoire National de la Jeunesse-Social Science Forum* 2013). Figure 1.4 presents an overview of NEET rates for Tunisians of working age, comparing young Tunisians (aged 15–29) to those aged 30 and above.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the country, young men are about 2.5 times more likely to be NEET than men above 29 years.<sup>6</sup> In addition, young women are nearly twice as often affected by NEET than young men. On a positive note, NEET rates

**Figure 1.4. NEET Rates among Working Age Population by Youth and Gender**



Source: World Bank 2012c; 2012d.

Note: Youth refers to age 15–29. Comparison group refers to age 30–59.

among young women are slightly lower compared with women above 29 years, suggesting a shift in the social roles of younger women. Nevertheless, NEET rates remain very high for young women (60.2 percent in urban and 81.5 percent in rural areas).

**Overall, this report contributes to research and policy studies in the areas of youth participation, education, employment, and labor market policy in Tunisia.**

The concepts of social inclusion and social exclusion are rarely used in either the Francophone or Arab language research literature about Tunisia. The latter tends to focus on local traditions, identity, and cultural heritage. In the dominant strand of Francophone social research, the issue of social inclusion/exclusion has been articulated primarily through the lens of the economic integration or marginalization of youth (Mahfoudh-Draouti and Melliti 2006). Dropping out of school, unemployment, inactivity, and precarious work are portrayed as outcomes of marginalization. Some of the existing literature, primarily through in-depth interviews, also captures the subjective experience of living the life of a marginalized, vulnerable, and unemployed young person (Melliti 2011). A related concept is that of public acknowledgement (reconnaissance), in contrast to the invisibility experienced by an unemployed or inactive young person. The plight of unemployed graduates is also seen in social justice terms as the breaking of a social contract with a state that encouraged tertiary education as a means of accessing secure employment (Dhillon and Yousef 2009).

### 1.3 Data and Methodology

**This study draws on primary data derived from qualitative and quantitative methods and on secondary sources.** A full overview of data sources can be found in annex 1. The main primary sources are as follows:

- A quantitative survey of urban youth from 4,214 urban households undertaken in 2012–13 and known as the Tunisia Household Survey on Youth in Urban Areas (THSYUA).
- A quantitative survey of rural youth from 1,400 households across Tunisia undertaken in 2012–13 called the Tunisia Household Survey on Youth in Rural Areas (THSYRA).

- A qualitative component, designed to elicit the narrative perceptions of youth with regard to the phenomenon of their experience with social inclusion and exclusion, supplements and helps explain the quantitative findings. This component was comprised of 21 focus groups and 35 individual interviews undertaken in 2012 with a total of 199 young people in seven regions of Tunisia.
- A desk review and analysis of institutions and programs serving Tunisian youth was undertaken in 2012.

This report compares youth living in rural and urban areas as well as in different geographic regions. Tunisia has 24 governorates aggregated into seven administrative regions, each comprised of several contiguous governorates. For the purpose of this report, the governorates are grouped into three distinct survey regions: the coast, the interior, and the south, based on the structural differences the country is facing in terms of regional disparities and social and economic inclusion.<sup>7</sup> The analysis also builds on two separate surveys in urban and rural Tunisia.

### 1.4 Report Structure

**The report is organized along the different dimensions of youth inclusion.** Chapter 2 investigates voice and participation of young Tunisians and identifies both constraints and opportunities for their engagement in civic and political life. The report then analyzes economically excluded groups in decreasing order. Chapter 3 highlights the severity of the situation faced by young Tunisians that are NEET. Chapter 4 describes the available economic opportunities for young Tunisians; the state of employment and entrepreneurship, including informal work as well as gender and regional disparities; and relevant socioeconomic and educational data. Chapter 5 discusses programs and services relevant to employment—such as Active Labor Market Programs, including the quality and impact of the programs. Chapter 6 presents conclusions and recommendations, recognizing the need to address the interrelatedness of the different dimensions by combining a strong focus on inclusive youth policy and institutions with a call for youth participation in decision making.

### Notes

1. As quoted in British Council 2013, 34.

2. The following contributions exemplify the various paradigms used to analyze the youth dimension: Assad and Roudi-Fahimi 2009, British Council 2013, Dhillon and Yousef 2009, and World Bank 2007.

3. The report also builds on the framework of socioeconomic constraints (i.e., job relevant skills constraints, lack of labor demand, and social constraints on the supply side) and interventions identified by Cunningham et al. 2010.

4. Data is from United Nations (2010), “World Population Prospects” database. 2010 estimate. Young people aged 15 to 24 represent nearly 20 percent of the total population.

5. The official retirement age in Tunisia is 60 years for men and women.

6. In rural areas, 20.6 percent of older men are NEET compared with 46.9 percent among young men, a NEET ratio of 2.3. In urban areas, the NEET ratio among old versus young men is 2.6 (NEET affects 13.1 percent of older men versus 34.6 percent of young men).

7. For the purposes of this report, the northwest, center-west, and southwest are collectively referred to as the interior or as interior regions. The northeast, which includes Greater Tunis, is treated separately from the rest of southeast for the purpose of some of the study’s analysis. The center-east is the coast or the coastal region.