Workshop on the Social-Economic Situation of Middle East Youth on the Eve of the Arab Spring  
December 8-9, Beirut, Lebanon

Silatech and the Middle East Youth Initiative (MEYI) held the two day “Workshop on the Social-Economic situation of Middle East Youth on the eve of the Arab Spring”. The event was hosted by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs (IFI), and took place at the American University of Beirut, with a focus on the region’s rapidly changing social, political, and economic landscapes, and the events leading up to and during the early days of the Arab Uprisings.

Researchers, academics and experts from different Universities, Institutes, and organizations across the Middle East North Africa region and the wider world, presented working papers that consisted of regional and country studies that examined various aspects of youth life including market policy failures and successes, as well as the evolution of employment in the different Arab countries. Issues such as schooling and education, marriage, social security systems, training, and labor regulation were presented in context of its effects on the Arab economies and youth participation. Many participants called for a closer look at the informal sectors as well as the formal sectors of Arab economies in order to fully address the socio-economic problems. Participants engaged with each other to help improve the methodology of their studies and better knowledge production of the socio-economic settings of the youth in the region. Organizers noted that an edited volume of papers presented at the workshop will be published.

Rami G. Khouri, Director of IFI, called for a need to address the translation of knowledge that was presented during the workshop as well as existing knowledge and research in order to better inform policy making processes and to maximize impact and most effectively benefit youth. Khouri also called for the need to look beyond monetary issues that drive the youth to go to the streets and protest which requires looking at the bigger picture in regards
to concepts such as legitimacy and citizenship and better understand the structural vulnerabilities in Arab statehood. Collaboration between the different scholars from different fields is needed in order to help translate the knowledge into something that is more tangible and accessible for the policymakers.

Silatech CEO Dr. Tarik M. Yousef stressed on the positive change that Arab youth, as an important demographic segment, can push forward: “These young people are also a wonderful opportunity for our region. The ‘Asian tigers’ experienced a demographic bulge similar to that which the Arab world is now experiencing, and with the right policies and programs in place, the energy, ambition and numbers of our youth can spur great progress in this region much like that which the east Asian countries achieved.”