FIKR12 Conference Summary Report:

The 12th Arab Thought Foundation (ATF) Conference, FIKR12, entitled “The Development of New Business Opportunities in the Arab World” was held in the United Arab Emirates on the 4th and 5th of December, 2013. The conference was a platform for dialogue involving the public-private sectors, civil society organizations and youth participants, thereby engaging all stakeholders in this vital developmental challenge that is enhancing job creation.

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI), a knowledge partner for the Arab Thought Foundation, organized a closed workshop during FIKR12 entitled “Public Policy Enhancement in the Arab World”. The workshop addressed youth issues within the public policy-making framework in the Arab world, particularly focusing on the advancement of public policies that would better serve the local societies. The panel highlighted the role of different stakeholders in the youth related policy-making processes. It was composed of Professor Samer Al Kherfi, a researcher at the American University of Sharjah, Mr. Drew Gardiner, a member of an international organization and an expert on measurement and evaluation, Mr. Tarek Zebian, a member of the civil society in Lebanon, and Mr. Ziad Mikati, a member of the public governmental sector. The panel was moderated by IFI’s Senior Program Coordinator, Dr. Hana A. El-Ghali.

Mr. Ziad Mikati, advisor to the Lebanese Prime Minister on youth issues, explained the need of having a youth policy in Lebanon. He highlighted the role of the Government, Parliament and the youth themselves in developing public policy in general and their role in the process of formulating the youth policy in Lebanon. He then explained the status/process of involving the public in policy-making, describing the youth policy as a bottom up approach suggested and pushed for by the youth to the policy-makers.
Mr. Tarek Zebian, a member of the civil society, discussed the challenges faced by the youth as well as those tackled by the civil society. He addressed the political factors that play a role in developing policies or passing laws in the Arab world, even more so after the Arab uprisings.

Dr. Al Kherfi, Professor at the American University of Sharjah and author of a paper entitled “Unemployment and Labor Market Participation of UAE Youth”, explained the relationship between policymakers and researchers. Dr. Al Kherfi discussed the nature of the evidence/research that should be used to inform the policymakers in addition to sources that may be considered as evidence in looking at the policy-making process.

Mr. Drew Gardiner, member of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and an expert on measurement and evaluation, focused his presentation on how the production of rigorous evaluations of youth employment interventions can create the basis for evidence-based policy-making. He provided an overview of the current evidence base for effective youth employment programming, highlighting the ILO and Youth Employment Network’s role in this debate.