

Youth and human development in Arab countries: the challenges of transitions

The central theme of this report is young people in the Arab region. Never before has the region had this high share of young people. Although age distribution is only one demographic variable in the complexities of social and political life, the large presence of youth in Arab countries is a crucial reality conditioning the region's political, economic, social and cultural development.

Over the past five years, more and more young people in the Arab region have been raising their voices against their economic, social and political exclusion. This was made evident by the youth-led uprisings that brought to the fore the urgent need for reform. Youth have emerged as a catalyzing force for change in societies. In several

countries, their movements and protests have put pressure on traditional power structures.

This report offers a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the challenges youth face in terms of the human development process. It calls for bringing youth in the Arab region back into the centre – politically, economically and socially – by giving them a stake in their societies.

This chapter argues for a renewed policy focus on youth development in the region from the perspectives of demography and human development in the context of an inauspicious economic outlook. Youth in Arab countries could be effective agents of positive change provided their capabilities are recognized, developed and called upon.

1.1

Introduction

Since 2011, uprisings and social unrest have affected several Arab countries, and a number have fallen into protracted conflict. The year 2011 was a tipping point: since then, the momentum for change has been unstoppable, and a new epoch began unfolding in the region. This represents an opportunity to reassess the development paths of Arab countries and to identify patterns of change that have been forming.

The incidents that triggered the uprisings highlighted the reality among large segments of the populations who find themselves increasingly facing limited opportunities and significant challenges in advancing their lives and bettering their future. In light of the development paths adopted by many Arab countries, this reality is bound to become worse in a region in which 60 percent of the population have not yet reached the age of 30.

The protests that took place across several countries and began spreading in 2011 underline the significance of the Arab region's youthful demographic profile. Never before has the region had such a large share of youth; youth of ages 15–29 make up around 30 percent of the population, or some 105 million people (box 1.1; figure 1.1). Rapid population growth has placed massive pressures on societies and the entire infrastructure of Arab States. It is youth who often translate broader social problems into an explosive and radicalizing mixture.

The Arab uprisings have also underlined the economic and political exclusion of many youth who have been denied influence over the public policies affecting their lives. Citizens of the Arab region in general and the youth in particular are thinly represented in the public space. As a result, youth development policies have not found their way onto the agendas of Arab governments and policymakers. The recent youth-inspired protests and revolutionary movements represented an expression of the frustration and alienation of the current generation of youth.

Disenchanted with the narrow choices society offers and stifled in a restrictive public sphere, youth in Arab countries are looking elsewhere for room to breathe. Their eyes are on the seemingly free streets beyond the family and nation, on the camps of those who seek to become militant heroes, and on the enticing social activism of faith-based movements, including some concealing political ambitions in religious causes.

Social attitudes that treat young Arabs as passive dependants or merely as a generation-in-waiting will have to change. As the uprisings of 2011 have shown, these youth are anything but that. Social change is not engineered by youth, but it is most manifest among youth, who must be at the centre of any movement forward in the Arab countries. The future not only belongs to them, but will be shaped by them. It is therefore urgent to focus on youth as subjects and agents of human development in the region because no account can be complete without considering how those who mediate such tensions in their daily lives perceive and respond to their situations. This is not a matter of sentiment. Rather, it speaks directly to questions of representation and relevance.

Box 1.1 Who counts as youth?

Youth can be broadly described as the stage during which a person moves out of dependence (childhood) and into independence (adulthood). For statistical purposes, the United Nations (UN) defines youth as individuals of ages 15–24 years. This range encompasses people who are officially recognized as youth in the UN Millennium Development Goals and people whom many would classify as adolescents.

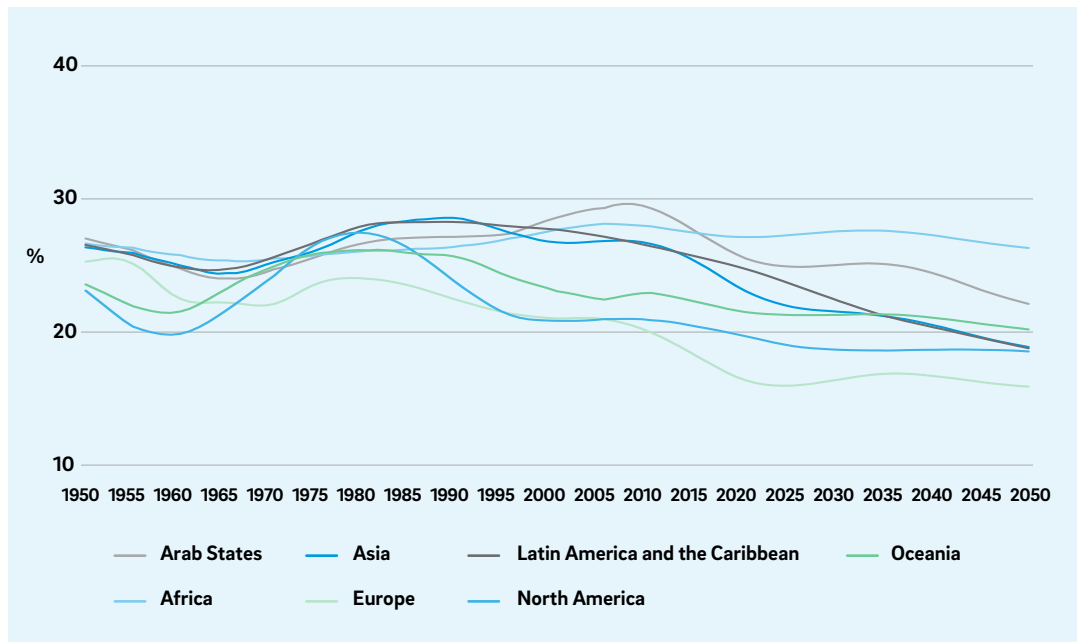
Using another classification, the Middle East

Youth Initiative defines youth as people of ages 15–29 years. This range has been adopted here to reflect the prolonged transitions to adulthood faced by many in the region.

Youth do not constitute a homogeneous group. Their socioeconomic, demographic and geographical situations vary widely within and across countries. Yet, despite the differences, regional analysis can provide a broad understanding of the development profile of youth.

Source: *The Report team.*

Figure 1.1 The changing share of youth, ages 15–29 years (as a % of total population)



Source: UN DESA 2013c.

1.2 Progress in human development in Arab countries

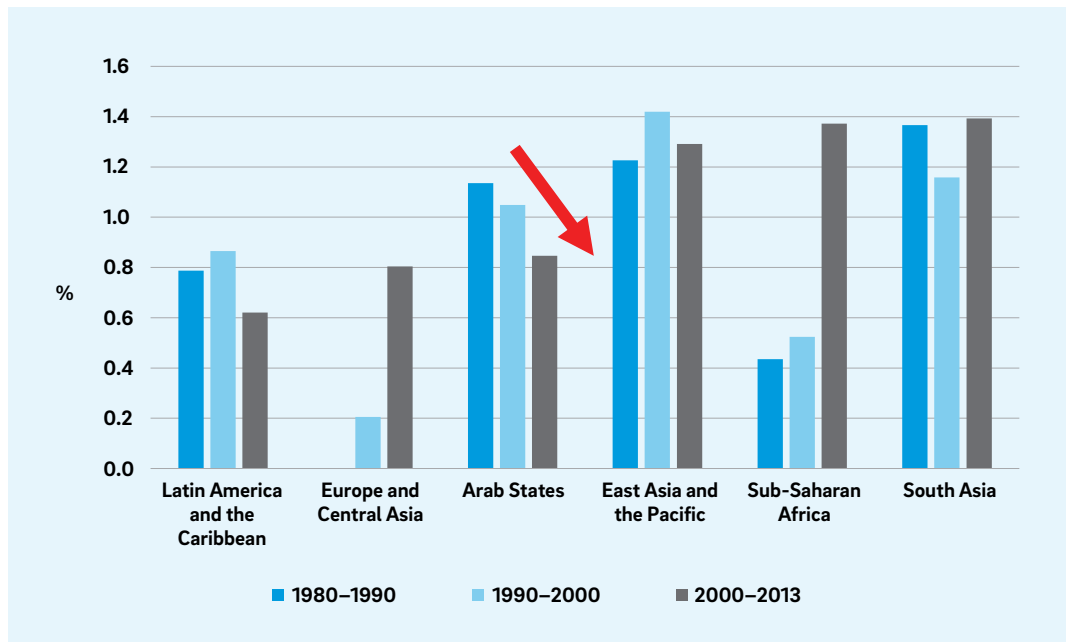
Over its 35-year history, the human development index (HDI) has remained the most salient tool in the human development approach to measuring human well-being. The HDI tracks improvements in key aspects of people's lives, capturing progress in three basic human capabilities: to live a long and healthy life, to be educated and knowledgeable, and to enjoy a decent standard of living. It stands as an alternative to the purely economic gross domestic product (GDP) indicator and is helpful in monitoring and understanding change in societies because it allows progress to be assessed more broadly.

Measured in terms of the HDI, all Arab countries increased their level of achievement between 1980 and 2010, driven mostly by gains in education and health, while income fell behind in comparison. Although it is difficult to place the Arab countries into one Arab basket, the region still scores lower than the world average on the HDI and already lags three of the world's six regions, namely, East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. By the year 2050, the region is projected to rank fifth, only a little ahead of sub-Saharan Africa.¹

The HDI has been following a plateau-like behaviour since 2010. Average annual growth in the indicator dropped by more than half between 2010 and 2014 relative to the growth between 2000 and 2010. The global financial and economic crisis in 2008–2009, coupled with political instability, appears to have had a widespread impact on HDI growth thereafter because average annual HDI growth then followed a stagnant or consistently downward trajectory (figure 1.2).

A disaggregated analysis of human development seems to indicate that inequality is rising in Arab countries. The region suffers an average loss of 24.9 percent when the HDI is adjusted for inequalities, which is above the world average loss of 22.9 percent. Inequality is widest in the education component of the inequality-adjusted HDI (about 38.0 percent). This may reflect the inequalities in

Figure 1.2 Average annual HDI growth



Source: UNDP 2014a.

education systems that properly prepare only a small minority of youth with the adequate skills to meet the demand of labour markets, where most new entrants face a lack of opportunity (see below).²

Inequality in the income component may seem less severe (17 percent), especially if compared with the corresponding component in other regions such as South Asia (18 percent), East Asia and the Pacific (27 percent), sub-Saharan Africa (28 percent) and Latin American and the Caribbean (36 percent).³ However, the hard core of poverty is definitely captured in the non-income space, best highlighted through the multidimensional poverty index (MPI), which reveals significant social deprivation. More specifically, the MPI shows that the Arab region has the highest ratio of rural to urban poverty (3.5) among all developing regions except Latin America and the Caribbean.⁴

The progress achieved in some areas of human development over the years has tended to elevate the expectations of people in Arab countries, and this has taken on even more importance because many people have become more well educated, are living longer lives and are more connected to the outside world. Yet, enhancing human development is only meaningful if people have the opportunity to make choices and if they are free to exercise these choices. In this sense, any improvement in the HDI is incomplete unless it also measures positively the ability of people to act.

1.3 Conceptualizing youth in human development

Since their launch in 2002, the Arab Human Development Reports (AHDRs) have offered an intellectual framework for clarifying the changing dynamics of human development in the Arab region and identifying choices for the future. The reports have unearthed rooted obstacles to the well-being of people in the Arab region and have provided strategic analyses of the region's social, political and economic trends. They are founded on the concept that the purpose of development is to expand people's choice and advance the quality of human life. The expansion in choice requires the enlargement of human capabilities and opportunities.

The defining vision of the AHDR series is that the Arab countries must undergo comprehensive reform to create greater opportunities for people to use their decision-enhanced capabilities. The reform must be political, to establish systems of good governance and release the creative energies of the region's people; social, to build and liberate their capabilities; and economic, to become centred on greater regional and global integration. The ultimate objective is to rebuild societies with full respect for freedom and human rights, the empowerment of women, the consolidation of knowledge activities, and responsible stewardship of the natural environment.

Like its predecessors, this sixth AHDR is grounded in a concept of human development that embraces human freedom as a core value. The AHDRs thus underscore the close link between human development and human rights. By enhancing human capabilities, progress in human development empowers people to exercise their freedoms. Human rights, by guaran-

teeing people's individual and collective entitlements, create the opportunities for this exercise of freedoms.

A central cross-cutting concept in the AHDR 2016 is youth empowerment. This entails, as Naila Kabeer observes, "The expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them."⁵ Key to this concept is a sense of agency, whereby Youth themselves become resolute actors in the process of change. The concept is embedded in self-reliance and based on the realization that young people can take charge of their own lives and become effective agents of change. Thus, for example, indicators of university enrollment could improve, but, unless the intervening processes involve youth as agents of change rather than merely recipients of change, youth will not become empowered through the improvement (box 1.2).

Evidence shows that the prospects of young people in the region are, now more than ever, jeopardized by poverty, economic stagnation,

Box 1.2 Youth and vulnerability: The human development perspective

The AHDR 2016 examines the status and determinants of youth empowerment in the region. There are important reasons for focusing on youth. First, susceptibility to adversity is heightened during this critical period in the human life cycle. Young people confront specific life phase challenges. Beginning with adolescence and continuing into youth, this is a period of accelerated maturation and social transition, when individuals shift from a position of relative powerlessness and dependency that characterizes childhood to the responsibilities and autonomy expected of adults. This transition can be difficult, and the deficits, deprivations and other risks experienced during youth can have debilitating emotional, political, economic and social consequences on these youth when they become adults and on their families and communities.

Second, if young people fail to realize their full potential, this undermines their future capabilities as adults, thereby weakening whole communities and economies. In the many low- and middle-income countries with exceptionally youthful populations, this results in a substantial loss in the momentum of na-

tional development. Youth should represent a demographic dividend to society. Ensuring the well-being, self-determination, productivity and good citizenship of youth is the best way to reap this dividend.

Third, the world has undergone significant changes during the life course of this generation of young people. While some of these changes have opened up important new opportunities for the young, there is also much uncertainty, as well as untold privation and suffering. Young people everywhere are negotiating the implications of economic transition, climate change, the depletion of natural resources, the rapid advance of communication and information technologies, and new forms of surveillance and control. Though all age groups and generations are affected, young people experience some of the most profound hardships associated with these phenomena.

Finally, the consideration of the vulnerabilities of youth is timely because there is a growing political will in the international community and among many national governments and civil society groups to develop more effective policies focused on the young.

Source: UNDP 2014b.

Table 1.1 What are the most important challenges your country is facing today (%)?

	The economic situation (poverty, unemployment and price increases)	Financial and administrative corruption	Enhancing (strengthening) democracy	Achieving stability and internal security	Other
Algeria	76.9	14.9	2.7	3.3	2.2
Egypt	87.6	6.5	1.4	1.3	3.1
Iraq	52.5	32.5	3.5	9.7	1.7
Jordan	81.0	14.0	1.1	0.7	3.3
Kuwait	56.5	25.3	9.4	0.9	8.0
Lebanon	60.6	24.4	3.5	7.1	4.3
Libya	23.1	32.3	2.3	0.7	41.6
Morocco	83.9	9.6	2.1	0.8	3.6
Palestine	50.3	8.7	1.3	3.0	36.6
Sudan	74.2	17.2	2.3	3.4	2.8
Tunisia	88.4	8.6	0.7	0.9	1.6
Yemen	74.6	17.1	3.9	2.8	1.6

Source: Arab Barometer 2014.

governance failure and exclusion, all compounded by the violence and fragility of the body politic (table 1.1). Empowerment can break this cycle and drive transformational change by altering the power relationships in society. Hence, this AHDR attempts to elucidate the ways in which youth in Arab countries are socially excluded and how an enabling environment might be created for them. Youth are not the only population group to bear the brunt of failed policies; nor do they alone suffer the effects of war and conflict. However, unless current trends are shifted, youth in Arab countries stand to inherit stagnant, violent, or otherwise failed societies that few of their number had a hand in making, and they are the ones who will have to rebuild these societies. This is their claim on our attention today.

Recent research on youth development in the region

Youth development in the Arab region has received considerable attention in the last decade. Through the World Programme of Action for Youth, major research and advocacy initiatives to promote the welfare of youth have been undertaken by UN agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization

(UNESCO). Worldwide, UNDP has published 24 national human development reports with a focus on youth development issues, of which five were on Arab countries. Most of the research and public policy work of the UN system have centred on analysis of the situation of youth in education, employment, health care and participation in public life, encouraging governments in the region to formulate national youth policies and monitoring the progress of Arab countries towards achieving goals and targets in youth development.⁶

The World Bank's Middle East and North Africa regional vice presidency has shown great interest in youth development issues, inspired by *World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation*, which concentrated on youth transitions.⁷ The League of Arab States has also placed youth issues at the top of development priorities, conducting numerous regional studies and organizing, in Cairo in 2013, the Youth Arab Summit.⁸

The Middle East Youth Initiative, launched in 2006 by the Wolfensohn Center for Development at the Brookings Institution and the Dubai School of Government (the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government), also conducts research on youth issues, including exclusion, education, employment, marriage, housing and credit, and on how all of these elements are linked during young people's experience of 'waithood'. The initiative's research shows that the poor labour market outcomes among the region's youth are

made more acute by the institutional rigidities, formal and informal, that govern the region's education and employment markets.⁹ It also shows that similar institutional barriers obtain in the marriage and housing markets, perpetuating social and economic exclusion among youth.

Opinion polls on the situation of youth in Arab countries and their self-perceived welfare outcomes are also proliferating. Since 2009, Gallup and Silatech have published the Silatech Index, a representative yearly survey that reveals how youth themselves look at job creation, access to the resources they need to find a job and policies they see as blocking their path.

Yet, few recommendations from this work have found their way into government policy. Official responses to youth development issues and to the World Programme of Action for Youth, in particular, are still weak. In most countries, they are restricted to scattered sectoral programmes that are only partly designed to meet the younger generations' needs. Moreover, laws and political decisions on youth development are absent, and coordination is almost non-existent among the institutions that affect young people's livelihoods (education, labour, health care, and other ministries and institutions).

1.4 Youth in Arab countries- post-2011: Defining the factors behind the changing reality

The literature on identity and social values indicates that the values and aspirations of youth in the region are deeply shaped by the socio-political circumstances in which they have grown up. Though youth in the Arab countries have great difficulty voicing their expectations and effectively engaging in the political sphere, they tend to be more well educated and more networked and connected to global knowledge and information relative to older citizens, and they live in urban areas where the population exceeds 57 percent of the total population of the Arab states.¹⁰

A review of opinion surveys reveals that the opinions of the public in Arab countries, especially youth, are diverse and dynamic. Youth tend to develop values and even a sense of identity that are different from the corresponding values and sense of identity of their older fellow citizens. Through their access to information and communication technology, youth are increasingly connected to the world. For young people living in an inhibiting environment, this exposure to information and communication has been a liberating portal and a virtual space to express themselves, raise objections, voice their opinions and challenge power structures, thus transforming them from passive members of society into active, self-aware and reform-driven individuals. This was manifested in the 2011 uprisings when social media were used to organize and mobilize public rallies against governments. Social media outlets have become a major part of the daily lives of youth in Arab countries. On average, these youth are more well connected to means of information than their peers in other middle-income countries and more well connected than their parents. This connectivity also expands dramatically with education.

The vast majority of youth in the Arab countries still adhere to conservative traditions. According to recent opinion survey data, more than three quarters of youth in the region believe tradition is important in their lives. The findings of values surveys likewise indicate considerable support for political Islam, though this tends to rise with age and fall with education. Younger and more well educated individuals show a greater preference for democratic forms of governance.

The Arab region is one of the most urbanized in the world. More youth are living in urban areas (for instance, 81.9 percent in Jordan, 67.4 percent in Tunisia and 41.5 percent in Egypt), mostly in slums and informal settlements.¹¹ In the least developed countries of the region, almost two thirds of urban residents live in slums, and 28

percent of all urban residents in the region are living in slums or informal settlements.¹² Youth growing up in these slums are increasingly subjected to social exclusion, violence and pervasive poverty. This fuels social tension and polarization, as noted by Marilyn Booth: "Many Arab adolescents grow up in cities where rapid expansion far exceeds capabilities of city services and existing housing, and where extreme poverty is juxtaposed with new, conspicuously displayed, wealth."

The absence of decent job opportunities, declines in wages, the rise of conflict, and the political instability in the region have led many youth from Arab countries to immigrate temporarily or permanently in search of better opportunities. Immigration is often a reaction to the lack of opportunities, including opportunities in education and vocational training. By selecting immigration as a means to disengage from their difficulties, these young immigrants contribute to the reproduction of social and political exclusion.

Young women are still suffering in even more complex conditions in the Arab countries. They are now facing repercussions from their political activism in mobilizing on social and political issues during the protests across the region in 2011, although the notable benefits of this activism included an opening-up of the public space for participation and the expression of opinion. Several Arab countries have witnessed the striving among conservative social forces to restrict the rights and freedoms of young women and raise the potential for the exercise of legal, political and social injustice towards them. Specific characteristics of the political, legal and economic contexts in various countries affect the situation of young women substantially. In addition to differences across countries, there are significant differences in the experiences of young women within each country.

As conservative factions gain more power, the movements, behaviour and dress of young women are more likely to become constrained, including by law enforcement authorities, while the freedom of choice among women about their lives tend to narrow. Especially in poorer and more rural areas, the age of marriage has not risen dramatically, and, in many places, the legal age of marriage

is still below 18. Nonetheless, the family in Arab countries is undergoing significant change. Thus, the model of the extended family living together in one household or in close proximity is no longer the norm everywhere, and, ultimately, rising rates of education among women, especially in urban areas, will have a positive correlate by raising the age of marriage among women.

The rise of the largest, most well educated, and most highly urbanized generation of young people in the region's history may also constitute a destabilizing force. It is imperative to examine the prevailing trends and factors affecting the environment in which these people are living.

The momentous popular uprisings that began in 2011 and in which young protesters figured prominently have ended one era in the region and launched another, one that is still unfolding.¹³ In this new era, the trend towards the escalation of conflict has drastically disrupted stability and development and may exert a harsh influence on the future. A grave new development has been the emergence of militant non-state actors, notably in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, carving out large swathes of land and proclaiming a state.

The longer-term impacts remain unclear, but, while a few extremists have succumbed to the allure of the self-styled defenders of the faith who espouse violence, youth more generally have come to see the conflicts as an almost inevitable disfigurement of their formative years. Distinct from the intergenerational tensions that many of them must already mediate within their families and personal lives, the estrangement of youth because of coercive states that lack legitimacy, strife-torn societies destabilized by violent conflict, or states that fail to meet the notions of entitlement of the young has arisen from certain ingrained features of the region.

There is no disputing that the uprisings and conflicts have called into doubt many policies and practices that have prevailed since the Arab countries became nation-states. Putting this larger background back into the picture is important for reaching an understanding of the significance of the protests among youth against the perceived failures of their leaders.

1.4.1

The failure of the Arab development model

Countries in the Arab region share much more than a common language and social and cultural traditions. They have long pursued a model of development that is dominated by the public sector and turns governments into providers of first and last resort (figure 1.3). This flawed Arab model of development depends on inefficient forms of intervention and redistribution that, for financing, count heavily on external windfalls, including aid, remittances and rents from oil revenues. The reliance on unearned income is sometimes dubbed the original sin of Arab economies.¹⁴

Since independence, most countries have seen little change in economic structure. Manufacturing—the primary vehicle for job creation in emerging economies—has registered painfully slow and sometimes negative growth. The public sector has either crowded out and manipulated the private sector or forged uncompetitive and monopolistic alliances, while inhibiting the development of viable systems of public finance. With few exceptions, the private sector is weak and dependent on state patronage, and the business environment hampers the rise of young and independent entrepreneurs. Because of their

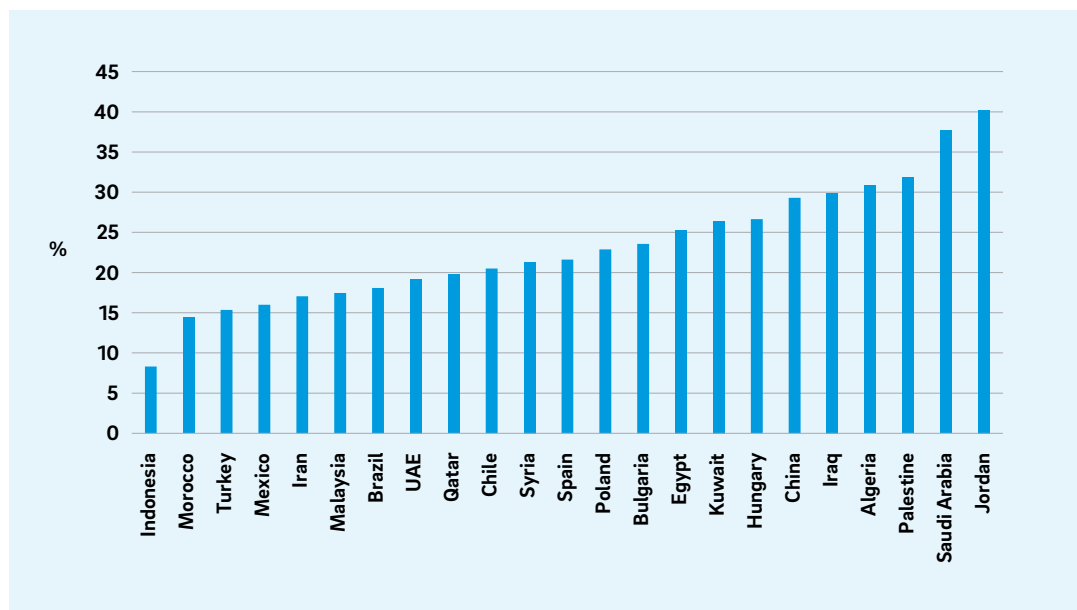
limited size and scope, the investments of the private sector have not been able to pick up the slack created by the more recent rollback in state employment. The sustainability of this system has been increasingly eroded by the rising costs of repression and redistribution.¹⁵

The state-led development model has created contradictions. It has expanded access to key entitlements, whether public employment or food subsidies, thereby raising some levels of human development. Thus, partly because of the entitlements, societies have been able to lower the incidence of poverty and income inequality, shielding disadvantaged groups from some of the worst economic pressures of our times.

However, these ostensibly favourable outcomes have entailed a deeper trade-off in the long run. The gains in human development have rarely translated into gains in productivity and growth, first because the model traps human capital in unproductive public sector jobs, and, second, because it builds a pyramid of privilege whereby economic advantage is restricted to firms and individuals connected to the state and its ruling elites.

Arab countries have long preserved social order by distributing unproductive rents (box 1.3). These rents are not merely revenues generated outside the economy in the form of oil and aid, but politically mediated rents created through economic

Figure 1.3 Average employment shares in the public sector in selected Arab countries and selected comparator countries in the 2000s



Source: AMF 2015.

controls, licences and monopolies. The region is one of the most protected in the world. The movement of goods, people and capital is subject to tight restrictions.¹⁶ The behind-the-border barriers that generate trade frictions are more pervasive in the Arab region than elsewhere. The trade regime is even more restrictive in the resource-rich, labour-abundant economies of the region, precisely where private sector employment generation is most required.

While the model has created an adverse legacy of entitlement that aims to sustain some individuals from conception to coffin, it has also fostered political marginalization, economic deprivation and social exclusion. Thus, the associated trade frictions push firms without political or social connections to the margins of the economy, and opportunities for absorbing young entrants to the workforce are lost. The model thereby hobbles promising enterprises, discourages economic efficiency and deters young talents because its goal is not to promote innovation or competition, but solely to preserve access to wealth and power among a few. The result is a top-down model that is based on hand-outs, undermines individual

agency and encourages short-term consumption at the expense of long-term investment in human capabilities and competitive production.¹⁷

The contribution of private investment to growth in the region is among the lowest in the world. This is especially the case because entrepreneurs consistently face anticompetitive and discretionary practices that favour incumbent or large firms at the expense of new entrants, small businesses and young entrepreneurs. These practices go beyond opportunistic corruption; they reflect a deep structural alliance between political and economic elites to secure economic interests. Recent data reveal how firms linked to former regimes in Egypt and Tunisia were given privileges or business advantages. In Egypt, for example, 71 percent of politically connected firms were operating in sectors protected by at least three import barriers.¹⁸ This was so among only 4 percent of unconnected firms. Likewise, in Tunisia, 64 percent of connected firms, but only 36 percent of unconnected firms were operating in sectors in which foreign direct investment (FDI) was restricted.¹⁹

Resource rents in the region have been channelled into lavish and conspicuous real estate

Box 1.3 Omar Razzaz: The rentier State

It is difficult to understand the course of economic development of Arab states without grasping the role of rentierism. According to the traditional definition, a rentier state is one that relies for a major part of its revenues on oil and other natural resources. The relative importance of such resources and of foreign aid and remittances places most Arab countries along a continuum of rentier to semi-rentier economies.

Foreign rents offer the state considerable autonomy and relieve it from the need to acquire legitimacy through the ballot box. The state establishes its legitimacy by allocating rent through various forms of privilege to groups and individuals. Income and wealth are not derived from work, innovation or risk-taking, but from the position of individuals in the pecking order of allocation channels (public sector jobs, public largesse, private sector cronyism and the like). In this way, the rentier system casts a shadow over the private sector because competition

does not arise from the production of goods and services or from innovation, but from the quality of client relationships with state patrons.

Not all resource-rich states suffer the same symptoms because the issue revolves around not so much the sources of national income and their shares, but public institutions, namely, the laws, regulations and policies governing the extraction of resources and the distribution of the resulting benefits. In this sense, a rentier state is one that extracts resources and allocates the income from such resources so as to maximize the short-term political and economic gains at the expense of long-term sustainable development and the accumulation of national wealth, thereby shifting the basis for classifying the state as rentier (or not) primarily onto whether institutions with adequate checks and balances have been built to realize the full, long-term potential of resources to maximize national wealth.

Source: Razzaz 2013.

Note: Omar Razzaz is chairman of Jordan Ahli Bank and winner of the Arab Prize for the Social Sciences and Humanities in 2012.

projects, unproductive public sector spending and military expenditures, but the spending benefits a tiny slice of society. In Egypt, inequality is strongly influenced by richer households according to recent World Bank estimates.²⁰ The top 1 percent of richer households contributes to inequality more than any other percentile in the distribution and accounts for up to 4 percentage points of the Gini coefficient.²¹

The average annual household income among the poorest households in the Arab region declined from \$4,600 a year (adjusted for purchasing power parity [PPP]) in 2008 to \$4,100 in 2012. Over the same period, the corresponding indicator among the richest families increased from \$29,900 to \$33,600. The richest families seem to earn more than 25 percent higher than the richest households in other middle-income countries. The trend over 2008–2012 also shows that the income gap between the richest and poorest households is similar in Arab countries to that in middle-income countries; yet, inequality is growing more rapidly in the Arab region. Over the five years, the ratio of the average income of the richest households to that of the poorest households grew from 6.5 to 8.2 in Arab countries, but from 9.2 to 11.4 in middle-income countries (annex 2 figure A.5).

As job havens in the make-work bureaucracies once financed by the rents disappear, more doors to the employment of young people—however unproductive that employment may be—are closed. As a consequence, youth are reaching their adult years in a context of rising income inequality, widening inequality of opportunity, and slow growth, alongside weak job creation. Wide access to media and information creates more awareness, especially among young people, of the miasma of elite alliances embedded in society, and this is heightening the perceptions of inequality on the street, driving a wedge more deeply between the haves and the have nots and helping fuel the uprisings and conflicts in the region.

1.4.2

Facets of youth disempowerment

Beginning with education: more is required than new places in schools

In recent decades, Arab countries recorded progress in indicators of human development. In 2010,

five of the top 10 countries with the highest rates of improvement were Arab: Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.²² Net enrollment rates in primary education, for instance, rose from 78.8 percent in 1999 to 88.4 percent in 2012, and the latter rate was slightly above the developing-region average of 88.3 percent and close to the world average of 89.1 percent. Many countries in the region are close to achieving universal primary enrollment.²³ And gains have also been made at the higher levels of education: secondary and tertiary enrollment increased almost threefold between 1970 and 2003.²⁴

But, by 2008, the average gross tertiary enrollment ratio in the region was only 23.7 percent, a modest rise from the 20.0 percent in 2002.²⁵ That colleges and universities have not significantly boosted their intake rates partly reflects the growing disenchantment of youth with the value of higher education amid the glut of unemployed graduates on the job market.

Overall, the quality of education is poor. Standardized international tests in education such as the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment show Arab countries scoring well below the average even if results are adjusted for per capita income, particularly in the rich Gulf countries.²⁶ The limited skills among the workforce are another indicator of poor human capital endowments and highlight a mismatch between supply and demand. More than a third of employers in the Middle East and North Africa region have zeroed in on inadequate skills as a major impediment to business growth, the highest such share worldwide.²⁷

The public has become increasingly dissatisfied with living standards, especially in Egypt and Tunisia (annex 2 table A.2). Dissatisfaction rates are lower in the Arab region overall than in other developing regions, but show pronounced sub-regional differences: the Mashreq and least developed countries show rising rates of dissatisfaction, reaching almost 55 percent in 2012, much higher than the rates in the Maghreb or the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (12 percent). Dissatisfaction thus seems driven by poverty, conflict, or unrealized political hopes.

Financial independence is difficult in the face of high unemployment and precarious jobs

Unemployment among youth in Arab countries is the highest in the world, 29 percent in 2013, versus 13 percent worldwide.²⁸ First-time job seekers account for around half the unemployed, also the highest

Box 1.4 The struggle for women's inclusion

"True, no Arab citizen, male or female, enjoys the full exercise of civil and political rights, but where men stumble, women fall, and the helping hand of society is fleeting and weak. Real gains secured in women's education at all

levels may ultimately prove a source of social frustration, so long as family structures continue to be rigid, jobs for women prove elusive, and social attitudes towards their personal and social advance remain restrictive."

Source: UNDP 2012c.

rate in the world.²⁹ Youth unemployment is hugely costly to the region's societies and requires a major turnaround in policy thinking about jobs. The region needs to create more than 60 million new jobs in the next decade to absorb the large number of workforce entrants and stabilize youth unemployment.³⁰

Important Arab labour markets, such as textiles and agricultural processing, have been affected by declining exports to Europe and other markets. Jobs have also been hit by declines in FDI and tourism. Meanwhile, many European countries have reduced migration quotas or made obtaining work permits more difficult, ultimately cutting into skilled Arab migration and putting more pressure on young graduates. Arab countries need to look inwards—not abroad—to address youth unemployment. The outlines of a response would entail strengthening inter-Arab trade in goods and services, enhancing regional cooperation in policy, and looking into new economic growth models with proven complementarities on a regional scale to create decent and sustainable jobs.

Employment among youth is often precarious and informal. Owing to harsh labour market conditions, many youth transitioning from school to work struggle to find a job in the formal sector, as the state has ceased being the employer of first or last resort. Many settle for insecure informal work at low wages and under poor conditions.³¹ Between 2000 and 2005, for example, three fourths of new labour-market entrants in Egypt were employed in the informal sector; this compares with one fifth in the early 1970s. Similarly, over 2001–2007, 69 percent of the new jobs in Syria were informal.³² Vulnerable jobs accounted for almost 30 percent of the region's employment in 2011.³³ The problem is even more acute among low-income youth, who are at a higher risk of settling for informal or unpaid family work.³⁴

The Arab region is not alone in facing this scourge: Greece and Spain, hit by economic crises, saw youth unemployment rise to more than 50 percent in 2013.³⁵ Poverty and social exclusion affect all social

strata in the region's societies, but the young and elderly are often the most vulnerable. Yet, youth are formally excluded politically by middle-aged and elderly men, who dominate society because of traditional norms and deeply entrenched state-sponsored economic practices. Youth also face large entry barriers to jobs, marriage and housing, where older groups enjoy privileges, largely acquired under public programmes during the oil booms.

The ongoing exclusion of young women

No society can progress by restricting the capabilities and opportunities of half its people. Women in Arab countries can show important development results, but they still face a life of discrimination. Their ordeal starts in traditional early childhood and runs through male-oriented family environments and education systems to confining marriages or underpaid work (box 1.4). Society's support for the better treatment of women has increased notably over the last five decades and certainly since the start of the 20th century, but the definitive elimination of all forms of discrimination against women is a struggle against a rooted historical injustice that will take more years to complete.

The rise of women in Arab countries is inseparably and causally linked to the future human development of the Arab region. The pervasive disempowerment of women in Arab countries is grounded in cultural, social, economic and political factors. As the 2005 and 2009 AHDRs observed, the seeds of discrimination are embedded in cultural beliefs and traditions in childraising, education, religious structures, the media and family relations.³⁶ Along with a plethora of legal obstacles, they prevent women from acquiring and using their capabilities to the fullest.

A basic principle of Islam is equality among men and women. However, highly conservative jurisprudential interpretations have accorded women lower status. Patriarchal family traditions have long undervalued the education of women

and kept women subordinated at home, while male-oriented marriage laws derived from those traditions have extended men's power over women in marriage. Beyond the family, discrimination by employers against women is commonplace.

In most countries of the region, constitutions provide for equality among citizens and usually refer in this regard to characteristics such as race, religion, ethnicity and gender. The constitutions in most Arab countries recognize equality between men and women. Yet, few countries have laws directly banning discrimination. Under personal status laws and codes, men and women have unequal rights in marriage and unequal rights in divorce. In societies where women are still bound by patriarchal patterns of kinship, legalized discrimination, social subordination and ingrained male dominance, women are exposed to domestic and institutionalized violence. Indeed, in some Arab countries, the penalties for assaults against women, even lethal assaults, are reduced if it can be established that the perpetrator committed a 'crime of honour' and the penal code discriminates against women in cases of adultery (so-called honour killings).³⁷

By most assessments, gender equality and women's empowerment are more restricted in Arab countries than in other regions. The region registered the world's widest gap in the global gender gap index of 2012, which takes account of political empowerment and economic participation and opportunity. Female labour force participation is slightly less than 24 percent, and, among young women, it is less than 18 percent, the lowest rate among all regions. The share of women in GDP in the Arab region is only about 29 percent, against 50 percent in all developing countries. The poverty rate is 31.6 percent among women, but 19.0 percent among men. While the support for equality and women's empowerment has grown, albeit slowly, legislative and institutional structures still discriminate heavily against women, and the share of women in lower and upper houses of parliament in Arab countries is the smallest in the world, at a mere 16 percent.³⁸ The exclusion of women is reflected in the high gender gap in human development achievements (annex 2 figure A.6).

Young women in Arab countries are at a particular disadvantage in access to jobs and health services. They face a high risk of reproductive health issues through a high prevalence of inequalities, early pregnancies, and other health risks. For instance, in the region's least developed countries, only 34 percent of births are attended by skilled

health personnel, against 83 percent in Maghreb and 99 percent in GCC countries.³⁹ Within countries, the poorest women are at a huge disadvantage: only 55 percent, 27 percent and 17 percent of births in the poorest households in Egypt, Sudan and Yemen are attended by skilled personnel, versus 97 percent, 88 percent and 74 percent in the richest households in those same countries. Similarly, early pregnancies measured by birth rates among women aged 15–19 remain high in the least developed countries and in Mashreq countries.⁴⁰ All these problems lead to adverse maternal conditions that are the major cause of young female mortality and the third major cause among women of years lost to disability.⁴¹

Family formation increasingly delayed

Marriage and family formation – key rites of passage to adulthood in conservative environments – are occurring later among young people. Almost half the men aged 25–29 in the region are still unmarried, up from 37 percent a generation ago and the highest proportion among developing regions. In Asia, only 23 percent of young men are unmarried; in Latin America, 31 percent; and, in Africa, 34 percent.⁴² In Lebanon, for instance, the average age at first marriage among women climbed from 21 in 1970 to 32 in 2008.⁴³

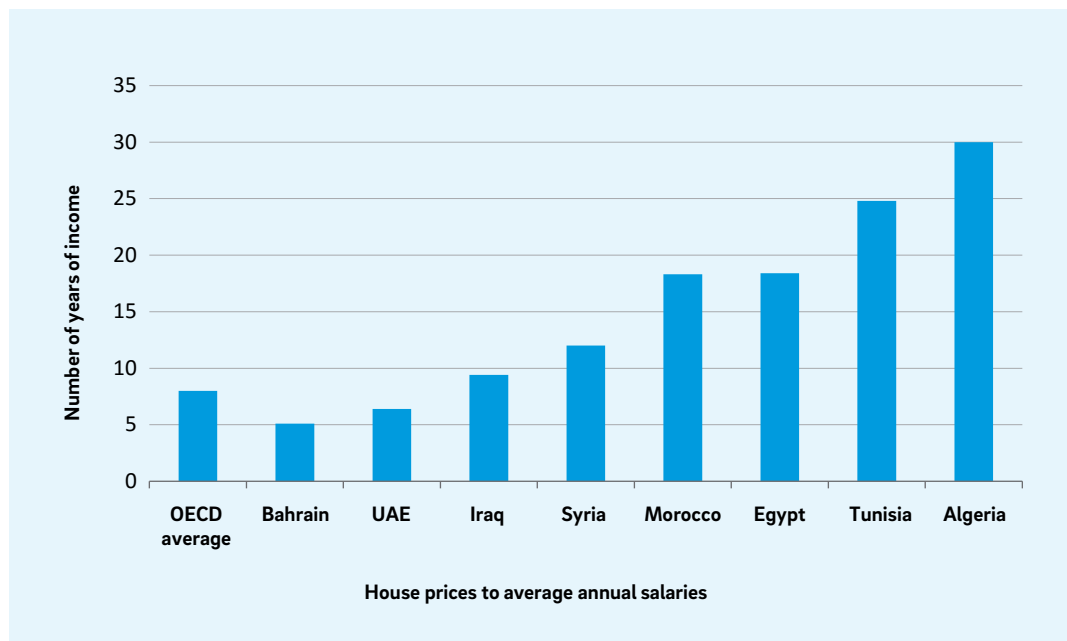
These delays arise partly because unemployment is a poor condition for undertaking family responsibilities and partly because a Middle Eastern marriage can represent a large financial burden. The latter is a result of persistent cultural norms and traditions such as the dowry, which is normally costly and borne by the groom and his father.⁴⁴ Further contributing to the delay in marriage is the high price of home ownership: a modest house now costs the poorest worker the equivalent of 12 years of wages (figure 1.4).⁴⁵

Substantial health challenges persist

Youth in Arab countries still suffer from health challenges, inadequate health care provision and poor access to health care facilities, even if the region is the world's least affected by HIV/AIDS (which is, however, on the rise). Many are prone to risky behaviour, notably smoking, substance abuse and reckless driving, which raise the region's morbidity and mortality rates, especially in the least developed countries and rural areas generally.

Youth are also becoming increasingly vulnerable to problems in mental and sexual health.

Figure 1.4 Ratios of house price to income, 2011



Source: Chaaban 2013.

Mental illness and, specifically, neuropsychiatric conditions are believed to be leading causes of years lost to disability.⁴⁶ Young men and women lack knowledge about sexual health; 87 percent in Algeria and Jordan, 93 percent in Syria, 97 percent in Iraq and 98 percent in Yemen are uninformed. Youth are also at greater risk of contracting HIV: around 66 percent of HIV cases in Egypt are among young single adults.⁴⁷ Contraceptive prevalence was only 45 percent in 2005–2012, around two thirds of the world average of 63 percent and only ahead of Africa's 25 percent.⁴⁸

1.4.3 Religion, identity and the prospects for human development

Religion plays a major role in the lives of citizens in Arab countries, including the young (table 1.2). It affects people's sense of identity and their ideological and intellectual orientations. It influences their values and shapes their attitudes towards society and the family. UNDP's *Human Development Report 2004: Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World*, stressed the "Profound importance of religion to people's identities."⁴⁹ The 2005 AHDR went on to state, "No political power can ignore the fact that religion, and

especially Islam, is a crucial element in the cultural and spiritual make-up of the Arab people."⁵⁰

Arab countries have entered the modern world, assimilating much of its economy and culture, while maintaining the role of religion in the public and private spheres. Religion is important in how states formulate their concept of governance and ensure continued legitimacy, and it is active in the public sphere as a key source of social capital and a strong stimulus for development outreach among the disadvantaged, among other issues.

The mantle of religion can be attractive to politicians. Political parties that use religious interpretation to support their platforms and political agendas are common in the region. Such parties run the gamut of ideology from moderate to extreme and tolerant to dogmatic, where the extent of religiosity, the manner in which religious texts are used and the type of ideology shape a party's relationship with the state and other social and ethnic groups. Many are in conflict to some degree or other with the (secular) political order.

In this politico-religious spectrum, political Islam has become more popular in the shadow of oppression for three main reasons: its moral critique of the ruling system is attractive to many; mosques and the informal sector are difficult for states to control; and, historically, the regimes that now fear political Islam allowed it scope for expression initially in an effort to dampen revolutionary tendencies.

The uprisings of 2011 prompted the collapse of several Arab regimes, creating a political void without a clear political alternative, which invited many Islamist parties to step in. Several quickly became politically active, aided by their strong internal organization and networks. Some common features can be gleaned: Islamists did not beget the revolutions, but they fought and won elections through strong organization and inspiring campaigns.

The rise of Islamist political movements has sparked a sharp, sometimes contentious and, more recently, divisive debate over core societal issues: relations between religion and politics, whether Islamist movements are capable of governing effectively, the nexus between religious and civil forces, and the prospects (or desirability) of establishing a religious state. This debate is becoming polarized, as extremist groups move in, adopting exclusionary positions against the other side, which encompasses all who disagree with them. These extreme ideologues maintain the recourse to armed conflict as a simmering option. In situations perceived to threaten Islamic identity, they may seek to shatter and fragment Arab societies even more.

Two types of conflict have emerged around political

Islam. The first is 'conflict with'. This involves a deep struggle between secular interests and political Islam fuelled by different views about the state, legislation, constitutions, civil rights, laws, culture and education.⁵¹ The second is 'conflict within'. Here, smaller groups across the ideological spectrum compete with one another for political influence under the umbrella of political Islam.⁵² The greatest challenge encountered by Islamist organizations and their political affiliates has not been how to act in opposition to regimes, but rather how to exercise power. Although strong in grassroots organization, they have been unable to convert this credential into a long-term vision, sound policy planning, or coherent development programmes.⁵³

1.4.4

The challenge of violent radicalization

Radicalization is a process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly extreme political,

Table 1.2 Religion is an important part of your daily life (% responding 'yes')

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Algeria	...	...	...	...	94	93	92	...	...	...
Bahrain	...	...	...	96	96	94	...	...	...	...
Comoros	...	...	...	96	99	99	97	...	...	...
Djibouti	...	...	98	98	97	91	...	...	...	...
Egypt	98	98	100	98	97	98	98	97	98	...
Iraq	...	...	81	86	85	79	84	87	90	...
Jordan	92	96	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Kuwait	84	...	...	93	97	...	...	...	...	...
Lebanon	88	88	86	89	87	84	85	80	84	...
Mauritania	...	95	97	98	99	99	99	98	92	99
Morocco	...	...	...	...	93	94	99	96	...	...
Palestine	88	90	89	93	95	94	95	93	98	...
Qatar	...	...	92	95	...	98	...	...	...	...
Saudi Arabia	98	98	96	94	...	...	...	...	...	...
Somalia	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	95	...
Sudan	...	...	...	95	97	92	95	...	...	...
Syria	...	...	84	88	83	78	82	75	...	...
Tunisia	...	...	...	95	93	93	96	89	88	91
UAE	98	...	...	91	95	...	...	...	...	...
Yemen	96	...	...	96	96	98	98	100	99	...

Source: Gallup 2015.

Note: "..." not available

social, or religious ideas or aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo or prevailing ideas, expressions, or institutions. Radicalization can be violent or nonviolent, although the most urgent sort of radicalization is that which leads to or is associated with violent extremism.⁵⁴

Radicalization is not new, and it is not isolated to any particular region or culture of the world. Scholars generally agree that radicalization has been present across the entire span of human history and surfaced among individuals and groups of every stripe and been affiliated with the full range of humanity's faiths, ideologies and lifestyles.⁵⁵

It is true that violent radicalization has become a particular concern – indeed, a defining feature – across the Arab region, particularly among youth, the subject and focus of this report. It has revealed itself in terrible ways and caused grave damage to societies across the region and around the world. Despite its importance, however, there is little scholarship on the issue and much discussion on the subject is clouded by divergent perspectives.

While radicalization can be an amorphous concept, and definitions and perspectives can justifiably differ, one ought to trace the basic contours of the process in the region as a starting point for crafting strategies to address it and mitigate against it.

A basic starting point is the recognition that there are multiple pathways that can constitute the process of radicalization in the region.⁵⁶ These pathways can be independent one from another, but are often mutually reinforcing. This radicalization that is driven by several mutually dependent pathways appears to be the most ingrained and, when associated with violent extremism, the most lethal and damaging to society (box 1.5).

In a general sense, violent radicalization among youth can be rendered more likely by specific demographic factors. The Arab region today is more populous and has a younger median age than ever before, meaning simply that there is a larger stock of young people to be recruited. However, demography is not destiny, and several other factors are shaping the outlook of young people across the region and the apparent growth of violent radicalism and extremist movements.

One key factor is an overall sense of exclusion and lack of opportunity that pervades much of the region. As this Report documents, young people across the Arab world are facing tremendous obstacles in their personal development across the broadest range of institutions, from cultural to social to economic to political (figure 1.5). Too often, the lives of young people are marked by frustration,

marginalization and alienation from institutions and the transitions that are necessary to begin adult life in a fulfilling manner.

A second factor is rapid change. Urbanization, globalization and technological development are inducing major changes across societies and creating major cleavages between the past and the present, across generations and between governments and peoples. These changes are inducing severe stresses across societies that require major adaptations. If institutions are brittle and unresponsive, the result can be viewed in a significant and widespread sense of dislocation and disorientation.⁵⁷

A third factor is ideology. As the region has struggled to find its way in a changing world, many ideologues have sought to propose new visions that, however unviable they are, are persuasive among people who are dissatisfied with the status quo. In the Arab region for decades, it has been common practice across many parts of society to suggest that Arab societies are somehow better, stronger, more vibrant, more just and more proud of their past. At the same time, the 'us versus them' ideal has been promoted in an effort to create a distance between the people of the Arab region and the rest of humanity. Similarly, ideologues have sought to entice potential recruits to violent radicalism through new visions of imagined futures based on imagined pasts, often using religious networks and ideals as sources of recruits and platforms for spreading ideology.⁵⁸

A fourth factor is organizational. As extremist networks have grown and become more well funded, they have increased their capability to attract and retain recruits. Online recruitment has proven especially effective as have the efforts of well-financed recruiters to recruit in the field.⁵⁹

In this context, violent radicalization has expanded. The overwhelming majority of young people in the Arab region have no desire to become radical or to participate in extremist or violent groups or activities. The overwhelming majority also see religion as distinct from ideology and do not wish for the latter to encroach on the former. The overwhelming majority likewise reject violence and regard extremist groups as terrorists. However, the minority that accepts violence and is open to participating in violent groups that claim to struggle for change continue to be active (figure 1.6). And, because of the increasing convergence of the pathways through which the dissatisfied can become radicalized and the radicalized can become violent, violent radicalization and violent extremism grow and are accelerating the tremendous damage they wreak on Arab society.

Box 1.5 Youth: The need to belong

Let us for a moment put ourselves in the place of a young man of 19 who has just entered a university in the Arab world. In the past he might have been attracted by an organization with Marxist tendencies that would have been sympathetic to his existential difficulties and initiated him, in its own way, into the debate about ideas. Or else he might have joined some nationalist group that would have flattered his need for identity and perhaps spoken to him of renaissance and modernization. But now Marxism has lost its attraction and Arab nationalism, annexed by regimes that are authoritarian, incompetent and corrupt, has lost much of its credibility. So it is not impossible that the young man we are thinking of will be fascinated by the West, by its way of life and its scientific and technological achievements. But that fascination would probably have little impact on his actions, since there is no political organization of any consequence that embodies the model he admires. Those who aspire to the “Western Paradise” often have no alternative but emigration. Unless they belong to the privileged “castes” who do their best to reproduce aspects of the coveted model in their own homes. But all those who are not born with a limousine at their disposal, all those who want to shake up the established order or are revolted by corruption, state despotism, inequality, unemployment and lack of opportunity, all who have difficulty finding a place in a fast-changing world – all these are tempted by Islamism. In it they find satisfaction for their need for identity, for affiliation to a group, for spirituality, for a simple interpretation of too-complex realities and for action and revolt.

I can't help feeling deeply uneasy as I point out the circumstances that lead young people in the Muslim world to enroll in religious movements. This is because, in the conflict between the Islamists and the rulers who oppose them, I find myself unable to identify with either side. I am unmoved by the utterances of radical Islamists not only because as a Christian I feel excluded, but also because I cannot accept that any religious faction, even if it is in the majority, has the right to lay down the law for the population as a whole. In my view the tyranny of a majority is no better morally than the tyranny of a minority. Moreover, I believe profoundly not just in equality, between men and women alike, but also in liberty in matters of faith and in the freedom of every individual to live as he chooses, and I distrust any doctrine that tries to challenge such fundamental values.

That said, I must add that I disapprove just as strongly of the despotic powers against which the Islamists are fighting, and I decline to applaud the outrages such regimes perpetrate on the pretext that they constitute a lesser evil. The people themselves deserve something better than a lesser evil or any sort of makeshift. What they need are genuine solutions, which can only be those of genuine democracy and modernity – by which I mean a complete modernity freely granted, not an eviscerated one imposed by force. And it seems to me that by taking a fresh look at the idea of identity we might help find a way that leads out of the present impasse and towards human liberty.

Amin Maalouf, In The Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong (Arcade Publishing, New York, 2011), pp. 90–91.

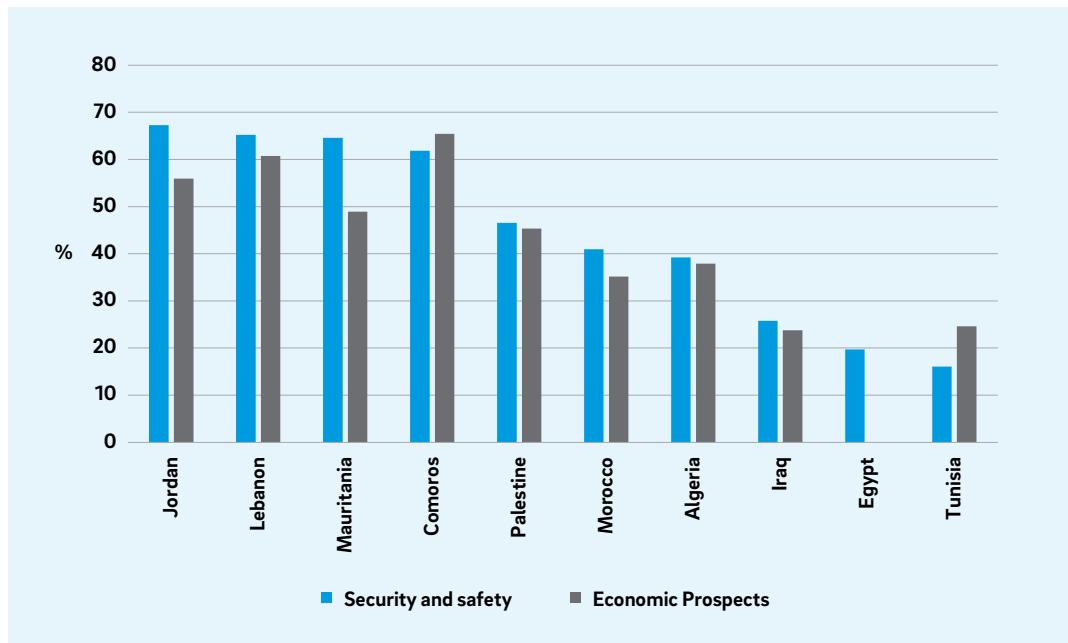
1.4.5 *Human development in reverse: the toll of spreading conflict*

For well over a decade, the Arab region has been witnessing interstate wars, civil wars and terrorist attacks. Between 2000–2003 and 2010–2015, the number of armed conflicts and violent crises have risen from 4 to 11 (table 1.3; figure 1.7; annex 2 figures A.1 and A.2). The uprisings and wars have led to regime change in some countries, often after much bloodshed. In others, there has been

no change, but terrible carnage. In Syria, initially peaceful protests against the government turned into one of the region's ugliest conflicts in modern Arab history.

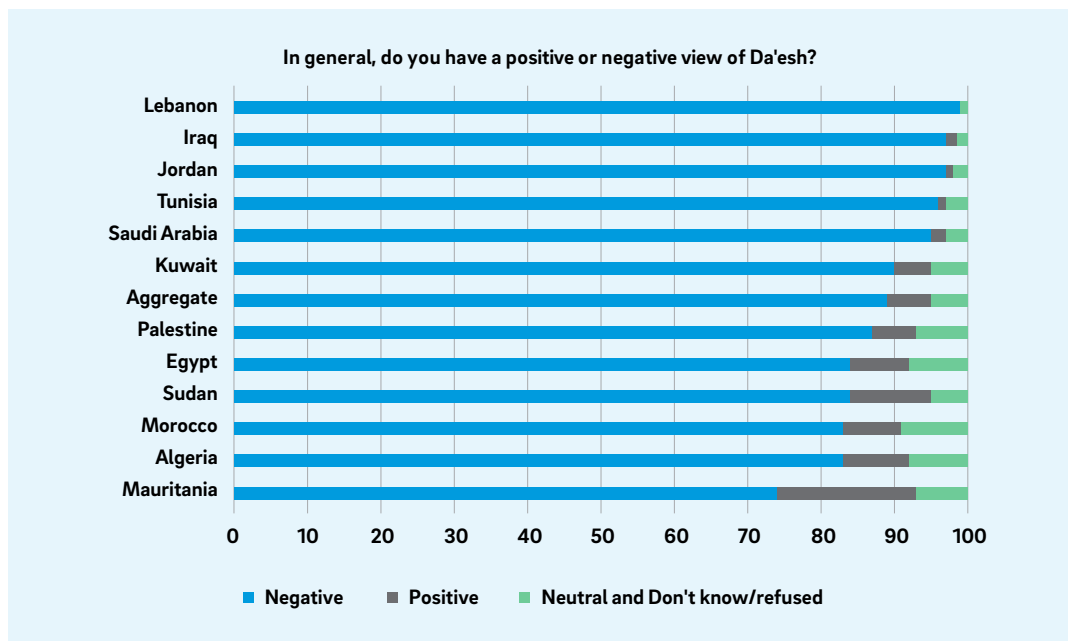
The Israeli occupation of Palestine is one of the longest lasting territorial occupations in modern history. It is also one of the most prolonged denials of self-determination to a people that has formulated its own nationhood against all odds. The freedom to live in dignity is palpably absent. Several decades of occupation have exposed people in Palestine to deep insecurity, loss of opportunities, desperation and profound political frustration. Under occupation,

Figure 1.5 Perceptions of youth (15–29 years), economy and security (% of those who believe it will worsen), selected Arab countries, 2012



Source: Gallup 2013.

Figure 1.6 Positive / negative view of Da'esh



Source: Doha institute 2015.

generations of Palestinians have lived suspended in a state of frozen transition to sovereignty and self-determination and denied progress and their most basic human rights. The question of Palestine occupies a central stage in Arab public opinion.

According to the Arab Opinion Index issued by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 84 percent of Arabs believe the Palestinian cause is not solely a Palestinian issue, but also an Arab cause, and 84 percent oppose diplomatic recognition of

Israel by their countries. Only 21 percent expressed support for peace agreements signed with Israel by Egypt, Jordan and Palestine. The Israeli occupation has had an impact on the whole region, particularly neighbouring countries that host more than five million refugees.⁶⁰

Armed conflict is destroying the social fabric of the Arab region, causing massive loss of life not only among combatants, but also and increasingly among civilians. Conflicts today are considerably less well defined, and civilians, including children, are paying the price, as many more fatalities occur away from battle zones. For every person killed directly by armed violence, between 3 and 15 others die indirectly from diseases, medical complications and malnutrition (see chapter 6). Conflicts also interfere with economic development by destroying productive economic resources, capital and labour, especially within the territory of the nations where they are fought.

Conflicts divert resources primarily through high military spending, which reflects the multiple conflicts in the region, the legacy of cold war rivalries and the nervousness of political systems on the defensive. Several Arab countries are among the most militarized in the world and are characterized by huge military outlays and high proportions of the population under arms (table 1.4). However, while arms-producing countries may reap economic dividends from the arms trade, this spending represents only missed opportunities to invest in broader economic and social progress among Arab countries. The five biggest global importers of arms during 2009–2013 were India, China, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, the latter two Arab countries importing 32 percent of the global total.

If faced with real military threats, Arab countries, including those with large defence budgets, almost invariably call on foreign troops for protection and pay the major share of the cost. This was the case, for example, of the second Gulf War (1990–1991). “Such dependence mocks the vast sums invested in Arab arsenals”, a recent ESCWA report dryly observes.⁶¹ Rising military expenses curtail spending in more effective areas such as education, health care, poverty reduction or infrastructure. They are also linked to the mounting cost of maintaining armed forces, which makes these expenditures even more exorbitant.

Conflict and destruction trigger massive displacement. In 2014, almost 41 percent of the world’s forcibly displaced population were represented by the Arab region, which has only 5 percent of the world’s population (annex 2 figure A.3). The share – more than 22 million people – was almost five times higher in 2014 than 14 years earlier. This increase was first driven by the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the civil war in Darfur around 2003 and then by the Syrian crisis in 2011.⁶² Some 98 percent of forcibly displaced individuals from the region originate from the conflict-ridden countries of Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. A sizeable share of these vulnerable groups are children.⁶³

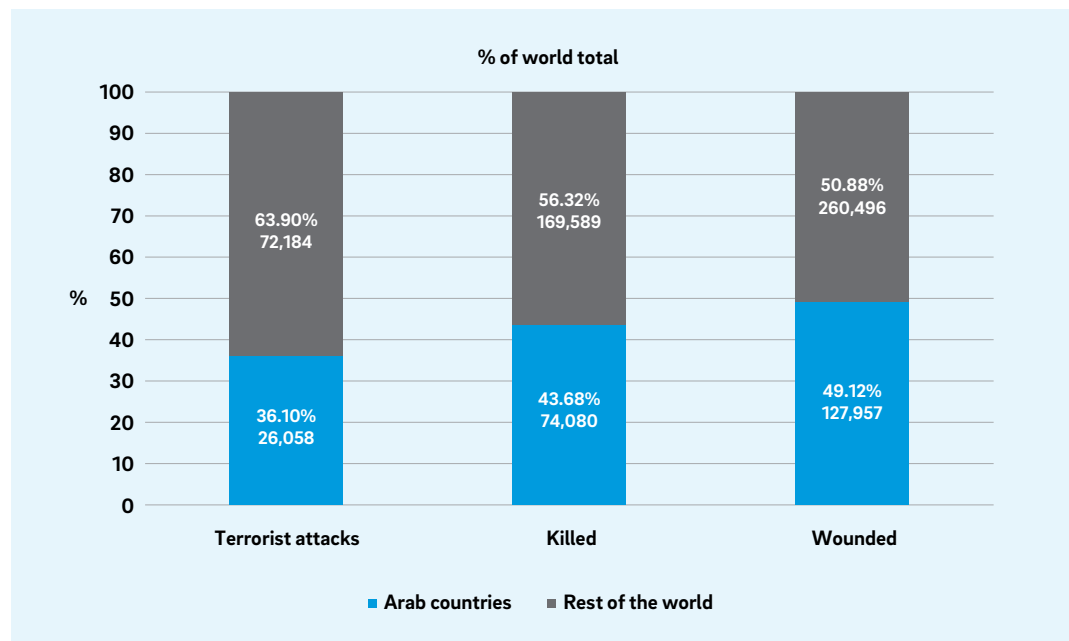
Besides displacing hundreds of thousands of refugees outside their borders, some Arab countries are also heavily burdened internally by war-related displacement. One person in five in Lebanon is a refugee, and one in three in Syria is either a refugee (most from Iraq) or has been

Table 1.3 Arab countries affected by political violence or conflict, 2000–2003 and 2010–2015

2000–2003	2010–2015
Iraq	Bahrain
Palestine	Egypt
Somalia	Iraq
Sudan	Lebanon
	Libya
	Mauritania
	Palestine
	Somalia
	Sudan
	Syria
	Yemen

Source: *The Report team.*

Figure 1.7 Terrorist attacks and their victims in the Arab region versus the rest of the world, 2000–2014



Source: START 2015.

internally displaced. Somalia's ratio of internally displaced persons exceeded 10 percent of the population in 2014. Syrians are the single largest group of internally displaced persons, with 6.5 million displaced in the country in 2013.⁶⁴

1.5 Youth in the Arab region as possible agents of change

Arab population growth rates in the past 50 years were among the highest in the world, the result of a combination of high fertility and declining infant mortality. The high population growth

rates of the 1960s and 1970s resulted in a large demographic wave that has been moving through the population. Although the growth rates subsequently declined, the demographic wave they created is now passing through the young adult years, swelling into a youth 'bulge' experienced to varying degrees across the region.

Never before has the region had such a high share of young people, and although age distribution is only one demographic variable in the complexities of social and political life, the large presence of youth in Arab countries is a crucial reality conditioning the region's political, economic, social and cultural development.

Historically and in periods of rapid demographic growth, it is the young people who become conspicuous in public life.⁶⁵ For the past five years, more and more young people in the region have been raising their voices against those responsible for their economic, social and political exclusion. This was made evident by the youth-led uprisings that brought to the fore the urgent need for change in the Arab region. Youth have emerged as a catalyzing force for change in societies. In several countries, their movements and protests have put pressure on traditional power structures.

What is certain is that these developments have amplified the voices of youth and put young people at the center of debate. A region experiencing

Table 1.4 Military spending, selected Arab countries, 2014, in constant 2011 prices

	Military spending 2014 (million USD)	Military spending 2014 (% GDP)	Growth since 2004 (%)
Qatar ^a	1,913	1.5	64
Bahrain	1,319	4.2	112
Iraq	8,381	4.2	344
UAE	21,877	5.1	114
Algeria	11,295	5.4	215
Saudi Arabia	73,717	10.4	156
Oman	8,985	11.6	117

Source: SIPRI 2015.

Note: GDP = gross domestic product. a. Latest available, 2010.

this type of demographic change must offer the new generation a platform to express concerns and debate views – about the future, society, the economy and the region.

This chapter provides a broad spectrum of the factors affecting youth in Arab countries, either directly or indirectly, yet negatively impacting their environment and development into adulthood. Some of these factors are crucial indicators of the state of human development, such as access to decent and satisfying employment, educational attainment, and access to professional health care, for both men and women. Other factors defining the reality of youth in the Arab countries relate to social interactions that characterize the Arab region today, particularly conflict and migration.

After the uprisings of 2011, it became increasingly evident that the younger generations in Arab countries reject the meagre choices offered by sterile political, economic and social arenas. These young individuals have on their shoulders the burden to navigate for their own survival, but also, by their doings, they are charting the future for their generation as well as the coming ones.

Empowering youth in Arab countries is not a call, in this context, for providing support to the young generation. It is a call for empowerment to rebuild Arab societies and head for a better future. The 2011 'dam breaking' has revealed the existence of three interrelated crises: of the state, of economic models, and of politics. While the focus on the ground is on the last, progress over the next 10 years will depend on moves along all three dimensions. The solutions for each crisis are well known; the problem is more with the process and sequence, and the role of the youth in affecting change (box 1.6).

The opening is available to ensure that youth in Arab countries enter a dynamic, healthy and economically active workforce, with lower dependency ratios (that diminish the economic burden imposed by non-working segments of society) and the capacity to generate income, savings and investment. This opening is a real – but finite – demographic window of opportunity. In most Arab countries, the window will remain open for, at best, the next two or three decades: a blink of an eye in the history of the Arab world.⁶⁶

Seven years before the uprisings, the AHDRs foresaw that *"...If the developmental inability accompanied by a repressive situation on the internal scene and desecration on the foreign scene today continues, intensified societal conflict in the Arab countries is likely to follow. In the absence of peaceful and effective mechanisms to address injustice that the current Arab reality is bringing about, the possibilities of internal strife in the Arab countries increase; and this is the worst fate the current era in modern Arab history could result in"*.

This report offers a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the most pressing challenges facing youth in the Arab region in terms of the human development process. It uses the pillars of human development as a gateway to go much beyond the three dimensions of the HDI. It analyses civic participation among young people; the effects of war and conflict on youth, mobility and migration; and the inclusion and empowerment of young women. To build a more reflective understanding of the different layers that affect youth and human development in Arab countries, it bases the analysis on a wealth of data and surveys. The perspectives of youth have also played a central role in shaping this report, as a series of regional consultations were held to examine key development challenges youth face in their respective countries.

Box 1.6 Ban Ki-Moon: Youth and peace building

The role of youth lies at the heart of international peace and security. We have to encourage young people to take up the causes of peace, diversity and mutual respect.

Youth represent promise – not peril. While some young people do commit heinous acts of violence, the overwhelming majority yearn for peace, especially in conflict situations. Many of those who commit violence are victimized by depraved adults who abuse youthful innocence. Over and over we see young people bearing the brunt of violent extremism. Violent extremists deliberately target youth for exercising their human rights.

I am impressed by young people who survive war and champion peace. I met a Syrian girl in a refugee camp who dreams of becoming a doctor so she can help others. Young people drive change but they are not in the driver's seat. I agree – and I call for giving them the "licence" to steer our future. They have idealism, creativity and unprecedented powers to network. They often understand the complexities of war and the requirements for peace.

There are countless youth groups that want to wage peace, not war. They want to fight injustice,

not people. I applaud these heroes – and especially the heroines. Gender equality is fundamental to combating violent extremism.

Youth suffer on the frontlines of war – but they are rarely in the backrooms where peace talks are held.

I call for giving young people a seat at the negotiating table. They pay a price for the fighting – and they deserve to help structure the healing. This is essential to lasting stability. Youth organizations can help in peacebuilding – if we scale up their activities and invest in their ideas.

Education is critical. I call for deploying "weapons of mass instruction" to foster a culture of peace – "weapons of mass instruction" instead of "destruction". This is more than a clever slogan – it is an effective strategy. Youth peace groups, especially in conflict-torn areas, deserve our unstinting support. Young people are inheriting the world. With more resources, they can be a force for peace, reconciliation and democratic governance. The United Nations is working to listen to youth and respond to their concerns. Let us see young people as the solution to our most vexing problems. They yearn for a more just and peaceful world – and with our help, they can create it.

Note: UN Secretary-General's Statement at the Security Council debate on the role of youth in countering violent extremism and promoting peace, April 2015.

The youth themselves must be significant actors in the process of change that is being described or measured. Youth empowerment emphasizes the importance of participation and social inclusion. This can be achieved provided society is instilled with principles and rules of citizenship that respect all groups and their legitimate differences. The more youth are granted equitable access to education, matched with proper standards of educational attainment and achievement, hold satisfying employment and are in control of their lives, the more well equipped they will be to 'reclaim' reason, assert themselves as powerful agents of change, and own the necessary debates around tomorrow's society.

These debates should address questions about how to achieve peace and preserve it, create an attractive and moral economic system, how to

re-invent an effective and inclusive state, and how to devise rules that can aggregate preferences that respect citizens and their legitimate differences. The debate should also include questions about how to end women's struggles against injustice. Equality of opportunity allows women to make the choices that are best for them, their families and their communities. However, the opportunities for women are not equal where legal gender differences are prevalent.⁶⁷

This Report will serve its purpose if it helps stimulate such a debate, frame the terms of the discussion and encourage youth in Arab countries to participate with the general public in answering questions directly touching their lives. The goal must be to empower youth to determine the nature of the society of tomorrow in which they will live as adults.

Endnotes

- 1 UNDP 2013c.
- 2 UNDP 2014a.
- 3 UNDP 2014a.
- 4 Nawar 2014.
- 5 Kabeer 1999.
- 6 See, e.g., the following reports: UN–LAS 2007; ILO 2012a; Issam Fares Institute 2011; UNESCO 2011.
- 7 World Bank 2007.
- 8 See <http://www.poplas.org/ar/publication.php>.
- 9 Middle East Youth Initiative 2009.
- 10 UN 2012.
- 11 ILO 2014e, 2014f, 2014g.
- 12 UN Habitat 2012.
- 13 Majed 2014.
- 14 Malik 2011.
- 15 Malik and Awadallah 2011.
- 16 World Bank 2015a.
- 17 Many Arab governments have ridden the economic liberalization wave since the 1980s and the rollback of the state to maintain their grip on power by shifting from social modernizing populism to an alliance with elite capital and by relying on crony capitalism.
- 18 World Bank 2015a.
- 19 World Bank 2015a.
- 20 World Bank 2014a.
- 21 World Bank 2014a.
- 22 UNDP 2011.
- 23 UNESCO 2014.
- 24 World Bank 2015b.
- 25 World Bank 2010.
- 26 The TIMSS and the Programme for International Student Assessment are administered to eighth graders and 15-year-olds, respectively, to assess the quality of education among these students. See World Bank (2008, 2013a).
- 27 World Bank 2013a.
- 28 World Bank 2015b; ILO 2015.
- 29 Chaaban 2013.
- 30 WEF 2012.
- 31 Dhillon and others 2009.
- 32 European Commission 2010.
- 33 ILO 2012a.
- 34 Dhillon and others 2009.
- 35 World Bank 2015b; ILO 2014b.
- 36 UNDP 2005, 2009.
- 37 In Algeria, Iraq, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Sudan and Syria, the constitution explicitly prohibits gender-based discrimination (in theory).
- 38 IPU 2015.
- 39 UN–LAS 2013.
- 40 UN–LAS 2013.
- 41 Jabbour and others 2012.
- 42 Dhillon and Youssef 2009.
- 43 Chaaban 2010.
- 44 Chaaban 2013; Dhillon and Youssef 2009.
- 45 Dhillon and Youssef 2009.
- 46 Jabbour and others 2012.
- 47 Issam Fares Institute 2011.
- 48 WHO 2013d.

- 49 UNDP 2004, p. 8.
- 50 UNDP 2005, p 1.
- 51 Krayem 2013.
- 52 Krayem 2013.
- 53 Ramadan 2012.
- 54 Ashour 2015.
- 55 Harrigan and El-Said 2011.
- 56 Fahmy2015.
- 57 Fahmy2015.
- 58 Fahmy2015.
- 59 Fahmy2015.
- 60 UNRWA 2015.
- 61 UN-ESCWA 2014a, p. 132.
- 62 For more information, visit <http://www.therefugeeproject.org/#/2011>.
- 63 UNHCR 2014a.
- 64 UNHCR 2014a.
- 65 Moller 1968.
- 66 Jamal 2009.
- 67 World Bank 2015c.