

Arab Human Development Report 2016

Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a
Changing Reality

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



50
YEARS

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Regional Bureau
for Arab States

Empowered lives. Resilient nations.

FOREWORD

Last year, world leaders adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* as a vision for transforming global development over the next fifteen years to build a more peaceful, prosperous, sustainable, and inclusive future. The Agenda asserts that young women and men are critical agents of change, and are central to achieving sustainable development.

Published at a time when countries are developing in earnest their plans to implement the *2030 Agenda*, the “*Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality*” strongly echoes this assertion. It calls on Arab States to invest in their youth, and to empower them to engage in development processes. This is a critical and urgent priority in its own right, and it is a prerequisite for achieving tangible and sustainable progress on development and stability for the entire region. The report makes two key arguments for investing in young people in the region:

First, that while young people between the ages of fifteen and 29 make up nearly a third of the region’s population, another third are below the age of fifteen. This “demographic momentum” will last for at least the next two decades, and offers an historic opportunity which Arab countries must seize.

Second, the report underlines that the wave of protests which has swept through

a number of Arab countries since 2011 with youth at the forefront has led to fundamental transformations across the entire region. Some countries have seen new national constitutions, free and fair elections, and a widening of the public participation sphere for previously excluded groups. Elsewhere, however, systems which had maintained stability came under serious challenge, with protracted conflict ensuing. This report emphasizes that empowerment and engagement of youth at this important juncture in the history of the region is essential for laying new and more durable foundations for stability.

The report explores the many challenges which youth in the Arab region continue to face. Many continue to receive an education which does not reflect the needs of labour markets. High numbers of young people, particularly young women, are unemployed and excluded from the formal economy. Young people without livelihoods find it difficult to establish an independent home and form their own family units. The risk for these young people is that instead of exploring opportunities and discovering future prospects, they experience frustration, helplessness, alienation, and dependency.

It goes without saying that young people across the Arab States have been severely affected by the recent crises. Large numbers of them were swept onto the

frontlines of conflicts they did not start. Many died, and many more have lost family members and friends, livelihoods and prospects, and hope in the future. In the face of such challenges, some have joined extremist groups.

In response to these challenges, the Report argues for youth empowerment from a human development perspective. This defines the goal of development as the expansion of the choices and freedoms available to people to live in ways they want and value.

Youth empowerment requires enhancing the capabilities of young people. Delivery systems for basic services, particularly in education and health, must be improved. The opportunities available to youth must be expanded – through economies which generate decent work and encourage entrepreneurship, political environments which encourage freedom of expression and active participation, and social systems which promote equality and act against all forms of discrimination.

In 2030, the Arab States will look back to assess what they have achieved over the fifteen years of the SDGs to fulfill the promise of peace, prosperity, and sustainable development for future generations. We hope that this report

will galvanize decision makers, other key stakeholders, and young people themselves across the Arab States' region to ensure greater participation of youth in development. Without such participation, it will be difficult to secure progress and ensure sustainable development.

The United Nations Development Programme is committed to supporting and facilitating progress in the Arab States' region towards a more prosperous and stable future. We will continue to work closely with our partners in all Arab States, the regional and sub-regional institutions, and sister United Nations agencies and other international partners. We look forward to the discussions which we hope this report will stimulate, and to supporting innovative and practical recommendations which come from those.



[Helen Clark](#)

Administrator

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PREFACE

Coming five years after the events of 2011, widely referred to as “the Arab Spring,” the publication of this report follows a period of extensive debate over the transformations that had occurred since in many Arab countries and in particular over the part that young people may have played in those transformations. Some considered the contribution of young people as a glimmer of hope for a new renaissance that would lead the region towards a better future, whereas others considered it a seditious influence dragging the region into chaos and jeopardising its future.

Events of 2011 inspired the thematic focus of this report on youth in the Arab region. Yet, publishing it five years after has spared the report’s research outlook and its analyses from falling prey to the intellectual clamour and reactive posturing that usually accompany the examination of defining moments of change, such as the ones that have swept the region since 2011. This temporal distance has allowed us a calm and reflective approach to evaluating the pulse on the street, monitoring developments and analysing premises and effects, particularly regarding the reaction of official circles to the wave of change, amidst continuing popular efforts to expand opportunities for change and to shape a better future.

The events of 2011 in the Arab region have refocused attention on the pivotal role of

youth (by which we mean young women and young men) in society. Numerous analysts have linked the wave of protests, spearheaded by young people with many significant transformations that have changed and are continuing to change political, economic and social foundations in several countries in the Arab region.

The “*Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality*” seeks to make a balanced contribution to a renewed and broad debate involving key relevant stakeholders about the best means of engaging youth in development in the region. It seeks to engage young people themselves in that debate with all other stakeholders over the issues it presents.

Youth empowerment key to future development in Arab countries

The Report argues that young people are not a problem or a burden on development; they are rather a key resource for resolving the problems of development in the region. It concludes that Arab states can achieve a huge developmental leap and ensure durable stability if they put the empowerment of their youth at the top of their urgent priorities and harness their energy to advance development processes.

From that perspective, the Report calls on Arab states to adopt a new development

model that focuses on enhancing the capabilities of young people, unleashing their energy and expanding the opportunities available to them, thus allowing them more freedom to shape their futures, and contributing actively to development in their societies and countries.

Numbers matter

Most recent statistics indicate that two-thirds of the Arab region's population is below thirty years of age, half of which falling within the 15 - 29-year age bracket. This age category defines "youth" according to the Report, which estimates the number of young people in the region at over one hundred million.

This unprecedented demographic mass of young people at the prime of their working and productive abilities constitutes a huge potential for advancing economic and social development if given the opportunity. The report points out that this demographic window provides a genuine opportunity over the coming two decades that the region must urgently seize.

Disempowerment of youth sows the seeds of instability

The report asserts that today's generation of young people is more educated, active and connected to the outside world, and hence have a greater awareness of their realities and higher aspirations for a better future. However, young people's awareness of their capabilities and rights collides with a reality that marginalises them and blocks their pathways to express their opinions, actively participate or earn a living. As a result, instead of being a massive potential for building the future, youth can become an overwhelming power for destruction.

Events in the region since 2011 have demonstrated the ability of young people to initiate action and catalyse change. They demonstrated young people's awareness of the serious challenges to development posed by current conditions, and their ability to express the dissatisfaction of society as a whole with those conditions and its demands for change. These events also revealed the depth of the marginalisation that young people suffer and their inability to master the instruments of organised political action that could guarantee the peacefulness and sustainability of such change.

Events since 2011 have proved also that employing a predominantly security-based approach to responding to demands for change without addressing the root causes of discontent may achieve temporary stability and ward off cycles of protest, but does not reduce the possibilities of their recurrence—it may lead to the accumulation of these demands and their re-emergence more violently.

Enhancing capabilities and expanding opportunities: the duality of youth empowerment

In practice, empowering youth requires, on the one hand, introducing changes to the political, economic and social environment that causes their exclusion. Such changes must increase opportunities for young people to engage in the spheres of official politics; stimulate a macro-economy capable of producing decent work for young people and enhancing their entrepreneurship; and entrench the principles of justice, equality and equal opportunity in society, challenging all discriminatory practices based on identity, belief, ethnicity or gender.

On the other hand, youth empowerment requires serious investments in improving the basic services necessary for enhancing young people's capabilities, particularly in education, health and other social services.

In our Arab region, which is experiencing an unprecedented escalation of conflicts that undermine gains of development, and in some instances reverse progress, the pursuit of empowerment must be rooted in serious and rapid efforts to establish security, peace and social stability, ensuring the full and active participation of young people in such efforts.

Three levels of reform

The empowerment of the youth requires reforms at three levels. The first pertains to redirecting macro-policies that regulate the social contract between the state and its citizens and the macro-economic structure to ensure inclusiveness and widen opportunities for all, including young people, in a fair and non-discriminatory manner.

The second level focuses on sector-specific policies, particularly in the fields of education, health and employment, and aims to ensure the availability and quality of the services that will enhance young people's capabilities, hence widening their freedom of choice.

Finally, the third level relates to national youth policies, which must transcend partial and short-term approaches attempting to “find solutions to the problems of young people,” which are at time superficial and ineffective. Instead, youth policies must interact effectively with the first and second levels of suggested reform

and enhance coordination amongst all stakeholders to ensure a greater role and wider participation of young people in formulating public policies, scrutinising budgetary allocations, and monitoring accountability for the implementation and progress towards achievement of national priorities.

A new generation of Arab Human Development Reports

In this iteration of the Arab Human Development Reports series, we seek to test new methods to widen the debate over human development in the Arab region, especially with two key audience categories of the Report—government stakeholders including decision makers dealing with youth issues, and young people themselves.

With decision makers in mind, we have decided to limit the publication of the hard copy of this report to its executive summary, in which we have included the most important propositions and messages derived from the rich information and analyses in the report's chapters. We present this executive summary as a “policy paper” that goes beyond a mere descriptive presentation summarizing the report's chapters to focus on the most significant policy options and avenues for action. Our hope is that the impact of the report will not be limited to serious debates amongst officials concerned with youth issues, but that its proposals will motivate practical action and concrete measures.

In keeping with new patterns of knowledge consumption, particularly amongst young people – the other key audience of the Report – we are publishing the full Report only in a digital version posted on our

website on the internet. In addition to making the digital version of the full chapters of the report available for downloading as customary, we were keen to support their content with interactive and data visualization tools, to allow for a wider dialogue and sharing of ideas, particularly those contributed by young people. To increase circulation and engagement, we are also making the digital version of the report mobile-friendly through an interactive application. We hope that this will contribute to widening the active participation of young people alongside all other concerned stakeholders in discussing the issues raised in the Report, expounding its ideas and engaging in implementing them.

I express my gratitude to Sima Bahous, Assistant Secretary-General, Assistant

Administrator and Director of the United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Arab States through August, 2016, under whose leadership this report was undertaken. I also thank the researchers who have put together this important analysis, which will remain a touchstone for years to come.



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1. INTRODUCTION

The *Arab Human Development Report* series has, since its launch in 2002, presented an accurate and frank description of the dynamics of human development in the Arab region, endeavouring to uncover the challenges facing the region, analyzing the social, political and economic trends that influence the region and contributing to guiding the debates on crucial issues with the aim of advancing the development process.

This report, the sixth in the series, seeks to provide a common platform for the debate on the future of development in the Arab region by considering the situation of youth (box 1), who constitute a pivotal issue, particularly at this time. The report's eight chapters are based on a careful, in-depth reading of the events of 2011—including the background and continuing ramifications throughout the

region—from the perspective of human development. The report concludes by proposing strategies to empower youth and the formulation of a new development model fit for youth and with the potential to achieve positive change.

Over the past 50 years, average population growth rates in the Arab region have been among the highest in the world (figure 1). This expanding population exerts great pressure on societies and represents a heavy burden on state institutions and basic infrastructure. The massive demographic wave began to recede after peaking in the 1960s and 1970s (box 2). However, the effects continue to reverberate through the region's demographic structure, albeit to varying degrees from one country to another, given that around 60 percent of the population is under 30 years of age.

Box 1

Definition of youth

Youth can be broadly described as the phase in life during which a person's state changes from one of dependence (childhood) to one of independence (adulthood). For statistical purposes, the United Nations defines youth as individuals of ages 15–24 years. However, this report employs a wider definition of youth, which stretches across ages 15–29 so as to reflect the prolonged transitions to adulthood faced by many young men and women in

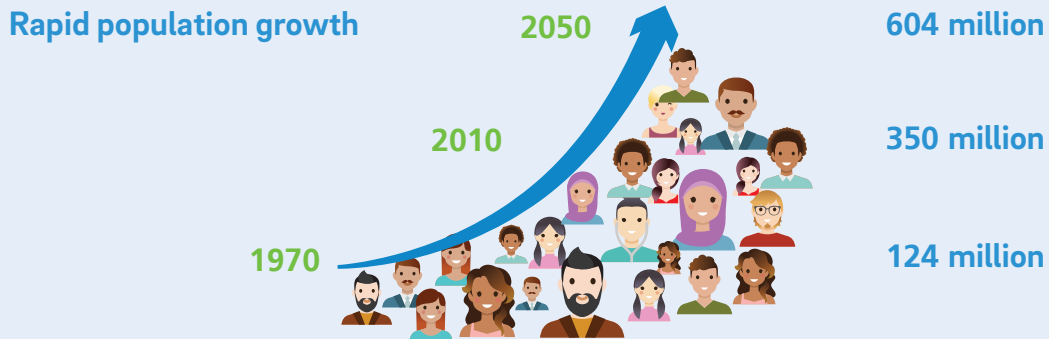
the Arab region, and given the absence of a regionally accepted definition.

Young people do not constitute a homogenous group in any case because their circumstances differ widely within and across countries. Despite these differences, a regional analysis can provide a wider understanding of the main features of the development of youth within the larger topic of human development.

Source: Report Team

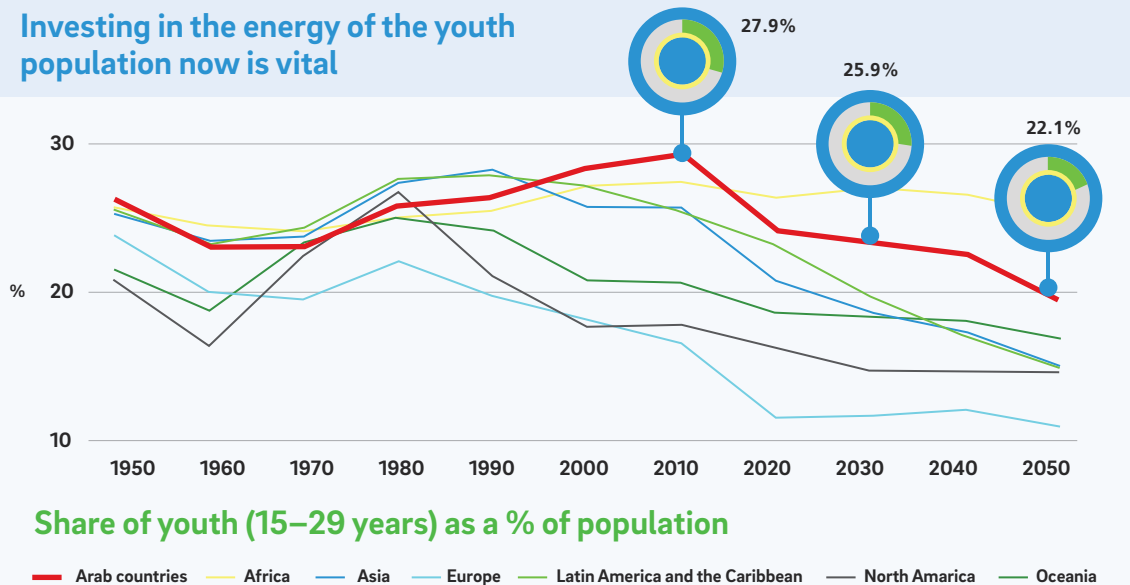
Figure 1

Youth in the Arab region: A demographic dividend to be harnessed



Source: UN DESA 2013.

Investing in the energy of the youth population now is vital



Source: Report Team calculations based on UN DESA 2013.

Rising number of youth in urban areas

Share of populations living in urban areas

2015 (57%)



2050 (75%)



Source: UNDP 2013b.

Share of youth living in urban areas

 JORDAN 82%

 Kuwait ≈ 98%

 EGYPT 42%

 TUNISIA 67%

Source: World Bank 2015, ILO 2014c, 2014d, 2014e.

Source: Report team.

Box 2

Demographic trends in the Arab region

The Arab countries have experienced high average population growth rates over the past 50 years, most notably in the 1970s when the growth rate exceeded 3.3 percent compared with 1.8 percent worldwide. It subsequently began to drop, reaching 2.2 percent in 2014. As the new millennium began, some countries—such as

Algeria (after 2002), Egypt (after 2006), Morocco (after 2003), Oman (after 2007) and Tunisia (after 2010)—once again experienced a gradual increase in population growth rates. However, rates in most other countries continue to fall, albeit at a lower rate.

Source: Report Team

Within this context, young people, as a demographic group, are considered an urgent challenge: their numbers exceed 105 million, equivalent to one third of the population. This is the highest share in the history of the region. At the same time, these young people represent an unprecedented opportunity because, by virtue of the investment made by Arab countries over decades, they are more well educated, healthier and better connected to the world than previous generations.

The importance of the young demographic bloc is not only linked to size, but also to the inherent energy of young people in

working and being productive. The large number of economically productive people compared with those who are dependent constitutes an important advantage that can help propel economic growth, resulting in a demographic dividend. Without proper investment in youth, the opportunity represented by this demographic dividend for promoting development will gradually disappear and may not recur in the Arab region. Although the slow pace of development is affecting everyone, it is especially felt by young people.

Youth in the Arab region suffer to varying degrees as a result of the state of human

Box 3

National youth policies and strategies in the Arab region

Since the beginning of the third millennium, nine Arab countries have adopted national youth policies or strategies. Some policies have been formulated in cooperation with the United Nations, particularly the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund. However, despite the efforts that have been undertaken, progress remains limited because the decisions on implementation have been deficient, because

of the absence of coordination among the institutions involved in providing youth with development opportunities (such as ministries and institutions of education, labour, and health care), or because of the absence of accountability deriving from a lack of evaluation of the effects of the policies and strategies and the failure to encourage youth to participate in formulating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the decisions.

Source: Report Team

development. Young people feel deeply anxious about their future and are gripped by an inherent sense of discrimination and exclusion. Many of them do not receive good education, find suitable employment, or have appropriate health care. Moreover, youth in Arab countries are insufficiently represented in public life, and have no meaningful say in shaping policies that influence their lives. These failures are exacerbated among young women, who face additional burdens of gender inequality and the persisting gap in the empowerment of women in economic, political and social life, despite the achievements made in a number of countries.

Many government decisions during past decades have resulted in the marginalization of a large segment of the youth population, and the insufficient government attention to the needs of youth has caused young people to build up a sense of bitterness and provoked feelings of resentment. Historically, and during rapid demographic growth, young people become conspicuous in public life.¹ That presence has re-emerged over the past five years, and increasing numbers of young people are actively challenging governments, which they hold responsible for failing to achieve development. This can be clearly seen in the wave of protests that were led by youth in 2011 and which highlighted the urgent need to change the existing patterns of managing public affairs and the resources of society.

There can be no doubt that young people in Arab countries can be effective agents in bringing about the positive change required in the region, provided their capabilities

are recognized, developed and tapped. This report calls for placing young people at the heart of the development process, which includes providing young people with genuine opportunities to unleash their energy and shape their future.

In parallel, the report warns that the policies and practices of exclusion across various fields, the lack of sufficient protection of political freedoms and human rights, weak economic competitiveness and the failure to establish good governance—particularly through greater transparency and accountability—are threatening the future prospects of youth and drawing some into circumstances that hinder their development. The risky circumstances include ideologies of violent extremism, particularly because several countries are experiencing escalating conflicts, fragile state institutions and a flawed relationship between political authorities and societal forces.

If the voices and potential of youth in Arab countries remain ignored, and formal or partial initiatives with no tangible impact on people's lives continue to be implemented, youth will grow ever more alienated, prompting them to lose their capacity to act as constructive forces serving development. Rather, they will become a potent source of protracted social instability threatening human security, which was thoroughly addressed in the *2009 Arab Human Development Report*, in all its dimensions. This would in turn threaten the entire development process.

The report does not merely call for developing youth policies and strategies (box 3), but also for reformulating sectoral

and general policies in the Arab region around a new development model fit for youth in light of the region's changing economic, political and social reality. The report seeks, within this framework, to motivate various stakeholders to engage

in broad-based discussions of the specific issues raised by youth themselves and to encourage the participation of youth in these discussions to define the nature of the societies they want to inhabit as adults.

2. THE EVENTS OF 2011 AND THEIR AFTERMATH FROM THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

The powerful protests that swept through the Arab region in 2011 served as a tipping point: it was no longer possible to contain the pressure for change (figure 2). However, the protests also coincided with situations of acute conflict and instability largely linked to old inherited problems.

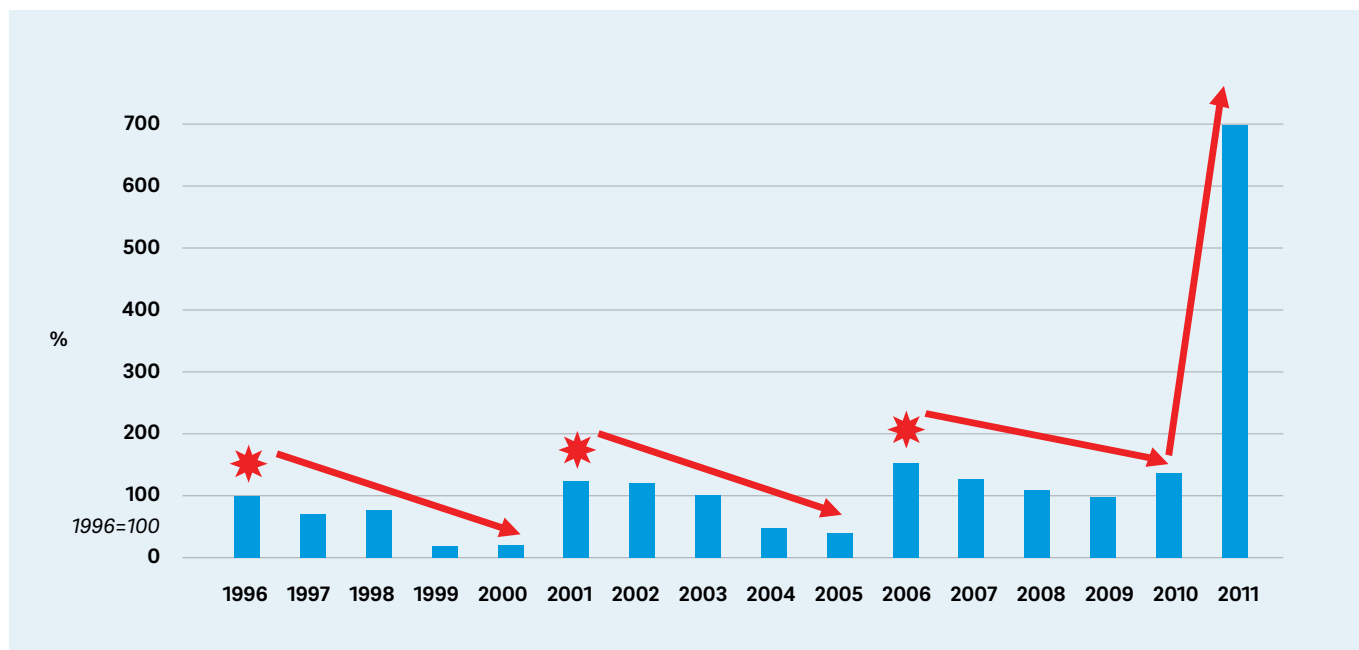
This report holds that the events of 2011 and their ramifications are the outcome of public policies over many decades that gradually led to the exclusion of large sectors of the population from economic, political and social life, depriving many people of appropriate health care, good

education and suitable livelihoods. This exacerbated the problem of the slow growth in incomes from which the region had suffered for a long time, widening the income gap across social sectors.

This evaluation is based on an analysis of the human development index of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which monitors progress in major aspects of people's lives, including longevity in a state of good health, educational attainment, and enjoyment of a decent standard of living. Following the region's success in raising the averages of the index in 1990–2010 as

Figure 2

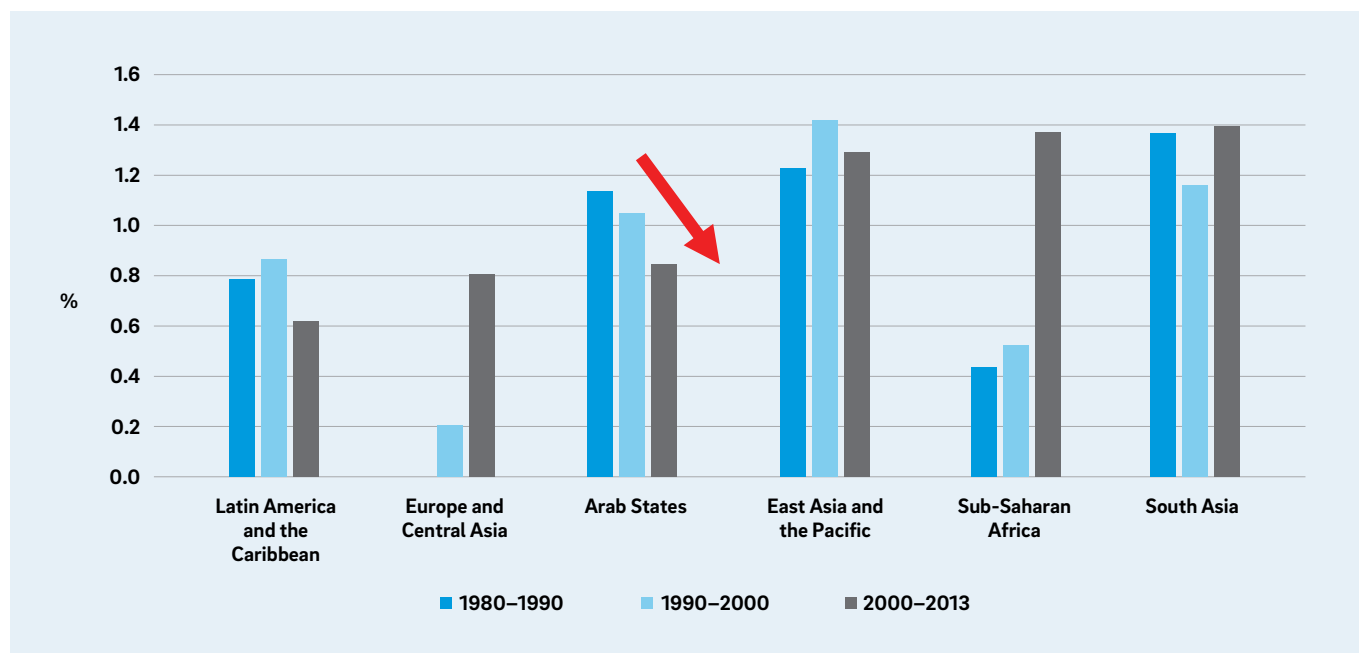
Public protests in North Africa 1996–2011



Source: Tzannatos, Z. and Abu Ismail, K. 2013. [Taken from OECD Development Centre (based on Information of Agence France Press)].

Figure 3

Average annual growth, human development index, 1980–2013



Source: UNDP 2014.

the result of progress in health care and education, the index began to fall (figure 3). The annual growth rate of the index fell by more than half between 2010 and 2014 relative to the rate in 2000–2010², seemingly under the combined influence of the global financial crisis in 2008–2009, political instability and the wars and armed conflicts that flared up in a number of Arab countries. If the current trend continues, the region is expected to rank fifth among the six world regions³ on the human development index by 2050, above only sub-Saharan Africa.⁴

For decades, the governments of the region have adopted a state-led development model dominated by the public sector, which became the provider of first and last resort of economic activity, thereby creating several contradictions.⁵ The model expanded the access of the population

to key entitlements through employment in public sector institutions or through government food subsidies, thus reducing poverty and income inequality, while shielding previously deprived groups from economic pressures.⁶

However, these ostensibly positive outcomes entailed a deeper trade-off in the long run. The gains in human development rarely translated into gains in productivity and growth because the model trapped human capital in unproductive public sector jobs, while building up a pyramid of privilege that gave economic advantages to companies and individuals closely linked to decision makers and reinforcing structural alliances among political and economic elites so they could protect their own interests. Ultimately, the model supported individuals from cradle to grave, but bequeathed a negative legacy.

Box 4

Corruption: an invisible nail in the coffin of development in the Arab region

The change in the dynamics of demography in the Arab countries was not accompanied by an appropriate shift in the economic development model adopted by governments. A rentier economy persisted with the attendant negative effects that disrupted growth and strengthened exclusion. Is such a deficiency merely the result of a lack of experience or short-sightedness or are there other factors? A fruitful line of research is the relationship between the deficiency in the economic model and corruption, the misuse of authority to gain a special undeserved benefit that undermines the public good.

The events of 2011 and their aftermath highlighted corruption as a major challenge in the region. The available information and intensive research on the subject over the past decade show that corruption has resulted in the waste of vast resources, estimated by the Arab Anti-Corruption Organization at a value of US\$1 trillion over 50 years. Moreover, the Arab Anti-Corruption and Integrity Network holds that these wasted resources could have been invested in creating job opportunities and improving the standard of basic services. Corruption has also contributed, through deliberate premeditation, to strengthening an exclusionist economic model that has harmed the process of development in the region.

As the transformation into a market economy began in the 1980s and 1990s, decision makers were supposed to empower the private sector to contribute to development. However, corruption and negligence in combating corruption prevented the growth of the private sector in a healthy and responsible manner. Corruption contravened the principle of administrative neutrality, rendering the emerging private sector dependent on the goodwill of politicians and linking existing scant economic opportunities to backdoor relationships rather than to market principles. This led to the emergence of political-

economic alliances that directed public policies and society's resources towards serving personal interests in the absence of effective mechanisms to guarantee transparency and accountability.

This also contributed to depriving the region of the fruits of integration into the global economy because corruption is considered noxious to foreign investment. This is because it increases investor costs, threatens the stability of investor transactions and renders investors liable to legal action as intercontinental legal instruments develop and the monitoring of cash flows through banks is tightened. If officials or their relatives insist on blackmailing investors to partner with them, use their influence to grant facilities, create obstacles to honest competition, or allow administrative corruption to spread, they are rendering investment less attractive, particularly in productive sectors, such as manufacturing, which requires vast amounts of capital and needs to be economically feasible and able to compete on the open world market.

The widespread incidence of corruption coincided with irregularities in the investments of governments. The greed for profits prompted some officials to divert a portion of state spending into high-cost, low-return projects or towards mostly secretive and opaque contracts for the purchase of expensive arms and equipment, instead of employing the spending in productive sectors. Even in cases in which noticeable growth in gross domestic product (GDP) was achieved, socio-economic studies show that the fruits were only enjoyed by a small elite that persisted in using its authority to gain the largest amount of benefits and to distribute them to supporters to ensure its survival. This widened social disparities, prompting people to rebel. Youth were at the forefront of the rebellions: corruption and distorted development had driven them to despair of social mobilization.

Achieving progress that satisfies youth and allows the Arab region to employ its huge potential to accelerate development and to tackle deficiencies requires a high degree of awareness on the part of political, economic and social elites. It also requires a high degree of cooperation among the various stakeholders, including youth, to strengthen an anti-corruption culture, implement the international standards associated with

the United Nations Convention against Corruption and formulate and implement effective and coordinated national strategies that target clear priorities. Such strategies directly influence the competitiveness of the private sector, the quality and integrity of basic services and the state's ability to earn revenues so that these can be reinvested in development in a transparent and accountable manner.

Source: Regional Project on Anti-Corruption and Integrity in the Arab Countries, United Nations Development Programme.

Another more serious consequence was that the model promoted political marginalization, fostered a socio-economic chasm across the population, undermined the spirit of individual initiative, encouraged consumerism at the expense of productivity and long-term investment in human capabilities and exacerbated the problem of corruption, which slowed development in all its features (box 4).

Then came the events of 2011, which revealed the dangers inherent in the development model and demonstrated that the escalating costs of the unfair distribution of income and the associated need for repressive security could render the governing regimes vulnerable to popular reaction.

3. THE DYNAMICS OF YOUTH DISEMPOWERMENT IN THE ARAB REGION

Despite the rise of a new generation of youth during the past few decades that is the largest, the most well educated and the most highly urbanized in the history of the Arab region, the prospects of young people remain more vulnerable than ever because of exclusion, poverty, economic recession and the prevalence of corruption. These factors are exacerbated in Arab countries that are experiencing conflict.

Young people are coming of age in a context of widening income disparities, increasing inequality of opportunity, slowing average growth and shrinking job opportunities. These problems are weakening their commitment to preserving government institutions and their desire to participate in a political world that does not meet their needs or their expectations (figure 4).

Such difficulties are not confined to youth, but youth tend to be more affected, and they will have to deal with the problems for many decades unless there is a change in the current situation, which they have had no hand in creating and which is characterized by the largest number of failed states in the world.⁷

The desired change cannot be achieved without empowering young people, which entails “the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.”⁸ This will enhance

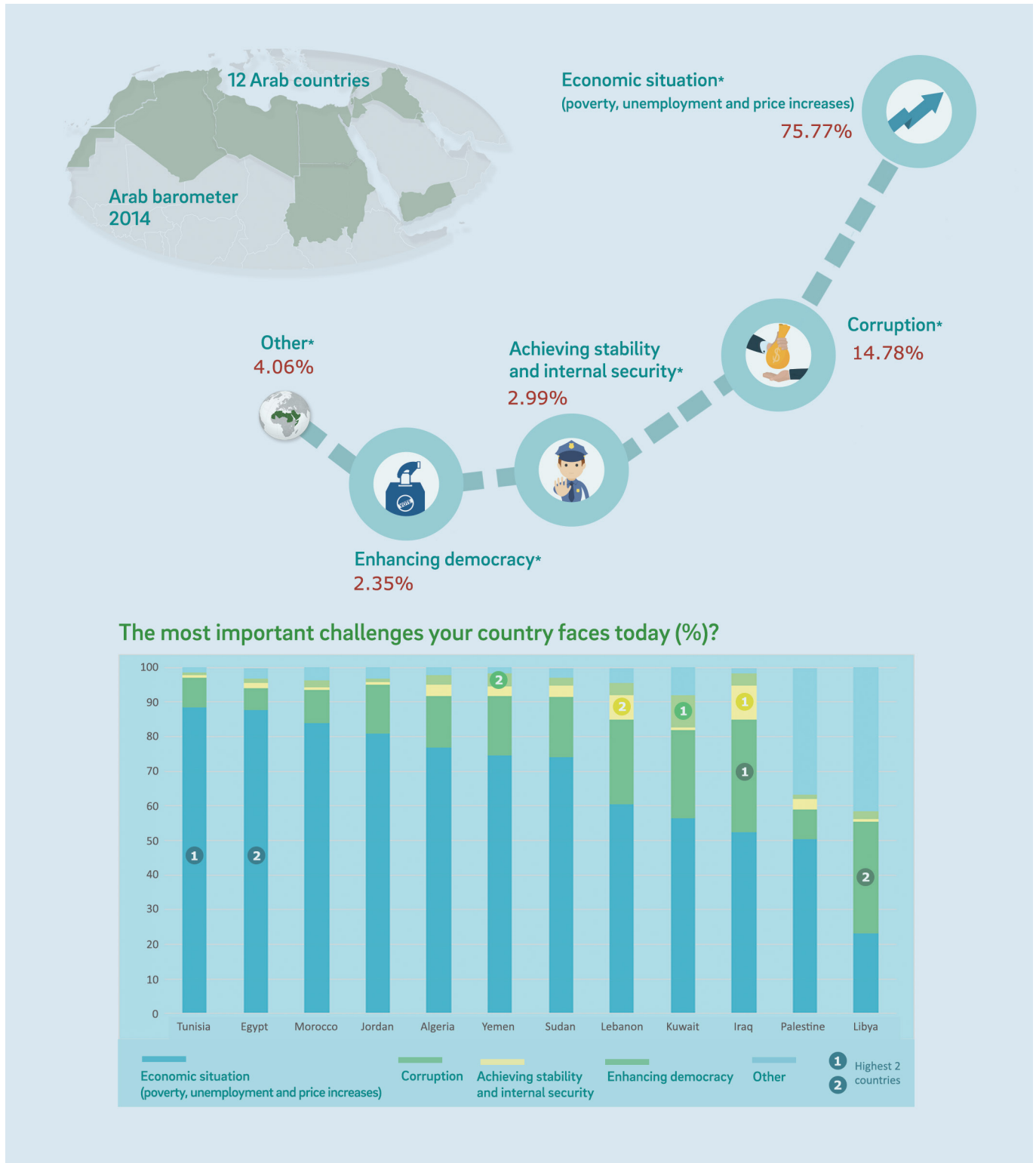
their feeling of effectiveness, motivate them to contribute to reform and boost their integration into society. The report identifies several deep-seated issues in the region that hinder the empowerment of young people, tend to undermine them and prevent the full unleashing of their inherent energy. It summarizes the most important of these factors as follows: (1) scant suitable job opportunities, (2) weak political participation, (3) poor-quality health care and education services, (4) mismanagement of social diversity, (5) the prevalence of inherited concepts and practices that promote gender inequality and (6) prolonged conflicts that undermine society of development gains.

3.1. Scant suitable job opportunities

In addition to weak economic productivity and competitiveness in most countries in the Arab region, the policies and laws that regulate the labour market hinder the growth of jobs in a manner that matches demographic growth and the needs of market. This affects youth in particular and prevents the economic empowerment of youth. The prevalence of nepotism and reliance on social connections play a large role in the distribution of the limited available jobs, prompting young people who are looking for jobs to depend on social relationships and family ties. Young people in influential families thus possess an

Figure 4

Perspectives of youth in the Arab region: Most important challenges



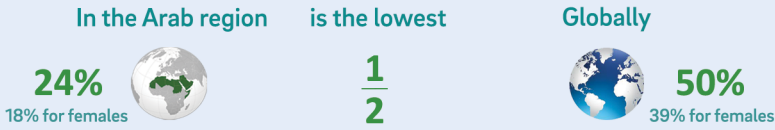
Source: Arab Barometer 2014.

*Population-weighted average for 12 Arab countries

Figure 5

Youth unemployment in the Arab region: One of the greatest challenges

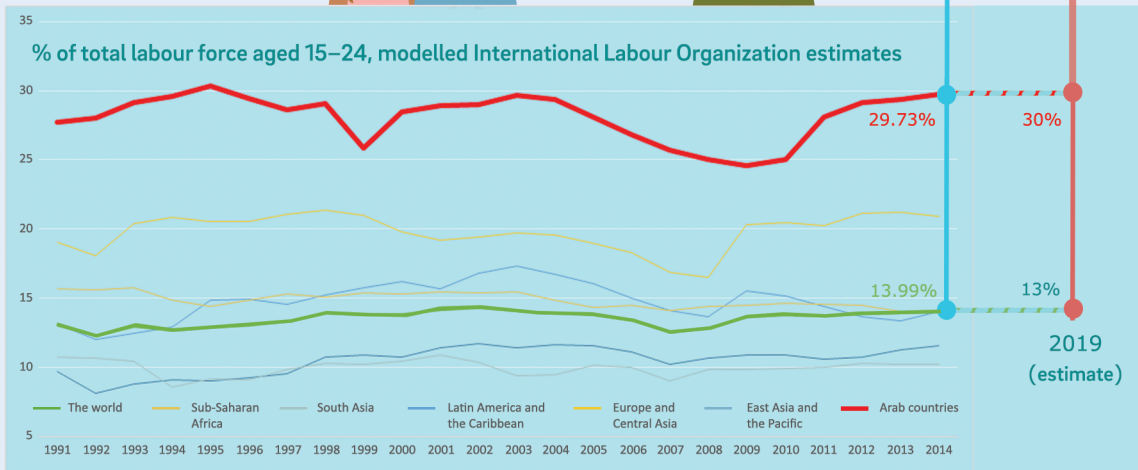
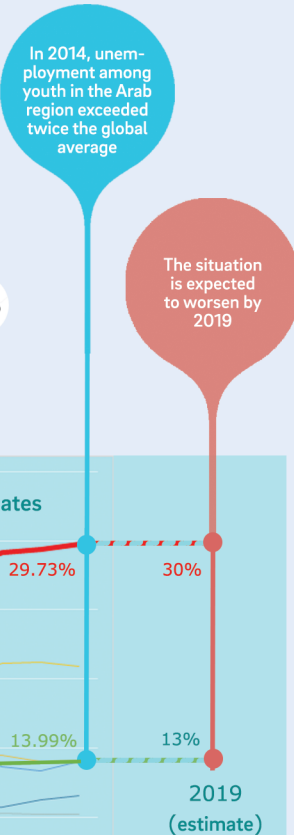
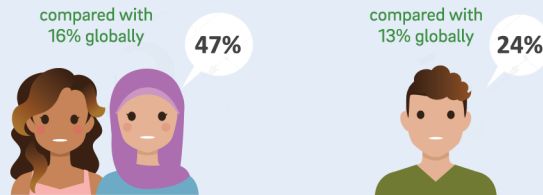
Young women's participation in the labor force



In the Arab region

Unemployment rate among young women (females) **x2** Unemployment rate among young men (male)

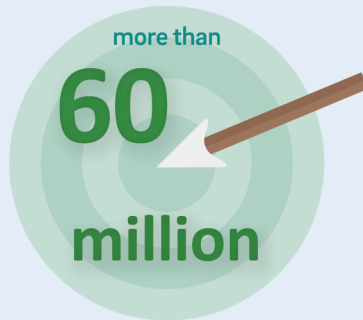
Unemployment among youth in the Arab region is the highest among world regions



Long periods of unemployment: unemployment duration exceeds a year for more than half of youth in some Arab countries

Source: World Bank 2015.

By 2020, the region needs to create



NEW JOBS to absorb the number of workforce entrants and stabilize youth unemployment.

Source: WEF 2012.

advantage over their peers, which violates the principles of social justice and sacrifices the criterion of merit necessary for the achievement of economic productivity.

The report provides an analysis of the main outputs of the labour market relevant to youth in the region. It indicates that the average rate of participation of youth in the workforce is low, at around 24 percent and falling to less than 18 percent among young women. This is the lowest regional average in the world. Meanwhile, the youth unemployment rate is the highest in the world, reaching almost 30 percent, even though five years have passed since the widespread protests demanding a dignified life (figure 5).⁹

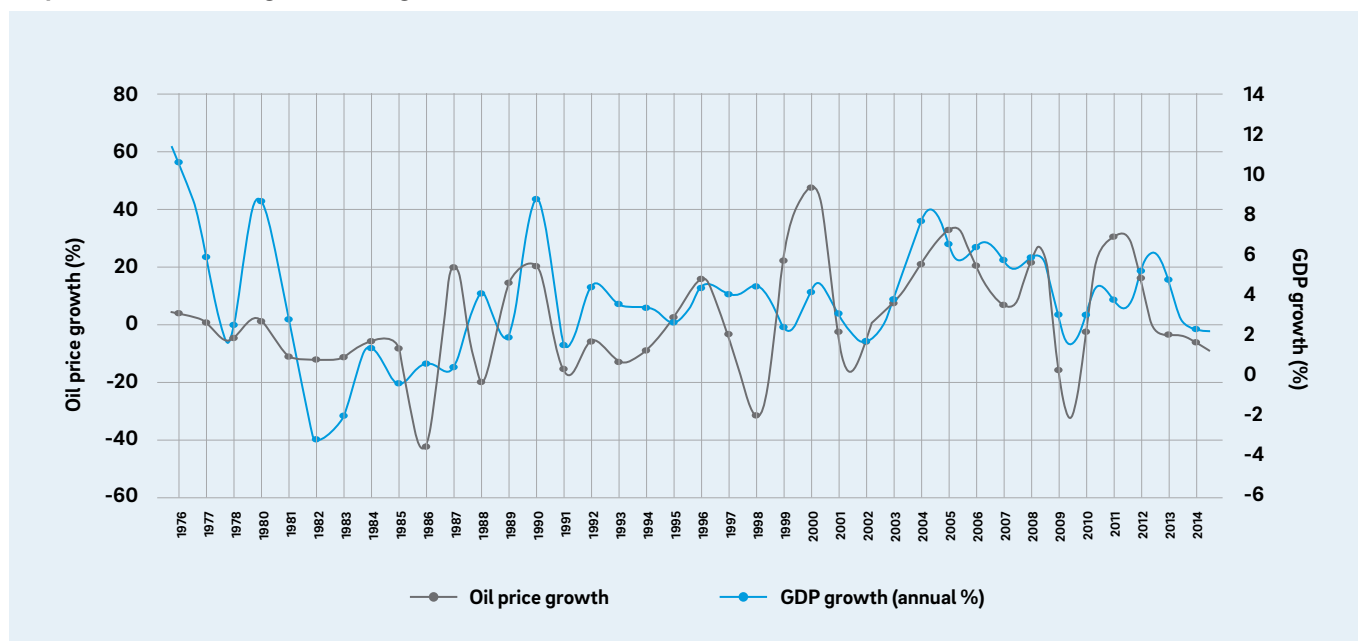
Many young people with high educational qualifications must wait for long periods that may exceed 1.5 years to find jobs

in the public sector.¹⁰ They usually end up accepting unstable jobs in the private sector that offer low wages and poor working conditions. They are driven to this solution by regulations on the minimum wage and social protection that create wide gaps in pay and benefits between jobs in the public sector and jobs in the private sector.¹¹ There seems to be no prospect of improvement in the ability of governments to create sufficient suitable jobs, particularly because of the decline in oil prices and the negative effects of the decline on economic growth throughout the region, not merely in oil-producing countries (figure 6).

Providing good job opportunities is thus one of the biggest challenges in the region, in which high youth unemployment is considered a characteristic feature.¹² This stops young people from getting married,

Figure 6

Oil price trends and regional GDP growth intertwined



Sources: BP 2015; World Bank 2015.

finding independent accommodation and starting families, inevitably weakening their ability to become productive members of society. There is no doubt that the inability to find suitable jobs was a major fuel of the instability afflicting the region over the last few years, as well as a fundamental reason for the growing phenomenon of immigration among young people in search of better conditions. During the first decade of the 2000s, the region saw one of the highest average rates of skilled labour immigration in the world. This helps perpetuate the exclusion of youth and could lead to a vicious circle of a shrinking job market and the flight of skilled labour.

3.2. Weak political participation

There may be no major legal obstacles that prevent young people as an age-group from participating in the political life of the countries in the region. For example, most laws on elections and political parties and

associations do not differ in most respects from international standards. Nonetheless, the level of political participation by youth is one of the lowest in the world (figure 7).¹³ Likewise, civic engagement among young people in the region is the lowest in the world, with a median of only 9 percent of youth across Arab countries volunteering with a civic organization in a given month, compared with 14 percent in the next lowest region, sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁴

The report attributes the low political participation of youth to the nature of political life in Arab countries, which is generally exclusionary. However, it also reveals that the interest of young people in political participation is rising. In the countries undergoing political transition, youth show more interest in politics relative to older age-groups. However, the interest rarely translates into active participation except among more well educated young people. Yet, even the latter generally limit their participation to demonstrations.¹⁵ The

Box 5

The quality of education in the Arab countries

Despite the progress achieved in boosting enrollment rates in education and the substantial progress in bridging the gender gap, the Arab countries are still uncompetitive in the quality of education and in education outcomes. The research literature continues to highlight the weak productivity of education and training systems in the region. This is apparent in the poor performance of students on international assessments of scientific, mathematical

and reading skills and in their limited creative abilities and limited advanced knowledge skills.^a This is cause for concern in view of the requirements of the knowledge society and the knowledge economy because it is evidence that the countries of the region are ill prepared to achieve knowledge security and contribute effectively to building global knowledge.

Source: UNDP and MBRF 2014.

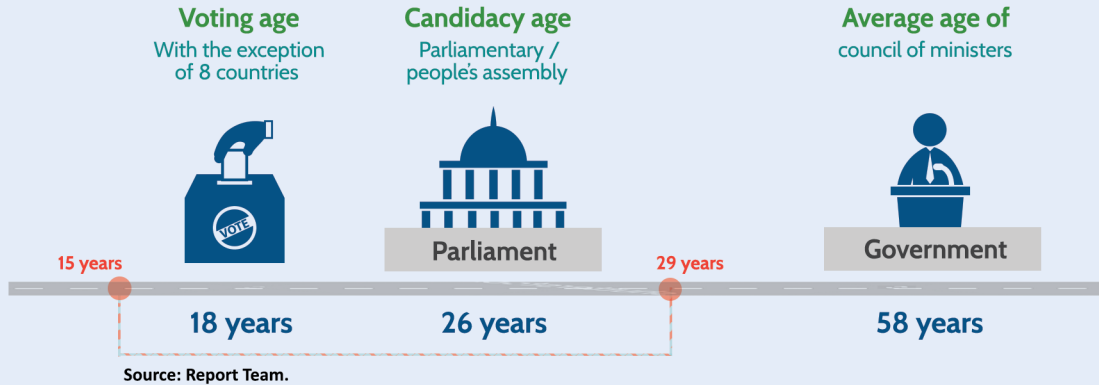
a. The international assessments of scientific, mathematical and reading skills are the Programme for International Student Assessment, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study. The limited creative abilities and limited advanced knowledge skills of students in the region are shown by the surveys of the second and third *Arab Knowledge Reports*.

Figure 7

Youth political participation in the Arab region: voices outside the ballot-box

Informal channels of engagement

Political participation among youth is limited to informal channels of engagement, despite the lack of significant legal or institutional barriers to formal youth participation



In **2013**, Youth participation in public protests in the Arab region exceeded **18%**

Compared with **10.8%** in middle income countries

Whereas youth voting rates were the lowest globally; **68.3%**

Source: Report team calculations based on WVS 2014.



Compared with **87.4%** in middle income countries

report also points to the lack of confidence of young people in the democratic process. This limits their participation in elections, compared with other social groups, thus deepening their deprivation, a major challenge to human development in the Arab region.

During the events of 2011 and the aftermath, young people, especially young women, used the opportunity of the protests to raise their voices to demand gender equality on the grounds that it is an indivisible part of social justice. Although some Arab countries have achieved positive results in reducing gender inequality in political life, the participation of women in decision-making is still restricted: only a small number of women are active in political institutions. Globally, women comprise 22.5 percent of members of parliament.¹⁶ Six Arab countries

exceeded that global average in 2015, but the regional average remained the lowest in the world, at 18.7 percent.¹⁷

3.3. Poor-quality health care and education services

National efforts have succeeded in raising completion rates in basic education, particularly in Arab countries with significant revenues. Moreover, widening access has increased the opportunities among young women to receive an education. However, education coverage shrinks during conflicts and in poor societies, particularly in higher education. In health care, most countries have seen a large improvement; average life expectancy at birth has generally risen, and under-5 mortality rates have typically fallen.

Box 6

The effect of war and conflict on young women

The wars and armed conflicts occurring in several Arab countries especially threaten young women and girls. Women are more frequent victims of atrocities and trauma, including forced marriage and violence, particularly rape. Some families marry girls off at a young age, usually with reluctance, to guarantee the protection of the girls. However, wives of a young age are more vulnerable to domestic violence, health problems and obstacles that prevent them from resuming their studies.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund, gender-based violence is common in situations of conflict to an alarming extent. Conflict also tends to promote the marginalization of women in public life, strengthening patriarchal society and increasing the dependency of young women on family members for protection. This threatens the freedom of women in many respects and

especially affects women who are the sole heads of households. If young women are able to escape conflict, they have not necessarily found safety. They experience greater danger than men if they seek refuge because of a lack of security, including at refugee camps, where unaccompanied young women are more subject than others to gender-based violence. Ethnic minority women also face particular dangers.

The UN Security Council has adopted seven international resolutions on women, peace and security, including Resolution 1325, which provides an important framework regarding what needs to be done to help young women before, during and after conflict and war. (See United Nations Peacekeeping, Women, peace and security: <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/issues/women/wps.shtml>)

Relative to expanding access and coverage, enhancing the quality of public services is a bigger challenge. This is so particularly in education because of the growing disillusionment among young people with the value of higher education in the labour market and the glut of unemployed graduates (box 5). The low level of educational outcomes in the region is closely linked to difficulties in entering the job market efficiently, earning a livelihood, gaining access to credit and succeeding at entrepreneurship.

3.4. Mismanagement of social diversity

Polarization over issues of identity is diverting attention away from the economic, political and social challenges that the Arab region faces. Moreover, the problem is generally poorly framed. It does not revolve around the issue of religious, ethnic, or cultural identity. Rather, the problem resides in the socio-political management of diversity through laws and institutions and especially through the implementation of legal texts. The failure to guarantee equality among all citizens has rendered several groups of citizens and inhabitants of Arab countries vulnerable to discrimination.

Arab Human Development Report 2009 demonstrates that the dominant focus in the region is the traditional concept of security, which is restricted to the security of the state and is less concerned with the security of the people and of society. This has delayed the region's embrace of diversity and limited the integration of various demographic

groups into a unified national project. If the state fails to lay the foundations of good governance and representative institutions that guarantee participation by all and respect for diversity, minorities can become vulnerable to discrimination by the institutions themselves in addition to the injustice they suffer from other groups in the population, seriously undermining the concept of citizenship.

3.5. The prevalence of concepts and practices that hinder gender equality

Although prevalent religious and political conventions in the Arab region include guarantees of gender equality, the region is still generally considered backward relative to any other place in the world. This is because the culture, the society and the laws do not entirely embrace the concept of equality, although some countries have undertaken efforts to change the gender environment and have achieved some progress in the empowerment of women.

Women suffer from gender inequality in most Arab countries, and they pay a double price in disempowerment if they are also young. Before marriage, social expectations determine the choices available to women to a large extent, particularly the choices that pertain to the economic conditions and resources to which they may gain access. Rights of marriage and divorce are unequal among men and women, and women remain considerably more vulnerable to domestic and institutional violence. Insufficient government efforts to provide effective protection for women against violence, rape and murder within

the context of the so called honor crimes places an additional and significant burden on young women seeking to establish their lives as independent adults.

The expanding opportunities available to women to acquire suitable education over the past few decades have not been accompanied by equally significant change in the labour market. When young women complete their education, they find that they are forced to exert more effort than young men to find satisfactory and suitably paid employment. Likewise, discrimination in the workplace against women by employers is common.

The growing influence of intolerant social and political forces that espouse ideologies informed by gender discrimination and their tendency to build alliances with one another will inevitably set back the empowerment of young women. These forces may succeed in neutralizing and even reversing the small gains achieved in gender relations over the past few decades. The same applies to the conflicts currently occurring in several parts of the Arab region, which constitute a new constraint on the independence, self-sufficiency and development of women, particularly young women, who suffer

higher rates of gender-based violence than others in such situations (box 6).

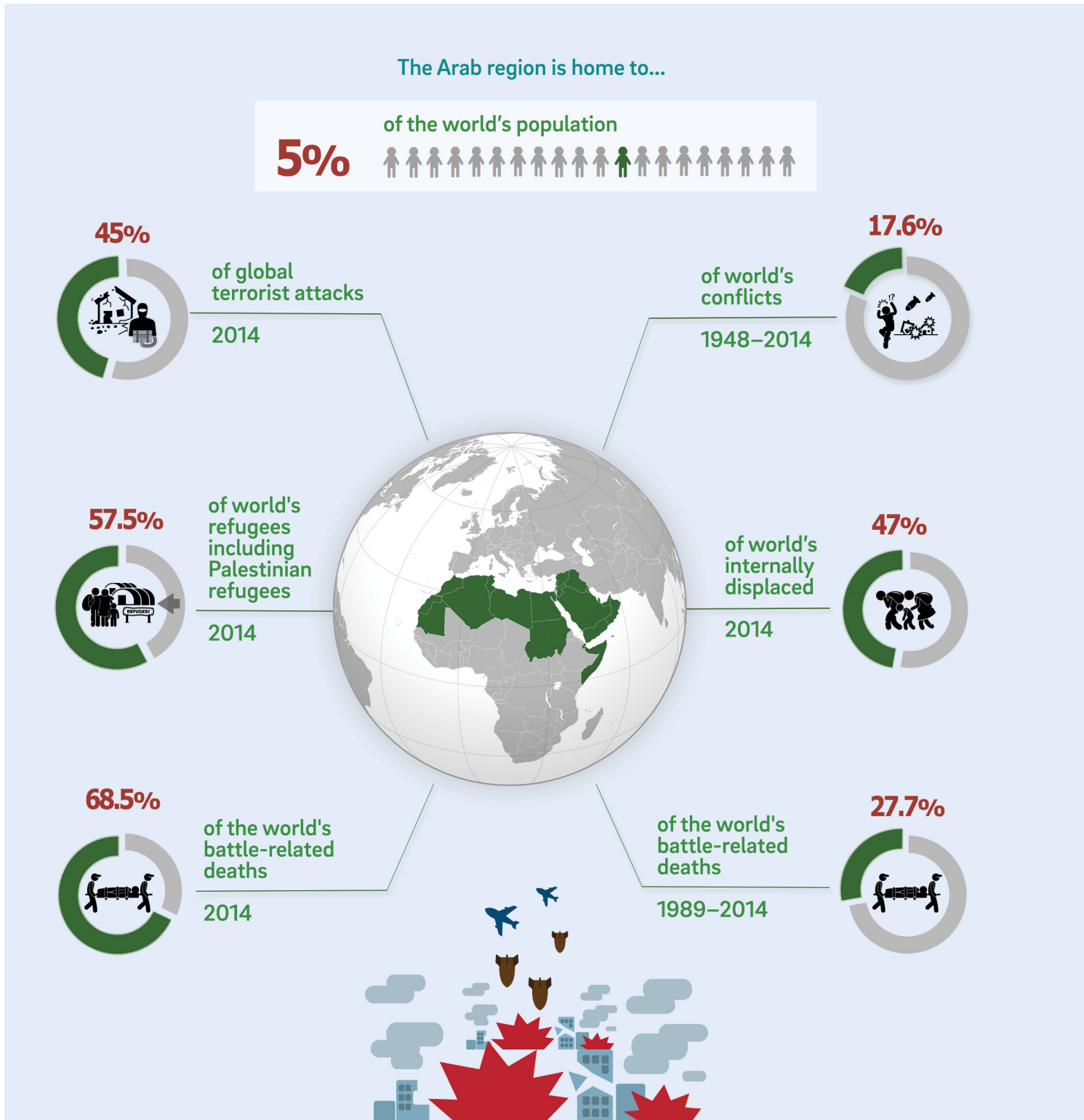
3.6. Prolonged conflicts that undermine the gains of development

War and conflict are destroying the social fabric in the Arab region, resulting in great loss of life not only among the combatants, but also and increasingly among civilians, including children. The largest number of deaths occur away from the battlefields. For every person directly killed through armed violence, between three and fifteen others are indirectly killed by medical complications, malnutrition and treatable diseases.¹⁸

Moreover, unlike economic development, war and conflict destroy productive resources, capital and labour. Thus, more than 13 million children, equivalent to around 40 percent of all school-age children in the region, are being deprived of a school education because of conflict.¹⁹ Current estimates indicate that the number of inhabitants living in countries vulnerable to conflict in the Arab region is expected to rise from around 250 million in 2010 to over 350 million in 2020. That number is expected to double by 2050 (figure 8).

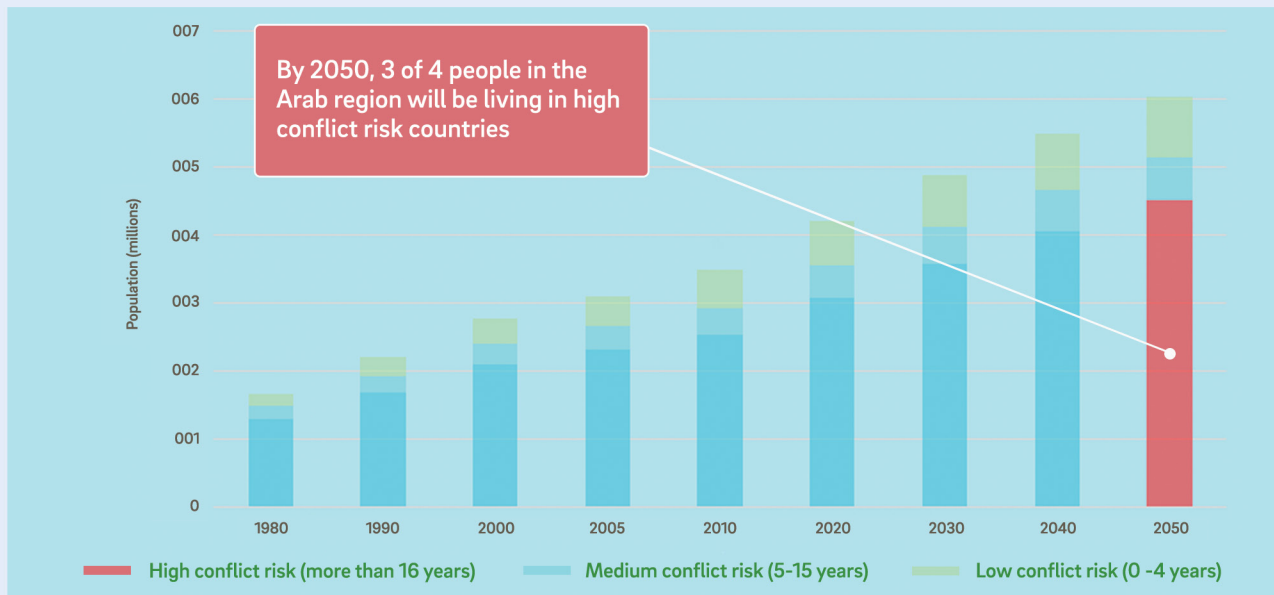
Figure 8

The costs of conflict in the Arab region



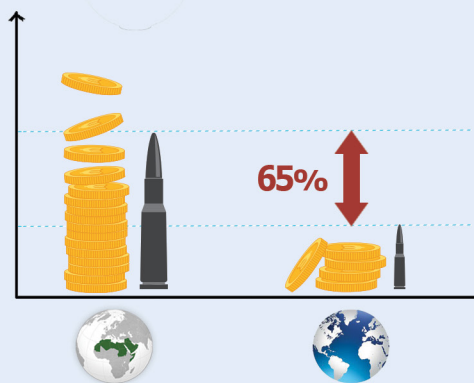
Source: Report team calculations based on START 2015, SIPRI 2015, UCDP/PRIO 2015, UCDP 2015, UN DESA 2013, UNRWA 2015, and UNHCR 2015.

If the past is any indication of the future: A majority of the Arab region's population lives in countries most at risk of conflict



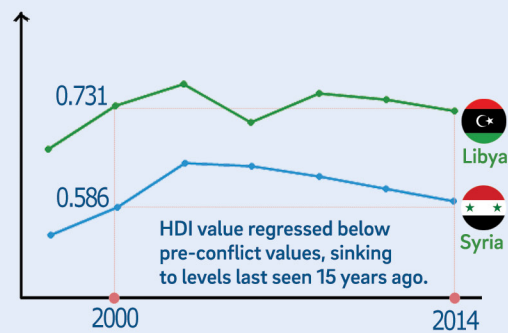
Source: Report Team calculations based on UN DESA 2013 and UCDP/PRIO 2014.

Military expenditure per capita of Arab countries between 1988–2014 higher than the global average by 65%



Source: SIPRI 2015.

Conflicts undermine human development gains



Source: UNDP 2015.

4. RELIGION, IDENTITY AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Human Development Report 2004: Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World stresses the “profound importance of religion to people’s identities”.²⁰ This is especially true of the Arab region, the cradle of the three major monotheistic religions, where religion is an indivisible part of political history, particularly Islam, which *Arab Human Development Report 2005* considers “a crucial element in the cultural and spiritual make-up of the Arab people.”²¹

Religion in the region is the basic source of values, contributing to the formation of society’s features and playing a major role in the lives of people, particularly youth (table 1). Religion is the pivot of the multifaceted identity of the overwhelming majority of youth. It helps shape their intellectual habits, ethical principles and attitudes towards others. However, the role of religion in political life and its influence on shaping the system of governance remains a controversial problem both in the region and the world. It is therefore necessary to highlight the role of religion in its various contexts and in the light of the particular conditions in Arab countries.

Religion is a strong factor in fuelling the current political conflicts in the Arab countries. To varying degrees that range from moderation to extremism, religious arguments are frequently used to garner support, gain advantages and attack adversaries. Religion is a reference point

among groups that seek to block change and renewal. It exerts an influential pull not only on the religiously committed, but also on social groups that object to the current state of affairs, including youth. Moreover, as the role of the state diminishes or collapses in some countries, more people have come to depend heavily for protection and services on networks managed by religious groups, thus becoming more vulnerable to ideologies that, by virtue of their intellectual structure, may erect barriers among people, encouraging intolerance and patterns of exclusion at all levels. This directly or indirectly weakens social cohesion, creating an opportunity to put religion at the service of politics, particularly in the absence of legal or social guarantees for pluralism and freedom of opinion and belief.

Over the past three decades, several groups have emerged that have adopted sharply exclusionist positions against whomever they consider as the other, by which they mean anyone who disagrees with them, basing their positions on extremist religious interpretations and drawing large numbers of young people into their ranks. This phenomenon has become more extensive since 2011 because of the opportunity created by the power vacuum in certain countries, allowing these groups to proliferate and become more extremist, heavily armed and violent. By 2014, organized groups had emerged that do

Table 1**Religion is an important part of your daily life (% of respondents saying 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.

not recognize borders and use the ugliest forms of violence, while exploiting religious texts and the weakness of governments to promote an extremist political agenda that seeks through the media, including Internet-based social media, to address marginalized groups already in protest against the current situation, especially young people.

The ability of such groups to attract young people by providing them with material incentives, feelings of empowerment, media

prominence and a social role is not difficult to understand. Disgruntled individuals are less prone to resorting to peaceful, patient social action to change their environment. They may prefer more direct, more violent means, especially if they are convinced that existing mechanisms for participation and accountability are useless.

Young people who join such movements and support them come from different social and economic strata, but most of them have presumably experienced the

Box 7

The views of youth in the Arab region on violent extremism

Surveys in Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia show that the majority of young people support the separation of religion and politics to varying degrees, regard the Islamic State as a murderous terrorist group and believe that unemployment, a lack of awareness and financial incentives may prompt some young people to join extremist groups.^a In Jordan, a survey among over 25,000 university students showed that 94 percent do not consider that extremist groups and organizations represent their

views.^b The situation is similar in Tunisia, where studies by the National Youth Observatory confirm that a majority of youth reject violence.^c A field study conducted by the Doha Institute shows that youth in Arab countries clearly distinguish between religion as a system of values and religion as an ideology that encourages confrontation with the other. It also shows that the vast majority of young people reject the violence that is perpetrated in the name of religion and consider extremist groups as terrorist.^d

Source: Report Team

a. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung; Sigma Conseil and the Arab Observatory of Religions and Freedoms 2016.

b. JCSS 2016.

c. National Youth Observatory, Tunisia 2015.

d. Doha Institute 2015.

failure of the development model in the region and espouse violence in the belief that they lack better options or perhaps in response to hardships or injustices they or those close to them have suffered, such as poverty, exclusion, or repression, or even out of a desire to belong to a group that responds to their needs and ambitions.

Indicators confirm that the overwhelming majority of young people in the Arab region do not tend to adopt extremist or violent views or to participate in extremist groups or activities (box 7). However, this should not lead us to complacency, because young people remain vulnerable to victimization by groups that misuse religion to benefit from its pivotal role in shaping identities. This calls for development approaches that involve youth in the formulation and implementation of initiatives because such participation has been shown to be an effective deterrent force against the political

exploitation of religion. The alternative, excluding youth, may promote more violent extremism.

The pathways along which those who are resentful reach extremism and support for organized violence are numerous. This means there is an urgent need for research on the reasons for this resentment to help avert violent extremism, which hugely damages society and, it is feared, may escalate, given the absence of space for peaceful change in the region. Because of the diminishing economic opportunities, the lack of genuine political competition, the weakness of parliaments and representative councils, defective regulatory and judicial bodies and the shortage of sufficient space for monitoring by free and responsible media and an independent, transparent civil society, appeals to violent extremism could become more widespread and more effective at attracting youth and other sectors of society.

5. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT GAINS IN THE ARAB REGION UNDER FIRE

Relative to other regions of the world, the Arab region has witnessed an escalation in war and armed conflict during the past decade, but especially in the last five years. The number of Arab countries affected by conflict increased from five in 2002 to eleven in 2016 (box 8). These conflicts have caused many deaths and permanent injuries and boosted the displacement of populations within and across countries within the region and farther afield. They have also caused massive damage to basic infrastructure and interrupted an already deficient development process. The horrific losses caused by the escalating destruction, violence, and the collapse of social systems have affected all age-groups, including young people, who are trying to gain an education, find jobs and start families and who are seeking security and a better future.

War, armed conflict and the destruction they cause result in waves of forced collective migration. Since 2011, massive demographic transformations have been occurring in the Arab region, and the high number of people fleeing has led to a profound collapse in human development outcomes. The Syrian crisis has so far produced the largest wave of population displacements in the region since the displacement of Palestinians in 1948. This continues a pattern of demographic transformation that has been affecting the regions since the mid-20th Century. The

region is now home to 47 percent of all internally displaced persons globally and 58 percent of the refugees in the world.

These tragic events should in no way obscure the ongoing suffering and deprivation of the Palestinians. The cause of the Palestinians remains the largest and most serious existential threat in the region as long as the Israeli occupation persists and as long as the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 and other international efforts to resolve the crisis stagnate.

Israel's occupation of Palestine is the longest occupation in the modern era and the longest period during which a people has been deprived of the right to self-determination. Nonetheless, the Palestinian people have been able to establish and maintain a sense of national identity despite all the difficulties that continue to rob them of the freedom to live in dignity. Seven decades of occupation have created a deep collective sense of insecurity, a lack of opportunity and political frustration that do not merely affect the Palestinians, but the rest of the peoples of the region, where the Palestinian issue remains central. According to the 2015 Arab opinion index of the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, 75 percent of respondents believe that the Palestinian cause is not only a Palestinian issue, but an Arab one as well, and 85 percent oppose diplomatic recognition of Israel by their countries.

Box 8

The effects of war and armed conflict on Arab countries

Quantifying the effect of war and armed conflict on the Arab countries is difficult. It includes the number of casualties and missing persons, the deterioration in living standards, the destruction of possessions and infrastructure and the amount of human suffering in all its forms. However, there is no doubt that the price has been high and that it is being paid by people, particularly the poor.

In Syria, one of the ugliest conflicts in the modern history of the region continues. It has caused the deaths of over 250,000 people to date and over 1 million injured. It has led 4.8 million people to become refugees and another 7.6 million people to become internally displaced. This is a total of 12.4 million people, more than half the population of Syria.^a

In Libya, fierce fighting continues in several areas, disrupting efforts to reach a settlement and claiming over 1 million dead and wounded.^b In Iraq, killing and destruction continue, inflicting a heavy material toll. The number of Iraqi refugees, both internal and external, exceeds 5 million, while the number of people requiring humanitarian aid has reached 10 million.^c In Yemen, the escalation of hostilities has taken the country to the brink of total collapse and created one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world. United Nations estimates at the end of 2015 indicated that

around 22.2 million people—82 percent of the population of Yemen—are in need of humanitarian aid.^d The number of refugees and internally displaced persons has reached 2.7 million, equivalent to over 10 percent of the population. Two million persons have escaped to Somalia, which is itself suffering from an internal displacement crisis affecting a 10th of the population.

The suffering resulting from forced eviction and flight primarily affects refugees and displaced persons, but also affects the host countries and regions. One person in every five in Lebanon is a refugee, and one person in every three in Syria is a refugee or displaced person. This creates a heavy economic and social burden that risks creating new crises unless it is managed carefully.

The sharp decline in the human development index in Libya and Syria highlights the high cost of war and armed conflict from another perspective. The index has registered a speedy collapse to the lowest levels seen in both countries in 15 years.^e The same applies to the cost of terrorism in Iraq, estimated at \$159 billion (in purchasing power parity US dollars) since 2005, representing 32 percent of the country's GDP in 2014. In Syria, war reduced GDP by 31 percent in 2012 and by around 38 percent by the end of 2013.

Source: Report Team

a. UNOCHA 2016a.

b. UN News Centre 2015a.

c. UN News Centre 2015b.

d. UNOCHA 2016b.

e. UNDP 2015.

In such a tense regional climate, some Arab countries are boosting their military spending to confront direct security threats. They are also still influenced by the legacy of cold war competition, and some of

them are anxious because of complex political conflicts with neighbours. Among the countries in the region are the most important military spenders in the world. The Arab region, which is inhabited by

5 percent of the world's population and witnessed around 18 percent of all global conflicts between 1948 and 2014, has become the arena of 25 percent of global conflicts since 2010 (figure 8).²² This has been accompanied by a rise in military spending since 2009 of around 21 percent.²³ The Arab region's military spending between 1988 and 2014 amounted to around \$2 trillion, representing a per capita increase by a factor of 2.5 over the 25-year period.²⁴

Because of the way in which military spending is managed, it is more vulnerable than other forms of spending to corruption, waste and, hence, to squandering society's resources that could have been invested in development. This is confirmed by Transparency International's government defence anti-corruption index.²⁵ Thus, despite its importance, there is no doubt that substantial military spending has a negative effect on investment in education, health care, infrastructure and the productive sectors and that this aggravates any threat to security.

6. TOWARDS A NEW DEVELOPMENT MODEL FIT FOR YOUTH IN THE ARAB REGION

This report concludes that young men and women in the Arab region struggle to achieve full economic, political and social integration in their societies, and are less satisfied with the prevailing situation in their countries than youth in other parts of the world. They are also less able than youth in other parts of the world to exercise any influence over their future. They are fully aware that the choices available to them are limited and often futile, and they reject these false choices. They feel insufficiently empowered to shoulder the responsibility to develop these choices.

The exclusion of youth is common throughout the Arab region. This is apparent in several areas. The exclusion is particularly acute among young women, youth in countries experiencing conflict and young people who are internally displaced or refugees in other countries after escaping violence and the lack of security. Youth empowerment is almost an existential issue in the region because youth inclusiveness is necessary to allow young people to manage their own struggle for survival. It is necessary because youth must map out the future for coming generations.

Based on this conviction, the report proposes the formulation of a new development model that is suitable for young people; tackles the challenges they face; helps empower them by strengthening their basic capabilities,

particularly in education and health care; and provides them with opportunities to fulfill themselves, particularly in the economic and social spheres (figure 9).

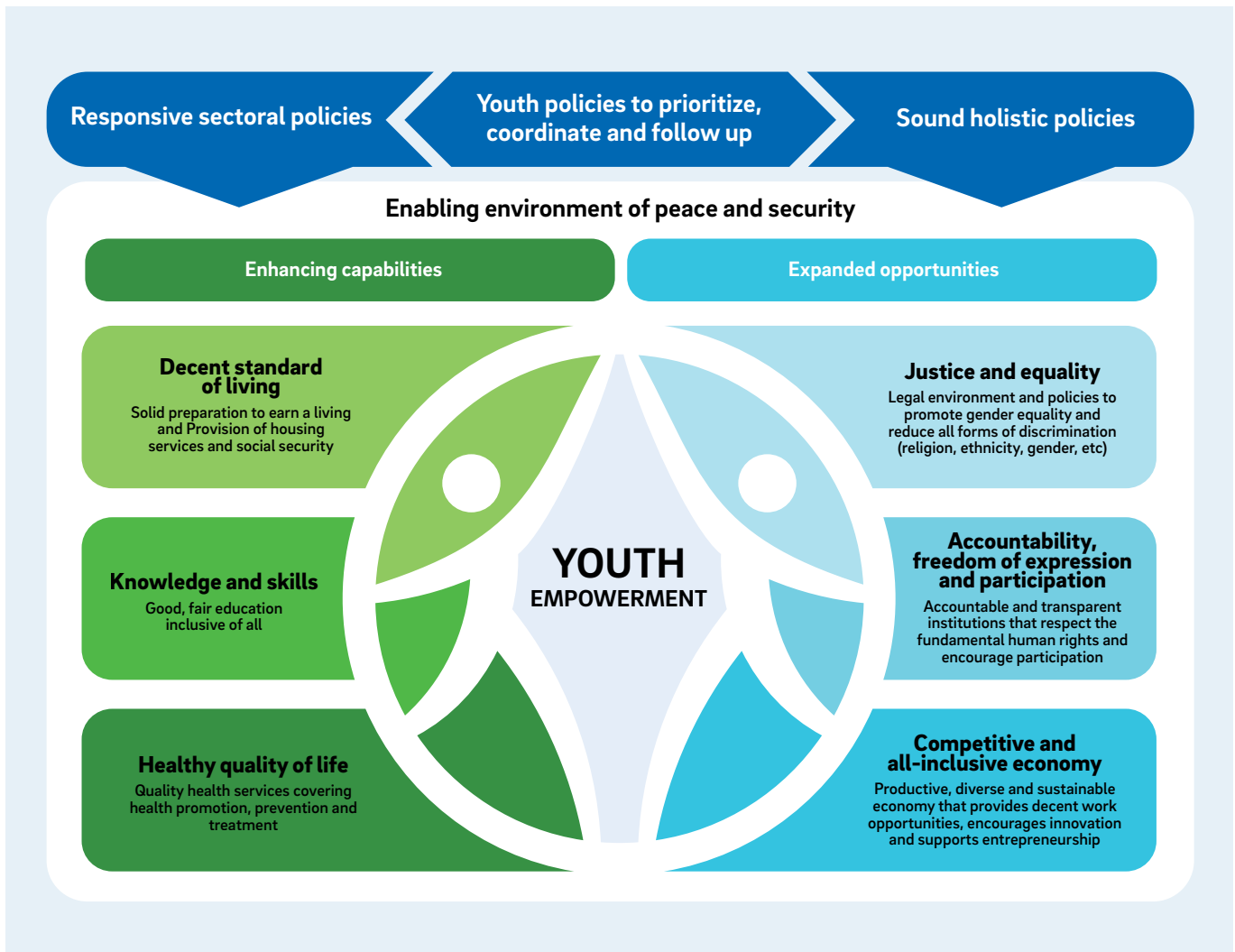
This will allow the Arab countries to derive greater benefits from the demographic transformation they are undergoing. The call to empower youth is thus not merely a demand to improve the situation of youth today. It is also a call to rebuild societies in the region in a manner that guarantees a better future for all. Such a call cannot be answered without changing prevailing attitudes about youth and identifying appropriate ways to empower youth as reliable partners in the reconstruction process.

The regional consultations and the results of the surveys that have been associated with the preparation of the report affirm the need to pay close attention to three major strategic dimensions in considering the formulation of the development model recommended by this report, as follows:

First, undertake to enhance the basic capabilities of young people to allow them to realize their full potential. Focus on the quality of the education and health care services necessary to achieve this, in addition to other services, such as housing and support for the unemployed, which contribute to ensuring a dignified life within society and a decent standard of living.

Figure 9

Suggested features of a new development model focused on youth



Source: Report Team

Second, undertake to widen the opportunities available to young people for self-fulfillment by providing suitable job opportunities, respecting their political and social rights and freedoms, enabling them to participate actively in government and public institutions and holding these accountable, and tackling all forms of discrimination based on identity or gender. Third, undertake to achieve peace and

security and to strengthen the role of youth to guarantee the feasibility and sustainability of the first two strategic objectives. Without peace and stability, it is not possible to enhance the capabilities of youth, widen their opportunities or effectively guarantee the sustainability and cumulative effects of such efforts so that young people will no longer face the risk of repeated, fundamental setbacks.

Box 9

Link between economic integration and human development in the Arab region

A widening of Arab economic integration beyond the establishment of free trade and the creation of a customs union would have a positive impact on GDP growth, inter-Arab trade, productive capacity and the levels of unemployment and poverty, according to a report published by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

In 2014, inter-Arab exports accounted for 9.9 percent of overall Arab exports, and inter-Arab imports accounted for 13.7 percent.^a A 5 percent annual reduction in transport costs in 2013–2020 would boost inter-Arab trade by around 23 percent by the end of the period. Such a boost would increase GDP across the region by 0.5 percent, which would exceed the possible negative effects of establishing

a larger Arab free trade zone.

The United Nations Economic Commission presents a scenario for the gradual reduction in the transport costs of trade in the Arab region and for the eventual substitution of a large share of the workforce coming from outside the Arab region with an indigenous workforce. Adding these two steps to a new customs union would boost GDP growth by an additional 3.1 percent in 2021. It would also reduce unemployment by over 4 percent through the creation of 6 million new jobs, thus contributing to greater prosperity in all Arab countries. The resulting cumulative growth would be equivalent to \$760 billion in additional revenues, which would exceed the collective production of North African Arab countries in 2013.

Source: UN-ESCWA 2014.

a. AMF 2015.

6.1. Enhancement of capabilities so that youth may realize their potential

Good-quality basic services, particularly in education and health care, are necessary for strengthening the ability of adults to contribute positively to the economy and participate actively in society. Investment in these two areas at an early stage of human life thus has a decisive influence on human development.

One of the most important elements in the formula for the enhancement of youth capabilities is education, which is closely linked to a large group of development outputs. Education maximises the opportunities for entering the job market, earning a higher income, achieving a more comprehensive level of political participation, supporting women's

participation and supporting gender equality. Hence, education should be at the heart of the policy issues with which governments in Arab countries rather than merely one or two ministries—are concerned. This is also true of Arab societies, including civil society and the business community, especially at the local level. Cooperation has a role to play in education, particularly among institutions of higher learning.²⁶ The widening knowledge gap cannot be filled without acting speedily, redoubling efforts and mobilizing the material and human resources needed to improve the quality of education in line with the principles of fairness and social justice.

This includes marshalling new technologies to create learning opportunities that challenge the conventional role of schools and universities, enriching Arabic content on

the Internet and making this content more accessible to sectors of the population that have hitherto been deprived.

The enhancement of young people's capabilities in Arab countries also requires comprehensive initiatives to tackle the social and structural limitations in health care. This is key to good long-term health outcomes. The initiatives ought also to cover the mental health of youth, especially in societies characterized by acute conflict, which is associated with stress and trauma. The mental health of young people is not now receiving sufficient attention.

Strengthening the health of youth will improve human development outcomes, encourage economic growth and productivity and help reduce the costs of health care systems. However, ensuring equitable and excellent health care for youth by means of comprehensive health care coverage and suitable health care services is only half the battle.²⁷ Awareness on the part of young people and their effective participation in preserving their own health is the other half.

6.2. Expanding opportunities for the self-fulfillment of youth

The availability of a wide range of political and economic choices among young people is one of the most important features of adequate human development in any society (box 9). Moreover, it is indispensable to guaranteeing the rights of youth and achieving social stability. It requires that governments provide a suitable climate that helps create jobs fit for young people. Governments should also

recognize the right of youth to express their opinions as part of the decision-making process and to participate fully in political processes, including holding decision makers accountable.

Public policies should be adopted that encourage comprehensive and productive economic growth based on providing job opportunities. The focus ought to be on economic sectors that most benefit the poor. Together with the private sector, governments should invest in infrastructure and provide relevant jobs for young people who are involved in public service programmes or work-intensive, time-limited public works programmes during periods of economic and political crisis. Another top priority is to facilitate the transition of youth from school to work by offering guidance and job counselling.

Some universities in the region have initiated such services. Relevant strategies might be linked to aptitude tests to help young people identify career choices that are appropriate to their skills and interests. Adequate information to help young people choose suitable careers should be made accessible, particularly in sectors that are expected to expand and create job opportunities.

Excluding youth from political participation endangers society and threatens confidence building in the relationship between governments and citizens. Early political participation contributes positively to improving societies and the lives of individuals. Enhancing political participation in the Arab region will encourage young people to become actively involved in society and positively

Box 10

Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities

The Marrakesh Declaration is a praiseworthy effort that stresses the importance of equal citizenship rights and of combating discrimination and the resort to violence and arms to settle disputes and impose opinions and choices. It calls on “Muslim scholars and intellectuals around the world to develop a jurisprudence of the concept of ‘citizenship’ which is inclusive of diverse groups.” This reiterates the calls made by *Arab Human Development*

Report 2009 to base the concept of citizenship on equality and inclusiveness, because “human beings are born into different circumstances, with varied access to options to expand their capabilities, but all are entitled to the same basic rights. The right of citizenship should be identical for all persons living in a given country, regardless of ethnic origin, religious belief, gender, health, culture, wealth or any other personal attribute.”^a

Source: <http://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org/>.

a. UNDP 2009, p. 194.

contribute to shaping the decisions that affect them. This will also strengthen their sense of belonging, which is a highly important element in the establishment of cohesive societies.

Rather than disrupting the new channels that young people use to build awareness and express opinions, these channels must be reinforced and exploited to listen to the voices of youth. During the 1990s, the region was deprived of information in a climate in which the state dominated the media. However, since the middle of the first decade of the 2000s, regional television stations and broadcast channels have proliferated, along with websites and blogs, and the use of social media has soared.²⁶

This wider horizon for communication has allowed young people to form their opinions and express their views in relative freedom, thereby giving them the ability to oppose the established political authorities and transform themselves from socially marginalized individuals with no influence on public opinion into active, effective

individuals capable of understanding and expressing themselves.²⁹

Efforts to empower youth politically and economically should not bypass two types of social discrimination: discrimination on the basis of identity and discrimination on the basis of gender. Tackling gender inequality and empowering women in the Arab region continue to be a central objective, because “human development, if not engendered, is endangered”, according to *Human Development Report 1995*.³⁰

Sufficient attention must be devoted to establishing inclusive societies based on the full rights and responsibilities of equal citizenship, including multiple ethnicities and cultures, so that the complexities of minority rights can be recognized and accounted for (box 10).³¹ Given the current situation in the Arab region, the success of any programmes or public policies to empower youth must involve strengthening the concept of inclusive citizenship for all. Such an objective is difficult to attain even in mature democracies.

6.3. Enhancing the role of youth in achieving peace and security

The existence of peace and security would provide a climate conducive to righting the process of Arab human development after the events of 2011 exposed the failures.

However, the outcomes and ramifications of those events also damaged a large share of the development gains that had been achieved previously. Realizing peace and security is contingent on resolving recent and long-standing conflicts across the region, foremost of which is the Palestinian problem.³² Effort should be invested in developing effective regional mechanisms to tackle conflict and support peace. Regional cooperation is the only practical means for establishing peace and security based on the will of the people and without resorting to external intervention. Regional cooperation is the most appropriate framework for governments to work collectively to improve the quality of the lives of citizens. This will also involve tackling the causes (rather than the symptoms) of conflict by means of new instruments for enhancing the prospects of peaceful change based on a discourse in which the culture of dialogue and the concept of citizenship are central.

Young people can be highly important and active elements in the achievement of peace and security if vigorous, methodical and realistic youth participation is supported. This is a demographic and a political imperative. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 of 2015 on the participation of youth in the process of peaceful conflict resolution and the

achievement of security provides a strong basis for such an effort.

Local school curricula on peace could be developed with the aim of promoting the values of peaceful coexistence, tolerance and acceptance of the other. This would help young people protect themselves from the plots of violent extremist groups that misuse religion to justify exclusivist and destructive behaviour.

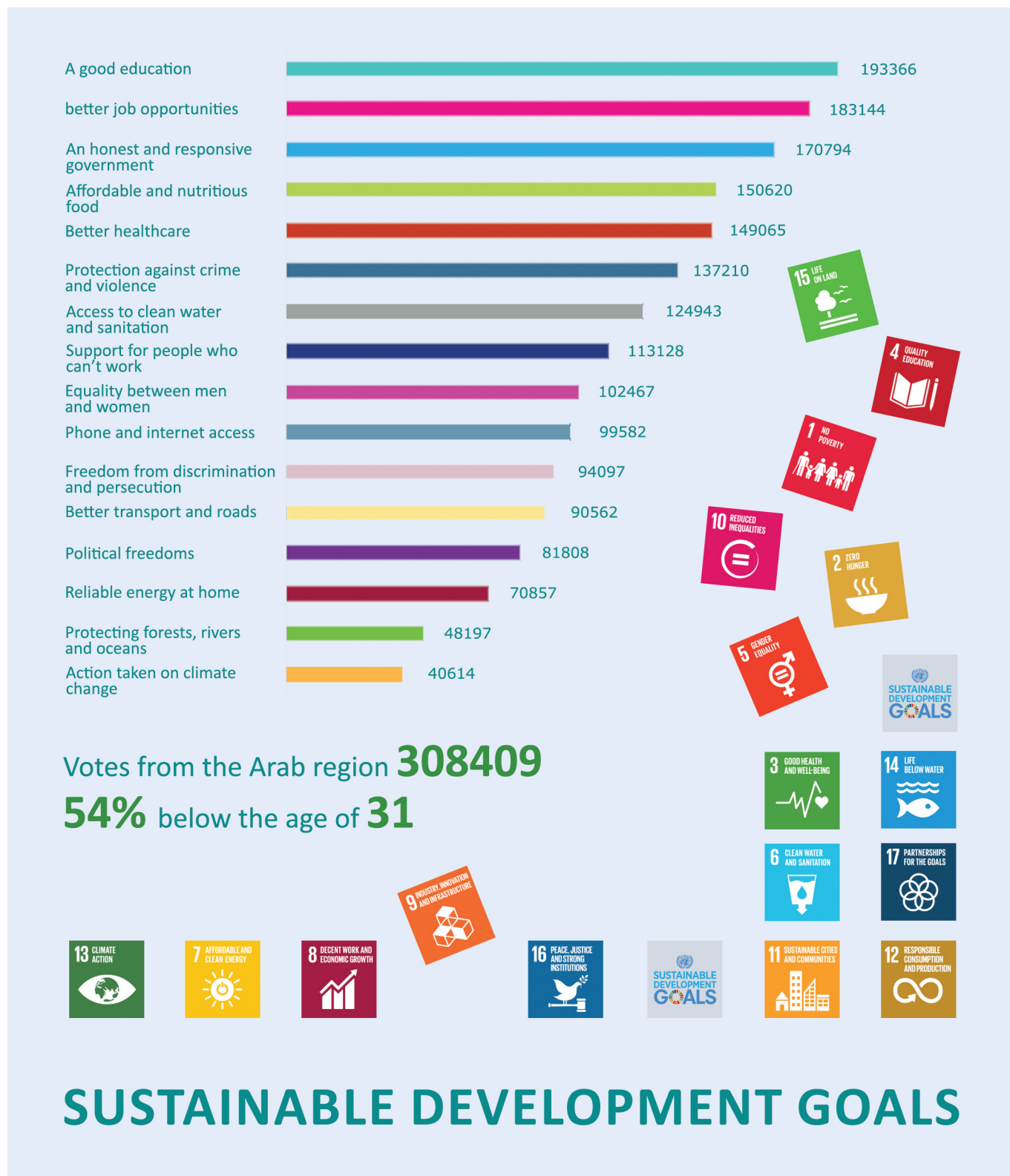
In countries that are experiencing growing social polarization over issues relating to class discrimination, young people who are active locally could help build a consensus and increase the spirit of solidarity within communities. Integrating young people into local political processes is key to limiting violent extremism.

Although the report warns that ignoring the voices and capabilities of youth will lead to yet more instability and intensify the risks of social fragmentation and the disintegration of the state, it also affirms that youth are not part of the problem, but are, rather, a key to the solution. Indeed, youth may be the only key because young people own the future and can put forward fresh thinking, of which the region is so badly in need.

Given the current state of uncertainty throughout the region, it is easy to lose sight of the long-term perspective. As one crisis follows another, the attention of decision makers usually shifts to emergency issues at the expense of strategic issues. It is therefore necessary to engage in a reevaluation of the initial conditions and examine them comprehensively, searching for basic causes of the escalation of

Figure 10

Perspectives of youth in the Arab region: My WORLD: priorities of the Arab States



Source: UN 2014.

problems that an increasing number of Arab countries are facing.

To this end, the report proposes a new development model with three strategic dimensions (figure 9). The model will allow decision makers to invest in youth and benefit from youth to achieve a huge leap in regional development.

The traditional method of dealing with youth from a narrow perspective that considers youth as a developmental burden must be abandoned. National youth policies and strategies that deal with youth as a problem that must be solved—the path usually followed in several Arab countries—should be set aside. They overlook the fact that most problems among youth reflect failures in society and the existing development model rather than failures among youth.

The recommendations put forward in this report might be integrated into the core of overall national and sectoral policies. They ought not to be treated as isolated interventions. Youth must also be involved in developing the policies through focused consultative processes among all stakeholders. The responsibility for implementing and monitoring the policies should not be assigned to one party, such as a ministry of youth or a higher council for youth, as is the case in several Arab

countries. The responsibility must be shouldered by planning ministries and interministerial committees led from the highest levels of the political pyramid.

The world agreed on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a roadmap for the future. It calls for including all sectors of society, including youth, in all efforts to implement the roadmap. It affirms that “Children and young women and men are critical agents of change and will find in the new Goals a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world.”³³

This report proposes that the efforts of the Arab countries to achieve the goals of sustainable development to which they have committed should be part of a wider framework for the empowerment of youth. The framework should be integrated into the development process in a visible manner in each country. Tackling the priorities that were identified by the young people from 19 Arab countries who participated in the consultations held during the preparation of this report could provide a starting point (figure 8). These priorities have been confirmed in several other regional and global surveys that have brought together the opinions and ideas of youth, such as the World We Want Survey that was conducted to determine the post-2015 development agenda (figure 10).

Endnotes

- ¹ Moller 1968.
- ² UNDP 2015.
- ³ World's six regions by UNDP grouping: Arab States, East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, and Sub-Saharan Africa.
- ⁴ UNDP 2013a.
- ⁵ Malik 2011.
- ⁶ Malik and Awadallah 2011.
- ⁷ See: [/http://fsi.fundforpeace.org](http://fsi.fundforpeace.org).
- ⁸ Kabeer 1999.
- ⁹ ILO 2014, World Bank 2015.
- ¹⁰ ILO 2014.
- ¹¹ Robalino and others 2013.
- ¹² World Bank 2013.
- ¹³ For example, the rate of voting among all age-groups in all the Arab countries, according to the World Values Survey is lower than the global average.
- ¹⁴ Silatech-Gallup 2013.
- ¹⁵ Desai and others 2014.
- ¹⁶ IPU 2014.
- ¹⁷ World Bank 2015.
- ¹⁸ Save the children 2014.
- ¹⁹ UNICEF 2015.
- ²⁰ UNDP 2004, p.8 .
- ²¹ UNDP 2005.
- ²² UCDP/PRIO 2014.
- ²³ SIPRI 2015.
- ²⁴ SIPRI 2015.
- ²⁵ See: <https://government.defenceindex.org/#close>.
- ²⁶ UNDP 2002.
- ²⁷ Halfon and others 2014.
- ²⁸ Bennett 2012; Arvizu 2009.
- ²⁹ Issam Fares Institute 2011; Norris 2012; UNDP 1995, p. 1.
- ³⁰ UNDP 2002.
- ³¹ UNDP 2009.
- ³² The Security Council adopted several resolutions on Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories (RES 242,343) and on illegal construction of settlements in the occupied Arab lands (RES 446,452,465).
- ³³ UN General Assembly 2015.

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