

# Arab Human Development Report Research Paper

Leaving No One Behind  
Towards Inclusive Citizenship in Arab Countries



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Paola Pagliani  
Ellen Hsu



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# Foreword

World leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 as a roadmap to guide global development in order to build a more peaceful, prosperous, sustainable, and inclusive future for all. The core principle of the agenda is “leaving no one behind” - linking the achievement of human development to building more inclusive societies. Inclusiveness should thus be at the heart of state–society relations.

This paper outlines how Arab countries have made significant strides in terms of human development since their independence; or the establishment of their modern state. However, this progress has been significantly hampered by the devastating effects of conflict in the region in recent years. Facing-up to the multifaceted challenges of such crises, many countries have made significant, and indeed positive strides forward. Nevertheless, this paper demonstrates that in many Arab countries, the deeply-rooted legacy of exclusion remains by drawing upon findings and data from within the region.

Since the 2011 uprisings, Arab countries have struggled to define a new social contract that would insulate their citizens from forces of exclusion—forces that range from poverty, inequality and unemployment to water scarcity, corruption and gender discrimination. In some cases, reforms and policies aiming at modernization have, as an unintended consequence, generated greater inequality rather than greater inclusion. In other cases, exclusion has fuelled societal tensions, instability and ultimately violence, putting people at greater risk of marginalization.

As momentum grows towards the drawing-up of new social contracts in Arab countries, this paper outlines the political and historical context for today’s societal dynamics - providing a framework to understand how the parameters of citizenship have been set across the region.

It assesses how and why Arab citizens are being left behind by various forces of exclusion, while also highlighting the precarious situation of those living in; and fleeing from crisis countries.

Finally, it identifies promising emerging trends, from the amplified voice of youth to the increased attention on sustainable development.

The hope is that by examining; and better understanding the region’s human development fault lines, as seen through the lens of citizenship in all of its dimensions – policy-makers and stakeholders can begin to draft new social contracts that will help states to achieve all 17 Sustainable Development Goals by the year 2030.



Achim Steiner  
*Administrator*  
United Nations Development Programme



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# Abbreviations

<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>HDI</b>	Human Development Index
<b>HDRO</b>	Human Development Report Office
<b>IEA</b>	International Energy Agency
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>International IDEA</b>	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
<b>ITU</b>	International Telecommunication Union
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PISA</b>	Programme for International Student Assessment
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>TIMSS</b>	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
<b>UN DESA</b>	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNHCR</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children’s Fund
<b>UNRWA</b>	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

# Introduction

With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, world leaders have committed to coherent and comprehensive global action for sustainable development. The agenda lays out the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for which signatory countries are accountable to their citizens, including the voluntary pledge of leaving no one behind (box 1).<sup>1</sup>

## BOX 1

### Leave no one behind

As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first (2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development).

Citizens are important agents for achieving the SDGs, and states have obligations to their citizens. But the way the roles of citizens and state institutions translate into practice has implications for different people and groups who risk being excluded by the state in delivering on the SDGs. And the failure of the state to meet its obligations can contribute to inequality, marginalization and exclusion.

Building inclusive societies has been a challenge in Arab countries, and the limitations in inclusion have become more acute since 2011, as the relationship between citizens and the state—and among various social groups—has deteriorated in some countries. Despite different governance structures, all Arab countries manifest serious fault lines in modern notions of citizenship (box 2).

The starting point of this paper is that the Arab region's human development fault lines have grown more complex since 2011—and

deepened in several countries. Today many people live insecure lives, more people live under persistent pressures that inhibit them from realizing their potential as human beings, and too many lives are cut short as armed conflicts take their grim toll. If the ongoing conflicts are not resolved and demographic projections of faster population growth in crisis countries are realized, 40 percent of the people in Arab countries will live in crisis and conflict in 2030, when the SDGs should be achieved (figure 1).

Achieving the SDGs in Arab countries thus requires addressing the most debilitating development problems related to citizenship in a region where the relations between the state and society remain deeply fraught and contested amid political, social and economic fragility.<sup>2</sup> Given the importance of understanding, and potentially explaining, manifestations of exclusion and inequality, the link between citizenship and human development needs to be further explored.

Achieving the SDGs in Arab countries requires addressing the most debilitating development problems related to citizenship in a region where the relations between the state and society remain deeply fraught and contested

**BOX 2**

**Citizenship**

Citizenship is usually defined based on the provision of rights (civil and political, social and economic, cultural and collective, and more recently environmental) interlinked with citizens' fulfilment of their duties (for example, paying taxes, obeying the law, and in some cases serving in the military).<sup>1</sup>

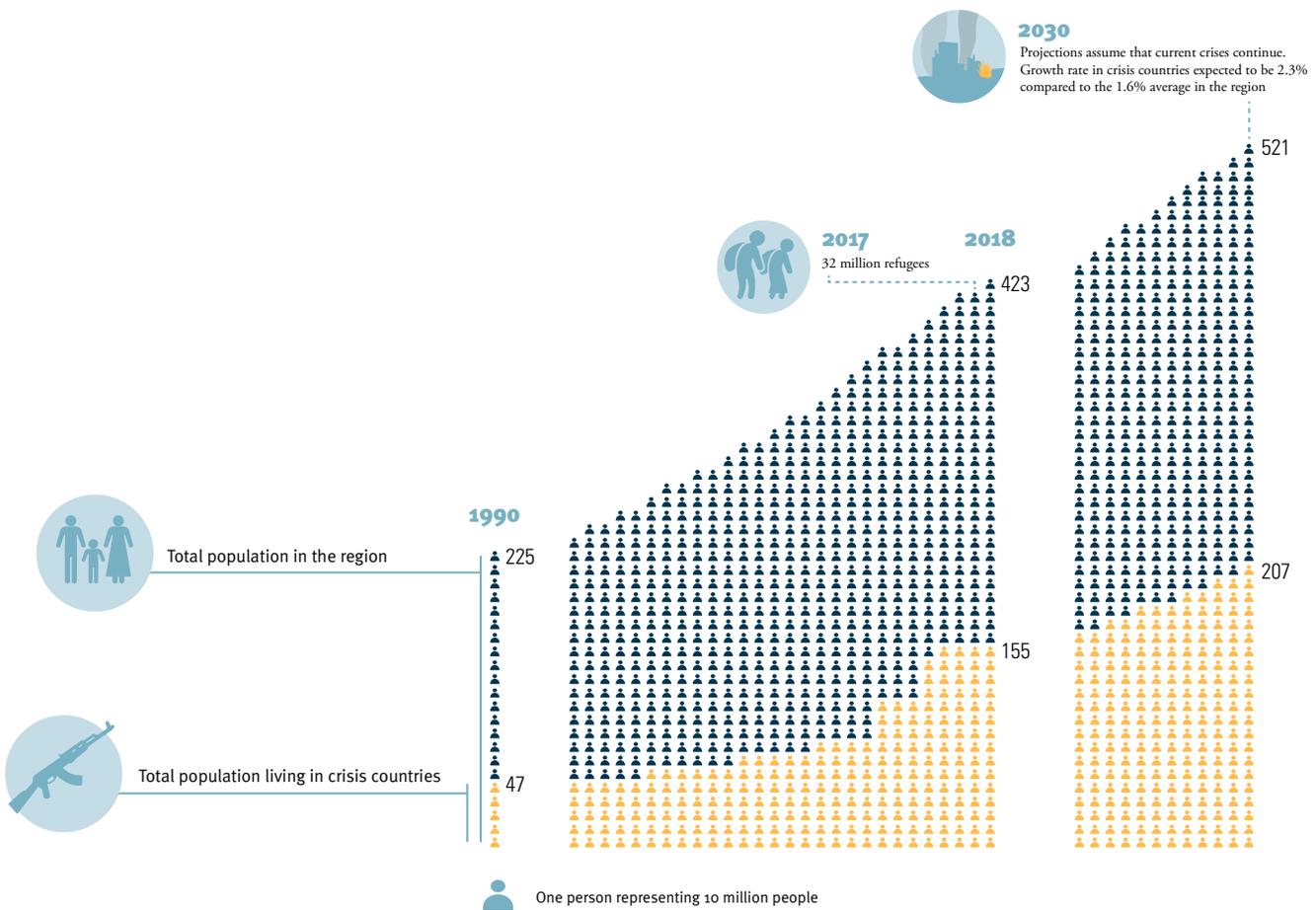
Citizenship is a contested historical process consisting of social relationships, both formal and informal, in complex environments. Law, political institutions, the economy and technology determine the environment, but citizenship is also the product of social interactions and power relations

and struggles. Based on experiences of exclusion and marginalization, equal status provided by the law might not be taken for granted in a society. The active engagement of marginalized groups and policies responsive to diverse needs are prerequisites for inclusive citizenship. So is the recognition that people have multiple identities and commitments, both within and beyond state borders. Thus, inclusive citizenship must embrace pluralism and diversity.<sup>2</sup>

1. Marshall 2009.  
2. Pfister 2012.

**FIGURE 1**

**If ongoing conflicts are not resolved and demographic projections do not deviate from current trends, 40 percent of people in Arab countries will live in crisis and conflict conditions by 2030**



Note: Crisis countries are Iraq, State of Palestine, Somalia and Sudan; Libya and Syrian Arab Republic since 2011; and Yemen since 2014.  
Source: UNDESA Population Division, World Population Prospects 2017.

## 2.

# State–society relations in Arab countries

Two key issues need to be examined as starting points to understand the drivers of inclusion and exclusion. The first is the process of state formation and its role in sowing the seeds for exclusion. The second is the development model and the social contract that emerges from it, because the social contract shapes citizens' perceptions of the role of the state.

## 2.1 Citizenship and state formation

In some Arab countries the notion of “national citizenship” emerged from conflict (as in Algeria) or from negotiations over sovereignty with colonial powers (as in Egypt). But for the Mashriq countries established after the fall of the Ottoman Empire,<sup>3</sup> that notion became more of a process contested with the British and French mandates. The 1869 Ottoman Law of Nationality had affirmed citizenship conferred by both *jus sanguinis* (right of blood) and *jus soli* (right of soil). For example, British officials crafted citizenship to be separate from nationality, with a view of the territory as divided communally, based on prior colonial legislation elsewhere. The Arabs, by contrast, relied on their pre-war experience as nationals of the Ottoman Empire to negotiate the definitions and meanings of the citizenship mandate.

Palestine stands out. Only between 1925 and 1948 did a Palestinian citizen exist.<sup>4</sup> At other times, Palestinians were differentiated as Palestinians from the West Bank, Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, Palestinians living in Israel, Palestinian refugees and Palestinians of the diaspora. After the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, legal pluralism predominated in the Palestinian system.<sup>5</sup> Palestinian refugees, as defined

by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, are “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.” They took shelter in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and other Arab countries, and they have no means of acquiring citizenship.

Nazih Ayubi's landmark study provides a thorough anatomy of the Arab state after independence, describing state formation in each Arab subregion—North Africa, the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>6</sup> The process differed across subregions, but with a clear common element about how countries addressed diversity within their borders. The Arab state did not consciously consider the diverse ties—whether cultural, ethnic or religious—among the human groups that formed the administrative units of countries that subsequently went on to become states. Instead, the Arab state was conceived as a unit of control for masking the diversity of the population and subduing its cultural, linguistic and religious heterogeneity under command structures.

Yet the extent to which the state has built legitimacy and trust and thus created a common denominator among different groups in society determines how inclusive societies are. Throughout the region it has been challenging for both the state and the people to build broader loyalty or a shared sense of nation that transcends narrow identities or clientelistic networks linking state and society.<sup>7</sup> People tend to trust other sources of authority to help them meet their basic needs and demands and to mediate competing interests and conflicts. Examples include family and clan ties, nonstate actors, religious institutions and pan-Arab networks.<sup>8</sup> It can thus be said that the Arab countries

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The extent to which the state has built legitimacy and trust and thus created a common denominator among different groups in society determines how inclusive societies are

are far from perfecting the transition to an inclusive society. Indeed, contemporary Arab societies developed around a state model that is not leading to social cohesion.

Arab state constitutions affirm equality before the law. But beyond the legal parameters, diverse policies, politics and social dynamics define how citizenship is implemented and experienced in practice, which differs across the region. This produces “differentiated” citizenship or different grades of citizenship depending on the rights and privileges that a citizen enjoys, thus producing “first-class,” “second-class” and “third-class” citizens—or “no citizens.”

Differentiated citizenship based on identities determined by religion, gender, race, ethnicity and class extends both vertically and horizontally, where unequal treatment and exclusion are practiced in state–citizen relations and citizen–citizen relations. Gender is among the most profound sites of structural inequality and discrimination across the region. For women, citizenship is not only differentiated—it is also mediated, with the relationship between the state and women not direct but in many instances through a male kinsman (father, brother or husband).<sup>9</sup>

Additional cultural and historical factors interact with this fractured citizenship. Religion affects people’s sense of identity and their ideological and intellectual orientation. It influences their values and shapes their attitudes towards society and the family. As the 2005 Arab Human Development Report stated, “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.”<sup>10</sup> With the establishment of the modern nation state, religion became instrumentalized and in some instances weaponized. It has been integrated into how states conceive of governance and ensure continued legitimacy. And in the public sphere it is a key source of social capital and a strong stimulus for social assistance to the disadvantaged.

The mantle of religion can be attractive to politicians, and political parties that use religious interpretation to support their

platforms and political agendas are common in the region. Such parties run the ideological gamut from moderate to extreme and tolerant to dogmatic, where the extent of religiosity, the manner of using religious texts and the type of ideology shape a party’s relationship with the state and other social and ethnic groups. Many conflict to some degree with the (secular) political order.<sup>11</sup>

So, religion has become a dividing issue that dominates politics and one of the main markers of citizenship. Constitutions, laws, education systems, rights and even arts are largely viewed and determined through a religious lens. At the centre of this lens are religious norms and religiously motivated cultural norms and symbols that have been created and politicized—and are observed and guarded by the state and by society at large. Therefore, religion has proved a powerful political, social and cultural means of control by the state and nonstate actors, heavily influencing the definition of citizenship.

Also influencing the concept of citizenship in Arab countries is the content of the education system. National curricula are highly politicized to enforce an understanding of citizenship and national identity, allowing education to serve as a “battle ground for controlling knowledge and acquiring ideological dominance through discursive and institutional means.”<sup>12</sup> Most countries teach civic concepts that seek to anchor a nationalistic narrative, although with diverse priorities ranging from the concept of religious citizens to that of patriotic nationalists. These pedagogical frameworks ignore questions of identity and belonging and fail to consider how they affect an individual’s ability to be fully included in society while influencing the capacity and desire for active democratic participation.<sup>13</sup> A few countries attempt to graduate youth with two or more identities—ethnic, religious, national, regional and international.<sup>14</sup>

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Differentiated citizenship based on identities determined by religion, gender, race, ethnicity and class extends both vertically and horizontally

The dominant model of development from the 1950s onward was having limited political participation and civil and political liberties in exchange for material benefits such as services, subsidies and employment

## 2.2 The Arab development model and its social contract

According to some observers and analysts, citizens across the Arab region have been calling for a new or renewed social contract anchored in new notions of citizenship that are more inclusive and equitable.<sup>15</sup> At the heart of this calling is the ongoing struggle around disparate notions of citizenship, identity and belonging, which remain largely unexplored.

The social contract that emerged from and continues to evolve as a result of contesting and bargaining stemmed from the state-building and formation after Arab states won their independence in the 1950s–1970s. The emergence of independent states was associated with a strong nationalistic sentiment and the idea that the state should be the provider and engine of social and economic development. Despite considerable variation across countries, which was affected by natural resources endowments, the dominant model of development from the 1950s onward was having limited political participation and civil and political liberties in exchange for material benefits such as services, subsidies and employment. The model

was based on strong central states overseeing and driving economic and social priorities while implementing widescale policies for redistribution and equity.<sup>17</sup> It rested on four main pillars:<sup>18</sup>

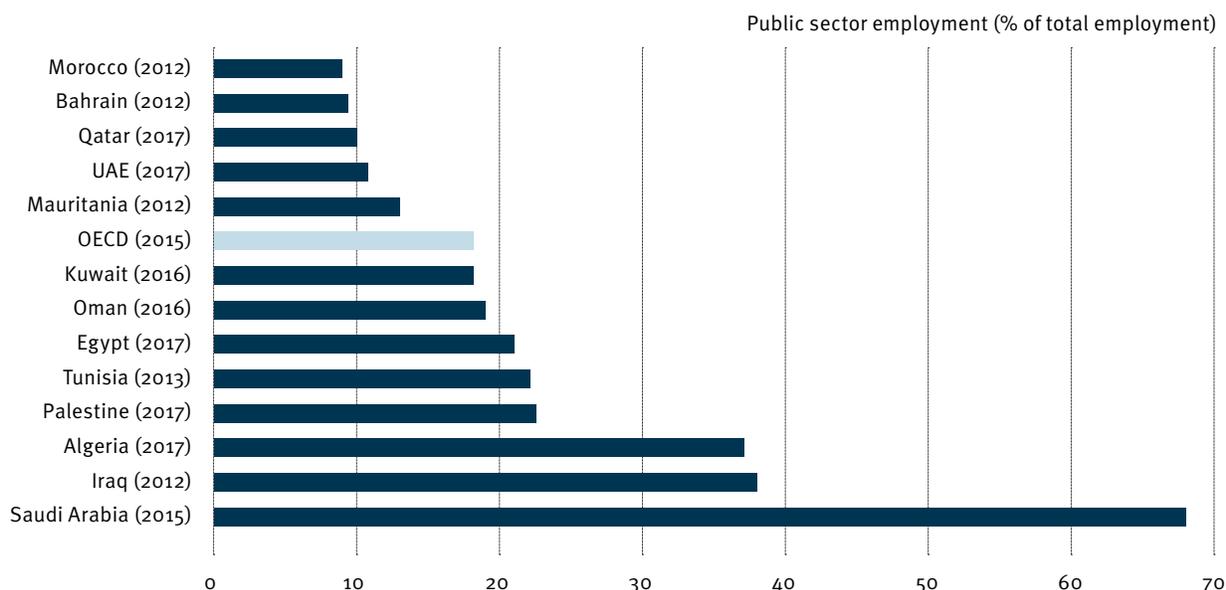
- Establishing a large bureaucracy to provide and deliver services.
- Expanding security services and the army.
- Setting up a large public sector of factories and companies.
- Subsidizing basic foodstuffs and energy products.

In Algeria, Iraq and Tunisia (among others) the government employs more than a fifth of the labour force, with a significant wage bill to match (figures 2 and 3). And the size of the state apparatus can be gauged by government spending (table 1): resource-rich countries tend to spend like advanced economies, about 40 percent of GDP. In middle-income countries the percentages are closer to those in emerging markets, about 30 percent of GDP. And the less developed countries, except Djibouti, tend to behave like Sub-Saharan African countries.

Countries engaged in negotiations with the International Monetary Fund, including

FIGURE 2

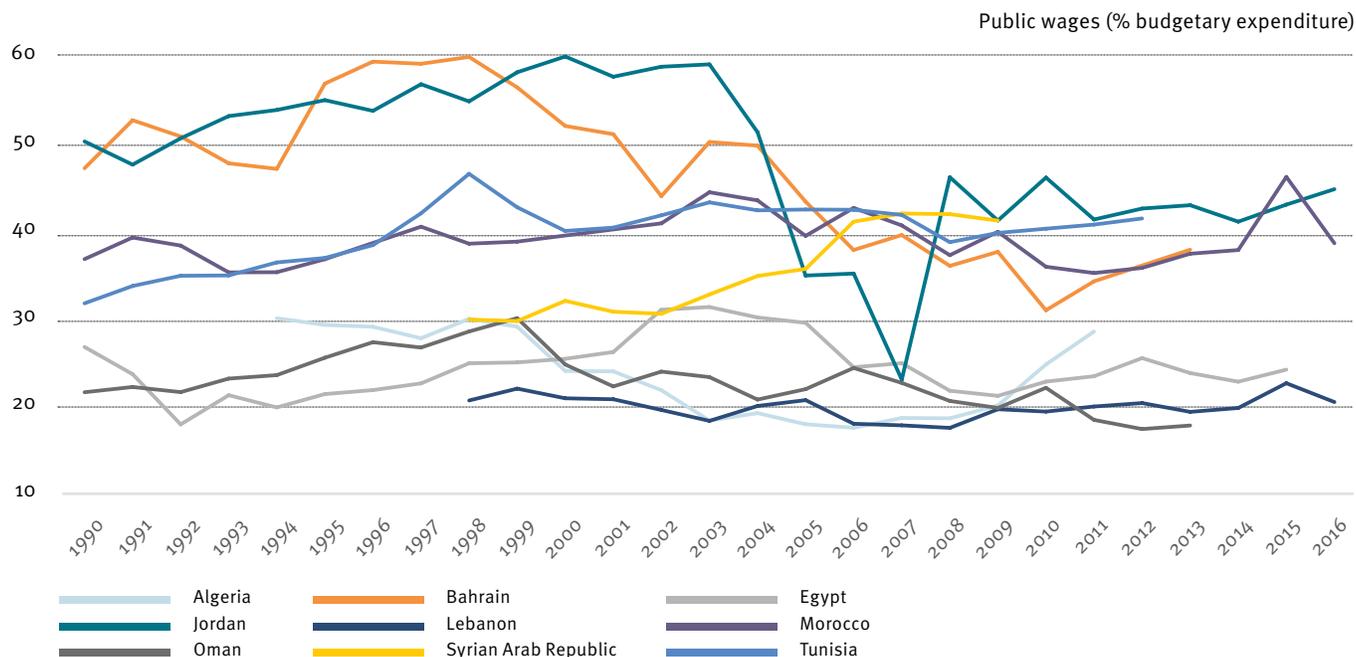
In several Arab countries the government employs more than a fifth of the labour force



Source: OECD Government at a Glance 2017 for OECD public sector employment; ILO Database, ILOSTAT for non-OECD public employment.

**FIGURE 3**

**... with a significant wage bill to match**



Source: IMF Finance Statistics database.

Egypt, Jordan and Morocco, have attempted to reduce public expenditure (see table 1; box 3 later in the section).

But the nature of public spending is more important than the volume in understanding its effectiveness and its impact on the social contract. For decades countries in the region have used subsidies, particularly energy subsidies, to stimulate economic growth and help the lowest income populations gain access to energy. But those subsidies are costly in economic and environmental terms, and they are socially regressive, because richer urban households capture the bulk of the benefits.<sup>19</sup> Despite efforts to curb subsidies in the past five years, they remain significant (figure 4). Resource-abundant countries such as Kuwait, Libya and Saudi Arabia are the largest fossil fuel subsidizers, but even less endowed countries such as Egypt and Lebanon subsidize energy products at a much higher rate than the rest of the world.

Historically, the Arab region has been more equal than other regions. The state-led development model expanded access to key

entitlements, whether public employment or access to education, raising human development. And partly because of the entitlements, societies have lowered the incidence of poverty and income inequality, shielding disadvantaged groups from some of the worst economic pressures. Most Arab countries have achieved substantial gains on social indicators over the last half century, such as increasing schooling and lowering child mortality (figure 5). But in some countries the gains have been reversed as a result of war, conflict and fragility (figure 6).<sup>20</sup>

**TABLE 1****General government total spending (% of GDP)**

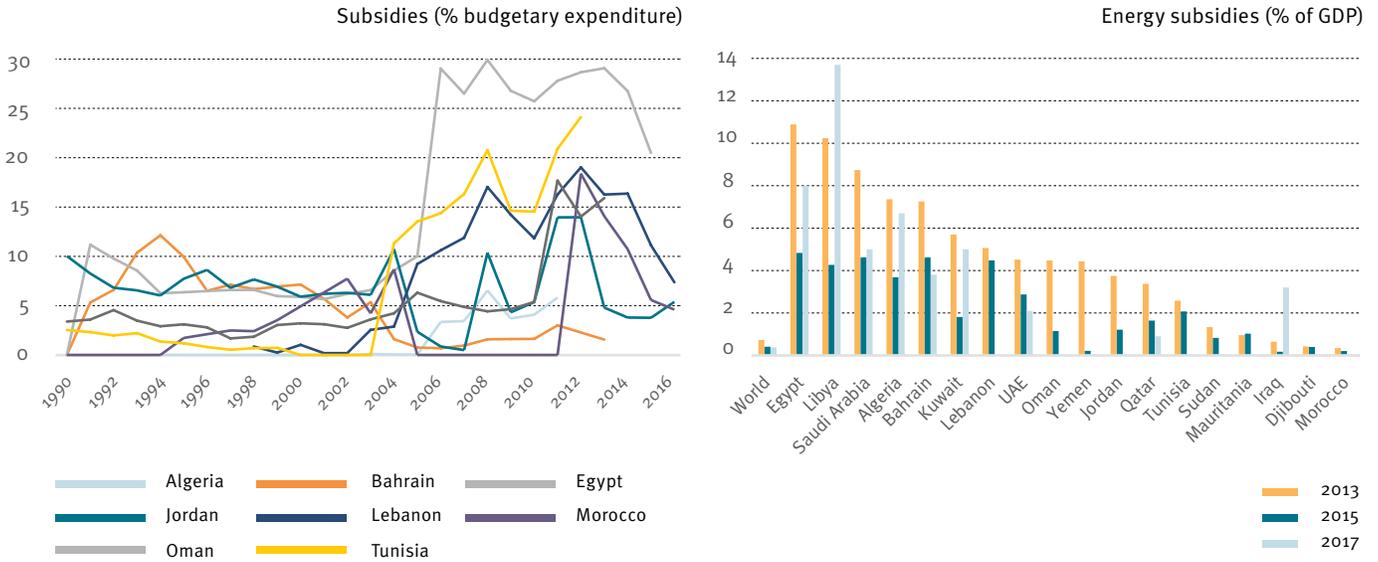
	2001	2005	2010	2015	2018
Syrian Arab Republic	28	28	29	—	—
Libya	38	29	58	182	77
Kuwait	43	28	45	54	46
Oman	38	35	35	51	40
Algeria	31	27	37	46	39
Iraq	—	63	50	43	38
Saudi Arabia	37	28	33	41	36
Djibouti	29	37	37	59	35
Lebanon	39	31	29	27	32
Bahrain	28	25	29	37	31
Jordan	33	40	30	29	30
Comoros	22	20	22	27	30
Tunisia	25	24	25	29	30
Egypt	28	30	31	33	30
Qatar	32	29	31	42	30
Morocco	26	31	31	31	30
United Arab Emirates	25	16	32	32	
Mauritania	—	29	22	33	28
Yemen	30	37	30	19	19
Sudan	10	20	17	12	13
<b>Advanced economies</b>	37	38	42	39	38
<b>Emerging market and developing economies</b>	26	26	29	31	31
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	24	23	25	22	23

— is not available.

Source: IMF World Economic Outlook Database, October 2018.

**FIGURE 4**

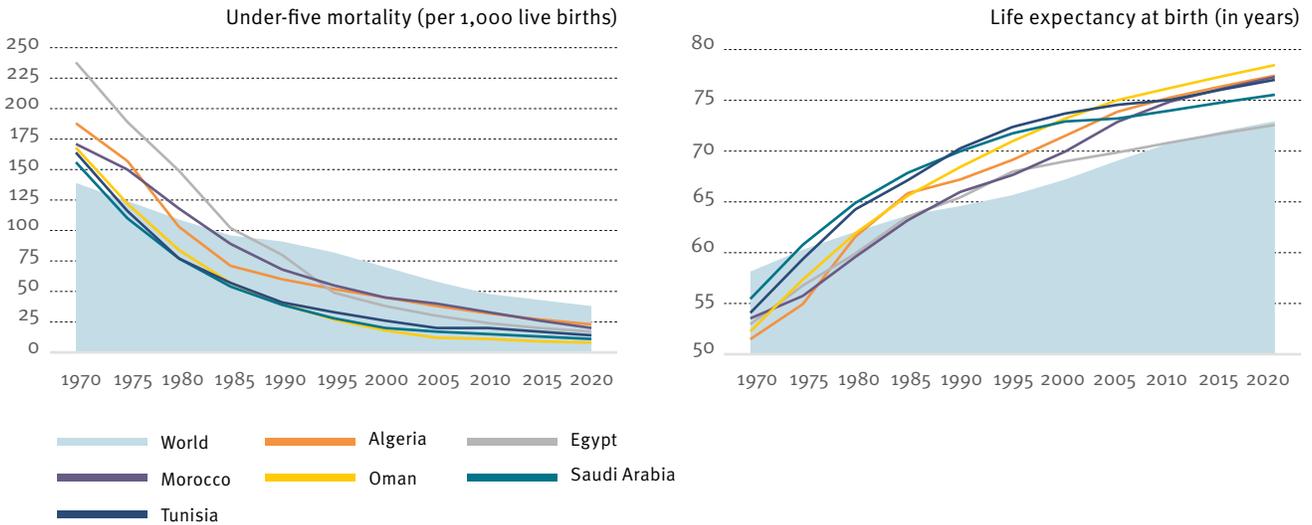
**Resource-abundant countries are the largest fossil fuel subsidizers, but even less endowed Arab countries subsidize energy products at a much higher rate than the rest of the world**



Source: IMF Government Finance Statistics database; IEA for 2017 energy subsidies in nine countries.

**FIGURE 5**

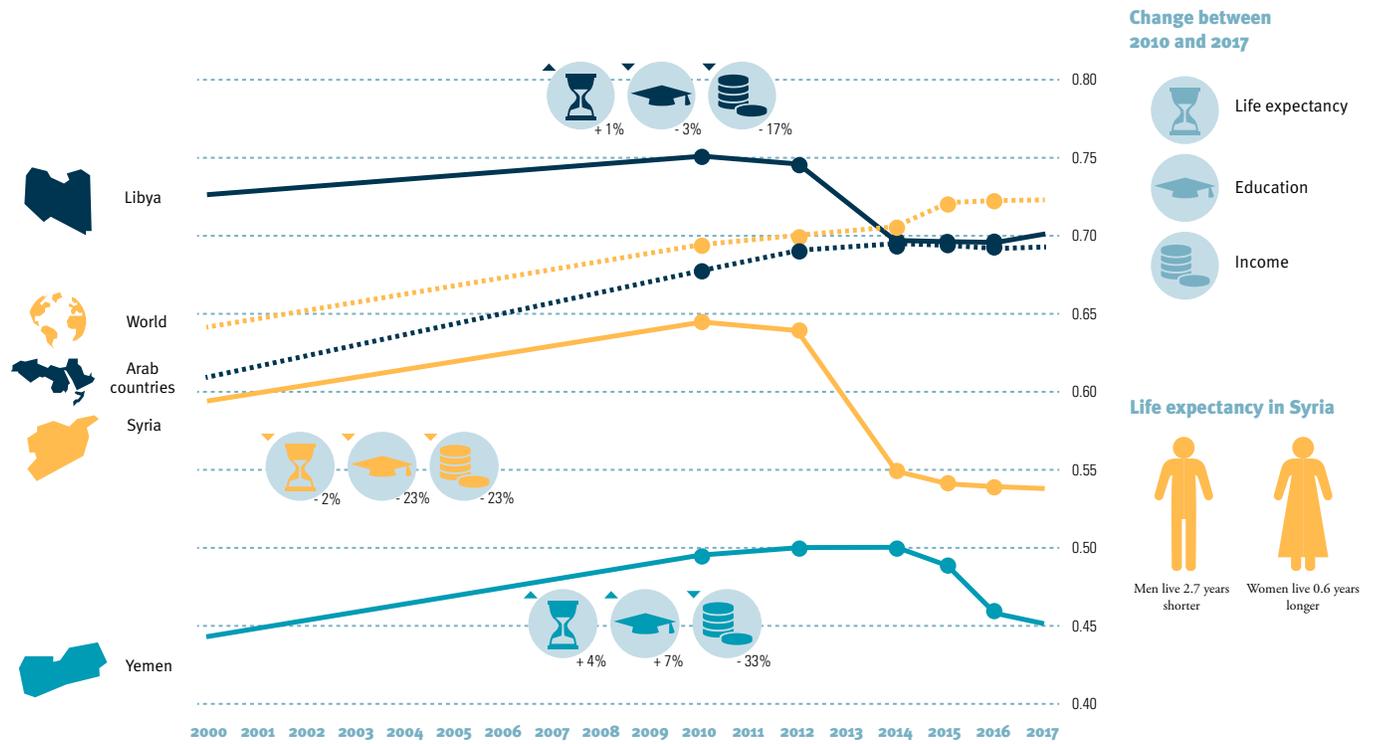
**Most Arab countries have achieved substantial gains on social indicators over the last half century**



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators.

**FIGURE 6**

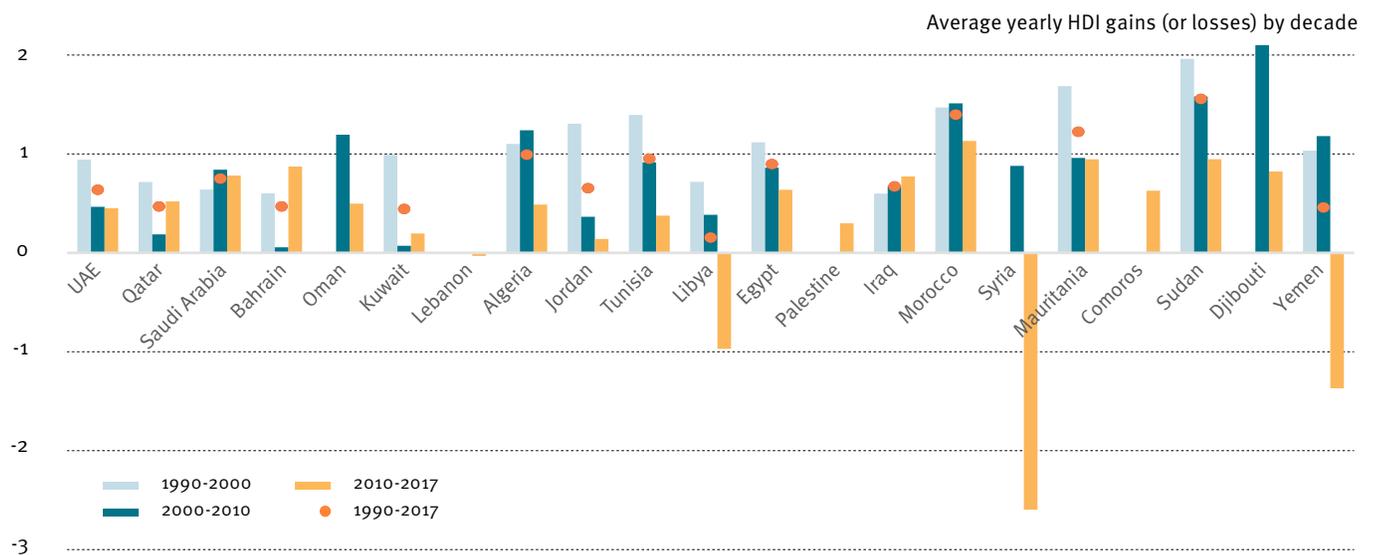
**In some Arab countries human development gains have been reversed as a result of war, conflict and fragility**



Source: HDRO.

**FIGURE 7**

**Since 2010 nearly all Arab countries have slowed or reversed their average annual human development advances**



Source: HDRO.

In the low- and middle-income Arab countries human development achievements might be at risk because of structural problems related to sluggish economies, societal tensions and conflicts in nearby countries. Since 2010 nearly all Arab countries have slowed or reversed their average annual human development advances (figure 7). The exceptions are Iraq, slowly recovering from decades of protracted crisis, and Bahrain, the region's real exception.

The Arab uprisings in 2011 raised the alarm about the social unsustainability of the policies in previous decades. How does the undeniable evidence of progress since independence square with unprecedented outbreaks of regionwide discontent? Could the slower pace in human development achievements, experienced in several countries in the region since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, have been interpreted as a sign of depleting resilience in society? One answer is that progress depended heavily on natural resources rents (figure 8) and other strategic positioning, which financed redistributive social welfare programmes and services. Over time that proved financially unsustainable,

especially with rapidly growing populations (figure 1). Moreover, the gains in human development rarely translated into gains in productivity and growth. Human capital was trapped in unproductive public-sector jobs. Economic advantage was restricted to firms and individuals connected to the state and its ruling elites. And social order was preserved by distributing unproductive politically mediated rents.<sup>21</sup>

Another interpretation is that development itself is a disturbance, as people whose intellectual and material horizons have been extended by human development may feel empowered to engage politically. They may reach a point where they perceive the cost of accepting oppression to be greater than that of confronting it. A more educated public may be less willing to tolerate such oppression, and its enhanced consciousness of injustice and political exclusion may lead to open rebellion. A country's well-being is about more than income: it has to do with opportunities to live a fulfilling life with dignity, fairness and political participation.<sup>22</sup>

If policies and institutions are not flexible to accommodate and respond to evolving

The Arab uprisings in 2011 raised the alarm about the social unsustainability of the policies in previous decades

**FIGURE 8**

**Progress in human development in Arab countries has depended heavily on natural resources rents (such as those for oil) to finance redistributive social welfare programmes and services**



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators.

circumstances, the distribution of resources remains skewed, and GDP increases may end up widening class divisions. The social contract that Arab governments imposed was not designed to operate in a dynamic context and consequently, public policies became less equipped to respond in line with people's preferences and expectations. The recent

weakening of the social contract is occurring in the context of a rapidly changing political, economic and social landscape, that is also exposed to regional and global dynamics, including the interaction with external actors such as the international financial institutions (box 3).

### BOX 3

#### The impact of austerity on the social contract

By the 1980s most Arab countries, especially resource-poor ones, had accessed International Monetary Fund (IMF) lending programmes, implementing the associated macroeconomic reforms focused on fiscal discipline. Egypt, Jordan and Morocco cut back public expenditure; froze public sector wages, salaries and employment; reduced subsidies; and increased taxes. An initial decline in social welfare was accompanied by an increase in poverty, but it generated fiscal stabilization and periods of growth that led to some poverty reduction. Even so, liberalization was unsuccessful, privatization policies meant to increase productivity concentrated economic wealth, and growth was not sustained.<sup>1</sup>

The combination of sluggish economic growth and structural reforms profoundly undermined the foundation of the social contract, as political and economic institutions struggled to meet the demands of a growing and increasingly young population.<sup>2</sup> Over time, unemployment, especially among young people—combined with perceptions of widespread corruption, little accountability and ineffective mechanisms to channel and respond to citizen interests needs and expectations (see figure 15 in the next section)—deprived the social contract of the means to achieve social and redistributive justice.

With the 2011 uprisings turmoil, the IMF recognized the risk of leaving large segments of the population behind while focusing solely on macroeconomic performance. A new approach paying more attention to poor people's needs recommends redirecting social protection from generalized subsidies to transfers that target poor people or progressively increasing direct and indirect taxes to fund infrastructure development, as well as health and education.<sup>3</sup>

Yet agreements between the IMF and Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia since 2011 display more continuity than a new approach. Fiscal austerity and subsidy reduction are recommended in place of revenue enhancement. Privatization and trade liberalization do not seem to consider the scarce competitive capacities of local industries or the lack of safeguards against negative social consequences. And the promotion of export growth is preferred to more employment-intensive investments.<sup>4</sup>

1. El-Said and Harrigan 2014.

2. Cammack and others 2017.

3. IMF 2014.

4. Mossallam 2015.

## 2.3 The impact of regional dynamics on citizenship and the social contract

An important dimension in unpacking state–society relations is the geopolitics driven and motivated by regional rivalries, on the rise since the late 1970s. Some of the rivalries unfolded because of uneven economic development, in an area home to some of the world's richest and poorest countries, heavily oil dependent and rentier based.<sup>23</sup> Regional power struggles have defined markers that determine citizenship and belongingness to

the nation-state beyond the law. Regional sectarian and political agendas influence domestic policies and politics, and define the boundaries of those belonging to a regional rival or “other” group.

Between-country income inequality is stark, with countries at different levels of economic development and different economic structures.<sup>24</sup> For example, the disparities between the rich Gulf countries and the middle-income and the least developed Arab countries have shaped interregional economic cooperation in several dimensions, including through foreign direct investment and migration, contributing

Regional power struggles have defined markers that determine citizenship and belongingness to the nation-state beyond the law

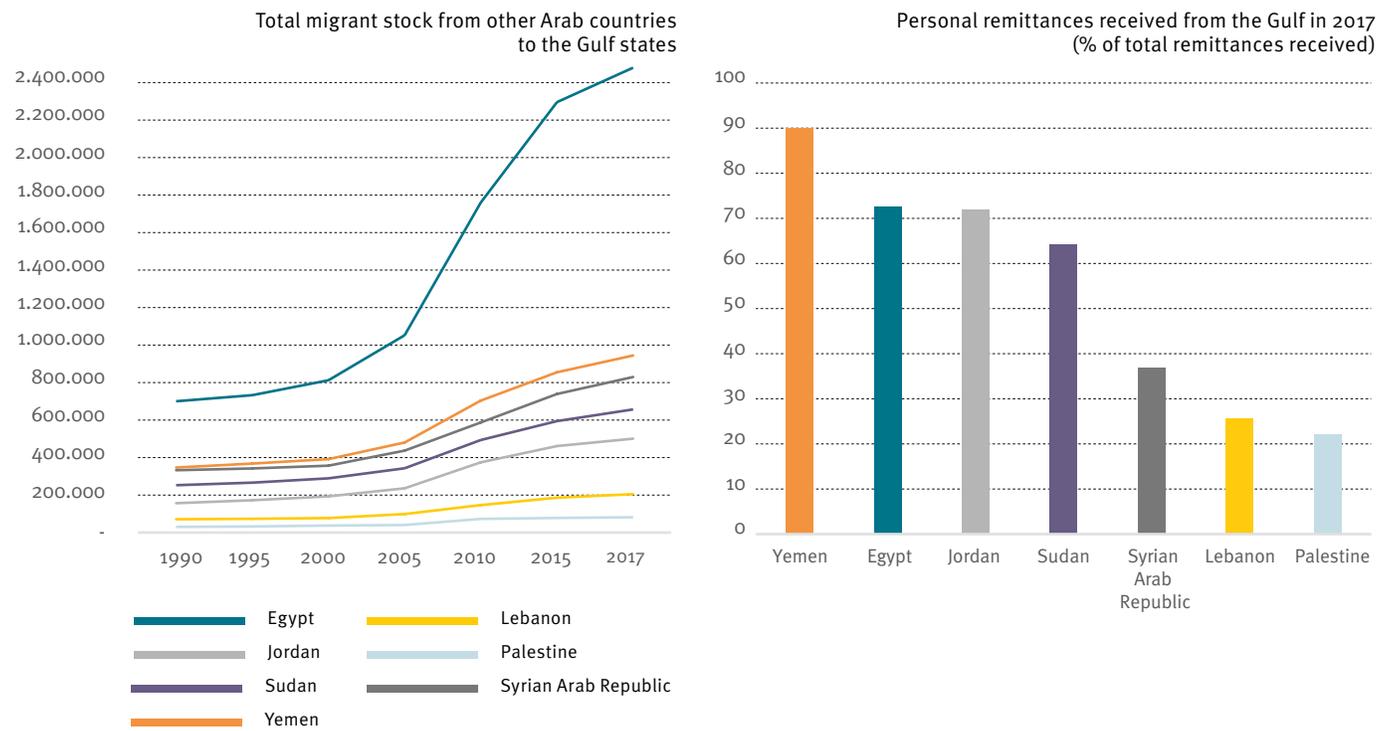
to remittances to countries like Yemen, Egypt, Jordan, and Sudan (figure 9).<sup>25</sup> Migration to the Arab Gulf countries has been a relief option for unemployed young people in several countries.

Another example of the multiple facets for the regional dimension to influence country dynamics is official development assistance. Kuwait, Libya to some extent before 2011, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have been the region’s major aid

donors. Most aid has been channelled bilaterally rather than through multilateral agencies or multilateral development banks. The aid has occasionally been used to preserve subsidies or other social protection schemes that would have been otherwise fiscally unsustainable. Aid thus increased the regional donors’ leverage, whether political or economic, to influence national policies and politics—and therefore to redefine the social contract.<sup>26</sup>

**FIGURE 9**

**The disparities between the rich Gulf countries and the middle-income and least developed Arab countries has shaped interregional economic cooperation in several dimensions, including migration**



Source: UNDESA Population Division, International migrant stock: the 2017 revision and World Bank, Migration and Remittances Data.

### 3.

## Forces of inequality and exclusion

Processes that define state formation and the social contract have unleashed forces of exclusion, which have translated into people being unable to exercise their rights as citizens

Arab countries suffer from horizontal and vertical inequalities within societies and across state–society relations.<sup>27</sup> Processes that define state formation and the social contract have unleashed forces of exclusion, which have translated into people being unable to exercise their rights as citizens. The state and influential nonstate actors have often defined who enjoys citizenship rights in practice and on what basis certain groups and people are excluded or “differentiated” in enjoying rights.

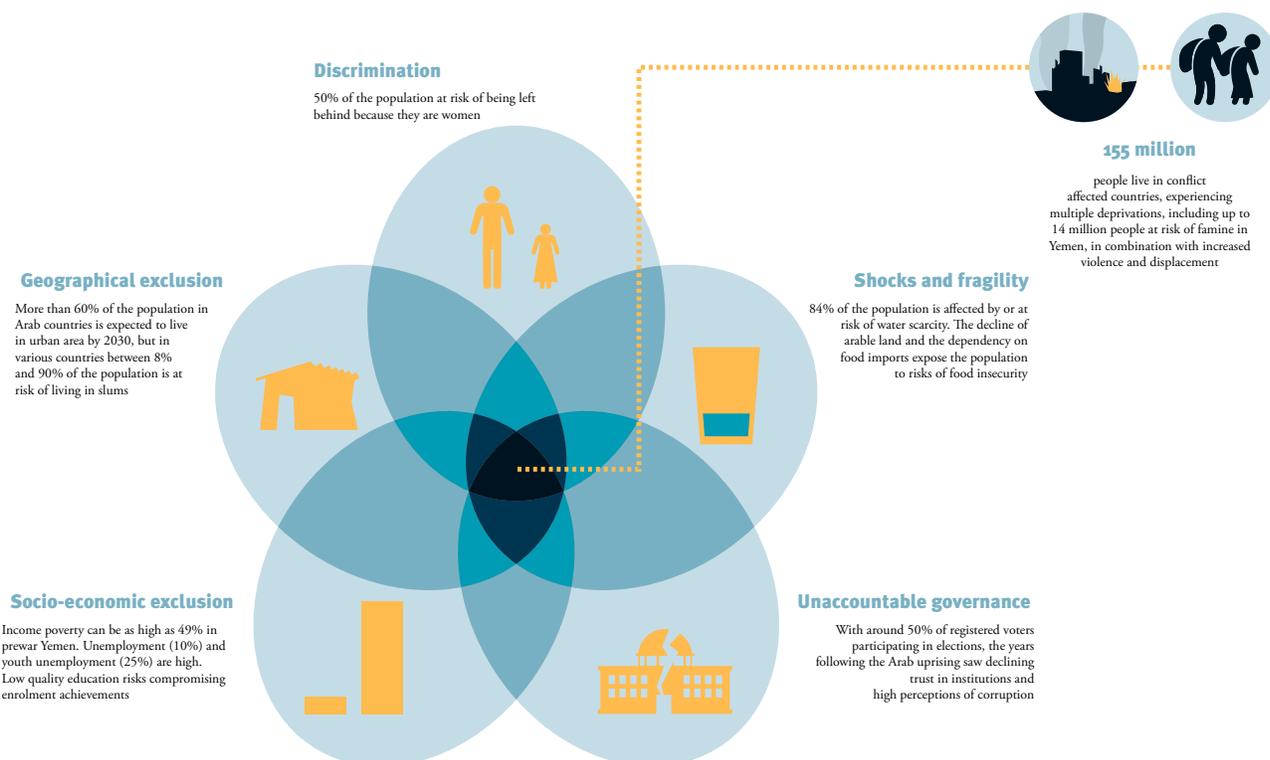
In light of the 2030 Agenda’s imperative of combatting inequality to contain insecurity, injustice and violence, this

section analyses who is left behind in Arab countries (see box 4 on data limitations). It examines five key areas in which forces of exclusion exist (figure 10):<sup>28</sup>

- **Discrimination.** What biases, exclusion or mistreatment do people face based on one or more aspects of their ascribed or assumed identity, including gender, ethnicity, age, class, disability, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, indigenous status, and migration?
- **Geography.** Who endures isolation, vulnerability, missing or inferior public services, or gaps in transport, internet

FIGURE 10

Leaving no one behind in Arab countries requires addressing the forces of exclusion in five key areas



Source: see figures 11, 13, 15, 16, 18, 20 and 21.

or other infrastructure because of their place of residence?

- **Governance.** Who faces disadvantage because of unjust, ineffective, unaccountable or unresponsive institutions, laws, policies, processes or budgets? Who is less able or unable to gain influence or participate meaningfully in the decisions that affect them?
- **Socioeconomic status.** Who has fewer chances to stay healthy, be nourished, acquire wealth, enjoy the benefits of quality education, compete in the labour market or benefit from social protection and financial services?

- **Shocks and fragility.** Who is more exposed or vulnerable to setbacks because of climate change, natural hazards, health emergencies, economic downturns or price or other shocks?

These forces of exclusion are stronger in conflict situations, where affected people are usually deprived in all five areas, in addition to being exposed to violence. The forces can also ignite tensions and prolong crises, as widespread perceptions of exclusion and injustice, combined with ineffective institutions and insecurity, limit chances to build a consensus around a sustainable social contract.

#### BOX 4

##### Arab countries are data deprived

Soon after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, it became evident that monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals, with their numerous and complex indicators, would be a challenge, particularly for developing countries with limited statistical capacities. In the Arab region, only 43 percent of the 97 country-level tier I indicators—those that are conceptually clear, with an internationally established methodology—are available and updated across all (or almost all) countries; 9 percent of tier I indicators have not been updated since 2013 for many countries, and 16 percent have not been calculated since 2000 for numerous countries.

Knowledge about the multifaceted aspects of inequality, polarization and equal access to opportunity is also almost non-existent in Arab countries.<sup>1</sup> Most inequality measures are based on household surveys, which have been carried by 17 of 22 countries since 2011 but with inconsistent quality and methodologies that preclude systematic regional comparisons. Moreover, access to existing data remains limited, or the data are not in a format that allows for robust insights about inequality and deprivation. For example, most data are not disaggregated beyond sex.

The available conventional measures of economic well-being show good development achievements, with low poverty rates in most countries and economic inequality lower than in other parts of the world, with Gini coefficients of .30–.45 in Arab countries. But this supposed equal distribution of development benefits is at odds with the dissatisfaction expressed during the Arab uprisings and with perceptions of institutional performance and accountability (see figure

14 later in the section). Traditional measures of inequality and the data they are based on seem unreliable. Attempts to combine household surveys with income tax data reveal much higher income inequality. But such analysis is only in its preliminary stages, and the necessary data are not available in enough countries to allow regional analysis.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the need to understand and document the impact of intersecting inequalities on social and other forms of exclusion, the region largely lacks practical micro-level studies to shed light on those interconnections. Sustainable Development Goal diagnostics, similar to the one provided by the World Bank for Egypt, need to be available for more countries.<sup>3</sup>

Understanding and measuring progress (or reversals) in achieving equality require the sustained production of robust and highly granular data, which still eludes the capacity of many governments, hindering policy responses. The priorities, preferences and needs of marginalized groups become invisible. Development strategies and plans are prepared in the dark, and policymaking is uninformed by the light that robust data could cast on assumptions that do not always hold true.

It is not by chance that the 2030 Agenda has dual calls for leaving no one behind and producing a data revolution. Policymakers need to understand that the first is not possible without the second.

1. Bibi and Nabli 2010.

2. Alvaredo, Assouad and Piketty 2018.

3. Amin-Salem and others 2018.

### 3.1 Discrimination

Discrimination happens when people, or groups of people, are deprived of their rights because of their identity. That can mean violations of civil rights as well as such cultural rights as practicing one's traditions and speaking one's language.

Different forms of group- or identity-based discrimination exist in the Arab region, some linked to the process of state formation described earlier. The concept of minority rights is not widely accepted, though most Arab countries have diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic groups that were incorporated as minorities in the post-colonial era. While laws, policies and public institutions do not intend to discriminate or oppress minorities, they often lack provisions to pursue inclusion, fair distribution of wealth and respect for cultural diversity.

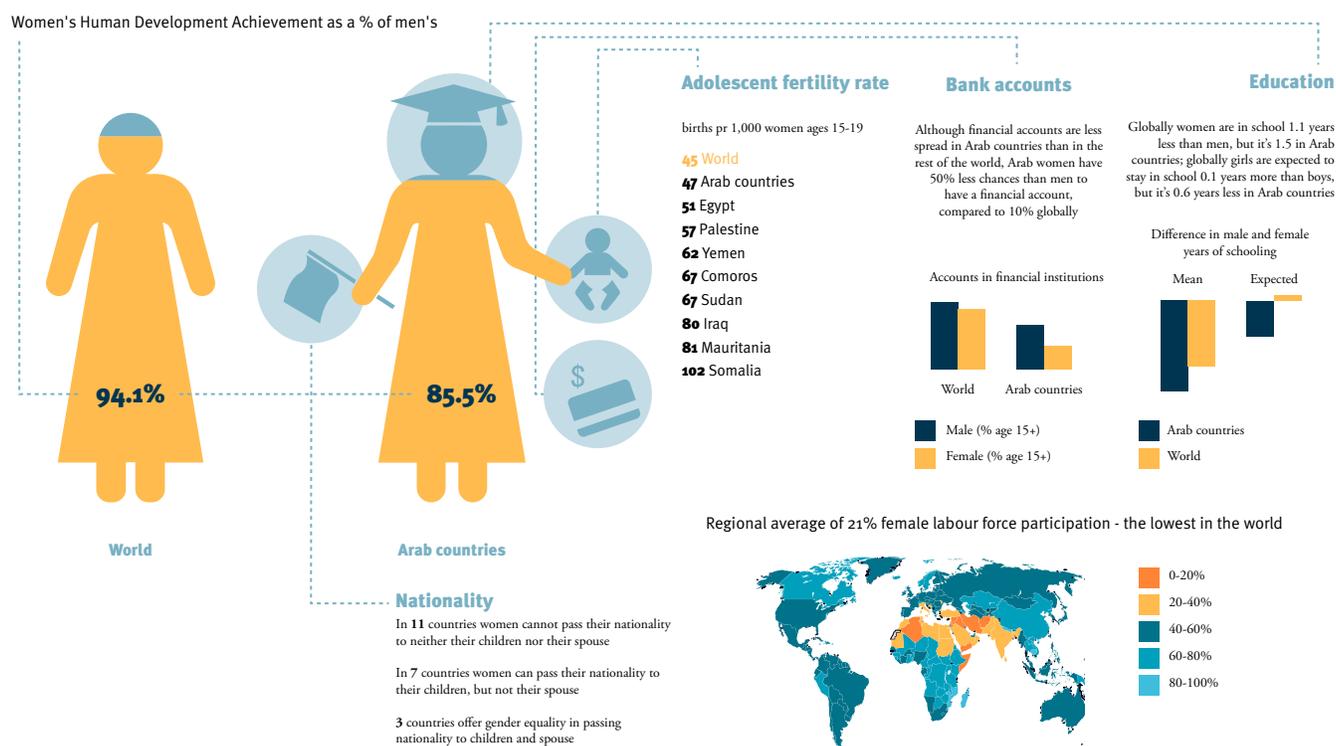
While laws, policies and public institutions do not intend to discriminate or oppress minorities, they often lack provisions to pursue inclusion, fair distribution of wealth and respect for cultural diversity

No statistical data track inequalities between minority and majority populations. But anecdotal evidence suggests that minorities experience discrimination, particularly in access to public sector employment. This discrimination affects mostly the poorest within minority populations, making them victims of multiple forms of exclusion. Some identity-based groups have responded to real or perceived discrimination by rejecting the legitimacy of the state, contributing to social tension and conflict.<sup>29</sup> But a few individuals from minority groups have held high political office, and some minority groups have established education institutions to protect and promote their cultural heritage. For example, Algeria and Morocco offer schooling in the Tamazight language and related teacher training.<sup>30</sup>

Gender inequality differs according to the context and intersection with other

FIGURE 11

#### Women are being left further behind in Arab countries than elsewhere



Source: HDRO for human development achievements and education; World Bank, World Development Indicators for adolescent fertility rate and bank accounts; ILO Database, ILOSTAT for labour force participation; UNHCR 2017 and UNDP 2018b for nationality.

inequalities, but it exists in all Arab countries. Nadia Murad, 2018 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, exemplifies how overlapping forms of exclusion can affect women in the region: as a woman belonging to a religious minority in war torn Iraq, she was the victim of sexual violence perpetrated by the Islamic State because of her identity.

Gender discrimination starts with who is entitled to citizenship rights: in only 3 Arab countries can women pass their nationality to their spouse and children, in 7 countries they can pass it to their children but not their spouse, and in the remaining 11 countries they cannot do either. Women in Arab countries achieve only 85.5 percent of men’s human development gains, as measured by the Gender Development Index—almost 10 percentage points less than the already unequal world average of 94.1 percent (figure 11). Achievements are unequal in all dimensions of human development, but at different levels. Life expectancy in the region is only 0.3 year shorter than the global average for men but a full year shorter for women. Men average 1.1 more years of schooling than women worldwide but 1.5 more years

in Arab countries. According to global averages, girls are catching up in education and are expected to stay slightly longer than boys in school, but girls are still lagging in Arab countries.

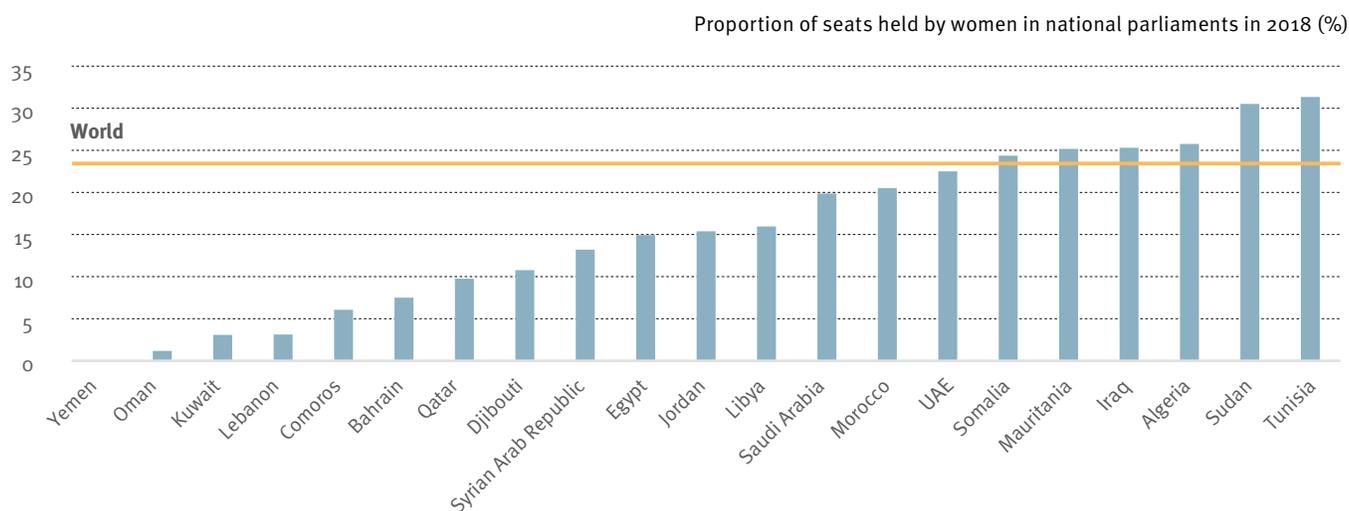
The greatest measurable disparities are economic: globally women’s income is 57 percent of men’s, but Arab women’s income is only 21 percent of Arab men’s. Unequal gendered division of labour—both in unpaid care and domestic work and in the labour market—is a major characteristic of gender economic inequality across the Arab region. Women’s participation in the formal labour market remains among the lowest globally because of both cultural norms and weak incentives (figure 11). Although several countries have restrictions (such as on women working night shifts), laws in Arab countries generally allow women to work. Even so, traditional gender roles, coupled with high adolescent fertility rates and stagnant labour markets, keep most women from entering the labour market.

Low participation in political, civic and household decisionmaking limits women’s opportunity to voice their concerns and

Low participation in political, civic and household decisionmaking limits women’s opportunity to voice their concerns and address gender disparities

**FIGURE 12**

**Although equal representation in national parliaments is a challenge throughout the world, it is particularly unsatisfactory in Arab countries**



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in National Parliament database.

address gender disparities.<sup>31</sup> Although equal representation in national parliaments is a challenge everywhere, the situation in Arab countries is particularly unsatisfactory (figure 12). Underpinning these manifestations of gender inequality are social norms and beliefs cited as traditional practices but at odds with a human rights approach to development. Progress in women's rights and gender equality across the region requires a reconfigured social contract and greater individual and group-based citizenship rights. Elements of this process can be found in redefined constitutional provisions following the 2011 uprisings.<sup>32</sup>

Persons with disabilities in Arab countries face particular disadvantages in education and employment opportunities and suffer from inequitable treatment at the societal and household levels.<sup>33</sup> They are often unintentionally discriminated against by policies that are blind to their needs because of a lack of data. The costs they face—for example, for special means of transport—are frequently overlooked, leaving their real risk for poverty underestimated. Available data on persons with disabilities in Arab countries lack consistent definitions, comparisons with people without disabilities, and disaggregation across standard socioeconomic arenas. Some countries have made progress with national household survey and population census data gathered in accordance with international standards. Those data show a disability prevalence rate of about 2.9 percent, a number expected to steadily rise because of the ongoing armed conflicts and the ageing population.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.2 Geography

Rural or urban location, living in informal settlements or slums, and the unequal distribution of development gains in a country can affect the quality of infrastructure and access to services and economic opportunities. In Egypt, where overall urbanization seems stagnant, the biggest cities, such as Cairo, have grown considerably in the last 20 years (figure 13). The incidence of poverty, usually

higher in rural areas than urban ones, helps explain this. Migration from rural to urban areas, if it happens without good job opportunities, can translate into urban discontent, infrastructure and environmental disruptions, and changes in political and social relations.<sup>35</sup> In at least seven countries with data, more than half of the urban population lives in slums. In Sudan, because of rapid and chaotic urbanisation, 91.6 percent of the urban population is exposed to poor waste and sanitation services. In Darfur the majority of the 2 million displaced people still live in camps, which in some cases have doubled in size over the last decade (box 5). In those areas, inadequate sewage treatment and the burning of garbage is related to the elevated incidence of waterborne diseases, which account for 80 percent of reported diseases in the country.<sup>36</sup>

Countries in the region are concerned about the development gap between leading and lagging areas. Spatially uneven development may be seen as a failure of economic justice or a betrayal of the social contract. Consider the national reports submitted to the Human Rights Council as part of the Universal Periodic Review. Morocco speaks of precariousness in “rural and mountainous areas.” Tunisia notes the lack of access to pregnancy monitoring clinics in the midwestern, north-western and southern areas. Sudan warns of lower school attendance in the eastern provinces. Algeria and Mauritania consider regional disparities. The concentration of economic activity in certain areas is evident in many of these and other countries (figure 14).

Finally, place of residence can be associated with inequalities in environmental health: air, water and solid waste pollution (such as plastic) is pervasive. Part of the problem may be with fundamental geography (people with scarce water resources are more likely to drink water with pesticides from agriculture). Part results directly from policy choices—for example, polluting public sector industrial companies that are not held accountable. These issues contribute to public health problems, and the burden of failing public health systems falls disproportionately on poor people, who are more likely to be exposed to pollution and less able to afford private health care.<sup>37</sup>

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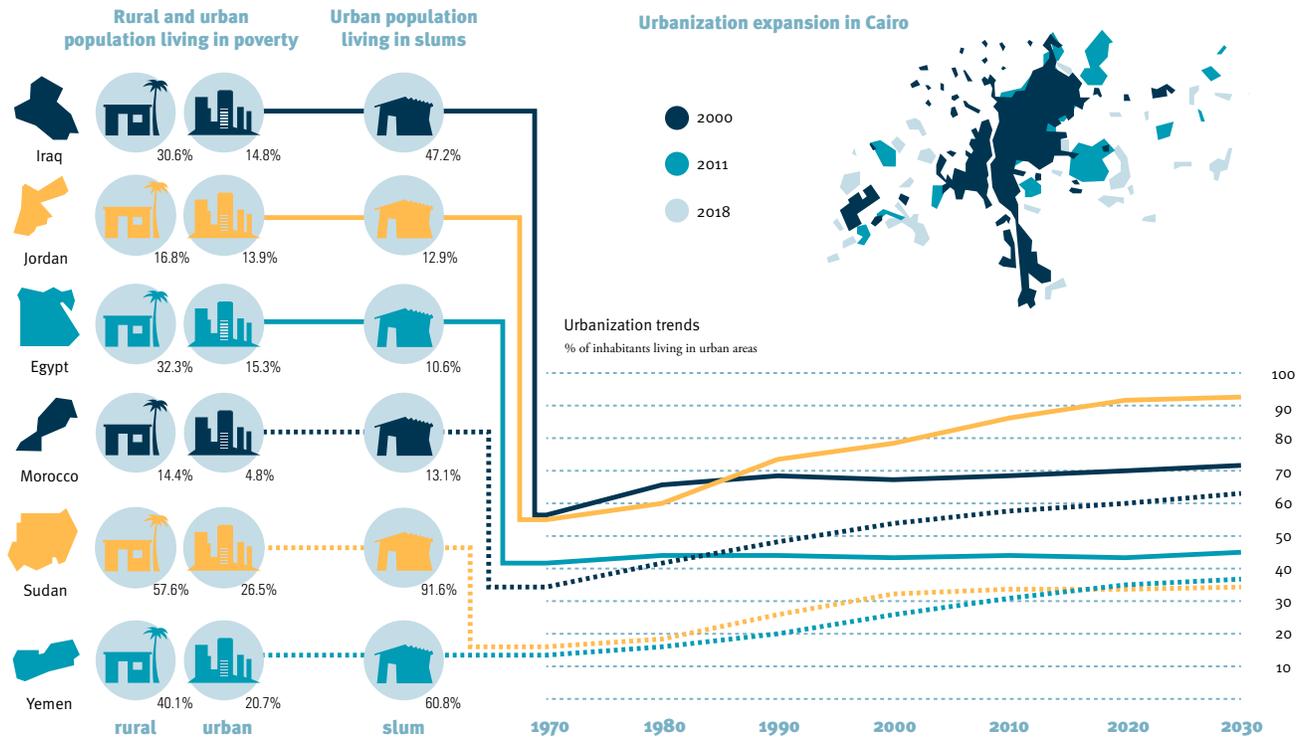
People with disabilities are often unintentionally discriminated against by policies that are blind to their needs because of a lack of data

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Spatially uneven development may be seen as a failure of economic justice or a betrayal of the social contract

**FIGURE 13**

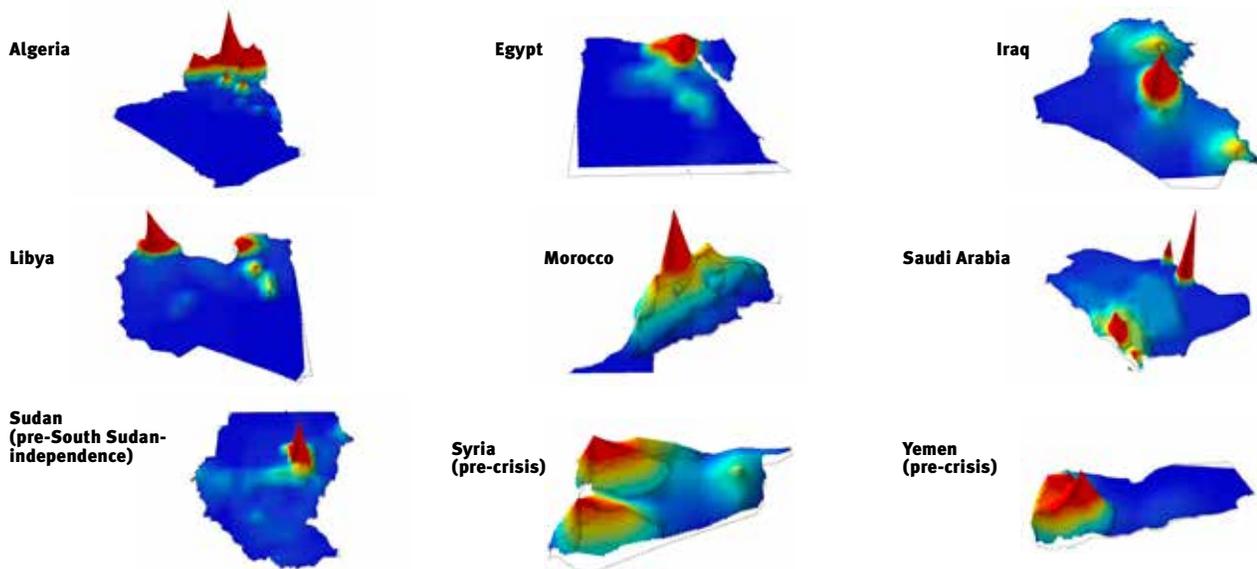
**The pace of urbanization in the Arab region is diverse**



Source: UNDESA Population Division, World Population Prospects 2017, for urbanization trends; World Bank, World Development Indicators for rural and urban poverty rates and population living in slums; Google Earth for urbanization expansion in Cairo.

**FIGURE 14**

**The concentration of economic activity in certain areas is evident in many countries**



Note: GDP displayed per 1 degree of longitude by 1 of degree latitude cells.  
Source: G-Econ Project, Yale University, September 2009.

## BOX 5

### Darfur—a crisis ignited by regional disparities

Historically, Darfur has been rich economically, with abundant natural and livestock resources—and culturally, with diverse ethnic, religious and tribal traditions intertwined for centuries. Yet colonial governments occupying Sudan focused on cost-effective resource exploitation with minimal infrastructure building, developing the centre where water and fertile soil were abundant and access to the sea easy. Peripheral areas that were remote and expensive to develop were relegated to indirect governance by native administrations whose responsibilities were to collect taxes and maintain local security.

After independence in 1956, the new national government faced wide development disparities between the centre and peripheries and continued along the same path of the colonial authorities. The concentration of development projects in the central region, while neglecting the rest of the country,

was met by resistance and the ensuing violent conflicts in peripheries, such as Darfur, left behind and unable to transition from a traditional society to a modern society and a market-based economy.<sup>1</sup>

The pattern of recurring civil wars in Sudan can thus be attributed to poor governance and to institutional failures spurring centre–periphery disparities. Despite recent improvements in security, the human rights of people in Darfur remain unattended. The Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, adopted in 2011, remains unevenly implemented, unsustainable and inadequate to address the root causes of the conflict, including strengthening central and local governance institutions and managing land, water and other resources.<sup>2</sup>

1. Suliman 2011.

2. Statement by the President of the United Nations Security Council, 31 January 2018, S/PRST/2018/4.

## 3.3 Governance

Unaccountable and unresponsive public institutions as well as perceived widespread corruption often drive exclusion and disenfranchisement for large segments of the population. Beyond shaping the space where citizenship unfolds and determining citizens' entitlements and obligations, governance institutions are also responsible for establishing the social contract between state and citizens and for renewing it when the contract no longer holds. Where citizens and social groups are not treated equally before the law or where the law is weakly enforced, feelings of exclusion and social rivalry inevitably rise.

The previous section elaborated on the evolution of the social contract in Arab countries and on the strong signal the 2011 uprisings sent that the contract was no longer valid for large parts of the populace. Major shortfalls in the lead-up to the uprisings include citizens' acceptance of the state, states' compliance with international charters of human rights, ways of using force and coercion, and preventing abuses of power.<sup>38</sup> Redefining the social contract implies

TABLE 2

### Voter turnout

Country, election year	Voter turnout (%)
Algeria, 2017	37
Bahrain, 2014	53
Djibouti, 2018	62
Egypt, 2015	28
Iraq, 2018	45
Jordan, 2016	36
Kuwait, 2016	70
Lebanon, 2018	50
Libya, 2014	42
Mauritania, 2013	74
Morocco, 2016	43
Oman, 2015	57
Sudan, 2015	46
Syrian Arab Republic, 2016	58
Tunisia, 2014	67

Source: International IDEA, Voter Turnout database.

interactions between the state and citizens, where public institutions have the duty to create mechanisms to understand social grievances and mediate conflicting interests. And yet, in the aftermath of the uprisings, most Arab countries have failed to improve representation, introduce policies responsive to citizen demands or uphold human rights in line with international standards.

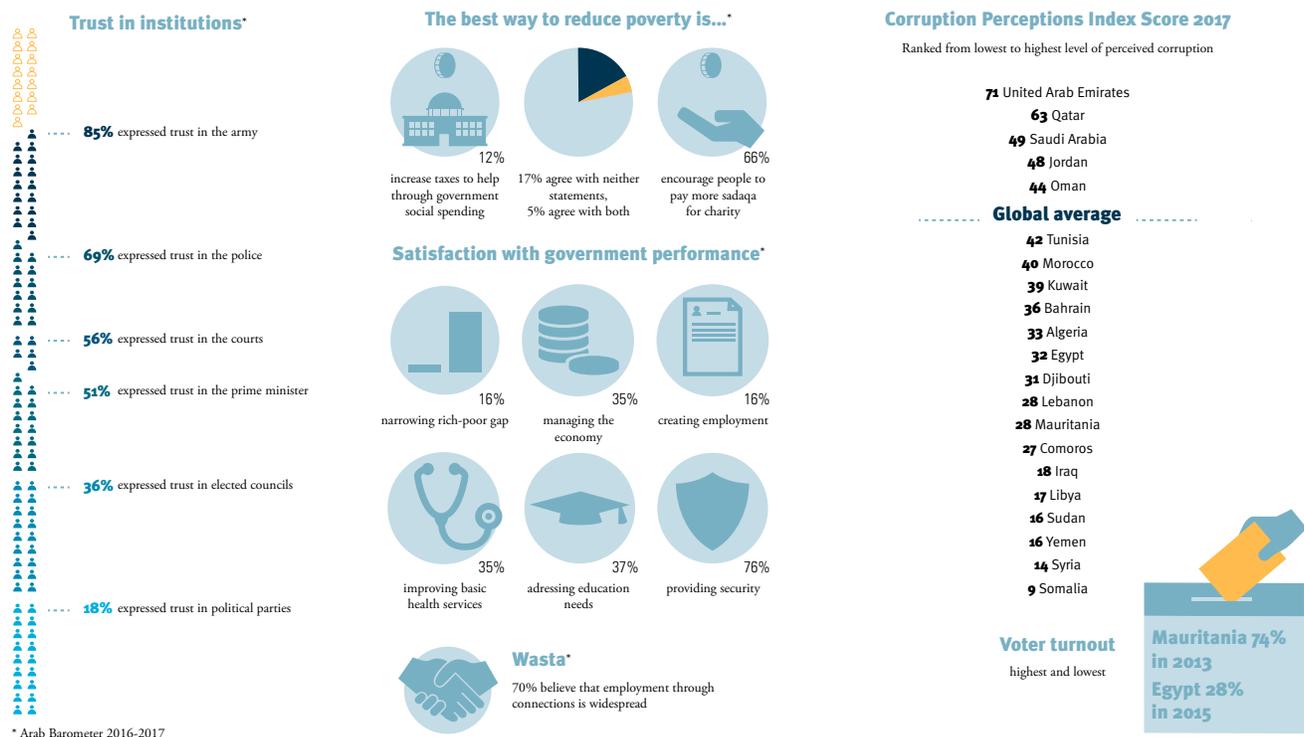
A substantial number of citizens believe that the institutions meant to take care of their needs are leaving them behind, and only security institutions still enjoy the trust of a large majority of the population (figure 15). Trust in elected bodies, those that should be in charge of redesigning the social contract, is particularly low. Lack of trust is also reflected in low electoral turnouts—below 50 percent in most countries (table 2).

Governments are perceived as particularly ineffective in addressing the issues at the core of the 2011 uprising and subsequent protests, such as reducing poverty and inequality. Employment opportunities seem to depend more on personal connections than on government policies, further increasing perceptions of injustice and inequality. The delivery of health and education services also appears unsatisfactory, while corruption is considered widespread (figure 15).

Public institutions have the duty to create mechanisms to understand social grievances and mediate conflicting interests

**FIGURE 15**

**A substantial number of citizens believe the institutions that are meant to take care of their needs are leaving them behind**



Source: Arab Barometer 2016–2017; Transparency International for Corruption Perceptions Index scores; International IDEA, Voter Turnout database for voter turnout.

### 3.4 Socioeconomic status

Perceptions of ineffective institutions seem confirmed by stagnating or narrowly based economic structures, high unemployment, young people facing difficult prospects to secure their future and uneven provision of social services and social protection nets. Unemployment, averaging 10 percent, almost double the world average, disproportionately affects young people, at 25 percent. These averages conceal diverse human stories. In the State of Palestine unemployment is as high as 27 percent (42 percent for young people), almost twice that in such middle-income countries as Jordan and Tunisia, where it hovers around 15 percent. The figure in Somalia, at 6 percent, needs to be seen in relation to the 31 percent of working poor among the active population.

Information and communication technology has the potential to empower people economically, especially vulnerable communities. Digital technology can be an inexpensive tool to access online or gig work and connect with potential employers worldwide, providing opportunities to vulnerable

and marginalized communities.<sup>39</sup> Yet the gig economy has its own challenges, especially in terms of work protections related to pay, working conditions and hours. Moreover, work in the gig economy has a legal gap for jurisdiction—which country’s labour laws take precedence? Those of the employee, the employer or the company providing the platform? So, despite the potential for economic empowerment, the sector does not seem to present a viable solution to youth unemployment and stagnating labour productivity in many Arab countries, especially with the uneven levels of internet penetration (figure 16).

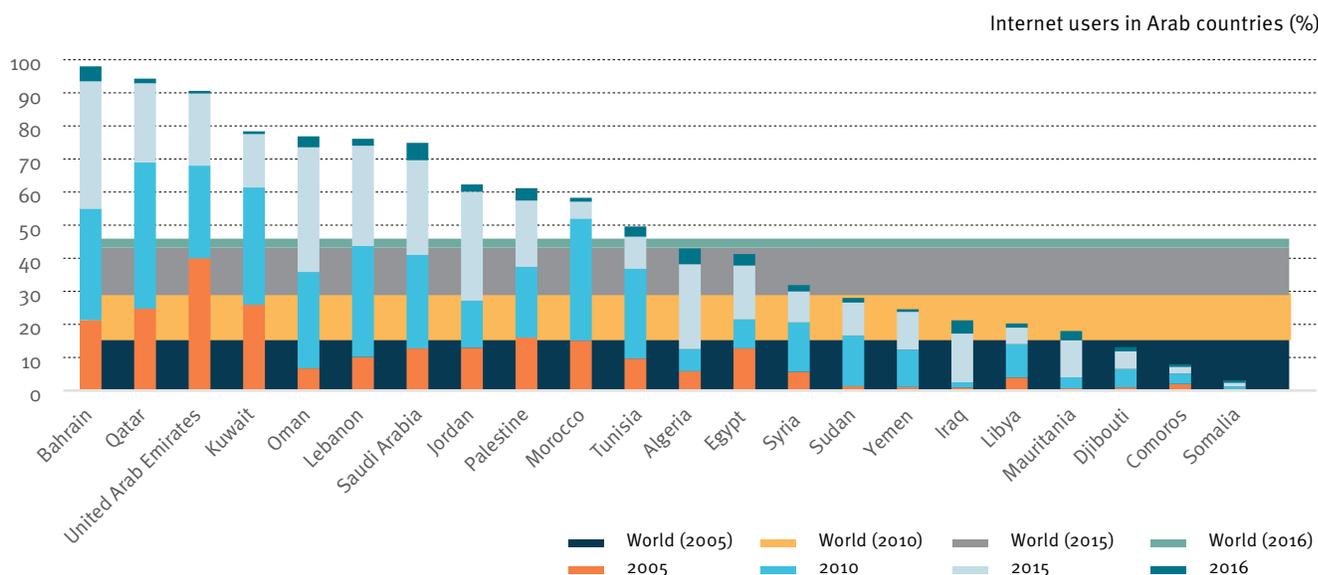
Even areas of good performance, such as enrolment rates catching up with world averages, lag in quality (figure 17). Students in the region consistently underperform on science, reading and mathematics assessments in relation to international averages.

Income inequality is often analysed as fuelling social tensions.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, social and economic injustice have been identified as one of the top reasons for the Arab uprisings (figure 18), despite data indicating low income and consumption inequality (see box 4 on data challenges).

Unemployment, averaging 10 percent, almost double the world average, disproportionately affects young people, at 25 percent

FIGURE 16

Arab countries have uneven levels of internet penetration, some well below world averages



Source: ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators database.

**FIGURE 17**

**Even areas of good socioeconomic performance lag in quality**

**Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of population)**



**48.6** Yemen  
**27.4** Lebanon  
**4.8** Morocco

**2018 unemployment (%)**



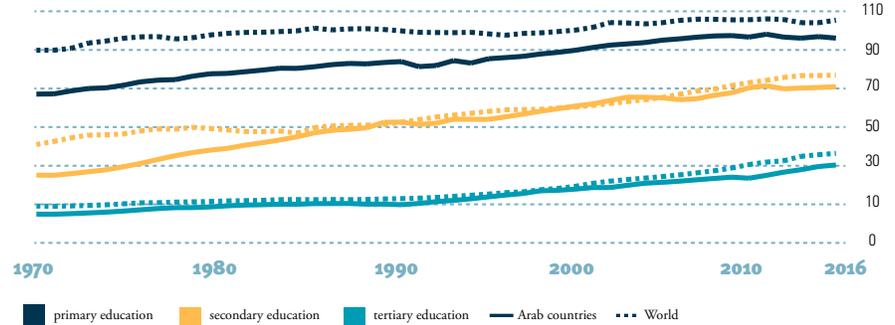
**26.8** Palestine  
**10.0** Arab countries  
**5.9** Somalia  
**- with 30.6% working poor**

**2018 youth unemployment (%)**

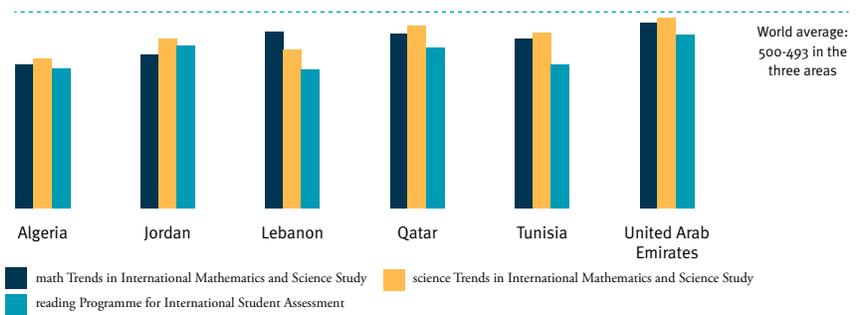


**42.3** Libya  
**25.4** Arab countries  
**10.9** Somalia  
**- with 37.4% working poor**

**Gross enrolment (%)**



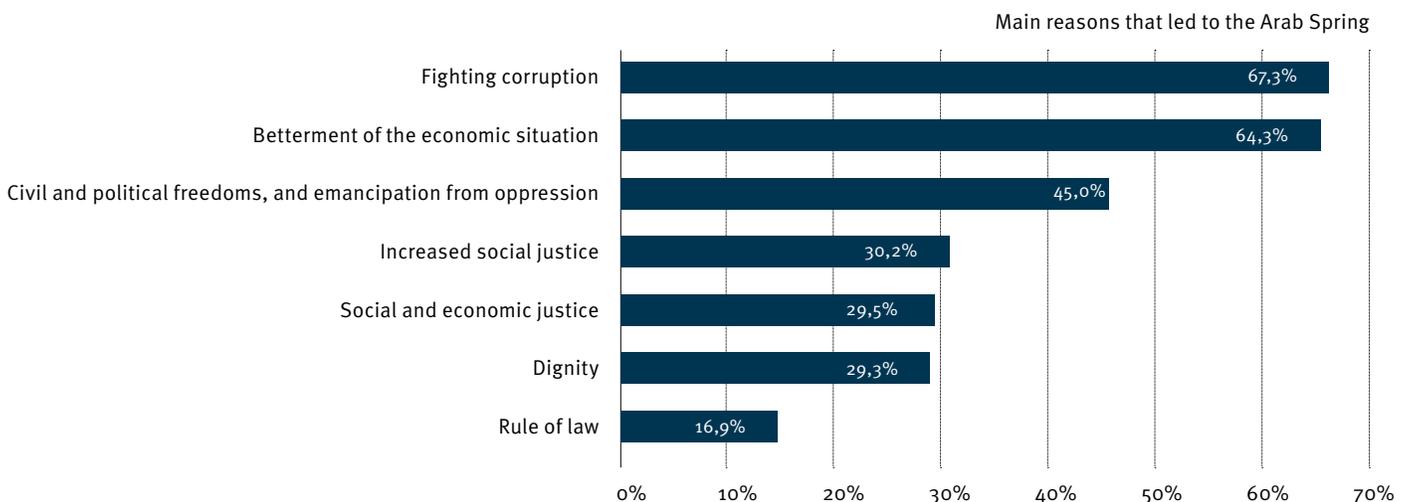
**TIMSS and PISA achievements**



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators for poverty headcount and gross enrolment; ILO Database, ILOSTAT for unemployment; International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, IEA Data Repository for TIMSS; OECD, PISA Database for PISA.

**FIGURE 18**

**Social and economic injustice are among the top reasons for the Arab uprisings**



Source: Arab Barometer 2012–2014.

### 3.5 Shocks and fragility

Substantial environmental degradation and poor management of natural resources, coupled with the scarcity of resources such as water and the high reliance on food imports, disproportionately affect the region's less developed countries and most vulnerable populations. The institutional inability to provide a development model that could adapt to the expanding needs of the growing population has undermined resilience to shocks. Moreover, poor people—farmers, pastoralists, those living in marginal environments such as drylands and mountains with fragile soils—are more likely to depend on natural resources for their livelihoods, but natural resources and ecosystems are increasingly fragile because of unsustainable development policies.<sup>41</sup>

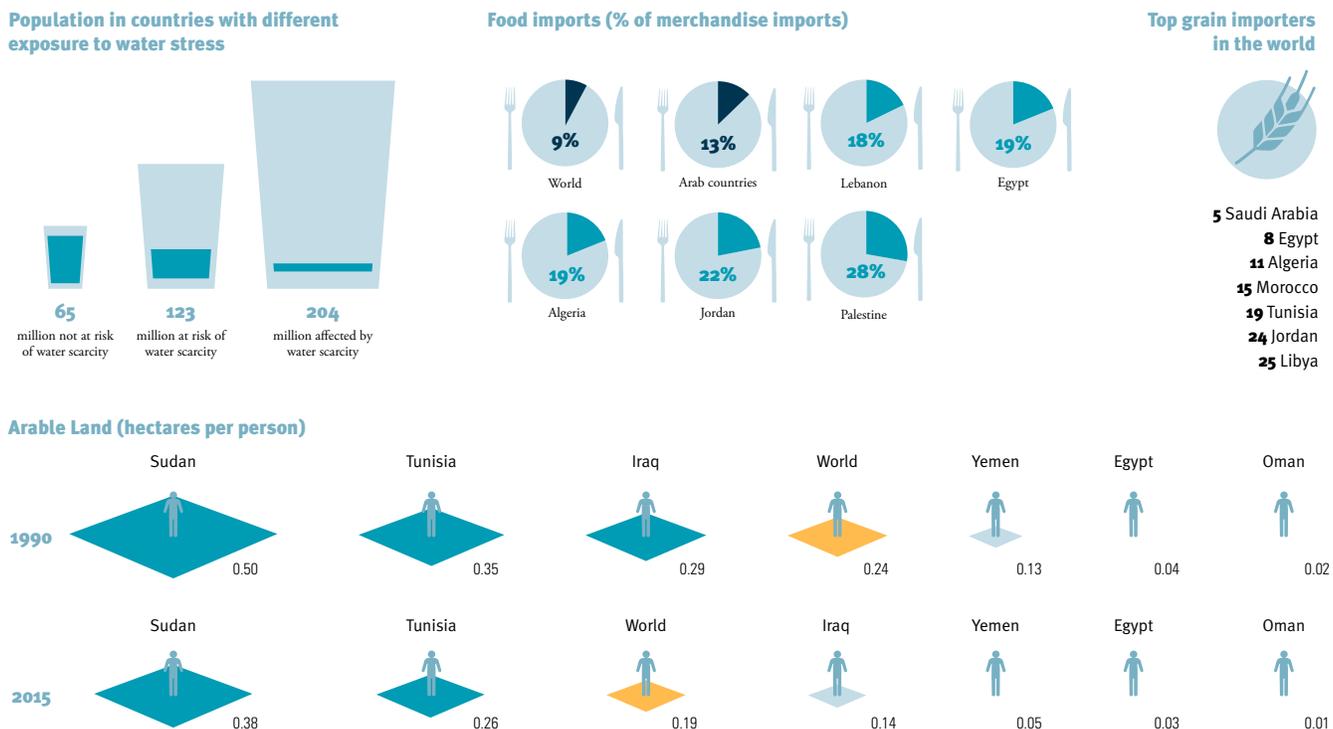
The institutional inability to provide a development model that could adapt to the expanding needs of the growing population has undermined resilience to shocks

The Arab region has not had a notable increase in natural disasters. But droughts in a few countries reveal the vulnerability of a region ill equipped with the necessary risk reduction and recovery capacity. Environmental mismanagement in Syria shows a path running from human interference with the climate, including unsustainable agricultural practices, to severe drought—leading to agriculture's collapse and migration from rural to urban areas, where the government failed to address the needs and grievances of the displaced people.<sup>42</sup>

Water stress and water scarcity affect the majority of people in the region, coupled with scarce and shrinking arable land (figure 19). From 1990 to 2015 the decline in arable land was upwards of 45 percent in more than half the countries, many already having less than 0.24 hectare per person, the world average in 1990. While famine has mostly hit war-affected countries, such as Yemen, the

FIGURE 19

Water stress and water scarcity affect the majority of people in the region, coupled with scarce and shrinking arable land



Source: FAO AQUASTAT database for water stress; World Bank, World Development Indicators for food imports and arable land; US Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service, Production, Supply and Distribution Database for grain imports.

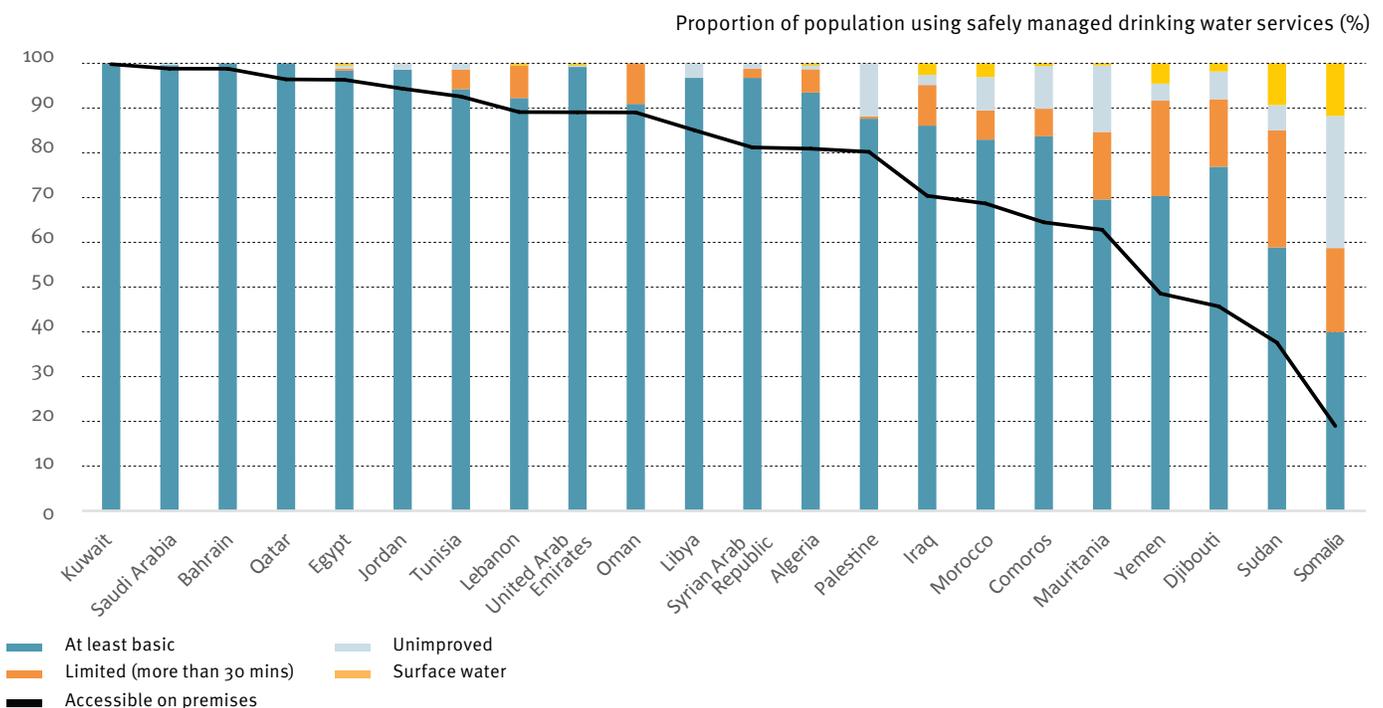
foregoing factors have meant high dependency on food imports (especially grain), making many countries vulnerable to production shortages and price volatility. Food imports represent 13 percent of all merchandise imports in the region, but for Algeria, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon the figure is closer to 20 percent. Saudi Arabia alone accounted for 6.4 percent of global grain imports in 2018, with another six Arab countries figuring in the top 25 grain importers.

Sudan shows how environmental shocks and fragility are interlinked with conflict, including population displacement, resource exploitation and underinvestment in development. Indeed, environmental issues continue to fuel conflict, including competition for oil and gas reserves, Nile waters and timber, and agricultural land use. Darfur exemplifies the social breakdown that can result from ecological collapse, given the strong link among land degradation, desertification and conflict (see box 5).<sup>43</sup>

Reliable access to safe drinking water—a basic right and thus part of the social contract—is becoming a challenge across the region (figure 20). Current water challenges go beyond age-old scarcity to include the water–food–energy nexus, climate change, droughts, floods, water quality, transboundary water and managing water in conditions of fragility, conflict and violence. Accelerating economic transformation and population growth, coupled with poor governance, have overwhelmed previous efforts in water management and innovation. Many countries in the region are living beyond their means, withdrawing unsustainable volumes from rivers and aquifers, depreciating their natural capital and undermining longer term wealth and resilience.<sup>44</sup> This also has a clear inequality dimension, because the poorest people are more likely to lack access to safe and reliable drinking water. The richest are more able to self-supply, by purchasing water on the private market but aggravating problems with public supply.

**FIGURE 20**

**Reliable access to safe drinking water—a basic right and thus part of the social contract—is becoming a challenge across the region**



Source: WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Global Database.

### 3.6 Overlapping exclusions in conflict situations

All these dimensions of exclusions are exacerbated when they overlap, and they all tend to overlap in areas affected by protracted conflict and large numbers of displaced populations within and across borders. The collapse of the social contract in many countries, and the multidimensional exclusion factors described here, can ignite and fuel social tensions and eventually violent conflicts (figure 21). Protracted crises also expose an increasing number of people, and in some cases entire generations, to mutually reinforcing deprivations, increasing the sense of exclusion and mistrust towards institutions. The Arab uprisings brought equity, inequality and exclusion to the fore of

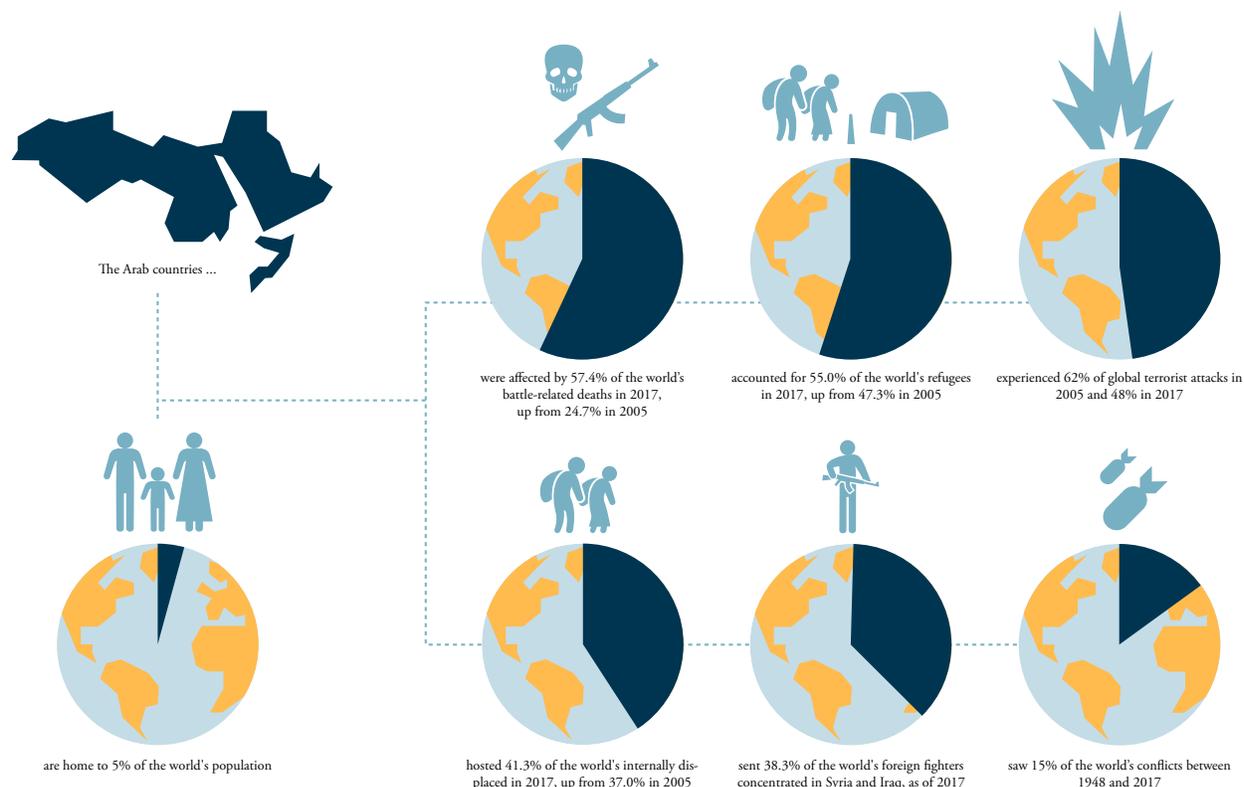
politics and public attention, demonstrating the debilitating forces beyond inequality. As much as inequality and exclusion may have been the underlying causes of fragility and conflict across the region after 2011, they have also been the consequence of previous fragility, including violent civil wars and other forms of conflicts over the past 30–40 years.<sup>45</sup> If we do not learn from past failures, policies decided today will probably generate similar unsustainable outcomes tomorrow.

Decades of regional advances in human capabilities related to health, education and income are put at risk by the broken social contract and are already being reversed in countries affected by conflict (see the Human Development Index trends in figure 5). In Syria, previous achievements

If we do not learn from past failures, policies decided today will probably generate similar unsustainable outcomes tomorrow

FIGURE 21

The dimensions of exclusions are exacerbated when they overlap, and they tend to overlap in areas affected by protracted conflict and large numbers of displaced populations within and across borders



Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program Battle-Related Deaths Dataset and Georeferenced Event Dataset for battle-related deaths and number of conflicts; UNHCR Population Statistics Database for refugees and internally displaced persons and UNWRA Annual Operational Reports for Palestinian refugees; Global Terrorism Database for terrorist attacks and the Soufan Group, "Foreign Fighters in Syria" for foreign fighters.

in human development have already been reversed: men have lost close to 8 years in life expectancy due to the conflict, while the gross primary school enrolment rates declined 50 percentage points. In Yemen the primary school enrolment rate fell from 97 percent to 92 percent between 2013 and 2016. Conflict also impairs people’s ability to sustain their livelihoods: Libya’s gross national income per capita in 2017 was only 68 percent of what it was in 2010, and the percentage of working poor in Yemen has more than doubled since the start of the conflict. A quarter of the working Syrian population is below the poverty line, five times the proportion in 2011 (figure 22). In Yemen the overlapping of factors of exclusion—including governance, geography, shocks and fragility—has led to a severe humanitarian crisis.

The Palestinian population also shows how protracted crises lead to overlapping

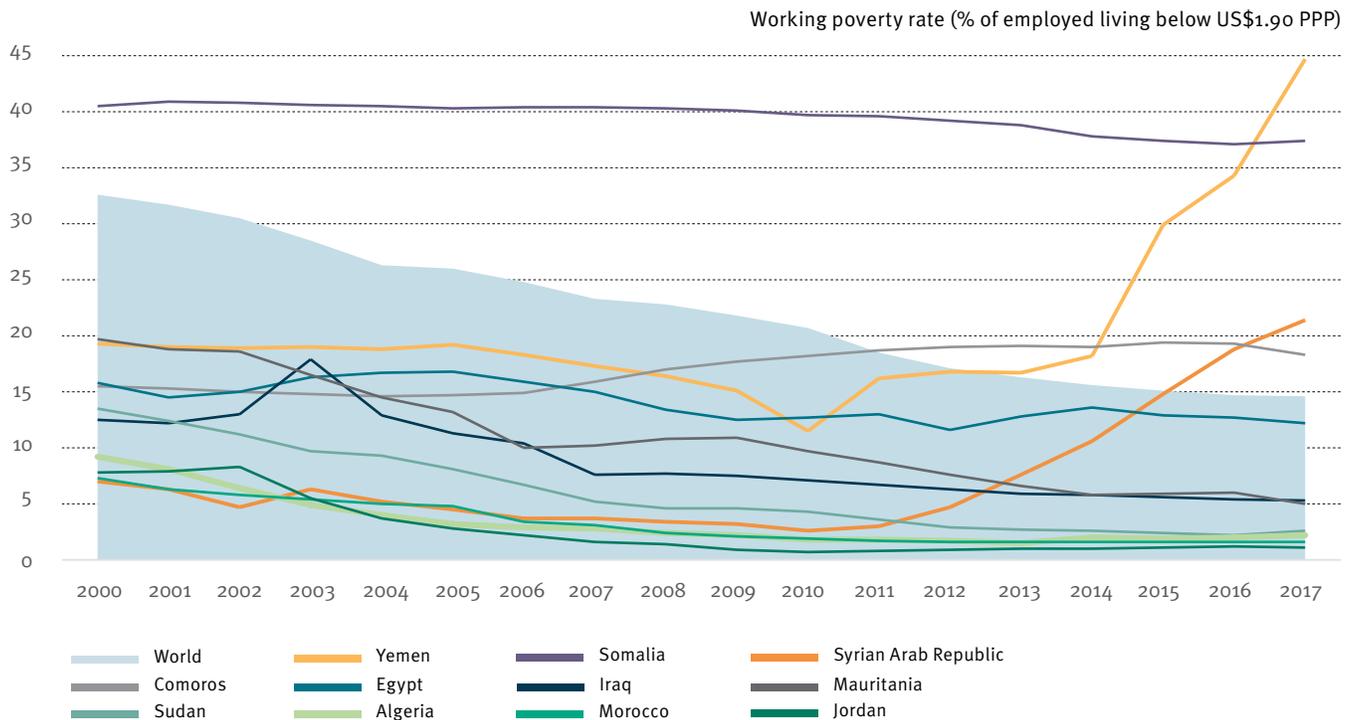
exclusions and grievances, often reinforcing each other. Palestinians in the West Bank are subject to a complex combination of Israeli and Palestinian legal systems, causing differentiated treatment and application of human rights. Ongoing tensions impose harsh restrictions on the movement of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, while exposing them to high risks of violence and incarceration. Property, infrastructure, social services and natural resources are depleted, and occasionally destroyed, undermining livelihoods and leaving about half the Palestinian population in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>46</sup>

Particularly severe forms of exclusion affect populations subject to forced displacement due to conflict. Internally displaced persons lose their home, economic means and often their community safety nets. Refugees who find shelter in other countries suffer from additional deprivations,

Decades of regional advances in human capabilities related to health, education and income are put at risk by the broken social contract and are already being reversed in countries affected by conflict

**FIGURE 22**

**Conflict impairs people’s ability to sustain their livelihoods: increasing numbers of working poor in Syria, Somalia and Yemen**

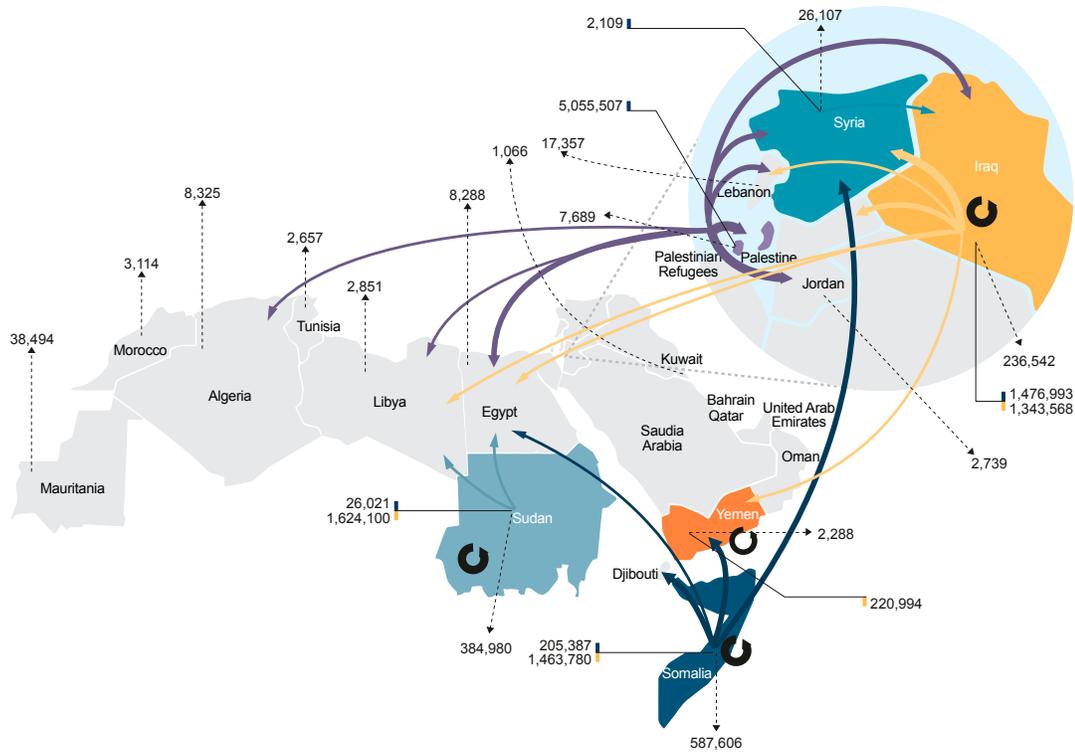


Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators.

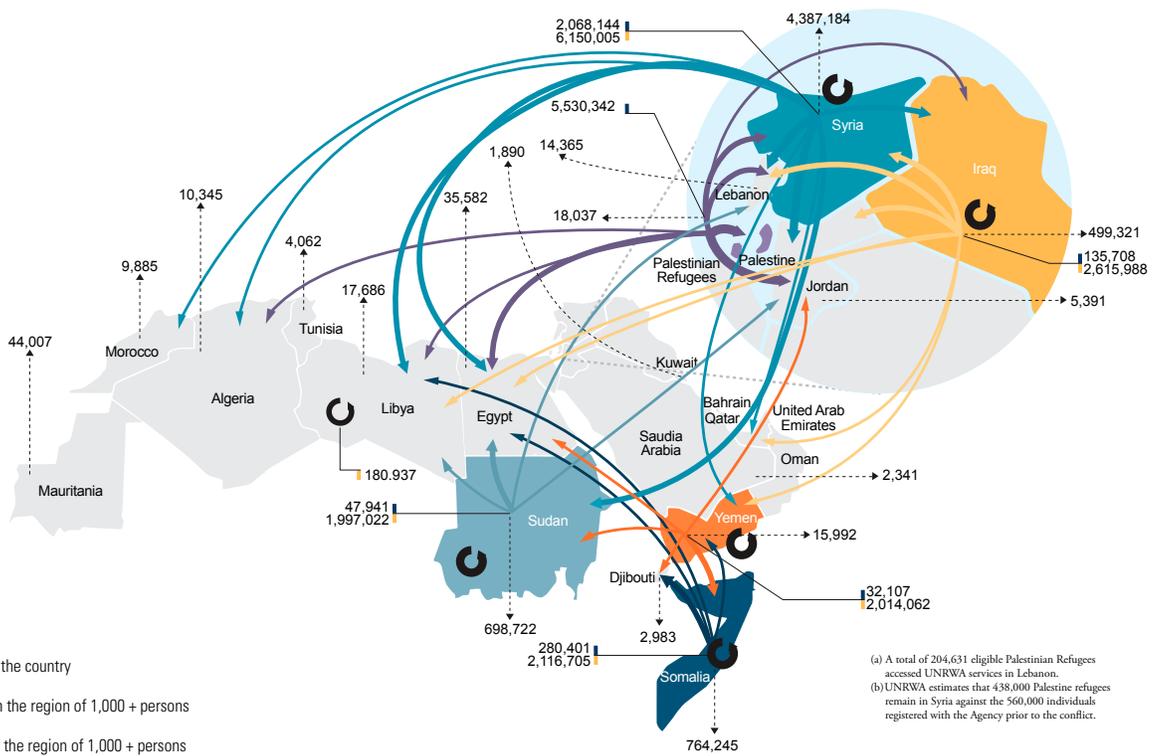
**FIGURE 23**

**Increase of refugees and populations subject to forced displacement between 2010 and 2017**

**2010**



**2017**



- Displaced within the country
- Movement within the region of 1,000+ persons
- Movement out of the region of 1,000+ persons
- Total refugees within the Arab region
- Total IDP

(a) A total of 204,631 eligible Palestinian Refugees accessed UNRWA services in Lebanon.  
 (b) UNRWA estimates that 438,000 Palestine refugees remain in Syria against the 560,000 individuals registered with the Agency prior to the conflict.

Source: UNWRA Annual Operational Reports for Palestinian refugees and UNHCR Population Statistics Database for all others.

since they cannot claim their citizenship rights and their existence depends on humanitarian aid or other, often informal, coping mechanisms. Children's education and access to other social services are often jeopardized, a reason of particular concern because in Jordan, Lebanon, Somalia and Sudan, those under age 17 make up half or

more of the refugee population. The number of people from the region exposed to forced displacement more than doubled, from 12.8 million in 2010 to 29.7 million in 2017, including refugees and internally displaced people resulting from conflicts in the past 15 years, as well as Palestinians who have been refugees for generations (figure 23).

## 4.

# The way forward

This paper provides an analysis of the relationship between citizenship and Agenda 2030 from a regional perspective, understanding citizenship as a multidimensional concept related to the “leave no one behind” notion. This approach sees the struggle for citizenship as a dynamic and iterative process of interaction, negotiation and contestation within and between different actors in the state and society to determine how power is exercised and distributed, to shape rights and obligations and to (re)define the underlying rules of the game.

The Arab region faces many socioeconomic development challenges that are intensified by political fragility, instability and recurrent conflict. There are close links between violent conflict and the five forces of exclusion identified in this paper: discrimination, geography, governance, socioeconomic status, and shocks and fragility. Tackling not only poverty but also inequality and social exclusion—and the factors that perpetuate them—are urgent priorities. These are complex challenges central to citizenship, state formation and state–society relations. In many respects, the region presents a puzzle: officially there has been steady progress in reducing poverty, and expanding health and education coverage, but social exclusion has been on the rise, leading to the discontent expressed during the Arab uprisings.

However, this seemingly dark picture may not be completely indicative of what could happen in the near future as some emerging trends have the potential to pave the way for a new social contract, more responsive to people’s needs. We are witnessing transformative dynamics that could bring about a more inclusive definition of citizenship:

- *The youth factor.* Since 2011, protests have highlighted the voice of the youth and their desire to be politically engaged, a radical shift from previous generations characterized by

a higher level of apathy. As the 2016 Arab Human Development Report noted, “civic engagement in politics had been expanding in the run-up to the uprisings, and youth took a leading role in this development”.<sup>47</sup> To some extent the protests also signalled the advent of a “new cultural epoch” in terms of political participation and institutional accountability.<sup>48</sup> In March 2019, peaceful demonstrations in Algeria led president Abdelaziz Bouteflika to drop his bid for a fifth term and later to resign.

- *Political rights and participation.* Post-2011 constitutions attempted to integrate some of the political demands first articulated in the streets. Algeria’s constitutional amendments of 2016 granted more power to members of both houses of parliament.<sup>49</sup> Tunisia’s new Constitution of 2014 guarantees fundamental rights, such as freedom of belief and of conscience for all religions, the right to assembly and peaceful demonstration, the freedoms of opinion, thought expression, information, and publication, “not subject to prior censorship,” among others.<sup>50</sup> Jordan amended its constitution in 2011 to establish a Constitutional Court and an Independent Elections Commission to supervise the electoral process. In many countries, people have shifted political participation to the ballot box. In 2018, the first free municipal elections were successfully held in Tunisia, while Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon also saw peaceful electoral processes. In 2019, planned elections in Algeria, Tunisia and Libya have raised expectations for a more meaningful political participation everywhere in the region.
- *Advancing women’s rights.* Positive developments are happening on the

Emerging trends have the potential to pave the way for a new social contract, more responsive to people’s needs

issue of gender discrimination where the region has traditionally struggled. Several countries have enacted legislation on domestic violence: Algeria and Bahrain in 2017, Lebanon in 2016 and Saudi Arabia in 2015.<sup>51</sup> Egypt introduced penalties for sexual harassment in 2014, including a minimum of one year's imprisonment for perpetrators.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile there has been a growing awareness of the many constraints women face when it comes to participation in the labour market. Paid maternal leave of at least 14 weeks is now available to Iraqi women since 2017 and for Syrian women since 2011.<sup>53</sup> More women are represented in parliament and in decision-making positions.

- *Rethinking social policies.* Public revenues and expenditures are critical in shaping the social contract and this paper has emphasized how subsidies have historically been a major factor in the region, despite their limited effectiveness as a social protection measure. In recent years, many governments started to phase out subsidies, also due to fiscal pressure, fostering a debate on what social protection policies are best fitted to address the needs of all, including the poorest and most vulnerable segments of the population. For example, following the elimination of fuel subsidies, Egypt launched in 2015 the social safety net program “Takaful and Karama” (“Solidarity and Dignity”) which has reached 2.26 million households, 88% of which are headed by women, through both conditional and unconditional cash transfers.<sup>54</sup> In countries where oil revenues have allowed to provide subsidies and services in the absence of direct or indirect taxation, political participation was constrained. Those dynamics are increasingly put into question. For example, as countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council start introducing value-added taxation (VAT) for financial sustainability

purposes, the use of those new revenues could begin to be scrutinized.

- *Embracing sustainability.* Fossil fuels have been a blessing and a curse for the entire region. With regards to sustainable energy production, non-oil producing countries are taking steps in the right direction: Morocco for example recently announced its plans to build a solar-power generating plant in the High Atlas Mountains to help reach its ambitious objective of generating 52% of its energy from renewables by 2030.<sup>55</sup> With the Benban Solar Park expected to go live in 2019, Egypt is hoping to sustainably produce electricity for one million households.<sup>56</sup>
- *Addressing violent extremism beyond security.* Peace as the cornerstone of an enabling environment for sustainable development cannot be overstated and though it remains elusive in large swathes of the region, there has been a notable recent decrease in the impact of violence, from 74,019 battle-related deaths in 2014 to 39,559 in 2017. Casualties from terrorism have also declined by 41% between 2014 and 2017 (from 21,207 to 12,549), attributable in part to the fall of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh). The latter opened the Arab people's eyes to the dangers of ideological and violent extremism. The Arab Barometer has been asking respondents since 2007 whether they think “A system governed by Islamic law without elections or political parties” is appropriate for their country. From 2007 to 2016, the percentage of people answering “Very appropriate” halved while those answering “Absolutely inappropriate” increased from 35.7% to 62%. In the most recent survey, the overwhelming majority of respondents rejected the Islamic State's tactics, with 92% saying that it “(certainly) does not represent true Islam.” Governments have expanded their strategy to combat violent extremism beyond security measures, to incorporate stronger prevention

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Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, national strategies have strived to incorporate the SDGs, displaying signs that the idea of sustainability and “leaving no one behind” is moving towards the centre of policymaking and decision-making

efforts. The Islamic State’s rule also shined a long overdue light on the plight of minorities in vulnerable contexts, in particular the persecution of the Yazidis. Finally, peace agreements moving through slowly for Syria and Yemen, as well as the elections expected to be held in Libya this year, provide some beacon of hope.

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, national strategies have strived to incorporate the SDGs, displaying signs that the idea of sustainability and “leaving no one behind” is moving towards the centre of policymaking and decision-making. While some seeds of a new social contract have been planted, the trajectories they will take are still unknown. Here are some takeaways from the analysis to inform the debate highlighting the contribution of inclusive citizenship to implementing the 2030 Agenda in Arab countries:

- *Citizenship beyond the law.* Citizenship goes beyond the legal status of an individual as a member of a particular society—it refers to all political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights and duties that define the social contract. Examining how citizenship is exercised in practice, in all its dimensions, can enable unpacking the forces contributing to exclusion and inequality to better address them and reach out to those left behind.
- *Citizenship in the SDGs.* The concept of citizenship has been taken for granted in the SDGs. But the SDGs do not adequately address some of the most acute development problems related to how citizenship can flourish amid contested state–society relationships, with political, social and economic fragility. In delivering on the SDGs, it is important to contextualize citizenship, especially in relation to state accountability.
- *Measuring citizenship achievements.* The region largely suffers from the lack of reliable up-to-date data, especially in relation to socioeconomic rights. Such data are crucial for assessing whether the state has lived up to its

commitments in delivering on rights. The region has few practical micro-level studies on the impact of intersecting inequalities on exclusion. Countries across the region need to be urged to collect data on the “capability” to claim, enjoy and practice rights as set out in the 2030 Agenda.

- *Shared responsibility for inclusive citizenship.* The 2030 Agenda emphasizes in goal 17 that the SDGs cannot be achieved by state institutions alone. Instead, partnerships among national and international institutions, civil society, the private sector and other actors have to be forged to mobilize adequate resources and ensure sustained progress towards the goals. In this regard, it is important to examine the dynamics of the five identified forces of exclusion as they unfold across the region, especially in relation to the role of the state as well as other societal actors that help define the social contract and realize inclusive and prosperous citizenship.

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# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> UN 2015.
- <sup>2</sup> El-Zein, DeJong and Salti 2015.
- <sup>3</sup> Includes the modern states of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, State of Palestine and Syrian Arab Republic.
- <sup>4</sup> Based on the 1925 Palestinian Citizenship Order and the 1931 Palestinian Citizenship Amendment Order issued by the British Mandate for Palestine.
- <sup>5</sup> Parolin 2009.
- <sup>6</sup> Ayubi 1995.
- <sup>7</sup> Heydemann 2016.
- <sup>8</sup> Anderson 1987, 2014.
- <sup>9</sup> Suad 2010.
- <sup>10</sup> UNDP 2005, p. 1.
- <sup>11</sup> UNDP 2016.
- <sup>12</sup> Asik 2012, p. 85.
- <sup>13</sup> Abu El-Haj 2009.
- <sup>14</sup> Faour 2013.
- <sup>15</sup> See Devarajan and Ianchovichina (2017), Forstenlechner and Rutledge (2010), Hamzawy (2016), and Meijer and Butenschön (2017), among others.
- <sup>16</sup> Winckler 2013.
- <sup>17</sup> Bibi and Nabli 2010.
- <sup>18</sup> Winckler 2013.
- <sup>19</sup> Fattouh and El-Katiri 2012.
- <sup>20</sup> El-Zein, DeJong and Salti 2015.
- <sup>21</sup> UNDP 2016.
- <sup>22</sup> Korany 2014.
- <sup>23</sup> Sørli, Gleditsch and Strand 2005.
- <sup>24</sup> Ansani and Daniele 2012, and Milbach-Bouche 2015.
- <sup>25</sup> Kapiszewski 2006 and Malik 2017.
- <sup>26</sup> Neumayer 2004.
- <sup>27</sup> Mansour-Ille 2014.
- <sup>28</sup> UNDP 2018a.
- <sup>29</sup> UNDP 2009.
- <sup>30</sup> UNDP 2010.
- <sup>31</sup> UNDP 2005.
- <sup>32</sup> Vericat 2017.
- <sup>33</sup> Abi Zeid Daou 2017.
- <sup>34</sup> UNESCWA 2018.
- <sup>35</sup> World Bank 2011.
- <sup>36</sup> UNEP 2007.
- <sup>37</sup> El-Zein and others 2014.

- <sup>38</sup> UNDP 2009.
- <sup>39</sup> Hunt and others 2017.
- <sup>40</sup> Ianchovichina, Mottaghi and Devarajan 2015.
- <sup>41</sup> Jobbins and Henley 2015.
- <sup>42</sup> Kelleya and others 2015.
- <sup>43</sup> UNEP 2007.
- <sup>44</sup> World Bank 2018.
- <sup>45</sup> Ianchovichina, Mottaghi and Devarajan 2015.
- <sup>46</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council 2018.
- <sup>47</sup> UNDP 2016.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> Djabi 2016.
- <sup>50</sup> El-Sadany 2017.
- <sup>51</sup> World Bank 2019.
- <sup>52</sup> UNDP 2018b.
- <sup>53</sup> World Bank 2019.
- <sup>54</sup> World Bank 2018, November 15.
- <sup>55</sup> Jezard 2018, May 1.
- <sup>56</sup> Fleming 2019, January 25.

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