

A

GENERATION

ON THE MOVE:

Insights into the conditions,
aspirations and activism of Arab youth

Executive Summary



With support of



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Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs

American University of Beirut

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Preface

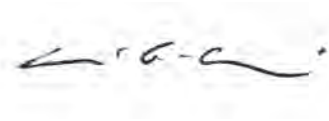
Historians may well look back one day and record that modern history in the Middle East and North Africa and even across the world marked a decisive turning point starting in December 2010, due in large measure to the collective sentiments and coordinated activities of hundreds of thousands of young men and women in half a dozen Arab countries. The trajectory and consequences of the current political, social and economic transformations rippling across the Arab world will become clear in the years ahead. For now, we are collectively challenged to understand the driving forces for the momentous changes underway, and the underlying causes that sparked them. Enormous energy and talent are being unleashed across the Arab region, as adults and youth alike start to reconfigure some of the basic institutions of their societies; in the fields of representative governance, education, private business, culture and the arts, foreign policy, and social development.

This report is an attempt to act on the need to better understand the stirrings that already were obvious in the minds, worldviews and behavior of many young Arabs, but that had been manifested primarily in the private or the virtual realms – and not yet in the street and other public spaces. In 2009, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut initiated a two-year research project with the support of the UNICEF Middle East & North Africa Regional Office and with scores of colleagues across the region and the world, including the Regional United Nations Development Group, in particular the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which adopted Young People as one of the three regional priorities for the UN in MENA. The project aimed to explore more deeply, and across many sectors, the sentiments, grievances, and aspirations of young men and women aged 15-24 throughout the region. Such a wide range of ages, across a region characterized by diverse social, economic and political conditions, meant that this study intended primarily to identify some of the most important issues that mattered in the lives of young Arabs, as seen both by youth themselves and by adults who were intimately involved in their lives as educators, researchers or civil society activists.

We believe this report identifies and explores critical issues that define the lives and mindsets of young men and women across the region, and suggests priority areas for further research, policy analysis and new interventions.

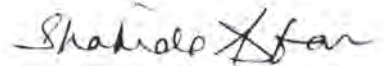
Most of all, perhaps, the report helps illuminate the changes of recent years within young Arab men and women whereby this generation moved from quietly absorbing the constraints, frustrations and deficiencies in many aspects of their lives to a condition where they initiated actions to reshape their lives and redefine a future with more options and opportunities. When the work on this report began in 2009, youth and researchers across the region were consulted to better understand the issues in the lives of young Arabs, because most of what concerned them was not manifested in public in a clear or systematic manner. Two and a half years later, young people had initiated new forms of mass activism that have started to rewrite the modern history of this region, and researchers and policy-makers alike have to run faster to keep pace with the actions of young Arabs.

More than ever before, we need accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the issues and sentiments that define the lives of Arab youth if their enormous energy, talent and commitment to their societies are to be fully harnessed for a new era of state-building based on the two key values that they seem to express: equity and opportunity.



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INTRODUCTION

“A Generation on the Move:
Insights into the conditions,
aspirations and activism of Arab youth”

Understanding the state of mind of the activist young men and women throughout the region provides a window into the challenges Arab societies are facing today, and into the recent revolts that are driving the national social and political transformations in the Arab world. With the aim to identify and better understand key elements of young Arabs' perspectives on themselves and their place in society, in 2009 the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut initiated a two-year partnership to produce an updated and forward looking situation analysis on youth in the Middle East and Northern Africa region with the support of the UNICEF Middle East & North Africa Regional Office.

Goal

This report aims to provide relevant insights into those important dimensions of the lives of young Arabs aged 15-24 years – civic participation, gender equality, sexuality, migration, identity, among others – that are not sufficiently acknowledged by the decision-makers and key actors in society who directly influence the well-being of Arab youth. The report also intends to inform and sensitize audiences about the myriad challenges and rights violations adolescents (10-19) and youth (15-24) confront on a daily basis throughout the MENA region, and the opportunities to address these in the current evolving context. The report fills a regional gap in knowledge, information and evidence-based policy-making related to youth across the region. The situation, conditions and mindsets of young people are addressed in the study through four broad categories of inter-dependent rights – survival, development, protection and participation – that are highlighted in key universal rights conventions and documents related to young men and women.

Why

Understanding the choices young Arabs make in their lives and how such choices impact their societies within and beyond the region is a fundamental first step to creating a protective and supportive environment for this generation of young people. If youth do not contribute meaningfully to formulating public policies that impact their present and future lives, the policy-makers are likely to implement 'youth agendas' that do not accurately address the real concerns and needs in young people's lives.

What

The report studies youth in the Arab region¹ through several lenses that aim to: 1) explore the opinions and attitudes of young Arabs and reflect their views on a wide variety of topics; 2) analyze the motivations, concerns and expectations of young men and women, including sensitive areas like autonomy, political rights and sexuality that are understudied in most Arab societies; and 3) identify research priorities to support further knowledge development and policy advocacy for youth.

The report's findings point to a number of constraints and inequities that young people have faced for years and that have been the impetus for the recent Arab uprisings where youth rebelled and demanded significant structural and political changes in their countries. The most common complaints of Arab youth touch on two related issues that define their private and public lives: not enjoying all the rights and opportunities they are entitled to, and feeling constrained by different forces in their society, including the family, society as a whole, and government policies.

The research, consultations and analysis carried out for this report identified a series of priority issues in the lives of young Arabs which are each addressed in a unique chapter of this report: Youth Identities and Values; Civic and Political Participation; Arab Youth and Media Expression; Youth Autonomy in the Arab Family; Young Women and Girls; Arab Youth Sexuality; Migration of Arab Youth; Youth in Situations of Violence and Armed Conflict; and, National Youth Policies in MENA.

How

In producing the report "A generation on the Move: Insights into the conditions, aspirations and activism of Arab youth" over a two-year period from 2009-2011, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut with UNICEF's support, coordinated an extensive consultative process with a wide range of partners, stakeholders, young people, researchers and experts, to inform the themes explored and discussed in this report. Principal aspects of the collaborative effort included:

- integrated alliance-building

¹ The countries and territories covered in this report include: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, North Sudan, Yemen, Djibouti, Iraq, oPt, Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.



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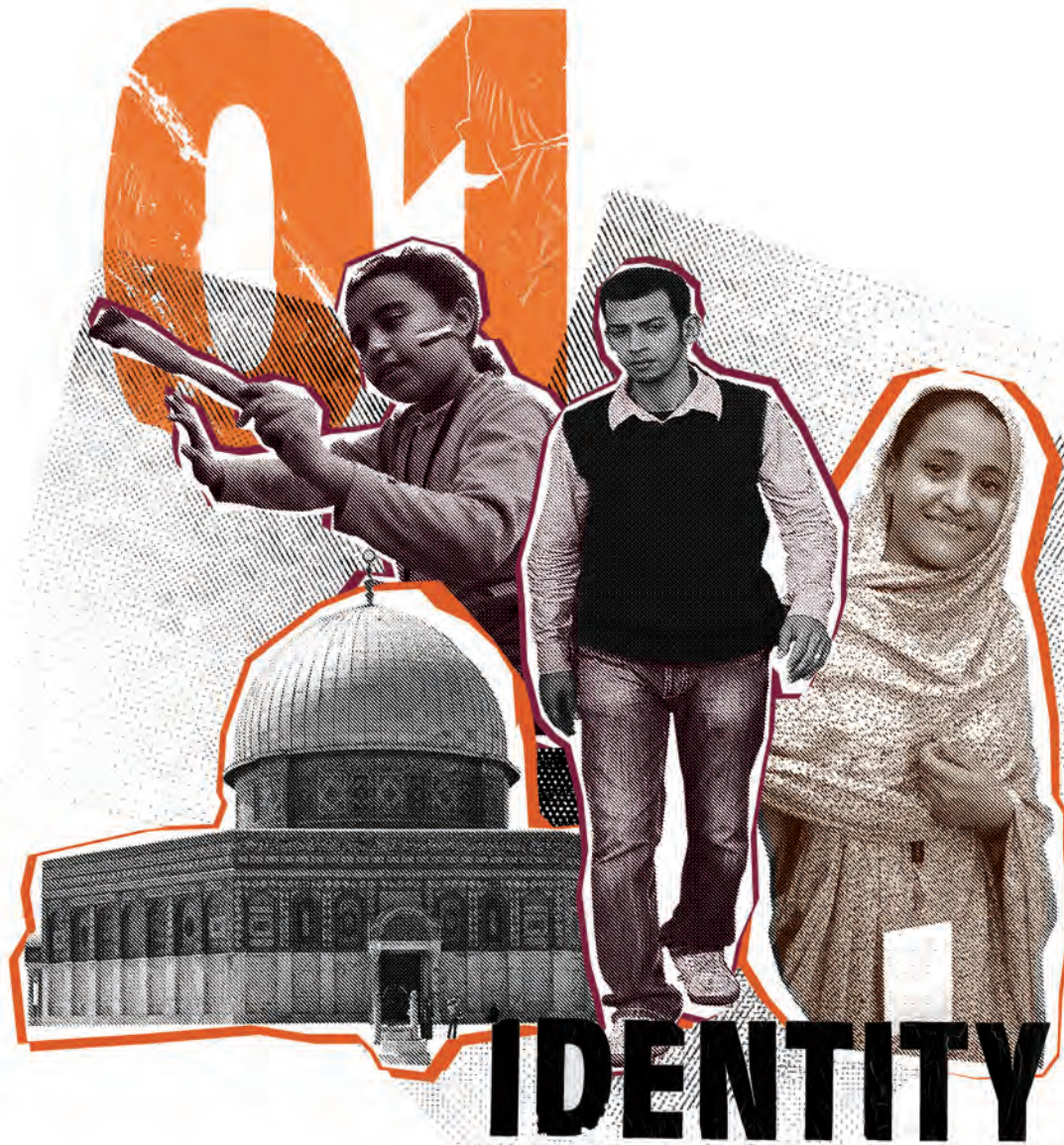
- youth participation in research and review
- private sector and civil society engagement, and
- inter-sectoral and trans-regional knowledge-sharing.

The publication is based on numerous consultations and analyses of new and existing research that includes a combination of available national and international statistical data, recent polls and surveys, national studies, ongoing or completed research, and analytical texts from respected experts in the field. Many of the papers written for this report are available in full on the AUB-IFI and UNICEF websites. Methodologies used include reviews of existing literature, quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation.

Over this period of collaboration, a series of regional meetings and roundtables were held with researchers, experts and practitioners to inform the content and direction of the project, and to create future partnerships. Four thematic roundtables were held in Cairo, Dubai, Beirut and Tunis, on the themes of (1) youth political participation and civic engagement; (2) identities and values; (3) new media use; and (4) adolescent girls. The discussions and views presented by

researchers, regional experts, practitioners and young people themselves during these roundtables were incorporated into the report. Other consultations included the inaugural AUB-IFI annual meeting of pollsters of Arab youth, the first two Goethe Institute-IFI seminars on *Studying Youth in the Arab World*, and roundtable workshops on youth social entrepreneurship in the Arab world and youth social policies.

The research team placed significant emphasis on tapping into the voices and sentiments of young Arabs through four key approaches: (1) credible recent surveys and polls at national and regional levels; (2) focus groups with youth throughout the region, including youth researchers in eight Arab countries organized through a British Council project; (3) country-based analyses of youth expressions on websites, chat rooms and other web-based outlets; and (4) field research by respected scholars who directly engaged, surveyed or interviewed young people. This new research, commissioned to fill data gaps, was undertaken primarily by local academic researchers within the Arab world, highlighting the wealth of knowledge and expertise available locally, while also affording a nuanced in-depth analysis.



CHAPTER 01: YOUTH IDENTITIES AND VALUES

An abundance of identities in evolving societies

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CONTRIBUTORS: Charles Harb, Nasser Yassin, Moussa Shteivi, Yazan Doughan and Abla Rouag-Djenidi

KEY FINDINGS

Youth identities and values are under-researched and are complex due to three key factors: (1) young people adhere to different, and sometimes conflicting, identities in spheres such as ethnicity, religion, nationality, gender and sexuality, family ties, ideology, and social norms; (2) the powerful indigenous communal values that have defined Middle Eastern people (such as religion, family, tribe, ethnicity) have been widely complemented by individualistic norms, values and social attributes mostly from the Western world; and (3) youth identities and values are constantly evolving as their combinations of local and foreign identities and values are constantly being reconfigured.

New impulses, such as global movements on the environment, sexual freedom or globalized commercial trade issues, continuously enter into the world of youth. With the historic political changes underway since early 2011, **the nature and pace of change in the lives of young Arabs are likely to accelerate** and amplify, though this would occur in different ways across the region as some countries liberalize, while others remain tightly centrally controlled.

Two common elements characterize Arab youth's identities and influence their vision and priorities: **family and religion**. A regional survey of 18-24-year-old Arabs indicated the strong role of religion in their lives; 68 percent of respondents said that religion defines them as a person (Asda'a 2008, 75-76). Arab youth tend to convey two attitudes about themselves and their place in society: on the one hand, they look at family and religion as powerful anchors of their identity and their ability to navigate the future; on the other hand, they express real concerns about their lack of opportunity to make their voices heard, be taken seriously, achieve their full potential, or compete fairly for jobs and other assets.

In Egypt, according to the Silatech-Gallup Arab youth survey 63 percent of young Egyptians believe that having or starting a family is the most important goal to both young women and young men. In Egypt 69 percent of youth believe that knowing people in high places is critical to getting a job. *Wasta*, or having the right connections, is perceived as a major obstacle in gaining employment, and this reflects widespread youth complaints about job prospects across much of the region.

In a recent study conducted in Lebanon, **Lebanese youth** show clear family and national identities, closely followed by sectarian affiliation. They are significantly concerned

for, and identify with, their families, Lebanon and their sect. Lebanese youth did not espouse values of hedonism and stimulation, but seemed more focused on achievement, self-direction, independence of thought and action. The Lebanese youth surveyed were influenced by the rise of global youth culture, enriched by the intensive global communication networks and the mass media; at the same time, they felt stuck in parochial practices that entrap them in confined milieus.

Jordanian youth, like their counterparts throughout most of the Arab region, express a combination of satisfaction and pride. In a recent survey, two-thirds of respondents (67 percent) felt that achieving success in life depends on the status of their family in society, rather than on their own effort. Religion plays a strong role in the identity and values of Jordanian youth, with those identifying themselves first as belonging to the Islamic Umma (community of believers) (34 percent) being slightly higher than those who identified themselves first as Jordanians (31 percent). Most Jordanian youth (58 percent) said they were very proud of their nation and expressed significant trust in state institutions like the armed forces, judiciary and police, but relatively less in parliament, media and the private sector.

Despite common concerns among youth about favoritism and discrimination, polling data across the region consistently reveals a **sense of optimism and a willingness to work hard to achieve life goals**. The latest Silatech-Gallup poll of Arabs aged 15-29 in 2011 shows that a strong majority, averaging over 80 percent in most cases and reaching 94 percent in Tunisia and 95 percent in Sudan, believes that if they work hard they will get ahead and achieve their life goals.

A recent survey of youth attitudes, mostly students aged 15-25, in the six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman – revealed **high levels of optimism about their future prospects** while also reflecting grievances in some areas. In all countries – except Bahrain (81 percent) – over 90 percent said they were optimistic or very optimistic about their future prospects, while all expressed very high levels of satisfaction (88 percent and above). The GCC youth expressed a strong need for more democracy and political participation in all six countries.

Men and women's perceptions of women's rights are important elements of both their identity and value

systems that can have enormous impact on young women's education, careers, life choices and self-fulfillment in general, which in turn influences the course of a country's national development. Perceptions of women's roles in society vary within the Arab world: one regional survey showed that 58 percent of males and 73 percent of females aged 18-24 believe that men and women should have equal opportunities in the workplace (Asda'a 2008, 80).

CASE STUDY: Marginalized Algerian youth create their own group identity

In a recent study surveying 13-23-year-old youth in peri-urban housing districts in Algeria, the sociologist Dr. Abla Rouag-Djenidi of the University of Constantine identified the phenomenon of how economically frustrated and marginalized young men created an identity for themselves using the only means available to them – the empty outdoor spaces within their housing projects. The survey consisted of interviewing 368 young men in four housing projects in eastern Algeria.

The interviews confirmed that men spend most of their free time outside the home. The vast majority of youth were dissatisfied with their living conditions at home and spent very little time there, with around 85 percent spending most of their free time outside the house and returning home late at night because inside the home they did not have their own space or did not enjoy positive relations with other family members. Over half of the youth were out-of-school; half had used drugs; 72 percent had friends who used drugs; 75 percent belonged to local gangs; and around half had engaged in acts of delinquency. The 17-20-year-old age group is the most susceptible to this kind of 'social marginalization.' Such marginalization represents the manner in which these youth react to their inability to adapt to the living and socio-economic conditions defined by their community. The youth gang culture and behavior is their way of forging a role for themselves in a society that does not offer them other opportunities to otherwise affirm themselves or feel part of the community.

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PARTICIPATION

CHAPTER 02: YOUTH CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Apathy amidst new forms of activism

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CONTRIBUTORS: Barbara Ibrahim, Gregory Gause and Christine Asaad

KEY FINDINGS

In December 2010 and January 2011, young people in half a dozen Arab countries ushered in one of the most dramatic episodes of mass civic expression and street-level public participation in the history of the modern world. **Arab youth demarcated a historic line** that separates two radically different phases of their lives: their docile and passive attitudes on the surface before December 2010, and a much more self-assertive public willingness to reconfigure the exercise of political power in a continuing process that has been given many names, including the ‘Arab Spring’, the ‘Second Arab Awakening’, the ‘Arab Citizen Revolt’, the ‘Arab Revolution’, or the ‘Arab National Uprisings’.

The sudden transition from apparent apathy to extreme activism was not widely predicted. That notwithstanding, researchers of Arab youth have long documented **youth frustration** which manifested itself in three main ways: (1) widespread lack of confidence in established political outlets; (2) frustration at limited opportunities to be meaningfully engaged in public and civic actions; and (3) the beginning of many new forms of self-expression and community action.

For decades, although Arab youth shied away from formal political organizations and remained skeptical about their national elections, they felt the need to be active in society; to bring about changes or improvements in their lives.

Youth activism – especially acute in the Arab world’s non-democratic and socially patriarchal societies – asserted itself in the 1990s and 2000s through a variety of actual and virtual channels that could be seen as precursors of the explosion of recent youth civic and political participation.

Until the current Arab street revolts, **youth civic and political participation comprised three different kinds of activities in society**: (1) traditional NGOs, volunteer activity and charitable societies; (2) traditional political action (parties, authorized trade unions, state-run youth organizations) and more modern political activism (street protests, web mobilization, new media exposure and activism); and (3) a combination of these two in ‘civic activism’ – a blend of public education and consciousness-raising, political lobbying, street activism, or volunteerism and community service of young people around a single common cause. Examples of the civic and political participation activities in the region include: “Building the Umma” and “Resala” in Egypt (religious); “Tawasul” in UAE; the “Independence Intifada” in Lebanon (patriotic); or “Sharek” in Palestine (equity).

Available data on youth civic and political participation is weak in the MENA region. Although the number of active youth-specific NGOs has increased in recent years, it still remains underdeveloped. Statistics from recent national surveys highlight the problem of **young Arabs’ low political and civic participation rates** in traditional institutions and outlets. Fifty-three percent of Arab youth are confident in their national government, but a significant 42 percent are not confident, and fully half of all Arab youth do not see their national elections as being honest. Before December 2010, many young Arabs seemed to react to their lack of trust in public politics in different ways: a few created new public political movements narrowly focused on a single issue; others joined some Islamist youth groups linked to leading groups like Hamas, Hizbullah or the Muslim Brotherhood; some others involved themselves in charitable and volunteer work, or engaged in national political and social debates.

However, low levels of political or civic participation do not imply lack of interest in democratic reform or global citizenship. Recent surveys show that youth in the Arab region place **a high value on democracy** (93 percent in Jordan, 84 percent in Egypt, 85 percent in Morocco, 91 percent in Iraq and 75 percent in the UAE), and that most young Arabs aged 18-24 desire the right to vote. Palestinian youth are politicized in a more active manner than most other Arab societies, especially since the emergence of the generations of the first and second intifadas in the 1980s and 90s.

The public sphere of social and political activism remains heavily male dominated, and the absence of women in public in mainstream movements remains obvious. Yet in some cases **young women are becoming more active**, and often lead movements for social, environmental or political change, particularly in countries like Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco and Kuwait. Some efforts (like the movement for women’s voting rights in Kuwait or the women’s family law status in Morocco) succeeded to a large extent. As home computers and cell phones become more widespread, the cyber-sphere is narrowing some of the gender divides in public participation. In fact, young Arab females do not need to leave home or have male permission to become actively engaged in public discussion and opinion formation.

Understanding youth public and civic engagement cannot be isolated from other economic and social trends affecting youth. So while a majority of young people are positive toward greater citizen participation, they have low expectations that governments will allow them to become active



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citizens, and their priorities still remain job, career advancement and the ability to start families.

Social entrepreneurship is one of the fastest growing sectors in NGOs and youth activism, with new programs of innovative activism that aim to achieve social benefits throughout society on a sustainable basis, such as the Injaz ('achievement') program in Jordan and Alashanek Ya Balady Association for Sustainable Development (AYB-SD) in Egypt.

Arab youth today increasingly use **new digital media** to express themselves and communicate, thus creating new spheres and forms of political and civic participation. If some forms of public participation that once took place on the street now occur in the virtual realm (via websites or cell-phones), digital activism also has proved able to mobilize large numbers of people to demonstrate in the streets. As an example, in Egypt, the use of new media as a tool for expression, organization and mobilization has recently increased, with over 23 million internet users at the end of 2010, and a parallel expansion in the number of blogs, email groups, Twitter and Facebook users (20 percent of the ten thousand blogs created by Egyptians focus on political issues).

Millions of young Arabs who now demonstrate in public spaces, in cyberspace, or in their community organizations have achieved an **important psychological transformation** from being passive subjects of adult categorization and control, to more active agents of self-expression and social change. This has resulted in one of the most important developments in recent years: the ability of youth activism to achieve greater impact in society by linking up with traditional media and political forces.

The Arab region is still in the early days of defining **the complex and ever-changing linkages among several forces** in the lives of its youth: the power of new media and communications technology; young people's involvement in charitable and volunteer community work; youth who drive some of the Arab uprisings and governance revolutions underway; parents' perception of the role and rights of their own sons and daughters; and the formal political and legal systems that continue to define the limits and opportunities for young people. Beyond all these factors, young people have made clear that they will actively engage in their societies, and if society does not offer them the appropriate opportunities they may take the initiative to change how society operates in the public realm.

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CHAPTER 03: ARAB YOUTH AND MEDIA EXPRESSION

Jump starting movements through the Virtual World

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CONTRIBUTORS: Jad Melki, Mark Levine, Hebr.com, Waad Ibrahim, Rodda Leage, Ivana Chalmers, Karen Abi Saab, Sarah Tabbara and Joe Khalil

KEY FINDINGS

New media use for entertainment and activism is on the increase in much of the Arab world, and has critically contributed to the historic political changes, the Arab Uprisings in 2011. Even though large parts of the region remain outside the digital world, young men and women, as political activists, are creating new concepts of the ‘public sphere’ where views are expressed, ideas are debated, identities are explored, and in some cases, the established power structures are challenged.

Arab and Western analysts increasingly believe that while activism on social networks may give users the opportunity to express themselves, it may not always have a direct impact because the relationships formed online produce ‘weak-tie’ connections to movements. High-risk activism for political change requires ‘strong-tie’ connections for on the ground activism and change, which happens more often in real life than digitally.

Like most other aspects of young Arabs’ lives, the use of media is characterized by three central phenomena: (1) **disparity** in the rates of access to, and use of, new media; (2) **transformation**, as the nature of the media and how Arab youth use them is in a constant state of change; and (3) **self-assertion**, as these new media provide the single most important means by which young Arabs today speak out and transcend the limits imposed on them by their societies.

The democratic transformations underway in some Arab countries are slowly removing the barriers that prevented youth from expressing themselves freely in public spaces. Yet two other common constraints still exist: wide disparities in access to new media, and the inability of political systems to translate young people’s needs into government policy changes. **Only a minority of Arab youth can access the full potential of today’s new media.** Around 29 percent of people in the Middle East and North Africa use the internet, the majority of them youth. The most recent data for access to the internet by young Arabs aged 15-29 shows that 62 percent have access in their community, but just 22 percent have access at home.

For the entire Arab world, the breakdown of Facebook users indicates an average 2:1 ratio of male to female users, which is well below the global average of 54 percent of Facebook users being female (Dubai School of Government 2011). Facebook usage in particular has increased rapidly across much of the Arab world in recent years, especially

in the last year. In December 2010, 21.3 million Arabs in the region used Facebook, a phenomenal annual growth of 78 percent from the 11.9 million users the previous year (Dubai School of Government 2011). While 22 percent of the population uses Facebook in the Gulf, only 9 percent does so in the Levant and 4 percent in North Africa (International World Stats 2011).

Women face stringent rules and obstacles in experiencing online access and freedom, but they learn to circumvent these codes of conduct online just as they do in their homes and in public. However, perceptions of online expression by young women in conservative Arab societies show some signs of change. While a small number of young women use Facebook in relatively liberal ways, among the majority, self-expression online is still constrained due to the high value placed on reputation and the small community in which they live.

Political and social activists in the Arab world have also used **cell-phone communications** to mobilize and organize public protests in recent years. According to national averages, cell-phones are more prevalent than telephone landlines or internet access. In Aswan, Egypt, for example, there are six times less home internet users than the national average, but the cell-phone penetration rate is 74 percent (Gallup 2010). As with social media, cell-phones and satellite television played central roles in sparking the Arab youth-led revolts in early 2011.

Thanks to the very open and often anonymous nature of the internet and other new media tools, young users cannot be fully controlled, though at another level online activism is easier to monitor than underground activism. Nevertheless, **internet freedom in the Arab region has been declining** in recent years, according to Freedom House (Ghannam 2011). Aside from family online surveillance, most Arab governments actively restrict freedom of expression in both traditional and new media. In recent years, five of the top ten leading censors of the internet worldwide hailed from the Arab world: Syria, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Yemen and Egypt – though this situation will change in line with the evolving political conditions in some of these countries.

Throughout the region **traditional press laws are being adapted and applied to the online world.** These laws include vaguely defined prohibitions that can be used by state prosecutors to indict, intimidate or imprison journalists



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or other citizens, creating legal constraints to all people's right to free expression and access to information. While arrests for online declarations have occurred, they are not commonplace – perhaps because nationals have learned to routinely practice self-censorship or to disguise their true identities online.

In addition to (1) social and political mobilization and (2) accountability, **young people make use of the interactive and portable new media for:** (3) self-expression, (4) communication, (5) entertainment, and (6) companionship. Online spaces, including social networking sites, seem to be most important to young Arabs for allowing them an opportunity to express themselves with minimal inhibitions.

A recent random review of online content (websites, blogs, videos, forums, etc.) examined **youth-created sites** in a number of countries, and found broadly that Tunisian, Lebanese, Qatari, Algerian and Saudi youth express frustrations with state polices and human rights violations in their respective countries (Ghannam 2011). The most widely discussed freedoms and rights are workers' rights, freedom of expression and women's rights. Unemployment is addressed across the board, but especially in Algeria and Lebanon.

Both new and traditional media are used heavily for recreational or entertainment purposes. Television ranks highest, with cell-phone texting, listening to music on a PC, and talking on a cell-phone following close behind. Social networking, chatting online, watching movies, and playing video games come next. At the bottom of the list of most frequently used media for entertainment are reading books, magazines or blogs, and finally, cinema. Media as an entertainment vehicle can be seen as a substitute for other leisure-time activities or spaces that many people in the Arab world may not have access to, especially those in the lower income brackets and young women.

Although the majority of youth say they have used the internet and rate themselves as highly adept at employing new media, **they spend considerably less time producing content than they do consuming** both new and traditional media. For example, the majority of the surveyed youth in one three-country study admit to never blogging. Those that do most often do so in a language other than their mother tongue: French or English (81% use English to blog), but this is not necessarily the case across the region.

As know-how and internet access increase among Arab young people, youth could be more incorporated

by the governments into the decision-making process, if the internet becomes a new dimension or form of political activism. Governments could establish innovative e-government mechanisms, for example, where youth and other citizen concerns can be expressed more openly and can also expect to receive a fair hearing. If the digital divide is addressed and media literacy is incorporated into the education system, physical, social and economic barriers – like transportation, income disparities and geographical distances – could gradually lose significance, along with the hierarchical structure of government, thus resulting in a more democratic process where voices will be heard, and not silenced.

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CHAPTER 04: YOUTH AUTONOMY IN THE ARAB FAMILY

Decision-making, participation and the family:
patriarchy or participation?

LEAD AUTHOR: Zina Sawaf

CONTRIBUTIORS: Carine Allaf and Diane Singerman

KEY FINDINGS

In the Arab region, the family is society in miniature (Barakat 1993, 183). Since the family continues to be the basic unit of patriarchal organization in the Arab region, life-changing decisions – such as marriage and career path – continue to be seen as family or societal matters. Great family loyalty and the collective nature of the unit are fundamental values in the society. However, the centrality of the family is being challenged by the state and other social institutions, as patterns of divorce and marriage are changing over time and different types of relationships are appearing.

While most families provide a nurturing and protective environment for their children, **traditional norms and values often constrain dialogue and mutual understanding** between young people and family authority figures. This translates into vertical youth-adult relationships, whereby communication takes the form of orders, instructions, warnings, threats and shaming (Barakat 1993, 183). Decision-making and participation within the family are important barometers for measuring future effective participation of youth in the society. When young people enjoy participation among family members, they are better prepared and motivated for active participation in decisions and matters relating to their society (Melhim Abu-Hamdan 2008, 2).

Data collected by the World Values Survey¹ between 2005 and 2008 indicates that **family is very important to young people between the ages of 15 and 29 throughout the region**. This view is held by 98 percent of young Egyptians, 94 percent of young Moroccans, 95 percent of young Jordanians and 95 percent of young Iraqis. Moreover, tradition is important to more than three-quarters of young people in MENA, as they see themselves as people who follow their cultural, religious and family customs.

While marriage is increasingly seen as an individual choice that does not depend on parental approval, and love is seen as a prerequisite in the minds of young Arabs, **marriage continues to be a highly contentious and often controlled family affair**, especially for young women (Jarallah 2008, 2). In the Gulf and some countries like Iraq,

marriage is most often exclusively a family decision, while in other countries like Lebanon and Morocco young people increasingly make the final decision.

Families in oPt, Yemen and Egypt, where early marriage is prevalent, continue to make such decisions despite existing laws setting a minimum legal age for marriage. In Yemen, the law allows girls to be married early as long as they do not move in with their husbands until they have reached ‘sexual maturity’ (first menstruation). More often than not, young women are affected by their families’ choice of early marriage. Marriage choice and timing as a human right are more fully enjoyed by young men in the Arab region than by young women.

Education contributes to a decrease in early marriage in some Arab societies. Married women now often have similar or higher levels of education when compared with their husbands (Rashad 2005). Marriages between uneducated males and females have decreased significantly as school enrollment rates have increased for both sexes (Rashad 2005). More highly educated women marry later than their less educated counterparts. As more women pursue their education, family unity is challenged and greater democratization in the family increases because of socio-economic competition and women’s increasing employment status. Both men and women are starting to leave their homes for their professions (Brotman 2008). Less than 50 percent of the marriages in Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt fall into the traditional pattern of husbands with higher educational attainment than their wives (Brotman 2008).

Young women in the Arab region are in constant negotiation between societal, familial, and self-expectations. For example in relation to their studies, a qualitative study conducted on the decision-making process of young women in Jordan, showed that in terms of enrolling and attending university, the women expressed they had limited choice in the matter – the decision was made based on both a familial and societal expectation.

The situation for single women, or women that cannot bear children, whether educated or uneducated, across the region is quite difficult, as they are challenged by societies that have no established societal roles for them and that assign value to a woman as a wife and mother, but not as a person (Jarallah 2008). Single uneducated women are expected to care for their parents and families,

¹ The World Values Survey (WVS) is a global network of social scientists who have surveyed the basic values and beliefs of the publics of more than 80 societies, on all six inhabited continents.



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since they have no established lives or careers of their own (Jarallah 2008). However, as the number of unmarried women increases in the Arab world, those with successful careers have more prospects for self-fulfillment outside the roles of mother and wife mainly due to their economic independence (Rashad 2005).

Women's rights in relation to the dissolution of marriage are limited. According to some versions of Islamic law, a man can divorce his wife simply by saying 'divorce' three times. A woman, on the other hand must provide 'legitimate' reasons for divorce to a court (Rashad 2005). Women are required to obey their husbands in exchange for financial support and protection and also to maintain her family's honor since she is perceived as the carrier of her family's honor (Rashad 2005). As a result, most women are unable to attain status equal to that of their husband's in matters central to family life.

As women's education and employment options increase and they gain financial resources, **the possibilities of greater autonomy expand and women's roles and decision-making power within the family are**

strengthened. The rising age of marriage has led young women to engage in ordinary and common practices of everyday life that may be seen as the precursors of significant social change, known sometimes as 'non-movements' (Bayat 2009, p.20). Some core practices of 'non-movements' include young women choosing their own marriage partners, dressing as they want, listening to the music they like, and spending leisure time where they prefer.

Young men in the Arab world also feel pressured to live up to the gendered expectations placed upon them by both the family and society, to eventually become the main breadwinners of their future families. Many young men ultimately turn to the family business and to the private sector and set aside their own personal dreams, as they are keen on making their parents and communities proud by complying with this expected role as main income earner.

CASE STUDY:**Youth and Marriage in the Arab world: A Short Brief**

By Diane Singerman - American University, Washington, DC

The phenomenon of ‘waithood’ or prolonged adolescence which unmarried young people experience in MENA has been facilitated by the demographic transition, improved female education, greater employment opportunities for women (even if quite low on a global level), urbanization, and changing norms and desires facilitated by globalization and consumerism. Many young women are no longer marrying in their teens, but in their early or mid-twenties, whereas men across the MENA region are now marrying in their mid-to-late twenties and thirties (in both urban and rural areas).

Young people are clearly delaying the timing of their marriages, but this ‘delay’ needs to be contextualized in the social structure of the Arab world. In fact, what is problematic about delayed marriage is that sexuality is *only* housed within marriage, both within Christian and Islamic traditions. As young men and women negotiate their schooling, employment, and marriage, they must view these decisions through the lens of an additional economic consideration to the already challenging economy that is characterized by high youth unemployment: the cost of marriage.

Despite their interest in dating, or finding a marriage partner, the financial impediments to marriage remain huge and young people spend years not only finding a suitable and appropriate spouse that their family will approve of, but they also spend years, along with their parents, accumulating the money needed to cover the costs of marriage. The financial requisites of marriage, although varied by class, region, education, and other criteria, are an important factor delaying marriage.

There are now much greater numbers of single women across the Middle East and North Africa who are well-educated and have either chosen to remain single, or have been unable to find an appropriate partner with a proper education, economic status, and worldview. But as a relatively new social group, these single women “have also spoken of the need to be creative and to find ways to maintain their status and live in a society that considers them deviants” (Jarallah 2008). As one 42-year-old single woman from Ramallah in oPt explained: “In our society a woman’s value or worth is that of her husband and kids, she as an individual comes as second best no matter what she has, and she is not perceived as an individual on her own (...).”

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CHAPTER 05: YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS

The gendered experience of growing up
as a young Arab Woman

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CONTRIBUTORS: Barbara Ibrahim, Gregory Gause and Christine Asaad

KEY FINDINGS

Gender differences first appear and are accentuated during adolescence (Barsoum 2010). How young people develop their attitudes towards gender equality provides important information about their roles in the society, and their aspirations. Disparities are mostly present in such areas as education, employment, civic and political participation, and access to health and legal services.

Recent survey data from the region on adolescents' attitudes and values indicates that the **traditional patriarchal structure of the family** predominates throughout the Arab region, where traditional gender roles are assigned to the male and female heads of household, which are reinforced by socialization and rationalizations. Traditionally, the father has authority, responsibility and expects respect, while the wife joins the husband's kin group and, thus, her actions and responsibilities as a housewife exist to support the father (Barakat 1993). While these traditional patriarchal gender roles are slowly changing, they remain most prevalent among rural and lower-income groups and often reinforce the attitudes of Arab adolescents towards gender roles and gender equality.

For example, according to a nationally representative survey of 15,029 young people in Egypt conducted by the Population Council in 2010, **one in three young males believes that educating boys is more important than educating girls**, and the majority of boys and girls do not believe that boys should do as much domestic work as girls. Moreover, over 70 percent of young men and 41 percent of young women agree that a girl must obey her brother's opinion even if she is the older sibling (Population Council 2010, 20).

Empowering young girls and women and battling gender stereotypes are identified as key components to address gender discrimination and to foster sustainable development of the society as a whole. Gender equality allows for happier, healthier and more educated youth to develop and become productive citizens.

The trends in attitudes of Arab adolescents and youth towards gender roles and gender equality are confirmed by **three distinct patterns of time use and spatial access**. First, young men spend significantly more time in paid work than young women. As a result, young women are relegated to the private domain, while young men enter the public domain. Second, the older the adolescent gets, the longer the hours she or he spends in either economic or non-economic responsibilities. The third pattern is that

girls and young women are allowed less time for leisure activities, compared to their male counterparts. Thus adolescent girls' and boys' organizations and activities mirror those of the adult world in these societies (Population Council 2010, 20). Patterns for time use vary among adolescent girls and boys according to socio-economic background, age, social status (married or unmarried), area of residence, access to transportation, and independent financial means.

Despite such defined gender roles, according to nationally representative surveys conducted across the region, **young Arab's life-satisfaction does not seem to change by gender**, but it varies mainly between low and high- and middle-income countries (Silatech 2010). In fact, in high-income countries, 10 percent of the female population complete post-secondary education but only 4 percent of the male population reach this stage. Further research to explain this occurrence is required.

Despite increasing representation in the education system, **young women still face limited decision-making power** and are generally underrepresented in the public and economic spheres. They face significant challenges in terms of employment given the global financial crisis and market saturation in the Arab world that affect all youth. In the region, historically, men have been doing the majority of paid labor and women much of the unpaid labor. Nonetheless, with the changing situation in the Arab world, the Arab uprisings, and the increasing cost of living, the role of women is changing, and, thus their representation is also on the rise.

Within MENA, **gender roles are justified largely by arguments based on biological determinism, culture and religion**, as popular definitions of masculinity value such traits as aggressiveness, competitiveness, dominance, strength, courage and control. Marginalizing women, both through acts of sex-selective violence and domination in the social sphere, can become a matter of affirming one's masculinity. As a result, phenomena such as domestic violence, female genital mutilation and honor killings become socially acceptable in some societies.

Despite preferential treatment and gendered experiences of growing up, adolescents in the region are keenly aware of both the protective and constraining roles that parental controls play. In focus group discussions with adolescents in schools throughout Lebanon, adolescents identified both positive and negative attributes of their relationship with their parents.

CASE STUDY:

How did you spend your day yesterday? Gender differences in time use among youth in Egypt

By Ghada Barsoum, American University in Cairo

An analysis conducted in 2010 in Egypt shows how young females confine their economic and non-economic activities to the private domain of the household. Schooling and learning seem to be one gender-neutral domain in Egypt. Away from learning and studying, gender differences continue as defining parameters for how young people spend their time. Leisure activities are defined by gender norms, with girls and young women spending their leisure time in front of the television, their most accessible form of entertainment. Another relatively gender-neutral activity is praying, which is practiced by young males and females equally.

Despite decades of substantial investment in education in Egypt, about five percent of young males and females aged 10 to 24 have never been to school. These youth come primarily from the poorest families and are in rural areas in the southern region of Upper Egypt. For the females among this group, the main

time use activities are household chores, caring for siblings, or children as they form their own families. For their male counterparts, paid work in agriculture is the main time use activity.

Schooling time is, by and large, the same for girls and boys. Television is the main source of entertainment for females in Egypt. Females spend more time (2.2 hours per day) in front of television than males, especially in rural areas. Internet use, however, is not a daily activity for most young Egyptians. While females use the internet for 1.8 minutes per day, males access the internet for about 6 minutes per day. Going out with friends seems to be a male-only form of pleasure. Praying is another major time use activity for young people in Egypt, 86 percent of whom say that they are religious. Male youth tend to spend slightly more time than female youth in religious activities outside of the home, while young women pray in their homes.

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SEXUALITY

CHAPTER 06: ARAB YOUTH SEXUALITY

LEAD AUTHOR: Nicola Bull

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KEY FINDINGS

Although there is very little data available, evidence seems to show that **most young people in the Middle East and North Africa do not have sex until they marry**, that there are few unwanted pregnancies and that the number of sexually transmitted infections remain low. In fact, many of the region's social, religious and cultural values have served to protect young women and men from risk-taking behavior.

Across the MENA region, **social, religious and cultural values have often nurtured positive relationships** and encouraged safer behavior choices, but they have also fostered a deafening silence around youth sexuality outside the confines of marriage. The vast majority of adults and young people in MENA place a high value on marriage and strongly believe that sex before marriage is wrong. Some changes, however, are registered as the age at marriage is rising and in more than a third of countries, the average age at first marriage has increased between 4.7 and 7.7 years in the last twenty years

At the time of life where young people become acutely aware of their sexual identity and desires, they are finding **that they do not have a socially acceptable outlet to express their sexual needs**. As a result, young people are finding alternative ways to have 'sanctioned' sex through non-conventional marriages (including temporary marriages) in Lebanon, as well as summer and 'urfi' marriages in Egypt (Shepard & Dejong 2005, 23–24).

An analysis by the World Bank concludes that with the increase in age at marriage, **traditional forms of managing youth sexuality around the Middle East are in decline and young people may increasingly engage in risky behaviors** to dissipate their sexual energy (Abu-Raddad 2010, 132).

There is a lack of available age-specific data, because governments in the region are reluctant to investigate such a sensitive topic. Studies confirm, however, that young men are having sex with other males – at a young age – despite the hostile legal environment and the immense social stigma that comes with this. A study of men having sex with men (MSM) in Sudan showed that 85.5 percent of participants had had their first anal sex between ages 15 and 25 (Abu-Raddad 2010, 128). Data from UNAIDS also shows that MSM are at greater risk of contracting HIV with around 5 percent of them being HIV positive in Egypt (5.6%) and Tunisia (4.8%) and 1% being HIV positive in Lebanon (UNAIDS 2010, 200).

Young people are also having sex as, or with, sex workers. A study in Sudan showed that the majority of female sex workers were under 30 years of age, and 19.6 percent were less than age 18. More than half of female sex workers in Syria were 25 or younger whilst 63 percent of female sex workers in Djibouti said that their first commercial sex happened when they were still adolescents.

In 2001, UNAIDS estimated that **180,000 adults and children in MENA were living with HIV**. By 2009, this number had shot up to 460,000 (UNAIDS 2010, 194). Young people are at the center of the epidemic and young women are at greater risk. In 2009, 62,000 young women and 32,000 young men aged 15-24 were HIV positive (UNICEF 2011, 42). Young people aged 15-24 make up nearly a quarter (23 percent) of adults aged 15 and above living with HIV (UNICEF 2011, 43).

The limited data on Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) also shows that **infections are more common among younger adults aged 15-29 than those in older age groups** (UNICEF 2009, 39). Nearly two thirds of infections in Egypt were found to be among young, predominantly single adults.

Young people start to use drugs at an early age and this affects their capacity to make safer choices, with implications also for their sexual health. Tobacco, cannabis, sedatives, opiates and stimulants appear to be the most commonly used substances (UNICEF 2009, 45).

The data on young people's knowledge about their sexual and reproductive health comes primarily from surveys focusing on HIV and AIDS. These surveys confirm that **very few young men and women in the region have correct knowledge**. Young people still cannot get the reliable, trusted, relevant, and age appropriate information they need in a timely manner to protect themselves from HIV infection.¹ Just 13 percent of youth in Algeria and Jordan are sufficiently informed, and less than 7 percent in Syria,

1 UNAIDS measures HIV knowledge as the % of 15-24 year olds who correctly identify the two major ways of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV (using condoms and limiting sex to one faithful, uninfected partner), who reject the two most common misconceptions about HIV transmission and who know that a healthy-looking person can be HIV-infected.



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3 percent in Iraq and 2 percent of youth in Yemen have correct knowledge.

There is very little/no information to assess the extent to which young people are accessing sexual and reproductive health services or experiencing an unmet need for services. The taboos surrounding sex before marriage and the laws which criminalize sex work and sex between men makes it almost impossible to provide appropriate services to these groups. The often discriminatory attitudes of many health workers and policy makers also represent a problem. Most countries have not systematically addressed the urgent need for targeted, age-specific sexual and reproductive health services. Only Tunisia has developed a national program on young people's sexual and reproductive health (Abu-Raddad 2010, 131).

The little data available on young people's sexuality is rarely disaggregated by age or sex and it is usually not comparable across countries. Few local research institutions have the skills to collect data on marginalized and at-risk populations and this becomes even more complex when conducting research amongst adolescents who are under age 18.

Sex is not always a choice, particularly in conflict affected areas and on the street, where children and young people are especially vulnerable to rape, sexual exploitation and abuse. Little is known about the extent to which rape, incest, sexual abuse and harassment are experienced by young people in the region but the data suggest that it is taking place. In Lebanon a survey showed that sexual harassment was reported by nearly one in five male students, and just over 15 percent of their female peers.

A study of street girls and boys aged 12-17 in Egypt found approximately half had had sex. Nearly 15 percent of the boys and a third of the girls said they had been involved in commercial sex, and thus were sexually exploited. Three quarters of the boys had engaged in sex with other males and over a third (37 percent) said they had been forced to have sex with males – as did 45 percent of the girls. Many reported that they were using drugs and only a few said they used condoms (Abu-Raddad 2010, 139).

In the region, **social norms for young men and women protect them but they also repress sexuality and can end up putting them at greater risk**. In the early years of marriage, girls and young women have little to no control over key decisions in the household. Once they marry, young women often find themselves under great pressure from their families to have children as soon as possible.

Even though adolescent fertility rates in MENA have fallen significantly in the past thirty years, Yemen, oPt and Sudan record the highest number of births amongst adolescents aged 15-19. The lowest rates of teenage pregnancy are found in Libya, Algeria and Tunisia (UNICEF 2009).

Schools present an enormous opportunity to promote the sexual health and well-being of young people in MENA, especially with the improvements in enrolment rates and comparatively high literacy levels for the region. Schools can provide critical age- and gender- specific information and life skills education to young people.

It is worth noting that **young people's behavior, attitudes and ways of communicating are gradually changing in the region.** Young people are demanding political, social and economic changes that will fundamentally affect their sexual rights and well-being – including their rights to information and services free from all types of discrimination.

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MIGRATION

CHAPTER 07:

MIGRATION OF ARAB YOUTH

Youth Exodus: The desire to migrate

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Mohammad Younis and Ahmed Younis

KEY FINDINGS

Migration by Arab youth is a phenomenon with many dimensions and attributes, reflecting both positive and troubling dimensions of the young and their societies. Lack of job opportunities, a general mismatch between the skills of new graduates and the opportunities available to them in the labor market, low wages, underemployment and poverty are some of the push factors motivating youth to migrate. The possibility of getting a higher salary, greater demand from labor markets abroad, and migrant networks constitute some of the strongest pull factors that motivate young people to look abroad for academic specialization, career development and professional self-fulfillment.

A clear trend in Arab migration is the fact that **youth from MENA are moving around within their countries** and the region, and beyond it, at an unprecedented scale. Most Arab migrants are young people, three-quarters of all Arab migrants are under 35 years of age, and 50 per cent are under 25 (ESCWA 2007).

Four main factors are contributing to youth emigration from the region: (1) the increasing number of MENA's youth population; (2) the growing number of young well-educated workers facing poor employment conditions; (3) population density; and (4) unresolved conflicts (Fargues 2008, 3).

Although youth migration patterns are complex and ever changing, there are some clear patterns that have emerged in the region. **Intra-regional** migration provides youth in MENA with the opportunity to fulfill their needs and pursue their ambitions without abandoning many aspects of their culture, identity and customs. Sub-regional agreements (GCC, Mashreq and Maghreb regions) allow many nationals to enter other Arab countries without an entry visa, making the migration process even easier. At the same time, **inter-regional** migration appeals to many MENA youth as well, with EU and Organization for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) countries being attractive for education, employment and safety reasons.

Unpredictable flows of migrants highlight **two problem areas** quite unaddressed in the region. First, most migrant workers have little legal protection and usually are at the mercy of their host countries, even if they have signed contracts. Second, large, sudden, return flows of workers due to political conditions sometimes play havoc with national economies, as Jordan and Yemen experienced in 1991.

The global financial crisis has also affected migration patterns, distressing remittances flows and influencing youth migration dynamics. Still, youth are especially exposed during financial crises, as youth employment is very vulnerable to rises and falls in the economy, and due to the fact that youth unemployment patterns are closely connected to and influence migration trends especially for young men.

The most comprehensive regional youth survey, the Silatech Index conducted by Gallup in 2010, showed that across all the Arab League countries surveyed, **an average of 30 percent of youth aged 15-29 say they would like to migrate permanently to another country if they had the opportunity**. Four in 10 youth who would like to move away permanently name a country in the Arab League as their desired destination, and just as many mention a country in the European Union. Overall, Saudi Arabia, the United States, France, and the UAE are the top emigration destinations. **The higher the educational level, the higher is the propensity to intend to migrate**. According to the survey, the desire among youth to emigrate permanently was highest in Tunisia (44 percent), Libya and Morocco (37 percent), Lebanon (36 percent) and Jordan (35 percent), and is lowest in the GCC states of UAE and Kuwait (2 percent) and Bahrain (4 percent).

Young women typically express less desire to migrate than men. According to the Gallup World Poll (2010), 44 percent of Tunisians said they would prefer to move permanently to another country (Gallup 2011). This is the highest in the Arab world. Of youth from MENA who say they want to leave their countries permanently if given the opportunity, 60 percent are male and 40 percent are female, suggesting that greater attention should be paid to the phenomenon of young female migrants. However, the gender composition of migration from MENA to the North remains male-dominated.

Studies show that migrant networks facilitate youth migration. In Egypt, while only 14% of youth aspiring to migrate reported having migrants in their network, 55% of youth aspiring to migrate reported having friends or relatives who are migrants.

The growing number of young people having access to the internet is contributing to migration motives and migration flows. The internet has made it easier for

young males and females in the region to connect with youth abroad, including strengthening ties with migrant family members, making it easier to find country-specific information on migration from formal resources or from others, thus providing them with more space to seek opportunities abroad, such as scholarships.

A general lack of job opportunities results in a growing number of youth in Arab countries adopting **labor migration as a livelihood strategy**. Unemployment is not limited to the uneducated. Educated youth, including holders of university degrees, are not accommodated in the labor market easily despite their qualifications and look for a solution abroad. Oil-producing countries in MENA, due to their booming oil economies and need for skilled and unskilled workers have attracted MENA migrant workers since the 1980s, most of them young males.

A study in Lebanon showed that youth continue to migrate due to instability and lack of opportunities. Around 47 percent of Lebanese youth desired to emigrate for career advancement and 32 percent for a better salary (McKenzie 2005, 43). Some countries, like Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen, have adopted pro-migration policies as part of their national strategy, though migrant integration policies are absent in the Arab world, especially integration of other Arab workers.

ESCWA concluded in a report from 2009 **that education-driven migration is one of the significant aspects of youth migration in Arab countries**. Egypt provides us with a clear picture of the educational attainment of the emigrant population. Most young Egyptian migrants are semi-skilled and skilled males who migrate without their families, with an intention to return to Egypt after a few years working abroad. Generally, youth in MENA opt for education-driven migration due to a series of push factors, including dissatisfaction with the educational opportunities available at home or with the overall quality level of education; the prospect of facing a limited labor market that is unable to provide enough quality jobs; and, a desire to pursue career advancement and professional self-fulfillment abroad.

Political factors have a major impact on migration dynamics and flows in the region. Pressure on MENA countries in terms of civil war, conflicts, emergency situations, political instability in countries like Iraq, Lebanon, Algeria, Sudan and oPt all contribute to increasing the



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scope of inter-regional and intra-regional migration, as people of all ages seek refuge and security somewhere else. Thus, in conflict cases migration is the only option available in order to guarantee one's security. Adolescents and young adults either accompanied by family members or alone, seek a way out of violent and potential life-threatening situations by legal and illegal means.

Pluses and minuses? Advantages and disadvantages

On the **positive side, migration reduces unemployment at home, generates remittances** that are sent back to the home economy, allows **youth to gain** valuable professional experiences, **reduces social and even political tensions**, and allows returning migrants to tap into a web of professional contacts they may have generated abroad. On the **negative side**, migration may result in the so-called '**brain drain**' and reduced productivity at the national level. Migration often removes youth from the social environment of family and friends, and it can put youth at a greater risk of exploitation and/or abuse, and lead to increased exposure to health problems.

Remittances are arguably one of the most tangible economic benefits of international migration. According to the World Bank, remittances are especially likely to be higher when migrants are young but married, with family behind at home (World Bank 2007, 41). Research in Egypt paints a complex picture of the impact of remittances on young males, and shows that remittances enhance school attendance among university-aged boys 19-21, but increase domestic work burden of boys 15-17 in migrant households (Assaad 2010, 37).

It is also argued that migrants play an essential role in transmitting various forms of **social remittances** across borders, e.g., ideas, behaviors, value structures, and identities that flow from receiving to sending countries and that are transferred along with monetary remittances. These social remittances can play an important role in the overall development of the mindset of migrants' children, adolescents and youth back home, influencing their future ambitions and maybe even preparing them to become future migrants themselves.

The complex '**brain drain**' phenomenon explains a series of both push factors (e.g., lack of opportunities, unemployment, and underemployment) and pull factors (labor shortages abroad, higher wages) which motivate young professionals to migrate. Estimates from the World Bank suggest that the Maghreb countries and Lebanon

are especially affected by high-skilled youth migration, which – being in their most productive years – represents a waste and inefficiency in national social expenditures and, consequently, can compromise migrant-sending countries' socioeconomic and political development (World Bank 2007, 41).

A significant number of children, adolescents and youth participate in, and are impacted by, migration in numerous ways in MENA, but there is still little knowledge of the impacts of migration on especially older youth left behind. **Parental migration** can lead to psychosocial problems, endangerment of the realization of youth's rights, deteriorated social and legal protection, higher risk of abuse and exploitation, stigma from the community, and family instability or even disintegration.

Migration will always be a natural phenomenon in the Arab world, given the disparities in population sizes, natural resources, political conditions, economic development and labor market needs throughout the region. Managing migration more efficiently should be a high priority goal for Arab policy-makers, so that it produces win-win consequences for the migrants and their host and home countries.

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CHAPTER 08: YOUTH IN SITUATIONS OF VIOLENCE AND ARMED CONFLICT

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KEY FINDINGS

Adolescents going through the transition from child to adult can find themselves without the protection or attention that the status of ‘child’ affords; they could be especially at risk of being recruited directly into conflicts as combatants by armed parties or of being subjected to forms of sexual and gender-based violence, abuse and exploitation, particularly in environments where rape is adopted as a tactic of war, thereby increasing their exposure to HIV and other forms of abuse and exploitation (UNICEF 2009).

Many governments in the MENA region lack the capacity to provide effective protection or to bring those responsible for violating the rights of children to justice. Reducing the risk of conflicts requires commitment from states to address the root causes of conflicts and engage in preventive measures before tensions erupt. As a consequence, the capacity of young people to contribute positively to longer-term post-conflict reconstruction and development interventions is often ignored, thereby limiting the durability of peace (UNICEF 2009, 3-8).

The youth bulge in the MENA region in addition to its wealth of natural resources, history of armed conflict, large numbers of refugees and IDPs (internally displaced persons), low civic engagement, political exclusion, poor social protection, large informal economy and weak systems of governance combine to fuel tensions, conflict and civic unrest. According to UN estimates, the recent and on-going violence in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Libya and Sudan erupted as a result of these pressures.

Arab children and adolescents in conflict zones in the MENA region grow up with the fear of being killed on a daily basis. According to Save the Children, civilians now make up more than 90 percent of casualties of armed conflicts and about half of these are children who are increasingly being used, manipulated and killed in the name of war by governments, armed militias and criminal gangs (Save the Children UK 2010).

While mortality rates for young people are generally in decline across the MENA region, available data clearly shows that in areas where there has been continued armed conflict the reverse is the case. In the decade 1996-2006, for instance, UNICEF data shows that the probability of young people between ages 10-24 dying increased 3 percent in Djibouti and Sudan and 2 percent in Yemen. Unsurprisingly, the figure for Iraq was much higher – estimated at 8 percent (UNICEF 2008).

Palestinian youth have perhaps received the most attention of all those experiencing conflict in the MENA region (Sikimic 2010). The situation of young Palestinians in oPt, including East Jerusalem, remains grave as they find themselves caught up in Israeli military operations, incursions and raids throughout the territory, in addition to intense fighting between rival Palestinian factions. In 2008, the UN reported 202 Palestinian deaths and injuries in settler-related incidents and a further 204 in 2009 (Save the Children UK 2009).

Conflict destroys social infrastructure and communities, separating them from essential services and protective environments that empower adolescents and young people to forge their own lives. Schools across the region have been destroyed and many of those remaining open in Palestine, Iraq, and Sudan have been forced to enact double or triple shifts to accommodate the increase in students from shuttered schools. Incident reporting on attacks against education facilities suggests that Iraq and oPt have been among the worst affected over the past five years (O’Malley 2007).

Iraq’s youth have been particularly affected as schools and students have increasingly been attacked by violent crimes and sectarian killings. In late 2009, the Iraqi Education Minister announced that insecurity had prevented the construction of over 4,500 additional schools needed to provide adequate education for all Iraqi children, with violence and the imposition of economic sanctions resulting in a dramatic fall in net enrollment rates (Save the Children Fund 2008).

UNRWA has been the main provider of basic education to Palestinian refugees for nearly five decades. In Jordan, the government offers secondary education to Palestinian refugees, and facilitates secondary schools in the refugee camps. More than 95 percent of the Palestinian refugee students that continue their education attend governmental secondary education. Young refugees in unofficial camps, however, do not fully enjoy their right to education. Syria provides secondary education for Palestinian youth on the same basis as Syrian nationals; with 80 percent attending UNRWA primary schools before continuing their secondary education in government schools. By contrast, in Lebanon just over 5 percent of Palestinian refugee students are admitted to public secondary schools.

Conflict, blockades and restrictions on movement and

improvement of infrastructure have had a similarly devastating impact on the health of young Palestinians in oPt. Denial of passage through or delays at checkpoints have significantly affected the access of Palestinian youth to medical care and services, seriously threatening their physical health. Data from 2009 highlight that the health of children in some communities of the West Bank was two to five times worse than known national averages, as measured by key health indicators such as low height or weight for their age.

As a result of the destruction of basic services caused by conflict, communities across the MENA region have become reliant on humanitarian aid to meet their basic needs. The U.N.'s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that following the 2008/09 Israeli incursion into the Gaza Strip 71 percent of the population was left reliant on humanitarian aid to survive, mostly in the form of food assistance.

Abuse, Exploitation and Sexual/ Gender-Based Violence

Young Arabs in Algeria, Sudan, Iraq and the occupied Palestinian territories have been exposed to some of the worst political violence. These situations are frequently correlated with increased instances of violence in the home and high rates of acceptance, and often trivialization, of domestic violence and child abuse. During armed conflict, protective environments are destroyed, and adolescent girls and young women become more vulnerable to rape, domestic violence, honor killings, sexual exploitation, trafficking, sexual abuse and mutilation.

In Northern Iraq, the number of honor killings in the Kurdish region is also believed to have risen after the invasion – from 106 in 2005 to 266 the following year. While incidents of abuse and violence are on the increase, the availability of government and NGOs services that would normally provide health, legal and other support greatly diminished leaving the physical and psychological needs of young Iraqis unmet (Assyrian International News Agency 2008).

Adolescent girls and young women in camps for IDPs are particularly vulnerable to sexual attacks. An estimated 80 percent of the camp populations are women and children, and as camps have become increasingly militarized, rape and other sexual violence against women and girls have also become more widespread. While adolescent girls are prone to sexual and gender-based violence, young adolescent boys are particularly vulnerable to being arrested and detained by the authorities in conflict zones.

Child Soldiers

As young people become displaced from their normal lives they can be attracted to the power and status that comes with joining armed groups (ICR 2009). A huge array of international instruments are in place to stop the use of child soldiers by both governments and militia, but the practice continues and can sometimes be condoned by local cultural attitudes (Coalition to the Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 2008, 9). In his reports to the Security Council on children and armed conflict, the Secretary-General listed parties that recruited or used children in situations of armed conflict in 17 countries or territories from 2002 to 2007, including Sudan, Yemen, Iraq and Israel/oPt in the MENA region.

In the MENA region, Arab youth and adolescents are at particular risk in Sudan. UNICEF Sudan estimated that in 2008 as many as 6,000 child soldiers, some as young as 11 years of age, were involved in the Darfur conflict along with another 8,000 involved in armed conflict across Sudan. The phenomenon of child soldiers is by no means unique to Sudan. Of recent concern in Iraq is the use of Arab youth by groups allegedly associated with Al-Qaeda. Additionally, in Yemen as many as half of the fighters involved in violent tribal clashes are under age. An estimated 402 young people have been exploited by the Yemeni Houthis tribe, with around 282 child soldiers recruited by pro-government militias since August 2009.

Refugees

Palestinian refugees are one of the world's largest groups of stateless persons. Nearly 4.5 million refugees are registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East out of which 1.3 million live in 58 refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, West Bank, Gaza and Syria. Life in these camps is stressful and dangerous. International bodies guarding and monitoring human rights have uniformly expressed concern about the daily living conditions of young Palestinians, a large proportion of whom live below the poverty line, lacking access to adequate housing, health and education services, and subject to severe restrictions on their movement in and out of the camps.

For young Palestinians growing up in these camps, there are very few opportunities for employment as their refugee status prevents them from accessing opportunities to work or benefit from social security. These and other restrictions, including limitations to the right to association and political participation, or arbitrary detention, have negatively affected the quality of life of Palestinian youth, with many engaging in high-risk behaviors to survive.



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According to current UNHCR estimates between 450,000 and 500,000 Iraqis live in Jordan, approximately 31,000 of whom are registered as refugees, with a further 151,000 Iraqi refugees registered in Syria. Many of these entered illegally, placing them in conflict with the authorities and leaving them unable to access basic services. For many Iraqis, the inability to access NGOs and government services means that they are more vulnerable to violence and exploitation. The rise in the number of Iraqi refugees in the MENA region has placed a heavy burden on host countries such as Jordan and Syria.

Ongoing violence in Somalia has resulted in an estimated 678,000 refugees seeking asylum in cities in neighboring countries by the end of 2009. Djibouti and Yemen hosted an additional 3,700 and 32,000 Somali refugees respectively in 2009, increasing existing refugee populations of 14,000 and 170,000 respectively (UNHCR 2010). While many have become self-reliant, others suffer from police harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, and forced return.

Landmines, Unexploded Ordnance & Small Arms and Light Weapons

Children make up almost a third of all casualties of mines and explosive remnants of war and 46 percent of all civilian casualties. In an attempt to protect family members and property, youth often take up arms to resolve community disputes, contributing to local cycles of instability that persist in damaging their lives. For young women and adolescent girls, cultural imbalances leave them vulnerable to gender-based violence as men may use available small weapons to express their power.

Landmines and explosive remnants of war represent a major threat to Iraqi youth, with more than 4,000 parts of the country contaminated, making it one of the most dangerous countries in the world. In southern Lebanon, the extensive and unprecedented use by Israel of cluster bombs during the 2006 conflict left 37 million square meters of Lebanese territory severely contaminated with approximately 1 million unexploded submunitions that could injure children and young people.

Psychological Recovery & Social Reintegration

As a result of the conflicts in the region, young Arabs are often forced to take on adult responsibilities, looking after and providing for other family members or being recruited to fight. This causes severe psychological scars and they often suffer physical and behavioral problems with consequences into adult life. Young Arabs have been physically and mentally affected by decades of conflict and political violence, especially in Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan and oPt.

Where conflict has drawn in significant numbers of child soldiers, **peace-building efforts have included disarmament, demobilization and reintegration** of those children and adolescents into community life as part of preventing further cycles of violence (UNSG 2007). For adolescent girls, the social stigma associated with sexual abuse has at times resulted in rejection by members of their family and community, leaving them unable to marry and facing life-long poverty.

It is very important, however, **not to categorize children and young people as simply victims**. This approach can rob them of their agency and minimize the impact of their own response to conflict and violence in the region. As one of the most dynamic segments of the MENA population, young people can be agents of change if they are empowered to participate in finding solutions to conflict, building peace and reconstructing communities following conflict. Young people constitute over half the MENA population

and must therefore be central to any national and regional efforts to create and maintain lasting peace and security.

Several structural and institutional barriers exist for realizing the peace-building potential of young people. However, in a region where cultural norms tend to exclude young people from decision-making processes, the youth, especially young men, are often seen as a destabilizing influence. Concern for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict can also mean that their participation in peace-building is seen by some as an unnecessary risk to children. At the same time, there is a growing recognition of the need to engage with children and youth as participants within specific projects and programs as well as in the various dimensions of their everyday lives – domestic, educational, economic, cultural and political.

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09



POLICY

CHAPTER 09: NATIONAL YOUTH POLICIES IN MENA

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KEY FINDINGS

Many Arab countries have been active in the process of formulating a national youth strategy to place youth issues on their public agenda for the first time ever, and to have young people at the heart of national development processes. Although the policy-formulation process has generated greater focus on the condition, rights and needs of young people in the Arab world, National Youth Policies/Strategies (NYP/NYS) are not afforded the conditions for realistic implementation with corresponding budgets. National youth policies are critical because they represent the point of convergence between the condition and needs of youth, society's perceptions, and Arab and international norms and programs related to youth.

The potential opportunities and benefits of youth and their well-being in the region rely on the implementation of realistic policies and programs by governments that can also cooperate with the private sector and civil society. Relevant and sustained youth policies can allow youth to lead fulfilling lives and contribute positively to the national development of their countries.

Weak national youth policies and programs can be the result of a number of constraints, including: the absence of sufficient political will and effective advocacy; the lack of available information on which to base realistic policies and programs; the lack of faith in the national governments and their widespread corruption. In many cases, the youth population is not taking its government seriously, and the government is not seriously considering this sector of the population.

At the country level, the first states in the MENA region to devise a national youth framework for cross-sectoral future action were Jordan and Bahrain. Lebanon is constrained by its recurring political stresses and has been unable to activate a full national youth strategy. Egypt and Tunisia had Party Youth Policies that are not matched by the means for implementation. Syria has recently made attempts to transform the national youth policy (NYP) from a state party endeavor to a non-politicized youth development effort. Egypt is finalizing its draft of an Egyptian NYP; while the NYP in Palestine (2004), has been designed by the Ministry of Youth and Sports through a participatory approach, to integrate youth into the nation's advancement strategy. Yemen has its own NYP vision (2006-2015) to build a society where all Yemeni children, young men and women are protected, valued and respected for their unique contributions and creativity.

The participation of youth in the formulation of NYPs is critical for successful youth policies. The concerns of youth have to be appreciated and effectively targeted, and young people have to be empowered to let their voices be heard. However, in the region until recently, youth have often been silenced or ignored, and their public outlets remained carefully controlled environments for them to express their views.

Youth-related policy concepts as well as the act of NYP/NYS formulation are new developments, and many Arab countries lack the experience to develop the necessary structures and methods, and allocate the resources to support youth participation. As youth participation is a new phenomenon, many initiatives have not been able to incorporate different levels of youth participation, including vertical (structural and organizational) and horizontal (inclusive of different youth representation) dimensions.

Even after NYPs are defined and launched, **a number of challenges face Arab states and societies** in the successful implementation of such strategies. Among the main challenges are: the lack of sufficient funds for their NYP/NYS agenda; inadequate political commitments and non-involvement of stakeholders; the lack of capacity-building and the problems in implementing a strategy once it is defined. In Jordan, for example, implementation mechanisms were not sufficiently considered during the formulation process. In Bahrain, although certain structures and mechanisms were outlined in their strategies, they did not have the capacity to establish them and facilitate the coordination of different units, structures, and stakeholders within the country.

CASE STUDY: Youth Employment, Skills and Investments in the Region By Zafiriz Tzannatos

The link between education and employment has some important common characteristics in the region. Since the early 1960s the region has registered remarkable gains in providing access to formal education. With more females enrolled in schools than males, especially at successively higher levels of education, education-related gender disparities against women and girls have slowly disappeared. As a result of these advances, MENA has been able to achieve significant improvement in literacy, a remarkable decline in fertility and infant mortality, as well as rapid increases in life expectancy. Yet, the region is still affected by the low employment outcomes of job seekers and the low productivity at the workplace, in particular for young men and women.

Analysis should be directed to better understand how the economy allocates resources and creates jobs for all, not just how to place the youth. Two issues are relevant: first, labor market outcomes are determined by how employers and job seekers react to incentives. Second, there are

activities and investments that should be pursued from a business and broader economic perspective but may have no direct impact on employment.

Youth unemployment is high when unemployment is high. In such an environment, specific employment policies for the youth can be as desirable or ineffective as those for adults. Certain youth programs and projects can help, if designed and implemented properly as well as evaluated and adjusted regularly.

One of the major constraints is the lack of data and statistics in the Arab region. This lack doesn't allow a better understanding of employment creation – especially in the private sector or through public-private partnerships. Youth policies and initiatives carried out by both governmental and non-governmental organizations should be well-informed, and should see the issue of youth through the larger, more accurate, lens of nationwide policies, including employment policies.

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