

Listening to people's concerns

04



Key messages

01



People in the Arab region are optimistic about the future of social and economic equality in their countries.

02



Around 60 per cent of people in Kuwait and 55 per cent in Oman think that current levels of social and economic equality are high; and 55 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively, think social and economic equality levels will be high in five years. In contrast, only 2 per cent of people in Lebanon think that social and economic equality currently exist, and 6 per cent think there will be more social and economic equality in five years.

03



Job opportunities for young people are the preferred option to improve social and economic equality in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the Sudan and Tunisia.

04



Unlike other countries, Lebanese people think that the best way to reduce social and economic inequality is by combatting corruption.

05



In people's opinion, top government actions to improve employment opportunities in the region are the creation of more jobs in the private sector, and the provision of more funding for micro and small enterprises.

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04



“There is no greater wealth than wisdom, no greater poverty than ignorance, no greater heritage than culture and no greater support than consultation.”

— Ali Ibn Abi Talib

A. Methodology of the public opinion survey on social and economic equality in the Arab region

To understand the views of people in Arab countries, their concerns about inequality, and their policy priorities, ESCWA commissioned a public opinion survey to further understand perceptions of social and economic equality, in general, and youth employment, in particular, in the Arab region.

A representative sample of 10,000 adult respondents across 10 Arab countries (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the Sudan and Tunisia) were polled by IPSOS, a leading global

market research organization, in March and April 2022. Of the 10,000 persons polled, 54 per cent were male and 46 were female. Around 20 per cent were aged 18-24, 18 per cent were aged 25-30, 34 per cent were aged 31-45, and 28 per cent were aged 46 and above.

Box 2. Voice of the people

Public opinion surveys are defined as vox populi – the voice of the people.

“The people want...” first emerged as a slogan in Tunisia in December 2010. It echoes two famous lines by Tunisian poet Abul-Qacem al Shebbi (1934-1909), included in the country’s national anthem:

- ■ ■ If the people want life some day, fate will surely grant their wish.
- ■ ■ Their shackles will surely be shattered and their night surely vanish.



Source: Gilbert Achar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*, 2013, p. 13.

B. Results of the public opinion survey on social and economic equality

1. People’s perceptions of current social and economic equality in the Arab region

At the regional level, 52 per cent of those polled felt that there was social and economic equality in the Arab region: 22 per cent felt that there was full equality, and 30 per cent felt that there was some equality. In contrast, 46 per cent felt there was inequality: 19 per cent felt there was some inequality, and 27 per cent felt that there was full inequality.











At the national level, Lebanese respondents were the least optimistic when rating social equality in their country, with 67 per cent saying that there was full

inequality. Iraqi respondents were the second least optimistic, with 49 per cent saying that there was full inequality in their country. In contrast, people in Kuwait were the most optimistic, with 60 per cent saying that there was full equality in their country. Omani respondents were the second most optimistic, with 55 per cent saying that there was full equality in their country (table 1).

Table 1. Current perceptions of social and economic equality at the national level

Q1. How would you rate social and economic equality in your country?

Lebanese people are the least optimistic when rating social and economic equality in their country while Kuwaitis are the most optimistic.

	Egypt	Iraq	Jordan	Kuwait	Lebanon	Mauritania	Morocco	Oman	Sudan	Tunisia	Total
											
There is full social and economic equality	28%	6%	16%	60%	2%	17%	14%	55%	14%	4%	22%
There is some social and economic equality	39%	24%	46%	18%	13%	36%	40%	32%	29%	20%	30%
There are some social and economic inequality	17%	20%	19%	8%	18%	26%	26%	7%	30%	18%	19%
There is full social and economic inequality	15%	49%	18%	0%	67%	19%	19%	4%	26%	56%	27%
I don't know	1%	1%	1%	14%	0%	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%

2. Arab people's perceptions of social and economic equality in the next five years

At the regional level, 47 per cent of respondents said that there would be more social and economic equality in the region in the next five years: 26 per cent felt that there would be a lot more equality, and 21 per cent felt that there would be some more equality. Around 19 per cent of those polled felt that there would be the same level of social and economic equality in the next five years, and 27 per cent said that there would be less or a lot less equality.

At the national level, Kuwaiti respondents were again the most optimistic with regard to social and economic equality in the next five years, with 55 per cent expecting that there would be a lot more social and economic equality. Omani respondents were the second most optimistic, with 50 per cent expecting a lot more social and economic equality. In contrast, Lebanese respondents were again the most pessimistic, with only 6 per cent expecting a lot more social and economic equality in the next five years. Iraqi respondents were the second most pessimistic, with 17 per cent expecting a lot more social and economic equality (table 2).













Overall, Arab people are optimistic and believe that the status of social and economic equality in the region will improve in the next five years.



Results of the survey show that when there is a certain level of social and economic equality, such as in Kuwait and Oman, people are more optimistic and believe that the future will be better.

Table 2. Perceptions of social and economic equality at the national level in the next five years

Q2. How do you see the social and economic equality situation in your country in five years?											
	Egypt	Iraq	Jordan	Kuwait	Lebanon	Mauritania	Morocco	Oman	Sudan	Tunisia	Total
											
A lot more social and economic equality	29%	17%	20%	55%	6%	20%	23%	50%	18%	18%	26%
Some more social and economic equality	28%	14%	15%	12%	19%	28%	29%	15%	19%	28%	21%
The same level of social and economic equality or inequality	22%	19%	22%	13%	16%	28%	15%	19%	21%	17%	19%
Some more social and economic inequality	10%	16%	19%	0%	13%	13%	12%	6%	19%	9%	11%
A lot more social and economic inequality	9%	26%	22%	-	40%	7%	11%	3%	21%	22%	16%
I don't know	2%	8%	2%	20%	6%	4%	10%	7%	2%	6%	7%

3. Arab people's perceptions of priority policies that Governments should adopt to improve social and economic equality

Respondents were presented with the following 11 options:

- Job opportunities for young people.
- Combatting corruption.
- Increased wages for workers.
- Financial support for low-income households.
- Vocational training and education that are better tuned to labour market needs.
- Decent and affordable housing for all.
- Enhancing gender equality.
- Enhancing the rule of law.
- A fairer tax system.
- Increasing citizen engagement in government policy.
- Making Internet access more widely available.

“As a young woman struggling to find a job and struggling to provide for my family, I would say job opportunities for young people must be a priority.”

Tunisia, female, aged 18-24

With the exception of Lebanon, 9 of the 10 countries polled believe that job opportunities for young people was the most important policy option to enhance equality. Jordan and Iraq had the highest percentage of respondents who ranked creating job opportunities

as the preferred option (72 per cent and 65 per cent, respectively). Significantly, unlike the other countries, people in Lebanon said that the best way to improve social and economic equality was by combatting corruption (table 3).

The following five policy priorities received the most support among respondents to improve social and economic equality:

- Job opportunities for young people (56 per cent).
- Combatting corruption (39 per cent).
- Increased wages for workers (36 per cent).
- Financial support for low-income households (27 per cent).
- Vocational training and education that are better tuned to labour market needs (23 per cent).



“All these topics are important, but the precarious situation of low-income families must come first.”

Tunisia, female, age 20, student

Table 3. Government actions to improve social and economic equality at the national level

Q3. Which of the following do you think should be the main priorities area(s) for your government to improve social and economic equality?

Unlike other countries, the Lebanese think that the best way to improve social and economic equality is through combatting corruption.





















	Egypt	Iraq	Jordan	Kuwait	Lebanon	Mauritania	Morocco	Oman	Sudan	Tunisia	Total
											
Job opportunities for young people	51%	65%	72%	53%	58%	40%	56%	57%	52%	58%	56%
Combating corruption	32%	42%	41%	29%	65%	39%	36%	24%	42%	43%	39%
Increased wages for workers	40%	17%	65%	33%	40%	34%	44%	27%	34%	26%	36%
Financial support for low-income households	30%	24%	39%	18%	28%	27%	32%	19%	27%	28%	27%
Vocational training and education that are better tuned to labour market needs	16%	9%	16%	44%	18%	23%	29%	24%	21%	30%	23%
Decent and affordable housing for all	21%	17%	14%	17%	13%	23%	28%	10%	15%	17%	17%
Enhancing gender equality	16%	8%	11%	17%	12%	15%	17%	11%	12%	9%	13%
Enhancing the rule of law	9%	14%	7%	13%	20%	24%	8%	6%	13%	10%	12%
A fairer tax system	8%	3%	7%	4%	11%	13%	6%	5%	9%	21%	9%
Increasing citizen engagement in government policy	8%	2%	5%	16%	9%	15%	5%	7%	11%	5%	8%
Making internet access more widely available	10%	1%	4%	6%	3%	12%	5%	7%	7%	4%	6%

Table 4. Perceptions of decent job opportunities with the next five years at the national level

Q4. Do you think there will be more decent and productive jobs within the next five years?

	Egypt	Iraq	Jordan	Kuwait	Lebanon	Mauritania	Morocco	Oman	Sudan	Tunisia	Total
											
Yes	70%	44%	46%	54%	32%	42%	65%	85%	56%	54%	55%
No	26%	47%	51%	23%	60%	15%	20%	9%	39%	39%	33%
Maybe	2%	4%	2%	16%	3%	39%	9%	3%	3%	4%	8%
I don't know	2%	5%	1%	7%	5%	4%	6%	3%	2%	3%	4%

4. Arab people's perceptions of decent and productive jobs within the next five years

When asked whether there would be more decent and productive jobs in the next five years, Omani respondents were the most optimistic at 85 per cent. Egyptian respondents were the second most optimistic at 70 per cent. Lebanese respondents

were again the most pessimistic, with 60 per cent saying that there would not be more decent and productive jobs in the next five years. Jordanian respondents were the second most pessimistic at 51 per cent (table 4).

5. People's perceptions of what Arab Governments should do to enhance employment opportunities

Respondents were presented with the following eight options:

- ===== Create more jobs in the private sector.
- ===== Provide more funding for small and micro enterprises.
- ===== Reform the education system to meet market demands.
- ===== Reform laws that govern the establishment of private businesses.
- ===== Engage more women in the labour market.
- ===== Reform the taxation system.
- ===== Engage persons with disabilities in the labour market.
- ===== Reform the private business ecosystem.

The following five policy priorities to enhance employment opportunities received the most support among respondents across the 10 countries:

- ===== Create more jobs in the private sector (47 per cent).
- ===== Provide more funding for small and micro enterprises (46 per cent).
- ===== Reform the education system to meet market demands (39 per cent).
- ===== Reform laws that govern the establishment of private businesses (23 per cent).
- ===== Engage more women in the labour market (22 per cent).

The creation of more jobs in the private sector was the most popular action to improve employment opportunities in Jordan (62 per cent) and in Iraq (61 per cent). Respondents in the following countries showed the least support for creating more jobs in the private sector: Tunisia at 37 per cent, Mauritania at 38 per cent, and Kuwait and Egypt both at 41 per cent.

The option of providing more funding for small and micro enterprises to improve employment was most popular in Jordan at 54 per cent, followed by Mauritania at 52 per cent, the Sudan at 50 per cent, and Kuwait at 49 per cent.

Reforming the education system to meet market demands was most popular in Morocco at 55 per cent. It was the least popular option in Iraq at 24 per cent, and in Oman at 28 per cent.

Reforming laws that govern the establishment of private businesses was the most popular approach in Kuwait at 47 per cent, followed by Mauritania at 32 per cent.

Out of the five top policy options, engaging more women in the labour market was the least attractive approach to improving employment opportunities. This option received the most support in Lebanon at 31 per cent, Morocco at 28 per cent, Mauritania at 27 per cent, and Kuwait at 25 per cent. It was seen as the least attractive option in Iraq at 13 per cent, followed by Oman at 15 per cent and the Sudan at 19 per cent.











Reforming the taxation system received the most support in Jordan at 36 per cent, followed by Mauritania, the Sudan and Tunisia at 28 per cent each, and Morocco at 27 per cent.

Engaging persons with disabilities in the labour market received the most support in Lebanon at 35 per cent, followed by Morocco at 27 per cent.

Reforming the private business ecosystem received the most support in Kuwait at 38 per cent.

Table 5. Perceptions of government action to improve employment opportunities at the national level

Q5. What do you think the government should do to enhance employment opportunities?

	Egypt	Iraq	Jordan	Kuwait	Lebanon	Mauritania	Morocco	Oman	Sudan	Tunisia	Total
											
Create more jobs in the private sector	41%	61%	62%	41%	54%	38%	44%	50%	45%	37%	47%
Provide more funding for small and micro enterprises	43%	34%	54%	49%	47%	52%	43%	41%	50%	46%	46%
Reform the education system to meet the market demands	38%	24%	43%	47%	36%	38%	55%	28%	38%	46%	39%
Reform laws that govern setting up private businesses	19%	13%	26%	47%	21%	32%	14%	16%	18%	24%	23%
Engage more women in the labour market	22%	13%	22%	25%	31%	27%	28%	15%	19%	21%	22%
Reform the taxation system	22%	7%	36%	3%	23%	28%	27%	12%	28%	28%	21%
Engage persons with disabilities in the labour market	20%	9%	21%	18%	35%	23%	27%	10%	20%	16%	20%
Reform the private business ecosystem	15%	7%	11%	38%	14%	21%	10%	11%	13%	14%	15%

C. Perspectives by country

1. Egypt

In Egypt, respondents had an optimistic perspective, with 28 per cent saying that they currently had full equality, and 39 per cent felt that they had some equality. Regarding equality in the next five years, 29 per cent were expecting a lot more equality, and 28 per cent were expecting some more equality.

Job opportunities for young people were seen by 51 per cent of Egyptian respondents as the most important way to improve social and economic equality, while 70 per cent said that there would be more decent and productive jobs in the next five years. Providing more funding for small and micro enterprises was considered the best method to enhance employment opportunities by 43 per cent of Egyptian respondents.

2. Iraq

Iraqi respondents had a pessimistic perspective, with only 6 per cent saying that they currently had full equality, and 24 per cent saying that they had some equality. Regarding perceptions of equality in the next five years, 17 per cent were expecting a lot more equality, and 14 per cent were expecting some more equality.

Job opportunities for young people were seen by 65 per cent of Iraqi respondents as the most important way to improve equality. However, only 44 per cent believed that there would be more decent and productive jobs within the next five years. Creating more jobs in the private sector was considered the best method to enhance employment opportunities by 61 per cent of Iraqi respondents.

3. Jordan

In Jordan, 16 per cent of respondents felt that they currently had full equality, and 46 per cent felt that they had some equality. Regarding perceptions of equality in the next five years, 20 per cent were expecting a lot more equality, and 15 per cent were expecting some more equality.

Job opportunities for young people were seen by 72 per cent of Jordanian respondents as the most important way to improve equality. However, only 46 per cent of said that there would be more decent and productive jobs within the next five years. Creating more jobs in the private sector was considered the best method to enhance employment opportunities by 62 per cent of Jordanian respondents.

4. Kuwait

Kuwait respondents had an optimistic perspective, with 60 per cent saying that they currently had full equality, and 18 per cent feeling that they had some equality.

Regarding perceptions of equality in the next five years, 55 per cent were expecting a lot more equality, and 12 per cent were expecting some more equality.

Job opportunities for young people were seen by 53 per cent of Kuwaiti respondents as the most important way to improve equality, and 54 per cent said that there would be more decent and productive jobs within the

next five years. Providing more funding for small and micro enterprises was considered the best method to enhance employment opportunities by 49 per cent of Kuwaiti respondents.

5. Lebanon

Lebanese respondents had an extremely pessimistic perspective, with only 2 per cent saying that they currently had full equality, and 13 per cent feeling that they had some equality. Regarding perceptions of equality in the next five years, 6 per cent were expecting a lot more equality, and 19 per cent were expecting some more equality.

Unlike other countries, most Lebanese respondents (65 per cent) said that the best way to improve equality was by combatting corruption. Only 32 per cent believed that there would be more decent and productive jobs within the next five years. Creating more jobs in the private sector was considered the best method to enhance employment opportunities by 54 per cent of Lebanese respondents.

6. Mauritania

In Mauritania, 17 per cent of respondents felt that they currently had full equality, and 36 per cent felt that they had some equality. Regarding perceptions of equality in the next five years, 20 per cent were expecting a lot more equality, and 28 per cent were expecting some more equality.

Job opportunities for young people were seen by 40 per cent of Mauritanian respondents as the most important way to improve equality, and 42 per cent said that there would be more decent and productive jobs within the next five years. Providing more funding for small and micro enterprises was considered the best method to enhance employment opportunities by 52 per cent of Mauritanian respondents.

7. Morocco

In Morocco, 14 per cent of respondents felt that they currently had full equality, and 40 per cent felt that they had some equality. Regarding perceptions of equality in the next five years, 23 per cent were expecting a lot more equality, and 29 per cent were expecting some more equality.

Job opportunities for young people were seen by 56 per cent of Moroccan respondents as the most important way to improve equality, and 65 per cent said that there would be more decent and productive jobs within the next five years. Reforming the education system to meet market demands was considered the best method to enhance employment opportunities by 55 per cent of Moroccan respondents.

8. Oman

In Oman, 55 per cent of respondents said that they currently had full equality, and 32 per cent felt that they had some equality. Regarding perceptions of equality

in the next five years, 50 per cent were expecting a lot more equality, and 15 per cent were expecting some more equality.

Job opportunities for young people were seen by 57 per cent of Omani respondents as the most important way to improve equality, and 85 per cent said that there would be more decent and productive jobs

within the next five years. Creating more jobs in the private sector was considered the best method to enhance employment opportunities by 50 per cent of Omani respondents.

9. Sudan

In the Sudan, 14 per cent of respondents said that they currently had full equality, and 29 per cent felt that they had some equality. Regarding perceptions of equality in the next five years, 18 per cent were expecting a lot more equality, and 19 per cent were expecting some more equality.

Job opportunities for young people were seen by 52 per cent of Sudanese respondents as the most important way to improve equality, and 56 per cent said that there would be more decent and productive jobs within the next five years. Providing more funding for small and micro enterprises was considered the best method to enhance employment opportunities by 50 per cent of Sudanese respondents.

10. Tunisia

In Tunisia, 4 per cent of respondents said that they currently had full equality, and 20 per cent felt that they had some equality. Regarding perceptions of equality in the next five years, 18 per cent were expecting a lot more equality, and 28 per cent were expecting some more equality.

Job opportunities for young people were seen by 58 per cent of Tunisian respondents as the most important

way to improve equality, and 54 per cent said that there would be more decent and productive jobs within the next five years. Reforming the education system to meet market demands was considered the best method to enhance employment opportunities by 46 per cent of Tunisian respondents.