
Foreword



The Arab region continues to be one of the most unequal regions worldwide. As poverty rises, the growing wealth gap between individuals fuels increasing inequality. The region exhibits persistent and increasing levels of inequality in opportunity, especially among certain groups and in certain areas. For example, youth unemployment, which is 3.8 times higher than that of adult workers, has been the highest in the world for the past 25 years. Unemployment among certain groups, such as women and persons with disabilities, is even higher than that of men and persons without disabilities. Gender-based inequalities stubbornly remain above global levels. Wealth creation opportunities are declining, with the wealthiest 10 per cent of Arab adults holding 80 per cent of the total regional wealth. Such factors, if left unaddressed, will deepen existing inequalities, hitting the poorest and most vulnerable communities hardest. These factors risk inflaming greater disaffection and alienation among Arab populations, resulting in a breakdown of social cohesion.

Furthermore, social, political and economic inequalities have amplified the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affected young people in the Arab region. The pandemic highlighted the economic inequalities and fragile social safety nets in the region, with vulnerable and at-risk communities bearing the brunt of the pandemic's repercussions.

Despite this bleak picture, Arab populations are optimistic and hopeful. A survey conducted by ESCWA found that 52 per cent of people in the region believe that equality exists, either fully or partially, while 47 per cent believe that equality will increase in the next five years.

This optimism must be utilized.

To seize this momentum, Arab Governments should not spare an effort to capitalize on youth enthusiasm, which can serve as a strong catalyst for change. This requires going beyond superficial and temporary fixes

to fundamentally reform the root causes of inequality, including addressing structural challenges, corruption, governance and institutional deficits, and introducing coordinated economic and social policies. Notably, creating job opportunities was chief among the demands of those surveyed. Decent job creation is necessary to unleash the productive potential of young people, and avoid another “lost generation” with limited access to opportunities as it transitions into the labour market.

Arab Governments must recognize that delivering visible impact, securing credibility, and promoting solidarity within the region constitute a successful three-pronged policy approach to reducing inequalities. Practical solutions should be put in place to translate this approach into practice, and ensure that benefits trickle down to those most in need.

To kickstart this paradigm shift in policy reform, I propose establishing a solidarity fund and a regional coalition to reconnect different population groups across the wealthiest and poorest segments of society, so as to create opportunities to ensure dignified and prosperous lives for the poor and vulnerable, improve shared wellbeing, guarantee growth to build stronger and more stable societies that leave no one behind in the achievement of the SDGs, and promote shared responsibilities, societal solidarity and effective partnerships for development.

We need to act now. Our children will never forgive us if the legacy they inherit is fragmented, fragile and marginalized societies.

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