

Introduction



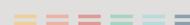
The challenges facing Arab countries today reflect decades-long problems, such as civil war, political violence, foreign military intervention, youth unemployment, gender inequality, limited social protection coverage, and widespread human vulnerability owing to poverty and unmet basic needs.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Arab region has witnessed disparities that sharply contradict the vision of equality and inclusion inspired by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Many poor people in several Arab countries

could not procure private medical care and consequently died of the virus, while others survived because they could protect themselves at home or access private health care. Around 8.8 million people became newly unemployed during the pandemic in the Arab region,¹ while the wealthiest 10 per cent of the region's population now control 81 per cent of its net wealth compared with 75 per cent prior to the pandemic. In 2023, an additional 10.9 million poor people in the region will fall into extreme poverty, 8.5 million owing to the impact of the pandemic and 2.4 million as a result of the war in Ukraine.

 **Inequality** are not destiny
and **exclusion** – **change is possible.**

Pathfinders, *From Rhetoric to Action – Delivering Equality and Inclusion*, 2021.



The present report builds on the increasing awareness among Governments and people of the importance of tackling inequality as a prerequisite for a just and peaceful society. It complements the Pathfinders flagship global report entitled *From Rhetoric to Action: Delivering Equality and Inclusion*.² The Pathfinders report seeks to identify practical and politically viable solutions to meet the SDG targets on equitable and inclusive societies, especially Goal 10 on reduced inequality. The focus of the present roadmap for the Arab region is to provide a practical

set of actions that identify how opportunities can be shared more equally to reach the most vulnerable populations and reduce inequalities. It highlights the challenges of delivering equality and inclusion in the Arab region, and identifies practical solutions to address these issues, based on recent and longer-term experiences of other countries. The roadmap echoes the message of the Pathfinders report that “inequality and exclusion are not destiny – change is possible”. The roadmap builds on the policy approach set out in the Pathfinders report, aimed at providing

practical solutions to inequality and exclusion. The three pillars of the policy approach are: delivering visible impact; securing credibility; and promoting solidarity.

The present report also tackles the long-standing challenge of youth unemployment in the Arab region, which is one of the most enduring forms of inequality. Enhancing the status of young people and assimilating them into the labour market is crucial

to reducing inequality, since young people (aged 15-29) represent about 30 per cent of the entire Arab population. Economic growth alone will not solve this problem. On the contrary, non-inclusive growth could exacerbate inequalities without strengthening economic participation for all. The best way to translate economic growth into reduced inequality is by creating upward mobility opportunities and decent employment that reduce poverty and narrow the income gap between high and low earners.

Box 1. Global messages of the Pathfinders report

The global report has the following three main messages:

- ■ ■ ■ People globally are demanding a new social contract to heal a divided world. Opinion surveys show an immense preoccupation with societal divisions and a consensus that more needs to be done to address them.
- ■ ■ ■ Nationally, countries that have sustained progress in tackling inequality have adopted the following three-pronged approach:
 - Delivering visible results that make a difference in people's daily lives, in areas such as social protection, housing and wages.
 - Building solidarity through truth-telling exercises and strong community-based programmes.
 - Securing credibility and avoiding setbacks by fighting corruption and widening political power.
- ■ ■ ■ International policies are a critical complement to national action. The three urgent priorities now are vaccine equity, access to finance, and tax norms and agreements incentivizing those who have most profited from growth to contribute to the COVID-19 recovery and to climate change.
- ■ ■ ■ New aspects of the report include the following:
 - It lays out key statistics explaining how reducing inequality and exclusion is in everyone's interest, through more stable growth, pandemic containment, the ability to address the climate crisis, and political stability.
 - It looks at the "how to" of practical policymaking, starting with political and practical viability. It describes a menu of 21 policy areas that can be adapted to country circumstances, rooted in polling, research, and government and civil society consultations.
 - It combines attention to both income and identity-based inequalities, including gender, race and ethnicity.
 - It links the economic and social aspects of inequality to its civil and political aspects, including the links between State capture and inequality, and the benefits of maintaining civic space.
 - It is explicit about the relationship between national and international policies in combating inequality and exclusion.