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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2016 - Regional Press Release Arab States Region

Youth and women among those being left behind as the Arab region develops, UNDP Report warns

Gap set to widen unless deep-rooted development barriers, including discrimination and unequal political participation, are tackled.

Stockholm, 21 March 2017 – Despite significant progress in human development over the past 25 years, the Arab States region has, among developing regions of the world, the highest youth unemployment rate and the lowest share of primary school-aged children attending school. A stronger focus on youth and others excluded – particularly women and girls, rural dwellers, and those living in conflict-affected areas – is now needed to ensure sustainable human development for all.

These are among the findings of the [Human Development Report 2016, entitled ‘Human Development for Everyone’](#), released today by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The report finds that although average human development improved significantly across all regions from 1990 to 2015, one in three people worldwide continue to live in low levels of human development, as measured by the Human Development Index (HDI).

“The world has come a long way in rolling back extreme poverty, in improving access to education, health and sanitation, and in expanding possibilities for women and girls,” said UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, speaking at the launch of the report in Stockholm today, alongside Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and the report’s lead author and Director of the Human Development Report Office, Selim Jahan. “But those gains are a prelude to the next, possibly tougher challenge, to ensure the benefits of global progress reach everyone.”

In the Arab States, over half the population is under the age of 25. Yet the percentage of children of primary school age currently in school is the lowest in the developing world. Youth unemployment is the highest among developing regions, with 29 percent of individuals between 15 and 24 out of a job.

“As this report notes, in order to ensure that no one is left behind, the region needs to focus on those excluded and on actions to dismantle deep-rooted and often unmeasured barriers to development,” said Mourad Wahba, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for the Arab States Region.

In addition to young people, rural populations, women, and people living in conflict-affected areas can also suffer deprivations both overt and hidden.

The region has the largest gap between male and female labour participation rates

Women in the Arab States still suffer from more inequalities than in most regions of the world. The difference between the HDI values for the female and male population, as measured by the Gender Development Index, is the second largest across all developing regions (after South Asia), owing

mainly to income gaps between men and women. Longstanding patterns of exclusion and lack of empowerment for women and girls remain pressing challenges.

Across the region, the report shows, only 22 percent of women aged 15 and older were employed outside the home in 2015, compared with 75 percent of men. This is the lowest female labour participation rate – and the largest gap between male and female labour participation rates – across developing regions.

The report shows that geography is a significant factor of inequality in the region. Disparities between urban and rural areas exist in every country, but in the Arab States they are more pronounced than the average for developing countries. There is a 21-percentage-point difference in multidimensional poverty, as measured by the Multidimensional Poverty Index, between the regional urban population (eight percent) and the rural population (29 percent).

The region has experienced human development setbacks because of conflict

The report also illustrates the disparity in human development levels as a result of conflicts and violence. 2014 saw the highest number of battle-related deaths since 1989, many from the region. Refugee children and adolescents are five times more likely to be out of school than their non-refugee peers, with serious implications for their futures. Refugees often also face barriers to work and political participation, the report notes.

Five years of crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic and the spillover into Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey have cost close to \$35 billion – the equivalent of the GDP of the Syrian Arab Republic in 2007. Restoring Libya's infrastructure will cost an estimated \$200 billion over the next 10 years.

Countries hosting people fleeing conflicts and violence are also affected, especially Jordan and Lebanon, which have taken in the vast majority of Syrian refugees. Basic services, including education and healthcare systems, are under stress.

Action for equality and inclusion can advance human progress

“By eliminating deep, persistent, discriminatory social norms and laws, and addressing the unequal access to political participation, which have hindered progress for so many, poverty can be eradicated and a peaceful, just, and sustainable development can be achieved for all,” Helen Clark said.

To this end, the report calls for far greater attention to empowering the most marginalized in society, and recognizes the importance of giving them greater voice in decision-making processes.

The report also calls for a more refined analysis to inform actions, including making a shift toward assessing progress in such areas as participation and autonomy. Key data, disaggregated for characteristics such as place, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, is vital to identifying who is being left behind.

“We place too much attention on national averages, which often mask enormous variations in people's lives,” stated Selim Jahan. “In order to advance, we need to examine more closely not just what has been achieved, but who has been excluded and why?”

The report stresses the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to build on human development gains, noting that the agenda and human development approach are mutually reinforcing.

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