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ARAB FAMILY HEALTH AND POPULATION

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Preface

One of the main objectives of Pan Arab Programm for Family Health (PAPFAMP) at the League of Arab States (LAS) is to encourage Arab researchers to publish their researches and disseminate and exchange knowledge and information.

To achieve this objective, PAPFAM has issued a specialized scientific peer reviewed periodical “Arab Family Health and Population – Researches and Studies” since 2007.

Due to the importance of the youth roles particularly after Arab Spring, the editorial board prepares the 16th issue one “Arab Youth in the Context of Empowering Opportunities and Emerging Challenges” in order to examine and analyze the context of rising youth protests in several Arab countries.

Editor-in-chief

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Arab Youth In The Context Of Empowering Opportunities And Emerging Challenges

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Translated into English by: Tania Ali Faour

- Abstract

This paper analyzes the situation of Arab youth in the context of empowering opportunities and emerging challenges. It is issued in the context of rising youth protests in several Arab countries and in light of the "International Year of Youth" declared by the United Nations under the title of "Dialogue and Mutual Understanding".

The paper concludes by providing recommendations to build the capacities of Arab youth and to integrate them in the development process. The main recommendations can be highlighted as follows:

- Formulating a comprehensive and integrated national youth policy.
- Matching educational outputs with labour market requirements.
- Developing policies to improve the health and well-being of youth.
- Ensuring an enabling environment to engage youth in public life.

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I- INTRODUCTION.

The United Nations defines "youth" as persons aged between 15 and 24 years old. It emphasizes that this definition does not involve any bias against other definitions that might be adopted by countries in the context of different social, cultural, economic, political and institutional factors, but it is preferable to adopt a common definition in order to facilitate comparison between countries and over time. In fact, this definition of youth is an operational definition having a statistical basis because national data are often available in 5-year age groups (*United Nations, General Assembly, 1996; United Nations, 2012-a*). It is also useful to distinguish between "adolescents"³ aged 15-19 years and "young adults" aged 20-24 years, considering the different needs of youth and the different challenges that they face in each of these two categories.

The period of youth is very important from a life course approach because it is a transitional stage from childhood to adulthood that includes physiological changes and personality development. It also marks the transition from education to the labour market that is from dependency to economic independence. In several cases, this stage also includes the beginnings of family formation through marriage and childbearing. Therefore, the United Nations has accorded, since decades, a special priority to youth issues, with the General Assembly adopting in 1965 the "Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding Between Peoples" (*United Nations, General Assembly, 1965*). Youth issues were tackled in various global conferences since

³The period of "adolescence" covers the age bracket 10 to 19 years, but it can be divided into "early adolescence" that covers the age group 10-14 years and "late adolescence" that covers the age group 15-19 years.

1990, leading to the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) by the General Assembly in 1995. This Programme provides a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of youth. It currently includes 15 priority areas for youth, grouped into three clusters: (1) youth in the global economy, (2) youth in civil society, (3) youth and their well-being (*United Nations, General Assembly, 1996*). The United Nations has later identified a set of goals and targets and proposed a list of indicators to monitor the progress of youth along these priorities. In 2009, the United Nations also declared the year beginning on 12 August 2010 and ending on 11 August 2011 as the "International Year of Youth" under the title of "Dialogue and Mutual Understanding", in recognition of the importance accorded by the international community to the integration of youth issues within development agendas at all global, regional and national levels (*United Nations, General Assembly, 2010*).

In the Arab region, countries adopt various definitions of "youth". Some countries abide to the age bracket 15-24 years as proposed by the United Nations, while other countries prefer to opt for different definitions ranging from 10 to 35 years (*UN-ESCWA, 2008*). For example, Jordan defines "youth" as persons aged 12 to 30 years (as mentioned in the National Youth Strategy for Jordan 2011-2015, adopted by the Higher Council for Youth, 2010), while Bahrain adopts the age bracket 15 to 30 years (according to the Bahrain National Youth Strategy 2005-2009, adopted by the General Organization for Youth and Sports (GOYS) in Bahrain) and Palestine the age bracket 15 to 29 years (as mentioned in the National Cross-Sectoral Youth Strategy of Palestine 2011-2013 adopted by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 2010).

The Arab Region is currently witnessing a ‘youth bulge’, with the youth population (15-24 years of age) constituting about one-fifth (19.7%) of the total population in 2010. Statistics reveal that this bulge has opened a demographic window of opportunity to increase savings and investment, increase per capita income and ultimately improve the quality of life. In fact, the Total Dependency Ratio in the region has decreased to 61 dependents per 100 persons in the working ages in the year 2010 (*United Nations, Population Division, 2011*). However, this youth bulge has also imposed various challenges, particularly in the case of countries where the youth population faces high unemployment rates and has limited opportunities to participate in the development process and to benefit from its returns.

This paper is prepared in the context of rising youth protests in several Arab countries and examines the situation of Arab youth in light of empowering opportunities and emerging challenges. The paper proceeds by analyzing demographic, social and economic changes in the Region, examining the impacts of the demographic transition and socio-cultural changes, as well as economic conditions and their contribution to the exclusion of youth. It highlights empowering opportunities and emerging challenges facing youth in their attempts to match their knowledge and skills with labour market requirements, secure health care and protection and participate in public life. The paper concludes by proposing recommendations for building the capacities of Arab youth and their integration in the development process. These recommendations highlight the importance of formulating a comprehensive and integrated national youth policy, matching educational outputs with labour market requirements, developing policies to improve the health and well-being of youth, as well as ensuring an enabling environment to engage youth in public life.

II- ARAB YOUTH AND DEMOGRAPHIC, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES.

The Arab Region is currently experiencing a storm of demographic, social and economic transformations. This section examines the situation of youth in light of these changes.

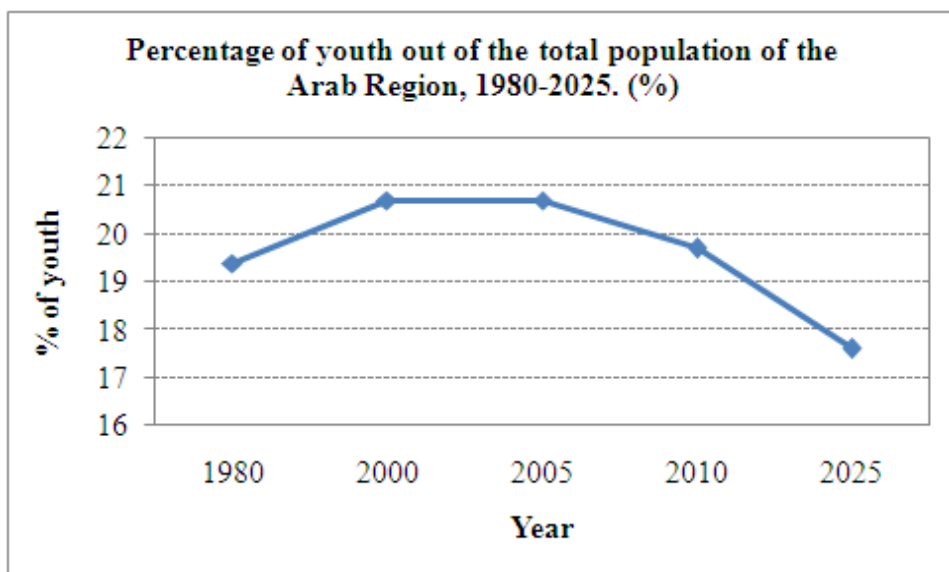
2-1- Impacts of the demographic transition.

The Arab Region is undergoing a period of demographic transition from high to low birth and death rates. Data from the United Nations Population Division (*World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*) reveal that the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) for the Region has declined from 6.3 children per woman in the period 1980-1985 to 3.4 children in the period 2005-2010 and it is expected to reach 2.7 children in the period 2020-2025. During these same time intervals, the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) has declined from 69.0 to 34.1 and it is expected to reach 24.3 infant deaths per 1,000 live births. In parallel, the life expectancy at birth (both sexes) has increased from 60.8 to 69.1 years and it is expected to increase further to 72.4 years.

This demographic transition was accompanied by an age-structural transition whereby the percentage of children (0-14 years of age) has declined from 44.4% of the total population in the year 1980 to 33.8% in 2010 and it is expected to reach 29.5% by 2025. On the other hand, the percentage of older persons (65 years and over) has only slightly increased from 3.4% of the total population in the year 1980 to 4.1% in 2010 and it is expected to reach 5.9% by 2025. As a result, the percentage of the population of working age (15-64 years) has increased from 52.1% of the total population in the year 1980 to 62.2% in 2010 and it is expected to reach 64.7% by 2025.

This age-structural transition led to the increase in the percentage of youth (15-24 years of age) in relation to the total population, a phenomenon referred to as the 'youth bulge' (Graph 1). In fact, the percentage of youth increased from 19.4% of the total population in 1980 to 20.7% in the period 2000-2005 (period witnessing the largest youth bulge). In 2010, the youth population constituted 19.7% of the total population in the Arab region but this percentage is expected to slightly decline to 17.6% by 2025. In other words, one of every five persons in the Arab region is a young person aged 15 to 24 years. In this context, the size of the youth population in the region has doubled from 33.5 million in 1980 to 70.3 million in 2010 and it is expected to reach 82.1 million by 2025, knowing that the size of the total population in the Region has increased from 172.7 million to 357.4 million between the years 1980 and 2010 and it is projected to increase to 467.9 million by 2025.

Graph 1:



Source: United Nations, Population Division, 2011.

The demographic transition and accompanying youth bulge have various repercussions on the development process in the Arab Region, offering opportunities but also imposing challenges, as follows:

- The opportunities consist of benefiting from the demographic window that was opened with the decline of the Total Dependency Ratio from 92 dependents per 100 persons in the working ages in 1980 to 61 in 2010, taking into account that this Ratio is also expected to further decline to only 55 by 2025 (*United Nations, Population Division, 2011*). This window provides an opportunity to increase savings and investments, increase per capita income and ultimately improve the quality of life. However, in order to seize this opportunity, the Arab countries should adopt appropriate social and economic policies that convert savings into productive investments in order to boost the development process.

- The challenges consist of absorbing the growing numbers of youth in education and the labour force and ensuring their participation in public and political life. This is often a difficult task for countries that already suffer from limited resources. In this context, Cincotta and other researchers (2003) have explained that countries where those aged 15-29 years of age constituted 40% or more of all adults (aged 15 years and over) were in the nineties of the last century twice as vulnerable to the outbreak of conflicts than other countries. In the case of the Arab region, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) had

warned, since 2008, that the increase in the percentage of youth 20 to 30 per cent of the total population, in a context of unemployment and social and economic exclusion of youth, may lead to the movement of youth seeking to change their unfair situation (*Shakoori, 2008*).

2-2- Socio-cultural change and its impacts on youth.

The Arab region is witnessing a change in its socio-cultural fabric. This change is most apparent in the transformations of the pattern, size and cohesion of the Arab family which is the nucleus of society.

First: The pattern of the family is shifting from the extended family (that usually includes parents and children in addition to grandparents and/or the married children's family) to the nuclear family which is limited to parents and their children.

Second: The size of the nuclear family is shrinking as a result of the decline in Total Fertility Rates.

Third: The cohesion of the family is at risk. In fact, cohesive families characterized by cooperation and mutual understanding between their members of different generations are often gradually transforming into less cohesive families witnessing inter-generational gaps between parents and children as well as gaps among the children themselves.

The youth culture is gradually diverging from the culture of parents. In fact, parents are gradually losing the ability to transfer their culture to their children because of the growing influence of external factors such as peer groups (in schools, universities or clubs...), the media, internet as well as educational institutions. It seems as if every young person is continuously assessing things to build his/her own value system, having in many cases to choose and combine between the society's different cultural references authorities and values. Therefore, we cannot talk about a single "youth culture" but about various "youth cultures", in light of the heterogeneity of youth culture among Arab countries and among different groups of youth within the same country. This cultural diversity is manifested in distinct behaviors and practices (for example in relation to food habits and dress codes) for different groups of youth. In general, young people who reside in urban areas and who are better off financially are more inclined to international dishes and more likely to avoid fatty foods for health and aesthetic reasons. They also opt for modern dress styles in line with international fashion trends while young people belonging to poor traditional families are more likely to conform to traditional dress styles.

In this context, it is also essential to refer to the impact of globalization on these social and cultural changes, noting that young people are the population group that is most affected by globalization because they are better able to deal with information and communication technologies and they are more likely to move between different regions in the same country and between countries of different cultures. Globalization has offered positive opportunities

for youth empowerment in the Arab region, but it has also confronted them with various challenges, as follows:

- On the one hand, through the internet, media and geographic movement, globalization has provided young people with opportunities to broaden and deepen their education and knowledge base, to be familiar with cultures that are different from their own, as well as to discover global labor market demands. As a result, Arab youth have picked up some positive elements from Western culture and have customized them to match their local setting.

- On the other hand, globalization has imposed challenges on youth culture, leading in some cases to the emergence of double standards among young people, such as those related to women's rights and the role of women in society. It has also sometimes led to young people's excessive individualism and independence, whereby they tend to take decisions under the negative influence of their peer group, in total isolation from their family, which makes them more vulnerable to deviance as well as addiction to smoking, alcohol and drugs, which threatens their ability to pursue their studies, ruins their physical and mental health and increases their risk of engaging in violence and crime.

These social and cultural changes in the region have impacted on issues of gender equality and women's empowerment. The region achieved a significant positive progress in women's acquirement of

empowerment tools such as university education, improved health and decreased fertility rate, but women are often unable to use these empowerment tools to participate in the labor market and in public life. In general, social customs and traditions still limit women to their reproductive role (considering that their natural place is in the household as wives and mothers), at the expense of their productive role (achieved through participation in the labour market and achieving economic independence) and societal role (achieved through participation in public and political life).

2-3- Economic conditions and their contribution to the exclusion of youth.

Arab countries have in the past few years attempted to develop their economic structures and to create job opportunities to absorb the large numbers of unemployed persons, mainly young people who are first-time job seekers. However, these countries have faced several challenges as a result of the global financial crisis, the economic impacts of globalization and the political instability and the lack of security in several Arab countries.

The global financial crisis, which first appeared in the real estate sector in the United States in 2007, had negative impacts on most financial markets in the Arab region and resulted in economic difficulties and the exclusion of young people in particular. In fact, facing this financial crisis, the Arab region suffers from a critical weakness: its economic growth generally depends on oil revenues, real estate investments, tourism revenues and foreign aid, rather than depending on productive activities. In this context, several Arab

countries have witnessed a decline in investment rates, international trade and consumption, resulting in lower labour demand and higher unemployment rates. Some Gulf countries have reduced the number of offered jobs, particularly in the banking, investment and construction sectors, leading to the return of thousands of Arab and foreign workers from Gulf countries to their home countries which were already suffering from high unemployment rates. (*United Nations-ESCWA, 2009-a*).

In addition, globalization was accompanied by significant technological and economic changes, transformations in the type of skills required in the labour market and the dominance of multinational corporations and the local private sector over the largest share of national income. This has sometimes resulted in high rates of unemployment, poverty and economic exclusion of some young people who lack the skills necessary to join the labor market. On the other hand, globalization has expanded the scope and deepened the impact of conflicts and instability in the Arab region.

In general, the Arab region faces a major challenge in the structure of its labor market and the demand for jobs. Some Arab countries report a limited demand for educated and skilled labor, leading to the increase of unemployment rates among university graduates as compared with persons having low educational levels. This phenomenon is linked to the structure of growth and production and the lack of adequate investment in fixed capital. In order to reach full employment and to raise women's labor force participation to 35%, Arab countries (not members of the Gulf Cooperation Council), should, by the year 2030, create 92 million new jobs, which requires an

investment of 4.4 trillion dollars (at constant 2005 prices), implying an average annual investment bill of 220 billion dollars or the equivalent of almost 50% of these countries' GDP in 2009. As for the least developed countries, the required rate of investment is much higher, reaching about 100% of their GDP. (*UNDP, Regional Centre for Arab States, 2011*).

Facing these economic challenges, statistics show that the Arab region has recorded over the past two decades the highest growth rate of employment among developing regions, with the overall unemployment rate falling from 12% in 1990 to 9.3% in 2010. However, the region still records the highest unemployment rate among developing regions, with the recorded decline in unemployment being largely attributed to mainly two countries, Algeria and Morocco, noting that the decline of unemployment in these countries was not achieved as a result of a dynamic economic productivity creating sustainable work opportunities but it was rather the result of an increase in government-supported employment and the illegal emigration of young people looking for better work opportunities. Unemployment rates are particularly high among youth, leading to their economic exclusion and their emigration in search of better jobs. Despite the decline of the youth unemployment rate in the Arab region from 30% in the nineties to 24% in 2009, it still represents more than twice the world average and young people constitute more than half of the unemployed population in most Arab countries. The decline in the youth unemployment rate is also somewhat deceptive because it reflects an increasing willingness of young people to accept any job (even if not suitable to their education and skills) or to simply abandon a futile job search. (*UNDP, Regional Centre for Arab States, 2011*).

In this context, high unemployment rates are translated into increasing income poverty⁴ and multidimensional poverty⁵ rates in the Arab region. An examination of the international poverty line (\$1.25 per day) reveals that the least developed Arab countries have recorded the highest poverty rates, reaching 46.1% in the Comoros, 21.2% in Mauritania, 18.8% in Djibouti and 17.5% in Yemen. This is also noted with regard to the national poverty line, with Mauritania recording the highest rate of 46.3%, followed by Comoros (44.8%). National poverty line data are also available for Palestine where the poor accounted for one fifth of the total population (21.9%). As for the Multidimensional Poverty Index, the highest value was recorded in Somalia (0.514), followed by Comoros (0.408), Mauritania (0.352), Yemen (0.283) and Djibouti (0.139), that is the least developed Arab countries. (*UNDP, 2011*).

III- ARAB YOUTH: MATCHING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS WITH LABOUR MARKET REQUIREMENT.

Education is one of the most important means of empowerment because it provides individuals with the necessary knowledge, skills and self-confidence to participate in the development process and to benefit from its returns. Education can be considered as a key to the

⁴ Income poverty refers to the percentage of the population living below the national poverty line. Poverty line could be defined in absolute terms (The International Poverty Line) as in relative terms (The National Poverty Line).

⁵ UNDP (2011) classifies countries according to the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) which includes three dimensions and ten indicators: (1) The Health dimension, measured by two indicators: nutrition and child mortality; (2) The Education dimension, measured by two indicators: years of schooling and children enrolled in education; (3) The Standard of living dimension, measured by six indicators related to cooking fuel, toilet, water, electricity, floor and assets. Each person is assigned a deprivation score according to his/her household's deprivation in each of these indicators. However, UNDP could not calculate this Index for all countries because the various data needed for its calculation were unavailable in some cases.

empowerment of young people because it generally makes it easier for them to join the labor market, participate in public life as well as improve their health and status in the family and society as a whole. In fact, education broadens the choices and opportunities available to young people, making it a tool that can be used to break the cycle of poverty and improve their situation and the situation of their families.

In this context, education is a prerequisite for sustainable human development. The right to education is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948, which declares in Article 26.1 that "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit", (*UNOHCHR, 1997*). In addition, this right has been reiterated in several international treaties on human rights such as the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). During the Millennium Summit convened by the United Nations in New York in the year 2000, the international community committed itself to "achieve universal primary education" (Goal 2) by 2015 (*United Nations, General Assembly, 2000*). In relation to youth, the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) has stressed the importance of "education" in its list of priority areas, (*United Nations, General Assembly, 1996*).

Since 1990, the Arab region witnessed a significant progress in access to education as a result of countries' interest in achieving

universal primary education. However, one of every ten young people in the region still suffers from illiteracy, which makes him/her vulnerable to unemployment as well as to social, economic and political exclusion. As follows, we examine youth literacy rates in the Arab region, the enrollment rates in various educational levels, the quality of education, in addition to vocational and technical education. We also highlight the high rates of youth unemployment which point to the mismatch between educational outputs and labor market requirements.

3-1- Youth literacy rates.

UNESCO statistics (Table 1) reveal that the youth literacy rate was 87.9% in the Arab region in 2009. The lowest literacy rates were registered in Less Developed Countries such as Mauritania (67.7%), Yemen (84.1%), Comoros (85.3%) and Sudan (85.9%), in addition to Morocco (79.5%), Iraq (82.7%) and Egypt (84.9%). The Gender Parity Index (GPI) in literacy rates was 0.92 for the region, meaning that the literacy rate of young females was lower than that of young males, noting that this ratio is lowest in Yemen (0.75) and Morocco (0.83).

In other words, 12.1% of youth in the Arab region are still illiterate and their number reaches 8.4 million, with 2.6 million of them being in Egypt. Young women form 63.3% of illiterate youth in the region and their share reaches 85.8% in Yemen and 72.8% in Libya.

Table 1:
Youth literacy rates and numbers of illiterate youth (15-24 years) in Arab countries, 2005-2009.

Country	Reference Year	Literacy Rate		Illiterate youth	
		Both sexes(%)	Gender Parity Index (GPI)*	Both sexes (in thousands)	% Females
Algeria	2006	91.8	0.94	609	65.0
Bahrain	2009	100.0	1.00	-	NA
Comoros	2009	85.3	0.99	20	51.4
Djibouti	...	...	...	...	...
Egypt	2006	84.9	0.93	2597	59.3
Iraq	2009	82.7	0.95	1058	55.1
Jordan	2007	98.9	1.00	13	48.8
Kuwait	2008	98.6	1.00	6	42.7
Lebanon	2007	98.7	1.01	10	35.9
Libya	2009	99.9	1.00	2	72.8
Mauritania	2009	67.7	0.91	214	53.7
Morocco	2009	79.5	0.83	1319	67.7
Oman	2008	97.6	1.00	14	47.2
Palestine	2009	99.2	1.00	6	48.8
Qatar	2009	97.8	1.00	6	21.3
Saudi Arabia	2009	97.6	0.98	116	72.1
Somalia	...	...	...	...	...
Sudan	2009	85.9	0.93	1205	60.6
Syria	2009	94.4	0.97	257	61.8
Tunisia	2008	96.8	0.98	62	68.3
UAE	2005	95.0	1.04	34	24.0
Yemen	2009	84.1	0.75	827	85.8
Arab Region	-	87.9	0.92	8376	63.3

Source: UNESCO, 2011.

Note: UNESCO states that data on youth literacy are obtained from national population censuses, household surveys and UIS estimates using the Global Age-Specific Literacy Projections Model (GALP).

* The "Gender Parity Index" (GPI) is defined as the value of a given indicator for girls divided by that for boys. A GPI value of 1 signifies that there is no difference in the indicators for girls and boys: they are perfectly equal. In other words, a GPI value less than 1 signifies that the indicator is higher among boys than among girls. In this context, UNESCO (2003) considers a GPI value of between 0.97 and 1.03 (after rounding) as the achievement of gender parity. This allows for some measurement error but does not imply a judgment about the acceptability of any particular level of disparity.

... No data available.

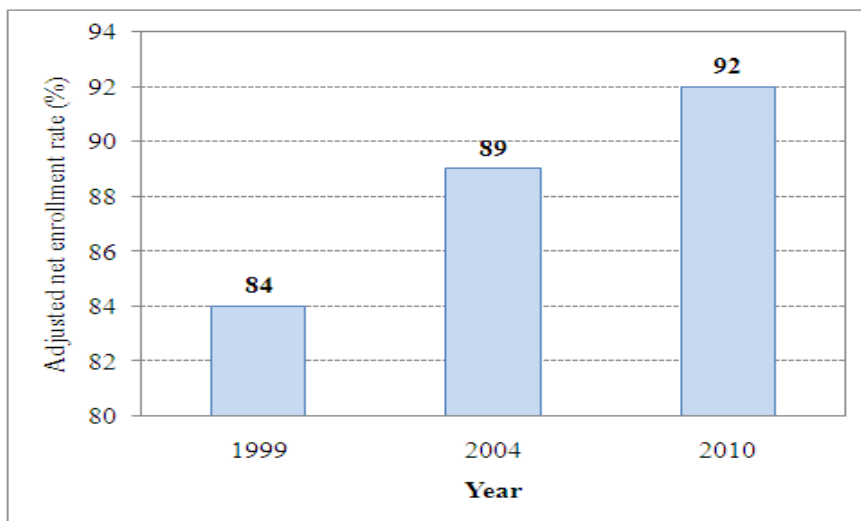
- Magnitude nil or negligible.

NANot applicable.

3-2- Educational enrollment rates.

From a life-course approach, children's enrollment rates in primary education today give us an idea about the expected future youth illiteracy rates and educational status. Achieving universal primary education is one of the Millennium Development Goals and seeks to "ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling". In this context, the region has made a significant progress in primary education, and as shown in Graph 2, the net enrollment rate in primary education in Western Asia has increased from 84% in 1999, to 89% in 2004, then to 92% in 2010 (*United Nations, 2012-b*).

Graph 2:
Net enrollment rates in primary education* in Western Asia, 1999, 2004 and 2010.



Source: United Nations, 2012-b.

* This rate refers to the number of pupils of the official school age for primary education, enrolled either in primary or secondary school, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group.

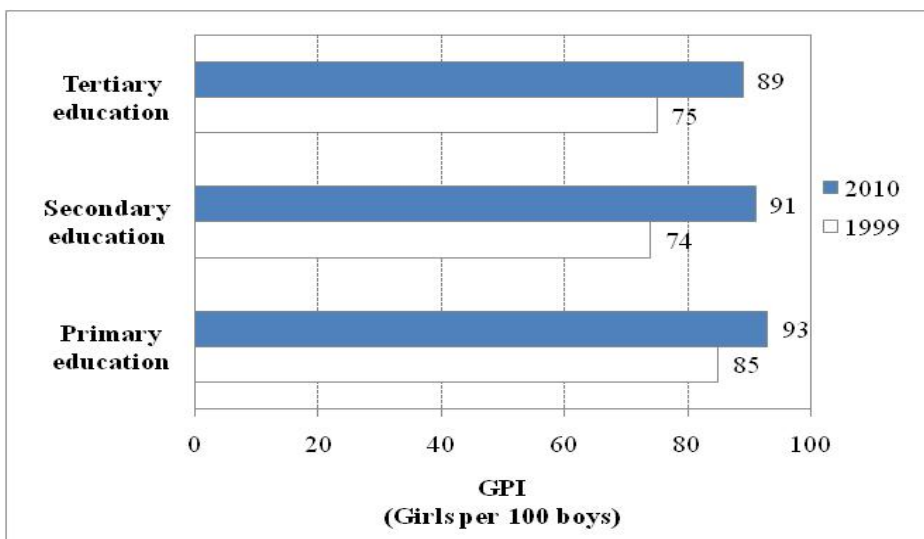
Despite this improvement, UNESCO 2009 statistics indicate that the Arab region still includes at least 5.8 million children in the age of primary education who are not enrolled in school (noting that data were not available for Somalia, Syria, Sudan and Libya). Girls constituted 58% of these children at regional level, with their percentage reaching 70% in Iraq, 67% in Egypt, 63% in Comoros and 62% in Yemen (*UNESCO, 2011*). In fact, the challenges to achieving universal primary education are many and varied, particularly in the Less Developed Arab Countries. These challenges include the difficulty of securing the necessary funding, poor management skills in public schools, the lack of qualified teachers, the lack of female teachers in rural areas (leading to lower enrollment rates of girls), as well as security issues in countries suffering from conflicts impeding the work of educational institutions and resulting in parents' fear of sending their children to school.

On the other hand, the Arab region still includes at least 3.5 million children who are in the age of the first phase of secondary education but are not enrolled in school (noting that data were not available for Somalia, Comoros, Sudan, Yemen, Tunisia and Libya). Girls constituted 61% of these children at regional level and their percentage reached 81% in Egypt and 63% in Iraq. Also with regard to higher education, the region did not record a visible improvement in the gross enrollment rate which only increased from 19% in 1999 to 22% in 2009. However, the examination of national statistics reveals that some countries have achieved a significant progress, such as Lebanon (where this percentage rose from 33% in 1999 to 53% in 2009), Bahrain (from 22% to 51%) and Palestine (from 25 % to 46%). (*UNESCO, 2011*).

Given the gender disparity in educational enrollment rates, the United Nations has included, in the Millennium Development Goals, specifically in Goal 3 pertaining to "promoting gender equality and empowering women", the target of "Eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015". Graph 3 shows that, during the period 1999-2010, Western Asia has achieved a significant progress in the Gender Parity Index (GPI) related to gross enrollment ratios in primary, secondary and tertiary education. The Less Developed Countries in particular should pursue their efforts to achieve full gender equality in educational enrollment by overcoming socioeconomic factors that impede the educational enrollment of girls and increase their dropout rates.

Graph 3:

Gender Parity Index (GPI) for gross enrolment ratios in primary, secondary and tertiary education (Girls' school enrollment ratio in relation to boys') in Western Asia, 1999 and 2010.



Source: United Nations, 2012-b.

3-3- The quality of education.

The Arab region achieved a remarkable progress with regard to the quantitative dimension of education, as compared with only a slight progress in the qualitative dimension. A combination of factors contributes to the low quality of educational systems, including lack of modern educational tools, low salaries of teachers and limited opportunities for their capacity development, lack of adequate facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and undeveloped traditional educational curricula, etc...

In this context, it is important to refer to the survey carried out by the League of Arab States in 2010 to assess the progress achieved by Arab countries in the framework of the Arab Action Plan on Childhood. The survey's questionnaire was completed by 17 Arab countries and the findings related to the quality of education are given in Table 2. For example, the survey revealed the following:

- Seven Arab countries (out of 17 completing the questionnaire) were able to develop teaching skills in line with curricula development.
- Seven Arab countries have developed their educational system according to the needs of their local community.
- Six Arab countries have developed learning resources in line with new educational outcomes.
- Seven Arab countries were able to develop and diversify teaching and evaluation methods in harmony with new educational curricula.
- Six Arab countries have developed integrated curricula for students' skills development.

Results also revealed that Algeria, Morocco, Qatar and Lebanon recorded the greatest achievements with regard to improving the quality of education.

Table 2:
Goals achieved by Arab countries in the context of the Arab Action Plan on Childhood
in relation to improving the quality of education, by goal and country.

	Develop teaching skills in line with curricula development	Develop the educational system according to the needs of the local community	Develop learning resources in line with new educational outcomes	Develop and diversify teaching and evaluation methods in harmony with new educational curricula	Develop integrated curricula for students' skills development	Number of goals achieved by country.
Palestine	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	0
Jordan	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	-
Qatar	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Partial achievement	4
Oman	Not achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Partial achievement	3
Yemen	Achieved	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	1
Syria	Partial achievement	Achieved	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Achieved	2
Saudi Arabia	Achieved	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Achieved	Achieved	3
Tunisia	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	0
Egypt	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	0
Kuwait	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Achieved	Partial achievement	Achieved	2
Algeria	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	5

	Develop teaching skills in line with curricula development	Develop the educational system according to the needs of the local community	Develop learning resources in line with new educational outcomes	Develop and diversify teaching and evaluation methods in harmony with new educational curricula	Develop integrated curricula for students' skills development	Number of goals achieved by country.
Libya	Achieved	Achieved	Partial achievement	Achieved	Partial achievement	3
Lebanon	Partial achievement	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	4
Sudan	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	0
UAE	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	0
Bahrain	Achieved	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	1
Morocco	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	5
Number of countries achieving goal	7	7	6	7	6	

Source: Farah and Abdel Monem, 2010.

NA= Not available.

3-4- Vocational and technical education.

Vocational and technical education programs differ in terms of content and duration, but their main objective is to provide students with occupational skills required by employers and useful to start one's own business.

Table 3 gives the results of the survey carried out by the League of Arab States in 2010 to assess the achievements of Arab countries in the framework of the Arab Action Plan on Childhood, in relation to vocational and technical education. It reveals that six out of 17 Arab countries responding to the survey questionnaire (Oman, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, United Arab Emirates and Morocco), have expanded the establishment of vocational schools and vocational training centers and have developed their programs and linked them to the needs of the labor market.

In particular, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco have encouraged productive work in vocational schools and seven countries succeeded in enabling dropout students to acquire learning and vocational skills. Also, seven countries have enabled dropouts to acquire learning and vocational skills. In addition, six countries have strengthened their existing informal education programs, developed their quality and encouraged "self-learning" to enable students to continue education and training throughout their lives, (*Farah and Abdel Monem, 2010*).

Table 3:
Goals achieved by Arab countries in the context of the Arab Action Plan on Childhood
in relation to vocational and technical education.

	Expand the establishment of vocational schools and vocational training centers, develop their programs, and link them to the needs of the labor market.	Increase enrollment of students, including those with special physical and mental needs.	Encourage productive work in vocational schools	Enable dropout students to acquire learning and vocational skills.	Strengthen existing non-formal education programs, develop their quality, and encourage "self-learning" to enable students to continue education and training throughout their lives.	Create incentives for the private sector to invest in vocational education.	Gain students' and parents' support for enrollment in vocational education.	Number of goals achieved by country
Palestine	NA	NA	NA	NA	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	NA	0
Jordan	NA	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	4
Qatar	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	0
Oman	Achieved	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Achieved	Achieved	Partial achievement	3
Yemen	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Not achieved	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Not achieved	Partial achievement	0
Syria	Achieved	Partial achievement	Achieved	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Achieved	Achieved	4
Saudi Arabia	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	7
Tunisia	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	0
Egypt	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	0

	Expand the establishment of vocational schools and vocational training centers, develop their programs, and link them to the needs of the labor market.	Increase enrollment of students, including those with special physical and mental needs.	Encourage productive work in vocational schools	Enable dropout students to acquire learning and vocational skills.	Strengthen existing non-formal education programs, develop their quality, and encourage "self-learning" to enable students to continue education and training throughout their lives.	Create incentives for the private sector to invest in vocational education.	Gain students' and parents' support for enrollment in vocational education.	Number of goals achieved by country
Kuwait	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Achieved	Achieved	2
Algeria	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	7
Libya	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Not achieved	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	0
Lebanon	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Achieved	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	1
Sudan	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	0
UAE	Achieved	Partial achievement	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	6
Bahrain	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Partial achievement	Achieved	Partial achievement	Not achieved	Partial achievement	1
Morocco	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	7
Number of countries achieving goal	6	4	6	7	6	7	6	

Source: Farah and Abdel Monem, 2010.

NA = Not available.

3-5- Youth unemployment.

In times of growing popular protests in several Arab countries, condemning the economic conditions leading to poverty, unemployment, misery, marginalization and illness, the International Labour Office (ILO) issued its report on “*Global Employment Trends for Youth: 2011 Update*” which warned that youth unemployment has attained unprecedented high rates at world level, exacerbated by the recent financial and economic crisis (*ILO, 2011*). Unfortunately, this warning came at the onset of the International Year of Youth which was supposed to celebrate progress towards achieving youth-related goals in international agreements. In fact, contrary to optimistic assumptions, this report revealed that young people were facing a severe shortage of secure jobs with equivalent and fair wages.

At world level, the ILO *Global Employment Trends for Youth, (ILO, 2010)* and the UNFPA *State of World Population 2011, (UNFPA, 2011)* stated that 81 million young people aged 15-24 years, that is 13% of youth, were unemployed in 2009, compared with 11.9% in 2007. During the period 2008-2009, youth unemployment rates rose twice faster than adult unemployment rates (with growth rates of 1% and 0.5% respectively) and the unemployment rate for young women (13.2%) was relatively higher than the unemployment rate for young men (12.9%) in 2009.

In the Arab region, the situation was more disappointing for youth who wished to ameliorate their economic, social and political conditions and who expected governments to fulfill their youth-related commitments in international and regional agendas. This disparity between the hopes of young people on one hand, and their bitter reality on the other hand, has contributed to the emergence of social

and political movements led by young people in the streets and public squares, demanding "jobs, freedom and justice" and aiming at political change under the banner of the "Arab Spring".

High youth unemployment rates reflect the inability of economic and social policies in many Arab countries to meet the needs of the citizens and to allocate resources for overall sustainable development. In fact, ILO (2010) indicated that the youth unemployment rate reached 23.4% in 2009 in countries of the Middle East. In other words, one out of every four young people in this region was suffering from unemployment.

Youth unemployment in the Arab region has the following main features:

First: Unemployment is mainly noticed among young people having completed secondary or university education. This negative relationship between youth educational levels and employment rates is a dangerous phenomenon in the Arab world, manifested in both rich and poor Arab countries and revealing the mismatch between the outputs of the educational system and the needs of the labor market. In 2007, Tunisia for example reported a youth unemployment rate of about 40% or more among tertiary education graduates, as compared with 25% among those with primary education. On the other hand, Jordan reported that the youth unemployment rate was about 30% among secondary graduates and 15% among university graduates, as compared with only 8% among those with primary education (*United Nations, ESCWA, 2009-b*). This phenomenon also applies to petroleum-rich countries in the

region. For example, about 66.4% of unemployed Qatari youth in 2011 were secondary graduates (44%) or tertiary graduates (22.4%), while 18.3% of them had completed preparatory education and 15.3% had only primary education and below (General Secretariat for Development Planning in the State of Qatar and the United Nations Development Programme, *(UNDP, 2012)*).

Second: ILO data for 2009 reveal that the youth unemployment rate is about four times the adult unemployment rate (3.8%) in the Middle East (*ILO, 2010*). This indicates the continued weak capacity of economies in the region for providing jobs to young people, particularly those searching for jobs for the first time. In fact, job opportunities are either lacking or inappropriate to the qualifications of these young people searching for employment. In both cases, this indicates a serious waste in the productive capacity of youth and in the future human capital needed for sustainable development.

Third: Young women face more difficulties in joining the labour market than their male counterparts. Indicators of employment and unemployment reveal the persistence of wide gender gaps in the Middle East. In 2009, the youth unemployment rate was 30.9% among young women, compared with 20.4% among young men (*ILO, 2010*). The gender gap also widens during economic and political crises in the region. In fact, these crises tend to jeopardize women's rights in particular, shutting down the few doors that were open to their empowerment. Even during the best circumstances, young women face more difficulties than their

male counterparts in finding employment and they often receive lower salaries and tend to work in the non-formal sector with no job security, (*Farah, 2011*).

Fourth: The large scale of youth unemployment and its impact on the region make it difficult to isolate this phenomenon from the rapidly evolving socio-cultural, economic and political backgrounds. For example, the change from traditional economic systems to global and knowledge economies has resulted in a structural transformation, increasing the demand for a highly-skilled workforce mastering information technology and modern applied sciences, which has reduced the employability of young people lacking such skills. In the Gulf countries in particular, this phenomenon has made it difficult for young citizens to compete with Asian and European expatriate workers who master these skills. The situation is made worse with the dominance of the private sector on economic activities, having negative impacts on job creation for young people, particularly young women, who lack these skills.

Fifth: The Arab region was able to maintain an annual GDP growth rate of about 5% over the first decade of this century, thereby surpassing the world average of 2.5%. However, the region still suffers from a low youth economic activity rate (about 35%, compared with the world average of 52%) and an increasing youth unemployment rate. Therefore, the economic growth in the region is characterized by a decrease in employment and an increase in unemployment. (International Finance Corporation IFC (World Bank Group), in

collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank, 2011). Moreover, the unprecedented increase in the numbers of young people in the region will exert pressure on the labor market over the coming years and might negatively impact on the economic, social and political life of youth.

As a consequence, facing the challenges of youth unemployment in the Arab region requires two-fold strategies that focus on creating job opportunities, including self-employment, as well as ensuring that young people possess the skills actually needed to take these jobs. Arab countries should thus formulate national integrated policies that are highly-sensitive to the issues of youth and are aware of their interrelation with socio-cultural values and international standards.

IV- ARAB YOUTH: HEALTH CARE AND PROTECTION.

The World Health Organization (*WHO, 1948*) defines “health” as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. The concept of health is widened beyond the narrow scope and includes general health as well as reproductive health and rights of the individual throughout his/her life course.

Until recently, the health of young people was considered to be better than the health of other population groups since they were generally less likely to suffer from health problems. This hypothesis was built on comparative studies of mortality rates in different age groups and in various societies. These studies had revealed that the mortality rates of youth were generally low compared with other age groups. Acknowledging the validity of this hypothesis, we cannot but

notice the recently increasing health risks among youth as a result of high risk behaviors and the complications of the modern lifestyle.

At world level, WHO has stated that youth are generally of good health, but more than 2.6 million young people (in the age group 10-24 years) die each year, mainly as a result of preventable causes, and many young people suffer diseases that hinder their growth while they are in a transitional stage of their life characterized by critical physical, mental and social transformations. In addition, many young people adopt behaviors that threaten their current and future health. In fact, “nearly two-thirds of premature deaths and one-third of the total disease burden in adults are associated with conditions or behaviors that began in their youth, including: tobacco use, lack of physical activity, unprotected sexual relations or exposure to violence” (*WHO, 2011*).

In the case of the Arab region, we focus in this section on critical issues related to the health care and protection of youth, including the age at first marriage, the risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the unhealthy lifestyle (improper nutrition, smoking, alcohol abuse, lack of regular physical exercise) in addition to mental health and the risk of injuries and violence.

4-1- Age at first marriage.

Arab countries are witnessing an increase in the age at first marriage, leading to a decrease in the percentage of married young men and women in the early ages of childbearing. For example, the age at first marriage in Lebanon has risen from 23.2 years for females and 28.5 years for males in the year 1970 to 27.4 years for females

and 31.4 years for males in 2004. Also in Tunisia, the age at first marriage has risen from 22.6 years for females and 27.1 years for males in the year 1975 to 26.6 years for females and 30.3 years for males in 1994 (*United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2009*). On the other hand, Qatar's 2010 census data have revealed that only a small proportion of youth (less than 1% of males and 4% of females) marry in the age group 15-19 years, compared with 59% of males and 64% of females in the age group 25-29 years (General Secretariat for Development Planning in the State of Qatar and the United Nations Development Programme (*UNDP*), 2012). This change in the age at first marriage has several demographic and health consequences, such as short birth intervals and deliveries among women beyond the ages of safe motherhood, thereby exposing both mothers and children to multiple health risks.

In general, we can identify the following three main reasons for the rising age at first marriage and increasing celibacy:

- (1) The tendency to continue education and to delay marriage till after the completion of university education.
- (2) The inability to afford the costs of marriage (including the costs of the wedding, the costs of securing a house as well as the expenses of the new family) in light of the difficult economic conditions of youth and their high unemployment rates.
- (3) Cultural factors that are reflected in changing perceptions of marriage among youth who have become more determined to choose their spouse by themselves and less influenced by their

parents and community. In the case of Lebanon for example, Frederick Maatouk (2002) has explained that Lebanese youth no longer view marriage as a “fundamental goal in their life”. Although their parents and community still encourage them to get married, they tend to “put the issue of marriage on the shelf” until they find the best and most appropriate conditions, believing that it is better to be cautious rather than to hurry for marriage and later regret it.

For young women in particular, the delay of marriage till after the completion of advanced university studies might make them fall in a "celibacy trap", particularly after they reach 30 years of age, because of the declining Mate Availability Ratios for women in these ages.⁶In Lebanon for example, there are less than 70 males for every 100 single females in the age group 25-29 years, as a result of male emigration to study and work outside Lebanon (The Daily Star Newspaper, 2000; Saxena and Kulczycki, 1998).

In parallel to this rising age at first marriage in the Arab region, the phenomenon of early marriage still persists. In some cases, we can note an increase in the absolute numbers of youth marrying very early, either because they chose to do so or because their parents have forced them to marry and withdraw from education. In Yemen for example, 52% of females marry before age 18 and 14% marry before age 15 years (*UNICEF, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2011*). This type of

⁶The Mate Availability Ratio is the number of available single males for every 100 single females in a specific age group. If we assume that females usually marry males who are about 5 years older, we can calculate the Mate Availability Ratio for females in the age group 20-24 years as the number of single males aged 25-29 years divided by the number of single females aged 20-24 years.

marriage, which is referred to as “child marriage” in international declarations, reflects negatively on countries' efforts to eradicate poverty, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, as well as improve maternal and child health. In addition, forcing these children to marry, girls in particular, for whatever reason, is considered as a violation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The socio-cultural setting in the Arab region also affects the right of young people to independently choose their spouse based on mutual understanding. In fact, many marriages are arranged by parents and there is a traditional push towards consanguineous marriages whose incidence ranges between 18% in Lebanon and 56% in Sudan. Also, in seven countries of the region, at least 30 percent of ever married women aged 15-49 years are married to their first cousin (*UNDP, 2006*). However, these consanguineous marriages have several negative impacts including the increased risk of hereditary diseases in children, in addition to the fact that forcing young people to arranged marriages is a violation of their basic human rights and could weaken family cohesion. Indeed, recent research suggests that there is a strong relationship between parental involvement in the choice of the spouse and the high divorce rates, particularly in the early years of marriage.

4-2- Risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth.

Women in the Arab region face various risks related to childbearing. In fact, pregnancy and childbirth often occur at an early age (in the case of married adolescent girls) or beyond the ages of safe

maternity (in the case of women married in advanced ages). In addition, many births occur within short intervals.

In particular, pregnancies and childbirth during adolescence could have negative effects on the health of both mothers and children.

The younger the age of the adolescent at pregnancy, the greater the likelihood of spontaneous abortion, fetal loss, pregnancy complications and even maternal death. Worldwide, about 16 million girls aged 15 to 19 give birth every year, accounting for about 11% of all births, with the majority of adolescents' births occurring in developing countries, (*WHO, 2011*).

In the Arab region, the adolescent fertility rate (in the ages 15-19 years) reached about 45 births per 1,000 women in the period 1996-2008. This rate was higher than the rates registered in Asia and the Pacific (34) as well as Eastern Europe and Central Asia (31), but lower than rates registered in Sub-Saharan Africa (122) and Latin America and the Caribbean (74). For example, the adolescent fertility rate was 123 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years in Somalia, 80 in Yemen and 72 in Sudan. In parallel, the contraceptive prevalence rate (using any method) reached 47% among women aged 15-49 years in the Arab region in the period 1990-2010, which was one of the lowest worldwide with the exception of Sub-Saharan Africa (25%). The percentage of unmet needs for family planning also reached 21% among these women in the period 1992-2009, which was among the highest in the world except for Sub-Saharan Africa (26%). (*UNFPA, 2011*).

4-3- HIV/AIDS.

At the global level, the World Health Organization (2011) stated that there were 5.7 million youth living with HIV/AIDS. In the year 2009, young people aged 15 to 24 years accounted for 40% of all new HIV infections among adults, such that 2,400 young people get infected every day. In fact, only 36% of young men and 24% of young women have the comprehensive and correct knowledge they need to protect themselves from acquiring the virus.

Although the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is still relatively low in Arab countries, it is one of the most frustrating issues for national policies because of the increasing risk of infection, especially among young people and adolescents, at a time when rich and poor countries of the world are achieving a significant improvement in their ability to control the spread of the epidemic and to reverse its upward trend. In 2002, the total number of individuals infected with HIV in the Arab region was about 550,000 (adults and children), of whom nearly 83,000 were new infections which occurred in that year alone. In 2006, there were 68,000 new HIV infections, resulting in 36,000 deaths, mostly among adults and young people, with women and young people bearing the primary burden of this disease. (*Farah and Abou Nuwar, 2007*).

In the Arab region, a significant portion of the population, especially youth and adolescents, have insufficient or even false information about means of infection with HIV/AIDS and ways of prevention. Available data indicate that the percentage of the population with comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS was 18% among young males and 7% among young females aged 15-24

years old in the period 2000-2008. These percentages are the lowest among all world regions, (*UNFPA, 2011*).

The Arab region suffers from a number of factors hampering governments' efforts to stop or to limit infection with HIV/AIDS. Among these factors, we can cite the absence of efficient national surveillance systems, the lack of screening services and voluntary counseling, socio-cultural norms that hinder recognizing the practice of risky sexual behaviors, the stigma and misconceptions associated with the methods of infection and prevention, the delayed provision of care and support for infected individuals, the heterogeneity of the group infected by HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (including youth/adolescents, migrants and refugees, sex workers and intravenous drug users), as well as the prevalence of poverty and unemployment.

4-4- Unhealthy lifestyle.

A lifestyle is considered unhealthy when it involves high risk behaviors such as improper nutrition, smoking, alcohol abuse and the lack of regular physical exercise. As a result of such lifestyle, today's young people are increasingly at risk of developing chronic diseases that were previously classified as health risks to older people living particularly in developed countries.

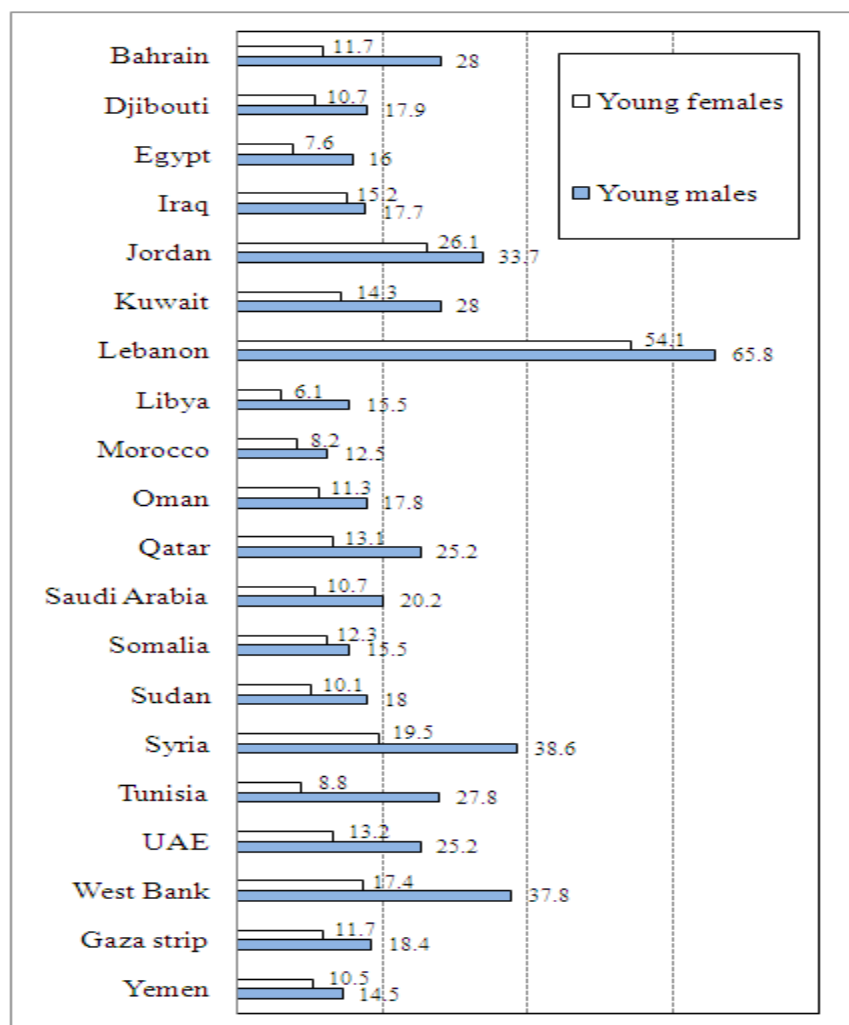
In this context, field research on the health of young people in the Arab region, especially in the Gulf countries, has revealed that excess weight and obesity (resulting from over-eating and the lack of physical exercise) are strongly related to developing chronic non-infectious diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular problems.

Indeed, many young people in the region suffer from improper nutrition, consuming daily less than five servings of fresh fruits and vegetables and increasing their consumption of calories through fast food outside the home. In parallel, only few young people engage in regular physical exercise, with this percentage being limited to 33% in Syria according to a survey on Empowerment and Societal Participation of Youth conducted in 2007 (Syrian Arab Republic, State Planning Commission, Syrian Commission for Family Affairs (SCFA), in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (*UNFPA*), 2007). Also, Iraq's 2009 National Youth and Adolescents Survey has revealed that about 14% of youth (15-24 years of age) go to sports clubs and forums and 33% like to practice sports as activities (*Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology in Iraq, the Kurdistan Ministry of Sports and Youth and the Kurdistan Regional Statistics Office, in cooperation with UNFPA Iraq Country Office and the Pan Arab Project for Family Health in the League of Arab States, 2009*).

Graph 4 shows the percentage of currently smoking youth (cigarettes and others) in selected Arab countries for the period 2002-2008. We notice that smoking is more prevalent among males as compared with females in all countries, with Lebanon recording the highest percentages (according to 2005 data) reaching 65.8% among young males and 54.1% among young females. In addition, we notice the high percentages of smoking among youth in Syria, the West Bank and Jordan. However, it is important to clarify that these data take into account all types of smoking, including cigarettes and other tobacco products such as the arghile/water pipe. If we re-calculate these percentages for cigarette smoking only, they will drop

significantly and reach 11.8% among young males and 5.6% among young females in Lebanon for example. (WHO, 2009).

Graph 4:
Percentage of currently smoking young males and females (any tobacco products) for the period 2002-2008.



Source: WHO, 2009.

In addition to smoking, alcohol abuse is also increasing among some youth in the Arab region, often resulting in their inability for self-control and increasing the likelihood of their injury (particularly injury from road traffic accidents) and violence (including domestic violence).

4-5- Mental health.

Mental health is an integral essential component of health. WHO (2010) defines "mental health" as "a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. In this positive sense, mental health is the foundation for individual well-being and the effective functioning of a community". Therefore, youth/adolescence is an important stage of life, not only in terms of physiological changes and puberty, but also from the viewpoint of mental health because it is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood and it involves personality formation and the growing tendency for independence. However, in any given year, one out of every five adolescents will experience a mental health problem, most commonly depression or anxiety, (*WHO, 2011*).

Arab youth are subject to several factors that increase the likelihood of developing mental health problems. Among these factors, we can cite the difficult economic conditions, high rates of unemployment, difficult working conditions, widespread poverty, lack of participation in public life and decision-making, gender-based discrimination and increased violence during armed conflicts, etc...

For example, Iraq's 2009 National Youth and Adolescents Survey has revealed that the war worries 39.3% of Iraqi youth and that 20.3% of them are worried due to the lack of security, while the bloody accidents disturb 19.2% of them. This survey pointed out that only 60.1% of Iraqi youth were optimistic. (*Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology in Iraq, the Kurdistan Ministry of Sports and Youth and the Kurdistan Regional Statistics Office, in cooperation with UNFPA Iraq Country Office and the Pan Arab Project for Family Health in the League of Arab States, 2009*).

4-6- Injuries and violence.

At world level, unintentional injuries are a leading cause of death and disability among young people. Road traffic injuries result in about 700 deaths among young people every day. Furthermore, violence is one of the leading causes of death, particularly in the case of young males. In fact, it is estimated that about 430 young people (aged 10 to 24 years) die every day because of interpersonal violence. For each death, an estimated 20 to 40 youths require hospital treatment due to a violence-related injury. (*WHO, 2011*).

In the Arab region, we can note the increased exposure of young people to injuries and violence. Road traffic accidents are the leading cause of death among young people in several Arab countries. These accidents accounted for 46% of all youth deaths in Kuwait in the year 2002 and 14% of youth deaths in Bahrain in 2000 (*UN-DESA, 2007*). In addition, and despite the lack of recent, reliable and comparable data, we can say that youth violence is significantly increasing in the region, particularly in countries with emerging youth movements.

V- ARAB YOUTH: PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE.

Participation in public life is a process enabling young people to impact on social, economic and political decision-making in their community. Therefore, participation is an end in itself because it is a right for young people. It is also a prerequisite for advancing the process of human development in their communities. In this context, the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) has included the “full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making” among its fifteen youth priority areas, stating that:

“The capacity of our societies for progress is based, among other elements, on their capacity to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of youth in the building and designing of the future. In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account.

Any efforts and proposed actions in the other priority areas considered in this programme are, in a certain way, conditioned by enabling the economic, social and political participation of youth, as a matter of critical importance.”

(United Nations, General Assembly, 1996, p.25, Paragraphs 104-105).

As follows, we examine the participation of Arab youth in public life, highlighting the issues of participation in political life and in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOS) as well as youth participation in volunteer work.

5-1- Political participation.

Table 4 shows the voting age (in years) in ESCWA countries for the year 2010. This age ranges from 17 years in Sudan to 18 years in Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Qatar, Egypt and Yemen, to 21 years in Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia.

Table 4:
Voting age in ESCWA Countries in the year 2010.

Country	Voting age (in years)
Bahrain	21
Egypt	18
Iraq	18
Jordan	18
Kuwait	21
Lebanon	21
Oman	21
Palestine	18
Qatar	18
Saudi Arabia	21
Sudan	17
Syria	18
UAE	-
Yemen	18

Source: UNDP-POGAR, 2010.

ESCWA, 2010-a.

In general, youth participation in legislature and the parliaments is still limited in the Arab countries, with these authorities mainly including older persons but rarely young people under thirty years of age. In 2005, young people (under 45 years of age) formed 16% of the members of the People's Assembly in Egypt, 32% of the National Council in the UAE and 9% of the Parliament in Lebanon (Sawi, 2005). In addition, youth-related activities that are implemented by most Arab parliaments are rarely undertaken through a separate committee for youth issues, but they are often included alongside sports, culture and family, which implies that they are only partially approached.

Among the few available data on Arab youth participation, we can refer to a field study carried out by the League of Arab States in 2005. The questionnaire of this field study was filled by 468 young men and women, mostly aged 20-29 years, from Egypt, Yemen, Palestine, Iraq, Morocco, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Libya. Males formed 65% of this sample and females formed 35%. Also, 64.2% of youth in the sample were college graduates, while the rest were still high school or college students. This survey revealed that the education, work and social networking concerns of young people did not distract them from desiring political participation. In fact, 72% of them had stated that they desired political participation but did not trust political practices in the Arab region. In addition, one out of every five interviewed youth had stated that he/she spends leisure time surfing the internet discussing diverse issues, mainly political issues (*LAS, 2007*). Although the selected sample did not represent all Arab youth, these data somehow predicted the protests which later escalated in the region demanding more youth participation in political life and a change of political systems.

It is also important to refer to a recent report by Mercy Corps (2012) on the civic engagement of youth in the Middle East and North Africa. This report analyzed quantitative data available from the following three sources:

- Arab Barometer Round 1 surveys carried out in 2008 for Morocco, Algeria, Kuwait, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen.⁷ (*Arab Barometer, 2012*).
- The Survey of Young People in Egypt (SYPE) conducted by the Population Council in 2010.⁸ (*Population Council, 2011*)⁸.
- Surveys on the Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) conducted in 2010 in Lebanon, Yemen, and Morocco, commissioned by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR).⁹ (*International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2011*)⁹.

⁷ In 2005, the University of Michigan developed a barometer or measure of Arab democracy in collaboration with institutions and scholars from the Arab region and in consultation with similar barometer projects in countries of East Asia, Latin America and Africa. This barometer aims at providing a reliable set of data on the political attitudes of citizens in order to disseminate and publish such information to contribute to the process of political reform and to strengthen institutional capacities in research related to public opinion surveys. (*Arab Barometer, 2012*).

⁸ The Population Council conducted the Survey of Young People in Egypt in collaboration with the Egyptian Cabinet, Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC). The survey was supported by the Ford Foundation, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Embassy of the Netherlands, the World Bank, UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF, UNIFEM and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

⁹ The Project aims at measuring how women in Lebanon, Morocco and Yemen perceive themselves as members of society, the economy and the polity. Using information obtained from the surveys, the project aims at building the capacity of local NGOs seeking to improve women's well-being by providing them with tools to develop policy recommendations and skills for working on advocacy campaigns. (*International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2011*).

This Mercy Corps (2012) report included important findings such as the following:

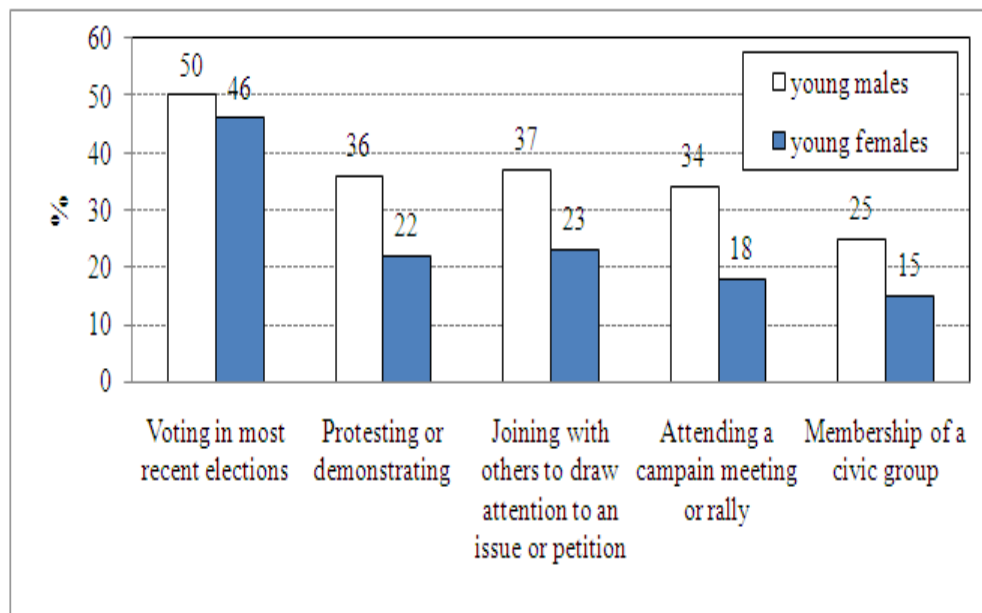
- Compared with youth from other regions, Arab youth are more likely to participate in protests and demonstrations. In fact, about one third of young people covered by the surveys (28.9%) have already participated in protests and demonstrations as compared with a world average of 15.2%.

- Arab youth are less likely than youth from other regions to participate in civic organizations. In this regard, data have revealed that 19% of young people covered by the surveys are members of civic organizations as compared to 32% of youth in Africa for example.

- Arab youth are less likely to participate in electoral actions: 48% of young people covered by the surveys have actually participated in electoral actions as compared to 59% globally.

On the other hand, the report stated that young males are more likely to be civically engaged than young females. As shown in Graph 5 below, in the case of young females, only 15% of them are members of a civic organization, 18% have participated in an elections campaign, 23% have joined with others to draw attention to an issue or petition and 22% have protested or demonstrated. In the case of young males, these figures are 25%, 34%, 37% and 36% respectively. As for voting in the most recent elections, the percentages for young females (46%) are close to those for young males (50%).

Graph 5:
Civic engagement* of young males and females in the Arab region, 2008.



Source: Mercy Corps, 2012, based on the Arab barometer Round 1 surveys,

* Mercy Corps stated that civic participation is primarily about fostering citizen voices in governance processes. This study examined three main types of civic participation among youth: (1) Civic activities which generally focus on improving ones' local community or society in general; (2) Electoral activities such as voting, persuading others to vote, or volunteering for a political campaign; (3) Political voice which means the things people do to express their political or social concerns and opinions in a non-violent and constructive manner. (Mercy Corps, 2011 and 2012)

5-2- Participation in NGOs.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can be operationally defined as groups of people (not less than ten people) forming a social organization, carrying out volunteer activities in one or several areas in accordance with legal regulations and securing their funding from membership fees of individuals and institutions as well as from

donations and government support, without relying on specific financial allocations to achieve their goals, (*Kamal, 2000; Farid, 2005*).

In order to examine the participation of Arab youth in NGOs, it is important to refer to a field study undertaken by Abeer Ameen Farid (2005) on a sample of 31 NGOs with direct or indirect youth-related activities, in Jordan, Bahrain, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt. For the purpose of the study, an organization was considered as an NGO when it had a formal codified structure and when it was a private non-profit association with self-administration, with no political affiliation and including some volunteer participation. The main results of this study included the following:

- The participation of young people (15-29 years old) in the Board of Directors of NGOs is still relatively limited and they only formed about a quarter of board members. For countries covered by the survey, this share ranges between 14% in Jordan and 30% in Egypt. Several young people have complained that many NGOs that claim to integrate youth in their governing body only used them as “decoration” to give the impression that they were “democratic” organizations. In fact, these young people had no real active role in these NGOs and risked losing their board membership if they tried to voice their opinions persistently, (*Farid, 2005, page 31*).
- Young people constituted on average half of the paid staff in NGOs, but their positions were limited to secretariat, accounting and project coordination, noting that 66.6% of

them were females and most of them (85.5%) had university or higher education.

- Youth participation was relatively high in the implementation of NGO projects but low in project proposal, planning, follow-up and evaluation. In this context, some young people reported their negative experiences due to the lack of adults' confidence in their capacities, expressing the frustration that they suffered and mentioning that they thought of establishing independent organizations to implement their ideas.

5-3- Volunteer work.

Volunteering can be defined as an effort exerted by individuals with no expectation of material reward in return. In order to examine the participation of Arab youth in volunteer work, it is possible to refer to the field study carried out by Farid (2005) which provides information about the characteristics of young volunteers. Indeed, this study revealed gender parity in volunteer work and indicated that 98% of volunteers were under 30 years of age and 90% of them had university and higher education.

Young volunteers are mainly engaged in activities involving the training of other youth, organizing camps, helping poor families and orphans, environment protection, awareness and community services, illiteracy eradication as well as activities related to organizing seminars, conferences and the preparation of publications, etc...

On the other hand, young people's participation in volunteer work is most often a result of their desire to gain experience (27% of

them) and to usefully exploit their leisure time (18%). They are also motivated by altruism (13.5%), political duty (11%), the need for self-fulfillment (9 %), the desire for a better employment status (6.8%), the religious sense of duty (6.5%) as well as the desire to gain popularity among citizens (4.5%). (*Farid, 2005*).

Furthermore, we note the withdrawal of young people from volunteer work, soon after their engagement in it, not only because of their lack of time and the difficulty to reconcile volunteering with their studies and employment, but also because of their dissatisfaction with such work. Some of them explained that they “feel, after a period of volunteering in organizations, that they are being exploited and that they are engaged in a sort of forced labor with the organization using them as unpaid workers ...”, (*Farid, 2005, quoting young people*).

Youth engagement in volunteer work has declined over time. The Survey of Young People in Egypt revealed that only 2.3% of youth 10-29 years were engaged in volunteer work in the year 2010 (*Population Council, 2011*). Volunteer work is also tightly linked to religion and most young people seeking to volunteer would search for such work in mosques and churches.

VI- RECOMMENDATION FOR BUILDING THE CAPACITIES OF ARAB YOUTH AND THEIR INTEGRATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS.

Based on the analysis of the situation of youth with regard to education, employment, health and participation in public life, we can propose recommendations to build their capacities and to integrate

them in the process of development. These recommendations include

- (1) Formulating a comprehensive and integrated national youth policy,
- (2) Matching educational outputs with labour market requirements,
- (3) Developing policies to improve the health and well-being of youth, as well as (4) ensuring an enabling environment to engage youth in public life.

6-1 - Formulating a comprehensive and integrated national youth policy.

The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) states that “Governments which have not already done so are urged to formulate and adopt an integrated national youth policy as a means of addressing youth-related concerns. This should be done as part of a continuing process of review and assessment of the situation of youth, formulation of a cross-sectoral national youth programme of action in terms of specific, time-bound objectives and a systematic evaluation of progress achieved and obstacles encountered.” (*United Nations, General Assembly, 1996, p. 27, Paragraph 112*).

In 2005, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 60/2 on “Policies and programmes involving youth” in which it “urges Governments, in consultation with youth organizations, to develop holistic and integrated youth policies based on the World Programme of Action and to evaluate them regularly as part of the follow-up action on and implementation of the Programme of Action” (*United Nations, General Assembly, 2005, p.1, Paragraph 4*).

As follows, we highlight the definition and rationale of a national youth policy and overview the process of its formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

a- Definition of ‘national youth policy’.

A national youth policy is an official document that highlights the country’s position in relation to youth issues. It is usually based on an in-depth analytical study of the situation of youth in this country (with regard to education, employment, health, participation in public life, etc...) in order to identify the problems that they are facing, specify their priorities and propose the goals and targets needed to improve their situation and to enable them to participate in the development process and to benefit from its returns. In addition, the national youth policy sets quantitative and qualitative indicators that can be used to track the progress achieved in the implementation of goals and targets. (UN-ESCWA, 2009-b).

b- Rationale of a national youth policy

The formulation and implementation of a national youth policy are based on a four-dimensional rationale, as shown in Figure 1.

(1) Quantitative dimension.

This dimension is concerned with the numbers of youth and their percentage in relation to the total population, as well as their annual growth rate. It is an important dimension in the context of Arab countries which are undergoing a period of youth bulge whereby young people now constitute about one fifth of the total population. As previously stated in this study,

the youth bulge offers a demographic opportunity to advance the process of human development but it also imposes challenges for the country to ensure the needed education, employment, health and participation opportunities for the growing numbers of young people.

(2) *Qualitative dimension.*

This dimension encompasses the social, educational, health and economic characteristics of the youth population. In this regard, we have previously explained in this study that Arab countries have generally achieved a considerable progress in education, but one out of every ten young people is still illiterate. Also, the progress achieved in youth participation in economic and public life is still rather limited. In fact, one out of every four young people still suffers from unemployment, which increases the risk of falling into poverty and social exclusion. Furthermore, in relation to health, young women are still facing several risks associated with pregnancy/childbirth and youth in general are at greater risk of HIV/AIDS, unhealthy lifestyles, mental health problems as well as injuries and violence.

(3) *Vulnerability dimension.*

The youth population is not homogeneous, but it includes several sub-groups with some of them being more vulnerable than the others. In general, the most vulnerable youth include young females (as compared with young males), adolescents aged 15-19 years (as compared with young adults aged 20-24 years), poor youth (in relation to rich ones) and youth residing

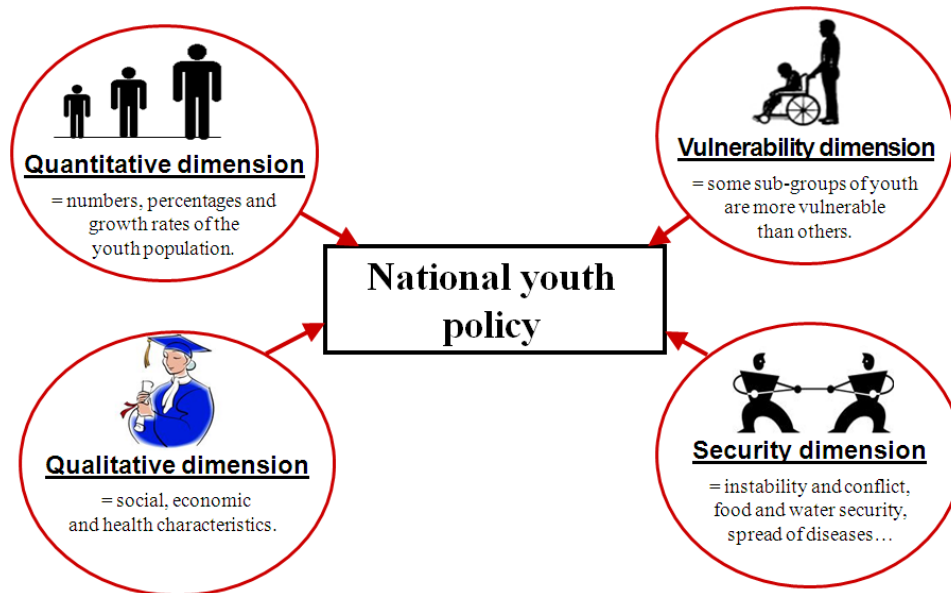
in rural areas (in relation to those residing in urban areas). Similarly, vulnerable youth include those who are illiterate, unemployed, having special needs and having withdrawn from education. This dimension examines the situation of these sub-groups in order to identify their problems and to propose the interventions and measures needed to improve their status.

(4) Security dimension.

This dimension highlights the challenges to youth security, focusing on the need for youth protection during political disturbances and armed conflicts, as well as food and water security and the protection from emerging diseases such as HIV/AIDS, diabetes and obesity, etc...

Figure 1:

Rationale of a national youth policy



c- Formulating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the national youth policy.

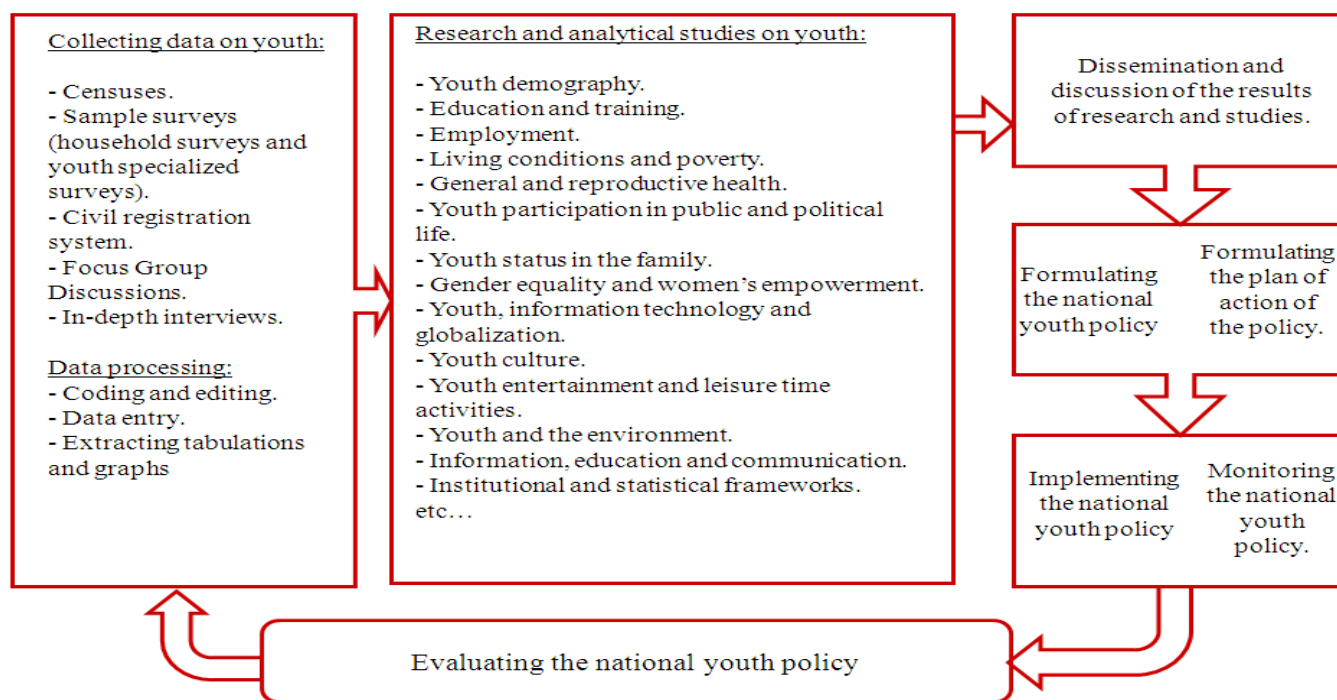
Figure 2 highlights the process of formulating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the national youth policy. This process is called a “loop” because it is a continuous process in order to improve the situation of the youth population.

The formulation of the national youth policy necessitates the availability of recent, accurate, reliable, detailed and comparable data on the situation of youth. In general, quantitative data can be obtained from three sources: censuses, sample surveys and the civil registration system. In addition to household surveys, it is helpful to conduct specialized surveys in order to collect more detailed data on youth priority issues that should be tackled in the national youth policy. Furthermore, qualitative data can be obtained through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews with youth themselves, their parents as well as community leaders, in order to examine their various points of view and to highlight socio-cultural issues that might not be sufficiently explored through quantitative data collection. Countries should ensure the efficiency of data processing, including coding, editing, the evaluation of internal and external data consistency, as well as data entry and the extraction of tabulations and graphs needed for analysis.

This is followed by the preparation of research and in-depth analytical studies on the situation of youth, covering diverse topics such as the demography of youth, education and training, employment, living conditions and poverty, general and reproductive health, participation in public and political life, status in the family, gender equality and the empowerment of women, youth and

information technologies and globalization, youth culture, youth entertainment and leisure time activities, youth and the environment, Information, Education and Communication (IEC), in addition to institutional and statistical frameworks. These studies examine each topic and identify the areas that should be tackled in the population policy. It is important in this regard to take into account the set of fifteen youth priority areas identified by the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), considering them as a minimum package of issues to be tackled by the national youth policy, in addition to other issues that gain priority in the context of the country itself. The findings of these studies are then disseminated and discussed with concerned experts, governmental and non-governmental organizations, civil society, as well as concerned regional and international organizations, in order to agree on the priorities to be tackled by the national youth policy.

This is followed by the formulation of the national youth policy document and its plan of action that specifies its time frame, distribution of responsibilities as well as the measures and interventions required to reach the goals and targets. The policy and its plan of action are then submitted to the Ministerial Council for endorsement and resource allocation (including financial, human and physical resources). Once the population policy document is endorsed by the government, its implementation begins and it is periodically monitored and independently evaluated in order to provide responsible agencies with an objective appraisal of the progress achieved towards the specified goals. Evaluation also helps to identify issues that were insufficiently understood or overlooked in policy development and to determine the types of data and analyses needed to improve the knowledge base.

Figure 2:**Youth policy loop: Formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the national youth policy.**

In this context, it is necessary to ensure that the process of formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the national youth policy is a participatory process involving the following parties:

- (1) Young people themselves, in order to enable them to determine their priorities and needs.
- (2) The society as a whole, including the families of these young people, their teachers, medical doctors, social workers, as well as community leaders and religious authorities, etc...
- (3) Concerned governmental, non-governmental and civil society organizations, in order to benefit from their experiences and ensure their commitment to the national youth policy document. It is useful in this context if the country had a national institution (for example a Higher Council for Youth) that overviews the work of different stakeholders, such that this institution is directly linked to the Council of Ministers and assumes advisory, executive and coordination responsibilities between the various concerned ministries and agencies.
- (4) Concerned regional and international organizations, mainly the League of Arab States, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA), in addition to other concerned United Nations agencies (UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP...), etc... For example, UN-ESCWA is

implementing a regional project which aims at strengthening the capacity of policy makers to formulate national policies and plans of action for youth in the context of the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY).(*UN-ESCWA, 2011*).

Furthermore, Arab countries can be divided into three groups according to the methodology adopted in planning for youth:

- (1) Countries that have a national youth policy, such as Jordan, Bahrain and Palestine which are the three countries granted certificates of appreciation from UN-ESCWA (during the Twenty-Sixth Ministerial Session held in Beirut, 17-20 May 2010) because of their efforts in formulating and implementing their national youth policies (*UN-ESCWA, 2010-b*).
- (2) Countries that are currently working on the formulation of their national youth policy (such as Lebanon, Syria and Iraq).
- (3) Countries that still deal with youth issues within their sectoral plans and national development plans.

6-2 - Matching educational outputs with labour market requirements.

Education is the key to the participation of youth in the labor market. However, the mismatch between educational outputs and

labor market requirements in a given country means that the educational system is providing youth with a key that is not designed to open the door of the national labor market. In fact, young people might successfully complete an important university specialization, but then find out that this specialization is not required by employers nor is a specialization suffering from high labour supply as compared with available labour demand. In other cases, young people might complete a specialization that is actually required by the labor market, but the educational institution in which they pursued this specialization did not provide them with specific theoretical and practical skills required by employers, such as mastery of foreign languages, information and communication technologies and the use of certain methodologies, etc... As a result, many young people might spend months or even years after their graduation in search for work, with some of them ultimately giving up and deciding to accept employment that does not fit their competencies simply because they want to get out of unemployment and social exclusion, while others might choose to emigrate in search for a suitable job outside their country, or might even simply stop searching for employment.

It has thus become important to address this phenomenon, especially in the context of statistics revealing that youth unemployment is leading to serious economic losses in the region exceeding 40 to 50 billion USD annually, which is equivalent to the GDP of countries such as Tunisia and Lebanon (*International Finance Corporation IFC (World Bank Group), in collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank, 2011*).

In this context, a new concept has emerged: the concept of “Education for Employment”, known as e4e, which is education that leads to improved employment prospects for youth. In fact, the International Finance Corporation, in collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank, have issued in 2011 a report entitled “Education for Employment: Realizing Arab Youth Potential”, under the Honorary Chairwomanship of Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan. The authors of this report have sought to understand the various perspectives on this issue, engaging in discussions with all key stakeholders, including the youth themselves, public and private education providers, civil society, public sector policy makers and administrators, in addition to private employers. The report covered nine Arab countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the Palestinian Territories), carrying out more than 200 in-depth interviews and conducting a survey covering 1,500 employers and 1,500 young people.

Among the most important findings of this report, we cite the declaration of surveyed private employers that only one third of new graduate employees were ready for the workplace when hired, obliging more than half of these employers to provide substantial training for their new hires to ensure their work readiness. This declaration is in line with the confirmation of only a third of surveyed youth that their education prepared them adequately for the job market. In this context, matching educational outputs with labour market requirements necessitates a three-dimensional approach (as shown in Figure 3):

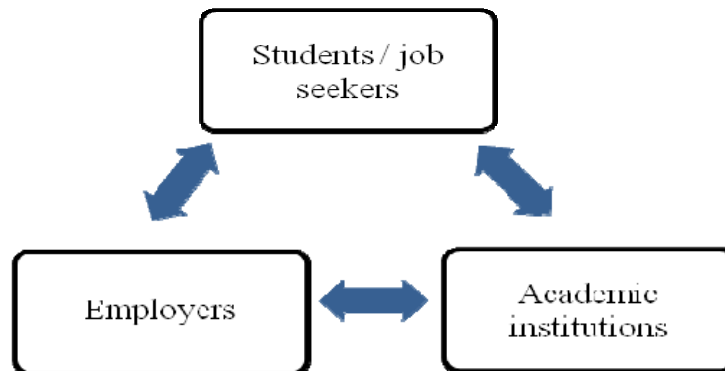
- (1) Matching job seekers with employers. This necessitates providing those seeking employment with information on

the range of jobs open to them, in addition to providing employers with information on the skills of those seeking employment and how such skills might match the positions that these employers are seeking to fill.

- (2) Matching academic institutions with employers. This entails informing academic institutions about the types of skills required by employers in order to enable these institutions to integrate such skills into their educational curricula.
- (3) Matching students (who will ultimately become job seekers) with academic institutions. This will enable students wishing to enroll in a certain academic institution to acquire information on the achievements of this institution in terms of the average grades of its graduates, their level of satisfaction and their success in finding suitable work opportunities.

Figure 3:

**Matching educational outputs with labour market requirements:
a three-dimensional approach.**



Governments cannot on their own achieve the matchmaking between educational outputs and labour market requirements. In fact, this matchmaking requires efforts by all concerned stakeholders, including the youth themselves, public and private education providers, civil society, public sector policy makers and administrators as well as private employers. Joined efforts can focus on three domains: (1) university education, (2) vocational education and training and (3) work readiness training. Students can enroll in work readiness training programs directly after completing secondary education or even after completing university or vocational education, in order to acquire specific applied skills demanded by employers but not acquired through previous education, or in order to acquire entrepreneurial skills needed for self-employment.

6-3 – Developing policies to improve the health and well-being of youth.

The broad definition of “health” is a strategic entry point in setting policy priorities for improving the health and well-being of youth. In fact, the health of youth is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. This definition includes general health as well as reproductive health of youth.

From a life-course perspective, encouraging healthy behavior during childhood, adolescence and youth is critical for preventing several health problems during adulthood and old age. Worldwide and in the Arab region in particular, we note that governmental and non-governmental organizations were late in recognizing the need to

adopt health strategies that protect from high-risk behaviors and the complications emanating from modern unhealthy lifestyles. Failure to adopt these strategies in a timely manner has increased the pressure on health systems in their attempts to improve the health and well-being of youth, (*Farah and Abdel Monem, 2010*).

In this context, policies seeking to improve the health and well-being of youth should focus on the following measures and interventions:

- Reducing the incidence of early pregnancies, by raising awareness of the risks associated with such pregnancies for both mothers and children, adopting and implementing laws that stipulate a minimum age for marriage, as well as by improving access to contraception.
- Reducing the spread of HIV/ AIDS through raising awareness of the ways of transmission of this virus and the methods of prevention.
- Improving mental health since early age by building life skills in children and adolescents and providing them with psycho-social support in schools and other social settings.
- Avoiding malnutrition and obesity by increasing awareness of the importance of adopting a healthy and balanced diet and the importance of regular physical exercise.

- Reducing smoking by increasing awareness of the harmful effects of smoking, raising the price of tobacco products, as well as enacting laws that prohibit tobacco advertising and laws that prohibit smoking in public places.
- Reducing alcoholism among youth by banning alcohol advertising and limiting youth access to alcohol.
- Raising youth awareness of the importance of driving safely, ensuring the rigorous implementation of laws related to putting the safety belt and avoiding phone conversations while driving, as well as laws prohibiting driving under the influence of alcohol.

As for reproductive health in particular, the majority of Arab governments and their national and international development partners have pledged, since the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, to approach reproductive health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and its functions and processes. The youth population is a critical target population in the approach to reproductive health and rights which focuses on: (1) ensuring the provision of advice on reproductive health through the points of service at all levels of the health system, including prevention and care services before marriage, (2) improving maternal health care during pregnancy, childbirth and post-partum, as well as improving newborn health care, (3) providing high-quality family planning services in addition to services related to the treatment of infertility, (4) preventing illegal unsafe abortions, (5) ensuring the prevention and

treatment of reproductive tract infections and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV / AIDS, (6) ensuring early detection, referral and treatment of reproductive diseases affecting women such as cancer of the uterus and ovaries.

6-4 - Ensuring an enabling environment to engage youth in public life.

The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) offers six proposals for action in relation to ensuring the full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making:

- “(a) Improving access to information in order to enable young people to make better use of their opportunities to participate in decision-making;

- (b) Developing and/or strengthening opportunities for young people to learn their rights and responsibilities, promoting their social, political, developmental and environmental participation, removing obstacles that affect their full contribution to society and respecting, inter alia, freedom of association;

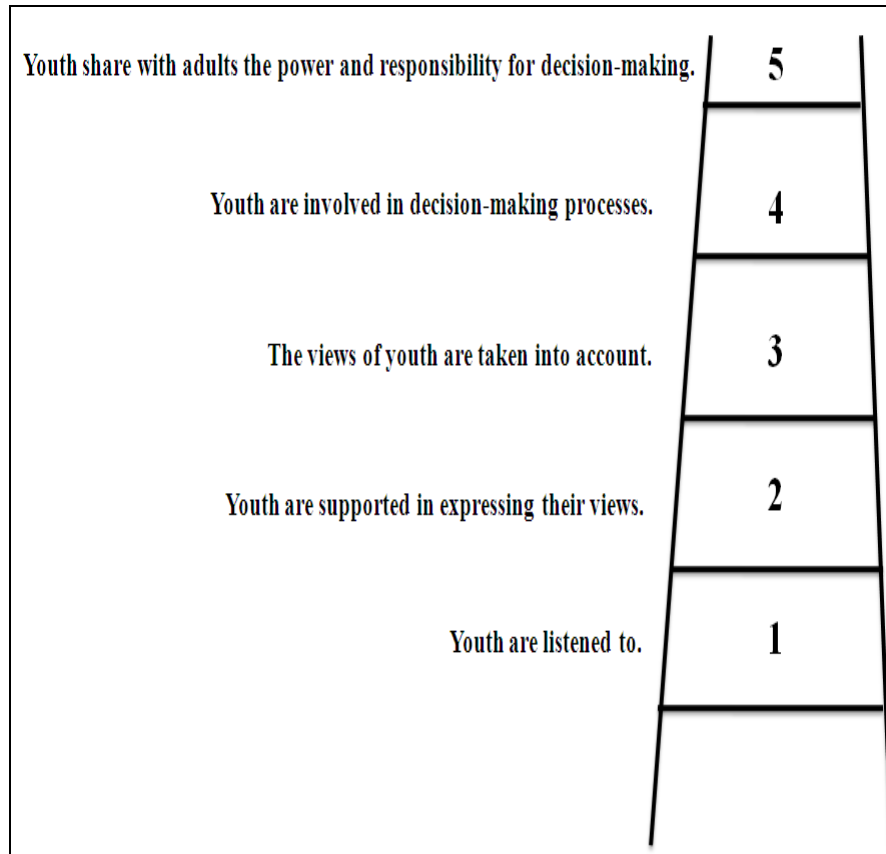
- (c) Encouraging and promoting youth associations through financial, educational and technical support and promotion of their activities;

- (d) Taking into account the contribution of youth in designing, implementing and evaluating national policies and plans affecting their concerns;
- (e) Encouraging increased national, regional and international cooperation and exchange between youth organizations;
- (f) Inviting Governments to strengthen the involvement of young people in international forums, inter alia, by considering the inclusion of youth representatives in their national delegations to the General Assembly.”

United Nations, General Assembly, 1996, p.26, Paragraph 107.

In the Arab region, governments are increasingly realizing the importance of targeting youth in development planning, as a distinct socio-demographic group having their specific needs and challenges. In this context, it is important to involve youth in development planning, starting from the early stages of formulating the national youth policy and reaching its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In fact, the participation of youth enables them to voice their priorities for inclusion in this policy, and thus ensures their commitment to the goals and targets of this policy.

As for the level of youth participation, it is important to go beyond the level of superficial involvement and to achieve the highest level of participation in decision-making. In order to facilitate the task of measuring youth participation in the work of a certain agency, we could use the ladder in Figure 4 that was drawn based on the works of Roger Hart (1992) and Harry Shier (2001 and 2006).

Figure 4:**Youth participation: five levels ladder.**

The first step of the ladder represents the lowest level of participation in which adults only listen to the views of young people, if they want to voice them, without necessarily taking these views seriously. The level of youth participation increases as we climb up the ladder. In fact, in the second step of the ladder, adults support youth in expressing their views and in the third step they actually take these views into account during decision-making, then in the fourth

step they involve youth in the process of decision-making, reaching the fifth step which is the highest level of participation in which youth share with adults the power and responsibility for decision-making. This ladder could be used to measure the level of youth participation in various domains, including participation in municipalities, academic institutions, civil society organizations, etc. ...

In addition, the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) calls for strengthening the role of youth organizations which can be considered as “important forums for developing skills necessary for effective participation in society, promoting tolerance and increased cooperation and exchanges between youth organizations”. (*United Nations, General Assembly, 1996, p.26, Paragraph 106*).

VII- FINDING

This paper analyzes the situation of Arab youth in the context of empowering opportunities and emerging challenges. It is issued in the context of rising youth protests in several Arab countries and in light of the "International Year of Youth" declared by the United Nations under the title of "Dialogue and Mutual Understanding".

The paper proceeds by analyzing demographic, social and economic changes in the region, changes that had critical impacts on youth in their attempts to participate in the development process and to benefit from its returns. In fact, the region which is politically witnessing what is known as the “Arab spring” is also demographically witnessing what is known as the “youth bulge” such that the youth population aged 15 to 24 years constitutes about one

fifth of the total population. This youth bulge has opened up a demographic window of opportunity that countries can seize through appropriate planning in order to boost their human development process. However, it has also imposed various challenges related to absorbing the growing numbers of young people, providing them with education and employment opportunities, as well as enabling them to participate in public and political life. Of course, meeting the needs of youth is a difficult task, particularly for countries already suffering from limited resources.

In addition to this demographic transition, the region is undergoing a change in its socio-cultural fabric, with youth culture gradually diverging from the culture of their parents because of the growing influence of external factors such as peer groups, media channels and the internet. This has resulted in the emergence of various "youth cultures" that are manifested in different behaviors and practices in everyday life. Difficult economic conditions, worsened by the world financial crisis and the impacts of globalization, are also contributing to high youth unemployment rates, thereby increasing multi-dimensional and income poverty rates and exacerbating the social and economic exclusion of youth.

This paper examines the status of Arab youth in relation to education, employment, health and participation in public life, with the aim of identifying the main challenges that they are facing in each of these domains. With regard to education, Arab countries admit that education is a key to the empowerment of young people because it generally makes it easier for them to join the labor market, participate

in public life as well as improve their health and status in the family and society as a whole. As a result, these countries sought to achieve universal primary education and to increase enrollment rates in all educational levels. However, one of every ten young people in the region still suffers from illiteracy. Also, there are still at least 5.8 million children in the age of primary education and at least 3.5 million children in the age of the first phase of secondary education who are not enrolled in school, with most of them being young girls (*UNESCO, 2011*). As for the quality of education, it still suffers from several pitfalls, including the lack of modern educational tools, overcrowded classrooms and a limited improvement in traditional educational curricula. Most of all, countries suffer from the mismatch between educational outputs and labour market requirements, leading to high youth unemployment rates, particularly among secondary and university graduates. One out of every four young people in this region still suffers from unemployment, either because job opportunities are not available, or because the available job opportunities simply do not match their skills. In addition, unemployment rates are higher among young females as compared with young males (30.9% and 20.4% respectively in the Middle East in the year 2009). (*ILO, 2010*).

As for the health of youth, it is considered as generally better than the health of other population groups, but they are sometimes suffering health problems related to early pregnancy and childbirth, the spread of HIV/AIDS, stressful mental health, unhealthy lifestyles and increased incidence of injuries and violence. In fact, the age at first marriage has increased in the Arab region, but there are still

several cases of “child marriages”, arranged marriages and consanguineous marriages. We also note the persistence of health risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth outside safe maternity ages and within short birth intervals, as well as the increased risk of infection by HIV/AIDS among youth and adolescents. On the other hand, many young men and women still adopt unhealthy lifestyles that involve high risk behaviors such as improper nutrition, smoking, alcohol abuse and the lack of regular physical exercise, which increases their risk of developing chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular problems. Furthermore, Arab youth are subject to several factors that increase their vulnerability to mental health problems in the context of their social, economic and political exclusion as well as their higher risk of injuries (as a result of road traffic accidents for example) and violence resulting from armed conflicts and rising crime rates.

Finally, in relation to public life, youth participation in legislature and the parliaments is still limited in the Arab countries, with these authorities mainly including older persons but rarely young people under thirty years of age. In fact, a field study carried out by the League of Arab States in 2005 revealed that 72% of youth desired political participation but did not trust political practices in the region (*LAS, 2007*). Another report by Mercy Corps (2012) has revealed that Arab youth are more likely than youth from other regions to involve in protesting and demonstrating, such that 28.9% of them declared having already participated in protests and demonstrations as compared with a world average of 15.2%. Youth participation in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) is also still relatively limited

such that they rarely participate in the Board of Directors of these NGOs. In fact, youth involvement is relatively high in the implementation of NGO projects but low in project proposal, planning, follow-up and evaluation (*Farid, 2005*). Similarly, young people constitute the majority of volunteers but they tend to withdraw from volunteering after a short period not only because of their lack of time and the difficulty to reconcile volunteering with their studies and employment, but also because of their dissatisfaction with such work and the feeling that they are being exploited (*Farid, 2005*).

The paper concludes by providing recommendations to build the capacities of Arab youth and to integrate them in the development process. The main recommendations can be highlighted as follows:

First: Formulating a comprehensive and integrated national youth policy.

The rationale for formulating a national youth policy has four dimensions: (1) Quantitative dimension related to the youth bulge in the Arab region, (2) Qualitative dimension related to the gaps in the progress achieved by youth in education, employment, health and participation, (3) Vulnerability dimension which focuses on specific groups of youth (such as those with special needs) who should be targeted in interventions and measures, (4) Security dimension which involves the protection of youth in the context of political instability, armed conflicts, food and water insecurity and the spread of certain diseases. This paper has overviewed the process of formulating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating a national youth policy and

has stressed the importance of ensuring the availability of recent, accurate, reliable, detailed and comparable data on youth, as well as the preparation of research and in-depth analytical studies on the situation of youth in light of WPAY priorities. This is followed by the formulation of the national youth policy document and its plan of action, then its submission to the Council of Ministers for endorsement in order to proceed with implementation, emphasizing that the implementation process is accompanied by periodic monitoring and independent evaluation in order to provide responsible agencies with an objective appraisal of the progress achieved towards the set goals and targets. In this context, it is necessary to ensure that the process of formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the national youth policy is a participatory process involving young people themselves, the society as a whole, concerned governmental, non-governmental and civil society organizations, as well as concerned regional and international organizations.

Second: Matching educational outputs with labour market requirements.

Statistics have revealed that youth unemployment is leading to serious economic losses in the region exceeding 40 to 50 billion USD annually (*International Finance Corporation IFC (World Bank Group), in collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank, 2011*). Matching educational outputs with labour market requirements necessitates a three-dimensional approach: (1) Matching job seekers with employers, (2) Matching academic institutions with employers and (3) Matching students (who will ultimately become job seekers) with academic

institutions. However, governments cannot on their own achieve this matchmaking which requires efforts by all concerned stakeholders, including the youth themselves, public and private education providers, civil society, public sector policy makers and administrators as well as private employers.

Third: Developing policies to improve the health and well-being of youth.

Based on the broad definition of “health” and from a life-course perspective, it is important to encourage healthy behavior during childhood, adolescence and youth in order to prevent several health problems during adulthood and old age. Policies seeking to improve the health and well-being of youth should mainly focus on reducing the incidence of early pregnancies, reducing the spread of HIV/ AIDS, improving mental health since early age and building life skills in children and adolescents, avoiding malnutrition and obesity and encouraging regular physical exercise, reducing smoking and alcoholism, in addition to raising youth awareness of the importance of safe driving. As for reproductive health in particular, the youth population should be a critical target population in approaching reproductive health and rights.

Fourth: Ensuring an enabling environment to engage youth in public life.

The participation of youth in public life is an important end in itself as well as a prerequisite for sustainable human development.

Youth should be involved in all the stages of the national youth policy in order to enable them to voice their priorities and ensure that these priorities are tackled in this policy, as well as to ensure that youth are committed to the goals and targets of this policy. It is also necessary to go beyond the superficial participation of youth where they are merely a ‘decoration’ in meetings and other activities, but their views should actually be taken into account in order to achieve their highest level of participation in decision-making.

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منظمة الصحة العالمية
المكتب الإقليمي لشرق المتوسط

HPD. 10/1 (IMEMR/EGY)

2 October 2012

Dear Prof Dr Abdel Monem,

This is to acknowledge with thanks receipt of the “Arab Family Health and Population”, which you have kindly forwarded to us.

We are pleased to inform you that the “Arab Family Health and Population” has been selected to be one of the sources of input of the IMEMR. Therefore, we would appreciate sending us future issues of the Journal. Meanwhile we would appreciate receiving the electronic files of the English abstracts, and/or full text of the articles on CD, if available, to ensure its complete indexing in the IMEMR.

On the other hand, kindly be informed that the complete database of the IMEMR is available on the Internet and updated regularly at the following URL <http://www.emro.who.int/information-resources/publications/>. However the IMEMR Journal directory is also available at: <http://www.emro.who.int/library/injournals/>. In addition to access the Index, a document delivery service has been activated to enable any user to acquire a copy of any article listed in the IMEMR **free of charge**.

We would like to take this opportunity to send the first issue of the e-publications Eastern Mediterranean Region Series, “EMHJ – Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal”, which contains all issues from 1995 to 2010, with off line access to the full text of 1810 articles. Your feedback and comments are highly appreciated.

For further technical details and information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Looking forward to our continued and fruitful co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Hatem Nour El-Din
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الدورة الحادية عشر ٢٠١٣/٢٠١٥

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مدير وحدة الدراسات والمسوحات الميدانية الاجتماعية
ورئيس تحرير مجلة صحة الأسرة والسكان - جامعة الدول العربية

تحية طيبة وبعد،،،

يسعدنى أن أنهى لسيادتكم بأن اللجنة العلمية الدائمة للدراسات الإحصائية
(الأساتذة والأساتذة المساعدين) فى اجتماعها بتاريخ ٢٧/١٠/٢٠١٣ إدرجت
مجلتكم الموقره ضمن المجالات المعتمدة للترقية على مستوى الأساتذة والأساتذة
المساعدين فى تخصص الإحصاء السكاني.

وتفضلوا سيادتكم بقبول وافر الاحترام،،،

مقرر اللجنة
العلمية الدائمة للدراسات الإحصائية

أ.د. عبد الهادي نبيه احمد

