

Arab Human Development Report

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Arab Spring: Demographics in a region in transition

Barry Mirkin



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Executive Summary

The main aim of this study is to examine the demographic trends, in particular, population growth, age structure, fertility and marriage, rapid urbanization, unprecedented levels of international migration and significant forced displacement, that have shaped the Arab Spring. These trends are highlighted below:

1. Popular uprisings have unseated dictators in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. Building strong, viable democracies in the Arab region from the rubble of failed dictatorships is a long, slow process with many formidable obstacles. It requires restructuring government institutions, including constitutional reform, good leadership, the willingness to compromise, fair and representative elections, freedom of speech and press, respect for human rights, and a strong civil society among other things. Many transitions to democracy that ultimately succeeded were tumultuous and were often preceded by conflict and war.
2. The causes of recent revolutions in the Arab world are numerous and complex, but have been exacerbated by the region's underlying demographics. Changing age structure, combined with other demographic trends have exacerbated the challenges to governments, particularly regarding unemployment, underemployment and job creation. Low labour participation, partial empowerment of women, environmental degradation, food and water shortages, rapid urbanization and the insufficient provision of housing, education and medical care are yet another challenges.
3. A history of high fertility in the Arab region, six children per women during the 1980s, has produced a youth bulge aged 15 to 24 years. The number of youth more than doubled since 1980 and its share in the population is at an all-time high. Although the share of youth peaked in 2010, the absolute number of youth is estimated to increase by 12 million by 2025.
4. In the wake of the Arab Spring, youth unemployment rose sharply and is almost three times higher than total unemployment. Twelve million additional jobs need to be created by 2025 in the Arab Region to prevent youth unemployment, currently at almost 30 per cent in the region, from increasing even further. For young women, unemployment is higher and labour force participation lower than for young men. Lack of economic opportunity for young people cannot be separated from the wave of social unrest sweeping the region.
5. The reduction of high fertility and increases in the working-age population can create opportunities for economic growth if the right mix of educational, health, and labor-market policies are in place. For Arab countries to reap the benefit from this “demographic dividend”, employment

generation must keep pace with the large number of job seekers, which has not been the case in the recent past.

6. Countries in the Arab region are experiencing population movements from rural to urban areas, as young men and women leave tedious agricultural employment in search of “bright city lights” and supposedly more reliable and better paid urban jobs.

7. The deliberate reduction by the Gulf Cooperation Council of workers from the Arab region and growing preference for South Asian workers has negative consequences. As labour migration becomes more restricted in and outside the Arab region, while domestic employment for youth remains limited, countries that had relied on emigration will experience mounting pressures from youth bulges, accompanied by a higher risk of political violence in demand for wider opportunities.

8. Turmoil and conflict in Arab countries are spilling over into neighboring countries in the form of refugees and repatriated migrants, as well as to neighboring regions, most recently as illegal migration to southern Europe. The crisis reveals the absence, or inadequate implementation, of existing norms, obligations or standards and highlights the need for the international community to address the situation of “stranded migrant workers” more systematically.

9. Political instability, conflict, violence, surging fuel and food prices and food insecurity has precipitated significant forced population displacements within transition countries.

10. Demographic trends undermine the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While high income Arab countries will reach most MDGs, poorer Arab countries might not meet the targets even by 2020. High population growth renders the demand for public services that critical for meeting MDGs restricts countries’ ability to provide these services. Recent conflict in the region is believed to retracts the development of Arab countries.

11. Without noticeable improvements in their economies or employment prospects, especially for much of the frustrated youth, rising demonstrations, unrest and violence appear unavoidable for the nearly half a billion people in the Arab world by 2025.

I. Introduction

The Arab region has experienced considerable and ongoing instability, culminating in protracted conflict in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia, Egypt, Sudan and Yemen. In 2011, popular uprisings also took place in Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Tunisia. Will the Arab Spring initiate a blossoming of democracy or spread extremism, conflict and violence?

Building strong, viable democracies from the rubble of failed dictatorships is a long, slow process with many formidable obstacles. It requires restructuring government institutions, especially constitutional reform, good leadership, a willingness to compromise, fair and representative elections, freedom of speech and press and respect for human rights and a strong civil society, among other things. Many transitions to democracy that ultimately succeeded were tumultuous at first and were often preceded by a period of conflict and war. History abounds with examples, such as the American, French and Mexican Revolutions. Other countries, like Argentina, Chile, Greece and Spain have experienced coups or attempted coups on the road to democracy. The experiences of the extremely varied countries swept up in the democratization process suggest there are no insurmountable obstacles to democratization in Arab countries. They also emphasize the importance of adopting a long view of where the Arab Spring can lead. The experiences of other countries also demonstrate that democratic consolidation can be elusive and can take different paths before achieving the ultimate goal.

With images of widespread demonstrations and conflict in the Arab region flashing around the world, it is an appropriate time to examine some of the likely reasons behind these violent eruptions. Numerous factors have been cited for the unrest sweeping across the region, including the absence of democracy, repression, authoritarianism, corruption, cronyism, alienation, disenfranchised religious and ethnic groups and minorities, lack of socio-economic development, poverty and the meddling of foreign powers. The causes of the recent revolutions in the Arab world are numerous and complex, and certainly cannot be attributed to one factor. One narrative of the Arab Spring has focused on demographics and the fact that many of the likely causes have been exacerbated by the region's underlying demographic features. The prevailing high fertility in the Arab region combined with low mortality has resulted in rapid population growth. This has produced an unprecedented youth bulge, a large population of youth aged 15 to 24 years.

From the recent demonstrations in Greece to increased unemployment in urban China, to anxiety over the prospect of more protests by young people throughout Europe, youth unemployment and underemployment is increasingly recognized as a potential trigger for social instability in the world. Not unlike the Arab Region, other world regions, for example Africa also faces demographic challenges as its population of young people aged 15 to 24 increases, while access to

secure jobs continues to be problematic. In addition, the global financial and economic crisis threatens to further strain labor markets and aggravate a tenuous situation for the world's youth.

Beyond economic costs, high rates of youth unemployment and underemployment have social ramifications. Youth with limited job prospects and little hope of future advancement may see little alternative to criminal activities or joining armed conflicts. "Unemployed and underemployed [youth] are more exposed to conflicts and illegal activities—many of them fall prey to armed and rebel groups. Youth unemployed and underemployed are more exposed to economic cycles," making them vulnerable to job instability (World Bank, 2008).

But are countries and areas with youthful age structures or youth bulges, more likely to experience political violence and conflict? In recent years, this issue has received increasing attention, following a more general debate over the security implications of population pressure and resource scarcity. For example, in *The Coming Anarchy*, Robert Kaplan argues that anarchy and the crumbling of nation states will be attributed to demographic and environmental factors in the future (Kaplan, 1994, p. 46). More recently, youth bulges have become a popular explanation for the current political instability in the Arab world and for recruitment to international terrorist networks (Urdal, 2012).

Recent research suggests that high unemployment and growing inequality fuel social unrest around the world. For example, in 57 out of 106 countries, the Social Unrest Index, an indicator developed for the International Labour Organization, increased in 2011 compared to 2010. Europe, the Middle East, Northern Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa show the most heightened risk of social unrest. The two regions with the highest risk are Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and Northern Africa. On average, Latin America – where there has been a degree of employment recovery and, in a few cases, improvements in job quality – has experienced a decline in the risk of social unrest (ILO, 2012a). The violent protests that erupted in Jordan in November 2012, demonstrate that events seemingly unrelated to unemployment can trigger large and widespread demonstrations, involving mostly young men. After the Government of Jordan announced a hike in fuel prices, protests broke out throughout the country. In addition, the more than 100,000 Syrian refugees who fled the civil war to Jordan have taxed Jordan's stretched resources (New York Times, 2012a). In addition to Jordan, the possibility exists of unrest spilling over to other neighbouring countries, for example Bahrain and Lebanon. In late November 2012, this destabilizing trend spread to Gaza and Israel, where violent clashes broke out.

In a recent review of the growing body of literature on the subject, it was found that empirical studies suggest that youth bulges are associated with an increased risk of political violence. However, governments to some extent are able to reduce this risk through the provision of better opportunities for young people, primarily by providing education. The level of secondary education appears to have a clearly pacifying effect on large youth bulges in low and middle income countries, although the effect appears to be contingent on structural economic factors (Urdal, 2012).

While the Arab Region is experiencing the same demographic transition to lower population growth and fertility that other countries have already gone through, for many countries in the

region the transition is occurring at a significantly slower pace or in some cases has stalled. Thus, the demographic momentum from earlier rapid population growth and high fertility continue to exert a powerful influence on current demographic trends in the Arab region, which will persist into the future. This seems to be especially true for the countries in transition in the Arab region.¹ While other world regions, for example Eastern Europe and Latin America had also experienced spates of political and economic upheavals in recent decades, they had already achieved the demographic transition and thus were experiencing slow or no demographic growth and no youth bulge at the time of the upheavals.

The changing age structure, combined with other demographic trends in the transition countries of the Arab Region poses a host of serious challenges to the governments in such areas as unemployment, underemployment and job creation, low labour force participation, inadequate women's empowerment, environmental degradation, food and water shortages, rapid urbanization and the provision of services (housing, education, medical care). Demographic trends are also undermining the achievement of the MDGs by 2015. The transition countries are also characterized by significant international migration flows and thus very dependent upon migrant remittances. Furthermore, turmoil and conflict in transition countries is spilling over into neighboring countries (Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Turkey) in the form of refugees and repatriated migrants, as well as to neighboring regions, namely as illegal migration to southern Europe.

In the wake of the on-going Arab Spring, several newly elected heads of state, for example of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia have stressed a number of priorities for their new governments, including education, training and job creation, especially for young people, rebuilding the health sector and the reduction of emigration. Demographic patterns are exacerbating these problems and make the crafting of solutions far more difficult.

In view of the political upheavals, which are transforming the Arab Region, this study will give special attention to a subset of countries or areas, "countries in transition", namely those countries that have been most directly affected by the changes sweeping across the region. The study aims to examine some of the demographic trends, in particular, population growth, age structure, fertility and marriage. In addition, other demographic trends, namely, rapid urbanization, unprecedented levels of international migration and significant internal displacement have also shaped the Arab Spring and will be also addressed.²

¹ Egypt, Iraq, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen.

² A previous study by this author examined demographic trends in the entire Arab Region. See B. Mirkin, *Population Levels, Trends and Policies in the Arab Region: Challenges and Opportunities*. Arab Human Development, Report no. 1. 2010.

II. Population levels and trends

A. Population size and growth

In late 2011, the world achieved a milestone, when it reached a population of 7 billion. Every year, 78 million persons are added. In 2010, the population of the Arab region attained 357 million people, having doubled since 1980 (Table 1). Of the 357 million, 231 million people or two-thirds are in countries in transition. The two most populous countries in the region, Egypt (81 million) and Sudan (44 million) are countries in transition. Since 1980, both the Arab region and the transition countries have grown by 2.4 per cent a year. For the world, it was 1.5 per cent annually. However, after 2010, population growth begins to diverge, with annual growth of 1.8 per cent during 2010-2025 for the region, but higher for transition countries, 2.1 per cent.

TABLE 1. POPULATION SIZE AND GROWTH IN THE ARAB REGION, 1980-2025

Country or area	Total population			Increment	Annual growth rate	
	1980	2010	2025	2010-2025	1980-2010	2010-2025
	(thousands)			(thousands)	(percentage)	
World	4,453,007	6,895,889	8,002,978	1,107,089	1.5	1.0
Arab Region, of which:	172,699	357,433	467,945	110,512	2.4	1.8
Transition countries	113,085	230,985	343,256	112,271	2.4	2.1
Egypt	44,952	81,121	100,909	19,788	2.0	1.5
Iraq	13,744	31,672	48,885	17,213	2.8	3.1
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	3,063	6,355	7,465	1,110	2.4	0.8
OPT 1/	1,510	4,039	6,207	2,168	3.3	2.8
Somalia	6,436	9,331	14,152	4,821	1.2	2.6
Sudan 2/	20,071	43,522	60,811	17,289	2.6	2.4
Syria	8,907	20,411	26,009	5,598	2.8	1.7
Tunisia	6,457	10,481	11,921	1,440	1.6	1.0
Yemen	7,945	24,053	36,698	12,645	3.7	3.0

1/ Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT)

2/ Includes South Sudan

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat 2011. *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*.

With Iraq growing at 3.1 per cent annually and Yemen at 3.0 per cent, they are among the fastest growing countries in the world. Among the countries in transition, the biggest gainers of population between 2010 and 2025 are Egypt (20 million), Iraq and Sudan (17 million each) and Yemen (13 million).

B. Population age structure

Populations in the Arab Region are relatively young, with majorities in many countries aged under 25 years. One-third of the Arab Region is under the age of 15 years and one-fifth are youth, aged 15-24 years. In contrast, for developed countries youth account for only 13 percent of the population. Neither Egypt, Libya, Syria nor Tunisia, the epicenters of the Arab Spring, are particularly unique in their demographic shift (Table 2). Young people represent 20 percent of the population in Egypt and Syria, compared with 15 percent in Bahrain, 21 percent in Algeria, and 22 percent in Iran and Jordan, all of which have faced their own protests. In fact, the numbers of children and young people in the Arab region are at an all time high. Between 1980 and 2010, the number of youth in transition countries more than doubled and stood at 46 million. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and Yemen, the youth population tripled between 1980 and 2010, as a result of the persistence of high fertility and continuing population momentum. The Arab region is characterized by large numbers of youth and adults in the working ages (15-64 years), and comparatively small but growing populations of older persons (60 years or above). The growing youth population is entering a labour market already suffering from persistently high unemployment.

The good news is that the share of youth in the total population of transition countries peaked in 2010 and will decline from 20 per cent to 17 per cent by 2025, a reflection of declining fertility.

However, because the number of youth is expected to climb to 58 million by 2025, twelve million additional jobs need to be created by then to prevent youth unemployment from climbing even higher in transition countries.

When a country undergoes a decline in fertility, the age structure of the population is altered, producing a temporary increase in the proportion of youth (referred to as a “youth bulge”). Such bulges tend to be exaggerated in urban areas of developing countries where rural-urban migration is also an important factor. This implies a population age structure with a lower total dependency rate and a higher proportion of the population in working ages. In certain countries, particularly in South-East Asia, such population dynamics have been associated with more rapid economic growth, the so-called “demographic dividend”. The reduction of high fertility and increases in the working-age population can create opportunities for economic growth if the right mix of educational, health, and labor-market policies are in place. For Arab countries to benefit from this “demographic dividend”, employment generation must keep pace with the large number of job seekers. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in the recent past.

TABLE 2. YOUTH POPULATION IN THE ARAB REGION, 1980–2025

	Youth population (15-24 years)			Percentage of total population		
	1980	2010	2025	1980	2010	2025
Country or area	(thousands)			(percentage)		
World	839,244	1,212,960	1,219,353	19	18	15
Arab Region, of which:	33,486	70,286	82,139	19	20	18
Transition countries	21,854	45,983	58,094	19	20	17
Egypt	8,889	16,009	17,270	20	20	17
Iraq	2,495	6,205	9,702	18	20	20
Libyan	558	1,124	1,363	18	18	18
OPT	289	858	1,161	19	21	19
Somalia	1,225	1,732	2,750	19	19	19
Sudan 1/	3,764	8,568	11,825	20	20	19
Syria	1,748	4,166	5,011	20	20	19
Tunisia	1,362	1,994	1,635	21	19	14
Yemen	1,524	5,327	7,377	19	22	20

1/ Includes South Sudan

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat 2011. *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*.

C. Fertility, marriage and family planning

In the last three decades, fertility in the Arab Region declined from 6.3 children per woman to 3.4 children, a difference of 2.9 children per woman (Table 3). However, in transition countries, fertility declined only to 3.9 children, a half child higher than in the Arab Region. By 2020-2025, transition countries will continue to exhibit slightly higher fertility, 2.9 children per woman versus 2.7 children for the Arab Region. While the Arab Region is projected to reach replacement fertility, 2.1 children per woman by 2050, five countries or areas will fall short; Iraq, the OPT, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen will not achieve replacement level fertility until around 2100. Moreover, as these countries and areas have been experiencing, economic crises, civil strife and political instability in recent years, factors that militate against the provision of reproductive health services for the population, it is unlikely that governments will be able to provide such services at the necessary levels. Thus, the likely continuation of rapid population growth and fertility pose serious challenges to their future socio-economic development.

Families in the Arab world are undergoing major changes as new patterns of marriage and family formation take hold across the region. Universal, early marriage is no longer the standard it once was in Arab countries: The average age at marriage for both men and women is generally rising, and more Arab women remain single longer or are not marrying at all (Rashad et al, 2005). Further nuptiality changes have the potential to bring about substantially more fertility decline in the region, especially in the populous countries, Egypt, Syria and Yemen. Nuptiality changes in the region are likely being driven by increasing educational levels, the decline in economic opportunity and the high cost of marriage.

One of the most significant population policy developments is the increase in the number of governments in the Arab region reporting policies to reduce fertility. In 1976, 14 per cent of governments in the Arab region had policies aimed at lowering fertility. Today more than half of countries in the region, including five transition countries (Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen) seek to lower fertility (UN, 2010). Governments have implemented a variety of measures to reduce fertility either directly or indirectly. These measures include the integration of family planning and safe motherhood programmes into primary health care systems, providing access to reproductive health services, promoting the responsibility of men in sexual and reproductive health, raising the minimum legal age for marriage of men and women, discouraging son preference, improving female education and employment opportunities, promoting women's empowerment and providing accessible, low cost, safe and effective contraception. Government programmes to provide modern contraceptive methods are an important determinant of reproductive behaviour, as well as of maternal and child health. Access to methods of contraception has steadily increased. Despite widespread government support for improving access to contraceptives, demand is believed to outstrip supply. The use of modern contraceptive methods among women in the least developed Arab countries remains especially low; Yemen, 19 per cent, Sudan, 9 per cent and Somalia, 1 per cent (Table 3).

TABLE 3. TOTAL FERTILITY IN THE ARAB REGION, 1980–2025 AND CONTRACEPTIVE PREVALENCE

Country or area	Total fertility			Contraceptive prevalence, modern methods
	1980-1985	2005-2010	2020-2025	latest year
	(children per woman)			(percentage)
World	3.6	2.5	2.3	56
Arab Region, of which:	6.3	3.4	2.7	..
Transition countries	6.1	3.9	2.9	31
Egypt	5.2	2.9	2.3	60
Iraq	6.4	4.9	4.0	33
Libyan	7.2	2.7	2.0	26
OPT	7.1	4.7	3.6	39
Somalia	6.7	6.4	6.0	1
Sudan 1/	6.3	4.6	3.6	9
Syria	6.8	3.1	2.3	43
Tunisia	4.9	2.0	1.7	52
Yemen	9.2	5.5	4.0	19

1/ Includes South Sudan

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat 2011. World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision; World Contraceptive Use 2011.

D. Urbanization

More than half of world population now lives in urban areas. Since 1980, the urban population more than doubled in the transition countries, climbing from 43 million in 1980 to 105 million by 2010, representing almost half of the total population (table 4). Even larger increases during the three decades were evident in the OPT and Syria where the urban population tripled, in Sudan where it quadrupled and Yemen, where the number of urban dwellers grew by a factor of six. Cairo, the 20th largest urban agglomeration in the world, contains some 11.2 inhabitants. Khartoum, a medium-sized agglomeration of 1.2 million in 1980 now has 4.6 inhabitants, while Sana'a', a small city of 250,000 inhabitants in 1980 has mushroomed into an urban agglomeration of 2.4 million residents. Many countries in the Arab Region are experiencing large population movements from rural to urban areas, as young men and women leave tedious agricultural employment in search of "bright city lights" and supposedly more reliable and better paid urban jobs.

TABLE 4. URBAN POPULATION IN THE ARAB REGION, 1980–2025 AND POPULATION OF MAJOR AGGLOMERATION, 2011

	Urban population			Major agglomeration	Population
	1980	2010	2025		2011
Country or area	(thousands)				(thousands)
World	1,753,229	3,558,578	4,642,582
Arab Region, of which:	73,029	195,849	275,024
Transition countries	42,953	104,670	154,163
Egypt	17,438	35,186	47,751	Cairo	11,169
Iraq	9,005	21,073	32,956	Baghdad	6,036
Libya	2,147	4,929	6,007	Tripoli	1,127
OPT	943	2,994	4,669	Ramallah	75
Somalia	1,722	3,479	6,375	Mogadishu	1,554
Sudan 1/	3,013	11,083	17,063	Khartoum	4,632
Syria	4,106	11,363	16,082	Damascus	2,650
Tunisia	3,265	6,928	8,316	Tunis	790
Yemen	1,314	7,635	14,944	Sana'a'	2,419

1/ Includes South Sudan

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat 2011. *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2011 Revision*.

E. International migration

Lying at the intersection of three continents, migration has been a distinctive feature of the Arab region for centuries. Many of the poorer countries in the Arab region have witnessed substantial outflows, often illegal to Europe as well as to wealthier countries in the region. A dominant feature of migration flows in the Arab region has been the large and growing volume of labour migration, especially to the Member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Of the world's 20 countries with the highest proportion of international migrants in 2010, nine are found in the Arab region. A significant change in the pattern of immigration to the GCC countries is the deliberate reduction by the GCC of workers from the Arab region and growing preference for South Asian workers. While in 1990, more than one in four migrants in the GCC were from transition countries, by 2010 this declined to one in five migrants. Increased competition in the GCC countries due to the influx of South and South-East Asian migrants, has redirected some migration from the Arab region towards the European Union and countries further afield. Because of the conflicts that flared in Iraq, Somalia, Sudan and Tunisia, the number of immigrants in these four countries declined between 1990 and 2010.

Emigration has been an important feature of many countries in the Arab region. Most transition countries are labour-exporting and thus very dependent upon remittances (Table 5). While transition countries are countries of both immigration and emigration, only in Libya and Syria does the number of immigrants exceed the number of emigrants. In fact, all nine countries exhibit significant emigration. The percentage of the population living abroad ranges from a low of three per cent in Syria and Yemen to a high of 137 per cent in the OPT. Between 2000 and 2010, the total number of emigrants increased in the nine transition countries from almost 12 million emigrants to 15.4 million. Emigration can work as a safety valve in countries with large youth cohorts. However, as migration opportunities are increasingly restricted both in the Arab region and outside the region and domestic job opportunities for youth are limited, countries that previously relied on emigration may experience mounting pressures from youth bulges, accompanied by a higher risk of political violence.

Table 5. International immigrants and emigrants 2010, percentage of population, remittances 2011 and number of refugees, 2011

Country or area	Number of inter-national immigrants	Percentage of total population	Number of inter-national emigrants	Percentage of total population	Remittances	Number of refugees
	(thousands)	(%)	(thousands)	(%)	(US\$ millions)	(thousands)
	2010	2010	2011	2011		
World	214,199	3.1	214,199	3.1	501,000	10,400
Developing countries	86,232	1.5	147,000	2.6	372,000	8,440
Arab Region; of which:	32,790	9.1	18,342	3.9	42,000	1,700
Transition countries	6,468	2.8	15,367	6.7	22,420	1,226
Egypt	245	0.3	2,913	3.6	14,213	95
Iraq	83	0.3	1,598	5.0	77	35
Libya	682	10.4	300	4.7	..	8
OPT	1,924	43.6	5,543	137.2	1,106	0
Somalia	23	0.2	1,534	16.4	..	2
Sudan 1/	753	1.7	1,599	3.7	1,478	113
Syria	2,206	9.8	582	2.9	1,988	755
Tunisia	34	0.3	570	5.4	1,955	3
Yemen	518	2.1	728	3.0	1,603	215

1/ Includes South Sudan.

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. 2012. *Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin* (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2012); World Bank, *Remittance Flows in 2011—an update, Migration and Development Brief*, 18. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Global Trends 2011*.

Beginning in the late 1980s, the increasing presence of migrant workers in the labour force has prompted governments of the GCC to introduce programmes to “nationalize” the labour force, that is, to encourage the replacement of migrant workers by nationals, so as to provide more employment opportunities to nationals, while reducing dependence on migrants. Saudi Arabia’s most recent indigenization effort, “*Nitaqat*” came into effect in September 2011. “Saudization” or the policy of encouraging employment of native Saudis in the private sector is not new. Similar efforts underway since the 1990s have met with little success, with firms using various ruses or “wasta” to meet the quota requirements. Although the current *Nitaqat* program is better formulated, with quotas that take into account the existing employment patterns, such indigenization efforts are unlikely to adversely affect the longer-term employment prospects of migrants in the Gulf. It is felt that indigenization will displace only a small fraction of foreign workers, if at all (World Bank, 2011).

Migrant workers who are caught in situations of natural disasters, civil conflict or war are often unable to avail themselves of the protection and assistance of their country of citizenship, residence or transit. Cut off from their means of subsistence, they face economic hardship upon return. The plight of these “stranded migrants” is particularly precarious for those who are undocumented. In 2011, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) jointly launched a massive humanitarian response to assist

and repatriate third country nationals who were affected by the crisis in Libya. The crisis revealed the absence, or the inadequate implementation, of existing norms, obligations or standards and thus highlights the need for the international community to address the situation of “stranded migrants” more systematically.

The “Arab Spring” has adversely affected migrants within the Arab region and in Sub-Saharan Africa. The full impact of the “Arab Spring” however is not yet accurately reflected in the data. Violence in Libya and Syria resulted in the mass evacuations of migrants to their home countries or to neighboring countries. Libya’s economy had long relied on migrant workers; thus, the conflict generated an immediate and protracted migration crisis. Beginning in 2011, more than 800,000 migrant workers and their families fled from Libya into neighbouring countries and returned or were evacuated to their countries of origin. The majority were nationals of Northern Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Migrants from Africa were particularly hard hit by the crisis. According to the Government of Niger, some 200,000 Nigeriens returned to the country after the crisis began in Libya. Some 150,000 nationals returned to Chad, 30,000 to Mali and 40,000 to Mauritania (IOM, 2012). Such a sudden and large influx of returning migrants has precipitated a burden on scarce resources in these countries, as well as loss of future remittances.

Instability and conflict, high rates of unemployment and underemployment at home, and potential socioeconomic opportunities abroad have contributed to a surge in irregular migration – at the intraregional level, as well as to Australia, Europe and North America. The Arab Spring has brought these challenges to the fore; for example, while thousands of migrants have rushed to escape across Libya’s borders with Egypt, Tunisia and other neighbouring countries, thousands more (including Libyan nationals) have attempted the dangerous maritime route across the Mediterranean to Europe, landing in Southern Europe. Even upon the conflict’s cessation, there is a risk that, with transitional authorities struggling to address the security vacuum and directing critical resources towards Libya’s internal security, large-scale irregular migration via Libya may continue and increase. Given the ongoing instability in Libya, and in view of the uprisings in Egypt, Syria and Tunisia, there could also be a surge in irregular migration among these countries’ nationals. Tunisia has become a destination and transit country, as migrants from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa travel to Tunisia in the hope of reaching Europe.

Irregular migration of Tunisians to Europe was also a major issue in 2011, with some 26,000 Tunisians fleeing across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe in the wake of the revolution and collapse of the Ben Ali regime. Unemployment rose to 18 per cent by 2011 in Tunisia. Another country coping with a wave of transit migration is Yemen, with more than 100,000 migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers arriving along Yemen’s Red Sea and Arabian coasts in 2011. In most cases, these were irregular Ethiopian migrants hoping to reach neighboring Gulf States, but who became stranded in Yemen.

F. Remittances

Officially recorded remittance flows to developing countries are estimated to have reached \$372 billion in 2011, an increase of 12.1 per cent over 2010 (Table 5).

The growth of migrant remittances was higher in 2011 than in 2010 for all regions except the Middle East and Northern Africa, where flows were moderated by the Arab Spring.

Contrary to the regional trend, remittances to Egypt have surged since 2010, due to a variety of factors including the return of migrants from Libya and Syria and falling housing prices that likely spurred home purchases in Egypt by Egyptians residing abroad (World Bank, 2012a). With over \$14 billion in 2011, Egypt is the largest recipient of migrant remittances in the Arab region and sixth largest in the world. Lebanon is among the world's top 10 recipients of migrant remittances as a share of GDP, 18 per cent in 2011.

Remittances to developing countries are vulnerable to uncertain economic prospects in migrant destination countries. Recent political events in the region, especially in Libya and Syria, are likely to impact remittance flows in 2012. Additionally, high unemployment in Europe and the United States can adversely affect the employment prospects of migrants, while hardening political attitudes toward additional immigration have created political pressures to reduce current levels of immigration (Chamie and Mirkin, 2010). There are risks that if the European crisis worsens, immigration controls in these countries could become even tighter. A deepening and spread of the European debt crisis could reduce demand for migrant workers and further depress remittance flows to the Arab Region.

In its most recent assessment of global remittances flows, the World Bank issued a decidedly more optimistic forecast than previously for remittances in the Arab Region. Among developing country regions, South Asia and Northern Africa and the Middle East saw the strongest growth in remittances in 2012, driven primarily by robust economic activity in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (World Bank, 2012b).

G. Refugees

Refugees constitute an important share of international migrants residing in the Arab region. By the end of 2011, the refugee population reached 10.4 million persons (Table 5). An additional 4.8 million Palestinian refugees were under the protection of the United Nations Relief and Welfare Agency, with the largest number of Palestinian refugees, two million in Jordan (UNRWA, 2012). The Arab Region hosts some 1.7 million refugees or 17 per cent of the world total, with most of these refugees, 1.2 million in transition countries (UNHCR, 2012a). Among the five largest source countries of refugees in the world, three are transition countries: Iraq, 1.4 million; Somalia, 1.1 million and Sudan, 500,000. Southern Africa is hosting some of the refugees from transition countries, including 760,000 from Somalia and 462,000 from Sudan. More recently, the UNHCR announced in November 2012, that the number of refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria had reached

almost 500,000 Syrians, who were being hosted by Turkey (122,000), Lebanon (121,000), Jordan (116,000), Iraq (54,000) and Egypt (7,000) (UNHCR, 2012b). In most cases, host countries were struggling to accommodate the sudden and large influx of refugees and to provide already scarce resources. In addition, the European Union, along with Norway and Switzerland received more than 16,000 asylum requests from Syrians between early 2011 and mid 2012 (UN, 2012). The number of Syrian refugees is expected to surge, as the Syrian conflict continues and possibly intensifies. Also in late November 2012, there were almost 200,000 Sudanese refugees in refugee camps in newly independent South Sudan, having fled escalating violence and insecurity in the Sudanese states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile (UN News Centre, 2012b).

H. Internally displaced persons

Conflicts and other crises frequently precipitate the sudden displacement of large numbers of people within national boundaries. By the end of 2011, the number of people internally displaced (IDPs) by conflict, generalised violence or human rights violations across the world stood at 26.4 million (IDMC, 2012a). The Arab region continued to experience an increase in population displacement. The vast majority of the region's new displacement took place against the backdrop of the Arab Spring, resulting in the displacement of 75,000 people in Libya, and up to two million in Syria by early 2012. In Yemen, political instability, conflict, terrorist activity, surging fuel and food prices and food insecurity precipitated a population displacement of almost 500,000 Yemenis in remote areas of the country in 2012.

The country with the largest internally displaced population in the region is Iraq; over 2 million people were still displaced there at the end of 2011 (IDMC, 2012a). In Sudan, out of 2.2 million IDPs, some 700,000 southerners who had been internally displaced years before were no longer within the same country following the independence of South Sudan in July 2011 and their situation remained to be clarified. At the end of 2011, they had lost Sudanese citizenship with the new nationality law, but may not have had access to documents confirming their South Sudan citizenship. Without an effective central government since 1991, the humanitarian crisis in Somalia continued to worsen, due to a combination of warlords, pirates, bandits, conflict between the government, its allies and insurgent groups and drought across the Horn of Africa which led to famine in southern and central regions of Somalia. High rates of malnutrition and severe food insecurity as a result of drought and skyrocketing food prices were reported in most IDP settlements. At the end of 2011, there were 1.5 million IDPs in Somalia (IDMC, 2012b).

III. Socio-economic situation

A. Economic developments

The macroeconomic situation deteriorated substantially during 2011, both at the global and regional levels. The wave of uprisings that started in Tunisia and Egypt at the beginning of 2011 expanded across the Arab region, restraining economic growth in a number of other countries. In Syria and in Yemen, where popular demonstrations have turned into violent conflict, economic growth was negative in 2011 amidst the political and social turmoil. Even though these two countries are the only countries in the region which registered negative economic growth in 2011, spillover effects threaten their neighbours. Social unrest remains the principal downside risk for the region as a whole (ILO, 2012). Another risk is weaker than projected economic growth in developed countries, as well as in China and India, which would have a dampening effect on income from exports of oil and natural gas from the Arab region.

B. Labour markets and youth unemployment

The world is confronting a worsening youth employment crisis with young people three times more likely to be unemployed than adults and over 75 million youth worldwide hunting for work. The ILO has warned of a “scarred” generation of young workers facing a dangerous mix of high unemployment, increased inactivity and precarious work, as well as persistently high working poverty in the developing world.

The Arab region stands out in terms of its overall unemployment problem; it is the only region where unemployment exceeded 10 per cent in 2011 for the population aged 15 years or older. Youth unemployment has been at very high levels for decades in this region. Northern Africa had been relatively resilient to the global economic crisis but following the Arab Spring economic growth decreased, while youth unemployment increased by 5 percent in 2011 (ILO, 2012c). The already very high youth unemployment in the Arab region rose sharply in the wake of the Arab Spring and was hovering at around 27 per cent in 2012, the highest in the world and twice the global rate for youth. Furthermore, it is almost three times higher than the 10 per cent unemployment rate for the working age population in the region (table 6).

TABLE 6. TOTAL UNEMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE ARAB REGION AND SELECT COUNTRIES, LATEST AVAILABLE YEAR

Country or area	Latest year	Unemployment rate	
		Total	Youth
World	2011	6.0	12.6
Arab Region	2011	10.2	27.0
Algeria	2010	10.0	21.5
Bahrain	2010	3.7	..
Egypt	2011	11.9	30.7
Iraq	2006	15.3	43.5
Jordan	2010	12.5	28.1
Kuwait	2008	7.7	..
Lebanon	2007	9.0	22.1
Morocco	2010	9.1	17.6
Qatar	2009	0.3	1.2
OPT	2008	23.7	40.2
Saudi Arabia	2009	5.4	29.9
Sudan 1/	2009	20.7	..
Syria	2010	8.4	18.3
Tunisia	2011	18.9	30.0
United Arab Emirates	2008	4.0	12.1
Yemen	2009	14.6	..
Bulgaria	2011	11.2	26.2
France	2011	9.7	22.9
Germany	2011	5.9	8.6
Greece	2011	17.7	44.4
Italy	2011	8.4	29.1
Netherlands	2011	4.4	7.6
Portugal	2011	12.9	30.1
Spain	2011	21.7	46.4
Sweden	2011	7.5	22.9

.. No data available
1/ Includes South Sudan.

Source: International Labour Organization 2011. *Statistical Update on Arab States and Territories and North African Countries*. 02 June; International Labour Office 2012. *Global Employment Outlook, September*. Eurostat 2012. *Unemployment Statistics, August*

The highest recorded youth unemployment is in Iraq (44 per cent), Occupied Palestinian Territory (40 per cent), Egypt (31 per cent) and Saudi Arabia and Tunisia (30 per cent). For young women in the Arab Region the situation is even worse, unemployment is higher, about 32 per cent and labour force participation lower. Future employment prospects are clearly one of the biggest concerns facing Palestinian youth. In 2011, 54 per cent of young women and 32 per cent of young men were unemployed (ILO, 2012d).

Levels of youth unemployment in the Arab region are similar to those now confronting Southern Europe, where the financial crisis continues to exact a high toll. Youth unemployment is approaching one-half of all youth in Greece and Spain and one-third of youth in Italy and Portugal (figure 1).³ A major difference, however, is the existence of a social net in Europe and the availability of unemployment benefits, which has played a part in dampening the scale of demonstrations. The data reveal that youth unemployment can occur even when youth represent a small share of the population. In Egypt and Tunisia, where the share of youth is about 20 per cent, youth unemployment is 30 per cent. In comparison, in Italy, where the share of youth is only 11 per cent, youth unemployment is also 30 per cent.

At the same time in the Arab region, youth labour force participation, 37 per cent, is the lowest in the world, compared to one half for youth globally. Unemployment would even be higher if one takes into account youth, who - often discouraged by the lack of prospects - give up or postpone looking for a job by continuing their education. The data also demonstrate that highly educated people are affected by unemployment just as much as those with lower education - a phenomenon which is unique in the world. In some Arab countries, unemployment amongst the highly educated and highly skilled is even higher than among the low-skilled.⁴

Despite relatively high levels of educational attainment, employers frequently cite the lack of employable skills among the region's youth as a barrier to employment. Furthermore, a large proportion of the jobs created in the region continue to be for migrant workers, at wages and conditions incompatible with the expectations of the national labour forces. As a result, labour market dualities are prominent in the region, raising questions about the quality of employment that the region is generating and the attendant need to create jobs that are acceptable to jobseekers. Lack of economic opportunity for young people cannot be decoupled from the wave of social unrest sweeping the region (ILO, 2012c).

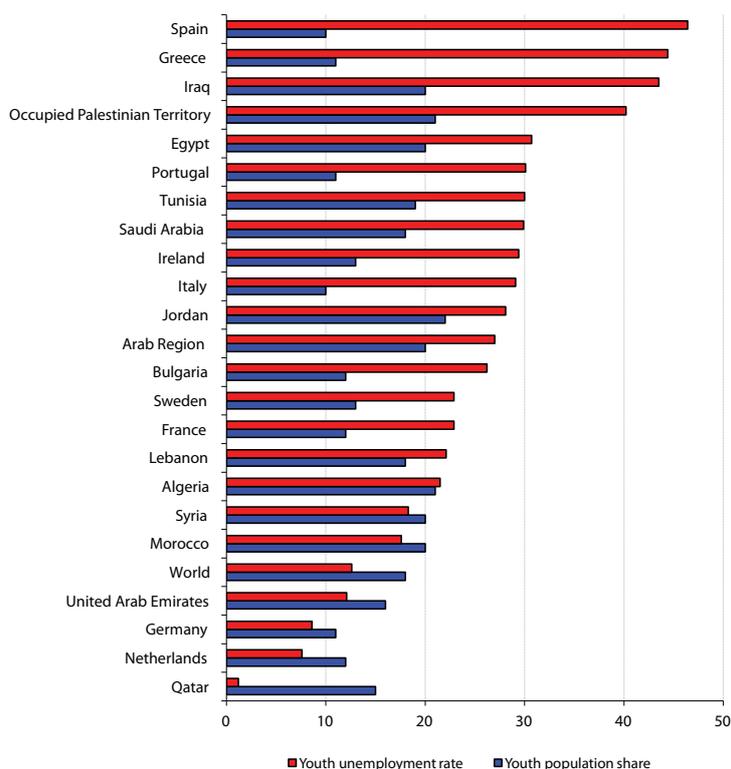
It may take four to five years before jobs market rebound. In the meantime, many of the 75 million unemployed young people will completely give up looking for work. Extremely adverse labour market conditions lead many youth to give up the job search altogether or to decide to postpone it and continue their education. The crisis induced withdrawal from the labour force amounts to 6.4 million young people worldwide (ILO, 2012c).

Youth unemployment in the Arab region is viewed as part of a wider problem featuring weak labour markets with too few and too poor employment opportunities. The situation is compounded by a poor overall investment climate and lack of growth, together with a limited and tightly controlled private sector. The higher and lower education and income levels are equally affected

³ Data released in late 2012 indicate that youth unemployment continues to increase unabated in the European Union. By September 2012 it had climbed to 23 per cent. The highest recorded rates were in Greece (56 per cent), Spain (54 per cent) and Italy and Portugal (35 per cent).

⁴ For a review of the role of education in the uprising in the Arab Region, see Adams, A. and Rebecca Winthrop. 2011. *The Role of Education in the Arab World Revolutions*. Brookings Opinion, June 10. For a review of the causes of high unemployment in the Arab Region, see Chaaban, Jad. 2010. *Job Creation in the Arab Economies: Navigating Through Difficult Waters*. Arab Human Development, Report Series no.3, 2010.

FIGURE 1. YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE AND YOUTH POPULATION SHARE FOR SELECTED COUNTRIES: AROUND 2011



by unemployment. In addition, social security coverage, including unemployment and pension schemes, is usually available only to civil servants.

Labour market problems in the region are very similar, although the countries differ in many respects. For example, in Tunisia, youth have received a much better education than in Egypt. Similarly, Tunisia has made more progress in combating discrimination against women in the labour market than other countries in the region. There are also differences in the size of the informal sector. In Egypt, most new jobs are created in this part of the economy, while it plays a smaller role in Tunisia. Despite these differences youth unemployment is about the same in both countries, almost one-third of youths (ILO, 2011). According to the ILO, even when young people have jobs, working conditions are often very poor: low wages, little social protection, lack of secure contracts and career prospects, and weak or lacking trade unions to give them a voice.

In Northern Africa and the Middle East, a “generation in waiting” of young, educated, jobless, unmarried people living in parental households has emerged. However, the recent social and political uprisings in this region have a wider support base, including also employed educated youth. Whether this generation’s potential is realized and made productive or becomes a politically destabilizing force, depends, among other factors, on the course of economic development and government policies. Youth unemployment rates are projected to remain above 25 per cent over the next years in the Arab region, and may rise even further in some countries (ILO, 2012d).

C. Millennium Development Goals

With respect to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), significant progress has been made in a number of areas at the global level, owing to sustained per capita income growth in some developing countries and targeted policy efforts in critical areas, including expansion of programmes to deliver services and other resources directly to those most in need. The Arab region has achieved progress in many MDGs, including significant strides in health and education. However, there have been serious setbacks and constraints attributable to various factors, including the relatively poor economic performance in the 1990s and early 2000s, inadequate financing of social policies, and increasing political tensions and conflicts.

The Arab region continues to be characterized by sharp disparities between the different sub-regions. According to a slew of recent United Nations reports, while the high income countries of the GCC are on-track to achieving most of the MDG targets, the poorer countries, most of which suffer from conflict, together with Iraq and the OPT, lag significantly behind. This makes it very unlikely that they will be able to meet the majority of the targets by 2015 or even by 2020 (UN and LAS, 2010; UNDP, 2010; UNESCWA, 2011; UNESCWA, 2012). These reports paint a dismal portrait. For example, recent conflict in the region is believed to set back the development of Arab countries by at least five years.

In terms of specific MDGs, Arab countries are on track with respect to halving the proportion of people living below US\$1.25-a-day. However, the picture changes when considering national poverty lines whereby the Arab region did not experience significant progress in reducing income poverty, which is concentrated in rural areas. Moreover, labor markets in most Arab countries are characterized by a wide spread of unemployment.

With regard to achieving universal primary education, the Arab region has seen improvement in net enrolment rates, literacy rates of young adults aged 15-24 and gender parity in primary schooling. Women's economic and political participation remains very limited in the Arab region. Under-five mortality rates have declined by half in the Arab region over the period 1990-2008. But the least developed countries in the region are still off track. The universal immunization coverage will not be achieved by 2015 without addressing problems of accessibility to vaccines, low health facility coverage, suboptimal delivery strategies and unavailability of services in conflict areas and for mobile and displaced populations.

There are great variations in reducing maternal mortality ratios among countries of the region – ranging from levels below 10 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in some Gulf countries to around 1,100 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in Somalia by 2010. Somalia together with Sudan, whose maternal mortality ratio stands at 730 maternal deaths are among the ten countries with the highest maternal mortality in the world. In transition countries, only Egypt and Syria are on track to reduce maternal mortality by 75 per cent between 1990 and 2015 (WHO et al., 2012). It is too soon to determine the impact of the Arab Spring on maternal mortality.

With respect to the environment, all Arab countries share, in varying degrees, the major challenge of improving environmental governance and integrating environmental resources management into poverty reduction strategies and national development plans. The Arab region as a whole contributes less than 5 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions, but the impacts of climate change on the region are of major concern to policy makers who recognize that the Arab region will be negatively impacted by climate change.

In the last three decades, rapid population growth and the acceleration of social – economic development in the Arab countries were linked to significant increases in the demand for water. The proportion of population receiving access to improved drinking water sources is still low.

There are priorities that will contribute to reducing the constraints to achieving the MDGs in the Arab region. These priorities include: slowing population growth through lower fertility; food security, poverty reduction; adaptation to climate change; youth employment and decent work; good governance and effective institutions; reduction in violence and conflict, regional integration and development partnerships; gender equality and availability and quality of data.

Conflict-affected countries, their security situation and often their political environments remain fragile and require addressing. While this does not have to come at the expense of MDG targets, there is a need to acknowledge that without a secure polity, the provisions of public goods and services required for MDG achievement are more likely to be produced in a piecemeal, suboptimal and inefficient manner (UNESCWA, 2011). In order to address these challenges, the international community is already looking beyond the 2015 deadline for achieving the MDGs. At the global MDG Summit held in September 2010, United Nations Member States initiated steps towards advancing the development agenda beyond 2015.

IV. Summary and conclusions

The causes of the recent revolutions in the Arab world are numerous and complex, and cannot be distilled into a single cause. Although there are distinct economic and political differences across the Arab region, it is clear that the demographic trends have exacerbated many of the challenges confronting the region. High rates of population growth during the 1980s and 1990s, has led to large cohorts of young people entering labour markets in recent years. In the transition countries of the Arab region, the large inflow of young people into the labour force has led to a situation in which young people confront high unemployment and high rates of inactivity. Demographic pressures are not the only reason behind the protests, but they compound the problems. Creating viable jobs for young people is a precondition for poverty eradication, sustainable development, and peace; and in countries emerging from conflict, access to employment for youth is integral to peace-building processes.

As has been pointed out, the impact of youth bulges on political violence is expected to fade in the Arab region over the next decades because of declining fertility and shrinking youth bulge. Furthermore, the relationship between age structure and conflict can be maintained if countries with declining fertility implement policies to benefit from the demographic dividend. However, for countries such as Somalia, Sudan and Yemen that continue to experience high fertility and large youth shares, the demographic potential for conflict will continue to be a cause of concern.

Fertility decline has led to transitory increases of the proportion of adolescents and youth in the population, which may open economic opportunities. A demographic dividend can be realized if the economies of transition countries are expanding and youth are provided with opportunities for education and quality jobs for new entrants to the workforce. Conversely, worsening work and living conditions, and contradictions between higher levels of education of youth and scarcity of high-skilled jobs will feed frustration and continue contributing to social unrest. Finally, virtually all transition countries in the Arab region have included youth employment as a top priority on the political agenda and have taken measures in one way or another, so far with limited success.

Other demographic trends are also impacting negatively on the transition countries. Emigration and the related human resource drain on the one side, and additional pressure on labour markets as a result of immigration on the other will continue to pose challenges for countries. The deliberate reduction in the percentage of Arab migrants in the oil exporting countries of the Arab Region has eliminated a potential outlet for high unemployment in the transition countries. Finally, significant forced internal displacement of populations remains a serious obstacle to countries reeling from the consequences of the Arab Spring.

As regards the realization of the MDGs by 2015, high population growth continues to be a challenge for several transition countries. Among the least developed countries in the Arab Region, achieving the MDGs is unlikely even by 2020. The persistence of high population growth ensures that the demand for public services - are critical for meeting the internationally agreed development goals - will constrain the countries' ability to provide these services. Furthermore, conflict undermines development prospects.

As one observer noted, "Even though most Arab countries are experiencing the demographic transition from high to low rates of fertility and population growth and related population changes, the demographic momentum from earlier periods of rapid growth will remain a commanding force well into the future, imposing social, economic and political consequences for the almost half billion people in the Arab world by 2025. Without noticeable improvements in their economies or employment prospects, especially for much of the frustrated youth, more demonstrations, unrest and violence appear unavoidable" (Chamie, 2010).

The experiences of extremely varied countries swept up in the democratization process suggest that there are no insurmountable obstacles to democratization in Arab countries. They also show the importance of taking the long view of where the Arab Spring can lead. The lessons from other countries demonstrate that democratic consolidation can be elusive and can take different paths before achieving the ultimate goal.

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