

Policy Brief:

An Opportunity to

labour market lag markedly behind compared to other parts of the world. Women earn on a lower per capita basis and they stand to lose 700,000 jobs particularly in the informal sector where women are concentrated.

Women in the region, will be hard hit by the pandemic, notably in terms of access to services, job losses and ability to return to their countries of origin.

The region is home to 55.7 million

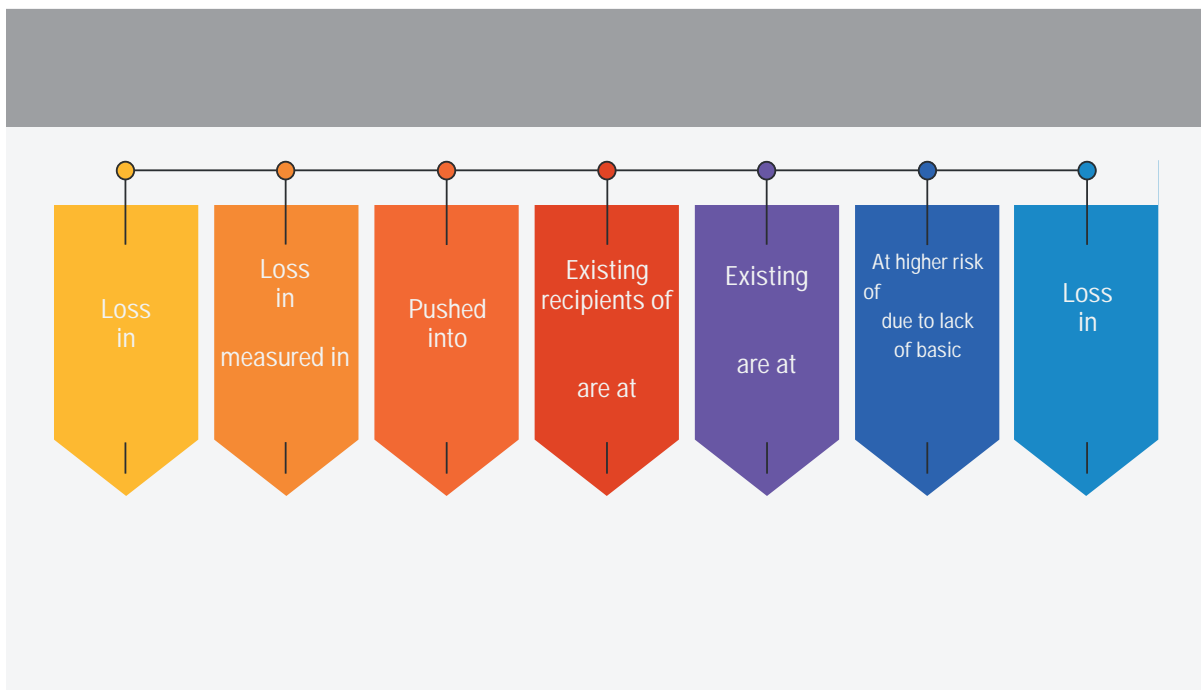
people, with 10 million forcibly displaced. 74 million people are at a higher risk of contracting the virus due to lack of access to health services. Significant investment is required in 2020 alone to address the risks and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the most vulnerable people in countries affected by humanitarian crises or otherwise at risk.

COVID-19 is also likely to exacerbate wealth inequality in the region, which already has the highest wealth inequality worldwide with the highest share of the adult population in the bottom half of the adult population in 2020.

No country in the region is spared the challenges of responding to the pandemic.

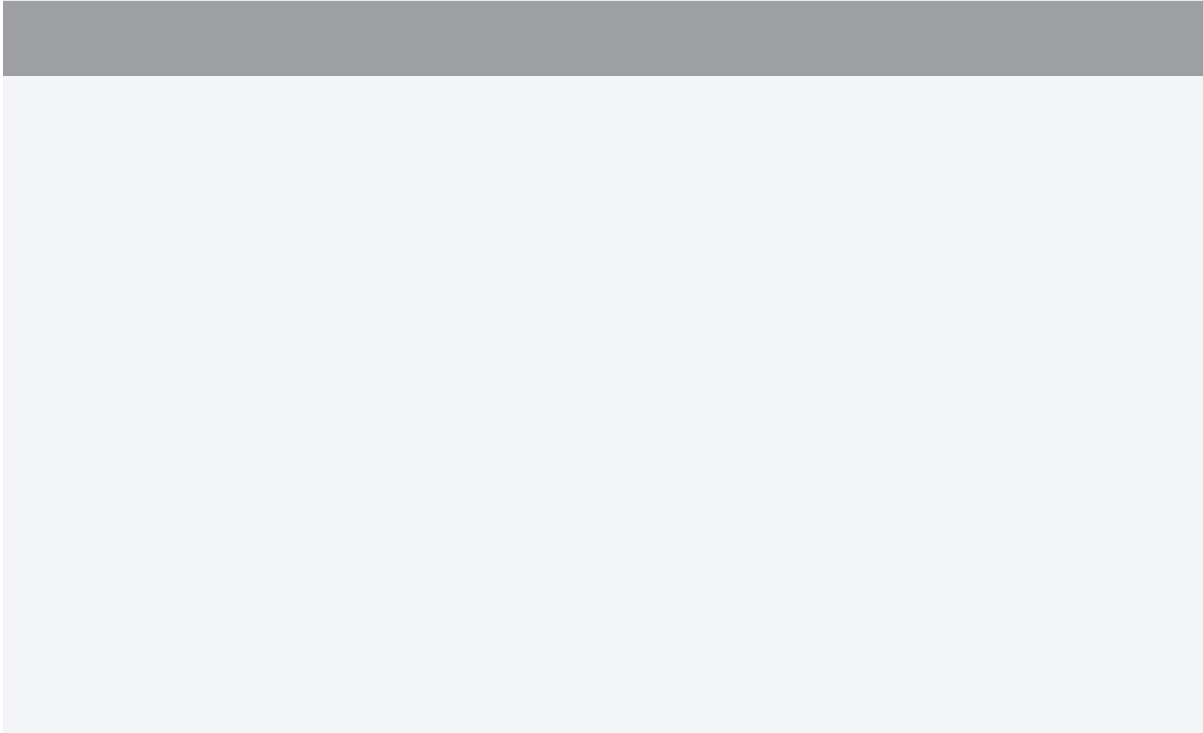
Oil-rich countries face constraints on their ability to provide adequate stimulus and recovery packages, due to the plunge in the demand for, and price of, oil. This has underscored the need to expand their sources of revenue beyond oil and embark on low-carbon development.

The capacity of middle-income countries to offer stimulus packages has been severely limited by a serious drop in revenues from tourism, remittances, trade and general economic activities. Unsustainable level of debts and low tax revenue have further constrained their response.



1. ESCWA estimates based on Forbes and Credit Swiss data.

Least Developed Countries (LDCs), highly



In addition to the structural weaknesses in health infrastructure, the pandemic destroyed precious health infrastructure and left many populations without access to even the most basic care. This has led to the death, or migration of, care workers and the interruption of health services, adding an additional unexpected pressure on national health systems to deliver services to 11.5 million refugees, including Palestine refugees, and 14.5 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the region, many of whom have been repeatedly displaced. Today, millions reside in camps, informal dwellings or underserved communities, which often lack regular access to health care and, crucially, water and sanitation services. They live in small overcrowded settings, which, if not impossible, exacerbating the possibility of spreading the virus and challenging basic containment and mitigation actions, while making them more prone to discrimination, stigmatization and collective punishment. Host communities are increasingly seeing the burden of caring for refugees and IDPs as unsustainable, and are seeking support from the international community.

The economic costs of the pandemic are likely to be high, particularly in sectors that are negatively impacted by the pandemic. These sectors include tourism, retail, and services, which will aggravate the impact of COVID-19 on the Arab region. The region's economies have not fully

UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/search?comid=56b079c44&&cid=49aea93aba&tags=globaltrends>.
International Monetary Fund, *Regional Economic Outlook Update*, available at [https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/REO/Arab-Region/Issues-Articles/2020/04/01/20200401-ROU-ARAB-REGION](#)

major role in the post-COVID-19 economic recovery. The poor road and rail interconnectivity in most Arab countries will negatively impact the contribution of inter-Arab trade to the recovery efforts. Moreover, while Arab air carriers witnessed a sharp decline in revenue, the sector risks losing approximately \$23 billion in revenue and 2.4 million in jobs in 2020.

is likely to drop of \$17.8 billion that could have been used in before the pandemic had already been used in 2019. The sector risks losing approximately \$23 billion in revenue and 2.4 million in jobs in 2020.

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immeasurable suffering and led to massive
economic loss over the last decade. Violence
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iment to responding to COVID-19, placing
millions of people in far more precarious
situations than they otherwise might have
been, from the health, humanitarian, human
rights and socioeconomic perspectives.

On 23 March 2020, the Secretary General called
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aid and to create conditions for sustaining
peace. A number of Arab countries endorsed
the Secretary General's call. Building on the

In this challenging context, the cost of humanitarian assistance continues to increase, while new obstacles arise in the context of COVID-19, including travel restrictions, logistical disruptions, and overstretched health-care systems. These challenges have added to concerns that lifesaving assistance reaches all those in need of humanitarian assistance across the region.

An additional \$1.7 billion is required in 2020 alone to address the risks and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the most vulnerable people in countries affected by humanitarian crises or at high risk of facing humanitarian crisis, in the Arab region.

The COVID-19 crisis is a threat to the well-being of all social groups.

Humanitarian crises in Arab countries were already on the rise prior to the pandemic. Inequality and discrimination have undermined the region's progress in all the SDGs, while impinging on human rights and threatening peace and social cohesion. The region was also witnessing the world's only increase in extreme poverty. Today, 1.3 billion people live in extreme poverty, up from 1 billion in 2015. The Arab region is no exception, with 10.7 million people living in extreme poverty, up from 10.5 million in 2015. The region is also witnessing a significant increase in the number of people living in relative poverty, with 14.9 million people living in relative poverty, up from 14.7 million in 2015. The region is also witnessing a significant increase in the number of people living in absolute poverty, with 4.7 million people living in absolute poverty, up from 4.1 million in 2015. The region is also witnessing a significant increase in the number of people living in extreme poverty, with 1.3 million people living in extreme poverty, up from 1 million in 2015. The region is also witnessing a significant increase in the number of people living in relative poverty, with 14.9 million people living in relative poverty, up from 14.7 million in 2015. The region is also witnessing a significant increase in the number of people living in absolute poverty, with 4.7 million people living in absolute poverty, up from 4.1 million in 2015. The region is also witnessing a significant increase in the number of people living in extreme poverty, with 1.3 million people living in extreme poverty, up from 1 million in 2015.

exacerbate youth's vulnerability within the labour market, as youth unemployment is higher, and unemployed than their adult counterparts.

Hundreds of millions of children are currently out of school globally. In the Arab region, more than 16 million children were already out of school in 2019, and/or poverty. These numbers are likely to increase, particularly for girls, even as lockdown measures ease and schools gradually reopen. Inequality in education, both in terms of quality and access, is high across the region, and the short- and long-term impact of lockdown. There are already alarming trends in terms of food security and malnutrition in the region, a situation likely to deteriorate as poverty is

set to increase and children who depend on school meals are missing out because of widespread closures. In general, social assistance schemes and socioeconomic policies do not target the long-term development of children.

It has become evident that inequality is a significant pandemic and its impacts. Arab countries have some of the highest levels of wealth inequality in the world. The average national wealth Gini is estimated at 83.9. Even when not considering within-country inequality, the average national wealth Gini is estimated at 73.6 compared with 73.1 in other countries worldwide.

¹ World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI>.

, which are also open, transparent and accountable, are key to managing societal progress and ensuring full enjoyment of human rights in normal times. They are even more critical in times of crisis. While COVID-19 is testing institutions and governance structures across the world, it is important for necessary lockdown and other restrictive measures to respect human rights so that all such measures are proportionate, transparent, time-limited and sensitive to the rights and needs of vulnerable groups. Many citizens of this region continue to seek more socioeconomic justice, less corruption and more rights and dignity. These demands have contributed to large protest movements and instability in some countries and have also been

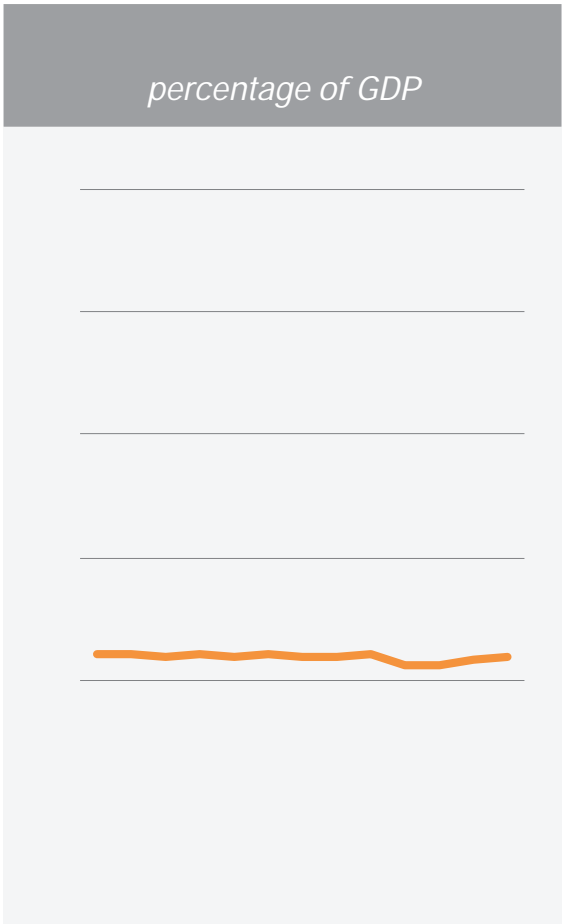
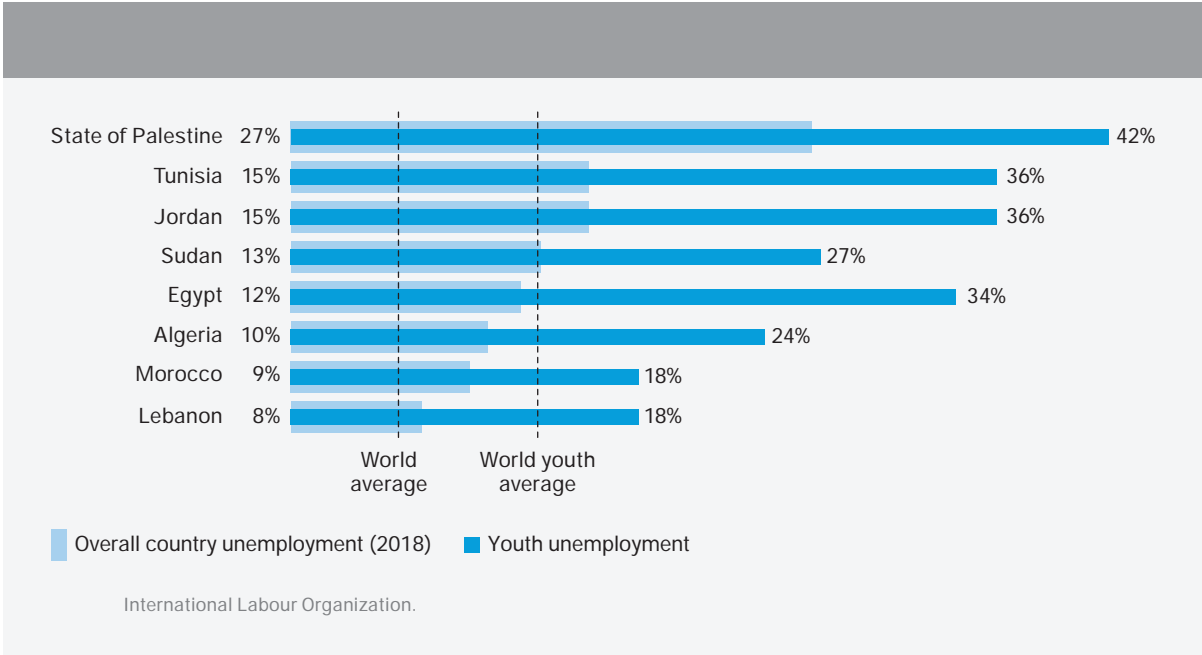
Trust in government has proved to be a major factor in effective handling of the COVID-19 pandemic around the world. Except for slight progress in terms of ‘voice and accountability’, governance indicators have declined over the last decade. are unprepared to address the COVID-19 pandemic in an inclusive manner. By undermining trust in institutions, a fundamental attribute of peaceful societies, structural severely reduced the capacity of some countries to focus on achieving inclusive and sustainable development for their peoples. Negative trends, regional spill-overs and intergenerational impacts continue to undermine the realization of the 2030 Agenda in many Arab countries.

An additional symptom of institutional weakness, is inequality that manifests itself within

and across countries. The geographic distribution of oil resources and the extreme distortion of income distribution are key causes and predic- In several settings, political groups have used the public sector to serve their own narrow interests, while underfunding basic human and physical infrastructure required to effectively deliver health services, education and other vital services, such as electricity, water and sanitation.

United Nations, "COVID-19 and Human Rights: We are all in this together", available at [United Nations, "COVID-19 and Human Rights: We are all in this together"](#), available at [United Nations, "COVID-19 and Human Rights: We are all in this together"](#)

World Bank World Development Indicators, available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators/preview/on>.



The Arab region can seize the opportunities of COVID response and recovery to make progress on human rights, reconciliation, displacement, humanitarian challenges, the root causes

religious and community leaders, as well as social media platforms and regional media outlets, should reject such messages and seek opportunities to advance a culture of tolerance, mutual respect and peaceful co-existence.

More regional cooperation would assist in tackling the many transboundary sources of fragility that plague the Arab region. The League of Arab States provides for concerted action by Arab Governments through mechanisms, such as the Summit of the Heads of Arab States, the Economic and Social Council, and the Council or the Arab Ministers of Interior. Greater use

rights and launch socioeconomic recovery. Furthermore, there is a need to strengthen national institutions to tackle human-made and natural risks. Greater resources are needed to enhance risk management and mitigation and support national and local entities on the front lines dealing with the health, social and economic impact of the pandemic. The United Nations, with its specialized agencies, is prepared to provide support to the League of Arab States and act in the spirit of solidarity and unity.



effectively assisting the most vulnerable,
while ensuring that no-one is left behind.



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