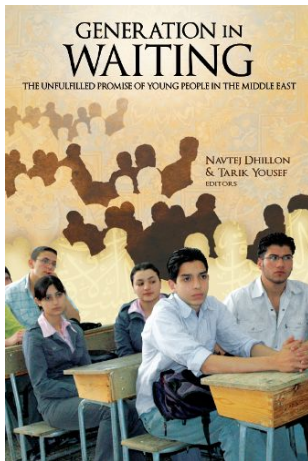


Fact Sheet

Generation in Waiting:

The Unfulfilled Promise of Young People in the Middle East



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EDITORS

Navtej Dhillon, Tarik Yousef

SELECTED CONTRIBUTORS

Ragui Assaad (University of Minnesota), Brahim Boudarbat (University of Montreal), Jad Chaaban (American University in Beirut), Nader Kabbani (Syria Trust for Development), Taher Kanaan (Jordan Center for Public Policy Research and Dialogue), Djavad Salehi-Isfahani (Wolfensohn Center for Development and Virginia Tech), Edward Sayre (University of Southern Mississippi)

OVERVIEW

There are over 100 million young people in the Middle East between the ages of 15 and 29, representing the largest youth cohort in the history of the region. While today's young men and women are more educated than previous generations, educational quality is poor. Moreover, these youth face diminishing opportunities to secure good jobs, access credit and housing, achieve financial independence, and form successful families. *Generation in Waiting* represents three years of research on the economic and social inclusion of Middle Eastern youth in these areas. Bringing together perspectives from Morocco to Iran, the volume is an essential resource for researchers, policymakers, civil society and private sector leaders hoping to better understand the challenges and opportunities facing this demographic. *Generation in Waiting* presents an agenda for economic development policies that empower youth as they make the transition to adulthood.

KEY FINDINGS

- Previous generations of youth in the Middle East benefited from free education, public sector job guarantees, and strong state support in the form of subsidies and entitlements. However, the severity of demographic pressures have strained these institutions, and for those born in the 1980s and later, institutions which once ensured intergenerational equity and improved economic wellbeing are no longer working.
- Countries in the Middle East have made significant gains in increasing enrollment in primary, secondary and tertiary education since the 1970s. For example, Iranians born in the 1980s have attained, on average, twice as many years of schooling as those born twenty-five years earlier. Nearly half of all Palestinian youth of age are currently enrolled in tertiary education. Despite the region's strong commitment to ensuring access to education, however, the quality of education remains substandard in many countries, as evidenced by the region's low average scores on international tests.
- Unemployment rates in the Middle East remain high, at nearly 11 percent, with young people suffering the worst labor market outcomes. Youth unemployment rates in the region averages between 20 to 25 percent, and many unemployed youth wait for two to three years for their first position. Young women often face the most daunting prospects in securing a job.

- Poor labor market prospects for the region's youth have led to delayed marriage and difficulties securing housing. These challenges are reinforced by weak financial markets that do not allow opportunities for young people to leverage future earnings in order to purchase housing and rental laws that create disincentives for landlords to provide affordable living opportunities to young families.
- The key to unlocking the potential of youth lies in improving incentive structures within existing institutions. This includes revisiting tracking and admission policies within regional education systems as well as public sector hiring practices, which propagate the skills mismatch. It also requires addressing norms related to marriage customs and rigidities within the region's housing and credit markets. Holistic, inclusive reform will require the respective efforts of local and national governments, international donors, educators, business leaders, and young people and their families.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Navtej Dhillon is currently a senior advisor on international development at the U.S. Department of the Treasury. Until September 2009, Dhillon was a fellow at the Wolfensohn Center for Development at Brookings, where he directed the Middle East Youth Initiative. Previously Dhillon served as a special advisor and speech writer to James D. Wolfensohn and worked at the World Bank. Dhillon's research focuses on development economics and in particular the transitions of young people. He has written widely on the social exclusion of young people in the Middle East, and his work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Guardian*, *Independent*, *The National* (United Arab Emirates), and additional regional newspapers. He also has been interviewed by BBC World Service, Public Broadcasting Service, and Al-Jazeera.

Tarik Yousef is dean of the Dubai School of Government and a nonresident senior fellow at the Wolfensohn Center for Development at Brookings. Yousef specializes in development economics and economic history with a particular focus on the Middle East. He has held the positions of associate professor of Economics in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and Sheikh Al Sabah chair in Arab Studies at Georgetown's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies. Yousef received his Ph.D. in Economics from Harvard University. His current research interests include the structure and dynamics of labor markets, the political economy of policy reform, and development policies in oil-exporting countries.

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The Wolfensohn Center for Development at Brookings and the Dubai School of Government launched the Middle East Youth Initiative (MEYI) in July 2006. The Initiative is devoted to promoting the economic and social inclusion of youth in the Middle East. Recently, MEYI has embarked on a new partnership with Silatech to generate solutions in critical youth areas by promoting new knowledge, innovation, and learning across borders. For more information, please contact: Samantha Constant (sconstant@brookings.edu or 202-797-2975) or Diana Greenwald (dgreenwald@brookings.edu or 202-238-3515) in Washington, D.C. or Paul Dyer (paul.dyer@dsg.ae or +971 4 329 3290) in Dubai. Visit the Middle East Youth Initiative website at: www.shababinclusion.org.