

Arab Human Development Report 2022

Expanding Opportunities for an
Inclusive and Resilient Recovery
in the Post-Covid Era





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ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
REPORT 2022

**Expanding Opportunities
for an Inclusive and
Resilient Recovery in
the Post-Covid Era**

Foreword by UNDP Administrator

More than two years have passed since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Its impacts have been far ranging and are still being felt across the world. In many cases, the pandemic has erased several years of hard-won gains in human development. This has been even more pronounced in less developed countries, fragile regions and vulnerable communities.

This Arab Human Development Report provides a timely assessment of what it will take to get human development back on track in the Arab States region in the postpandemic era. With its diverse country contexts, the region provides good examples of response measures, a diversity of lessons learnt, as well as evidence of deepening and persistent challenges.

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly affected governance systems, economies and societies in the region. Many of these impacts are interconnected and mutually reinforcing and need to be known and fully understood to be acted upon.

Measures to combat the pandemic, including laws, orders, decrees and regulations, have in many instances affected civic freedoms, which has decreased trust in institutions. On the path to recovery, finding the balance between protecting public health and safety and safeguarding individual civil liberties and citizens' privacy will be key. An effective recovery will require a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society response, with stepped up collaboration among governments, the private sector, citizens, civil society organizations and international organizations. The Report calls for rebuilding trust between citizens and government, ensuring freedoms and strengthening human rights and the rule of law to leave no one behind in the recovery.

While the region's growth recovered to some degree in 2021, the recovery has been uneven, and future prospects are uncertain in view of emerging challenges and macroeconomic volatility.

Fiscal deficits have widened across the region, with implications for government debt, particularly in oil-importing countries in the region. During the Covid-19 pandemic, many businesses shut down, and workers lost many working hours. On average, the region experienced an 11 percent loss of labour income, which pushed more people into poverty. The pandemic's impact widened existing inequalities, with workers in small or informal businesses more impacted than those in the public sector and women more likely to exit the labour market than men. Social protection measures were implemented by all countries and played a key role in the response. The Report calls for greater regional economic integration; promotion of job creation in the private sector, especially for women; and strengthened public financial management, with increased social spending to protect the poor and vulnerable.

Social exclusion resulting from poverty and various types of inequalities has a bearing on social cohesion in the region. Prior to the pandemic, with some exceptions, inadequate public financing for healthcare placed the burden on patients, often making it beyond the reach of the most vulnerable segments of society. Following the pandemic, unpaid care work increased for women, coupled with a concerning reported rise in the incidence of gender-based violence, as has also been seen in other parts of the world. Youth already faced inequalities in the education sector before the pandemic due to factors such as gender, family income, geography and the digital divide. During the pandemic, access to quality education was further compromised, especially in conflict-affected areas. Some positive measures were also enacted by governments towards greater inclusion, enabling digital access and protection of disadvantaged groups that could lead to more comprehensive reforms. The Report calls for placing

care, solidarity and social cohesion at the centre of the recovery effort.

Not least, nature was also impacted in the region before and during the pandemic, and its continued degradation creates barriers to a resilient recovery. Enhanced environmental services can support building forward better from the crisis, with new nature-positive recovery investments addressing decarbonization, investment in renewables, and sound water and waste management.

The Arab States region can foster an inclusive and resilient recovery by making human development a central tenet and expanding opportunities for all. The Report's broad recommendations provide a recovery path that can enable the region to diffuse the triggers of exclusion and crisis and promote increased resilience in the face of future shocks, knowing that there is no silver bullet and that integrated development solutions will be needed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Achim Steiner'.

Achim Steiner

Administrator, United Nations Development Programme

Foreword by the Regional Director, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States

The *Arab Human Development Report 2022: Expanding Opportunities for an Inclusive and Resilient Recovery in the Post-Covid Era* (AHDR 2022) is the latest in our Arab Human Development Reports (AHDRs) series. It focuses on understanding the broader impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the region and presents recommendations for recovery that can enable building forward better towards a more inclusive and resilient development. At the core of this Report is the concept of human development, which calls for expanding opportunities for people to live productive, meaningful and empowered lives, while also reducing planetary pressures¹ and learning to live in harmony with nature.

AHDR 2022 builds upon the legacy of the AHDRs over two decades that has engaged institutions and citizens in Arab countries in debates about factors that shape choices and opportunities available to people across the region. The aim of the AHDRs since their inception has been to foster understanding and consensus around regional and national development priorities and suggest policies, strategies and opportunities to address them.

As we reflect on the far-reaching changes in the region and in the world, ushered in during the two decades since the launch of the first AHDR in 2002, the sense of urgency is renewed. Today half the countries in the region are facing varying crises, while we host the largest number of refugees and internally displaced persons in the world. There have also been modest gains towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly on access to education and infrastructure; however, the Covid-19 pandemic and new challenges emerging in the aftermath of the war in Ukraine risk slowing down or even setting back the progress.

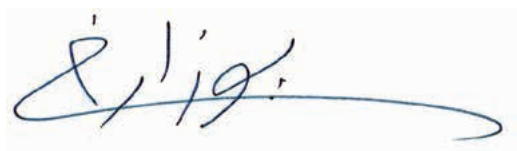
The Arab States region is notable also for a diverse range of development contexts—including high income, middle income, low income and fragile crisis-affected countries—but the rapid onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic challenged all to varying degrees, generating cascading effects across governance, economy and society. Despite the new challenges that emerged, there were also positive response measures undertaken that could be scaled up or pave the way to more comprehensive efforts. While targeted and context-specific solutions will be necessary for the diverse contexts, the Report points to several broad aspects that will be important to address:

- Critical steps will be needed to tackle the causes of inequality and vulnerability—for example, by creating social and economic safety nets, reducing the digital divide, promoting private sector growth that can advance women and youth, supporting responsive and accountable governance, increasing access to social services and enhancing social cohesion.
- The planetary pressures impacting the Arab States region require understanding the reality of our interconnectedness with the climate, dependence on fossil fuels, and depletion of water and other ecosystem services. The recovery can serve as an opportunity to reset our course towards sustainability.
- An inclusive postpandemic recovery will require the commitment and involvement of all stakeholders in the region, from governments to civil society, public to private sector, and academia and policy-makers, to effectively steer the course.

Knowledge and solutions exist to tackle the challenges; many are known and have been tested and

¹ United Nations Development Programme. 2020. *Human Development Report 2020: The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene*. New York. <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2020>.

shown to work. The region is also full of potential and brimming with innovative efforts. Our collective endeavour now is to create the conditions to allow these efforts to blossom and reach fruition. What will be needed is to act with resolve towards a new social contract founded in nature-based norms, generating economic opportunities for all, ensuring citizens' enjoyment of rights and strengthening their links with responsive institutions. This can provide the basis for prosperity, stability and peace. I invite you to read the Report, and I hope you will join in discussing, debating and amplifying its messages.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K. Bouzar', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Khalida Bouzar

Assistant Secretary-General, Assistant Administrator and
Regional Director, Regional Bureau for Arab States, United
Nations Development Programme

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