



REFLECTIONS ON THE ARAB SPRING IMPACT ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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The human development of the populations living in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East has played a key role in initiating the so called Arab Spring that led to the fall of dictatorial regimes as well as deep political and social changes.

The high birth rate of the countries of the region during the 80's and 90's was combined with a general improvement in the economic situation of the families and with an increase in the education level. On the other hand, the labor market and the policies adopted by the different governments of the area have not been able to cope with the high number of jobseekers among the youths. In fact the average ratio of those who enter the labor market to those who retire is about 6 to 1¹. This means that for every person who retires there are 6 youths entering the labor market. According to evaluations of the International Labor Organization (ILO), in 2011 the rate of unemployment among youths in the MENA region was around 27%, while the overall unemployment rate was around 10%².

¹ Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, "Human Development in the Middle East and North Africa", *Virginia Tech and Brookings Institution*

² Barry Mirkin, "Arab Spring: Demographics in a region in transition", *Arab Human Development Report Research Paper Series*, 2013



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All these elements contributed to create a large quantity of youths, with a high level of education, so completely aware about their rights, but with no job. This, mixed with the lack of personal freedom and democracy, led to the uprisings that took place from the end of 2010 in different countries of the region.

The changes in the human development of the area are just one of the reasons of the Arab Spring, but for sure one of the most important. So it would be interesting to analyze how the uprisings influenced the human development itself. This is exactly the aim of this paper. Maintaining the focus on youths, level of education, communication tools and human rights, I will study the differences occurred in the human development since the outburst of the uprisings. I will take into consideration also some technical data like the Human Development Index (HDI), the ratio of people living with less than 1,25\$ a day, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), life expectancy and the ratio of maternal death³. The analyzed countries will be: Egypt; Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT); Israel; Lebanon; Syria and Jordan.

Egypt

Egypt situation is definitely a case on its own in the sphere of the Arab Spring, considering the dual collapse of the governments, first with the overthrow of the thirty years president Hosni Mubarak, then with the military coup d'état that deposed the newly elected Mohamed Morsi in July 2013. After a few days from his deposition, the former president has been arrested. In August, after the declaration of a month-long state emergency, the army commenced raids against Brotherhood encampments that were protesting against Morsi's arrest. Violence escalated rapidly and led to over 600 deaths and 4.000 injured⁴ and to the arrest of most of the leaders of the movement. On 1st September Morsi was referred to trial on charges of inciting deadly violence. On 23rd September a court ordered the group outlawed and its assets seized. Even now, despite the recent referendum on constitution, held in mid-January, has given a positive result, the situation is still very tense and acts of violence came in succession in different parts of the country while General Al-Sissi, the Commander in chief of the Egyptian army, announced on 21st January to run for president. Return to normality still seems far away.

³ Not all the data have been taken into consideration for each country because they are not enough recent to be relevant for this analysis.

⁴ Manar Mohse, "Health Ministry raises death toll on Wednesday's clashes to 638", in *Daily News Egypt*, August 16, 2013.



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Another element that has to be taken into consideration in analyzing the context that led to the 2011 uprisings in Egypt is the workers situation. The decade preceding the uprising against the rule of Husni Mubarak saw the most sustained wave of strikes in Egypt since 1952. The strikes coincided with severe hardship for average Egyptian households, as wages failed to keep pace with the rising cost of living against the backdrop of the Mubarak regime's accelerated neoliberal economic policies. According to the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, during 2012 there were over 3,400 protests over economic and social issues, mostly labor actions. This number is nearly five times greater than the number of collective workers' actions in any year of the 2000s. Over 2,400 of these protests occurred after Muhammad Morsi's inauguration as president on June 30⁵. This huge number of strikes is partly due also to the fact that in the aftermath of Mubarak's overthrow and during the first months of Morsi, around 1.000 new independent trade unions arise, protesting against the policies of the new government but also against the state-sponsored Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions (ETUF). The coordination between so many organizations is very difficult and the gains obtained are very low compared to the efforts, but despite their weakness at the national level, the independent unions have mounted high-profile strikes that have put the demands for workers' freedom of association and collective bargaining rights squarely on Egypt's political agenda⁶. For all these reasons the Egyptian government should take into consideration the workers demands and should try to meet their request, in order to avoid the escalation of violence and this could be possible only by mapping the independent unions, including all the actors and the stakeholders.

The political unrest and the situation of instability led to a series of problems, mainly in the economic sector. In the attempt to offset the impact of the uprising, the interim government boosted spending. The temporary supply shortages that followed the upheaval, coupled with the rising of international prices of food and fuel, have been adding to the pressure on domestic price level. The inflation rate increased from 11.7% of 2010 to 13.4% of 2011. Revenues from tourism, one of Egypt's economic pillars, dropped by 60% and foreign investments deteriorated from 6.8 to 2 USD billions. Unemployment, that was decreasing in a stable manner in the mid-2000s thanks to the economic reforms, has risen of the 3.2%, showing the effect of the upheaval, reaching 12.2% in 2011⁷. Even the GDP per capita that was growing constantly in the last years has been subjected to an interruption. The only economic

⁵ Presentation of Alia al Dalli, Regional Director of UNDP in Cairo, at the conference "Impact of the revolutions on human development", Madrid, 1st of April, 2014

⁶ Joel Beinin, "Workers, Trade Unions and Egypt's Political Future", in *MERIP online*, 18 January 2013.

⁷ All the figures about Egyptian economy have been taken from Doaa S. Abdou, Zeinab Zaazou, "The Egyptian revolution and post socio-economic impact", in *Topics in Middle Eastern and African Economies*, 2013, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 92-115.



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element that did not change, compared to the period before the uprisings, is the ratio of people living with less than 1,25\$ a day: 1.7% of the population⁸.

Regarding women situation, that has not improved after the outburst of the revolution. Egypt occupies a very low position in world ranking, 125 out of 136 countries, in fact there is still a huge difference in estimated earned income between women and men (2.784USD per year against 10.629USD per year) and women are just the 10% of the members of parliament. All the most important indicators of the Gender Index, like economic participation or political empowerment, suffered stagnation or a downgrade, especially between 2012 and 2013. For example, the situation of instability has rolled back women economic participation of 5 years. Even those indicators in which Egypt normally obtained a very high score, like educational attainment or health and survival, have been negatively affected by the political unrest⁹.

Focusing on youth situation, their level of education remain unchanged with 12.1 expected years of schooling and 6.4 mean years of schooling¹⁰. Instead, what has been deeply affected is their transition to adulthood, in fact youth unemployment reached the striking rate of 54.1%¹¹ in 2012, delaying marriage and family formation.

With regard to the communication aspect, it is known that the new media has played a key role in the organization of the uprising, in the breakage of the curtain of the information controlled by the government as well as awareness generators, even though President Mubarak tried, during the first days of the upheaval, to eliminate nation's internet access in order to inhibit protesters ability to organize through the social media. What has been reached in Egypt is even more surprising if we consider that only the 26.7%¹² of the population has access to Internet. That has been possible because every Internet user was functioning as an antenna, spreading the information to his background.

Unfortunately, all these changes did not have a major impact on the respect of human rights. In 2012 Egypt held the first democratic elections in its history and ended a 31 years old emergency law. However serious human rights problems has not changed yet including police abuse and impunity; restrictions on freedom of expression, association and religion; and limit on the rights of women and workers. Police continues to use tortures in police stations and at points of arrest; journalists are still

⁸ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*

⁹ World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2013*

¹⁰ UNDP, *Human Development Data for the Arab States*, <http://www.arab-hdr.org/data/profiles/EGY.aspx>

¹¹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*

¹² UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*



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arrested and abused and in September 2013 an Egyptian court ordered Al-Jazeera's local affiliate to stop broadcasting along with three other stations known for their coverage of Islamist protests, saying that they had operated illegally. Al-Jazeera was considered sympathetic to the ousted President Morsi. In December 2011 the police raided the offices of 17 NGOs, confiscating document and computers, and in February 2012, 43 individuals from five foreign groups were charged with obtaining international funds illegally. Four of the groups were American, among them the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute, and the other was a the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

Many clashes occurred between Copts and Muslims during 2011, when Christian's houses, shops and churches were torched. The sectarian incidents continued through-out 2012 with almost no prosecution or serious investigations. The hope is that with the amendment of the new constitution, that is more liberal than the previous one, these acts of violence will stop. In fact article 47 states that freedom of religion remains protected and absolute and that the government facilitates the construction of places of worship for the three faiths. Even though sharia remains the main source of legislation.

A repressive Mubarak-era law on associations is still applied and systematic harassment of women and girls in public spaces continues without any effort by the government to halt this practice.

Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT)¹³

In the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) there has been a series of anti-government protests in different cities throughout the second half of the year 2012. In particular the demonstrators were protesting against the economic policies of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and the increasing living cost, mainly the raised price of the fuel and the added tax rate.

Of course the challenges that the Palestinian territory has to face are much more complex than the demonstrations originated from the so called Arab Spring and the living conditions of the population did not change a lot compared to the pre-revolutionary period. The poverty rate of the population is 34.5%; the overall

¹³ Occupied Palestinian Territory is not one of the country analyzed by the Gender Gap Report, so it has not been possible to insert specific data about gender equality.



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unemployment rate is 22.8%¹⁴, while youth unemployment is 49.6%¹⁵ and the situation is even worst in the Gaza Strip where unemployment rates remain among the highest in the world; GDP per capita was just 1.261 USD¹⁶ in 2012, while in 2005 was 2.465 USD; PNA can survive only thanks to funding by other countries.

Despite this difficult economic situation, the development of the society is quite good, thanks to a high education level of the youths (13.5 expected years of schooling and 8.0 mean years of schooling), illiteracy has almost been eliminated in recent years: adult literacy rate is 94.9%. The rate of Internet users is among the highest in the region, 36.4%¹⁷, only after Israel and Jordan. PNA institutions have reached the threshold of a functioning state in the key sectors.

The respect of human rights inside Palestinian territory is inevitably linked to Israeli interference. Israel imposed severe restrictions on Palestinians' right to freedom of movement, continued to build unlawful settlements in occupied territory, and arbitrarily detained Palestinians, including children and peaceful protesters. The West Bank is suffering from the Israeli physical occupation with the construction of the wall and of hundreds of checkpoints. Every two days a child is arrested with the charge of throwing stones during the demonstrations. These are considered as administrative detentions: the children do not have the right of being represented by a lawyer and they can be sentenced to jail for a period up to 10 years. It impeded the rebuilding of Gaza devastated economy by blocking virtually all the exportations and by preventing the inhabitants of the Strip to use part of their farmland and fishing waters. Actually around 1.7 millions of people are living in Gaza and they are totally dependent from the humanitarian aid but UNRWA is able to attend the needs of only 800.000 of them, considered the most vulnerable. Furthermore, due to the situation in Egypt, the illegal tunnels that were connecting the two countries have been closed, affecting negatively the situation in the Strip: thousands of Gaza inhabitants lost their jobs and there was a shortage of basic necessities¹⁸. Also Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank represent a threat for human rights respect. Hamas carried out six judicial executions in 2012, including after unfair trials; the authorities often denies the detainees' access to their lawyers and they conduct arbitrary arrests and torture detainees. Hamas security forces assaulted, arbitrarily detained, and

¹⁴ UNDP, *About the Occupied Palestinian territory*,

<http://www.ps.undp.org/content/papp/en/home/countryinfo>

¹⁵ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*

¹⁶ UNDP, *About the Occupied Palestinian territory*,

<http://www.ps.undp.org/content/papp/en/home/countryinfo>

¹⁷ All the figures about the development of the society have been taken from UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*

¹⁸ Presentation of Raquel Martí, UNRWA Spanish Committee Executive Director, at the conference "Impact of the revolutions on human development", Madrid, 1st of April, 2014



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allegedly tortured civil society activists and peaceful protesters who had called for an end to the political split between Hamas and its rival, Fatah. Hamas continued to ban three newspapers from Gaza printed in the West Bank. Hamas security forces destroyed scores of homes, leaving hundreds of people homeless, without due process and with inadequate or no compensation.

In the West Bank, Palestinian Authority security services beat peaceful demonstrators, detained and harassed journalists and online activists, and arbitrarily detained hundreds. Credible allegations of torture committed by the PA's security services increased. Women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory face high levels of violence. Nearly a quarter of ever-married women report that they had been exposed to physical abuse, 62% to psychological violence, and 10% to sexual violence¹⁹. In Gaza, the pressures of the Israeli blockade and occupation exacerbate tensions in a society in which women often suffer acutely under traditions that can discriminate against them. Palestinian women and girls suffer from limited access to justice. According to a UN Gender Needs Assessment, while 37% of women in Gaza perceive domestic violence as a main security and safety problem for women and girls, a mere 2% said they would go to the police for protection and help²⁰. The PA does not have a constitution; however, the Basic Law provides for religious freedom. The Basic Law states that Islam is the official religion but also calls for respect and sanctity for other "heavenly" religions (such as Judaism and Christianity) and that the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) shall be the main source of legislation. The PA requires Palestinians to declare their religious affiliation on identification papers. Either Islamic or Christian ecclesiastical courts handle legal matters relating to personal status. Inheritance, marriage, and divorce are handled by such courts, which exist for Muslim and Christians. Christians and Muslims enjoyed good relations although tensions existed. Existing tensions between Jews and non-Jews remains high.

Israel

Even Israel has experienced demonstrations inspired by the Arab Spring. In 2011 huge demonstrations took place in several cities of country, including the largest demonstration ever seen in Israel: 430.000 protesters throughout the country, of which 300.000 in Tel Aviv only²¹. Demonstrators were protesting against the high cost of housing and living expenses.

¹⁹ MDG Achievement Fund, *Striking out against gender-based violence in Gaza*, <http://www.mdgfund.org/story/striking-out-against-gender-based-violence-gaza>

²⁰ MDG Achievement Fund, *Striking out against gender-based violence in Gaza*, <http://www.mdgfund.org/story/striking-out-against-gender-based-violence-gaza>

²¹ Harriet Sherwood, "Israeli protests: 430.000 take to streets to demand social justice", in *The Guardian*, September 4, 2011.



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Of course Israeli economic situation is completely different compared to the other countries of the region. The GDP per capita is 26.720 USD²²; the unemployment rate was 6.9% in 2012, in slight decrease from the previous year²³; youth unemployment rate is 11.8%²⁴; the inflation rate has decreased from 3.5% to 1.7% in 2012²⁵. Thanks to its strong trade ties outside the Middle East, Israel succeeded in limiting the economic spillover after the outbreak of the Arab uprisings.

Considering human development, Israel occupies the sixteenth position in the world ranking: the level of education is very high (15.7 expected years of schooling and 11.9 mean years of schooling); the rate of internet users is the highest of the region, 65.4% of the population²⁶, in fact, also during Israeli demonstrations, social media represented a key role in the organization of the protests, with the creation a Facebook protest group.

Regarding gender equality, Israel occupies a high position in the world ranking, 53 out of 136 countries, and the general condition of women has not been affected by the Arab Spring. Even though there are still some big differences between women and men, like for example the estimated earned income (women earn the average of 22.776USD per year while men 34.973USD per year) or the presence in parliament (women are just the 22% of the members of parliament)²⁷.

Despite a great economic and social development, Israel still has a long way to go to achieve full respect of human rights within its own borders. Bedouin citizens of Israel who live in “unrecognized” villages suffer discriminatory home demolitions on the basis that their homes were built illegally. Israeli authorities refuse to prepare plans for the communities and to approve construction permits, and reject plans submitted by the communities themselves. There are an estimated 200,000 migrant workers in Israel. Government policies restrict migrant workers from forming families. The Ministry of Interior deports migrants who marry other migrants while in Israel, or who have children there, on the basis that these events indicate intent to settle permanently in violation of their temporary work visas. Israel continues to deny asylum seekers who enter the country irregularly from Egypt the right to a fair asylum process.

²² UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*

²³ CIA, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html>

²⁴ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*

²⁵ CIA, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html>

²⁶ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*

²⁷ World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2013*



Lebanon

Lebanon has not experienced large street demonstration because, unlike other Arab countries in the region, has a relatively democratic system. Even though some experts identify the massive street protests of the year 2005, the so-called Cedars Revolution that led to the withdrawal of the Syrian troops from Lebanon, as the first act of the Arabic Spring. Anyway what is greatly influencing Lebanese internal politics is the Syrian crisis, which threatens to plunge the country into a new civil war, as evidenced by the increasingly frequent attacks in the capital.

The Syrian crisis is in addition to a decidedly unstable domestic politics, characterized by the presence of Hezbollah, a paramilitary group formed under the impetus of Iran during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and it refuses to disarm. Hezbollah, which started with only a small militia, has grown to an organization with seats in the Lebanese government, a radio and a satellite television-station, and programs for social development. The organization has been called a state within a state. Hezbollah maintains strong support among Lebanon's Shi'a population. Hezbollah receives military training, weapons, and financial support from Iran, and political support from Syria.

In general, Lebanese economy is more stable compared to other Arab countries in the area, as evidenced by its GDP per capita that is 12.900 USD²⁸. The Syrian crisis is negatively affecting the country's economy, harming key economic drivers such as tourism, trade and banking and slowing the economic growth to the 1-2% range in 2011-2012, after four years of 8% average growth²⁹. Unemployment rate is 11%, while youth unemployment rate is 22.3%³⁰, but World Bank economists forecast that the unemployment rate would increase by nearly twofold in 2014 reaching 20% as a result of the Syrian crisis³¹. The inflation rate increased from 5.1% to 6.4% in 2012³².

Focusing of women situation, Lebanon occupies a very low position in the world ranking, 123 out of 136 countries, and the situation has worsened between 2011 and 2012. All major indicators, apart from educational attainment, have suffered stagnation or a downgrade. Women represent just the 33% of the overall labor force and their estimated earned income is definitely lower than that of men (6.154USD per

²⁸ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*

²⁹ CIA, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html>

³⁰ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*

³¹ Elias Sakr, "Economists: World Bank unemployment figure too low", in *The Daily Star Lebanon*, September 30, 2013.

³² CIA, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html>



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year against 22.776USD per year) and they are just the 3% of all the members of parliament³³.

In recent years Lebanon showed progress in each of the HDI indicators and its HDI value increased of 4% in the last five years, positioning the country at 72 out of 187 in the high human development category. The level of education is high (13.9 expected years of schooling and 7.9 years of schooling), adult literacy rate is 89.6% of the population and the Internet users rate is 31%³⁴. Unfortunately Lebanon continues to face serious challenges in translating relative financial wealth into broad-based, socio-economic progress for its people, with significant regional disparities and pockets of extreme poverty remaining, in fact the poverty rate is still 10.3%³⁵. Inevitably, the positive trends of recent years are put to the test by the arrival of a large quantity of Syrian refugees who now reached more than 1.000.000, and could reach 1.500.000 by the end of 2014³⁶, more than one-fifth of the Lebanese population. In Lebanon there are no refugee camps: Syrians spread all over the country on political and confessional bases. All the weight of crisis management lies on the local communities. In addition, refugees often stop in regions close to the border, which are among the poorest in the country and therefore cannot meet the needs of the refugees. This puts to test the resilience of the economy and especially of the society. In a country divided on religious basis, the arrival of thousands of Syrian Sunnis, threatens to destabilize the situation, as evidenced by clashes between Sunnis and Alawites that took place in Tripoli. Moreover some feelings of resentment are growing among the Lebanese population in the host communities, that's why the projects addressing Syrian refugees, especially in those regions close to the border, should try to meet the demands of the local population as well. Apart from that, the situation of the refugees is very difficult, often they gather in unofficial tent settlements. There are various in the Bekaa Valley, but the living conditions in those camps are very difficult and it is not possible to provided all the services needed as education and health. The INGOs are now trying to provide services of cash assistance, above all to help the refugees to pay the rent in Lebanon that is sensibly much higher than in Syria, but these programs are not sustainable on a long period because the refugees are completely dependent on it so there will be no exit strategy. Furthermore the Lebanese government does not have the possibility to control all the projects and the distributions of items implemented by the different organizations and some inside the country are reporting transparency problems in the aid provided by those INGOs. This huge influx of refugees is influencing also the situation of other minorities living in Lebanon. The already difficult situation of the Palestinians is even worst now because all the

³³ World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2013*

³⁴ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*

³⁵ UNDP, *About Lebanon*, <http://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/countryinfo>

³⁶ Figures of UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486676&submit=GO>



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humanitarian aid is addressed to Syrians. And all pro-regime Syrians are moving to the Shiite neighborhood in Beirut, that is already hosting the double of its normal population, considering that Hizbollah is supporting the regime of Bashar al-Assad and the situation is very tense with an increasing number of terrorist attacks³⁷.

Despite repeated appeals by international actors addressed to the Lebanese government in order to improve laws to stop torture, improve the treatment of migrant domestic workers, and protect women from domestic violence, nothing has changed during 2012. Women face discrimination under personal status laws, and vulnerable groups report being mistreated or tortured by security force members during arrest and in custody. A number of former detainees reported that security force members ill-treated them during arrest or while they were in detention facilities. The estimated 300,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live in appalling social and economic conditions. Lebanese laws and decrees still bar Palestinians from working in at least 25 professions requiring syndicate membership, including law, medicine and engineering, and from registering property. Migrant domestic workers are excluded from the labor law and subject to restrictive immigration rules based on employer-specific sponsorship, which put workers at risk of exploitation and abuse. Discriminatory provisions that significantly harm and disadvantage women continue to exist in personal status laws, determined by an individual's religious affiliation. Women suffer from unequal access to divorce and, in the event of divorce, are often discriminated against when it comes to child custody. Lebanese women, unlike Lebanese men, still cannot pass their nationality to foreign husbands and children, and continue to be subject to discriminatory guardianship and inheritance law.

Syria

Among all the countries of the Middle East, Syria is definitely the one who's paying the highest price for the Arab Spring. There, the peaceful initial demonstrations were gradually transformed into a real armed conflict opposing those loyal to the regime to the insurgents. Moreover, the situation is getting more and more complicated for the fragmentation of the opposition front and for the infiltration into the country of al-Qaeda groups, making the end of the conflict increasingly distant. Inevitably, it is the civil society who's suffering most from this situation.

Syria's economy continues suffering the effect of the ongoing crisis. The economy further contracted in 2013 because of international sanctions and reduced domestic consumption and production. GDP per capita stopped increasing since two years; the

³⁷ Presentation of José Antonio Naya, Director of ICU Lebanon, at the conference "Impact of the revolutions on human development", Madrid, 1st of April, 2014



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unemployment rate raised from 14.9% in 2011 to 18% in 2012³⁸, while youth unemployment is 40.2%³⁹; inflation rate grew from 4.8% in 2011 to 59.1% in 2013⁴⁰.

Political unrest and civil war have rolled back Syria's human development achievements by 35 years⁴¹; education services, who's level was quite high in the pre-revolutionary period, even though a bit under the regional standards (11.7 expected years of schooling and 5.7 mean years of schooling) with an adult literacy rate of 83.4%⁴², is now insufficient to cover the needs of the population; poverty spread all around the country with more than 50% of the population living in poverty conditions⁴³. All these elements, combined with the lack of other essential services, like sanitation and socio-economic infrastructure, are exacerbating deprivation and the rising tension have begun to threaten social cohesion. Inevitably the Syrian crisis has a very strong impact on the civilian population with more than 6.5 million internally displaced; the death toll would be around 120.000 with close to 600.000 injured⁴⁴ since the beginning of the conflict, but there are no reliable data; thousands of children have no access to education and health situation is precipitated with the spread of diseases like polio in many areas of the country; the destruction of entire cities, like Homs and Hama, and of the Syrian cultural heritage. Apart from that, the situation of the Palestinian refugees inside Syria, around 500.000, is even worst. For them is very difficult to leave the country because of their status, in fact the number of the Palestinian refugees coming from Syria in the neighboring countries is very low: around 50.000 in Lebanon and only 10.000 in Jordan. The worst situation occurred in Yarmuk Camp, that has been under siege for months: Syrian authorities were impeding the INGOs to enter the camp and thousands of people died of starvation⁴⁵.

Inevitably the crisis has deeply affected gender equality in Syria, even though there are some surprising data that have to be taken into consideration. Syria occupies a very low position in the world ranking, 133 out of 136 countries, losing 9 position compared to the pre-revolutionary period, even if there has been a slight increase in the overall score between 2012 and 2013. The economic participation of women has dropped by half after the outbreak of the war: women represent just the 18% of the

³⁸ CIA, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html>

³⁹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*

⁴⁰ CIA, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html>

⁴¹ UNDP, *Resilience-based Development Response to the Syria Crisis*, December 2013

⁴² UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*

⁴³ UNDP, *Resilience-based Development to the crisis in Syria and neighbouring Countries*, [http://arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/ourwork/crisispreventionandrecovery/successstories/Responding to crisis Syria](http://arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/ourwork/crisispreventionandrecovery/successstories/Responding%20to%20crisis%20Syria)

⁴⁴ UNDP, *Resilience-based Development Response to the Syria Crisis*, December 2013

⁴⁵ Presentation of Raquel Martí, UNRWA Spanish Committee Executive Director, at the conference "Impact of the revolutions on human development", Madrid, 1st of April, 2014



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Syrian labor force and their estimated earned income is around 1.437USD per year against 9.285USD per year for men. From the other hand, analyzing the other indicators of the Gender Index we can see for example that health and survival did not suffer any change, which is quite surprising considering that the health situation in some areas of Syria has precipitated. Even more astonishing is the fact that educational attainment and political empowerment increased compared to the pre-revolutionary period; even if we have to admit that the latter is still far from equality with a presence of women in the parliament of the 12%⁴⁶ and probably this increase is due to external pressures not to a real internal change.

As we have already seen for Egypt, also for Syria new communication tools, like the social media, have been fundamental in the organization of the demonstrations and in the information spread. The Syrian case is even more surprising than Egypt because we have to take into consideration that Internet users rate is just the 20.7%⁴⁷. Apart from that the regime, already in the pre-revolutionary period, put restrictions in the access to Internet, especially to social media.

Since the beginning of the conflict, both factions committed crimes and violations of human rights. Government forces and pro-government militia, known as *shabeeha*, continue to torture detainees and commit extrajudicial killings in areas under their control. Security forces conducted several large-scale military operations in restive towns and cities across the country, resulting in mass killings. Security forces subjected tens of thousands of people to arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions, enforced disappearances, ill-treatment, and torture using an extensive network of detention facilities throughout Syria. Many detainees were young men in their 20s or 30s, but children, women, and elderly people were also included. A large number of political activists remain in solitary confinement detention. Several former detainees said they had witnessed people dying from torture in detention. At least 865 detainees died in custody in 2012, according to local activists. Syrian government forces have used sexual violence to torture men, women, and boys detained during the current conflict. Instead, armed opposition groups have committed serious human rights abuses including kidnapping, arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and torture and carried out extrajudicial or summary executions of security force members, government supporters, and people identified as *shabeeha*. Unfortunately raping women and children is a major military practice among all factions in Syria.

Unfortunately, the political instability in the country has concentrated in Syria various jihadist groups that have exacerbated the conflict even from the religious point of

⁴⁶ World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2013*

⁴⁷ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*



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view, attacking churches and monasteries; kidnapping and killing nuns and clergymen. These military groups, among them Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), have imposed sharia law in areas under their control, mostly in the north of the country, blotting of public executions for adultery, kidnapping and tortures, even against children. In addition these groups, as well as other groups of rebels, have often kidnapped journalists, both in an attempt to help the negotiations and with the aim to obtain ransoms to finance.

Jordan

During 2011 and 2012 there have been mass demonstrations in Jordan as well. Protestors were initially against unemployment, inflation and corruption along with a real constitutional monarchy and electoral reforms, but then their demands escalated to a call for abdication of King Abdullah II. In October 2012 the King, under the pressure of the ongoing protests, decided to dissolve the parliament and to call for anticipated parliamentary elections.

Jordan's economy is one of the smallest of the Middle East with insufficient supplies of natural resources, which oblige the government to rely on foreign assistance. Other economic challenges include a high poverty rate, unemployment and inflation. The global economic crisis and the regional turmoil have affected Jordan GDP per capita, that registered only a limited increase in the last three years; and have influenced negatively key sectors like tourism and construction. Unemployment rate is 12.5%, even though unofficial data refer a rate around 30%⁴⁸; youth unemployment rate is 46.8%⁴⁹, while inflation rate rose from 4.4% in 2011 to 4.8% in 2012⁵⁰.

In the last few years Jordan achieved remarkable successes in many fields, including health and education with an adult literacy rate of 92.6% and good education infrastructures (12.7 expected years of schooling and 8.6 mean years of schooling). Jordan is also contributing to the Arab information technology revolution with a internet users rate of 38.9%⁵¹, the second highest in the region. Despite all these positive results, Jordan is still suffering from a high rate of poverty: 14.4%⁵². Unfortunately, the Syrian crisis risks to affect these positive results. Thousands of refugees are fleeing to Jordan on a daily basis, the current figure is about 600,000⁵³, around the 68% of them are women and children, while the men remain in Syria to

⁴⁸ CIA, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html>

⁴⁹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*

⁵⁰ CIA, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html>

⁵¹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*

⁵² UNDP, *About Jordan*, <http://www.jo.undp.org/content/jordan/en/home/countryinfo>

⁵³ Figures of UNHCR, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107>



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fight⁵⁴. This is putting a strain on the tightness of the Jordanian economy. This large influx of population is placing a considerable burden on the already poor local Jordanian host and their basic social and economic services, considering that around the 80% of the refugees live in the host communities⁵⁵. Crowding effects in the local market, in particular with regards to housing and labor, are widely reported in the Northern governorates. In fact the increased demand has pushed up the rents up to 300% in some areas and the increased competition in the labor market has put significant downwards pressure on wages, threatening to intensify the degree of poverty and vulnerability among Jordanians in host communities, especially in those households that had not long since escaped poverty⁵⁶. The present crisis comes at difficult time for Jordan, despite many efforts to engage in economic stabilization and liberalization; the country faces real economic and social challenges. Moreover, some resentment and a growing feeling of unfairness and exclusion are emerging among the host communities, leading to an atmosphere of increased violence and unrest. Furthermore, the situation is of course very difficult for the refugees inside the camp as well : the poorest families are obliged to sell their 12/13 years old daughters to wealthy men in order to get some money. This practice was almost eradicated before the Syrian crisis⁵⁷. In an effort to help the Jordanian government to deal with this crisis, in October 2013 an agreement was signed with the World Bank for a loan of 10 million dollars, that is part of a US\$53 million program of support to the Jordanian Ministry of Municipal Affairs co-financed by the Bank-administered State and Peace Building Fund along with the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Canada. The Project will initially support municipalities most affected by refugee inflows.

Considering gender equality, Jordan occupies the higher position in the world ranking compared to the other Arabic countries of the region, but still quite low, 119 out of 136 countries. The indicators did not suffer important changes in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. The economic participation, that started increasing again in 2011 after the economic crisis of 2008, is slightly decreasing since 2012: women represent the 24% of the overall labor force and their estimated earned income is 2.097USD per year while that of men is 10.031USD per year. Educational attainment, that has been halted since 2007, has been subjected to an increase in 2012, allowing the country to gain 14 positions in the world ranking. Also the political empowerment of women

⁵⁴ Presentation of Giuseppe Belsito, Representative of UNWOMEN Country Office for Jordan and Syria, at the conference “Impact of the revolutions on human development”, Madrid, 1st of April, 2014

⁵⁵ “National Resilience Plan” realized by Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (Jordan), United Nations and Host Community Support Platform

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⁵⁷ Presentation of Giuseppe Belsito, Representative of UNWOMEN Country Office for Jordan and Syria, at the conference “Impact of the revolutions on human development”, Madrid, 1st of April, 2014



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increased in 2013, but their presence in parliament is still very low: they represent just the 12% of the members⁵⁸.

To respond to continuing demonstrations for political and economic reform, Jordanian authorities increasingly resorted to force, arrests, and politicized charges. Jordan criminalizes speech that is critical of the king, government officials and institutions, Islam, as well as speech deemed defamatory to other persons. Hundreds of foreign migrants working in the duty-free Qualified Industrial Zones and in agriculture and domestic work complained about labor violations, including unpaid salaries, confiscation of passports, and forced labor. Jordan's personal status code remains discriminatory. Marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslims are not recognized. A non-Muslim mother forfeits her custodial rights after the child reaches seven years old. Perpetrators of torture enjoy near-total impunity⁵⁹.

Conclusions

The protests that have occurred in the Middle East, originated by the same motivation to obtain better life conditions and personal freedom, presented at the beginning several points in common, but later on, they evolved inside each country with different intensity and assuming national characters. So it is difficult to compare them.

Egypt, as we have already seen, represents a case on its own in the sphere of the Arab Spring because of the two revolutions that characterized it in less than two years. These brought deep changes in the society, especially in the new generations: from one side that allows the youths of being aware of their rights and to fight for a society less corrupted and more free in which it would be possible to find a job; from the other side it could worsen the situation because of the political unrest and the insecurity that are affecting negatively the Egyptian economy. The Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, perhaps because of the peculiarity of the context that characterize them, have not been particularly affected by the Arab Spring. Therefore they have not been affected by profound internal changes. Considering Syria, three years of civil war have completely destroyed all the achievements obtained during the last years. The economy and the society are falling apart; there are no more scholastic or health systems. Syria is becoming the home of small jihadi groups that fight against each other and against other groups of rebels. Lebanon and Jordan are both paying a high price for the Syrian crisis from the economical and from the political point of view, threatening to deeply affect their internal security and their social cohesion for

⁵⁸ World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2013*

⁵⁹ All the figures about human rights for each country are taken from *Human Rights Watch*, "World Report 2013, events of 2012".



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the next years, considering that, even when the war will finish, a lot of refugees will stay in the host countries.

Surely the Arab Spring has changed the aspect of the society but in order to fully evaluate the changes in the human development we need to wait because the situation is still evolving, in particular in Egypt or Syria, and also because some data will be relevant only in a few years.

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