



NATO Strategic Direction South Hub



March 2021

The Challenge of the Youth Bulge in Africa and the Middle East Empowerment and Radicalisation



NATO Southern Hub

The NSD-S HUB was established at Allied Joint Force Command Naples in order to improve NATO awareness and understanding of the opportunities and challenges from the South, while contributing to the overall coordination of NATO activities and efforts.

NSD-S HUB products are developed with a direct engagement of regional experts, open-source information from governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, academic institutions, media sources and military organizations. By design, NSD-S HUB products or links to open-sourced and independently produced articles do not necessarily represent the opinions, views or official positions of any other organization.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The “Youth Bulge” is not a new phenomenon, but during the last decade the youth population has demonstrated the power to reshape the political and security landscapes in Africa and the Middle East. The population growth, in combination with globalisation, and digitalisation in particular, has the potential for negative impact on the security environment in these regions and beyond. This is of growing importance since it has been assessed that by the end of the century the number of young people in Africa will be double the size of the entire European population.

The youth bulge is a multidimensional issue affecting every sphere of modern society. Failed aspirations of the well-educated young generation for successful transition have been exacerbated by increased unemployment and lack of favourable conditions for entrepreneurship. Moreover, the political exclusion of youths from decision-making processes increases their propensity towards radical views and violence. This creates space for Violent Extremist Organizations to exploit young people by providing them with a feeling of empowerment.

Nonetheless, with the right investments the potential of the burgeoning young population could be harnessed to include it as an integral part of a sustainable future in Africa and the Middle East. Possible ways to reverse the negative trend could be to adapt educational systems and the development of professional skills to the changing, contemporary job market. Additionally, in terms of the political dimensions, efforts should be made to ensure a successful transition where young people are more included in the process of defining policies which shape their future.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
CONTENTS	4
INTRODUCTION	5
APPROACHES TO THE YOUTH BULGE	6
EMPOWERMENT	8
ECONOMIC PROSPECTS	8
POLITICAL EXCLUSION	9
RADICALISATION	11
CIVIL PARTICIPATION VERSUS VIOLENT EXTREMISM.....	11
THE PROBLEM OF OVER-SECURITIZATION	12
MIGRATION	14
WAYS FORWARD	16
Short-term	16
Medium-term	16
Long-term	17
CONCLUSIONS	18
REFERENCES	19

INTRODUCTION

The “Youth Bulge” is a common phenomenon in many developing countries in Africa and the Middle East and, in particular, in the least developed countries. It is often seen during the development phase when a country achieves success in reducing infant mortality while maintaining a high birth rate.¹ The result is that a large share of the population is comprised of children and young adults. With the right investments and continued progress through the demographic transition, the youth can become a large, economically-productive population which can drive economic gain, known as the *demographic dividend*. On the other hand, if it is not addressed adequately, it can quickly become a great concern. Despite the fact that population growth rates are beginning to slow down, the population of Africa and the Middle East will double in size during the first half of the twenty-first century. Furthermore, by 2100 Africa’s youths could grow to be twice the entire European population.

The conceptual notion of what the youth bulge entails has been a source of contestation amongst scholars. Governments and institutions have shown preference for the biological or chronological approach to defining youths over the social approach on the basis that it is a more measurable factor.² This is reflected in the various normative frameworks of institutions for the youth agenda³ as well as National Youth Policies for countries which have them.⁴ The African Union (AU) defines youths as people between the ages of 15 and 35.⁵ Currently, Africa and the Middle East - with median age of 19.7 and 22 respectively in the past decade⁶ - are at a phase where those born at the stage just before fertility declines constitute majority of the population, thus are experiencing a “youth bulge”.

There are two interconnected sides of the youth bulge phenomenon in Africa and the Middle East. The first relates to the dilemma the governments face in managing and leveraging its youth population as a result of the socio-economic and political gaps in their societies. These provoke various responses from young people which can threaten peace and security. The second highlights the resilience of the youth in their response to threats and vulnerabilities caused by the former. Nonetheless, despite their vulnerabilities and the possible negative consequences, many of them are

¹ Lin, J. (2012) Youth Bulge: A Demographic Dividend or a Demographic Bomb in Developing Countries? www.blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/youth-bulge-a-demographic-dividend-or-a-demographic-bomb-in-developing-countries

² Spence, J. (2005). Concepts of youth.

³ See the AU Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security, and the various youth policies of countries in Africa and the Middle East, <https://www.youthpolicy.org/nationalyouthpolicies>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See the African Youth Charter. Date of Adoption: July 02, 2006. Date of last signature: June 27, 2019. Date entry into force: August 08, 2009.

⁶ See <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/africa-population/> and <https://www.youthpolicy.org/mappings/regionalyouthscenes/mena/facts/>

interested in contributing positively to peace and security.⁷ However, the feeling of exclusion persists, which is further exacerbated by a common lack of political will and commitment to effectively address it.⁸

APPROACHES TO THE YOUTH BULGE

The youth bulge can increase the statistical risk of conflict.⁹ Economic, political and education gaps fuel the risk by providing a steady supply of vulnerable youths for armed group recruitment.¹⁰ In response, Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) policies have been developed in Africa. They include: the African Youth Charter and its implementation roadmap, the Silencing the Guns by 2020 Initiative, the AU's theme on youth in 2017, the AU's Youth for Peace Program, inter-faith dialogue on violent extremism, the AU's Office of the Youth Envoy, the 1 Million by 2021 Initiative and the adoption of the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security in June 2020, all of which were in response to peace and security issues in relation to Africa's young population. Guided by the provisions of the AU's Peace and Security Council protocol, African Governance Architecture, and the Constitutive Act of the AU, they are in sync with UN resolution 2250 and 2419 and other initiatives by Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms. For the Middle East there is yet to be a concrete regional approach to YPS as a response to the challenges of the youth bulge.

While the problems persist, youths in Africa and the Middle East explore different options to adapt, escape, or challenge the problems. On the one hand, some wait to see what will happen, while others, described as the "elite youths", navigate this reality by working in tandem with ruling governments. On the other hand, some migrate in search of better opportunities, while others engage in socio-political activities and activism, such as elections, protests and even violent extremism. In particular, the exclusion from political and economic domains opens youth populations up to being exploited by extremist groups, thereby posing a direct threat to peace and security.¹¹ Due to the persistence of the system of exclusion, however, the AU took stock to affirm and recognize the roles and contributions of young men and women in peace and security.¹²

⁷ African Union (2020). A Study on the Roles and Contributions of Youth to Peace and Security in Africa. An Independent Expert Report Commissioned by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. <https://au.int/en/documents/20200701/study-roles-and-contributions-youth-peace-and-security-africa>.

⁸ Brainard, L. & Chollet, D. (2007). Too poor for peace? Global poverty, conflict and security in the 21st century. *Brookings Institution Press*.

⁹ Paasonen, K. & Urdal, H. (2017). Youth bulges, exclusion and instability: The role of youth in the Arab Spring. *Peace Research Institute Oslo*.

¹⁰ Beehner, L. (2007). The effects of "youth bulge" on civil conflicts. *Council on Foreign Relations*.

¹¹ Wright-Neville, D. & Halafoff, A. (2010). Terrorism and Social Exclusion: Misplaced Risk-Common Security. *Edward Elgar Publishing*.

¹² Atuhaire, G. (2019). African Union's Securitization of Youth: A milestone for Regional Coordination of Youth Programmes in Peace and Security. *Policy Brief 13(5)*

This report is the result of a joint production process between a representative of the African Union and the NSD-S Hub and includes the results of in-depth discussions entered into during a Webinar, relying on primary and secondary data sources, including youth representatives from the Middle East and all five of Africa's sub-regions, to investigate the various dimensions of this topic and ways forward. It begins by examining how confronting the issue of empowerment can have a dramatic effect on whether the youth bulge leads to positive rather than negative consequences. It goes on to analyse how, when empowerment is not dealt with, or dealt with insufficiently, radicalisation is very often the violent alternative. Migration, too, is looked into as a way for the young population to escape in search of a better life. Finally, a variety of strategic options for how to adequately take advantage of the growing youth population are assessed.

EMPOWERMENT

The economic and political status of youths is predominantly defined and affected by the exclusivity and entitlement orientation of some African political elites. This is in addition to cultural norms like “respecting elders” which is sometimes framed as a means to exclude younger people from meaningful inclusion when required.¹³ It is worse for young women, where cultural and religious practices further entrench their exclusion. Kenya and Nigeria are examples.^{14,15} In terms of religion, Davids (2018) identified the dilemma of Muslim women who

*...might be perceived, and therefore constructed, as the custodian of family values, modesty and purity. Yet the very essence that designates her as the custodian of particular values – and therefore at the centre of Muslim culture – relegates her to the periphery.*¹⁶

ECONOMIC PROSPECTS

There is still some way to harness this potential, however. Continued, inclusive and sustainable economic growth is essential for prosperity. This will only be possible if wealth is shared and income inequality is addressed. Youth employment and economic empowerment are essential components of a strong foundation in any society. Having decent work is crucial for young people and their future.¹⁷

In this regard, Africa and the Middle East have the highest youth population shares in the world and the highest rate of unemployment. This fact increases the dependency ratio which can also be a decisive factor in the increased probability of violence in communities.¹⁸

In addition, while young women have achieved remarkable gains in education over the past five decades, these have not translated into comparable increases in labour force participation. In numbers, it is 80% higher than those among young men, compared to an average gender differential of 20% globally.¹⁹ In essence, young people become more susceptible to shortages in real income

¹³ Amupanda, J. (2018). The African Union, the African Youth Commission and the Pan-African Youth Union: Sabotaging or bureaucratizing the youth? *Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien* 18(35), 73-82.

¹⁴ Ilesanmi, O. O. (2018). Women's Visibility in Decision Making Processes in Africa - Progress, Challenges, and Way Forward. *Frontiers in Sociology*.

¹⁵ Chika, I. & Nneka, U. (2014). Discriminatory Cultural Practices and Women's Rights among the Igbos of South-East Nigeria: A Critique.

¹⁶ Davids, N. (2016). Religion, culture, and the exclusion of Muslim women: on finding a reimagined form of inclusive-belonging. *Knowledge Cultures*, 4(04), 46-59.

¹⁷ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2018/12/WorldYouthReport-2030Agenda.pdf>

¹⁸ Kabbani, N. (2019). Youth Employment in the Middle East and North Africa: Revisiting and Reframing the Challenge. *Brookings Doha Institute*.

¹⁹ Ibid.

and are imposed to risk of falling below the poverty line²⁰ that increased the vulnerability to be exploited by violent groups.²¹

Economic productivity depends on the level of knowledge, skills and opportunities. For instance, in countries with natural resources, the youth population lack the required expertise for meaningful employment in the extractive industry. The dearth of regulatory institutions, to guarantee other social and legal protection to help youth enterprises strive for employment benefits and economic growth, remains a challenge.

Meanwhile, overregulation of the formal private sector has hampered the ability to create decent jobs. This has led to the expansion of informal sector jobs, which generally offer fewer benefits or protection.²² From another perspective, faced with a lack of job opportunities, some youth could turn to entrepreneurship and self-employment. But with limited credit history they face one of the main barriers to expansion – the lack of access to finance. This is common for many young peoples' businesses in small-medium enterprises, not registered as corporate entities but limited to a street trade, for example. Hence, they are more vulnerable to economic shocks such as waves of recession.

POLITICAL EXCLUSION

While, youth inclusion policies currently are focused mainly on economic concerns, the political, social and cultural aspirations of young people should not be underestimated. For example, in one case in the Middle East, the instituted policy of integrating the unemployed youth into the army is aimed at preventing their exploitation by Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) and keeps them away from committing crimes. Nevertheless, this also keeps them away from the job market where they could challenge adults or older generations. In this sense, economic exclusion, unemployment and poverty are poor predictors of political extremism, even if young people figured centrally in the Arab Spring protests.²³

Youth is an important phase of life for political socialization, and for acquisition of democratic norms, values and behaviour. Post-conflict transitions and processes of democratisation may offer equal rights and avenues for participation that can, in theory, be empowering to young people. But there are considerable barriers hampering their political engagement.

The first relates to age restrictions for political candidates and those running for office. Usually, it is almost double the legal voting age. However, there are a few positive examples of national initiatives, such as in Nigeria where, in 2017, the minimum age for the office of the President and

²⁰ Bank of Industry (2018). Economic Development through the Nigerian Informal Sector: ABOI perspective. *Working Paper, Series 2*.

²¹ Rice, S. (2007). *'Poverty breeds insecurity'*.

²² Kabbani, *op. cit.*

²³ <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/1042278/CIRSSummaryReport15YouthInTheMiddleEast2016.pdf?sequence=1>

governorship were reduced to 35 and 30 respectively. More usually, youths are structurally excluded from decision-making processes based on legal and sociocultural grounds. There are also significant economic barriers, with high candidate nomination fees and campaign costs as well as a lack of political financial regulations. Additionally, a lot of young people are deprived of opportunities in political parties because of the perception that only certain, usually older, people will be allowed to be promoted within the party and/or run as candidates in local or national elections. All this has caused the systematic exclusion of young people from political processes, debates and decision-making.²⁴

The generation gap of about 40 years is also highly relevant. As the largest in the world, it challenges the very core imperative of governance, as well as sustainable development and the potential for harnessing demographic dividends. It deprives the youth of leadership roles which reduces their ability to optimize their contributions to society, particularly in developing and implementing policies which are relevant to them.

All of the above are exacerbated by the lack of access to social infrastructures: quality education, healthcare, quality housing and other amenities coupled with structural and cultural gaps. These often encourage gender bias, as young women are a critical mass of the youth population which could have better developed economic value.²⁵ This creates immense difficulty for Africa and the Middle East to reap the economic benefits of the youth bulge, especially because the youth feel deprived and disenfranchised.

²⁴ <https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39165-doc-greaterinclusionofafricanyouthreportaugust2020.pdf>

²⁵ Buheji, M. & Ahmed, D. (2017). Investigating the Importance of 'Youth Economy'. *International Journal of Current Advanced Research* 6(3), 2405 – 2410.

RADICALISATION

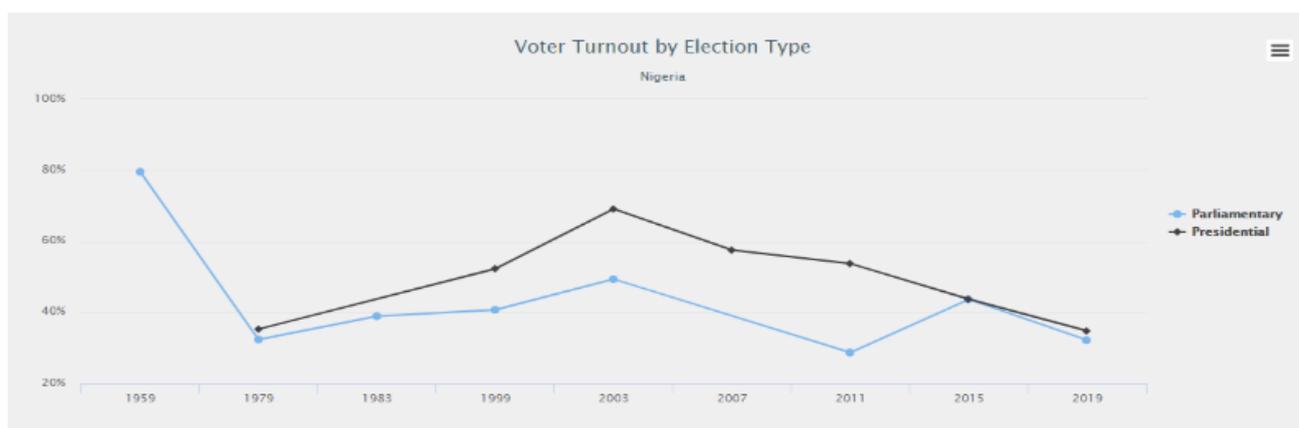
The lack of empowerment programs and continued political exclusion as set out above often causes an inability on the part of governments to generate the demographic dividend which the youth bulge could lead to. Worse still, the disenfranchised young people, living in poverty, poorly educated, feeling no likelihood of things ever improving, can easily be swayed towards more radical behaviour. While some still believe in the system and try to participate in political elections and the respective protests on a pacific level, others fell justified for a multitude of reasons to turn to VEOs.

CIVIL PARTICIPATION VERSUS VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Between 1970 and 1999, 80% of civil conflicts occurred in countries where 60% or more of the population were under the age of thirty. It has been observed that Africa and the Middle East have seen more violent protests and extremism than active participation in institutional politics.²⁶ For example, with respect to institutional politics, the participation for the most recent election in Jordan was only 29.9%. Figure 1²⁷ shows voter turnout in Nigeria since the 50s. There is a feeling of distrust and a lack of sense of belonging in the respective institutions.²⁸ These two examples support what was described as the “Democracy Paradox” in Galstyan’s submission:

*In theory, the enlargement of democratic institutions should have increased the level of political participation of wider society, including youth, but the same studies show a steady decrease in public participation and a widening gap between politics and citizens.*²⁹

Figure 1



Protests are attached to the level of political awareness, information and dissatisfaction. In this regard, the #EndSARS protest movement in Nigeria which initially started with demands for

²⁶ Galstyan, M. (2019). Youth Political Participation: Literature Review. *European Commission and the Council of Europe*.

²⁷ See IDEA for more on voter turnout: <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voter-turnout>.

²⁸ Galstyan, *op. cit.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

dismantling the country's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit has turned into a symbolic platform of all disenfranchised youths.³⁰

There are several issues that underlie violent extremism,³¹ with poverty and unemployment often highlighted as primary causes.³² Moreover, disempowerment is exacerbated by urbanization and modernization. Both are products of globalization, exploited by terrorist networks to disseminate their message and draw people into violent extremism.³³ However, many terrorists are well-educated and from the middle classes,³⁴ as witnessed in Africa and the Middle East. For example, the ringleader of the Al-Shabaab cell which carried out the attacks in eastern Kenya in 2018, close to the border with Somalia, was a lawyer from a middle-class family. Neither income nor education was the problem. Rather, his motivation was the perceived marginalization and discrimination against his community by the Kenyan government.

Another cause is personal relationships and influence.³⁵ Kinship encourages young men and women who have a sense of purposelessness or living in deprivation and exclusion to join armed groups in response to their dissatisfaction. Generally, extremist groups stress disenfranchisement in addition to religious propaganda.

Indeed, personal dissatisfaction escalates at the community level which also attracts extremism.³⁶ The youth tend to act based on communal feelings of injustice with personal considerations being secondary. For example, the Al-Hawl camp in Syria, which hosts family members of the so called "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" (ISIS), is occupied by thousands of youths who are excluded from mainstream society because of the "ISIS" label. This encourages them to follow that very path because their needs are not properly, if at all, catered to. Thus, they are increasingly likely to join Daesh or other VEOs.

THE PROBLEM OF OVER-SECURITIZATION

Evidence from literature demonstrates that over-securitization fuels violent extremism.³⁷ With respect to the youth bulge in Africa and the Middle East, economically fragile border communities with active conflicts are an instance. Due to limited economic opportunities, youths in these communities often engage in illicit economic activities such as smuggling drugs, fuel and fertilizers, which can be also used to make explosives. A heavy security presence makes it more difficult, and

³⁰ Effoduh, J. (2020) Why Nigeria's #EndSARS movement is more than a call to end police brutality. *World Economic Forum*.

³¹ Ranstorp, M. (2016). The root causes of violent extremism. *RAN Issue paper 4*.

³² Brainard, L. & Chollet, D. *op. cit.*

³³ Saleh, S. (2020). Radicalisation and the identity crisis in the Middle East. *European Eye on Radicalisation*.

³⁴ Angus, C. (2016). Radicalisation and violent extremism: Causes and responses. *New South Wales Parliamentary Research Service*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Wright-Neville, D. & Halafoff, A. *op. cit.*

³⁷ Charrett, C. (2009). A critical application of securitization theory: overcoming the normative dilemma of writing security. *International Catalan Institute for Peace, Working Paper, (2009/7)*.

sometimes impossible, to carry out with these activities. As a result, some are offered or actively seek to join active combat groups, or serve as informants, as an alternative. Security forces, especially foreign ones, are easily framed as enemies working with governments to enforce economic hardship and further marginalisation. Hence youths become potential recruits for violent extremist groups. Thus, violent extremism is seen as a replacement of whatever illegal business they are deprived of and a path to justice and empowerment. Countries in the Sahel are examples.³⁸ While increased security has had some success, it must be sensitive to the root causes and drivers of violence in the context of economic opportunities in many of these countries.³⁹

³⁸ Sour, L. (2015) The Strategy of Securitization in African Sahel: Regional Arrangements and Transnational Security Challenges.

³⁹ Kundnani, A., & Hayes, B. (2018). The Globalisation of Countering Violent Extremism Policies. *Transnational Institute, Amsterdam, the Netherlands*.

MIGRATION

The above situation may contribute to illegal migration with negative consequences for the security landscape. Globalization has increased fluid movements of people across the world. While migration is not new, what is novel is the extent to which it creates opportunities and challenges for peace and security. With global economic inequalities as well as socio-historical affiliations within Africa and the Middle East, youths have been exploring the options of moving from one place to another in search of a better life.

At the World Economic Forum, three major causes of migration were highlighted: economic, socio-political and ecological. All are evident in Africa and the Middle East.⁴⁰ Economic factors mostly refer to the labour market, income and standard of living, economic environment and opportunities, industrial and educational capacity.⁴¹ Introducing the concept of “waithood”, migration helps to secure the financial foundation for young men and women transiting to adulthood.⁴² Socio-political factors are in relation to political instability and conflict, safety and security concerns with respect to identity, availability and access to social infrastructure, independence and freedom.⁴³ Ecological factors in Africa are mostly associated with natural resource management, climate change and natural disasters.⁴⁴ This affects those who depend on rural livelihood which constitute a large share of young people’s work. All these are double-sided: the departure point and destination.

Furthermore, the implicit nexus between education and migration which explains a thread between the youth bulge and violent extremism (as well as other forms of violence) or economic (dis)advantage is predominant. Literacy levels often determine migration patterns and the nature of illicit or legal activities. See Figure 2 below, in which instances of the former and latter include Zimbabwe/Zambia and Tanzania/Mozambique respectively.

Figure 2



⁴⁰ World Economic Forum. (2017). Migration and its impact on cities.

⁴¹ Carling, J. & Talleraas, C. (2016). Root causes and drivers of migration. *Peace Research Institute Oslo*.

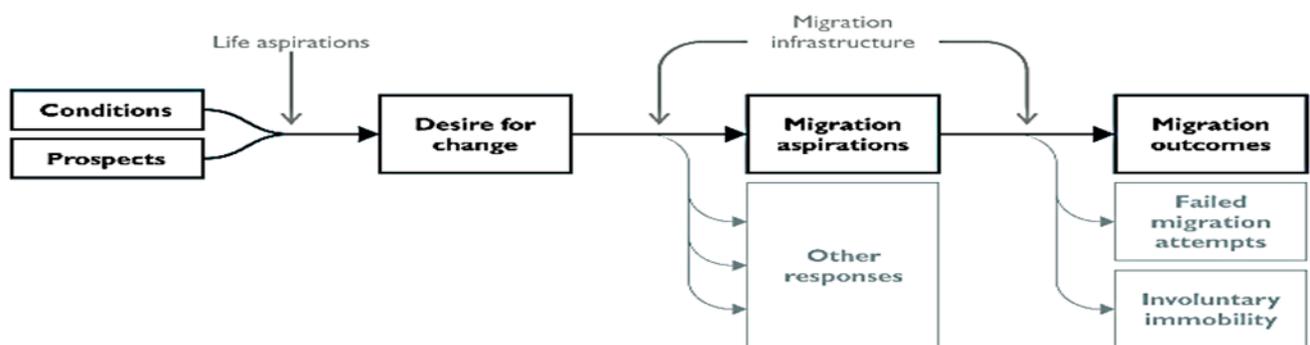
⁴² Hernandez-Carretero, M. & Carling, J. (2012). Beyond “Kamikaze Migrants”: Risk Taking in West African Boat Migration to Europe. *Human Organization*, 71(4), 407-416.

⁴³ Carling, J. & Talleraas, C. *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ World Economic Forum, *op.cit*

The most common narrative about education and migration usually revolve around young people leaving Africa or the Middle East to study in societies with better educational opportunities.⁴⁵ In this case, the desire for better education is the pull factor. However, there are scenarios where the search for better economic opportunities is the push factor, but it is highly dependent on the individual's quality of education. On the one hand, in a country like Zimbabwe and Zambia where they were able to revamp the standards, young people have more options in the legitimate job market, thus making legal migration relatively easier. Thus, they are able to make remittances to the home country, thereby improving the economy. On the other hand, there are countries like Tanzania and Mozambique where the educational quality is low. This makes it difficult for many young people to find placement in the legal job market. As a result, they depend on illegal migration and are more susceptible to the illicit job market, violent extremism, drug trafficking, and so on. This creates insecurity in both the host and home country. See figure 3 below:

Figure 3



Source: Carling & Talleraas (2016).⁴⁶

When the conditions of one's home country do not align with life aspirations and there is exposure to the prospects of other climes, the desire to change is stirred. When acted upon, the outcomes may either be positive or negative. Hence, more often than not, migration is a response to the conditions of the home country and prospects of the destination.

⁴⁵ Baas, M. (2019). The Education-Migration Industry: International Students, Migration Policy and the Question of Skills.

⁴⁶ Carling, J. & Talleraas, C. *op. cit.*

WAYS FORWARD

Turning the “youth bulge” phenomenon into a *demographic dividend* depends on four pillars: Employment and Entrepreneurship; Education and Skills Development; Health and Well-Being; and Rights, Governance and Empowerment.⁴⁷ Embedded in these are short-, medium-, and long-term goals. However, for meaningful progress, there are two vital elements - interventions should not be undertaken on a one-off approach and the investment in capacity building (knowledge and skill) must be prioritised.

Short-term

Many young men and women depend on the informal sector for their economic sustenance. However, to ensure sustainability of livelihoods, there is a need for transition to the formal sector including by way of job creation. Therefore, it means youth productivity and income in the informal sector should be increasingly explored.

Many youths are deficient in terms of decision-making processes. Thus, capacity building to improve the knowledge and skill of young men and women in terms of policy making, implementation and evaluation is required to promote their active and meaningful inclusion.

Medium-term

Regarding the transition into the formal sector, there is a need for improved infrastructure, connectivity of information flows, trade facilitation and better management in the public and private sector for job creation. The African Continental Free Trade Agreement can promote this just as it requires it to record success. The major concern for youths, however, is that countries need to find a way to address the following: Freedom of Movement; Ease of Doing Business; and legislation which protects and guarantees the immunity for private assets and property in the case of inter-governmental clashes with respect to home and host governments.

Political party reforms are required to mainstream youth in the decision-making processes within the political parties, as well as continuous youth-government forums, especially with respect to specific communities. The inter-generational nature of this process would allow easy transition which may also be replicated for the next generation of youths.

With respect to over-securitization, there is a need to leverage existing mechanisms such as continental and regional early warning mechanisms. In this regard, this could be achieved by promoting enhanced cooperation between the law-enforcement sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs). This should be simultaneously accompanied with socio-political and economic measures to diminish the possibility of violent extremism as an alternative hope or solution to perceived injustice. A challenge here is how to

⁴⁷ African Union Commission & Population Reference Bureau (2019). *Africa's Future and the Data Defining Their Lives. Policy Brief.*

leverage the exchange of information between law-enforcement and NGOs/CSOs in terms of need-to-know procedure and to build trust and increase the level of cooperation.

Long-term

With the future of work as a major concern, rescaling the current labour market and upscaling educational institutions in terms of technological development is vital. African and Middle East countries should set an institutionalized quota for youth in all policy making, implementation and evaluation processes. Inclusion at all levels is needed while also remaining sensitive to gender issues. Therefore, the quota should prioritize young men and women equally.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ AU Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security.

CONCLUSIONS

This joint report by the African Union and the NSD-S Hub highlights the variety of dimensions of the “youth bulge” phenomenon and shows the importance of power, access, equality, recognition, meaningful representation and participation. Notably, they are vital elements to prevent and counter violent extremism across the regions. However, the above mentioned options are not exhaustive and represent a foundation with which Africa and the Middle East could turn towards a positive outcome of the youth bulge.

The challenges in the region, already difficult to overcome, are likely to worsen due to the rapidly growing population unless measures are taken. So, the focus of reform is not simply about getting youth into governance, or improving their socio-economic conditions, but about refreshing and reforming the public sector and the governance culture by introducing change via individuals who can support the governments’ growth, development and digitalisation.

It is important to recognize that today’s rapidly increasing child and youth populations will soon constitute working age populations. Investing in their health, protection and education holds the promise for reaping a *demographic dividend* in the 21st century which could lift hundreds of millions out of extreme poverty and contribute to enhanced prosperity, stability and peace. The years between now and 2030 are critical for building human capital. Investing in the youth is imperative and needs to be complemented by an equally strong emphasis on investing in children to establish the strongest foundation for Africa and the Middle East’s future.

REFERENCES

1. African Union (2020). A study on the roles and contributions of youth to peace and security in Africa. An Independent Expert Report Commissioned by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. Retrieved from <https://au.int/en/documents/20200701/study-roles-and-contributions-youth-peace-and-security-africa>
2. African Union Commission & Population Reference Bureau (2019). Africa's Future and the Data Defining Their Lives. *Policy Brief, 1-14*
3. Amupanda, J. S. (2018). The African Union (AU), the African Youth Commission (AYC) and the Pan-African Youth Union (PYU): Sabotaging or bureaucratizing the youth? *Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien 18(35), 73-82*
4. Angus, C. (2016). Radicalisation and violent extremism: Causes and responses. *New South Wales Parliamentary Research Service.*
5. Attuhaire, G. (2019). African Union's Securitization of Youth: A milestone for Regional Coordination of Youth Programmes in Peace and Security. *Policy Brief 13(5)*
6. AU Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security
7. Baas, M. (2019). The Education-Migration Industry: International Students, Migration Policy and the Question of Skills. *International Migration, 57(3), 222-234.*
8. Bank of Industry (2018). Economic Development through the Nigerian Informal Sector: ABOI perspective. *Working Paper Series 2*
9. Beehner, L. (2007). The effects of 'youth bulge' on civil conflicts. *Council on Foreign Relations, 27, 1-*
10. Bigio, J. & Vogelstein, R. (2019). Women and Terrorism: Hidden Threats, Forgotten Partners. *Council on Foreign Relations.*
11. Brainard, L. & Chollet, D. (Eds.). (2007). Too poor for peace? Global poverty, conflict, and security in the 21st century. *Brookings Institution Press.*
12. Buheji, M. & Ahmed, D. (2017). Investigating the Importance of 'Youth Economy'. *International Journal of Current Advanced Research 6(3), 2405 - 2410*
13. Carling, J. & Talleraas, C. (2016). Root causes and drivers of migration. *Peace Research Institute Oslo, 1-44.*
14. Charrett, C. (2009). A critical application of securitization theory: overcoming the normative dilemma of writing security. *International Catalan Institute for Peace, Working Paper, (2009/7).*
15. Chika, I. S. & Nneka, U. (2014). Discriminatory Cultural Practices and Women's Rights among the Igbos of South-East Nigeria: A Critique. *JL Policy & Globalization, 25, 18.*

16. Davids, N. (2016). Religion, culture, and the exclusion of Muslim women: on finding a reimagined form of inclusive-belonging. *Knowledge Cultures*, 4(04), 46-59.
17. Gallen, Y. (2018). Motherhood and the gender productivity gap. *Becker Friedman Institute for Research in Economics Working Paper 41*.
18. Galstyan, M. (2019). Youth Political Participation: Literature Review. *European Commission and the Council of Europe*. p.7.
19. Hernandez-Carretero, M. & Carling, J. (2012). Beyond “Kamikaze Migrants”: Risk Taking in West African Boat Migration to Europe. *Human Organization*, 71(4), 407-416.
20. Ilesanmi, O. O. (2018). Women's Visibility in Decision Making Processes in Africa - Progress, Challenges, and Way Forward. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 3, 38.
21. Kara, N. (2007). Beyond tokenism: Participatory evaluation processes and meaningful youth involvement in decision-making. *Children Youth and Environments*, 17(2), 563-580.
22. Kundnani, A. & Hayes, B. (2018). The Globalisation of Countering Violent Extremism Policies. *Transnational Institute, Amsterdam, the Netherlands*.
23. OECD/ILO (2019). Tackling Vulnerability in the Informal Economy. *Development Centre Studies. OECD Publishing*.
24. Paasonen, K. & Urdal, H. (2017). Youth bulges, exclusion and instability: The role of youth in the Arab Spring. *Peace Research Institute Oslo*.
25. Ranstorp, M. (2016). The root causes of violent extremism. *RAN Issue paper, 4*.
26. Rice, S. E. (2007). Poverty breeds insecurity. *Too poor for peace*, 31-49.
27. Sour, L. The Strategy of Securitization in African Sahel: Regional Arrangements and Transnational Security Challenges.
28. Spence, J. (2005). Concepts of youth.
29. The Federal Republic of Nigeria. Bouncing Back: The Nigerian Economic Sustainability Plan
30. Ukeje, C. U. & Iwilade, A. (2012). A farewell to innocence? African youth and violence in the twenty-first century. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence (IJCV)*, 6(2), 338-350.
31. World Economic Forum. (2017). Migration and its impact on cities.
32. Wright-Neville, D. & Halafoff, A. (2010). Terrorism and Social Exclusion: Misplaced Risk-Common Security. *Edward Elgar Publishing*.

THIS PAGE HAS BEEN INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

