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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The workshop related to The Challenge of Youth Bulge in Africa and the Middle East was organized by the NATO Strategic Direction South (NSD-S) Hub on 31st March and 1st April 2021. This complex and cross-cutting project, organized in partnership with the Nato Defense College (NDC) as part of the NATO

Regional Cooperation Course (NRCC), was made possible by a collective effort structured around a network of trusted partners, namely the African Union Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division (CPEWD - AU, Ethiopia) and the Policy Centre for the New South (PCNS, Morocco). We also thank the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS, Ethiopia) for the productive relationship we have developed with them on this topic.

The event opened on the morning of 31st March, 2021, with an intervention at the Nato Defense College in Rome by the Director of the Hub, Brigadier General Davide RE.

This was followed in the afternoon by a first panel presenting the key findings of the papers that examined the challenges posed by the Youth Bulge, focusing in particular on empowerment and radicalization; migration and brain drain; and education and employment. The presentations elicited an interactive exchange with the NRCC participants.

The following day, the Hub and the NDC had the opportunity to exchange further with youth representatives from the MENA region and Sub-Saharan Africa on the topic at hand.

The objective of this report is to compile and outline the main findings of the work conducted by the HUB and its partners. The initial working papers are available on the Hub's website:



- Empowerment and Radicalisation (with the African Union): [Youth Bulge: empowerment and radicalisation \(thesouthernhub.org\)](https://thesouthernhub.org/youth-bulge-empowerment-and-radicalisation)
- Migration and The Brain Drain (with PCNS): [Challenge of the Youth Bulge in Africa and the Middle East - Migration and The Brain Drain.pdf \(thesouthernhub.org\)](https://thesouthernhub.org/challenge-of-the-youth-bulge-in-africa-and-the-middle-east-migration-and-the-brain-drain.pdf)
- Education and employment in Sub-Saharan Africa: [YOUTH-BULGE-EDUCATION \(thesouthernhub.org\)](https://thesouthernhub.org/youth-bulge-education)

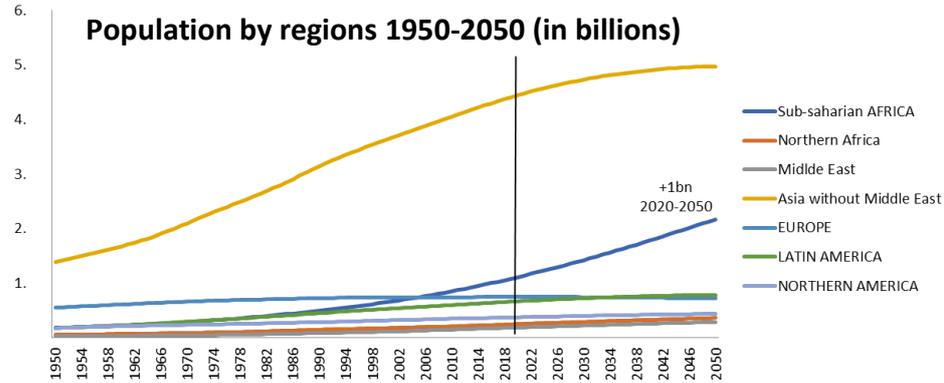
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Characteristics and specific challenges of this Youth Bulge

Youth inclusion is a key issue for southern countries' development over the next few decades.

According to the United Nations, most of the demographic growth of the next 30 years will take place in the Middle East and Africa, which are expected to have 3.4 billion inhabitants in 2050, i.e. more than the projected populations of China and India combined.

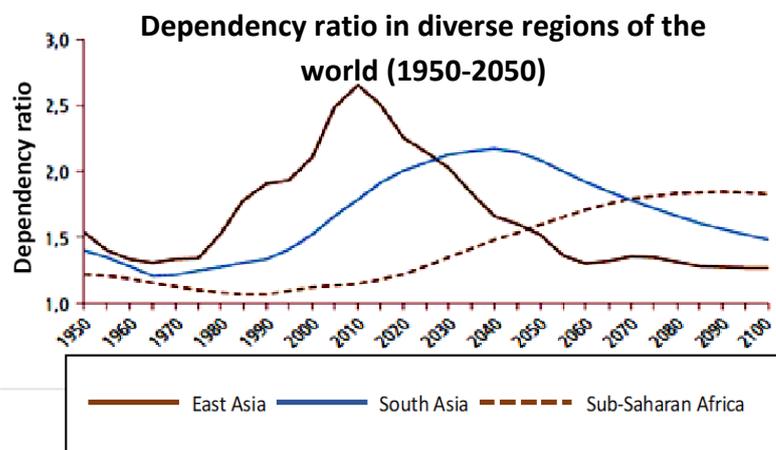


Over this period, Africa will account for more than half of this growth, rising from 1.3 billion in 2018 (17% of the world's population) to 2.5 billion in 2050 (26%). The population of sub-Saharan Africa is expected to increase sevenfold between 1990 and 2100 to reach 3.7 billion.

This strong growth generates a "youth bulge", i.e. a relatively large increase in the number and proportion of the working-age population. This influx opens a window of opportunity for rapid social change and economic development, provided that these newcomers have access to the labour market and are integrated into the political sphere.

Thus, the challenge posed by the influx of youth can be either the promise of a dividend, if the growing pool of human capital is leveraged productively, or a threat, if socially excluded youth foster social unrest and political instability. Indeed, a prolonged period of instability can result from a combination of widespread youth unemployment and high levels of political exclusion, sectarian politics, militarization, (real or perceived) injustice, frustrated aspirations, and the rapid collapse and/or transformation of structural institutions.

This issue is all the more critical since the demographic transition in these regions is unique. Compared to other regions such as Southeast Asia, the transition is slower and results in growth rates that remain high for a longer period. This leads to a considerable increase in the total population, with a dependency



ratio¹ that remains low throughout the period. In addition, current forecasts suggest that economic growth over the next 30 years will be insufficient to allow the population to experience a significant improvement in their living conditions.

While the youth population has demonstrated its capacity to reshape the political and security landscape in Africa and the Middle East over the past decade, its strong growth represents a multidimensional challenge affecting all spheres of modern society. Also, the exceptional nature of this demographic surge highlights the urgency for the countries concerned to identify innovative solutions to enable youth to integrate economically and politically and to contribute to the development of their respective economies.

¹ This indicator provides the ratio of dependents (persons aged 0 to 14 plus persons aged 15 and above that are either outside the labour force or unemployed) to total employment. (Source: ILOSTAT – 2019)

Youth empowerment: a priority

Politically, the failure of a significant portion of young people to successfully integrate into their respective societies has led them to explore different options for adapting, escaping, or defying the obstacles they face. Some wait for generational change and others seek to cooperate with the current authorities. Others attempt to emigrate in search for better opportunities. And others yet become politically active, participating in electoral processes, popular protests and, at times, even violent extremism.

By and large, the prevalence of frustration among young people - faced with a lack of social mobility, employment opportunities, and political participation - leaves them with the impression that they have only two choices: accept the status quo or challenge it. The latter option sometimes involves joining an armed group. Thus, the political exclusion of youth is a 'ticking time bomb', as evidenced by the political alienation affecting youth in Africa and the Middle East, the popular protests against the governing elites, etc. It is estimated that between 1970 and 1999, 80% of civil conflicts took place in countries where 60% or more of the population was under 30 years old.

Therefore, the political, social and cultural aspirations of youth must be taken into consideration and must be matched by innovative solutions. These should empower youth to participate in decision-making, governance and other relevant forums. Symbolic inclusion processes will not suffice if the civic space continues to shrink.

Additionally, youth empowerment also depends on the creation of economic opportunities. Indeed, according to a World Bank study realised in 2011, 40% of those who join rebel and terrorist movements are motivated by a lack of jobs². It is therefore urgent for the countries concerned to generate enough decent formal jobs for current and future youth. In this regard, supporting the emergence of a formal private sector and training the youth for future professions are well-understood objectives for these countries.

Youth inclusion in the societies concerned is not only a matter of justice or rights, but also a necessity on which the stability and peace of the regions concerned depend. The African Union (AU) stresses the urgency of these reforms in a continent where the average age of the African population is 19 years and that of its leaders is 63 years, the largest gap in the world (44 years against only 10 years for the member countries of the European Union). These reforms cannot be limited to bringing a few representatives into governance or improving their socio-economic conditions at the margin but must go through a full-scale reform of the public sector and lead to an intergenerational co-leadership.

These reforms can only come about through an ambitious investment strategy, particularly in education and professional training.

² World development report 2011: conflict, security, and development - overview (English). World development report Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.

Education or the need for investing in the future

Africa and the Middle East will have to consider investment in education as a priority to ensure strong, sustainable, and inclusive growth, which is essential for the stability of the South. Investing in education is a prerequisite for changing social behaviours and production patterns and is the cornerstone of a country's competitiveness. Strengthening this sector is essential given the slow demographic transition and insufficient economic growth in these regions.

Depending on the national situation, the country will have to find the right balance between 4 major policy challenges.

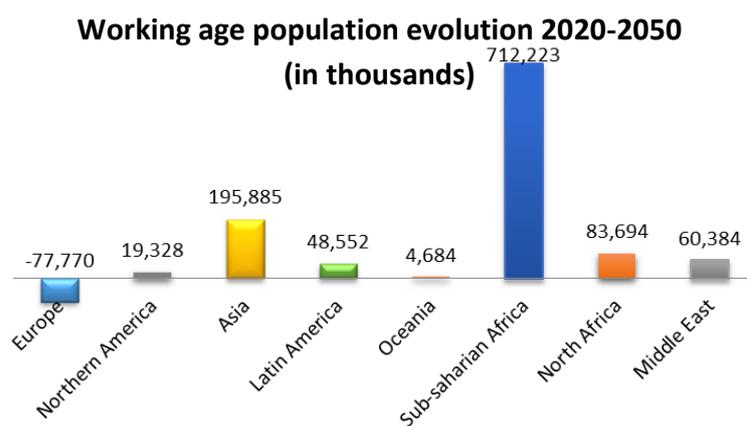
First, access to education will need to be improved in many countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa where progress has been very significant but, because population growth is so high, the region still has the lowest level of schooling in the world.

Secondly, the quality of the education provided must be improved in order to adapt it to the expectations of the current and future labour market. This challenge is important as the vast majority of the growth in the world's working-age population (15-64 years) over the next 30 years will come from the afore-mentioned regions.

Additionally, countries will need to ensure that educational opportunities are equitable in order to ensure sustainable, inclusive, and politically stable economic development. The inclusion of women is crucial as it is an important lever for economic growth, the qualitative development of the education sector, and the reduction of the fertility rate.

Finally, generating a sustainable growth that creates enough jobs requires not only investments in education but also a massive injection of capital to finance other areas essential to economic growth, such as infrastructure or the development of strategic sectors like health... Finding the right balance between such immense needs and limited resources will be a major challenge for numerous countries that spend a significant portion of its budget on education and where the need for investment in infrastructure is significant. In Africa alone, infrastructure investment needs are estimated at \$6 trillion by 2040.

The spectacular demographic growth of the countries concerned requires that they find innovative solutions that would enable their youth to prosper in an inclusive economy, or else they will be required to migrate to secure satisfactory wages and adequate social protection.

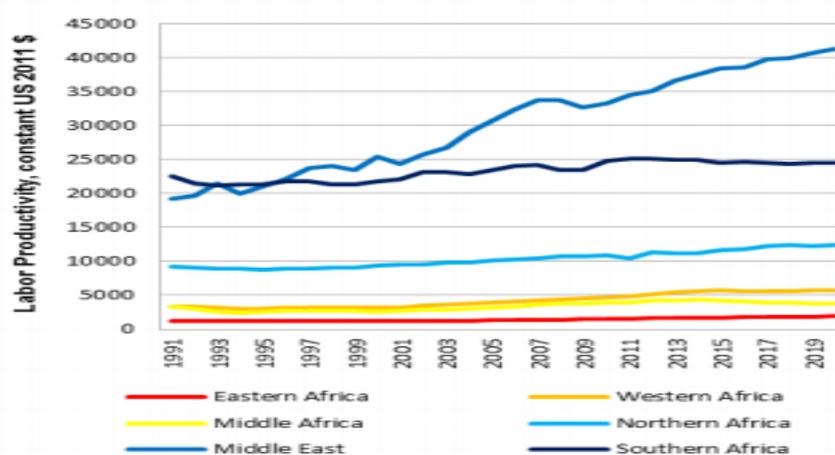


Migration or the necessity to provide opportunities

Without socio-economic opportunities, many among the youth might feel that they have no choice but to rebel or to migrate. In this respect, it should be noted that the situations differ greatly depending on the region. Population is unevenly distributed as Eastern, Middle and Western Africa account for more than half of all the under 35s; and Northern Africa and Middle East host more than half of the over-65s.

Also, the youth bulge is concentrated mainly in West, Middle, and East Africa, and East, Middle, and West Africa accounts for about 75 percent of new-borns. In terms of migration, Africa's population is currently the fastest growing in the world, and the continent is home to the largest number of refugees and internally displaced persons, as of 2017. As for the Middle East, countries torn by conflict and violence have become important sources of refugees with diverse educational and professional backgrounds, fleeing for their lives.

Labour productivity remains the primary economic driver of migration. With a large proportion of young workers entering the labour market likely to earn unsatisfactory wages upon entry due to low labour productivity³ particularly in East, Middle, and West Africa, where migratory pressures could increase very significantly in the next few years.



In addition to economic factors, other dimensions also play an important role in determining patterns of human mobility, including multidimensional poverty, weak institutions, and corruption. The deterioration of the security situation in many MENA and SSA countries is causing, over the last years, a sharp increase in forced migration and displacement. The impact of climate change on the environment of several populations, particularly in the Sahel, could push even more people to migrate.

Without denying the positive developmental effects of migration, the proposed analysis considers that, for the countries studied, the benefits of migration do not outweigh the losses. For example, while remittances have a generally positive effect on poverty alleviation, only a limited number of countries receive flows that are adequate at triggering such outcomes. In addition, gaping wage disparities separating host from origin economies

³ Labour productivity represents the total volume of output (measured in terms of Gross Domestic Product, GDP) produced per unit of labour (measured in terms of the number of employed persons or hours worked) during a given time reference period. (Source: ILOSTAT, 2019)

hinder the contribution of diaspora communities. Furthermore, brain drain results in the loss of skilled labour in countries of origin and creates obstacles in sectors strategic to structural change in home economies.

In order to alleviate the negative factors pushing young people towards migration to migrate, global strategies can be envisioned to help diminish the negative repercussions of the brain drain phenomenon. This will also involve exploiting the potential of the diaspora abroad (brain gain) and, above all, fostering the contribution of youth to domestic productive capacities which, in turn, are necessary to trigger sound economic development.

Conclusions

Given that Africa and the Middle East are expected to have more than 4 billion inhabitants by the end of the century, investments in youth over the next few decades will be crucial to ensure a strong, sustainable, and inclusive growth, which is essential for the stability of both Africa and the Middle East.

African and Middle Eastern countries present undeniable opportunities that, arising from the conjunction of a largely motivated youth and emerging technologies, can pave the way for sustainable forms of economic development through robust processes of structural change.

Unfortunately, commodity revenues are not yet succeeding in stimulating productivity growth in these economies. For the time being, economic policies do not foster sufficient national productive capacities and have a long way to go in terms of exploring the untapped potential of the growing youth bulge in economic activities beyond the "natural resource curse".

Since economies in these areas do not produce enough local formal employment for youth, extremist groups thrive as the nation's wealth flows abroad. Cabo Delgado and the Niger Delta are stark examples of the impact of youth exclusion from key sectors of the economy.

Socio-political inclusion of youth is still too low and distrust in political establishments prevails. For example, according to the 2019 Youth Arab Survey⁴, Arab youth in conflict-ridden countries overwhelmingly support anti-government protests in hopes of bringing about change.

The COVID-19 crisis, which has already had a huge impact on economic growth and education access in most countries, could lead to further social unrest.

The need to transform the "youth bulge" into a demographic dividend requires a strong and ambitious investment policy that seeks to economically empower young people and to promote their socio-political inclusion while also fostering their contribution to domestic productive capacities. Only such policies can change the narrative about youth who are eager to contribute to their societies and local communities, as opposed to posing a long-term risk.

⁴ <https://www.arabyouthsurvey.com/pdf/downloadwhitepaper/download-whitepaper.pdf>

Agenda

Wednesday March 31st, 2021 (UTC+1 time):

1400-1420: Opening Addresses

- Hub Deputy Director – Col LANCRENON Ghislain
- NDC Representative – Dr BERGER Chloe
- AU Representative - Dr AKO Rhuks

First Panel: The Challenge of Youth Bulge in Africa and the Middle East (Chair: Ms AVASILOAE Sabina – NSD-S Hub)

1420-1430: Introduction

1430-1450: Session One: Empowerment and Radicalisation

- AU – CPEWD briefing
- Hub briefing

1450-1510: Session Two: Migration and Brain Drain

- PCNS briefing
- Hub briefing

1510-1530: Session Three: Education and Employment

- Hub briefing
- IPSS comments

1530-1600 Coffee break

Second Panel: Comments and Questions from the Floor (Chair: Dr BERGER Chloe – NDC)

1600-1700:

- Introduction
- Q&A with NRCC participants

1700-1710: Findings of the first day

- Chairperson of the second panel
- Chairperson of the first panel

1710-1715: Closing remarks

Thursday April 1st, 2021 (UTC+1 time):

0930-0940: Opening remarks

0940-0945: Brief on the first day (Ms AVASILOAE Sabina)

Third Panel: The regional perspectives (Chair: Dr AKO Rhuks – AU)

0945-0950: Introduction

0950-1000: The Challenge of Youth Bulge: a view from the Middle East

1000-1010: The Challenge of Youth Bulge: a view from North Africa

1010-1020: The Challenge of Youth Bulge: a view from Sub-Sahara Africa

1020-1030: Wrap-up (Dr AKO Rhuks)

1030-1045: Coffee break

1045-1200: Roundtable (Chair: Mr HAMARD Alexandre – NSD-S Hub)

1200-1240: Findings of the workshop: the youth bulge, opportunity or threat?

- Chairperson of the Roundtable
- Chairperson of the first panel

1240-1245 Closing remarks

