

Highlight of Charting the Mediterranean Child 2006

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Abstract

As in the former editions, the third *Charting the Mediterranean Child* report 2006 will focus on Demographics, Education, Health, Economy, Child Labour, Labour Market, and Social development indicators across the Mediterranean.

While the Southern European trends appear to be relatively stable, some snapshots of the MENA region developments will show significant changes, in as far as it concerns particularly:

1 Demographic transition

- What formerly looked as a “Population explosion” in the MENA region has to be considered actually as a “health explosion” - fuelled entirely by declining mortality and improved birth rate?
- Significant declines in local fertility levels. In the projections to 2050, the under-5 child population proportion in the MENA region drops significantly.
- This will have the effect of reducing the burden of child dependency without affecting the size of the labour force.

2 Education

- The MENA countries have made progress towards the goal of universal primary education, but disparities remain - both between and within countries.
- A number of Arab countries have succeeded in narrowing the gender disparity gap.
- Illiteracy, school non-attendance and dropouts are more characteristic of vulnerable segments of the population, including poor persons and women.

3 Health

- Data show a striking correlation between the under-five mortality rate and the educational level attained by a child’s mother.
- Breastfeeding performance remains far below the UNICEF recommended standard.
- Most MENA countries are on track towards providing access to drinking water, but urban populations are about twice as likely as rural populations to enjoy access to adequate sanitation.

- Per capita health expenditure still very low in the Balkan region (except Slovenia), as well as in North Africa

4. Economy

- The MENA region is dependent on oil prices in the case of oil-exporting countries, and on world interest rates in the case of the more diversified economies that are constrained by external debt burdens.
- Increased spending on security and defence, together with the risks of instability to long-term investment, render impossible the normality needed for the regional economies to develop.

5 Child Labour

- Over the past decade, several Arab countries have raised the minimum age for employment.

6 Labour Market

- Overall MENA region unemployment rate 16 %, with regional youth unemployment rate at between 25% and 30%.
- Women's share in the regional labour force has been increasing, albeit starting from a very low base.
- Over the next decade, the MENA region will need to create about 35 million new jobs to reduce unemployment, which would require an increase in the growth rates of the economy to the range of 6-8 per cent per annum.
- Well-designed programmes (education focusing on flexible skills and labour market requirements; vocational training; removal of labour market distortions) if adopted in a timely fashion, may help introduce a large degree of labour flexibility at minimum cost.

7 Social development

- Despite some progress in certain areas, half the population in the region still subsists on below \$2 per day.
- Social welfare continues to be viewed largely as 'charity' rather than a right.
- The MENA region still displays an extremely high inequality of income distribution
- The number of mobile phones in the region is increasing at a very fast pace, leading to greater mobility, facilitating information flow, reducing transaction costs, broadening markets and network, and facilitating searches of employment.