THE ECONOMIC MARGINALIZATION'S

Problem in the light of
Ethnic Conflicts in the Arab Region

The world is witnessing increasing levels of extreme poverty, with increasing conflict, population displacement, and intensification of ethnic conflicts, all of which are deepening inequality around the world and increasing rates of economic marginalization and the inability to make progress in empowering marginalized groups. In the Arab region, inequality between social groups and groups has increased significantly in the last two decades, and the differences between geographical areas within a single country have sharpened, and the forms of those differences vary from regional to ethnic, linguistic, religious, tribal, and other differences that significantly increase the rates of economic marginalization.

The Arab world is one of the most prominent geographical areas facing great challenges in economic empowerment, and it's also emerging as one of the areas witnessing continuous conflicts. The period after 2011 witnessed an increase in conflict and sectarian disparities, which greatly affected the targeted development plans and caused a deterioration of the economic and social situation and an increase in displacement rates, especially in Syria and Yemen. We will discuss here the dimensions and determinants of economic marginalization and the map of ethnic conflicts within the Arab world and how these ethnic conflicts affect the exacerbation and marginalization of some social groups and how to deal with this problem.

First: The status of marginalized groups in the Arab nation

The Arab world is characterized as diverse and significantly different in its economic, social and religious classifications. At the economic level, for example, Qatar is one of the countries with the highest per capita GDP. On the other hand, Yemen is among the poorest countries in the world. For each country, there are noticeable disparities in terms of income and distribution of opportunities between social groups and geographic regions. Conflicts and ethnic conflicts are widespread in the Arab region, and they are a strong influence on increasing inequality rates between different groups.

Economic marginalization is defined as the inability of individuals to fully participate in the economic, social, political and cultural fields. The concept of economic marginalization is multidimensional, as it is linked to several factors such as:

- Discrimination; They are people who face prejudices and exclusion because of their identity, whether because of differences in ethnicity, age, social class, religion, gender, and their status as indigenous or immigrant.
- Geography; Where it affects access to service or equal opportunities in general, that is, there is a maldistribution of resources among residents of cities and regions.
- Governance; where there is unequal access to opportunities as a result of ineffective institutions or unbalanced laws and policies that cause an imbalance between different groups in accessing services.
- Socio-economic status as the deterioration of the socio-economic situation causes unequal access to food, education and health services.
- Wars and conflicts, as the Arab region is one of the regions most affected by ethnic conflicts and strife, which causes an increase in the rates of migration and displacement, the destruction of institutions, and consequently a further deterioration in equality and economic empowerment of marginalized groups, which exacerbates economic crises.

Since 2011 and the outbreak of uprisings in several Arab countries to demand social justice as a basic demand, marginalized groups were among the most prominent participants, and the demands were represented in balance and equality in access to opportunities and economic and political empowerment. However, the responses to these demands differed in the Arab region. There are countries that responded to and dealt with those demands, enacting policies and developing plans to empower these marginalized groups (Tunisia, although the experience did not fully succeed). There are places where violence was the main feature to deal with those demands, and the crisis (Yemen, Syria, and Libya at the beginning of the crisis) aggravated significantly, which led to an increase in marginalized rates and an increase in inequality and access to opportunities and services[1].

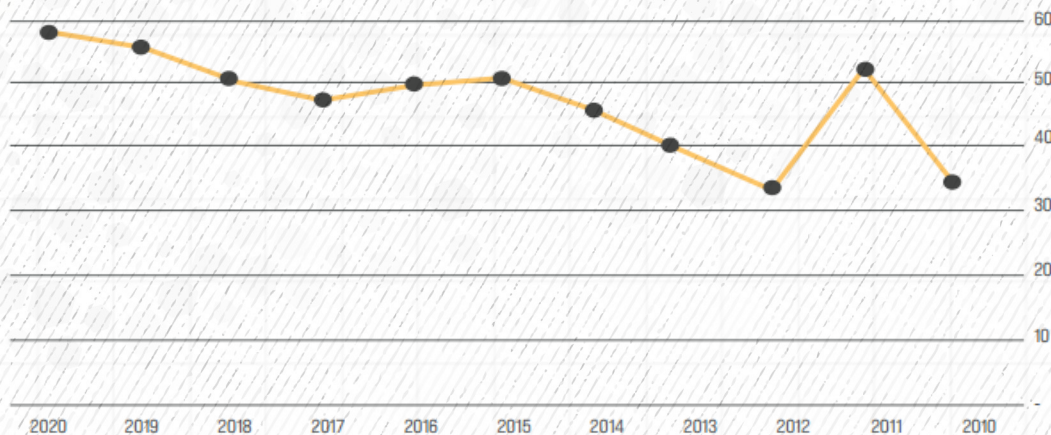
(1) ESCWA, Trends in Conflict and its Repercussions, 2019

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Through Figure No. (1); we note the extent of the increase in the rates of internal displacement, and this shows that there is a great disparity and inequality of opportunities between geographical areas within a single country in a number of Arab countries that witnessed various ethnic, internal and sectarian conflicts[2].

Figure No. (1)
Total number of internally displaced people (in millions) in Syria, Somalia, Irak, Palestine, Lebanon, Libya and Yemen
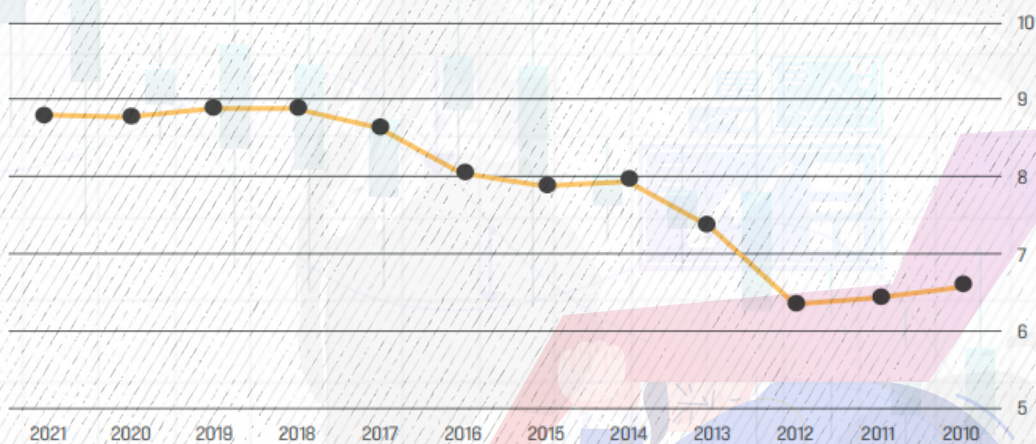

Source: Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies and Peace Research Institute in Oslo

With regard to migration and displacement abroad, the increase in migration and displacement abroad has increased the suffering of marginalized groups through access to very weak services, exposure to natural disasters and lack of support directed to them, in addition to attracting a part of them to join terrorist groups and participate in conflicts and disputes that significantly increased their marginalization[3].

Figure No. (2)
Total number of refugees (in millions) from Syria, Somalia, Irak, Palestine, Lebanon, Libya and Yemen

Source: Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies and the Peace Research Institute in Oslo

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(2) The Center for Conflict Studies and Humanitarian Action and the Peace Research Institute in Oslo, Conflict trends in the Arab world (1946–2019), 2021
(3) Aforementioned reference, Center for Conflict Studies and Humanitarian Action and the Peace Research Institute in Oslo

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Therefore, economic empowerment does not face huge challenges in the Arab region, and it needs effective mechanisms and policies to confront them. We note that ethnic and racial conflicts greatly affect progress in achieving economic empowerment for these marginalized groups.
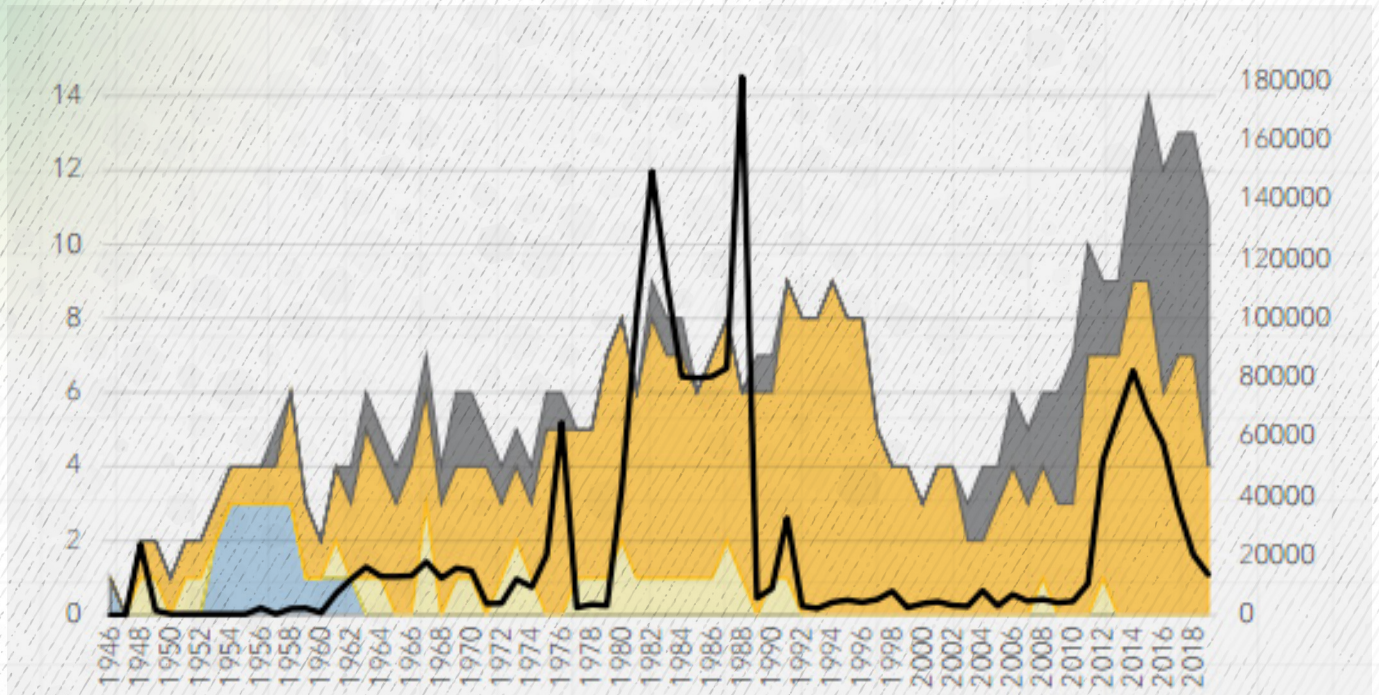
Second: Map of ethnic conflicts in the Arab nation.

Conflicts in general - whatever their kind - are among the most prominent challenges and obstacles facing the Arab region. When trying to study the reasons that hinder economic empowerment, conflicts are the most prominent challenge, especially the ethnic conflicts that spread in the Arab world as a result of various disparities such as different ethnicities and sectarianism or political orientations and external sectarian polarization. Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan and Morocco are among the most prominent countries that suffer from the impact of these conflicts. Also, economic marginalization is a strong influence in the intensification of conflicts. The lack of a fair distribution of wealth, unequal opportunities, the absence of social justice and strong institutions work to increase the gaps between different groups, which leads to the emergence of separatist movements and the absence of a peaceful atmosphere for dialogue between these groups that fuels conflicts and thus more marginalization and waste of the economic resources.

Historically, the Arab region is one of the most prominent hotbeds of conflict in general, and this is evident from Figure (3), where we note that the largest killing rates were during the period from 1980 to 1988, due to the Iran-Iraq war, which resulted in about 70% of the deaths in the Arab region, and also the Lebanese civil war; and these conflicts were characterized by being motivated by political, ethnic and tribal factors. As for the second prominent period, it was in 2011 and continues until now, and the most prominent events were the conflict in Syria and the sectarian polarization that occurred and supporters from abroad, which greatly affected the increase in sectarian conflicts in the region, directly and indirectly. Lebanon was the most affected by the strong interactions that govern it with the Syrian regime, the association of Shiite movements with the Iranian regime as well, and their involvement in the Syrian conflict, and the conflicts during that period spread to Yemen and Libya[4]. Bahrain witnessed a pattern of sectarian conflict, but to a lesser extent than the conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Iraq. The biggest reason is the increase in the intervention of external actors, the transformation of conflicts into proxy wars, and the strengthening of ethnic and sectarian polarizations

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[4] Aforementioned reference, the Center for Conflict Studies and Humanitarian Action and the Peace Research Institute in Oslo

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Figure No. (3)
Existing conflicts at the Arab countries level

Blue: Colonial Wars - Grey: Internationalized Civil Wars - Orange: Civil Wars - Yellow: Inter-Nations

Source: Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies and the Peace Research Institute in Oslo

Third: Patterns of ethnic divisions in the Arab nation

The Arab nation can be divided into three types of homogeneity, as follows:

1- The most homogeneous countries

There are eight countries in which the proportion of ethnic groups is less than 15%, namely Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Somalia. It can be said that the vast majority of the population of these countries are ethnically very homogeneous in terms of being Arab in language and culture, Muslims by religion and Sunnis in sect.

2- Moderately homogeneous countries:

The term moderately homogeneous means those countries that contain ethno-linguistic, religious, sectarian or ethnic formations, amounting to between 15 and 25% of the total population, and comprising five countries: Kuwait, United Arab of Emirates, Oman, Syria and Algeria.

3- The most diverse countries:

The volume of diversity reaches great levels, due to the large size of the ethnic groups that make up them, as their number reaches more than 35% of the population, which are in nine Arab countries: Iraq, Bahrain, Syria, Lebanon, Mauritania, Yemen, Sudan, Djibouti and Morocco. In these countries, there is no numerical majority for any Athenian group, as is the case in both Iraq and Lebanon[5].

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[5]   Hussein Moussa, Determinants of Ethnic and Sectarian Division in the Arab World, The Arab Democratic Center, 2020
   https://democraticac.de/?p=65794

Fourth: Towards adopting effective policies.

Despite the great losses and damages inflicted on the entire region as a result of ethnic conflicts and disputes in the Arab world, they still exist, and the catalysts for these conflicts still exist and grow from time to time, due to the absence of real policies facing the problem, which require a mechanism for dialogue and trust between the different parties.

The economic empowerment of marginalized groups, enhancing their roles, achieving fair and balanced development, and engaging with the stimuli of ethnic conflicts still face great obstacles and challenges that no one party can address, especially that conflicts have become complex forms for you, the external actors, and the great disparities in interests between the different parties and the linkage of conflicts to each other on the geographical ranges.

Therefore, in order to adopt effective policies, we must work on:

- Adopting a mechanism for dialogue between the various countries involved in these conflicts, either directly or indirectly, so that this mechanism enjoys a consensual and obligatory form and possesses tools and mechanisms capable of implementing its ideas.
- These policies must be based on main items whose aim is to promote economic empowerment and achieve equal access to services and political representation in a balanced manner between the different spectrums to avoid one of the main causes of internal conflicts.
- Strengthening institutions and promoting governance in a balanced manner from all groups without prejudice to any of the ethnicities in order to address impartially the issues of concern to these ethnically different groups.
- Enhancing the central role of the state, strengthening its institutions, avoiding the adoption of sectarian policies and ideas, and activating laws that achieve social justice, while ensuring freedom of representation and effective political participation for all groups.
- Working on identifying the most influential priorities according to each country to deal with, and working to establish a regional early warning system to deal with all risks that could hinder empowerment plans and deal with the triggers of ethnic conflicts.
- Develop policies to create mechanisms to ensure the safe return and access of the displaced to basic services, especially in times of crisis, and work to create more job opportunities through the provision of decent work, fair, and safe employment.