

THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

on Civil Society Funding and
the Rights of the Marginalized
and Minorities in the Arab Region

Introduction

The marginalized and the minorities' issues represent an important branch of knowledge in which political, economic and social issues are intertwined. It is not hidden that the weaker the ability to integrate these groups, the more severe and painful the problems will be, and the more the social and political entity of society will be shaken as well.

The Arab region is characterized by complexity, diversification, history and civilization together, as it abounds with cultures that manifest themselves in multiple dimensions: ethnic, tribal, religious and linguistic, resulting from history, traditions and immigration⁽¹⁾.

Accordingly, the term civil society refers to all kinds of voluntary activities organized by groups around common interests, values, and goals. Thus, civil society represents a dense network of groups, networks, and links that connect the individual with the modern state. This modern definition of civil society has become a familiar component of the main strands of contemporary liberal and democratic theorizing⁽²⁾. For this reason, this article aims to monitor the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on funding civil society and the rights of the marginalized and minorities in the Arab region.

First: The Role of Civil Society in the Arab Region

Civil society is a major actor in development at the global and local levels. Many countries of the Arab world, for example, have committed themselves internationally to the need to involve non-governmental organizations in making public policies, especially social ones, so that the latter suddenly and without

(1) Yahiaoui, D. and Al Ariss, A. (2017), "Diversity in the Arab World: Challenges and Opportunities", Management and Diversity (International Perspectives on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Vol. 3), Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 249-260.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/S2051-233320160000003010>.

(2) Said, Abdel Moneim. A look at civil society in Egypt. Center for Information and Decision Support. June Cairo.

<https://www.idsc.gov.eg/DocumentLibrary/View/7089>

preparation found themselves demanding to fill the void from which the state withdrew in the areas of social spending. These organizations are mostly charitable and philanthropic, and so we are faced with two parties that are supposed to cooperate with each other by virtue of international pressures and internal need, but within the context of an unhealthy relationship, a crisis of trust, the absence of any expertise for interaction and dialogue, in addition to the weakness of the institutional frameworks and the organizational capabilities and skills of these organizations⁽³⁾.

In our Arab world, the concept of civil society was discovered at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties of the twentieth century, and it gradually rose to become a major ideological and dynamic component in the visions of the liberal and leftist forces and the political Islam currents⁽⁴⁾.

Therefore, non-governmental organizations in the Arab region, or what can be called civil associations, form the pillar of civil society. Recent decades have witnessed an unprecedented awakening in the work of these organizations or associations, which indicates the growing need of society for such kind of organizations on the one hand, and the lack of social spending on the other hand⁽⁵⁾.

Civil society organizations are seen as a third force⁽⁶⁾. Hence, the realization of an independent civil society is a necessary precondition for a healthy democracy, and its absence or relative decline is often cited as a cause and consequence of various contemporary socio-political ills. Therefore, civil society organizations refer to a wide range of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, charitable organizations, religious organizations, and professional associations⁽⁷⁾.

In contrast, while the brokers of democracy succeeded in building relationships with some liberal think tanks and other institutions during the 1990s and early 2000s, there has also been a political backlash in recent years, as Arab governments have attempted to regain their monopoly on foreign funding and the production of political information⁽⁸⁾. This affected the role of civil society

(3) Youssef, Malika Hajji. 2018. (The problem of activating the role of civil society in the Arab world). Facts Journal for Psychological and Social Studies. Volume3. Issue 9. Algeria.

<https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/131197>.

(4) Hamzawy, Amr. 2017. In explaining the importance of civil society in our country. Analytical article. Care Carnegie Malcolm Center. For the Middle East. Doha. March 14.

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(5) Youssef, Malika Al-Hajji, reference previously mentioned p. 4.

(6) Shaaban, Abdullah. 2010. Arab Civil Society Is It a Third Force? International Studies Series. Issue 46. Center for International Studies. Iraq. p3

(7) Said, Abdel Moneim. A look at civil society in Egypt, reference previously mentioned

(8) Carapico, S. (2002). Foreign Aid for Promoting Democracy in the Arab World. Middle East Journal, 56(3), 379–395

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4329784>

organizations in the Arab region and made it limited to a charitable role rather than a human rights awareness role.

Second: Civil Society Organizations and the Reality of the Marginalized and Minorities in the Arab Region

According to statistics, the Arab world is rich in human power, as the population in Arab countries in 2022 reached about 470 million. The Arab region is also characterized by youth, as the data indicates that the percentage of the population in the age group of economic activity (10-65 years) has reached about 64.7% of the total population in the Arab countries. In contrast, about 40% of the population in Arab countries lives below the international poverty line estimated at about \$2.75 per day using the purchasing power parity dollar, according to the Arab Economic Report 2021⁽⁹⁾.

This is due to the extreme contrast in the Arab region, while some are blessed with enormous oil wealth, such as the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which are among the richest countries in the world with a per capita GDP, according to the purchasing power parity (at constant international prices in 2011) as an average of \$14,602, with a minimum of \$3,060 in Djibouti and a maximum of \$90,044 in Qatar. There are some countries that suffer from extreme poverty and tragic conditions and do not find a minimum standard of living, such as Somalia, Djibouti and Yemen, which are among the poorest countries⁽¹⁰⁾. Which indicates an unfavorable paradox in the Arab region.

In light of the growing wars in the region since the first and second Gulf Wars, then the US-British aggression against Iraq, then the Arab Spring revolutions, the state of political polarization and the armed conflict over power, the Arab world seemed to be torn apart, as the need for effective civil society organizations has increased in light of the increasing cases of destitution, asylum, flight and forced migration from conflict areas. In addition, the problems of access to basic services are exacerbated, especially with regard to access to water, and thus the ability to provide a basic service.

In addition to the above, the Arab region is classified as the most unequal region worldwide, with 56% of national income accruing to the top 10% and only 12% going to the bottom 50%. The Gulf countries were the most disparate in the region over the past three decades, with 54% of the national income belonging to the top 10%. (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia) Heavy emphasis on

(9) Arab Monetary Fund. 2021. Presentation of the Unified Arab Economic Report 2020. Abu Dhabi.

(10) United Cities and Local Governments(UCLG), (2020), The Localization of the Global Agendas How local action is transforming territories and communities Middle East and West Asia region

top distribution, with the top 1% owning 23% of total income in 2019, nearly twice the share held by the bottom 50. Inequality levels have remained very high over the past decades, with a slight decline in the share of the top 10% of income from 60% in 2009 to 56% in 2019 due to the narrowing of the income gap between Gulf and non-Gulf countries⁽¹¹⁾.

In the opposite direction, the share of Arab countries in the cumulative total of official development assistance provided to developing countries during the period (1990-2018) amounted to about \$411.8 billion⁽¹²⁾. This is at the level of civil society organizations in the Arab countries, which number more than 371,000 organizations⁽¹³⁾.

The Arab region is the only one among the regions of the world where extreme poverty has increased since 2010 (the number of people whose income is less than US\$ 1.25 per day), and social protection systems have been suffering for many years from a number of severe shortcomings⁽¹⁴⁾. Social and health insurance systems also tend to be undermined due to low coverage, a high degree of fragmentation and financial unsustainability. In brief, some of the main challenges facing Arab countries in the matter of social spending and social protection are to provide protection to the poor and vulnerable populations, and the people in the “missing middle” i.e. the middle class. The latter part consists mainly of informal workers, who are often employed in micro and small enterprises or in the so-called liberal professions (lawyers, doctors, individual contractors).

In the wake of the Corona pandemic, international organizations such as the World Bank and the Monetary Fund estimated that an estimated 8.3 million people would fall into poverty, which means that a total of 101.4 million people in the region will be classified as poor, as shown in Figure (1). The consequences of this crisis could be particularly harsh for vulnerable groups, especially women and youth, and those working in the informal sector who do not enjoy social protection and unemployment insurance.

(11) Ahmed Muhammad Sidqi and Hazem Hassanein Muhammad. 2021. Economic recovery policies in the Arab world towards a just and comprehensive recovery to combat inequality. The Arab Planning Institute conference, “Arab economies, a year and a half after the Covid-19 pandemic. Kuwait, June.

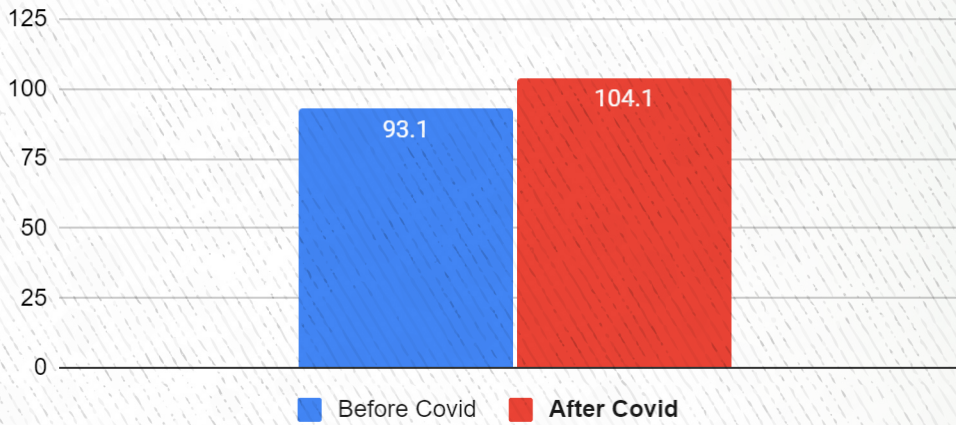
(12) The Arab Monetary Fund, a reference previously mentioned.

(13) The Unified Arab Statistical Report, a reference previously mentioned.

(14) Maat. 2022. Civil Society Governance in the Arab Region. Jun5. Cairo

<https://www.maatpeace.org/ar/%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%8>

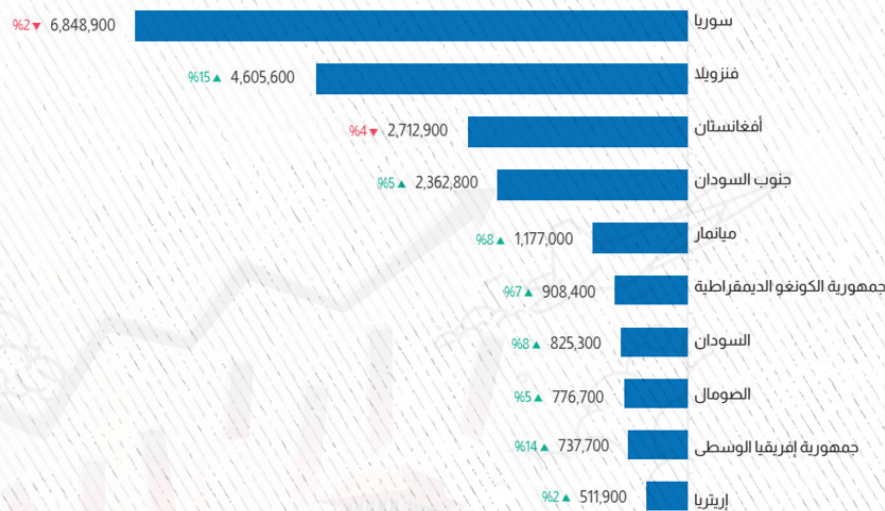
The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the of poverty percentages in the Arab region



Source: Prepared by the researcher, based on ESCWA estimates.

In addition, the region loses about \$60 billion annually due to food loss and waste. At 210 kg per capita per year, the total food loss and waste is estimated to be about a third of the region's food. In some countries, the food loss and waste rate per capita is 427 kg annually⁽¹⁵⁾. In addition, during the last decade and the growing state of the Arab-Arab conflict, millions of people were forced to leave their countries. Out of the 60 million refugees in the world, 40% come from the Arab region in 2017, mainly from Syria and Palestine⁽¹⁶⁾. This number has increased to record nearly 90 million displaced people around the world in 2021. Figure No. (2) shows that the Arab region is witnessing a large displacement in the countries of Syria (6.8 million), South Sudan (2.4 million), Sudan (825 thousand) and Somalia (777 thousand); that is more 11 million displaced Arabs in 2021⁽¹⁷⁾.

Figure No. (2), Numbers of forcibly displaced people in the world and the Arab region in 2021



Source: United Nations. 2021. Global Trends Report on Forced Displacement in 2021. UNHCR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. p.17.

(15) ESCWA, (2020), Poverty and food insecurity in the Arab region, E/ESCWA/CL3.SEP/2020/Policy Brief.2, p2.

(16) "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2018

<http://www.unhcr.org/5b27be547.pdf>

(17) United Nations. 2021. Global Trends in Forced Displacement Report 2021. UNHCR. p.17

For their part, governments in the Arab region face a huge gap between their ambitions to integrate into the global economic system and their limited ability to bring about change. Thus, as in all parts of the world, the need for effective management of civil society organizations turned into a clash or rather a conflict at times. And about the role of civil society in getting out of crises, especially in light of the systematic targeting of civil rights and public freedoms. Also, civil society, in view of the security situation and armed conflicts, has directed towards humanitarian work and work in the field of services under the weight of oppression, restrictions and persecution on the one hand, and crises, donor pressures and funding conditions on the other hand⁽¹⁸⁾.

Third: The Impact of the Russian-Ukrainian War on Civil Society Funding and the Rights of the Marginalized and Minorities in the Arab Region

The Russian-Ukrainian war constituted a major shock to the commodity markets, as the war led to major disruptions in the production and trade of commodities, of which Russia and Ukraine are major exporters. As a result, prices of all energy commodities and some food commodities, including wheat and oilseeds, have risen sharply, raising energy and food security concerns, particularly for the poorest households. In response to rising prices, policymakers have often sought to provide relief to consumers through subsidies or tax cuts; however, these treatments are generally ineffective and may exacerbate undersupply⁽¹⁹⁾.

Under light of the accelerating deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Ukraine in 2022, after Russia's war led to an escalation after eight years of conflict in the east to turn into an all-out war. The devastation has reached an appalling degree, with about 40% of Ukraine's population now in need of protection and humanitarian assistance. The war has also forced many to flee Ukraine, creating a humanitarian crisis on a scale not seen in Europe for decades (United Nations, 2023)⁽²⁰⁾.

(18) Abdel Samad, Ziad. 2023. The Arab region is over a fateful rift. International challenges and their repercussions exacerbate crises and put the countries and peoples of the region in the wind. Arab Non-Governmental Organizations Network for Development. April 3

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(19) World Bank Group. 2022. Commodity Markets Outlook: The Impact of the War in Ukraine on Commodity Markets, April 2022. World Bank, Washington, DC. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO.

(20) United Nations. 2023. The United Nations and its partners are calling for \$5.6 billion to help the millions affected by the Ukraine war. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Feb 15.

On the level of Arab economies, the repercussions of the ongoing war were not far from it, as the World Bank summarized⁽²¹⁾ the main channels of the impact of the crisis in five categories, which are: 1) food price shocks (especially wheat), 2) oil and gas price increases, 3) risk aversion/safe haven investors (which may affect private capital flows to emerging markets as a whole, 4) remittances, and 5) tourism.

In view of the fact that the marginalized, the poor, and minorities are the weakest groups in the Arab region, the repercussions of the Russian-Ukrainian war have inevitably reached them, either directly or indirectly. Therefore, it is likely that the Arab region will face severe cascading effects from the increase in food and energy prices. In Egypt, for example, 80% of its wheat imports come from Russia and Ukraine, and it is a tourist destination that enjoys great demand from both countries, and it will also witness a contraction in the expenses of its visitors. Rising prices may have increased social tensions in some countries, such as those with weak social safety nets, few job opportunities, and limited fiscal space for spending⁽²²⁾.

As such, the effects of the Russian-Ukrainian war on Arab civil society organizations can be monitored in the following points:

1. The charitable role of civil society organizations will inevitably be affected under light of the shift of Western support towards Ukraine.
2. Weakness/turning a blind eye in the present time to the issues of the poor and marginalized in the Arab world in exchange for intense media coverage of what is happening in Ukraine.
3. Limited global and Arab popular support for the issues of the marginalized and the poor.
4. Unlimited vulnerability to food security, especially since many Arab countries depend on both Russia and Ukraine for their food security.
5. The inability of civil society in the Arab world to fix what politics has corrupted, and to work side by side with the current governments.

(21) Farid Belhaj. (2022). Mounting Pressures: The War in Ukraine and its Implications for the Middle East and North Africa. World Bank Blogs. March.

<https://blogs.worldbank.org/ar/ArabVoices/compounded-stress-impact-war-ukraine-middle-east-and-north-africa>.

(22) Alfred Kammer, Jihad Azour, Abebe Amro Selassie, Ilan Goldfein, Chang Yong Rhee. 2022. The war in Ukraine and its repercussions across the world. Publications of the International Monetary Fund. March 17th

<https://www.imf.org/ar/Blogs/Articles/2022/03/15/blog-how-war-in-ukraine-is-reverberating-across-worlds-regions-031522>.

Conclusion

Community organizations play an important and vital role in all societies and work to empower the marginalized, the poor, and the weak in general, which indicates that their role is not limited to one aspect only, but is multiplied by the cultural, economic and political aspects as well.

Under light of the fact that the Arab region is caught in many paradoxes, including the outrageous wealth of some and the deadly poverty of others, civil society organizations have found an environment conducive to work and achieve their goals. However, it has fallen into a major dilemma in recent decades that made it not play its role to a large extent on the one hand, or at least limit its ability to reach its goals on the other hand. It can be said with it that political events and conflicts have affected the work of civil society organizations in the Arab region, despite the fact that this region is rife with many crises such as poverty, vulnerability, fragility, forced displacement, armed conflict and scarcity of resources in most countries.

In light of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the issues of the marginalized, the poor and minorities in the Arab region were not a priority, as this war withdrew the majority of appeals and demands for humanitarian, medical and medical aid, food and others over the past year. This indicates a negative impact on the issues of the marginalized and the poor in the Arab world, at times on the material level and at other times on the media and political levels. This is confirmed by the increasing incidence of poverty, forced displacement and flight from conflict as well.



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<https://carnegie-mec.org/2017/03/14/ar-pub-68273>

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