

The economic and social challenges young Arabs face

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Deborah Amos (DA): We heard from [Ali Sahadi \[in the previous segment\]](#), a young man from Lebanon who's studying in the U.S. and he's got bright prospects. He's emphasized that he really wants to return to Beirut to begin his career. For young Arabs who try to start a business or make a difference in their own communities, what challenges do they face?

Samantha Constant (SA): Young people today in the Middle East are more educated than their parents but they're also worse off. You have a situation where the parents of this current generation and their grandparents had jobs guaranteed by the government upon their graduation. This perception unfortunately still prevails to date. Young people today are not graduating with the right skills of the changing labor market. Those who do qualify face limited availability of positions – whether it's in the shrinking public sector or the still limited private sector.

DA: Do you think that there is an Arab government that gets this right? Or as close as you can get because this is a crisis and it is hard to tackle.

SA: Investments in education and health have been enormous – the Middle East has done more than any other region in the world. For example, if you look at Jordan, they've made substantial investments and improvement in the education sector. Yet unemployment is at 22% among the 15 to 24 year olds and if you are looking at youth under 29, it's almost 30%. You're still seeing a disconnect between investments that are being made, what's happening on the ground, and the ability for young people to obtain jobs.

DA: This problem is important because there are so many youth at this moment in the Middle East – 60% of the population in the region is under 30. What are the consequences of not getting this right?

SA: The consequences are essentially the future prosperity of the region. You lose potential. There's an economic cost not tapping into these young people. If there are so many unemployed young people that currently exists – 20 to 25% right now. This costs the region \$25 billion annually. This is an economic loss.

At the end of the day, young people – as cliché as it may sound – are the next generation of leaders. Right now, the Middle East is at its peak in terms of the youth bulge. In the 1970's, the baby boomers were coming to age and were graduating and entering the market. The U.S. benefited greatly from the contributions of the baby boomers. Imagine if that generation didn't have the opportunities that it did at the time? Where we would be today? It's the same in terms of thinking about the future of the Middle East region. These young people today don't have the same opportunities that their parents had. Where will they be 15 years from now? Where will they be 30 years from now?