

One in four children in North Africa, Middle East live in poverty – UNICEF study

16 May 2017 – Poverty continues to impact the lives of Middle Eastern and Northern African children, according to new analysis from the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)), which highlights that millions of the region’s young people live without quality health care or decent housing.

Based on research among children in 11 countries, UNICEF says that the lives of at least 29 million children – or one in four in the region – are deprived of two or more of the most basic life necessities including basic education, nutritious food, quality safe water, sanitation and access to information.

The outcome of the UNICEF research has been presented ahead of the first-ever conference on child poverty in the region, which is currently taking place in Rabat, Morocco.

While at the conference in Rabat, the UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Geert Cappelaere, [explained](#) that child poverty is about much more than family income – it is about access to quality education, healthcare, a home and safe water.

He also warns that future families could become impoverished for at least three generations. “When children are deprived of the basics, they are at risk of getting trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty.”

Looking back, UNICEF notes that important progress has been made in most countries to reduce poverty, but at the same time the number of children living in poverty continues to be high, particularly in conflict-affected countries, which are seeing a rapid regression of gains made in past decades.

UNICEF’s key findings

Among others, the study finds that:

- Lack of education was found to be one of the key drivers of inequality and poverty for children. Children who live in households that are headed by an uneducated family member are twice as likely to live in poverty. One quarter of children aged 5 to 17 are not enrolled in school or have fallen two grades behind;
- Almost half of all children live in inadequate housing with poor flooring and overcrowding;
- Almost half of all children are not fully immunized or were born to mothers who did not get enough antenatal care or birth assistance; and that
- One in five children are forced to walk more than 30 minutes to fetch water or use unsafe drinking water. More than one third of children live

in homes with no tap water.

Looking ahead

UNICEF warns that major regional challenges stand in the way of measuring the impact of poverty on children and taking collective action towards poverty alleviation. The agency says there is a risk that existing policies and actions fall short from addressing child poverty effectively in absence of a full understanding of children's reality, including the most marginalised or invisible ones. "The return on investing in the most vulnerable children now is a peaceful and prosperous region in the future," says Mr. Cappelaere. "It takes a combination of true leadership and courageous public and private investment from governments, civil society, private sector, individuals and the international community."