

ESCWA in the News

الإسكوا في الإعلام

➤ **Launch of Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2015-2016**

(10 November 2016)

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Arab Spring has cost region 6 pct of GDP - UN agency

by Reuters

Thursday, 10 November 2016 17:14 GMT

By Lisa Barrington

BEIRUT, Nov 10 (Reuters) - ARAB SPRING UPRISINGS OF 2011 HAVE COST REGION 6 PCT OF GDP, UN AGENCY ESTIMATES

The Arab Spring unrest of 2011 has cost the region's economies an estimated \$614 billion of growth because of regime change, continuing conflict and falling oil prices, a United Nations agency said on Thursday.

The figure from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), equivalent to 6 percent of GDP up to the end of last year, is based on growth projections made before the uprisings that toppled four leaders and mired Yemen, Syria and Libya in war.

Published on Thursday, it is the first estimate of its kind by a global economic body.

In its sixth year of conflict, Syria alone has suffered GDP and capital losses of \$259 billion since 2011, according to estimates from the National Agenda for the Future of Syria, another U.N. programme.

Oil prices began to slide in mid-2014 and fell to 13-year lows this January, hitting producer countries such as Saudi Arabia, and others including Lebanon that rely heavily on remittances from citizens working in Gulf Arab states.

Mohamed el Moctar Mohamed el Hacene, ESCWA's Economic Development director, said the oil downturn would probably benefit producer countries. "They will put in place economic reforms leading to real diversification," he told Reuters.

Meanwhile the region needed more financial support from the international community.

"We have seen in Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Balkans the support they got in order to recover after conflict. We have not seen so far such support occurring for the Arab region," el Hacene said. (Reporting by Lisa Barrington; editing by John Stonestreet)

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FEATURE-In Morocco's hills, tourist dollars could keep argan oil flowing

by [Laurie Goering \(/profile?id=003D0000017fbQ7IAI\)](/profile?id=003D0000017fbQ7IAI) | [🐦 @lauriegoering](https://twitter.com/lauriegoering)
(<http://www.twitter.com/@lauriegoering>) | Thomson Reuters Foundation

Thursday, 10 November 2016 18:21 GMT



In an ambitious project, the U.N. is hoping tourism can be enlisted to help pay locals to protect shrinking argan forests

By Laurie Goering

AIT HSSAINE, Morocco, Nov 10 (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - In these arid and stony red-earth hills in southwest Morocco, flanked by the Sahara Desert and the snowy high Atlas Mountains, finding a way to make money isn't easy. Water is scarce, rainfall increasingly unpredictable, and not much but goats survive on the sparse vegetation.

But the 150 members of the Afoulki women's cooperative are pounding away at the problem - literally.

In a back room at the hillside cooperative's centre in Ait Hssaine, a dozen scarf-clad Berber women rhythmically bring stone hammers down on argan nuts, expertly splitting the shells and then flicking the oil-bearing kernels into a woven basket.

The rich argan oil, once pressed and refined, is both tasty and popular on international markets as an additive to cosmetics, soaps, shampoos and other products. Virtually all the world's supply comes from this area of Morocco, inland from the coastal city of Agadir.

"There's nothing else like argan here. It's the main thing," said Rquia Elhjam, one of the women pounding nuts to produce the oil. She and other women call it their "wallet" - the source of much or all of their income.

But half of the 2.5 million-square kilometre argan forest in the region has been lost over the last century, cut for firewood or charcoal making, eaten by goats or removed to make way for expanding families, said Moha Haddouch, a former agriculture ministry official now working with the U.N. Development Programme (UNDP).

Fewer trees means less reliable rainfall in the area and fewer opportunities for women and their families. So in an effort to protect the remaining forest, plant more trees and boost incomes, UNDP and community members are working to put in place a "payment for ecosystem services" scheme.

CASH FOR NATURE

Under the plan, foreign tourists who flock to Agadir's sandy beaches and travel into the UNESCO-recognised argan reserve to buy oil and local honey, eat Berber food and enjoy the spectacular scenery will be asked to offset the carbon emissions generated by their travel with a donation. Tourism businesses may also contribute.

Around \$10 per visitor - about the cost of offsetting round-trip air travel from Europe, UNDP officials said - could pay for argan tree seedlings and water to irrigate them, or support traditional beekeeping in the hills and

the pollination services the bees provide.

The aim is to ensure that the people who work to protect nature get some pay-off from their labour, and that those who benefit from the services nature provides - including a landscape attractive to tourists - contribute to the cost of maintaining them.

"If it weren't for the local population, the forest would be long gone," said Fatima Ait Moussa, president of the women's argan cooperative.

Cash coming into the community from tourism payments would give added incentives to protect trees - and top up the relatively low prices women get for their oil, which sells locally for \$25 a litre, compared to \$200 a litre in Paris, Haddouch said.

Hicham Kdir, president of the local tourism association, said business owners are beginning to understand that if they don't help protect the environment and the communities their clients come to see, they stand to lose out.

His association, and the beach guest house he runs with his Australian-born wife Renee O'Sullivan, started a campaign earlier this year to clean up their sometimes trash-strewn Tamraght beach.

After successful volunteer clean-up days on the beach and in the neighbouring scenic "Paradise Valley", 20 local tourism businesses last month donated cash to pay two full-time beach trash collectors and install waste bins.

The success of the campaign "Keep it Clean, Keep it Zouine" - which means "beautiful" in the local Darija Arabic dialect - suggests that "when businesses see the results and the value, they are excited to do more",

Kdir said.

"We understand we need to help protect" the region, he said. "I think people are going to pay."

CREATING AMBASSADORS

To help everyone understand the sometimes complex effort, UNDP has also taken locals, tourism leaders and government officials to Costa Rica to see working "payment for ecosystem services" programmes there

that tap tourist dollars for biodiversity protection and community support.

"Now all these people are really strong advocates for the project - they are like ambassadors," said Mohamed Fouad Bergigui, a programme analyst with UNDP Morocco.

Currently UNDP, channeling money from the Global Environment Facility, is funding the start-up of the Moroccan project. It is equipping the women's argan cooperative with processing machines to boost the quantity and quality of their oil, working with local beekeepers, and providing argan seedlings and water deliveries to farmers in the area.

Just as important, UNDP is calculating what level of income from tourism would be needed to keep the project going privately - and helping conduct the negotiations to get a deal in place, probably in 2017, Bergigui said.

Plenty of questions remain. Those include whether tourists will stump up cash, whether that cash will actually make its way to communities, whether it will be sufficient to keep local people interested, and whether the level of "ecosystem services" they provide can be measured in a meaningful way.

"On some fronts we will fail, that's for sure," Bergigui said.

But the effort is likely to have benefits beyond those aimed directly at the participants. Hit by failing rainfall and drying reservoirs, the regional government, for instance, is building a desalination plant to produce irrigation water for farmers.

Enlarging the argan forest to protect rainfall, a form of "soft" adaptation to changing climate conditions, can be much less costly and more sustainable, Bergigui said.

Improving opportunities to earn money in poor rural areas may also be able to stem the growing and unsustainable flood of migration to Morocco's cities by young people looking for a better life, he said.

"These payment-for-ecosystem-services schemes can revolutionise the way of doing business in the countryside," he said. "Everyone is a winner here, including nature."

Elhjam, deftly pounding her argan nuts for \$5 a day, agreed. "Even without more money, we need to protect the environment," she said. "If we get more money too, that's good."

(Reporting by Laurie Goering; editing by Megan Rowling; Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, that covers humanitarian news, climate change, women's rights, trafficking and property rights. Visit <http://news.trust.org/climate>)

 THEMES

ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE (/SEARCH/?Q=&F_THEME=CLI-ADA)

Arab Spring 'cost region \$600bn' in lost growth, UN says

5 hours ago | [Middle East](#)



The Arab Spring protest movement has cost the region \$614 billion in lost growth since 2011, the UN says.

The estimate is the first of its kind by a major economic body.

It is equivalent to 6% of the region's total GDP between 2011 and 2015, the UN's Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) **says.**

The uprisings, which started in Tunisia, saw leaders toppled in four countries, and led to war in Libya, Syria and Yemen.

ESCWA used growth projections made before the uprisings to calculate its figure.

It included countries not directly affected by political conflict but subject to spill-over effects from it, include refugee arrivals, lost remittances and falls in tourism.

In Syria, where anti-government protests spiralled into a messy civil war that now involves various foreign powers, GDP and capital losses are equal to \$259 billion since 2011, according to ESCWA's National Agenda for the Future of Syria.

In countries where political transitions have occurred, new governments have not made economic reforms required to address "the issues that led to unrest in the first place", the report says.

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The Arab Spring cost the region over \$600bn in lost growth, says UN



A Tunis resident throws a stone while a police officer shoots tear gas canister at residents from the central Tunisian region of Sidi Bouzid in January 2011 CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

By **Chiara Palazzo**

11 NOVEMBER 2016 • 4:22AM

The Arab Spring cost \$614 billion in lost growth to Arab countries, a new UN survey has found.

The report, the first of its kind by a major economic body, estimates that conflicts in the region between 2011 and 2015 led to a net loss of \$613.8 billion in economic activity, equivalent to 6% of the region's GDP.

To reach the figure, the UN's Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) used growth projections made before 2011. The calculation includes direct and indirect effects of the conflicts, including refugee arrivals and falls in tourism.

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The ESCWA also calculated that countries in conflict since 2011 and countries experiencing spill-over together have had a fiscal balance shortfall of \$243.1 billion, \$217.9 billion more than had been projected.

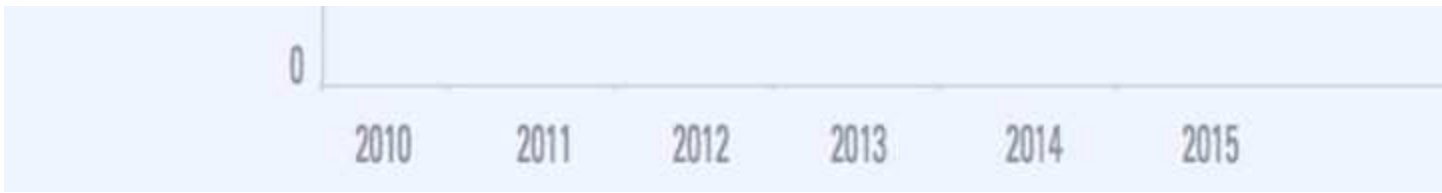
"The economic and political uncertainty that has characterised the Arab region in the wake of the 2011 transitions and upheaval continues to restrain the region's prospects for growth, job creation and stability," the ESCWA says in the survey.

Arab Spring: protests continue one year on
02:03

In December 2010, 26-year-old Mohamed Bouazizi set himself ablaze after having his vegetable cart confiscated by a Tunisia official who slapped him and spat in his face.

The incident caused long-simmering frustrations over injustice, poverty and the greed of the political elite to spill over into protests, which were brutally subdued.





Total GDP, countries in conflict since 2011 CREDIT: ESCWA

The sociopolitical events sparked by the Tunisian events, which became collectively known as the Arab Spring, has resulted in instability and, in Libya, Syria and Yemen, war.

"Conflicts have worsened other economic and social indicators, such as debt, unemployment, corruption and poverty. The international refugee crisis has placed a strain on communities that have lost populations, on countries coping with refugee influxes, and above all on the refugee populations themselves, which suffer from poor health and malnutrition, and have limited access to employment and education," the ESCWA says.

The Arab Spring: a year of revolution



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NEWS | ARAB SPRING 1 HOUR AGO

ESCWA: 'Arab Spring' cost Middle East economies \$600bn

 Comment

UN agency estimate equivalent to 6 percent of GDP of regional economies from 2010 Tunisia protests to end of last year.



Hundreds of people were killed in Egypt's revolution that began in January 2011 [AP]

The so-called Arab Spring of 2011 has cost the region's economies an estimated \$614bn of growth because of governmental changes, continuing conflict and falling oil prices, according to a United Nations agency.

The figure from the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), equivalent to six percent of GDP up to the end of last year, is based on growth projections made before the revolutions started.

Published on Thursday, it is the first estimate of its kind by a global economic body.

In December 2010, [protests broke out in Tunisia](#) which led to the first of the series of revolutions that became known as the Arab Spring, which later toppled four leaders and mired [Yemen](#), [Syria](#) and [Libya](#) in war.

[READ MORE: My Arab Spring - Tunisia's revolution was a dream](#)

In its sixth year of conflict, Syria alone has suffered GDP and capital losses of \$259bn since 2011, according to estimates from the National Agenda for the Future of Syria, another UN programme.

Oil prices began to slide in mid-2014 and fell to 13-year lows this January, hitting producer countries such as Saudi Arabia, and others including Lebanon that rely heavily on remittances from citizens working in Arab Gulf states.

Mohamed el Moctar Mohamed el Hacene, ESCWA's economic development director, said the oil downturn would probably benefit producer countries.

"They will put in place economic reforms leading to real diversification," he told Reuters news agency.

Five years on: After the Arab Spring

Meanwhile, the region needed more financial support from the international community.

"We have seen in Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Balkans the support they got in order to recover after conflict. We have not seen so far such support occurring for the Arab region," el Hacene said.

According to ESCWA, there has been some progress on social indicators, such as gender equality in Middle East.

[READ MORE: My Arab Spring - Egypt's silent protest](#)

"However, countries in and affected by political transition and conflict have regressed on a plethora of socioeconomic indicators over the past five years," the report stated.

The [Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2015-2016](#) uses recent data to assess the destructive impact of instability and conflict, including on growth and economic output.

It also draws on research by ESCWA on migration, social developments, the impact of conflict, women's empowerment and specific country-level analysis.

After the Arab Spring: A Tunisian artist's view

Source: Al Jazeera News And Agencies



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Economics

ESCWA says unrest curbs growth, stability in Arab region

10/11/2016 | LOC22:57 19:57 GMT | Arab News

BEIRUT, Nov 10 (KUNA) – The cumulative effects of the economic and political uncertainty in the Arab region continue to impede its prospects for growth and stability, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) said in a report on Thursday.

Director of ESCWA Economic Development and Integration Division Mohamed El-Mokhtar Mohammad El-Hassan added that the economic growth is semi-stopped as a result of the economic and political uncertainty in the region.

He noted that the drop in oil prices has increased burdens on regional economy and imposed restrictions on growth in countries which depend on energy exports.

The average growth rate of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the Arab region in real terms for 2015 has been estimated at 0.9 percent and expected to reach 1.5 percent in 2016, he said.

He expected that the slow economic growth of GCC member states will continue due to the continued cut in general spending.

The growth rate of the GDP of GCC states dropped by 3.4 percent in 2014 and 3 percent in 2015, he said, indicating that it is anticipated to hit 2.1 percent in 2016.

Some Arab countries will witness a slow economic growth because of some geopolitical factors, a little demand from China and Europe and imposing restrictions on balance of payments, he said.

Meanwhile, Chief of ESCWA Modeling and Forecasting Section (MFS) Mohamed Hedi Bchir said the loss of the Arab region resulted from the economic and political unrest reached USD 614 billion of GDP.

At least 7.6 million people have been internally displaced in Syria and more than four million others fled the country, while about 130,000 people have been displaced in Yemen and about 434,000 in Libya by the end of 2015, he stated.

At least 470,000 Syrians had been killed as a result of the conflict and the loss ranged between USD 169-259 million, he added.

The unemployment rate rose in Syria from 15 percent in 2011 to 48 percent in 2014, and more than 80 percent of Syrians are living below poverty line, he said.

Nathalie Khaled, an official of economic affairs, said that women in the Arab region have been suffering from inequality on all levels.

Women political representation rose from 14 percent in 2015 to 17.5 percent in 2016, Tunisian, Algerian and Sudanese women topped the rankings in this regard, she revealed.

She called for exerting further efforts to increase jobs for women, and improve social protection systems and labor laws. (end) wsm.hm

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