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# Youth in GCC Countries

*Meeting the Challenge*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The six nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are experiencing a unique demographic period in which one-half to one-third of their population is under 25 years of age. This youth bulge presents GCC governments with an opportunity to propel their nations forward: These young people can bring creativity, energy, and productivity to the GCC national and regional economies. With their contributions, the GCC region can accelerate its development and continue building knowledge economies.*

But a Booz & Company survey of young people in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates shows that there are challenges to overcome as well. The survey, together with our research and our experience in the region, shows that five areas are critical for public and private stakeholders to address:

- Education
- Employment
- Gender gap
- Leisure activities
- Community engagement

GCC stakeholders are aware of both the opportunities and the challenges in these areas and are making good progress in addressing them. But a more universal, all-encompassing effort is needed to ensure that young people are fully engaged in GCC societies, including governments, private sectors, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and civic organizations. The region needs a new paradigm that puts the region's youth at the forefront of national policies, and involves young people themselves in building their future. Only such a holistic effort will allow the GCC to capitalize on this demographic dividend.

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## What Do Young People in the GCC Think?

- **62%** feel the high cost of living is their biggest concern  
**55%** believe it is finding a job
- **87%** think unemployment is a major problem in their country
- **45%** say that their primary ambition in life is to complete their education  
**32%** think their education system has not prepared them to find a job
- **39%** think a good salary is the most important criterion in a job  
**22%** think it is job satisfaction
- **65%** want their governments to develop youth service programs  
in order to create economic opportunities for youth  
**62%** want governments to promote youth entrepreneurs
- **63%** want governments to give them increased access to  
decision-making processes and policies
- **70%** of young women and **44%** of young men said that the government  
should encourage women to work in different fields
- **59%** of young men think women's primary role in society  
should be that of a wife and mother  
only **22%** of young women agree
- **67%** want their country to be known as a technologically advanced nation  
**65%** want it to be known as an educated, intellectual society
- **36%** exercise less than once a week
- Only **28%** participate in community development
- The most popular leisure activities among young people take place at home:  
**88%** surf the Internet  
**78%** watch TV  
**65%** spend time at home with family

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## THE GCC: A YOUTHFUL REGION

Young men and women, who embody the hopes and dreams of a nation, are any country's most important asset. As catalysts for revitalization and regeneration, young people play an essential role in shaping their society and sustaining their country's development. They seek the new and the modern, and in the process transform their social environment. Young people want to influence all aspects of their country's life, whether intellectual, artistic, cultural, educational, or political. In the workplace, their energy and brains fuel national economies and their achievements become the foundation for future development.

For all these reasons, the active participation of youth is vital for the progress and momentum of any society. This is all the more true if young people account for an unusually large

part of the population, as is the case in GCC countries.

The GCC's six member-nations make up one of the most youthful regions in today's world; one-third to one-half of the population is under the age of 25. People under 25 account for 51.5 percent of the population in Oman, 50.8 percent in Saudi Arabia, 43.9 percent in Bahrain, 37.7 percent in Kuwait, 33.8 percent in Qatar, and 31 percent in the United Arab Emirates.<sup>1</sup>

### A Unique Moment

Youth, formally defined by the United Nations as those between 15 and 24 years of age, are a critical element in the GCC region at this juncture. The GCC's "youth bulge" is a shift in demographics resulting from the dramatically high population growth in the region over the last 40 years. The youth bulge will also be a

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hallmark of the Gulf region for some time to come; in 2009, the percentage of the population under age 14 ranged from 16 percent in Qatar to 32 percent in Saudi Arabia—significantly higher, for the most part, than OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries' average of 18 percent.<sup>2</sup>

The youth bulge will not last forever. New demographic trends, such as declining fertility rates, are already beginning to make themselves felt. (See *"The GCC's Youth Bulge: A Demographic Opportunity,"* p. 70) For now, though, the youth bulge is clearly visible in the rising numbers of young people in search of work, who will soon be followed by their younger brothers and sisters. This large and growing youth population has placed the GCC in a demographically historic moment that presents its societies with

monumental challenges and equally sizable opportunities.

GCC countries can reap great benefits if they can harness the creative and economic potential of this so-called demographic dividend of young people. Helping them become productive workers and resourceful citizens will give GCC countries a critical advantage in accelerating their economic growth and expanding their human resource capital.

This is particularly important as the GCC nations move to diversify their predominantly oil-based economies. Young people are essential instruments for creating sustainable, knowledge-based economies in sync with today's globalized world. Although large numbers of youth certainly contribute to the worrisome trend of high unemployment rates, these same young people are sources of the innovation and

experimentation required to build the techno-friendly societies of the future.

But youth will be able to fully contribute to this critical transformation only when given the right conditions for using their talents, creativity, and energy, particularly when it comes to education and employment. Right now, despite their unique strategic advantage for the region, young people in the GCC are not being adequately utilized or supported by their societies. Despite solid economic growth, technological improvements, and increased expenditure on education, GCC countries' socioeconomic systems have not yet evolved sufficiently to meet the basic aspirations of their youth, who are seeking both social recognition and economic empowerment. GCC countries can do more to become educationally and economically competitive in today's knowledge-based global economy.

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## WHAT GCC YOUTH THINK

In order to shed light on the goals and aspirations of GCC youth, Booz & Company's Ideation Center conducted a survey of young people in three countries: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The objective was to better understand youth perceptions concerning several issues, including the main challenges they believe themselves to be facing—both individually and nationally.

We also asked their views on obstacles to entering the workforce, how well their education had prepared them for the labor market, and how their governments should serve youth. Other questions probed their use of new media as well as their participation in sports, leisure activities, and community development. Because of the increased

visibility of Gulf women in public life, we also explored attitudes about gender as it relates to education and employment opportunities.

The survey findings, together with our research and official statistics, form the platform on which we present this detailed analysis of the interrelated challenges affecting GCC youth, as well as recommendations on how best to surmount those challenges.

Even though GCC youth live in a relatively prosperous region, our survey found that they are concerned about their economic well-being. When they answered the question *“What do you think are the major challenges affecting the GCC region today?”* the high cost of living ranked number one, and it was followed by unemployment and



the economic crisis triggered by the global downturn (see *Exhibit 1*). Lack of affordable housing was fourth. Answers again centered on finances when respondents were asked “*What are the major concerns/challenges in your life?*” The top-ranked reply was the high cost of living, followed by finding a suitable job on completion of education, and unemployment.

These findings strongly suggest that although GCC youth generally do not face the same level of economic deprivation and lack of opportunities as youth in other Arab countries, they definitely believe they

are at a disadvantage in financial matters. This is key because perceptions matter as much as realities when it comes to social and political developments.

Other key findings from the survey included dissatisfaction among respondents with how their education system is preparing them for the labor market, and very low participation in community development and volunteering, suggesting a lack of civic awareness and involvement among youth.

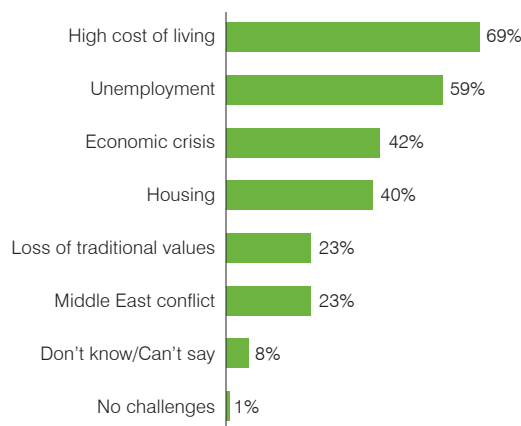
The survey also revealed discrepancies in gender expectations. Simply

put, the desire of women for equal opportunities in education and employment is not fully matched by a willingness on the part of men to support complete equality. This disparity, we feel, will be a major dynamic playing out among youth in Gulf societies in the years ahead.

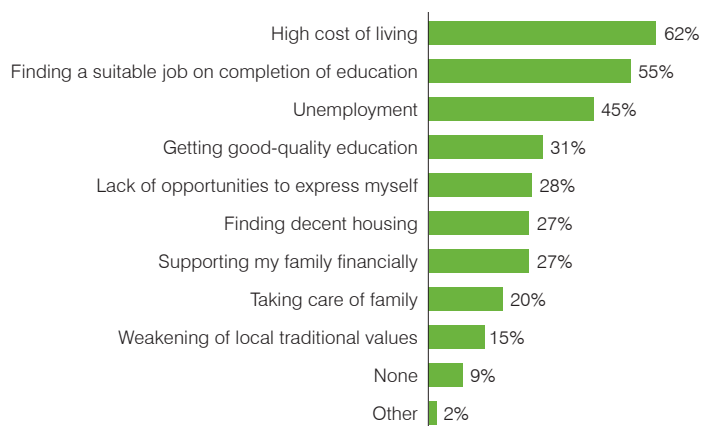
Finally, the survey results made clear the encouraging trend that GCC youth today want to be decision makers and agents of change. Tellingly, 63 percent of those questioned said the government should “give young people increased access to [the] decision-making process and policy implementation

**Exhibit 1**  
**GCC Youth Are Facing Significant Socioeconomic Challenges**

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE MAJOR CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE GCC REGION TODAY? (PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



WHAT ARE THE MAJOR CONCERNS/CHALLENGES IN YOUR LIFE? (PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

at [the] local level” (see *Exhibit 2*). More than half (58 percent) also would like to see the government “create local youth councils for effective participation in society.” It is evident, then, that young people want to have their voices heard and actively participate in their country’s economic and social affairs.

### Interrelated Challenges and Solutions

The GCC’s demographic dividend poses unique challenges for youth and society at large, including governments, the private business sector, educators, and even families. These challenges arise from a nexus of social and economic problems, including a developing education system, unemployment, gender discrimination, a lack of leisure opportunities, and limited awareness of the importance of community engagement.

These challenges are explored in the pages that follow. Education,

as discussed in the next section, is the top priority because it is the root of an individual’s lifelong job opportunities. It also is essential for alleviating widespread unemployment, which is the focus of “Employment: Making the Most of the Youth Dividend” (p. 25). Half of the GCC’s youth population—women—got a late start in employment and today are still facing challenges in realizing their aspirations and achieving equal rights with men. As discussed in “Youth and Gender in the GCC: Narrowing the Gap” (p. 39), GCC women, especially those who are educated and working, will need help if they are to realize their full potential.

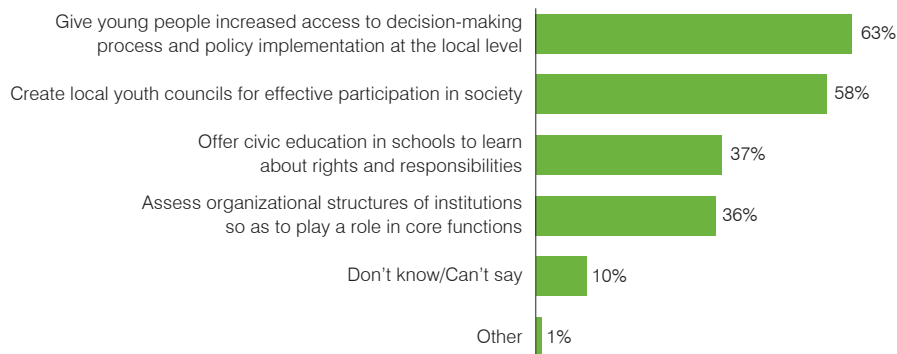
Finally, the social ills afflicting youth in many other parts of the world are now present in the Gulf, including obesity and illegal drug use. Such problems are exacerbated by the lack

of leisure pursuits and a low commitment to community service—which are not secondary considerations, as many may think. Rather, as we note in “Leisure: Expanding Young People’s Horizons” (p. 51) and “Community Development: Youth and Nation Building” (p. 65), these activities play important roles in developing personal character, giving youths shared experiences, and, most of all, instilling a sense of national belonging and solidarity.

Each country needs to design solutions for the challenges that are appropriate to its own circumstances and the needs of its youth. However, we believe that a holistic approach is the best one for meeting the challenges facing GCC youth, and this means engaging the whole nation in the effort. This belief underpins our recommendations, which close out each section of this report.

### Exhibit 2 Young People Want to Play an Active Role in Building Their Society

HOW DO YOU THINK THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD INTEGRATE/  
PROMOTE YOUTH ISSUES IN NATIONAL POLICY FORMULATION?  
(PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

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## A NEW PARADIGM FOR YOUTH IN THE GCC

This paper strongly advocates that the GCC adopt a new paradigm for dealing with and engaging youth, and for constructing national policies regarding this important segment of the population.

We believe that a new youth vision for GCC countries is necessary in order for societies to take full advantage of this unique demographic period in their history. Although governments should take the lead in forging this new paradigm, it should also be embraced by all other segments of society, particularly educators, the private sector, civic organizations, and NGOs.

A new approach to youth will require a revised perspective in adults, especially parents and teachers. Rather than viewing their young people only as passive receptacles into which culture and values are poured, adults should regard youth as change agents with contributions to make. We believe it is important to start involving young people directly in the programs and policies that affect them because they often will know best how to overcome the challenges they face.

The challenges created by the expanding youth population are manifold—but not insurmountable. GCC governments

must create jobs for hundreds of thousands of young people who are marching into the job market each year, many of whom have not been adequately prepared for the working world by their education. Governments also need to facilitate positive civic participation, as well as healthy leisure environments that offer youth rewarding recreational outlets. How governments address young people's potential and the challenges facing them will shape the social and economic conditions, as well as the livelihood and well-being, of future generations.

Fortunately, GCC governments are increasingly conscious of the needs of their young people and are already making efforts to enhance their status. But more strides are necessary.

If these challenges are not met, the region's youth are likely to feel marginalized. The Arab world is witnessing unprecedented turmoil in the form of youth uprisings and protests, fueled in large part by poverty, high unemployment, and high costs of living. These events underscore the dissatisfactions of young people. At stake is no less than the transformation of these countries into dynamic, forward-looking societies.

## Immediate Priorities

GCC governments can initiate the long-term task of creating a new youth paradigm with a number of concrete steps.

- Develop a comprehensive national youth strategy blueprint in each GCC country that takes into consideration the needs and aspirations of young people. It should involve the government, NGOs, and the private sector, as well as young people themselves.
- Set up a high-level committee for youth affairs in each GCC country to be responsible for formulating plans to deal with youth-related issues.
- Convene a GCC-sponsored regional youth meeting, bringing together representatives of national and regional governmental and intergovernmental organizations concerned with youth and employment, to review and discuss youth issues for national implementation.
- Establish a dialogue with young people and allow them to take an active role in policymaking, recognizing them as key participants in the decision-making processes that affect them and their future. Their voices should be heard and they should be positively encouraged to contribute to the implementation and evaluation of policies and development plans at the community, national, and international levels.
- Launch a campaign to change society's perceptions of youth in the region; the GCC countries remain largely influenced by traditional and conservative values, and the problems and issues of modern youth are still not recognized as being significant.
- Create an institutional framework, possibly consisting of national youth councils, that allows young people, regardless of gender, access to appropriate programs, services, and policymaking forums.
- Collect, analyze, and present accurate data and statistics on youth for effective planning, target setting, and monitoring of youth issues and trends, as well as for evaluating progress toward goals involving education and employment.

## **SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

The Booz & Company survey was conducted during October and November 2010 using a structured questionnaire of 30 questions with multiple-choice answers. Responses were solicited both online and in face-to-face interviews.

A total of 415 respondents between 15 and 24 years old were interviewed in selected GCC countries: Saudi nationals (residents of Jeddah, Riyadh, and Dammam); Emirati nationals (residents of the emirates of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah); and Qatari nationals (residents of Doha).

The margin of error of the total sample is 4.67 percent at a 95 percent confidence level.

The respondents were 55 percent young men and 45 percent young women, and most (85 percent) were single.

Fifty-six percent of respondents were full-time students. Among them, 53 percent were at the secondary level, 32 percent were at the university level, 7 percent were at vocational secondary institutions, and 3 percent were in primary school. Another 3 percent had dropped out of school. Only 1 percent were enrolled in higher studies.

Among the rest of the respondents, 17 percent were unemployed, 14 percent were working full-time, 7 percent were working part-time (eight to 29 hours a week), and 3 percent were working fewer than eight hours a week.

Fifty-two percent of those employed were working in the private sector, 37 percent in the public/semipublic sector, 8 percent in "other," and 3 percent with NGOs.



## EDUCATION: CRUCIAL FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The essential underpinning of any civilization is the education of its youth. This has long been true in the Arab world, which has a history studded with academic achievements. Education is also the keystone of an individual's life, determining to a large extent future career opportunities, lifelong earnings, social status, and the ability to use knowledge to advance personal and community well-being.

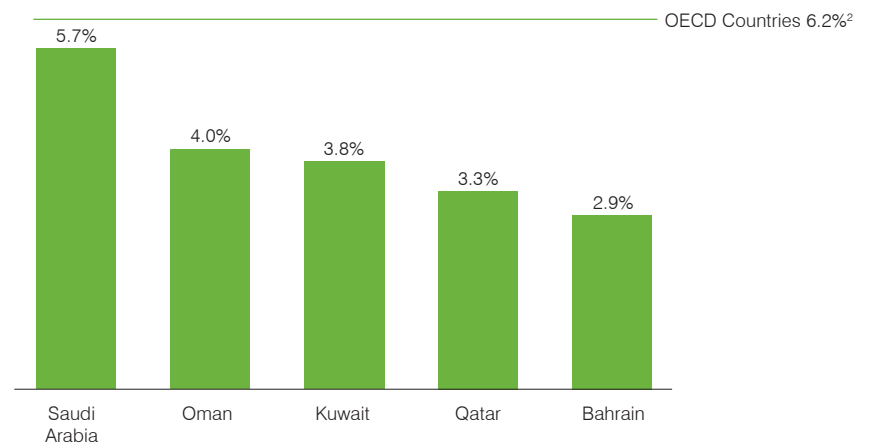
GCC countries, as part of the social compact with their citizens, are the primary providers of education for their youth. Over the past 40 years, they have put their oil wealth to good use by investing heavily in education (see *Exhibit 3*). For example, 26 percent of Saudi Arabia's 2011

national budget (SAR150 billion or US\$40 billion) is allocated to education and training.

As a result of such financial commitments, education has become widespread in the region, with significant progress made toward achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education. For example, the number of Saudi students in primary, intermediate, and secondary schools increased by nearly 1,200 percent in the 40 years prior to 2009. At the same time, the number of teachers increased by more than 1,850 percent, and the number of schools nearly 1,050 percent.<sup>3</sup> There has also been improvement in equity of access to public education

**Exhibit 3**  
**GCC Nations Spend a Significant Portion of GDP on Education**

### PUBLIC EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION AS A PERCENTAGE OF GDP<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Figures are for most recent year available between 2000 and 2007.

<sup>2</sup> 2007.

Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2010*, Statistical Annex, Table 15; pp. 202–203; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *Education at a Glance 2010*

for young men and women. And in another measure of success, literacy among people 15 to 24 has increased considerably and is expected to reach almost 100 percent in Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman by 2015, with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and UAE not far behind (see *Exhibit 4*). Clearly, GCC countries have made remarkable strides in providing GCC youth with access to education opportunities.

Nevertheless, major problems remain in GCC education systems. These deficiencies, some of which urgently need to be addressed, were underscored by our youth survey. Fixing them will require a commitment by Gulf societies to address curricula, teaching methods, the use of information and

communications technology (ICT) in schools, the involvement of the private sector, and the engagement of society as a whole in the process of education. We will discuss these elements in more detail later in this section in “Vision for the Future of Education” (p. 19).

#### Survey Results: What Young People Think of Education

Our survey revealed that GCC governments’ emphasis on education coincides with the aspirations of its youth. When asked “*What is your major priority/ambition in life?*” respondents ranked completing education first (see *Exhibit 5*). Finding employment came second, followed by getting married and starting a family. Clearly, many young people

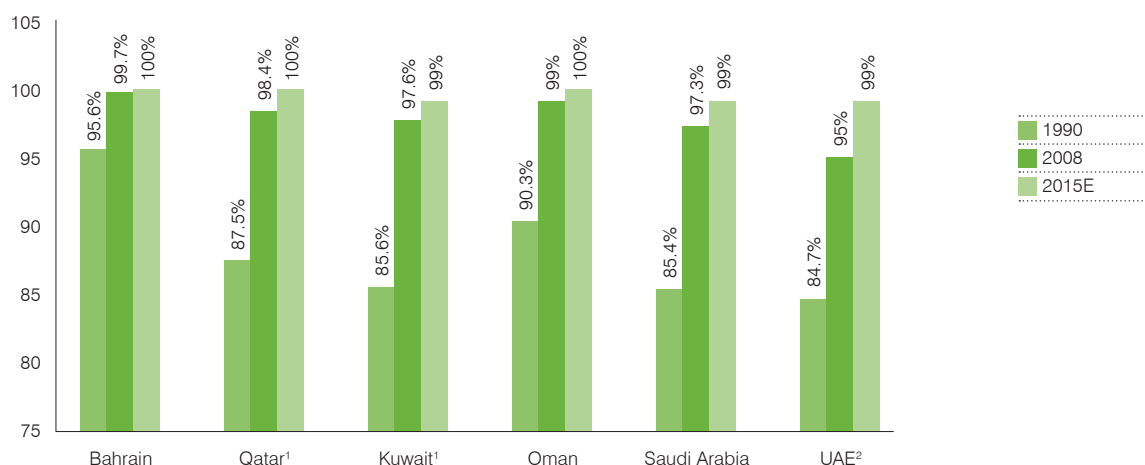
today value the importance of education as a stairway to self-improvement and economic independence.

We should also point out one of the most interesting findings from our survey because we believe it is a signpost to an important feature of Gulf societies in the future. In response to the question “*What would you like your country to be reputed for?*” 67 percent of respondents chose being a technically advanced nation and 65 percent said having an educated/intellectual society (see *Exhibit 6*).

These preferences indicate that young Gulf citizens are not only aware of the benefits and prestige that come with a good education, but also conscious of the close connection between educa-

**Exhibit 4**  
GCC Youth Will Be Almost Universally Literate by 2015

#### TOTAL LITERACY RATES FOR PEOPLE AGES 15–24 IN GCC COUNTRIES



<sup>1</sup> 2007 data.

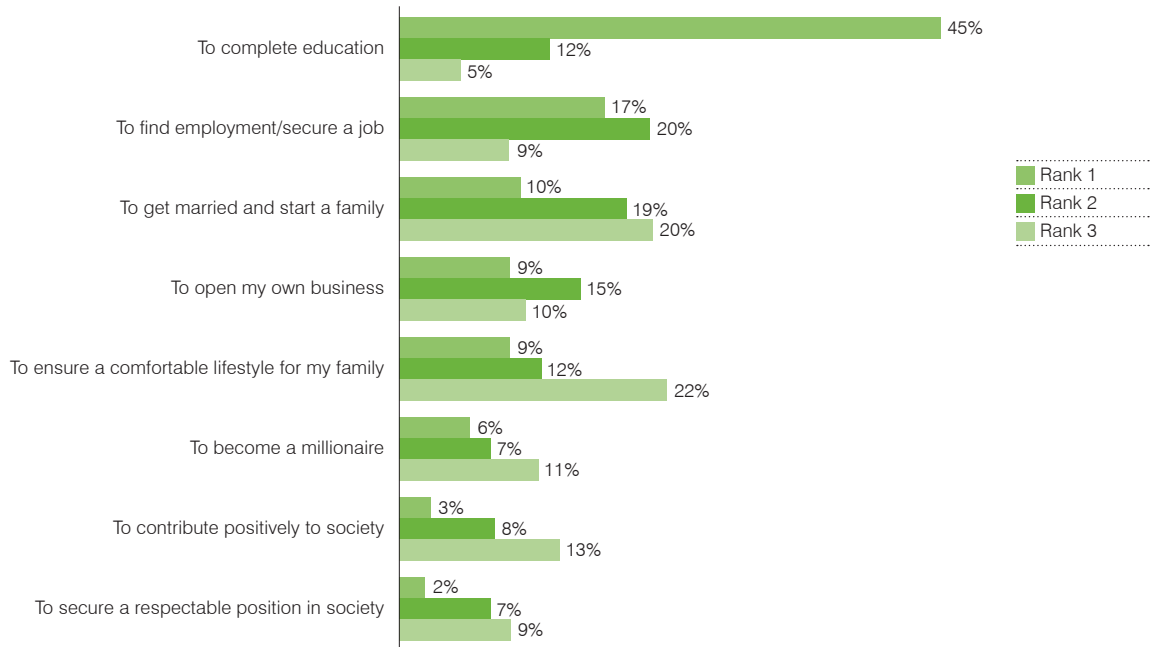
<sup>2</sup> 2005 data.

Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Arab Human Development Report 2005*, Regional Bureau for Arab States, Table A4–10: Literacy/Enrolment: p. 296; World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2010*



**Exhibit 5**  
**Education Is a Critical Aspiration for Young People**

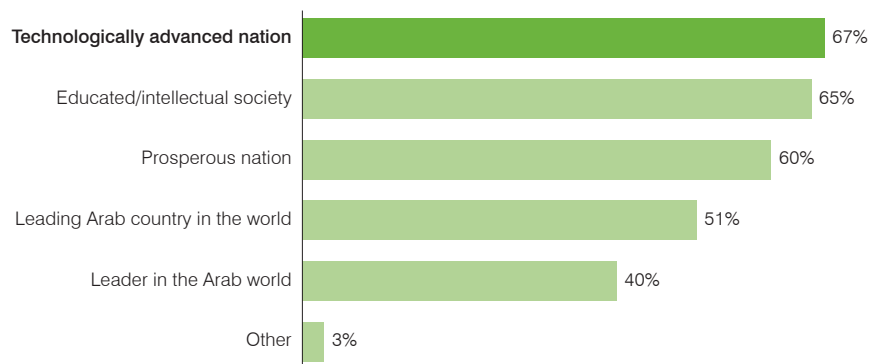
WHAT IS YOUR MAJOR PRIORITY/AMBITION IN LIFE? PLEASE RANK BY ORDER OF IMPORTANCE.  
 (PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES ACCORDING TO RANK)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

**Exhibit 6**  
**Young People Want Their Countries to Be Educated and Technically Advanced**

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR COUNTRY TO BE REPUTED FOR?  
 (PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

tion and technology. As today's youth move into decision-making positions in Gulf societies, they will bring with them an appreciation of the importance of education, technological competence, and intellectual aptitude, as well as an aspiration for their countries to be known for these traits.

However, our survey demonstrated that when it comes to the *quality* of their education, the primary beneficiaries of the GCC's education expansion are not happy. Keeping in mind that today's youth are deeply concerned about financial insecurity and unemployment, it is important to register that many survey participants believe that their education is not adequately preparing them for the workplace. When asked *"To what extent do you think the education system of your country has prepared you/ is preparing*

*you to find a job?"* only 19 percent said their education is preparing them "to a large extent" (see Exhibit 7). The rest were much less enthusiastic about their preparation for the working world: Fifty percent said "to some extent," 20 percent "to a lesser extent," and 12 percent "not at all."

The discontent was also evident when our survey asked, *"To what extent do you think the education system in your country has prepared you/ is preparing you to succeed in your chosen career?"* Only 22 percent of respondents replied "to a large extent" (see Exhibit 8). Almost half (49 percent) said "to some extent," 18 percent said "to a lesser extent," and 10 percent replied "not at all."

These findings indicate that young people perceive a mismatch between

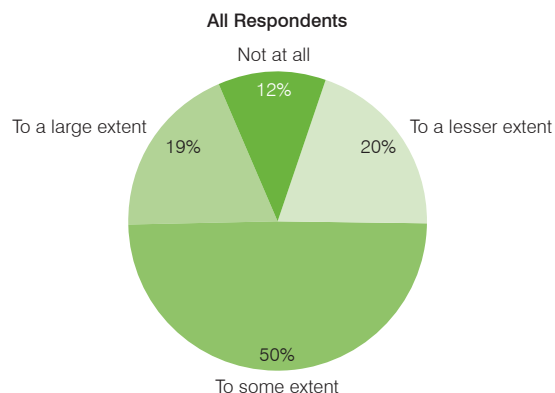
what the education system is providing and what the workplace is requiring. And on top of worrying about finding a job, many GCC youth feel ill-equipped once they do secure employment. Many young people are not able to gain work experience while studying because of a lack of summer jobs and internship opportunities. Additionally, on-the-job training is not an integral part of school curricula.

### Opportunities for Improvement

It is evident from these survey findings that young people are frustrated with their education systems and well aware of the shortcomings. Given their aspirations regarding their country's reputation, and the importance they attach to getting a good education, their disappointment means that GCC

**Exhibit 7**  
**Young People Do Not Feel That Their Education System Will Help Them Find Jobs**

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU THINK THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF YOUR COUNTRY HAS PREPARED YOU/ IS PREPARING YOU TO FIND A JOB?  
(PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

education systems are not meeting the needs of today's youth.

In fact, some indicators already reflect the disappointment in Gulf education systems. For one, the mean number of years of schooling in GCC countries is still lower than it is in most developed countries. In Norway, for example, it is 12.6 years, and in the United States, 12.4 years. In the GCC, by contrast, the highest mean number of years of schooling is 9.4 years in Bahrain. Kuwait has the lowest (6.1 years). In Saudi Arabia, the mean is 7.8 years; in Qatar, 7.3; and in the UAE, 9.2.<sup>4</sup>

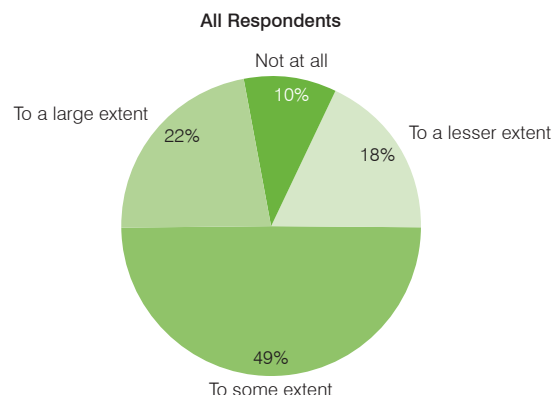
Second, anecdotal evidence suggests that the GCC suffers from high dropout rates (see *"Dropping Out"*). The decision to drop out is usually not made lightly, and although there are

## DROPPING OUT

Dropout rates are a serious issue in the GCC region. In the UAE, for example, the Dubai Statistics Centre's 2008 labor force survey notes that 22 percent of male and 14 percent of female Emiratis in Dubai age 20 to 24 had dropped out of school prior to graduating. Also, the Second Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) *Annual Report 2010* indicates poor motivation and a high dropout rate among boys attending public schools.<sup>i</sup> Current data indicates that out of 100 male Emirati students commencing grade six in public schools, 32 percent graduate on time, 47 percent fail in the annual exams, and 21 percent drop out permanently. In Qatar, primary school dropout rates reached 4.9 percent in grade one, 5.5 percent in grade two (6.1 percent male, 5.0 percent female), and 3.2 percent in grade three (data for the school year ending in 2005).<sup>ii</sup>

**Exhibit 8**  
***Young People Are Concerned That They Are Not Prepared to Succeed in Their Careers***

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU THINK THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN YOUR COUNTRY HAS PREPARED YOU/IS PREPARING YOU TO SUCCEED IN YOUR CHOSEN CAREER? (PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

various reasons students leave school, one factor may well be their lack of interest and motivation.

In order to drill down into youths' discontent and discover the reasons for it, we asked survey participants to specify what was wrong with their education system. Sixty-three percent listed traditional methods of teaching (see *Exhibit 9*). The other top complaints were a lack of practical application, curricula that are not in line with the job market, a lack of training, and a lack of qualified teachers.

It is worth elaborating on some of the areas of universal discontent among students.

Traditional teaching methods in the GCC countries emphasize repetition

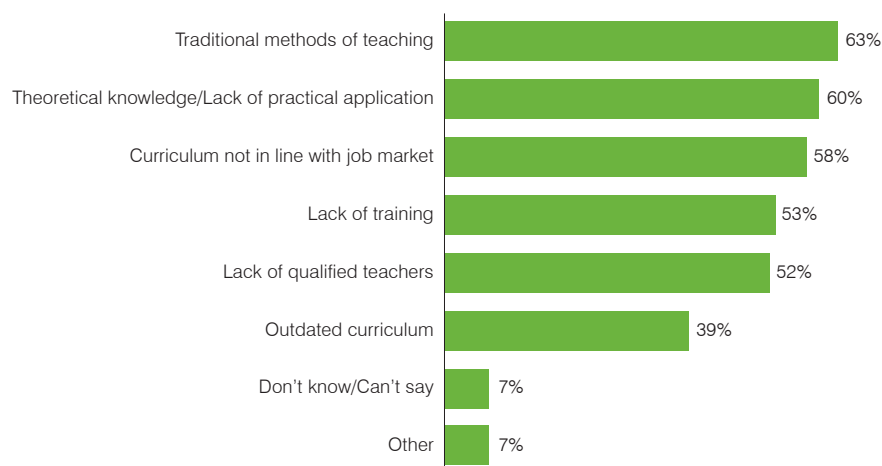
and memorization rather than skills highly valued in the modern workplace, such as creative thinking, brainstorming, problem solving, and personal initiative. In traditional teaching environments, teachers have a command-and-control function in the classroom; instead, they should be acting as facilitators, pointing the way for students to develop their sense of individual responsibility and find the information they need to solve the problems presented to them. Significantly, too, traditional teaching methods do not instill in youth an entrepreneurial spirit of healthy risk taking. This attitude is critical in any workplace, but inculcating youth with this spirit is especially important because, as we will discuss more in "Employment: Making the Most of the Youth Dividend" (p. 25), self-

employment will be a major part of meeting the job needs of today's youth. Students who graduate with an understanding that taking risks is all right, even if the effort ends in failure, will not only be more creative employees and more in tune with the modern marketplace—they also will be more apt to start their own businesses, thus helping mitigate unemployment.

Outmoded curricula and textbooks are another issue because they are not preparing students to succeed in rapidly changing societies that aspire to become knowledge-based economies in competitive global markets. Inadequate attention is given to math, science, and information technologies. For example, the International Association for

**Exhibit 9**  
**Young People Have a Number of Concerns About the Education System**

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE MAIN WEAKNESSES OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN YOUR COUNTRY?  
(PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, which measures students' learning achievements in 50 countries, found in its 2007 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) serious deficiencies in these subjects among GCC students, who failed to reach the advanced international benchmark on items involving complex topics and reasoning skills. In mathematics, the scores of 4th and 8th grade students from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain registered the lowest level (one out of a possible five); science results were similar. Qatar registered the lowest overall score of all countries; Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman also had poor scores.<sup>5</sup>

Field of study is a related problem. The number of GCC university students in the fields of humanities, social sciences, and business is far greater than the number of those in science, engineering, and manufacturing.<sup>6</sup> This is a disadvantage because as GCC countries push to become more diversified economies, young people will need the technical

and digital skills to master—and create—new technologies.

Finally, vocational training is undervalued and underdeveloped in the Gulf region. Fifty-three percent of our surveyed youth were unhappy with their education because of a “lack of training.” If education systems are going to meet youths' aspiration to be prepared for the workplace, vocational training clearly has to come into the mix in a much stronger way. At the moment, course offerings are limited and often not designed with a view toward meeting market demands. In addition, in most GCC countries, manual work as part of vocational training is still largely considered socially undesirable, better left to school dropouts, expatriates, and those from low-income backgrounds. Because of this societal bias against vocational training, most students prefer an academic education, believing that it will lead to a high-salaried position, usually in the public sector. But this choice leaves them without skills demanded by the market if a public-sector job does not materialize.

### **Vision for the Future of Education**

The GCC's youth bulge presents a major education challenge to the region's governments. They already have demonstrated their commitment to education through generous funding. But they need to examine why there is such dissatisfaction among students with the schooling they are receiving, and why their national education systems are failing to prepare young people to acquire productive, gainful employment or successfully compete in a global economy.

In fact, GCC governments *have* begun to recognize the need for change and reorientation, and initiatives undertaken so far are laudable. We are mindful of Bahrain's *Economic Vision 2030*, a document that aims to establish a first-rate education system enabling all Bahrainis to fulfill their ambitions. It has a clear strategy for raising standards and performances in schools, vocational institutions, and universities.

Oman's Eighth Five-Year Development Plan (2011–15) focuses on the role of higher education in

helping youth contribute to Oman's development. Likewise, the *Qatar National Vision 2030* presents a plan of action for an advanced education system providing students with a first-rate education and training opportunities. In particular, it encourages programs that foster analytical and critical thinking, creativity and innovation, and a curriculum responding to the needs of the labor market.

And in Saudi Arabia, Tatweer, which is the King Abdullah Project for General Education Development, aims to develop the curriculum and improve teachers' classroom performance, the learning environment, and extracurricular activities. Launched in 2007, Tatweer seeks to prepare students for a knowledge-based economy. The *Ninth Development Plan* (2010–14) calls for education programs that meet modern scientific and technological requirements, develop critical thinking and practical skills, and promote initiative and entrepreneurship.

In addition, the *UAE Government Strategy* published in 2007 urges the

creation of a high-quality education meeting international standards that matches the needs of the workplace, strengthens scientific research, and promotes vocational education.

These are serious beginnings, and the nature of education is such that it will take a generation to see their results. In the meantime, however, there is more that can be done. Our vision of a truly enhanced education experience for GCC youth requires a large-scale, society-wide effort that draws in parents, educators, NGOs, and particularly the private sector. We believe that this society-wide mobilization is necessary because, as we have noted, the problems facing GCC youth nowadays are interrelated—education has an impact on employment, leisure time, and community engagement. Solutions for these problems require the involvement of an entire society.

One goal of this mobilization would be to change attitudes that are adversely affecting education and its sister issue, employment. The stigma associated with vocational training, for example, should be countered.

Also, young people's clear preference for working in the public sector will need to change, so that they are increasingly drawn to business (particularly to establishing their own), medicine, science, and NGOs that serve society. The entrepreneurial spirit needs uplifting.

One of the most urgent tasks, we believe, is to speed up the move away from traditional teaching methods. This requires massive programs to retrain and motivate teachers to embrace modern methods of pedagogy. We do not underestimate the huge investment of time and funding this will require.

A modern economy stresses knowledge, computer literacy, collaboration, and creative problem solving—skills enhanced by access to modern information and communication technologies. Therefore, it is urgent to ensure that GCC schools have digitally rich learning environments with advanced ICT infrastructure; they should offer students access to laptops, the Internet, online classes, and the latest in collaborative technologies. The

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*Our vision of a truly  
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classroom of the future requires high ICT literacy rates for both students and teachers.

In our vision of the future of Gulf education, curricula would be revamped to emphasize science, technology, mathematics, and foreign languages. They would also include opportunities to develop skills relevant to the real world of work, such as skills in problem solving and researching information. Materials for classes would match the revised curricula.

We suggest GCC countries pay urgent attention to upgrading and expanding vocational education in partnership with the private sector. The aim would be to link the two environments of classroom and workplace in a practical way so that

young people do not feel they are crossing into unknown terrain when they move from one to the other.

The amplification of vocational training, however, should be just one of the goals of an intensified relationship between the education and business sectors. The heightened collaboration we envision would include contributions from the private sector in the form of summer jobs, internships, mentoring programs, and research and development (R&D) ventures that involve young people. And from public education systems, there would be more responsiveness to the needs of the labor market; young people would graduate with marketable skills and a capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship.

Another goal in our ideal vision of education would be to give youths more guidance on potential careers from an early age, but especially in high school and tertiary education institutions. They could profit immensely from information about different careers, opening up horizons they might not otherwise have imagined.

In an era of economic diversification, the private sector must lead the way in providing jobs for the millions of youth seeking to join the labor force. Education systems must therefore produce graduates who have the skills to succeed in the private sector.

It is urgent, as our survey has confirmed, that these changes begin soon, or be accelerated where they have already been launched.



## Immediate Priorities

GCC stakeholders can take a number of concrete steps to achieve this vision, allowing GCC education systems to reach their fullest potential and ensure young people's future as productive members of the global community.

- Revamp public education systems, including national vocational training programs, so they are more flexible and receptive to the needs of youth in the labor market. This revamping should be done in a high-profile, widely advertised partnership with chambers of commerce and industry leaders.
- Reform curricula, giving increased emphasis to science, technology, mathematics, foreign languages, and ICT at all grade levels. Classroom materials ought to match the curricula. Practical know-how should be a major part of all courses.
- Develop a national program to change attitudes toward vocational education in order to raise its profile as a valued path to employment. This national campaign should include visits to schools by vocational teachers; posters in school corridors; and advertisements on television, government websites, and YouTube, as well as in newspapers.
- Accelerate national programs that demonstrate modern teaching methods to retrain teachers and ease them into new attitudes regarding their role in the classroom as guides who encourage students to take personal initiative, solve problems, and ask questions.
- Encourage a culture of continuous education and lifelong learning, both formal and informal, using digital resources as well as traditional classroom settings.
- Create opportunities for young people who have dropped out of school or not completed their education for whatever reason to reenter the formal education system.
- Encourage the creation of local parent-teacher associations to get parents more involved in their children's education.
- Create a private-sector education agenda, including a clear synopsis for governments, multilateral institutions, and other key players, that details the actions necessary to improve the private sector's ability to finance and provide high-quality, employment-driven education. It should include plans for greater involvement of the private sector in governing bodies, advisory boards, and research boards, as well as inspection, accreditation, and auditing services. The private sector can also provide ICT equipment, student loans, scholarships, and extra-curricular education opportunities such as science clubs and museums.
- Engage civil society, especially NGOs, nonprofits, and professional associations, to play a part in developing education and skills training programs for young people. Community-based training programs should be directed toward the identification of employment and income-generating activities at the local level and could offer vocational guidance, technical assistance, and labor market information.



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## EMPLOYMENT: MAKING THE MOST OF THE YOUTH DIVIDEND

Work offers much more than a salary. It gives young people self-esteem, a sense of accomplishment, and the psychic reward of contributing to their society. Work is also the heartbeat of a nation's economy, allowing it to thrive and expand.

At this moment in history, the GCC's large youth bulge—a cohort of ambitious workers—presents the region with an amazing opportunity for generating economic growth, diversifying its economy, and enhancing its human capital. But finding work for all these young people may be the region's biggest hurdle to future development.

Creating the hundreds of thousands of jobs that will be needed is a daunting undertaking. Failure means the loss of a unique occasion for the Gulf nations to elevate their economic and social development, and heightens the risk of possible future recriminations from members of a generation

who never had a chance to achieve economic stability and experience the self-worth that comes with satisfying work and careers.

The Middle East currently has among the highest unemployment rates of any region in the world for people between the ages of 15 and 24; one out of four young people in the labor market is unemployed. This unemployment rate of 24.9 percent, as measured in 2009, is nearly double the global rate of 12.8 percent.<sup>7</sup>

GCC countries have not escaped this dire situation, despite their oil-based prosperity and high rates of economic growth. The strides they have made in enrolling youth in education have not been matched by rising rates of youth employment.

Up-to-date statistics on youth unemployment are difficult to obtain, because not all GCC countries publish

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official figures on a regular basis. This makes it hard to know the precise extent of the problem. But according to the latest available official national data, unemployment rates among people age 15 to 24 between 2001 and 2009 were highest in Bahrain, 31 percent in 2001, followed by Saudi Arabia, 29.9 percent in 2009. Kuwait suffered 18.4 percent youth unemployment in 2005. In 2008, Qatar reported 7 percent unemployment among its youth. And the UAE indicated in 2005 that its youth unemployment rate was 8 percent. However, a labor force survey conducted in the UAE in 2009 revealed that the unemployment rate in the age group 15 to 19 reached 36.1 percent; among those age 20 to 24, it was 11.3 percent.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, according to official national data, young people have

made up a significant percentage of the total unemployed population during the past decade (2001–09); rates include 54.1 percent (2001) in Bahrain, 68.6 percent (2005) in Kuwait, 53 percent (2008) in Qatar, 45.5 percent (2009) in Saudi Arabia, and 33.4 percent (2005) in the UAE.<sup>9</sup>

To their credit, GCC governments are well aware of their unemployment problem and its ramifications. But successfully tackling it requires a speedier and more holistic commitment from all stakeholders—governments, the private sector, educators, and young people themselves—than the region has so far witnessed. Significantly, our recommendations for action in “Immediate Priorities” (p. 37) at the end of this section all pivot on the axis of greater cooperation and partnerships among these parties.

### **Survey Results: What Young People Think About Unemployment**

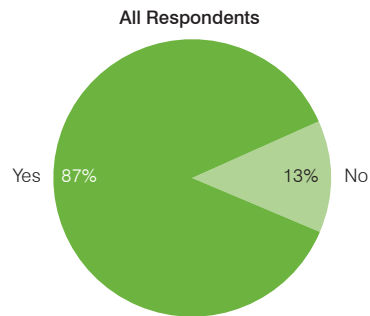
Unemployment looms as a huge worry for young people; 87 percent of our respondents described it as a major problem (*see Exhibit 10*).

GCC youth feel that they are facing a number of difficulties in their quest for employment. When asked “*In your opinion, what are the challenges that people encounter while looking for a job?*” 58 percent noted the scarcity of jobs (*see Exhibit 11*). Low salaries were cited by 57 percent, and 49 percent said lack of previous experience.

Given these concerns, we thought it important to learn what considerations young people are using in their search for work. So we asked them to rank certain criteria in order of importance, and their rankings offered some interesting

**Exhibit 10**  
**GCC Youth Are Extremely Concerned About Unemployment**

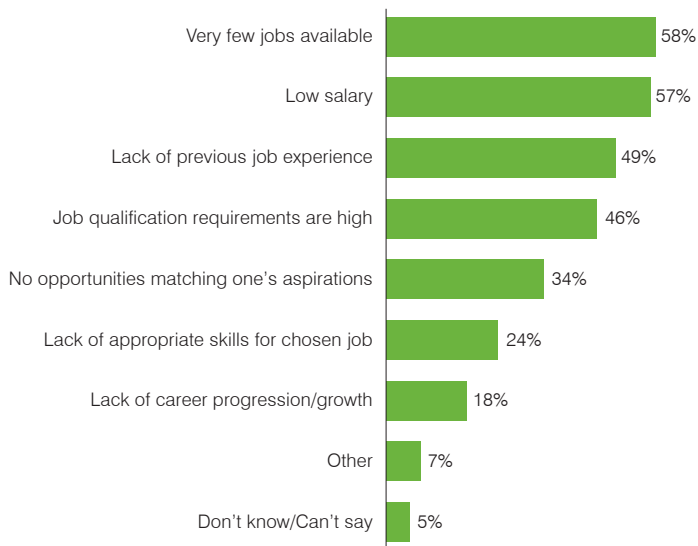
DO YOU CONSIDER UNEMPLOYMENT NOWADAYS  
A MAJOR PROBLEM FOR YOUTH IN YOUR COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE?  
(PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

**Exhibit 11**  
**Challenges to Finding a Job Are Structural and Personal**

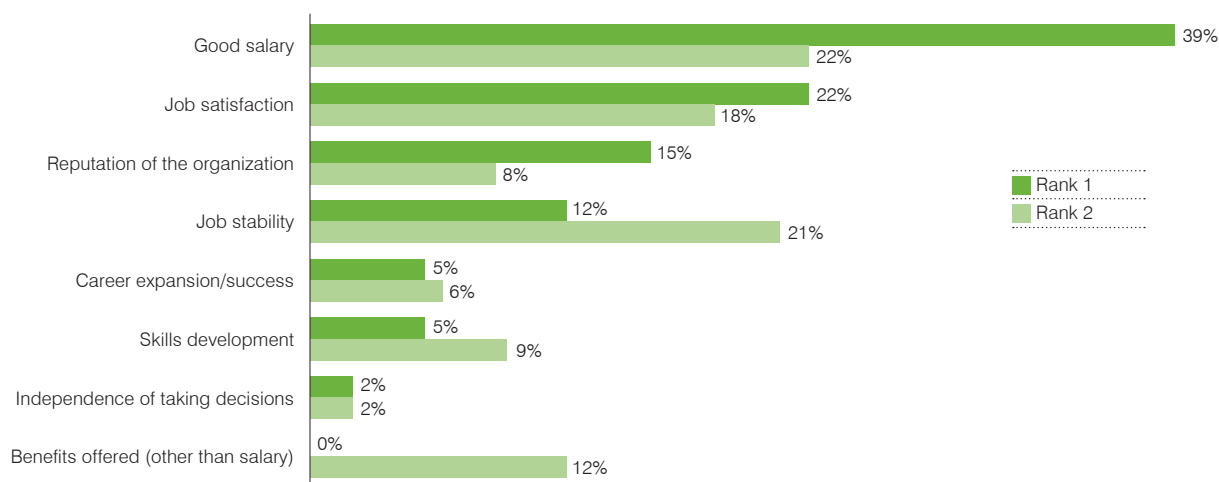
IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES THAT  
PEOPLE ENCOUNTER WHILE LOOKING FOR A JOB?  
(PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

**Exhibit 12**  
**GCC Youth Seek Well-paying, Satisfying Jobs**

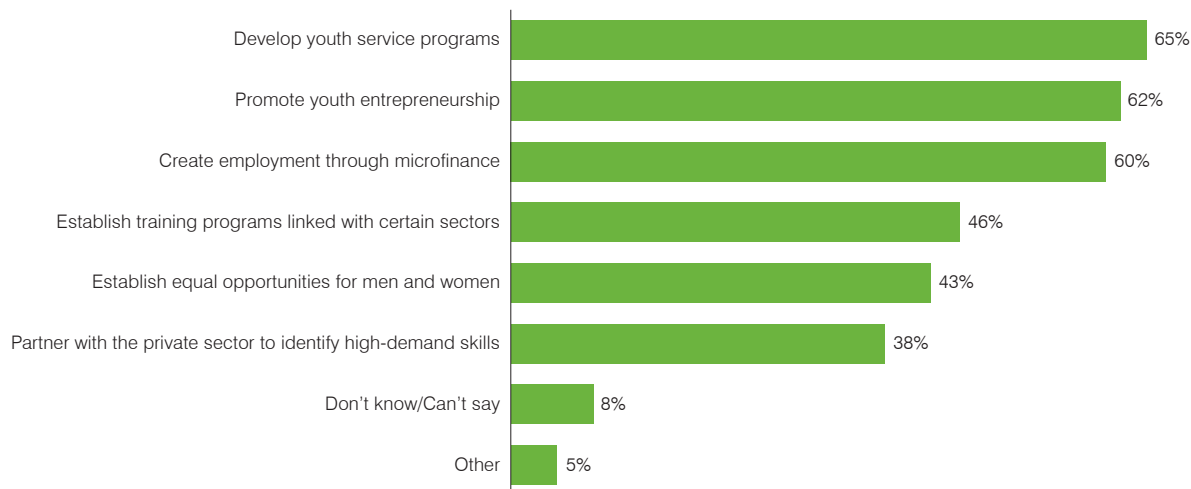
GIVEN BELOW IS A SELECTION OF CRITERIA THAT PEOPLE USE TO EVALUATE JOBS.  
 COULD YOU PLEASE RANK THE FOLLOWING IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE TO YOU?  
 (PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES ACCORDING TO RANK)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

**Exhibit 13**  
**Young People Seek Creative Solutions to the Employment Problem**

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT CAN YOUR COUNTRY'S GOVERNMENT DO TO EXPAND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH?  
 (PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

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insights. The number one consideration was a good salary (*see Exhibit 12*). The second most important criterion was job satisfaction, which was followed by the reputation of the organization and job stability. Respondents placed career growth and skills development after these other desirable characteristics in a job. These rankings suggest that GCC youth are highly motivated by a desire for financial security and perhaps independence. The rankings also reflect the impact on some GCC countries of an economic downturn that resulted from the global recession, which has no doubt intensified the fears of financial insecurity among many youth.

Finally, our survey respondents felt that their governments had a role to play in mitigating unemployment. When asked “*In your opinion, what can your country’s government do to expand economic opportunities for youth?*” 65 percent said it should develop youth service programs, which would allow young people

opportunities to provide a service to their communities, such as first aid or recreational activities (*see Exhibit 13*). Sixty-two percent said the government should promote youth entrepreneurship, and 60 percent wanted it to create employment through microfinance programs that target low-income groups with small loans.

These findings show that young people are conscious of the government’s role and have high expectations that the government will work to reduce unemployment. Significantly, only 38 percent said they believed the state should partner with the private sector to identify high-demand skills. This low figure points to a problem: Even youth do not give high priority to public–private partnerships in tackling youth unemployment. As we said earlier, we believe such partnerships are urgently needed.

#### **Opportunities for Improvement**

Our survey confirmed that GCC youth struggle to find suitable

employment and are anxious about their prospects. Their chances of finding employment are much lower than adults’ because of their lack of substantial work experience and lack of occupational skills required by potential employers. Young people are also more likely to quit their jobs voluntarily or be fired, and in difficult economic times, they are more vulnerable to being laid off than are adults who have longer work histories. Youth also may take longer to shop around for the right job, waiting for work that suits them. And because of limited financial resources, their job search is likely to be limited to the vicinity of the family home.<sup>10</sup>

But these observations should not obscure the reality that unacceptably high youth unemployment is caused by a number of interconnected issues that require society’s attention.

Paramount is the poor preparation for the workplace given to youth by

their education systems, which do not teach the skills demanded by today's modern labor market, as we discussed earlier in this report.

Other reasons for high youth unemployment have their roots in the Gulf's recent economic history. A sharp drop in oil revenues in the second half of the 1980s led to a relative decrease in employment growth. At the same time, technological innovations introduced changes in

production processes and in the skills needed for all sectors of the economy. However, the GCC region found it difficult to adapt to the new requirements of a global economy that puts high value on change and innovation. Although GCC countries liberalized their economies to some extent, more needed to be done.

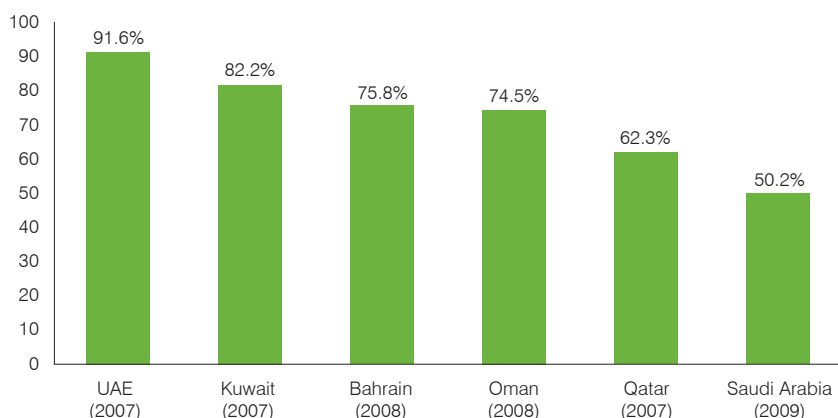
Meanwhile, the public sector emerged as the dominant employer of nationals, but was eventually unable to employ

all those seeking work. As a result, the labor market became stagnant with unskilled workers, and unemployment rose.<sup>11</sup> GCC countries came to depend on foreign laborers to fill jobs, especially in building their national infrastructure (*see Exhibit 14*).

This trend, which began more than 40 years ago, contributed to the GCC's industrial development. But today, dependency on foreign labor and the sponsorship system that undergirds

**Exhibit 14**  
**The Majority of Each GCC Country's Workforce Consists of Foreigners**

#### FOREIGN LABOR FORCE AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL LABOR FORCE IN GCC COUNTRIES



Source: Arab Labor Organization, Official National Statistics on Employment, Youth, Migration & Human Development in Arab Countries, 2010, Table 14: p. 24; Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), 46th annual report, 2010



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*GCC governments  
have found themselves  
carrying a very large  
share of the  
employment burden.*

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it are major obstacles to overcoming the youth unemployment problem. In the absence of a mandatory minimum wage, foreigners are willing to work for lower salaries and fewer benefits than nationals. This reduces work opportunities for nationals, especially youth. It also fosters a preference for foreign laborers in the private sector, which naturally is alert to the bottom line. Government efforts to wean businesses off foreign workers and to encourage—or require—they to employ more nationals have met with limited success.

GCC nations' use of foreign labor is just one factor contributing to youth unemployment. Another is GCC youth's strong preference for work in the public sector, even though it

is already saturated with employees. This preference, which stems from the job security, good wages, and substantial benefits that accompany a government job, deters many youth from seeking private-sector work. GCC governments have done little to alter this bias or address the disparity between public- and private-sector salaries. As a result, they have found themselves carrying a very large share of the employment burden.

In addition, there is an absence of effective public and private employment agencies and programs to match young job-seekers with prospective employers. As one report on Middle East youth unemployment observed, "Many young people complain that they would be willing to work if they

knew where to find a job. At the same time, many enterprises complain that they cannot find young people who are willing to work."<sup>12</sup>

Another obstacle is the absence of a tradition of part-time work during school vacations, as well as a lack of internships and mentoring programs offered by the private sector. As our survey revealed, almost half the respondents (49 percent) listed lack of previous work experience as a top challenge in job hunting. This deficit could be fixed if young people had opportunities to get on-the-job training through part-time work.

Among our survey respondents, only 41 percent said they had ever held a temporary job or internship during

summer vacation while they were at university. Exploring why the rest had not done so, we discovered that youth are not conditioned to see such experiences as part of their job preparation. Forty-five percent said they had not worked part-time because they traveled during vacations; 31 percent said they preferred resting/relaxing at home, and 26 percent said they felt they were not ready for work. Only 19

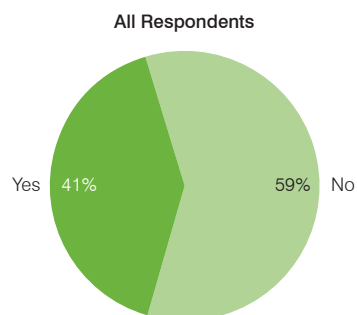
percent cited the lack of good opportunities to work (*see Exhibit 15*).

These findings suggest that GCC youth need to adjust their attitude so that they see part-time work as valuable, necessary training. Our research has found that employers complain about the lack of a work ethic among youth—something that can be learned early through part-time jobs.

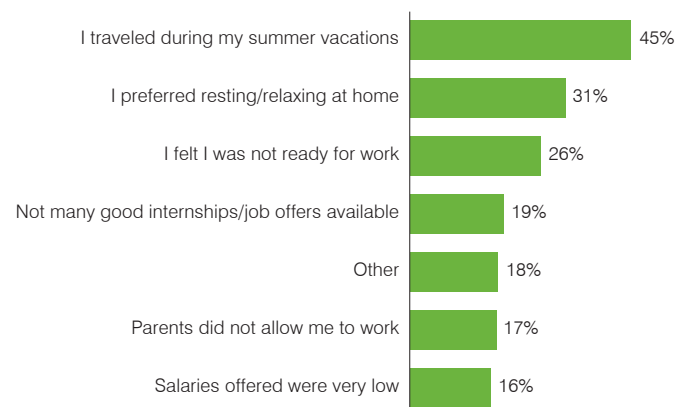
An additional concern for policymakers is the voluntarily unemployed or inactive youth. In 2009, the worldwide youth inactivity rate reached 49 percent, and the highest rate—63.6 percent—was in the Middle East. In the GCC, according to International Labour Organization data for 2009, Saudi Arabia had the highest youth inactivity rate in the region, 71.1

**Exhibit 15**  
*The Majority of Survey Respondents Did Not Work During Summer Vacations*

HAVE YOU EVER HELD A JOB (TEMPORARY/INTERNSHIP/TRAINING) DURING YOUR SUMMER VACATION WHILE AT SCHOOL/UNIVERSITY? (PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



WHY DID YOU NOT TAKE UP A JOB (TEMPORARY/INTERNSHIP/TRAINING) DURING SUMMER VACATION WHILE AT SCHOOL/UNIVERSITY? (PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS WHO ANSWERED “NO”)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

percent, and Qatar had the lowest, 36 percent (*see Exhibit 16*).<sup>13</sup>

The voluntarily unemployed includes youth who are not actively seeking work because they are getting an education, or are sick or disabled. But the GCC's high rate of youth inactivity is also explained by the fact that many young women are not actively seeking a job, either because

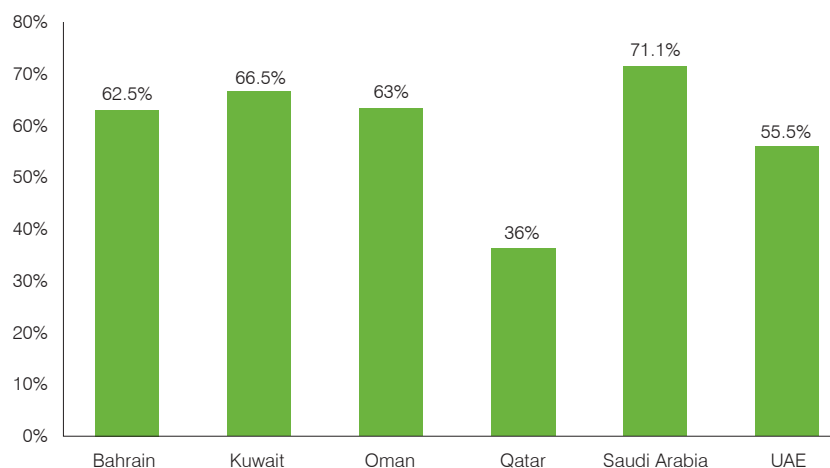
they are mothers taking care of children, or because social constraints preclude their search for work. Since some men do not allow their wives, daughters, or sisters to work in mixed-gender environments, job opportunities for women are limited, leading to a significant number of "inactive" young women disengaged from the labor force. We discuss gender discrimination in the GCC's

patriarchal societies as it relates to youth unemployment at greater length in "Youth and Gender in the GCC: Narrowing the Gap" (p. 39).

Other youth who contribute to the GCC's high inactivity rate could be more worrying to governments. They include those who, frustrated by the lack of job prospects, have given up their search and are idly waiting

**Exhibit 16**  
***The GCC Has an Extremely High Rate of Youth Inactivity***

**TOTAL INACTIVITY RATE IN GCC COUNTRIES AMONG PEOPLE AGES 15–24 (2009)**



Source: International Labour Organization (ILO), *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*, 2010

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for better times. Beyond suffering from personal disappointment and discontent, these so-called discouraged workers could become a societal problem to the extent that they engage in delinquent behaviors.

#### **A Vision for the Unemployment Challenge**

GCC governments are mindful of the youth unemployment challenge and have already launched a variety of initiatives to deal with it. A sampling of those initiatives includes Tamkeen-Bahrain, a semiautonomous authority that runs youth career awareness programs in tourism and manufacturing; Oman's Fund for Development of Youth Projects (Sharakah), the only venture capital fund dedicated to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) started by Omani youth; and the *Qatar National Vision 2030*, which supports entrepreneurship and innovation capabilities, and the country's Social

Development Centre, which offers youth capacity-building programs.

In Saudi Arabia, a package of financial benefits worth an estimated SAR135 billion (US\$36 billion) was announced in early 2011 by King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud; it will support youth education, housing, and employment. It also included, for the first time in Saudi Arabia, compensation for up to a year for jobless Saudis, many of whom are youth. In the Eastern Province, the Prince Mohammad bin Fahd Program for Youth Development serves youth through vocational training and employment. The program has organized more than 7,000 training sessions for young men and women, trained more than 36,000 young Saudis during summers, and found employment for more than 39,000 Saudi youths.

And the *UAE Government Strategy* published in 2007 promotes voca-

tional education to meet skills demanded by the labor market, in particular the private sector, and calls for proactively increasing the number of young nationals in the workforce.

These are commendable initiatives. But like most such programs, they were launched by governments. In order to reap the full rewards of the GCC's demographic dividend of youth, a truly society-wide campaign is needed. Government action alone will not be enough to assuage youth unemployment. Countries need to partner much more extensively with their large, wealthy private sectors for this nationwide undertaking. The pervasive attitude that it is the task of government alone to provide work must change. The private sector needs to be aware of its responsibilities and role in this endeavor.

Indeed, the private sector has launched some laudable programs

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to alleviate youth unemployment. INJAZ Bahrain and INJAZ Kuwait are private-sector NGOs associated with Junior Achievement Worldwide, an international organization that seeks to educate students on entrepreneurship, finance, and work readiness. In Saudi Arabia, Bab Rizq Jameel, an initiative created by businessman Muhammad Abdul Latif Jameel, aims to match young Saudi men and women with existing job opportunities, support owners of small businesses with interest-free loans, and offer franchise opportunities to young entrepreneurs. Programs include training in hotel and restaurant services, arts and crafts, electronics, health services, and car repair. Bab Rizq Jameel has created almost 160,000 jobs as of July 2011.<sup>14</sup>

But much more is needed to ignite the sustained national mobilization required to deal with the growing problem of youth unemployment. In

addition to action on the part of governments and private sectors, solutions will also require participation from civil society, universities, secondary schools, local community groups, human capital development organizations, and families and youth themselves—all working toward the same end of job creation and employee training.

One of the most crucial efforts in this movement is to align education systems with labor market needs so that today's students become workers who are able to take their country into the competitive, globalized 21st century. This requires comprehensive, research-based strategies that strengthen the link between education systems and markets and that prioritize the market's needs so that educators are producing employable graduates. It also means developing diversified curricula that include ICT and foreign language training as well as more math, science, and technology.

It is vital to develop clear, strategic economic plans to reach simultaneously the twin goals of economic diversification and youth employment. That means job creation in sectors where the GCC can gain a competitive edge, including knowledge-based activities such as R&D and finance.

Compared with their peers in the larger Middle East region, young people in the GCC do have more work opportunities. However, they also have high expectations for good, well-paying jobs. And, as our survey found, they are aware of the disadvantages they face when job hunting. Increasing numbers of youth will be entering the job market as the demographic youth bulge passes through GCC populations in the years ahead. If their employment needs and aspirations are not met, discontent will simmer beneath the surface of society and could become a major worry for governments.

## Immediate Priorities

In order to implement this vision of an effective, society-wide effort to deal with youth unemployment, GCC stakeholders can take a number of concrete steps.

- Establish a high-level office dedicated to creating intensive, sustained partnerships with the business community and education institutions in order to trade information on the skills needed by youth so they can get and keep jobs in the private sector.
- Engage youth directly in a dialogue about careers and employment. Ask their advice, keep them informed, and expect them to perform to high standards and to do their part to relieve unemployment by, for example, having an open mind about what career path to choose.
- Establish career guidance centers at all education institutions in order to help young people make the right choices, look at broader opportunities than they have done in the past, consider vocational training and private-sector opportunities as possible career paths, and develop their work ethic.
- Gather and publish timely data on the labor market, job openings, and skills needed so that job seekers, students, and businesses can make better decisions on how to meet those needs. This will require governments to establish labor market information systems that collect data, including all types of jobs in the labor market, with regular updates on vacancies and projections for the future. This information should be easily accessible online.
- Launch a high-profile national campaign to change the national preference for working in the public sector by highlighting the rewards of a private-sector job.
- Incentivize the private sector to assist in alleviating unemployment through a variety of measures, such as community recognition with nationally televised awards, and revisions of labor laws that would make it easier for businesses to recruit, hire, and fire young nationals. Governments might also want to consider penalties for companies that fail to meet goals on hiring nationals, as well as incentives for companies that meet or exceed their goals.
- Incorporate entrepreneurship training into vocational education programs and focus on the capabilities required for establishing small enterprises. These efforts should be funded and run by both the public and private sectors.
- Encourage an entrepreneurial mind-set by helping young people start SMEs through the provision of microloans and a variety of business programs, including reserving slots for them in government contract bidding, reducing the complexity of government regulations, and raising SMEs' profile through nationally televised awards for successful entrepreneurs.
- Get local banks and NGOs involved in small business advisory centers where young entrepreneurs can get mentoring in such skills as how to write a business plan or apply for a loan.
- Encourage companies, incentivizing them through subsidies if necessary, to create part-time summer internships, apprenticeship programs, and temporary jobs for young people so they can acquire job experience.
- Establish clearinghouses, either state-run or privately run, where businesses can register their offerings for internships, summer jobs, mentoring programs, and apprenticeship programs, as well as full-time jobs so that young people can know where the opportunities are.





## YOUTH AND GENDER IN THE GCC: NARROWING THE GAP

A major feature of the past half century in human history has been the expansion of women's participation in all aspects of public life. During the same period, it has become widely accepted that progress in eliminating poverty, increasing literacy, improving public health, and developing human capital greatly depends on bolstering women's capabilities so they can play significant roles in a nation's socioeconomic life.

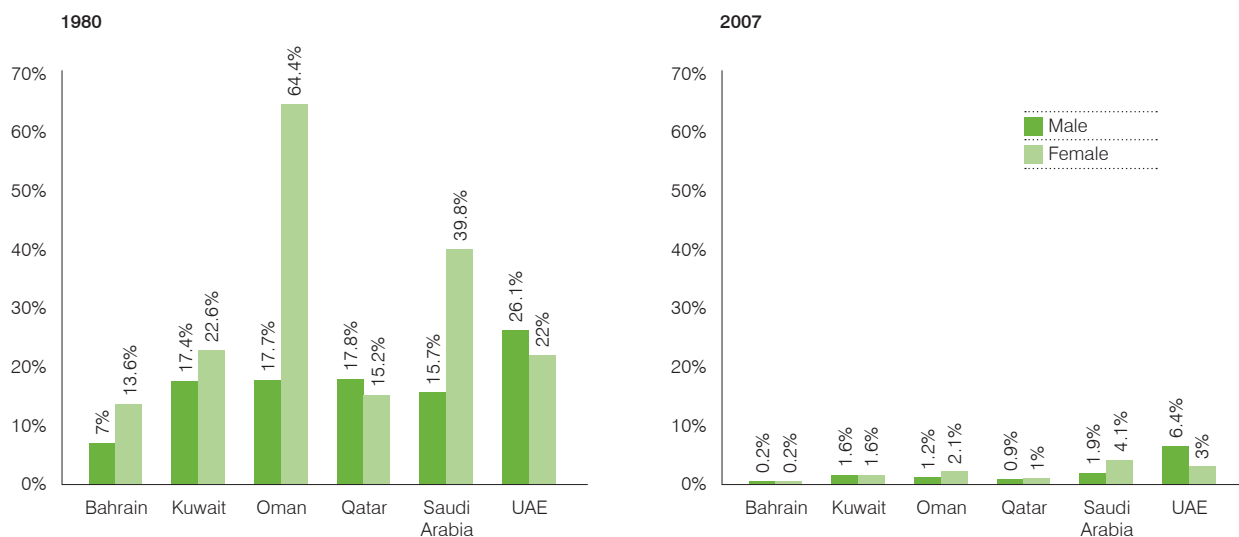
GCC countries are no exception to this global trend. Young women in this region are openly participating more and more in the public arena as businesswomen, university deans, bankers, medical professionals, scientific researchers, and government ministers. GCC women are exerting a positive influence on their society as they move beyond the traditional confinements of home and family.

This modern development has largely been the result of women's increased education. GCC countries' commendable efforts to advance gender equality in their education systems are underscored by the significant decrease in youth female illiteracy in recent decades (*see Exhibit 17*). For example, Oman's female illiteracy rate in the group age 15 to 24 was 64 percent in 1980, but by 2007, it had dramatically decreased, to 2.1 percent. And in the UAE, female youth illiteracy, which was 22 percent in 1980, stood at 3 percent in 2007—even lower than that of men (6.4 percent).

In addition, by 2007 the percentage of young women in schools had surpassed that of young men in four GCC countries—Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE—while in Oman the

**Exhibit 17**  
*Illiteracy Has Decreased Substantially Among Young Women in the GCC*

### ILLITERACY RATES AMONG PEOPLE AGES 15–24 IN GCC COUNTRIES



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database 2010; United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) Statistical Abstract of the ESCWA Region, Issue 25, 2005, Table II-2: p. 27, and Issue 29, 2010, Table II-1: pp. 27–28

rates were almost equal (see *Exhibit 18*). In Saudi Arabia, there were more than 101,300 graduates from all levels of higher education during the 2007–08 academic year, of whom 61,500, or 60.5 percent, were young women.<sup>15</sup>

GCC women in our cohort of 15 to 24 are intelligent and ambitious. Having grown up amid remarkable advancements in media and technology, they are much more aware of what is happening around the world than their mothers and grandmothers were. The Internet, travel, and satellite television have exposed them to modern ideas and influences and given them a global outlook.

And yet, a mix of local norms and traditions, social beliefs, and principles emanating from the GCC’s patriarchal system still, to some extent, exert an influence over young women’s lives, limiting their opportunities in education, employment, and leisure pursuits.

Cultural norms and traditions favoring early marriage and motherhood,

as well as a low level of awareness of the social and cultural value of educating girls and women, often cause female students to drop out of school before completing their secondary or tertiary education.

And despite the progress in primary, secondary, and tertiary education that GCC governments have achieved, young women still face gender inequality in the labor market. They are more likely than young men to be unemployed and to be in vulnerable jobs. According to ILO official data, Saudi Arabia has the region’s highest female youth unemployment rate (45.8 percent in 2008); Qatar and Kuwait have among the lowest (see *Exhibit 19*).

#### Survey Results:

##### Youth Perspectives on Gender

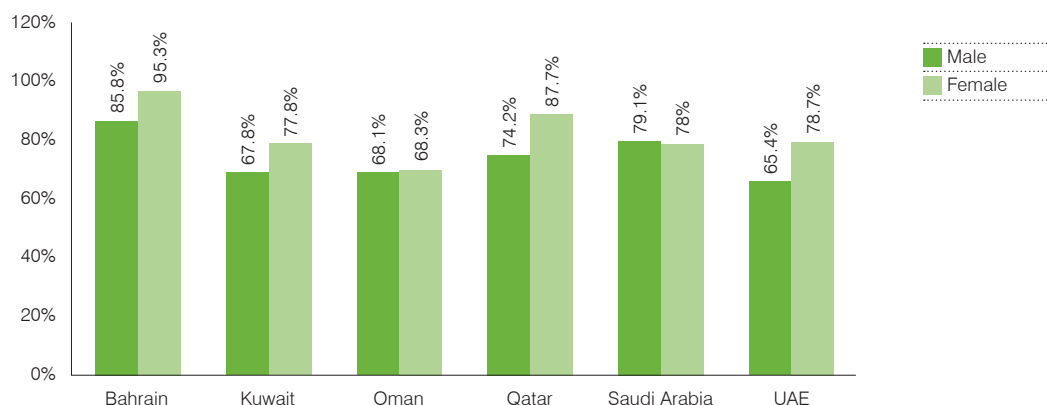
Because GCC women are participating more in public life, our survey examined youth’s attitudes toward gender roles and opportunities. Notably, we found a significant “aspiration gap” between men and women. In response to the question “*What*

*do you think should be the role of young girls/women in society?*” 59 percent of male respondents selected “housewife and mother of children” and 27 percent chose “seek employment to provide financial support/financial independence” (see *Exhibit 20*). Female respondents’ views were decidedly different. Only 22 percent chose “housewife and mother of children,” whereas 71 percent selected “seek employment to provide financial support/financial independence.”

Similar differences appeared in the survey results when it came to education and employment. Overall, 78 percent of our surveyed youth replied positively when asked, “*Do you believe in equal opportunities between men and women in education?*” and 13 percent replied negatively. But when broken down by gender, the replies tell a different story. The vast majority—92 percent—of women agreed that both genders should get equal education opportunities, but only 67 percent of men agreed. And 20 percent of male respondents said they did not believe in

**Exhibit 18**  
**Women Are Entering the Education System in Large Numbers, Surpassing Men in Some Countries**

#### PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE ENROLLED IN EDUCATION IN GCC COUNTRIES (2007)<sup>1</sup>



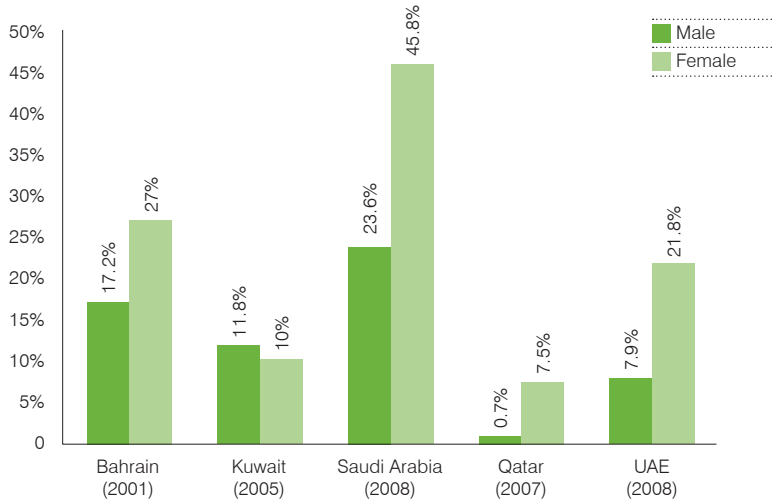
<sup>1</sup>Combined gross enrollment ratio.

Source: UNDP, *Human Development Report 2009*, Table J: p.181

### Exhibit 19

#### In Most GCC Countries, Young Women Are More Likely Than Young Men to Be Unemployed

##### TOTAL GCC UNEMPLOYMENT RATE AMONG PEOPLE AGES 15-24, BY GENDER



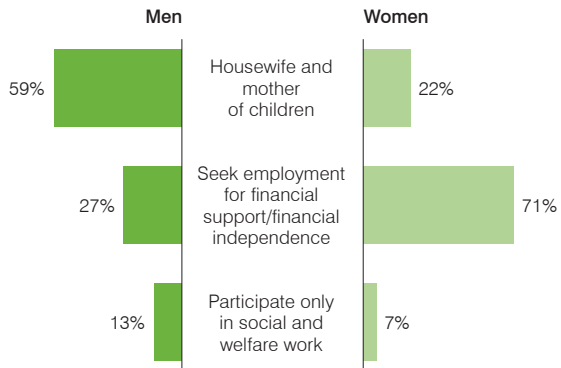
Note: Data from Oman is unavailable.

Source: International Labour Organization (ILO), *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*, 2010

### Exhibit 20

#### Men and Women Have Markedly Different Opinions on the Role of Women

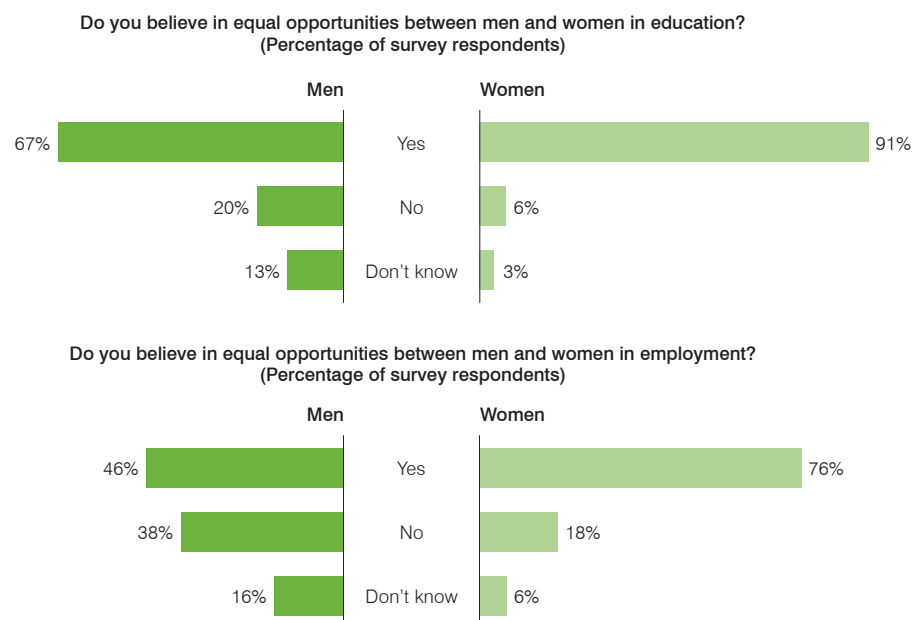
##### WHAT DO YOU THINK SHOULD BE THE ROLE OF YOUNG GIRLS/WOMEN IN SOCIETY? (PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

**Exhibit 21**  
**More Women Than Men Believe Women Should Have Equal Opportunities in Education and Employment**

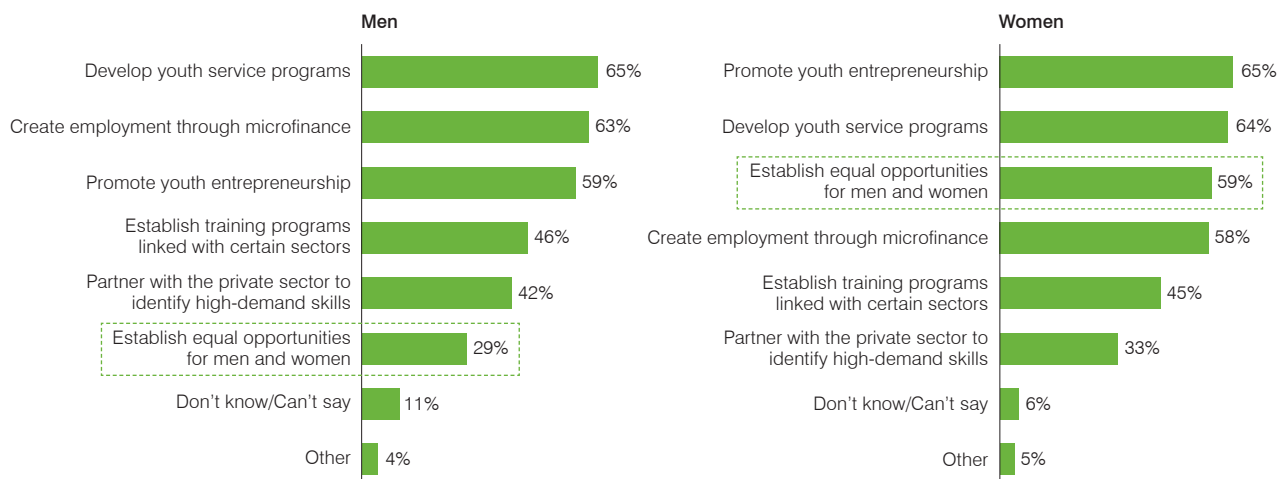
**YOUTH PERCEPTIONS ON GENDER-EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES, BY GENDER**



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

**Exhibit 22**  
**More Women Than Men Believe That Gender Equality Will Promote Economic Advancement**

**IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT CAN YOUR COUNTRY'S GOVERNMENT DO TO EXPAND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH?**  
 (PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

equal education opportunities, as did 6 percent of the women (see Exhibit 21). Furthermore, when asked, “Do you believe in equal opportunities between men and women in employment?” 46 percent of male respondents said “yes,” and 38 percent said “no.” By contrast, 76 percent of female respondents said “yes,” and 18 percent said “no.”

Another pertinent finding suggesting that equality is important to young women in the GCC was revealed when participants were asked, “What can your country’s government do to expand economic opportunities for youth?” Fifty-nine percent of women selected “establish equal opportunities for men and women,” as opposed

to only 29 percent of male respondents (see Exhibit 22).

Several other telling insights about GCC female youth emerged from our survey. First, high percentages of women in Saudi Arabia (96 percent) and the UAE (88 percent) said they regarded youth unemployment as a major problem. If women were not eager to be employed, these percentages would likely not be so high.

Second, when asked how government could expand economic opportunities for youth, 65 percent of women ranked “promote youth entrepreneurship” first. Among male participants, this option came third in ranking; 59 percent of

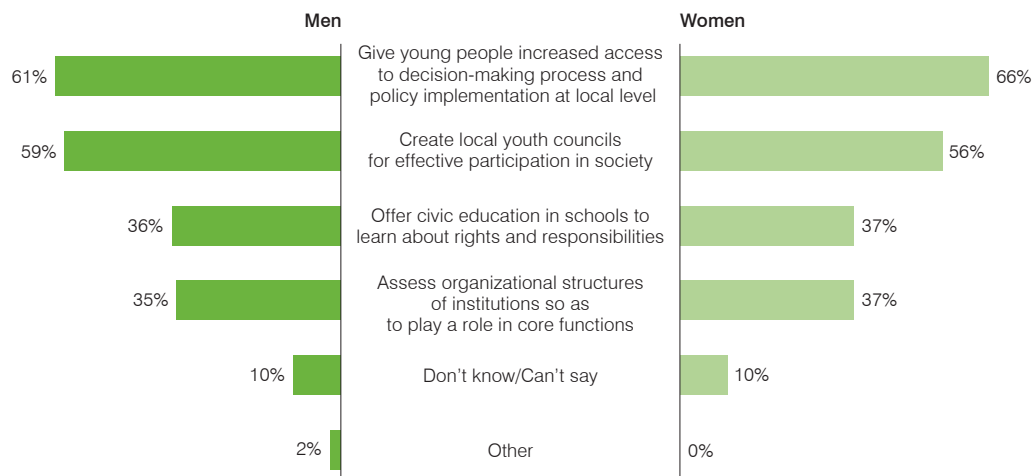
them selected it, after “develop youth service programs” and “create employment through microfinance.” This finding suggests that young women are somewhat more ready to be entrepreneurial than their male counterparts.

Finally, more young women (66 percent) than young men (61 percent) in our survey suggested that youth be given increased access to the decision-making process and policy implementation at the local level when asked, “How do you think the government should integrate/promote youth issues in national policy formulation?” (see Exhibit 23).

Overall, our survey confirmed that young GCC women have high expect-

**Exhibit 23**  
**More Young Women Than Young Men Want to Have a Voice in Formulating National Policy on Youth Issues**

HOW DO YOU THINK THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD INTEGRATE/PROMOTE YOUTH ISSUES IN NATIONAL POLICY FORMULATION?  
(PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

tations and ambitions for the future and are determined to go after their goals. But these aspirations are not endorsed to the same degree by their male peers.

Young men are more accepting of women's education, but because of conservative perceptions are resistant to the idea that women should have the same opportunities as men in the workforce. The high support among male survey participants (59 percent) for the traditional female role of housewife and mother demonstrates that the GCC region is still—even among youth—a patriarchal society.

Indeed, only 55 percent of all respondents said their government should encourage women to work in different fields as a way to improve the status of girls and women,

and only 51 percent said it should encourage the promotion of women to prominent decision-making posts (*see Exhibit 24*). Sixteen percent said there was no need to improve the status of women.

But again, when men's and women's replies are considered separately, significant differences become evident. Seventy percent of women but only 44 percent of men believe that their governments should encourage women to work in different fields. And although 69 percent of women think governments should promote women to prominent decision-making posts, only 36 percent of men support such an initiative.

### Opportunities for Improvement

Because of social and cultural constraints arising from the traditional

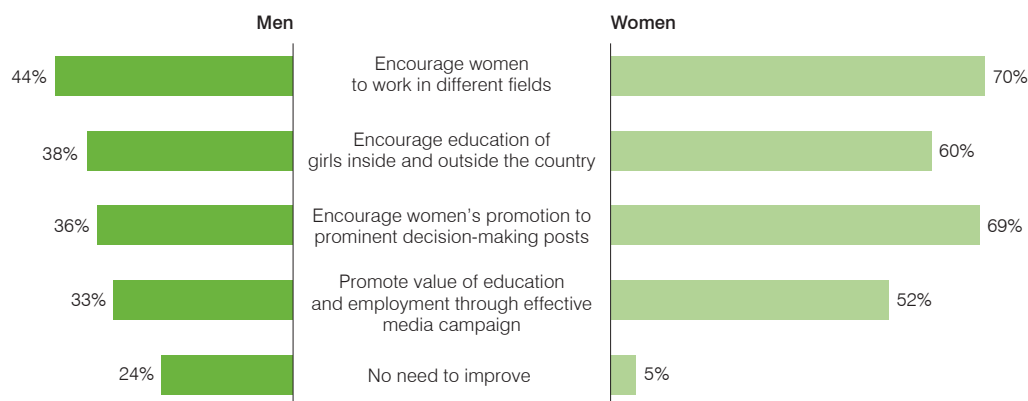
perception of the role of women, half of the GCC populations are unprepared to play their full role in national development and in enriching their country's human resources.

The constraints are evident in GCC education systems. Family pressures to marry early are one reason many young girls drop out of school before completing their education.<sup>16</sup> Besides having to cope with the drawbacks of traditional teaching methods discussed on p. 18 of this report, schoolgirls have the added disadvantages presented by curricula that have often been influenced by society's expectations of gender roles, which favor boys over girls. As a result, girls may not get sufficient instruction in math, science, foreign languages, and computers. This deficit leaves them insufficiently prepared

### Exhibit 24

#### More Women Than Men Believe That the Status of Girls and Women Needs to Be Improved

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD DO TO IMPROVE THE STATUS OF GIRLS/WOMEN IN THE COUNTRY?  
(PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

to participate in today's highly technological workplace.

Also, the discrimination that women face in the labor market, which has kept them out of certain professions deemed to be for men only, also exists in GCC schools. As a result, women in government schools are less likely to study such subjects as pharmacy, dentistry, engineering, marine sciences, and architecture. Women's limited participation in these fields, plus the lack of career guidance for female students, has resulted in a preponderance of women being trained in teaching and humanities, leaving them without marketable skills for today's modern workplace.<sup>17</sup> For example, in Saudi Arabia, the vast majority—95 percent—of Saudi working women are in the public sector, and 85 percent of those work in education.<sup>18</sup>

When applying for a job, women have little work experience to fall back on. Our survey found that more women than men said they had never held a summer job, ranging from 80 percent in Qatar to 67 percent in the UAE.

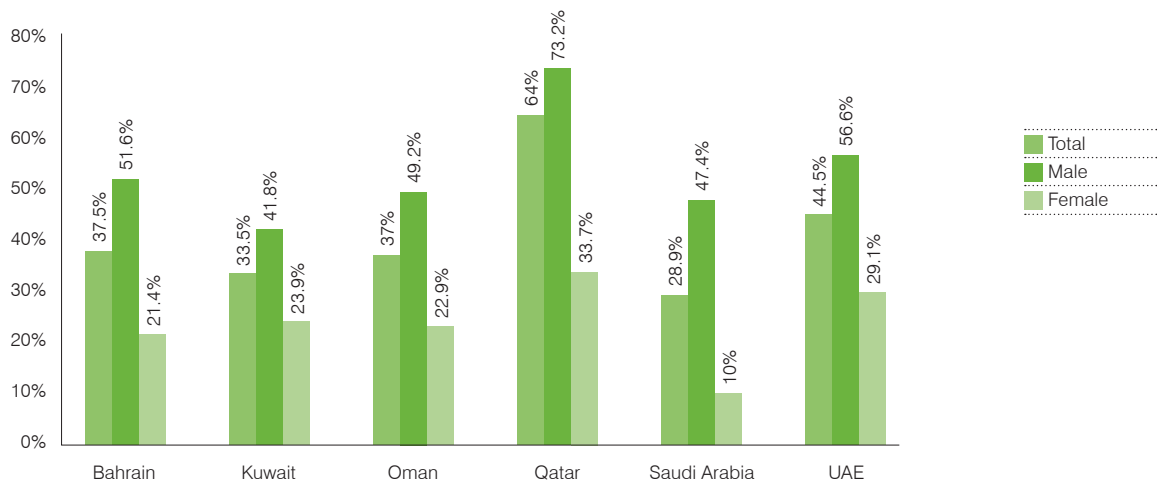
If they do get hired, women quickly discover that GCC workplaces, in both public and private sectors, generally lack family-friendly policies and organized infrastructural support for working women, including flexible working hours, parental leave, and child-care facilities. And women rarely make it into decision-making and management positions. Instead, they are placed in jobs that are considered nonstrategic. Female youth labor force participation rates in GCC countries are among the lowest in the world, reflecting the lack of jobs for women that allow them to combine work and

family responsibilities. According to official ILO data, the highest labor force participation among GCC women age 15 to 24 is in Qatar, at 33.7 percent (2009), and the lowest is in Saudi Arabia, at only 10 percent (see Exhibit 25). In the Middle East as a whole, female youth participation in the labor force reached 21.5 percent in 2010, a rate that is half the world average of 42.4 percent.

As discussed in "Employment: Making the Most of the Youth Dividend" (p. 25), one reason that the GCC has such a large "inactive" youth population is young women's absence from the labor force. This absence is attributable to a variety of factors. They may be students, they may be homemakers, or they may come from families that do not encourage them to work. Or they may simply find it hard to get a

**Exhibit 25**  
*Young Women Are Less Likely Than Young Men to Be Active in the Labor Force*

**GCC TOTAL LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE AMONG PEOPLE AGES 15–24, BY GENDER (2009)**



Source: International Labour Organization (ILO), *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*, 2010

job. According to ILO official data, some GCC countries far outstripped the 2009 worldwide female youth inactivity rate of 57.1 percent: For females age 15–24, rates were as high as 90 percent in Saudi Arabia and 78.6 percent in Bahrain.<sup>19</sup>

This all adds up to low female participation in the national workforce, which drags down national economic and human resource development and is a huge deficit for GCC countries as they transition from oil-reliant economies to more diversified, knowledge-based economies.

#### **Vision for the Gender Issue**

Important initiatives to expand opportunities for young women are taking place in GCC countries. In Bahrain, the Supreme Council for Women announced in 2005 a “national strategy for empowerment of Bahraini women,” which aims to achieve full participation of women in the workforce and enable their access to leadership positions in both the public and private sectors.<sup>20</sup> And Bahrain, like Oman, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, participates in the U.S.-funded Women in Technology

program, which uses a cutting-edge curriculum developed by Microsoft to train women in ICT.

In Saudi Arabia, the Human Resources Development Fund (HADAF) aims to increase job opportunities for women through telecommuting arrangements with private-sector enterprises. The fund has already created employment for more than 4,120 women. The Saudi government is also in the process of ramping up tertiary education opportunities for women. It has announced plans to set up 17 technical colleges for women in different parts of the country. And on May 15, 2011, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud formally inaugurated the Princess Noura bint Abdulrahman University for Women, which will eventually have capacity for 40,000 female students.

The nonprofit Centennial Fund, established in 2005 as part of Saudi Arabia’s initiative to assist small businesses and young entrepreneurs outside the country’s largest cities, has spent more than a quarter of its funds (26 percent) on female entrepreneurs. And the Empowering Capabilities,

Skills and Aptitude (ECSA) employment agency is the first Saudi recruiting company working to specifically address the needs of Saudi women. The agency has already succeeded in placing more than 200 women in such companies as Sama Airlines, Four Seasons Hotel, and the World Trade Center in Riyadh.<sup>21</sup>

Qatar, too, is giving considerable attention to women’s empowerment and the elimination of gender inequality. In terms of education, it has achieved gender-equal opportunity in schools and reduced the gender gap at all stages of public education.<sup>22</sup> The nation is promoting the empowerment of young girls as a key factor in breaking the cycle of discrimination, recognizing that investment in girls’ development is a priority in achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. According to Ambassador Nasser bin Abdul Aziz Al-Nasr, permanent ambassador of Qatar at the United Nations, education is the most valuable way to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women.<sup>23</sup> The country’s *National Development Strategy 2011–2016* also seeks to build on



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*Low female participation  
in the national workforce is  
a huge deficit for  
GCC countries as they  
transition to diversified,  
knowledge-based economies.*

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women's advancements, including increasing the percentage of women in the labor force. The government is also planning to establish a women's leadership center and an awareness program to promote the role of women in society.<sup>24</sup>

The UAE has also actively promoted women's advancement in the workplace. As a result, 41 percent of public-sector workers are women. Other initiatives in the UAE have included 20 scholarships for female students who major in environmental science at Abu Dhabi University, and the Intilaq program started in 1999 by the Department of Economic Development in Dubai to help home-based small businesses. Around 25 percent of its clients have been women entrepreneurs.<sup>25</sup> Also, the Emirates Businesswomen's Council set up in 2002 is targeting young female entrepreneurs who would like assistance.<sup>26</sup>

Most of these initiatives address female education and employment, but our focus is on a more elevated vision of female empowerment. In calling for a new paradigm for how

to engage GCC youth, we believe particular attention should be paid to creating opportunities for women to voice their opinions and ambitions so as to be heard by society. It is clear from recent events in the Middle East, in which young women have openly played major roles, that they are eager to participate in public life. Even a brief visit to Twitter and Facebook, where GCC women are expressing themselves on a wide variety of topics, illustrates the rising expectations of young women in the region.

We believe that change must come from within societies and have a foundation in cultural traditions and social values. At the same time, nations should encourage their female population to fully participate in society's development so as not to be at a disadvantage on many fronts in today's modern world, be they economic, educational, technological, or cultural.

Young women in GCC countries face a question that occupies women across the globe: "How do I balance work and family?" Finding this

balance benefits not just the woman herself but her children, as a child with an educated, economically empowered mother is likely to fare far better in life than one whose mother was constrained by a lack of opportunities. But achieving a comfortable work-life balance is not determined solely at the personal, family, or workplace level. It is also a function of having appropriate national policies in place. Even highly developed nations struggle with finding the right balance between preserving the family as a cohesive unit and offering all citizens equal opportunities. Each nation must find its own equilibrium.

We believe it is necessary to recognize women as active agents in society who not only are mainly responsible for running a household and raising children but also, when time and circumstances permit, participate positively in public life, including the workplace.

In our vision of a new paradigm for GCC youth, officials would begin to develop policies that support the needs and aspirations of women as much as they support those of men.

They would also work to change national perceptions about the role of women in GCC society, sending the message that the demands of a modern economy require the productive participation of women and that women represent a largely untapped resource for powering up their economies. A more flexible approach to women's participation in the workforce not only would generate more jobs for women and contribute to national income, it also would reduce countries' dependence on foreign labor.

The challenge for GCC policymakers is to create programs that assist women without upsetting strongly held traditions. It is not easy to design and implement such nuanced policies. But recent history offers encouragement. When Saudi Arabia introduced female education in the 1960s, it was highly controversial. But now, few doubt the positive impact of education on women; it is evident how that investment in female education has been vital in reducing population growth and mortality rates, improving health and nutrition, and increasing literacy rates.

## Immediate Priorities

Achieving a new vision of women's role in GCC societies is a long-term and multifaceted endeavor. It begins with the following:

- Establish a national commission for women's social affairs to participate in high-level decision making for girls' education policies and participation in the labor market.
- Pass labor legislation to ensure that national and international labor laws are implemented and enforced—including United Nations conventions on gender equality in the workplace.
- Revise the concept of girls' education to highlight its role in reshaping a modern society and send the message that increasing female skills is a key part of developing a nation's human capital. Revamp education curricula to give female students the skills needed for a modern workplace, especially vocational training.
- Launch public-awareness campaigns aimed at sending positive messages about young women's valuable role in the labor force. These campaigns should also counter harmful gender stereotypes that hamper women's ability to participate fully in the economy. Through the media, conferences, and public service announcements, governments should convey a fundamental message: GCC women can play a critical role in the labor market.
- Respond to the desire of young women for greater access to decision-making and policy formulation by establishing an institutional framework for youth participation, regardless of gender, including the establishment of national youth councils.
- Encourage and prepare women to assume highly visible positions in the public and private sectors, including representing governments abroad as head of a delegation at regional and international meetings.
- Establish career guidance offices at secondary and tertiary education institutions serving women so that they consider a broad array of options when it comes to career opportunities.
- Encourage the private sector to hire more women and train them when necessary. In particular, the business community should receive incentives to offer summer jobs and internships so women can get job experience while still studying.
- Develop robust microfinance programs to assist female entrepreneurs and low-income women who want to start their own business.



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## LEISURE: EXPANDING YOUNG PEOPLE'S HORIZONS

Young people always look for new ways to spend their leisure time. And as they begin to explore life beyond school and family, the ways in which youth spend their leisure time is crucial—not just for their personal self-fulfillment but also for the social and intellectual advancement of their nation.

Leisure-time pursuits cover a wide spectrum: sports, hobbies, Internet surfing, computer games, and activities in the performing and visual arts of music, theater, dance, film, painting, and poetry. Relaxation, recreation, and self-improvement are some of the benefits of leisure activities. They also entertain, provide social engagement, and expand a person's imagination and creativity.

In the Gulf region, young people do not always have a great many options for their leisure time. A limited number of cinemas, theaters, and concert halls, as well as a dearth of public parks, football pitches, walking paths, and bicycle trails leave many young

people with few options for exercise and social activities outside the home.

### Survey Results: How Young People View Their Leisure Time

Because of the benefits of organized leisure activities, and in particular of the physical exercise involved in sports, we asked survey participants about their leisure time.

Their most preferred pastimes were sedentary and were pursued at home. The top-ranked activity, which highlights the importance of the online world to GCC youth, was Internet surfing. More than a quarter of our respondents (26 percent) said they regularly spend more than 10 hours per week in this activity.

This was closely followed by watching TV and being at home with family. Social gatherings/time with friends, exercising/sports, playing computer games, and reading came next in the rankings, followed by school/university-related activities,

housework, chatting online or using social networking sites, and self-learning activities (see Exhibit 26).

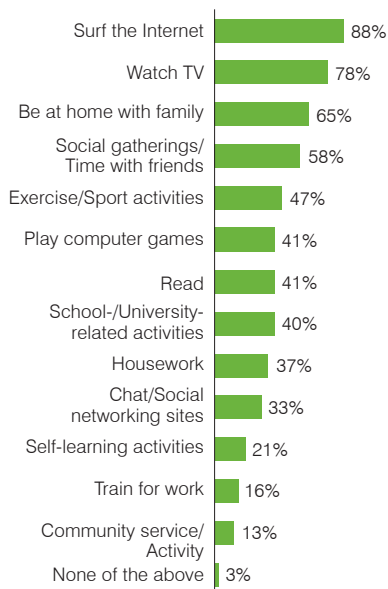
As for sports and exercise, only 14 percent of respondents said they

exercised more than five times in a typical week. Thirty percent said they exercised once a week or less. And 19 percent, or almost a fifth of our respondents, reported that they did not exercise *at all* (see Exhibit 27).

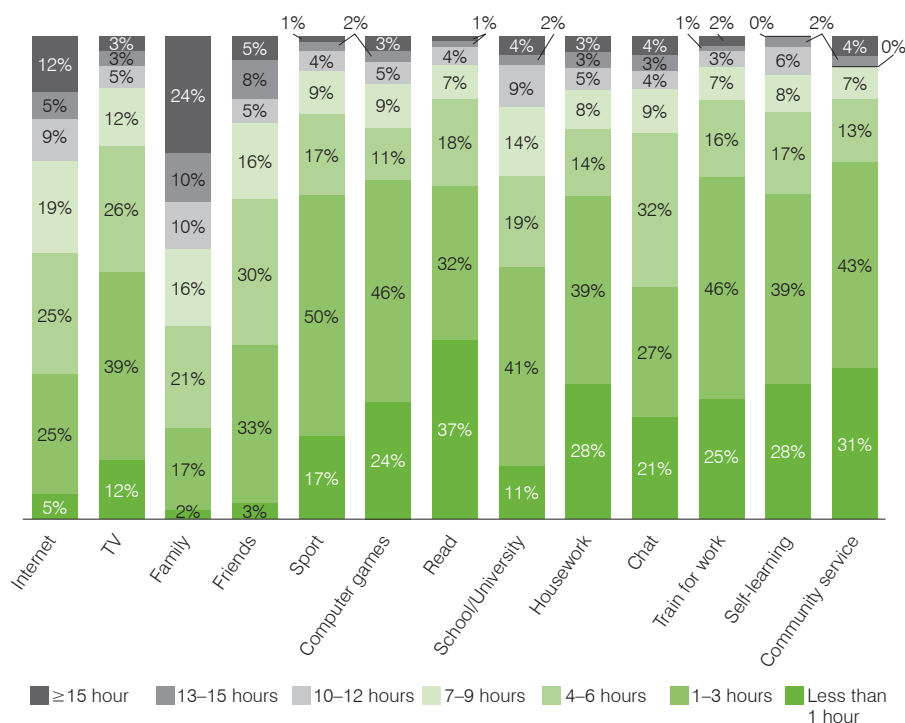
Even among the youth who exercise, many are not engaging in the type of aerobic activity that is recommended for maintaining cardiovascular health (see Exhibit 28). Forty-three percent of men counted walking as their main

**Exhibit 26**  
**A Significant Number of Leisure Activities Take Place at Home**

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING  
DO YOU DO IN YOUR LEISURE TIME?  
(PERCENTAGE OF  
SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



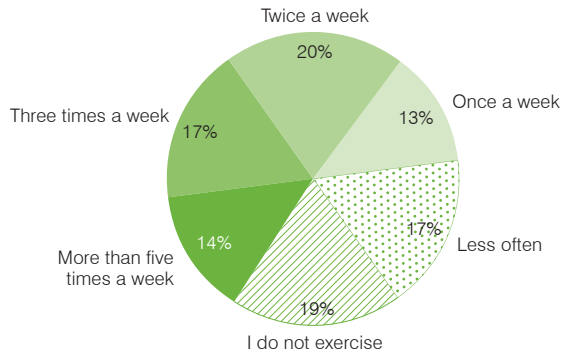
HOURS SPENT PER WEEK PER LEISURE ACTIVITY



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

**Exhibit 27**  
**Many Young People Exercise Infrequently or Not at All**

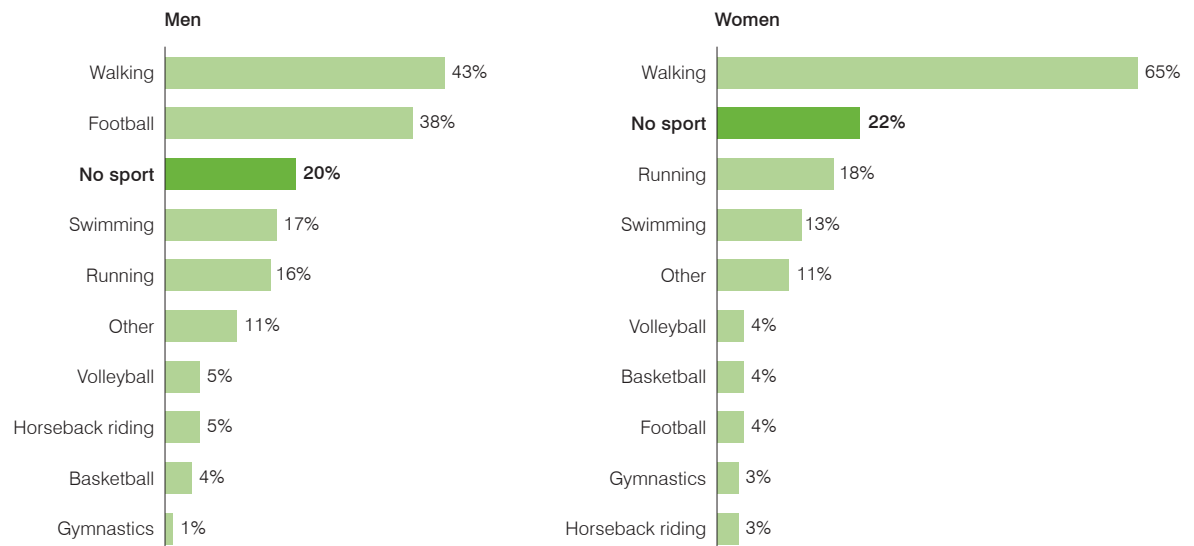
HOW OFTEN DO YOU EXERCISE IN A TYPICAL WEEK?  
 (PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

**Exhibit 28**  
**Even Young People Who Exercise Do Not Necessarily Exercise Strenuously**

WHAT TYPE OF SPORTS DO YOU ENGAGE IN ON A REGULAR BASIS?  
 (PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

exercise, as did 65 percent of women. Among men, playing football came next; for women, however, the second most frequently chosen answer was “no sport.”

The 19 percent of our surveyed youth who said they do not exercise listed “laziness” and “lack of time” as the top reasons for their behavior (see Exhibit 29). But close behind those reasons came “no accessible/convenient facilities” and “don’t like

sports,” which indicates that there might be potential to increase young people’s physical activity with the right infrastructure and exposure to fun forms of exercise.

#### Opportunities for Improvement

The tendency of Gulf youth to spend a lot of time with their families during their leisure hours reflects the importance of the extended family as a self-sufficient unit and a center of support, as well as the ultimate defining

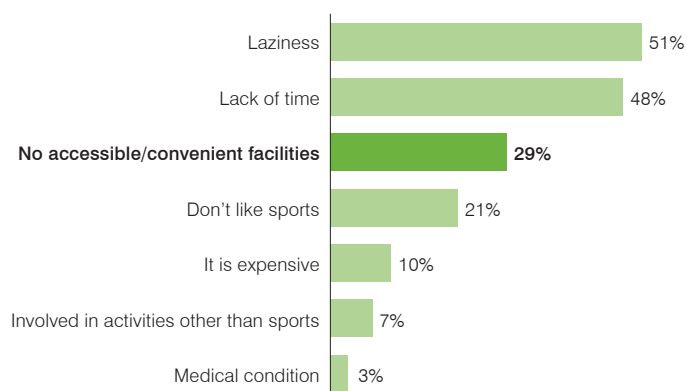
group for youth. This is an important national asset, because strong families create strong societies.

However, it is also widely recognized that leisure activities outside the home can make tremendous contributions to developing well-rounded personalities, fostering healthy peer relationships, and opening new intellectual horizons for youth. Young people who take up extracurricular activities acquire social capital by learning

#### Exhibit 29

##### *Lack of Convenience Is a Major Factor Inhibiting Exercise*

WHY DO YOU NOT ENGAGE IN ANY SPORT?  
(PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS NOT ENGAGING IN ANY SPORT)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey



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skills, developing their innate talents, and making new connections with other youths and adults who are not family members.

Each individual must decide for himself or herself the right balance between time spent with family and time devoted to outside leisure activities. Fortunately, plenty of leisure pursuits can meet both goals because they can be done by parents and children together; these include biking, hiking, bird-watching, museum visiting, and gardening.

One of the great dangers in having limited leisure opportunities is boredom and the deleterious effects that can flow from that, including poor performance at school and delinquent behavior such as illegal drug consumption. Illicit drug use by young people is a concern of GCC

governments, some of which have launched campaigns in schools to raise awareness about the physical and social dangers of such behavior.

In the UAE, for example, the National Rehabilitation Centre (NRC) in Abu Dhabi under the patronage of Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, deputy prime minister and minister of presidential affairs, launched the UAE First International Conference on Addiction in 2007. The campaign, with the motto “Yes to Life,” is intended to fight drug addiction and raise awareness among children and young people in the UAE and the Arab region.<sup>27</sup> More recently, in 2011, Dr. Hesham Farouk Al Arabi, head of health education research at the NRC, declared that the organization will soon launch another awareness campaign in Abu Dhabi schools. He stated, “It is part of a two-tier programme for the youth, which will

be implemented in cooperation with the United Nations Organization for Drugs and Crime.”<sup>28</sup>

Saudi Arabia is also taking this issue seriously. In 2010, the General Directorate of Narcotics Control, a department of the Interior Ministry, held an international conference in Riyadh devoted to the sharing of information in the fight against illegal drugs. The directorate said at the time that the symposium would show its awareness “of the seriousness of the drug phenomenon and the resulting threat [to] economic and social security.” In a January 24, 2011, statement carried by the Saudi Press Agency, Prince Nawaf bin Faisal bin Fahd bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, president of the General Presidency of Youth Welfare, who is also a member of the National Anti-Narcotics Committee, said the “menace of narcotics is a

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national responsibility that should be shouldered by society,” adding that there was a “dire need” for narcotics prevention.<sup>29</sup>

Our survey’s results on youth participation in exercise and sports represent a challenge for Gulf governments, given their publicly expressed concern, backed by medical professionals, that levels of obesity and diabetes among the region’s population are rising. Obesity prevalence in the GCC is among the highest in the world, and four GCC countries are in the top six nations suffering from adult diabetes. Diabetes rates in 2007 ranged from 15.4 to 18.7 percent—more than twice the global average of 7.2 percent.<sup>30</sup> The health downside of inactivity is of particular concern in young GCC women, who are traditionally not encouraged by families or schools to take part in athletics. In many girls’ schools, physical

exercise is not a priority because it is considered incompatible with local traditions and customs. But exercise is necessary for the physical health and mental well-being of young women. It not only keeps their bodies strong and flexible, but also boosts circulation to the brain and clear thinking.

Engaging in competitive sports has long been seen as a rehearsal for life, teaching youth good sportsmanship, how to compete with confidence, and how to lose graciously. In a world shrinking by the day because of globalization and the instant connections made possible through the Internet, sports are increasingly filtering into the consciousness of GCC youth. With more encouragement, they would be more likely to gravitate toward all types of competitions, bringing acclaim and pride to their countries. When a young man named Faruq Al Zuman became the first Saudi to make

it to the top of Mt. Everest, in 2008, he was hailed as a hero at home. The UAE’s Dana Al Hammadi received similar accolades when, in 2011, she became the first Emirati woman to journey to the South Pole.

As for the nearly one-fifth of our surveyed youth who did not exercise, it is noteworthy that almost a third of them said they did not have access to a convenient facility. We suspect that more young people would participate if there were more organized opportunities and facilities for exercise and sports. And this would enhance GCC countries’ performance in international amateur sports competitions.

Our surveyed youth clearly feel that their government should invest in more leisure and sports opportunities for them. When asked “*In your opinion, how can the government encourage participation of youth*

*in community development and/or leisure-time activities?” more than half of respondents said they would like it to integrate areas for sports and recreation into urban and suburban development plans. There also was strong support for the government to create a special fund to finance local, cultural, and youth enrichment activities (see Exhibit 30).*

#### **Vision for the Future of Leisure in the Gulf**

A number of initiatives already under way in the GCC offer youth

greater choice in how to spend their leisure time.

Abu Dhabi is constructing art museums modeled on some of the world’s most renowned cultural landmarks, such as the Louvre. The Abu Dhabi Festival is an annual showcase for musicians and artists from around the world, invited to perform before UAE audiences. The festival’s sponsor, the Abu Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation, also runs a year-round program of cultural education, sponsoring workshops, lectures, performances,

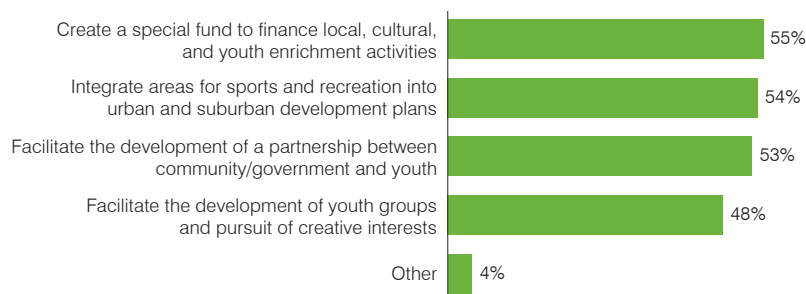
classroom activities, and concerts.

The Emirates Foundation for Philanthropy funds projects that promote reading among students. It also offers internships and workshops to develop the talents of budding Emirati artists, filmmakers, musicians, and writers. And aspiring filmmakers from all over the GCC avidly wait for the annual Dubai International Film Festival.

In Saudi Arabia, Al Janadriyah, the annual springtime Festival for Heritage

**Exhibit 30**  
***Young People Would Like More Opportunity for Activity in Their Communities***

**IN YOUR OPINION, HOW CAN THE GOVERNMENT ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND/OR LEISURE-TIME ACTIVITIES? (PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)**



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

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and Culture, is an extremely popular celebration of local traditions, folklore, history, and crafts that draws over a million visitors a year, and young Saudi men and women are encouraged to develop, display, and sell their crafts there. And in early 2011, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud announced an increase in financial subsidies to cultural and literary clubs.

Other initiatives have been launched to nurture an affinity for technology and science among GCC youth. Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) and Sultan bin Abdulaziz Science and Technology Center strive to spread an interest in these topics among youth. In the same vein, the Emirates Foundation runs science fairs for gifted students to inspire them to greater creativity. And the UAE will host the 2011 World Robot Olympiad, which brings young people together from all over the world to hone their problem-solving

skills through robotic challenges and competitions.

Likewise, GCC countries have made major efforts to promote youth sports. Qatar's *ASPIRE* Academy for sports excellence, established by Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani, seeks to create a world-class institution for sports and has three centers in which young women can participate in handball, basketball, volleyball, table tennis, chess, gymnastics, and shooting. Qatar will also host the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

In Saudi Arabia, the General Presidency of Youth Welfare, a government ministry, sponsors a range of cultural activities and promotes sports for youth, especially football, and in early 2011 King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud authorized increased funding for sports clubs. There are plans to build the King Abdullah Sports City north of Jeddah with a 100,000-spectator football stadium.

And in the UAE, Abu Dhabi hosted the 2010 World Professional Jiu-Jitsu Cup. Its sister emirate Dubai has become a golf hub, sponsoring several international golf competitions each year.

Similar efforts are under way in Bahrain, where King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa issued a decree in 2010 to put in place a Higher Council for Youth and Sports; the country has also established the Bahrain Olympic Committee, which oversees the national sports federation. In 2010, Bahrain hosted the International Children's Games.

Finally, Kuwait has a long track record of support for young people's athletic endeavors: The Kuwait Public Authority for Youth and Sports was established in 1992. Kuwait's Sheikha Naeema Al Sabah, chairperson of the GCC Women's Sports Organizational Committee (created in 2007), has actively encouraged

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*GCC youth should be  
taught from an early age  
about the importance of  
leisure activities as  
an avenue to personal  
excellence.*

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women across the region to become more involved in sports.

These initiatives offer GCC youth good outlets for their leisure time, but we believe that they should also be taught from an early age about the importance of leisure activities as an avenue to personal excellence, whether in sports, reading, filmmaking, or painting. In our vision, GCC youth would receive more incentives and encouragement from their parents, their schools, and their communities to become involved in all kinds of leisure opportunities in order to become well-rounded people.

GCC governments have several major incentives to heavily promote leisure opportunities for their young citizens. First, their commitment to diversify their economy and build a knowledge-based economy requires increased national capacity. They need to create workforces that not only have 21st-century business

skills—that are resourceful, productive, and creative—but that also know how to operate in multicultural settings. These are traits learned through leisure experiences, be they recreational sports or science fairs. Diversified, knowledge-based economies also will require young people to take a broader look at their career options—something else fostered by leisure pursuits, which expose young people to different areas of interest.

By advocating leisure pursuits, GCC governments can improve the quality of life in Gulf cities, as well as produce residents who are physically and mentally healthier. But when governments seek to create leisure opportunities, whether in sports, recreation, or performing arts, they should do so in collaboration with the communities for which these opportunities are intended. It is vital that citizens, especially youth, be consulted about the types of leisure activities they want. This will ensure that young

people will take advantage of the new options offered them and that their expectations will be met. This community engagement can be pursued through surveys, community meetings, blogs, and websites that solicit citizen views.

The other partner whose participation should be sought is the private sector. Many facilities can be built and run by private companies, which also can organize recreational activities, particularly in sports, and sponsor cultural performances as part of their corporate social responsibility program.

Finally, we believe governments have been too focused on professional sports and not enough on the amateur. After all, it is in stirring amateurs to participate in sports that the citizenry is mobilized. Not everyone can be a star athlete. But millions can jog a little, lift a few weights, kick around a football with co-workers, or play a fun game of tennis.

## Immediate Priorities

Here are some initial steps that governments can take to elevate the stature of horizon-expanding leisure-time activities.

- Consult with communities and establish a dialogue with youth about what kinds of leisure activities and types of facilities (libraries, playing fields, trails, concert halls, parks) they would like to have.
- Launch a national education campaign on the relationship between exercise and good health that encourages lifelong activity.
- Recognize that exercising is best established as a habit in one's childhood and adolescence by making physical education and sports dedicated aspects of school curricula and by adding athletic directors to school staffs. This effort should include raising awareness of the importance of proper nutrition.
- Encourage youth sports clubs and build sports facilities, such as tennis courts, swimming pools, and football pitches that can be used year-round by young people.
- Make arts and culture integral parts of government school curricula in all grades.
- Ensure that field trips to cultural landmarks, such as national museums and archeological sites, are part of school curricula.
- Encourage the private sector, schools, government offices, bookstores, and community groups to organize book clubs and lecture series on history, technology, innovation, arts, and music. Those lecture events could be along the lines of the popular TED conferences featuring talks by innovative thinkers in all fields.
- Use television and the Internet to encourage participation in competitive events that promote local culture and hobbies, such as horseback riding, falconry, and poetry. *Million's Poet* on Abu Dhabi television was the highest-rated program on primetime television in the Gulf in its initial seasons, and the show has revived popular interest in *Nabati* poetry, which is recited in colloquial Bedouin dialect and dates to the fourth century.
- Encourage young artists by giving them opportunities to perform and by awarding prizes at annual festivals such as Riyadh's Al Janadriyah. The Abu Dhabi Festival Award is also given annually to participating national university students who excel in the field of performing and visual arts, music, film, literature, and communications.
- Promote science fairs at schools on national television, with award winners given an opportunity to explain their projects on air.

## GCC YOUTH: A TECHNOLOGY-SAVVY GROUP

It is clear from our survey that GCC youth spend a great deal of time online. They are a technology-savvy generation—thumb-punching messages on smartphones,<sup>iii</sup> making new friends on Facebook, and spreading news—both real and rumored—on Twitter.

Their love of technology and appreciation of its importance are also evident in their national aspirations. As we have noted, when asked what kind of reputation they wanted their country to have, 67 percent said they would like it to be known as a technologically advanced nation. This ambition came ahead of having their country seen as a prosperous nation or as the leading Arab country in the world.

This finding is good news for the GCC, where transforming oil-dominated economies into knowledge-based ones is now a priority. Clearly, officials have allies for this project in their youth.

Another finding confirmed that GCC youth have a high comfort level with the Internet as a trustworthy source of information; 40 percent selected it as their favorite channel for receiving news and information. And when asked which topics they follow regularly for new developments, 57 percent said technology, which far outpaced topics such as computer games, sports, religion, and local politics (see *Exhibit A*).

Important conclusions can be drawn from the technological prowess of today's youth. First of all, members of this Internet-friendly and computer game-loving generation often have capabilities that their parents, aunts, and uncles do not. Accustomed to searching online for information, young people have access to a world of knowledge that older family members often have no idea how to tap. Although this capability is not turning GCC youth into rebels, it sometimes can subtly affect the parent-child relationship because of the empowerment that youth feel from their online activities.<sup>iv</sup>

Online savvy can also cause friction because of the juxtaposition of two worlds that occurs when young people sit down at their desks: the real world of traditional social norms in which they live their everyday lives, and the world viewed on the Internet, which may strike them as more enticing and modern. Although they are grounded in traditions and values instilled by their families, they also feel the heavy wind of technology at their backs.

There are also implications for society at large. The information revolution has presented young people with a new, easy way to express themselves. Facebook is a prime example, as is the abundance of young bloggers writing in both Arabic and English. "La Yekthar," a YouTube comedy channel created by a young Saudi standup comic and his friends, is yet another illustration of how youth are using this new technological platform to air their ideas, talents, and ambitions.

The Internet has also allowed youth to organize, as evidenced by the recent upheavals in the Arab world and the numerous online campaigns for issues as varied as allowing women to work in lingerie stores and protecting the

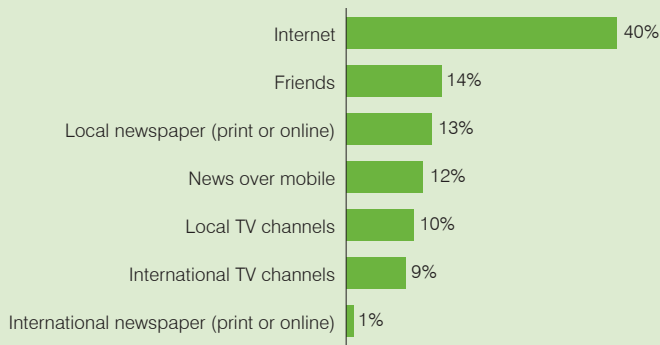


environment. Through the Internet, young people are telling society what they want and telegraphing changes they would like to see.

In this way, it has liberated young people from real-world constraints, an experience that is likely to lead to an increased desire among youth for real-life ways of doing the same. In addition, the new horizons opened to them online will undoubtedly encourage many of them to aspire to jobs they might not otherwise have chosen, or prompt them to seek jobs with a heavy online component.

**Exhibit A**  
***GCC Youth Are Very Interested in Technology and Follow It Through High-tech Channels***

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE CHANNEL FOR RECEIVING NEWS INFORMATION?  
(PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)**



**WHAT TYPE OF TOPICS DO YOU FOLLOW REGULARLY?  
(PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)**



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey



# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: YOUTH AND NATION BUILDING

In November 2009, disastrous floods swept over the Saudi port city of Jeddah, leaving more than one hundred dead and causing extensive damage to scores of homes and the city's infrastructure. In a remarkable and hopeful coda to the devastation, young Saudis spontaneously mobilized to organize rescue and relief operations that provided aid, shelter, food, and transportation to flood victims. Unsurprisingly, they used social media websites to organize and channel this upsurge of civic service. Videos were uploaded to YouTube to show what the floods had done, and dedicated Facebook pages were created to recruit volunteers to help. Twitter became a valuable tool in rescuing those stranded by the flood.

This grassroots volunteer effort drew national attention and praise. In the future perhaps we will see more

such effort, but to date community engagement in GCC countries has been sporadic. Because community development activities are critical to building a sense of civic pride and responsibility, this is an important issue for GCC countries to address.

## Survey Results: How Youth Relate to Their Community

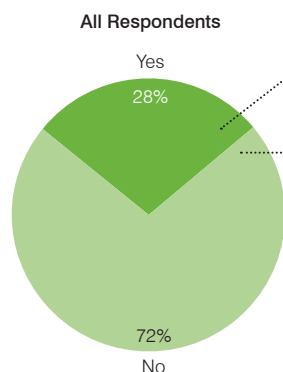
Community service and volunteering are surprisingly low on the priority list of GCC youth.

Asked if they participate in community development activities, 72 percent of respondents said they did not (*see Exhibit 31*). A significant number of those who did not said that they had no time (42 percent) or no opportunity (40 percent) to do so. Other reasons they gave for not doing community service included a lack of guidance and no encouragement from family members.

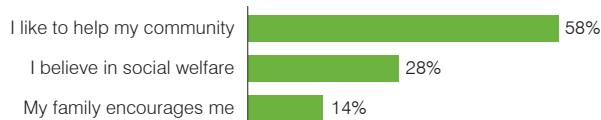
**Exhibit 31**

*Nearly Three-quarters of Young People Do Not Participate in Community Development*

DO YOU PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES?  
(PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



WHY DO YOU PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES?  
(PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



WHY DON'T YOU PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES?  
(PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

The 28 percent who said they did spend time in some type of volunteer work explained that they like to help their community and believe in social welfare. Only 14 percent said they had received encouragement from their families to participate in these activities.

Of those who said they did participate in community development, almost half (45 percent) participated in volunteer work with the *baladiyah* (municipality) or government; the rest did charitable work with an NGO or through a youth club (see Exhibit 32).

Our survey also found that many young people would like the government to take measures to encourage youth participation in community development and to help them find opportunities to do so. For example, when asked “*In your opinion, how can the government encourage participation of youth in community development and/or leisure-time activities?*” more than half of respondents (53 percent) said they would like the government to facilitate the development of partnerships between community/government and youth (see Exhibit 30, p. 57).

### Opportunities for Improvement

The fact that the vast majority of GCC youth are not participating in community service or volunteer work is a deficit for GCC nations, because these activities are widely recognized as essential for building civic pride and responsibility. They also foster the feeling of belonging that binds together communities and nations. And in many instances, they are ethically uplifting because they nurture compassion toward and solidarity with those who are less fortunate.

The good news, however, is that youth want more opportunities to do community development work. As the Jeddah flood experience and our survey findings suggest, young people are willing to sacrifice some time to help improve their communities when opportunities present themselves.

### Vision for Youth’s Community Engagement

We believe there is great potential to be tapped here. Almost a third of our surveyed youth are already involved in some type of community service. That is a good base on which to create new attitudes toward community develop-

ment projects and new opportunities for participating in them.

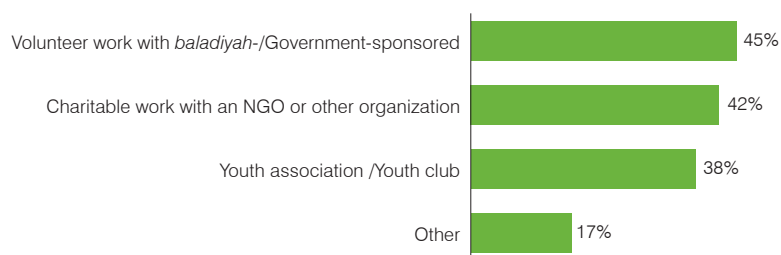
What is needed is greater awareness of civic responsibilities and greater commitment to community building. The character-enhancing aspect of contributing time and energy to helping others in one’s community should be highlighted and promoted.

But altruism need not be the only motive for community service. Such service is also excellent preparation for the workplace. Volunteer work exposes youths to teamwork, gives them leadership qualities, and builds their organizational skills. The result is a person who is more employable and will likely have a better chance of finding and keeping a job than a peer who has never done any community service work.

There are already some examples of how Gulf societies can help youth get involved in community work. The Emirates Foundation launched Takatof in 2007 to focus on volunteering projects with young people. Takatof—which means “shoulder-to-shoulder”—offers young people meaningful opportunities to do volunteer

**Exhibit 32**  
**Much Community Development Work Is Sponsored by Governments**

WHAT TYPE OF ACTIVITIES DO YOU PARTICIPATE IN?  
(PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS WHO ENGAGED IN COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES)



Source: Booz & Company Youth Survey

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*Community service and  
volunteer work are widely  
recognized as essential  
for building civic pride and  
responsibility.*

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work in humanitarian, social, and community programs. In addition, Sharjah's Youth Consultative Council promotes young people's involvement in community engagement by giving youth the opportunity to express their opinions and discuss relevant issues with officials. The council selects and trains young people as potential members of future state legislative and political councils.

In Saudi Arabia, the Boy Scouts Association instills the concept of community service in hundreds of young people who volunteer to help pilgrims during the annual Hajj. And the Department of Volunteerism at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) in Dhahran has held an annual Volunteer Week for the past three years to raise community awareness of volunteer work. This year, volunteers visited orphanages and the homes of physically challenged children, provided food and furniture to poor families, and visited residents at Al-Amal Hospital in Riyadh, a drug rehabilitation facility.

Qatar University, in cooperation with Qatar Charity, organizes programs to promote volunteerism among university students. This is part of the university's mission, according to Vice President Dr. Omar al Ansari, who has said, "The QU Student Affairs Department attaches great importance towards the value of volunteer work" because of its role "in building the students' character and career growth."<sup>31</sup>

## Immediate Priorities

We believe it is important to show leadership on the vital issue of community engagement and civic responsibility. Youth learn by example; when leaders set a good example, they respond. Here are a number of first steps that could be taken in this direction.

- Make civic education and awareness an integral part of school curricula so children and teens learn about their rights and responsibilities.
- Appoint an official in local government whose job is to reach out to youth with volunteer opportunities.
- Create a national online database for students to learn about volunteering opportunities in their local communities.
- Have representatives of philanthropic organizations, local governments, and places of worship come to schools to talk about their work and how citizens can help.
- Establish clubs for young men and women in schools and communities and develop youth camps to engage them in cultural activities.
- Encourage the private sector, as part of its corporate social responsibility, to set a good example by offering one paid day off a year for employees to volunteer. In company newsletters, recognize those who participate and urge them to bring along their families.
- Reach out to role model figures, officials, and cultural tastemakers, asking them to speak publicly about their volunteer work or to participate in national campaigns that raise the prestige of community service.

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## CONCLUSION

GCC countries are at a historic juncture in their economic and social development because of a unique demographic event: Young people make up a larger part of their population than ever before.

It is a time, then, of opportunity and challenge.

There is great opportunity because by leveraging the creativity and power of this segment of their population, GCC countries can advance their economic, social, and human resource capital to new heights. Young people are poised to become dynamic pillars in the creation of the region's new knowledge-based economies.

But in order to reach these goals, young people need to be provided with the right social and economic

surroundings in education and employment. They need to become fully active in the region's labor market. Herein lie the challenges for the GCC countries.

The region's governments are aware of the needs of their youth and have launched national strategies for improving the lives of young people. However, more needs to be done to meet the needs and aspirations of GCC youth.

Fully harnessing the great potential of this demographic dividend requires a new paradigm for engaging youth across the full range of GCC societies, including governments, private sectors, NGOs, and civic organizations. It is a paradigm that puts the region's youth at the forefront of national policies, and involves young people themselves in building their future.

This new paradigm rests on the recognition that today's GCC youth want to contribute to the development of their country. It also recognizes that they aspire to live in technologically advanced, prosperous nations with a

well-educated citizenry. Ambitious to complete their education and find suitable employment, they also are keenly aware of the importance of being part of a globalized technological world.

These young people face major challenges in the high cost of living, high unemployment rates, poor preparation for the workplace, and insufficient affordable housing. They want improved education systems built on international standards that provide them with modern skills relevant to a global, dynamic economy. They want increased access to the decision-making process, policy formulation, and civic and community development at the local level, as well as the creation of local youth councils for effective participation in society.

Young people are the key human resource on which the future of the GCC's economic and social development depends. And they must be seen in this light in order for GCC societies to reap the rewards that today's youth offer.

## THE GCC'S YOUTH BULGE: A DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITY

GCC countries witnessed high population growth from 1970 through 2010. During 1970–75, the highest population growth rates were in the UAE (17.17 percent). Ten years later, the growth rates remained high, although they decreased in absolute value. From 1980 to 1985, Qatar scored the highest rate, with a population growth of 9.04 percent. In the 1990s, the GCC countries with the exception of Kuwait continued to witness a growth rate that on average was between 2.32 and 3.17 percent; once again the UAE had the highest with a population growth rate of 5.28 percent between 1990 and 1995.

Beginning in the early 1980s, improved healthcare, sanitation, and food supplies led to declining rates of death and infant mortality, even as high birthrates continued. As a result, the Gulf region experienced successive phases of a demographic transition—that is, the change in the relative growth of different age cohorts. These trends have given us today's youth bulge, which will continue to expand as today's children move into their teen years.

As of 2010, however, the population growth rate of the GCC countries has begun a decline that projections indicate will continue for the next 30 years (*see Exhibit B*).

In other words, another age-related transition is taking place in the GCC region; actual fertility is declining, and that implies a decline in the youth cohort and a slowdown in the growth of the young working-age population of tomorrow, as well as an increase in the aging population.

**Exhibit B**  
*Population Growth Rate in GCC Countries (1950–2050)*



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (Population Division), *World Population Prospects: the 2008 Revision, Volume 1*, pp. 136, 300, 376, 396, 418, 478



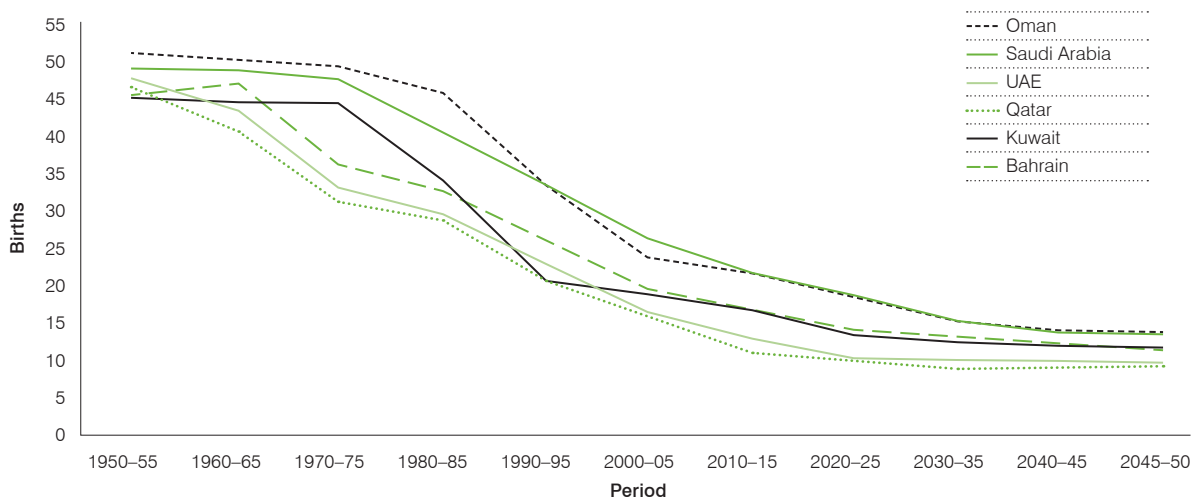
After 2015 it is projected that the overall population will still rise as a result of the baby boom of previous decades. However, the birthrate will decline as more women are educated and have increased access to family planning. At the same time, the death rate will continue to decline.

After 2050, the population is predicted to stabilize as rates of birth and death reach almost a balance: The birthrate will drop to replacement level, the death rate will increase slightly, and the population will become generally older (see *Exhibit C*).

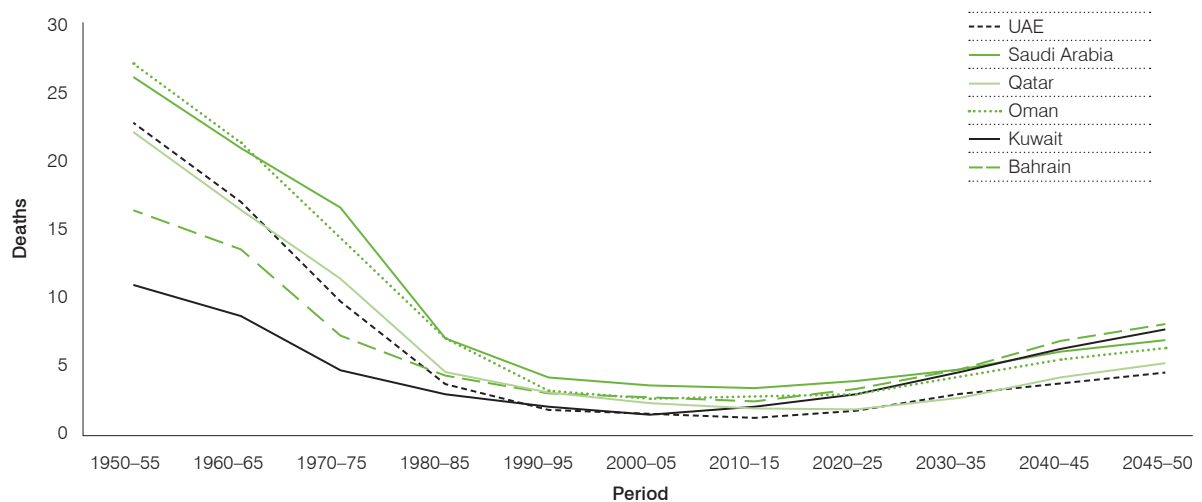
**Exhibit C**  
**The Population Will Begin Aging After 2050**

**CRUDE BIRTHRATE AND CRUDE DEATH RATE (PER 1,000 POP.) IN GCC COUNTRIES (1950–2050)**

**Crude Birth Rate**



**Crude Death Rate**



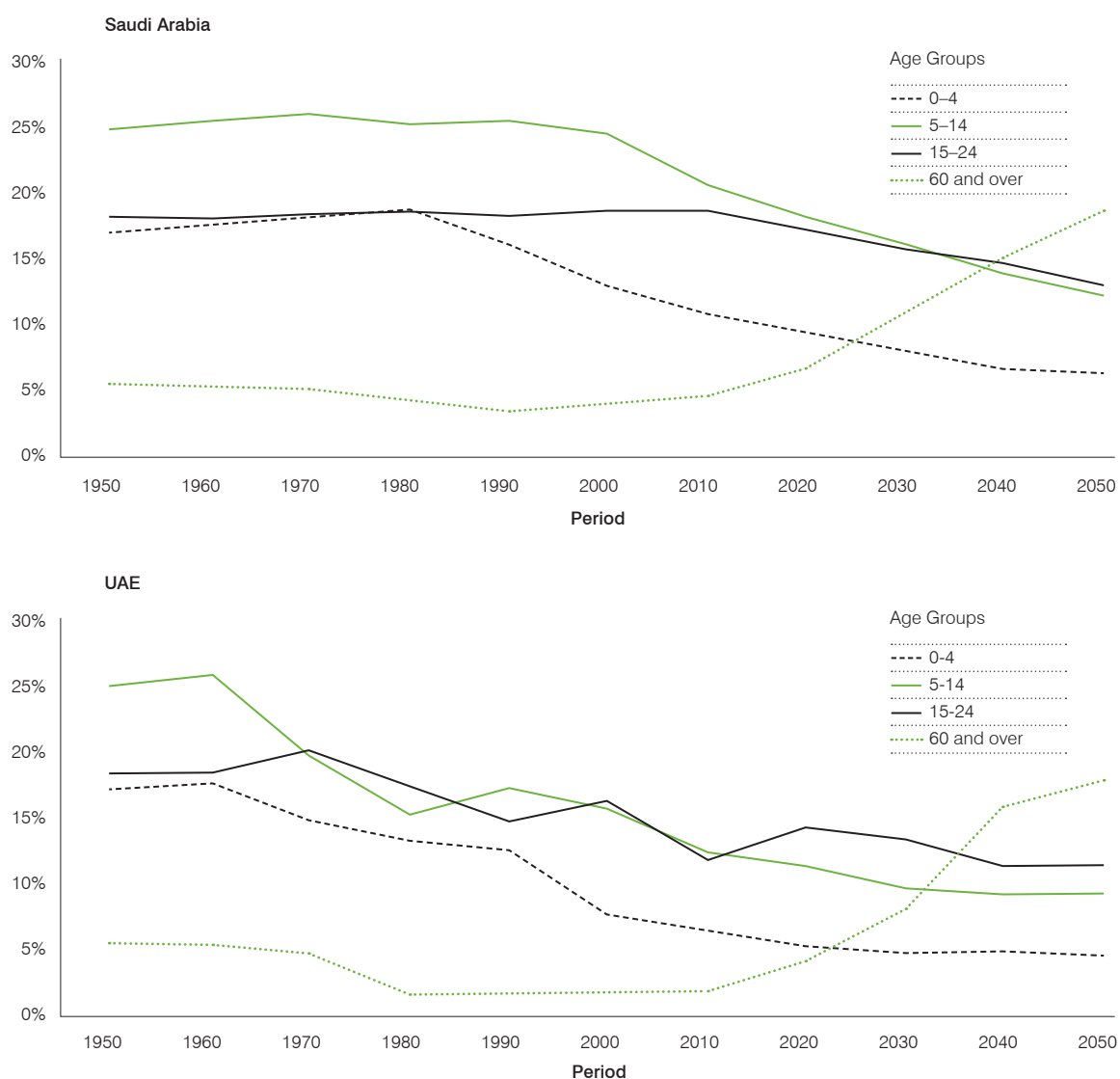
Source: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (Population Division), *World Population Prospects: the 2008 Revision, Volume 1*, pp. 136, 300, 376, 396, 418, 478

In Saudi Arabia, the youth age distribution (15 to 24) was 18.4 percent in 1950; it increased to 18.8 percent in 1980, then 18.9 percent in 2000 and 2010. It will start declining in 2020. In the UAE, the youth age distribution was 18.5 percent in 1950, increased to 20.2 percent in 1970, then started decreasing in 1980, when it reached 17.6 percent (see *Exhibit D*).

The youth bulge provides a demographic window of opportunity for GCC countries to take strategic advantage of the young population in the labor market and could eventually represent a source of development and innovation, an asset for Gulf societies that want to stimulate economic growth.

**Exhibit D**  
**The Percentage of Young People in the Population Will Begin Declining After 2020**

**SELECTED AGE DISTRIBUTION IN SAUDI ARABIA AND THE UAE, 1950–2050  
(PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION)**



Source: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (Population Division), *World Population Prospects: the 2008 Revision, Volume 1*, pp. 418, 478

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *The Economist*, Economist Intelligence Unit, 2011. Population—2010 data: Bahrain: 1.2 million; Kuwait: 3.5 million; Oman: 3.3 million; Qatar: 1.7 million; Saudi Arabia: 27.1 million; United Arab Emirates: 6.7 million.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank, 2009. The data for GCC countries, except UAE, is for total population, including expatriates.

<sup>3</sup> Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), Research and Statistics Department, *46th Annual Report 2010: The Latest Economic Developments*, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2010: p. 375.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2010*, New York, 2010, Statistical Annex, Table 1: pp. 143–44.

<sup>5</sup> International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (TIMSS) 2007; UNESCO, *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the Marginalized*, Paris, 2010, Regional Overview: Arab States: p. 6; Supreme Education Council, *TIMSS 2007 Study in Qatar: A Summary of Key Findings and Options for Policy and Further Studies*, 2008. Also, a recent World Bank study examined the physical conditions, curriculum, teaching, finance, and administration in education systems in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries to see if they have “education systems that exhibit better features of education engineering, stronger alignment of incentives with educational outcomes, and greater political accountability than those [that] lagged behind.” Saudi Arabia was among the GCC countries that scored low in pedagogy, structure of education, flow of students, and resource mobilization, and only medium in teaching capacity, but Kuwait’s education system was judged to be better engineered than others. However, the report’s conclusions were that the engineering approach, although necessary, is not on its own able to achieve the level of change required in many countries and “the more successful countries seem to have education systems that exhibit a good mix of engineering, incentives, and public accountability.” See: World Bank, *The World Not Traveled: Middle East and North Africa Development Report 2008*, Washington D.C., 2008: p. 182.

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO, *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the Marginalized*, Paris, 2010, Table 9B: p. 380. In Bahrain, 51.8 percent of students are in the field of social sciences, business, and law, whereas only 9.2 percent are in science and

8.6 percent in engineering, manufacturing, and construction (for the academic year ending in 2006). In Saudi Arabia, the percentage of students in the field of humanities and arts reached almost 40 percent, whereas 20.6 percent were in science and only 5.3 percent in engineering, manufacturing, and construction (for the academic year ending in 2006). In the UAE, only 10.4 percent of students were in science and 10.6 percent in engineering, manufacturing, and construction; almost 39 percent of students focused on social sciences, business, or law (for the academic year ending in 2007).

<sup>7</sup> International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends 2011: The Challenge of a Jobs Recovery*, Geneva, Table A3: p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> Bahrain Central Informatics Organization, *Census 2001*, Kingdom of Bahrain, 2001, Tables 11.02, 11.13; Kuwait Ministry of Planning, Statistics & Census Sector, *Annual Statistical Abstract 2008 (Census 2005)*, 2008: p. 62; Qatar Statistics Authority, Population & Social Statistics Department, *Labor Force Sample Survey 2008*; Saudi Arabia Central Department of Statistics & Information and Ministry of Economy & Planning, *Labor Force Survey 2009*; Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), Research and Statistics Department, *46th Annual Report 2010: The Latest Economic Developments*, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2010; United Arab Emirates, National Bureau of Statistics, *Annual Statistics Yearbook 2009*, 2009 (UAE Census 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Bahrain Central Informatics Organization, *Census 2001*, Kingdom of Bahrain, 2001, Tables 11.02, 11.13; Kuwait Ministry of Planning, Statistics & Census Sector, *Annual Statistical Abstract 2008 (Census 2005)*, 2008: p. 62; Qatar Statistics Authority, *Population & Social Statistics: Labor Force Sample Survey*, 2008; Saudi Arabia Central Department of Statistics & Information and Ministry of Economy & Planning, *Labor Force Survey 2009*, 2009; Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), Research and Statistics Department, *46th Annual Report 2010: The Latest Economic Developments*, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2010; United Arab Emirates, *Annual Statistics Yearbook*, National Bureau of Statistics, 2009 (UAE Census 2005). Note: Data is for nationals only. Data for Oman was unavailable.

<sup>10</sup> International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, Geneva, 2006: p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> An unemployed person is defined as one who does not have a job and is actively looking for one.

## Endnotes, continued

<sup>12</sup> International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends 2011: The Challenge of a Jobs Recovery*, Geneva, 2011: p. 52.

<sup>13</sup> International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, Geneva, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> For more information, see [www.babrizqameel.com/en/](http://www.babrizqameel.com/en/).

<sup>15</sup> Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), Research and Statistics Department, *46th Annual Report 2010: The Latest Economic Developments*, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2010: p. 203.

<sup>16</sup> For Saudi dropout rates, see UNESCO, "Education For All," Global Monitoring Report, 2008, Table No. 3, and Al Hamed, M., Ziadeh, M., Al Oteibi, B., and Mutawalli, N., *Al Taalim fi AlMamlaka al Arabiya AlSaudia: Rouyat al Hader wa Istishraf al Mustakbal*, 4th ed., Al Rushd Library, Beirut, Lebanon, 1428/2007.

<sup>17</sup> For example, in 2007, 93 percent of Saudi female university graduates had specialized in education and human sciences degrees; as a result, many could not find work because the marketplace was already full of similarly trained people. See UNDP, Ministry of Planning, MDGs in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2008; p. 50. Also, 78.3 percent of unemployed Saudi women are university graduates. Saudi Arabia Central Department of Statistics & Information and Ministry of Economy & Planning, *Labor Force Survey 2009*, Table 8: p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Mona AlMunajjed, *Women's Employment in Saudi Arabia: A Major Challenge*, Booz & Company, 2010: p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, Geneva, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Labour Office, "Institutions and Policies for Equitable and Efficient Labor Market Governance in the Arab Region," 2008: p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Mona AlMunajjed, *Women's Employment in Saudi Arabia: A Major Challenge*, Booz & Company, 2010: pp. 8-9.

<sup>22</sup> Qatar Statistics Authority and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), *Millennium Development Goals in Qatar*, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> "Qatar's holistic view of girl child," *The Peninsula* ([thepeninsulaqatar.com](http://thepeninsulaqatar.com)), March 6, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> *Qatar National Development Strategy 2011-2016*.

<sup>25</sup> Hans Christiaan Haan, *Small Enterprises: Women Entrepreneurs in the UAE*, Centre for Labour Market Research & Information (CLMRI), Tanmia, Dubai, 2004: p. 33.

<sup>26</sup> Hans Christiaan Haan, *Small Enterprises: Women Entrepreneurs in the UAE*, Centre for Labour Market Research & Information (CLMRI), Tanmia, Dubai, 2004: p. 29.

<sup>27</sup> [www.ameinfo.com](http://www.ameinfo.com)

<sup>28</sup> *Gulf News*, June 21, 2011

<sup>29</sup> Survey of 149 adolescent nationals conducted by YouGovSiraj, 2010, aired on Al Aan TV (Nabd al Arab) in the UAE; website of Saudi conference: [www.drugfreesa.com/english/theimportance.html](http://www.drugfreesa.com/english/theimportance.html); "Drugs Menace Is Society's Responsibility, says Prince Nawaf," *Saudi Gazette*, January 25, 2011. In 2010, Second Deputy Premier and Minister of Interior Prince Naif, who is also chairman of the National Committee for Narcotics Control (NCNC), said the government plans to set up youth clubs across Saudi Arabia to give young men the opportunity to spend their free time fruitfully. See "Naif: Government to Open Youth Clubs Across Kingdom," *Arab News*, May 23, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Health Authority—Abu Dhabi (HAAD) statistics; WHO; NIH (USA), *Australian Diabetes, Obesity and Lifestyle Study*; Booz & Company analysis.

<sup>31</sup> See [www.qatarisbooming.com/2011/05/06/qatar-charity-launches-volunteer-competition/](http://www.qatarisbooming.com/2011/05/06/qatar-charity-launches-volunteer-competition/).

<sup>i</sup> Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau, Government of Dubai, Knowledge and Human Development Authority, *Annual Report 2010*, 2010: pp. 35, 42, 43.

<sup>ii</sup> UNESCO, *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the Marginalized*, Paris, 2010, Table 7: p. 356.

<sup>iii</sup> The cell phone penetration rate in GCC countries reached 152.82 percent in 2009, higher than in the Levant (69.8 percent) and North Africa (92.2 percent). It is projected that the GCC will reach a 176 percent penetration rate by 2014. See Madar Research, *Arab ICT Use Report*, 2010: p. 36.

<sup>iv</sup> For an interesting take on this topic, see "BlackBerry Messenger: Boon or bane to family relations?" by Diana Al Jassem, *Arab News*, May 17, 2011.

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