

First Out, Last In amid COVID-19: Employment Vulnerability of Youths in Arab Countries

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This study estimates the impacts of the COVID crisis and of government responses to it on the trends in workers' outcomes in Arab countries, particularly focusing on youths' and women's vulnerable employment. Using microdata from ERF COVID-19 MENA Monitors for five countries (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia), we estimate multinomial logistic models of employment statuses, separately by gender. We confirm that the stringency of the COVID regime affected negatively employment and labor participation of most groups of workers, and particularly youths, even if youths were not disadvantaged pre-COVID. For all groups of workers (especially Egyptian, Jordanian and Tunisian men), higher education was associated with a better employment status. Education conferred consistently high positive returns in terms of formal wage employment and of being economically active. Workers' pre-COVID employment status also affected eventual outcomes of both genders under COVID, implying strong state-dependence in employment outcomes. Those made unemployed under COVID came predominantly from among those without formal employment pre-pandemic. Under COVID, men's employment prospects stagnated in the early 2021 in most countries, but partially recovered in summer. Women witnessed more of a stagnation throughout 2021 by being largely excluded from work opportunities.