Introduction

Social policy has a distinctive capacity to offer a new and insightful narrative about the political dynamics of the region of the Middle East. Indeed, a social policy perspective can highlight the existence of political agency social welfare action, broadly defined, in the public sphere which is bringing about positive change in Middle Eastern societies and yet has so far remained under-represented in the mainstream social policy and development studies literatures (Jawad, 2009). While there is common rhetorical consensus both in academia and policy circles that the main goal of social policy is general social welfare, the history of social policy shows that this field of action is much more concerned with how social welfare is defined, achieved and measured. We argue that political cleavages underpin the trajectory of welfare state development, and it is these debates which we hope to highlight in this chapter on social policy in the Middle East.

The second decade of the millennium was a period of far-reaching and, sometimes, violent, upheavals in much of the Middle East. These began with the Arab Spring that swept through the region in 2010, and were followed by subsequent political and social upheavals that have yet to reach their conclusion. In some parts of the region, these have led not only to continuing political and religious unrest and even to civil war, but also to a burgeoning refugee crisis. These developments have underscored the need for political reform and civil rights in many countries in this region, but also the underlying social causes that gave momentum to these upheavals and to the policies required to deal with them. Clearly, the spiraling cost of living, unemployment and the unequal distribution of wealth in these nations along with widespread poverty all played a major role in creating the conditions for public unrest and demands for system change in Middle Eastern nations. These changes are mirrored in policy discourse. A key shift in thinking after the Arab uprisings is the adoption by more and more Middle Eastern states of the discourse of social protection which is now enriched in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals under Goal 1 (End poverty in all its forms everywhere), Target 3 (Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors; and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable). Hence, the policy context in the Middle East, and especially the Arab countries in the present time, is dominated by donor and government efforts to integrate social
protection thinking into social policies, even if this only translates into residual forms of provision in the form of cash transfers (Jawad et al., 2018 forthcoming).

It is possible to argue, therefore, that the political mobilization which emerged in the region in the second decade of the new millennium has precipitated policy concern for social protection programming. This in turn necessitates more concerted academic attention to social policy in the Middle East as a field of study of practice, thereby supporting the foundations of a more intrinsic concern for social policy and social justice issues in the Middle East. A critical overview of social policy in this region at an important time of change will therefore form the subject of this chapter.

For clarification, the Middle East includes countries in a geographic region which, according to Henry and Springborg (2001), extend ‘from Morocco to Turkey along the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean and as far east as Iran and south to Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen’. The region has a population of half a billion which is Muslim in the majority, but as the seat of the world’s three largest monotheistic religions it is also home to long-standing Christian and Jewish populations.

The Middle East is diverse historically, culturally and politically. Parts of it, like Iran and Turkey, were never colonized by Europe, while other nations were greatly influenced by colonial rule; it is not all Arab or Arabic-speaking; some countries have been ruled under dictatorships or Islamic theocracies, like Iraq, Libya or Saudi Arabia, while others have operated more as liberal democracies, such as Turkey and Israel; its outer and inner geographical boundaries remain disputed – the Palestinian Territories are seeking to gain independent status and Cyprus skirts closely the boundaries of the Middle East and the Mediterranean. The Middle East is, of course, also in the throes of one of the world’s longest political-religious conflicts (the Arab–Israeli conflict) which casts a long shadow on both the history and prospects of social policy there.

However, regardless of the Arab Spring and its aftermath, this chapter asserts that the study of social policy and social welfare action is an academically viable and politically urgent endeavour for the Middle East. As noted above, the current interest in social protection only serves to confirm this reality (Jawad et al., 2018 forthcoming). Publications on social policy in the Middle East remain few and far between, with attention continuing to focus on poverty reduction or youth unemployment (see Jawad et al., 2018 forthcoming). In particular, donor agencies such as the World Bank or the African Development Bank continue to lead the debate, with current emphasis focusing on income inequality (Ncube et al., 2014). As noted above, interest has grown in social protection by international donor agencies following the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, and this has translated into greater interest among Middle East and North African MENA governments in recent years.

In terms of the academic literature, the seminal work by Gough and Wood (2004), which sought to explore the welfare regime approach in the extent of non-OECD countries, did not include the Middle East. It is mainly Israel and Turkey that have tended to be mentioned in the literature due perhaps to the availability of reliable data, the similarities between them and other welfare states, and their closer ties with Europe and the United States. Karshenas and Moghadam (2006, 2009), Jawad (2009) and Baylouny (2010) have provided some of the key studies into the social policy context of the Arab states (in addition to Iran and Turkey), highlighting the hybrid residual and corporatist natures of the welfare systems of the region.

It is important to note however that the neglect of the study of social policy in the Middle East, and in the Arab countries in particular, helps perpetuate misconceptions about the populations of the region as socially backward or politically disorganized, and averts critical discussion of social welfare action that is already taking place on the ground. We adopt a ‘strengths/assets-based’ approach in this chapter which combines salient analytical trends in social development
policy to consider what type of social welfare action is already taking place on the ground in Middle Eastern countries and how this might form the basis of more structured thinking about the situation of social policy and social welfare there.

Given the economic, political, social and cultural diversity across nations in the Middle East, efforts to develop overarching conclusions regarding developments in their social policies or to identify significant commonalities between these nations are premature. Nevertheless a number of issues that require greater attention in all of these countries can be identified. In particular, these include the role of religion in the formulation and provision of social welfare, the crucial importance of civil society in the field of social welfare, and the need to take into account the unique demographic structure of the nations in this region. In this chapter, we consider the following arguments. In the first section, a historical overview of the key forces that have shaped social policy in the region is offered; in the second section we look at the existing theoretical approaches to the study of social policy or rather public policy in the region; in the third section we look at the role of religion and its influence on social policy in both state and non-state forms; in the fourth section we discuss the uses of welfare regime classifications and how elements of these approaches may be used for analysing social policy in the Middle East; the fifth section synthesizes this discussion by proposing possible classifications of social policy in the countries of the region. The concluding section summarizes the main arguments of the chapter.

Historical development: the lost opportunities of independence

Social policy in the Middle East has been greatly influenced by international intervention; for example, opening up to the European-dominated economy since the seventeenth century through colonization and mandate rule, which set particular political and economic structures in motion; and since the 1980s, economic reform under the pressure of globalization and structural adjustment programmes led mainly by international development agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. In many cases, the groups that have taken control of state social policy have tended to be local élites made up of tribal, religious or ethnic leaders and wealthy merchants whose privileged status during mandate rule and afterwards marginalized the interest of a primarily rural agricultural population.

The increasing market orientation of Middle Eastern economies and the privatization programmes they underwent under the present influence of globalization and international development actors redefined the role of the state as the principal provider of social services and employer in the public sector (Baylouny, 2010). Karshenas and Moghadam (2006), El-Ghonemy (1998), Henry and Springborg (2001) and Clark (2001) describe how most states in the Middle East, especially the Arab states, have failed or are failing to develop effective democratic institutions that will ensure representative government and political participation for all citizens. As a result, the impact of citizens and social groups upon the social policy formulation process and the distribution of resources has tended to be minimal and achieved at a high price. Whether oversized and coercive (such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia) or weak and dysfunctional (such as Sudan and Lebanon), these states have been rife with corruption and the embezzlement of public funds.

Basic issues such as access to jobs and adequate incomes have plagued many Middle Eastern countries for many years (Ncube et al., 2014). State social provisioning is especially hard hit because of several factors such as: (1) the misallocation of resources and the prioritization of military spending over key social sectors such as health and education; (2) the narrow economic focus of public policy, which hinges social progress on economic prosperity; (3) the dominance
of minority factions in Middle Eastern countries dating back to the colonial era; (4) political insecurity, military conflict and a growing number of displaced persons, with the protraction of the Arab–Israeli conflict and internal struggles in nations such as Syria, Libya and Yemen; (5) high levels of state indebtedness, which have diverted funds from social welfare services; (6) the introduction of structural adjustment programmes and the increasing privatization programmes, which have reduced the role of the state further as provider of social services and public sector jobs and have often placed a high financial burden on individuals and families seeking to satisfy basic social needs such as housing, health and education for themselves or their children. The resulting social ills of unemployment, wealth polarization, and even undernourishment, would therefore need to be addressed through the reform of public policy and state legislation.

The 1940s and 1950s in the Middle East saw high secular and socialist fervour. Up until the 1980s, the Middle East experienced immense social and economic changes, due almost singlehandedly to oil windfall. This was used to establish and fund state social services such as guaranteed government employment for graduates; new labour legislation (typically favouring workers in large public enterprises) such as health insurance, retirement pay, maternity pay; free education; free hospital care; and basic consumer subsidies, the most important of which were food and housing. Urbanization and economic development were accompanied by significant attainments in education and enhanced female labour participation (Karshenas and Moghadam, 2006).

But this was a short honeymoon. The easy access to capital that resulted from oil revenues led to the concentration of wealth among the urban élites, and left the majority of the populations poorly skilled and ruled primarily via patrimonial and tribal structures. This reliance on natural resource rents for social spending has typically earned the welfare regimes of the Middle East the label of ‘Rentier’ (Beblawi, 1990). Even in countries like Turkey, which is not an oil-producing country and underwent a staunch modernizing agenda following independence, large segments of the population became disenfranchised which led to major rural–urban migration and the emergence of the urban shanty dwellings known as geçecondo, especially around Istanbul.

Another major factor hampering social policy is the pervasiveness of clientalism, meaning the politicization of welfare and the instrumental use of social policy by the state to gain power and political legitimacy (Stubbs and Zrinščak, 2015). Some authors argue that even apparently progressive social policy initiatives, such as the introduction of categorical social benefits to workers and employment guarantees to university graduates in Iran and Egypt in the 1950s/1960s, were in fact motivated by the need to win the support of the working classes in the post-colonial states, and were not based on a civic discourse of social citizenship. Today, social benefits are often channelled through clientelist networks, which link ruling governments to their supporters. Thus, social policy today in the Middle East, particularly in the Arab countries, lacks a sense of its own legitimacy.

Theoretical perspectives: rentierism, corporatism and residualism

Empirical knowledge and more sophisticated theoretical models concerning social policy in the Middle East are limited in the existing literature. While the higher income and more industrialized nations in this region, particularly Turkey, Israel, Iran, Cyprus and Lebanon, have been the subject of some interest in recent years (Aybars and Tsarouhas, 2010; Buğra and Keyder, 2006; Gal, 2017; Harris, 2010; Jawad, 2009), this has clearly not been the case for much of this region. Indeed, in the case of most Middle Eastern nations, discussions pertaining to state policies concerning social welfare issues tended to adopt the rather constricting rentier state paradigm for
the Arab and oil-producing countries in the region, particularly the Gulf states and Iran (Beblawi, 1990). Analytical literature examining social policies and outcomes in Middle Eastern nations, and based on a firm empirical foundation and a theoretical basis, have generally been extremely limited in number and scope (though see e.g. the edited collections by Dixon, 1987; Karshenas and Moghadam, 2006; and Gal and Greve, 2010).

Research conducted by the authors of this chapter as well as the research cited above indicates that state social policy in Middle Eastern countries is generally residual in character and focused primarily on the provision of social safety nets and the reintegration of vulnerable groups (such as orphans and the elderly) into society. The most comprehensive employment-based insurance goes to urban public sector workers, particularly those who are unionized, with the best protection going to the army and security forces. At the heart of this residual social policy are key conceptual blockages, namely the overly economic focus of public policy and a corresponding lack of importance accorded to the social. A significant example of this residual or piecemeal approach to social policy was highlighted following the 2011 Arab uprisings when most governments sought to appease popular anger by increasing social assistance support, such as cash transfers and higher public sector wages.

Related to this is the characterization of Middle Eastern states as ‘rentier’, meaning that their primary source of revenue is from natural resources such as oil and natural gas. This is particularly the case for the oil-rich countries in the Arab and Persian Gulfs and Algeria. The over-reliance on oil revenues has meant that some states were able to provide social welfare and social insurance services to citizens during the oil boom era of the 1960s to 1980s without having to tax citizens on the basis of their civic membership of the nation. The easy access to capital and the sudden overnight affluence brought about by the oil windfall in the region is depicted as a curse by El-Ghonemy (1998), since it has directly undermined the structures of social citizenship and the need to develop the productive capacity of the local population, due to the over-reliance on foreign labour.

For some authors writing about the region, the major challenges for social welfare provisioning are less about the long-term structures of democratic participation and a share in decision-making by society, and more about the urgent measures of wealth redistribution, income transfers, provision of basic needs and ensuring the basic support systems of survival. When measures of human well-being are discussed by some authors it is in the developmental/survival terms of child mortality, female literacy, sanitation and housing. At the heart of social policy, then, are key challenges of basic economic and social development. This gives the desired purpose and definition of social policy in much of the existing literature a focus on economic productivity, inherent in female labour participation, creating more employment opportunities, reducing indebtedness, and reforming property rights and the Islamic laws that dominate inheritance and family planning. This is not to say that social policies in the past did not bring about improvements in society in the Middle East. In the immediate post-independence era in the 1940s and subsequently the oil-boom era, which lasted until the 1980s, there was rapid social transformation of the region with enormous improvements in education and health, as well as rapid urban transformation. But these gains were soon lost as states became more authoritarian in character and failed to develop adequate economic policies.

This political context exacerbated a sense of breakdown in state and society relations in the Middle East, leading to sporadic waves of political mobilization as mass populations sought to reclaim a voice. These waves of protest have been expressed in sectarian terms: for instance, the Sunni majority population rising against the Alawite regime in Syria and the Shi’a majority in Bahrain rising against the Sunni regime. The sense of social unrest has been exacerbated further by the notion within Middle Eastern (and Arab) populations that the state should take more
responsibility for the welfare of citizens and that the latter have the rights and entitlement to be provided with social services. The 2011 Arab uprising needs to be seen, therefore, in the context of these continuous eruptions of popular protest.

Competition between state and societal groups over the public sphere is most acutely expressed in the rise of Islamic groups in the Middle East, which are providing vital public and social services to excluded groups in society, and are thus challenging the state not only as a provider of welfare but also as a modern secular institution of government. Even violent groups, such as the Taliban and Daesh, have at various moments during their rule provided social and welfare services to their fighters as well as to the communities supporting them. Other more long-standing political groups include the Muslim Brotherhood (Egypt) and Hamas (Palestinian Territories). There also exist more local and less politicized social welfare actors ranging from Zakat funds organized by local mosques to professional medical organizations such as the Islah Charitable Society in Yemen or the Mustafa Mahmood Health Clinic in Egypt (Clark, 2004).

Religion and social policy

The role of religion in social policy is common to all the nations in the Middle East even though this takes diverse forms (Jawad and Yakut-Cakar, 2010). Islam, Judaism and Christianity are an important cultural influence on inheritance laws as well as family planning, and exercise a major influence of definitions of poverty and approaches to charity and social action in the Middle East (Jawad, 2009). Islam is, of course, the dominant religion in most countries in the Middle East and its impact upon the provision of social welfare the greatest. In terms of Islam, some authors argue that religion can perpetuate wealth and gender inequalities, although authors differ, arguing that women do have rights to property and to work or do have a say in family planning. Islam is also discussed in terms of its welfare institutions such as waqf (religious endowments) and zakat (an obligatory 2.5 per cent tax levied on assets). Zakat has acted as a hugely important source of poverty alleviation for the poor and waqf has played a key role in the socio-economic development of the Middle East in the past few centuries prior to colonization – not least in the urban and political development of Istanbul in Turkey (Heyneman, 2004; Richardson, 2004).

Islamic principles can also inform public policy areas such as health, finance and economy and human rights legislation. Here, it is argued that Islamic economics remains underdeveloped but in the health sector, for example, some countries, such as Iran, have been able to make substantial improvements to primary care thanks to the influence of Islamic principles in Iran following the revolution (Underwood, 2004). Islamic values are also important as an activating force for social groups and movements in society to engage in public and social service provisioning. In Jordan, for example, Islamic movements or Islamic charity organizations use social welfare to challenge the basis of the secular modern state, and/or to protect the political status of the professional classes through the provision of employment opportunities and social networks.

In the case of political Islamic groups, contributions in the book edited by Wiktorowicz (2004) depict organizations such as Hamas in Palestine as social movements that have developed locally and are now supported by a comprehensive institutional basis of which the provision of social welfare and public services is a vital component. In these cases, Islam is depicted as the only remaining platform for political contestation and struggle for social justice in the Middle East.
Regime classifications and the production of social welfare

In order to discuss the classification of welfare regimes in Middle Eastern countries, it is apt that we begin with some notion of how social welfare is produced. There are two overarching accounts of the evolution of welfare states, one focusing on the role of industrialization and the social needs it generates, particularly unemployment and poverty which make the provision of state welfare inevitable; the other focusing on the role of political competition or cleavages. This latter perspective highlights how new political groups such as industrial workers, feminists or ethnic minorities emerge and seek to have their interests represented in government and thus their needs met through the welfare state. It is the industrialization thesis which has tended to dominate accounts of social policy.

This split in perspective parallels two opposing approaches in the study of social policy, both of which rest upon the tension between state and market in the provision of social welfare services. The first approach considers social policy as subsidiary to capitalist development, a tool for serving the needs of the capitalist market and for alleviating the social problems which market forces cause. At the opposite end is a view of social policy as a central pillar of progressive social change, actively employed to achieve a more equitable and just society. In practice, whichever stance is adopted, the key dynamics underpinning the nature and scope of social policy in any particular national setting are affected by the interplay among the main institutions of society: the state, the market and the family/community.

For this reason, it is more appropriate to speak of the ‘mixed economy of welfare’ or the ‘welfare mix’ which refers to the varying configurations of state, market and family/community in the provision of social protection. This means that different elements (of welfare) are delivered in different measure by different means. The Middle East social welfare mix is dominated by a strong role for nuclear and extended family; tribal, sectarian and religious communities; market-based social welfare such as private medical insurance and paid-for domestic help to assist with social care needs; and basic state provision in health and education.

The underlying philosophy behind the welfare regime approach as developed by Esping-Andersen (1990) is to avoid normative statements about the ‘best’ kind of welfare arrangement and to include a political analysis of welfare systems. In particular, Esping-Andersen followed a long tradition in Western social policy analysis which linked the political strength of labour movements to the development of the welfare state, against a relatively uniform level of economic growth in Western countries. A key feature of the welfare regime approach is to compare states that have generous welfare provision with those that do not. This consists of two key elements which distinguish between different types of welfare state. These are de-commodification and stratification. Based on these two key features, Esping-Andersen identified three types, or ‘regimes’, of ‘welfare capitalism’ which focused on the welfare conditions of male wage workers.

Esping-Andersen’s model has raised criticisms on a number of counts. These have ranged from its lack of gender-sensitiveness, to its assumption of the homogeneity and internal coherency of policy regimes, to questioning the accuracy of the clusters of nations (Emmenegger et al., 2015) (see also Chapter 11, this volume). Where developing country contexts are concerned, criticisms have been raised regarding the transferability of the model. Research led by Gough and Wood (2004) on the transferability of the welfare regime model to the non-Western world omits from its analysis the region of the Middle East (including North Africa) entirely. There is discussion of informal security regimes in Africa but this focuses primarily on the high risk of war and violence in agrarian peasant societies there, a situation which does not characterize the more urban societies of the Middle East. Discussion of the segmented public–private
provision of welfare in Latin America in Gough and Wood’s (2004) volume does however bear relevance for the Middle East where the labour market and family are core providers of welfare.

Esping-Andersen’s welfare regime approach has also been criticized for its assumption of the internal coherency of social policy formulation, since this assumes a false level of stability in the era of globalization and structural adjustment programmes. Other critics note that the concept fails to highlight the importance of health, education and housing programmes which play a more important role in poor countries than do income-maintenance schemes. This latter argument is quite relevant for the Middle East. Criticisms have also been raised about welfare outcomes in the approach. Needs satisfaction and self-sufficiency, it is argued, are more important in lower income settings, whereas Esping-Andersen’s typology is built on de-commodification. Furthermore, it is argued that stratification outcomes overemphasize class-based social structures at the expense of gender, religious, ethnic and clientelistic outcomes which are more relevant to social settings in developing countries. Esping-Andersen’s typology is also criticized for not devoting enough attention to the critical role of international development institutions without which policy analysis of social welfare in low-income settings would be very lacking. Finally, it is pointed out that there is a problem of terminology inherent in the concept of welfare which in certain country contexts such as the Far East denotes charity and is contrasted with development which implies more long-term notions of social investment. This latter argument also bears relevance for Middle Eastern countries where development is the focus of government policy.

Towards a welfare regime classification of the Middle East

How then can we apply the welfare regime approach to assess social policy in the Middle East region? The simple answer is that the welfare regime offers both opportunities and challenges for the task at hand because it is possible to apply only some aspects of it, and to a certain extent. Moreover, the argument works the other way, in that the particular construction of the welfare regime approach may not capture the entire dynamics of social policy in the Middle East. This is because the welfare regime approach is underpinned by particular assumptions and values about social welfare which have been described above and which highlight the debate surrounding the transferability of the welfare regime approach to developing countries. Thus, by employing a process of elimination, it becomes clear what elements of the welfare regime classification we can use for the Middle East region. This also begins to draw a picture of the configuration of social policy in the region. For example, we do not have adequate comparable data on social welfare expenditure (the welfare effort) and other key facets of welfare state activity, save for Turkey, Cyprus and Israel, due to the inclusion of these countries in the databases and annual reports of either the OECD (Israel and Turkey) or the EU (Cyprus); labour movements have not had the same importance in the political life in Middle Eastern countries as they did in the West; social security schemes are partial and still in their infancy in most Middle Eastern countries and are confined in the large part to health and pension schemes with more marginal benefits for unemployment and maternity where these exist. As a result of incomplete data availability and problems of definition of social security packages, it is difficult to accurately measure benefit levels and to be confident that rules of entitlement are being correctly applied.

Thus, in order to move this argument towards classification of the welfare regimes of the Middle East forward, we propose four types of countries as a way of categorizing the social contexts and social policies of the region:

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The oil-rich Gulf countries, namely Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, which are primarily concerned with reaping and accelerating the benefits of economic prosperity and oil wealth, and integrating their economies into the global market. These countries tend to be much less concerned with problems of social inequalities and deprivation in their respective countries (with the possible exception of Saudi Arabia).

Conflict countries, namely Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, Yemen and the Palestinian Territories, which are struggling to cope with major issues of debt, weak economic development, unemployment and rising costs of living leading to significant flows of out-migration and brain drain. These countries demonstrate residual welfare regimes whereby family and market-based social welfare supersede state provision.

Non-oil countries (also known as diversified economies) with traditionally strong state control over social and economic policy, such as Egypt and Jordan. These are countries which deal with stark regional imbalances (such as between rural and urban areas) and the challenges of administrative reform. These countries have strong statist tendencies and, as in the case of Egypt previously, have provided subsidies for essential commodities which have been an essential pillar of the in-kind social assistance welfare regimes of the region (Bayat, 2006).

Mediterranean welfare states, including Turkey, Israel and Cyprus. Sharing commonalities with other high-income, industrialized, liberal democracies in the Mediterranean regime, these nations have a common modern history of late industrialization, authoritarian or colonial rule, and weak, ineffective states that have contributed to similarities in the structuring of their welfare states and in their ability to achieve acceptable welfare outcomes. While these countries have relatively extensive welfare and social security systems and their social expenditure is higher than that in most other Middle Eastern nations, spending levels generally remain lower than those in social democratic and corporatist welfare states though at a level with that in liberal welfare states. Poverty levels and the degree of inequality in the Mediterranean welfare states are lower than in other Middle Eastern countries, but nevertheless remain high in comparison to most European welfare states and equal to or higher than those in liberal welfare states. This apparently reflects an inability on the part of these welfare states to successfully overcome social gaps through redistribution (Gal, 2010).

Conclusion

The role of social policy in achieving greater social well-being and economic prosperity has been gaining increasing attention among national and international policy-makers in the Middle East region in recent years. The renewed emphasis on social protection in current donor and government policy discourses confirms this new direction of policy-making in the region. But in order to create effective social policy, there is a need to articulate a coherent vision for how social policy operates and what it is meant to achieve. This requires a clear understanding of what social policy means, how it differs from social development and how it complements it. It is an endeavour that would represent an important step for the Middle East region, where social policy has never really played a central role in public policy or in national development planning more specifically.

This chapter argues that a social policy perspective helps in understanding the shortcomings of the traditional ‘growth first’ approach in development policy, whereby social concerns are
relegated to a secondary role or treated as residual outcomes of economic production. Middle Eastern countries hover between corporatist and residual models of welfare regime provision. We have suggested a way forward in terms of classifying the welfare regimes of this region that takes into account their distinctive geo-political profiles. More specifically, we have distinguished between four types of welfare regime in the Middle East: the oil-rich Gulf countries; (post-)conflict countries; non-oil countries; and Mediterranean welfare states. Future research will need to study more deeply the way in which political and institutional forces have shaped the development of social policy in the Middle East and how the frustrations of the 2011 social mobilizations may be better addressed in social policy there. The current policy interest in social protection marks a key moment in this regard and it is important for academic study to offer more critical and comprehensive insights into these debates. For, as Ncube et al. (2014) argue, inequality harms both social cohesion and economic growth.

Note
1 This refers to the International Labour Organisation’s proposal of Social Protection Floors as the basic system of social protection which all countries should implement comprising basic health and education as well as the extension of social security.

References


