



# The sixth review of the International Conference on Population and Development in the Arab region

Ten years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration:  
regional review report



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life





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# Acknowledgements

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This report was jointly prepared by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the United Nations Population Fund's Arab States Regional Office (UNFPA-ASRO) and the League of Arab States. It was co-authored by staff members: Nadine Chalak, Ipek Dedeoglu, Ismail Lubbad, Milad Pournik, Manal Said, Sara Salman and Dina Tannir (ESCWA); and Theodora Castan and Saima Ilyas (UNFPA). The report was prepared under the overall guidance of Laila Baker, UNFPA-ASRO Regional Director and Mehrinaz Elawady, Director and Cluster leader, Gender Justice, Population and Inclusive Development, ESCWA.

The report is based on data and information drawn from a survey filled out by 13 Arab Governments assessing their progress and challenges using national data. ESCWA, UNFPA and the League of Arab States would like to

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# Key messages

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- Mainstreaming rights-based approaches, strengthening governance systems, investing in multi-stakeholder partnerships, and adopting inclusive approaches to policymaking processes in the areas related to the 2013 Cairo Declaration and the ICPD Programme of Action are key to ensuring the human rights and needs of women and girls, youth, older persons, migrants and persons with disabilities without discrimination of any kind, and to promote social justice, equality and the resilience of systems to the impacts of climate change and other crises.
- Fiscal space should be increased to build institutional capacities and develop effective policy frameworks, implementation mechanisms and cross-sectoral coordination to meet the goals of the 2013 Cairo Declaration.
- Enhancing data collection and analysis and investing in research are essential to support evidence-based policymaking and effective implementation in the areas related to the 2013 Cairo Declaration and the ICPD Programme of Action.
- It is important to recognize and increase efforts to mainstream a gender perspective into policies and programmes, and implement new legislation to eliminate gender discrimination and gender-based violence, and empower women and girls.
- It is important to promote efforts to strengthen, invest in and expand basic sexual and reproductive health services, adopt a life-cycle approach, and include comprehensive and quality sexual and reproductive health services within universal health coverage programmes without discrimination of any kind, to fulfil sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.
- Regional dialogue, cooperation and peer learning in the areas related to the 2013 Cairo Declaration and ICPD Programme of Action are crucial to enhance population and development programmes in the region, and to address transboundary challenges including forced displacement, climate change and food insecurity.





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# Introduction

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Thirty years ago, following the ground-breaking International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the world began a historic journey towards putting people's rights at the heart of development, recognizing sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as human rights, and affirming that empowering all women and girls is key to ensuring the well-being of all. In the ICPD Programme of Action, Governments set out an ambitious agenda to deliver inclusive, equitable and sustainable global development. Since then, this agenda has guided global policies that have helped to secure advances: in equality and empowerment for women and girls; in the areas of health and education; and in coping with demographic and climate changes and their consequences. On the twentieth anniversary, the broad support for the ICPD Programme of Action led Governments to reaffirm their commitments and to extend the ICPD Programme of Action beyond 2014 at a Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>1</sup> It is now time to review progress during the last decade.

In 2013, leaders in Arab States reiterated their strong support for the ICPD Programme of Action and stressed the ICPD vision of gender equality, equity and empowerment of women to achieve and sustain population and development goals in the 2013 Cairo Declaration which represents the consensus on the ICPD

Programme of Action going into its second decade beyond 2014.<sup>2</sup> In particular, Governments called on Arab countries to “commit to ensuring political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights of women and girls without discrimination” and, among others, to “enact reforms of marriage laws that prevent child marriage and ensure protection and well-being of the girl child”.

The 2013 Cairo Declaration has since served as the regional framework to advance the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action with 129 recommendations across four main pillars: (a) dignity and equality (which covers various population groups – women, migrants and displaced persons, young people, older persons and persons with disabilities); (b) health, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; (c) place and environmental sustainability; and (d) governance, including regional and international cooperation as well as data.

The Declaration underscores that the Arab region is highly diverse with differing challenges related to gender equality and the rights of women and girls, demographic trends, climate change, access to services, and poverty and unequal wealth distribution. Global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic compounded health and socioeconomic challenges in the

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1 United Nations Population Division, [Special Session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014](#), 2014.

2 International Conference on Population and Development, [Development Challenges and Population Dynamics in a Changing Arab World](#): Cairo Declaration, 2013.

Arab region, including disrupting access to life-saving services to address gender-based violence, and by deepening multiple and intersecting forms of inequalities and discrimination against women and girls, but also marginalized groups. Additionally, many countries of the region are plagued by crises that have created mass displacement and migration, unequal access to basic sexual and reproductive health services, and have deprived many people of their dignity.

Despite the challenges, this *Regional Review Report*, based on both quantitative and qualitative data provided by countries, finds that progress has been made in many areas. Some countries have enacted and are implementing new legislation to eliminate gender discrimination and to empower women and girls including through addressing negative social norms, investments in education, supporting their integration in the labour market, and a gender-responsive budgeting approach. There are good examples of investments in capacity-building and in strengthening of institutions, multisectoral coordination, accountability and participatory approaches. The responses provided by Arab Governments for this report recognize that complex issues must be addressed through cross-sectoral mechanisms. They underscore the need to allocate dedicated resources to meet the goals of the 2013 Cairo Declaration, to build capacities within ministries and departments, to make the best use of technology, and to build strong policy frameworks and implementation

mechanisms that will yield success. Similarly, countries also underline the importance to strengthen and expand systematic data collection mechanisms at national and local levels to ensure that their policies and measures comprehensively and effectively provide the complex picture presented by the Arab region across areas of the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2013 Cairo Declaration for the benefit of all their populations.

Findings from the report were presented in the Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development: Challenges and Prospects 10 Years After the 2013 Cairo Declaration taking place in Beirut on 13–14 September 2023. Building on the recommendations from the 2018 review of the Cairo Declaration, the recommendations herein respond to challenges and priorities outlined by Arab Governments in their national voluntary reviews and reports.

The outcome of the Conference and the report serve as the Arab region's input to the Report of the Secretary-General on the thirtieth global review of the ICPD Programme of Action to the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Population and Development from 29 April 2024 to 3 May 2024. The evidence in this report demonstrates that countries have yet to achieve their goals in the implementation of commitments they have made, and, as in other regions of the world, there is still a long way to go before every individual can exercise their rights in society with equality, justice and dignity for all.

# 1. Methodology

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In anticipating the thirtieth anniversary of the ICPD Programme of Action in 2024, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Arab States Regional Office (ASRO) of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the League of Arab States (LAS) co-led the review of the status of implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2013 Cairo Declaration. One of the key outputs of the regional review is this report on some of the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the 2013 Cairo Declaration, highlighting the challenges, presenting good practices from the region and offering a set of policy recommendations that are designed to facilitate accelerating achievement of the goals of the 2013 Cairo Declaration and the ICPD Programme of Action.

The review methodology adopted for this report consisted of a quantitative survey of data on 32 indicators that capture the four pillars of the 2013 Cairo Declaration (see annex 1 for the list of indicators); and a qualitative survey on progress and challenges on six themes of the 2013 Cairo Declaration since the last review held in 2018. The two surveys were filled out by governments assessing their national progress and challenges using national data. This was complemented by a review of recent national and regional progress reports on the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action; the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing; the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) (First Regional Review completed in 2021); and the Voluntary National Reviews on the 2030 Agenda and the

Sustainable Development Goals (latest available year) to facilitate the collection of information on the remaining four themes (women, ageing, migration and environmental sustainability). The quantitative and qualitative data should be viewed jointly to present a fuller picture of the situation in the Arab region.

ESCWA distributed the quantitative survey and guiding template, including the qualitative questions, to Arab countries in November 2022. ESCWA, UNFPA and LAS organized two capacity-building workshops for Arab countries in October 2022 and February 2023 to introduce the quantitative survey and guiding templates. A total of 13 countries submitted national reports, with 12 countries submitting both quantitative and qualitative analyses: Algeria, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia. Morocco submitted its response to the quantitative survey only. In addition, this report includes a regional overview of the demographic profile using data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Population Prospects*, 2022 revision.

The report has several limitations. Firstly, the analysis is based solely on the national reports submitted for this report or for the reviews outlined above. Not all countries that submitted national reports for ICPD+30 had submitted national reports for these reviews, and not all countries who submitted national reports for the reviews submitted provided a qualitative survey. They are not, therefore,

mentioned in all sections and the report is not exhaustive of the experience of all countries in the region. Secondly, data used in this report is based on the data shared by Arab countries in their national reports. It is difficult to establish a baseline to measure the progress achieved during the past five years given that

some of the information presented in the national reports predates 2018. In addition, some of the national reports on international frameworks (such as GCM) were submitted in 2020–2021, and developments witnessed in Arab countries since then may not be included in this report.

## 2. A quantitative snapshot of demographic trends

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This section presents an overview of selected demographic trends in the Arab countries based on the United Nations Population Division data, and an analysis of the 32 indicators that capture the different dimensions under the four main pillars of the 2013 Cairo Declaration. In 2016, this set of indicators was selected by matching ICPD's priority areas and the Sustainable Development Goals indicators in a regional workshop organized by UNFPA ASRO in Cairo, ESCWA and LAS. In its twelfth session in 2017, ESCWA's Statistical Committee recognized the progress made in the work on data collection of these indicators. ASRO and ESCWA then organized a series of capacity building activities for the Arab States and presented the measurement issues and data collection procedures. Based on these indicators, ASRO collected the indicators (2010–2019) and designed a Population and Development Composite Index for Arab States. ESCWA sent the pre-filled indicators to ICPD focal points appointed by Arab Governments who revised and completed the indicators supplied by national statistical offices. ESCWA validated the data collected by

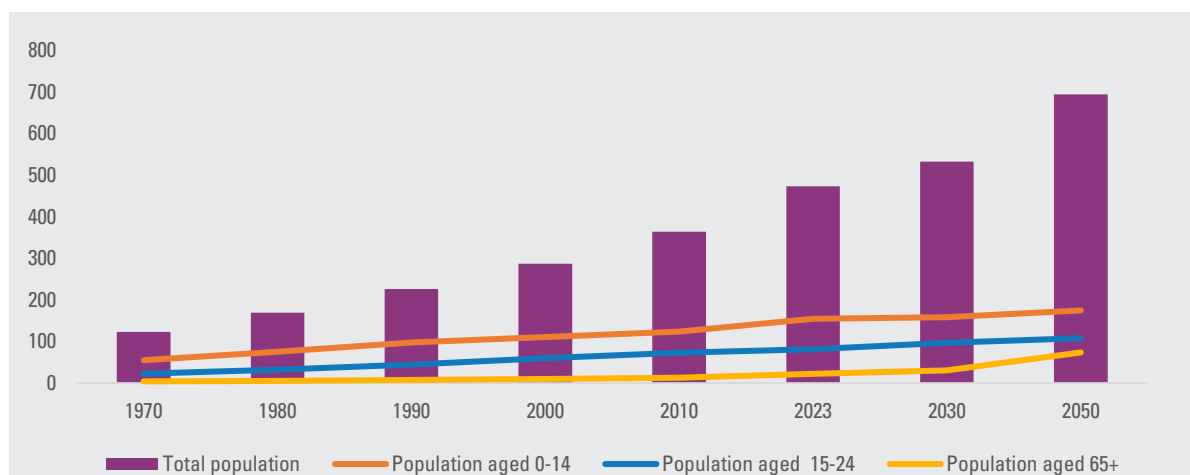
comparing them with those from national sources.

According to the United Nations Population Division, the Arab population<sup>3</sup> exceeded 473 million people in 2023, accounting for 5.9 per cent of the world's total. The region's population is expected to grow to over 533 million by 2030 and 694 million by 2050. The Arab region is still characterized by a youthful population: the proportion of children under 15 years of age constitutes about a third of the region's population in 2023. The number of youths aged 15 to 24 years increased from 51 million in 1995 to nearly 82 million in 2023 and is expected to reach 108 million in 2050. The proportion of senior persons 65 and older in the Arab region is currently small – less than 5 per cent in most countries except for Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia. In absolute figures, however, the total number of older persons is expected to rise from 22 million in 2023 to 31 million in 2030. In other words, the share of the region's older population is expected to grow to 22 million (6 per cent) by 2030 and 74 million (11 per cent) by 2050 (figure 1).

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3 The combined population of Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen.

Figure 1. Population size in the Arab States, 1970–2050 (Millions)



Source: ESCWA calculation based on the United Nations, DESA, Population Division (2022).

This growth in the percentage of older persons is reflective of the fact that women in the region are having fewer children, and as a result of the decrease in mortality rates and improvement in access to health services. The total fertility rate (TFR) for Arab States decreased from 6.2 in 1990 to 3.1 children per woman in 2023.<sup>4</sup> In the region, Somalia has the highest TFR with 6.2 children per woman, followed by the Sudan at 4.4. The TFR range is near or below the so-called replacement level (2.1 children per woman) in Lebanon, Kuwait and Tunisia in 2023.<sup>5</sup> The other powerful force driving the increasing number of older people is that life expectancy increased from 60 years in 1990 to 69 years in 2023, a positive achievement showing the advancements in health and well-being that were championed by the 2013 Cairo Declaration.

The other main driver of demographic trends is the role of migration – both voluntary and

forced – and displacement. These movements of people have significantly affected both the size and structure of the population in the region. In 2020, the Arab countries hosted 41.4 million international migrants and refugees who made up around 15 per cent of all migrants and refugees worldwide. At the same time, migration and forced displacement from the Arab countries continued to increase, reaching an estimated 32.8 million people in 2020, 44 per cent of whom stayed within the region.<sup>6</sup>

Arab countries are witnessing high levels of migration towards urban areas. Estimates indicate that about 59 per cent of the population currently live in urban areas while in the Gulf Cooperation Countries almost all the population live in cities.<sup>7</sup> The percentage of the urban population in the region is expected to rise to about 70 per cent by 2050.

4 United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA), [World Population Dashboard](#), accessed on 16 May 2022.

5 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, [World Population Prospects](#), 2022.

6 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), *Situation Report on International Migration, 2021: Building Forward Better for Migrants and Refugees in the Arab Region*. E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2021/2.

7 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. [World Urbanization Prospects](#), 2018.



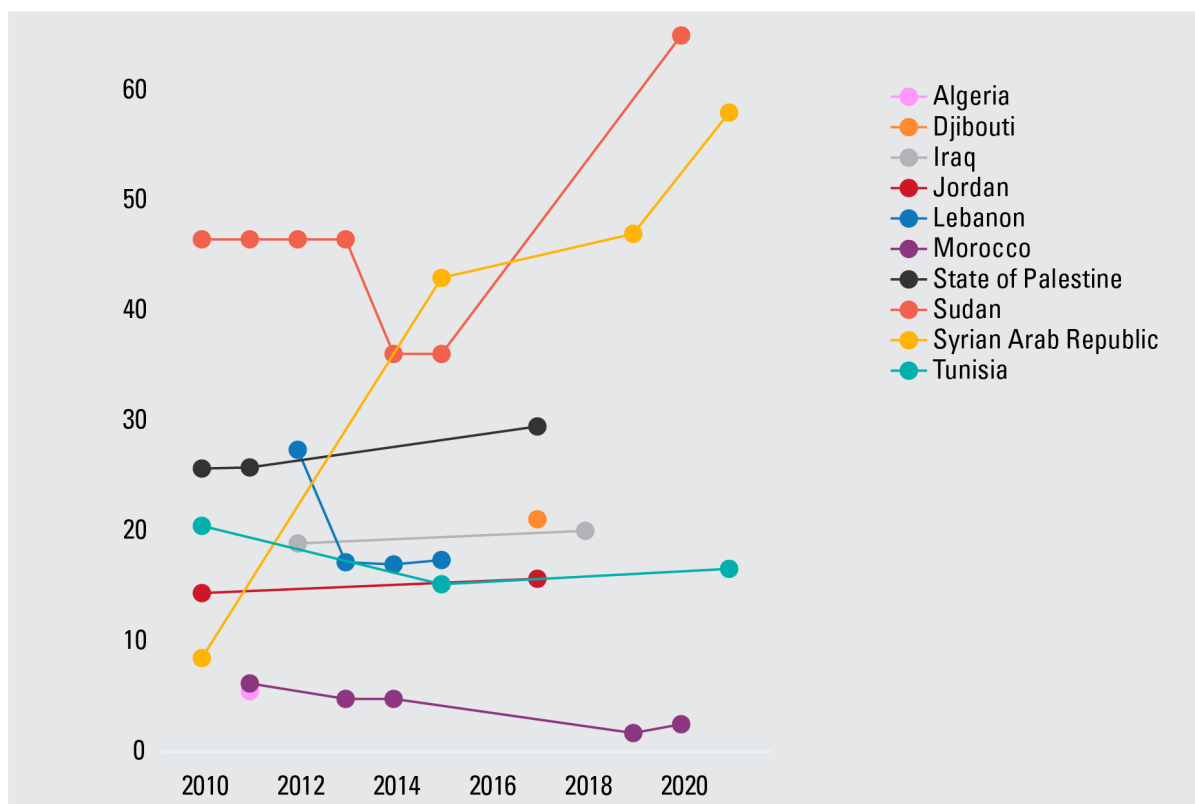
### 3. Analysis of selected International Conference on Population and Development indicators

#### A. Dignity and equality

Equality and human dignity are integral to human rights and are a fundamental element of democracy. The 2013 Cairo Declaration calls for more efforts to fight poverty and ensure equality and social justice for all. In this context, figure 2 illustrates the

percentage of populations living below the national poverty line by country. The graph shows an increase in poverty in seven Arab countries between 2010–2021. As per the national reports, poverty rates in Morocco were reported at 2.5 per cent in 2020, 65 per cent in the Sudan in 2020 and 58 per cent in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2021.

Figure 2. Percentage of population living below the national poverty line, 2010–2021



Source: ESCWA calculations based on the quantitative survey completed by the 13 Arab countries between November 2022 and March 2023.

Within the context of poverty and inequality, vulnerable employment (own-account workers and family workers) is of major concern because it is often associated with income insecurity, difficult working conditions, and engagement in informal work with limited or no social security.<sup>8</sup> In the last decade, the vulnerable employment rate decreased in most of the Arab region except for Tunisia, indicating an overall advance in reducing vulnerability, a key goal of the 2013 Cairo Declaration.

## B. Women

Child marriage is still high in the region. The percentage of women who were married before the age of 18 increased between the period 2010 and 2021 in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan and the Sudan. The highest increase among countries with data was the Sudan, where the rate almost doubled between 2010 and 2021 from 37 to 62 per cent. In contrast to other countries, Tunisia and the Syrian Arab Republic have reported a decline in this indicator since 2010. The lowest percentage was recorded in Tunisia at 2 per cent in 2020. The trend of percentage of women married before the age of 15 decreased in the State of Palestine from 4 per cent to 1 per cent between 2010 and 2019. Somalia recorded the highest percentage of women married before the age of 15 at 17 per cent in 2019. Overall, even though the data is not comprehensive, indications are that this important goal of the 2013 Cairo Declaration is not being met, as shown in figure 3.

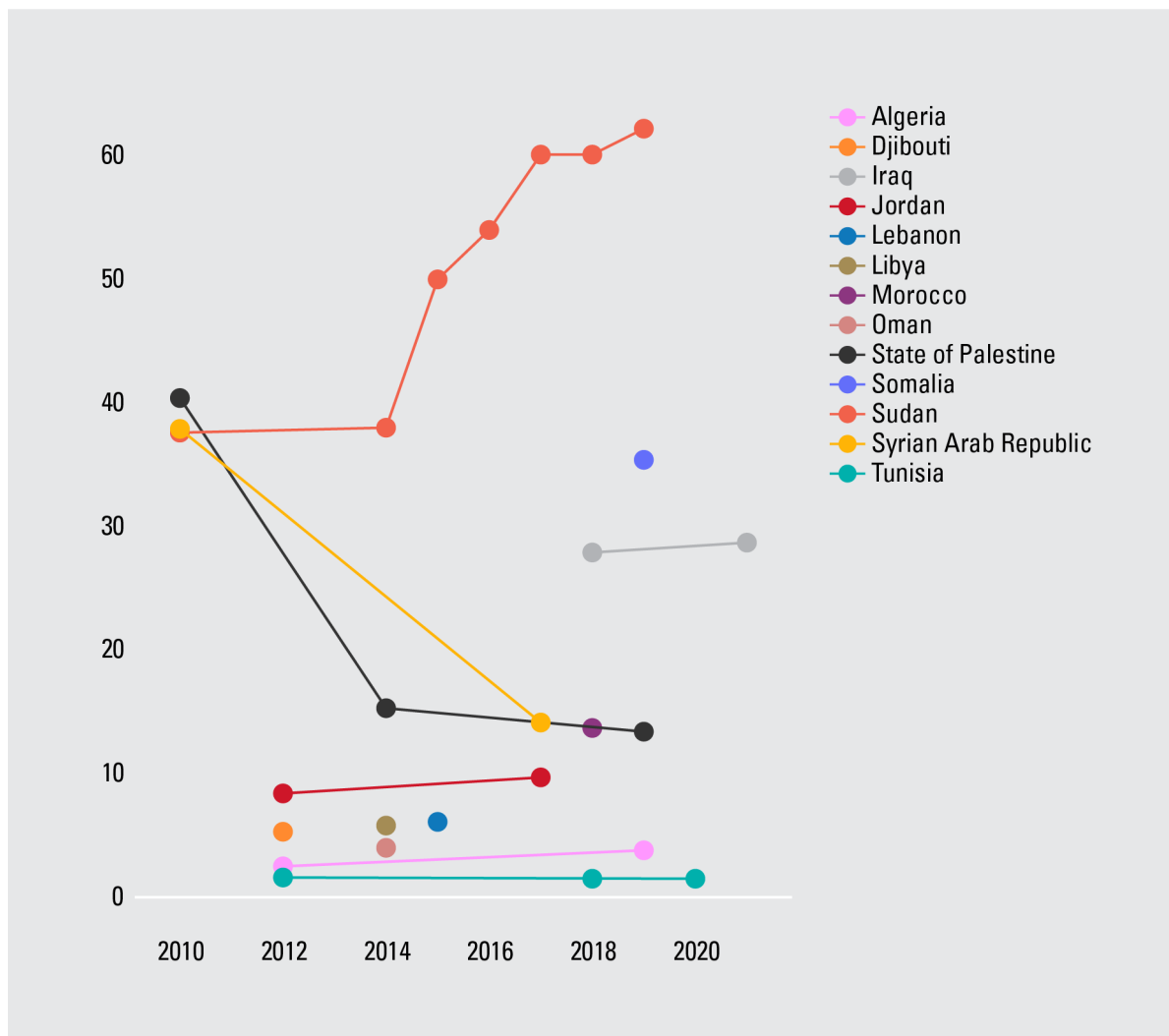
Collecting data on gender-based violence, especially comparative data, is notoriously difficult because of methodological and definitional issues, and the reticence of respondents. However, in the responses supplied by national governments it is significant that around a third of women in the region reported experiencing physical, sexual or psychological violence from a current or former partner in the past 12 months, which would indicate a serious gap in meeting the goals of the 2013 Cairo Declaration. All countries reported only one-year or two-year data points, precluding any trend analysis. The State of Palestine reported the highest level of gender-based violence at 58 per cent, and Oman reported the lowest level at 1 per cent between 2010 and 2021. A significant increase was reported in Morocco reaching 46 per cent in 2019 from 30 per cent in 2012. Tunisia recorded a significant decrease from 20 per cent to 10 per cent between 2012 and 2018.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) persists in several Arab countries despite the many commitments made in national and international policy documents, including the 2013 Cairo Declaration, to eliminate it. Based on data available from four country reports (Djibouti, Iraq, Somalia and the Sudan), Somalia had the highest prevalence of FGM at 99 per cent of females in 2019, while the Sudan recorded an increase from 66 per cent in 2010 to 72 per cent in 2017. Iraq reported 7 per cent in 2018.

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<sup>8</sup> According to the International Labour Organization, the share of vulnerable employment is calculated as the sum of contributing family workers and own-account workers as a percentage of total employment. Family workers and own-account workers are less likely to have social security and they do not have representation by the trade union; therefore, they are considered as part of vulnerable employment.

Figure 3. Percentage of women between the ages of 20–24 years married before reaching the age of 18, 2010–2021



**Source:** ESCWA calculations based on the quantitative survey completed by the 13 Arab countries between November 2022 and March 2023.

The share of seats held by women in national parliaments is an important indicator to ensure that the voices of women are heard. However, in most Arab countries, the women's share of seats in parliament remains low although there were increases in Algeria, Djibouti, Iraq,

Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic between 2010 and 2021. Jordan, the State of Palestine and Tunisia experienced decreases in their shares.

According to data submitted by participating states, Algeria<sup>9</sup> and Iraq had the highest level of

9 In 2021, amended election law in Algeria dropped the 30 per cent quota for women and introduced gender parity in party lists. In the 2022 elections, women's representation fell to 7.8 per cent in the Algerian Parliament. Available at [https://api.data.ipu.org/content/algeria?chamber\\_id=13314](https://api.data.ipu.org/content/algeria?chamber_id=13314).

representation of women among the Arab States in 2021. In Tunisia, the share of seats held by women decreased from 31 per cent to 23 per cent between 2014 and 2019. The highest share of parliamentarians under the age of 40 was recorded in Tunisia at 47 per cent followed by Oman at 25 per cent in 2021, with Lebanon having the lowest share at 5 per cent in 2020.

In terms of gender differences in labour participation, the female-to-male ratio in labour force participation rates is still low in the Arab region despite the increasing trend during the past 10 years. In Algeria, Djibouti, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia the female-to-male ratio in labour force participation has shown an increasing trend between 2010 and 2021, though it decreased in Morocco. Djibouti, Libya and the Sudan reported the highest rates of female-to-male ratio in labour force participation in 2020 at 74, 52 and 43 per cent, respectively.

### C. Youth

One of the main goals of the 2013 Cairo Declaration is to take account of the youthful population of the Arab States and to provide for the well-being of young people through education and employment. In the region as a whole this has had variable results. In terms of education, trends in overall school dropout rates showed a decline between 2010 and 2016 in many countries, including Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Oman and the State of Palestine. The school dropout rate increased in Somalia (which has the highest rate – 69 per cent in 2016, the latest year with available data), the Sudan and

Tunisia. On the whole, the gender parity index shows that girls have at least equal access to secondary education as boys with only a few exceptions.<sup>10</sup>

Advances in youth employment have not been as widespread. Overall, the youth unemployment rate increased between 2015 and 2021 in most of the Arab countries that provided data including Djibouti, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia, although it decreased in Algeria and the Sudan. Oman reported the lowest youth unemployment rate of 13 per cent among the six reporting countries in 2021. Jordan, which reported the highest rate among the six countries, reported 49 per cent in 2021.

### D. Older persons

The fast-paced ageing transition in most Arab countries<sup>11</sup> requires immediate attention in areas such as health and social protection to ensure dignified ageing for all. The indicator selected to measure progress in improving the lives of older persons shows that the proportion of older persons receiving a pension is increasing in the region but remains at a low 38 per cent on average.<sup>12</sup>

### E. Sexual and reproductive health

The 2013 Cairo Declaration acknowledged that promoting and protecting sexual and reproductive health, and protecting reproductive rights are key to ensuring a healthy life and achieving sustainable development.

10 UNESCO Institute of Statistics, [Gross enrollment ratio, secondary education, gender parity index \(GPI\)](#), *Our World in Data*, 2016.

11 Ageing transition is when the proportion of older persons in the population increases from 7 to 14 per cent.

12 ESCWA, *Population and Development Report*, No. 9, 2022.

As shown in figure 4, maternal mortality in the Arab region has significantly decreased since 2010.<sup>13</sup> Recent estimates of maternal mortality ratios are below 50 deaths per 100,000 live births in 9 out of the 13 countries that have provided estimates since 2010. National reports reveal some significant accomplishments. In the Sudan, for example, maternal mortality declined from 408 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010 to 251 deaths per 100,000 in 2021. In Djibouti, it declined from 546 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2011 to 383 deaths per 100,000 in 2019. Similarly, in Morocco, the maternal mortality ratio was estimated at 112 per 100,000 live births in 2010 but fell to around 66 per 100,000 live births by 2021. In the State of Palestine, the ratio decreased by more than half from 32 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010 to 10 deaths per 100,000 in 2021. The maternal mortality ratio in the remaining countries varied between 10 and 46 deaths per 100,000 live births. Somalia has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, although there has been a slight decrease from 732 per 100,000 live births in 2015 to 692 per 100,000 live births in 2019.

Overall, in the region, under-five mortality rates have decreased (below 25 children per 1,000 live births) except for Lebanon, Oman and the Syrian Arab Republic. Neonatal mortality rates in all Arab countries decreased during the 2010–2021 period.

Adolescent birth rates<sup>14</sup> showed a downward trend in Arab countries during the period 2010–2021. The lowest rates were witnessed in Oman and Tunisia which reported around seven and five births per 1,000 adolescent females aged 15–19, respectively, in 2021. In Libya, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine and Tunisia, adolescent birth rates decreased by two thirds between 2010 and 2021.

Access to sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning, is central to exercising reproductive rights and to women making informed decisions over themselves and their lives.<sup>15</sup> According to the 2013 Cairo Declaration, it is essential to the realization of social justice, and ensuring a healthy and secure life. Family planning is a key factor in reducing unintended pregnancies and their health consequences, and as such was highlighted in the 2013 Cairo Declaration. Over half of the women were satisfied with their access to modern methods of family planning in Algeria, Djibouti, Jordan, Morocco, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia, but overall satisfaction rates showed a decreasing trend. Based on the data provided, for example, Somalia reported a very low rate of satisfaction of 2 per cent in 2019. Satisfaction rates in Tunisia have decreased dramatically from 90 per cent in 2012 to 62 per cent in 2018.

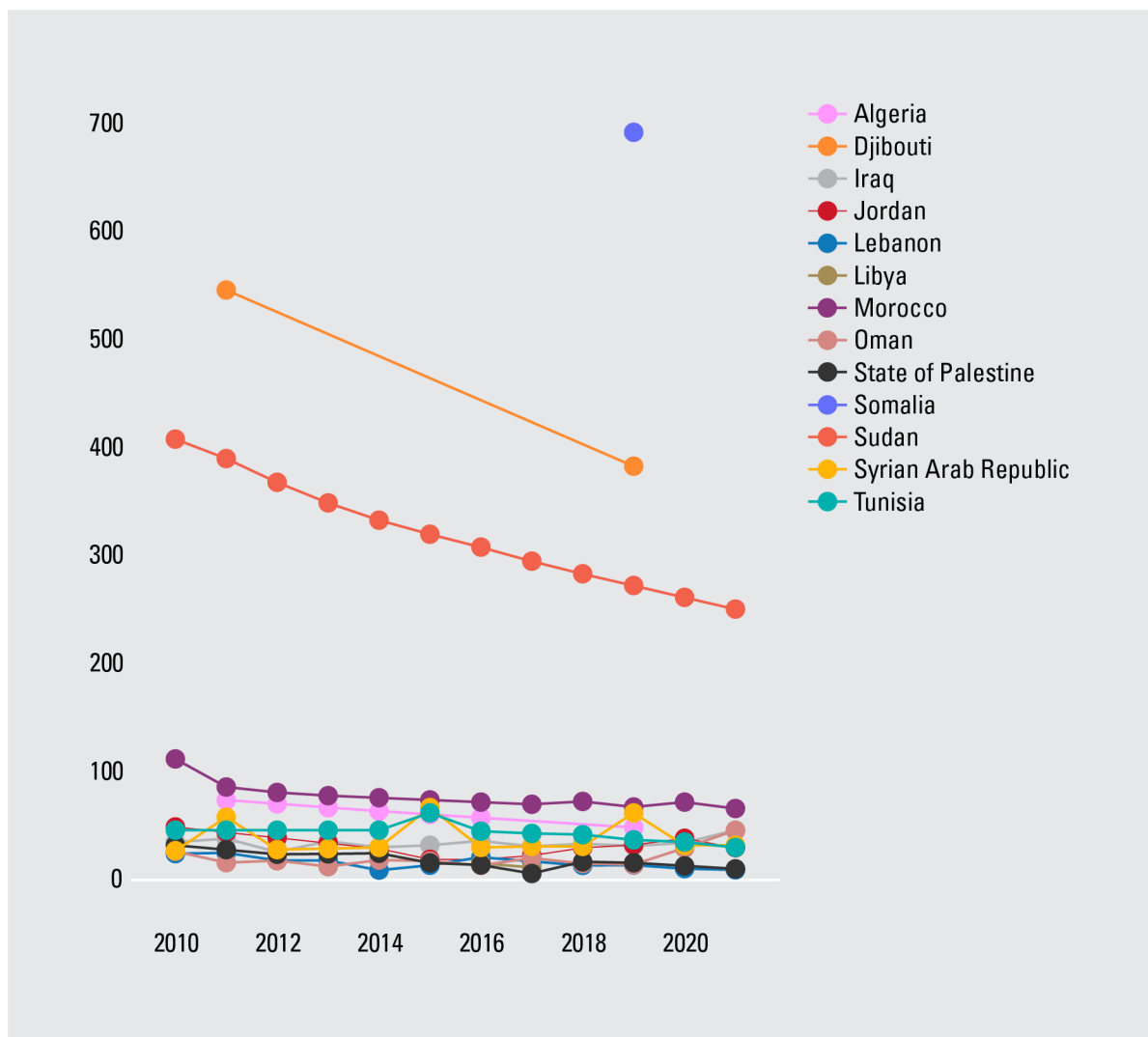
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13 According to the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), maternal mortality refers to deaths due to complications from pregnancy or childbirth.

14 World Health Organization, [The Global Health Observatory](#), accessed on 8 June 2023.

15 UNFPA, [Strategy for Family Planning 2022–2030: Expanding Choices, Ensuring Rights in a Diverse and Changing World](#), 2022.

Figure 4. Maternal mortality ratios, 2010–2021 (Maternal deaths per 100,000 live births)

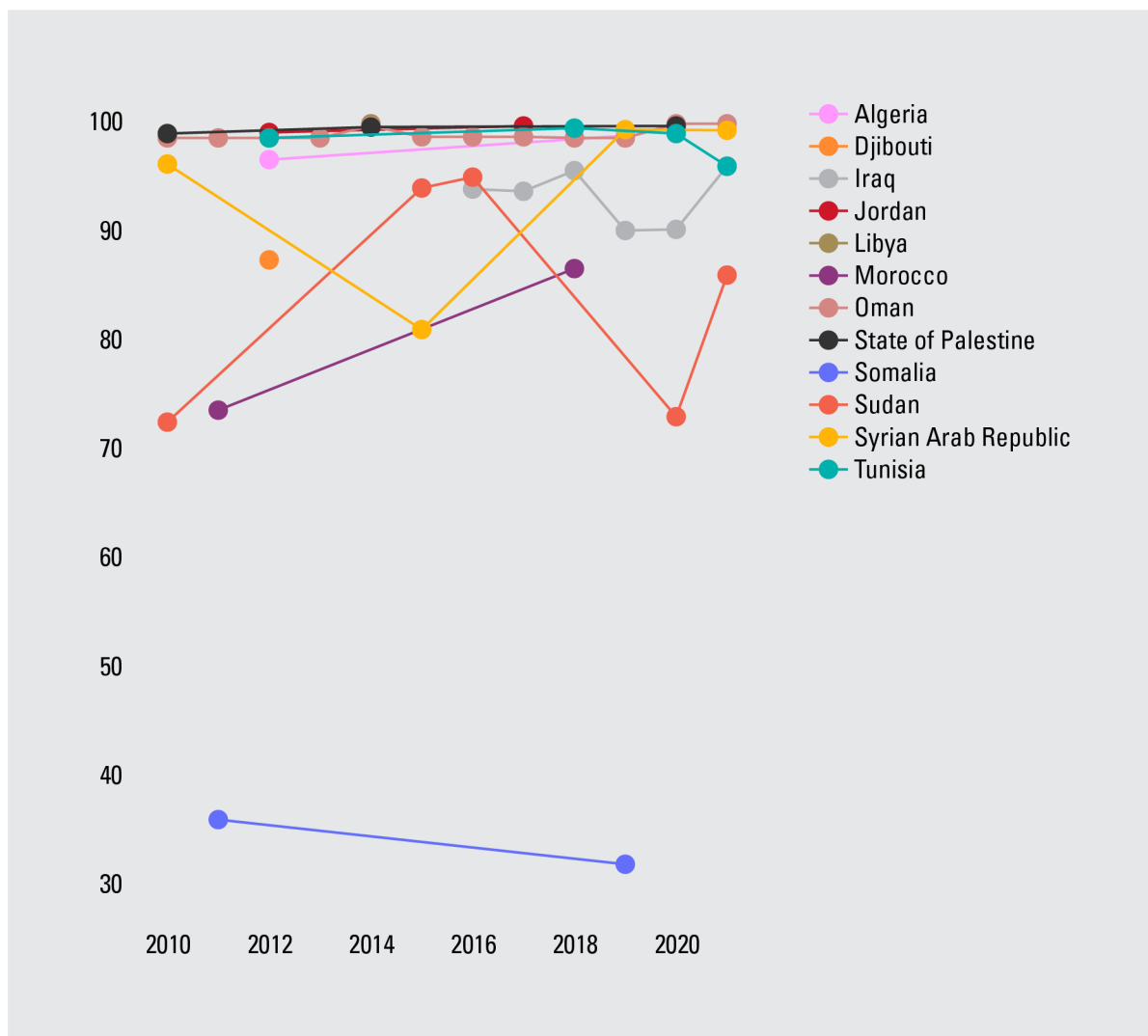


**Source:** ESCWA calculations based on the quantitative survey completed by the 13 Arab countries between November 2022 and March 2023.

In recent years, many countries in the region have ensured that a high proportion of births are attended by skilled health professionals (90 per cent and above). Despite an overall increase in the region, the proportion decreased from 99

per cent in 2020 to 96 per cent in 2021 in Tunisia. Low rates were observed in Somalia, where access to skilled birth attendance and facility-based deliveries has decreased from 36 per cent in 2011 to 32 per cent in 2019 (figure 5).

Figure 5. Percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel, 2010–2021



**Source:** ESCWA calculations based on the quantitative survey completed by the 13 Arab countries between November 2022 and March 2023.

The number of new HIV infections (per 1,000 uninfected population) are significantly low in all Arab countries. Only the State of Palestine reported an increase during the period 2010–2021 where the number of new HIV infections almost doubled from 66 to 125.

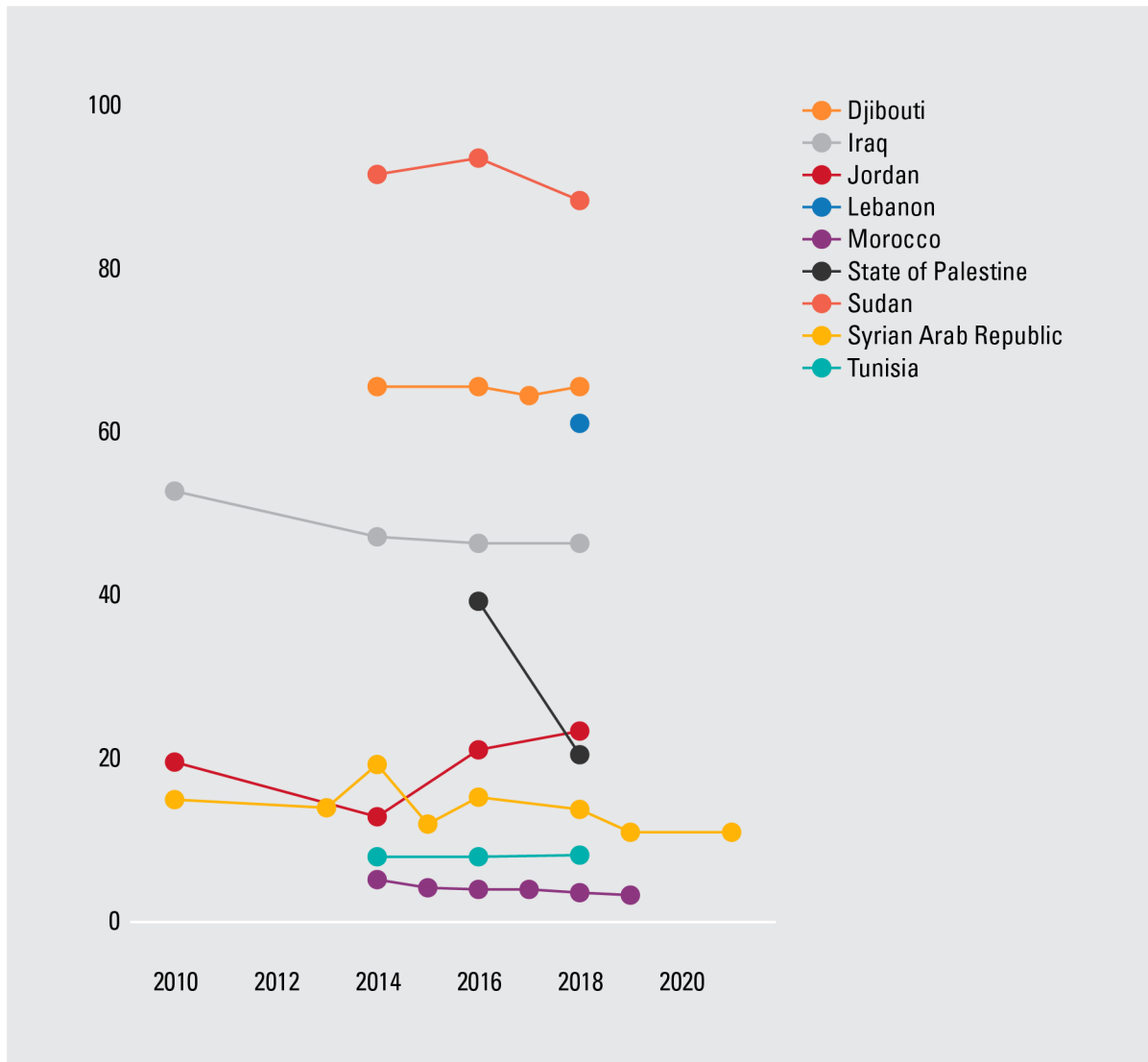
## F. Place and environmental sustainability

Within the environmental sustainability pillar, the 2013 Cairo Declaration calls for addressing the situation of persons living in urban slums,

and providing them with adequate and affordable housing and social services. The data points show a generally static trend with some exceptions, for example, the proportion of the urban population living in slums increased in Jordan from 13 per cent in 2014 to 23 per cent in 2018, while the proportion of the urban population living in slums steadily decreased in

Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic between 2015 and 2019 (figure 6). The analysis points to promising strides in improving access to sanitation services in all countries by 95 per cent of the population except in the Sudan where the proportion of the population using effectively managed sanitation services stood at 37 per cent in 2017.

Figure 6. Percentage of urban population living in slums, 2010–2021



Source: ESCWA calculations based on the quantitative survey completed by the 13 Arab countries between November 2022 and March 2023.



In terms of environmental sustainability, the analysis shows that the share of renewable energy in total final energy consumption rates in all countries are at extremely low levels except in the Sudan. While the Sudan had 61 per cent in 2017, the Syrian Arab Republic had 0.1 per cent in 2021. For countries where data is available, the Sudan had the highest mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution at 105 per 1 million population in 2016, while the State of Palestine had the lowest rate at 0.6 per 1 million population in 2013.

One crucial data point tied to the goals of the 2013 Cairo Declaration is the amount of funding for research and development. According to the reported data, seven countries spend less than 1 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on research and development. The Syrian Arab Republic reported 1 per cent expenditure on research and development in 2019; this percentage dropped to 0.05 per cent of GDP in 2021.

## G. Governance

The 2013 Cairo Declaration calls on the Arab States to enhance the quality and availability

of population data. Only 10 countries have undertaken a population and housing census during the 2020 census round (2015–2024) due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the sociopolitical situation in some countries. This has decreased the possibility of obtaining full coverage of population indicators at national and subnational levels. However, birth and death registration can also supply basic demographic information, and most countries in the region have good coverage for these data sources. Among the countries that provided data for birth registration,<sup>16</sup> Oman had the highest birth registration rate at 100 per cent and most countries were well over 95 per cent. Somalia, however, had the lowest birth registration rate at 5.9 per cent and the Sudan was at 67.3 per cent.

In one salient indicator, the percentage of individuals using the internet increased over time in all countries. Jordan, Oman and the State of Palestine had the highest percentages in 2021 at 93 per cent, 89 per cent and 86 per cent, respectively. Somalia, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic had the lowest percentages at 28 per cent, 31 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively, between 2015 and 2021.

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<sup>16</sup> Birth registration is defined as a proportion of children under five years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority.



## 4. Qualitative review of the 2013 Cairo Declaration

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### A. Population and development planning

#### 1. Context

The various population trends and dynamics outlined in the previous section are interlinked, and all of them significantly impact social, economic and political development and environmental sustainability. Integrating current and projected population dynamics is a prerequisite for sound short-, medium- and long-term development planning. In the Arab region, where many countries stand at the cusp of realizing the benefits of the demographic dividend, addressing outstanding population and development challenges would help to ensure that the region reaps the benefits of the demographic dividend, minimizing the possible negative consequences of rapidly changing age structures.

#### 2. Institutional and policy developments

To ensure that population concerns are addressed, several countries have designated a lead ministry such as the Ministries of Planning in Algeria, Iraq and Tunisia, the Ministry of Social Affairs in Lebanon and the Ministry of Economy in Oman as the focal point for integrating population dynamics into development planning. At the initiative of the National Assembly, the Group of Parliamentarians for Population and Development of Djibouti was created. Over the past couple of decades, many countries have

also established national bodies on population to ensure coordination across the government and with non-governmental stakeholders including Iraq, Jordan, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. National bodies have not been activated in Algeria and Lebanon.

Understanding of the importance of the population and development nexus is evident in many countries' medium- and long-term planning. Population concerns and demographic trends are at the heart of national development plans including those of Iraq, Jordan, Oman, the State of Palestine, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia. Several Arab countries have also recently adopted national population policies including Iraq, Jordan, Oman and the Syrian Arab Republic. Algeria evaluated and updated its national population policy from 2010 in 2014, while the Syrian Arab Republic intends to update its 2011 population policy in 2023. It is worth noting that following the Nairobi Summit on ICPD+25, Jordan and the Sudan developed national strategies to implement the Nairobi Commitments.

#### Jordan: Integrating population issues in development planning processes

During the past five years, Jordan has increased its efforts to integrate population issues and projections in development planning. As a result, the most recent Economic Reform Vision 2022–2033, “A Better Future”, is aligned with the National Population Strategy 2021–2030 and is based on two main pillars: accelerating economic development and improving the quality of life for all.

Although some countries have been able to conduct population and housing censuses in recent years including Algeria (2022), Oman (2020), Jordan (2015) and the State of Palestine (2017), and Tunisia has reported plans to conduct a census in 2024, some countries, especially those witnessing conflict or post-conflict transition including Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, reported on the immense challenges they face in this regard. However, almost all countries reported on conducting surveys on various issues of national importance such as the labour force, youth, women, refugees, food security and health. Several countries including Iraq, Jordan, Oman and Tunisia reported the use of electronic population databases that are regularly updated by their respective national statistical offices.

### 3. Challenges highlighted by countries

- (a) Due to the cross-sectoral nature of population issues, weak coordination among governmental as well as non-governmental organizations has resulted in fragmentation of efforts and less efficiency. A whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach is needed to address the interlinkages and to increase efficiency;
- (b) Limited financial and human resources, especially those available to national population bodies, as well as limited technical and technological skills, hinder the effectiveness of integrating population dynamics in development planning across sectors;
- (c) Despite the significant steps taken by many countries in the area of policy development, there is a need to further develop comprehensive policy frameworks,

including through developing national population policies where they are missing or outdated;

- (d) There are challenges of outdated and/or inaccessible data on population;
- (e) There are gaps in the availability and implementation of monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track progress in achieving the objectives of population policies.

## B. Dignity and equality

### 1. Context

The 2013 Cairo Declaration set dignity and equality as one of its four pillars to contribute to the elimination of poverty and to reduce socioeconomic inequalities recommending Arab States to work in parallel on: (a) reducing socioeconomic inequality including through addressing unequal distribution of wealth and increasing opportunities for the full utilization of human capital; (b) reinforcing the rights and responsibilities of family members and supporting households; (c) reducing poverty and developing strategies that target vulnerable groups and female-headed households; and (d) working to develop human capital through empowerment programmes, including for women, and by supporting social cohesion.

While there are notable differences across countries in the Arab region in terms of wealth distribution and access to opportunities, the region as a whole is considered the most unequal in the world.<sup>17</sup> In 2020, 58 per cent of national income was accrued by those in the top 10 per cent, and only 8 per cent was accumulated by the bottom 50 per cent.<sup>18</sup>

17 ESCWA, [Inequality in the Arab region: A ticking bomb](#), 2022.

18 Ibid.

The region reported having the second highest gender gaps worldwide in 2022 at 37 per cent compared with 31.9 per cent globally.<sup>19</sup>

The dynamics of inequalities are further compounded by persistent political instability, economic insecurities and conflict, which have been present in multiple countries in the region since 2010.<sup>20</sup> As for poverty, the Arab region is the only region worldwide with increasing poverty rates since 2010. Using national poverty lines, 35.3 per cent of the population in the Arab region is below the national poverty threshold, and it is projected to increase to 36 per cent in 2024.<sup>21</sup> While the region's economy is expected to grow by 4.5 per cent in 2023 and 3.4 per cent in 2024,<sup>22</sup> there is a need to ensure that the benefits of such growth are spread more broadly.

## 2. Institutional and policy developments

Arab States have undertaken a number of institutional and policy actions in the field of equality and dignity including ratifications of international human rights instruments; developing poverty strategies, social protection policies and cash support programmes; and establishing tax and wealth redistribution policies and economic empowerment programmes.

Each of the countries that submitted qualitative surveys reported having implemented poverty reduction strategies. Some of the poverty reduction strategies, such as those of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Sudan and Tunisia, specified, in line with the 2013 Cairo Declaration, methods to target the most

vulnerable and marginalized groups in society including households in the poorest geographical locations, female-headed households, internally displaced populations and those working in the informal economy. Jordan and Lebanon highlighted the centrality of human rights approaches in these efforts. Arab States have also made efforts to adopt comprehensive approaches to reducing poverty with both the State of Palestine and Tunisia reporting their efforts to address multidimensional poverty. In 2021, the State of Palestine calculated the multidimensional poverty index, going beyond looking at only monetary poverty, to strengthen its poverty reduction strategies. In a similar vein, Somalia reported addressing growing environmental concerns, such as the management of natural resources, in its interim poverty reduction strategy paper.

Since 2018, Arab States have also taken steps to implement social protection policies and cash support programmes including in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, the State of Palestine, Somalia, the Sudan and Tunisia. Djibouti and the Syrian Arab Republic have also been working on adopting an integrated social protection system.

While a human rights-based approach permeates the implementation of all the 2013 Cairo Declaration recommendations, national reports on the nature and level of inclusion of marginalized groups in social protection packages vary from country to country. Lebanon specifically highlighted its integration of a rights-based approach for the national social protection strategy, and both Jordan and

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19 Ibid.

20 ESCWA, Through their eyes: [Climate change and economic inequality in the MENA region](#), 2022.

21 ESCWA, [Survey of economic and social developments in the Arab region 2021-2022](#), 2023.

22 Ibid.

Lebanon reported on the comprehensive services provided by their social protection packages. Somalia described building the resilience of households against recurring natural disasters in its first national social protection strategy of 2019. Iraq's proposed new social security system makes specific reference to the rights of persons with disabilities as well as the intention to reach refugees, internally displaced populations and migrants, and to empower women and girls.

In line with the recommendations on addressing women's empowerment, Arab States have also adopted gender-specific social protection programmes including to address the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the Sudan adopted a direct cash support programme for pregnant mothers and children to mitigate the negative effects suffered by pregnant and lactating women, and young children as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis.

A number of Arab States also implemented additional measures to support the economic empowerment of different groups, particularly women. These efforts include Iraq's national strategy for the empowerment of women (2023–2030) and its women's economic empowerment plan within the Levant Initiative; Lebanon's national plan for the economic empowerment of women; Algeria's establishment of the principle of parity in the labour market in its 2020 Constitution; the adoption of national programmes in Algeria and Tunisia for the empowerment of rural women and girls; and Oman's integration of women's economic empowerment in its "Oman Vision 2040".

Countries in the region also took steps to address inequalities of wealth and income, including via strengthened tax and wealth redistribution

systems. This includes Somalia and Tunisia, where the economic and financial reforms support programme was established in 2022 to contribute to reducing poverty and income inequalities. There are draft laws in the State of Palestine to advance a value-added tax and the formulation of tax system reform proposals in Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic.

#### Somalia: Integration of climate change in National Social Protection Policy

Somalia's National Social Protection Policy actively integrates climate change considerations, including their gendered impact, in its objectives to build the resilience of households to support people, particularly in rural areas, and thereby work to address the exacerbating impact of climate change on equality.

### 3. Challenges highlighted by countries

- (a) Discriminatory practices and laws as well as negative social norms that assign less value to women and girls compared to men and boys creates barriers to achieving equality, economically empowering women and girls, and stopping cycles of intergenerational poverty;
- (b) Political instability, lack of coordination between government institutions, variable success in tackling corruption, and gaps in the rule of law and a lack of resources hamper the adoption, implementation, effectiveness and reach of strategies and policies dedicated to poverty alleviation, the promotion of equality and support to vulnerable groups;
- (c) The impact of climate change is exacerbating the food crisis and pre-existing inequalities in terms of access to resources as well as contributing to new risks such as the loss of livelihoods;

- (d) External factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, terrorism, conflict, the rise in oil prices and inflation have increased poverty by contributing to loss of livelihoods and by raising the cost of living;
- (e) The lack of data on poverty, and multiple and intersecting inequalities, hampers the efficacy of policies and strategies for poverty alleviation and the promotion of equality.

## C. Women

### 1. Context

The picture on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the Arab region continues to be complex. Relevant commitments in the 2013 Cairo Declaration on gender equity and equality include: (a) mainstreaming gender equality through legislative actions, especially by embracing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) with no lingering reservations; (b) promoting gender equality by building a supportive environment, encouraging community participation, involving men and empowering women; (c) ending child, early and forced marriage, and responding to the needs of survivors of such marriages; and (d) addressing gender-based violence.

The complexity of the region is indicated by the wide range of the representative statistics on gender as cited above. In the case of parliamentary representation, for example, there has been a meaningful increase in some

countries, but a decline in others. Gender-based violence of women and girls – in its many forms – remains high in the Arab States, even increasing in some countries. According to estimates in 2018, 31 per cent of women in the Eastern Mediterranean region reported experiencing physical, sexual or psychological violence from a current or former partner over their lifetime, higher than the global average of 27 per cent.<sup>23</sup>

Given these reports it is clear that many of the countries in the Arab region are not on track to meet the SDG indicators on gender, especially the SDG target 5.2 on the elimination of violence against women and girls – despite committing to policies and action plans to address the issues. The multitude of humanitarian crises and conflict in the region along with the fragile context in some countries, including those related to climate change, have both exacerbated and compounded the risks of gender-based violence as well as hampered prevention and response. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in higher reported an increase in cases of gender-based violence in countries such as Lebanon, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

Child, early and forced marriage, while steadily decreasing, is an ongoing critical issue in many countries. In the region as a whole, 20.4 per cent of women aged 20–24 years were married or in union before age 18.<sup>24</sup> The region also encompasses countries with some of the highest rates of FGM in the world, ranging from near universal prevalence in Somalia at 98.8 per cent<sup>25</sup> to 70.7 per cent<sup>26</sup> in Djibouti.

23 World Health Organization (WHO), *Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018 – WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region*, 2021.

24 UNICEF, *Child marriage in the Middle East and North Africa*, 2022.

25 ICPD Progress Review Survey by Somalia.

26 ICPD Progress Review Survey by Djibouti.

## 2. Institutional and policy developments

Almost all countries taking part in the survey highlighted the importance of prioritizing gender equality and gender issues. A number of Arab States, including Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, the State of Palestine and Tunisia, reported the adoption and implementation of cross-sectoral national strategies, integrating human rights-based approaches to support the promotion and mainstreaming of women's and girls' rights and their empowerment.

While current laws to address gender-based violence in the Arab region are mostly limited to domestic violence, some countries reported on efforts to strengthen existing laws or pass new laws to broaden the scope of gender-based violence legislation along with strengthening prevention efforts and providing response services for survivors. Djibouti passed a new law in 2020 to protect women and girls from domestic violence, harmful practices, sexual harassment and discrimination along with measures to provide assistance and shelters for survivors. Similarly in 2020, Lebanon amended its domestic violence law to include economic and psychological violence as well as passing a landmark bill to criminalize sexual harassment. Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, the State of Palestine and Tunisia have strengthened their national strategies and plans to eliminate gender-based violence and to support the provision of comprehensive services that include referral systems. Arab States also underlined challenges in their efforts to pass laws that protect women and girls from gender-based violence, such as Somalia and the failure to pass a sexual offences bill.

Child, early and forced marriage is a difficult issue in the region as not all Arab countries

have legislation that puts the minimum age of marriage at 18 without exception, as required by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and CEDAW. While there are exceptions such as the State of Palestine that took steps to revise their laws in that direction, the overall picture is that where these laws exist, exceptions are allowed. To stop the legal loopholes, countries such as Iraq have made serious efforts to close the gaps between national laws, international conventions, and religious laws and practices – which are particularly used in rural areas – to prevent the occurrence of child marriage.

All Arab States that report occurrence of FGM have developed some level of initiatives such as national action plans, strategies, awareness-raising campaigns, community engagement and empowerment programmes, to address this harmful practice. In 2020, the Sudan Sovereign and Ministerial Councils endorsed an amendment in law to criminalize FGM and operationalized a roadmap to enforce the new law in 2021.<sup>27</sup> Iraq has several programmes to promote sexual and reproductive health but does not yet have a set of laws or policies to eliminate FGM. Other countries, while facing challenges, have taken legal and policy measures to prevent and respond to FGM. In Somalia, Puntland's cabinet unanimously endorsed a zero-tolerance FGM bill banning all forms in 2021. This makes it the first constituency in Somalia that has approved a zero tolerance FGM bill, despite the bill being rejected at the national level.<sup>28</sup>

In relation to women's political participation, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and the Sudan reported on their efforts to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 to increase women's participation in leadership positions and in the security and defence sectors as well as in peace

27 UNICEF, [Sudan enters new era for girl rights with criminalization of FGM](#), 2020.

28 United Nations, [Daughters of Somalia, a continuous pledge to end female genital mutilation](#), 2022.



building efforts, and to integrate women's perspectives into peace agreements. They also aimed at addressing the impact of conflict on women and to protect them from sexual abuse while criminalizing sexual violence.

#### Morocco: Reforms to advance gender equality

To strengthen gender equality and combat all forms of discrimination and violence, a structured process was carried out by the Government of Morocco to consolidate the various women's legal protection measures, including policy reforms such as the National Equality Plan, which aims to integrate a gender approach into national policies and development programmes as well as strengthen the capacity of women and enable them to cope with emerging threats in an increasingly complex regional and international environment.

Morocco enacted legislative reforms to combat discrimination and gender-based violence with new laws in 2018 with service mechanisms for survivors. In parallel, Morocco has led in the development of gender-responsive budgeting: a tool that requires the consideration of the social gender perspective in the development of public policies and the allocation of budgets by government departments.

#### The State of Palestine: An institutional approach to combat gender-based violence

The Ministry of Health, UNFPA and other partners institutionalized a programme to combat gender-based violence that provides health, physical, psychological and social services for survivors of violence as well as referral services. Referral systems were adopted in 2022 with the support of UNFPA, taking into account the needs of women with disabilities, girls younger than 18 and older women. Survivors, by law, are exempt from any payment for treatment.

Through the development of a new procedural guide for gender-based violence, the Ministry of Health is better able to monitor cases of gender-based violence and has strengthened the capacity of health workers to deal with these cases, especially rape cases.

### 3. Challenges highlighted by countries

- (a) Discriminatory gender social norms that place less value on women and girls than men and boys continue to hinder the realization of the rights of women and girls and impede them from reaching their full potential;
- (b) Implementation of gender-supportive policies continues to lag in some situations, denying access to key services for many women and girls, such as those providing protection from gender-based violence;
- (c) Scarce resources and poor multisectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination and the limited resilience of systems providing gender-based violence prevention and mitigation services continue as barriers to an effective response to violence;
- (d) The lack of data on violence against women and girls, including for those experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, impedes evidence-based policymaking. Conflict, economic, health and humanitarian crises and political fragility are prevalent in the region and create additional challenges to collect data.

## D. Youth

### 1. Context

The contribution of young people in promoting sustainable development is particularly important for countries and regions where youth constitute a large demographic group, including in the Arab region. In 2022, the region was home to 465 million people, half of whom were under 25 years old, making it one of the

youngest regions worldwide.<sup>29</sup> The number of young people in the age cohort 15–24 was 79.9 million, accounting for 17.2 per cent of the total population. In 2030, this number will increase to 96.9 million (18.2 per cent) and is likely to reach 108.2 million in 2050.<sup>30</sup>

The majority of youth often share common challenges and various forms of inequalities. Some key aspects that characterize youth in the Arab region include soaring unemployment, education gaps, poor participation and representation, and disproportionate access to information and services. Conflict and political instability compound these challenges and hinder their overall development and well-being.

Faced with limited prospects, many young people opt to leave their country and migrate either within or outside the Arab region. In 2020, 11 per cent of migrants or refugees residing in Arab countries were between 15 and 24 years old.<sup>31</sup> Arab countries are also experiencing unprecedented rates of rural-urban migration by young people.

The 2013 Cairo Declaration called for enacting the required policies, legislation and programmes that promote and protect the rights and well-being of young people, boost human capital, and to ensure their participation in public life as prerequisites for reaping the demographic dividend.

## 2. Institutional and policy developments

All Arab countries that participated in the review process acknowledged the role of young people

in achieving sustainable development and the importance of empowering them through education, employment and participation in decision-making. National institutions and mechanisms concerned with coordinating or developing policies and programmes that target youth exist in Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Somalia, the Sudan and Tunisia.

Since 2018, six countries – Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Somalia and Tunisia – have adopted new youth-specific policies, strategies and plans to enhance their skills, promote their active participation in society and improve their access to health services and employment opportunities. Other countries reported ongoing efforts or plans to develop national policy frameworks for youth. The State of Palestine, for example, recognizes that youth is a cross-cutting issue and has developed a cross sectoral strategy of the youth sector for the years 2017–2022, and is currently working on a new five-year strategy for 2024–2029. Similarly, Oman and the Sudan are drafting a national youth strategy or plan, and the Syrian Arab Republic is also preparing a multisectoral national framework for youth and adolescents. These strategies address key issues of concern to young people such as education, economic empowerment, health, political participation, sports and recreation, information technology and entrepreneurship, and creating an enabling environment for their development.

In addition to policy development, some countries have updated national legislation to meet the needs of young persons and ensure their participation in public and political life.

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29 ESCWA calculations, based on the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, [World Population Prospects](#), 2022.

30 Ibid.

31 ESCWA, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), [Situation Report on International Migration 2021](#), 2021.

For example, Algeria amended laws to support youth-led entrepreneurship and investment in startups and enacted a new law to protect and promote the health of adolescents and youth. Legislation in Jordan addressed the minimum age criteria to vote and run for elections, and the criteria that determine access to social security and the organization of youth clubs. Jordan also issued a new child rights law in 2022 to guarantee the rights of children and youth under 18 years of age to education and cultural activities. In the State of Palestine, draft laws have been submitted to increase the age group that defines youth and reduce the age of candidacy for elections at local levels.

Some Arab countries recognized the positive role of youth in preventing and resolving conflict, delivering humanitarian support, countering violent extremism and restoring trust and peace. In this context, Lebanon launched the national strategy for preventing violent extremism in 2018, and the State of Palestine developed a strategy for youth, security and peace. Somalia provided for a specific pillar on youth, peace and security in its national youth strategy and a National Strategy on Youth, Peace and Security (2022–2026) was developed in Tunisia.

A number of governments took measures to mainstream a youth-centric approach in the development of strategic documents. For example, Jordan's Vision 2025 and the vision of economic modernization 2022–2033 aim to accelerate growth by unleashing the full economic potential of young people. Oman included youth in its vision for 2040 and among the national priorities in the tenth five-year development plan (2021–2025). At the same time, several countries developed a set of

sectoral strategies and implementation plans that include pillars, programmes or activities on youth, including Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Somalia and Tunisia.

#### Algeria: Participatory youth policymaking

Algeria established the Supreme Council for Youth in 2021. The Council is a constitutional body of an advisory nature under the tutelage of the President and is made up of 348 members, of whom 232 are elected to represent youth organizations and associations. The Council participates in the design of the National Youth Plan as well as policies, strategies and programmes that promote the well-being and development of young people in various areas including civic values, volunteerism and social solidarity in collaboration with government ministries, civil society organizations and youth-led initiatives.

All participating countries have taken practical steps to promote youth development across various areas. They include programmes and initiatives in social inclusion (Libya); economic empowerment (Somalia); access to finance (Libya, Somalia); leadership (Libya); protection and empowerment (the Syrian Arab Republic); and skills development (Lebanon, Somalia). Efforts aimed at improving education quality and making it more relevant to the labour market were particularly pronounced in Algeria, Djibouti, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia.

The 2013 Cairo Declaration called on Governments to ensure the right of young people to decent work. All responding countries have implemented various programmes and measures to address youth unemployment, ensure young people's access to decent jobs, and increase their skills to make them more

employable and to encourage youth entrepreneurship. For example, Algeria invested in vocational training programmes and apprenticeships to enhance the skills and employability of young people and introduced unemployment benefits for youth. Iraq is preparing a new national employment policy that will account for young job-seekers. The State of Palestine created the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Empowerment in 2019, and Oman launched the “Upgrade” programme that transforms winning graduation projects into startups. The Syrian Arab Republic also launched the labour market observatory in 2018 to provide an evidence base for labour market policies and programmes, and Somalia established the Somali Youth Livelihoods Programme aiming to provide economic opportunities for young people.

In terms of enhancing the participation of young people in public life, all 12 countries indicated the implementation of programmes to encourage young people’s political and civic engagement through special committees and councils. At the same time, the majority of countries highlighted national consultative mechanisms with representatives from civil societies and young people to ensure that projects concerned with youth respond to their needs. They also emphasized joint planning and coordination between relevant government institutions to integrate youth concerns and issues into sectoral policies and programmes as well as bilateral cooperation with United Nations agencies and international development organizations. In terms of collecting and publishing detailed data and statistics on youth, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman and the State of Palestine reported the implementation of sample surveys, household surveys and labour force surveys that classify demographic, economic and social data according to age and

gender groups. The Sudan conducted a youth survey and study in 2020 as part of its work on national youth policy development, and Tunisia carried out a national youth survey in 2018–2019.

#### Oman: Embracing young capabilities and talents

The Youth Centre in Oman was established in 2021 to support and hone the skills and talents of young people in line with Oman Vision 2040. It serves as an incubator for developing the capabilities of youth, discovering their talents and nurturing their creativity. The Centre offers a variety of training programmes aimed at young people in various fields, and a working space and recreational facilities to use free of charge in addition to a reference library. The Centre also serves as an incubator for local small- and medium-sized enterprises working on innovative projects.

### 3. Challenges highlighted by countries

- (a) High youth unemployment, and the mismatch between education, training and the skills required by the labour market, are the most urgent and pervasive challenge facing youth development;
- (b) High risk of social exclusion and poverty faced by youth relate to high percentages of youth who are neither in education, employment nor training;
- (c) Dependence on rentier economies and the weak capacity of the private sector to create new job opportunities for young graduates;
- (d) Challenges for young people in accessing finance to start businesses or engage in entrepreneurial activities which limits their economic empowerment;
- (e) Lack of and unequal opportunities for young people to acquire the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in life. Challenges which are compounded in the context of conflict and economic crises as they can

- lead to school dropouts for economic and social reasons such as difficulties in paying tuition fees and the need for income generation to support their families;
- (f) Lack of information and access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights services for youth;
  - (g) Gender inequality remains a significant challenge in some countries, with young women facing multiple and intersecting barriers to empowerment including limited access to education, employment and decision-making positions;
  - (h) Fragmentation of youth development efforts between different governmental entities with insufficient coordination. Weak institutional capacity of government entities and civil society concerned with youth policies and limited resources raises barriers to the effective implementation of programmes aimed at empowering youth;
  - (i) Gaps in scientific research and data on the enjoyment of rights, the needs and aspirations of Arab youth to design responsive policies;
  - (j) Occupation, conflict and instability in countries such as Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic have created significant challenges for youth empowerment, causing displacement and limiting access to education, health care and employment opportunities.

## E. Older persons

### 1. Context

The Arab world is still described as a young society, yet it is witnessing a fast-approaching ageing transition. It is projected that the older

persons' proportion of the population will increase from 5 per cent in 2020 to reach 11 per cent by 2050.<sup>32</sup> In light of this new reality, the 2013 Cairo Declaration and reporting from Arab countries affirms the need for Arab countries to improve the situation of older persons and ensure dignified ageing.

The ICPD Programme of Action was among the earlier frameworks to address the need to ensure older persons' quality of life and autonomy, focusing on developing health care, social security and the infrastructure to support healthy ageing. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted by most Arab States in 2002, offers a detailed framework to protect the rights of older persons and empower them as active agents of development in their societies. Arab countries further reaffirmed their commitments to the rights of older persons in the 2013 Cairo Declaration, including through mainstreaming ageing in development planning, recognizing the opportunities associated with population ageing, promoting a life cycle approach to health, combating ageism and abuse, and engaging with stakeholders to achieve those objectives.

### 2. Institutional and policy developments

In most countries, the Ministry of Social Affairs is the leading ministry to address ageing issues. However other ministries, especially the Ministries of Health and of Education, also have programmes to address the needs of older persons and their priorities – this dispersal of responsibility sometimes results in difficulty in ensuring optimal coordination between the relevant governmental institutions. In response, many countries have established national committees or commissions for older persons including Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman,

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32 Population and Development Review, Issue No. 9, 2022.

the State of Palestine, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

The past several years have witnessed increased efforts by governments to coordinate their efforts on older persons and ensure that their issues are incorporated into development planning. Several Arab countries including Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the State of Palestine and Tunisia have developed national older persons strategies, while other countries including Iraq, Oman, Somalia, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic are currently in the process of developing their strategies. Some Arab countries have passed laws specifically on older persons to protect their rights and ensure ageing with dignity, these include Egypt, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia – and Somalia is currently developing such a law.

Inclusion in social protection platforms is essential for the financial security for older persons. Algeria has achieved almost 100 per cent inclusion rates in their social protection programmes for older persons. In most of the other countries, the social protection coverage varies considerably between the formal sector and the informal one, and between men and women.

With regard to the education of older persons, Lebanon has supported older persons' learning through the University of Seniors with training on technology, computers and language, and Tunisia has developed the Tunis University for lifelong learning in addition to developing training programmes for adults. To improve the care of older persons, several countries including Egypt, Lebanon and Morocco have implemented various programmes to build the skills of care providers. Older persons were especially vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, most Arab countries

focused on older persons in their crisis response plans and gave them priority in access to health services and vaccination.

#### Tunisia: Optimizing opportunities for active ageing

In the context of promoting active ageing, the Government of Tunisia launched the National Register of Older Persons in 2003 to invest in the expertise and skills of older citizens and enable them to participate more in public life. The Register contains information on the older persons who wish to share their knowledge or professional expertise and skills to benefit society, and further contribute to the development process. The Register has helped promote the inclusion of retirees and older persons, and leverage their volunteering experiences.

### 3. Challenges highlighted by countries

- (a) Significant gaps in the coverage of social protection systems adopted in most Arab countries leave large groups of older persons, especially women and persons working in the informal sector, vulnerable to financial insecurity and dependency in old age;
- (b) Health insurance programmes in many countries exclude large groups of older persons which increases their risk for ill health and poverty. Accessibility to quality health services that are responsive to older persons' needs remains limited, particularly in rural areas;
- (c) The family continues to be the primary care provider for older persons. However, in light of changing social norms, migration and urbanization, these family support structures are being weakened, leaving some older persons without support and in need for service provision. Care provision programmes that encourage ageing in place remain limited in most countries;

- (d) Negative stereotypes of ageing and older persons persist in most societies. Efforts to ensure their inclusion and empowerment as active agents of development remain limited in most countries. Neglect and abuse of older persons remains under-reported and understudied in most Arab countries;
- (e) Accessible, reliable and disaggregated data on older persons is limited in most Arab countries;
- (f) The collaboration between different government sectors, as well as between government and non-government organizations, continues to be limited which results in fragmentation of efforts and resources.

## F. Persons with disabilities

### 1. Context

It is estimated that around 16 per cent of the world's population has some form of disability.<sup>33</sup> However, figures reported by most Arab countries reveal prevalence rates below 8 per cent. This can be explained by under-reporting due to the social stigma associated with disability in addition to the fact that some countries have not yet adopted international standards for collecting data on disability.<sup>34</sup>

Persons with disabilities, especially women, children and older persons, are often at a disadvantage when it comes to employment and education opportunities, access to health care –especially sexual and reproductive health services – and participation in political and public life. These conditions are exacerbated in

times of crises and conflict, and among refugee populations.

The 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) constituted a paradigm shift in addressing disability, moving from medical and charity approaches to a social and human rights-based approach that considers disability as the result of the interaction between an impairment and the attitudinal, institutional and environmental barriers in society. As of 2023, all Arab countries have either ratified or acceded to the Convention.<sup>35</sup>

The 2013 Cairo Declaration recognized the obligations of CRPD, which provides for the full rights of persons with disabilities to participate in all spheres of life and to be protected from discrimination, exclusion and violation of their dignity. The 2013 Cairo Declaration also reaffirmed the reproductive health needs of persons with disabilities while acknowledging the greater risks of violence, neglect and exploitation facing women and girls with disabilities inside and outside their homes.

### 2. Institutional and policy developments

Several countries have put mechanisms or frameworks with varying degrees of independence in place to coordinate policymaking processes on disability issues with the participation of persons with disabilities and their organizations, typically through national level councils or commissions. These include Algeria, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia where some frameworks are affiliated with government ministries.

<sup>33</sup> WHO, [Disability Factsheet](#), 2023.

<sup>34</sup> ESCWA, [Disability in the Arab region](#), 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Status of Ratification Interactive Dashboard](#), 2014.

Countries have made considerable efforts during the past years to align their national laws and policies with the provisions of the Convention. Jordan has been effectively implementing its law on the rights of persons with disabilities since 2017. At the same time, 9 out of the 12 countries participating in the review reported either enacting or finalizing new overarching national legislation related to disability. These include Djibouti, Oman, Somalia and the State of Palestine while Iraq and the Sudan have already amended their laws on disability. Algeria, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia are working on reviewing their national disability laws to ensure persons with disabilities have full enjoyment of their rights. Lebanon adopted an overarching law on disability in 2000 but reported that the law has not been fully implemented yet due, for the most part, to the absence of executive directives.

New national strategies and national development plans that seek to empower and integrate persons with disabilities have been developed in the past five years or are currently being prepared in Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia.

At the sectoral level, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia developed strategies on employment of persons with disabilities, and Jordan issued a law in this regard. Several measures were taken to promote the inclusive employment of persons with disabilities, including women, in Algeria, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Oman, Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia. These include developing vocational training and rehabilitation and career guidance programmes, implementing employment quotas, ensuring reasonable accommodation

and accessible recruitment exams, providing micro and small enterprise opportunities with soft loans, and granting incentives in the form of salary increase, time off for caregivers and unemployment assistance.

#### Jordan: An independent living approach

Recognizing the rights of persons with disabilities to choose their place of residence, Jordan embarked in deinstitutionalizing persons with disabilities, replacing the shelter system with inclusive day care centres. In this respect, the national strategy for government and private shelter alternatives (2019–2029) and a law on alternatives to shelter and support services for persons with intellectual disabilities were issued that included alternatives to institutionalization of persons with disabilities in the form of family integration and support services, among others.

Several countries including Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia have taken policy actions to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the general education system. Other reported measures include creating accessible national examination formats, developing sign language guidelines, dictionaries and Braille School curricula, and adapting school and university infrastructure.

Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Oman, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia reported preparing laws, developing policies or taking tangible actions to ensure the right and access of persons with disabilities to services such as sexual and reproductive health, mental health and psychosocial support, early detection and intervention, health insurance and health-related rehabilitation with due consideration to the requirements, rights and needs of women



with disabilities. Jordan is proposing an amendment to the penal code to criminalize the removal of any part of the reproductive system of persons with disabilities with the intention of sterilizing them without any medical necessity.

Countries in the region reported on fulfilling the rights of persons with disabilities to an adequate standard of living and protection by such measures as customs exemption on their cars, provision of assistive devices, cash assistance, employment assistance, housing restoration, health insurance, reduction of income tax, medical care, marriage support, allocation of social housing and lending programmes. Countries also reported on targeting persons with disabilities by social protection strategies or schemes, poverty reduction programmes or social aid funds.

Several countries addressed accessibility of persons with disabilities to the built environment and to transportation including Algeria, Iraq, Libya, Oman, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia. Jordan launched its national plan for rectifying existing buildings and public facilities for 2019–2029 that targets touristic and archaeological sites, banking institutions, places of worship and transportation systems. Both Jordan and Iraq are reviewing and enforcing the implementation of building codes with respect to accessibility. In Oman, accessibility to facilities and services is addressed in the tenth five-year plan of the Ministry of Social Development, while the Djibouti national development plan 2020–2024 includes goals related to ensuring accessibility.

In the same context, relevant national authorities in Iraq, Oman, Somalia, the Sudan and Tunisia provide access to assistive devices and assistive technology in addition to access to information on services available to them.

In Jordan, comprehensive measures have been taken to ensure access to data and information, and develop accessibility guidelines.

Several countries have mainstreamed issues of women with disabilities in both national laws and strategies, and sectoral and cross-sectoral policies. In Lebanon, the national strategy for women (2022–2030) integrates the rights of women with disabilities. Djibouti and the State of Palestine have adopted strategies to economically empower women with disabilities, including to support their business creation capacities, and Oman’s social insurance law equalises men and women regarding disability pensions. In relation to gender-based violence, Iraq and the Sudan have incorporated provisions in their legislation to address violence perpetrated against women and girls with disabilities, and Tunisia augmented sanctions in the penal code against perpetrators of this form of violence. The State of Palestine revised its national referral system for women survivors of violence to be responsive to women and girls with disabilities.

### 3. Challenges highlighted by countries

- (a) There is a scarcity of reliable, accurate and updated data and statistics on persons with disabilities. This is partly due to the lack of comprehensive data collection systems. Only six countries undertook studies on disability or integrated disability in their national surveys and only four countries are adopting the international standard (“Washington Group”) set of questions on disability in their surveys;
- (b) There is a continuing lack of sufficient financial resources allocated to implement disability policies and programmes and to provide adequate services to persons with disabilities;

- (c) Existing laws and policies are inadequately implemented and the disability-related institutions set up to put in place and monitor such policies remain weak;
- (d) The impact of crises (economic, health, climate related), political instability and armed conflict, in addition to occupation, put extensive pressure on the systems in place, especially health systems, limiting their capacity to provide services;
- (e) Prevailing social stigma on disability along with the lack of awareness of the rights-based approach to disability lead to denial of disability, abuse and hiding of persons with disabilities, especially women;
- (f) Lack of specialization in formulating legislation and developing policies on disability rights and lack of qualified cadres who possess specialized technical skills in disability-related rehabilitation impedes development and implementation of supportive policies for persons with disabilities;
- (g) Lack of accessibility in the built and digital environment hinders persons with disabilities from accessing public service facilities, means of transportation and public spaces, and in accessing information.

## G. Health

### 1. Context

Despite efforts to invest in sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, gaps remain in the quality, availability and access of such services in the Arab region.<sup>36</sup> For example, despite progress, the unmet need

for family planning in the Arab region remains higher than the global average. While the efforts undertaken in sexual and reproductive health have seen the reduction of the maternal mortality ratio over the past two decades, progress has nonetheless been uneven across countries. It is estimated that there are still 151 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in the Arab region based on figures from 2017.<sup>37</sup>

Although access to sexual and reproductive health services has improved overall, it remains uneven across population groups, with those experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination such as youth,<sup>38</sup> persons with disabilities<sup>39</sup> and refugees experiencing additional challenges. Ongoing challenges resulting from the impact of conflict and climate change in the Arab region directly impact access to sexual and reproductive health services.

The 2013 Cairo Declaration is comprehensive in its recommendations to promote the enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights including by facilitating the accessibility to services and information as well as providing culturally and age-appropriate sexuality education; strengthening the legal framework so all enjoy reproductive rights; integrating the human rights-based approach in the delivery of sexual and reproductive health services to prevent discrimination and exclusion, in particular based on age, sex, nationality or marital status; improving the quality, coverage and reach of sexual and reproductive health services, including for family planning, maternal health and prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections; and increasing and developing the capacity of human resources.

<sup>36</sup> UNFPA, [Seeing the unseen, the case for action in the neglected crisis of unintended pregnancy](#), 2022.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> UNFPA, [Youth sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in the Arab region](#), An overview, 2022.

<sup>39</sup> UNFPA, [Disability in the Arab region: A challenged vulnerability](#), 2022.

## 2. Institutional and policy developments

All 12 countries who submitted qualitative surveys comprehensively outlined ongoing and new measures taken since 2018 to develop and implement policy frameworks for achieving the full enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

The majority of countries reported on the adoption, or plans for adoption, of policy frameworks to support the enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights either as comprehensive policies, issue-specific strategies and/or as a component of a broader health policy. For example, Jordan, Somalia, the State of Palestine and Tunisia reported on new national strategies on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights adopted since 2018, and the Sudan highlighted their pending adoption of a similar strategy. Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, Somalia and Tunisia have additionally adopted issue-specific sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights strategies such as on family planning, and maternal and newborn health, while Algeria and Oman integrated sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights within their broader health policies.

Although these policies are intended for all, whether they apply to all women without discrimination – such as based on marital status – in their implementation is not reported on. Some Arab States have taken additional policy steps to address the specific needs of populations such as youth, persons with disabilities and persons living with HIV/AIDS. Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia reported on specific strategies addressing the health of adolescents and youth, including their sexual and reproductive health. Tunisia highlighted

ongoing efforts to adopt a national plan for sexual and reproductive health for persons with disabilities, and Djibouti referred to their plans to adopt a similar strategy. Algeria, Iraq, Somalia, the State of Palestine and Tunisia reported on measures to address HIV/AIDS. Policies adopted by Jordan and Tunisia promote the engagement of men and boys on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Nine of the reporting countries also confirmed having adopted or implemented different elements of comprehensive sexuality education programmes.

All 12 reporting countries highlighted their efforts to increase the prioritization, scope and access to sexual and reproductive health services including for family planning, birth spacing and maternal health. Most of the Arab States reported taking steps towards integrating services for sexual and reproductive health, including for family planning, as part of primary health care. Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Somalia, the State of Palestine and Tunisia also highlighted their efforts to increase the number of service delivery outlets including via mobile clinics and technology for remote support, and to improve the coverage and quality of the sexual and reproductive health services provided.

Iraq, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia outlined their efforts to increase the access to sexual and reproductive health services of women and girls who may suffer from multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as rural women and girls, and, in the case of Jordan and Lebanon, migrant and refugee women and girls. Countries emphasized that HIV/AIDS prevalence was low. Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia reported on the provision of services for

the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, though they varied in the extent of coverage reported. The level of access to these services without discrimination was not reported on, although some acknowledged that such discrimination exists.

#### Tunisia: National Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health

Tunisia's National Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health, developed alongside UNFPA, academia and civil society, is anchored in a human rights-based approach to promote the enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all without discrimination of any kind. The strategy highlights the specific efforts undertaken to expand the coverage of sexual and reproductive health services and to reach multiple populations, including youth, persons with disabilities, persons with HIV/AIDS, and to engage with men and boys.

Arab States have also taken steps to strengthen the capacity and efficacy of their health systems. Most countries reported developing guidelines and providing training to health professionals to deliver gender-responsive sexual and reproductive health services. Strengthening the standards of midwives to ensure safe births was highlighted in Somalia, and Lebanon and Tunisia reported on the provision of specialized training for midwives. Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Somalia, the State of Palestine and Tunisia also referred to their efforts, including via strengthened referral systems, safe spaces and one-stop centres, to support the coordination of integrated sexual and reproductive health services and gender-based violence services in order to provide improved access and quality of care. The majority of reporting countries highlighted their cooperation and partnership with the United Nations, the private sector and

civil society, including women-led, youth-led and faith-based organizations.

### 3. Challenges highlighted by countries

- (a) The strain on and redistribution of resources during the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the capacity to deliver sexual and reproductive health services. Additional reported strains on resources available to deliver sexual and reproductive health services include the prevalence of conflicts in the region and climate change;
- (b) The low financial investments in sexual and reproductive health services, as well as the lack of financial incentives for health workers, are negatively impacting both the coverage, including the geographical coverage, and comprehensiveness of sexual and reproductive health services and the level of human resources available;
- (c) The lack of coordination and multisectoral cooperation within government departments negatively impact their ability to deliver comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services that are integrated with other services, such as for those gender-based violence;
- (d) Negative social norms and lack of evidence-based information on sexual and reproductive health, and related services put restraints on the access of some, such as young people, to sexual and reproductive health services;
- (e) Gender-responsive health budgeting mechanisms are often lacking.

## H. Migration

### 1. Context

The Arab region is witnessing unprecedented levels of international migration. In 2021, Arab

countries hosted more than 41 million migrants and refugees, more than two-thirds of whom are of working age. During the same period, the number of people migrating from Arab countries reached about 33 million, with 44 per cent of them staying in the Arab region.<sup>40</sup> Migration to and from Arab countries has multifaceted developmental impacts. Migrants from the region contribute to the economies of their countries of origin through the remittances, knowledge and skills they transfer back to their families and communities. Migrants to the region in turn contribute to enriching the social fabric, diversifying the skills available and providing the required labour force needed for various economic sectors to thrive. However, migration to and from the Arab region does have some negative effects such as brain drain and the challenges associated with forced migration and displacement.

Arab countries highlighted the importance of migration in the context of development in the Arab region in the 2013 Cairo Declaration. They reaffirmed their commitments to intensify efforts to protect migrants and include them in social protection systems, protect the rights of migrant workers, integrate the benefits of migration into development plans, reduce the costs of remittances, recognize and develop migrants' skills, and combat xenophobia and human trafficking.

GCM, which was adopted in 2018 by most Arab States, provides a roadmap for countries to better govern migration, protect migrants and empower them as agents of change in the development process.

## 2. Institutional and policy developments

The adoption of GCM acted as a catalyst that accelerated Arab countries' efforts to adopt policy and institutional reforms related to migration governance. In this regard, a number of Arab countries have aligned the implementation of GCM with their national development plans. In response to the need to adopt a coherent approach to govern migration, many Arab countries have established and developed appropriate institutional structures. For example, Libya established a national committee to develop migration-related policies and strategies, while Morocco established a governance mechanism to monitor the implementation of the national strategy for migration and asylum. In addition, several countries appointed coordination bodies or focal points to follow up on the implementation of GCM and coordinate with various stakeholders. Iraq and Lebanon appointed national focal points.

Many Arab countries have made great efforts to adopt new migration-related policies or to reform existing policies. A number of Arab countries adopted national strategies for migration, including Iraq and Morocco, while other countries are currently working on developing such strategies including Lebanon and the Sudan. In addition to the adoption of overarching strategies, many countries adopted policies that focused on issues such as the rights of migrant workers, reducing irregular migration, responding to displacement and refugee movements, combating human trafficking and smuggling of migrants,

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40 ESCWA, IOM and UNHCR, *Situation Report on International Migration 2021: Building forward better for migrants and refugees in the Arab region*, 2022.

and developing data collection systems. The COVID-19 pandemic also prompted many Arab countries to adopt urgent policies to protect migrants.

Some countries have reformed policies on nationality and statelessness including ensuring that women and men are equally able to pass their nationality to their children. Many countries focused on reforming policies related to the protection of labour migration. For example, Morocco passed a law to protect migrant women that stipulated specific labour and employment conditions. In order to protect domestic workers, who are among the most vulnerable migrant groups, Morocco adopted a law that guarantees the rights of domestic workers, while Jordan and Lebanon have also developed programmes and procedures in that regard. Several Arab countries have also made efforts to address the irregular situation of migrants through campaigns to regularize migrants' residence or facilitate their departure, as in the case of Morocco.

To combat human trafficking and smuggling of migrants, some countries have adopted relevant laws, for example Morocco, while other countries such as Iraq have established a central committee to combat human trafficking. Libya developed programmes to build the capacity of judicial bodies to address human trafficking and smuggling of migrants, and Lebanon and Tunisia trained their border officials to combat migrant smuggling.

Countries in the region still suffer from a lack of data related to migration and migrants. In response, some countries including Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, have focused on developing data exchange systems and collecting accurate and disaggregated data on migration to ensure evidence-based policies and to improve

the livelihoods of migrants, their access to protection and their working conditions.

Migrants were one of the population groups most at risk during the COVID-19 pandemic. Large numbers of migrants were left stranded and unable to return to their countries due to border closures. Migrants faced loss of jobs, financial insecurity and threats of poverty and malnutrition, and workers living in overcrowded spaces were at higher risk of infection. Considering this reality, many countries adopted policies and programmes including regularizing the status of migrants and extending their visas, residency and work permits, as in the case of Algeria, Jordan and Lebanon. Many countries also provided health services and vaccines to migrants, as in the case of Iraq, which targeted the displaced and refugees and intensified efforts to raise awareness and established local centres to provide them with health services.

#### Algeria: Providing access to basic services for migrants

Algeria has mobilized significant human, financial and material resources to provide migrants in situations of irregularity with free health and social services. According to its national report, more than 100,000 irregular migrants have accessed public health services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, health and social care was provided free for all migrants without the need to request a document proving their identity or legal status.

### 3. Challenges highlighted by countries

- (a) The lack of financial and human resources available to governmental and non-governmental institutions, the lack of appropriate training, and the lack of technical expertise impede countries' ability to develop good migration governance systems;

- (b) The scarcity of disaggregated, updated and accessible data and research on migration limits governments' abilities to develop evidence-based policies that address the needs of migrants. The obstacles faced include limited capacities to collect migration-related data, the fragmentation of available data and limited data-sharing among the relevant governmental stakeholders;
- (c) Given the transboundary and regional nature of migration, weak regional coordination and collaboration on migration governance hampered the effectiveness of national responses;
- (d) The negative impact of external shocks, including conflict, economic instability and the COVID-19 pandemic, on the ability to better govern migration. As a result, the region witnessed successive waves of displacement, forced migration and irregular migration. Human trafficking and migrant smuggling were also on the rise. These external factors posed constraints and challenges in allocating the resources necessary to respond to migrants' needs, improve migration management systems, and strengthen bilateral and regional collaboration.

## I. Place and environmental sustainability

### 1. Context

The 2013 Cairo Declaration recognizes the importance of environmental sustainability in

the formulation of development planning and programmes. Yet, Arab States score poorly on environmental sustainability, mainly due to water scarcity and threats to biodiversity.<sup>41</sup> The region is not on track to meeting more than half of the Sustainable Development Goals related to climate.<sup>42</sup> This is occurring at the same time that the Arab region is going through rapid urbanization, with 75 per cent of its inhabitants expected to be living in urban areas by 2050.<sup>43</sup>

The 2013 Cairo Declaration calls attention to place and environmental sustainability. It calls for ambitious urban planning strategies and a focus on living conditions in large urban centres. It calls for sustainable production and consumption patterns, climate change action, development of coastal zones, and better management of natural and environmental resources. These are reaffirmed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### 2. Institutional and policy developments

Urbanization, especially rapid and unplanned urbanization, brings about a host of challenges that Arab countries have been working to address and anticipate. To consolidate the fragmented urban planning institutional structure, Lebanon established the Ministry of State for Planning in 2016 which has been developing a national urban policy. To establish national frameworks to guide their approach, Morocco and Oman adopted national strategies for urban development. Morocco also adopted a national strategy for urban mobility. Given the sub-national nature of urbanization, many Arab countries have localized efforts.

41 ESCWA, *Environmental sustainability and human Development: perspectives from the Arab region*, 2021.

42 ESCWA, 2021. *Between Now and 2030: A statistical overview of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab region*, 2021.

43 ESCWA, UN-Habitat and UN Women, *Sustainable Cities and Communities: Make Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable*, 2021.

For example, Algeria is building new urban centres based on sustainable development requirements outlined in its national land development plan 2030. Similarly, the State of Palestine has completed 23 different urban plans in 2017 in addition to supporting local councils in creating and executing their own urban plans. This is also seen in the case of Jordan, where Amman developed the Amman Climate Action Plan and Amman Green City Action Plan.

A key pillar of sustainability involves responsible consumption and production. To that end, Algeria, Jordan and Lebanon have developed national action plans on sustainable consumption and production. Jordan also has a national food strategy (2021–2030) which includes a goal on the efficient use of resources and reduction of waste. Similarly, Tunisia has a waste law (2016) and strategy for integrated waste management (2020–2035). Oman incorporated responsible consumption and production in their national priorities through their 9th five-year plan (2016–2020) as well as Oman Vision 2040. The post-war national development programme for the Syrian Arab Republic promotes sustainability and devotes special attention to non-depletion of resources.

A common response to vulnerability to climate change has been to develop national climate change plans or policies, which is seen in the cases of Algeria, Djibouti, Morocco, Oman, Somalia and Tunisia. Other countries have set up specific institutions to address climate change, including Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Somalia and the Sudan. Lebanon incorporates climate change into sectoral policies, such as those of the Ministry of Agriculture.

To adopt a coherent approach to govern environmental sustainability, many Arab countries have established and developed

institutional structures focused on different aspects of environmental issues. For example, Algeria, Djibouti, Lebanon and Morocco have national biodiversity action plans which include protection of coastal areas and marine biodiversity. Jordan launched a guide on the state of the coastal environment, established online monitoring stations for the quality of sea water, and developed a by-law on the comprehensive management of coastal areas. Oman has been giving attention to marine and coastal ecosystems through its coral reef management plan. To address water scarcity concerns, Libya passed laws to regulate irrigation and prevent the cultivation of water-hungry crops.

#### Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia: Engaging youth in environmental protection

The 2013 Cairo Declaration calls for empowering young people as agents of change by engaging them in environmental protection efforts. Several countries in the region have reported on such efforts in their Voluntary National Reviews. Iraq's Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research organized a voluntary project to plant 1 million trees throughout Iraq. In Jordan, *ProjectSea*, a civil society organization, started a movement to conserve marine life which includes school campaigns and writing a children's book. The Ministry of Social Affairs in Lebanon has a Volunteer Work Department that organizes two-week summer camps in five governorates to engage youth in community service. And Tunisia has implemented the *Madinatouna* project to engage young people in urban planning initiatives.

### 3. Challenges highlighted by countries

- (a) Lack of systematic data collection on indicators relating to urbanization and environmental sustainability. For example, in developing the global environmental



- sustainability index, data gaps led to the exclusion of five Arab countries;<sup>44</sup>
- (b) Unplanned and sudden urbanization has led to an increase in the population living in slums, put strain on infrastructure, and compromised access to basic services and public green spaces;
  - (c) Deforestation, land degradation, coastal erosion and air pollution have led to the loss of biodiversity in many countries. This is further exacerbated by overexploitation of natural resources such as oil;
  - (d) Efforts to adapt to the impact of climate change are hindered by the underdeveloped research infrastructure in the Arab region in terms of measuring environmental hazards and changes in climate.

## J. Regional and international cooperation

### 1. Context

The ICPD Programme of Action recognized the importance of international cooperation to achieve its objectives. Building on the principles of equality and solidarity, regional and global communities are encouraged to intensify their efforts to improve multilateral cooperation, advocate for policy dialogue, develop long-term joint programmes among donors and recipients, and ensure the alignment of international cooperation with national population and development priorities.

Arab countries further emphasized the need to improve regional and global cooperation in the 2013 Cairo Declaration, particularly to find joint solutions to transboundary challenges such as forced migration, conflict and climate change. They highlighted the importance of facilitating

dialogue and peer learning among Arab countries to address common challenges, including widespread poverty and scarcity of data.

### 2. Institutional and policy developments

To improve regional cooperation and collaboration in the area of population and development, the Arab Council for Population and Development was launched in 2019 under the aegis of the Economic and Social Council of LAS. The Council aims to raise awareness, build knowledge, support national population councils and facilitate regional dialogue.

Many Arab countries including Algeria, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Somalia, the State of Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic also reported on bilateral cooperation in areas such as education, health, refugees, early childhood development and data collection. Almost all countries reported that they benefited from participation in regional forums and collaboration with regional and international organizations including the Arab Council for Population and Development, ESCWA, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, UNFPA, the World Health Organization, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the World Bank, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Gulf Cooperation Council, among others.

### 3. Challenges highlighted by countries

- (a) The increasing economic challenges and dwindling funding from regional and international entities, including donors and other organizations, limits the financing needed to sponsor regional collaboration and national efforts in the area of population and development;

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44 ESCWA, [Environmental sustainability and human development: perspectives from the Arab region](#), 2021.

- (b) Limited cooperation in developing regional guidance on data related to population and development hinders the ability to produce and share regionally comparative data. These include lack of harmony in data sources, terminology, and data collection methodology and indicators, and the limited capacity of national statistical offices;
- (c) The increasing severity in transboundary challenges including food insecurity, climate change and forced displacement, and the need to intensify regional and international collaboration in this regard.

## 5. The way forward: policy recommendations to accelerate implementation of the 2013 Cairo Declaration

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Based on the challenges identified in the review, the following policy recommendations are suggested for consideration by Arab countries and other stakeholders to guide their efforts to accelerate implementation of the 2013 Cairo Declaration and to work towards the achievement of the goals and objectives expressed in the ICPD Programme of Action. These recommendations build further on the recommendations of the 2018 regional review report of the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2013 Cairo Declaration, as well as anchor themselves in the priority areas highlighted by countries in their Voluntary National Reviews.

Recommendations are organized by thematic sections, though some recommendations are cross-cutting across all themes including:

- To mainstream rights-based approaches and strengthen the rule of law, governance institutions and multisectoral coordination, at both national and local levels, in policy areas related to the 2013 Cairo Declaration and the ICPD Programme of Action and integrate participatory approaches to policy-making to ensure policies are responsive to the rights and needs of all persons and leave no one behind.
- Taking into account the complexities of the Arab region and the challenges created by conflict and humanitarian settings, to work to

strengthen, adapt and systematize data collection and analysis mechanisms at national and local levels, as well as invest in research, both quantitative and qualitative, including by building on existing data collection frameworks and partnerships, to support the development, effectiveness and implementation of evidence-based policies and measures related to the 2013 Cairo Declaration and the ICPD Programme of Action which capture the specificities of Arab countries and address comprehensively the needs and experience of persons in the Arab region to fulfil their rights.

- Investing in multi-stakeholder partnerships, including with civil society, the private sector and the United Nations, in the development and implementation of policies and measures related to the 2013 Cairo Declaration and the ICPD Programme of Action.

### A. Population and development planning

- Strengthen national population bodies, including through provision of necessary financial and human resources, and build their capacity to integrate population dynamics into developmental planning across sectors.

- Mainstream human rights-based approaches in population and development planning policies that capitalize on the demographic dividend and minimize the potential risks of changing age structures.
- Strengthen governments' capacities to collect and integrate timely disaggregated data and make it accessible. Mobilize financial and technical resources, including from donor agencies, to support countries to carry out population censuses and continually update demographic data.
- Strengthen and/or put in place, where necessary, monitoring and evaluation frameworks to ensure that population policies are implemented efficiently and are responsive to those most at risk of being left behind.
- Mainstream a gender perspective into poverty reduction efforts and eliminate gender discrimination in both law and in practice, working to empower all women and girls, including through the transformation of gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms assigning less value to women and girls than to men and boys, equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, continued investments in the education of women and girls, strategies to integrate them in the labour market and to reduce and redistribute their unpaid care and domestic work, and through gender-responsive budgeting to implement economic and social policies.
- Strengthen the rule of law and institutions by improving multisectoral coordination with clear cross-sectoral accountability lines, and by integrating participatory approaches to policy-making to ensure the adoption, strengthening and effective implementation of poverty alleviation, and equality policies and strategies that leave no one behind and to build the resilience of households and communities against the impact of factors such as humanitarian crises and climate change.

## B. Dignity and equality

- Mainstream and implement rights-based approaches across poverty alleviation and equality policies and strategies to leave no one behind and continue to ratify or accede to international human rights instruments, and implement the instruments fully by, inter alia, putting in place effective national legislations, policies and mechanisms to ensure the rights of all persons are fulfilled without discrimination of any kind.
- Strengthen the comprehensiveness and coverage of social protection measures and enhance the effectiveness of existing poverty alleviation strategies by addressing multidimensional poverty and by integrating human rights-based approaches and an equity lens to reach the most marginalized populations, including those experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, to reduce poverty and its intergenerational transfer.
- Develop, strengthen and implement tax systems that promote social justice, equality and a fair distribution of wealth and income to support an adequate standard of living for all.
- Develop, strengthen, implement and finance policies and programmes to support the economic empowerment of all without discrimination of any kind including by providing access to inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels and to equal and increased opportunities for full and productive employment and decent work, and by expanding banking services including to those belonging to marginalized groups.

## C. Women

- Reform legal systems in line with international human rights standards to guarantee and protect human rights, dignity and gender equality to support women and girls, and respect their agency, voice and leadership free of coercion, discrimination or violence.
- Adopt, strengthen and implement laws and policies in line with international and regional human rights standards to close legal loopholes in the protection against all forms of gender-based violence, online or offline, including domestic violence, sexual violence and harassment in all settings, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, and harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage, and FGM.
- Strengthen the institutional multisectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination of services to prevent and respond to gender-based violence with comprehensive standard operating procedures, clear accountability and leadership lines across sectors and effective referral systems.
- Eliminate any structural barriers and discriminatory references and provisions, in law and in practice, and adopt and implement policies to support women and girls' economic empowerment as well as their equal political and public participation, including in peace building and conflict resolution efforts.
- Strengthen systematic data collection and analysis systems on issues pertaining to gender equality, including by investing in violence against women and girls prevalence surveys, in systematic administrative data collection upholding the rights of women and girls, and integrating a gender perspective to ongoing data

collection efforts on population and development issues.

- Strengthen the engagement of communities, including men and boys, in eliminating structural barriers and discriminatory gender social norms and attitudes facing women and girls.

## D. Youth

- Expedite the development and adoption of national youth strategies and action plans, and integrate youth issues in the various development policies and plans as well as in legislation.
- Prioritize investment in quality education that equips young people with relevant skills for the job market and allows them to become better lifelong learners.
- In order to create employment opportunities for young people, invest in sectors that can create jobs as well as policies and programmes that support entrepreneurship and skill development.
- Expedite the structural reforms necessary to improve the business climate, stimulate investment and diversify the economy to enable both private sector, regional and international investment.
- Adopt a life cycle approach to youth health promotion and protection, and ensure equal access of all young people, without discrimination of any kind, to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services.
- Recognizing the importance of mental health, governments should provide accessible, quality and affordable mental health services for young people.
- Address gender disparities and promote gender equality in all aspects of young people's lives including through removing

structural barriers, addressing traditional and socio-cultural norms and gender stereotypes.

- Promote youth participation in decision-making processes.

## E. Older persons

- Mainstream older persons issues and their rights into development policies across sectors and ensure their participation in designing policies that affect them.
- Reform social protection policies to strengthen inclusiveness and increase the coverage to include all older persons and ensure the adequacy of social protection platforms to provide older persons with a dignified life.
- Endorse healthy and active ageing by ensuring that all older persons have access to age-friendly and holistic health services that adopt a life cycle approach.
- Build the skills of formal and informal care providers, and develop gerontology and geriatrics programmes in universities to ensure an optimal level of adequate care both at home and in institutions.
- Intensify efforts to combat ageism and highlight older persons' positive contributions to their families and communities including through life-long learning programmes, age-friendly work environments and an age-friendly built environment that is accessible to older persons.
- Protect older persons from neglect and abuse, including in situations of displacement and conflict, through developing supportive legal frameworks and protection mechanisms.

- Develop age-disaggregated, timely, reliable and accessible data on older persons and encourage in-depth research on ageing.
- Strengthen coordination and partnerships between all government and non-government stakeholders to optimize available resources and to meet the needs of older persons.

## F. Persons with disabilities

- Strengthen the legal and institutional framework for disability by continuing efforts to harmonize laws and policies in line with the provisions of CRPD and establish or strengthen independent mechanisms to promote the rights of persons with disabilities and protect them from discrimination.
- Maximize efforts to realize the rights of persons with disabilities to access employment opportunities and an adequate standard of living, inclusive education and accessible curricula, quality health services including reproductive and sexual health services and family planning, psychosocial support, full social protection coverage, access to the built and digital environment, and access to assistive devices and assistive technology.
- Promote a disability inclusive approach to disaster and humanitarian emergency responses.
- Raise awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities among the public, policymakers and service providers, including informing persons with disabilities of the rights and services available to them.
- Develop a comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date national database on persons with disabilities and enhance data collection and research on disability.

- Strengthen partnerships between government, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities, and ensure their full participation in the design and implementation of initiatives that affect them.
- Allocate the financial resources needed to design and implement action plans and deliver services for persons with disabilities.

## G. Health

- Continue efforts to strengthen, invest in and expand the package of basic sexual and reproductive health services, including for family planning, information and education, adopting a life course approach, and include comprehensive and quality sexual and reproductive health services within universal health coverage programmes if they are not already covered.
- Develop, review, modify and implement laws, policies and programmes to fulfil the sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights of all without discrimination of any kind, including for young people, and support the rights of all women to decide freely and responsibly on all matters related to their sexuality including access to sexual and reproductive health services, free of coercion, stigma, discrimination of any kind or violence.
- Ensure the effective integration of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, including for family planning and maternal health in national development, and health strategies and programmes.
- Increase gender-responsive investments in the health sector, in both the infrastructure and in the human resources, such as midwives, to ensure the delivery and

resilience of sexual and reproductive health services including against external shocks such as those generated by conflict, climate change and other humanitarian crises.

- Provide and facilitate access to culturally and age-appropriate sexuality education, which encompasses human rights, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health, to promote informed decision-making and the effective use of sexual and reproductive health services for all to lead full, safe and healthy lives.
- Eliminate discrimination and ensure the full respect of the rights of persons living with HIV/AIDS, including by increasing national programmes and integrating quality services to prevent, treat and care for persons living with HIV/AIDS in the health system which are accessible, affordable and free from stigma and discrimination.
- Strengthen multisectoral cooperation and multi-stakeholder partnerships including with civil society, the private sector and the United Nations for the provision of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services.

## H. Migration

- Mainstream migration in development planning across sectors to better capitalize on the positive impact of migration to empower migrants as active contributors to development and to protect their human rights.
- Enhance the knowledge and skills of relevant stakeholders, and encourage regional peer learning to strengthen the capacity to manage migration flows.
- Reinforce national coordination mechanisms to ensure a coherent approach

to migration governance and reduce policy fragmentation including fostering a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach to migration governance.

- Facilitate evidence-based policymaking by enhancing capacity to collect disaggregated, timely, reliable and accessible data on migration and improving migration data systems, and by fostering exchange of data on migration between countries.
- Strengthen bilateral, sub-regional, regional and cross-regional collaboration to facilitate exchange of information, data and experiences in order to ensure better migration governance, protect the rights of migrants, combat human trafficking and optimize the developmental returns of migration for both sending and receiving countries.
- Include migration dynamics and migrants in risk reduction strategies to pre-empt the consequences of external shocks including political, social, economic and environmental shocks.
- Establish solidarity funds to better manage crises and emergencies, and to mitigate their impact on migrants and refugees.

## I. Place and environmental sustainability

- Continue to strengthen data collection capacity on indicators relating to urbanization and environmental sustainability.
- Adopt inclusive and gender-responsive urban planning models that take into consideration the rights and needs of all, especially those in vulnerable groups.
- Increase the share of renewable energy in total consumption to better manage solid waste, and to protect coastal areas and marine ecosystems.

- Develop and implement gender-responsive climate action policies with adequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure their implementation.
- Expand planning for and investment in the green economy in light of increasing demand for green products, capitalizing on the opportunity to create jobs while delivering on climate and sustainability goals.

## J. Regional and international cooperation

- Intensify collaboration and joint programming among donors and respective international and regional organizations to avoid redundancy, increase efficiency and mobilize funding needed to address population and development programming in the region, especially in the least developed countries.
- Develop regional guidance on data and statistics related to population and development, including through developing a framework to monitor the achievement of the goals of the 2013 Cairo Declaration.
- Increase regional collaboration and peer learning to build the capacities of national statistical offices, and work to strengthen regional academic and training centres.
- Intensify regional dialogue, peer learning and collaboration to explore regional solutions to transboundary challenges including forced displacement, climate change and food insecurity.
- Develop and/or strengthen regional frameworks for intensifying cooperation in the areas on population and development outlined in this report.





This report celebrates the 30th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action. It reviews the progress made in the Arab region in implementing the recommendations of the 2013 Cairo Declaration – the regional framework to advance implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action.

The report provides a snapshot of the key indicators that capture the pillars of the 2013 Cairo Declaration. It highlights challenges and promising practices from the region across 10 key themes from the 2013 Cairo Declaration: population and development planning; dignity and equality; women; youth; older persons; persons with disabilities; health; migration; place and environmental sustainability; and regional and international cooperation.

The report's findings demonstrate that despite progress made in many areas, the impact of crises, including that of protracted conflicts and the COVID-19 pandemic, has compounded existing challenges and exacerbated multiple and intersecting forms of inequalities. As a result, further efforts to advance human rights, dignity, equality and justice for all are required to meet the objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action.

The report concludes with a set of policy recommendations anchored in the priority areas and good practices underscored by Arab countries to accelerate implementation of the 2013 Cairo Declaration and to work towards the achievement of the goals and objectives expressed in the ICPD Programme of Action.



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