



BUILDING FORWARD BETTER

Ageing trends and socioeconomic status of older persons in the Arab region



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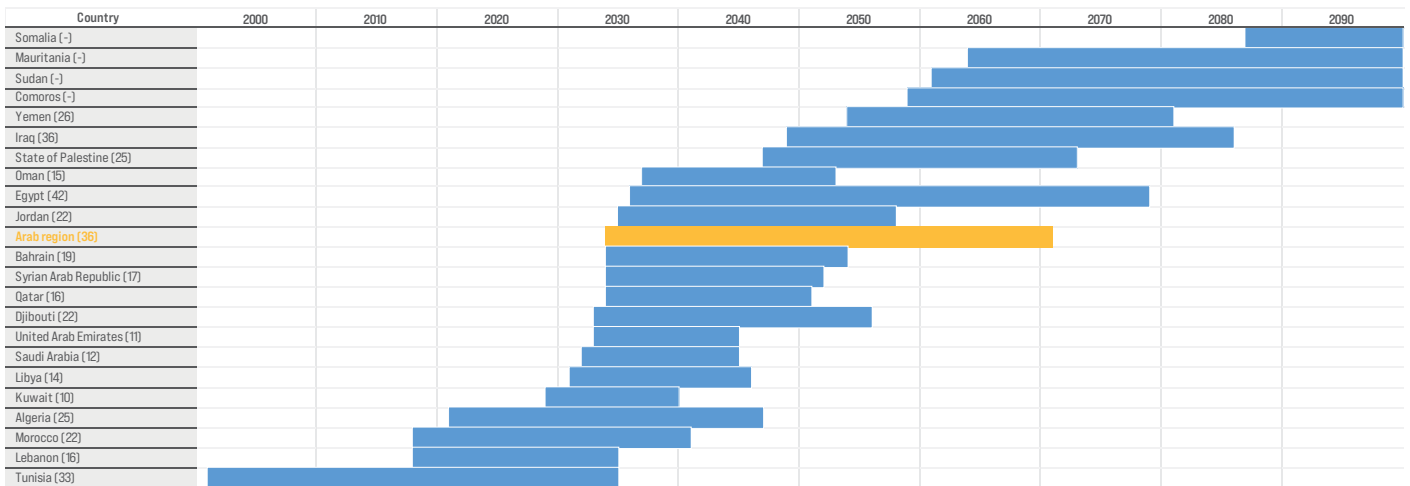
*This brief is based on PDR 9, available at:
<https://www.unescwa.org/publications/population-development-report-9>*

Historic demographic shift

Most Arab countries will have an ageing population or will have become aged in the next 30 years.

There is considerable variation across the region in the timing and pace of ageing, defined as the percentage of persons aged 65+ doubling from 7 to 14 per cent.

Ageing transition in the Arab region



Source: ESCWA calculations based on data from United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019.

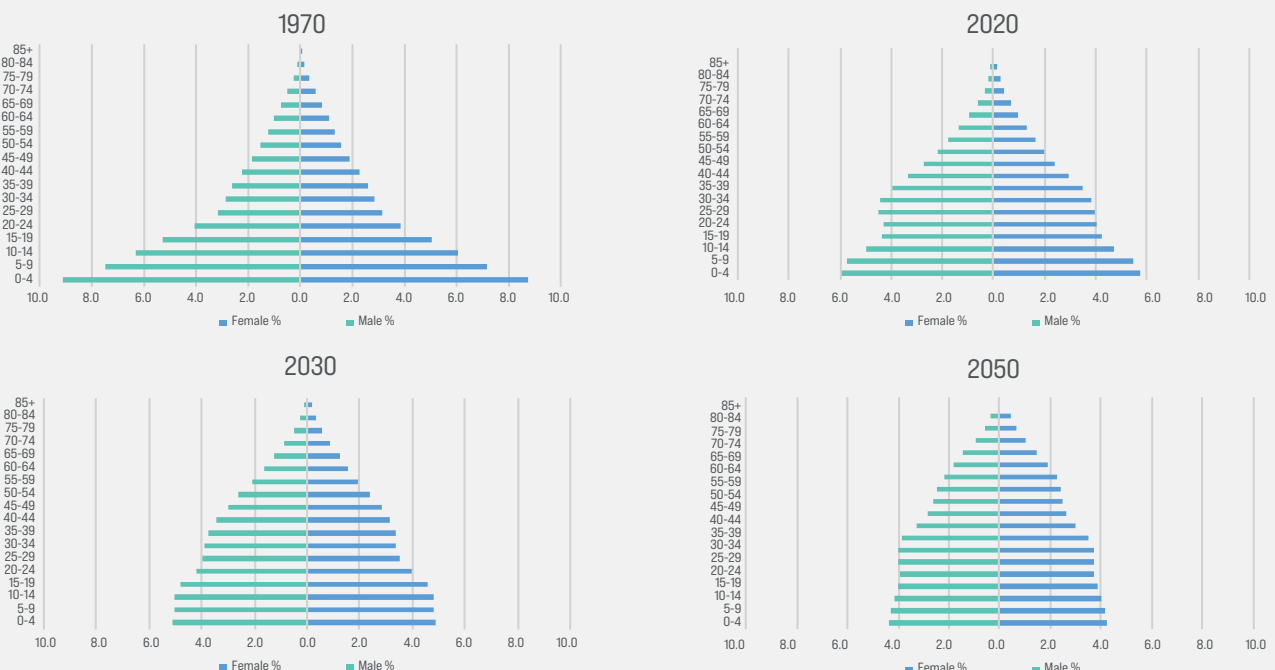
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Number of years the **Arab region** as a whole will take to complete its **ageing** transition

The number of older persons increased from **4.5 million** in 1970 to **20.8 million** in 2020 and will increase to **71.5 million** by 2050

While the age pyramid has flattened considerably in the last 50 years, the projected flattening that will occur in the next 10 and especially 30 years is even more stark.

Age pyramids for the Arab region (1970, 2020, 2030 and 2050)



Source: ESCWA calculations based on data from United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019.

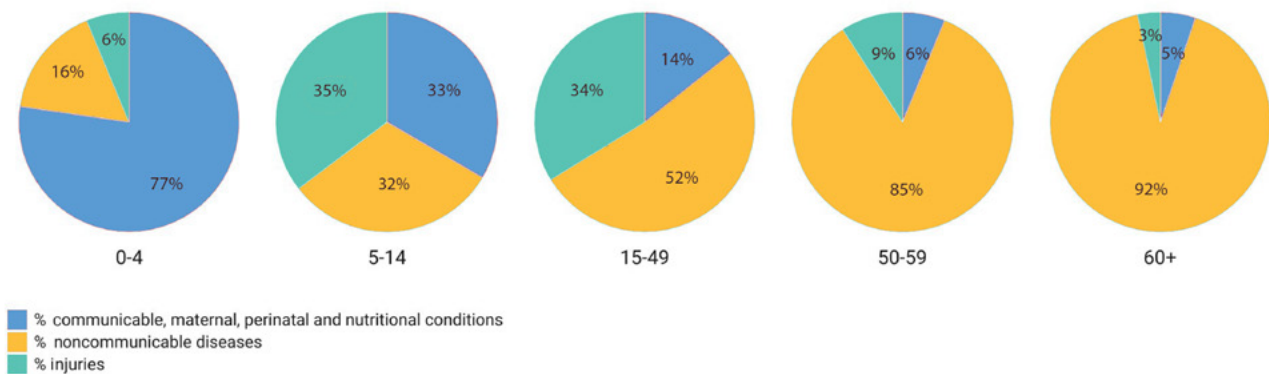
Socioeconomic status

Health

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are increasingly becoming the leading cause of death, with a marked jump from 52 per cent for those in the 15–49 age group up to 85 per cent for those who are in the 50–59 group.

SDG 3 urges countries to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”.

Cause of death as a percentage of all deaths, both sexes, in the Arab region (2019)



Source: ESCWA calculations based on data from World Health Organization, 2020.

Note: data for the State of Palestine was not available.

Goal: prepare generations for healthy ageing

Policy recommendations

Short-term

- Promote physical activity.
- Promote healthy eating habits.
- Conduct a gap assessment on the availability, accessibility and affordability to all, and sensitivity to older persons, of primary, secondary and tertiary health care centers.
- Provide health care coverage through social protection.

Medium-term

- Introduce legal measures to support healthy habits and disincentivize unhealthy habits.
- Invest in public spaces and resources that facilitate physical activity.
- Invest in health care institutions that are age-friendly.
- Increase access to information on available health resources.
- Develop, implement and enforce quality standards.

Long-term

- Conduct periodic assessments of the age-responsiveness of healthcare systems.
- Implement necessary reforms considering periodic assessments.

Socioeconomic status

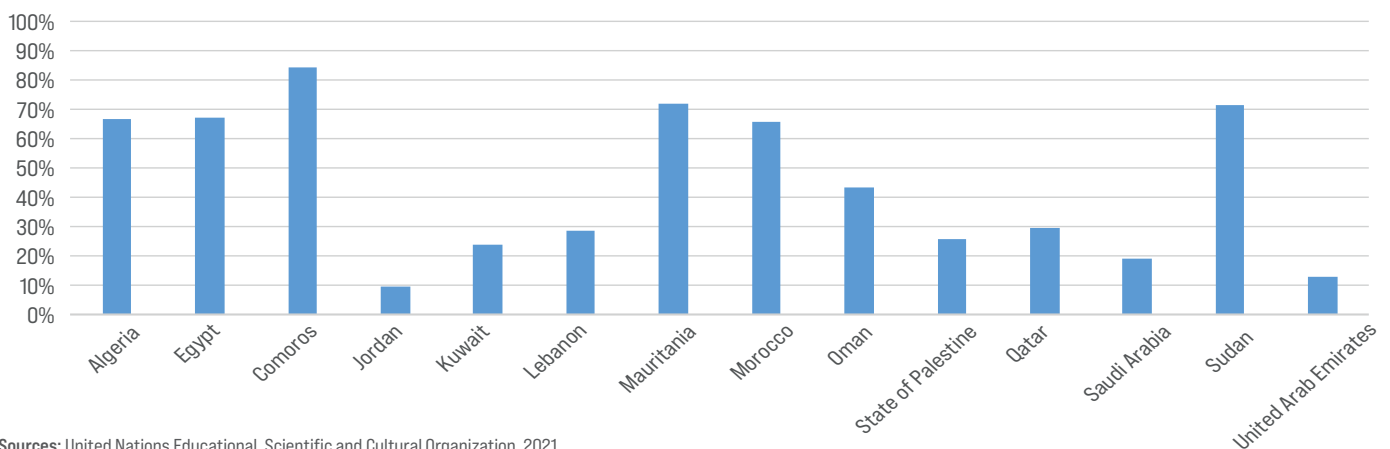
Education

The Arab region is lagging in meeting the educational needs of older persons, with widespread illiteracy among older persons above 65. Among the 14 Arab countries for which data is available from 2017 onwards, at least two in every three older persons are illiterate in six Arab countries.

SDG 4 calls for **lifelong learning** opportunities for all.



Illiteracy rates among older persons in selected Arab countries (2020 or latest year available)



Sources: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021.

Note: the data is taken from 2017 for Egypt, Mauritania and Qatar; 2018 for Algeria, Comoros, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman and the Sudan; 2019 for the United Arab Emirates; and 2020 for Kuwait, the State of Palestine and Saudi Arabia.

Goal: provide opportunities for learning throughout the lifecycle

Policy recommendations

Short-term

- Assess the extent of and underlying dynamics behind adult illiteracy.
- Scale up adult education programs, especially in areas exhibiting the highest rates of adult illiteracy.
- Establish regular training sessions on skills that are relevant to the times for those interested in developing their career prospects, including older persons.

Medium-term

- Invest more in public education, including reducing out of pocket expenses for public education.
- Hold regular training sessions with teachers and educational administrators.

Long-term

- Conduct periodic assessments of the age responsiveness of education systems.
- Implement necessary reforms considering periodic assessments.

Socioeconomic status

Poverty

Data on poverty among older persons disaggregated by sex and geographic area of residence remain limited.



SDG 1 includes a target to “reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children **of all ages** living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions”.

Goal: prepare future generations for financial security in old age

Policy recommendations

Short-term

- Develop data on poverty among older persons.
- Incorporate financial literacy into school curriculums.
- Conduct financial literacy trainings for adults, including older persons.
- Strengthen social protection systems (see policy brief 2).

Medium-term

- Introduce legal measures to reward saving for old age.
- Conduct investment strategy trainings for adults, including older persons.

Long-term

- Conduct periodic assessments of the age responsiveness of financial systems.
- Implement necessary reforms considering periodic assessments.



Evidence base

- Age-disaggregated data remain limited and where they do exist, they often only offer one age range covering all older persons.
- The fragmentation of data systems limits the utility of collected data.
- Older persons are at risk of being further marginalized given the challenges they face in terms of digital literacy and access.

Goal: build comprehensive, unified and inclusive data systems

Policy recommendations

Comprehensive

Short-term

- Conduct gap assessment of national statistical offices (NSOs) and sectoral data centres.
- Conduct capacity-building workshops for NSOs and sectoral data centres.

Medium-term

- Include modules on older persons' socioeconomic situation into existing regular surveys.
- Develop specific surveys to fill data gaps as needed.

Long-term

- Devote specific budget lines for data collection for NSOs and sectoral data centres.
- Provide regular training opportunities for NSOs and sectoral data centres.
- Review data system responsiveness through multi-stakeholder meetings, including older persons.

Unified

Short-term

- Assess the level of integration of current data systems.
- Implement reforms to build more integrated data systems.
- Conduct mainstreaming workshops for NSOs and sectoral data centres.

Medium-term

- Organize systems for centralized and standardized management of data.
- Facilitate interaction between different stakeholders responsible for data collection, management and analysis.
- Conduct outreach campaigns to ensure data is accessible and clear for older persons.

Inclusive

Short-term

- Conduct a baseline survey of older persons' data needs.
- Develop indices that capture the contributions of older persons.

Medium-term

- Provide training opportunities on digital literacy for older persons.
- Conduct outreach to ensure older persons can engage with evolving data systems.

Long-term

- Facilitate interactions between NSOs and older persons.
- Update data systems to be responsive to older persons' evolving priorities.





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22-00409