



# Regional Review of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in the Arab Region: Ten Years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration

## Background

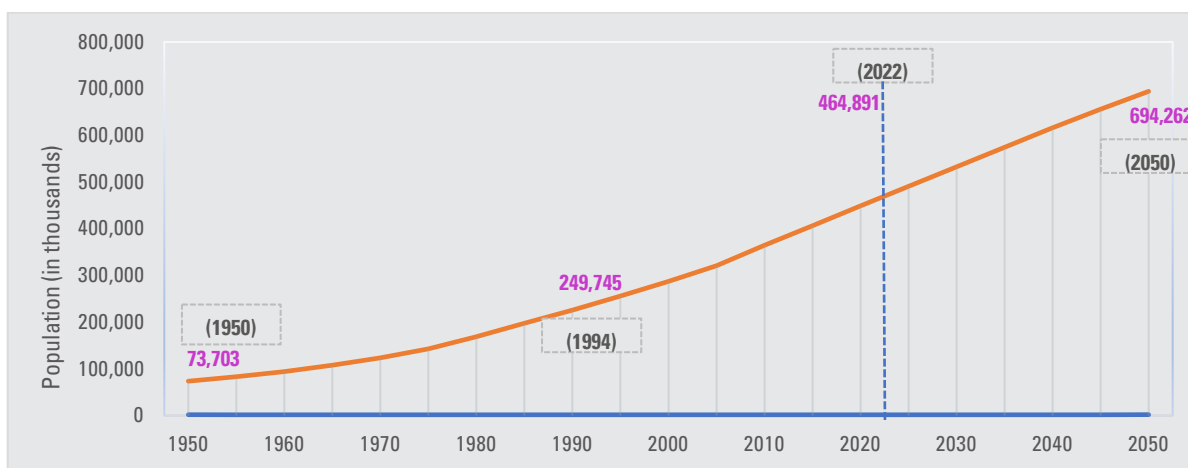
The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund - Arab States Regional Office (UNFPA ASRO) and the League of Arab States, conducted the ten-year review of the [2013 Cairo Declaration](#)—the regional framework to advance the implementation of [the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development \(ICPD\)](#). The brochure offers a summary of the progress made by Arab Governments in implementing the Cairo Declaration and the main challenges they faced in the process. It concludes with a set of messages that came out of the Regional Review.

## The demography of the Arab region at a glance

### 1. The population in the Arab region continues to grow but at a slower pace

The total population of the region increased from 249.7 million in 1994 to 464.9 million in 2022 and will reach 694.3 million in 2050 (figure 1). The region’s population growth rate will remain above the global average for the next three decades.

**Figure 1.** Population size in the Arab region (1950–2050)



**Source:** Data presented in the brochure are based on the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition.

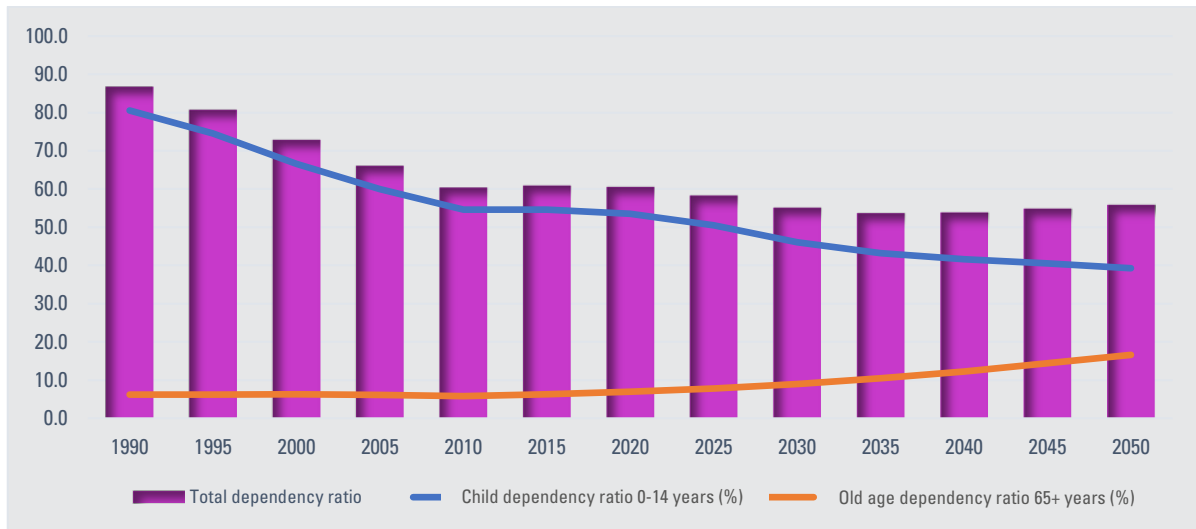
**By 2050, Egypt, the Sudan, Iraq and Yemen will be the top contributors to population increase in the region while Lebanon is likely to experience a negative population growth**

## 2. The region is predominately young but the proportion of youth is declining

Currently, 58 per cent of the total population in the Arab region is under 30 years of age. The number of youth (15 to 24 years) will increase from 80 million in 2022 to 108.3 million in 2050 but their share of the population will shrink to 15.6 per cent by mid-century.

Child dependency ratio is also declining in the region but the old-age dependency ratio is on the rise (figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Trends in dependency ratios in the Arab region



**Source:** Data presented in the brochure are based on the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition.

## 3. The Arab region is ageing more rapidly than other regions

Lower mortality and increased longevity in the region have led to a surge in both the numbers and proportions of older persons (65+). The proportion of older persons (65+) increased from 3.4 in 1994 to 4.6 in 2022 and will reach 10.6 per cent in 2050.

Countries in the region will complete their ageing transition<sup>1</sup> within 36 years on average. Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco and Algeria have already begun their ageing transition. Most Arab countries will follow in the next 15 years.

<sup>1</sup> The 'ageing transition' refers to the period of time in which the share of older persons shifts from 7 per cent to 14 per cent. The ageing transition has important economic and social implications for countries.



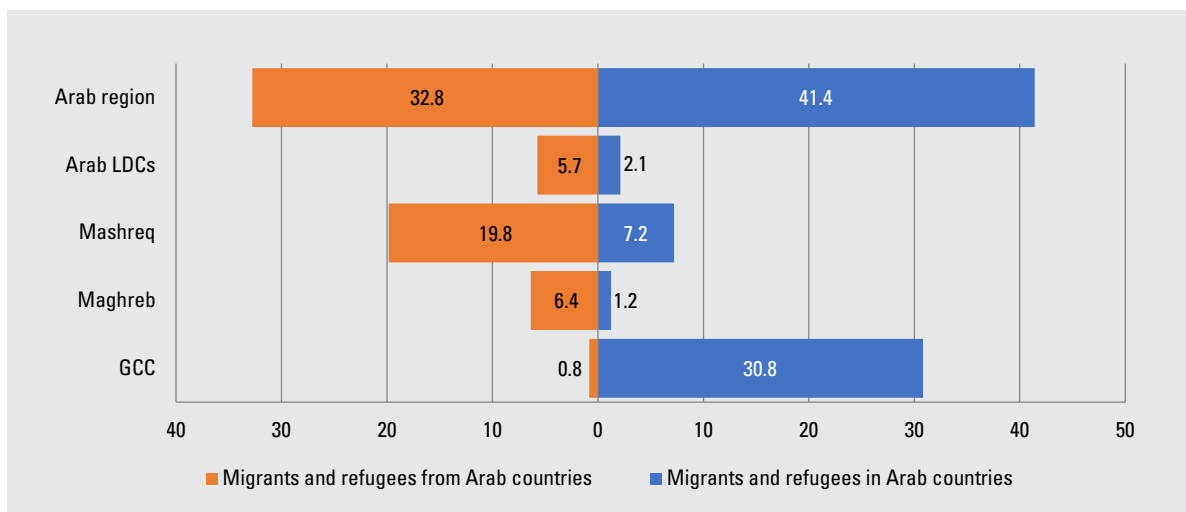
#### 4. A region on the move

The Arab region continues to be a prominent region of origin, transit and destination for international migration and forced displacement, hosting around 41.4 million migrants and refugees in 2020, constituting 15 per cent of all international migrants worldwide.<sup>2</sup> In addition, 32.8 million people had migrated or were forcibly displaced from Arab countries, 44 per cent of whom remained within the region (figure 3).

In terms of displacement, more than 2 out of 5 refugees in the world came from Arab countries in 2020. Moreover, there were around 2 million newly internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to natural disasters and around 1.7 million IDP due to conflicts and insecurity.<sup>3</sup>

The region is also going through rapid urbanization, with projections indicating that 75 per cent of its population will be living in urban areas by 2050.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 3.** Number of migrants and refugees from and to Arab countries, by sub-region 2020 (in millions)



**Source:** Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and others (ESCWA) (2021). [Situation Report on International Migration 2021: Building forward better for migrants in the Arab region.](#)

### The sixth Regional Review of the International Conference on Population and Development: challenges and prospects ten years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration

The 6<sup>th</sup> Regional Review of the International Conference on Population and Development reviewed the progress made and the challenges faced in implementing the 2013 Cairo Declaration. It highlighted positive practices and offered policy options to bridge the remaining gaps across four

2 ESCWA and others, 2021. Situation Report on International Migration 2021: Building forward better for migrants in the Arab region.

3 Ibid.

4 ESCWA, UN-Habitat and UN Women, 2023. SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

main pillars: (1) dignity and equality; (2) health; (3) place and environmental sustainability; and (4) good governance. The Regional Review included:

- National focal points to coordinate the review process (October 2022).
- Guiding template for the preparation of the national reports (October 2022).
- First capacity-building workshop for Arab Governments on the methodology of the review (October 2022).
- Second capacity-building workshop for Arab Governments on the preparation of the national reports (February 2023).
- Parliamentarians dialogue (May 2023).
- Multi-stakeholders' dialogue (June 2023).
- Regional consultation for adolescents and youth (June 2023).
- Submission of the National Review Reports (Jan-Jul 2023).
- Preparation of the Regional Review Report (May-July 2023).
- Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development: challenges and prospects ten years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration (13-14 September 2023).<sup>5</sup>
- **Outcome document** and Regional Review Report will feed into the report of the Secretary-General on "programmes and interventions assessing the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development" submitted to the 57<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on Population and Development, New York, 29 April to 3 May 2024.

## The Arab region 10 years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration<sup>6</sup>

### 1. Key achievements and opportunities

- Significant declines in infant, child and maternal mortality.
- Improved reproductive health and family planning coverage and services.
- Declines in school dropout rates and progress in gender parity in secondary education.
- Improved access to water and sanitation services.
- Investments in poverty alleviation and economic empowerment of vulnerable groups.
- Increased number of policies and strategies that support youth, older persons and persons with disabilities.
- New and strengthened legislation and policies to address gender-based violence, gender discrimination, and empower women and girls.
- Progress in the adoption of policy frameworks on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

5 The Conference was organized by ESCWA, the UNFPA-ASRO and the LAS, in partnership with the International Planned Parenthood Federation-Arab word region. The Conference documents can be downloaded from <https://www.unescwa.org/events/challenges-prospects-2013-cairo-declaration>.

6 Findings are based on the National Review Reports submitted by 12 countries: 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.



- Adoption or reform of migration-related policies in line with the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), with a special focus on labour migration.
- Investments in capacity-building, strengthening of institutions, accountability and participatory approaches.

## 2. Major challenges and priorities

### (a) Dignity and equality

- Discriminatory practices and laws, as well as negative social norms, create barriers to achieving equality and reducing poverty.
- The impact of climate change is exacerbating the food crisis and pre-existing inequalities.

### (b) Women

- Child marriage is still high in the region.
- Around a third of women reported experiencing physical, sexual or psychological violence in the last 12 months.
- Discriminatory gender social norms continue to hinder the realization of the rights of women and girls, and impede them from reaching their full potential.
- Implementation of gender-supportive policies continues to lag in some situations, denying access to key services for many women and girls.

### (c) Youth

- The mismatch between education, training and the skills required by the labour market contributes to the highest youth unemployment in the world, reaching 26 per cent in 2019.<sup>7</sup>
- Difficulty in accessing finance to start businesses or engage in entrepreneurial activities limits youth economic empowerment.
- Lack of information and access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights services for youth is a priority.
- Political participation of youth in policy-making processes remains weak.

### (d) Older persons

- Gaps in the coverage of social protection systems leave large groups of older persons, vulnerable to financial insecurity and dependency.
- Health insurance programmes often exclude large groups of older persons, which increases their risk for ill health and poverty.
- Care provision programmes that encourage ageing in place remain limited in most countries.
- Negative stereotypes of ageing and older persons persist in most societies. Neglect and abuse of older persons remain under-reported and understudied.

<sup>7</sup> ESCWA and ILO, 2021. Towards a Productive and Inclusive Path: Job Creation in the Arab Region.



**(e) Persons with disabilities**

- Social stigma leads to denial of disability, abuse and exclusion of persons with disabilities, especially women.
- Existing laws and policies are poorly implemented and the disability-related institutions set up to design and monitor such policies remain weak.
- Specialization in formulating legislation and developing policies on disability rights and specialized technical skills in disability-related rehabilitation are needed.
- Lack of accessibility in the built and digital environments hinders persons with disabilities from accessing public services and facilities, and information.

**(f) Health**

- The low financial investments in sexual and reproductive health services negatively impact both the coverage and the comprehensiveness of sexual and reproductive health services.
- Negative social norms and lack of evidence-based information on sexual and reproductive health, and related services, worsen inequalities in accessing these resources.
- Gender-responsive health budgeting mechanisms are often lacking.

**(g) Migration**

- Weak regional coordination and collaboration on migration governance hamper the effectiveness of national responses.
- Lack of appropriate training and technical expertise impede the ability of the countries to develop good migration governance systems.
- Competing priorities constrain the allocation of resources necessary to improve migration management systems, and strengthen bilateral and regional collaboration.

**(h) Place and environmental sustainability**

- 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.
- Deforestation, land degradation, coastal erosion and air pollution have led to the loss of biodiversity in many countries.
- Efforts to adapt to the impact of climate change are hindered by underdeveloped research on measuring environmental hazards and climate changes.

**(i) Cross-cutting issues**

- Political fragility, conflict, climate change, economic, health and humanitarian crises, in addition to occupation, create additional challenges to the service delivery systems in place.
- Variable success in tackling corruption and gaps in the rule of law hamper the adoption, the implementation and the effectiveness of policies and programmes aimed at empowering vulnerable groups.



- Dwindling funding from regional and international entities and donors is a barrier for regional collaboration and national efforts.
- The scarcity of disaggregated, updated and accessible data and research on the various priority areas of the 2013 Cairo Declaration hampers the ability of the Governments to develop evidence-based and responsive policies and programmes.

## Seven years to achieve the objectives of ICPD and the Sustainable Development Goals: key messages from the Regional Review and the Regional Conference

<b>Dignity and equality</b>	Adopt and implement laws, policies and strategies aimed at promoting the role of the family, achieving gender equality, and empowering women and eliminate discrimination and gender-based violence.
	Mainstream gender equality in poverty reduction efforts, continue to invest in the education of women and girls, and adopt gender-sensitive budgets to implement economic and social policies.
	Prioritize investment in youth by enhancing their participation in public life and their contribution to sustainable development, peace and security, and by developing policies that ensure quality education, capacity-building and life skills.
	Strengthen programmes and strategies for older persons, reform social protection policies to promote their inclusiveness and access to life-cycle health services, and protect them from neglect and abuse.
	Maximize efforts to realize the rights of persons with disabilities to access education, employment opportunities, adequate standard of living, quality health services, psychosocial support, social protection and access to a built and digital environment.
<b>Sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights</b>	Promote investment in sexual and reproductive health, family planning and reproductive rights for all population groups, at all stages of life.
	Integrate sexual and reproductive health services into universal health coverage, invest in the workforce in this area, and align national efforts with the regional nursing and midwifery strategy.
<b>Crises and mobility</b>	Include migration dynamics and migrants in risk reduction strategies, to protect their rights and anticipate the consequences of external shocks.
	Integrate risk prevention and crisis response concepts and mechanisms into development planning to ensure the continued achievement of population and development goals and build sustainable and resilient societies.
<b>Place and environmental sustainability</b>	Adopt inclusive urban planning models that seek to achieve city sustainability, and develop and implement gender-sensitive climate action policies.
	Provide affordable technologies for climate change action to least developed countries (LDCs), small farmers and low-income people.



	Build partnerships with the private sector and expand investment in the green economy and capitalize on this opportunity to create jobs while delivering on climate and sustainability goals.
<b>Mechanisms to accelerate implementation</b>	Intensify efforts to change negative societal attitudes towards different population groups and remove structural barriers that encourage gender discrimination and all forms of violence.
	Adopt policies that integrate the different population dimensions while ensuring the required institutional frameworks and budgets, mainstreaming rights-based approaches, and strengthening the rule of law, governance institutions and multisectoral coordination.
	Work with multiple stakeholders, and enhance their potential to contribute to the development, implementation and evaluation of population policies.
	Promote regional collaboration and exchange of information, and strengthen cooperation in developing and implementing regional solutions to cross-border challenges.
	Intensify collaboration and joint programming among donors and respective international and regional organizations especially in LDCs.
	Direct national financing towards the implementation of the 2013 Cairo Declaration goals, the ICPD objectives and the SDGs, and establish regional financing funds for specific population issues.
	Enhance institutional capacities and leverage modern technology in the management of data related to population and development, and invest in national and regional research to support evidence-based policymaking.

