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for Western Asia

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT BULLETIN

Population Ageing in Arab Countries Building A Society for All Ages

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End Notes

1. ESCWA, "Population and Development: the demographic window of opportunity in Arab countries" (November 2005).
2. ESCWA, "Ageing in the Arab countries: regional variations, policies and programmes" (E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WG.1/2), p.3
3. ESCWA, "Population and Development: The demographic profile of the Arab countries" (ESCWA/SDD/2003/BOOKLET.2)
4. Ibid.
5. ESCWA, "Demographic trends of ageing in the Arab countries" (E/ESCWA/SD/2002/WG.1-1/3), p. 11
6. ESCWA, "Ageing in the Arab countries: regional variations, policies and programmes" (E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WG.1/2), p.16 & p. 19.
7. United Nations, UNFPA Programme of Action, which was adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, September 2004, p. 39.
8. United Nations, Second World Assembly on Ageing, Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (New York, February 2003).
9. ESCWA, Arab Plan of Action on Ageing to the Year 2012. Adopted by member countries during the Arab Preparatory Meeting for the Second World Assembly on Ageing (Beirut, 5-8 February 2002).
10. Ibid. Arab Plan of Action on Ageing to the Year 2012, pp. 8-9.
11. ESCWA, "Demographic trends of ageing in the Arab countries" (E/ESCWA/SD/2002/WG.1-1/3), p. 14.
12. ESCWA, "Ageing in the Arab countries: regional variations, policies and programmes" (E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WG.1/2), pp. 25 and 27.

THE ARAB FAMILY AND THE AGED:

I. Culture and care-giving:

▷ The role of the family in care-giving for older people continues to provide social support in the countries of the region. This trend is increasingly promoted and strengthened whereby the family is acknowledged as the primary actor within the traditional social support system.

▷ In Arab countries, the majority of the ageing population lives within their families and relies on care and donations provided by their family members. However, the nuclear family unit is slowly taking over the expanded family role and could weaken/diminish the support system.

▷ A number of countries, including Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia, have established mobile units to reach the elderly within their families in order to provide health and other services. Using such mobile units, social workers have direct contact with older persons at their own home or at the community centre.

II. The majority of older women are vulnerable:

▷ Owing to socio-economic conditions, older women in the Arab region suffer additional problems compared to men, that is, their lack of access to paid employment, lack of equal access to adequate health and social

services, and social and financial dependency.⁽¹⁰⁾

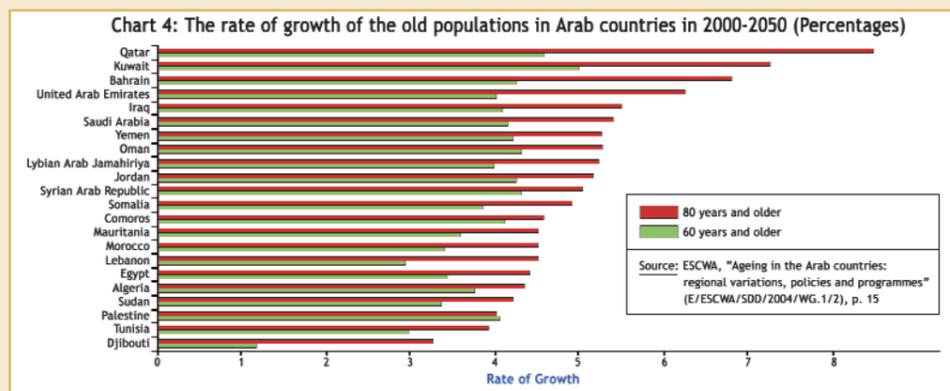
▷ Given that women live longer than men, the proportion of women among the widowed elderly is higher than for men. This situation is aggravated in countries and territories afflicted by wars, particularly Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine. In 1996, more than 84 per cent of widowed persons in Lebanon aged 60 and above were women, and 16 per cent were men. This is expected to raise the dependency ratio among elderly women and trigger a high proportion of households headed by elderly women who are poor and widowed.⁽¹¹⁾

DEMOGRAPHIC AGEING AT THE AGENDAS OF ARAB COUNTRIES:

⇒ By 2050, the old and oldest old are projected to grow at proportions - both in terms of absolute numbers and percentages of total populations - that require attention and action. Thus, there is an urgent need for demographic ageing to be at the **agenda** of all Arab countries.⁽¹²⁾

⇒ **The way forward** calls upon policymakers to focus on the socio-economic and social policy challenges of ageing, and to prioritize the formulation of relevant national policies aimed at the following:

- (a) **Improving the quality of life of older persons;**
- (b) **Enabling older people to remain active and to live independently in their own communities;**
- (c) **Providing adequate health care and social security in old age relative to the working population;**
- (d) **Promoting and facilitating a social support system, formal and informal, including enhancing the abilities of relatives to take care of the elderly within the family environment.**



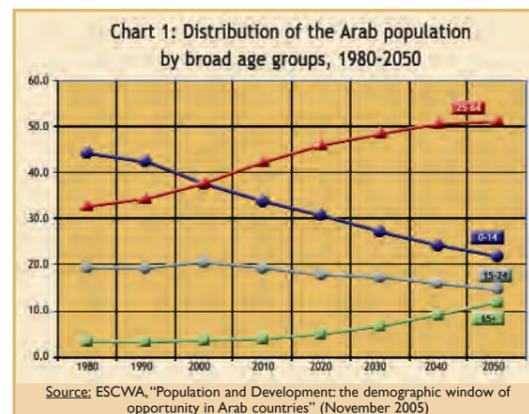
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DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE CALLS FOR ACTION:

The pattern of the traditional demographic balance in Arab countries has changed in recent decades. One of the consequences of the demographic transition from high to low fertility and high to low mortality has been the evolution in the age structure of population. In Arab countries, the declining fertility rates have caused important changes in the age structure of the population. These changes are shown in a sharp increase in the proportion of the working-age population (aged 25-64), a decline in the young age group (aged 0-14), and a slow yet gradual increase in the older persons 65 years old and above in the Arab region.⁽¹⁾



The population annual growth rate in the Arab region is expected to decline from 2.6 per cent in 2000, to 1.99 in 2025, and to 1.67 in 2050. For the period 2000-2050, the rate of growth of the population aged 65 and older has been projected at 4-5 per cent in Arab countries, with an average annual growth rate of the oldest old (aged 80 years and older) estimated to exceed 5 per cent in 11 Arab countries, including Kuwait and Qatar both at rates of more than 7 per cent.⁽²⁾

The absolute number of people aged 65 and above in the Arab region has already doubled from 5.7 million in 1980 to 10.4 million in 2000, and is expected to increase to 14 million by 2010 and 21.3 million by 2020.⁽³⁾

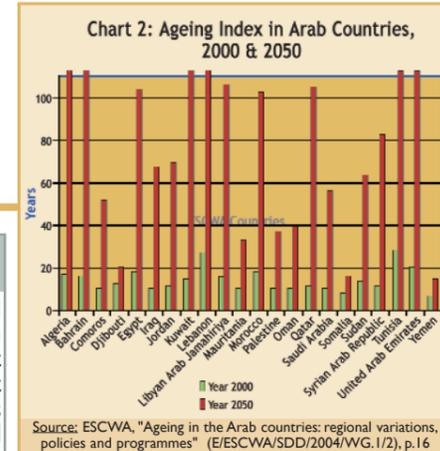
In most Arab countries, both men and women live much longer today with life expectancy averaging 66.2 for men and 69.7 for women, exceeding by some 7 years longer than their counterparts did 20 years ago. Average life expectancy is expected to reach 73 by 2025 and 76 by 2050.⁽⁴⁾

Old age dependency ratio (ODR):

Is calculated as the ratio of persons aged 65 and above to persons aged 15-64 years. Compared to the world average, the Arab region enjoys the lowest ODR, which is currently estimated at 5 per cent. This ratio is expected to rise to 8 per cent in 2025 and 13 per cent by 2050. This will affect the total dependency rate (young and old dependants) in the region where the responsibility of the workforce shifts from the support of children to the support of older persons.⁽⁵⁾

Ageing index:

Is the number of individuals aged 60 years and older divided by the number of children aged 14 years and younger. In the Arab region, the ageing index is expected to increase substantially by 2050, particularly in countries that are advanced in their demographic transitions, such as: Lebanon, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Tunisia. Chart 2 shows the ageing index in 2000 and its estimate in 2050.⁽⁶⁾

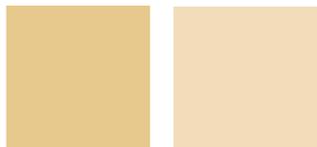


UNITED NATIONS MANDATES:

ICPD 1994: The objectives of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action are based on the principle that elderly people constitute a valuable and important component of a society's human resources. ICPD adopts a gender perspective in programmes and policies, and states the following old age-related objectives:⁽⁷⁾

To enhance the self-reliance of elderly people, and to create conditions that promote quality of life and enable them to work and live independently in their own communities as long as possible or as desired.





UNITED NATIONS MANDATES: (Cont.)

To develop systems of health care as well as systems of economic and social security in old age, paying special attention to the needs of women.

To develop a social support system, both formal and informal, with a view to enhancing the ability of families to take care of elderly people within the family.

THE SECOND WORLD ASSEMBLY ON AGEING:

The Second World Assembly on Ageing (Madrid, April 2002) adopted the Political Declaration and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA). As a source for policy-making, MIPAA represents a tool for governments, NGOs, and other actors to address ageing as a developmental issue. MIPAA focuses on three priority areas. They are: Development; health; empowerment.⁽⁶⁾

I. Development: MIPAA calls for the active participation of older persons in society, in productive work, and in decision-making in all walks of life. MIPAA calls for income security, social protection/ social security, including pensions, disability insurance and health benefits, poverty eradication and alleviation of the marginalization of older persons. It also calls for the improvement of living conditions and infrastructure particularly in rural areas, continuous

access to knowledge, education and training, as well as intergenerational solidarity.

2. Advancing health and well being into old age: In promoting health and well-being throughout life, MIPAA calls for universal and equal access to health-care services, for improving and strengthening of primary health-care services, care-giving skills and the provision of professional training, including involving older persons in the process, in order to meet their short and long-term needs.

3. Ensuring enabling and supportive environments: MIPAA promotes the concept of "ageing in place", whereby the needs of older persons concerning supportive community, independent living, affordable housing including adequate environmental design for older persons with disabilities, and affordable transportation, are met. MIPAA also supports the care-giving role of older persons, particularly older women, and addresses the elimination of all forms of neglect, abuse and violence against older persons.

THE ARAB PLAN OF ACTION ON AGEING TO THE YEAR 2012 (APAA):

The Plan calls on member countries to implement MIPAA at the regional and country levels. Similar to MIPAA, the



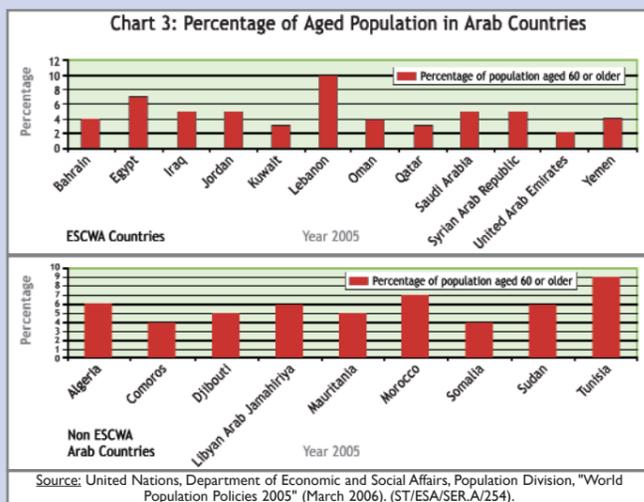
objectives and recommendations of the Arab Plan of Action on Ageing centre on the same three basic priority areas. Further, APAA addresses the vulnerability of Arab women, and introduces issues that are regional and culture specific. The following issues and relevant objectives stand as additional to MIPAA and highlight APAA's region-specific considerations:⁽⁷⁾

- ⇒ Enhancing the provision of integrated social welfare;
- ⇒ Strengthening and supporting the cohesion of the Arab family;
- ⇒ Supporting the NGOs and other civil society institutions concerned with ageing;
- ⇒ Mainstreaming older women's issues into social development programmes, targeting the formulation of special older women-related programmes to ensure they are able to live a life of dignity;
- ⇒ Enhancing the provision of care and protection for older women and older men in situations of armed conflict, war, occupation and sanctions.

ARAB COUNTRIES ARE KEEN TO FORMULATE:

I. National plans of action:

▷ MIPAA and APAA have prompted member countries to draw policy guidelines aimed at initiating and formulating national plans of action. Five countries have completed this exercise, namely, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar and the Syrian Arab Republic. Other countries are implementing plans or programmes that are based on existing provisions within general national policies. The



WHAT IS BEING DONE AT THE POLICY LEVEL?

Providing care for older persons continues to adopt a welfare-based and service-oriented approach rather than a developmental, human rights and/or 'participatory approach'. It is worth mentioning that all directors of governmental institutions and civil society organizations are usually selected from older age groups in order to benefit from their experiences.

Little progress has been made in formulating national policy for older people. In many member countries, existing old age programmes are often uncoordinated. Hence there is a need for a clear and coherent policy ageing.

WHAT IS BEING DONE AT THE POLICY LEVEL? (Cont.)

Plan of Action on Ageing of the Syrian Arab Republic tackles mainly health-related issues, and is modified annually according to needs and priorities.

▷ Lebanon is in the process of elaborating its national plan of action. Qatar has completed guidelines for its national strategy for ageing, formulated a national plan of action on ageing, and is setting up a mechanism for cooperation regarding the implementation of MIPAA.

II. National committees:

▷ Many ESCWA countries have set up national committees for ageing, including Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria. In most cases, these national committees comprise representatives from the private and public sectors, and are usually headed by the minister of social affairs. In the Syrian Arab Republic, it is headed by the Minister of Health.

▷ In Qatar, the National Committee for Ageing functions within the Supreme Council for the Family; and in Saudi Arabia, the National Committee on Ageing has been involved in drawing the

General Policy for the Elderly, and in formulating relevant plans, programmes and projects.

▷ Some ESCWA member countries have recently established specialized departments within the concerned ministries, including Jordan and Lebanon. In Lebanon, the Ministry of Social Affairs established a specialized homepage on ageing on its website.

▷ Partnership and networking between the concerned governmental and private sectors have been strengthened in most countries.

III. Legislation: Are member countries upgrading relevant legislation?

▷ Some member countries are keen to formulate new or upgrade existing relevant legislation. Such as:

- a) Issuing licenses and tax directives regarding the establishment of homes and clubs for older persons, as in the case of Jordan, Iraq and Qatar. In Lebanon, legislation proposals aimed at tax and other financial exemptions for older people are being considered.

b) Initiating health insurance provisions that cover the needy elderly, as in the case of Egypt, Jordan and Oman;

c) Expanding welfare provisions to cover disability caused by ageing, as in the case of Kuwait;

d) Formulating projects to implement a new pension law, as in the case of Lebanon;

e) Upgrading pension funds and social security schemes, as in the case of Oman.

ACHIEVEMENTS ARE PENDING UPGRADING OF:

Skills: While most ESCWA member countries realize the importance of conducting training programmes aimed at enhancing and upgrading skills, few have initiated such programmes owing to existing financial constraints, such as Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon.

Data: Egypt's general policy covers provisions that target old age and calls for the preparation of a database and reports/studies on ageing related to health and socio-economic conditions. Also, Qatar's national strategy on ageing calls for establishing an updated database on ageing.

Services: Most ESCWA countries continue to upgrade health services, are increasing the number of specialized centres and introducing mobile clinic services. Such mobile clinic services are operational in Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, a number of countries have established day centres for the aged, including Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon.

Calls for action: More work is still required in terms of: advocacy from a human rights perspective, collection of data, survey analysis, programme management, policy formulation and monitoring.



ADVOCACY, AWARENESS AND EMPOWERMENT:

I. The International Day of Older Persons is a tool:

▷ In most ESCWA member countries, there has been significant progress in raising public awareness towards addressing ageing issues at both the governmental and civil society levels. Most countries have implemented awareness-building activities by issuing brochures and other relevant publications. Additionally, social clubs for older persons, which are active in Egypt and Lebanon, form a positive component in this regard.

▷ Commemorating the annual International Day of Older Persons has become a major national venue for raising awareness of ageing issues.

Five countries, Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Qatar and Syria have reported commemoration activities, which include specialized training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, exhibitions of handicrafts made by older persons and honoring their initiatives.

II. Pilot projects and initiatives are instrumental:

▷ In order to promote productive ageing, some countries, namely Egypt and Qatar, have initiated projects with prizes for older persons who continue to work productively. In Qatar, the Supreme Council for Family Affairs is implementing a multi-purpose project aiming at the following:

- (a) building the capacity of participating older persons;
- (b) creating opportunities for older persons to train young students in relevant fields;
- (c) enhancing intergenerational interaction; and
- (d) securing financial benefits to participating older persons.

▷ A pilot project in Egypt consists of granting senior citizens a 'golden card' that entitles the holder to benefit from a variety of services and privileges.

▷ Some countries, such as: Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, have introduced the study of geriatrics (branch of medical science dealing with old age and its diseases) and ageing issues within academic programmes at schools and universities. Furthermore, Lebanon has

established a national society for geriatrics; and the Syrian Arab Republic is in the process of setting up a national task force on geriatrics.

▷ Lebanon has initiated work towards publishing a manual covering information on existing specialized centres/ institutions and services available for the aged at the country level.

NEWS:

In May 2007, the United Nations Programme on Ageing has established a new web-site on ageing: www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing