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MENA GENERATION 2030

AN OPPORTUNITY TO ACT NOW

The UNICEF **MENA Generation 2030** report ([Arabic/English](#)) provides an in-depth analysis of demographic projections for children, adolescents and youth in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The population in the MENA region is expected to more than double in size during the first half of the 21st century. An unprecedentedly **large proportion of the population will be in their most productive years, opening up the potential for a demographic dividend** – economic growth due to demographic changes. This temporary age structure presents a **historic opportunity to invest in human capital** and boost economic growth. Provided that appropriate policies are budgeted and operationalized within a **politically and socially stable environment**.

Appropriate policies like – improving access to healthcare, protection, education, and meaningful engagement opportunities – thereby enhancing the prospects for productive employment, increased income per capita and thus stimulated growth and wealth generation.

WITHOUT URGENT INVESTMENTS IN



Healthcare



Education



Employment



Engagement

we will have:



5 MILLION
additional children
out of school



11 PER CENT
Increase in youth
unemployment



Greater disillusionment among young people

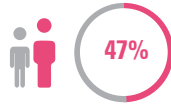
ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH IN MENA¹

A young population:

There are currently **124 million adolescents and youth** in the MENA region



of the MENA populations is aged between **10 and 24 years**



Children and young people (0-24 year olds) account for nearly half of the region's population

Impact by 2030

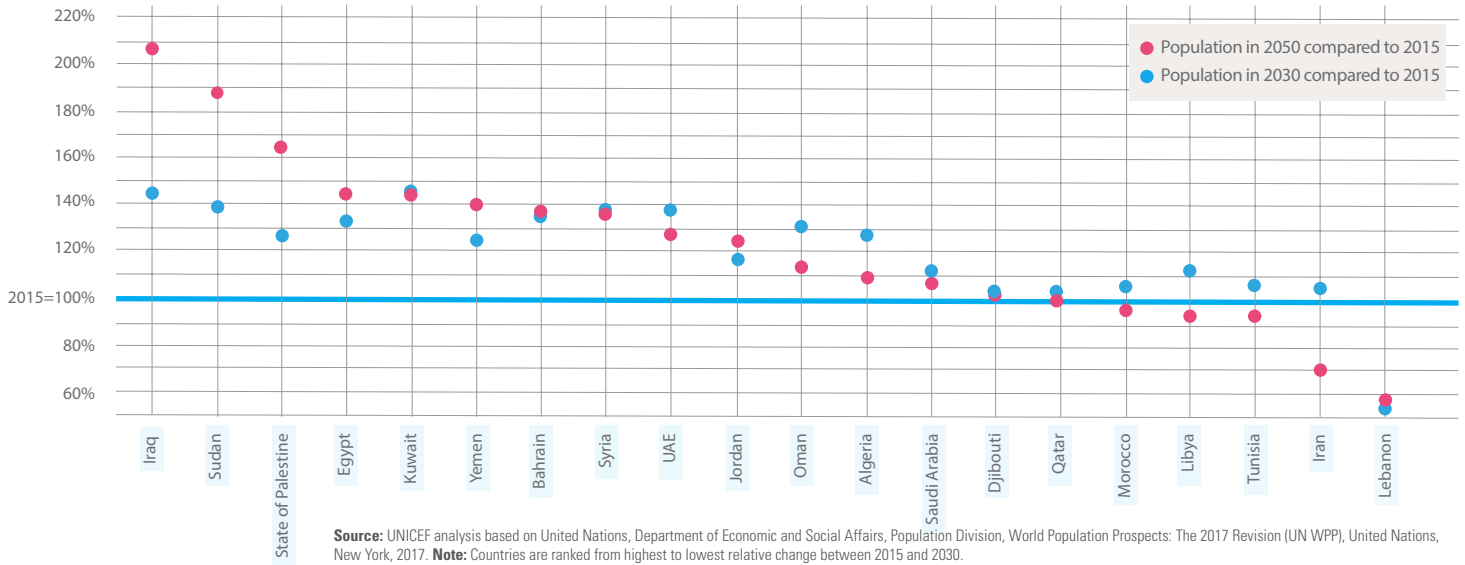


more students to **accommodate in school**



new **entrants to the labour market**. Additional burden on region's economies to create **2.6 million new jobs per year**

Changes in youth population (15-24 years) from 2015 to 2030 and 2050



MENA COUNTRIES BY DEMOGRAPHIC PHASES

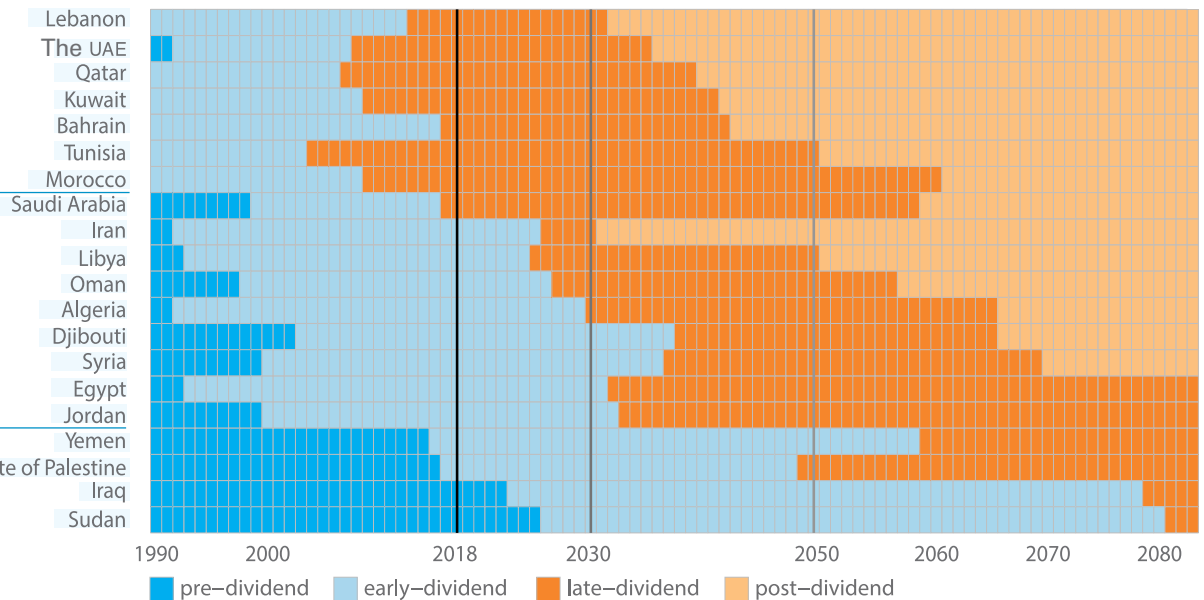
Countries in the Middle East and North Africa by demographic type (1990-2085)

Countries sorted from top to bottom by type (from post- to pre-dividend) and Total Fertility Rate (increasing) in 2018

Late Dividend Countries, with a declining share of working age population, due to low fertility rates, but increasing elderly-dependency ratio

Early Dividend Countries, showing a relative increase in the working age population, on the path towards reduced fertility rates, and reduced child-dependency ratio

Pre Dividend Countries, whose share of working age population will increase, due to quite high fertility rates, and hence high child-dependency ratio



¹ This document refers to the overlapping age groups and follows the UN definitions as follows: children - 0 to 17 years; adolescents - 10 to 19 years; youth - 15 to 24 years; and young people - 10 to 24 years.

BARRIERS TO REAPING THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND IN MENA

Conflict and Violence



MENA is home to **six per cent** of the world's adolescents



More than one-third (**37 per cent**) of youth in MENA **live in fragile and conflict** affected countries



MENA is home to **58 per cent** of the world's refugees and **nearly half** of the world's internally displaced populations



1 in 4 aged 13 to 15 in countries reported being **bullied at school at least once** in the past two months

Extreme Survival Measures

1/4



experience acute poverty²

half of the 118 million under-18-year-olds, **experience moderate poverty**, while one in four (29.3 million) experience acute poverty



One in five girls in the region **married before the age of 18**



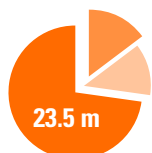
The poorest children are five times less **likely to complete primary education**



One-third of school-aged Syrian refugees in host countries are still **out of school**

Education

15 million children out of school in MENA, many because of conflict



3.5 million are out of school
2.9 million at risk of dropping out of school

Of the 23.5 million **children of lower secondary school-age** in the region, at least 3.5 million are out of school, and an additional 2.9 million are at risk of dropping out of school



Learning outcomes

Out of those children who are in school, only half meet the lowest benchmark measuring skills for reading, mathematics and science

Employment

MENA has the world's highest youth unemployment rates: 29 per cent in North Africa and 25 per cent in the rest of the region

Female youth unemployment is even higher: 39 per cent in North Africa and 41 per cent in the rest of the region



Unemployment is also particularly **high among Syrian refugees in host countries**, for example 61 per cent in Jordan.

Barriers for expanded employment opportunities:



Poor quality education



Mismatch between skills and labour market requirements



Lack of available jobs

Disillusionment and Disengagement

Disillusionment among young people due to:



Unemployment, conflict, crises and violence



Discriminatory roles and social norms



Limited space and scope for voice and accountability

As a result:

Young people feel that **life in MENA has deteriorated** over the last decade



of young people **have confidence in their governments** in dealing with unemployment



Civic engagement levels among the adolescents and youth of the region **are the lowest** in the world, with only **nine per cent** of youth in region volunteering with a civic organisation in any given month

VULNERABLE ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Girls, refugees, the displaced and people with disabilities face multiple burdens and discriminatory practices. For girls, these practices start early. As a result, girls are more likely to be out of school than boys, face higher unemployment levels, lower labour force participation and lower civic engagement. Currently one in five girls in the region are married before the age of 18 and the rate is increasing in conflict-affected countries in response to instability.

Primary education
Out-of-school rate



for girls



for boys

Secondary education
Out-of-school rate



for girls



for boys

PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR REAPING THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND IN MENA

Pre-dividend countries – window of opportunity is yet to open



Increased investment in **early childhood development**, as it is proven to be the most effective investment, with the highest rates of return.

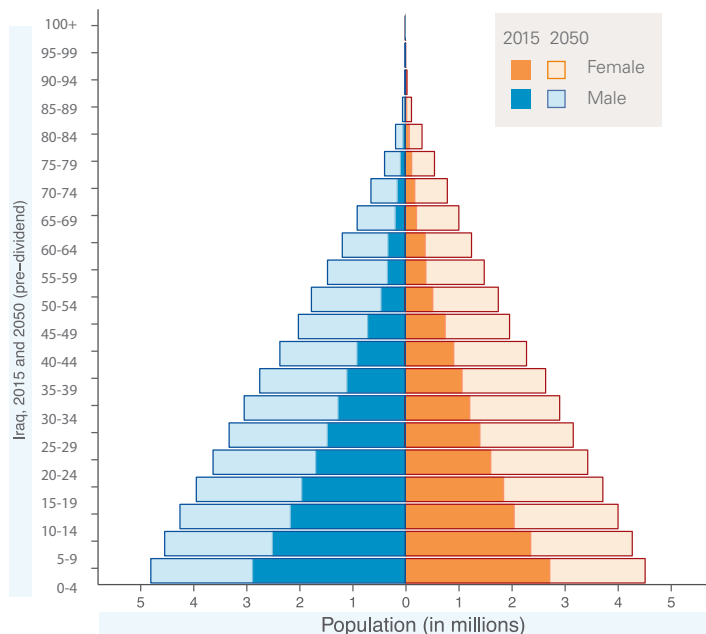


Investment in **relevant and quality education**, prioritizing skills for a fast-changing world, combined with policies **facilitating the school-to-work transition**, and

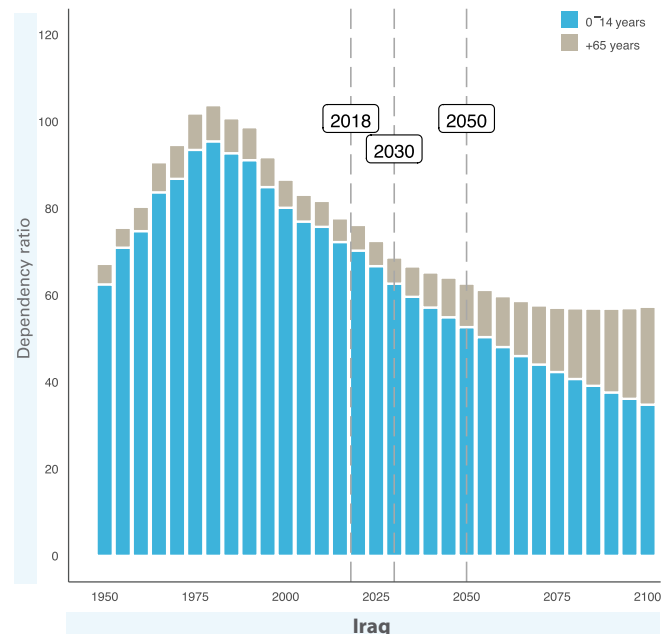


Strong **engagement of adolescents and youth**, especially girls, to reap the peace and the gender dividend.

Iraq: the country with the fastest growing population in the region – similar to Bahrain and Palestine, Iraq's population will grow by almost 50 per cent within only 15 years.



Current population 2018: 39 million
 2018-2030: +35 per cent (+14 million), to a total of 53 million
 2018-2050: +107 per cent (+42 million), to a total of 81 million



High increase in children population between 2018-2030:
 +20 per cent children (0-4), to a total of 7 million
 +30 per cent school-aged children (5-17), to a total of 16 million
 +35 per cent adolescents (10-19), to a total of 12 million
 +35 per cent youth (15-24), to a total of 10 million

Early-dividend countries – window of opportunity is wide open



Increased investment in **secondary education**, where the highest increase of school-age population is expected,



Investment in policies focusing on **skills development** through multiple pathways and **vocational training, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship and job placements**,

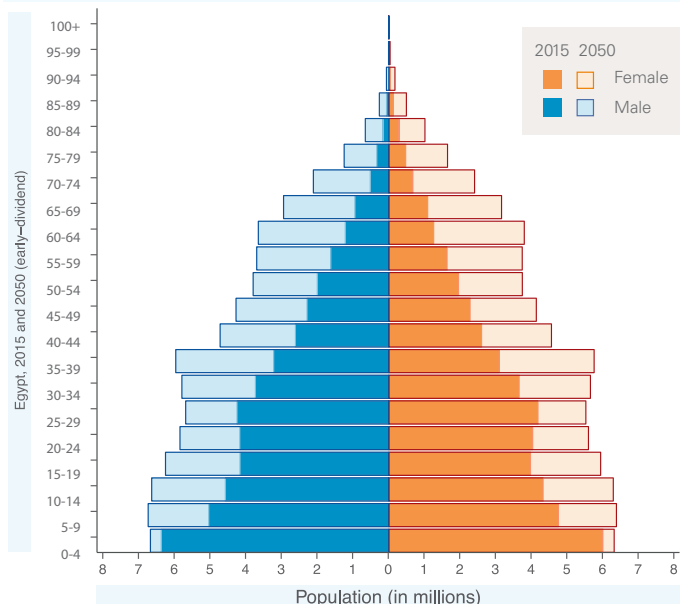


For the most vulnerable adolescents and youth, **transformative social protection measures** that can facilitate their transition to employment, breaking the cycle of generational poverty, and

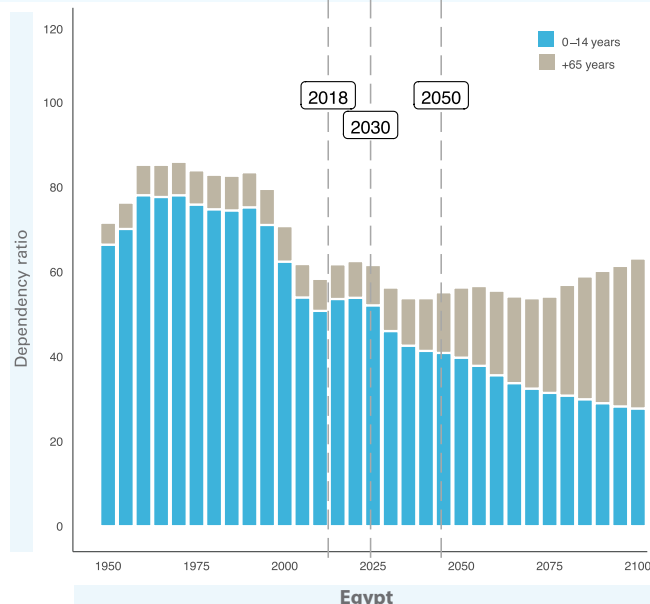


Strong engagement of adolescents and youth, to reap the peace and the gender dividend.

Egypt : the country with the largest population growth in the region – along with Sudan and Iraq, Egypt will contribute to nearly half of the total population growth in the MENA region



Current total population 2018: 99 million
 Population change between:
 2018-2030: +20 per cent (+20 million), to a total of 120 million
 -2018-2050: +54 per cent (+54 million), to a total of 153 million



High increase in children population between 2018-2030:
 -7 per cent children (0-4), to a total of 12 million
 +21 per cent school-aged children (5-17), to a total of 31 million
 +36 per cent adolescents (10-19), to a total of 24 million
 +32 per cent youth (15-24), to a total of 22 million

Late-dividend countries – window of opportunity is slowly closing



Crucial to act now and invest in **skills development** through multiple pathways and **vocational training, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship and job placements,**

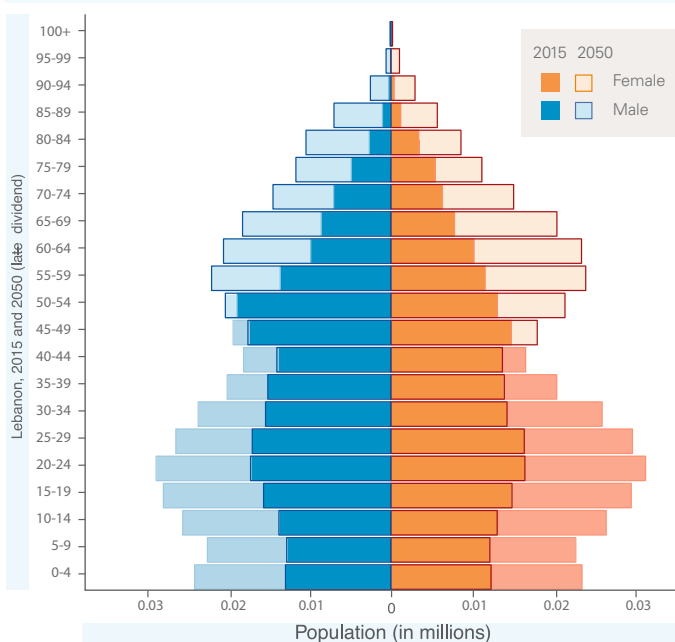


Increased investment in policies to address **labour force participation,** especially female labor force participation, **employment generation, business environment,** and productivity gains through **enhancing human capital** in the existing labour force,

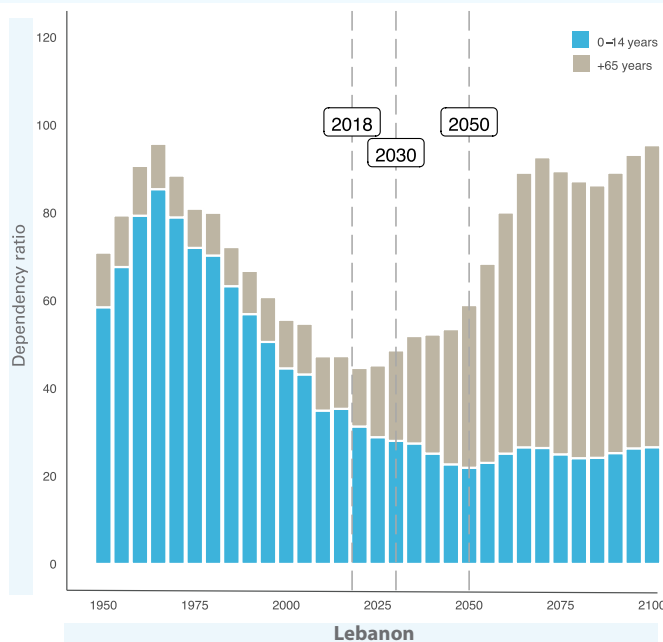


Strong **engagement of adolescents and youth,** especially girls, to reap the peace and gender dividend.

Lebanon : the only country in the region with a shrinking population, with a decrease of children and youth population as share of the total population.



Current total population 2018: 6 million
 Population change between:
 2018-2030: -8 per cent (-0.5 million), to a total of 5 million
 2018-2050: no substantial change



Decrease in children population between 2018-2030:
 -27 per cent children (0-4), to a total of 0.3 million
 -29 per cent school-aged children (5-17), to a total of 0.9 million
 -37 per cent adolescents (10-19), to a total of 0.6 million
 -45 per cent youth (15-24), to a total of 0.6 million

