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 MENA

A young population:
There are currently 124 million adolescents and youth in the MENA region

- 26% of the MENA populations is aged between 10 and 24 years
- 47% of the region’s population is aged between 10 and 24 years

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

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

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

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
- Lebanon
- The UAE
- Qatar
- Kuwait
- Bahrain
- Tunisia
- Morocco
- Saudi Arabia
- Iran
- Libya
- Oman
- Algeria
- Djibouti
- Syria
- Egypt
- Jordan
- Yemen
- The State of Palestine
- Iraq
- Sudan

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.

Source: UNICEF analysis based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision (UN WPP), United Nations, New York, 2017. Note: Countries are ranked from highest to lowest relative change between 2015 and 2030.
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 poverty

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

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

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.

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2 Beyond monetary poverty, this measures the multi-dimensional child poverty due to lack of access to, or poor quality of: water, sanitation, housing, health, nutrition, education, and information
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. Only half 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.
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.

- 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 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.

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