

Introduction

Arab Society: A Compendium of Social Statistics is the latest in a series of biennial compendia of the Statistics Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). It provides a broad description of Arab society in the region and how it is changing over time. Drawing on data provided mainly from National Statistical Offices (NSOs), it focuses on population dynamics, employment, education, housing conditions, health, poverty and culture. Other issues of social concern such as crime and justice, social protection are left out owing to the lack of reliable data.

The report shows that the Arab population in the Arab region continues to grow rapidly and diversify. Population growth rates vary widely from less than 1 per cent to over 3 per cent. The population is young overall, but there is considerable heterogeneity in the age-sex profile of countries in the region owing to varying demographic transitions and the size of migrant laborers as well as refugees in some countries. The proportions of children less than 15 years range from a low of about 15 per cent in Qatar to a high of over 40 per cent in Palestine and Iraq. The sex ratios for all Gulf countries are large, and there are nearly 300 men per 100 women in Qatar.

Recent estimates show a rapid decline of fertility and mortality during the recent past. Total fertility varies greatly from a below replacement level (below 2.1) in Lebanon and Tunisia to over 5.5 in Sudan and Yemen. Improvements in the health and survival chances of populations are evident, but the data show clear disparities. Life expectancy at birth ranges from 57-60 years (for men and women, respectively) in Sudan to 77-81 years in Qatar.

The region houses an exceptionally large proportion of immigrants, with the number of migrants doubling in the last two decades. Data for 2012 show that about one out of four persons in 5 out of 9 countries in the region was an

international migrant. The region also has a relatively large number of refugees and displaced populations, with three countries (Jordan, Palestine and Syria) having over 1.5 million refugees each.

Household size varies considerably from a high of about 7 persons in Yemen to about 4 in Egypt and Lebanon. With the exception of Sudan, female headship is generally low.

Recent data show that age at marriage continues to rise, and marriage can no longer be considered universal in some countries. Divorce has been on the rise, with the number doubling (or nearly so) in merely 10 years in a few countries.

The data show that labor force participation is generally low in the ESCWA region, mainly because of very low rate of participation among women; the former being less than half the rates for working-age men overall. Overall unemployment among labor force participants varies widely, ranging from 30 per cent in Iraq to about 3 per cent in Qatar. All countries reported higher unemployment for youth than for the working age population. The size of public sector employment is rather large in some countries (e.g. the Gulf), exceeding 80 per cent of employment.

Data on housing conditions are generally 'thin', and were derived from censuses. The majority of countries showed high (50 per cent +) ownership of housing units. The most recent available data show that access to a public electricity network is generally high, with little variations between urban and rural areas in most countries. Availability of public piped water in housing units was generally high, the exceptions being Lebanon, Sudan and Yemen. Data for urban areas show over 60 per cent availability of sewage networks in most countries.

Overall adult literacy rates have been increasing, but current rates vary considerably

from about 95 per cent (Qatar and Palestine) to less than 65 per cent in Yemen. The absolute difference between adult literacy rates for men and women ranged from 1 per cent in Qatar to about 15 per cent in Yemen. Enrollment in primary schools has been increasing in all countries, and the sex gaps narrowed in most countries. In about half the countries with data, women have higher enrollment ratios in secondary schools than men. However, wide variations are observed in pupil-teacher ratios - 6.3 pupils per teacher in Kuwait to 19 in Iraq.

Available data show a decrease in maternal mortality in most countries during recent years. The most recent national estimates show rates ranging from 210 in Yemen to 5 or less in Qatar and U.A.E. Almost all births attended by skilled health personnel in most countries. Prenatal care varies between the countries ranging from 47 per cent in Yemen to 100 per cent in Bahrain, Kuwait and UAE. However, all countries reported a higher level of prenatal care in urban areas compared to rural areas. There has been an increase in contraceptive prevalence in most countries, with current rates approaching 60 per cent in some countries. Three countries reported a decrease in DPT and almost all countries showed an increase in measles immunization rates in recent years. A considerably higher percentage of men smoke than do women in all countries for which national data are available. The men rates ranged from 18 per cent to 44 per cent, while the women rates ranged from 1 per cent to 19 per cent.

Unlike smoking, obesity is higher among women than men in all countries of the region for which data are available. Disability ranges from 0.4 in Qatar to 4.9 per cent in Sudan. All countries witnessed an increase in their per capita expenditure on health between 2000 and 2010.

Egypt has the largest number (57) of museums among ESCWA member states; however, the State of Palestine has the greatest number of museums per capita, reporting 3.4 museums per million residents. The smallest number was 0.4 museums per million residents, reported by the Sudan. There has been a dramatic increase in internet usage between 2005 and 2012. In 2012, usage rates over 50 per cent were found in 8 of the 17 member states, 4 of which had usage rates of 80 per cent and over. Some countries (Bahrain, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), experienced almost a tenfold increase in internet usage.

ESCWA member countries

Bahrain	Palestine
Egypt	Qatar
Iraq	Saudi Arabia
Jordan	The Sudan
Kuwait	The Syrian Arab Republic
Lebanon	Tunisia
Libya	United Arab Emirates
Morocco	Yemen
Oman	