

Introduction

Compendium of Social Statistics and Indicators, 2010-2011: Arab Society 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 general view of Arab society in the ESCWA region and the changes it has encountered over time. Drawing on data provided mainly from national statistical offices (NSOs), it focuses on issues of population, employment, housing conditions, education, health and culture. However, other issues of social concern such as living standards, social protection and crime and justice are left out owing to a lack of reliable data.

The report reveals that the Arab population in the ESCWA region continues to grow rapidly and diversely. Population growth rates vary widely from less than 1 per cent to over 3 per cent. The overall population is young, but there is considerable heterogeneity in the age-sex profile of countries in the region owing to varying demographic transitions and the proportion of migrant labourers in certain countries. The proportion of children less than 15 years of age ranges from a low of about 14 per cent in Qatar to a high of more than 40 per cent in both Palestine and Iraq. The gender ratios for all Gulf countries are distinct, as for example, there are more than 300 men per 100 women in Qatar.

Recent estimates show a rapid decline in fertility and mortality rates in recent years. Total fertility varies greatly from a below replacement level, around 1.9, in Lebanon to over 5.5 in the Sudan and Yemen. Improvements in the overall health and survival rate of populations are evident, but the data show clear disparities. Life expectancy at birth ranges from 59-63 years in Iraq and Yemen to 75 or more years in many Gulf countries.

The region houses an exceptionally large proportion of immigrants, with the number of migrants doubling in the last two decades. Data for 2010 revealed that around one in four persons in 7 out of 11 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 the Syrian Arab Republic) each having over 1.5 million refugees.

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

Recent data shows that a person's age at marriage continues to rise and the prospect of marriage can no longer be taken for granted in some countries. The rate of divorce has also increased, with the figure almost doubling in certain countries.

Data revealed that labour force participation is generally low in the ESCWA region, mainly because of the very low rate of participation amongst women, who account for less than half the figure of working-age men. Overall unemployment amongst labour force participants varies widely, ranging from 23 per cent in Palestine to around 2 per cent in Qatar. All countries reported higher unemployment amongst youth than amongst the working age population. The size of public sector employment is notably large in some countries (the Gulf), exceeding 80 per cent of total employment.

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

Overall adult literacy rates are increasing, but current rates vary considerably from around 95 per cent in Qatar and Palestine to less than 40 per cent in Yemen. The difference between adult literacy rates for men and women ranged from 2.2 per cent in Qatar to 14.7 per cent in Yemen. Enrolment into primary schools has increased in

all countries and the sex gap has also narrowed in the majority of countries. In approximately half of the countries that provided data, women have higher enrolment ratios in secondary schools than men. However, wide variations are observed in pupil-teacher ratios, which ranged from 9.3 pupils per teacher in Qatar to 32.1 in the Sudan.

Available data shows a decrease in the rate of maternal mortality in the majority of countries in recent years. The most recent estimates from WHO range from 750 in the Sudan to less than 10 in Qatar and Kuwait. In certain countries, almost all births were attended by skilled health personnel. Prenatal care is generally low, but very common in some countries. In Bahrain, for example, the prenatal care rate is 100 per cent. There has been an increase in the prevalence of contraceptives in most countries, with rates approaching 60 per cent in some countries. Five countries reported a decrease in DPT and measles immunization rates in recent years. In all countries where national data are available, a considerably higher percentage of men smoke compared to women. Rates among men ranged from 18 per cent to 44 per cent, while the rate for women ranged from 1 per cent to 7 per cent. All ESCWA member countries witnessed an increase

in their per capita expenditures on health between 1999 and 2009.

Egypt had the greatest number (54) of museums among ESCWA member countries; Bahrain, with two, had the fewest. Qatar had the greatest number of museums per capita, reporting 2.3 museums per million residents. The smallest figure was reported by the Sudan, with 0.4 museums per million residents.

There has been a dramatic increase in Internet usage in recent years. In 2010, 10 out of 14 member countries recorded usage rates of over 33 per cent, 4 of which had usage rates of over 50 per cent. Some countries (Oman, the Sudan and Yemen), experienced almost a tenfold increase in Internet usage between 2005 and 2010.

ESCWA member countries

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