

Population Ageing in the Middle East and North Africa: Policy and Practice Implications

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The Region

- Similar but crucially different
- Common 'code of norms'; importance of families; 'respecting' the elderly
- Different countries at different stages of demographic transitions – in terms of fertility and mortality rates
- Diverse population size, poverty levels, literacy and employment rates



A sea of change

- A success story
 - Declining mortality rates
 - Declining fertility rates
 - Improved life expectancy
- Historical high fertility rates
- Socio-economic changes
- Migration and mobility
- Variable stages of the demographic transition
- Variable pace of population ageing

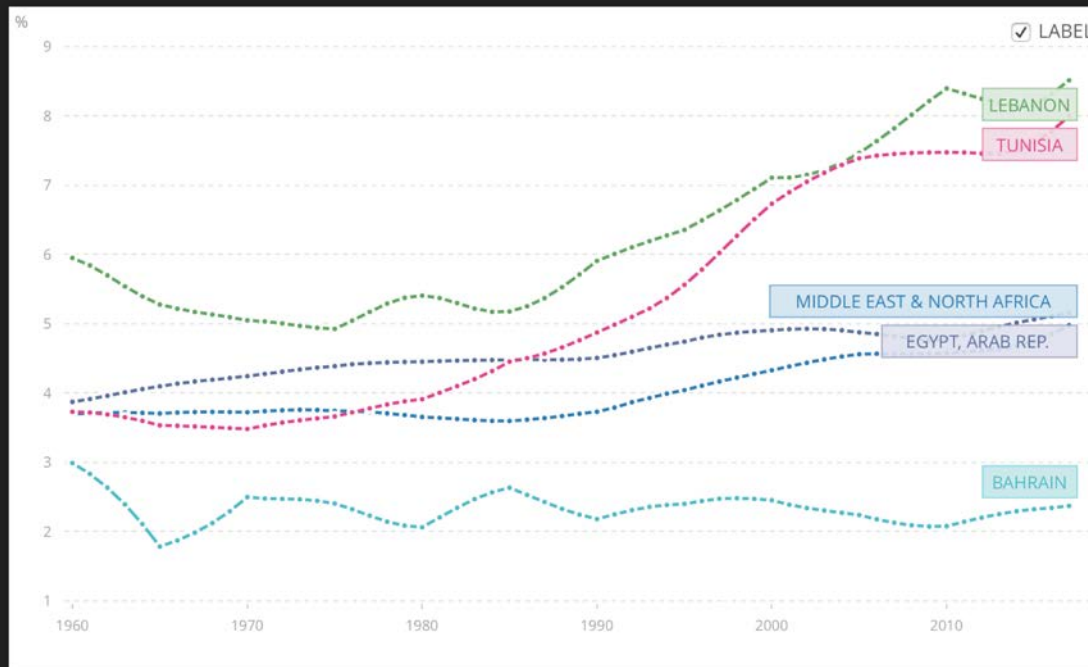
Total Fertility Rate 1960-2016



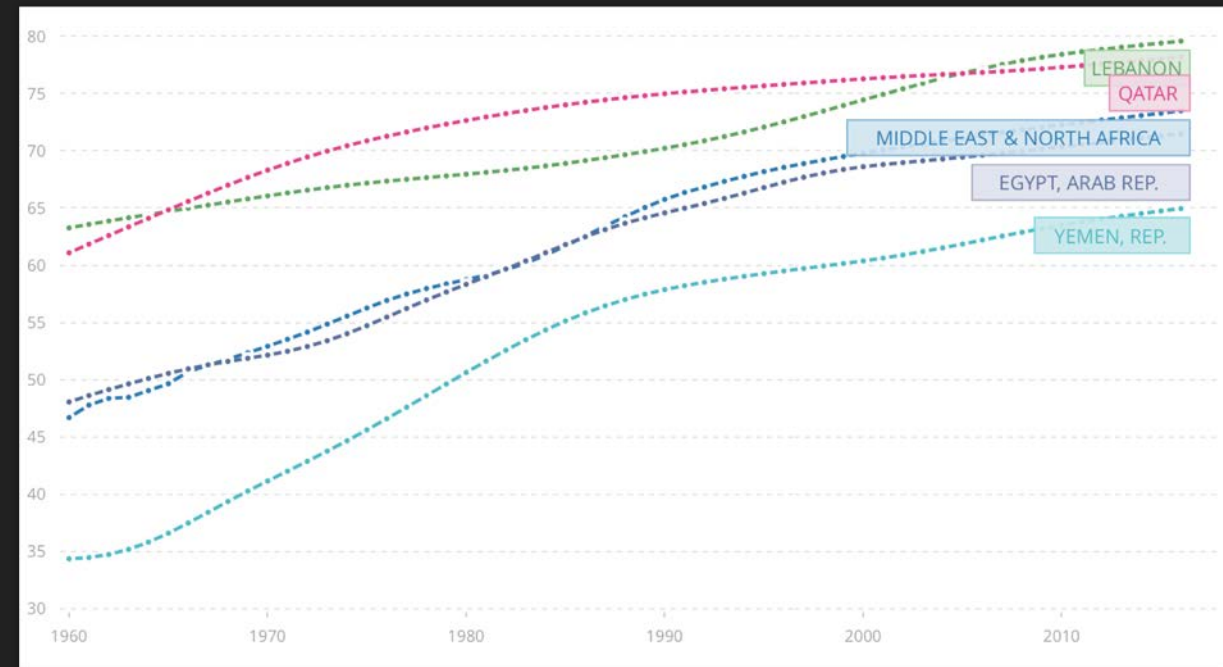
Source: World Bank

Demographic shifts

Population ages 65 and above (% of total)



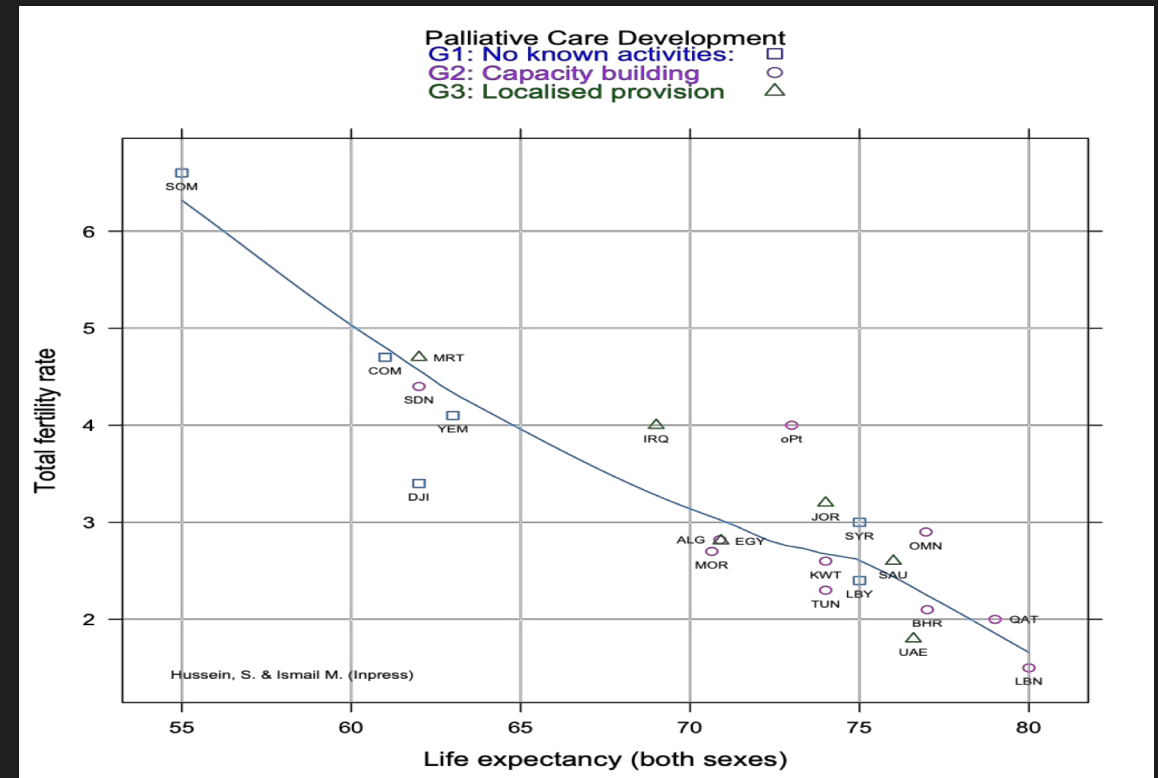
Life expectancy at birth, total (years)



Source: World Bank

The pace of change is not the same across the region

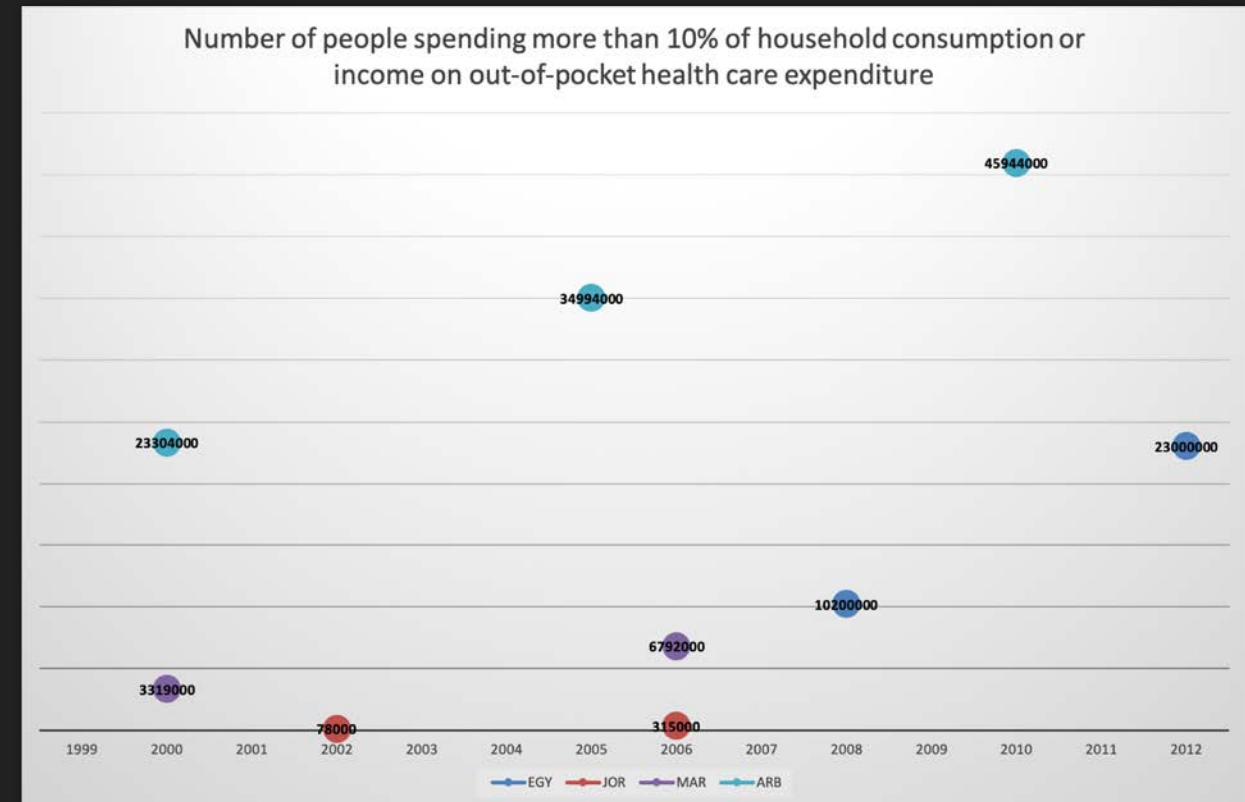
- Somalia and Lebanon at extreme ends:
 - Very high TFR(6.6) and low LE (55 years) compared to 1.8 and 80 years in Lebanon
- A cluster of countries with medium TFR(3.4- 4.7) and relatively low LE (61-63)
- Another group situated at a later stage of demographic transition (TFR: 2-3.5; LE:70+)
- Palliative care as a proxy of LTC preparedness
 - No clear link between demographic transition stage and palliative care development



Source: Hussein and Ismail (2017)

Population ageing is not occurring in isolation

- Population ageing is occurring simultaneously with 'youth bulge'
- Socio-demographic changes
 - Co-residency patterns
 - Urbanisation
 - Displacement
- Epidemiological and health transitions
 - Non-communicable diseases replacing communicable diseases
 - Life style, physical activities, obesity
- Real cost at the individual and HH levels



Source: World Bank

Summary

- The region experiences one of the fastest growing populations
 - more than tripled from 123 million in 1970 to over 400 million in 2017.
- The pace of population ageing is also historically fast
 - On average, countries will experience 'ageing transition' within 13- 40 years compared to 50-150 years in OECD countries' experience
- Current evidence indicates some significant concerns regarding the health, wellbeing and socio-economic status of older people in the region
- Although there are some efforts in developing ageing strategies in a number of countries as well as basic social protection schemes; there is a lack of coherent long term care policies and systems
- Families and informal carers are carrying the burden with considerable economics, social and health cost

Major implications

Individuals and families

- People are spending more years post-retirement or at 'old age' than ever
- Many years are spent in ill-health with multiple co-morbidities
- Intersectionality of gender and age
- Dignity and wellbeing of older people
- Families are the primary care givers
 - Usually women with multiple responsibilities
 - Financial, emotional and physical burden

Systems and society

- Preparedness, awareness and formal support availability
- Communities and the role of charitable and NGOs
- How fare the environment is enabling (or disabling) for older people and their families
- Financial burden (on the state)
- How well the system is prepared
 - Potential exploitation (e.g. unregulated care market including private health and care services)

Developing an ageing policy agenda

- Some recent policy attention
- Scarcity of disaggregated data to investigate the physical, emotional and social wellbeing of older people
- Competing policy priorities
 - Ageing as almost on the 'blind spot'
- A window of opportunity (demographic dividends)
- The potential of social capital approaches, only as an integrated part of a wider system
- Economies and cost



Addressing the needs of older people: now and in the future

- Clear links to almost all the UN 2030 SDGs (all need to be achieved simultaneously)
- Adopting a life course approach
 - developing social protection policies and schemes for all age groups
 - Improving health for all; reducing inequalities across the life span
- But... there is a clear need to 'prioritize' both the research and policy agenda
- The need to combine goals: e.g. economic and social growth while reducing inequalities
- Human rights and person-centeredness as core components
- Clear short, medium and long term plans

Setting up research priorities

- Older people's wellbeing
 - Physical, emotional, mental and social
- Gender, ethnic, religious and socio-economic inequalities at old age
- Availability, access and quality of long term care support for older people and their informal carers
- The impact of mobility, migration and co-residency patterns on older people and long term care
- Developing policy and social systems: who is responsible for what and how everything work together to create a 'system'
- Perspectives and expectations of 'old age'; by individuals, families, communities and society

Success factors

- Paradigm shift
 - Acknowledge and value older people's input- at different levels including informal employment within and outside the family
- Creating and harnessing opportunities
 - Youth bulge; Inclusivity: empowerment and participation; social capital and cultural norms
- Working together
 - Multi-sectorial; within communities and across regions
- Investing in data and in-depth analyses
- Encouraging multi-disciplinary and Joint efforts: e.g. developing LTC workforce from ageing and women's entry to education and labour market simultaneously

Discussion points

- What are the key research priority areas?
- What are the 'low hanging fruits'?
- Innovative schemes and practice
- National and local variations
- Identify 'low hanging fruits'
- System changes:
 - Where to start?
 - Linking ageing to other research priority areas

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Acknowledgment and Disclaimer

- This workshop is partially funded by the University of Kent to support partnership building for future GCRF funding applications
- The partners for the original application were University of Kent, the American University in Lebanon, the American University in Cairo, the African Population and Health Research Centre and London School of Economics and Political Science
- We are grateful to the Social Research Center at the AUC for hosting the workshop and providing practical support including lunch!
- The views presented here are those of the author alone

Thanks for listening

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