

Executive Summary - The Middle East

The Middle East and North Africa



Source: The U.S. Department of State (modified by PRC)

- The Middle East and North Africa, defined in this report to include Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Yemen, is an area of 18 nations covering approximately 4.3 million square miles. It was home to 326 million people in 2002. In contrast, the United States has 3.7 million square miles with 287 million people. The region includes geographical giants such as Algeria, with almost one-fourth the land area of the United States, and Bahrain, which is smaller than the five boroughs of New York City. Populations also vary greatly from Qatar, with less than one million people, to Egypt, with 71 million individuals.
- The nations of the Middle East exhibit a variety of sociopolitical environments, yet share four underlying characteristics. First, minerals and fossil fuels dominate the area's economy, constituting 88 percent of the region's Gross National Product, since about two-thirds of the world's oil is located in the Middle East. Next, the region's population is overwhelmingly Muslim; only Israel has a minority Muslim population (15 percent). Third, the area is largely arid and semi-arid, with little surface water and strained ground water sources. Finally, high birth rates combined with low death rates have resulted in rapid population growth and very young populations. Since the 1970s, international demand for oil has provided high incomes for several Gulf States, improving the overall standard of living for some individuals, yet exaggerating income inequalities. Fertility rates have also remained relatively high, placing stress on natural resources and the oil-dependent economy.
- Contrary to popular assumptions, many Middle Eastern countries have fairly heterogeneous ethnic compositions. There are significant Kurdish populations in Iraq (15-20%), Syria (9%) and Iran (7%), and substantial Berber populations in northwestern Africa (16% in Algeria). Several Gulf States host large numbers of guest workers from South Asia. Israel and Iran are the only nations without ethnic Arab majorities. Arabs make up almost one-fifth of

Israel's population (see insert). Persians constitute 51 percent of the population in Iran; Azerbaijanis follow at 24 percent.

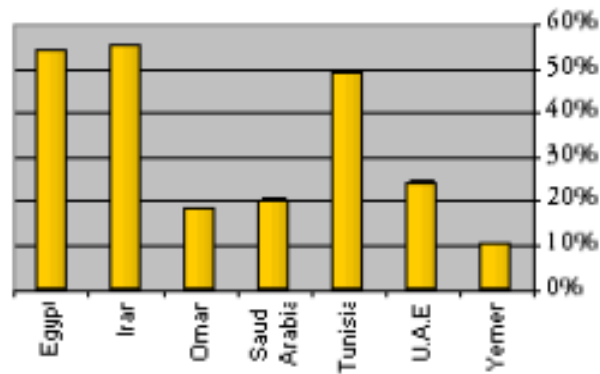
- Most Middle Eastern countries practice Islam and speak Arabic; exceptions are Israel, which speaks primarily Hebrew, and Iran, which speaks primarily Persian. Yet the various ethnic minorities in these countries often speak several different languages. Moreover, English and French are common trade languages.

Population Overview

- Although projections depict slowing population growth, the region's population is expected to more than double by 2050 to reach 649 million individuals. Saudi Arabia and Yemen are expected to grow almost fourfold by 2050, from 24 million to 91 million, and from 19 million to 71 million, respectively. Egypt and Iran are predicted to have populations of over 100 million in 2050.
- Low mortality rates, along with high fertility rates and worker migration, have contributed to these population growth rates that are among the highest in the world. Since 1960, the region's population has more than tripled, from 106 million to 326 million people. The largest population gain for the region was in Iran, which added almost 50 million people.
- Population patterns in the Middle East and North Africa vary extensively from country to country. Although only 57 percent of the region's population lived in cities in 2001, over four-fifths of the population was urban in Saudi Arabia, Libya, and many of the smaller coastal states, including Bahrain, Gaza, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, and the UAE. Furthermore, many other nations had highly concentrated populations. For example, while only 43 percent of Egypt's people lived in urban areas in 1996, over 98 percent of its population lived on just 15 percent of the land—a population density comparable to that of New Jersey. Additionally, the region has experienced rapid urbanization. Only 25 percent of the population was urban in 1960, compared with 57 percent in 2001. This rate is expected to climb to 70 percent by 2015, with about one-quarter of the population living in cities of one million or more.
- Despite that most countries in the Middle East have recently experienced declines in the rural population, the proportions of the population in rural areas are expected to increase substantially over the next ten years in six states: Yemen (39%), the Gaza Strip (31%), Syria (14%), Jordan (12%), Iraq (11%), and Egypt (10%).

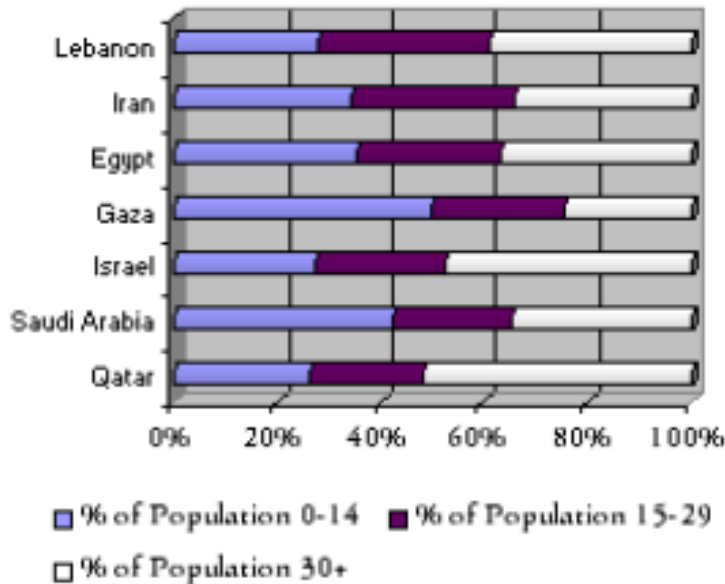
Fertility and Reproductive Health

Percent of Married Women Using
Modern Contraceptives, 2001



- The primary factor driving population growth in the Middle East is extremely high fertility rates. In 2002, the highest total fertility rates were in Yemen, Palestine and Saudi Arabia, at 7.2, 5.9 and 5.7 births per woman, respectively. Tunisia (2.1), Lebanon (2.4) and Iran (2.5) had the lowest rates in the region.
- Eight governments in the area, including Yemen and Oman, view the current birth rate as too high, while nine states, including Saudi Arabia, are satisfied with the present level of growth. Only Israel, anticipating a decline in births to Jewish mothers, deems its total fertility rate (2.9 in 2002) too low.
- Most nations in the Middle East and North Africa culturally adhere to Islamic codes, which stress familial obligations for women. As a result, women are encouraged to marry young and to have children, although in many nations such emphases are waning. For example, the median age of marriage for women has increased in every Arab country since the 1970s. Bahrain had one of the largest increases; the average age at first marriage was 14.8 years from 1967-1975, but was 22.5 by 1987-1995. In nations such as Oman and Yemen, change is occurring much more slowly, with median ages at first marriage of 15.7 and 16.2 years, respectively, from 1987-1995, which is up from 14.7 and 15.7, respectively, from 1967-1975.
- Abortion is available in most Middle Eastern countries; however it is largely restricted to cases in which the life of the mother is threatened. Only Tunisia has no restriction with regard to reason for the abortion, yet consent laws and gestational or viability limits may apply.

Age Distribution (2000)



Age Structure

- A large proportion of the region's population is under 15 years of age. In 2002, 48 percent of Yemen's population was under 15, and 46 percent of Palestinians were also in that age group. The smallest proportions were in Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, where 26 percent of the population was younger than 15 years.

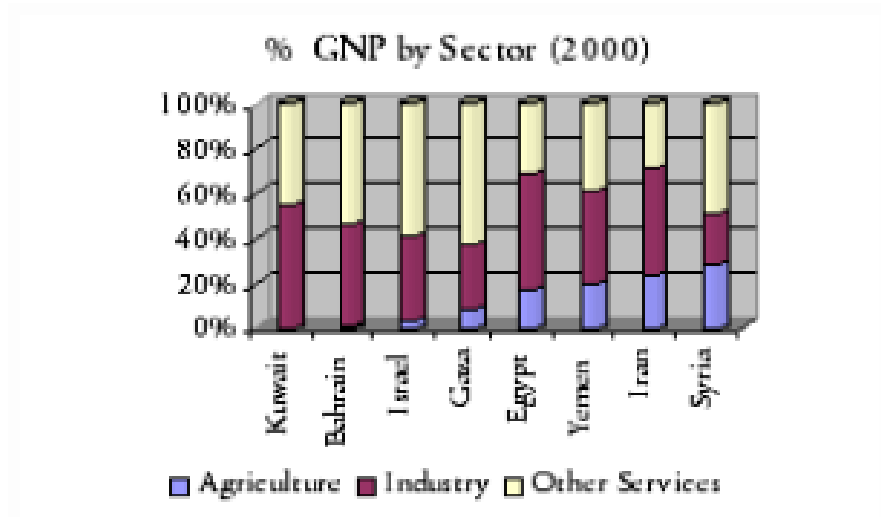
Health and Education

- Oil revenues since the 1970s have aided several nations in making relatively modern healthcare available. In 2002, 13 of the 18 nations in the region had life expectancies of 70 or higher; the average Israeli lived 78 years. Yet Iraq and Yemen had life expectancies of 58 and 59, respectively.
- Infant mortality rates vary extensively throughout the region, from 5.3 deaths per 1,000 births in Israel in 2002 to 103 per 1,000 in Iraq. In comparison, the world average in 2002 was 54 deaths per 1,000 births. High infant mortality is typically a consequence of poor health care, a lack of clean water, malnutrition, infection, and other factors stemming from poverty. The age at which women have children and the spacing between births also affect infant mortality rates.
- AIDS is not considered a major threat in the Middle East, where estimates of HIV-infected individuals generally fall below one-half of a percent.
- Literacy rates differ greatly, from 44 percent in Morocco to 96 percent in Israel. The disparity between male and female literacy is also striking. The largest difference was in Syria, where 86 percent of men were literate in 2001, while only 56 percent of women could read and write. In contrast, the gender gap in the UAE and Qatar was around one percent.
- Similar gender disparities exist in secondary school enrollment. In 2000, 53 percent of Yemeni males attended secondary school, but only 17 percent of

Yemeni women did. In comparison, over 95 percent of women in Libya and Bahrain attended secondary schools.

Labor and Income

- Income in the Middle Eastern countries varies widely, partly due to differences in oil resources. In 2001, per capita incomes ranged from the service-oriented Israel at \$20,000, to Yemen, with about \$800 per capita. Oil rich nations such as Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE had per capita incomes of \$13,000, \$21,000 and \$21,000, respectively.



- Labor force participation is much lower for women than for men. In 2000, the highest participation rates among women were in Israel (46%) and Morocco (40%), while rates in Oman (16%) and Iraq (17%) were the lowest. Migrant labor has put the labor participation rates of men well above 80 percent in some countries, like Qatar (91%) and the UAE (89%).
- The expansion of the oil industry in the 1960s and 1970s sharply increased the demand for labor, prompting several Gulf States to import migrant laborers from other Arab states and South Asia. In 2000, only 24 percent of the UAE's population was Arab, while 50 percent of the population was South Asian. Saudi Arabia, with a larger population of 22.8 million, was 20 percent South Asian.

Water

- Although the Middle East contains about five percent of the world's population, it contains only one percent of the world's renewable water resources. The per capita regional renewable water resources are less than 1,400 cubic meters, compared with 7,000-8,000 cubic meters per capita worldwide. Water availability in the region ranges from near zero cubic meters of internal renewable water per capita in Kuwait to 4,000 cubic meters per capita in Iraq.

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