



## Middle East Youth Bulge

### Demographic Overview

- The population of the Middle East was 273.3 million in July 2006. The total population is projected to reach 346.9 million by 2025.
- 34.1 percent of the population was under the age of 15, which is projected to drop to 29.5 percent by 2015.
- In 2000-2005, the total fertility rate was 3.0, down from a high of 6.7 from 1970-1975.
- Infant mortality is also declining; dropping from 54 per 1,000 births in 1990 to 47 per 1,000 births in 2004.
- 85.5 percent of the Middle Eastern population above the age of 15 is literate. Illiteracy is most prevalent among women (29.4 percent).
- However, education and literacy programs in the Middle East are steadily improving; resulting in a literacy rate among the population aged 15-24 of 90.9 percent.
- Female workforce participation differs by country. The share of women in the adult labor force, as measured by the UN, varies from highs of 47 percent in Israel and 23 percent in Kuwait to a low of 12 percent in both the United Arab Emirates and Iran (percentages for Lebanon and Jordan were unavailable).

### Economic and Humanitarian Consequences

*“Perhaps the greatest single issue facing the economies of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is the challenge of equipping its people with good jobs.”*

(Jennifer Keller and Mustafa Nabli, World Bank)

Region	Population Under 18	Population Growth Rate (%)	GDP Growth Rate per Capita (%)	GDP Growth Rate per Capita (\$)
Middle East/North Africa	152.7	2.2	1.9	\$1,359
South Asia	580.6	2.0	3.6	\$461
East Asia	597.9	1.2	6.3	\$1,232
Industrialized Countries	205.9	0.6	1.8	\$26,214
Least Developed Countries	347.8	2.6	1.6	\$277

Source: UNICEF; IMF/World Bank; JAM Research

*“Historically, there's reason for some concern on the part of those who hold power. France experienced a "youth bulge" in the 1780's, which increased demand for scarce food supplies; that, in turn, drove up prices, hurt the business classes and helped to create conditions for its revolution in 1789. Iran was in the midst of a youth bulge before its 1979 revolution, when young people took to the streets, helping to bring down the monarchy in favor of a virulently anti-American theocracy.”* (The Economist, 2003)

- The region’s workforce is expanding at a rate above 3 percent a year, which means, to counter workforce expansion and current unemployment, the region will require the creation of 100 million jobs in the next twenty years.
- The Middle East needs 6 to 7 percent sustained economic growth in order to keep up with its growing population. If oil is removed from the equation, the current economic growth rate is reduced to 3.6 percent.
- Unemployment in the region was estimated at 13.2 percent in 2005 (ILO), giving it the highest unemployment rate in the World.
- Unemployment in the region’s hot spots is markedly worse. In Palestine, the UN estimated unemployment to be 40 percent in 2005 and as much as 50 percent in Iraq. Among Iraq’s Sunni population, unemployment was estimated at 80 percent in 2005.
- According to the IMF’s most recent estimates, Lebanese unemployment among the 20 to 25 age group was 30 percent in 2004. This is made worse by the fact that 25.4 percent of emigrants are college graduates.
- The UN Statistical division estimates that Lebanese Labor Force migration was 15 percent in 2000. The majority of which migrated to the United States, though the data does not reflect the large number of college graduates that seek employment in the Gulf region. Of the immigrants to OECD countries, more than 50 percent of migrates from Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan were college graduates.
- Even in Saudi Arabia, when factoring in fluctuations in the price of oil, population growth is the determining factor the in drop in per capita income from \$23,294 in 1980 to \$13,226 in 2003.

World:	6.3%
East Asia:	3.8%
Rich countries:	6.7%
<i>United States:</i>	5.1%
<i>European Union:</i>	8.7%
<i>Japan:</i>	4.5%
<i>Australia:</i>	4.8%
Latin America:	7.7%
Africa:	9.7%
Middle East:	13.2%

**Treatment**

- The majority of United States sponsored micro economic development programs in the Middle East are connected to the empowerment of women. Such programs include the Jordan River Society, “women-based cottage industries” in Lebanon, and the Gaza Women’s Loan Fund, among others.
- The USAID also provides training for Lebanese farmers in organic farming techniques and marketing and branding. In Iraq, the agency’s reconstruction projects provide tens of thousands of jobs and have restored 1,500 MW of generation capacity to the national electric grid. In the West Bank and Gaza,
- The United Nations Relief and Works Agency sponsors a number of programs including the Small-Scale Enterprise Product, the Solidarity Group Lending Product, the Micro Enterprise Credit Product, and the Consumer Lending Product.
- Though the Jordanian projects have been widely successful, the projects in Palestine have fallen short of expectations. Their failure is largely due to interruptions in aide funding.
- In Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine instability and factional fighting have contributed to prolonged economic crises. However, small enterprise funding projects are successful across the board despite roadblocks to their expansion.

*“A typical civil war leaves a country 15% poorer than it would otherwise have been, and with perhaps 30% more people living in absolute poverty. The damage persists long afterwards. Skills and capital continue to flee, because people do not trust the peace: half of newly peaceful countries revert to war within a decade.”*  
*(The Economist, May 22, 2003)*