

# Demography of Palestine

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## 5.1 Introduction

The Palestinian territories are part of the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) according to the WHO classification of world regions, previously called the Middle East Crescent. Politically, it is part of the Arab League which extends some 5,000 miles from the Atlantic coast of northern Africa in the west, to the Arabian and the Gulf of Oman in the east. MENA covers an area of 5.25 million square miles and straddles two continents with 72% of its territory in Africa and 28% in Asia. By comparison, the US comprises 3.6 million square miles.<sup>(1), (2)</sup>

## 5.2 Countries in the Arab League

The population of the Arab League countries was approximately 280 million in 2000, nearly tripling in 50 years and is expected to approximate that of Europe by million in 2020 reaching 500 millions.<sup>(3) (4)</sup>

Human settlement is concentrated in areas with adequate water supplies; making an overwhelming majority of the population live in relatively high concentrations along coastal areas and major river valleys. The most striking example of this phenomenon is in Egypt where

more than 90% of the population lives on less than 5% of the land. Resources are limited as only relatively few Arab countries possess petroleum and natural gas resources. The region's annual population growth rate is 2.7%, compared to 1.5% for the less-developed world as a whole.

According to the 2002 Arab Human Development Report, the average economic growth rate in the region is lower than the population growth rate, and is the lowest in the world after sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, the population of the Arab world is young; with almost 39% below the age of 15 and a median age under 20 years. (Table 5.1) Moreover, there has been a sizeable increase in the number of women of reproductive age (during the 1990s, the number grew from 50 to 69 million; a 38% increase).<sup>(5)</sup>

## 5.3 Demographic Trends in MENA

There are four demographic patterns seen in the Middle East and North Africa region, previously called by WHO as the Middle East crescent,<sup>(5)</sup> These are:

1. High fertility, declining mortality in intermediate to low socio-economic settings.

- This includes: Jordan, Oman, Syria, Yemen, West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. (Table 5.1)
2. Declining fertility and mortality rates in an intermediate level of socio-economic development. This includes; Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey and Iran.
  3. High fertility amid rapidly declining mortality in a high socio-economic setting. These include: the Gulf States, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.
  4. Low fertility and mortality in an above average socio-economic setting i.e. Israel.

Yemen	47 %
Gaza	50 %
West Bank	45 %
Syria	42 %
Oman	46 %
Iraq	43 %

Population doubling times in this region are one of the highest in the world. (Table 5.2) This has led to the high percentage of <15 population. (Table 5.2)

Gaza Strip	16
Oman	18
West bank	21
Saudi Arabia	23
Yemen	24
Egypt	35
Morroco	41
UK	423
Spain	1,980

Life Expectancy, however, remains below average although this has improved significantly in the past 40 years. (Table 5.3)

There have been improvements in trends in infants and under-5 mortality rates (U5MR) in

the past 40 years. (Tables 5.4, 5.5) The exception to that is Iraq, where the under 5 mortality doubled from 1994 to 2002 as a result of the sanctions.<sup>(5), (6)</sup>

**Table 5.3 Life Expectancy in 1960 and 2002**

	1960	2002
Yemen	37	59
Iraq	50	58
Iran	51	61
Jordan	48	70
Morocco	48	69
Oman	41	73
Egypt	47	66
Afghanistan	33	45

**Table 5.4 Infant Mortality Rate (Death by 1000 Live Births)**

	1960	1994	2002
Yemen	230	78	75
Morocco	133	56	50
Iran	145	40	32
Egypt	169	51	44
Oman	180	22	17
UAE	160	21	19
Israel	32	7	5.3
Iraq	117	57	103

Maternity Mortality Rate figures for maternal mortality rates (MRR) also varies and, like other figures, matches the economical growth and health care within the individual country Figures for maternal mortality rates (MRR) in the region are shown in Table 5.6.

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## 5.4 Migration in the Arab Region

There are 4 Key Migration Streams:

1. Emigration from the Mediterranean to Western Europe,

2. Labour migration to oil-producing states,
3. Labour migration to non-oil producing states,
4. East and South Asian labour migration to oil producing states.

Migrant labour is often characterised by extraordinary deprivation of basic rights. By 1957, 3.7 million Palestinians were registered as refugees working in other countries as migrants.

**Table 5.5 Under-Five Mortality Rate (Per 1,000 Live Births)**

HDI Rank		1970	2002
High human development			
40	Bahrain	75	16
44	Kuwait	59	10
47	Qatar	65	16
49	United Arab Emirates	83	9
Medium human development			
58	Libya	160	19
74	Oman	200	13
77	Saudi Arabia	185	28
80	Lebanon	54	32
90	Jordan	107	33
92	Tunisia	201	26
101	Iran	191	42
102	OPT	n/a	25
106	Syria	129	28
107	Uzbekistan	-	68
108	Algeria	234	49
110	Kyrgyzstan	146	61
116	Tajikistan	111	72
120	Egypt	235	41
125	Morocco	184	43
139	Sudan	172	94
Low human development			
142	Pakistan	181	107
149	Yemen	303	107
154	Djibouti	241	143

OPT: The Occupied Palestinian Territories

**Table 5.6 Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) in some Middle Eastern countries in descending order per 100,000. <sup>(8)</sup>**

Country	MMR
Yemen	1600
Morocco	610
Iraq	310
Lebanon	300
Libya	220
Syria	180
Oman	190
Egypt	170
Saudi Arabia	130
UAE	26

## 5.5 Demographic Aspects of the West Bank and Gaza Strip

After the 1967 war, the Israeli labour market opened up to workers from Gaza and West Bank but conditions were poor and exploitation rife. Palestinians found jobs in construction agriculture, hotels, restaurants and domestic services. By 1984, 87,000 Palestinians were employed in Israel – about 36% of the total workforce of the Occupied Territories. Following 1991 (i.e. since the ‘Intifadah’) a sharp decline in employment of Palestinians took place. Workers from Romania and Thailand were recruited to replace Palestinian workers from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. <sup>(5)</sup>

Nowadays girls and young women increasingly risk illiteracy and school dropout because of conflict. This has created a tendency for girls to marry at a younger age for security. There is a societal preference for larger families and to begin childbearing early, status often being defined by the number of children combined with a high proportion of cousin marriage. <sup>(5)</sup>

## 5.6 Population Estimates in the West Bank and Gaza Strip 1985-1987

Reliable statistics on the Palestinian population have never been easy to assemble, largely because Jewish immigration to Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 interrupted the intended evolution of Mandatory Palestine towards full independence.<sup>(7)</sup> Several Websites have been developed since the formation of the Palestinian Authority but the data includes only information and figures from recent years.<sup>(8)(9)(10)(11)</sup> (Appendix 1)

## 5.7 Population Figures

Some wide fluctuation was found over the fifteen-year range.<sup>(11)</sup> The most significant feature of the distribution is the increased fertility or survival rate affecting the 2 to 6 years age cohort.

Population figures show that M/F ratio in the <20 was 1.1:1 in both the WB and GS. From the age of 20 to 24 years, this starts changing to 1.07:1 /1.08:1, and is reversed from 25 years of age and above, averaging in the 16+ at 0.88:1, 0.94:1 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip respectively and 0.76:1 for both regions combined.

## 5.8 Age and Sex Distribution

At the beginning of the study, age and gender figures were derived from a 'Study of the prevalence of handicapping conditions affecting children and a case finding intervention in the refugee camps population in the Gaza Strip'<sup>(11)</sup> by Saunders in 1987.

Refer to Appendix-1 for the relevant population figures.

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