

POPULATION AND EDUCATION PROSPECTS IN THE ARAB WORLD: THE NEED FOR MULTI-EDUCATIONAL STATE POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Anne GOUJON,
International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), Laxenburg, Austria.

The Arab region has been going through a rapid demographic transition from sustained high fertility rates to much lower levels since the beginning of the 1990s. This phenomenon is accompanied by many changes locally, among which is an increase in the levels of school enrollment, especially of female children who used to lag behind males in this regard. These changes will lead to further decrease of the rates of population growth in the Arab world. In general, the fertility of women has been shown to be highly influenced by their individual levels of education and this is also the case in Arab countries. No other socio economic variable shows a similar degree of association with fertility – and also mortality – than education. This is the main reason for inclusion of education as a parameter together with age and sex into the projection work. Multi-educational state population projections provide an excellent tool to show the long-term benefits of investments in education. In this paper, we show the potential impact of education on population growth and composition in Arab countries through the educational population projections of two countries: Egypt and Lebanon. The projections substantively indicate that one cannot expect an immediate pay-off on investments in education. The models clearly demonstrate, however, that investments will significantly impact the educational attainment and fertility of the adult population in the future. The multi-state scenarios implementing increases in the levels of educational enrollment show that these efforts will not have fully reached the entire population over 15 years of age by 2050. In addition to the social and economic benefits of better education, this is very likely to have a sizable impact on fertility trends in the future, possibly even causing non-linearities in the decline when highly educated cohorts enter the prime childbearing ages. Education policies and future levels of enrolment will be decisive in shaping future population composition and growth. This is especially true in the Middle East and North African region where the educational fertility differentials are very strong and substantial changes are presently occurring or can be expected to occur in the educational composition. Increased efforts towards achieving higher levels of school enrolment in the Arab region may induce fertility rates to decline faster than expected. Moreover the analysis of the output of multi-educational state population projections could provide insights into the combined effects of population and education momentum implications in terms of population growth, aging, and levels of educational attainment of the population in the future in the case of several realistic scenarios.