

HelpAge

International

Country Profiles on the Rights and Wellbeing of Older Persons A How-to-Guide from the Arab Region



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Introduction

Over the last three years in the Middle East, HelpAge has worked in partnership with UNFPA to produce a total of eighteen country profiles, to present facts and figures relating to the rights of older people in useable ways. Designed in an accessible pictorial format they have been aimed at policy makers in national governments as well as statisticians in relevant ministries to highlight where policies are absent or deficient in meeting a problem, as well as where national statistical systems need to be more inclusive in collecting information. Rights to income security, enjoyment of autonomy and equality, opportunities for lifelong learning, and freedom from violence, abuse and neglect featured as common omissions.

These profiles do not claim to present a definitive picture of the full range of rights of older people either covered or absent in data from a particular country. They are a work in progress that will require further development to cover other circumstances and situations, such as data gaps and omissions in humanitarian contexts or the absence of facts and figures relating to migrant communities. This how-to-guide has been put together, therefore, not only to share the history, objectives, methodologies, uses and lessons learned from a particular initiative in the Arab States, but to prompt further discussion as to what is needed in the field of data and statistics to support the realisation of the rights of older people in concrete and achievable ways.

I would like to thank Alex Mihnovits and Lina Al Qurah for all the work they have done on the country profiles over these past few years as well as documenting lessons learned for this guide. I would also like to acknowledge our close technical partnership with UNFPA throughout the process of putting these together, as well as their facilitation of country level engagement so that the profiles are also informed by those who can best use them at national level.

Chris McIvor
HelpAge Regional Representative
Eurasia and Middle East
March 2025

General information

Background

In 2020 HelpAge International in partnership with UNFPA ASRO conducted a review of national ageing strategies of six countries - Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.

The review examined the inclusion of the rights of older persons in the strategies as well as their alignment with the human rights principles and standards, and other relevant frameworks such as the Madrid International Plan of Action, Sustainable Development Goals, Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, and the Regional Arab Strategy for Older Persons.

In summary the assessment found provisions that if implemented fully would advance older person's enjoyment of their rights, but significant gaps were also noted, among which lack of data was identified as a barrier to strengthening policy and practice. This finding is not unique to the Arab region as two reports released by the Titchfield City Group on Ageing highlight inadequate data on ageing¹ as a roadblock to the realisation of the Agenda 2030 at the national and international levels.

To raise awareness of these gaps and to encourage actions to realize the rights of older persons, the country profiles were developed. During 2021–2024, HelpAge International in partnership with UNFPA ASRO published ageing country profiles for eighteen Arab countries (see section Links and key reference materials for links to the country profiles).

What is a country profile on the rights and wellbeing of older persons?

The country profile on the rights and wellbeing of older persons is an infographic-style card that covers four areas. First, it provides the latest information on core indicators of the demographic transition and the situation of older persons in relation to income, health, education, autonomy and safety. Second, the response of national systems and national strategies on ageing to the rights of older women and older men in these areas. Third, a brief commentary on presented information, the availability of statistics to support the monitoring of the rights, and key data gaps. Finally, the country profile includes recommendations to improve the availability and quality of data on older persons.

¹ For more information, see [Making older persons visible in the sustainable development goals' monitoring framework and indicators](#) and [Improving the visibility of older persons in global statistics](#)

Why do we need a country profile on the rights and wellbeing of older persons?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development pledges to eliminate poverty in all its dimensions and improve health outcomes for all, while protecting the environment. These pledges are made to every individual, regardless of their age, gender, disability, or socio-economic background. Similar pledges are made by the Regional Arab Strategy for older persons and other international social development frameworks.

However, present-day data systems and tools struggle to produce good quality, timely and disaggregated statistics on older persons, especially in humanitarian and migratory settings, to support the development of evidence-based responses as well as the monitoring of these frameworks. Key problems include:

- Data gaps in certain areas affecting the lives of older persons such as violence, abuse and neglect, mental health and depression, autonomy of choice, and issues around income security and economic status.
- Lack of quality granular data, such as the experiences of older women with disabilities, reinforces the perception that older persons are respected and not discriminated against.
- Where good quality disaggregated data on older persons exists, it is not used to inform policy, strategies and plans relevant to older persons, highlighting deeper issues of capacity, policy priorities and ageism within data systems.
- Data is often captured in a language that is technical and inaccessible, limiting its ability to influence and inform public opinion.



RSS1 Ali A Abu Shanab HelpAge International Palestine (1)

What are the objectives of the country profiles on the rights and wellbeing of older persons?

The profile aims to:

- Highlight key information on the situation of older persons and the realisation of their rights in the selected country.
- Raise the visibility of older persons in official statistics, exposing critical data gaps and limitations, and motivate countries to improve statistics on ageing;
- Foster demand for accessible and informative data on ageing among policy makers and other stakeholders to support evidence-based decisions and policies.



Ralph Dargham IDRAAC HelpAge International Lebanon

What information is covered by the country profiles?

The indicators presented in the profile cover two areas - the general demographic context and specific rights.

Table 1 lists key indicators included under each area.

Table 1
General context

Indicator	Description	Data sources
1.1	Number and proportion of older and younger persons 2020 – 2050	World Population Prospects by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division
1.2	Proportion of older persons with disabilities	National sources
1.3	Existence of national strategy on ageing	National sources
1.4	Existence of national legislation and enforcement strategy against age-based discrimination	Maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health and ageing by World Health Organisation

Right to social protection, social security, and work

Indicator	Description	Data sources
2.1	Proportion of older women and men living in poverty	National sources
2.2	Proportion of older persons working	National sources or International Labour Organisation STAT
2.3	Proportion of older persons receiving a pension	National sources or International Labour Organisation STAT

Right to autonomy, equality and non-discrimination

Indicator	Description	Data sources
3.1	Self-rated level of freedom of choice and control over one's life	Arab barometer ² and Afrobarometer ³

Right to freedom from violence, abuse and neglect

Indicator	Description	Data sources
4.1	Proportion of older women and men who have experienced violence, abuse or neglect	National sources

² Arab Barometer is a nonpartisan research network that provides insight into the social, political, and economic attitudes and values of ordinary citizens across the Arab world.

³ Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, the economy, and society.

Right to health

Indicator	Description	Data sources
5.1	Causes of disability in older age by type of disease	Global Burden of Disease Study by Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation
5.2	Top four non-communicable diseases	Global Burden of Disease Study by Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation
5.3	Proportion of older persons with diabetes	National sources or STEPwise approach to NCD risk factor surveillance by World Health Organisation
5.4	Proportion of older persons with hypertension	National sources or STEPwise approach to NCD risk factor surveillance by World Health Organisation
5.5	Proportion of older persons covered by a health insurance	National sources

Right to education and lifelong learning

Indicator	Description	Data sources
6.1	Educational attainment of older persons	National sources

Why do the profile indicators for my country show ‘N.I.’ when I know data exists and why does the profile data differ from data published elsewhere?

The country profiles draw data from openly available online sources (Table 1). When no documented information dated from 2015-2024 is identified for an indicator, the field is marked ‘N.I. – data or information is not available’. This does not mean that data for this indicator does not exist, as it might be available in print and has not been digitized, or it is proprietary information that is not open to the general public.

Data on older persons is collected by different national and international stakeholders using different data tools that often overlap in topics and information they cover, e.g. educational attainment, employment. These different sources may produce varying estimates for the same indicator due to the differences in how a survey question is formulated, the survey sample size and population coverage, whether the information for the indicator was given by an older person or a member of their household, etc. The examination of the variation in estimates from different data sources is out of the scope of the country profiles.

What country profiles are available?

English country profiles are available for the following Arab countries : [Egypt](#), [Iraq](#), [Palestine](#), [Tunisia](#), [Jordan](#), [Morocco](#), [Lebanon](#), [Syria](#), [Algeria](#), [Libya](#), [Yemen](#) and [Djibouti](#) as well as 6 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries: [Bahrain](#), [Qatar](#), [Kuwait](#), [United Arab Emirates \(UAE\)](#), [Saudi Arabia](#) and [Oman](#).

Who are the country profiles for?

The profiles provide information that the following stakeholders will find useful:

- National Statistical Offices
- National governments, including relevant line ministries such as the Ministries of Social Affairs, Health, Labor, Education and Population
- National policy makers involved in the development and review of strategies and plans that either directly or indirectly affect the lives of older persons
- National focal points on Ageing issues across relevant Ministries
- Civil Society Organisation
- UN agencies
- Academia

⁴

Arabic country profiles are available for the following countries: [Jordan](#), [Lebanon](#), [Morocco](#), [Syria](#), [UAE](#), [Libya](#), [Bahrain](#) and [Oman](#)

How can I use the country profiles?

The country profiles provide a framework and evidence to initiate a dialogue with the relevant national government and their partners on the situation of older persons as well as the development, resourcing, implementation, and monitoring of policies and programmes that support the realisation of the rights of older persons in different settings.

As the rights and indicators included in the country profiles are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, and the Regional Arab Strategy for Older Persons, the country profiles can be presented at and inform the national review or monitoring of these development frameworks. Additionally, the country profiles can inform the development of national policies and strategies on ageing.

Specifically, multi-stakeholder dialogues with target audiences identified above provide important opportunities to use the country profiles to:

- Strengthen the relevant stakeholders' thinking on, and commitment to ageing and application of the life-course approach in policies and programs, ensuring that national strategies on ageing and national systems fully address needs and protect the rights of older women and older men;
- Make data systems and statistics more age-inclusive, addressing data gaps on the situation of older persons, granular disaggregation of data around the intersection of age, gender and disability, as well as timeliness and accessibility;
- Acknowledge through evidence that Ageism is prevalent in policies, practices and norms, and commit to challenge and prevent its manifestations along with other forms of discrimination experienced by older persons;
- Strengthen the realisation of older persons' rights to social protection, work, autonomy, equality and non-discrimination, freedom from violence, abuse and neglect, health and education by ensuring older women and older men are included and heard in policy and program formulation and monitoring.



The Media Booth HelpAge International Palestine (1)

Methodology

How were the country profile's rights and indicators selected?

The rights and their aspects were selected based on those proposed by the Chair of the UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing in 2016 as being the areas where further protection of the rights of older persons is needed.⁵

Indicators on the situation of older persons and their rights (Table 1) were selected based on the alignment of priorities across the Regional Arab Strategy for Older Person 2019-2029, the SDGs, the Decade of Healthy Ageing, and the general availability of statistics.

Overall, the six rights, their corresponding aspects and relevant indicators highlighted in the country profiles are not exhaustive. They aim to illustrate diversity of rights and their aspects while ensuring the country profiles are brief and concise. Depending on the national context and policy priorities, countries and their partners may adapt the country profiles' template to include other human rights, aspects and indicators, e.g., SDGs.

What data sources are used in the country profiles and how is data selected?

The profiles draw on a mix of data sources published by national statistical offices, relevant Ministries, UN agencies, and other international data initiatives.

Table 1 lists data sources by indicator. For country specific data sources, their web links and the year of observation, refer to the references section of the country profiles.

To ensure comparability of data across countries, the data for the following indicators is drawn from international data sources:

- Indicator 1.1 – World Population Prospects by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division;
- Indicator 1.4 – Maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health and ageing by World Health Organisation;
- Indicator 3.1 – Arab barometer and Afrobarometer;
- Indicators 5.1 and 5.2 – Global Burden of Disease Study by Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation

⁵ For more information, pls. refer to page 9 of the HelpAge/UNFPA report The rights of older persons: a review of national ageing strategies in the Arab region ([Link](#))

Where multiple data sources are available for an indicator (i.e. indicators 2.2 ,2.3 ,5.3 ,5.4), the data source with the most recent data and higher level of disaggregation is selected. For the rest of the indicators (i.e., 1.2 ,1.3 ,2.1 ,4.1 ,5.5 and 6.1) data is drawn from national sources such as census and survey reports, dashboards, thematic reports published by relevant ministries, country Voluntary National Review, as well as reports published in partnership with UN agencies.

Data for the country profiles is selected based on the following criteria:

- Timeliness – data published during 2015-2024
- Representation – population-based data
- Reliability – data published by official and established sources
- Relevance – data on population aged 60 and over

How is the country profile data analysed?

Where age and sex-disaggregated statistics on the situation of women and men aged 60 and over are available, they are collated and presented for each of the rights' indicators. Where age and sex-disaggregated data is not published but microdata is available, authors produce tabulated results. Any indicators calculated by the authors are noted in the reference section of the country profile.

To assess government's commitment to the realisation of the rights of older persons, a national strategy on ageing strategy/policy/law or a relevant national social development framework⁶ are reviewed with respect to the six rights and their selected aspects.⁷

⁶ For example: Oman Vision 2040, Kuwait Vision 2035, Qatari's National Vision 2030 and the National Health Strategy 2018 – 2022 and Iraq's Vision for Sustainable Development 2030,

⁷ For more information on the rights' aspects please, refer to pages 44-55 of the HelpAge/UNFPA report 'The rights of older persons: a review of national ageing strategies in the Arab region' ([Link](#))

Presentations of the results

How is data presented in the country profiles?

Older age is often perceived to be a time of frailty, dependence and decline. The country profiles aim to challenge this stereotype by highlighting diversity of experience, as well as age, gender, income and disability-based inequality within this population group. To achieve this some of the data is presented in the form of charts, graphs and infographics.

Additionally, to ensure the accessibility and readability of the content, the country profiles adopt a balanced visual design using colors and icons that refer to the different themes and elements of the profile. Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop were used to refine colors and backgrounds to achieve a better visual balance between data and text.

To foster greater use of the country profiles and comparability across countries all profiles have a standardized design and are generally limited to 9-10 pages.

Quality review

How do you ensure accuracy and quality of information of the country profiles?

Original sources of data and information presented in the profiles are referenced and included in the country profiles.

Before publication, all country profiles are shared for feedback with HelpAge Eurasia & Middle East Office and relevant HelpAge Network members in the respective countries, UNFPA regional and country offices, and in some cases with ESCWA and respective governments. The review process is used to identify relevant information to close data gaps or more recent data, check the clarity and quality of content, review data sources and references, and validate the country profiles by those in charge of ageing issues in their respective governments.

Limitations and other considerations

What are the limitations of the country profiles on the rights and wellbeing of older persons?

The resource and time constraints, as well as general issues around data availability, timeliness and access impacted the scope and details of the exercise. Specifically,

- The profiles do not provide a comprehensive and in-depth overview, analysis, or discussion of ageing-related issues. The profiles capture key dimensions as identified by international development and human-rights frameworks, highlighting a limited number of indicators across these domains with a top-line commentary on results;
- The profiles draw on the latest publicly available data collected during 2015-2024, and data across countries and across indicators for a single country vary in timeliness and levels of disaggregation, making the comparison challenging;
- The profiles are not able to build a deeper understanding of accumulated multi-dimensional deprivation experienced by different population groups of older persons due to the limited availability of data required for such analysis.

What considerations are important to strengthen the content and effective use of the country profiles on the rights and wellbeing of older persons?

Data scoping for the country profiles should cover statistics and information published online as well as on social media, in academic literature and other trusted sources.

Country profiles should be available in English, Arabic and relevant local languages to ensure they are reviewed and used more broadly.

Presentation of the country profiles as an infographic offers users a quick, accessible and memorable snapshot of top-line issues on ageing in a country.

Future developments of the country profiles

How can the country profiles be tailored to country-specific context?

The country profiles can be adapted and developed to expand the breadth and depth of topics and analysis they cover. Specifically,

Conceptual improvements

- Inclusion of additional rights (e.g. care and support for independent living, access to justice, and participation in society) as well as all aspects of the rights of older persons.
- Inclusion of humanitarian and migration indicators to understand the situation of older refugees and internally displaced persons in relation to key priorities in water supply, sanitation and hygiene, food security and nutrition, shelter and settlement, and health, as well as the programmatic impact across these areas. The Sphere Handbook (<https://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/sphere/#ch001>) provides guidance on the minimum key indicators for humanitarian response.
- Inclusion of the monitoring framework for SDGs relevant to older persons developed by the Titchfield City Group on Ageing and Age-disaggregated Data (see Making older persons visible in the sustainable development goals' monitoring framework and indicators in the Reference section)

Methodological improvements

- Undertake gender and multidimensional analysis to examine intersecting and compounding inequalities.
- Undertake analysis of ageism experienced by older persons across different aspects of life and its economic and social costs.

Promotion and dissemination of the country profiles and the How-to-Guide

How can the country profiles be used to build impact?

The country profiles can be used to advocate for the rights of older persons at national, regional and international levels.

- Develop a communication plan to promote the country profiles and the Guide across different stakeholders and fora to help build interest and demand for data and information on ageing and the situation of older persons among policy makers, donors, civil society, private sector and older persons.
- Invest in relevant regional Arab activities to promote, disseminate and discuss the country profiles and How-to-Guide to stimulate cross-country learning and action. Specifically, engage with the League of Arab States and its relevant regional partners in relation to the implementation, monitoring and reporting on the progress of the Arab Regional Ageing Strategy.
- Engage with ESCWA to discuss collaboration to promote, disseminate and use the country profiles and the How-to-Guide in order to strengthen awareness about ageism in policy and programs, and to build age-inclusive programmes, practices and systems.
- Identify opportunities to engage with relevant working groups and expert groups of the UN Statistical Commission to advance the production of good quality, timely and disaggregated data on older persons.

The following groups can be considered:

Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys

Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators

Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics

Expert group on Well-being measurement

Links and key reference materials

HelpAge/UNFPA report The rights of older persons: a review of national ageing strategies in the Arab region

HelpAge/UNFPA [Right to dignified Ageing](#)

Titchfield Group on Ageing-related Statistics and Age-disaggregated Data

Making older persons visible in the sustainable development goals' monitoring framework and indicators

Improving the visibility of older persons in global statistics

Arab Barometer is a nonpartisan research network that provides insight into the social, political, and economic attitudes and values of ordinary citizens across the Arab world.

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, the economy, and society.

Country ageing profiles are published on the following links:

[Country Profiles](#)

[UNFPA Arab States](#)

Further Information is available through the HelpAge EME office at farah.alsharief@helpage.org

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