

**The Sisterhood Is Global Institute (Jordan) in collaboration with the World
Demographic & Ageing Forum (Switzerland)**

**Report on the Book Launch “Population Dynamics in Muslim
Countries” and the Celebration of the International Women Day**

Amman

March 4, 2014



She wants to be a doctor, a mother and a wife!

About the Event

The Sisterhood Is Global Institute (SIGI) in collaboration with the Embassy of Switzerland in Jordan and SAANED for Development and Philanthropy Advisory hosted a book launch to promote the book 'Population Dynamics in Muslim Countries - Assembling the Jigsaw'. The academic textbook, published by Springer in Heidelberg, Germany, was edited by *Mr. Hans Groth* and *Mr. Alfonso Sousa-Poza* from the World Demographic & Ageing Forum (WDA Forum) based in St. Gallen, Switzerland.

The launch event was attended by 60 experts from Jordan and included the following speeches and discussion panels:

1. Official welcome by *Ms. Asma Khader*, President of SIGI Jordan and General Secretary of the Jordanian National Commission for Women and *Mr. Michael Winzap*, Ambassador of Switzerland.

Ms. Asma Khader focused on the important role of educated women in the development and transformation of nations. She referred to Jordan's challenges in the coming years in capturing the unique demographic opportunity presented by a huge and young workforce. She also highlighted the importance of female economic participation as a key factor in capturing this opportunity arising from demographic change. A well-executed strategy in that regard can have a huge beneficial impact on the lives of Jordanians. While Jordanian women have gained a high level of education, the women unemployment rate is still 15% or even higher. Jordanian women still face discrimination preventing them from choosing their preferred job or pursuing a career path based on individual performance. The key elements to empower women constitute their integration in the workforce without any barriers and their greater independence. The ultimate goal should be to give women the power to themselves decide on what they want to do in their lives.

2. Presentation of the book's main findings by *Mr. Hans Groth*, President of the WDA Forum

Ms. Asma Khader's welcoming speech was followed by an introduction to the book "Population Dynamics in Muslim Countries" and a summary of its main findings by *Mr. Hans Groth*. In his speech, *Mr. Groth* explained how the book's academic concept "Assembling the Jigsaw" was put together, namely by 21 experts in demographic research from 13 countries, more than half of whom are women and/or Muslim. The book addresses a couple of sensitive topics in Muslim societies such as fertility, the education of women, the youth bubble, labour markets, the demographic dividend, and political space. The book is based on country case studies of Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Indonesia, and Nigeria as well as on regional studies of MENA and Gulf Cooperation Council countries. It therefore constitutes a unique reference for demographic trends and their implications in Muslim societies.

As *Mr. Groth* highlighted, the book provides five critical insights for everyone engaged in shaping a prosperous future in a Muslim country:

- Changes in gender perceptions are key drivers of demographic trends and dynamics
- There is an urgent need for education and job development - an issue that cannot be postponed any longer
- Capturing the upcoming demographic dividend is the key to future wealth and welfare
- The relationship between Islam and demography is *one* factor and not *the* factor
- Rapid change is possible if well planned and executed

Mr. Groth finally presented the key demographic indicators linked to the demographic dividend, which Muslim countries will most likely reach by 2050 (dynamics of population ageing, fertility rate, crude mortality rate, education & skills etc.). More specifically, the 13 Muslim countries explored in the book will see their working-age population peak already before 2050. Governments therefore need to start now to capture the demographic dividend and develop policies that will drive their economic growth, in particular by:

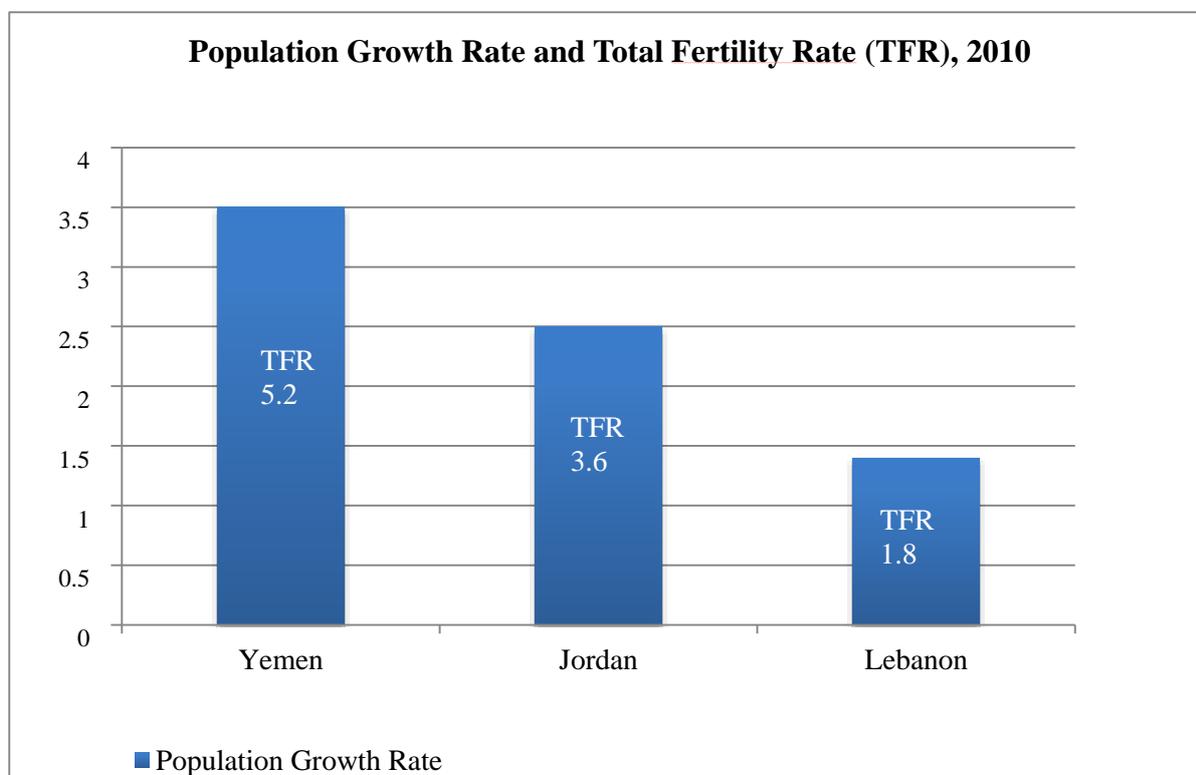
- expanding education and training (in particular business skills fitting the needs of economies of the 21st century)
- ensuring the creation of job opportunities especially for the youth and women
- creating a favourable investment climate through transparent governance and government leadership

3. Speech on the book's policy dimension for the "Arab World" by *Mr. Christian Blickenstorfer*, former Ambassador and Board Member of the WDA Forum

The third speaker, *Mr. Christian Blickenstorfer*, spoke about the policy dimension of the book for the "Arab World". He referred to the influence of the Arab Spring on the political development in this region. Mr. Blickenstorfer highlighted that the critical factors in creating the change demanded by the people are related both to demographic changes and to the prevalent economic situation. During the Arab Spring, the youth was inspired to employ latest technology to pursue their interests. Till today the Arab Spring movement is still evolving and has so far neither managed to frame new relations between Islam and the state, nor provided answers on how to integrate ethnic and religious minorities. The speaker explained that the book covers four Arab countries as important case studies regarding policy considerations related to the Arab Spring: Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia. It addresses Tunisia because that is where the Arab Spring movement began, and Egypt because it is the country with the largest population in the region. It mentions Morocco because King Muhammad VI was the first of the Arab sovereigns to react to the People's Power movement, announcing a series of reforms and thereby acknowledging the movement's ultimately irresistible strength to empower the citizens. And there is Saudi Arabia, the largest of the oil-rich monarchies: This country is heavily conditioned by Islam and sooner or later facing considerable challenges for change.

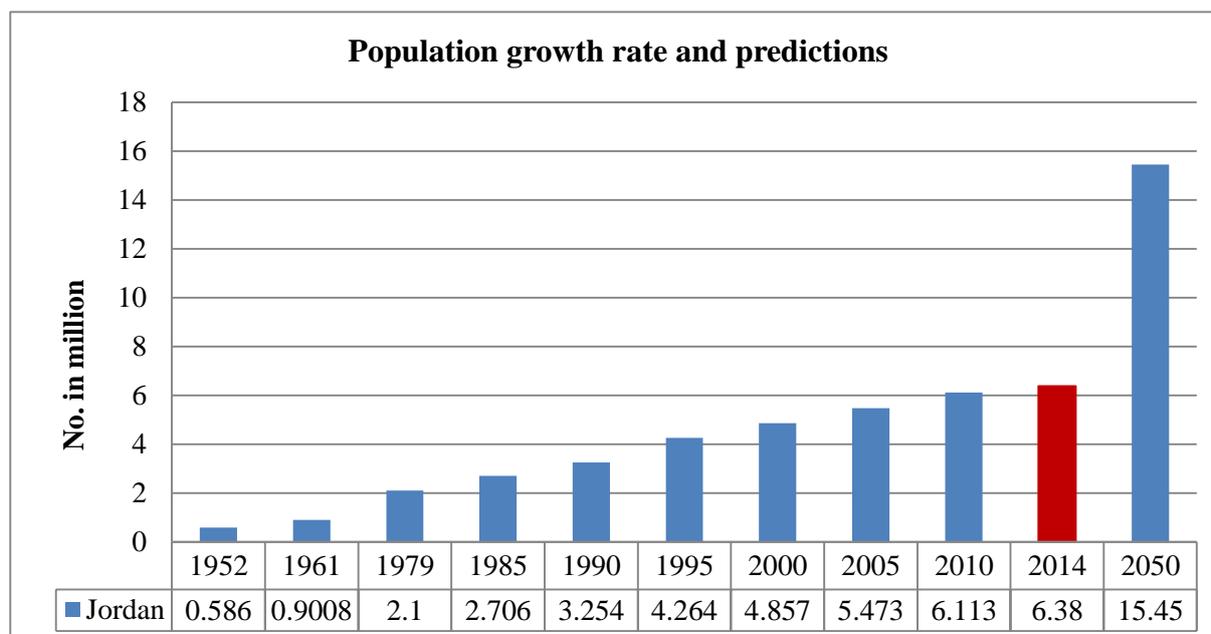
4. Speech on the link between population dynamics, gender and the economic and social development in Jordan by *Mrs. Ebba Augustin*, CEO of SAANED

In her speech, *Mrs. Ebba Augustin* linked population dynamics and gender systems to development and opportunities in Jordan. She highlighted that Jordan is a very resource scarce country (especially in water and energy). At the same time, with the current total fertility rate (TFR) of 3.6 per woman Jordan's population will more than double to 15.4 Million by 2050. Jordan's "National Population Strategy 2000 – 2020" sets the clear target of reducing the TFR to 2.9 by 2010 and to 2.5 by 2017. While the country has made significant progress in the 1990s, the fertility decline has stalled since 2002. *Mrs. Augustin* presented her thesis that the current strong patriarchal gender paradigm in Jordan constitutes a major barrier to a balanced and sustainable demographic development. In Jordan's demographic development, gender matters first because the status of women explains as much variance in fertility as all socio-economic predictors combined. Second, prevalent gender roles determine female and male personal identity and the families they aspire to have.



Mrs. Augustin further pointed out that Jordan has highly educated women. Girls increasingly outpace boys in exams in all levels of schooling, except in university education at MA level

and beyond. Yet, most well-educated and qualified women remain at home: Jordan's female labour force participation rate averages 15 percent, which is very low. The speaker further argued that the stalling fertility rate could hardly be explained when considering selected fertility indicators: The primary health care coverage is high and 97% of women have physical access to health care facilities. Contraceptive use averages 49.3 % and studies show that 89 % of family planning needs are met; still 45.1 % of women discontinue contraceptive use in the first year. 75% of those women who report to have no intention of using contraceptives or who stopped to use them do so because they want to have a child. As *Mrs. Augustin* stressed, this is where the rationale for Jordan's stagnating fertility decline lies: in the role as a wife, mother and homemaker that women are expected to play and in where they find their self-worth and social recognition.



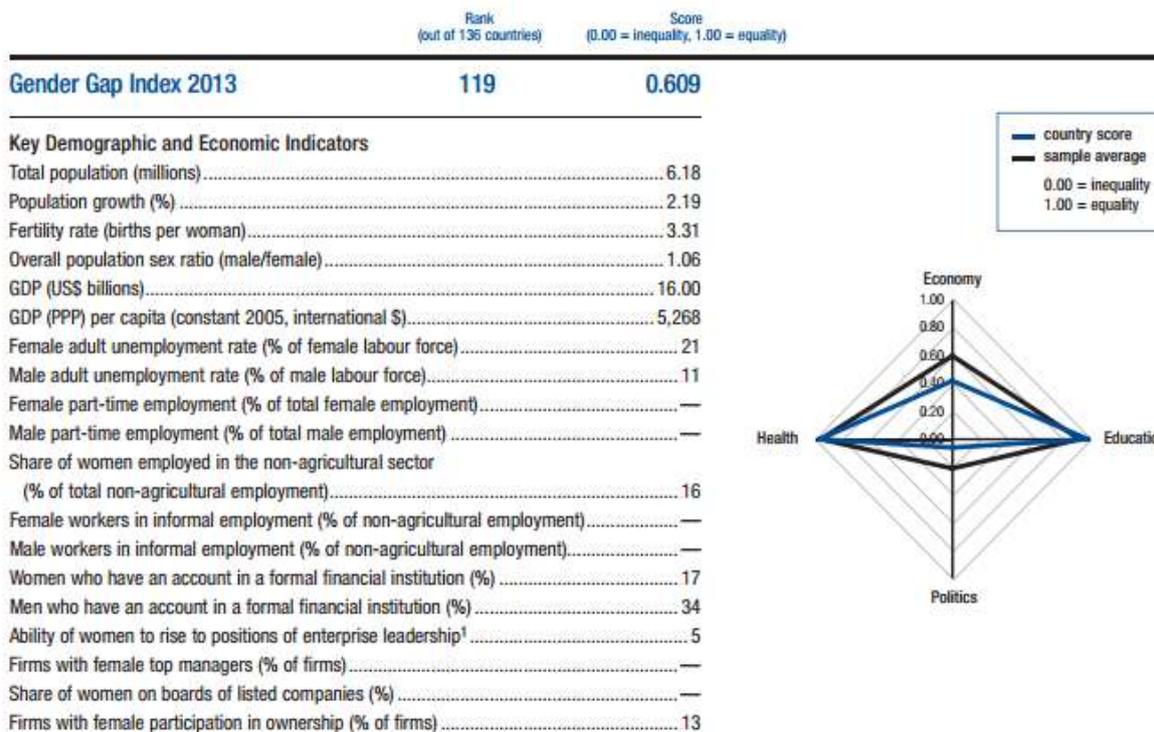
Source: Jordan Department of Statistics and estimate based on 3.6 TFR for 2050, 2014 figures

To illustrate the consequences of the prevailing patriarchal gender paradigm, *Mrs. Augustin* referred to the findings of the study 'Insights into gender dynamics in marginalized urban communities in Jordan', published in 2009 by W. Williamson and E. Nimri. The study found that Jordan is a country in demographic and gender transition. However, it is marginalized women that push for change while men try to reinforce existing gender norms, largely out of fear of exclusion. Furthermore, the channels to access information on reproductive health and relationships are different between men and women; as are their level of knowledge on such issues and their expectations of marital relationships.

Several of the study's findings illustrate the role that prevailing gender norms play in the low labour force participation of women. Many women consider their reproductive role as primary while employment is seen as only secondary. Women's 'window' to start a professional career is between 18 and their early 20s – the time after a young woman finishes her education and before she marries. Women currently work in a very limited number of jobs, mainly related to child-rearing and girls' education, but wish to enter other professions, in particular in social work and office work. To be able to enter the workforce, a woman has to seek the permission of, and agree to 'rules' imposed by her family and husband. While for young men higher education is seen as an entry point into a career or better work prospects, it is for women largely considered as a means to improve marriage prospects.

Mrs. Augustin concluded that in order to achieve balanced population growth, Jordan urgently needs to initiate reforms towards a more gender equitable society and challenge the prevailing patriarchal gender paradigms in the personal status, in criminal law, and in the education as well as in the private sector.

Jordan



5. Speech on the demographic opportunity by *Dr. Sawсан AlMajali*, Secretary General of the Higher Population Council of Jordan

The last presentation was given by *Dr. Sawсан AlMajali*. *Dr. Sawсан* spoke about the “demographic opportunity”, which he defined as the time period when the rate of growth of the working age population (15-64 yrs) exceeds the growth rate of the dependent population (population less than 15 yrs and higher than 65 yrs). The speaker argued that in order to benefit from this demographic opportunity – an opportunity which cannot be repeated – Jordan needs to adopt the policies that address the following issues:

- Reduce the fertility rate to a sustainable level
- Promote the concept of small family sizes and its mutual implementation in the Jordanian culture

Dr. AlMajali introduced the key policies that are needed to be able to benefit from the population opportunity (expected to start in 2030 and last for two decades until 2050). She showed the interrelated indicators that influence the development and the improvement of living conditions in Jordan. Smaller family sizes and a lower dependency ratio will result in improved levels of education for children and adults due to the raise of the per capita share of private and public investment. It will also contribute to increased women participation in the economy, to an enhancement of their positions and to an improvement of the health of mothers and their children.

Any increase of per capita income and improved living conditions will contribute to increased domestic savings. As a consequence, new sources of funding and internal investment will drive the economy, resulting in GDP growth and enhanced wellbeing of the family. To sum up, it is a win-win situation for everyone.

Dr. AlMajali finished her speech by sharing concrete qualitative indicators on Jordan's population growth in relation to workforce and educational/social parameters.

6. Concluding panel discussion

The main focus of the panel discussion was on the current and future refugee situation in Jordan. *Dr. AlMajali* and *Mrs. Salwa Almasri* provided a clear description of the growing number of Syrian refugees. Their key points were:

- According to current statistics, 1.3 million Syrian refugees were registered in 2013, a number which is expected to increase by 800.000 by the end of 2014.
- 75% of them are living in border governorates (Irbid and Mafraq).
- Both panellists referred to the high cost Jordan is bearing due to Syrian refugees in different sectors such as health, education, water and the labour market. Around 60-70 thousand Syrians workers participate in the unofficial workforce in Jordan.
- *Dr. Almajali* compared Jordan's demographic opportunity under "normal conditions" and the situation given a continuous influx of refugees.

Dr. Nabil Kronfol, another member of the panel and professor of health policy and management, discussed Lebanon's experience with the inflow of Syrian refugees due to the ongoing Syrian crisis since 2012. *Dr. Kronfol* noted that the Center for Studies on Ageing (Lebanon) had recently organized a technical workshop on this subject with a special focus on the older population in this and other emergency situations. There are currently around 1 million Syrian refugees (both Syrians and Palestinians) in Lebanon, representing about one fourth of Lebanon's total population of 4 million. The Lebanese Government along with local communities, civil society and international organizations has provided shelter and relief as well as health, educational and security services with relatively minimal support from international relief organizations.

Dr. Kronfol further emphasized the demographic changes in the countries of the region (described in detail in the book) and highlighted the social changes associated with these demographic trends. He noted that Lebanon (as well as Iran and Tunisia, amongst the countries of the region) has now a fertility rate close to replacement levels despite the fact that this rate was still very high a generation ago. These transformative changes have occurred because of better education opportunities for girls, improved economic standards, better employment possibilities for women as well as migration (which is also an important factor in Jordan and in many other countries in the region).

Dr. Kronfol concluded his comment by stressing the need for improved security and political stability to enhance economic and social development in a region of turmoil and disequilibrium.

For media coverage: <http://cleopatraneews.com/read.php?tid=47607>