

Population

Donatella Cangialosi

An overview

INDICATORS	Population, total (in millions)		Population growth (annual %)		Population ages 0-14 (% of total population)		Population ages 65 and above (% of total population)		Age dependency ratio, old (% of working-age population)		Birth rate, crude (per 1,000 people)		Fertility rate, total (births per woman)		Life expectancy at birth, total (years)		Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births)	
	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2023	2023	2024 (e)	2023	2023	2023	2023	2023	
PRT	10,7	1,2	12,9	24,3	38,7	8,1	1,5	82,3	2,6									
ESP	48,8	1,0	13,1	20,9	31,7	6,7	20,9	2,4	83,9	2,4								
FRA	68,5	0,3	16,6	22,0	35,7	9,9	1,6	82,9	3,5									
ITA	59,0	-0,1	12,2	38,3	24,3	6,4	1,2	83,0	2,2									
SVN	2,1	0,3	14,8	21,6	33,9	8,0	1,6	82,0	1,8									
HRV	3,9	0,2	14,0	23,0	36,5	8,3	1,5	78,5	3,5									
GRC	10,4	-0,2	13,4	23,7	37,7	1,3	37,7	8,15	3,3									
MLT	0,6	3,8	13,1	20,0	29,9	8,1	1,1	83,5	6,2									
CYP	1,4	1,0	16,1	14,5	20,8	10,8	1,4	81,7	3,1									
SRB	6,6	-0,5	14,3	22,5	35,6	9,2	1,5	76,2	4,2									
XKX	1,5	-9,7	21,0	9,9	14,3	12,1	1,5	78,0	8,1									
BIH	3,2	-0,7	13,1	21,9	33,8	7,7	1,5	77,9	5,3									
MNE	0,6	0,1	18,2	17,7	27,5	11,2	1,8	77,6	1,7									
MKD	1,8	-2,0	17,0	17,8	27,2	9,2	1,5	75,3	4,7									
ALB	2,7	-1,2	16,9	16,6	25,0	1,3	25,0	79,6	8,1									
TUR	85,5	0,2	21,6	10,1	14,9	11,2	1,6	77,2	9,2									
SYR	24,7	4,5	29,7	4,7	7,2	22,1	2,7	72,1	16,7									
LBN	5,8	0,6	26,5	10,0	15,7	16,1	2,2	77,8	15,7									
JOR	11,6	1,0	31,0	4,4	6,8	20,6	2,6	77,8	11,8									
ISR	10,0	1,3	27,5	12,5	20,8	18,6	2,8	83,2	2,8									
PSE	5,3	2,4	38,2	3,8	6,6	27,1	3,3	65,2	14,2									
EGY	116,5	1,7	32,2	5,0	8,0	21,0	2,7	71,6	14,6									
LYB	7,4	1,0	27,7	5,0	7,4	17,0	2,3	69,3	16,0									
TUN	12,3	0,6	24,2	9,4	14,1	13,8	1,8	76,5	9,0									
DZA	48,8	1,4	30,5	6,5	10,3	19,6	2,7	76,3	17,8									
MAR	38,1	1,0	25,8	8,0	12,1	16,7	2,2	75,3	14,3									

(a) 2023 for West Bank and Gaza.

Source: World Bank Development Indicators on data UN Population Division and national sources; UN Population Division; Istat. UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation also for Italy.

Some highlighted topics

Population size and dynamics. In 2024, the total population of the Mediterranean region will be 585.6 million people, of whom almost two-fifths will live in North Africa (221.1 million, or 37.8% of the total), 205.3 million in the European Union (35.1%), 142.8 million in the Middle East (24.4%) and 16.4 million in the Western Balkans (2.8%). The seven most populous countries are, in descending order: Egypt, Turkey, France, Italy, Spain, Algeria and Morocco. Compared to the previous year, there was a slight overall increase in all geographical areas, with the exception of the Balkans, where the population decreased by 1.7%.

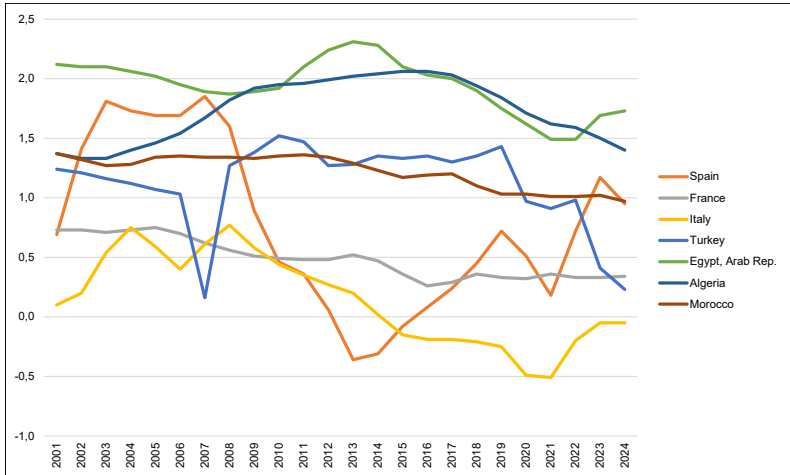
Over the last two decades, the population has increased by more than a quarter (+27.3%) compared to 2001, with significant differences between geographical areas and within them. North Africa has the largest population and the most marked relative increase (+47.3%), with Egypt contributing most in both absolute and relative terms (+41.9 million, +56.1%), followed by Algeria (+49.4%). The overall trend in the Middle East is slightly lower (+39.1%), with the largest contribution coming from Turkey in absolute terms (+19.3 million) and Jordan, West Bank and Gaza and Israel in relative terms (+110.1%, +76.4% and +54.9% respectively). Population growth in the Mediterranean countries of the European Union was very modest (+9.2%), with more significant trends in Spain and France (+19.5 and +11.7% respectively), a moderate balance in

Italy (+3.5%) and a reduction in the number of inhabitants in Croatia and Greece. The Western Balkans is the only area to record a population decline between 2001 and 2024 (-14.6%), with Bosnia and Herzegovina (-24.3%) being the most affected.

The demographic trend in terms of annual growth over the last twenty years shows different dynamics in the seven most populous countries in the Mediterranean area (Figure 1). Egypt has long been the country with the highest growth rate, exceeding 2% per annum, albeit with an uneven pace of growth: a decline from 2005 to 2010 followed by a recovery in the following four years, then a further slowdown. Algeria recorded annual growth of between +1.5% and +2%, rising steadily in the first fifteen years of the period under review, then slowing from 2017 onwards.

Turkey and Morocco are experiencing moderate population growth of between 1% and 1.5%, with a gradual slowdown in both countries. In the case of Turkey, this slowdown will be particularly marked in 2023 and will continue in 2024 (only +0.2% compared to the previous year). Among European countries, Spain's population growth is concentrated in the first decade and then declines sharply, albeit with a slight recovery of +1.2% in 2023, which weakens again in the last year. In France, the trend is more regular, consistently below one percentage point of annual growth and at more modest levels in recent years. Finally, Italy stands out for a clear change in dynamics over the entire period: weak

Fig. 1. Annual population growth in the most populous countries of the Mediterranean region. Period 2001-2024 (% compared to previous year).



Source: World Bank Development Indicators on data UN Population Division and national sources; Istat.

population growth that came to a halt in 2014, the year that marked the beginning of an uninterrupted decline in population; the decline in the last two years, 2023 and 2024, is stationary.

Demographic structure. In 2024, the youngest population group, under 14 years of age, will represent 22.8% of the entire Mediterranean area, reaching a quarter of the total population in Middle Eastern countries and peaking in North Africa (30.2%), with the highest values in West Bank and Gaza (38.2%), Egypt (32.2%) and Jordan (31.0%). The Western Balkans have a lower percentage of this population group (15.6%), with the highest figure in Kosovo (21.0%). In European Union countries, on the other hand, the incidence of children under the age of 14 is the lowest, with

the highest figure in France (16.6%) and the lowest in Italy (12.2%).

In contrast, EU countries as a whole have the highest incidence of elderly people aged 65 and over (22.8%), with the highest figures in Italy and Portugal, where almost a quarter of the population is over 64 (24.5%); only Cyprus and Malta have a percentage below the European average. The percentage of this population segment is slightly lower in the Western Balkans (19.6%), followed by the Middle East (8.8%), where West Bank and Gaza has the lowest incidence of elderly people in the entire Mediterranean region (3.8%). Finally, North Africa, the youngest area in the Mediterranean region, ranks last, with older people accounting for only 6.2% of the total population.

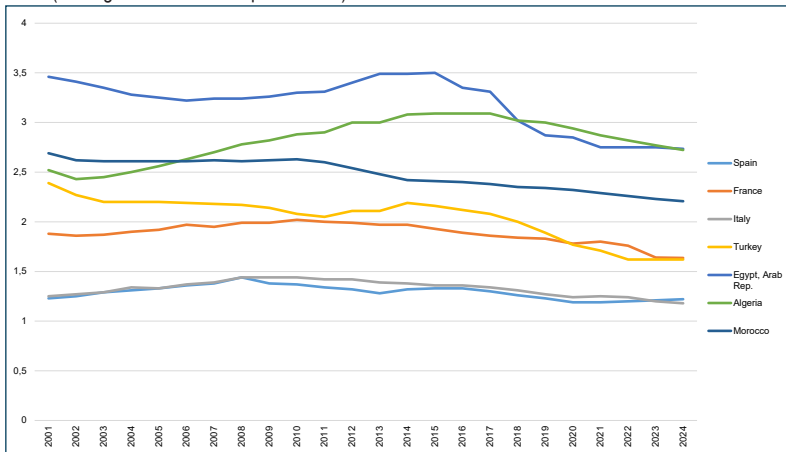
Birth rate and fertility. The younger demographic structure of the Middle East and North Africa, as evidenced by the higher percentage of young people, is also reflected in birth and fertility rates, which are higher here than in other areas.

West Bank and Gaza ranks first in the Mediterranean region in terms of fertility and birth rates, with an average of 3.3 children per woman and 27.1 live births per thousand inhabitants. Israel and Egypt follow (with an average of 2.78 and 2.74 children per woman, respectively); Syria and Egypt rank second and third in terms of birth rates (22.1 and 21.0 per thousand). In contrast, the birth rate is rather low in European Union countries, and in 2023 Italy will have the lowest birth rate (6.4 per thousand), followed by Spain (6.7 per thousand), accompanied by the lowest fertility rate after Malta

(1.18 and 1.11 children per woman, respectively). The decline in births, as is well known, is determined both by the decline in fertility and by the reduction in the number of potential parents.

Considering the most populous countries in the Mediterranean area, fertility trends have followed different trajectories since the beginning of the century (Figure 2). Among these, the dynamics in Egypt, Algeria and Morocco are more sustained, with levels ranging from 2.5 to 3.5 children per woman, although the indicator in Egypt and Morocco shows a continuous decline, especially in recent years. In Algeria, on the other hand, the trend was upward until 2019, then reversed with a steady decline that seems to be bringing fertility back to the initial level of the period. In the three most populous European countries in this area (France, Italy and Spain), the lowest fertility levels have not been

Fig. 2. Total fertility rate in the most populous countries of the Mediterranean region. Period 2001-2024 (average no. of children per woman).



Source: UN Population Division; Istat.

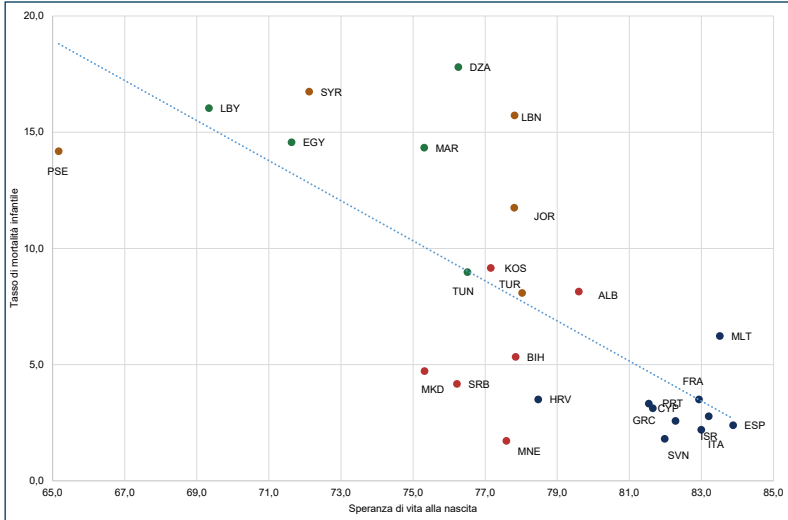
particularly dynamic and, since the end of the first decade considered, are returning to the levels observed at the beginning of the period.

Life expectancy and infant mortality. Indicators relating to mortality and life expectancy at birth for 2023 allow us to identify three distinct types of countries in the Mediterranean area in the most recent data (Figure 3). A group of nine countries with a total life expectancy (males and females) above 80 years and infant mortality rates below 5 per thousand live births (with the exception of Malta, at 6.2%): this group includes eight European Union countries (with the exception of Croatia) plus Israel. In these countries, life expectancy at birth continues to increase for various reasons, resulting in an increase in life expectancy, which will reach its maximum value in Spain (83.9 years) in 2023. Infant mortality, on the other hand, is declining and, in several cases (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Slovenia and Israel), is below 3 per thousand live births.

There is also a second intermediate group of ten countries with a life expectancy at birth of less than 80 years, accompanied by an infant mortality rate below the threshold of 10 per thousand, although the latter in turn divides these countries into two blocks: five of them, mainly in the Western Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro) and Croatia, have an even lower infant mortality rate, below or close to 5 per thousand. Finally, there is a third group comprising six countries in the Middle East and

North Africa (Algeria, Syria, Libya, Lebanon, Egypt and Morocco) with the highest infant mortality rates, above or close to 15 per thousand live births, and life expectancy at birth below 80 years. This indicator is even lower in Libya, Egypt and Syria, with values ranging from 69.3 to 72.1 years.

Fig. 3. Life expectancy at birth (M and F) and infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births). Year 2023.



Source: World Bank Development Indicators on data UN Population Division and national sources, Istat; UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation also for Italy.