

Female Kurdish musician Aynur Dogan wins prestigious international award

Author:

Sun, 2021-08-29 23:14

ANKARA: A Kurdish singer-songwriter has won a prestigious international award for maintaining the “highest artistic integrity in the face of political pressure.”

Aynur Dogan received the WOMEX 21 Artist Award, which was introduced in 1999 to acknowledge the social and political importance of musical excellence at an international level. The prize also recognized Dogan’s “long-term dedication to the preservation and innovation” of Kurdish and Alevi culture.

The 46-year-old artist said she was honored that her “years-long efforts on this rocky path” was accepted and welcomed internationally.

“I know that it is hard to make it acknowledged (get acknowledgement for) a traditional music that is not familiar to everybody,” Dogan told Arab News. “It is also very challenging to make it with a language that is not recognized widely.”

She was born in the southeast Turkish province of Dersim (Tunceli) and left home in 1992 for Istanbul, where she was able to establish contact with the music world, attend music classes and learn to play instruments.

She released her first album in 2002 with Kurdish songs – a significant taboo at the time – and faced restrictions and bans on her songs and concert appearances.

A court banned her 2004 album “Kece Kurdan,” alleging its lyrics had inspired separatism. The ruling was later annulled.

One of her concerts during the Istanbul Jazz Festival in 2010 was interrupted by audience members who booed her for singing in Kurdish, causing her to leave the gig.



Her rise to stardom was not easy, but Aynur Dogan has become a cultural symbol for the Kurdish community. (Supplied)

But the restrictions were gradually lifted over the years, and her melancholic music and rich voice became popular among a wide Turkish audience.

She has become a cultural symbol for the Kurdish community, releasing several albums that focus on its folk music and oral traditions.

"This prize reminded me that I'm not alone and I have a point in promoting music in my mother tongue," she said. "It also inspired a positive message to the community I belong to. Their happiness, their pride makes me so happy. I used my music as an instrument to overcome the challenges I face. My previous experience showed me that your determination and your self-awareness help yourself in breaking the national boundaries and making your music globally accepted."

Her popularity goes beyond Turkey, with several international awards and appearances in national and international documentaries such as "Crossing the Bridge," directed by Fatih Akin, and "The Music of Strangers," directed by Morgan Neville.

She has collaborated with several artists and groups, including Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble.

"To hear Aynur's voice is to hear the transformation of all the layers of human joy and suffering into one sound," the famous cellist said when speaking about Dogan. "It reaches so deep into our soul, tears into our hearts, and then we are for one moment, joined as one. It is unforgettable."

Music critic Naim Dilmener said that Dogan's musical style was one of the strongest examples of world music being performed beyond mainstream

languages.

“She performs in Kurdish and she is doing it in the best way,” he told Arab News, praising her “great interpersonal communication (skills) and social network” that had given her a broad audience on an international scale.

She was able to sing at the most famous musical festivals around the world and had “plentiful” followers, he added.

Dogan performs more often in Europe than in Turkey, with concerts planned for the coming months in Germany, the UK and Netherlands.



Her rise to stardom was not easy, but Aynur Dogan has become a cultural symbol for the Kurdish community. (Supplied)

She was awarded the Master of Mediterranean Music Award in 2017 from the Berklee College of Music in Boston, in the category of Mediterranean Women in Action, for her efforts to promote Kurdish folk oral traditions and blend it with modern Western styles.

“Another characteristic of Aynur Dogan is her ability to move us to tears in each of her songs. I don’t know how she can do it, but I think it is because of her superhuman skills,” Dilmener said.

She has also used her success to build her audience and connect the younger generation with the roots of Kurdish music.

Turkish people mostly know Dogan for her cameo in the blockbuster movie “Gonul Yarası” (Heartbreak). She sang “Dar Hejiroke” (Fig Tree of the Mountain) and made the movie’s main character cry with the lyrics and her rich voice.

Her latest album “Hedur / Solace Of Time” has eight songs and was released in

Feb. 2020.

She will be on a European tour in the coming months to promote the album, and will receive the WOMEX award on Oct. 31 in Porto.





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Kurdish-Iranian journalists jailed, sentenced to 90 lashes
Kurdish artist Hiwa K discusses highlights from his Dubai exhibition

[Can fuel subsidy cuts halt Lebanon's descent into darkness?](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-08-29 21:35

DUBAI: Time was when the streets of Beirut throbbed with life once dusk fell. But nowadays they become ghosts of their former selves as soon as the sun sets. The reason: There is no money in the state's coffers to buy fuel to operate Lebanon's power plants.

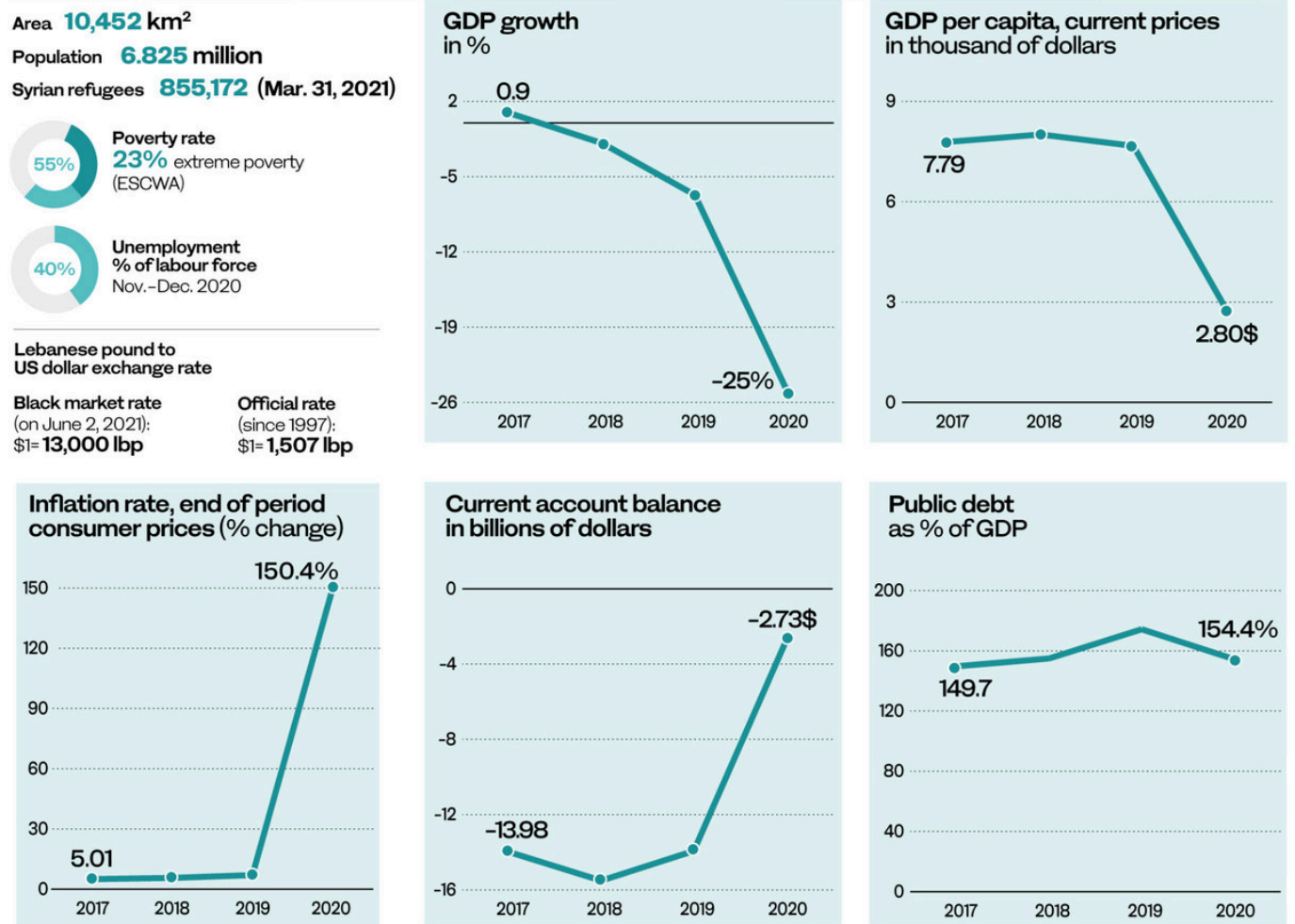
Private generators too have run out of supplies, with fuel becoming the latest casualty of a complex web of crises that have drained Lebanon's foreign currency reserves.

Last week, the price of fuel in Lebanon rose for the second time in less than two months. The government lifted subsidies for gasoline and diesel in an effort to ease shortages, which led to a nearly 66 percent spike in prices since the last hike in late June.

Lebanese people were already struggling to keep up with expenses given that the pound has lost nearly 90 percent of its value (since mass protests kicked off in late 2019) while salaries have stagnated.

LEBANESE ECONOMY

Nation trapped in worst economic crisis since 1975–1990 civil war



Source: IMF, UNHCR, Lebanese government

ARAB NEWS

Mustafa Naboulsi lives in Qalamoun, a town in the north of Lebanon, and has been working as a firefighter for 11 years. On Aug. 23, he sent his family to live in France owing to the country's worsening economic situation.

"Sometimes we have to even sleep in the car while waiting for the fuel so that we can wake up in the morning and fill up the tank. A lot of times we have spent two to three hours in queues, only to be told that the fuel was finished and that we should return tomorrow," Naboulsi told Arab News.

It has been over 10 days since Khaled Zakaria last filled his tank with gasoline. To do so, he had to travel for nearly 50 km from Tripoli to Byblos and stand in line for over an hour.

The high demand for gasoline coupled with its unavailability has predictably given rise to a black market, where the commodity can be bought for seven to 10 times more than its official price. Zakaria said he refuses to purchase gasoline this way as he does not want to encourage hoarding and corruption, which in his view can only make a bad situation worse.

Naboulsi, the firefighter, also treats fire burns, but the restrictions on his mobility have left him feeling helpless.

"Sometimes I get called into areas that are outside my town. These are people that are in pain and I would love to help them, but I can't even reach them," he told Arab News.



Fire devours a building close to where a fuel tank exploded in Lebanon's northern region of Akkar on August 15, 2021. (AFP file photo)

"Especially after what happened in Akkar. I have no words to describe the pain. It's a very hard feeling. You feel like you are not doing enough even though the situation is out of your control," he said.

On the morning of Aug. 15, a gasoline-tanker explosion in Akkar left 28 people dead and nearly 80 injured. The incident prompted neighboring countries to step in to provide aid since Lebanon is also in the midst of a medical crisis.

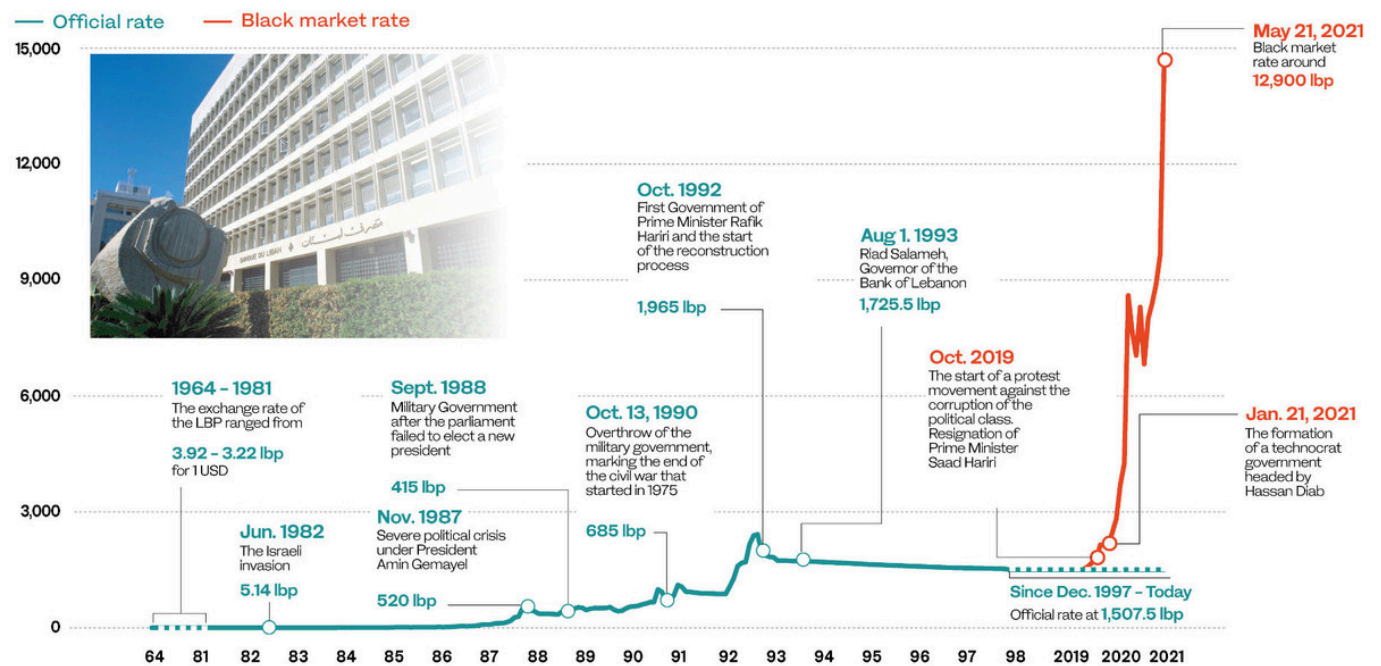
At the beginning of August, Riad Salameh, Lebanon's Central Bank governor, blamed local traders for fuel shortages.

"It's unacceptable that we import \$820 million worth of fuel and not get to

see diesel fuel, gasoline or electricity. This, not the positions adopted by us, is humiliation in itself against the Lebanese,” he told a local radio station.

THE TURBULENT HISTORY OF THE LEBANESE CURRENCY

Lebanese pound to US dollar exchange rate



Source: BDL/AFP

ARAB NEWS

The imported fuel was expected to cover the country's needs for three months. Instead, it did not last for even one month.

Bachar Elhalabi, senior Middle East and North Africa analyst at ClipperData, says the Lebanese political system of “muhasasa,” or the sectarian division of ministerial spoils among 18 religious sects, has allowed each leader to grab “a piece of the pie” for themselves.

“Whether it is funding allocations, projects, contracts, etc. Unfortunately, the energy sector is part of that ‘muhasasa.’ In fact, it might be one of the biggest golden geese for sectarian leaders,” he said.

While the caretaker government struggles to keep mass hunger and a total economic collapse at bay, one political faction has found an opportunity to make a grandstand play.

The leader of the Iran-backed Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, said on Friday that he had decided to arrange for a third shipment of Iranian oil.

“We have agreed to start loading a third vessel,” Reuters news agency quoted Nasrallah as saying. “The coming days will prove those doubtful about the shipments arriving with fuel wrong ... and our words will be clear when the first vessel reaches Lebanon.”



Hezbollah leader Massahn Nasrallah caused an uproar when he announced that his group has ordered oil from Iran, a move that could place Lebanon under US economic sanctions. (Reuters file photo)

Earlier last week, Nasrallah announced that the first vessel with Iranian oil had set sail to Lebanon.

Some analysts have warned that importation of Iranian fuel could expose Lebanon to something it cannot afford: US sanctions. Nevertheless, Elhalabi believes Nasrallah is serious because, regardless of whether the vessels make it to Lebanon, the move still serves Hezbollah's interests.

"The country and the various stakeholders are in a bind. And that includes opponents of Nasrallah. If the tanker arrives at a Lebanese port, the staff are going to look really bad" if they refuse to offload the fuel, Elhalabi said.

On the one hand, if Iranian oil ends up reaching Lebanon, Nasrallah will have succeeded in presenting himself as someone capable yet separate from the government. On the other hand, if the international community – more specifically the US – hits Lebanon with sanctions for importing Iranian oil, Nasrallah will reap the resultant political rewards, Elhalabi said.

Since Lebanon was gripped by economic and financial crises in late 2019, the government has continued to subsidize wheat, gas, fuel, food and other essential items at lower-than market rates.

"Fuel shortages can be traced back to the inefficiency of the decades-old subsidy program," Jean Tawile, an economist who has advised the government in the past, told Arab News.

"This paved the way for many cases of abuse such as hoarding, stockpiling and

smuggling.”



Lebanese pharmacy workers demonstrate in the Achrafieh district of Beirut on August 16, 2021, with their placards saying “no gasoline = no ambulance” and “no electricity = no hospital” and “no vaccine = no treatment”. (AFP)

Most of Lebanon’s subsidized goods are being smuggled into Syria “as prices have skyrocketed there since the outbreak of war,” he said.

Historical data shows that Lebanon imported 5.7 million tons of fuel in 2011, Tawile said. However, by the end of 2012, after the Syrian civil war broke out, the figure shot up to 7.6 million tons.

“So essentially, Lebanese depositors were subsidizing the fuel needs of Syria,” he said.

According to Tawile, the removal of subsidies will eliminate discrepancies in the two countries’ fuel prices and put an end to smuggling of the commodity.

Fuel hoarding will also decrease as distributors will have no reason to stockpile the commodity, something they regularly do in anticipation of price hikes.

Additionally, as Mohamed Ramady, a former senior banker and professor of finance and economics at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals points out, Lebanon has been facing pressure from international lenders to lift subsidies.

“Lebanon is facing a difficult situation. This decision to reduce the

subsidies on fuel is not politically driven. It is economically driven,” Ramady told Arab News.



A demonstrator carries a national flag along a blocked road during a protest against the mounting economic hardships near the Central Bank building in Beirut on March 16, 2021. (REUTERS/File Photo)

Ramady said reducing subsidies is also a way for the government to achieve a measure of fiscal prudence.

“Custom duties are not there. The trade situation is fragile as Lebanon is not exporting vegetables and fruits like before. Tourism revenue has dropped drastically. In other words, Lebanon’s sources of income have narrowed,” he said.

Tawile says the government can cushion the impact of decreased subsidies on the people by implementing a social safety net mechanism, for instance by providing poorest with direct cash payments.

The caretaker government did propose in May to provide ration cards to the most vulnerable families as a replacement for subsidies. The \$556 million scheme was expected to benefit more than 500,000 needy families.

However, as with so many other programs in Lebanon, the absence of a clear funding source has kept the plan in the deep freeze since then.





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[Abu Dhabi orders residents to take booster shot for Sinopharm vaccine](#)

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DUBAI: Abu Dhabi residents who received the second dose of the Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine more than six months ago are required to get a booster shot by Sept. 20.

The booster dose must be taken to “enhance their immunity and comply with approved health protocol,” Abu Dhabi Media Office said on Sunday.

Those who don't receive the third jab will lose their green status on the UAE's Al-Hosn App, which allows people to access public venues like shopping malls, schools and gyms.

“After 20 September they will no longer be eligible for green status to enter

public places limited to those fully vaccinated,” the office said. The Chinese state-backed Sinopharm jab is an inactivated vaccine which triggers the production of antibodies that fight the coronavirus.



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[How scientists are drawing a genetic portrait of modern-day Middle Easterners](#)

Sat, 2021-08-28 21:36

DUBAI: Genetic analysis has become immensely popular in recent years, with a proliferation of commercial home testing kits allowing families to trace their ancestry back over generations and to map out their genetic origins with remarkable accuracy.

However, to pinpoint an individual's genetic roots, these services require a huge DNA dataset. And while ancestry testing continues to grow in the West,

contributing to an ever more accurate genetic portrait, it is yet to catch on in a big way in the East.

The genetic origins of modern day Middle Easterners have always been something of a mystery. Until now, more was probably known about the region's migratory routes and ethnic mixing down the ages from cuneiform tablets than from the double helix.

Yet, beyond satisfying the public's anthropological appetites, genetic analysis has important medical applications, chief among them the treatment and prevention of inherited genetic diseases.

Three years ago, for the first time ever, scientists from Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the UK teamed up to map the Middle East's genetic heritage and health stretching back 125,000 years.

The researchers uncovered millions of novel genetic variants that are common to the region but considered rare elsewhere in the world. The knowledge gained in the process enabled the analysis of local genomic structures in immense detail for the first time.



German and Kurdish archaeologists uncover the skeleton remains of a woman thought to date from the Hellenistic period (323 BC to 31 BC) near the northern Iraqi city of Duhok. (AN Photo/Robert Edwards)

The project's findings, which were published in the scientific journal *Cell* on August 4, represent the first comprehensive open-access dataset in the Middle East mapping the whole human genome.

"The Middle East was always underrepresented in these studies," said Saeed Al-Turki, a Saudi consultant in clinical genomics at Anwa Labs in Riyadh, who took part in "The Genomic History of the Middle East" study.

“We started to feel that huge discoveries were being made that could actually have a population-specific impact, and the Middle East was always missing, so this was the major drive for the study.”

Launched in partnership with the UK's University of Birmingham and the Wellcome Sanger Institute, a British non-profit genomics and genetics research institute based near Cambridge, the study marked a crucial first step in filling the blanks in the region's genetic history.

"The Middle East is a very important region that has a unique history compared to other local populations," Dr Mohamed Almarri, the study's lead author and a Wellcome Sanger Institute alumnus based in the UAE, told Arab News.

"The underrepresentation limits our understanding of the genomics and the implications of disease on these populations, so we wanted to fill those gaps that we see in the literature."



A lab worker prepares liquids for DNA extraction. (AFP)

Researchers analyzed DNA from hundreds of people across the region to reconstruct their genetic heritage. What they found was that many people in the modern-day Arabian Peninsula draw their genetic ancestry from ancient hunter-gatherers and from regional Bronze Age civilizations.

Going back even further, this ethnic lineage draws its origins from an enigmatic population that left Africa around 60,000 years ago and which differs in significant ways from all other Eurasian genomes.

The findings hold intrinsic historical and medical value, allowing experts to understand the effects of migration on the Arabian Peninsula, and what genetic traits its peoples hold in common.

“For the medical impact, the more data we have from populations, the more we understand why some populations are more at risk to common diseases, such as hypertension, diabetes and others,” Al-Turki told Arab News.



Saeed Al-Turki, a Saudi consultant in clinical genomics at Anwa Labs in Riyadh, taking part in “The Genomic History of the Middle East” study.
(Supplied)

One of the most significant findings of the study was the discovery of a quarter of a million single nucleotide polymorphisms, or SNPs, that were highly specific to the people of the Middle East.

“So all those previous studies that involved someone from the Middle East could have a bit of an incomplete picture,” Al-Turki said. “By adding another quarter of a million SNPs from just 130 individuals – imagine if we had 1,000

or 2,000.

"We are actually enriching the biomarkers, and that's what leads to the discovery of what gives some populations a higher risk of contracting a certain disease."

FASTFACTS

*** Populations all over the Middle East grew at a similar rate until around 15,000 to 20,000 years ago.**

*** Aridification linked to climate change events coincided with a reduction in Arabian populations 6,000 years ago.**

*** A mutation that allowed people to digest lactose was found in genomes local to Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the UAE.**

The study uncovered genetic variations associated with type 2 diabetes, challenging earlier assumptions that high rates of the condition in the Middle East were caused solely by the shift towards sedentary lifestyles.

Another mutation related to body mass index and the proclivity of hypertension was also found in 60 percent of Saudis and Yemenis – a figure that has long been missing from global health datasets.

"Without this project, we would not be able to understand why some of these populations are more prone to having one of the highest rates of type 2 diabetes in the world," Al-Turki said.

"Yes, it's related to the environment, fitness and a sedentary lifestyle, but there is also evidence of very strong genetic components that come with it, which means we should work out and be more health conscious than other populations.

"We inherited some genetic components. It's not all bad nor good, but it's good to be conscious about what extra steps are needed once we understand what we have."



The study uncovered genetic variations associated with type 2 diabetes, challenging earlier assumptions that high rates of the condition in the Middle East were caused solely by the shift towards sedentary lifestyles. (Shutterstock)

Based on a mapping of genomic movement, the study concluded that Bronze Age peoples from the Levant or Mesopotamia likely spread Semitic languages to Arabia and East Africa.

Moreover, they discovered that populations all over the Middle East grew at a similar rate until around 15,000 to 20,000 years ago, when the Arabian population growth stalled while Levantine populations continued to grow.

This trend was attributed to the emergence of agriculture in the Fertile Crescent, leading to settled societies supporting much larger populations.

The study also noted that aridification linked to climate change events coincided with a reduction in Arabian populations 6,000 years ago and a fall in Levantine populations 4,200 years ago.

A distinct mutation which allowed people to digest lactose was found in genomes local to modern-day Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the UAE, with a probable attribution to the domestication of animals providing a source of dairy.

Although they have merely scratched the surface of the Middle East's genetic heritage, the findings of the project are critical to understanding the present-day gene pool and what regional nations can do to plan for future health needs.



Famous prehistoric rock paintings of Tassili N'Ajjer, Algeria. (Shutterstock)

Almarri, the study's lead author, hopes to delve even deeper into the region's genetic past.

"Our region remains to be understood," he told Arab News. "Every person in the future will have a tailored treatment for any disease that they have, and we need researchers from the region to investigate this in our populations."

More regional collaboration will be needed, drawing together hospitals and universities, to identify the link between genetic mutations and specific diseases and to usher the Middle East toward an age of genetics-informed medicine.

"There is so much work done in separate organizations in the Gulf and in the Middle East," Al-Turki said. "They're usually not published in high-ranking journals like Cell because they are a single population."

"This is an example of how much higher we can go in the quality of research once we collaborate with different countries. We cannot do it alone."

"It is only when we collaborate with others that we can actually be a part of the bigger picture."

Twitter: [@CalineMalek](https://twitter.com/CalineMalek)



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Genes that helped our Arabian ancestors to survive could now be killing us
Genetics lab at KFSHRC attracts attention of global researchers

[**UAE resumes issuing tourist visas to vaccinated travellers**](#)

Sat, 2021-08-28 21:40

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates said it will resume issuing tourist visas to vaccinated travellers from Aug. 30, Emirates News Agency (WAM) reported on Saturday.

The decision also covered people coming in from countries from which the UAE had previously barred entry, WAM reported.

In those cases, visitors would have to take a COVID-19 test on arrival, it added.

UAE has currently recorded 715,394 cases of the virus, with 2,036 deaths as of Saturday.



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UAE condemns Kabul attacks as it starts hosting refugees UAE daily COVID-19 cases hover under 1,000