

# **Resilience Amid Crisis: The Impact of COVID-19 on Older Adults in Jordan - Challenges, Interventions, and Policy Innovations**

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## **Purpose**

The COVID-19 pandemic was not only a global health crisis but also a profound social and humanitarian challenge. Older adults, particularly those living with chronic illnesses and limited access to healthcare, were the most severely affected. In Jordan, where adults aged 60 and above represent 5.7% of the population, the pandemic revealed both systemic gaps and remarkable resilience.

This presentation seeks to explore the lived realities of older Jordanians during the crisis, the national and community-based responses that emerged, and the lessons that can guide future gerontological policy and practice.

## **Problem**

Even before the pandemic, Jordan's elderly population faced multiple vulnerabilities: such as high rates of non-communicable diseases, limited pension coverage, and barriers to digital engagement. COVID-19 exacerbated these conditions. Over 60% of COVID-19-related deaths in Jordan occurred in people aged 60 and above. Curfews and overburdened hospitals restricted access to care, while limited digital literacy, with only 4.6% of those aged 65 and above using computers, left many elders unable to register for vaccines or access telehealth. Beyond physical health, the pandemic intensified isolation, loneliness, and economic insecurity, placing older adults at the intersection of multiple risks.

## **Approach**

This presentation takes a multi-sectoral perspective, drawing on data from government reports, WHO and UNICEF initiatives, NGO programs, and local community responses. The analysis combines demographic insights with case-based examples of grassroots action. Initiatives such as mobile vaccination units, youth-led helplines, intergenerational technology support, and expanded home-based healthcare programs are highlighted to illustrate how health-, social care, and civic solidarity intersected during the crisis. By weaving together quantitative evidence and qualitative

accounts, the presentation aims to humanize statistical trends and give voice to the resilience of Jordan's elderly population.

## **Results**

The findings reveal a dual narrative of vulnerability and innovation. Health outcomes exposed the urgent need for geriatric-focused training and development of age-sensitive healthcare systems. Mental health challenges were widespread: older adults reported heightened depression, loneliness, and cognitive decline.

Yet community-driven programs such as the “Sanad initiative” (volunteers making weekly phone calls to isolated elders) and “Virtual Majlis” cultural sessions over WhatsApp and Zoom provided emotional lifelines. Economically, many older adults have experienced a sudden loss of income from informal work, forcing reliance on borrowing, savings depletion, or family assistance. In response, the National Aid Fund expanded cash transfers to 85,000 families, while NGOs coordinated food and medicine deliveries. Institutional care homes, initially sites of outbreak and fear, saw improved infection control and dignity-preserving measures after intervention from the Ministry of Social Development, UNHCR, and the Red Cross.

Importantly, the pandemic spotlighted the digital divide: while elders struggled with online systems, innovative youth-elder partnerships and the distribution of simplified devices provided practical bridges to inclusion.

## **Conclusion**

COVID-19 magnified both the fragility and resilience of Jordan's older population. The crisis underscored the need for structural reforms in healthcare, social protection, and digital inclusion. Lessons learned have already informed Jordan's National Strategy on Older Persons (2025–2030), which prioritizes universal pension system, integration of geriatric care, community-based services, and intergenerational solidarity. Moving forward, the challenge is not merely to prepare for the next crisis but to embed age-friendly principles into everyday governance, public health, and community life.

Older adults are not passive recipients of care; they are central to the fabric of Jordanian society. By addressing their needs with dignity and foresight,

Jordan and the international community can ensure that aging is associated with resilience and opportunity rather than vulnerability.