

TRANSFORMING ECONOMIES, REALIZING RIGHTS

Progress of the World's Women: Transforming economies, realizing rights documents the ways in which current economic and social policies are failing women in rich and poor countries alike, and asks, what would the economy look like if it truly worked for women?

The report brings together human rights and economic policymaking, and provides the key elements for a far reaching new policy agenda that can transform economies and make women's rights a reality.

FACT SHEET – MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

1 / TRANSFORMING WORK FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

With the right mix of economic and social policies, governments can generate decent jobs for women and ensure that the unpaid care work that goes into sustaining all economies is recognized and supported.

PERSISTENT GENDER GAPS IN LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND PAY

Between 1990 and 2013, women's labour force participation rate (LFPR) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region increased from 19.7 to 21.9 per cent, compared with a slight global decrease from 52.3 to 50.3 per cent. The LFPR for men was 75.2 per cent in 2013, down slightly from 76.3 per cent in 1990.

Women's LFPR varies across the region, but despite increases in most countries gender gaps remain extremely wide everywhere. In 2013, Qatar had the highest women's LFPR with 50.8 per cent (compared with 95.5 per cent for men), and the Syrian Arab Republic had the lowest rate at 13.5 per cent for women, (compared with 72.7 per cent for men). The United Arab Emirates experienced the largest increase (21.5 percentage points) in women's LFPR between 1990 and 2013, from 25.0 to 46.5 per cent respectively.

In 2013, across the region, the unemployment rate for women was 22.7 per cent compared to males at 8.1 per cent. In Saudi Arabia, the unemployment rate for females was 21.3 per cent, compared to males at 2.9 per cent. In Yemen, the unemployment rate for females was 38.8 per cent, compared to males at 9.9 per cent.

Of particular concern is the rising levels of unemployment among young people: in MENA, 51 per cent of young women and 23 per cent of young men aged 15-24 were unemployed in 2013.

The gender pay gap in MENA is just under 14 per cent. This compares to a global gender pay gap of 24 per cent. Relatively few women are employed, but those who are tend to be highly educated and in well-paid jobs, which accounts for the lower gender pay gap.

TOO OFTEN WOMEN ARE TRAPPED IN LOW PAID, POOR QUALITY WORK

Realizing women's rights at work requires that women have access to employment with decent pay, safe working conditions and social protection.

In common with other developing regions, informal or 'unprotected' work is the norm. In Egypt in 1998, 62 per cent of women were in 'unprotected' employment, compared to 50 per cent of men. By 2012, this figure had declined, but 'unprotected' jobs still made up a large proportion of employment: 58 per cent for women and 40 per cent for men.

In the MENA region, women's ability to undertake paid work outside the home is often restricted by rigid social norms and cultural expectations about women's role within the family and in the public domain. For those women who do join the labour force, social norms also restrict the types or locations of work they can do, as well as their earnings and their capacity to retain control over them. For example, the practice of *purdah* or seclusion in some communities means that women are confined to work in the home or in single-sex occupations.

WOMEN'S DISPROPORTIONATE SHARE OF UNPAID CARE WORK LIMITS THEIR OPPORTUNITIES

If paid and unpaid work are combined, women work longer hours than men in nearly all countries, including all countries in the MENA region except Iraq and Qatar. On average, women do at least two and a half times more unpaid care and domestic work than men globally.

In Algeria, women in rural areas do 5.5 hours of unpaid care and domestic work per day, compared to 5.1 hours for urban women, rising to 7.3 hours a day for women with children younger than 4 years. Men's contribution to domestic work remains constant at less than one hour per day across all these categories. In the State of Palestine, from 2012-2013, women and girls aged 10 and over spent 293 minutes per day on unpaid care and domestic work compared to 55 minutes per day for men.

DISCRIMINATORY LAWS CONTINUE TO CONSTRAIN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Equality before the law is crucial for gender equality. Family laws are of particular significance for women because they regulate gender and age hierarchies in the home, by shaping the rights and obligations of spouses in marriage and divorce, the relationship between parents and children, marital property, child custody or guardianship and inheritance. As such, they have a direct impact on women's ability to access and control resources.

Globally, almost all countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), but many retain reservations that limit its implementation. Out of the 26 countries that retain reservations on equal rights in marriage and the family, 12 are located in the MENA region. Since 2011, two countries in the region—Morocco and Tunisia—have removed their reservations in this area.

Globally by 2014, 128 countries had laws that guarantee married women's equality when it comes to property, including all twelve countries in MENA for which there is data available. While in 112 countries

daughters had equal inheritance rights to sons, none of the MENA countries had stipulated equality in this area in 2014. With regards to women's employment, only Algeria and Morocco had laws mandating for equal remuneration for work of equal value in 2014; and only the Moroccan law guaranteed non-discrimination in based on gender in hiring. 9 out of 17 countries in the region had laws banning sexual harassment in the workplace.

In Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine and Yemen, there is no specific legislation mandating gender equality any of these three categories.

POLICIES TO TRANSFORM LABOUR MARKETS

Recognizing, reducing and redistributing women's unpaid care and domestic work

Governments in low-income countries can take a range of measures including investments in basic social services and infrastructure (see below); as well as family-friendly policies, such as the provision of childcare services and paid leave, to enable women to participate in paid work.

Employers are responsible for funding maternity leave in most countries in the region. Currently, in 24 per cent of countries, maternity leave is funded through social security contributions, in 12 per cent of countries through a mix of government and employer contributions and in 65 per cent of countries through employer contributions.

The majority of countries in the region also do not meet the ILO standard of 14 weeks paid maternity leave. The highest minimum length of paid maternity leave in 2013 was in the Syrian Arab Republic, with 17 weeks. MENA countries offering paternity leave include: Tunisia, Syrian Arab Republic, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Libya, and Algeria, although these often constitute just a few days of unpaid leave. The Syrian Arab Republic offers the most days for paternity leave, with a minimum length of 6 days.

Narrowing gender pay gaps and addressing occupational segregation

Occupational segregation means that women are concentrated in a small number of under-valued jobs.

Women in MENA comprise just over a quarter of managerial, professional and technical positions, compared with a global average of over 45 per cent.

There are 1.3 million female domestic workers in the Middle East, making up 32 per cent of all paid female employees. Many of these workers are migrants and are not protected by labour laws, making them particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Following years of activism by domestic worker organizations, the ILO Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189) was adopted in 2011. The convention requires States to extend basic labour rights to domestic workers, such as overtime pay, annual paid leave, minimum wages and safe working conditions. So far, 17 countries worldwide have ratified the convention, including no countries in MENA to date.

2/ MAKING SOCIAL POLICY WORK FOR WOMEN

Well-designed social policies can enhance women's income security, and their ability to realize their potential and expand their life options. Social protection policies—including family and child allowances and old-age pensions—can be powerful tools to address women's poverty and reduce inequality. Social services, such as health care, child- and elder-care, and water and sanitation can have an even greater effect, as well as reducing the drudgery of unpaid care and domestic work.

WOMEN'S GREATER VULNERABILITY TO POVERTY IN CHANGING SOCIETIES

Household surveys show that women aged 20-59 years are more likely than men to live in a poor household, in 6 out of 8 MENA countries with data.

WOMEN HAVE LESS ACCESS TO SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social transfers reach less than 3 per cent of unemployed working-age adults in the Middle East.

While sex-disaggregated data on pension coverage is scarce for MENA, women are much less likely than men to enjoy access to a pension in old age in the two countries for which data is available: in Egypt and Jordan 62 per cent and 82 per cent of men respectively receive a pension, compared to only 8 per cent and 12 per cent of women.

Contributory pension schemes exclude the majority of working-age women in MENA. In some countries, men are 10 to 20 times more likely to contribute to a pension scheme than women. In Saudi Arabia, 2 per cent of women compared with 44 per cent of men contribute; and 45 per cent of men compared with 13 per cent of women in Egypt contribute.

SOCIAL TRANSFERS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR REALIZING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Public social security expenditure (as a percentage of GDP) was 3.7 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa, based on latest available data from 2005-2013, compared to 12.3 per cent globally. Public health

expenditure was 2.4 per cent of GDP in 2012, compared to 6.5 per cent globally.

Well-designed social transfers, such as child allowances or social pensions, can play a crucial role in reducing income insecurity among women and improve their employment opportunities. In Egypt, feminist researchers, policymakers and NGOs designed and implemented a cash transfer programme with women's empowerment at its heart, making it the first of its kind in the region. A year after the programme was first piloted, women were working fewer hours, but in better jobs: the reliability of payments meant they knew their minimum needs would be met, so they did not have to accept exploitative work. More than a quarter of women who had reported domestic violence said that it had stopped now that the financial pressure on the family had eased. After the successful pilot, the programme is now being rolled out nationally, covering half a million families in Egypt.

ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE SOCIAL SERVICES ARE JUST AS IMPORTANT

Social services can have an even greater effect on poverty and inequality than that of social transfer systems, and can reduce the demands of unpaid care and domestic work on women. For example, research found that improved connectivity in the water grid in urban Morocco has increased women's time for rest and leisure.

Access barriers to social services remain large for women

A large share of women report major barriers to accessing health services in Egypt (69 per cent), Jordan (62 per cent) and Morocco (49 per cent). Women from poorer households and rural areas are particularly likely to experience difficulties. In Egypt, almost 90 per cent of lower-income women report difficulties in accessing health care. In Jordan, 34 per cent of rural women report difficulties in accessing health care because of the distance to health facilities, compared to 25 per cent of urban women.

Health care

In 2012, governments in the Middle East and North Africa spent \$447 (PPP) per capita (2.4 per cent of GDP) on average on the health of their citizens, compared to global average expenditure at \$1,121 (PPP) per capita (6.5 per cent of GDP).

Low levels of spending on health translate into serious shortcomings in service delivery: there are 1.6 physicians per 1,000 people in the region (compared with approximately double that in Developed Regions); and there are 2.5 midwives/nurses per 1,000 people in MENA, compared with 9.2 per cent in Developed Regions.

High out of pocket payments (OPP) for health care can keep women from getting the health care they need.

Global average out-of-pocket health expenditure in 2012 was 22.2 per cent of total health expenditure. The average for MENA was 23.9 per cent.

Care services

Care services must be affordable, accessible, of appropriate quality and respectful of the rights and dignity of both caregivers and care receivers, but in most countries care services are still scarce, and where they exist their coverage and quality is often uneven.

Policy responses to the care needs of dependent adults—including frail elderly people and people with disabilities—have been slow to develop, even in developed countries. Public expenditure on elderly care remains low. Families, friends, neighbours and community networks provide the bulk of long-term care, with women assuming most of the related unpaid work.

Water and sanitation

In developing countries, access to improved water is higher in urban than rural areas and high-income groups have significantly better access than low-income groups. A large proportion of the world's poor rely on a 'patchwork quilt of provision', including water standpipes, water kiosks and delivery agents.

Several countries have successfully extended water and sanitation services to underserved areas and ensured their affordability through public investments, subsidies and price regulation. Experiences across regions suggest that placing women at the centre of water decisions leads to improved access, more cost-effective delivery and less corruption in water financing.

3/ TOWARDS AN ENABLING MACROECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Macroeconomic policies can and should support the realization of women's rights, by creating dynamic and stable economies, by generating decent work and by mobilizing resources to finance vital public services.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ECONOMIC GROWTH AND GENDER EQUALITY

Gender gaps in labour force participation are associated with lower growth rates. In the MENA region, gender gaps in the labour market reduce GDP per capita by 27 per cent.

However, in some cases *gender inequality* fuels growth. In some contexts, lower wage rates for women contribute to lower average labour costs, providing a short-term boost to growth in labour-intensive industries. Virtually all economies rely on the unpaid care and domestic work that is largely provided by women. Firms, for example, depend on the human resources that are produced and sustained through such work. The unequal distribution of the costs of care therefore supports economic growth.

UNPAID CARE WORK UNDERPINS ECONOMIC GROWTH AND MUST BE RECOGNIZED AND SUPPORTED

The work involved in caring for people is essential for reproducing the labour force and generates real economic value. Despite the benefits to society, the unpaid care work predominantly performed by women is not incorporated into the calculation of GDP or reflected in other macroeconomic indicators, or taken into account in economic policymaking.

Across MENA, women report doing a larger share of unpaid care and domestic work: five times or more in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and the State of Palestine; and between 1.4 and 2.4 times more in Iraq, Qatar and Oman.

MOBILIZING RESOURCES TO FUND SOCIAL POLICIES

Governments need revenue to pay for social policies and corporations must pay their fair share.

Annual tax revenue lost to developing countries due to trade mispricing alone is estimated at between US\$98 and \$106 billion, nearly \$20 billion more than the annual capital costs needed to achieve universal water and sanitation coverage.

As well as eliminating tax avoidance, there are other ways of raising resources to fund essential infrastructure and public services: a number of countries have reduced spending on security and the military and redirected resources to fund social protection. Others have used revenues generated from natural resource extraction to finance their social protection systems.

Gender responsive budgeting can have a profound effect on women's lives and a country's development. In 2014, Morocco passed a new finance law, which obliges the government to consider gender throughout the budget process.