

Challenges of Unpaid Care Work in Arab Countries





The gender equality narrative in our region has not been subjected to any notable changes in the last three decades.

Despite advancing in education and health indicators, women's economic participation remains stagnant.

Although Arab governments made significant efforts to increase women's participation in economic life, it remains significantly low, **scoring 19.5% in 2023**, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates.

Women's high participation in unpaid care work is a major cause for the Arab region having one of the highest gender gaps in the world and the lowest rates of women participation in the workforce.

Women in the Arab region do around 80% to 90% of unpaid care work, dedicating around 5x more of their time compared to men.

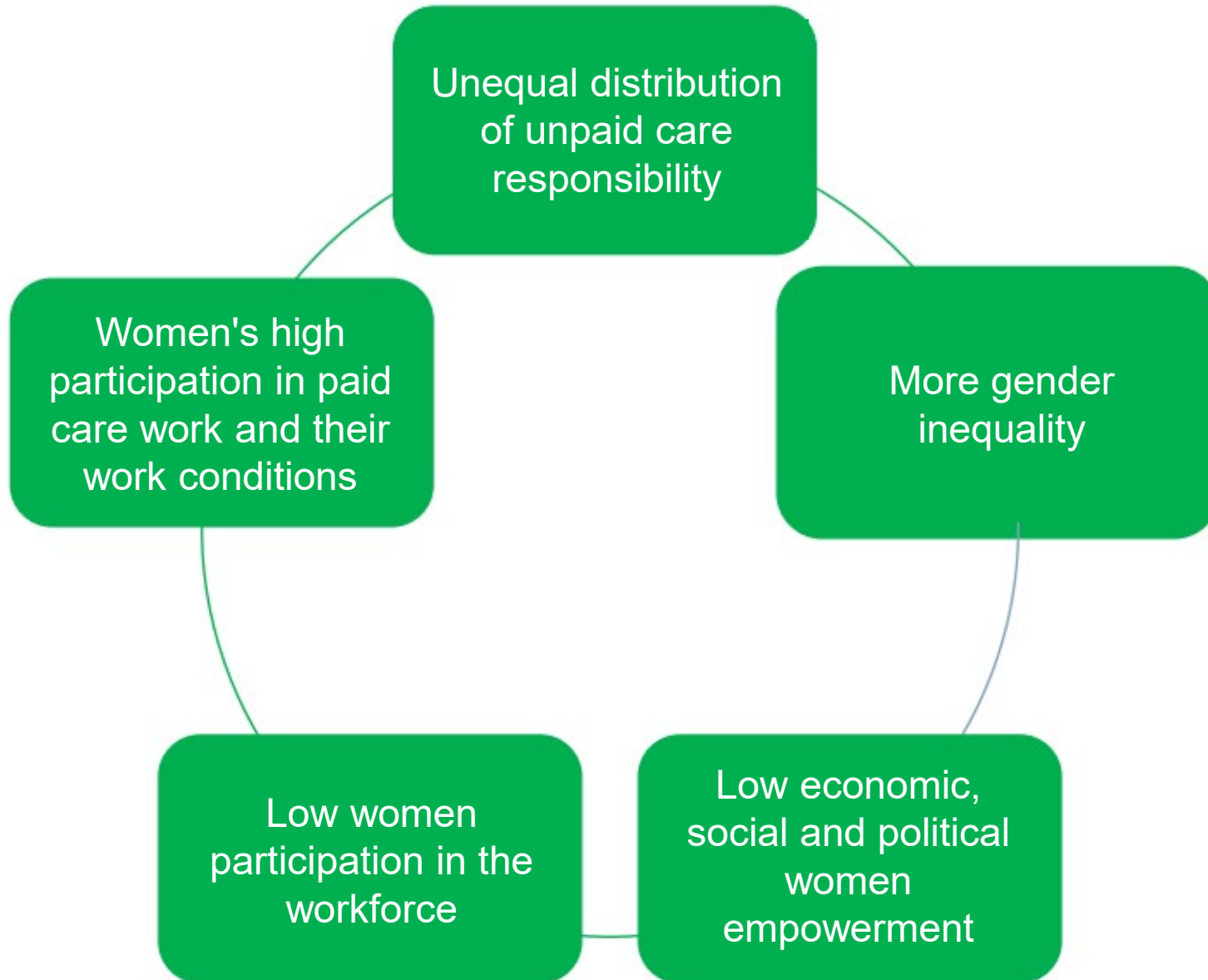
- ➡ Prevailing Stereotypes
- ➡ Weak and inadequate care economy and policies

As a result, various women cannot enter or participate in the labour market and cannot advance in their professional careers either. Around **73.3%** of women in the Arab world are out of the labour market due to their care responsibilities (ILO estimates).

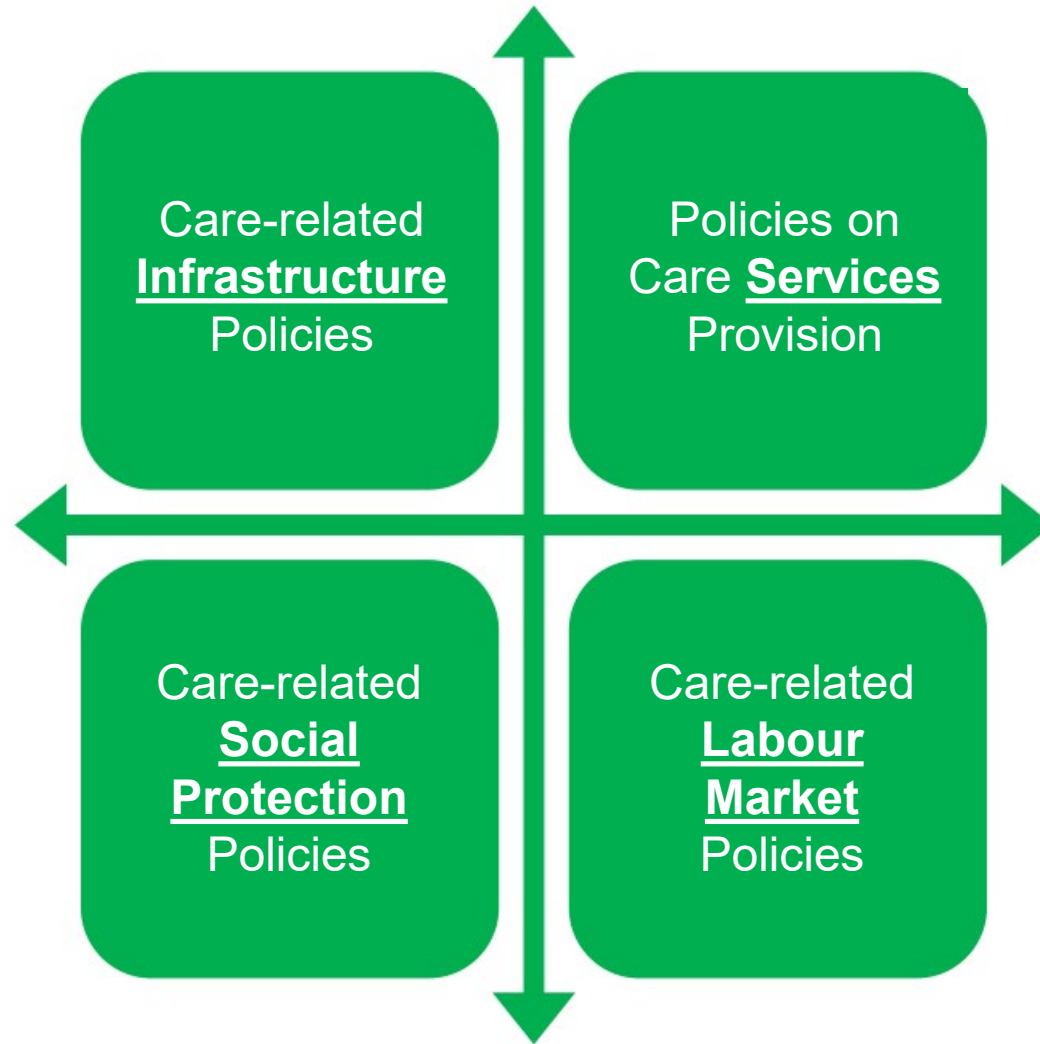
Thus, It is important to focus on care policies.



Why is “Care Economy” so Vital?



Care Policies Requiring Development or Update



Care-related Work Policies

Maternity Benefits

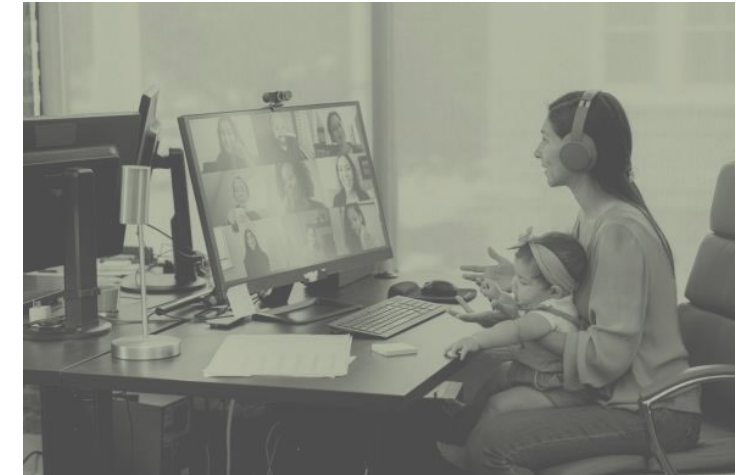
Care Leave

Flexible Work Arrangements

Paternity Leave

Care Leave Allowing Employees to Provide Care to any Sick Family Member

Social Protection for Workers Providing Care Services



The positive impact of investing in the care economy while designing and implementing relevant policies

Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Attaining gender equality

Promoting women's economic participation

Empowering women to cope with and address future shocks, crises and setbacks

Realizing children's potential and enhancing human capital

Realizing the rights of the elderly and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) by respecting their dignity

Driving economic growth and even protecting the environment

Strengthening Care Policies: An Analytical Comparative Approach



- Having a deep understanding of the available national care policies, their development and the stakeholders' roles in formulating and implementing them
- Exploring implementation challenges, proposing alternative policies, and identifying the needed improvement and the required policy and legal changes to implement these alternatives

Empowering Women in the Arab Region by Strengthening the Care Economy

Economic Empowerment of Women and Child Care in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Economic Empowerment of Women and Elderly Care in Morocco

Economic Empowerment of Women and PwD Care in the Sultanate of Oman

Economic Empowerment of Women and Child Care in Lebanon

Empowering Women by Strengthening the Care Economy

Key Features of the Arab Region

Women carrying out most care responsibilities and the need to realize the rights of all human beings

Prevailing gaps in legal and policy frameworks

Providing limited service in general and facing shortages in expressing needs

Offering weak and unequal services threatening to entrench and deepen inequality

Having limited and weak technical capacities

Not addressing care as an independent sector leading to poor coordination between various stakeholders involved in childcare services and policies

Tangible development and good practices to build on

Economic Empowerment of Women and Child Care in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Women's labour force participation rate is 34.2%.

Vision 2030 includes equal employment opportunities for all and supports the increase of women's participation in the labour force.

Regulatory frameworks and reforms are implemented to develop the children hospitality sector.



Economic Empowerment of Women and Child Care in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Identified Challenges

Feminization of the sector
reinforcing prevailing
stereotypes

High Cost

Economic Empowerment of Women and Elderly Care in Morocco



Women's labour force participation rate is 20%.

Women's employment rate is four times lower than men's.

Women do 87.5% of unpaid care work, including elderly care.

There is a rapid increase in elderly population

Economic Empowerment of Women and Elderly Care in Morocco

Identified Challenges

Lack of qualified
male/female workers

High cost

Feminization of the sector

Lack of care facilities and centers
providing domestic care services

Weak capacities and skills of
unpaid male/female caregivers

Economic Empowerment of Women and PwD Care in the Sultanate of Oman



Women's labour force participation rate is 32.6%.

Women in Oman devote 19.2% of their day (i.e. 4 hours and 37 minutes) to unpaid household chores compared to men dedicating 8.1% (i.e. 1 hour and 57 minutes).

Economic Empowerment of Women and PwD Care in the Sultanate of Oman

Identified Challenges

Legal frameworks lacking the multi-faceted perspectives required to meet the needs of children with disabilities' caregivers

The need for flexible work arrangements

High Cost

The need to establish nurseries for children with disabilities

Economic Empowerment of Women and Child Care in Lebanon

Women's labour force participation rate is 27.5%.

Women in Lebanon perform 94% of childcare tasks.

Women spend 333 minutes every morning on childcare compared to men dedicating 111 minutes.

37% of parents who use private childcare facilities reported relying on grandparents to care for their children when daycare centers are closed.



Economic Empowerment of Women and Child Care in Lebanon

Identified Challenges

The number of daycare centers in the private sector is 10 times greater than those available in the public sector.

Better services in the private sector

High cost in the private sector

The profession of caring for children under 3 is poorly regulated

Economic Empowerment of Women and Child Care in Lebanon

Achieved Results

Two draft laws presented to the Lebanese Parliament and an action plan under the National Strategy for Women



- The first draft law on flexible work arrangements is proposed.
- The second draft law is set to extend maternity leave from 10 to 14 weeks, along with providing breastfeeding breaks and facilities; grant a 10-day paternity leave; ensure the availability of care services in the workplace for the private and public sectors; and eliminate discrimination against women in social security laws.
- A work plan has been developed to mobilize resources and support the process of adopting both draft laws.
- Work is ongoing to advance the adoption of both draft laws through setting and implementing a specific roadmap.

Benefits of Family-Friendly Work Policies

Developing Human Capital

Achieving Gender Equality

Respecting the dignity of all care service recipients, including the elderly and PwDs

Attaining economic growth

Bridging the gender pay gap by increasing women's participation in the labour force

Creating a more stable and productive labour force

Reducing work absence rate

Improving male and female employee morale in the public and private sectors





Next Steps

Adopting a holistic and comprehensive approach that considers the different types of care policies, thus, requiring joint efforts by different sectors and stakeholders to achieve targeted reforms

Thank You