Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals

A gender snapshot of the Arab region 2024

UNITED NATIONS
ESCWA
Shared Prosperity Dignified Life
WOMEN COUNT
UN WOMEN

1. A snapshot of gender equality in the Sustainable Development Goals

1 NO POVERTY

24.5 million **women and girls** live in extreme poverty, and 3 in 4 of them live in rural areas. (2024)

Only **8.5%** of mothers with newborns are covered by maternity cash benefits, ¼ of the world average. (2023)

1 in 3 **older women** receives old-age pensions, compared to **2 in 3** **older men**. (2023)

2 ZERO HUNGER

62 million **women and girls** are moderately or severely food insecure. (2023)

1 in 3 **women**, including pregnant women, suffers from anaemia. (2019)

2.2 million pregnant **women** suffer from anaemia. (2019)

1 in 3 infants is exclusively breastfed in their first six months. (2023)

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Between 2000 and 2020, maternal mortality declined by **45%**, from **246.1** to **139.3** deaths per 100,000 live births. (2020)

1 in 5 birth deliveries is not attended by skilled health personnel. (2023)

2 in 5 **women** remain with unmet need for family planning. (2024)

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

42% of children are in kindergarten, which is below the global average of **75%**. (2022)

1 in 5 girls in primary school and **1 in 3** girls in lower secondary school do not complete their education. (2022)

10.9 million girls are out of school compared to **9.5 million** boys. (2019)

1 in 3 girls is not in school, including **1 in 8** girls in urban areas and **1 in 5** boys in rural areas. (2019)

11 million girls do not achieve minimum proficiency levels in reading and math. (2023)

5 GENDER EQUALITY

Only **8** countries provided evidence on legal frameworks that advance gender equality. (2024)

The region gained scores out of **100** in the following domains:

50 in laws regarding employment and economic benefits

51 in overarching legal frameworks and public life

64 in laws regarding violence against women

51 in laws regarding marriage and family. (2024)

17.7% of seats in parliament are held by women. (2024)

19.5% of local government positions are held by women. (2023)

15.7% of management positions are held by women. (2022)

29.4 million girls were married before the age of 18 years old. (2023)

40 million women and girls have been subjected to female genital mutilation. (2022)

100.5 million women lack legal protection against intimate partner violence. (2023)

Women spend **4.7** times as many hours a day on unpaid work than men.

37.7 million women do not own a mobile phone. (2024)

Only **64%** of women use the internet compared to **75%** of men. (2024)

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

51 million people lack access to basic drinking water services. (2022)

26 million people, mostly women, spend one to four hours a day collecting water. (2024)

More than **19,000** **women and girls** die each year due to unsafe water and lack of sanitation and hygiene. (2022)

In rural areas, **1 in 5** people lacks access to basic water services. (2022)

1 in 3 people lacks access to safely managed water. (2022)

1 in 3 people lacks handwashing facilities. (2020)

1 in 5 people lacks access to basic sanitation. (2022)

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

23% of people in rural areas lack access to clean fuels and technology compared to only **7%** in urban areas. (2022)

91,350 **women** died prematurely from exposure to household air pollution. (2019)

Nearly **35 million** people do not have access to electricity in their homes. (2022)

15% of **women** participate in the energy sector, whereas the global average is **22%**. (2023)

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

1 in 5 **women** is unemployed compared to **1 in 12** **men**, while **2 in 5** **young women** are unemployed compared to **1 in 5** **young men**. (2023)

20% of **women** are in the labour force compared to **70%** of **men**. (2023)

42.1% of **young women** are not in education, employment or training (NEET) compared to only **19.7%** of **young men**. (2023)

10.9% of **women** are unpaid contributing family workers compared to **2.8%** of **men**. (2022)

Only **29%** of **women** have a financial account compared to **46%** of **men**. (2021)

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

23% of employed **women** are in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) jobs. (2022)

8.2% of **women** work in manufacturing compared to **10.2%** of **men**. (2022)

2 in 5 researchers are **women**. (2021)

1 in 6 inventors is a **women**. (2023)

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

20.3 million **women** and **girls** are forcibly displaced. (2023)

Only **8.3%** of gross domestic product (GDP) is allocated to social expenditure compared to the world average of **19.8%**.

Women's share of all labour income in the Arab region is **14.5%**, behind the global average of **51.8%**, reflecting persistent gender gaps in wages and labour force participation in 2024.

16 countries have clauses in their national constitutions on gender equality, non-discrimination and/or protection from gender-based violence.

12 countries have anti-trafficking laws with punitive, protective and preventive measures.

3 countries have provisions on domestic workers in their labour code.

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

39% of **women** are exposed to sexual harassment in public places compared to **22%** of **men**. (2019)

27.7 million **women** and **girls** live in slums. (2022)

14 countries have sustainable smart cities initiatives. (2024)

18.7% of **women** work in agriculture compared to **15.4%** of **men**. (2022)

24.2 million **women** suffer from severe food insecurity, an increase of **9 million** **women** since 2015. (2023)

11 countries have national action plans to advance the **women**, peace and security agenda.

2.5 **women** per 100,000 population are victims of intentional homicide.

1.7 million **women**, **men** and children are in modern slavery.

5 countries have ratified the Convention on Consent to Marriage.

4 countries have ratified the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29).

Less than **39.5%** of indicators are disseminated as disaggregated by sex. (2024)

36% of gender indicators lack any available data. (2024)

The Open Gender Data Index (OGDI) score is **42%** compared to **46%** globally. (2022)

2. IN FOCUS: OVERLOOKED WOMEN AND GIRLS OF THE ARAB REGION

A. Women and girls represent half of the Arab region's population and thus hold half of the Arab region's human potential and capital

Halfway to the end point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Arab region is failing to achieve gender equality, making it an increasingly distant goal. Gender inequality in the Arab region is a pressing challenge, constraining the region's human, social and economic development. Women constitute half (48.3 per cent) of the region's population, and despite the significant progress made in closing the gender gap in education and health, women remain overlooked in other development areas. Women's limited access to decision-making and leadership positions, employment, entrepreneurship and economic opportunities undermines democracy, economic resilience, peace and women's empowerment. There is an urgent need to create a more conducive environment that fully enables women to participate in development, as economic empowerment is foundational to empowerment in all spheres of life.[1]

The political, social, economic and legal realms of life in most Arab countries are largely controlled through informal and personalized dominant male networks (or those which are usually male dominant). Arab women's educational advancements over recent decades have not translated into a simultaneous and equivalent advancement in their political representation or economic empowerment, nor have they resulted in proportionate improvements in their safety and well-being compared to other regions. Arab women, especially those with advanced education levels, are still being marginalized, while a large number of women are overlooked in policies and programmes and are left behind entirely. There is a distinct negative relationship between gender inequality and economic development. Including more women in the workforce accelerates economic growth with positive spillover effects on society, families and children.[2]

B. Bridging gender gaps in the labour market would increase the Arab region's gross domestic product

Through reducing gender inequalities in the Arab region's labour markets, the region's economic welfare and growth outlook could be improved. The region's gross domestic product (GDP) would increase by more than 20 per cent, mainly driven by the addition of women workers to the labour force and the positive impact of gender diversity on productivity.[3,4] The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has estimated that the exclusion of women costs the region around $575 billion per year.[5] Countries in the Arab region are increasingly recognizing the importance of supporting and nurturing entrepreneurs, both through subsistence and in transformational ways, to further economic development. Research indicates that if women and men participated equally as entrepreneurs, global GDP could rise by as much as 2 per cent, or $1.5 trillion.[6]

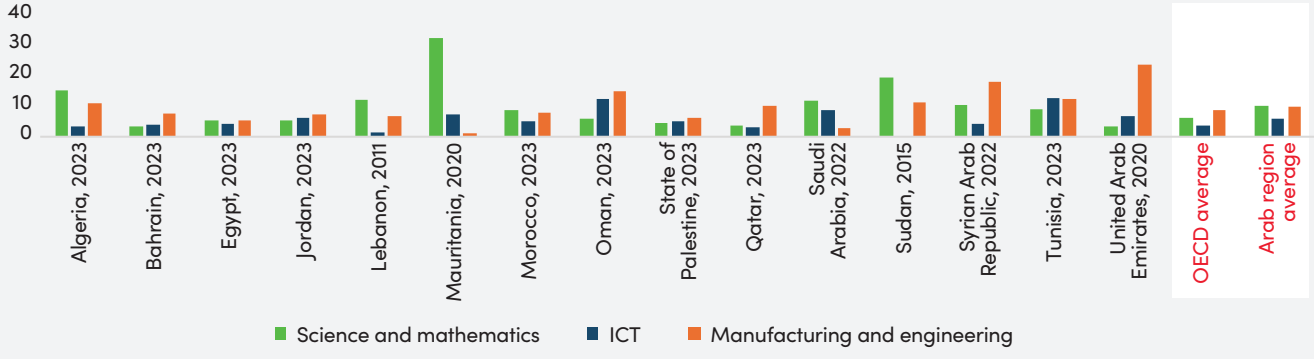
C. Let the numbers shed some light

Women and girls, when provided with the necessary opportunities and targeted resources, have the potential to excel and thrive. In the Arab region, women are increasingly enrolling in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) majors. They have now outpaced men in the sciences, with 9 per cent of women compared to 6.3 per cent of men pursuing degrees in this area.

The regional average of young women graduates in manufacturing and engineering stands at 8.8 per cent, in information and communications technology (ICT) at 5.4 per cent, and in science and mathematics at 9 per cent. These statistics are higher than the OECD average of 7.9 per cent in engineering, 3.1 per cent in ICT and 5.5 per cent in science, according to the latest available data.

FIGURE 1

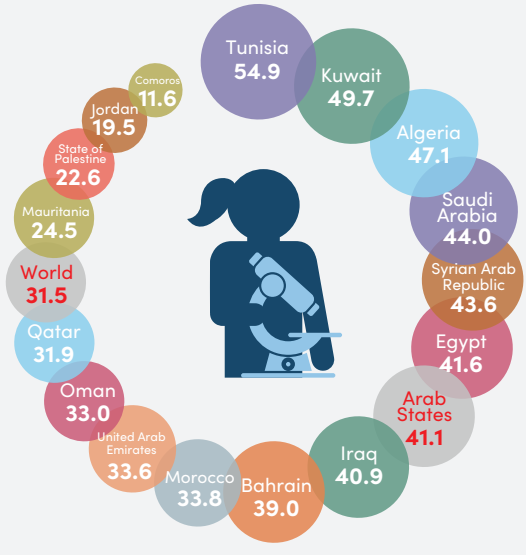
Proportion of female STEM graduates from tertiary education, by field of study (Percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Distribution of tertiary graduates by field of study" (accessed in October 2024).

FIGURE 2

Share of female researchers, latest data (Percentage)



Source: UNESCO, UIS Database.

The Arab region ranks third among global regions in terms of the share of women researchers (41 per cent) and scored higher than the world average (31.5 per cent) in 2021.

Despite their significant progress and achievements, Arab women continue to be overlooked in the political sphere and face economic challenges, with their livelihoods and safety still being compromised. Education alone is unlikely to close gender gaps in the labour market; other factors also need to be addressed.[7]

D. Politically overlooked

Regardless of the progress achieved in education, women's representation in parliament across the Arab region remains low, at just 17.7 per cent. Women's representation in local government is also low, at 19.5 per cent, and even lower, at 16.3 per cent, in ministerial positions – figures that fall short of both OECD and world averages. This lack of representation signals that women are not recognized as equal partners in the political landscape, a status which undermines their influence in public decision-making and leadership roles.

Research indicates that higher rates of women's political representation are closely linked to the enactment of inclusive and gender-equal legislation. For instance, countries with greater representation of women in parliament tend to have progressive laws concerning property rights and inheritance, and protections against violence and workplace harassment.[8]

A notable example is Bahrain, which saw significant improvements in women's political and economic participation.[9] By 2024, parliamentary seats held by women increased by 5 percentage points (20 per cent), while the share of women in ministerial positions has risen by 17 percentage points (22 per cent) since 2021. The proportion of women in the judiciary also increased, with 11 per cent of judges being women in 2023. Bahraini women's labour force participation rate rose to 43 per cent in 2023, an increase of 6 percentage points in two decades. This progress contributed to a dramatic increase in women's participation in economic and commercial activities. By the end of June 2023, 45 per cent of active commercial registrations were owned by Bahraini women.[10] Bahrain additionally has provisions allowing for civil claims and remedies for sexual harassment in the workplace.[11]

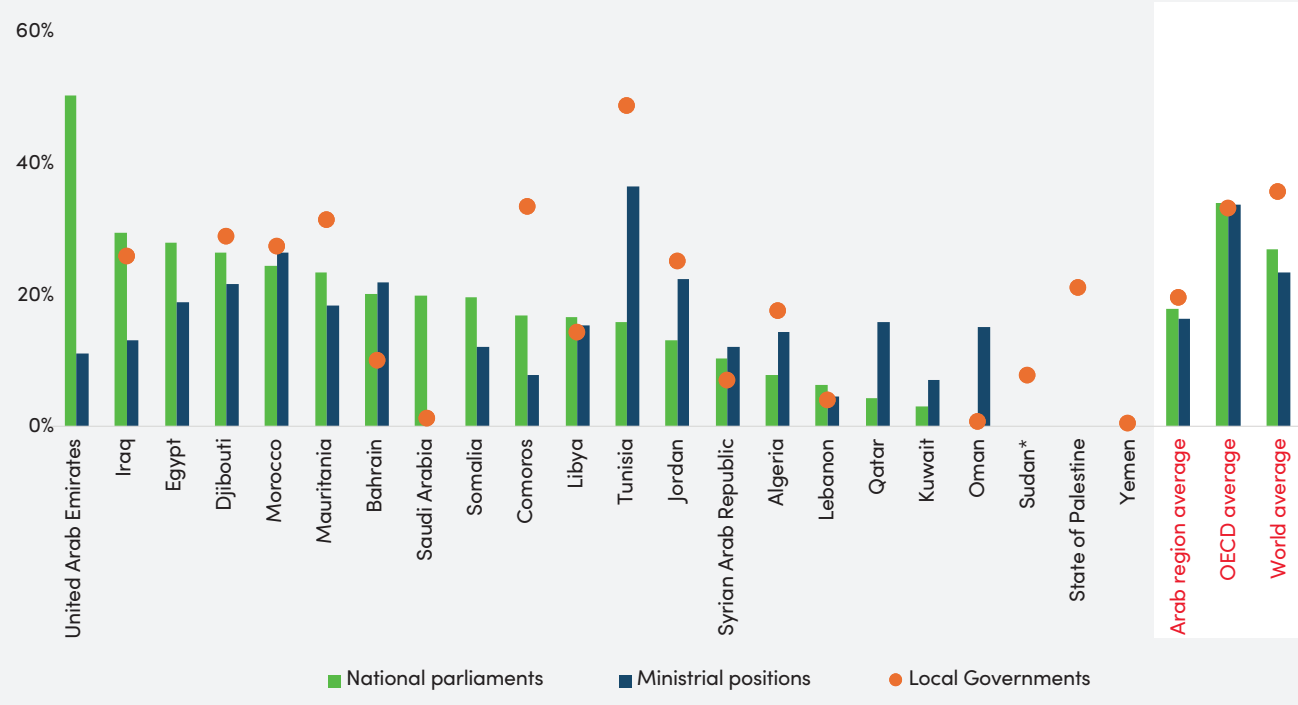
The United Arab Emirates achieved gender parity in its Federal National Council in 2020, with women constituting 50 per cent of the members, and women's labour participation rate also reached 50 per cent. The United Arab Emirates, which made strides in recent years in reforming its laws towards gender equality,[12] has since introduced legislation on equal pay, dismissal of pregnant workers,[13] and programmes to support women in STEM fields, all of which have contributed to higher incomes for women. With quotas ensuring that 24 per cent of seats in parliament are held by women, Morocco has seen incremental progress in enacting laws to combat gender discrimination in the workplace, such as through the recent labour reforms aimed at reducing gender pay gaps and improving job security for women.

Women are still often overlooked in the political arena despite their achievements at the academic level, limiting their political participation and thereby ability to effect meaningful change in their lives. Increased representation in parliament boosts women's economic participation through three mechanisms: policy advocacy prioritizing issues like equal pay, maternity leave and childcare services; role modelling by visible women leaders, which fosters cultural shifts, inspiring greater women's labour market participation and breaking traditional stereotypes; and gender-sensitive budgeting that directs resources to health, education and infrastructure. These factors collectively help narrow gender income gaps and promote inclusive growth.

To empower women and drive progress, it is crucial to adopt and implement laws that strengthen their rights. Such measures not only enhance women's empowerment but also promote economic growth and social resilience.[14]

FIGURE 3

Women's share of public positions (Percentage)



Source: National parliaments: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), "Women in National Parliaments" (situation as of 1 January 2024). Ministerial positions: UN Women, Poster: Women political leaders 2024 (situation as of 1 January 2024). Local governments: United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), Global SDG Database (accessed in October 2024).

E. Qualified women remain left out of the labour market

Globally, women face significant challenges in securing employment compared to men, resulting in lower labour market participation rates. When women do find work, they are often confined to low-skill, low-quality jobs in precarious conditions that offer little opportunity for advancement.[15] Data on the Arab region reveal the largest gender gaps in key labour market and enterprise metrics, and its economic performance significantly trails behind that of most other regions.[16]

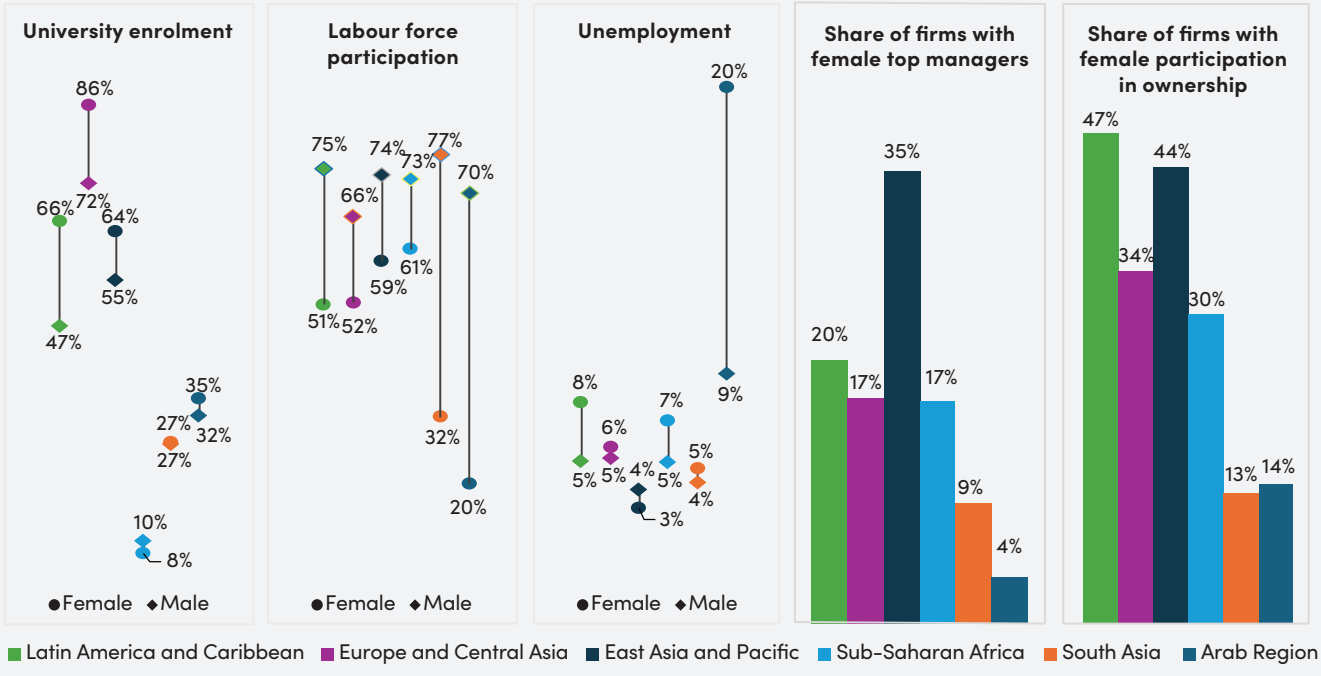
Women in the Arab region hold more university degrees than men, a trend consistent with other regions except for sub-Saharan Africa. However, the Arab region's women's labour force participation rates are lower than those in other regions, with a striking 50-percentage-point gap compared to men's participation rates.

Additionally, while women's unemployment rates are generally higher or comparable to men's across most regions, the Arab region stands out with the highest unemployment rates for women in the world, alongside the widest gender gap of 11 percentage points in unemployment.

The higher the level of women's and men's education, the higher their employment rates. However, women do not receive the same employment dividends as men for their education.[17] Arab women with advanced education continue to face barriers to accessing the labour market. In contrast, OECD countries demonstrate that both women and men with advanced education enjoy high labour participation rates and minimal differences in unemployment rates.

FIGURE 4

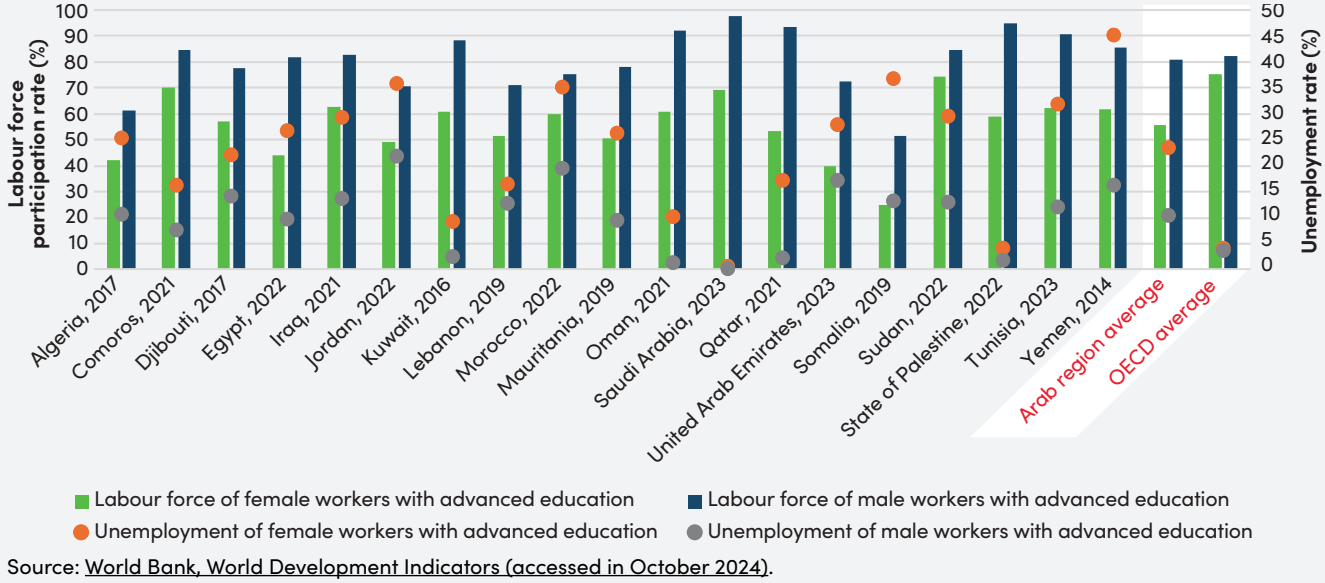
Gender gaps in the Arab region compared to other regions (Percentage)



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators; data for unemployment in the Arab region are from the ILOSTAT Database (accessed in October 2024).

FIGURE 5

Labour force participation rates and unemployment rates of women and men with advanced education, latest year (Percentage)



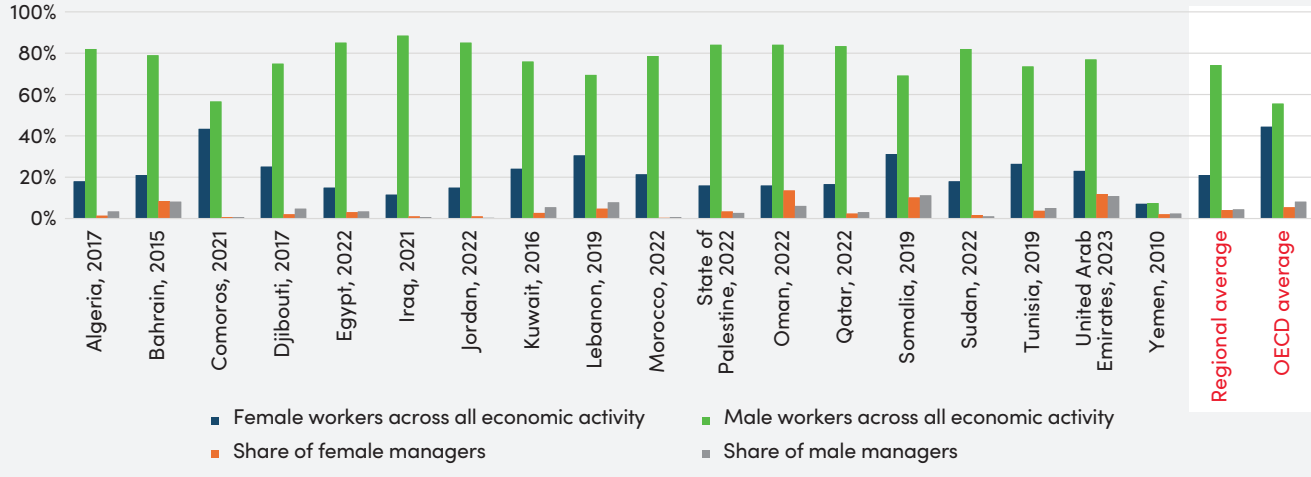
Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators (accessed in October 2024).

The ratio of Arab women workers in all occupations (labour force participation) remains much lower than the ratio of Arab men workers (56 per cent of women versus 81 per cent of men). While 23 per cent of adult women with a university degree are either unemployed or outside the labour force, the same is true for only 10 per cent of men in the same situation. In most countries, there is a notable gender gap in unemployment rates among the highly educated, whereas in OECD countries, this gap is non-existent between women and men.

However, in some Arab countries, there have been strong improvements in the share of women managers among employed women. Oman recorded the highest share of women managers, at 14 per cent, and several countries such as Bahrain, Qatar, Somalia and the United Arab Emirates have reported a narrow gender gap between women and men managers.

FIGURE 6

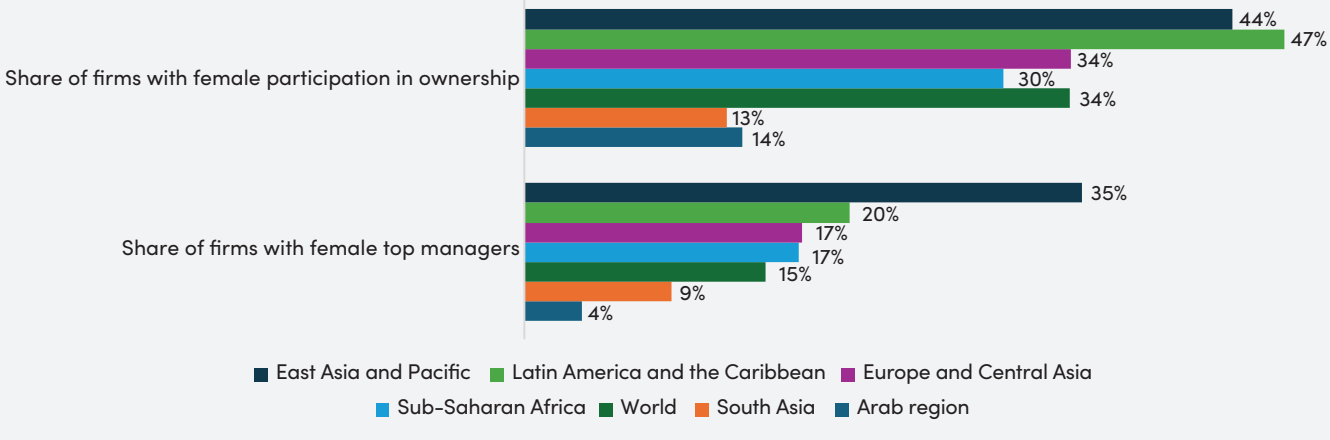
Share of women and men workers and managers in all occupations (Percentage)



Source: Calculated by ESCWA and UN Women from ILOSTAT Database (accessed in October 2024).

FIGURE 7

Inequalities in women's ownership and share of top managers (Percentage)



Source: World Bank, Enterprise Surveys database (accessed in October 2024).

While entrepreneurship is an essential driver of societal health and wealth, it is also a formidable engine of economic growth.[18] The gender gaps in entrepreneurship are persistent and result in missed opportunities for job creation, growth and innovation.[19] Despite recent progress in the creation of opportunities for entrepreneurs, specifically in some countries, women-led small, medium and large businesses are relatively limited (13.6 per cent) and still lag behind the world average (33.7 per cent) by 20 percentage points. In addition, the share of firms with female top managers drops drastically to 3.6 per cent compared to the world average of 15.1 per cent.[20]

Social support for women entrepreneurs, including access to necessary resources to start and run their businesses, is rated by experts as unsatisfactory compared to the social support provided to men entrepreneurs.[21] Venture capital is a growing source of funding for start-up companies, with start-ups in 14 Arab countries[22] raising $2.3 billion in 2024. However, there is a significant gender disparity in venture capital funding. In 2024, despite a 31 per cent increase in investments going to start-ups founded by women, rising from 0.47 per cent in 2023 to 1.2 per cent in 2024, 90 per cent of investments were still directed towards start-ups founded by men. The remaining funds of 8.6 per cent went to start-ups founded by both women and men.[23]

It is important to note that 63.2 per cent of women in the Arab region would prefer to work in paid jobs, according to Gallup survey data, illustrating that even when women want to take up paid employment, they face significant barriers preventing them from doing so.[24] Apart from a small gender gap in university enrolment, women are at a significant disadvantage in comparison to men when it comes to economic indicators.

These aggregate figures mask significant additional gender disparities in the Arab region. In 2023, 42.1 per cent of young women were not in employment, education or training (NEET) compared to 19.7 per cent of young men. A major factor contributing to the limited attachment to the labour force participation of women is the highly uneven allocation of unpaid care work.[25] Gender roles in the region emphasize women as the main caregivers and men as the main breadwinners. The Arab States have the largest proportion of women who work full-time as unpaid carers (59.9 per cent).[26] A lack of relevant public services and an underdeveloped care economy make it even more difficult for women to pursue a professional career.[27]

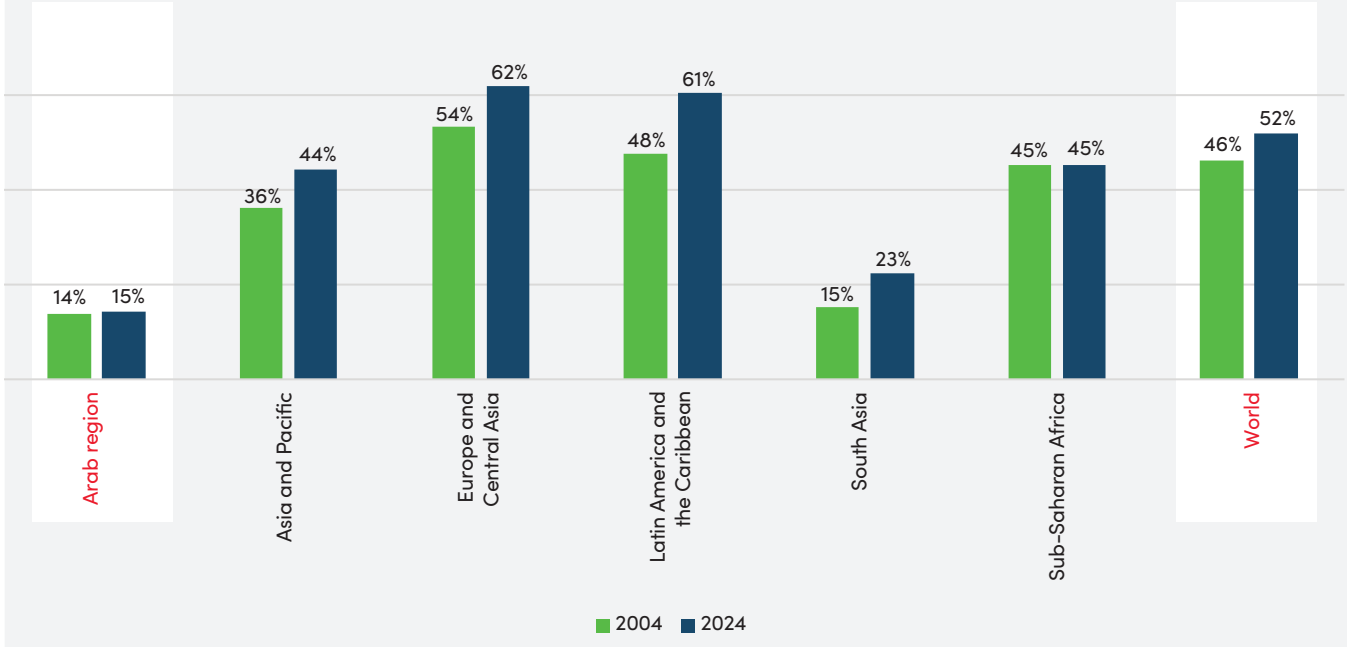
Despite some progress, gender equality at work remains a challenge for many women due to unequal pay, lack of supportive care services, breastfeeding provisions and maternity leave, gaps in social protection and the prevalence of sexual harassment. Achieving gender justice requires equal opportunities for all, ensuring that both men and women can fully participate in the economy without legal or social discrimination.[28]

F. Inequalities in labour income and pay

The gender pay gap, or gender wage gap, is the average difference between the remuneration for men and women who are working. The gender pay gap has a compounding effect that results in a woman's reduced earning capacity over her lifetime. Despite progress in mandating equal pay for men and women for work of equal value,[29] the region experiences significant gender income disparities; women's labour income is only 14.5 per cent of total labour income – the highest gender income gap among global regions and below the world average of 51.8 per cent. The Arab region made the lowest progress of only 0.5 percentage points in two decades, another devastating reality when compared to the progress made by other regions.[30] On average, Arab women earn 89 cents for every dollar earned by men, a figure that decreases to 82 cents after adjusting for factors such as education, job type and experience.[31]

FIGURE 8

Gender income gap: ratio of women's to men's labour income (Percentage)



Source: ILOSTAT database (accessed in October 2024).

The gender pay gap in the Arab region could be due to a lack of "pay transparency" policy instruments.[32] It is also particularly the case in countries with a large informal sector due in part to weak public services, a restrictive regulatory environment and low State capacity.[33] Recently, both Jordan and Oman enacted reforms mandating equal pay for work of equal value or lifting restrictions on a woman's ability to work in industrial or dangerous jobs.[34]

G. Supportive care services

Women, whether working in the private or public sector or being self-employed, require affordable childcare, after-school clubs or eldercare in addition to regulations that make working for themselves or being employed attractive. The unavailability of affordable childcare and after-school day care discourages women from joining the workforce. Most of the early childcare services are in urban areas and major cities and only educated parents with a relatively high income are able to access these services. It is also worth noting that across the Arab region, 56 per cent of employed women with caregiving responsibilities are in informal work, compared to 37 per cent of employed women without caregiving responsibilities.[35]

Several countries in the Arab region have guarantees in their legal frameworks to provide at least one year of free early childhood education.[36] Access to and enrolment in early childhood services remain low in the region, especially among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged and in countries suffering from multifaceted crises.[37] The proportion of children participating in pre-primary organized learning (3 to 6 years of age) stands at 52.3 per cent; this number is much lower for those under the age of 3 due to the limited availability of quality and affordable services. Moreover, evidence from the region shows that the labour force participation rate for women aged 25 to 54 decreases with the presence of children under 6 years of age (with children 27 per cent, no children 30 per cent).

H. Granting maternity and paternity leave

Paid maternity leave, or maternity protection, is a universal human right as well as a labour right. In many countries, women's job income is vital for the survival of the family. However, working women who become pregnant are faced with the threat of job loss, suspended earnings and increased health risks due to inadequate safeguards for their employment. The standards established by the International Labour Organization (ILO) mandate a minimum maternity leave period of 14 weeks[38] (i.e. 98 days) and recommend increasing it to at least 18 weeks[39] (i.e. 126 days) to ensure adequate rest and recovery time for the mother.

All Arab States provide a paid maternity leave to mothers in employment; however, most do not meet International Labour Standards. The length of paid maternity leave in the region ranges from 4 to 26 weeks as follows: Tunisia (30 days); Qatar (50 days); the Sudan (56 days); Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (60 days); Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine and Yemen (70 days); Egypt (90 days); Algeria, the Comoros, Iraq, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman and Somalia (98 days); the Syrian Arab Republic (120 days); and Djibouti (182 days).[40]

Paternity leave is increasingly seen as a positive measure that allows women to balance professional priorities better.[41] Men's greater access to and use of paternal leave have been shown to have a direct correlation with women's economic success in research from high-income countries.[42] Several countries in the region have made some provisions for paid paternity leave, namely: Bahrain and Tunisia (1 day); Algeria, Djibouti, Jordan and Saudi Arabia (3 days); the United Arab Emirates (5 days); Oman (7 days);[43] and Morocco (which increased paid paternity leave from 3 to 15 days for public sector employees).[44]

I. Supported breastfeeding

Breastfeeding provisions ensure the good health of the mother and the child, and also benefit the company by increasing employee engagement and retention. Women are more likely to return to work when there is maternity support such as breastfeeding facilities at the workplace. Introducing breastfeeding support at work has helped companies to reduce absenteeism, improve productivity and increase retention of employees after childbirth.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the provision of at least six months of paid leave to support exclusively breastfeeding.[45] Women of Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia are entitled to 60 minutes of paid leave for breastfeeding their children for one year, starting from the day of birth. In the United Arab Emirates, women are also entitled to two hours of reduced working hours for six months from the time of resuming work, fully paid.

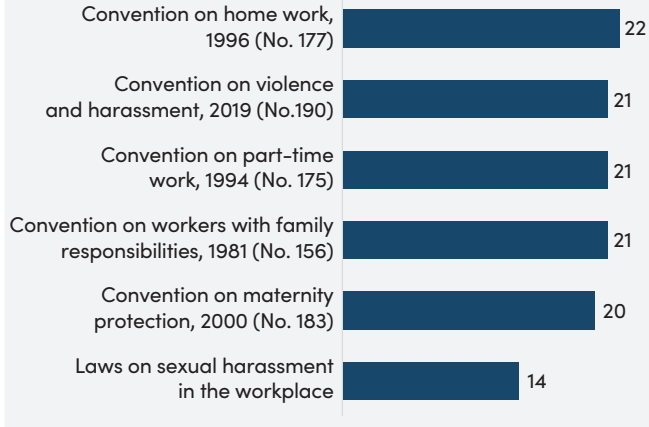
J. Instituting and implementing legal frameworks

Ensuring legal protections against employment discrimination for all women is a critical step towards reducing gender inequality in the Arab economy. At the same time, it is equally critical to address the structural discrimination that leaves broad swaths of women workers uncovered by basic labour laws.[46] The Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) on women's right to equal pay with men is protected by law in the following 16 countries in the Arab region: Algeria, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Yet women's right to equal pay for work of equal value is only protected in 10 countries in the region: Somalia, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine, Morocco, Jordan, Bahrain, Iraq and Syrian Arab Republic.[47] Convention No. 111 concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation (1958) has been ratified by 20 Arab countries.[48]

Yemen is the only Arab country that has ratified the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156). The Sudan is the only Arab country that has ratified the Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175). Both Djibouti and Morocco have ratified the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), while Somalia is the only Arab country that has ratified the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190). Moreover, 14 Arab countries (Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates) have laws on sexual harassment in employment. Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have provisions allowing for civil claims and remedies for sexual harassment in the workplace.[49]

FIGURE 9

Number of countries that did not ratify selected ILO conventions related to home work or have laws on sexual harassment



Source: All conventions: ILO, NORMLEX Information System on International Labour Standards. Laws on sexual harassment in the workplace: World Bank.

K. In conclusion

The Arab region continues to suffer from a significant gender gap and persistent inequalities that hinder the realization of women's rights. Discriminatory laws, entrenched social practices and the lack of transparency, often unaddressed by legal frameworks, disproportionately affect women.

This inequality is evident in political and economic participation, with women facing barriers to entering the workforce and experiencing wage disparities. Moreover, many workplaces lack policies and practices that actively promote gender equality.

There is an urgent need to increase female representation in parliament to boost women's economic participation. It is also critical for Arab countries to use more contextualized policies and programmes that acknowledge the diversity of women, build a gender-inclusive environment and infrastructure, and increase social support and resources while reducing gender barriers. By creating a more enabling environment, women can thrive and contribute effectively to the economy.

3. IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON PROGRESS TOWARDS THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Source: Authors

4. PROGRESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Women continue to bear an increasingly heavy burden of persistent poverty in its multidimensional facets, especially in rural areas.

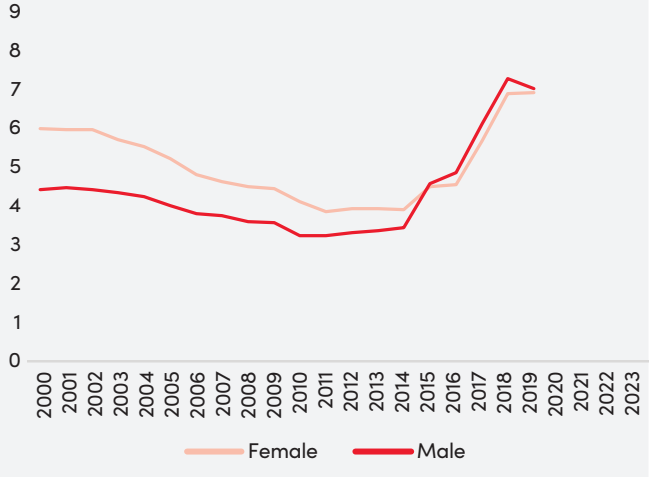
The female population in the Arab region has increased by more than 170 per cent in recent decades, from 140 million in 2000 to 237.3 million in 2024, with persistent increases in the number of women and girls living in extreme poverty – a statistic which is at variance with numbers showing a decline in the number of those living in extreme poverty globally. Extreme poverty (defined as living on less than $2.15 a day) in the Arab region has increased significantly, from 5.8 per cent in 2000 to 12.3 per cent in 2024. Over 24.5 million women and girls – more than 12 per cent – are trapped in a cycle of extreme poverty.[50] One third of them live in rural areas.[51]

The average number of working poor adult women in the Arab region has also been on the rise, from 6.2 per cent in 2000 to a peak of 7.2 per cent in 2019. There are 6.7 million women in vulnerable employment (own account and contributing family workers), amounting to one in three women compared to one in four men in 2022. Vulnerable employment is twice as prevalent in rural areas, at 38 per cent, compared to 15 per cent in urban areas, as of 2020.

While most Arab countries have social protection systems, only one third of the population is covered by at least one social protection benefit. Women are less covered by social protection benefits, at 31.8 per cent compared to men at 33.1 per cent. In addition, only 8.5 per cent of women with children receive maternity cash benefits, a quarter of the world average of 36.4 per cent in 2023.

FIGURE 10

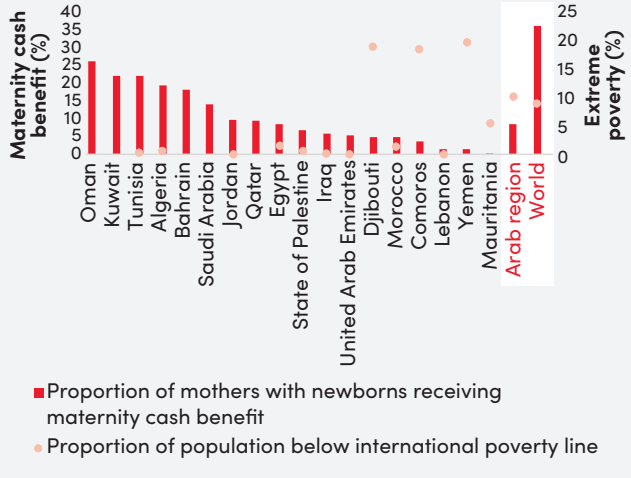
Employed population (aged 15+ years) below international poverty line (Percentage)



Source: ILO modelled estimates.

FIGURE 11

Extreme poverty and maternity cash benefit in the Arab region, latest year (Percentage)



Source: UNSD, Global SDG Indicators database (accessed in November 2024).

Older women and females with disabilities are also at a higher risk of financial insecurity. Only 29.1 per cent of older women compared to 65.1 per cent of older men receive pensions. This gender disparity is more overt for persons with disabilities despite an overall low coverage rate of only 16.7 per cent of persons with disabilities receiving cash benefits in 2023. In Tunisia, for example, men with disabilities are three times more likely than women with disabilities to have access to social protection programmes (8 per cent for men, 3 per cent for women), despite overall low coverage rates as of 2017.[52]

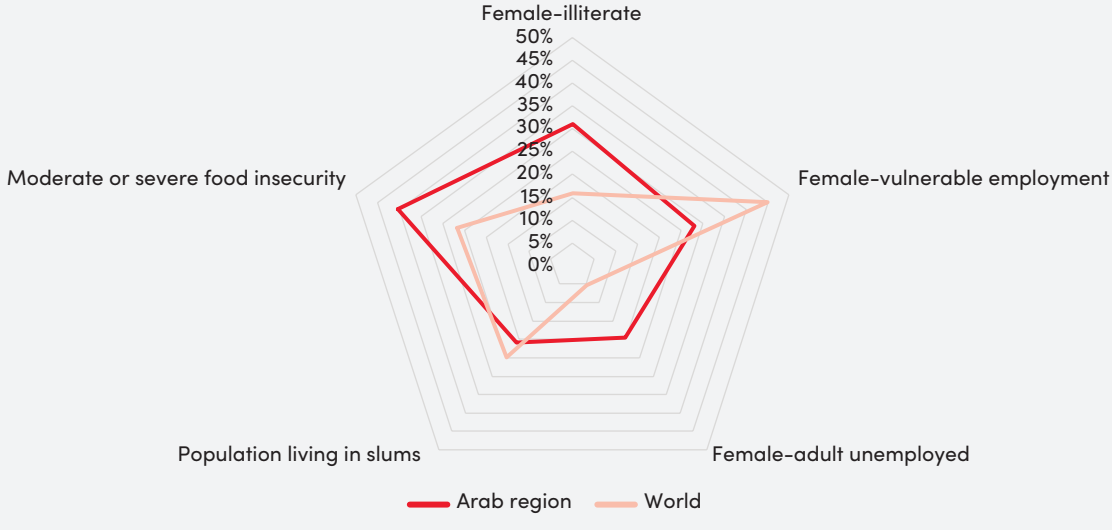
One fifth (20.9 per cent) of the Arab population lives in slums, lacking basic housing and access to essential services, especially in urban areas (2022), with women and children being the most vulnerable within those communities.

Over 46.4 million adult women are illiterate, representing one third of adult women and double the number of illiterate men (28 million, or 17.2 per cent of adult men) in 2023.

The Arab region has one of the highest extreme poverty rates, and its population suffers from deprivation in multidimensional areas, including health, education, employment and access to services. If current trends continue, more women and girls will live in extreme poverty and will experience poverty in many other dimensions by 2030. There is thus an urgent need for targeted policies that address gender inequality and enhance social protection to improve women's economic security and well-being.

FIGURE 12

Female multidimensional deprivation: a comparison between the Arab region and the world (Percentage)



Source: Illiteracy, vulnerable employment and unemployment: ILOSTAT Database (accessed in November 2024). Living in slums: UN-HABITAT Database (accessed in November 2024). Food insecurity: FAOSTAT Database (accessed in November 2024).

End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Women face severe health impacts as a result of food insecurity and hunger, with pregnant women and women in rural areas being the most vulnerable.

Conflict was the primary cause of acute food insecurity in the Arab region in 2023, forcing people to leave their land and areas where livestock graze, ruining food supplies and farming resources, and causing chaos in food systems and markets. Worldwide, women are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity, leading to higher instances of gender-based violence as a result of turning to negative coping mechanisms.[53,54]

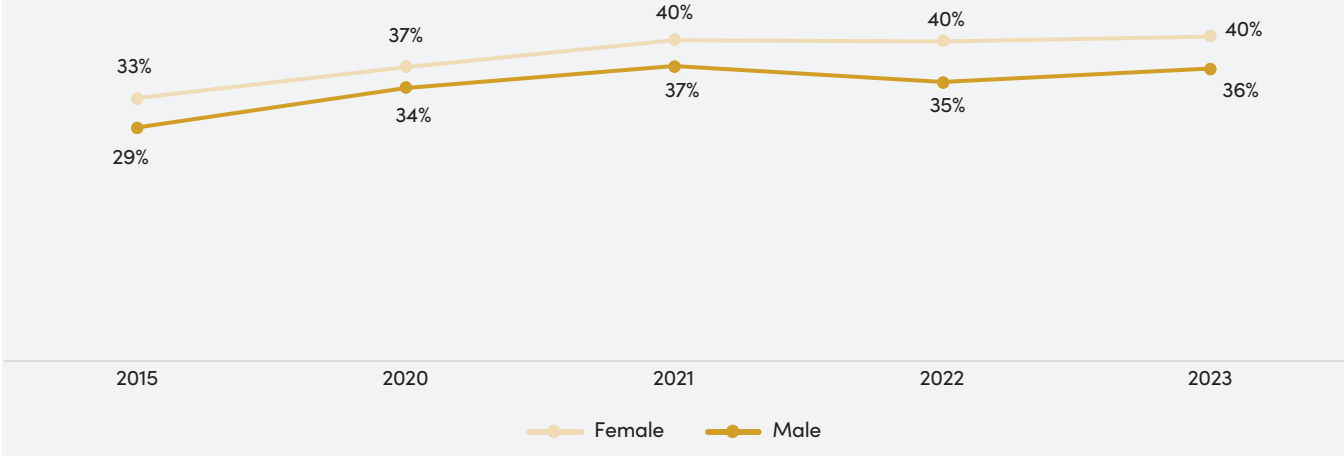
The number of undernourished people has continued to increase in the region. There are over 66.1 million undernourished people, representing 14 per cent of the population, which is significantly higher than the global average of 9.1 per cent[55] in 2023.[56] Hunger caused undernourishment in one in every three people in the Arab region. Undernourishment in conflict countries is almost four times higher (26 per cent) than in non-conflict middle-income countries (7.4 per cent), as of 2023.[57]

Moderate or severe food insecurity has also continued to rise in the Arab region, affecting 186.5 million out of a total of 2.33 billion people globally in 2023.[58] There are 1.8 million more women than men aged 15 or older who have experienced moderate to severe food insecurity. The gender gap in food insecurity increased from 2.6 percentage points (females 36.5 per cent, males 33.9 per cent) in 2020 to 4 percentage points (females 40.3 per cent, males 36.3 per cent) in 2023.

Breastfeeding is a vital source of nutrition that can save children's lives and contribute to improved health outcomes for children and mothers. It is also a central part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and is linked to many of its Sustainable Development Goals.[59] Yet only one third of infants across the Arab region are exclusively breastfed in the first six months of life – far below the global average of 48 per cent in 2023. This is partially due to the limited maternal leave and workplace policies to protect and promote breastfeeding in the region.[60]

FIGURE 13

Population aged 15+ years suffering from moderate or severe food insecurity (Percentage)



Source: FAOSTAT Database (accessed in November 2024).

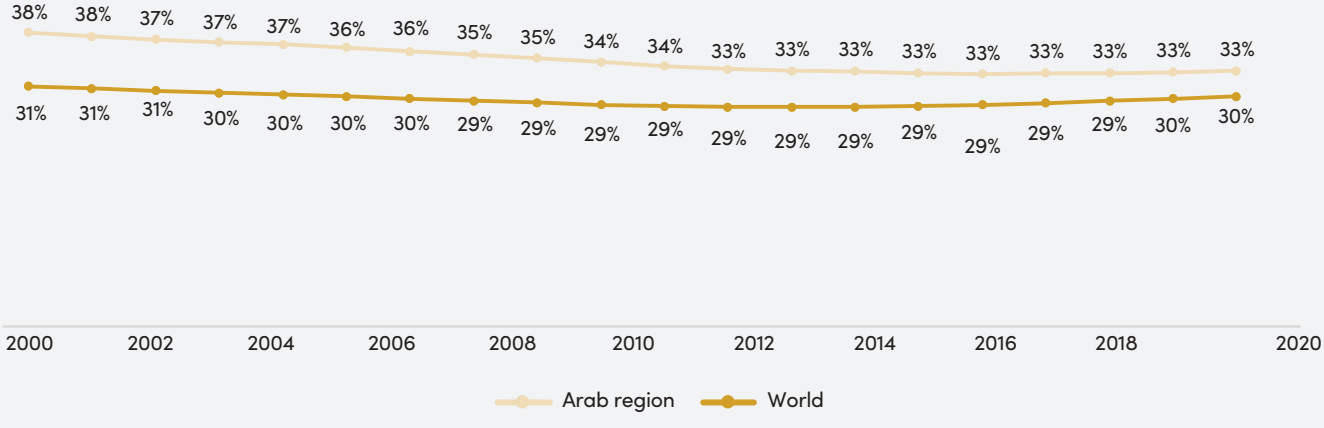
The Arab region has continued to suffer from the triple burden of malnutrition. Besides undernutrition,[61] an alarming proportion of adult women are overweight or obese, and a third suffer from anaemia.[62] Despite a decrease in women with anaemia, over 35 million women (33 per cent) aged 15 to 49 are in food-insecure households, reflecting a serious public health issue in the region, higher than the world average (30 per cent) in 2019. The rates are even higher in Arab low-income and least developed countries (LDCs) (45.9 per cent), peaking in Yemen at a staggering 61.5 per cent.

While anaemia among women of reproductive age (15–49 years) has slowly decreased, it remains notably high among pregnant women in the Arab region. Anaemia affects two in five (34 per cent) pregnant women. An estimated 2.2 million Arab pregnant women suffer from anaemia (2019), and more are likely to reside in rural areas, belong to poorer households and lack formal education.[63] Oman has significantly reduced anaemia among women aged 15 to 49 by fortifying the wheat flour.[64]

Women in the Arab region face disproportionate impacts from food insecurity. Rising rates of undernourishment increase their vulnerability; combined with economic stress, this can escalate tensions and lead to intimate partner violence. Food insecurity can heighten women's dependency on others, mostly men, for resources, leading to greater control and coercion of men over women's lives. These factors highlight the urgent need for inclusive policies that address women's specific challenges in accessing nutrition and healthcare.

FIGURE 14

Women aged 15–49 years with anaemia (Percentage)



Source: World Health Organization (WHO), Global Health Observatory data repository (accessed in November 2024).

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Mothers in rural areas continue to die because the decision that their lives matter has not been made.

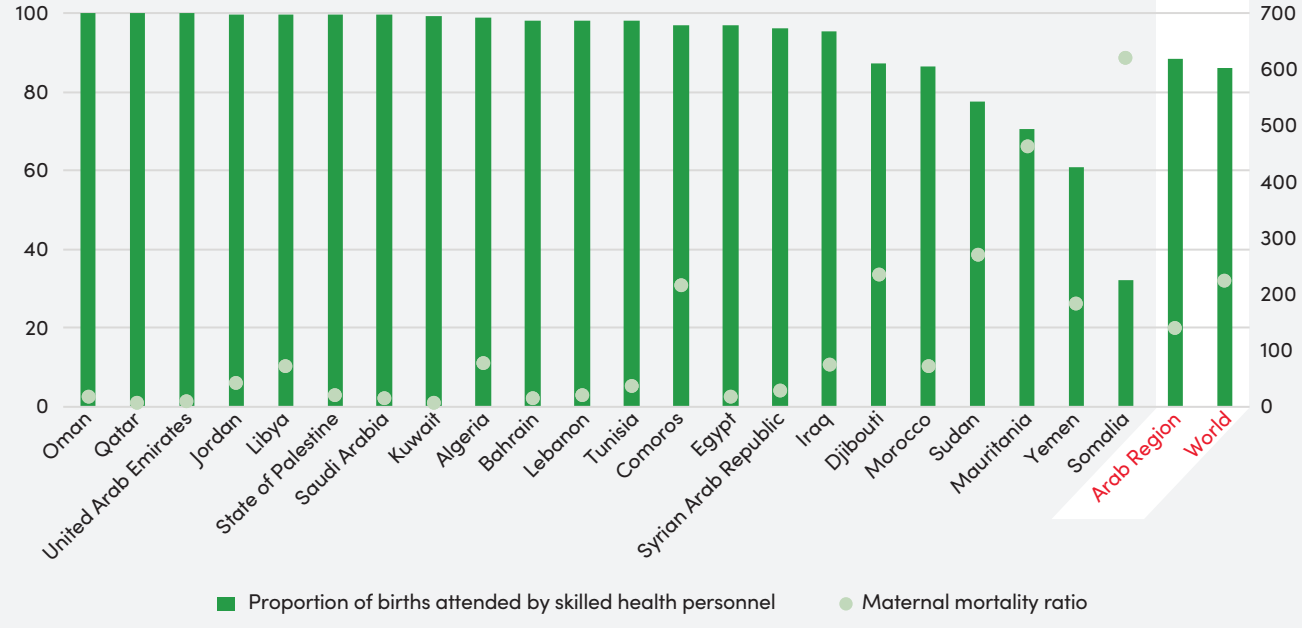
In most Arab countries, maternal deaths have decreased as a direct result of women gaining access to family planning, skilled birth attendance and emergency obstetric care. Between 2000 and 2020, maternal mortality declined from 246.1 to 139.3 deaths per 100,000 live births – a decrease of 45 per cent. However, the regional average remains double the maximum global target of 70 deaths per 100,000 live births,[65] driven primarily by the high maternal mortality rate among LDCs of 339.4 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020.

Antenatal care and skilled health personnel attendance at delivery are necessary to end preventable maternal deaths. There has been a significant increase in skilled birth personnel attendance in the region, from 62.2 per cent of births in 2000 to 88.4 per cent in 2023. However, sexual and reproductive healthcare accessibility is especially challenging in rural areas; one in three poor women living in rural areas and in LDCs (69.3 per cent in 2023) often lacks assistance during childbirth.

There are broader challenges regarding maternal health services in rural and impoverished areas across the Arab region. In conflict-affected countries like Yemen and other least developed countries in the region, including the Comoros, Djibouti, the Sudan and Somalia, poor women often lack adequate and quality maternal and neonatal health services due to systemic issues such as inadequate healthcare infrastructure, economic barriers and sociopolitical instability.

FIGURE 15

Maternal mortality ratio and births attended by skilled health personnel in the Arab region and the world, latest year



Source: UNSD, Global SDG Indicators database (accessed in November 2024).

The adolescent birth rate has decreased from 55.4 births (2000) to 43.9 births (2024) per 1,000 adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 due to the significant decrease in the teenage pregnancy rates in LDCs, from 109.9 births to 76.6 births per 1,000 adolescent girls in 2000 and 2024, respectively. Adolescent pregnancies are more likely to occur in marginalized communities. They are commonly driven by poverty and a lack of education and employment opportunities in addition to conflict and war, where women and adolescent girls bear extraordinary burdens and frequently become victims of sexual violence.

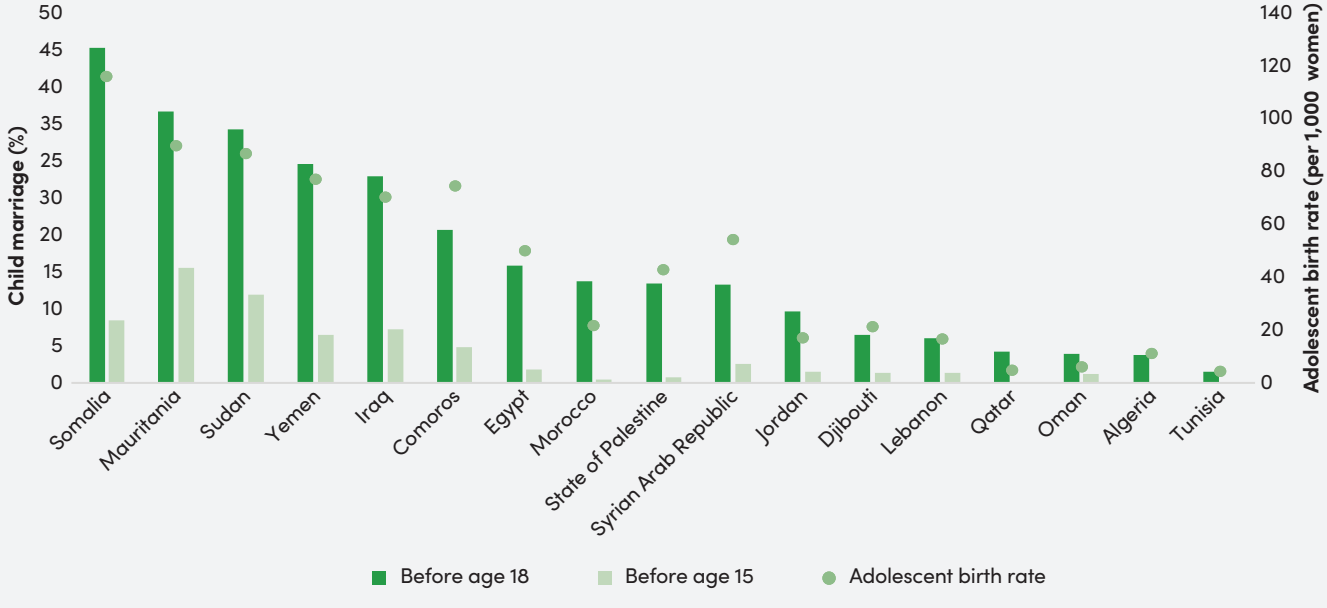
Child marriage is closely linked to higher adolescent birth rates. This is especially due to the fact that young girls have limited access to contraceptives, and in many communities, such as those in rural areas, where the early marriage of young girls is most prevalent, early childbearing is an expected and awaited natural outcome. Child marriage poses significant health risks for young mothers, including complications during childbirth. Eliminating child marriage in the Arab region would have a significant positive impact on economic growth. It could boost the region's economy by an estimated 3 per cent per annum, adding a staggering $3 trillion between 2021 and 2050.[66]

In the Arab region, the satisfied demand for modern family planning methods by women of reproductive age has improved by 6.6 percentage points, from 57.8 per cent in 2000 to 64.4 per cent (three in five women), but remains below the global average (77.6 per cent) in 2024. However, challenges to accessing family planning persist among women with disabilities.[67] Data collected from 12 countries in the Arab region demonstrates that every dollar spent in ending the unmet need for family planning and preventable maternal deaths results in $5 in expected returns.[68]

Access to skilled healthcare, family planning and education is crucial for improving maternal health outcomes. Investing in maternal health not only saves lives but also yields substantial returns, highlighting the need for a continued focus on equitable healthcare access and women's empowerment.

FIGURE 16

Child marriage and adolescent birth rate, latest year



Source: UNSD, Global SDG Indicators database (accessed in November 2024).

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Disparities remain – especially for girls from poorer and rural backgrounds, and those with disabilities – despite rising school completion rates.

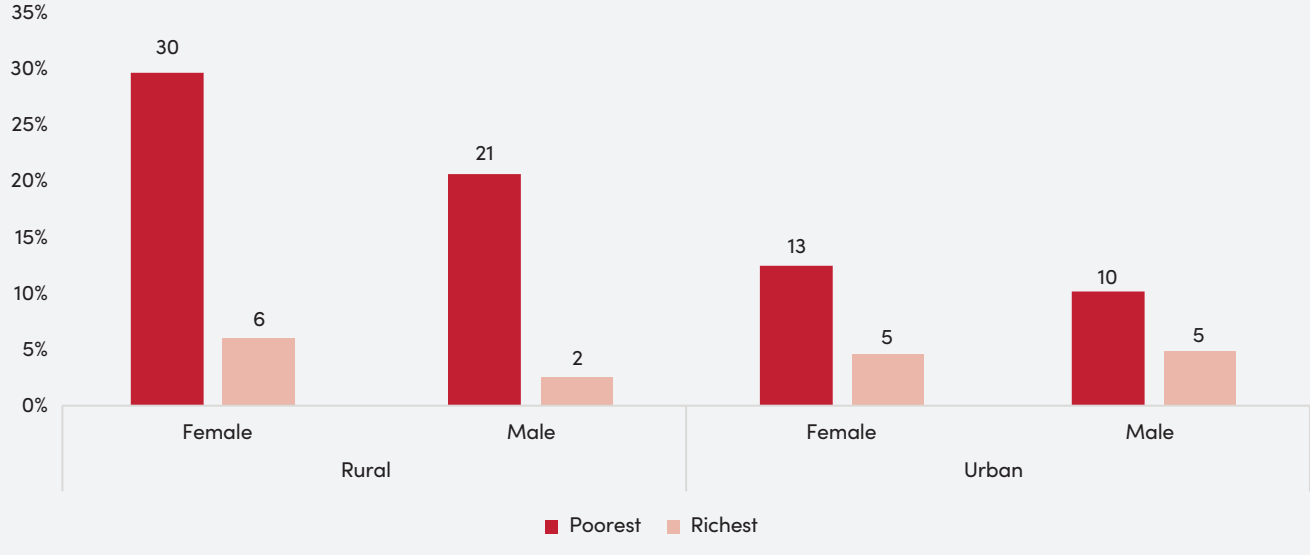
There are 5.5 million more girls completing each level of education from primary to lower secondary compared to the number in 2015. The gender gap in completion rates narrowed to 3 percentage points in primary education (girls 81 per cent, boys 84 per cent). In 2022, girls in secondary school outperformed boys by 2 percentage points, achieving a completion rate of 68 per cent compared to 66 per cent for boys.

Nevertheless, the Arab region has registered better completion rates for primary than lower secondary education, indicating that a sizeable number of children are dropping out of education after primary school. In 2019, 10.9 million girls (22.6 per cent) remained out of school compared to 9.5 million boys (18.9 per cent). One third (32 per cent) of girls did not complete their lower secondary education, highlighting a significant dropout issue that needs to be addressed.

Gender disparities in education persist, with the poorest and conflict-affected children consistently left behind. The poorest girls and those living in rural areas remained the least likely to complete school. Girls from poorer families with the highest dropout rates (29.2 per cent) are more common at the lower secondary level than boys (21 per cent) – one in three girls compared to one in five boys. At the primary school level, girls in rural areas from the poorest families (19 per cent) are twice as likely to be out of school than girls in urban areas (7.8 per cent).[69] Similarly, dropout rates for girls are at 2.9 per cent from the wealthiest families in rural areas compared to 1.5 per cent from the wealthiest families in urban areas. Girls in conflict-affected countries are much more likely to never go to school than boys.

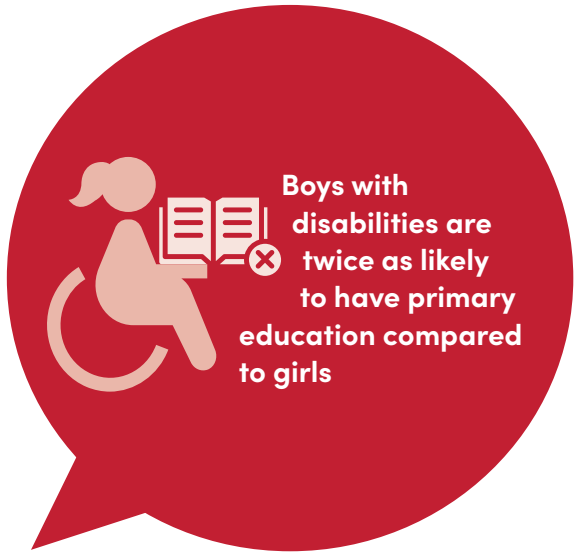
FIGURE 17

Children out of school in lower secondary school by sex, wealth and location, 2019 (Percentage)



Source: Calculated by ESCWA and UN Women from World Bank data.

Access to good-quality pre-primary education increases children's primary education outcomes and women's employment. In the last two decades, pre-primary education has expanded to reach more families. The enrolment of girls and boys increased from 25 per cent and 28 per cent in 2000, respectively, to 42 per cent for both girls and boys in 2022, with no significant gender disparities. However, this proportion is significantly below the world average of 75 per cent. The latest data from the Arab subregions show that the Maghreb countries have the highest female participation rates in organized learning, followed by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.



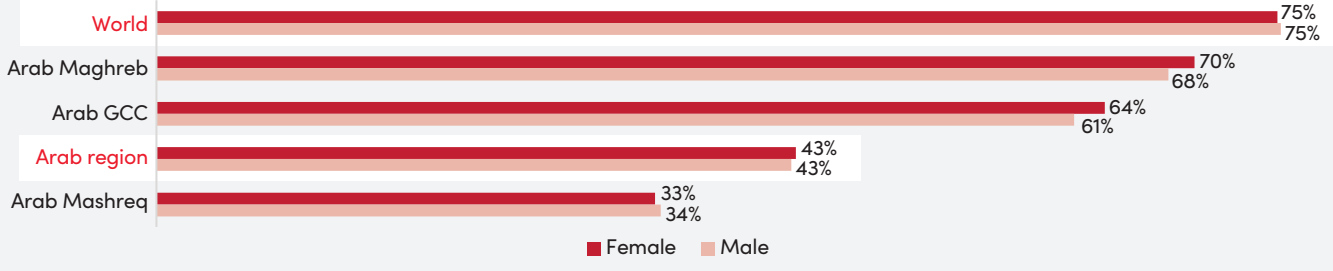
Persons with disabilities face some of the most significant barriers in accessing quality education. Only 69 per cent of schools reported having access to adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities. In several Arab States, males with disabilities aged 5 years and above are nearly twice as likely to have primary education compared to females with disabilities. This is the case in Yemen (females 11.1 per cent, males 23.9 per cent), Morocco (females 12.1 per cent, males 23.3 per cent), Iraq (females 6.9 per cent, males 13.6 per cent), Somalia (females 4.5 per cent, males 10.8 per cent) and Egypt (females 6.8 per cent, males 11.1 per cent).[70]

Data from 2023 show that the proportion of girls who are developmentally on track in at least three of the four specified domains – literacy and numeracy, physical development, social-emotional development, and learning – is higher than the proportion of boys, at 78.7 per cent versus 75.2 per cent. However, out of 24.3 million children and adolescents in basic education levels (primary and lower secondary), 11 million girls[71] do not achieve minimum proficiency levels in reading and math.[72]

While there has been significant progress in girls' education in the Arab region, with increased completion rates at the primary and secondary levels, disparities remain – especially for girls from poorer and rural backgrounds, and those with disabilities. To ensure that all girls have equal opportunities, it is crucial to promote gender-equitable education systems, enhance access to quality pre-primary education, and provide targeted support for the most vulnerable, including vocational training and skills development in high-demand fields. More inclusive education – with equitable educational opportunities for all – has the potential to be an important driver of inclusive growth.[73]

FIGURE 18

Participation rate in organized learning, pre-primary school (Percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Participation rate in organized learning" (accessed in October 2024).

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

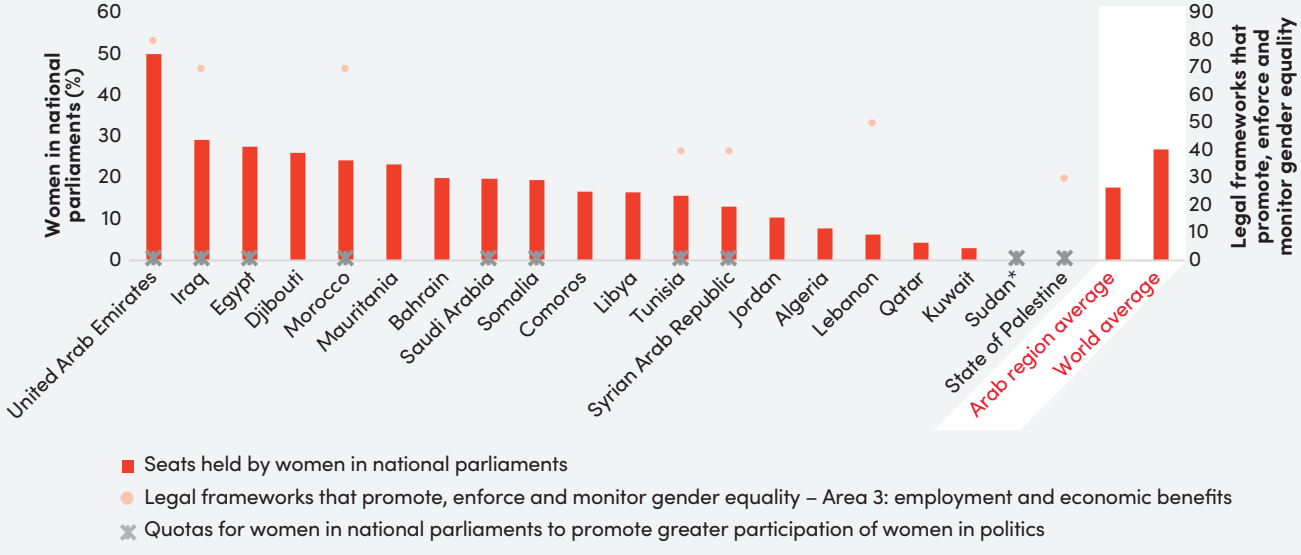
Legal frameworks that promote gender equality and women's representation in parliament are essential elements for driving meaningful change in the Arab region.

Legal frameworks that advance gender equality are fundamental to enabling change.[74] Although data reporting has increased from 23 per cent in 2018 to 36 per cent in 2024, more Arab countries need to report so that advances in policy actions can be monitored. As per the latest data available from eight countries – Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates – The region made limited progress toward gender equality, with efforts to promote and monitor legal frameworks showing varying levels of success across the reporting countries. While in the area of employment and economic benefits, the region scored only 50 per cent, the United Arab Emirates scored the highest achievement, progressing from a low of 10 per cent in 2018 to 80 per cent, followed by Iraq and Morocco at 70 per cent in 2024. In 2024, the region achieved a score of 51.5 per cent in the area of overarching legal frameworks and public life, with Morocco and the State of Palestine scoring 63.6 per cent and Tunisia leading at 80 per cent. In the domain of violence against women, the region earned a score of 63.9 per cent, with Morocco scoring 77.8 per cent and Tunisia achieving a perfect score of 100 per cent. Regarding marriage and family, the region scored 50.8 per cent, with Lebanon standing out with the highest score of 70 per cent.

Women in politics not only confront social stigma and challenges but also physical and psychological violence, including threats and coercion. Until recently, violence against women in politics was a predominantly invisible problem. Countries such as Tunisia have enacted a law that explicitly criminalizes violence against women in elections and politics.[75]

FIGURE 19

Legal frameworks for gender equality and women's representation in national parliaments, latest year



Source: IPU, "Women in National Parliaments" (2024). Legal frameworks: UN Women. Quotas: International IDEA.

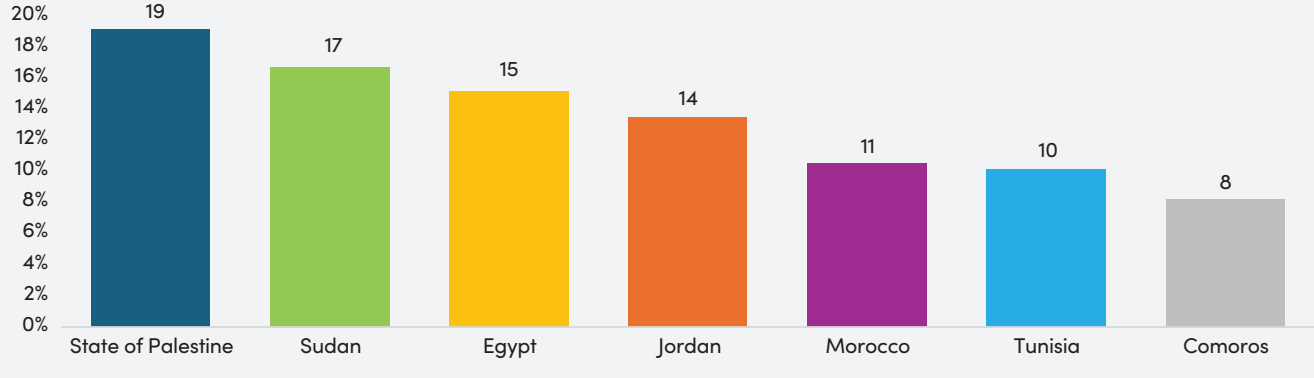
Legislated gender quotas are effective to achieve equality in politics through women's representation in parliament. Despite the impressive fourfold increase since 2000 to 17.7 per cent in 2024, the share of women in parliament in the Arab region remains the lowest compared to other regions and is below the world average of 26.9 per cent. Over half of Arab countries (52.4 per cent) have used gender quotas to increase female representation.[76] For instance, the United Arab Emirates achieved gender parity with the highest share of women in parliament at an impressive 50 per cent. The representation of women in local governments in the region also remains low at only 19.5 per cent in 2023.

As a direct parallel to their challenges in political participation, employed women in the Arab region struggle to break the glass ceiling in securing high management positions. The region lags behind others globally, with women holding only 15.7 per cent of management roles or half the world average share of 27.5 per cent in 2022.[77]

One of the most extreme forms of gender inequality – and a violation of human rights – is violence against women.[78] Spousal or intimate partner violence is one of the most widespread forms of violence against women. Evidence shows that countries with no domestic violence legislation reported higher rates of intimate partner violence against women between the ages of 15 and 49 in Palestine (19 per cent), the Sudan (17 per cent) and Egypt (15 per cent) in past 12 months. Violence against women increases by at least 10 percentage points if measured during women's lifetime, such as in Egypt (25 per cent). In the past decade, laws on domestic violence increased due to legal reforms in 12 Arab countries.[79] However, only five of these countries have national plans or strategies to address violence against women and only one of them makes binding budgetary commitments to implement the existing legislation.[80] Despite this progress, more than 100.5 million adult women in the Arab region lack legal protection against domestic violence by an intimate partner. Disturbingly, marital rape is still not criminalized by the penal code in any Arab country.

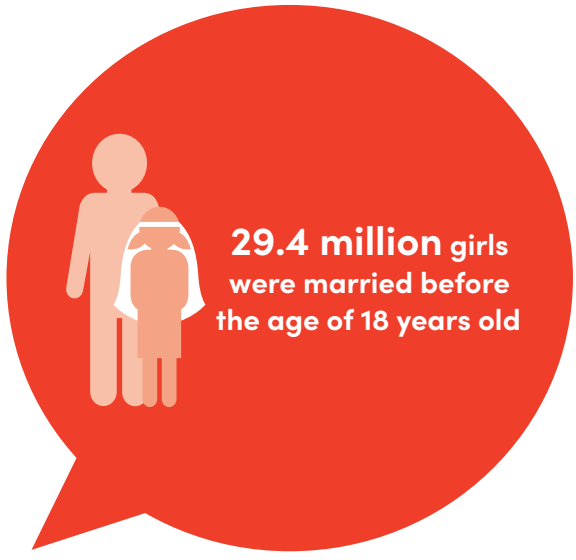
FIGURE 20

Prevalence of intimate partner violence and availability of laws to combat violence against women in selected Arab States (Percentage)



Source: Prevalence of violence against women from UNSD Global SDG Database.

Across the world, the harmful practice of child marriage continues, with 640 million women and girls worldwide married before the age of 18,[81] 29.4 million of whom are in the Arab region. Child marriage, though gradually declining, continues to be a prevalent regional practice, encouraged as a way to alleviate poverty, and increases in the aftermath of conflict. Around one in six girls (16.4 per cent) was married before the age of 18 in 2024.[82] Only five countries – Tunisia, the State of Palestine, Yemen, Jordan and Libya – have signed the Convention on Consent to Marriage, the Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages.[83] Tunisia, a signatory of the Convention, has achieved the lowest rate for child marriage before the age of 18 at 2.9 per cent; it also has the lowest adolescent birth rate in the region at six births per 1,000 women in 2023.

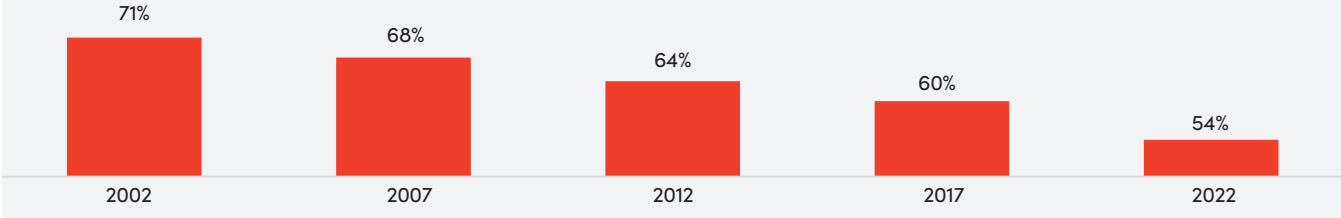


Female genital mutilation (FGM) is another harmful practice that impacts women and girls' well-being in many ways. Available data by age show that FGM is in decline, albeit progress towards its elimination is slow in countries where the practice is prevalent. The region has reduced FGM among girls aged 15 to 19 by 17 percentage points since 2002. However, the latest data from 2023 show that more than half of girls (54.8 per cent) in reporting countries have undergone this harmful practice, affecting over 40 million girls. Girls in rural areas and from the poorest families face a higher risk. Some countries have taken concrete measures to eliminate this harmful practice. In the Sudan, a new law that criminalizes FGM was passed, and in Egypt, amendments to existing laws provide more protection to victims of FGM.[84] Data on FGM by wealth quintile show a further disparity between the poorest and richest in the population. The poorest girls are at a higher risk of undergoing FGM than richer girls, with the highest gap reaching 45 percentage points between the richest and poorest girls in Mauritania (poorest 84 per cent, richest 38 per cent).

The total time spent on both paid work and unpaid care work is higher for women than men in the Arab region, limiting the time available to women for social and public activities that are essential for self-actualization and well-being. The latest data show that women spend 4.7 times as many hours a day on unpaid work than men – the highest rate among all regions globally.[85] Tunisian women, for example, spend 22 per cent of their time on unpaid chores and care work, while men only spend 3 per cent of their time on similar tasks per day. Rural women also suffer from the uneven division of labour in agriculture. Rural Somali women, for example, play diverse roles within and outside the household, including productive and reproductive ones. They spend four hours more a day than men on household and agricultural work.[86]

FIGURE 21

Prevalence of female genital mutilation, girls aged 15–19 years (Percentage)



Source: UNICEF.

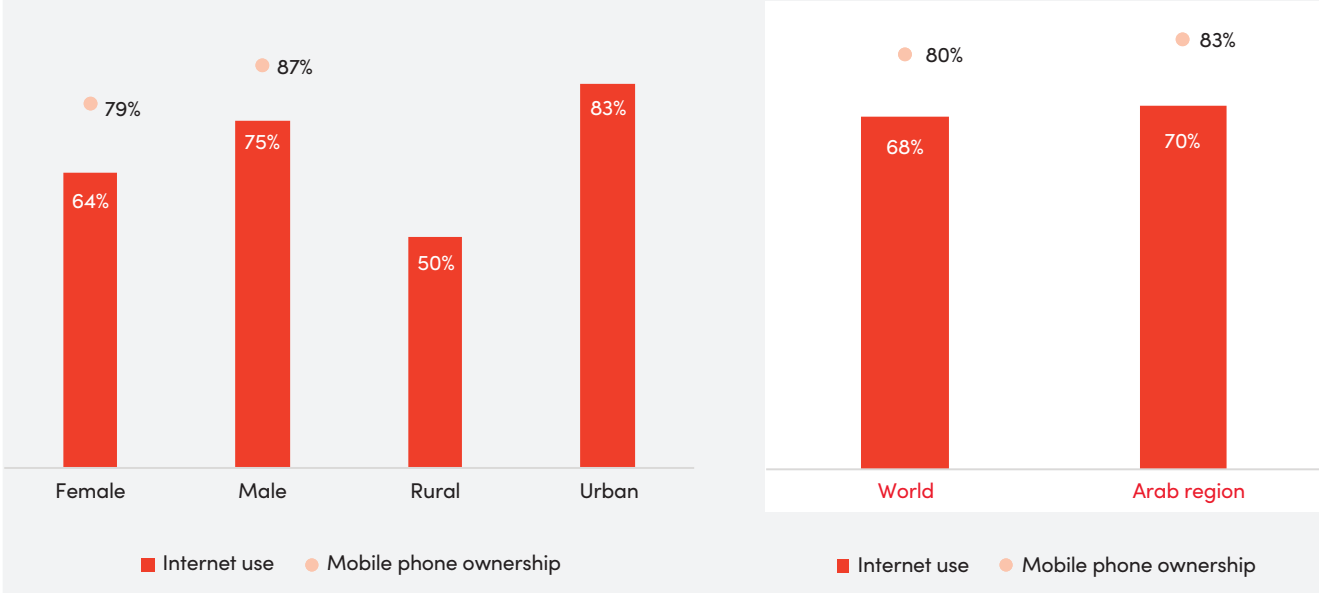
Despite progress, significant gender disparities in Internet access and mobile phone ownership persist, particularly in rural areas. Women continue to face digital exclusion especially in poorer countries in the Arab region where Internet connectivity could have the most significant impact. Digital gender parity is still a distant prospect in the region in light of the low Internet use. As of 2024, Internet usage stands at 64 per cent for women compared to 75 per cent for men.[87] This is the second largest gap (11 per cent) after Africa (12 per cent). Moreover, the urban-rural divide widened to a gap of 33 percentage points (rural 50 per cent, urban 83 per cent), putting women in rural areas at a greater disadvantage than those in urban areas. Many countries have taken steps to close the digital gap. The digital strategy of Morocco has a target of reducing the digital divide by 50 per cent, including the gap between rural and urban areas. However, the digital divide remains wide in LDCs, where only 15.3 per cent of women use the Internet compared to 35.3 per cent of men.[88]

The ownership of mobile phones has proven to be a crucial resource for empowering women. Mobile phones are the primary – and often the only – way people, especially women, access the Internet.[89] The Arab region has a gender gap of 8 percentage points (women 79 per cent, men 87 per cent) in mobile phone ownership. There are 39.3 million women (one in five) who do not own mobile phones, as of 2024.

Strengthening collaboration among Governments, civil society and the private sector is vital to ensure that women are not left behind in the digital age, enabling them to acquire the skills and resources needed to thrive. Addressing issues like domestic violence, child marriage and harmful practices requires comprehensive laws, enforcement and support services for victims. Raising the minimum age for marriage, strengthening law enforcement on gender-based violence and ensuring access to justice are key. Temporary measures such as gender quotas in decision-making bodies, along with opportunities for women's financial independence through education, job training and microloans, can empower women and foster equity. A combined approach of strong legal frameworks and affirmative action promotes women's participation in economic, political and social life, building a fairer society.

FIGURE 22

Mobile phone ownership and Internet usage rates, 2024 (Percentage)



Source: ITU.

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

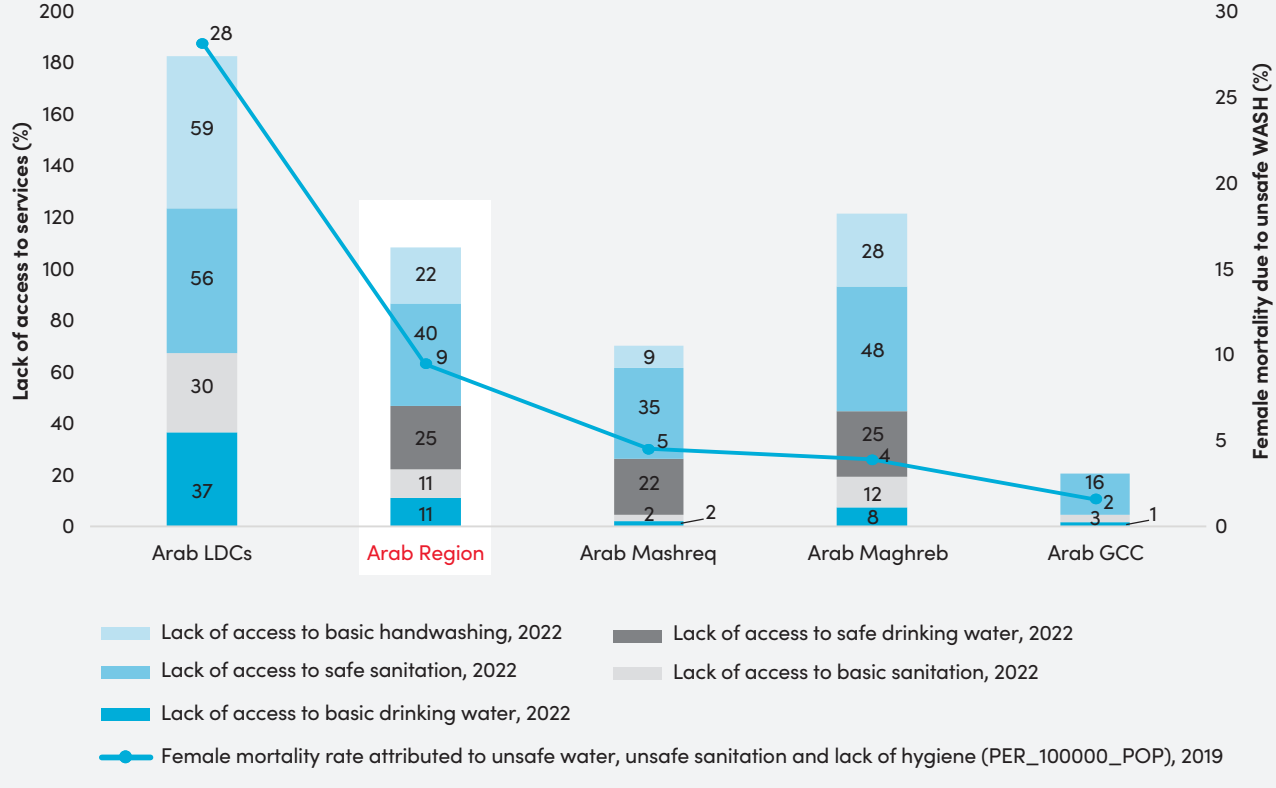
Rural women and girls bear the heavy burden of lack of access to basic water and sanitation, putting their lives at risk.

Women and girls play a central role in the provision, management and safeguarding of household water and sanitation. Addressing the water and sanitation needs of women benefits the health and well-being of entire communities.[90] Lack of access to basic and improved water and sanitation services remains a challenge in many Arab countries. With over 341 million people (75 per cent) living in high and critical water stress areas in 2021, women and girls in poor households, slums and rural areas are particularly affected.

The majority of the 51 million people lacking access to basic drinking water live in rural areas (20 per cent), compared to just 5 per cent in urban areas in 2022. Similarly, 32 per cent of those without access to safely managed water reside primarily in rural areas (24.9 per cent), while only 19.8 per cent live in urban areas. Handwashing with soap and water is important for reducing disease transmission and vital for the hygiene needs of women and girls. The proportion of the population using handwashing facilities with soap and water stands at 78.4 per cent, with 69.3 per cent of people in rural areas and 84.7 per cent of people in urban areas in 2020.

FIGURE 23

Lack of access to services and female mortality rate attributed to unsafe water and lack of sanitation and hygiene (Percentage)



Source: WHO, Global Health Observatory data repository (accessed in November 2024).

Lack of basic sanitation in rural areas is also more significant than in urban areas, as one in five people living in rural areas lacks basic sanitation (18.4 per cent, i.e. 34,579,181), compared to 1 in 17 people living in urban areas (5.9 per cent, i.e. 16,328,520).[91] Inadequate sanitation and handwashing facilities can also make it difficult for women to manage their menstrual hygiene, which can lead to embarrassment and stigma, as well as increased risk of infection.[92] In 2019, women's death toll reached 19,238 deaths[93] in the region due to unsafe water and lack of sanitation and hygiene.

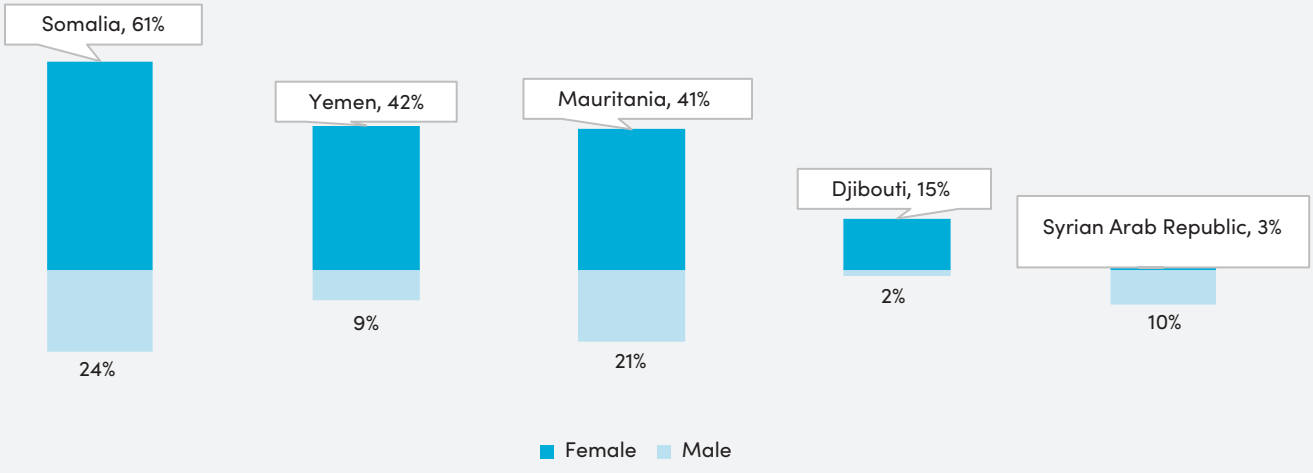
Lacking access to clean water and sanitation is frequently compounded by intersecting inequalities[94] that impact women's health and livelihoods, including their children's. Out of 32.3 million people in the Arab region[95] living in deprived households, 26.1 million people reside in rural areas where women and girls, responsible for cooking and domestic chores, shoulder the heavy burden of fetching water. Women, and very often children, have to walk many miles every day to collect water. A single trip takes over an hour in Mauritania, Somalia, Tunisia and Yemen;[96] in Iraq, women and girls spend more than three hours collecting water.[97]

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation has been integrated into the policies of most Arab countries. However, measures tailored to the specific needs of vulnerable populations remain less common to ensure equitable access in rural and urban areas. Conflict exacerbates existing gender inequalities in water and sanitation. Women's participation is thus crucial for building equitable water and sanitation solutions, especially in conflict zones where women and children bear the burden of water collection. Three countries – Lebanon, the State of Palestine and Somalia – have made strides in mainstreaming gender in water resource management in an effort to integrate gender concerns effectively.

Addressing the specific needs of women in water and sanitation policies is crucial for promoting gender equality and improving health outcomes. By empowering women to participate in the development of equitable water solutions, especially in conflict-affected regions, it is possible to enhance community resilience and ensure that water and sanitation services meet the needs of all, leading to healthier and more sustainable communities.

FIGURE 24

Primary responsibility for water collection in rural areas, by sex, latest year (Percentage)



Source: The World Bank (n.d.). Realizing gender equality: A greater challenge with climate change.
Note: Data does not add up to 100 per cent, as not all households harvest water and data for some households is not available.

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy

Rural women and girls face unique challenges due to energy poverty, which significantly impacts their health, safety and economic opportunities.

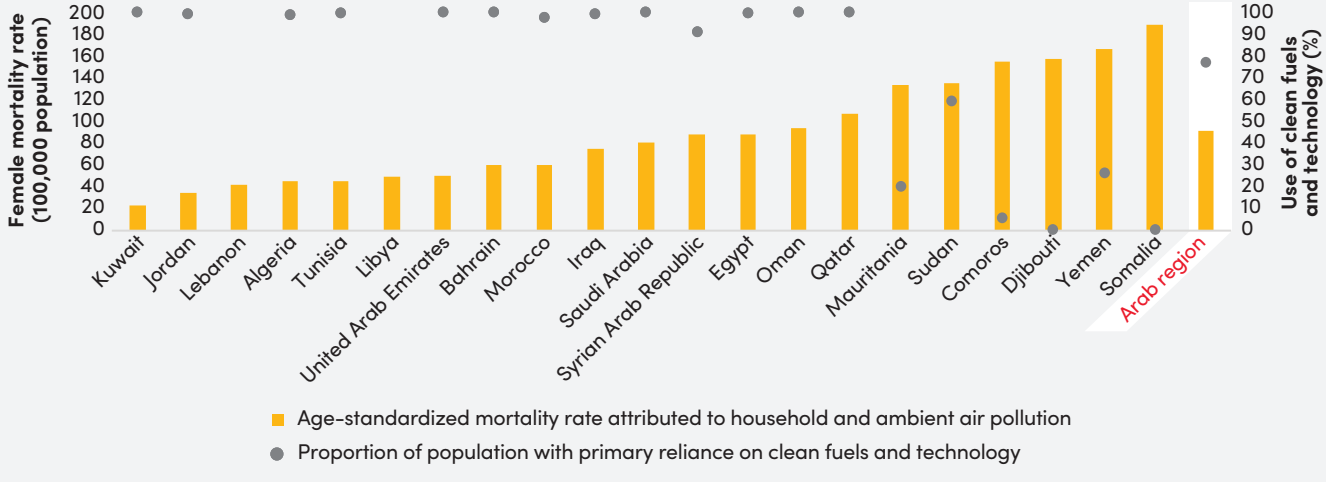
Women and girls are disproportionately affected by energy poverty where their needs and imposed social and gender roles are different than those of their male counterparts.[98] Lack of access to modern energy has disproportionate negative impacts on women and girls' health and safety due to their care work burdens related to cooking and domestic chores. The affiliated risks include exposure to indoor air pollution, cooking with dirty fuels, and travelling long distances to collect heavy loads of biomass and to gather firewood. The impacts extend to the environment and local communities.

In the Arab region, access to clean fuels and technology stands at 86.5 per cent. However, the substantial rural-urban gap (rural 77.1 per cent, urban 93.2 per cent) highlights the distinct challenges faced by rural communities,[99] where reliance on traditional biomass for cooking remains prevalent. Such disparities disproportionately impact the rural population, estimated at 48 million (11.7 per cent), which suffers from higher exposure to household air pollution, contributing to adverse health outcomes, particularly among women and children.[100] The premature death toll of women and girls reached 91,350 deaths from exposure to household air pollution related to cooking fuels in 2019. Universal access to clean cooking fuels could save women on average 1.5 hours a day. In addition to improving their overall health, it would deliver multiple benefits, including increasing economic opportunities and education.

Electrification can reduce gender inequality by freeing up women's time from household chores, enabling them to work outside the home and access new job opportunities.[101] Despite progress in the availability (91 per cent) and affordability of electricity, inhabitants of rural (81.3 per cent) and remote areas face significant disparities in access to energy services compared to their urban (97.6 per cent) counterparts, as of 2022. Approximately 34.9 million people in rural areas still lack access to electricity in their homes, with this issue being most pronounced in LDCs. In Yemen, for example, access to electricity in rural areas does not exceed 26 per cent, whereas access to electricity in urban areas stands at 88 per cent.

FIGURE 25

Link of female mortality to air pollution and use of clean fuels in rural areas, latest year



Source: UNSD, Global SDG Indicators database (accessed in November 2024).

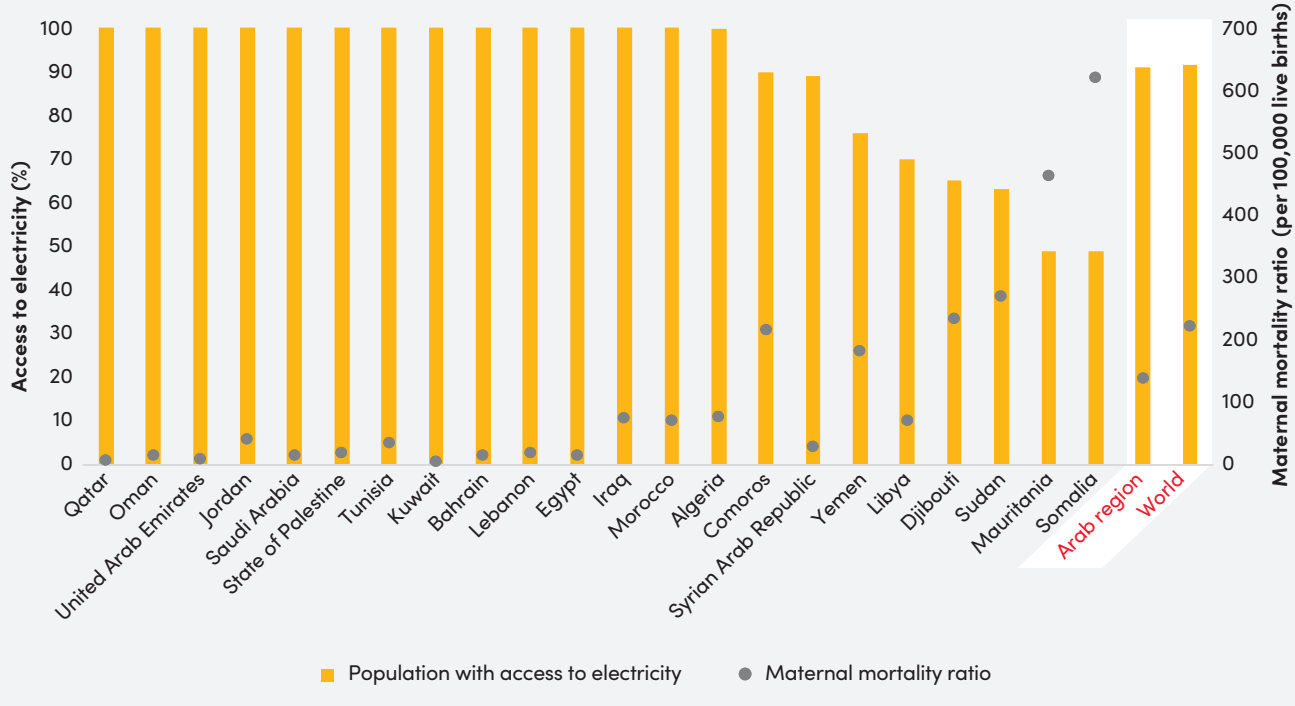
There is a significant relationship between maternal mortality ratios and access to electricity across the Arab region. Generally, countries with higher maternal mortality ratios tend to have lower proportions of their populations with access to electricity. For instance, Somalia, which has the highest maternal mortality ratio of 621 per 100,000 live births, has only 48.9 per cent of its population with access to electricity as of 2022. Similarly, Mauritania and the Sudan, which have high maternal mortality ratios at 464 and 270 per 100,000 live births, respectively, have lower electricity access rates of 49 per cent and 63.2 per cent, respectively. Conversely, countries such as Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, which have low maternal mortality ratios (ranging from 7 to 9 per 100,000 live births), have a 100 per cent rate of electricity access as of 2022.

The energy sector has historically been a male-dominated field. Women's representation in key public sector roles responsible for energy policies and programmes remains insufficient and its workforce continues to be unrepresentative of the population and workforce at large.[102] Women's participation in the energy sector is below 15 per cent[103] on average, well below the world average of 22 per cent. Their activities in the energy sector are mainly concentrated in clerical work and low-skill services.[104] Furthermore, women's economic contribution to the energy sector, such as through fuel collection, is unpaid, unrecognized and undervalued.[105]

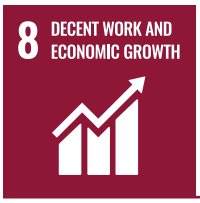
Enhancing women's access to clean fuels and electricity not only improves their well-being but also has the potential to free up valuable time for education and income-generating activities. To achieve gender equality and empower rural women, it is essential to remove barriers to their participation in the energy sector, promote their involvement in decision-making and recognize their critical role as energy managers within households. Expanding clean energy solutions will not only alleviate energy poverty but will also support sustainable development in rural communities.

FIGURE 26

Maternal mortality and access to electricity, latest year



Source: UNSD, Global SDG Indicators database (accessed in November 2024).



Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

Addressing gender inequalities in labour markets will not only achieve gender equality and women's empowerment but will also boost the region's economic welfare and growth outlook.

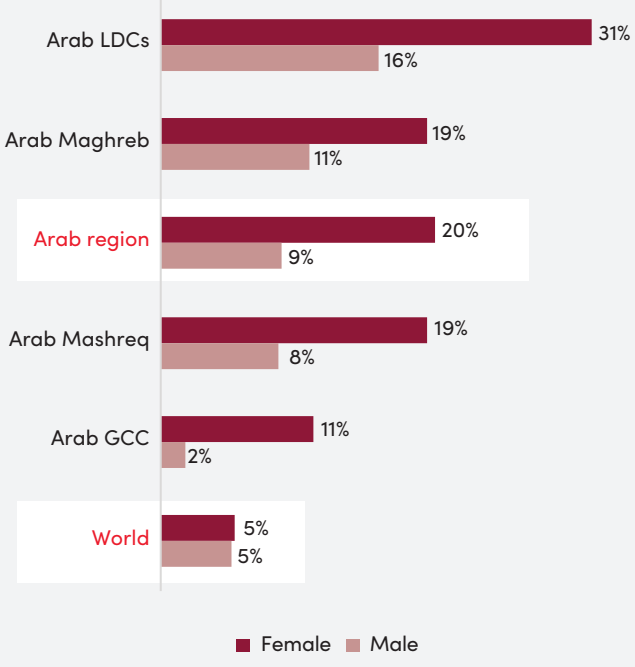
The socioeconomic impact of conflict and war is evident in labour market indicators. There are higher rates of unemployment, underemployment, youth not in education, employment or training (NEET), and extreme poverty in non-GCC countries in conflict compared to GCC countries not in conflict.[106]

Although women represent around 48 per cent of the Arab population, female unemployment rates are comparatively higher than those of their male counterparts.[107] In 2023, the Arab region had one of the worst unemployment rates in the world, particularly among women and young people (19.54 per cent), compared to the global average of 5.29 per cent. Unemployment is a persistent challenge for several countries in the region. Female unemployment rates have increased while the rates for male unemployment have decreased since 2000. The State of Palestine had the highest rate of female unemployment at 40.4 per cent in 2022, which was twice the rate of male unemployment (20.3 per cent).

As with the adult population, there are considerable gender gaps in unemployment among young people. Despite wide variations between countries, female youth unemployment rates are notably higher than among older age groups. In 2023, young women (40.1 per cent) faced unemployment twice as often as young men (23.4 per cent).

FIGURE 27

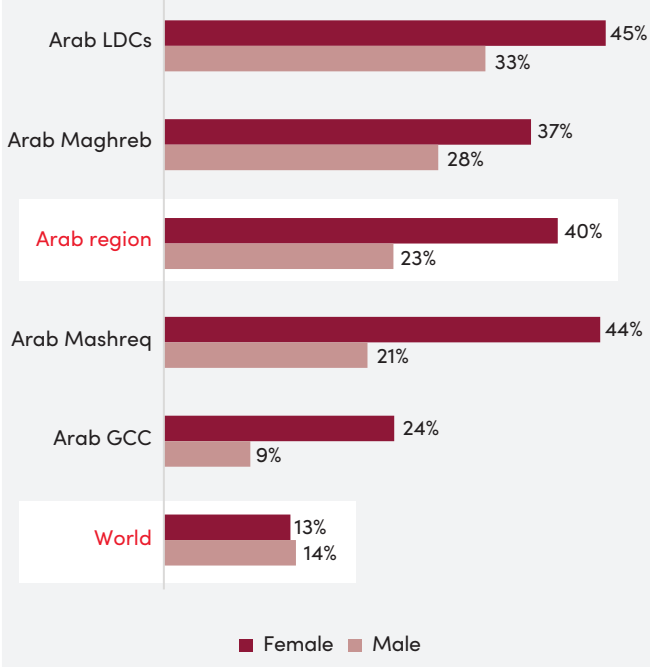
Adult unemployment rate (15+ years), 2023 (Percentage)



Source: ILOSTAT Database (accessed in November 2024).

FIGURE 28

Youth unemployment rate (15–24), 2023 (Percentage)



Source: ILOSTAT Database (accessed in November 2024).

There is a striking gap between women's improved education and their limited participation in economic activities in several Arab countries.[108] The female labour force participation rate (20 per cent) in the Arab region is more than three times lower than the male labour force participation rate (69 per cent). Only one out of five women is employed or seeking employment compared to the world average of 49 per cent. The region has the lowest labour force participation rate compared to other regions, with the time frame to close this gap estimated at 115 years.[109] The female labour force participation rate decreased by 3 percentage points in rural areas and 1 percentage point in urban areas from 2015 to 2020 (rural 18 per cent, urban 21 per cent). Exceptions include Saudi Arabia, where female labour force participation has nearly doubled, from 22.5 per cent in 2006 to 43.2 per cent in 2024, as well as Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, which have also seen significant increases since 2006.[110]

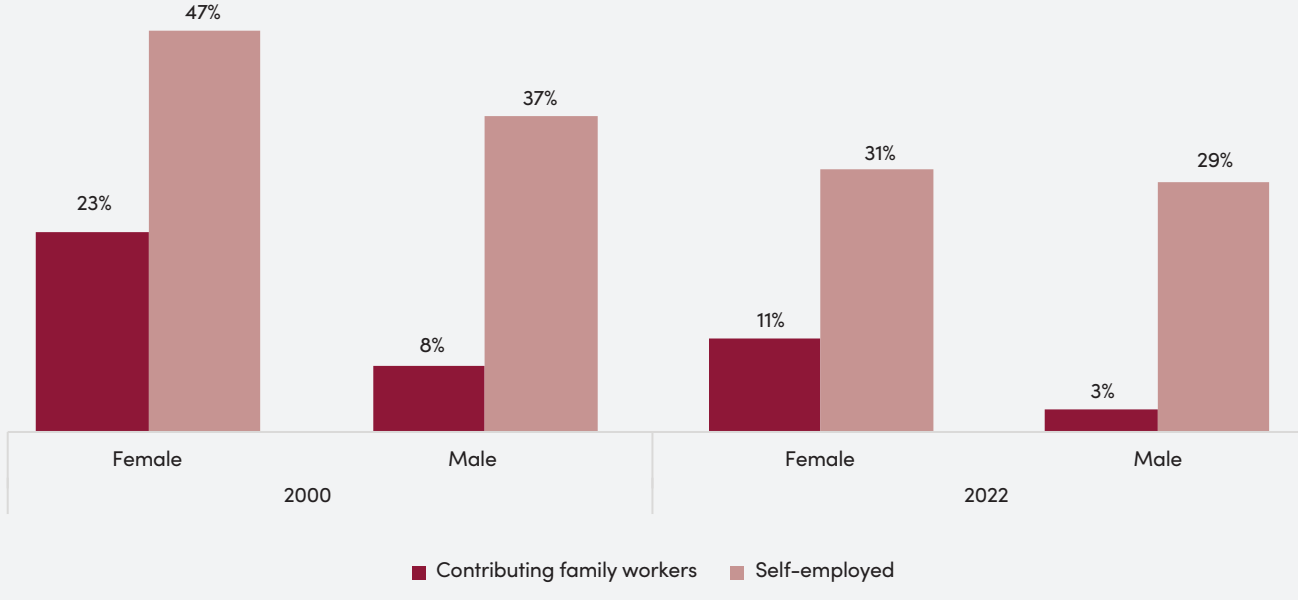
Limited employment opportunities, poor investment and a tightly controlled private sector result in too few jobs. Regardless of education level, informal employment is a greater source of employment for women workers than for men workers. While there is a disproportionate number of women in the Arab region who are not economically active, those who are also have a higher likelihood of working in unprotected and informal work.[111]

In 2023, 50.3 per cent of female workers were in precarious informal jobs and were either insufficiently covered or not covered at all by formal arrangements in law or in practice.[112] It is also worth noting that the gender gap in employment status is significant where women (10.9 per cent) are more likely to be contributing family workers than men (2.8 per cent), while there is no significant gender gap in self-employment (women 30.6 per cent, men 29 per cent) as of 2022.[113]

Out of the 25 million young people not in education, employment or training (NEET),[114] there are over 16.8 million females in this category in the Arab region, representing more than double the NEET rate of males (19.7 per cent) and over 12 percentage points more than the global female average (29.7 per cent) in 2023.

FIGURE 29

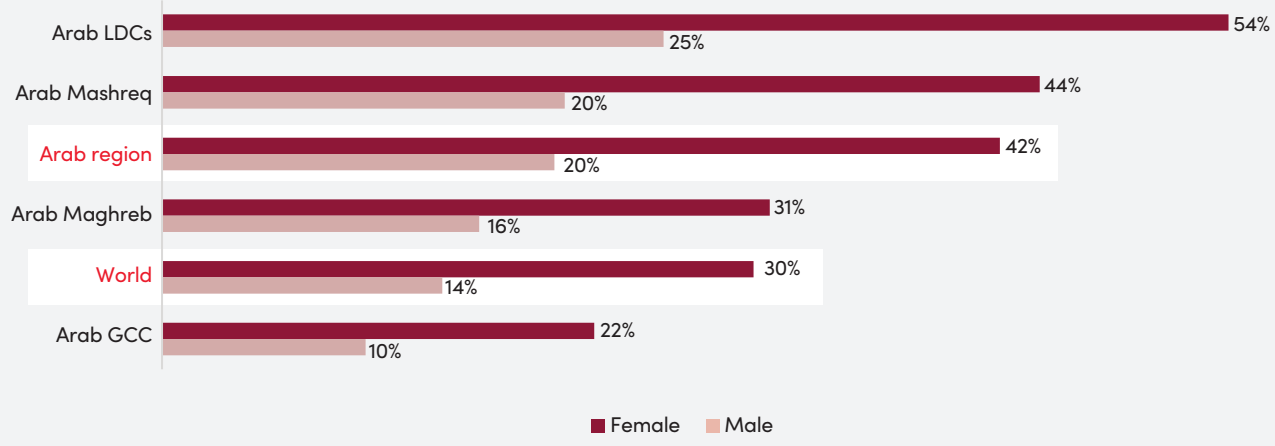
Employment status, 2000 and 2022 (Percentage)



Source: ILOSTAT Database (accessed in November 2024).

FIGURE 30

Proportion of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET), 2023 (Percentage)



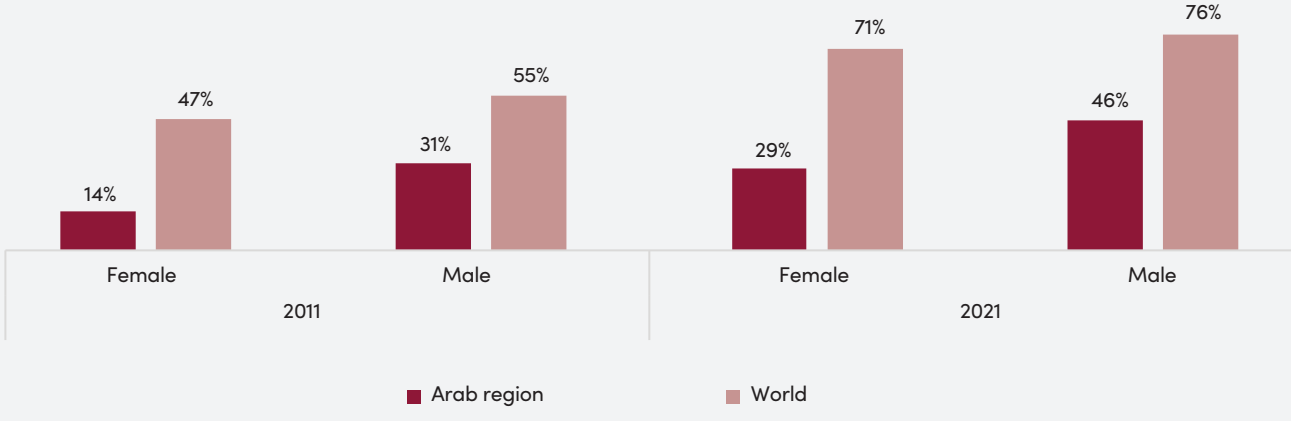
Source: ILOSTAT Database (accessed in November 2024).

Women's lack of financial inclusion limits their control over household finances, decreases opportunities to earn income and constrains their empowerment to be economically independent. The region has a large gender gap (17 percentage points) between women and men in holding an account at a financial institution. As of 2021, only 28.9 per cent of women hold an account compared to 45.8 per cent of men; these numbers are below the global averages of 71.4 per cent and 76.4 per cent, respectively.

The socioeconomic landscape for women in the Arab region remains profoundly challenging in the labour markets. Targeted interventions include enhancing job opportunities, promoting financial inclusion and creating a supportive environment for women's economic empowerment. Closing these gender gaps will require comprehensive policy reforms that challenge entrenched social norms and provide equitable access to education and employment, ensuring that women can fully contribute to the region's economic development and resilience.

FIGURE 31

Proportion of adults (15 years and older) with an account at a financial institution or a mobile-money-service provider, 2011 and 2021 (Percentage)



Source: World Bank, World Development indicators (accessed in November 2024).

Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Access to higher-skilled, better-paid manufacturing jobs would allow women to benefit more equally from the advantages of industrialization.

Increasing women's participation in technology, science and innovation is critical for meeting the global challenges ahead.[115] Despite the rising number of female graduates in science and technology fields, women remain underrepresented in employment in these sectors.[116] There is a persistent gender segregation in terms of both occupational and sectoral distribution of employment; segregation in the manufacturing sector is the highest in the Arab region.

While women are still underrepresented in fields such as science, engineering, and information and communications technology (ICT), holding only 23.2 per cent of jobs in these sectors in 2022, they have a higher presence in the manufacturing sector compared to men; roughly one in five women[117] works in manufacturing compared to 1 in 10 men. However, the majority of women are employed in the service sector, with 7 in 10 women working in this field. This highlights both the progress and the challenges women face in accessing high-skill, high-paying industries and suggests that more women are concentrated in lower-wage service sector jobs.

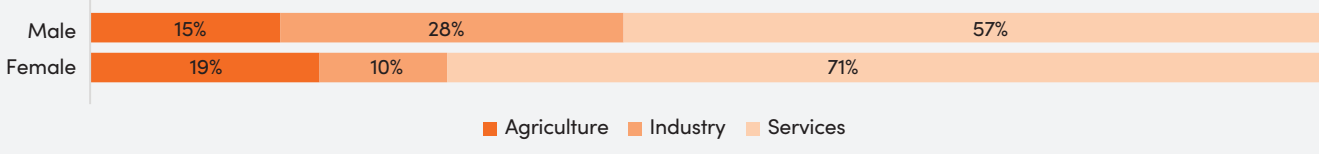
As of 2023, women inventors make up only 16 per cent of inventors listed in international patent applications in the Arab region compared to the 84 per cent who are men inventors. The region's female researchers make up an impressive 41.1 per cent of all researchers (two in five), higher than the world female share (31.5 per cent) in 2021. Among the Arab countries, Tunisia recorded the highest share of female researchers at 55 per cent in 2022.

The significance of information and communications technologies (ICTs) goes beyond mere access or basic skills; they are particularly valuable when they facilitate innovation in everyday life. Technological advancements are most effective when they foster social innovation. Skills development remains crucial to connect the unconnected. Lack of relevant skills prevents many women and girls from using the Internet and maximizing the potential benefits of devices and services.

Data show that females in a few Arab countries have made progress in two basic ICT skills: sending emails with attached files and using copy and paste tools to duplicate or move information within a document. Women in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have reached gender parity with a 100 per cent score in these two skills. In the other Arab countries, women are still deficient in both skills, with a notable gender gap in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Morocco and the State of Palestine. It is important to highlight that low digital literacy increases individuals' vulnerability to the risks associated with the negative aspects of connectivity, such as cyberattacks, scams, misinformation and harmful content, including violence against women.

FIGURE 32

Employment by sector, 2022 (Percentage)

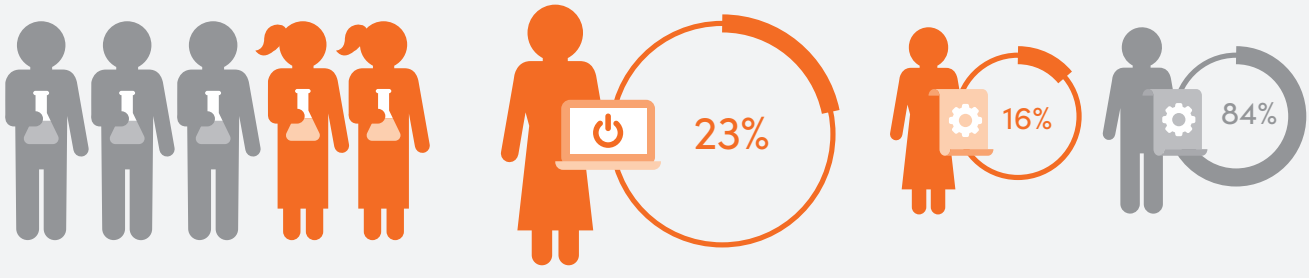


Source: ILOSTAT Database (accessed in November 2024).

Enhancing women's participation in technology, science and innovation is not only vital for achieving gender equity but is also crucial for tackling the most pressing global challenges of today. Despite the promising increase in female graduates, significant barriers persist, resulting in a stark underrepresentation of women in STEM fields and innovation. The statistics reveal an urgent need for targeted initiatives that address occupational segregation, improve access to skills development, and foster an inclusive environment that empowers women to contribute fully to these sectors. By investing in women's potential and ensuring their voices are heard in technology and innovation, it becomes possible to harness their capabilities to drive sustainable progress and create a more equitable future for all.

FIGURE 33

Participation of women in research and STEM remains far from gender parity



2 in 5 researchers are women (2021)

Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Female researchers as a percentage oftotal researchers" (accessed in October 2024).

23 per cent of women hold science, engineering and ICT jobs (2022)

Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators (accessed in October 2024).

16 per cent of women inventors hold international patents compared to 84 per cent of men (2023)

Source: WIPO, IP Statistics Data Center, October 2024.

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

Reduce inequality within and among countries

Overlooking gender dynamics and inequalities can expose women and girls to further risks and vulnerabilities and exacerbate existing inequalities.

It is vital to address gender dynamics and inequalities that contribute to social and economic empowerment and promote gender equality. Gender inequalities contribute to heightened risks of human rights violations and reduced socioeconomic outcomes, especially affecting women and girls,[118] and are deepened in conflict and crisis situations.

Forced displacement remained a defining feature of armed conflicts in 2023. Refugee and displaced women and girls face additional exposure to gender-based violence, trafficking, higher risks of early and forced marriage, unintended pregnancies and disproportionate negative effects on their health, education and nutrition. Approximately 42.4 million refugees and internally displaced people[119] were forced to flee their homes in the Arab region. Women and girls account for 20.3 million or nearly half (48 per cent) of those in this category in the Arab region and two fifths (40 per cent) of all internally displaced females in the world in 2023.

Gender earnings inequality remains very high; women's share of 14.5 per cent of all labour income in the Arab region is well behind the global average of 51.8 per cent, reflecting persistent gender gaps in wages and labour force participation in 2024.[120]

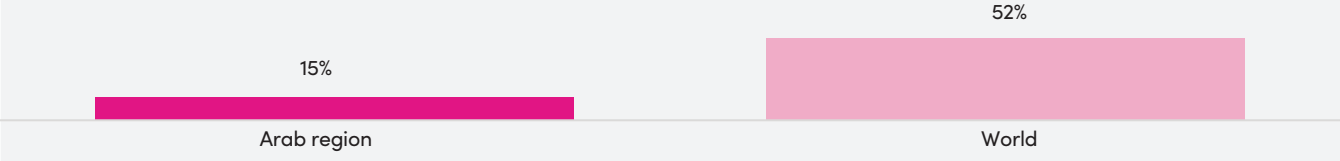
Regionally, limited data show that on average one in six females[121] (16 per cent) experiences discrimination based on any grounds; for both women and men, the highest discrimination is based on individuals' socioeconomic status. Available data show that women are twice as likely as men to report discrimination based on sex and almost twice as likely to experience discrimination based on marital status. Men, on the other hand, are twice as likely as women to report discrimination based on religion and beliefs.

The Arab region has made significant legislative progress in addressing gender-based violence. However, laws often fail to specifically protect those who are at the greatest risk, including refugees, women and girls with disabilities, and migrant domestic workers.

In the Arab region there are 16 countries with national constitutions referring to gender equality, non-discrimination and/or protection from gender-based violence, making them substantially compliant with international standards in this regard: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia. There are comprehensive anti-trafficking laws with punitive, protective and preventive measures in 20 Arab countries but not in Palestine and Somalia.

FIGURE 34

Gender income gap ratio, 2024 (Percentage)



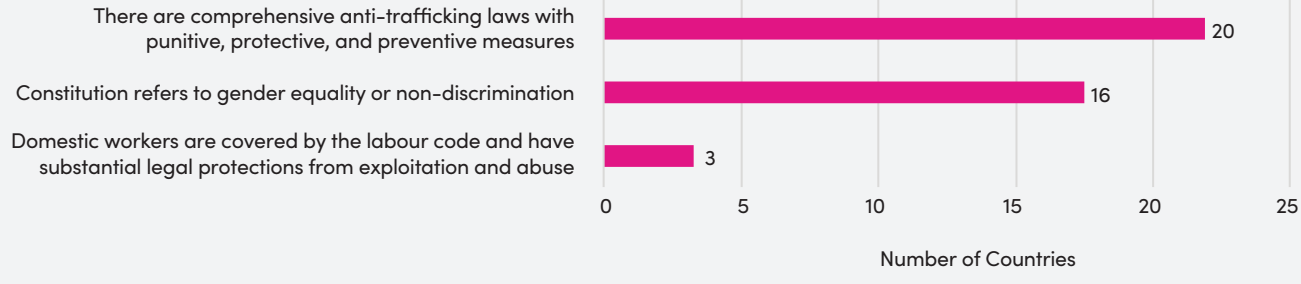
Source: ILOSTAT Database (accessed in November 2024).

Only three countries in the Arab region – Algeria, Iraq and Libya – offer substantial legal protections to domestic workers under their labour codes. This coverage is crucial because the majority of domestic workers in the region are women, making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse in the absence of robust legal safeguards. Strengthening protections for domestic workers is essential for addressing gender disparities and ensuring fair and safe working conditions in this highly feminized sector.[122] Despite the commitment to leave no one behind and to eliminate discrimination as part of the 2030 Agenda, only 4 out of 22 countries – the Comoros, Iraq, the State of Palestine and Tunisia – have measured the prevalence of discrimination.

Addressing gender inequalities is crucial for the social and economic empowerment of women and girls, particularly in conflict and crisis situations where these disparities are exacerbated. With nearly half of the displaced population in the Arab region being women and girls who face heightened risks of violence and discrimination, there is an urgent need for comprehensive legal protections and targeted support services. Strengthening national and international mechanisms to safeguard the rights of marginalized women and girls, coupled with robust data collection on discrimination, is essential to create an inclusive environment that promotes gender equality and protects human rights.

FIGURE 35

Number of countries with gender-related legislation addressing inequalities experienced by women and girls in conflict and crisis situations



- Constitution refers to gender equality or non-discrimination. Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, FACT SHEET: JANUARY 2020.
- There are comprehensive anti-trafficking laws with punitive, protective and preventive measures. Source: The Warnath Group, Global Collection of human trafficking laws, https://www.warnathgroup.com/laws/.
- Domestic workers are covered by the labour code and have substantial legal protections from exploitation and abuse. Source: Gender Justice & Equality before the Law in the Arab States Region.

Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Urbanization presents significant opportunities for women, but safety concerns in public spaces remain a critical barrier to achieving gender equality.

Urban life can open up immense opportunities for women, yet often women in cities have fears for their safety in public spaces. This impedes gender equality, which is crucial for inclusive, resilient and sustainable urbanization.[123] Nearly 60 per cent of the region's population lives in urban areas with more than 283 million inhabitants, including over 136.9 million (48.37 per cent) women and girls in 2023.

The number of female urban residents is expected to rise by 53 per cent, reaching 210.1 million out of a total urban population of 430.6 million by 2050. Additionally, the population of women aged 65 and older is projected to triple, growing from 7.4 million to 21 million, making up a significant portion of the total urban population. As well as having safety concerns, older women are particularly vulnerable to poor mental and physical health from air pollution and increased rates of dementia, which requires attention in urban planning.[124]

Research has shown that women's use of the public realm is affected by how inclusive and accessible it is. Limited mobility options, gender bias, ageing, disabilities as well as fear of violence can all reduce the willingness of women to enjoy public spaces.[125,126] Women and girls often fear and experience verbal sexual harassment and physical violence on streets and in public transport. In the Arab region, the availability of public transportation systems is weak. Moreover, the public transportation systems are inaccessible to most people, including those with disabilities. A recent barometer study in the Arab region found that 39 per cent of women, compared to 22 per cent of men, reported experiencing sexual harassment in public places. In Egypt, sexual harassment is prevalent, with 62 per cent of women reporting that they have been harassed in public spaces.[127] The obstacles women face in accessing safe and efficient public transport hinder their employment opportunities, restrict access to education and curtail participation in cultural and social activities.[128]

Women residing in slums face poverty-restricted mobility as well as inequalities in access to services and decent work compounded by the lack of secure tenure.[129] In 80 per cent of the countries analysed, women are over-represented in urban slums among residents aged 15 to 49.[130]

In 2022, one fifth (20.9 per cent) of the Arab population still lived in slums, with more than 57.8 million inhabitants, including over 27.7 million women and girls, lacking basic housing and access to essential services such as water and sanitation, including handwashing facilities with soap and water on the premises – two critical components of managing menstrual hygiene.[131] In Somalia, nearly two in three (68.13 per cent) women and girls do not have access to handwashing facilities with soap and water in urban areas.

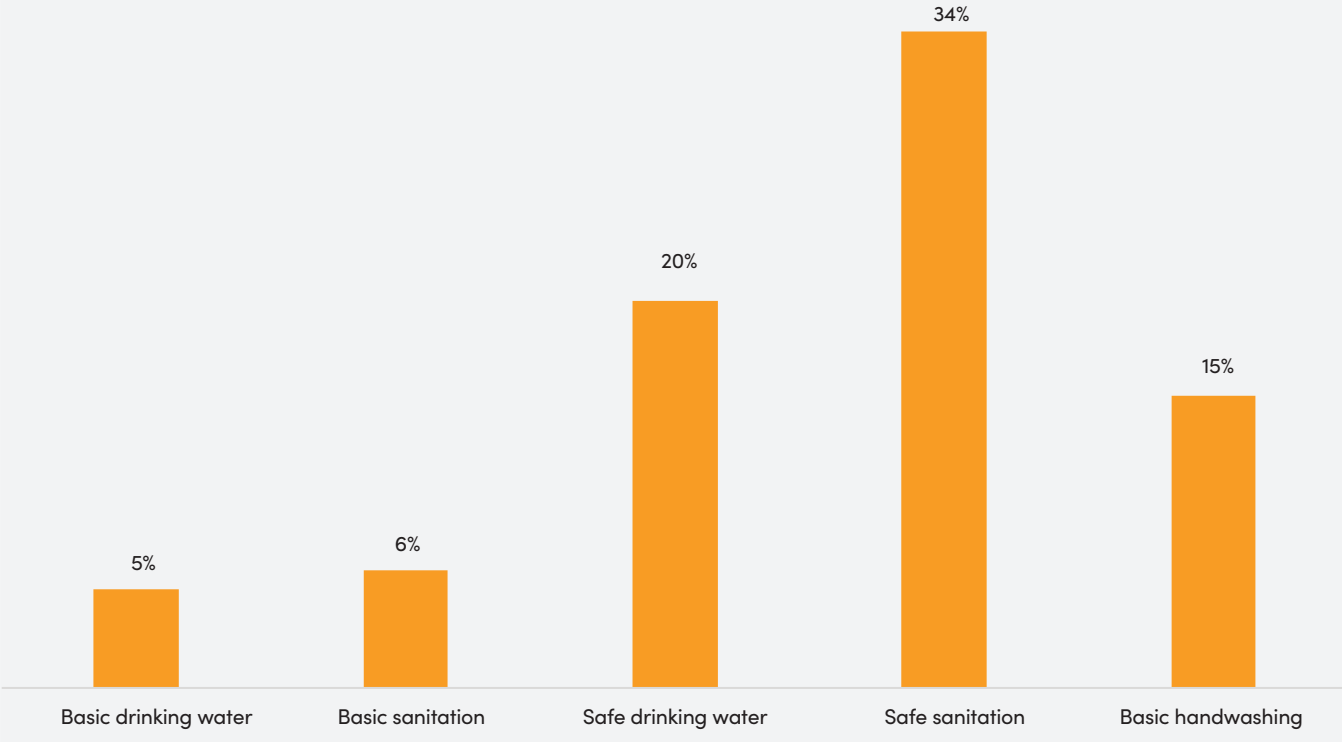
Sustainable smart cities are emerging in the region, with 14 out of 22 Arab countries having related initiatives that can enhance urban safety, increase traffic safety, strengthen early warning systems, unlock the potential

of real-time data in predicting and preventing crime and terrorism, and address violence against women and girls in public spaces (Sustainable Development Goal 11).[132]

Urbanization presents significant opportunities for women, but safety concerns in public spaces remain a critical barrier to achieving gender equality. Inclusive urban planning must prioritize women's safety and accessibility. Implementing targeted measures in transport, infrastructure and public safety is essential to unlock the full potential benefits of urban spaces for women and girls.

FIGURE 36

Proportion of population lacking essential services in urban areas, 2022



Source: ESCWA calculation based on UNICEF data.

The intersection of gender inequality and climate change presents a critical challenge for sustainable development in the Arab region, disproportionately affecting women, particularly those in rural and marginalized communities.

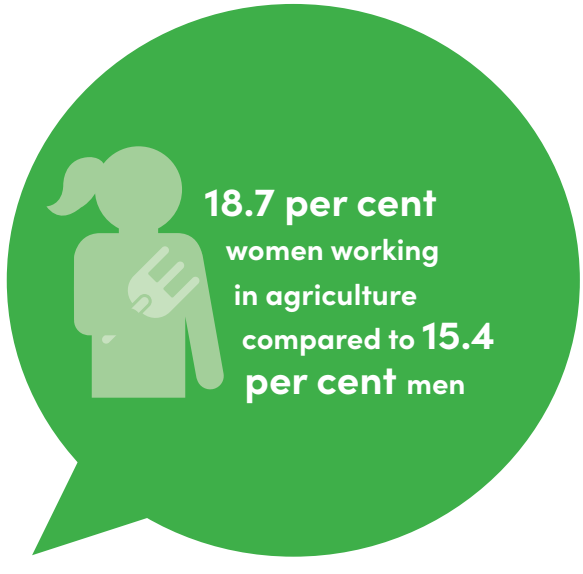
The intersection of gender inequality and environmental crises presents one of the most significant challenges for sustainable development in the Arab region. Climate change is intensifying, with rising risks of floods, wildfires, desertification, land degradation and severe droughts disproportionately affecting the poorest and most vulnerable, many of whom are women. The impacts of climate change, combined with unsustainable production and consumption patterns, affect women differently due to their socioeconomic position.

Marginalized women in low-paying jobs, for example, have fewer resources to cope with the challenges brought about by climate change, exacerbating existing inequalities.[133] Women in rural areas face additional challenges, with limited access to basic services, technology and market information, including training. Access to the Internet in rural areas is 50 per cent compared to 83 per cent in urban areas. This is compounded by a significant gender digital divide, as fewer women than men have access to the Internet as of 2024.[134]

The agricultural labour force in the region is predominantly female, with 18.7 per cent of women working in agriculture compared to 15.4 per cent of men in 2022. Rural women, particularly those in marginalized communities relying on agriculture and fishing for their livelihoods, are especially vulnerable to climate impacts such as land degradation. Women are increasingly affected by land degradation, which was estimated at 8.7 per cent in 2019, up from 3.4 per cent in 2015. Additionally, despite their crucial role in food production, women face systemic discrimination and deepening inequalities in food systems. In 2023, 24.2 million women in the Arab region suffered from severe food insecurity, marking a 62.5 per cent increase, or an additional 9 million women, compared to 2015.

One avenue for climate change mitigation and adaptation is ensuring land tenure security for women. Secure land rights can support long-term investments, foster diverse response strategies and promote sustainable forest management. However, there is a significant gender disparity in land tenure across the region. In Jordan, for example, only 3 per cent of landholders are women, compared to the 97 per cent who are men, while in Tunisia, 6.4 per cent of landholders are women compared to the 93.6 per cent who are men.[135]

Climate change also exacerbates gendered household roles, with women bearing the brunt of essential tasks like water collection. In the Arab region, 37.5 million people lack access to basic drinking water services, and women often bear the responsibility of securing water.



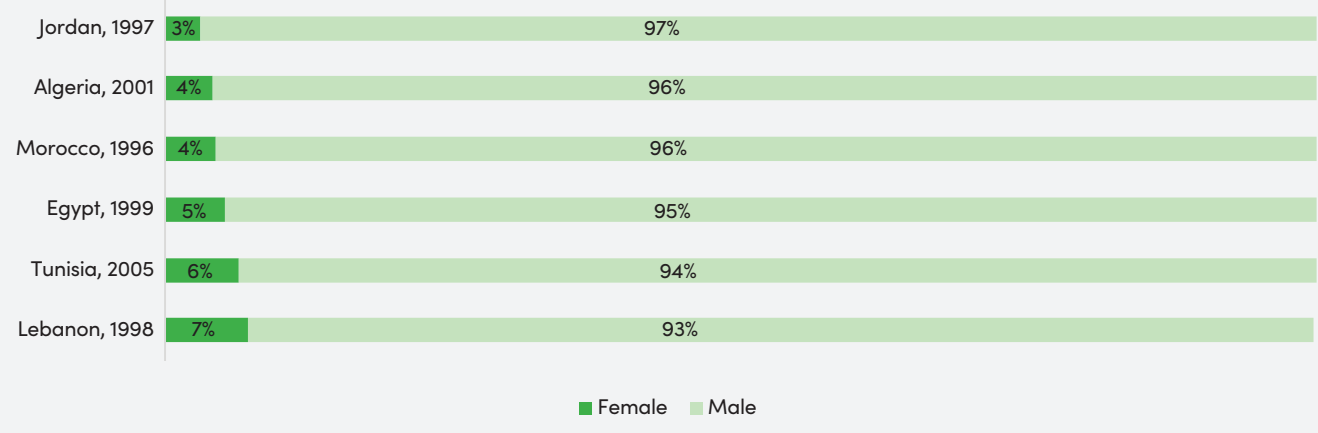
To mitigate the impacts of climate change, gender equality is critical. Women's inclusion in climate discussions leads to more effective and equitable climate-related policies and projects.[136] Nine Arab countries participating in the Climate Promise have integrated gender dimensions into their nationally determined contributions (NDCs).[137] The 2021 enhanced NDC put forward by Tunisia is a regional leader in gender responsiveness, prioritizing gender as one of three transversal areas.[138]

Women in the agriculture sector are key change agents who can help decouple economic progress from environmental degradation. By improving resource efficiency, promoting sustainable lifestyles, and contributing to forest conservation and regeneration,[139] women play a pivotal role in achieving sustainable development. Empowering women through access to information, training on updated technologies,[140] and equitable access to opportunities is urgent to enhance their capabilities and contributions to climate action.

The intersection of gender inequality and climate change poses a critical challenge for sustainable development in the Arab region. Empowering women – particularly those in rural and marginalized communities – through secure land tenure, resource access and inclusion in decision-making processes is essential for building resilience. By harnessing women's knowledge and roles in agriculture and resource management, it becomes possible to drive sustainable development that benefits all.

FIGURE 37

Land tenure (Percentage)



Source: Arab Women Organization, 2021. Gender Equality in the Agricultural Sector in the Arab Region.

Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies

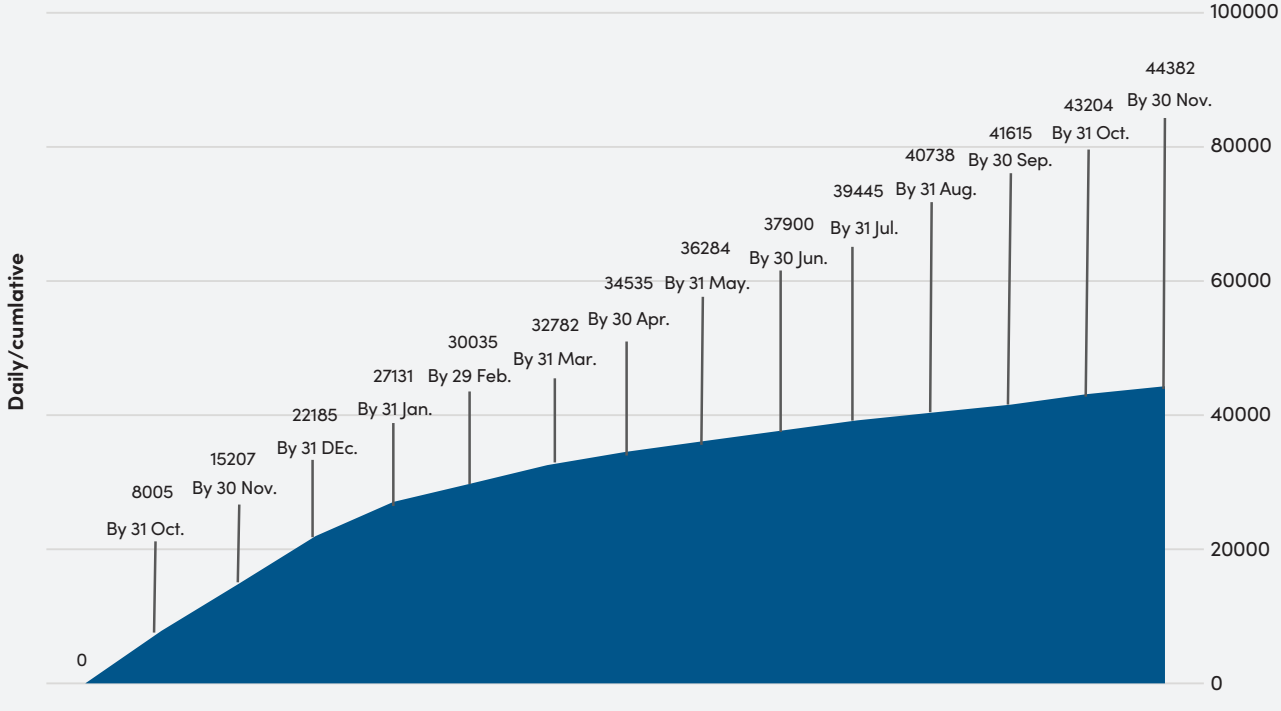
Women's leadership and participation in peacebuilding are essential for achieving lasting peace and sustainable development in the Arab region.

Women's leadership and participation in peacebuilding are a "prerequisite for the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"[141] without which lasting peace will not be sustained and sustainable development will not be achieved. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.[142] Women's participation in leadership positions is necessary to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. However, there is a lack of overall progress on women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace processes in the Arab region.

The rise in the number of conflicts in the past decade (Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Syrian Arab Republic, Somalia, the Sudan, State of Palestine and Yemen) has not been followed by a similar rise in the number of agreements. As a consequence, conflicts have contributed to the devastating harm experienced by women and girls – and by civilians at large.[143] The number of civilian deaths in armed conflicts peaked in 2024. Civilian casualties in armed conflict zones witnessed significant increases, with 7 out of 10 recorded deaths occurring in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Evidence shows that the proportion of women killed doubled and that of children tripled. Similar civilian casualties occurred in Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and other conflict-affected countries, particularly impacting women and girls.[144]

FIGURE 38

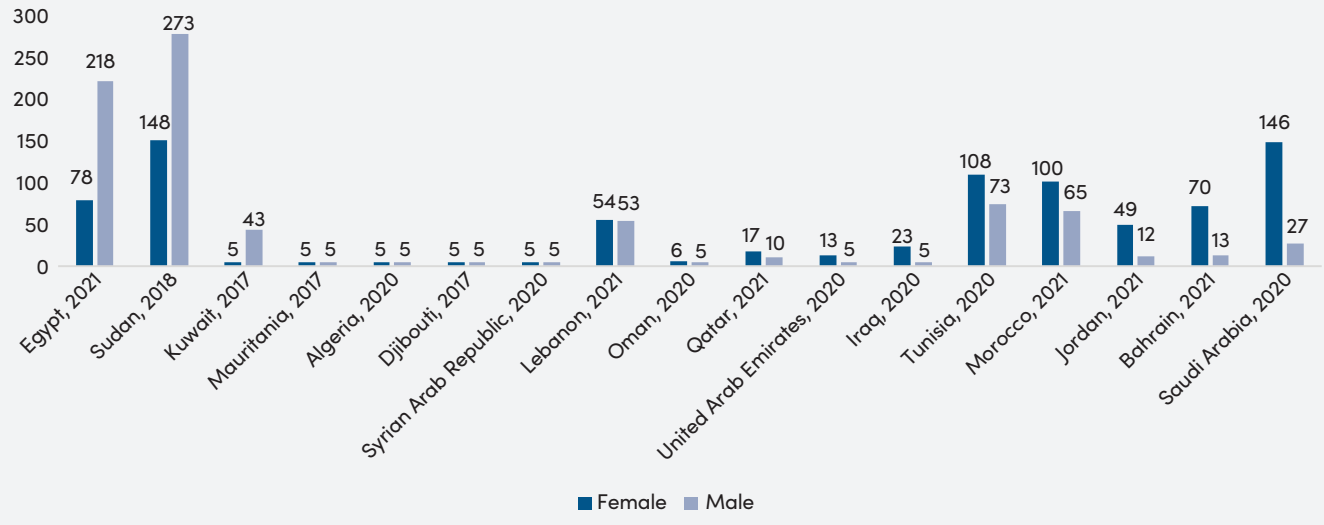
Reported casualities in Gaza (cumulative) as of 24 December 2024



Source: OCHA https://www.ochaopt.org/content/reported-impact-snapshot-gaza-strip-24-december-2024.

FIGURE 39

Number of detected trafficking victims, latest year



Source: UNODC Database (accessed in November 2024).

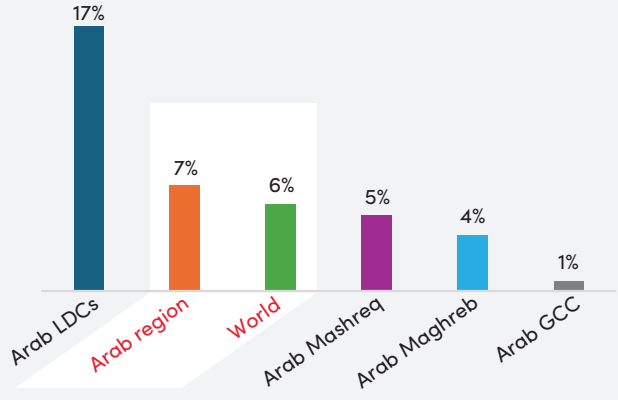
The spreading conflicts and crises in the region causing large population displacements and heightened vulnerability have created fertile ground for human traffickers, the recruitment and use of child soldiers and the forced sexual slavery of girls. The number of people in modern slavery has risen in recent years worldwide. The Arab region has the highest prevalence of modern slavery, estimated at 1.7 million women, men and children (10.1 per 1,000 people).[145] Moreover, intentional homicides of females have increased from 2.4 victims per 100,000 population in 2000 to 2.5 victims per 100,000 population (5,531 victims), surpassing the world average of 2.2 female victims per 100,000 population in 2022.[146] Iraq has the highest rates of victims of intentional homicide for both women and men (females 3 and males 15.8 per 100,000 population). In contrast, the GCC countries have the lowest rates of intentional homicide, not exceeding 1 per 100,000 population.

Women's equal participation in public administration and decision-making is a necessary condition for women's interests to be fully taken into account and properly addressed. Barriers to women's advancement in public administration undermine the fundamental principles of equal opportunity and social justice in society as a whole.[147] The Arab region is the least inclusive region for women among world regions when it comes to their representation in public service. The Arab region ratio stands at 0.44 women in public service to the total number of women of working age.

These figures show that the road to global peace and security, without which there can be no sustainable development, has been diverted. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, this trend must be reversed and parties to conflicts must strictly abide by their international humanitarian and human rights obligations to protect the lives of civilians.[148] Women's leadership and participation in peacebuilding are essential for achieving lasting peace and sustainable development in the Arab region. Despite the rising conflicts and the urgent need for inclusive peace processes, progress towards women's meaningful involvement remains stagnant. Ensuring that women have a voice in decision-making is critical not only for addressing their specific needs but also for fostering just and peaceful societies. To reverse current trends of violence and instability, it is imperative to prioritize gender equality and empower women in all facets of public life, particularly in conflict resolution and governance.

FIGURE 40

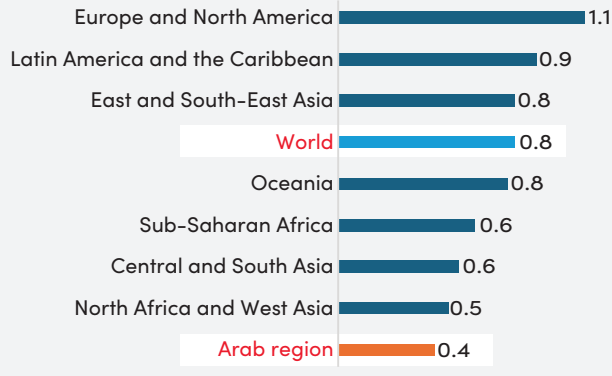
Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, 2022



Source: UNODC estimate based on national data.

FIGURE 41

Ratio of women to men in public service by region, 2022



Source: UNDP Global Policy Centre for Governance.

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Gender statistics in the Arab region must be streamlined and funded in national strategies for the development of statistics.

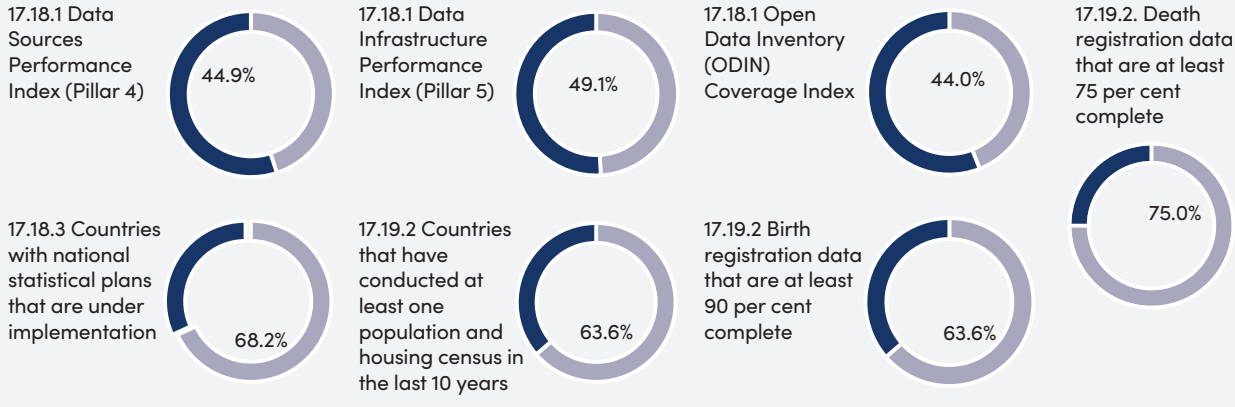
Gender statistics are crucial for understanding the needs and experiences of women and girls and the existing inequalities and biases they experience daily. Robust gender-disaggregated data are necessary to inform targeted policies that address these inequalities and promote inclusive development. Accurate data enable the monitoring of progress in implementing gender-inclusive policies, ensuring that interventions are effective and responsive. Additionally, this information fosters awareness, breaking down stereotypes and stigma, and promotes a more inclusive society. In essence, reliable gender data are the key to building a world where everyone's abilities and rights are recognized and where policies are designed to leave no one behind. This can be facilitated through the design and implementation of strategic statistical plans, which are integrated within national policy processes and cover all data sectors and all users. These national strategies for the development of statistics provide a robust framework and action plan for building the statistical capacity to meet both current and future data needs.[149]

In the Arab region, only 68.2 per cent of the reporting countries have national statistical plans under implementation compared to 64.2 per cent globally in 2023. Fourteen Arab countries (63.6 per cent) have implemented at least one population and housing census in the last 10 years (i.e. between 2013 and 2023) compared to 86.1 per cent globally. Registrations for deaths and births suffer from incompleteness of records at 50 per cent and 63.6 per cent, respectively, as of 2021. The average data source performance index stands at only 44.9 per cent, below the global average of 51.7 per cent in 2022, while the average data infrastructure performance index stands at only 49.1 per cent – still below the global average of 50.9 per cent in 2022. The Open Data Inventory (ODIN) coverage index[150] stands at 44 per cent compared to 56 per cent globally in 2022 (figure 41).

The lack of gender data increases marginalization and the discrimination encountered by women and girls. As a result, during the planning and budgeting, considerations of women and girls' specific situations are frequently neglected. The ODIN Gender Data Index (OGDI)[151] measures the availability and openness of gender data worldwide. The median overall OGDI score is 42 per cent for the Arab region compared to 46 per cent globally in 2022 (figure 42).[152]

FIGURE 42

Statistical capacity to collect and produce data (Percentage)



Source: ESCWA Arab SDG Monitor (accessed in December 2024).

Evidence-based data are instrumental in identifying the gaps and challenges that women and girls face, knowledge that can support policymakers in addressing gaps and amending existing policies and regulations. In the Arab region, there is a significant dearth of data when it comes to gender-related concerns. Many of the administrative records do not capture information by sex; very few countries implement gender-specialized surveys such as those capturing time use and violence against women. In almost half of the 22 Arab countries, data collection coverage and frequency of surveys are weak.[153]

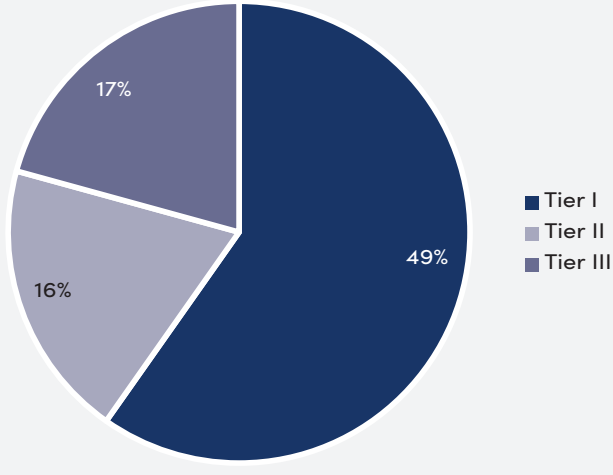
Countries have committed to collecting and disseminating quality gender indicators and sex-disaggregated data. The Arab Gender Indicator Framework[154] shows that over half of the Arab countries produce 49 per cent of the gender indicators (Tier I), while nearly one third of them produce 16 per cent of the gender indicators (Tier II), and the remaining countries have only 17 per cent of the gender indicators (Tier III), as shown in figure 43.

However, even when countries have been producing gender indicators, they are not disseminating them by sex but rather as a total (both sexes). The latest ESCWA assessment available on the Arab SDG Monitor[155] shows that on average, Arab countries publish less than 63.9 per cent of the selected gender-related indicators, while less than 39.5 per cent are disseminated as disaggregated by sex and another 36 per cent are with no available data (figure 44).

At the regional level, there is a dearth of officially disseminated data to address the issue of inequality and vulnerable populations. Granular data and reliable, sex-disaggregated data – including disaggregation by wealth and location – are essential for understanding and addressing gender inequalities in the Arab region. Lack of gender perspectives and adequate budget allocation hinders the development of targeted policies that meet the unique needs of women. To ensure that no one is left behind, it is crucial for countries to prioritize the collection and dissemination of quality gender indicators, which will enhance accountability and foster inclusive development that empowers women and vulnerable populations.

FIGURE 43

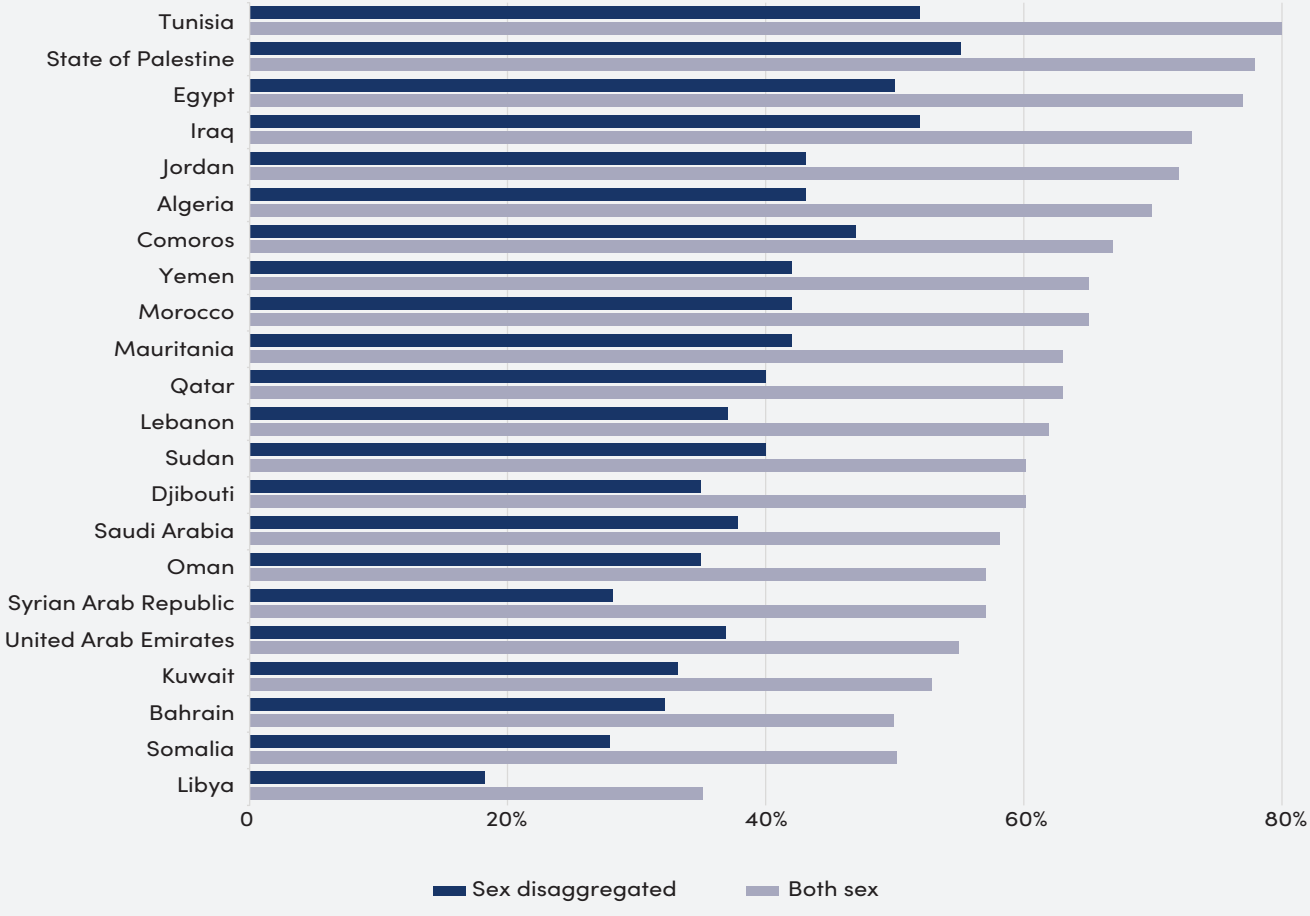
Production of gender indicators by tier



Source: ESCWA Handbook on the Arab Gender Indicator Framework 2023.

FIGURE 44

Statistical capacity to disseminate Sustainable Development Goal gender indicators, December 2024 (Percentage)



Source: ESCWA Arab SDG Monitor, Disaggregation.

5. A GENDER LENS ON PROGRESS TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

"Gender equality is the goal that will help abolish poverty, that will create more equal economies, fairer societies, and happier men, women and children." — Graça Machel

The United Nations has defined nine targets and 14 indicators for Sustainable Development Goal 5: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". Targets specify the goals and indicators represent the metrics by which the world aims to track whether these targets are achieved. Having robust gender indicators and sex-disaggregated data enables stakeholders to identify gaps and inequalities in various sectors, implement targeted policies and interventions, and enhance accountability and transparency.

However, the absence of sex-disaggregated data and gender-specific indicators remains a major barrier to effectively addressing gender inequality. Without data it is difficult to establish gender equality baselines and track progress or assess the impact of measures taken to address gender inequality.[156]

There is a lack of sufficient data for Sustainable Development Goal 5 in the Arab region. Sufficient data of two data points (years) provides sufficient information for policymakers to track progress. According to the latest data available in the Global SDG Database, only two targets have sufficient data while seven have insufficient data (one data point). In terms of data availability for the 14 indicators, there are only 3 indicators with sufficient data, 10 with insufficient data and 1 with no available data (table 1).

TABLE 1

Assessment of data availability of Sustainable Development Goal 5, 2024

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls		
5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere	5.1.1 Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex	Insufficient
5.2 Eliminate all forms of violance against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation	5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls ages 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age	Insufficient
	5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than a intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurance	No data
5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation	5.3.1 Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18	Insufficient
	5.3.2 Proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, by age	Insufficient

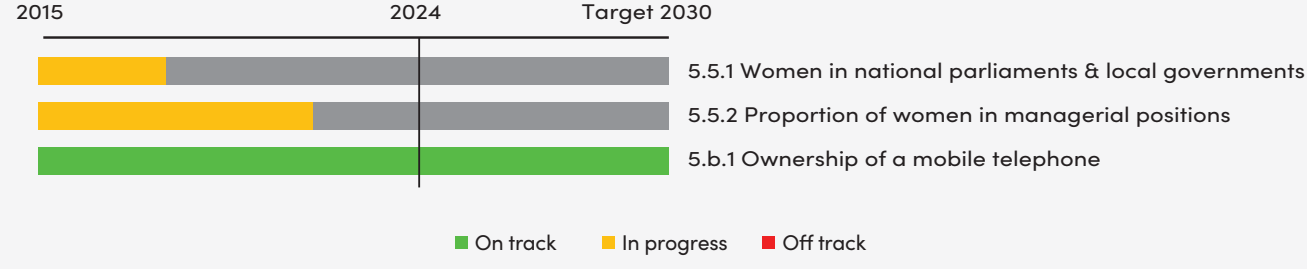
5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate	5.4.1 Proportion if time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location	Insufficient
5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life	5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in (b) local governments	Sufficient
	5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions	Sufficient
5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences	5.6.1 Proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual realtions, contraceptive use and reproductive health care	Insufficient
	5.6.2 Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education	Insufficient
5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic recources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms or property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws	5.a.1 (a) Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure	Insufficient
	5.a.2 Proportion of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control	Insufficient
5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women	5.b.1 Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex	Sufficient
5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels	5.c.1 Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment	Insufficient

-Sufficient: data available for 50% and above of countries of the region.
-Insufficient: data available for less than 50% of the countries of the region.
-No Data: data not available for all countries of the region.

Source: ESCWA and UN Women assessment of SDG 5 data availability, 2024.

FIGURE 45

Are we on track to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5 by 2030?



Source: ESCWA Arab SDG Monitor (accessed in December 2024).

Therefore, based on data availability in the region, policymakers are only able to use 3 indicators, while the remaining 10 indicators have insufficient or no data. As shown in figure 45, the region has met the 2030 target of Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.b.1 (Mobile phone ownership). However, the region is lagging in Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.5.1 (Women in national parliaments and local governments) and Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.5.2 (Proportion of women in managerial positions). Concrete action must be taken in both areas to meet the 2030 targets.

It is also possible to track progress on gender-related indicators and targets through other goals where data are available. The progress of the Arab region along with its four subregions – GCC, LDCs, Maghreb and Mashreq – provides a snapshot on gender issues in the main policy areas.

The progress of the region, including that of the four subregions, is tracked through the available gender-related indicators of each target (table 2). The fields in the table below are colour-coded as follows: red highlights the importance of taking concrete and urgent action; orange requires further steps to be on track; and green signifies either that progress is on track or that the desired target has been achieved.

TABLE 2

Tracking progress of the Arab region by Sustainable Development Goals and targets from a gender perspective

Sustainable Development Goal	Region or subregion	Target				Sustainable Development Goal	Region or subregion	Target		
Sustainable Development Goal 1: No poverty	Arab	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	Sustainable Development Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation	Arab	6.1	6.2	
	GCC	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4		GCC	6.1*	6.2	
	LDCs	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4		LDCs	6.1*	6.2	
	Maghreb	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4		Maghreb	6.1	6.2	
	Mashreq	1.1	1.3	1.3	1.4		Mashreq	6.1	6.2	
Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero hunger	Arab	2.1	2.2	2.4		Sustainable Development Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy	Arab	7.1		
	GCC	2.1	2.2	2.4			GCC	7.1		
	LDCs	2.1	2.2	2.4			LDCs	7.1		
	Maghreb	2.1	2.2	2.4			Maghreb	7.1		
	Mashreq	2.1	2.2	2.4			Mashreq	7.1		
Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good health and well-being	Arab	3.1	3.4	3.7	3.8	Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth	Arab	8.5	8.6	8.10
	GCC	3.1	3.4	3.7	3.8		GCC	8.5	8.6	8.10
	LDCs	3.1	3.4	3.7	3.8		LDCs	8.5	8.6	8.10
	Maghreb	3.1	3.4	3.7	3.8		Maghreb	8.5	8.6	8.10*
	Mashreq	3.1	3.4	3.7	3.8		Mashreq	8.5	8.6	8.10
Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality education	Arab	4.1	4.2	4.5	4.a.1	Sustainable Development Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure	Arab	9.c	9.5	

	GCC	4.1*	4.2	4.5	4.a.1	Sustainable Development Goal 10: Peace, justice and strong institutions	Arab	16.1	16.7
	LDCs	4.1	4.2	4.5	4.a.1*		GCC	16.1	16.7
	Maghreb	4.1*	4.2	4.5	4.a.1		LDCs	16.1	16.7
	Mashreq	4.1*	4.2	4.5	4.a.1*		Maghreb	16.1	16.7
Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender equality	Arab	5.3	5.5	5.6	5.b		Mashreq	16.1	16.7
	GCC	5.3 *	5.5	5.6	5.b	Sustainable Development Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals	Arab	17.6	17.8
	LDCs	5.3	5.5	5.6	5.b		GCC	17.6	17.8
	Maghreb	5.3	5.5	5.6*	5.b		LDCs	17.6	17.8
	Mashreq	5.3	5.5	5.6	5.b		Maghreb	17.6	17.8
*Assessment of progress by subregion is based on the progress status of the region and relative to other available and relevant indicators when data for the subregion are not available.							Mashreq	17.6	17.8

Legend

	On track		In progress		Off-track

A. Sustainable Development Goal targets and indicators used in table 2

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Target 1.1 Eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere (indicator 1.1.1).

Target 1.2 Reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions (indicator 1.2x).

Target 1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all (indicator 1.3.1).

Target 1.4 Ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, basic services, ownership and control over land (indicator 1.4.1).

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Target 2.1 End hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations (indicator 2.1.2).

Target 2.2 End all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025 the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age (indicator 2.2.3).

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Target 3.1 Reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births (indicators 3.1.1 and 3.1.2).

Target 3.4 Reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases (indicators 3.4.1 and 3.4.2).

Target 3.7 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services (indicators 3.7.1 and 3.7.2).

Target 3.8 Achieve universal health coverage (indicator 3.8.1).

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Target 4.1 Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education (indicator 4.1.2).

Target 4.2 Ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development (indicators 4.2.1 and 4.2.2).

Target 4.5 Eliminate gender disparities in education (indicator 4.5.1).

Target 4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all (indicator 4.a.1).

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Target 5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices (indicators 5.3.1 and 5.3.2).

Target 5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership (indicators 5.5.1 and 5.5.2).

Target 5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (indicator 5.6.2).

Target 5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology (indicator 5.b.1).

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Target 6.1 Achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all (indicator 6.1.1).

Target 6.2 Achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all (indicator 6.2.1).

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy

Target 7.1 Ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services (indicators 7.1.1 and 7.1.2).

Goal 8. Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

Target 8.5 Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all (indicator 8.5.2).

Target 8.6 Substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training (indicator 8.6.1).

Target 8.10 Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions (indicator 8.10.2).

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Target 9.c Significantly increase access to information and communications technology.

Target 9.5 Enhance scientific research, upgrade the technological capabilities of industrial sectors.

Goal 16. Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies

Target 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere (indicator 16.1.1).

Target 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (indicator 16.7.1b).

Goal 17. Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Target 17.6 Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation (indicator 17.6.1).

Target 17.8 Fully operationalize the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism (indicator 17.8.1).

B. List of Sustainable Development Goal gender indicators

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Indicator 1.1.1 Proportion of the population living below the international poverty line by sex, age, employment status and geographic location (urban/rural).

Indicator 1.2.1 Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age.

Indicator 1.2x Illiteracy rate, by sex and age.

Indicator 1.3.1 Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable.

Indicator 1.3x Females in vulnerable employment, total (per cent of total employment).

Indicator 1.4.1 Proportion of population living in households with access to basic services.

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Indicator 2.1.1 Prevalence of undernourishment.

Indicator 2.1.2 Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES).

Indicator 2.2.3 Prevalence of anaemia in women aged 15 to 49 years.

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Indicator 3.1.1 Maternal mortality ratio.

Indicator 3.1.2 Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel.

Indicator 3.7.1 Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15–49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods.

Indicator 3.7.2 Adolescent birth rate (aged 10–14 years; aged 15–19 years) per 1,000 women in that age group.

Indicator 3.9.1 Mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution.

Indicator 3.9.2 Mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene (exposure to unsafe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All (WASH) services).

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Indicator 4.1.1 Proportion of children and young people (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex.

Indicator 4.1.2 Completion rate (primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education).

Indicator 4.2.1 Proportion of children aged 24–59 months who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex.

Indicator 4.2.2 Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex.

Indicator 4.2x Children out of school, by sex and age (percentage of primary school age).

Indicator 4.4.1 Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill.

Indicator 4.6.1 Proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex.

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Indicator 5.1.1 Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex.

Indicator 5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age.

Indicator 5.3.1 Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18.

Indicator 5.3.2 Proportion of girls and women aged 15–49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation, by age.

Indicator 5.4.1 Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location.

Indicator 5.5.1a Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments.

Indicator 5.5.1b Proportion of seats held by women in local governments.

Indicator 5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions.

Indicator 5.b.1 Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex.

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Indicator 6.1.1 Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services.

Indicator 6.2.1 Proportion of population using (a) safely managed sanitation services and (b) a hand-washing facility with soap and water.

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy

Indicator 7.1.1 Proportion of population with access to electricity.

Indicator 7.1.2 Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology.

Goal 8. Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

Indicator 8.3.1 Proportion of informal employment in total employment, by sector and sex.

Indicator 8.5.2 Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities.

Indicator 8.6.1 Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training.

Indicator 8.10.2 Proportion of adults (15 years and older) with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider.

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Indicator 9.2.2 Manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment.

Indicator 9.5.2 Researchers (in full-time equivalent) per million inhabitants.

Indicator 9.c.1 Proportion of population covered by a mobile network, by technology.

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

Indicator 10.3.1 Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law.

Goal 11. Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Indicator 11.1.1 Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing.

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Indicator 15.3.1 Proportion of land that is degraded over total land area.

Goal 16. Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies

Indicator 16.1.1 Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age.

Indicator 16.1.2 Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause.

Indicator 16.2.2 Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation.

C. Other Sustainable Development Goal indicators

Goal 17. Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Indicator 17.6.1 Fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, by speed.

Indicator 17.8.1 Proportion of individuals using the Internet.

Indicator 17.18.1 Statistical capacity indicator for Sustainable Development Goal monitoring.

Indicator 17.18.2 Number of countries that have national statistical legislation that complies with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

Indicator 17.18.3 Number of countries with a national statistical plan that is fully funded and under implementation, by source of funding.

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This report provides regional averages and should not be interpreted as overlooking the significant variations among countries within the region or diminishing the notable progress achieved by many of them.

يتيح هذا التقرير متوسّطات إقليميّة دون أن يغفل التفاوتات الكبيرة بين بلدان المنطقة، أو يقلّل من التقدّم الملحوظ الذي حققه العديد من هذه البلدان.

Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals
A gender snapshot of the Arab region 2024

Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: A gender snapshot of the Arab region 2024 provides a comprehensive analysis of gender equality across the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), examining the Arab region's progress, challenges and setbacks in achieving gender parity by 2030. Despite notable advances in education, health and essential services, critical disparities persist in employment, economic empowerment and the prevalence of violence and conflict, slowing progress towards gender equality.

This report underscores the pivotal role of gender equality in driving SDG achievements and highlights the centrality of women and girls in shaping sustainable futures. It also addresses the interconnections between the SDGs, providing regional and subregional evidence of both progress and persistent inequalities. A key focus is the importance of sex-disaggregated data, particularly from administrative sources and specialized gender surveys, which remain limited in the region. By emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive gender-related data, the report offers strategic policy recommendations aligned with the Beijing Platform for Action, calling for concrete governmental action to close the gender gap and advance women's empowerment.

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