



# PROMOTING MEN'S CAREGIVING TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY



A Guidance Note to Inform the Development of National Policies and Programmes Based on Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa.





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(IMAGES) - Middle East and North Africa**

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### **The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES MENA)**

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The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region continues to witness progress – driven by new Government policies and civil society initiatives – in health and education indicators, and towards greater equality between men and women and the advancement of women’s rights. However, as in all regions of the world, there is a long road ahead before true equality between women and men is attained.

While the region has seen some progress across health and education, women’s economic and political participation remains among the lowest in the world.<sup>1</sup> Legal barriers continue to limit women’s rights, opportunities to work and access to justice; and institutions have not yet embraced – through policy or practice – full gender equality, that is to say, an all-encompassing equality between men and women. In addition, social expectations about what it means to be a man or a woman – at work and at home – reinforce these inequalities.

The International Men and Gender Equality Survey – Middle East and North Africa (IMAGES MENA) was designed to take a holistic look at the lives of men and women at home and at work. The study<sup>2</sup> involved interviewing nearly 10,000 individuals (men and women), led by UN Women, Promundo and local research partners in Egypt, Lebanon (where the sample included Syrian refugees), Morocco and Palestine, to investigate many of the stereotypes commonly associated with men and women in these countries, and to highlight pathways to equality.

This guidance note draws upon data and recommendations from *Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa*<sup>3</sup> on the topic of accelerating men’s participation in unpaid care work for the well-being of children, women, men and societies and in support of women’s economic advancement. It provides action-oriented steps and guidance on how civil society partners and United Nations actors can design and adapt programming, and influence a policy environment that promotes equality at work and at home. The recommendations put forward in this note are intended to serve as regional guidance, and should be further contextualized and adapted for use at the national level. These efforts are crucial to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. This guidance note was produced in combination with three other thematic guidance notes on the topics of gender socialization, violence against women and young men and gender equality.

## THE STATE OF PARENTING AND CAREGIVING IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA<sup>4</sup>

While children in the Middle East are more likely to live in two-parent households and with an extended family than in most other regions, the average family size has been declining in MENA: fertility rates range from under two children per woman in Lebanon to approximately four in Palestine.<sup>5,6,7</sup> Parents and experiences in the home have profound, wide-ranging and long-lasting impacts on children. Ideally, homes will be violence-free and models for gender equality: spaces where children see their parents sharing childcare and housework on an equal basis.

In MENA, raising children and taking care of the home is still, for the most part, the responsibility of women. Women’s daily average time spent on unpaid work is 4.5 times that of men,<sup>8</sup> and only one in ten to one in three married men with children reported having recently carried out tasks perceived to be women’s responsibility at home, such as preparing food, cleaning or bathing children.

IMAGES MENA’s qualitative research also explores these gender norms around caregiving, with regional voices emphasizing the persistence of gender roles, although they also contain glimpses of men who are already involved in their children’s lives:

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**“The man has the primary responsibility to work and provide. The woman has the other responsibility of caring for the home and children,” – Man, 62-years, Cairo**

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**“My father had the biggest influence on my life. He set me on the right path. If it weren’t for him, I would not have finished my studies, or be where I am now. He pushed me to study, although he never finished his education. But he had a discerning mentality for he respected reading, culture and women. This played an important role in shaping my personality.” – Woman, 58 years, village near Ramallah**

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In Egypt and Lebanon, **women working outside the home** can be a driver of men's greater participation in daily chores and caregiving. Among the small percentage of men in Egypt (10 per cent) whose spouses are working full time, 45 per cent reported participating in domestic work, a far higher number than men whose wives do not work outside the home (less than 25 per cent). Similarly, in Lebanon, men with wives working full time reported doing more of the housework.<sup>9</sup>

However, on the whole, the female labour force participation in MENA remains the lowest in the world, ranging from 17 per cent to 25 per cent in Palestine and Egypt respectively<sup>10</sup> (while the male labour force participation is 69 per cent and 76% per cent respectively).<sup>11,12</sup> Women and men are socialized to perceive a woman's primary role as being that of a mother or caregiver, and a man's primary purpose as being the breadwinner and provider. These socially constructed roles for women and men affect attitudes and behaviours, limit opportunities and create barriers for women's economic participation and men's caregiving.

To change these social norms, it is necessary to reshape ideas around the division of labour both at work, and, more importantly, at home. When it comes to encouraging men's caregiving, certain patterns emerge:

- In all four countries of the IMAGES MENA study, **men whose fathers had engaged in what has been traditionally defined as feminine household work, and those who were taught to do this work as children**, were far more likely to report doing so within their own marriages.
- Situations of **insecurity or conflict in the MENA region**, as in other regions, while having devastating physical, mental, and emotional impacts, can also lead to shifts in gender roles. In the case of some Syrian refugees in Lebanon, for instance, men have taken on more domestic and childcare work when their conflict-related displacement has led to a loss of employment or income. In the case of imprisoned men and their wives in Palestine, family gender roles also shifted by dint of necessity, when women became the primary financial providers during the men's imprisonment. These stories affirm that some men can and will take on more caregiving roles when their life conditions make it necessary for them to do so.

- While women carry out the majority of daily caregiving, the **majority of men expressed a desire to become more involved** in their children's lives. In all of the countries surveyed, half or more of the men said that their work takes time away from being with their children, and over 80 per cent of men in Morocco and Lebanon reported being in favour of parental leave for fathers.<sup>13</sup> This finding suggests the tremendous opportunity that men's caregiving represents for engaging men in the quest for gender equality.

Encouraging men's caregiving – in policy and practice – can help to create a future where men's and women's roles are defined according to their own choice, not predetermined by their gender.

## PROGRAMMATIC GUIDANCE: DIRECT EFFORTS TO BOOST FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT IN UNPAID CARE WORK

Many men are already thinking about fatherhood in new ways. Some grew up in homes with very involved fathers, some have embraced new roles due to their wives working outside the home, and some yearn for more meaningful involvement in their children's lives. To build on these and other encouraging findings from IMAGES MENA, and to improve the well-being of families and children across the region, programmers can take the concrete steps outlined in this section.

Parents, both women and men, need support and are actively calling for it. In addition to poverty alleviation programmes and workplace and Government policies to support parents, research shows that **parent training programmes** – particularly those that apply the programme recommendations below – can be effective in preparing new parents for all the rigours and responsibilities of parenthood, and also in improving child development outcomes and reducing the use of violence against children. Such programmes can have the added benefit of reducing conflict between couples.<sup>14</sup>

Too often, due to inequitable gender norms and the fact that mothers are more likely to be doing the caregiving, parent training programmes are aimed specifically or exclusively at mothers rather than *both* parents, and programmes lack a gender

perspective that encourages caregivers to reflect on and challenge stereotypes pertaining to girls, boys, mothers, and fathers.<sup>15</sup> The practice excluding fathers in conversations about childcare only further entrenches the unequal division of unpaid care work in the home. By contrast, when programmers engage fathers more directly in parent training, evidence shows that participating fathers increased their direct involvement in day-to-day childcare, thus shifting the landscape of gender equality in the home.<sup>16</sup> The programmes have also been shown to reduce domestic violence against women and children in participating homes and to increase the adoption of more positive disciplinary approaches in the place of corporal punishment of children.<sup>17</sup>

## HOW CAN WE BUILD AND EXPAND SUCH PROGRAMMES IN THE MENA REGION?

According to global evidence and promising practices in the region, the best programmes to boost fathers' involvement in unpaid care work in the Middle East and North Africa would be the following ones:

- **Gender-transformative, rather than gender-neutral.** Programmes must seek to transform gender power dynamics and promote more gender-equitable relationships between men and women directly, as opposed to ignoring or remaining neutral to the underlying power imbalances and inequitable ideas about “what men should do” and “what women should do.”<sup>18</sup> Group discussions, campaigns and the training of Government leaders and those in the workplace asking men – and women – to reflect on and challenge their assumptions about men's roles in their children's lives and in domestic work in general is an essential first step toward this type of outcome. These types of reflective exercises and discussions can then be combined with models or examples of alternate behaviours and skills. These conversations can be carried out with men at the community level, in schools, in workplaces, in the military, via the health sector, in refugee or internally displaced persons settlements and other appropriate settings, rather than being stand-alone. Shifting gendered patterns requires talking directly about gender, as it is understood in the MENA region.

### BOX 1

#### Transforming “The Man Box”

One strategic initial activity for a gender-transformative parent training programme with men might be the “Man Box” discussion, frequently implemented in the region by organizations, including CARE and the Lebanese human rights organization ABAAD – Resource Centre for Gender Equality, with fatherhood groups and youth groups. In this activity, the facilitator asks programme participants to list as many possible words, associative characteristics and other ideas that come to mind when they hear the phrase “be a man” or “be a real man.” Participants will share a wide range of ideas, some based on men's physical characteristics, but most are based on socially constructed notions of masculinity in that context.

A facilitator of a parenting-focused programme can prompt the participants to list specific items related to feeding, bathing, clothing, disciplining and otherwise caring for children. This will help the facilitator understand the socially constructed, gender-based caregiving expectations among the participants. Often, facilitators of this activity write all of the suggested items inside a large “box” on a white board, flipchart or chalkboard. When the box is filled, the facilitator then leads a critical conversation with the participants, to begin the process of transforming their understanding of these gender-based expectations.

- What happens if a man fails to meet all the standards of “being a real man”?
- What would such a man be called?
- Is it actually possible to acquire all of these characteristics?
- How many of these characteristics are actually biological (meaning that they are an inherent part of men's physical bodies), and how many are actually socially created?
- Do you want to be a real man, as defined by the Man Box? If so, why? If not, what are the important characteristics of the kind of man you aspire to be?



Photo: Beirut-based organization ABAAD facilitates the Man Box activity.

- **Be inclusive of fathers and design strategic entry points to engage fathers, as informed by IMAGES data.** More than 70 per cent of men in all IMAGES MENA study countries reported accompanying their pregnant wives to at least one or more prenatal health care visits. Health clinics across the region should recognize these early moments of a father’s involvement as an opportunity to get men more fully invested in their caregiving roles throughout their children’s early years. Materials, resources and handouts should be designed and distributed in targeted and purposefully inclusive ways, helping fathers feel like they play an essential role in caregiving practices. Materials that only show photos of female caregivers, and/or that use terminology that refers exclusively to female caregivers, can inadvertently reinforce the notion that men have nothing to do with caregiving. Bring men into caregiving conversations early and often, with targeted materials that tell them – and show them – they have powerful roles to play as allies, as caregivers, as husbands and as fathers,

## BOX 2

### The MenCare Campaign

The MenCare Campaign is a global effort to promote men’s involvement as equitable, non-violent fathers and caregivers in order to achieve family well-being, gender equality and better health for mothers, fathers and children. At present, the

campaign is active in at least 40 countries. On its website, the campaign provides a wide array of resources for free, including posters and images that meet the programmatic guidance established above: they show fathers from around the world as important, natural familial participants of caregiving practices. Programmers in the MENA region could use existing posters directly, or keep the same language, but include more locally-relevant images, stories, and examples.<sup>5</sup> All MenCare posters are available online at: [men-care.org/resources/?type=posters](https://men-care.org/resources/?type=posters)

### Understanding Masculinities: An IMAGES MENA Film

*Understanding Masculinities: An IMAGES MENA, UN Women and Promundo Film*<sup>6</sup> provides another example of testimonials promoting positive role models. This short film highlights four men from the MENA region championing equality and challenging stereotypes. In the film, Adnan Melki, the primary caregiver for his children while his wife works, affirms the value of men’s role as involved fathers, saying: “I am a civil society activist, a university professor, and a farmer. More importantly, I am a father and a husband, which is a priority.” The film demonstrates the benefits of engaged fatherhood for Adnan, his wife and his family’s well-being, and it serves as a powerful tool for gender-transformative advocacy efforts in the region.

with images and testimonials to help subvert gender stereotypes.

- **Aligned with efforts to shift gender norms among women as well, rather than operating in isolation.** IMAGES MENA data show that rigid, inequitable attitudes and ideas related to gender are common among women and men alike, and the landscape of men’s care work will not fundamentally shift without widespread attitudinal change among both women and men. Programmes engaging men as fathers

should coordinate their activities closely with mothers themselves, with local women's groups, women's empowerment initiatives and with any parenting or children's health programming primarily involving mothers. As the EngenderHealth report, "Synchronising Gender Strategies"<sup>19</sup> advises, "What is generally missing from every single-sex approach is the broader awareness of how gender norms are reinforced by everyone in the community."<sup>20</sup> As gender norms around parenting are reinforced by many individuals in the community and family, it is unlikely that a single-sex approach will be able to fundamentally change caregiving patterns in the MENA region. Parenting programmes may be physically separated by sex – acknowledging that participants at times feel more comfortable in single-sex settings – but they should also be thematically streamlined, coordinated and collaborative. The best programme outcomes come from cooperative rather than competitive parenting and programming approaches.

- **Built around opportunities for hands-on practice, not merely theoretical.** The best father-inclusive parent training programmes are available to young men when they have just discovered fatherhood, and such programmes involve hands-on practice in alternative parenting approaches. Research shows that introducing new parenting approaches and offering opportunities for fathers to practice these approaches in a safe, supportive educational environment can help reduce the use of corporal punishment, and introduce more proactively caring, nurturing styles of connecting with one's children.<sup>21</sup> It can also be useful for young fathers to be introduced, in training sessions, to role model fathers who have become deeply engaged in daily care work and positive parenting. Group parenting

### BOX 3

#### Programme P in Lebanon

- Programme P is the MenCare campaign's manual for engaging men in fatherhood, in caregiving and in maternal, newborn, and child health. Local and regional adaptations of this programme have been implemented around the globe, including

in Lebanon by ABAAD. Many of the sessions in the Programme P manual embody the guiding principle of emphasizing hands-on practice. For example, in one activity, participants spend the majority of the session taking individual turns changing a diaper (on a doll), and practicing how to hold a baby properly. Later sessions will apply the same "practice makes perfect" principle by facilitating role-playing activities on conflict resolution approaches and on positive disciplinary approaches.

- Programme P is presently being pilot-tested and implemented by ABAAD, Promundo and UN Women in Lebanon, with a special focus on early childhood development. The programme engages Lebanese and Syrian fathers and couples in Beirut in active parenting, with the goal of increasing men's involvement in early childhood development, reducing intimate partner violence and decreasing violence against children. Its results will be used to inform the potential for scaling-up and institutionalizing this type of gender-transformative parenting curricula in Lebanon and around the MENA region. English and Arabic translations of the Programme P manual are available for free download at: <http://men-care.org/resources/program-p/>

## ADVOCACY FOR ACTION: CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR MEN'S CAREGIVING

Supportive laws and policies and practices within day care centres, schools and the health sector are an essential way of providing parents – and fathers – with the support they need. However, laws and policies are seldom designed to actively encourage men's participation in unpaid care work. Furthermore, broader gender inequalities in the Middle East and North Africa are not only

reinforced by social norms, but are often made official and codified in law. Thirty of 173 countries maintain ten or more legal barriers for women seeking work opportunities; more than half of these (18) countries are in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>22</sup>

Civil society and United Nations actors can play a role in influencing policy-makers, key stakeholders and relevant audiences to advocate for policy change around parenting roles and care work.<sup>23</sup> Advocacy can be conducted in many ways: through written statements, meetings or briefings with policy-makers and decision-making bodies; by building and taking collective action with partnerships, coalitions, and alliances; or by leading targeted communications campaigns or media engagement efforts. Engaging with local civil society and building on existing networks and platforms is critical for effective advocacy in MENA. Promundo and UN Women are producing a forthcoming brief, *Understanding the Business Case for Gender Equality in the Workplace*, based on results from IMAGES MENA and other regional research, which provides guidance on policies and procedures to achieve greater equality in the workplace, with a focus on ways for organizations and companies to engage men in caregiving and support for women's economic empowerment.

It is important to advocate specifically for **gender-transformative policies**. These policies are ones which explicitly provide equal access and opportunity to all people both economically (employment) and domestically (caregiving). Gender-transformative policies also actively seek to address, challenge, and transform existing, harmful gendered dynamics and power imbalances. The table below provides examples of gender-transformative policies to advance men's caregiving.

## LEVERAGING INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

There are many international mechanisms (goals, resolutions, platforms for action, among others) designed to hold National Governments accountable for advancing gender equality on the global stage, and serving as useful tools for

joint advocacy efforts.<sup>24</sup> The SDGs<sup>25</sup> of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>26</sup> provide the opportunity for continued global attention to the issue. Particularly, SDG Goal 5 aims to achieve gender equality by 2030. It also calls for the need to recognize, value and promote the shared responsibility for unpaid care in Target 5.4. This means recognizing the unequal burden that women face when it comes to childcare in MENA, and promoting both the responsibility of the State to implement public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and specific, cross-sectoral strategies that encourage men's responsibility as equal partners in caregiving.

Civil society and United Nations partners can support Governments<sup>27</sup> in reaching this goal by undertaking the following initiatives: building their capacity to understand how gendered expectations of men and women lead to this unequal care burden; providing evidence-based best practices in programmatic approaches and policies to promote shared responsibility between men and women around unpaid care; collecting disaggregated data on both what men and women think about caregiving and on how they are using their time; and building civil society partnerships to effectively implement policies, protocols and programmes to advance the SDGs with a focus on engaging fathers in caregiving as a pathway to equitable division of unpaid care work and gender equality more broadly.

## ENTRY POINTS AND TARGETS FOR ADVOCACY AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

There are many examples of national policies (listed in the table below) which can be advocated for, implemented and enforced to encourage men's active and equal participation in childcare and domestic work, while working to alleviate the load of unpaid care work for all and to support women's economic participation. The wide array of national policies on these topics in place throughout the region should be further assessed when adapting these recommendations for policy change at the national level.

## Areas for advocacy in the MENA region to advance men’s caregiving roles, including “family- friendly” policies

Policy	Status	Recommendation
Parental Leave	Maternity leave – provided for women after childbirth – is available to women in all the countries in the MENA region, <sup>28, 29</sup> but only 8 economies in the region have paternity leave for fathers, with durations ranging from just 1 to 3 days. <sup>30</sup> Parental leave, or longer-term leave for parents to take care of an infant or child, usually after the initial maternity or paternity leave period has ended, is still rare. <sup>31</sup> In Lebanon, a draft bill providing 3 days of paternity leave has been proposed and is currently under review – an important first step, although efforts to sensitize Government officials and the public to the importance of longer paternity leave must continue.	It is recommended that advocates work toward leave offerings (maternity, paternity and parental) that are equally <sup>32</sup> paid and non-transferable so as to encourage and allow all parents to be equally responsible for the care and upbringing of their children. These policies should complement other “family- friendly” policies such as fair and non-discriminatory labour conditions, a living wage for all individuals, and other gender-sensitive work-life balance policies.
Education	Most MENA countries have closed the gender gaps in education enrolment. <sup>33,34</sup> However, this achievement has not translated into equally higher rates of women’s economic and political participation, or of men’s caregiving. High-quality and gender-sensitive education is crucial as young people learn about gendered expectations – the roles they should play as providers or caregivers – from a young age. In three of the four IMAGES MENA countries, young men did not hold more gender-equitable attitudes than older men, pointing to a need for the education system to introduce gender-equitable values from a young age.	Policies should be in place that require curricula in schools to be gender-transformative (including the promotion of gender-equitable values and the notion that caregiving is an important skill and everyone’s responsibility), and such policies should allocate resources to that end. These efforts should build on current work in the region, including efforts to remove gender stereotypes from educational materials. This should complement policies which ensure that schools are safe places for all children to thrive, and that the technical quality of education meets international standards.
Social support services	Only a few MENA countries have employer-provided childcare facilities (Egypt and Jordan), or subsidies for childcare (Morocco, Egypt, and Lebanon). <sup>35</sup> The worldwide percentage of women who report receiving wages in countries that provide Government-supported childcare is more than twice than in countries that do not. <sup>36</sup> While Government-supported childcare does not necessarily specifically target men’s participation in caregiving, it does alleviate the overall, individual burden of childcare and support women’s economic empowerment.	Subsidized, high-quality childcare and other social security benefits, including tax allowances, tax subsidies, or payments – where relevant – should be provided to all parents and caregivers <sup>37</sup> to alleviate the burden of caring, particularly for the lowest income parents and families. Childcare facilities can encourage fathers to take an active role in caregiving through targeted outreach inviting them to meetings and events, for example. As with school teachers, childcare staff should be trained on gender-sensitive socialization so they do not reinforce harmful gender stereotypes.

<p>Parent training (health or other sectors)</p>	<p>Engaging men in parent training initiatives has been shown to reduce violence and increase fathers' involvement in childcare. However, these programmes are largely absent in the region.<sup>38</sup> More than 70% of men in IMAGES MENA countries reported going for at least some prenatal visits with a pregnant wife (although that male participation may reflect a degree of male control and guardianship, as well as concern and caregiving), providing a positive entry point for engaging men in these gender-transformative, fatherhood programmes.</p>	<p>Policies should include provisions to train health sector and other social services staff to engage men as equal caregiving partners, and to implement parent training to encourage fathers to be involved from the start of their children's lives. Beyond the health sector, adult literacy programmes, home visitation programmes for new mothers, youth services and refugee and immigrant services may provide other spaces to reach and engage fathers.<sup>39</sup> Efforts to engage fathers should make information accessible and available in local languages and in representational format as drawings for illiterate fathers and families.</p>
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It is also important to recognize that policies may support gender equality on paper, but that the authors of such policies may lack the political will, resources, or public awareness to put them into practice. The gender attitudes of policy-makers and policy implementers also matter, and must be taken into account. Conducting successful policy advocacy means not only passing positive, gender-transformative laws and policies, but also analyzing and addressing the multi-layered barriers to implementation on many levels, and holding Governments accountable to their commitments and plans of action.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE POLICY CHANGE

Advocacy efforts that are conducted to accelerate men's participation in unpaid care work for the well-being of children, women, men and societies should be gender-transformative, building on – and accountable to – the women's rights movement. Some guiding principles for this work are contained below. These recommendations are intended to serve as regional guidance, and they should be further contextualized and adapted for use at the national level.

- Frame the advocacy focus of men's engaging in 50 per cent of the world's unpaid care work within the broader **gender justice movement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.

Engaging men in caregiving is not an endpoint in and of itself, or just an instrument for women's economic empowerment, but a strategy for achieving greater gender equality, justice and choice for all. Working to engage men and boys in caregiving must not result in perpetuating power imbalances by creating or reinforcing men's dominance, or by limiting women's rights or autonomy in certain spaces.

- Build **alliances** between local women's rights NGOs already working on the topic of unpaid care, and NGOs working with men and boys, and those working with youth, to identify common goals and map out potential unintended consequences. This coalition-building will reinforce advocacy efforts and will ensure that the goals of policy advocacy are shared, inclusive and **accountable** in regard to the needs of key stakeholders.
- Identify and support key male **political leaders**, both in the public sector and in civil society, and **religious leaders** as visible allies, working together with female leaders, to guide policy change and show personal commitment in changing norms around men's caregiving.
- Engage men in programmes and platforms that are informed and driven by the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**, particularly Goal 5 to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" and contribute towards the holistic implementation of a gender-responsive 2030 Agenda.

- Recognize the **diversity** of men and women (including sexual orientation, race, class, religious affiliation, employment status, among others) and address the **structural barriers** that have the greatest impact on certain identities, providing them with fewer opportunities for livelihoods or reduced support for caregiving. Policies are not “one-size-fits-all.”
- Actively seek to **transform gendered expectations and power imbalances** around caregiving, which are reinforced by policy, that delineate the roles men and women can play domestically and economically – specifically those reinforcing men as exclusively providers, or protectors, and women as nurturers, or caregivers. This may include implementing and expanding campaigns inspired by UN Women’s HeForShe campaign or MenCare: A Global Fatherhood Campaign.
- Work with **new and traditional media and the arts** to expand the reach and visibility of gender-transformative campaigns and messages on men’s caregiving, questioning stereotypes around gender roles. In addition to MenCare, other examples of innovative approaches include UN Women’s “Because I Am a Man” social media campaign, or the “Théâtre Aquarium” NGO’s theatrical play about the experiences of fatherhood and masculinities in Rabat, Morocco.
- While using a rights-based approach, highlight the **positive social and economic impacts** of engaging men more fully as fathers and caregivers, and of women’s more active participation in the paid labour force. For example, involved fatherhood can have positive effects on the health and development of children and the well-being of women and men, and can contribute to enabling women’s participation in the paid labour force.<sup>40</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Full equality will only be attained when men and women are sharing unpaid care work and participating in the region’s workforce on an equal basis. Far from a utopic idea, research has found that many women and men do aspire to greater equality and see the benefits of both female labour force participation and men’s greater participation in caregiving. IMAGES MENA provides powerful evidence for action around gender-transformative programming and evidence-based advocacy to encourage men’s active and involved caregiving. The challenges ahead are twofold: the first lies in identifying and supporting all those men and women who are already demonstrating a spirit of equality in the sharing of unpaid care and in labour force participation, and upholding supportive policies and serving as political champions; the second challenge is changing the underlying social norms that perpetuate inequitable attitudes through gender-transformative policies and practices.

## END NOTES

- 1 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Centre for Arab Women Training and Research (CAWTAR) (2014). *Women in Public Life: Gender, Law and Policy in the Middle East and North Africa*. Tunis: OECD and CAWTAR.
- 2 In Lebanon and Palestine, the samples are nationally representative. In Egypt and Morocco, specific regions of the country were selected, and the samples are broadly representative of those regions.
- 3 El Feki, S., Heilman, B. and Barker, G. (2017). *Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa*. Cairo and Washington, D.C.: UN Women and Promundo-US.
- 4 The Middle East and North Africa is a diverse region. The UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States, for example, covers 17 countries in the region. While this guidance note alludes to the state of caregiving more broadly in the region, much of the data and examples focus on Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine – as informed by the IMAGES MENA study.
- 5 Scott, M., Wilcox, W., Ryberg, R. and Derose, L. (2015). *World Family Map 2015: Mapping Family Change and Child Well-Being Outcomes*. Bethesda: Child Trends.
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- 24 These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Universal Periodic Review and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), among others.
- 25 The SDG strategy is informed and guided by international standards and mechanisms, CEDAW – which all Arab countries, except Somalia and Sudan, have ratified, although the majority have reservations towards some of its main provisions; the Beijing Platform for Action; the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action; relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions; the Commission on the Status of Women agreed conclusions – which, in 2017, called upon States to “Strengthen laws and regulatory frameworks that promote the reconciliation and sharing of work and family responsibilities for women and men, including by designing, implementing, and promoting family responsive legislation, policies, and services, such as parental and other leave schemes, increased flexibility in working arrangements, support for breastfeeding mothers, development of infrastructure and technology, and the provision of services, including affordable, accessible, and quality childcare and care facilities for children and other dependents, and promoting men’s equitable responsibilities with respect to household work as fathers and caregivers, which creates an enabling environment for women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work.” It also calls for the fuller engagement of men and boys “as strategic partners and allies in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.”; and other applicable United Nations instruments and resolutions on gender equality and women’s empowerment.
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- 40 For more information on the benefits of engaged, equitable fatherhood, see the *State of the World’s Fathers* report: <https://sowf.men-care.org>







# UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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