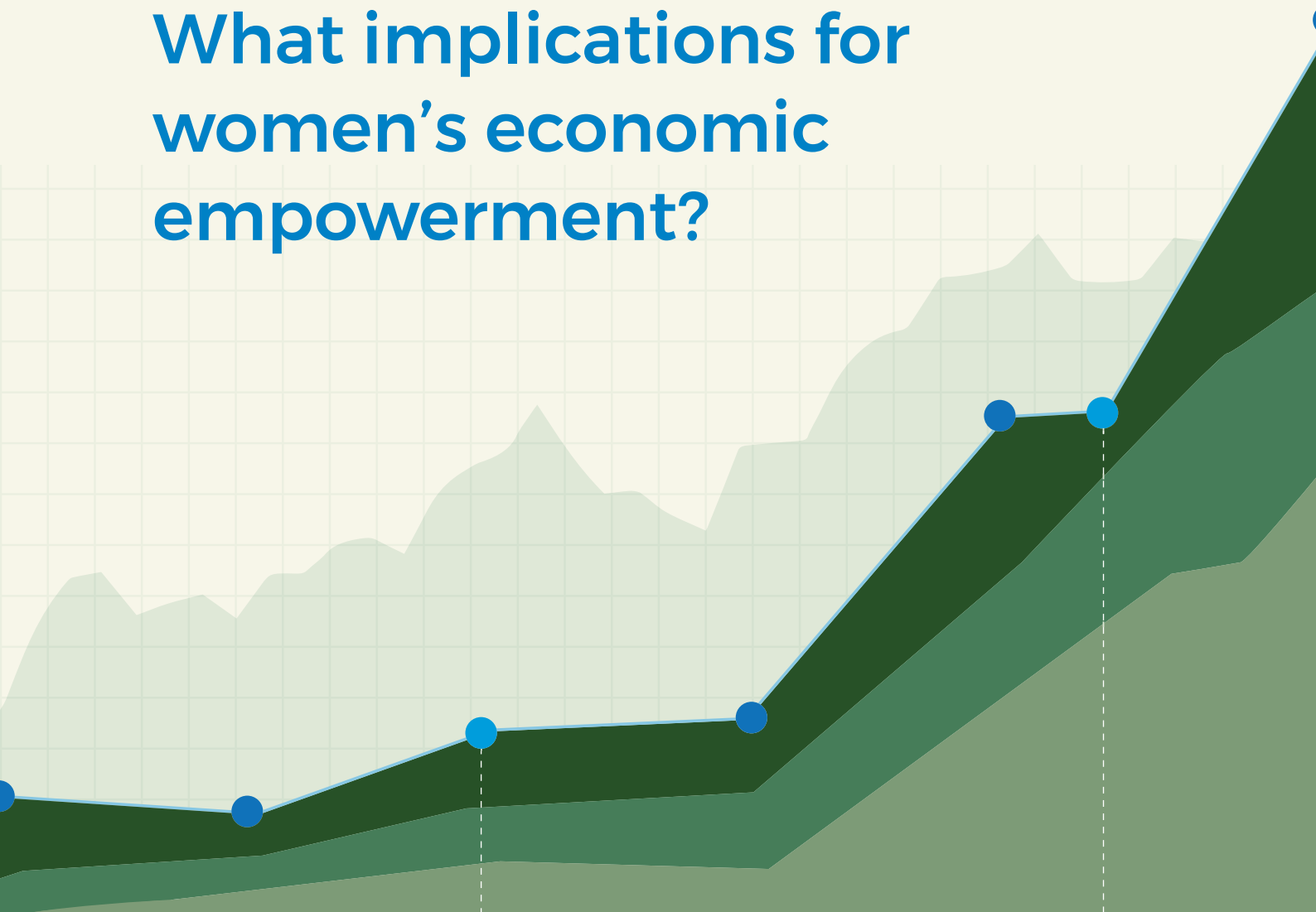


Assessing macroeconomic response policies to COVID-19 in the Arab region:

What implications for women's economic empowerment?



Executive Summary

The objective of this regional assessment is to look at the implications of the macroeconomic response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Arab region. The regional mapping allows for identification of the dominant trends and policy priorities across different areas of interventions and looks at the potential implications of [largely] gender-blind macroeconomic responses and investments during the first six months of the pandemic. The gender impact of these interventions is estimated, with a focus on labour market outcomes and livelihoods. The countries included in the report are: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Data on the response packages is collected and classified along four major pillars of intervention to produce a mapping of the regional macroeconomic response policies up to the end of August of 2020: i. employment and economic activity, ii. social protection, iii. social infrastructure and public services, and iv. food security. Policies are classified into gender-sensitive versus gender-blind responses.

Key Findings:

- There is extreme variability in the size of the response but similarity in the composition.
- Less than 5% of COVID-19 response spending in the Arab region is gender sensitive.
- About 90% of the regional stimulus package is spent on **protecting employment and economic activity**. Only 6% of spending on this pillar is gender sensitive. The extensive stimulus spending on this pillar is expected to result in some 20 million jobs in the region, but women only benefit from 18% of jobs created by stimulus spending while bearing 41% of job losses.
- Investments in **social protection** constitute 3% of total spending in response to COVID-19 in the Arab region. The variation is wide and the spending is mostly concentrated on social assistance schemes. The budget of social protection policies explicitly targeting women constitutes a minimal share of COVID-19 response spending,
- At a regional scale, spending on **social infrastructure represents 6%** of the total intervention spending of the region. Many countries adopted additional or expanded policies for the protection from GBV, in one way or another. However, most devote minimal budgets to these policies.
- Most interventions to protect **food security** have taken the form of a one-time distribution of in-kind assistance, or a temporary top-up to existing cash transfer programs.

A number of [recommendations](#) are proposed to steer the economies back on track based on a rich global body of evidence on the policies' effectiveness and high economic and social returns. Further, the proposed interventions are identified on the basis of their ability to advance countries towards their set national targets, their promise to recover some of the losses due to the crisis but also redress many of the pre-crisis imbalances, as well as their implementability even within existing budgets for recovery spending, through reallocation and reprioritization.