

Situational Analysis of Women and Girls in the MENA and Arab States Region: Pillar 2 Learning and Livelihoods

Key Messages and Recommendations

OVERVIEW

Despite recent gains, educational inequalities between males and females persist throughout the region. In terms of livelihood, there has been an increase in recognition of the need to further integrate women more fully into the economy, with many countries introducing new incentives programmes and changing labour laws to allow this to be achieved. Yet, women's labour force participation rates are still among the lowest in the world, and women and girls face disproportionate barriers to inheritance, property ownership, and access to capital.

Formally codify or enhance anti-discriminatory and gender-responsive laws governing livelihoods, such as the labour code, and include implementable repercussions or sanctions against those who violate them, in addition to enforcement mechanisms and robust monitoring.

POLICY GAPS

Right to education is constitutionalized in most countries including provisions around compulsory and free education (15 countries), around half of the countries prohibit corporal punishment in schools, and gaps remain in policies to remove barriers for girls and young women living with disabilities (with exceptions in Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates). Only two countries in the region, Egypt and Morocco, include training and vocational training as a right in their constitutions, while other countries address training generally within separate laws, or explicitly reference men (e.g. Iraq, Libya, Sudan, and the State of Palestine).



Review and amend education policies to promote girls' and young women's access to both learning and livelihood, specifically addressing harmful practices and social norms barriers.

SYSTEM BARRIERS

GBV, corporal punishment as well as experience of bullying (46% of girls aged 13-15) remains prevalent in school. Within the region, around one in five schools lack access to WASH services, which often lead to girls missing school or dropping out altogether. Only two countries, Qatar and Tunisia, have Comprehensive Sexuality Education in schools, with other countries (Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria) providing some form of sexuality education outside a school context. Female educators are one way to combat gender discrimination and provide positive role models of women in leadership roles to younger girls and women. In the region, female teachers are most prominent at the primary level, apart from LDCs. Countries with a greater proportion of secondary schools with internet access report more digital literacy. Within countries with available data, GCC, Tunisia, and Palestine report more than 95% secondary schools with access to the internet, Jordan 74% and Egypt 49% of schools.



Implement policies and accountability frameworks to ensure a safe and protective school and workspace environment to address wellbeing, including mental health and psychosocial support, and to mitigate against the increased risk of GBV.

NORMS

Girl's school attendance is constrained due to long distances/restricted mobility as it is unacceptable for a girl to walk to school alone.

Following marriage, it is difficult for girls to continue their education or return to school due to a combination of stigma and gender norms related to household responsibilities. High unemployment rates lead caregivers to prescribe less value to their girls' education. Traditional gender roles and harmful social norms undermine girls' and women's access to and use of ICT tools especially in lower socio-economic environments or rural localities, where ICTs are often accessed outside of the home where safety concerns and norms regarding socializing act as barriers. Parents' preferences around the gender of teachers influence the decision to send girls to school where there are only male teachers available.

Young people expressed that manual occupations are inferior, and TEVT is not alternative to university. Negative perceptions to TEVT more so for girls. Women shoulder the majority of the burden of unpaid work in the region, on average 4.7 times more unpaid care work than men. This gender gap highlights the undervaluation of women's economic contributions in the region. Often, leadership is seen as a strictly male and patriarchal, and women are largely seen in supporting roles.



Invest in the care economy, inspired by the 5R framework for decent care work: recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work, including in collaboration with the private sector; reward paid care work, by promoting more and decent work for care enforcement workers; and guarantee care workers' representation, social dialogue, and collective bargaining;

EMERGENCY SETTINGS

Conflict is amplifying the quality of learning crisis and reinforcing already-existing inequalities within the formal education system. In crisis-affected areas, marginalized groups of children, including girls and young women, are disproportionately disadvantaged. Access to education in emergency remains a challenge; including damaged or destroyed schools. In many refugee communities, where women-headed households make up significant portions of the population, women often engage in informal work, many of these women create microbusinesses, selling hand-crafted goods, food, or other small items. There is a heightened risk for refugee women to rely on black markets to support their families. The challenge of addressing unpaid labour has only grown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women have largely taken on the burden of caring for ill family members, as well as increased childcare and education responsibilities due to closures.



Ensure education services and policies are gender-responsive in emergency and humanitarian settings, with specific attention to girls and young women needs and risk of dropping out of school and strengthen the ability of refugee communities to obtain work permits by providing opportunities and develop local economies that will allow women to join the formal economy.

EDUCATIONAL GAINS



Girls outnumber boys in terms of enrolment in the region, for primary education, nine countries have achieved gender parity in primary school and three exhibit an advantage for girls. For secondary education, six countries exhibit an advantage for girls and two more countries have achieved gender parity. In formal education specifically, girls outperform boys in learning outcomes throughout the region. Nonetheless, pre-primary enrollment, enrolment rates remain low in many countries with intra-country disparities in favor of wealth and mother educational levels.

EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES

Throughout the region, the most common out of school children at both primary and secondary levels are rural females, with out of school secondary education levels for young girls in rural areas ranging from around 30% in Sudan to 40% in Yemen to as high as around 60% in Iraq. Between 63% and 92% of females with disabilities report having no schooling at all.



Ensure that education opportunities, including digital learning, are available, accessible, and acceptable to all girls and women, independent of wealth, location, ethnicity, ableness or displacement status.

EDUCATION CURRICULA

Reform that develops quality education systems, from early childhood to university education, is essential, and engender critical and independent thinking and capacity for lifelong learning. Within the region, traditional teaching, learning, and examination practices are a major constraint. These practices mean that young people largely do not receive an education that is aligned with current labour market requirements nor one that cultivates the requisite skills to become positive and active members of society. Even with several years of schooling, millions of students in the region lack basic numeracy and literacy skills. Textbooks in the region sometimes display stereotypical images of women as mothers and domestic workers while men are shown as professionals and providers. Vocational training programmes themselves reinforce gender-based discrimination, often dividing programmes into topics that are socially acceptable to men and socially acceptable to women. To battle these notions, some countries have developed plans for gender-sensitive education systems (Jordan and Morocco) while Egypt has piloted projects to establish 'girl-friendly' schools.



Review and revise education curricula, including e-learning content, to ensure that they are gender-responsive, do not perpetuate gender stereotypes and equally prepare girls and boys for a dignified transition into adulthood, including decent and productive employment/livelihood and lifelong learning.

SKILL BASED EDUCATION

Life skills programming empower women and girls with tools and skills needed to increase their economic and social power. Within the region, textbooks and teaching methods do not foster independent and critical thinking at all levels of education. Only few countries in the region have integrated life skills and citizenship education into their national education system and curriculum. Within the region, TVET accounts for only 20% of post-secondary enrolment and suffers from a negative perception, even though evidence shows that TVET graduates have higher prospects for employment compared to university graduates. Research in the region concluded that life skills and citizenship education programmes in non-formal settings play an important role in targeting marginalized and vulnerable groups, however, life skills and citizenship education programmes in non-formal settings are sporadic and sustained by support from implementing non-governmental organizations.



Integrate and operationalize gender responsive foundational and transferable life skills curricula through formal and non-formal education platforms and improved teaching practices.

DIGITAL DIVIDE

Within the region, access to ICTs and low levels digital literacy are factors that contribute to an unequal landscape within the region, both between countries and between the sexes. The percentage of the female population using the internet in the region ranges from 11% in Sudan to 99.8% in Kuwait, average 53.9 female and. The greatest disparity between males and females is in Iraq where 98.3% of males use the internet versus 51.2% of females. Computer literacy data reveal gaps between females and males in the region. Apart from Qatar (where females are 3.8% more email literate than males in the country), females are reported to have technological skills at lesser rates than their male counterparts. The gender gap in mobile ownership and mobile internet use in the region is pronounced and has remained stagnant or increased within the last few years (women in the region were 9% less likely to own a mobile phone in 2019).



Promote and monitor equal access to and acceptance of digital learning to address and mitigate gender-inequalities reinforced by the digital divide and expand affordable access to the most disadvantaged population with focus on girls in rural areas.

LEARNING TO EARNING

The increase in girls' and women's literacy and educational attainment has not translated into participation in the labour force. Socio-cultural norms including what is considered appropriate work and roles for women, laws and policies that restrict a woman's ability to perform certain tasks (e.g., hours or sector), and traditional gender norms all contribute to higher levels of unemployment. Unemployment is highest among female youth in the Mashreq region, where 42.7% of women seeking work are not successful at finding a job. The unemployment rates among women is much higher rates than among men, in both youth and adult categories. The least educated and the most educated women see the highest levels of unemployment.



Enact gender-responsive laws and policies, including those on finance and enforcement, and support the private sector to improve working conditions, safety and security at work, to encourage more women to enter the private sector as an employer of choice.

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

On average, the rates of women and girls who are NEET were 26 percentage points higher than their male counterparts. The female labour force participation rate in the region is lowest in the world slightly over 20% compared to a world rate of 48%. The reason behind gender gaps in employment are largely socio-cultural; including patriarchal state structures, dominant public sector employment, weak private sector employment, and an inhospitable business environment for women because of the conservative nature of gender roles and the lack of support for reproductive and family costs. For those women who do participate in the formal economy, they most often participate in agriculture (27%), education (21%), and manufacturing (11%).



Support women entrepreneurs through increased access to credit and capital, business and technical training, strengthening networks and associations, and gender-responsive procurement and inclusion of women-led businesses in value chains.

UNPAID LABOUR

Women shoulder the majority of the burden of unpaid work in the region, on average 4.7 times more unpaid care work than men – the highest ratio anywhere in the world. This gender gap between women and men's contribution to unpaid care work highlights the undervaluation of women's economic contributions in the region, and suggest the need to recognise the social and economic function of women's unpaid care work as well as the opportunity cost of the time that women spend towards unpaid labour.



Address the high burden of women's unpaid care work and disproportionate domestic responsibilities such as childcare, education, and caring for the elderly and the infirmed, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, including responding to any need of support for women to re-enter the workforce or shift demands as businesses reopen.

WORK POLICIES

Most countries in the region have equal remuneration laws, as well as paid maternity leave policies (20 countries). However, a limited number of women are benefitting from these policies, because of the low female labour-force participation and, in particular, because women working in the informal sector are not covered. Women largely hold the ability to own assets and sign contracts, however, lack of wealth and collateral, often driven by the inability to inherit from parents or a spouse, leaves women unable to access credit in the same way as men. 14 countries prohibit women night work, and nearly all ban women from specific labour-heavy positions.



Enact or strengthen legislation that addresses discriminatory social norms that dissuade women from inheriting wealth and accessing collateral.

Situation of Learning – Key Highlights

POLICIES/ LEGISLATIVE

Majority of countries constitutionalized the right to education

65% of countries guarantee 12 years of free and compulsory primary and secondary education

5 countries developed policies to remove barriers towards students with disabilities. Major challenges realizing these policies exists.

Gaps in policies related to corporal punishment (at home, schools, and institutions)

SYSTEMS/ INSTITUTIONS

Quality of education within the region is a major concern and does not align with labour market requirements

Few countries have integrated life skills education into the curriculum, however implementation is sporadic

Vocational training programmes reinforce gender-based discrimination

High connectivity costs and poor connections makes ICT access especially challenging for women and girls

High prevalence of GBV in schools and inadequate MHPSS

3 countries developed plans for gender-sensitive education systems

1 in 5 schools does not provide access to hygiene services, limiting female participation

Only 6 countries provide some sort of sexual education

NORMS

High unemployment rates lead caregivers to prescribe less value to girls' education

Belief that education may not necessarily lead to or ensure employment

Traditional gender roles undermine girls' and women's access to and use of ICT tools.

Constrained attitudes towards TVET

Girls school attendance is constrained due to restricted mobility and the gender of teachers

Societal norms problematize returning to school after marriage

EMERGENCY SETTINGS

Conflict is amplifying the quality of learning crisis and reinforcing already-existing inequalities within the formal education system. Marginalized groups of children, including girls and young women, are disproportionately disadvantaged. Access to education in emergency remains a challenge; including damaged or destroyed schools.



ISSUES

Pre-primary school has improved across the region, yet rates remain low in many countries and intra-country disparities are stark

9 countries achieved gender parity in primary school

Most common out-of school children at both primary and secondary levels are rural females

In formal education specifically, girls outperform boys in learning outcomes

Prevalence of girls drop-out due to child marriage

Female youth are more than twice as likely to be not in education, employment, or training than male youth.

The digital divide is exacerbating gender inequalities hindering women's and girls' participation in education

Use of internet in the region ranges from 11% in Sudan to 99.8% in Kuwait

Between 63% and 92% of females with disabilities report having no schooling.

Women with disabilities in urban areas are at least 35% more likely to be literate than females in rural communities

No country exceeded 14% of its older population having achieved a secondary education

Women in rural areas suffer from low education attainment.

Situation of Livelihoods – Key Highlights

POLICIES/ LEGISLATIVE

20 countries have remuneration laws and paid maternity leave

Existence of laws and policies that restrict a woman's ability to perform certain work

14 countries prohibit women from doing night work

Barriers to inheritance, property ownership, and access to capital

Largely women hold the ability to own assets and sign contracts within the region.

Only 2 countries include training and vocational training as a right in their constitutions.

SYSTEMS/ INSTITUTIONS

INGO/NGO's have launched programmes to support women entrepreneurs and business owners

Availability of programmes on workforce preparedness for women are sparse

LSCE programmes in nonformal settings is important to target marginalized groups, however, these programmes are sporadic

Dominant public sector employment and weak private sector

Vocational training programmes themselves reinforce gender-based discrimination

Utilizing ICTs as lifelong learning tools is a challenge due to expensive and unstable connectivity

NORMS

Gendered gaps in employment rate are largely socio-cultural and due to traditional gender norms

Women experience a need to prove themselves and need to perform better than their male counterparts

Women face obstacles within their families to pursuing an outside career due to pressures to adopt a traditional family structure

Gender expectations are further exacerbated in rural communities that rely on women's unpaid labour such as childcare and food preparation

Socio-cultural norms have been slower to change despite legal and policy adjustments

Pervasive belief that men should be the primary holders of family wealth

EMERGENCY SETTINGS

In many refugee communities, where women-headed households make up significant portions of the population, women often engage in informal work and there is a heightened risk for refugee women to rely on black markets to support their families. Women have largely taken on the burden of caring for ill family members, as well as increased childcare.



ISSUES

Young females do not transition from learning to earning

Women in the region 9% less likely to own a mobile phone and 21% less likely to have used the internet on a mobile phone

One of the highest proportions of women who perform unpaid labour

Women's entrepreneurship has grown substantially over the past decade

However, due to policy and system constraints, not equally able to finance and run business

Informal employment tends to be higher amongst women and girls (especially agriculture)

20% participate in the labour force

The least educated and the most educated women see the highest levels of unemployment.

Women with advanced education are at least twice as likely to be unemployed than their male counterparts in 90% of the countries in the region