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(ESCWA)



# WOMEN and MEN

IN THE ARAB COUNTRIES

# EDUCATION



2002

# Women and Men in the Arab Countries: EDUCATION



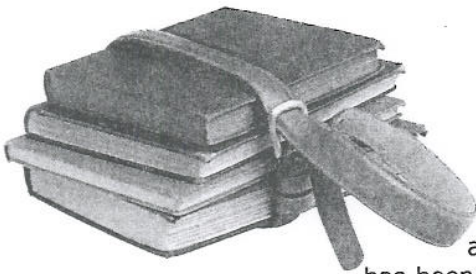
The preparation of profiles on women and men in the Arab region is one of the activities carried out by the Statistics Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). Within the framework of the regional project, *Development of National Gender Statistics Programmes in the Arab Countries*, these publications present statistical overviews on a number of issues of concern to both women and men in the Arab States, with the immediate objective of increasing awareness and the ultimate goal of achieving gender equality.

It is well known that education is instrumental in the process of securing equality of opportunity for women and men. This publication, *Women and Men in the Arab Countries: Education*, reviews the state of education in the Arab States during the past decade with regard to both literacy rates and enrolment figures. It highlights the existing gender gap from pre-primary to tertiary education, and the gender imbalance in the employment of teachers in schools and universities throughout the Arab region. The tables and charts throughout are presented in a clear and concise format with a view to rendering them accessible to a wider audience.

I would like to thank all those who contributed to this project. It is hoped that this publication will be particularly beneficial to those interested in gender statistics on education, including the planners, administrators, policy makers and the mass media

*M. Tallawy*  
MERVAT TALLAWY  
Executive Secretary

# Women and Men in the Arab Countries: EDUCATION



**G e n d e r** discrimination, an issue which has been recognized as a critical obstacle to the development process, remains embedded in various cultures across the globe. While there have been improvements in recent years, inequalities between men and women are still apparent. In many developing countries, one of the major problems for both planners and policy makers is the disparity between girls and boys with regard to gaining access to all levels of education. The United Nations Millennium declaration adopted by all 189 member States on 8 September 2000 noted that in 1998, "of some 113 million school-age children not enrolled in primary education, nearly 60 per cent were girls. Female enrolment in rural areas, in particular, remains shockingly low"<sup>1</sup>.

The State of education in the Arab countries is not significantly different from that of other developing countries. The illiterate population in the region amounts to some 68 million, and an estimated 11 million children do not attend school. In addition to coping with this illiteracy burden, the Arab States need to devise special education programmes for those receiving low-quality schooling. This will enable them to be better equipped to follow a career in the scientific and technological world of the twenty-first century<sup>2</sup>.

At the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, the Arab States adopted a framework for action which included the "removal of gender disparity in education" as one of the central themes<sup>3</sup>. The target date for its implementation was set for the end of

2000. In 2000, the Arab States convened in Cairo to assess the progress made and to adopt the Arab Framework for Action, a blueprint for the basic learning needs and targets for 2000-2010<sup>4</sup>. That document was subsequently submitted to the Conference on Education for All held in Dakar, in 2000<sup>5</sup>. Despite the fact that education has been placed at the forefront of the Government agendas in the respective Arab States, the goals set have not been fully achieved.

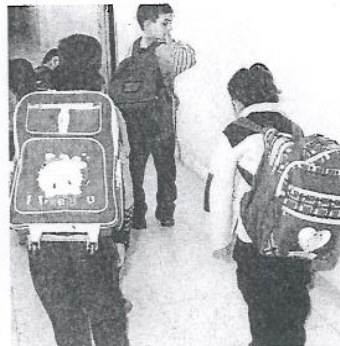
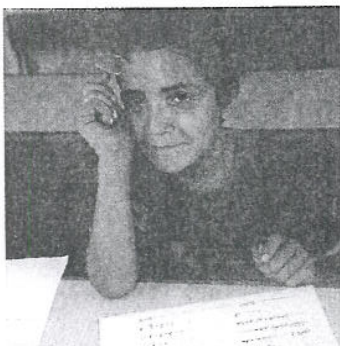
The purpose of this publication is two fold. First, it seeks to highlight the progress of education in the Arab States over the past decade. However, the main objective is to review the levels and trends in women and men enrolments in the Arab countries for the periods 1990-1994 and 1995-1999, with particular focus on geographical variations and gender disparities. The progress is assessed with regard to the following four levels:

- (a) Literacy;
- (b) Pre-primary and primary;
- (c) Secondary;
- (d) Tertiary.

All the relevant figures and data have been compiled from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)<sup>6</sup>.

**"GOAL: To ensure that, by the year 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education."**

United Nations General Assembly,  
*Road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration*, Report of the Secretary-General, fifty-sixth session, Item 40 (6 September 2001).





# LITERACY

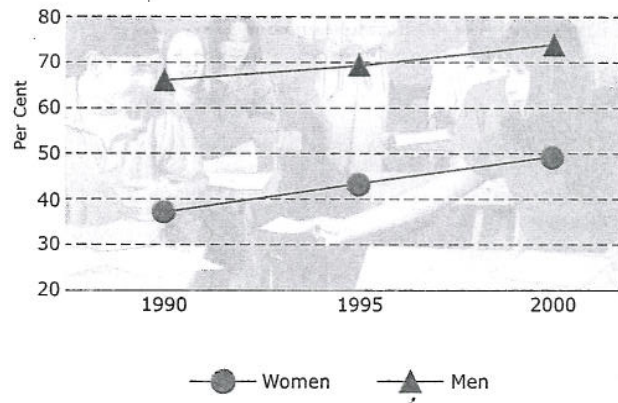
Literacy has been a critical concern for the Arab States over the past five decades. Various plans and strategies have been adopted to eradicate illiteracy in the region. This section focuses on what has been achieved 10 years after the World Declaration on Education for All.

## 1. LITERACY RATES FOR THOSE AGED 15 & OVER AND THE GENDER EQUALITY INDEX

Table 1 presents literacy rates for women and men aged 15 and over (15+) and the literacy gender equality index (GEI) for Arab countries for 1990, 1995, and 2000. While literacy rates for both women and men have recorded an increase over the past decade, the gender gap has not shown an appreciable change and continues to be significant (see chart I).

**Chart I**

**Trends in women and men literacy rates for those aged 15+ in the Arab region, 1990-2000**



Source: Compiled from table 1.

**TABLE 1**

**Literacy rates for those ages 15+ and the gender equality index in selected Arab countries, 1990-2000 (Percentages and ratios)**

	Literacy rate for those aged 15 and over						Gender equality index		
	1990		1995		2000		1990	1995	2000
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women/ Men	Women/ Men	Women/ Men
Algeria	39.1	66.4	45.2	71.1	51.3	75.1	0.59	0.64	0.68
Bahrain	74.8	86.9	79.5	89.2	82.7	91.0	0.86	0.89	0.91
Djibouti	27.4	55.5	32.8	60.4	38.4	65.0	0.49	0.54	0.59
Egypt	33.6	60.3	38.5	63.5	43.7	66.6	0.56	0.61	0.66
Iraq	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Jordan	71.7	89.9	80.1	90.5	84.4	94.9	0.80	0.89	0.89
Kuwait	72.8	79.5	76.0	82.3	79.9	84.3	0.92	0.92	0.95
Lebanon	73.2	88.5	77.0	90.5	80.4	92.3	0.83	0.85	0.87
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	50.9	83.0	59.8	87.4	67.6	90.9	0.61	0.68	0.74
Mauritania	23.9	46.4	26.7	48.7	29.5	50.6	0.52	0.55	0.58
Morocco	25.0	52.7	30.5	57.7	36.0	61.9	0.47	0.53	0.58
Oman	38.4	67.9	50.7	74.6	61.7	80.4	0.57	0.68	0.77
Palestine	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Qatar	76.1	77.4	80.0	79.0	83.2	80.5	0.98	1.01	1.03
Saudi Arabia	50.6	77.6	59.7	80.8	67.2	84.1	0.65	0.74	0.80
Somalia	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Sudan	31.2	58.6	38.3	63.5	46.0	68.3	0.53	0.60	0.67
Syrian Arab Republic	47.5	81.9	54.1	85.4	60.4	88.3	0.58	0.63	0.68
Tunisia	46.4	71.7	53.0	76.0	60.1	81.4	0.65	0.70	0.74
United Arab Emirates	71.0	71.5	75.1	73.2	79.5	75.2	0.99	1.03	1.06
Yemen	13.0	55.4	18.4	62.1	25.0	67.4	0.23	0.30	0.37
Arab region <sup>a/</sup>	37.4	65.9	43.4	69.7	49.4	73.9	0.57	0.62	0.67

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Statistical Yearbook* (UNESCO Publishing and Bernan Press, 1999).

Note: Shaded area indicates that the gender equality index was greater than 0.90 by 2000.

<sup>a/</sup> Excluding Iraq, Palestine and Somalia.

The GEI, which is defined as the ratio of women to men literacy rates, measures progress towards gender equality with regard to literacy and the level of learning opportunities available for women in relation to those available for men. When the GEI is 1, the literacy rates for women and men are equal. A value less than 1 indicates that fewer women than men have basic literacy skills, and conversely a value exceeding 1 denotes that women are relatively more literate.

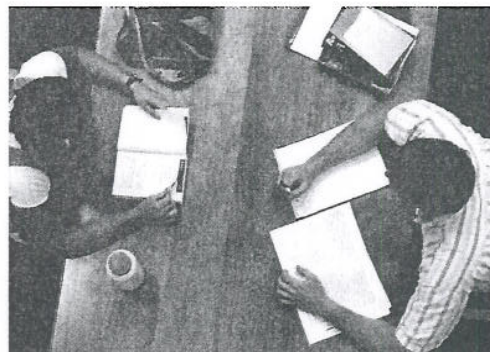


Table 1 illustrates that in 2000 only four countries in the region reduced the gender gap in literacy rates for the 15+. These include, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates which both attained gender equality; and Bahrain and Kuwait which recorded indices of 0.91 and 0.95 respectively. The remaining 14 Arab countries for which data was available, have indices below 0.90. This points to a greater disparity between women and men with regard to literacy rates for the 15+. The largest gap in gender literacy was found in Yemen with 0.37, followed by Mauritania, Morocco and Djibouti, all

with indices of less than 0.60.

On average, the top four States also attained considerably higher literacy rates for women compared to other Arab countries. This would seem to suggest that there is a correlation between those States with rising women literacy rates and those with falling gender gaps.

It should be noted that the GEI ratio may also reflect a wide range of other issues besides access to education, namely, cultural norms, differing educational standards and expectations.

**TABLE 2**

**Literacy rates for those ages 15-24 and the gender equality index in selected Arab countries, 1990-2000 (Percentages and ratios)**

	Literacy rate for those aged 15 and over						Gender equality index		
	1990		1995		2000		1990	1995	2000
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women/ Men	Women/ Men	Women/ Men
Algeria	59.5	82.2	65.7	84.6	71.4	87.1	0.72	0.78	0.82
Bahrain	95.1	96.3	97.4	97.5	98.6	98.3	0.99	1.00	1.00
Djibouti	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Egypt	50.9	70.9	56.7	73.8	62.3	76.4	0.72	0.77	0.82
Iraq	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Jordan	96.4	98.1	99.5	96.4	99.8	99.3	0.98	1.03	1.01
Kuwait	87.6	88.5	91.1	90.7	93.5	92.3	0.99	1.00	1.01
Lebanon	88.6	95.7	91.0	96.6	93.0	97.5	0.93	0.94	0.95
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	81.7	99.0	87.8	99.7	92.2	99.8	0.83	0.88	0.92
Mauritania	35.7	55.4	37.3	56.4	39.2	56.8	0.64	0.66	0.69
Morocco	42.0	68.1	50.0	72.7	58.1	76.2	0.62	0.69	0.76
Oman	75.5	95.5	89.6	98.6	96.3	99.7	0.79	0.91	0.97
Palestine	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Qatar	93.0	88.3	95.6	90.9	97.1	92.7	1.05	1.05	1.05
Saudi Arabia	78.7	91.5	85.8	94.0	90.4	95.6	0.86	0.91	0.95
Somalia	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Sudan	53.8	75.2	63.2	79.3	71.5	82.7	0.72	0.80	0.86
Syrian Arab Republic	66.8	92.2	73.1	94.0	78.6	95.4	0.72	0.78	0.82
Tunisia	74.3	92.6	82.5	95.3	88.0	97.2	0.80	0.87	0.91
United Arab Emirates	88.9	82.1	92.2	85.2	94.6	87.9	1.08	1.08	1.08
Yemen	25.0	73.5	34.7	79.4	45.2	82.6	0.34	0.44	0.55
Arab region <sup>a</sup>	56.8	78.6	63.8	81.6	69.9	84.1	0.72	0.78	0.83

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Statistical Yearbook* (UNESCO Publishing and Bernan Press, 1999).

Note: Shaded area indicates that the gender equality index was greater than 0.90 by 2000.

<sup>a</sup> Excluding Djibouti, Iraq, Palestine and Somalia.

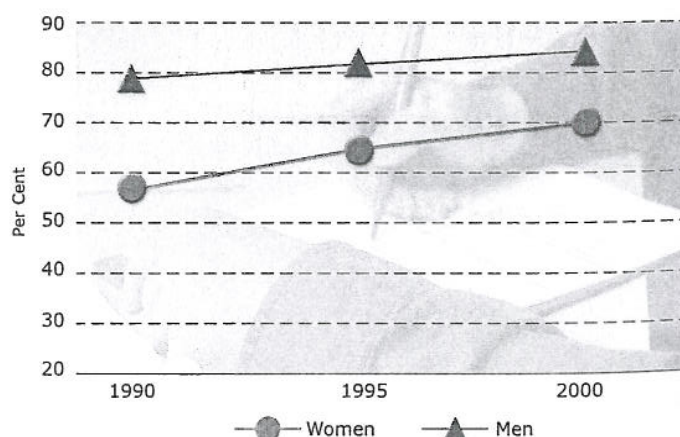
## 2. LITERACY RATES FOR THOSE AGED 15-24 AND GEI

The literacy rates and GEI for the 15-24 year-olds are shown in table 2. Out of the 17 Arab countries for which data were available, 10 had either attained gender equality or were approaching it, as illustrated by the shaded area in the table. Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates had an index greater or equal to 1, while the value of GEI ranged between 0.91 and 0.97 for Lebanon, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia.

A comparison between women literacy rates for the two age brackets, namely, the 15+ and the 15-24, revealed a sharp increase in women literacy rates for the latter. Moreover, while the literacy rate increased in the Arab region as a whole from 1990 to 2000, the increase was found to be relatively higher for women than for men.

**Chart II**

**Trends in women and men literacy rates for the 15-24 in the Arab region, 1990-2000**



Source: Compiled from table 2.

# B

## PRE-PRIMARY AND PRIMARY

### 1. PRE-PRIMARY

The stated goals of Education for All are to promote enrolment in education and to improve the level of tuition within the framework of health and social care for the young. At the Jomtien conference in 1990, the Arab States recognized the need to include pre-primary schooling in the educational process, to form legislation, and to set the required curricula. This resolve was later reinforced in 2000, at the conference in Dakar. However, the opportunities with regard to enrolment of three-, four- and five-year-olds in pre-primary education remain very limited in various Arab countries. In part, this is because of direct material costs, such as books and transportation to schools, coupled with cultural factors, such as prohibiting daughters from going to school unaccompanied. As a result, many parents prefer to keep their young children at home.<sup>7</sup>

However, on a positive note, enrolment figures for girls in the pre-primary bracket seemed to be improving. The gender gap in gross enrolment ratios for pre-primary narrowed from 1990 to 1998, particularly after 1995 (see chart III).

Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement. Other than in sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab region is at the bottom of the league with regard to gross enrolments at the pre-primary level (see table 3). It is also worth noting that in North America and Western Europe, where the gross enrolment ratios are highest, there is no observable gender gap.

**TABLE 3**

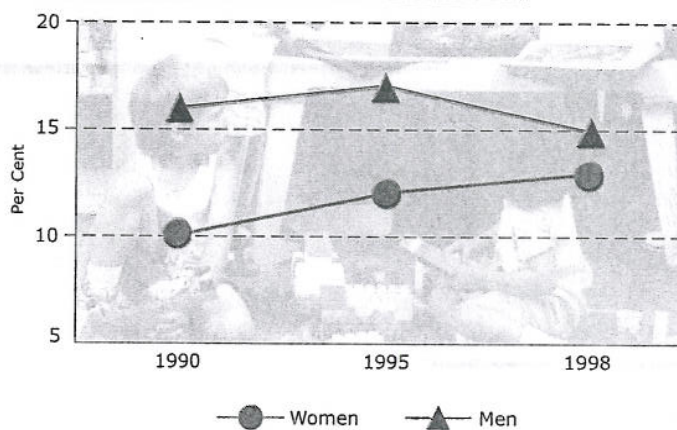
**Gross enrollment ratios for girls and boys in pre-primary schools for different regions of the world, 1998 (Percentages).**

Region	Girls	Boys
Arab region	13	15
Caribbean	79	81
Central Asia	21	24
Central and Eastern Europe	54	58
Central and Western Africa	5	6
East Asia	45	48
Latin America	51	55
North America and Western Europe	82	82
Pacific	55	63
South and West Asia	17	19
Southern and Eastern Africa	14	10

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *World Education Report* (UNESCO Publishing, 2000).

**Chart III**

**Trends in the gross enrolment ratios in pre-primary schools for girls and boys in the Arab region, 1990-1998**



Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *World Education Report* (UNESCO Publishing, 2000).

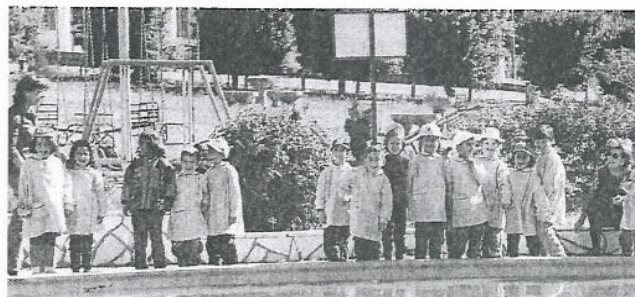


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### 2. PRIMARY

Table 4 illustrates the gross enrolment ratios and the GEI at the primary level in selected Arab countries for 1990-1994 and 1995-1999. The figures are favourable in terms of enrolments. Out of the 20 countries for which data were available in the period 1995-1999, the ratio exceeded 80 per cent in 9 States for girls compared to 13 States for boys. The ratio remained below 50 per cent for girls in only three countries, namely, Djibouti, Sudan and Yemen. Furthermore, in both Djibouti and Sudan, the boys fared poorly with enrolment ratios below 60 per cent.

Interestingly, some countries show ratios that exceed 100 per cent. This does not necessarily indicate universal primary education. Rather it might best be explained by other factors, such as a large number of students who remain at primary school beyond the official age, or pupils who repeat the same grade. Thus, rather than being an indication of genuine progress, a ratio that far exceeds 100 per cent could instead be a measure of poor attendance or of an inferior quality of tuition.<sup>8</sup>

**TABLE 4**

**Gross enrollment ratios for girls and boys and gender equality index in primary schools in selected Arab countries, 1990-1994 and 1995-1999 (Percentages and ratios)**

Country (age limits)	Gross enrolment ratios				Gender equality index	
	1990-1994		1995-1999		1990-1994	1995-1999
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls/Boys	Girls/Boys
Algeria (6-11)	99	112	102	113	0.88	0.90
Bahrain (6-11)	112	109	106	105	1.03	1.01
Djibouti (6-11)	33	43	33	44	0.77	0.75
Egypt (6-10)	91	104	94	108	0.88	0.87
Iraq (6-11)	83	97	78	92	0.86	0.85
Jordan (6-15)	94	94	...	...	1.00	...
Kuwait (6-9)	67	65	77	78	1.03	0.99
Lebanon (6-11)	110	114	108	113	0.96	0.96
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (6-14)	111	110	...	...	1.01	...
Mauritania (6-11)	64	78	75	84	0.82	0.89
Morocco (7-12)	68	93	74	97	0.73	0.76
Oman (6-11)	79	83	74	78	0.95	0.95
Palestine (6-16)	...	...	97	97	...	1.00
Qatar (6-11)	84	88	86	87	0.95	0.99
Saudi Arabia (6-11)	74	79	76	79	0.94	0.96
Somalia (6-13)	...	...	...	...	...	...
Sudan (6-13)	47	58	47	55	0.81	0.85
Syrian Arab Rep. (6-11)	96	107	96	106	0.90	0.91
Tunisia (6-11)	112	122	114	122	0.92	0.93
United Arab Emirates (6-11)	92	96	87	91	0.96	0.96
Yemen (6-14)	45	113	40	100	0.40	0.40

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Statistical Yearbook* (UNESCO Publishing and Bernan Press, 1999).

Note: Shaded area indicates that the gender equality index was greater than 0.90 by 1995-1999.

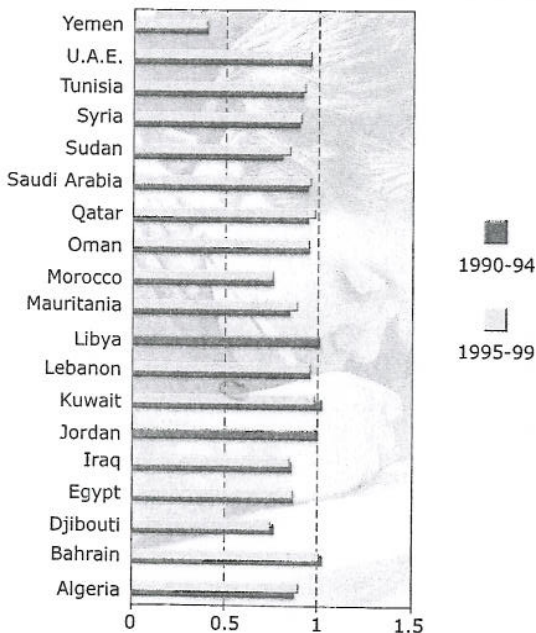
**3. GENDER EQUALITY**

In the period 1995-1999, the GEI in primary enrolment exceeded 0.90 in 10 out of 18 Arab countries for which data were available. There was no observable gender gap in Bahrain and Palestine. In Djibouti and Morocco, however, enrolment of girls in primary education fell short by some 25 per cent. Yemen recorded the highest gender gap: only 40 girls were in primary schools for every 100 boys, a level that barely changed throughout the period 1990-1999 (see chart IV).

Chart V illustrates the number of women teachers per 100 men in primary education in 11 Arab countries for 1993-1996. Qatar topped the chart with the greatest number of women employed in primary schools followed by Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. Conversely, the scales were tipped in favour of male teachers in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia where the ratios for all three States were below 100.

**Chart IV**

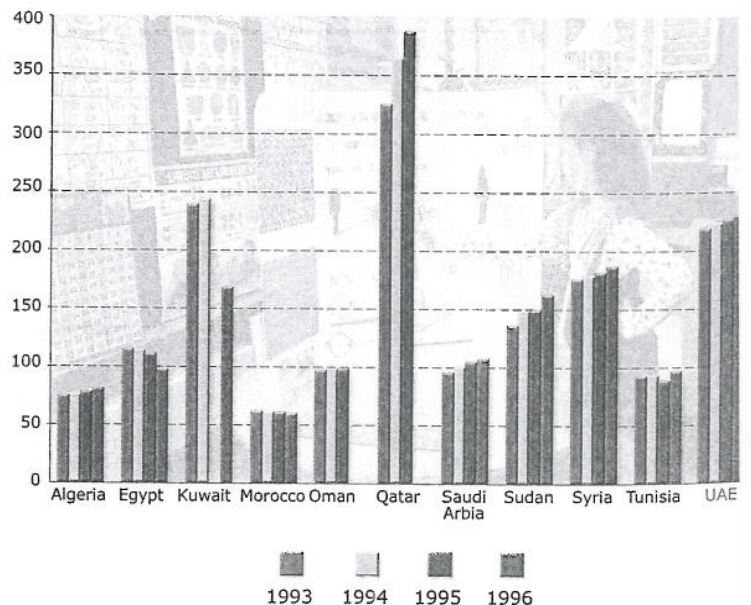
**Gender equality index in primary education in selected Arab countries, 1990-1994 and 1995-1999**



Source: Compiled from table 4.

**Chart V**

**Number of women teachers per 100 men in primary schools in selected Arab countries, 1993-1996**



Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Statistical Yearbook* (UNESCO Publishing and Bernan Press, 1999).



## SECONDARY

### 1. GROSS ENROLMENT

In 1990-1999, both the level of enrolment in secondary schools and the rate of change of that level were significantly low in a number of Arab States (see table 5). Enrolments were below 50 per cent in Djibouti, Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen; Mauritania and Djibouti recorded the lowest levels with 11 per cent for girls and 17 per cent for boys respectively. In terms of narrowing the gender gap, a noteworthy increase in the enrolment of girls was in Morocco, which saw a rise to 34 per cent in 1995-1999, up from 13 per cent from the period, 1990-1994. The highest gross enrolment ratios were in Lebanon for girls with 84 per cent and in Egypt for boys with 83 per cent.



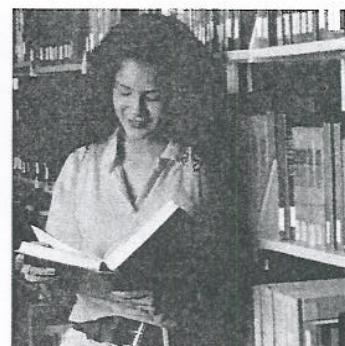
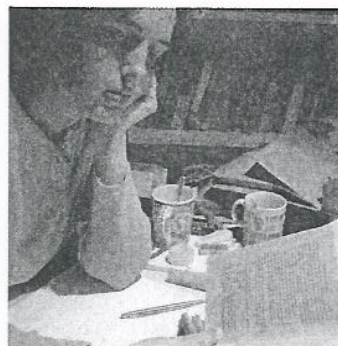
**TABLE 5**

**Gross enrolment ratios for girls and boys and gender equality index in secondary schools in selected Arab countries, 1990-1994 and 1995-1999 (Percentages and ratios)**

Country (age limits)	Gross enrolment ratios				Gender equality index	
	1990-1994	1990-1994	1995-1999	1995-1999	1990-1994	1995-1999
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls/Boys	Girls/Boys
Algeria (15-17)	58	66	62	65	0.88	0.95
Bahrain (15-17)	98	91	...	...	1.08	...
Djibouti (16-18)	10	15	12	17	0.67	0.71
Egypt (14-16)	71	82	73	83	0.87	0.88
Iraq (15-17)	35	53	32	51	0.66	0.63
Jordan (16-17)	...	...	...	...	...	...
Kuwait (14-17)	62	62	66	64	1.00	1.03
Lebanon (16-18)	83	75	84	78	1.11	1.08
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (15-17)	...	...	...	...	...	...
Mauritania (15-17)	11	20	11	21	0.55	0.52
Morocco (16-18)	13	43	34	44	0.30	0.77
Oman (15-17)	62	68	66	68	0.91	0.97
Palestine (17-18)	...	...	68	68	...	1.00
Qatar (15-17)	82	82	79	80	1.00	0.99
Saudi Arabia (15-17)	51	59	57	65	0.86	0.88
Somalia (14-17)	...	...	...	...	...	...
Sudan (14-16)	13	15	20	23	0.87	0.87
Syrian Arab Republic (15-17)	40	49	40	45	0.82	0.89
Tunisia (15-18)	54	59	63	66	0.92	0.95
United Arab Emirates (15-17)	84	76	82	77	1.11	1.06
Yemen (16-17)	...	...	14	53	...	0.26

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Statistical Yearbook* (UNESCO Publishing and Bernan Press, 1999).

Note: Shaded area indicates that the gender equality index was greater than 0.90 within the period 1995-1999.





## 2. GENDER EQUALITY

In general, the gender gap was found to be unsubstantial in a number of Arab countries for the period 1995-1999. This was partly as a result of relatively low enrolment ratios for boys. Out of 17 Arab States for which information on gross enrolment was available, 8 had obtained scores of GEI of approximately 0.90 and above, and four had indices between 0.87 and 0.89. The highest gender disparity was found in Yemen where only 26 girls were in secondary schools for every 100 boys (see chart VI).

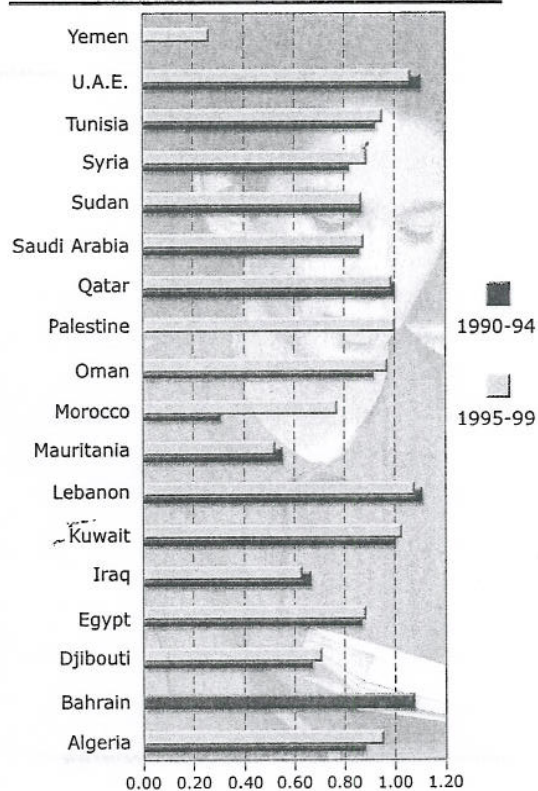
With regard to the employment of teachers in secondary schools, a number of Arab States had significantly fewer female teachers as compared to male colleagues (see chart VII). The countries with an index value below 100 include Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Oman, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia. The widest gender gap for teachers was in Morocco where the ratio was a low of just below 50, that is, for every 100 male teachers, there were fewer than 50

female colleagues. This disparity showed no signs of appreciable change over the four consecutive years from 1993 to 1996.

The situation was similar in Tunisia, despite a slight improvement for female teachers. The only countries where there were proportionately more female teachers were Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. In Kuwait, there was a sharp drop in the ratio over the period under study, which culminated in 1996 in gender equality.

**Chart VI**

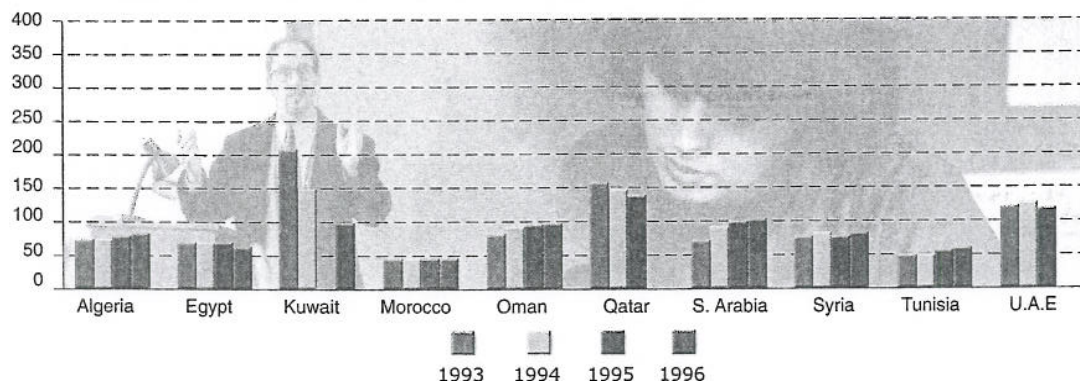
**Gender equality index in secondary schools in selected Arab countries, 1990-1994 and 1995-1999**



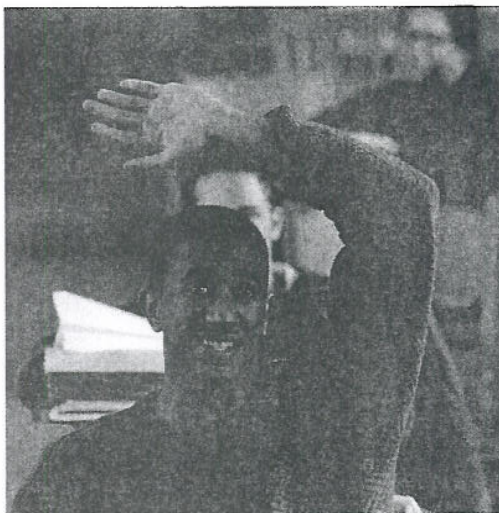
Source: Compiled from table 5.

**Chart VII**

**Number of women teachers per 100 men in secondary schools in selected Arab countries, 1993-1996**



Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Statistical Yearbook* (UNESCO Publishing and Bernan Press, 1999).



**1. GROSS ENROLMENT**

In the period 1990-1999, the Arab States as a whole witnessed relatively low gross enrolment ratios in tertiary or university education when compared to developed countries.<sup>9</sup> There were, however, significant regional variations. The gross enrolment ratios for women during the period 1995-1999 ranged from a low of 0.2 per cent for Djibouti to a high of 41 per cent for Qatar. In the case of men, Djibouti came bottom of

the table with 0.3 per cent, whereas Palestine scored highest with a male enrolment figure of 30 per cent. Irrespective of gender, Djibouti, Mauritania, Oman and Yemen all had gross enrolment ratios below 10 per cent. The United Arab Emirates had considerably fewer men enrolled in tertiary education as compared to women, with 5 per cent and 21 per cent respectively (see table 6).

**TABLE 6**

**Gross enrollment ratios for girls and boys and gender equality index in tertiary schools in selected Arab countries, 1990-1994 and 1995-1999 (Percentages and ratios)**

Country (age limits)	Gross enrolment ratios				Gender equality index	
	1990-1994		1995-1999		1990-1994	1995-1999
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women/Men	Women/Men
Algeria (18-20)	9	12	10	14	0.75	0.71
Bahrain (18-20)	24	16	...	...	1.50	...
Djibouti (19-20)	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	1.00	0.67
Egypt (17-20)	14	22	16	24	0.64	0.67
Iraq (18-20)	...	...	...	...	...	...
Jordan (18-20)	...	...	...	...	...	...
Kuwait (18-20)	23	14	24	15	1.53	1.60
Lebanon (19-20)	28	30	27	27	0.93	1.00
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (18-20)	15	18	...	...	0.83	...
Mauritania (18-20)	1	6	1	6	0.17	0.17
Morocco (19-20)	9	13	...	...	0.69	...
Oman (18-20)	6	6	7	9	1.00	0.78
Palestine (19-20)	...	...	23	30	...	0.77
Qatar (18-20)	42	15	41	14	2.80	2.93
Saudi Arabia (18-20)	13	15	15	17	0.87	0.88
Somalia (18-20)	...	...	...	...	...	...
Sudan (17-20)	3	3	...	...	1.00	...
Syrian Arab Republic (18-20)	13	18	...	...	0.72	...
Tunisia (19-20)	11	14	12	15	0.79	0.80
United Arab Emirates (18-20)	14	5	21	5	2.80	4.20
Yemen (18-20)	...	...	1	7	...	0.14

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Statistical Yearbook* (UNESCO Publishing and Bernan Press, 1999).

Note: Shaded area indicates that the gender equality index was greater than 0.90 within the period 1995-1999.

**2. FIELD OF SPECIALIZATION**

ESCWA has gathered and compiled data from its member States with regard to the distribution of university students both in terms of gender and field of specialization. This information was grouped in the following six categories:

- (a) Education/arts/humanities;
- (b) Business/law/social science;
- (c) Science;
- (d) Engineering;
- (e) Health and welfare;
- (f) Others.

A total of 11 ESCWA members provided the relevant information (see table 7).

For the academic year 1995/96, there seemed to be a clear case of gender selectivity in terms of choosing a field of study. For instance, other than in Bahrain, a high proportion of women enrolled in Arab universities opted

for education / arts / humanities with attendance rates ranging from 41 per cent for the Syrian Arab Republic to 83.1 per cent for Oman. Interestingly, some 71.2 per cent of Saudi Arabian men also opted for education/arts/humanities. This could be as a result of a limited number of places in other faculties.

In Yemen, 41.8 per cent of women opted for business/law/social science, as opposed to their male counterparts who generally preferred to study education/arts/humanities subjects. Comparatively fewer Yemenis chose to study science and engineering. Furthermore, engineering was relatively unpopular for female undergraduates across the Arab region. Only Bahrain and the Syrian Arab Republic had over 10 per cent of women enrolled in the faculty of engineering

**TABLE 7**

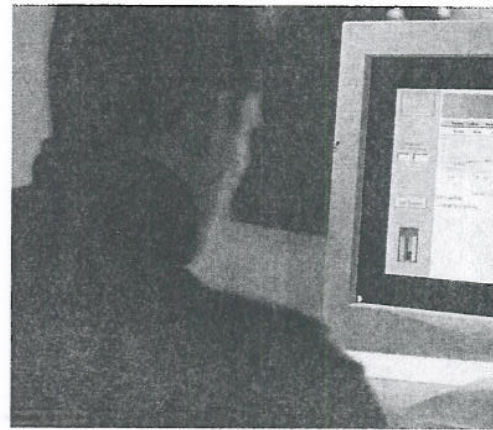
**Distribution of university students by field of specialization and by gender in selected arab countries, 1995/96 (Percentages)**

Country	Education, arts, humanities		Business, law, social science		Science		Engineering		Health and welfare		Others <sup>a/</sup>	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Bahrain	23.0	12.0	30.5	17.1	8.6	4.4	12.1	48.4	18.4	7.9	7.4	10.3
Egypt	51.8	38.9	34.1	40.6	3.0	3.2	1.5	7.2	7.1	6.1	2.5	4.0
Jordan	45.4	26.8	24.0	35.9	11.7	11.5	4.9	13.4	11.4	10.1	2.6	2.3
Kuwait	41.7	16.4	40.7	65.9	8.9	3.5	5.3	9.9	3.3	4.4	0.0	0.0
Oman	83.1	45.0	0.0	0.0	10.2	8.8	2.8	20.5	3.0	10.4	0.9	15.3
Palestine	74.4	60.2	0.0	0.0	17.1	19.7	2.8	8.1	3.8	1.8	1.9	10.2
Qatar	63.2	26.5	12.3	19.4	12.1	23.1	6.3	23.8	0.0	0.0	6.3	7.1
Saudi Arabia	82.5	71.2	5.1	8.9	8.5	4.3	0.2	10.5	2.7	3.7	1.1	1.4
Syrian Arab Republic	41.0	19.1	16.9	38.2	10.2	8.8	15.9	35.6	12.3	23.6	3.7	10.2
United Arab Emirates	57.2	22.1	11.2	36.0	9.9	9.9	2.6	14.3	1.7	1.8	17.4	15.8
Yemen	46.6	55.8	41.8	32.4	1.3	1.8	1.9	4.0	7.9	3.8	0.5	2.3

Source: ESCWA, *Statistical Abstract of the ESCWA Region* (2001).

<sup>a/</sup> Others include agriculture and unspecified.

In general, the distribution of female and male undergraduates in the field of science was roughly equal in the 11 ESCWA members for which data were available. It should, however, be noted that the percentages of university students in science, engineering and health and welfare do not necessarily indicate a preference for these fields of study since they largely depend on the availability of places in other faculties.



### 3. GENDER EQUALITY

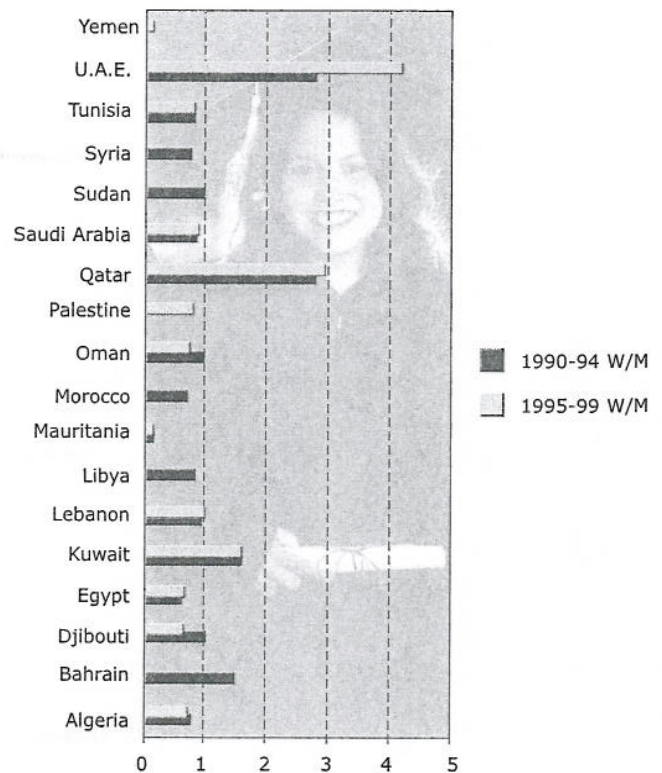
In the period 1995-1999, the highest gender inequality with regard to gross enrolments at the tertiary level was observed in Yemen and Mauritania, with respective GEI's of 0.14 and 0.17 (see chart VIII). Conversely, when compared to the previous period 1990-1994, the gender gap in favour of female undergraduates grew to even higher levels in both the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

The GEI for the United Arab Emirates was 4.20. This implies that there were over four times more women enrolled in universities than men. The reason for this is two fold: first, relatively more men seek to pursue tertiary studies abroad; and secondly, men tend to be more prone to enter the labour market at a relatively younger age. In the case of the Gulf States, this could be due to better career prospects. This is in stark contrast to Lebanon where, as a consequence of 15 years of civil strife from 1975 to 1990 and an economy in recession, more young men are forced to leave education to join the workforce.<sup>10</sup>

Chart IX illustrates the wide variations in gender ratios in the 11 selected Arab countries and as a function of the six fields of specialization.

**Chart VIII**

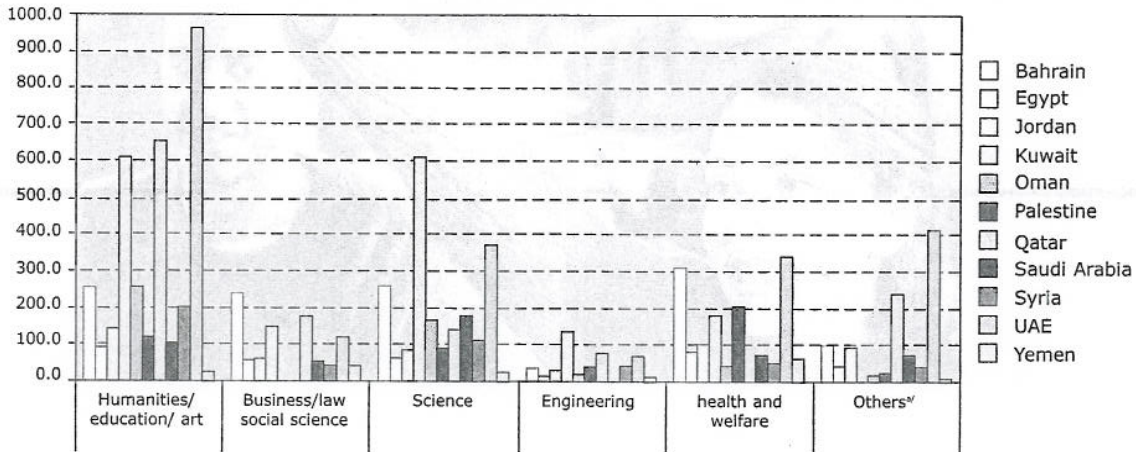
**Gender equality index in universities in selected Arab countries, 1990-1994 and 1995-1999**



Source: Compiled from table 6.

### Chart IX

**Number of women students per 100 men at universities in six fields of specialization in selected Arab countries, 1995/96**



Source: ESCWA, *Statistical Abstract of the ESCWA Region* (2001).

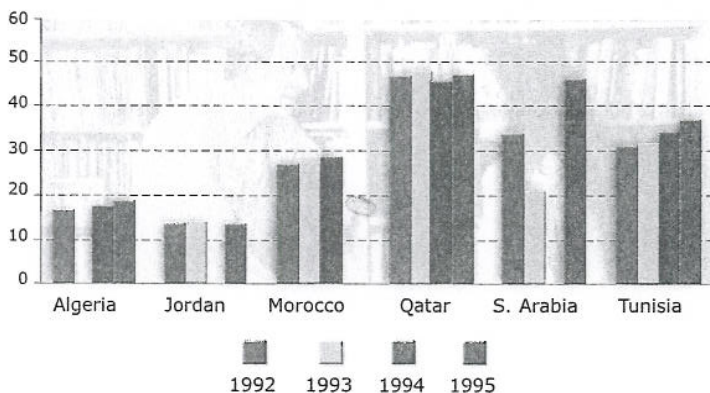
Women outnumbered men in one or more specialization in all the States except Egypt and Yemen. In Business/law/social science, women outnumbered men only in four countries, namely, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. However, women were outnumbered by men in engineering in all the countries except Kuwait.

countries in this survey, Qatar had the highest number of women employed in tertiary education with a GEI of almost 50; while Tunisia, though ending lower with an index of 40, showed a gradual increase from 1992 to 1995, implying some success with regard to narrowing the gender gap.

There was more gender inequality among teachers at the tertiary level than at the primary or secondary levels. Chart X illustrates the gender ratios in six countries, namely, Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. Jordan ranked lowest with a ratio of 15 female lecturers to every 100 male colleagues. Algeria was only marginally better with a ratio of approximately 20. Among the Arab

### Chart X

**Number of women teachers per 100 men in universities in selected Arab countries, 1992-1995**



Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Statistical Yearbook* (UNESCO Publishing and Bernan Press, 1999).



Photo © UNICEF

There is, however, clear evidence of a sharp decline in the number of female teachers at the tertiary level as compared to the primary and secondary levels. This gender imbalance at the highest level of education could be the result of a shortage of highly educated women in the Arab region.

## EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION

Public expenditure on education is generally believed to be the impetus for maintaining quality of tuition and ensuring completion of the primary cycle.<sup>11</sup> Despite the fact that the relevant statistics for the Arab region vary in terms of accuracy and comprehensiveness, a pattern can nonetheless be gleaned to investigate the importance given to education as a function of the public funds allocated to it. Table 8 illustrates the expenditure on education both as a percentage of total public expenditure and as a percentage of the gross national product (GNP) for the two five-year periods, 1990-1994 and 1995-1999.

**TABLE 8**

**Percentage of expenditure on education to government expenditure and to the gross National Product, 1990-1994 and 1995-1999 (Percentages)**

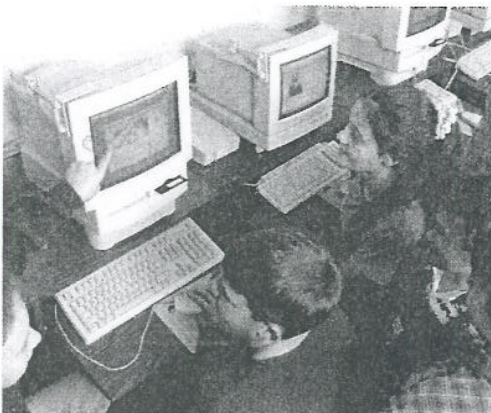
	To Government expenditure		To gross national product	
	1990-1994	1995-1999	1990-1994	1995-1999
Algeria	18.8	16.4	6.0	5.1
Bahrain	11.8	12.0	4.6	4.4
Djibouti	11.1	...	3.6	...
Egypt	13.8	14.9	4.7	4.8
Iraq	...	...	...	...
Jordan	19.6	19.8	7.7	7.9
Kuwait	10.9	14.0	5.5	5.0
Lebanon	7.5	8.2	2.0	2.5
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	...	...	...	...
Mauritania	16.2	16.2	5.2	5.1
Morocco	22.6	24.9	5.6	5.3
Oman	15.2	16.7	4.6	4.5
Palestine	...	...	...	...
Qatar	...	...	3.4	...
Saudi Arabia	18.0	22.8	6.2	7.5
Somalia	...	...	...	...
Sudan	...	...	...	1.4
Syrian Arab Republic	12.5	13.6	3.8	3.1
Tunisia	16.4	19.9	6.6	7.7
United Arab Emirates	17.3	16.7	1.8	1.8
Yemen	21.6	...	6.3	7.0

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Statistical Yearbook* (UNESCO Publishing and Bernal Press, 1999).



The percentage share of public spending on education to the total Government expenditure in the period 1990-1994 was highest in Morocco and Yemen at 22.6 per cent and 21.6 per cent respectively. It was lowest in Lebanon with 7.5 per cent. In general, the pattern of the share of public spending on education in the Arab States remained unchanged during the subsequent five-year period, 1995-1999.

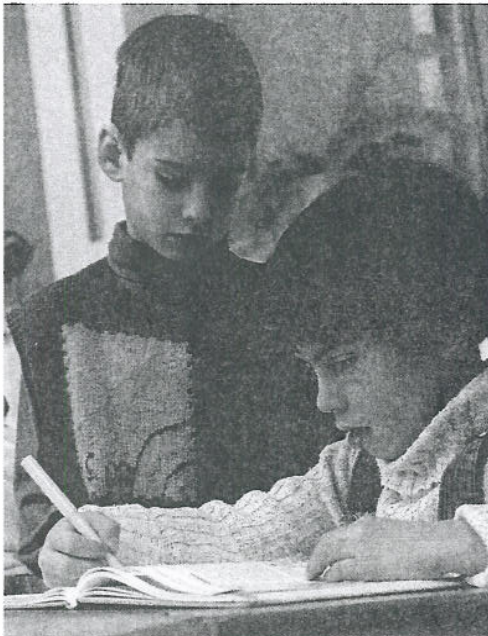
The data in tables 4, 5 and 8 have been used to investigate any correlation between public expenditure on education and enrolments in primary and secondary schools. The results yield no apparent correspondence: statistically, at least, there does not seem to be a link between the public funds allocated to education and the number of enrolled schoolchildren. In fact, the share of public expenditure on education in any given country can decrease because of a rise in the GNP, as in the case of rich countries. Moreover, it can decline as a result of a strong private sector in primary and secondary education, as in Lebanon.<sup>12</sup>



## LIMITATIONS OF THE INDICATORS

This publication uses two indicators to monitor educational progress and gender gap in education, namely, the gross enrolment ratios and the gender equality index. Both have their own limitations and need to be interpreted with caution.

The gross enrolment ratios are computed by dividing all students enrolled at a particular level of education regardless of their age by the number of persons within the specified age limits. The age limits in the numerator are not the same as those used in the denominator if, as is often the case, students outside the officially prescribed age limits are included in the numerator. Students begin and end their education cycles at different ages in different countries as illustrated in tables 4, 5 and 6. As regional comparisons on enrolments are based on students within the same age brackets, this gives rise to certain discrepancies.<sup>13</sup>

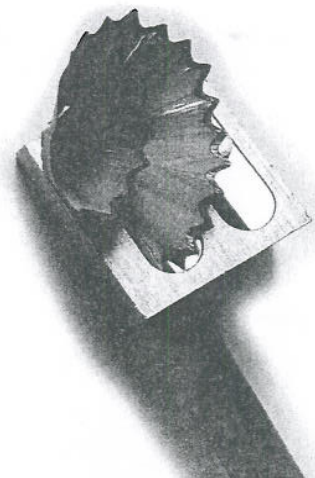
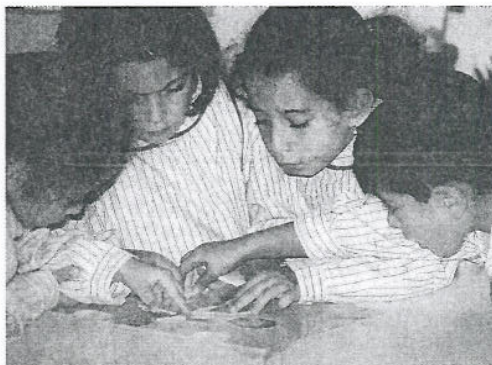


Net enrolment ratios are preferable because the same age limit is used for the numerator and denominator, thereby providing a more accurate indicator of enrolment of the school age population.

Unfortunately, however, schools generally report enrolment statistics at different education levels based on the official age limits for these levels and not on the actual ages of the students. The data on net enrolment ratios are therefore not available for many countries.<sup>14</sup>



To measure educational disparity among women and men, the GEI is computed in relative terms, namely, as enrolment ratios of girls to boys. This index has been widely used as the measure of the gender gap in studies concerned with women.<sup>15</sup> The main reason for its popularity seems to be the ease of its interpretation. The ratio varies between 0 and 1 and the gender equality is attained when the ratio is equal to 1. However, the serious limitation of this index is that it measures proportions and not absolute values. For instance, where the enrolment ratios for both sexes are approximately equal, the index will yield a value that is close to 1 regardless of any net differences in enrolments.<sup>16</sup>





# CONCLUSION

The prime objective of this publication is to examine the progress made with regard to education in the Arab countries during the 10-year period, 1990-1999. It also aims to emphasize gender disparities. The majority of the statistics has been compiled from the most recent UNESCO and ESCWA publications. Non-availability of relevant data for a number of States has hindered the complete analysis of educational development in the Arab region. Nevertheless, it is hoped that those countries included in this study are reasonably representative of the entire Arab region as far as the progress of education is concerned.

The literacy rates for those aged 15 and over for both women and men recorded an increase over the past decade in the Arab region. However, there was little change in the gender gap that remains extensive. The statistics revealed significant regional variations in both literacy rates of women and the GEI. The States that had higher literacy rates for women recorded narrow gender gap. These include Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Yemen and Mauritania had the lowest literacy rates for women and men, respectively in 2000.

The literacy rates for the 15-24 were consistently higher than they were for the 15+ bracket during the past 10 years. Despite the fact that the GEI based on literacy rates for 15-24 year-olds attained or approached the value 1 in 2000 in a number of Arab States, Yemen still had the maximum gender disparity. For every 100 men aged 15-24, only 55 women were literate in Yemen.

Improving the level of pre-primary education is key to achieving the goal of

Education for All. However, it will take years to gather momentum for gross enrolment ratios in pre-primary in the Arab region. The respective ratios for girls and boys were approximately 13 per cent and 15 per cent in 1998. The gender gap narrowed in 1998. However, that was mainly due to a decrease in the gross enrolment ratio of boys in that year. The reason for the poor gross enrolment ratios in pre-primary education in the Arab region is largely because of a lack of educational facilities for three-, four- and five-year-olds. Parents generally keep their young children at home.<sup>17</sup>

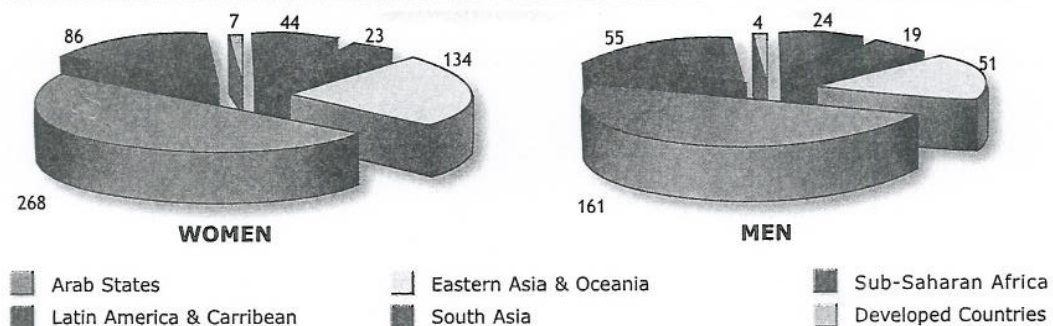
In terms of gross enrolment ratios for both girls and boys in primary education, the Arab States seem to have made fairly good progress. A number of countries attained gross enrolment ratios that exceeded 80 per cent in 1995-1999. Only three States, namely, Djibouti, Sudan, and Yemen showed enrolment of girls below 50 per cent in that period. With respect to gender equality, the index either reached 1 or exceeded 0.90 in the majority of States.

Based on employment statistics by gender for the years 1993 to 1996, women teachers outnumbered men teachers in primary schools in the majority of Arab States. Out of 11 countries for which relevant statistics was available, three States, namely, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia had by far a lower number of women than men employed as teachers in primary schools. The gender equality ratio, however, showed some improvement in favour of women over the period 1993-1996.

The majority of Arab States have not shown significant improvement during the 10-year period with regard to

Chart 11

Burden of illiteracy for those aged 15+ and by gender in different regions of the world, 2000



Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Statistical Yearbook* (UNESCO Publishing and Bernan Press, 1999).

existing low levels of gross enrolment ratios for both girls and boys in secondary education. In 1995-1999, the list of States which had gross enrolment ratios for girls in secondary schools at 20 per cent or below includes Djibouti, Mauritania, Sudan, and Yemen. The latter, however, had a ratio of 53 per cent for enrolment of boys. Lebanon and Egypt had the highest gross enrolment ratios for girls and boys at 84 per cent and 83 per cent respectively.

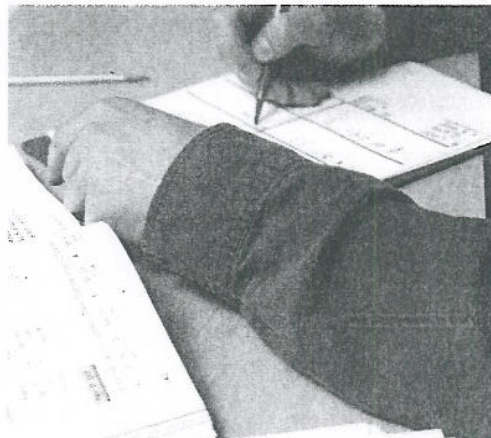
In most countries, the GEI was more than 0.80 in 1995-1999. For Kuwait, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates the index even exceeded unity, implying that a larger number of girls than boys were enrolled at secondary level. However, Yemen recorded the largest gender gap with regard to gross enrolment in secondary education—only 26 girls out of 100 boys were enrolled in secondary schools in Yemen.

There was a significant gender imbalance with regard to employment of teachers in secondary education in most of the Arab countries for 1993-1996. Out of 10 countries for which relevant data were available, two States, namely, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates had a larger number of women teachers than men employed in secondary schools. Morocco showed the highest gender disparity with regard to employment of teachers—approximately 50 female teachers worked in secondary schools for every 100 male colleagues during the period 1993-1996.

Across the Arab region, there was a phenomenal decline in gross enrolment ratios in tertiary or university level education for boys and more so for girls as compared to respective ratios in primary or secondary education. The enrolment ratios for girls in 1995-1999 ranged from a minimum of 0.2 per cent for Djibouti to a maximum of 41 per cent for Qatar; whereas for boys, the lowest was 0.3 per cent and the highest was 30

per cent for Djibouti and Palestine respectively. Social, cultural, and economic factors are believed to affect enrolments,

particularly of girls. Several studies have revealed that because of the differences in parental perceptions of opportunity and the direct costs of education, girls are often withdrawn from school before boys in times of economic hardship.<sup>18</sup> Boys are more likely to be

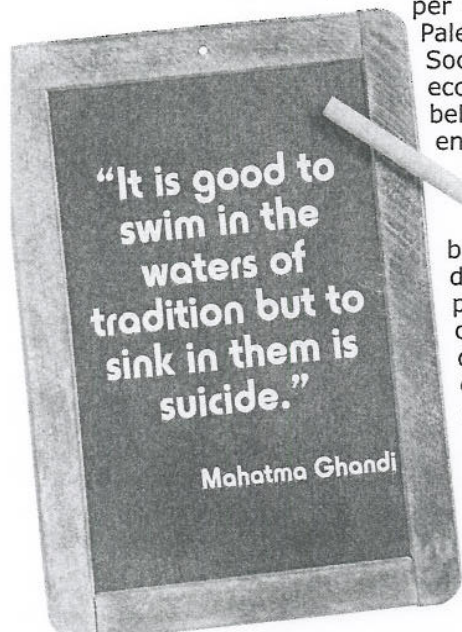


withdrawn at the secondary or tertiary level to contribute to the family income; whereas the withdrawal of girls at primary or secondary level is mainly to work in the household.<sup>19</sup>

Another important reason for low gross enrolment ratios for girls is that if parents have to spend their own limited resources on education, boys receive priority over the girls.<sup>20</sup> In many Arab societies, there are those who believe that educating a girl is pointless as she will eventually live with her in-laws after marriage and that, if she works, she will earn for them or for her own family. Furthermore, the early marriage of girls is encouraged in many countries. These deeply rooted beliefs, practices and traditions have a direct bearing upon the enrolment of girls, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels.

Among non-cost factors which seem to strongly influence enrolment of girls are the availability of female teachers in schools and physical accessibility. The latter is responsible for non-enrolment or withdrawal of girls from education because many parents do not permit their daughters to go to school unaccompanied.<sup>21</sup> All these factors could be considered to have affected the enrolment of girls, particularly in university education in the Arab States.

As expected, the gender inequality among teachers is highest among teachers at the tertiary level in the Arab States between 1992 and 1995. Among the six countries, namely, Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia, for which relevant data were available, the gender ratio ranged from a minimum of 15 women per 100 men for Jordan to a maximum of nearly 50 women per 100 men for Qatar. The cause of this large disparity in the gender ratio could be two fold: first, because of a lack of highly qualified female teachers in the Arab region; and secondly, because, among those available, some refuse to join the labour force as a result of discouragement from their husbands or in-laws.





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

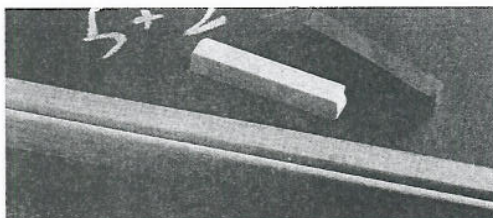
This pamphlet represents one of the activities carried out under the umbrella of the regional project, Development of National Gender Statistics Programmes in the Arab Countries.

It was prepared by an ESCWA team supervised by Ahmed Hussein, the regional coordinator of the project. He was assisted by Nada Moudallal, Nadine Shaar, May Baydoun and Zeina Sinno, who provided the data and contributed to the revision of the pamphlet.

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## NOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Regional Report on Education for All in the Arab States* (Cairo, 24-27 January 2000).
- <sup>3</sup> UNESCO, *The World Conference on Education for All* (Jomtein, Thailand, 5-9 March 1990).
- <sup>4</sup> UNESCO, *Regional Report on Education for All in the Arab States* (Cairo, 24-27 January 2000).
- <sup>5</sup> UNESCO, *Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments* (Dakar, 26-28 April 2000).
- <sup>6</sup> UNESCO, *Statistical Yearbook* (UNESCO Publishing & Bernan Press, USA, 1999); UNESCO, *World Education Report* (UNESCO Publishing, 2000); and ESCWA, *Statistical Abstract of the ESCWA region, twenty-first issue* (2001).
- <sup>7</sup> UNESCO, *Regional Report on Education for All in the Arab States* (Cairo, 24-27 January 2000).
- <sup>8</sup> Rose, P., *Female Education and Adjustment Programs: A Crosscountry Statistical Analysis* (World Development, U.K., 1995), vol. 23, pp. 1931-1949.
- <sup>9</sup> UNESCO, *Statistical Yearbook* (UNESCO Publishing & Bernan Press, USA 1999).
- <sup>10</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1998).
- <sup>11</sup> Mehrotra, S. and Delamonica, E., *Household costs and public expenditure on primary education in five low income countries: a comparative analysis* (International Journal of Educational Development, U.K., 1998), vol. 18(1), pp. 41-61.

<sup>12</sup> ESCWA, *Compendium of Social Statistics and Indicators*, fifth issue (United Nations, New York, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Rose, P., *Female Education and Adjustment Programs: A Crosscountry Statistical Analysis* (World Development, U.K., 1995), vol. 23, pp. 1931-1949.

<sup>14</sup> Rose, P., *Female Education and Adjustment Programs: A Crosscountry Statistical Analysis* (World Development, U.K., 1995), vol. 23, pp. 1931-1949.

<sup>15</sup> King, E. and Hill, M.A., "Women's education in developing countries: An overview", in E. King and M.A. Hill (Eds.), *Women's Education in Developing Countries: Barriers, Benefits, and Policies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993a), pp. 1-50; and Colclough, C., *Under-enrolment and low quality in African primary schooling: Towards a gender-sensitive solution*, IDS Working Paper No. 7 (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 1994).

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<sup>20</sup> Mehrotra, S. and Delamonica, E., *Household costs and public expenditure on primary education in five low income countries: a comparative analysis* (International Journal of Educational Development, U.K., 1998), vol. 18(1), pp. 41-61.

<sup>21</sup> Mehrotra, S. and Delamonica, E., *Household costs and public expenditure on primary education in five low income countries: a comparative analysis* (International Journal of Educational Development, U.K., 1998), vol. 18(1), pp. 41-61; and Dreze, J. and Sen A., *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1995).