



WOMEN IN THE ARAB STATES ECONOMY: A REGIONAL OVERVIEW

WOMEN IN BLUE ECONOMY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN 22 SEP 2021

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THE REGIONAL REALITY: WHERE WE STAND ON GENDER EQUALITY

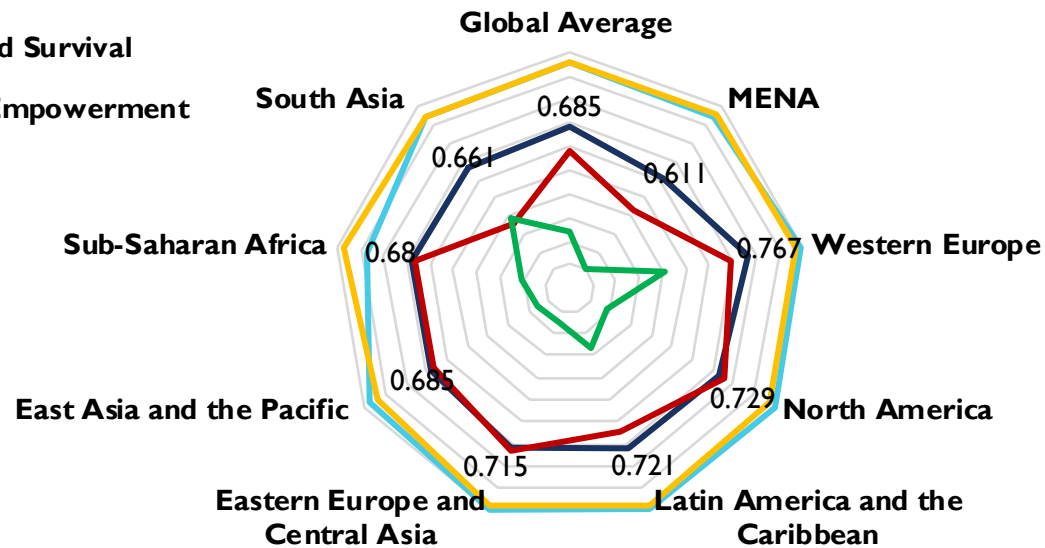
— Overall Index

— Economic Participation
and Opportunity

— Educational Attainment

— Health and Survival

— Political Empowerment



- **Gender Development index: 0.856** is the second lowest in the world:
 - Women have less years in schooling and significantly lower gross national income/capita
- **Gender Inequality index: 0.518**, is the second highest region in the world:
 - Higher maternal mortality rates,
 - Higher adolescent births,
 - lower participation in parliaments than other regions and
 - lower economic participation rates

Source: World Economic Forum, Gender Gap Index, 2020

LABOR MARKET CONDITIONS FOR WOMEN IN ARAB STATES

- **Female Labor Force Participation rate in the region is one of the lowest in the world at around 19.6% in 2021** compared to about 71.7% for males (1).
- **Female unemployment rates, and especially female youth unemployment rates are also among the highest in the world (3.5 to 4 x world average) (2)**
- **62% of working women in the region are informally employed.** Moreover, they are over-represented in risky categories of informal employment. (3)
- **The share of women owned SMEs is only 14% compared to 34% global average (4), and share of female top managers does not exceed 6.5 % compared to the average of 18% world average (5).**
- **The proportion of female workers in Agriculture; forestry and fishing: 18.9% in 2020** as a ratio of the total employed females within the region (6)
- The tourism sector is male-dominated. **8.3% of people employed in tourism are women (7)** (without Maghreb)

COVID'S IMPACT ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ECONOMY

- A 2020 ESCWA policy brief estimated that out of some 1.7 million jobs that would be lost in the Arab region, fully **700,000 of them would be women's jobs**
- A UNDP 2021 study found that between **12% and 34% of employed women in five Arab countries are in high or medium high-risk industries**. Certain groups of women are at higher risk
- Some evidence from the Economic Research Forum that **women in the private sector were particularly likely to exit employment**: 76-86% of men who were employed in the private sector in February 2020 remained employed a year later in February 2021, but only 54%-71% of women were still employed in February 2021.
- Arab Barometer data found **more job loss by women than men in the five countries surveyed**
- **The increase of the burden of care work on women during COVID-19**
- **Women SMEs were more heavily impacted by COVID-19** although new opportunities emerged as well **Tourism was one of the hardest hit sectors due to the Covid-19's travel bans and social distancing.**

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ECONOMY

Policies, laws and formal institutions

- Despite progress there is still discrimination or inadequacy in legal provisions that impact women's economic participation with variations
- Unequal participation in decision making
- Lack of social protection for low skilled jobs

Social norms and gender stereotypes

- Religious or tribal ideology and discriminatory practices and exclusionary customs
- Employers' discriminatory attitudes
- Family restrictions on movement/choice of work

**Disproportionate role in unpaid care work- time poverty
(4.7 X men)**

Inequality in access to resources & services

- Skills and education: there is progress, stereotypical specializations still prevail, practical & business skills
- Access to information and networks
- Financial services, affecting women's access to capital and income-generating projects, small entrepreneurs, HHBs
- Inequality in land ownership and tenure
- Insufficient gender-friendly services especially transport

Gender-based violence and conflict

- Exposure to domestic violence, sexual harassment and other forms of S/GBV
- Occupation (Palestine), conflict and extremism impact women's freedom of movement and participation

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Addressing **economic participation in an integrated way** that tackles legal barriers, discriminatory social norms and unequal access to decision making
- Adoption of empowering, **non-discriminatory policies and legislations**
- Paying special importance to unpaid care work that women perform within the family, **with labour/care policies and provision of care services.**
- Prioritizing workers in medium-high and high-risk industries where women are concentrated and informal workers in plans **for expansion of social protection**
- Providing **innovative finance**, for promotion of SMEs and investing in cooperatives as a method that has worked for the economic integration and empowerment of women.
- Investment in infrastructure that provides **affordable digital solutions, digital financial services and digital literacy** to overcome movement restrictions and administrative barriers
- Providing **skills and education** opportunities and incentives for women to join relevant specializations
- Improving **data about gender gaps** in participation including in sectors of the blue economy