



UNITED NATIONS

الاسواق
ESCWA

Women: Arab Horizon 2030

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/ECW/2017/Technical Paper.2
5 May 2017
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Women: Arab Horizon 2030



United Nations
Beirut, 2017

17-00318

Acknowledgments

The present publication was prepared by the Centre for Women of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The study was conducted by Ms. Nemat Guenena, regional consultant and expert in gender studies, under the supervision of Ms. Mehrinaz El Awady, Director of the ESCWA Centre for Women, who provided critical review and substantive input.

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Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TEA	Total Entrepreneurial Activity
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
VAW	Violence against Women

موجز تنفيذي

يهدف هذا التقرير إلى تقديم تحليل تطوعي للنهج أو الممارسات الجيدة التي يمكن أن تعتمد عليها البلدان العربية في سبيل دمج قضايا الجنسين في السياسة العامة وصنع القرار. وجرى استعراض التقدم المحرز في الأعوام العشرة الماضية باستخدام إطار أهداف التنمية المستدامة وغاياتها. وأشار هذا الاستعراض إلى أن تقدماً هاماً قد أحرز في مجالي التعليم والصحة على الرغم من الفوارق بين البلدان وداخلها. ومع أن البلدان بمعظمها شهدت تحسناً في إمكانية الوصول إلى التعليم، ما زالت تفتقر بشأن نوعية التعليم ومسارته ومدى تماشيها مع متطلبات سوق العمل. ويشير تقرير التنمية الإنسانية العربية لعام 2016 إلى عدم تطابق التحصيل العلمي الذي يتلقاه الشباب، وفي طليعتهم النساء، مع متطلبات سوق العمل. كما خطت المنطقة العربية خطوات ملحوظة نحو تحسين الصحة العامة وتمديد العمر المتوقع لدى السكان والحد من وفيات الأمومة، إلا أن هذا التقدم جاء متبايناً بين البلدان. وتعاني البلدان العربية بمعظمها، ولا سيما الأكثر فقراً منها و/أو البلدان المنكوبة بالنزاعات، من أوجه قصور في مجال تقديم الخدمات الصحية.

والتحدي الأكبر الذي تواجهه البلدان العربية هو التمثيل الاقتصادي والسياسي للمرأة، الذي ما زال دون المستوى في المنطقة. وتُظهر نتائج الدراسات أن المجالات الاقتصادية والسياسية تُعتبر حكرًا على الرجال. وما لم تسدّ البلدان هذه الثغرة، ستتعثّر المنطقة في تحقيق أهداف التنمية المستدامة، ولا سيما الهدفين 5 و8. وقد بادر عدد من البلدان إلى معالجة هذا الوضع من خلال سن تشريعات واتخاذ إجراءات إيجابية لتحسين مشاركة المرأة في الحياة الاقتصادية والسياسية، ولكن لا بد من بذل مزيد من الجهود المدعومة بالإرادة السياسية للتغلب على العقبات الهيكلية والتحيز الثقافي ضد التمثيل المتساوي للمرأة في المواقع الهامة لصنع القرار. ولا تزال الرعاية غير المدفوعة الأجر مسألة عالقة في المنطقة، ولكن استقصاءات استخدام الوقت، التي أجريت في تونس والجزائر ومصر والمغرب، تمثل خطوة حاسمة نحو تقييم هذه الرعاية. ولا بد من زيادة الضغط على الحكومات في المنطقة للاستثمار في الخدمات العامة، وصياغة سياسات الحماية الاجتماعية للمرأة التي تزاوّل عملاً غير مدفوع الأجر، والتوعية بشأن القيمة الاقتصادية والاجتماعية لهذا العمل.

والعنف ضد المرأة والفتاة آفة اجتماعية تترتب عليها تكاليف اقتصادية وسياسية، وقد تفاقمت منذ عام 2011 بسبب الصراعات والحروب التي طال أمدها، والظروف الأمنية الهشة، والركود الاقتصادي في بعض البلدان العربية. ويشمل العنف ضد المرأة والفتاة العنف الأسري، وجرائم الشرف، وزواج الأطفال، والبيغاء القسري، والاتجار (الاستعباد الجنسي)، والتحرش الجنسي، والاعتصاب، وتشويه الأعضاء التناسلية للإناث وبتزها (ختان الإناث). ولا يزال ختان الإناث مشكلة خطيرة في بعض البلدان العربية، ولا سيما السودان، والصومال، ومصر، وموريتانيا. وظاهرة زواج الأطفال منتشرة في جميع البلدان العربية، ولكنها أكثر انتشاراً في البلدان الأشد فقراً وفي المناطق المنكوبة بالصراع. وتشير التقديرات إلى أن نسبة النساء اللواتي يتعرّضن للعنف الأسري على يد الأزواج أو الأقارب الذكور تناهز 30 في المائة في المنطقة. ويُستعمل العنف ضد المرأة والفتاة كسلاح حرب، كما هي الحال في الجمهورية العربية السورية، والعراق، وليبيا، واليمن.

وقد أقر عدد من البلدان في المنطقة تشريعات واستراتيجيات لمكافحة العنف ضد المرأة والفتاة. وأظهرت دراسة رائدة حول تكاليف هذه الظاهرة في مصر أن البلاد تتكبد تكاليف اقتصادية هائلة على نحو مباشر وغير مباشر نتيجة حوادث العنف التي يتم الإبلاغ عنها. وتكمن أهمية هذه الدراسة في أنها تقدم تحليلاً كمياً للأثار السلبية للعنف ضد المرأة والفتاة على الاقتصاد، ما يبرز ضرورة أن تصيغ الحكومات والمجتمع الدولي سياسات حاسمة لاستباق حصول هذا العنف بهدف حماية ضحاياه من النساء وإعادة تأهيلهن.

ويصنف هذا التقرير التحديات التي تحول دون تحقيق المساواة بين الجنسين في العالم العربي في ثلاثة مواضيع رئيسية: عدم الاستقرار السياسي والتطرف، وهو السياق الذي يُتخذ فيه الأمن القومي ذريعة لتبرير تهميش قضايا المرأة؛ والتحيّز الجنساني في هيكليات الاقتصاد والعمل، حيث يؤدي التحيّز ضد المرأة في التعليم إلى تحيّر ضدها في هيكليات العمل، ما يدفعها نحو تخصصات ووظائف تُعدّ أكثر ملاءمة لدورها كزوجة وأم، وتتلقى في مقابلها أجوراً متدنية؛ وعقيدة الاستقطاب والفصل بين الجنسين، التي باتت راسخة في المشهد الاجتماعي والمعايير المؤسسية في المنطقة، ما يبرر صياغة التشريعات والسياسات التي تبقي المرأة في "موقعها الطبيعي" أي الحيز الخاص، فيما تتيح للرجل الوصول من دون أي قيود إلى الحيز العام.

ويقدم التقرير لمحة موجزة عن الممارسات الجيدة والواعدة التي طبقت أو يجري اختبارها في المنطقة، ومنها تبادل المعلومات الذي هو من الممارسات المعتادة للإسراع في إحراز التقدم وسد الفجوات بين البلدان والمناطق دون الإقليمية. وتؤكد الأدلة المستمدة من مختلف التدخلات الرامية إلى تنفيذ غايات الهدف 5 من أهداف التنمية المستدامة أن تمكين المرأة والنهوض بالمساواة بين الجنسين يتطلبان إرادة سياسية وتدابير مؤقتة لتحقيق الإنصاف.

وأبرز ما يخلص إليه هذا التقرير هو أن تمكين المرأة وتحقيق المساواة بين الجنسين يتطلبان تضافر الجهود، وإيلاء الأولوية إلى مشاركة المرأة اقتصادياً وسياسياً وتحريرها من العنف. ولعل أول خطوة نحو تمكين المرأة تقضي بمنحها حقوقاً متساوية من خلال التشريعات، إلا أن العدالة بين الجنسين لا يمكن أن تتحقق كاملة من دون تمكين جميع النساء من الحصول على حقوقهنّ. وهذا يتطلب إرادة سياسية وتوافقاً مجتمعياً، وذلك باعتماد نهج التشاور في الاتجاهين: من الأعلى إلى القاعدة، ومن القاعدة إلى الأعلى. كما أن إعادة النظر في التفسيرات الدينية الذكورية من خلال طرح تفسيرات أكثر توازناً ومساواة بين الرجل والمرأة تشكل محركاً هاماً لتحقيق المساواة بين الجنسين. هذا هو المطلب الرئيسي للجماعات النسائية في جميع أنحاء المنطقة. وأحرز عدد من البلدان العربية وغيرها (مثل إندونيسيا وماليزيا) تقدماً بالغاً في هذا المجال، في حين أن بلداناً أخرى لا تزال تجهد لتحقيقه.

ويخلص التقرير إلى التوصيات العامة والمواضيعية التالية التي سترفع إلى المجتمع الدولي، والجماعات النسائية، وصانعي السياسات.

التوصيات العامة

نسبة كبيرة من التقدم المحرز في تحقيق المساواة بين الجنسين في المنطقة تعود إلى ضغط المجتمع الدولي والمصادقة على الصكوك الدولية. ورغم التراجع والتحفّظات على بعض مواد هذه الصكوك، وببطء التقدم في تحقيق بعض الأهداف، يشهد معظم البلدان في المنطقة تغييراً في الاتجاه الصحيح.

التوصيات إلى المجتمع الدولي

- إقناع الحكومات بأهمية التقيّد بالتزاماتها الدولية وتقديم تقارير وطنية بانتظام وفي الوقت المناسب بشأن التقدم المحرز في تحقيق الغايات المتفق عليها؛
- تقديم المساعدة التقنية إلى المنظمات النسائية في صياغة تقارير موازية، وتشجيعها على التنسيق في ما بينها لإعداد تقرير موحد يمكن أن تستخدمه لمساءلة حكوماتها؛

- تقديم الدعم التقني والمالي لمعالجة قضايا المرأة عموماً، وتحديد أولويات الأنشطة والتدابير التي تعزز تمكين المرأة سياسياً واقتصادياً؛
- دعم الجهود التي تبذلها الحكومات والمجتمع المدني لمكافحة العنف ضد المرأة والفتاة، وسن التشريعات وصياغة السياسات الرامية إلى حماية المرأة، ومنع العنف الجنساني، وإعادة تأهيل ضحاياه؛
- تقديم الدعم التقني والمالي لتعزيز القدرات الإحصائية الوطنية في تنفيذ الدراسات الاستقصائية وإنتاج الإحصاءات المفصلة، لضمان المتابعة الفعالة لوضع المرأة ضمن الإطار الشامل لأهداف التنمية المستدامة.

ومع أن الحركة النسائية مجزأة في المنطقة وداخل البلدان العربية، أثمرت الأنشطة التي دأبت الجماعات النسائية على إنجازها تقدماً نحو النهوض بقضايا المرأة، حتى في الظروف الأكثر تقليدية. ولكن هذه المكاسب قد تتلاشى بسهولة، كما حصل في أعقاب انتفاضات عام 2011، ويمكن أن تُفوّض نهائياً ما لم تظل الجماعات النسائية بقطعة.

التوصيات إلى الجماعات النسائية

- اعتماد استراتيجيات وطنية حول النهوض بالمرأة، ودفع قضايا المرأة قدماً للتغلب على الحواجز التي تحول دون المشاركة الكاملة للمرأة في المجالات السياسية والاقتصادية؛
- تأييد تدابير الإنصاف اللازمة في المجالين السياسي والاقتصادي لتهيئة فرص متكافئة للمرأة؛
- العمل مع الرجال، وتوعيتهم بشأن قضايا الجنسين، وإشراكهم في النضال للنهوض بقضايا المرأة.

اللامساواة بين الجنسين لها كلفة اجتماعية ومالية وسياسية. فهي تكبل إمكانات المنطقة في تحقيق التنمية المستدامة. ويعتبر البنك الدولي أن المرأة مورد غير مستثمر في المنطقة، مع أنها تشكل نسبة 50 في المائة من السكان. والاستفادة من إمكاناتها في المجال السياسي سيثمر سلاماً وعدالة اجتماعية؛ والأمر سيان بالنسبة إلى المجال الاقتصادي الذي سيشهد ارتفاعاً في عائدات الاستثمار في خدمات التعليم والصحة في معظم البلدان. إذاً، فمعالجة اللامساواة بين الجنسين من خلال صياغة سياسات مراعية لقضايا الجنسين، بما في ذلك دمج هذا المنظور واتخاذ التدابير التي تحقق الإنصاف، هي السبيل الوحيد لتحقيق غايات أهداف التنمية المستدامة في المنطقة.

التوصيات إلى صانعي السياسات

- دمج قضايا الجنسين في الاستراتيجيات والميزانيات الوطنية والقطاعية، ومراقبة تنفيذها؛
- إنشاء آليات وطنية لتحقيق المساواة بين الجنسين ووحدات تكافؤ الفرص في الوزارات والبرلمانات، وتفعيلها وتعزيز دورها؛
- وضع أهداف وخطط عمل محددة زمنياً من أجل زيادة تمثيل المرأة في مواقع صنع القرار في التعيينات الوزارية والقضائية وفي هيئات القطاع العام؛
- تعزيز وصول المرأة إلى العدالة عن طريق استعراض التشريعات وتعديل الأحكام القانونية التي تميز ضد المرأة؛

- إنشاء مكاتب للمساعدة القانونية في محاكم الأسرة وتعزيز ارتباطها بالجهات التي تقدم خدمات غير قانونية للمرأة (مثل القروض الصغرى، والمشورة النفسية، وغيرها)؛
- تأييد الحملات الوطنية بشأن المساواة بين الجنسين وتمكين المرأة، مثل حملة "تاء مربوطة" في مصر؛
- دمج مفاهيم حقوق الإنسان والمساواة بين الجنسين في المناهج الدراسية؛
- إنشاء مرصد وطنية للعدالة الاجتماعية لتعزيز حقوق الفئات المهمشة، بما في ذلك النساء والفتيات، ولا سيما اللواتي يعشن في المناطق الريفية. وتتولى هذه المرصد مهام الرصد وتقديم التقارير عن جهود الحكومة والبرلمان ومجموعات حقوق الإنسان في تحسين التشريعات والسياسات وأنظمة تقديم الخدمات العامة من أجل تعزيز العدالة الاجتماعية. كما يمكن أن تتحول هذه المرصد إلى منصة لتوثيق الممارسات الجيدة المبتكرة وتبادلها في المنطقة والعالم.

التوصيات المواضيعية

المشاركة الاقتصادية للمرأة

- دعم ممارسات العمل المراعية للأسرة، بما في ذلك اعتماد دوام عمل مرن، ومراعاة المساواة بين الجنسين في التوظيف، ومنح إجازة الأبوة؛
- دعم عمليات الشراء المراعية للمساواة بين الجنسين؛
- دعم تطبيق الكوتا النسائية في شركات القطاع الخاص من خلال الحوافز الضريبية و/أو التأييد العلني. ولا بد من إعادة النظر في تجربة مصر مع "ختم المساواة بين الجنسين" قبل عام 2011، الذي مُنح للمؤسسات المشاركة كتأييد علني لجهودها في تحقيق الإنصاف بين الجنسين؛
- دعم إنشاء برنامج لتنمية المهارات في القطاعات العالية النمو، يستفيد منه عدد متساو من الرجال والنساء؛
- تنقيح قوانين العمل للاعتراف بعبء عمل المرأة غير المدفوع الأجر (مثل قانون ضمان العمالة الريفية في الهند)، وإعادة توزيع تكلفة الرعاية الأسرية بحيث لا تكون كلفة عمل المرأة باهظة جداً (مثل صندوق الأمومة في الأردن)؛
- دعم التدابير الرامية إلى زيادة الوصول إلى الخدمات العامة ومطابقتها مع الحاجات المتباينة للنساء.

المشاركة السياسية للمرأة

- دعم مشاركة المرأة في الانتخابات المحلية والوطنية من خلال تطبيق الكوتا السياسية، واعتماد بطاقات الهوية، والتدريب وتنمية القدرات، وإنشاء صناديق دعم لتشجيع النساء على الترشح للانتخابات؛
- وضع أدوات لرصد مراعاة المساواة بين الجنسين في الترشيحات والانتخابات، وإشراك المجتمع المدني والجماعات النسائية في الرصد وتقديم التقارير عن الانتخابات؛
- زيادة تمثيل المرأة في المناصب الحكومية الرفيعة المستوى لكي يرى الرأي العام مدى جدية الحكومات في تعزيز المساواة والعدالة بين الجنسين؛

- إصدار قوانين انتخابية تنص على ضرورة تحديد كوتا نسائية في اللوائح الحزبية، ووضع قواعد صريحة بشأن التراتبية، وفرض جزاءات قانونية على المخالفين.

العنف ضد المرأة والفتاة

- سن وتنقيح تشريعات تجرم العنف ضد المرأة والفتاة لضمان تعريفات واضحة ووضع آليات فعالة لإنفاذها؛
- توفير خدمات الدعم الاجتماعي ومرافق الإيواء الكافية لضحايا العنف الأسري؛
- إنشاء وحدات من الشرطة للتصدي لحالات التحرش الجنسي، وتطوير قدرتها على الاستجابة؛
- دعم المبادرات التي تتخذها الحكومة والمجتمع المدني لمعالجة العنف ضد المرأة، مثل "برنامج المدن الآمنة" و"خريطة التحرش" في مصر، و"خارطة قاومي التحرش" في لبنان؛
- دعم إطلاق حملات وطنية وتنفيذها لتتقيف الرأي العام بشأن الآثار السلبية والتكاليف التي يتكبدها المجتمع والاقتصاد جرّاء العنف ضد المرأة والفتاة، بما في ذلك ختان الإناث، والعنف الأسري، وزواج الأطفال؛
- حشد المؤسسات الدينية وإشراكها في نشر الرسائل حول منافع تنظيم الأسرة. وعمان خير مثال على المشاركة الفعالة للسلطات الدينية في تثقيف الرأي العام وإقناعه بأن المبادعة بين الولادات لا تتنافى مع الدين.

Executive summary

The aim of the present report is to provide a forward-looking analysis of possible approaches or good practices adopted by Arab countries to mainstream gender in public policy and decision-making. A review of progress achieved over the past 10 years was undertaken using the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets. The review indicated that despite disparities between and within countries, significant progress was achieved in the areas of education and health. However, while access to education has improved, there are concerns in most countries about the quality and streams of education, and their alignment with the requirements of the labour market. The 2016 Arab Human Development Report notes the mismatch between the education that young people, especially women, receive on the one hand, and the requirements of the labour market on the other. Similarly, the Arab region has made significant progress in improving the overall health and life expectancy of populations and in reducing maternal mortality, yet this progress is not even across all countries and deficiencies in the provision of health services exist within most Arab countries, but especially in poorer and/or conflict-ridden countries.

The biggest challenge that countries face is the economic and political representation of women, which remains below par in the region. Findings suggest that economic and political participation are the domain of men. Yet, unless countries address this gap, the region's ability to realize the SDGs, specifically SDGs 5 and 8, will be compromised. A number of countries have intervened through legislation and affirmative action to improve women's participation in economic and political life, but greater efforts sustained by political will are needed to overcome the structural obstacles and cultural biases to women's equal representation in significant decision-making spaces. The issue of unpaid care is still unresolved in the region, but the time-use surveys conducted in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia represent a critical step towards discussing its valuation. More government lobbying is needed in the region to invest in public services, to provide social protection policies for women who are doing unpaid work, and to raise awareness about the economic and social value of such work.

Violence against women (VAW) and girls is a societal scourge with economic and political costs, yet it has risen since 2011 because of protracted conflict, wars, precarious security conditions, and the economic recession affecting certain Arab countries. Violence against women includes domestic violence, honour killings, child marriage, forced prostitution and trafficking (sexual slavery), sexual harassment and rape. Female genital mutilation remains a serious problem in some Arab countries, namely Egypt, Mauritania, Somalia and the Sudan. Child marriage exists in all Arab countries, but its prevalence is highest in the poorest countries and in conflict areas. It is estimated that nearly 30 per cent of women in the region have experienced domestic violence perpetrated by husbands or male relatives. Violence against women is also used as a weapon of war, as is the case in Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

A number of countries in the region have passed legislation and strategies to combat violence against women. A ground-breaking study in Egypt shows the staggering direct and indirect economic costs incurred by the country as a result of reported incidences of such violence. The importance of this study is that it quantifies the detrimental impact of violence against women on the economy, highlighting the need for Governments and the international community to develop decisive policies to pre-empt such violence, and to protect and rehabilitate its survivors.

The present report classifies the challenges facing gender equality in the Arab world under the following three main themes: political instability and radicalization, a context in which national security is invoked to justify sidelining the women's agenda; gender bias in the economy and employment structures, a context in which gendered education leads to gendered employment structures with women pushed into streams of education and work that are considered more suited to their role as wives and mothers, and accordingly are less remunerated; and an ideology of gender polarization and separate spheres that has become ingrained into the region's social landscape and its institutional norms, justifying legislation and policies that keep women in their 'natural space', the private sphere, while allowing men unfettered access to the public sphere.

The report provides a synopsis of good and promising practices that have been implemented or are being tested in the region. Exchanging information is a standard practice to expedite progress and close gaps among countries and subregions. Evidence from the various interventions on the targets under SDG 5 confirms that the empowerment of women and the advancement of gender equality require political will and the institution of temporary equity measures.

The main conclusion of the present report is that women's empowerment and gender equality require concurrent efforts, while prioritizing women's economic and political participation, and freedom from violence. Establishing equal rights for women through legislation is a first step towards their empowerment; however, gender justice cannot be fully realized without enabling all women to access their rights. This requires both political will and societal consensus: top-bottom and bottom-up approaches. Furthermore, challenging patriarchal interpretations of religion through more balanced egalitarian interpretations is an important lever for gender equality. This has been a key demand of women groups throughout the region. A number of Arab and other countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, have made headway, while others are still struggling.

The report concludes with general and thematic recommendations to the international community, women's groups and policymakers.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

The objective of the present report is to review the progress of the Arab region over the past 10 years in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. The aim is to provide a forward-looking analysis of possible approaches or good practices adopted by Arab countries to mainstream gender in public policy and decision-making, and their relevance to the ability of the region to fulfil its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) commitments. Particular emphasis is placed on efforts to protect and promote the inclusion of vulnerable groups, rural women, women heads of households, survivors of violence, the disabled and the displaced. Accordingly, the report provides recommendations on enhancing the performance and effectiveness of multi-stakeholder partnerships for gender equality and sustainable development. The report is regional in scope, covering the 22 Arab countries.

B. METHODOLOGY

The information and analysis presented in the present report relies heavily on secondary sources available on the Internet and on websites of international and national organizations, including non-governmental organizations, as well as resources provided by experts and donors in the region. Secondary sources include studies, reports and findings from surveys and censuses, case studies, articles and position papers. A number of face-to-face and Skype interviews were also conducted with experts and representatives of women groups in the region, which provided invaluable insight into the situation of Arab women, policy gaps and priorities, and the challenges and constraints that hinder women's effective participation in public life.

The analysis and recommendations presented in the report are based on a synthesis of the information collected from desktop research and interviews. However, while efforts were made to ensure a comprehensive review of the situation of women in the region and a balanced presentation of Arab countries and sub-regions, this was not always possible owing to a lack of data.

C. BACKGROUND ON GENDER EQUALITY IN THE REGION

The 2016 Global Gender Gap Report¹ indicates that the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has yet to close its gender gap of just under 40 per cent. It has the greatest gender inequality compared with other regions, including East Asia and the Pacific, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Although some progress has been made, it is uneven across countries, with Algeria, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates as top performers, and the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen ranking bottom. The progress achieved in the region spans all sub-indices, but the least progress is in economic participation and opportunity and political empowerment, as is the case globally.

The Global Gender Gap Report and the final Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Report² emphasize that all countries, particularly those in regions where progress continues to bypass women, must do more to close the gender gap. The 2015 MDG report affirms that women globally continue to be disadvantaged in accessing work, controlling economic assets, and participating in significant decision-making spaces in the public and private sectors. These disparities are more pronounced in some regions, including the Arab region, where a patriarchal culture prevails with gender stereotypes inhibiting the achievement of gender equality. In addition, the political instability and economic deceleration that followed the 2011 political developments have led to the deterioration of women's conditions in a number of countries. In Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan and Yemen, women continue to suffer disproportionately compared with men from the consequences of protracted conflicts. In occupied Palestine, gender-based violence is on the rise, with women's

¹ Available from http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR16/WEF_Global_Gender_Gap_Report_2016.pdf.

² Available from [www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20\(July%201\).pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf).

organizations reporting increased incidents of related deaths.³ In Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, women have seen their hard won gains threatened by conservative forces seeking to reclaim whatever public space women had secured and push them back into the private sphere under the control of male relatives.

The MDG report concludes that to rectify such injustice, it is important to understand the context that nurtures it, while addressing in the new development agenda the gaps in gender equality that were not addressed by the MDGs. The SDGs and the 2030 Agenda offer an expanded and more nuanced interpretation of gender, which recognizes the complexity and contextually specific nature of gender discrimination. Developing the 2030 Agenda entailed extensive global, regional and national consultations to ensure its localization, and enhance the commitment of regional and national stakeholders to the achievement of its Goals and targets. Its approach is both holistic and transformative, placing gender equality and women's empowerment at the centre of sustainable development. In this context, gender equality is considered a goal in itself as well as a means of accelerating progress. Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls embeds women's participation in development – they are both actors and beneficiaries within the context of gender justice and human security. Ignoring women's rights and failing to harness their potential as actors in development would be a missed opportunity, with grave political, social and economic costs for the Arab region.

II. INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL COMMITMENTS TO ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY AND MAINSTREAMING A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

A. WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY IN INTERNATIONAL TREATIES

The 2030 Agenda is not the first international instrument advancing gender equality. International efforts to promote and monitor progress on this front began decades ago. The 1945 United Nations Charter on Human Rights was the first international instrument establishing the principle of equality between men and women. Although only four of the 160 signatories were women, they succeeded in including women's rights in the founding document of the United Nations, whose preamble affirms “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of Nations large and small”.⁴ Accordingly, the Commission on the Status of Women was established in 1946.

The 1954 Convention on the Political Rights of Women emphasizes women's political rights. It has articles on women's rights vote (article I), to be eligible for election (article II), and to hold public office (article III), with each article ending with the specification: “all on equal terms with men, without any discrimination”.⁵ This Convention was followed by a number of additional conventions, covenants, resolutions and declarations asserting women's rights and the promotion of equality between women and men in all aspects of life.

The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a landmark document as it includes the most comprehensive incorporation of women's rights. Moreover, it provides a framework for measures, including legislation, which need to be taken by State parties to ensure gender equality in opportunities and outcomes. All Arab countries, except Somalia and the Sudan, have ratified or acceded to CEDAW. However, only Libya and Tunisia have ratified its optional protocol. Oman, Qatar and Palestine were the last Arab countries to ratify the Convention in 2006, 2009 and 2014, respectively.⁶ Nevertheless, the numerous reservations entered by countries are considered by human rights and women

³ Available from www.yourmiddleeast.com/opinion/the-women-of-palestine-caught-between-the-occupation-and-patriarchy-31602.

⁴ Available from <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/preamble/index.html>.

⁵ Available from www.google.se/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0ahUKEwjFw6mrn8bQAhXnd5oKHRpDD5kQFgghMAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.un.org.ua%2Fimages%2FConvention_on_the_Political_Rights_of_Women_eng1.pdf&usq=AFQjCNG6_YheAyT2Ifkief20MZ0lsb6DVw&bvm=bv.139782543.d.bGs.

⁶ Available from <https://treaties.un.org>.

activists to defeat the purpose of the Convention. Most reservations are concerned with articles deemed incompatible with Islamic jurisprudence (Sharia) or with national sovereignty.

The 1985 Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women was an outcome of the United Nations Third World Conference on Women, reviewing progress made since declaring 1976-1985 the decade for women. The Conference mandate was to provide concrete measures to overcome obstacles to achieving the decade's goals. The Forward Looking Strategies therefore emphasized violence against women, and the role of women in peace and development. Accordingly, the first United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women was appointed at the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993, followed in December 1993 by the adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (resolution 48/104).⁷ This breakthrough Declaration provided the first unified definition of violence against women: "any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life". The Declaration states that gender-based violence is rooted in structural relationships of inequality between women and men, and that it thrives on impunity.⁸ In this context, the Arab Strategy for Combating Violence Against Women (2011-2020) was developed by the Arab Women Organization to assist members of the League of Arab States in developing national action plans for combating violence against women. The Strategy builds on international and regional perspectives related to combating such violence and promoting women's human rights.⁹

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action provides an actionable framework to accelerate the implementation of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. It identifies the following 12 critical areas of concern and specific actions to be taken by Governments, the international community, civil society and the private sector: poverty, education and training, health, violence, armed conflict, the economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights, media, the environment, and the girl child.¹⁰ Arab countries submit their national reports every five years indicating progress made or actions taken to address these areas of concern. Nevertheless, the outcome document of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) acknowledged that despite progress made by most countries on many developmental fronts, the realization of gender equality has been lagging globally but more so in certain regions, including the Arab region. The outcome document stresses the international community's commitment to accelerating the implementation of CEDAW, Agenda 21, the Beijing Platform for Action and the United Nations Millennium Declaration through technical and financial support measures. A whole section of the outcome document is dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment as a stand-alone theme and as a cross-cutting issue. Temporary quotas to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in all spheres, and the removal of barriers to their full and equal participation in decision-making are highlighted as preconditions for sustainable development.¹¹

The SDGs build on lessons learned from the MDGs and other international mandates, while striving to address gaps identified through various reports assessing the effectiveness of the millennium development agenda and reflecting on the way forward. The overarching principle of the 2030 Agenda is "leaving no one behind". To operationalize and localize the SDGs, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission (ESCWA) has established a subcommittee, in partnership with the League of Arab States and the regional offices of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). The

⁷ Available from www.5wvc.org/conference_background/1985_WCW.html.

⁸ See www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm.

⁹ See www.arabwomenorg.org/Content/Publications/VAWENG.pdf.

¹⁰ See www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/plat1.htm#statement.

¹¹ See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/rio20.html>.

Intergovernmental Sub-Committee on Gender and the SDGs is part of the ESCWA Committee on Women,¹² a biannual intergovernmental committee comprising Arab government representatives and gender specialists to advance the implementation of various aspects of gender equality in the 2030 Agenda.

B. REGIONAL INSTRUMENTS ON GENDER EQUALITY

In addition to international instruments, there are a number of regional instruments promoting women's rights, notably the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, adopted in 2003 by the African Union. It emphasizes the importance of promoting women's empowerment and women's rights as "inalienable, interdependent and indivisible human rights", and reaffirms the commitment of the African Union to women's rights as enshrined in international and regional instruments. The document, which is known as the Maputo Protocol, includes 32 articles guaranteeing women's equal rights in the public sphere and their autonomy in reproductive health decisions. It also calls for an end to harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and cutting.¹³ The Maputo Protocol entered into force in 2005 following ratification by the required number of member States. Among the Arab countries that are members of the African Union, only Egypt has not signed or ratified the Protocol because of reservations regarding some of the marriage and divorce clauses (articles 6 and 7).¹⁴ Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, the Sudan and Tunisia have either only signed, or signed and ratified the Protocol.

The Regional Strategy for the Protection of Arab Women builds on and refers to regional and international human rights instruments and the international policy framework on women peace and security. It was developed in 2012 by the secretariat of the League of Arab States and the Arab Women Organization. Its vision is "to guarantee the right of Arab women to be protected from all forms of gender-based violence in times of war and peace, to attain their full rights without any form of discrimination, and to enhance their role in a society where justice and equality prevail". The overall objective is "to develop a general Arab framework that creates a gender-sensitive environment that will stimulate other Arab parties concerned and decision-makers at the Arab regional level and at national levels in the various Arab countries to undertake concrete steps to protect women against all forms of gender-based violence to which they are exposed, particularly in wartime, occupation and armed conflicts". In 2016, the League and UN Women organized the first ministerial conference on Women and Achieving Peace and Security in the Arab Region. Conference participants from 18 Arab countries discussed the implementation of the regional strategy and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), concluding with a number of recommendations, including the provision of technical assistance to Arab countries to develop their national action plans. Other recommendations focused on the importance of developing monitoring mechanisms to enhance accountability for the women, peace and security agenda, and of ensuring at least 30 per cent representation of women in legislative bodies, decision-making circles and peace negotiation teams. The closing statement urged the international community to support the development of reliable reporting mechanisms on sexual violence, and better access to services and medical and psychological care for VAW survivors and for refugees and internally displaced women and girls.¹⁵

¹² The Committee on Women was established pursuant to ESCWA resolution 240 (XXII) of 17 April 2003, endorsed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2003/9 of 18 July 2004.

¹³ Available from www.achpr.org/files/instruments/women-protocol/achpr_instr_proto_women_eng.pdf.

¹⁴ See www.peaceau.org/uploads/special-rapporteur-on-rights-of-women-in-africa-presentation-for-csw-implementation.pdf.

¹⁵ See www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/9/ministerial-conference-on-women-and-achieving-peace-and-security-in-the-arab-region.

III. REGIONAL TRENDS IN GENDER EQUALITY

A. GENDER EQUALITY IN POLICY AND PRACTICE

The conclusions of a 2015 regional report prepared by ESCWA, in cooperation with the UN Women and the League of Arab States, for the Arab High-Level Conference on Beijing+20: Towards Justice and Equality for Women in the Arab Region, are very revealing. The report, which synthesizes 21 national reports submitted by Arab member States, notes that while progress to advance women's empowerment and women's rights has been recorded, it has been slow with several setbacks. These setbacks were caused by unstable security conditions, wars and acts of terrorism in some countries; while in others, a lack of technical and financial resources and poor institutional performance has hindered the progress of the women's agenda. Moreover, the values of masculinity and patriarchy that prevail in the region, and the radicalization of population groups, often through misinterpretations of religion, hinder efforts to empower women and increase their agency.¹⁶

Significant progress has been achieved across the region on two fronts: education and health (MDGs 2 and 5). However, the economic and political representation of women remains a challenge, appropriately described as “the paradox of gender inequality in the MENA region”.¹⁷ It is a definite obstacle to the region's progress in realizing SDG 5 on “Gender equality and the empowerment of women” and SDG 8 on “Promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”. The present report maintains that economic and political participation are still considered the domain of men. Despite measures taken by Governments and efforts by human rights and women's groups, the representation of women in public life, especially in decision-making spaces, remains below par throughout the region. Social, cultural and economic restrictions explain to some extent the minimal presence of women in decision-making spaces; however, other reasons include the politics of authoritarianism, the deeply entrenched gender bias of the State apparatus, and the discriminatory organizational culture of the business sector.¹⁸

Violence against women and girls is another challenge in the region that is on the rise, with significant human, social and economic costs. This is especially the case in fragile and transition countries where economic conditions are difficult, and in war-torn countries where armed conflict causes great suffering for women and girls. However, the phenomenon also occurs in relatively stable countries. Unless it is effectively addressed through targeted prevention, protection and rehabilitation measures, it will hinder the region's progress towards achieving SDG 5 and SDG 16 on “Promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies”, including target 16.3 on ensuring the rule of law and equal access to justice for all, and target 16.10 on protecting fundamental freedoms.

The following section looks closely at where the region stands with regard to the targets of SDG 5.

TARGET 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

Regarding education, most Arab countries have taken measures to achieve universal primary education and to prevent gender-based discrimination in both access and enrolment, bringing the region's average net enrolment rate to 88.4 per cent, which is close to the global average of 89.1 per cent. Nevertheless, the situation is not so positive in all countries. Access and retention remain problematic in Mauritania and the Sudan, and

¹⁶ Available from www.lasportal.org/ar/sectors/dep/Documents/Report%20on%20the%20Implementation%20of%20the%20Beijing%20platform%20for%20Action%20Twenty%20Years%20Later.pdf.

¹⁷ See <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/546801468299700356/Opening-doors-gender-equality-in-the-Middle-East-and-North-Africa>.

¹⁸ See www.devex.com/news/how-to-advance-gender-equality-and-make-successes-last-83133.

ongoing wars and unstable security conditions in Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen are affecting all children's education, but especially that of girls.¹⁹

Significant gains have also been made in the enrolment of both sexes at the secondary and tertiary education levels (60 per cent in Tunisia, around 53 per cent in Jordan and close to 50 per cent in Egypt) but serious disparities remain between countries, rural and urban settings, and the sexes.²⁰ Girls are less likely to enrol because of child marriage and distant education facilities, and because families do not perceive a return on the investment of their children's education, particularly their daughters', in terms of opportunities for personal advancement and/or contribution to the household economy.²¹

As for literacy, an estimated 97 million people in the region, 60 per cent of whom are women, are illiterate.²² Some countries have high illiteracy rates, while others have made significant progress in eradicating illiteracy and achieving parity. The illiteracy rate in the Arab region stands at 19 per cent, which is low compared with other regions.²³ Literacy among women is higher in the Gulf region and in Algeria and Jordan where sizeable investments have been made to combat illiteracy. It is lower in countries with unstable political and economic situations and high population growth, such as Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, the Sudan and Yemen; Mauritania has the lowest literacy rate of all Arab countries at 62.6 per cent.²⁴ The gender bias against women in literacy is highest in Yemen (30 per cent), Mauritania (20 per cent) and Egypt (16 per cent), affecting the ability of these countries to meet target 4.6 of SDG 4 on ensuring that both men and women achieve literacy and numeracy.²⁵

Evidence from various countries indicates that progress in expanding access to education and literacy is speeded by policy and institutional reform and by equity measures. Examples include measures taken by the Moroccan Government to address the problem of out-of-school children and drop outs, which is yielding positive results, especially among vulnerable and rural populations. Other examples are the Community Schools Initiative and the One Classroom Schools for Girls implemented in Egypt by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), in partnership with the Egyptian Ministry of Education. The Saudi Government has established formal literacy centres, resulting in the near eradication of illiteracy in the country.²⁶

Although access to education has improved, in many countries, there are concerns related to the quality and streams of education, and their alignment with the requirements of the labour market. The 2016 Arab Human Development Report notes the mismatch between the education that young people, especially women, receive on the one hand, and the requirements of the labour market on the other. More women than men are concentrated in traditional academic streams that do not meet market demands, and preference is given to men when jobs are scarce because of poor economic growth. This is true worldwide but more so in the Arab region, where employment is still considered the domain of men. For example, women's unemployment rates exceed those of men by over 15 per cent in Egypt, and 12 per cent in Jordan and in Tunisia.²⁷ Unless measures are

¹⁹ See www.knowledge4all.com/en/257/Publications/Education-for-All--Regional-Synthesis-Report-of-the-2015-National-Reviews-in-the-Arab-States-Region.

²⁰ See www.ebrd.com/gender/voice-agency.pdf.

²¹ Ibid.

²² See www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140210-alecso-report-97-million-illiterates-in-arab-countries/.

²³ See www.knowledge4all.com/en/257/Publications/Education-for-All--Regional-Synthesis-Report-of-the-2015-National-Reviews-in-the-Arab-States-Region.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ UNESCO Institute for Statistics. September 2015.

²⁶ See www.knowledge4all.com/en/257/Publications/Education-for-All--Regional-Synthesis-Report-of-the-2015-National-Reviews-in-the-Arab-States-Region.

²⁷ See www.ebrd.com/gender/voice-agency.pdf.

taken to improve the quality of education and encourage more women into the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, Arab countries will not report significant progress on SDG 5 or SDG 4 on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, especially target 4.4 on increasing the number of adults with relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship; and target 4.5 on eliminating gender disparities in education.

The Arab region has made significant progress in improving the overall health and life expectancy of its populations. An ESCWA regional synthesis report indicates that most countries have made advances in health service provision for women, thereby reducing maternal mortality rates.²⁸ However, while progress is significant, it is not even. In countries like Mauritania, Yemen and the Sudan, maternal mortality remains very high at 626, 216 and 148 per 100,000 live births, respectively. In Gulf countries, however, national maternal mortality estimates are comparable with the most advanced countries. In Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, maternal mortality rates are lower than the 2010 average of 15 for ‘very high human development’ countries. The rates of other Arab countries are within the ranges of ‘high and medium human development’ countries.²⁹

Deficiencies in the provision of health services exist within most Arab countries, but especially in poorer and/or conflict-affected countries. In Egypt, for example, skilled health personnel attend 97 per cent of births in rich households compared with 55 per cent in poor households.³⁰ Similar inequalities are reported in the Sudan and Yemen.³¹ These disparities affect countries’ ability to achieve progress towards SDG3 on ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all at all ages.

TARGET 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

Violence against women and girls has risen since 2011 because of protracted conflict, wars, precarious security conditions, and the economic recession affecting certain Arab countries. It takes many forms, including domestic violence, honour killings, child marriage, forced prostitution and trafficking (sexual slavery), sexual harassment, rape and female genital mutilation. Nearly 30 per cent of women in the region have experienced violence in the private sphere, with acts of violence perpetrated by husband or male relatives.³² For example, in Saudi Arabia, a study conducted in 2009 revealed that 57.7 per cent of women reported a lifetime of spousal abuse.³³ In Jordan, 44.7 per cent of women report lifetime spousal abuse.³⁴ In Egypt, 30 per cent of women experience spousal violence, ranging from physical to sexual and psychological abuse.³⁵ In Morocco a study conducted in 2009 by the Haut Commissariat au Plan indicates that 63 per cent of women aged 18 to 64 in Morocco have been subjected to violence; in over 50 per cent of these cases, women were subjected to violence by their husbands, but only 3 per cent reported it.³⁶ In conflict-affected and war-torn countries, violence against women is used as a weapon of war. In Yemen, men have left to fight, leaving women and children exposed to violence. In 2015, 5,866 cases of violence, including rape, sexual harassment

²⁸ See www.lasportal.org/ar/sectors/dep/Documents/Report%20on%20the%20Implementation%20of%20the%20Beijing%20platform%20for%20Action%20Twenty%20Years%20Later.pdf.

²⁹ See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/maternal-mortality-ratio-deaths-100000-live-births>.

³⁰ See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2283ESCWA_Women%20and%20Gender%20Equality%20in%20the%20Arab%20Region_Beijing20.pdf.

³¹ Ibid.

³² See www.theArabweekly.com/Society/7494/Alarming-rise-of-violence-against-women-in-Arab-region.

³³ See www.repository.law.indiana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=etd.

³⁴ See <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3061851/>.

³⁵ See <http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/fr302/fr302.pdf>.

³⁶ Available in French from www.hcp.ma/downloads/Violence-a-l-egard-des-femmes_t13077.html.

and child marriage, were reported in Yemen.³⁷ Widespread and systematic sexual violence is also widespread in the Syrian Arab Republic, where over 4,000 cases of rape and sexual mutilation have been reported to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, and in areas controlled by the Islamic State in Iraq. Thousands of displaced Iraqi women have been forced to work as prostitutes in neighbouring countries.³⁸ In Libya, there are reports of Islamic State and Ansar El Sharia fighters forcing women into marriage.³⁹ In these countries, women who want to participate in political and economic life face threats of violence and kidnapping.⁴⁰

In Egypt, a 2015 study on the economic cost of gender-based violence notes the prevalence of particular forms of violence against women, namely domestic violence, sexual harassment and female genital mutilation. According to the study, almost 8 million women between the ages of 18 to 34 suffered from violence at the hands of their companion or spouse, individuals in close surroundings, or strangers in public spaces in 2014. The study estimates the annual direct and indirect costs of the reported incidences of violence at 2.17 billion Egyptian pounds.⁴¹

A number of Arab countries have passed legislation and strategies to combat violence against women. In Lebanon, a law on the protection of women and all family members from violence in the family was enacted in 2014 criminalizing domestic/spousal violence.⁴² Bahrain, Jordan and Saudi Arabia have also passed legislation to address this phenomenon.⁴³ However, the effectiveness of legislation and strategies is often undermined by narrow definitions, weak enforcement mechanisms, the reluctance to report cases of violence, and the absence of effective support services. In addition, there are a number of cultural and educational variables that determine what constitutes violence and when it is justified. For example, a 2015 study on costing violence against women in Egypt states that women believe that spousal violence is justified under specific circumstances, such as going out without the husband's permission, neglecting the children, or refusing to have sex.⁴⁴ A study of 112 men and 118 women in Saudi Arabia indicated that 75 per cent of respondents believed that physical punishment is normal and acceptable for Saudi families.⁴⁵ The concept of marital rape is not recognized by any Arab country and, accordingly, is not addressed in legislation.

Unless Arab countries undertake constitutional and legal reform and develop national strategies informed by an understanding of the economic cost of violence at the national level, the Arab region will not meet its commitment to target 5.2 and to most of the SDG goals, since violence against women affects the entire society.

TARGET 5.3: Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

Child marriage exists in all Arab countries, but its prevalence is highest in the poorest and in conflict-affected countries. Child marriage has severe health and emotional consequences. Early childbearing and childbirth can result in maternal mortality, a leading cause of death for girls aged 15-19 in low- and middle-income countries.⁴⁶ Babies born to teenage mothers are up to 80 per cent more likely to die within their first

³⁷ See <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1611178.pdf>.

³⁸ See www.reuters.com/article/us-arab-women-factbox-idUSBRE9AB00I20131112.

³⁹ See <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1611178.pdf>.

⁴⁰ See www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/five_years_after_the_arab_spring.pdf.

⁴¹ See <http://egypt.unfpa.org/publications/economic-cost-gender-based-violence-survey-egypt-2015>.

⁴² See www.socialwatch.org/node/11599.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ See <http://egypt.unfpa.org/publications/economic-cost-gender-based-violence-survey-egypt-2015>.

⁴⁵ See www.repository.law.indiana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=etd.

⁴⁶ See <http://egypt.unfpa.org/publications/economic-cost-gender-based-violence-survey-egypt-2015>.

year than those born to mothers aged 20-29.⁴⁷ In Egypt, teenage childbearing rose from 9 per cent in 2005, to 10 per cent in 2008, and to 11 per cent in 2014.⁴⁸ Child marriages often deprive girls of their right to education, and the possibility of working and becoming financially independent. In Yemen, almost two-thirds of marriages occur before girls are 18.⁴⁹ In Somalia, 45 per cent of girls are married before 18 and 8 per cent before 15.⁵⁰ Child marriage existed in the Syrian Arab Republic before the start of the conflict; nonetheless, the Secretary General's report notes that "the rate of underage marriage among Syrian refugee girls hosted in neighbouring Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey has more than doubled since the beginning of the crisis (from 12 per cent to 26 per cent) owing to fears of sexual violence, lack of access to education and economic hardship".⁵¹

Reports indicate a rise in the number of child brides among refugees.⁵² In Egypt, although child marriage is reportedly decreasing, 21 per cent of women aged 20-24 were married before the age of 18, while 12 per cent of those aged 18-19 years old were married before the age of 18, and 2 per cent of girls were married before age 15.⁵³ In 2012, conservative forces in the new Government proposed draft legislation to reduce the minimum age of marriage for girls to 9 years old. The National Council for Women and activists were quick to react and this proposal did not see light. In 2013-2014, the National Population Council developed a national strategy aiming to reduce child marriage in Egypt by 50 per cent by the end of 2019.⁵⁴ However, the strategy had not been activated. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is currently working with government authorities, including the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, to support its activation.

Despite the efforts of various government and civil society organizations to address harmful practices against women, female genital mutilation and cutting continues to prevail in a number of Arab countries. According to UNFPA, an estimated 200 million girls and women alive today have been cut, most of who are from sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab region.⁵⁵ A 2013 UNICEF report estimates that 125 million women in sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab region have undergone female genital mutilation.⁵⁶ The prevalence of the practice is highest in Egypt, Somalia and the Sudan, moderate in Mauritania, and low in Iraq, Oman and Yemen where it is only practised by certain population groups or in certain regions.⁵⁷ Most Arab countries, including high-prevalence countries, have legislation prohibiting the practice, and national data indicate that the practice is declining. In Mauritania, the law bans the practice on minors and in government health facilities.⁵⁸ In Egypt, in 2016, article 242 of the penal code was amended to impose a stricter prison sentence for perpetrators. Under the new amendment, practitioners committing this crime can be imprisoned between five and seven years, rather than the previous penalty of three months to two years.⁵⁹ However, evidence from various countries indicates that the effectiveness of constitutional clauses or legislation alone is limited.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ See <http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/fr302/fr302.pdf>.

⁴⁹ See www.unfpa.org/news/families-increasingly-resort-child-marriage-yemen%E2%80%99s-conflict-grinds#sthash.Uyb8RJ8J.dpuf.

⁵⁰ See www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/somalia/.

⁵¹ See <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1611178.pdf>.

⁵² See www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/syrian-arab-republic/.

⁵³ See <http://egypt.unfpa.org/publications/economic-cost-gender-based-violence-survey-egypt-2015>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ <http://www.unfpa.org/resources/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-frequently-asked-questions>.

⁵⁶ See www.unicef.org/publications/index_69875.html.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ See www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/egypt-new-law-enhancing-the-penalties-for-fgm-approved-by-parliament/.

To address target 5.3 on eradicating harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, countries affected should enact both legislation and measures to raise awareness of their adverse effects, and dispel any misconceptions concerning the link between female genital mutilation and religion.⁶⁰

TARGET 5.4: Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

While both women and men suffer from poverty and economic recessions, women across the world tend to be the poorer sex because of gender discrimination in work opportunities and salary, and access to financial services and technology, among other things. However, in the Arab region, women's situation is direr, especially in low and low middle-income countries such as Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen, and in countries such as Egypt, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia where the economy has severely deteriorated because of uprisings and armed conflict. Furthermore, the rural-urban divide is biased against rural residents in general, and rural women in particular. A high percentage of illiterate people are from rural areas, and most are women. Rural women have limited access to basic services, technology, information and networks. Moreover, their social mobility is hindered by their inability to access justice, and to exercise property rights.

Access to resources is also a major factor, the lack of which increases poverty among women. In a number of countries, there are regions where customary law and social pressure dictate that women cede their inheritance to their brothers or uncles. This is the case in villages in Upper Egypt and in certain regions of Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia.⁶¹

The Arab region has the highest gender unemployment gap.⁶² Only 25 per cent of working-age women participate in the labour market – either employed or looking for work.⁶³ The economic participation of women remains very low in the region, mainly because of gender-related biases in the economic structure of employment. This is the case in a number of Arab countries, including Algeria (16.3 per cent), Jordan (13.2 per cent) and Yemen (10 per cent).⁶⁴ Women's economic participation is highest in countries where there is a political will to improve gender balance in the work force, and where significant measures are in place to improve the professional environment for women. Such countries include Kuwait (48 per cent) and Bahrain (47 per cent) and, to a lesser extent, Iraq (38 per cent), Qatar (35 per cent) and Morocco (27 per cent).⁶⁵ However, even in those countries the majority of women are absorbed into the public sector. Saudi Arabia recently launched Vision 2030, which aims to increase women's participation in the labour force from 22 per cent to 30 per cent. It is considering the measures required to realize this objective, mainly through the private sector.⁶⁶

Women are disproportionately represented in certain sectors, such as in agriculture (Egypt and Morocco) and in low paid occupations, including in the public sector (Egypt), non-trade services (Egypt and Jordan) and in informal or unpaid family work.⁶⁷ In Yemen, for example, an estimated 80 per cent of agricultural labour

⁶⁰ See www.unicef.org/publications/index_69875.html.

⁶¹ See <https://s3.amazonaws.com/ipri2015/MENA+case+study+final.pdf>.

⁶² See www.ilo.org/gender/Informationresources/Publications/WCMS_457317/lang--de/index.htm.

⁶³ See www.ft.com/reports/women-arab-awakening.

⁶⁴ See www.lasportal.org/ar/sectors/dep/Documents/Report%20on%20the%20Implementation%20of%20the%20Beijing%20platform%20for%20Action%20Twenty%20Years%20Later.pdf.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ See <http://vision2030.gov.sa/en/goals>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

on smallholdings is unpaid family work carried out by women.⁶⁸ A time-use survey conducted in Egypt, and recently released by the Central Authority for Public Mobilization and Statistics, confirms that 90 per cent of women aged 30–49 are engaged in unpaid work compared with only 26 per cent of men in the same age bracket. Moreover, women spend approximately five hours a day doing such work, compared with under two hours for men.⁶⁹ Other countries (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia) that have conducted time-use surveys show similar trends, with women spending five hours or more doing unpaid work compared with less than an hour for men.⁷⁰ These time-use surveys are a first step towards meeting target 5.4 on recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work, and promoting shared responsibility within the household and the family.

TARGET 5.5: Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

Women are either absent from or poorly represented in the most significant spaces of decision-making in public life: from the economy as entrepreneurs or managers, from politics as ministers, and from the judiciary as judges. In the economy, their lack of agency is reflected in low entrepreneurial activity at 4 per cent of the population compared with 27 per cent globally.⁷¹ Moreover, there are variations in the region concerning the gender gap with regard to total entrepreneurial activity (TEA). Jordan, Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic have the biggest TEA gender gap, while Lebanon and Morocco have the narrowest gap. In Egypt, approximately 7.4 per cent of the adult population aged 18–64 is self-employed, but women constitute only 2.2 per cent.⁷² The Gulf countries of Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia witnessed a growth in female TEA, from 4 per cent to 10 per cent over the period 2011–2014, and a narrowing of the gender gap.⁷³ However, despite progress achieved across the region, women’s representation on corporate boards at 7 per cent remains less than half the global average of 15 per cent. A report by the International Labour Organization entitled *Women in Business Management* states that women’s labour force participation rates drop significantly with age, once they have enough experience to assume higher positions and more responsibilities at work.⁷⁴

The Arab region continues to have the lowest rates of women’s political representation at 17 per cent, compared with 27 per cent in Europe and the Americas.⁷⁵ Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Yemen have the lowest women’s representation in the legislative, judicial and executive branches.⁷⁶ After 2011, legislation to guarantee a quota for women’s representation and the appointment of women to ministerial and government positions was enacted in many countries, including Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. Gender strategies were formulated to activate and monitor the responsiveness of Governments to the needs of women and women’s machineries. Despite being one of the first Arab countries to institute a women’s quota, women’s representation remains at a mere 15.4 per cent in Jordan, ranking thirteenth in the region,⁷⁷ followed by Egypt at 14.9 per cent. Only three Arab countries have met the 30 per cent representation benchmark mandated by the Beijing Platform: Algeria at 31.6 per cent, Tunisia at 31.3 per cent, and the Sudan at 30 per cent.⁷⁸ The number of women in ministerial positions remains unequal compared

⁶⁸ See www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-2016--youth-and-the-prospects-for-.html.

⁶⁹ Central Authority for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), Time-Use Survey, 2015.

⁷⁰ See www.ebrd.com/gender/voice-agency.pdf.

⁷¹ See www.ecomena.org/women-entrepreneurship-in-mena/.

⁷² See www.gemconsortium.org/report/49480.

⁷³ See http://www.zawya.com/mena/en/story/Female_entrepreneurs_on_the_rise_in_the_GCC_says_report-ZAWYA20160828070825/.

⁷⁴ www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS_446101/lang--en/index.htm.

⁷⁵ <https://pomeps.org/2016/04/14/womens-political-representation-and-authoritarianism-in-the-arab-world/>.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ See www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/sep/23/jordan-election-women-gain-ground-gender-gap.

⁷⁸ See www.ipu.org/WMN-e/classif.htm.

with men in all Arab countries. By appointing 7 women ministers to its 29 member cabinet, the United Arab Emirates boasts the highest percentage (24 per cent) of female ministers in any Arab cabinet. In Egypt, the first female governor was appointed in 2017; radical Islamists immediately denounced the appointment claiming it was against Sharia and detrimental to the welfare of the Muslim Umma.⁷⁹

Arab countries will not report significant progress on target 5.5 without implementing measures that reduce barriers to women's participation, and ensuring a big pool of women who are able and willing to participate in political life.

TARGET 5.6: Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

Despite progress in expanding access to reproductive rights, the region continues to report deficiencies in knowledge on methods for fertility regulation and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. An estimated 40 per cent of married women in the region use modern contraceptives, with disparities across the region. For example, 67 per cent of Moroccan women use contraceptives, compared with only 9 per cent of Sudanese women. In Jordan and Tunisia 61 per cent and 63 per cent of women, respectively, use contraceptives.⁸⁰ In Egypt, 59 per cent of married women use contraceptives.⁸¹ Oman has the highest percentage of women using contraceptives at 99 per cent, and Mauritania has the lowest at 11.4 per cent.⁸² Disparities also exist within countries. In rural Upper Egypt, for example, women have the highest unmet need for family planning, and the lowest rate of satisfied demand in that regard (73 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively).⁸³

The reasons for non-use are numerous, notably a lack of information about family planning and limited levels of autonomy when it comes to receiving health care. Access to sexual and reproductive information and services increases women's chances of completing their education and breaking out of poverty.

In Egypt, the proportion of women reporting exposure to family planning messages on television dropped from almost 90 per cent in 2005 to less than 40 per cent in 2014. In Yemen, 42.2 per cent of married women need to have their husband's permission to receive health care, compared with only 7.3 per cent in Egypt.⁸⁴ In war-torn countries such as the Syrian Arab Republic, health care facilities have been destroyed.

Overcoming constraints to family planning information and access through a comprehensive concept of women's health, which prioritizes expenditures on health infrastructure and family planning services and education, is critical to realizing target 5.6 and to affirming that "the right of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular their own fertility, is basic to their empowerment", as stated in the Beijing Declaration.

⁷⁹ See www.youm7.com/story/2017/2/18/البحيرة-محافظه-ويهاجمون-المرأة-يعادون-السلفيون-خسارة-الرد-دئف-السلف (in Arabic).

⁸⁰ See www.lasportal.org/ar/sectors/dep/Documents/Report%20on%20the%20Implementation%20of%20the%20Beijing%20platform%20for%20Action%20Twenty%20Years%20Later.pdf.

⁸¹ See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2283ESCWA_Women%20and%20Gender%20Equality%20in%20the%20Arab%20Region_Beijing20.pdf.

⁸² See www.lasportal.org/ar/sectors/dep/Documents/Report%20on%20the%20Implementation%20of%20the%20Beijing%20platform%20for%20Action%20Twenty%20Years%20Later.pdf.

⁸³ See <http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/fr302/fr302.pdf>.

⁸⁴ See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2283ESCWA_Women%20and%20Gender%20Equality%20in%20the%20Arab%20Region_Beijing20.pdf.

B. CONCLUDING ANALYSIS

The Arab region must fulfil its commitment to the 2030 Agenda by achieving SDG 5 and mainstreaming gender in all other SDGs, and by respecting other international obligations related to promoting women's empowerment and gender justice. However, there are significant challenges that countries must address to achieve their development and gender equality commitments. These challenges can be classified under the following three themes: political instability and radicalization; gender bias in the economy and employment structures; and an ideology of gender polarization and separate spheres ingrained in the region's social landscape and its institutional norms.

1. *Political instability and radicalization*

Since 2011, the Arab region has been grappling with instability and radicalization. In Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen, women and men protested the status quo and called for a new social order that was more inclusive and more accountable to citizens. Six years later, the region is still in the throes of instability and radicalization, with adverse consequences for women who have had their human rights and physical integrity violated and their agenda deferred. Regressive interpretations of religion have been used in certain Arab countries to rationalize discrimination and even violence against women. Moreover, national security is almost always invoked to justify sidelining the women's agenda. This is a reflection of politicians' lack of understanding of the important role of citizens, both women and men, in promoting comprehensive and sustainable security. Tireless advocacy for women's equitable representation in formal political processes, including those related to peace negotiations and peacebuilding is critical to ensuring that their voices are heard and heeded. Moreover, vigilant monitoring by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and women groups is essential to holding Governments accountable to fulfilling their human rights and gender commitments. In this context, it is worth mentioning that Arab NGOs have systematically voiced their concerns in the shadow reports presented to the CEDAW committee. These reports have been synthesized into regional reports, the latest of which was issued by the General Arab Women Federation in 2015.

2. *Gender bias in the economy and employment structures*

Gendered education leads to gendered economies and employment structures, as is the case in the Arab region. A recent policy briefing issued by the Brookings Institute argues that the advancement of women will spur prosperity in the region, and promote the normative and social change required to sustain economic growth and social justice.⁸⁵

Women's under-representation in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics is a global phenomenon, but it is more pronounced in the Arab region where the norm is to encourage women to study arts and humanities, which are less paid and considered more appropriate to women's role as wives and mothers. Women are over-represented in public sector employment, where there are usually lesser opportunities for career advancement than in the private sector.⁸⁶ The policy briefing concludes that women's full employment would increase household incomes by as much as 25 per cent. If women and men were employed in equal numbers, the GDP of Arab countries would rise significantly.⁸⁷ In this context, measures proposed to promote women's participation in the labour force, and especially in traditionally male-dominated fields, include higher salaries, greater maternity benefits, safe and affordable public transportation, women's quotas and affirmative action programmes in both the public and private sectors, and female entrepreneurship initiatives.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ See www.brookings.edu/research/equality-and-the-economy-why-the-arab-world-should-employ-more-women/.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

3. *Gender polarization and separate spheres*

The gender blind nature of policymaking in the region has reinforced gender polarization and discrimination, especially in the public sphere and more so in decision-making. Biological differences and conservative interpretations of religious texts are evoked to justify legislation and policies that keep women in their ‘natural space’, the private sphere, while allowing men unfettered access to the public sphere. As such, the institutions that are meant to effect change towards social justice are those that perpetuate the gender gap and deprive women from acting as agents of change. In this context, the “circle of dual deprivation” suggests that women’s limited participation in decision-making and their restricted access to decision-makers, who are usually men, prevent them from holding these institutions accountable to their needs and demands.⁸⁹

Deconstructing the discourse that perpetuates the gender divide is critical. Challenging patriarchal interpretations of religion through more balanced egalitarian interpretations is an important lever for gender equality. This has been a demand of women’s groups throughout the region. A number of countries in the region and beyond, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, for example, have made headway, while others are still struggling in that regard. In the Arab region, the reform of the Moroccan personal status law, the *Mudawana*, is an example of progress achieved on behalf of the women’s agenda within the context of an egalitarian interpretation of religion. Renamed the Family Code, it is considered among the most progressive in the region. Reforms include raising the marriage age from 15 to 18, requiring the consent of both husband and wife in divorce cases, and establishing equal parental responsibility.⁹⁰

IV. PROMISING PRACTICES FROM THE ARAB REGION

To facilitate the implementation of SDG 5 and its six targets, Arab countries could benefit from identifying actual or potential ‘good practices’ for adaptation and replication. Exchanging information and learning from one another is standard practice to expedite progress and close gaps among countries and subregions.

Evidence from Arab countries confirms that the empowerment of women and the advancement of gender equality require political will and the institution of temporary equity measures. The following section presents some interesting examples that are being tested by some Arab countries using legal and financial instruments, affirmative actions, including quotas, and civil society monitoring approaches to address the conundrum that is women’s economic and political participation, and the rising occurrence of gender-based violence in the region.

TARGET 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia: gender diversity in the workplace

Seven companies in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia were selected through a competitive process to join the EconoWin regional programme, aimed at promoting gender diversity in the workplace through the gender diversity management approach. Implementing this approach requires that selected companies undergo a gender diversity audit, on the basis of which action plans and budgets are developed. The companies chose to experiment with various family-friendly measures, including the institution of flexible working hours and paternity leave, and gender-responsive recruitment and promotion policies. In Egypt and globally, Vodafone is implementing a host of measures designed to make it the best employer for women by 2025. It has introduced diversity, including gender, in its recruitment and operations, and has implemented career development programmes targeting female employees. It grants four months maternity leave,⁹¹ and two hours daily for

⁸⁹ See <http://awrad.org/files/server/Article%20Arab%20women%20by%20Nader.pdf>.

⁹⁰ See www.developmentprogress.org/sites/default/files/case-study-report/morocco_full_report-final-digital.pdf.

⁹¹ As opposed to the 90 days mandated by the Egyptian labour law.

breastfeeding during the first year after childbirth. Other measures that Vodafone is experimenting with to attract and retain talent include part-time and flexible working arrangements, and paternity leave.⁹² With the exception of Vodafone, with 30 per cent women's representation and 50 per cent of its female staff in leadership positions, the measures introduced by the other companies participating in the EconoWin pilot are still nascent, so it is difficult to gauge their impact in terms of promoting more balanced gender representation in the workplace. Documenting their experience is an important component of the programme, which will help inform the policymaking process in the Arab region. These initiatives with the private sector not only respond to SDG 5 on gender equality, but also to target 7.17 on encouraging public, public-private and civil society partnerships.

TARGET 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

Saudi Arabia: Protection against abuse

The 2013 Protection from Abuse Law is a breakthrough for the country. It is a step forwards in the fight against domestic violence that is reportedly widespread in Saudi Arabia, owing to a patriarchal culture and traditional system of guardianship which requires women to seek permission from their guardian to study, work and travel, among other things, rendering them particularly vulnerable to abuse. The Law defines 'abuse' as "all forms of exploitation, or bodily, psychological, or sexual abuse, or threat of it, committed by one person against another, including if [that person] has authority, power, or responsibility, or [if there is a] family, support, sponsorship, guardianship, or living dependency relationship between the two [individuals]". The Law sets the penalty for offenders at one month to one year in prison and/or a fine of 5,000-50,000 Saudi riyals. Moreover, judges can exercise discretion and double the specified sentence for repeat offenders.⁹³ Human rights and women activists agree that the Law is a step in the right direction; however, measures are being proposed to enhance its effectiveness. Such amendments apply to some articles, and to strengthening enforcement and rehabilitation mechanisms.⁹⁴

Egypt: Safe Cities Programme

In November 2010, UN Women launched the "Safe Cities Free of Violence against Women and Girls" Global Initiative in partnership with UN-Habitat. The aim is to prevent and respond to sexual violence in public spaces, most notably in three intervention sites populated with disadvantaged communities in Greater Cairo. The programme addresses sexual violence and promotes a safe environment for women and girls by engaging the local community, its representatives and the Government in a dialogue and on-the-ground activities designed to prevent and address violence. Six years later, reported achievements include contributing at the macro level to the definition and criminalization of sexual harassment in the Penal Code; contributing to the development of the 2016 National Strategy on Combatting Violence against Women; and designing a locally owned Cairo Safe City Programme consultation with the Government, United Nations partners, women's groups, and civil society organizations. At the meso level, the programme worked with the Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban Development on developing women's safety audits to guide urban planning. At the micro level, the programme mobilized over 20,000 community members to use innovative awareness-raising tools, such as art, interactive theatre performances, photography and music to combat sexual harassment. The Egyptian Government is interested in scaling up the model, with a view to replicating it nationwide.

⁹² All countries in the region lack policies on parental leave, and only Bahrain and Tunisia have paternal leave consisting of a single fully paid day.

⁹³ See www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/03/saudi-arabia-new-law-criminalize-domestic-abuse.

⁹⁴ See www.repository.law.indiana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=etd.

Egypt: HarassMap

HarassMap is a volunteer-based initiative, the first of its kind in the Arab region. It was established in late 2010 to expose and condemn the phenomenon of sexual harassment in Egypt. The approach is based on an interactive process of crowdsourcing through mobile messages and online mapping reports of sexual harassment. The initiative also organizes campaigns and awareness-raising workshops, and partners with private companies. Examples include the Uber taxi service provider, whose drivers are trained to react against sexual harassment, and provide a safe means of transportation for women. The information provided by HarassMap is credible and is referred to in studies and reports on women's status and violence against women in Egypt. In 2016, HarassMap collaborated with Cairo University in advising other Egyptian universities on measures for tackling sexual harassment. In January 2017, HarassMap received a recognition award from Cairo University for efforts in combating violence against women.⁹⁵

Lebanon: Resist Harassment

Inspired by HarassMap, three Lebanese women activists launched a website to track and document harassment in Lebanon's public spaces, and to redefine and raise awareness in Lebanon of what constitutes sexual harassment. The group collaborates with Nasawiya, a feminist association in Lebanon, in organizing weekly discussions on how to combat harassment. It also participates in the Adventures of Salwa anti-harassment campaign. The Resist Harassment website provides information on how to respond to harassment, including how to confront the perpetrator. The online map provides information about harassment hotspots and incidents.⁹⁶

TARGET 5.3: Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

Egypt: Combating female genital mutilation

The national initiative to combat female genital mutilation began in 2003, led by the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme and the Donor Assistance Group. Activities were implemented with local communities, and involved a sustained public awareness campaign that mobilized religious authorities and male public figures to condemn the practice. This resulted in its criminalization and, more importantly, in a shift in the attitude of families, which led to a decline in the practice according to the latest Egypt Demographic and Health Survey, which notes that the percentage of circumcised girls aged 15-17 dropped from 74 per cent in 2008 to 61 per cent in 2014.⁹⁷

Yemen: Preventing child marriage

Only 34 per cent of Yemeni women use contraceptives, according to the latest national statistics. However, despite the political instability of the past years, this percentage has risen from a low of 23 per cent in 2003.⁹⁸ This increase is largely due to efforts by the Government, international organizations and civil society. The 'Safe Age of Marriage' pilot project was implemented in 2009 in Amran Governorate, covering the communities of two districts where only 8 per cent of girls aged 15-17 attended school. The project was implemented in partnership with the Basic Health Services Project in Yemen and the Yemeni Women's Union as part of Yemen's national effort to reduce maternal and neonatal mortalities. Forty male and female volunteer community educators, including religious leaders and nurse-midwives, were trained to use various mediums (school plays, discussion groups, mosques, films, etc.) to discuss the detrimental effects of child

⁹⁵ See <http://harassmap.org/en/>.

⁹⁶ See <https://qawemeharassment.wordpress.com/discussion-group-النقاش-لانة->

⁹⁷ See <http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/fr302/fr302.pdf>.

⁹⁸ See http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMENA/Resources/MENA_Gender_Compndium-2009-1.pdf.

marriage and the benefits of allowing girls to pursue their education. In addition, a mobile clinic provided women with reproductive and child health services. In one year, the project reached 29,000 community members, including students. By the end of that year, 10 families (five per district), who delayed the marriages of their daughters and ensured that they completed high school, were selected as model families. Since then, the pilot project has expanded to cover other areas in Yemen.⁹⁹ Furthermore, the Yemeni Women's Union and human rights activists lobbied for a change in Yemeni law to prohibit the marriage of child girls. In 2015, Yemen added a provision to its new constitution fixing the minimum marriage age at 18.¹⁰⁰

TARGET 5.4: Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

The time-use surveys conducted in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia represent a first and critical step towards starting a conversation on the valuation of unpaid family care, and the need to ensure that women are not overburdened by their domestic and care responsibilities and have equal opportunity to participate in the public sphere. Arab Governments must invest in public services, provide social protection policies for women doing unpaid work, and raise public awareness on the economic and social value of such work.

TARGET 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

Jordan: Maternity insurance fund

Labour laws designed to protect women have deterred businesses from hiring and retaining them. Their disproportionate representation in the public sector in most Arab countries is a consequence of the cost to businesses of employing women. In Jordan, investments in young women's education have not been matched with opportunities for their participation in the labour force, despite periods of high economic growth. Social Security Law No. 7 of 2010, replacing Social Security Law No. 19, is meant to institute more equity in the labour force by providing for maternity benefits through a 0.75 per cent payroll contribution paid by the employer on behalf of both male and female employees. The reasoning is that by distributing the cost across men and women, the 'per head' cost is reduced and businesses will be incentivized to employ more women, so that Jordan can reach its target female employment rate of 25 per cent by 2025.¹⁰¹ The benefits of such family-friendly policies are recognized globally but, in Jordan, the expected impact of this maternity insurance fund has yet to materialize. The influence of social norms on gender roles and the persistence of informal discrimination practices are delaying the benefit of the amended Social Security Law with regard to enhancing women's economic participation.¹⁰²

Algeria: Women's quota on electoral party lists

In January 2012, a law was enacted stipulating variable quotas for women on the electoral lists of parties running in legislative, municipal and communal elections. The law required 20-50 per cent of candidates to be women, depending on the number of seats in each electoral district. Finding candidates to make up the 30 per cent female representation required for the 462 members of the lower house of parliament is often a struggle for contending parties; nevertheless, the quota has forced them to reach out to women and has in turn given

⁹⁹ See www.intrahealth.org/sites/ihweb/files/attachment-files/ESD_Legacy_Child_Marriage.pdf.

¹⁰⁰ See <http://gulfnnews.com/news/gulf/yemen/minimum-age-set-for-marriage-in-yemen-1.1445215>.

¹⁰¹ See www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowTheme.do?tid=3525.

¹⁰² See <http://jsf.org/sites/default/files/EN%20-%20Job%20Creation%20in%20Jordan%20-%20Emphasizing%20the%20Role%20of%20the%20Private%20Sector%20%282%29.pdf>.

women the opportunity to participate in politics and to influence the legislative process. Consequently, Algeria's parliament has the highest female representation among all Arab countries.

Morocco: Women's quota and support fund

In 2008, in response to the vocal demands of women groups, the Communal Charter was formulated stipulating a 12 per cent quota for women's representation in parliament through the creation of additional election constituencies. In addition, a support fund was established to promote and support the candidacy of women. These measures resulted in a 12 per cent representation of women in 2009, compared with 1 per cent in 2003.¹⁰³ Today, while not yet living up to the expectations of the women's movement in Morocco, female representation in parliament stands at 20.5 per cent, surpassing the regional average of 17 per cent.¹⁰⁴

United Arab Emirates: Affirmative action

The United Arab Emirates' handling of women's representation in politics is the perfect example of how political will and enlightened leadership can overcome the most resistant gender norms. Under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, women have been gaining ground on a number of fronts, including in the political arena where they have been encouraged to compete. In 2006, they ran for elections of the entity representing Emirati citizens, the Federal National Council. In these elections, 63 of the 452 candidates were women. Despite the reportedly high turnout of women voters, only one woman managed to win a seat on the Council. However, to boost female representation, the Government nominated 8 women to the 40-member Council, which meant a female representation of 22.5 per cent in 2006. Today, women's representation is plateauing at around 20 per cent, and the Government is calling on Emiratis, both women and men, to encourage women to run for Council elections.¹⁰⁵ As a result of Government efforts and the political will to support women's participation in politics, women are active contributors in debating and reviewing all draft laws, and represent their constituencies in Council committees.¹⁰⁶

TARGET 5.6: Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

Oman: Birth-spacing programme

The birth-spacing program was launched in 1994, following a census that revealed that uncontrolled fertility would cause significant demographic challenges in Oman. The programme had two main objectives: improving the health of Omani women and children by reducing high-risk pregnancies among women who were very young or above the age of 35; and providing women with the means to regulate their fertility safely and effectively with modern contraceptives. Today, Oman has the highest percentage of women using contraceptives (99 per cent). The programme's success was due to notable improvements in the provision of family planning services, including one-on-one counselling provided by nurses and physicians on various contraception methods and their side effects. Moreover, Muslim religious leaders were mobilized to deflect people's concern about birth spacing being against Islam, and to educate the public about the importance of family planning for Oman's development and the wellbeing of its people.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ See www.developmentprogress.org/sites/developmentprogress.org/files/case-study-report/morocco_full_report-final-digital.pdf.

¹⁰⁴ See <http://www.ipu.org/WMN-e/classif.htm>.

¹⁰⁵ See <http://dubaieye1038.com/call-for-more-women-to-stand-for-fnc/>.

¹⁰⁶ See http://www.uae-embassy.org/sites/default/files/Women_in_the_UAE_Eng.pdf.

¹⁰⁷ See www.jstor.org/stable/40389588.

V. LESSONS LEARNED AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The main conclusion of this report is that women's empowerment and gender equality require efforts on multiple fronts, while prioritizing women's economic and political emancipation, and their freedom from violence. Establishing women's equal rights through legislation is a necessary step towards their empowerment; however, gender justice cannot be fully realized without enabling all women to access their rights. This requires both political will and societal consensus: top-bottom and bottom-up approaches. In Arab countries, there are cases where a boost in women's political participation was triggered by enlightened leadership and sustained by societal consensus, as in the United Arab Emirates that has the highest proportion of female ministers in its cabinet. In other cases, leadership is responding, sometimes reluctantly, to the lobbying of women's groups and civil society. This is the case in Egypt where, despite repeated calls from women's movements, there were only four female ministers in the 35-member cabinet as at March 2017. Similarly, measures to promote the economic participation of women are imposed in some countries, while in others, policies on women's economic rights are put in place out of conviction that economic growth and diversification can only be achieved with women's participation. Saudi Arabia, with its diminishing oil revenues and rising unemployment, is reluctant to accept women's economic participation, while the leadership in Bahrain and Kuwait appreciate its value. The issue of violence against women is complex because it is imbued with cultural and religious interpretations and ill-conceived notions of honour. Nevertheless, in some Arab countries, significant measures have been taken to address the phenomenon, some in response to the outcry of women groups (Egypt and Saudi Arabia). Others have taken significant steps to combat such violence, which have proved effective.

There are a number of takeaways from the review of women's status, and corresponding recommendations suggested for the way forward. Some are general in nature, and addressed to the international community, women groups and policymakers, while others are more specific to the advancement of women's political and economic participation and their freedom from violence, which are priority areas for the region.

A. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Much of the progress achieved in the region concerning gender equality results from the pressure of the international community and the ratification of international instruments. Progress is slow on certain goals; however, and despite setbacks and reservations on certain articles, change in the right direction is happening in most of the region.

1. *Recommendations to the international community*

- Prevail upon Governments the importance of abiding by their international commitments and submitting regular and timely national reports on progress regarding agreed targets;
- Provide technical assistance to women's organizations in writing shadow reports, and encourage them to collaborate on producing one consolidated shadow report that can be used to hold their Governments accountable;
- Provide technical and financial support to the women's agenda in general, and prioritize activities and measures that will further their political and economic empowerment;
- Support government and civil society efforts to combat violence against women and girls, and to enact legislation and policies to protect them, prevent gender-based violence and rehabilitate survivors;
- Provide technical and financial support to strengthening national statistical capacities in the implementation of surveys and the generation of disaggregated statistics, to ensure the effective tracking of women's status within the overall framework of the SDGs.

Despite fragmentation of the women's movement across the region and within Arab countries, the relentless activism of women groups has driven progress towards advancing the women's agenda, even in the most traditional settings. However, as witnessed in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, such gains are easily threatened and can be reversed unless women groups remain vigilant.

2. Recommendations to women groups

- Embrace national strategies on women's advancement and work to push the women's agenda forward to overcome barriers to full political and economic participation;
- Support equity measures in the political and economic arenas, which are needed to level the playing field for women;
- Work with men, engender them and engage them in the struggle to advance the women's agenda.

Gender inequality is costly socially, financially and politically. Gender inequality holds back the region's potential for sustainable development. According to the World Bank, women are an untapped resource in the region, although they make up 50 per cent of the population. Harnessing their potential in the political arena will promote peace and social justice; doing the same in the economic arena will raise the returns from investments made by most countries in their education and health services. Therefore, addressing gender inequality through gender-responsive policymaking, which includes mainstreaming and equity measures, is the only way for the region to realize its SDG targets.

3. Recommendations to policymakers

- Mainstream gender into national and sectoral strategies and budgets, and monitor their implementation;
- Establish, activate and strengthen the role of national gender equality machineries, and equal opportunity units in ministries and parliaments;
- Establish specific time-bound targets and action plans for increasing women's representation in decision-making in ministerial and judicial appointments and on public sector boards;
- Promote women's access to justice by reviewing legislation and amending legal provisions that discriminate against women;
- Establish legal aid offices in family courts and support linkages between them and non-legal service providers offering services to women (e.g. micro-credit, psychological counselling, etc.);
- Support national campaigns on gender equality and women's empowerment, such as Taa Marbouta in Egypt;
- Introduce human rights and gender equality education into school curriculums;
- Establish national social justice observatories to promote the rights of excluded groups, including women and girls, especially those living in rural areas. These observatories would monitor and report on the efforts of Government, parliament and human rights groups to improve legislation, policies and public service delivery systems to enhance social justice. They would also become a platform for the documentation and exchange of innovative good practices within the region and internationally.

B. THEMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *Women's economic participation*

- Support family-friendly workplace practices, including flexible working arrangements, gender sensitive hiring practices and paternity leave;
- Support gender sensitive procurement processes;
- Support the implementation of gender quotas for women in private sector companies through tax incentives and/or public recognition. The experience of Egypt with the Gender Equality Seal before 2011 should be re-examined, which offered participating firms public recognition for their gender equity efforts;
- Support the establishment of a high-growth industry skills development programme, targeting an equal number of women and men;
- Revise labour laws to recognize women's unpaid work burden (e.g. the Rural Employment Guarantee Act in India), and redistribute the cost of family care so that it is not too costly to employ women (e.g. the maternity Fund of Jordan);
- Support measures to make public services more accessible and responsive to women's differentiated needs.

2. *Women's political participation*

- Support women's participation in local and national elections through the implementation of political quotas, identity cards, and training and capacity development measures, and the establishment of support funds to encourage women to run for election;
- Develop tools for gender monitoring of nominations and elections, and engage civil society and women's groups in monitoring and reporting on elections;
- Increase the representation of women in high-level government appointments to show the public that Governments are serious about promoting gender equality and justice;
- Issue election laws requiring a female quota on party lists, and establish explicit rules concerning rank order and legal sanctions for non-compliance.

3. *Violence against women and girls*

- Enact or revise legislation criminalizing violence against women and girls to ensure that definitions are clear and that effective enforcement mechanisms are in place;
- Provide social support services and adequate sheltering facilities for victims of domestic violence;
- Establish sexual harassment police response units and develop their capacity;
- Support existing government and civil society initiatives addressing violence against women, such as the Safe Cities Programme and HarassMap in Egypt and Resist Map in Lebanon;

- Support the launch and implementation of nationwide campaigns educating the public of the detriments and costs to society and the economy of violence against women and girls, including female genital mutilation, domestic violence and child marriage;
- Mobilize and engage the religious establishment to disseminate messages about the benefits of family planning. Oman is a good example of the effectiveness of engaging religious authorities in educating the public and convincing them that spacing births is not against religion.

