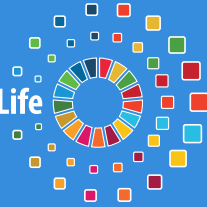


# Arab Report on the Periodic Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 Years





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## **Arab report on the periodic review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years**

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The present report was reviewed by Ms. Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Social Affairs Sector of the League of Arab States; Ms. Janneke van der Graaff-Kukler, UN-Women Regional Director Ad Interim for the Arab States; and Ms. Fadia Kiwan, Director-General of the Arab Women Organization. The Danish Institute for Human Rights and the Danish Centre for Research and Information on Gender, Equality and Diversity (KVINFO) provided support to the regional review process, and facilitated the participation of national human rights and civil society organizations in the regional consultations that guided the authors of the present report.

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## Preface

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in 1995, was a historic milestone on the path to realizing women's rights, culminating in the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Beijing Declaration is a global road map for advancing the status of women and girls, and empowering them by achieving 12 goals related to issues affecting their lives in various stages and aspects. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action provide a reference framework for measuring and monitoring national, regional and global efforts for the advancement of all women and girls worldwide.

As in the past, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the League of Arab States, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Arab Women Organization have supported Arab countries in conducting periodic national reviews, which measure progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and serve as a framework for the international review of progress made in their implementation 25 years after their adoption.

Based on those national reviews, 20 Arab countries prepared national reports. The present synthesis report compiles their findings and recommendations. On that basis, a regional review was conducted using a unique approach that measured progress in several processes, namely the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the fifth goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and all other Sustainable Development Goals.

The review took place under extremely difficult conditions in the Arab region. Some Arab countries are suffering from internal conflicts and stifling economic conditions that continue to affect economic development and social protection. Despite these challenges, several Arab countries managed to hold national consultations with stakeholders within the framework of their national reviews. They prepared national reports on those consultations, in which they identified the main priorities for the advancement and empowerment of women over the next five years.

The present report, entitled “Synthesis Arab report on the periodic review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years”, provides a detailed regional analysis of progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the Arab region, based on data drawn mainly from national reviews. The report shows that several countries have implemented legislative measures and reforms to mainstream gender equality, notably withdrawing reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopting new legislation to combat violence against women, or amending legislation that discriminates against women. The report indicates progress in areas such as education, health care, and women's participation in political and public life. Such progress is uneven across countries because of a number of national variables.

However, despite this progress, the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has yet to be achieved. As the present report shows, the political participation of women in the Arab region is below expected national and global levels. The region has the second lowest percentage of women in parliament globally. Moreover, conflict has had a devastating effect on the status of women and girls in countries affected by civil war or by ongoing conflict in neighbouring nations. These regional developments have emerged in the context of a social culture that promotes unfair and discriminatory treatment against women and girls, and restricts the full inclusion of women in the sustainable development process. Undoubtedly, such issues do not negatively impact women and girls alone, but also the entire process of economic, political and social development.

The preparation of the present report, which addresses various aspects of the status of Arab women, falls within the framework of the fifth periodic regional review of progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It provides a set of recommendations drawn from national reports, so as to draw a roadmap for accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.



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## Executive Summary

Gender equality and women's empowerment are central to human rights. They are also considered crucial for achieving sustainable and equal development. For a quarter of a century, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have been international pathways for countries to advance the status of women and girls and achieve equality. The year 2020 is pivotal for accelerating gender equality and empowering all women and girls. In 2020, the fifth review of the Beijing Platform for Action will coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995,<sup>1</sup> the twentieth anniversary of Security Council [resolution 1325](#) on women, peace and security,<sup>2</sup> and the fifth anniversary of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>3</sup>

The present report, entitled "Synthesis Arab report on the periodic review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years", reviews the achievements of Arab countries and the difficulties they face in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It also analyses the challenges facing the Arab region as a whole, highlighting the regional dimensions of the political, security, economic, social and cultural contexts of these countries.

The present report is based on detailed national reports prepared by 20 Arab countries for the period 2014-2019. It draws on information and data obtained from the United Nations and other sources.<sup>4</sup> The preparation of the report was guided by the results of consultations on the fifth periodic review of progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years. A number of these consultations were organized in 2019, at meetings held by civil society and young people in Beirut (April 2019), Tunisia (April 2019), and Cairo (August 2019). These meetings reviewed progress and future priorities from the perspectives of non-governmental stakeholders.

The present report follows the same structure as the detailed national reports, and is divided into five sections. Section I reviews the general framework of the status of women in the Arab region. Section II presents progress made in empowering women, adopting the same framework used in the guidance note for comprehensive national-level reviews (six overarching dimensions and their subheadings).<sup>5</sup> Section III provides an analytical review of Arab countries' efforts in establishing and developing bodies and institutions concerned with implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Section IV examines the efforts of States in providing gender-disaggregated data to measure progress and identify weaknesses, despite general shortfalls in the gender statistics system and a lack of gender disaggregated data in most Arab countries. Section V focuses on analysing lessons learned, highlights national and regional priorities and makes recommendations to assist Arab countries in working towards gender equality.

Analyses of detailed national reports prepared by 20 Arab countries for the period between 2014-2019, and analysis of data from other sources, indicate some progress in the status of women and girls in the Arab region, especially in areas that were neglected in the past decades. Notable developments include radical reform of legislation on women in some countries, and their increased participation in politics and the economy.

However, such achievements are below expectations, and development processes remain slow. The region faces multifaceted challenges, notably high unemployment, especially among young men and women; high rates of poverty, hunger and inequality; insufficient coordination between different sectors; low participation by multiple stakeholders, including civil society, young men and women, and the private sector,

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<sup>1</sup> [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995](#).

<sup>2</sup> [S/RES/1325\(2000\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> [A/RES/70/1](#).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Development Programme and others, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> UN-Women, 2018a.

in various development processes; and weak sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic and social growth. These challenges are exacerbated by terrorism, conflict and war; and the severe economic and social repercussions of the prolonged occupation in the State of Palestine, and the diminished humanitarian and development role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) after several countries withdrew funding. The challenges are compounded by scarce natural resources, environmental degradation, climate change, and declining living standards. Women and girls are most affected by these political, social, economic and environmental challenges, and by economic reform programmes that address such issues. These programmes are often based on reducing social spending and job opportunities in the government and public sectors.

In the light of those challenges and of Arab countries' achievements with regard to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years, the present report provides the following lessons learned:

(a) Legislation alone is not enough. A comprehensive and coordinated approach is needed to eliminate discrimination against women, based on human rights principles and programmes that address all stages of the female life cycle;

(b) Government interventions alone are insufficient. It is necessary to adopt a participatory approach, provide an enabling environment for civil society organizations, and make way for local initiatives and innovations to empower women and girls and achieve gender equality;

(c) Education and training alone are not enough to empower women and girls. It is necessary to eliminate all barriers that discriminate against women and prevent them from obtaining paid employment, promotions and access to key political, judicial and business positions in equality with men;

(d) Social protection programmes that target women are insufficient. It is necessary to implement a comprehensive set of policies to support women and girls, which addresses not only the symptoms of the problem but also its causes;

(e) Without an integrated system of gender equality statistics, it is impossible to document successes, identify failures, formulate policies and establish priorities;

(f) Achievements that are reflected by one-dimensional averages and that are measured at the national level are not a substitute for equity development, and do not necessarily lead to women and girls not being left behind;

(g) Women and girls suffer the most from conflict, wars and environmental risks, and are the most affected by economic reform programmes that tend to reduce social spending and to cut employment in the government and public sectors.

Building on these lessons learned, the present report recommends adding several processes to the region's priorities for the next five years, so as to achieve the strategic goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda, especially those related to gender equality, as follows:

(a) Update legislation and policies related to gender equality to ensure: (i) coverage of all aspects of gender equality; (ii) protection of women and girls from all types of violence; and (iii) that no social or spatial segment of women and girls are left behind;

(b) Move forward with the economic empowerment of Arab women, and transform progress achieved in the field of cognitive empowerment over the past years into a driving force for the economies of Arab countries;

(c) Protect the most marginalized and primary-care segments through parallel paths that incorporate social protection programmes and economic empowerment programmes, which include providing access to quality education for girls and creating job opportunities for young women;

(d) Strengthen the institutional framework by providing more resources to national women's machineries and to institutions and associations working in the fields of women's rights and the economic and political empowerment of women and girls, while intensifying action at the local level;

(e) Update gender equality data and statistics in terms of: (i) content to allow for the calculation of indicators of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and SDG indicators on gender equality; (ii) coverage of the different social and spatial segments of society, especially marginalized groups, refugees and displaced persons; and (iii) regularity of periodic data collection and transparency in making data available.

In response to these priorities, the present report makes the following recommendations aimed at promoting progress towards the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda, especially the Goals related to women.

### *1. Gender-sensitive policies and programmes*

(a) Strive to localize global commitments related to gender equality by integrating them into national development plans, policies, legislation and other relevant frameworks; apply appropriate mechanisms to implement programmes and interventions at the decentralized/local level whenever possible; and place gender equality as a priority goal when designing and implementing development programmes at the national and local levels;

(b) Develop effective strategies to reach out to the most marginalized women and girls, and collaborate with researchers and women's rights organizations to identify marginalized groups of women and girls, design appropriate interventions for each group and allocate resources to implement such interventions;

(c) Achieve gender justice by ensuring women's access to decent work, promotion opportunities, and senior executive positions in government institutions, in addition to introducing suitable legislation and incentives that guarantee this can be achieved in both the private and public sectors, including on corporate boards;

(d) Support women in their role in the workplace, and in their domestic role as related to the performance of unpaid domestic and care work. This includes motivating men and boys to increase their contribution to such work, creating a supportive environment for women's work (establishment of day care facilities) and updating work systems (introducing flexible working arrangements and work from home modalities);

(e) Integrate social protection policies in a way that achieves a shift from protection to empowerment, and that takes into account the perspective of positive discrimination in favour of women and girls;

(f) Move beyond isolated approaches and dealing with gender equality issues in a partial and seasonal manner, and adopt an interdependent, coherent and integrated approach that focuses on the universality and indivisibility of human rights.

### *2. Leaving no one behind*

(a) Design development programmes that prioritize the weakest and most vulnerable social groups, including women with disabilities, poor women, women heads of households, older women, women working in the informal sector, domestic workers and workers without social protection, noting that these groups vary

between countries. Governments should adopt a criterion to identify development project priorities based on the extent to which they meet the needs of these groups;

(b) Identify the weakest and most vulnerable social groups through a participatory approach as an alternative to one-dimensional taxonomic analysis when conducting socioeconomic diagnostic studies and assessing the effects of multiple discrimination against women and girls;

(c) Redistribute available resources to ensure that vulnerable groups receive a fair share to achieve inclusive and sustainable development and ensure that no one is left behind;

(d) Ensure minimum protection and basic care for refugees and displaced women and girls, and take measures to guarantee a safe and dignified life for them.

### *3. Protecting women and girls from all forms of violence*

(a) Enact laws to protect women and girls from all forms of violence, including domestic violence, in countries that have not passed such laws, and amend or remove all contradictory provisions set out in other laws;

(b) Enact legislation to protect women and girls by taking preventive measures against all forms of violence; provide specialized training for workers in this field, and ensure that all women and girls who suffer from violence have access to protection and long-term care to ensure their recovery and integration into society; implement legislation related to the prevention of violence against women and girls, and enforce and adjudicate in an independent manner to ensure that perpetrators do not go unpunished;

(c) Promote values that oppose violence against women and girls, and provide monitoring mechanisms and supporting information.

### *4. Governance of the gender equality system*

(a) Support national women's machineries and provide them with the necessary resources to fulfil their role at the national and regional levels, and establish communication between them and Governments, parliaments, women's rights organizations, the media and study centres;

(b) Provide an enabling environment for women's rights organizations and civil society organizations to conduct their own assessments of progress at the national and regional levels, and support them with resources and information;

(c) Produce all statistical indicators that measure progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in a periodic manner and in sufficient detail to represent the most vulnerable segments, and make these indicators available to all development partners;

(d) Support citizen-led initiatives to implement non-traditional approaches to achieving gender equality, monitor discrimination against women and girls, and promote success stories and viable models for empowering women and girls.

### *5. Gender equality data and statistics*

(a) States should undertake an assessment of gender equality statistics to identify gaps at the national, local and social levels, especially among the most marginalized groups, and incorporate this assessment into national statistical strategies implemented by the national statistical system, which includes all governmental and non-governmental producers and users of data. This assessment also includes information gaps and material and human resource needs, and identifies priorities to guide resource allocation;

(b) Update data and statistics systems that allow for an assessment of progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda;

(c) Build national capacity in the field of gender equality statistics;

(d) Utilize modern information and communication technologies (ICT) to produce and make available gender equality statistics at lower costs.

## Introduction

1. Gender equality and women's empowerment are central to human rights, and a cornerstone of sustainable development and justice. For a quarter of a century, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have been international pathways for countries to advance the status of women and girls and achieve equality. The year 2020 is pivotal for accelerating gender equality and empowering all women and girls. In 2020, the fifth review of the Beijing Platform for Action<sup>6</sup> will coincide with the twentieth anniversary of Security Council [resolution 1325](#) on women, peace and security,<sup>7</sup> and the fifth anniversary of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>8</sup> The fifth periodic review is an important opportunity for countries: it allows them to conduct a constructive critical review of their development process related to women, to identify their achievements and failures and draw lessons from them, and take the necessary measures to achieve all the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 5 on gender equality.

### A. International review

2. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women will assess progress by countries worldwide in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and conduct an international review of this progress at its sixty-fourth session to be held in New York in March 2020.<sup>9</sup> The international review will be based on national reviews undertaken by countries in accordance with the guidance note for comprehensive national-level reviews, and on regional reviews by United Nations regional commissions and other regional bodies.

### B. Regional review

3. In the Arab region, the regional review of Arab countries is carried out by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA),<sup>10</sup> the regional office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the League of Arab States, and the Arab Women Organization. The present report, entitled "Synthesis Arab report on the periodic review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years", sets out the results of the periodic review, based primarily on detailed national reports prepared by 20 Arab countries for the period 2014-2019.

4. Analyses of the national reports, and of data from other sources, indicate some progress in the status of women and girls in the Arab region, especially in areas that were neglected in past decades. In some Arab countries, fundamental legislative reforms have been made that have had positive effects on efforts to combat violence against women, and on women's participation in society, politics and the economy. However, these achievements are still below expectations, and development goals are still far from being achieved. Such negative results cannot be considered in isolation from global, regional and national contexts and circumstances affecting Arab countries for the past five years.

#### 1. Background

5. The Arab region, like other regions globally, faces enormous challenges: turmoil in global political situations; difficulties undermining joint Arab action; poor coordination between sectors; weak participation by stakeholders, including civil society, young people, women and the private sector, in various development processes. These challenges are compounded by worsening poverty, hunger and inequality; and weak prospects

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<sup>6</sup> [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995](#).

<sup>7</sup> [S/RES/1325\(2000\)](#).

<sup>8</sup> [A/RES/70/1](#).

<sup>9</sup> Economic and Social Council resolution 2018/8 ([E/RES/2018/8](#)).

<sup>10</sup> Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2018/8 ([E/RES/2018/8](#)).

for sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth illustrated by high unemployment rates, especially among young men and women.

6. These challenges not only slow development processes and hinder the Arab region's ability to achieve transformative development, but also devastate many basic development gains, including those related to health, education, and the empowerment of women and girls.<sup>11</sup> In this context, stark disparities in development emerge between regions and societies, and within a single society, as well as vast differences in gender equality levels, and the absence of strong institutions capable of responding to the needs of all groups and provinces. These challenges cannot be considered in isolation from the situation in the occupied Golan Heights and the State of Palestine - a situation that is deteriorating with the shrinking role of UNRWA. Moreover, these challenges cannot be addressed in isolation from the conflicts, wars and waves of terrorism afflicting the Arab region, and the brutality that Islamic State inflicted on Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, which disproportionately affected girls and women, especially Yazidis.

7. These dangerous circumstances contributed to destabilizing economic and social growth, thus exacerbating the burdens already placed on the region's peoples, institutions, natural resources and infrastructure. Moreover, global environmental sustainability and human welfare are threatened by climate change, increases in consumption patterns, and resource scarcity.

## *2. Methodology and approach*

8. When preparing the comprehensive national reviews that underpin the present report, Arab countries referred to the guidance note for comprehensive national-level reviews, prepared by the Commission on the Status of Women, and specifically to Arab countries' responses to the questionnaire contained in the note, entitled "Questionnaire for the content of national reports on Beijing +25".<sup>12</sup> ESCWA provided technical support to a number of Arab countries in preparing their national reviews. Nonetheless, some countries commented on the shortcomings of the guidance note, which might have influenced countries' progress reviews.

9. The regional review was a multistage process that included conducting national reviews, holding regional meetings and consultations, preparing a synthesis Arab report, and submitting a final document on the position of Arab States and adopting it at a high-level meeting held in Amman on 28 November 2019. Below is a summary of these stages.

- A training workshop for Arab countries was held in January 2019 to introduce the philosophy and methodology of comprehensive national reviews and the structure of reports;
- ESCWA provided direct technical support to some countries, upon request, to assist them in preparing their national reports;
- Between May and June 2019, 20 Arab countries submitted their national reports, namely Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates. The conflict in Somalia and Yemen prevented these two countries from submitting their reviews;
- Regional consultations were held with civil society organizations and national human rights institutions to gauge their perspective of progress, challenges and priorities. Civil society organizations were chosen based on a set of criteria, including that they be registered at the national level; they have experience at the regional level in the field of gender equality; they have experience in preparing national and regional reports; they have a network of relationships with other civil society organizations working at the national level; and that they be accredited by the United Nations

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<sup>11</sup> [E/HLPF/2019/3/Add.3](#).

<sup>12</sup> UN-Women, 2018a.



Economic and Social Council. The consultations resulted in recommendations that were presented to representatives of organizations and experts at the Tunis Forum on Gender Equality, held in May 2019, to incorporate them in the Forum's final recommendations as a contribution to an international dialogue on civil society's visions on implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;

- ESCWA and its partners prepared the regional report following these events. The first draft of the report was presented at an experts meeting held on 25 and 26 September 2019, attended by representatives of Arab countries, civil society organizations, national human rights institutions, and young men and women. Participants discussed the draft report's findings and agreed on a final version that reflected the status of women and girls in the Arab region, for adoption at a high-level meeting to be held in 2020.

## C. Synthesis Arab report

### 1. *Aim*

10. The present report, entitled "Synthesis Arab report on the periodic review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years", reviews progress by Arab countries in fulfilling their commitments under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It also analyses challenges impeding progress, and highlights the regional dimensions of the political, security, economic, social and cultural contexts of those countries. Based on Arab countries' national reports, the present report identifies priorities for action on gender equality over the next five years in the Arab region; and provides proposals and recommendations on strategies to address relevant weaknesses at the national and regional levels.

### 2. *Methodology*

11. Part of the United Nations regional commissions' role is to conduct regional reviews of progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The present report is mainly based on an analytical review of Arab countries' comprehensive national reviews, a quantitative analysis of national data, and a qualitative analysis of achievements and challenges. It adopts an analytical approach, not narrative or descriptive. The aim is not to summarize or compile national reports, given that they are available on the websites of partners.<sup>13</sup> Achievements at the national level indicate trends at the regional level, specifically regarding the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the women-related SDGs. A review of Arab countries' performance in only one of these processes would be incomplete, given the key intersections between the strategic goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the SDGs.

12. The 12 critical areas of the Platform for Action are: women and poverty; education and training of women; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for women's advancement; women's human rights; women and the media; women and the environment; and the girl child.

13. These 12 critical areas resonate clearly in the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, not only in Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, but also in many other SDGs that have gender-sensitive targets. These SDGs aim to: end poverty in all its forms everywhere; end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture; ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all ages; ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; reduce income inequality within and among countries; make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access

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<sup>13</sup> ESCWA, 2019b.

to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

### 3. Terminology and definitions

#### (a) *Refugee*

- Every person who is outside the country of his nationality owing to a justified fear of being persecuted because of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, and is unable or unwilling, owing to such fear, to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

*Source:* 1951 Refugee Convention, article 1, paragraph A.

#### (b) *Child marriage*

- Any formal marriage or informal union before the age of 18. Child marriage is a reality for boys and girls, although it disproportionately affects girls.

*Source:* UNICEF.

#### (c) *Violence against women*

- Any act of gender-based violence 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.

*Source:* Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (20 December 1993).

#### (d) *Trafficking in persons*

- The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

*Source:* Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000.

#### (e) *Achievement*

- This term is used to refer to a positive change that has occurred over the past five years. This change is measured by the resulting progress towards achieving the strategic goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

### 4. Sources

14. The present report draws its data from voluntary national reviews, specifically from the detailed national reports prepared by 20 Arab countries for the period 2014-2019. In these reports, countries reviewed their achievements and the challenges they faced in the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action.

15. The present report is also based on United Nations data, in particular to clarify the economic, social, political, cultural and security contexts of Arab countries and the region. These sources include statistical data prepared by the ESCWA Statistics Division; in some cases, ESCWA findings differed from national data. However, the preference for the use of ESCWA data, and of data from other United Nations regional specialized bodies, is to ensure that indicators are calculated in a unified manner, and to provide consistent data in terms of definitions that can be compared between Arab countries. The present report was based on internationally agreed standard definitions.

16. Another source used in the present report is a study entitled *Gender Justice and the Law*.<sup>14</sup> It addresses national successes in achieving access to justice for women and men in 18 Arab countries, and the gaps that States must tackle to fulfil their international obligations.

17. The preparation of the present report was also guided by the outcomes of consultations on the periodic review, in particular civil society and youth meetings in Beirut (April 2019), Tunisia (April 2019), and Cairo (August 2019). These consultations discussed progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and future priorities from the perspective of non-governmental stakeholders.

### 5. *Structure and contents*

18. The present report follows the same structure as the detailed national reports, and is divided into five sections. Section I reviews the general framework of the status of women in the Arab region. Section II presents progress made in empowering women, adopting the same framework used in the guidance note for comprehensive national-level reviews (six overarching dimensions and their subheadings).<sup>15</sup> Section III provides an analytical review of Arab countries' efforts in establishing and developing bodies and institutions concerned with implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Section IV examines the efforts of States in providing gender-disaggregated data to measure progress and identify weaknesses, despite general shortfalls in the gender statistics system and a lack of gender disaggregated data in most Arab countries. Section V focuses on analysing lessons learned, highlights national and regional priorities and makes recommendations to assist Arab countries in working towards gender equality.

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<sup>14</sup> UNDP and others, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> UN-Women, 2018a.

## I. Status of women in the Arab region

19. Section I reviews key achievements by Arab countries in the field of women's empowerment over the past five years. It analyses progress at the legislative level, especially regarding accession to international instruments on women, and gender mainstreaming in national constitutions and laws. It includes an analysis of challenges hindering gender equality in the Arab region.

### A. Key achievements

#### 1. Context

##### (a) Political and social context

20. Over the past decade, the Arab region has witnessed political and social transformations that have had devastating consequences on sustainable development processes. These transformations have sometimes taken the form of political fluctuations accompanied by security, political or institutional instability, or instability affecting all aspects of life; or the form of armed conflicts, terrorist attacks, or waves of violence in which women and girls have been used to execute attacks. These transformations have not only affected emerging Arab economies, but also cast a shadow over the economies of oil-rich countries. In many cases, these transformations have resulted in all the above-mentioned challenges, especially in conflict-affected countries.

21. The repercussions of those transformations are not limited to countries witnessing internal conflict, but also affect neighbouring countries which host populations that have been forcibly displaced for economic, security or other reasons. Waves of displacement have adversely impacted basic services in these host countries, sparking severe political and social tensions that have undermined the effectiveness of policies to achieve sustainable development, in general, and gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, in particular.

22. An assessment of the political and social context of the Arab region must necessarily consider the situation in the State of Palestine. In the midst of these transformations, the Palestinian issue remains unresolved and the living conditions of the Palestinian people are deteriorating, in the light of a sharp drop in interest in realizing their legitimate rights. Palestinians within the country are languishing under oppression and the blockade; and Palestinians in the diaspora suffer from some countries' reluctance to provide aid, indifferent to their deteriorating humanitarian conditions or their urgent development needs. In this worsening Palestinian context, women and girls remain the most affected.

##### (b) Development context

23. According to the Human Development Index (HDI),<sup>16</sup> the Arab region made little improvement in the period 2012-2017. It was the weakest region globally. While HDI worldwide increased from 0.709 percentage points to 0.728 percentage points in that period, Arab countries recorded an increase of only 0.013 percentage points compared with improvements in other regions ranging between 0.018 percentage points and 0.036 percentage points. Exceptions include Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, where HDI decreased in the past five years by 0.035 percentage points, 0.095 percentage points, and 0.053 percentage points, respectively. This decrease means that over the period 2012-2017, HDI lost around 15 per cent of its value in the Syrian Arab Republic, 5 per cent in Libya, and 10 per cent in Yemen. Table 1 sets out HDI values for the world and for six regions, namely the Arab countries; East Asia and the Pacific; Europe and Central Asia; Latin America and the Caribbean; South Asia; and sub-Saharan Africa.

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<sup>16</sup> A statistic composite index that measures average achievements in three basic dimensions of human development, namely life expectancy (measured by life expectancy at birth); education (measured by years of study and expected number of years of study); and standard of living (measured by gross national income per capita).

**Table 1. HDI in the regions of the world and in Arab countries that witnessed internal conflicts, 2012 and 2017**

	2012	2017	Value of change	Percentage of change (%)
World	0.709	0.728	0.019	2.67
Arab countries	0.686	0.699	0.013	1.89
East Asia and the Pacific	0.707	0.733	0.027	3.67
Europe and Central Asia	0.749	0.771	0.022	2.93
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.740	0.758	0.018	2.43
South Asia	0.602	0.638	0.036	5.98
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.514	0.537	0.023	4.47
Syrian Arab Republic	0.631	0.536	-0.095	-15.05
Libya	0.741	0.706	-0.035	-4.72
Yemen	0.505	0.452	-0.053	-10.49

Source: UNDP, 2018.

24. Despite the importance of HDI, it remains deficient. Most repercussions of political changes, positive or negative, are difficult or impossible to measure. Estimated measures at the national level, based on averages, do not accurately reflect the development status of marginalized groups that the 2030 Agenda aims to integrate into the development process, so as to leave no one behind.

(c) *Economic context*

25. The economic situation differs between Arab countries in terms of the structure of the economy and its pace of growth, and of indicators of domestic product, growth and employment. However, some groups of Arab countries have similar characteristics, namely the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, which are classified as oil-exporting countries; conflict-affected countries; and middle-income countries in the Mashreq and Maghreb. Despite disparities between countries and groups, which translate into varying progress at different levels, the economic situation in the Arab region as a whole is similar in many respects. The same challenges and difficulties often impede the economies of individual countries, affecting the economic situation of the region as a whole. Over the past few years, the Arab region has achieved slight growth in GDP, which did not exceed 2.3 per cent in 2018. Inflation rates decreased slightly to 6.7 per cent in the same year, compared with 6.9 per cent in 2017.<sup>17</sup> However, per capita income has not registered similar growth. A lack of inclusive economic development policies has reduced the economic opportunities available to the majority of Arab social groups.

26. In addition to meagre economic growth in the Arab region, public debt increased disparately among countries, and exceeded 50 per cent in most of them. The public deficit has also increased in most countries, exacerbating economic challenges in States that have yet to develop mechanisms that mobilize financial resources to meet such challenges. Regarding employment, job growth has not matched the increasing labour supply. The Arab region has the highest unemployment rate globally, in view of shrinking employment opportunities and poor-quality jobs. Youth unemployment has reached 26 per cent, and it is particularly high among young women. Arab countries use economic models that rely on public institutions, which weakens decent work opportunities in the business sector that remains limited in Arab countries.

<sup>17</sup> E/ESCWA/EDID/2019/1.

27. Slower growth has had a major impact on human wellbeing. Improvements in income distribution have waned along with growth in the region, which explains why poverty rates did not decrease significantly during the period of slow growth. The recent slowdown in growth is due to conflict in the region, and government measures to protect and regulate the work environment. This has resulted in higher investment costs and, consequently, weaker national competitiveness.

28. Recent social and political developments that have rocked the region contributed to reduced economic activity and higher unemployment. Factors that increase youth unemployment include a growing workforce; the gap between labour requirements and opportunities, on the one hand, and available skills, on the other; weak labour market capacity to open up to the private investment sector; and public sector inflation. In this regard, the region records wide disparities between the sexes. Women's workforce participation is much lower than men's, and educated young women in the Arab region have the highest unemployment rates globally.

#### (d) *Status of women*

29. In this context, which is fraught with grave challenges and imminent dangers, the greatest burden falls on women and girls. They are negatively affected by transformations, either directly, for no other reason than being female; or indirectly, because of their affiliation to local communities exposed to collective dangers affecting all members, women and men alike. Women and girls in Iraq, Libya, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen are among those hardest hit by these transformations, whose repercussions may impact their future after destroying their present. Depriving a large proportion of girls of education poses an imminent threat to the human capital of one or more generations of women. Denying them basic health services, such as vaccination, nutrition and mental health services, is a threat to their survival. Exposing them to deep-rooted social scourges, such as child marriage, is a blatant crime against them. Their lives have ended following rape and forced disappearance. Extremists and terrorists have directly targeted women and girls with abhorrent practices from the Middle Ages, perhaps the most brutal of which is their enslavement - a human tragedy. A tragedy with enormous physical and psychological effects on women and girls, which are difficult or even impossible to mitigate.

### 2. *Achievements*

30. The next section examines Arab countries' achievements in six areas that are aligned with the overarching dimensions set out in the guidance note for comprehensive national-level reviews, namely inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work; poverty eradication, social protection, and social services; freedom from violence, stigmatization and social stereotypes; participation, accountability and gender-sensitive institutions; peaceful societies without marginalization; and the preservation, protection and restoration of the environment.

## **B. First area: Achieving inclusive development, common prosperity and decent work**

### 1. *Employment*

31. The past five years have seen some progress in mainstreaming gender equality issues into legislation, policies and programmes to strengthen women's capacity to play a productive role in the economy and society. The following measures have been implemented:

- Enacting legislation to achieve equal pay, allocating quotas for women in government appointments, applying equity in promotion, criminalizing violence against women in the workplace, encouraging the establishment of nurseries in the workplace, and adopting a flexible work system;
- Designing entrepreneurship programmes, providing financing for startups, giving priority to women entrepreneurs, and increasing women's financial inclusion rates;

- Appointing women to decision-making positions in the executive and legislative branches, thus limiting gender-based social stereotyping and providing successful role models for girls.

32. However, these measures will not translate into real improvements in women's employment in the Arab region without an integrated set of policies. Without such policies, women's labour force participation will remain low, and high female unemployment rates, especially for young women, will persist. Despite some disparities between Arab countries, the past five years have not witnessed any real change in women's employment throughout the region. Despite improvements in female human capital, as demonstrated by significant advances in education indicators for women and girls, female labour force participation has not increased, and was estimated at only 21 per cent in 2017.<sup>18</sup> When women's labour force participation is compared with men's, the gender equality gap becomes clear: men's labour force participation is 74 per cent, which is three times higher than women's. This gap also highlights unemployment rates, which stand at around 19 per cent for women compared with 6 per cent for men. When comparing these indicators with those in other regions worldwide, it is clear that the Arab region lags behind all developed, developing and least developed regions globally. Women's labour force participation is 21 per cent in the Arab region, compared with a global average of 49 per cent (table 2).

**Table 2. Labour force participation by sex in all regions of the world, 2017**

	Labour force participation (%)	
	Men	Women
World	75.3	48.7
Countries by human development level		
Countries with very high human development	68.9	52.9
Countries with high human development	75.5	55.0
Countries with medium human development	78.9	36.8
Countries with low human development	74.7	59.3
Regions		
Arab countries	74.2	20.7
East Asia and the Pacific	77.3	60.1
Europe and Central Asia	70.3	45.5
Latin America and the Caribbean	77.5	51.6
South Asia	79.1	27.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	74.0	65.2

Source: UNDP, Human Development Data 1990-2018.

33. These results are consistent with data issued by the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the labour underutilization index,<sup>19</sup> which stands at 8.6 per cent globally and varies between 7.1 per cent for men and 11 per cent for women. In the Arab region, the index is at 14.1 per cent, with a wide gap between the sexes (9.4 per cent for men compared with 34 per cent for women).

<sup>18</sup> UNDP, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> The index is calculated by dividing (unemployed + potential workforce) by (workforce + potential workforce). ILO, 2019.



34. Increasing women's participation in the workforce has enormous economic gains. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF),<sup>20</sup> removing barriers to women's labour force participation leads to significant GDP increases. Although this estimated increase varies between regions globally, it is expected to be highest in the Arab region at around 58 per cent. This means that labour force participation is not just a human right for women and girls, but rather an imperative economic necessity, especially in view of the economic slowdown in Arab countries. The success of women's employment policies and programmes will have positive effects not only on women, but also on entire Arab economies and societies. Moreover, aligning women's employment policies and programmes in Arab countries with new global trends will accelerate economic growth in Arab countries, and enable them to join the Fourth Industrial Revolution and to benefit from the resulting 'disruptive innovation'.

## 2. *Unpaid care and domestic work*

35. In Arab countries, where women provide around 82 per cent of care services, a large proportion of the population requires care, especially children. In the Arab region, the number of people requiring care was 56 per cent in 2015, compared with a global average of 44 per cent. This number of people requiring care in the Arab region is expected to surpass 60 million in 2030.<sup>21</sup> Despite the economic and social importance of care work, Arab countries have made little progress in terms of unpaid care, most of which falls on women. Furthermore, there are no indications of a trend towards redistributing unpaid care and domestic work between spouses. There is an urgent need to recognize unpaid care work and provide adequate support to women to assist them in achieving a good work-life balance, which should be reflected in employment policies.

## C. **Second area: Poverty eradication, social protection, and social services**

### 1. *Poverty reduction*

36. Most Arab countries with available data have achieved a relative decrease in poverty levels since the start of the millennium, to varying degrees, as indicated by the percentage of the population living below the poverty line. Despite this progress, over a third of the population in six Arab countries lives below the poverty line, and between a quarter and a third in four Arab countries. According to the Multidimensional Poverty Index, which tracks deprivation across three dimensions, namely health, education, and the living standards, approximately 41 per cent of the population in Arab countries lives below the multidimensional poverty line, while 13 per cent of the population lives in extreme poverty.<sup>22</sup>

### 2. *Social protection*

37. Arab countries provide various forms and models of social protection. Despite significant efforts, these models remain fragmented. The economic model in many countries focuses on measures to address the implications of structural adjustment programmes, under the assumption that the gains of economic growth will go to the poor. This reveals that social protection approaches in the region are adopted in isolation from citizenship rights and the equitable distribution of resources, and are biased towards the concept of assistance rather than development.<sup>23</sup> With some variations between Arab countries, ILO data indicate that Arab countries average GDP spending on social protection, excluding health, does not exceed 2.5 per cent.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ostry and others, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> ILO, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> صندوق النقد العربي، 2018.

<sup>23</sup> [E/ESCWA/SDD/2015/Technical Paper.3](#).

<sup>24</sup> ILO, n.d.



### 3. *Health and reproductive health*

38. Arab countries have achieved a number of health indicators. For example, life expectancy at birth among females increased from 72.2 years in 2013 to 73.4 years in 2017.<sup>25</sup> The maternal mortality rate decreased from 164 deaths per 100,000 births in 2010, to 149 deaths per 100,000 births in 2015. However, disparities in these numbers between Arab countries indicate that some societies have made achievements comparable to those achieved in the best health systems in developed countries, while others have failed. According to the 2018 Human Development Report, disparities in health indicators within Arab countries are similar to the global average.<sup>26</sup> However, this does not apply to education and income indicators, which reveal a greater degree of inequality in the Arab region compared with global levels.

### 4. *Education and capacity-building*

39. Average years of schooling per capita highlight the status of education in the Arab region, and education development over the past years. This indicator registered an increase from 4.9 years in 2013 to 6.2 years among females in 2017, compared with a lower increase among males from 6.7 years to 7.7 years for the same period. Despite this improvement, illiteracy remains prevalent in many Arab societies, especially among women. It is estimated that one third of girls and women aged 15 years and above, who number approximately 41 million, suffer from illiteracy in Arab countries - double that of illiterate males in the same age group (17 per cent). Illiteracy rates in the 14-24 age group reflect a gender gap of 5 percentage points: 11 per cent among young men compared with 16 per cent among young women. The 5.3 million young Arab women who suffer from illiteracy embody lost development opportunities for the Arab region.

40. The cognitive development and resulting potential of Arab girls are impeded by a cultural system that limits their labour force participation in a number of Arab countries. Those who do participate suffer from weak employment opportunities, especially in the private sector. If they are offered employment, women do not have sufficient support to balance work and family responsibilities. Women may also be exposed to violence, in the workplace or in public, which makes their participation in the labour market risky. Often, all these circumstances are accompanied by discrimination against women in their career advancement and in obtaining equal remuneration to men.

#### **D. Third area: Freedom from violence, stigmatization and stereotypes**

41. Arab countries have made remarkable progress in amending or implementing legal systems that eliminate discrimination against women, protect women and girls, and address social stereotypes based on gender discrimination, in line with their obligations under several international instruments. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) requests States parties to provide legal protection for women and girls, to repeal or amend discriminatory laws and regulations against them, and to enact legislation prohibiting discrimination in all areas related to their lives. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action provide a comprehensive plan for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including by enacting necessary legislation. The preamble of the 2030 Agenda emphasizes the rule of law as a cornerstone of its implementation, and outlines the legislative tracks needed to achieve many of the 17 SDGs and their targets.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Human development reports issued by UNDP for separate years.

<sup>26</sup> UNDP, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> SDG 5 targets stipulate adopting sound policies and enforceable legislation, and strengthening existing policies and legislation to advance gender equality and empower women and girls at all levels. SDG 16 calls for enhanced law enforcement and non-discriminatory policies to achieve sustainable development.

42. Arab countries' legislative achievements have varied over the past five years,<sup>28</sup> as highlighted by countries in their recent reviews of progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years. These achievements include ratifying international agreements, or withdrawing reservations to them; strengthening the legislative environment to support civil rights and women's political participation; enacting legislation related to the economic, social and cultural rights of women and girls; supporting the most marginalized groups; providing protection to women and girls; and repealing discriminatory legal texts.

43. Despite the importance of these legislative accomplishments aimed at combating violence against women and girls, many women and girls continue to suffer from various forms of violence, including domestic violence; child marriage; forced marriage; sexual harassment; and female genital mutilation. Indicators measuring violence against women are cause for concern.<sup>29</sup> UN-Women reports that 4 of every 10 women in the Arab region have experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of their husbands at some point in their lives, and that female genital mutilation is still practised in some Arab countries. In conflict-affected countries, women and girls are increasingly exposed to domestic violence, sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Unsafe conditions rob girls of their right to postpone their marriage until they reach adulthood.

44. Overall, Arab countries have witnessed a decline in child marriage, owing to the dissemination of positive values related to girls' right to access education at all levels; and to the enactment of legislation against denying girls the right to choose and to marry at the appropriate age, and against depriving girls of a childhood and of education and care that qualify them to play an active role in the public domain. Nonetheless, there are 40 million females married in childhood in Arab countries.<sup>30</sup>

45. Freedom from violence, stigmatization and stereotyping requires an integrated package of interventions that are coherent, consistent and complementary, and that avoid selectivity. This is all the more important in a patriarchal socio-cultural context dominated by men, and perpetuated by biased family upbringing and a discriminatory environment in the public sphere. This value system is also rooted in the female mindset. For example, many women accept that husbands can beat their wives.<sup>31</sup> Over half of women accepted this notion in five Arab countries, namely Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and Somalia, compared with a quarter to half of women in six Arab countries, namely the Comoros, Egypt, Mauritania, the Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen.

#### **E. Fourth area: Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions**

46. Arab countries have made significant progress in appointing more women to leadership positions, as reflected in a noticeable increase in recent years in the numbers of women ministers and representatives in Arab parliaments; female judges and ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps; women in leadership positions in academic circles, including university presidents and college deans; and female members of corporate boards and chief executives. In some Arab countries, women have assumed leadership positions of great importance, as chairperson of the House of Representatives and as adviser to the head of State for national security. These unprecedented achievements have resulted in Arab women's wider participation in decision-making; the enactment and amendment of legislation supporting women; the mainstreaming of gender equality; and the protection of women and the creation of a more suitable business environments for them, whether in public institutions or private companies.

47. The Arab Barometer, whose data were collected from seven Arab countries in 2018, indicates that the approval rate for women to occupy the position of Head of State or Prime Minister is 62 per cent. This result differs from the entrenched mental image of a lack of confidence in women playing key roles in the public

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<sup>28</sup> The present report includes a section detailing progress made at the legislative level.

<sup>29</sup> Many indicators do not reflect the true extent of the phenomenon, given the tendency of some survivors to not report violence.

<sup>30</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, 2018b.

<sup>31</sup> UNDP, 2016, table 12. Data are not available for all Arab countries.

sphere, and reflects a change compared with 2011, when the approval rate was 57 per cent. The most recent findings of the Arab Barometer show that the approval rate for women to occupy very high positions exceeded 60 per cent in 6 Arab countries, namely Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the State of Palestine and Tunisia, with the highest rate registered in Lebanon (77 per cent) and the lowest in Algeria (36 per cent). As expected, the acceptance rate is higher among women than men in general, with disparate gender gaps between Arab countries. While this gap does not exceed 7 percentage points in Lebanon (80 per cent among women versus 73 per cent among men), the difference widened to 22 percentage points in Algeria (47 per cent among women versus 25 per cent among men). The effect of education on embracing gender equality values also differs between countries. For example, when comparing the approval rate of those with secondary education or higher with that of those with basic education, differences range between 13 percentage points in Morocco and one percentage point in Algeria.

#### **F. Fifth area: Peaceful societies where no one is marginalized**

48. Many Arab countries have witnessed some of the most destructive conflicts and crises in recent history. They have caused significant damage to the health and welfare of citizens, have undermined economic growth, political systems and human rights, and have led to huge development losses. Occupation and conflict have had devastating repercussions for the peoples of the region, for its institutions, natural resources, infrastructure and civil peace, and for sustainable development in general. Their effects have not only constrained the region's ability to advance a transformative development project, but have also led to a significant decline in basic development gains, including in health, education and the empowerment of women and girls.<sup>32</sup>

49. In the State of Palestine, the security situation is undermined by continued Israeli violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. These violations have a severe impact on Palestinian women by denying them security and protection, and exposing them to various forms of violence.<sup>33</sup> In Yemen, hostilities have led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands to neighbouring countries,<sup>34</sup> and the fighting has exacerbated challenges resulting from long years of poverty and insecurity. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the conflict has led to deterioration in all sectors, significant waves of refugees and displaced persons, and high levels of poverty. Over 5.6 million people have been forced to flee the Syrian Arab Republic, and 6.6 million have been internally displaced,<sup>35</sup> keeping in mind that three of every four Syrian refugees or displaced persons are women and children.<sup>36</sup> In Libya, the security situation has deteriorated considerably, resulting in the killing of hundreds, the injury of thousands, and the displacement of many thousands more, most of them women and children.<sup>37</sup> Refugee and internally displaced women and girls face serious challenges and restrictions on employment because of their limited mobility. They also bear disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work, and are threatened by child marriage or forced marriage in some countries.<sup>38</sup>

50. The Arab region is making efforts to advance women and girls in the context of building and maintaining peace, especially through the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda, which intersects with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Pursuant to this agenda, Arab countries have developed national plans of action for women's advancement containing goals related to women, peace and security, and have formulated sectoral strategies and legislation to mainstream gender equality. At the regional level, the League of Arab States adopted the Executive Action Plan on the Protection of Arab Women: Peace and

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<sup>32</sup> [E/HLPF/2019/3/Add.3](#).

<sup>33</sup> [E/ESCWA/ECW/2016/Technical Paper.3](#).

<sup>34</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, n.d.b.

<sup>35</sup> UNHCR, n.d.a.

<sup>36</sup> UNHCR Progress data for Syrian refugees. Available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/news/13033>.

<sup>37</sup> UN News, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> IPSOS Group SA, 2018.

Security, which was endorsed by the Arab League Council at the ministerial level at its 144th session held in September 2015. The Executive Action Plan constituted a guiding framework for developing national plans. Among Arab countries, Iraq, Jordan, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia have formulated national action plans pursuant to Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. Other Arab countries have made strides in developing national plans, including Lebanon, where government approval is required for implementation. Algeria and Djibouti are currently preparing their plans. Some countries, such as Egypt, have announced the preparation of a national plan on enhancing the role of women in making, maintaining and building peace.

51. In some countries, national human rights institutions and women's machineries are working to integrate the women, peace and security agenda into national policies and plans, enhance women's participation in political life, combat violence against women, and develop the security sector's capacity to respond to violence resulting from gender-based discrimination. Some countries have begun formulating strategies to combat extremism, with a focus on the role of women in combating extremism. Moreover, work has begun on plans to prepare a national response to refugee waves in countries with large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons. In addition to these efforts, Arab countries must still adapt action plans on women, peace and security to their domestic capacity; enhance the role of women in times of peace and war; and intensify efforts to enhance cooperation on women, peace and security issues at all levels of the State.

52. Regarding women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution, the past years have witnessed unconventional forms of women's participation. Political developments in the period 2010-2011 provided an unprecedented opportunity to increase the political participation of women from different social groups. Women's participation was not limited to demonstrations, but also included data collection, reporting on human rights violations, and enhanced feminist rhetoric focusing on women's empowerment and gender equality. Moreover, the past years have witnessed women's participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes. Examples include women's participation in the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, and the participation of Libyan and Yemeni women in national dialogue processes.<sup>39</sup> Although supporting women's participation in politics, peace negotiations and decision-making is a critical priority, parties involved in conflict tend to believe that women's issues, rights and empowerment are not priorities in conflict conditions.<sup>40</sup>

### **G. Sixth area: Environmental preservation, protection and rehabilitation**

53. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action focuses on environmental issues through two pillars. The first relates to the impact of environmental issues on women, and the extent to which policies and programmes on women's issues meet their needs. The second relates to women's participation in decision-making regarding the environment and sustainable development at various levels. This approach is consistent with the 2030 Agenda, particularly with SDGs 13, 14 and 15 related to climate change and natural life in the oceans and on land. These Goals focus on environmental issues, and motivate action to deal with them and to mitigate the effects of climate change on people and the planet.

54. The Arab region is one of the most affected by climate change globally. Global warming and water scarcity, in particular, adversely affect fresh water sources, agricultural productivity and food security. They put pressure on urban societies and lead to a significant deterioration in living standards. Consequences include higher costs for food, fresh water and energy, and negative economic, social and health effects for both women and men, albeit in varying forms and degrees. These conditions are exacerbated by the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters, such as successive floods and droughts, in addition to desertification and pollution.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> [E/ESCWA/ECW/2017/3](#).

<sup>40</sup> UN Women, 2018b.

<sup>41</sup> [E/ESCWA/SDPD/2017/RICCAR/Report](#).

55. Arab countries are taking various measures to strengthen their societies' capacity to adapt to the effects of climate change, including developing policies and programmes to combat pollution and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and strengthening social protection networks to assist the most vulnerable. However, these policies and programmes often do not take into account gender mainstreaming when setting and implementing priorities. Moreover, there is a lack of knowledge-based studies on the differential exposure of women and men to the risks of climate change, and on the best ways to support them in facing the various effects of climate change, whether direct effects related to immediate relief, or medium-term impacts. For example, measures could include rebuilding and providing sustainable living and work opportunities.

56. In Morocco, climate change is contributing to a significant decline in agricultural production, to soil degradation, and to a 12 per cent increase in plants' water requirements. Successive climatic fluctuations and high temperatures are straining the agricultural sector.<sup>42</sup> This directly affects women in Morocco, since they constitute the majority of the workforce in the agricultural sector, which comprises 60 per cent of all working women.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, in the summer of 2016, Kuwait set the world record for highest temperature, at 54 degrees Celsius.<sup>44</sup> Temperature rises affect living standards, especially for older women who represent the majority of the population over 70 years old, thus requiring special interventions to help them age with dignity.

57. A number of Arab countries have implemented projects to improve infrastructure to reduce thermal emissions, including investing in renewable energy by utilizing solar and wind energy, implementing initiatives to combat desertification, recycling, and ensuring the optimal use of available natural and water resources.

## H. Laws and legislation

58. Arab countries have made significant legislative achievements, notably introducing amendments or establishing legal systems that prohibit discrimination against women, and protect women and girls. These countries have made strides in fulfilling international obligations, including CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the 2030 Agenda whose preamble emphasizes the rule of law as a cornerstone of its implementation. Arab countries have introduced various legislative amendments over the past five years, which they highlighted in their recent reviews of progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years.

### 1. *Acceding to international agreements*

59. Amendments under this heading relate to ratifying international agreements, or withdrawing reservations to them. For example, Qatar has acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. The State of Palestine has joined a number of international instruments, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. It has also acceded to other agreements, such as the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, and the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages. Saudi Arabia joined the Convention concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value. Tunisia joined the third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Iraq joined the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183). Several Arab countries have joined international agreements that contribute to developing a national framework more in line with international developments. For example, Oman ratified the Paris Agreement, and Algeria ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. Bahrain issued a decree to amend some reservations to

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42 E/ESCWA/SDPD/2019/CP.6.

43 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.FE.ZS?locations=MA>.

44 World Meteorological Organization, 2016.



CEDAW, stipulating the implementation of provisions that do not conflict with Sharia law. Oman withdrew its reservation to paragraph 4 of article 15 of CEDAW.

60. However, Arab countries have maintained their reservations to articles 9 to 16 of CEDAW. Not only do these reservations significantly impede the amendment of nationality laws or family and personal status laws, they also impact numerous women's issues. The effects of some Arab countries' reservations to article 2 of CEDAW, which calls for integrating gender equality in national constitutions and taking appropriate legislative and non-legislative measures to prohibit all discrimination against women, cannot be ignored.<sup>45</sup>

## *2. Amending national constitutions and legislation*

61. In theory, the majority of Arab countries' constitutions stipulate that women and men have equal rights before the law. However, some constitutions do not explicitly refer to gender equality, or do not include specific provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex. Over the past five years, no major amendments have been made to Arab countries' constitutions to comply with international standards, with the exception of Algeria, the Comoros, Egypt and Tunisia. Algeria amended its constitution to emphasize the principle of citizen equality and non-discrimination on any basis, especially discrimination based on sex. The Algerian constitution now provides for the promotion of equity between men and women in the labour market, and encourages women to assume positions of responsibility in public bodies and departments and at the institutional level. The amended 2014 constitution contains over 20 articles designed to guarantee women's rights in various areas of life. In the Comoros, the constitution was revised in 2018. It now upholds women's rights, protecting them from exploitation and violence, and placing them on a par with men in decision-making positions. In Egypt, the constitution stipulates that the State must guarantee equality between women and men in all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; ensure adequate representation of women in parliament's councils; and uphold women's right to assume public and senior management positions in the State. The State must also ensure that women are appointed to the judiciary without discrimination; and that women are protected against all forms of violence. The constitution also provides for the establishment of an independent national women's council.

62. In contrast, some constitutions restrict the amendment of family and personal status laws,<sup>46</sup> and cause difficulties in constitutional appeals before judicial authorities concerned with the constitutionality of laws. In general, legislation in most Arab countries does not cover the definition and various forms of discrimination, as set out in international texts and instruments such as CEDAW, or in other international human rights instruments where the concept of discrimination has significantly developed in recent decades. These instruments prohibit discrimination based on colour, race, national origin, economic and social status, sex, descent, health status, marital and family status, nationality, age, wealth, religion and language. They also prohibit depriving individuals of their legal capacity because of imprisonment or for other reasons. However, constitutions and legislation have been adopted in Arab countries without ensuring sufficient integration and consistency between them.

63. In the past years, several Arab countries have enacted national laws and legislation to create an enabling environment for the advancement of women's conditions. For example, Bahrain issued law No. 27 of 2018, which requires amending the Law of the Court of Cassation, and allows appeals against rulings issued by Sharia courts. In Lebanon and Kuwait, laws were passed to establish national human rights institutions. Moreover, Morocco passed a law on the terms of employment of domestic workers. Noting the issues of the most marginalized groups, especially persons with disabilities, Bahrain, the Comoros, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates have passed laws on the rights of persons with disabilities. Laws and mechanisms to protect children and young people have been established over the past five years in Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

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<sup>45</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/AR/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>.

<sup>46</sup> Several trends are recorded in Arab constitutions. The first adopts Islam as the State religion and Shariah as the sole source of legislation. The second adopts Islam as the State religion and Sharia as a major source of legislation. The third does not establish a binding rule on the source of legislation.

64. The national reports addressed developments in laws directly related to women, by following two tracks. The first track relates to abolishing discriminatory laws that threaten women's protection, while the second track relates to enacting laws specific to women or to amending legislation related to them, in line with the principles of gender equality. Under the first track, countries have eliminated a number of articles related to so-called honour killings, or articles that allow impunity by marrying a victim of sexual assault in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco and the State of Palestine.

### *3. Legislative steps to protect women's participation in work, politics, the economy and society*

65. The national reports highlighted legislative initiatives taken to strengthen social protection for women. For example, Kuwait passed the Early Retirement Law, which gives men and women equal rights in retirement. Qatar passed the Civil Human Resources Management Law, which gives men and women equal rights, duties and wages.

66. Despite such progress, the ILO 14-week paid maternity leave has yet to be adopted. Provisions that exclude women from certain jobs and impose legal restrictions on women's work must also be amended. The challenges facing domestic workers, who are excluded from labour laws in many countries, must be addressed and they must be afforded legal protection, while continuing to adhere to ILO conventions, in particular the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), and the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). It is essential that labour laws include provisions on direct and indirect discrimination, based on the considerations identified in the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), and the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

67. The past five years have witnessed legislative developments in nationality laws, albeit limited, in countries such as Bahrain, Oman and Tunisia. These developments aim to ensure that women enjoy the same rights as men, such as the right to confer nationality to their children. Since these developments are new, their effects on the lives of children, the family and society have yet to be determined. Various attempts have been made in countries such as Algeria, the Comoros, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates to fix the imbalance in women's political participation. These attempts aimed to enhance women's participation and push them towards leadership positions and higher decision-making positions, as a priority for those countries. Various measures have been taken to achieve these goals, including enacting legislation on political participation and appointing women to senior positions. For example, Lebanon amended the Municipalities Law to allow women to run in the place of their original registration, after they were previously obliged to run in the place of registration of their husband.

68. Several countries have also passed laws relating to freedom of expression and information, while ensuring that such platforms are not used to harm women. Morocco passed the Law on Press and Publication, which bans all publications that include abusive or degrading language against women, perpetuate the inferiority of women, or promote discrimination on the basis of sex. Iraq passed the Media Network Law, which stipulates a quota for women in the Board of Trustees of no less than a third. However, press and publishing laws are a double-edged sword: while these laws somewhat succeed in protecting Internet users from abuse and protecting women from violence, they may impose restrictions on freedom of expression that also affect women.

### *4. Protecting women from violence*

69. Arab countries have attached special importance to the issue of violence, and have adopted laws to protect women from violence. Morocco and Tunisia have passed laws to protect against all types of violence, while Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia have passed laws to protect against family or domestic violence. Other countries are currently working on enacting laws to protect against violence, which are either being drafted or are under consideration in national parliaments. Algeria and Oman criminalized violence under the penal code, while several countries have taken measures to protect against domestic violence despite their failure to pass protection laws.

70. Some countries have passed laws to criminalize sexual harassment, including Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. Many countries have criminalized unwanted sexual acts or practices, without explicitly criminalizing sexual harassment. Some countries have enacted legislation on female genital mutilation, which has been banned in the Kurdistan region of Iraq since 2011. Egypt has gone further by criminalizing the practice: the amendments to the 2016 Penal Code stipulate a prison sentence of between five and seven years for perpetrators.

71. Regarding laws on trafficking in human beings, most Arab countries have ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and had begun adopting laws to punish or protect against trafficking in the period before the years covered by the present report. Kuwait, Morocco and Tunisia completed this process in the past five years, whether by adopting relevant laws and legislation, as in Morocco, or by activating mechanisms to combat human trafficking, as stated in the national report of Kuwait.

72. Undoubtedly, all Arab countries have taken significant measures to protect women from violence. However, States should continue their efforts to combat sexual harassment in the public sphere and in the workplace; and find solutions to so-called honour crimes and to provisions that allow sexual predators to act with impunity if they marry their victims. All countries should adopt legislation on family or domestic violence, human trafficking and sexual harassment, in addition to providing the necessary protection mechanisms to translate protection legislation into practice.

#### 5. *Personal status issues*

73. With regard to civil rights issues covered by personal status or family laws, the Arab region is witnessing a tendency to work, albeit in part, on advancing personal status issues. For example, initiatives have been taken in Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon and Morocco, Tunisia and the Syrian Arab Republic on issues related to raising the age of marriage or custody. The Syrian Arab Republic amended its Personal Status Law to raise the marriage age to 18, while Jordan introduced amendments to its Personal Status Law to increase the custody age for a non-Muslim mother to maintain custody of her children.

74. Despite the importance of the legislative steps taken by Arab countries over the past five years, there are still many legislative gaps that must be addressed in the next five years. Approaches should include expanding protections for girls from early marriage; eliminating provisions that discriminate with regard to guardianship; ensuring equal rights to marriage and divorce; empowering girls and women to exercise their right to inheritance; providing legal guarantees after the dissolution of marriage that ensure women have the same rights as men with regard to property acquired during the marriage; and addressing issues related to custody and guardianship in line with the principle of the best interests of the child, as emphasized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

75. As indicated above, Arab countries have taken positive steps towards legislative reform. However, this progress is marred by weakness in terms of interlinkages, coherence, integration and merging of the various processes. A review of the amendments approved by Arab countries in the past five years indicates that work on women's rights at the legislative level is still lacking. Giving priority to some issues and neglecting others means that gender equality is not addressed in a holistic, comprehensive and consistent manner. Eliminating discrimination against women in law requires a comprehensive and coherent human rights-based approach. For example, legislation related to violence against women is approached from a perspective that adopts a narrow definition, which does not include all forms of violence against women. Such legislation does not address the provisions of international agreements in terms of prevention, protection, trial, punishment and compensation for victims, nor does it take into account family or personal status laws that impede the protection of women.

76. In addition to the shortcomings resulting from fragmented efforts, shortfalls owing to poor consistency are also revealed. A number of countries have passed laws on violent crime, in general, and on domestic violence



and human trafficking, in particular. However, these countries still need to put in place a consistent legislative system that ensures the homogeneity of the legal texts, and takes into consideration the overlaps and intersections between them. For example, there is ambiguity between the legislation on prostitution and the legislation on human trafficking. Confusion also exists between laws on at-risk children or juveniles, and personal status or family laws that permit child marriage, and thus conflict with the best interests of the child. Research on labour laws and criminal laws reveals a weak complementarity between the obligations of legislation and the effectiveness of legislation, on the one hand, and the obligations of legislation and the lack of neutrality of legislation, on the other. Arab countries must consider the legislative process as essential to creating an appropriate environment, which leads to sustainable livelihoods, the eradication of poverty and discrimination, and legislation based on a true understanding of the roles, capacity and status of both women and men.

77. Arab countries are working to approve amendments to specific articles of their penal codes. The penal laws adopted in most Arab countries need updating to keep pace with global developments in the concept of crime and punishment, and the essence of the latter's purpose. The same applies to labour laws: despite its many achievements in establishing equal pay for women and men, further reform is needed. Labour laws require reconsideration of the concept of 'work', according to new global, humanitarian and human rights visions that take into account social justice and social protection for the most marginalized groups, in the light of unequal and inequitable work relationships. This highlights the importance of a clear and targeted legislative vision, and the need for a full revision of labour laws in Arab countries. Prejudices at the social level remain an obstacle that cannot be addressed only at the legislative level, but also through education and awareness programmes that target all members of society, to ensure the rule of law and that social biases do not violate rights provided by law. For example, although legislative frameworks do not distinguish between women and men in accessing banking and financial services, societal biases prevent women from accessing these services. Moreover, established and undisclosed biases among service providers limit women's access to them.

78. In this context, it is worth noting the results of the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law Index.<sup>47</sup> This composite Index reflects how laws affect women throughout the different stages of their life. It consists of eight subindicators covering mobility, workplace, pay, marriage, parenthood, entrepreneurship, assets, and pension. When calculating the index for 187 countries, including 20 Arab countries, its value ranged between 100 points and 26 points, and the global average was 75 points. The average value for Arab countries was 45 points, a difference of 30 points from the global average. These results indicate that Arab countries have made good progress in legislative reform, and that they should continue efforts to become more supportive of women.

79. The values of the subindicators can provide guidance in determining countries' successes and failures in terms of the impact of current laws on each of the eight subareas that they cover, compared with the rest of the world. They can also be used to set work priorities for the coming years. Analysis of Arab countries data<sup>48</sup> indicates that the average value of the indicator on entrepreneurship in Arab countries is the highest (78 points), followed by pension (60 points), mobility (54 points), workplace (44 points), assets (41 points), pay (34 points), parenthood (30 points) and marriage (23 points). Comparing the average index in Arab countries with the global average indicates that the widest gap lies in the laws governing marriage (23 points versus 79 points globally), and in the laws governing assets (41 points versus 82 points globally).

## **I. Major challenges to achieving gender equality**

### *1. Political sphere*

80. The 2010s witnessed major political transformations, the effects of which are still evident in many Arab countries, including conflicts, crises, waves of forced migration, mass displacement and asylum, and humanitarian tragedies that placed the greatest burden on women and girls. These repercussions were not

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<sup>47</sup> World Bank, 2019.

<sup>48</sup> ESCWA estimates, based on the World Bank database.

limited to countries directly affected by these political events, but also impacted neighbouring countries. Waves of displaced persons and refugees poured into these receiving countries, which were often unable to absorb them and provide basic services. Moreover, the presence of large numbers of displaced persons and refugees sometimes sparked acute political tensions. Even countries far from hotbeds of conflict were not spared the waves of violence resulting from extremism and terrorism affecting Arab countries, which undermined development efforts and political and economic stability.

81. Furthermore, the Arab region as a whole has not succeeded in building peaceful societies, where no one is marginalized. Some population groups in conflict-affected countries have become more marginalized. The situation was made worse by the waves of terrorist attacks that struck the region, increasing the suffering of women and girls, especially Yezidis, to unprecedented levels. These circumstances support the belief that the Arab region will not achieve sustainable development as long as wars are tearing societies apart, draining their capacity and destroying their institutions.

82. In addition to the human suffering caused by political transformations in the region over the past decade, the suffering of the Palestinian people continues. This suffering is endured by Palestinians in the occupied territory and in the diaspora, especially those living in camps, whose aid has been cut by some countries. This suffering is magnified for women and girls, and will escalate further following the curtailment of UNRWA activities because of the failure of some countries to fund its humanitarian programmes. This suffering creates a reality in the region characterized by anxiety, fear of the future, anger at the international silence on people's suffering in some Arab countries, limited assistance, and a weak will to build peace.

83. Within Arab societies, a sharp polarization has emerged between calls for adherence to universal human rights instruments and gender equality, and calls for an approach to rights and freedoms that enshrines the customs of traditional societies. This polarization has become a feature of the political competition that accompanies parliamentary elections and government formation, and figures strongly in political crises. It is often characterized by the provision of concessions that impede, or even stunt, women's empowerment.

## *2. Cultural sphere*

84. Some Arab societies still view violence against women and girls as 'personal issues that do not require public, security or judicial interference, which contributes to the normalization of violence. Social norms associated with gender roles remain deeply rooted, whether in marital or family relationships, or in the public sphere. These discriminatory beliefs pose a major obstacle to women's access to their rights, and undermine their willingness to seek justice.

85. In general, Arab women are not fully aware of their rights guaranteed by law, nor the procedures that protect them from violence. They also largely lack the financial capacity to pay for legal services and litigation, especially for lengthy procedures. This reality leads many women to refrain, out of despair, from completing lawsuits, thus forcing them to compromise their rights because of their weak negotiating position.

86. The patriarchal system still plays an important role in many Arab societies, and contributes to restricting women's empowerment through discriminatory customs and traditions that are often justified by religious pretexts. This may not affect elite women and girls, but it limits the rights, opportunities and freedom of choice of women in the middle and lower classes of society, thus depriving Arab societies of women and girls' potential.

## *3. Economic and social infrastructure*

87. Arab countries suffer from high rates of unemployment among women and young people. Given the unfavourable regional circumstances, there is no real hope for future economic improvements or sufficient employment opportunities, especially in view of the population growth witnessed in recent years, resulting in increased numbers of new labour force participants. In these challenging circumstances that prevent the creation of new job opportunities, achieving gender equality in employment remains elusive.

88. Geographical disparities, especially between urban and rural areas, are an obstacle to achieving gender equality, since there are fewer opportunities in rural areas. Moreover, conservative values limit women and girls' ability to relocate to seek employment away from their original place of residence. Some urban environments prevent women from moving around safely, which may force some women to quit work or to refuse jobs that put them at risk.

#### 4. *Institutional framework*

89. Diversity undoubtedly benefits all public institutions. However, diversity is of particular importance in the judiciary, as an emerging accountability and justice mechanism. Historically, women have been excluded from the judiciary, owing to negative stereotypes. Recently, however, most Arab countries are allowing women into the judiciary, but they have yet to fill all types of judicial positions. Unfair scepticism about women's ability to make objective rulings continues to hamper women's ability to assume judicial positions without discrimination. Those in charge of the judiciary usually hold conservative values, which constitute a psychological barrier against their acceptance of women in leadership positions.

90. A number of Arab countries suffer from weak civil society institutions and their limited ability to manoeuvre in the areas of human rights and development. This weakens legislation enacted to protect women and girls, impedes accountability mechanisms, and limits legal support to marginalized women.

#### 5. *Legal frameworks*

91. In Arab countries, the judicial system, characterized by a lack of integration and coherence and by conflicting rulings, remains a major obstacle to women's access to justice. Despite legislative accomplishments, many challenges obstruct the full achievement of justice and impede the timely implementation of judicial rulings. These deficiencies are exacerbated by inconsistencies between international treaties to which Arab States are parties, on the one hand, and national constitutions and laws, on the other. Moreover, there is a wide gap between women's rights as stipulated in national laws, and their effective implementation in practice.

### **J. Perspectives of civil society and young people on the status of women in the Arab region**

92. Given the central importance of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to women's issues, civil society institutions have attempted to strengthen their cooperation with government agencies and development partners in that regard. Civil society maintains that such cooperation must involve all stakeholders in developing action plans to address weaknesses in implementing national obligations, and in responding to shared work priorities, whether at the legislative, executive or policy levels. In parallel consultations, young people noted discrimination against girls in particular, according to their age group, reflected in a lack of programmes aimed at empowering girls in the economic, political, social and security spheres and in other fields. Young people also highlighted the importance of working with different generations to ensure the continuity of the results achieved under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action since 2015. They stressed the importance of supporting the efforts of young women leading the women's movement, to ensure recognition of diversity and interconnectedness within the various social groups of the Arab region. The consultations revealed a particular interest in using ICT tools to bridge the generational gap, and to communicate with young people in particular.

## II. Progress in women's empowerment

93. The present section examines progress made in empowering women and girls across the Arab region over the past five years. It provides a detailed analysis of progress in each of the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform, which are grouped into 6 comprehensive dimensions showing the areas of convergence between the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda.<sup>49</sup> The present section not only aims to showcase national reports and compile country achievements towards gender equality, but also to highlight regional developments and general trends to that end.<sup>50</sup>

94. Over the past five years, international and regional institutions promoting gender equality in the Arab region have made great efforts to support countries, and implement initiatives to empower Arab women. The aim of the present section, and of the present report, is not to summarize those efforts, although they undoubtedly deserve detailed documentation in a separate report. The national reports prepared by Arab countries to review the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years revealed significant achievements in some fields, while highlighting shortfalls in other areas that should be given more attention in the coming years. The national reports revealed disparities between countries in the extent of progress achieved; and highlighted the challenges faced by conflict-affected countries, which affect women and girls more severely than others.

### A. First dimension: Inclusive development, common prosperity and decent work

95. Despite progress in a number of areas related to the empowerment of women and girls, the gender gap in the Arab region remains wide, reaching about 40 per cent in 2018.<sup>51</sup> In that year, the average female labour force participation in the region was 20 per cent, compared with a global average of 48 per cent, and a regional average for men of 74 per cent.<sup>52</sup> There were also clear disparities between countries in women's economic participation, ranging from 58 per cent in Bahrain and Qatar to 6 per cent in Yemen. In seven Arab countries, this rate was less than 20 per cent, and ranged between 20 and 30 per cent in eight other countries (figure 1).

96. The gender gap in labour force participation differs between Arab countries, at around 20 percentage points in the Comoros and Djibouti, compared with over 50 percentage points in nine other Arab countries. Comparing between labour force participation for men and women reveals that the male rate is four times that of females, on average, in Arab countries, with significant disparities between countries. The gap is less than double in five Arab countries, six-fold in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, and 12-fold in Yemen.

97. Low rates of women's economic participation are directly related to other forms of gender inequality in Arab societies, including discrimination against women in the legal sphere which negatively affects their participation in the formal economy. Women's labour force participation is influenced by the extent of society's support in allowing them to achieve a balance between their productive role in the economy and their social role as carers for their families. Social stereotypes assign rigid gender roles, primarily tasking women with family care roles, even if they are employed. Data on the percentage of time Arab women spend on unpaid domestic work is available for only seven Arab countries. These data indicate that the percentage of time a woman spends on unpaid work ranges from 8 per cent in Qatar to 24 per cent in Iraq. The same data sources indicate that men's participation in such work has decreased significantly. Comparing the time spent by women and men in unpaid domestic work reveals that women spend nine times more time, on average, than men

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<sup>49</sup> The grouping of the 12 critical areas of concern into six comprehensive dimensions showing the areas of convergence between the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda facilitates the analysis of progress made in these two processes, given that progress in one enhances progress in the other.

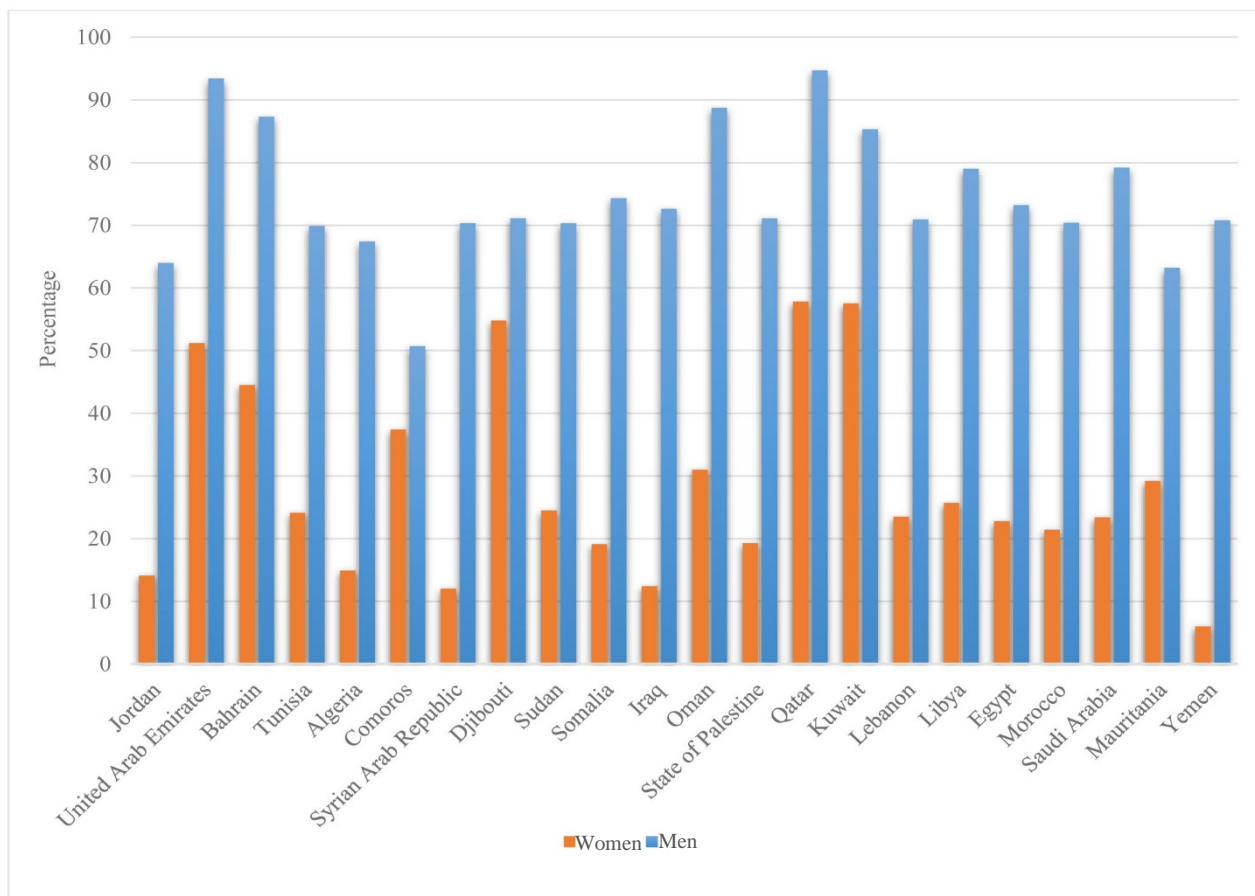
<sup>50</sup> For more information on countries' achievements, please see the national reports.

<sup>51</sup> World Economic Forum, 2018, p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> UNDP, 2019,

completing such work in Egypt, seven times more in Morocco, and six times more in Algeria, Iraq and the State of Palestine.<sup>53</sup>

**Figure 1. Labour force participation of women aged 15 and above (%), 2018**



Source: UNDP, 2019, table 5.

98. An enabling legislative, administrative and regulatory environment related to maternity, childcare and parental care can assist working women in achieving a balance between their multiple roles, and help them remain in the formal labour market, even after having children. Average global paid maternity leave is 107 days, compared with 75 days in the Arab region, placing Arab countries at the bottom of the list when compared with other geographical regions worldwide. Average paid maternity leave is 165 days in Europe and Central Asia, 110 days in South Asia, 96 days in Latin America and the Caribbean, 89 days in sub-Saharan Africa, and 86 days in East Asia and the Pacific.<sup>54</sup>

99. The financial and organizational burdens incurred by employers resulting from women’s role as carers lead to biases in the private sector against employing women, even when women and men have equal capabilities and skills.

100. Table 3 sets out national provisions on maternity leave in Arab countries, highlighting disparities between countries in duration, remuneration, and wage financing sources. It indicates that maternity leave ranges between 30 and 120 days. Countries differ in terms of who is responsible for paying women during maternity leave, and in terms of the duration of fully-paid maternity leave. Maternity leave is granted with full pay in most Arab

<sup>53</sup> UNDP, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

countries, but wage financing sources vary between countries. Some Governments bear this financial burden entirely, so that employers do not stop employing women. The financial burden falls entirely on social security agencies in six Arab countries, namely Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. Some countries tend to adopt a participatory approach, with employers covering 25 per cent of the financial costs in Egypt and 50 per cent in Djibouti. In other Arab countries, employer cover the full cost of maternity leave. In general, such provisions apply to the public sector and the formal private sector. They often do not apply to seasonal or temporary jobs in the informal sector, or to sectors where most poor women find work.

**Table 3. National provisions on maternity leave, 2017**

Country	Duration	Remuneration	Financing sources
Jordan	10 weeks	Full pay	Social security
United Arab Emirates	6.4 weeks	Half pay or full pay	Employer
Bahrain	10.8 weeks	Full pay for the first 60 days	Employer
Tunisia	14 weeks	Two-thirds pay	Social security
Algeria	14 weeks	Full pay	Social security
Comoros	14 weeks	Full pay	Employer
Syrian Arab Republic	17.2 weeks	Full pay	Employer
Djibouti	14 weeks	Full pay	50 per cent by social security, 50 per cent by the employer
Sudan	8 weeks	Full pay	Employer
Somalia	14 weeks	Half pay	Employer
Iraq	12 months	Six months full pay, and six months half pay	Social security
Oman	7 weeks	Full pay	Employer
State of Palestine	10 weeks	Full pay	Employer
Qatar	8 weeks	Full pay	Employer
Kuwait	70 days	70 days full pay, and four months unpaid	Employer
Lebanon	10 weeks	Full pay	Employer
Libya	14 weeks	Full pay	Employer
Egypt	17.2 weeks	Full pay	75 per cent by social security, 25 per cent by the employer
Morocco	14 weeks	Full pay	Social security
Saudi Arabia	10 weeks	Full pay	Employer
Mauritania	14 weeks	Full pay	Social security
Yemen	10 weeks	Full pay	Employer

*Source:* ESCWA, based on national reports and the websites of relevant ministries and institutions in the Arab countries.

101. In general, unemployment rates have increased in most Arab countries. When examining these rates, it is necessary to take the context in the Arab region into consideration. Over the past five years, some Arab countries have witnessed turmoil, political changes and instability following conflict, which have also indirectly affected other Arab countries. These conditions have resulted in higher unemployment for both men

and women. However, the gender unemployment gap<sup>55</sup> is vast compared with other regions worldwide. The global average gender unemployment gap is 124 per cent, meaning that unemployment among women is 24 per cent higher than for men. In Arab countries, it reaches 237 per cent, meaning that the level of unemployment among women is more than double than for men. It ranges between 115 per cent and 153 per cent in the rest of the world, with the exception of East Asian countries where it is around 85 per cent.<sup>56</sup> In addition to low female labour force participation, women suffer from high unemployment rates in the Arab region, as shown in table 4.

**Table 4. Unemployment rates among those aged 15 and above in the Arab region, 2018**

Country	Women	Men	Total unemployment
Jordan	23.0	13.3	15.0
United Arab Emirates	7.5	1.7	2.6
Bahrain	3.5	0.3	1.0
Tunisia	22.6	12.9	15.5
Algeria	21.3	10.1	12.2
Comoros	4.1	3.5	3.7
Syrian Arab Republic	20.6	6.0	8.1
Djibouti	12.0	10.4	11.1
Sudan	23.2	9.2	12.9
Somalia	15.4	13.6	14.0
Iraq	12.3	7.2	7.9
Oman*	12.9	1.7	3.1
State of Palestine	50.8	24.7	30.2
Qatar	0.6	0.1	0.1
Kuwait	4.6	.9	2.1
Lebanon	9.9	5.0	6.2
Libya	24.6	14.9	17.3
Egypt	23.1	7.8	11.4
Morocco	10.4	8.6	9.0
Saudi Arabia	20.3	3.0	5.9
Mauritania	12.9	9.1	10.3
Yemen	23.5	12.1	12.9

Source: ILO, “Unemployment rate – ILO modelled estimates, November 2018”, ILOSTAT database. Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org> (accessed on 24 June 2019).

\* Based on data for November and December 2018, the National Centre for Statistics and Information of Oman issued different estimates of the unemployment rate, equivalent to 0.8 per cent for men and 7.1 per cent for women. These estimates are based on the following definition. Unemployment rate: percentage of individuals looking for work (15 years and over) who are not employed, but are seeking employment, or have taken specific steps to search for work by registering with the Public Authority of Manpower Register, and who update their data monthly as a sign of their serious intention and willingness to obtain work, as a share of the ‘active population’ in Oman. The active population is the total working age population (the total population aged 15 years and over who are employed or who are actively seeking employment, as registered in official administrative records).

<sup>55</sup> The gender unemployment gap is calculated by dividing the female unemployment rate by the male unemployment rate multiplied by 100. If the result is 100, then full gender equality has been achieved. The higher the result is above 100, the higher the gender inequality in favour of men.

<sup>56</sup> UNDP, 2018.



102. In their review of progress towards implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years, Arab countries monitored many accomplishments achieved under the following themes: promoting gender equality in paid employment; and redistributing unpaid care work and domestic work, and promoting a better work-life balance. The following sections consider regional trends under these themes.

### *1. Promoting gender equality in paid employment*

103. While some countries continue to implement existing wage legislation, many have enacted new legislation that promotes wage equality and prevents discrimination on the basis of sex, while other countries have reformed their internal systems. Such legislative reforms are major steps towards addressing one of the main structural obstacles limiting women's labour force participation.

104. For example, Morocco enacted article 9 of the Labour Code, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. Article 12 punishes violations of article 9 by imposing fines on offenders. Saudi Arabia amended its Labour Law, and article 34 prohibits discrimination between male and female workers in remuneration for work of equal value. Jordan also amended its Labour Law, emphasizing paragraph 4.2<sup>57</sup> on equal pay for work of equal value, and increasing the penalty for offenders. An article was also introduced to ensure harassment-free workplaces, and replicated as article 306 in the amended 2017 Penal Code. This article punishes harassment in the workplace, and the penalty is doubled if the act is committed by the employer. Saudi Arabia also enacted a law against sexual harassment, including in the workplace, and issued royal decree No. M/96 of 2018 endorsing an anti-harassment crime system. This decree stresses that the relevant authorities in the public and private sectors must put in place measures to prevent and combat harassment, and identify the necessary complaint mechanisms to implement the law. In Egypt, article 306A-b of the Penal Code was amended to criminalize sexual harassment, including sexual harassment in the workplace.

105. Several Arab countries have strengthened policies and mechanisms to ensure the implementation of such legislation. Egypt established a unit for gender equality and equal opportunities in the Ministry of Manpower in accordance with decision No.1 of 2019.<sup>58</sup> The unit aims to achieve gender equality, eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against women, empower women economically, balance family duties with work requirements, and promote equal opportunities. All Arab countries have started implementing agricultural or industrial programmes to improve women's access to financial services and credit. Projects and initiatives have also been designed to ensure women's participation in investment, and facilitate access to modern and smart technologies.

106. Periodic reviews indicate many good practices in Arab countries, including criminalizing denying women inheritance rights, as is the case in Egypt (law No. 219 of 2017); and promoting gender equality laws in inheritance, as in Tunisia. However, in general, strengthening women's rights to land ownership, ensuring land tenure, and improving women's access to modern technologies (including smart climate technologies), infrastructure and services (including agricultural extension) have not received sufficient attention in Arab countries. Most Arab countries have not put in place mechanisms for equal participation of women in economic decision-making bodies (in ministries of trade and finance, central banks and national economic committees, for example). These countries have also not sufficiently supported the transition of women from informal to formal work by taking legal and policy measures that benefit women in the informal sector.

### *2. Redistributing unpaid care work and domestic work, and promoting a better work-life balance*

107. Reports by Arab countries indicate that several of them have taken measures to expand childcare services in early childhood, to help working women achieve a better balance between their professional and family roles. Many countries have also strengthened institutional support for older persons who are chronically

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<sup>57</sup> المراجعة الوطنية الشاملة للتقدم المحرز نحو تنفيذ إعلان ومنهاج عمل بيجين بعد خمسة وعشرين عاماً، المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية، نيسان/أبريل 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Report on the progress made in the implementation of the Beijing platform from action (from 2014 to March 2019).



ill, decrepit or need extensive health and psychological care. Such support significantly reduces the responsibilities of working women. Algeria issued a law in 2015 that covers social security for women working in the informal sector, allowing them to take advantage of in-kind payments for medical and maternity insurance for a monthly sum.

108. Several countries offer benefit packages for maternity or paternity leave. Bahrain has established committees to ensure equal opportunities in private sector institutions, which have succeeded in amending internal regulations to guarantee that women are granted maternity leave for 140 days and that men are granted paternity leave for 10 days with pay; to provide flexible and reduced working times for pregnant women, namely six working hours starting from the eighth month of pregnancy; and to grant care leave to women who are adopting an infant.

109. Several Arab countries have made significant efforts to calculate unpaid care and domestic work, so as to include them in statistics and in the national accounting system. For example, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar and Morocco conducted time-use surveys to assess the contribution of both men and women to domestic work and the welfare of family members, and to calculate the value of unpaid work performed by women.

110. The country reports did not reflect any progress in promoting decent work for women workers in paid care, including women migrant workers, or in launching awareness-raising campaigns or activities to encourage the participation of men and boys in unpaid care and domestic work. Moreover, no progress has been made in adopting legal amendments on dividing marital assets or pension benefits after divorce, or recognizing the unpaid contribution of women to the family during marriage.

## **B. Second dimension: Poverty eradication, social protection, and social services**

111. Arab societies suffer from varying degrees of poverty; however, up-to-date and comparable data on poverty are not available for all Arab countries. Based on World Bank data on the proportion of people below the national poverty line, or the proportion of people below the international poverty line, or the proportion of people suffering from multidimensional poverty, it is clear that poverty is particularly rampant in the Comoros, Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen. Data on the gender gap in poverty are not available, given that poverty is measured at the household level. However, the feminization of poverty is evident when comparing poverty rates among women heads of households, especially divorced or widowed women, with the rest of society.<sup>59</sup>

112. Poverty eradication is linked to the structure of the economy and cannot be achieved without implementing a package of macro policies conducive to the empowerment of women. However, available data may not be up-to-date, and may not necessarily reflect the impact of changes experienced by conflict-affected countries in the past five years. In these years, the manifestations and consequences of poverty have been clear, albeit not accurately measured, among migrants, internally displaced persons and refugees. These manifestations of poverty have affected women and girls in particular. Their effects have exceeded the provision of basic needs, threatening the safety and dignity of women and girls and exposing them in many cases to sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and child marriage.

113. One of the root causes of poverty is women's lack of access to paid and decent work opportunities. This lack of opportunities is related to the structure of national economies, and the degree of diversification of economic structures. An effective poverty reduction tool for women and female-headed households is to promote poor women's access to decent work by adopting effective labour market policies, providing on-the-job training, enhancing skills, and providing employment benefits. A large percentage of Arab women work in the agricultural sector, especially in low-return seasonal work with no laws protecting their rights. The

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<sup>59</sup> Nieuwenhuis and others, 2018.

percentage of female workers in the non-agricultural sectors does not exceed 17 per cent of total female workers, which is low when compared with the global average of 39 per cent.<sup>60</sup>

114. Several countries have implemented measures to adapt social protection systems to changing realities in the world of work; for example, by providing maternity and unemployment insurance benefits, and by extending coverage to specific groups of self-employed workers. However, these measures are not sufficient to provide universal coverage and secure high levels of benefits. Social security plans tend to focus on providing pensions, without covering risk or other situations such as unemployment or maternity, or provide only partial coverage. The lack of adequate mechanisms to provide health care to the most vulnerable citizens is a major concern in most Arab countries. ILO data indicate that only 27 per cent of older persons receive old-age pension benefits in the Arab region.<sup>61</sup> Social protection systems in the region face a number of challenges, including a drop in the number of male and female subscribers to less than a third of the workforce contributing to social coverage. Added to these challenges are ongoing political changes and the effects of displacement and asylum, which put great pressure on social assistance and social security systems.

115. In some cases, instead of establishing universal social protection systems, most Arab countries provide financial subsidies to obtain goods, especially fuel and food; however, these subsidies remain limited in scope, coverage and benefits.<sup>62</sup> Inequality in obtaining social protection is an obstacle to social justice in the Arab region. In most countries, plans and programmes cover workers in the public and private sectors with formal contracts only. Temporary workers, agricultural workers, domestic workers, informal workers, migrant workers, and the self-employed are often excluded from those programmes. Relatively high employment rates in the informal sector, and low female labour force participation and high unemployment rates, contribute to reduced social insurance coverage, especially for women.

116. Consequently, there is an urgent need for reform to develop and implement an integrated social protection strategy. Arab countries should seriously discuss the concept of minimal social protection, and the importance of social protection in helping to solve major social problems in the Arab region. They should also formulate new policies that establish an appropriate minimum level of social protection; and intensify efforts to ensure continued social protection as a basic mechanism of social solidarity, covering all eligible classes. This is achieved by enshrining everyone's right to social protection in constitutions, policies and legislation; increasing social protection coverage and improving its efficiency, effectiveness, fairness and sustainability; and ensuring that it covers all individuals and households. Participatory social dialogue, which plays an important role in determining the right balance between protecting employment systems, on the one hand, and guaranteeing socially acceptable minimum wage levels, on the other hand, should also be encouraged. A stable labour relations system contributes to achieving these results and, in turn, to encouraging investment and guaranteeing social justice, by ensuring that the benefits of economic growth are shared more equitably. Arab countries should also develop effective employment policies and programmes to stimulate the labour market, especially for women.<sup>63</sup>

117. Some Arab countries have made great achievements in reducing maternal mortality rates, dropping below 20 deaths per 100,000 live births in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Lebanon and Libya, and ranging between 20 and 60 deaths per 100,000 live births in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and the State of Palestine. However, the maternal mortality rate remains high in Maghreb countries, and rises significantly in the Comoros, Mauritania, the Sudan and Yemen. It is the highest in Somalia, with over 700 deaths per 100,000 live births (figure 2). This indicator is inversely related to the percentage of births performed by a health-care provider (figure 3), exceeding 90 per cent in 14 Arab countries compared with only 9 per cent in Somalia.

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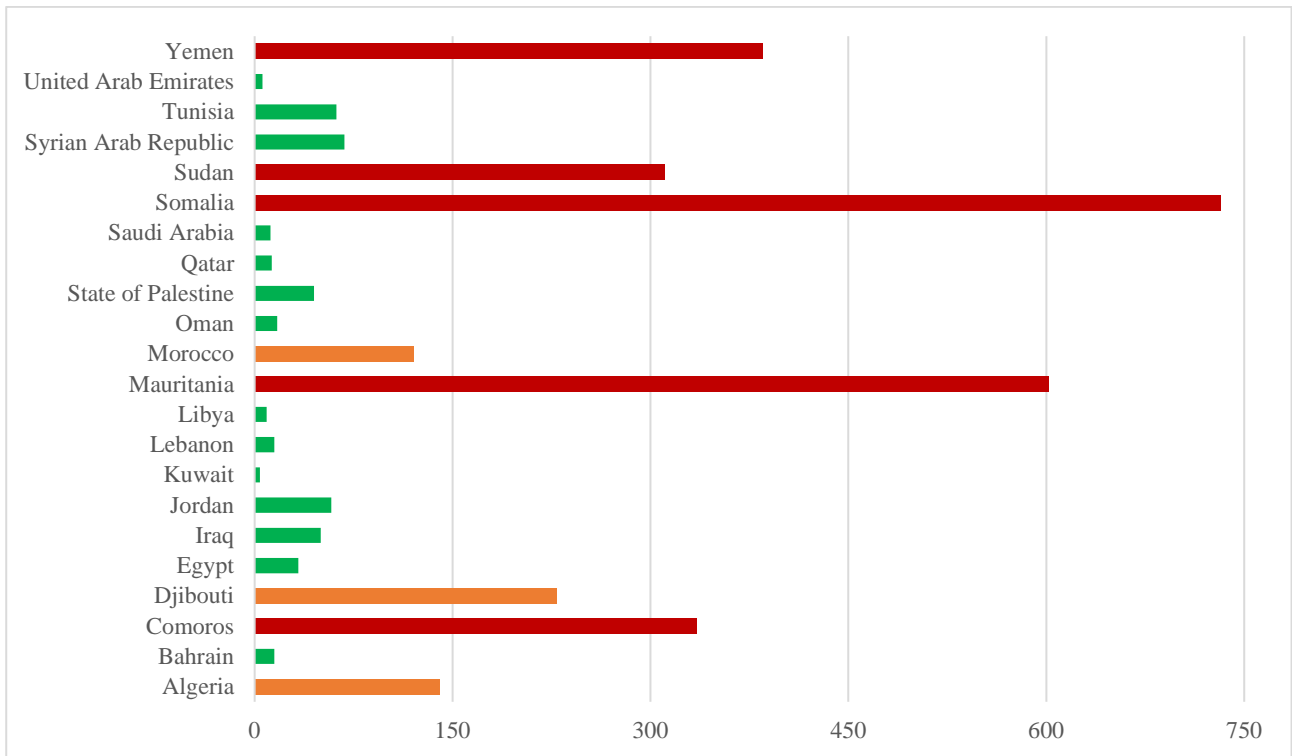
<sup>60</sup> UNDP, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> ILO, n.d.

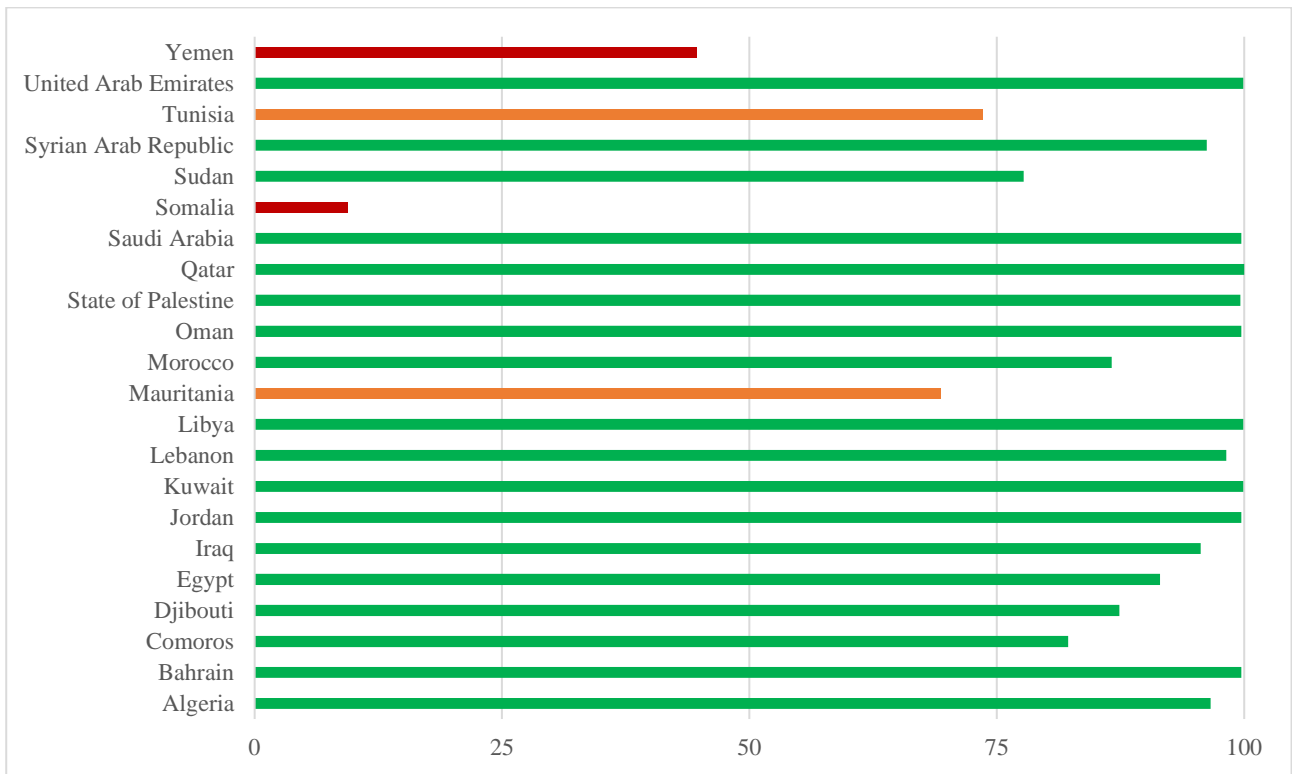
<sup>63</sup> قعوار، 2014.

**Figure 2. Maternal mortality rates in Arab countries, 2015-2018**



Source: UNDP, 2019, table 5.

**Figure 3. Percentage of births performed by a health-care provider in Arab countries, 2015-2018**



Source: UNDP, 2019, dashboard 3.

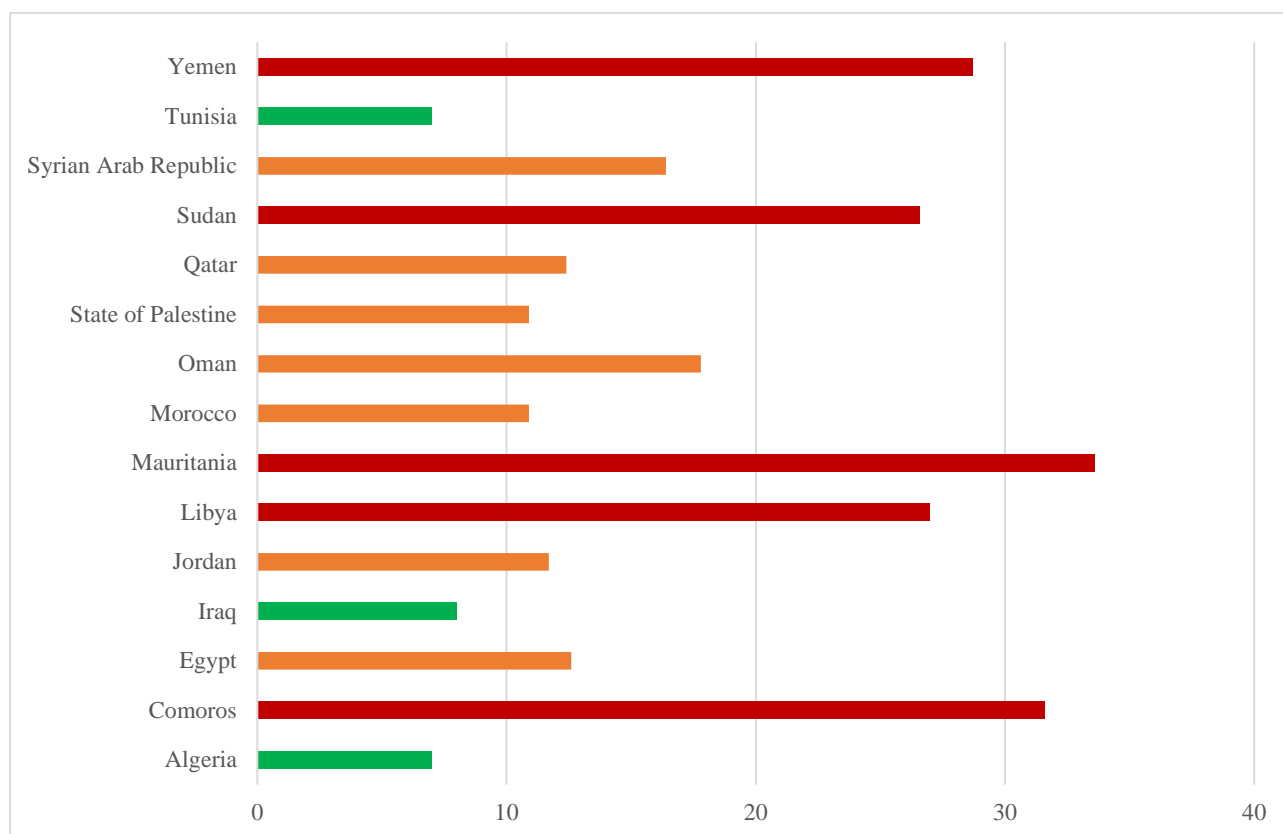
118. Significant disparities exist in total fertility rates between the Arab countries (table 5), ranging from 1.7 children to 5.4 children per woman. In general, the rate is lower in GCC and Maghreb countries, and is highest in the lowest-income countries and in Iraq and the State of Palestine. Countries with high birth rates have a low percentage of women who use family planning methods, dropping below 20 per cent in the Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia and the Sudan. However, the low use of such methods does not necessarily reflect reproductive values that favour a large number of children. In these countries, many women, over 25 per cent, want to postpone or stop having children, but they do not have access to family planning services, so their needs remain unmet (figure 4).

**Table 5. Total fertility rates and the percentage of people using family planning methods in Arab countries, 2013-2017**

Country	Total fertility rate	Percentage of people using family planning methods
Jordan	3.5	61.2
United Arab Emirates	1.7	62.5
Bahrain	2.1	61.8
Tunisia	2.4	27.5
Algeria	3.0	57.1
Comoros	4.3	19.4
Syrian Arab Republic	2.9	53.9
Djibouti	2.8	19.0
Sudan	5.2	12.2
Somalia	5.4	14.6
Iraq	4.1	52.5
Oman	2.9	29.7
State of Palestine	4.1	57.2
Qatar	1.9	37.5
Kuwait	1.9	52.0
Lebanon	1.7	54.5
Libya	3.4	41.9
Egypt	3.5	58.5
Morocco	2.2	67.4
Saudi Arabia	2.4	24.6
Mauritania	4.3	17.8
Yemen	4.4	33.5

Source: Based on regional indicators compiled by ESCWA.

**Figure 4. Unmet family planning needs in Arab countries, 2014-2017**



Source: Based on regional indicators compiled by ESCWA.

119. Among the health challenges facing the Arab region is a lack of reproductive health services, and services for people living with AIDS. With the exception of Lebanon, these services are still not in demand, owing to a lack of knowledge. A cultural transformation is needed to accept comprehensive sexual education in schools, or to implement community-based programmes to enhance awareness in that regard. No statistics are available on the prevalence of AIDS, given that societies prefer to ignore its existence. Arab countries hosting migrants, internally displaced persons and refugees face a major challenge in providing women and girls with appropriate services. Despite some countries' efforts, including Jordan and Lebanon, to provide health services for Syrian refugees, limited resources impede their provision.

120. With regard to education, the past five years have witnessed an improvement in female education indicators in all Arab countries, with the exception of those experiencing political conflict. Despite the persistence of a gender gap in the illiteracy rate, this gap tends to shrink among young people. There is ample evidence indicating a bridging of the gender gap in most indicators on education enrolment, including university education. One of these indicators compares the numbers of persons, of both sexes, who have a secondary education. The data indicate that the number of females with a secondary education exceeds the number of males in eight Arab countries, namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. In five other Arab countries, 10 per cent more men than women have completed their secondary education. However, the gap between the sexes widens further in other countries; for example, the number of males with a secondary education is almost double that of females in Mauritania and Yemen.<sup>64</sup> Health indicators in Arab countries show an improvement in some areas, including child and maternal mortality, but many reproductive health indicators remain unchanged.

<sup>64</sup> No data are available for the Comoros, Djibouti and Somalia.

121. A key indicator measuring women and girls' contribution to sustainable development is the percentage of the population aged 15-24 who are not participating in education or employment. In the light of available data on Egypt, Jordan and the Sudan, this indicator is higher among females by about 10 percentage points, rising to 20 percentage points when persons with disabilities are included.<sup>65</sup> Reports submitted by Arab countries point to achievements in several areas, including reducing poverty among women and girls; increasing women and girls' access to social protection; improving health services for women and girls; and improving educational outcomes for women and girls and enhancing their skills.

### 1. *Reducing poverty among women and girls*

122. With regard to developing social protection programmes for women and girls, such as cash transfer programmes for women with children, plans to guarantee public work/employment for women of working age, and pensions for older women, Egypt launched a conditional cash transfer programme known as *Takaful and Karama*. The programme covers 563 villages and 345 centres in 27 governorates, and aims to improve household consumption, increase conditional human capital, enhance women's right to decision-making in households, strengthen economic productive inclusion, promote women's financial inclusion, and combat violence against women. The programme is aimed primarily at women, and nearly two million women have benefited from it. Since 2015, Morocco has allocated a budget to finance activities related to the integration of gender equality issues in programmes and projects for the development of agricultural production chains. This measure complements a programme for the follow-up of rural women in the areas of valuation and organization, alongside income-generating agricultural projects that have benefited 30,000 women and monitored over 200,000 women.

123. Moreover, several Arab countries, such as Jordan, have implemented financial inclusion programmes for women, or have used information technology to create job opportunities for women, including creating an e-business pioneer platform in the United Arab Emirates, to increase young women's opportunities to obtain decent work. Most Arab countries have adopted policies and implemented successful programmes to support women business entrepreneurs. Young Arab women have especially benefited from these programmes, as pathways that allow them to overcome the discrimination that is often practised against them in the labour market.

### 2. *Increasing women and girls' access to social protection*

124. A number of Arab countries have made progress in reforming contributions-based social protection programmes to facilitate women's access to them. For example, Oman offers domestic and foreign scholarships for children of social security families, and scholarships for positions in government and diplomatic missions. The distribution of these positions reflects a trend towards empowering girls, as women have obtained about two-thirds of the positions allocated over the past three years.

125. Several countries have made progress in providing or promoting conditional cash transfers and social pensions. If such programmes are sustainable, they could contribute to reducing poverty among Arab households, in general, and women and girls, in particular. For example, Algeria offers an "Algerian solidarity grant," which provides direct State-paid assistance to disadvantaged groups, and women constitute two-thirds of recipients of these grants.

126. Arab countries should focus on improving access of marginalized social groups to a minimum level of social protection, including to women in informal employment such as domestic workers, migrant and refugee women, and women in difficult circumstances.

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<sup>65</sup> UN-Women, 2018c.

### 3. *Improving health services for women and girls*

127. Most Arab countries hold awareness-raising campaigns, including on public health issues. Campaigns on women's health receive great attention, especially those related to the early detection of breast and cervical cancer. Arab countries, in particular GCC countries, have developed many maternity health services, including increasing the percentage of births that take place under medical supervision, and the number of medical visits during pregnancy. These efforts are complemented by an improvement in women's access to health services, through the expansion of universal health coverage or public health services. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in communicable diseases and in maternal mortality.

### 4. *Improving educational outcomes for women and girls and enhancing their skills*

128. Despite the existence of a literacy gender gap in favour of males, the academic achievements of literate girls exceeds those of their male peers. Over the past five years, Arab countries have witnessed an increase in girls' enrolment rates (gross and net)<sup>66</sup> in primary and secondary education, with the exception of the Syrian Arab Republic where girls' enrolment in primary school declined from 117 per cent to 75 per cent in terms of gross enrolment, and from 93 per cent to 62 per cent for net enrolment. Enrolment rates in secondary education declined over the same period, from 72 per cent to 49 per cent for gross enrolment, and from 67 per cent to 45 per cent for net enrolment.<sup>67</sup> However, as a result of increased focus on girls' education, the Gender Equality Index<sup>68</sup> in most Arab countries is close to 100 per cent, except in Djibouti, Iraq, Somalia and Yemen.

129. A key achievement was an increase in the gross enrolment rates for higher education (post-secondary), exceeding 50 per cent in seven Arab countries, namely Algeria, Bahrain, Libya, Oman, the State of Palestine, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, compared with only three countries in 2010, namely Libya,<sup>69</sup> the State of Palestine and Saudi Arabia. Oman recorded the fastest growth, with the total enrolment rate for females in higher education increasing from 29 per cent to 60 per cent. This achievement was reflected in the Gender Equality Index on higher education,<sup>70</sup> exceeding 100 per cent in most Arab countries, except the Comoros, Djibouti, Iraq, Mauritania and Yemen.<sup>71</sup> Qatar topped the list of Arab countries according to the Gender Equality Index on higher education, reaching 7.4.

130. Most Arab countries have taken measures to increase girls' access to technical and vocational education and to training and skills development programmes, and to increase their education continuation and completion rates. For example, Algeria implemented a vocational integration programme for young people with degrees over the period 2014-2018, and some 164,000 women benefited from it. Today, women constitute around 80 per cent of total beneficiaries.

131. The reports of some Arab countries (Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman and the State of Palestine) on progress made over the past five years reflect efforts to strengthen skills and training in new and emerging areas, especially science, technology, engineering and mathematics. This is an appropriate channel to take advantage of the potential of girls who have made educational achievements that have not been adequately translated into added value in GDP, because of a cultural system that limits women's ability to compete in the labour market.

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<sup>66</sup> The gross enrolment ratio is the total enrolment within a country in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the official age group corresponding to that level of education. The net enrolment ratio is the number of boys and girls of the age of a particular level of education that are enrolled in that level of education, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group.

<sup>67</sup> 13/2 الملحق، العربي، 2018، صندوق النقد العربي.

<sup>68</sup> The Gender Equality Index provides a ratio of the female enrolment rate to the male enrolment rate.

<sup>69</sup> The rate in Libya fell from 61 per cent to 50 per cent.

<sup>70</sup> Data may not include those enrolled in higher education institutions outside their countries.

<sup>71</sup> No data are available for Somalia.

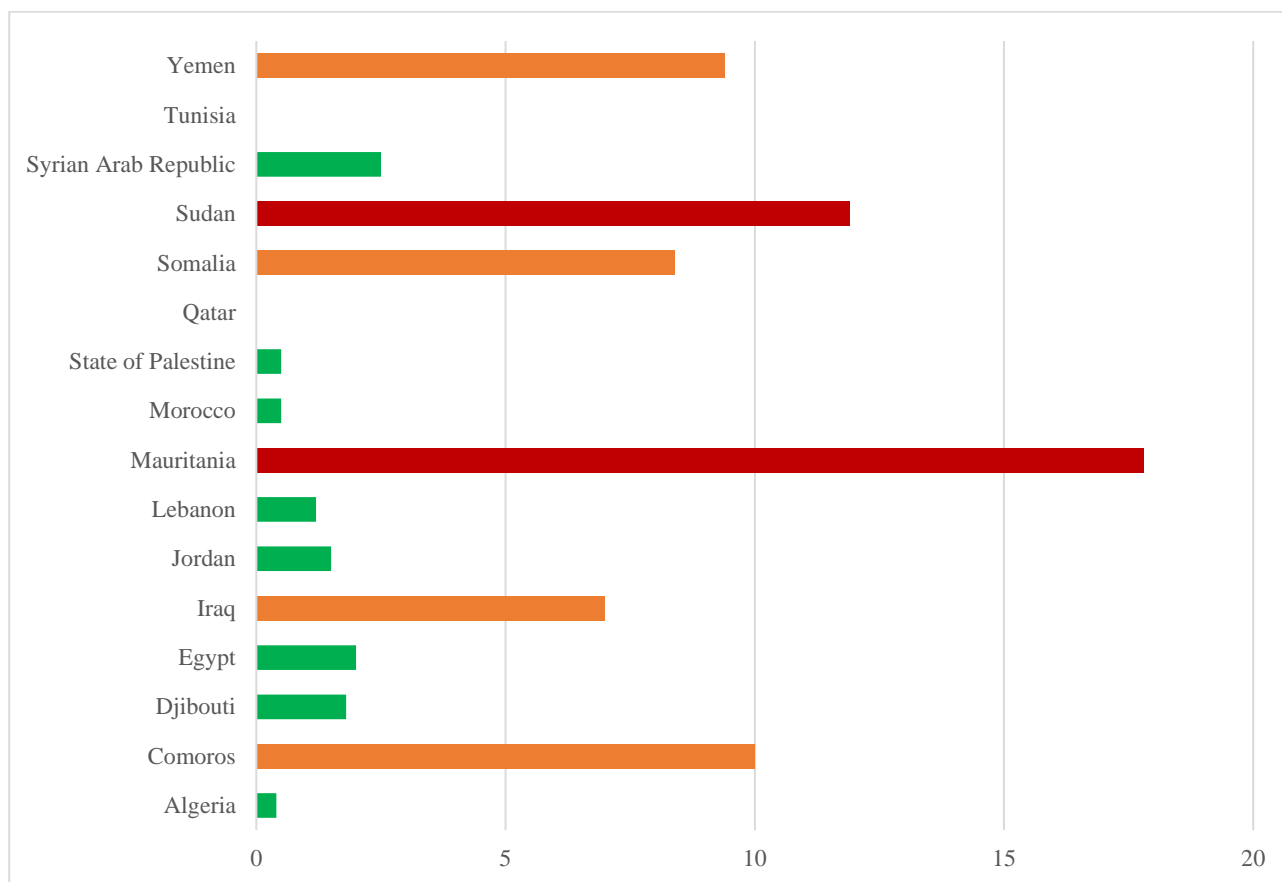
132. With regard to amending educational curriculums to promote gender equality and eliminate prejudice against women, Jordan prepared a strategy to mainstream gender equality in the Ministry of Education’s policies, plans and programmes, which has been approved and disseminated. Gender equality issues were mainstreamed in the Education Strategy 2018-2022, and a gender equality education strategy for 2018-2022 was prepared in line with the Education Strategy and the SDGs.

### C. Third dimension: Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

133. Gender-based violence prevents women and girls from learning, working and participating in public life. It constitutes a violation of women’s dignity and a gross violation of human rights. Over the past five years, this type of violence has received considerable attention in Arab countries. There is conviction in the gravity and seriousness of its repercussions, and in the need to acknowledge its existence and prevent its occurrence. Arab countries’ efforts in this regard are varied, including enacting laws, developing policies and strategies, taking institutional measures to prevent gender-based violence, establishing reporting mechanisms, increasing and implementing penalties for perpetrators, encouraging victims to report abuse, and providing medical and psychological support to victims.

134. The decline in child marriage, as a form of violence against women, varies between Arab countries. More efforts are needed in the Comoros, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. Child marriage is particularly high in Mauritania, where the percentage of females who were married before 15 years of age is 18 per cent, and the percentage of those married before the age of 18 is 37 per cent. The averages age of child marriage within Arab countries varies by province, especially between urban and rural areas (figures 5 and 6).

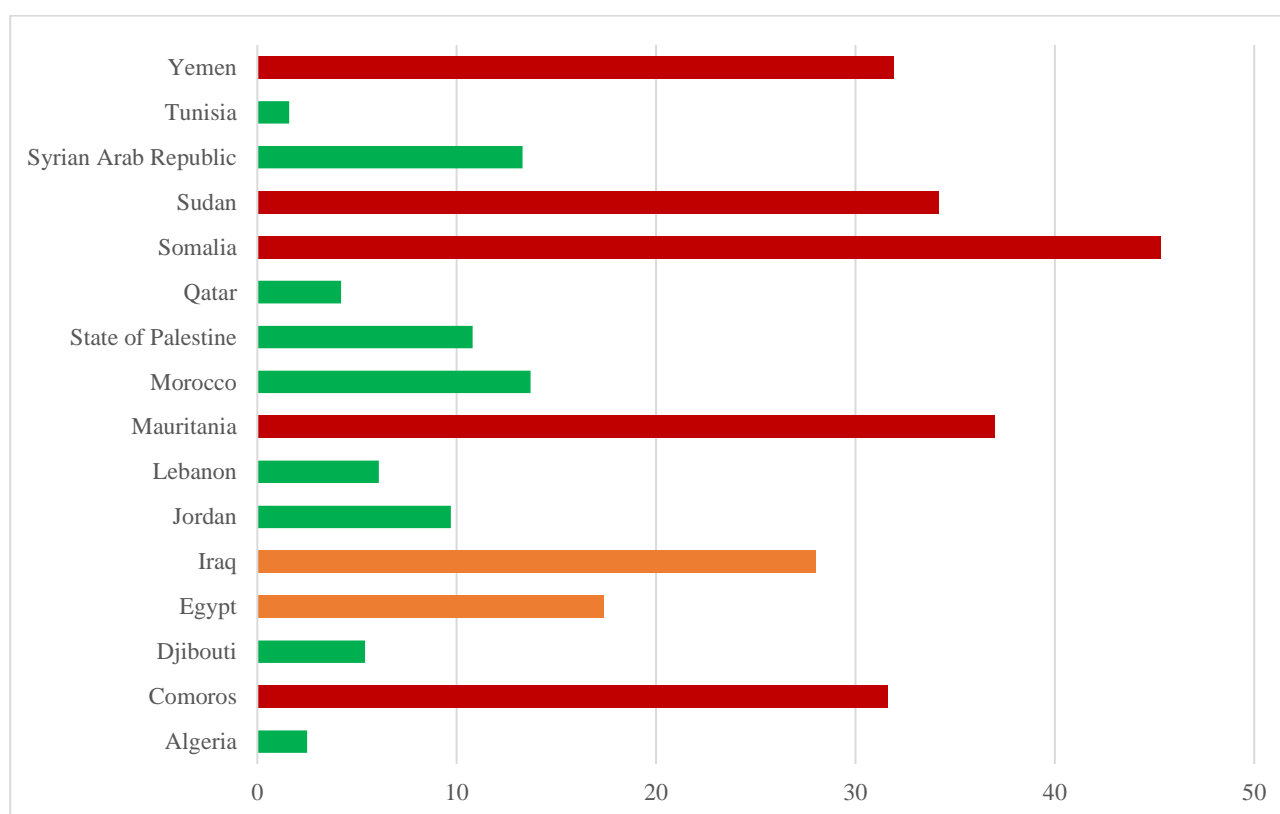
**Figure 5. Percentage of women aged 20-24 married before the age of 15 in Arab countries, 2013-2017**



Source: Compiled by ESCWA.



**Figure 6. Percentage of women aged 20-24 married before the age of 18 in Arab countries, 2013-2017**



Source: Compiled by ESCWA.

135. Despite the scarcity of data on violence, the overall urgency of the situation has prioritized the issue of violence against women and girls in Arab countries over the past five years. In general, data used to measure violence against women in society only cover a few Arab countries. These data are not collected in a periodic and organized manner to reveal trends in this phenomenon, and there are no consistent definitions of violence in countries' statistical systems. Data on women's exposure to violence by their husbands (table 6), which covers only six Arab countries, refer to three types of violence: psychological, sexual and physical abuse. The percentage of women who have been subjected to physical violence by their husbands exceeds 20 per cent in the State of Palestine (31 per cent), Egypt (25 per cent) and Tunisia (20 per cent). Sexual violence reached 17 per cent in Mauritania, and 15 per cent in the State of Palestine. Psychological abuse by a spouse was around 60 per cent in Mauritania and the State of Palestine. Given that comparisons between countries may not be useful because of different social and family contexts across societies, these data indicate the importance of providing more statistics on sexual violence to repeatedly measure its various aspects in all Arab countries.

**Table 6. Percentage of women subjected to violence by their husbands, most recent year where data are available**

Country	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Psychological abuse
Jordan	17.5	5.1	20.6
Tunisia	20.3	5.2	24.8
Comoros	5.6	1.8	8.1
State of Palestine	30.6	14.6	58.8
Egypt	25.2	4.1	18.8
Mauritania	1.2	17.3	59.9

Source: Compiled By ESCWA.

136. Progress has been made in adopting or strengthening measures to increase women's access to justice, including establishing specialized courts, providing training on accessing justice and the police, issuing protection orders, and ensuring fairness and compensation. However, prevailing values and stereotypes in some societies still prevent a large number of women from accessing justice, especially marginalized women and women from conservative groups. In general, there is an urgent need in the Arab region to devote greater efforts and resources to monitoring and evaluating the impact of violence against women and girls, and to producing evidence and collecting data on violence, including for specific groups of women and girls. There is also a need to implement or strengthen measures to improve understanding of the causes and consequences of violence against women, especially among those responsible for implementing measures to end violence against women and girls.

137. Country reports indicate achievements in freedom from violence, both at the legal and policy levels. Over the past five years, Arab countries have given top priority to the following areas: preventing child marriage and forced marriage; combating sexual harassment and violence in work, education and public places; and ending domestic violence, including sexual violence. Combating the practice of female genital mutilation was a priority in Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq (Kurdistan Region) and the Sudan.

138. At the legal level, constitutions in only two countries, Tunisia (2014 constitution, article 46) and Egypt (2014 constitution, article 11) expressly provide for the protection of women and girls from violence. Most Arab countries, especially Bahrain, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia, have established the necessary legislative environment to address violence against women, by issuing or strengthening laws to combat violence against women. Some countries have completed such efforts by increasing penalties for the perpetrator. However, only a few countries have addressed domestic violence. Morocco has increased the penalties for the husband, divorcé, fiancé or anyone who violates the personal life of the woman, with a maximum sentence of five years in prison and a fine of 5,000-50,000 dirhams.

139. At the policy level, eight countries have developed strategies addressing violence against women, namely Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia, in addition to Egypt and Lebanon where violence against women is addressed through a national strategy to empower women.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, measures have been taken to implement relevant laws and policies, including the establishment of specialized departments in ministries of the interior to combat violence against women, and the creation of a women's police force to reduce violence in the public domain. Arab countries have also made progress in providing or strengthening services to prevent exposure to violence, such as setting up telephone helplines and mobile applications for those exposed to violence. They also provide services to survivors of violence, including shelters, health and psychological services, legal services and guidance.

140. To end violence against women and girls, especially technology-facilitated violence, most Arab countries have increased public awareness and challenged stereotypes and negative behaviours related to gender-based violence. A successful initiative implemented in most Arab countries was a 16-day campaign to combat violence against women, as part of celebrations for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The League of Arab States, in cooperation with the UN-Women regional office, launched a 2018 campaign at its headquarters. The League also prepares an annual regional report on Arab countries' efforts in response to the international campaign entitled "16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence". At the national level, many initiatives have been implemented, including "Don't stay silent, harassment is a crime" (Jordan), "Break the barrier of humiliation, you have a right to live safely" (Egypt), "No to harassment" (Iraq), and "There is no honour in crime" (State of Palestine), and "School awareness portfolio" (Bahrain). Iraq is also improving women and girls' representation in the media, and Egypt is working with men and boys as part of the "Because I am a man" campaign.

141. Bahrain approached the issue of violence from an evidence-based perspective, by launching a national database of domestic violence data and statistics, known as *Takatuf*. Algeria created the *Aman* administrative database in 2018 to collect and process all data on violence against women.

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<sup>72</sup> [E/ESCWA/ECW/2017/2](#).

142. Despite progress, the success of such efforts depends on a coherent and integrated approach to dealing with violence against women, which must take into account the various people responsible for such violence (husbands, family members, or strangers), and the numerous places where it occurs (home, workplace, place of study, transport, or public domain). This approach must also address violence against women with disabilities. It is important, when applying laws related to violence against women, to take into account cultural contexts that blame victims and encourage their silence, even if this leads to impunity for perpetrators.

#### **D. Fourth dimension: Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions**

143. Countries have taken a number of measures to increase women's participation in public life. For example, Tunisia passed the Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Women's presence in the political sphere in the region has increased in recent years, as a result of various measures taken by all stakeholders, reflected in the increase of seats held by women in parliament which exceeded a quarter in five Arab countries (Algeria, Iraq, Djibouti, the Sudan and Tunisia), and ranged between 15 and under 25 per cent in nine Arab countries (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and the United Arab Emirates) and under 15 per cent in the remaining Arab countries (table 7). Saudi Arabia issued a royal decree stipulating that women should become full members of the Shura Council, and occupy 20 per cent of its seats, as part of a package of reforms that guarantee women many rights to increase their participation in public life. These reforms are part of a national transformation programme under Saudi Vision 2030. In the United Arab Emirates, members of the Federal National Council elected a woman in 2015 to assume the presidency of the Council, thus becoming the first woman to chair an Arab parliamentary institution. Despite these advances, women are still underrepresented at all levels of government in the Arab region. The average proportion of women members of Parliament at the regional level is 19 per cent, well below the world average.

**Table 7. Women's participation in decision-making in Arab countries, 2018**

Country	Percentage of female members in the legislature (parliament)	Percentage of female ministers
Jordan	15.4	7.1
United Arab Emirates	22.5	28.1
Bahrain	15	5
Tunisia	31.3	23.1
Algeria	25.8	13.3
Comoros	6.1	0
Syrian Arab Republic	13.2	6.1
Djibouti	26.2	5.6
Sudan	30.5	25
Somalia	24.4	6.7
Iraq	25.5	10.5
Oman	1.2	6.3
State of Palestine	12.7	13.5
Qatar	9.8	6.3
Kuwait	3.1	6.7
Lebanon	4.7	3.4
Libya	16.0	-
Egypt	14.9	11.8
Morocco	20.5	13.0
Saudi Arabia	20.0	0
Mauritania	20.3	30.8
Yemen	0	5.4

*Source:* World Bank, "Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments". Available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS> (accessed on 15 December 2019).

144. The situation is the same at the government level. Governments are often made up of men, with a few exceptions that fall short, whether in terms of the proportion of women ministers, or in terms of the portfolios they assume, which are usually linked to the traditional roles of women in society, such as health, education or social affairs. Among the most recent significant exceptions are women assuming the position of foreign minister in the Sudan, and the position of interior minister in Lebanon. The same conditions prevail at the level of the local authorities, which have not yet succeeded in creating welcoming spaces for women, despite the importance of women's participation and presence in local development frameworks, given their vital role in development processes, and despite the impact of local governance decisions on their lives. There are many obstacles to women's participation, which perpetuate the insignificant political roles women play in the Arab region, and undermine their political representation. These barriers are intertwined, linking political, social, economic and cultural aspects. This creates a system that rejects women and their leadership roles. The cultural and social practices of patriarchal societies impose stereotyped roles on women and, in many contexts, hinder equal rights. There are also significant institutional and structural obstacles to women's political participation, notably the system of discriminatory legislation against women in the areas of family, personal status, work and protection from violence. Official and political party structures do not respect gender equality, or provide women with the tools they need to break into the male-dominated political sphere.

145. There are clear disparities between Arab countries regarding women's participation in the judiciary, exceeding 40 per cent in Algeria, Lebanon and Tunisia, reaching 22 per cent in Jordan, 39 per cent in Djibouti and 24 per cent in Morocco, ranging between 18 and 7 per cent in seven countries, namely Bahrain, the Comoros, Iraq, Libya, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, and registering below 7 per cent in the remaining Arab countries.<sup>73</sup> Over the past five years, constitutional reforms have also been implemented at the level of the executive, with a greater share of women holding ministerial portfolios. The percentage of women ministers in Arab Governments exceeded 20 per cent in Mauritania, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates, and ranged between 10 and 20 per cent in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Morocco and the Sudan (table 5). In a number of Arab countries, women hold prominent positions in the academic and diplomatic fields, and have achieved major successes in the business sector. The United Arab Emirates has issued a decree obligating national companies and institutions to represent women on their boards of directors, becoming the second country in the world to issue such a decree.

146. However, such progress has not been witnessed in countries whose institutional structure is not conducive to expanding women's participation in the public sphere, and to promoting their role in decision-making. The Arab region has exhibited limited progress in providing opportunities for guidance, leadership training, decision-making, public speaking, and self-assertion for women. Such structures do not create an enabling environment for launching political campaigns that benefit minority or young women, or encourage their participation in political life. Moreover, only minor progress was made in collecting and analysing data related to the political participation of women, given the absence of evidence on measures implemented to prevent, investigate and punish perpetrators of violence against women in the political sphere.

147. A guiding indicator issued by the World Bank is the Women, Business and the Law Index. It shows how legislation affects equal opportunities for women during different stages of their working lives. This composite index consists of eight subindicators related to the international legal framework for human rights, as stipulated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The World Bank calculated the value of the composite Index and subindicators for 187 countries. The value of the Index ranged between 100 and 26 points. The Index was calculated for 20 Arab countries, and ranged between 73 and 26 points. Morocco is at the forefront of Arab countries, scoring 73 points (less than the global average). Seven other countries ranged between 50 and 69 points (Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya and Tunisia). Nine Arab countries ranked between 30 and 49 points, while three countries registered less than 30 points. The subindicators (table 8) can be used to determine country work priorities, by comparing the situation in a country with the global situation.

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<sup>73</sup> [E/ESCWA/ECW/2018/Brief.1](#).

**Table 8. Subindicators of the Women, Business and the Law Index, 2019**

Country	Mobility	Workplace	Pay	Marriage	Parenthood	Entrepreneurship	Assets	Pension	Composite Index
Jordan	25	0	25	20	20	75	40	75	35
United Arab Emirates	25	0	0	0	0	75	60	75	29.38
Bahrain	25	25	25	20	40	75	40	50	37.5
Tunisia	100	50	25	20	60	75	40	100	58.75
Algeria	75	75	50	60	60	75	40	25	57.5
Comoros	75	75	100	40	40	75	40	25	58.75
Syrian Arab Republic	25	25	0	40	20	75	40	50	34.38
Djibouti	100	50	75	0	60	100	40	50	59.38
Sudan	0	0	0	0	20	75	40	100	29.38
Iraq	25	100	25	0	20	75	40	50	41.88
Oman	25	100	25	20	20	75	40	50	44.38
State of Palestine	50	25	25	20	20	75	60	100	46.88
Qatar	25	0	50	20	0	75	40	50	32.50
Kuwait	50	0	0	40	0	75	40	75	35
Lebanon	100	50	50	60	20	75	40	75	58.75
Libya	100	50	100	20	40	75	40	25	56.25
Egypt	50	100	25	20	20	75	40	75	50.63
Morocco	100	100	50	40	80	100	40	75	73.13
Saudi Arabia	0	25	0	20	20	75	40	25	25.63
Mauritania	100	25	25	0	40	75	20	50	41.88

Source: World Bank, 2019.

148. Arab women leaders occupy influential positions in the media (for example, in Kuwait), which allows for the integration of a gender perspective in media discourse. One way to increase women's participation in the public sphere is to increase their ability to express and participate in decision-making in the media, including through ICT. Some countries have taken measures to enhance women's access to ICT at affordable costs, and to empower women and girls to use them. Such measures include establishing Wi-Fi centres offering free Internet and community technology centres. For example, women's community knowledge centres were set up in various Omani governorates to provide digital knowledge, training and qualification opportunities for women in the field of information technology.

149. When reviewing the reports submitted by Arab countries under Beijing+25 for the previous five years, there are discrepancies between countries in implementing measures to enhance women's participation in public life and decision-making. That period did not witness many constitutional amendments in the Arab region, with the exception of the amendments made by Egypt in 2019 that stipulated a special quota for women's participation in politics at the parliamentary and local levels. In Kurdistan, the draft constitution approved by the region's parliament states that parliamentary and municipal elections must result in women holding at least 30 per cent of seats. The revised 2018 constitution of the Comoros covers some women's rights issues, including the right to representation in local and national political bodies, and the fair and equitable distribution of men and women in the formation of Government. The same applies to Algeria, where a 2016 constitutional amendment stipulates the promotion of equality between men and women in the labour market, and encourages women to assume positions of responsibility in public bodies, departments and institutions.

150. At the legislative level, the reports highlighted some legal reforms directly related to women's participation in politics over the past five years. In Egypt, according to the 2014 Political Rights Regulation Act, half of the seats on each electoral list were reserved for women to ensure their adequate representation. In Kurdistan, the regional parliament developed an internal system requiring that the parliamentary presidency include at least one woman among its three members. As a result, on 18 February 2019, members of parliament elected the first female speaker of parliament in Kurdistan. Moreover, in 2014, the system of municipal councils in Saudi Arabia gave women the right to vote and run in municipal councils on an equal footing with men. Electoral reform in Qatar included amendments to increase the share of women participating in elections to 47 per cent. In Bahrain, a 2014 royal decree recommends that women be represented in the Shura Council. Furthermore, law No. 10 of 2014 in Libya allocated 16 per cent of seats to women in the People's Assembly elections. In Djibouti, a 2018 law stipulates that 25 per cent of seats be allocated to women in the National Assembly. In Morocco, a 2015 regulatory law adopted a new methodology for allocating a third of parliamentary seats to women. Regulatory laws related to territorial authorities emphasized the need to mainstream gender equality into results-based planning, formulate action plans and determine priorities, and operationalize gender-sensitive budgeting.

151. At the strategic level, Arab countries have worked to strengthen women's political participation through various strategic frameworks. The issue of women's political empowerment has been incorporated into various plans and strategies related to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. For the first time, some countries such as Algeria, Kuwait and Libya have included women's political empowerment in their efforts to implement SDG 5.

152. At the capacity-building level, Arab countries have spared no effort to build women's capacity to participate effectively in public affairs. Specialized long-term programmes were developed to enhance women's participation in various decision-making and leadership positions. Governments have also worked on various issues to enable women to attract voters, run election campaigns, and participate in the development of public policies. They have reviewed and enacted national legislation to increase women's participation in politics, and provide them with communication, networking and advocacy skills. Some countries have taken motivational steps, such as announcing awards to motivate and empower women at the national level (Bahrain); and adding the topic of empowerment to university curriculums by offering a master's degree in gender equality and women's empowerment (Egypt). Regarding awareness-raising, some countries have focused on enhancing knowledge of the international system of women's rights, such as resolution 1325 and CEDAW (State of Palestine), while others have worked to secure financial support for women to run in elections (Morocco). As part of awareness-raising and capacity-building efforts, Arab governments have targeted various groups, such as women candidates for parliamentary and local elections, union members, public sector employees, and members of local councils (Jordan); female members of political parties (Lebanon); marginalized women (State of Palestine); female civil servants and media women (Oman), and women working in the private sector (Saudi Arabia).

153. Although Arab countries have targeted various groups in awareness-raising efforts aimed at promoting women's participation in politics, there is little evidence that young women and minority women are covered by such efforts. A report prepared by Iraq indicated that the Kurdistan regional parliament issued the 2015 Law of Protecting Components in Kurdistan to guarantee the rights of religious and national minorities in the region. The new internal system of parliament, developed in 2017, stipulates that parliament include a presidential body consisting of a president and two deputies, and that one of them be from a national or religious minority. In Jordan, a 2016 decision by the Law Interpretation Bureau allowed people aged 17 to vote in parliamentary elections. The Oman report noted the implementation of educational programmes targeting young women, especially in universities.

154. In addition to building awareness and encouraging the participation of women in public life, some countries have issued decisions appointing women to decision-making positions. For example, a 2014 Emiri Decree of Qatar stipulated the appointment of four women to the Shura Council, and a 2016 royal decree in Saudi Arabia stipulated the appointment of 30 women to the Shura Council. Moreover, the President of the

United Arab Emirates decided to raise the proportion of Emirati women in the Federal National Council to 50 per cent in the 2019 elections. In 2018, the King of Morocco decided to strengthen the role of women in the judicial and legal professions. A similar decision was issued in the Comoros in 2017 to enhance women's opportunities to run in elections.

155. Measures taken by Arab countries also included advocacy and monitoring strategies. For example, the Gender Forum was established at the Ministry of Local Government in the State of Palestine. It functions as a coordination and supervisory body, and as a mechanism representing the priorities and interests of women in the local government sector. Moreover, Tunisia established a peer council for gender equality and equal opportunities to mainstream gender equality in public institutions.

156. The country reports indicate efforts made in a number of Arab countries to enable women to express and participate in decision-making in the media, through ICT. Countries' tactics and strategies vary in this regard. Some have worked to represent women in high positions in the media, while others have built the capacity of programme and media producers in the press, radio and television on women's rights issues and violence against women. Several countries have fought stereotypes by monitoring and analysing all material published about women, and by monitoring women and men's representation in the media.

157. Bahrain has provided training courses for women to enable them to communicate with the media. On the legislative level, the Iraqi Media Network Law provides a quota for women of at least a third of positions in media institutions. Moreover, the community radio media code in Jordan, approved and signed by Jordanian community radio stations, stipulates the right of women to work in the press without discrimination, prejudice or exploitation on the basis of sex or social status. Moroccan television stations have also developed internal regulations that take into account women's issues. In the State of Palestine, the media network, made up of media institutions, was established to support gender equality issues. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Directorate of Developmental Media was created to tackle various women's issues, including reproductive health and family planning issues.

158. Arab countries have worked to empower women to use technology through various measures, including enhancing women's capacity to use technology, supporting them to obtain financing for computers, expanding their access to the Internet, reducing taxes to facilitate ICT access, and improving IT infrastructure (Jordan). Moreover, telecom companies are implementing the principles of gender equality and the empowerment of women, through appointments, wages, training, and promotions (Kuwait). Several countries have designed information safety programmes for women and the family (Oman); are supporting employers to empower women in the fields of media and technology; and are motivating women to be interested in technology, such as in Mauritania. Some countries have focused their efforts on working with rural women, as exemplified by a 2014 campaign in Djibouti to enable all rural women to own a mobile phone.

159. However, in general, the country reports do not indicate specific measures that promote and provide education and training at the formal and professional levels in the media, ICT, administration and leadership. The reports do not reflect efforts to issue and enforce regulations to achieve equal wages between the sexes, or to strengthen women's advancement in career paths in the media and ICT sectors. There is also no evidence of cooperation with employers in the media and ICT fields to improve internal policies and encourage gender-balanced recruitment practices on a voluntary basis. Furthermore, no progress has been made in providing support to women's media networks and organizations. Weak progress in these areas not only limits the ability of Arab societies to increase women's participation in the public domain, but also stigmatizes and stereotypes women's role in development efforts.

#### *1. Gender-responsive budgets*

160. In their periodic reviews, most countries did not address efforts to establish gender-responsive budgets. Nonetheless, Morocco has long-term experience in developing gender-sensitive budgets. The 2015 financial regulation law requires institutions to prepare their programmes according to clear gender-sensitive goals and



indicators. Other countries have adopted strategies to integrate gender equality into economic policies and programmes and the public budget, and to create an environment conducive to achieving their development strategies or other strategies adopted at the budget level. Some countries, such as Bahrain, have made adopting gender-sensitive budgets one of the goals of their national equality strategies. However, overall progress has been weak in that regard. According to many country reports, it is difficult to quantify resources spent on women's issues, given that the approach to preparing State budgets depends on general provisions covering all groups. The role of government agencies is limited to reviewing financial spending on the sectors they supervise, including the women's sector, to identifying areas where spending should be increased, and to review spending with the Ministry of Finance when discussing the annual budget.

## 2. Strategies and action plans aimed at achieving gender equality

161. Table 9 contains a summary of strategies for achieving gender equality, as indicated in the reports of countries that carried out the periodic review. These reports highlighted Arab countries' efforts in developing strategies and action plans aimed at achieving gender equality. Arab countries have adopted various development approaches at the national level. They have also adopted disparate approaches with regard to implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and adopting general national strategies that include a dimension on advancing the status of women. For example, Saudi Arabia has its Vision 2030, Oman has its Vision 2020-2040, Qatar has its Vision 2030, and Kuwait has its National Development Plan 2015-2020. Several general sectoral strategies have been developed that include themes specific to women's issues, including those related to rural development, combating poverty, employment, education, human trafficking, and violent extremism.

**Table 9. National strategies for women's advancement**

Country	National strategies that include women-specific dimensions	Advancing the status of women, gender equality, or women's empowerment	Violence against women	Environment/rural women	Harmful practices (child marriage, forced marriage, FGM)	Combatting trafficking in persons	Family, reproductive health (motherhood and childhood)
Algeria			National strategy to combat violence, 2007	National strategy for biodiversity (2016-2030) covering women-specific issues			National plan to reduce maternal mortality, 2015-2019
Bahrain	Policy on gender balance in the legislative axis of the Government's work programme (2019-2022)	National Plan for the Advancement of Bahraini Women 2013-2022	National strategy to protect women from domestic violence (2015-2018)			Strategy and action plan to combat trafficking in persons	
Comoros			National strategy to combat violence against women and children 2015-2019				



**Table 9** (continued)

Country	National strategies that include women-specific dimensions	Advancing the status of women, gender equality, or women's empowerment	Violence against women	Environment/rural women	Harmful practices (child marriage, forced marriage, FGM)	Combatting trafficking in persons	Family, reproductive health (motherhood and childhood)
Djibouti		National action plan for gender equality (2011-2021)/ Ministry of Women and Family Affairs Triple Action Plan (2019-2021)			National strategy to eliminate female genital mutilation (2018-2022)		National family planning strategy (2016-2018)
Egypt		National strategy for empowering Egyptian women 2030	National strategy to combat violence against women 2015		National strategy to end child marriage 2015-2020 National strategy to combat FGM (2016)		National population strategy 2015-2030 National reproductive health strategy (2015)
Iraq	National development plan (2018-2022)	National strategy to advance the status of Iraqi women (2013-2018) National strategy for the advancing the status of women in the Kurdistan region (2016-2026)	National strategy to combat violence against women (2012-2017)	Rural women strategy	A plan for behavioural change called the Combi Plan for Child Marriage (2017-2020)		National strategy for reproductive and maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health, 2016-2020 Maternal and child health and reproductive health strategy, 2013-2017 Maternal and child health strategy in Kurdistan, 2018-2022
Jordan	National financial inclusion strategy 2018-2020, which includes targets dedicated to supporting women entrepreneurs and ensuring their financial inclusion Ministry of Education Strategy 2018-2022	National strategy for women, 2020-2025 Mashreq plan for women's economic empowerment, 2019-2024	National framework for the protection of the family from violence, 2016 Executive action plan to strengthen institutions' response to cases of domestic violence, 2016-2018		National plan to combat child marriage, 2018		National reproductive health/family planning strategy (2013-2018)

**Table 9** (continued)

Country	National strategies that include women-specific dimensions	Advancing the status of women, gender equality, or women's empowerment	Violence against women	Environment/rural women	Harmful practices (child marriage, forced marriage, FGM)	Combatting trafficking in persons	Family, reproductive health (motherhood and childhood)
Kuwait	National development plan for Kuwait, 2015-2020					National strategy to prevent trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling	
Lebanon		National strategy for women, 2011-2020 National strategy for gender equality, 2017-2030	National strategy to combat violence against women and girls, 2019-2029				National strategy for primary health care, including reproductive health and family planning
Libya		Strategic plan on the work of the Women's Empowerment and Support Unit in the Presidency Council, 2019 National strategy to support and empower women in Libya, 2019-2023					
Mauritania	National strategy for access to justice that facilitates poor women's access to legal and judicial services Strategy for the advancement of women National strategy for gender mainstreaming to achieve the empowerment of women and the enjoyment of all their rights National strategy to combat discrimination, racism and xenophobia Gender equality strategy and action plan		Strategies to combat spousal violence, 2017-2020				Mauritanian national action plan for family planning, 2013

**Table 9** (continued)

Country	National strategies that include women-specific dimensions	Advancing the status of women, gender equality, or women's empowerment	Violence against women	Environment/rural women	Harmful practices (child marriage, forced marriage, FGM)	Combatting trafficking in persons	Family, reproductive health (motherhood and childhood)
Morocco		Government plan for equality 2017-2021 Strategy for mainstreaming gender equality in public institutions		Strategy for mainstreaming gender equality in the water sector, 2015			
Oman	Ninth five-year plan of Oman 2016-2020 National agricultural development strategy (2015-2040) (including rural women) Social work strategy (2016-2025)					Preparing a national plan on human trafficking	National Childhood Strategy (2016-2025)
State of Palestine	Palestinian development plan, 2014-2016 Agricultural sector strategy, 2017-2022	Strategy to promote gender equality and justice and empower women, 2017-2020 National strategy to promote Palestinian women entrepreneurship, 2018					National strategy for reproductive and sexual health, 2018-2022
Qatar	Second national development strategy, 2018-2022 Social protection strategy, 2017-2022	Family cohesion and empowerment of women sector strategy, 2011-2016					National health strategy, 2018-2022 Population policy of Qatar, 2017-2022 National primary health care strategy, 2013-2018
Saudi Arabia		Saudi Arabia Vision 2030				National plan to combat trafficking in persons, 2017-2020	National reproductive health and maternity strategy
Syrian Arab Republic		National framework for women's support					

**Table 9** (continued)

Country	National strategies that include women-specific dimensions	Advancing the status of women, gender equality, or women's empowerment	Violence against women	Environment/rural women	Harmful practices (child marriage, forced marriage, FGM)	Combatting trafficking in persons	Family, reproductive health (motherhood and childhood)
Tunisia		National action plan to mainstream gender in institutions, 2018		National strategy for the economic and social empowerment of women in rural areas, 2017-2020		National strategy to combat trafficking in persons, 2018-2023	National family strategy (2018-2022) National multisectoral strategy for early childhood (2017-2025)
United Arab Emirates		National Strategy for the Empowerment of Emirati Women, 2015-2022					Strategy to promote the rights of children with disabilities (2012-2017) National strategy for motherhood and childhood (2017-2021)

Source: Extracted from national reports on progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years.

162. Country reports show that a number of States focused on adopting specialized national strategies as a tool for advancing the status of women and improving their conditions. Bahrain and Lebanon, for example, continued to implement strategies that they had adopted earlier in the period covered by the present report to improve the status of women. One of these strategies is the National Plan for the Advancement of Bahraini Women (2013-2023), which is still being implemented through a series of interim strategies, the latest of which is the strategy for the period 2019-2023. Lebanon is implementing the National Strategy for Women in Lebanon (2012-2022), which includes annual national plans that are monitored periodically. Iraq developed a national strategy to advance the status of women in Kurdistan (2016-2026). The United Arab Emirates is following up on the implementation of the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Emirati Women (2015-2021), which was approved during the current review period of the Beijing Platform for Action. The State of Palestine is monitoring the implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2017-2022). Morocco is focusing on implementing the second version of the government plan for equality *Ikram* (2017-2021). Egypt is implementing the National Strategy for Empowering Egyptian Women 2030. The Sudan updated its national policy for empowering women in 2017. The Comoros and Jordan are currently assessing their previous strategies for advancing the status of women, in view of their willingness to prepare updated strategies that are consistent with the SDGs. Saudi Arabia is about to finalize its first strategy on advancing the status of women, in line with the Saudi Vision 2030.

163. A new trend has emerged in a number of countries with regard to developing gender equality strategies. Tunisia prepared a national action plan to mainstream gender in institutions (2018-2020). The State of Palestine endorsed a cross-sectoral strategy for gender equality, justice, and women's empowerment (2017-2022). Mauritania adopted a national strategy to mainstream gender, and Djibouti is implementing its National Gender Policy (2011-2021). In addition to the women's strategy, Lebanon adopted the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2017-2030). Morocco approved a strategy to institutionalize mainstream gender in public institutions in 2016, in addition to the government plan *Ikram*.

164. The reports indicate that countries are focusing on specific women and girls' issues as priorities requiring separate strategies. Violence against women has emerged as a priority in some countries that have adopted strategies to combat violence, such as Algeria (since 2007) and Bahrain (2015). The Sudan developed a national strategy to combat violence against women and children (2015-2032), and the Comoros developed the road map to combat violence against women (2017-2019). Egypt is implementing a national strategy to combat violence against women (2015-2020). Iraq updated its anti-violence strategy for the period 2018-2030, while the Kurdistan Regional Government remains committed to implementing a specialized strategy to combat violence against women (2017-2027). Lebanon developed a strategy to combat violence against women and girls (2019-2029). Country efforts were not limited to combating domestic violence or violence against women, since trafficking in persons also emerged as a priority issue. Some countries, such as Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia, have adopted specialized strategies, while others, such as Morocco and Oman, have only enacted related laws and legislations.

165. The issue of harmful practices has been modestly covered by some Arab countries. The past five years have witnessed the adoption of various strategies related to the issue of child marriage (Egypt and Jordan) and female genital mutilation (Egypt, Djibouti and the Sudan). Economic, social and cultural rights also received some attention, as a number of countries focused on maternity issues, such as reproductive health, through special strategies and plans (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates). In spite of this, there are clear shortfalls in adopting strategies related to women's issues in rural areas, except in Tunisia, and tackling environmental issues from a gender equality perspective. Examples of such efforts include Morocco developing a strategy to mainstream gender in the water sector (2015), and the State of Palestine adopting a feminist media strategy for the period 2015-2017.

166. Regarding national plans to implement Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, several countries are preparing national plans to ensure the implementation of the four pillars of the resolution, namely prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery. Iraq and the State of Palestine prepared related national plans in a previous period, and are currently assessing previous plans and preparing new plans based on previous experiences.

167. Regarding developing action plans to implement the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, national reports showed that most Arab countries were working to implement those recommendations through national strategies and plans to advance the status of women. Several countries have circulated the concluding observations to all relevant national and government institutions. However, only a few countries have drafted action plans and set timetables for compliance with the recommendations of the Committee, such as the State of Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic, which set out a comprehensive plan to implement the Committee's recommendations. Initiatives have been implemented in a number of countries to establish a national mechanism for preparing reports on human rights agreements, and for following up on recommendations issued by various international human rights mechanisms.

168. Arab countries have endeavoured to establish national human rights institutions since 1993, in accordance with the Paris Principles issued in 1991 and adopted at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights. The majority of Arab countries established these institutions in the years prior to the period covered by the present report. Some of these institutions are likely to receive an A rating, such as those in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, the State of Palestine and Qatar. Some are rated "B", such as those in Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Mauritania, Oman and Tunisia. Legislation to establish a national institution was approved in Kuwait (2015) and Lebanon (2016) in the five-year period preceding the preparation of the present periodic review.

169. In general, the tasks of these institutions vary, but most monitor human rights violations and make proposals to limit them. Others are concerned with receiving, studying and researching human rights, and referring complaints about violations to competent authorities, in addition to submitting proposals and draft laws, including those related to gender equality, in line with the obligations of States under international human rights conventions such as CEDAW. Many national reports did not indicate whether these institutions had a specific gender equality mandate. However, most existing institutions have sections dealing with women's

rights. Some reports indicated the mandate of these institutions to monitor and analyse violations of women's rights; their role in evaluating the performance of the Government, the legislature, the judiciary and the security apparatus in implementing women's rights; and their work in raising awareness on women's rights. The reports also highlighted collaboration between these institutions and national women's machineries to support legislative proposals aimed at aligning national legislation with international conventions on women. These institutions collaborate at the national level, and some constitute the official framework for preparing national reports on CEDAW.

#### **E. Fifth dimension: Peaceful societies where no one is marginalized**

170. There is various evidence of the adoption and/or implementation of national action plans on women, peace and security, and of plans to integrate the commitments of women, peace and security in policy development, planning and monitoring at the national level and in ministries and executive bodies. Evidence also exists on national action plans related to the use of communication strategies, including social media, to raise awareness of the women, peace and security agenda, or to increase budget allocations to implement this agenda. However, such efforts remain disproportionate to the risks women and girls are exposed to by armed conflicts in several Arab countries, and by forced migration to neighbouring countries as a result of those conflicts. Efforts and resources required to establish a just and sustainable peace and implement the women, peace and security agenda exceed the capacity of many Arab countries, especially in the light of regional tensions.

171. Conflicts have a major impact on moulding perceptions of gender equity, and on the escalation of sexual, gender-based and domestic violence. This situation is exacerbated by persistent obstacles preventing women from gaining access to justice in conflict situations. These obstacles are linked to social and political attitudes, a lack of economic and social opportunities, and legislative and political practices. Women's access to judicial and legislative authorities and government mechanisms has decreased, forcing many women to resort to informal justice systems.<sup>74</sup>

172. Despite the accession of most Arab States to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, protecting children, especially girls, remains a daunting challenge. Armed conflicts in the Arab region have caused a catastrophic situation where thousands of children are exposed to multiple risks, including a lack of health services, rampant malnutrition, low school enrolment and high drop-out rates. Education for all is still a long way off in Arab countries, with around 5 million school-aged children out of school in the region, 60 per cent of whom are girls.<sup>75</sup> The risks posed by conflict have led to the death of children in Iraq, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen.<sup>76</sup> These risks also include abhorrent practices, such as child labour, which are exacerbated by a fragile economy, a lack of education opportunities, and the prevalence of toxic social norms.<sup>77</sup> Measures taken by countries to protect children include addressing the negative health consequences of malnutrition, early pregnancy (such as anaemia) and exposure to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases from a gender equality perspective, and taking into account the needs of infected women. Nonetheless, countries face difficulties in implementing policies and programmes to eliminate child labour, excessive levels of domestic work and unpaid care work for girls.

173. Several Arab countries still face challenges resulting from child marriage and forced marriage, especially in conflict areas and among the forcibly displaced. The gravity of child marriage cannot be underestimated: it is estimated that one in every five young women in the Middle East and North Africa was married before her eighteenth birthday.<sup>78</sup> In view of the prevailing system of values, various measures are

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<sup>74</sup> [E/ESCWA/ECW/2017/4](#).

<sup>75</sup> UNESCO, 2016.

<sup>76</sup> أخبار الأمم المتحدة، 2018.

<sup>77</sup> League of Arab States and others, 2019.

<sup>78</sup> UNICEF, 2018a.

needed to combat negative social norms and practices; raise awareness of the needs and abilities of girls; and encourage girls' awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life.

174. The national reports indicate countries' efforts to provide protection against violations that affect women and girls in conflict situations. The region has witnessed legislative efforts to combat violence against women, and to enhance access to justice for refugee and displaced women, by developing the capacity of the security services. The use of rape as a weapon of war has been documented in some conflict countries; however, few Arab countries have acceded to the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the 1951 Refugee Convention.

175. Regarding combating discrimination against girls and upholding their rights, international indicators point to the success of Arab countries in increasing girls' enrolment in education and their access to quality education. There are many successful examples of skills development and training, especially innovation and entrepreneurship development. There is also evidence of policies and programmes to eliminate violence against girls, including physical and sexual violence and harmful practices. However, the absence of accurate statistics on such violence prevents the objective evaluation of these efforts.

176. National reports highlighted the contribution of some Arab countries to international peacekeeping efforts, including Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco, and their role in conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding, humanitarian action and crisis response. Egypt, for example, has pledged that women should comprise at least 10 per cent of its peacekeeping teams, so that these forces become more sensitive to preventing breaches of international humanitarian law and violations of the human rights of women and girls in conflict situations.

#### **F. Sixth dimension: Preserving, protecting and rehabilitating the environment**

177. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action prioritize mainstreaming a gender perspective and assessing the implications of any action, including legislation, policies or programmes in all areas and at all levels, on both women and men. The Platform for Action is a strategy to mainstream the concerns of women and men in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in the political, economic and social fields, to ensure that they benefit both women and men and combat gender inequality. The ultimate goal of the Platform for Action is to achieve gender equality.

178. While recognizing that some efforts are being made to support women's participation and leadership in managing the environment and natural resources, and their access to and control of land, water, energy and other natural resources, these efforts remain insufficient to integrate gender equality perspectives in environmental policies in a methodological and sustainable manner. More attention is required to monitor and assess the impact of environmental policies and sustainable infrastructure projects on women and girls, and to strengthen evidence on the impact of these policies. Although some countries have made efforts to raise awareness of environmental and health risks to women, such as the risks of some consumer products, technologies and industrial pollution, preserving and protecting the environment is not a priority in most Arab countries where urgent programmes are needed to meet citizens' basic needs.

179. While some countries did not provide sufficient information in their reports on their approach to environmental issues from the perspective of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, others highlighted their achievements in this area. For example, the integration of gender equality issues into planning and programming has been a key strategy of the Moroccan Government, aimed at implementing its action plan on gender equality. The Moroccan Government prepared a strategic study entitled "Institutionalizing the mainstreaming of a gender approach in the water sector", aimed at ensuring the observance of gender equality in administrative mechanisms in the water sector, and integrating it in practices, programmes and projects through multiple tracks. The study concludes with a strategy to mainstream gender equality issues in the water sector, based on the following four pillars: (1) developing sustainable institutional capacities to ensure the integration of gender equality in the water sector; (2) mainstreaming gender equality issues in human resources

management, and increasing women's representation and participation in decision-making in the ministry responsible for water; (3) incorporating gender equality in the professions related to the water sector; (4) mainstreaming gender equality issues in the programmes implemented by the ministry responsible for water and water basin agencies, and in programmes implemented through a participatory approach with actors from the water sector. The strategy was followed by an action plan to implement the four pillars in the medium term, over the period 2017-2020. The plan defined the activities, implementing parties and budget for each activity.

180. In the coming years, more attention should be given to ensuring that women benefit equally from decent jobs in the green economy, as this would improve the gender balance in employment. Given that the Arab region is not prone to natural disasters, the risks posed by climate change are not receiving sufficient attention. A key area that the country reports did not cover, and which should receive more attention in the coming years, is the promotion and implementation of gender-sensitive laws and policies related to disaster risk reduction, addressing climate change and mitigating its impacts.



### III. National institutions and measures taken at the national level

181. The national reports addressed national institutions concerned with women's issues, and with implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda. The reports set out efforts made by Arab countries to establish institutions concerned with women's issues. The approaches to the establishment of these institutions, their roles and work methods vary across countries, as do efforts to implement a national response to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda, with a focus on SDG 5.

#### A. National institutions

182. At the institutional level, there are many types of national women's machineries working to advance the status of women. Most Arab countries established such mechanisms in preparation for the Fourth Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. After their establishment, these mechanisms were granted the mandate to conduct the work entrusted to them, as set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Most Arab countries have intensified national efforts to advance women and promote gender equality in three general directions.

183. The first of these trends is to conduct institutional reviews to develop new institutions that complement existing ones, or to work to restructure or reposition existing institutions to enhance their role, guided by national priorities. The second trend focuses on reviewing the working methods of national mechanisms for women's advancement, in response to national priorities, mandates and transformations, to enhance capacity to respond to SDG 5, for example. Such efforts are carried out in line with policies regulating these institutions and guiding their work, whether at the national, sectoral or regional levels. The third trend focuses on pumping more resources, capacity and knowledge into existing institutional frameworks for further action. There are many interlinkages and similarities within these three trends, and several countries are implementing integrated steps within this framework.

184. The State of Palestine is unique in establishing a Ministry for Women's Affairs. In Egypt, article 214 of the constitution guarantees the independence of the National Council for Women, which reports to the President of the Republic, and whose work is regulated by law. The Council's opinion is taken into account when considering laws and regulations pertaining to its functions in the field of protecting and empowering Egyptian women. This also applies to the Supreme Council for Women in Bahrain, which reports directly to the King. This Council was established by law as an independent institution. All official bodies are required to seek its opinion on any issue related to women before taking action.

185. In other countries, such as Algeria, the Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, women's advancement machineries form part of ministries concerned with several issues, including family, women, children, older persons and social solidarity. In Libya, Oman and the Sudan, the work of national women's machineries is part of the work of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Other countries have established national institutions or national committees dealing with women's issues, or both. Iraq established the Higher Committee for the Advancement of Women and the Syrian Arab Republic established the Syrian Commission for Family and Population Affairs, which are affiliated with government agencies while maintaining their independence. In contrast, the Jordanian National Commission for Women is considered a semi-government agency. Lebanon established the Ministry of State for Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth, and the National Commission for Lebanese Women.

186. Institutional frameworks have been reviewed in a number of countries over the past five years. In Kuwait, the Supreme Council for Family Affairs is now responsible for preparing and presenting the present report to international mechanisms, succeeding the Women's Committee that was formerly under the Cabinet. The Council's statute was issued in 2016, and it works under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs. In Saudi Arabia, the Family Affairs Council was established pursuant to a decision by the Council of Ministers in 2016. It conducts its work through its four committees on women's issues, childhood, older persons, and

family protection. At the time of preparing the present report in September 2019, the Qatari Cabinet had issued a resolution establishing the National Committee on Women, Children, the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities. This Committee works in accordance with international agreements, and aims to protect and promote women's rights. It is headed by the Minister of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs. In the United Arab Emirates, the General Women's Union, which is a non-governmental institution, still fulfils the role of a national women's machinery, despite the development of other national mechanisms and governmental institutions, such as the NAMA Women Advancement Establishment that was established in 2015.

187. In recent years, a trend has emerged in Arab countries to establish multiple institutions, councils and mechanisms to bridge gender gaps. One such body is the Gender Balance Council established in the United Arab Emirates in 2015 to reduce the gender gap in employment. The Council issued a guide on gender balance to enhance the country's efforts to meet national development priorities in several areas. Tunisia established the National Council of Peers for Equality and Equal Opportunities between Women and Men in 2016, which is affiliated with the Prime Minister and plays an advisory role in mainstreaming gender equality issues in planning, programming, evaluation and budget. It aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination between women and men, and achieve equality in rights and obligations. In Morocco, the Equity and Reconciliation Commission was established in 2017 to combat all forms of discrimination alongside the Family and Childhood Advisory Council. In Iraq, the Higher Committee for the Advancement of Women, affiliated with the Council of Ministers, was reconstituted and tasked with proposing public policies related to women's issues.

188. In general, the work of the national women's machineries is consistent with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, despite differences across countries in approaches to their establishment, the scope of their work, their areas of intervention, and their mandates. They fulfil a cross-sectoral consulting role for policymakers and decision makers that includes the following:

- Providing advice on matters related to women's issues, directly or indirectly;
- Formulating national policies and plans on gender equality and women's empowerment;
- Formulating action plans on gender equality and women's empowerment;
- Proposing or commenting on bills regarding women's issues.
- Following up on and evaluating public policies dealing with gender equality issues;
- Providing advice on relevant international conventions and frameworks;
- Representing the State in international forums and organizations concerned with women's affairs;
- Monitoring information and data on women, and conducting studies and research in the field of women's issues;
- Raising public awareness of women's issues;
- Building the capacity of various institutions on women's issues, and promoting ways to mainstream gender equality into policies and plans;
- Preparing national reports on CEDAW;
- Participating in drafting and presenting national reports submitted to the treaty committees concerned with women's issues;
- Supporting efforts to develop gender-sensitive budgets;
- Coordinating work with international, regional and national frameworks on women's issues;
- Coordinating with Governments to ensure the adoption and implementation of policies, plans and programmes, and the allocation of government resources and budgets for their implementation;

- Coordinating collaboration between the public and private sectors and local communities;
- Monitoring the implementation of international commitments on women's advancement and gender equality, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, CEDAW, and Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security.

189. When discussing national women's machineries, countries stressed the participatory approach adopted within these various frameworks, and their commitment to ensuring that these machineries comprise representatives of various bodies active in the field of women, such as civil society, academics and researchers. However, countries' efforts were not limited to establishing these frameworks. Women's issues are covered by various national human rights mechanisms and bodies, such as those concerned with persons with disabilities, children, families, and rural women; women's committees in parliament; and women's departments in relevant ministries, specifically ministries of solidarity and social affairs.

190. A number of national women's machineries and their complementary institutions are developing operational and procedural tools, such as appointing focal points or forming specialized agencies and committees, to help accelerate the pace of work and enhance its effectiveness, thus enabling them to fulfil their role and respond to new mandates and priorities. For example, the National Council for Women in Egypt formed the Women with Disabilities Committee in 2016, which plays a role in coordinating a number of executive programmes that support women with disabilities, and in promoting efforts to pass the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Egypt (10/2018). The Qatar Foundation for Child and Women Protection has established offices in the Capital Security Department in the Ministry of Interior and in Hamad Medical Corporation, an office for social rehabilitation under the Public Prosecutor, and another for family counselling in the Old Justice Courts Building. The National Human Rights Commission, the Department of Human Rights of the Ministry of the Interior, and the Human Rights Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were also established. These bodies aim to implement and follow up on programmes and activities stipulated in relevant international strategies and protocols and national legislation related to human rights, in general, and women, in particular, in an integrated manner and in line with the Qatar National Vision 2030.

191. Progress in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda requires further resources and efforts to translate national commitments and plans into concrete measures, and operationalize institutional frameworks to improve the status of women and society. For example, the National Report of Lebanon indicated that the budget of the National Commission for Lebanese Women is continuously declining. Moreover, following a decree establishing the Office of the Minister of State for Women's Affairs, no decision was made to convert the Commission into a ministry with a clear budget, which weakens its ability to implement programmes that contribute to empowering women. In contrast, the budget for 2019 in Saudi Arabia increased by 7.3 per cent compared with 2018, which will contribute to investments in 26 initiatives aimed at empowering women and the family under three programmes to achieve the Saudi Vision 2030.

### **B. The 2030 Agenda and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: two intersecting paths for national women's mechanisms implementing the 2030 Agenda**

192. Arab countries' reports reviewed national mechanisms concerned with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. While some countries assigned the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to relevant ministries, others have established specialized mechanisms to implement it, comprising relevant bodies. In some countries, these mechanisms consist of representatives from the private sector, civil society, academia, religious institutions, parliaments and parliamentary committees, and the United Nations system. These mechanisms formulate national plans and visions on development from the perspective of women issues, as set out in the 2030 Agenda. Their priorities include mainstreaming gender equality and the advancement of women in all areas. Several countries are working to integrate women's machineries in national sustainable development mechanisms, and to enhance their effective participation in various stages of implementation, reporting and voluntary national reviews.

193. Several countries noted the importance of the 2030 Agenda as a supportive framework for national development plans. For example, to implement the 2030 Agenda, the Jordanian Government established the National Higher Committee on Sustainable Development as an official mechanism to align national plans with the 2030 Agenda. There are 17 sectoral task forces affiliated to the Committee, including the sectoral group for gender and gender equality, chaired by the Secretary-General of the National Commission for Women and comprises a number of government agencies and civil society organizations.

194. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires clearly defined participatory frameworks that bring together various government agencies, the private sector, civil society organizations and development partners to develop national plans and programmes, and implement and report on them. As the experience of Iraq has shown, the comprehensive and broad nature of the 2030 Agenda stipulates an effective and vital role for various partners, to translate the 2030 Agenda into concrete action, manage its implementation efficiently, and ensure accountability. This, in turn, requires effective coordination and cooperation mechanisms that adopt a unified, comprehensive and participatory approach, which responds to the requirements of the 2030 Agenda.

195. Despite the establishment of institutional mechanisms concerned with women and development issues in Arab countries, reports from the majority of these countries highlight challenges hindering these mechanisms' work. Major challenges include a lack of coordination between these mechanisms, and weak mechanisms for mainstreaming gender equality in committees or bodies concerned with reviewing legislation and preparing plans and strategies for protecting and promoting the rights of women and girls. The reports also indicate a lack of information, data and statistics, and underscore the financial and human resources needed to develop the responses of these institutions. The reports also mention the options for collaboration and participatory action offered by the use of information and communication technology, which in turn help overcome geographical, economic, security and other constraints. These challenges are greatest in conflict-affected countries and their neighbouring countries, where women and girls are displaced.

196. In most Arab countries, participatory mechanisms fail to ensure the participation of women and girls from marginalized groups, and to highlight their concerns. This is due to a number of structural factors related to institutional work mechanisms and opportunities for working with women and community groups represented by these mechanisms. These factors include relying on existing knowledge mechanisms and observatories to determine women's priorities, and on civil society organizations and charities to communicate their voices indirectly, especially those of domestic workers or refugee and displaced women and girls in countries neighbouring Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Moreover, the Israeli occupation continues to marginalize Palestinian women and girls in the occupied territory behind the Israeli wall, imprisoned women and girls, and those residing in the Seam Zone.

## IV. Data and statistics

197. The collection, analysis and disaggregation of data to produce gender equality statistics is a cornerstone of activities related to development policies in general, and women's empowerment policies in particular. Providing periodic and comprehensive statistics for all segments of society is essential for conducting evidence-based reviews, to identify problems and challenges, and to prioritize and allocate the necessary resources to implement interventions and assess their impact. Planners and policymakers require sex-disaggregated data and statistics to assess trends and develop gender-sensitive strategies and programmes. Civil society also needs these statistics to play its role in monitoring and evaluating policies and programmes, in line with the SDGs and national sustainable development plans.

### A. References

198. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action provide a road map to guide countries in integrating gender equality statistics in national statistical systems, and using these statistics to monitor and evaluate efforts to achieve gender equality in an objective manner. Strategic objective H.3 of the Beijing Platform for Action emphasizes the need to “collect, compile, analyse and present data disaggregated by age, sex, socio-economic and other relevant indicators for utilization in policy and programme planning and implementation”, and identifies those responsible for this and the actions required from them. The Platform for Action directs to national, regional and international statistical bodies a set of recommendations to undertake the following:

- (a) Periodically collect, analyse and present data disaggregated by age, gender and other indicators;
- (b) Involve study and research centres concerned with women's issues in developing and testing indicators for analysing gender equality statistics, and for monitoring the achievement of the Platform for Action;
- (c) Improve data collection concepts and methods regarding the status of women and men and their participation in all sectors;
- (d) Strengthen vital statistics systems and include analysis of gender equality statistics in publications and research.

199. The Platform for Action calls on Governments to implement the following measures:

- (a) Ensure that a statistical publication is issued periodically, presenting and interpreting data on women and men in a format accessible to a wide range of non-specialized users;
- (b) Ensure that statistics producers and users keep a review of the adequacy of the official statistical system and its coverage of gender equality issues;
- (c) Conduct quantitative and qualitative studies, and encourage research organizations, unions, employers, the private sector and non-governmental organizations to conduct such studies;
- (d) Use gender-sensitive data when developing policy and implementing programmes and projects.

200. At the Fourth World Conference on Women, Governments committed themselves to mainstreaming the concept of gender equality in all policy and development processes, and to applying it when implementing and evaluating these policies and programmes.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> [E/ESCWA/SD/2016/Technical Paper.4.](#)

201. At the regional level, ESCWA, at its twenty-fifth session, adopted resolution 286 (XXV) on gender statistics for equality and empowerment of women, in which it called on member States to adopt the following measures:

(a) Adopt the set of indicators in the Arab Gender Issues and Indicators Framework as a common set of indicators, and produce the statistics related to those indicators for use in the monitoring and evaluation of strategic policies and work plans in areas related to gender;

(b) Develop a mechanism for the collection, dissemination and analysis of gender-sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated data by rural, urban and age information for the formulation of gender-related and gender-sensitive policies and programmes;

(c) Formulate and implement training programmes to mainstream gender issues and statistics into their statistical systems, with a view to sensitizing data producers and users to the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment.

202. The 2030 Agenda complements the Beijing Platform for Action. It provides a framework that includes a set of indicators to measure progress in achieving the targets of SDG5 and other SDGs from a gender equality perspective. The list of indicators related to the empowerment of women and girls and gender equality comprises 54 indicators distributed among the 17 SDGs, of which 24 are indicators specific to SDG 5. The gender equality indicators measure differences and disparities between women and men in all areas of life. These differences often arise from prejudices resulting from gender discrimination, and are often deeply rooted in society through culture and traditions.

203. Gender equality statistics highlight disparities between women and men, and the specific characteristics of different groups of women and girls. These statistics are necessary to monitor the implementation of the SDGs and ensure accountability for their implementation, and to contribute to social dialogues on sustainable development in general, and on women's issues in particular. Gender equality statistics include data collected and published by sex, and data not disaggregated by sex but that reflects the needs, opportunities, challenges and contributions of women and girls in society. Despite increased interest in gender equality statistics in recent decades, challenges still impede systematic and gender-sensitive monitoring. These challenges include the following: failure to integrate gender equality indicators equitably into all the SDGs and targets of the 2030 Agenda; absence of internationally agreed standards for data collection; and imbalances between countries in providing gender equality statistics on an ongoing basis. A report entitled "Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" issued by UN-Women, recommends the following:<sup>80</sup>

(a) Support the inclusion of gender equality indicators in all 17 SDGs by 2020;

(b) Collect data for gender equality indicators on a regular basis, and ensure their quality and comparability;

(c) Develop global, regional and national strategies to identify marginalized groups in the development process;

(d) Promote and commit to quality standards, human rights standards and the fundamental principles of official statistics;

(e) Expedite the formulation of global standards for category III indicators on gender equality;

(f) Strengthen commitments at the highest political levels to inclusive, open, transparent and gender-sensitive monitoring of the SDGs.

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<sup>80</sup> UN-Women, 2018c.

204. The Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators assessed indicators used to measure the SDGs (232 indicators), according to their methodology and the availability of data used in their calculation. These indicators are classified into the following three categories:<sup>81</sup>

(a) Tier I: Indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, and data are regularly produced by countries;

(b) Tier II: Indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, but data are not regularly produced by countries;

(c) Tier 3: No internationally established methodology or standards are yet available for the indicator.

205. The entire global monitoring framework faces challenges related to data availability. Based on the above classifications, of the 14 indicators selected to monitor the implementation of SDG 5, only two are in Tier I. These are indicators 5.2.5 on the proportion of women in managerial positions; and 5.b.1 on the proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex. The following 10 indicators come under Tier II, meaning that data for these indicators are collected and available in only a limited number of countries:

(a) 5.1.1 on whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex;

(b) 5.2.1 on violence perpetrated by an intimate partner;

(c) 5.2.2. on sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner;

(d) 5.3.1 on child marriage;

(e) 5.3.2 on female genital mutilation;

(f) 5.4.1 on unpaid domestic and care work;

(g) 5.6.1 on women who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care;

(h) 5.a.1 on equal land ownership rights for women;

(i) 5.a.2 on countries with legal frameworks guaranteeing women's equal rights to land ownership;

(j) 5.c.1 on countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment.

206. Tier II indicators are difficult to monitor at the global level owing to insufficient coverage at the national level, which entails a lack of comparability in some cases. Moreover, indicator 5.6.2 on laws and regulations guarantee women aged 15-49 access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education falls under Tier III, which means no internationally established methodology or standards are yet available for this indicator. Further complications arise in the case of some indicators that can be included under more than one Tier, such as indicator 5.5.1 on seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments. It is possible to include the component of national parliaments in Tier I, and the local government component in Tier II. Methodologies for Tier III indicators are urgently needed to monitor progress in implementing SDG 5.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

## **B. Evaluating gender equality statistics in the Arab region**

207. In general, comprehensive statistics are not available in all Arab countries for numerous economic and social issues. If these data are available, they are not updated periodically. For example, ESCWA data indicate that only seven of the 18 ESCWA member States have updated data on poverty over the past five years. Table 10 sets out the 14 gender indicators that measure progress in implementing the targets of SDG 5. It shows that data availability rates vary between indicators. The rate is high for indicator 5.5 on ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. This is due to the availability of data on women's membership in parliaments for all Arab countries,<sup>82</sup> and the availability of data on women occupying key administrative positions for 68.2 per cent of Arab countries (table 11).

208. In second place for data availability are indicators related to target 5.3 on eliminating all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. This is due to the availability of data on child marriage and marriage of minors (before the age of 15 years and before the age of 18, respectively) for 16 Arab countries (72.7 per cent of Arab countries), and data on the prevalence of female genital mutilation in eight Arab countries where the practice is common.

209. With regard to target 5.4 on recognizing and valuing 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, data are available that facilitate the assessment of the percentage of time spent on unpaid care and domestic work in seven countries, namely Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine and Qatar. The availability of data for this indicator depends on the time use surveys; however, such surveys are not organized periodically because of the high cost, which often impedes the provision of updated data for all countries.

210. Moreover, there is little data on progress in achieving other SDG 5 targets. Regarding target 5.2 on eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation, the data required to measure progress is only available in three countries, namely the Comoros, Egypt and Jordan. Furthermore, only the Comoros and Jordan have data for assessing progress under target 5.6 indicators on ensuring 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.

211. Data is non-existent for target 5.1 on ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere, and target 5.c on adopting and strengthening sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels. Measuring progress in implementing these targets is based on qualitative analyses, which is absent from the submitted national reports. Table 11 sets out the number of indicators reflecting gender equality under SDG 5 for each country. The number of available indicators ranges between only one indicator (Libya) and seven indicators (Egypt). This demonstrates the need to allocate more resources to generating the data necessary to calculate indicators, so as to assess the current situation and to periodically evaluate progress. Moreover, quality, reliability, accuracy, measurability, timeliness, and comprehensiveness of data should be taken into account when disseminating these indicators.

## **C. Progress in data and information on gender equality**

212. Country reports on progress made over the past five years in the area of gender equality data and statistics indicate that all Arab countries have worked to develop databases for such data. Countries made these data available on the websites of national statistical offices or institutions that fulfil the role of national women's

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<sup>82</sup> Data are available for national parliaments, but not for local or regional councils.



machineries. Statistical frameworks were created in most countries, including units responsible for statistics disaggregated by sex. The past five years have also witnessed additional information resulting from the first-time implementation of various field surveys, such as surveys on family violence and violence against women, cost estimations, time use surveys, and surveys on social groups requiring unpaid care work. Today, most Arab countries issue periodic bulletins on gender equality statistics. Arab countries' reports indicate that their biggest achievements in this type of statistics over the past five years have been in the following three areas:

1. *Conducting new surveys to produce information on gender equality statistics in specialized topics*

213. Djibouti prepared the Djiboutian Survey of Households (2017) on harmful practices and violence against women. For the first time, Kuwait implemented the National Youth Survey, in which young people of both sexes provided opinions on issues of concern to them, and that serve to establish a society based on the participation of men and women. Saudi Arabia conducted a field survey on persons with disabilities, which provided gender statistics in the disability field. This has contributed to reducing the information gap on a key segment requiring care, for which there is usually limited information. Egypt implemented a time use survey and a survey on the cost of violence against women, which allowed the production of previously unavailable indicators on unpaid work and violence against women.

2. *Reprocessing existing data to produce more detailed sex-disaggregated statistics and/or to produce new statistics*

214. Jordan conducted a census to produce more data on gender equality. Questions were added to the population and housing census, including a question on age at the time of first marriage to provide data on marriage of minors; questions on maternal mortality for the age group 13-54 to assess the prevalence of maternal mortality; a question on household economic activity conducted from home, to identify the economic activities that both men and women engage in from home so as to identify economic activity in the informal sector where a large percentage of women work. Jordan collected data from a new agricultural census to calculate an index on property rights or agricultural tenure for both sexes, in line with one SDG 5 indicator. Jordan also included additional questions in its Population and Family Health Survey to collect previously unavailable data on violence against women, including child marriage, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

3. *Providing data and statistics on gender equality by developing databases or centralized online dashboards*

215. In the interest of transparency and accountability in achieving global and national development goals, several Arab countries have developed technological tools that allow the generation of such data and statistics for all, including observatories of gender equality data and statistics. Examples include a national observatory on gender equality in Bahrain, the National Observatory of Women in Saudi Arabia; the Observatory of Egyptian Women; and a national observatory on violence in the Syrian Arab Republic.

216. In addition, some countries have produced knowledge products related to gender equality statistics. Egypt, through the Observatory of Egyptian Women, released a large number of policy and graphic summaries for use in the media and in community dialogues on women's empowerment. The State of Palestine issued posters, brochures and unconventional products, such as the Student Ticket. A number of countries, including Iraq, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, have made progress in building capacity to enhance the use of gender equality statistics. Regarding priorities for the next five years, country reports indicate that future priorities do not differ significantly from those of the past five years. Several countries include in their priorities conducting new surveys to produce national background information on specialized topics (such as time use, gender-based violence, asset ownership, poverty and disability), and developing a database and/or central online dashboard for gender equality statistics.

217. A shift is expected in the coming years, which will prioritize building statistical capacity for users, to enhance their ability to produce statistical estimates of indicators and to use gender equality statistics more effectively and on a larger scale. It is also expected that during the same period, priority will be given to using more gender-sensitive data in policy formulation and programme and project implementation. This could lead to gender equality policies becoming more evidence-based.

#### D. Conclusion

218. The provision of gender equality data and statistics for all social groups, especially the most vulnerable and those in need of care, is stipulated in the 2030 Agenda to uphold the principle of leaving no one behind. However, providing such data is a significant challenge for all Arab countries, albeit to varying degrees. In spite of this, the information obtained from national reports and other sources indicates that Arab countries can be classified into three groups. The first group continued to make achievements in the production of sex-disaggregated statistics. The second group succeeded during the past five years to emerge from statistical poverty in the field of gender statistics. For the third group, providing gender data and statistics remains a big challenge. This challenge must be overcome to formulate gender equality policies that are more responsive to the needs of women and girls.

**Table 10. Indicators of gender equality and the availability of related data in Arab countries, 2018**

	Target		Indicator	Indicator or classification	Arab countries with data (%)
5.1	End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere	5.1.1.	Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex	3	0
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	5.2.1	Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age	2	13.6
		5.2.2	Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence	2	0
5.3	Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation	5.3.1	Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18	2	72.7
		5.3.2	Proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, by age	2	36.4

**Table 11** (continued)

	Target		Indicator	Indicator or classification	Arab countries with data (%)
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	5.4.1	Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location	2	36.4
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	5.5.1	Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments	1/2	100
		5.5.2	Proportion of women in managerial positions	1	68.2
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	5.6.1	Proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care	2	9.1
		5.6.2	Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee women aged 15-49 years access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education	3	0
5.a	Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws	5.a.1	(a) Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure	2	0
		5.a.2	Proportion of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control	2	4.5
5.b	Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women	5.b.1	Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex	1	22.7
5.c	Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels	5.c.1	Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment	2	0

Source: Based on UN-Women, "Gender Equality and Poverty are Intrinsicly Linked", 2018, annexes 1 and 2, with some data adjusted in view of the information contained in country reports.

**Table 12. Availability of gender equality indicators in Arab countries, 2018**

Indicator number	Indicator	Jordan	United Arab Emirates	Bahrain	Tunisia	Algeria	Comoros	Syrian Arab Republic	Djibouti	Sudan	Somalia	Iraq	Oman	State of Palestine	Qatar	Kuwait	Lebanon	Libya	Egypt	Morocco	Saudi Arabia	Mauritania	Yemen	Number of countries	
5.1.1	Legal frameworks																							0	
5.2.1	Partner violence																								3
5.2.2	Violence outside the household																								0
5.3.1	Marriage of minors																								16
5.3.2	Female genital mutilation																								8
5.4.1	Domestic work																								8
5.5.1	Parliamentary membership																								22
5.5.2	Administrative positions																								15
5.6.1	Control of decisions on reproductive health																								2
5.6.2	Reproductive health																								0
5.a.1	Land ownership																								0
5.a.2	Legal frameworks on land ownership																								1
5.b.1	Ownership of mobile phone																								5
5.c.1	Budgets allocated to gender equality																								0
	Number of indicators	5	2	3	4	4	5	3	3	3	3	4	5	4	4	2	3	1	6	5	2	3	4		

Source: UN-Women, 2018c.

## **V. Towards Beijing+30**

219. The present chapter includes the proposed road map for the next five years, to move towards achieving the strategic goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It presents lessons learned from a regional perspective, to be applied when developing policies and implementing programmes for achieving gender equality. It also presents national and regional priorities in the field of gender equality in the coming years. The chapter considers the overall situation in the Arab region, which is greatly affected by armed conflicts and the political changes taking place in some countries, which have resulted in forced migration either between Arab countries or from Arab countries to other regions of the world. The status of refugee and displaced women and girls poses a major challenge, not only for countries directly affected by conflict, but also for the rest of the region. The protection of refugee and migrant women should be a top humanitarian priority in the Arab region. The chapter concludes with a number of recommendations derived from assessing indicators related to the status of Arab women, and from analysing progress in the field of gender equality. These recommendations apply to all Arab countries, albeit to varying degrees.

### **A. Lessons learned from a regional perspective**

220. Based on national reports on progress made by Arab countries over the past five years, and in the light of the results of consultations carried out by Arab civil society organizations and literature on the status of women and girls in Arab countries, the following lessons can be drawn:

(a) Legislation alone is not enough. A comprehensive and coordinated approach is needed to eliminate discrimination against women, based on human rights principles and programmes that address all stages of the female life cycle;

(b) Government interventions alone are insufficient. It is necessary to adopt a participatory approach, provide an enabling environment for civil society organizations, and make way for local initiatives and innovations to empower women and girls and achieve gender equality;

(c) Education and training alone are not enough to empower women and girls. It is necessary to eliminate all barriers that discriminate against women and prevent them from obtaining paid employment, promotions and access to key political, judicial and business positions in equality with men;

(d) Social protection programmes that target women are insufficient. It is necessary to implement a comprehensive set of policies to support women and girls, which addresses not only the symptoms of the problem but also its causes;

(e) Without an integrated system of gender equality statistics, it is impossible to document successes, identify failures, formulate policies and establish priorities;

(f) Achievements that are reflected by one-dimensional averages and that are measured at the national level are not a substitute for equity development, and do not necessarily lead to women and girls not being left behind;

(g) Women and girls suffer the most from conflict, wars and environmental risks, and are the most affected by economic reform programmes that tend to reduce social spending and to cut employment in the government and public sectors.

### **B. Regional and national priorities**

221. Based on reports by Arab Governments and civil society organizations on progress made over the past five years towards achieving the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda, in

particular its Goals and targets related to gender equality, it is proposed that the following areas be given top priority over the next five years:

(a) Update legislation and policies related to gender equality to ensure: (i) coverage of all aspects of gender equality; (ii) protection of women and girls from all types of violence; and (iii) that no social or spatial segment of women and girls are left behind;

(b) Move forward with the economic empowerment of Arab women, and transform progress achieved in the field of cognitive empowerment over the past years into a driving force for the economies of Arab countries;

(c) Protect the most marginalized and primary-care segments through parallel paths that incorporate social protection programmes and economic empowerment programmes, which include providing access to quality education for girls and creating job opportunities for young women;

(d) Strengthen the institutional framework by providing more resources to national women's machineries and to institutions and associations working in the fields of women's rights and the economic and political empowerment of women and girls, while intensifying action at the local level;

(e) Update gender equality data and statistics in terms of: (i) content to allow for the calculation of indicators of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and SDG indicators on gender equality; (ii) coverage of the different social and spatial segments of society, especially marginalized groups, refugees and displaced persons; and (iii) regularity of periodic data collection and transparency in making data available.

222. In response to the above-mentioned regional priorities, the present report provides a set of recommendations under several headings, as follows.

#### 1. *Gender-sensitive policies and programmes*

(a) Localize global commitments related to gender equality by integrating them into national development plans, policies, legislation and other relevant frameworks. Countries should also operationalize appropriate mechanisms to implement programmes and interventions at the decentralized/local level whenever possible, and place gender equality as a priority goal when designing and implementing development programmes at the national and local levels;

(b) Develop effective strategies to reach out to the most marginalized women and girls, and collaborate with researchers and women's rights organizations to identify marginalized groups of women and girls, design appropriate interventions for each group and allocate resources to implement such interventions;

(c) Achieve gender justice by ensuring women's access to decent work, promotion opportunities, and senior executive positions in government institutions, in addition to introducing suitable legislation and incentives that guarantee this can be achieved in both the private and public sectors, including on corporate boards;

(d) Support women in their role in the workplace, and in their domestic role as related to the performance of unpaid domestic and care work. This includes motivating men and boys to increase their contribution to such work, creating a supportive environment for women's work (establishment of day care facilities) and updating work systems (introducing flexible working arrangements and work from home modalities);

(e) Integrate social protection policies in a way that achieves a shift from protection to empowerment, and that takes into account the perspective of positive discrimination in favour of women and girls;

(f) Move beyond isolated approaches and dealing with gender equality issues in a partial and seasonal manner, and adopt an interdependent, coherent and integrated approach that focuses on the universality and indivisibility of human rights.

## *2. Leaving no one behind*

(a) Design development programmes that prioritize the weakest and most vulnerable social groups, including women with disabilities, poor women, women heads of households, older women, women working in the informal sector, domestic workers and workers without social protection, noting that these groups vary between countries. Governments should adopt a criterion to identify development project priorities based on the extent to which they meet the needs of these groups;

(b) Identify the weakest and most vulnerable social groups through a participatory approach as an alternative to one-dimensional taxonomic analysis when conducting socioeconomic diagnostic studies and assessing the effects of multiple discrimination against women and girls;

(c) Redistribute available resources to ensure that vulnerable groups receive a fair share to achieve inclusive and sustainable development and ensure that no one is left behind;

(d) Ensure minimum protection and basic care for refugees and displaced women and girls, and take measures to guarantee a safe and dignified life for them.

## *3. Protecting women and girls for all forms of violence*

(a) Enact laws to protect women and girls from all forms of violence, including domestic violence, in countries that have not passed such laws, and amend or remove all contradictory provisions set out in other laws;

(b) Enact legislation to protect women and girls by taking preventive measures against all forms of violence; provide specialized training for workers in this field, and ensure that all women and girls who suffer from violence have access to protection and long-term care to ensure their recovery and integration into society; implement legislation related to the prevention of violence against women and girls, and enforce and adjudicate in an independent manner to ensure that perpetrators do not go unpunished;

(c) Promote values that oppose violence against women and girls, and provide monitoring mechanisms and supporting information.

## *4. Governance of the gender equality system*

(a) Support national women's machineries and provide them with the necessary resources to fulfil their role at the national and regional levels, and establish communication between them and Governments, parliaments, women's rights organizations, the media and study centres;

(b) Provide an enabling environment for women's rights organizations and civil society organizations to conduct their own assessments of progress at the national and regional levels, and support them with resources and information;

(c) Produce all statistical indicators that measure progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in a periodic manner and in sufficient detail to represent the most vulnerable segments, and make these indicators available to all development partners;

(d) Support citizen-led initiatives to implement non-traditional approaches to achieving gender equality, monitor discrimination against women and girls, and promote success stories and viable models for empowering women and girls.

## 5. Gender equality data and statistics

(a) Assess gender equality statistics to identify gaps at the national, local and social levels, especially among the most marginalized groups, and incorporate this assessment into national statistical strategies implemented by the national statistical system, which includes all governmental and non-governmental producers and users of data. This assessment also includes information gaps and material and human resource needs, and identifies priorities to guide resource allocation;

(b) Update data and statistics systems that allow for an assessment of progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda through the following parallel tracks:

- Collecting and disseminating data currently unavailable on the following topics:
    - Use of time, unpaid work and care work;
    - All types of violence against women and girls, including domestic violence;
    - Women working in the informal sector;
    - The situation of marginalized and disadvantaged women and girls, including women with disabilities and older women.
  - Conducting a national survey on the situation of women and girls that addresses the various aspects related to gender equality, and allows linking economic and social variables with the characteristics of women and girls, and identifying the social relations dynamic within the family and its impact on gender equality throughout the female life cycle;
  - Conducting surveys on the situation of displaced and refugee women to identify their humanitarian needs and to assess basic services provided to them, in a way which allows the calculation of indicators that are useful for policymaking and for resource allocation when addressing issues of displacement, asylum and forced migration at the national and regional levels;
  - Ensure better use of existing censuses and surveys to obtain estimates of gender-equality indicators, including indicators on decent work, modern types of employment (remote work and work from home) and child marriage;
  - Ensure better use of government and non-governmental administrative records, and produce and disseminate gender-disaggregated data on workers as related to their level of employment; on those who have been promoted to leadership positions, chief executive officers, board members/secretaries of public bodies, private companies, public benefit institutions, nongovernmental organizations, trade unions and sports clubs; on those who have received loans from government funds and private banks; on those who work in the judiciary and police forces; on worker productivity by sectors; and on members of local councils;
  - Periodically collect data that monitor trends in the role of women in the public sphere and its development over time, and explain the system of cultural values that aggravate discrimination against women and girls;
- (c) Build national capacity in the field of gender equality statistics, including through the following:
- Building analytical capacity in statistical agencies and national mechanisms to empower women and academic institutions;
  - Building knowledge and skills related to collecting gender equality data in statistical bodies, national women's machineries, ministries, non-governmental organizations and the private sector at both at the national and local levels;



- Building human capacity in the design and dissemination of statistics using modern techniques and media;

(d) Utilize modern information and communication technologies (including mobile applications) to produce and make available gender equality statistics at lower costs while maintaining data quality and comprehensiveness, and unleash individual innovations in this field and invest in their development.

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