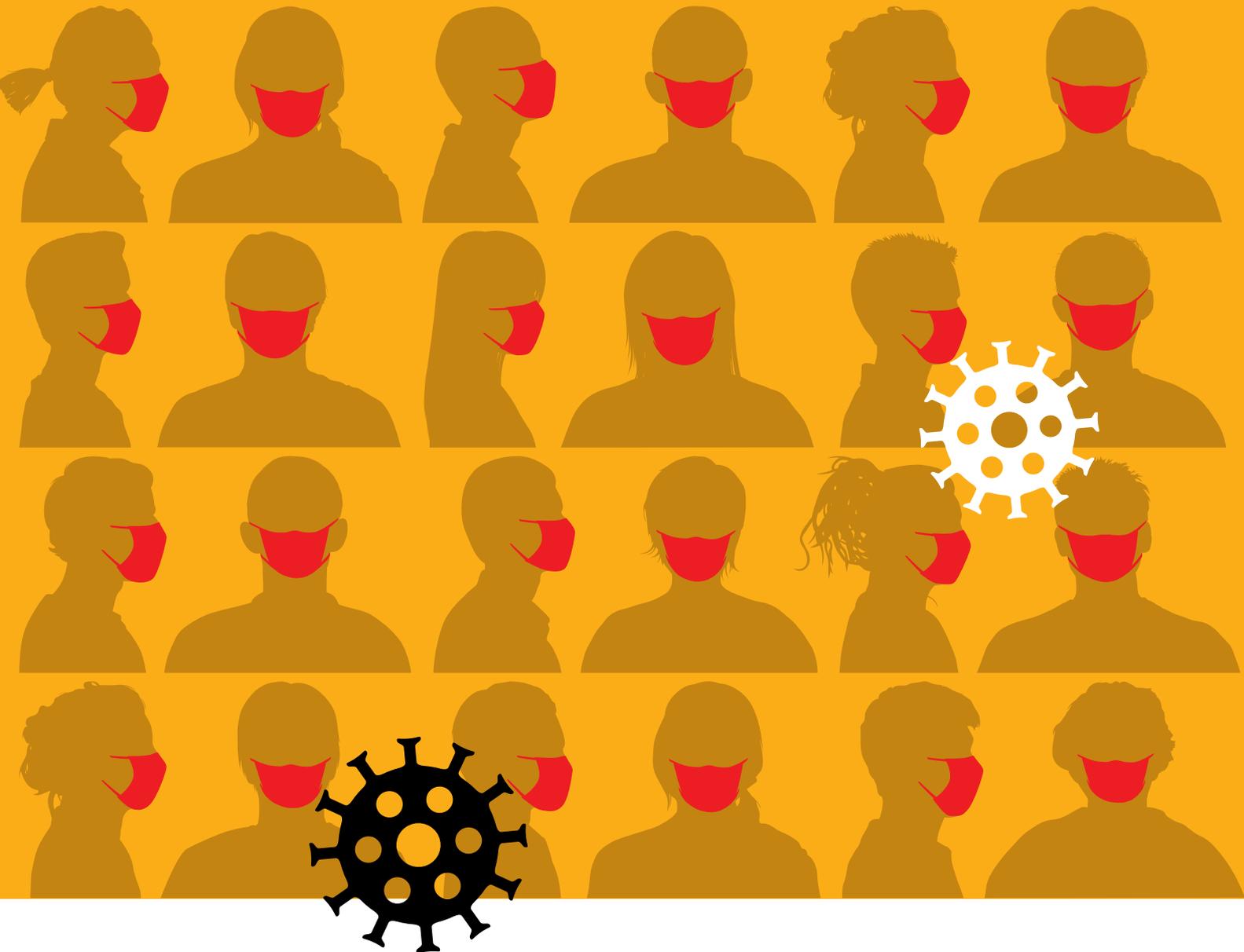
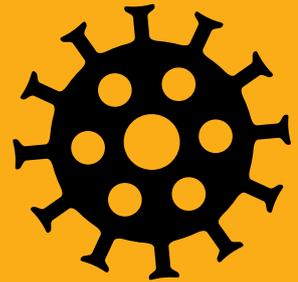
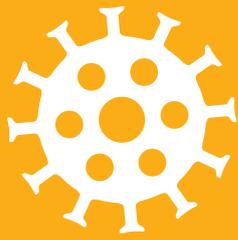


Gendered Impacts and Responses



08

Gendered Impacts and Responses

Whilst many of the gendered impacts of COVID-19 and the slump in oil prices have been covered within this report, this chapter focuses on key areas that have not been covered elsewhere, and in particular those relating to political decision making, domestic violence, unpaid care work and the digital divide. By way of an overall caveat, it is worth noting the continued lack of gender

disaggregated data in the region and beyond; on 18 June, an Executive Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) noted that, globally, only 40 percent of the data being shared on the COVID-19 response is disaggregated by sex.¹ Until there is a systematic improvement in the collection of disaggregated data, real analysis of the gendered impact of COVID-19 will remain limited.

Overview: Pre-COVID-19 realities

Twelve of the bottom 22 countries in the latest World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index are in the Arab region.² Yemen has been at the bottom of the Index for the last 13 years³ and is among the worst countries in the world in which to be a girl.⁴ Other countries in crisis perform poorly, but the rich countries of the region also have high gender equality gaps. Gender inequality is pervasive across the region, which has the lowest level of participation of women in the labour force in the world and poor – if improving – numbers of women in political positions. Levels of employment are generally low across the region, but higher in the GCC countries, where over 40 percent of women are employed.⁵

Women's per capita income is about two-thirds lower than men's.⁶ Across the region women are

disproportionately engaged in the informal rather than the formal economy, including in family businesses where their contribution often goes unaccounted for. Beyond employment, the richer countries of the Gulf have high scores on gender parity in terms of access to health and education, and particularly high scores on female access to higher education. The poorest countries of the region score poorly on both, with low figures on secondary school completion for girls in Iraq, Somalia, Sudan and Syria.⁷

Significant gender gaps are also evident when it comes to access to finance. One indicator is account ownership whereby the proportion of women owning an account is 26 percent, or 22 percentage points below men (48 percent). Despite remarkable progress in some countries, on average, the region

1 Nata Menabde, Executive Director, WHO to a meeting of CSW-NGOs on 18 June 2020.

2 World Economic Forum (WEF), *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*, New York, 2019, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf/.

3 Ibid.

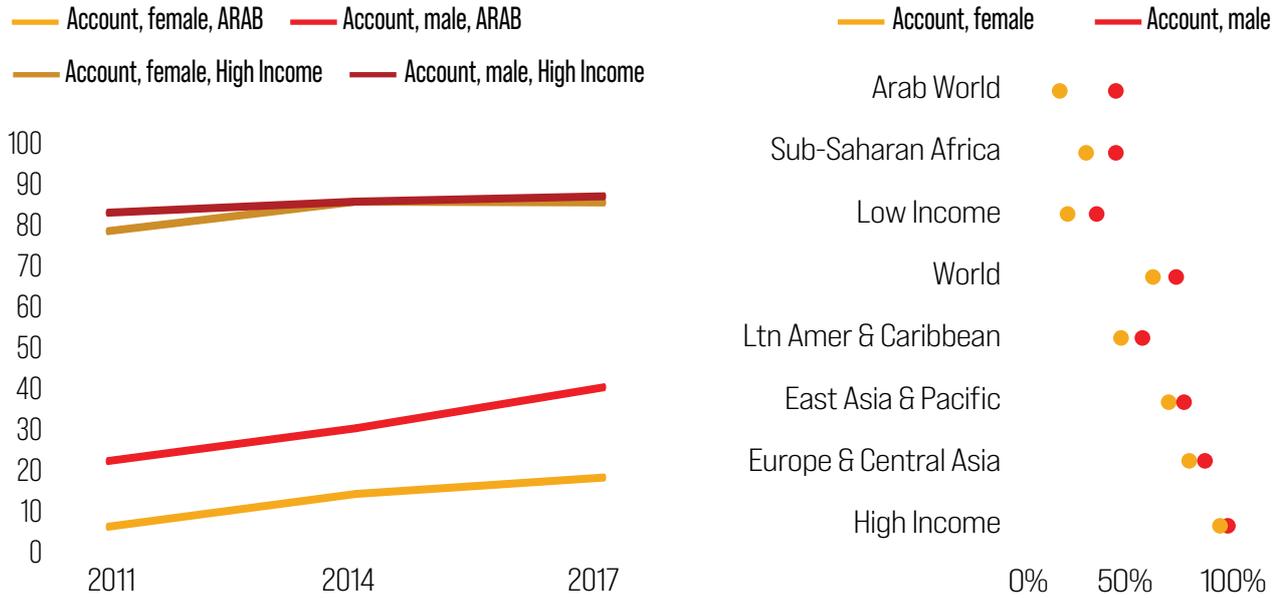
4 Moyer, J.D. et al., *Assessing the Impact of War on Development in Yemen*, UNDP, 2019, <https://yemen.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/Assessing%20the%20Impact%20of%20War%20on%20Development%20in%20Yemen.pdf/>.

5 The World Bank, "Gender Data Portal", <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/middle-east-&-north-africa/>; and WEF, *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*, op. cit.

6 UNDP, "Table 4: Gender Development Index", 2019, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-4-gender-development-index/>.

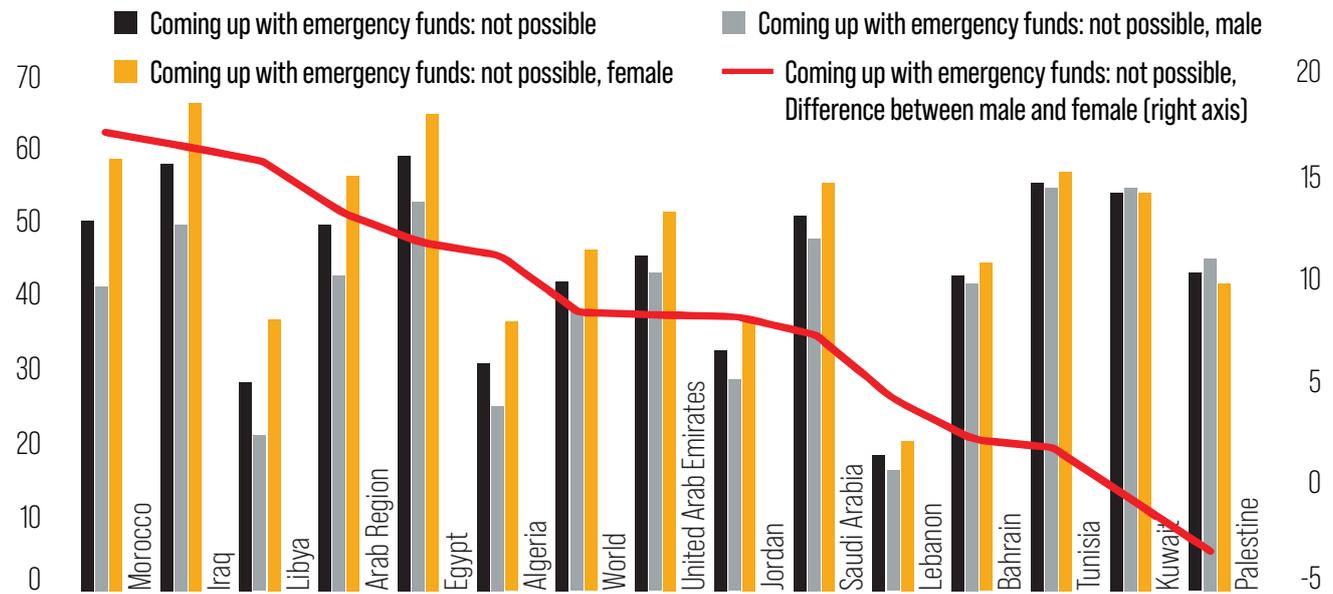
7 The World Bank, data, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ENR.PRIM.FM.ZS?display=graph--%3E&locations=1A/>; and <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ENR.SECO.FM.ZS?display=graph--%3E&locations=1A/>.

Figure 8.1 Gender gaps in bank account ownership (percentage)



Source: Elaboration from Findex 2017 data.

Figure 8.2 Access to emergency funding by gender (percentage)



Source: elaboration from Findex 2017 data.

has the widest gender finance gap in the world which continues to hinder women from being empowered to effectively control their financial lives (see Figure 8.1).

Access to emergency funding is particularly important in facing crises; this type of funding can be sourced from several different channels: sale of assets; loans from a bank; from private lenders, family or friends; or from savings. For the poorest in the Arab world, the main access to emergency funding is through family and friends. There

is also a gender gap in the region in accessing emergency funding. The world average has an eight percentage point gap between men and women, with 46 percent of women unable to access emergency funds (see Figure 8.2). Across the Arab States the gap is 13 percentage points, with 57 percent of women unable to access emergency funds. There is also a marked gap among the poorest people in the Arab States, with 63 percent finding it not possible to come up with emergency funds.

Likely post-COVID-19 impacts

As indicated elsewhere in this report, the impacts of declining oil prices and the economic shutdowns are disproportionately affecting the informal sector and the most vulnerable – including women. This is particularly the case in both oil-importing middle-income countries and FCCs in the region, where female-headed households depend on the informal economy. Almost 62 percent of women who are working in the region are informally employed in jobs that generally lack basic social or legal protection and employment benefits.⁸ Women in the region are relatively disproportionately represented in the two most vulnerable categories of informal employment: the agriculture sector and the domestic workforce. As one OECD report points out: “Most female refugees and migrants also work informally when they have access to work. These women are facing an increasingly precarious situation as confinement measures jeopardising their ability to work may reduce them to impoverishment, with especially high risks for female-headed households”.⁹

The COVID-19 pandemic risks setting back the already slow progress that the region has made to close the gender gap, with real implications for the achievement of the SDGs, especially the 54 targets with a specific gender dimension.

Gender equality in political decision making

As noted above, one of the key areas of inequality in the region is the very low figure of women involved in political decision making. This is particularly important in the COVID-19 crisis because evidence demonstrates that including more women in government can lead to improved health outcomes.¹⁰ Across the Arab region, women make up 17.5 percent of legislators¹¹ and – with the exception of Egypt, Lebanon, Somalia and Sudan – an even lower proportion of women in government.¹² Women have generally not been in a position to

influence the levels or priorities of health spending.

As in many other parts of the world, Arab governments have put in place a range of emergency committees to deal with the response to COVID-19. Few of these committees feature more than one or two women, and some – as in Iraq, and despite quotas in parliament – have no women in key decision-making positions. This matters, because inclusive decision making not only tends to be more effective, it has also been found to be quicker¹³; and, in fighting the pandemic, speed of decision making has been important. In some countries of the region – e.g. Lebanon and Djibouti – female doctors have been engaged in technical committees advising governments on the pandemic response. It is to be hoped that such inclusion prevents the diversion of resources from maternal health and sexual and reproductive services which has been seen during other pandemics, and which initial indicators from UNFPA suggest is happening in the poorest Arab countries with already high maternal mortality rates.¹⁴

Importance of active Ministries of Women and the presence of women in key positions in the public service

While women ministers have not always been included in key decision-making bodies, some active ministers of women – and their equivalent counterparts across the region – have made public recommendations on responses; we see evidence of this in Jordan, Tunisia, Somalia and Egypt. Indeed, the combination of an active National Council of Women in Egypt with women ministers of health and social affairs has led to a series of measures that have sought to minimize the impact of COVID-19.¹⁵ Also, as the OECD points out: “In Egypt, the corporate social responsibility (CSR) Department of the Central Bank, which is headed by a woman, has launched a joint initiative with the Federation of

8 OECD, *COVID-19 crisis in the MENA region: Impact on gender equality and policy responses*, 10 June 2020, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=134_134470-w95kmv8khl&title=COVID-19-crisis-in-the-MENA-region-impact-on-gender-equality-and-policy-responses/.

9 Ibid.

10 Muntaner, C., and E. Ng, “Here’s why having more women in government is good for your health”, WEF, 16 January 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/01/the-more-women-in-government-the-healthier-a-population/>.

11 Inter-parliamentary Union, “Women in National Parliaments: Situation as of 1 October 2019”, <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm/>.

12 According to the IPU data, the regional average is 13.5%.

13 Larson, E., “New Research: Diversity + Inclusion = Better Decision Making At Work”, Bloomberg, 21 September 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/company/stories/new-research-diversity-inclusion-better-decision-making-work/>.

14 UNFPA, *COVID-19 Situation Report No. 3 for UNFPA Arab States*, 13 May 2020, <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/covid-19-situation-report-no-3-unfpa-arab-states/>.

15 For example, amongst other measures to protect SMEs, the Ministry of Social Solidarity announced an increase in the monthly income for rural women leaders from EGP 300 to EGP 900 per month.

Egyptian Banks to support the government in funding monthly cash transfers for irregular workers.”¹⁶

The role of civil society

Women’s NGOs have also been active across the region, from awareness raising at all levels from Somalia to Iraq to Morocco, to the provision of hotlines and support for victims of domestic violence, to the transformation of small businesses to produce masks and other protective clothing (PPE). This practical experience could be important for ensuring the needs of women and girls are included in future responses.

Domestic violence

Globally, preliminary figures suggest an average increase of at least 20 percent in domestic violence as a result of lockdown measures.¹⁷ Precise figures in the Arab world are difficult to find. Initial reports from the Ministry of Women in Palestine in early May suggested a threefold increase in appeals for help from female victims, including a significant increase in suicide attempts.¹⁸ The Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling in Palestine has separately reported a 69 percent increase in gender-based violence (GBV) related consultations, with a specific emphasis on psychological harassment.¹⁹ A report by UN Women, UNHCR and a number of NGOs in Lebanon found that 54 percent of survey respondents reported an increase in levels of harassment and abuse, with just over 43 percent of women unable to get support or unaware of how to obtain it during lockdown.²⁰ Women’s NGOs across the region have moved support services online and have actively worked with authorities where possible to maintain access to shelters, encourage police to visit during curfew hours, and set up alternate support services via cooperating pharmacies.

In a region where levels of domestic violence are under-reported, it is striking that surveys in some countries indicate that more than 50 percent of women have suffered from domestic violence.²¹ The impact of COVID 19 is likely to induce a sharp increase in these figures – posing a challenge to policymakers to include moves to end legal discrimination and to end the impunity of perpetrators. Not all countries in the region have laws that criminalise domestic violence.²² It is therefore important that governments accelerate efforts to pass new legislation, especially where draft laws exist.

As activities such as education have moved online, there is also anecdotal evidence in Jordan and Palestine and elsewhere of an increase in online harassment of women and girls. In this regard, the Jordanian National Council for Women (JNCW) has sought to monitor cases and alert legal authorities to close down offending sites.

Access to justice

Although the closure of courts across the region has an impact on everyone seeking justice, there are a number of specific, particular gendered impacts, notably concerning the lack of access to Sharia courts and the inability of women to obtain alimony payments or rights to access children, increasing hardship amongst some of the most vulnerable. In addition, the rights of victims of GBV, including access to protection orders, have been particularly affected.²³ Some systems in the region have successfully moved to online systems for certain cases (e.g. in Bahrain and Morocco). Differences in approach and a willingness to open courts during lock-downs – including virtually – seem to depend on individual decisions at the country level rather than any specific pattern related to socio-economic status.

16 OECD, *COVID-19 crisis in the MENA region*, 2020, op. cit.

17 UNFPA, *Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/impact-covid-19-pandemic-family-planning-and-ending-gender-based-violence-female-genital/>.

18 Minister of women during a consultative meeting.

19 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *A crisis within a crisis: fighting Gender-Based Violence (GBV) during COVID-19*, 2 June 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/crisis-within-crisis-fighting-gender-based-violence-gbv-during/>.

20 UN Women, *Impact of COVID-19 on the SGBV situation in Lebanon*, 2020, https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/05/impact%20of%20covid%2019%20on%20sgbv_final.pdf?la=en&vs=5723/.

21 La Rédaction, “Plus d’une Marocaine sur deux affirme avoir été victime de violences”, TELQUEL, 15 May 2019, https://telquel.ma/2019/05/15/plus-dune-marocaine-sur-deux-affirme-avoir-ete-victime-de-violences_1638479/.

22 For a full assessment of discriminatory laws see the gender justice and the law report: UNDP, *Gender Justice & Equality before the law*, 10 December 2019, https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/Dem_Gov/gender-justice---equality-before-the-law.html/.

23 Arab Renaissance for Democracy & Development, “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women’s Access to Justice in Jordan”, 19 April 2020, <https://www.ardd-jo.org/Publications/the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-womens-access/>.

Unpaid care and undervalued care work²⁴

According to the ILO, before COVID-19, women in the region did on average five times more unpaid childcare work than men²⁵, with figures increasing to eight times as much in countries of North Africa.²⁶ While lockdowns have seen an increase in the amount of time men are spending on household chores, the gender gap has generally increased, with women disproportionately taking on the extra tasks of distance education, care for the sick and elderly and extra household chores brought on by lockdowns.

Whilst figures are not specifically available, except in a few countries of the region (see below), it is likely that with the exception of some of the wealthy countries of the Gulf – where many tasks are carried out by migrant domestic workers – such gender differences apply across all countries of the region.

Increasing unpaid care work increases the likelihood that women will not be able to take on income earning activities outside the home and that adolescent girls will drop out of school – particularly in FCCs, due to the deterioration of health and social support systems.²⁷

By way of an illustration, a UN Women report from Jordan that includes time-use survey data suggests that women are now carrying out 22 times as much unpaid care work in the household (including support for child education, washing and cleaning and caring for the young and elderly) as men, compared to 17.1 times²⁸, as per 2016 data, even though both sexes claim an increase in time spent on domestic work during lockdowns.

Low-paid domestic work

Care work is not only mostly unpaid – when it is paid, it is poorly paid and undervalued, as evidenced by its general exclusion from labour laws and partial coverage by separate legislation across the region.²⁹ About a third of migrant workers in the region (i.e. GCC countries plus Jordan and Lebanon) are women.³⁰ According to 2015 figures, 1.6 million female migrant workers in the region were working as domestic workers.³¹ The impact on these workers of the COVID-19 epidemic is poorly documented but under lockdowns some will have had increases in their duties and work, whilst others have been summarily dismissed – leaving them with no salaries, nowhere to live, no means to return to their countries of origin³² and no recourse. In other countries of the region, such domestic work is carried out by national workers and is equally underpaid and undervalued. It is necessary to recognize and fully protect domestic workers by including them in national labour laws and by providing access to social protection and justice.

Gender digital divide and access to education

There are broad differences across the countries of the region in terms of access to the internet, with almost total gender parity and over 90 percent internet use across populations in the Gulf³³ and reduced access and an increasing gender gap in line with differing income levels across the rest of the region – with the exception of Somalia, where penetration rates are equally poor for men and women (see Figure 8.3).³⁴ Further variations

24 See also: Traboulsi, Y., and L. Abu Habib, "Social Reproduction and Care Work in Crisis: The Dice are Loaded Against Women", June 18, 2020, <https://daraj.com/en/48750/?fbclid=IwAR3eddFNooNSFZMNCbWLiMTKoYqjIFZR6bAPHhDM9wR8nouDdVW2fVMXNU> for a feminist view of the dynamics of care work during COVID-19.

25 ILO, "Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work", Executive Summary, n.d., https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633166.pdf.

26 Charmes, J., *The Unpaid Care Work and the Labour Market. An analysis of time use data based on the latest World Compilation of Time-use Surveys*, ILO, 2019, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms_732791.pdf.

27 Reliefweb, "Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women", 9 April 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/policy-brief-impact-covid-19-women/>; and UN Women, *The Priorities for Gender Equality in Yemen's COVID-19 Response*, 2020, <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/05/brief-priorities-for-gender-equality-in-yemen-covid19-response/>.

28 UN Women, *COVID-19 and Women's Economic Empowerment: Policy Recommendations for Strengthening Jordan's Recovery*, UN Women Jordan, May 2020, <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20jordan/images/publications/2020/may/covid-19%20and%20womens%20economic%20empowerment-%20policy%20recommendations%20for%20strengthening%20jordans%20recovery.pdf?la=en&vs=4619/>.

29 Kagan, S., *Domestic Workers and Employers in the Arab States: Promising practices and innovative models for a productive working relationship*, ILO White Paper, ILO, 2017, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_619661.pdf.

30 ILO, "Labour Migration", n.d., <https://www.ilo.org/beirut/areasofwork/labour-migration/lang--en/index.htm>.

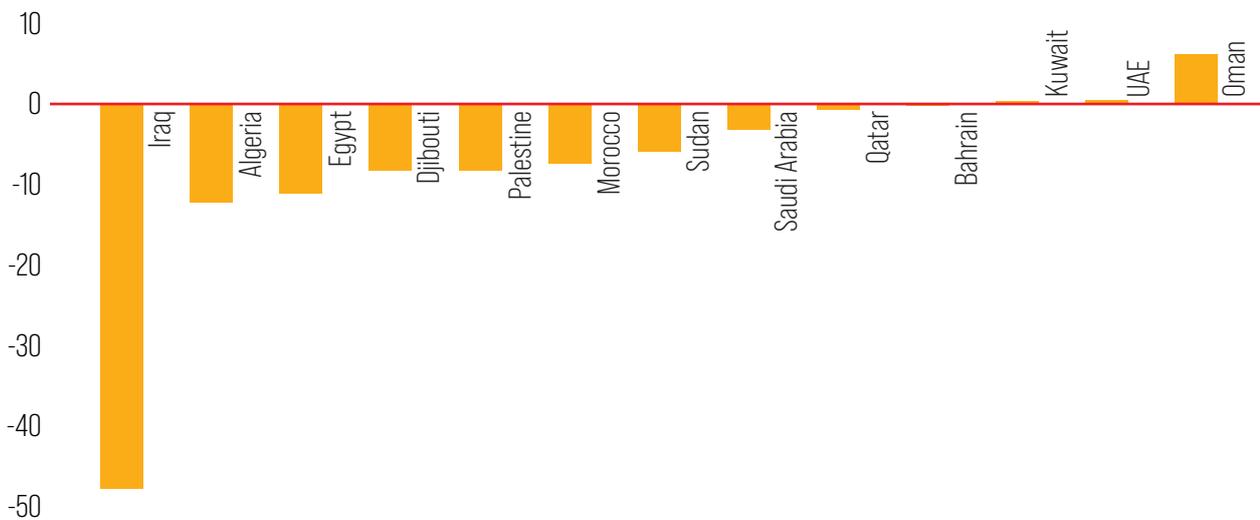
31 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_619661.pdf.

32 Aoun, R., "COVID-19 Impact on Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East", Social Development Direct, n.d., http://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1953/covid-19-and-impact-on-vulnerable-female-migrant-domestic-workers_english.pdf.

33 International Telecommunications Union (ITU), ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators database.

34 Internet World Stats, "Africa", <https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm>.

Figure 8.3 Gender gap in Internet use (percentage points difference)



Source: authors' calculations based on ITU data.

within the region can be expected between rural and urban areas, and for informal and refugee settlements. With attempts to move business and education online, this adds to the burden of those already disadvantaged. Even where mobile phone penetration is high, gender gaps exist, especially in Sudan and Djibouti but also in Algeria, Egypt, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. In addition, the cost of access to the Internet via mobile phones is prohibitive for many segments of the population.³⁵

The COVID-19 crisis has triggered school closures in the Arab region affecting 110 million students.³⁶ Alternatives to in-school education have included online platforms in several countries as well as TV-based learning, radio-based learning and home-based instruction.³⁷ Inequalities in access to technology (electricity, internet, tablets, computers and other devices) and resources; capacity of school teachers³⁸ and quality of infrastructure all threaten to further marginalize male and female students in disadvantaged situations, including people living in

underserved areas, people suffering from poverty, refugees, the internally displaced and children with disabilities.³⁹ Initial evidence suggests that access to education during COVID-19 has been poor amongst the most vulnerable communities and that girls are left carrying out a significant proportion of household chores. Anecdotal evidence also shows that girls in conservative families may not be allowed to access certain platforms, such as WhatsApp in Yemen.⁴⁰ Additionally, as revealed in Jordan, safety of online access is an issue with risks of sexual harassment, exploitation, being lured into criminal behaviour or cyber-bullying by peers, all of which can be more harmful to girls than boys and to children with disabilities.⁴¹ Evidence from the Ebola experience suggests that significant numbers of adolescent girls in the poorest countries of the region will never return to school unless policies are specifically targeted to prevent this.⁴² It is important that governments recognize these risks and disparities and introduce targeted policies to help correct them.

35 Faek, R., and T.A. El-Galil, "The Shift to Online Education in the Arab World Is Intensifying Inequality", Al-Fanar Media, 30 April, 2020, <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2020/04/the-shift-to-online-education-in-the-arab-world-is-intensifying-inequality/>.

36 OECD, *COVID-19 crisis in the MENA region*, 2020, op. cit.

37 UNESCO, *Alternative Solutions to School Closure in Arab Countries to Ensuring that Learning Never Stops: COVID-19 Education Response*, Beirut office, n.d., https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/alternative_solutions_to_school_closure_in_arab_countries_-_final.pdf.

38 Ibid.

39 According to Handicap International, in the households they surveyed, 42% children with disabilities in Jordan did not use the online education platform during quarantine.

40 Faek and El-Galil, 2020, op. cit.

41 UNICEF, "Guidance for ISPs and schools for children's safety online" May 2020, [https://www.unicef.org/jordan/media/2526/file/Safeguarding_Guidance%20to%20Keep%20Children%20Safe%20Online%20Eng%20\(002\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/jordan/media/2526/file/Safeguarding_Guidance%20to%20Keep%20Children%20Safe%20Online%20Eng%20(002).pdf).

42 Giannini, S., "Covid-19 school closures around the world will hit girls hardest", UNESCO, 31 March 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/news/covid-19-school-closures-around-world-will-hit-girls-hardest?fbclid=IwAR2dLaRVzAF5t3MNY9hNgyuKz3H5ivUfkG-6DfGW-F4mAU8b18buqkikzo8/>.

Policy review

As the OECD noted in its paper of 10 June on COVID-19 and its impact on gender equality, “only a few public policy actions to date have focused specifically on supporting women in dealing with the **economic repercussions** of the crisis”.⁴³ Some of these responses have already been noted in this section, others – such as the provision of hotline support for domestic violence – are not policies, per se, but government actions in response to the unintended consequences of policies

taken without prior consultation with women’s groups and other members of civil society. Other policies, like the provision of paid or unpaid leave for women to take care of children, have gendered implications.⁴⁴ As reported in other chapters, some governments have provided support to the informal sector, which will help some women, but generally there is more that could have been done and that can be done to mitigate the gendered impacts of the crisis and ensure that countries build forward differently.

⁴³ OECD, *COVID-19 crisis in the MENA region*, 2020, op. cit.

⁴⁴ The Tunisian government changed a proposed provision to force women to stay at home to look after children after protests by women’s groups in April. Provisions by other governments in the region, including the Egyptian government, offer special leave to women only.

08

Policy recommendations

Ensure women and marginalized groups' voices are represented in the COVID-19 response by:

- Having at least 30 percent representation by women on all decision-making bodies.
- Setting up consultative mechanisms for future policy responses that include civil society representatives, including women's NGOs, labour associations and representatives of the most marginalized groups.

Tackle increasing levels of domestic violence by:

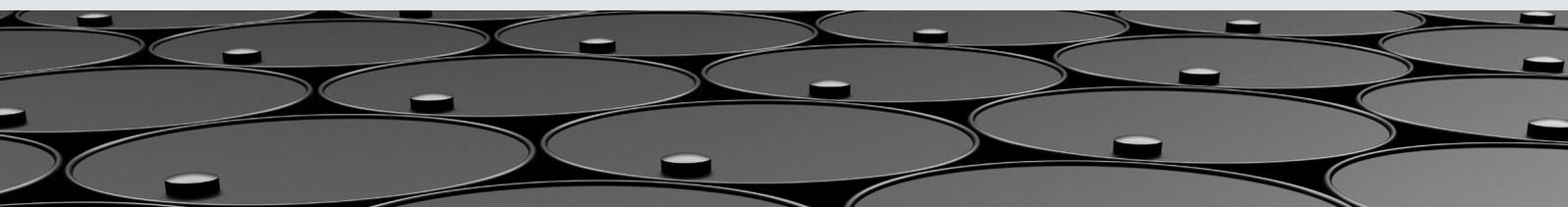
- Fast tracking access to justice for GBV cases.
- Passing legislation on domestic violence, where it does not exist
- Increasing budgets for awareness campaigns aimed at changing behaviour as well as for shelters and other support for survivors.

Help women in the informal sector by:

- Including all workers, including migrant domestic workers in social protection measures.
- Considering special measures for women owned businesses.
- Ensuring measures designed to support the economy include all those in the informal sector, including women engaged in family businesses, without pay.
- Offering incentives to family businesses that register family members in the work force.

Introduce new measures to target the burden of unpaid care such as:

- Special care allowances for both care of children and the elderly.
- Focused awareness raising campaigns about sharing household chores.
- End Kafala legal systems for domestic workers and introduce clear laws on hours and conditions for domestic care work.



Minimize the digital gender gap and encourage girls back to school by:

- Investing in equal access to technology, with both infrastructure and programmes challenging cultural norms to ensure online safety and accessibility.
- Considering specific programmes to support adolescent girls returning to school, including young mothers.

