



**MUNDP 2020**  
COMMITMENT TO DEVELOPMENT

# **RESEARCH REPORT**

**ECOSOC**

**EMPLOYING TARGETED MEASURES TO  
COMBAT UNEMPLOYMENT WITH A FOCUS ON  
WOMEN AND THE YOUTH**

**MEHMET DENİZ BIRLIKCI**



## Basic Overview of the Issue

Achieving gender equality and empowering women to become more integrated into the economy are critical goals in realizing sustainable development and economic growth. In a wider lens, overcoming gender disparity in the economy would foster an additional 12 Trillion US Dollars. To put it in perspective, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Germany is 3.7 Trillion USD and the GDP of the United Kingdom is 2.6 Trillion USD. Inheriting a narrower lens and focusing on the MENA Region, one can recognize that the share of output generated by women constitute only 18%, while women constitute 50% of the population. In boosting female integration to the workforce, the region can have a GDP boost of 47% (Badran).

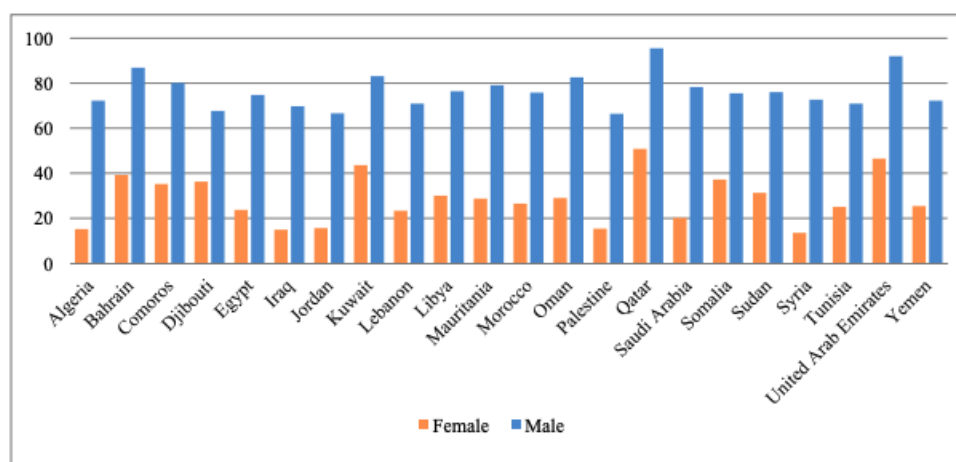


Figure 1: Labor Force Participation Rates (%) by country and by sex (2013) (ESCWA)

The Arab countries have the highest regional youth unemployment rate in the world, around 30% in 2016. Looking individually at the countries that make up the region, one can see that the national youth unemployment rates vary considerably in the region. While the unemployment rate in 2019 is 36.7% in Jordan, it is 7.6% in the United Arab Emirates. Young Arab women face a double burden: their age and their gender. The combination of these two factors has caused the highest regional gender gap in terms of unemployment (United Nations, Regional

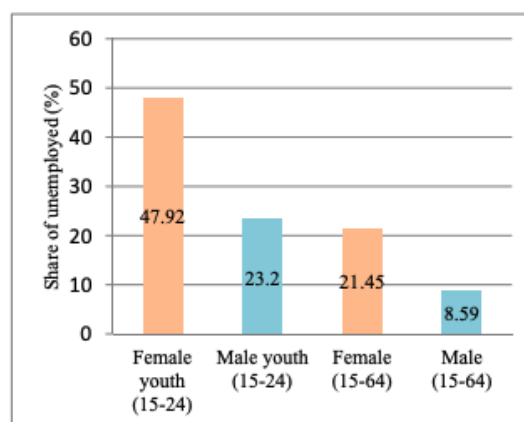


Figure 2: Unemployment Rate (%) by sex and demographic (ESCWA)



## Explanation of Important Terms

### *Subsidization*

When a government subsidizes a service, it covers some of the costs associated with it. Such a practice decreases the cost of the consumer, the individual, has to bear.

### *Civil Societies*

Civil societies are formed by the members of the society and often these groups are exempt from the reach of the government. It refers to a wide range of organizations: community groups, NGO's, or labor unions.

### *Capital Markets*

“Capital markets are venues where savings and investments are channeled between the suppliers who have the capital and those who are in need of capital. The entities that have capital include retail and institutional investors while those who seek capital are businesses, governments, and people” (Kenton).

### *Public Sector*

The public sector is part of an economy that is controlled by the government.

### *Private Sector*

The private sector is part of the economy that is not under direct government control. This sector is owned by private individuals or groups and often run for profit.

### *Entrepreneurship*

Entrepreneurship is the process of designing, launching, and running a new business and taking on the financial risks in the hope of profit.

## Detailed Background of the Issue

### *Female Unemployment*

In the Arab Region, oil wealth financed economic development and fostered infrastructural and state-owned industries. Yet, in a contrasting manner, this growth also distorted the labor force. Most Arab countries pursued import-substitution-industrialization (ISI), importing



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machinery to create local industries and produce consumer goods<sup>1</sup>. This strategy meant central planning and a large public sector. Women's entry into the workforce came in the form of such state-sponsored job opportunities created by the enlarging public sector. Fatma Mernissi, a Moroccan feminist writer and sociologist, had stated how the North African women of that time did not look to a man for their survival, but the State. While far from ideal, it was nevertheless a step in the right direction.

Relying on oil, gas, and imports, the economic strategies were capital-intensive, minimized labor use, and was not particularly suited for female employment. Contrasting Iran/Algeria with Tunisia/Morocco, one can recognize how larger oil revenues correspond with a smaller female share of employment. Furthermore, the migration of female workers from the Philippines (and elsewhere) to oil-rich Gulf countries met the demand for work in hospitals, restaurants, and hotels, keeping females in the patriarchal societal order.

The question then becomes: what about non-oil economies? As the levels of female employment is also low in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. One explanation for this phenomenon is that while the economic structure of countries in the region may have been different, the labor and capital flow across the countries made the economy of the region integrated. Another explanation suggests a set of social institutions and norms as a barrier against female employment. The social and political conditions were kin-based relations, conserving the patriarchal family law. As in other nations, the Arab women's rights were influenced by international treaties and norms besides national legislation. While Arab governments had signed several legislations regarding women's rights, most were weakly enforced and rendered obsolete by interpretation of sharia. Furthermore, labor laws that signified women's rights as a worker contradicted the social understandings that denied women equal rights to family wealth. Such contradiction, combined with weakly enforced rights, made the economic citizenship more difficult<sup>2</sup>.

"Only a handful of Arab countries currently meet the international standard of ensuring a minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave, and the duration of maternity leave established by the law falls below this mark in most Arab States (see Figure 3). The challenges faced by

<sup>1</sup> Moghadam

<sup>2</sup> Moghadam



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women who are contending with short maternity leave are further compounded by the limited availability and costly nature of early childcare and education services in the region, which leave many women with limited options to care for their children until they reach primary school-age” (ESCWA).

Figure 3: Maternity Leave Structures of Arab Countries (ESCWA)

	Duration of paid maternity leave (as stated in national legislation)	Duration of paid maternity leave (approximate equivalent in weeks)	Amount of cash benefits during maternity leave (% of Previous Earnings)	Source of funding for cash benefits during maternity leave
<b>Algeria</b>	14 weeks	14 weeks	100%	Social Insurance
<b>Bahrain</b>	60 days	9 weeks	100% for 45 days	Employer Liability
<b>Comoros</b>	14 weeks	14 weeks	100%	Employer Liability
<b>Djibouti</b>	14 weeks	14 weeks	100%	50% Social Insurance 50% Employer
<b>Egypt</b>	3 months	13 weeks	100%	75% Social Insurance 25% Employer
<b>Iraq</b>	62 days	9 weeks	100%	Employer Liability
<b>Jordan</b>	10 weeks	10 weeks	100%	Social Insurance
<b>Kuwait</b>	70 days	10 weeks	100%	Employer Liability
<b>Lebanon</b>	7 weeks	7 weeks	100% <sup>a</sup>	Employer Liability
<b>Libya</b>	14 weeks	14 weeks	50% in general 100% for self-employed women for 13 weeks <sup>b</sup>	Employer Liability as a general rule Social Insurance for self-employed women
<b>Mauritania</b>	14 weeks	14 weeks	100%	Social Insurance
<b>Morocco</b>	14 weeks	14 weeks	100%	Social Insurance
<b>Oman</b>	50 days	7 weeks	100%	Employer Liability
<b>Palestine</b>	70 days	10 weeks	100%	Employer Liability
<b>Qatar</b>	50 days	7 weeks	100%	Employer Liability
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	10 weeks	10 weeks	50%–100% <sup>c</sup>	Employer Liability
<b>Somalia</b>	14 weeks	14 weeks	50%	Employer Liability
<b>The Sudan</b>	8 weeks	8 weeks	100%	Employer Liability
<b>Syrian Arab Republic</b>	120 days <sup>d</sup>	17 weeks <sup>d</sup>	100%	Employer Liability
<b>Tunisia</b>	30 days	4 weeks	66.7%	Social Insurance
<b>United Arab Emirates</b>	45 days	6 weeks	50%–100% <sup>e</sup>	Employer Liability
<b>Yemen</b>	60 days	9 weeks	100%	Employer Liability



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Scholars have outlined five types of family structures with varying earner-carer arrangements:

1. Male breadwinner/female carer
2. Male breadwinner/female part-time earner
3. Dual earner/state carer
4. Dual earner/marketized carer
5. Dual earner/dual carer

In the region, the dual-earner category is not prevalent. The most common is the male breadwinner/female homemaker structure. The burden of caring for the young and the elderly are varying with social class. While upper-income women may be able to hire a nanny or pay for a childcare center, such an opportunity is not possible for working-class and low-income families. Maternity leave policies in the region are not drastically different from Argentina and South Korea, yet, the female labor force participation is higher in these countries compared to the Arab region. It should be noted, however, both Argentina and South Korea have subsidized daycare. The social services provided by the government should also include family allowances, subsidized daycare, maternity leaves, paternity leaves, and similar solutions that overall aim to enable families to thrive and females to engage in both paid work and family<sup>3</sup>.

## Youth Unemployment

“Youth unemployment reflects the level of economic activity in general as well as the trends in the demand on labor in the labor market. In the Arab region, where at least 20 percent of the total population is between 15 and 24 years, each year over 500,000 enter the labor market, the vast majority are in the age cohort of 15-24. However, youth unemployment rates in this region are much higher than adult unemployment rates, averaging 27.3 % in 2007. It accounts for 54.2% of total unemployment (more than 70% of unemployment in Jordan, Mauritania, Yemen as well as Egypt) and is considered as the highest in the world (ahead the poorest region in the world, Sub-Saharan Africa which has the second-highest rate of youth unemployment 21%)” (Jelli).

<sup>3</sup> Moghadam



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It is rather peculiar that most unemployed youths are educated. The ratio of high-school and university graduates in total unemployed individuals is 51% in Tunisia, 44% in Morocco and 34% in Algeria (Jelli). Unemployment of youth has the potential to cause a long-term negative impact on people's productive potentials and future work opportunities. Furthermore, youth unemployment can lead to marginalization, frustration, and low self-esteem, which can corrode the social structure. In questioning the high unemployment rates in educated youth, experts have posed forward several explanations.

### ***Skills Match Hypothesis***

The UN World Youth Report outlines how traditional education systems and training programs have done nothing to bridge the gap between the skills education instills and those required by employers in the rapidly changing global economy of today. The Arab Region is no different. Reports and articles on the region all suggest that there is a mismatch between skills workers poses and the skills employers seek. This imbalance between supply and demand is known as the *skills mismatch hypothesis*. If this is the case, the problems will become more severe because the rate of change in technologies is increasing and the workplace is becoming more high-tech.

### ***Lack of Employment Opportunities***

“Arab private sector characterized by lack of entrepreneurship culture and a high degree of aversion to risk. Private investment generally focused on protected domestic markets, is both insufficient and inefficient. One of the main reasons for investment insufficiency is that savings are not properly channeled by the financial sector (dominated by the banking system) to productive projects. The lack of liquid investments in the Arab region has a direct negative effect on productive investment in the region, as it makes it difficult for entrepreneurs to raise capital to finance their potentially good ideas. As a result, the ratio of private investment to public investment is unusually low; for the Arab region as a whole, the ratio is close to 2 (slightly larger for non-oil economies). It remains well below the levels of OECD economies (ratios close to 6) or that of the East Asian economies (ratios close to 5)” (Jelli).

## **Major Parties Involved**

### ***UN Women***

UN Women support women's economic empowerment along the lines of international





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commitments such as the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and ILO conventions on gender parity. In Morocco, UN Women had helped females adapt to changing climate and supported associations of female farmers. In Kenya, UN Women has supported the training of around 1,500 women entrepreneurs and encouraged a minimum of 30% of annual government spending to be reserved for women, people with disabilities, and youth<sup>4</sup>.

### *Youth Employment Network (YEN)*

YEN is a global partnership of the World Bank, the UN, and the ILO, providing a platform to build international consensus and influence the international agenda to hold comprehensive youth employment and social inclusion strategies<sup>5</sup>. The network consists of development agencies, the private sector, youth groups, governments, and other NGOs.

### *Arab NGO Network for Development*

Arab NGO Network for Development is a regional network that operates in twelve Arab countries with twenty-three NGO partners. ANND aims to strengthen the role of civil society and enhance sustainable development efforts in the region. Through fostering effective civil societies, ANND hopes to make the Arab region more democratic and empower the society to affect policy change. The network programs focus on three main ideas: developing policies, creating social and economic reform agendas, encouraging economic and trade liberalization policies.

### *The Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR)*

“The Center of Arab Woman for Training and Research (CAWTAR) was created in 1993 in response to the request of a number of Arab governments and civil society organizations and institutions. CAWTAR is dedicated to working in a region where women and men are equal in rights and in practice, where gender gaps have been overcome and where women and men can participate equally in achieving prosperity.

CAWTAR’s mission is to eradicate discrimination against Arab women and reduce gender

<sup>4</sup> UN Women

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, Fact Sheet: Youth Employment





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gaps by promoting research, education, training, and advocacy in all areas of life that affect the status of women, and to carry our message to policymakers, researchers, activists and local communities alike. The main objectives are to empower women and promote gender equality and to reduce gender gaps as a means of achieving sustainable development in the Arab Region.” (EuroMesco)

### **The Association for the Development & Enhancement of Women (ADEW)**

ADEW aims to “give women, especially female heads of households, their legal, economic, social, political and cultural rights in order to become full citizens and decision-makers within the family”. On a societal level, they seek to change women’s image in society and affect policy change. On a personal level, they aim to cultivate life skills.

### **The Arab Women Organization of Jordan (AWO)**

AWO is a non-profit human rights organization that has been supporting gender equality and empowering women and girls since 1970. AWO is implementing projects to end discrimination and violence against women and empower women’s political, economic, and social status. AWO also works to encourage governments to ratify UN Conventions. AWO has also undertaken research to present conditions of women to UN monitoring bodies, such as CEDAW Monitoring Committee or Human Rights Council (AWO).

### **Women’s Islamic Initiative in Spirituality & Equality (WISE)**

“WISE promotes an overarching message of gender equality as a value intrinsic to the Islamic faith meaning that a denial of any of those rights constitutes a violation of Islamic principles. Founded in 2006 in New York City as a faith-based global network and social justice movement by 200 leading Muslim activists and leaders from 25 countries. WISE has worked against female genital mutilation in Egypt, ran a domestic violence awareness campaign in Pakistan with Bedari, and worked with NEDCO, an NGO in Afghanistan to train Imams on women's rights” (Bonnie Riva).

### **Kafa**

“KAFA has been aiming to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence and exploitation since its establishment in 2005. It seeks to realize substantive gender equality through the adoption of a combination of different approaches, such as advocacy for law reform and introduction of new laws and policies; influencing public opinion, practices, and mentality; conducting research and training; and empowering women and children victims of



## Chronology of Important Events

Date	Description of Event
<b>June 29, 1951</b>	The Convention concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value is adopted.
<b>June 25, 1958</b>	The Convention concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation or Discrimination is signed.
<b>December 14, 1960</b>	Convention against Discrimination in Education is adopted.
<b>December 16, 1966</b>	International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) is signed.
<b>December 16, 1966</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is signed.
<b>December 18, 1979</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is signed.
<b>December 18, 1990</b>	The UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 45/158 at the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.
<b>September 15, 1995</b>	Beijing Platform for Action is produced.
<b>June 15, 2000</b>	Maternity Protection Convention is adopted.

## Relevant International Documents

- [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\), December 18, 1979](#)
- [Beijing Platform for Action, September 15, 1995](#)
- ILO Convention 156: Workers with Family Responsibilities, June 3, 1981



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- [ILO Convention 183: Maternity protection, May 30, 2000.](#)
- [Resolution concerning youth employment at the 93<sup>rd</sup> Session of the General Conference of the International Labor Organization, June 2005.](#)
- [Resolution concerning the youth employment crisis: A call for action, adopted at the 101<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Conference of the International Labor Organization June 2012.](#)
- [Report of ILO on The Youth Employment Crisis, June 2012.](#)

## Past Attempts to Resolve the Issue

As noted by the international documents listed above, over the past three decades, the issue of female and youth unemployment has accumulated growing importance on the agenda of many organizations and countries.

While international agreements on maternal leave minimums have been achieved, only a handful of Arab countries currently meet the international standard of ensuring a minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave. Such examples underline how international attempts to solve the issue have been unsuccessful due to national policies.

Similarly, while a wide spectrum of solutions has been adopted at the national level for youth unemployment, these interventions have been limited to programs with a narrow scope and limited time frame. Priority given to these programs decay over time and change with the business cycle. Emphasizing entry to work, some programs do nothing to solve the poor working conditions of young individuals<sup>6</sup>.

## Solution Alternatives

Proving to be inefficient and costly, the public sector heavy economic structuring in Arab countries increase the cost of exports and decrease the appeal for foreign and domestic private investors. Privatization of state-owned companies and banks will help incite trade and investment, opening more avenues for employment.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, Fact Sheet: Youth Employment



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Only 8% of Arab trade is facilitated in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, underlining the region's dependence on North America, Europe, and Asia. As the oil sector is quite saturated, to create employment, most will have to come from other industries by the likes of tourism and manufacturing. Passing conducive trade agreements would be a great solution to improve this situation. Recognizing that another problem is the lack of products to conduct trade with, the countries should diversify their economies and keep pace with technological advancements.

In most Arab countries, the capital markets are underdeveloped. Due to little local competition and state-owned nature of the banks, innovation and entrepreneurship are low. There are a small number of private companies and these offer very poor liquidity for equity markets (stocks). To attract investors, high liquidity is an important factor. Simply put, the attempts at increasing the size of local markets are restricted by the complicated regulations and requirements. In that regard, going for deregulation can be in order.

In terms of more social elements, “strengthening women's visibility, voice and representation are critical to achieving the political will to improve the economic environment for women's fundamental labor and human rights, such as the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining” (Pacific Community). Building on this idea, creating solutions that aim to ensure a welcoming environment for women workers to organize and solutions that aim to recognize and support women worker’s organizations would be a good step in the right direction.

To transition from the breadwinner/female carer structure prevalent in Arab countries to the dual-earner/dual carer model (which would allow females to be active in both paid employment and family), the governments could create support mechanisms like family allowance, social insurance, subsidized child care (Argentina and South Korea examples), or elder care provisions.

Another important aspect covered in this report was the *skills mismatch hypothesis*, which suggested that the reason for unemployment was the mismatch between the skills employers require and the skills education systems teach. If this is the case, the education systems have to be rethought and modeled in accordance with the rapidly changing global economic structure of today. Skills training programs provided by non-governmental and international organizations can be an important means of tackling this issue in the short term. Such programs would include targeted vocational training programs and training programs



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aimed at teaching important life skills such as effective communication, negotiation, decision-making, leadership, and critical thinking. To achieve the best programs possible, cooperation with private sector employers in the development of these programs is crucial. This approach ensures that the teaching of these programs is in line with the skills employers need, bridging the aforementioned gap. The long-term goal would be to make sure that the national education systems are up to date and efficient, but in the short term, such programs can prove very useful.

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## Useful Links

- [CIA World Factbook](#)
- [United Nations Digital Library](#)
- [United Nations Official Document System Search](#)
- [Al Jazeera](#)
- [BBC](#)
- [Amnesty International](#)
- [International Labor Organization](#)
- [UN Women](#)
- [UNICEF](#)