

2.

Gender equality, inclusion and sustainability

Key messages



While many jobs target both women and men, many other occupations are **gender exclusive**.



Many job advertisements explicitly or implicitly target a **specific gender for a job opening**. However, the needed skills in these job advertisements are **gender neutral** by definition.



Most in-demand **female-targeted jobs** are in **entry-level jobs**, while the lowest share of jobs targeting women are in management and senior-level positions, even though more senior jobs have more flexible work modalities.



Job openings in the Arab region are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities; however, **no job openings target persons with disability**. Moreover, there is no evidence that most jobs can accommodate persons with disabilities.



Communications and **accounting** are the **most demanded skills** at any career level, while project management, quality control, planning, and leadership are only demanded at mid and senior career levels.

2. Gender equality, inclusion and sustainability



A. Overview

The gender gap is still significant in all Arab countries, where access to jobs, finance and land, and asset ownership remain low for women compared with other regions worldwide. Youth unemployment is also high, with the Arab region recording the highest level of unemployment among female youth globally. Regarding persons with disabilities, although the region has advanced significantly in promoting better access to job hubs, it still faces challenges related to incorporating people

with disabilities and accommodating them in decent jobs. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 15 per cent of the world's population are persons with disabilities.⁴⁴ In the Arab region, national data on disability prevalence rates varies between 0.2 per cent in Qatar, 1 per cent in Mauritania, and 4.8 per cent in the Sudan.⁴⁵ Prevalence rates in the region are likely higher than reported, owing to various challenges in disability identification and data collection methodologies.⁴⁶



B. Gender inclusion

Disruptive changes in the workplace brought by the Fourth Industrial Revolution have delivered mixed signals. It is still unclear whether new work modalities worsen, reduce or sustain existing gendered inequalities. In the Arab region, many economic opportunities have been created for Arab women; however, unemployment is still significantly high and gender bias in employment (and

economic participation in general) remains widespread. The unemployment rate among Arab women was 20 per cent in 2019 compared with only 7.8 per cent among Arab men. Female youth unemployment in the Arab region is the highest worldwide. Employed women in the region are clustered in public or quasi-public firms with significant glass ceilings, as the number of women

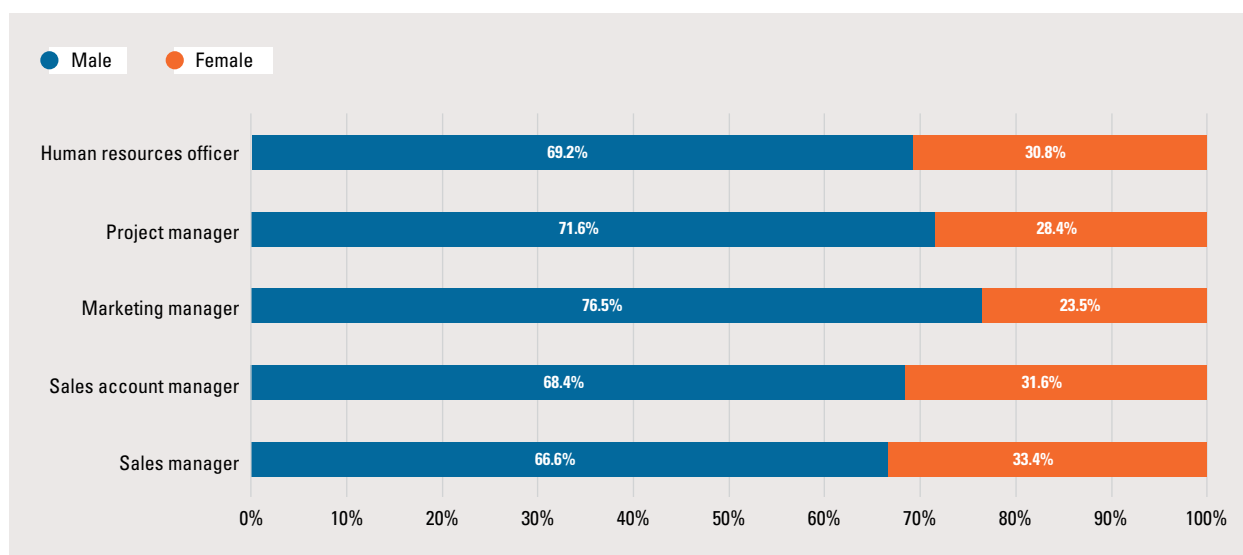
in management positions is the lowest worldwide.⁴⁷ For this reason, we tested how sensitive job advertisements are to gender equality in the Arab job market at different levels of seniority.

According to the ESCWA Skills Monitor, nearly 55 per cent of online job openings in the Arab region target males, whether explicitly or implicitly, while 32 per cent target females only and 12 per cent are gender neutral. This classification was based on a dictionary of masculine versus feminine wording, which assigns a gender bias label to a job description. The dictionary is developed by Gaucher, Friesen and Kay (2011) who employed experimental and archival analyses. Within a random sample of job openings, they verified the existence of indirect but systematic differences in wording. Their findings revealed that job openings for male-dominated areas used masculine wording more than openings within female-dominated areas. However,

no difference was noticed between male-dominated areas and female-dominated areas when it came to the use of feminine wording. The consequences of extreme masculine wording were later tested across three experimental studies. When job openings were created to comprise more masculine than feminine wording, these jobs became less appealing to women, and more men were perceived in these occupations.⁴⁸

Figure 12 shows the top five online advertised jobs in the region (sales manager, Sales account manager, marketing manager, project manager and human resources officer) also reveal the preference for men in their job recruiting advertisements. This is alarming as it does not only affect those who apply, but also those who get hired. Such a screening process factions jobs based on gender, and entrenches the gender-biased cultural and social norms that have prevailed in the region for decades.

Figure 12. Gender bias in the top five occupations advertised online in the Arab region

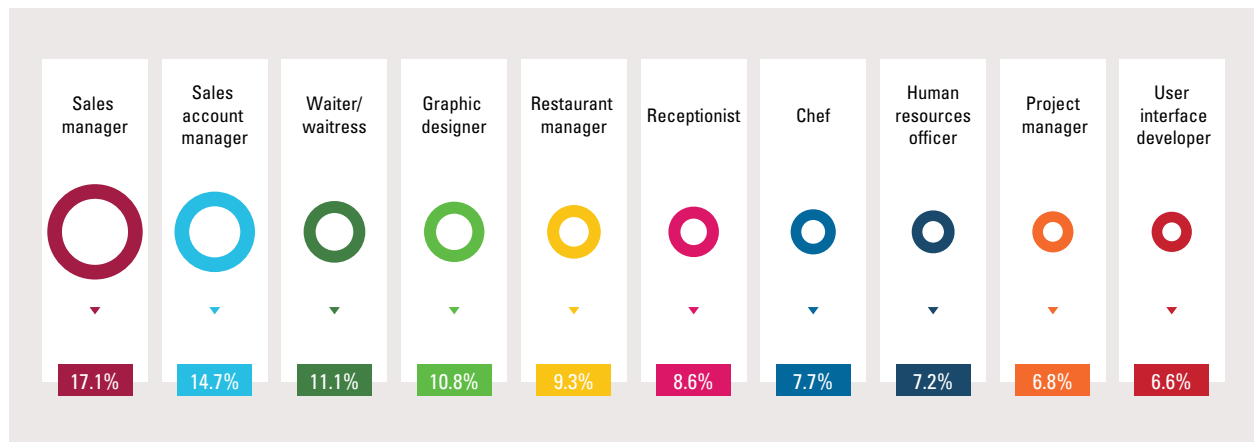


Source: ESCWA calculations based on the ESCWA Skills Monitor.

Figures 13 and 14 show the top 10 female-targeted jobs and the top 10 male-targeted jobs. Sales managers, sales account managers, human resources officers, project managers, and restaurant managers are among the top 10 online posted jobs for both males and females. The results do not confirm gender disparity further along the responsibility ladder across the Arab region, precisely in decision-making roles. However, as stated previously, the number of women in managerial positions is significantly lower than the number of men occupying such

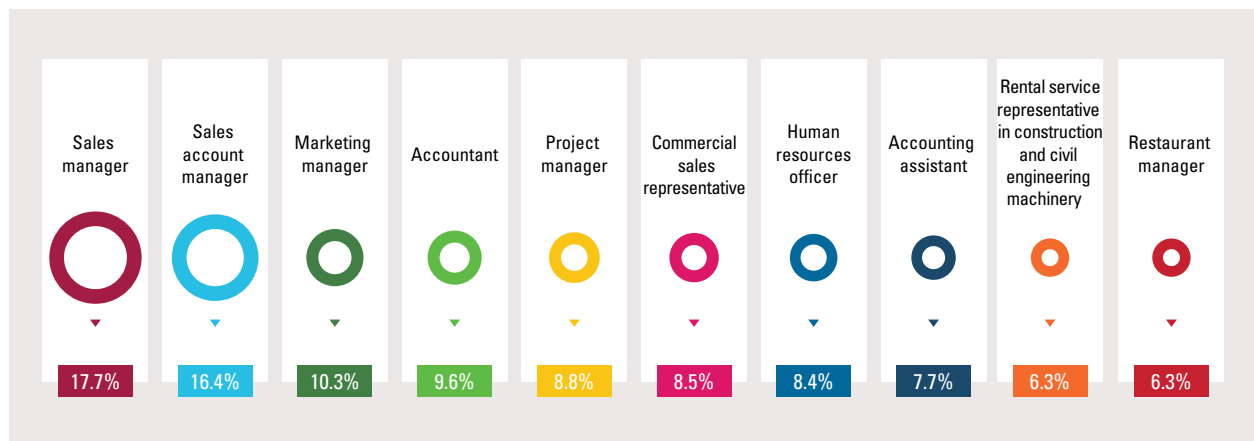
positions. ESCWA and ILO (2021) claim that the Arab region noticeably lags behind the world, with less than 5 per cent of the region’s studied enterprises having a female top manager compared with over 15 per cent worldwide. However, it can also be inferred from figures 13 and 14 that demanded jobs stress that women should have an edge over males in creative fields given the existence of two creative jobs (graphic design and user interface development) in the top 10 female-targeted jobs, while no creativity based jobs are detected in the top 10 male-targeted jobs.

Figure 13. Top 10 female-targeted jobs



Source: ESCWA calculations based on the ESCWA Skills Monitor.

Figure 14. Top 10 male-targeted jobs

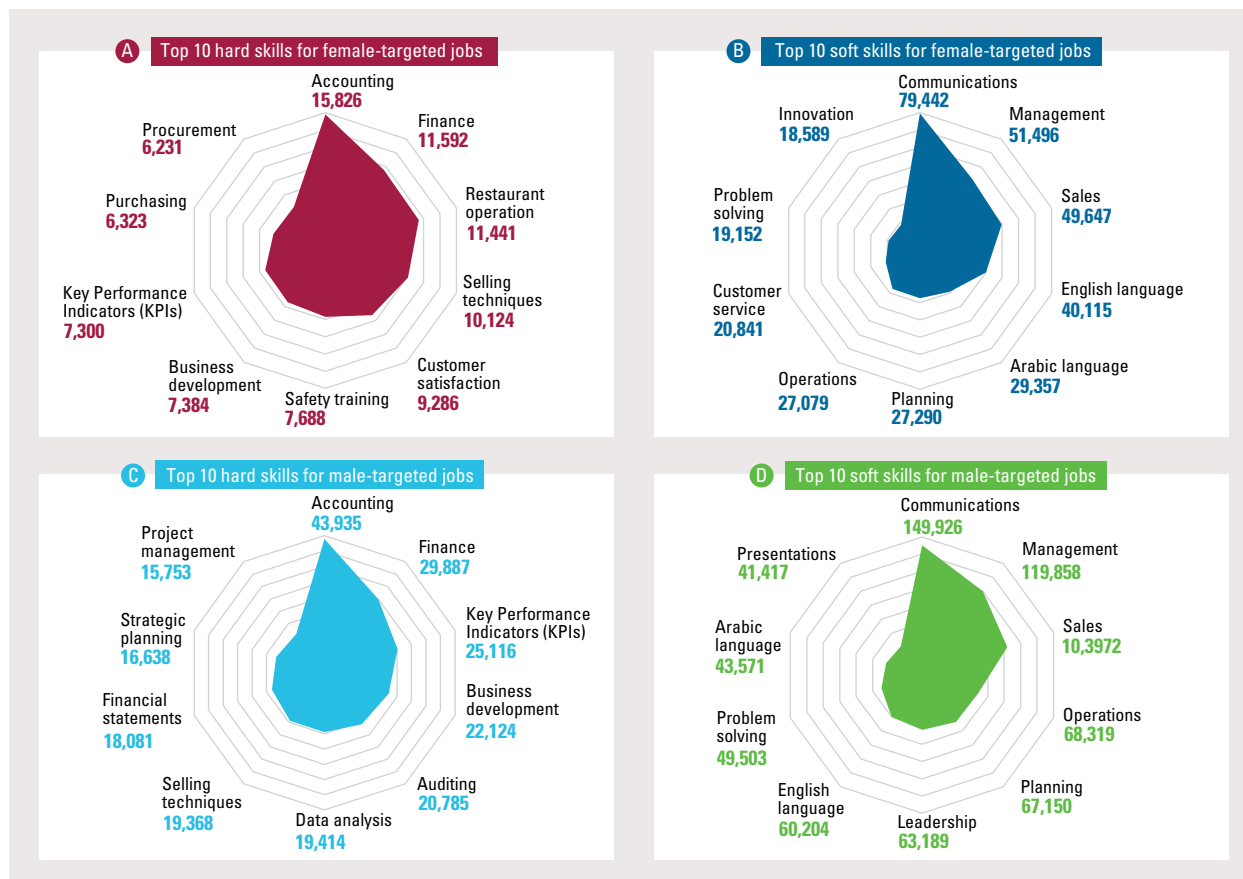


Source: ESCWA calculations based on the ESCWA Skills Monitor.

The different skills deployed by men and women in the workplace are influenced by the jobs they tend to occupy. As stated previously, in today's business world, the most sought-after skills are soft skills. Women are more often present in occupations requiring high social skills. They flourish in such jobs as most of these soft skills come naturally to women, compared with men who are usually more concentrated in occupations that require more mechanical skills.⁴⁹ This could be one of the reasons why women have an edge over men in jobs related to health care, education, administrative support, and sales. However, our findings (figure 15) indicate that the Arab job market demands soft and hard skills almost equally from both men and women. The ratio of demanded soft skills to demanded hard

skills is 63 per cent for men and 61 per cent for women. This implies that women are no longer more likely than men to work in jobs that require a high degree of proficiency in soft skills only. Moreover, women are not less likely than men to hold jobs that strongly require mechanical skills. One interesting observation is that 8 of the top 10 soft skills, and 5 of the top 10 hard skills are common between male-targeted and female-targeted jobs. Given this background, our data indicate that online job openings unintentionally avoid gender bias in their demand for skills, but discriminate in the wording of job advertisements. One additional observation is that innovation as a soft skills is highly demanded for jobs requesting female candidates which links to the global demand for skills.

Figure 15. Top 10 demanded hard and soft skills for female jobs vs. male jobs



Source: ESCWA calculations based on the ESCWA Skills Monitor.

The aim of gender inclusive policies is not only to retain women's comparative advantage in specific sectors, but also to reverse detected discrimination in other sectors. Inclusive policies limit the gender-based constraints that women entrepreneurs and employees face. Consequently, access

to job opportunities must be supported for both genders equally. Moreover, women must be involved in capacity-building, and should be given more access to finance. Enhancing gender equality will ultimately improve efficiency, productivity, competitiveness and the overall economy.



C. Labour inclusion for persons with disabilities

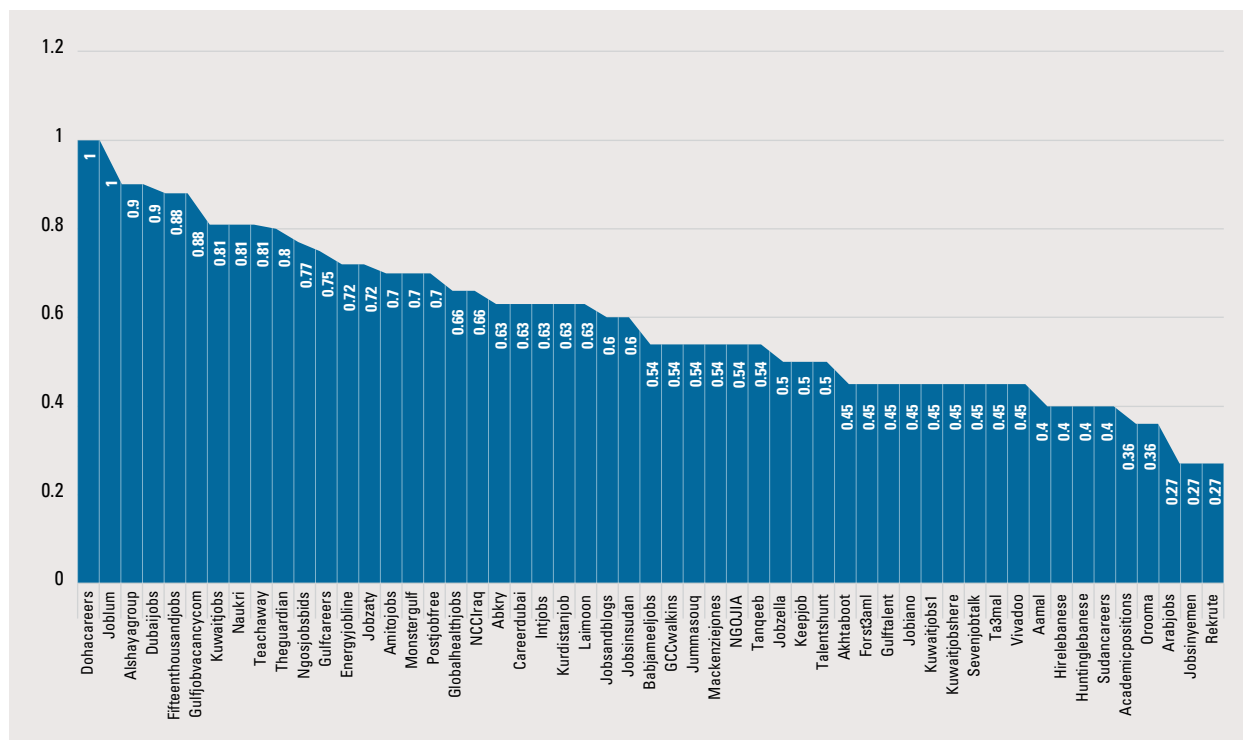
A total of 17 Arab countries have instituted employment quotas for persons with disabilities in both the public and private sectors. For example, the Algerian law stipulates that 1 per cent of workers for each employer must be for persons with disabilities. This figure varies to 2 per cent in Bahrain, 5 per cent in Egypt and Iraq, and 7 per cent in Morocco.⁵⁰ Inclusion and diversity are two defining issues, particularly within businesses that have long been drivers of social change. Even though some progress has been made in the Arab region when it comes to gender, improving disability inclusion lags behind owing to constraints in persons with disabilities' access to quality education and decent employment opportunities.

In Arab countries, unemployment rates for persons with disabilities are significantly higher than those of persons without disabilities.⁵¹ In Lebanon, for instance, around 86 per cent of persons with disabilities are economically inactive, and therefore not engaged in the labour market.⁵² While 43.1 per cent of persons who do not suffer from any type of disability in Lebanon are employed, only 12.4 per cent of persons with disabilities are employed.⁵³ This indicates that Arab countries should strive to build and promote more inclusive work environments where everyone feels welcome and respected, and to create environments that enable all potential candidates to equally realize their potential.



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Figure 16. E-accessibility score for persons with disabilities by job hub



Source: ESCWA calculations based on the ESCWA Skills Monitor.

Note: The e-accessibility score evaluates the ease with which persons with disabilities can use the Internet and information technologies.

On that front, e-accessibility scores were computed for the first 54 scraped hubs in the ESCWA Skills Monitor.⁵⁴ Figure 16 shows that of the 54 scraped job hubs, Doha Careers and Joblum are the two most accessible job hubs to persons with disabilities, with an e-accessibility score of 100 per cent each. For those that were not scraped, such as Indeed and Linked-In, the e-accessibility rate is 93 and 100 per cent, respectively. Moreover, our results indicate that of the five job hubs from which we extracted most job postings (Tanqeeb, Waseet, GCC walkins, Wuzzuf, and Energy Jobline), four job hubs have e-accessibility scores equal to or greater than 94 per cent. Given that job hubs are the most common way job candidates initially learn about

an organization, incorporating disability inclusiveness within job hubs would lessen the risk of alienating a large candidate pool from the job market. However, having an inclusive job hub or website does not mean guaranteeing inclusive jobs for persons with disabilities.

Looking at accessibility for persons with disability, the data reveal that job hubs in the Arab region are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities. However, this is not the only aspect that should be assessed. Job postings normally have narrow posting windows, which might be due to companies' urgent need to fill certain vacancies, companies' limited budget, or imposed closing dates by job hubs. As reported by

Chen and Eriksson (2009), jobs targeting persons with disabilities are associated with longer recruitment processes. Consequently,

the duration of online job postings should be assessed in the Arab region, in addition to the inclusive language used in the postings.



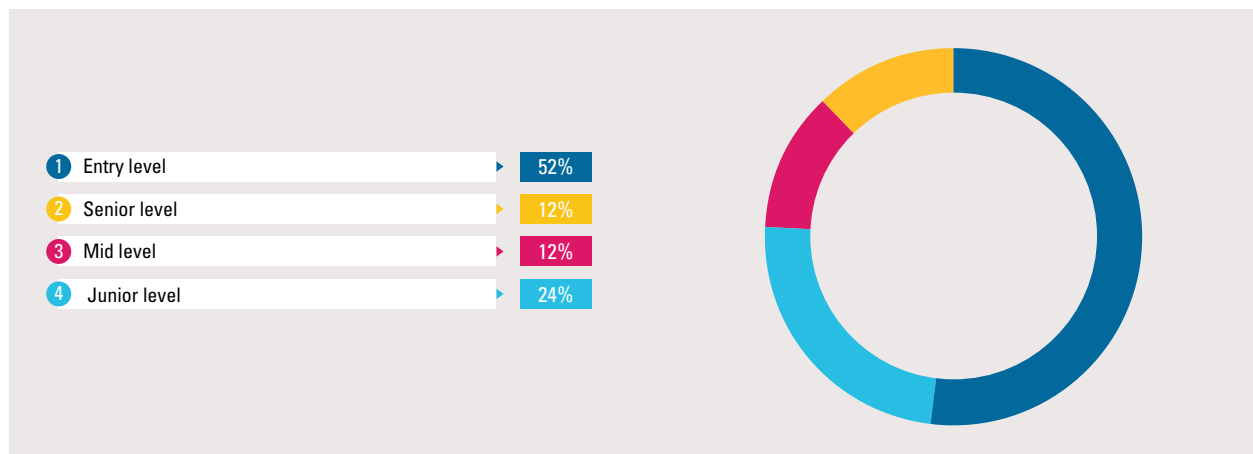
D. Youth and career progress

Many jobs for new job market entrants have been created in 2021. Figure 17 shows that in the Arab region, around 52 per cent of online job openings that state years of experience are entry-level jobs, while only 12 per cent are senior-level positions. However, the issue is whether enough jobs are created to fit Arab demographic changes, especially for those newly entering the job market. Even though many new entry jobs are created, in the Arab region, young people (aged between 15 and 24) are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults (25 years and older).⁵⁵ The reason behind this high unemployment rate is high female youth unemployment and the youth bulge that

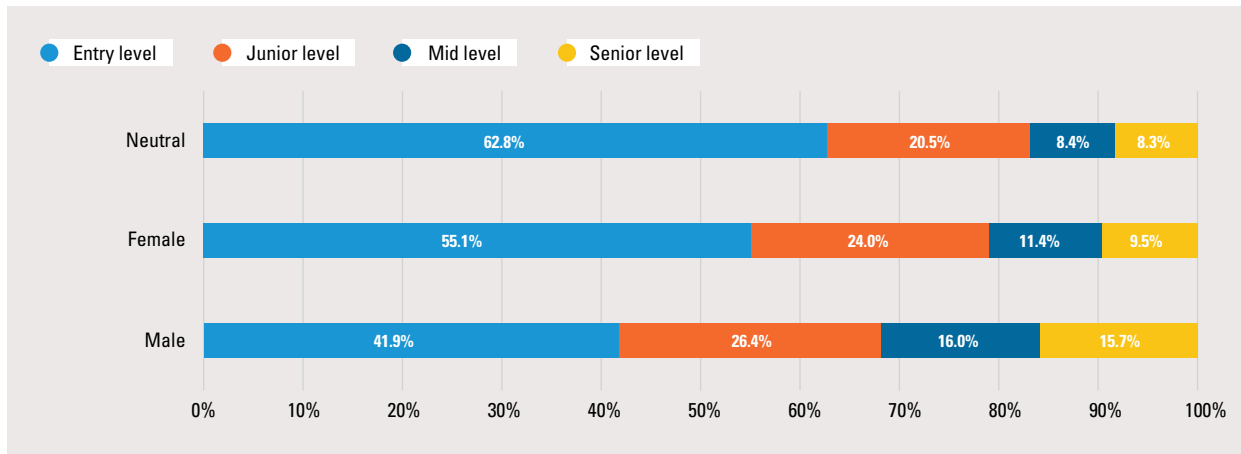
has proven to be a burden rather than a demographic dividend.

Deciphering gender disparity in career-level distribution shows similar results (figure 18)⁵⁶. The share of entry-level jobs is larger for females (55 per cent) than males (42 per cent) in female- and male-targeted jobs. However, the opposite is true for senior-level positions: almost 16 per cent of online advertised jobs for senior-level positions only target men, compared with only 10 per cent that exclusively target women. Consequently, it could be inferred that while women are more likely to be hired in entry-level positions, they are less likely to reach senior management positions.

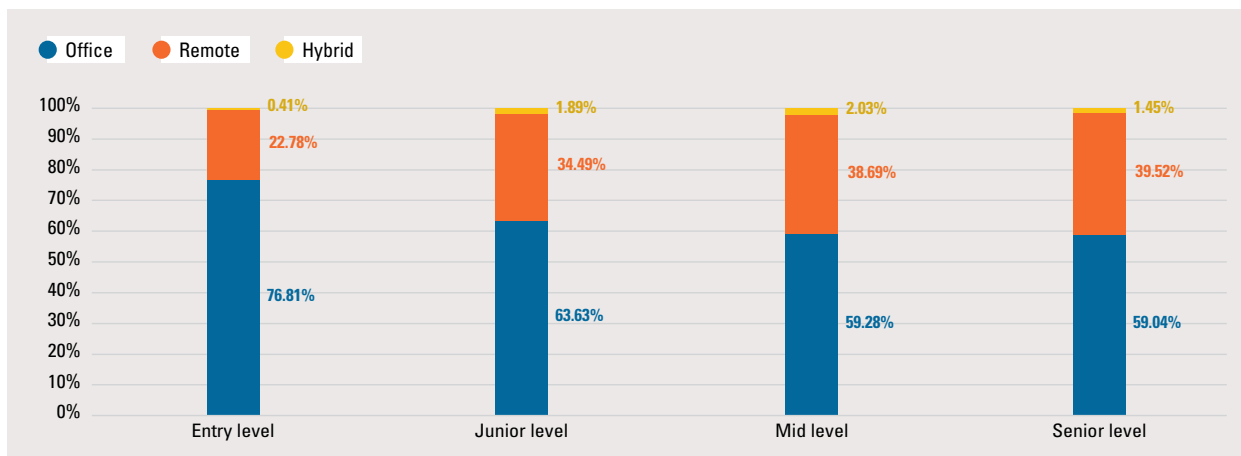
Figure 17. Career-level distribution of online job openings in the Arab region



Source: ESCWA calculations based on the ESCWA Skills Monitor.

Figure 18. Career-level distribution of online job openings by gender

Source: ESCWA calculations based on the ESCWA Skills Monitor.

Figure 19. Work modality distribution by career level in online job openings

Source: ESCWA calculations based on the ESCWA Skills Monitor.

Figure 19 shows that from the jobs that mention the type of work modality, only 23 per cent of entry-level positions in these jobs are remote, compared with 40 per cent of senior-level vacancies for jobs that posted work modality requirements. Employers usually provide relative freedom and flexibility for older workers to work from anywhere. In general, managerial positions provide additional work flexibility. As per the

European Union (2020), prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work was most common among highly autonomous workers and high-skilled workers who did most of their work on computers. Arguably, although young people are better equipped to adapt to the digital requirements of successful remote work, and even though their inability to telecommute may put their older family members at risk, young people

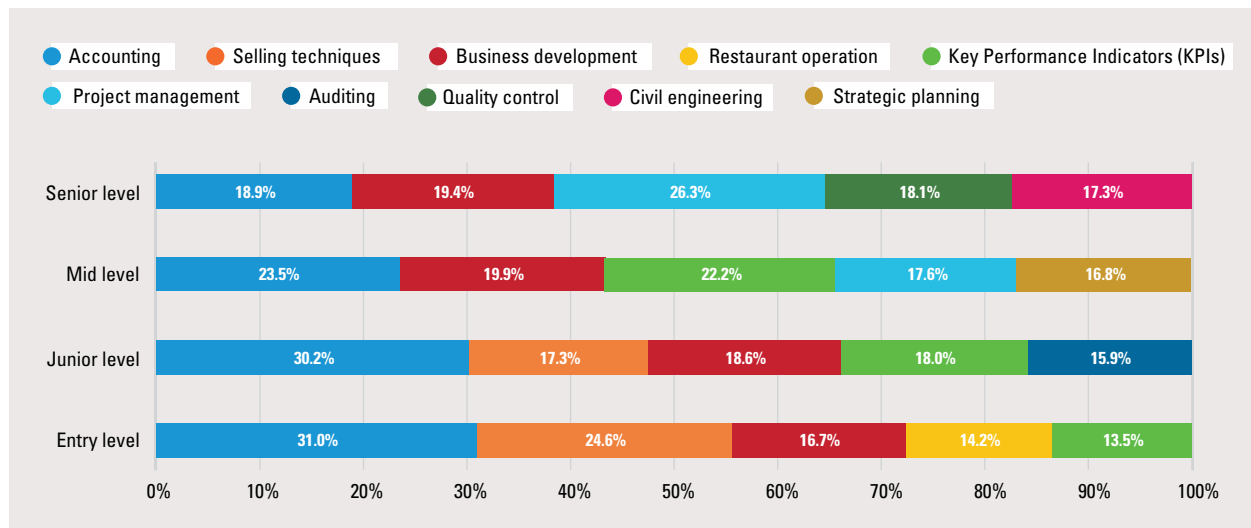
are less likely to work remotely. Among other reasons, this might be influenced by the fact that many entry-level workers have been suffering in autonomous working conditions because they lack the collaboration, support and networks that are better fostered at the office. For instance, in their examination of psychological factors that impact remote working, Grant, Wallace and Spurgeon (2013) concluded the following: relationship-building can be much more difficult for remote workers; and monitoring from a distance requires good communication. Young employees who are still attempting to make professional ties most likely suffer from a lack of face-to-face contact, especially in large companies. For those people, teleworking could be alienating.

Figure 20 shows the top five demanded hard skills from online job openings by career level. Our findings indicate that project management (26 per cent) is the top hard skill for senior professionals, whereas accounting (31 per cent) is the top hard skill for young people followed by sales and business development. Figure 20 shows that

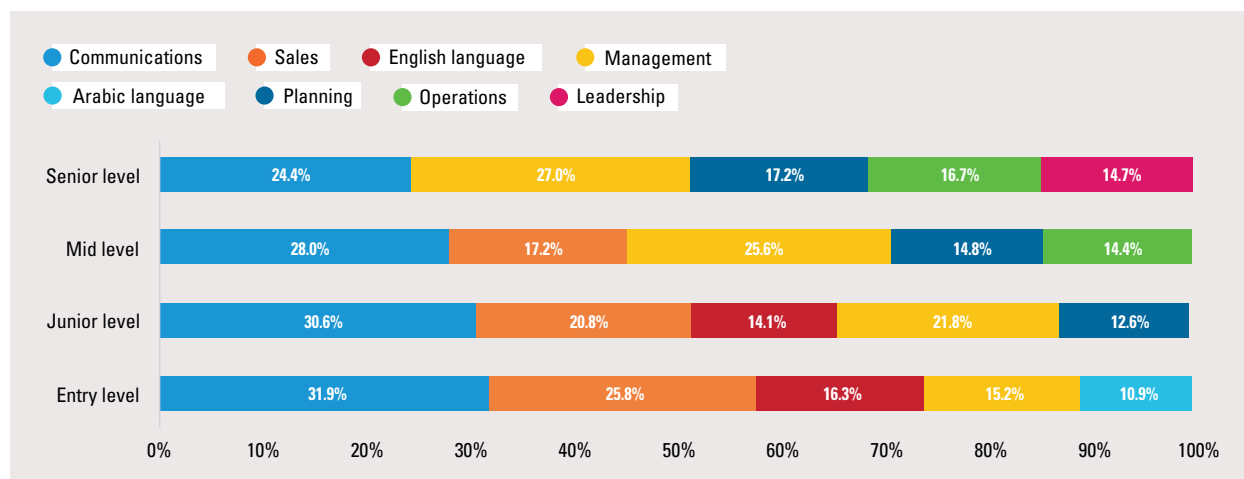
the top 5 entry level hard skills are mainly related to the business administration field. On the other hand, mid-career and senior level jobs have strategic planning and project management and quality control as their key skills.

Figure 21 shows the top five soft skills by career level. Communications (31 per cent) and sales (21 per cent) are the top soft skills for junior staff, while management (27 per cent), communications (24 per cent) and planning (17 per cent) are the top soft skills for senior employees. It is worth mentioning that communication is widely demanded at all career levels. This once again underscores the importance of communication as a soft skill. Effective communication increases overall productivity in the workplace, and promotes collaboration, teamwork and the understanding of the objective of a given task. Besides maintaining strong working relationships at all organizational levels, communication skills set candidates apart from their competitors when applying for jobs.

Figure 20. Top five demanded hard skills by career level



Source: ESCWA calculations based on the ESCWA Skills Monitor.

Figure 21. Top five demanded soft skills by career level

Source: ESCWA calculations based on the ESCWA Skills Monitor.



E. Arab jobs and their links to the Sustainable Development Goals

As Arab Governments joined the global community in their commitment to the 2030 Agenda, structural issues and institutional and governance deficits have negatively impacted the region's ability to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Political conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic have placed additional obstacles to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. As stated in the 2020 Arab Sustainable Development Report,⁵⁷ Arab countries are home to some of the most severe humanitarian crises, with conflict destroying communities and displacing millions. Moreover, unemployment is the highest worldwide, including the globally highest unemployment rates for young people and women. Consequently, SDG 8 requires additional focus in the Arab region, where decent work and full and productive employment for all men and women should be considered a priority.⁵⁸

Overall, many Arab nations have initiated steps to incorporate the SDGs into their national

plans and strategies. However, efforts to embrace the SDGs in the region still face significant challenges. A critical assessment of the region's 2030 Agenda implementation frameworks can be inferred from the extent to which job openings in the region are in line with the 17 Goals. To test the links between job openings and related SDGs, we used a dictionary of SDG wording, and then skills in every job description were checked against this SDG dictionary. The analysis is based on word-to-word matching and text recognition.⁵⁹

The results revealed that advertised jobs target all SDGs; however, such targeting was disproportionate reflecting distinct private-sector priorities compared with regional ones. Figure 22 shows that SDG 11 is the most referenced SDG, with 38.17 per cent of collected online job openings containing keywords that can be attributed to sustainable cities and communities. This is followed by SDGs 4, 10 and 3.⁶⁰ It can therefore be inferred

that those skills in online job openings in the region consider SDGs related to sustainable cities and communities; quality education; reduced inequality; and good health and wellbeing. The jobs analysed thus indicate an economy that is responsive to those principles. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed health-care systems to their limits in 2020 and 2021, where most jobs were related to the SDGs. However, the demand for health-care services has started to subside due to a considerable decrease in COVID-19 cases across the Arab region, putting SDG 3 in fourth place.

Based on the Arab Sustainable Development Report,⁶¹ urban population in the Arab region grew more than fourfold from 1970 to 2010, and is expected to more than double between 2010 and 2050. This might be an indication of why SDG 11 is the most targeted SDG in demanded jobs, where housing and transport are considered key aspects. Looking at quality education as a cornerstone for enhanced social and economic wellbeing, the Arab region's online job markets are asking mainly for jobs that require quality education and a diverse number of skills, putting SDG 4 second in the list of top SDGs. Regarding

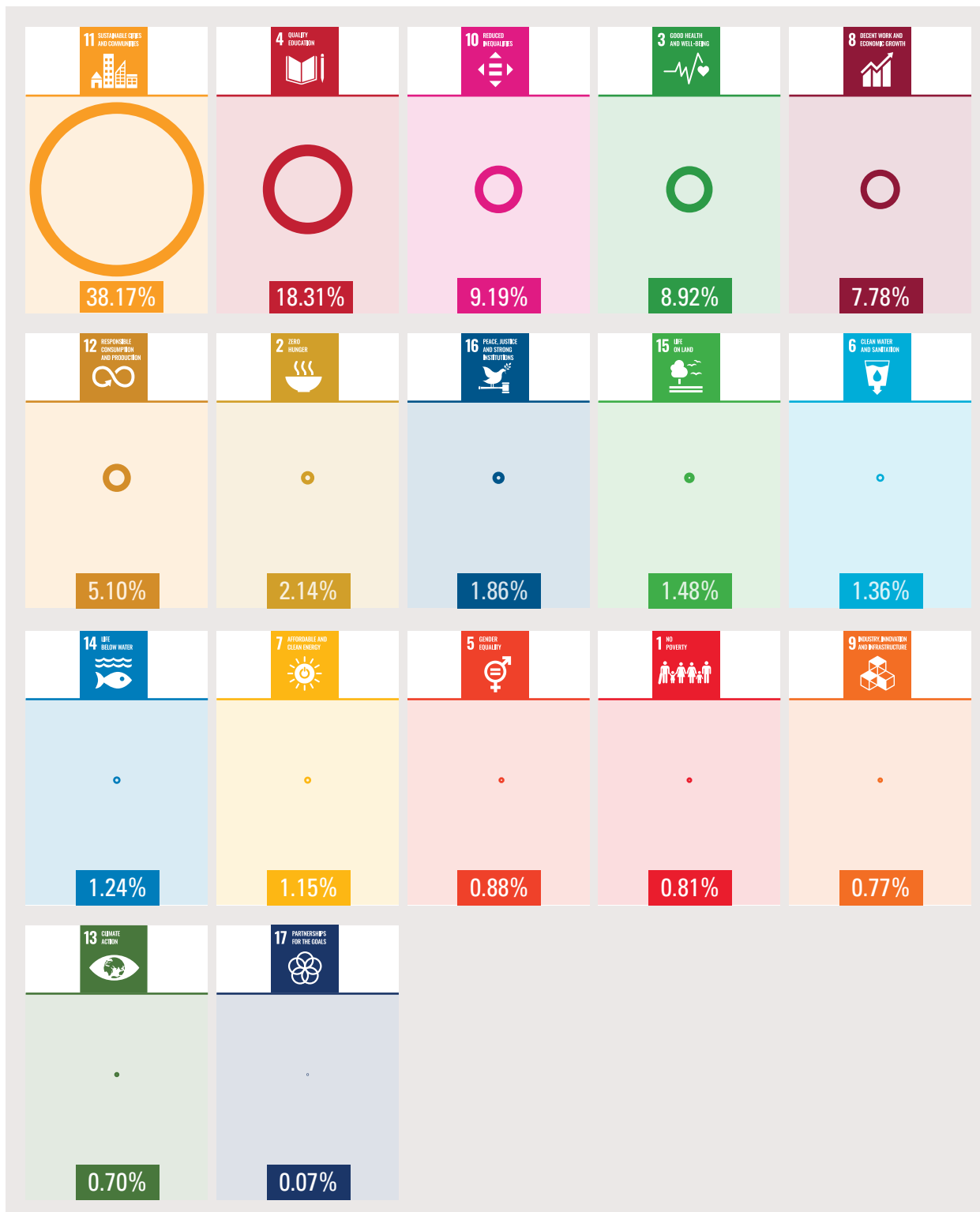
SDG 10, many jobs in the region are asking for equal opportunities in employment, including social responsibility, corporate social responsibility and social security, putting SDG 10 in third place.

Looking at unemployment rates, it could be expected that SDG 8 would be the most prevalent Goal in the Arab region, as the region registered the highest unemployment rates worldwide, especially among young people and women. At the same time, the region has experienced subdued long-term growth, even in countries rich in natural resources, which may limit the financial resources available to implement the 2030 Agenda. Even during high economic growth periods, the Arab region failed to bring more demand for productive employment and decent work, and was limited to jobs in the informal sector and the public sector. According to ESCWA Skills Monitor, SDG 8 comes fifth, although such an SDG would be expected to be given greater priority in the region. Employment can be used as a tool to fight poverty, inequality and conflict, which have severely impacted the region over the past decade.



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Figure 22. Percentage of online job openings targeting each Sustainable Development Goal in the Arab region



Source: ESCWA calculations based on the ESCWA Skills Monitor.



F. Policy recommendations

The following recommendations provide policymakers with options for additional inclusiveness in the demand for jobs:

1

Enforce laws that enhance gender equality in job applications and in recruitment to enhance equal opportunity and representation in employment. Lobbying legislators, gender committees and international organizations could be effective, and enhancing gender equality may ultimately improve productivity, competitiveness, and overall economic performance.

2

Provide teleworking as an option to all seniority levels to create additional flexibility for employees, especially women. This can be done by equipping staff with the right tools for different work modalities, and providing the needed training. Employers' tax subsidies, tariff reductions on needed equipment, and infrastructure incentives can play a crucial role in facilitating telework.

3

Incorporate additional e-accessibility features for persons with disabilities within job hubs, such as ensuring a text-to-speech function and adjusting the colour contrast and font size of job descriptions. This can be ensured by following the WCAG e-accessibility standards in the design of websites, digital platforms and mobile applications to lessen the risk of alienating a large candidate pool in the job market.