

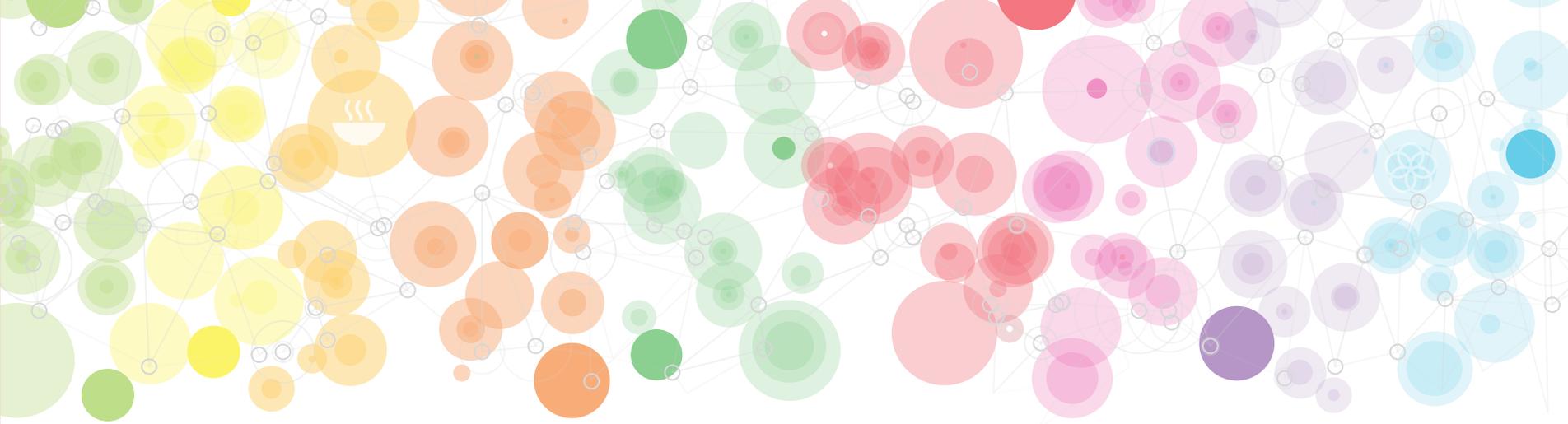


## Chapter 5 Education

Women are twice as likely to be illiterate as men, making up two thirds of the region's illiterate adults. Gender gaps decreased as more girls were enrolled in primary education; however, gender gaps widened as the level of education rose. Girls in rural areas and from the poorest households have lower attendance rates in primary and secondary school. Those in conflict-affected countries are much more likely to never to go to school than boys.

The type of education and specialization is still highly correlated with a person's gender: women tend to favour science majors over engineering, and a lack ICT and Internet skills continues to be a major barrier keeping women from fully benefitting from the potential of ICT.





# Education

**“The ability to read, write, and analyse; the confidence to stand up and demand justice and equality; the qualifications and connections to get your foot in that door and take your seat at that table — all of that starts with education.”**

**Former First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama**

Education is not only a basic human right but also a stepping stone to the enjoyment of other rights and a driver for sustainable development. It is through education that people can access broader social, economic, political and cultural benefits and achieve human development.

Despite significant progress in recent decades, the right to education is still far from being a reality for many girls and women. Discriminatory practices hold back girls and women from fully exercising their right to participate in, complete and benefit from education.

**Arab States need to increase efforts to address obstacles to schooling that effect the most marginalized girls**



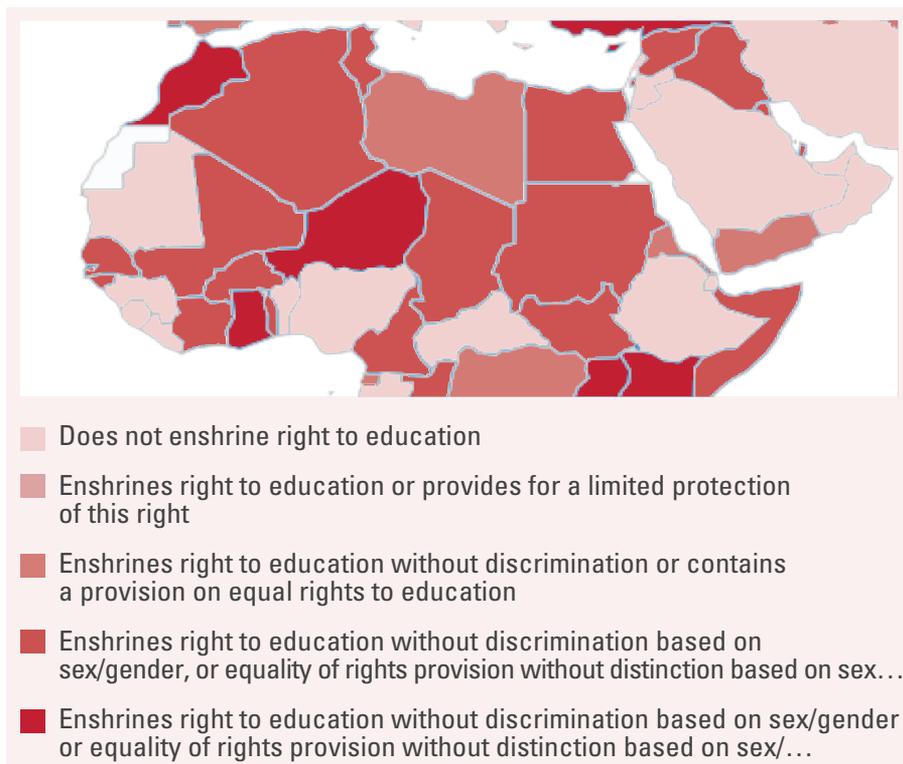
## A. Enabling environment

Figure 56 shows the status of national legal frameworks related to girls’ and women’s right to education. Although few Arab States have ratified the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention against Discrimination in Education, some countries went a step further to include the right to education based on gender or equality of rights without distinction based on sex in their constitutions. These countries include Algeria, Comoros, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Tunisia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen. Eight countries, Bahrain, Djibouti,

Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, however, neither ratified the Convention against Discrimination in Education nor enshrined the right of education for all girls and women in their constitution nor legislation.<sup>1</sup>

A country’s long-term economic growth increases by 3.7 per cent for every year the adult population’s average level of schooling rises.<sup>2</sup> In the Arab region, the interaction between the region’s economic structure and its conservative culture in which traditional gender roles are strongly ingrained, is largely responsible for lower levels of women’s education and labour force participation than other regions with similar income levels.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 56.** National constitutions that enshrine the right of education for all girls and women



Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Atlas of girls' and women's right to education, Map 3/12.

Globally, government education expenditure (in per cent of GDP) was recorded at 4.4 per cent in 2017. The Arab countries invested between 1 - 7 per cent of GDP on education. As per latest available data, the highest government expenditure on education is in Oman (6.7%) and Tunisia (6.6%), followed by both Morocco and the State of Palestine (5.3%), Yemen (5.2%), the Syrian Arab Republic and Saudi Arabia (5.1%), Djibouti (4.5%), Algeria and Comoros (4.3%), Egypt and Kuwait (3.8%), Iraq and Jordan (3.6%), Qatar (2.9%), Mauritania (2.6%), Lebanon (2.5%), Bahrain and Libya (2.3%), the Sudan (2.2%) and the United Arab Emirates (1.1%).

In addition, many Arab countries have committed to at least five years of compulsory primary education and provided some years of free education. Attendance rates at primary level have increased as a result of these measures. Many countries, thanks to their successful policies

and programmes, achieved equality; enrolment rates showed no gaps and biases between sexes, rural and urban, and poorest and richest population.

Net attendance rates in primary school were above 90 per cent in countries with compulsory and free primary education, which included Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia. Similarly, high rates were also observed in Iraq and Morocco, except they were lower for females, in rural areas and among the poorest people, which indicates a shortcoming in the programmes targeting vulnerable population [Table 8](#).

Data show that the higher the level of schooling, the fewer females, rural and the poorest population have access to schooling. This is particularly in countries where there is less coverage of compulsory and free years of education offered by governments at the higher levels. In almost all the countries, the rates at higher secondary schools were very low because mostly they were not compulsory nor free.

All Arab States have or have almost **achieved gender parity** in primary education





But the **Gender Disparity widens:** The higher the level of schooling in rural areas and among the poorest population

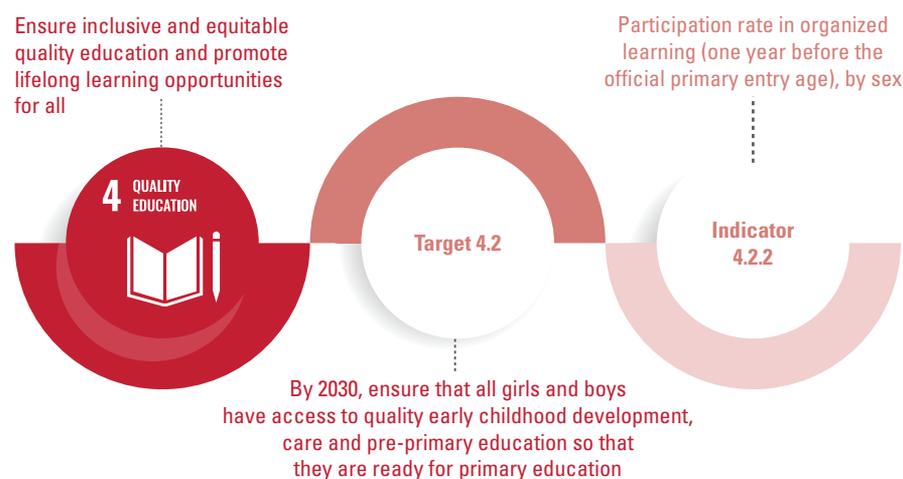
**Table 8.** Net attendance rate in primary education by location, wealth, compulsory and free years

Country	Total	Female	Male	Rural	Urban	Poorest	Second	Middle	Fourth	Richest	Compulsory years	Free years
Algeria	98	97	98	97	98	96	97	98	98	98	5	5
Comoros	84	84	84	82	90	72	81	89	94	95	6	6
Egypt	97	97	97	97	97	95	96	98	98	98	6	6
Iraq	90	87	93	84	94	79	90	94	96	98	6	6
Jordan	98	98	98	98	98	97	99	97	99	99	6	6
Morocco	89	88	91	83	96	77	87	95	97	97	6	6
State of Palestine	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	4	4
Sudan	68	67	69	61	86	48	54	68	87	94	6	6
Syrian Arab Republic	97	96	97	96	98	92	97	98	98	99	6	6
Tunisia	98	98	98	97	99	96	98	99	99	99	6	6
Yemen	76	72	80	73	85	56	76	82	83	90	6	6

**Source:** UNICEF Global databases 2017 based on MICS, DHS and other national household surveys (last updated on December 2017) (primary net attendance rate); and UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, “Number of years of (a) free and (b) compulsory primary education guaranteed in legal frameworks” (compulsory and free years).

## B. Early childhood education

Access to good quality pre-primary education has an enormous impact on girls’ and boys’ primary education outcomes, increasing their chances of enrolling, avoiding dropout and repetition, and achieving strong foundational skills, Berlinski et al., 2009; Myers, 2004.<sup>4</sup> There is also a strong positive association between maternal employment and the access to formal childcare. The demand for childcare services is high among working women, while affordable, accessible childcare is a strong enabler of women’s employment. Moreover, women’s employment status has been shown to be clearly linked to decisions and choices concerning childcare. Often, women reduce their working hours or withdraw from the labour market altogether, because of childcare responsibilities.<sup>5</sup>



It is worth noting that only a few Arab countries have guarantees in their legal frameworks to provide at least one year of free early childhood education, namely: Algeria (one year), Djibouti (two years), Iraq (two years), Mauritania (three years), the State of Palestine (one year) and the Syrian Arab Republic (three years).

Since 2000, early childhood education services have expanded considerably. The global adjusted net enrolment rate for one year before the official primary entry age increased by 3 percentage points for girls, from 61 per cent in 2012 to 64 per cent in 2018 and increased by 3 percentage points for boys, from 62 per cent in 2012 to 65 per cent in 2018.

A similar increase took place in the Arab States during the same period, however, the gap between regional and global averages remained large at 19 percentage points in 2018. There was an increase of 2 percentage points in net enrollment rates for early childhood education for total average and for females (from 43% to 45%). A similar increase of 2 percentage points was also reported in male rates (from 44% to 46%). In 2018, early childhood education remains low in the Arab region with a gender gap of 1 percentage point in favour of male children.

Few countries had good rates for early childhood learning for both

females and males, such as Qatar and Lebanon (over 90%), Oman (over 80%). Countries that need to exert more effort to increase early childhood education are Djibouti, Egypt, Comoros, Morocco and the State of Palestine where less than 65 per cent of children were in early childhood education **Figure 57.**

Globally there were no gender gaps in early childhood, however, in the Arab countries, female rates on average were more than male rates by 2 percentage points. There were more females than males attending early childhood education in Algeria, Qatar, Oman and Kuwait. However, there was a

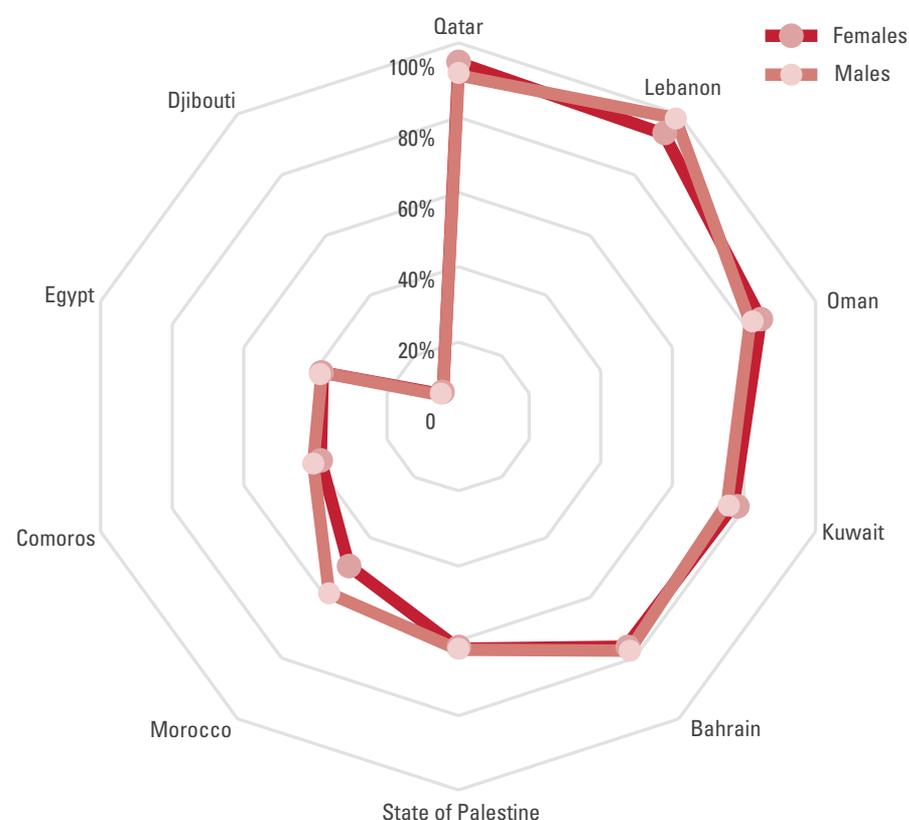
significant gender gap in favour of males in Morocco by 9 percentage points, followed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates at 6 percentage points and Lebanon at 5 percentage points.

### C. Primary education

Access to education has improved and there has been a clear trend in reducing gender disparity in primary gross enrolment ratios for a majority of Arab States, often starting from a point of severe disadvantage for girls.

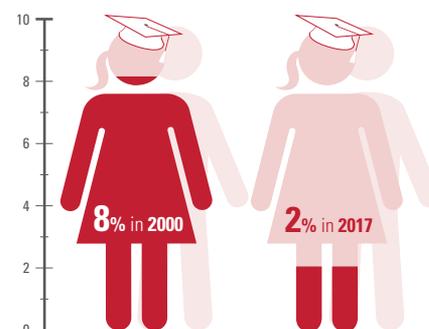
In the Arab States, school Net Enrolment Rate (NER) in primary education for girls was 72 per cent and for boys was 80 per cent in 2000. There has been a significant increase for girls over the years. In 2017, the rate for girls increased significantly to 83 per cent, while the boys had a modest increase to 85 per cent. Between 2000 and 2017 the gender gap decreased by 6 percentage points.

**Figure 57.** Adjusted net enrolment rate, one year before the official primary entry age

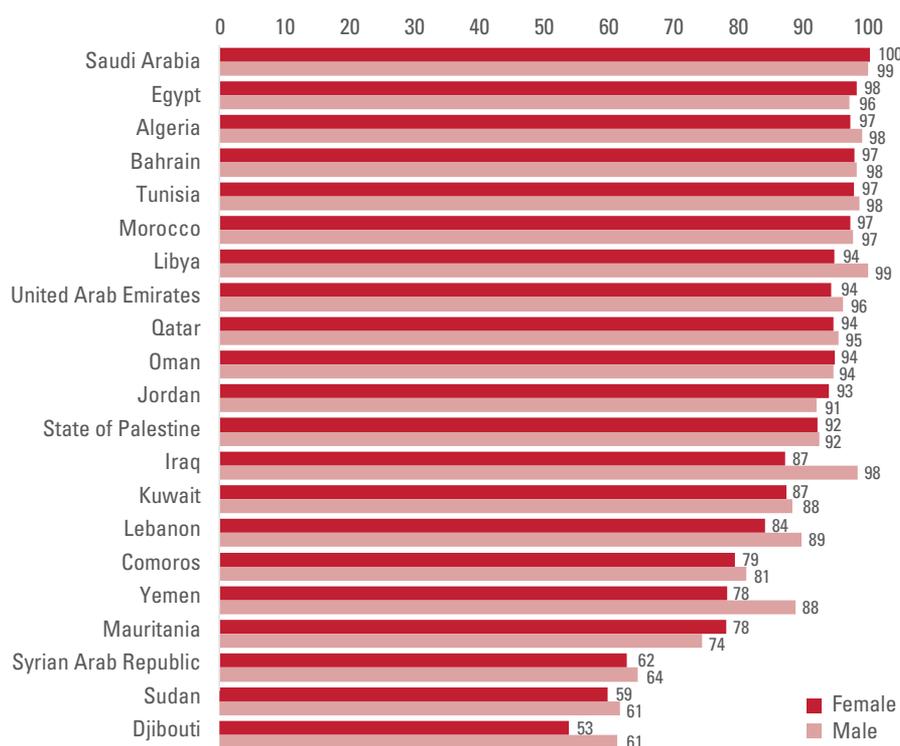


Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Adjusted net enrolment rate, one year before the official primary entry age".

**As more girls enrolled in primary education, the gender gap decreased**



**Figure 58.** Net enrolment rate in primary education, latest year (percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, “Net enrolment rate, primary”.

Yemen had the highest gender gap in education of 10.5 percentage points and faced the dual challenge of increasing the number of children in school and ensuring gender parity **Figure 58**.

### D. Survival rate and completion rate of primary education

Accelerated improvements made a difference in working towards achieving gender parity in primary education in the Arab States. In most countries of the region, almost all children who enrolled in primary education, survived and completed their education. However, in some countries gender gaps remain, especially among the poorest females living in rural areas.

However, those rates have remained stagnant since 2013, indicating that countries face great difficulty in reaching the last 15 per cent of children currently excluded from the school system. Arab States need to reach the goal of gender parity and with high overall enrolment as well as increase efforts to address obstacles to schooling that affect the most marginalized girls.

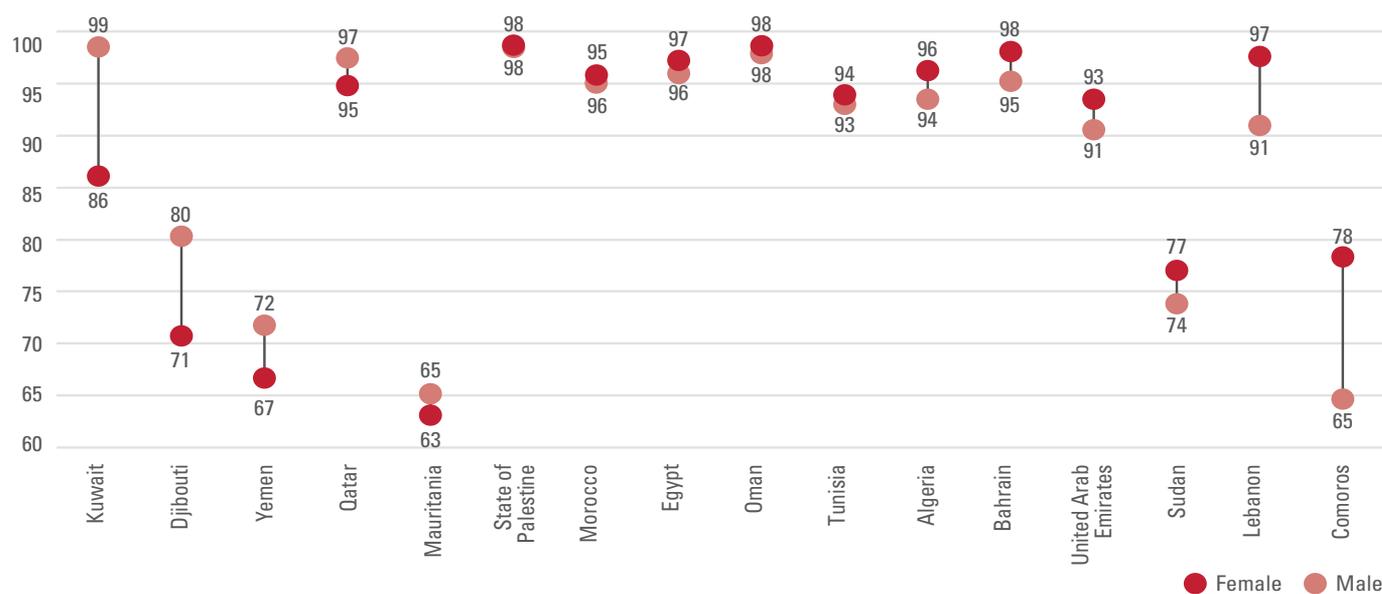
Most countries were within reach of or have achieved universal primary education for both sexes. Djibouti remarkably doubled the net enrolment rate for girls and boys between 2000 and 2017. In the same period, Yemen increased enrolment for girls by 37 percentage points

and by 18 percentage points for boys. The United Arab Emirates and Morocco increased the female and male enrolment from around 75 per cent to reach universal primary education. There was a significant increase in Morocco’s enrolment rates for girls by 28 percentage points during 1999 – 2013 period. The gains were directly attributable to long-term emphasis on school construction in rural areas and gender equity reforms.<sup>6</sup>

Latest available data in Djibouti, Mauritania, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic showed NER for both sexes of less than 80 per cent. Those countries face the challenge of increasing the number of children in school. In 2016,

The survival rate for the Arab States was 81 per cent for both females and males in 2016. Nevertheless, many countries have reported rates close to 100 per cent for both girls and boys, namely: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. The gender gap in survival rates varies among Arab States. The highest gender gaps in favour of boys were in Kuwait (12 percentage points), Djibouti (10 percentage points) and Yemen (5 percentage points). In contrast, just two countries had gender gaps in favour of girls, namely Comoros (13 percentage points) and Lebanon (6 percentage points) **Figure 59**.

**Figure 59.** Gender gap in survival rates, latest available data (percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Survival rate in primary education".

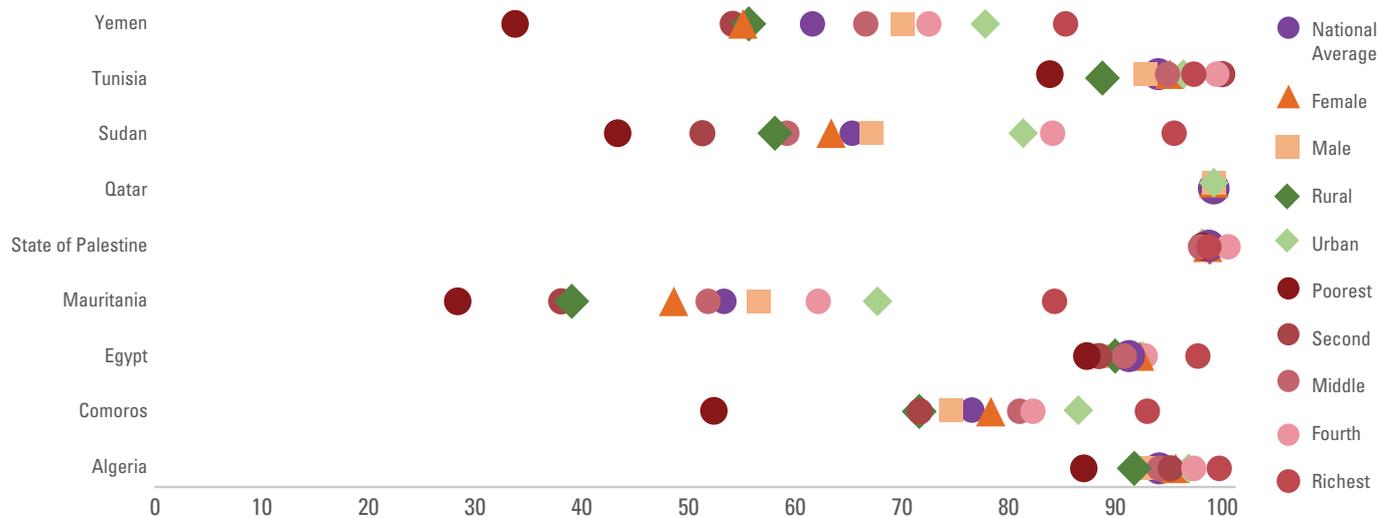
Completion rates indicate how many persons in a given age group have completed their education, entering school on time and progressing through the education system without excessive delays. Globally, the primary education completion rate reached 84 per

cent in 2018, up from 70 per cent in 2000.

Data on the primary education completion rate showed a gender disparity between females and males. Girls were at a higher risk of not completing their primary

education than boys. Data on Yemen showed a high gender gap of 15 percentage points (females 55% and males 70%). The poorest girls and those living in rural areas remained the least likely to complete school as clearly shown in Figure 60.

**Figure 60.** Completion rate of primary education of young people aged 15-24 years by location and wealth, latest available data (percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Completion rate, primary education".

## E. Secondary education

Without secondary education, women are often excluded from better paying jobs and positions of responsibility. The level of girls' enrolment in secondary education is a good signpost of women's empowerment because it can show whether equality has been achieved at a high level of enrolment or low one. However, when young women enter school in equal numbers with young men, they may "still suffer from harassment or be discouraged from seeking higher education that might open more opportunities for future jobs".<sup>7</sup>

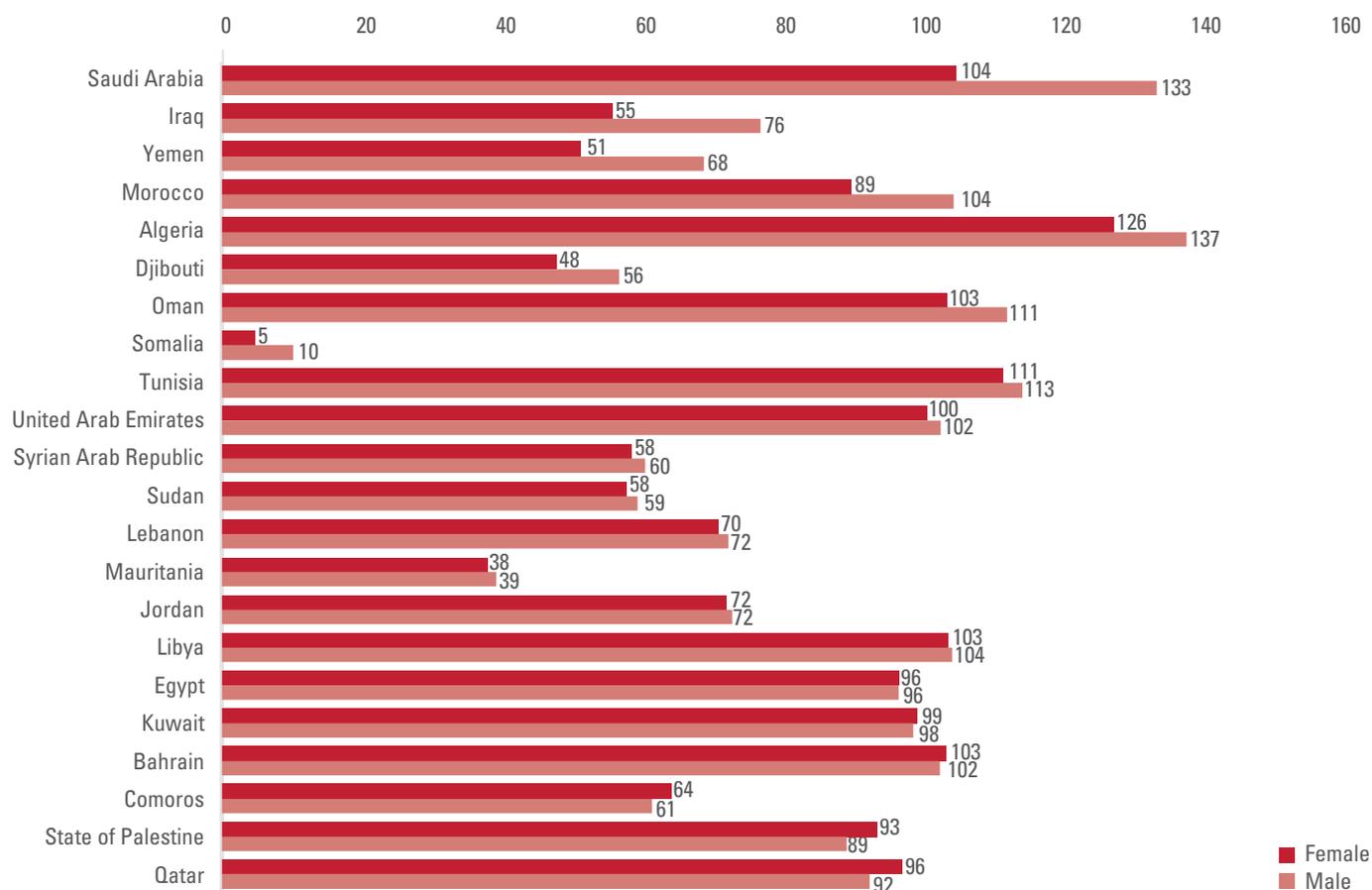
Globally, less than half of children in upper secondary education – 43 per cent of adolescent boys and 45 per cent of adolescent girls– were enrolled in or completed upper secondary education. At the global level, the ratio of girls enrolled in 1999 was 91 for every 100 boys. By 2015, the global average increased to almost 97 girls.

The gross enrolment ratio in lower secondary education at the global level has increased from 72 per cent in 2000 to 85 per cent in 2017. Similarly, in the Arab States the ratio has increased from 75 per cent in 2000 to 89 per cent in 2017.

Despite recent gains in enrolment, there remain 58%, or two thirds, of females who are out-of-school in lower secondary, the highest proportion in the world.<sup>8</sup>

As per the latest data, the gender gap in gross enrolment ratio in lower secondary education was in favour of boys in the Arab States. The gender gap was greatest in Saudi Arabia at 28 percentage points followed by Iraq at 21 percentage points. Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania and the Sudan had the lowest gender gaps in gross enrolment ratio at 1 percentage point, and no gender gap in Egypt. **Figure 61** shows

**Figure 61.** Gross enrolment ratio in lower secondary education, latest available data (percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Gross enrolment ratio, lower secondary".

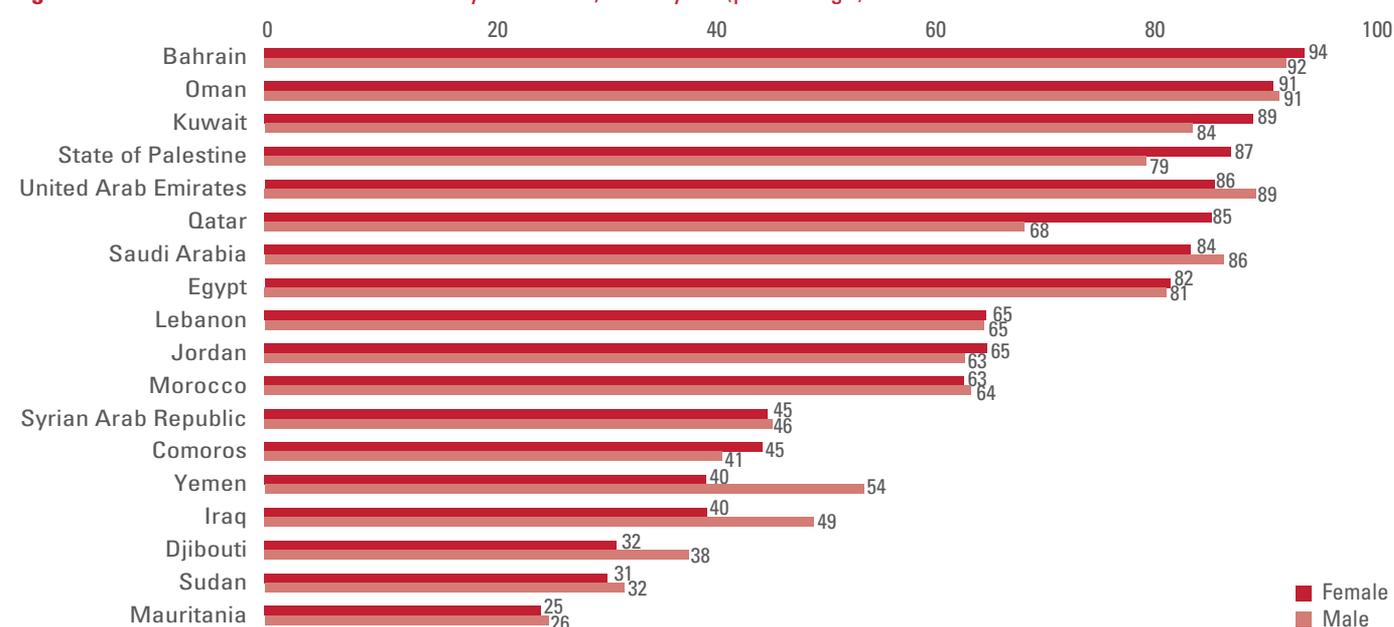
the gender gap in gross enrolment ratio in lower secondary education from highest to lowest among Arab States.

However, NER in Comoros, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen is still below 80 per cent, primarily due to the interlinked dynamics of poverty and conflict in many of these countries.

In fact, the rates are extremely low for both sexes in Mauritania (girls 25% and boys 26%) and in the Sudan (girls 31% and boys 32%). The gender gap was largest in Yemen (14 percentage points) followed by Iraq (10 percentage points), indicating a severe disadvantage for girls. There was a reverse gender gap – meaning a higher rate for girls than for boys – in other countries such as Bahrain,

Comoros, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, the State of Palestine and Qatar. Although those countries had higher enrolment rates of girls than boys, girls in those countries were not more empowered than boys. Women were still likely to earn less than men when they enter the job market and spend more time in providing unpaid work to support their families **Figure 62**.

**Figure 62.** Net enrolment rate in secondary education, latest year (percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Net enrolment rate, secondary".

## F. Completion of secondary education

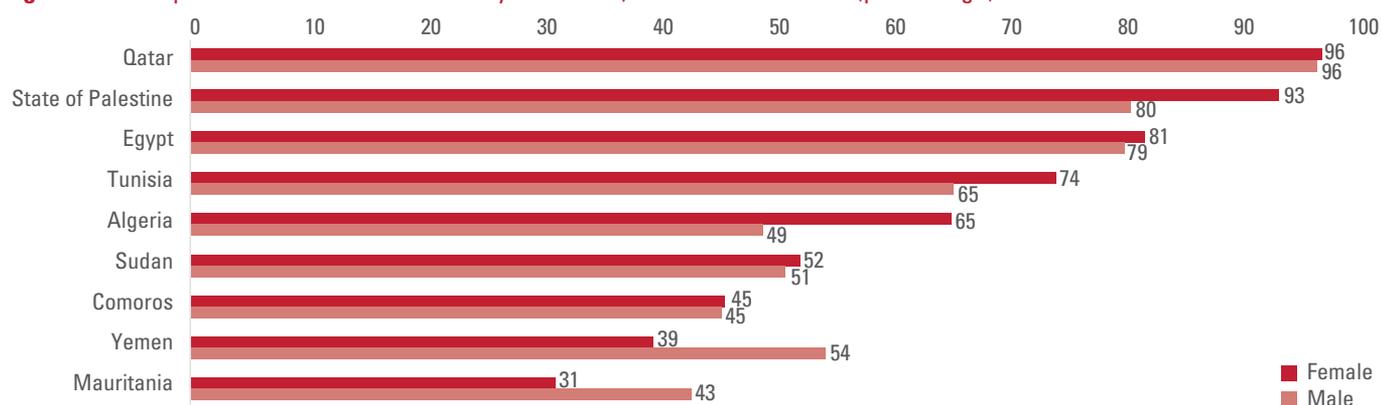
It is important to also monitor completion rate which gives a clearer picture of girls' ability to compete in the job market.<sup>9</sup> Across 148 countries, the lower and upper secondary completion rates stood at 72 per cent and 48 per cent, respectively in 2018. In the Arab countries data on completion rate

for lower and upper secondary education show an additional decrease in female and male completion rate as the grade level gets higher, especially in Algeria, Comoros, Egypt, Jordan, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia.

Data on lower secondary education completion rates show a gender disparity between girls and boys. The completion rate for girls and boys varies among the countries with available data. The reverse

gender gaps, girls more than boys, were largest in Algeria at 16 percentage points (girls 65% and boys 49%); the State of Palestine at 13 percentage points (girls 93% and boys 80%); and in Tunisia at 9 percentage points (girls 74% and boys 65%). The gender gap, boys more than girls, remained highest in Yemen at 15 percentage points (girls 39% and boys 54%) followed by Mauritania at 11 percentage points (girls 31% and boys 43%) **Figure 63**.

**Figure 63.** Completion rate of lower secondary education, latest available data (percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Completion rate of lower secondary education".

## G. Wealth and education

Wealth plays a major role in completing secondary education

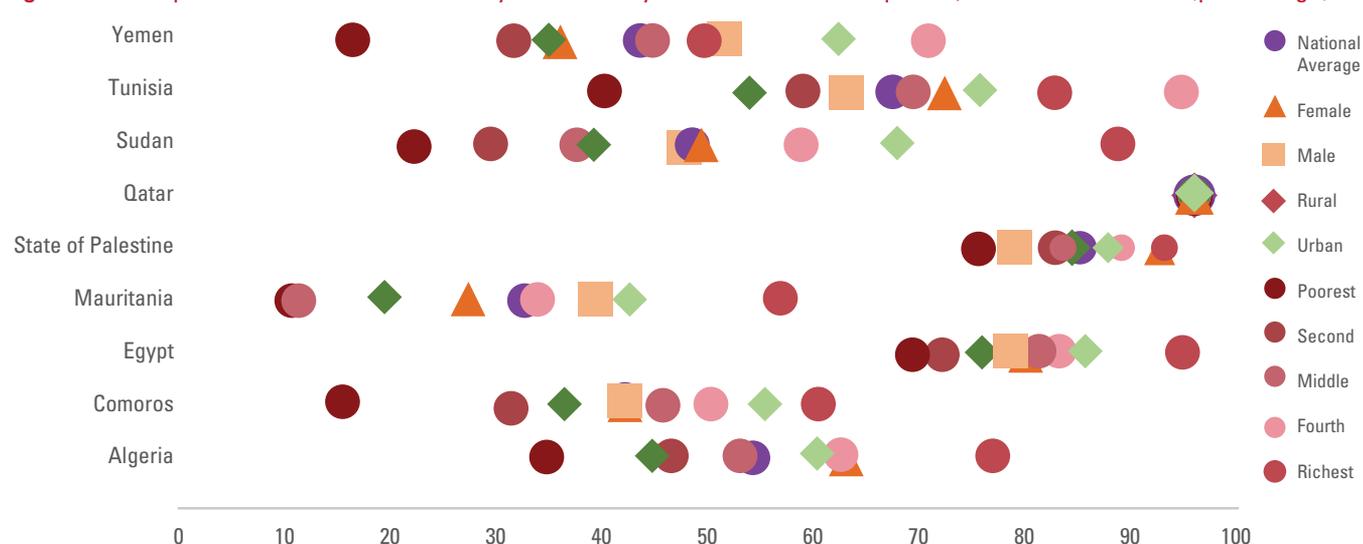
The completion rate of lower secondary education was highest among the richest quintile of population and among those living in urban areas. It was lowest among

the poorest quintile and those living in rural areas, except in the State of Palestine. The completion rate in rural areas of the State of Palestine was higher than urban areas. The widest gap between rural and urban areas was in the Sudan at 27 percentage points (rural 42% and urban 70%), followed by Yemen, Mauritania and Comoros at 26, 22 and 18 percentage points,

respectively. The narrowest gap in the region was in Egypt at 9 percentage points.

Completion rates of lower secondary education among the poorest and richest also varied in the Arab States. The widest gap between poorest and richest population, for example, was in the Sudan at 63 percentage points

**Figure 64.** Completion rate of lower secondary education by location and wealth quintile, latest available data (percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Completion rate of lower secondary education".

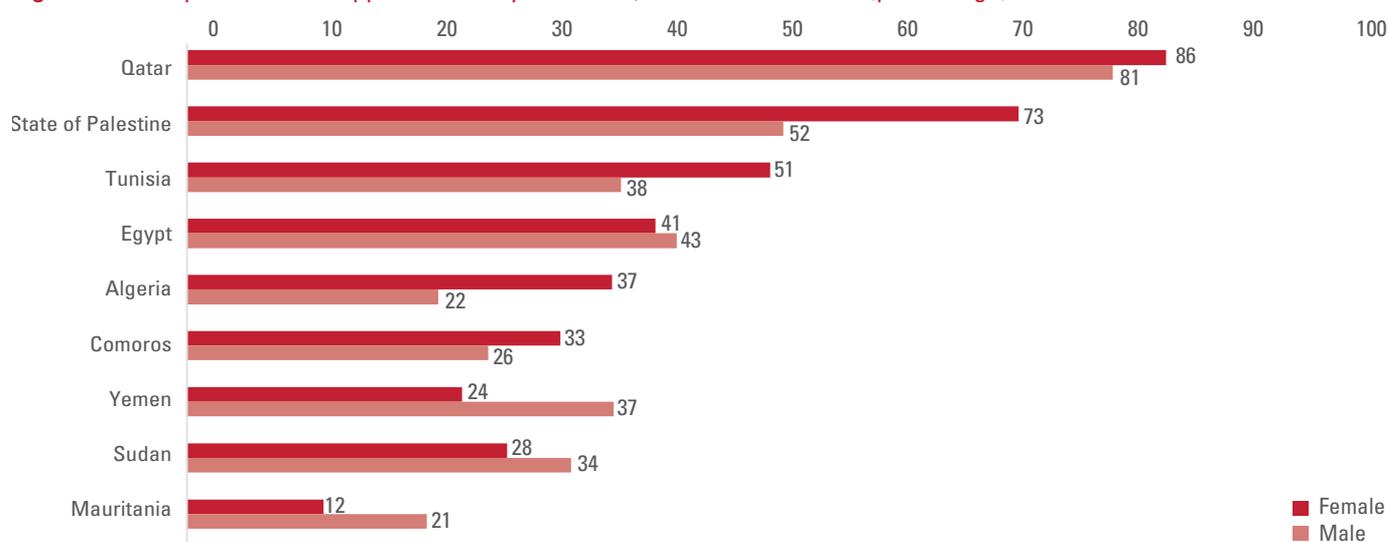
(poorest 26% and richest 89%). The State of Palestine had the narrowest gap between poor and rich at 16 percentage points (poorest 77% and richest 93%) **Figure 64**.

Data on upper secondary education completion rates show a gender disparity between girls and boys.

The completion rate for girls and boys varies among countries in the region with available data. The highest gender gap was in the State of Palestine at 21 percentage points (girls 73% and boys 52%), in Algeria at 15 percentage points (girls 37% and boys 22%) and in Tunisia at 13 percentage points

(girls 51% and boys 38%). In some countries, the situation was reversed. The reverse gender gap, more boys than girls, was highest in Yemen at 13 percentage points (girls 24% and boys 37%) followed by Mauritania at 9 percentage points (girls 12% and boys 21%) **Figure 65**.

**Figure 65.** Completion rate of upper secondary education, latest available data (percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Completion rate of upper secondary education".

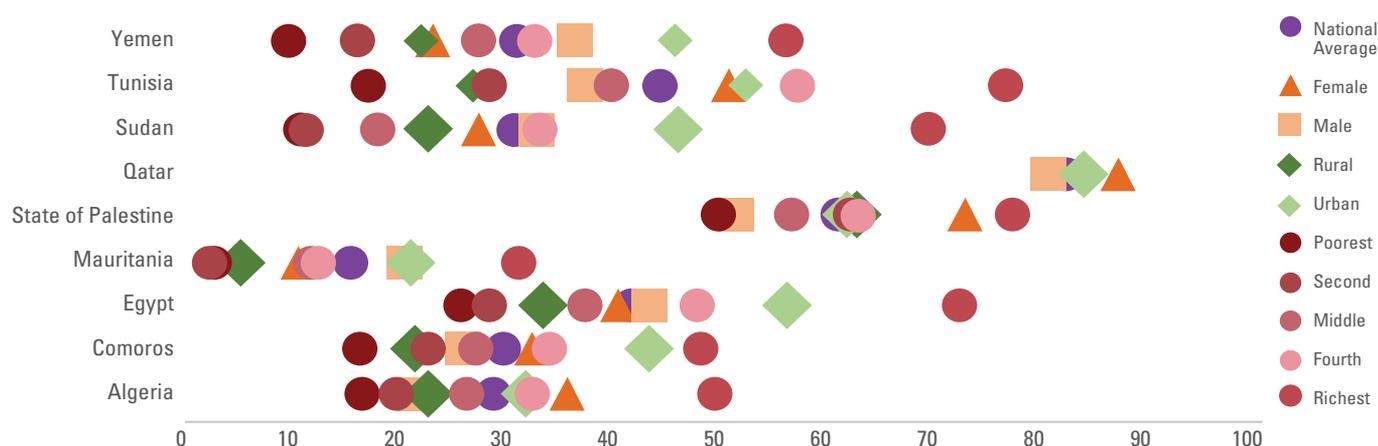
Latest available data in the Arab States show that the rich and urban population had higher completion rates of upper secondary education in comparison to those who were poor and living in rural areas, except in the State of Palestine. The completion rate of upper secondary education in rural areas was more than urban areas in the State of Palestine. The widest gap between rural and urban areas was in Tunisia at 27 percentage points (rural 26% and urban 53%), followed by the Sudan, Egypt and Yemen 26, 23 and

23 percentage points, respectively. The narrowest gap in completion rates of upper secondary education between rural and urban areas was in Algeria at 11 percentage points.

In addition, to the wide gap between rural and urban, Tunisia had also the widest gap between poorest and richest population at 59 percentage points (poorest 18% and richest 77%). Mauritania had the lowest gap at 27 percentage points (poorest 4% and richest 31%) **Figure 66**.

While the gender gap in completion rates between lower and upper secondary education may vary, in almost all the countries the completion rates for both sexes lowered significantly as the grade level rose. On the other hand, countries like Algeria, Egypt and the Sudan have witnessed a widening of gender gaps as the level of education increases. The completion rates for both sexes also dropped significantly with the increase in the level of education.

**Figure 66.** Completion rate of upper secondary education by location and wealth quintile, latest available data (percentage)



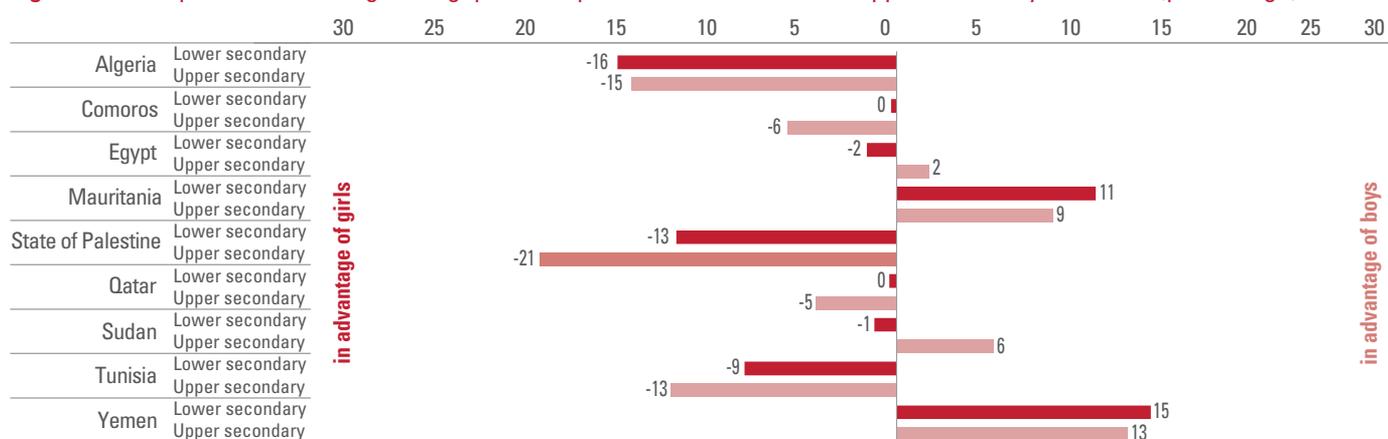
Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Completion rate of upper secondary education".

It is interesting to note, however, there was a larger decrease in completion rates for females than for males. Completion rates of upper secondary education in Egypt, for example, decreased by 40 percentage points for females, while rates for males decreased by 36 percentage points, four points less. In the Sudan, the female completion rate decreased by 24 percentage points while the male rate was less by seven points.

In contrast, as the level of education increased the completion rate for males was higher than rate for females. The gender gap in Mauritania in lower secondary education was 11 percentage points, and in upper secondary education was 9 percentage points. Moreover, the completion rates for both sexes significantly dropped by nearly half (females from 31% to 12% and males from 43% to 21%). Similar decreases occurred in Comoros, Qatar and Yemen.

These countries have witnessed a greater rate of decrease for males from lower secondary to upper secondary than for females. The completion rate for females in Mauritania decreased by 19 percentage points and for males by 22 percentage points; in Yemen female rate decreased by 15 percentage points and for males by 20 percentage points; and in Comoros the rates decreased by 12 percentage points for females and by 19 percentage points for males **Figure 67**.

**Figure 67.** Comparison between gender gaps in completion rates of lower and upper secondary education (percentage)



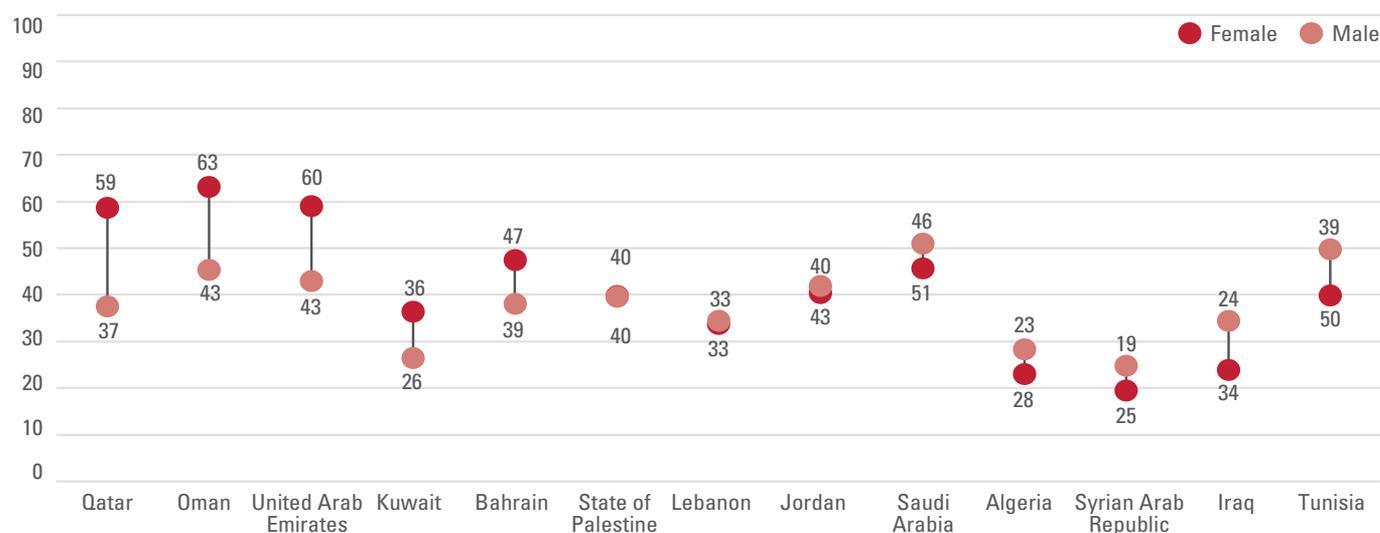
Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Completion rate of lower and upper secondary education".

Rates in educational attainment for population aged 25 years and older who completed the upper secondary education or higher varies among Arab States, where data are available. Gender gaps for GCC such as Qatar, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain were in favour of

females. The highest gender gaps in educational attainment for population aged 25 years and older were in Qatar at 22 percentage points (females 59% and males 37%); followed by Oman at 18 percentage points; the United Arab Emirates at 17 percentage points; Kuwait at 10

percentage points; and Bahrain at 7 percentage points. Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia all had a gender gap in favour of men. Only the State of Palestine had no gender gap in educational attainment among population aged 25 years and older **Figure 68**.

**Figure 68.** Gender gap in educational attainment rate of population aged 25 years and older who completed upper secondary education or higher, latest available data (percentage)



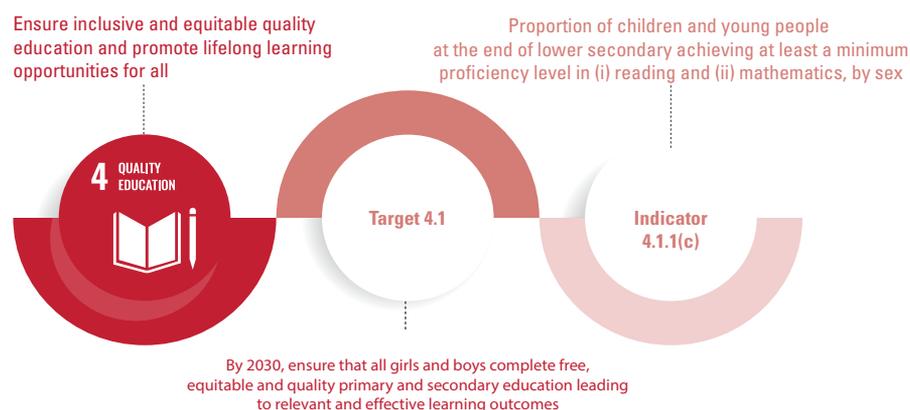
**Source:** UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Educational attainment rate, completed lower/ upper secondary education or higher, population 25+ years".

## H. Quality of education

More than one-half of children and adolescents are not learning worldwide

Gender sensitivity is a key aspect in the quality of education. Curricula, teaching materials and even the media has a powerful role in shaping people's knowledge and opinion and often reinforce traditional roles that may deny women opportunities for full equal principal in society.<sup>10</sup>

Latest data show that there were more than 617 million children and adolescents



globally who were not meeting the minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. This new data is a warning of a tremendous waste of human potential that could threaten progress towards the SDGs.<sup>11</sup>

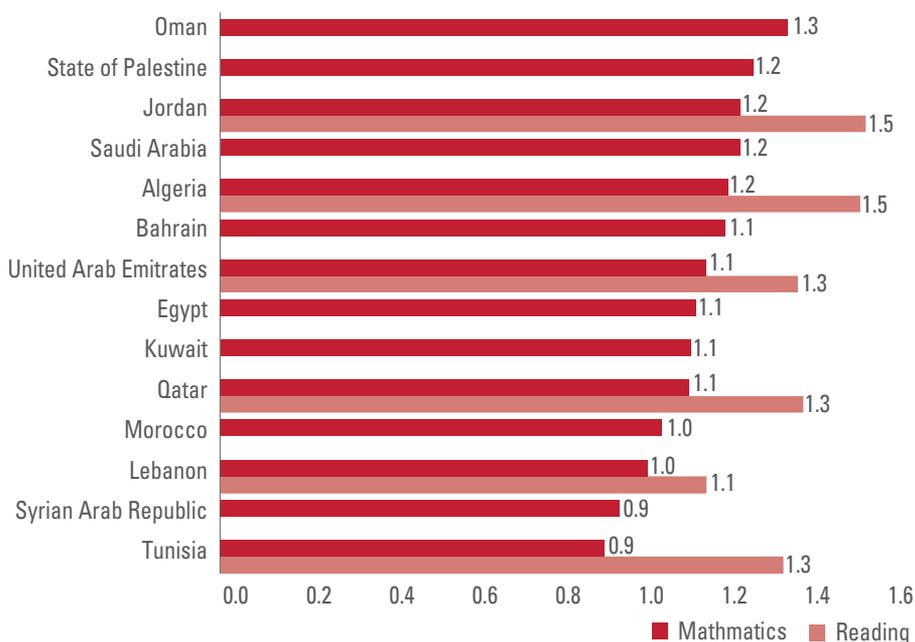
Globally, six out of ten children and adolescents were not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics<sup>12</sup> **Figure 69**. Across the region, girls at primary education level faced the greatest disadvantage. More than 70 million girls – or 90 per cent – will not meet minimum proficiency levels in reading by the time they are due to complete their primary education. This is also the case for 85 per cent of boys.<sup>13</sup>

Globally, men usually outperform women in math scores; however, the trend is different in the Arab world.<sup>14</sup> Examining the ten Arab States where women outperformed men in mathematics, the gender parity index was highest in Oman (1.3), slightly less in the State of Palestine, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Algeria (1.2) followed by Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Kuwait and Qatar (1.1). Girls and boys performed equally well in Morocco and Lebanon. In the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia, boys outperformed girls in mathematics. With regard to reading in lower secondary education in all the countries, girls outperform boys. Jordan and Algeria recorded the highest gender parity index in reading skills at 1.5, followed by Tunisia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates at 1.3 and then Lebanon at 1.1.

## I. Vocational training

“Globally, young women are also less likely than young men to become entrepreneurs, in part due to cultural and societal barriers in some countries, which further limits the employment options for female youth.” *World Youth Report, 2016*

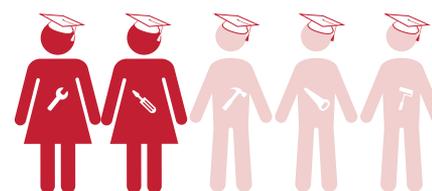
**Figure 69.** Gender parity index for achievement (a) in mathematics and Gender parity index for achievement (b) in reading in lower secondary education, latest available data (percentage)



Source: UNSD, “SDG indicators”, Global SDG Indicators database.

Investing in young women’s economic empowerment and skills development is one of the most urgent and effective means to drive progress on gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth. Vocational training enables adolescent girls to earn an income and build crucial life skills, however, adolescent girls have been historically overlooked by global development programmes. Girls, more than women or boys, lack access to financial capital and have limited opportunities to gain education, knowledge and skills that can lead to economic advancement. Biased gender norms and inadequate policy frameworks often create barriers to girls’ economic advancement. Globally, 600 million adolescent girls struggle with widespread poverty, limited access to education and health services and persistent discrimination and violence.<sup>15</sup>

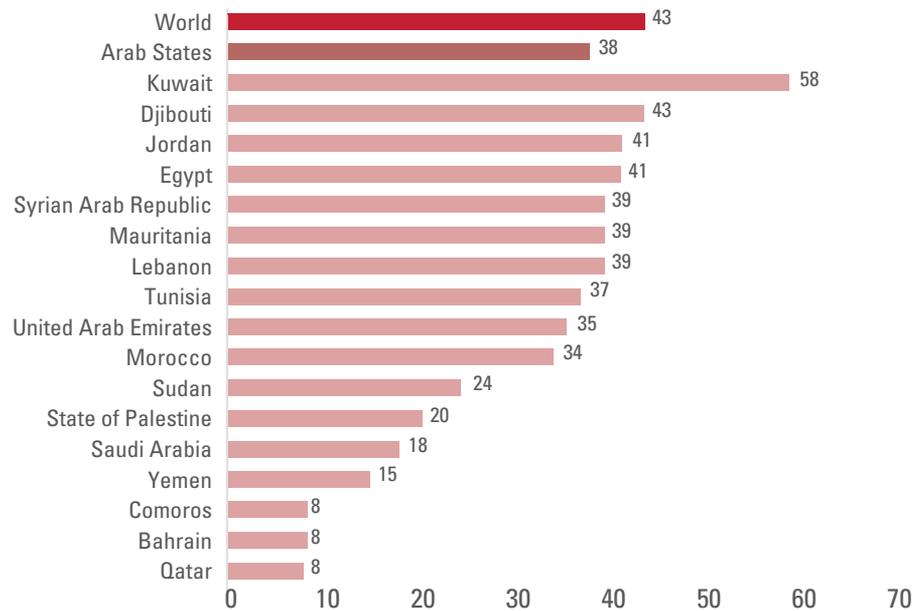
Young women and girls need full and equal access to economic opportunity, as well as the skills, education and resources to start their own businesses. The positive gain of empowering women in work and the economy is exponential. The value of removing the employment participation and wage gap globally is calculated at \$17 trillion. Increasing women’s earning power grows economies through greater demand and productivity.<sup>16</sup>



**2 out of every 5 adolescents in vocational training are girls in the Arab States**

In the Arab States early marriage, poverty and conflict often are barriers to the progress of young girls in education. The stigma associated with vocational learning also has a major role in discouraging young adults from pursuing vocational qualifications. Globally, the female share of secondary vocational educations stands at 43 per cent; 7 percentage points away from gender equality. In the Arab States, the share of females is only 38 per cent **Figure 70**.

**Figure 70.** Share of female students in secondary vocational education, latest available data (percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Percentage of students in secondary vocational education who are female".

## J. Higher education

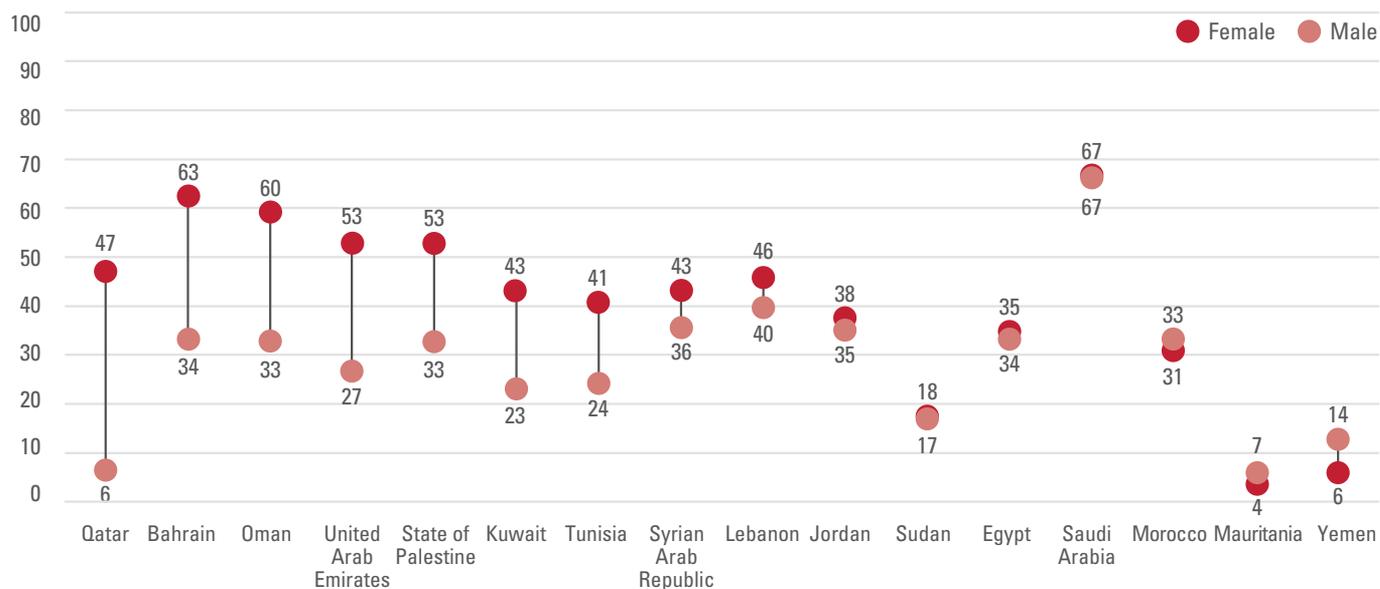
Most disadvantaged in tertiary education are the poorest boys and those living in rural areas

Tertiary education provides an avenue for females and males to develop a specialization and attain

the qualifications needed for their chosen career. The percentage of young people (aged 19-23 years) who

are enrolled in tertiary education varies significantly between countries. Globally, the gross

**Figure 71.** Gender gap in gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education, latest available data (percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Gross enrolment ratio, tertiary".

enrolment ratio in tertiary education has increased from 19 per cent in 2000 to 38 per cent in 2017, with the female enrolment ratio exceeding the male ratio by 4 percentage points. The tertiary gross enrolment ratio ranges from 9 per cent in low income countries to 77 per cent in high income countries where, after rapid growth in the 2000s, it reached a plateau in the 2010s.<sup>17</sup>

Lowest gross enrolment ratios were in Mauritania and Yemen for both sexes. In Mauritania, few young people were enrolled in university (females 4% and males 7%). While in Yemen, gross enrolment ratios were

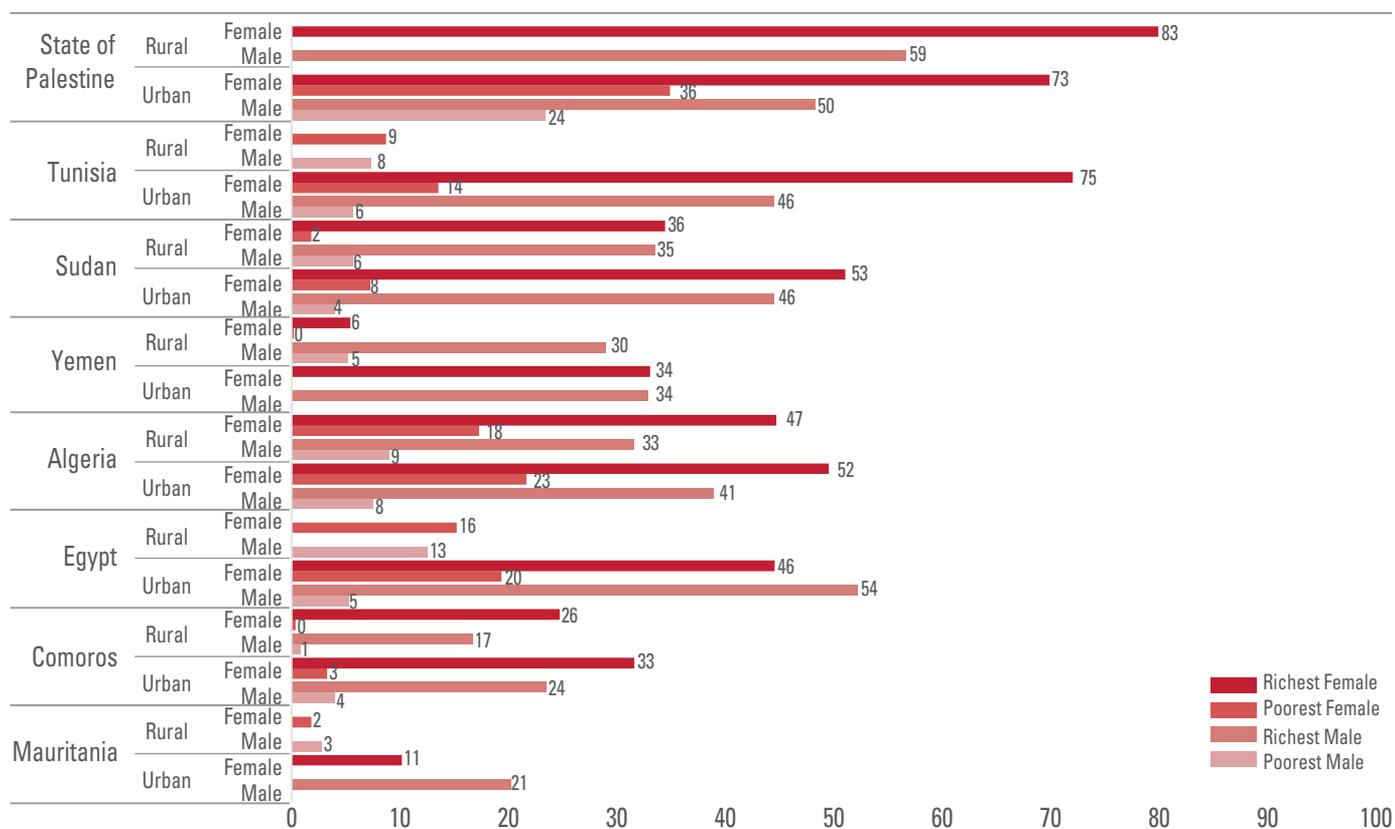
6 per cent for females and 14 per cent for males. Enrolment in tertiary education among Arab States was highest in Saudi Arabia for both females and males (67%).

In the majority of Arab countries, where data were available, the gender gap favours women. The gap was greatest in Qatar, where the percentage of women enrolled in higher education is 47 per cent at standard tertiary age, compared to just over 6 per cent of men. However, this should be seen in the context that Qatar has a significantly small female population which are outnumbered by a high number of male migrants who

were there for employment rather than education [Figure 71](#).

However, data on gross attendance ratio for tertiary education by sex show a gender disparity between females and males, where boys are at a higher risk of not attending tertiary education than girls. Data on Tunisia, for example, showed a gender gap of 14 percentage points (females 35% and males 21%). Moreover, the poorest boys and those living in rural areas were the most disadvantaged with regard to tertiary education as clearly shown in [Figure 72](#).

**Figure 72.** Gross attendance ratio for tertiary education by location and wealth, latest available data (percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Gross attendance ratio, tertiary education".

## K. Specialization in education

Gender discrimination in education is a phenomenon that is still prevalent around the world and especially in the Arab countries. Nowadays, education opportunities for females and males around the world are almost equal; however, the type of education and the type of specialization is still highly correlated with the person's gender.

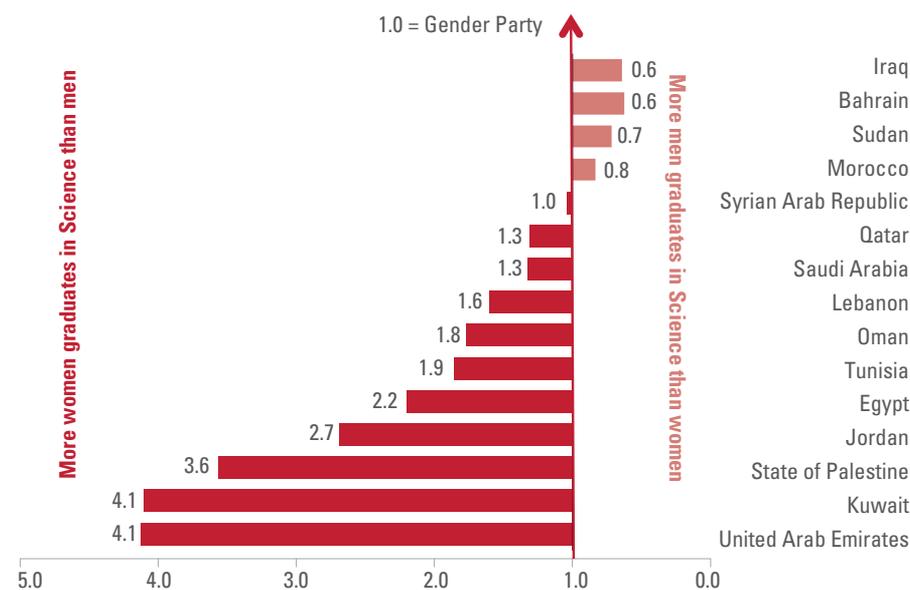
For instance, when choosing a specialization, females tend to favour science<sup>18</sup> majors over engineering.<sup>19</sup> This can be easily seen in the Arab States where the number of female graduates in science is higher than that of males. In the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, for example, there are four times more female graduates than male graduates in science **Figure 73**.

Male graduates in engineering were higher than female graduates in all Arab States, except in Kuwait where there were twice as many female graduates in engineering than male graduates **Figure 74**.

## L. Literacy

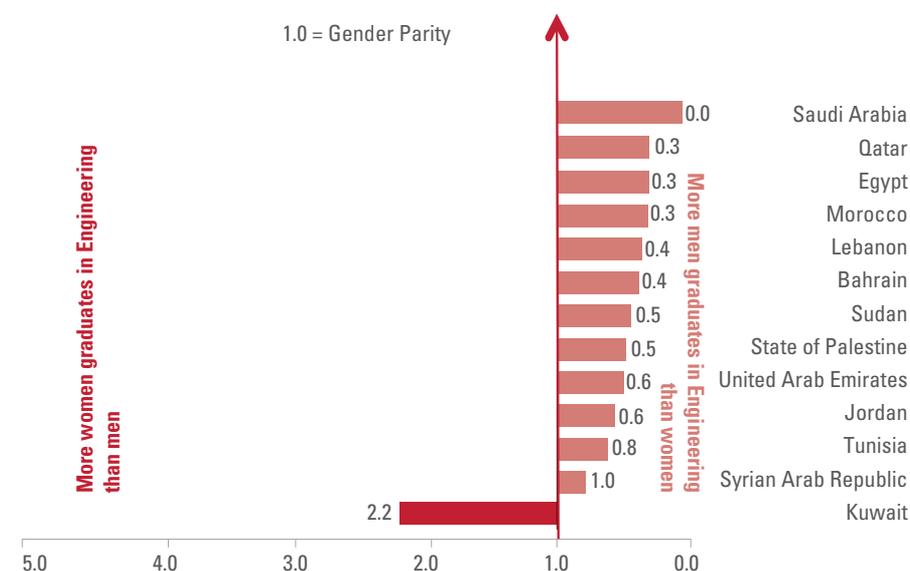
The literacy rate shows whether schooling has equipped young women and men with of the ability to communicate by reading and writing. The literacy rate is the percentage of people who can both read and write with understanding a short simple statement about

**Figure 73.** Gender Parity Index of graduates by specialization in science majors, latest available data



Source: E/ESCWA/SD/2019/TP.1.

**Figure 74.** Gender Parity Index of graduates by specialization in engineering, manufacturing and construction majors, latest available data



Source: E/ESCWA/SD/2019/TP.1.

their everyday life. This data can predict the quality of future labour force and can be used in ensuring life skills policies for men and women. The literacy rate is in

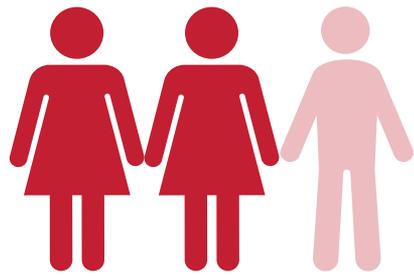
some ways a stronger indicator of young people's empowerment than education, as it parallels a nation's progress in developing its human capital.

## Adult literacy

Globally, 750 million adults (15+ years) lacked basic literacy skills in 2016. There were 92 literate women for every 100 literate men globally, and in low income countries, as few as 77 literate women for every 100 literate men.<sup>20</sup>

Regional data also suggest that there was a greater gender gap in literacy rates than there was in school enrolment. Women (41 million) in the Arab States are twice as likely to be illiterate as men (24 million), and they make up two thirds of the region's illiterate adults (65 million).

However, the progress in improving adult female literacy rates in the Arab



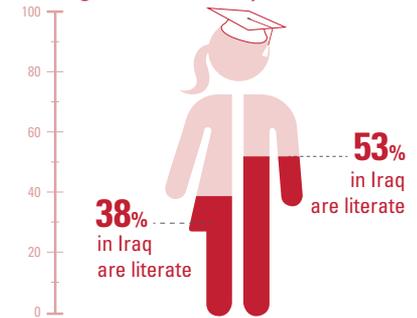
In the Arab States, **women are twice likely to be illiterates as men**

States from 2000 to 2016 was double the rate of males' (females 13 percentage points and males 6 percentage points). Female literacy increased substantially in Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman and Saudi Arabia. Progress was also achieved in male literacy although at a lower rate and mainly in Kuwait and Morocco. In Iraq literacy rates for both females (38%) and males (53%) in 2013 have fallen markedly since the war, and at a higher rate for males than females, by 31 and 26 percentage points respectively, since 2000 **Figure 75**.

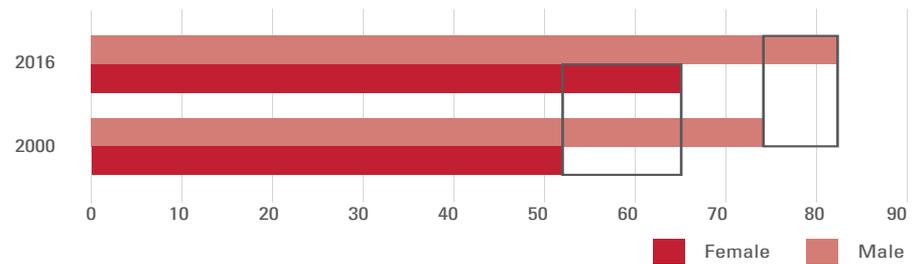
The gender gaps in education varies across countries but are generally wider when literacy and school

enrolment rates are lower. In Yemen, for example, the education gender gap was the widest and the literacy rate among men was 73 per cent double that of adult women at 35 per cent **Figure 76**.

**Iraq adult literacy is extremely low, having fallen markedly since the war.**

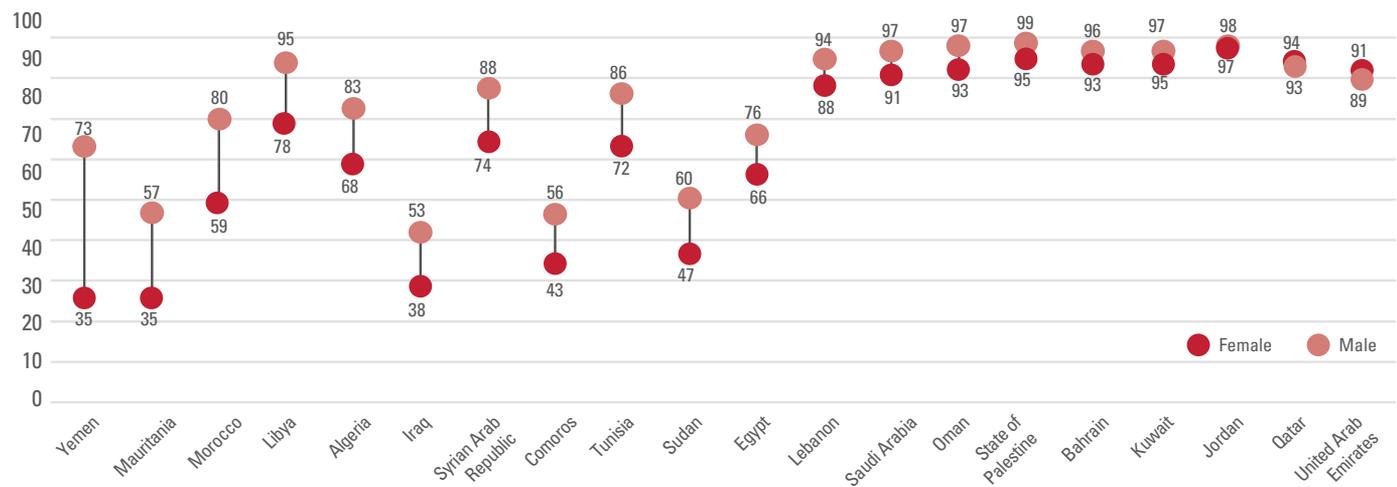


**Figure 75.** Progress in adult literacy rates from 2000 to 2016 in the Arab States



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Adult literacy rate, population 15+ years".

**Figure 76.** Gender gap in adult literacy rates, latest available data (percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Adult literacy rate, population 15+ years".

## Youth literacy

The youth literacy rate, for ages 15-24, reflects recent progress in education. It measures the accumulated outcomes of primary education over the previous 10 years or so by indicating the proportion of the population who have passed through the primary education system and acquired basic literacy and numeracy skills. Literacy and numeracy are essential if the next generation is to realize their potential and to work to support local and national efforts to improve development outcomes.

Globally, 102 million youth lacked basic literacy skills in 2016.<sup>21</sup> Although the Arab region has quadrupled the average rate of schooling since 1960, literacy among young women continues to lag behind men. In 2016, there were 9 million youth in the Arab

States who lacked basic literacy skills, 5 million, were women, in comparison to 4 million men.

While there was a 2 percentage point increase in youth female literacy rate from 2012 to 2016, the gender gap between females and males in the Arab States remains large even though it decreased from 7 percentage points (females 82% and males 89%) in 2012 to 5 percentage points (females 84% and males 89%) in 2016 **Figure 77**.

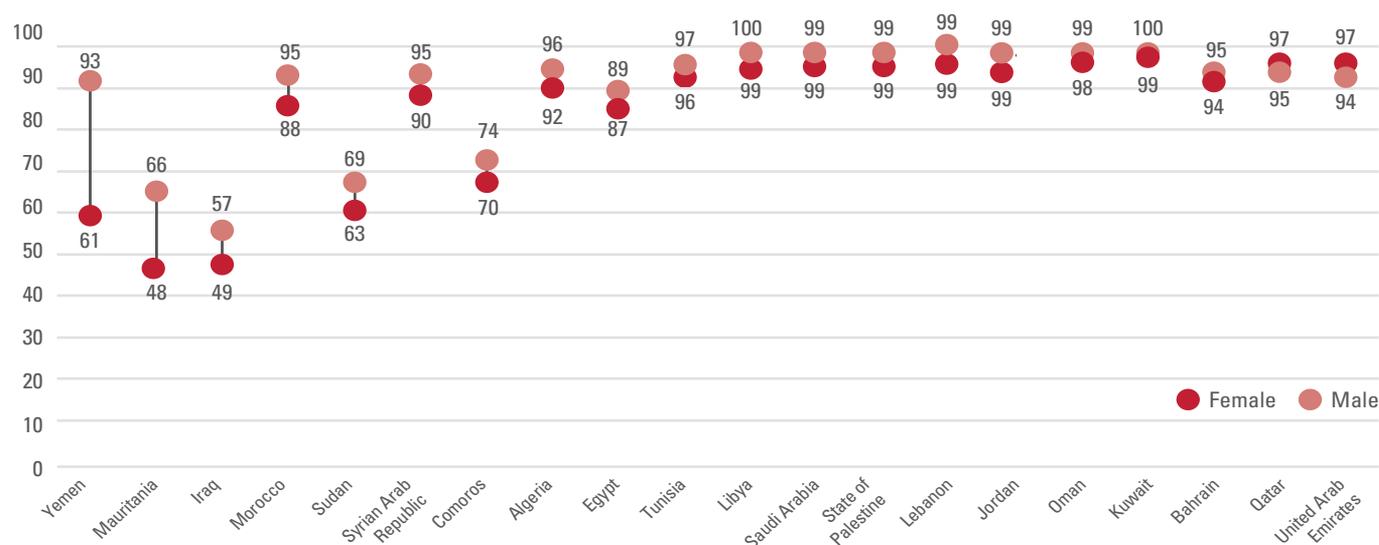
The data show remarkable improvement among youth in terms of reading and writing skills and a steady reduction in gender gaps. From 2000 to 2016 there were gains in the youth literacy rate, especially for females for whom the rate increased by 7 percentage points, while a 1 percentage point increase was recorded for males. Fifty years ago, almost one quarter of youth lacked basic literacy skills

compared to less than 10 per cent in 2016.<sup>22</sup> Despite the progress made over the years, there was still a large population from both sexes who lack the knowledge and skills to actively participate in society.

In 2013 gender parity for youth literacy in Iraq, for example, was reported at 0.85, however, the literacy rates for both females and males were very low at 49 per cent and 57 per cent, respectively **Figure 78**. The Sudan also showed a high gender parity at 0.91 in 2008, but the youth literacy rates for both sexes were low (females 63% and males 69%).

While young women generally have a lower literacy rate than young men, the gap has been narrowing over time. The largest increases in youth literacy over the years took place in Morocco where the female rate nearly

**Figure 77.** Gender gap in youth literacy rates, latest available data (percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Youth literacy rate, population 15-24 years".

doubled between 2004 and 2012, with an increase of 27 percentage points in comparison to only 14 percentage points increase for males. Egypt also recorded an increase of 8 percentage points for females and a decrease of 1 percentage point for males from 2005 to 2017. This narrowing of the literacy gap was likely due to the fact that women are much more likely to be educated now than was the case in the past **Figure 78**.

In contrast in Iraq, there has been a major decline in youth literacy: during the period 2000-2013 it dropped from 80 per cent to 49 per cent for females, and from 89 per cent to 57 for males. Mauritania and the Sudan have also witnessed a decrease in youth literacy over the years. Conflict and war affect the literacy rates of both females and males. Some countries, such as in the Gulf, did not witness

major increases in literacy due to the fact that the baseline data was already high for both female and male literacy rates.

### M. Out-of-school children

Three years after the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) and the promise to provide universal primary and secondary education, there has been no progress in reducing the global number of out-of-school children, adolescents and youth.

In 2017, 262 million (18%) children, adolescents and youth were out of school worldwide. The total number of children who are not in school includes 64 million children out of primary education, 61 million or 16 per cent of adolescents out of lower secondary education and 138

No progress in reducing the number of children out of school:



**1 in 5 children**  
adolescents and youth are not in school

million or 36 per cent of youth out of upper secondary education.<sup>23</sup>

In 2017, around 17.4 million children across the Arab States were out of school. This included 5.5 million children not in primary education, 3.8 million adolescents not in lower secondary education and 8 million youth not in upper secondary education.<sup>24</sup>

In 2000, 54 per cent of the 378 million out-of-school children, adolescents and youth were females. By 2016, the female share of the global out-of-school population had fallen to 50 per cent. However, these global averages mask considerable differences at regional and national levels.<sup>25</sup>

The total number of out-of-school children and youth has declined by a little more than 1 million per year since 2012.<sup>26</sup> Some have never been to school (43%), others enrolled but dropped out (19%) and the remainder are expected to enroll late (38%).<sup>27</sup> It is estimated that half of the out-of-school girls will never enroll, compared with just over one quarter of boys in the Arab States.<sup>28</sup>

**Figure 78.** Trends in youth literacy rates in selected countries

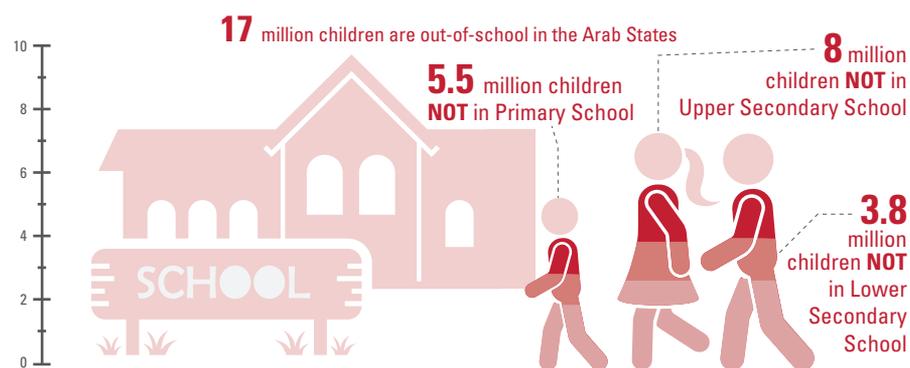
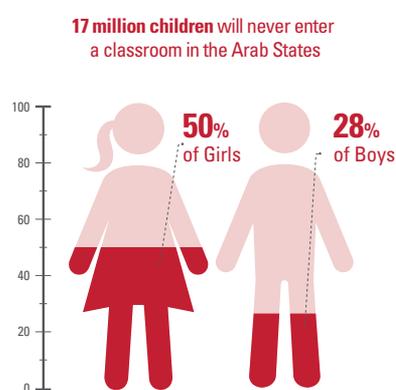


Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Youth literacy rate, population 15-24 years".

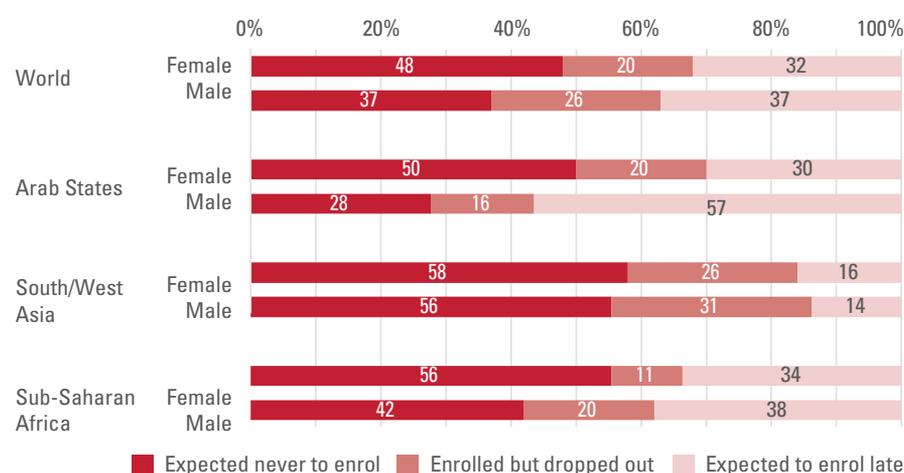
As shown in **Figure 79**, there is a considerable gender gap in the Arab region with girls much more likely never to go to school: 50 per cent compared with 28 per cent of boys, a gap of 22 percentage points. The problem of out-of-school children is becoming increasingly concentrated in conflict-affected countries worldwide, where the proportion of out-of-school children increased from 30 per cent in 1999 to 36 per cent in 2012. This trend is particularly strong in the Arab States where it increased from 63 per cent to 87 per cent over the same time period.<sup>29</sup> Girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school in countries with conflict.<sup>30</sup>

Countries with the highest out-of-school rates include the Sudan (44%) and Djibouti (41%). Countries with the highest out-of-school rates also tend to be among the poorest countries in the world.<sup>31</sup>

Globally, the gap between female and male out-of-school children in primary education increased by 1.1 percentage point (females 9.8% and males 8.7%) in 2011 to 1.8 percentage point (females 9.8% and males 8.0%) in 2017.



**Figure 79.** Distribution of out-of-school children by school exposure, World, Arab States, and selected regions, 2012



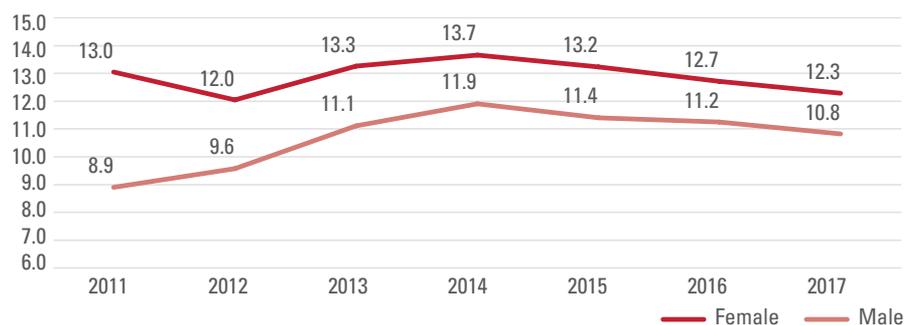
Source: UNESCO, *Education for all 2000-2015: achievements and challenges (2015)*.

The Arab region, however, witnessed a decrease in the gap between female and male out-of-school children in primary education from 4.2 percentage points (females 13% and males 8.9%) in 2011 to 1.5 percentage points (females 12.3% and males 10.8%) in 2017 **Figure 80**.

Marginalization in education is one of the main factors preventing universal access to primary and

secondary education and youth literacy in the region. It is a form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying diverse social and economic inequalities, which includes poverty, gender ethnicity, location, disability and health. Marginalized children include those children belonging to ethnic and linguistic minorities or nomadic communities, children with disabilities, those living in slums and children who work.

**Figure 80.** Out-of-school rate for children of primary education in the Arab States, 2011-2017 (percentage)



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, "Rate of out-of-school children of primary school age".

Pre-primary education, for example, tends to reach only more advantaged urban population, as in the case of many Arab States.

Analysis of household surveys shows that there are major inequalities for those who are out of school.<sup>32</sup> Girls are more likely to be out of school during primary and secondary education than boys

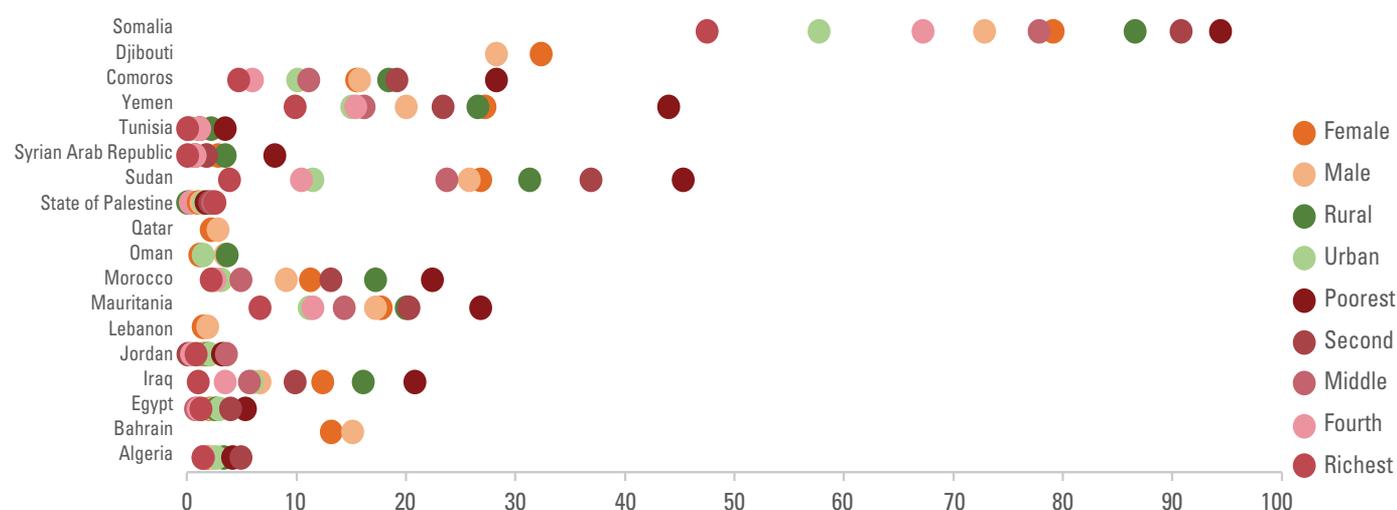
in all the Arab States **Figures 81 and 82**. In Iraq, for example, there were twice as many girls as boys out of school in primary education (females 12.6% and males 6.8%) and in secondary education (females 36.4% and males 16.9%).

Rural children are more likely to be out of school than urban children and the gap between urban and

rural areas is even wider. In Somalia, for example, there were three times as many children out of school at the primary and secondary education level living in rural areas than in urban areas (the gap between urban and rural areas is 28 percentage points in primary education and 34 percentage points in secondary education).

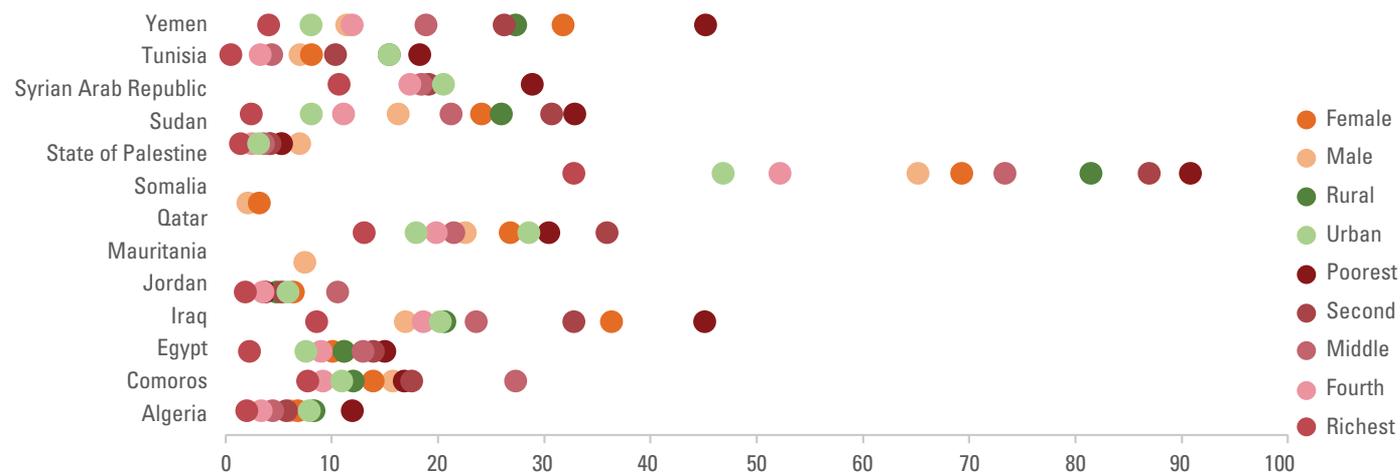
There is also a clear link between household wealth and the probability of being out of school. Compared with children from the richest quintile of households, children from the poorest quintile in the Sudan were three times more likely to be out of primary and secondary school (gap between richest and poorest quintile is 40 percentage points in primary education and 30 percentage points in secondary education). The probability of being out of school decreases steadily with increasing household wealth.

**Figure 81.** Out-of-school rate for children of primary education by location and wealth quintile, latest available data (percentage)



Source: UNICEF Global databases 2017 based on MICS, DHS and other national household surveys (last updated on December 2017).

**Figure 82.** Out-of-school rate for adolescents of lower secondary education by location and wealth quintile, latest available data (percentage)



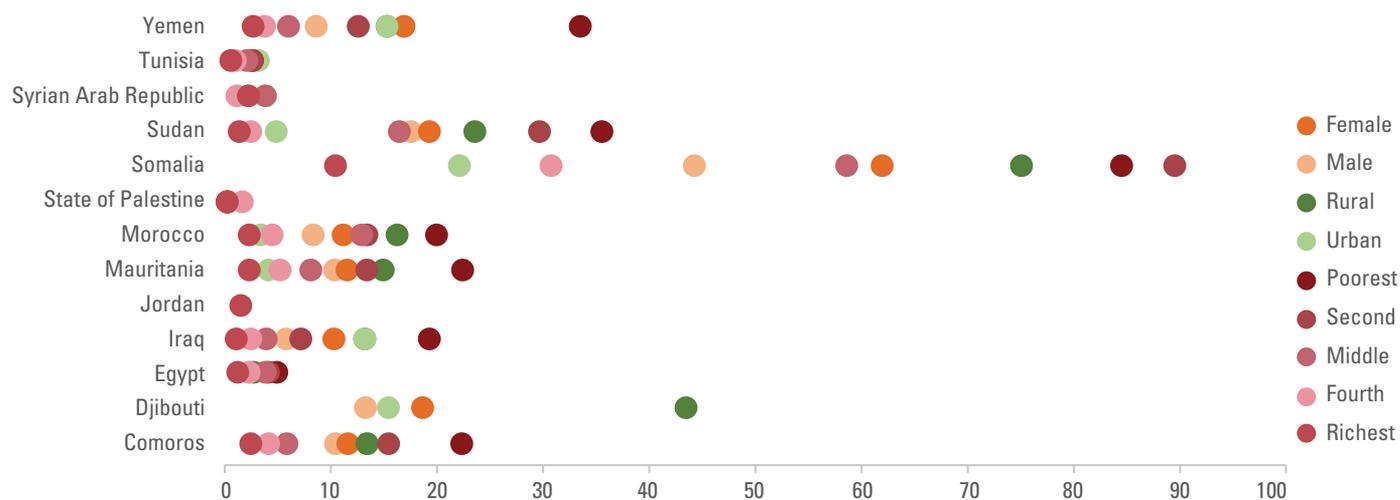
Source: UNICEF Global databases 2017 based on MICS, DHS and other national household surveys (last updated on December 2017).

Poor children, especially girls, are particularly at risk of being out of school. The latest data from Arab countries show that disparity exists at the expense of girls in Djibouti, Iraq, Tunisia, Somalia and Yemen. Both wealth and location play a major role in disadvantaging females in education **Figure 83**.

Countries need to invest in positive actions such as abolishing school fees, introducing social cash transfers to help families offset the cost of schooling, increasing attention to ethnic and linguistic minorities (Morocco), increasing education expenditure, introducing more relevant curricula and

improving education quality, providing financial support to struggling families and overcoming conflict repercussions by increasing education opportunities, such as scholarships for marginalized groups. Most importantly, the political will to bring about real change in education is required.

**Figure 83.** Proportion of children, aged 3-6 years, who have never been to school by location and wealth, latest available data (percentage)



Source: World Inequality Database on Education.

## N. Use of information and communication technologies

The Internet is a worldwide public computer network. It provides access to a number of communication services including the world wide web, and carries e-mail, news and entertainment and data files, irrespective of the device used. The advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs), meaning the Internet, mobile telephony, social media, blogs, etc., represent a revolution in the way people interact with each other, access services, work and news by acting as a facilitator for easier, faster, wider communication and access to information for all. These developments have a strong potential to contribute to the empowerment of women, as well as for citizens as a whole.<sup>33</sup>

Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

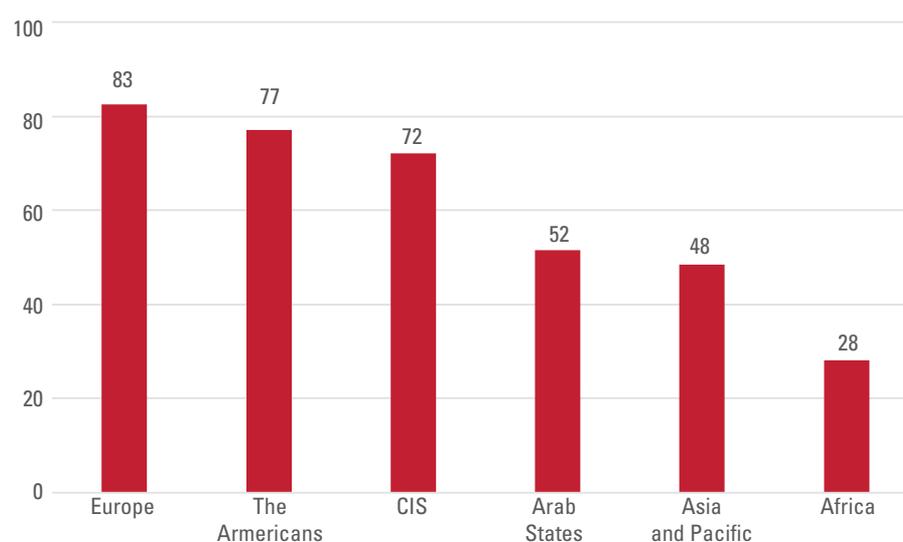


According to International Telecommunication Union (ITU), in developed countries, slow and steady growth increased the percentage of population using the Internet from 53 per cent in 2005 to 87 per cent in 2019. In developing countries, growth has been much steeper, increasing from 8 per cent in 2005 to 47 per cent at the

end of 2019. According to ITU, use of Internet increased in the Arab States more than six times from 8 per cent in 2005 to 52 per cent in 2019 **Figure 84**.

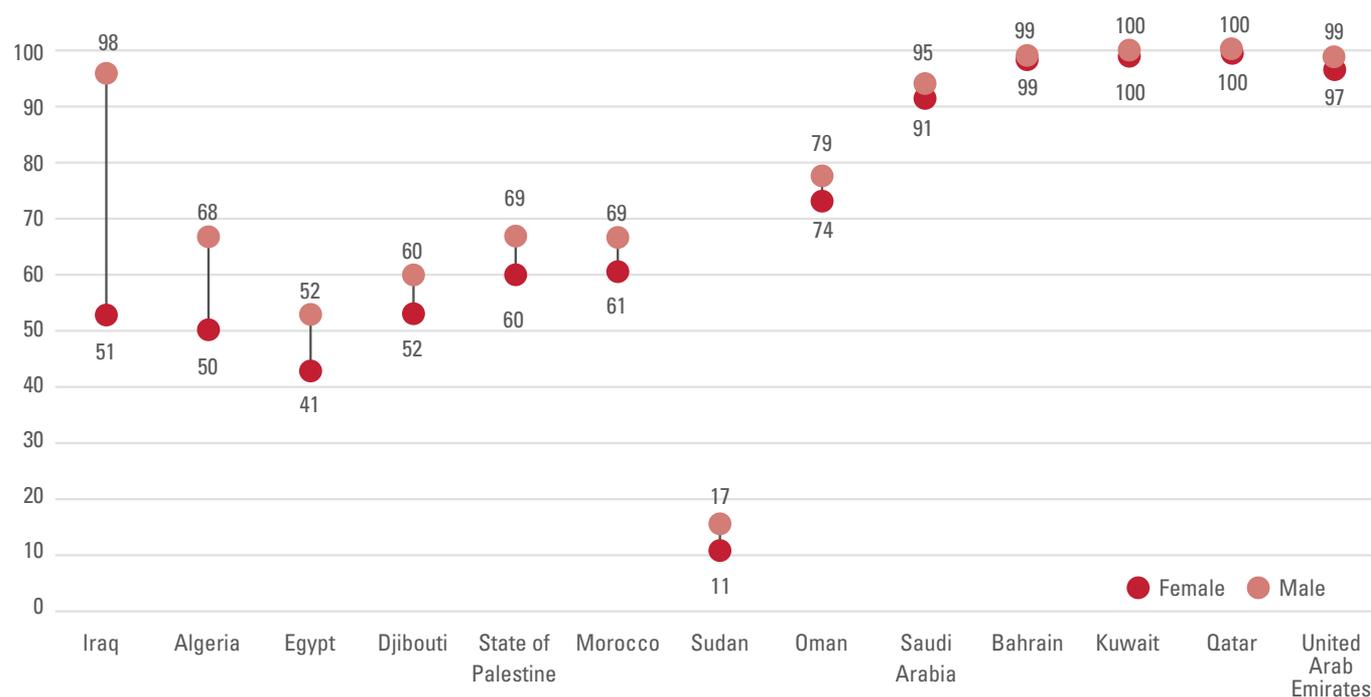
In the majority of Arab countries gender gap in Internet use is in favour of males. Gender gap was greatest in Iraq at 47 percentage points; the number of males using the internet was 98 per cent, compared to only 51 per cent of females. Algeria followed with a gender gap at 18 percentage points (females 50% and males 68%), then Egypt at 11 percentage points (females 41% and males 52%). Saudi Arabia had the lowest gender gap at 4 percentage points (females 91% and males 95%). There was no gender gap in Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. In contrast, the United Arab Emirates had a reverse gender gap in favour of females at 2 percentage points (females 99% and males 97%) **Figure 85**.

**Figure 84.** Proportion of individuals using the Internet by region, 2019 (percentage)



Source: ITU World Telecommunication, ICT Indicators database.

**Figure 85.** Gender gap in using the Internet, latest available data (percentage)

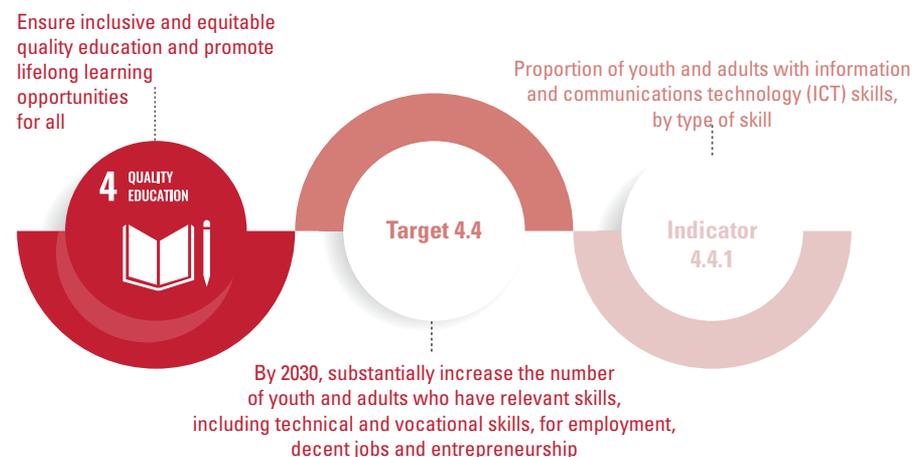


Source: ITU World Telecommunication, ICT Indicators database.

## O. Information and communications skills

ICT skills determine the effective use of information and communication technology. The lack of such skills continues to be one of the key barriers keeping people, and in particular women, from fully benefitting from the potential of information and communication technologies.<sup>34</sup>

Data for Saudi Arabia show a wide gender gap at 30 percentage points in skills related to finding, downloading, installing and configuring software (SOFT) and 22 percentage points in skills related to connecting and installing new devices (INST). Qatar, on the other hand, reported a reverse gender

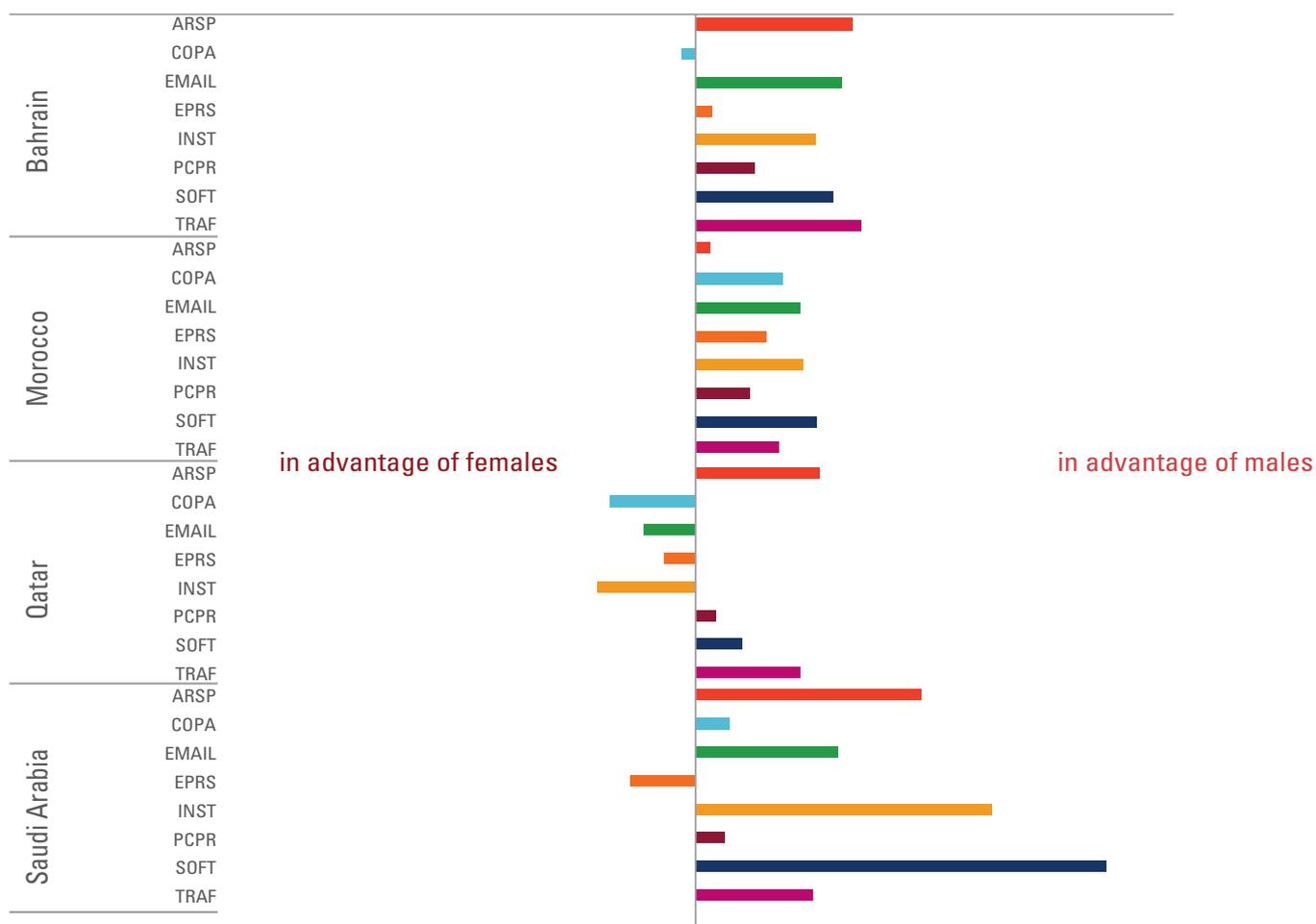


gap at 7 percentage points in the INST skills in favour of women, and 6 percentage points in using copy and paste tools to duplicate or move information within a document (COPA) **Figure 86.**

The narrowest gender gaps were in Bahrain at 1 percentage point in

skills related to creating electronic presentations with a presentation software (EPRS) and in Morocco at 1 percentage point in skills related to using basic arithmetic formula in a spreadsheet (ARSP) **Figure 86.**

**Figure 86.** Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills by type of skill, latest available data



Source: ITU World Telecommunication, ICT Indicators database.

Type of skills	
<b>ARSP</b>	Using basic arithmetic formula in a spreadsheet
<b>COPA</b>	Using copy and paste tools to duplicate or move information within a document
<b>EMAIL</b>	Sending e-mails with attached files
<b>EPRS</b>	Creating electronic presentations with presentation software
<b>INST</b>	Connecting and installing new devices
<b>PCPR</b>	Writing a computer program using a specialized programming language
<b>SOFT</b>	Finding, downloading, installing and configuring software
<b>TRAF</b>	Transferring files between a computer and other devices
<b>LITE</b>	Literacy
<b>NUME</b>	Numeracy