

● Introduction

Why gender statistics are so important for the 2030 Agenda?

“The global development agenda should seek not only to address and monitor the elimination of specific gender gaps, but also to transform the structural factors that underpin the widespread persistence of gender inequalities, gender-based violence, discrimination and unequal development progress between women and men, girls and boys. The empowerment of women and girls and the protection of their rights should be centre-pieces of the post-2015 agenda”. UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, Realizing the Future We Want for All, Report to the Secretary-General, New York, June 2012.

To achieve real and sustainable development for all, it is important to expose the gaps, injustice and violence for those people most marginalized and vulnerable to identify where social and economic change needs to be made. Women and girls, who represent half of the world’s population, have not only been marginalized, but also exploited and harmed, mostly because they are not empowered to fully share and benefit from developmental efforts. Women’s and girls’ advancement, equality and empowerment are central to achieve sustainable development for all.

The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, in 1995 witnessed the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) which provides a significant and comprehensive mandate for governments to ensure gender equality and women’s empowerment and addresses core development concerns. Most importantly, the BPfA identified 12 critical action areas to empower women and achieve gender equality that, ever since, have provided guidance worldwide, including in the Arab States. This platform was also one of the first to provide a clear mandate for the production and use of gender statistics. BPfA Strategic objective H.3 calls upon countries to “generate and disseminate gender disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation”.

The Beijing Platform: 12 critical areas

- Women and poverty
- Education and training of women
- Women and health
- Violence against women
- Women and armed conflict
- Women and the economy
- Women in power and decision-making
- Institutional mechanisms
- Human rights of women
- Women and the media
- Women and the environment
- The girl child

Arab States have recognized the importance of data in monitoring the progress towards the SDGs, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In May 2008, member countries of the Economic and Social Commission of Western Asia (ESCWA) adopted resolution 286 (XXV) on gender statistics for equality and empowerment of women which calls upon countries to collect, analyse and disseminate gender indicators with detailed information to assist in the formulation of gender-related and gender-sensitive policies and programmes. This is a clear commitment to intensify efforts to strengthen statistical capacities and to disaggregate data.¹ Improving the availability and use of gender statistics to inform policy is crucial for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Gender analysis that reveals differences and similarities between women and men, girls and boys relies on disaggregated data. Issues can be examined by a range of characteristics – age, geographic location, marital status, education level, employment status and the list goes on. Investing in gender statistics will result in better quality statistics to support informed decisions in all development fields.

This report on Arab Gender Gaps comes at a critical moment as discussion on achieving sustainable development for all in the region intensifies, propelled by the need for more inclusive societies to transform the world. The Report provides critical information through gender-equality indicators to help fast track progress in the Arab world for a more gender-equitable society including those indicators in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It evaluates women's and girls' status compared to that of men and boys to identify challenges and impediments that our societies face in becoming more inclusive in social, economic and environmental contexts.

The Arab Gender Gap report is divided into nine chapters and includes more than 200 indicators illustrated by more than 200 charts and tables in addition to infographics. The first chapter is an introduction to the Arab States through a gender lens and underscores the importance of gender equality, women's empowerment and leaving no one behind.

Chapter two sets the scene on population and family life. Chapter three is on health and well-being, reproductive health and health of children and adolescents. Chapter four covers persons with disabilities and the gaps that exist between persons with and without disabilities in old age, education and labour. Chapter five presents gender gaps in all levels of education including literacy and out-of-school children in the Arab States. Chapter six presents information on the gender gap at work and provides information on the enabling environment in countries, labour force participation, work in different sectors, paid and unpaid work and unemployment.

Chapter seven is on power and decision-making and includes information on voting rights, gaps at ministerial and parliamentary levels, in local government and judiciary positions and includes data on women and men as lawyers, managers and board members. Chapter eight presents information on violence against women and girls, particularly on early marriage, female genital mutilation, spousal violence, trafficking and child labour. Finally, chapter nine covers the environment and access to safe water, sanitation and electricity.

The report, where the latest data were available, has used disaggregation by age, wealth and location to provide in-depth information on dimensions of inequality that contribute to the gaps that exist between females and males. Information on youth have been fully utilized as well, wherever data existed, to reveal gaps among adolescent females and males in the Arab States.

The report also draws on various sources of data, national and international, to make the case for the Arab gender gap. The complete set of data are also made available on the Statistics Division Gender Data Portal link: <https://data.unescwa.org/>

1. ESCWA, Role of official statistics in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region: Proposed Arab regional action plan for sustainable development data, E/ESCWA/SD/2017/IG.1/4 (Part II), (Beirut, 2017).