

# The Arab Gender Gap Report 2020

## Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals

Key messages and recommendations



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life





Shared Prosperity **Dignified Life**



## **VISION**

ESCWA, an innovative catalyst for a stable, just and flourishing Arab region

## **MISSION**

Committed to the 2030 Agenda, ESCWA's passionate team produces innovative knowledge, fosters regional consensus and delivers transformational policy advice. Together, we work for a sustainable future for all.





## Introduction

The promise of leaving no one behind holds the potential to transform the lives of women and girls in the Arab region. However, gender inequalities manifest themselves in each dimension of sustainable development. Despite significant progress in recent decades, the human rights of women and girls are still far from being a reality. Daunting challenges hinder their ability to enjoy a healthy lifestyle and engage in education, work, and public life. The 'last mile' remains to be covered before girls and women can enjoy full equality and realize their rights.

## Daunting challenges

hinder the ability of women and girls to enjoy a healthy lifestyle and engage in



Education



Work

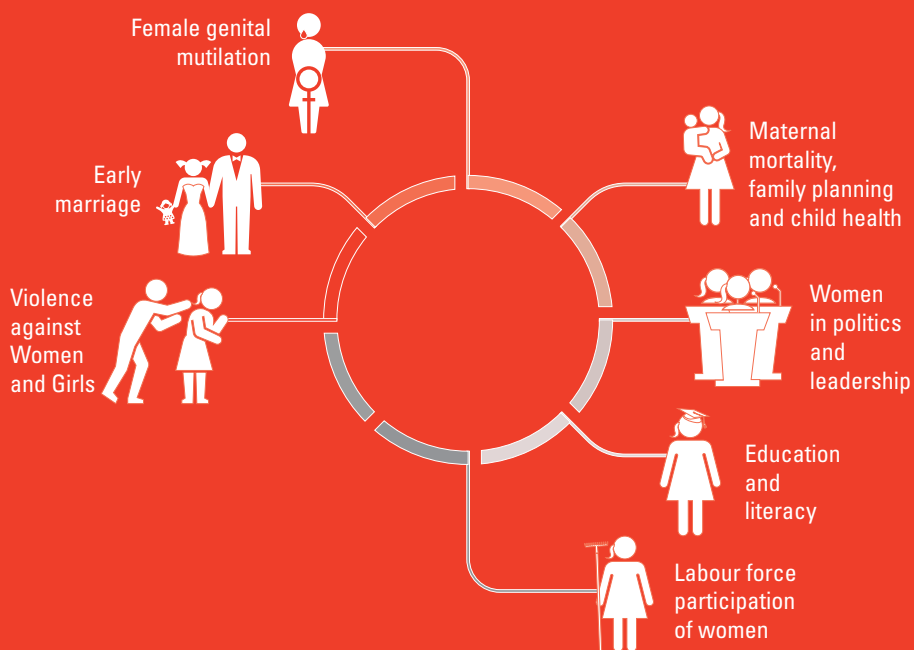


Public life

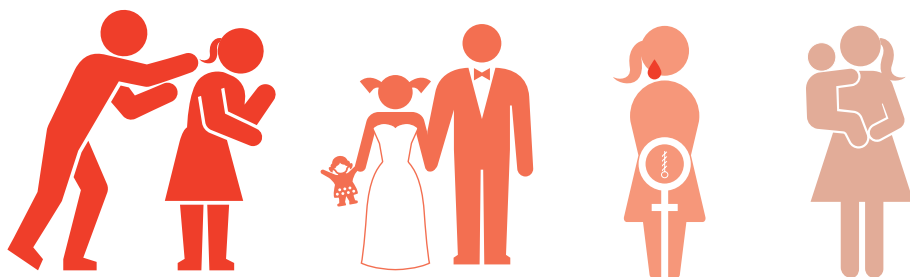


A network diagram at the top of the page consists of numerous grey dots connected by thin grey lines. One dot on the left side is highlighted in red.

## Arab countries under a gender lens



Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is a central driver for achieving sustainable development. Women and girls play an essential role in contributing to safeguarding the environment and to social and economic development. Despite progress in some areas, Arab countries face major challenges in achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls.



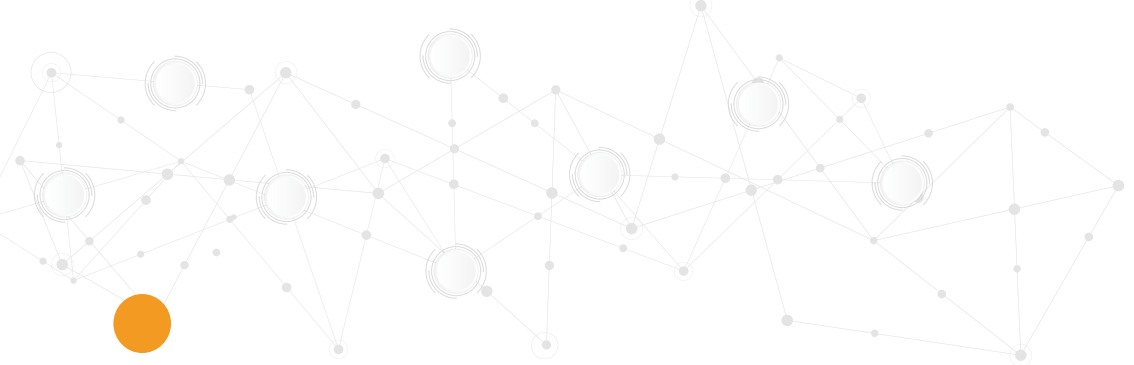
Violence against women and girls has been identified as the highest priority in the fight for gender equality across the region. Harmful practices, such as early marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), remain a significant problem in some countries, driving up the fertility rate and maternal mortality, respectively, and impacting the health and education of young women.

Moreover, early marriage and high levels of teenage pregnancy, lower life expectancy, poor health outcomes, and higher poverty are challenges facing several Arab countries.

Another major concern is a lack of women's representation in political and economic spheres. Women's share of seats in national parliaments is among the lowest in the world, and there are major gaps in labour force participation and economic empowerment.

Gender norms - the roles that women and men, girls and boys are expected to play in a society – differ across and between countries, and are typically shaped by long-held customs and beliefs. As new technologies change the way people live, and as people become more educated and information more accessible, gender norms change. Consequently, using official statistics to monitor gender concerns is extremely important.





# Population

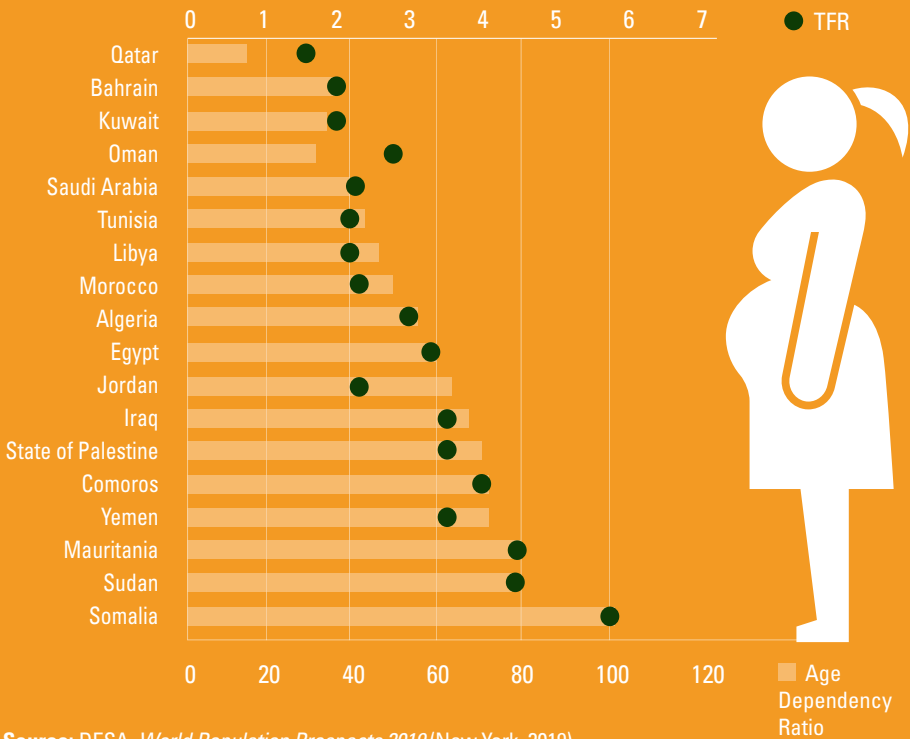
The Arab region has witnessed a large decrease in the mean age for childbearing, resulting mostly from an increase in early marriages among girls from poor families and with less education, mostly in conflict-affected or post-conflict countries.



Source: DESA, Population Division, "World Marriage Data 2017".

The age dependency ratio provides an insight into the burden of unpaid care work, which most often falls on women owing to ascribed gender roles. The age dependency ratio was highest among countries with the lowest GDP in the region. High fertility rates in these countries further contributed to high dependency ratios.

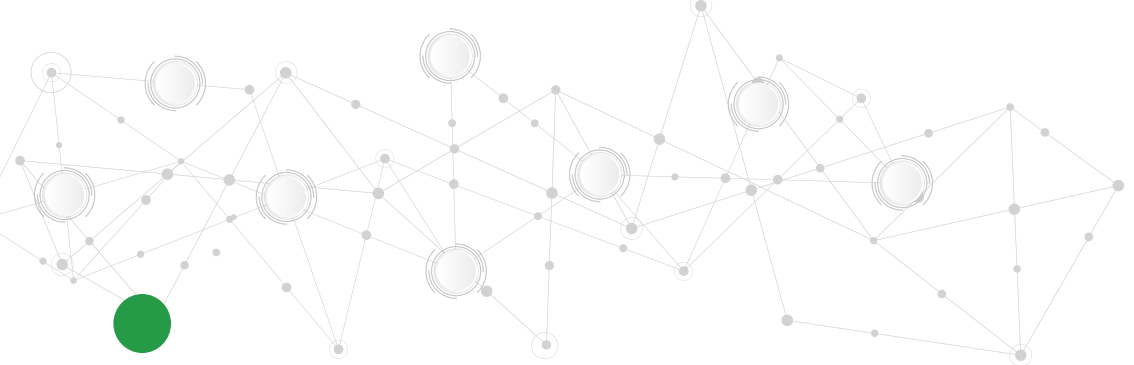
Age dependency ratio and total fertility rate (children per woman), latest available data



Source: DESA, *World Population Prospects 2019* (New York, 2019).

### Recommendations

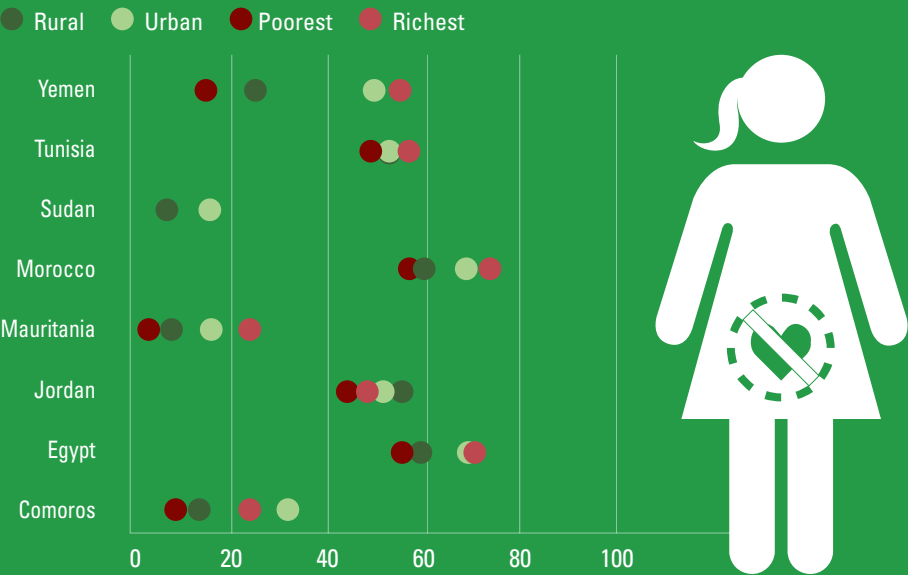
- Develop and implement a comprehensive awareness plan on child marriage and its negative side effects on individuals, families, children and society as a whole.
- Raise or enforce the minimum age of marriage, expand girls’ secondary school enrolment or retention, and provide school-based sexual education.
- Offer financial support and family guidance and counselling to families that seek to marry off their young daughters owing to poverty.



# Health and well-being

Arab women witness various challenges in their life cycles. The female advantage in life expectancy at old age does not necessarily mean that women are healthier than men. Arab women’s fertility has declined but remained relatively high above the world average. Fertility rates exceeded three children per women in countries with unmet needs of more than 20 per cent. Utilization of health facilities for childbirth and access to contraceptives still depend on the level of education and the socioeconomic status of women, with marked variations between urban and rural areas.

Proportion of married women currently using any method of contraception by location and wealth, latest available data (percentage)

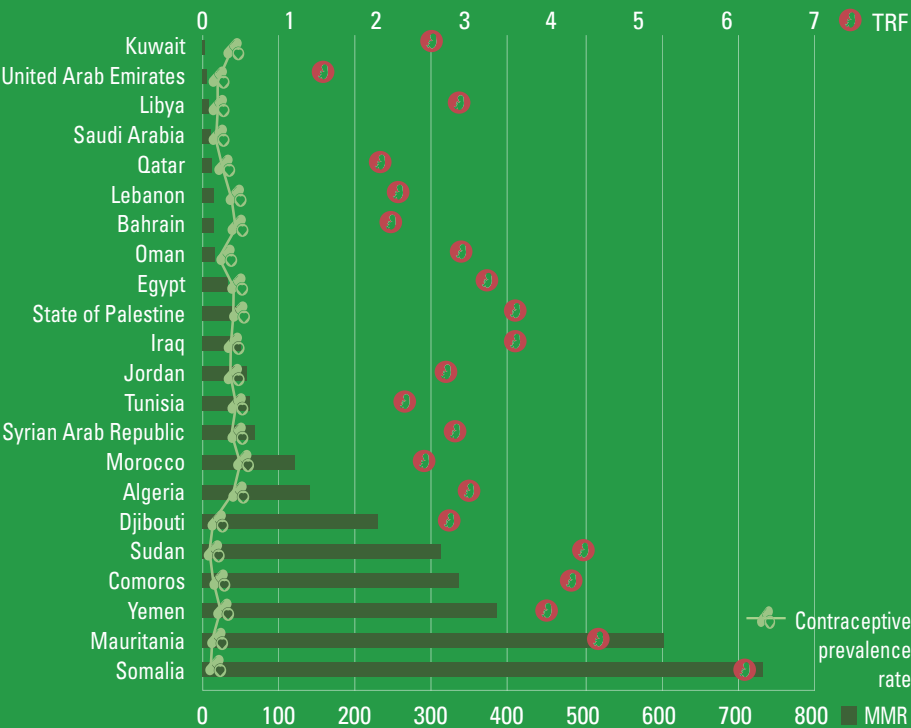


Source: ICF 2015, The DHS Program STATcompiler; and data for Tunisia from: MICS 2018.



Women living in rural areas are also disadvantaged in terms of using any method of contraceptives compared with urban women. High fertility rates occur in parallel with low contraceptive prevalence and high maternal mortality rates.

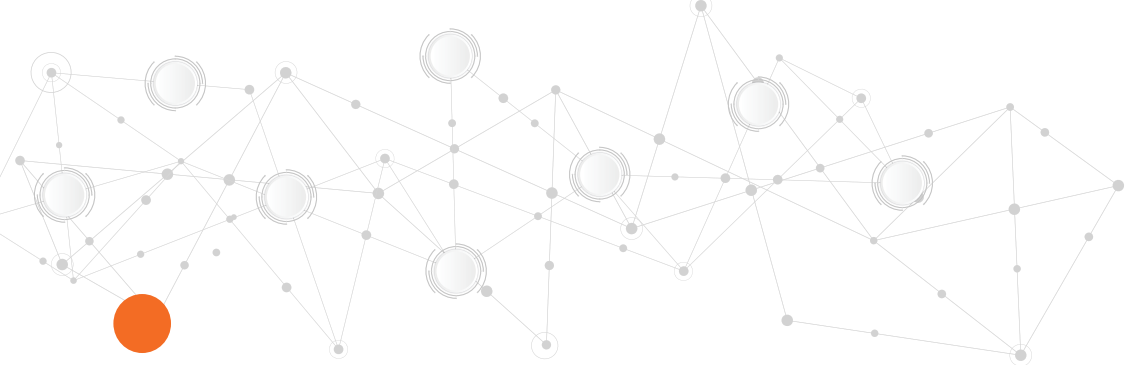
Prevalence of contraceptive use among currently married women, aged 15-49 years, TFR (children per women) and MMR (deaths per 100,000 live births)



**Source:** DESA, Population Division, “World Contraceptive Use 2019” (contraceptive use); DESA, *World Population Prospects 2019* (New York, 2019) (TFR); and WHO, Global Health Observatory data repository (last updated on 18 October 2019) (MMR).

### Recommendations

- Issue legislation and policies for girls and women covering the entire life cycle, and increase public investment in health and reproductive health services to ensure accessibility of all to quality health services.
- Provide direct support and expand access to effective contraception or family planning through government-run facilities.
- Adopt policies or programmes aimed at improving the reproductive and sexual health of adolescents.

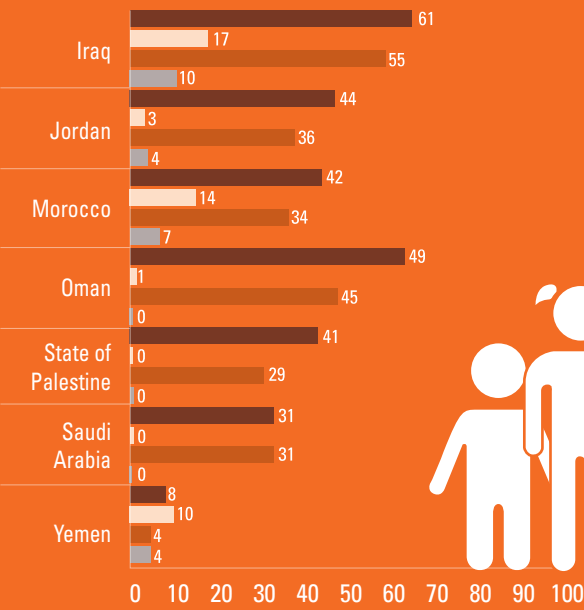


# Disability

Disadvantaged in both education and work, person with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty. Many children and young people with disabilities remain excluded from education. In all countries, persons with disabilities have lower literacy rates than persons without disabilities. The illiteracy gap among young women with and without disabilities is wider than among young men with and without disabilities.

Youth illiteracy rate of persons aged 15-24 years by disability status, latest available data (percentage)

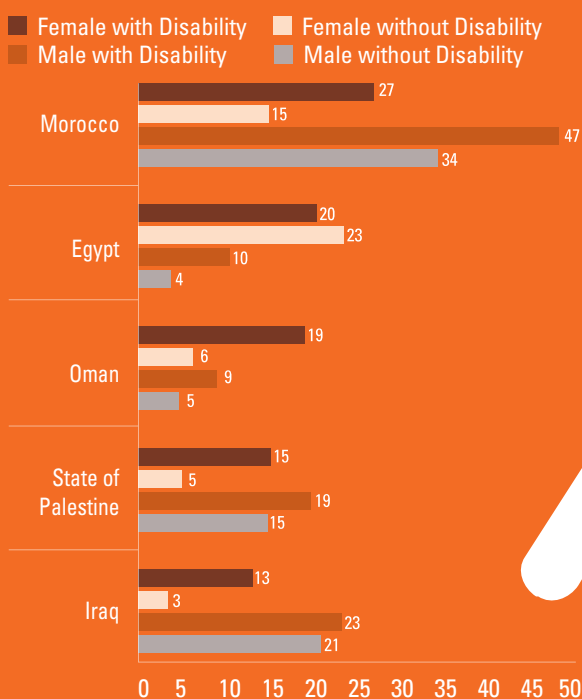
- Female with Disability
- Female without Disability
- Male with Disability
- Male without Disability



Source: Calculated by ESCWA from national statistical offices.

Women with disabilities are less likely to be part of the labour force given that their levels of inactivity are higher than those of men with disabilities. They are also more likely to be unemployed than men with disabilities. Furthermore, persons with disabilities are more likely to be in vulnerable employment. In almost all countries, persons with disabilities are more likely to be own-account workers than persons without disabilities.

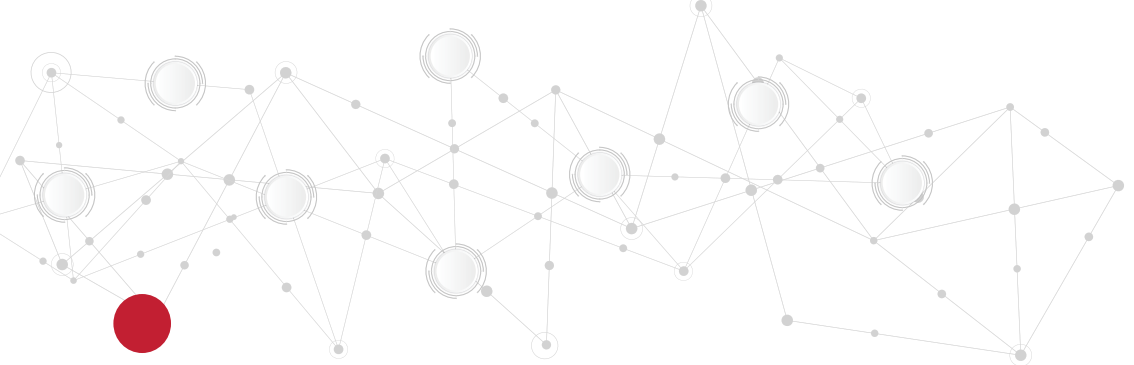
Proportion of own-account persons with and without disabilities, latest available data (percentage)



**Source:** Calculated by ESCWA from national statistical offices.

### Recommendations

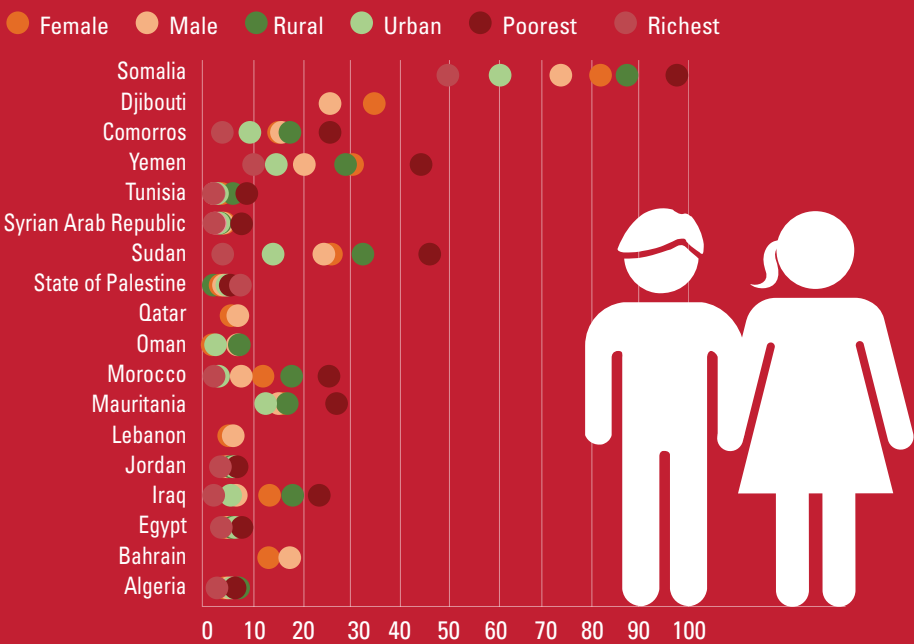
- Provide free appropriate public education for persons with disabilities, and assisted remote learning in cases where the environment is not accessible or safe for girls.
- Support accessible and safe working environments, especially for women, and ensure that certificates from vocational training centres are recognized by ministries of education and are valuable on the labour market.



# 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.

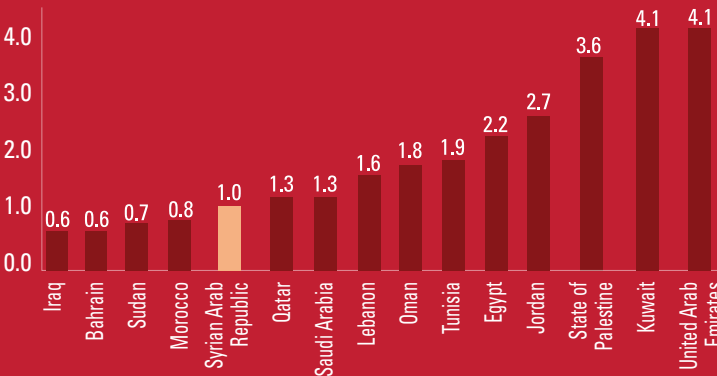
Out-of-school rate for children of primary education by location and wealth quintile, latest available data (percentage)



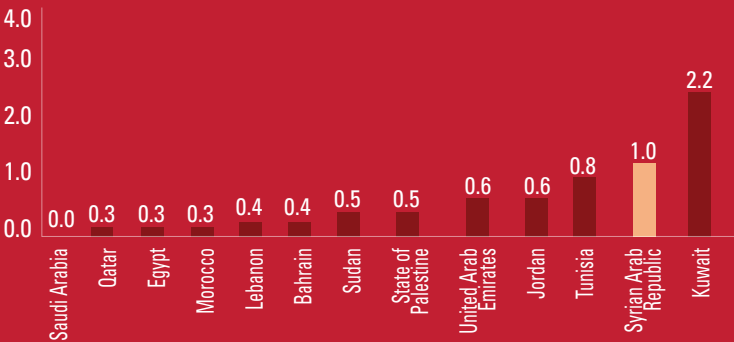
**Source:** UNICEF Global databases 2017 based on MICS, DHS and other national household surveys (last updated on December 2017).

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.

Gender Parity Index of graduates by specialization in science majors, latest available data



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



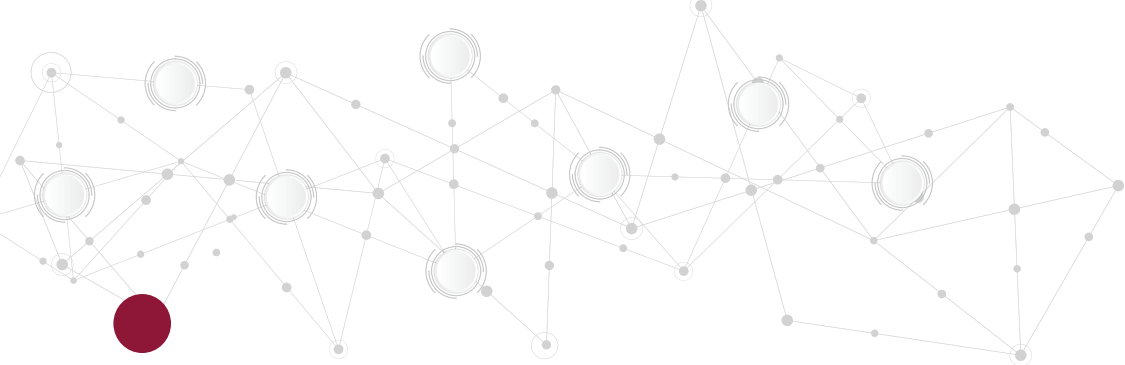
Source: E/ESCWA/SD/2019/TP.1.

### Recommendations

- Promote gender-equitable education systems and social protection measures, including cash transfers, to improve girls' transition to and retention in secondary school.
- Address discriminatory gender norms and harmful practices that deny girls access to school and quality learning. Remove gender

stereotyping from school curriculums and promote diversified curriculums.

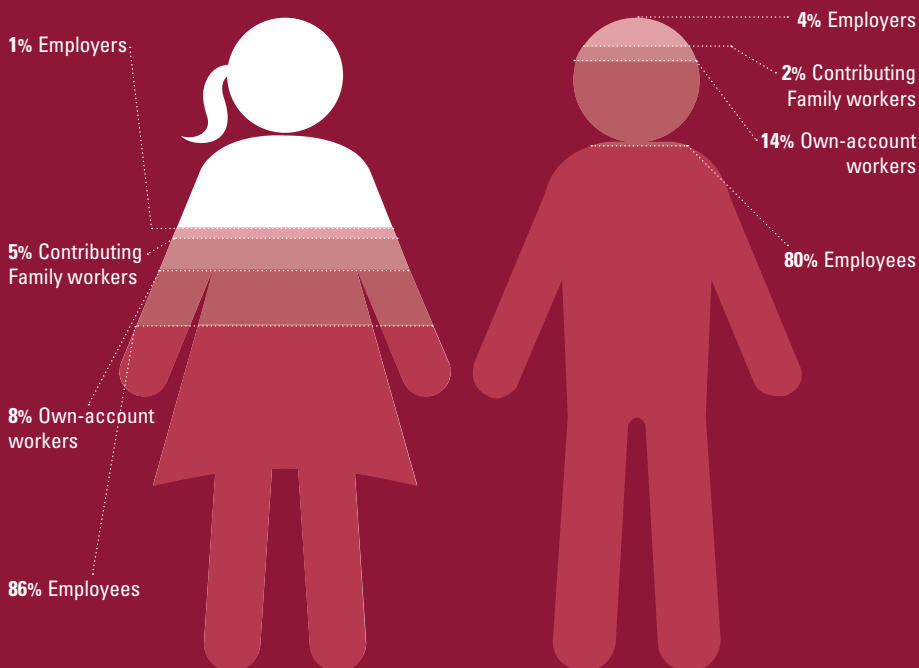
- Increase girls' access to vocational training in engineering fields and to specializations that are highly demanded in the labour market.
- Ensure women benefit fully from ICT, including equal access to ICT-related education, training and entrepreneurship opportunities.



## Work

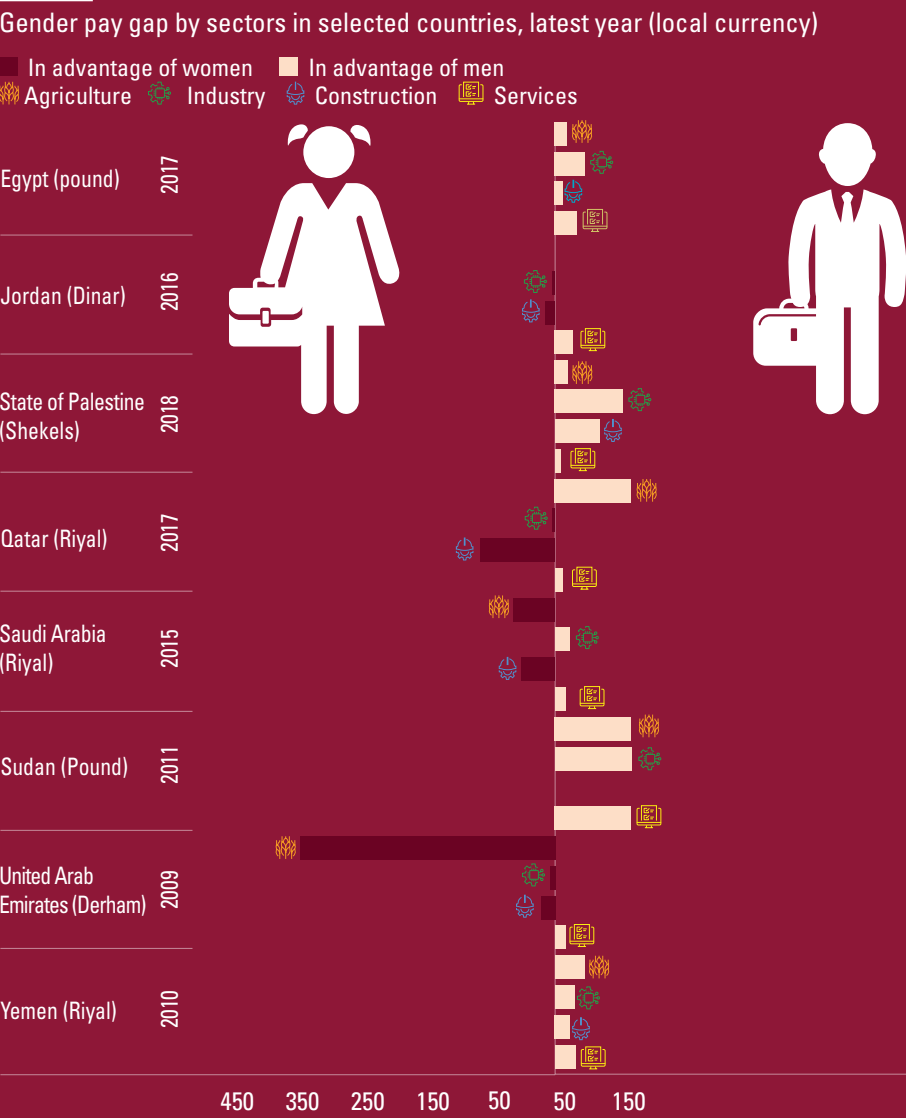
Women are more likely to be in vulnerable jobs. There are more contributing family workers than men, and more men employers than women. Women's highest labour force participation rate is the lowest rate recorded for men.

### Status in employment, Arab States 2019



**Source:** ILOStat database, “modelled estimates, November 2018” (last updated on 11 July 2019).

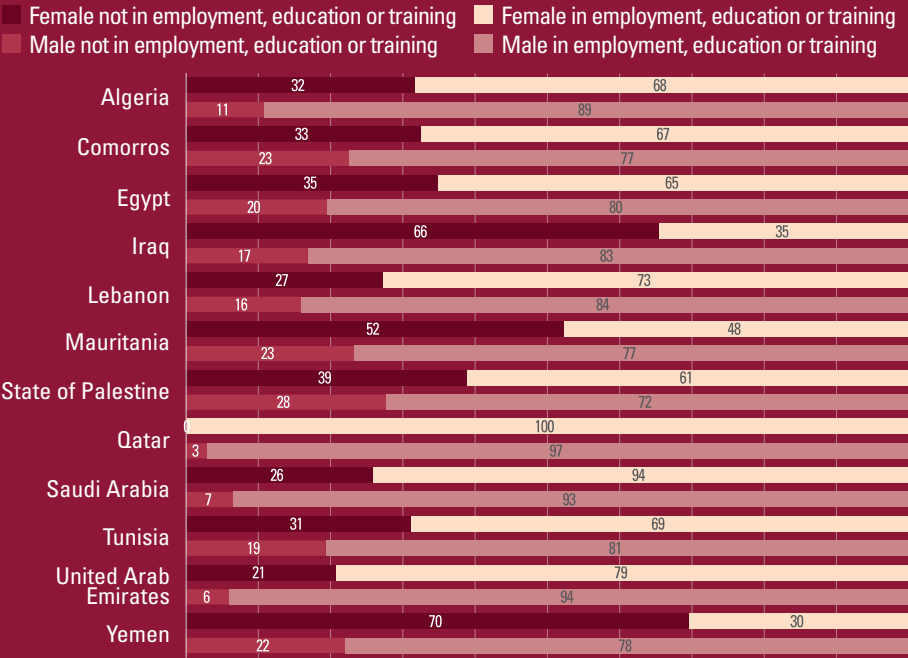
Women tend to be employed in lower wage jobs, resulting in gender inequalities in pay despite numerous changes in women’s economic behaviour and educational attainment.



**Source:** Data collected and calculated by ESCWA from ILO, LABORSTA.

Moreover, there are more young women than young men who are potentially disengaged and at risk of disaffection with society, suffering from long-term unemployment and risking forced early marriage.

NEET rate for youth aged 15-24 years, latest available data (percentage)

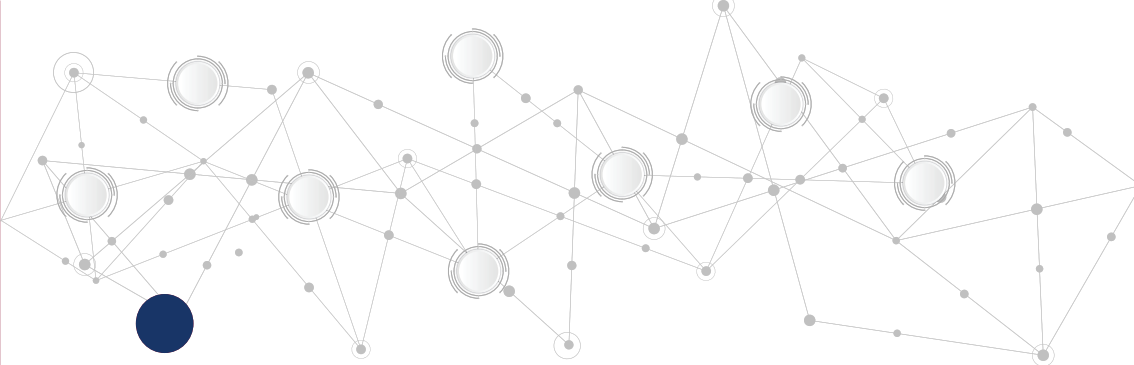


Source: UNSD, “SDG indicators”, Global SDG Indicators database.

### Recommendations

- Remove obstacles to young women’s participation in decent work.
- Support women’s transition into formal employment, and reform national laws to promote equal treatment of men and women in the labour market, including equal pay for equal work.
- Provide maternity and paternity leave to increase female participation in the labour force and reduce employers’ reluctance to hire, retain or promote pregnant workers.
- Tackle the burden of unpaid care work through the provision of affordable care services.
- Launch public campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes and effectively implement legislation for equal pay and against discrimination.
- Implement comprehensive youth programmes to re-engage disengaged young people, especially females, in employment, education or training.

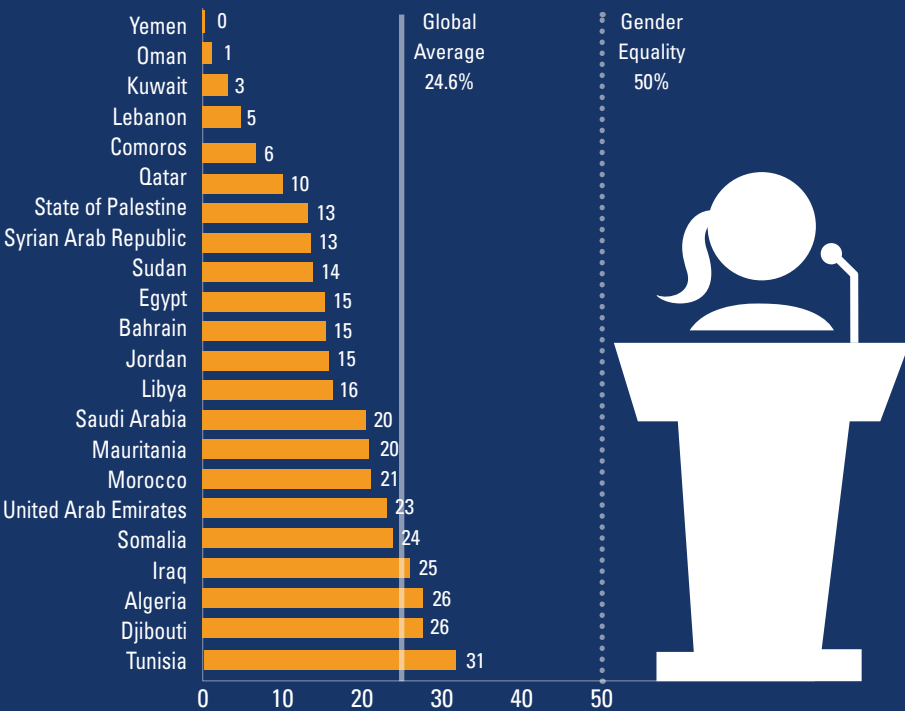




# Public life and decision-making

Women’s representation in political decision-making continues to rise, but is far from achieving equality. Women’s share in parliament has more than quadrupled since 2000; however, it is still below 20 per cent in the Arab region.

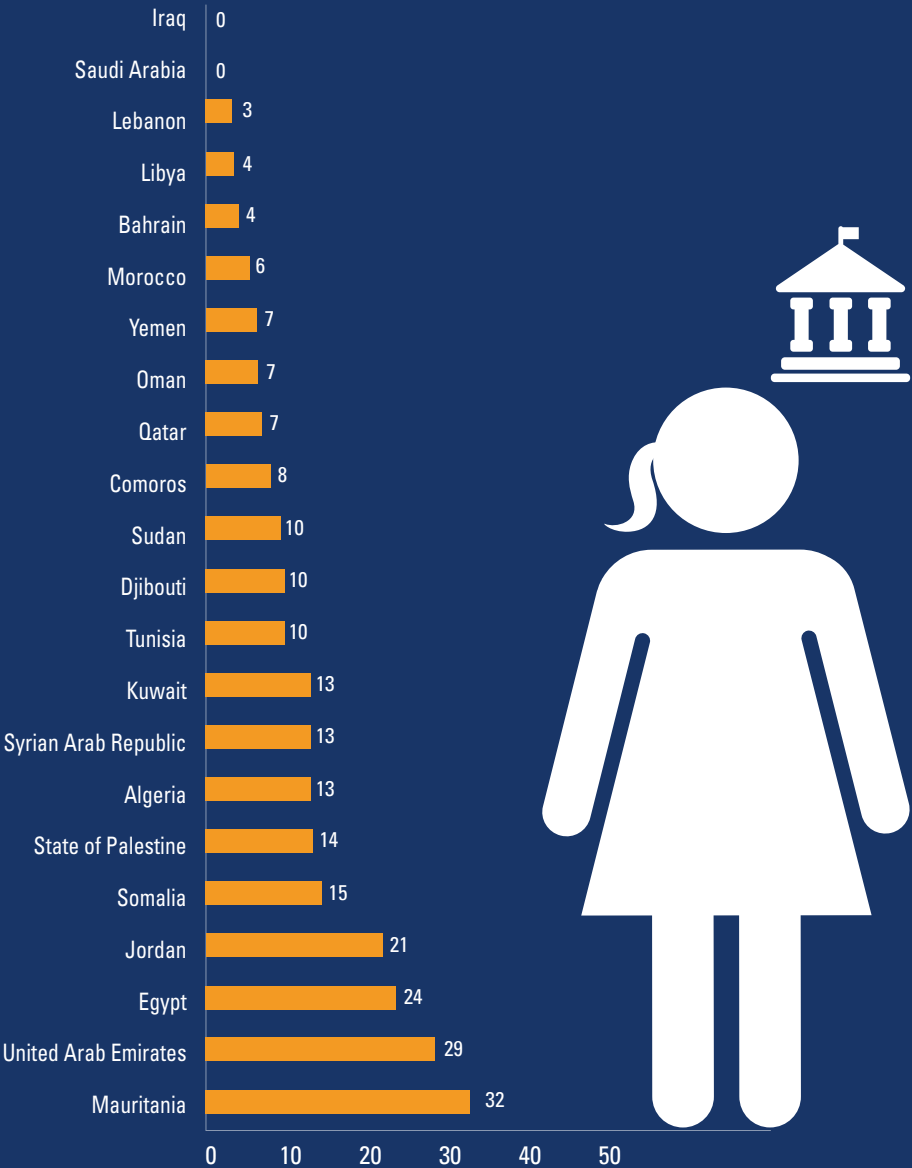
Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments, latest year (percentage)



Source: IPU, “Women in National Parliaments” (situation as of 1st January 2019).

Similarly, the proportion of women ministers does not exceed 20 per cent.

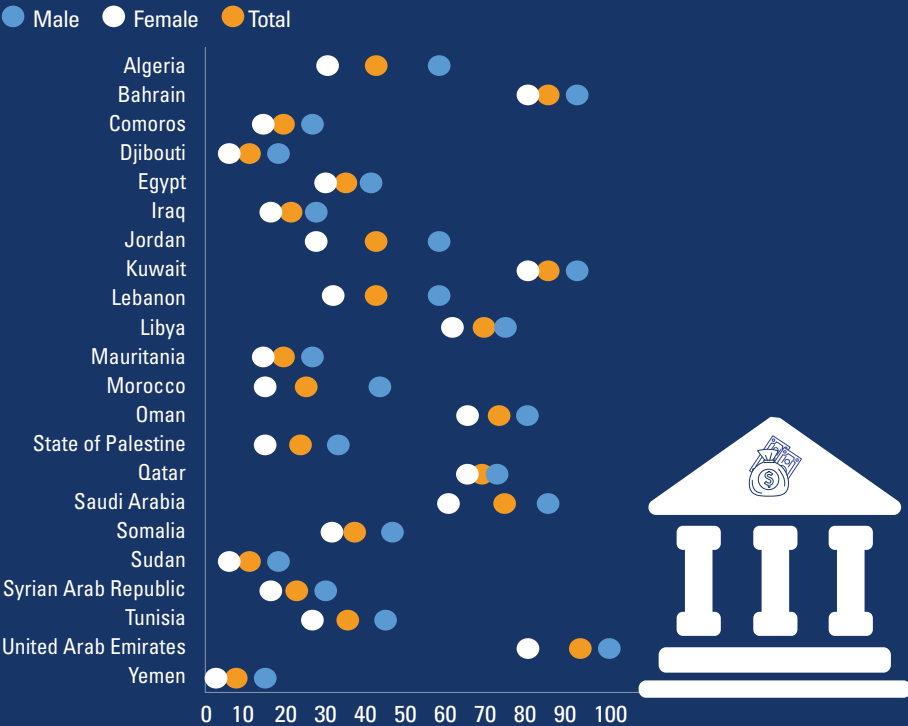
Share of women in government ministerial positions, 2019 (percentage)



**Source:** IPU, "Women in Politics: 2019" (situation as of 1st January 2019).

Having a bank account is an important starting point for people to access financial services. Women’s economic empowerment is still low given that the Arab region has the highest gender gap in globally in terms of holding a bank account.

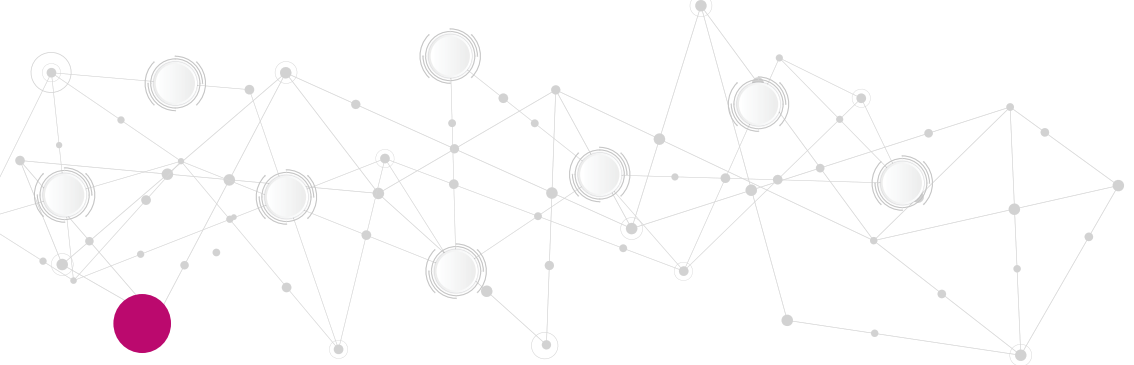
Proportion of adults, aged 15 years and older, with an account at a financial institution or mobile-money-service provider (percentage)



Source: World Bank, “Global Financial Inclusion Database”.

**Recommendations**

- Include quotas for women’s participation in leadership and decision-making positions, and enforce merit-based recruitment and promotion to ensure equal access for women to leadership positions.
- Adopt an integrated and multiple-entry-points approach, mainstream gender and women’s financial inclusion into national policy agendas, and support financial and digital literacy programmes for women and girls.
- Implement women’s entrepreneurship programmes to improve women’s access to finance and economic empowerment.



# Human rights of women and girls

Violence against women and girls continues to be an issue, and child marriage remains a widely ignored form of violence. Pregnancy and childbirth complications are the leading cause of death among 15 to 19 year-old girls. In all countries, adolescent birth rates were higher among uneducated and poorest girls.

Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women) by education and wealth, latest available data

● No education or primary   ● Secondary or higher   ● Poorest   ● Richest



Source: ICF 2015, The DHS Program STATcompiler.

The harmful practice of FGM impacts women and girls' health and wellbeing, and can result in death. FGM remains a significant problem in some countries, with the poorest girls and those living in rural areas at higher risk.

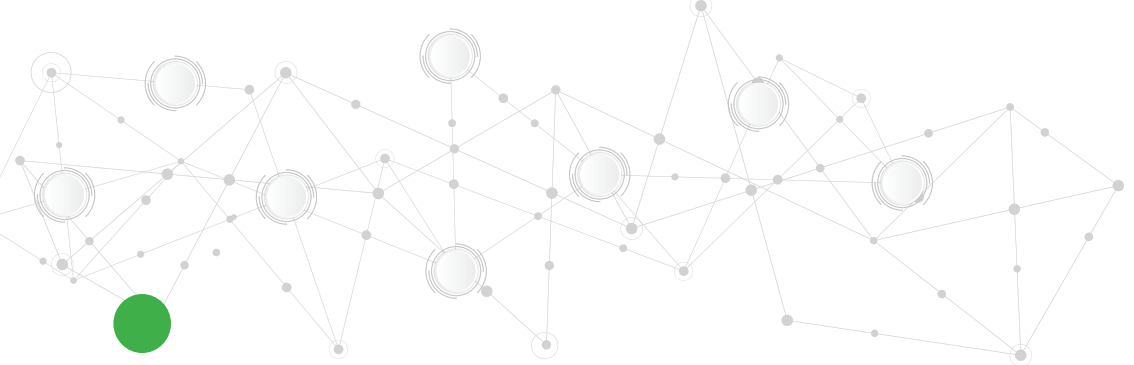
Proportion of women and girls who have undergone female genital mutilation by wealth quintile, latest available data (percentage)



**Source:** UNICEF global databases 2018, based on DHS, MICS and other nationally representative surveys (last updated on October 2018).

### Recommendations

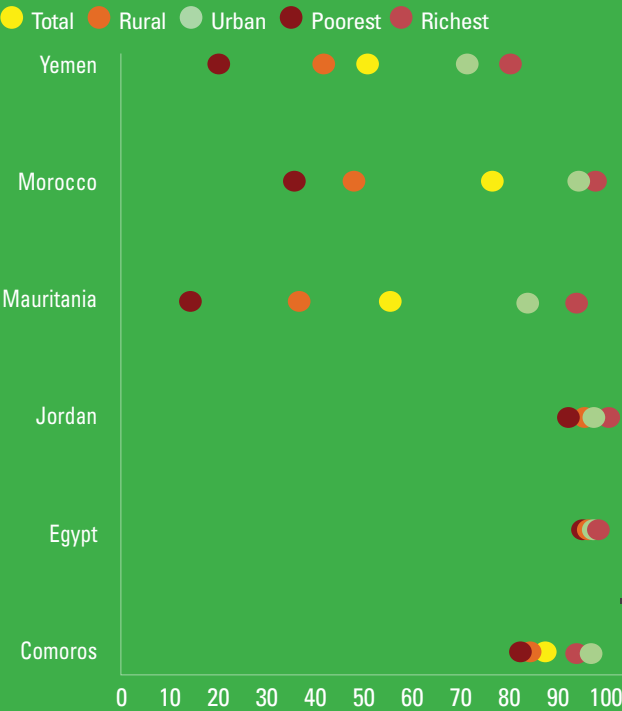
- Enact, implement and monitor legislation addressing all forms of violence against women, including child marriage and female genital mutilation.
- Institutionalize gender-sensitive planning and budgeting to ensure adequate allocation of resources.
- Establish human-rights based standards and procedures for the provision of services to survivors of violence.



# Environment

Lack of access to basic and improved water and sanitation services remains a challenge in many Arab countries, especially for poor households and those living in rural areas. Women and girls’ death attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene is higher than men’s.

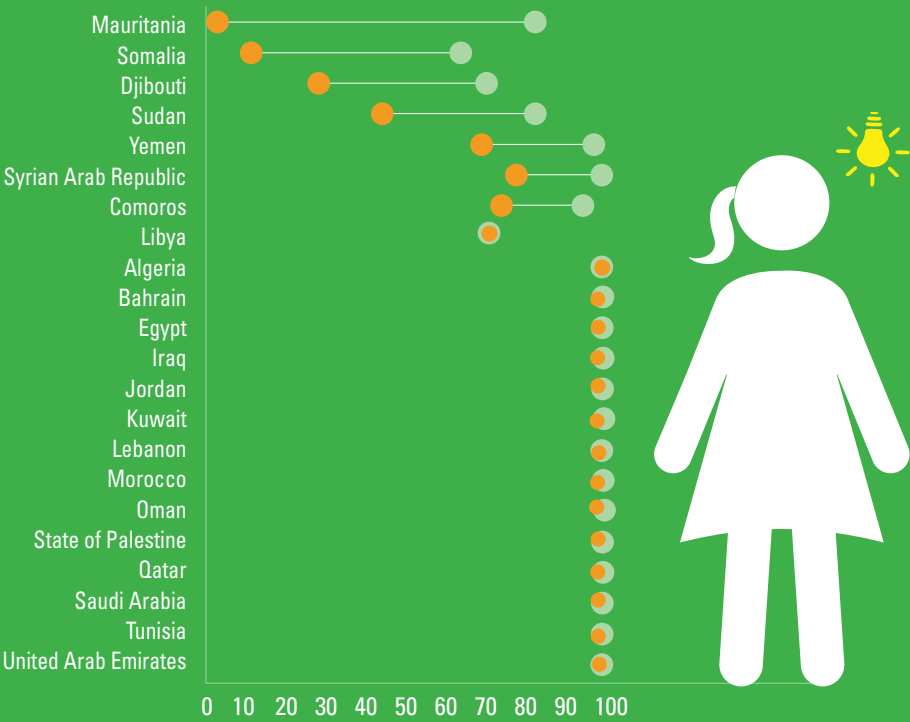
Population living in households using an improved water source by location and wealth, latest year (percentage)



Source: ICF 2015, The DHS Program STATcompiler.

Many still do not have full access to clean fuels and technology, and only a handful of countries have full access to electricity. The burden of not having access to those services falls more on women, because they are mostly responsible for cooking and domestic chores.

Gap between rural and urban areas of population with access to electricity, 2017 (percentage) ● Rural ● Urban



Source: World Bank, "Access to electricity (% of population), 2017", World Bank Data.

### Recommendations

- Incorporate water, sanitation, clean fuels and electricity programmes explicitly in national development strategies, and ensure that a gender perspective is mainstreamed in them.
- Prioritize clean-cooking fuels and technologies.





