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DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SITUATION OF ARAB WOMEN

**HEALTH, EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, POLITICAL
REPRESENTATION, CEDAW**

ARAB WOMEN AND HEALTH

- Arab women are living longer and healthier lives. Women and men in ESCWA member countries are generally expected to outlive their counterparts in non-ESCWA Arab countries by some 10 years.¹
- Between the periods 1990-1995 and 2000-2005, the life expectancy of women rose from 66 to 69.3 years, while that of men increased from 62.6 to 65.7 years.²
- The total fertility rate in the Arab region declined from 4.90 to 3.84 children per woman between the periods 1990-1995 and 2000-2005 as a result of the increase in family planning and health awareness.³
- Adolescent fertility is expected to decline in the Arab region from 49.86 births per 1,000 women in 1990-1995 to 36.79 per 1,000 women in 2005-2010.⁴
- During the same period, while significant variation occurred between countries, maternal mortality ratios (MMRs) declined throughout the region.
- During the period 1995-2001, a modest 67 per cent of all Arab women gave birth in the presence of skilled health personnel. More than 90 per cent of deliveries in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) were attended by such personnel, whereas only slightly more than half the deliveries in the least-developed countries (LDCs) had such access. In the Mashreq and Maghreb subregions, the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel was 67.1 and 71.7 per cent, respectively.⁵

MATERNAL MORTALITY RATIO PER 100,000 LIVE BIRTHS, 1995 AND 2000

	1995	2000
Mashreq countries	206	144.8
Maghreb countries	230.9	165.5
GCC countries	32	29.8
Arab LDCs	1 281.70	716.7

Sources: Compiled by ESCWA based on United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) database, and estimates by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

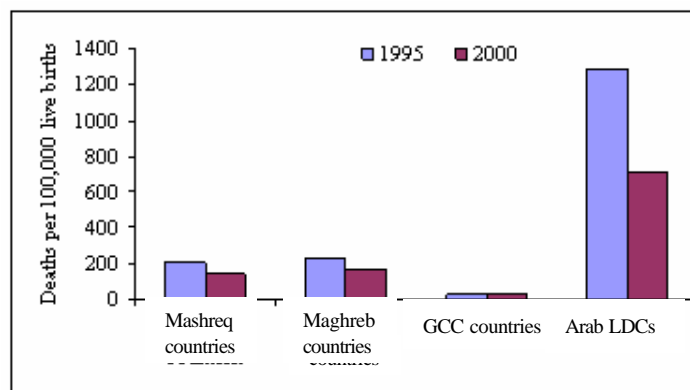
¹ ESCWA, "Where do Arab women stand in the development process: A gender-based statistical analysis" (E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/Booklet.1), p. 2.

² Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World population prospects: the 2004 revision* (2005).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) databases, which are available at: www.unfpa.org/swp/

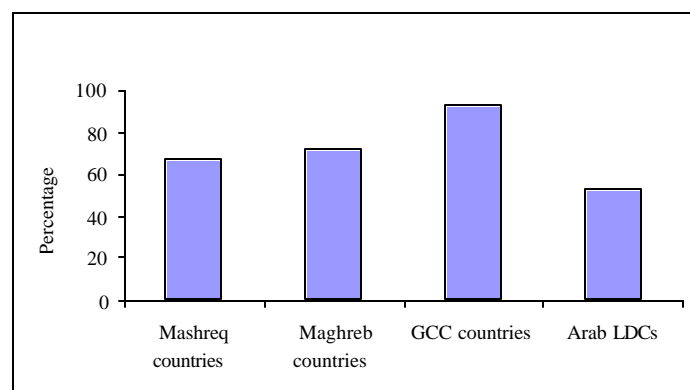
⁵ *Ibid.*



PROPORTION OF BIRTHS ATTENDED BY SKILLED HEALTH PERSONNEL, 1995-2001

	1995-2001
Mashreq countries	67.1
Maghreb countries	71.7
GCC countries	93.3
Arab LDCs	53.1

Source: Compiled by ESCWA based on UNSD database, and estimates by WHO and UNICEF.



ARAB WOMEN AND EDUCATION

- The gender parity index (GPI), which measures the ratio of girls to boys, increased between 1990 and 2002 from 0.79 to 0.90 in primary education, from 0.76 to 0.91 in secondary education, and from 0.60 to 0.85 in tertiary education. However, the Arab region is still facing a number of challenges with regard to the education of girls and women.
- Women's literacy in the region is low in absolute value and lower than that of men.
- Between 1990 and 2002, the adult literacy rate of Arab women rose from 35 to 49.6 per cent, while the corresponding rate for Arab men increased from 63.5 to 72 per cent.⁶

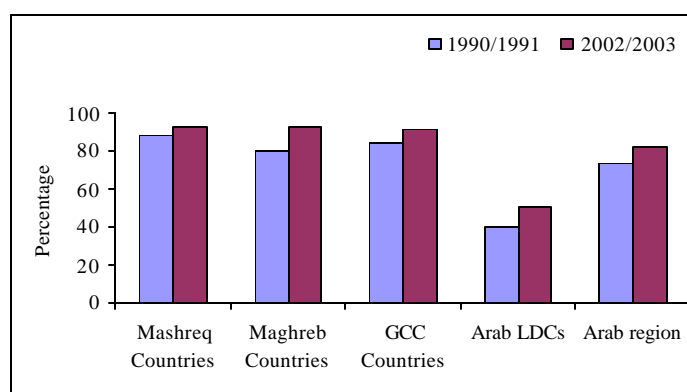
⁶ ESCWA, "Where do Arab women stand in the development process" (E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/Booklet.1).

- Despite this advancement, 44 million adult women (aged over 15 years and representing almost half of the female population of the Arab region) could not read or write in 2002.
- The gender gap in youth literacy rates is wider than that of adults. Out of the 13 million illiterate young people in the region, 8.5 million are women.⁷
- The region continues to suffer from high school drop-out rates for girls.

NET ENROLMENT IN PRIMARY EDUCATION, 1990/1991 AND 2002/2003
(Percentages)

	1990/1991	2002/2003
Mashreq countries	88.6	93.2
Maghreb countries	80.2	93.5
GCC countries	84	91.6
Arab LDCs	39.9	51
Arab region	74	82

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS) and ESCWA social statistics datasets.

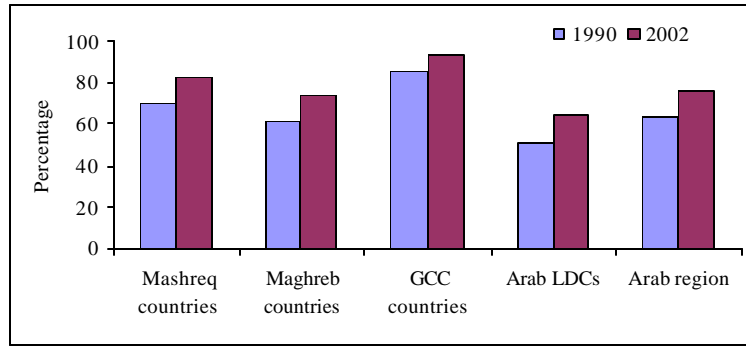


YOUTH LITERACY RATES IN THE ARAB REGION, 1990 AND 2002
(Percentages)

	1990	2002
Mashreq countries	70.3	83.2
Maghreb countries	60.9	73.6
GCC countries	85.8	93.9
Arab LDCs	51	65.1
Arab region	63.9	76.3

Source: UNESCO, which is available at: www.uis.unesco.org/.

⁷ UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) databases, which are available at: www.uis.unesco.org/.



ARAB WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT

- Women's economic activity rate in the Arab region, which was estimated at 29 per cent in 2000, is one of the lowest in the world.⁸
- Women's economic activity rate is higher in the Arab LDCs, where agriculture is an important sector and a large employer of women.
- The lowest economic activity rates prevail in the higher-income countries; however, in Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, more than one-third of women aged 15 years and over were economically active in the period 1995-2002.⁹ This relatively high rate can be attributed to the large presence of female migrant workers in those countries.
- Women's economic activity rates in the Mashreq and Maghreb subregions are relatively high, given the predominantly services-oriented nature of those economies.
- Women's share of paid employment is smaller than that of men. In 2001, women's share of non-agricultural wage employment in the Arab region ranged from a low of 7 per cent in Yemen to a high of 27 per cent in Morocco.¹⁰
- In the Arab region, women represented two-fifths of the labour force in the agricultural sector, one-tenth of those in the industrial sector, and at least 70 per cent of those in the services sector.¹¹
- At 21 per cent, the unemployment rate among Arab youth in 2004 was more than double that of adults. In that same year, more than 24 per cent of young women were unable to find a job.
- While women are more prone to unemployment than men, gender inequality in the labour market is manifested in other significant ways, including wage gaps, occupational segregation and women's disproportionate representation in informal employment.

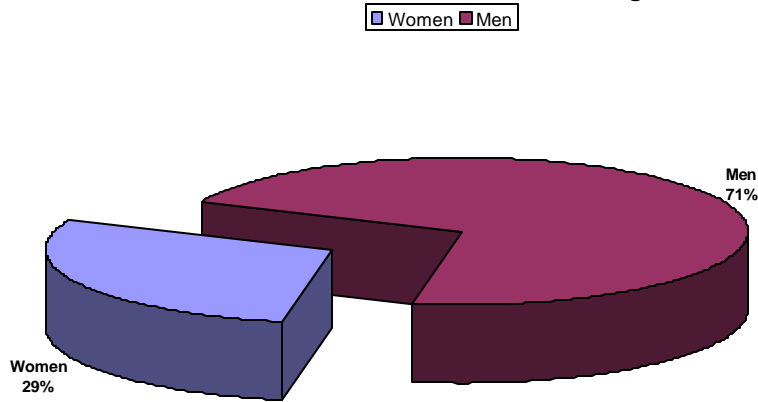
⁸ ESCWA, "Where do Arab women stand in the development process (E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/Booklet.1), p. 12.

⁹ L. Asford and D. Clifton, *Women of Our World 2005* (Population Reference Bureau, 2005); and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), "Country profiles for population and reproductive health: policy developments and indicators" (UNFPA, 2003).

¹⁰ ESCWA, "Where do Arab women stand in the development process (E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/Booklet.1), p. 13.

¹¹ F.S. Kassem, "Beijing + 10: Arab women at a glance", which was presented to the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars (7 March 2005).

Women in the Labour Force in the Arab Region, 2005



ARAB WOMEN AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

- An increasing number of Arab women are appointed as ministers. In 1990, a modest eight Arab countries had female ministers, namely, Algeria, Comoros, Egypt, Jordan, Mauritania, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia. However, by June 2006, 19 out of the 22 Arab countries had women working at ministerial level.¹²
- Positive developments occurred at the judicial and international levels when, in 2003, a Jordanian judge was elected to the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), thereby becoming the first Arab judge to serve on that prestigious international court. Moreover, in June 2006, the first Arab woman, originally from Bahrain, was elected President of the United Nations General Assembly.
- Despite these recent positive developments concerning Arab women's participation in the political arena, the share of Arab women in national parliaments, which in June 2006 stood at 8.2 per cent, remains the lowest in the world.¹³
- In 2005, women in the Mashreq subregion enjoyed the greatest parliamentary representation for the Arab region, at 10 per cent, followed by the Maghreb and Arab LDCs, with rates of 8 and 6 per cent, respectively. In the GCC region, women are represented only in the national parliament of Oman, leaving the average for the Gulf subregion at 2 per cent.¹⁴

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See UNDP Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (UNDP-POGAR), which is available at: www.pogar.org.

¹⁴ Calculations are based on data derived from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) database, which is available at: www.ipu.org. For 1997, no data were reported for Bahrain, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Somalia. Women's share of parliamentary seats was not known for Iraq or the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. For 2005, no data were reported for the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Qatar and Somalia. Data for Palestine were obtained from the UNDP Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (UNDP-POGAR), which is available at: www.pogar.org.

- Iraq has the highest percentage of women members of national parliaments, at 32 per cent, followed by 22.8 per cent in Tunisia and 14.7 per cent in Sudan.¹⁵ Those high percentages can be attributed to the institutionalization by those countries of the quota system.

SHARE OF SEATS IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS (LOWER AND SINGLE HOUSE), 2006
(Percentages)

Country	Women	Men
Yemen	0.3	99.7
Kuwait	0.0	100.0
Mauritania	1.7	98.3
Egypt	2.0	98.0
Bahrain	0.025	99.97
Lebanon	4.7	95.3
Jordan	5.5	94.5
Palestine	12.8	87.2
Algeria	6.2	93.8
Djibouti	10.8	89.2
Morocco	10.8	89.2
Syrian Arab Republic	12.0	88.0
Sudan	14.7	85.3
Tunisia	22.8	77.2
Iraq	32.0	68.0

Source: Compiled by ESCWA based on data by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which is available at: www.ipu.org

THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)

- As of December 2006, 18 out of the 22 Arab countries had signed or ratified CEDAW.
- A total of 11 out of the Arab States that have ratified CEDAW have expressed reservations to specific articles; and some, including the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania and Saudi Arabia, have declared that the State is not committed to the implementation of any of the articles of CEDAW that do not comply with the provisions of Islamic shari'a.
- Arab States have mainly expressed reservations to articles 2, 9, 15, 16 and 29.
- Article 2 summarizes the obligations of the State for implementing the Convention, including integrating the principle of equality to the constitution and taking legislative, administrative and other steps to ensure that equality.
- Article 9 pertains to the right of women to acquire, change and retain a nationality and transmit it to their children.
- Article 15 underlines women equality before the law and the right to conclude contracts, administer property, and be treated equally in all the stages of procedure in courts and tribunals.

¹⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) database, which is available at: www.ipu.org.

- Almost all the Arab States expressed reservations to the last substantive article of CEDAW, namely, article 16, given that it relates to family law. Specifically, States that legislate according to religious codes have argued that article 16 contradicts Islamic sharia.
- Article 29 relates to resorting to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for arbitration in case of dispute among ratifying States concerning the interpretation or implementation of the Convention.
- Only the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya has ratified the CEDAW Optional Protocol.

Countries/territories	Ratification of CEDAW ^{a/}	Reservations on articles ^{b/}	Ratification of Optional Protocol
Algeria	22 May 1996	2, 9, 15, 16, 29	
Bahrain	18 June 2002	2, 9, 15, 16, 29	
Comoros	31 October 1994	No reservations	
Djibouti	2 December 1998	No reservations	
Egypt	18 September 1981	2, 9, 16, 29	
Iraq	13 August 1986	2, 9, 16, 29	
Jordan	1 July 1992	9, 15, 16	
Kuwait	2 September 1994	7, 9, 16, 29	
Lebanon	16 April 1997	9, 16, 29	
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya ^{d/}	16 May 1989	2, 16, Declaration	18 June 2004
Mauritania ^{c/}	10 May 2001	Declaration	
Morocco	21 June 1993	2, 9, 15, 16, 29	
Oman ^{c/}	7 February 2006	9, 15, 16, 29, Declaration	
Palestine			
Qatar			
Saudi Arabia ^{c/}	7 September 2000	9, 29, Declaration	
Somalia			
Sudan			
Syrian Arab Republic	28 March 2003	2, 9, 15, 16, 29	
Tunisia ^{c/}	20 September 1985	9, 15, 16, 29, Declaration	
United Arab Emirates	6 October 2004	2, 9, 15, 16, 29	
Yemen ^{d/}	30 May 1984	29	

Source: Compiled by ESCWA based on Bayefsky.com, which is available at: www.bayefsky.com/.html/cedaw_ratif_table.php.

^{a/} Ratification includes ratification, accession or succession.

^{b/} Reservations of Arab Countries are mainly related to the conflict between national legislation and shari'a on articles 2, 7, 9, 15, 16 and 29.

^{c/} Declaration denotes that the State is not committed to the implementation of any articles of CEDAW whose provisions do not comply with the provisions of Islamic shari'a.

^{d/} On 22 May 1990 the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen merged into the Republic of Yemen. With regard to the treaties concluded prior to their union, Yemen is considered a party as from the date when one of the former States first became a party to those treaties. In terms of CEDAW, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen ratified the Convention on 30 May 1984.