

# Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Institutional Actors on Paternity Leave and the Role of Men in Childcare in the Middle East and North Africa Region



مركز العالم العربي للبحوث والتنمية  
Arab World for Research & Development

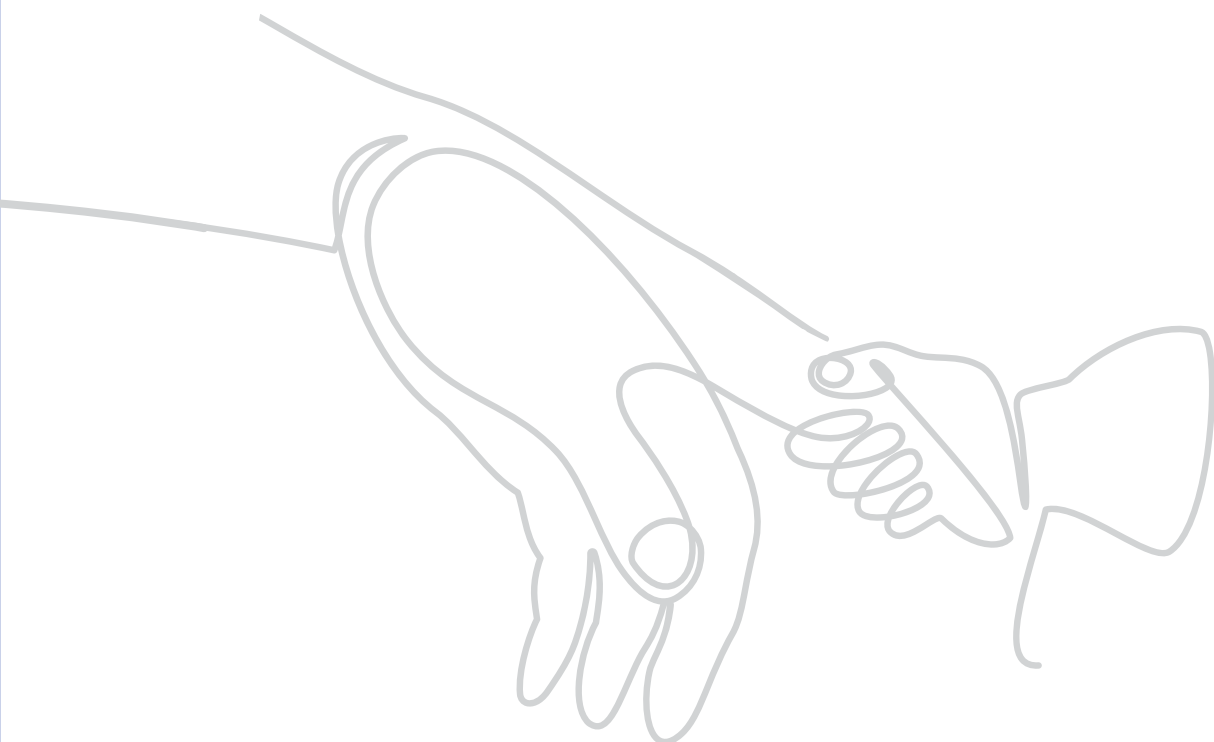




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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFTURD	Tunisian Women's Development Research Association
ALO	Arab Labour Organization
ARDD	Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CIBL	Centre for Inclusive Business and Leadership
CPRW	Convention on the Political Rights of Women
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DOS	Department of Statistics
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPC	General Personnel Council
HACA	Higher Audiovisual Communication Authority
HCP	Higher Planning Commission
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMAGES	International Men and Gender Equality Survey
IT	Information Technology
KII	Key Informant Interview
Maputo Protocol	The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa
MATUHPV	Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms
MDTAR	Ministry of Digital Transition and Administration Reform
MEISES	Ministry of Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment, and Skills
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MFFES	The Ministry of the Family, Women, Children and the Elderly
MIFTAH	Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOL	Ministry of Labor
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
MOSA	Ministry of Social Affairs-Lebanon
MoSD	Ministry of Social Development
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
MPs	Members of Parliament
MSSIF	Ministry of Solidarity, Social Integration and the Family
MWGE	Men and Women for Gender Equality
NCFA	National Council for Family Affairs
NCLW	National Commission for Women's Affairs – Lebanon
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PCC	Palestinian Central Council
PEF	Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection of Workers
PJD	Justice and Development Party
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PNA	Palestinian National Authority
PNC	Palestinian National Council
REFORM	Palestinian Association for Empowerment and Local Development
SAWI	Support and Accelerate Women's Inclusion
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SSC	Social Security Corporation
UGTT	Tunisian General Labour Union
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
WRO	Women's Rights Organization

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Rationale: Continuing Challenges and Rising Opportunities

Restrictive social norms towards gender roles and relations and their codification in discriminatory laws continue to treat childcare as part and parcel of traditional conceptions of reproductive roles. Women continue to be viewed as the primary caregivers to children and men are discouraged from such roles by the dominant framework that constructs and represents a one-dimensional image of masculinity. These social and cultural constructs are preserved and perpetuated through the inculcation of the complementary division of labour between men and women, where men and women are indoctrinated differently – breadwinners and caregivers, respectively. At the same time, women and men commonly subscribe to such notions through a complex set of soft and coerced acculturation mechanisms using traditional and religious discourse and tools (e.g., use of violence or threat of violence), within a political-economic system that benefits from such socially-constructed division and false image of complementarity. Patriarchal communities often praise men who make an effort to provide unpaid care to children or do domestic work at home as “helpful” rather than as “duty bearers”, sharing childcare responsibilities equally with women partners. Restrictive gender norms that place an undue burden of unpaid caregiving on women and girls also negatively impact men who want to be active, engaged, and involved fathers.

Against this backdrop, there is an evolving realization that one of the key strategies to advance gender equality and women’s economic empowerment is the achievement of long-term equitable care roles and promoting the role of men in childcare. The enactment of paternity leave, flexible hours and other legal and institutional measures are among the most important steps in pursuit of this goal. In the long run, however, equitable gender roles will require changing the beliefs and images around masculinities, where men and women are equally expected to have the freedom to express their feelings and fulfil their parental roles.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), gender gaps remain pronounced, though efforts to affect change are increasing. According to the Global Gender Gap Report

2022, the region has the second largest gender gap, after South Asia. Though high, the gender gap has slightly improved over the past decades. At the present pace, however, the MENA region will not close the gap for another 115 years.

As will be detailed in the succeeding, country-specific chapters, while the countries included in the research have certain similarities, they also exhibit distinct political, economic, and social conditions. The disparities between countries are due to a complex set of variables, but the most consequential factor in recent history has been the varying levels of political will among the governing regime on the one hand and the agency of women’s rights organizations (WROs) and other human rights groups on the other. The historically-invoked example is Tunisia, where many of the achievements towards gender equality were driven by the political leadership and a strong women’s movement. More recently, Morocco has been cited for its progress, where major reforms have been introduced in all fields of gender equality, most notable of which is the enacting in 2022 of a 15-day paternity leave in the public sector.

Despite these advancements, women and girls continue to shoulder the primary responsibility for caregiving roles in general and childcare in particular. In households around the world, the responsibility for unpaid childcare is not shared equally between caregivers of both sexes. Globally, women spend around three times as many hours on unpaid care work as men. Indeed, it is estimated that 16.4 billion hours are spent on unpaid care work each day, with three-quarters (12.3 billion hours) of this unremunerated time spent by women and girls. Overall, the Arab States have the lowest rates of women’s participation in paid work and men’s participation in unpaid care work. Women in Arab States are paid for 10 per cent of their overall work load (compared to 40 per cent globally), and unpaid for 90 (compared to 60 per cent globally). The reverse is true for men, where 76 per cent of their work load is paid (compared to 80 per cent globally) and 24 per cent unpaid (compared to 20 per cent globally). More notable is the rate of reported work hours for men compared to

women, measured at 80:100, compared to the global average of 90:100. In addition, the number of hours for men and women in the region is lower than any other regions<sup>1</sup>. In the MENA region, childcare roles are directly correlated with relatively high fertility rates, as well as low labour market participation, and mixed achievements in literacy and educational attainment.

Women in the Arab States continue to spend 4.7 times more time in unpaid work than men. These gender roles and social norms persist even in the face of women's emerging role as household breadwinners, either in full or in part, as well as broader social shifts towards modern family arrangements and relations (e.g., moving from extended families to nuclear families), urbanization and consumerism, and, finally, the impact of globalization and social media. In defiance of the transformative pressure of these developments, the contribution of women to care work in general, and childcare in particular, is largely unnoticed, unrecognized, and unvalued or undervalued, with no legal benefits, rights or entitlements emanating from such a role. Despite these stubborn circumstances, there are auspicious signs of men's increasing interest in spending more time with their children, as reflected in the findings of the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) conducted in six countries from the MENA region: Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and Tunisia. In addition, socializing boys to play an integral, deliberate, and equitable role in providing care within their households – for instance, by encouraging men to model involved fatherhood and childcare, teaching boys to care for children, and modelling gender-equitable attitudes at home – increases the likelihood that they will share caregiving responsibilities more equitably as adults.

### **Scope and Objectives: Focus on Men's Role in Childcare and the Issue of Paternity Leave**

The present research is guided by the goals of informing legal and policy reforms that will increase men's contribution in unpaid childcare, promote paternity leave, and address the evidence gap on this topic in the MENA region. As such, it focuses on the knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, and practices of state and non-state actors surrounding men's childcare roles and the issue of paternity

leave. It covers five of the six countries included in the second phase of *The Men and Women for Gender Equality programme of UN Women's Regional Office for the Arab States*, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). These five are: Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine.

The research also aims to inform advocacy interventions, policy, and programming to promote men's childcare roles and paternity leave across the MENA region. It builds upon the work undertaken by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women's (UN Women) regional programme "Men and Women for Gender Equality" and complements evidence generated by the International Labour Organization (ILO) - UN Women joint regional programme "Promoting Productive Employment and Decent Work for Women".

Particularly, this research seeks to provide an overview of the global and regional trends and best practices in relation to men's childcare and paternity leave. In addition, the research identifies entry points and recommendations for future action and advocacy to promote paternity leave across the MENA region, as well as in each participating country, based on the findings of the research.

<sup>1</sup> All citations and footnotes are available in the body of the report.

## Research Participants

The research defines state actors as officials and employees at the level of decision-making or influence on public policies, legislation, and public discourse, who also have knowledge and interest in public issues, especially gender issues, and interact with non-governmental, international and regional institutions, ministries and other executive agencies, legislators, judges and other government research institutions. Non-state actors include officials and representatives at the decision-making level or with influence on public policy, legislation, and public discourse in the private sector, civil society organizations (CSOs), WROs, youth leaders, trade unions, think tanks, media influencers, national workers in international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and donor agencies, in addition to United Nations (UN) agencies.

To collect and analyse the data, the research utilized a mixed-method approach that combined quantitative and qualitative tools to collect data from primary and secondary resources. For the qualitative tools, the research team organised 23 focus group discussions (FGDs), and 89 in-depth interviews with key informants and decision-makers within the targeted countries, as well as informants

with expertise in regional and global contexts. To collect quantitative data, an anonymous online survey, targeted 1,500 decision-makers and influencers and was completed by 878 of them. In total, the research involved 1,154 participants across the five countries. The following table provides a distribution of participants by sex and country:

**Distribution of Research Participants by Sex and Country**

Participants disaggregated by sex	KIIs	FGDs	Survey	Total
Male	34	73	424	531
Female	55	114	454	623
Participants disaggregated by country				
Morocco	14	34	236	284
Tunisia	18	37	119	174
Lebanon	22	32	161	215
Jordan	15	33	148	196
Palestine	15	29	214	258
International organizations	5	22	-	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>878</b>	<b>1,154</b>

**Field work for the primary data collection was carried out from October 2021 to June 2022.** In addition, the research team conducted an exhaustive review of local and international documents and reports pertaining to the research topic.

**The participatory research methodology and process sparked constructive dialogue and heated debate** between the parties from different sectors and within each sector. The subject of the research was unprecedented,

which stimulated the interest of all participating actors. Throughout the process, the vast majority of participants responded positively in terms of their willingness to learn about the nature of the study, its rationale, and related questions. However, some participants were sceptical, resisting even the discussion of the issue from the start, basing their rejection on the conviction that the subject was irrelevant to their contexts and, hence, not a priority.

## Summary of Findings

In the MENA region, the role of men in the provision of childcare is an issue that has not been receiving sufficient attention. With some recent exceptions, the issue, for the most part, has been absent from national dialogue across the region. The undertaking of this study coincided with a host of developments in the legal environment surrounding childcare (as further illustrated in the succeeding country chapters). Building on this foundation, the research process allowed for serious discussions at the national level in the five countries included in the study. The following summary provides the most salient results of the research.

**Indications of shifting roles, but limited scope:** The findings reveal that there are signs of change in childcare roles. Various cohorts of research participants commented on an observable increase in cooperation between partners in providing childcare within the household. In addition, the attitudes of younger actors seem to be relatively more supportive of equitable childcare. While these developments do provide evidence that prevailing care roles are not rooted in immutable structures, as well as offering opportunities for actors to build upon in future endeavours, a close analysis of the research data confirms that the role of men as primary child caregivers remains limited.

**Blue-washing existing gender roles:** The data show that women, with or without working husbands, continue to be the primary child caregivers. In contrast, men who are married to stay-at-home caregivers are rarely involved in childcare. The qualitative data illuminated the potential existence of a phenomenon this study defines as “blue-washing”, in which a glamorized reality of gender roles is presented by amplifying or exaggerating successes in gender equality, in order to cloak the underlying,

unequal reality of gender roles and relations. Many of the key informants warned of the perils of overlooking this reality, where women continue to do the caregiving in general and childcare in particular without any derived rights or entitlements, while men have the option to “assist” or “not assist” in childcare, all the while enjoying full legal rights. Such a finding highlights the need for a balanced, interactive, and evidence-based approach in achieving gender equality, which can ensure empowerment of women.

**Entrenched beliefs and cultural norms:** Though the region is witnessing changes in social and cultural norms, prevailing values and attitudes around masculinity are deeply resistant to revision. Though positive shifts in views towards women’s paid work and participation in the public sphere have transpired, perspectives on the role of men and masculinity have not witnessed significant change. As the research results show, the majority of all cohorts (regardless of sex, sector, or country) continue to believe that women must be the primary caregivers, while men must be the primary breadwinners. These beliefs are persisting at the same time that new and varied lifestyles, family formations, urbanization, and globalization are creating virtually-lived alternatives to the dominant norms, allowing individuals and couples to dissent and create their own reality within their own society. As such, the data show that younger couples, single actors who are mostly female, and divorced, separated, or widowed women tend to generally hold more progressive views of gender equality and childcare roles, in particular. It is critical to note that not all views on the issue of childcare are driven by social and cultural norms. The data show that support for more equitable gender relations and legislations is also driven by necessity. For example, the greatest support for equal sharing of childcare is ex-

pressed by women who are divorced, separated, or widowed and young couples who are mostly working at the same time. In contrast, men who have a stay-at-home wife are less supportive of gender equality.

Prevalent gender-based discrimination in the workplace regarding childcare: Actors perceive that gender-based discrimination dominates the workplace. In general, less than one-third of the actors stated that the various elements of work (e.g., hiring, promotion, firing) are equitable for men and women. Rather, the largest plurality believed that women are discriminated against on all of these issues, with some expressing beliefs that men are discriminated against. Overall, while actors believe that discrimination at the workplace is directed predominantly against women, they are also of the view that men face higher levels of discrimination in matters of paternity leave and flexible work hours, both of which are critical to men's involvement in childcare.

For many, a question of priorities: While majorities of actors are interested, in principle, in the issue of men's caregiving, the qualitative data show that many of these believe that there are other issues, prerequisites, and priorities to be addressed and achieved alongside or in advance. While particular to each of the assessed countries (as presented in the specific chapters), a number of common priorities are observed, including economic growth, employment and political stability, and women's empowerment.

Individual support for legislative reform, but an uncertain enabling environment: Both qualitative and quantitative data indicate that, overall, actors are generally supportive of a greater role for men in childcare. Importantly, the majority also supports a range of potential legislative options capable of promoting men's involvement in childcare, though to varying degrees by sex, country, and work sector. That said, it is critical to note that while research participants express their individual support for such measures, they are sceptical of the existence of widespread support across society. For example, while 60 per cent of respondents supported an increase in the number of paternity leave days, allowing men to provide greater care for children, only one-third believed that their colleagues would be supportive.

Examined in concert with findings from the qualitative data, it is reasonable to suggest that opposition or simply lack of support for paternity leave is larger than the rates

observed among research participants. It is the views and preferences of these colleagues that will hold the key to successful policy making. Further, as noted previously, those groups that tend to be more supportive of such policies often have less access to decision-making and thus less influence on policy and legislation. This phenomenon is common in conservative societies, referred to as "pluralistic ignorance," which occurs when people erroneously infer that they feel differently from their peers, even though they are behaving similarly.

It is consistent with a situation in which the minority position on a given topic is wrongly perceived to be the majority position or where the majority position is wrongly perceived to be the minority position. Accounting for the possibility of such a phenomenon, the data suggest that the realm of legislation might be open for further reform on this issue, though with the likelihood of potential resistance among actors across all segments of society.

**Variations by sector:** While perceptions of the reality of childcare are not significantly different among actors from various sectors, it was notable that actors from the private sector are the most affected by work-related limitations to spending time with children. Though a significant group of these respondents believes that the private sector is already burdened by time and financial implications of maternity leave, many were interested in finding creative and modern ways to motivate their male and female employees through workplace policies linked to caregiving, such as child leave and flexible working hours.

Government actors tend to fall between the private sector and civil society and unions in their perspectives on contemporary caregiving. They are, however, the least willing to admit the current laws are inequitable and in need of reform. Actors from civil society and the national staff of international organizations tend to be the most supportive of equitable rights and paternity leave.

Across all sectors, there are actors who will support and others who will oppose new legislations providing a separate paternity leave or an equitable parental leave law. Despite the higher overall levels of reluctance and opposition by private sector actors to expanded parental leave, all countries assessed in this study offered examples of innovative and pioneering private sector firms interested in the issue and also working to promote or facilitate the role of men in childcare. In most instances, they are concentrated among international companies. In contrast, there



are a number of actors in civil society and international organizations who were not enthusiastic about placing the issue for discussion at this stage on the public agenda, a position frequently justified on the basis that there are other priorities requiring more immediate attention. Reflecting these circumstances, a comprehensive, tripartite dialogue that includes civil society and WROs is an important mechanism to structure and advance future policy and legal interventions.

Overall, women more supportive of men's involvement in childcare and paternity leave: The issue of childcare and men's role is important to both women and men. Yet, results indicate that women, overall, hold more progressive views on gender equality-related issues and are more supportive of new legislations and cultural norms that engage men in active childcare. However, women are not a homogeneous group, nor are men. For example, while married women with children have a greater interest in the subject, overall, married women with no children and single women are also highly interested and more supportive of equitable legislations. Men who have adult children and men who have a stay-at-home partner are the least interested and supportive.

### Entry Points for Future Actions

The question of men's role in childcare and paternity leave is gaining momentum around the world and among governmental and non-governmental actors in the MENA region. The ongoing social, economic and political transformations in the region are among the key drivers, principally the transformation from extended to nuclear families, urbanization, decline in fertility rates, increase in parity in education and women's employment, and the widespread access to new technology and social media. These transformations augur increasing pressure on traditional perspectives regarding childcare and their developments should be proactively studied and incorporated in initiatives focused on care roles. Many families, especially nuclear ones in urban settings, young couples, divorced, separated, or widowed women, and working couples with children, are increasingly relying on non-family sources for care (e.g., nurseries and babysitting services). Members of these families are increasingly adjusting their roles, with men doing more than before to engage in childcare. The momentum and accompanying openings created by these changes represent valuable entry points for future mobilization in the goal of more equitable childcare roles. At present, all targeted countries have a plethora of gov-

ernmental, non-governmental and international institutions that are interested in the issue of gender equality, but with varying levels of interest in introducing and supporting equitable gender roles and paternity leave. These organizations work together, and at times compete with each other on issues, as well as on funding. While varying in size and influence among the countries, the role of civil society and WROs is important to bring the issue of childcare to the attention of decision-makers and legislators, along with their broader work towards awareness raising and cultural change.

In addition, while countries have adopted a number of policies and programmes regarding childcare, there is little material specifically dedicated to the roles of men. There are, however, a number of initiatives that, while currently embryonic, have the potential to serve as a starting point for future actions. In addition, the recent legal developments that were cited in the country chapters are significant. All countries have introduced some form of paternity leave, ranging from a limited focus on a narrow sector (the military and security forces in Lebanon) to recently-initiated paternity leave decisions applicable to public sector employees alone (Morocco, Palestine and Jordan). Though disparate in their scope, all of the recent initiatives are important and require concerted follow up to ensure meaningful implementation.

For future programming, it must be emphasized that the most supportive groups identified in the analysis (e.g., young couples, divorced, separated, or widowed women) remain weaker in their ability to influence public policy and debate, relative to older, married, male actors who are well-established, with an associated interest in preserving the status quo. All of the above illustrates that the level of interest among men in changing the present situation does not match that of women, in large part owing to the fact that half of the men have their female partners at home caring for the children. Still, a combination of rising political will in a number of countries and the few pioneering efforts on this issue might constitute an effective springboard to expand to a wider national interest, extending beyond a few political actors. The present opportunity to place this issue on the national agenda must build on these developments and advance efforts tailored to the ongoing developments in each country.

## Summary of Recommendations

Reflecting the above-listed summary of limitations and opportunities, the following section presents priorities and recommendations to promote the role of men in childcare, while aiming to achieve equality in the long run. More detailed recommendations are in Chapter 3, which also includes the identification of specific actions.

### Cultural Norms and Awareness

1. Draw attention of all segments of society to the economic, social, and psychological value of care work to society, families and individuals. This should be accompanied by clear linkages of care work to children, persons with disability, elderly, and family members with chronic diseases. The various contributions of men, women, and other actors, including government and private sector companies, must be incorporated. Remaining work to improve the situation must be highlighted, as well.
2. Provide positive images of men and women who exemplify egalitarian gender roles. Such representations should show the benefits of gender equality for development and human rights, as well as the place of such roles in a modern life increasingly requiring genuine partnership and engagement of all family members.
3. Emphasize the market value of unpaid care work, with a focus on childcare, and the need to compensate women and men who provide care work with legal rights, such as social security and retirement funds. At the same time, the value of the role of men in childcare must be further captured and disseminated.
4. Draw attention of decision-makers to the changing realities of society overall, and communities and families in particular.
5. Assess and highlight the needs of specific groups too often lumped into the traditional understanding of family formation, namely male and female partners with children. Such groups include single women who might live with others and care for children, and divorced, separated and widowed women (and men, albeit limited in numbers).

6. Formulate and present messages carefully crafted to promote equality and generate broad support in society. Such messages must be authentic and derived from the reality of men and women in the region, as well as country.
7. Develop a balanced approach to the engagement of religious leaders and houses of worship (e.g., mosques and churches).
8. Convene regional and country-by-country awareness sessions with decision-makers from all sectors especially during the early stages of future interventions.

### Advocacy and Lobbying

9. Carefully identify CSOs, including youth organizations and WROs, with previously-accumulated experience in mobilizing and advocating on issues of equality with a human rights background and readiness to be engaged in the issue. Where necessary, the capacities of these organizations in articulating the issue, gathering evidence, and crafting messaging on the role of men in care must be improved.
10. Form a specialized network of CSOs, including labour and professional unions to work together for the promotion of legal, cultural, and policy change conducive to equitable care roles.
11. Convene a national dialogue mechanism focused on the issue of childcare with the ultimate aim of achieving equality.
12. Capitalize on the opportunity offered by ongoing dialogue on labour issues, social security, and gender equality to generate interest in men's caregiving as a primary issue for discussion among the various actors. Stemming from these activities, ensure that any new legislation, programmes and budgets are able to effectively address the new realities of families and, in doing so, further promote shifts in conceptualizations of gender roles and masculinity.



13. Target parliamentarians in general and women parliamentarians in particular, to enhance their legal literacy and understanding of legal options based on existing national laws and international conventions, agreements, or practices.
14. Organize focused and evidence-based advocacy campaigns targeting decision-makers on the issue of men's participation in caregiving and unpaid work, highlighting the positive economic and social impacts of a more egalitarian approach to childcare, to create counterparts to support WROs in their advocacy efforts.
15. Build the capacity of WROs and other allies, including labour unions, in specialized advocacy campaigns on issues such as care work.
16. Advocate for the endorsement and accession to international instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while devoting attention to the articles governing state parties' commitments to changing stereotypes, combating discriminatory norms, and developing equitable gender roles.
17. Encourage and capacitate media professionals and social media influencers to promote the success of future campaigns and lobbying.
18. Lobby the private sector, especially its representative bodies, such as Chambers of Commerce, Associations of Businessmen and Businesswomen, among others, to further embrace the idea of paternity leave and flexible hours for both men and women.
19. Engage small and large business led by women, along with supportive leaders of private business, which exhibit higher levels of support for paternity leave and flexible hours. Any campaign must place these business leaders at the forefront of future lobbying.
20. Through lobbying and awareness initiatives, place the issue of men's role in childcare and paternity leave on the national agenda, serving as an item for dialogue in strategic and policy formulation, as well as planning and programming.
21. Promote and engage with relevant actors to ensure that government economic and educational policies are designed to create change not only in individual awareness, but also to codify and protect rights and entitlements derived from paid, formal work, as well as from unpaid care work.
22. Work to enact comprehensive packages of policies and laws that promote employment opportunities for women and men, especially youth, decent work conditions, and the establishment of care facilities of children and other cared-for groups, allowing men and women to balance their work and family commitments.
23. In the short term, work to ensure that paternity leave is implemented as codified in the law by assisting the relevant countries with the development of specific bylaws, implementation, and monitoring procedures and instruments.
24. In the medium term, work to approve legislative packages on paternity leave and flexible hours, through negotiations, advocacy, and lobbying by WROs and like-minded groups and allies.
25. In the long term, an equitable paternal leave law should be developed. For this to succeed, efforts must combine legal reform efforts with carefully-designed campaigns, as outlined above.
26. Engage and incentivize the private sector in promoting the more equitable distribution of care work and contributing to national funds that support men's and women's childcare. Research and Data Needs
27. Support the regular conducting of time-use surveys, as well as those measuring costs of the contribution of men and women to care work in general and childcare in particular.
28. Deepen prevailing understandings of gender relations, roles, and rights within households through study of the dynamic and evolving roles of men and women.

## Public Policies and Government Programmes

20. Through lobbying and awareness initiatives, place the issue of men's role in childcare and paternity leave on the national agenda, serving as an item for dialogue

Additional tools and indicators must be introduced by statistical agencies to comprehensively capture the nature of care work in households.

- 29.** Highlight the diversity of gender roles and formation within households that are non-traditional in their formation (women living together and caring for children, divorced, separated or widowed women and men, and single parents).
- 30.** Better incorporate men and boys in examining and studying care work, and in changing conceptualizations of care work in communities. This must be accomplished from a gender perspective placing women at the centre of the analysis.
- 31.** Increase the visibility of care work in general and childcare in particular in economics-focused and gender-focused research, analysis, and policy assessment.
- 32.** Examine the role of conflict, occupation, and political unrest in shaping gender roles and policies regarding childcare. In addition, studies and indicators should better account for the presence of migrants and refugees, as well as social class, in child-related gender roles.
- 33.** Generate knowledge and data about the market value of unpaid and underpaid care work and childcare in particular. This data will allow for a stronger argument on the role of childcare in potential financial savings for the private sector and the government.
- 34.** Prepare case studies related to positive paternity and its impacts on individuals, families, communities, and society at-large.

## CHAPTER 1

# BACKGROUND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY



## Background

Restrictive social norms towards gender roles and relations and their codification in discriminatory laws continue to treat childcare as part and parcel of traditional conceptions of reproductive roles. Women continue to be viewed as the primary caregivers to children and men are discouraged from such roles by the dominant framework that constructs and represents a one-dimensional image of masculinity. These social and cultural constructs are preserved and perpetuated through the inculcation of the complementary division of labour between men and women, where men and women are indoctrinated differently – breadwinners and caregivers, respectively. At the same time, women and men commonly subscribe to such notions through a complex set of soft and coerced acculturation mechanisms using traditional and religious discourse and tools (e.g., use of violence or threat of violence), within a political-economic system that benefits from such socially-constructed division and false image of complementarity. Patriarchal communities often praise men who make an effort to provide unpaid care to children or do domestic work at home as “helpful” rather than as “duty bearers”, sharing childcare responsibilities equally with women partners.<sup>2</sup>

Against this backdrop, there is an evolving realization that one of the key strategies to advance gender equality and women’s economic empowerment is the achievement of long-term equitable care roles and promoting the role of men in childcare. The enactment of paternity leave, flexible hours and other legal and institutional measures are among the most important steps in pursuit of this goal.

Despite these advancements, women and girls continue to shoulder the primary responsibility for caregiving roles in general and childcare in particular. In households around the world, the responsibility for unpaid childcare is not shared equally between caregivers of both sexes. Globally, women spend around three times as many hours on unpaid care work as men. Indeed, it is estimated that 16.4 billion hours are spent on unpaid care work each day<sup>3</sup>, with three-quarters (12.3 billion hours) of this unremunerated time spent by women and girls. Overall, the Arab States have the lowest rates of women’s

participation in paid work and men’s participation in unpaid care work. Women in Arab States are paid for 10 per cent of their overall work load (compared to 40 per cent globally), and unpaid for 90 (compared to 60 per cent globally). The reverse is true for men, where 76 per cent of their work load is paid (compared to 80 per cent globally) and 24 per cent unpaid (compared to 20 per cent globally). More notable is the rate of reported work hours for men compared to women, measured at 80:100, compared to the global average of 90:100. In addition, the number of hours for men and women in the region is lower than any other regions.

In the MENA region, childcare roles are directly correlated with relatively high fertility rates, as well as low labour market participation, and mixed achievements in literacy and educational attainment. Women in the Arab States continue to spend 4.7 times more time in unpaid work than men<sup>4</sup>. These gender roles and social norms persist even in the face of women’s emerging role as household breadwinners, either in full or in part, as well as broader social shifts towards modern family arrangements and relations (e.g., moving from extended families to nuclear families), urbanization and consumerism, and, finally, the impact of globalization and social media. In defiance of the transformative pressure of these developments, the contribution of women to care work in general, and childcare in particular, is largely unnoticed, unrecognized, and unvalued or undervalued, with no legal benefits, rights or entitlements emanating from such a role.

Despite these stubborn circumstances, there are auspicious signs of men’s increasing interest in spending more time with their children, as reflected in the findings of the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)<sup>5</sup> conducted in six countries from the MENA region: Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and Tunisia. In addition, socializing boys to play an integral, deliberate, and equitable role in providing care within their households – for instance, by encouraging men to model involved fatherhood and childcare, teaching boys to care for children, and modelling gender-equitable attitudes at home – increases the likelihood that they will share caregiving responsibilities more equitably as adults.<sup>6</sup>

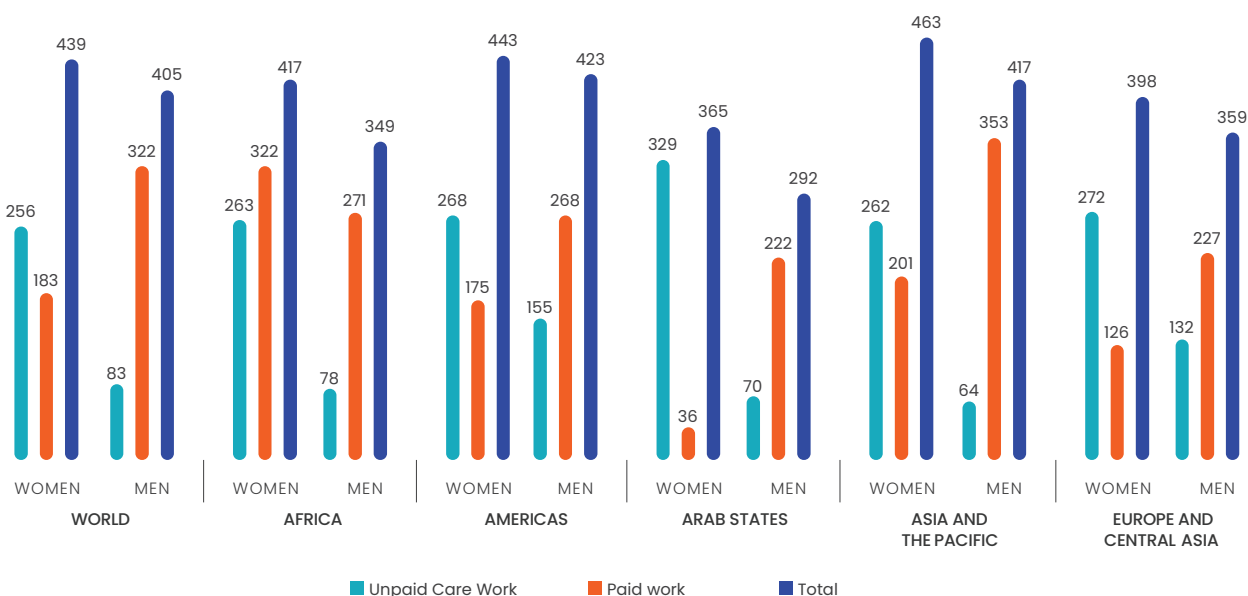
<sup>2</sup> Van der Gaag, N., Heilman, B., Gupta, T., Nembhard, C., & Barker, G. (2019). State of the World’s Fathers Unlocking the Power of Men’s Care: Executive Summary. Promundo.

<sup>3</sup> Business Insider. (2021). Unpaid care-economy work amounts to \$11 trillion per year, BofA estimates, 2021. <https://www.businessinsider.com/care-economy-unpaid-work-minimum-wage-jobs-labor-infrastructure-bofa-2021-5>

<sup>4</sup> UN Women. (2020). The Role of the Care Economy in Promoting Gender Equality. <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/12/the-role-of-the-care-economy-in-promoting-gender-equality>

<sup>5</sup> UN Women. (2017). Understanding masculinities, results from the International Men and Gender Equality Study in the Middle East and North Africa. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/5/understanding-masculinities-results-from-the-images-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa>

<sup>6</sup> Kato-Wallace, J., Barker, G., Eads, M., & Levtoy, R. (2014). Global pathways to men’s caregiving: Mixed methods findings from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey and the Men Who Care study. *Global Public Health*, 9(6), 706–722.

Figure 1: Participation in Unpaid Care Work and Paid Work, by Sex and Region<sup>7</sup> (Minutes per Day)

Despite encouraging changes, the global gender gap in unpaid caregiving could take as many as 92 years to close.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and global responses, such as lockdowns, has impacted how people provided unpaid care at home, and even exacerbated pre-existing inequalities. Though unpaid workloads increased for both sexes during the pandemic, women were more likely than men to report allocating increased time to unpaid domestic work, as well as taking on more intense care-related tasks, in addition to leaving the workforce to provide childcare at home. Two-thirds of women said that their partner was more involved in caregiving, compared to 82 per cent of men who said that their partner was more involved, while more parents reported that their daughters' involvement in caregiving increased, as opposed to their sons'.<sup>9</sup>

Studies in high-income countries found that during COVID-19 lockdowns more men spent time with their children and larger amounts of time providing childcare at home. Men also reported feeling that they were better

caregivers, closer to their children, and meeting ideal expectations of family life.<sup>10</sup>

Despite promising increases in men's unpaid caregiving at home, the average amount of extra time spent by women providing unpaid childcare during the pandemic (5.2 hours per week) was greater than extra time spent by men (3.5 hours per week).<sup>11</sup>

Encouraging men to be more involved, engaged, and active caregivers can have far-reaching positive impacts. A 2019 study concluded that these impacts include: better relationships between couples, reduction in violence against women and children, more positive relationships between fathers and their children, greater likelihood that boys will be involved in caregiving during adulthood, improvements in girls' sense of empowerment, and a more gender equitable home environment.<sup>12</sup> For many men, becoming more involved with their children increases their sense of happiness and wellbeing, improves their physical, mental, and sexual health, reduc

7 Jacques Charmes. (2019). The Unpaid Care Work and the Labour Market. An analysis of time use data based on the latest World Compilation of Time-use Surveys. ILO.

8 Barker, G., Garg, A., Hellman, B., van der Gaag, N., & Mehaffey, R. (2021). State of the World's Fathers: Structural Solutions to Achieve Equality in Care Work. Promundo.

9 UN Women. (2020). Whose time to care? Unpaid care and domestic work during COVID-19. UN Women.

10 Fathers and COVID focus group study. (2020, June 20). Blueprint & University of British Columbia; Sifo. (2020). Pappor, pandemi och föräldraskap. Kantar Sifo; UN Women. (2020). Whose time to care? Unpaid care and domestic work during COVID-19. UN Women; Weissbourd, R., Batanova, M., McIntyre, J., & Torres, E. (2020). How the Pandemic is Strengthening Fathers' Relationships with Their Children (p. 7). Harvard Graduate School of Education.

11 UN Women. (2020). Whose time to care? Unpaid care and domestic work during COVID-19. UN Women.

12 Van der Gaag, N., Heilman, B., Gupta, T., Nembhard, C., & Barker, G. (2019). State of the World's Fathers Unlocking the Power of Men's Care: Executive Summary. Promundo.

13 Doyle, K., Kato-Wallace, J., Kazimbaya, S., & Barker, G. (2014). Transforming gender roles in domestic and caregiving work: Preliminary findings from engaging fathers in maternal, newborn, and child health in Rwanda. Gender & Development, 22(3), 515–531; Månsson, A., Lindholm, L., & Winkvist, A. (2007). Paternity leave in Sweden—Costs, savings and health gains. Health Policy, 82(1), 102–115; Månsson, A., & Lundin, A. (2010). How do masculinity, paternity leave, and mortality associate?—A study of fathers in the Swedish parental & child cohort of 1988/89. Social Science & Medicine, 71(3), 576–583; van der Gaag, N., Heilman, B., Gupta, T., Nembhard, C., & Barker, G. (2019). State of the World's Fathers Unlocking the Power of Men's Care: Executive Summary. Promundo.

14 Doyle, K., Kato-Wallace, J., Kazimbaya, S., & Barker, G. (2014). Transforming gender roles in domestic and caregiving work: Preliminary findings from engaging fathers in maternal, newborn, and child health in Rwanda. Gender & Development, 22(3), 515–531.

es risk factors for mortality, encourages them to make decisions more equally with partners, and promotes more open discussions about family finances.<sup>13</sup>

Sometimes, the benefits of involved, engaged fatherhood are enough to encourage men to provide unpaid caregiving at home, even in the face of social reproach resulting from subverting traditional, patriarchal notions of masculinity.<sup>14</sup>

There is a growing movement that encourages men to become more engaged and involved as parents, which involves transforming gender and social norms around parenting, implementing family support policies, and more. Like other regions around the world, the MENA region could benefit from actions that promote men's engagement in childcare in achieving gender equality, human rights, and prospects for human development. Actions linked to these outcomes include: a) enacting policies and legislation and capacitating institutions to recognize the value of unpaid caregiving to children, whether carried out by men or women, b) working with men and boys to improve understanding of the root causes of gender inequalities, c) creating communities that have more gender equitable attitudes and behaviours, d) integrating and promoting gender responsive practices in key regional and national institutions, e) advocating for and supporting the drafting, revision, and/or approval of laws, policies, and strategies that promote gender equality, f) reducing the unpaid childcare work burden on women and girls, and g) redistributing the responsibility for childcare work between women and men, as well as families, communities, governments, institutions, and the private sector.

Ultimately, an increased role for men and boys in unpaid childcare could improve gender equality generationally and have a positive legacy on the children who may themselves become fathers and mothers one day. An increased role for men and women in Arab States would require the creation of favourable realities where men and women in the region are allowed and encouraged to define more equitable gender roles and identities without fear of social sanction or persecution.

## Scope and Objectives

The present research is guided by the goals of informing legal and policy reforms that will increase men's contribution in unpaid childcare, promote paternity leave, and address the evidence gap on this topic in the MENA region. As such, it focuses on the knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, and practices of state and non-state actors surrounding men's childcare roles and the issue of paternity leave. It covers five of the six countries included in the second phase of The Men and Women for Gender Equality programme of UN Women's Regional Office for the Arab States, funded by Sida. These five are: Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine.<sup>15</sup>

The research also aims to inform advocacy interventions, policy, and programming to promote men's childcare roles and paternity leave across the MENA region. It builds upon the work undertaken by UN Women's regional programme "Men and Women for Gender Equality" to generate knowledge on masculinities in the MENA region through research and knowledge products (e.g., IMAG-ES), and complements evidence generated by the ILO-UN Women joint regional programme "Promoting Productive Employment and Decent Work for Women" (i.e., regional Care Economy report).

Particularly, this research seeks to provide an overview of the global and regional trends and best practices in relation to men's childcare and paternity leave. It further aims to understand the knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, and practices of state and non-state institutional actors with regard to men's engagement in childcare, focusing on paternity leave in the MENA region and specific key findings in each assessed country. It will also identify entry points and recommendations for future action and advocacy to promote paternity leave across the MENA region based on the findings of the research.

<sup>15</sup> Egypt was among the original list of countries to be assessed by the study, however, due to unforeseen circumstances, research was not conducted.



### Box 1: Targeted Actors

**State actors:** Officials and employees at the level of decision-making or influence on public policies, legislation, and public discourse, who also have knowledge and interest in public issues, especially gender issues, and interact with non-governmental, international and regional institutions, ministries and other executive agencies, legislators, judges and other government research institutions.

**Non-state actors:** Officials and representatives at the decision-making level or with influence on public policy, legislation, and public discourse in the private sector, CSOs, WROs, youth leaders, trade unions, think tanks, media influencers, national workers in international NGOs and donor agencies, in addition to UN agencies.

## Research Methodology and Ethical Considerations

The research utilized a mixed-method approach that combined quantitative and qualitative tools to collect data from primary and secondary resources. For the qualitative tools, the research team organised 23 FGDs and 89 in-depth interviews with key informants and decision-makers within the targeted countries, as well as informants with expertise in regional and global contexts. To collect quantitative data, an anonymous online survey, targeted 1,500 decision-makers and influencers and was completed by 878 of them (48.3 per cent males and 51.7 per cent females).

Furthermore, the research team conducted an exhaustive review of local and international documents and reports pertaining to the research topic. The following section describes in detail the target groups as well as the tools utilized for this research.

**Field work for the primary data collection was carried out from October 2021 to June 2022**

### Literature and Desk Review<sup>16</sup>

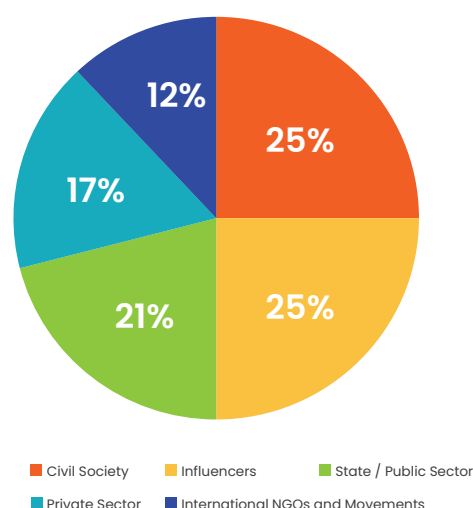
The research team conducted a comprehensive review of 170 local, regional, and international documents, studies, literature, and statistics to develop a deeper understanding of the relevant context, frameworks, policies, and laws in each country. The review focused on the following areas: (1) the economic, social, and political systems, (2) labour laws and related policies in the target countries, (3) the initiatives and programmes run by international, state, and non-state institutions to advance the concept of paternity leave, (4) paid and unpaid care work, (5) pertinent statistics in the target countries with relevance to care work and related topics (6) relevant local, regional, and international issues, and (7) previous programmes and initiatives aimed at achieving gender equality.

### Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)<sup>17</sup>

The research included 23 FGDs; four FGDs were held in each country and three FGDs at the regional level. FGDs were conducted with representatives from the private, state, and non-state sectors, the latter of which included social activists, influencers (including local staff of international organisations, researchers, academics, and media persons), and young activists. In total, 186 people

participated in the FGDs (114 females – 61.2 per cent, and 72 males – 38.7 per cent). The greater representation of women likely reflects a higher level of interest among them than men. The distribution of participants by sector from various countries is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Distribution of Participants in FGDs, by Sector



<sup>16</sup> For the list of reference sources, please refer to Annex 3.

<sup>17</sup> Further details can be provided by the research team upon request.

## Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)<sup>18</sup>

The research included 89 KIIs with experts, decision-makers, and influencers (65 per cent women and 34 per cent men) from various state, non-state, and international institutions. In each country, 14 to 18 interviews were conducted, while five interviews were conducted at the international and regional levels.

## Online Survey<sup>19</sup>

A survey was designed to measure the knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, and practices of men's childcare and paternity leave. It was distributed and collected electronically, with protections for participant confidentiality. The research team approached 1,500 actors (decision-makers and activists) in various countries' governmental and non-governmental sectors. The survey achieved a final response rate of 58.5 per cent (i.e., 878 accepted responses); 48.3 per cent of respondents were men and 51.7 per cent were women. Consistent with the other research tools, the elevated rate of women's participation reflects higher level of interest and engagement of women across all assessed sectors. Following data collection, final survey results were weighted to more accurately reflect the reality of women presence in decision-making processes, as explained below. The breakdown responses to the survey questionnaire according to the assessed countries is as follows: 119 in Tunisia, 148 in Jordan,

161 in Lebanon, 214 in Palestine and 236 in Morocco. Respondents to the survey questionnaire were also more educated than their national counterparts; 45 per cent held a two-year diploma or Bachelor's degree, while 40 per cent held a Master's degree or higher. The final 14 per cent had a high school diploma. Overall, male respondents had higher levels of educational attainment than female; 46 per cent of men reported having a Master's degree, compared to 34 per cent of women. The average age of respondents was 42 years old, in part owing to the inclusion of a cohort of youth influencers active with civil society and international organizations. As will be further detailed, the majority of actors are married, with higher rates of marriage among male actors. In addition, almost all married, divorced, separated and widowed actors had or presently have young children. The average number of children per household was 2.6. Among married actors, 66 per cent are married to a working partner, with higher rates among married female actors (86 per cent) than male (50 per cent).

Before fielding the survey, the questionnaire was tested and piloted to identify any questions or statements that needed clarification, as well as to ensure that the statements and options were appropriate for each country's context.

### Data Statistical Weighting:

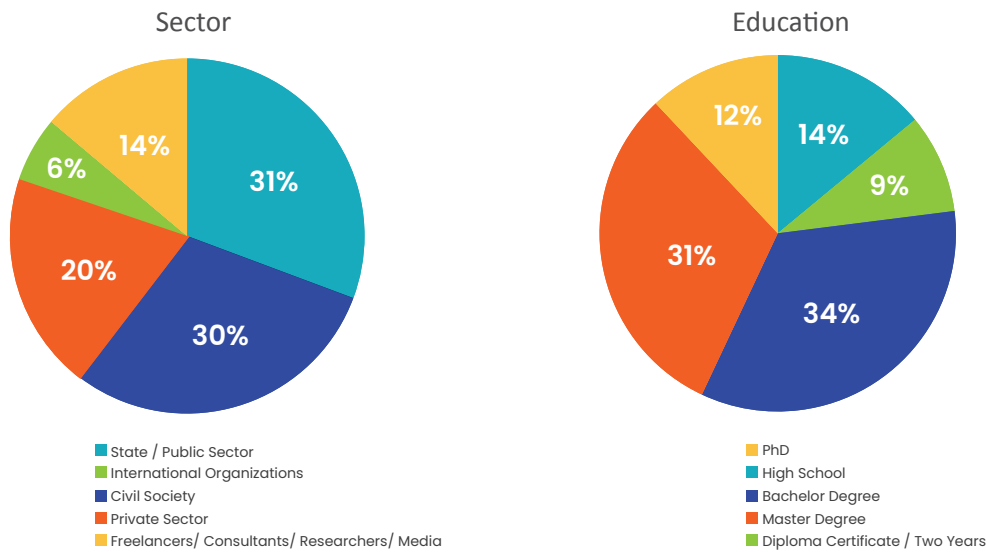
Response rate to the survey questionnaire was higher among women than men, which likely reflects a greater interest in the research topic among women. As a result, and to reflect contemporary circumstances to the most accurate extent possible, the research team developed a statistical weighting methodology to adjust the results for each country and the total sample. Based on the available secondary data and informed estimates from

key informants in each country, the statistical weight of women was adjusted to 30 per cent and men to 70 per cent. This re-calculation ensured results at both the regional and country level reflect a more realistic account of the contemporary presence of women and men's influence in decision-making positions and important areas of public life and dialogue.

<sup>18</sup> Further details can be provided by the research team upon request.  
<sup>19</sup> Further details can be provided by the research team upon request.



Figure 3: Sample Distribution of Surveyed Actors, by Sector and Education



## Ethical Considerations

The sensitive nature of the project raised several ethical issues, some related to the context of the research and others linked to the content. The research team was cognizant of these challenges and accounted for them in the design of the research methodology and training of the researchers and research assistants. In designing the research methodology, the team drew both on its experience in conducting similarly sensitive research in the MENA region, including on topics related to gender equality, and internationally recognized leading practices. This research was grounded on the experiences of men and women. They were key to the successful conclusion of this research and its utility in the future. Respect was the watchword of the research team throughout the research. The primary objective was to keep the research participants and research team safe and reduce any risks. With that in mind, the research team kept all of the research participants anonymous and obtained informed consent from all. All electronic data were encrypted and physical records stored securely.

## Challenges and Mitigation

The research team encountered several challenges during the research period. In cooperation with UN Women, the team was able to address these challenges and identify and craft alternative solutions, as described in following paragraphs.

## Technical Challenges

The principal technical challenges encountered by the research team included:

- The limited number of specialized, evidence-based studies, reports, and statistics related to the issue of care leave in all the targeted countries. In addition, there was a similar lack of timely data related to women's participation in the labour market (whether formal or informal), care work, the care economy, as well as the character of this participation. The absence of surveys on time use in many countries makes measuring the reality of care difficult. The team utilized international literature and available data, as well as primary research to compensate for this limitation.
- Participants sometimes lacked sufficient knowledge on the issue of care leave, both in terms of its content and implications. In addition, participants displayed varying levels of acceptance of the issue of care leave in general and paternity leave in particular. Thus, in certain instances, the research was an opportunity for furthering the interest of these actors and increasing their level of knowledge and curiosity.
- The research team faced differing levels of cooperation by private sector actors in the assessed countries. In some countries, these actors expressed explicit rejection of the study, creating difficulty in coordinating workshops and interviews and obtaining data from the

private sector. Echoing the sentiments of a number of private sector actors in all countries, an official in a leading private sector institution in Morocco commented: **“Our agendas are full; we are already burdened by the significant economic decline. Don’t put more pressure on us.”**

(Male, 46 years, private sector, Morocco).

- The absence of focus on the informal labour market and home-based businesses among secondary sources and participating actors proved limiting, considering this is where a sizable portion of the labour force in all the assessed countries is concentrated, especially female workers and other marginalized groups.

### Political and Economic Challenges

Among the most important challenges and obstacles at the time of conducting the field research, were the following:

- Conducting the study coincided with the parliamentary elections in Lebanon and changes in the government and parliament in Morocco, which led to difficulty coordinating workshops and interviews with the actors from the government sector.
- Tunisia continued to face constitutional, political, economic and social challenges throughout the research period. As a result, such studies were considered secondary in relation to other issues perceived as more crucial and immediate.
- In Lebanon, the ongoing energy and resulting power cuts and internet outages hindered conducting interviews or workshops on time. Meetings were postponed more than once due to these factors.
- The research team experienced difficulty in moving across the different areas of Palestine due to the restrictions on movement within the West Bank and between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. As a result, the team was forced to hold many meetings via virtual means of communication.
- While a typical online survey has an average response of 44 per cent, the response rate for the present survey (more than 58 per cent) is considered a sign of interest and motivation. Still, a non-response rate of 40 per cent indicates a gamut of possible reactions among the sizable segment of targeted actors who elected not to participate. Such reactions range from limited or absent interest to outright opposition to the research. It may also indicate a significant share of those approached are too busy. Regardless of the specific reason, the absence of any information related to those who chose not to participate deprives the present research of the ability to investigate the reasons behind this decision. Reflecting this, non-response and non-respondents represent a possible topic of study for the future.
- Despite the challenges encountered, the research team was able to complete the study at the highest levels of quality, owing to the collective experiences of team members and their understanding of the reality of each assessed country, in addition to the ability to access data sources and communicate with state and non-state institutions. The support of UN Women through its regional office and country offices also played a vital role in this success.

## Box 2: Research as an Opportunity for Positive Change

The research process and the methodology behind its preparation sparked constructive dialogue and heated debate between the parties from different sectors and within each sector. Overall, the research was able to reach more than 1,100 men and women from all sectors (decision-makers, staff members, freelancers, journalists, and religious leaders), targeting them to participate in the systematic activities of collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data. The subject of the research was unprecedented, arousing the interest of all segments of the target audience. Throughout the process, the vast majority of participants responded positively in terms of their willingness to learn about the nature of the study, its rationale, and related questions, as well as the willingness to learn, debate, and benefit from different stages of the research. At the same time, some evinced negative and oppositional positions towards discussion of the issue from the start, claiming it was not relevant to the contemporary reality or to their priorities or those of their countries. The research process prompted discussion across all the targeted countries at state and non-state levels and within the private sector and international institutions. A large number of participants expressed their belief that improvements and change had transpired as a result of the research. These observations can be summarized as follows:

1. A part of the broader issue of care work: Some considered the dialogue about paternity leave an opportunity for change and development on the overall issue of care roles regarding women and men, the state, the private sector, and society as a whole.
2. Appropriate timing: For some, the research came at an appropriate time, as it was accompanied by important changes at the legal level regarding paternity leave (in Morocco, Palestine and Jordan) and at a time when political and economic crises threaten the historical accomplishments towards achieving equality (in Tunisia and Lebanon).
3. Human impact: The research affected participants on the individual and human level, with many

feeling that the research process itself gave them the opportunity to express not only their opinions, but also their own concerns and needs.

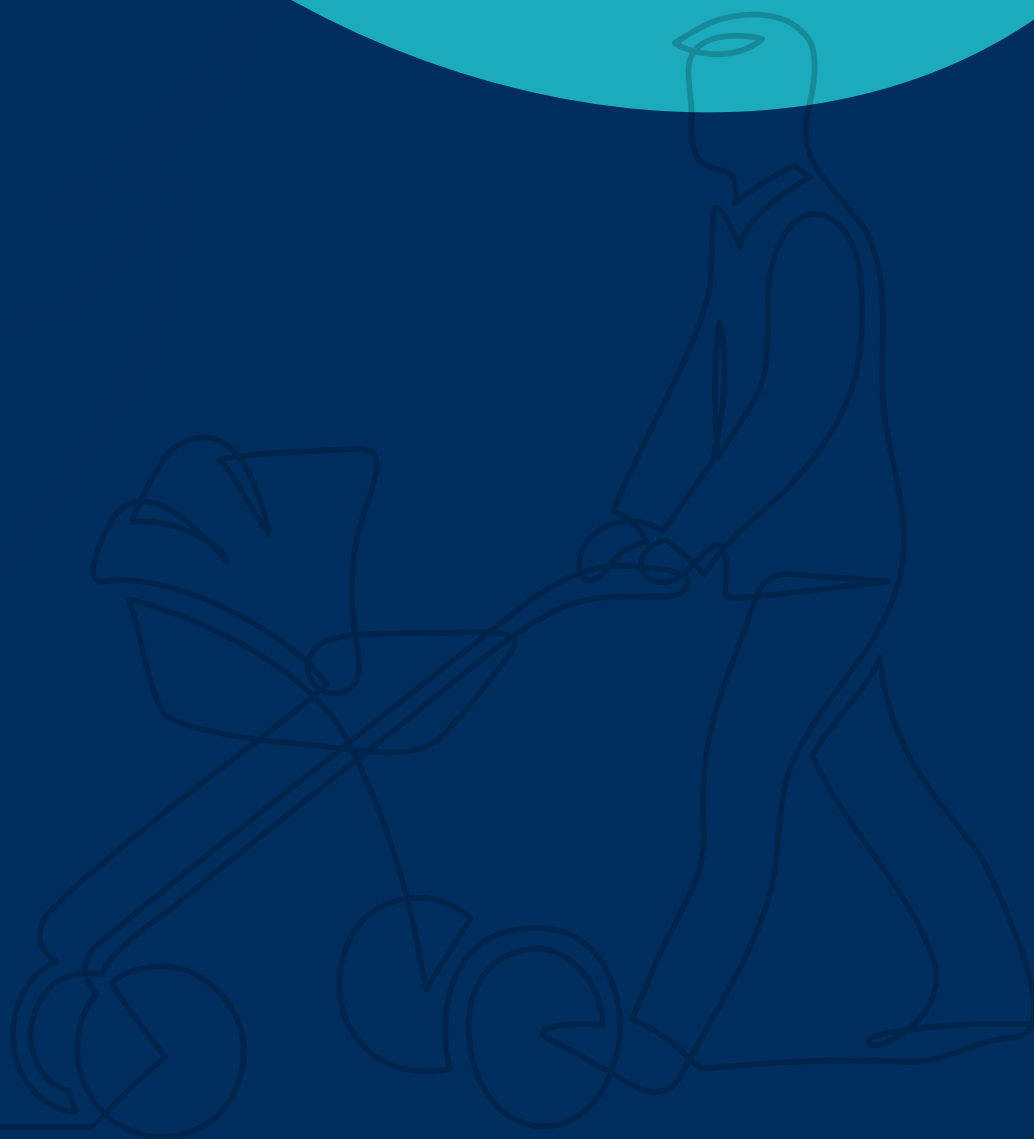
4. Generating Momentum for Change: The impact of the research extended to the ongoing national and sectoral debates at the highest levels. A large number of participating decision-makers expressed their perspective that the subject of the study had become a priority for them, which they will actively work towards. They committed to open discussion about it in their institutions and between the respective parties at every possible opportunity.
5. Detecting Incipient Opposition: While limited, signs of vocal resistance to introducing the issue of men's role in caregiving, but, especially, the issue of paternity leave were detected. This was present across sectors, but most prevalent in the private sector. As mentioned previously, a number of institutions representing the private sector refused to cooperate or participate in the research arguing that the topic is not only a non-issue for the sector, but, in fact, an additional burden for a challenged economy. This view was not universally held, however, as a number of representatives of the private sector were enthusiastic to participate. In their own words, they returned to their institutions with suggestions and potential interventions in support of extending paternity leave and flexible work to women and men across the private sector. Across all countries, these individuals pledged to continue dialogue within their sector and support the research recommendations once issued. As a representative of the private sector explained, in a sentiment shared across the assessed countries:

**“The biggest beneficiary of parental leave and flexible hours for workers, both men and women, is the private sector. We will seek to clarify this to the rest of our sector, as the traditional perspective is currently dominating our sector.”**

(Male, 48 years, private sector, Palestine)

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **PATERNITY LEAVE AND THE ROLE OF MEN IN CHILDCARE IN THE MENA REGION: AN OVERALL PERSPECTIVE**



## Introduction

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2022, the MENA region has the second largest gender gap to close among all regions, save for South Asia. At the present pace, the region will not close the gap for another 115 years.<sup>20</sup> Although persistently high, improvements have been observed, especially relative to 2020, when the MENA region received the lowest positive score (61.1 per cent and a 39.9 per cent gap) of all regions in the Index. Continuous reform has been witnessed over the past years; by 2020, the gap had narrowed by 0.5 points compared to 2019 and by 3.6 points compared to 2006.<sup>21</sup> As will be detailed in the succeeding, country-specific chapters, while the countries included in the research have certain similarities, they also exhibit distinct political, economic, and social conditions. The disparities between countries are due to a complex set of variables, but the most consequential factor in recent history has been the varying levels of political will among the governing regime on the one hand and the agency of women's rights organizations (WROs) and other human rights groups on the other. The historically-invoked example is Tunisia, where many of the

achievements towards gender equality were driven by the political leadership and a strong women's movement. More recently, Morocco has been cited for its progress, where major reforms have been introduced in all fields of gender equality, most notable of which is the enacting in 2022 of a 15-day paternity leave in the public sector.

This chapter provides an analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data for the five countries overall (i.e., a regional analysis). Though providing comparative data for illustration of key points, full analysis for each country follows in the specific chapters. It must be noted that the use of the terms regional / region does not mean that the study is representative of all MENA countries. Instead, it may provide important regional insights, which prompt further investigation in each country, as well as those not assessed in the present research. All findings presented are reflective of the results of the primary research, and, thus, the responses of each group of actors in each country.

### Regional Relevance and Evolving Agendas

"The issues of care work in general and the issue of childcare in particular, are on our agenda. Women in our region continue to be challenged on multiple levels, especially in relation to discrimination in the labour market. The equality that we seek is necessary for respecting human rights and achieving development. The patriarchal system encourages men to be forceful and use violence at times, while women are raised as caregivers. The region is going through transformations in gender roles and responsibilities regarding childcare. We must seek to identify and reform childcare-related legislations and policies. We must also highlight the need for partnership in care work in order to achieve sustainable development and the enabling of men and women to carry their childcare work, while also carrying out their work and engagement in the public sphere."

**Dr. Fadia Kiwan, Director General of the Arab Women's Organization**

## MENA Region Context, Discourse and Evidence

There is a growing interest across the region in the broader issue of unpaid and underpaid care work in general and the issue of men's role in care work in particular. This is exemplified by a plethora of recent laws, policies, and regulations extending parental leave to men, in addition, to a number of initiatives, *albeit* many still in an embryonic stage, spearheaded by international organizations and local NGOs, as will be clarified later. However,

paternity leave remains either ignored, unregulated, unstandardized, short and symbolic, or even non-existent as Table 1 illustrates. Across the region, maternity leave ranges between 56 to 120 days, while paternity leave ranges from zero days (in the case of 10 countries listed below) to as high as 15 days in Morocco. The most common duration of paternity leave is three days, the case in five countries.

<sup>20</sup> World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2022. [Global Gender Gap Report 2022 | World Economic Forum \(weforum.org\)](https://www.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, Page: 23. [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf)

Table 1: Duration of Maternity and Paternity Leave in Arab States

Country	Maternity Leave	Paternity Leave	Country	Maternity leave	Paternity Leave
Morocco <sup>23</sup>	98 days	15 days (public sector) and 3 paid days in private sector	Mauritania <sup>22</sup>	98 days	0
Tunisia <sup>25</sup>	60 days	2 days in public sector and 1 day in private sector	Iraq <sup>24</sup>	98 days	0
United Arab Emirates <sup>27</sup>	60 days	5 days	Syria <sup>26</sup>	120 days for the first child, 90 days for the second child, 75 days for the third child	0
Lebanon <sup>29</sup>	70 days	4 days (Only military sector)	Oman <sup>28</sup>	50 days	0
Jordan <sup>31</sup>	90 days	3 days	Qatar <sup>30</sup>	98 days	0
Algeria <sup>33</sup>	98 days	3 days	Kuwait <sup>32</sup>	70 days	0
Bahrain <sup>35</sup>	70 days	3 days	Libya <sup>34</sup>	98 days (112 days in case of delivering more than one child)	0
Egypt <sup>37</sup>	120 days	1	Yemen <sup>36</sup>	60 days and shall be extended by 20 days in case of delivering twins	0
Saudi Arabia <sup>39</sup>	70 days	3 days	Sudan <sup>38</sup>	56 days	0
Palestine <sup>41</sup>	98 days for government employees, 70 days for the private sector	3 days (public sector)	Somalia <sup>40</sup>	98 days	0

22 ILO. Mauritania – Maternity Protection. <https://cutt.ly/43K23yl>

23 Moroccan Labor Code, Article 152

24 Iraq Labor Law No. (37) 2015 Article 87 <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/MONOGRAPH/96652/114261/F-218842884/IRQ96652%20Eng.pdf>

25 Law No. 70 of 1982 dated August 6, 1982 on the Regulation of the Rules of Procedure of the Internal Security Forces, and Tunisia Civil Service Law, Article 47

26 Syrian Labor Law No. (17) 2010 Article 120 <https://bit.ly/3fU13Ci>

27 Federal Decree Law Regarding the Regulation of Employment Relationship <https://bit.ly/3MkxqX0>, <https://bit.ly/3MkxqX0>

28 Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Manpower Labor Law No. (35) 2003 Article 83 <https://omanportal.gov.om/wps/wcm/connect/ac78dc4f-69f0-4ddd-ad36-eebf357a43f6/Omani+Labour+Law.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>

29 Amendment of Articles 28 and 29 of the Lebanese Labor Law No. 267 of 15 April 2014

30 Qatar Financial Center. QFC Law No. (7) 2005, Article 40 <https://qfcra-en.thomsonreuters.com/rulebook/article-40-maternity-leave>

31 Civil Service Bureau 1955. "Civil Service Law No. (9) for the Year 2020 and its Amendments until 5/1/2022 [http://www.csb.gov.jo/web/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=28&Itemid=302&lang=ar](http://www.csb.gov.jo/web/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=28&Itemid=302&lang=ar)

32 Kuwait Labor Law No. (6) 2010, Article 24 <https://www.manpower.gov.kw/docs/LaborLaw/KuwaitLaborLaw-English.pdf>

33 SKUAD. "Employer of Record (EOR) in Algeria" <https://www.skuad.io/employer-of-record/algeria#:~:text=Working%20Hours,than%20eight%20hours%20a%20week>

34 Libya Labor Law No. (12) 2010, Article 25 <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/travail/docs/2080/Law%20No.%2012%20for%202010%20concerning%20of%20labor%20relations.pdf>

35 The Daily Tribune News of Bahrain.(2021).Bahrain Extends Maternity Leave by 10 Days. <https://www.newsofbahrain.com/bahrain/69900.html>

36 Republic of Yemen Labor Code No. (5) 1995 Article 45 <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/WEBTEXT/44043/65001/E95YEM01.htm>

37 <https://www.egypt.gov.eg/arabic/laws/labour/default.aspx>

38 Sudan Labour Code 1997, Article 46 <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/WEBTEXT/49122/65103/E97SDN01.htm>

39 Albawaba. "Maternity and paternity leaves in the Arab World: Slow Yet Significant Progress". 21 September 2020 <https://www.albawaba.com/business/maternity-and-paternity-leaves-arab-world-slow-yet-significant-progress#:~:text=Maternity%20Leave%3A%2070%20Days>

40 Somalia Leave Laws – Vacation Tracker. <https://rb.ly/3pzegh>

41 Palestine Economy Portal. "The Government Increases Maternity Leave from 10 Weeks to 14 Weeks". 1 March 2022 <https://bit.ly/3YrCGSX>, Palestinian Labor Law No. (7) 2000, Article 103 [http://legal.pipa.ps/files/server/ENG%20Labour%20Law%20No.%20\(7\)%20of%202000.pdf](http://legal.pipa.ps/files/server/ENG%20Labour%20Law%20No.%20(7)%20of%202000.pdf)  
cade-through-enhancing-womens-economic-opportunities



Gendered roles, defined and enforced by societal norms and traditions and the patriarchal system in the MENA region, contribute to the low participation of women in the labour market. According to data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)<sup>44</sup>, women in the MENA region spend nearly five times as

## Regulatory Policies on Women's Work

Women's participation in the labour market and increasing levels of education have prompted countries and governments to set regulatory policies for women's work in different sectors. This includes, for instance, paid maternity leave, unpaid leave, breastfeeding hours, maternal health services, and protection against discrimination and dismissal from work for reasons related to maternity. Additionally, women now have the right to return to work after maternity leave, and some organizations provide flexible hours and nursery services at work in order to protect the rights of women and their children and facilitate childcare. Globally, laws have been enacted across various regions of the world to ensure protection for working women and their children. The Arab Labour Organization (ALO), for example, drafted Convention No. (5) on Arab Women Workers of 1976.<sup>47</sup>

Overall, the Convention emphasized the necessity of gender equality in all labour legislation and called for equal employment opportunities for men and women in all fields and for equality across working conditions. As for maternity leave, the Convention stipulates that women have the right to take full paid leave, before and after birth, for a period of no less than 10 weeks, including at least six weeks afterwards. It further prohibited employers requiring women to return to work before the expiry of this period. The Convention gave pregnant women the right to obtain a special sick leave in the event of illness resulting from pregnancy or giving birth and guaranteed women the right to take unpaid leave to care for children while retaining their jobs during this period. In addition to the

necessity of setting up a nursery in the establishments in which women work, whether by the employer alone or jointly with owners of other establishments, the Convention delineated that the conditions and specifications of these nurseries must be in line with the relevant legislation of the respective country. As regards, working conditions and protection of women, the Convention prohibits employment of women in hazardous or arduous work or work that is harmful to health or a violation of their morals. It further prohibited their employment at night or for additional hours, noting that the work they perform during the last periods of pregnancy and the first period after giving birth should be reduced.

47 ALO, Arab Convention No. 5 in 1976 on Working Women (Arabic) <https://bit.ly/3wz55WV>

The ALO had also addressed care work during its various conferences; the most recent being the 47<sup>th</sup> Session of the ALO Conference in 2021. The Conference recommended unpaid care work be recognized and redistributed through social protection policies, in addition to the adoption of flexible work arrangements for those responsible for providing care. During the International Breastfeeding Week activities, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) emphasized the importance of employers allowing women to take paid maternity leave, providing safe places for breastfeeding in the workplace, promoting access to quality and affordable childcare, and providing comprehensive child benefits and adequate wages.

## Section 1: The Role of Men in Childcare<sup>48</sup>

The perceived and actual reality of childcare roles is influenced by marital status, having children, and the work status of partner. As such, it is essential to understand that circumstances for men and women, state and non-state actors (hereinafter referred to as actors) are varying, and,

as such, produce varying perceptions and relations to care roles in general and childcare in particular.

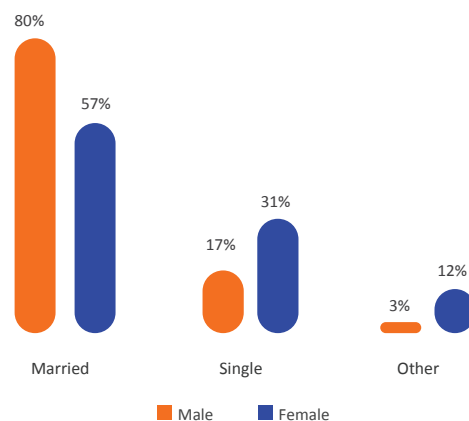
As Figures 4 and 5 show, a much larger percentage of surveyed male actors (80 per cent) – men hereafter – were married than surveyed female actors (57 per cent) – women hereafter. In contrast, more women (31 per cent) than men (17 per cent) reported never having been married. It is also notable that many more women were single parents and breadwinners (12 per cent) than men (4 per cent). These participants are mostly divorced, separated, or widowed.

In addition, 50 per cent of men were married to women who are stay-at-home care workers, compared to only 14 per cent of female actors who were married to stay-at-home men. In contrast, 86 per cent of female actors were married to a working-for-pay partner, compared to 50 per cent of male actors. As many as 85 per cent of married men and women reported having children; 73 per cent had children who were under 18, while the remaining 12 per cent had children who were 18 years old or older. In contrast, 15 per cent of the surveyed actors had no children, most being younger and recently married.

Figure 4: Distribution of Employment of Partners for Surveyed Actors, by Sex



Figure 5: Distribution of Surveyed Actors by Marital Status, by Sex



## Perception of the Contribution of Men to Childcare

Beliefs and perceptions are an important dimension in assessing the willingness and readiness of the region and each country to address the issue of men's role in caregiving in general and childcare in particular. The data generated from

the regional survey provides further evidence about the presently limited, yet promising, contribution of men to childcare. As explored below, men and women were found to hold diverging perceptions and experiences on the question of childcare.

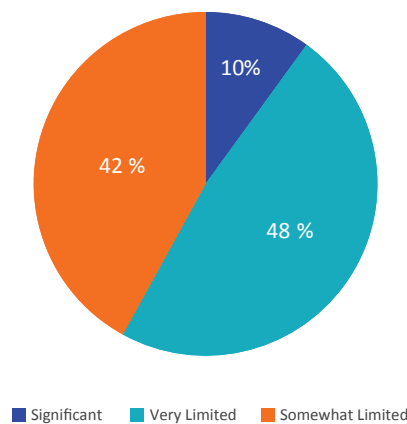
<sup>48</sup> The percentages in this chapter represent the total of surveyed actors from five countries: Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and Palestine.



**Only 10 per cent of research participants believed the contribution of men to childcare is significant:** The majority of actors, instead, believed that the contribution of men to childcare is either very limited (48 per cent) or medium/somewhat limited (42 per cent). Assessment of contribution varied by country, where 58 per cent of Palestinian actors assessed contributions of men to be very limited, compared

to 36 per cent of Tunisian actors who shared the same belief. Actors from civil society reported the highest level of equality in childcare within their households (44 per cent), followed by government employees (37 per cent), international organizations (34 per cent), and private sector employees (25 per cent).

Figure 6: Perceptions on the Extent to Which Men Participate in Childcare



**Women were considered the most burdened<sup>49</sup> by childcare, with only a limited role performed by government and private sector:** While 68 per cent believed that current childcare roles are burdensome to women, only 50 per cent believed that they are burdensome to men. Further, when assessing the character of men's burden, respondents associated it less with tasks that require direct engagement with children and more with tasks related to providing for the family and home.

**“Men are burdened by their role as breadwinners and work long hours outside of the household. Do we really expect working men who come home exhausted to actually carry out more chores?! This is especially true for men from poorer families, where they must struggle to put food on the table.”**

(Male, 38 years, state actor, Jordan)

Another 39 per cent believed that the private sector is burdened by childcare, manifested in obligations to provide maternity leave, breastfeeding time, and sick days taken by women to care for ill children. The least burdened party, as assessed by actors, is the government, with only 30 per cent believing it shoulders any burden related to childcare.

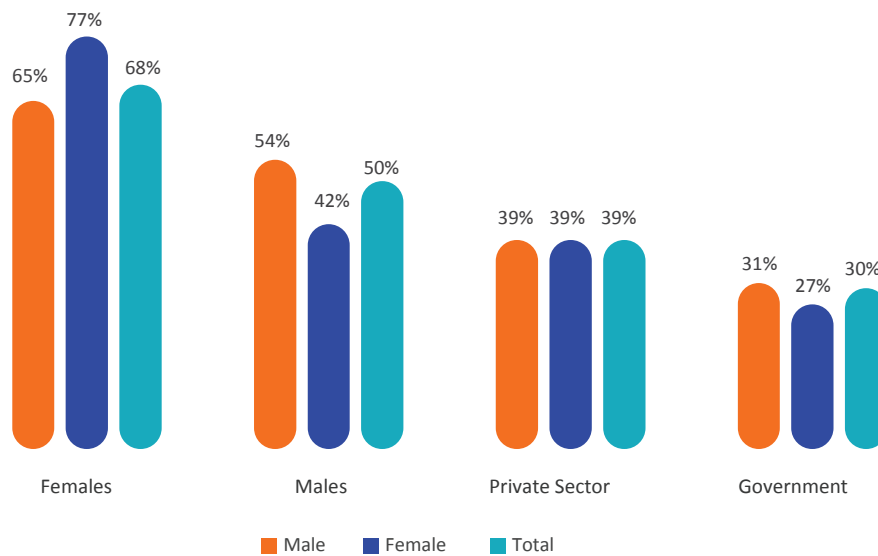
**“The private sector is already burdened by employing women who become pregnant, have babies, and leave work. Employers are forced to incur a high cost and this keeps them from employing women. The government, all the while, is not covering our expenses, and for any discussion of care work to succeed, all parties must perform their respective responsibilities, such as paying for a national social security system or fund that relieves the private sector from the burden of paying for additional leave for women or men.”**

(Male, 48 years, private sector, key informant, Palestine)

Female and male actors agreed that women are the most burdened by childcare, yet this perception was more commonly held by women (77 per cent) than men (65 per cent). Less than half of female actors believed that men are burdened by childcare, compared to 54 per cent of male actors. There were no significant differences between male and female actors in their perceptions of the burdens borne by the government or private sector.

<sup>49</sup> The use of the term “burden” here is equivalent to the word *onus* which implies an unduly held responsibility, which has negative connotation.

Figure 7: Belief Among Surveyed Actors that Childcare Responsibilities Pose a Burden to the Following Parties, by Sex



Disaggregated by work sector, 35 per cent of government actors believed that the government is burdened by childcare, while only 22 per cent of the private sector believed so. In comparison, while 44 per cent of private sector actors believed that the private sector is burdened by childcare, 42 per cent of government actors, 39 per cent of civil society actors and 31 per cent of international organizations shared the same belief. This is important as it has implications for future dialogue and debate over the issue between the tripartite actors, in which actors from the government and private sector may attempt to lay responsibility for the financial implications of any potential laws or policies on each other.

**“The government and the private sector try to tell you that they are already burdened by childcare, when their active and system-wide role is hardly existent. The private sector likes to argue that it is already burdened, and will resist any concessions in future debates over improved childcare laws and the financial responsibilities that come with that. Each side is trying to shift the responsibility to the other, while both are trying to avoid the issue all together by invoking financial limitations”**

(Male, 52 years old, civil society, Lebanon)

### Self-reporting on Care Roles by State and Non-State Actors

**Men were rarely the primary care givers, but many of them report sharing childcare roles equally:**

- None of the surveyed male actors in this research stated that they were the primary caregivers for children in their households. Only two per cent of male actors

reported that they “usually” serve as the primary caregiver.

- The percentage of male actors who reported assuming primary responsibility for childcare ranged from zero per cent in Lebanon, one per cent in Palestine, two per cent in Morocco, three per cent in Tunisia to six per cent in Jordan. Across all countries, the majority of male respondents identified women as the primary caregivers for children, with the rate of such perceptions ranging from 53 per cent in Lebanon and Morocco to 54 per cent in Jordan, 62 per cent in Palestine and 70 per cent in Tunisia.
- Childcare being divided equally between partners was reported by 28 per cent of male actors in Tunisia, 37 per cent in Palestine, 39 per cent in Jordan, 45 per cent in Morocco and 47 per cent in Lebanon.

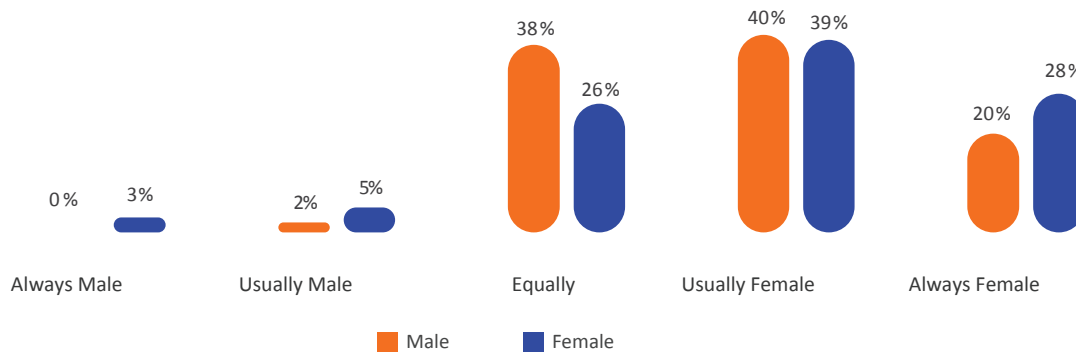
### Women provided a different account of the reality of childcare roles:

- While 60 per cent of ever-married<sup>50</sup> male actors reported that their spouses are the primary child caregivers, 67 per cent of ever-married female actors report that they are the primary caregivers.
- While 38 per cent of ever-married male actors reported equality in childcare roles, only 26 per cent of females agreed.

- Only three per cent of female actors who were working at the time of the survey reported that their spouses are the primary child caregivers, while 5 per cent of surveyed female actors report that their spouses are usually the primary child caregivers. It is interesting to find out that more females are willing to report the

primary contribution of males to childcare (8 per cent), while males are much less willing to report that (2 per cent). This is related to other findings about dominant masculinity and negative perceptions towards males who contribute to childcare.

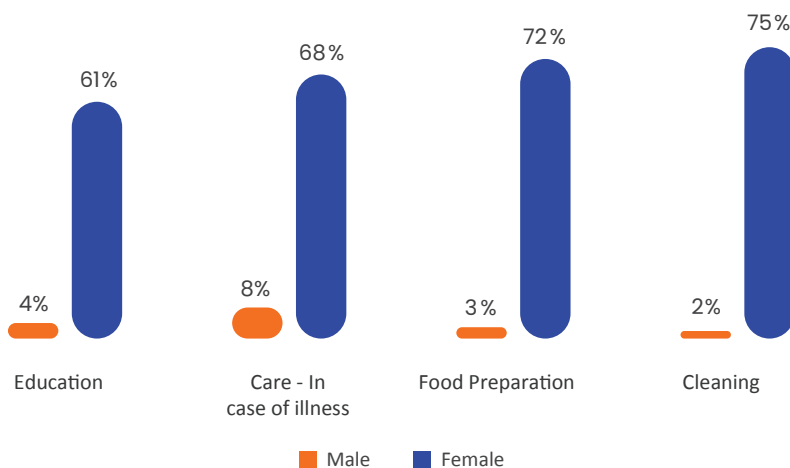
Figure 8: Reports by Surveyed Actors on the Primary Caregiver for Daily Childcare Roles Within their Own Households, by Sex



- The variations in reported perceptions between male and female actors on the role of men in childcare is partly explained by the fact that married male actors (50 per cent) are more likely to have a stay-at-home partner than female actors (14 per cent). Equality in the provision of childcare is reported at a higher level among married actors who have a working partner (44 per cent) than among those with a stay-at-home partner (27 per cent).
- Female actors who are divorced, separated, or widowed reported that they are fully responsible for caring for their children, while more than half of the divorced, separated, or widowed male actors reported that other women care for their children, for example, a current wife caring for step-children from a previous marriage.

An assessment of specific care chores related to childcare adds further clarity to these prevailing relationships and division of labour. Below, Figure 9 shows that men were most likely to become involved when a child is ill (8 per cent), followed by helping with schoolwork (4 per cent), food preparation (3 per cent) and house cleaning (2 per cent).

Figure 9: Reports by Surveyed Actors on Primary Caregiver in Childcare Roles within their Households, by Sex



50 A term referring to those respondents who are either divorced, separated, or widowed.

Qualitative data confirms and provides further elaboration on the trends above. Along with evidence presented in the succeeding chapters, these data suggest that men exaggerate their role in childcare. Many key informants argued that the contributions reported by men in the quantitative data do not match the prevailing household realities. Expressed by them, this is partly due to varying interpretations of the concept of equality among male respondents and/or their inclination to both subscribe to and present a more positive side of themselves.

**“Men exaggerate their role in care work at home. They keep saying words such as ‘We help’ or ‘We assist,’ when they should be talking about partnership. Men pick and choose what to do and when to do it. They have a choice to work with the children, otherwise they can just delegate or coerce women to do all of the care work, especially with children. Many think that it is cute of men to help. As a result, men are not really partnering with women and no real changes are being observed in regards to how men see their role and masculinity at home.”**

(Female, 42 years, key informant, civil society, Lebanon)

The exaggeration of the role of men in childcare is encouraged by celebrating men who carry out such roles, mostly by WROs. All the while, women are carrying out these roles as duties without any rights, entitlements or even appreciation derived from them.

**“Some men say that they ‘assist’ their wives. They never say that they are real partners with duty and responsibility for childcare. When a man gets to be known as assisting his wife with the home and childcare, he instantly becomes a hero among like-minded people and institutions.**

**He is considered as a role model and an example that must be disseminated. It is a step in the right direction, but we must be careful about making equality a matter of exception, instead of the norm, and we must not present these men as if that is the reality we aspire to, as such an arrangement is still very hard for most women.”**

(Male, 29 years, key informant, civil society, Tunisia)

This phenomenon, in which inequalities are glamorized through the presentation of a few role models – also known as “blue-washing” – should be reviewed and exercised responsibly, from a do-no-harm perspective. However, it is critical to note that factors do exist that drive men to undervalue or diminish their role in caregiving. Reflecting prevailing perceptions that male involvement in childcare is irregular and abnormal, a small number of participants in the study argued that the role of men in childcare and other care work is, in reality, more expansive than what is fully captured.

**“Some men do work at home and care for children, but they must hide that to protect impressions of their masculinity in a society that suppresses personal and unique expression of self.”**

(Female, 53 years, state actor, Morocco)

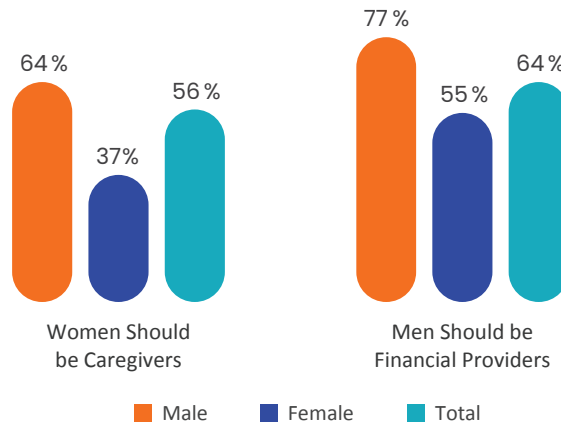
## Section 2: Attitudes Towards Childcare

The role of men and women in care work in general, and childcare in particular, is influenced by social norms, attitudes, and values. The perceptions of what constitutes “masculinity” and “femininity” and the roles attached to them are central to driving future cultural and institutional change.

### Views on Social Norms

- A majority of actors still subscribe to traditional division of roles, with 56 per cent expressing belief that women must be the primary child caregiver. However, a large minority (43 per cent) disagreed with such a perspective. Important variations are observed between sectors. As many as 65 per cent of private sector actors and 60 per cent of government actors believed that women should be the primary care givers, while 48 per cent of actors of civil society and international organizations shared the same view.
- 64 per cent of male actors believed that women must be the primary caregivers, compared to 37 per cent among female actors.
- Furthermore, 64 per cent believed that men should be the primary breadwinners within the household, while 36 per cent disagreed. The notion that men must be the primary breadwinners was expressed by 77 per cent of male actors and 55 per cent of female actors.

Figure 10: Agreement Among Surveyed Actors with the Statements “Women should be the Caregivers” and “Men should be the Financial Providers (Breadwinners)”, by Sex



- Though the majority of respondents believed males should serve as breadwinners, 83 per cent support the notion that women should also contribute to family income.
- Actors from civil society were the least supportive of the notion that men must be the primary breadwinners in the household (56 per cent), compared to two-thirds of actors across other sectors.
- 78 per cent of actors believed men should have an equal role with women in doing household chores. A majority also believed that men should spend greater time with their children.

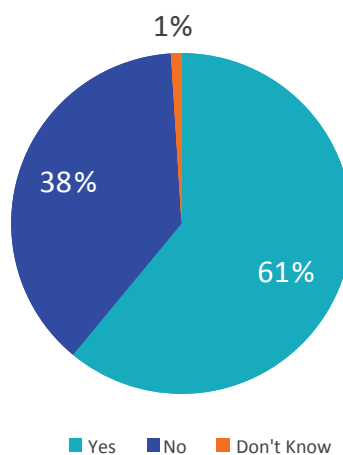
In general, the data show that while actors were generally supportive of the role of women in the labour market and their role as contributors to households' incomes, they were less supportive of broader changes in household roles that would result in men becoming more involved in care work and childcare, specifically.

### Views on the Role of Men in Childcare

The attitudes explored above operate in tandem with other broad cultural pressures that push men towards the labour market and away from the household.

- A majority (61 per cent) of respondents believed that men who engage in domestic work and childcare are shamed by the surrounding community.

Figure 11: Agreement Among Surveyed Actors that Men Who Contribute to Childcare are Shamed



- At the same time, 78 per cent of surveyed actors believed that men are under continuous pressure to be income earners, leaving them no room to enjoy or express their parental feelings or desires with their children. A majority (63 per cent) also believed these factors lead to unequal opportunities for men to contribute to child-care.

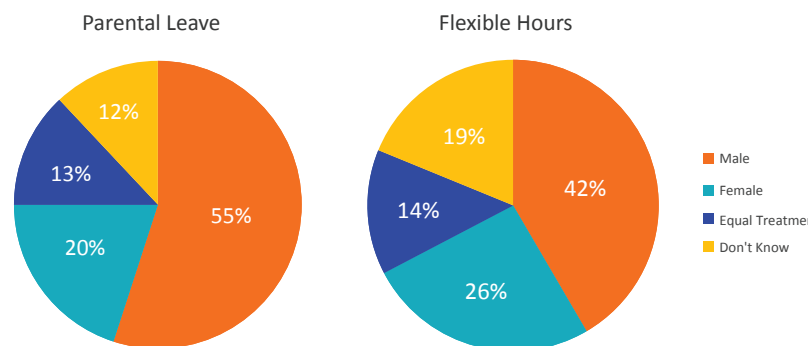
## Section 3: Discrimination in the Workplace

### Dimensions of Discrimination in the Workplace

The ultimate success of a parental leave policy will be influenced by the broader workplace circumstances in which it is implemented. The survey data shows that men and women reported facing varying work conditions. The findings show that the women were perceived to be discriminated against in all areas of employment (e.g., hiring, promotions, and firing, among others), with the exception of parental leave and flexible work hours. Among those surveyed:

- 55 per cent believed that men face the most discrimination regarding parental leave; only 20 per cent say women faced higher levels. A further 13 per cent believed men and women are treated equally and 12 per cent were unsure.
- Women and men viewed the issue differently. As many as 30 per cent of men believed that those women and men received equal treatment on the issue of parental leave, double the rate of women (15 per cent).
- Flexible work hours to carry out childcare is another issue where men (42 per cent) were perceived to face greater levels of discrimination than women. Overall, 42 per cent of respondents believed men were discriminated against, compared to 26 per cent who believed women faced discrimination. Remaining respondents either believed both were treated equally (14 per cent) or were unsure (19 per cent).

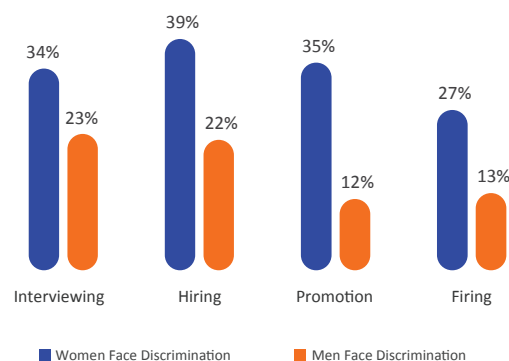
Figure 12: Reports of Surveyed Actors on Levels of Discrimination Against Men and Women in Access to Parental Leave and Flexible Hours



- Across all other areas, namely interviewing, hiring, promotion, and firing, respondents believed that

women face greater discrimination. Specific findings for each are presented below:

Figure 13: Reports of Surveyed Actors on Levels of Discrimination Against Men and Women in Interviewing, Hiring, Promotion, and Firing



- Similar views existed among actors in all countries, with the exception of those in Jordan, where the largest number of respondents believe that men and women are treated equally in the various elements of workplace interaction and performance.
- Actors from the government, the private sector and international organizations expressed agreement that women may face dismissal for childbirth at relatively equal rates (48 per cent). This was markedly lower than counterparts from civil society (61 per cent). In addition, male actors did not believe such discrimination is prevalent to the same degree as female. Specifically, while 62 per cent of women believed that women might be fired in case of childbirth, only 47 per cent of men expressed the same.
- Men were more convinced of the negative impact of childbirth on the performance of female colleagues than women. As many as 88 per cent of men believed that a maternity leave negatively affects a woman's performance, in comparison to 66 per cent of women.
- In contrast, only 15 per cent of female actors believed that the performance of men is negatively influenced in case of a paternity leave, compared to 26 per cent of male actors.

**“Women are penalized before they are even employed, most especially married women who are pregnant or have the potential to become pregnant. They are discriminated against in advertising for jobs, interviewing, assessments of performance, promotion, and firing. Most will be treated as a burden to the employers. A man leaves for one day or two and it is big news and a source of joking among men that he is now playing the role of the mother.”**

(Female, 34 years, key informant, civil society, Morocco)

Discrimination against women is rooted in arguments related to their reproductive role. The same prejudice is not displayed in the case with men, even those who express a desire to care for their children.

**“I avoid hiring women as much as possible, the same as many of my colleagues. They will become pregnant and have babies, which is highly costly and inconvenient for the employer. This way you avoid any future issues with maternity leave and avoid bringing up paternity leave.”**

(Male, 56 years, key informant, private sector, Palestine)

## Childcare as Viewed in the Workplace

The character of the work environment, particularly prevailing attitudes towards gender roles, is also a critical influence on men's ability to engage in childcare.

- As the primary responsibility for childcare is typically borne by women, with men playing a limited role, as much as 74 per cent of actors believed that the birth of a child negatively influences women's performance at work. Only 23 per cent believe that the birth of a child negatively influences the performance of men.
- Actors across all work sectors believed that a woman's performance is negatively affected as the result of childbirth. They are, however, more divided in assessing the effect on men; one-quarter of government actors believed that the performance of men is negatively impacted, while only 10 per cent of international organizations believed the same.

Figure 14: Perceptions of Surveyed Actors on Impact of Childbirth on Employee Performance, by Sex

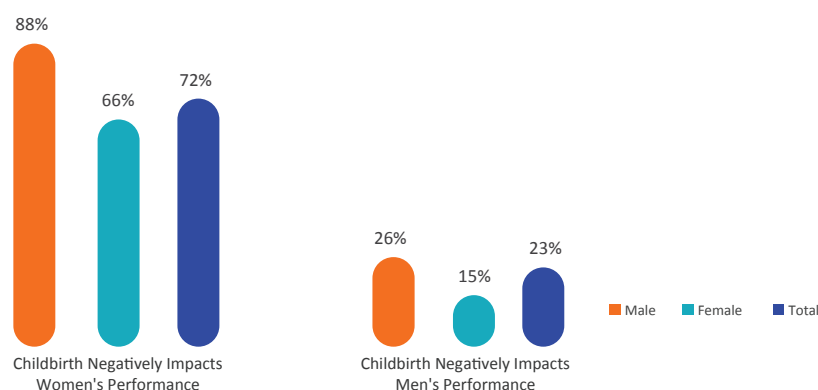
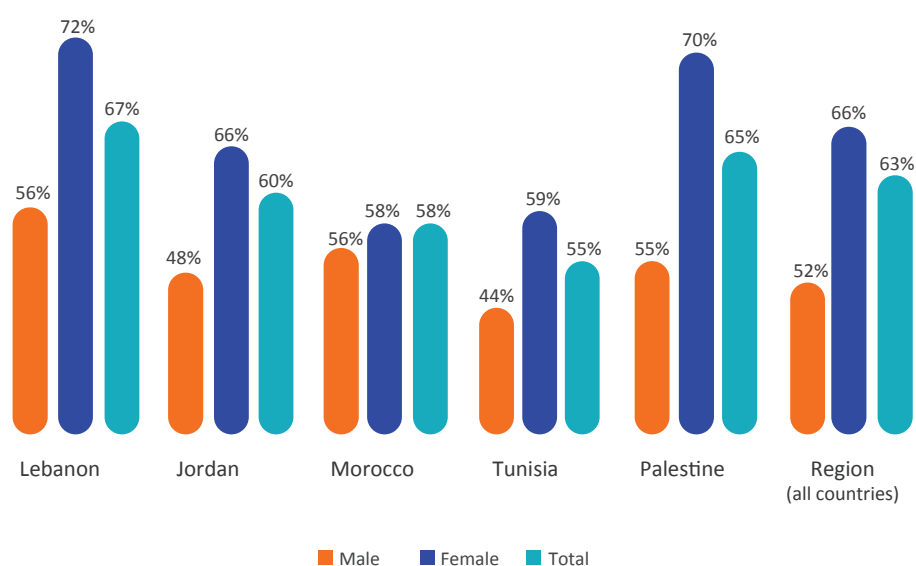


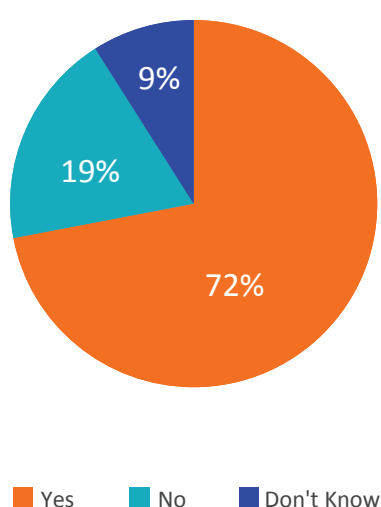


Figure 15: Perceptions of Surveyed Actors that Men are Penalized if they Request Paternity Leave, by Country and Sex



- Regionally, actors believed that men are penalized at a higher rate (62 per cent) than women (54 per cent) if they requested parental leave. In addition, 67 per cent of actors in Lebanon believed that men are penalized if they asked for paternity leave, a view shared by 65 per cent in Palestine, 60 per cent in Jordan, 58 per cent in Morocco, and 54 per cent in Tunisia. Male actors tended to assess their own risk of penalization at a higher rate than their female counterparts, as shown in the Figure below.
- The issue of masculinity is the heart of gender norms and attitudes towards men in childcare. While 68 per cent of surveyed actors believed that a woman would be positively treated in her workplace in case of taking leave to care for children, only 23 per cent believed men would receive a similar reaction. Rather, as many as 72 per cent of actors believed that men who request a paternity leave will be viewed as less masculine by colleagues. A final 19 per cent disagree, with 9 per cent unsure.

Figure 16: Agreement Among Surveyed Actors that Men Who Request Leave for Childcare are Viewed as Less Masculine

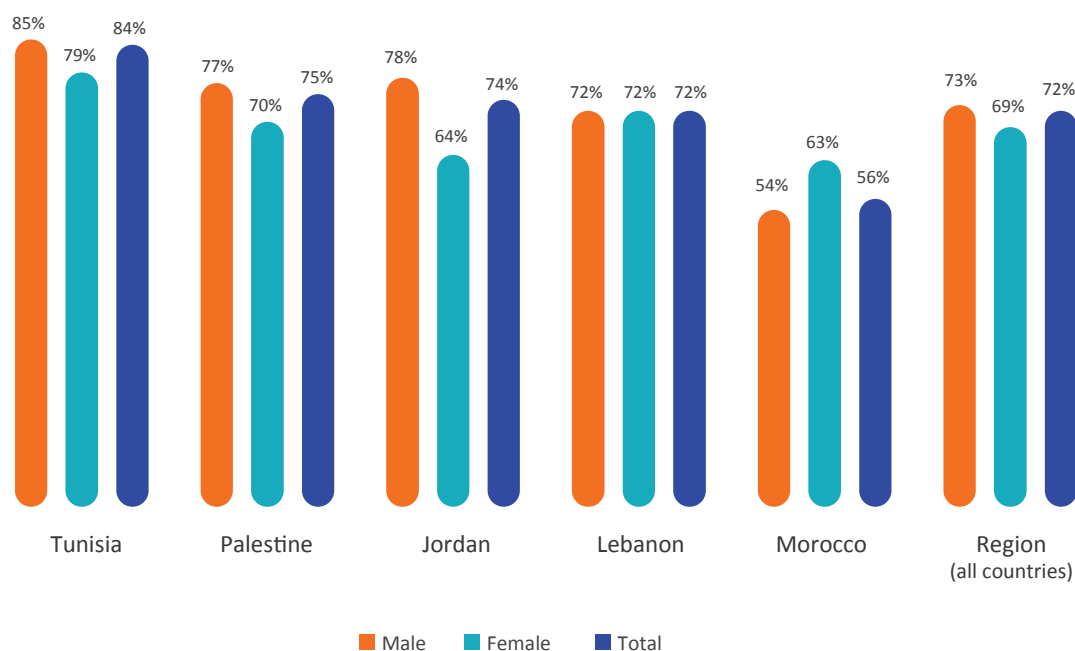




- Across all countries, masculinity is considered an important element in assessing the role of men in childcare. In Tunisia, 84 per cent of the actors believed that men who ask for a paternity leave are viewed

as less masculine by colleagues. The same belief was shared by 75 per cent of respondents in Palestine, 74 per cent in Jordan, 72 per cent in Lebanon, and 56 per cent in Morocco.

Figure 17: Agreement Among Surveyed Actors that Men Who Request Leave for Childcare are Viewed as Less Masculine, by Country and Sex



- The perception that men who ask for childcare leave will be considered less masculine was higher among civil society actors (76 per cent) compared to all other sectors (68 per cent). Such a belief is also slightly more common among male actors (73 per cent) than their female counterparts (69 per cent).
- Actors from civil society and international organizations (70 per cent and 68 per cent respectively), were more likely to disagree that men would receive a positive reaction from their workplace colleagues if they requested paternity leave of equal length as maternity leave than those in the private sector (61 per cent) and government (56 per cent).

The qualitative data provide additional insights on the complexity of the issue of masculinity, with actors presenting varying views to be considered in future actions. Some of the actors believe that the prevailing social norms around masculinity are entrenched in the dominant culture, inhibiting potential change.

**“From day one, boys and girls are brought up with an image of masculinity that boxes men into one role: earning money. Men are not expected nor encouraged to do childcare or even general care work. Both men and women buy into such a structure and consider it normal.”**

(Female, 34 years, key informant, civil society, Morocco)

Others believe that the continuous invocation of masculinity serves to cover deeply-rooted political and economic structures and interests that must be first tackled.

**“Whenever we make any demands for equality, our opponents start crying about the feelings of men and the risk of threatening their masculinity. I believe that the government, the private sector, as well as men, find the current arrangements convenient where women do the care work, thus creating significant savings for the government and the private sector. To men, this arrangement is convenient and must be preserved.”**

(Female, 44 years, key informant, state actor, Lebanon)

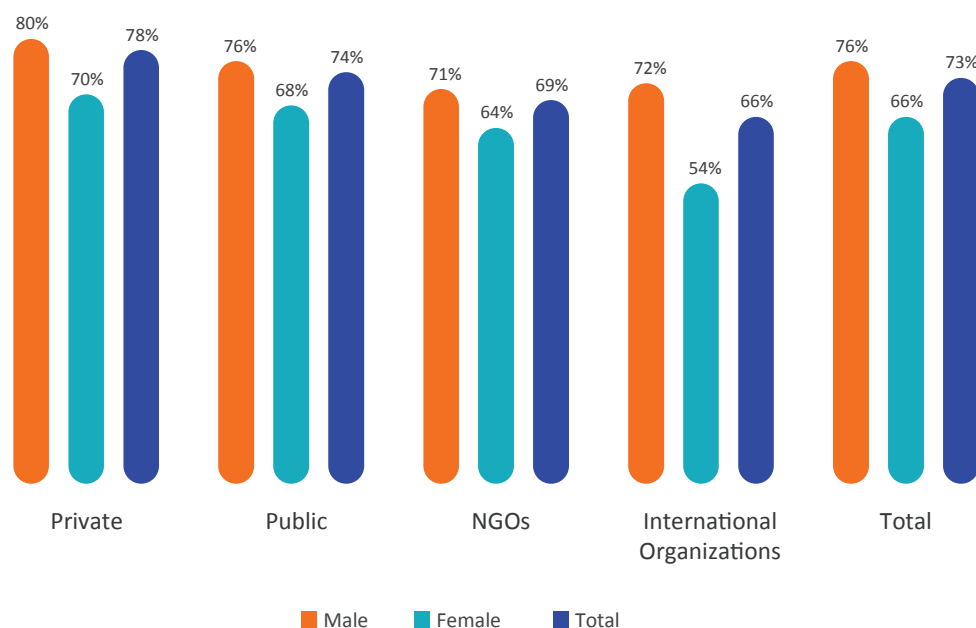
A third group among the surveyed actors pointed to the developments in the region around the definition of masculinity, which provide indications as to the current level of progress in society and points from which to move forward in engaging men with childcare.

**“There are some families that are highly egalitarian, where men and women are moving into more equitable arrangements and they share and partner on care work. Younger men are becoming more engaged. This is due to varying factors, including the need for the female partner to work and earn income, and the movement into nuclear family arrangements within increasingly urban settings. They are also impacted by social media and what they witness around the world.”**

(Male, 58 years, private sector, Tunisia)

- Closely related are concerns for parent-child relationships and time spent with children. Not having enough time to spend with children is a widespread concern, with most working parents feeling that they do not spend enough time with their children. As many as 74 per cent of survey respondents reported spending too little time with their children, as a result of their job. Perceptions of not spending enough time with children were most prevalent among private sector actors (78 per cent), followed by those in government (74 per cent), civil society (69 per cent) and those from international organizations (66 per cent). More male actors reported that they spend too little time with children (76 per cent) than female (66 per cent).

Figure 18: Reports of Surveyed Actors that they Spend Too Little Time with their Children, by Sector and Sex



## Section 4: Assessment of the Importance of Childcare and Interest in the Issue

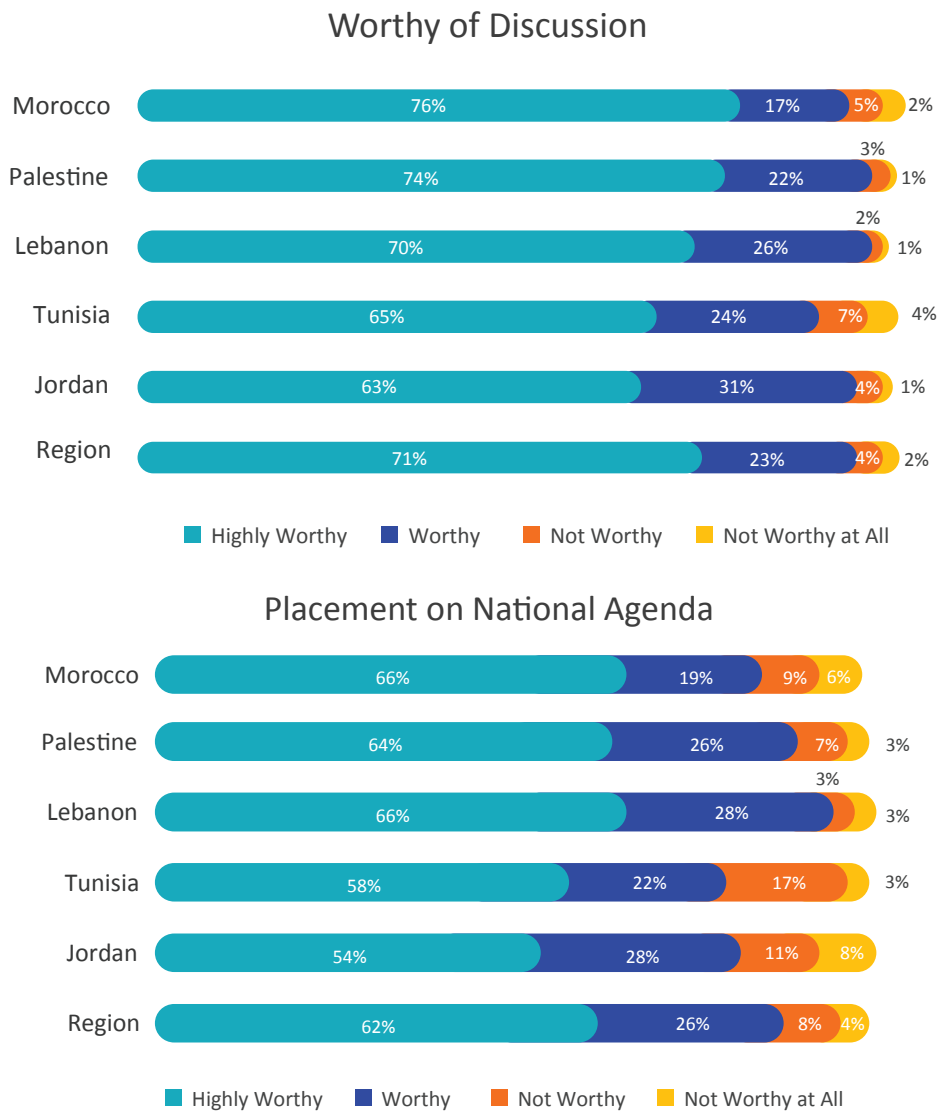
High levels of interest in men's role in childcare are observed among research participants, yet a crowded list of priorities challenges its inclusion in future policymaking.

Overall, the survey reveals the majority of respondents in the region (71 per cent), as well as in each country, believed that the role of men in childcare is highly worthy of discussion, while 23 per cent believed it was worthy. Only 6 per cent say that it is unworthy, while 23 per cent are neutral. A lower percentage of actors in the region (62%) believe that the issue should be placed on the national policy dialogue agenda. In contrast, 12 per cent believe that it should not be, while 26 per cent are neutral.

Belief that the issue is relevant and worthy of discussion was observed at the highest levels among across in Morocco (76 per cent), followed by Palestine (74 per cent),

Lebanon (70 per cent), Tunisia (65 per cent), and Jordan (63 per cent). Support for placing the issue on the national development agenda is lower, but still constitutes a majority of actors across all assessed countries.

Figure 19: Perceptions of Surveyed Actors on whether Men's Role in Childcare is Worthy of Dialogue and Placement on the National Agenda, by Country



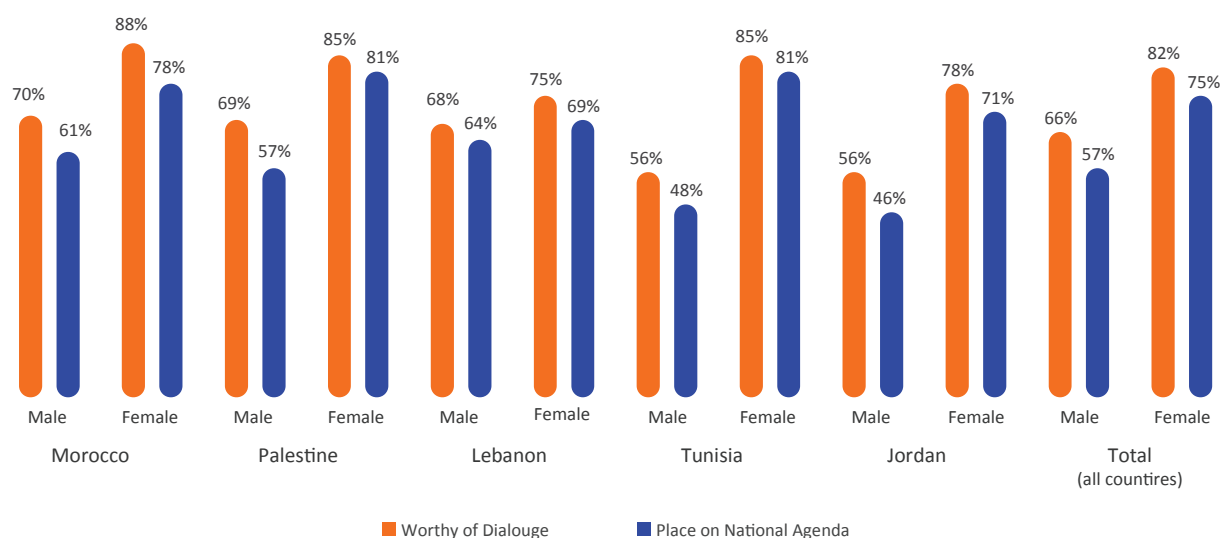
Women were more interested in the issue of men's role in childcare, as well as its placement on the national agenda, than men. Region-wide, 82 per cent of women believed that men's caregiving is worthy of dialogue, compared to 66 per cent of men. Another 75 per cent of women believed the issue should be placed on the national

agenda, compared to 57 per cent of men. Across the assessed countries, the greatest gaps between men and women are observed in Tunisia; 81 per cent of women believe men's caregiving should be placed on the national agenda, compared to only 48 per cent of men. The gap is lowest, by contrast, in Lebanon.

Critical to note is that, region-wide, 15 per cent of male actors' express explicit opposition to the placement of the issue on the national agenda, a segment of the population

that will be critical to account for in the design of future advocacy strategies and related interventions.

Figure 20: Perceptions of Surveyed Actors on whether Men's Role in Childcare is Worthy of Dialogue and Placement on the National Agenda, by Country and Sex



Interest in the issue of men's role in caregiving was highest among actors from international organizations (82 per cent), followed by civil society actors (77 per cent) and government employees (70 per cent). The lowest levels of interest were exhibited by private sector

actors (62 per cent). Support for placing this issue on the national agenda was also highest among international organizations (71 per cent), followed by civil society (67 per cent) and government (61 per cent). Private sector actors (54 per cent), again, expressed the lowest levels.

Figure 21: Interest of Surveyed Actors in Men's Role in Caregiving, by Sector

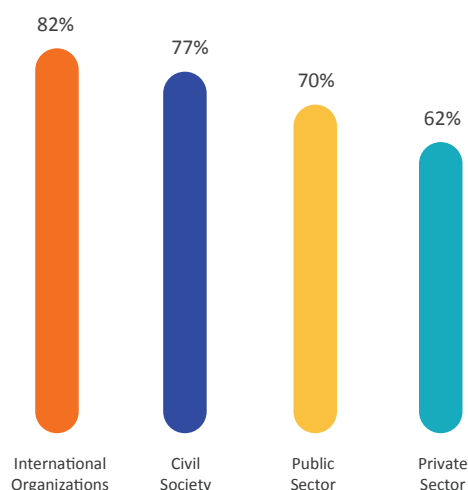
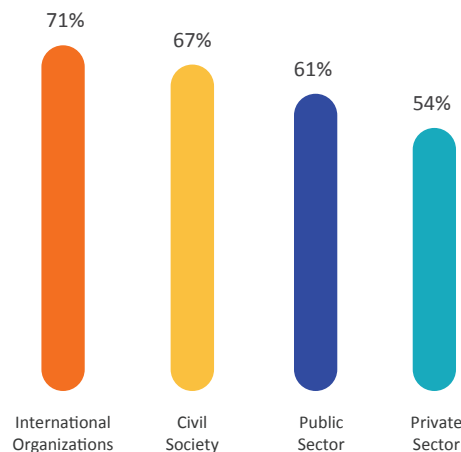


Figure 22: Support by Surveyed Actors for Including Paternity Leave in the National Agenda of their Country, by Sector



While a similar percentage of actors with children or without children at the time of the study said that the issue of paternity leave is relevant, there were variations in levels of support for placing the issue on the national agenda. Specifically, while 73 per cent of actors without children and 67 per cent of actors with children believed that the issue must be placed on the national agenda, only 61 per cent of actors with adult children felt the same way.

## Section 5: Perceptions on Legislations and Support for Paternity leave

### Perceptions of the Legal Environment

- In general, 67 per cent of respondents believed that contemporary childcare-related laws are discriminatory against either men or women. Specifically, 54 per cent believed that they discriminate against women, while 13 per cent believed that they discriminate against men. A final 22.0 per cent believed that contemporary laws do not discriminate.
- Actors were divided about the treatment of men and women in the workplace regarding childcare-related leaves and flexible hours. While 22 per cent believed that men and women are treated equally by employers, one-third believed that men are discriminated against, with an equal percentage believing that women are discriminated against.

- Women (13 per cent) were less likely to believe that laws are non-discriminatory than men (26 per cent). The majority of women believed that women are discriminated against, while only 46 per cent of men believe the same. Discrimination against men is reported by 16 per cent of men and only 4 per cent of women.
- The perception that legal discrimination exists against women is greatest among actors in Palestine (68 per cent) and Lebanon (60 per cent), followed by those in Morocco (46 per cent), Tunisia (41 per cent), and Jordan (34 per cent).
- The perception that legal discrimination exists against men, by contrast, is greatest in Tunisia (26 per cent), followed by Morocco (16 per cent), Jordan (11 per cent), Lebanon (9 per cent) and Palestine (8 per cent).

Table 2: Perceptions on the presence of discrimination in law regarding men and women's access to parental leave

Country	Discriminates Against Men	Discriminates Against Women	Both equally	Don't know
Lebanon	9%	60%	18%	13%
Palestine	8%	68%	15%	9%
Morocco	16%	46%	22%	16%
Tunisia	26%	41%	28%	5%
Jordan	11%	34%	38%	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>11%</b>

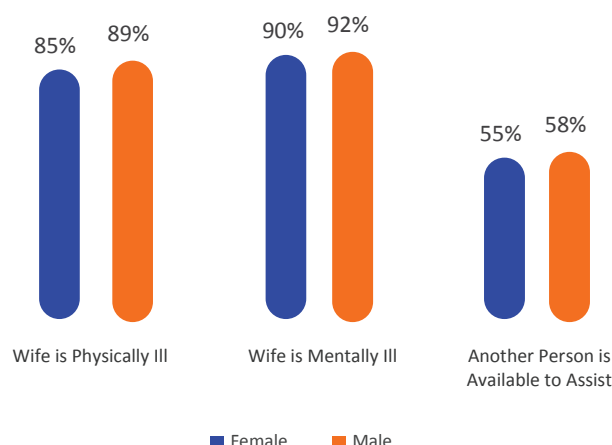
## Support for Change

- Male actors (61 per cent) were more likely than female (43 per cent) to report laws regarding care leave are discriminatory against men. In contrast, female respondents (31 per cent) were more likely than male (15 per cent) to believe that women are discriminated against under the law.
- Government actors were the least likely to believe existing legislation is not equitable, with 30 per cent reporting prevailing laws do not discriminate against men or women. In contrast, only 15 per cent of civil society actors believed present legislation is equitable, along with 18 per cent of those from international organizations and 21 per cent from the private sector.
- By contrast, 68 per cent of civil society actors viewed prevailing legislation as discriminatory against women, followed by those working in international organizations (64 per cent), the private sector (51 per cent) and the government (45 per cent). At the same time, 16 per cent of government employees and 14 per cent of those in the private sector believed that men faced discrimination. Only 8 per cent of respondents working with civil society and international organizations agreed.
- On the question of equality across care leave, a majority of government and private sector actors believed that men face discrimination (62 per cent and 60 per cent respectively). By contrast, 51 per cent of civil society actors and 47 per cent of those with international organizations held the same view.

**Increasing days allocated for parental leave:** Actors were supportive or supportive to some extent of an increase in the present number of maternity (87 per cent) and paternity (86 per cent) leave days. While 98 per cent of actors agreed (strongly or to some extent) that workplaces should provide maternity leave, 91 per cent also believed that they should provide paternity leave. Support for paternity leave is not uniformly distributed across the various work sectors. Rather, agreement is highest among actors from international organizations (95 per cent) and the government sector (93 per cent), and comparatively lower among civil society (92 per cent) and those in the private sector (90 per cent).

Actors also expressed support for extending the duration of paternity leave to be equal with maternity leave, given certain conditions. For example, 91 per cent supported an equal duration paternity leave in the event the wife is mentally ill, while 86 per cent expressed support in the event the wife is physically ill. As many as 68 per cent support paternity leave if both parents believed that it is necessary for them to be providing care. Support for paternity leave declined, though still constituted a majority (56 per cent) of respondents, in the event a person other than the husband is available to assist in childcare. There were no significant differences between men and women on this issue.

Figure 23: Support Among Surveyed Actors for Paternity Leave of Equal Duration to Maternity Leave, Given Specific Conditions, by Sex



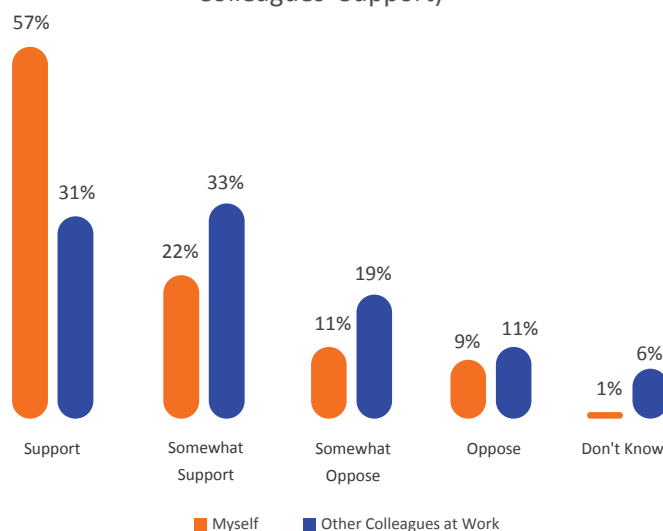
While actors from all work sectors supported extending the duration of paternity leave to be equal with maternity leave under specific conditions, pertinent divergences emerge when assessing the various conditions under which leave should be extended. For example, 60 per cent of actors from civil society and international organizations supported equal paternity leave even if there are other people available to care for the child (beyond than the mother). This compares to 58 per cent of those from the private sector and 50 per cent from the government.

**Equitable childcare legislation:** Actors were divided on whether legislation should be introduced to guarantee equal parental leave (i.e., the same duration for both paternal and maternal leave). Overall, 57 per cent expressed support for such legislation, while 22 per cent said they supported “somewhat,” and 20 per cent expressed opposition (wholly or to some extent). When

assessing the ideal length in the event of a paternity leave durations, actors in Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan identified 30 days, while those in Tunisia said two months, and those in Morocco three months.

Participants in the KIs and FGDs cautioned that such high levels of support might be driven by a combination of “political correctness” and the hypothetical nature of the questions. Rather, a more accurate representation of contemporary attitudes might be captured in indicators asking respondents to assess potential support by their colleagues with decision-making powers. When assessing these results, only 31 per cent of actors reported that their colleagues would support a paternity leave legislation, while 33 per cent said that colleagues would support to some extent, and 30 per cent that their colleagues would oppose such a legislation, either outright or to some extent.

Figure 24: Perceptions by Surveyed Actors of Support for Equal Parental Leave (Personal Support and Assessments of Colleagues’ Support)





Levels of support varied across countries. The greatest levels of support for equal parental leave were observed in Lebanon (72 per cent), followed by Tunisia (65 per cent) and Morocco (65 per cent). Actors in Palestine (48 per cent) and Jordan (45 per cent) were less supportive. The gap between the levels of self-reported support and perceptions of other relevant decision-makers is notable, especially when applying the theory that assessments of colleagues' support is a more accurate barometer of contemporary attitudes and, by extension, potential

for such policy changes. In Tunisia, the gap reaches 49 per cent, with only 16 per cent of the surveyed actors believing that their colleagues would support equality in parental leave. In Morocco, the gap is 27 points, with 38 per cent believing their colleagues support such policies. The gap is smallest in Lebanon and Jordan (18 points in both), though those in Lebanon were markedly more likely to believe colleagues would support such legislation than those in Jordan (54 per cent vs. 27 per cent).

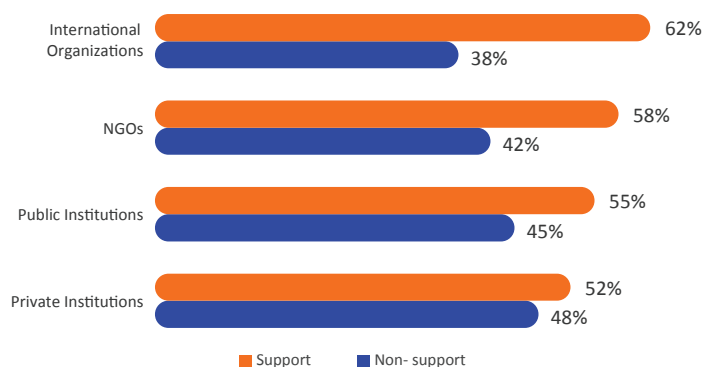
**Table 3: Levels of Declared Personal Support and that of Colleagues for Equal Parental Leave, by Country**

Country	Self-reported support	Assessment of colleagues' support	Gap
Lebanon	72%	54%	18%
Tunisia	65%	16%	49%
Morocco	65%	38%	27%
Palestine	48%	26%	22%
Jordan	45%	27%	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>26%</b>

Personal support for equal parental leaves also varied according to work sector. The highest levels of support were observed among actors from international organizations and civil society (62 per cent and 58 per cent respectively). Among government and private sector actors, 55 per cent and 52 per cent, respectively, expressed support. Simultaneously, 27 per cent of private sector actors declared that they would oppose legislation to grant equal parental leave, compared to 21 per cent of government actors, 16 per cent of those in civil society and 13 per cent in international organizations. Opposition among various actors might be further heightened depending on political will and / or realization of the implications of any new

law on government budgets or firms' expenses or overall operations. These are those actors who support equal parental leave on a hypothetical level, free to conceive of it according to their own preferences and priorities, but, when encountering the final product of the policymaking process, may shift to opposition owing to the changes, implications, or responsibilities ascribed. These potential individuals, represented in by those respondents who did not express unqualified support for equal leave (i.e., those who are "somewhat" supportive, in opposition, or uncertain), constitute significant segments across all the surveyed work sectors.

**Figure 25: Levels of Personal Support and Non-Support for Equal Parental Leave by Sector (Non-Support Includes Opposition and Uncertainty)**



Assessments of colleagues' suspected reactions for legislation guaranteeing equality in parental leave are highly talking about the potential support or opposition policymaking around parental leave will face. As the next figure illustrates, unqualified support among actors from all sectors was low, with a large segment of respondents expressing support with reservations, opposition, or uncertainty. Overall, when respondents assessed support of their colleagues, in no sector did a majority believe

these actors would be supportive. In the public sector, for example, only 26 per cent believed their colleagues would be supportive, whereas 74 per cent believed their colleagues were not wholly supportive, meaning they were believed to either be in opposition, supportive with reservations, or respondents were uncertain of their position. Overall, levels of "non-support" ranged between 64 and 74 per cent, depending on the sector.

Figure 26: Levels of Colleagues' Expected Support and Non-Support for Equal Parental Leave by Sector (Non-Support Includes Opposition and Uncertainty)

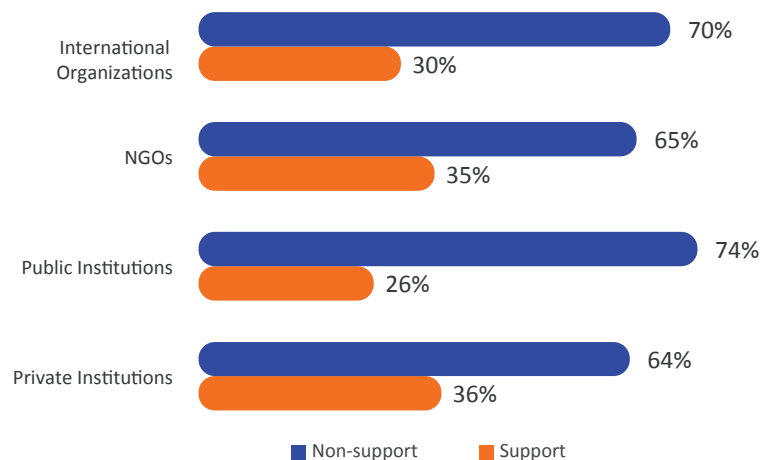
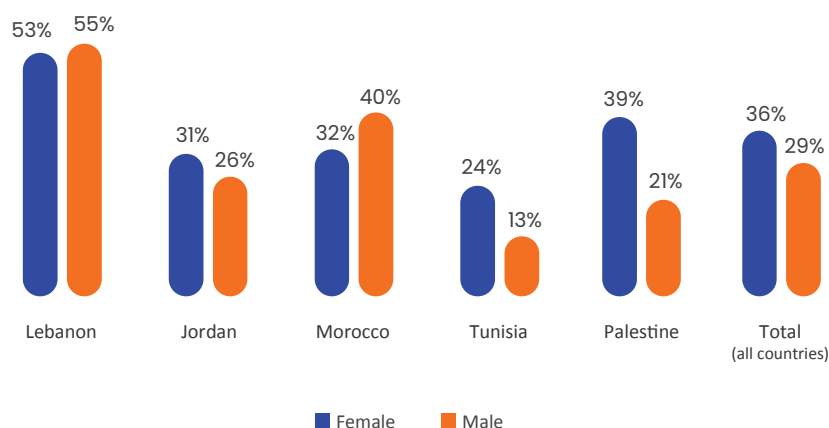


Figure 27: Level of Colleagues' Expected Support for Equal Parental Leave, by Country and Sex<sup>51</sup>

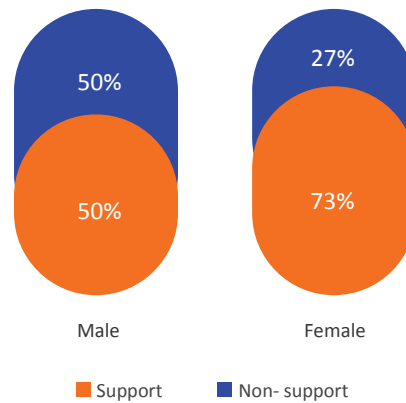


There were no significant differences between male and female actors in levels of support for increasing allocated time for the present childcare leave or allowing men to take leave under specific conditions discussed above. Women, however, were more supportive of introducing a

new law that provides equal childcare leave (73 per cent) than men (50 per cent). In contrast, 24 per cent of male actors oppose the introduction of such a law, along with 16 per cent of female.

<sup>51</sup> Male or female, in the legend, refers to the sex of the respondent, not the sex of assessed colleagues.

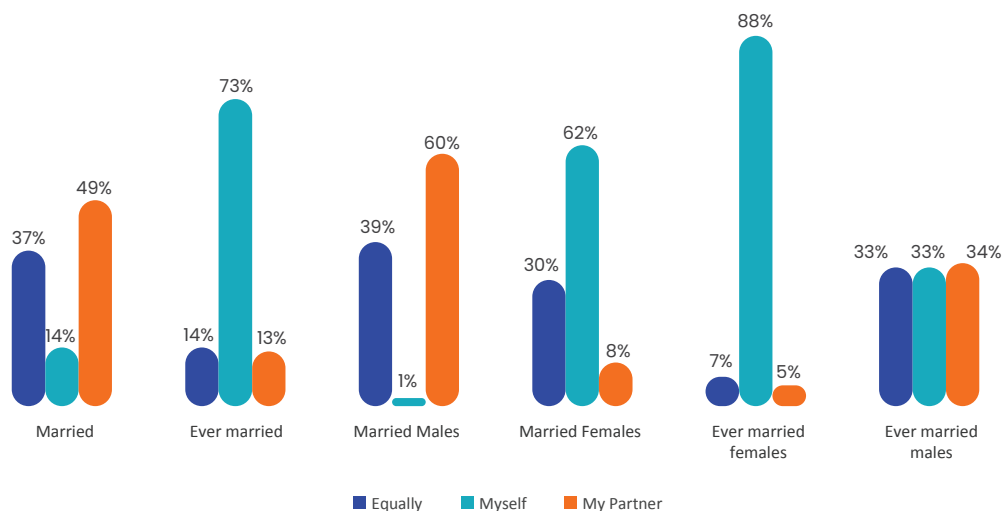
Figure 28: Levels of Personal Support or Non-Support for Paternity Leave, (Non-support Includes Opposition or Uncertainty), by Sex



**Marital status and having children are correlated with views on paternity leave.** Divorced, separated, or widowed actors (who were predominantly women) were the most supportive of various propositions regarding expanded paternity leave, as well as a broader role for men in childcare work. Single actors (predominantly female and young) were also interested and have an important role in any future support for paternity leave. Married actors (predominantly males and those married to stay-at-home partners) expressed interest, as well, though not at the same level as the other cohorts.

- One-third of married actors reported that childcare is done equally in their households, compared to 10 per cent among divorced, separated, or widowed actors. As many as 83 per cent of the divorced, separated, or widowed actors reported being the primary caregivers, while 26 per cent of married actors said the same. Only 1 per cent of married men reported being the primary caregiver for children, compared to 62 per cent of married women. Among divorced, separated, or widowed female actors, 88 per cent reported being the primary caregiver for children, while 12 per cent reported sharing such a responsibility with others (including other women and girls in the household, neighbours, and, in a few cases, former partners).

Figure 29: Levels of Participation of Survey Actors in Daily Childcare Work by Marital Status (Ever-Married Refers to Divorced, Separated, or Widowed Respondents)



- Overall, 74 of divorced or widowed actors believed that the issue of childcare is relevant and of interest to them, along with 71 per cent of married actors and 71 of single ones.

Figure 30: Percentage of Surveyed Actors Who Considered Paternity Leave a Relevant Issue, by Marital Status

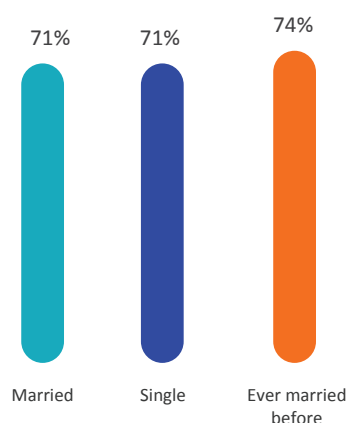
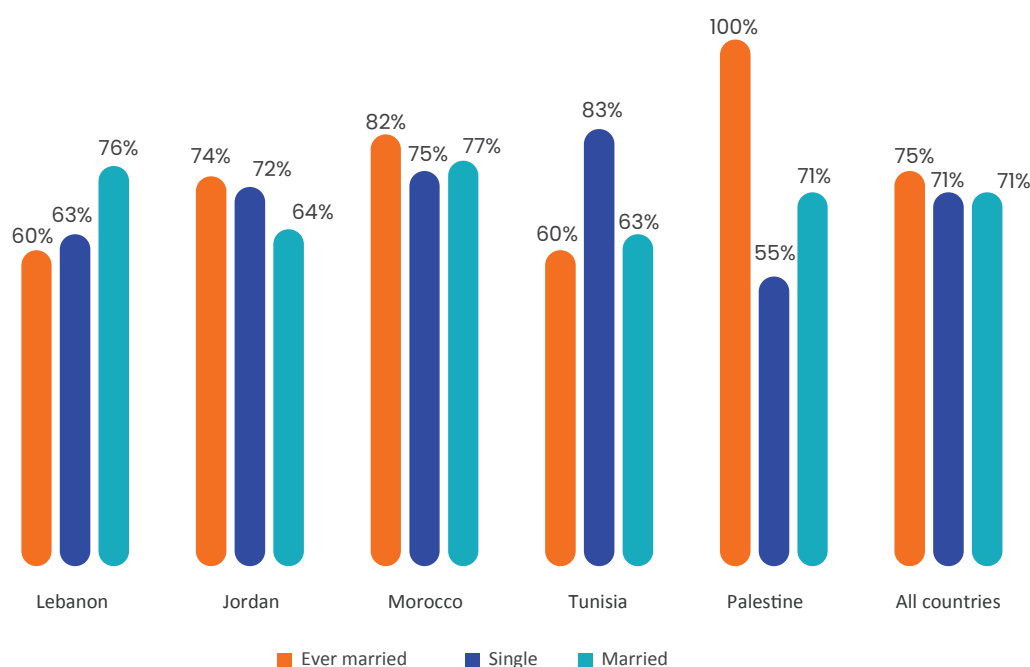


Figure 31: Percentage of Surveyed Actors Who Considered Paternity Leave a Relevant Issue, by Country and Marital Status

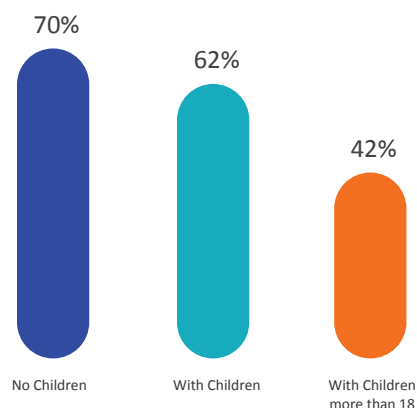


- A separate paternity leave law was supported by 92 per cent of divorced, separated, or widowed actors, compared to 69 per cent of single actors and 57 per cent of married ones. In addition, 52 per cent of single and divorced, separated, or widowed actors supported the enactment of a law that provides equal childcare leave, compared to 43 per cent support of married actors. Important are the differences in perceptions expressed by married men and women as indicated below.
- Actors who are married to a working partner were generally more supportive of paternity care leave than the ones who have stay-at-home partner (the vast majority of which are women). For example, two-thirds of those with working partners supported

the introduction of a separate paternity leave law, compared to 40 per cent of those married to a stay-at-home partner. Furthermore, 75 per cent of those with working partners supported the introduction of a law that provides equitable access to parental leave compared to 56 per cent of those with working partners.

- Actors with children under 18 and actors without children were generally more supportive of such new legislation than actors who have adult children. On the issue of paternity leave laws, 70 per cent of actors without children and 62 per cent of actors with children under 18 were supportive of introducing such policies, compared to 42 per cent among actors with adult children.

Figure 32: Levels of Support by Surveyed Actors for Legislation Guaranteeing Equality in Parental Leave, by Presence of Children in Household



## Summary of Findings

In the MENA region, the role of men in the provision of childcare is an issue that has not been receiving sufficient attention. With some recent exceptions, the issue, for the most part, has been absent from national dialogue across the region. The undertaking of this study coincided with a host of developments in the legal environment surrounding childcare (as further illustrated in the succeeding country chapters). Building on this foundation, the research process allowed for serious discussions at the national level in the five countries included in the study. The following summary provides the most salient results of the research.

**Indications of shifting roles, but limited scope:** The findings reveal that there are signs of change in childcare roles. Various cohorts of research participants commented on an observable increase in cooperation between partners in providing childcare within the household. In addition, the attitudes of younger actors seem to be relatively more supportive of equitable childcare. While these developments do provide evidence that prevailing care roles are not rooted in immutable structures, as well as offering opportunities for actors to build upon in future endeavours, a close analysis of the research data confirms that the role of men as primary child caregivers remains limited.

**Blue-washing existing gender roles:** The data show that women, with or without working husbands, continue to be the primary child caregivers. In contrast, men who are married to stay-at-home caregivers are rarely involved in childcare. The qualitative data illuminated the potential

existence of a phenomenon this study defines as “blue-washing”, in which a glamorized reality of gender roles is presented by amplifying or exaggerating successes in gender equality, in order to cloak the underlying, unequal reality of gender roles and relations. Many of the key informants warned of the perils of overlooking this reality, where women continue to do the caregiving in general and childcare in particular without any derived rights or entitlements, while men have the option to “assist” or “not assist” in childcare, all the while enjoying full legal rights. Such a finding highlights the need for a balanced, interactive, and evidence-based approach in achieving gender equality, which can ensure empowerment of women.

**Entrenched beliefs and cultural norms:** Though the region is witnessing changes in social and cultural norms, prevailing values and attitudes around masculinity are deeply resistant to revision. Though positive shifts in views towards women’s paid work and participation in the public sphere have transpired, perspectives on the role of men and masculinity have not witnessed significant change. As the research results show, the majority of all cohorts (regardless of sex, sector, or country) continue to believe that women must be the primary caregivers, while men must be the primary breadwinners. These beliefs are persisting at the same time that new and varied lifestyles, family formations, urbanization, and globalization are creating virtually-lived alternatives to the dominant norms, allowing individuals and couples to dissent and create their own reality within their own society. As such, the data show that younger couples, single actors who

are mostly female, and divorced, separated, or widowed women tend to generally hold more progressive views of gender equality and childcare roles, in particular.

It is critical to note that not all views on the issue of childcare are driven by social and cultural norms. The data show that support for more equitable gender relations and legislations is also driven by necessity. For example, the greatest support for equal sharing of childcare is expressed by women who are divorced, separated, or widowed and young couples who are mostly working at the same time. In contrast, men who have a stay-at-home wife are less supportive of gender equality.

**Prevalent gender-based discrimination in the workplace regarding childcare:** Actors perceive that gender-based discrimination dominates the workplace. In general, less than one-third of the actors stated that the various elements of work (e.g., hiring, promotion, firing) are equitable for men and women. Rather, the largest plurality believed that women are discriminated against on all of these issues, with some expressing beliefs that men are discriminated against. Overall, while actors believe that discrimination at the workplace is directed predominantly against women, they are also of the view that men face higher levels of discrimination in matters of paternity leave and flexible work hours, both of which are critical to men's involvement in childcare.

**For many, a question of priorities:** While majorities of actors are interested, in principle, in the issue of men's caregiving, the qualitative data show that many of these believe that there are other issues, prerequisites, and priorities to be addressed and achieved alongside or in advance. While particular to each of the assessed countries (as presented in the specific chapters), a number of common priorities are observed. Those priorities directly related to childcare are elaborated upon in the recommendations chapter. The following are included as examples:

- Support parents in the performing of childcare – and women's access to the labour market – by improving the availability childcare services, such as nurseries and kindergartens;
- Ensure the equal treatment of women in the labour market, especially in employment, pay, and promotion;
- Work to expand and improve maternity leave, as WROs in all countries consider the present policies to be

insufficient. At the same time, ensure that employers are committed to providing women with their full leave as entitled under the law;

- Enhance the social welfare system to provide equal opportunity for both men and women to take care of their children;
- Raise awareness on the importance of men's childcare to support the establishment of equal parental leave for both men and women and more flexible working hours.

For future programming, it must be emphasized that the most supportive groups identified in the analysis (e.g., young couples, divorced, separated, or widowed women) remain weaker in their ability to influence public policy and debate, relative to older, married, male actors who are well-established, with an associated interest in preserving the *status quo*. All of the above illustrates that the level of interest among men in changing the present situation does not match that of women, in large part owing to the fact that half of the men have their female partners at home caring for the children.

Still, a combination of rising political will in a number of countries and the few pioneering efforts on this issue might constitute an effective springboard to expand to a wider national interest, extending beyond a few political actors. The present opportunity to place this issue on the national agenda must build on these developments and advance efforts tailored to the ongoing developments in each country.

**Individual support for legislative reform, but an uncertain enabling environment:** Both qualitative and quantitative data indicate that, overall, actors are generally supportive of a greater role for men in childcare. Importantly, the majority also supports a range of potential legislative options capable of promoting men's involvement in childcare, though to varying degrees by sex, country, and work sector. That said, it is critical to note that while research participants express their individual support for such measures, they are sceptical of the existence of widespread support across society. For example, while 60 per cent of respondents supported an increase in the number of paternity leave days, allowing men to provide greater care for children, only one-third believed that their colleagues would be supportive.

Examined in concert with findings from the qualitative data, it is reasonable to suggest that opposition or simply lack of support for paternity leave is larger than the rates observed among research participants. It is the views and preferences of these colleagues that will hold the key to successful policy making. Further, as noted previously, those groups that tend to be more supportive of such policies often have less access to decision-making and thus less influence on policy and legislation. This phenomenon is common in conservative societies, referred to as “pluralistic ignorance,” which occurs when people erroneously infer that they feel differently from their peers, even though they are behaving similarly. It is consistent with a situation in which the minority position on a given topic is wrongly perceived to be the majority position or where the majority position is wrongly perceived to be the minority position.<sup>52</sup> Accounting for the possibility of such a phenomenon, the data suggest that the realm of legislation might be open for further reform on this issue, though with the likelihood of potential resistance among actors across all segments of society.

**Variations by sector:** While perceptions of the reality of childcare are not significantly different among actors from various sectors, it was notable that actors from the private sector are the most affected by work-related limitations to spending time with children. Though a significant group of these respondents believes that the private sector is already burdened by time and financial implications of maternity leave, many were interested in finding creative and modern ways to motivate their male and female employees through workplace policies linked to caregiving, such as child leave and flexible working hours.

Government actors tend to fall between the private sector and civil society and unions in their perspectives on contemporary caregiving. They are, however, the least willing to admit the current laws are inequitable and in need of reform. Actors from civil society and the national staff of international organizations tend to be the most supportive of equitable rights and paternity leave.

Across all sectors, there are actors who will support and others who will oppose new legislations providing a separate paternity leave or an equitable parental leave law. Despite the higher overall levels of reluctance and opposition by private sector actors to expanded

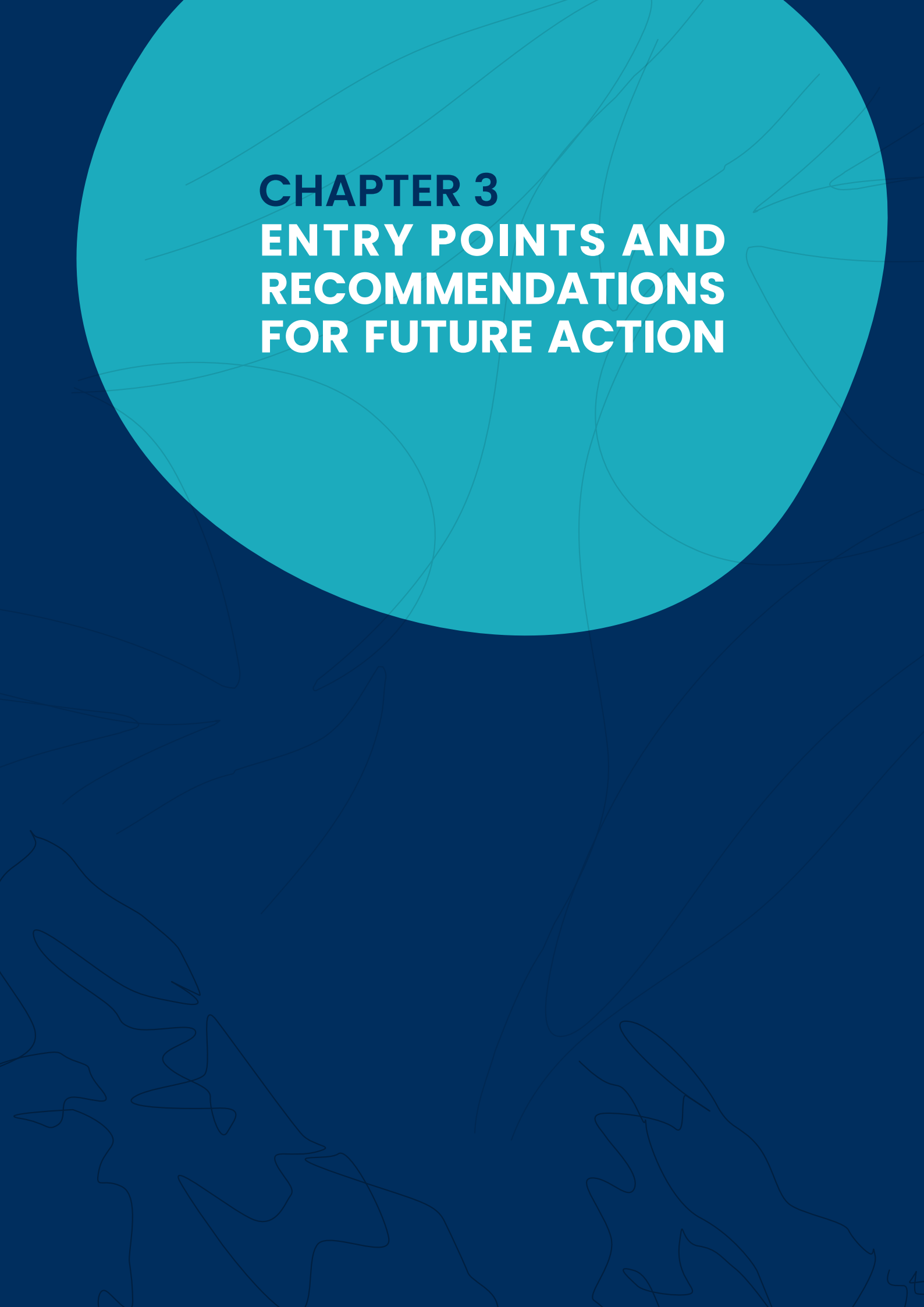
parental leave, all countries assessed in this study offered examples of innovative and pioneering private sector firms interested in the issue and also working to promote or facilitate the role of men in childcare. In most instances, they are concentrated among international companies. In contrast, there are a number of actors in civil society and international organizations who were not enthusiastic about placing the issue for discussion at this stage on the public agenda, a position frequently justified on the basis that there are other priorities requiring more immediate attention. Reflecting these circumstances, a comprehensive, tripartite dialogue that includes civil society and WROs is an important mechanism to structure and advance future policy and legal interventions.

**Overall, women are more supportive of men’s involvement in childcare and paternity leave:** The issue of childcare and men’s role is important to both women and men. Yet, results indicate that women, overall, hold more progressive views on gender equality-related issues and are more supportive of new legislations and cultural norms that engage men in active childcare. However, women are not a homogeneous group, nor are men. For example, while married women with children have a greater interest in the subject, overall, married women with no children and single women are also highly interested and more supportive of equitable legislations. Men who have adult children and men who have a stay-at-home partner are the least interested and supportive.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> See for example, <https://psychology.iresearchnet.com/social-psychology/decision-making/pluralistic-ignorance/>

<sup>53</sup> Country-by-country analysis is presented in full in the succeeding chapters.





# **CHAPTER 3**

## **ENTRY POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION**

## Introduction

This chapter presents the overall conclusions, entry points, and opportunities for future action, as well as recommendations that, though based on the five assessed countries, may yet prove relevant for other countries in the MENA region. Specific entry points and immediate actions for each country are also provided.

## Overall Entry Points and Opportunities

### Changing Family Patterns and Gender Roles

The question of men's role in childcare and paternity leave is gaining momentum around the world and among governmental and non-governmental actors in the MENA region. The ongoing social, economic and political transformations in the region are among the key drivers, principally the transformation from extended to nuclear families, urbanization, decline in fertility rates, increase in parity in education and women's employment, and the widespread access to new technology and social media. These transformations augur increasing pressure on traditional perspectives regarding childcare and their developments should be proactively studied and incorporated in initiatives focused on care roles. Many families, especially nuclear ones in urban settings, young couples, divorced, separated, or widowed women, and

working couples with children, are increasingly relying on non-family sources for care (e.g., nurseries and babysitting services). Members of these families are increasingly adjusting their roles, with men doing more than before to engage in childcare. While these developments are, to some extent, reflective of pragmatic shifts in response to the exigencies of new conditions, additional and renegotiated childcare roles, as well as increasingly equitable family relations and roles, will impact social norms in the long run. With time, new and more egalitarian arrangements will be slowly mainstreamed in society. While pragmatic arrangements for childcare and new legislations to reflect and facilitate these changes are necessary, the hard work will be in changing social norms and values around gender-inequitable masculinities and reversing existing conceptions of the value and role of men as rooted in earning an income. Critically, changes that do not go beyond conceiving of childcare as an optional activity for men – too often treated as the aspired end – will be insufficient. So long as childcare remains an activity that men can elect to participate in, women will continue to shoulder the primary, unrecognized responsibilities. In fact, such visions will entrench existing inequalities, as men receive praise and validation for thinking and acting as selfless volunteers, while women remain unrecognized, both socially and legally, for the significant labour that they remain expected to perform without protest.

### Relevance Out of Necessity:

“Women in our region work hard for their communities and contribute to development on all levels. Yet, no matter how far they come and whatever ranks they occupy, and no matter how they try to change and prove their worth in their field of work, they are forced to continue to struggle at all levels and are constantly reminded that there is yet more to prove. In every aspect of life, men could choose to be supportive, but in most cases, instead they choose to subordinate women and force them to serve them, children, and all others. Men continue to behave as masters, even if women occupy the highest positions in decision-making in public institutions. Change is not an undertaking required of women only, rather, genuine change requires first a change in men's conceptions of their masculinity, which must, with time, become derived from their humanity and not from what society imposes on them in terms of roles and attributes. Boys and men must be brought up to be kind, loving, and engaged human beings. Men do not become more masculine by mastering society's norms to suppress women and children, nor through suppressive laws that keep them in control of women's lives, or use of violence and threat of violence to force women to do all care work.”

**Dr. Amal Hamad, Minister – Ministry of Women's Affairs (Palestine)**

## Relevant Institutions are Increasingly Interested

At present, all targeted countries have a plethora of governmental, non-governmental and international institutions that are interested in the issue of gender equality, but with varying levels of interest in introducing and supporting equitable gender roles and paternity leave. These organizations work together, and at times compete with each other on issues, as well as on funding. While varying in size and influence among the countries, the role of civil society and WROs is important to bring the issue of childcare to the attention of decision-makers and legislators, along with their broader work towards awareness raising and cultural change.

Countries have been working, to varying extents, on mainstreaming gender equality in policies and legislations. Such undertakings have frequently been built upon partnerships with a number of international organizations, and the roles played by labour and professional unions and CSOs, including WROs, and traditional and new media. The strength and capacity of unions and their presence in social dialogue varies from countries in which they have a significant presence (e.g., Morocco), to a moderate (e.g., Tunisia) or a limited one (e.g., Jordan and Lebanon). The dialogue between these actors – whether through tripartite or social dialogue – is established and functional, to a reasonable extent, in all countries.

## Evolving Public Policies

While countries have adopted a number of policies and programmes regarding childcare, there is little material specifically dedicated to the roles of men. There are, however, a number of initiatives that, while currently embryonic, have the potential to serve as a starting point for future actions. In addition, the recent legal developments that were cited in the country chapters are significant. All countries have introduced some form of paternity leave, ranging from a limited focus on a narrow sector (the military and security forces in Lebanon) to recently-initiated paternity leave decisions applicable to public sector employees alone (Morocco, Palestine and Jordan). Though disparate in their scope, all of the recent initiatives are important and require concerted follow up to ensure meaningful implementation.

Among recent examples of significant policy and programming initiatives is the choice by certain countries (e.g., Tunisia, Morocco, and Lebanon) to establish programs for parental education. Others have made progress on the establishment of nurseries in public facilities (e.g., military institutions in Lebanon and private sector companies that employ more than 20 employees in Jordan). In addition, more companies and public institutions have been introducing rooms for breastfeeding and adopting various forms of flexible work hours. Levels of implementation and compliance with all initiatives require additional research and monitoring to assess the degree of success. All countries currently have an ongoing social dialogue mechanism that brings employers, workers, and government actors together to discuss issues relevant to work and employment. In some circumstances, additional civil society representatives are included in the dialogue.

Developments and progress at the country-level are significant. At the same time, it is crucial to reflect on the influence of agreements at the regional level, such as those relating to the length of maternity leave and the character of work (e.g., paid and unpaid, formal and informal). It must also be noted that some national legislations are influenced by various agreements at the regional level including the length of maternity leave and other issues pertinent to the world of work. Thus, the role that Arab-wide organizations, such as the League of Arab States (also known as the Arab League), and international organizations that work at the regional level (e.g., ILO, UN Women) must be taken into consideration in future initiatives. The various agreements and conventions relevant to the world of work and care work, specifically, must be revisited at the regional level, with additional attention devoted to the role and influence of the Arab League and any other regional relevant organizations.

In this context, several initiatives have been launched in the MENA region, such as the “Campaign for Justice in Muslim Family Laws”, coordinated by Musawah for Equality in the Family and supported by UN Women and other partners. This campaign aims to build support and empower advocates for family law reforms predicated on gender equality and justice in Muslim societies.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Campaign for Justice in Muslim Family Laws. Musawah For Equality in the Family. <https://www.musawah.org/campaign-for-justice/>

## Limited Signs of Conducive Legislations

When examining paternity leave laws across countries, there does not exist larger, regional coherence in approaches to gender equality in general and paternity leave laws in particular. Tunisia has traditionally been presented as a pioneering model in initiating equitable laws reflective of the conditions of contemporary life. However, in recent years, these laws have become increasingly threatened and at risk of being curtailed. In contrast, over the past two decades significant advancements were made in Morocco, where new legislation has been introduced on marriage and, more recently, paternity leave. In Palestine, owing to the suspension of the legislature since 2007, little reform has occurred, with those limited changes having been brought about through presidential decree.

In Jordan, interest in new legislations is high and several WROs have been calling for the drafting of new laws. Important achievements have been notched, including laws mandating the establishment of nurseries in companies with 20 employees or more. In Lebanon, the Parliament and legislative process is consumed by the ongoing political and economic instability, affording little remaining capacity to social and gender-related issues. While all countries have adopted legislation entitling women to paid maternity leave, these policies have been rooted in the traditional view of gender roles, which conceives of women as primary caregivers to children, with men playing supporting roles where relevant. In all countries, the private sector and civil society are still not mandated under law to provide paternity leave. Another key challenge is that childcare is not viewed as a shared responsibility between the household, the government, civil society and the private sector. In addition, much of the debate surrounding new legislation is focused on the financial costs created, and the ability and willingness of various parties (e.g., government, firms, organizations) to bear these. Thus far, the private sector has resisted laws that impose any additional costs on them. As a result, governments have been able to enact laws that apply to them, but not the private sector. Key informants from governmental bodies argue that this initial, partial application nonetheless represents an important step, able to generate incremental change and, ultimately, facilitate the passage of future, more expansive legislation. Revising existing laws and adopting new ones, which together create a legal environment more conducive to equality, is necessary, but insufficient. Laws have value in their ability to mandate equality and related measures, thus representing both a challenge to prevailing taboos

and a foundation for the dissemination of new values for members of society to adopt and normalize. They also reflect the political will of the government, promoting increased support among public servants and, by signalling a supportive position, strengthen the demands of civil society and WROs. Laws, however, must be accompanied over the long run by far-reaching change in cultural norms and images of masculinity. They must also be further rooted in a developmental approach that can create widespread opportunities for decent work across all marginalized groups, including women and youth. A key dimension to be incorporated in the pursuit of these goals is who, among the various segments of society, will ultimately benefit or be protected by the legislation passed. For example, findings show that women and men involved in the paid and formal labour market are expected to benefit most by new policies enacted, while, broad categories of women and men who are not working or working in the informal sector, are not typically covered by labour laws. Ensuring legislation provides benefits and protections to those who are most in need of them, as well as creates the monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to detect, deter, and punish non-compliance, is critical.

## Dialogue About Paternity Leave

Existing dialogue and debate on the issue of paternity leave is unique to the assessed countries, including both their general context, as well as the role and capacity of various actors in assessing its relevance or need in contemporary times. On the most basic level, there exists in-principle agreement by majorities of all actors across the assessed countries that the issues of care work in general and parental leave (with a primary focus on maternity leave) are important issues and should be discussed further. For example, in Morocco and Tunisia, it was observed that ongoing social dialogue is focused on the issue of parental leave, along with redistribution of roles within families and evaluating existing contributions of men in providing active care. Labour unions, traditionally stronger in both countries than others in the region, were active participants.

In Palestine, social dialogue has reached a comparatively advanced stage, though the specific issue of paternity leave remains absent from such discussions. Difficulties are compounded by the non-functioning of the legislature and the increasingly circumscribed role of civil society, both of which entrench the ongoing absence of meaningful and

fruitful dialogue. In Lebanon, no meaningful dialogue has occurred, owing to the prevailing priority of the broader political and economic challenges facing the country. However, as explained before, there are some elements including the presence and advocacy of WROs and the adoption of recent laws relating to the security agencies (e.g., providing paternity leave and nurseries), which together form an important basis for future dialogue.

In Jordan, WROs are pushing for greater discussion around the relevant issues, but overall dialogue remains limited. Elsewhere, dialogue in Morocco led to the newly-announced agreement on paternity leave, while in Tunisia, the long-existing progressive laws are under threat due to the political instability, economic decline, and the freezing of the work of the legislature.

### Positive Experiences and Models

Across the assessed countries, there are a number of positive experiences providing evidence that prevailing conceptualizations of care roles or social norms are capable of being changed. While limited, these experiences and examples are found across all sectors. Despite a degree of resistance, an increasing number of firms and other private sector actors have adopted paternity leave policies in Morocco and Jordan. In the former, country branches of foreign companies allow paternity leaves of between 14 and 24 days.

Instances of progress are also observed within labour unions, such as the Tunisian General Labour Union, which, since 2021, has conducted awareness-raising sessions across the country around parental roles in childcare and the division between men and women. Similarly, in 2013, the National Council for Family Affairs in Jordan adopted a three-day paternity leave and had since been calling for other institutions to do the same. In addition, the National Commission for Women's Affairs in Lebanon launched a project in 2019 on women's economic empowerment, including a communication strategy targeting attitudes and behaviours, and national campaigns on paternity leave and men's participation in family business.

In addition, there are efforts across countries by international organizations (e.g., The Men and Women for Gender Equality programme of UN Women's Regional Office for the Arab States), in partnership with local ones, to promote awareness on the role of men, positive masculinity and its various manifestations, and images of household roles in general and care work in particular.

Many of these initiatives are relatively recent and will require future evaluation to derive lessons learned and means of improvement.

## Potential for Action and Recommendations

The remainder of this chapter presents recommendations common to all the countries under study, which, appropriately adapted, may apply to other countries of the MENA region:

### Recommendations

Through a review of reports, strategies, and related materials of countries across the region, it is evident that the issue of care roles is gaining ground in the national debates, progress reflective of the efforts by international organizations and WROs. The issue of childcare and the role played by men is still in the incipient stage of discussion and awareness around both remain limited, though interest is noticeable. Though citing the urgency of other priorities and challenges, actors, nonetheless, express a fundamental willingness to explore the issue of men's role in childcare and paternity leave. The following present a series of recommendations, categorized according to their theme and area of focus, which can guide actors and establish goals and benchmarks in the ongoing efforts to promote men's role in childcare and parental leave:

### Cultural Norms and Awareness

1. Draw attention of all segments of society to the economic, social, and psychological value of care work to society, families and individuals. This should be accompanied by clear linkages of care work to children, persons with disability, elderly, and family members with chronic diseases. The various contributions of men, women, and other actors, including government and private sector companies, must be incorporated. Remaining work to improve the situation must be highlighted, as well.
2. Present the vital contribution of women, and men, to some extent, to care work, while simultaneously providing evidence of the negative health, economic, and psychological impacts of the present division of roles not only on women, but also children and men, as well as the development potential of society at-large.



3. Provide positive images of men and women who exemplify egalitarian gender roles. Such representations should show the benefits of gender equality for development and human rights, as well as the place of such roles in a modern life increasingly requiring genuine partnership and engagement of all family members. These efforts should also showcase actors across the government and private sector who can serve as role models for initiating childcare programs and promoting the role of men in childcare.
4. Emphasize the market value of unpaid care work, with a focus on childcare, and the need to compensate women and men who provide care work with legal rights, such as social security and retirement funds. At the same time, the value of the role of men in childcare must be further captured and disseminated. Such contribution must be objectively highlighted, so as to demystify and illuminate the contributions of men, both as ongoing and normal, in societies that insists such contributions be hidden or stigmatized.
5. Emphasize that positive masculinities will benefit from highlighting the contribution of women to family income and national accounts. By highlighting the financial contribution of women, in the formal and informal sector, audiences, both among the general public and key sectors of the economy (e.g., private firms), will better understand that men are not the only group in society that is “burdened” or “tasked” with earning income.
6. Draw attention of decision-makers to the changing realities of society at large, and communities and families in particular. Such changes – and the necessity to develop policies and laws that respond to the new realities – will serve as clear messages for decision-makers and help them be more effective in responding to the needs of their constituents.
7. Assess and highlight the needs of specific groups too often lumped into the traditional understanding of family formation, namely male and female partners with children. Such groups include single women who might live with others and care for children, and divorced, separated and widowed women (and men, *albeit* limited in numbers). These groups experience and endure conditions that are different from typical families, requiring focused interventions, policies, and laws.
8. Formulate and present messages carefully crafted to promote equality and generate broad support in society. Awareness campaigns should be rooted in the distinct context of each country, the local language, and local role models. Such messages must be authentic and derived from the reality of men and women in the region, as well as country.
9. Develop a balanced approach to the engagement of religious leaders and houses of worship (e.g., mosques and churches). Such an approach must insist on a human rights-based approach and discourse, but in a manner that promotes broad consumption and acceptance. This is especially important as men are the primary congregants of mosques, especially during the Friday sermon.
10. Convene regional and country-by-country awareness sessions with decision-makers from all sectors especially during the early stages of future interventions. Special sessions should be directed at the leaders of political parties and legislators.

### Advocacy and Lobbying

11. Carefully identify CSOs, including youth organizations and WROs, with previously-accumulated experience in mobilizing and advocating on issues of equality with a human rights background and readiness to be engaged in the issue. Where necessary, the capacities of these organizations in articulating the issue, gathering evidence, and crafting messaging on the role of men in care must be improved. Such capacity building programmes must build on these organizations accumulated experiences in the fields of labour, care work, legal reform, advocacy and lobbying. Such work can also be accompanied by work with regional organizations and networks that are similarly involved on the relevant issues, such as women and youth networks.
12. Form a specialized network of CSOs, including labour and professional unions to work together for the promotion of legal, cultural, and policy change conducive to equitable care roles.
13. Convene a national dialogue mechanism focused on the issue of childcare with the ultimate aim of achieving equality. Such a dialogue should serve as a steppingstone for further advocacy and lobbying and include all relevant actors identified throughout the present report.

14. Capitalize on the opportunity offered by ongoing dialogue on labour issues, social security, and gender equality to generate interest in men's caregiving as a primary issue for discussion among the various actors. Stemming from these activities, ensure that any new legislation, programmes and budgets are able to effectively address the new realities of families and, in doing so, further promote shifts in conceptualizations of gender roles and masculinity.
15. Though not all parliaments are presently operational, parliamentarians should be targeting, with specific efforts devoted to female legislators in particular, to enhance their legal literacy and understanding of legal options based on existing national laws and international conventions, agreements, or practices. This will also allow for a more active and empowered role in monitoring the implementation of laws and holding the government accountable.
16. Organize focused and evidence-based advocacy campaigns targeting decision-makers on the issue of men's participation in caregiving and unpaid work, highlighting the positive economic and social impacts of a more egalitarian approach to childcare, to create counterparts to support WROs in their advocacy efforts.
17. Build the capacity of WROs and other allies, including labour unions, in specialized advocacy campaigns on issues such as care work. Such capacity must include capacity to identify the connections between childcare work, unpaid care work in general, and other labour-related issues, such as low wages, flexible hours, maternity and paternity leave, and the establishment of nurseries and kindergartens. Future campaigns launched by such actors should be predicated on the linkages and relevance of childcare work with broader policies and legislations, such as social security laws.
18. Advocate for the endorsement and accession to international instruments, such as CEDAW and the SDGs, while devoting attention to the articles governing state parties' commitments to changing stereotypes, combating discriminatory norms, and developing equitable gender roles. Reporting on CEDAW and SDGs is an opportunity to highlight the relevance of issues related to gender equality and caregiving and generate needed visibility. To properly fulfil this role, the accumulated experiences of organizations such as UN Women, the ILO, and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) will be valuable to refer to and consult.
19. Encourage and capacitate media professionals and social media influencers to promote the success of future campaigns and lobbying. Young male and female influencers, in particular, require higher levels of capacity building in fields of gender equality, gender analysis, care work, and gender-sensitive journalism and messaging.
20. Lobby the private sector, especially its representative bodies, such as Chambers of Commerce, Associations of Businessmen and Businesswomen, among others, to further embrace the idea of paternity leave and flexible hours for both men and women.
21. Engage small and large business led by women, along with supportive leaders of private business, which exhibit higher levels of support for paternity leave and flexible hours. Any campaign must place these business leaders at the forefront of future lobbying.

## Public Policies and Government Programmes

22. Through lobbying and awareness initiatives, place the issue of men's role in childcare and paternity leave on the national agenda, serving as an item for dialogue in strategic and policy formulation, as well as planning and programming.
23. Promote and engage with relevant actors to ensure that government economic and educational policies are designed to create change not only in individual awareness, but also to codify and protect rights and entitlements derived from paid, formal work, as well as from unpaid care work.
24. Work to enact comprehensive packages of policies and laws that promote employment opportunities for women and men, especially youth, decent work conditions, and the establishment of care facilities of children and other cared-for groups, allowing men and women to balance their work and family commitments.
25. Develop the capacity of nurseries through development of financial and human resource capacities. This requires the combined efforts of the government, private sector, and elected officials to accomplish, with the adoption of policies and programmes that encourage men and women to engage responsibly.



26. Encourage men to engage in rehabilitation and vocational training programs for running and revitalizing nurseries and opening the way for them to work in paid employment in this sector, furthering larger efforts to change stereotypical visions around childcare.
27. In the short term, work to ensure that paternity leave is implemented as codified in the law by assisting the relevant countries with the development of specific bylaws, implementation, and monitoring procedures and instruments.
28. In the medium term, work to approve legislative packages on paternity leave and flexible hours, through negotiations, advocacy, and lobbying by WROs and like-minded groups and allies.
29. In the long term, an equitable paternal leave law should be developed. For this to succeed, efforts must combine legal reform efforts with carefully-designed campaigns, as outlined above.
30. Expand coverage of health insurance to care providers, as they are both providers of labour and contributors to the national development of human capacity.
31. Engage and incentivize the private sector in promoting the more equitable distribution of care work and contributing to national funds that support childcare by men and women.
35. Better incorporate men and boys in examining and studying care work, and in changing conceptualizations of care work in communities. This must be accomplished from a gender perspective placing women at the centre of the analysis.
36. Increase the visibility of care work in general and childcare in particular in economics-focused and gender-focused research, analysis, and policy assessment.
37. Examine the role of conflict, occupation, and political unrest in shaping gender roles and policies regarding childcare. In addition, studies and indicators should better account for the presence of migrants and refugees, as well as social class, in child-related gender roles. This is especially relevant considering the growing refugee population in Jordan and the culture of having maids from within certain socioeconomic segments of the community.
38. Generate knowledge and data about the market value of unpaid and underpaid care work and childcare in particular. This data will allow for a stronger argument on the role of childcare in potential financial savings for the private sector and the government.
39. Prepare case studies related to positive paternity and its impacts on individuals, families, communities, and society at-large.

## Research and Data Needs

32. Support the regular conducting of time-use surveys, as well as those measuring costs of the contribution of men and women to care work in general and childcare in particular.
33. Deepen prevailing understandings of gender relations, roles, and rights within households through study of the dynamic and evolving roles of men and women. Additional tools and indicators must be introduced by statistical agencies to comprehensively capture the nature of care work in households.
34. Highlight the diversity of gender roles and formations within households that are non-traditional in their formation (women living together and caring for children, divorced, separated or widowed women and men, and single parents).

## Country-by-Country Additional Considerations

The following section provides some additional considerations, specific to the assessed countries, to be incorporated in the planning of future actions. It also provides entry points for the promotion of the role of men in childcare in each country based on an analysis of the current stage of dialogue and willingness of key actors and the public to embrace such changes. The data presented below is cited, as need, in the following country-by-country chapters.

**Morocco:** Morocco recently adopted the most extensive paternity leave law of all countries in the region, granting up to 15 days of leave to men in the public sector. The Moroccan Government, representatives of trade unions, and the private sector all signed the agreement that

served as the foundation for the new policy, the outcome of an extensive process of tripartite dialogue. It was not, however, part of a broad national debate, but instead limited to actors and leaders representing various sectors of society through the mechanisms of official social dialogue. Implementation of the agreement began on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022. The agreement applies only to employees in the public sector, excluding other sectors including civil society, the private sector and informal work. Building on this opportunity, the following entry points are suggested:

1. Develop an implementation plan, regulations, and bylaws to ensure the proper and fullest application of the new 2022 agreement regarding public sector paternity leave.
2. Ensure the implementation of the law is successful in changing public perceptions by targeting male government employees to promote attitudes around active and positive parenting.
3. Capitalize on the momentum created by the public sector paternity law to push for the civil and private sector to follow suit.
4. Work on broad cultural change and the development of an enabling environment for women and men to carry out their parenting roles in a participatory manner.

**Tunisia:** A decline in the dialogue between the relevant parties on the issue of women's rights is presently occurring. Decades of relatively equitable laws, political changes, and transformations are under threat by the prevailing conditions of instability and insecurity, declining political and economic performance, and the accompanying regression in social fields. As for paternity leave, existing legislation grants a leave ranging from one day in the private sector, to two days in the public sector, and six days in the Internal Security Forces. In addition, the debate on men's role in childcare and parental leave is still not a priority, compared to other issues that the actors consider more important.

Presently, the most urgent aim is stopping the potential deterioration and reversal of what has been achieved over the past decades in women's rights and the role of men in achieving gender equality through:

1. Opening a broad social dialogue on the relationship between laws and cultural change, ensuring the mechanisms of cultural change and social norms are activated for the ensuing acceptance of the application of laws.
2. Open a dialogue between the parties around the disparate durations of paternity leave with the aim of finding an agreement on the space available for developing a unified legal framework.
3. Strengthen women and human rights institutions and unions to defend past achievements, while at the same time advocating for continued positive change in this field.

**Lebanon:** Lebanese law does not provide for paternity leave, whether in the governmental or non-governmental sectors. The sole exception is the military sector, in which men are granted four days of paternity leave. Though existing proposals to extend paternity leave exist in draft form, they have failed to receive sufficient investment from political actors. In 2017, the government developed a draft law giving men three days of paternity leave, while the National Commission for Women's Affairs has also developed a proposed law providing 10 days. In both cases, these proposals did not receive the attention of parliament. Reflecting these circumstances, the following actions are proposed:

1. Raise awareness and open discussion between the parties participating in the social dialogue on the importance of equality in providing care roles and, specifically, the importance of and linkages with parental leave.
2. Strengthen women and civil rights organizations, work to unify their demands, enhance their ability to advocate and work with interested parties, and seek to push the legislature to discuss the proposal submitted by the National Commission.

**Jordan:** Despite the importance and capacity of some civil initiatives and institutions, ongoing dialogue in Jordan is still limited to a select number of highly-interested actors and organizations. Overall, present legislation allocates three days of paternity leave, whether in the public or private sector. Reflecting these circumstances, the following actions are proposed:

1. Seek to research and raise awareness about the different roles played by women and men in care, in order to confront the tendency among actors to underestimate the scale and significance of the issue.
2. Strengthen women and human rights institutions to work on raising awareness among actors and leaders on the one hand, and groups such as youth and representative institutions, such as trade unions, on the other. Push for a law more sensitive to families' needs for parental leave.

**Palestine:** The Palestinian government, through the efforts of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, though without significant involvement from women's institutions and civil society, took the initiative to issue a decision allocating three days for paternity leave for public sector employees. The government decision is still without detailed regulations and is not presently ready for implementation. In addition, discussions between the parties to the social dialogue continue around amendments to the

Labour Law and the Social Security Law. Reflecting these circumstances, the following actions are proposed:

1. Ensure that the recent draft decision on paternity leave is converted into a binding law, and further transformed into executive regulations that are applied effectively and fairly.
2. Invest in the opportunity for social dialogue on the Social Security and Labour Laws, seeking to find a formula acceptable to all parties, capable of promoting equality in the field of childcare and granting paternity leave across all public and private sectors.
3. Unify the positions and demands of governmental and non-governmental women and human rights organizations, especially in connection with the issue of paternity leave.

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