



► Statistical Brief

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Gender and statistics in the world of work in the Arab States Region

Key points

- The Arab States region¹ encompasses countries with diverse socio-political contexts, economic structures, and cultural norms. Despite this diversity, the region shares a common challenge: gains in women's educational attainment have not translated into commensurate improvements in women's economic participation or political representation.
- Data gaps remain a major challenge across the Arab States region. Limited availability of quality, disaggregated data obscures inequalities, particularly those related to gender and disability, making it difficult to assess needs, monitor progress, and design evidence-based policies.
- Strengthening data collection, analysis, and dissemination across a broad range of indicators on gender and inclusion in the world of work is essential for informed policymaking and accountability.

Overview

Understanding the situation of women, men, and people with disabilities in the world of work is a critical step toward achieving inclusive and sustainable development. By collecting and analysing data, the labour market situation can be made more visible, and gender and inclusion gaps in employment, pay, working conditions, and representation – as well as factors affecting women, men, and people with disabilities – can be identified. This is essential for designing effective policies to promote decent work for all.

Surveys and administrative data are the two major data sources that provide key information on gender equality and inclusion in the world of work and help track progress over time. They are also the main sources of

data for monitoring progress against the indicators of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

National labour force surveys (LFS) are considered the primary source of essential headline labour market indicators. A wide range of economic and social policies – from monetary and fiscal policies to employment, decent work, vocational education and training, and various poverty reduction and social inclusion policies – depend on labour force surveys as their main source of statistics for informed decision-making and monitoring.

LFS can be designed to cover the entire population of a country, all sectors of the economy, and all categories of workers (including own-account workers, contributing family workers and persons engaged in casual work).

¹ Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

Hence, household-based LFS offer a unique advantage in obtaining information on a country's labour market and its structure.

They can also be designed to generate data that cannot be obtained through administrative sources (e.g., the proportion of employed persons who do not have access to social protection, or reasons for not being in the labour market, such as care responsibilities). Since the same questions are asked to all respondents, comparisons across groups and over time can be made easily (e.g., labour force participation rates of women and men, the proportion of workers with access to social protection by sex, and the share of women and men in managerial positions). When conducted in accordance with ILO definitions and methodologies, the results are also internationally comparable as reflected in [ILOSTAT](#).

Administrative data are generated as a by-product of administrative processes (e.g., registration of residency, family status or births, tax records, social security, school enrolment, and hospital records). As such, they can provide accurate and up-to-date information to understand the situations of those who are part of the system. For example, administrative data can be a strong data source for understanding the key indicators, such as the gender pay gap and the number of women and men with access to social security. However, since the administrative data cover only populations that have

access to the formal systems, they do not provide information on the labour market situation of the entire population.

The ILO's research and publications largely rely on the data from labour force surveys to generate comparable statistical data across countries and over time to track progress towards the realization of decent work for all. It is important to note that the ILO does not accept administrative records as a substitute for LFS microdata for the calculation of key labour market indicators.

Status in the Arab States region

Gaining a clear understanding of progress on gender equality and inclusion in the world of work in the Arab States region² has been generally challenging due to limited data availability. In the Arab States region, Jordan, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) regularly conduct labour force surveys and share microdata with the ILO for statistical production in the [ILOSTAT](#). Other countries have also conducted LFS in the past and the statistical data from the latest LFS conducted may be shown in the ILOSTAT. The ILO is also supporting more countries in the region to conduct LFS aligned with the latest international standards to support national efforts to advance decent work (See Table 1).

► **Table 1: Labour force survey status in countries in the Arab States region**

Country	Labour force surveys	Frequency	Note
Bahrain	Yes ³	Quarterly ⁴	The latest data shared with the ILO is from the Population Census, 2010, which have applied the standards and definitions of the 13 th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS).
Kuwait	-	-	The latest data shared with the ILO is from the Labour Force Sample Survey, 2016, which have applied the standards and definitions of the 19 th ICLS.
Iraq	Yes	-	The first survey in decades took place in 2021, and a new one is now being conducted, applying the standards and definitions of the 19 th ICLS.

² Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

³ According to the Government of Bahrain ([Labour Force Survey](#)).

⁴ Ibid.

Jordan	Yes	Quarterly	The data shared with the ILO are from Employment and Unemployment Survey, 2017 to 2024. The conducted surveys are in line with the standards and definitions of the 19th ICLS.
Lebanon	Yes	-	The Labour Force Survey and its follow-up LFS were conducted in 2018 and 2022 ⁵ , respectively. Both surveys applied the standards and definitions of the 19th ICLS.
Oman	No	-	Oman collects administrative data, however, labour force surveys are not yet implemented. The ILO has been engaging in discussions on the importance of labour force surveys as a main source for labour statistics.
Qatar	Yes	Quarterly	The country has shared its 2024 data with the ILO for the first time. The data is based on Labour Force Survey and applied some of the 19th ICLS guidelines.
Saudi Arabia	Yes	Quarterly	The data shared with the ILO are from Labour Force Survey, 2017 to 2024, conducted applying the 19th ICLS.
State of Palestine	Yes	(Quarterly basis up to 2023)	The ILO provides technical support to the Labour Force Survey in Gaza strip which also generates gender disaggregated results. The next round is scheduled to take place in first quarter of 2026, applying the standards and definitions of the 19th ICLS.
Syrian Arab Republic	No	-	Data available in ILOSTAT are from Labour Force Survey, 2011, 2010Q4, 2010M12, conducted applying the 13th ICLS. Most recently, a pilot was done in 2025 and the full LFS is scheduled in 2026, applying the 19th ICLS.
United Arab Emirates	Yes	Quarterly	The data shared with the ILO are from Labour Force Survey, from 2017 to 2024, conducted applying the 19th ICLS.
Yemen	No	-	The data available in the ILOSTAT are from Labour Force Survey, 2014, 2014Q4, applying the 13th ICLS.

Gender statistics in the labour force surveys

Basic labour market information

A labour force survey generally covers large samples, requiring a large number of trained enumerators and trained data processing and validation experts to process large amount of data from complex questionnaires.

Since 2015, the ILO has developed and refined model questionnaire content through extensive methodological development and in country testing. The model questionnaire, together with related guidance and tools, has been progressively updated to incorporate new topics and provide additional areas of methodological support. It includes the questions needed to apply the latest international statistical

standards and recommended measurement practices, supporting the production of high-quality data. The [ILO Toolkit](#) includes a computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) questionnaire and a range of complementary tools to support countries implementing detailed labour force surveys in line with the latest statistical standards. support.

The questionnaire identifies all employed respondents and collects detailed information on their jobs. For respondents who are not employed, it includes questions to determine whether they are unemployed and to capture how they engage, or do not engage, with the labour market. It also collects information on other forms of unpaid work they may undertake.

An important component of the questionnaire [development and testing process](#) has been ensuring that the survey adequately captures gender differences and inequalities in the world of work. This has required

⁵ The 2022 was a follow-up telephone survey with a sub-sample drawn from the 2018 survey, hence the microdata was not obtained. The computed indicators were published in percentages only.

a gender-responsive approach to questionnaire design and the measurement of labour market outcomes.

In a labour force survey, the employment module (or employment roster) is a key component of the questionnaire module. This module can generate sex-disaggregated data on key labour market indicators such as labour force composition, employment-to-population ratio, unemployment rate, and underemployment rate, while also capturing work relationships as classified by the International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE-18), identifying informal employment, and classifying economic units within the three sectors: informal, formal and household own-use production and community sector. This includes 2 standard questions on salary (type of salary (monthly basis, commission basis, etc), and the amount of salary) which can also generate some information related to earnings such as the average monthly earnings.

The ILO also encourages the inclusion of the international migration status module, which consists of seven questions, as well as the inclusion of the Washington Group short set of six questions as a prerequisite for understanding the disability status of respondents when a labour force survey is conducted with technical support from the ILO. For the upcoming labour force surveys in Iraq and Syria in 2026, the questionnaire will include the Washington Group short set of six questions. At the request of the Government of Iraq, the questionnaire for the 2021 Labour Force Survey included an additional response option for the reason for disability - "conflicts/war" - to better understand its causes.

Proportion of women in leadership positions

The basic employment module allows for the generation of information on the proportion of women in leadership and managerial positions. Survey respondents are asked to report their occupations, which are then classified according to the 2008 International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08). The proportion of women in managerial positions, corresponding to SDG indicator 5.5.2, is therefore defined based on the relevant ISCO-08 categories. The indicator measures the proportion of women among all managers, as well as the proportion of women in senior and middle management positions,

based on occupations classified at the two-digit level of ISCO-08. The managerial occupations covered include chief executives, senior officials and legislators, administrative and commercial managers, production and specialized services managers, and hospitality, retail, and other services managers.

Gender pay gap

The gender pay gap is an important indicator for understanding the situation of equal pay for women and men for work of equal value and for tracking progress in implementing ILO Convention on Equal Remuneration, 1951 (No. 100), as well as SDG Indicator 8.5.1, which measures average hourly earnings by sex, age, occupation, and disability status.

Currently, the statistics are available in ILOSTAT for Iraq (2021), Jordan (2023), Lebanon (2019) and Yemen (2014), based on labour force surveys.

To calculate the gender pay gap using a Labour Force Survey, the basic employment module is not sufficient. Additional variables – primarily related to earnings (hourly, weekly or monthly gross earnings), working time (actual and usual hours worked, as well as full-time or part-time status), employment status, and job characteristics - need to be collected to produce meaningful and internationally comparable indicators. Data on employee earnings can be obtained from establishment surveys, which are generally considered more reliable than Labour Force Surveys for measuring this particular variable.

The gender pay gap can also be calculated using administrative data, such as payroll, tax or social security records, which may provide more accurate information on earnings than survey based data. Currently Qatar and the United Arab Emirates calculate the gender pay gap using administrative records and publish this information on their national statistical office websites.

Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

Some countries in the Arab States region have made good progress in promoting gender equality in STEM, as reported in various sources, including Saudi Arabia. National Statistical Offices typically define Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) occupations using categories at the 4-digit level. For

practical reasons, this experimental data series is currently based mainly on the 2-digit level of ISCO. Currently, data on STEM occupations are available for five countries and territories in the Arab States region (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the State of Palestine, and the United Arab Emirates) and are published on [ILOSTAT](#). To enable the ILO to calculate the number of women in STEM, household microdata files are required, including variables for both the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) and the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC) at the 2-digit level.

Violence and harassment in the world of work

The ILO is also working, for the first time, on developing international statistical standards on violence and harassment in the world of work. Currently, there are no internationally agreed definitions or methodological guidelines for measuring the issue.

The ILO established the Technical Working Group on Work-related Violence and Harassment Statistics (TWG_WVH) in 2025 to support the development of Guidelines on Work-related Violence and Harassment statistics. A preliminary questionnaire and survey protocol were developed and piloted in Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Burkina Faso in 2024, to inform this work. The ILO is also exploring opportunities to carry out a pilot in the Arab States region.

The Guidelines on Work-related Violence and Harassment Statistics will be presented for discussion and endorsement at the next International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in 2028. Their endorsement would support the monitoring of progress in implementing the Violence and Harassment

Convention, 2019 (No. 190). In this regard, experience gained from a pilot survey in the Arab States region can also be very valuable.

Unpaid care work

Understanding the time spent by women and men on unpaid care work is important for promoting gender equality and decent work for, as the disproportionately longer time spent by women often negatively affects their employment outcomes. For the SDG 5 on gender equality, one indicator (5.4.1) measures the proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, disaggregated by sex, age and location, recognizing the importance of better recognition, sharing, and redistribution of unpaid care work in advancing gender equality.

To better understand the situation, a time-use survey can be conducted. The ILO has developed a [light time-use module for Labour Force Surveys \(LFS\)](#) that countries can implement. Applying this module within an LFS offers a cost-effective option for generating data on unpaid domestic and care work in countries that lack the resources or expertise to implement a stand-alone time-use survey.

Conclusion

Improving the availability of labour-related data in the Arab States region is an urgent priority, as what is not measured or counted cannot be monitored for progress, including on women's empowerment and gender equality in the world of work. Building on progress made in implementing Labour Force Surveys (LFSs), it is important to further strengthen data collection and production to better track progress on equality and inclusion in the Arab States region.



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