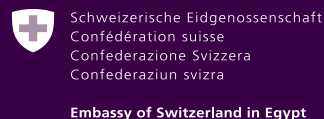


# THE CARE ECONOMY IN THE ARAB STATES:

## TOWARDS RECOGNIZING, REDUCING AND REDISTRIBUTING UNPAID CARE WORK



# KEY COMPARATIVE FINDINGS FROM COUNTRY CASE STUDIES



## THE RATIO OF WOMEN'S TO MEN'S TIME ON UNPAID CARE WORK REACHES AS HIGH AS 19:1

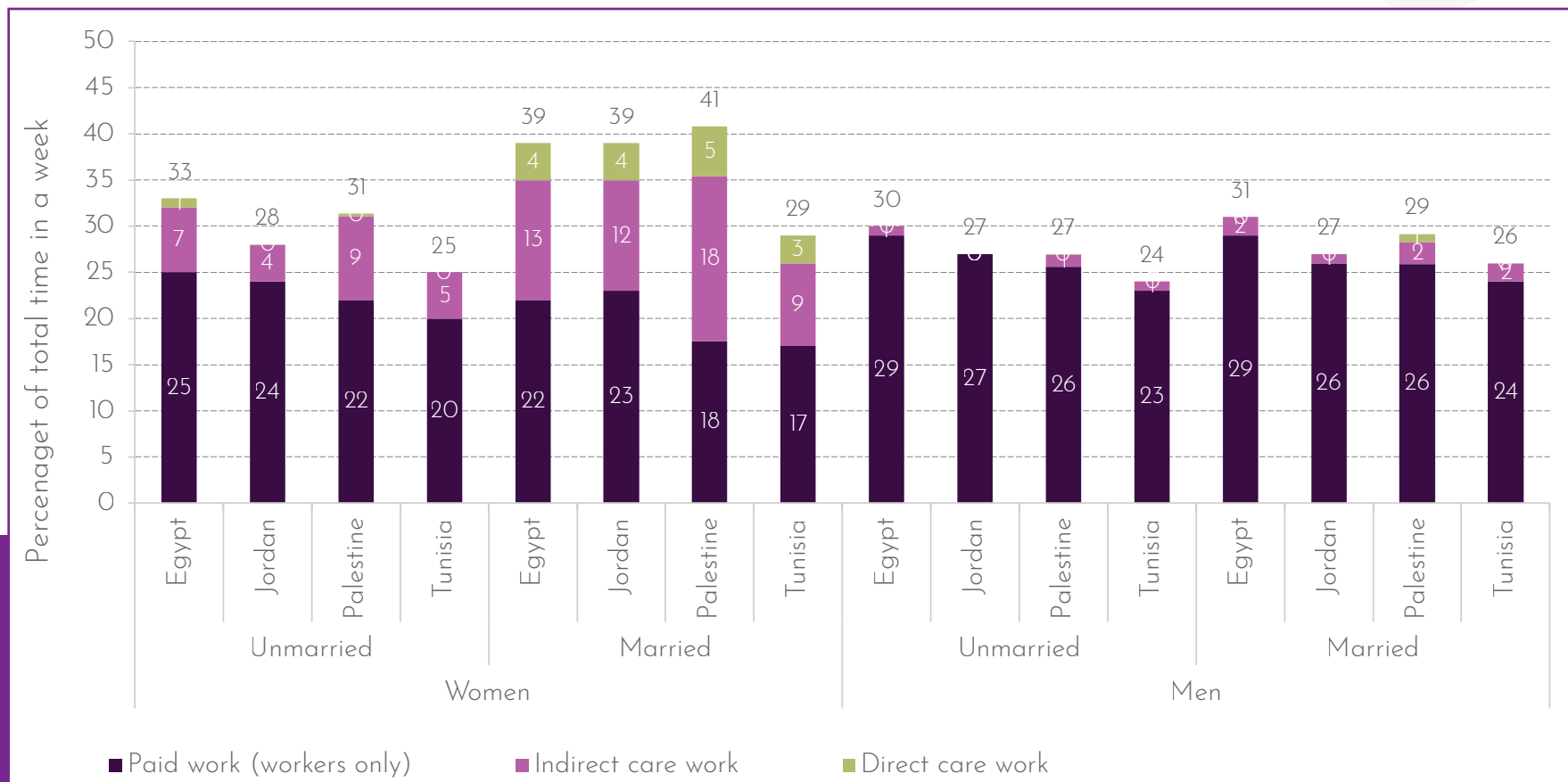
- Women spend on average, 24, 19, 34 and 17 hours weekly on unpaid care work in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Tunisia, respectively.
- However, men only spend few hours on unpaid care work.
- The ratio of women's to men's time spent on unpaid care work reaches 12:1, 19:1, 7:1, and 16:1 in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, and Tunisia.

# THE GENDER GAP

in total work highlights the drastic undervaluation of women's economic contributions

- Employed and non-employed women spend the same amount of time in unpaid care work
- The result is a higher amount of total time spent in work (paid and unpaid) for women than for men, regardless of marital and employment status

Figure 1:  
Percentage of total hours in a week spent  
on all forms of work, employed men and women

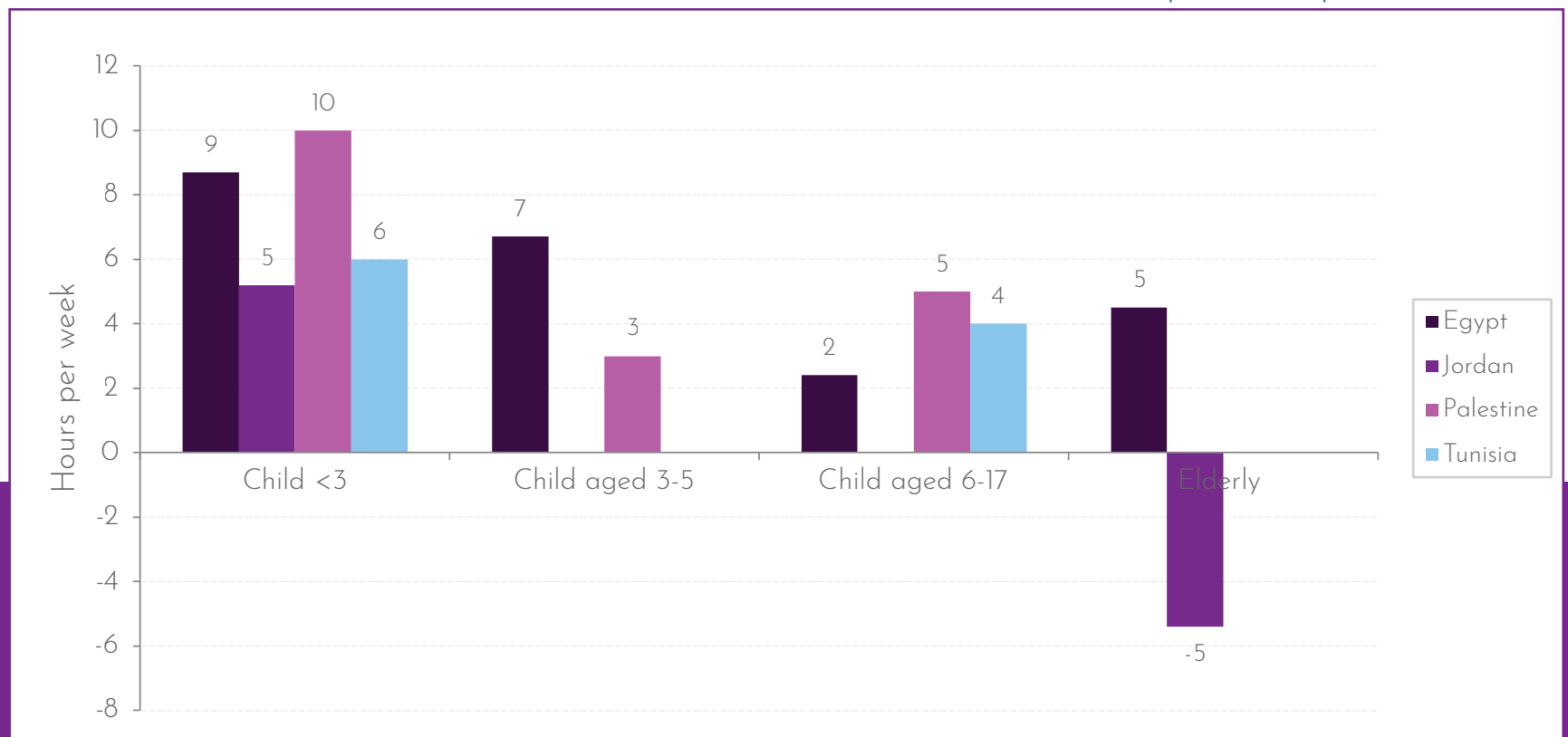


# CARE SERVICES

can play an important role in redistributing women's unpaid care work

- Having a child age 0–3 was the strongest predictor of time spent on unpaid care work among married women
- This may be in part due to the low rates of ECCE enrolment among children under 3 compared to those aged 4–5

Figure 2:  
*The effect of different household structures on married women's time spent in unpaid care work*

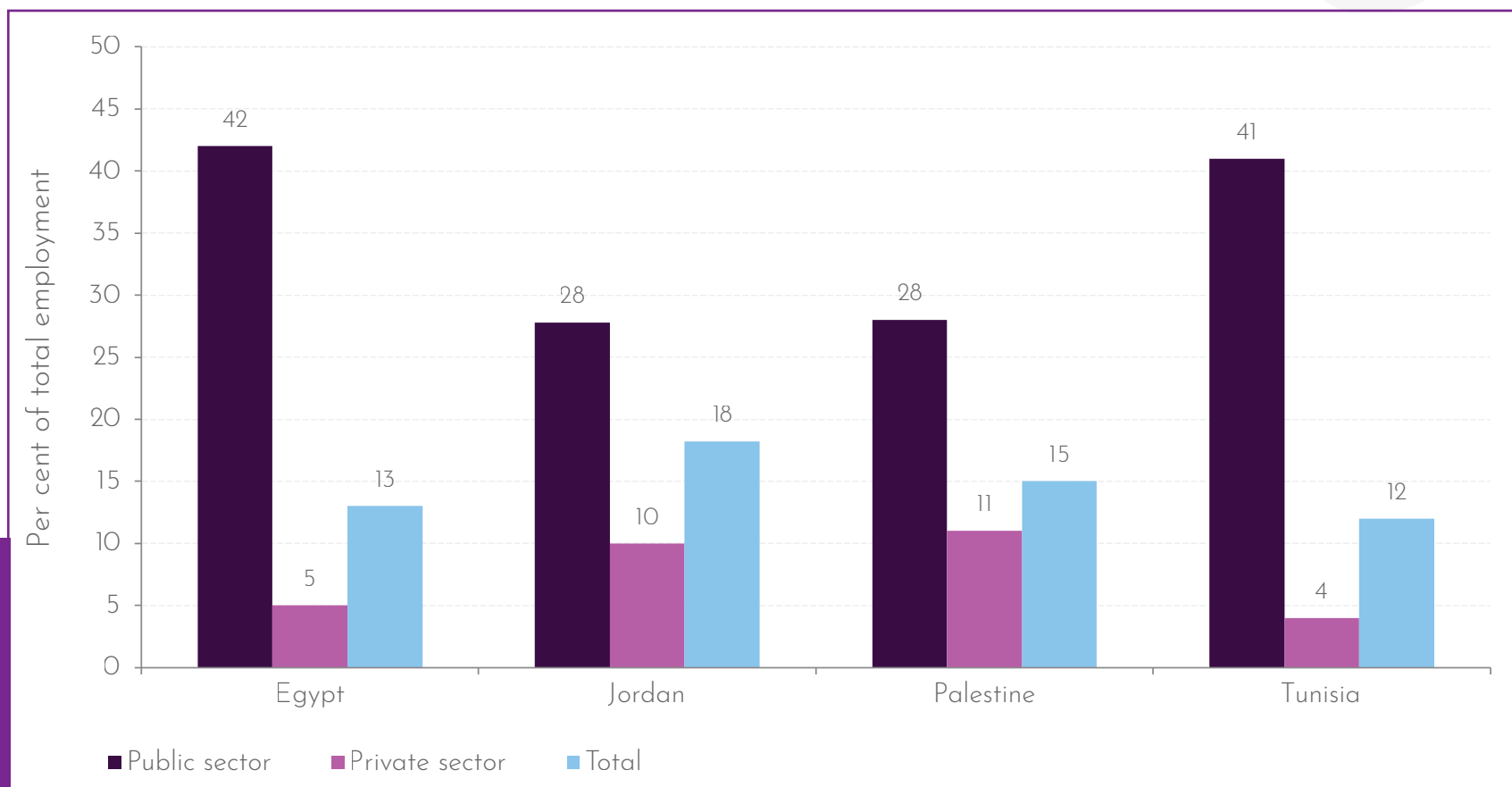


# PAID CARE SECTORS

constitute an important part of regional economies

- The paid care sector contributes substantially to employment in the region, constituting between 12–15% of total employment in all countries and 18% in Jordan.

Figure 3:  
*The share of care sectors in total employment in selected Arab States*



# THE PAID CARE SECTOR

is a main source of employment for women but job quality is a critical issue

- Employed women in the region are concentrated in paid care sectors.
- In the public sector, paid care work accounts for two-thirds or more of women's employment. Among men, by contrast, it accounted for 16% of public sector employment in Jordan, 18% in Palestine and 31% in Egypt.
- The feminization of economic activities, including social care and domestic work, is also often associated with the devaluation of these forms of work.
- Efforts to expand private care services must take into consideration the need for decent working conditions.

# GROWTH IN THE PAID CARE SECTOR

has outpaced growth in non-care sectors

- Employment growth in the paid care sector has generally been stronger than in non-care sectors over the past decade.
- Investments in expanding paid care services can thus provide multiple benefits:
  - Offering families options to redistribute some of women's unpaid care responsibilities.
  - Developing high-quality care services that support the needs of children, the elderly and the disabled.
  - Expanding employment opportunities for women.
  - Contributing to overall economic growth.



# RECOMMENDATIONS:

Investment in the care economy  
as a path towards gender equality



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Adopt coordinated national strategies on the care economy

- Policies and services currently in place fall under the jurisdiction of different ministries, leading to serious gaps in their legal and effective coverage
- Adopted national care strategies should:
  - Promote equity in care provided and care received.
  - Adopt a life course approach to meeting the care needs of different individuals and families.
  - Monitor and enforce the implementation of care policies.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Invest in national time-use surveys and other sources of data on care economy

- Data has a great potential to reveal women's hidden economic contributions through measurement of unpaid care work.
- Regularly collected time-use data is essential for measuring the impact of changes in care policies or services on women's time in unpaid care work.
- Provider-level data on ECCE and elder-care services, particularly in the private sector, are also critically needed in order to provide a basis for monitoring the growth and quality of these establishments.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Bring maternity leave policies in line with ILO recommendations and introduce paternity or parental leave

- Most of the Arab States do not meet the standards of ILO Convention 183 regarding maternity leave duration
- Financing is a major barrier to achieving international standards. There is a need for the region to adopt the ILO recommendation to finance maternity leave through the social insurance system
- The implementation of a sufficient paternity leave in the region is a long-term goal to promote men's greater involvement in caregiving

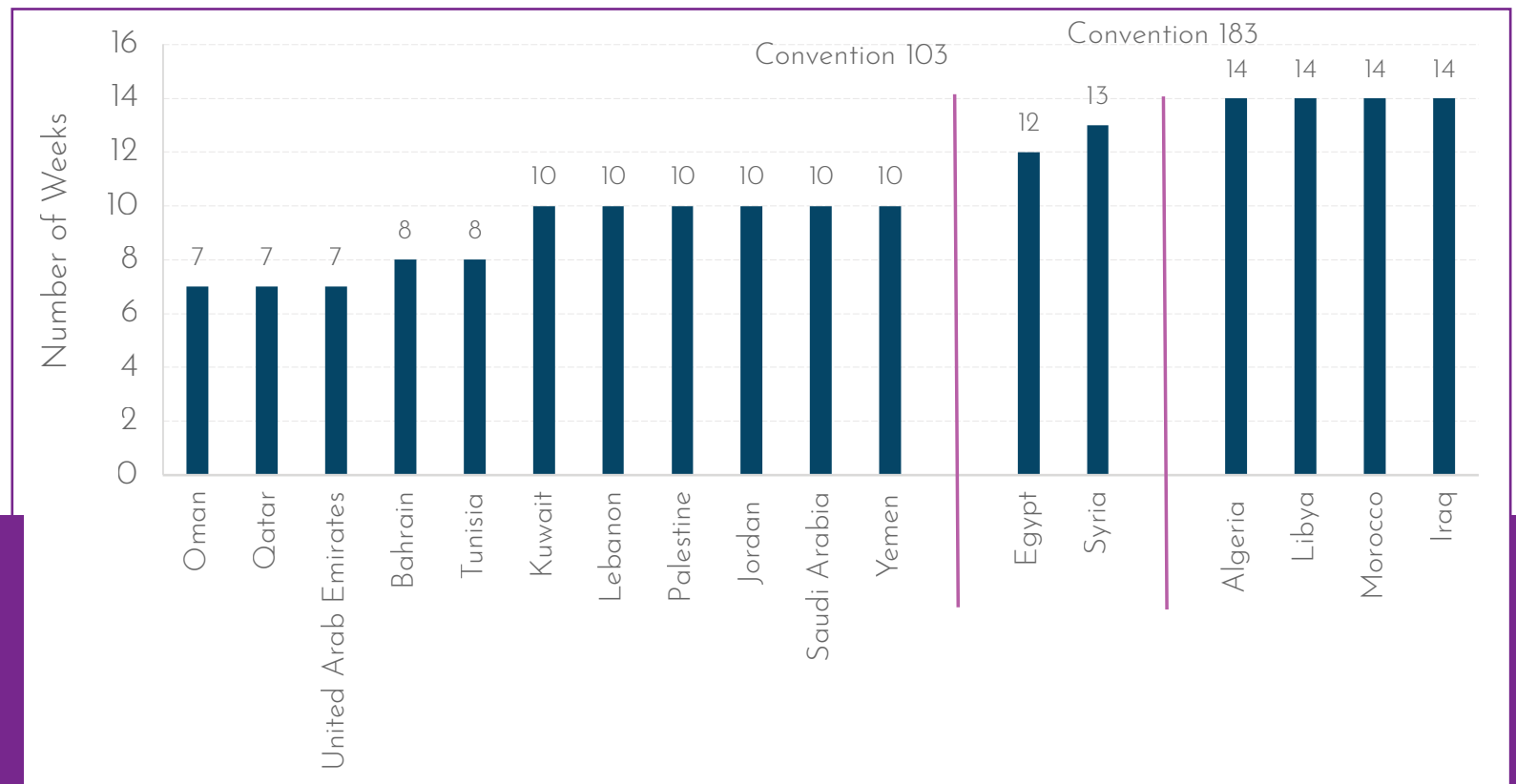


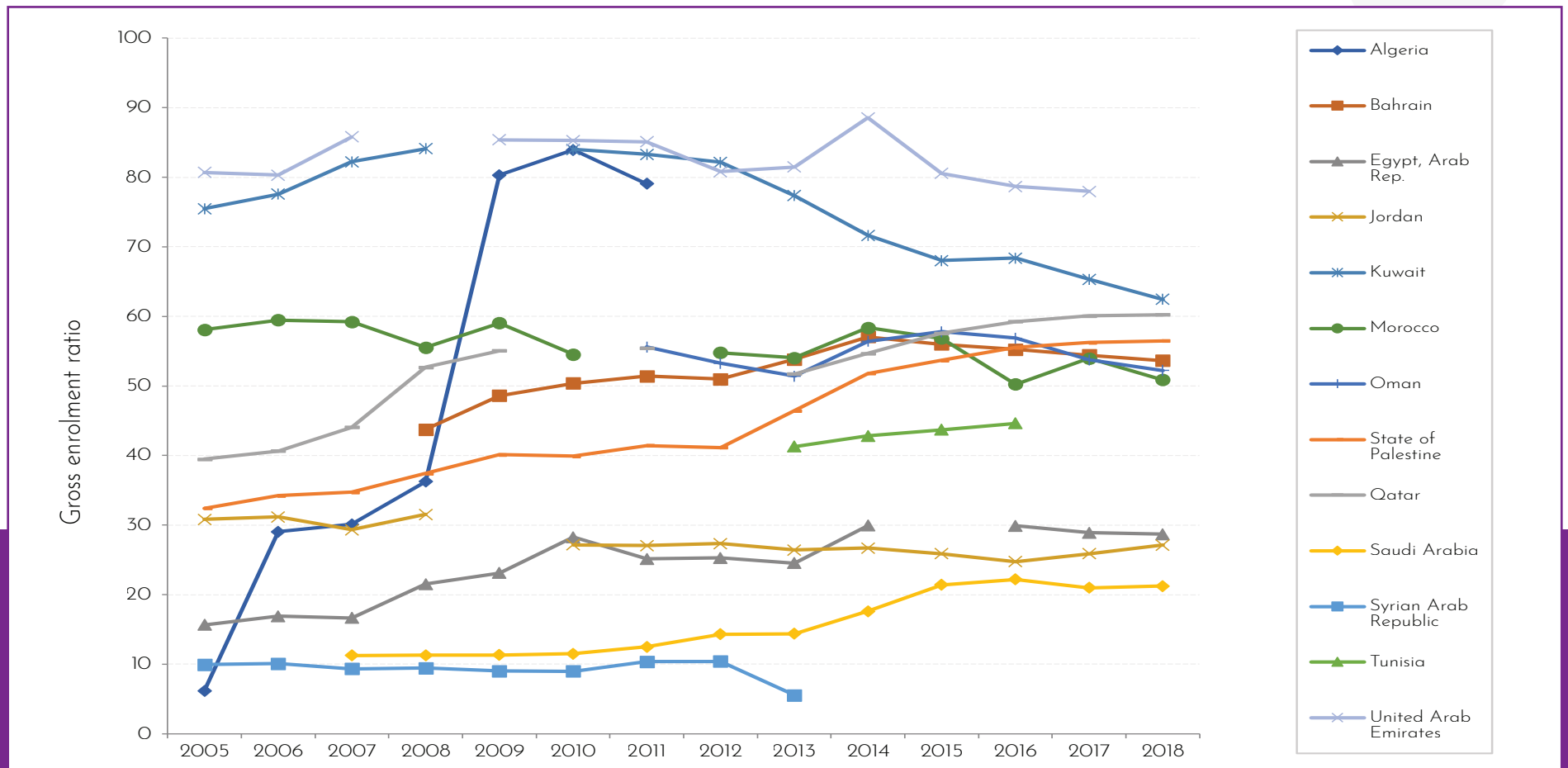
Figure 4:  
Paid maternity  
leave duration  
in the Arab  
States, in weeks

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Expand Early Childhood Care and Education

- ECCE enrolment rates remain well below universal across the region
- Expanding ECCE has multiple positive effects that are critical to achieving the SDGs, including :
  - Improved early childhood development outcomes
  - Redistribution of some of women's unpaid care responsibilities
  - Expansion of an economic sector that provides job opportunities for women

Figure 5:  
Gross enrolment ratios for pre-primary education, 2005-2018, selected Arab States

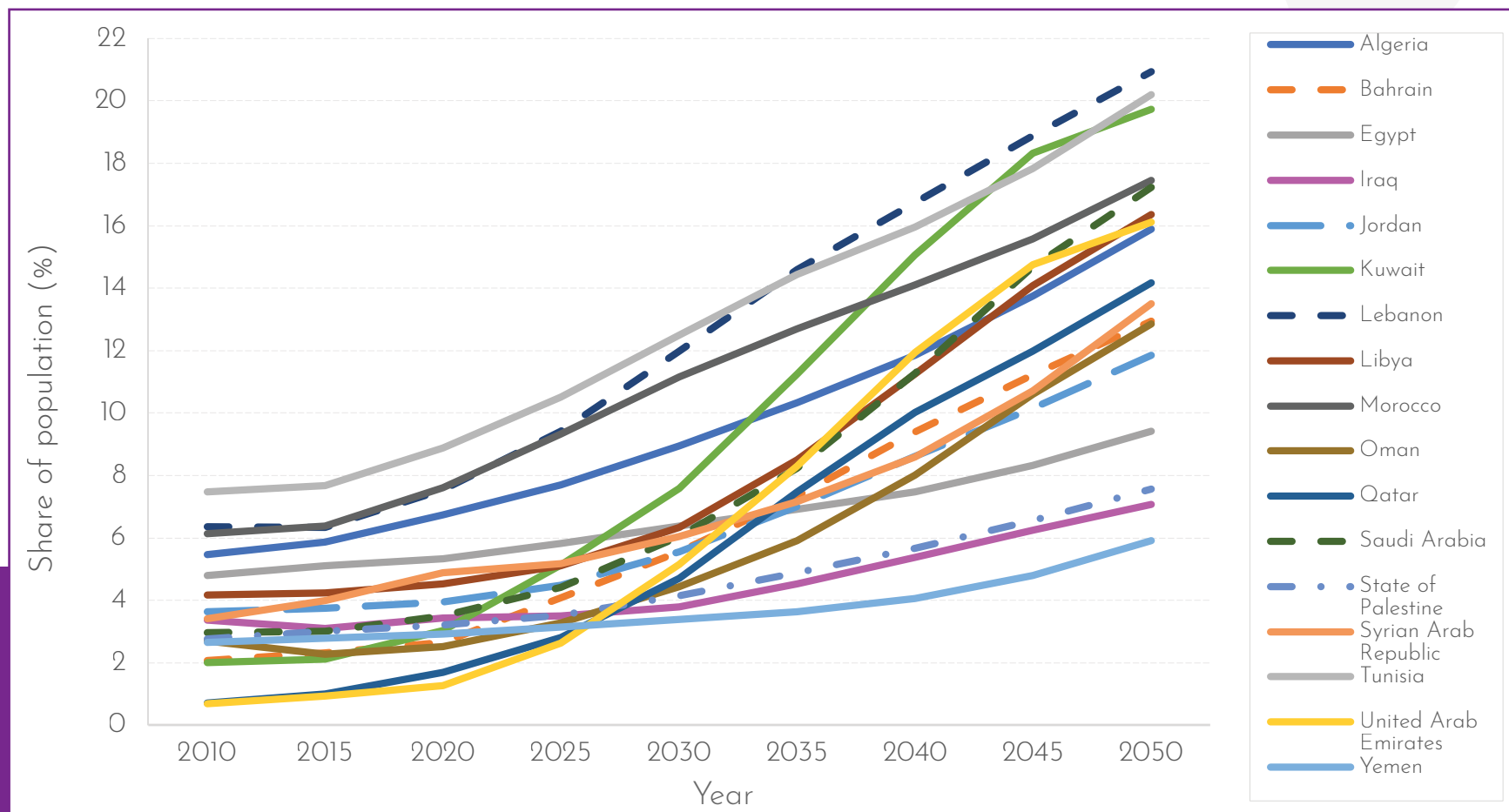


# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Start to plan for long-term care options

- The elder-care sector remains highly underdeveloped in the Arab region
- The share of elderly population will increase considerably over the coming decades, and with it the need for elder care
- In the absence of long term care options, the responsibility for elder care will likely add to women's unpaid care time

Figure 6:  
*Share of the population aged 65 and older, 2010-2050, Arab States*



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Address professionalization and job quality in particularly vulnerable care sectors

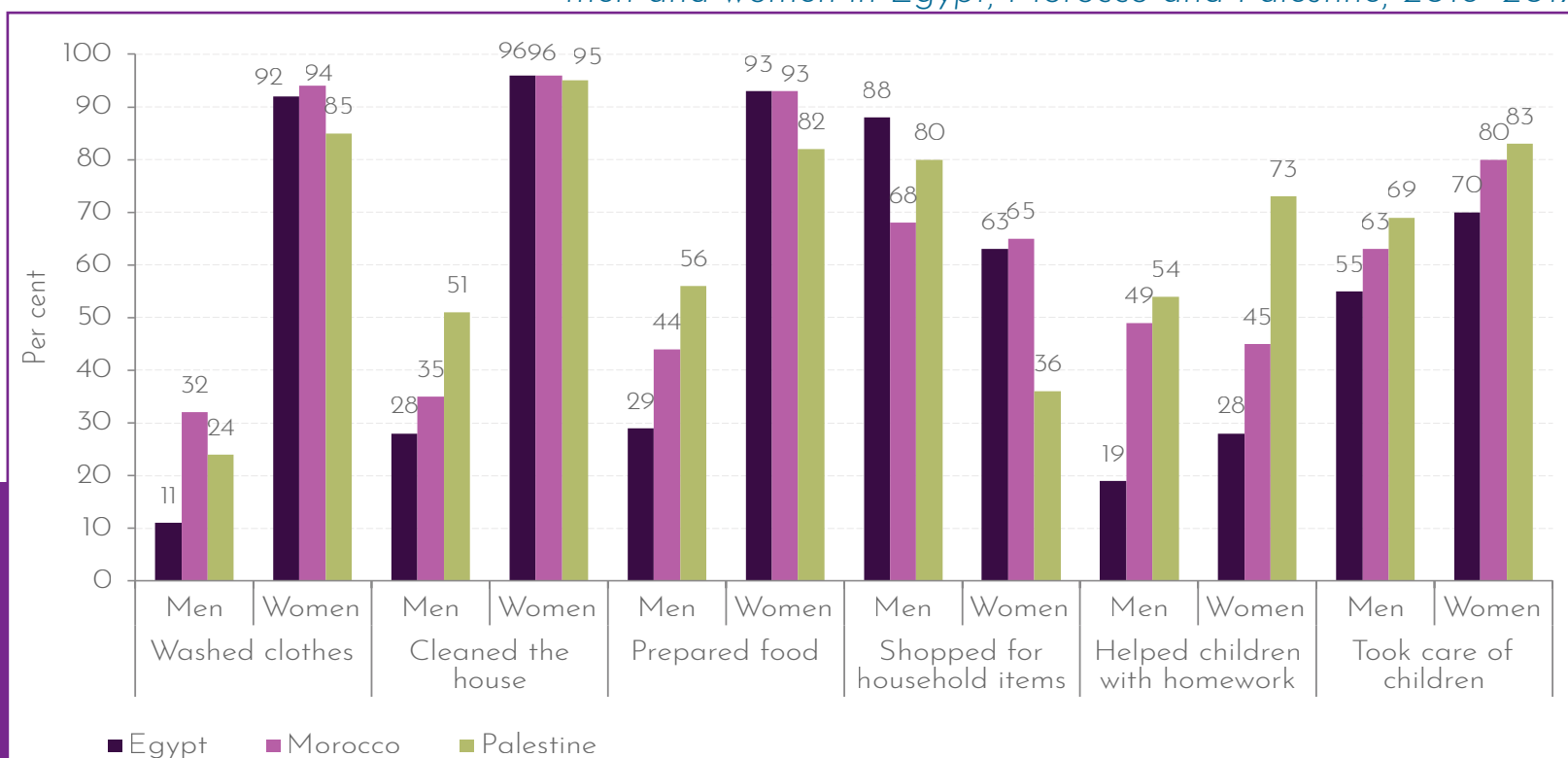
- Social care and ECCE have the most vulnerable employment, as measured by levels of informality and the education levels of workers.
- Professionalization of these sectors is important to ensure service quality, job quality and for changing social views that devalue these forms of paid care work.
- Professionalization of ECCE and elder-care services requires establishing corresponding areas of specialization as degree programmes in post-secondary education institutions.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Seek to change gender norms

- Until prevailing views that caregiving is 'a woman's role' change, redistribution will be an uphill battle and women will continue to bear the brunt of the double burden of paid and unpaid work
- Several recent studies have found that both men and women in the region sometimes overestimate the rigidity of norms in their communities
- Normative change is a slow and complex process. Yet it is a prerequisite to achieving true gender equality.

Figure 7:  
Participation in indirect and direct care activities when age 13-18,  
men and women in Egypt, Morocco and Palestine, 2016-2017





## About the authors

### Ragui Assaad

Professor at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota.

### Maia Sieverding

Assistant Professor in the Department of Health Promotion and Community Health at the American University of Beirut.

### Racha Ramadan

Associate Professor of Economics at the Faculty of Economic and Political Science, Cairo University.

### Marina Hesham

Teaching Assistant of Economics at the Faculty of Economic and Political Science, Cairo University.



### About the research

This policy brief is based on the report *Progress of Women in the Arab States 2020: the role of the care economy in promoting gender equality*, which has been produced under the UN Women-ILO Joint programme “Promoting productive employment and decent work for women in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine”, with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The report is equally the result of the “Production of a regional companion report to UN Women’s *Progress of the World’s Women report on Families in a changing world: public action for women’s rights*,” programme, which was funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation. This research was conducted by UN Women in partnership with the Economic Research Forum.”

