



# RAISING CHILDREN MORE GENDER EQUITABLY



A Guidance Note to Inform the Development of National Policies and Programmes Based on Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa.





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### **The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES MENA)**

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The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region continues to witness progress – driven by new Government policies and civil society initiatives – in health and education indicators, and towards greater gender equality, including the advancement of women’s rights. However, as in all regions of the world, there is a long road ahead before true equality between women and men is attained.

This guidance note draws on data and recommendations from *Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa*<sup>1</sup> on the topic of gender socialization: the ways in which families, schools, media and other influential societal groups shape the mainstream definitions of how a man, woman, boy or girl should act. Specifically, results from IMAGES MENA highlight key linkages between the way we raise boys – with a focus on the impact of fathers’ attitudes and behaviours - and their viewpoints and behaviours as men later in life. This is in relation to their support for gender equality, participation in unpaid care work and outlook towards the practice of intimate partner violence, among other factors related to achieving gender equality. When adapting the content and recommendations of this guidance note, women and girls, men and boys, should be understood as unique individuals, who have different experiences and varying needs depending on their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation and abilities.

The guidance note aims to provide action-oriented steps and guidance on how civil society partners and United Nations key players can design and adapt programming to shift those negative patterns of traditional gender-based socialization of boys and girls, young women and men, which are harmful or limit children’s full potential, as well as advance new policies to promote equality at home, at school and across society. These efforts are crucial to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The recommendations put forward in this note are intended to serve as regional guidance, and should be further contextualized and adapted for use at the national level. This is one of four thematic guidance notes produced in this series. The other three focus on violence against women, fatherhood and caregiving and engaging young men to advance gender equality.

The International Men and Gender Equality Survey – Middle East and North Africa (IMAGES MENA) is designed to take a holistic look at the lives of men and women in the MENA region, including the gender-based experiences of the respondents as children. The study<sup>2</sup> interviewed nearly 10,000 individuals (men and women), led by UN Women, Promundo and their local research partners in Egypt, Lebanon (where the sample included Syrian refugees), Morocco and Palestine. The study investigated many of the stereotypes commonly associated with men, women, boys and girls in these countries, and highlighted pathways to equality. This guidance note draws directly on data first presented in the IMAGES MENA regional report.

## GENDER SOCIALIZATION AS A ROOT CAUSE OF SOCIETAL INEQUALITY

The ways in which boys and girls learn the societal and cultural rules and norms about how boys, girls, men, and women ought to behave play a tremendous role in shaping their identities, and in influencing dozens of gender-related outcomes later on in life. Above and beyond the individual realm, restrictive ideas and definitions about how men and women ought to act and behave also shape the public institutions, policies, and broader systems that limit women’s rights and inhibit gender equality.

### BOX 1

“**Gender socialization**”<sup>3</sup> can be defined as the process through which children learn about the social expectations, attitudes and behaviours associated with one’s gender. Children of all genders begin to acquire a sense of themselves and their place in the world through interacting with caregivers and observing their environment at a very early age. This process is a crucial component of early childhood development, but it is one that is not always considered perspicaciously by policymakers working on education, healthcare and other policy areas that directly affect young children.

Parents and other caregivers, siblings, peers, religious leaders and teachers all influence children’s gender socialization. Research has shown that by the age of three, children know their own gender and already act according to the behaviours and expectations that they have learned are associated with that gender, typically by imitating the behaviour of same-sex family members.<sup>4,5</sup> Schools also greatly affect children’s gender socialization. Teachers and peers directly influence gender differentiation by providing boys and girls with different learning opportunities and expectations. Peers particularly encourage and discourage behaviours and interests based on gender stereotypes they have learned and internalized from adults, especially from their parents.<sup>6</sup> Religious interpretation and resulting practices also tend to influence ideas on appropriate roles for men and women in society, very often ascribing to women caregiving roles in the home and to men income-earning and other roles in the public sphere. This confluence of family, school, media and entertainment requires that programming aimed at shifting gender socialization patterns be multifaceted.

## FINDINGS FROM IMAGES MENA ON GENDER AND CHILDHOOD

The IMAGES MENA survey results paint a picture of the rigid landscape of gender socialization, even at an early age, in all regions of the study. Both male and female respondents reported that girls had

more restrictions on their mobility during childhood than boys did, for example. When asked about their own current attitudes, many respondents of both genders agreed with traditional norms about men’s and women’s roles and behaviours. The “Attitudes Toward Gender Equality: GEM Scale Questions” table below presents the proportion of respondents who either agreed, or strongly agreed, with certain gender-based messages, by location and gender. As the table shows, the majority of men in all four countries, along with significant proportions of women, agreed with the idea that “A man should have the final word about decisions in the home,” among other notable patterns of gender attitudes.

These results should also be considered in the context of ongoing situations of conflict and displacement across the region, which bring distinct challenges for children and their parents, including those related to political, economic and social upheaval: the MENA region is home to nearly half of the world’s internally displaced people and 57.5 per cent of all refugees in the world.<sup>7</sup> However, little research has looked at how men view gender equality, how their perspectives on gender relations are affected by conflict and social upheaval in the region, and what pathways toward gender-equitable attitudes and practices might be possible for men in the current political and socioeconomic realities of the region. The results of IMAGES MENA provide an additional context to these attitudes and behaviours.

**TABLE 1: ATTITUDES TOWARD GENDER EQUALITY: GEM SCALE QUESTIONS**

Percentage of respondents who agreed, or strongly agreed, with selected statements about gender roles and decision-making, violence and perceptions of masculinity and femininity, IMAGES MENA 2016.

GEM Scale Questions		Egypt	Morocco	Lebanon	Palestine
A woman’s most important role is to take care of the home and cook for the family	MEN	87	72	59	80
	WOMEN	77	49	46	59
A man should have the final word about decisions in the home	MEN	90	71	52	80
	WOMEN	59	47	31	48
There are times when a woman deserves to be beaten	MEN	53	38	21	34
	WOMEN	33	21	5	26
It’s a man’s duty to exercise guardianship over his female relatives	MEN	78	77	35	82
	WOMEN	79	56	45	64
Boys are responsible for the behaviour of their sisters, even if they are younger than their sisters	MEN	80	64	37	76
	WOMEN	61	50	20	26

The IMAGES MENA results demonstrate that witnessing gender norm-defying behaviours, that is, ways of acting by men and women that break traditional ideas, in one's childhood home can have lasting and positive in favour of gender equality as the behavioural norm. In some countries, for instance, men with fathers who were involved in traditionally feminine household work, and/or men with life circumstances that forced them to take on new household roles, tended to show more gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours themselves. As one Lebanese man interviewed for the IMAGES MENA study in Beirut stated:

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*“I believe that household chores and child upbringing should be done by both the man and the woman. As I mentioned earlier, I iron at home, I wash my own dishes, I put away my clothes, I tidy up after myself when I wake up and put away the mattress and blanket -- this should be normal.”<sup>8</sup>*

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Qualitative data collection connected with IMAGES MENA research in some study regions also showed that women with more equitable attitudes could often point to a father who encouraged them to take on non-traditional professions, or who permitted them to choose their own husbands. One woman, a university professor in a village near Ramallah, said:

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*“My father had the biggest influence on my life... If it weren't for him, I would not have finished my studies, or be where I am now. He pushed me to study, although he never finished his education. But he had a discerning mentality for he respected reading, culture and women.”<sup>9</sup>*

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These findings point to the positive generational impact when parents – including fathers – create more gender-equal homes for their children. Children internalize gender norms about care work from the earliest age. IMAGES

MENA research from around the world finds that if children see their parents and other adults share care work more equally, they tend to act similarly as adults.<sup>10</sup>

However, not only experiences of care, but also those of violence can have long-term impacts on how children grow into adulthood. Patterns of violence by men against women and by both parents against girls, and boys often follow gendered patterns in ways that children can see and they internalize them. Any experience of violence during childhood can be deeply harmful. The damage goes beyond immediate trauma and fear, extending through every aspect of a child's life: it can affect their health, education and future employment opportunities.<sup>11</sup>

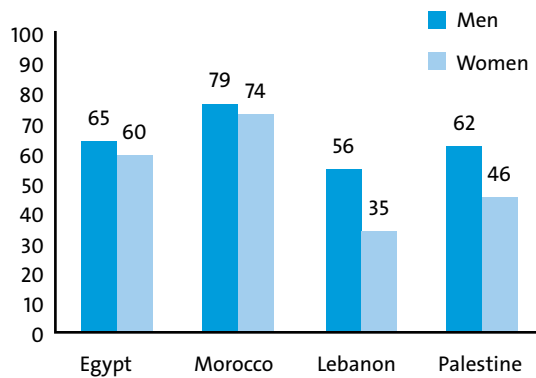
The IMAGES MENA findings demonstrate that many children in all countries studied experience various forms of violence during childhood. Across the four study regions, one half to three quarters of male respondents reported experiencing physical violence in their homes during childhood, and two thirds or more reported experiencing physical violence by teachers or peers in school.<sup>12</sup> Within the region, a wide variety of bullying is reported in schools. Boys tend to face more physical forms of bullying and violence in school than girls do, although the rates of all forms of bullying are alarming, with some 57 per cent of men saying they were physically punished by a teacher as children compared with 30 per cent of women, and 24 per cent of men saying they were bullied at school more broadly compared with 14 per cent of women.<sup>13</sup>

The figure below shows the percentage of IMAGES MENA respondents in each study region who experienced one or more forms of physical violence in the home before turning 18 years. In all four countries, men are more likely to report having experienced violence as children, although the rates for all genders in all regions are very high. While the IMAGES MENA study did not investigate why these respondents were victims of violence as children, other data sources consistently demonstrate that corporal punishment<sup>14</sup> and violence against children follow gendered patterns.<sup>15</sup>



## FIGURE 1: EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE IN CHILDHOOD

Percentage of respondents aged 18 to 59 years who experienced at least one to three acts of physical violence at home before the age of 18, IMAGES MENA 2016

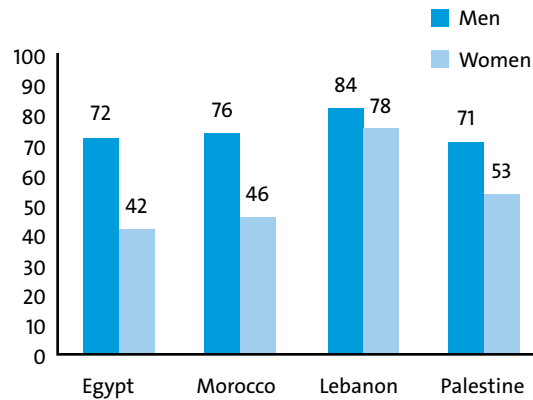


Experiencing or witnessing violence in childhood has multiplying effects throughout adulthood. In all four countries, and as observed in other parts of the world,<sup>16</sup> men who witnessed their father or another man using violence against their mothers and men who experienced physical violence at home as children, were significantly more likely to report perpetrating violence against their spouses in their adult relationships. The violence that men and women experience as children is often linked with the perpetration of violence against their own children, as demonstrated by IMAGES studies around the world. Across all four countries in IMAGES MENA, 29 per cent to 50 per cent of men and 40 per cent to 80 per cent of women reported using some form of physical punishment, or other forms of violence, against their children.<sup>17</sup> Women's higher rates of physical punishment against children are clearly a function of the fact that women carry out the majority of the caregiving. Violence against children is also gendered: in most countries, fathers tend to use more physical punishment against sons.

There are certain key entry points for programming and messaging around positive gender socialization. These can start from an early age. Data on the extent to which parents in the IMAGES MENA study reported that the father attended at least one prenatal visit during the prior pregnancy is encouraging, with more than 70 per cent of men in all four countries reporting attending at least one appointment (see Figure 2).<sup>18</sup> Such early involvement by fathers may set lifelong patterns and provides an example of early engagement.

## FIGURE 2: MEN'S ATTENDANCE OF PRENATAL VISITS

Percentage of male and female respondents (with at least one child) reporting that men made at least one prenatal visit during the last pregnancy, IMAGES MENA 2016



Furthermore, IMAGES MENA finds that at least 44 per cent of men would like to have the option of parental leave for fathers, pointing to the latter's desire to be more involved in their children's lives from the outset.<sup>19</sup> Shifting the patterns of gender socialization so they become more positive, less constraining and violence-free – by formulating policies and programming that reject violence and address the underlying norms that perpetuate it – is essential to creating a future where everyone's roles, attitudes and identities reflect their own individuality, and are not predetermined by rigid societal ideas based on gender. True equality is only possible if children are raised in homes, schools and societies free from harmful gender stereotypes.

## PROGRAMMATIC GUIDANCE:

*How can we support parents, teachers, school systems and the media in the MENA region to ensure that all children are raised in an equitable, supportive and violence-free environment?*

To create positive patterns of gender socialization, this section presents a variety of guidance points for programmatic development. Practitioners may take into account the following recommendations and examples when adapting their work at the national or local level to focus on positive gender socialization of children:

- **Empower teachers and schools specifically to challenge rigid, traditional gender messages and those that might reinforce gender stereotypes, and to replace them with equitable,**

**pro-social messages.** A school environment and the curricula are tremendous forces in the gender socialization processes of children. The role of teachers, especially, is essential in the effort to support children and youth in the MENA region to have safe, gender-equitable experiences, and to not feel restricted by gender expectations or stereotypes. This may be possible through gender-transformative school texts and curricula, teacher training, campaigns, or other school-based policies or activities.

### BOX 3

#### School-based curricula, group discussions, and campaigns to shift gender norms

**Palestine:** Sawasya is a project implemented jointly by UN Women, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) through the education system. In this project, UN Women works with teachers, counsellors, parents and students in seventh and eighth grades. Training courses were delivered to school counsellors, teachers and legal advisors on gender, violence, human rights, personal status law and access to justice; group sessions were implemented with parents and students; and radio talks on gender and violence prevention were broadcast. In one of the group sessions with youth and parents, the facilitator asked the participants about their understanding of gender, then started to explain the concept using pink and yellow papers to differentiate between the expected roles of women and men.

The facilitator asked the parents and children which colour was for women and which for men. Sarah, a 13-year-old girl, said, “The pink paper is for girls. If boys choose pink we will laugh,” illustrating the internalization of rigid gender stereotypes and policing by children from a young age. The facilitator used these classes to explain gender roles, and how behaviours and attitudes socialize children so they grow up with these discriminatory attitudes regarding girls and boys. At the end of the session, the facilitator asked Sarah, “Can boys now choose the pink paper?” and

she said “Yes, and I can choose the yellow paper!” These restrictive gendered norms go beyond colours to impact institutions, policies and broader systems, as well as social and economic opportunities for girls and women, hence they are important root causes of social inequalities. Gender-transformative programming like Sawasya is key to shifting gender norms and preventing harmful stereotypes from permeating the institutions in which children are socialized.

- Embrace a multisectoral, holistic approach to more gender-equitable messaging. No one social space or sector will be able to fundamentally alter gender socialization processes alone, and as such programmers and their donors should work to ensure that comprehensive, co-ordinated efforts across sectors are taking place simultaneously in countries across the MENA region. This holistic approach may involve working with new or traditional media, engaging with religious and public leaders and private sector companies to break free of gender stereotypes in training curricula; literature, art and culture; advertisements; public speeches; and other spheres. Such messages can be particularly powerful when they build on existing individuals or leaders who already support and seek to “live” gender equality.

### BOX 4

#### Leveraging media channels to address gender inequality

**Morocco:** Preventing sexual harassment requires a shift in public perceptions and attitudes, as it is largely normalized in Moroccan society. As veteran journalist, Mohamed El Kennour, noted, “Women are often depicted in the media as entertainment personalities [...] their image is presented as inferior [to that of men] and provocative.” El Kennour was one of 27 local journalists who participated in UN Women Morocco’s training on how to better represent women in the media as part of the “Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces” programme in Marrakech. After the training, El Kennour added, “It is our responsibility to reduce

stereotypes in the media and use the human rights and gender equality approach in our stories and articles about women,” he says. The media training was one element of multilevel intervention in the Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces project, which also sensitized taxi, bus

drivers and city officials to harmful gender norms. More information is available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/fr/news/stories/2017/11/feature-marrakech-safe-cities>

- **Given their immense popularity in the region, social media platforms should also play a role in shifting public conversations and attitudes about gender, masculinity and other socialized expectations;** programmers also bear responsibility for the potential harmful influence of these platforms. Community-based or national campaigns to address pressing issues facing youth and young men in the region must incorporate social media components, including careful efforts to confront and counter the harmful messages that are too often disseminated on these platforms as well.

#### BOX 5

#### Engaging with social media platforms to shift gender norms

As part of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence in 2017, UN Women launched the “Because I Am a Man” campaign in the MENA region to raise awareness about the positive roles men can play in achieving gender equality. The campaign seeks to change the negative stereotypes related to men’s roles in the household, in using violence against women, at work and in other spheres. The campaign has been rolled-out on social media and includes endorsements from celebrities, partners, social media influencers and private sector companies. It also includes a “tell your story” series, through which men and youth can narrate personal accounts of men who positively influenced their lives.

UN Women, in partnership with the National Council for Women, launched “Because I am a Man” campaign on social media November 2017, including a short video exploring gender inequality. They recruited influential local figures like Egyptian football team star, Mohamed Salah, to share the video on their social media accounts along with gender-equitable messages. Using popular platforms and engaging with celebrity role models allowed the campaign to generate a wide audience in the region, reaching over one million views on Facebook alone and receiving endorsements from various public figures, including Mohamed Salah (football player); Dhafer Al Adbin (Tunisian actor); Zap Tharwat (rapper); Mohamed Hefzy (script-writer); Osama Kamal (TV anchor/media figure); Khaled Habib (media figure); CAREEM (private sector company); and Aly Mazhar (athlete and founder of BeFit Egypt). The campaign will be launched in Lebanon and Palestine in 2018. The video is available at the following site:

<https://www.facebook.com/unwomenegypt/videos/1472042279510726/>

- **Build on existing, evidence-based parent-training programmes in the region and globally to encourage and support parents – both mothers and fathers – to raise sons and daughters in an equitable manner, to practice non-violent childrearing and to advocate for legislation that bans all forms of violence against children.** Even more so than teachers, parents have foremost influence on the gender socialization processes, and, therefore, on both the present and future well-being of their children. Programme evidence now shows that parent training programmes from various countries, particularly those that engage parents as early as possible in the childrearing process, and that allow for hands-on practice of non-violent discipline techniques, can achieve multiple powerful objectives.<sup>20</sup> Men in particular must be encouraged to feel capable of, and responsible for, taking on unpaid care work. Well-designed parent training and educational campaigns that specifically target or include fathers have been demonstrated

to lead to greater equality in care and domestic work, which evidence shows will also positively influence children in these homes.

- **Teach all children to see the value of care work from an early age, and to see that care work is everyone's responsibility, regardless of gender.** In schools, homes and communities, programmes should work with boys and girls, as early as possible, encouraging them to critically reflect on traditional gender norms and expectations, and to focus on the capacity of all individuals for care work. The unequal distribution of care work is rooted in historical patterns and in the ways boys and girls are raised, and it is perpetuated at the systemic level. Children internalize gender norms about care work from the earliest ages. IMAGES research from around the world finds that if children see their parents and other adults share care work more equally, they tend to do the same as adults.<sup>21</sup> Boys and girls must be prepared from an early age to be both future caregivers and future providers. For more information on this theme, please see the IMAGES MENA Guidance Note on Promoting Men's Caregiving.
- **Engage and involve children and youth directly in programme design, development, implementation, and in public advocacy for new policies.** Children are able to articulate very well what kinds of activities, messages and media are most compelling and effective for any efforts to transform messages of gender socialization in their lives. Programmers and policymakers should find new and innovative ways to collaborate directly with children from diverse backgrounds and from the earliest stages of programme design. The MENA region's thriving children's broadcast media and children's literature are important potential avenues to reach youth.

## ADVOCACY FOR ACTION: CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR EQUITABLE, NON-VIOLENT GENDER SOCIALIZATION

There are many international mechanisms (goals, resolutions, platforms for action and others) designed to hold National Governments accountable

for advancing gender equality and children's healthy development and positive socialization on the global stage.<sup>22</sup> A wide array of national policies on these topics are in place throughout the region, and these should be further assessed when adapting these recommendations for policy change at the national level.

It is important to advocate for the formulation and implementation of gender-transformative policies at all levels. These policies explicitly provide rights to all children, and actively seek to address, challenge and transform existing, harmful gendered dynamics and power imbalances that are both modelled and perpetuated by the way children are raised. (See examples of gender-transformative policies to advance positive child development in the table below.)

At the global level, all countries in the Middle East and North Africa have signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a human rights treaty that outlines the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children.<sup>23</sup> Notably, all Arab countries except Somalia and Sudan have also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly (although the majority of countries have reservations to some of its main provisions).<sup>24,25</sup> While the MENA region made significant progress on the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals by 2015, when it comes to enrolment and gender parity in primary education, the quality of education remains a concern;<sup>26</sup> the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>27</sup> of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>28</sup> provide the opportunity for continued global attention to the issue. Particularly, SDG Goal 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education; Goal 5 aims to achieve gender equality by 2030; and the prevention of violence against children is also outlined in Goal 16 to promote peaceful and inclusive societies.<sup>29</sup>

Civil society, the United Nations and Government key players can play a role in influencing policymakers, key stakeholders and relevant audiences to advocate for policy change.<sup>30</sup> Advocacy can be conducted in many ways: through written statements; meetings or briefings with policy-makers and decision-making bodies; by building and taking collective action

with partnerships, coalitions and alliances; or by leading targeted communications campaigns or media engagement efforts. Policy advocacy is also strengthened immensely by a solid evidence base: IMAGES MENA, the Population Council’s Survey of Young People in Egypt, the European Union’s SAHWA Survey, the Global School-Based Health Survey and other data collection efforts on similar themes represent encouraging steps to strengthen the evidence base. However, additional information rigorously gathered and researched on the shape and nature of gender socialization processes in the MENA region is still needed.

Civil society and United Nations partners can support Governments<sup>31</sup> in attaining their international and national goals in several ways: by building their capacity to understand how gendered expectations of boys and girls leads to disparities in areas such as education and access to employment and entrenched inequalities into adulthood; by providing evidence-based best practices in programmatic approaches and policies; by collecting disaggregated data on both what men and women think about

gender norms and children’s rights; and by building civil society partnerships to effectively implement policies, protocols and programmes to advance the SDGs.

## ENTRY POINTS AND TARGETS FOR ADVOCACY AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Supportive laws and policies and practices within day care centres, schools and the health sector are another way of providing parents and educators with the support they need to eradicate stereotypes, to promote positive modelling of gender roles, and to prevent violence against children at home and at school. However, laws and policies are seldom designed to specifically target the positive gender socialization of children. Examples of national policies are listed in the table below. They can be advocated for, implemented and enforced to promote the gender-equitable socialization of children at home, at school and via the media to build a more equal society.

### Advocacy spheres in the MENA region to vanquish harmful gender socialization and bring about gender equality

Policy	Status	Recommendation
Gender-Equitable Curricula, Enrolment, Achievement	Most MENA countries have closed gender gaps in education enrolment. <sup>32,33</sup> However, the quality of education needs improvement. <sup>34,35</sup> Changes to date in educational enrolment and achievement have not translated into higher rates of women’s economic and political participation, nor in changes in men’s caregiving practices. Education is crucial as children learn about gendered expectations – the roles they should play as providers or caregivers – from a young age. <sup>36</sup>	Policies should require curricula and teaching practices in schools to be free from gender stereotypes and discrimination. For instance, lessons should include the messages that care is a valuable skill that is everyone’s responsibility; and that all children are equally capable of succeeding at science and math, regardless of gender. This should complement policies that ensure schools are safe places for all children to thrive, and the overall standard of education is excellent. Dedicated efforts to monitor girls’ attendance in school are also important in the region. In Jordan, such efforts have shed light on the harmful practice of keeping “homebound girls” for domestic labour, or early marriage. <sup>37</sup>



<p>Corporal Punishment</p>	<p>Children face high rates of violence at home: 80 per cent of children (1-14 years old) reported having experienced violent discipline (psychological aggression and/or physical punishment) in the previous month.<sup>38</sup> Across the four IMAGES MENA countries, half to three quarters of male respondents reported experiencing physical violence in their homes during childhood, and two thirds or more reported experiencing physical violence at the hands of teachers or peers in school. In all four countries, women had also experienced these forms of physical violence, but at lower rates than men.<sup>39</sup> In MENA, there are few laws against corporal punishment in classrooms or at home. As at September 2017, three States (Israel, South Sudan, Tunisia) in MENA have banned corporal punishment in all settings, including the home; the Governments of four others (Algeria, Bahrain, Morocco, and Oman) have expressed a commitment to enacting a total prohibition. Three States have prohibited corporal punishment in all alternative care settings and day care, 12 in all schools, 12 in penal institutions and 16 as a sentence for crime.<sup>40</sup> In Lebanon, for example, corporal punishment is lawful in schools under Article 186 of the Penal Code which states that, “the law permits the types of discipline inflicted on children by their parents and teachers as sanctioned by general custom”; and in Morocco, violence is prohibited only if it causes severe injuries.<sup>41</sup> Opportunities for legal reform in this area are critical.<sup>42,43</sup></p>	<p>At the global level, all countries in the Middle East and North Africa have signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a human rights treaty that outlines the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children.<sup>44</sup> Legislation should follow international standards, as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, namely that “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child’s parents, legal guardians, or family members.”<sup>45</sup> Additionally, the 42nd session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted General Comment 8 on the right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment.<sup>46</sup> Efforts could be made to build on the work of children’s rights organizations and committees to advance and implement its provisions. Policies and national action plans to prevent school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) should protect all children from violence, strengthen connections between education and child protection policies, include plans for staff training in prevention and response to SRGBV, as well as reporting and response mechanisms.<sup>47</sup></p>
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<p>Parental Leave/ Family-friendly workplaces</p>	<p>Engaging men in parent training initiatives has been shown to reduce violence and increase fathers' involvement in childcare; however, these programmes are largely absent in the region.<sup>48</sup> More than 70 per cent of men in IMAGES MENA countries reported going for at least some prenatal visits with a pregnant wife (although that male participation may reflect a degree of male control and guardianship, as well as concern and caregiving), providing a positive entry point for engaging men in these gender-transformative, fatherhood programmes.</p>	<p>Establishing a gender-equitable division of labour at home can serve as a model and set a lifelong standard for children when they establish norms in their own relationships. Policies should include provisions to train health sector and other social services staff to engage men as equal caregiving partners, and to implement parent training to encourage fathers to be involved from the start of their children's lives. Beyond the health sector, adult literacy programmes, home visitation programmes for new mothers and refugee and immigrant services may provide other spaces to reach and engage fathers.<sup>49</sup> These policies should complement fair and non-discriminatory labour conditions, a living wage for all individuals, and other work-life balance policies such as parental leave.</p> <p>See the Men's Caregiving Guidance Note for more recommendations on social support services and parental leave policies.</p>
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It is also important to recognize that current policies may support positive gender socialization and children's rights on paper, but lack the political will, resources or public awareness to put them into practice. Conducting successful policy advocacy means not only passing positive, gender-transformative laws and policies, but also analysing and addressing the barriers to implementation at many levels, and holding Governments accountable to their commitments and plans of action.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE POLICY CHANGE

Advocacy efforts conducted to contribute to the positive gender socialization of children should be gender-transformative, and build on and be accountable to the children's rights and women's rights movements. Some guiding principles for this work are outlined below. The recommendations are intended to serve as regional guidance, and should be further contextualized and adapted for use at the national level.

- Frame the advocacy focus of positive gender socialization within the broader **gender justice and children's rights movements**. Raising children,

who live a life free from violence at home and at school by banning corporal punishment and all forms of violence, and who are raised with gender equitable role models and gender-transformative education free from stereotypes, is not an end in itself. Rather such an upbringing will contribute to achieving greater gender equality, justice, and choice for all. When doing this work, diversity becomes a key factor among boys and girls, men and women. It includes race, class, religious affiliation, employment status, among other notions. Diversity creates structural barriers, inequities, that have the greatest impact on certain individual "identities" by giving them fewer opportunities for high-quality education, or putting them at higher risk of violence. Certainly, policies should not be designed as "one-size-fits-all."

- Build **alliances** between local women's rights and children's rights NGOs already working on the topic of positive gender socialization, with NGOs working with men and boys and those working with youth. The aim would be to identify common goals and to map out potential unintended consequences. This coalition-building will add strength to advocacy efforts, and will ensure the goals of policy advocacy are shared, inclusive and **accountable** to the needs of key stakeholders.

- Implement well-designed **parent training and educational campaigns** that specifically target or include fathers as early as possible in the child-rearing process. This is key to promote greater equality in care and domestic work and also to positively influence children in these homes. These programmes should allow for hands-on practice of non-violent discipline techniques, and encourage men in particular to feel capable of, and responsible for, taking on unpaid care work. Using photos or stories or other examples of men in the region who are already fatherhood models can be particularly useful.
- Work within **education systems** to promote positive patterns of gender socialization from early on. This may include the following actions:
  - Challenge and eliminate gender stereotypes about the social, political and economic roles of men and women in school texts and curricula, and implement school-based gender-transformative education for boys and girls;
  - Expand teacher training to include basic education on the concept of gender, gender socialization and practical workshops on non-violent child discipline;
  - Hold teachers accountable when they use violence against children;
  - Train teachers and other school staff to recognize and respond to child abuse;
  - Implement campaigns and school-based efforts to reach boys and girls at younger ages about sharing caregiving and domestic work, and to promote positive, gender-equitable and violence-free relationships among boys and girls; and
  - Fund and develop children- and youth-led programme activities to advance gender equality.
- Identify and support key **political leaders**, both in the public sector and in civil society, **religious leaders, sports and public figures**, who support gender equality, as visible allies to guide policy change and show personal leadership in support of children's rights; equitable, caring versions of manhood; and autonomous, empowered versions of womanhood for children at home and at school, including within religious education and sports.
- Work with appropriate **private sector companies** to eliminate harmful gendered messaging in advertisements, in the design and marketing of gender-neutral toys and other products for children, and in the design and content of video games.
- Generate research and evidence-based programmes and platforms that are informed and driven by the **Sustainable Development Goals** – particularly Goal 4 on education, Goal 5 on gender equality and Goal 16 on peaceful societies – and that contribute towards the holistic implementation of a gender-responsive 2030 Agenda.
- Consult and **involve children** directly in the design, development, and implementation of gender transformative programmes and policies, including as youth producers and partners, to design messaging in support of gender equality.
- Build **partnerships with new and traditional media** to expand the reach and visibility of gender-transformative campaigns and messages; and to question stereotypes and the conventional roles of boys and men, and girls and women, building on positive trends towards change. These partnerships may include practical tools and capacity-building for media professionals and build on existing literature, art, and cultural expressions that already include messages of positive masculinities;
- Start early and use a **multisectoral, holistic approach** to achieve more equitable gender messaging. The gender socialization process occurs across the ecological model (a framework of interacting individual relationships and community/society levels), therefore programmers and policymakers must build comprehensive, coordinated efforts across sectors in order to be most effective. At home, schools, through the media and sports programming, work is ongoing to deconstruct harmful gender stereotypes, such as those related to girls and young women's education and to women's empowerment. Tactics may include the following: deconstructing proverbs that contain gendered messaging; questioning ideas about attributes that are commonly associated with boys

(such as the adjectives “strong,” or “tough”) or with girls (the attributes “tender,” or “emotional”); or using games or art to explore expectations around gender. These should ideally be longer-term and institutionalized rather than short-term trainings.

- Actively seek to **transform expectations and power imbalances around gender norms**, particularly those that are reinforced from a young age and that delineate the roles men and women can play domestically and economically. This pertains, in particular, to those reinforcing men as exclusively providers or protectors, and women as nurturers or caregivers. This may include implementing and expanding campaigns inspired by UN Women’s HeForShe campaign, including the UN Women “Because I Am a Man” campaign, or the MenCare: A Global Fatherhood Campaign, and by working with the media.
- While using a rights-based approach, highlight the **positive social and economic impacts** of raising children in a gender-equitable way at home and at school. For example, involved fatherhood has been shown to contribute to boys’ acceptance of gender equality and to girls’ sense of autonomy and empowerment<sup>50</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Full equality in the Middle East and North Africa in adulthood will only be attained when children are raised in an equitable manner, and when the behavioural model of gender equality is practiced daily at home and at school. IMAGES MENA provides powerful evidence for gender-transformative programming and evidence-based advocacy showing the impact that parents have on how children are raised, and the importance of the broader environment in shaping these norms. The challenge ahead lies in advocating for more supportive policies, engaging political champions and challenging and transforming the underlying social norms that perpetuate inequitable attitudes through gender-transformative policies and practices.

## END NOTES

- 1 El Feki, S., Heilman, B. and Barker, G. (2017). Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa. Cairo, & Washington, DC: UN Women, & Promundo-US.
- 2 In Lebanon and Palestine, the samples are nationally representative. In Egypt and Morocco, specific regions of the country were selected, but the samples are broadly representative of those regions.
- 3 According to UNICEF, “Early gender socialization starts at birth and it is a process of learning cultural roles according to one’s sex.” For additional information, see: [https://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/index\\_40749.html](https://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/index_40749.html)
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- 7 UNDP and Regional Bureau for Arab States. Arab Human Development Report, 2016.
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- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Heilman B., Levto, R., Van der Gaag, N., Hassink, A. and Barker, G. (2017). State of the World’s Fathers: Time for Action. Washington, D.C.: Promundo, Sonke Gender Justice, Save the Children and MenEngage Alliance.
- 11 Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP). (n.d.). Adverse Childhood Experiences. Atlanta: CDCP. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>
- 12 Many children also face violence in schools. School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is defined as “acts or threats of sexual, physical, or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics.” Boys and girls can experience different forms of violence in schools: while girls experience more sexual harassment, boys experience more bullying and physical punishment from teachers.
- 13 Know Violence in Childhood. (2017). Ending Violence in Childhood. Global Report 2017. New Delhi.
- 14 According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19: “States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.”
- 15
- 16 World Bank and Open Knowledge Repository. (n.d.). Engaging Men and Boys in Advancing Women’s Agency: Where We Stand and New Directions. World: World Bank and Open Knowledge Repository. <https://open-knowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/16694>
- 17 El Feki, S., Heilman, B. and Barker, G. (2017). Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa. Cairo and Washington, D.C.: UN Women and Promundo-US.
- 18 For more information on strategic entry points to promote men’s full involvement in caregiving roles throughout their children’s early years, see the IMAGES MENA Policy Brief on Fatherhood and Caregiving.
- 19 El Feki, S., Heilman, B. and Barker, G. (2017). Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa. Cairo and Washington, D.C.: UN Women and Promundo-US.
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- 22 These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and the Universal Periodic Review, among others.
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- 24 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Status of treaties: [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtmsg\\_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtmsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en)
- 25 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)/Centre for Arab Women Training and Research (2014), Women in Public Life: Gender, Law and Policy in the Middle East and North Africa, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264224636-en>
- 26 United Nations League of Arab States. (2013). The Arab Millennium Development Goals Report: Facing Challenges and Looking



- Beyond 2015. New York: United Nations and League of Arab States.
- 27** The SDG strategy is informed and guided by international standards and mechanisms including CEDAW – which all Arab countries, except Somalia and Sudan, have ratified, although the majority have reservations toward some of its main provisions; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; the ICPD Programme of Action; relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions; the Commission on the Status of Women agreed conclusions; and other applicable United Nations instruments and resolutions on gender equality and women’s empowerment.
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- 29** See more information on the SDGs here: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>
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- 32** World Bank. (2012). World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
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- 35** United Nations and the League of Arab States. (2013). The Arab Millennium Development Goals Report: Facing Challenges and Looking Beyond 2015. New York: United Nations and the League of Arab States.
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