

Measures to promote work-family reconciliation in the MENA region: parental leave, child care and good practices

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In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the socio-economic, cultural and political spheres that affect women, particularly education, have undergone considerable changes in recent years. Research has indicated a close relationship between education/training and employment. However, the dramatic increase in the number of educated women in the MENA region is not reflected in their participation in the labour market, which remains low despite an increase in recent years. The fundamental puzzle of the relatively low labour-market participation of women in the MENA region relates to an issue that has long been at the core of studies in the social sciences, namely work and family reconciliation. Partly reflecting this, appropriate policies have increasingly become part of employment-led social policy, as well as neo-liberal programmes, in the EU and its Member States. However, in developing nations, and in MENA in particular, the problem of work–family balance has not yet been expressed to the same extent, and there is a dearth of literature on this matter. This is not to imply that no action is being taken and work-family policies have advanced in MENA, and several countries in the region have undertaken considerable reform in recent years.

This paper will discuss work and family reconciliation strategies implemented in certain MENA countries, such as Iran and Turkey. Recommendations will be proposed for the further development of policies, programmes and strategies in supporting parenthood and reconciling work and family life in MENA. This is crucial given global changes in the working world. There is also increasing awareness that it will be difficult to achieve the Millennium Development Goals if they do not focus on families. The twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014 offers an opportunity to highlight the family in all parts of the world, and promote family-based solutions to attain development objectives.