

# Role of information and communication technology in closing gender employment gap in MENA Countries

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## Key words

SDGs, Gender Equality in employment, Information and Communication Technologies, MENA countries

## Abstract

*Within the framework of Sustainable Development Goals, the present study aims to investigate the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in closing gender employment gap in Middle-East and North Africa countries (MENA). Using Panel Least Square for 21 MENA countries over the period 1995-2014, the small value of the estimated ICT usage elasticity indicates that MENA countries will fail to achieve gender equality if they depend solely on the actual ICT usage. In order to accelerate closing gender employment gap, policy makers in MENA countries have to promote higher ICT usage growth rate, boost GDP per capita and enhance openness; as the results reveal that these three factors exhibit significant and positive impact on gender equality in employment. On the other side, the policy makers in MENA countries have to shape a policy targeting to change the economic structure so as not to depend heavily on natural resources rents. Moreover, they have to increase the quality of female education and link the education system output with the labor market as the results show that natural resources rents and female education exert significant and negative impact on gender equality in employment.*

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## 1- Introduction

Sen (2001) defines gender inequality as “not one homogeneous phenomenon, but a collection of disparate and interlinked problems”. He explains various types of disparities between genders as mortality inequality, higher education inequality, employment inequality, professional training inequality and ownership inequality. In the current study, gender inequality is defined as inequality in employment participation in the labor market.

Despite the good level of human development achieved in several directions in the Middle East and North Africa countries (MENA) over the last four decades, this achievement has not been translated into better gender equality in employment. The participation of women in the labor market in MENA countries is just about half the global average WB (2013: xi). Accordingly, MENA countries will be affected negatively as the existence of gender inequality in employment has a negative impact on economic growth. In addition, gender inequality in employment lowers average productivity of labor which influences investment rates (Chen 2004: 6). Moreover, it increases fertility rates and lowers desiring female education. It adversely affects the possibility of exchanging information, overcoming surrounding problems, gaining representation in the government and lobbying for women's rights (Ross 2008:107).

As MENA countries suffer from gender employment gap, several empirical studies aim to identify the main determinant of this gap. Ross (2008) attributes the gender employment gap in MENA countries to the dominance of mining and oil sector in most of the countries, which is inherently a masculine sector. Rauch and Kostyshak (2009) conclude that Arab countries have a significant negative impact on gender inequality in employment because of the prevailing gender norms in the society. Markle (2013) indicates that women in MENA countries face continuous challenges concerned with sexual discrimination which is rooted in communities' cultures, religions, social and economic structures.