

POLICY BRIEF

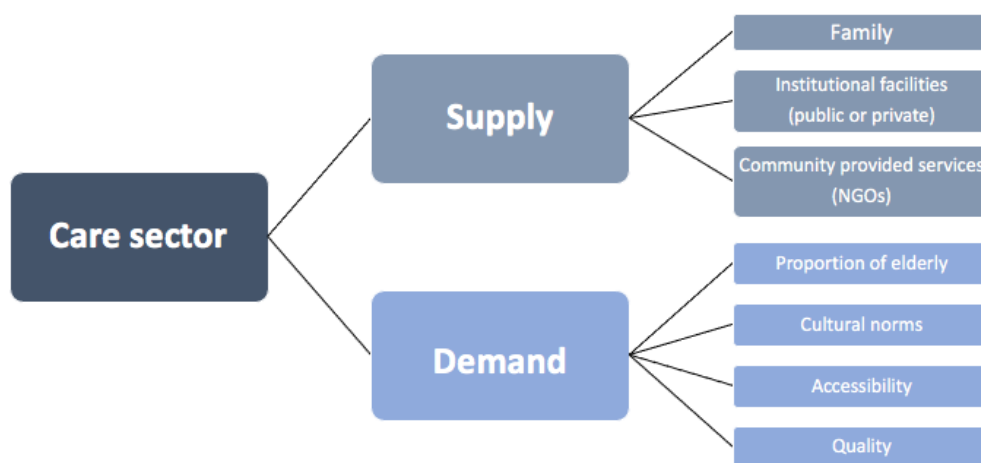
Who cares? Elderly care and female labor force participation in the Mashreq

By Rose Khattar

The Mashreq nations of Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq experience persistently low female labor force participation (FLFP) limiting their economic growth and women's economic security. This report analyses one factor that may act as a barrier to women entering or spending more time in the paid labor market: unpaid elderly care work.

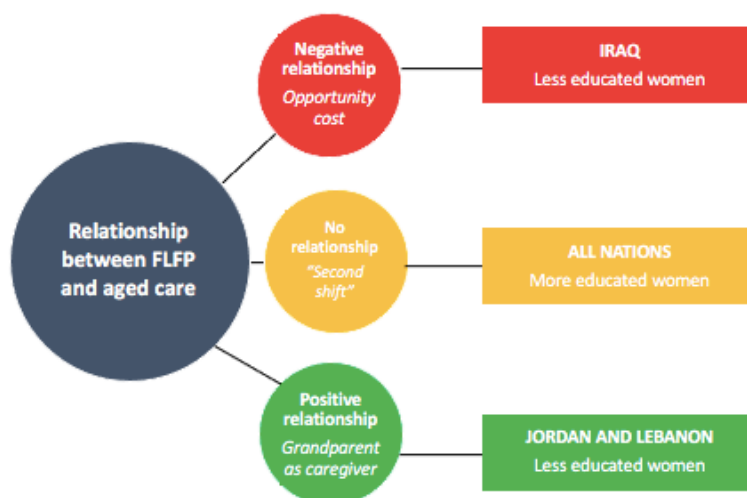
This report starts by analysing factors affecting the supply and demand of the current aged care landscape in all three nations (Figure 1). Across the Mashreq, there is a lack of supply of formalized care services, with care overwhelmingly being provided at home by family members and not by private, public or NGO providers. In addition, cultural preferences for the elderly to be looked after by their family impact demand for different suppliers of care. Alongside patriarchal norms, this has meant that female family members are the most likely carers –providing valuable care work to their husband, parents or parents-in-law for no wage.

Figure 1: Framework for aged care sector



Analysing nation-specific household survey data, this report provides evidence of the complicated relationship between both time spent looking after the elderly or living with the elderly and FLFP (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Alternative findings of the relationship between FLFP and aged care



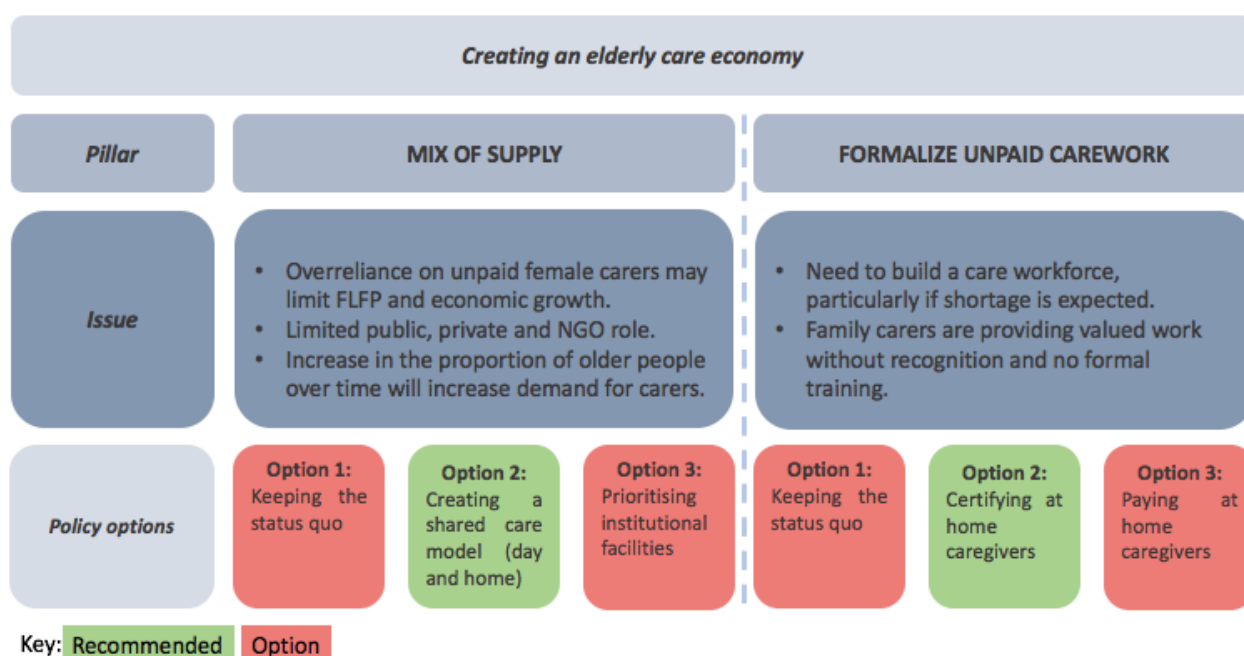
In Iraq, women with less than secondary education that look after or live with the elderly are less likely to be in the paid labor market. In contrast, in Lebanon and Jordan, an analogous group of women are more likely to be in the paid labor market. This could be because the elderly are freeing up mothers to enter or return to the paid labor market by providing free and accessible care to their grandchildren. In all three nations, for more educated women there is no statistically significant relationship between elderly care and FLFP. While for

these women working at home is not a barrier to paid labor market work, they could be experiencing adverse outcomes, such as mental health burdens, as they juggle two jobs yet are only paid for one.

Regardless of the relationship between FLFP and aged care, reform to the aged care sector is necessary for social, economic and moral reasons. The future of elderly care in the Mashreq nations is likely increased demand and increased pressure on unpaid female carers. With lower fertility rates and rising life expectancies an ageing population is likely to put pressure on the fragile elderly care systems. Reform can increase women’s paid labor market participation by creating paid care work for women to supply and free them up to work in other sectors. It will also reduce the responsibilities placed upon women and help ensure the elderly are able to live the remainder of lives where they like while receiving high-quality care.

This is not an issue limited to the Mashreq. Across the world, care work is invisible, unpaid or low-paid and undertaken mostly by women. While ageism and sexism is universal, the Mashreq nations can learn from the development of aged care systems in other nations. Policy options are recommended based upon best practice learnings. They discuss how to change the supply mix of care to redistribute care away from unpaid family caregivers and how to formalize the provision of unpaid care work in the home to recognize female carers (Figure 3). This reports recommends that each nation creates and expands day-care facilities, as well as certifies and trains women providing home care. This will increase FLFP in a culturally appropriate manner.

Figure 3: How to create an elderly care economy



The Mashreq region has continually experienced fragility related to conflict and development. While having a plan to reform elderly care is difficult in most nations, it will be even more complicated in this region. The World Bank’s Mashreq Gender Facility (MGF) should work with the Steering Committee Members and National Coordinators to create a distinct implementation plan for each nation (Figure 4). They need to start by identifying NGO partners to conduct a landscape analysis to scale-up existing day-care facilities and training programs to begin certifying women. They need to commence work with social partners to build support amongst male community members to ensure women can work without backlash. All three nations must recognize that reforms to aged care can increase FLFP and be a source of sustainable economic growth.

Figure 4: Next steps for MGF

