

Women and Men in Lebanon: A Statistical Portrait

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One strategic objective adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995 is the generation and dissemination of gender disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation. This objective aims at ensuring that all statistics related to individuals are collected, compiled, analyzed and presented by sex and age and that they reflect problems and questions related to women and men in society.

It is within this context that a recent publication has appeared under the title of *Women and Men in Lebanon: A Statistical Portrait, in 2000*. The publication is part of a Regional Project for development of national gender statistics programmes in the Arab Countries. The project aims at strengthening the national capacities in the production, and use and dissemination of statistics related to gender issues at the national and regional levels, in an effort to influence policies and programmes and promote changes for the benefit of women. The project, supported by the UN, was executed in nine countries, including Lebanon.

The book makes use of a number of surveys that were done in Lebanon over the past five years. A historical overview of the progress in the situation of women and men is noted when data is available. The book takes into consideration differences among women and men in a number of areas, following a descriptive and analytical approach. It consists of six chapters, including a general introduction on the legal conditions of women in Lebanon and six chapters on the various topics, including demography, education, health, labor, economy and public life and leadership.

The statistics available indicate a significant number of findings. First, the increase in the average age at marriage

from 23 years in 1970 to 27 years in 1996. Second, the significant difference in the migration rates between men (1.3%) and women (0.2%). Third, the continuing differences in the illiteracy rates, 16% for women and 7% for men. Fourth, differences in favor of women in the enrolment rates although these are not coupled with a change in the types of educational specialties sought at higher institutions, wherein women are still concentrated in the areas of humanities and social sciences. Fifth, a significant improvement in the health status of Lebanese women, especially in terms of prenatal and natal care. Sixth, the rate of participation of women in the Lebanese labor force is 21.7%. Most of them are in the age group 25-39 years and are employed in the service sector. The participation of women in agriculture is underrepresented, as is the case in many countries of the world. Seventh, a very low level of participation of women in public and political life.

A number of cross-cutting themes run throughout the book. First, although there is very little discrimination against women at the legal level, i.e. in terms of laws, there are serious disparities between women and men at the practical level. Second, regional disparities are noted with respect to all variables and the remote rural areas are the worst affected.

The book is considered important because it represents the first attempt to compare the situation of men and women in Lebanon, and not merely to describe the conditions of women. It adopts therefore a typical gender outlook. Nevertheless, the real challenge is to ensure the mainstreaming of gender into the national statistical databases, thus rendering gender disaggregation of statistics sustainable.