

## DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION IN THE MASHREQ REGION

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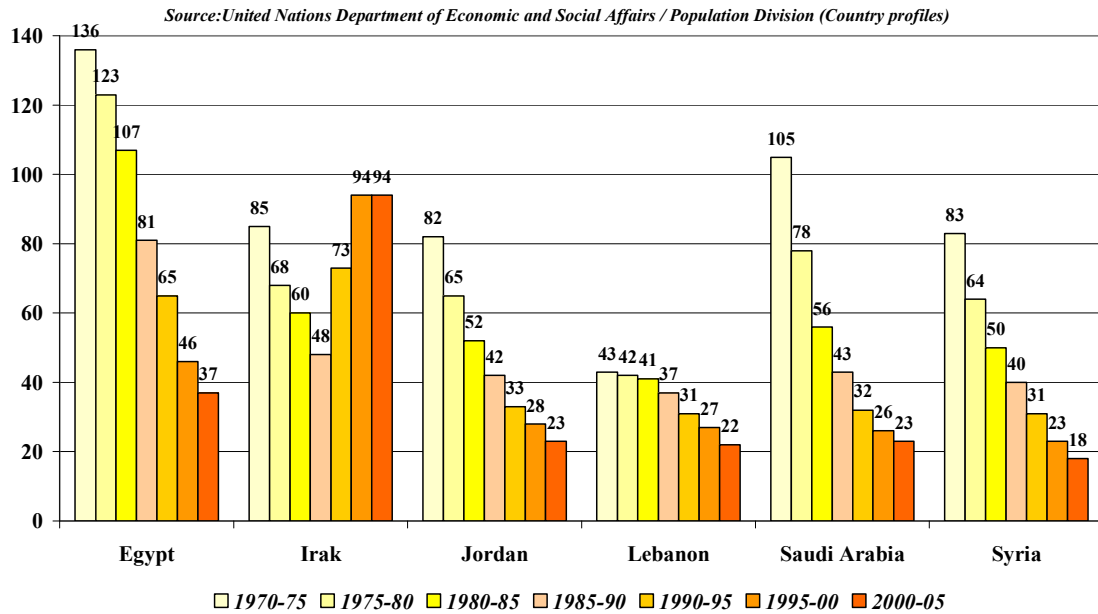
### Abstract

*This poster attempts to illustrate the **demographic situation of most Arab countries of the Mashreq region** (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Syria). After having completed the transition from high to low mortality rates, these countries are currently undergoing the transition from high to low fertility demographic regimes, and while this transition is not completed, a period of **rapid population growth** has been taking place. Analysis of official UN data show that most of the past decline on fertility experienced so far has been due to the **delay of the age of marriage of Arab women**, for marital fertility has continued to remain quite high. **This rapid decline of fertility rates** has reshaped the age structure of these populations, and will cause a dramatic **reduction of the dependency ratio** during the oncoming decades, opening a window of opportunity for strengthening the economic development of the region. However, this “**demographic bonus**” might not be exploited to its full potential if the economies of the region do not provide sufficient employment opportunities for an increasing number of educated women. **The poster aims to highlight the complex interdependence between changes on fertility, marriage patterns, school attendance and participation of women in the labour force.***

## Decrease of mortality

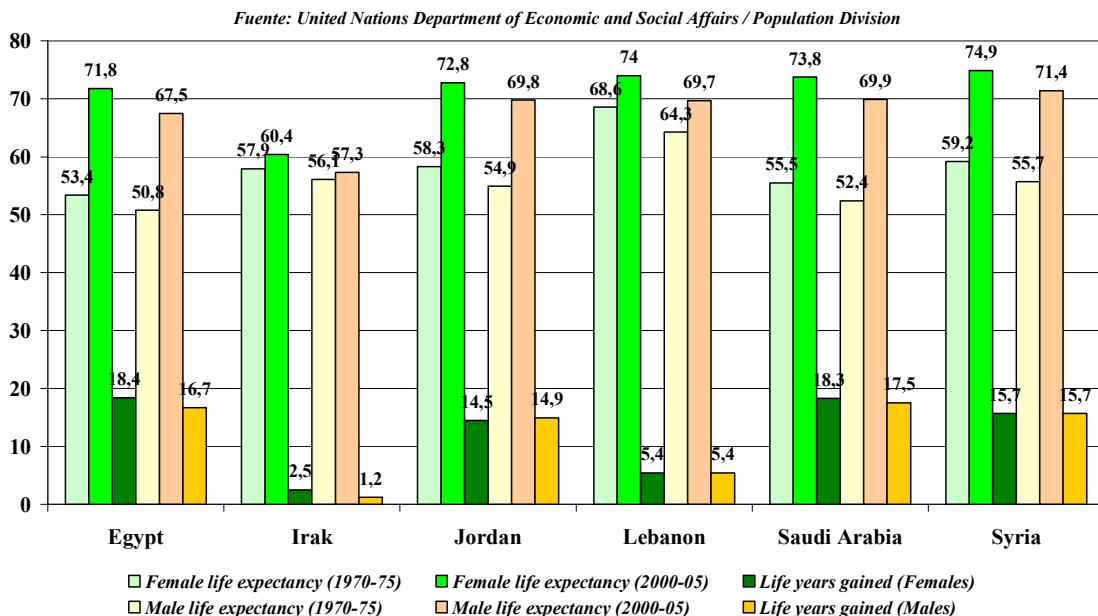
Graphs show that all countries have experienced a dramatic decrease of infant mortality although still exist some differences between them, notably between Egypt, Iraq and the rest.

### Infant mortality rates (n° of deaths per 1.000 births)



This has had a great impact of life expectancy.

### Improvements in life expectancy



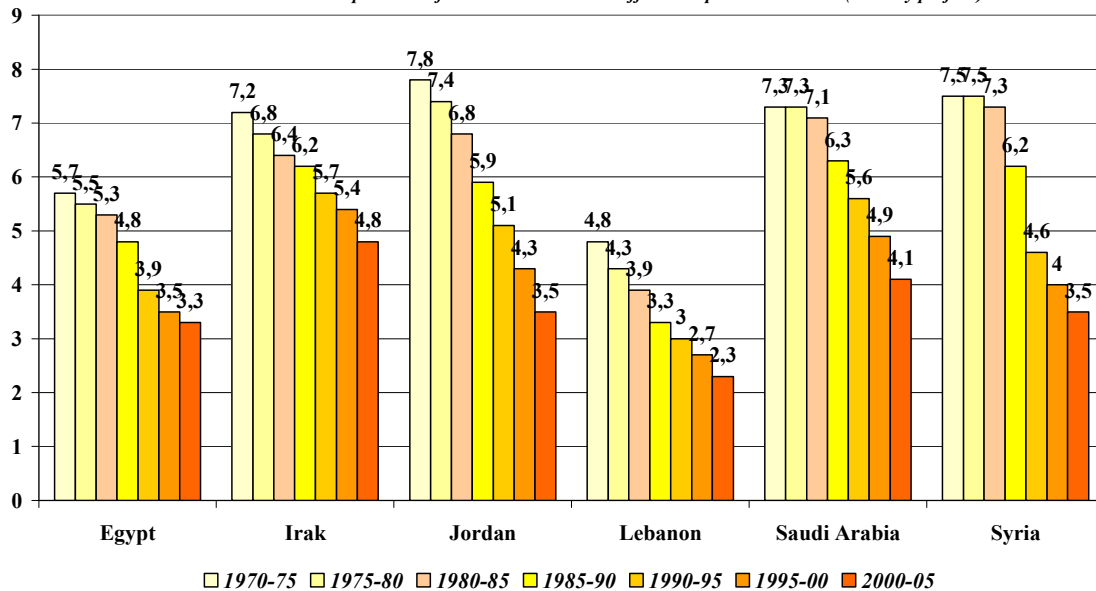
## Decrease of fertility

The evolution of fertility has been different from one country to another. If we combine the analysis of the evolutions of both mortality and fertility we can conclude that **each country of the Mashreq area has a unique profile**.

A close look to the graphs of mortality and fertility shows that the level of association between both is far from being perfect, which suggests that **fertility is being determined also by other variables and not just by a decrease in infant mortality**. This becomes clearer when we compare the trends shown by Egypt with those of Saudi Arabia. The former has lower fertility but higher infant mortality than the later.

### Total Fertility Rates (n° of births per woman)

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs / Population Division (Country profiles)



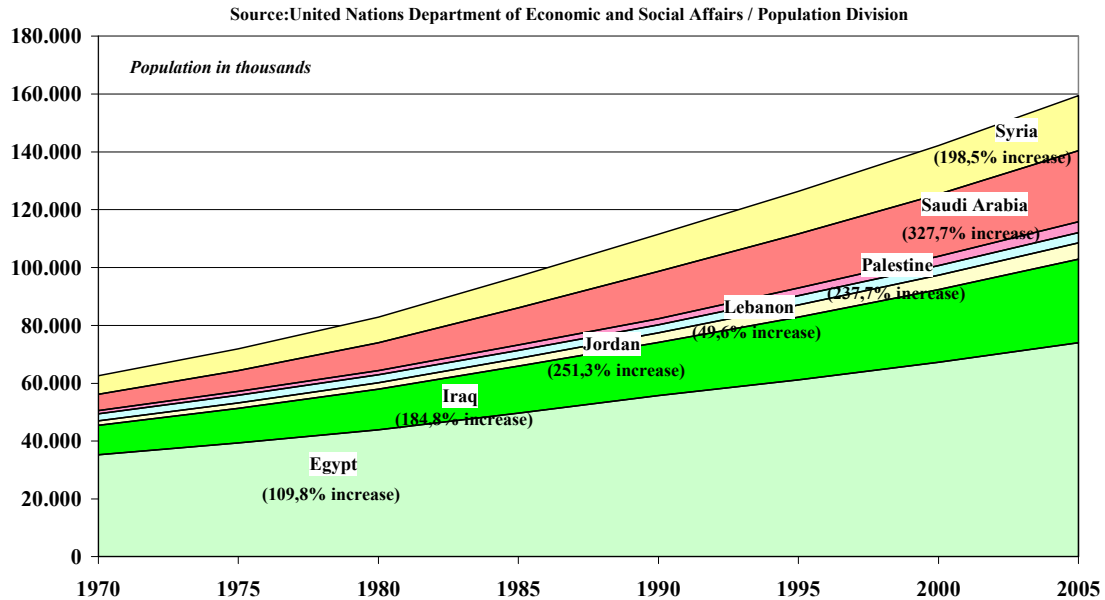
One plausible explanation for those differences on the evolution of fertility could be related to **differences in the process of women emancipation**. A “third transition” that is caused by the other two but that in return is affecting them as well.

## Rapid population growth

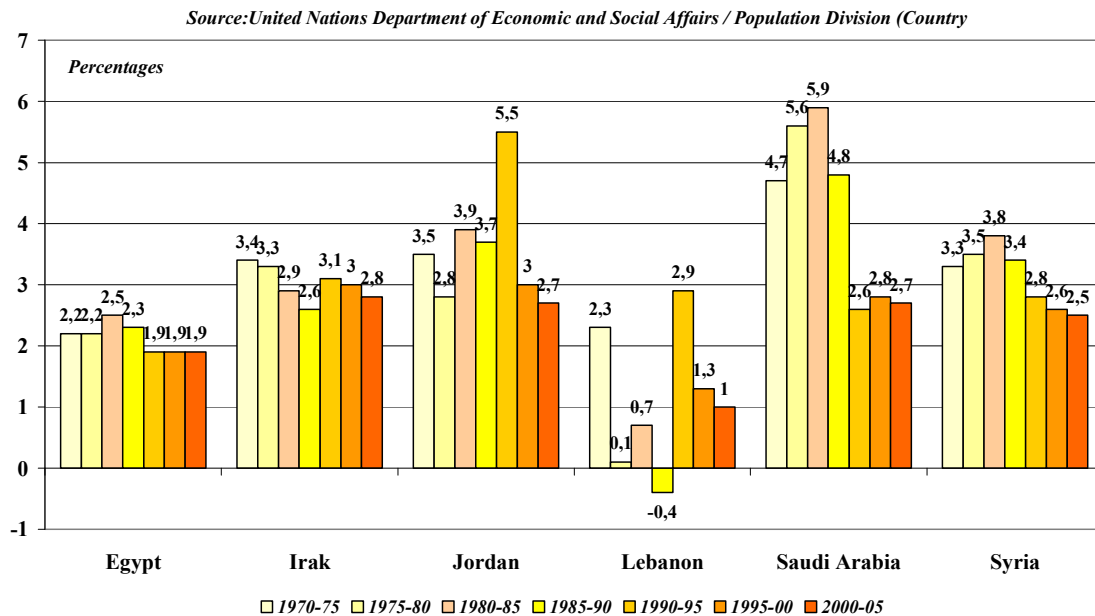
This transition from a regime of high to low mortality opens the possibility to reduce fertility. However, as long as this second transition (from high to low fertility) is not completed, the immediate consequence of the decrease of mortality (notably infant mortality) is a rapid population growth.

Rapid population growth has been one distinctive feature of Mashreq countries. However, not all countries have grown at the same rate. These differences in growth are mainly due to differences in fertility levels rather than differences in mortality.

### Population growth of some countries of the Mashreq region



### Average yearly growth rates



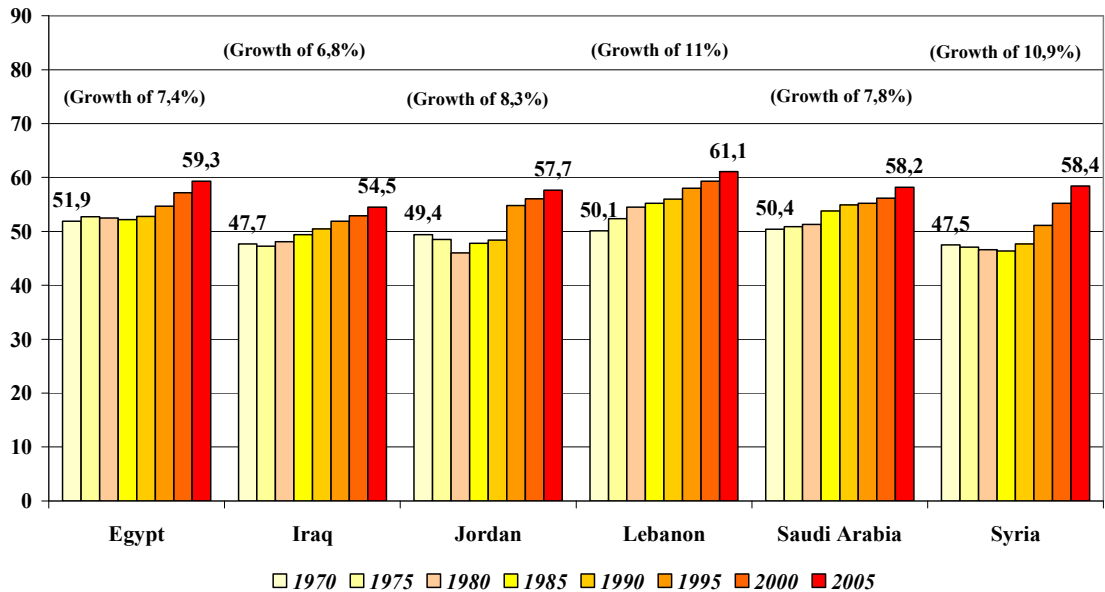
Population growth has been higher in countries where fertility has decreased at a slower pace, except for the case of Iraq, where despite of higher fertility than Jordan or Saudi Arabia, due to higher infant mortality rates, its population growth has been more moderate. Lebanon had already made a great part of the transitions to low mortality and low fertility at the beginning of the 70's, and later, during the 80's, it has also been affected by migration caused by a civil war.

## Changes in the age structure of the population

Periods of rapid population growth followed by decreases in fertility cause an alteration of the population pyramid that entail beneficial consequences such as a temporary decrease on the dependency ratio. For decades ahead, the proportion of people below age 15 will continue to reduce sharply, in favour of those in active ages.

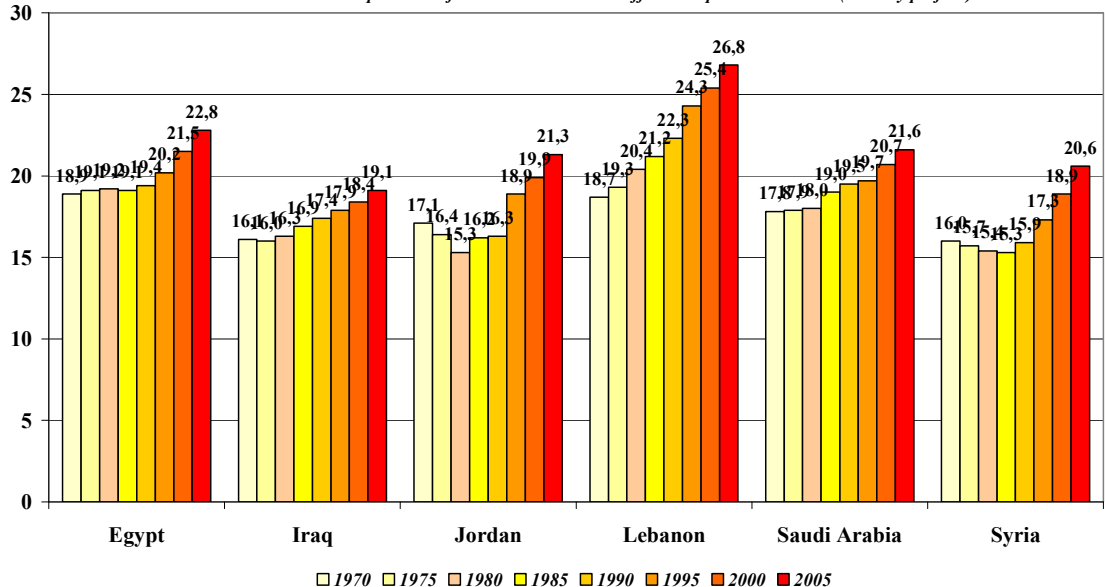
### Percentages of population of ages 15 to 59

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs / Population Division (Country profiles)



### Mean Age of the population

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs / Population Division (Country profiles)

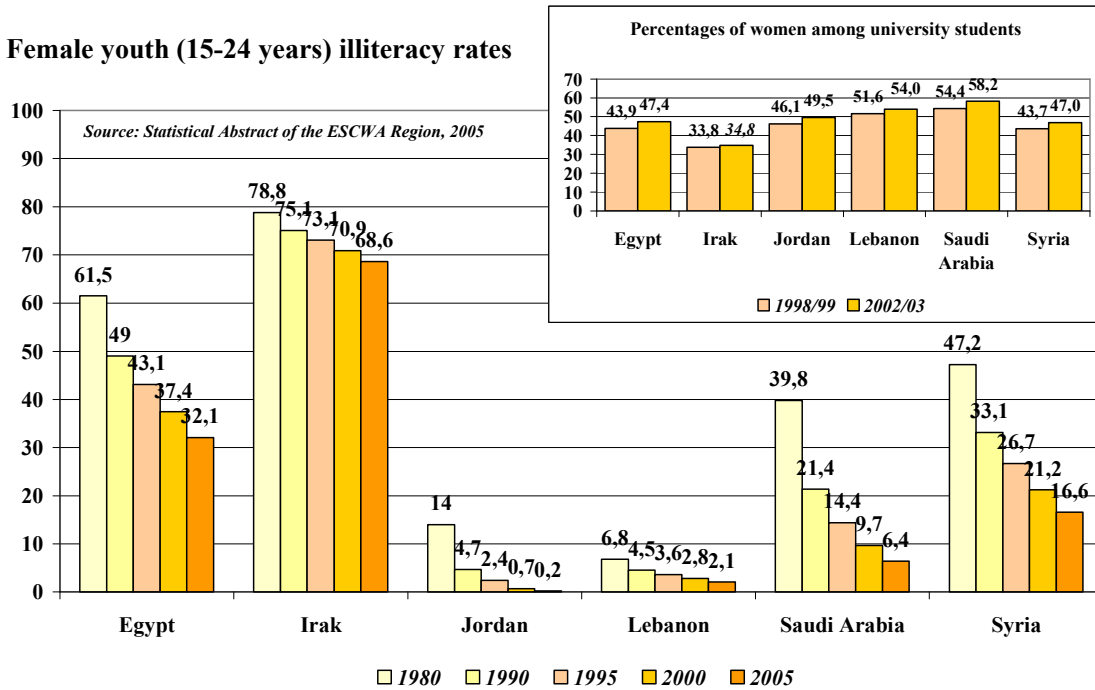


This will allow saving resources from education and childcare and, therefore, divert them to infrastructure development and other investments (**Demographic bonus**). However this situation will only be exploited to its full potential if there is a massive incorporation of Arab women to the labour force, and this includes single women as well as married ones.

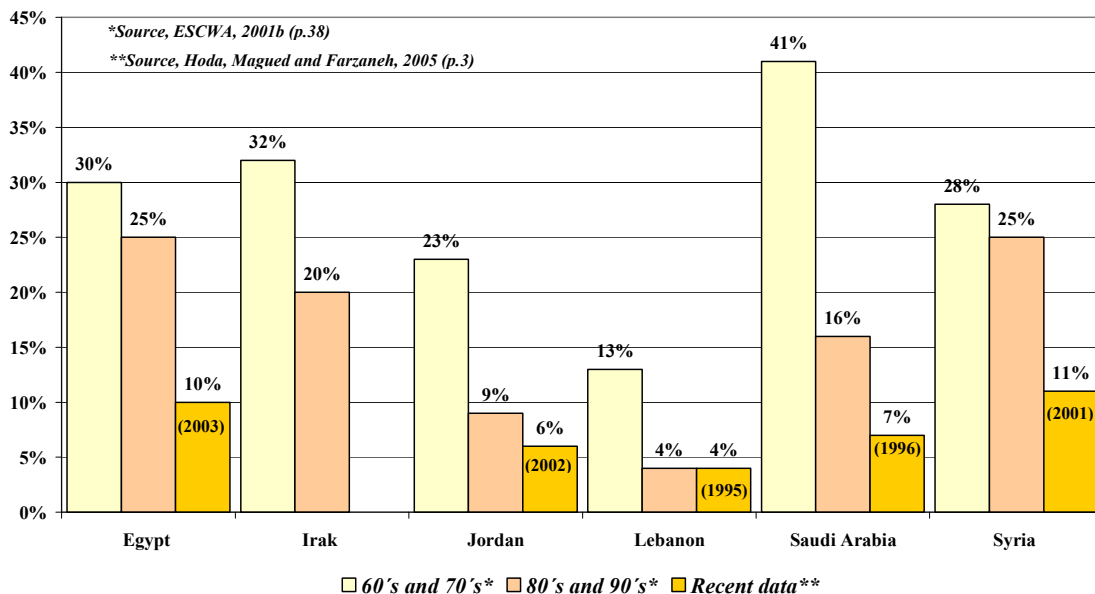
## Women emancipation and decrease of fertility rates

Although marriage and childbearing continue to be fundamental institutions in the Arab world, there are some changes taking place that affect greatly the lives of many women and which entail important consequences for the evolution of demographic trends in the future, as we will see in this section of this resume. Decrease in fertility rates is know to be influenced by the **spread of formal education** because women tend to postpone marriage and childbearing while they still in school.

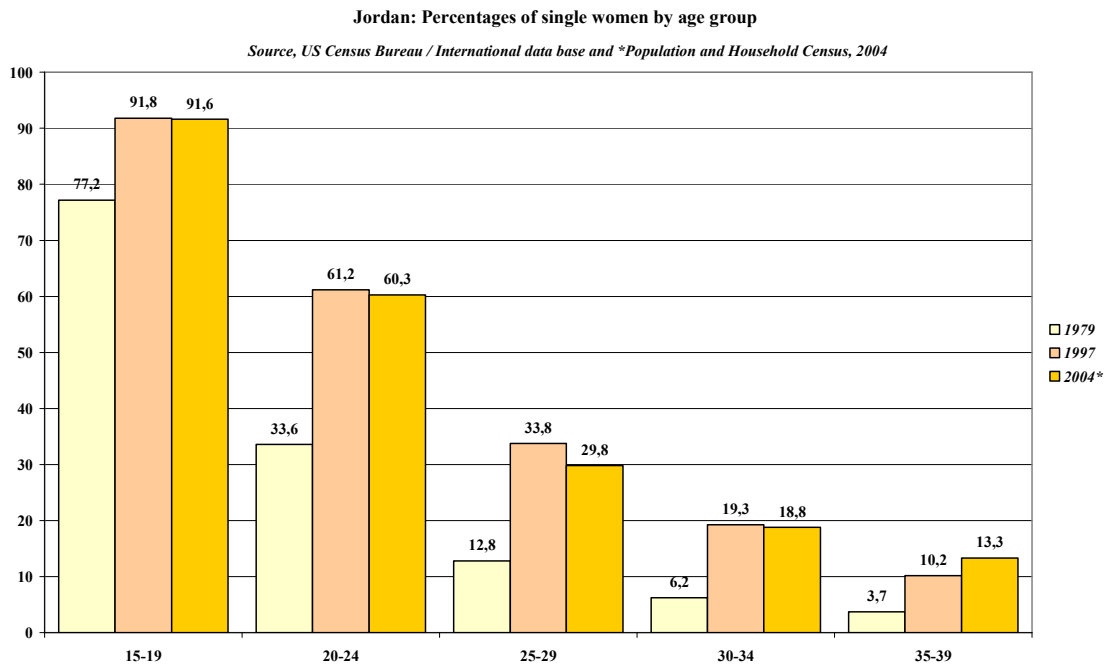
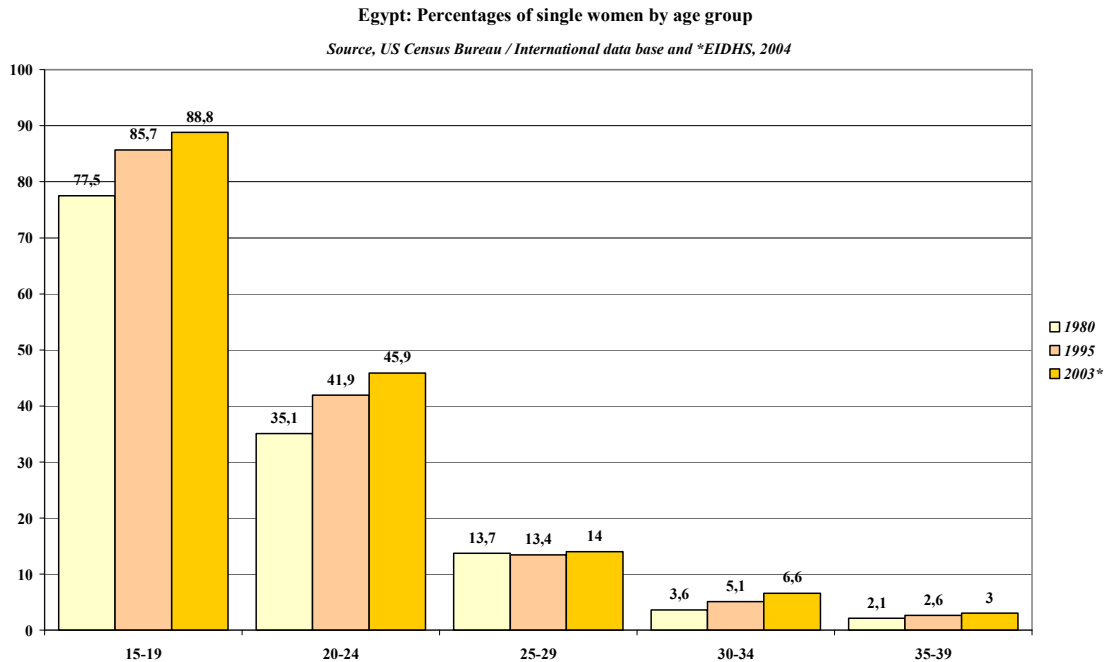
### Female youth (15-24 years) illiteracy rates



### Percentages of married women of ages 15 to 19

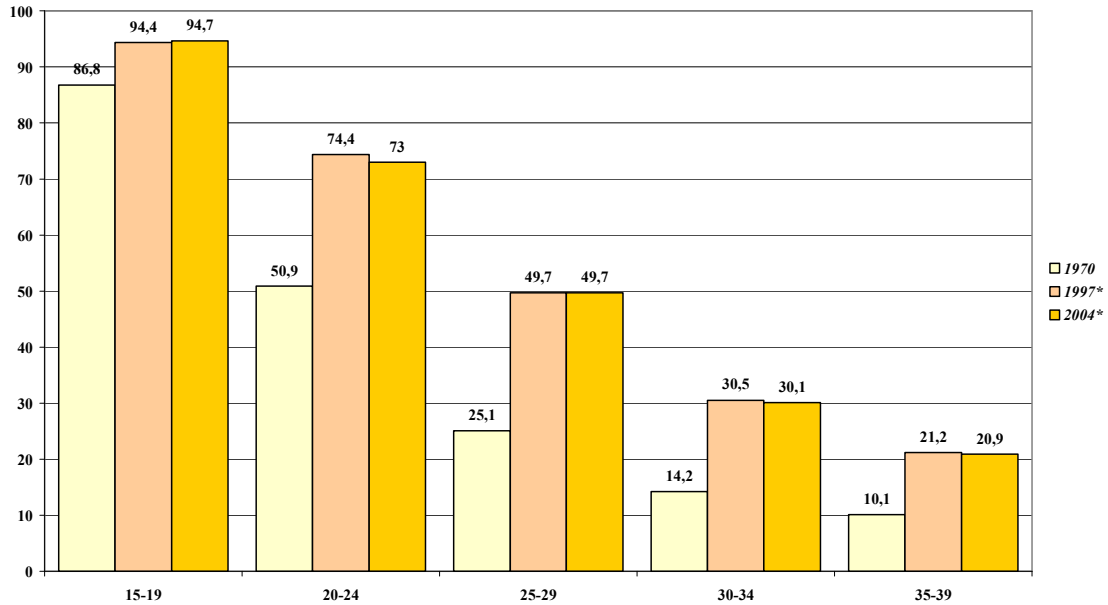


There has been a change in the patterns of marriage during the last decades in the Mashreq region. These changes have entailed sharp **increases in the percentages of women who still remain single between ages 15 to 24.**



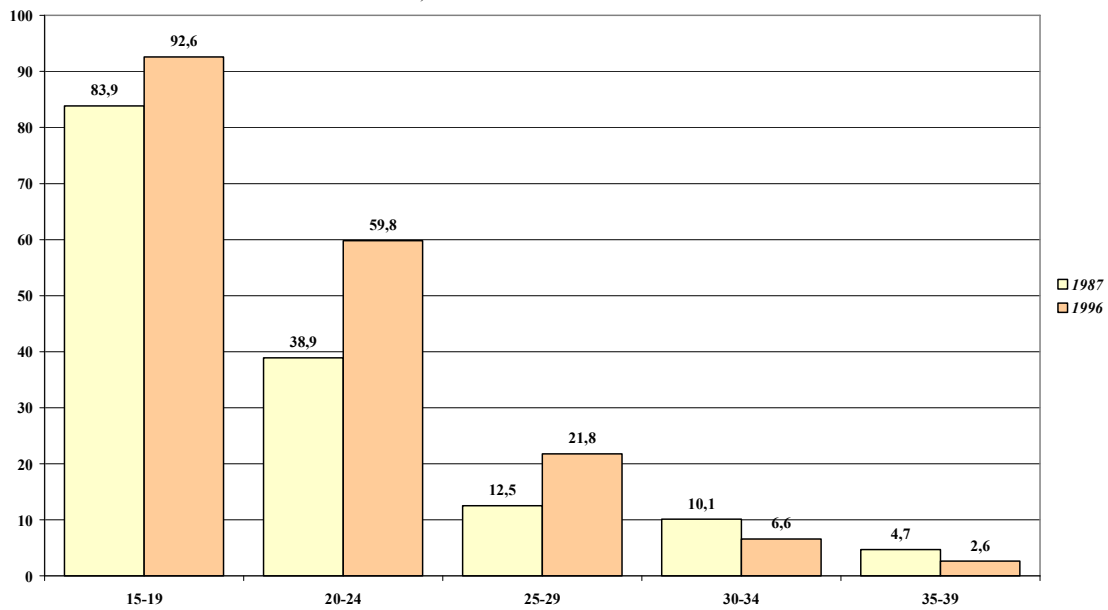
**Lebanon: Percentages of single women by age group**

Source, US Census Bureau / International data base and \*National Survey of Household Living Conditions, 2004



**Saudi Arabia: Percentages of single women by age group**

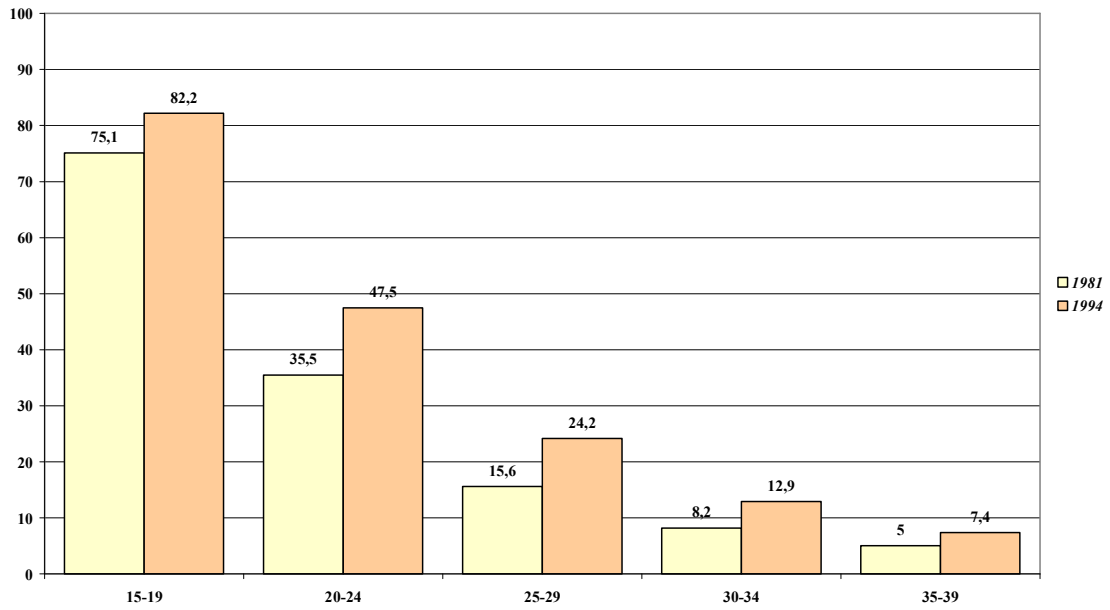
Source, US Census Bureau / International data base





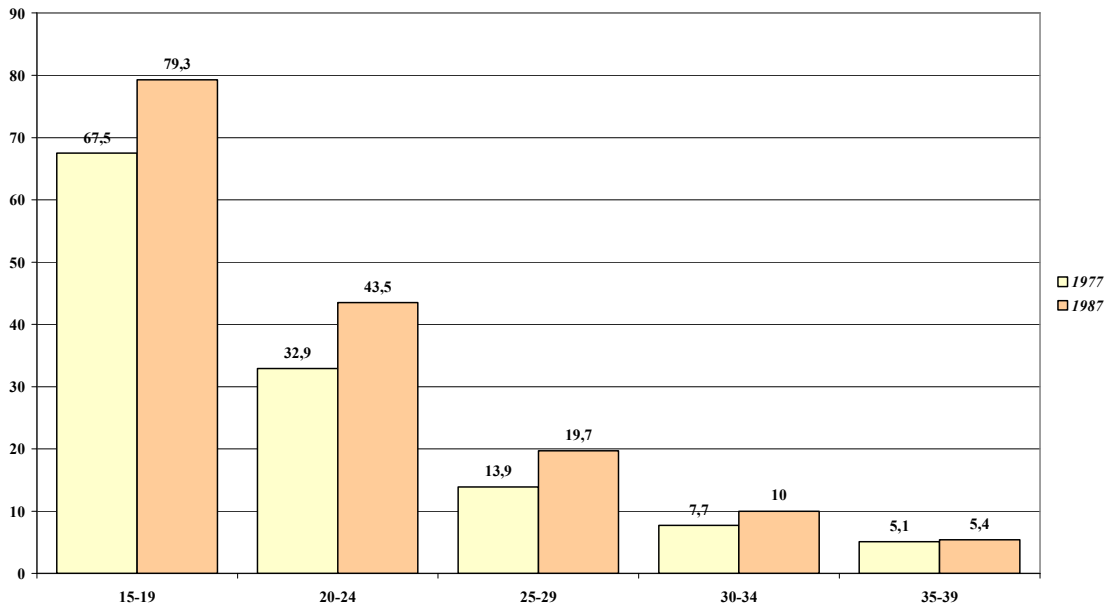
Syria: Percentages of single women by age group

Source, US Census Bureau / International data base



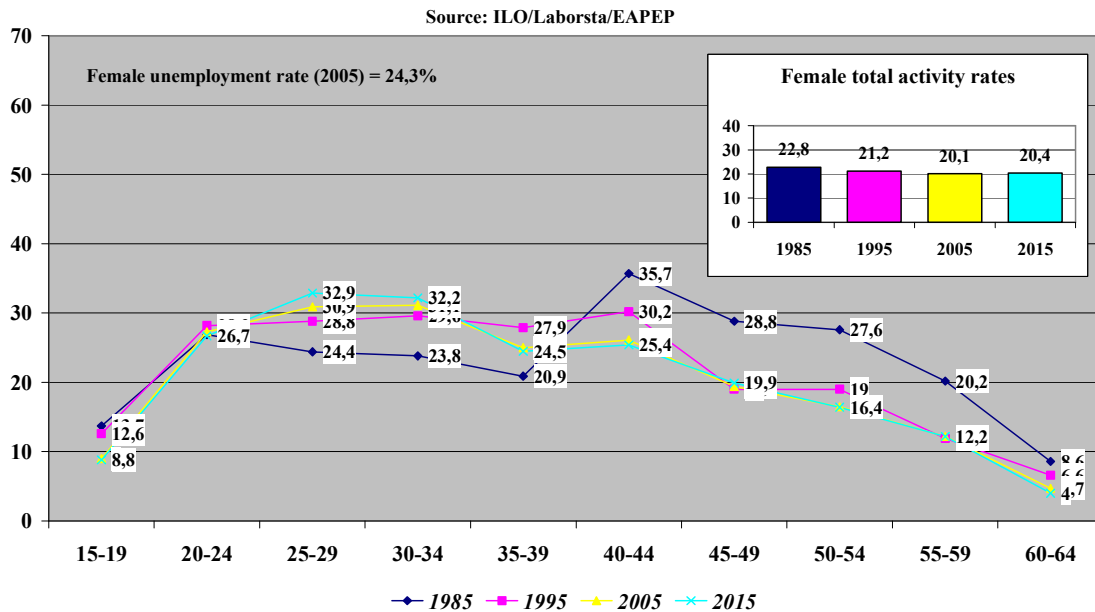
Irak: Percentages of single women by age group

Source, US Census Bureau / International data base

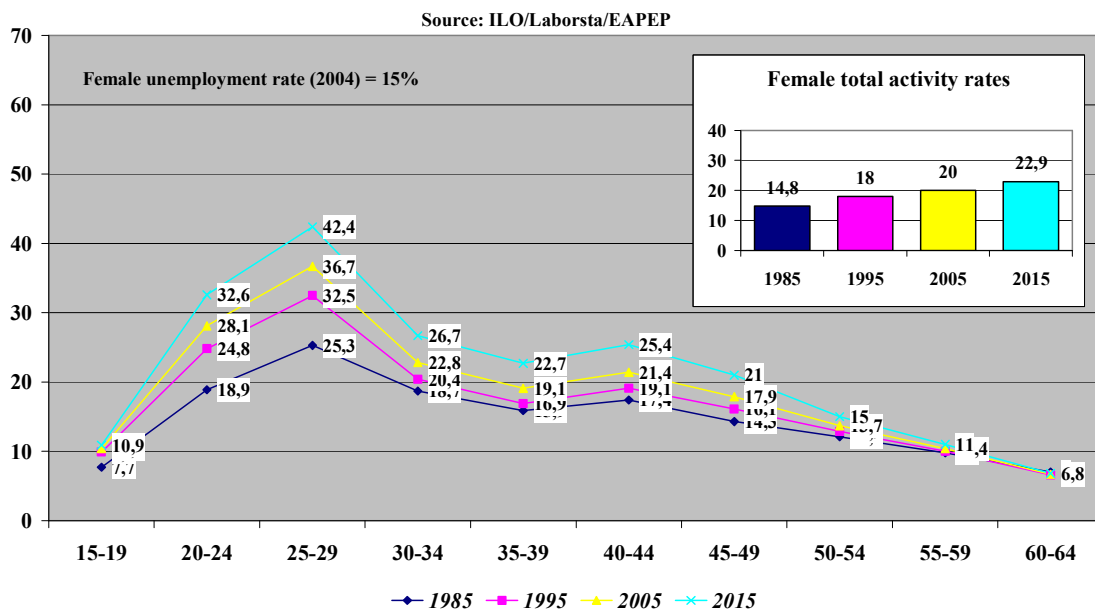


The growing **access of women to the labour market** constitutes the last major factor related to women emancipation that is affecting both, age at marriage and fertility. It can be seen that in most countries of the Mashreq region there is a clear tendency towards an increase on the participation of women in the labour market. However, as data from the International Labour Office shows, there are great differences between countries.

### Egypt: Female age specific activity rates

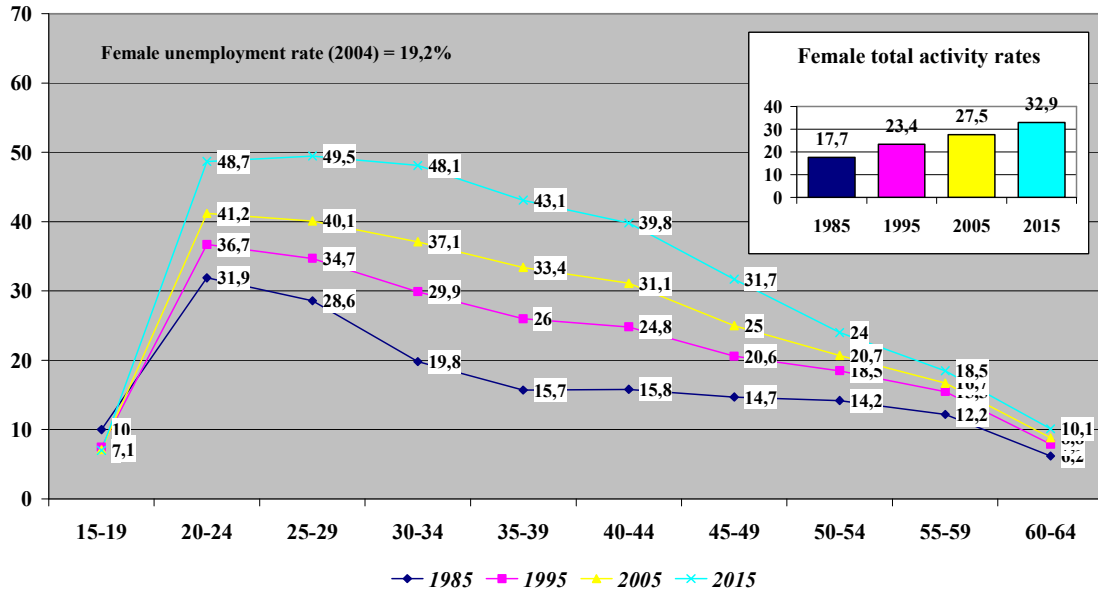


### Irak: Female age specific activity rates



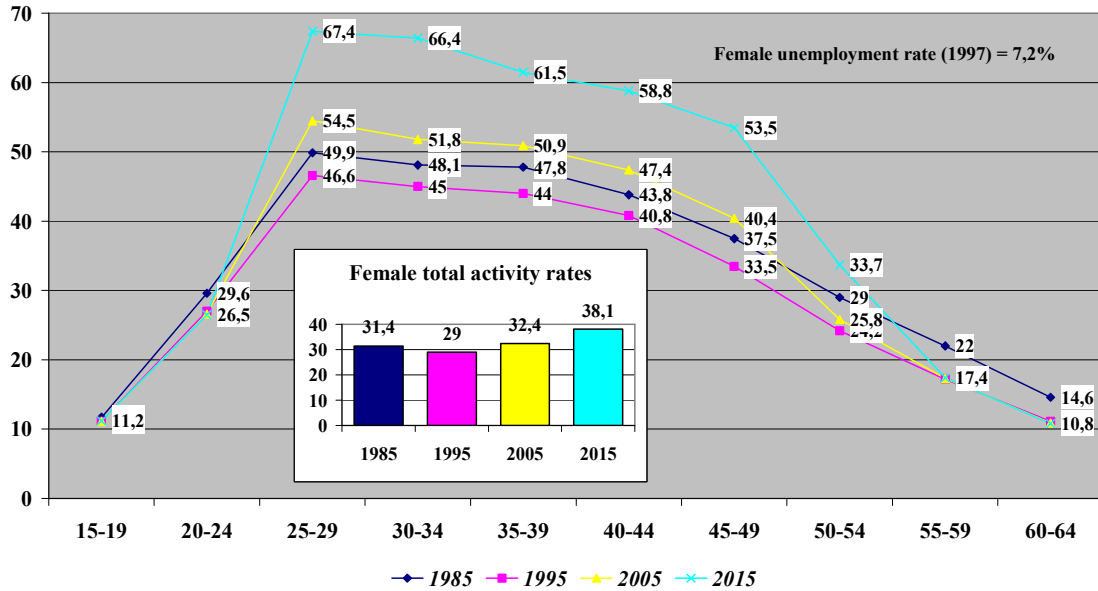
### Jordan: Female Age specific activity rates

Source: ILO/Laborsta/EAPEP

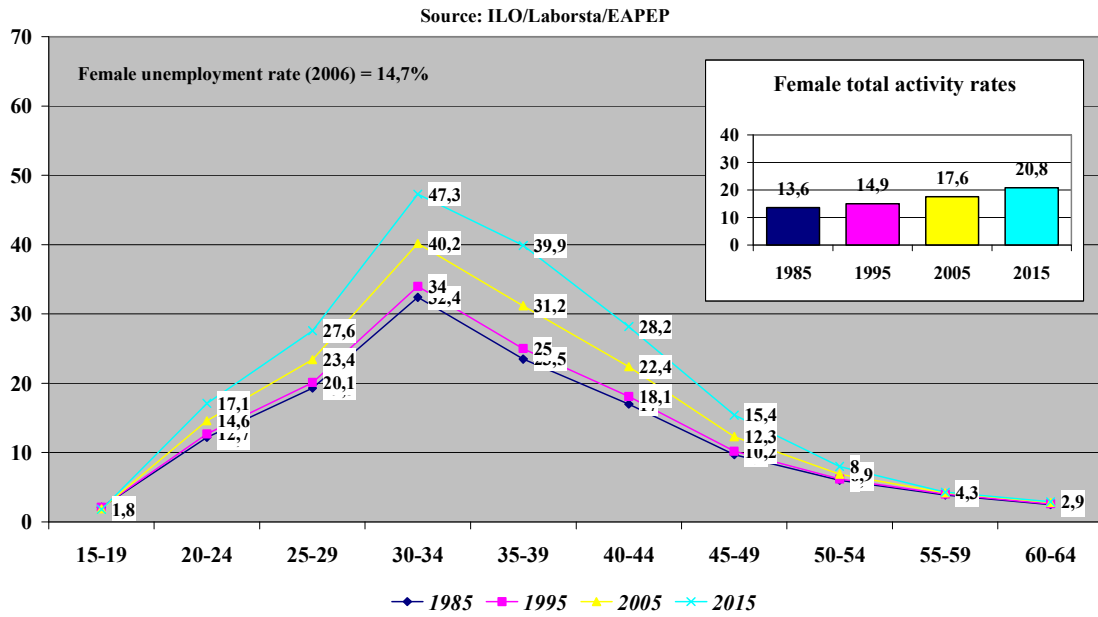


### Lebanon: Female age specific activity rates

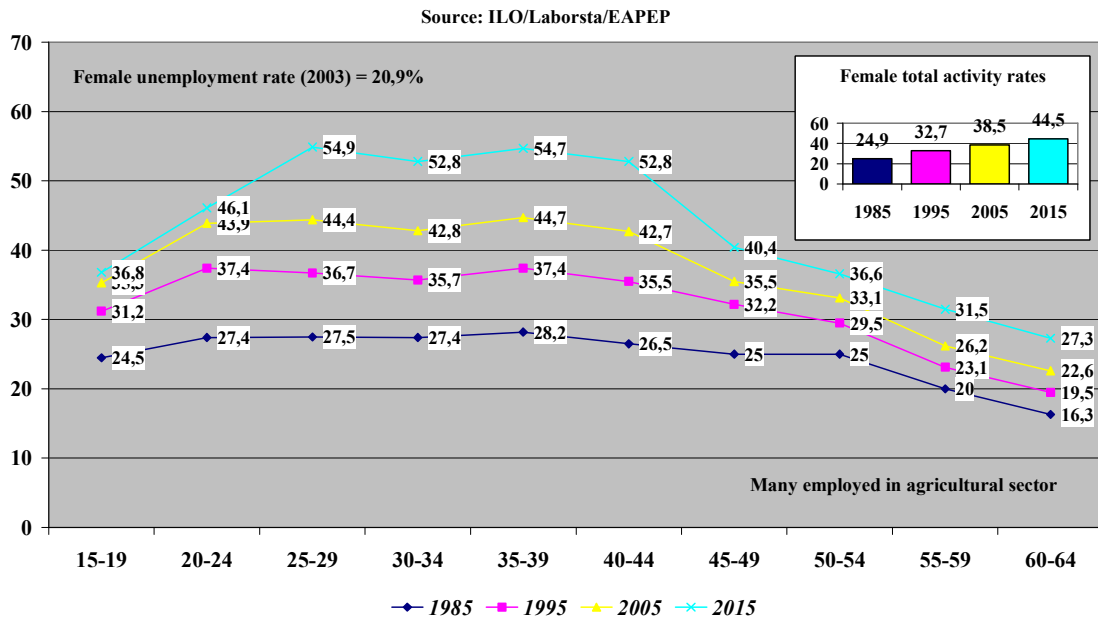
Source: ILO/Laborsta/EAPEP



### Saudi Arabia: Female age specific activity rates



### Syria: Female age specific activity rates



## Concluding remarks

These three variables (age at marriage, access to labour market and formal education), so closely related to the emancipation process, have evolved differently during the past decades in Mashreq societies, therefore contributing to shape a situation of great regional heterogeneity and diversity between countries. While increasing school attendance and reducing infant mortality sets the path for lower fertility, early marriages and households of only one male breadwinner tend to slower the pace at which fertility transition occurs.

A rough description of how these variables interact and affect fertility in the Mashreq region could be the following: Higher levels of income per capita such as those of Saudi Arabia have lead to improvements on **female schooling** but also allow larger number of households to continue attached to a **model of a sole male breadwinner** and also facilitates earlier **emancipation from parental households** of young adults and earlier formation of couples. This helps to explain why decreases on fertility have been sharper in a country like Syria, with lower GDP per capita and lower rates of female literacy and university enrolment. In this country, as in Jordan and Lebanon, data on **female employment** suggests that income from women activity in the labour market is needed in a larger number of households than in Saudi Arabia.

Finally, it must be noted that countries like Jordan, Lebanon and Syria are in a better position to profit from the “**demographic bonus**” than the rest. In these countries, women of all ages have experienced significant improvements in their access to the labour market, while in Saudi Arabia and Irak relative high female participation rates still seem to be restricted to women of rather young ages. Egypt shows little progress, but informal activity in this country remains quite important, and it might be hiding a larger involvement of Egyptian women on economic activity.

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