



FEMALE LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION IN MENA: SUPPLY-SIDE BARRIERS

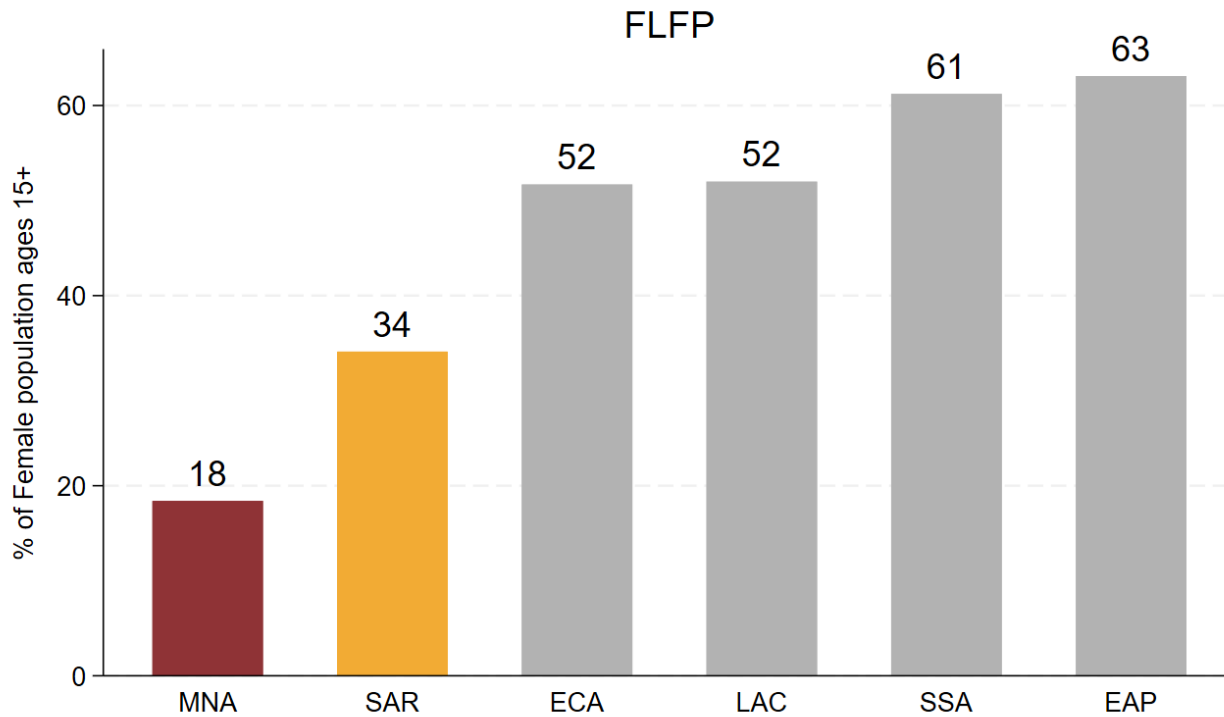
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THE WORLD BANK

STAGNANT AND DECLINING FEMALE LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION IN MENA AND SAR: LOWEST GLOBALLY

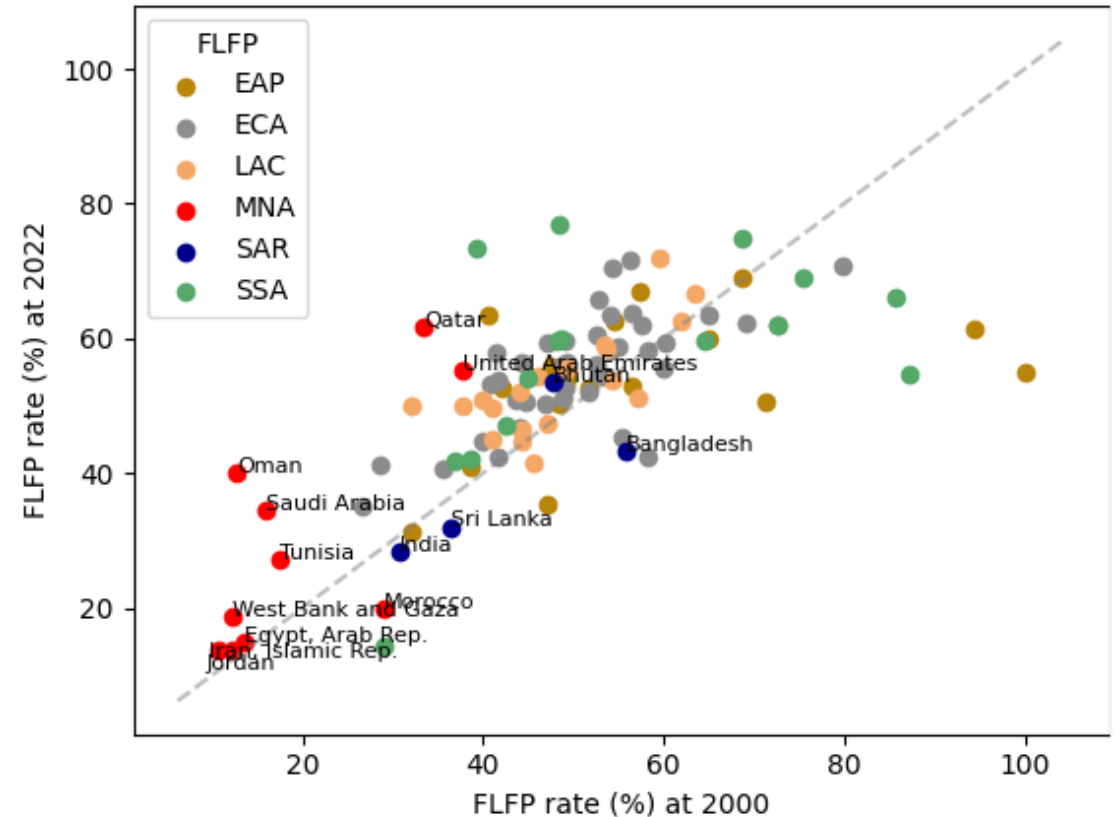
Female Labor Force Participation (15+) by region in percent

Most recent year available



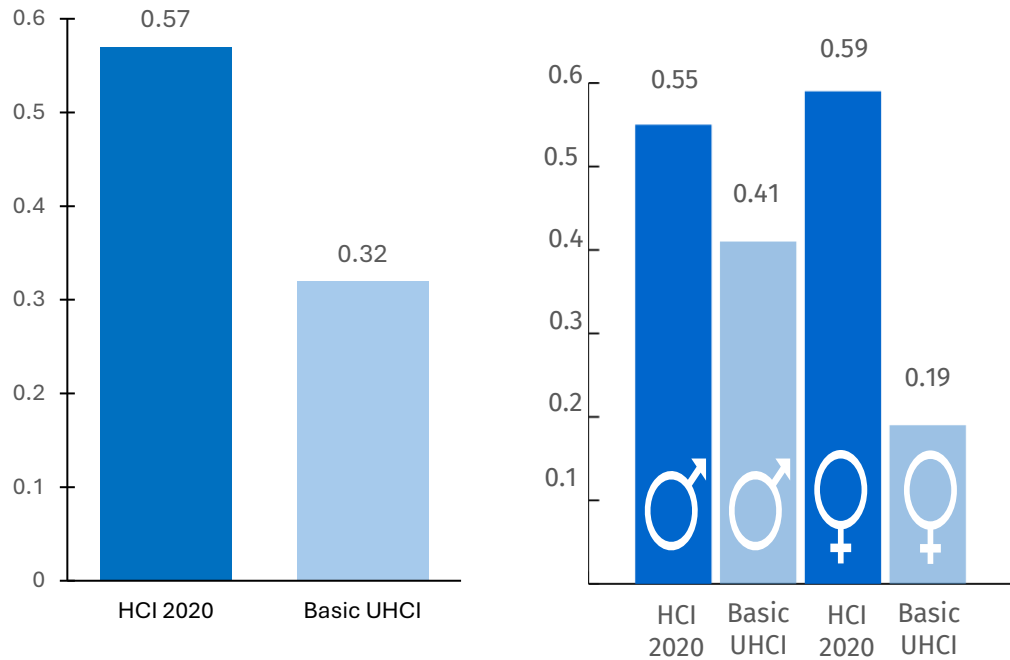
Evolution of Female Labor Force Participation (15+) in percent

FLFP between circa 2000 and 2022



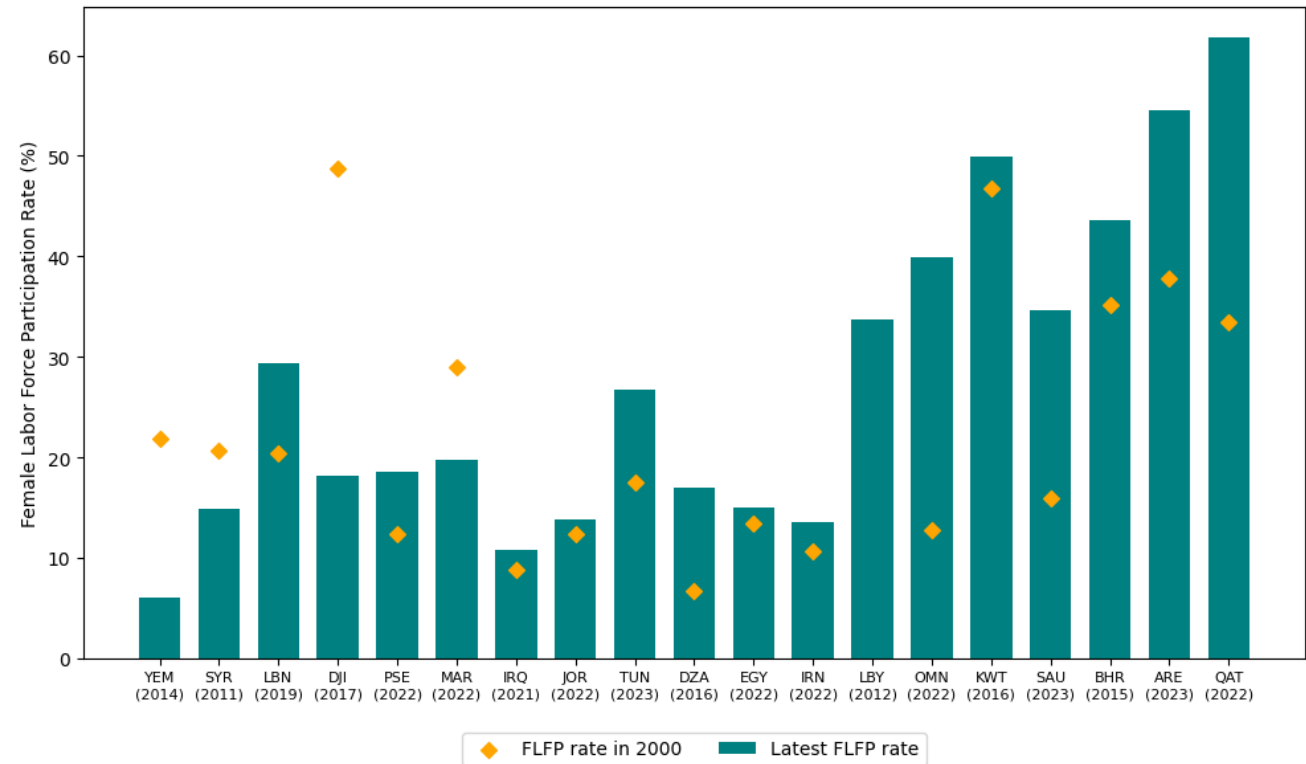
WOMEN'S HUMAN CAPITAL IS NOT UTILIZED TO THE FULLEST

Human Capital Index and Utilization-adjusted Human Capital Index



Source: Human Capital Index, World Bank.

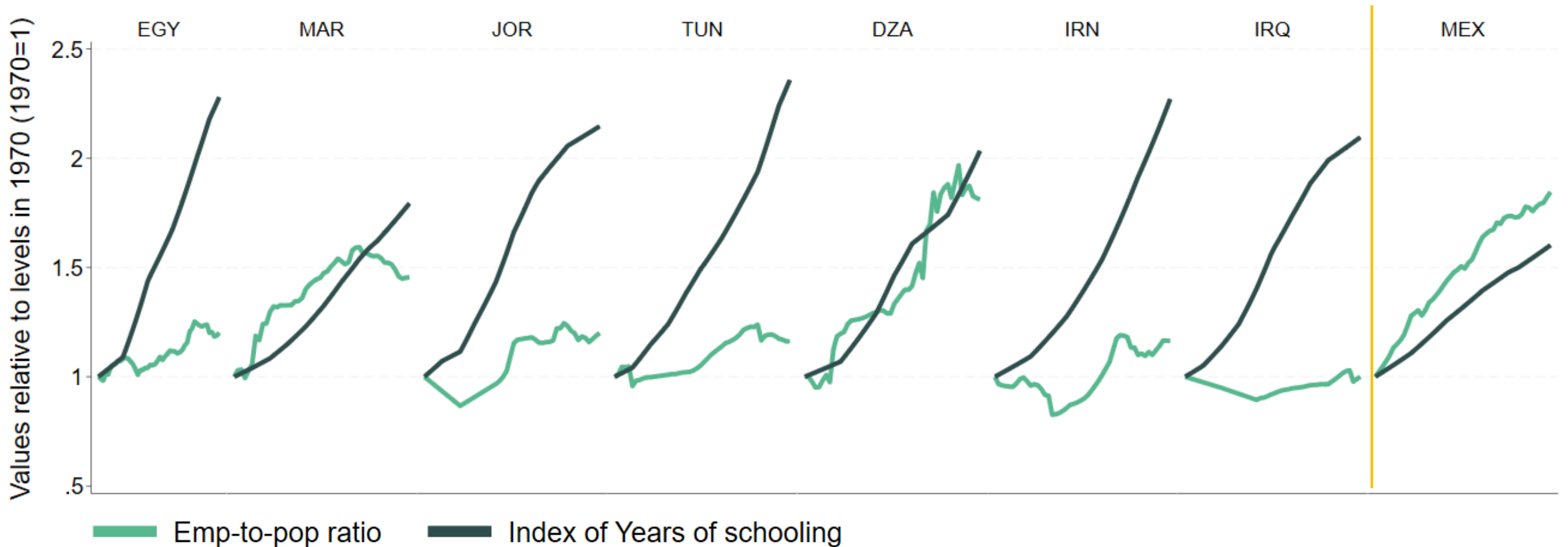
Labor Force Participation (15+) in MENA in percent



Source: International Labor Organization (national estimates)

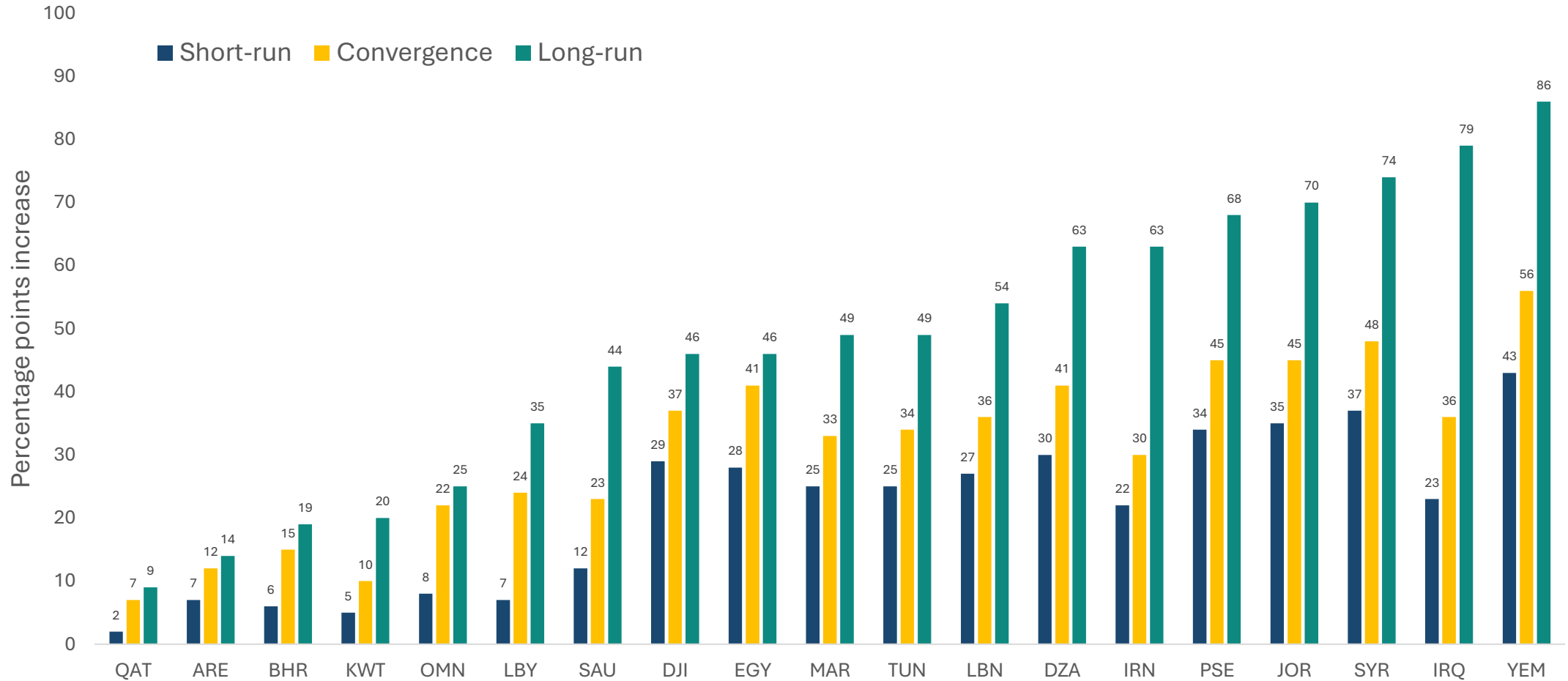
EMPLOYMENT IN THE REGION HAS NOT KEPT PACE WITH GAINS IN YEARS OF SCHOOLING IN THE PAST 50 YEARS

Evolution of Employment-to-population ratio and Years of schooling 1970-2019



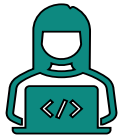
ECONOMIC GAINS FROM CLOSING GENDER GAPS ARE LARGE

Percentage gain in GDP from closing the gender employment gap

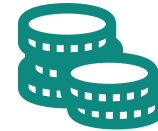


Source: Fiuratti, Pennings, Torres (2024). Policy Research Working Paper

ADDRESSING SUPPLY-SIDE BARRIERS TO FLFP



Reduce gaps between women's skills and labor market demands



Improve access to finance



Remove legal restrictions



Address unpaid care burden and lack of access to quality childcare



Shift gender norms that are restrictive of women's economic participation



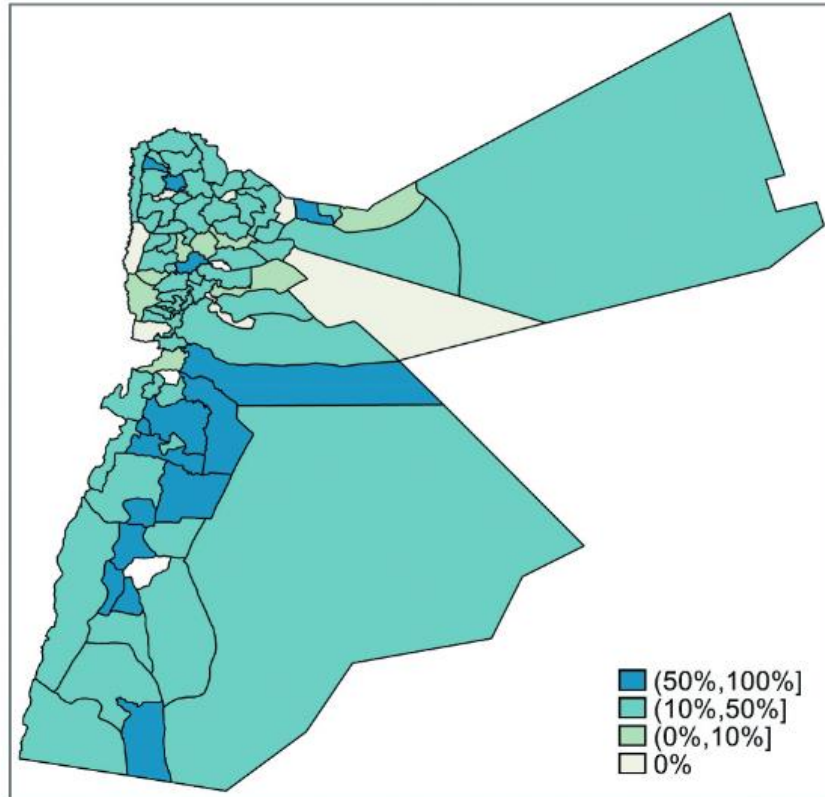
Prevent harassment against women and girls



Address transport barriers

ADOPTION OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES CAN INCREASE FLFP

Internet access by subdistricts in Jordan in 2016

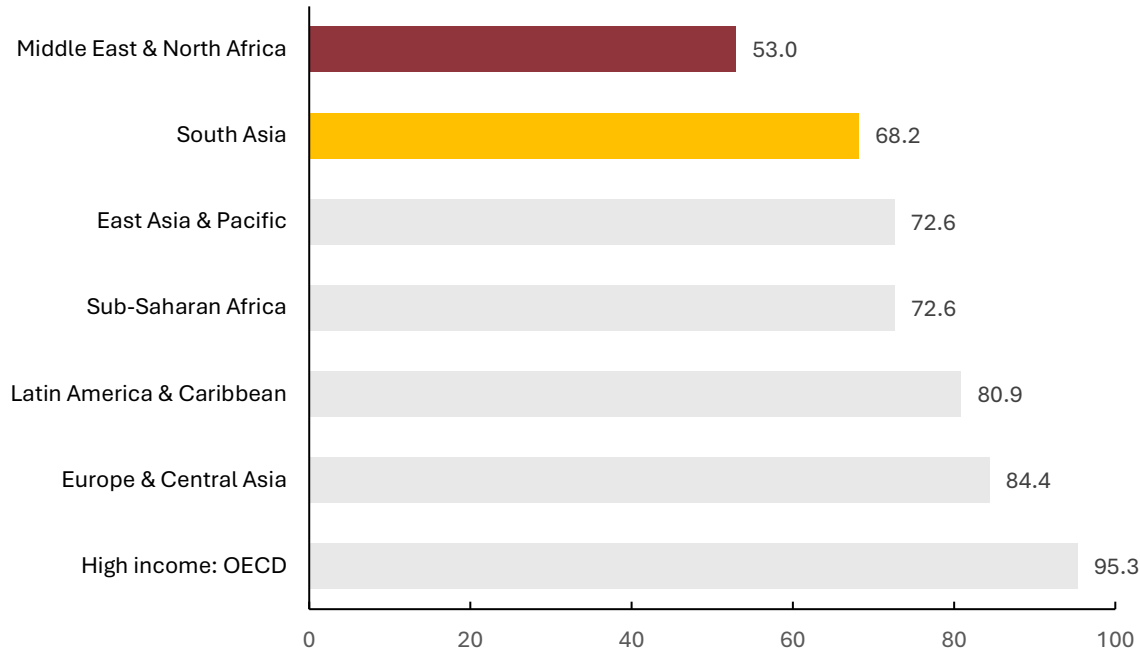


- One p.p. increase in internet access increases FLFP by 0.7 p.p. in Jordan (Viollaz and Winkler, 2022).
- Increased internet job search explains part of the increase in FLFP.
- Increase employment among the most educated women in response to gaining internet access. Results are also driven by women who were unmarried at baseline.

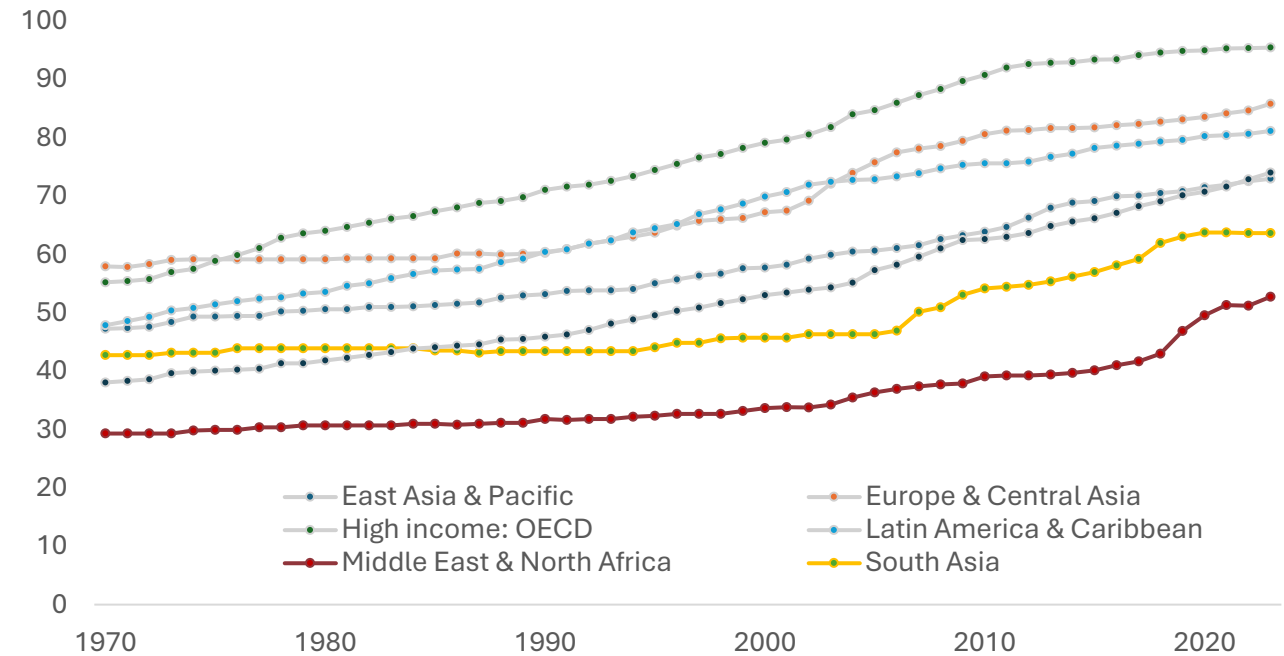
Source: Viollaz and Winkler (2022), *Journal of Development Studies*.

REMOVE LEGAL RESTRICTIONS

Women, Business, and Law Index in 2023 (0-100)



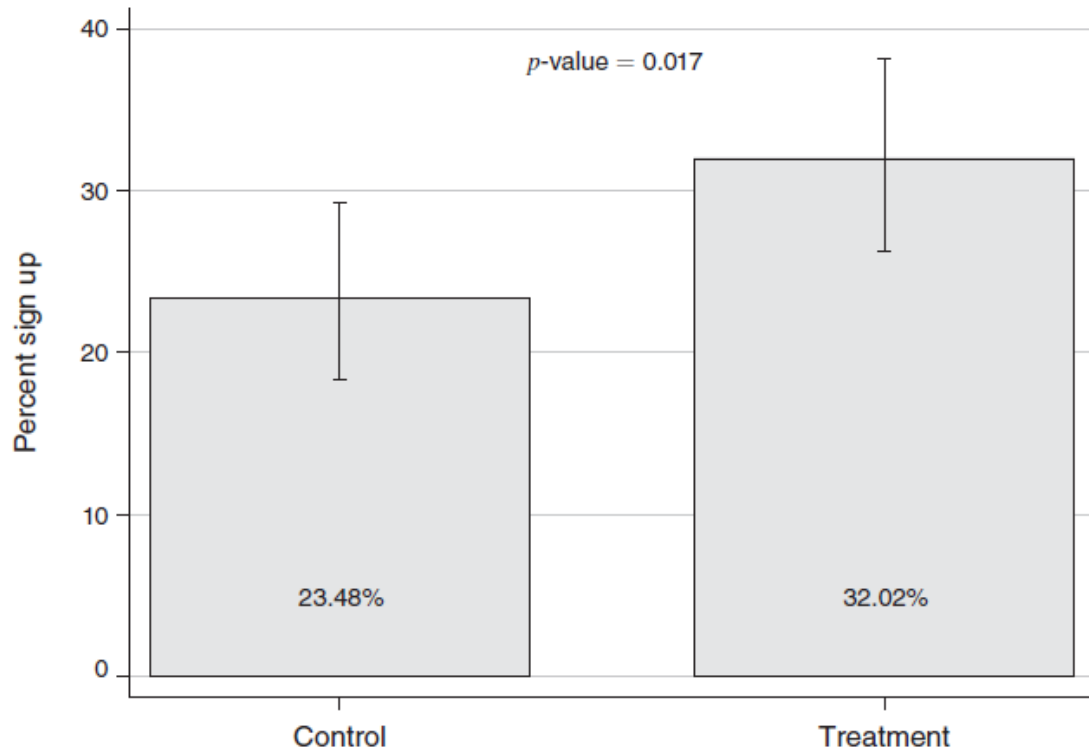
Evolution of Women, Business, and Law Index in 1970 – 2023 (0-100)



Source: The 2023 Women, Business and the Law Index from <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl-data>

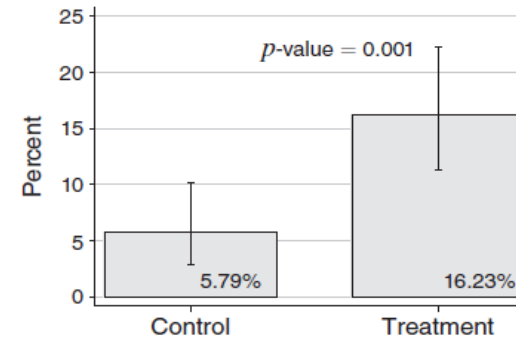
SHIFT GENDER NORMS

Short-Term Outcomes: Job Matching Service Sign-Up

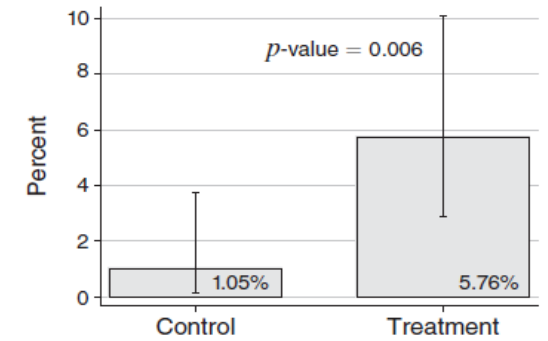


Longer-Term Outcomes: Job Application, Interview, Employment, Driving Lessons

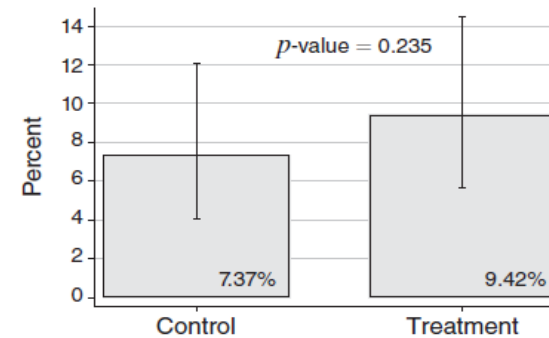
Panel A. Applied for job



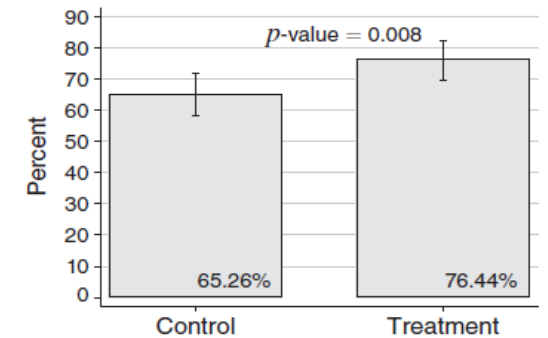
Panel B. Interviewed for job



Panel C. Employed



Panel D. Driving lessons



Source: Bursztyn et al. (2018) AER

SPOTLIGHT ON SAUDI ARABIA EXPERIENCE

Institutional reform

Wide range of legal reforms & enabling policies for working women



Shifting social norms

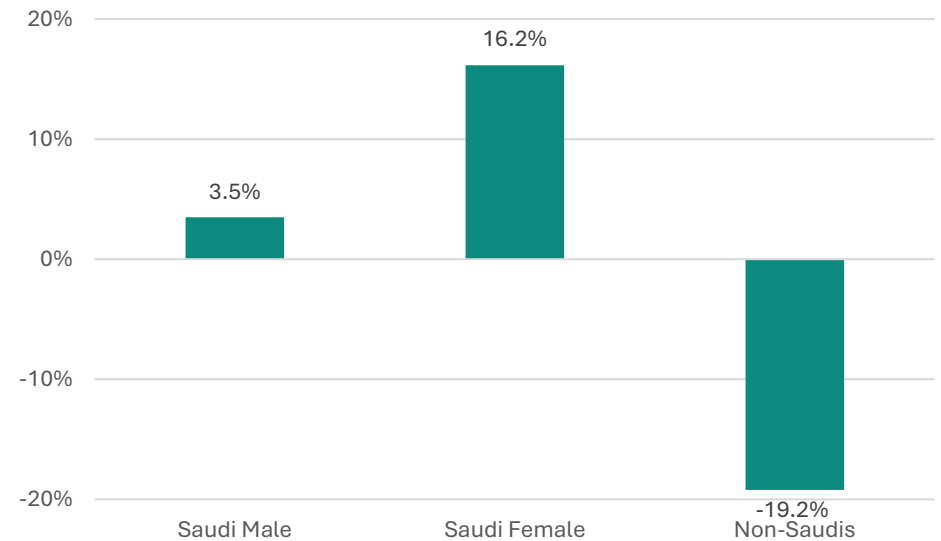
Embracing women's work – underlying private belief + government's messaging on the importance of increasing FLFP



Demand side

Saudi quota system & expatriate levies in 2017-18 + Pandemic in 2020

Private sector employment growth 2018-2021



Source: GASTAT, MNACE staff calculation adapted from De Moraes, Tamayo, Alrayess, and Koettl (2024)

SAFE & AFFORDABLE TRANSPORT

Multiple transport barriers: 65% of non-working women in Amman, 52% in Beirut and 48% in Cairo identified commuting as a barrier to employment, but specific barriers varied [Alam & Bagnoli, 2023, descriptive study]

Safety

A 5-percentage-point increase in safety index could increase FLFP in Amman by 4.7 pp (~59,000 women) [Alam & Bagnoli, 2023, descriptive study]

Affordability

Price reductions on ride-hailing services increased mobility among women in Cairo, particularly those who perceived public transit as unsafe [Christensen and Osman, 2023, experimental study]

Accessibility

A 5-percentage-point increase in accessibility could increase FLFP by 4.9-8.9 pp (~337,000 – 614,000 women) in Cairo [Alam and Bagnoli, 2023, descriptive study]

After lifting the ban on women's driving in Saudi Arabia, among women who received drivers' training, only those who were unmarried demonstrated increases in employment [Abu Daher et al., 2023, experimental study]

IMPROVE ACCESS TO FINANCE

Cash grants

- In Tunisia, cash grants and financial training boosted the income and living standards of less educated women in rural areas. [Gazeaud et al. 2023, experimental study]
- However, when husbands were involved, these gains for women disappeared. Men may feel entitled to influence how the grants are spent due to their involvement in the training

Multifaceted intervention

- In Egypt, an intensive, multi-component poverty graduation program consisting of a package of interventions (large asset transfer, training, access to savings, consumption support) improved women's employment outcomes, even in the long run [Assaad et al., ongoing work, experimental study]

ACCESS TO CHILDCARE

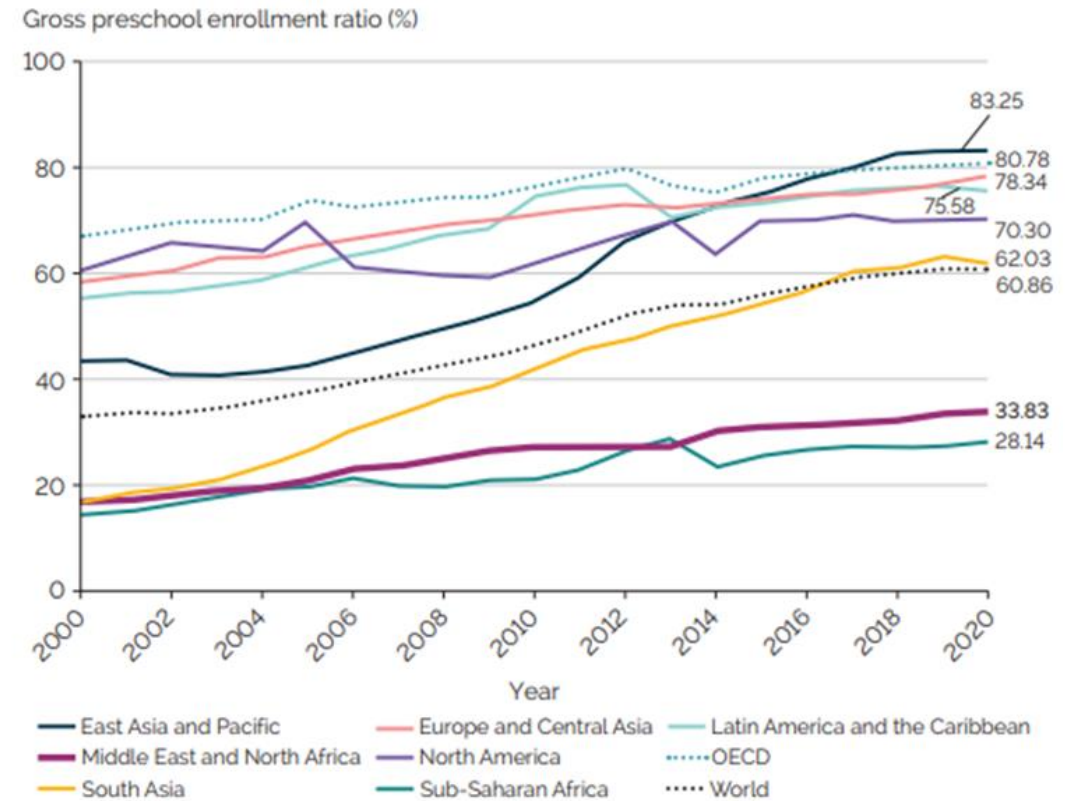
Childcare subsidies

In Egypt, relieving childcare constraints only through providing childcare subsidies, may be insufficient to allow women to work [Caria et al., 2022, experimental study]

Public pre-primary care provision

In Algeria, substantial public pre-primary expansion targeted at children aged five had a surprising negative effect on women's employment [Krafft and Lassassi, WBER, 2023, quasi-experimental study]

Gross preschool enrollment rates by region (%)



MENA GENDER INNOVATION LAB



Building evidence

- Partnerships through support to External Researchers
- Finance RCTs
- Measurement: Measuring women's agency in Tunisia



Scaling up: Bridging knowledge and operational engagement

- Evaluate the childcare expansion of the Enhancing women's economic opportunities project in Jordan
- Add-on intervention to Morocco preschool expansion RCT
- Ex-post assessment "kindergarten in our neighborhood" project in Tunisia

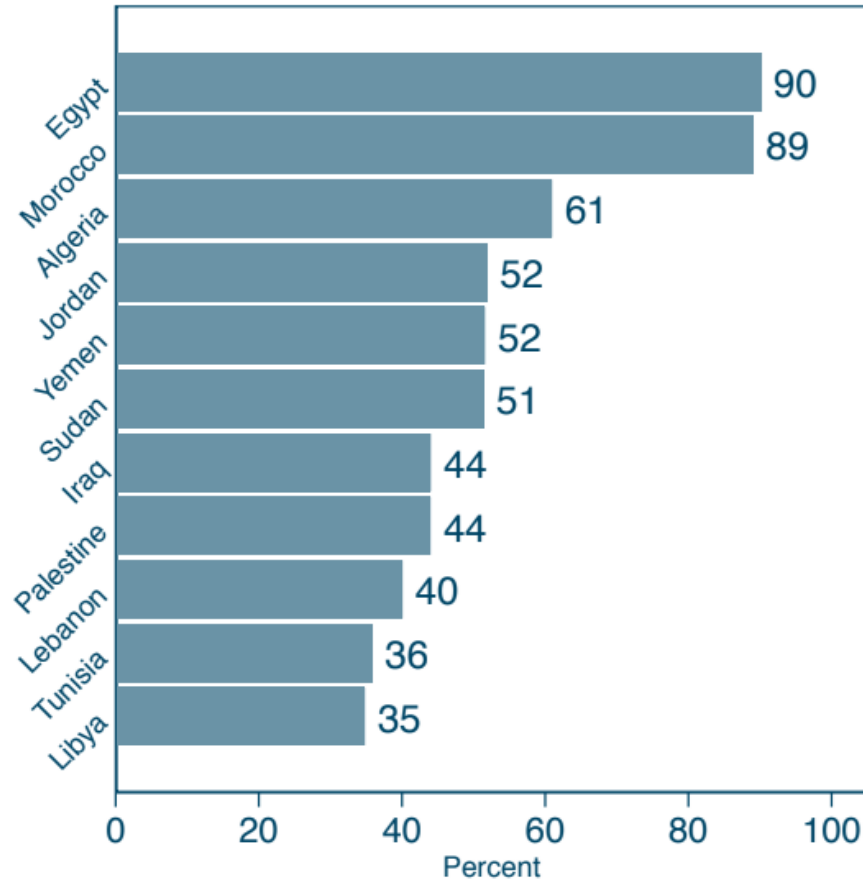


Building capacity for evaluation

- In collaboration with the Global Fund for Widows – will conduct a Randomized Control Trial in Egypt to compare the effectiveness of the microloans scheme vs. the savings and loan association scheme
- In collaboration with Bader Fund (SMEs investing arm of the Arab Fund), and Egypt, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency- discussing support to women refugee and Egyptian online entrepreneurs training and access to funding

WOMEN'S SAFETY IN PUBLIC SPACES IS A CRUCIAL PRIORITY

Frequency of sexual harassment in the past 12 months
Females aged 17-28



Source: Bouhlila (2019), Arab Barometer V.

- A 1 standard deviation increase in media reports of local sexual assaults reduces the probability that a woman is employed outside her home by 0.67 p.p. in India (Siddique, 2022).
- Direct exposure to sexual violence is associated with even larger effects: 6.6% lower probability of FLFP among women in the U.S. (Sabia et al., 2013).

THANK YOU