

The heavier burden of women in unpaid care work and their higher contribution to total work in the Maghreb countriesJacques CHARMES¹

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Abstract:

The Maghreb countries are among those with the lowest female economic participation rates. And the same is true for the female participation rates in the informal economy. To what extent such an underrepresentation of women in the labour force and in the informal economy in particular can be explained by the content and the boundaries as well as the common understanding of the concepts of labour force and employment? The paper tentatively assesses the trends in labour force participation rates in a comparative perspective. It then synthesises the contribution of women (and men) to unpaid care work as measured by time-use surveys conducted at national level in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, assuming that it can lead to a better knowledge and understanding of the real contribution of women to the economy in this region. It concludes by discussing the recent adoption, in 2013, of new concepts for labour force and employment and by replacing this discussion within the broader reflexion on the definition of work that irrigated the economic thought since its very beginning.

Keywords: carework; gender; the informal economy; labour force; Maghreb.

JEL: B54, E26, J16, J22, J46, O17

Introduction

The Maghreb countries are among those with the lowest female economic participation rates (and as a result the lowest participation rates for both women and men). And the same is true for the female participation rates in the informal economy, which also explains why these countries are characterised by relatively limited rates of employment in the informal economy as compared with other regions of the developing world. To what extent such an underrepresentation of women in the labour force and in the informal economy in particular can be explained by the content and the boundaries as well as the common understanding of the concepts of labour force and employment? Could the recent adoption, in 2013, of new concepts for labour force and employment and the availability of time-use data on unpaid care work contribute to a better knowledge and understanding of the real contribution of women to the economy in this region? These are the two questions that this paper intends to highlight.

In a first section, we will recall the permanence and the trends of low female economic participation rates in the region, in comparison with other regions in the world. In the second section, the high share of female unpaid care work and the high level of the gender gap in this respect will be stressed to conclude by the comparison of economic participation rates with participation in unpaid care work as an argument to show that the overall contribution of women to the economy and to the wellbeing is not smaller in the region than in other parts of the world. We will conclude with the need for change in our conceptions and concepts of economic activity, production and work – a reflexion that started a long time ago since the very first beginnings of economic thought and a change still (or already?) in progress.

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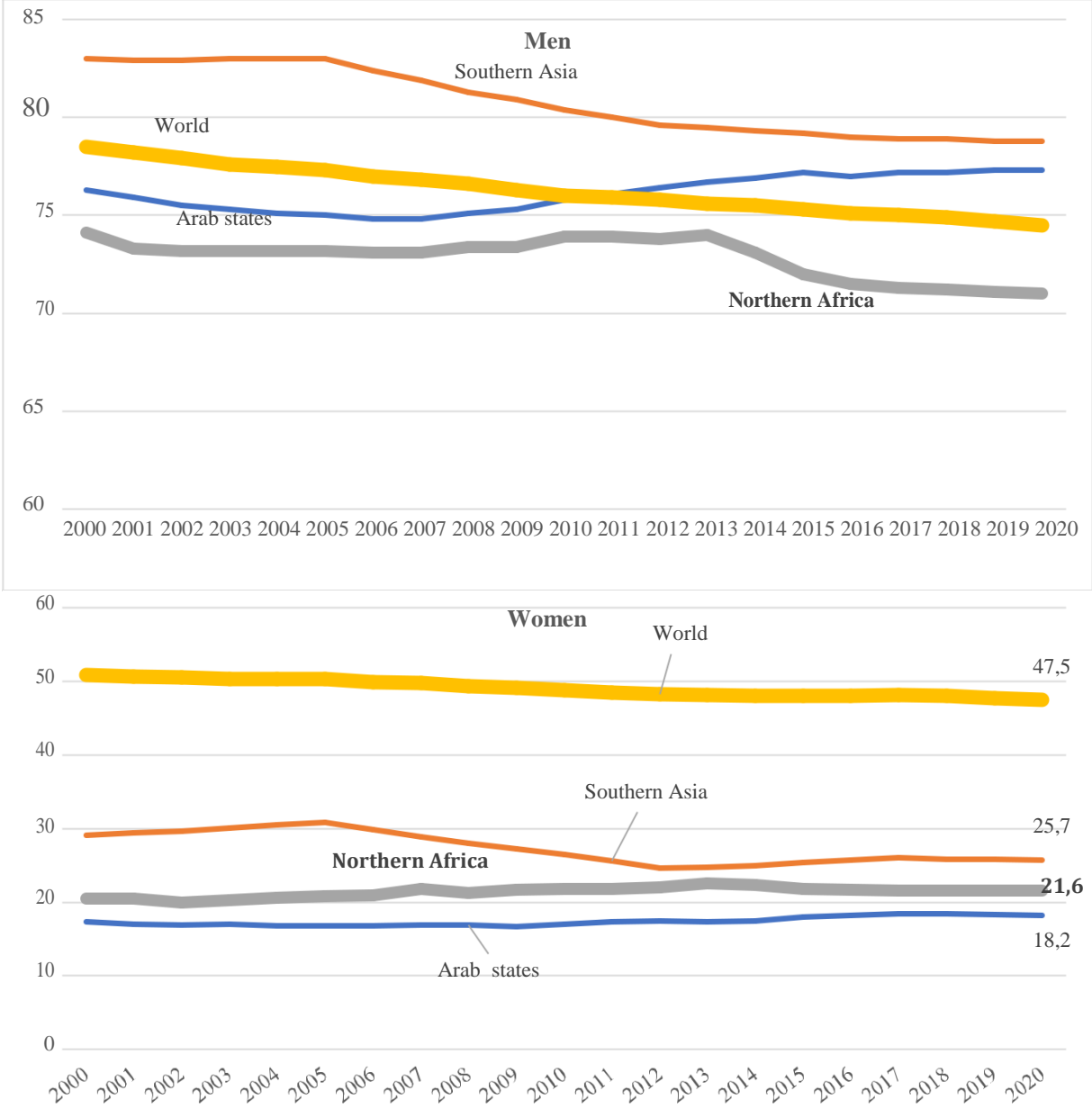
1. Maghreb² countries have in common with the Arab states³ to belong to the group of countries characterised by the lowest female labour force participation rates in the world

On the labour markets across the world female labour force participation rates are always and everywhere below male rates and in the long run, both female and male rates are declining mainly because of a higher retention of youth in the education system. But over the two decades 2000-2020 gender gaps in labour force participation are closing only marginally and remain wide (ILO 2018a and 2019). Male labour force participation rates will have decreased from 78.5% (of the working age population) to 74.5% in the interval of 20 years and female rates from 50.9% to 47.5%: in other words, the gender gap of 27.6 percentage points will have fallen down to 27 percentage points, which limits the improvement to only 0.6 percentage point. And according to the World Employment and Social Outlook (ILO 2019) such a marginal improvement is not even observed in all regions: the gender gap has worsened in emerging countries and in Eastern Asia, the Arab States and Eastern Europe during the last decade, as well as at world level during the most recent period. In the Northern Africa countries however, the gender gap slightly shrunk highlighting an improvement of 4.2 percentage points that slowed down to 2.7 percentage points during the last decade. Figures 1 and 2 below clearly illustrate these trends. However, if we look more precisely at age groups, and specifically the age groups 15-24 (the schooling age group) and the 25-54 (the active age group), the view may be more optimistic and some progress took place (Figures 3 and 4). Singularly the progress took place in regions where the gap is the lowest (Africa and especially sub-Saharan Africa) or the highest (Northern Africa, the Arab States, Central and Western Asia and Southern Asia). Whereas the gender gap in labour force participation rates increased at world level for the age group 25-54, it noticeably decreased in Northern Africa by 4.1 percentage points for the 15+ and by 5.1 percentage points for the age group 25-54 but this is far less than in Latin America and the Caribbean (9.4 percentage points). As a matter of fact, Northern Africa, the Arab States, Western Asia and Southern Asia are characterised by common traditional social and religious norms that tend to confine women in the private space.

² The Maghreb countries referred to here are: Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

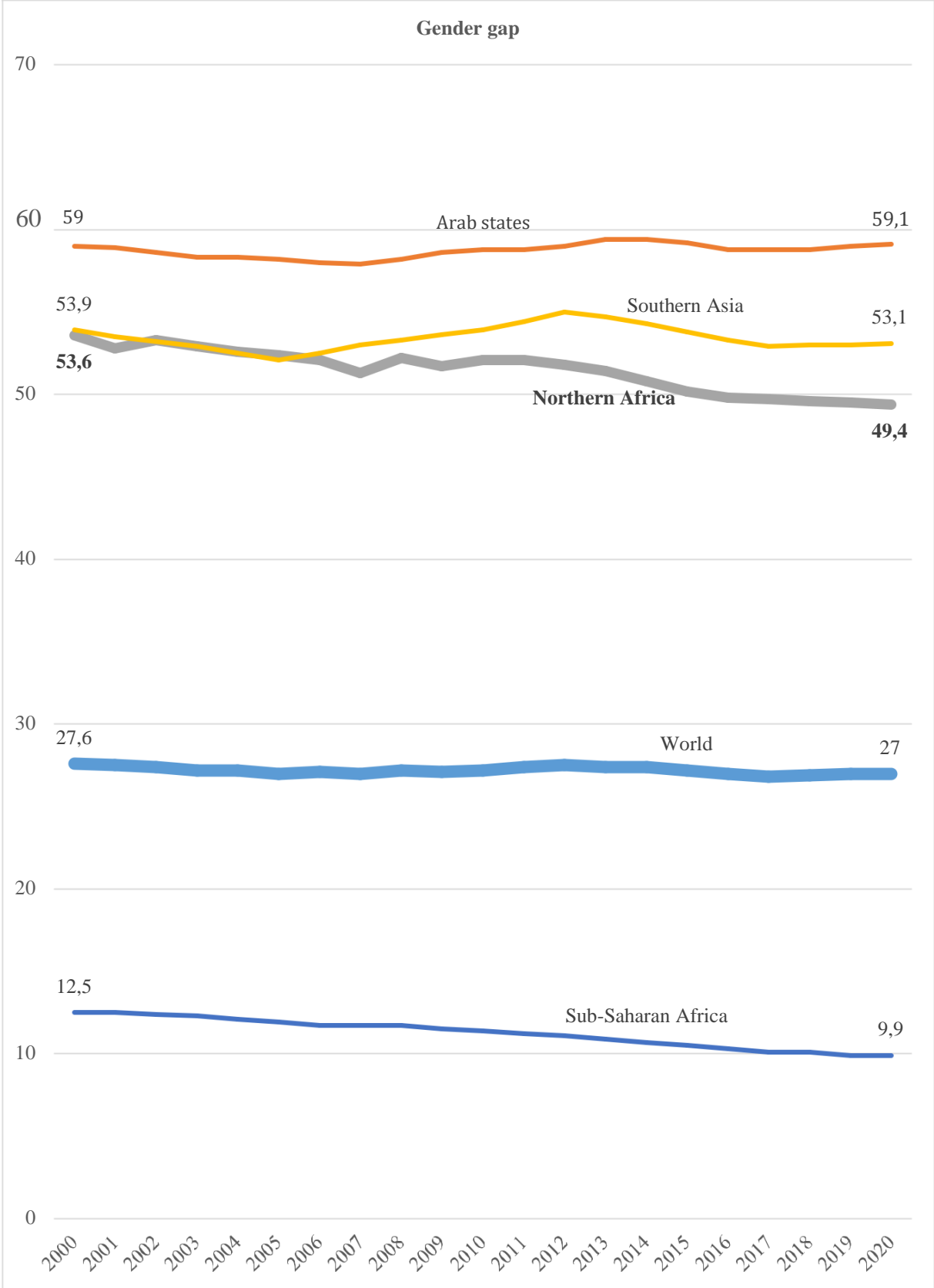
³ According to the ILO classification of countries, the Arab states comprise: Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

Figure 1: Trends in labour force participation rates 2000-2020



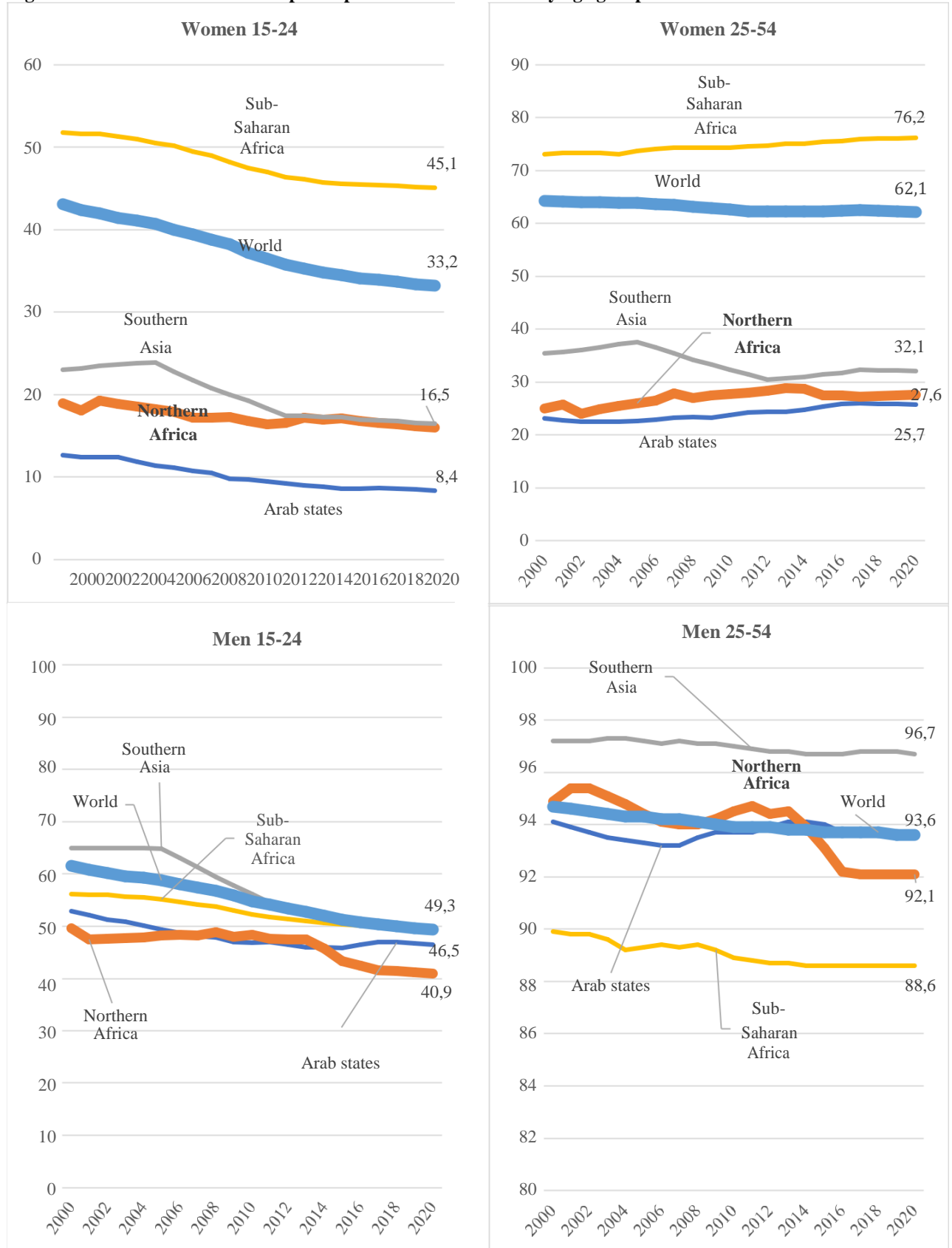
Source: Based on ILOSTAT. ILO modelled estimates, November 2018. Consulted on FRI, 11 OCT 2019 17:12 from ILOSTAT

Figure 2: Trends in gender gaps in labour force participation rates 2000-2020



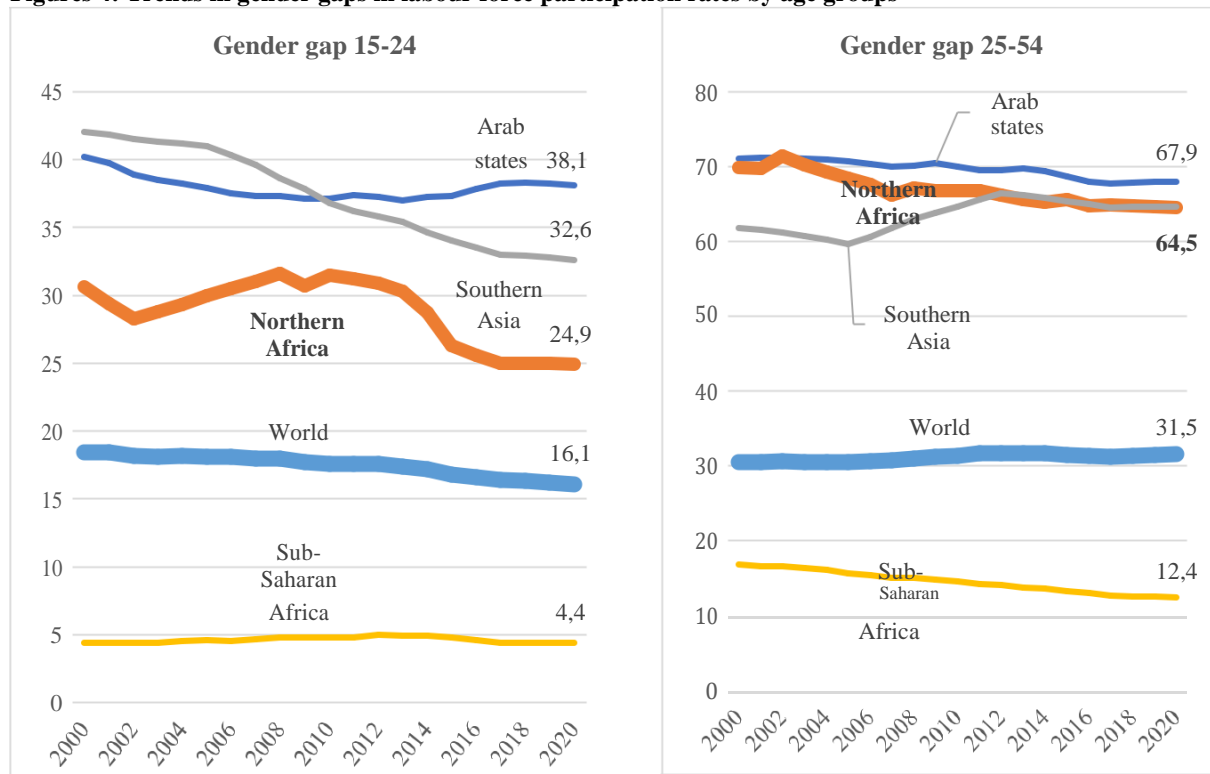
Source: Ibid.

Figures 3: Trends in labour force participation rates 2000-2020 by age groups



Source: Based on ILOSTAT. ILO modelled estimates, November 2018. Consulted on FRI, 11 OCT 2019 17:12 from ILOSTAT

Figures 4: Trends in gender gaps in labour force participation rates by age groups



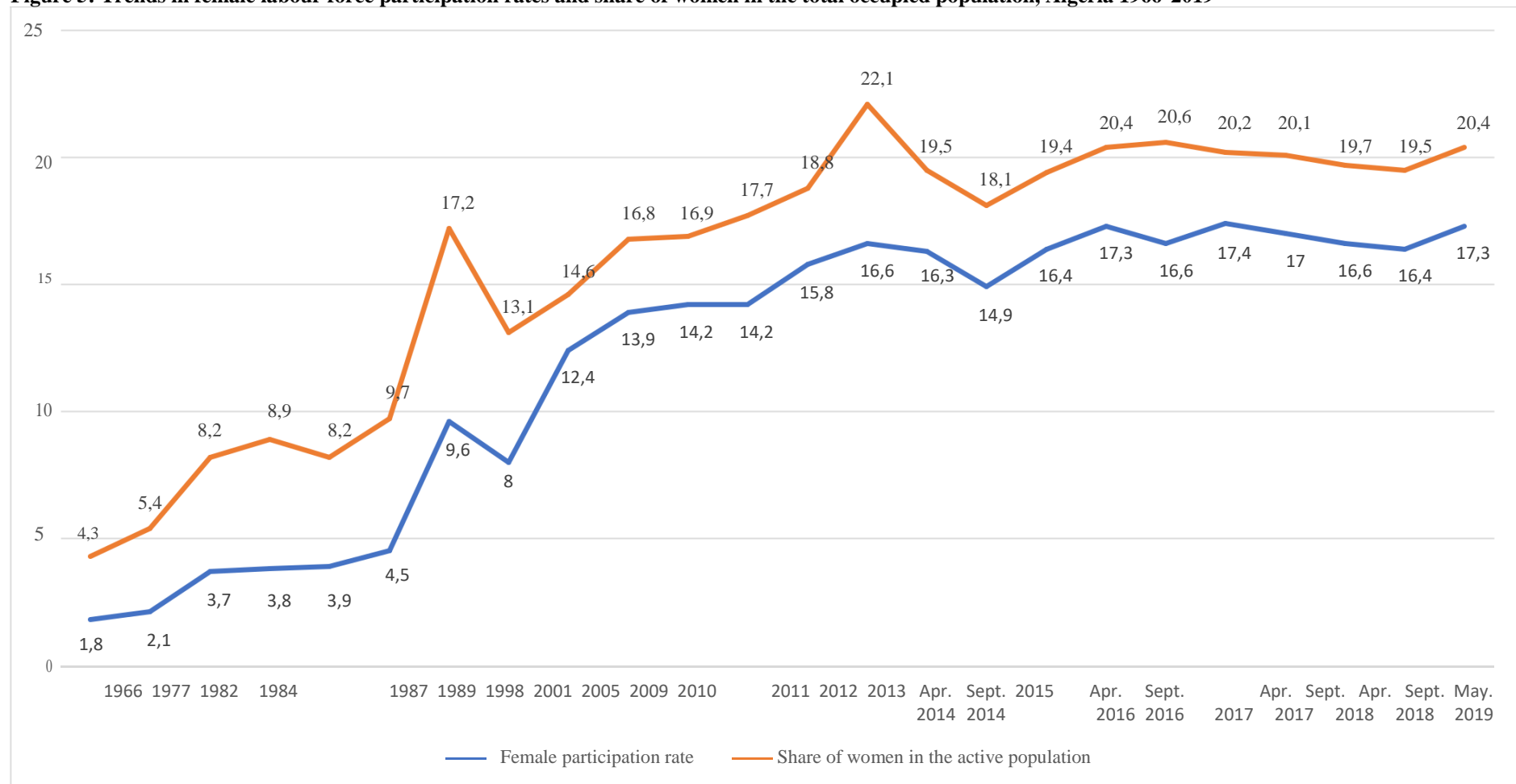
Source: Ibid

Algeria is illustrative of the constant difficulty encountered in capturing female activity and the slow progress over the years, as shown on Figure 5.

Trends in labour force participation rates by age group in Algeria also perfectly illustrate the systematic withdrawal of women from the labour market at marriage and maternity with no subsequent return (Figures 6 include all surveys since 2001 just for providing the reader with the sense of a big push upward over the years, without succeeding in breaking the glass ceiling). The rapid increase in female participation rates until the age of marriage (between 25 and 29) is followed by a steady decrease for the older age groups and the peak of the 24-29 age group (at 35.1) does not manage to stay at this level across the older age groups and over the years. The curve is just slightly upward oriented and still not on a regular basis from one survey to the next.

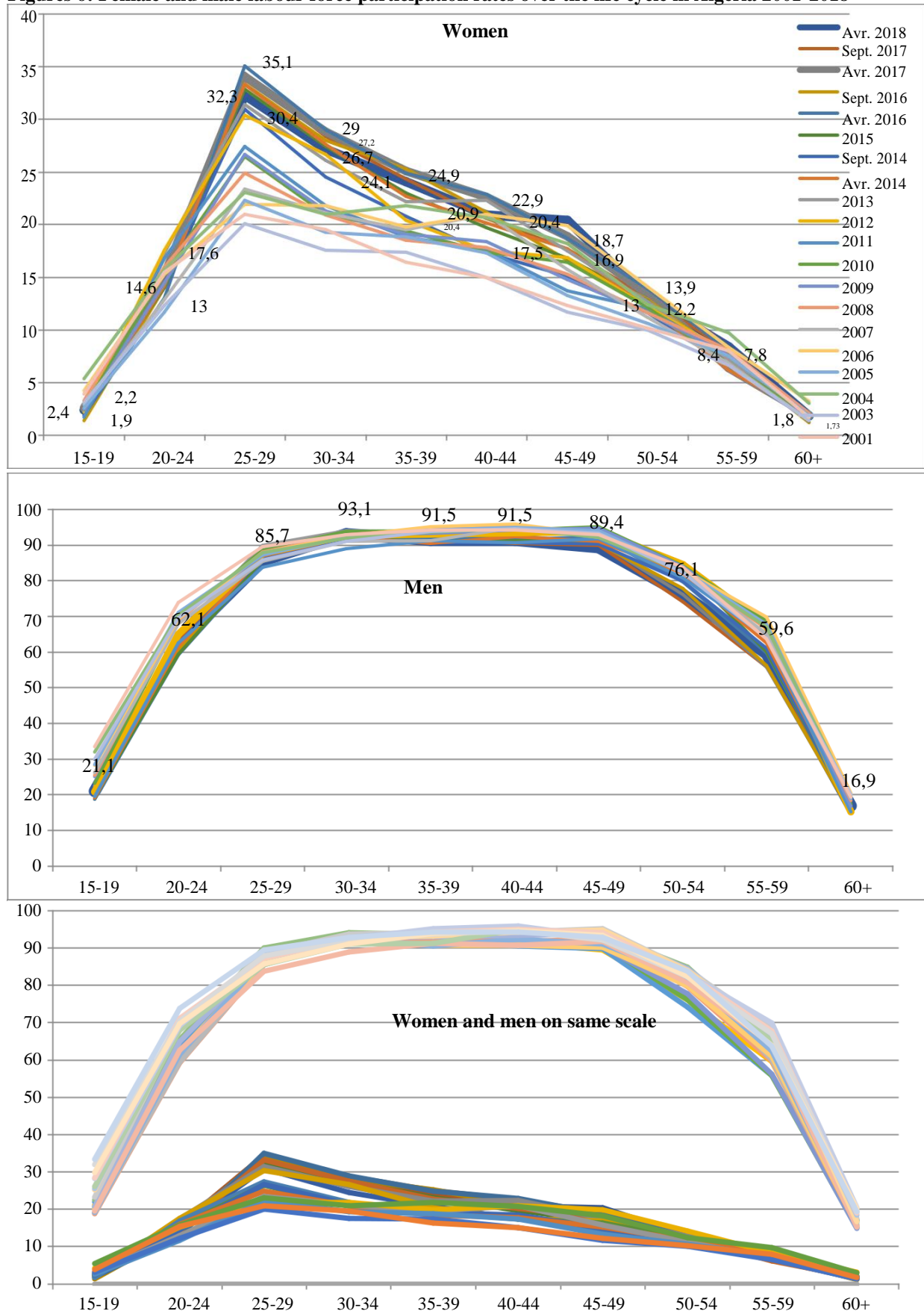
At the same time, women are more affected by unemployment than men, with unemployment rates generally higher than men across most regions and countries. With more than 1.367 billion in 2019, women represent 38.9% of the total world labour force (and 38.8% of total employment) against 39.5% (39.3%) in 2000 (ILO 2018a and 2019). In Northern Africa these indicators were respectively measured at 23.4% in 2019 against 21.8% in 2000.

Figure 5: Trends in female labour force participation rates and share of women in the total occupied population, Algeria 1966-2019



Source: Author's compilations of population censuses and labour force surveys (annual since 2009 and bi-annual since 2014).

Figures 6: Female and male labour force participation rates over the life cycle in Algeria 2001-2018



Source: Charmes and Remaoun (2016) updated.

2. Measuring unpaid care work and total work

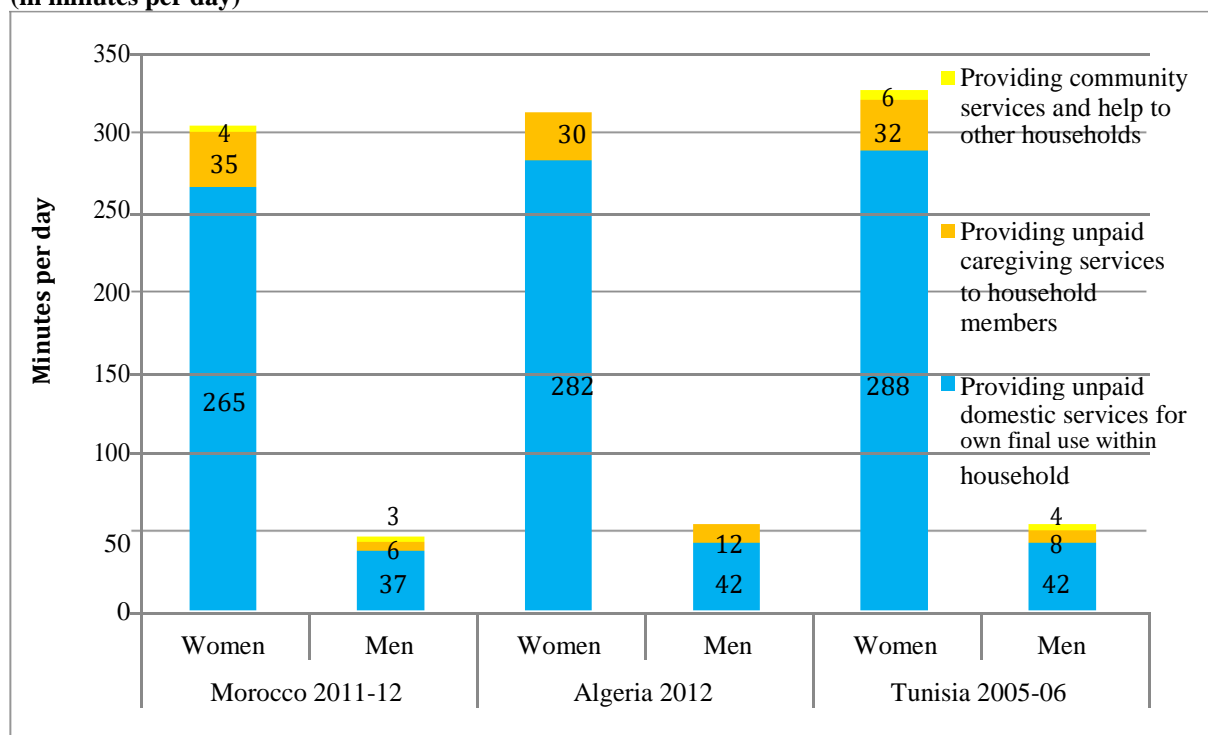
The measurement of work and employment is traditionally restricted to these jobs that are contributing to the production as defined and measured by the GDP in the system of national accounts (SNA) since its inception. However, these traditional thoughts have begun to evolve since the introduction of a wider conception of production as early as the 4th revision of the SNA in 1993, when the production of services for own final consumption by the households has been recognized as being part of it and a distinction was delineated between the SNA production boundary and the (extended) general production boundary (see section 3 below).

Low female economic participation rates in the whole economy and also lower rates in the informal economy exemplified in a parallel paper (Charmes 2021) are more than compensated by women's higher contribution to unpaid care work, i.e. these domestic and care activities undertaken within the households and for their own final consumption (i.e. belonging to the general production boundary, but not to the SNA production boundary). In what follows, three categories of unpaid care work are taken into account: the provision of unpaid domestic services for own final use within the household (e.g. cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing, etc.), the provision of unpaid caregiving services to household members (children, adults, elderly) and the volunteer (unpaid) provision of community services and help to other households.

The three Maghreb countries belong to some eighty countries that have carried out national time-use surveys based on the diary method of data collection (Charmes 2020), Tunisia in 2005-06 (Ministère des Affaires de la Femme 2011), Algeria in 2012 (ONS 2013) and Morocco in 2011-12 (HCP 2014 and 2020a).

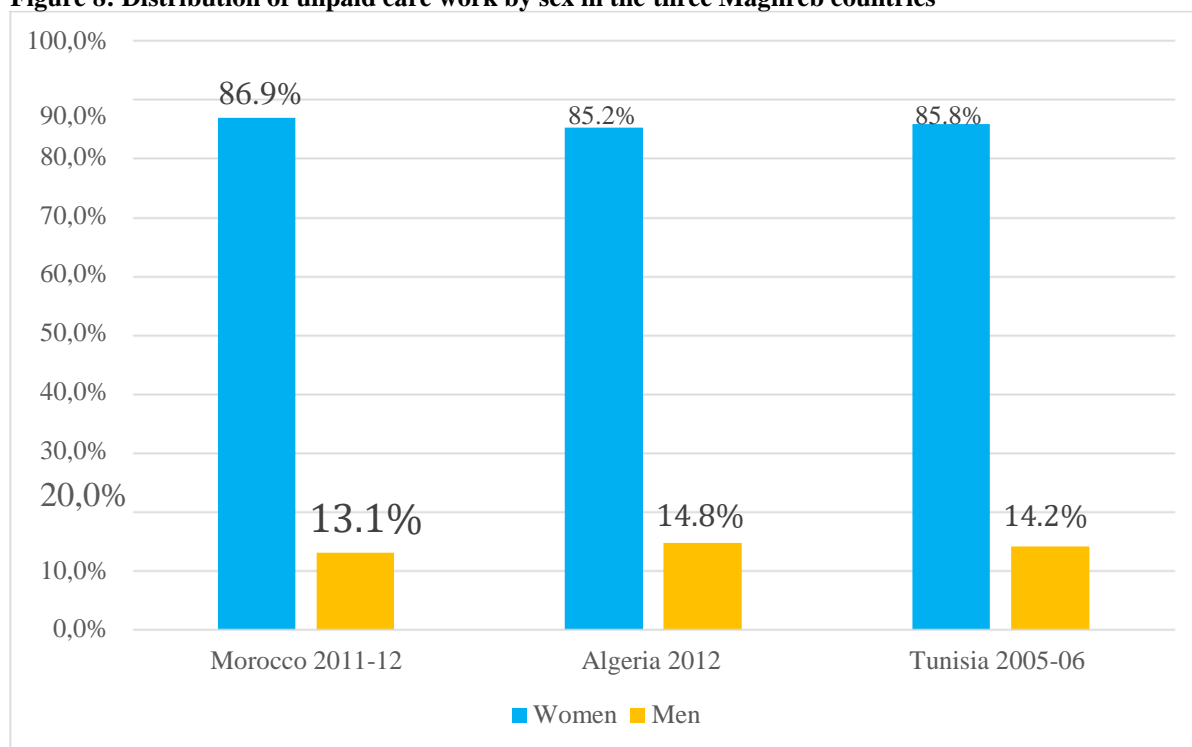
In average, women dedicated 5 hours and 4 minutes per day (304 minutes) to unpaid care work in Morocco, 5 hours and 12 minutes (312 minutes) in Algeria and 5 hours and 26 minutes (326 minutes) in Tunisia (Figure 7). In comparison, men dedicated only 46 minutes per day to these tasks in Morocco, 54 minutes in Algeria and in Tunisia. These figures approximately equal 35 to 38 hours per week for women against 5 to 6 hours per week for men. In other words, the week of female unpaid care workers is nearly as long as the average paid workers' week. Women's contribution to total unpaid care work performed in the family is more than 85% (Figure 8). But women are also engaged in paid work (though much less than men as already shown) and time spent in paid activities add on to time spent in unpaid care work, so that women's overall burden exceeds that of men. Figures 9 aggregate the three Maghreb countries (weighted by their 15+ years old population) and show that with paid work taken into account (women contributing for 19.3% of total time spent in these activities), in the end the overall burden of work that falls on women's shoulders is as high as 54.3% of total, or 6 hours and 10 minutes per day (370 minutes), which makes a 7-day week of 43 hours, against 36 hours for men. This share is more than the world average (52.9% of the overall burden of work falling to women; 76.4% of the unpaid care work, but 36.1% of paid work), but the total duration of the week is shorter than the world average as the latter reaches 7 hours and a half per day or nearly 53 hours of a 7-day week at world level), as shown on Figures 10.

Figure 7: Time spent in the various categories of unpaid care work by sex in the three Maghreb countries (in minutes per day)



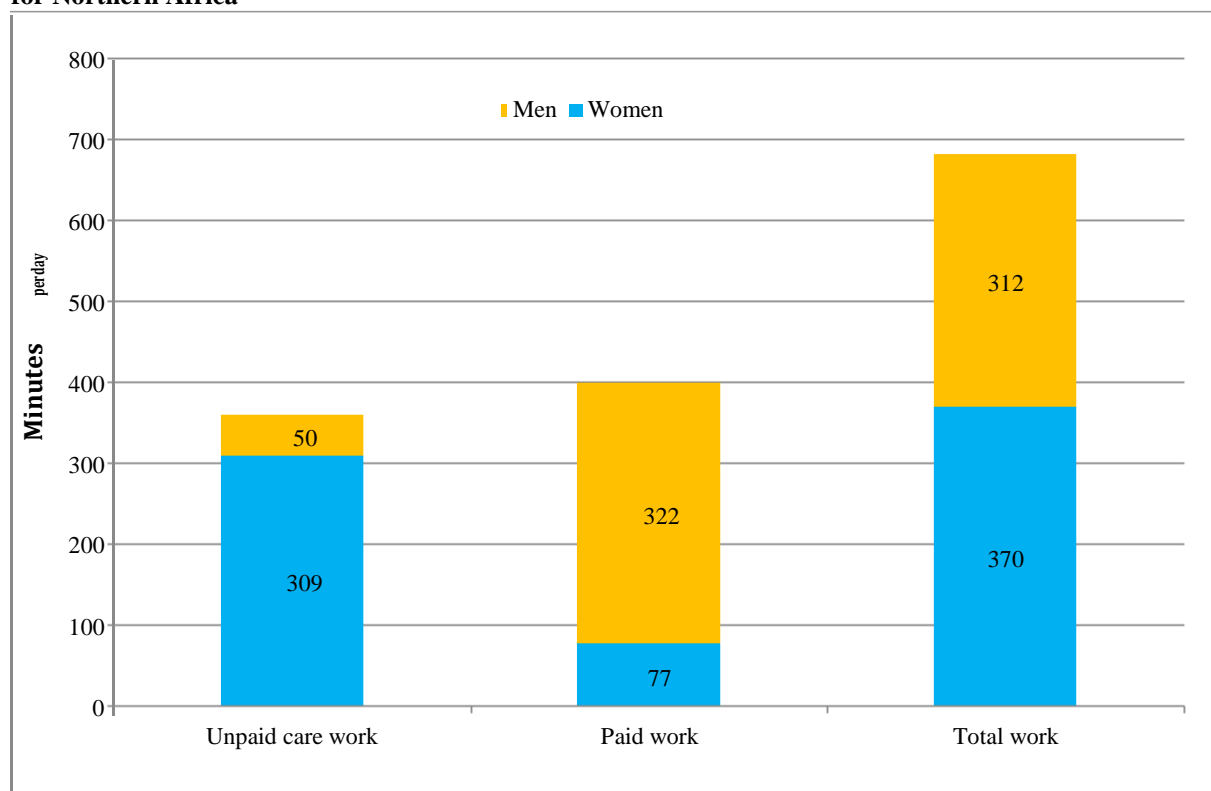
Source: Charmes (2019b)

Figure 8: Distribution of unpaid care work by sex in the three Maghreb countries

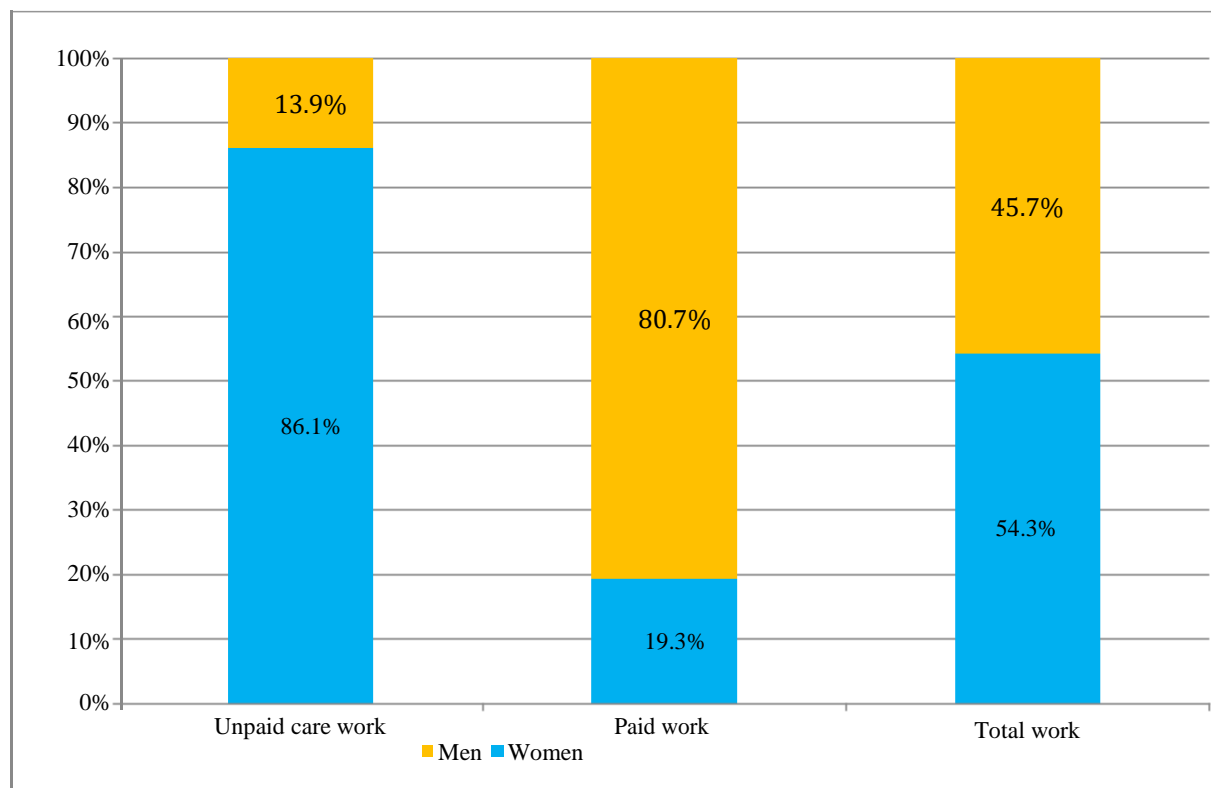


Source: Charmes (2019b)

Figures 9: Paid work, unpaid care work and total work by regions and sub-regions: global averages for Northern Africa

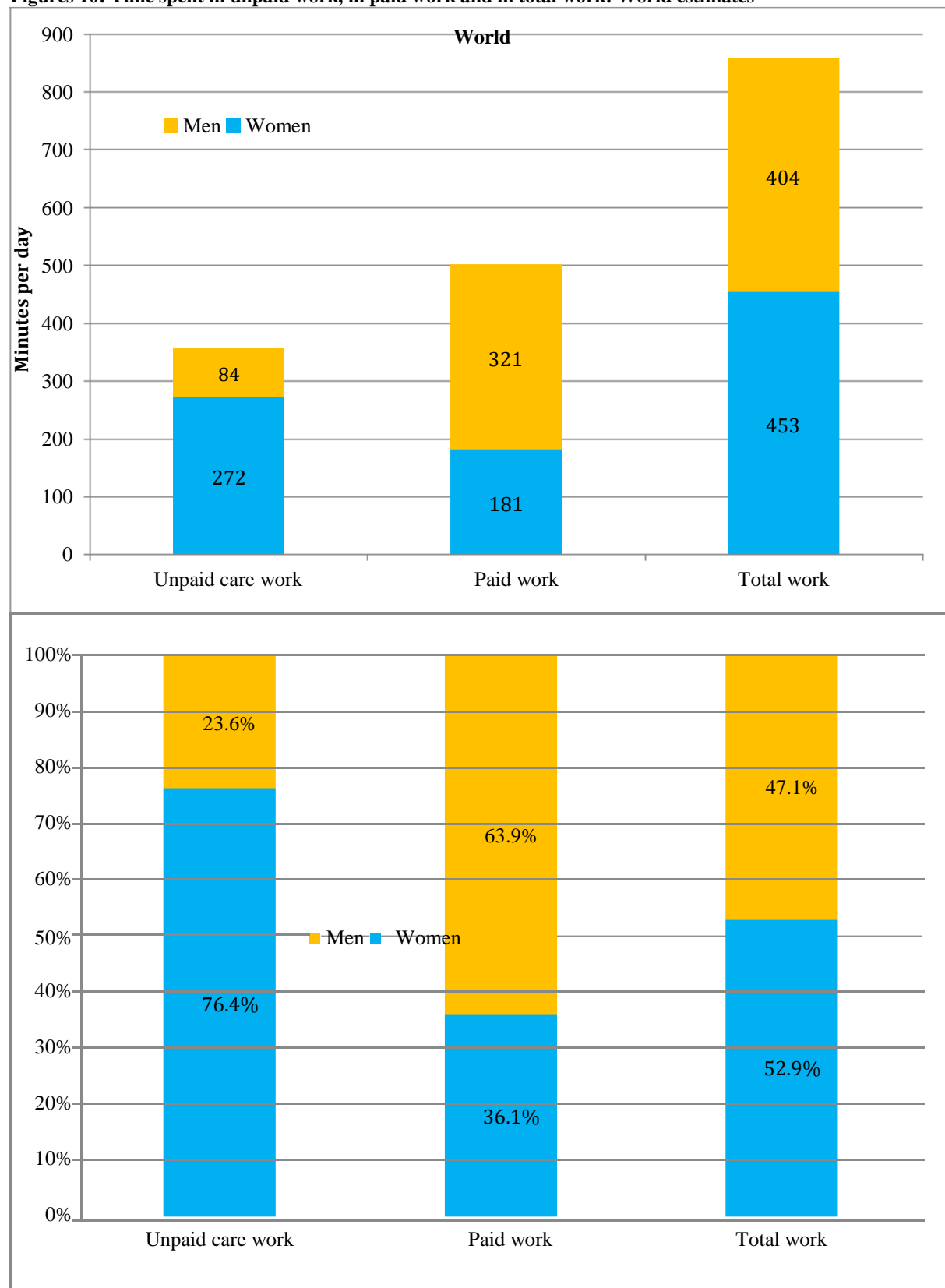


Source: Charmes (2019b)



Source: Charmes (2019b)

Figures 10: Time spent in unpaid work, in paid work and in total work: World estimates



Source : Charmes 2019b

Figures 11 compare the Maghreb with the other regions of the world. Northern Africa is the region where the gender gap is the most severe in terms of contribution to unpaid care work (only Southern Asia is doing worse) with women’s time spent in unpaid care work higher than

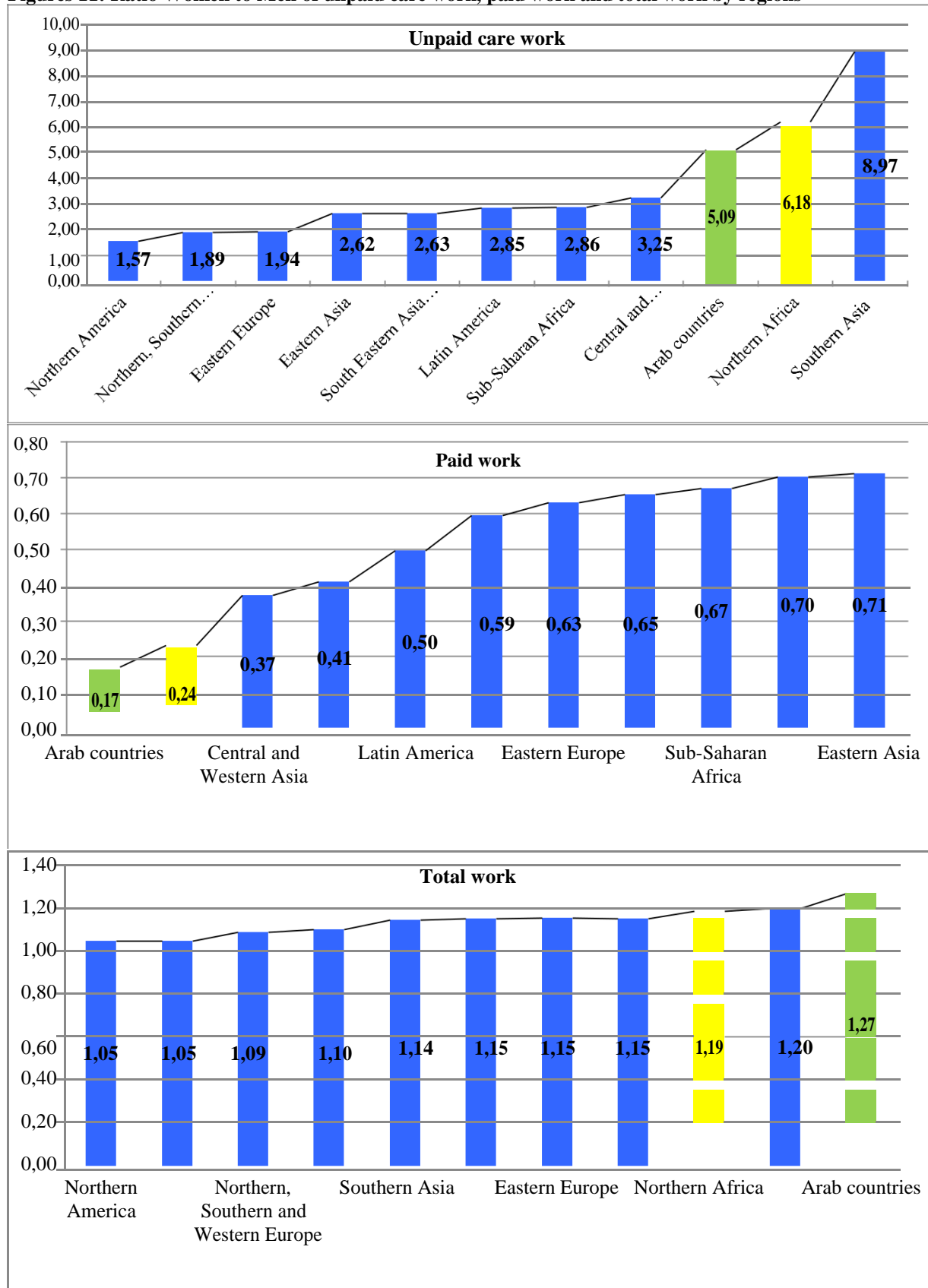
men's by more than 6 times (6.18 against 3.24 for the world average), contribution to paid work (only Arab countries are doing worse) with women's time spent in paid work representing only 0.24 of men's (against 0.56 for the world average). This leads the region to the higher level for women's time spent in all forms of work (1.19 time more than men's), just a little better than sub-Saharan Africa (where women are involved in long hours of paid work (mostly informal) as well as of unpaid care work) and Arab countries, and far from the world average (1.12).

In addition, Figure 12 shows that, over the life cycle, women increase much the time they spend in unpaid care work in the adult age (with marriage and maternity) until they enter in the old age, whereas men do not change much their participation to domestic tasks: the slopes are the sharpest for women and the flattest for men, among all regions.

In conclusion, the combination of low participation rates and long hours spent in unpaid care work for women in the Maghreb countries can be interpreted in two opposite directions. One may argue that women spend so much time in unpaid care work because they stay – or are kept - away from paid employment in the labour market. Conversely (and this is the usual explanation in other contexts - especially for explaining the situations of feminization of poverty) women's involvement into unpaid care work – allegedly not substitutable with men or with market equivalent services - prevents them from seeking paid work opportunities. It is true that in the Maghreb countries, social and religious norms tend to assign women in their gender role of spouse and mother within the household. Both Figures 6 on women's labour force participation rates by age group, and 12 on time spent in unpaid care work over the life cycle perfectly illustrate their assigned status.

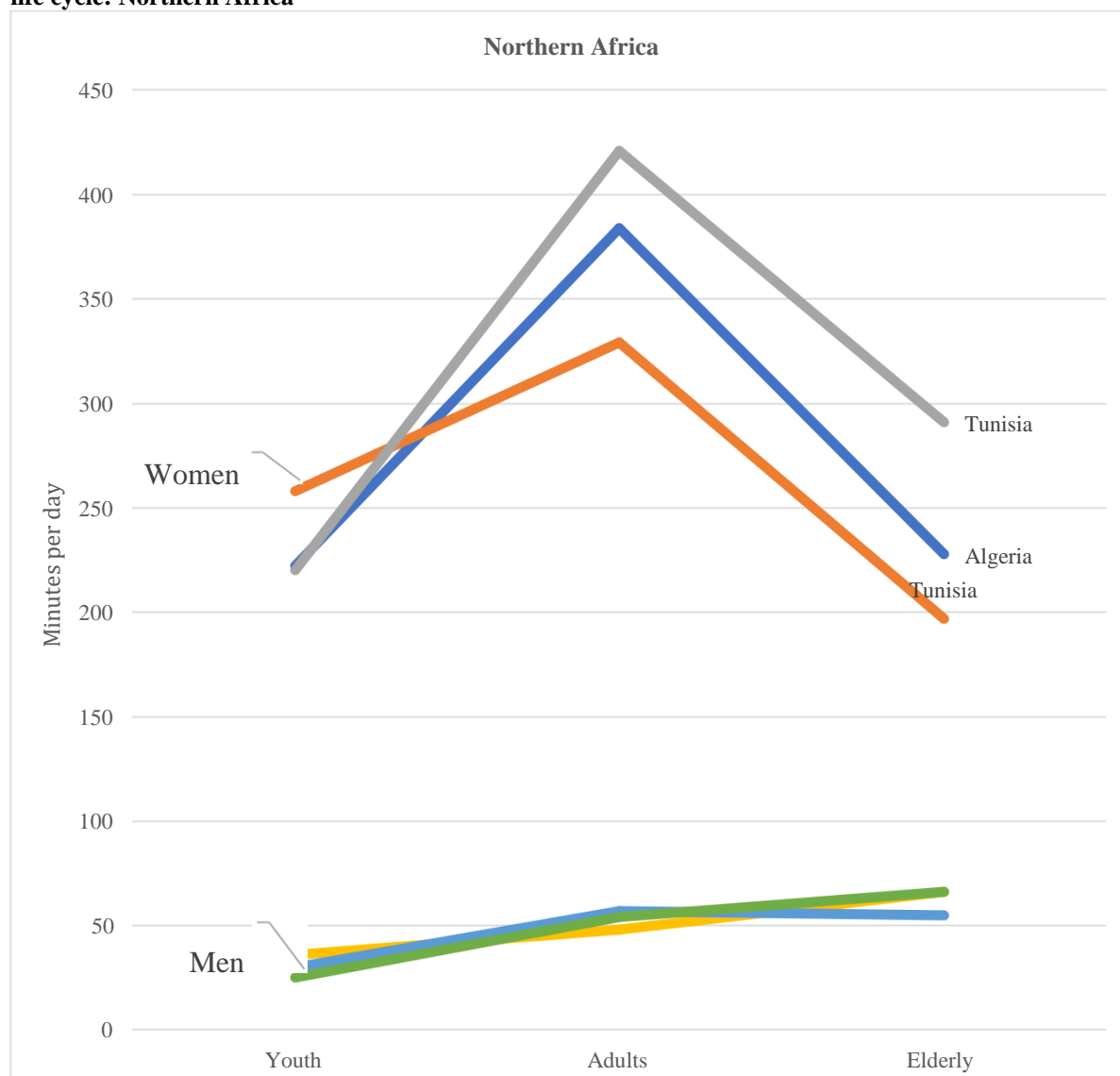
The International Labour Organization (ILO 2018b) recently developed a “5Rs of care” framework and strategy towards achieving gender equality in this domain: Recognising, Reducing and Redistributing unpaid care work, Rewarding paid care work and Representing care workers in social dialogue. The changing thoughts and conceptions on the real load, meaning and character of such unpaid work, as an inherent part of the national production, constitute a first step towards this due recognition.

Figures 11: Ratio Women to Men of unpaid care work, paid work and total work by regions



Source: Charmes 2019b, based on 75 countries.

Figure 12: Patterns of change in time spent by women and men in unpaid care work by age group over the life cycle: Northern Africa



Source : Charmes 2019b.

3. The need for change in our conceptions and concepts of economic activity, production and work

The definition of production is a subject of debate since a long time among the economists. For long the concept of production as defined by the economists did not include the services. Adam Smith (1723-1790), influenced by the Physiocrats (late 1750s), circumscribed the definition of production to the sole goods. This conception continued with Marx (1818-1883) and the material balances (equivalent to the national accounts) used in the former socialist countries. But the definition of production, and of work, extended to services, will be introduced by Alfred Marshall (1842-1924) who, in its *Economics of Industry* (a work from 1879 written with Mary Paley Marshall, but it is in its 4th edition in 1909 that the question at stake was raised) laid the foundations of the modern conception of the national production (GDP): “Everything that is produced in the course of a year, every service rendered, every fresh utility brought about is a part of the national income. Thus, it includes the benefit derived from the advice of a physician, the pleasure got from hearing a professional singer, and the enjoyment of *all other services which one person may be hired to perform for another*”. Later on, in 1920, in “*The Economics of Welfare*”, his student Arthur C. Pigou (1877-1959) drew the consequences of the limitative

interpretation of Marshall's ideas, by those who were interested in the measurement of production, to the sole services transiting to the market. He pointed out the paradox of the gentleman who lowers the national welfare when marrying his maid (Part 1, Chapter 3 of his "Economics of Welfare").

The extension of the notion of production (and subsequently of the notion of work) to the whole category of services was taken over by feminist economists such as Margaret Reid in her "*Economics of Household Production*" in 1934 where she states that "if an activity is of such character that it might be delegated to a paid worker, then that activity shall be deemed productive". Some of the economists who founded the system of national accounts, addressed the issue of housework valuation (Kuznets, 1941; Clark, 1958), but it was up to Gary Becker's (1965, 1981) theoretical works to root them into the framework of economic theory.

Ironmonger (1989, 1996 and 2000) defines the concept of household production as "the production of goods and services by the members of a household, for their own consumption, using their own capital and their own unpaid labour. Goods and services produced by households for their own use include accommodation, meals, clean clothes, and childcare. The process of household production involves the transformation of purchased intermediate commodities (for example, supermarket groceries and power-utility electricity) into final consumption commodities (meals and clean clothes). Households use their own capital (kitchen equipment, tables and chairs, kitchen and dining room space) and their own labour (hours spent in shopping, cooking, laundry and ironing)".

Marilyn Waring (1988) is the author of an influential book ("*If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics*") later republished (1999) under the title "*Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and What Women Are Worth*") that summarises the situation: women's work is neglected by the National Accountants ('what men value') who do not take into account the entire domestic and care work mainly done by women ('what women are worth'). But how to measure domestic and care work as there is no price fixed by the markets? Marshall's vision, however, opened the door to such a valuation provided that these services are subjects of transactions on the market. Still had to be measured the quantities of services or at least the number of hours and days dedicated to these activities. Time-use surveys that the Beijing Conference's Platform of Action (UN 1995) contributed to put back on the front of the stage have become today the essential tool for accurately assessing women's unrecognized and unregistered work, and the past recent years have seen the rapid development of this type of surveys.

Among the obstacles toward achieving gender equality on the labour market and breaking the glass ceiling that prevents women to progress as rapidly as men in their job and career, the burden of homework and care-work is one of the most insidious because it remains widely invisible, is still not well informed and is not actually taken into account by policies.

The 2013 ICLS resolution I (ILO 2013) tentatively addressed the potential and often existing divergences between SNA and the labour force concepts by distinguishing several forms of work and especially: employment, own-use production work (including own use production of goods and services), volunteer work (including organization-based and direct volunteering to produce goods and services for others). Separately, the labour force classification determines the labour force status of the population with reference to a person's relation to employment (as more narrowly defined). The SNA 2008 framework excludes services from the measurement of GDP for these two latter sets (Figure 13 below). Although the application of these new definitions currently creates much confusion in the production of labour market indicators and may be consequently misleading (the Maghreb countries did not yet embarked into this process), they could mark a step towards the future enlargement of the scope of SNA to the

production of services for own consumption by the households (the unpaid care work). Though, it does not yet appear among the points in discussion for the future revisions of the SNA.

Figure 13: Forms of work and the System of National Accounts 2008

<i>Intended destination of production</i>	<i>for own final use</i>		<i>for use by others</i>				
	Own-use production work		Employment (work for pay or profit)	Unpaid trainee work	Other work activities	Volunteer work	
<i>Forms of work</i>	of services	of goods				in market and non-market units	in households producing goods services
	<i>Activities within the SNA production boundary</i>						
<i>Relation to 2008 SNA</i>	<i>Activities inside the SNA General production boundary</i>						

Source: Resolution 1 concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization, 19th ICLS, ILO Geneva, 2013.

Finally, international statistical frameworks have become more flexible to meet multiple uses without prioritizing one over another. This means they are no longer being designed to be 1-to-1 match between, say employment and SNA production, but rather built as building blocks, with categories that can be re-grouped to enable mapping to different economic or social classifications, and to produce different types of indicators as relevant for macro-economic, employment, social policy purposes, etc.

In all regions of the world and in all countries, women’s contribution to “unpaid work” - that is these activities provided by household members for own use by the household and not being taken into account for the compilation of GDP – surpasses men’s by a factor that ranges from 2 to 8 (see section 2 above). Consequently, women’s total work (including paid work) exceeds men’s by far, illustrating what is commonly qualified as “time poverty”: because of their home duties, women have less time to dedicate to paid work so that they earn less income than their male counterparts and are individually poorer.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to show the importance of gender disparities existing on the labour markets of Maghreb countries and their trends, as compared with other regions of the world. Northern Africa shares with Arab countries, and often with Southern Asia, the lowest levels in labour market indicators referring to gender, but in contrast with most regions, women in these countries do not represent the bulk of the labour force engaged in the informal economy and the informal economy does not constitute for women the main entry door to the labour market. Gender disparities are nonetheless important in the informal economy of Maghreb countries. Correlatively these countries are characterized by the highest levels of unpaid care work, which translates not necessarily into the highest workloads for women, but the highest indicators of gender disparity in sharing the overall workload.

Such acute disparities make of the Maghreb countries the archetypes on which the current changes in labour force concepts definitions (with a narrower definition of employment and a broader definition of work) could have the greatest impact in terms of better understanding of the functioning of the labour market and in terms of recognition of unpaid care work as a significant contribution to the overall wellbeing but also as an obstacle to the full access of women to decent paid jobs.

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