

The uncertainty that coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has brought to the economy is unprecedented in the modern world. Many have described the current economic situation as a global “shutdown” and/or “induced-coma”, with a high level of unemployment on the rise almost everywhere. Recent research studies showed that the negative implications of the pandemic are harder on women than men. This is particularly true in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region where the provision of the unpaid-care work is primarily left to women and the income of women in the formal economy is precariously low.



## Defining Economics

The word ‘economics’ comes from the ancient Greek term ‘oikonomia’, meaning to “manage the household”. Economics is classically divided into **microeconomics** and **macroeconomics**. The first refers to the study of the individuals acting in specific markets, while the second deals with the behavior of the overall economic process, including design, production, distribution and consumption of good, services, capital and human labor. It can be defined as the “study of how society distributes its scarce resources” and deals with their “alternative uses”. However, the approach of focusing primarily on the paid economy and commodification failed to compensate caregiving, which is mostly done by women. Unpaid care work is an aspect of the economy which remains hidden and thus unaccounted for. A more comprehensive and holistic approach is, therefore, needed.

## Feminist Economics

Relying on gender as an essential category to seek a more holistic and inclusive methodology, feminist economics in the 20th century have gained a prominent position in research, as of the late 1980s. A feminist approach to business and politics has two aims: the first is helping the economy serve the interest of the whole society, while the second is to lay the foundations for social justice by fighting for equality and against discrimination and stereotyping. Women are often portrayed as the care-givers in the family, while men are seen as the breadwinners, with the perception that only the latter is relevant to the economy. However, care is a vital part of functioning economies. A holistic approach should value both. Thus, feminist economics is both profit and values based, placing an emphasis on commodities, transactions, recognition of all work, whether paid or unpaid, and the contributions of all participants in the economy irrespective of their gender, social class, race, age, sexual orientation, language, or disabilities.

# Major Distinctions between Feminist Economics & Traditional Economics

Feminist	Traditional
Values all work, including unpaid care work whether carried out by men or women within the household	It is constructed around the motivation of self-interest to provide goods and services and only measures 'paid work' in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and fails to recognize the contribution of unpaid work to the economy
From a political point of view, it is an inclusive economic practice which focuses on what is needed to produce a gender equal society	Uses men's life as the standard, it builds its concepts around the "economic man", while ignoring the experiences of women and the quest for gender equal societies
Recognizes the relationship nexus which influence how economy functions: economy does not depend only on the production & distribution of goods and services, but on cooperation & care	Celebrates money, production, machinery and men
Acknowledges the intersectionality and the complexity of human life and the interests of all members of one family or household	It does not acknowledge non-market activities and assesses interests and decision making processes in economics based on a mathematical, quantified equation

## Facts and Figures

- **Researchers** and economists predict that the global effect of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic will worsen the existing gender inequalities and will hit women and girls harder than men and boys.
- **According** to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the rate of female labor force participation in the Arab region is 19.4 percent which is extremely low if compared with the global average of 48 percent.
- **Male** labor force participation rates in the Arab region is 77 percent, which is above the global average of 75 percent (Source ILO).
- **In the Arab region**, women spend 4.7 more time in unpaid care and domestic work than men. This is the highest rate in the world (Source ILO).
- **During** the COVID-19 pandemic, both paid and unpaid care workers in the Arab region, who are mostly women, found themselves in exceptionally vulnerable economic positions. This is especially the case for migrant domestic workers who suffer from various labor violations under the oppressive Kafala (guardianship) system due to the devaluation of their work.
- **Studies** conducted by the United Nations and ILO show that investing in the care economy would result in job creation throughout multiple sectors. Predictions estimate that an increase in investment in care services would create 120 million more jobs in the care economy and 149 million indirect jobs in non-care sectors by the year 2030.
- **The** "5R Framework for Decent Care Work" includes policy recommendations by the ILO, which stand for: Recognize, Reduce, and Redistribute unpaid care work; Reward and Represent care workers. These guarantee not only fair and decent work for all, but also attract more workers, women and men to enter the care sector.