

Lebanon ranks high on development, falls behind on gender equality

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BEIRUT: Lebanon was in the “high human development” category in a report released Monday by the United Nations Development Program examining levels of development and inequality in countries around the world. But it fell behind in some measures, particularly with regard to gender equality. The UNDP’s 2019 “Human Development Report” measures each country’s “Human Development Index,” a gauge that assesses development based on “a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living,” using the metrics of life expectancy, average years of schooling and gross national income per capita.

The report assessed Lebanon’s HDI value for 2018 at 0.730, ranking it at 93 out of 189 countries and territories assessed, and putting it in the “high human development” category. The value is higher than the average for the region; the average score for all Arab states was 0.703. By way of comparison, Lebanon came in above Jordan, which was at 102 on the list, and below Kuwait, which ranked 57.

From 1990 to 2018, Lebanon’s life expectancy at birth increased by 8.6 years, and currently stands at 78.9 years. Mean years of schooling increased by 1.2 years, currently standing at 8.7 years, while gross national income per capita increased by 63.9 percent, currently standing at \$11,136.

Between 2005 and 2018, Lebanon’s overall HDI value increased from 0.724 to 0.730.

However, the report showed that since 2010, while life expectancy continued to rise, the education and income indicators have trended downward.

The report also looked at gender inequality, where Lebanon came in at 79 out of 162 countries assessed. By some measures, Lebanon fared better than other Arab states. For instance, in Lebanon, 54.3 percent of adult women had reached at least the secondary level of education, compared to an average of 45.9 percent for the region.

In Lebanon, female participation in the labor force was 23.5 percent compared to 70.9 percent for men, while for the region as a whole, average female labor force participation was 20.4 percent compared to 73.8 percent for men.

But, when it comes to political representation, Lebanon fell far behind the pack. Only 4.7 percent of parliamentary seats in the country were held by women in 2018, compared to an average of 18.3 percent for the Arab region.

For “high development index” countries generally, an average of 68.9 percent of women had attended secondary education, female labor force participation was 53.9 percent, and the average number of parliamentary seats held by women was 24.4 percent.

The report noted that the Arab region generally “has experienced significant growth in human development over the past two decades,” but that the “unequal distribution of education, health and living standards has stymied progress in the region.” Notably, the analysis found a 14 percent gap in human development measures between men and women in the region.

“Analysis of inequality can be a powerful lens to understand recent events in the region,” Mourad Wahba, UNDP acting associate administrator and regional director for Arab states, said in a statement. “This report calls on us all to examine inequalities in order to support efforts to promote a more equitable distribution of opportunities among people everywhere.”

Likewise, conflict has pushed much of the region backward when it comes to development. Syria, for instance, lost 15 percent of its human development index value from 2010 to 2018, with Libya and Yemen decreasing by 10 and 8 percent respectively.