



# EMPOWERED WOMEN EMPOWERED CHILDREN

EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN'S  
EMPOWERMENT AND THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN  
IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND EUROPE REGION

## SUMMARY REPORT

MIDDLE EAST AND EASTERN EUROPE REGION

# Executive Summary

It is estimated that it will take

**142 years to close the gender gap in the Middle East and North Africa region**

**and 135 years in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region.**

As well as this being unjust towards women, it also worsens child vulnerability. Women and children across the Middle East and Eastern Europe region (MEER) cannot afford to wait nearly a century and a half for equality, while being subjected to the intergenerational cycle of disempowerment.

To help address this unacceptable situation, this study by World Vision measures the empowerment of 1,336 women on a personal, relational and environmental level across 10 contexts in MEER, along with indicators of their children's well-being and the connection between the two. Amongst the major findings of the study are:

## MAJOR FINDINGS

**NONE** of the surveyed women were found to be **EMPOWERED** on a personal, relational or environmental level across the region

**EDUCATION** is a **CRITICAL FACTOR** for women's empowerment, especially at a personal level

Displacement, living with an extended family and being married at a young age **SIGNIFICANTLY LIMITS** women's empowerment

Women's education and participation in a labour force **SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVES**

Women's lack of household decision-making and exposure to GBV **DIRECTLY AFFECTS** their children's exposure to violence

well-being in children, especially their health and education outcomes

Women's **ACCESS** to legal aid, civic rights and freedom of movement outside the house are associated with better educational, nutritional and protection outcomes in children

Discriminatory attitudes, acceptance of GBV and time poverty in women **ARE LINKED** to poorer educational, protection and psychosocial outcomes in children

Women and children in the Middle East and Eastern Europe should not have to wait until the year 2157 for fair treatment and good indicators of well-being.

It is imperative that the international community and all of humanity speed up progress from its glacial pace.

## MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS



**Prioritise women's empowerment projects**, invest in GBV response services, address population displacement and its implications in Fragile States.



**Embed women's empowerment and gender equality approaches into all child-focused policies**, strategies and interventions, and build them on sound gender and social analysis.



**Include more women in income generation activities** and provide mothers with **education opportunities** connected with future employment.



Along with providing targeted mental and psychosocial support for mothers and their children, **invest in addressing harmful social and cultural norms** and engage men and boys in dialogue to change social norms.

Empowering women is much more than an issue of justice amongst genders. It is about empowering children to build better futures for themselves and their societies and allowing economies to reach their full potential by enabling everyone's full participation.

**Empowering women today, will empower everyone tomorrow.**

# 1. Introduction

Economic crises, ongoing conflicts and displacement, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, have exacerbated gender inequalities and the prevalence of violence against women and girls in the Middle East region. The children have suffered immensely from the effects of these crises. Deprived of adequate care, nutrition and schooling, they are under increased risk of psychosocial distress and exposure to violence.

In the so-called “Transitioning Economies”, the costs associated with restructuring these economies has had gendered implications for men and women, and despite some progress (much of which has occurred in the education and health sectors), gender disparities still manifest in relation to the economic and political participation of women.

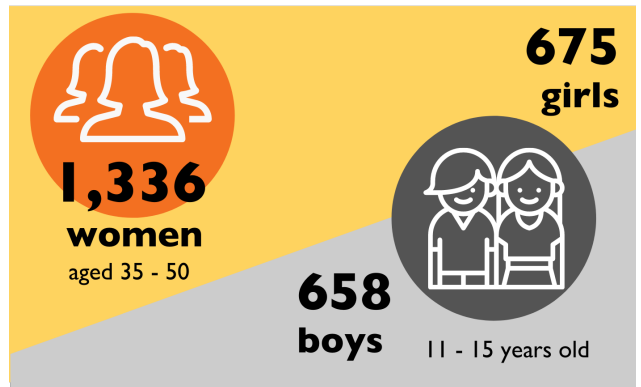
World Vision recognises that children’s vulnerability is greatly exacerbated by gender inequality. The current research was aimed at measuring the extent of women’s empowerment as well as examining its association with children’s well-being outcomes in structured families in MEER.

# 2. Research Framework and Methodology

World Vision carried out a mixed method study design, with girls and boys (and their respective mothers) already participating in World Vision programmes in 10 countries/areas of MEER. The quantitative data was gathered through population-based cross-sectional design. The qualitative data was gathered through key informant interviews (KIs).

The survey tools relied on existing reliable and valid instruments/scales to measure selected indicators of women’s empowerment and the well-being of children. The data collection was guided by the World Vision International Safeguarding policy and data collectors were trained on Psychological First Aid (PFA). The names of participants have been anonymised to ensure full confidentiality.

Research participants:



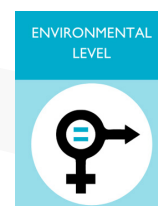
The research utilised a women’s empowerment framework that examines empowerment at three distinct levels:



**Empowerment at a personal level:**  
A woman’s perception in relation to herself, her well-being, and her role in society.



**Empowerment at the relational level:**  
Women’s decision-making power, control over assets, control over time and ability to redistribute care burden and experience of GBV.



**Empowerment through environmental factors:**  
A broader context which consists of informal and formal systems, such as existing social norms and legislative frameworks.



In addition, the research framework consists of the specific **child well-being indicators** that focus on children’s education, health, protection and psychosocial well-being.

### 3. Demographic and socio-economic profile of surveyed women

The average age of the surveyed women was between 28 and 31 years old, with the exception of Lebanon where the average age was 42. On average they married at around the age of 19 to 21 and have extended families between four and nine members. In Transitioning Economies, most of the women were citizens, with the majority having secondary or a higher-level of education, and more than half involved in paid activities. In Fragile States, the majority of the surveyed women in Iraq and Lebanon were citizens, while in North West Syria (NWS) and Government of Syria (GoS) areas a high percentage of the women were internally displaced. In Jordan and Turkey, the vast majority were refugees. In Fragile States, a high percentage of the surveyed women had an intermediate level of education and the majority were not involved in any kind of paid activities.

Details on the surveyed women's demographic and socio-economic profiles can be found in Annex 1.

### 4. Child well-being outcomes



With low levels of self-perceived functional literacy, inadequate and non-diverse nutrition, an absence of positive health-related behaviours and a heightened risk of exposure to violence, **none of the surveyed children in Fragile States achieved overall well-being. In Transitioning Economies, the highest rate of child well-being was reported in BiH with 9%.** The major factors preventing the overall well-being of children was low functional literacy, a lack of positive health behaviour, and child violence. Unlike physical and protection outcomes, surveyed children showed better results in psychosocial and mental health outcomes, with the majority of them being resilient, empathetic and spiritually and mentally empowered.

For more information on child well-being indicators, please refer to Annex 2.

“ Education is the only empowerment opportunity for me in order to have a voice. I want to have an education. ”

Zeinab, 13, Beqaa

“ It was difficult to adapt to the online learning process; sometimes I wasn't able to understand what teachers were saying. Then, the frustration came, especially when I couldn't meet my classmates and friends. ”

R.S.S, 15, Romania



## 5. Women's empowerment factors

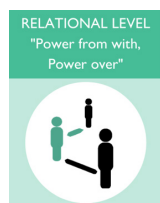


### PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT:

The majority of the surveyed women have moderate to high self-esteem, a positive self-image and are spiritually empowered through their faith. Most of them have good mental health, are resilient and can cope with challenging situations in their lives. However, the challenges encountered in their society make it difficult for them to break out of the traditional gender roles, resulting in the majority of them still having self-sabotaging discriminatory attitudes and believing that gender-based violence (GBV) is acceptable.

Women in Transitioning Economies and Syrian refugee women in Turkey seem to be the most empowered, while Syrian women living in NWS and women in Iraq seem to be the least empowered through personal factors.

	Albania	Armenia	BiH	Romania	Iraq	Lebanon	NWS	GoS	Jordan	Turkey
Women with high/moderate self-esteem (%)	94	96	97	98	92	82	93	87	91	94
Women with high/moderate mental well-being (%)	89	91	89	94	77	76	83	80	90	91
Women with high/moderate spiritual well-being (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Women with sexist attitudes (%)	49	38	53	47	54	58	42	62	62	37
Women who accept GBV (%)	14	37	11	4	69	33	76	26	8	11
Women empowered through personal factors (%)	41	41	41	48	10	29	7	24	24	48



### RELATIONAL EMPOWERMENT:

None of the surveyed women in Fragile States are empowered at a relational level, while in most Transitioning Economies only 1% of the surveyed women are relationally empowered. In both context women have limited decision-making power within their families and limited control over household assets. The vast majority of women experience time poverty and continue to provide most of the unpaid care work, often leaving them with little or no discretionary time. Many of them have also experienced GBV and intimate partner violence (IPV), undermining their health, dignity, security and basic human rights.

“ I spend my free time serving my family, there is little time for myself ”  
 Aurora, 36, Albania

“ I do not have free time; all my time is taken by childcare. ”  
 Fatima, 31, South Lebanon

	Albania	Armenia	BiH	Romania	Iraq	Lebanon	NWS	GoS	Jordan	Turkey
Women without household decision-making power (%)	45	76	28	17	71	46	67	56	46	22
Women with no control over household assets (%)	39	64	30	18	69	68	64	62	52	15
Women with experience of GBV (%)	22	16	25	23	25	24	45	38	26	34
Women with no control over time (%)	68	81	75	78	79	88	75	76	82	50
Women without ability to redistribute the burden of care (%)	91	87	76	96	83	80	75	89	83	91
Women empowered through relational factors (%)	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0



#### ENVIRONMENTAL EMPOWERMENT:

The vast majority of the women live in communities with highly restrictive gender norms, which restrain their behaviour and limit their freedom of movement. In Fragile States a gender-responsive legislative framework is yet to be developed, while in Transitioning Economies, although a significant effort has been made to develop a sound legal framework, the majority of women lack awareness of their own civic rights, as well as access to much-needed legal services. Consequently, none of the surveyed women in the Fragile States and Romania are empowered through environmental factors, with only 2 per cent of surveyed women in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and 1 per cent in Albania and Armenia reporting environmental empowerment.

“There is no equality at all in my community, men have all the privileges and rights like inheritance and access to employment. Women are supposed to stay at home and do domestic work.”

Nahida, 40, GoS

	Albania	Armenia	BiH	Romania	Iraq	Lebanon	NWS	GoS	Jordan	Turkey
Women living in communities with high or moderate restrictive gender norms (%)	88	80	58	59	96	99	95	88	78	80
Women not able to enjoy safety and freedom of movement outside home (%)	43	30	21	12	94	50	84	63	53	44
Women without access to legal aid/assistance (%)	78	63	86	73	91	22	68	71	67	56
Women without access to civic rights (%)	91	96	82	86	100	98	100	99	97	97
Women empowered through environmental factors (%)	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

## 6. Associations between women's socio-demographic characteristics, empowerment factors and child well-being outcomes

### *Finding 1. Education is a critical factor for women's empowerment*

Women who are more educated tend to have less discriminatory attitudes, more decision-making power in their household (HH), as well as more freedom of movement and access to legal aid. Educated women are also less likely to accept GBV and hold discriminatory attitudes.

### *Finding 2: Living with an extended family and being married at a young age limits women's empowerment*

Women who live in large families (and with in-laws) or those that get married young, have less control over the HH assets, as well as poorer mental health, are more likely to hold sexist attitudes and to experience GBV, especially in Fragile states.

### *Finding 3: Women's economic participation plays an important role in women's empowerment*

Even though employed women tend to have less control over their own time, they are more likely to have better mental health, experience less GBV and more freedom of movement, especially in Transitioning Economies.

For more information on statistically significant correlations between women's socio-demographic characteristics and their empowerment factors please refer to Annex 4.



## Finding 4: Women's education and participation in the labour force improves well-being in children

Educated women are more likely to have children that are not exposed to child violence, have higher self-esteem and better mental health, whereas the children of employed women are more well-nourished and resilient.



## Finding 5: Displacement is a limiting factor for both, women's and children's well-being

In Fragile States, the displaced women are more likely to accept GBV, while their children are more likely to be lacking proper diet diversity.

## Finding 6: Living with an extended family, marrying and becoming a mother at a young age are factors negatively associated with child well-being outcomes

Children of young wives/mothers tend to be less involved in formal education, while children living in larger HHs are likely to be less well-nourished and more exposed to violence, especially in Fragile States.

Summary of statistically significant correlations between women's socio-demographic factors and child well-being:

	Women's socio/ demographic factors	Children's physical, psychosocial and mental well-being	
Mother's education level	Albania	Diet diversity	Self-esteem
	BiH	Exposure to violence	Socio/ecological resilience
	GOS	Diet diversity	Socio/ecological
	Iraq	Diet diversity	
	Jordan	Enrolment in formal education	
	Lebanon	Diet diversity	Exposure to violence
	NWS	Socio-ecological resilience	Mental well-being
Mother's employment	BiH	Socio-ecological resilience	
	GOS	Diet diversity	
Mother's marriage age	GOS	Attitude towards learning	
	Lebanon	Functional literacy	Enrolment in formal education
Household size	GOS	Diet diversity	
	Iraq	Exposure to violence	
	Lebanon	Enrolment in formal education	Diet diversity
Displacement	Jordan	Diet diversity	
	Lebanon	Diet diversity	
	NWS	Enrolment in formal education	
Mother's age	Lebanon	Enrolment in formal education	
Family income	Jordan	Positive health-related behaviour	
	Lebanon	Diet diversity	Socio-ecological resilience
	NWS	Exposure to violence	Self-esteem
	Romania	Positive health-related behaviour	
	Turkey	Positive health-related behaviour	



### Finding 7: Women’s mental well-being is strongly associated with their children’s overall well-being, resilience, protection, and mental health

Mothers with good mental well-being are more likely to have children with good mental health, as well as with positive attitudes towards learning, good self-esteem and less exposure to child violence.

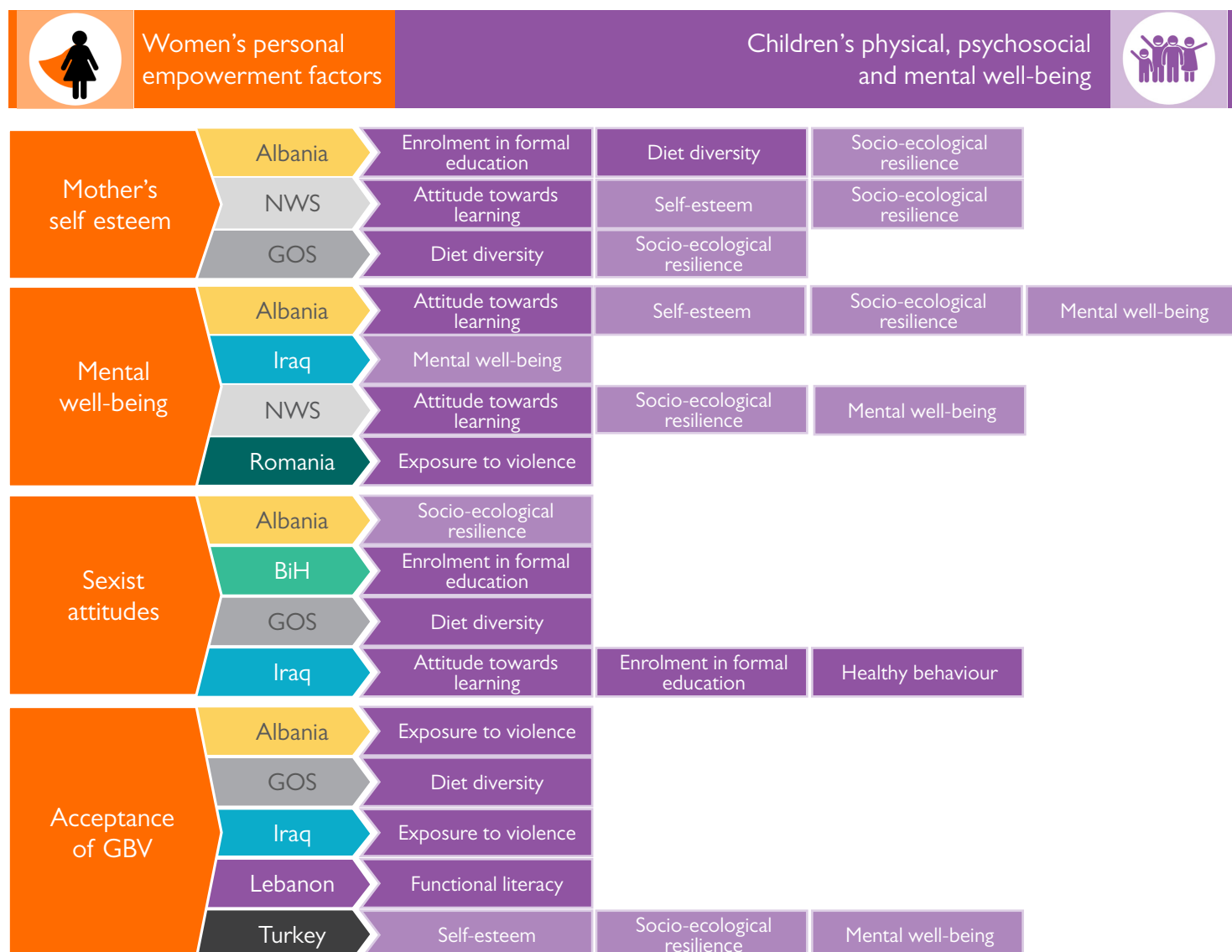
### Finding 8: Discriminatory attitudes and acceptance of GBV in women are linked with educational, protection and psychosocial outcomes in children

Mothers with sexist attitudes and those that accept GBV are more likely to have less resilient children that are more exposed to child violence, are less well-nourished and less likely to go to school.

### Finding 9: Mother’s self-esteem is directly linked to their children’s self-esteem and resilience

Mothers with moderate or high self-esteem are more likely to have children with good self-esteem and high socio-ecological resilience.

Summary of statistically significant correlations between women’s personal empowerment and child well-being:



## Finding 10: Women's decision-making power at household level is associated with better educational and protection outcomes in children

Mothers with decision-making power in HHs are more likely to have children that are not exposed to child violence and have higher literacy, as well as more positive attitudes towards learning.

## Finding 11: Women's experience of GBV is negatively associated with protection and mental health outcomes in children

Mothers that experience GBV are more likely to have children exposed to violence, as well as children with poor mental well-being, low self-esteem, and negative attitudes towards learning.

## Finding 12: Women's time poverty is linked to worse educational and protection outcomes in children

Mothers that have no control over their own time are more likely to have children exposed to violence, and mothers that are not able to redistribute the burden of care tend to have children with negative attitudes towards learning, especially in Fragile States.

Summary of statistically significant correlations between women's relational empowerment and child well-being:

Women's relational empowerment factors		Children's physical, psychosocial and mental well-being		
Household decision-making power	Albania	Attitude towards learning	Exposure to violence	Mental well-being
	BiH	Functional literacy	Enrolment in formal education	Exposure to violence
	Iraq	Attitude towards learning	Enrolment in formal education	Healthy behaviour
	Jordan	Exposure to violence	Socio-ecological resilience	
Control over household assets	Albania	Exposure to violence		
	Iraq	Exposure to violence	Mental well-being	
	Jordan	Exposure to violence		
	Romania	Functional literacy		
Experience of GBV	Albania	Exposure to violence	Mental well-being	
	GOS	Exposure to violence		
	Iraq	Healthy behaviour	Exposure to violence	Mental well-being
	Jordan	Attitude towards learning	Exposure to violence	
	Romania	Exposure to violence	Mental well-being	
Control over time	Iraq	Enrolment in formal education		
	Turkey	Exposure to violence		
Ability to redistribute the burden of care	Iraq	Attitude towards learning		
	Jordan	Attitude towards learning		

**Finding 13: Mother’s access to legal aid and civic rights are associated with better educational, nutrition and protection outcomes in children**

Women with access to legal aid tend to have children that are not exposed to child violence, have higher literacy and are more well-nourished.

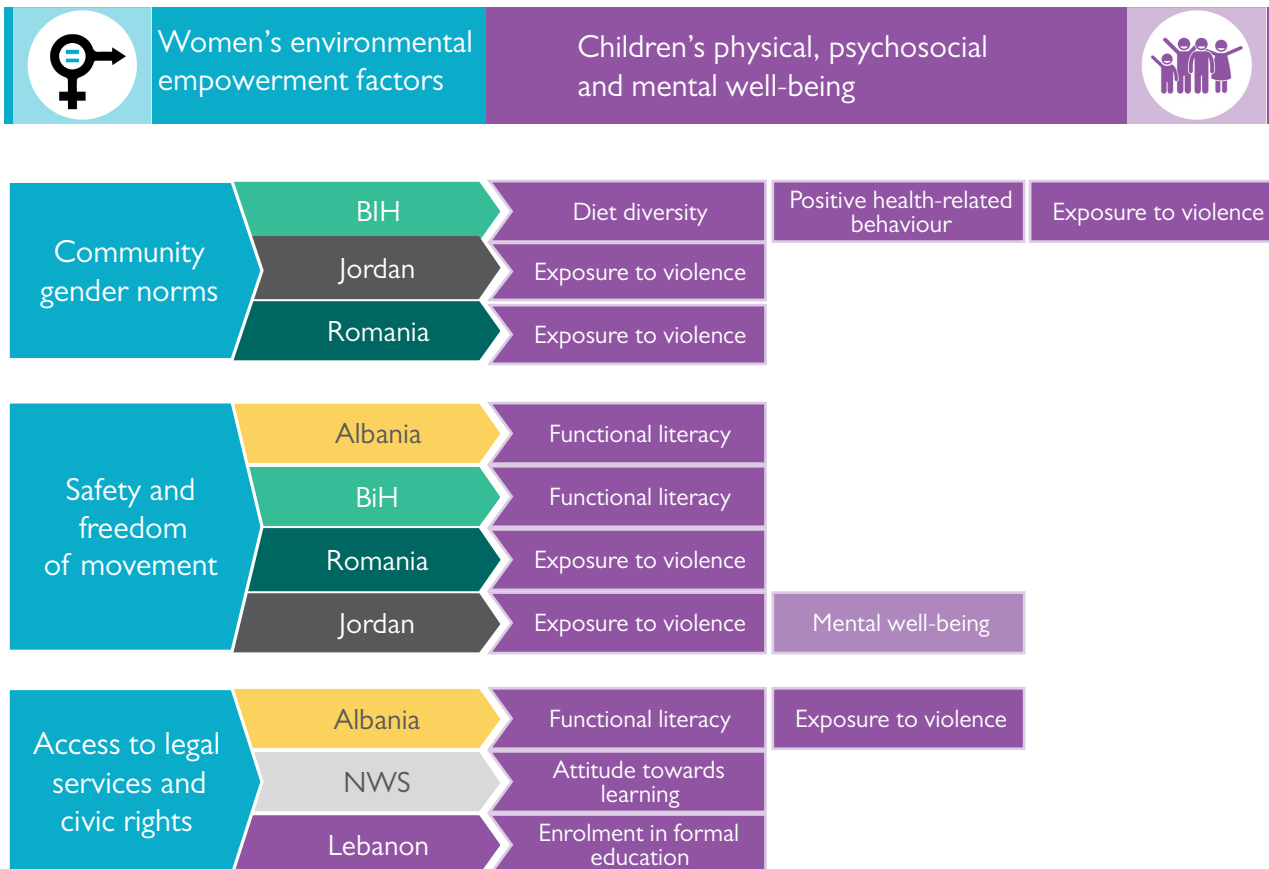
**Finding 14: Mother’s freedom of movement outside home is associated with better educational, nutritional and protection outcomes in children**

Women with the ability to move freely outside their homes tend to have more well-nourished, literate children that are not exposed to child violence.

**Finding 15: Community gender norms and stereotypes are associated with poorer nutrition and protection outcomes in children**

Children living in more restrictive communities are more likely to lack diet diversity and be exposed to child violence, especially in Transitioning Economies.

Summary of statistically significant correlations between women’s environmental empowerment and child well-being:



## Recommendations for donors, policymakers, and governments:

**1.** Prioritise women's empowerment projects, with a strong focus on preventing GBV, access to legal services, shifting gender norms, provision of life skills and women's employment.

**2.** Invest in adapting and expanding GBV response services such as shelters and safe spaces, along with psychosocial support and advice for individuals experiencing or at risk of GBV.

**3.** Ensure gender equality is embedded in the education policy and practice, to ensure gender-responsive classroom practices and effective transition from education to workforce.

**4.** Strengthen the application of gender markers, that ensure proposed projects address root causes of gender inequality, by specifically tackling gender norms and gender relations.

**5.** In Fragile States, invest in addressing population displacement and its implications by providing sustainable funding and durable solutions to refugees and IDPs.

**6.** State and non-state actors to better coordinate their efforts to ensure women's empowerment dimensions are prioritised and addressed while developing and implementing national policies.

## Recommendations for Programming:

**1.** Consider women's empowerment as a critical precondition for achieving children's well-being and accordingly embed women's empowerment approaches into child-focused policies, strategies, and interventions.

**2.** Ensure adoption of project models/ approaches that are gender-responsive and provide explicit opportunities to address gender norms and relations in the project design.

**3.** Ensure that all projects, regardless of the sector, are grounded in sound gender and social analysis, which seeks to understand the different experiences, needs and barriers of women/men and girls/boys.

**4.** Ensure consulting with women on their needs, barriers, and wishes while designing new projects and interventions, even when they primarily target children's well-being.

**5.** Provide income-generating activities for women and potentially create sustainable economic participation opportunities within the community.

**6.** Provide mothers with education opportunities, connected with future employment, to improve their basic life skills and awareness of human/civic rights and services.

7.

Provide targeted mental and psychosocial support for mothers and their children, especially for the ones affected by GBV and IPV.

8.

Invest in addressing harmful social and cultural norms, through awareness-raising in close partnership with local civil society organisations (CSOs) and faith leaders, as the leading power holders for social change.

9.

Through informal power holders, strategically engage men and boys in dialogue to change social norms and strengthen their engagement in reproductive and caregiving roles, as well as women's participation in the economy.

10.

Engage UN agencies, CSOs, and organisations focusing on women's rights and empowerment for effective coordination and work alignment.

## 7. Conclusions

This study comprehensively investigated the extent to which women's empowerment is linked to child well-being. We can now categorically say that a mother's education, household decision-making power, protection from GBV and good mental well-being are all critical factors that impact a child's physical and psychosocial well-being. Most importantly, women's empowerment means safety from the child violence.

The study also sets out the concerning degree to which Fragile States and Transitioning Economies – where women lack basic rights at home and in their communities – are still a long way from achieving gender equality. Women in these contexts need and deserve critical knowledge about their rights, as well as the services and opportunities available to leverage their full potential for the good of their families and their society. In addition to this information these women need the space to practice their rights. They need households and communities that are not constrained by patriarchal norms and power relations. To achieve this meaningful and sustainable programmatic interventions are required that are gender-transformative with gender-targeted actions aimed at addressing GBV, increasing women's access to education and employment, and promoting the status and rights within their families and communities.



Thanks to this report, we now know that when women lack empowerment it is not just an injustice to them, but to their children too. The time for the international community, especially researchers, programmers and policy makers, to place women at the centre of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding initiatives is long overdue. For the world to take child well-being seriously, it is imperative that women's empowerment is taken just as seriously.

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To see the full research, please refer to two regional reports for [Fragile States](#) and [Transitioning Economies](#), as well as country level reports from participating WV MEER Field Offices.

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## Annex I - Women's demographic and socio-economic profile

		Albania	Armenia	BiH	Romania	Iraq	Lebanon	NWS	GoS	Jordan	Turkey
Age	Average	28	28	31	30	31	42	30	32	31	29
	Marriage age	21	21	23	21	20	22	18	21	19	19
Household size	Average	5	5	4	5	9	6	8	8	8	6
	Residency status										
Residency status	Citizen	93%	100%	96%	100%	73%	91%	15%	30%	30%	3%
	Internally displaced	7%	0%	4%	0%	27%	0%	85%	70%	0%	0%
	Refugee	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	9%	0	0	70%	97%
Education	Illiterate	1%	0%	0%	2%	29%	7%	20%	11%	15%	8%
	Primary	2%	0%	4%	6%	51%	22%	20%	8%	9%	17%
	Intermediate	64%	6%	22%	36%	20%	30%	50%	37%	41%	55%
	Secondary and higher	33%	94%	74%	56%	0%	41%	10%	44%	35%	20%
Paid activity	No	49%	58%	26%	39%	93%	74%	81%	72%	81%	86%
	Yes	51%	42%	74%	61%	7%	26%	19%	28%	19%	14%
Monthly income	Average	USD 294	USD 209	USD 504	USD 690	USD 225	USD 85	USD 147	USD 45	USD 375	USD 257



## Annex 3 - Summary of statistically significant correlations between women's socio-demographic factors and women's empowerment:

