

A general overview on women's poverty in the worldAbdullah Özdemir¹Hatice Erol²**Abstract**

Poverty is the condition in which an individual cannot meet their basic economic and social needs. This phenomenon can affect various strata of society, but it particularly impacts women and children deeply. Poverty encompasses not only income deficiency for women but also the lack of social participation, leading to social exclusion. However, the question of whether poverty should be considered primarily as a women's issue or examined from a broader perspective is a subject of debate, as women can be disproportionately affected due to a gender-biased perspective.

Recent research indicates that in contemporary societies, women are more adversely affected by poverty compared to men. Gender inequality and income disparities often restrict women's access to education, limit employment opportunities, push them into low-paying jobs, or hinder their workforce participation due to domestic responsibilities. Studies conducted by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) highlight the prevalence of global gender inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab Peninsula, and many South Asian countries. These studies also reveal that gender inequality is more pronounced in countries with low to medium levels of human development. Consequently, regions like the Arab Peninsula and South Asia exhibit extremely low rates of female workforce participation. Moreover, these regions often witness a significant lack of female representation in their parliaments.

Among the fundamental causes of women's poverty are deficiencies in education and negative societal attitudes towards women. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to elevate women's educational levels and encourage their participation in the labor force. Studies have shown a correlation between increasing women's education levels and economic growth. Consequently, governments should review employment policies and social security mechanisms to enhance women's access to employment opportunities. Social assistance policies should be implemented with a rights-based approach and should encompass women. Addressing the excessive burden of household chores, gender-based discrimination, and patriarchal attitudes limiting women's career choices is of paramount importance. Transforming societal norms and dismantling gender biases are necessary for this purpose. The combat against female poverty necessitates the active engagement of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the realm of social policy implementations, social assistance programs, governmental initiatives related to gender-responsive budgeting, and the practices of financial institutions concerning microcredit.

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1. Introduction

The world has recently witnessed both pandemic diseases and natural disasters, as well as significant climate changes. All of these adversities can make individuals more anxious and vulnerable. The negative experiences of individuals also lead to problems in their economic and social activities. The inability to carry out essential production processes within the economy directly contributes to a decrease in the final output of goods and services. These production declines, in turn, lead to income losses and ultimately result in poverty among individuals (Jafino et al., 2020).

While historically, poverty has been predominantly defined based on income levels alone, the contemporary understanding of poverty has evolved significantly. Today, poverty is addressed not only

¹ Corresponding Author, Prof. Dr., Aydın Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi, Nazilli İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, İktisat Bölümü, Nazilli, Aydın, Türkiye, aozdemir@adu.edu.tr,  ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7506-3431

² Prof. Dr., Aydın Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi, Nazilli İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, ÇEKO Bölümü, Nazilli, Aydın, Türkiye, haticeerol@adu.edu.tr,  ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8816-1137

in terms of income but also with a broader perspective that encompasses education, health, and political participation alongside economic factors. The outdated growth models that solely attribute poverty to income have been replaced by more comprehensive development models. These new models consider a range of social and economic factors that impact an individual's life, creating a more nuanced understanding of poverty (Erol & Özdemir, 2023).

The gender dimension of poverty and social exclusion is currently a subject of intense debate. Examining poverty through a gender-specific lens has become a focal point in academic research. In this context, the dominance of a male-centric culture has acted as an oppressive force on women, resulting in an unequal positioning compared to their male counterparts. As a result, women's poverty has gained significant attention, particularly in recent times.

This study's primary objective is to shed light on the various facets of female poverty in economically disadvantaged regions worldwide, with a particular emphasis on areas like Africa. Additionally, the research aims to explore potential strategies and approaches for effectively addressing this multifaceted issue. In pursuit of this objective, we will commence by providing an in-depth exploration of the concept of poverty and its various manifestations. Subsequently, statistical tables will be employed to delineate the dimensions of female poverty. Following a comprehensive discussion on the policies applicable to combatting female poverty, we will proffer policy recommendations aimed at mitigating the prevalence of female impoverishment.

2. Poverty Concept

2.1. Definition of Poverty

Poverty is a multifaceted concept that can be approached from various angles. However, all these definitions share a common core of inadequate resources, especially the absence of essential necessities required for survival. The exploration of poverty through research and its various definitions aids in recognizing the fundamental goods and services necessary to sustain human life.

In accordance with the World Bank's definition as articulated in 2000, poverty represents a pronounced state of deprivation in the realm of well-being. This multidimensional well-being encompasses various facets, including an individual's income, state of health, nutritional status, educational attainment, ownership of assets, housing conditions, and the realization of certain societal rights, such as the freedom of expression. Additionally, poverty encompasses a dearth of opportunities, a sense of powerlessness, and a heightened susceptibility to vulnerability (World Bank, 2000).

Another vital aspect within the definition of poverty revolves around an individual's capability to actively participate in society while upholding their dignity and self-respect. Amartya Sen's Capability Approach is a significant framework in this context. This approach is centered around acquiring the necessary data to evaluate individual well-being, societal policies, and associated domains. It explicitly rejects alternative methodologies that solely rely on financial metrics for assessment, deeming them normatively deficient. Moreover, the Capability Approach astutely acknowledges the existence of societal constraints that wield influence over both well-being and evaluative procedures. Importantly, the Capability Approach provides a nuanced and comprehensive framework for evaluating poverty and well-being. Instead of reducing assessment solely to monetary parameters, it emphasizes the significance of individual functioning within society. By considering the diverse dimensions of capability and functioning, the Capability Approach enriches discussions surrounding poverty measurement and social policy evaluation. Additionally, it recognizes that societal structures and constraints play a pivotal role in shaping individual capabilities and, therefore, must be considered in any meaningful assessment of well-being and poverty (Sen, 1995).

2.2. Types of Poverty

Absolute poverty is defined as the condition in which an individual lacks the economic means to meet their basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. In contemporary discourse, there is an ongoing academic debate concerning the necessity to revise the definition of poverty due to changing living conditions and

economic dynamics. Additionally, the concept of absolute poverty is criticized for its limited scope, as it solely focuses on the inability to meet specific basic needs and does not account for other crucial factors such as societal income inequality (Uğur, 2017: 171).

In contrast, the relative approach offers a more subjective assessment compared to the absolute approach. Relative poverty defines itself through a comparative analysis of living standards between those in disadvantaged circumstances and those with a relatively higher socioeconomic standing. Poverty, in this context, arises when an individual's economic resources significantly deviate from the prevailing community standards. This deviation indicates that their income consistently falls below the threshold required to achieve a predetermined average standard of living (Ramphoma, 2014: 63).

The concept of objective poverty is based on official data from government agencies, rather than an individual's own assessments. Subjective poverty is an approach in which individuals determine the standards necessary for them to lead their lives based on their own perceptions and thoughts (Özdemir & İnce, 2021: 2636).

Human poverty was first introduced in the Human Development Report (HDR) published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The HDR analyzes the concept of human development by examining not only income-based calculations but also the extent to which individuals can satisfy their fundamental characteristics and needs, such as freedom and personality. It emphasizes the role of the individual in development. When defining human poverty, UNDP takes into account not only income but also the availability of education, access to clean water sources, and the ability to lead a healthy life, which are essential for sustainability (Özdemir & Kaşıkçı, 2018: 85).

2.3. Dimensions of Poverty in The World

When defining poverty around the world, the population below a certain income level is examined. Recently, daily income of less than \$1.90 was used as an indicator of poverty, but due to changes in prices, this limit is now being used as \$2.15 (World Bank, 2023). Based on this measurement, changes in the poor population are shown in the Table 1 below for the period of 1981-2019.

Table 1. Number of People with Daily Income Less than \$2.15 in the World (Millions of People)

Years	Number of People	Years	Number of People	Years	Number of People	Years	Number of People
1981	1966.79	1991	2005.04	2001	1749.84	2011	994.74
1982	1983.92	1992	1990.09	2002	1684.29	2012	939.53
1983	1986.21	1993	1973.09	2003	1622.15	2013	841.52
1984	1951.78	1994	1927.40	2004	1520.88	2014	811.77
1985	1917.72	1995	1871.37	2005	1412.29	2015	793.04
1986	1888.82	1996	1809.65	2006	1377.13	2016	778.25
1987	1874.72	1997	1823.91	2007	1311.13	2017	722.64
1988	1820.27	1998	1861.03	2008	1269.45	2018	673.54
1989	1989.79	1999	1829.02	2009	1224.15	2019	648.10
1990	1996.23	2000	1781.38	2010	1126.73		

Source: Compiled from World Bank data.

The Table 1 presents data on monetary poverty worldwide. According to World Bank data, approximately one billion nine hundred sixty-seven million people have a daily income of less than \$2.15. Considering that the world population was around 4.5 billion during the given period, it can be said that about one-third of the world population tries to live below the poverty line. In the early 1990s, the population defined as poor exceeded two billion, and one of the reasons for this increase was that the population in the newly formed states after the dissolution of the Soviet Union could not have the necessary income for a certain period. Since the 2000s, this number has entered a decreasing trend. As of 2011, the poor population fell below one billion and by 2019, it decreased to approximately 648 million people. In 2019, the world population was approximately 7.74 billion. Therefore, the global poor population has decreased from a third in 1981 to about 8% in 2019.

People are considered at risk of monetary poverty when their equivalised disposable income (after social transfers) is below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. This is set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers (Eurostat, <https://ec.europa.eu>). To illustrate the levels of monetary poverty in different regions around the world, Table 2 below is provided.

Table 2. Poverty Rates (Below \$2.15) by Region in the World (%)

Years	East and S. Africa	West and Central Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	Europe and Central Asia	Latin America and the Caribbean	South Asia	Middle East and North Africa	East Asia and Pacific
1981	-	-	-	-	15.02	58.13	-	83.37
1985	-	52.58	-	-	17.04	53.10	6.92	71.02
1990	-	55.29	53.29	3.23	16.72	49.67	6.14	65.75
1995	56.79	59.72	57.96	8.26	14.44	43.46	5.25	50.01
2000	55.25	-	55.78	9.16	13.53	-	3.60	39.52
2001	55.22	54.69	55.01	8.35	13.24	-	3.49	37.23
2005	50.11	46.60	48.70	6.25	10.45	35.05	2.69	21.60
2006	48.39	45.78	47.34	5.55	8.52	33.63	2.59	21.04
2007	46.98	46.04	4.97	8.13	31.84		2.47	18.75
2008	45.80	42.59	44.50	4.39	7.55	30.44	2.36	17.63
2009	45.66	41.55	44.00	4.26	7.11	29.37	2.21	15.55
2010	44.20	39.05	42.13	4.20	6.45	26.22	1.82	13.32
2011	42.79	38.18	40.93	3.89	5.97	21.48	2.09	10.37
2012	43.00	36.21	40.26	3.74	5.06	19.74	2.05	8.82
2013	42.21	34.72	39.19	3.40	4.53	18.94	2.19	4.49
2014	41.68	32.70	38.06	3.55	4.27	17.98	2.56	3.58
2015	41.55	32.75	38.00	3.20	4.18	16.71	4.84	2.70
2016	41.51	31.66	37.53	2.87	4.41	15.77	5.44	2.24
2017	41.29	29.89	36.69	2.84	4.38	12.59	5.97	1.91
2018	40.79	28.16	35.69	2.43	4.29	10.02	7.50	1.53
2019	-	27.20	35.14	2.38	4.32	8.51	-	1.12

Source: Compiled from World Bank, Poverty and Inequality Platform data.

According to World Bank data, in the 1980s, the region with the highest incidence of poverty was the East Asia and Pacific region. By the 1990s, poverty rates had remained very high in the Europe and Central Asia region, as well as in all regions except the Middle East and North Africa. Since then, poverty rates have relatively decreased in all regions. However, currently, the highest poverty rates are concentrated in the Eastern and Southern Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Western and Central Africa regions. As can be seen, poverty rates in Africa as a whole remain very high. While the East Asia and Pacific region had the highest poverty rates in the 1980s, currently, poverty rates in this region are much lower.

In addition to financial deprivation, a new definition of poverty has been introduced, taking into account deprivations that individuals face with. This definition is referred to as the "multidimensional poverty index". The global multidimensional poverty index is calculated by the United Nations Development Programme and is based on three basic variables: health (two sub-indices), education (two sub-indices), and standard of living (three sub-indices). The index value ranges from "0 to 1". A high value indicates a high level of multidimensional poverty. The 2021 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index was calculated using data from 109 developing countries. Currently, about 1.3 billion people in these countries are trying to survive within the limits of poverty, and about half of them are children under the age of 18.

Table 3. Multidimensional Poverty Rates in Developing Countries in the World (Year 2021)

Regions	Multidimensional Poverty Index	Deprivation Intensity	Share of Multidimensional Poor in Total Population	Population Vulnerable to Multidimensional Poverty	National Poverty Line	Proportion of the Population Below \$1.9 per day
Arab States	0,071	0,286	6,5	8,9	26,1	4,9
East Asia and the Pacific	0,023	0,009	1,0	14,5	4,3	1,2
Europe and Central Asia	0,004	0,004	0,1	3,2	9,8	1,1
Latin America and the Caribbean	0,030	0,011	1,8	7,3	36,9	4,2
South Asia	0,131	0,015	1,2	18,3	22,9	19,2
Sub-Saharan Africa	0,286	0,022	30,8	18,8	4,1	43,7

Source: Compiled from UNDP, Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021 Report.

As seen from the table data, as of the year 2021, the region with the highest multidimensional poverty index values is Sub-Saharan Africa. This region is followed by South Asia and Arab States, with the latter experiencing higher levels of deprivation. Sub-Saharan Africa is also the region with the highest share of the population living in multidimensional poverty, and is the most vulnerable to multidimensional poverty. The other regions with high values are South Asia and East Asia and Pacific, with the highest proportion of the population living on less than \$1.9 per day.

3. The Feminization of Poverty

The concept of female poverty was first articulated in the literature by Pearce (1978). According to Pearce, nearly two-thirds of individuals living in poverty, aged 16 and older, were women. Pearce argued that despite the increasing participation of women in the labor force during the years from 1950 to the mid-1970s, the economic status of women had declined. Particularly, households headed by women constituted an increasingly larger percentage of the impoverished population. Pearce attributed the feminization of poverty to the lack of government support for divorced and single women. She contended that "for many, the price of that independence has been their pauperization and dependence on welfare" (Pearce, 1978: 28).

A further investigation into female poverty was undertaken by Goldberg and Kremen in 1990. This study, centered on the United States, aimed to delve into the rising trend of poverty among women. This trend was partly attributed to the increasing rates of living separately, non-marital parenthood, and divorce that became prominent in the 1960s. The responsibility of providing for households disproportionately fell on women, rendering them more vulnerable to economic challenges. Consequently, women found themselves compelled to share the economic hardships they encountered with those individuals they were financially responsible for. During the 1960s, households headed by women, a substantial portion of which were living in poverty, experienced a modest increase compared to the 1950s. However, by the late 1980s, this trend witnessed significant expansion. In the 1980s, among all impoverished households (excluding those without children), nearly 47.8% were led by women. This percentage escalated to 51.5% by 1987. As this trend endured, the issue of poverty

gradually became more closely associated with women. By the 1990s, in the United States, single-parent families, predominantly led by women, constituted roughly three-fifths of all impoverished families with children. Furthermore, it's worth noting that in the United States, a correlation was observed between female poverty and ethnic background, with African American or Hispanic American women experiencing even higher levels of impoverishment compared to their white counterparts (Goldberg & Kremen, 1990: 2-3).

The definition and measurement of women's poverty are based on social indicators such as literacy rates, life expectancy, enrollment in primary and secondary education, access to health services, maternal mortality rates, and access to land, in addition to traditional measures of household income and consumption. Other indicators such as employment, wage gaps, time use, average age of first marriage, fertility rates, and gender ratios can also be listed as key indicators of women's poverty. Monitoring progress or setbacks in social indicators is important in addressing women's "daily needs" (basic needs) and "strategic gender needs" (equality, autonomy, and empowerment) (Moghadam, 1998: 226).

The concept of the "feminization of poverty" as described by Rahnema (2009), is considered a perspective that challenges the feminist discourse. Rahnema identifies it as a secondary manifestation of modern poverty, which he refers to as "modernized poverty". The author contends that contemporary poverty has evolved into a state of destitution, with women being increasingly regarded as economic commodities. Furthermore, Rahnema highlights that the widening gap between the world's richest and poorest extends not only between societies but also among women themselves. In this context, Rahnema associates the shifts in women's status in the modern era with emerging power dynamics. Consequently, the origins and societal interactions of female poverty have become a focal point in feminist studies (Rahnema, 2009: 261–262).

An essential aspect to consider when discussing the feminization of poverty is the phenomenon of elderly women's poverty. Recent research indicates that elderly women living alone are at a higher risk of poverty compared to those living in groups or those who are married. Across the world, women in urban areas are often compelled to work in the informal sector for extremely low wages. The absence of social security, coupled with the necessity to work for meager incomes in adverse conditions, contributes to further impoverishment as these women age (Goldberg & Kremen, 1990: 6).

When defining and measuring women's poverty, a multidimensional and multisectoral approach should be adopted. Women's experiences of poverty vary across different social domains and over times. Institutionalized gender-based discrimination is pervasive in areas such as labor markets and political power structures. Social norms and expectations dictate which gender roles and relationships are considered acceptable. Moreover, power imbalances within households operate based on age and gender. Structural inequalities between men and women and among women themselves significantly influence women's experiences of poverty and relative poverty (Bradshaw & Linneker, 2009: 9).

The Global Gender Gap Index is a concept that shows to what extent women are equal to men. The index was first calculated by the World Economic Forum in 2006. The index is calculated based on several sub-indexes. However, there are essentially four sub-index headings: economic participation and opportunity (five sub-levels), educational attainment (four sub-levels), health and survival (two sub-levels), and political empowerment (two sub-levels). The index is evaluated based on data from 146 countries worldwide. The table below shows the sub-values of global gender inequality in regions as of 2022.

The 2021 Multidimensional Poverty Index report by the UNDP reveals that around two-thirds of multidimensionally poor individuals reside in households where no girl or woman has received at least six years of education. The proportion of multidimensionally poor individuals living in households where no girl or woman has attained this level of education varies significantly across regions, ranging from 12.8% in Europe and Central Asia to 70.5% in Arab States. In 14 countries with a collective population of 1.8 billion, households led by women have, on average, a higher Multidimensional Poverty Index value compared to those led by men. In regions where multidimensional poverty is

prevalent, rates of gender-based violence against women and girls are also considerably higher (UNDP, 2022).

The UNDP report also highlights that approximately 16 million multidimensionally poor men and boys, which equates to 0.3% of the total population, live in households without any woman or girl aged 10 or older. However, roughly half of all multidimensionally poor individuals (622 million) living with a woman or girl, regardless of gender, reside in households where nobody has received six or more years of education. The Arab States exhibit the highest percentage of multidimensionally poor individuals living in households where no girl or woman has attained at least six years of education. Studies on monetary poverty suggest that households led by women are typically less impoverished than those led by men. Nonetheless, in 14 countries with a combined population of 1.8 billion, households headed by women have a higher Multidimensional Poverty Index value than those headed by men, indicating that they are comparatively poorer. Women and girls living in multidimensionally poor households often face uncertain living conditions and are at a higher risk of violence due to having less financial independence and bargaining power within the household. In some countries, women have to travel long distances to access water, food, or attend school or work. Additionally, the risk of sexual and physical violence is higher in households with higher levels of poverty.

Table 4 below is provided to illustrate how global gender inequality looks across regions.

Table 4. Overview of Global Gender Inequality Sub-Indices in the World

	Overall Index	Economic Participation and Equal Opportunity	Education Level	Health and Survival	Political Participation
Central Asia	69.1	68.2	98.8	97.4	11.8
East Asia and the Pacific	69.0	72.2	65.4	95.2	13.3
Europe	76.6	70.2	99.5	97.0	39.8
Latin America and the Caribbean	72.6	64.5	99.5	97.6	28.7
Middle East and North Africa	63.4	46.0	96.2	96.4	15.1
North America	76.9	77.4	99.7	96.9	33.7
South Asia	62.3	35.7	93.2	94.2	26.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	67.9	67.7	85.3	97.2	21.3
World Average	68.1	60.3	94.4	95.8	22.0

Source: Compiled from World Economic Forum. Gender Inequality 2022 Report.

The data presented in Table 4 reveals a clear pattern in global gender inequality. North America emerges as the region with the least gender inequality worldwide, closely followed by Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean. Conversely, South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa stand out as regions with the most significant disparities between men and women. This trend extends to economic participation and opportunity equality, with North America, East Asia and the Pacific, and Europe demonstrating commendable performance in this regard. In contrast, South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean exhibit the highest levels of economic inequality.

These disparities are not confined to the workforce; they also extend to access to education and healthcare services, as well as political representation for women. Such inequities stem from deeply ingrained prejudices against women, often categorized as gender bias, which signifies a preference for one gender over the other, commonly referred to as sexism. Gender bias frequently arises when individuals unconsciously associate certain stereotypes with different genders. Consequently, individuals may face differential treatment solely based on their gender, overlooking their skills,

abilities, and qualifications. Studies conducted in the United States in the field of gender studies suggest that approximately 90% of participants exhibited bias against women. It is believed that a significant number of individuals hold unconscious biases against women, as these biases often operate beneath the surface (Suveren, 2022: 417).

The United Nations Development Programme evaluates countries around the world under four main headings according to their human development. The gender inequality table created according to this criterion is included below.

Table 5. Gender Inequality Index Values by Human Development Clusters in the World

Human Development Clusters	Index Value (2021)
Very High Human Development	0.155
High Human Development	0.329
Medium Human Development	0.494
Low Human Development	0.577

Source: Compiled from UNDP, Gender Inequality Report data.

As seen from the Table 5 data, regions with higher levels of human development have lower levels of gender inequality. While there are increases in the index value as the level decreases. These data reflect an expected pattern, as an increase in development leads to greater expression of women in society, while a decrease in development indicates that women live in a more unequal society.

Various factors, including the prolonged menopausal period and the increased life expectancy of women, have given rise to a range of health issues. Among these health concerns are conditions such as depression, osteoporosis, diabetes, hypertension, immune system disorders, rheumatoid arthritis, Alzheimer's disease, and several others. It is noteworthy that although these health problems affect individuals of all genders, they tend to exhibit a higher prevalence and lead to more severe complications in women. Despite women having a naturally longer lifespan, they often face economic hardships due to socio-economic challenges, coupled with difficulties in accessing healthcare services. Women, constituting approximately half of the global population, frequently encounter impediments in their ability to access healthcare facilities due to entrenched gender biases and their relatively lower social status. This predicament significantly impairs women's capacity to benefit from healthcare services and receive timely medical interventions (Bal, 2018: 17-18).

In the realm of education, global regions generally exhibit similar gender ratios. When examining gender equality on a regional basis, considering overall index values, North America, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean emerge as regions with the highest levels of gender equality. Conversely, the region with the greatest gender inequality is East Asia and the Pacific. This pattern holds true in terms of health and survival as well, with South Asia registering the lowest index value. However, the most notable gender disparity appears in the sub-index related to political participation. Women face greater challenges in securing a place in politics compared to their male counterparts. The regions that exhibit better female representation in this domain are Europe, North America and Latin America and the Caribbean, while Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, and the Middle East and North Africa have the lowest rates.

As of the 2022 Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum, it is estimated that it will take 132 years to address global gender inequality comprehensively. This represents a slight improvement from the 2021 estimate of 136 years, indicating a somewhat more optimistic outlook over the past year. The primary focus in addressing this issue should be on establishing the necessary infrastructure to ensure at least equal opportunities rather than striving for absolute equality.

In order to see the distribution of the number of women living in extreme poverty by regions in 2021, the Table 6 is given below.

Table 6. Number of Women Living in Extreme Poverty by Region in the World (2021)

Regions	Number of People (Million People)	Year 2022 Estimation Rates
Australia and New Zealand	0.1	12.2
Oceania	1	24.3
Europe and North America	3	14.0
West and South West Asia	19	7.3
North Africa and West Asia	20	22.6
Latin America and the Caribbean	20	30.4
Central and South Asia	81	20.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	244	41.2
World	388	

Source: Compiled from UN Women data.

Table 6 illustrates a notable concentration of extreme poverty among women in various regions across the world. Particularly striking is the fact that 62.8% of extremely impoverished women are situated in Sub-Saharan Africa, followed by 20.9% in Central and Southern Asia, 5.3% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 5.1% in North Africa and the Middle East, 4.8% in East and Southeast Asia, and a marginal 0.8% in other global regions. As is typically observed in less economically developed regions, both the overall poverty rate and the prevalence of female poverty exhibit higher levels. The significance of mitigating female poverty transcends mere economic considerations; it extends to the empowerment of women, enabling them to assume more substantial roles and contribute greater added value within the intricate fabric of societal structures. For a comprehensive overview of the distribution of women in leadership roles across diverse global regions, the subsequent table provides valuable insights.

Table 7. Percentage of Women in Managerial Positions by Region in the World (%)

Regions	2015	2020
North Africa and West Asia	11.0	12.2
Central and South Asia	12.7	12.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	29.3	29.8
East and Southeast Asia	31.0	33.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	38.9	37.7
Oceania	37.3	37.8
Europe and North America	36.8	38.9
World	27.2	28.3

Source: Compiled from United Nations. Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022.

As seen from the Table 7 data, in 2015, the region with the highest number of women in executive positions in the world was Latin America and the Caribbean. This region was followed by Oceania, Europe and North America. The region with the lowest number of women in executive positions was North Africa and West Asia, by 2020, the region with the highest percentage of women in executive positions had become Europe and North America. Other regions that ranked high were Oceania and Latin America and the Caribbean. The region with the lowest number of women in executive positions during this period was still North Africa and West Asia.

The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in the workforce today can be attributed to a complex interplay of individual, societal, sociological, and psychological factors. The root causes of this limited representation encompass various elements such as societal structure, traditional gender roles, and educational disparities. Moreover, the low presence of women in critical leadership may also be linked to the socio-economic and political inequalities reflected in gender equality (Ercan, 2016: 2).

Individuals who can find a more prominent place in the labor market will be able to show themselves more economically and this is also true for women. The Table 8 below provides the data on women's labor force participation rates and parliamentary representation rates by region in the world.

Table 8. Labour Force Participation Rates and Proportion of Women Representatives in Parliament by Region in the World (2021)

Regions	Labour Force Participation Rate		Share of seats held by women in national parliaments (%)
	Woman	Man	
Arab States	19.3	69.5	18.3
East Asia and the Pacific	59.7	75.2	20.9
Europe and Central Asia	42.9	67.0	26.1
Latin America and the Caribbean	48.6	72.7	33.2
South Asia	21.6	71.6	17.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	62.1	72.3	25.7

Source: Compiled from UNDP. Gender Inequality Report data.

According to UNDP data, in 2021, the region with the highest female labor force participation rate is Sub-Saharan Africa. According to ILO data, women in this region have a significant presence in the agricultural sector, with a rate of 90%, and 70% in the food sector. Women tend to work in sectors that create less added value and can often find themselves as unpaid agricultural or care workers. From a glass ceiling perspective, only 5% of women in Sub-Saharan Africa can become CEOs.

According to the data in the table, other regions with high female labor force participation rates are East Asia and the Pacific, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean. The lowest female labor force participation rates are found in Arab countries, primarily due to negative attitudes towards women's work, patriarchal beliefs, and the dominance of the oil industry as a source of income. Women in this region mostly work as unpaid family workers, mainly in caregiving and household services.

Women's representation in parliament can also be considered as another indicator of gender inequality. The region with the lowest representation of women in parliament is South Asia. The main reasons behind this include the predominance of gendered roles and rules that privilege men in the public sphere of the economy. Women's involvement in unpaid caregiving also impedes their political participation. Moreover, individual and societal violence against women and girls is prevalent in this region, leading to the reinforcement of male-dominated rules and ultimately resulting in women being relegated to the role of individuals confined within their homes. In Arab countries, where the female labor force participation rate is the lowest, the representation of women in parliament is only 18.3%. As observed, in economically and socially developed regions, women can express themselves better, but when the line of underdevelopment is crossed, women tend to confine themselves to their homes. The region with the highest representation of women in parliament worldwide is Latin America and the Caribbean.

Various studies have explored the impact of women's participation in parliamentary roles on economic growth. Among these, Er (2012) conducted a panel data analysis utilizing a fixed effects model, covering 187 countries during the period from 1998 to 2008. The outcomes of this study led to the conclusion that an augmented presence of women in parliamentary representation, along with increased participation in the labor force, had a beneficial effect on economic growth.

In their study, Lechman and Kaur (2015) analyzed the relationship between female labor force participation and economic growth using panel data methodology, considering a sample of 162 countries for the period 1990-2012. The analysis revealed a connection between female labor force participation and economic growth.

In another study, Pata (2018) analyzed the relationship between economic growth and female employment in Turkey using both asymmetric and symmetric causality tests with data spanning from 1988 to 2015. The analysis revealed that female employment affects economic growth by contributing to the GDP generated in the service sector.

In Şahin's (2022) study, an analysis was conducted for 31 European countries to determine the extent to which female employment influences economic growth. The analysis utilized annual data for female employment and GDP from 2009 to 2020. The relationship between female employment and economic growth was estimated using panel data methodology. The study's analysis findings suggest that female employment significantly and positively impacts economic growth.

4. Policies to Combat Female Poverty

Methods for combating poverty can be classified into two categories: indirect and direct. Indirect strategies involve reducing poverty through the impact of economic growth on income levels. Conversely, direct strategies encompass governmental programs and policy measures designed to enhance the living standards of impoverished individuals. Therefore, among the methods utilized to address poverty are enhancing the effectiveness of civil society organizations, implementing various financial incentives to alleviate family debt burdens, providing assistance in the realms of family, education, disaster relief, healthcare, and migration, municipal social aid initiatives, housing acquisition programs, employment projects, Gender Responsive Budgeting, and the widely preferred microcredit approach, particularly endorsed by institutions such as the World Bank (Şahin, 2020: 39-40).

In contemporary efforts to combat women's poverty, the approaches and methods often revolve around expanding social policies in line with the principle of the welfare state, encompassing all sectors of social policies. However, in practice, social policy measures alone may sometimes prove insufficient in addressing poverty. Due to the structural challenges faced by the state, there are instances where it cannot reach every segment of society, fully comprehend all issues, or raise awareness of all problems. In such cases, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a significant role in finding solutions. NGOs, often localized in nature, possess certain advantages such as proximity to issues and streamlined decision-making processes, which facilitate their work. As a result, they are occasionally observed to be more effective in resolving problems. This underscores the important role and responsibility that NGOs hold within society. One of the primary roles of NGOs in the fight against poverty is to act as a bridge between those in need and those willing to provide assistance. NGOs, largely relying on volunteers, mostly secure the majority of their aid to impoverished communities through donations from fellow citizens. Furthermore, thanks to technological advancements and innovations, NGOs today have the capability to reach millions of volunteers and donors (Tinar, 2022: 143).

Another tool utilized in the fight against poverty is social assistance. Referred to as "social assistance" or public social aid, it constitutes in-kind (goods) or cash assistance provided by competent state authorities without imposing any reciprocity or obligation, subject to conditions and controls of destitution, with the aim of ensuring a dignified standard of living for those who cannot sustain themselves through their own means and labor. These aids are one of the effective instruments in combating poverty, directed towards impoverished and needy individuals. Such assistance measures are outside the scope of social security institutions and are designed to address the gaps in the existing social security system. The social assistance method does not involve continuous support for individuals in need but aims to swiftly alleviate their destitution. The objective is to enable the recipients to rejoin the workforce and attain the capacity to generate income for their livelihoods as soon as possible. It discourages idleness and extravagance while seeking to safeguard an individual's social well-being and uphold their dignity (Önen, 2010: 79).

Another tool employed in the fight against women's poverty is referred to as gender responsive budgeting. This concept is increasingly being examined independently of strategies aimed at reducing women's poverty. At the core of gender inequality are hierarchies stemming from culturally entrenched values regarding the division of labor and the sharing of responsibilities based on gender roles. To address these inequalities, gender sensitivity must be integrated into all major plans and programs. Therefore, all plans, policies, and programs must prioritize the maximization of societal benefits. In this context, the necessity arises for budgets, which impact the lives of all individuals due to their nature, to be prepared with gender sensitivity at all levels. The preparation of budgets reflecting the repercussions

of economic plans and programs in accordance with this approach holds significant importance in achieving the desired development.

The microcredit system, initially developed by Muhammad Yunus, originated in Bangladesh and rapidly spread worldwide. Microcredit can be defined as a sum of money obtained by women from microcredit authorities for a specified period in exchange for engaging in various activities (such as agriculture, livestock farming, handicrafts, and small-scale entrepreneurship) with the aim of generating additional income, establishing their own businesses, and sustaining their livelihoods. This funding encompasses various forms of education, knowledge dissemination, and all forms of informational support provided by microcredit experts (Tutar & Alpaslan, 2017: 181).

5. Conclusion

The issue of poverty extends beyond gender, impacting all members of society. Nevertheless, women's heightened vulnerability and precarious circumstances compared to men accentuate the adverse consequences of female poverty. This distinction arises from the often unequal treatment of women, particularly within the labor market. Globally, one in three individuals earns less than two dollars a day, and the alarming fact that 70% of these individuals are women serves as a stark testament to prevailing inequalities.

Empowering women involves equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to overcome the challenges they face. This concept is intricately linked with the goal of reducing gender inequality, as these two aspects mutually reinforce each other. Empowering women encompasses not only economic dimensions but also encompasses the acquisition of social and human resources that enhance women's capabilities. This includes improving access to education, healthcare, and other services that elevate their living standards. Therefore, empowering women entails not only increasing their income levels but also enhancing the quality and quantity of services that support their overall well-being.

One pivotal aspect of empowering women involves tailoring education services to their specific needs. Expanding the number of educated women facilitates better self-expression, increased participation in the labor market, and the promotion of equitable decision-making. Elevated education levels not only yield economic and political benefits but also prepare women to be conscientious individuals who share household responsibilities with their male counterparts. Women with higher levels of awareness have the opportunity to work in more skilled professions rather than being limited to sectors characterized by informal employment.

In many instances, ensuring comprehensive access to healthcare services, especially in developing nations, plays a critical role in poverty reduction, the advancement of gender equality, and ultimately the empowerment of women. Strengthening healthcare services for women is essential for promoting the use of contraception, preventing child marriages, and reducing maternal mortality rates. Women living in challenging conditions often experience higher fertility rates and limited access to healthcare, leading to increased mortality rates. Consequently, there is a pressing need for projects and policies aimed at empowering women and girls. Empowering women and girls, coupled with improved access to healthcare services, is indispensable for poverty reduction, the promotion of gender equality, and the acceleration of social development.

In today's world, female poverty remains a significant concern, particularly in regions like Africa. Consequently, investments targeted at enhancing agricultural productivity, improving livestock management, and providing livelihood opportunities are essential for addressing poverty among rural women. Additionally, another strategy to improve the economic situation of impoverished women involves increasing their access to and control over land. Women who own or control land have the opportunity to utilize it for food production, income generation, or as collateral for credit.

Studies such as Er (2012), Lechman and Kaur (2015), Pata (2018), and Şahin's (2022) have reached the conclusion that increasing women's participation in the labor force has a positive impact on economic

growth. Emphasizing the advancement of women's education and their active involvement in the workforce is of utmost importance. Government efforts should revamp employment strategies and social safety nets to support women's engagement in the labor market. Social welfare policies must be grounded in the fundamental rights of all citizens. Compelling women to accept low-wage jobs and shoulder heavy domestic responsibilities solely due to their gender reflects deeply entrenched patriarchal ideologies. Transforming this mindset and ensuring that women's voices are truly heard in both public and private spheres, traditionally dominated by men, is crucial. Moreover, expanding opportunities and incentives for women is an urgent necessity. Only through such comprehensive measures can a more equitable power dynamic be realized for women.

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ETİK VE BİLİMSEL İLKELER SORUMLULUK BEYANI

Bu çalışmanın tüm hazırlanma süreçlerinde etik kurallara ve bilimsel atıf gösterme ilkelerine riayet edildiğini yazar beyan eder. Bu çalışma etik kurul izni gerektiren çalışma grubunda yer almamaktadır.

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1. yazar katkı oranı: % 40

2. yazar katkı oranı: % 60