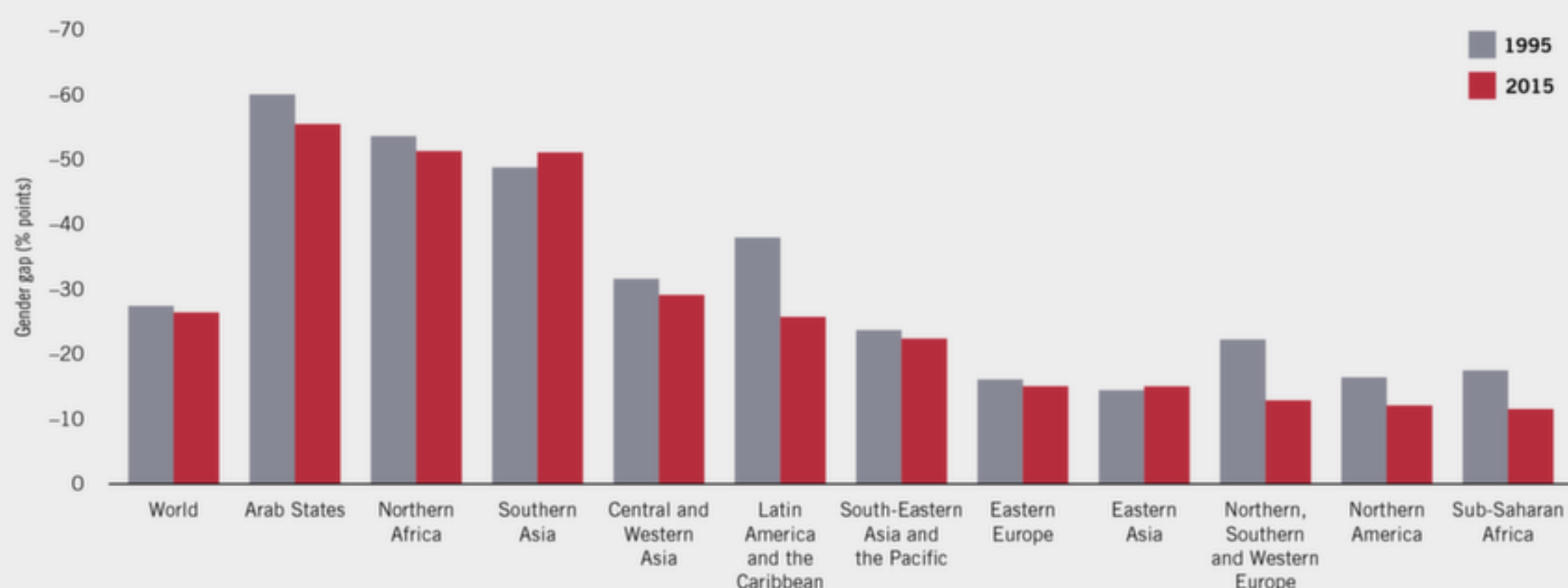


Figure 1 Gender gaps in labour force participation rates by region, 1995 and 2015



Note: The gender gap is measured as the difference between women and men labour force participation rates. The data cover 178 countries and the same countries are covered in figures 2, 3, 5, 6, 13, 14 and 16 of this report.

Source: ILO calculations based on ILO, *Trends Econometric Models*, November 2015.

In sub-Saharan Africa, female participation rates have increased by 3.2 percentage points over the last two decades. This increase could well be due to the absence of or insufficient alternative income from social protection and persistent poverty not allowing the option of dropping out of work. Moreover, limited opportunities to further their education or training also compel more women to work (United Nations, 2011). In addition, persistent male unemployment often leads to an increase in female labour force participation, in order to compensate for lack of income, but such increases in the female labour supply are likely to be absorbed among own-account and contributing family workers.

In the Arab States, and to a lesser extent in Northern Africa, labour force participation gaps have narrowed over the last two decades (by 4.6 and 2.3 percentage points respectively), but they still remain large compared to the other regions.

B. Widening participation gaps in Eastern and Southern Asia

Southern Asia and Eastern Asia have witnessed a decrease in participation rates for both men and women in the last two decades. In both regions, women were more affected and hence gaps in participation rates have widened by 2.3 percentage points in Southern Asia and 0.6 percentage points in Eastern Asia.⁵

5. Some studies have attributed the low female participation rates observed in Southern Asia to conservative social attitudes toward women, which might prevail in the work place (Chaudhary and Verik, 2014).