





SDG 5

**Achieve gender
equality and
empower all women
and girls**

A. Introduction

Some progress on SDG 5 is evident in the Arab region, including in amending legislation to support gender equality and the empowerment of women and women's increased presence in political decision-making. Yet major challenges persist. The region is not on track to achieve this goal. The representation of women in leadership positions is well below global averages. Law enforcement and legal gaps and inconsistencies continue to be concerns. Violence against women occurs largely unabated in private and public spheres, and harmful practices remain a significant problem in some countries. Marked variations exist between urban and rural areas in access to sexual and reproductive health care and contraceptive use, largely hinging on women's level of education and socioeconomic status. Women still disproportionately bear the responsibility for unpaid care work, a factor in low female labour force participation and gender gaps in economic opportunities and outcomes.

What the data say

Data included in this section are from the *ESCWA Arab SDG Monitor*, unless otherwise indicated (accessed in December 2023).



A little over one third of women in the Arab region¹ will likely endure **intimate partner violence**, with the rate significantly increasing in some settings, including conflict-affected areas.²



Women held 18.2 per cent of **seats in national parliaments** in the region in 2022, close to a fivefold increase from 3.8 per cent in 2000 and a slight decrease from the 2015 level of 18.8 per cent. The share compares to 26.5 per cent globally.



20.4 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 years were **married or in a union before age 18** in the Arab region in 2020, slightly higher than the world average, reaching 33.5 per cent in Arab least developed countries.



Women are also underrepresented in local government, where they held 19.5 per cent of seats in 2023 compared to 35.5 per cent globally. Significant regional variation exists, with women constituting 31.7 per cent of elected members in local deliberative bodies in the least developed countries in 2023 compared to 25.5 per cent and 8.0 per cent in the Maghreb and Mashreq subregions, respectively, and 1.3 per cent in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.



Female genital mutilation is still practised in a number of Arab countries.³ The prevalence for girls and women aged 15 to 49 varies from 99.2 per cent and 90.1 per cent in Somalia and Djibouti, respectively, to 7.4 per cent in Iraq.⁴ Over the past 20 years, progress has been made in reducing the regional rate of female genital mutilation, from 71.0 per cent in 2001 to 54.3 per cent in 2021 for girls aged 15 to 19 years.⁵





The proportion of **women in managerial positions** is especially low. It increased from 9.1 per cent in 2000 to 12.1 in 2011 regionally, only to decrease again to 9.4 in 2013. It stood at a mere 12.4 per cent in 2021, a slight rise from 9.7 per cent in 2015, compared to a world average of 28.2 per cent.



A key factor influencing the low economic participation of women is **unpaid care work**, which is significantly unevenly distributed between women and men in the region. Women perform 80 to 90 per cent of all unpaid care tasks, spending on average 4.7 times more time on these than men.⁷



Increasing education levels among women in the region and amendments to labour laws have not effectively translated into greater **female economic participation**. The female labour force participation rate stood at 19.8 per cent in 2022, less than half the global average of 47.9 per cent. This compares to 70.3 per cent for men.⁶ The **female unemployment rate** stood at 19.9 per cent in 2022, three and a half times higher than the world average of 5.8 per cent.

Advancing gender equality has a catalytic effect on the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. It drives progress on all dimensions, including poverty and hunger eradication; greater prosperity and more inclusive growth; inclusive, just and peaceful societies; and protection of the environment and natural resources. If SDG 5 is not attained, all SDGs will be compromised.

Source: UN Women, 2018.

Data are insufficient to measure regional progress for most targets under SDG 5.

For an up-to-date view of SDG 5 data at the national and regional levels and an analysis of data availability, please refer to the [ESCWA Arab SDG Monitor](#).



On the road to 2030 – suggested policy approaches to accelerate progress on SDG 5

- Engaging constructively with religious institutions to rethink the relationships between religion and human rights, justice and equality, and support amendments to gender-sensitive personal status laws.
- Promoting greater coherence among different legal frameworks and regulatory systems to close existing loopholes, and ensuring consistency and greater enforcement in applying laws to advance gender equality and protect women's rights.
- Supporting shifts in the attitudes of public servants and legal personnel to push for the effective implementation of legislation that combats violence and discrimination against women and promotes their economic inclusion.
- Focusing on punitive and preventive measures in combatting sexual harassment and violence against women; prevention has proven to be effective and cost-efficient.
- Ensuring binding budgetary commitments to implement national frameworks and legislation on combatting violence against women, and more effectively using macroeconomic policies to promote economic opportunities for women and enhance their participation in the labour force.

- Developing adequate care-related legislation and extending benefits to both men and women to encourage the sharing of unpaid care duties and to enable women to reconcile career and care responsibilities; and considering the expansion of care benefits to the large share of women workers in the informal sector.
- Developing an evidence base and gender-disaggregated data comparable across countries and over time to support necessary reforms in laws, policies and institutions as well as the assessment of reforms and gender-responsive budgeting initiatives.

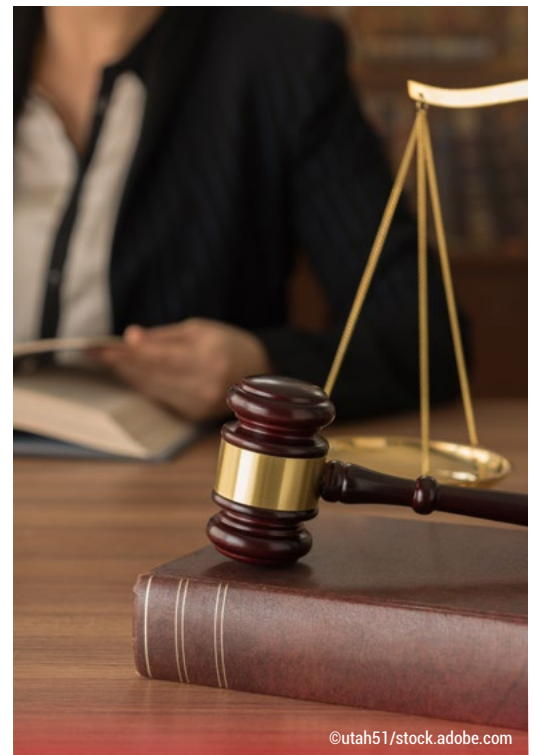
B. The policy landscape for SDG 5

In the Arab region, as is the case globally, gender inequality results from discriminatory, patriarchal social norms and practices. Patriarchal beliefs that privilege and empower men govern many aspects of life, with laws often reflecting and perpetuating discrimination and codifying inequality. While barriers to gender equality persist, several countries have advanced on eliminating gender discriminatory legal provisions. Substantial legislative progress has been made towards combatting violence against women and girls and enhancing female labour participation and gender equality in the workplace.

A proliferation of policies and legislative changes, however, has yet to have a catalytic or transformative impact on women’s equality and participation in the economy or politics.

- Policy changes related to gender equality and women’s empowerment and rights are often driven more by international frameworks than national priorities.
- By and large, the debate on gender issues is mostly confined to closed circles (national women’s machineries) that are already well aware and convinced of the concepts. There is a lack of regulatory frameworks requiring the integration of gender considerations into the work of different national institutions. Consequently, buy-in and the willingness to actively support and participate in change suffers.
- Policies and legislative amendments are not taking place as part of an agenda with a well-defined objective for what needs to be achieved. Governments have no clear vision for gender equality.
- A glaring policy gap exists in addressing indirect and entrenched discrimination against women. Legal standards, policies and rules viewed as gender neutral and that seem to treat everyone equally might end up being gender blind or less fair to women (for example, by not having a quota system or requiring employees to work full-time).

Changing the architecture of development funding and its conditions to support alignment with national gender equality strategies can improve progress on SDG 5 in the region. This will help ensure effectiveness in planning and the mainstreaming of national gender concerns in sectoral development projects and programmes.



- Gender equality continues to be considered a stand-alone issue. It has yet to be mainstreamed across policies (fiscal, monetary, sectoral employment, industrial, skills development, active labour market, entrepreneurship, loan disbursement, etc.).
- Work on social and behavioural changes is inadequate. This is needed alongside legislative changes to address negative social norms and practices that drive domestic as well as other forms of violence and discrimination against women, and to ensure progress on gender equality.⁸



There is little coherence and consistency in legislation for women's equality in the region. Personal status (family) laws are informed by man-made understandings of religious injunctions. If these laws are not changed, labour laws and penal codes aimed at promoting equal rights for women will fail to produce the desired outcomes. For instance, amending the Labour Law in **Saudi Arabia** to promote women's economic empowerment and the Penal Code in **Lebanon** to combat domestic violence without introducing commensurate changes to personal status laws will not be effective. Personal status laws maintain the guardianship system in Saudi Arabia and serve as the final reference for domestic violence in Lebanon. Moreover, progressive reforms to family law based on the principle of equality will not translate into empowerment and equality for women if they are not reflected in related legal frameworks. Changes to the Family Law in **Tunisia**, for example, did not boost economic participation for women given unaddressed inconsistencies with the Labour Code. More comprehensive and coherent legal reforms are imperative to accelerate the attainment of gender equality.

Source: ESCWA, 2023b.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women

Barriers to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment became more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated the disadvantaged position of many women. This was demonstrated on several fronts, including: a significant increase in reports of gender-based violence and a decrease in the provision of and access to related prevention, protection and response services; a disruption in the availability of reproductive and sexual health services; a further disproportionate increase in unpaid care responsibilities; and an adverse impact on the economic participation of women, especially those working in the informal sector and service sectors hit hardest by the pandemic, as well as small and medium entrepreneurs with limited access to technology and finance. The International Labour Organization estimates that the pandemic caused about 1.1 million women in the region to lose their jobs in 2020. This carries a high societal cost given already low economic participation levels among women before the crisis.

The response of Arab countries to the pandemic varied in size but not in composition. Marginal budgets were allocated for policies to protect against gender-based violence. Ninety per cent of the regional stimulus package aimed at safeguarding employment and economic activities, with a mere 6 per cent considered gender-sensitive.

Factors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, including confinement, economic difficulties and intensified patriarchal norms, accelerated the already growing trend of online violence against women, based on research in **Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Tunisia** and **Yemen**. It was found that 49 per cent of female Internet users in Arab countries felt unsafe and affirmed a link between online and offline violence against women. Among women subjected to online violence in 2020, 44 per cent said that it escalated offline. The lack of gender-specific legal frameworks for combatting online violence intensifies the impacts.

Sources: UNDP, 2021; UN Women, 2021; EuroMed Rights, 2021; UN Women, 2022.

C. Policy trends by theme

1. Gender-based violence

Discriminatory attitudes and beliefs that privilege men affect rates and forms of violence against women in the Arab region. Compounding factors include poverty, uneven education and instability. While considerable variation exists in the prevalence of different forms of violence, across the region and within countries,⁹ overall, intimate partner violence is the most common type.¹⁰

Countries have adopted more or less similar approaches to addressing violence against women.

◆ **Several countries have enacted laws on domestic violence or more generally addressing various forms of violence against women. They include Bahrain, Djibouti, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. Algeria has introduced amendments to the penal code to protect women from domestic violence.**

- ◆ Some enacted laws addressing domestic violence include prosecution, punishment, prevention, protection and reparation provisions.¹¹
- ◆ Most legislation does not clearly consider the issue of child custody when a protection order is in effect.
 - ◆ Law No. 58 of 2017 on the Elimination of Violence against Women in **Tunisia** exceptionally provides custody to women with a protection order and underlines the interest of the child regarding visitation schedules.
- ◆ Legislation tends to focus on only some kinds of violence committed by members of a household without addressing violence committed by previous partners.¹²
 - ◆ The 2015 amendment of the Penal Code in **Algeria** criminalizes various forms of violence against women, including violence committed by a current or former spouse, which is not common in the region.¹³

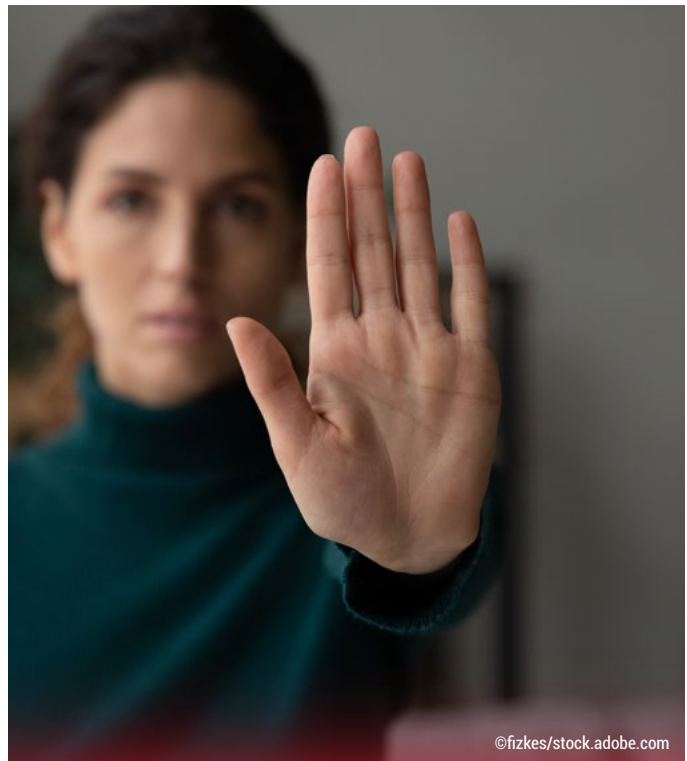
Weak enforcement and inconsistencies between different legal regimes (i.e., family and customary laws) interfere with the proper implementation of legislation aimed at ending domestic violence.

Provisions for implementation, including sustained or adequate funding and strong buy-in from governments, are often lacking. Inadequate training of relevant personnel, including judges, prosecutors and lawyers, also hinders implementation.

Limited awareness among gender-based violence survivors of available shelter services, the shortage of such shelters and their services, and prevailing sociocultural aspects play significant roles in restricting access to support.

Insufficient data on gender-based violence present another major challenge, even in countries with national strategies to stop violence. Improving data collection following globally agreed standards is critical to shape a better understanding of the nature and scale of the problem, and inform effective policies and solutions.

Sources: ESCWA and others, 2019a; ESCWA and others, 2019b; UNFPA, 2013; presentation on Data Collection on VAW in Order to Enhance Service Provision at a workshop, *Services to Protect Women Survivors of Violence in the Arab Region*, 26-29 July 2021.



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- ◆ Legislation tends to follow a definition of violence that is narrow in scope.¹⁴
 - ◆ In 2020, **Lebanon** amended its law on Protection from Domestic Violence to include economic and psychological violence in addition to physical and sexual violence.¹⁵
 - ◆ In Law No. 10 of 2019 on Protection from Domestic Violence, the **United Arab Emirates** defines violence as physical, emotional, sexual and economic.¹⁶
- ◆ Even though some domestic violence laws refer to sexual violence, they do not explicitly criminalize marital rape.
- ◆ Some legislation notes the need to establish specialized units with trained staff to support proper implementation.^{17,18}
- ◆ Only five countries with laws to protect against domestic violence have national plans or strategies on violence against women (**Bahrain, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia** and the **United Arab Emirates**) with a national mechanism mandated to oversee, monitor and review implementation.¹⁹
- ◆ Three other countries (**Egypt, Iraq** and the **State of Palestine**) have developed national strategies to address violence against women and established a national mechanism for implementation but do not have legislation on the issue.²⁰

A good practice that should be followed is to enact stand-alone laws on stopping domestic and other forms of gender-based violence that criminalize violence in all its forms (physical, sexual, psychological and economic); address prevention, protection and reparations; and acknowledge violence as a manifestation of unequal power relations between genders.

National strategies and action plans must complement domestic violence laws by setting attainable and well-financed goals, identifying partner organizations, specifying the responsibilities of relevant entities, and defining prevention and protection programmes to address gender-based violence.

Source: ESCWA and others, 2019a.

◆ Countries from different economic groupings have enacted and/or amended laws to protect women against sexual harassment in various spheres, including in public places and/or within the workplace.

- ◆ Thirteen Arab countries (**Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia** and the **United Arab Emirates**) have legislation that defines sexual harassment, with the act prohibited within criminal or labour laws or in stand-alone legislation.²²

Some legislation emphasizes increasing the penalty for and/or criminalizing sexual harassment.

- ◆ **Algeria** revised its Penal Code in 2015 to strengthen penalties for violence and sexual harassment in the workplace.²³
- ◆ **Lebanon** passed a law on Sexual Harassment and the Rehabilitation of Victims in 2020 that adopts criminal penalties for sexual harassment.²⁴ The law only focuses on punitive measures, paying no attention to preventive measures and labour law reforms.²⁵
- ◆ **Morocco** adopted Law No. 103.13 on Combatting Violence against Women in 2018, which amends some articles of the Penal Code, including to criminalize sexual harassment in the public sphere.²⁶
- ◆ **Saudi Arabia** passed a law in 2018 that criminalizes sexual harassment, with the definition of the act encompassing harassment inflicted by means of electronic communication.²⁷

Some laws specify penalties that do not apply to all perpetrators in the workplace.

- ◆ The Labour Code of **Jordan** includes provisions on fines against sexual harassment offenders that protect workers if they are assaulted by the employer but not by other employees.²⁸
- ◆ The Labour Code of **Libya** prohibits sexual harassment, which applies only to employees and not to employers; associated penalties are also not clear.²⁹

Few laws stress measures to prevent sexual harassment and address its structural causes, even though prevention is the most effective and cost-efficient way to stop violence against women.³⁰

- ◆ Law No. 103.13 of **Morocco** on Combatting Violence against Women defines preventive measures against sexual harassment and provides protection and support for survivors.³¹

Few laws offer civil remedies for victims of sexual harassment in the workplace.

- ◆ Law No. 205/2020 of **Lebanon** on Sexual Harassment and the Rehabilitation of Victims allows civil remedies,³² but does not specify the legal framework through which survivors can seek redress.³³



- ◆ In eight countries (**Kuwait, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen**), legislation does not specifically mention sexual harassment but penalties stipulated in criminal or labour laws provide some protection.
- ◆ Only three countries (**Egypt, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates**) have introduced legal provisions to criminalize cyberspace violence against women and girls.³⁴
- ◆ The majority of countries have introduced laws to criminalize rape by a person other than a spouse, with varying legal definitions.³⁵
 - ◆ Most countries regard rape as a crime based on a lack of freely given consent and require evidence of the use of physical force or penetration (**Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen**). Criminalizing rape based on the use of force is inconsistent with international standards, however.
 - ◆ Only five countries (**Iraq, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates**) do not require evidence of the use of physical force or penetration.
- ◆ Many countries have incorporated rape provisions in penal code sections dealing with family honour or morality offences, with trial verdicts at times emphasizing public morality and the preservation of family integrity instead of women's right to security and physical integrity.^{36,37}

Following a more integrated and comprehensive legislative approach to sexual harassment involves addressing the different dimensions of the issue, including protection and prevention, in different areas of law, related to labour, occupational safety and health, as well as non-discrimination and crimes, among others. It can help close persistent legislative gaps and guide effective steps to end and protect against sexual harassment.

Meaningful action requires institutional capacity-building for law enforcement, a greater understanding of different forms of violence and the sensitive treatment of victims to increase access to justice.

Public awareness-raising campaigns are important to shift norms, attitudes and behaviours; inform women of their rights; and encourage victims of sexual harassment to seek redress. Prevention policies and trainings in the workplace are also important.

Gender-based violence must be approached as a human rights violation. The lack of consent and not the use of force should be the defining characteristic of the crime of rape.

Sources: ILO, 2020; OHCHR, 2023; see the CEDAW Committee's [General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19](#) (2017), CEDAW/C/GC/35.

◆ **Human trafficking has been the subject of new and reformed laws in various countries.**

- ◆ Most countries have either adopted comprehensive laws with punitive, protective and preventive measures to combat trafficking or have penal measures to address this crime.
 - ◆ **Algeria, Libya, the State of Palestine, Somalia and Yemen** criminalize some forms of trafficking, such as human trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation.³⁸
 - ◆ **Djibouti,**³⁹ **Iraq,**⁴⁰ **Jordan**⁴¹ and **Tunisia**⁴² have taken punitive measures against offenders and/or protective measures in the form of legal assistance and the provision of shelters, among others, to support victims.⁴³
 - ◆ The **United Arab Emirates** approved amendments to its law on combating human trafficking crimes, which were introduced to protect victims from punishment for offences committed as a consequence of being trafficked.⁴⁴
- ◆ Migrant domestic workers are not protected under labour laws in most countries in the region, making them more vulnerable to trafficking.⁴⁵ For more on labour migration, see the chapter on SDG 10.

The number of trafficking cases investigated and prosecuted and resulting in convictions is relatively small compared to the extent of trafficking. This underlines the need for greater enforcement of laws.

More consideration should be given to addressing the vulnerability of migrant workers to trafficking, including by:

- Strengthening laws and policies that enhance access to travel documents as well as processes regulating employment for migrants to reduce their dependency on their employer/sponsor.
- Amending labour laws to cover and better protect domestic workers.

Sources: ILO, 2017; Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, 2022; League of Arab States, UNODC and AMAN, 2014.



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◆ **Mostly middle-income countries have taken steps to close legislative loopholes to stop the harmful practice of child marriage.**⁴⁶

- ◆ Most countries in the region have set 18 years as the legal age for marriage while allowing legal exceptions. Marriage at a younger age is often permitted at the discretion of judges or guardians, provided that a girl has reached puberty.⁴⁷ Enforcement and implementation vary widely.⁴⁸
- ◆ Some countries, including **Jordan**,⁴⁹ **Lebanon**⁵⁰ and **Tunisia**,⁵¹ have introduced changes to their penal codes so that aggressors can no longer escape punishment by marrying their victims.
- ◆ Prior to the ongoing conflict in the **Syrian Arab Republic**, child marriage was declining in the region at a faster rate than in other regions of the world. The eruption of additional conflicts in several Arab countries has caused this trend to reverse. In particular, child marriage has increased in **Yemen** and among Syrian refugees in **Iraq**, **Jordan**, **Lebanon** and **Türkiye**.⁵²

Ending child marriage requires coherent legislation that recognizes 18 years as the minimum age of marriage under any marriage law (civil or religious). It should enact safeguards against loopholes that allow for parental or judicial consent and exoneration by marriage.

While all countries in the region have acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they have not fully harmonized national laws on child marriage with the Convention.

Sources: UNFPA and UNICEF, 2020; ESCWA and others, 2022.

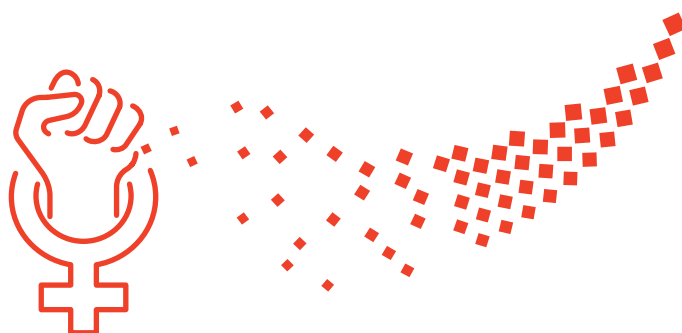


◆ **Some countries in which female genital mutilation is common have passed or amended legislation to criminalize it, toughen penalties against perpetrators and/or eliminate medicalization of the practice.**

- ◆ The medicalization of female genital mutilation has been intensifying in recent years, especially in **Egypt** and the **Sudan**.⁵³
- ◆ Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, **Egypt**, **Mauritania**, **Oman** and the **Sudan** have taken measures to criminalize female genital mutilation.
 - ◆ **Egypt** introduced amendments to the Penal Code criminalizing female genital mutilation in 2016 and deleted all references to medicalization.⁵⁴
 - ◆ **Mauritania** passed the 2017 Law on Reproductive Health, which imposes a ban on female genital mutilation and defines penalties for perpetrators.⁵⁵
 - ◆ The **Sudan** introduced legal provisions to criminalize female genital mutilation in 2020 and adopted a roadmap to enforce it in 2021.⁵⁶
 - ◆ The executive regulations for the Child Law issued by **Oman** in 2019 consider female genital mutilation a traditional practice harmful to the health of children and introduce prison penalties for perpetrators.⁵⁷
- ◆ Though female genital mutilation is not a common practice in **Tunisia**, the country amended its criminal code provisions in 2017 to prohibit it.⁵⁸

Despite the criminalization of female genital mutilation in some countries, enforcement presents a significant challenge. Girls and young women continue to die from complications related to the practice.

Source: ESCWA and others, 2019a.



Sexual and reproductive health and rights in the region

Several factors have hindered gains in sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in the Arab region over the past decade. These include prevailing discriminatory social norms against women and girls, the cultural sensitivity of the topic, and inadequate resources and competing priorities.

The general approach to sexual and reproductive health is not rights-based, despite country efforts to comply with relevant global instruments. Legal frameworks largely do not support well-informed individual choices. Barriers are often present in laws and policies related to contraception, child marriage and female genital mutilation. For instance, unmarried women and adolescent girls may face obstacles to contraception and family planning related to marital status or requirements for third-party authorization, which can leave them with unmet needs for services. Generally, there is a reluctance to teach young people about sexuality due to cultural sensitivities, leading many to resort to inaccurate sources of information.

Access to and the quality of sexual and reproductive health care vary by country, social class, displacement or marital status, and geographic area (urban or rural). Sexual and reproductive health services are not fully integrated in primary health care. Challenging prevailing social norms and practices will be key to meeting the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls along with following a rights-based approach.

Tunisia has recently taken steps to strengthen sexual and reproductive autonomy and promote greater access to sexual and reproductive health services without discrimination through its National Plan on Sexual and Reproductive Health (2021-2030). The plan aims to strengthen autonomy and ensure the enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all without discrimination throughout the life cycle. Adolescents are mentioned in particular in relation to access to comprehensive sexuality education. The plan also supports the engagement of men and boys on gender equality issues and the promotion of positive masculinities. It seeks to sensitize them on sexual and reproductive health issues, in particular to prevent gender-based violence. For more on sexual and reproductive health, see the chapter on SDG 3.

Sources: UNICEF and others, 2021; UNFPA and AUB, 2022; Tunisia's [Plan National de Santé Sexuelle et Reproductive \(2021-2030\)](#).

2. Women's economic participation

Despite increasing levels of education among Arab women and the commitment of most countries to increase the share of women in the labour force, the region has the world's lowest rate of women's economic participation. Driven by patriarchal norms and stereotypes, challenges to women in joining and staying in the labour force abound. They include harassment in the workplace, unequal distribution of care responsibilities, a lack of equal opportunity, and restrictions on labour and other rights that affect women's mobility.

Macroeconomic policies are often considered gender neutral even as they impact men and women differently.⁵⁹ The region has an urgent need for gender-responsive macroeconomic policies that help rectify gender inequalities and promote economic opportunities for women, ultimately fostering inclusive growth and development. This encompasses

prioritizing decent work in the formal and informal sectors (for more on decent employment, see the chapter on SDG 8); adequate social protection throughout the life cycle (see the chapter on SDG 1); investment in social infrastructure to address care work deficits; transportation services that reach the working poor (see the chapter on SDG 11); the expansion of fiscal space through a tax system that redresses gender inequality and provides adequate public resources; and gender-sensitive access to finance that responds to women's specific needs.⁶⁰

Trends in policies that Arab countries are using to support women's economic participation are highlighted below.



◆ **Some countries at all income levels have introduced care-related labour market and social protection laws that address discrimination against women in employment and facilitate their participation in the labour force.** Relatively recent care-related reforms to promote gender equality in the workplace include:

- ◆ Maternity-related benefits and job protection reforms that help women to balance motherhood and professional life, such as measures to prohibit the dismissal of pregnant workers, support maternity leave entitlements, require the government to cover maternity leave benefits or provide childcare subsidies or paid nursing breaks.
 - ◆ **Saudi Arabia** and the **United Arab Emirates** introduced legislation that prohibits the dismissal of pregnant workers.^{61,62}
 - ◆ **Iraq** increased the duration of paid maternity leave to at least 14 weeks following international standards,^{63,64} and the **United Arab Emirates** adjusted the labour law to increase the maternity leave entitlement from 45 to 60 days.
 - ◆ **Iraq** granted nursing mothers a one-hour nursing break per day that counts as a working hour.⁶⁵
 - ◆ **Bahrain** now accounts for childcare-related absences in calculating pension benefits.⁶⁶
 - ◆ **Jordan** has established subsidies for childcare, contributing to the cost of nurseries for working mothers through its maternity fund.⁶⁷
- ◆ Legislation addressing paternity leave that underlines the role of men in childcare.⁶⁸
 - ◆ **Jordan** and the **United Arab Emirates** introduced legislation on paid paternity leave for three and five days, respectively.⁶⁹
 - ◆ **Saudi Arabia** amended existing legislation to increase paternity leave from one to three days.
 - ◆ **Morocco** increased paid paternity leave from 3 to 15 days for public sector employees.⁷⁰
- ◆ Work-family balance measures to support women to stay in the workforce.
 - ◆ **Jordan** established a definition and regulation of flexible work covering men and women workers.⁷¹

The enforcement of laws supporting women in the workplace is inconsistent, and women often lack a practical recourse for violations.

Some issues arise around transferring the legal obligation to employers to pay for maternity leave, which is the case in most Arab countries. This may discourage employers from employing, retaining or promoting women of childbearing age, thus disadvantaging their employment prospects. Maternity schemes anchored in social security systems can have more positive outcomes for women.

Provisions on paternity leave, although inadequate in covering a limited number of days, represent an initial step towards the greater involvement of men in childcare responsibilities. In this sense, they can help fight gender stereotypes.

Across the region, the scope of care-related legislation is limited. It excludes many workers, including part-time, informal and migrant domestic workers.

Efforts to reform legislation pertaining to care are dispersed. They could benefit from a more holistic, coordinated approach.

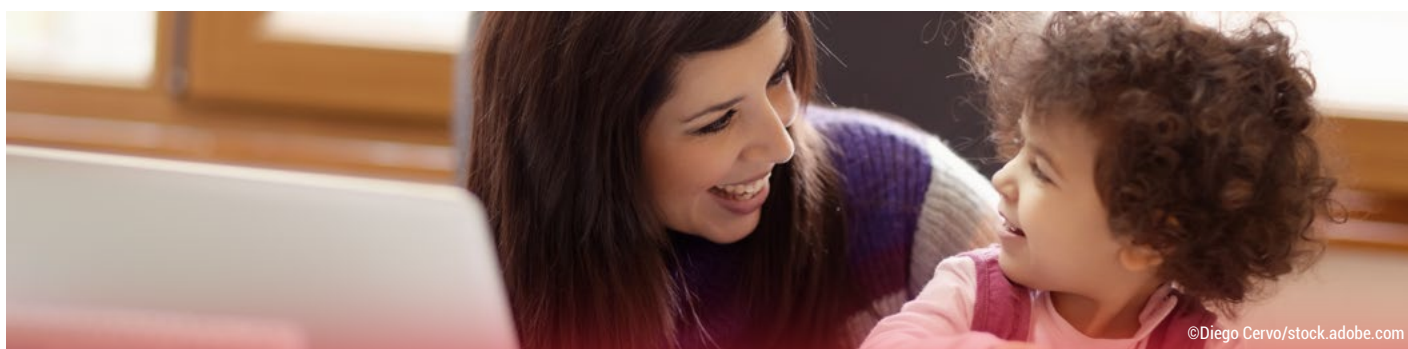
Sources: ESCWA and others, 2019a; ESCWA, n.d.

◆ **Several Arab countries have equalized the retirement age for women and men, yet some countries have kept the option for early retirement for women. In six countries (Iraq, Jordan, Qatar, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates), national legislation still stipulates a lower retirement age for women.**^{72,73}

The early exclusion of women from the workforce:

- Limits their opportunities for promotion and leadership positions.
- Reduces their pensions, considering a more limited number of years in employment. This effectively translates into large income inequalities over their lifetimes and consequences such as greater risks of poverty in old age.

Source: ESCWA and others, 2019a.



◆ Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, only a few countries, mostly Gulf Cooperation Council countries, have amended discriminatory labour laws limiting the types of employment available to women. Restricted jobs are considered strenuous or hazardous or involve night work.

- ◆ **Bahrain** and the **United Arab Emirates** removed legal restrictions on the employment of women in arduous/dangerous jobs and their ability to work at night.^{74,75} The 2023 amendments to the Labour Law of Jordan cancelled restrictions on women's work.⁷⁶
- ◆ **Saudi Arabia** removed similar restrictions but left it to the discretion of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development to determine which jobs are considered dangerous or harmful to women as well as appropriate working hours, in line with the country's commitments under international conventions.⁷⁷

Work restrictions that strictly apply to women go against women's right to choose their employment, as stipulated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. International standards require labour laws to be gender neutral and safeguard occupational health and safety and the free choice of work for all, regardless of sex.

Source: ESCWA and others, 2019a.

◆ Countries at different income levels have taken legal steps mandating equal pay for men and women for work of equal value.⁷⁸

- ◆ Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, four Arab countries have introduced legal provisions mandating equal pay for work of equal value: **Bahrain** (2022), **Iraq** (2017), **Jordan** (2020) and the **United Arab Emirates** (2021).⁷⁹ Eight countries did so prior to 2015.⁸⁰
- ◆ Some countries have legislation on equal pay that is narrow in scope, applying equal pay for the same type of work.⁸¹

The enforcement of equal pay legislation could be strengthened by using "pay transparency"^a policy instruments. These aim to improve accessibility to pay information and address possible information asymmetries to help bridge the gender pay gap.

Source: ILO, 2022.

^a Pay transparency tools include requiring employers to produce pay disclosure reports or equal pay audits, to engage with employee representatives on the implementation of pay transparency measures, and to use digital tools to enhance monitoring and reporting.

◆ A handful of Arab countries have taken legislative action to bar discrimination in access to credit based on gender.

- ◆ Policies and procedures, including rules on access to credit, often institutionalize discriminatory practices and cultural norms, restricting women's access to finance.⁸²
- ◆ Between 2020 and 2022, **Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia** and the **United Arab Emirates** have encouraged women's entrepreneurship by prohibiting gender-based discrimination in financial services and facilitating women's access to credit.^{83,84}

Access to land and property ownership, generally acquired by Arab women through inheritance or marriage, impacts women's entrepreneurship and chances to obtain credit.

Gender-unequal inheritance laws, unfavourable marital property laws and the lack of protection for women against disinheritance undermine women's decision-making power and economic independence, and their ability to secure financing to start, maintain or scale up a business, or to invest in high-performing sectors.

Legislation that gives women equal property rights is key for their social and economic empowerment.

Sources: ESCWA, 2023a; ESCWA and others, 2019a.

◆ A few countries have introduced legislative amendments to enhance the mobility of women.

- ◆ **Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, the Syrian Arab Republic** and the **United Arab Emirates** have addressed issues pertaining to male guardianship over women,⁸⁵ enacting laws and measures that affect the mobility of women and power dynamics within households.⁸⁶ Examples include removing restrictions on women applying for passports, travelling abroad, leaving the house or getting a job without a guardian's consent.
 - ◆ **Iraq, Jordan, Oman** and the **United Arab Emirates** have removed restrictions on women applying for passports without a guardian's consent.
 - ◆ The **United Arab Emirates** ended restrictions on women travelling abroad without a guardian's consent as well as on women getting a job without their husband's permission. It also erased the legal obligation for women to obey husbands.
 - ◆ The **Syrian Arab Republic** and the **United Arab Emirates** stopped restrictions on women leaving home without their husband's permission.
 - ◆ **Bahrain** and the **United Arab Emirates** formally allow women to head households.

- ◆ After introducing a number of legal amendments, removing restrictions on women travelling and applying for passports without the consent of a guardian, and ending their obligation to obey their husbands and not to leave home without permission, **Saudi Arabia** in 2022 again enacted legislation limiting women's right to travel and mandating that they obey their husbands.⁸⁷

Besides impeding the empowerment of women within the family and marriage, guardianship considerations reduce women's freedom of movement and ability to compete in the labour market, and could dissuade employers from recruiting or promoting women workers.

Source: ESCWA and others, 2019a.



Legislative efforts by Saudi Arabia to support the participation of women in the labour force

Driven by its Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia introduced reforms to its labour law to provide a solid framework for promoting the economic empowerment of women. These include provisions explicitly prohibiting discrimination against women in remuneration, guaranteeing the right to equal pay for work of equal value, and emphasizing equality in the right to work. Dismissal for pregnancy or illness resulting from pregnancy or childbirth is prohibited, and women are guaranteed a 10-week paid maternity leave, albeit covered by the employer. Reforms to the social insurance system equalized the retirement age for women and men. Legislation on combating sexual harassment requires all entities to adopt measures to prevent harassment in workplaces and allows civil remedies.

The reforms represent a step in the right direction but remain incomplete in light of the persistence of the guardianship system. This hampers the effectiveness and even counters the impact of the changes being made.

Source: ESCWA, 2023b.

D. Policies to leave no one behind: intersectionality and gender equality

Women and girls across the Arab region face structural barriers that influence all aspects of their lives. Gender intersects with other factors, including race, ethnicity, class, age, disability and location, compounding inequality. Conflict and instability further worsen the situation. The interplay of inequalities puts some groups of women at a higher risk of being left behind, making it more challenging to promote gender equality and achieve the SDGs. It is important to consider the different layers of inequality that women face in diverse contexts. This can improve the focus and effectiveness of development efforts to reduce exclusion and ensure that gender equality measures have wide-reaching impacts.⁸⁸

Many Arab governments have introduced policies or initiatives that target more vulnerable groups of women. Rarely, however, are these designed to respond to intersecting inequalities.

Table 5.1
Examples of policies to leave no one behind

	<p>Women from poorer rural areas largely do not have access to social protection and quality health care, with a larger proportion working in agriculture compared to men. They have limited access to land and other agricultural assets, and lack income security as they tend to work in family businesses or as daily wage workers on large farms.^a Limited access to land represents one of the biggest challenges for women in areas where most economic activity depends on it.^b</p>	<p>In 2019, Morocco adopted Law No. 62.17 on the administrative supervision of communities living on collective land and the management of their property, granting women equal access to this type of land.^c This was facilitated by a grass-roots women's movement that influenced the national debate on the issue and changed community power dynamics.^d</p>
	<p>Women and girls with disabilities are less likely to have access to education, including TVET, as well as employment and health care. This affects their life prospects. Further, their reproductive needs are often overlooked, and non-mainstream health services, such as rehabilitation therapy and the provision of assistive devices, are not consistently provided and covered. Challenges vary within countries and communities. In emergency settings, adolescent girls with disabilities are at a heightened risk of sexual abuse and exploitation.^e</p>	<p>Law No. 20 of 2017 on the Rights of Persons with Disability in Jordan stipulates that the Ministry of Health, the Food and Drug Administration and other relevant authorities must guarantee physical and content accessibility to ensure that women with disabilities fully benefit from reproductive health programmes and services. It also introduces, among others, a quota system that requires institutions, depending on their size, to reserve a certain percentage of job vacancies for persons with disabilities. Article 4.f. underlines equality in rights and duties between women and men with disabilities.^f</p>
	<p>Women in the informal economy are often not covered by labour laws and work in poor conditions with low pay. They are usually vulnerable to abuse and do not benefit from social protection schemes, including pensions, health coverage and paid leave. Without social benefits, women are prone to poverty in old age.^g</p>	<p>With women representing 36 per cent of micro-entrepreneurs,^{h,i} Morocco passed Law No. 114.13 of 2015 on the Status of Auto-entrepreneurs to encourage the formalization of micro-entrepreneurial businesses. Among other provisions, it provides for social and medical coverage.^j</p>
	<p>Migrant women workers are mostly employed in industry, agriculture or as domestic workers.^k They are often not protected by labour laws, facing barriers in accessing protective and other services, and are unaware of their rights, making them vulnerable to trafficking.^l Abused female migrant domestic workers who flee their employers^m and other women migrant workers in irregular situations face particularly high risks of trafficking.</p>	<p>Domestic workers are covered under Article 3 of the Labour Law in Iraq. Protection is provided through provisions barring discrimination and forced labour.ⁿ</p> <p>The open-door migration policy followed by Morocco, particularly the 2017 mass regularization of more than 50,000 irregular migrants, including all irregular women migrants, is a notable step towards protecting women migrants' rights and halting the trafficking of women and girls.^o</p>

Table 5.1**Examples of policies to leave no one behind**

Refugee women and girls may be socially isolated, with legal limitations on their ability to work and no available information or assistance to help them join the labour market.^p When they do, they work in the informal sector as daily wage earners.^q Refugee and internally displaced women and girls who lack civil documentation face a higher risk of trafficking and exploitation.^r

In **Egypt**, refugees are entitled to work under the Labour Law. The Egypt Response Plans^s recognized the special situation of refugee women by maintaining a focus, among others, on improving their sustainable livelihoods and self-reliance through skills development and self or wage employment.^t

^a OECD, 2020.

^b OECD, ILO and CAWTAR, 2020.

^c See [Morocco, Voluntary National Review 2020](#).

^d OECD, ILO and CAWTAR, 2020.

^e UNICEF and others, 2021.

^f [Jordanian Law No. \(20\) of 2017 on the Rights of Persons with Disability](#).

^g See UN Women on "[Women in Informal Economy](#)", accessed on 5 April 2023.

^h See the [Auto-entrepreneur](#) website, accessed on 31 July 2023.

ⁱ OECD, 2020.

^j [Moroccan Law No.114.13 of 19 February 2015 on the Status of Auto-entrepreneurs](#).

^k ESCWA, 2020.

^l ESCWA and others, 2019a.

^m UNICEF and others, 2021.

ⁿ ESCWA and others, 2018 (Profile on Iraq).

^o OHCHR, 2018.

^p See the ILO on "[Gender Equality in the Arab States](#)", accessed on 5 April 2023.

^q OECD, 2020.

^r UNICEF and others, 2021.

^s OECD, 2020.

^t UNHCR, 2020.



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Nationality laws, infringements on human rights and increased risks of vulnerability

Arab nationality laws often reflect and perpetuate discriminatory gender norms. Reforms have stalled over more than a decade, with the majority of countries either denying women the right to confer nationality to their children and spouses or limiting this right. This results in significant human rights violations for women and their families. It violates international laws ratified by countries and has far-reaching consequences for all aspects of family life.

Without citizenship, children and foreign spouses may be subject to a range of restrictions in their employment and education opportunities as well as in their ability to open bank accounts and own or inherit property. This increases their vulnerability, potentially resulting in intergenerational poverty. The risk of statelessness escalates. Stateless women and girls are more likely to be trafficked, while stateless girls are more threatened by child, early and forced marriage.

The intersection of gender discrimination in nationality laws and informal child marriage, a regional challenge on the rise in the wake of massive displacement, increases the chance that children born of such unions will lack the documentation needed to secure citizenship. This risk is also high for children born to low-skilled migrant women workers, who may face daunting legal and practical challenges in registering births and conferring their nationality.

To date, only seven Arab countries grant women the right to pass their nationality to their children (**Algeria, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen**). The Constitution in **Iraq** prescribes equality in passing nationality but the Nationality Law only upholds this right for women when children are born inside the country. The Interim Constitution in **Somalia** stipulates equality in granting nationality but the Citizenship Law was not updated to reflect this. The Interim Constitution in the **Sudan** also guarantees equality in granting nationality but this was not reflected in the Nationality Law. **Algeria** guarantees equal rights for women to pass their nationality to their foreign husbands.

Sources: ESCWA and others, 2018; ESCWA and others, 2022; UNHCR, 2023; UNICEF and others, 2021; ESCWA and others, 2021.

E. The financing landscape

Adequate and well-targeted allocations in national budgets to eliminate gender discrimination and promote equality are fundamental for progress in achieving SDG 5.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, available information shows that such allocations are generally inadequate in Arab countries.

Existing budgetary allocations tend to cluster mainly around ending violence against women:⁹⁰

- Government entities in six Arab countries (**Bahrain, Iraq, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia**) have made budgetary pledges to implement existing legislation on combatting violence against women. These are not binding, however.
- Only the **United Arab Emirates** makes binding budgetary commitments to ending violence against women, allocating funds to relevant plans and programmes.

- There are no budgetary pledges to enforce legislation on ending violence against women in other countries.

Only **Iraq** and the **United Arab Emirates** have developed a national strategy or plan of action on sexual and reproductive health with sufficient budgetary, human and administrative resources allocated for implementation. Eleven other countries⁹¹ have a national strategy or plan of action but have not allocated resources for implementation.⁹²

Gender-responsive budgeting helps to prioritize gender equality in national policies. It examines public budget allocations, spending and taxation using a gender perspective, and consequently supports budgetary reallocations to better promote gender equality and the advancement of women.⁹³ Some aspects that prevent women from entering the job market and that could

be addressed through fiscal policy include: inadequate access to quality education (see the chapter on SDG 4), insufficient provisions for maternity and parental care leave, the lack of mobility and gaps in equal pay for equal work.⁹⁴

Gender-responsive budgeting initiatives vary considerably between countries, and are generally fragmented.^{95,96} They involve governments more than other actors,⁹⁷ and have mostly focused on enhancing access to education and health and increasing female labour force

participation. There is room for more effective use of fiscal policies for women empowerment, such as to address discriminatory tax systems. Barriers to gender-responsive budgeting include a lack of transparency in budgetary processes, budget deficits and limited fiscal space, and inadequate disaggregated data and statistical capacities.⁹⁸ No Arab country has yet developed a comprehensive framework for gender-responsive budgeting but most have started applying some gender-budgeting tools, as shown in the table 5.2.⁹⁹

Table 5.2
Status of gender-responsive budgeting tools in selected Arab countries

Gender-responsive budgeting tools	Algeria	Egypt	Iraq	Lebanon	Morocco	State of Palestine	Tunisia
Gender budgeting framework ^a			X				X
Gender provisions in public finance and budget laws		X					
Gender budgeting statement			X		X		X
Gender impact assessments	X						
Budget circular and statements include instructions related to gender budgeting							
Performance indicators related to gender equality goals					X	X	
Fiscal data disaggregated by gender		X			X		
Budget classification with a gender perspective		X					
Ex-post gender impact assessments of budget expenditures			X				
Audit of the budget covers gender aspects							

Source: METAC, 2019, p. 5.

Note: The table is based on answers provided to a country questionnaire developed by the Fiscal Affairs Department of the International Monetary Fund and distributed prior to a workshop on gender-responsive budgeting in Amman, 12-14 February 2019.

^a "Iraq and Tunisia's answers [...] may be overstated [...] likely due to different interpretations of [the] gender budgeting framework across countries".

Country-specific approaches that take into consideration how public spending is managed are best suited to advance the use of gender-responsive budgeting. These approaches should be developed with a long-term perspective while accounting for existing

domestic constraints. Capacity-building opportunities should be provided for all sectoral ministries responsible for the design and implementation of development policies and programmes and the mainstreaming of gender.¹⁰⁰

Gender-budgeting in Morocco

Work on gender-budgeting in Morocco started in 2002 and has since advanced gradually. In 2006, the Ministry of Finance and Privatization (now Ministry of Economy and Finance) issued its first Gender Report with assessments of four ministries and information on existing gender gaps and future performance goals. The Gender Report has evolved over time to cover 31 public entities responsible for 80 per cent of the national budget.

Morocco has linked its gender budget work to its national development strategy. The Plan for Equality for 2012-2016 included 143 measures that support gender equality in education, health and the labour market. Amendments to legislation were introduced to remove discriminatory provisions and promote gender equality.

In 2014, an Organic Finance Law was approved requiring the consideration of gender equality in outlining performance objectives, results and indicators in all sector budgets. It mandates the inclusion of the Gender Report in the yearly Finance Bill. Efforts to collect sex-disaggregated data have sought to improve understanding of the development needs of women and men.

Source: IMF, 2016.





F. Regional dimensions

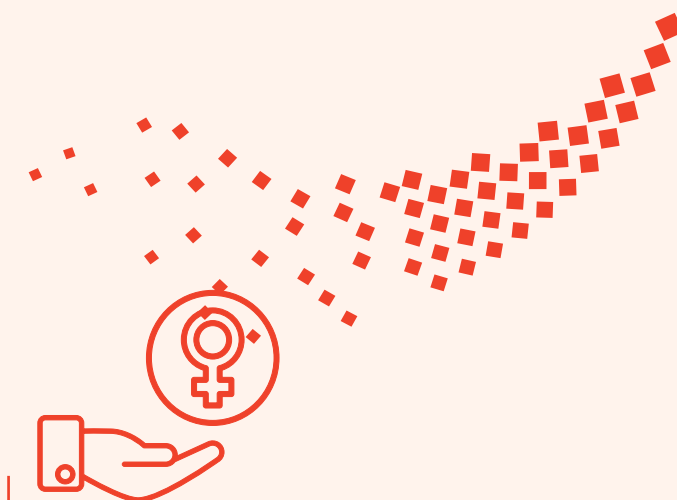
- Promoting legislative cooperation at the regional level:** Established in 2014, the Coalition of Women Parliamentarians from Arab Countries to Combat Violence Against Women is a network that brings together women parliamentarians from 13 Arab countries.¹⁰¹ They share experiences and good practices on ending violence and discrimination against women and girls, and join forces to advocate legislative changes.

Through the collaboration with national parliaments and other governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in five Arab countries in 2017, progress was made in three countries on removing legal provisions that allowed rapists to avoid prosecution by marrying their victims.¹⁰² The Coalition also developed the first regional framework to eliminate violence against women. The Regional Declaration to Combat Violence against Women and Girls was endorsed by the League of Arab States in December 2022.¹⁰³ Regional frameworks and their monitoring mechanisms help incorporate international standards into national legislation.¹⁰⁴

Devising and endorsing a regional roadmap for addressing common shortcomings in legal systems on gender equality could help advance the elimination of gender-based violence. Such a roadmap should bolster coherent implementation of laws on violence against women as well as the mainstreaming of gender in all laws, policies and strategies to help ensure consistency and connect theory and practice.¹⁰⁵

- Strengthening regional cooperation on comparable data collection on violence against women:** Data are key in informing legislation, policies and programmes to effectively address violence against women. Currently, data are not comparable at the regional level. Data gaps in countries are substantial.¹⁰⁶ Greater cooperation to support the production of comparable data following globally agreed methodologies and ethical standards and to further develop data collection systems and tools would be beneficial, including through South-South cooperation.

- Providing a platform for long-term constructive engagement and partnership with prominent religious institutions in the region to inform changes in personal status laws and help activate the realization of State human rights obligations:** This is an important entry point for legislative reform, given that personal status laws are based on religion and religious interpretations, and considering existing power alliances and interests between institutionalized religious structures and political structures. It could facilitate sustained interactions among religious authorities, decision-makers, and development and human rights actors, notably national women's movements, following an egalitarian religious discourse emphasizing progressive religious interpretations. This process could help support advances towards equality and justice for women by closing loopholes in legislation and ensuring proper enforcement of laws and policies to end violence against women and promote economic empowerment.



Endnotes

1. The regional average does not include the Comoros and Mauritania.
2. UNICEF and others, 2021.
3. Countries where the practice is prevalent include Djibouti, Egypt, the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen (UNICEF and others, 2021).
4. The figure for Somalia is for 2020; for Djibouti, it is for 2019; and for Iraq, it is for 2018 (ESCWA Arab SDG Monitor, accessed on 9 January 2024).
5. The regional average includes countries for which data are available (ESCWA Arab SDG Monitor, accessed on 9 January 2024).
6. See the ILOSTAT database (accessed on 9 January 2024).
7. ESCWA, 2022.
8. ESCWA and others, 2019a.
9. UNICEF and others, 2021.
10. United Nations, 2017.
11. ESCWA and others, 2019a.
12. Ibid.
13. UN Women's Global Database on Violence against Women, National Profile for Algeria, accessed on 17 January 2023.
14. ESCWA and others, 2019a.
15. Law No. 204 Amending Law No. 293/2014 of 7/5/2014 on the Protection of Women and Other Family Members from Domestic Violence, issued on 30 December 2020, Official Gazette, Number 1 of 07/01/2021.
16. ESCWA and others, 2022 (Profile on the United Arab Emirates).
17. ESCWA and others, 2019a.
18. Countries with such legislation include Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia.
19. ESCWA and others, 2022.
20. See the Gender Justice and the Law Portal, "detailed information" section, accessed on 10 May 2023. This section of the portal does not contain information on Algeria, the Comoros, Djibouti, Libya and Mauritania.
21. See the NORMLEX Information System on International Labour Standards, Observation (CEACR) – adopted 2012, published 102nd ILC session (2013).
22. ESCWA and others, 2018 (Profiles on Djibouti and Libya); ESCWA and others, 2022.
23. See Algeria, Voluntary National Review 2019.
24. See the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law website, "Reforms" section, accessed on 27 December 2022.
25. ESCWA and others, 2022 (Profile on Lebanon).
26. ESCWA and others, 2022 (Profile on Morocco).
27. ESCWA and others, 2022 (Profile on Saudi Arabia).
28. ESCWA and others, 2022 (Profile on Jordan).
29. ESCWA and others, 2018 (Profile on Libya).
30. UN Women, n.d.
31. ESCWA and others, 2022 (Profile on Morocco).
32. See the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law website, "Reforms" section, accessed on 27 December 2022.
33. ESCWA and others, 2022 (Profile on Lebanon).
34. See the Gender Justice and the Law Portal, "detailed information" section, accessed on 13 June 2023.
35. Ibid.
36. ESCWA and others, 2019a.
37. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women stipulates that "sexual assault, including rape, [be] characterized as a crime against the right to personal security and physical, sexual and psychological integrity". See the CEDAW Committee's General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19 (2017), CEDAW/C/GC/35, p. 12.
38. ESCWA and others, 2018 (Profiles on Algeria and Libya); ESCWA and others, 2022.
39. ESCWA and others, 2018 (Profile on Djibouti).
40. ESCWA and IOM, 2017.
41. See UN Women's Global Database on Violence against Women, National Profile for Jordan, accessed on 17 January 2023.
42. ESCWA and IOM, 2017.
43. Other countries that have adopted comprehensive anti-trafficking laws that provide punitive, protective and preventive measures are: Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and United Arab Emirates.
44. ESCWA and IOM, 2017.
45. UNICEF and others, 2021.
46. The harmful practice of child marriage disproportionately affects women and girls, with its prevalence increasing in times of conflict and displacement.
47. ESCWA and others, 2019a.

48. UNICEF, 2017.
49. See [Jordan, First Voluntary National Review 2017](#).
50. See [Lebanon, Voluntary National Review 2018](#).
51. See [Tunisia, Voluntary National Review 2019](#).
52. UNICEF, 2021.
53. See UNFPA's website page on "[Female Genital Mutilation](#)".
54. See [Egypt, Third Voluntary National Review 2021](#); UNFPA, 2018.
55. See [Mauritania, Voluntary National Review 2019](#); UNFPA and UNICEF, 2017.
56. UNICEF, 2020.
57. ESCWA and others, 2022 (Profile on Oman).
58. ESCWA and others, 2022 (Profile on Tunisia).
59. UN Women, 2015.
60. UN Women, 2017.
61. See the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law website, "[Reforms](#)" section, accessed on 27 December 2022.
62. The labour law prohibits employers from firing women on the grounds of pregnancy or maternity leave in 18 Arab countries (ESCWA, 2023b).
63. Five Arab countries (Djibouti, Iraq, Libya, Morocco and Somalia) guarantee maternity leave according to international standards (ESCWA and others, 2018 (Profiles on Djibouti and Libya)); ESCWA and others, 2022.
64. Governments in only four Arab countries (Algeria, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia) cover maternity leave benefits. In Egypt, the Government covers 75 per cent of maternity leave benefits for private sector employees; the employer covers the remaining 25 per cent (ESCWA, 2023b).
65. ESCWA, n.d.
66. See the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law website, "[Reforms](#)" section, accessed on 27 December 2022.
67. See [Jordan, First Voluntary National Review 2017](#).
68. This helps fight stereotypes on the role of men and women in childcare provision and in paid work (ESCWA and others, 2019a).
69. See the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law website, "[Reforms](#)" section, accessed on 27 December 2022.
70. ESCWA, n.d.
71. Ibid.
72. See the [Gender Justice and the Law Portal](#), "detailed information" section, accessed on 13 June 2023.
73. See the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law website, "[Reforms](#)" section, accessed on 27 December 2022.
74. Ibid.
75. ESCWA and others, 2018 (Profile on Bahrain).
76. Official Gazette, [Law No. \(10\) for the year 2023 amending the Labour Law](#).
77. ESCWA and others, 2022 (Profile on Saudi Arabia).
78. Unequal economic opportunities for women manifest in discrimination in pay based on gender. This is rooted in traditional roles that society assigns to women and men. ILO standards require equal pay for work of equal value regardless of the type of work involved. This is to guarantee greater equality by accounting for historically undervalued jobs primarily undertaken by women (ESCWA and others, 2019a).
79. See the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law website, "[Reforms](#)" section, accessed on 27 December 2022.
80. Algeria (1991), the Comoros (2014), Djibouti (2007), Libya (2011), Morocco (2005), Saudi Arabia (2012), Somalia (1974) and the Syrian Arab Republic (2010).
81. They include: Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, the Sudan and Tunisia. See the [Gender Justice and the Law Portal](#), "detailed information" section, accessed on 13 June 2023.
82. ESCWA and others, 2019a.
83. See the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law website, "[Reforms](#)" section, accessed on 27 December 2022.
84. Two other countries in the region have legislation that prohibit gender-based discrimination in access to credit: Djibouti (1996) and Morocco (2005).
85. The male guardianship system grants men the authority to decide on behalf of women under their guardianship on matters regarding work and travel, limiting their employment options.
86. See the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law website, "[Reforms](#)" section, accessed on 27 December 2022.
87. Ibid.
88. ESCWA, 2018.
89. IMF, 2016.
90. See the [Gender Justice and the Law Portal](#), "detailed information" section, accessed on 3 May 2023.
91. They are Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan and Tunisia.
92. See the [Gender Justice and the Law Portal](#), "detailed information" section, accessed on 3 May 2023.
93. See the gender-responsive budgeting definition on the [ESCWA website](#).
94. METAC, 2019.
95. ESCWA, UNDP and UNICEF, 2022.
96. Countries that have taken steps towards gender-responsive budgeting are Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.
97. UN Women, 2016.

98. ESCWA, UNDP and UNICEF, 2022.

99. METAC, 2019.

100. Ibid.

101. The countries are Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia.

102. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy programme, [Enhancing women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa \(MENA\)](#), accessed on 14 May 2023.

103. [Westminster Foundation for Democracy](#), 2022.

104. UN Women and WHO, 2020.

105. EuroMed Rights, 2021.

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