

Situational Analysis of Women and Girls in the MENA and Arab States Region: Pillar 4 Participation and Leadership

Key messages and Recommendations

OVERVIEW

Women's participation and leadership in the MENA and Arab States region have historically been obfuscated, despite decades of community involvement, activism at the national and international levels, and formal and informal political engagement. Despite improvement in women's formal engagement during the past decade, challenges remain, none the least of which is the COVID-19 pandemic that has widened gaps between men and women in terms of employment, care work, perceived family obligations and, in some cases, actively curbed women's access to the public sphere.

POLICY GAPS

Whilst many countries in the region have lifted reservations made to paragraph 4 of article 15 of CEDAW related to equal rights to choosing one's residence, as well as lifted any legal restrictions on women's mobility, some countries of the region still have legal provisions within the personal status law which may limit women's ability to travel as compared to a man. Space for participation is limited by laws that have restricted the freedoms of assembly, association and expression in some countries. As such, women's rights activists and organizations have experienced backlashes resulting in increased insecurity and a narrowing of human rights.



Adopt legislation and policies that facilitate women's political participation, including gender-based quota systems for seats in national parliament and local government level or gender-based quota systems for candidate lists for national parliament that meet the international standard of 50 per cent

SYSTEM BARRIERS

Across the region, women have yet to reach parity with men at any level of government. Besides gender bias and stereotypes which informs such decisions, evidence shows an overall poor levels of transparency and lack of fairness in appointments. In many countries, women are appointed into ministries dedicated to issues of women and children. Although there are some occasional outliers, often women are assigned as ministers in NWMs, social development or what is termed as "soft ministries", which is further disempowering. The lower proportion of ministerial-level positions held by women may be interpreted as women holding less political power. In many countries in the region, disproportionate power is held in the executive (including the ministries) and, as such, fewer women ministers means less voice for women where decisions are being made.



Ensure transparent and complete reporting of women's participation in all areas of public life, including in the public service, in line with international standards and methodologies developed by Sustainable Development Goal indicators (women in local governance)

NORMS

Gender bias is significantly more prevalent in the region among males and females than the worldwide average; 75% women and 90% of men in the region versus global level of 53% of women and 64% of men. This exacerbates traditional gender roles, with homemaking and caretaking being held in high regard. Perceptions of women as leaders, and especially political leaders, are significantly more negative in the region as compared to global statistics. Low civic engagement is caused by traditional age-based hierarchies, disillusionment in engagement with civic action, a lack of safe spaces, and/or a wariness of foreign sponsored programming.



Introduce policies and programmes and allocate adequate resources that address the unequal division of labour and gender stereotypes within households.

EMERGENCY SETTINGS

Female-headed households are more prevalent in conflict zones or displacement settings, where families have been forced to flee, often without a male figure who may or not be involved in the conflict. Since COVID-19, NWMs have been positively engaged in pandemic responses concerning economic relief. For women's NGO, the pandemic led to worsen working conditions, mobility restrictions, decrease in resources and increased surveillance



Create a safe environment for women to participate and actively engage in peace processes.

HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING

Issues at the household level often influence the most basic and most important decisions that families make, such as decisions to start a family, health care, child and elder care, employment, spending habits, residency, and migration. There are still many barriers preventing women from exercising full autonomy. More than half of the married respondents in the region believes that a husband should always have the final say on family decisions. Young people feel left out from public life, for many girls, this sense of disempowerment begins at home, where decision-making power is often severely restricted.



Initiate qualitative research to understand household decision-making dynamics, as well as research into women's participation in activism and politics at the local and national levels, in order to better understand and address barriers to leadership.

LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADOLESCENT ENGAGEMENT

There is limited data on children engagement in extracurricular activities within schools, however country based anecdotal reports indicate limited opportunities. Data from National Scout Organization for the Arab countries refer to around 150,000 scouts with girl participation ranging from zero percentages in several countries to more around 30% in Qatar, Palestine to around 40% in Algeria, Lebanon, Oman and 50% in Iraq and Libya. Based on data collected through NGO and UN partners data systems, approximately 1 million adolescents and youth in in the MENA region, lead and/or involved in civic and economic engagement programmes.



Develop and implement policies and programmes, including in schools, to engage youth and provide safe physical and online spaces for young women to participate in volunteerism and local communities.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement among young people – both men and women – in the region is the lowest in the world. Only 15% of girls and 22% of boys volunteered in their communities. A larger percentage of youth are a member of a civic organization, however the gap between women and men is relatively large: an average of 13% of women and 22% of men are members of civic organizations. Female youth's ability to participate in any type of civic engagement is limited by both traditional norms around gender, age and lack of opportunities to participate. The shrinking civic space is hampering women's effective participation in civil society.



Enhance partnerships with civil society organizations and other non-governmental actors and ensure adequate funding for services provided by civil society organizations.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Women play an influential role in public life outside formal public institutions through their involvement in women's organizations and feminist movements, as well as in other civic engagement, including the media, labour unions and academia. Through these channels, women and gender equality advocates successfully promote legislation and mechanisms to advance gender equality and to eliminate laws that are discriminatory against women. They play a critical role in requiring decision makers to be accountable for upholding the human rights of women and girls. The Arab uprisings provided an environment in which women challenged stereotypes and broke cultural norms by participating in public, data records over 370 women-led protests in the MENA and Arab States region since 2015.



Remove legal and financial restrictions on the work of civil society organizations and enforce protection of all women's human rights defenders

PEACE AND SECURITY

Through peace processes around the world, it has been shown that the inclusion of women is central to creating meaningful and lasting peace. As of 2019, only seven country-level action plans for Women, Peace and Security have been passed: Iraq, the State of Palestine, Jordan, Tunisia, Lebanon, Sudan and Yemen. Women's civil society in the region also has a significant role in WPS agenda. Additional efforts need to be made in the implementation of the WPS agenda, primarily through the empowerment of responsible institutions, such as NWMs, including through funding. More efforts are also needed to engage younger women groups in the process.



Fund local civil society organizations to implement identified activities within Women, Peace, and Security National Action Plans in order to increase the oversight capacity of relevant ministries (often the Ministry of Women's Affairs).

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

Only a handful of impacted States have managed to use transitional justice processes to increase stability and reform legislation and institutions. Several states reformed their constitutions as part of transitional processes, often with input from women's organizations and activists; this was seen in Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen.



Mainstream gender into all transitional justice processes at all levels.

WOMEN IN MINISTRIES

No country has enacted a quota for women ministers, and the percent of women ministers varies from zero to 50%. At the executive level, in cabinet or ministerial level positions, women have been making gains. However, women have yet to reach parity with men at any level of government. Most countries in the region have less than 15% of ministerial level positions filled by women; fewer women ministers mean less voice for women where decisions are being made. Often women are assigned as ministers in NWMs, social development or what is termed as 'soft ministries', further disempowering them. The overall rate for the region of women in judiciary is the lowest in the world. While there are no laws in the region that prohibit women from becoming judges or lawyers, social norms in many countries discourage women from working and/or pursuing a career in the legal field. In some settings, however, significant gains have been made in women's representation in the legal/justice sector due to targeted efforts to support legal education and establish quotas for females in the legal/justice sector. At the same time, several initiatives at the regional level helped to develop networks of women judges, led by organizations such as Arab Women's Legal Network, Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research, the International Commission of Jurists, and the International Development Law Organization.



POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

In all countries, women have been granted the right to vote. However, women are between 6-18% less likely than men to vote. In some countries, the process of registration and identification can cause issues for women. The social and cultural norms surrounding women in politics are largely similar throughout the region and play a crucial role in impacting decisions women make with regards to participating in the political process. Perceptions of women as leaders, and especially political leaders, are significantly more negative in the region as compared to global statistics. More than 90% of men in the region believe that men make better leaders and do not agree that women's rights are essential, as compared to a global average of 64%. Violence against women in politics is another reason for limited participation, around 80% of women parliamentarians in the Arab region were exposed to one or more forms of violence, and 32% reported experiencing harassment on the internet or social media. The implementation of quotas has been a significant way that Arab States have been able to ensure women's participation in the electoral process. 33% of countries in the region have legally mandated candidate quotas and 58% have reserved seats in the legislative body.



Adopt legislation and policies that facilitate women's political participation, including gender-based quota systems for seats in national parliament and local government level or gender-based quota systems for candidate lists for national parliament that meet the international standard of 50 per cent.

Situation of Leadership and Participation – Key Highlights

POLICIES/ LEGISLATIVE

Space for participation is limited by laws that have restricted the freedoms of assembly, association and expression in some countries

Only 7 countries comply with NAP for WPS

Implementation of quotas to ensure women’s participation in the electoral process.

Women need permission from a guardian to marry

In 14 countries, married women are restricted from freely traveling within their country

SYSTEMS/ INSTITUTIONS

Poor levels of transparency and lack of fairness in appointments

National Women’s Machineries experience inadequate funding

No gender parity at any level of government

Women’s civil society in the region has actively engaged with the WPS agenda

Limited funding for NAP for WPS specially in emergency

NORMS

Gender bias in the region is at 75% of women and 90% of men, in comparison to global level of 53% of women and 64% of men

Female youth’s ability to participate in civic engagement is limited by traditional gender norms and lack of opportunities

50% of married population believes a husband should always have the final say on family decisions (10% more likely in rural areas)

Marriage brings sociocultural norms, leading women more often than men to choose not to work outside the home

Male perceptions of women as leaders are significantly more negative in MENA as compared to global statistics (90% versus 64%)

Gaps between men and women in terms of employment and perceived family obligations curb women’s access to the public sphere

EMERGENCY SETTINGS

Conflict is amplifying the quality of learning crisis and reinforcing already-existing inequalities within the formal education system. Marginalized groups of children, including girls and young women, are disproportionately disadvantaged. Access to education in emergency remains a challenge; including damaged or destroyed schools.



ISSUES

Around 60% engaged in ECD activities at household level

Limited evidence on opportunities and utilization of extra curricula activities

Girls disempowerment and feeling of being outside of public life begins at home, where decision-making power is often severely restricted

Civic engagement among youth is the lowest in the world with volunteerism at 9% and member of civil society 13%

Education level increases opportunity for equitable partnerships that share domestic duties

Limited opportunity to get transferable skills

Limited autonomy and decision-making power at household level

Women in the region are between 6-18% less likely than men to vote

On average, women feel less safe in their cities than men (increased in emergency)

Women in judiciary is the lowest in the world (range from 55% in Bahrain to 13 % in Morocco)

Marriage can reinforce stereotyped gender roles which impacts women’s decisions regarding work and public life

Increased income correlates with freedom to make decisions in life

The burden on women of unpaid care work and domestic work is a barrier to participation in the labour force

3 in 5 satisfied with freedom of choice