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THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC VULNERABILITIES IN THE MENA

SYNTHESIS REPORT AND FOCUS ON EGYPT,
JORDAN, MOROCCO AND TUNISIA

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The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's economic vulnerabilities in the MENA

Synthesis report and focus on Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and
Tunisia

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women's economic empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), in the context of elevated gender-based discrimination in social institutions – formal and informal laws, social norms and practices. The analysis focuses on Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. Using 2023 data from the fifth edition of the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), the paper analyses the levels of discrimination in social institutions that women and girls face, underscoring the impact of discriminatory laws and social norms on women's economic empowerment. The paper also explores the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic in amplifying this discrimination. Finally, it provides policy recommendations to tackle discriminatory social institutions and address the specific needs of women and girls, both in the face of public health crises and beyond, to shape more inclusive and resilient MENA societies.

Résumé

Ce papier donne un aperçu de l'impact de la crise du COVID-19 sur l'autonomisation économique des femmes au Moyen-Orient et en Afrique du Nord (MENA), dans un contexte régional où les discriminations de genres demeurent élevées dans les institutions sociales – c'est-à-dire les lois formelles et informelles ainsi que les normes sociales. Bien que régionale, l'analyse se concentre sur quatre pays : l'Égypte, la Jordanie, le Maroc et la Tunisie. En s'appuyant sur les données de 2023 de la cinquième édition de l'Indice des institutions sociales et égalité des genres (SIGI de par son acronyme en anglais), le document analyse les niveaux de discrimination dans les institutions sociales auxquels les femmes et les filles sont confrontées, soulignant le rôle que jouent les lois et normes sociales discriminatoires sur l'autonomisation économique des femmes. Le papier étudie également la manière dont la pandémie de COVID-19 a amplifié ces discriminations. Enfin, il fournit des recommandations de politiques publiques afin de s'attaquer aux institutions sociales discriminatoires et de répondre aux besoins spécifiques des femmes et des filles, tant dans un contexte de crise ou de pandémie qu'au-delà, dans l'optique général de construire des sociétés plus inclusives et plus résilientes au sein de la région MENA.

Foreword

The socio-economic crisis induced by the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women and girls in the MENA region, posing a significant threat to the progress made towards gender equality. The crisis not only risks diverting attention away from this policy issue but also exacerbating women's economic vulnerabilities. As the region recovers from the pandemic and faces new challenges, this paper demonstrates how policies aiming to reinforce women's empowerment are crucial to shape more inclusive and resilient MENA societies that can cope with external shocks. The paper specifically focuses on Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia.

The analysis of the root causes of gender inequality in the region draws upon 2023 data from the OECD Development Centre's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI). Since 2009, the SIGI has exposed structural barriers affecting women's and girls' lives in developing and developed countries. By taking into account formal and informal laws, social norms and practices, it captures the underlying drivers of gender inequality across 179 countries, with the aim of promoting gender-transformative policies that stem from data and evidence. It also serves as an official data source for monitoring Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 5.1.1.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

CAWTAR	Center of Arab Women for Training and Research
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
GDI	Gender Development Index
GID-DB	Gender, Institutions and Development Database
GII	Gender Inequality Index
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPV	Intimate-partner violence
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Index
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

Women's status in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has steadily improved over the past 30 years, marked by increased participation in the public sphere, and a growing body of laws, policies and initiatives aimed at fostering gender equality. However, the onset of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 posed a significant threat to this progress, diverting attention away from gender equality and exacerbating women's economic vulnerabilities.

In this context, women's economic empowerment in the region remains a distant reality. Their participation in economic and labour markets is notably low. Moreover, working women face specific challenges that hamper their empowerment. Among others, women's employment is concentrated in the public sector and gender-based occupational and sectoral segregation is widespread, largely reflecting social norms and views on sectors traditionally associated with feminine attributes or deemed acceptable for women. Women are also under-represented in decision-making and managerial positions, lack access to equal remuneration, and are less likely than men to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

Discriminatory social institutions are at the heart of women's economic disempowerment in the MENA

The economic vulnerabilities experienced by women in the MENA region stem from deeply entrenched discriminatory social institutions that limit their rights and agency. Results from the fifth edition of the OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) in 2023 show that women and girls in the MENA face among the highest levels of discrimination in social institutions in the world. As in the rest of the world, gender-based discrimination in social institutions is highest in the family sphere. These restrictions faced by women and girls stem from two channels that interact strongly with one another and tend to reinforce themselves: discriminatory legal frameworks and discriminatory social norms.

Legal frameworks in the MENA region tend to restrict women's economic empowerment, both in the public and private spheres. In most countries, multiple and complex personal status laws – i.e. laws that are statutory or customary, and applicable to specific religious, ethnic or cultural groups within a national jurisdiction – govern family matters, ranging from marriage to guardianship, child custody, spousal maintenance, divorce and succession. Many of these personal status laws uphold distinct rights between men and women, for instance by establishing that female heirs receive reduced inheritance shares compared to men. Loopholes also exist in the legislation addressing violence against women, while labour laws often lack crucial provision to protect women's economic rights. These gaps vary widely across countries and range from a lack of provisions explicitly prohibiting gender-based discrimination in employment, to women being forbidden to work in certain sectors or professions, or the failure to mandate by law the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.

Discriminatory social norms also hamper women's economic empowerment by weakening their status and exposing them to increased risks of violence. The MENA is characterised by widespread perceptions that men hold a dominant position, which can lead to the prioritisation of their needs in education and the labour

market. In contrast, women's primary role revolves around their care and domestic responsibilities. Violence against women, which can severely restrict women's economic and public contribution, remains a pervasive issue partly because it is tolerated by society.

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified women's vulnerabilities in the MENA region

In this context, the COVID-19 pandemic had specific consequences on women and exacerbated their vulnerabilities. The socio-economic impacts of the crisis amplified women's unpaid care and domestic workload, hampered their labour market participation and access to education, and increased their exposure to violence. In a regional context where women's inheritance rights remain severely restricted, spouses and daughters of deceased male family members also faced acute risks of asset loss.

Governments of MENA countries demonstrated robust responses to the pandemic, but most policy measures struggled to integrate a proper gender lens. Across the region, only 28% of all policy measures implemented to address the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19 were classified as gender-sensitive. These gender-sensitive measures were primarily targeted at violence against women and social protection, whereas fiscal, economic and labour market measures were largely gender-blind. Nevertheless, the inclusion of gender considerations in the policy response to COVID-19 varied greatly across countries. For instance, Egypt and Tunisia stand out for introducing at least one gender-sensitive measure across all four categories.

How can MENA policy makers tackle deeply rooted discrimination that hampers women's empowerment?

To empower women and build more resilient societies for future crises, this paper provides tailored policy recommendations to address discriminatory social institutions. The approach seeks to inform policy makers on how lessons learnt during the COVID-19 crisis can help better integrate the specific needs of women and girls, both during public health crises and beyond. The objective is not only to reinforce women's empowerment, but more broadly to shape more inclusive and resilient societies that can cope with external shocks. In this perspective, the paper puts forward three types of policy options for MENA governments and policy makers:

- Amend laws and implement gender-responsive policies.
- Promote gender-equitable social norms.
- Strengthen data collection and monitoring.

1 COVID-19 and the state of gender equality in the Middle East and North Africa

Women's status in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)¹ has been substantially improving since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action in 1995 (ESCWA, 2016^[1]). This has been marked by increased female participation in the public spheres, whether political or economic. Across the region, there is a growing emphasis on laws, policies, and initiatives aimed at fostering gender equality. For instance, 15 MENA countries out of 19 have established national institutions dedicated to advancing the rights and well-being of women and girls (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014^[2]; UNICEF, 2021^[3]).²

Despite progress, challenges persist, and gender equality remains a distant goal. At the current rate of progress, achieving gender parity across the entire region is projected to take 152 years (World Economic Forum, 2023^[4]). International indices measuring levels of gender equality reveal important bottlenecks for MENA countries, especially in terms of women's economic participation, educational attainment, health and political empowerment (Figure 1).³ The region's data and trends underline that despite socio-economic accomplishments, women's empowerment and well-being remain limited, particularly in some countries, and that crises can exacerbate their vulnerabilities (Talbot and Lovotti, 2023^[5]).

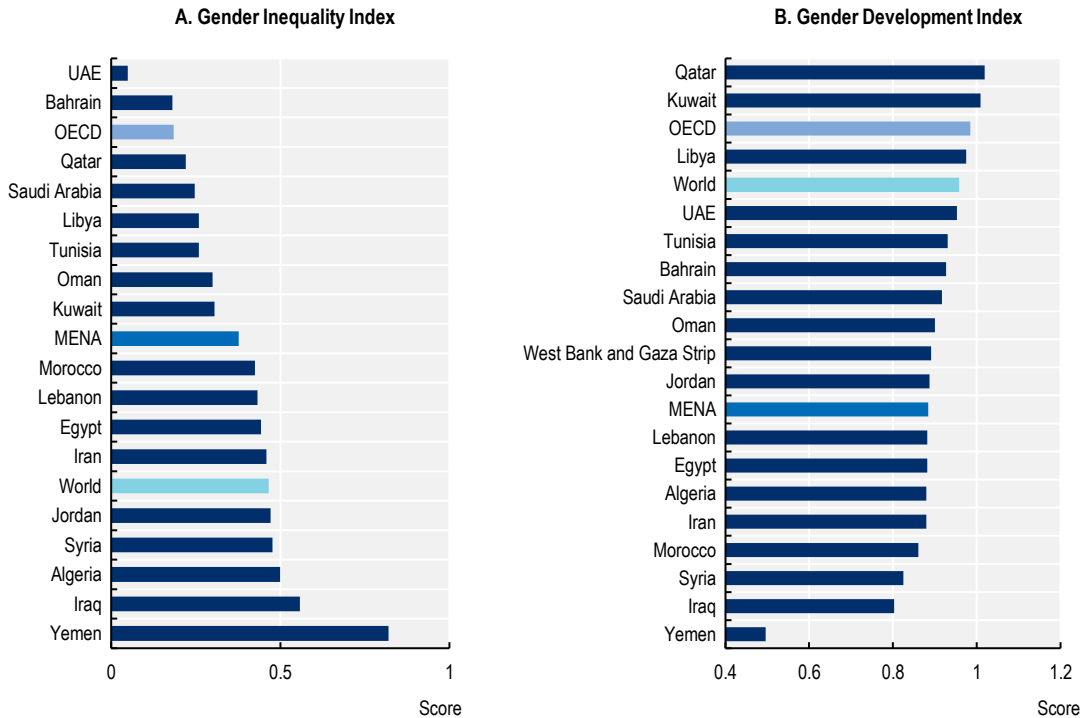
¹ The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region covers 19 countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran (hereafter Iran), Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic (hereafter Syria), Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Yemen.

² Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

³ Numerous indices measure different aspects of gender inequality. On average, MENA countries' performance across these indices reveal persisting gender gaps and disadvantages faced by women. These indices include for example the Gender Inequality Index and the Gender Development Index, the SDG Gender Index, the Global Gender Gap Index or the Social Institutions and Gender Index (UNDP, 2021^[6]; 2021^[7]; Equal Measures 2030, 2022^[133]; World Economic Forum, 2023^[4]; OECD, 2023^[36]). For instance, in 2022, 10 MENA countries out of 18 demonstrated low gender equality in the basic dimensions of human development (health, education and economic empowerment) (UNDP, 2021^[7]); and the 2022 SDG Gender Index classified MENA as a "poor" performing region (Equal Measures 2030, 2022^[133]).

Figure 1. Challenges persist and gender equality remains a distant goal in the MENA

Scores of MENA countries in the Gender Inequality Index (Panel A) and Gender Development Index (Panel B), 2021



Note: The Gender Inequality Index (GII) reflects gender-based disadvantage in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. The GII ranges from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating that women and men fare equally and 1 indicating that one gender fares as poorly as possible in all measured dimensions. Data are missing for Djibouti and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Gender Development Index (GDI) measures gender inequalities in achievement in three basic dimensions of human development: health, education and command over economic resources. It is based on the underlying concept of the Human Development Index (HDI). Parity is attained at 1. Values below 1 means that the HDI value of women is lower than the HDI value of men (inequality in favour of men); values above 1 means that the HDI value of women is higher than the HDI value of men (inequality in favour of women). Data are missing for Djibouti. For both indices, the MENA average is calculated as a simple average of the MENA countries for which data are available.

Source: (UNDP, 2021^[6]), Gender Inequality Index (GII), <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>; (UNDP, 2021^[7]), Gender Development Index (GDI), <https://hdr.undp.org/gender-development-index#/indicies/GDI>.

Women's economic inclusion is a key challenge for gender equality in the MENA

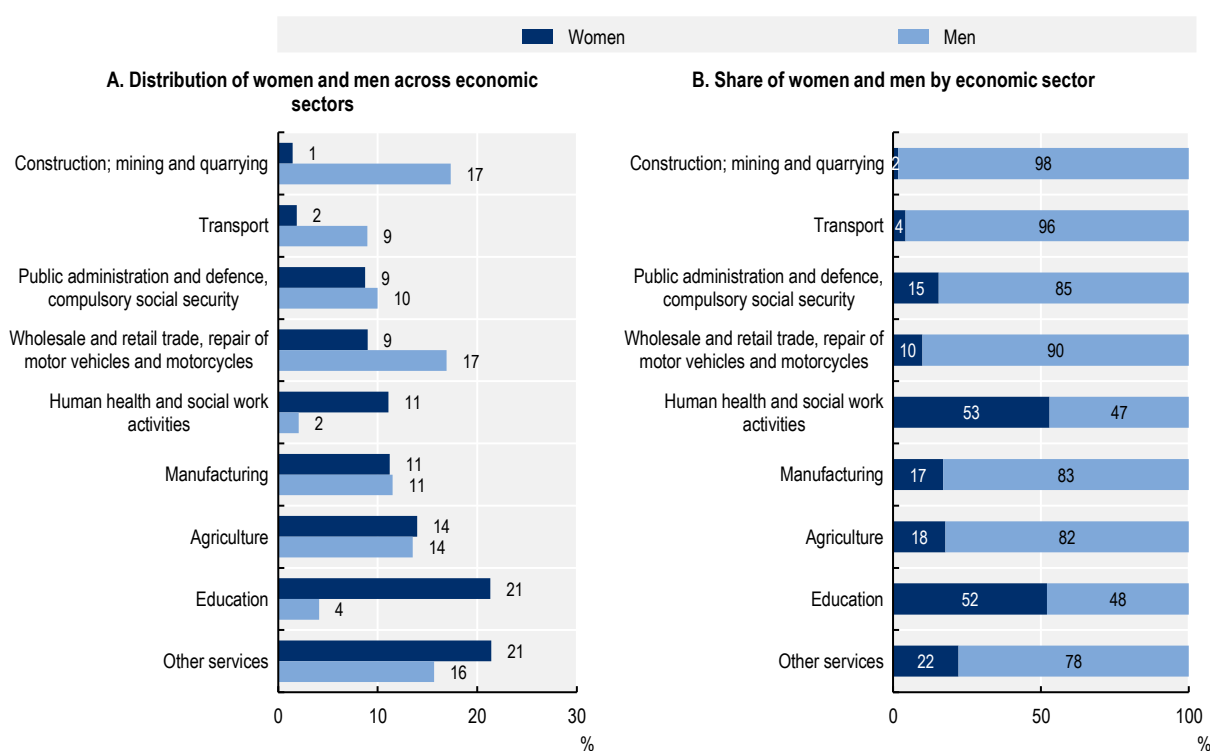
Women's labour market participation in the MENA remains very low. In 2024, 27% of working-age women are in the region's labour force, compared to 73% of working-age men, translating into a gender gap of 46 percentage points (ILO, 2024^[8]). Women's labour force participation rate in the MENA region is substantially lower than the global average of 48%. This low participation of women to the labour market particularly affects young women, which translates into large shares of young women who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET) (OECD, 2022^[9]; 2022^[10]). However, differences exist at the country level. For instance, in Tunisia, women's labour force participation (27%) is in line with the regional average. In contrast, rates are lower in Morocco (20%), Egypt (17%) and Jordan (14%) (ILO, 2024^[8]).

In addition, gender-based occupational and sectoral segregation is extremely important across the region and in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. This sectoral segregation largely reflects social norms and views on sectors traditionally associated with feminine attributes or deemed acceptable for women, such

as the health, social work and education sectors. In 2022, across the MENA, 21% of employed women worked in the education sector, and 11% in human health and social work activities (Figure 2, Panel A). In contrast, only 4% and 2% of men of the MENA were employed in these two sectors, respectively. Agriculture also continued to represent a substantial share of women's employment in the region (14%), reaching 48% in Morocco (ILO, 2022_[11]).

Figure 2. Women and men in the MENA region are concentrated in different economic sectors

Distribution of employed women and men across economic sectors (Panel A) and share of working women and men by economic sector (Panel B), 2022



Note: Sectors are based on the ISIC Rev. 4 classification. "Other services" groups the following ISIC-4 sectors: "Accommodation and food service activities", "Financial and insurance activities", "Real estate, business and administrative activities", "Utilities" and "Other services". Source: (ILO, 2022_[11]), "Employment by sex and economic activity – ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2023 (thousands) – Annual", ILOSTAT: *Labour Force Statistics* (database), <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/>.

Sectoral segregation not only means that certain sectors account for most of women's employment, but also that women account for a large part of the workforce in a given sector. However, in MENA countries, the low participation rate of women in the labour market compared to men means that even when a sector accounts for a substantial proportion of women's employment, including compared to men, women rarely account for more than half of the employees working in that sector. For instance, 21% of women worked in the education sector compared to only 4% of men. Yet, the gender gap in employment in this sector is only 4 percentage points with 52% of workers being women and 48% being men (ILO, 2022_[11]) (Figure 2, Panel B). In Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia women accounted for the majority of the workers employed in health and social work activities, and in the education sector – except for Morocco in the latter (Table 1).

Table 1. Employees of the education, health and social sectors are primarily women in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia

Share of working women and men by economic sector, 2022

	Egypt		Jordan		Morocco		Tunisia	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
Human health and social work activities	67	33	51	49	61	39	57	43
Education	55	45	57	43	46	54	58	42
Other services	13	87	15	85	25	75	29	71
Agriculture	17	83	3	97	34	66	16	84
Manufacturing	9	91	11	89	26	74	43	57
Public administration and defence, compulsory social security	25	75	10	90	19	81	22	78
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	17	83	5	95	8	92	22	78
Transport	3	97	7	93	4	96	7	93
Construction; mining and quarrying	1	99	1	99	1	99	2	98
Total	17	83	15	85	22	78	26	74

Note: For each sector, the table shows the proportion of women (W) and men (M) employed in that sector. Sectors are based on the ISIC Rev. 4 classification. "Other services" groups the following ISIC-4 sectors: "Accommodation and food service activities", "Financial and insurance activities", "Real estate, business and administrative activities", "Utilities" and "Other services".

Source: (ILO, 2022^[11]), "Employment by sex and economic activity – ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2023 (thousands) – Annual", ILOSTAT: *Labour Force Statistics* (database), <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/>.

The public sector is a major source of employment in the MENA region, notably for women. Compared to other emerging countries, the public sector is large in the MENA (OECD, 2022^[9]). For women, jobs in the public sector⁴ are perceived as offering safer and more socially acceptable work environments, shorter working hours and important benefits such as social security and maternity leave (OECD/ILO/CAWTAR, 2020^[12]). This choice often allows women to balance their work responsibilities with unpaid care work, which remains a rigid social expectation and obligation. In 2023, the share of women employed in the public sector accounted for 43% in Egypt, 41% in Jordan and 26% in Tunisia (ILO, 2023^[13]).

Informal employment is widespread but the absolute number of women in the informal economy remains relatively low because of their limited labour market participation. The MENA region has one of the highest rates of informal employment in the world (OECD, 2022^[9]). In 2022, among the Arab States, 60% of men and 43% of women worked informally; and in North Africa, 71% of men were in informal employment compared to 62% of women (OECD, 2023^[14]). However, in contrast with other developing regions, the absolute number of women in informal employment remains relatively low as only 27% of working-age women in the MENA participate in the labour market, compared to 51% in Latin America and the Caribbean and 54% in Southeast Asia (ILO, 2024^[8]). The pattern observed in the MENA region is in line with the global trend whereby countries with lower labour force participation of women tend to have a lower proportion of women in informal employment (OECD/ILO/CAWTAR, 2020^[12]).

Women face challenges in accessing decision making positions and receiving equal remuneration (Krafft, Selwaness and Sieverding, 2022^[15]). In the MENA, women are significantly underrepresented in management positions, comprising only 14% of employees in managerial roles and heading only 5% of firms and companies at the regional level (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[16]). Jordan stands out

⁴ Public sector employment covers employment in general government and employment in publicly owned resident enterprises and companies. The general government sector employment is the total employment in institutions operating at central, state (or regional), and local levels of the government; i.e. all government units, social security funds and non-market non-profit institutions that are controlled and mainly financed by public authority (OECD, 2023^[131]).

as the only country where women constitute the majority of managers (60%), although they head only 3% of firms. In most countries of the region, women working in the private sector hold low-skilled jobs and low-paying sectors (OECD, 2022^[9]) and, in similar positions, women often receive lower wages than men. Although gender-disaggregated data on wages remain extremely limited in the MENA, available information reveals that the gender pay gap ranges from being negligible in Tunisia to approximately 9.5% in Egypt and 23% in Jordan (ILO, 2023^[17]).

Women in the region are also less likely than men to engage in entrepreneurial activities and face specific constraints. Entrepreneurship, and more specifically small and medium enterprises, play a crucial role in MENA economies, providing the large majority of jobs (OECD, 2022^[9]). Yet, on average, only 8% of women in the MENA participate in such activities, compared to 13% of men (OECD/ILO/CAWTAR, 2020^[12]). Women-owned businesses tend to operate in specific sectors of the economy such as retail trade, hospitality or personal services, which makes them relatively more vulnerable in times of crises as it was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2022^[9]). Compared to men-owned businesses, women's businesses also tend to be smaller in size, to employ younger individuals, to dispose of fewer financial assets, and to rely more on self-financing or funding from family and friends (OECD, 2022^[9]).

Crises can exacerbate women's vulnerabilities, especially when response measures are gender-blind

Crises and conflict can heighten women's vulnerabilities and risk to revert advances made on gender equality. Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated how crises can affect men and women differently. As most societies are based on patriarchal values and power structures, crises can amplify women's vulnerabilities, especially when response measures are gender-blind. For instance, women, who are typically over-represented in the health care workforce, faced increased exposure to COVID-19 in the initial and most intense stages of the pandemic (OECD, 2020^[18]). At the same time, containment measures and lockdowns increased women's household responsibilities including childcare, home-schooling, and caring for the sick and elderly, adding further weight on the longstanding inequalities in unpaid care work. Moreover, women found themselves at an increased risk of experiencing violence, exploitation, abuse and harassment during quarantine periods (OECD, 2020^[19]).

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the MENA in February 2020, but the fatality rate of confirmed cases appears relatively low compared to other regions. Most MENA countries documented their first cases between mid-February and early March 2020 (Statista, 2022^[20]). As of October 2023, MENA countries have collectively reported more than 21.6 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and more than 300 000 deaths (Table 2). With over 7.5 million confirmed cases and a fatality rate of nearly 2%, Iran has been particularly hard-hit, accounting for over one-third of all cases and almost a half of the deaths in the region (Johns Hopkins University & Medicine, 2023^[21]). Based on available data, the fatality rate of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the MENA has remained relatively low compared to the rest of the world, which partly stems from the population being relatively young. At the same time, the considerable strength of healthcare systems in certain countries such as the Gulf states also played a role (Dyer, Schaidler and Letzkus, 2020^[22]), although the spread of COVID-19 underlined the vulnerabilities of the health systems in the rest of MENA countries – despite many efforts to improve their effectiveness prior to the pandemic (OECD, 2022^[9]). Yet, available data should be interpreted with caution. Significant discrepancies may exist within and across countries, both in terms of definition of indicators and quality of the reported data reported. These variations, that hamper comparability, primarily stem from low testing rates as well as limited data on excess mortality and vital registration systems (Wehbe et al., 2021^[23]).

Table 2. COVID-19 cases and deaths in the MENA region

Number of confirmed cases and deaths, and fatality rates in MENA countries, 2023

Country	Confirmed cases	Deaths	Fatality rate
Algeria	271 496	6 881	2.5%
Bahrain	710 693	1 553	0.2%
Djibouti	15 690	189	1.2%
Egypt	515 759	24 812	4.8%
Iran	7 572 311	144 933	1.9%
Iraq	2 465 545	25 375	1.0%
Jordan	1 746 997	14 122	0.8%
Kuwait	663 860	2 570	0.4%
Lebanon	1 232 828	10 841	0.9%
Libya	507 187	6 437	1.3%
Morocco	1 272 490	16 296	1.3%
Oman	399 449	4 628	1.2%
Qatar	495 090	688	0.1%
Saudi Arabia	830 127	9 618	1.2%
Syria	57 467	3 164	5.5%
Tunisia	1 151 126	29 341	2.5%
United Arab Emirates	1 053 213	2 349	0.2%
West Bank and Gaza Strip	703 228	5 708	0.8%
Yemen	11 945	2 159	18.1%
Total	21 676 501	311 664	1.4%

Note: Data as of October 2023. Fatality rate corresponds to the ratio of number of deaths to the number of confirmed cases.
Source: (Johns Hopkins University & Medicine, 2023^[21]), Coronavirus Resource Center.

Governments across MENA countries demonstrated robust initial responses to the pandemic. In the initial stage of the crisis, most MENA countries promptly declared a state of national emergency and implemented strict containment measures aimed at minimising social interaction to curb the spread of the airborne disease (OECD, 2020^[24]). These measures applied throughout the region included the closure of schools⁵ and workplaces, the cancellation of public events, restrictions on the size of gatherings, shutdowns of public transportation, stay-at-home orders, limitations on internal movement, and bans on international travel. Additionally, some countries made historical decisions related to religious practices, such as cancelling communal Friday prayers or Sunday masses, and closing mosques and other religious sites (Hobaika, Möller and Völkel, 2022^[25]; Karamouzian and Madani, 2020^[26]).

However, MENA countries entered the crisis with very different socioeconomic contexts which impacted the focus and effectiveness of their policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Several countries, including Jordan and Morocco, proactively instituted comprehensive measures to combat the spread of the virus, sometimes even before the first case being recorded (OECD, 2022^[9]; Koehler and Schulhofer-Wohl, 2021^[27]). Other countries, including Egypt and Iran, entered the crisis in a state of relative economic vulnerability which contributed to a response primarily focusing on economic implications and a delayed implementation of public health measures (Woertz, 2020^[28]). Finally, countries that suffered from civil conflict and weaker state capacities, such as Libya, Syria and Yemen, faced intense political and economic instability that hampered their ability to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic (Woertz, 2020^[28]; Kubinec, 2022^[29]).

⁵ By the end of March 2020, all MENA countries had closed their schools' physical premises; some had also suspended or cancelled teaching at the higher education level.

In absolute numbers, the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker⁶ shows that the overall policy responses primarily focused on social protection measures, followed by fiscal and economic measures (UNDP/UN Women, 2022^[30]). Conversely, fewer policies were enacted to address challenges in the labour market or violence against women (Figure 3).

The COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker reveals that 28% of all COVID-19 policy measures undertaken by MENA countries were gender-sensitive, compared to 33% worldwide.⁷ Compared to other global regions, this is lower than in Latin America and the Caribbean where 41% of policy measures were gender-sensitive, but slightly higher than in Southeast Asia (26%).

As in the rest of the world, most of the gender-sensitive measures implemented across the region targeted violence against women (Figure 3). They also entailed gender-sensitive social protection measures aimed at coping with the impacts of COVID-19. Many of these measures were built on, and expanded, existing social protection policies, strategies and programmes, either by providing additional benefits to existing beneficiaries or by their coverage to new beneficiaries (OECD, 2022^[9]).

Conversely, fiscal, economic and labour market measures were largely gender-blind. Across the MENA, 26% of actions focusing on the labour market were identified as gender-sensitive (Figure 3). This proportion is lower than in Latin America and the Caribbean where 32% of these actions were gender-sensitive, but substantially higher than at the global level and in Southeast Asia where 19% and 10% of labour market measures were gender-sensitive, respectively. However, they remained very scarce in absolute numbers and regional coverage was limited with only 8 MENA countries⁸ out of 19 that incorporated gender considerations in these measures geared towards labour markets. Fiscal and economic policies exhibit the lowest proportion of measures addressing the specific situation of women (9%), below the average proportions for the rest of the world (14%) and in Latin America and the Caribbean (21%), and in line with Southeast Asia (10%). Although some examples of good practices aimed at supporting women's entrepreneurs have emerged in several MENA countries (OECD, 2022^[9]), this limited adoption of gender-sensitive measures in the fiscal and economic spheres, together with the reduced regional coverage of gender-sensitive measures focusing on labour markets, may suggest a disregard for women's economic standing and challenges across the region.

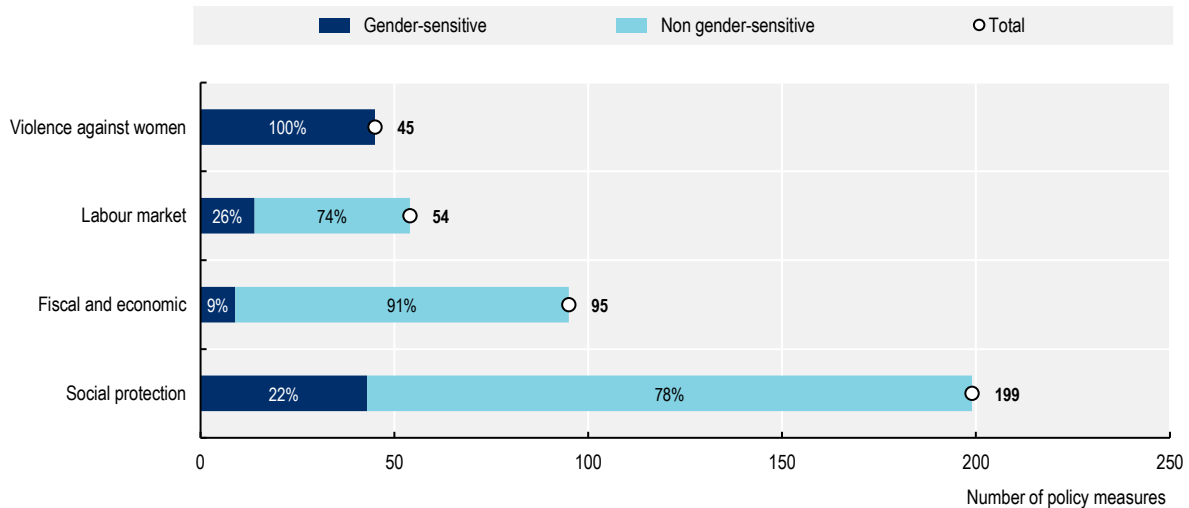
⁶ The COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker was jointly developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), and classifies actions taken by countries globally across four key domains: (i) violence against women, (ii) the labour market, (iii) fiscal and economic measures, and (iv) social protection (UNDP/UN Women, 2022^[30]). The tracker tags measures according to their gender-sensitiveness: (1) all measures addressing violence against women were automatically categorised as gender-sensitive; (2) social protection and labour market measures were deemed gender-sensitive if they specifically target women's economic security or address unpaid care responsibilities; (3) fiscal and economic measures were defined as gender-sensitive if they provide support to sectors predominantly occupied by women, with the assumption that this will protect women's employment and, in turn, their economic security.

⁷ Unless otherwise specified, all regional averages for the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker are calculated using only the 179 countries covered by OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index.

⁸ Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Figure 3. About one fourth of COVID-19 policy measures implemented in MENA countries were gender-sensitive

Number of COVID-19 policy measures implemented in MENA countries and share of policy measures classified as gender-sensitive, 2022



Note: The figure presents the total number of COVID-19 policy measures put in place by MENA countries in four distinct dimensions and according to their gender-sensitive status. For each dimension, the percentages indicate the share of measures that are classified as gender-sensitive and non-gender-sensitive.

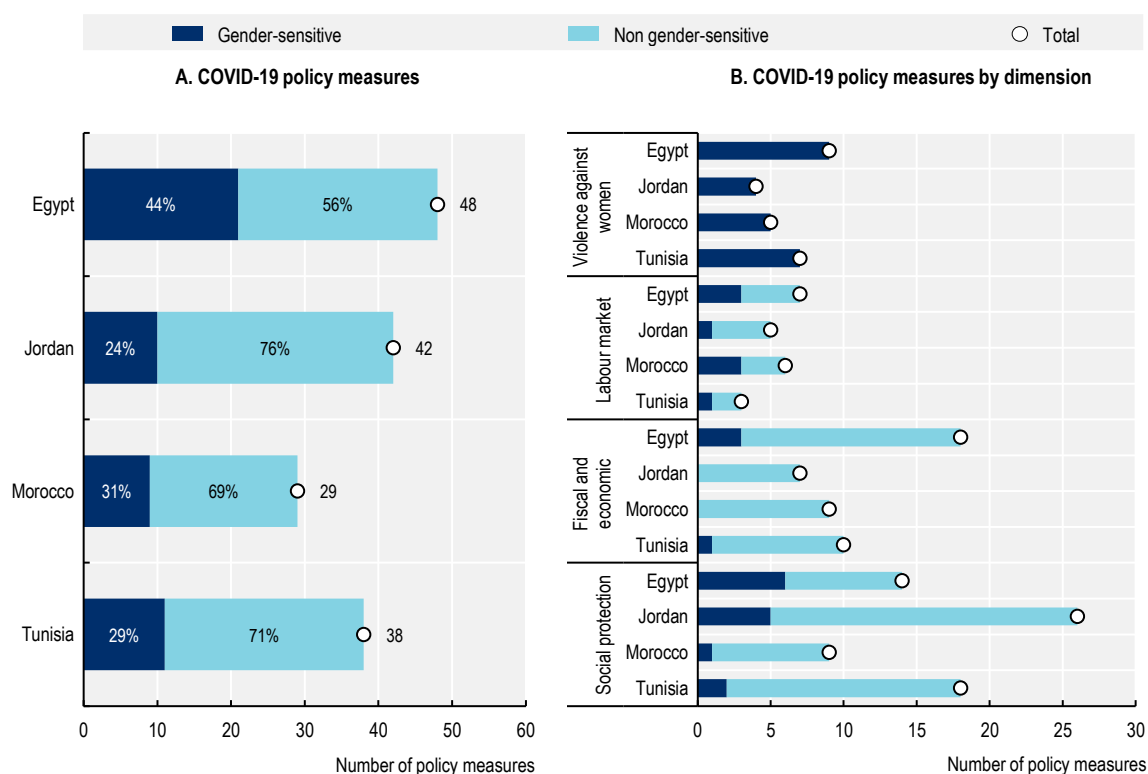
Source: (UNDP/UN Women, 2022^[30]), *COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker*, <https://data.undp.org/insights/covid-19-global-gender-response-tracker>.

Women were also largely absent from leadership positions in national COVID-19 task forces created to co-ordinate governments' pandemic responses. Only two task forces in the MENA region – in Egypt and Libya – were headed by women, and none achieved gender parity (UNDP/UN Women, 2022^[30]). This is in line with findings at the global level. Among the 262 COVID-19 task forces established across 130 countries with available data, 82% were predominantly composed of men, 7% reached gender parity and 11% had a majority of women. Worldwide, only 24% of these task forces' members were women and 15% of task forces with an economic focus had no women members (UN Women and UNDP, 2022^[31]).

Although the inclusion of gender considerations in the policy response to COVID-19 varied greatly across MENA countries, levels of disparity were relatively lower among the four countries of focus. Egypt and Tunisia stand out for introducing at least one gender-sensitive measure across all four policy areas of the COVID-19 tracker, while Iraq and Libya did not implement any such measures (UNDP/UN Women, 2022^[30]). Among the four countries of focus, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia implemented more gender-sensitive measures than the regional average (see Annex C for the full list of gender-sensitive measures adopted in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia). In Egypt, for example, 44% of the measures implemented (21 out of 48) addressed some of the specific needs of women (Figure 4, Panel A). In all four focus countries, gender-sensitive policy measures were largely concentrated in the area of violence against women, with a focus on service provision and awareness-raising (Figure 4, Panel B). For instance, during the pandemic, Egypt took the initiative to launch a national hotline, while Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia actively promoted and strengthened the existing hotlines and platforms to support survivors/victims of violence.

Figure 4. The inclusion of a gender lens in COVID-19 policy measures varied greatly across policy areas

Overview of policy response measures taken by Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, in general (Panel A) and by dimension (Panel B)



Note: The figure presents the total number of COVID-19 policy measures put in place by MENA countries in general and in four distinct dimensions, according to their gender-sensitive status. In Panel A, the percentages indicate the share of measures that are classified as gender-sensitive and non-gender-sensitive.

Source: (UNDP/UN Women, 2022_[30]), *COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker*, <https://data.undp.org/insights/covid-19-global-gender-response-tracker>.

Women's limited participation in the labour market may explain the relatively low number of policy measures addressing women's economic security in the MENA. In general, this was also the case in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia despite the implementation of some gender-sensitive measures targeting women's economic security. Morocco initiated support programmes targeting women entrepreneurs, while Tunisia introduced a reduced interest rate credit aimed at domestic workers, who are predominantly women. Egypt made efforts to enhance women's economic empowerment by developing training programmes for women in digital entrepreneurship, e-marketing, e-commerce and financial skills. These initiatives aimed to build women's capacities to sustain their businesses online during lockdowns and to equip them with new skills to utilise upon the resumption of economic activities. Meanwhile, Jordan provided parents with cash payments to compensate for childcare and school closures (UNDP/UN Women, 2022_[30]).

2 Discriminatory social institutions in MENA countries severely limit women's rights and opportunities

At the heart of gender-based inequalities lie discriminatory social institutions – the established set of formal and/or informal laws, norms and practices that govern behaviour in society. Differences in opportunities and outcomes observed between women and men represent the tip of the "iceberg of discrimination", while discriminatory social institutions constitute the bottom part of it and contribute to reinforcing the status quo (OECD, 2023^[32]). Social institutions fundamentally dictate what women and men are allowed to do, what they are expected to do and what they do in a given society. The OECD Development Centre measures this invisible part of the iceberg through the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) (Box 1). In 2023, the fifth edition of the SIGI shed light on the systemic barriers that continue to affect women and girls in the MENA region.

Laws and social norms are deeply connected and mutually reinforcing. Legal frameworks often reflect and perpetuate social norms, either by explicitly endorsing them or by neglecting to address and rectify inequalities established by social norms. When laws conflict with prevailing social norms, gradual legal reforms can prove more effective in transforming social norms and behaviour than sudden and radical legal changes (Acemoglu and Jackson, 2017^[33]). Social norms, however, are often more pervasive than laws: they do not undergo any legislative processes, they rely on social incentives, and their social enforcement is rarely limited by material resources (Goodman, Jinks and Woods, 2012^[34]). In this context, deeply rooted social, cultural and religious norms in the MENA tend to resist change and pose a significant barrier to initiating and enforcing legal reforms that challenge traditional gender roles, creating a formidable impediment to the advancement of women's rights (Elefante et al., 2023^[35]).

This chapter starts by outlining the results of the fifth edition of the SIGI in the MENA. With a focus on Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, it then discusses specific social norms that have a bearing on women's agency and empowerment. The chapter ends with an analysis of the countries' legal frameworks that continue to undermine women's rights.

Box 1. What is the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)?

The SIGI measures discrimination in social institutions faced by women and girls throughout their lives

The SIGI is a unique cross-country composite index measuring the level of gender-based discrimination in social institutions. It looks at the gaps that legislation, attitudes and practices create between women and men in terms of rights, justice and empowerment opportunities at all stages of their lives. The fifth edition covers 179 countries, including 19 countries of the MENA region.

The SIGI builds on a framework of 4 dimensions, 16 indicators and 25 underlying variables. It covers the major socio-economic areas that affect women and girls throughout their lifetime, from

discrimination in the family to restrictions on their physical integrity, their economic empowerment, and their rights and agency in the public and political spheres (see Annex E).

The SIGI measures the root causes of gender gaps observed at the outcome level

Worldwide and regionally, most gender equality indices – e.g. the Gender Development Index and the Gender Inequality Index – seek to measure deprivations and inequalities between men and women at the outcome level. Their focus is on the upper and visible part of the "iceberg of discrimination", and they tend to include measures related to boys' and girls' enrolment in education, differences in income and wages, inequalities in access to health services, and so forth.

The SIGI, on the other hand, studies the submerged part of the iceberg. Discriminatory social institutions are the root cause of the gender gap observed at the outcome level. They play a fundamental and underlying role by erecting invisible barriers that have lasting consequences on women's and girls' lives.

Source: (OECD, 2023^[32]).

The MENA region exhibits very high levels of discrimination in social institutions

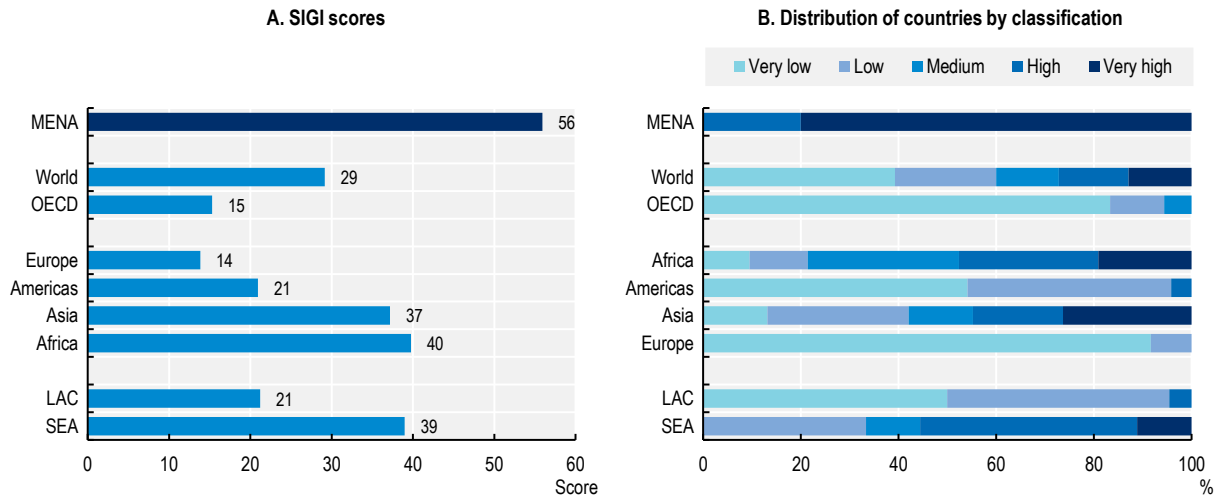
Results from the fifth edition of the SIGI in 2023 show that women and girls in the MENA face among the highest levels of discrimination in social institutions compared to the rest of the world. On average, the MENA obtains a SIGI score of 56,⁹ indicating very high levels of discrimination (Figure 5, Panel A). Contrary to some other regions of the world, and despite very different socio-economic contexts, levels of gender-based discrimination do not vary significantly across MENA countries with available data. Among the 10 MENA countries¹⁰ out of 19 that obtained a SIGI score in 2023, two of them exhibit high levels of discrimination in social institutions, and in the remaining eight, levels are estimated as very high (Figure 5, Panel B). Overall, the regional score for the MENA is substantially higher than the world's average of 29 and that of other developing regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean (21) or Southeast Asia (39).

⁹ Scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination. Countries are classified into five groups according to their SIGI score: (1) very low level of discrimination (SIGI < 20); (2) low level of discrimination (20 < SIGI < 30); (3) medium level of discrimination (30 < SIGI < 40); (4) high level of discrimination (40 < SIGI < 50); and (5) very high level of discrimination (SIGI > 50).

¹⁰ SIGI scores were calculated for 10 MENA countries: Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Because of data gaps, SIGI scores could not be calculated for 9 MENA countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen (see Annex B).

Figure 5. Levels of discrimination in social institutions are high in the MENA region

SIGI scores (Panel A) and distribution of countries by levels of discrimination (Panel B) by regions and selected sub-regions, 2023



Note: MENA refers to Middle East and North Africa, LAC refers to Latin America and the Caribbean, and SEA refers to Southeast Asia. Panel A presents the SIGI scores across regions and selected sub-regions. Scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination. Panel B presents the distribution of countries by levels of discrimination across regions and selected sub-regions. Countries are classified into five groups according to their SIGI score: (1) very low level of discrimination (SIGI < 20); (2) low level of discrimination (20 < SIGI < 30); (3) medium level of discrimination (30 < SIGI < 40); (4) high level of discrimination (40 < SIGI < 50); and (5) very high level of discrimination (SIGI > 50). Data cover 10 countries of the MENA. At the global level, data cover 140 countries for which SIGI scores were calculated in 2023, including 42 countries of Africa, 24 countries of the Americas (including 22 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean), 38 countries of Asia (including 9 countries of Southeast Asia) and 36 countries of Europe. Among these 140 countries, data cover 36 OECD countries.

Source: (OECD, 2023^[36]), "Social Institutions and Gender Index (Edition 2023)", *OECD International Development Statistics* (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/33beb96e-en>.

As in the rest of the world, gender-based discrimination in social institutions is the highest in the family sphere. The MENA region's average level of discrimination in the dimension "Discrimination in the family" is substantially higher than the world's average. Moreover, most MENA countries exhibit among the highest levels of discrimination in the world in this dimension (Figure 6). These levels of discrimination stem from legal loopholes and discriminatory social norms that hamper women's and girls' rights and opportunities in crucial aspects of their lives such as the age at which they get married, their status in the household, and their right to divorce or to receive shares of inheritance. For instance, although 12 countries¹¹ out of 19 set the minimum legal age of marriage for girls and boys at 18 years, the law introduces legal exceptions in all of them except Egypt (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]). These loopholes translate into high levels of girl child marriage throughout the region. In Iraq and Yemen, approximately 30% of women aged 20 to 24 years were married before the age of 18 years. In Egypt, despite the high level of protection offered by the law, this share lies at 17%, highlighting the role played by informal laws and practices in undermining the statutory law in place (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[16]). Likewise, legal frameworks restrict women's status in the household. In 13 countries¹² out of 19, women are legally

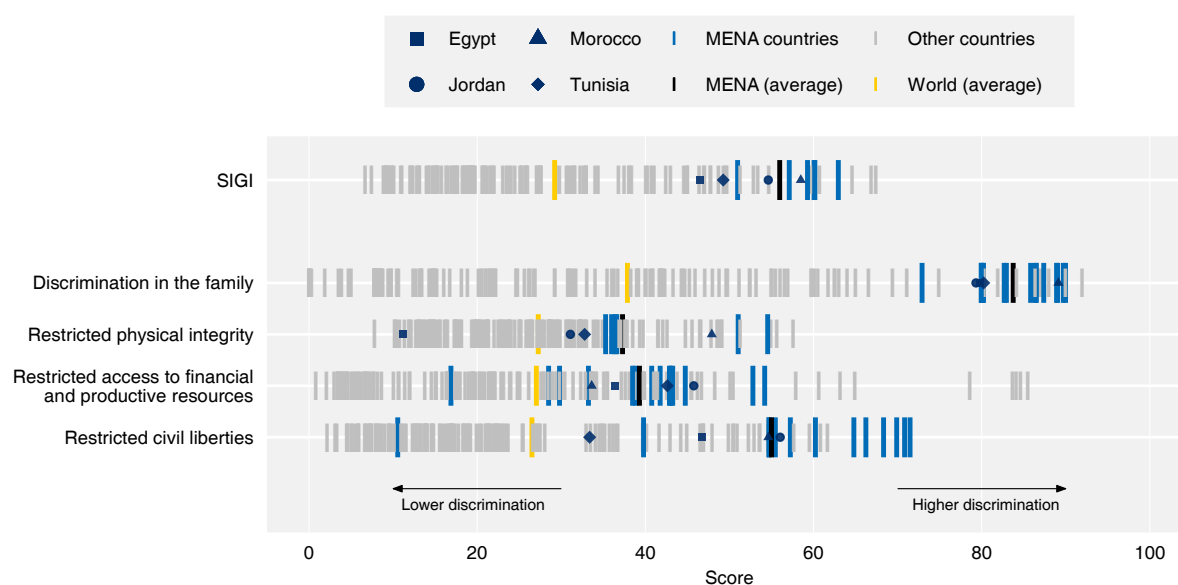
¹¹ Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

¹² Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Yemen.

required to obey their husbands. In all countries, except Djibouti and Morocco, women do not have the same rights as men to be the legal guardian of their child. Finally, no countries in the region guarantee equal inheritance rights between widows and widowers and/or between daughters and sons.

Figure 6. Discrimination in social institutions are high and very high in the MENA countries

Distribution of SIGI and dimension scores, 2023



Note: Scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination.

Source: (OECD, 2023^[36]), "Social Institutions and Gender Index (Edition 2023)", *OECD International Development Statistics (database)*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/33beb96e-en>.

Discriminatory social institutions continue to restrict women's physical integrity. As in the rest of the world, violence against women remains pervasive. High rates of intimate-partner violence across MENA countries (see section "Violence against women remains a pervasive issue, partly because it is socially accepted") stem from a large social acceptance of violence against women, coupled with legal frameworks that insufficiently protect women from all forms of violence. Only 4 countries¹³ out of 19 have adopted a dedicated legislation specifically addressing violence against women. Moreover, none of the MENA countries recognise marital rape as a crime, whereas six of them¹⁴ allow perpetrators to marry their victims in order to avoid prosecution (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]). Across the region, on average, 30% of women think that it is acceptable for a man to hit his spouse under certain circumstances, ranging from 5% in Qatar to 63% in Jordan (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[16]).

Women's physical integrity is further restricted by laws that undermine their reproductive autonomy. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women calls for countries to legalise abortion under essential grounds – when the pregnant women's life or health is in danger, and in cases of foetal impairment, rape and incest. Yet, in the MENA, two countries¹⁵ prohibit abortion under any circumstances, and all the other countries, except Tunisia, only allow abortion on very limited grounds. For instance, no

¹³ Djibouti, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia.

¹⁴ Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya and Syria.

¹⁵ Iraq and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

MENA countries, except Tunisia, authorise abortion when the pregnancy results from a rape or an incest (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]).

In the economic sphere, women primarily face discrimination in the workplace, mainly because of laws that do not adequately protect them and fail to uphold principles of gender equality. Although the majority of MENA countries forbid discrimination in employment on the basis on sex, 14 countries¹⁶ out of 19 continue to prohibit women from entering certain sectors and professions on the basis that these jobs may be hazardous or deemed unfit for women (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]). At the same time, only 10 countries¹⁷ out of 19 mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value. These inequalities are reinforced by social norms establishing men's role as the primary breadwinner. In 2023, 73% of the region's population believed that when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women, compared to 45% at the global level. These views are also reflected in women's low representation in decision-making positions. In 2023, only 14% of managers were women, compared to 25% worldwide, and women headed only 5% of firms and companies, compared to 15% worldwide (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[16]).

Finally, women from the MENA region face among the highest levels of restrictions in civil liberties worldwide. Yet, the situation varies greatly across countries (Figure 6). In countries where discrimination is high, issues are related to unequal rights to citizenship, restrictions in women's mobility, limited participation to and representation in politics, and limitations regarding women's equal rights to testify in front of courts of justice, notably in family courts.¹⁸ For instance, 11 countries¹⁹ out of 19 legally restrict women's mobility, either by establishing a different procedure for women and men to apply for national identity cards and passports, or because women must legally obtain the permission of their guardian or spouse to travel outside the country or the house (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]). In the political sphere, women's representation in parliaments remains low. Across the region, only 17% of parliamentarians are women, compared to 27% worldwide. Wide variations exist across countries, ranging from 0% in Yemen to 50% in the United Arab Emirates, which established a 50% legislated gender quota in 2019 (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]).

In line with the rest of the region, levels of gender-based discrimination in social institutions in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia are assessed as high or very high. All four countries display very high level of discrimination within the family. However, levels of discrimination in the other dimensions of the SIGI vary substantially across these four countries (Table 3). These variations underscore the diverse legal and social conditions and, consequently, unique challenges that women face in each country. For example, Tunisia demonstrates a very low level of discrimination regarding women's physical integrity, in contrast to the high levels observed in Jordan.

¹⁶ Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Syria, Tunisia, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Yemen.

¹⁷ Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Syria and the United Arab Emirates.

¹⁸ In 11 MENA countries out of 19, women's testimony does not carry the same evidentiary weights as men's in family courts; in 3 countries, women's testimony does not carry the same evidentiary weights as men's in all legal proceedings (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[16]).

¹⁹ Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Yemen.

Table 3. Discrimination in social institutions in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia is assessed as high or very high

SIGI, dimension and indicator scores in the MENA, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, 2023

	MENA	Egypt	Jordan	Morocco	Tunisia
SIGI score	56	55	58	49	47
Discrimination in the family	84	79	89	80	80
Child marriage	38	25	47	32	28
Household responsibilities	87	75	100	75	100
Inheritance	100	100	100	100	100
Divorce	97	100	100	100	75
Restricted physical integrity	37	31	48	33	11
Violence against women	43	44	54	50	31
Female genital mutilation	51	25	75	25	0
Missing women	6	0	0	0	4
Reproductive autonomy	49	48	49	48	6
Restricted access to productive and financial resources	39	46	34	43	36
Access to land assets	21	25	25	25	25
Access to non-land assets	20	25	25	25	0
Access to financial services	21	19	16	14	9
Workplace rights	79	93	62	88	86
Restricted civil liberties	55	56	55	33	47
Citizenship rights	84	100	75	75	100
Political voice	52	35	45	29	37
Freedom of movement	38	54	51	12	7
Access to justice	31	13	44	0	13

Note: Scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination. Countries are classified into five groups according to their SIGI score: (1) very low level of discrimination ($0 < \text{SIGI} < 20$); (2) low level of discrimination ($20 < \text{SIGI} < 30$); (3) medium level of discrimination ($30 < \text{SIGI} < 40$); (4) high level of discrimination ($40 < \text{SIGI} < 50$); and (5) very high level of discrimination ($50 < \text{SIGI} < 100$).

Source: (OECD, 2023^[36]), "Social Institutions and Gender Index (Edition 2023)", *OECD International Development Statistics (database)*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/33beb96e-en>.

Restrictive social norms and stereotypes are at the heart of gender inequality outcomes

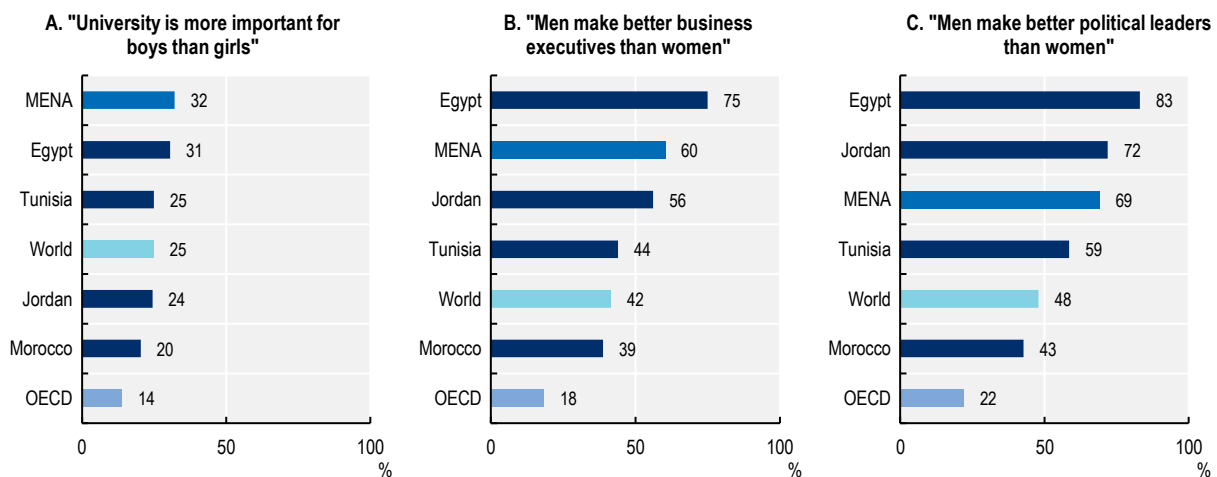
Social norms play a pivotal role in defining and shaping gender dynamics. They act as unwritten guidelines that dictate the traits, roles and behaviour expected from individuals based on their gender. For instance, social norms may associate men with characteristics such as strength and independence, and women with nurturing and caregiving (Koenig, 2018^[39]). These expectations influence how men and women perceive themselves and their roles in various spheres of life, and shape individuals' access to opportunities and ability to participate to decision-making processes (OECD, 2023^[32]). Social norms are deeply embedded in cultural, religious and historical contexts, and are instilled from a young age through socialisation processes and education (Pagano et al., 2003^[40]). Challenging and transforming discriminatory social norms is often met with resistance, requiring time and commitment, as they touch upon the core beliefs of individuals (OECD, 2023^[32]). Nevertheless, efforts to transform these norms into gender-equitable social standards are crucial for advancing gender equality.

The perception that men hold a dominant position can lead to the prioritisation of their needs in education and the labour market

Deeply ingrained social and gender norms in the MENA persistently reinforce the idea of men's dominance. This perception manifests itself early on in life: demographic and fertility data tend to demonstrate a significant preference for sons in many countries of the region, including Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen (El-Gilany and Shady, 2007^[41]). These preferences manifest themselves at various stages of a child's development and include biased prenatal care towards male foetuses during pregnancy, shorter breastfeeding durations for girls, and underinvestment in girls' education (Sharaf, Rashad and Mansour, 2019^[42]). Such dynamics perpetuate a system that undervalues women, puts their health at risk and deprives them from essential opportunities, which contribute to reinforcing societal structures that favour male dominance.

Figure 7. Men are perceived as holding a dominant position in the economic sphere

For each statement, share of the population agreeing with the statement, 2022



Note: Data are from wave 7 of the World Values Survey (WVS) (2017-2022) and from wave 6 of WVS (2010-2014) when data were not available for wave 7. In Panel A and B, the MENA average is based on data from 13 MENA countries out of 19; data are missing for Bahrain, Djibouti, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the United Arab Emirates. In Panel C, the MENA average is based on data from 14 MENA countries out of 19; data are missing for Bahrain, Djibouti, Oman, Syria and the United Arab Emirates.

Source: (Inglehart et al., 2022^[43]), "World Values Survey: All Rounds – Country-Pooled Datafile Version 3.0", *World Values Survey*, JD Systems Institute and WWSA Secretariat, <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWVL.jsp>.

Data reveal the existence of significant gender biases towards boys' and girls' educational opportunities. In Egypt, over 30% of the population thinks that university education is more important for boys than for girls (Figure 7, Panel A). Similar patterns are observed in Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, where rates range from 20% to 25%. These gender-based biases not only perpetuate inequalities in outcomes and opportunities, but also hinder women's personal growth, agency and autonomy. Denying women educational opportunities restricts their ability to fully participate in and contribute to societal and economic development.

The notion that men hold a dominant position in society is further illustrated by a widespread belief regarding their leadership capabilities. In 2023, 60% of the MENA population believed that men make better business executives than women, ranging from 36% in Lebanon to 75% in Egypt and 76% in Yemen (Figure 7, Panel B). These views were even more pronounced in the political sphere, with 69% of the MENA population thinking that men are better political leaders than women (Figure 7, Panel C). Notably,

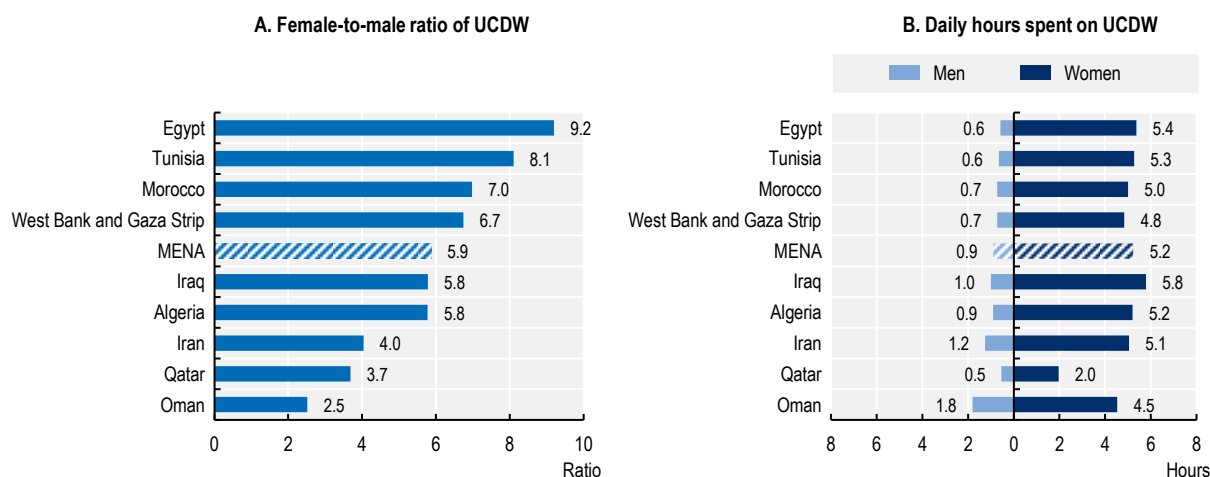
over 80% of the population in Egypt, Qatar, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Yemen share this perspective (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[16]). These beliefs favour an environment where women face systemic barriers, biases and more limited opportunities. In turn, it translates into the low representation of women in managerial and top executive positions, as well as in parliamentary and political offices.

Women's primary role revolves around domestic responsibilities, while society disregards their economic abilities and aspirations

Women in the MENA region undertake the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work. On average, based on countries for which data are available, women spend nearly six times more time than men on unpaid care and domestic tasks (Figure 8, Panel A). This gender gap is the largest worldwide and is more than twice the world's average ratio which stands at 2.6 in 2023 (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[16]).

Figure 8. Women carry the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work across MENA countries

Female-to-male ratio of time spent on unpaid care and domestic work (Panel A) and number of daily hours spent on unpaid care and domestic work for men and women (Panel B), 2023



Note: Hours refer to daily hours spent on unpaid care and domestic work (UCDW) by women and men in respective countries and are used to calculate the female-to-male ratio. In both panels, countries are ordered by decreasing female-to-male ratio of time spent on UCDW.

Source: (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[16]), "Gender, Institutions and Development (Edition 2023)", *OECD International Development Statistics* (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/7b0af638-en>.

Data from the fifth edition of the SIGI show that the gender division of unpaid care and domestic work in the MENA is most unequal in Egypt, followed by Tunisia and Morocco (Figure 8). Although no comparable data exist for Jordan, data from 2016 suggest that Jordanian women may dedicate up to 19 times more time to unpaid care and domestic tasks than men (UN Women and ERF, 2020^[44]).

These gender-based disparities are underpinned by entrenched social norms that uphold women's traditional role as caretakers and mothers whereas men are perceived as breadwinners. In line with these social norms, women's identity and value are closely linked to their ability to fulfil duties associated with caring and domestic roles. Traditionally, such responsibilities and societal expectations include caregiving, nurturing and overseeing the upbringing of children (Koenig, 2018^[39]). This perspective is not exclusive to men but is also perpetuated by women themselves due to the deeply ingrained nature of these socio-cultural norms, and is further reinforced by religious and patriarchal traditions. As a result, women are often expected to prioritise family responsibilities over professional aspirations (Box 2).

Box 2. The link between unpaid care and domestic work and women's economic participation

Existing research sheds light on the link between unpaid care and domestic work and women's economic activity. Time is a finite asset, distributed among various aspects of life, including work and leisure, productive and reproductive tasks, and paid and unpaid work. Each additional minute a woman dedicates to unpaid care and domestic work implies one less minute that could potentially be allocated to labour-related activities, education or vocational development. Therefore, unpaid care and domestic work fundamentally shapes the trajectory of women's and girls' lives, contributing to gender disparities in education, labour force participation, wages and career advancement, all of which diminish women's agency and decision-making power not only within their homes but also in society at large.

- **Educational barriers:** Unpaid care and domestic work impacts women's economic prospects from an early age by reducing their ability to pursue education. Findings covering 27 low- and middle-income countries, including 5 MENA countries,²⁰ show that approximately three in five economically inactive young women cite education as a reason for their inactivity, but that one in five cite family responsibilities (Elder and Kring, 2016^[45]). Estimates also suggest that girls who are required to spend more than four hours per day on unpaid care and domestic tasks are 28% less likely to attend school compared to those who must allocate only two hours a day to these tasks (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2017^[46]). This educational gap can result in reduced skills development, limiting women's access to better job opportunities.
- **Labour force participation:** The unequal distribution of unpaid care work has significant implications for women's participation in the labour force. Mothers, in particular, often find it challenging to enter or re-enter the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities. Care responsibilities also push women towards more informal types of employment whose "flexibility" allow them to fulfil these care responsibilities. This can limit their pathways for professional development, both in terms of skills and remuneration, as well as economic independence.
- **Wage gap:** The "motherhood penalty" is a recognised phenomenon that highlights the wage gap faced by working women with children. In the absence of structures that facilitate combining professional and caregiving responsibilities, women accept part-time, lower-quality or less demanding jobs. These choices and the time spent out of work explain the wage disparities between women with and without children.
- **Career progress and leadership:** The unequal distribution of unpaid care work also impacts women's career advancement and their ability to attain leadership positions. Balancing caregiving responsibilities with professional aspirations becomes a daunting challenge, often limiting women's progress in their chosen careers.

Source: (OECD, 2023^[47]; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2017^[46]; Elder and Kring, 2016^[45]; Ferrant, Pesando and Nowacka, 2014^[48]).

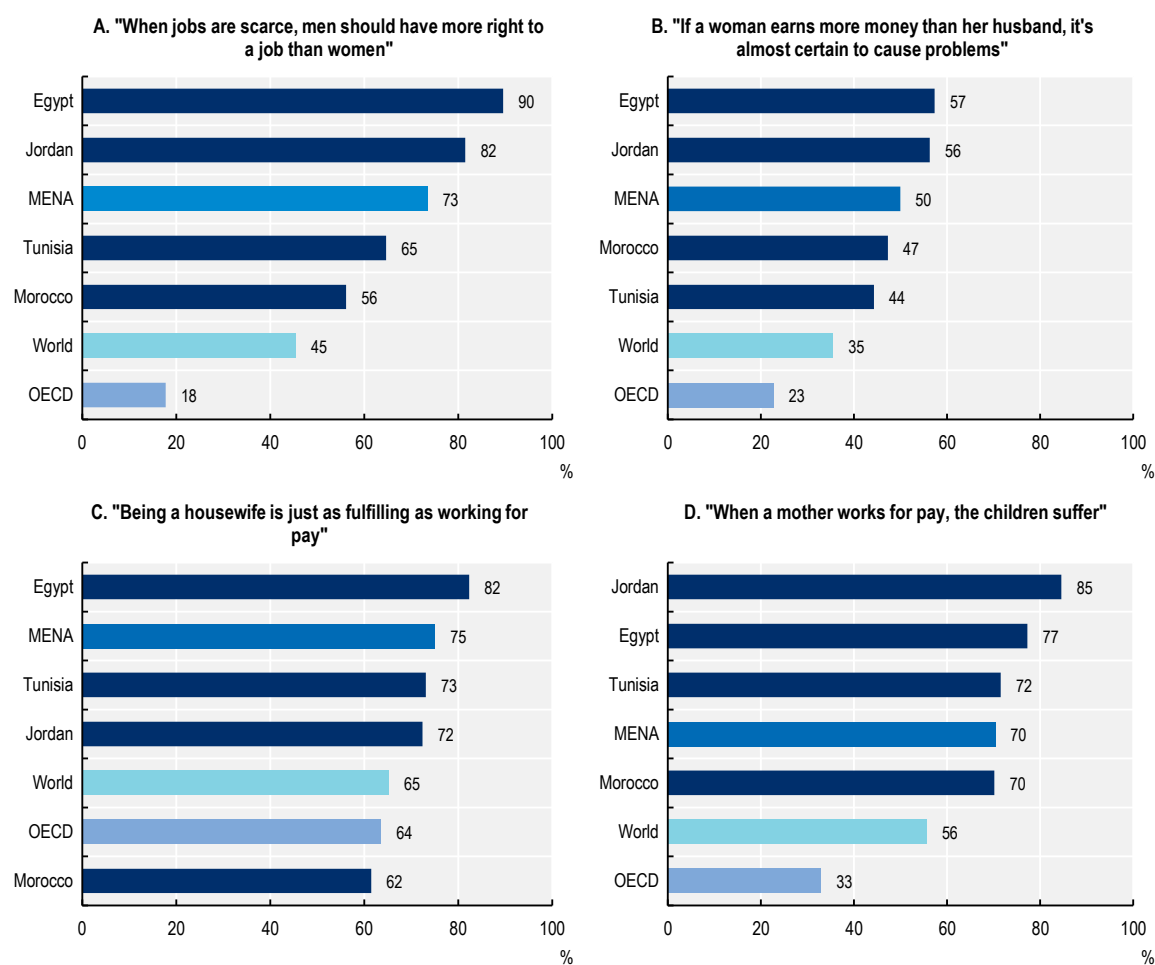
Societies in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia demonstrate a strong adherence to these social norms and views on women's and men's traditional roles. Men are given priority over women in securing employment, which reflects norms that establish men as the primary breadwinner. In both Egypt and Jordan, an overwhelming majority of the population – 82% and 90%, respectively – believes that when jobs are scarce, men should be given preferential rights to employment over women (Figure 9, Panel A). In Morocco and Tunisia, these views are shared by 56% and 65% of the population, respectively. Women's and men's distinct economic status is further highlighted by the predominant belief that when a woman earns more than her husband, it can lead to problems within the household. In all four countries of focus,

²⁰ Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

the share of the population holding such attitudes ranges from 44% to 57%, compared to a regional average of 50% (Figure 9, Panel B). In these countries, disregard for women's economic abilities and their confinement to domestic and caregiving responsibilities is evidenced by the widespread perception that being a housewife is just as fulfilling as engaging in paid work, and that a mother's employment negatively impacts the well-being of the children (Figure 9, Panels C and D).

Figure 9. Attitudes adhere to the social norm that confine women to care and reproductive roles

For each statement, share of the population agreeing with the statement, 2022



Note: Data are from wave 7 of the World Values Survey (WVS) (2017-2022) and from wave 6 of WVS (2010-2014) when data were not available for wave 7. In Panels A and C, the MENA average is based on data from 14 MENA countries out of 19; data are missing for Bahrain, Djibouti, Oman, Syria and the United Arab Emirates. In Panels B and D, the MENA average is based on data from 13 MENA countries out of 19; data are missing for Bahrain, Djibouti, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the United Arab Emirates.

Source: (Inglehart et al., 2022^[43]), "World Values Survey: All Rounds – Country-Pooled Datafile Version 3.0", *World Values Survey*, JD Systems Institute and WWSA Secretariat, <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWVL.jsp>.

While views on gender roles and rights are widely embraced in society, some levels of discrepancy exist between men and women. The findings from Equipundo's International Men and Gender Equality Survey conducted in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and the West Bank and Gaza underscore that views assign women to the primary responsibility of caring for the home and cooking for the family. However, the proportion of women and men who hold such views differ. In Egypt, for example, nearly 87% of men share this perspective, compared to 77% of women, corresponding to a gender gap of 10 percentage points. In

Morocco, the gender gap stands at more than 20 percentage points (72% of men compared to 49% of women) (El Feki, Heilman and Barker, 2017^[38]). Likewise, a large majority of the population believe that men should have the final say in household decisions, and more men than women hold these views. In Egypt, 90% of men and 59% of women are of this opinion, corresponding to a gender gap of about 30 percentage points. In Morocco, 71% of men and 47% of women feel the same way, corresponding to a gender gap of more than 20 percentage points (El Feki, Heilman and Barker, 2017^[38]). These convictions are rooted in religion and social norms, with more than three-quarters of Egyptian men viewing it as their religious and social duty to exercise guardianship over women.

Violence against women remains a pervasive issue, partly because it is socially accepted

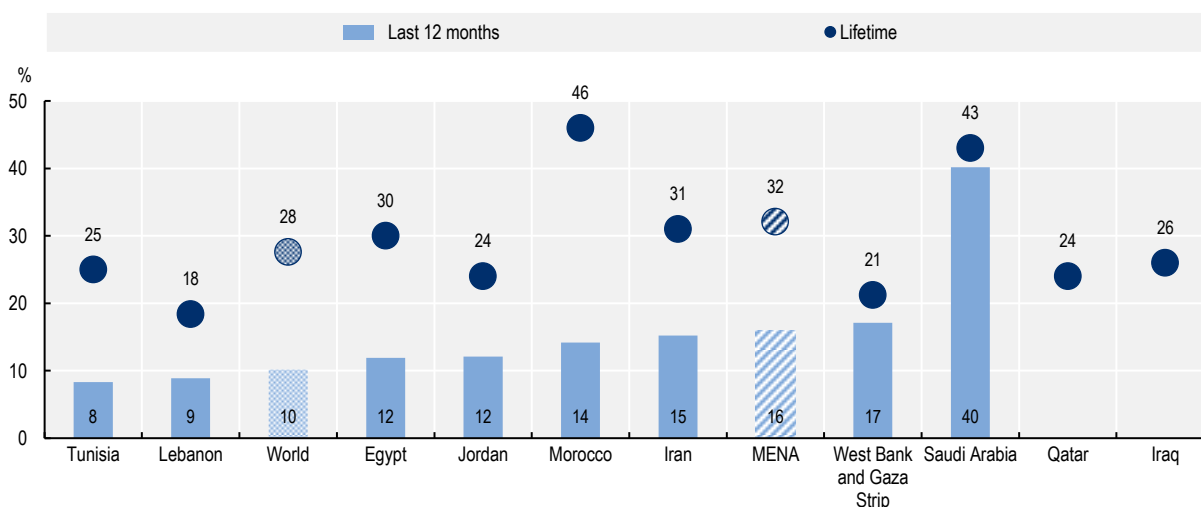
In the MENA, gender-based violence remains a significant and pervasive issue. In 2023, approximately one-third of women and girls (32%) aged 15 to 49 years have experienced intimate-partner violence at least once in their lifetime, slightly above the global average of 28% (Figure 10). Additionally, 16% of women aged more than 15 years have survived intimate-partner violence over the past 12 months, compared to 10% at the global level. The prevalence of lifetime intimate-partner violence is notably high in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, ranging from 24% in Jordan to 46% in Morocco. The highest rates of intimate-partner violence that took place over the past 12 months are also recorded in Morocco at 14%, followed by Egypt and Jordan (12%), and Tunisia (8%). Moreover, intimate-partner violence rates have reportedly increased in the region during the pandemic, although there are no official population-based statistics supporting such estimates (World Bank, 2021^[49]).

A full and accurate understanding of the scale of violence against women across the region is hampered by the systematic lack of available data. Many MENA countries have only recently started investing and addressing violence against women and girls, including by establishing data collection systems and reporting mechanisms (UNICEF, 2021^[3]). Moreover, the prevalence of intimate-partner violence may be underestimated due to survivors/victims' tendency to underreport, driven by fear of retaliation, privacy concerns, limited trust in law enforcement authorities and other cultural and societal factors (OECD, 2024^[50]; 2023^[51]; Ouedraogo and Stenzel, 2021^[52]). In this regard, lower rates of incidence do not necessarily mean that violence against women in general, and intimate-partner violence in particular, is less frequent – it could also reflect a higher number of unreported cases.

Violence against women is rooted in its social acceptance, from both men and women. It reflects patriarchal structures that prioritise men's authority and control within the family and society, often at the expense of women's rights and safety. Norms of restrictive masculinities – a set of social constructs related to perceived notions about how men should behave – impose rigid stereotypes of dominance on men, while women are expected to conform to traditional roles characterised by being "obedient, silent, and good" (OECD, 2023^[32]). For instance, "real" men are expected to dominate sexual and reproductive choices. In such an environment, there is a tendency to relegate domestic and intimate-partner violence to the private or family spheres. This can be observed in the MENA through survivors/victims' behaviour; they often hesitate to seek support from public institutions, with the majority turning to their relatives for assistance (Arab Barometer, 2020^[53]).

Figure 10. Violence against women remains a pervasive issue in the MENA

Share of women who have survived intimate-partner violence during the last 12 months and during their lifetime



Note: Countries are ordered by increasing shares of women who have experienced intimate-partner violence (IPV) during the last 12 months. Data for the 12-month IPV rate are missing for Iraq and Qatar. The population of reference for the 12-month IPV rate are ever-partnered women and girls aged more than 15 years; the population of reference for the lifetime IPV rate are ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 to 49 years. Global and regional averages are calculated based on countries for which data are available.

Source: (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[16]), "Gender, Institutions and Development (Edition 2023)", OECD International Development Statistics (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/7b0af638-en>.

In all four countries of focus, intimate-partner violence against women remains widely socially accepted. Jordan and Morocco stand out as countries where the majority of the population (63% and 52%, respectively) believes it is justified for a husband to hit or beat his wife under specific circumstances, such as burning food, arguing with the spouse, going out without telling him, neglecting the children, or refusing to have sex (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[16]). Similar discriminatory attitudes persist in Egypt (35%) and Tunisia (29%), though to a lesser extent. Tolerance for violence is seen as a crucial component of preserving family life. In Morocco, more than 60% of men and 46% of women believe that wives should tolerate violence to keep the family together, while 90% of men and 70% of women in Egypt believe the same (El Feki, Heilman and Barker, 2017^[38]).

Other forms of violence are also backed by considerable levels of social support. The acceptance of so-called "honour killings" remains prevalent in the region. For example, about 60% of Egypt's population agree that honour killing is justified in some circumstances, while in Morocco, about 30% of the population holds similar views (El Feki, Heilman and Barker, 2017^[38]). Likewise, a substantial part of the Egyptian population (72% of men and 63% of women) approves the practice of female genital mutilation and cutting, an extreme form of gender-based violence (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[16]).

Despite progress, legal frameworks remain discriminatory against women

Laws are fundamental elements and a pre-requisite to gender equality. This principle is embedded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a standalone indicator of Sustainable Development

Goal (SDG) 5.²¹ By setting the environment and establishing a common framework governing people's lives, laws and regulations profoundly influence individuals' capacity to accumulate endowments, enjoy returns to such endowments, access rights and resources, and act as free and autonomous agents in society (Hyland, Djankov and Goldberg, 2021^[54]; Chiongson et al., 2012^[55]).

Any legal provision that limits women's rights has a direct impact on gender equality, while the benefits of gender-equal laws go beyond women and can generate gains for the entire economy. The persistence of unequal or gender-blind provisions in many areas regulated by the law – such as labour, family, citizenship and so forth – continues to severely undermine women's empowerment. At the same time, evidence suggests that greater gender equality in the law facilitates cross-country income convergence over time (Sever, 2022^[56]).

In recent years, MENA countries have achieved significant advances in amending discriminatory legal provision and enacting new laws supportive of greater gender equality. Between 2019 and 2023, the four countries of focus enacted 22 legal reforms related to gender equality. Among these reforms, 16 (72%) were assessed as contributing to greater gender equality. Conversely, 2 reforms were assessed as gender unequal and further limiting women's rights and opportunities, and 5 of them were assessed as neutral from a gender perspective²² (see Annex D for a full list of legal and policy reforms undertaken by Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia between 2019 and 2023). Reforms contributing to greater gender equality spanned many different dimensions of women's and girls' lives, from violence against women to workplace rights and political voice. For instance, Egypt strengthened its legislation protecting women from sexual harassment, Morocco expanded the duration of paid paternity leave available to public employees, and Jordan raised the number of seats reserved to women in the lower house of the Parliament. Constitutional reforms also took place in Jordan and Tunisia, which allowed to enshrine more deeply certain fundamental rights of women and girls. In 2022, Jordan's new Constitution included the word "women" for the first time and guaranteed fundamental rights such as the right to bodily integrity or the right to freedom of residence and movement. In 2022, Tunisia adopted a new Constitution, which retained earlier gains on gender equality, although the legal framework lacks mechanisms for their implementation.²³

The 2024 edition of the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law further reveals that, globally, the MENA region made the most progress between 2023 and 2024 in enhancing women's rights across key indicators related to economic empowerment. Positive changes were notably driven by legal reforms in Jordan, Oman and Qatar. Despite these advances, MENA remains the global region where legal gaps between women and men's rights are the largest (World Bank, 2024^[57]).

Moreover, a multitude of action plans and national policy frameworks on gender equality support the legislative framework of the region. Between 2019 and 2023, 19 national action plans and policy frameworks related to certain gender issues were adopted across Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia (Annex D).

²¹ SDG Indicator 5.1.1, for which the OECD Development Centre is a co-custodian agency along with UN Women and the World Bank's Women Business and the Law, measures "[w]hether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex".

²² One reform was assessed as both positive and negative as it contained provisions contributing to greater gender equality and others that further limited women's rights and opportunities.

²³ For instance, Article 21 of the Tunisian Constitution of 2014, and Article 23 of the Tunisian Constitution of 2022 prohibits gender-based discrimination. Conversely, although Article 51 upholds the requirement for gender parity in elected bodies, the new Constitution does not establish any mechanism to guarantee this principle. Further, Presidential Decree No. 55 of 2022 amended the electoral law by removing earlier provisions requiring parliamentary candidate lists to be gender balanced.

Discriminatory personal status laws based on religion regulates family matters, reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting women's rights

Although most MENA legal systems are based on civil law and other international standards, family law remains primarily regulated by religion-based personal status laws. All MENA countries have enacted such family laws framed as personal status laws and most of them are rooted in Islamic principles.²⁴ These personal status laws regulate family dynamics and govern most aspects of people's private matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody and guardianship (Krawietz and Reifeld, 2008^[58]; Werthmuller, 2023^[59]). The application of personal status laws varies across countries. In some of them, one single personal status law applies universally to all citizens irrespective of their religion;²⁵ in other instances, multiple personal status laws that are based on different religions may coexist within a country (Werthmuller, 2023^[59]). Lebanon, for instance, has 15 separate personal status laws that apply to the different religious communities officially recognised by the State (HRW, 2015^[60]). Additionally, there are cases where the situation is mixed and where, for certain matters, only one single personal status law applies to all individuals, regardless of their religion, whereas other matters are governed by specific and separate civil or personal status laws for individuals of different faiths (Sadek, 2023^[61]; Eijk, 2013^[62]). In Egypt, for instance, the law governing inheritance is based on Islamic principles but applies to the entire population (OECD/ILO/CAWTAR, 2020^[12]).

When personal status laws formalise and sustain patriarchal gender relations, they can become barriers that perpetuate gender inequalities (Barber, 2019^[63]; Lomazzi, 2020^[64]). In most personal status laws of the region, the marital relationship is often based on male authority or responsibility over women, emphasising a woman's duty of obedience to her spouse in exchange for alimony (Barber, 2019^[63]). Such social and legal constraints undermine women's empowerment and hinder their ability to make decisions and to engage in economic activities. For instance, across the four countries of focus, the guiding principle in personal status laws is that female heirs are entitled to only half of the share that men receive. These rules derive from the traditional principle of reciprocity whereby men are deemed financially responsible for their families, while women do not have this obligation. Yet, in the current context, this rule does not reflect the reality as women often contribute significantly to the family income (OECD/ILO/CAWTAR, 2020^[12]).

The crucial role played by religion-based personal status laws is demonstrated by the reservations MENA countries express on Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Article 16 of the CEDAW provides for the equality of women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations. Out of the 18 MENA countries that are parties to the CEDAW,²⁶ 12 of them have entered reservations, either on the entire article or on some of its subsections, citing conflicts with the Islamic principles or national laws, which are often themselves based on these same principles (Table 4). Among the six MENA countries that do not have any reservation to Article 16 of the CEDAW,

²⁴ Many MENA countries officially recognise Islam as the state religion, and principles derived from Islamic law govern many aspects of both private and public life. In the public domain, religion is commonly acknowledged in legal systems through the establishment of Islam as the state religion in Constitutions or other fundamental pieces of legislation. Some countries specify that Islamic principles are the primary source of law or may require their head of state to be Muslim (Krawietz and Reifeld, 2008^[58]). Egypt, Jordan and Morocco officially recognise Islam as the state religion, whereas the Constitution of Tunisia promulgated in 2022 eliminated such specific provisions but reiterated the country's commitment to Islamic values throughout the text (Republic of Tunisia, 2014^[130]). Throughout the region, the interpretation and degree of influence of Islam in legal systems are not uniform across countries and evolve over time, influenced by local customs, social norms and historical context (Robinson, 2021^[134]).

²⁵ In some countries, Muslim personal status laws are applicable to all citizens, unless non-Muslims have specific provisions related to their respective religious groups.

²⁶ Iran is not party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Morocco and Tunisia withdrew all their reservations in 2011 and 2014, respectively (United Nations, 1979^[65]).

Table 4. Many MENA countries hold reservations on Article 16 of the CEDAW

Ratification and reservations of MENA countries on Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 2023

Country	Party to the CEDAW	Reservations to Article 16 of the CEDAW										Grounds for reservation
		1a	1b	1c	1d	1e	1f	1g	1h	2		
Algeria	Yes	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	National law
Bahrain	Yes	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Islamic Sharia
Djibouti	Yes											N/A
Egypt	Yes	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Islamic Sharia
Iran	No											-
Iraq	Yes	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Islamic Sharia
Jordan	Yes			x	x			x				National law
Kuwait	Yes						x					Islamic Sharia
Lebanon	Yes			x	x		x	x				National law
Libya	Yes			x	x							Islamic Sharia
Morocco	Yes											N/A
Oman	Yes	x		x			x					Islamic Sharia and national law
Qatar	Yes	x		x			x					Islamic Sharia and national law
Saudi Arabia	Yes											N/A
Syria	Yes			x	x		x	x				Islamic Sharia
Tunisia	Yes											N/A
United Arab Emirates	Yes	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Islamic Sharia
West Bank and Gaza Strip	Yes											N/A
Yemen	Yes											N/A

Note: Under Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations. This includes: (1a) the same right to enter into marriage; (1b) the same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent; (1c) the same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution; (1d) the same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status; (1e) the same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights; (1f) the same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children; (1g) the same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation; (1h) the same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property; and (2) the legal prohibition of child marriage, the establishment of a minimum age for marriage and the compulsory registration of marriages.

Source: (United Nations, 1979^[65]; 2006^[66]; 2023^[67]).

Family laws uphold discrimination, perpetuating gender power imbalances and undermining women's economic empowerment

Discriminatory civil and personal status laws are at the heart of the discrimination that MENA women face in the family spheres, which is the most challenging SIGI dimension. Personal status laws often differentiate between men and women when it comes to rights and abilities within the family structure and are further exacerbated by informal laws. The resulting discrimination affects all areas of women's and girls' private lives, including marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody and guardianship. Both formal and informal laws reflect social norms and religious teachings that designate men as the main decision-makers for all family matters, including economic decisions in the household. As such, they deeply limit women's agency (Musawah, 2018^[68]).

In Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, formal and informal laws continue to allow the practice of girl child marriage. Beyond the profound negative effects that girl child marriage can have on the health of adolescent girls and women, it has long-term adverse consequences on women's economic empowerment. By curtailing the educational opportunities of young brides who are often forced to abandon school to face their new marital obligations, girl child marriage contributes to depriving them of crucial knowledge and skills for their future employment and economic independence (UN Women, IDLO and World Bank, 2020^[69]). Egypt stands out as the only country of the MENA region that strictly prohibits the marriage of men and women before the age of 18 years, without any exception (Arab Republic of Egypt, 2008^[70]). Yet, in 2023, 17% of women aged 20 to 24 years were married or in union before the age of 18 years. These persisting large rates of girl child marriage underscore the presence of informal laws and practices that continue to encourage the marriage of girls before the age of 18 years and undermine the statutory law in place (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[16]). In Morocco and Tunisia, the law also sets the minimum legal age of marriage for men and women at 18 years but introduces legal exceptions allowing the marriage of individuals who are younger than 18 years with the permission of a parent, legal guardian or a judge (Kingdom of Morocco, 2005^[71]; Republic of Tunisia, 1956^[72]). Finally, in Jordan, the minimum legal age of marriage depends on the complex system of multiple personal status laws and varies across the country's religious communities. For Muslims, the law sets the minimum legal age of marriage for men and women at 18 years. Among Catholics, this age is 16 years for boys and 14 years for girls, while among Orthodox, this age is 14 years for boys and 12 years for girls (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2019^[73]; OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]).

In the MENA, legal frameworks governing divorce establish distinct rights for men and women. Except for Tunisia, laws in all MENA countries allow men to unilaterally divorce their spouse. Conversely, the circumstances upon which a woman can file for divorce are limited. Additional disparities between women and men exist after the divorce has been pronounced. For instance, in 10 MENA countries,²⁷ including Morocco and Tunisia, women must respect a waiting period before they can remarry, whereas no such restriction is imposed on men.

Laws governing guardianship and child custody also establish different rights between mothers and fathers. In most of these countries, the law grants child custody rights to mothers during the marriage, and in all MENA countries except for Djibouti and Tunisia, the law grants these rights to women following a divorce, whether it is the mother herself or another woman of the family. Conversely, in many countries, mothers are not entitled to be legal guardians of their children and this right belongs in priority to fathers or other men of the family (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]). In this regard, Morocco and Tunisia have made some advances to introduce more equal rights for men and women. For instance, in Morocco, child custody is the duty of both parents while married, and in Tunisia, both parents are entitled to child custody in the event of a divorce (Republic of Tunisia, 1956^[72]; Kingdom of Morocco, 2004^[74]).

The legal status of women in the household differs across most MENA countries, including the four focus countries. In Egypt and Morocco, both women and men can be formally and legally recognised as the head of households, despite the presence of informal practices that favour male-headships (Arab Republic of Egypt, 2014^[75]; Kingdom of Morocco, 2005^[71]; OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]). In Tunisia, the law designates a married man as the head of the family. In Jordan, legal provisions specify that a married man or the father is the head of the family, and a married woman only assumes this role in the event of the death or prolonged absence of her spouse (Republic of Tunisia, 1956^[72]; Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2019^[73]).

These restrictions placed on women's status in the household and their lack of agency in the family can have severe impacts on many aspects of their lives, including education, career choices, and financial matters. Ultimately, it can drastically impede women's ability to make independent decisions about their

²⁷ Algeria, Djibouti, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen.

economic status. For instance, research shows that legal gender discrimination, including restrictions on women's ability to be the head of a household, exhibits a negative correlation with female labour force participation (Gonzales et al., 2015^[76]).

Restrictive property and inheritance laws limit women's access to assets, with implications on their economic participation

Assets serve as the foundation for sustaining livelihoods, supporting family members and building wealth, and act as collateral for accessing credit (Fernando et al., 2022^[77]). The ability of individuals to own and use assets is therefore a key factor for economic empowerment. Any legal or social restrictions imposed on the ability of women and girls to access such assets carry both direct and indirect adverse implications for their economic empowerment. Throughout history, access to assets, particularly land, has been secured through purchase or inheritance. In this context, legal access to land and non-land assets depends as much on property laws that regulate the form under which assets are owned, managed and sold, as on inheritance laws that establish how assets are transmitted from one generation to another.

In Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, property laws do not overtly restrict women's rights. However, inheritance laws severely undermine women's and girls' ability to secure assets through inheritance. All four countries maintain legal traditions that adhere to local cultural practices and Islamic principles which uphold a system rooted in the primacy of male lineage. These inheritance rules severely undermine daughters' or widow's inheritance rights as compared to those of sons and widowers (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]). More specifically, the law establishes that female heirs receive reduced inheritance shares, with variations in each of the four jurisdictions (see details on SIGI Country Profiles in Annex A).

Changing these long-standing inheritance rights proves challenging, but some advances have been achieved, particularly for non-Muslim minorities. In 2018, Tunisia's president proposed to amend the legislation to establish equal inheritance rights between women and men but the draft law was abandoned following parliamentary opposition (Bajec, 2023^[78]; OECD/ILO/CAWTAR, 2020^[12]). In Egypt, to prevent women from being illegally deprived of their inheritance, the Inheritance Law No. 77/1943 – which is based on Islamic principles but applies to the entire population (OECD/ILO/CAWTAR, 2020^[12]) – was successfully amended in 2017, establishing penalties for those who disinherit family members. Moreover, in 2019, an Egyptian court ruled in favour of equal inheritance shares between female and male heirs in a case brought by a Catholic woman (BBC, 2019^[79]). In Jordan, Christian leaders have advocated for reform and proposed a draft law establishing equal inheritance rights between Christian women and men (Husseini, 2023^[80]). Inheritance rights are also debated in Morocco, but opinions on a potential legal reform that would grant equal rights to women and men are split. In 2022, a nation-wide representative survey conducted by the Association of Moroccan Women for Research and Development found that 34% of Moroccans would support a reform of the inheritance law aimed at introducing more gender equality, but that 44% of them would oppose such reform (Conseil national des droits de l'Homme, 2022^[81]; Zouiten, 2022^[82]).

Weak legislation addressing violence against women increases women's risk of experiencing violence and has adverse impacts on their economic empowerment

Legislation can play a crucial role in combating violence against women by holding perpetrators accountable, ensuring access to justice and providing the necessary support to survivors. In line with international standards, such as General recommendation No. 35 of the CEDAW Committee and the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, better known as the Istanbul Convention, legal frameworks must protect girls and women from all forms of violence without exceptions or legal loopholes, both offline and online. These forms of violence notably include domestic and intimate-partner violence, rape, marital rape, honour crimes, and sexual harassment. Beyond comprehensive laws, robust policy frameworks are crucial to ensure that the immediate safety of

victims/survivors is guaranteed and that the long-term and multifaceted consequences that extend beyond physical and psychological harm are mitigated.

The body of existing research highlights significant and adverse long-term impacts of violence against women on women's economic empowerment.²⁸ In 2019, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment and its accompanying Recommendation No. 206 on Violence and Harassment stressed that domestic violence can affect employment and productivity, emphasising that domestic violence can spill over into the work environment through the stress and trauma it causes (ILO, 2020^[83]). Through its psychological, social and health effects, intimate-partner violence can disrupt a survivor/victim's engagement at work, affect job stability, and hinder occupational attainment (Riger and Staggs, 2004^[84]; Docherty, 2022^[85]). As of 2024, 38 countries have ratified Convention No. 190, but no MENA country has done so (ILO, 2024^[86]).

Due to legal loopholes, laws in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia do not comprehensively protect women and girls from violence. In Egypt, the law does not specifically criminalise domestic violence, although since 2021, the law provides for a holistic definition of violence against women that covers all types of abuse (Arab Republic of Egypt, 2021^[87]). In Egypt, Jordan and Morocco the law acknowledges so-called honour crimes and provide for reduced penalties in such cases (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]). Moreover, none of the four countries specifically recognise marital rape. The legal definitions of rape in Jordan and Tunisia require proof of penetration, with Jordan additionally mandating proof of use of physical force. By failing to account for the full range of sexual abuses that women can experience and by diverting the focus from the fundamental lack of consent, this narrow take on legal definitions crucially curtails the legal protection of survivors/victims (United Nations, 2009^[88]; Kinports, 2001^[89]). The proof of requirements can also place undue burden on the survivor/victim to prove the severity of the assault.

Nevertheless, all four countries have taken positive strides – particularly over the past five to ten years.²⁹ In Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, legal protection extends to survivors/victims of domestic violence, covering various types of abuse (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]). Following an amendment to the Penal Code in Egypt in 2021, all four countries now have comprehensive laws in place on sexual harassment, covering various environments, including workplaces, educational establishments, public places and online platforms (Arab Republic of Egypt, 2021^[90]; OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]). Finally, all four countries have implemented national policies or strategies to combat violence against women, and have established comprehensive mechanisms to monitor and review the implementation of these strategies.

The lack of gender-sensitive labour laws hinders women's economic participation

Gender-sensitive labour laws play a crucial role in shaping women's economic participation. Employment is the primary avenue for women's involvement and contribution to the economy. Persistent inequalities between men and women in the labour force often arise from discriminatory laws. These include limitations in accessing economic opportunities and a lack of freedom to choose professions or sectors based on their interests and abilities. In some instances, women's engagement in the labour force may require the approval of a spouse or male relative (Fernando et al., 2022^[77]; OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]).

²⁸ The literature also stresses the importance of considering the reverse effect of economic growth on violence against women. This effect is beyond the scope of the paper.

²⁹ In 2015, Jordan enacted a law to address cybercrimes, including violence. In 2017 and 2018, Tunisia and Morocco both enacted laws dedicated to the elimination of violence against women. In 2020 and 2021, Egypt amended and added provisions of the Penal Code on sexual violence and harassment.

In this context, it is essential that legal frameworks establish safeguards against gender-based discrimination in the workplace and support women in securing employment and advancing their careers (Fernando et al., 2022^[77]). This requires addressing discriminatory hiring practices, unfavourable treatment of women, gender pay gaps and sexual harassment. For instance, research emphasises that gender pay gaps tend to narrow when legal reforms prioritise gender equality and actively encourage increased female labour force participation (Htun, Jensenius and Nelson-Nuñez, 2019^[91]). Furthermore, evidence shows that specific parental leave policies can significantly support women's workforce participation and encourage a more gender-equal division of childcare. Paid maternal leave in line with international standards not only ensure mothers' well-being but also improve their financial security. At the same time, well-paid and earmarked leaves for fathers can improve gender equality outcomes, including time spent on childcare. In the long run, such policies can help transform discriminatory social norms and norms of restrictive masculinities that limit fathers' involvement in caregiving responsibilities and reduce mothers' economic inclusion (Chai et al., 2021^[92]; Baird, Hamilton and Constantin, 2021^[93]; Kvande and Brandth, 2019^[94]).

All MENA countries mandate paid maternity leave, but only a few of them establish periods that are aligned with the ILO's standards, while paid paternity leaves are almost non-existent. Across the region, only 7 countries³⁰ out of 19 comply with the minimum maternity leave period of 14 weeks recommended by the ILO, with full payment of benefits (Figure 11) (ILO, 2022^[95]). All four countries of focus mandate paid maternity leave, but only Morocco attains the ILO-recommended duration of 14 weeks. In contrast with maternity leave, paternity leave is nearly non-existent across the region. Only 8 countries³¹ out of 19 mandate paid paternity leave and their duration is often limited to a few days, significantly shorter than for mothers (Figure 11). For instance, Egypt does not establish any mandatory paid paternity leave. Tunisia establishes a one-day paid paternity leave while it attains 3 days in Jordan and Morocco.

Overall, labour laws in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia exhibit varying levels of gender-sensitiveness. In Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, laws explicitly incorporate provisions that prohibit discrimination in employment on the basis of sex. Conversely, Jordan is among the two MENA countries³² out of 19, and 12 countries out of 179 globally, that lack explicit provisions against gender-based discrimination in employment. Laws in Egypt and Tunisia also fail to legally mandate the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. In Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, women face restriction from entering certain professions or sectors: in Egypt, women are barred from working in mining and construction jobs while the law prohibits women from undertaking underground work in Morocco and Tunisia. The law also forbids women from engaging in hazardous, morally inappropriate and indecent work in Egypt and Morocco. Finally, in Jordan, Muslim women are legally required to obtain permission from their husband to pursue paid employment (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]).

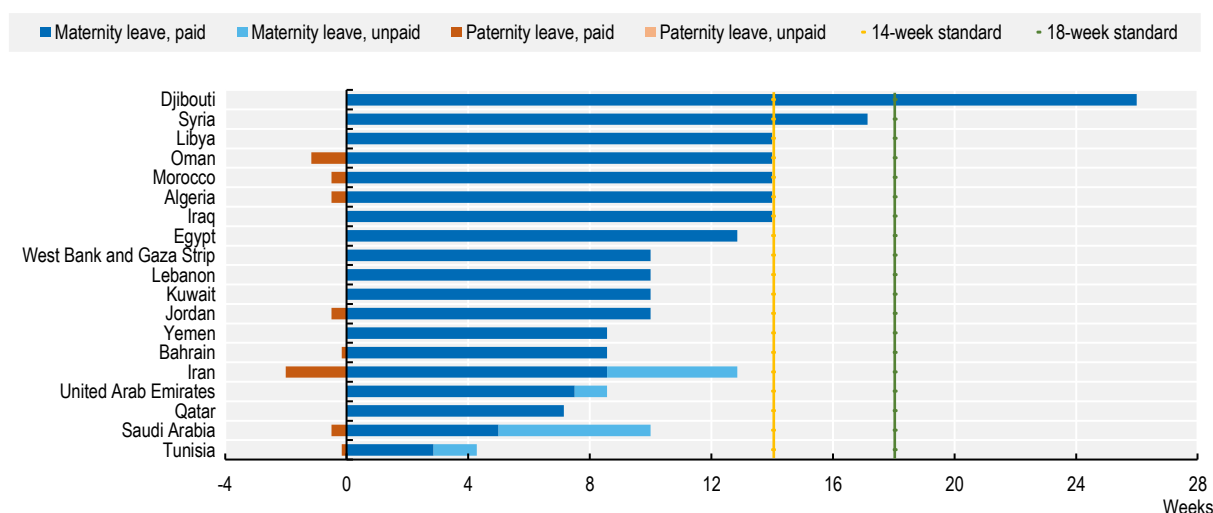
³⁰ Algeria, Djibouti, Iraq, Libya, Morocco, Oman and Syria.

³¹ Algeria, Bahrain, Iran, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia.

³² Iran and Jordan.

Figure 11. MENA laws mandate paid maternity leave, but duration varies, and paternity leave is almost non-existent

Duration of legislated paid and unpaid maternity and paternity leave, 2023



Note: The duration of paid maternity and paternity leave is assessed directly from the legal texts governing maternity and paternity benefits where the laws explicitly mention the number of weeks that are paid and those that are unpaid. Where the duration is expressed in days, the total was divided by seven to obtain the corresponding duration in weeks. Where the legal texts governing maternity and paternity benefits only mention a share of the income to which the beneficiary is entitled, the duration of paid maternity and paternity leave was calculated applying the same proportion to the entire length of maternity and paternity leave. In Djibouti and Oman, data include the reforms to maternity and paternity leave that took place in 2023. “14-week standard” refers to the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) standard of a minimum maternity leave period of 14 weeks; and the “18-week standard” refers to ILO’s standard of a recommended maternity leave period of 18 weeks to ensure an adequate rest and recovery time for the mother (ILO, 2022^[95]).

Source: (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi>.

Laws restricting women’s freedom of movement can limit their economic agency

Restrictions on freedom of movement can constitute a significant barrier to women’s economic empowerment. When women are unable to exercise their right to move freely, whether abroad or in their own country, due to a lack of required documents or male authorisation, it can curtail their ability to seek employment, attend job interviews and engage in entrepreneurial opportunities (Fernando et al., 2022^[77]; World Bank, 2019^[96]).

Women’s freedom of movement varies widely across Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. In Morocco and Tunisia, the law provides unrestricted freedom to women. Legal reforms in 1993 for Tunisia and in 2004 for Morocco eliminated provisions according to which women were required to obey their spouses. Prior to these reforms, women who left their homes without their spouses’ permission could be deemed disobedient, exposing them to the risk of losing alimony. Moreover, in both countries administrative regulations do not differentiate between men and women when applying for identity cards and passports (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[37]).

Conversely, in Egypt and Jordan, personal status laws restrict women’s ability to travel freely. In both countries, women are legally required to obey their spouse. Leaving the marital home without a legitimate reason can lead to the forfeiture of their right to spousal maintenance (Arab Republic of Egypt, 1985^[97]; Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2019^[73]). Such provisions considerably limit women’s agency and decision-making power. While not explicitly mandating women to stay home, any autonomous decision by women contrary to their spouses’ views, including those concerning employment opportunities or economic activity, may carry legal consequences. These clauses reaffirm the dominant position of men in the family

and their decision-making authority regarding the household's economic standing. Additional administrative restrictions also exist in these two countries. In Egypt, women must fulfil different requirements than men to apply for a passport (Government of Egypt, 2024^[98]).³³ In Jordan, women who wish to travel abroad with their child must obtain the consent of the father or of the guardian (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2019^[73]).

³³ Married or divorced women must provide a document that proves their marital status, whereas unmarried women must submit a declaration of non-marriage. No such documents are required for men.

3 Exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's economic vulnerabilities

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the role that discriminatory social institutions play and reinforced pre-existing gender disparities. Its socio-economic consequences shed light on the weaknesses of legal, policy and institutional frameworks and underscored how these challenges can exacerbate women's vulnerabilities. Examining the impact of the pandemic on women, this section focuses on the specific consequences it had on women's unpaid care and domestic work, their labour market participation, levels of intimate-partner violence, and women's and girls' access to education. Furthermore, it underscores the consequences of pre-existing unequal inheritance rights during the pandemic.

Throughout the section, the analysis relies on the best available information to identify and confirm patterns of discrimination that emerged during the COVID-19 crisis. Yet, official data and statistical resources on the issues covered in the section remain limited in the post-pandemic context.

Lockdowns and confinement measures amplified women's unpaid care and domestic responsibilities

The COVID-19 pandemic underlined and exacerbated existing inequalities in unpaid care and domestic work. Prior to the pandemic, the time allocated by women from the MENA region to unpaid care and domestic tasks was already one of the largest in the world, and differences between women and men were among the widest worldwide (see section "Women's primary role revolves around domestic responsibilities, while society disregards their economic abilities and aspirations"). These gender-based imbalances in the region primarily stem from traditional social norms that confine women to a role of primary caregivers and custodians of domestic responsibilities. Amid the COVID-19 crisis, lockdowns and confinement measures intensified women's domestic responsibilities (OECD, 2020^[18]). The pandemic also disrupted established support networks, forcing women to adapt to the increased demand for care and domestic activities while relying on a reduced access to external assistance (Krafft, Selwaness and Sieverding, 2022^[15]).

The closure of childcare facilities during the pandemic increased women's unpaid care workload, particularly for those with pre-school-aged children. Evidence from Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia shows that women with children reported bearing a heavier burden of care responsibilities during the pandemic (Krafft, Selwaness and Sieverding, 2022^[15]). This increase is primarily attributed to the closure of schools and childcare facilities. The impacts on the levels of unpaid care work undertaken by women depended on children's age. The presence of children under the age of 3 years resulted in the most significant increase in caregiving responsibilities, followed by those aged between 3 and 5 years, possibly due to the dual role of mothers as both primary caregiver and educator and the lack of remote options for children of this age. Conversely, the presence of school-aged children (6-17 years) did not lead to a

significant increase in unpaid care work, primarily due to their regular enrolment in remote educational activities. Despite its challenges, online schooling seems to have alleviated some of the care work burden in the four countries of focus, which constitutes a deviation from patterns observed in higher-income countries (Krafft, Selwaness and Sieverding, 2022^[15]). Other emerging evidence from Egypt shows a similar trend: women surveyed reported a significant increase in time spent on childcare (+ 61%) and housework, but the majority of respondents noted a decrease in time spent studying with their children (UN Women, NCW and Baseera, 2020^[99]).

The impact of COVID-19 on unpaid care work also varied depending on marital status. Married women consistently reported an increase in care work compared to pre-pandemic levels, with percentages ranging from 41% in Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia to 48% in Morocco. Unmarried women living with children in their households also reported an increase, ranging from 27% in Egypt to 35% in Tunisia. In contrast, women who were not married, and lived in households without children, were more likely to report a decrease in care work as compared to pre-pandemic levels (Krafft, Selwaness and Sieverding, 2022^[15]).

The distinct experience of married and unmarried women during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in terms of increased care work, may be attributed to several factors. Cultural expectations and traditional gender roles often place the caregiving burden on married women, especially regarding childcare and attending to the needs of the extended family, such as elderly parents or sick family members. In comparison, unmarried women who live in households where children are present may also have to contribute to care and domestic tasks, albeit to a reduced extent and not as the primary person responsible for the children, resulting in a slightly lighter care workload. Conversely, unmarried women who live in household without children may experience greater flexibility in managing their time and commitments, leading to a reduced impact on their care workload. However, it is important to note that individual circumstances vary widely, depending on factors such as living arrangements, family dynamics, and personal responsibilities. In this regard, available evidence falls short of providing qualitative insights into these dynamics.

Women's labour force participation did not significantly change due to pre-existing inequalities between women and men

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered one of the most significant job crises of the history, with severe implications on female employment. Globally, characteristics of women's employment, including informality, sectoral segregation, and part-time engagement, coupled with increased care and domestic responsibilities induced by response measures, posed specific challenges. Global data indicate that during the pandemic, one in four women considered leaving the workforce or downshifting their careers, compared to one in five men (Gardner, Walsh and Frosch, 2022^[100]; OECD/ILO, 2019^[101]).

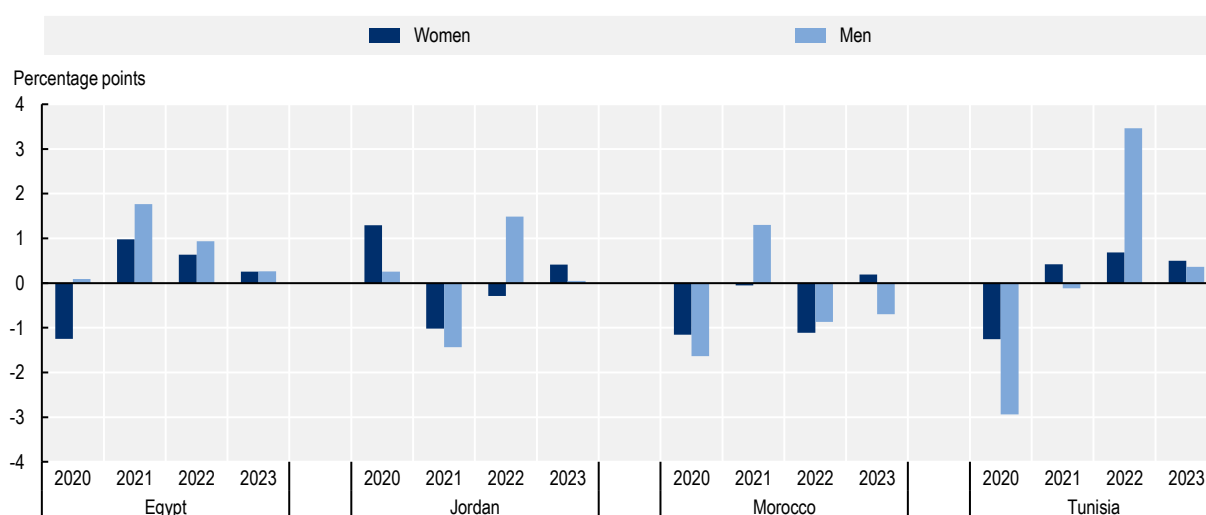
In the MENA region, women's unique characteristics on the labour market resulted in lower and less drastic impacts on women's labour force participation than for men during the pandemic and post-pandemic years. Pre-existing low female labour force participation notably meant that there was a more limited pool of women that were at risk of losing their jobs. In Morocco and Tunisia men's labour force participation drastically fell between 2019 and 2020, with drops of 1.6 and 2.9 percentage points, respectively. In comparison, the decrease in women's labour force participation rate was more limited to 1.2 and 1.3 percentage points, respectively (Figure 12). Likewise, in Jordan, between 2021 and 2020, men's and women's labour force participation dropped by 1.4 and 1 percentage points, respectively. However, men also experienced a stronger recovery and re-entry on the labour market. Between 2021 and 2020, men's participation to the labour market increased by 1.3 percentage points in Morocco, compared to a decrease of 0.1 percentage points for women. Likewise, between 2021 and 2022, men's labour force participation increased by 1.5 percentage points in Jordan compared to a decrease of 0.3 percentage points for women; and increased by 3.5 percentage points in Tunisia compared to an increase of 0.7 percentage points for

women. Conversely, in Egypt, women's labour force participation declined more sharply, a trend confirmed by national official data and that started before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Fadlalmawla et al., 2022^[102]).

Protective measures in the public sector, where many MENA women are employed, also disproportionately benefited them. In the MENA, government's labour market responses to the pandemic in terms of employment protection were primarily targeted to workers in the public sector (Krafft, Selwaness and Sieverding, 2022^[15]). These responses notably included expanded paid and unpaid leave, wage subsidies, and/or reduced work time, safeguarding employment throughout the crisis (see Annex C). For example, during the early stages of the pandemic in 2020, female public sector employees in Egypt with children below the age of 12 years or children with disabilities were granted unpaid leaves. Paradoxically, restrictive social norms placing the burden of care on women's shoulders resulted in women benefiting from these policies targeted at care providers. Nevertheless, the strain on public and fiscal resources induced by the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that the public sector was no longer in a position to create, and sometimes maintain, jobs (OECD, 2022^[9]).

Figure 12. The consequences of COVID-19 affected women's labour force participation in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, but less than for men

Year-to-year change in women's and men's labour force participation rate, 2019-23



Note: Each year represents the year-to-year change in women's and men's labour force participation rate compared to the previous year.
Source: (ILO, 2024^[8]), Labour force participation rate by sex and age, ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2023 (%) – Annual, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/>.

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified violence against women

Domestic and intimate-partner violence rates reportedly increased in the MENA during the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2021^[49]). Lockdowns and economic hardships intensified power imbalances within households. The combination of poor economic and social conditions along with lockdown measures led to escalating domestic tensions, resulting in a surge and a heightened risk of gender-based violence, particularly intimate-partner violence (CARE, 2020^[103]).

Norms of restrictive masculinities, deeply ingrained in societal structures, dictate that “real” men must consistently embody power and control over resources and members of the household. The pandemic's consequences on health and livelihoods have, in certain cases, threatened the perceived stability of

traditional masculine identities (Ruxton and Burrell, 2020^[104]). In such circumstances, some men may seek ways to regain a semblance of control and power by asserting dominance over others, particularly their partners and/or children. The uncertainties brought about by the pandemic constitute major risk factors for some men to justify their abusive behaviours as “authoritarian” efforts to protect their families from external threats, such as the dangers posed by COVID-19 (Santos et al., 2021^[105]).

Although official and up-to-date data on the prevalence of violence against women remain extremely scarce, some evidence suggests increased cases of violence during the COVID-19 pandemic in the MENA. In Tunisia, the Minister of Women’s Affairs indicated a five-fold increase in the cases of domestic violence reported to their 24-hour hotline since the implementation of lockdown restrictions (UNICEF, 2021^[3]; Bajec, 2020^[106]). Similarly, Moroccan domestic abuse hotlines witnessed a threefold increase in call volume (UNICEF, 2021^[3]; Ojima, 2020^[107]). The Family Protection Department of the Jordanian Police also reported a 33% increase in domestic violence cases during the lockdown (EuroMed Rights, 2020^[108]). In contrast, other sources from Jordan noted a decrease in cases of violence reported to the hotline, possibly due to a lack of privacy for hotline callers (CARE, 2020^[103]; EuroMed Rights, 2020^[108]). A survey conducted by Egypt’s National Council of Women in April 2020 revealed that 7% of married women reported experiencing verbal abuse and insults from their spouses – a form of violence not as prevalent prior to the pandemic. The survey also indicated a 33% increase in family problems and a 19% increase in violence among family members compared to before the outbreak of the pandemic (Magdy and Zaki, 2021^[109]).

Beyond the scarcity of prevalence data, perceptions on the levels of violence against women indicate a widespread increase throughout the region. Although data on the actual levels of violence remain limited, 2022 data from the Arab Barometer survey underscore that a large share of the MENA population reported a perceived increase of violence against women. In Tunisia and Jordan, 61% and 51% of respondents, respectively, believed that violence against women had increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Arab Barometer, 2022^[110]; 2022^[111]). Perception levels were slightly lower in Morocco and Egypt. In Morocco, only 23% of the respondents believed that gender-based violence had risen during the pandemic while 30% declared that, in their opinion, it had decreased (Arab Barometer, 2022^[112]), whereas in Egypt, 38% of the respondents believed it had increased while 32% stated it had decreased (Roche, 2022^[113]). Nevertheless, in all four countries, notable differences in perceptions exist between men and women, highlighting different experiences. For instance, in Jordan and Tunisia, the gap between the proportion of women who reported an increase in the perceived violence against women is nearly 20 percentage points larger than for men. In Egypt and Morocco, it reaches 8 percentage points (Roche, 2022^[113]).

The consequences of COVID-19 affected both boys' and girls' education, potentially hindering their ability to access future opportunities

The closure of schools in response to the pandemic deeply affected the educational landscape of the MENA, exacerbating pre-existing challenges. Prior to the pandemic, 15 million children aged between 5 to 14 years were out of school,³⁴ representing 17% of MENA children – the majority of which were girls. At the same time, two-third of children in the region lacked proficiency in reading (UNESCO/World Bank/United Nations Children’s Fund, 2021^[114]; UNICEF, 2018^[115]). As education level rises, girls are more likely than boys to be out of school. For instance, 13% of boys of lower-secondary school age were out of school in 2018, compared to 19% of girls (UNICEF, 2018^[115]). The situation aggravated in 2020, with an additional 1.3 million children and youths becoming at risk of dropping out due to the crisis. However, this

³⁴ Out-of-school children comprise children one year before the official primary school age entry date who are not in pre-primary or primary school; children of primary school age who are not in primary or secondary school; and children of lower secondary school age who are not in primary or secondary school.

increased risk primarily affected boys with about two-thirds of the new children at risk of dropping out of school being boys (UNESCO, 2020_[116]).

Disruptions to education carries significant implications for the region, with potential increases in illiteracy, a rise in the number of students performing below minimum proficiency levels, and an estimated economic loss of up to USD 0.8 trillion in lifetime earnings (UNESCO/World Bank/United Nations Children's Fund, 2021_[114]). Beyond educational attainment, the consequences of these disruptions extend to mental health and well-being, socialisation, and hinder the future participation of girls in the labour market.

Despite some efforts to implement remote learning through various modalities, around 40% of MENA students did not benefit from any remote learning initiative. Some initiatives were successful. For instance, proactive measures taken by Jordan, including collaborating with various stakeholders and swiftly implementing comprehensive remote education platforms, proved to be a successful model for a more resilient educational system in the face of crises (UNICEF Jordan, 2020_[117]). Yet, the general lack of access to remote online schooling across the region particularly affected students who were already vulnerable, and largely stemmed from the scarcity of dedicated initiatives and tools required for remote access (UNESCO/World Bank/United Nations Children's Fund, 2021_[114]). Overall, negative repercussions on children's education due to limited access to technology appear to be gender-neutral, as there is insufficient data to suggest that girls were more adversely affected than boys.

Evidence from Tunisia and Morocco underlined how the lack of access to technology largely hindered the potential impact of remote learning initiatives. In Tunisia, 61% of households reported that their children had not engaged in any educational activities, citing reasons such as the absence of remote learning options, a lack of family interest in education, limited communication with teachers, and shortages of materials at home (Drabble and Verheijen, 2021_[118]). In Morocco, the government's response included broadcasting recorded lessons on television. Yet, despite the distribution of millions of tablets, hard-to-reach rural students faced challenges accessing virtual classes, highlighting the need for innovative solutions to bridge the digital divide (OECD, World Bank, Harvard Global Education Innovation and HundrED, 2020_[119]).

Restricted inheritance rights exposed wives and daughters of deceased male family members to the risks of assets' loss

In times of crisis that can involve the death of relatives, women, and especially widows, are disproportionately at risk of losing their rights over houses, land and property. Evidence from past epidemics, such as HIV/AIDS and Ebola, demonstrated that due to restricted inheritance rights, widows are at risk of losing property to male family members. This jeopardises their ability to secure accommodation and increases their vulnerability amidst the health emergency (Harrisberg, 2020_[120]; UN Women, 2020_[121]; Stanley and Prettitore, 2020_[122]). In the MENA, prevailing inheritance practices, according to which women's rights to land and property are primarily acknowledged through their association with a husband or male relative, create legal and social dependence (Stanley and Prettitore, 2020_[122]). Women in traditional, customary, or informal marriages are particularly vulnerable, as property rights are typically contingent upon formal state-sanctioned marriages (Stanley and Prettitore, 2020_[122]).

Globally, the COVID-19 mortality rate has been notably higher for men than women. For instance, data reveal that men account for 59% of coronavirus deaths in Morocco, while this figure rises to 62% in Jordan and 66% in Tunisia (Gobal Health 50/50, APHRC and ICRW, 2022_[123]). This has important implications for widows and orphaned girls, whose economic security may be jeopardised as a result of restricted inheritance rights. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of available data regarding whether the pandemic has exacerbated disputes over inheritances following COVID-19-related deaths in these countries. The available data on the socio-economic consequences of women's restricted rights to inheritance in the MENA during COVID-19 are also extremely limited, with anecdotal evidence often serving as the primary

source of information. Equally lacking is information on any government initiatives aimed at safeguarding the well-being of widows and female orphans. Nevertheless, the application of existing laws points towards a potential significant number of women in the MENA countries that may have been left without assets following the death of their spouse or father.

4 Conclusion and policy recommendations

Results from the fifth edition of the SIGI in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia highlight the existence of substantial levels of discrimination in social institutions. These social institutions encompass formal and informal laws as well as social norms that shape girls' and women's experiences over the course of their lives. Data for the MENA region and the four countries of focus reveal that levels of gender-based discrimination are particularly pronounced in the family sphere. Legal loopholes allow girl child marriage and laws restrict women's rights in terms of divorce, household responsibilities and inheritance. Restrictive social norms uphold traditional gender roles according to which men are breadwinners and decision-makers, whereas women's responsibilities are primarily centred around childcare and housework. Together, these discriminatory legal frameworks and social norms not only undermine the principle of gender equality in the family but directly affect women's well-being and agency in all other aspects of their lives, including their economic inclusion. In particular, women's participation to the labour force remains very low across the entire region.

Crises can exacerbate women's and girls' vulnerabilities. Evidence reveals that the impacts of crises and external shocks are not gender neutral but also deplete resources to advance gender equality. While women and men face distinct challenges during and in the aftermath of crises, structural inequalities and social institutions tend to accentuate women's vulnerabilities. For instance, patriarchal power structures that shape the societal organisation of most countries, including in the MENA, inherently limit women's ability to take part in and contribute to decision-making processes. Yet, women's voices, needs and expertise are vital to ensure that crisis prevention and response mechanisms do not amplify existing inequalities.

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for gender-sensitive policies and programmes. While comparative and reliable data remain scarce, existing evidence suggests that the COVID-19 crisis amplified pre-existing gender inequalities and increased girls' and women's risk of experiencing gender-based violence. In the MENA – and particularly in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia – the majority of governments' policy measures that qualified as gender-sensitive targeted violence against women. Conversely, a limited number of policies or programmes addressed women's economic inclusion.

Gender equality is an indispensable condition to build more inclusive and resilient societies. In the MENA, discriminatory laws and social norms continue to represent key barriers to attain this goal. To ensure policies and programmes are not gender-blind, policy makers must systematically mainstream gender across all sectors. These efforts must also go beyond the public action. Enhancing girls' and women's fundamental rights and opportunities requires a whole-of-society approach that requires the active participation and involvement of individuals, civil society organisations, the private sector, philanthropic actors as well as development partners. All these actors have a unique role to play and should collaborate to effectively transform norms and laws that currently limit women's rights, well-being and empowerment to the detriment of a strong, shared and inclusive socio-economic prosperity.

Revise existing legal provisions, enact new legislation supporting gender equality, and implement gender-responsive policies

Laws are a fundamental element and a pre-requisite to gender equality. In most MENA countries, gender-based discrimination continues to be formalised at the heart of the legislation. It is crucial that lawmakers of the region, including in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, urgently address discrimination embedded in laws by amending existing laws, enacting new texts and ensuring the enforcement of provisions aimed at guaranteeing gender equality.

- *Equality in marriage and family:* Policy makers should repeal discriminatory provisions in laws that govern individuals' private lives and family relations, including in personal status laws, and ensure that the legislation adheres to gender equality principles embedded in countries' constitutions and are in line with international conventions.
 - The minimum legal age for marriage should be set at 18 years without any exceptions, applicable to all girls and boys irrespective of their background and characteristics – faith, legal regime or place of residence.
 - Provisions that do not grant women and men with equal rights and responsibilities in the family should be reviewed and amended. This includes abrogating provisions that establish men as natural heads of household and legal guardians, and clauses that directly or indirectly require women to obey their spouses.
 - Inheritance laws should be reviewed to grant men and women equal rights to inherit assets as well as equal shares of inheritance. This requires updating current laws that favour widowers and sons over widows and girls. In addition, provisions should be enacted to protect women from being forced to renounce their inheritance rights by criminalising unlawful disinheritance.
- *Violence against women and reproductive autonomy:*
 - The legislation must recognise and protect girls and women from all forms of violence without exceptions or legal vacuums. Specifically, countries must unequivocally condemn “honour killings”, criminalise all forms of domestic violence, criminalise sexual harassment in all places, and broaden the legal definition of rape to include consent and marital rape.
 - Lawmakers should review and reform laws on abortion in line with regional and international standards – i.e. legalising abortion when essential to save the pregnant woman’s life and health and in cases of rape, incest and foetal impairment (African Union, 2003^[124]; CEDAW, 2022^[125]).
- *Workplace rights:* Lawmakers should review and reform labour laws to eliminate provisions that prohibit the employment of women in certain sectors or activities, or in jobs defined as hazardous, morally inappropriate or indecent. Moreover, lawmakers should introduce provisions or enact new legislation aimed at supporting gender equality in the workplace. This notably includes prohibiting gender-based discrimination in employment, aligning the legislation with the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, and introducing or expanding supportive labour market policies such as paid maternity, paternity and parental leave.

Active and gender-responsive policies that are multi-sectoral and integrated should support the legislation. Policy makers should systematically embed a gender equality lens into policies and strategic frameworks that support the legislation and guarantee its enforcement. In this regard, it is crucial to work at all levels of government, from local to national, and to recognise the multidimensional nature of gender equality by adopting multi-sectoral and integrated approaches. This is the case in policy areas directly and traditionally associated with gender equality such as violence against women or women’s economic empowerment, but also in other policy areas where gender equality is not traditionally considered or may be often ignored – such as environment, energy, trade, foreign direct investment as well as transport. The systemic and interconnected nature of gender inequalities implies that any policy or law may affect women and men differently and can have impacts on other areas of women's lives. Integrating a gender lens at all stages

of policy making, from design to implementation and monitoring, allows to systematically promote women's empowerment and to mitigate any unintended adverse effects. Policy makers should notably develop and mainstream specific tools for promoting gender equality, including Gender Impact Assessments, Gender Budgeting, and Gender-Sensitive Public Procurement (OECD, 2023^[126]; OECD, 2023^[127]).

Existing laws and policies should be regularly evaluated to adapt to evolving societal norms and address emerging gender issues. Policy makers should notably evaluate the impact of gender-responsive measures that were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on identifying successful initiatives and lessons learned. The findings of these evaluations should inform future policies and ensure the continuation of effective services and initiatives during crises, including services that address the needs of survivors/victims of violence and other vulnerable populations.

Promote gender-equitable social norms

Addressing the root causes of gender inequality requires a transformation of social norms and the promotion of an environment that promotes gender-equitable values. Policy efforts should prioritise advancing gender-equitable norms of masculinities and shifting perceptions on the roles and status of women and girls. Interventions should strategically target various levels – individual, interpersonal, community, organisational, and societal/policy environments – in accordance with the social-ecological model.³⁵ Recognising that no single factor can fully explain the occurrence of specific discrimination, approaches should seek to address the multifaceted nature of gender inequality. Furthermore, acknowledging that transforming social norms and attitudes takes time and sustained commitment, interventions should have a long-term perspective.

- Policy makers, in collaboration with civil society organisations, philanthropic actors and development partners, should design and implement initiatives aimed at empowering girls and adolescents, equipping them with essential knowledge, skills, and tools to address the gender inequalities they face from an early age. This could involve (i) educational policies or modules focused on strengthening women's agency and autonomy, (ii) skills development in fields that are typically men-dominated, and (iii) mentorship and leadership programmes that support girls in building confidence and soft skills to seize future opportunities. These initiatives require allocating dedicated resources.
- Policy makers, together with education and gender experts, should conduct a thorough review of existing school curricula to identify content that upholds discriminatory social norms. This includes examining textbooks, educational materials, and classroom activities that may perpetuate gender-based stereotypes. The review should serve as a basis to develop and integrate new educational modules on gender equality. The design and content of these modules should challenge prevailing stereotypes, promote men's and women's equal roles and encourage greater inclusivity. Educational efforts should also seek to actively engage boys as allies in favour of gender equality. Actions may involve discussions, projects or initiatives that encourage boys to challenge traditional norms and stereotypes, building a sense of responsibility for change.
- Local governments and policy makers should collaborate with civil society organisations and traditional, religious and community leaders to co-create and implement initiatives aimed at transforming social and gender norms. These stakeholders are often regarded as the "gatekeepers" of their communities and have a significant influence in shaping community perspectives.

³⁵ The socio-ecological model recognises that individuals and their experiences are embedded within larger social contexts. It describes the interactive dynamics of individuals and their environments. This model assumes not only the existence of multiple levels of influence but also their interactive and reinforcing nature (Golden and Earp, 2012^[132]).

- National governments and policy makers should build capacities of officials from the public sector to address gender inequalities and promote women's rights, fostering gender-equitable norms at institutions and society at large. By providing them with the necessary knowledge and tools, public servants can act as catalysts for change within their respective institutions and in their interactions with citizens.
- Policy makers, in collaboration with the media, the private sector and philanthropic actors, should design and disseminate public awareness campaigns and edutainment content³⁶ that combine education with entertainment to effectively convey messages challenging traditional gender roles. To maximise their scope and reach diverse audiences, these programmes and campaigns should use a wide range of tools including various media platforms such television, radio, social media and print.
- Policy makers, the private sector and philanthropic actors should promote female role models by increasing the visibility of women holding political offices, working in the public sector and running businesses. Media coverage can help showcase women's achievements and contributions to society and emphasise their leadership qualities.

Strengthen data collection and monitoring

- Policy makers and development partners should allocate sufficient budget to collect and update gender-disaggregated, gender-relevant and intersectional data. To minimise the costs of regular data collection, National Statistical Offices and data providers could embed key social norms and gender indicators into surveys that are conducted on a regular basis, such as labour force surveys.
- National Statistical Offices, in collaboration with technical partners and relevant ministries, should identify existing gender data gaps and intensify efforts to close them. With the financial and technical support of development partners, National Statistical Offices and data providers of the region should notably intensify collection efforts in policy areas where data remain scarce or inexistent, such as on the prevalence of violence against women or on the time dedicated to unpaid care and domestic work.
- Countries should clearly establish a responsible institution for monitoring gender indicators. This task could be integrated into the mandate of existing National Statistical Offices or could be entrusted to a separate institution – for instance, in Egypt, the Egyptian Women's Observatory compiles, monitors and disseminates key indicators on the status of women (Government of Egypt, 2024_[128]). A proper data monitoring method should be established by the responsible body. Beyond monitoring trends, this institution should work closely with policy makers, civil society and development partners to inform these key stakeholders about trends as well as provide them with the evidence required to design effective policies and take corrective actions if needed.

³⁶ Edutainment refers to material such as video games, television and radio shows, movies, museum exhibits and so forth that intend to be both educational and enjoyable.

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Annex A. SIGI Country Profiles for the Middle East and North Africa

The Gender team of the OECD Development Centre produced SIGI Country Profiles for all 19 countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

SIGI Country Profiles provide an overview of the state of gender equality in each MENA country, highlighting key challenges and positive developments, and discussing in detail the level of gender-based discrimination in social institutions across all areas covered by the SIGI.

SIGI Country Profiles for the MENA were drafted between October and December 2023, using data on legal systems and frameworks collected through the *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, and data on social norms and practices from the [Gender, Institutions and Development Database 2023](#). Although the cut-off date for data collection on laws was 31 August 2022, important legal reforms that occurred in the MENA past this date are included in the analysis of the country profiles but are not taken into account to calculate countries' SIGI scores.

The full SIGI Country Profiles for the 19 countries of the Middle East and North Africa are available through the SIGI dashboard hosted on [the website of the Social Institutions and Gender Index](#) where they can be downloaded as PDF files.

Annex B. Results of the SIGI for the MENA

The fifth edition of the SIGI in 2023 covers 179 countries, including 19 MENA countries. SIGI scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination. Based on their SIGI scores, countries and territories are classified into five levels of discrimination, ranging from very low to very high.³⁷ Table A B.1 provides full overview of the results for the 19 MENA countries at the index and dimension level. MENA's scores are calculated using the countries for which scores are available.

Table A B.1. SIGI 2023 results for the Middle East and North Africa

Country	SIGI score	Classification	SIGI score by dimension			
			Discrimination in the family	Restricted physical integrity	Restricted access to productive and financial resources	Restricted civil liberties
Tunisia	47	high	80	11	36	47
Morocco	49	high	80	33	43	33
West Bank and Gaza Strip	51	very high	80	35	42	40
Egypt	55	very high	79	31	46	56
Lebanon	57	very high	89	36	39	55
Jordan	58	very high	89	48	34	55
Saudi Arabia	59	very high	80	55	30	66
Iraq	60	very high	87	51	41	55
Qatar	60	very high	86	37	38	71
Iran	63	very high	90	36	53	65
Algeria	-	-	80	-	45	60
Bahrain	-	-	89	-	28	57
Djibouti	-	-	73	-	43	11
Kuwait	-	-	83	-	33	70
Libya	-	-	86	-	-	55
Oman	-	-	86	-	43	-
Syria	-	-	83	-	43	68
United Arab Emirates	-	-	80	-	17	-
Yemen	-	-	90	-	54	71
MENA	56	very high	84	37	39	55

Note: Scores for the MENA region are calculated as the weighted average of the scores of countries for which data are available. For the MENA's SIGI score, the ten countries with data represent 74% of the regions' population. Missing scores are indicated by "-".

Source: (OECD, 2023^[36]), "Social Institutions and Gender Index (Edition 2023)", OECD International Development Statistics (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/33beb96e-en>.

³⁷ Countries are classified into five groups according to their SIGI score: (1) very low level of discrimination (SIGI < 20); (2) low level of discrimination (20 < SIGI < 30); (3) medium level of discrimination (30 < SIGI < 40); (4) high level of discrimination (40 < SIGI < 50); and (5) very high level of discrimination (SIGI > 50).

Legal data is available for all 19 MENA countries, but 9 countries have data gaps in the variables used to capture social norms and practices (Table A B.2). Because of these data gaps, SIGI scores could not be computed for these 9 countries.

Table A B.2. Number of SIGI variables missing in MENA countries without a SIGI score

			Oman	United Arab Emirates	Bahrain	Djibouti	Libya	Syria	Algeria	Kuwait	Yemen
Discrimination in the family	Child marriage	L	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
		P	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Household responsibilities	L	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Divorce	L	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Inheritance	L	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Restricted physical integrity	Violence against women	L	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
		A	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	+
		P	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Female genital mutilation	L	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Missing women	P	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Reproductive autonomy	L	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
	P	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
Restricted access to productive and financial resources	Land assets	L	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Non-land assets	L	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Financial services	L	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
		P	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Workplace rights	L	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
P		+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	
Restricted civil liberties	Citizenship rights	L	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
		P	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Political representation	L	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
		P	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Freedom of movement	L	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
		P	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Access to justice	L	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
	P	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
Number of missing SIGI variables			3	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	1

Note: Legal variables are labelled L, attitudinal variables are labelled A and practice variables are labelled P. Countries are ordered by the number of missing variables. While these nine countries did not receive a SIGI score, available data are featured in the Gender, Institutions and Development Database (GID-DB).

Source: (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2023^[16]), "Gender, Institutions and Development (Edition 2023)", *OECD International Development Statistics* (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/7b0af638-en>.

Annex C. Gender-sensitive COVID-19 measures in the MENA

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Egypt, Jordan Morocco and Tunisia enacted a variety of gender-sensitive response measures in the areas of social protection, labour market, economy and fiscality, and violence against women. Table A C.1 provides an overview of the measures classified as "gender-sensitive" that were taken by each of the four countries.

Table A C.1. Gender-sensitive COVID-19 measures in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia

Country	Type of policy measure	Description
Social protection measures		
Egypt	Care services	In July 2020, the Ministry of Social Solidarity announced that nurseries would resume their work with specific condition & precautionary measures.
	Social assistance	In March 2020, the Ministry of Social Solidarity announced increasing the monthly income for rural women leaders from EGP 300 to EGP 900 per month.
	Social assistance	In April 2020, the Ministry of Social Solidarity added 160 000 new households to the Takaful and Karama Programme (TKP) bringing the total number of people under TKP to 3.11 million households (approximately 11 million individuals). The TKP budget was also set to increase in the new fiscal year from EGP 18.5 billion to EGP 19.3 billion and coverage was set to reach a total of 3.5 million households. Among others, the programme mainly targeted women heads of households.
	Social assistance	In May 2020, the Tahya Masr Fund co-ordinated with the Ministry of Social Solidarity and the Ministry of Local Development to allocate a share of basic food supplies and disinfectants/sanitiser to branches of the National Council for Women to be distributed to families in need and impacted by COVID-19. The fund is continuing the distribution of 500 tons of food and 36 tons of poultry to those in need in 19 governorates. Beneficiaries are elderly in shelters, people with disabilities, widows and female heads of households.
	Social insurance	In June 2020, Al-Azhar Al-Sharif – an Islamic scientific body and the largest religious institution in Egypt – issued a decree giving exceptional leave for mothers of children aged less than 12 years, pregnant women, and people with chronic disease. The announcement was made in the context of resuming work amid recent announcements from the Prime Minister of Egypt.
	Social insurance	In July 2020, the Ministry of Health, Population and Health Insurance decided to grant exceptional leave to pregnant women whose pregnancy passed 28 weeks (7 months) until the date of birth.
Jordan	Care services	In June 2020, during the initial phase of returning to business, the government applied flexible working arrangement sfor women with children aged under 11 years because childcare centres were not allowed to open yet. Women were able to return to workplace when childcare centres reopened. Childcare centres were allowed

Country	Type of policy measure	Description
		to operate on a gradual increase of capacity from 50% to 75% with the condition to meet safety and health procedures according to published guidelines for this purpose.
	Care services	In September 2020, Jordan endorsed Regulation No. 93 of 2020 on Maternity Social Protection under the Social Security Law, which allowed for registered childcare centres to receive direct cash benefits to cover 50% of their operational costs.
	Social assistance	In April 2020, a total of 20 500 of the most vulnerable Palestinian refugees residing in Jordan (Jerash camp) that do not hold Jordanian citizenship received a one-time cash assistance of JOD 50. The transfer primarily targeted the elderly, female-headed households, and families with children under the age of 5 years.
	Social assistance	In August 2020, a new World Bank project was announced to support Jordan's COVID-19 response cash support programme as well as the regular Takaful CT programme, which specifically targets female-headed households. The government's programme provides cash support to about 293 000 poor and vulnerable households affected by COVID-19 and includes two parts: (i) temporary (six month) cash transfers to 200 000 additional vulnerable households; and (ii) temporary (six month) benefit top-ups for 93 000 NAF beneficiaries. The proposed new project was set to finance around USD 245 million of the overall amount of the government's programme, translating into a support of about 190 000 households out of the total 200 000 households under part (i) of the programme. The project was also set to provide top-up benefits for Takaful beneficiaries under part (ii). The project was set to finance regular Takaful cash transfers for a total amount of USD 128 million for all beneficiaries in 2020 (55 000 households) and for 25 000 beneficiaries in 2021 (out of 85 000 households). As of Q1 2021, an additional (estimated) 25 000 to 35 000 households were being targeted to be enrolled by Q2 2021 in the Takaful programme.
	Social assistance	In September 2020, Jordan endorsed Regulation No. 93 of 2020 on Maternity Social Protection under the Social Security Law. The regulation enables working mothers with maternity insurance under the social security corporation and children aged under 60 months to return to work while receiving childcare subsidy for their children either if they attend a childcare facility or if they stay at home. Monthly allowances with varied amounts depending on income level and location of childcare (in a centre or at home) would be granted for the duration of six months following the maternity leave.
Morocco	In-kind support	In 2020, Moroccan governmental institutions, with the support of UNFPA, delivered "Salama kits" containing hygiene products and COVID-19 prevention assistance to different people deemed vulnerable: pregnant women and those who assist with childbirth; people with disabilities, people in prisons, teachers and those involved with education at distance, and women who were victims of violence.
	Social assistance	In April 2020, Tunisia established a one-off cash transfer of TND 200 TND to households fostering children without parental support.
Tunisia	Social assistance	In May 2020, the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Seniors announced that as part of the effects of COVID-19 on the most economically vulnerable categories, a line of credit was opened in favour of domestic workers and in partnership with the Tunisian Development Bank and the Professional Association of Microfinance Institutions. The credit offered at a reduced interest rate is capped at TND 1 000, repayable over 24 months with a 2-month grace period. The only modality specified is the deposit with the regional delegations of women and family affairs. The press statement stressed the need for employers to respect the rights of women workers. The programme was envisioned to later allow for the development of a legal and protection framework and the implementation of special programmes for the benefit of domestic workers, including the accession of Tunisia to the ILO Convention No. 189 on Domestic Work.
Labour market measures		
	Activation measures and enterprise development	In April 2020, the Ministry of Communication and Information Systems (ICT) launched a package of educational programme for women to prepare them for the labour market, including new technological tools to help women in the areas of e-marketing and e-commerce to ensure they are empowered economically.
Egypt	Wage subsidy and income replacement for self-employed	In May 2020, Egypt's Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises Agency allocated a financing portfolio amounting to EGP 5.4 billion to finance projects for women, in particular in border and upper governorates through a strategy for the advancement of Egyptian women's projects and young graduates. It is expected that 216 000 micro-projects will be implemented over five years, and 250 000 jobs and projects will be funded through banks and civil society organisations that cooperate with the agency.

Country	Type of policy measure	Description
	Wage subsidy and income replacement for self-employed	In June 2020, the National Council for Women, through its Women Business Development Centre (WBDC), connected with women from different governorates within its project (<i>AL Mashghal</i>) to produce masks that can be sold to the public, in accordance with the latest government decision that all citizens should wear masks in public spaces.
Jordan	Activation measures and enterprise development	In April 2021, the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship launched a project for fresh graduates who graduated during the last three years in digital and IT companies. The government subsidises 50% of wages for a period of six months, at a total cost of JD 20 million. The employment subsidies supports inclusion, non-discrimination, and equal opportunity and specifically seeks to incentivise women's employment.
	Activation measures and enterprise development	In May 2020, the Ministry of Agriculture created a digital platform for the presentation and marketing of local products from women's cooperatives. In addition, these cooperatives have benefited from support in terms of logistics, product delivery and communication. In order to prepare for the de-confinement, the Ministry of Agriculture has set up a protocol regarding the procedures to be adopted at the level of farms and units for the valorisation, packaging and processing of agricultural products.
Morocco	Activation measures and enterprise development	In March 2020, Morocco took measures to support very small and small and medium enterprises, including those headed by women, through the establishment of a guarantee mechanism, known as "Damane Oxygène", with the Central Guarantee Fund (<i>Caisse Centrale de Garantie-CCG</i>). This new guarantee product is aimed at mobilising additional financing resources for enterprises whose cash flow is in difficulty due to a decline in their activities. Under the "Damane Oxygène" programme, 17 600 companies have benefited from an amount corresponding to EUR 9.5 billion in loans. "Damane Oxygène" ended on 31 December 2020 and transitioned into "Damane Relance" (intended to end on 31 March 2021).
	Activation measures and enterprise development	In 2020, the Ministry of Tourism, Handicrafts, Air Transport and Social and Solidarity Economy put in place measures to facilitate the certification system for cooperatives to produce 30 000 reusable masks per day. 15 cooperatives have been certified with a total of 103 members, 100% of whom are women.
Tunisia	Reduced work time & telework	In March 2020, Government Decree No. 2020-153 established derogatory provisions related to the work of employees of the State, local authorities, public administrative bodies, public bodies and establishments, and public enterprises. It provided for the possibility of reducing the number of working hours, on an exceptional basis, for pregnant women and persons suffering from certain diseases.
Fiscal and economic measures		
	Credit/loan deferral, restructuring or renegotiation	In 2020, the Central Bank of Egypt's preferential interest rate was reduced from 10% to 8% on loans to tourism, industry, agriculture and construction sectors. In Egypt, the agriculture sector accounts for 35% of women's employment compared to 20% of men's employment.
Egypt	Loan guarantees	In May 2020, the Central Bank of Egypt approved an EGP 100 billion guarantee to cover lending at preferential rates to the manufacturing, agriculture and contracting loans. In Egypt, the agriculture sector accounts for 35% of women's employment compared to 20% of men's employment.
	Tax cut/exemptions/credits	In December 2020, Decision No. 205 of 2020 granted companies and non-banking entities a 50% reduction in the development fee or service charge, according to the percentage of women they employ, which should not be less than 25% of the workforce.
Jordan	-	-
Morocco	-	-
Tunisia	Multiple measures	Measures to the health sector included assistance for purchasing medical equipment and tax exoneration of entities participating in the medical supply chain. In Tunisia, 7.1% of women are employed in human health activities, as opposed to 1.7% of men.

Country	Type of policy measure	Description
Violence against women		
Egypt	Awareness raising campaigns	In May 2020, in response to the government's request, the National Council for Women and UN Women Egypt joined forces with a number of therapists and institutions to develop awareness-raising videos addressing the psychological impact of COVID-19 on women and their families and providing practical tips on how to deal with these impacts and anxiety-related symptoms. The videos also highlighted the safety plans and service-providers where women might seek help for domestic violence, such as the hotline of the NCW, contacts for shelters and the hotline of the Ministry of Interior. Entitled "Our Mental Health is a Priority", the initiative was launched in May 2020 in collaboration with several partners, including Safe Kids and Shezlong. Seven videos were released on various digital platforms, including on the Facebook and Twitter accounts of UN Women Egypt and the NCW, as well as of the Egypt Today, Safe Kids and Shezlong. Additionally, some videos were also reflected on other Facebook pages, including those of UN Women Arabic (run by the regional office) and United Nations Egypt.
	Awareness raising campaigns	In June 2020, the Anti-Harassment Unit in Cairo University launched an awareness raising campaign against all forms of cybercrimes and violence against women through the internet.
	Awareness raising campaigns	In June and July 2020, a national "mega awareness campaign" was organised against female genital mutilation under the leadership of the National Committee for Eliminating FGM. The door-to-door campaign, while observing COVID-19 safety and prevention measures, reached at least 14 million Egyptian women, men and children across the country's 27 governorates to mitigate the increased risk of FGM due to the socio-economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.
	Collection and use of data	In March 2020, in consultation with UN Women, UNFPA, the World Bank and other actors, the National Council for Women in Egypt produced a policy paper entitled "Egypt's Rapid Response to Women's Situation during the COVID-19 Outbreak". The policy paper addresses the following pillars of Egypt's short- and medium-term response to COVID-19: (1) impact on human endowment (health, education and social protection); (2) women's voice and agency (eliminating violence against women, and women's leadership and representation); (3) impact on economic opportunities for women, and (4) promoting data and knowledge. The paper also calls for additional measures to be taken in each of these areas.
	Collection and use of data	In April 2020, the National Council for Women and UN Women, in collaboration with Baseera institution, conducted two rounds of a poll on the impact of COVID-19 on violence against women, access to services and the burden of unpaid care work on family members. Gender-sensitive data were collected and analysed, using a phone survey targeting women as well as a social media survey targeting women and men. In each round, data was collected from a representative sample of 1 500 women from across all Egyptian governorates.
	Strengthening of services	In March 2020, the Ministry of Justice suspended work in courts but exceptionally proceeded with family court cases (such as on alimony payment, child custody and residence) to support women custodians during the pandemic. Courts were attended with sanitary and precautionary measures in place. Public prosecution took immediate steps and necessary legal measures after the emergence of some lawsuit related to the exploitation of women and girls, and the pursuit of making money by illegal means, within the framework of protecting women and girls from human trafficking crimes and electronic/cybercrimes.
	Strengthening of services	In December 2020, the digital infrastructure and the technical capacities of the Women Complaints Office of the National Council for Women (NCW) as well as women's shelters affiliated to the Ministry of Social Solidarity were strengthened to better respond to women and girls survivors of violence through remote techniques. With support from UNODC, Standard Operating Procedures were established to record and follow up on complaints, and working hours were extended to cover all weekdays from 9am to 9pm, compared to the previous practice of 9am to 3pm only. With the support from UN Women, necessary IT equipment and ICT training workshops were conducted, engaging the main service providers of national institutions. Capitalising on this step, the NCW and UN Women were planning to conduct a specialised training on how to deal with severe cases of VAW through hotline services, including cases of PTSD and suicidal cases, and their dependants. Finally, the referral pathway for women and girls survivors of violence was updated to include the most recent hotlines and the newly introduced response and reporting mechanisms to ensure women's timely access to essential services during the COVID-19 situation. The updated referral pathway was meant to be disseminated publicly to reach out women and girls in remote areas under the leadership of the NCW.

Country	Type of policy measure	Description
	Strengthening of services	In 2020, a hotline was established at the Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Interior to provide a response to women survivors of violence. Additionally, a hotline was established at the National Secretariat of Mental Health to provide psychological support to people impacted by COVID-19. Other existing helplines and reporting mechanisms extended working hours. Furthermore, social media reporting at the shelters was introduced in 2020.
	Strengthening of services	In 2020, the Ministry of Social Solidarity kept eight women's shelters open for women and their children, providing a range of services including hosting, consultation, legal and psychosocial support. Newly hosted women and children stayed in a separate room in quarantine for 14 days. Furthermore, the newly endorsed bylaws of the Ministry of Social Solidarity ensured the consideration of the needs of the most vulnerable women under COVID-19, allowing homeless women in the shelters. Shelters were also provided with the necessary sanitary equipment and PPE, as well as informative materials from WHO on the virus and preventing its spread.
Jordan	Awareness raising campaigns	In 2020, the Ministry of Health chaired a Risk Communication Committee and launched the <i>Elak w Feed</i> communication campaign through the HeforShe movement, with efforts focusing on promoting inclusive communication and messaging as well as engaging youth in raising awareness on COVID-19 and domestic violence.
	Awareness raising campaigns	In May 2020, the national campaign on COVID-19 prevention included messages on gender-based violence prevention, including available hotlines disseminated in social media. In collaboration with the media, the Public Security Directorate launched an awareness campaign on violence against women during the pandemic.
	Strengthening of services	In March 2020, during the lockdown, Jordan formed and trained an emergency response team, with female police officers at its core, to respond to the crisis, including by conducting home visits to gender-based violence survivors to safely refer them to essential services, including psychosocial support. Police would also accompany survivors to the police station or court to ensure they could travel safely while movement restrictions were in place. PPE was distributed to law enforcement officers and professionals involved in the provision of violence against women services.
	Strengthening of services	In August 2020, the Public Security Directorate communicated and co-ordinated with NGOs for referrals of violence against women cases, especially for the most severe and urgent cases.
Morocco	Awareness raising campaigns	In April 2020, several communication and awareness-raising campaigns on gender-based violence in the context of the national lockdown were launched by the Ministry of Social Development/Women's Machinery, the Office of the Public Prosecutor and the National Commission for Women Victims of Violence. This included television, radio, social network and SMS campaigns, with the participation of celebrities.
	Strengthening of services	In 2020, in view of the difficult context induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for vulnerable populations, including women and girls, the Ministry in charge of Women's Affairs launched a financial operation to support NGOs and networks of listening centres for women in difficult situations. This support aimed at developing remote services and accompanying victims of violence on a national scale, through listening, psychological support, co-ordination with services in charge of protecting women victims, and orientation.
	Strengthening of services	In 2020, the Public Prosecutor's Office strengthened the cells for the care of women victims of violence, which had existed for years in all the jurisdictions of the country. The purpose of these cells is to receive and help women victims of violence to claim their rights. During the COVID-19 crisis, the Presidency of the Public Prosecutor's Office put in place different means allowing victims to address the courts and to declare the cases of violence they experienced. This was notably made possible through the publication on the website of Public Prosecutor's Office of the directories of all the courts of the country (telephone numbers, email addresses, and fax). The Public Prosecutor's Office also established electronic platforms for each court so that a victim can declare and file a complaint, without the need to physically go to a court.
	Strengthening of services	In March 2020, the Ministry in charge of Women's Affairs provided "Salama Kits" for the protection of women and girls during COVID-19, in partnership with UNFPA. The initiative targeted women victims of violence, beneficiaries and staff of the multifunctional spaces for women victims of violence, pregnant women, health professionals, including midwives, migrant women, and prisoners. The kits were made available to the NGOs for distribution to the beneficiaries.
	Strengthening of services	In 2020, the platform <i>Kolona Maak</i> , established in January 2020, as a result of co-ordination among institutional services, was strengthened by the Ministry of Gender, and with UN Women's support, to provide quality remote services to women and girls survivors of violence during and after lockdown. The platform is accessible through a free-toll number or a mobile application. It provides counselling to survivors of violence and offers a direct connection with courts and security forces.

Country	Type of policy measure	Description
Tunisia	Awareness raising campaigns	The Ministry of Women, Family and the Elderly, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, launched, during a remote workshop, the knowledge website on equality and violence against women "Together Against Violence". The website aims primarily to raise awareness in the field of promoting gender equality and combating gender-based violence and to develop and simplify knowledge in this regard, spread awareness of the dangers of violence and eradicate hate speech. The site is an interactive space listed within the official website of the Ministry of Women, Family and the Elderly, completed in Arabic and French, and includes all useful information for understanding the foundations of gender-based violence, and presents a set of concepts and definitions in a simple and smooth language. The site "Together Against Violence" will serve as the digital space, which brings together various productions of a scientific, research, formative and communication nature, depends on enabling specialists to exchange information about produced evidence, communication props or digital applications that help protect survivors of violence, and publications of articles, reports, books and other documents.
	Strengthening of services	In March 2020, the operating hours of the national domestic violence helpline were extended to 24/7. Individual and group coaching sessions were organised with the support of the United States Embassy for 17 hotline operators. The sessions covered practical topics such as stress and work management, provision of assistance, and connecting victims to service providers. In September 2020, UN Women Tunisia, in partnership with the National Observatory of Ending Violence Against Women in Tunisia, supported helpline operators through a training on the Law No. 2017-58 combatting violence against women.
	Strengthening of services	In April 2020, a free psychological support service via phone was launched for survivors of violence. The toll-free number 1809 was run by 11 volunteer psychologists.
	Strengthening of services	In April 2020, the Ministry of Women, the Family, Children and Seniors, with the support of UNFPA and in partnership with AFTURD, opened a new emergency shelter for women survivors of violence, including 10 containment spaces for a minimum period of 14 days, as a preventive measure against COVID-19 prior to accommodation in a special centre. In parallel, a co-ordination with various stakeholders was established, in particular with the special unit for combating crimes of violence against women in the Ministry of Interior and the Ben Arous regional police station for women, families and children.
	Strengthening of services	In August 2020, Government Decree No. 2020-582 was adopted and laid down the conditions for the creation of care centres for women and children who are survivors of violence and the procedures for their operation in order to guarantee the quality of the services provided in accordance with the provisions of Organic Law No. 2017-58 of 11 August 2017 on the elimination of violence against women and the international standards ratified in this area.
	Strengthening of services	In 2020, remote and electronic tools (for example the use of electronic forms, electronic court files, videoconferencing for hearings or testimony, etc.) were used or improved. Phone-based and online legal aid was implemented or improved. Specific directives or guidelines in relation to gender-based violence and violence against women cases (priority, eligibility rules for intake, etc.) were issued.
	Strengthening of services	In 2020, a notification was circulated to police and judicial authorities reminding the importance of managing domestic violence, including gender-based violence.

Source: (UNDP/UN Women, 2022^[30]), *COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker*, <https://data.undp.org/insights/covid-19-global-gender-response-tracker>.

Annex D. Legal and policy reforms in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia between 2019 and 2023

Between 2019 and 2023, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia passed 22 legal and regulatory reforms related to gender equality. Among these reforms, 16 (or 72%) were assessed as contributing to greater gender equality, 5 were assessed as neutral from a perspective of gender equality, and 2 were assessed as gender unequal and further limiting women's rights and opportunities³⁸ (Table A D.1). Moreover, the four countries have numerous (19) national action plans or policies in place aiming to promote gender equality holistically, or specific aspects of it via dedicated strategies.

Table A D.1. Legal and policy reforms since 2019

Country	Name	Year	Short description	SIGI indicator concerned	Assessment
Laws					
Egypt	Law No. 148 of 2019	2019	Law No. 148 of 2019, or the Social Insurance Law, consolidates different social security programmes into one scheme for all groups of workers, extends social insurance protection to additional categories of workers (incl. temporary, seasonal and domestic workers) and provides for self-enrolment in social insurance for informal workers. While this is a gender-neutral law, it has the potential to positively impact women, who are represented in many of these categories.	Workplace rights	Neutral
	Law No. 176 of 2020, amending Law No. 1 of 2000	2020	Law No. 176 of 2020 amends Article 47 of Law No. 1 of 2000 on matters of guardianship over money. The law seeks to support widows, especially those who care for minors, and to facilitate procedures in prosecutions and courts. In particular, the law introduces the possibility of raising the quorum for disbursement without going to court and allows to increase the amount in cases of extreme necessity.	Household responsibilities	Positive
	Prime Minister Decision No.	2020	Prime Minister Decision No. 2659 of 2020 reconstitutes the National Council for Wages, which was	Workplace rights	Neutral

³⁸ One reform was assessed as both positive and negative as it contained provisions contributing to greater gender equality and others that further limited women's rights and opportunities.

Country	Name	Year	Short description	SIGI indicator concerned	Assessment
	2659 of 2020		established by Resolution No. 983 of 2003, to further define its functions, and includes the National Council of Women among its members.		
	Law No. 189 of 2020, amending the Penal Code	2020	Law No. 189 of 2020 amends the Penal Code by adding Article 309 bis B to criminalise bullying, which includes gender-based abuse. The article defines bullying as “any show of strength or control by the offender, as well as exploitation of the weakness of the victim, or of a situation that the bully believes would offend the victim, such as gender, race, religion, physical descriptions, and health, mental, or social status, with the aim of intimidating, ridiculing or degrading them or of excluding them from a social environment.”	Violence against women	Positive
	Law No. 177 of 2020, amending the Penal Code	2020	Law No. 177 of 2020 amends the Penal Code by adding Article 113 (bis) on confidentiality of data regarding the victims of sexual harassment and assault. The law allows the Public Prosecutor’s Office or the judge to withhold personal information about the victim during the pre-trial investigation phase, which could play a key role in increasing the reporting of sexual violence crimes.	Violence against women	Positive
	Prime Minister’s Decree No. 827 of 2021	2021	Prime Minister’s Decree No. 827 of 2021 was issued to improve the service provision for women victims of violence, by establishing a one-stop shop for their protection. Further, the law provides a holistic definition of violence against women: “Any act, behavior, or omission in violation of the constitution and the law that results in harm or suffering to women, whether physical, material, moral, psychological, social, or economic, or assaults the rights and freedoms guaranteed by law, whether in public or private life, including threats or coercion or arbitrary deprivation.”	Violence against women	Positive
	Law 141 of 2021, amending the Penal Code	2021	Law 141 of 2021 amends the Penal Code by broadening the definition of sexual harassment and increasing the penalty. Specifically, Article 306 bis B was introduced to define acts of sexual harassment encompassing the use of a position of power to require sexual benefits from a person, and to raise penalties for acts of sexual harassment with specific provisions in cases where the perpetrator has occupational, family, or educational authority over the victim/survivor.	Violence against women	Positive
	Law No. 10 of 2021	2021	Law No. 10 of 2021 amends Articles 242 bis and 242 bis A of the Penal Code, increasing the penalties for those committing the crime of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). The amendments include omitting any reference to the use of medical justification, introduce independent penalties for medical professionals performing FGM, and introduces penalties for anyone promoting, advocating, encouraging, or inciting someone to commit FGM.	Female genital mutilation	Positive
	Ministry of Manpower Resolution No. 43	2021	Ministry of Manpower Resolution No. 43 specifies the jobs in which women may not be employed. Compared to previous legislation, it lifts some, but not all, restrictions on women’s ability to work in specific industries and professions. For instance, women are still prohibited from carrying out manual underground work.	Workplace rights	Positive
	Ministry of Manpower Resolution No. 44	2021	Ministry of Manpower Resolution No. 44 lifts restrictions on women’s ability to work at night. It establishes that women can request to work at night and that employers must take measures to protect women’s health and ensure they can combine night work with family responsibilities. While women and men do not have the exact same rights regarding night work, women now have the possibility to work at night.	Workplace rights	Positive

Country	Name	Year	Short description	SIGI indicator concerned	Assessment
Jordan	Law No.15 of 2019	2019	Law No.15 of 2019 sets forth Jordan's Personal Status Law regulating personal matters for the Muslim population. The law introduced some changes compared to the Personal Status Act of 2010 but most provisions regulating marriage, divorce, child custody and guardianship as well as inheritance continue to discriminate against women's rights. A small change occurred regarding child marriage. Both the 2010 and 2019 laws set the minimum legal age for marriage at 18 years with exceptions allowed. Under the 2010 law, children aged between 15 and 18 years were able to get married with the approval of judge. Under the 2019 law, this age was raised to 16 years.	Child marriage; Household responsibilities; Inheritance; Divorce	Negative and Positive
	Law No. 13 of 2019 on Real Estate Ownership	2019	While the Law No. 13 of 2019 is per se gender-neutral, studies suggest that it could entail negative consequences for women regarding land inheritance. The law stipulates the conversion of lands into private properties. Sharia law is applied regarding inheritance of private property according to which women inherit a smaller share than men (Ababsa, 2021 ^[129]).	Land and non-land assets	Neutral
	Law No. 22 of 2021 on Local Administration	2021	Article 3(C) of Law No. 22 of 2021 allocates 25% of the number of Governorate Council members to women. This shows an increase as compared to previous legislation, because the Municipalities Law No. 41 of 2015 introduced a 10% women's quota for Governorate Councils.	Political Voice	Positive
	Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan 1952, as amended in 2022	2022	The 14 th amendment to the Constitution included the word "women" for the first time, changing the title of Chapter 2 from "Rights and Duties of Jordanians" to "Rights and Duties of Jordanian Men and Women." While the Constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, language or religion, it does not mention sex or gender, a key principle for gender equality.	General	Neutral
	Law No. 4 of 2022 on the Election of the House of Representatives	2022	Law No. 4 of 2022 repeals Law of No. 6 of 2016 on the Election of the House of Representatives. It raises the female quota seats by establishing at least one seat for women in each of the 18 local electoral districts. Further, the law states that at least one woman should be among the first three candidates, as well as among the next three candidates, on the general list.	Political Voice	Positive
	Law No. 7 of 2022 on Political Parties	2022	Article 11 of Law No. 7 of 2022 on Political Parties establishes that the percentage of women among the founders of the parties should not be less than 20%. Article 15 states that each party should ensure the right of its affiliates, both women and youth, to assume leadership positions in it. Finally, Article 25 establishes that parties must enable the youth, women, and persons with disabilities to equally benefit from the party's resources, especially during campaign periods.	Political Voice	Positive
Morocco	Electoral Organic Law No. 04-21 of 2021 amending Organic Law No. 27-11 on the House of Representatives	2021	Article 23 of Organic Law No. 04-21 of 2021 establishes that each list of candidates submitted for the regional electoral constituencies must include the names of women candidates (number must not be less than two thirds of the number of seats to be filled). Additionally, the first and second positions on each list of candidates are reserved exclusively for women.	Political Voice	Positive
	Law No. 30-22 of 2022	2022	Article 46 of Law No. 30-22 of 2022 provides a paternity leave of 15 days for fathers who work as public employees.	Workplace rights	Positive
Tunisia	Governmental Decree No. 2020-582	2020	Governmental Decree No. 2020-582 regulates the management and costs of care centers for women and children victims of violence, with the goal of ensuring the quality of services for survivors (Article 1). It provides for different types of centers for specific populations (Article 7), as well as technical capacity building for staff (Article 8) and co-ordination between government agencies to ensure quality	Violence against women	Positive

Country	Name	Year	Short description	SIGI indicator concerned	Assessment
			and collect data on violence against women (Article 11). It also outlines consequences for centres that do not adhere to these regulations (Article 14).		
	Governmental Decree No. 2020-126	2020	Building on Law No. 58 of 2017 on the elimination of violence against women, Governmental Decree No. 2020-126 creates a national observatory for the struggle against violence against women. The responsibilities of this observatory include collecting data on violence against women, conducting research, collaborating with multistakeholder coalitions and continuing to develop national strategies to prevent violence (Article 3).	Violence against women	Positive
	Constitution of the Tunisian Republic	2022	Tunisia's 2022 Constitution replaced the 2014 Constitution. It retains positive provisions when it comes to gender equality, which were previously included in the 2014 Constitution. For example, gender-based discrimination is prohibited (Article 21), and men and women have equal rights to decent working conditions and fair wages (Article 40). While the new Constitution upholds the requirement for gender parity in elected bodies under Article 51, there are no mechanisms in place to guarantee this principle.	General	Neutral
	Presidential Decree No. 55 of 2022, amending Basic Law No. 16 of 2014	2022	Presidential Decree No. 55 of 2022 amends the electoral law (Basic Law No. 16 of 2014) and removes gender parity provisions that were previously in place. Previously, the 2014 electoral law required candidate lists to alternate between men and women for Tunisia's elected assemblies, and a 2017 amendment required political parties to ensure half the candidate lists were led by women for local elections. While Tunisia's 2022 Constitution continues to uphold the principle of gender parity, the electoral law no longer includes explicit mechanisms to ensure women's representation.	Political Voice	Negative
National action plans and policies					
Egypt	The National Strategy for Combating Violence against Women	2015-2020	The strategy was enacted in 2015 to co-ordinate all stakeholders' efforts on ending violence against women in the country. The National Council for Women is responsible for leading the strategy in partnership with other players, such as civil society organisations and line ministries.	Violence against women	Positive
	The National FGM Abandonment Strategy	2016-2020	The plan aims to reduce the incidence of FGM among future generations by implementing laws, supporting policies to raise awareness, and disseminating scientific, religious and legal information, developing a system for monitoring and evaluating the prevalence of FGM and encouraging families to report it.	Female genital mutilation	Positive
	National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women	2017-2030	The strategy mandates the expansion of health care services, legal aid, advice and counselling centres, medical and psychological counselling, hotlines, and shelters for survivors of violence. The plan addresses four pillars for women's empowerment: political empowerment and leadership; economic empowerment; social empowerment; and protection.	General	Positive
	The National Human Rights Strategy	2021-2026	Under the Focus Area, "Human Rights of Women, Children, Persons with Disabilities, Youth and the Elderly," the strategy sets forth plans to support the implementation of the legislation addressing violence against women.	Violence against women	Positive
	Sub-National Costed Implementation Plan to Secure	2022-2026	The implementation plan identifies the main challenges faced at the level of governorates to implement interventions to secure contraceptive supply and possible actions to overcome these	Reproductive autonomy	Positive

Country	Name	Year	Short description	SIGI indicator concerned	Assessment
	the Contraceptives Supply at the Governorates Level		challenges.		
	The National Population and Development Strategy	2023-2030	One of the strategy's pillars is to reach communities with reproductive health services and counselling. It strives to achieve a balance between population growth rate while safeguarding reproductive rights and sexual health.	Reproductive autonomy	Positive
Jordan	Jordanian National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security	2018-2021	The plan brings a gender lens to the country's security and military challenges, considering women's participation in prevention and protection during conflicts, as well as fostering peace, stability and sustainable security.	General	Positive
	National Strategy for Women in Jordan	2020-2025	The strategy sets four main goals to achieve a society free of discrimination and gender-based violence: 1. Women and girls are able to exercise their economic, political and human rights and freely lead and participate in society free of gender-based discrimination; 2. Women and girls enjoy a life free of all forms of gender-based violence; 3. Positive gender norms, roles and attitudes support gender equality and women empowerment; and 4. Institutions are executing and sustaining policies, structures and services that support Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in alignment with Jordan's national and international commitments.	General	Positive
	Jordan's National Strategy Reproductive and sexual health	2020-2030	The national strategy provides a reference framework for different stakeholders in the country to develop their institutional plans and interventions to achieve access to reproductive and sexual health services and information.	Reproductive autonomy	Positive
	Family Planning Costed Implementation Plan	2020-2024	The plan provides the Ministry of Health and its partners with strategies and interventions to reduce maternal mortality rates and increase the use of modern contraceptive methods. It includes detailed activities, timelines, and budgets for such interventions.	Reproductive autonomy	Positive
	Executive Plan for the National Priorities for Strengthening the Response to Gender Based Violence, Domestic Violence, and Child Protection	2021-2023	The plan is a collaboration between the National Council for Family Affairs and the United Nations Population Fund. It results from a continuous effort to set an implementation framework for the national priorities matrix for strengthening the family protection system. It has a multi-sectoral response to gender-based violence, bringing together the health, social services, police, and justice sectors.	Violence against women	Positive
Morocco	ICRAM 2: Concerted Initiative for the Reinforcement of the Achievements of Moroccan Women	2017-2021	Building on the first ICRAM (2012-2016), the plan reflects the commitment of the Moroccan government to the reduction of inequalities between women and men, by treating their causes and consequences. ICRAM 2 also led to the launch of other gender equality programmes in diverse areas. ICRAM 3 is expected to be released.	General	Positive
	National Policy to Combat Violence against Women and Girls by 2030	2021-2030	The policy is part of the implementation of the ICRAM 2 Plan. Among its goals, the policy provides for the protection and empowerment of women in vulnerable situations, like refugees, migrants and victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking. It also aims to contribute to changing social norms and practices based on gender stereotypes.	Violence against women	Positive

Country	Name	Year	Short description	SIGI indicator concerned	Assessment
	Open Government Partnership (OGP) Action Plan of the Government of Morocco	2021-2023	One of the commitments of the governmental plan is the "Promotion of gender equality and women's participation in the public life as well as their economic empowerment." The Ministry of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality and Family is the institution in charge of implementing the goals of this axis. Among the solutions are: launching the third governmental plan for equality and opening other multidisciplinary centres dedicated to women.	General	Positive
	Government Equality Plan	2023-2026	In 2023, the Government adopted the Strategic Framework for the Government Equality Plan 2023-2026, comprising the Women's Economic Empowerment Program. The plan has 3 main measures: foster an increase in women's labour force participation by 2026; prevent and protect violence against women; and strengthen values to combat stereotypes and discrimination and to promote women's rights.	General	Positive
Tunisia	The National Strategy for the Economic and Social Empowerment of Women and Girls in Rural Areas	2017-2020	The objectives of this strategy include increasing the employability of rural women and girls through capacity building programmes, preventing girls from dropping out of school, and ensuring decent working conditions.	Workplace rights	Positive
	The National Action Plan for the Integration and Institutionalization of the Gender Perspective	2018-2020	The plan seeks to integrate gender considerations into planning, programming and budgeting, and eliminate all forms of discrimination by enhancing accountability, increasing women's representation in government, and mainstreaming gender considerations in public policies.	General	Positive
	National Action Plan to implement the UNSC's Resolution No. 1325 on "Women and Peace and Security"	2018-2022	The plan outlines measures for preventing violence against women, in line with UNSC resolution 1325, which urges countries to improve gender equality and protect women in conflict settings, including by ensuring a gender perspective in international negotiations and taking special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence.	Violence against women	Positive
	National Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health 2021-2030 (<i>Plan nationale de santé sexuelle et reproductive 2021-2030</i>)	2021-2030	The plan provides a framework for ensuring access to high quality sexual and reproductive health services for all Tunisians. Objectives include adding contraceptives to the list of essential drugs that can be reimbursed by social security (objective 7.4); improving education on sexual health and family planning (objective 3); enhancing the legislative framework governing sexual and reproductive health (objective 14); and improving data collection (objective 18).	Reproductive autonomy	Positive

Annex E. Methodology of the SIGI

The OECD Development Centre's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) stands as a comprehensive cross-country measure of discrimination against women and girls in key areas shaping their lives, from discrimination in the family to restrictions on their physical integrity, their economic empowerment, and their rights and agency in the public and political spheres. The SIGI specifically defines discriminatory social institutions as a combination of formal and informal laws, social norms, and practices that restrict or exclude women and girls, limiting their access to rights, justice, empowerment opportunities, and resources. Since its inception in 2009, the SIGI has played an important role in documenting the persistence and prevalence of gender discrimination globally. It has consistently supported policy-making processes and delivered high-quality data to decision-makers, policy experts, researchers, international organisations, philanthropic entities, and the wider public. Currently, it supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development serving as an official data source on discrimination against women in legal frameworks (SDG 5.1.1).

The fifth edition of the SIGI, released in 2023, assesses 179 countries based on the level of gender-based discrimination in their social institutions. The index scores range from 0 to 100, with higher discrimination in social institutions. The four dimensions of the SIGI address key socio-economic aspects impacting women and girls across their lifespan (Figure A E.1):

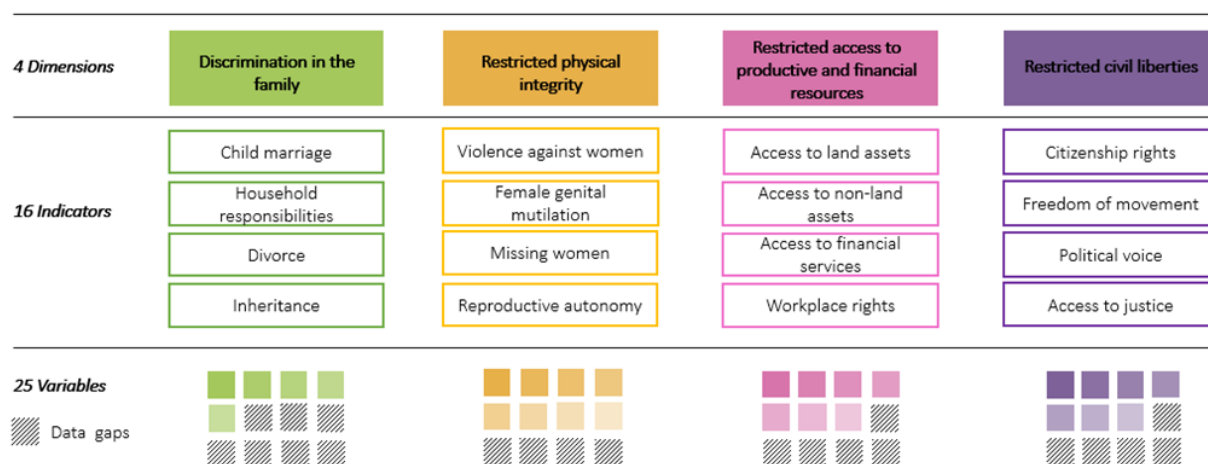
- The "Discrimination in the family" dimension captures social institutions that limit women's decision-making power and undervalue their status in the household and the family.
- The "Restricted physical integrity" dimension captures social institutions that increase women's and girls' vulnerability to multiple forms of violence and limit their control over their bodies and reproductive autonomy.
- The "Restricted access to productive and financial resources" dimension captures women's restricted access to and control over critical productive and economic resources and assets.
- The "Restricted civil liberties" dimension captures discriminatory social institutions restricting women's access to, and participation and voice in, the public and social spheres.

Each dimension of the SIGI comprises four indicators (Figure A E.1). Theoretically, each indicator builds on three variables. The first variable aims to measure the level of discrimination in formal and informal laws, while the second and the third variables aim to measure the level of discrimination in social norms and practices:

- Legal variables describe the level of gender-based discrimination in legal frameworks. Data for these variables are collected by the OECD Development Centre via a legal questionnaire (the SIGI 2023 Legal Survey) consisting of 173 questions. The survey was first filled by legal experts and professional lawyers from national and international law firms, before being reviewed by the Gender team of the OECD Development Centre and sent to governments for validation of the data. The cut-off date for the legal information collected was 31 August 2022.
- Attitudinal variables describe the level of discrimination in social norms. Data for these variables are compiled from secondary data sources. The cut-off date for the attitudinal data was 31 December 2022.

- Practice variables describe the level of discrimination in terms of prevalence and parity. Data for these variables are compiled from secondary data sources. The cut-off date for the practice data was 31 December 2022.

Figure A E.1. Conceptual framework of the SIGI



In theory, the computation of the SIGI should be based on 48 variables (16 indicators each composed of 3 variables). However, because of data gaps, discrepancies exist between the conceptual framework and the number of variables used to calculate the SIGI. In total, the fifth edition of the SIGI in 2023 is based on 25 variables – including 15 legal variables, 9 practice variables and 1 attitudinal variable. These variables were selected based on the following criteria:

- Conceptual relevance: The variable should be closely related to the conceptual framework of discriminatory social institutions and measure what it is intended to capture.
- Underlying factor of gender inequality: The variable should capture an underlying factor that leads to unequal outcomes for women and men.
- Data quality, reliability, and coverage: The variable should be based on high-quality, reliable data. Ideally, the data should be standardised across countries/territories and have extensive coverage across countries/territories.
- Distinction: Each variable should measure a distinct discriminatory institution and should add new information not measured by other variables.
- Statistical association: Variables included in the same dimension should be statistically associated, and thereby capture similar areas of social institutions without being redundant.