



S E C T O R B R I E F

GENDER IN MENA

The West Bank and Gaza Second Community Development Project

This project identified the need to integrate criteria such as inclusion of women, youth and the poor on microprojects' committees in social appraisals from the outset. Thus, targeted interventions such as promoting women training centers and kindergartens are to benefit women directly. Under this project, a series of women-only meetings enabled women to voice their opinion for consideration in the design and implementation of different project components.

In December 2002, the Bank completed a beneficiary assessment report of the project according to which nearly 40% of all schools rehabilitated under CDP II were girls and co-educational schools. Furthermore, the economic infrastructure - mainly roads - benefited women through greater access to health centers, improved hygiene conditions for their children and opportunities to participate in social activities through travel. Women and girls also benefited through training programs - in particular programs on health and environment, motherhood and child care.

The training facility for women constructed in Gaza also provided training programs in sewing and curtain design through the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The purpose of this brief is to update the main findings of the 2003 Regional Gender Report with respect to the status of women in the Middle East and North Africa [MENA]. The 2003 Report on Gender and Development highlighted several points. On the one hand, MENA's achievements in health and education during the 1980s and 1990s compared favorably with other regions. On the other hand, women's labor force participation remained low and women were under-represented in national parliaments and other decision-making bodies.

This update will examine progress during 2000-2005 in five areas; economic participation, access to education, access to health care, women's legal rights, and public participation and representation. The main objective is to assess whether there has been any improvement in women's empowerment indicators.

Economic Participation:

In years 2000-2004, the MENA region experienced an average annual GDP growth of 4.5 percent.¹ Despite this growth, most MENA countries continue to struggle with high unemployment rates and women are disproportionately at risk. The biggest difference between male and female unemployment can be seen in Egypt, where 7.5 percent of men versus 23 percent of women were unemployed in 2003,² and in Syria, where male unemployment was 8 percent in 2002 whereas female unemployment was 24 percent.³

Overall, female labor force participation in MENA increased from 28 percent in 2000 to 30 percent in 2004.⁴ Although this progress has been greater than in any other region, MENA continues to lag behind.

There are also great intra-regional disparities in terms of women's participation in the economy and the extent to which this participation has increased/decreased. In Algeria, for example, the drastic decline in unemployment during 2001 to 2004 led to a 13 percent decline in unemployment for females versus 9.5 percent unemployment decline for men. In other words, women were able to benefit from and take advantage of the new employment opportunities. The opposite occurred in Morocco where female labor force participation actually declined. In Iraq, however, male unemployment is much higher than female unemployment.⁵ The same applies in the West Bank and Gaza.

An issue that previous reports have raised is the low level of participation by women in the non-agricultural sector. In most MENA countries, the share of women as a percentage of total non-agricultural employment has stayed the same or increased only slightly with the average being less than 20%.⁶ The only two countries which have experienced notable changes are Algeria, with an increase from 12 to 16 percent from 2000 to 2003, and Egypt,

¹ The World Bank, GDF and WDI Central (August 2005)

² ILO

³ ILO

⁴ The World Bank, GDF and WDI Central (August 2005)

⁵ ILO

⁶ The World Bank, GDF and WDI Central (August 2005)

The **MNA Regional Strategy** identifies Gender as one of five strategic priority areas which are meant to serve as focus for all activities undertaken in the region.

Gender Work in MNA rests on Four Pillars:

- **Research & Strategy**
- **Policy Advice**
- **Capacity Building**
- **Partnerships**

which had a 3 percent increase to 22 percent in the same time period.⁷ The slow progress in this indicator shows that women do not have equal access to employment opportunities in the formal sector.

Because of insufficient job opportunities for both men and women, there is a belief that encouraging women to participate in the labor force will inevitably lead to more unemployment for men, who are traditionally considered to be the bread-winners of the family. It is important to note, however, that women's participation in the labor force can significantly improve the level of household income and bring many families out of poverty.

Access to Education

The past two decades' positive trend in equal access to education for women has continued. This trend is especially noticeable when contrasting the youth to the adult population. In every MENA country, there is a significant difference between the literacy rate of the female youth population (15-24 years of age) and the female adult population (15 years and above). In Algeria, for example, 86 percent of female youth were literate in 2002 whereas the percentage for literate female adults in the same year was only 60. In Tunisia, female youth literacy in 2004 was 92 percent whereas female adult literacy was only 65 percent. In Yemen, the percentages in 2002 were 51 versus 29.⁸

The investment in female education has been very fruitful. In 2000, the ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education in the MENA region was 89%.⁹ This percentage had increased to 92% in 2002.¹⁰

There has also been an increase in the number of girls who complete their education. For example, the primary completion rate for girls was 85% in 2002 whereas the rate for boys was 89% in the same year.¹¹ These rates suggest that there is not a significant difference between girls and boys in terms of finishing part of their education. Similarly, the literacy gap between young men and women has diminished over the years.

Most MENA countries fall within the 90-100% range¹² although there are great differences among the countries and certain regions within a country. For example, gender disparity in youth literacy is still substantial in Yemen whereas in countries such as Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar, the percentage of young literate women is actually greater than the percentage of young literate men. In addition to differences between countries, the urban-rural disparity in female literacy and school enrollment within each country continue to persist.

Despite progress in female education, women continue to enroll in "traditional fields of study" which are considered appropriate for girls. Furthermore, the problem of gender stereotyping persists – albeit increasingly in more subtle forms -- and is many times supported by school curricula.

⁷ World Bank Central Database

⁸ The World Bank, GDF and WDI Central (August 2005)

⁹ The World Bank, GDF and WDI Central (August 2005)

¹⁰ The World Bank, GDF and WDI Central (August 2005)

¹¹ The World Bank, GDF and WDI Central (August 2005)

¹² United Nations statistics division- UNESCO 2000-2004

¹³ The World Bank, GDF and WDI Central (August 2005)

¹⁴ The World Bank, GDF and WDI Central (August 2005)

¹⁵ WHO

¹⁶ The World Bank, GDF and WDI Central (August 2005)

¹⁷ United Nations Statistics Division- WHO and UNAIDS

¹⁸ The World Bank, GDF and WDI Central (August 2005)

¹⁹ The World Bank, GDF and WDI Central (August 2005)

²⁰ UN, http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/mi_series_results.asp?rowID=557 (Bahrain percentage was taken from the UNDP background paper "Women Leadership in Politics" for the "Workshop on Women and the MDGs.")

Addressing gender at many fronts ...

- **Internally within the World Bank**
- **In Partnership with our Counterparts**
- **At the Regional, Country, and Local Level**

Access to HealthCare

The Regional Gender Report showed that the region made extensive progress in the area of health care during the 1980 and 1990s. This progress has continued from 2000 and onward. Women's life expectancy increased from 68 years in 1997 to 70 years in 2003.¹³ In addition, the region experienced further declines in the fertility rate which decreased from four births/woman in 1997 to three births/woman in 2003.¹⁴ This has been the result of factors such as higher female education and availability of family planning policies.

More girls and women have been able to take advantage of the improved healthcare system. Infant and child mortality data from 2003 suggest that boys and girls under the age of five have equal access to health care.¹⁵ Furthermore, maternal mortality data, which is used to assess women's access to healthcare, shows that the Middle East and North Africa region is doing favorably compared to other regions. The most recent data which is from 2000 has estimated maternal mortality rate to be 179 per 100,000 live births.¹⁶

As in other regions, there is discrepancy in access to healthcare between rural and urban women. Rural women generally marry at a younger age and have more children. Maternal mortality rates, for example, are much higher in rural than in urban areas. It is essential to bring affordable health services closer to rural women in order to ensure that they receive the care that they are entitled to. Another important factor in the maternal mortality rates is the practice of early marriage in some of the countries of the region, mostly among the poor and the rural populations. This affects mainly already marginalized women.

Another issue that must be addressed is that of HIV/AIDS. Although the prevalence of HIV by itself is very low (0.1% of people ages 15-49 in 2003)¹⁷ in the Middle East and North Africa, data from countries such as Iran, Egypt, and Algeria show that the female proportion in the HIV infected population has steadily been increasing since 2001.¹⁸

Women's Legal Rights

There has been some progress in MENA in the area of women's legal rights in the past couple of years. From 2000-2006, countries such as Bahrain, Syria, Oman, and the UAE ratified the CEDAW with reservations to certain articles. In Egypt, the nationality law was amended in 2004 to allow Egyptian women married to foreigners to pass on their nationality to their children.

Despite the encouraging changes, challenges remain. Most of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa have ratified the CEDAW but with provisions and reservation that undermine potential progress. Certain articles of the CEDAW are rejected because they are considered to be incompatible with national legislation and the Sharia. These include article 9 (discrimination in granting nationality to children) and article 16 (discrimination relating to marriage and family relations.)

Challenges remain in national laws concerning matters of marriage, divorce, child custody, and granting nationality to children. For example, women do not enjoy the right to pass on their nationality to their children in instances where the children's father is a foreign national. Similarly, the penal code in many MENA countries does not protect women from crimes committed against them such as honor killings and sexual assault.

Public Participation and Representation

The region has witnessed many encouraging developments in the area of public participation and representation. For example, the percentage of seats held by women in national parliament in the MENA region increased from 4 percent in 2000 to 6 percent in 2004.¹⁹ The most notable changes in 2000-2005 occurred in Tunisia, Jordan, Bahrain, Morocco, Iraq, and Djibouti,²⁰ mainly as a result of appointments and the introduction of quota laws. In contrast, countries such as Iran and Yemen actually saw a decrease in

female representation in their parliaments.

In addition to representation in national parliaments, the region has in the 2000-2005 time period seen the appointment of women to cabinets and other high-level positions. Though this changes rapidly, the list includes several female ministers in Algeria (family and women's situation, reform of finances, research, national community abroad, and communications and culture/government spokesperson), two female ministers in Bahrain (Minister of Health and Minister of Social Affairs), two Lebanese female ministers, six women in the previous Iraqi Cabinet, one woman minister in Oman (Minister of Higher Education), a minister in Kuwait (Planning), in Jordan (Planning), and the first woman Vice-President in Syria. Furthermore, in 2002 in Bahrain and 2005 in Kuwait, women for the first time received the right to vote and run for public office.

Despite these encouraging developments, the Middle East and North Africa still lags behind other regions in the area of women's public participation and representation. There has been close to no change in certain countries, and in some places, previous positive steps have been reversed. As is also the case in other regions, the progress of political representation will be slow if not accompanied by quotas. In most parts of the world women political candidates face a higher up-hill battle in national or parliamentary elections. This may be due to political circumstances, social preconceptions, or the ability of candidates to appeal to broader audiences. In MENA, women have made more progress in local and municipal elections, where issues are more clearly defined and where they can compete with candidates of similar sophistication.

In the past few years, an increasing number of women's organizations and associations have been formed both at the national and local levels. These organizations play a fundamental role in increasing awareness on women's legal rights and other issues that affect women such as globalization, information technology, the environment, education, and healthcare.

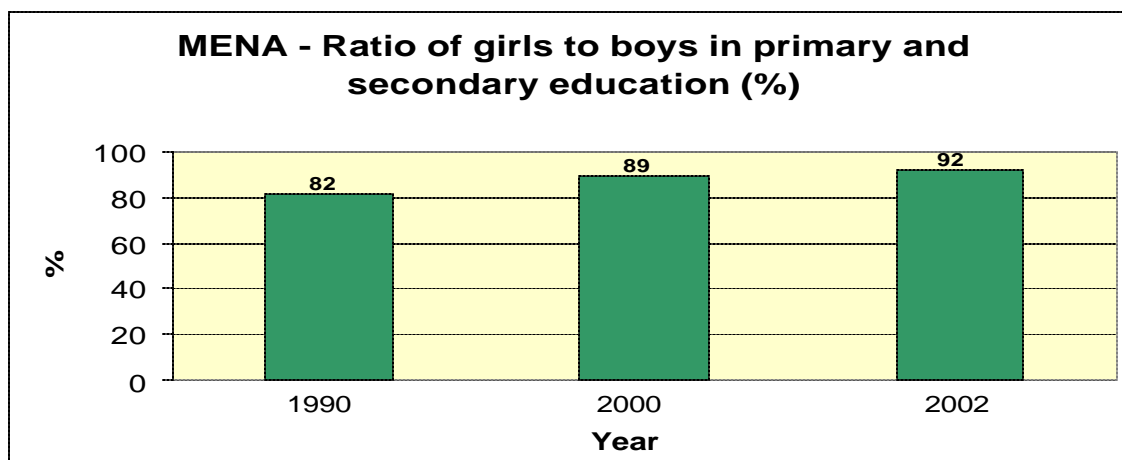
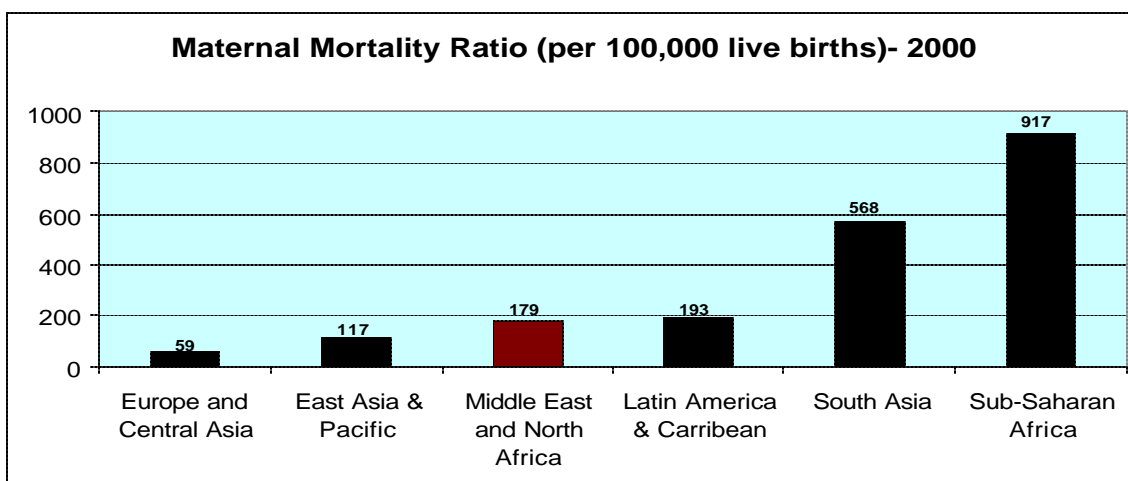
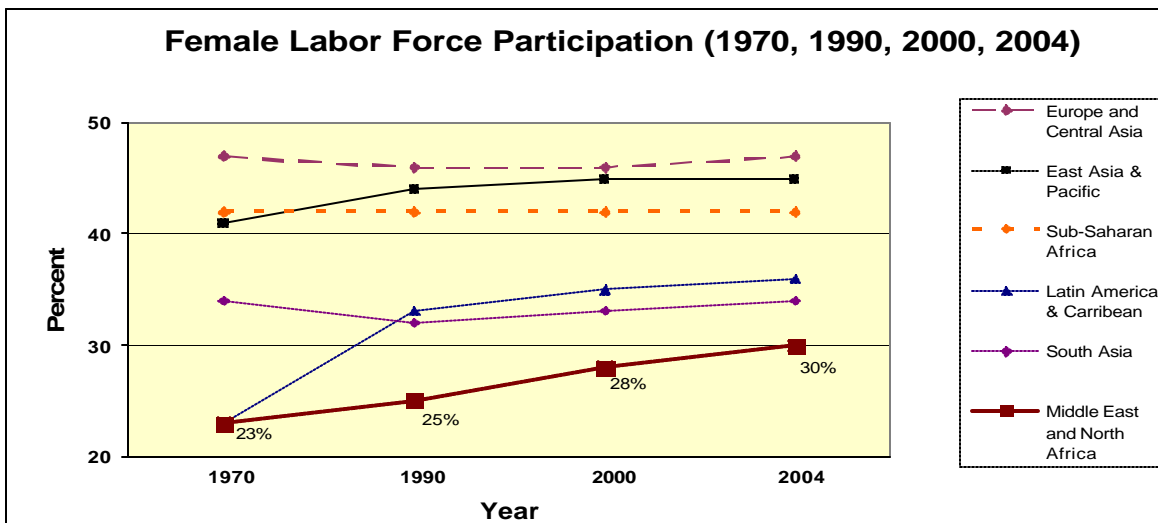
All dollar figures are in US dollar equivalents.

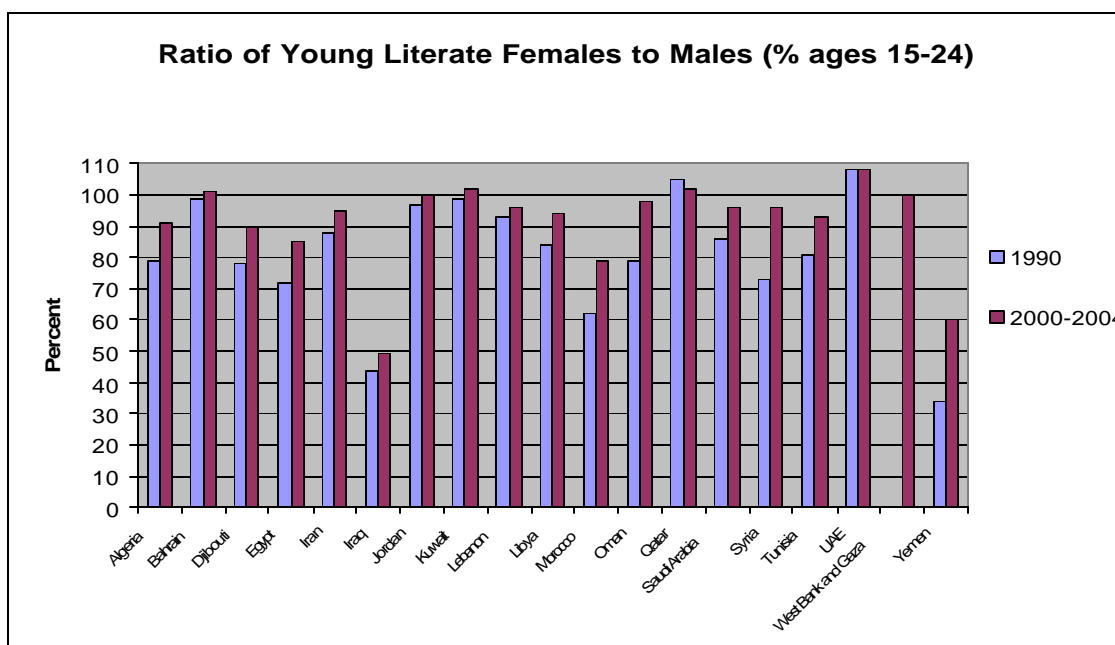
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For more information, please contact:

In Washington: Dina El Naggar, Phone: 1 (202) 473-3245; Fax: 1 (202) 522-0003; Email: delnaggar@worldbank.org

Charts & Tables





Country	Proportion of seats held by women in national Parliament (%)	
	2000	2005
Algeria	3	6
Bahrain	0	7.5*
Djibouti	0	11
Egypt	2	3
Iran	5	4
Iraq	6	8*
Jordan	0	6
Kuwait	0	0
Lebanon	2	2
Libya	---	---
Morocco	1	11
Oman	---	2
Qatar	---	---
Saudi Arabia	---	0*
Syrian Arab Republic	10	12
Tunisia	12	23
United Arab Emirates	0	0
West Bank and Gaza	---	---
Yemen	1	0

Sources: UN, http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/mi_series_results.asp?rowID=557

Equal Constitutional Rights, Freedom of Movement, and Marriage

Country	Constitution that stipulate equal rights and duties for all citizens under the law (both men and women)	Freedom of mobility: rights for a woman to travel or obtain a passport without husband's or guardian's permission signature	Marriage		
			Minimum legal age	Right for women to conclude their own marriage contract	Right for women to get a divorce by the court ^a
Algeria	Yes	Yes	F-18; M-21	No	Yes
Bahrain	Yes	Yes	None	Yes and No ^b	Yes
Djibouti	Yes	Yes	F and M-18	Yes	Yes
Egypt	Yes	Yes	F-16; M-18	Yes	Yes
Iran	No ^c	No	F-13; M-15	No	Yes
Iraq	Yes	Yes and No ^d	F-17, M-18	Yes and No ^d	Yes and No ^d
Jordan	Yes	No	F-15, M- 16 ^e	No	Yes
Kuwait	Yes	Yes and No ^f	F-15; M-17	Yes and No ^g	Yes
Lebanon	Yes	Yes	F-17;M-18 ^h	Yes	Yes ⁱ
Libya	Yes	Yes	F and M-20	Yes	Yes
Morocco	Yes ^j	Yes	F and M-18	Yes	Yes
Oman	Yes	No	None	Yes and No ^b	Yes
Qatar	Yes	Yes and No ^k	F-16; M-?	No	Yes
Saudi Arabia	No	No	None	No	Yes ^l
Syria	No	Yes and No ^m	F-17; M-18	No	Yes
Tunisia	Yes	Yes	F-17; M-20	Yes	Yes
United Arab Emirates	Yes	Yes	F:15; M-?	No ⁿ	Yes
West Bank and Gaza	Yes ^o	Yes	F-16; M-18	Yes	Yes
Yemen	Yes	Yes and No ^p	None	No	Yes

Sources: Freedom House Report "Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Citizenship and Justice, World Bank Report "Gender and Development in the Middle East and North Africa (All data for Iran and Djibouti, column 3 for Egypt and West Bank and Gaza, Column 4 for Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq, Column 5 for Oman and West Bank and Gaza, and column 6 for Oman), UNESCO (column 4 for West Bank

and Gaza), and Foreign affairs article "Women, Islam, and the New Iraq" (all but column 3 for Iraq).

^a In all MENA countries, women have the right to be granted a divorce under special circumstances, such as if the husband is imprisoned, if he is unjustifiably absent, or if he unjustifiably fails to pay maintenance. However, in certain cases (nonpayment of maintenance or physical and mental abuse), the burden of proof is entirely on the woman and, in practice, it is very difficult to get the court to approve the divorce. All countries allow women to be granted divorce through *Khulu*, whereby a woman, for any reason she deems justifiable, can be granted a divorce as long as she pays back the dowry to the husband and renounces any marital financial rights. Many women report that even obtaining *Khulu* is a frustrating and long procedure. Some countries require the husband's signature even in a *Khulu* divorce.

^b Two legal systems are followed and are based on two Islamic schools: *Maliki* (women must have their male guardian represent them in marriage and no woman can execute her own contract) and *Jafari* (any adult man or woman of sane mental capacity can execute his or her own marriage contract.)

^c In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the 20th amendment to the Constitution gives men and women equal protection under the law but does not accord them equal rights.)

^d Article 2 of the final version of the Iraqi constitution makes Islam the official religion of the state, cites it as a basic source of legislation, and says that no law can be passed that contradicts its "undisputed" rulings. Interpreting this provision will fall to the Supreme Court. Furthermore, Article 39 deems Iraqis "free in their personal status according to their religions, sects, beliefs, or choices," but leaves it up to subsequent legislation, such as the Sharia, to define what this means.

^e The provisional law had raised the minimum age of marriage to 18 for both men and women.

^f Under Article 15 of the Passport Law 11/1962, a married Kuwaiti woman cannot apply for a passport without the written approval of her husband, but an unmarried woman over 21 years of age can directly obtain her passport.

^g The Sunni family Law, which affects the majority of Kuwaiti women, deprives a woman of the right to conclude a marriage contract without the presence and consent of her wali (guardian).

^h In the Druze personal status codes, the minimum age for marriage is 18 for males and 17 for females (with the absolute minimum of 16 for males and 15 for females accepted only by an official statement from the court). In the Eastern Catholic personal status codes, Law 75 indicates that the minimum age for marriage is 16 for males and 14 for females. The minimum marriage age for Shi'a is puberty, or with judicial permission, 15 for girls and 9 for boys.

ⁱ In Lebanon, women can seek a divorce pertaining to their particular region.

^j Article 8 of the constitution provides for equality of citizens "before the law," rather than "in law."

^k Women are not legally required to have a male guardian's permission to travel abroad, but men can prevent female relatives from leaving the country by giving their names to immigration officers at departure ports.

^l A woman may obtain a divorce only if her husband granted her the right of divorce at the time of the signing of their marriage contract. The majority of women in Saudi Arabia lack this right, in which case, a Muslim wife can only obtain a legal divorce by proving in court desertion or impotence on the part of the husband

^m A woman no longer needs the permission of her husband to obtain a passport. However, Syrian law gives a husband the right to prevent his wife from leaving the country by submitting her name to the ministry of interior. Unmarried women over the age of 18 may travel domestically and abroad without the permission of male guardians.

ⁿ A woman may go to a court of law as early as at age 15, the legal age for marriage, to defend her right to marry a Muslim citizen of her choice if her male guardian forbids her marriage.

^o The third draft constitution of Palestine views Palestinians as equal before the law

^p Women are not legally permitted a passport without the approval of their guardians (wali), but women with passports are legally allowed to travel without their guardian's permission.