

Issue #181

Collective for Research and Training on Development. Action  
Middle East & North Africa Gender And Development Electronic Brief  
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### **Egypt's Christian, Muslim institutions join efforts to advance women's issues**

Muslim female preachers and Christian nuns attended an awareness course at Assiut University on Sept. 13-14. This came as part of the training they have been receiving in the Door to Door campaign, led by Egypt's National Council for Women, in cooperation with the Ministry of Religious Endowments and the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church to promote Egyptian women's issues.

The head of Egypt's National Council for Women, Maya Morsi, said during a press conference at the ministry's headquarters Sept. 7 that the Door to Door campaign reached 1 million Egyptian women, adding that "a lot of the problems women suffered from were resolved."

Morsi had stated in mid-August that the campaign reached 410,845 women, and it continues to take place in about 22 Egyptian governorates.

The Door to Door campaign, which was launched July 25, will be ongoing until October. The campaign opens informative dialogues that target particular issues during face-to-face meetings with women and their families and provides religious, social or legal solutions to the problems raised. These problems include girls dropping out of schools, female genital mutilation, violence against women and denying women the right to inherit in some parts of Egypt.

Read more:

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/cms/render/live/en/sites/almonitor/contents/articles/originals/2017/09/egypt-raises-awareness-among-women-through-nuns-preachers.html>

### **How Egyptian activists are trying to curb polygamy**



Through Facebook, social media activists in Egypt have been calling since Oct. 1 for adding a special condition in marriage contracts, requiring the first wife's prior consent in the event that her husband seeks a second wife under a polygamy arrangement.

Media activists posted a photo showing a copy of a marriage contract that added this condition, claiming it was officiated in Egypt.

This sparked a wide controversy in Egypt, pitting those who believe this condition is one of the first wife's most basic rights against those who see this as contradictory to Islamic Sharia, which allows men to marry up to four women.

Member of parliament Abdel Moneim al-Alimi, a member of the Legislative and Constitutional Committee, told Al-Monitor that this social media campaign will be supported by the draft law he submitted on Oct. 2 to Egypt's parliament to amend the law organizing the marriage officiant profession.

Read more:

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/10/egypt-right-to-a-second-marriage-women-rights-sharia-law.html>

## Saudi Arabia allows women into stadium as it steps up reforms



Saudi Arabia has allowed women into the national stadium for the first time as it launched celebrations to mark the 87th anniversary of its founding with an unprecedented array of concerts and performances.

The festivities are part of a government bid to boost national pride and improve the quality of life for Saudis timed to coincide with Saturday's national day.

As well as allowing women to attend an operetta at the stadium in Riyadh on Saturday night, another concert in the Red Sea city of Jeddah featured 11 Arab musicians, plus fireworks, air acrobatics and traditional folk dance shows.

The events are part of the government's Vision 2030 reform programme launched two years ago to diversify the economy away from oil, create new sectors to employ young citizens and open up Saudis' cloistered lifestyles.

Read more:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/24/saudi-arabia-allows-women-into-stadium-as-it-steps-up-reforms>

## Iranian Women Banned From World Cup Stadium Game While Female Syrian Fans Allowed Entry



Iranian women intent on watching a World Cup qualifier match between Iran and Syria on September 5, 2017, at Azadi Stadium in Tehran were turned away while Syrian women were allowed entry.

Some of the Iranian female fans had pre-ordered tickets online.

"Syrian women are sitting inside while Iranian women are behind the stadium gate in their own country... Why is there no room for Iranian women?" tweeted sports journalist Elham Yazdiha.

"They didn't allow us into the stadium," wrote Iranian journalist Banafsheh Jamali on Twitter. "The police took a lot of pictures and filmed us and threatened to arrest us. They took away all our tickets."

Although women are not legally banned from entering stadiums to watch male athletic events in Iran, the discriminatory practice—strongly supported by hardline religious conservatives—has been an unofficial policy of the Islamic Republic since the 1979 revolution.

Read more:

<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/09/iranian-women-banned-from-world-cup-stadium-game-while-female-syrian-fans-allowed-entry/>

## Turkey – Women March Against Rising Intolerance in Istanbul



Hundreds of women marched in Istanbul on July 29 to protest against violence and animosity they face from men demanding they dress more conservatively.

The march, dubbed “Don’t Mess With My Outfit,” started in the Kadıköy district on the Asian side of the city. Women chanted slogans and carried denim shorts on hangers as examples of the type of clothing some men say they find unacceptable.

“We will not obey, be silenced, be afraid. We will win through resistance,” the crowds chanted, holding up posters and LGBT rainbow flags.

Protesters say there has been an increase in the number of verbal and physical attacks against women for their choice of clothing in Turkey in recent years.

In one incident in June, a young woman, Asena Melisa Sağlam, was attacked by a man on a bus in Istanbul for wearing shorts during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Video of the incident showed the man hitting her while the bus driver watched.

Read more:

<http://wunrn.com/2017/08/turkey-women-march-against-rising-intolerance-in-istanbul/>

## GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

### #MeToo: Arab women open up about experiences with sexual harassment



*Women in the Middle East have shared their experiences with sexual assault and harassment as part of the global #MeToo hashtag to raise awareness of the magnitude of the problem.*

After allegations surfaced of years of sexual assault against women by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, more and more victims have been opening up about the harassment and discrimination they have faced in their industries and on the streets.

Under the latest prominent social media hashtag, #MeToo, which has gained momentum since Sunday, victims of sexual assault have shared their experiences in a show of solidarity - and to expose the magnitude of the problem in everyday society.

The #MeToo campaign comes as Egyptian capital Cairo was on Monday named the world's most dangerous city for women.

A survey carried out by the Thomson Reuters Foundation asked experts in women's issues in 19 megacities how well women are protected from sexual violence and other harmful cultural practices. Cairo ranked last, while London came top.

Read more:

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/blog/2017/10/17/metoo-arab-women-open-up-about-sexual-harassment>



## Violence against women is harming Arab economies, says UN



*In a bid to promote policy reform in Arab states, the United Nations is highlighting the huge economic cost of gender-based violence.*

The United Nations has called upon Arab states to analyse the economic damage caused by violence against women, as part of a drive to promote policy change in a region where gender-based violence remains a taboo.

The UN's agency on women said that only a few states in the region have laws designed to tackle issues like marital rape, honour killings and incest.

"Many countries in the Arab region still see violence against women and deal with it as a private issue and not a public issue," said Mehrinaz Elawady of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

"Costing (the) violence would help the government and the state understand that ... it is not only affecting the abused woman, it is also affecting the entire economy," the director of ESCWA's Centre for Women was quoted by the Thomson Reuters Foundation as saying.

Read more:

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2017/10/5/violence-against-women-is-harming-arab-economies-says-un>

## More Syrian families in Jordan resorting to child marriage



*More Syrian families in Jordan are marrying off their young daughters to ease the financial burden or protect the "honour" of girls seen as vulnerable outside their homeland.*

The number of Syrian child brides is rising, figures from Jordan's population census have documented for the first time.

More families who fled the now six-year-old civil war back home are marrying off daughters to ease the financial burden or protect the "honour" of girls seen as vulnerable outside their homeland.

In 2015, brides between the ages of 13 and 17 made up almost 44 percent of all Syrian females in Jordan getting married that year, compared to 33 percent in 2010.

With Syrians expected to remain in exile for years, it's a harmful trend for refugees and their overburdened host country, UN and Jordanian officials say.

More Syrian girls will lose out on education, since most child brides drop out of school. They typically marry fellow Syrians who are just a few years older, often without a steady job – a constellation that helps perpetuate poverty.

Read more:

[https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2017/8/8/more-syrian-families-in-jordan-resorting-to-child-marriage?utm\\_campaign=magnet&utm\\_source=article\\_page&utm\\_medium=related\\_articles](https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2017/8/8/more-syrian-families-in-jordan-resorting-to-child-marriage?utm_campaign=magnet&utm_source=article_page&utm_medium=related_articles)

## After allowing women to drive Saudi Arabia steers toward anti-harassment laws, fatwa rights

*After a royal decree allowing women to drive in the conservative kingdom, Saudi Arabia now steers toward tackling sexual harassment and allowing women to issue fatwas.*

Saudi Arabia is preparing a draft law to combat sexual harassment and help protect women from perpetrators, the latest in a string of recent "progressive" moves in the conservative kingdom this week.

King Salman bin Abdulaziz ordered the move to begin criminalising sexual harassment on Thursday, local reports said, just two days after a royal decree announced a historic and unprecedented law allowing women to drive for the first time in the kingdom's 87 years.

"Considering the dangers sexual harassment poses and its negative impact on the individual, the family and society, along with its contradiction of Islamic principles, our customs and traditions [...], the ministry shall prepare a draft law to tackle sexual harassment," a copy of the royal decree that has been circulating online, said.

The decree goes on to note the "importance of passing a law that criminalises it [sexual harassment] and outlines the necessary penalties that categorically prohibit such acts and deter anyone who feels tempted to commit them."

Read more:

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2017/9/29/saudi-arabia-steers-toward-anti-harassment-laws-fatwa-rights>

## GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS

### Saudi Arabia to allow women to drive for 1st time next year



Women will be allowed to drive for the first time next summer in Saudi Arabia, the ultra-conservative kingdom announced Tuesday, marking a significant expansion of women's rights in the only the country that barred them from getting behind the wheel.

While women in other Muslim countries drove freely, the kingdom's blanket ban attracted negative publicity for years. Neither Islamic law nor Saudi traffic law explicitly prohibited women from driving, but they were not issued licenses and were detained if they attempted to drive.

Prince Khaled bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Washington and the king's son, said letting women drive is a "huge step forward" and that "society is ready."

"This is the right time to do the right thing," he told reporters in the U.S. Women will be allowed to obtain licenses without the permission of a male relative.

The announcement came in the form of a royal decree that was reported late Tuesday by the state-run Saudi Press Agency and state TV.

Read more:

<https://apnews.com/e094f7bcdd624000a47fd19e536e1a5d>

## Tunisia scraps decades-old ban on Muslim women marrying non-Muslims

*Tunisia has abolished a decades-old ban on Muslim women marrying non-Muslims, the presidency has announced.*

Tunisia has abolished a decades-old ban on Muslim women marrying non-Muslims, the presidency said on Thursday.

"Congratulations to the women of Tunisia for the enshrinement of the right to the freedom to choose one's spouse," presidency spokeswoman Saida Garrach wrote on Facebook.

The announcement comes a month after President Beji Caïd Essebsi called for the government to scrap the ban dating back to 1973.

Until now a non-Muslim man who wished to marry a Tunisian woman had to convert to Islam and submit a certificate of his conversion as proof.

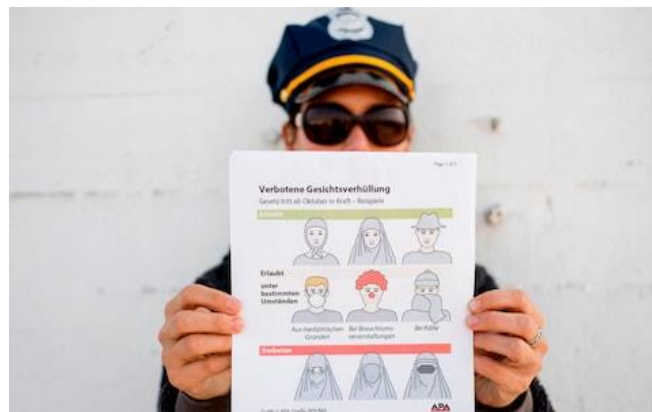
Human rights groups in the North African country had campaigned for the ban's abolition, saying it undermined the fundamental human right to choose a spouse.

The scrapping of the law has come under fire from conservatives and Islamists in Tunisia and around the region.

Read more:

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2017/9/14/tunisia-scraps-ban-on-muslim-women-marrying-non-muslims>

## Austria's 'burka ban' comes into force, prohibiting face veils in public places



A ban on full-face coverings, which includes Muslim veils such as those worn in burkas, comes into force in Austria today as anti-immigration parties look poised to win national elections later this month.

The new law states that faces must be visible from hairline to chin in public places and includes off-slope ski masks and surgical masks outside of hospitals.

Austrian police are allowed to use force to make people show their face and can impose fines of €150 (£132).

Austria's ban comes after France and Belgium bans in 2011 and the Dutch parliament also debating a similar law.

Muslim groups have condemned the law saying only a tiny minority of women in the country wear full-face veils. Carla Amina Bhagajati of the Islamic Religious Community in Austria said the "handful" of fully veiled women she knows of in Vienna "now are criminalized" and "restricted to their homes".

Read more:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/01/austrias-burka-ban-comes-force-prohibiting-face-veils-public/>

## **Feminising the Ma'zoon: Morocco allows women to officiate marriages**

*Women in Morocco can soon start authorising marriages, divorces and a number of other legal contracts as well as assist judges, as part of judicial reforms starting in October.*

Women in Morocco can soon start authorising marriages, divorces and a number of other legal contracts as well as assist judges, as part of judicial reforms starting in October.

The marriage registrar, known as ma'zoon in Arabic, is traditionally a man, as Moroccan law forbade women from officiating marriage and divorce contracts.

However, a recent decision to push for profound reforms to the justice system in Morocco - initiated by former minister of justice and liberties Mustafa al-Ramid - may see women starting to officiate marriage contracts for the first time in Moroccan history by October.

The move comes against the backdrop of criticism from ultra-conservatives in the country who argue that the role of a ma'zoon is conditioned on "masculinity".

Salafist preacher Hassan al-Kettani - who was formerly imprisoned on terrorism charges - strongly condemned the move, claiming that allowing women to officiate marriages is contrary to religious teachings.

Read more:

[https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2017/9/6/feminising-the-mazoon-morocco-allows-women-to-officiate-marriages?utm\\_campaign=magnet&utm\\_source=article\\_page&utm\\_medium=related\\_articles](https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2017/9/6/feminising-the-mazoon-morocco-allows-women-to-officiate-marriages?utm_campaign=magnet&utm_source=article_page&utm_medium=related_articles)

## **Saudi Woman Named to Senior Government Post for First Time**



A Saudi woman has been named to a senior government post for the first time, authorities said on Wednesday shortly after a ban on women drivers was lifted as the conservative kingdom takes steps to modernize its image.

Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, had been widely criticized for being the only country in the world that barred female motorists, a tradition seen by rights activists as emblematic of Riyadh's repression of women.

Twenty-four hours after King Salman issued a decree end the ban, the government announced that a woman had been appointed as assistant mayor of Al Khubar governorate.

Eman Al-Ghamidi was given the post "as part of plan to boost the number of females in leadership positions in line with Vision 2030," the Center for International Communication at the Ministry of Culture and Information said in a statement.

Read more:

<https://www.voanews.com/a/saudi-woman-named-to-senior-government-post-for-the-first-time/4047021.html>



## Saudi Arabia – Physical Education Classes for Girls for the First Time

Does Islam allow girls to play tag? What about soccer?

Such questions have suddenly become points of public policy in Saudi Arabia as public schools in the ultraconservative kingdom prepare, for the first time in their history, to offer physical education for girls.

The Saudi education ministry said on Tuesday that P.E./physical education for girls would start with the coming academic year, marking a slight loosening of the rules in a country that has long had one of the world's most restrictive environments for women.

The announcement did not detail what activities would be offered, but said they would be introduced gradually and “in accordance with the rules of sharia,” or Islamic law.

Because of the kingdom's desert traditions and strict interpretation of Islam, women in Saudi Arabia must cover their hair and bodies in public, and are barred from driving and from traveling abroad and undergoing some medical treatments without the permission of a male guardian — usually a father, husband or even a son.

That means no driver's education for female students.

Read more:

<http://wunrn.com/2017/08/saudi-arabia-physical-education-classes-for-girls-for-the-first-time/>

## RESOURCES & CALLS BOOKS & REPORTS

### Governance and Women's Economic and Political Participation: Power Inequalities, Formal Constraints and Norms

What role do institutional constraints and social norms play in determining persistent gender gaps in economic and political participation and have institutional reforms been successful in reducing these gaps? This paper argues that, at the roots of current gender inequalities, there are traditional patriarchal social structures in which power is unequally distributed, with men traditionally holding authority over women. The author reviewed the evidence on the effectiveness of reforms addressing gender inequality and applied via formal law changes. Aware of endogeneity issues as reforms may be adopted in countries where attitudes toward women had already been improving, we focus on micro-empirical studies that tackle this challenge. The evidence suggests that some reforms have been successful reducing inequalities. Formal laws can remain ineffective or cause a backlash because: i) the law is poorly implemented and/or people are not aware of it; ii) informal systems and social norms/sanctions are stronger; iii) powerful groups may oppose these changes. Finally, reforms that improve women's economic opportunities can create the conditions to increase political participation and vice-versa, thereby generating a self-reinforcing cycle of inclusion.

Read more:

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/27267>

For a direct link to publication:

[https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/27267/116405\\_WDR17\\_BP\\_Governance\\_and\\_Womens\\_Participation-Milazzo\\_Goldstein.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y](https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/27267/116405_WDR17_BP_Governance_and_Womens_Participation-Milazzo_Goldstein.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y)

## Measuring Women's Agency

Improving women's agency, namely their ability to define goals and act on them, is crucial for advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women. Yet, existing frameworks for women's agency measurement - both disorganized and partial -- provide a fragmented understanding of the constraints women face in exercising their agency, restricting the design of quality interventions and evaluation of their impact. This paper proposes a multidisciplinary framework containing the three critical dimensions of agency: goal-setting, perceived control and ability ("sense of agency"), and acting on goals. For each dimension, the paper (i) reviews existing measurement approaches and what is known about their relative quality; (ii) presents new empirical evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa: validating vignettes as a measurement tool for goal-setting, examining gender and regional discrepancies in response to sense-of-agency measures, and investigating what information spousal disagreement over decision-making roles can provide about the intra-household process of acting on goals; and (iii) highlights priorities for future research to improve the measurement of women's agency.

Read more:

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/27955>

For a direct link to report:

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/27955/WPS8148.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

## Women Human Rights Defenders and Judicial Harassment in the MENA Region



Judicial Harassment refers to any kind of act that limits WHRDs' work by the force of law and pressures them in different ways of summoning, interrogation, travel ban, property seizure, asset freeze and imprisonment.

During the recent months several cases of judicial harassment have happened in different countries in MENA in which woman human rights defenders have been trialed, sentenced and banned from traveling.

In Bahrain on 22 June 2016, Ghada Jamsheer, the President of the Women's Petition Committee (WPC), was sentenced on appeal to one year in prison by the Second High Criminal Court for four cases regarding her criticizing alleged corruption at King Hamad hospital on social media. She was also fined 10,000 dinars (approx. USD\$26,500) for alleged defamation of the management of the hospital, headed by a member of the ruling family.

Read more:

<http://whrdmena.org/2017/06/23/women-human-rights-defenders-judicial-harassment-mena-region/>

## Now is the time: research on gender justice, conflict and fragility in the Middle East and North Africa



This study examines the impact of fragility and conflict on gender justice and women's rights in the MENA, as a part of an Oxfam project entitled 'Promoting the Needs of Women in Conflict in the Middle East and North Africa' funded

through the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

It specifically aims to understand how conflict and fragility in four different contexts – Egypt, Iraq, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Yemen – have impacted the realization of gender equality and gender justice in the past several years of political and social upheaval.

Read more:

<https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/now-time-research-gender-justice-conflict-and-fragility-middle-east-and-north-africa>

For a direct link to report:

[https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file\\_attachments/rr-gender-justice-conflict-fragility-mena-050617-en.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/rr-gender-justice-conflict-fragility-mena-050617-en.pdf)

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