

Factbox: Women's rights in the Arab world

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Nov 12 (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Egypt is the worst country for women in the Arab world, closely followed by Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen, according to gender experts surveyed in a Thomson Reuters Foundation poll released on Tuesday.

Comoros, Oman, Kuwait, Jordan and Qatar came top of the survey, which assessed 22 Arab states on violence against women, reproductive rights, treatment of women within the family, their integration into society and attitudes towards a woman's role in politics and the economy.

The results were drawn from answers from 336 gender experts invited to participate in an online survey by the foundation, the philanthropic arm of the news and information company Thomson Reuters, in August and September.

Questions were based on key provisions of the U.N. Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which 19 Arab states have signed or ratified.

The poll assessed violence against women, reproductive rights, treatment of women within the family, their integration into society and attitudes towards a woman's role in politics and the economy.

Experts were asked to respond to statements and rate the importance of factors affecting women's rights across the six categories. Their responses were converted into scores, which were averaged to create a ranking.

Here are key facts on **women's rights in the 22 states surveyed**, listed from worst to best.

22. EGYPT

Sexual violence, harassment and trafficking combined with a breakdown of security, high rates of female genital mutilation and a rollback of freedoms since the 2011 revolution put Egypt at the bottom of the poll.

- 99.3 percent of women and girls are subjected to sexual harassment.
- 27.2 million women and girls - or 91 percent of the female population - are victims of female genital mutilation (FGM).
- 63 percent of adult women are literate.

(Sources: U.N. Women, UNICEF, World Bank)

21. IRAQ

Iraq's second-worst ranking reflects a dramatic deterioration in conditions for women since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. Mass displacement has made women vulnerable to trafficking and sexual violence. The Iraqi penal code allows men who kill their wives to serve a maximum of three years in prison rather than a life sentence.

- 14.5 percent of women have jobs.
- 1.6 million women are widows.
- Thousands of displaced women have been forced to work as prostitutes in neighboring countries including Syria, Jordan and United Arab Emirates.

(Sources: World Bank, Refugees International, Freedom House)

20. SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia polled third-worst overall and ranked last for political representation and inheritance rights. Despite stirrings of progress, the kingdom's guardianship system severely limits women's freedoms.

- Women can vote for the first time in 2015 municipal elections.
- Marital rape is not recognized and rape victims risk being charged with adultery.
- Women are banned from driving and need a guardian's permission to travel, enroll in education, marry or undergo healthcare procedures.

(Sources: Human Rights Watch, U.S. State Department, Amnesty International)

19. SYRIA

Massive war displacement, both inside Syria and across borders, has left millions of women and girls vulnerable to sexual violence and trafficking, the United Nations says. The collapse of the economy and healthcare system has disproportionately affected women.

- Girls as young as 12 have been married in refugee camps.
- More than 4,000 cases of rape and sexual mutilation have been reported to the Syrian Network for Human Rights.
- There are reports of government forces and armed militias sexually abusing women and girls during home raids and in detention centers.

(UNICEF, U.S. State Department, Human Rights Watch)

18. YEMEN

Historically marginalized, Yemeni women have been fighting for rights since the 2011 Arab Spring. Experts say child marriage, human trafficking and rape are endemic.

- No law deals effectively with domestic abuse and marital rape isn't recognized.
- There is no legal minimum age for marriage.
- 53 percent of girls finish primary school.

(Sources: UNICEF, U.S. State Department, World Bank)

17. SUDAN

Sudan hasn't ratified CEDAW and women face systematic discrimination and inequality. Strict interpretations of Islam curb women's freedoms and allow domestic abuse, child marriage and marital rape. Sexual violence is common and often goes unpunished.

- Girls can legally marry from the age of 10.
- 12.1 million women and girls are victims of FGM.
- Victims often don't report rape, fearing they will be tried for adultery.

(Sources: UNICEF, OECD Gender Index)

16. LEBANON

Lebanon ranked badly for not punishing marital rape, for biased inheritance laws and discriminatory employment laws.

- No law prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Lebanese women can't pass citizenship onto children or foreign-born husbands.
- One in six Lebanese women are illiterate.

(Sources: Freedom House, UNICEF, U.S. State Department)

15. PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

Israeli restrictions on movement have severe consequences for Palestinian women, experts said. Women suffer from poverty, unemployment and a high risk of domestic violence and honor crimes.

- Only 17 percent of women are employed despite a literacy rate of 93 percent.
- 51 percent of women in Gaza City experienced domestic violence in 2011.
- 25 honor killings were recorded in the first nine months of 2013.

(Sources: UNICEF, Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, Ma'an News Agency)

14. SOMALIA

Somalia has not signed CEDAW. It has one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates and sexual violence is widespread. In regions controlled by al-Shabaab extremists, women suffer from harsh application of sharia (Islamic) law.

- 1,200 women die in childbirth for every 100,000 live births.
- 1,700 women were raped in camps for internally displaced people in 2012.
- Girls as young as 13 have been stoned to death for adultery and 98 percent of women and girls undergo FGM.

(Sources: UNICEF, Amnesty International, Women Living Under Muslim Laws)

13. DJIBOUTI

Djibouti polled as one of the best countries for abolishing laws that discriminate against women but it struggles to curb child marriage and has one of the world's highest FGM rates.

- The Supreme Court has a female president.
- A law was enacted in 2009 to improve the living conditions of low-income women.
- 93 percent of women have been subjected to FGM.

(Sources: U.S. State Department, UNICEF)

12. BAHRAIN

Judges in Islamic courts make decisions on women's rights in divorce, marriage, inheritance and child custody cases, based on interpretation of Islamic law. Bahraini law doesn't recognize or punish marital rape or domestic abuse.

- A woman's testimony is worth half that of a man's in an Islamic court.
- Women could first vote or run for election in 2002.
- The Penal Code says a rapist can avoid punishment if he marries his victim.

(Sources: Freedom House, UNICEF)

11. MAURITANIA

Mauritania is one of the few Arab states with laws prohibiting domestic abuse and marital rape, but women face high rates of sexual violence and FGM. The practice of forced feeding to make daughters more attractive to potential partners is widespread.

- 69 percent of women are victims of FGM.
- More than 1,800 domestic violence victims sought help from the Mauritanian Association for the Health of Mothers and Children in 2012.
- 412 rapes were recorded in 2012.

(UNICEF, U.S. State Department, Association for the Female Heads of Households)

10. UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Women have access to education and health services but traditional gender roles are ingrained. Many foreign female domestic workers are trafficked and abused and women run the risk of being imprisoned for adultery when reporting sexual violence.

- Marital rape is not recognized and the law permits men to discipline their wives physically.
- Four women sit on the 22-member cabinet of the Federal National Council.
- Women represent 14 percent of the total workforce.

(Sources: Human Rights Watch, U.S. State Department, World Bank)

9. LIBYA

Libya ranked as one of the best countries for political representation but experts said insecurity, poverty and lack of education were some of the greatest concerns for women.

- 33 women were elected to the 200-member General National Congress in 2012.
- 20 is the legal minimum age for women to marry unless they get special permission from a court.
- Intimidation and harassment of women by militias and extremists has been widely reported.

(Sources: U.S. State department, UNICEF)

8. MOROCCO

Women in Morocco have a degree of independence and autonomy but domestic abuse is common. Experts say equality laws are not implemented and there are no laws against domestic violence or marital rape.

- 17,000 incidents of violence against women were reported in the first 3 months of 2008.
- 44 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 49 are literate.
- The Penal Code criminalizes anyone who harbors a woman who has left her husband.

(Sources: Freedom House, World Bank, Human Rights Watch)

7. ALGERIA

Algeria ranked badly for gender discrimination in the workplace and political participation by women.

- Algerian law doesn't recognize spousal rape.
- 16 percent of Algerian women have jobs.
- In October 2012, Algeria made its first-ever conviction for sexual harassment.

(Sources: UNICEF, World Bank, U.S. State Department)

6. TUNISIA

Long known as one of the Arab world's most progressive states, Tunisia has offered abortion on demand since 1965 and women can pass citizenship onto their husbands. Conservative elements are now calling for Islamic values to be enforced.

- In 2011, 61 women were elected to the 217-member Constituent Assembly.
- Women are entitled to 30 days maternity leave at 67 percent of full wages.
- Domestic abuse and marital rape laws are rarely enforced.

(Sources: U.S. State Department, World Bank, Freedom House)

5. QATAR

Qatari women are active in business and higher education but face pressure to conform to traditional gender roles. Sex outside marriage is illegal and many domestic workers are trafficked and abused.

- About 100 expatriate women are jailed annually for having children out of wedlock.
- 51.8 percent of women have jobs.
- An anti-trafficking law was passed in October 2011.

(Sources: Doha News, U.N. Data, U.S. State Department)

4. JORDAN

Despite its reputation as a progressive state, Jordan ranked second-worst in the category of honor killings.

- 681 cases of rape and sexual assault were reported to the Family Protection Department in 2012.
- 10 honor crimes were brought before judges in 2012 and 24 women went into protective custody to avoid honor killings.
- In 2003, the law was changed so women could get passports without the consent of husbands.

(Sources: U.S. State Department, UNICEF)

3. KUWAIT

Kuwait scored well on education and inheritance rights, though social protections are rarely extended to the country's large female foreign worker population.

- Kuwait has no laws against domestic abuse and marital rape.
- There are no shelters or hotlines for victims of domestic abuse.
- 15 is the minimum legal age for girls to marry.

(Sources: UNICEF, U.S. State Department)

2. OMAN

Omani women benefit from better social protection than in other Arab countries, but FGM is still practiced in some regions and women face discrimination in the workplace and pressure to conform to traditional roles.

- In 2010, 227 men were charged with rape or attempted rape.
- In December 2011, four women were elected to provisional councils out of 192 seats.
- Women can't transfer citizenship to foreign-born spouses or children.

(Sources: U.S. State Department, UNICEF)

1. COMOROS

The Indian Ocean archipelago nation polled well across all categories except political representation. Comorian women have a good deal of social freedom while sexual abuse is recognized and punished.

- Women hold only 3 percent of seats in the national parliament.
- 35 percent of adult women have jobs.
- Half the inmates of Moroni prison were jailed for sexual aggression.

(Sources: World Bank, U.N. Development Program, U.S. State Department)