



WHIS MUN 2024

STUDY GUIDE



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United Nations Women

Agenda : Protection of Women's Rights in the Middle East

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Letter from the Executive Board

Greetings Members,

It gives us immense pleasure to welcome you to this simulation of UNW. We look forward to an enriching and rewarding experience.

The agenda for the session being ‘Protection of Women Rights in Middle East’

This study guide is by no means the end of research, we would very much appreciate it if the diplomats are able to find new realms in the agenda and bring it forth in the committee. Such research combined with good argumentation and a solid representation of facts is what makes much as possible, as fluency, diction or oratory skills have very little importance as opposed to the content you deliver. So just research and speak and you are bound to make a lot of sense. We are certain that we will be learning from you immensely and we also hope that you all will have an equally enriching experience. In case of any queries feel free to contact us. We will try our best to answer the questions to the best of our abilities.

We look forward to an exciting and interesting committee, which should certainly be helped by the all-pervasive nature of the issue. Hopefully we, as members of the Executive Board, do also have a chance to gain from being a part of this committee. Please do not hesitate to contact us regarding any doubts that you may have.

All the Best!

Executive Board

Jasleen Singh

(Chairperson)

Rhea Khanolkar

(Vice-Chairperson)



About the Committee

UN Women or United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women-was created in July 2010 by the United Nations General Assembly through the merge of four distinct UN bodies which were focusing on women's empowerment.' Its main purpose is divided in five prioritized areas which are: support women's leadership participation, combat violence against women, ensure the participation of women in all peace and security processes, empower women economically, and make sure the inclusion of gender equality to national agendas.

Generally, it functions in a parallel manner with other UN bodies and tries to ameliorate their actions in terms of gender equality. More specifically, UN Women assists inter-governmental bodies with their work, provides Member States with technical and financial support when they request it, and -lastly- give guidance to other UN bodies in order to sustain their accountability towards gender sensitive issues. It consists of 41 Member States which are elected for a three-year term and the latter is distributed geographically.

UN Women is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities:

- Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems
- Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy
- All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence
- Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action

UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality, and in all deliberations and agreements linked to the 2030 Agenda. The entity works to position gender equality as fundamental to the Sustainable Development Goals, and a more inclusive world.



About the Agenda

As the societies of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) undertake the difficult process of enacting social and political change, the unequal status of women stands out as a particularly formidable obstacle.

The Gulf region, and the Middle East as a whole, is not the only region of the world where women experience inequality. In Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, and North America, women continue to face discrimination and significant barriers to the full realization of their rights. It is in the Gulf, however, that the gap between the rights of men and those of women has been most clear and substantial. The Gulf countries were the worst performers in nearly all subject areas examined in the recent past. Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa displayed particularly poor performance in the categories analyzing legal rights and protection from discrimination, political rights, as well as women's personal status and autonomy.

The country reports presented in the United Nations show details of how women throughout the Gulf continue to face systematic discrimination in both laws and social customs. Deeply entrenched societal norms, combined with conservative interpretations of Islamic law, continue to relegate women to a subordinate status. Women in the region are significantly underrepresented in senior positions in politics and the private sector, and in some countries they are completely absent from the judiciary. Perhaps most visibly, women face gender-based discrimination in personal-status laws, which regulate marriage, divorce, child custody, inheritance, and other aspects of family life. Family laws in most of the region declare that the husband is the head of the family, gives the husband power over his wife's right to work and travel, and in some instances specifically require the wife to obey her husband. Domestic violence also remains a significant problem.

Important steps, however, have been taken in each country over the last five years to improve the status of women. In 2005, women in Kuwait received the same political rights as men, which enabled them to vote and run for office in the parliamentary elections the following year. In Bahrain and the UAE, the first women judges were appointed in 2006 and 2008, respectively, setting an important precedent for the rest of the region. Moreover, the codification of family laws in Qatar and the UAE has been seen as another step forward; previously, family issues were decided based on each judge's interpretation of Islamic law. Since 2003, women have become more visible participants in public life, education, and business in all of the Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia. They have also gained more freedom to travel independently, as laws requiring a guardian's permission for a woman to obtain a passport have been rescinded in Bahrain and Qatar.

In Qatar and the UAE, the positive change has come as the result of an increased political will to engage on the issue of women's rights, as well as advocacy by powerful, well-connected women. In Saudi Arabia, reform is driven in large part by the strong grassroots efforts of women's rights activists, lawyers, and journalists. An earlier push to improve the quality of women's education,



combined with the growing presence of women in the workplace, has prompted an increasing number of women to demand greater rights in other spheres of life, including politics and family.

Past UN Actions

The Middle East has long been a region of strategic importance and complex socio-political dynamics, where women's rights have often been marginalized. Despite cultural and religious constraints, significant strides have been made towards gender equality, largely supported by international organizations like the United Nations.

Key UN Resolutions and Declaratations

1. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000):

Resolution 1325 underscores the crucial role of women in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding. It calls for:

- a. Increased participation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional, and international institutions.
- b. Protection of women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly in conflict zones.
- c. Integration of gender perspectives in peacekeeping missions and post-conflict reconstruction.

Implementation:

- a. Iraq: Training programs for women leaders and peacebuilders have been developed. These initiatives aim to ensure women's voices are included in peace negotiations and community rebuilding efforts .
- b. Syria: Efforts have focused on documenting women's experiences in the conflict and incorporating their perspectives into peace processes. UN Women has played a pivotal role in supporting Syrian women's participation in peace talks.

1. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):

CEDAW is a landmark international treaty adopted in 1979, which defines discrimination against women and sets an agenda for national action to eliminate such discrimination. Many Middle Eastern countries have ratified CEDAW, although often with reservations regarding family and personal status laws.

Middle East Specifics:

- a. Egypt: Ratified CEDAW in 1981. Efforts include legal reforms aimed at addressing gender discrimination in family law and enhancing women's property rights.
- b. Jordan: Ratified CEDAW in 1992. Initiatives focus on improving women's access to education and healthcare and reducing gender-based violence.
- c. Challenges: Reservations related to family law persist, reflecting the tension between international norms and local cultural and religious practices.



UN Agencies and Programs

UN Women Initiatives:

UN Women has been instrumental in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the Middle East. Its programs focus on economic empowerment, leadership, political participation, and combating violence against women.

Key Programs:

1. Economic Empowerment:

- a. **Egypt:** The "Women's Employment Programme" offers vocational training and entrepreneurial skills to women, facilitating their entry into the labor market and helping them start small businesses.
- b. **Jordan:** The "Spring Forward for Women" project provides funding and resources to support female entrepreneurs, aiming to enhance their economic independence and participation in the workforce.

2. Leadership and Political Participation:

- a. **Tunisia:** Campaigns have been supported to increase women's political representation and participation in local and national elections. Training programs prepare women for leadership roles in politics and civil society.
- b. **Lebanon:** Training programs are designed to equip women with the skills necessary for leadership roles in politics and other sectors.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

UNFPA focuses on reproductive health and rights, providing critical services and support, especially in conflict and crisis situations.

Key Actions:

- a. **Syria:** UNFPA has provided reproductive health services, including mobile clinics and health facilities for displaced women. They also offer psycho-social support and medical care for survivors of gender-based violence.
- b. **Yemen:** UNFPA supports maternal health programs, ensuring safe childbirth and access to family planning despite the humanitarian crisis. Community awareness programs aim to combat harmful practices such as child marriage.



Economic Empowerment Programs:

The UN supports initiatives aimed at increasing women's participation in the economy through training, funding, and policy advocacy.

UNDP Projects:

- a. **Egypt:** Vocational training programs and microcredit schemes help women start and sustain businesses. These initiatives aim to enhance women's economic roles and independence.
- b. **Palestine:** Programs focus on integrating women into the workforce and supporting female-led enterprises. These efforts aim to create sustainable economic opportunities for women.

Legal Reforms and Advocacy:

The UN collaborates with local governments and organizations to reform laws that discriminate against women and promote gender equality.

- a. **Tunisia:** UN Women has advocated for the amendment of inheritance laws that favor men over women. Efforts include supporting legal reforms to protect women from domestic violence.
- b. **Morocco:** Assistance in implementing the 2004 Family Code (Moudawana), which grants women more rights in marriage, divorce, and custody.

Education and Awareness Campaigns:

UNESCO and other UN agencies promote education for girls and women, aiming to close the gender gap in education.

- a. **Yemen:** Emergency education programs keep girls in school during conflicts. Campaigns raise awareness about the importance of girls' education and work to reduce dropout rates.
- b. **Jordan:** Support for refugee girls' education ensures access to quality education for Syrian refugees, addressing both immediate and long-term educational needs.

Humanitarian Assistance:

In conflict and post-conflict settings, the UN provides humanitarian assistance tailored to the needs of women and girls.

- a. **Syria:** Distribution of dignity kits containing hygiene products for women and girls in refugee camps. Safe spaces provide psychological support and vocational training.
- b. **Iraq:** Support for internally displaced women includes health services, protection programs, and economic empowerment initiatives.



Collaboration with Local Organizations

The UN's effectiveness in the Middle East is often enhanced through partnerships with local NGOs and women's groups, which help implement programs and provide culturally relevant support.

The UN has played a pivotal role in advancing women's rights in the Middle East through a combination of resolutions, conventions, and targeted programs. While significant progress has been made, challenges remain, particularly in addressing deep-seated cultural and religious norms that perpetuate gender inequality. Continued efforts and collaboration with local stakeholders are essential to sustain and expand these achievements, ensuring a more equitable future for women in the region.



Present Scenario

Restrictions on Women's Mobility

Many Middle East and North Africa countries still prevent women from moving freely in their own country or traveling abroad without the permission of a male guardian. These restrictions deprive women of their rights and enable men to control and abuse them.

- In some countries, women can be arrested or detained if male guardians report they are "absent"
- Some universities require women to show guardian permission before going on field trips or leaving campus
- Most countries now allow women to obtain passports and travel abroad without guardian permission, but some still have restrictions

Progress in Women's Rights

Despite challenges, women in the Middle East have made major strides in recent decades in education, employment, and political participation:

- The UAE has emerged as a leader in women's empowerment, with high female literacy rates, over 70% of university graduates being women, and women comprising 46% of the workforce. The UAE also has the highest rate of female parliamentary participation in the Arab world.
- In Saudi Arabia, women's literacy rate reached 93% as of 2021. Women's participation in the workforce is nearing 30% and women are taking larger roles in sectors including finance, education and even the military. Reforms have relaxed the male guardianship system and laws have been amended to ensure fairer divorce and child custody processes[2].
- Omani women represent 46% of those employed and have led civil society groups. A 2018 campaign advanced gender equality legislation. Omani women's progress has extended to rural communities, with a village electing its first female leader in 2017[2].
- Qatar has seen a shift in societal attitudes attributed to the efforts of the Qatar Foundation, led by Sheikha Moza bint Nasser. Prominent Qatari women include Hessa Sultan Al Jaber, who served as Minister of Information and Communications Technology[2].

However, significant discrimination remains in many countries. Laws still give male guardians authority over women in some cases. Acceptance of women's evolving roles is not universal across all levels of society. Women activists who advocate for change often face backlash.

While women in the Middle East have made important gains in education, employment and political participation in recent decades, many countries still impose restrictions on women's freedom of movement and male guardianship laws remain in place in some cases. Continued advocacy and societal shifts are needed to further advance women's rights in the region.

Recent Developments

Reforms to Male Guardianship Laws

Several countries have relaxed male guardianship laws that previously required women to obtain permission from a male relative to travel, work, or make other decisions:

- Saudi Arabia amended laws to allow women to travel abroad without a male guardian's permission.
- The Saudi judiciary now allows women to retain child custody after divorce under certain conditions.

Increased Women's Participation in the Workforce

Women's participation in the workforce has been increasing in many Middle East countries:

- In Saudi Arabia, women's participation in the workforce is nearing the Vision 2030 goal of 30%, with women taking on larger roles in sectors like finance, education and the military.
- In the UAE, women comprise 46% of the workforce as of 2019.
- In Oman, women represent 46% of those employed.

Advancements in Women's Education

Women have made significant strides in education across the region:

- In Saudi Arabia, women's literacy rate reached 93% as of 2021.
- Over 70% of university graduates in the UAE are women.
- Qatar has near-universal literacy rates and a notable presence of women in higher education, particularly at Qatar University.

Increased Women's Political Participation

Women's representation in politics and government has increased in some countries:

- The UAE has the highest rate of female parliamentary participation in the Arab world, with women holding 50% of the seats in the Federal National Council as of 2019.
- Thuraya Al Riyami was elected as the first female member of Oman's Majlis Al Shura.

Reforms to Family Laws

- The UAE has modernized family laws offering better protection and rights to women in divorce, child custody, and inheritance.
- A 2008 amendment to the Omani Personal Status Law addressed critical issues such as divorce and child custody.

However, significant discrimination remains in many countries. Male guardianship laws are still in place in some cases, and acceptance of women's evolving roles is not universal across all levels of society. Women activists who advocate for change often face backlash. Continued advocacy and societal shifts are needed to further advance women's rights in the region.

Key challenges:

To achieve equality in women's rights in the Middle East, several key areas need to be addressed:

1. Male Guardianship Laws

Saudi Arabia: Relaxing male guardianship laws to allow women to travel, work, and make decisions without permission from a male guardian.

- Oman: Amending laws to ensure equal rights in divorce, child custody, and inheritance.

2. Education and Employment

- UAE: Increasing female participation in higher education and the workforce, with a focus on STEM fields and leadership roles.

- Qatar: Enhancing education and employment opportunities, particularly in fields traditionally dominated by men, such as computer science.

3. Family Rights and Inheritance

- UAE: Modernizing family laws to provide better protection and rights to women in divorce, child custody, and inheritance.

- Qatar: Implementing progressive family laws, including changes in inheritance and divorce, to ensure greater equality.

4. Social and Cultural Norms

- Saudi Arabia: Encouraging societal acceptance and support for women's evolving roles, particularly in the face of challenges and backlash.

- Qatar: Promoting a shift in societal attitudes through initiatives like the Qatar Foundation, led by Sheikha Moza bint Nasser.

5. Economic Empowerment

- UAE: Supporting female entrepreneurs through initiatives like the 'Monsha'at' program, which provides funding and training for women-led startups.

- Qatar: Enhancing economic opportunities for women, particularly in high-level professional roles, through initiatives like the Qatar National Vision 2030.

6. Legal Frameworks

- Saudi Arabia: Strengthening legal frameworks to support women's rights, particularly in areas like driving and education.
- Oman: Implementing and enforcing laws that protect women's rights, including those related to family and inheritance.

7. Civil Society Engagement

- UAE: Encouraging civil society engagement and participation in public life, particularly through organizations like the Dubai Women Establishment and the Abu Dhabi Businesswomen Council.
- Qatar: Supporting organizations that advocate for women's rights, such as the Qatar Women's Sports Committee and the Qatar Women's Association.

8. International Sanctions

- Iran: Addressing the impact of international sanctions on women's employment opportunities and economic empowerment.

9. Corruption and Governance

- MENA Region: Combating corruption and improving governance to enhance economic stability and women's participation in the workforce.

10. Sustainable Development

- MENA Region: Integrating gender equality into sustainable development models to ensure a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

These areas are crucial for achieving equality in women's rights in the Middle East. Addressing these challenges will require a multifaceted approach involving legal reforms, social and cultural shifts, economic empowerment, and international cooperation.

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