



Bahrain shines in gender equality

Bahrain among top improvers in World Bank Group’s “Women, Business and the Law 2020” report

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Bahrain is among the economies that improved most globally in gender equality, according to a new World Bank report, thanks to laws improving the protection of women at workplace and introducing criminal penalties for sexual harassment.

The report “Women, Business and the Law 2020” which tracks legal equality between men and women in 190 economies also hails the Kingdom for introducing reforms allowing women to be head of households.

The 10 economies that improved the most were Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Nepal, South Sudan, São Tomé and Príncipe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Jordan and Tunisia. Each of the top improvers saw a score increase in at least two Women, Business and the Law indicators.

The World Bank project tracks how the law affects women at various stages in their lives and

Women, Business and the Law 2020 tracks how the law affects women at various stages in their lives, from the basics of transportation to the challenges of starting a job and getting a pension. This year’s study shows that progress is being made, with all regions improving their average scores.

explores the relationship between women’s empowerment and economic outcomes. The indicators chosen are Mobility, Workplace, Pay, Marriage, Parenthood, Entrepreneurship, Assets, and Pension.

Eight economies—Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Sweden—scored 100, meaning that women are on equal legal standing with men across all eight indicators.

Women mobility

Bahrain recorded an 8.8 point progress since 2017 to reach a score of 46.3 points out of 100 points in improving gender equality.

In mobility, Bahrain, which falls in the high-income group, recorded a score of 50 mainly for allowing women to apply for passport and travel outside the country in the same way as a man.

Also bettering Bahrain’s score was provisions on sexual harassment in employment and criminal penalties for perpetrators.

The reforms, World Bank says, have brought positive changes to the Kingdom as research shows clearly that reforms and policies that empower women boost economic growth. “When women can move more freely, work outside the home and manage assets, they’re more likely to join the workforce and strengthen the economy.”

Zero restrictions

The report points out that women here are allowed to work in the same fields as men

in several industries including Agriculture, water and transportation. There are also zero restrictions in the Kingdom for women in jobs deemed arduous.

Further, Labour laws which allow a maternity leave of 60 to 75 days for women along with paid leave for fathers also prohibits the dismissal of pregnant workers.

Head of households

The report highlights the Kingdom’s reforms allowing women to be “head of household” or “head of the family” in the same way as men as a positive change.

Bahraini Supreme Council for Women formed in 2001 recently adopted a second National Plan for the Advancement of Bahraini Women for 2013–2022, which focuses not only on supporting women’s entrepreneurship, career opportunities, and financial independence, but also on enhancing their physical and psychological well-being and protection from domestic violence.

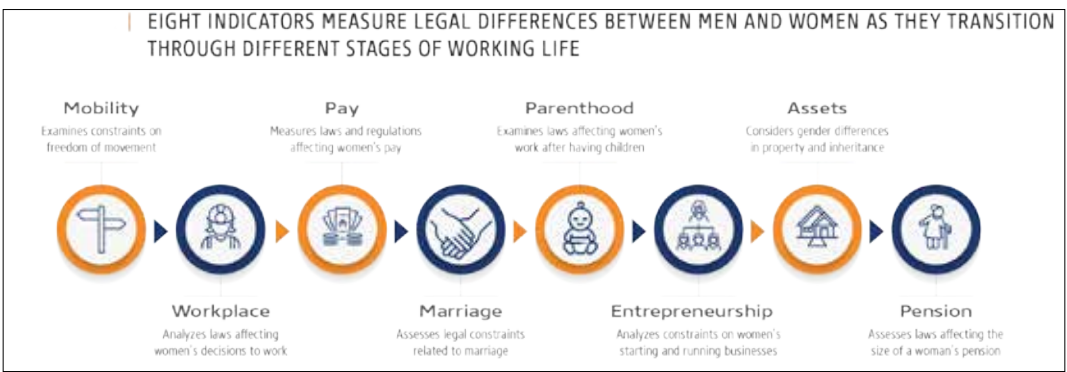
The council earlier commissioned a study on violence against women in Bahraini society that included data on workplace sexual harassment.

Bans sexual harassment

As Bahrain’s labour minister explains, the Kingdom introduced amendments to the labour law banning sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace to bring national legislation in line with international standards.

Bahrain’s move enacting leg-

TABLE 1.4 ECONOMIES THAT HAVE EXHIBITED THE MOST PROGRESS TOWARD GENDER EQUALITY SINCE 2017										
Economy	WBL 2020 score	Change in score	Mobility	Workplace	Pay	Marriage	Parenthood	Entrepreneurship	Assets	Pension
Saudi Arabia	70.6	38.8		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
United Arab Emirates	56.3	29.4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Nepal	73.8	18.1		✓	✓		✓			✓
South Sudan	70.0	18.1		✓	✓		✓			
Bahrain	46.3	8.8		✓		✓				
Jordan	40.6	8.8			✓		✓			
Tunisia	70.0	8.8		✓		✓				



Indicators capture legal differences between men and women in the following areas:

Economy	MOBILITY	WORKPLACE	PAY	MARRIAGE	PARENTHOOD	ENTREPRENEURSHIP	ASSETS	PENSION	WBL 2020 SCORE
Bahrain	50	75	0	40	40	75	40	50	46.3
Saudi Arabia	100	100	25	60	40	100	40	100	70.6
Oman	0	100	25	20	0	75	40	50	38.8
United Arab Emirates	25	75	75	40	20	75	40	100	56.3
Kuwait	50	0	0	20	0	75	40	75	32.5

islation on domestic violence protecting women from violence was introduced in 2015.

The report also highlights several reforms in Bahrain’s entrepreneurship sector where women are allowed to sign a contract, register a business and open a bank account in the same

way as a man.

Equal ownership rights

Among other reforms identified by the report, Bahrain allows men and women equal ownership rights to immovable property and grants spouses equal administrative authority

over assets during the marriage.

The report also finds that the mandatory retirement age for men and women are equal in the Kingdom, whereas women can also retire at the age of 55 with full pension benefits and at the age of 45 with partial pension benefits.

Saudi biggest improver

Saudi Arabia made the biggest improvement in the index since 2017 by recording a dramatic 38.8 point jump to a score of 70.6 points on the WBL 2020 gender equality table.

Saudi ranks high thanks to improvements in workplace, marriage, parenthood, entrepreneurship and pension schemes for women. Reforms were enacted in six out of the eight indicators over the two-year period covered by the index.

Saudi Arabian women no longer need permission from a male guardian to travel abroad or to obtain a passport. Saudi also amended the Civil Status Law to allow a woman to choose where to live in the same way as a man by removing a provision that made the husband’s home the default residence. Besides,

a husband can no longer sue his wife for leaving the marital home. This has implications for the Marriage indicator because the law that required a woman to obey her husband was repealed.

In 2018, Saudi Arabia further criminalised sexual harassment in public and private sector employment. Groundbreaking reforms to allow women greater economic opportunity were also enacted in 2019. Finally, Saudi Arabia also encouraged women’s entrepreneurship by prohibiting gender-based discrimination in accessing financial services.

UAE reformed in 5 indicators

The United Arab Emirates also reformed in five indicators producing a 29.4 points jump to

reach a score of 56.3 points out of 100 through changes in mobility, workplace, pay, marriage and parenthood conditions.

Also in the region, Jordan eliminated legal restrictions on women’s ability to work at night and introduced the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value.

Djibouti, Morocco, and Tunisia enacted legislation specifically addressing domestic violence, reflecting a movement toward protecting women from violence.

South Asian economies—India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—have enacted reforms as well. The Indian state of Maharashtra eliminated restrictions on women’s ability to work in jobs deemed dangerous. Pakistan and Sri Lanka both increased

Max score 90 in ME

Of the 40 economies with scores higher than 90, 27 are Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) high-income economies and nine are in Europe and Central Asia. The remaining four are in Latin America and the Caribbean, East Asia and the Pacific, and Sub-Saharan Africa. No economy in the Middle East and North Africa or South Asia scores higher than 90.

When classified by income level, high-income economies score the highest, with an average score of 84.9. Upper-middle-income economies are not far behind, scoring 74.9 on average. Lower-middle- and low-income economies have similar average scores of 68.8 and 67.2, respectively. However, one noteworthy finding is that low-income economies outperform both middle-income groups on the Workplace and Pension indicators.

The data also indicate that retirement ages are more equal between women and men in lower-income economies.

The report, however, warns that “much work remains.” “We shouldn’t be satisfied until every young girl can move through her life without facing legal barriers to her success.”

the period of paid maternity leave to exceed 14 weeks.

Altogether, the report finds, that parenthood indicator has

been the most popular area of reform, with 16 economies on the indicator.