

# BAHRAIN

## MENA Gender Equality Profile

Status of Girls and Women in the  
Middle East and North Africa



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## 1. BACKGROUND

Demographics	Value	Year
Total population (000)	791	2009
Total adolescent (10-19) population (000)	139	2009
Total under-18 population (000)	251	2009
Total under-5 population (000)	70	2009
Population annual growth rate (%)	2.5	2000-2009
Total fertility rate (births per woman)	2.2	2009
Under-five mortality rate (per 1000 live births)	12	2009
Life expectancy at birth (years), male	75	2009
Life expectancy at birth (years), female	78	2009
Singulate mean age at marriage, male	30	2001
Singulate mean age at marriage, female	26	2001
<b>Economic indicators</b>		
GNI per capita (current US\$)	25,420	2008
% share of income held by lowest 20 %	-	
% share of income held by highest 20 %	-	
<b>Sources:</b> UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 2011. Life expectancy and economic indicators from The World Bank, Data Catalog, <a href="http://data.worldbank.org/">http://data.worldbank.org/</a> , [accessed in July 2011] Marriage data from UNPD, World Marriage Data 2008, <a href="http://www.un.org/esa/population/">www.un.org/esa/population/</a>		

<b>Gender Gap Index 2010</b>		
Rankings of MENA countries with available data	Score	Rank
United Arab Emirates	0.6397	103
Kuwait	0.6318	105
Tunisia	0.6266	107
<b>Bahrain</b>	<b>0.6217</b>	110
Lebanon	0.6084	116
Qatar	0.6059	117
Algeria	0.6052	119
Jordan	0.6048	120
Oman	0.5950	122
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	0.5933	123
Syrian Arab Republic	0.5926	124
Egypt	0.5899	125
Morocco	0.5767	127
Saudi Arabia	0.5713	129
Yemen	0.4603	134
<b>Source:</b> World Economic Forum, The Global Gender Gap Report 2010 (rankings of in total 134 countries)		

## 2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

**Legal system.** Bahraini laws are primarily based on Islamic law (Shari'a). The court system comprises civil and Shari'a courts (separated into Sunni and Shiite courts) for personal status issues. In 2009 the country's first personal status law was adopted to regulate matters such as marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. The personal status law applies only to Sunni Muslims, which means that for more than half of the population (the Shiites), there is no codified personal status law. The previous lack of a codified law for Sunnis, and the current lack of a codified law for Shiites, often resulted in arbitrary processes in Shari'a courts, and still does for Shiites. Before a Shari'a court a woman is not considered a full person as her testimony is worth half of that of a man.<sup>1</sup>

**Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.** Bahrain acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2002 and maintains reservations to several articles: 2 (policy measures), 9 (2) (equal rights with regard to nationality), 15 (4) (freedom to choose residence and domicile), 16 (equality in marriage and family life) and 29 (1) (related to the administration of the convention; arbitration in the event of a dispute).<sup>2</sup> Several of these articles contain provisions that are central to the purpose of the convention and the CEDAW Committee has indicated that: "...reservations to article 16, whether lodged for national, traditional, religious or cultural reasons, are incompatible with the Convention and therefore impermissible..." and that article 2 is central to the purpose and objective of the convention.<sup>3</sup>

**Convention on the Rights of the Child.** Bahrain acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1992 without reservations and to the two CRC optional protocols in 2004, also without reservations.

<sup>1</sup> Freedom House, Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010 (report, online version, [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org))

<sup>2</sup> See United Nations Treaty Collection (<http://treaties.un.org>) for declarations and reservations made by State Parties

<sup>3</sup> Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Session, A/53/38/Rev.1, 1998, p.49

**Nationality rights.** NGOs as well as the Supreme Council for Women (the main government authority for women's affairs) have advocated for an amendment of the nationality law, but it remained unchanged, according to the Freedom House report *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010*. According to the law, Bahraini women married to foreign-born spouses cannot pass their Bahraini citizenship to their children or to their spouse. Bahraini fathers have the right to pass their citizenship to their children and to a foreign-born spouse.<sup>4</sup>

**Divorce rights.** A Bahraini man can divorce his wife for any reason, while women can request divorce only under certain specific circumstances. It is possible for a woman to seek divorce without the burden of evidence, but she has to return her dowry.<sup>5</sup>

**Guardianship and custody rights.** Upon a divorce Shiite women may be granted custody of their sons until they reach seven and their daughters until they reach the age of nine. According to the new personal status law, Sunni women may be granted custody of their sons until they are 15 and their daughter until they reach the age of 17 or until they marry, if they marry before 17. Even if the mother has custody, the father remains the children's legal guardian.<sup>6</sup>

**Inheritance rights.** Women have the right to inherit. The inheritance law is governed by Shari'a and the rules differ slightly between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. In general however, women will inherit a smaller share than men. For instance, a daughter has the right to a share of the inheritance that is half of her brother's.<sup>7</sup>

**Freedom of movement.** In 2004, the passport law was amended to allow married women to apply for a passport without the permission of their husband. A woman does not need her husband's or guardian's permission in order to travel abroad.<sup>8</sup>

**Protection from child marriage.** In 2007 the Minister of Justice and Islamic affairs established minimum ages of marriage of 15 for girls and 18 for boys. Prior to 2007 there was no set minimum age of marriage.<sup>9</sup>

**Protection from gender-based violence.** Domestic violence is not specifically addressed in the penal code and spousal rape is not considered a crime. Rape (although not of a spouse) is a crime with a punishment of life in prison. A rapist can, however, avoid punishment by marrying his victim. Although "honour killings" are punishable under the law, the penal code allows a lenient sentence for the killing of a spouse who is caught in the act of adultery (this applies to both women and men who find their spouse committing adultery).<sup>10</sup>

### 3. INSTITUTIONS AND MECHANISMS

**Governmental response.** The Supreme Council for Women (SCW) was established in 2001 and is the official authority responsible for women's affairs. The SCW is responsible for drafting national plans to promote women's rights, reviewing laws and legislation and recommending laws. It also supports activities to educate Bahraini women on their rights.<sup>11</sup> The SCW has supported the codification of the personal status law and launched in 2009 a lobbying campaign to amend the nationality law.<sup>12</sup>

**Strategies and services responding to gender-based violence.** In 2006, the government supported, for the first time, the establishment of a centre for victims of domestic violence. Other steps taken by the government to address the issue of gender-based violence include the training of judges and increasing the number of policewomen. The SCW has established a hotline that offers legal advice and support to victims. There are also NGOs that work to combat

<sup>4</sup> Freedom House, *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010* (report, online version, [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org))

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 44 of the Convention, Second and Third periodic report of Bahrain, CRC/C/BHR/2-3, 2010*

<sup>10</sup> Freedom House, *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010* (report, online version, [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org))

<sup>11</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *Initial and Second periodic report of Bahrain, CEDAW/C/BHR/2, 2007*

<sup>12</sup> Freedom House, *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010* (report, online version, [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org))

gender-based violence and support victims. Foreign female domestic workers in Bahraini society are vulnerable to gender-based violence. Government support for this group is limited and it is primarily NGOs that provide them with shelters and support.<sup>13</sup>

## 4. WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

**Political representation.** Women obtained the right to vote and stand for election on a universal and equal basis in 2002. That same year, a woman was appointed to parliament for the first time.<sup>14</sup> There is currently one woman in the lower house of parliament (out of 40 seats).<sup>15</sup>

**Representation in the legal system.** Bahraini women are represented in the legal field, especially as lawyers. There are female judges and prosecutors but they are few in number (only seven according to the 2010 Freedom House report). The first female judge was appointed in 2006. There are no female judges in Shari'a courts.<sup>16</sup>

**Civil society.** All NGOs in Bahrain are supervised by the Ministry of Social Development. Among women's rights organisations is the Bahrain Women's Union, which has several member associations and which submitted a shadow report to the CEDAW Committee in 2008. The Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society submitted a shadow report the same year. Women's rights organisations have been active in advocating for reform of discriminatory laws. For example, NGOs started advocating for a codified personal status law in 1982.<sup>17</sup>

## 5. EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

**Education.** According to estimates by UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) the literacy rate among both female and male youth is 100 per cent. The net enrolment ratios for girls and boys in primary school are roughly equal (97 and 98 per cent respectively). In secondary school, girls' net enrolment ratio is 91 per cent while boys' net enrolment ratio is 87 per cent. Current data on enrolment in tertiary education do not exist in the UIS global database; however, gross enrolment data from the 1990s show higher enrolment rates for young women than for young men at that time.

**Access to financial credit.** Bahraini women have access to bank loans and other forms of financial credit. The consent of the woman's husband or guardian is not required.<sup>18</sup> The Bahrain Development Bank offers both microcredit and other larger loans and according to the 2010 Freedom House report, 73 per cent of the bank's clients are women.

**Participation in the labour market.** Women's (age 15 and above) labour force participation rate (that is, the proportion of the working-age population that actively engages in the labour market either by working or looking for work) in Bahrain is low (32 per cent compared to 85 per cent among men). Globally, women's labour force participation rate is 52 per cent.<sup>19</sup> Among young women between 15-24 the labour force participation rate is 21 per cent, compared to 52 per cent for young men. This is despite the fact that the youth literacy rate is estimated to be 100 per cent among both young women and young men, and girls' net enrolment ratio in secondary education is slightly higher than that of boys'. Current data on enrolment in tertiary education do not exist in the UIS global database, however, gross enrolment data from the 1990s show higher enrolment rates for women at that time.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> UNDP, Human Development Report 2007/2008

<sup>15</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> (data updated as of 30 June 2011) [accessed in July 2011]

<sup>16</sup> Freedom House, Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010 (report, online version, [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org))

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Initial and Second periodic report of Bahrain, CEDAW/C/BHR/2, 2007

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, DESA, The World's Women 2010, p. 76

## 6. REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

**Maternal health.** Key maternal health indicators show high coverage of important interventions for safe motherhood. Antenatal care coverage (at least once) in Bahrain is 97 per cent (according to available data from 1995) and the coverage in skilled attendance at delivery is 98 per cent (also according to data from 1995). The 2008 Maternal Mortality Estimation Inter-agency Group (MMEIG) MMR estimate for Bahrain is 19 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.<sup>20</sup>

**Early childbearing.** In Bahrain, the adolescent birth rate is 13 births per 1,000 adolescent girls aged 15–19.

## 7. KEY INDICATORS ON THE SITUATION OF GIRLS AND WOMEN

MATERNAL AND NEWBORN HEALTH	YEAR	TOTAL	URBAN	RURAL	POOREST 20%	RICHEST 20%	SOURCE
Contraceptive prevalence (%)	1995	62	-	-	-	-	UNFPA, UNPD, MDG database <a href="http://unstats.un.org">http://unstats.un.org</a> [accessed in July 2011]
Antenatal care coverage at least once by skilled personnel (%)	1995	97	-	-	-	-	UNICEF global database/ Bahrain Family Health Survey 1995
Skilled attendant at birth (doctor, nurse or midwife) (%)	1995	98	-	-	-	-	UNICEF global database/ Bahrain Family Health Survey 1995
Adolescent birth rate (number of births per 1,000 girls aged 15–19)	2008	13					UNFPA, UNPD, MDG database <a href="http://unstats.un.org">http://unstats.un.org</a> [accessed in July 2011]
Maternal Mortality Ratio (adjusted) (maternal deaths per 100,000 live births)	2008	19					WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank, Maternal Mortality Estimation Inter-agency Group (MMEIG) / UNICEF global database
Lifetime risk of maternal death, 1 in:	2008	2200					

<sup>20</sup> See WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and The World Bank, 2010, Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990–2008. The report categorizes countries' progress towards MDG5. (Countries with MMR  $\geq 100$  in 1990 are categorized as "on track" if there has been 5.5% decline or more annually, "making progress" if MMR has declined between 2% and 5.5%, making "insufficient progress" if MMR has declined less than 2% annually, and having "no progress" if there has been an annual increase in MMR. Countries with MMR  $< 100$  in 1990 are not categorized.) Since Bahrain had an MMR which was  $< 100$  in 1990 it is not categorized.

EDUCATION	YEAR	MALE %	FEMALE %	GENDER PARITY INDEX (F/M)	SOURCE
Net enrolment ratio primary school (%)	2009	98	97	0.98	UIS, online database, <a href="http://stats.uis.unesco.org">http://stats.uis.unesco.org</a> [accessed in July 2011],
Net enrolment ratio secondary school (%)	2009	87	91	1.05	UIS, online database, <a href="http://stats.uis.unesco.org">http://stats.uis.unesco.org</a> [accessed in July 2011],
Youth (15-24) literacy rate (%)	2009	100	100		UIS, online database, <a href="http://stats.uis.unesco.org">http://stats.uis.unesco.org</a> [accessed in July 2011], UIS estimates
	YEAR	TOTAL			SOURCE
Share of females among teaching staff (%) in primary education		-			
Share of females among teaching staff (%) in secondary education		-			

CHILD PROTECTION	YEAR	TOTAL	URBAN	RURAL	POOREST 20%	RICHEST 20%	SOURCE
% of women aged 20-24 who were married/ in union before the age of 18		-	-	-	-		
Female genital mutilation/cutting among women 15-49 (%)		-	-	-	-		
	YEAR	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE			SOURCE
% of children aged 5-14 engaged in child labour	2000	5	6	3			UNICEF global database/ MICS 2000

ATTITUDES TOWARDS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE	YEAR	% WHO AGREE WITH AT LEAST ONE SPECIFIED REASON	SOURCE
Women (15-49) who think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances (%)		-	
Adolescent girls (15-19) who think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances (%)		-	

HIV/AIDS	YEAR	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE		SOURCE
HIV prevalence among young people (15-24)		-	-	-		
% of young people (15-24) who have comprehensive knowledge of HIV		-	-	-		

USE OF ICT	YEAR	TOTAL		SOURCE
% of young women (15-24) who used a computer during the last 12 months		-		
% of young women (15-24) who used the internet during the last 12 months		-		

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION	YEAR	TOTAL		SOURCE
Number of women in parliament (single/ lower house)	2011	1		IPU, <a href="http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm">http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm</a> (data updated as of 30 June 2011) [accessed in July 2011]
% women in parliament	2011	3		
Legislated quotas for women for single/ lower house (yes/no)	*	No		Bahrain is not listed in The Quota Project database on <a href="http://www.quotaproject.org">www.quotaproject.org</a> [accessed in July 2011*] which lists all countries with legislated quotas
Quota type		n/a		
Number of women in ministerial positions	2010	3		DAW/DESA, IPU, Women in Politics: 2010 (reflecting appointments up to 1 January 2010)
% women in ministerial positions	2010	11		

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION	YEAR	TOTAL		SOURCE
Labour force participation rate (%), male 15+	2009	85		ILO, Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM), 6th Edition <a href="http://kilm.ilo.org">http://kilm.ilo.org</a> Table 1a (ILO estimates), [accessed in July 2011]
Labour force participation rate (%), female 15+	2009	32		
Labour force participation rate (%), male 15-24	2009	52		
Labour force participation rate (%), female 15-24	2009	21		
Total unemployment rate (%), male 15+	2001	4		ILO, KILM, 6th Edition, Table 8a, [accessed in July 2011]
Total unemployment rate (%), female 15+	2001	11		
Youth (15-24) unemployment rate (%), male	2001	17		ILO, KILM, 6th Edition, Table 9, [accessed in July 2011]
Youth (15-24) unemployment rate (%), female	2001	27		

MATERNITY LEAVE	YEAR		SOURCE
Maternity leave duration	2004-2009	45 days	United Nations Statistics Division, <a href="http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/tab5g.htm#tech">http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/tab5g.htm#tech</a> , Table 5g, [accessed in July 2011]. Data compiled between 2004-2009.
% of wages paid in covered period	2004-2009	100	
Provider of benefit	2004-2009	Employer	

**Notes:**

The UNICEF global databases are available on [www.childinfo.org](http://www.childinfo.org)

For indicator definitions and further information on data sources please see "Guide to MENA Gender Profiles"

n/a = not applicable

## 8. RATIFICATION OF TREATIES

TREATY	YEAR OF SIGNATURE	YEAR OF RATIFICATION, ACCESSION (A), SUCCESSION (S)	RESERVATIONS
Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1953)			
Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (1962)			
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)		2007 (a)	
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)		2006 (a)	Articles 3 (18) (23), 9 (5), 14 (7)
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)		2002 (a)	Articles 2, 9 (2), 15 (4), 16, 29 (1)
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1999)			
Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)		1992 (a)	
Amendment to article 43 (2) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1995)	n/a	2000 Acceptance	
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000)		2004 (a)	
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (2000)		2004 (a)	
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)	2007		

n/a = not applicable

Source: United Nations Treaty Collection, <http://treaties.un.org> [accessed in April 2011]



