WHERE ARE THE WOMEN? GENDER EQUALITY IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN ARAB STATES
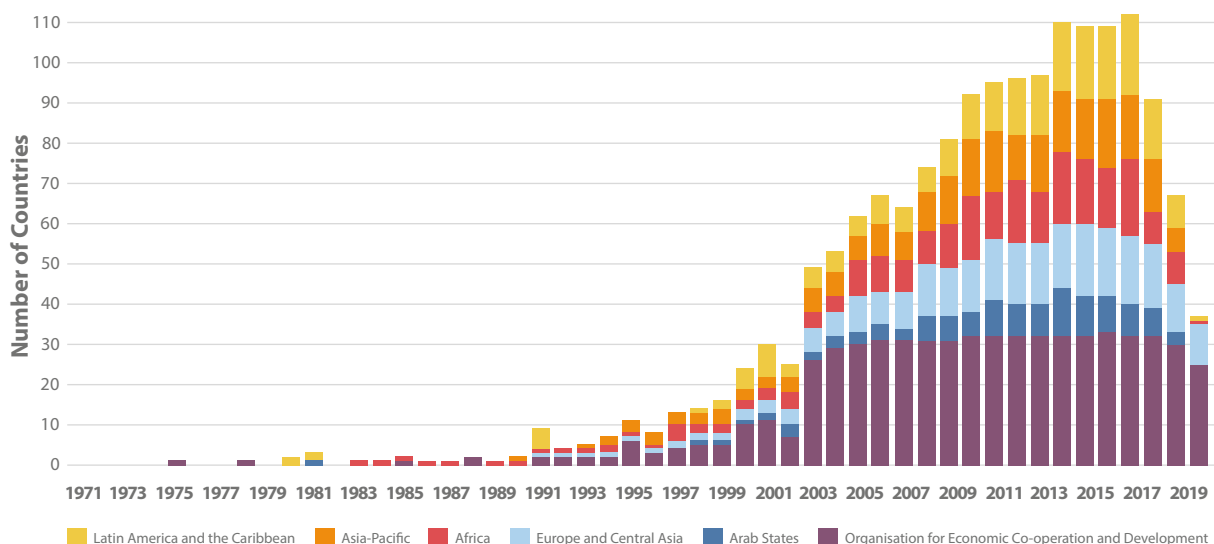
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Gender equality in public administration has improved in recent years, but there is still a long way to go. Women's participation in the civil service approaches parity with 46 percent on average across 139 countries and territories.[1] Yet, significant variation across countries and regions means that only one-third (33 percent) of countries have reached this goal. At decision-making levels of the civil service, women make up only 31 percent of top leadership positions on average. Women are also missing from COVID-19 policy decision-making spaces. Even though women make up 58 percent of employees in health ministries worldwide,[2] they average just 24 percent of COVID-19 task force positions and make up only 18 percent of task force leadership.[3]

This brief provides an overview on women's participation and leadership in public administration in the Arab States region, as well as on the gendered dimensions of the COVID-19 policy response. Women are under-represented across all levels of public administration in the region, but particularly at decision-making levels, consistent with global patterns.

Gender Equality in Public Administration in the Arab States[4]

FIGURE 1
Availability of gender-disaggregated data on public administration employment between 1970 and 2020

Legend: Latin America and the Caribbean · Asia-Pacific · Africa · Europe and Central Asia · Arab States · Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
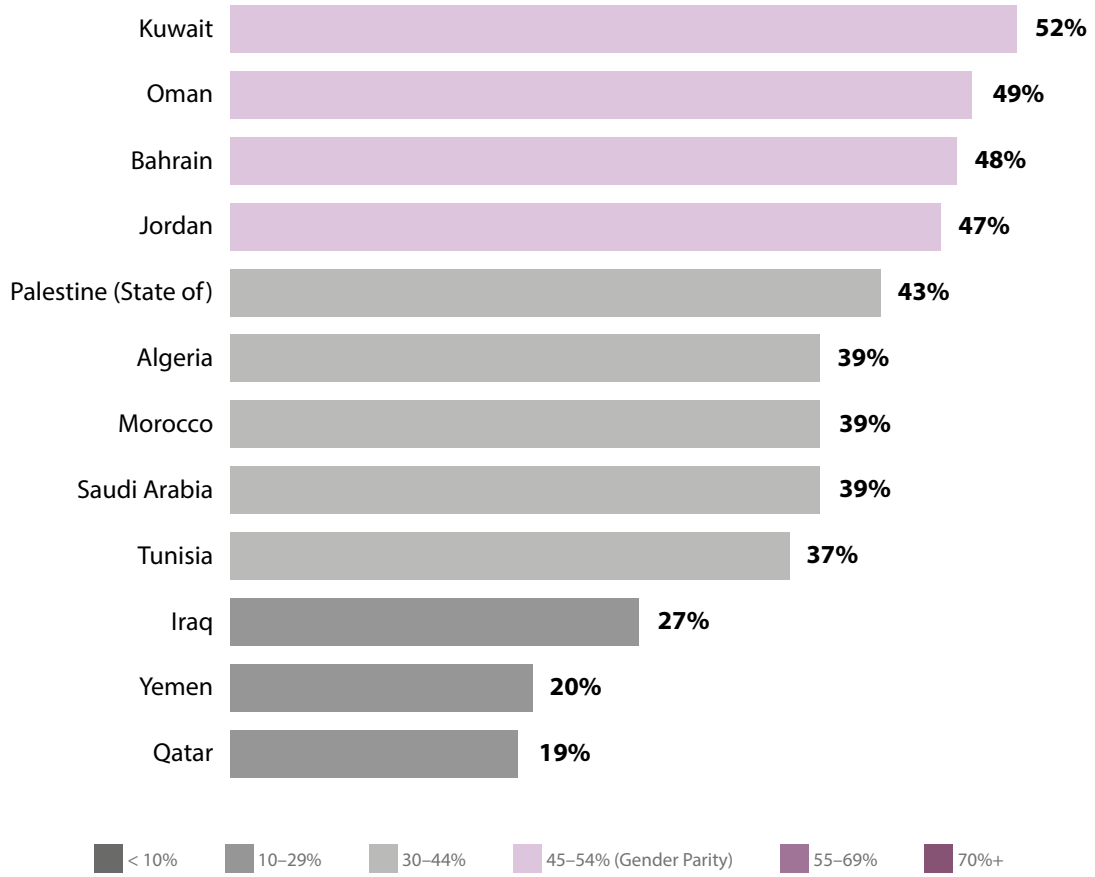
Source: *Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) dataset, December 2020.*

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1   Hughes, Melanie M., Müge Kökten Finkel, and Brianna Howell. 2021. "Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) Dataset."
2   Ibid.
3   UNDP-UN Women-UPITT. 2021. "COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Task Force Dataset." Living database, version 2 (November 11, 2021). Accessible at https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/.
4   Hughes, Melanie M., Müge Kökten Finkel, and Brianna Howell. 2021. "Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) Dataset."

The availability of gender-disaggregated data has improved over time in every region of the world, including in the Arab States. In this region, there are 14 countries or territories with gender-disaggregated data available on at least one dimension of public administration (see appendix). Thirteen countries have data available on overall employment, eight on decision-making, and seven have ministry-level data. Intersectional data remains a large gap in the region: data on age is available for only five countries, race/ethnicity in three countries, and disability in two countries.

FIGURE 2

Percentage of women's participation across all levels of public administration

Country	Percentage
Kuwait	52%
Oman	49%
Bahrain	48%
Jordan	47%
Palestine (State of)	43%
Algeria	39%
Morocco	39%
Saudi Arabia	39%
Tunisia	37%
Iraq	27%
Yemen	20%
Qatar	19%

Legend: < 10% | 10–29% | 30–44% | 45–54% (Gender Parity) | 55–69% | 70%+

Share of women public administrators in region	
Lowest share (Qatar)	19%
Average	38%
Highest share (Kuwait)	52%

Number of countries in region	
Women underrepresented	8
At gender parity	4
Women overrepresented	0

Note: *The graph indicates the overall share of women in public administration for countries in the Arab region using the most recent year of data available. Data prior to 2015 are excluded.*
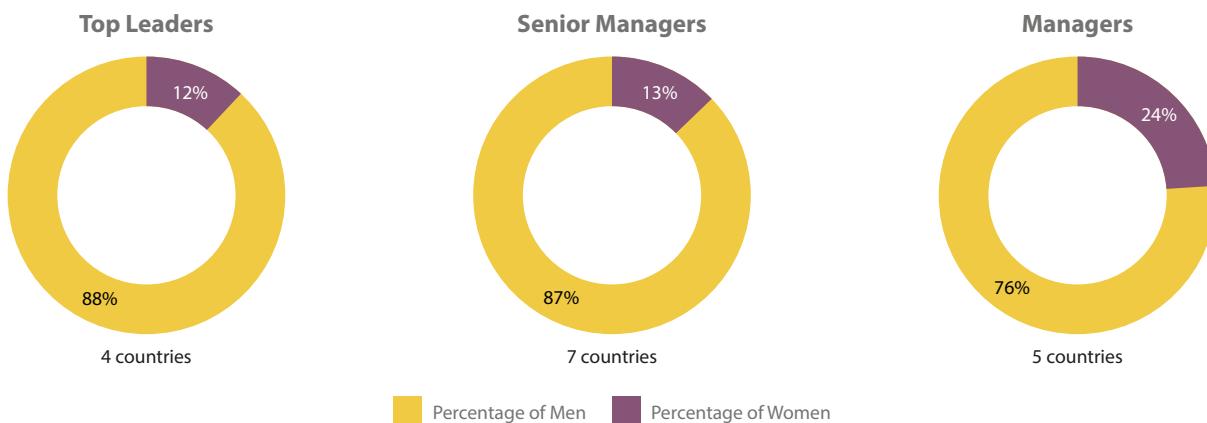**Source:** *Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) dataset, December 2020.*

Women's participation in public administration

In the 12 countries in the Arab States region with recent available data,[5] women account for 38 percent of civil servants at large, below the threshold of gender parity.[6] At the country level, four countries reach gender parity: Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, and Oman. Of these, Bahrain and Oman stand out for their consistent reporting of gender-disaggregated civil service data with a high rate of women's participation; both countries have regularly reported overall rates of women's participation of at least 40 percent for every year between 2010 and 2018. Women are not overrepresented in any country in the region. Women's underrepresentation is persistent since 2015 in the other eight countries and territories with relevant data (Algeria, Iraq, Morocco, Qatar, State of Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Yemen). Women are the most underrepresented in Qatar and Yemen, where they make up only 19 and 20 percent of public administrators, respectively.

Women in public administration decision-making positions

FIGURE 3
Share of women among public administration decision-making positions

Top Leaders	Senior Managers	Managers
12% / 88%	13% / 87%	24% / 76%
4 countries	7 countries	5 countries

Percentage of Men — Percentage of Women

Note: *Data is displayed for most recent year available. Data prior to 2015 is excluded.*
Source: *Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) dataset, December 2020.*

Women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making in public administration in the Arab States. The gender disparity is most noticeable at the highest levels of decision-making. In these top leadership positions, women make up only 12 percent of public administrators across four countries/territories with available data. Women are also absent from the next highest decision-making level of senior managers. In the seven countries/territories with available data, women make up only 13 percent of senior management positions in public administration. Across these two highest levels, women make up less than 10 percent of decision-makers in Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the State of Palestine. At the lowest level of decision-making measured, managers within the civil service, women make up 24 percent of members across five countries/territories with available data. Women are best represented at decision-making levels in Tunisia, where they comprise 36 percent of senior managers and 40 percent of all managers. Women do not reach more than 30 percent of decision-makers at any level in any of the other seven countries/territories with available data.

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5   Countries with data from prior to 2015 were excluded from this analysis. Data points are calculated using the most recent year of data available.
6   Parity is defined as an equal number of men and women, however small deviations from 50 percent women and men are expected, in some cases simply because of an odd number of positions. This brief therefore considers parity to have been reached once there are 45 percent women, and women's overrepresentation begins at 55 percent.

COVID-19 Leadership and Policy Response in the Arab States[7]

Women's representation on national COVID-19 task forces[8]

COVID-19 task forces are any executive branch institution created by the national government in response to the pandemic. There are 35 COVID-19 task forces across 17 countries/territories in the Arab States, including 16 task forces with data on membership and 35 task forces with leadership data. Women average just 14 percent of COVID-19 task force members in the region, ranging from 0 percent in Kuwait to 24 percent in Egypt. There are no task forces in the region that achieve gender parity, nor are there any task forces where women are overrepresented. Men lead 89 percent of task forces in the region, and there are only four women-led task forces in Egypt, Libya, Oman, and Qatar. Consistent with global patterns, women in Arab States countries are significantly underrepresented in all task force types, though they are better represented on task forces with a public health focus (21 percent) compared to economic or multi-sectoral task forces (11 percent). Egypt's "Committee for Supporting Irregular Workers," affected by economic repercussions of COVID-19, is chaired by the Minister of Planning and Economic Development, Dr. Hala El-Said, and stands out as one of the five economic task forces (out of 49) globally that is led by a woman.

Gender sensitive COVID-19 policy response[9]

The UNDP/UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker identifies policy measures taken by governments in response to COVID-19 and analyzes them with a gender lens. In the Arab States region, 407 measures have been identified from 22 different countries/territories. Of these, 117 (29 percent) are gender sensitive in 18 countries/territories, including 46 measures tackling violence against women (11 countries), 60 focused on women's economic security (18 countries/territories), and only 11 measures (eight countries) that address the burden of unpaid care work. Among the measures targeting women's economic security, several countries/territories, including Algeria, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia, created programmes that provided additional income for workers in sectors where women are employed at higher rates than men, such as education and health care. Other programmes, such as those in Jordan and Morocco, were designed to promote women's employment through training in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields and business support.

The Gender-Responsive Crisis Chamber in Iraq[10]

In July 2020, as part of ongoing efforts to assist the Iraqi Government's progress towards gender equality, UNDP supported Iraq's launch of the first Gender-Responsive Crisis Chamber (GRCC). The chamber includes women's rights activists and involves public institutions in the executive authority concerned with women's issues, including the Women's Empowerment Directorate, the Gender Team Leader in the Central Statistics Office, and the Ministry of Planning. The membership composition of the chamber is designed to ensure representation from marginalized communities, including women with disabilities and those from minority groups. While currently the GRCC works to ensure that COVID-19 public policy responses take into account the needs of Iraqi women and girls, in the long term it is set to become a permanent entity in charge of providing gender-informed policy making in times of crises and shaping recovery plans.

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7   For the most up-to-date information on COVID-19 task forces and policy responses, visit https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/.
8   UNDP-UN Women-UPITT. 2021. "COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Task Force Dataset." Living database, version 2 (November 11, 2021). Accessible at https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/.
9   UNDP-UN Women. 2021. "COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Policy Measures Dataset." Living database, version 3 (November 11, 2021). Accessible at https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/.
10   Finkel, Müge Kökten, Melanie M. Hughes, and Joanna Hill. 2021. *Gender Equality in Public Administration*. New York, NY: UNDP and University of Pittsburgh. https://www.undp.org/publications/global-report-gender-equality-public-administration.

Appendix

Women's participation in public administration in the Arab States[11]

Country or territory	Percentage of women in public administration overall	Decision-making positions		
		Top leaders (percent)	Senior managers (percent)	Managers (percent)
Algeria	39 (2017)	-	-	-
Bahrain	48 (2019)	-	-	-
Iraq	27 (2018)	12 (2015)	12 (2015)	-
Jordan	47 (2019)	-	-	-
Kuwait	52 (2015)	-	12 (2016)	-
Morocco	39 (2017)	16 (2016)	15 (2016)	22 (2016)
Oman	49 (2018)	10 (2018)	6 (2018)	21 (2018)
Palestine (State of)	43 (2017)	9 (2017)	11 (2018)	22 (2018)
Qatar	19 (2018)	-	-	15 (2018)
Saudi Arabia	39 (2019)	-	1 (2015)	-
Tunisia	37 (2016)	-	36 (2016)	40 (2016)
United Arab Emirates	55 (2014)	-	-	30 (2014)
Yemen	20 (2016)	-	-	-

Acknowledgements

11   Table displays data for most recent year available.