

GENDER EQUALITY

HAFSA HALAWA

ISSUES

- The MENA region has been challenged by slow development on the gender equality agenda that has thus far failed to support women seeking full and open access to work, education, and protection under the law. While the region's populations suffer from economic deprivation and curbs on civil liberties writ large, women in the region are the most physically, economically, and socially insecure of any demographic.
- Sexual gender-based violence and state-sponsored sexual assault remains a potent problem, and women are marginalized from accessing employment across a number of sectors. Challenges have only increased of late, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, making women even more vulnerable.
- Women refugees and displaced persons remain the most vulnerable to economic and sexual exploitation, making up the largest demographic as victims of conflict.
- Women remain exposed to risk of physical attacks, poverty, and social stigma in traditionally patriarchal societies that continue to impose conditions on women.

US INTERESTS

- The U.S. seeks to promote democracy in the region and the full protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- The U.S. is committed to a gender equality agenda that seeks to promote protection and extend opportunity to women.
- U.S. security interests seek to protect refugees and displaced persons and reduce the potency of security threats by creating safe environments or safe return.

- The U.S. seeks to promote stable and secure countries in the region, creating opportunities for economic prosperity for citizens.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The U.S. should make gender equality central to its forthcoming foreign policy agenda in its bilateral relations with countries in the MENA region, seeking a policy that prioritizes the inclusive engagement of women.
- U.S. aid and economic support should be conditional on equal opportunity and transparency in: i) promoting gender priorities, ii) requiring gender and sex disaggregated data in reporting, iii) promoting gender parity in employment across institutions, and iv) development cooperation investment that prioritizes inclusivity and gender-led/focused civil society organizations.
- The U.S. should mandate gender issues as part of its reporting within its human rights report.
- Bilateral diplomatic relations and human rights conditionality should include gender issues as a new priority. This can include gender-based violence, personal status legislation and guardianship principles, labor law legislation, and family courts providing protection mechanisms for women and children.