



THE IMPACT OF WOMEN'S UNEQUAL NATIONALITY RIGHTS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST- NORTH AFRICA REGION

Photo Credit: Jinsiyati Campaign, Lebanon





Sustainable Development aims to advance human development, to meet the needs of human beings and societies as a whole today, without inhibiting the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It is an approach to economic development that seeks to realize a better world - today and into the future - where all human beings can thrive.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, which serves as the primary global instrument for directing public policies towards the creation of sustainable, resilient, and inclusive societies. The 2030 Agenda encompasses 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that address the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainable development. The SDGs aim to leave no one behind.

Discriminatory laws and policies inhibit sustainable development and hurt societies. Given the importance of citizenship¹ to accessing a wide-range of rights and services, discriminatory nationality laws significantly impede sustainable development.

Nationality laws determine the ability to acquire, change, or retain citizenship, and the ability to confer citizenship to one's child or spouse. Despite commitments by governments to uphold women's equal rights, over forty countries worldwide, including 19 in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region, have nationality laws that discriminate against women. Globally, 24 countries² deny women the right to confer nationality on their child on an equal basis with men; 45 countries³ have nationality laws that deny women equal rights with men to confer nationality on a noncitizen spouse or to acquire, change, or retain their nationality.

Women's unequal nationality rights result in the exclusion and marginalization of women, men, and children, thereby inhibiting sustainable development. 9 of the 17 SDGs are significantly impeded in countries where discriminatory nationality laws persist.

¹ The terms 'nationality' and 'citizenship' are used interchangeably in this document. Under international law, both refer to the legal bond between an individual and a State.

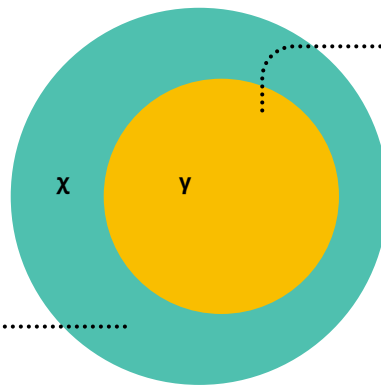
² As of March 2025, twenty-four countries have nationality laws that prevent women from conferring nationality on their biological children at birth: The Bahamas, Bahrain, Barbados, Brunei, Burundi, Eswatini, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kiribati, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Mauritania, Nepal, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Togo, and United Arab Emirates. An additional four countries uphold women's equal right to confer nationality on their biological children at birth, but that retain provisions that prevent women from conferring nationality on their children on an equal basis with men in instances of adoption or where the mother has naturalized: Dominican Republic, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Yemen.

³ Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Brunei, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Comoros, Congo (Republic of), Egypt, Eswatini, Guatemala, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kiribati, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mauritania, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent & Grenadines, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN NATIONALITY LAWS IN THE MENA REGION

In the Middle East-North Africa (MENA) region⁴, nationality laws in 14 countries prevent women from passing nationality at birth to their biological children on an equal basis with men. Nationality laws in 19 MENA countries discriminate against women in terms of their ability to confer nationality to a non citizen spouse and/or to acquire, change and retain their nationality.

Nationality laws discriminate against women in terms of their ability to confer nationality on a non-citizen spouse and/or to acquire, change and retain their nationality.



Nationality laws deny women the right to confer nationality at birth on their biological children and to confer nationality on a non-citizen spouse on an equal basis with men.

- X:** Bahrain, Comoros**, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia**, United Arab Emirates, Yemen.
- Y:** Bahrain, Iraq*, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania*, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates⁵.

* In Iraq and Mauritania, women may confer nationality to children born inside the country though are limited in their ability to confer nationality to children born outside the country.

** In Tunisia and Comoros, foreign husbands of married women can apply for naturalization under normal procedures with waived conditions (which are more onerous than those applicable to a foreign wife).

⁴ For the purpose of this report, the MENA region is referred to as encompassing the countries that are members of the League of Arab States.

⁵ Though Yemen upholds women's equal right to confer nationality on their biological children at birth, the Nationality Law prevents women from conferring nationality on their children on an equal basis with men in instances where the mother has naturalized. For more information, read: 'Background note on Gender Equality, Nationality Laws and Statelessness 2025', UNHCR and UN Women, available at: www.refworld.org/reference/reports/unhcr/2025/en/149603

Equal Citizens, Thriving Families, Stronger Societies

While much progress is needed to realize women's equal nationality rights across the MENA region, a number of significant reforms advancing equality between men and women in nationality laws have been achieved. Since 2000 five countries – Algeria (2005), Egypt (2004), Morocco (2007), Tunisia (2010), Yemen (2010) – enacted reforms to uphold the equal right of citizens, women and men, to confer nationality on their children.

Upholding women's equal right to confer and access nationality has profound benefits for children and families in the Arab region and is critical to promoting belonging, legal identity, equality, and **sustainable development**.



Women's Unequal Nationality Rights Stunts Personal and National Development:

- Discrimination against women in nationality laws prevents all members of society from fully contributing to a country's development.
- Research has proven the strong link between women's equal nationality rights, prosperity, and security.

WOMEN'S UNEQUAL NATIONALITY RIGHTS HAS FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES

- Without citizenship, children and foreign spouses are often subject to a range of restrictions in their job and education opportunities; their ability to travel, open bank accounts, own or inherit property; and their full participation in society generally.
- Women's inability to equally confer citizenship can put significant financial, psychological, and physical strains on families, which can result in intergenerational poverty and other multi-faceted hardships.
- Women's unequal nationality rights is a primary cause of statelessness - a status whereby a person does not hold the nationality of any state. For example, if the father is absent, stateless, cannot be legally linked to the child or the child cannot access the father's nationality for other reasons⁶, and the mother lacks the right to confer nationality on her child, the child is often rendered stateless and may be denied a birth certificate as a result. Later in life, stateless persons are often unable to acquire marriage certificates or even have their deaths registered. This cycle is often repeated across generations, impacting greater numbers and exacerbating gaps in civil registration systems.



- Women's unequal nationality rights can also threaten family unity and are linked to violence against women and girls. In contexts of displacement, where fathers may often be separated from their families, women's inability to confer nationality has the potential to impact exponentially larger populations.
- Today, humanitarian emergencies and displacement in the MENA region are posing new challenges to accessing civil status documentation and the registration of civil events, such as birth, marriage, and death. These challenges to acquiring civil registration and documentation are exacerbated when women lack the ability to confer nationality. In some contexts, women's unequal ability to register births or obtain birth certificates for their children also results in greater risks of childhood statelessness and obstacles to children accessing a range of social services.

Women's ability to confer nationality has significant implications for inclusive, sustainable development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

⁶ For example, some nationality laws prevent male citizens from conferring nationality on children born abroad if the father was also born abroad. In some instances, fathers may be unable to fulfill the administrative requirements needed to confer nationality on their child, such as the provision of certain documents or travel required for administrative procedures in his country of origin.


A CLOSER LOOK AT THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The SDGs set out the scope and ambition of the global development program from 2015 – 2030. There are 17 Goals in total, many of which are relevant to discrimination against women in nationality laws:



The commitment of states to the SDGs is a critical aspect of achieving the vision of a sustainable and equitable world. Since world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, many countries have made commitments to achieve the SDGs through various policies, plans, and initiatives. These commitments involve prioritizing sustainable development, increasing investments in areas such as education, health, and infrastructure, and promoting social inclusion and equality. However, progress towards achieving the SDGs will be impeded wherever women's unequal nationality rights remain in place. Though some states have policies to mitigate the impact of women's unequal ability to confer nationality – such as access to education and healthcare for the children of female citizens – impacted persons, their families, and society as a whole will continue to suffer until there is an end to discrimination against women in nationality laws. It is crucial for states to enact reforms to uphold equality between men and women in nationality laws to build a more sustainable and just future for all.

Halima



Halima was born in Morocco to her mother Zakia, a Moroccan national, and a foreign father. Prior to Morocco's 2007 reforms, Halima was treated like a foreigner, despite being born and raised in Morocco. In 2007, Morocco reformed its nationality law, which now guarantees the equal right of Moroccan women and men to pass their nationality to their children.

"Before this law, I didn't have the Moroccan nationality. I felt like I was a little bit different from the others. But now I can do anything I want, like all the other children."

– Halima

"Before they received Moroccan nationality, they were considered foreigners. Now everything has changed. Now that they have Moroccan nationality, they are considered Moroccan."

– Halima's mother, Zakia

ENDING GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN NATIONALITY LAWS IS NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE:

SDG 5, TARGET 5.1

End all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere

- Equality between men and women will not be achieved until discrimination against women in nationality laws, policies, and implementation have been eradicated.
- Removing discrimination against women from the law recognizes that men and women are equal citizens and should be treated as such.

In the 14 MENA countries with discriminatory nationality laws that deny women the right to confer nationality at birth to their biological children on an equal basis with men, this discrimination harms women and their families in a variety of ways.

In Somalia, discrimination against women in the nationality law inhibits the ability of Somali women refugees who have formed families abroad with non-Somali spouses to return to their homeland, due to their spouses and children lacking access to citizenship and its attendant rights and responsibilities.

Non-citizen children of Omani mothers, including those born and raised in the country, have no legal right to remain in Oman upon reaching 18 years of age unless an Omani company sponsors their visa. Family separation is one of the tragic results of discrimination against women in the nationality law.

“The development of society and the legal system as it relates to Tunisian women resulted in the need for legal provisions granting the children of Tunisian women nationality by descent. The increase in the number of women married foreign nationals, led to many cases in which the Tunisian woman was the primary custodian and responsible for a minor child who did not share her nationality. Until 2010, the law discriminated between men and women regarding the granting of nationality to children by descent. Although various legislative reforms were established to address the impact [of the discrimination in the law], problems still remained. The [2010] law was based on the need to end discrimination between men and women regarding their ability to confer nationality on their children by descent.”

- Hasna Ben Slimane, Former Minister in charge of Public Service, Former acting Minister of Justice and Judge in Tunisia

SDG 10, TARGET 10.3

Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome... by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation ... and action ...

- When women cannot pass their nationality to their children, the inequalities experienced by those children are often passed down to the next generation, and the next. Lack of opportunity, education, and the ability to work is inherited and entrenched further into the societies in which those families and their children reside.

In countries that have discriminatory nationality laws, affected individuals do not enjoy equal opportunities.

In Qatar, children born to Qatari mothers are not afforded the same opportunities as those born to Qatari fathers when it comes to public employment or receiving governmental social benefits like loans or land in adulthood—benefits that are readily available to the children of Qatari men, who automatically acquire citizenship.

“Our Constitution gives the same rights to women and men. Before reform, the Nationality Code was in violation with the Constitution. When the reform was adopted, I met with affected persons, and they told me it has changed their lives. Now they could travel with an Algerian passport, they had the right to scholarship, and they don’t have to justify why they live here for residency permits. It was very important to grow up belonging in the country, accessing the same rights. It is not only important for the welfare of the family, but for society. It is important to uphold fairness vis a vis your citizens.

We used to think that changes will undermine society. But, these reforms did not make the country weaker, it made us stronger. Children who belong to the country – they serve this country. It is better that they are integrated, that they feel that they belong to this country, that the mother feels the country considers her children as belonging. It creates a more peaceful, stable country.

With all the movement of people today, such reforms are especially positive. It is a positive reform, without a cost. It demonstrates progress on women’s rights. It is very important for the people affected, particularly children. It solved the problem for people in need. It gave them hope.”

– Leila Zerrougui, former Justice of the Supreme Court of Algeria, former Ministry of Justice legal advisor, and former Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict UN Geneva

Nawal and Her Children

As a result of the passage of the 2006 Nationality law, Iraqi women gained the right to pass their nationality to children born in Iraq.

"I am an Iraqi national married to an Iranian national. I am currently taking all the necessary legal procedures to enable my children to obtain Iraqi citizenship and enjoy the same rights as their peers, including their right to documentation, a passport, and the right to vote. All these privileges were not available under the previous law, where Iraqi women were prohibited from passing their nationality to their children."

– Nawal

SDG 16, TARGET 16.9

By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration

- Women's unequal nationality rights is one of just a few root causes of statelessness, a status whereby an individual is not considered a citizen of any country by operation of their law. When a child is denied their mother's nationality and cannot acquire their father's nationality - whether due to the father's inability or refusal to confer it - the child becomes stateless.⁷ Many stateless persons go their whole lives without holding any form of legal identity.
- In many countries, birth registration - while not on its own evidence of holding citizenship - is a prerequisite for establishing citizenship, and the mother's inability to confer nationality can be a barrier to birth registration. Where women cannot pass on their nationality, birth registration may be impossible without the father's presence or proof of his nationality.

In Syria, without nationality, non-citizen children of women face difficulties including in obtaining identity documents, affecting the enjoyment of an array of related human rights.

"My children and my two brothers' children are the third generation of undocumented people in our family" says Ahmed from Syria. Although Ahmed's mother had Syrian citizenship, her ten children suffered without citizenship, simply because Syrian women lack the right to pass nationality to their children on an equal basis with Syrian men.

⁷ For example, the child's father may be stateless or may be unwilling or unable to fulfill the administrative requirements to secure citizenship for his child.

Rama

Rama was born in Lebanon to a Lebanese mother.

However, Rama is stateless. Rama's father is stateless and her mother, like all Lebanese women, is denied the right to pass her nationality to her child. Lacking identity documentation because of her stateless status, Rama cannot travel freely and faces many obstacles.

"All my friends go to places and I could not go to them. I feel sad because I don't have an ID and all my friends have an ID. I want my job when I grow up to be a baby doctor, because when the baby is sick, I want to help them."

– Rama

Because Rama is stateless, it is unlikely she could sit for the public exams required to become a doctor.

"I feel that Rama has no future. The situation of stateless people in Lebanon should change so that they can exist and live with everyone else in society."

– Amal, Rama's mother

ENDING GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN NATIONALITY LAWS WILL HELP ACHIEVE:



GOAL 1

End poverty in all its forms everywhere

- Without a nationality it is harder to gain formal employment, leaving affected persons in vulnerable and unstable situations. When children affected by discrimination against women in nationality laws are rendered stateless, it can trap generations of stateless families in poverty.

In Kuwait, discrimination against women in the nationality law is a primary cause of statelessness, contributing to lost opportunities and poverty.

Saidika and Her Children

Saidika is a Kuwaiti woman married to a stateless man. They have three children who are all stateless because Kuwaiti women do not have the right to pass their nationality to their children – a right reserved for Kuwaiti men.

"If they don't have an ID card, if they don't have the nationality...they will face difficulties when dealing with the authorities. When applying for university, when applying for jobs, any of these things, they will face difficulties. [The government] should do something for us. Not for me or for my husband, but for the future of our children."

– Saidika, a Kuwaiti woman with three stateless children

GOAL 2

End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition

- Life without citizenship means living without access to banking institutions or formal employment, and often without the right to own and cultivate your own land. Such people often face difficulties with meeting the day to day needs for survival. The capacity to prioritize nutritious and sufficient food can be a luxury for stateless families and those without nationality in their country of residence as a result of discrimination against women in nationality laws.

The lack of economic opportunities for individuals affected by discrimination against women in nationality laws can trap generations in poverty.

In Mauritania, some vulnerable Mauritanian populations, including those not registered by the civil registration authority, face legal difficulties in obtaining identification and proving property rights, which affects their ability to cultivate land or receive state benefits.

GOAL 3

Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages

- In many states with laws which do not enable women to pass their nationality on an equal basis as men, access to free healthcare is restricted to nationals. Due to costly private healthcare and economic hardships faced by affected persons, many are unable to obtain treatment for illnesses.
- Poor mental health, depression, anxiety and isolation are well-reported issues facing both children who cannot acquire citizenship and mothers or fathers⁸ who cannot pass on a nationality because of discrimination against women in the law.

In many countries with discriminatory nationality laws, affected children do not have equal access to healthcare as citizens.

In Kuwait, Sarah, who was born to a Kuwaiti mother and a Jordanian father, shares her concerns over unequal access to healthcare because she is denied her mother's Kuwaiti nationality: "To this day, I have a fear of falling ill. As a child, I was denied treatment on multiple occasions, despite my condition being treatable."

⁸ Though MENA countries uphold the right of men to pass nationality to their children, many men are stateless because they were unable to acquire their mother's nationality due to discrimination in the nationality law. Such fathers then pass down their stateless status to their children when the children's mother is also denied the right to confer her nationality.

GOAL 4

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all

- Children who cannot obtain nationality may be required to provide documentation (that they do not have) or be forced to pay higher fees to access education. They may even be denied education outright. Access to student loans or free higher education is mostly impossible for children denied nationality.

Many families face challenges in accessing education because of women's unequal nationality rights.

Non-citizen children of Omani mothers, including those born and raised in the country, are denied access to government scholarships for higher education.

In Bahrain, non-citizen children of Bahraini mothers face discrimination in higher education, even if they achieve high results in secondary school. Treated as foreigners, they are charged the same university fees as foreign students.

Rabab, a Bahraini mother affected by Bahrain's discriminatory nationality law, shares: "There is no psychological stability. I think daily about the fate of my children when they reach the age of eighteen. What will happen? Will my eldest daughter get a scholarship when she finishes high school with a good grade? A frightening and humiliating feeling that I am being treated here in my country in this way, and that my children are paying the price for my ineligibility as a first-class citizen, because the laws discriminate against me and against many women who have lived through the same ordeal over the years."

Amina, Ahmed and their children

Amina, a Sudanese woman, had seven children with her husband Ahmed, a Sudanese man who passed away several years ago. Amina had no identity documents and had not been able to secure birth certificates for her children. A domestic cleaner, Amina had dreams that her children would get an education and become professionals.

When she realized the educational and employment opportunities that would be denied to her children without identity documentation, she went to the civil registry to try to obtain birth certificates and national numbers for them. However, the authorities asked her to bring members of her husband's family to testify in order for the children to get birth certificates and a national number. Amina was not in contact with her husband's family and did not even know where they lived.

While the Transitional Constitutional Charter of 2019 (Article 45/2) upholds the equal right of men and women to pass nationality to their children, the Sudanese Nationality Act (amended 2011 and 2018) retains several provisions that discriminate against women. However, in a decision in 2017, the Supreme Court of Sudan reaffirmed the right of Sudanese women to independently confer nationality on their children, regardless of the father's nationality. Despite this important decision – as Amina's case demonstrates – it can still be difficult for Sudanese mothers to independently secure needed documentation for their children. While children of Sudanese men acquire Sudanese nationality automatically, children of Sudanese women must apply for their children to acquire citizenship, which is dependent upon a number of conditions including written consent of the father (per the Nationality Act regulation). This underscores the need for Sudan and other countries to address discrepancies between their Constitution, nationality law, and related policies, in order to ensure women's independent right to confer nationality and access birth certificates for their children, regardless of the mother's marital status.

Luckily for Amina, UNHCR was able to work with authorities to first secure her national number and then birth certificates and national numbers for her children.

"Securing birth certificates and national numbers for my children has enabled them to sit for the primary and high school qualifying exam, and to access university. This in turn means a better future as well as work opportunities for them. Since we got the [birth] certificates, I'm finally able to sleep well in the night, as I was feeling guilty for not being able to secure these basic rights for them."

– Amina

GOAL 8

Promote economic growth, full employment and decent work for all

- Those lacking nationality are often unable to access formal employment, in particular professions that require certification or jobs in civil service. Those who access informal employment are at a heightened risk of exploitation in the workplace, and often have limited access to justice and protection under the law.

In most countries, discriminatory nationality laws restrict the employment opportunities for children and spouses of citizen mothers. For example, in Saudi Arabia, non-citizen children of Saudi mothers cannot access all jobs available to Saudi nationals. With no permanent right to work or live in the country, those denied citizenship because of discrimination against women in the nationality law often face severe financial hardships. In Libya, the Labor Law stipulates among the conditions for applying for a position in an administrative unit to be a Libyan national. In Lebanon, non-citizen children of Lebanese women are not allowed to work in professions regulated by unions such as some legal, medical and engineering functions. In Jordan, children of Jordanian mothers and non-Jordanian fathers are denied equal access to employment. Zainab, a Jordanian woman married to a non-Jordanian and a mother of five, shared her concerns about her children's limited access to employment. It is difficult for her children to find work, even after being exempted from work permits required of foreigners, as they cannot work in the public sector and private sector employers prefer Jordanians.

GOAL 11

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

- Without access to formal employment, bank loans or the ability to inherit property, affected persons will face significant difficulties in acquiring or affording housing.

While the UAE issued a directive to grant children of Emirati mothers and foreign fathers the same healthcare and education benefits as other citizens, children of Emirati mothers and non-nationals still cannot access benefits available to Emirati citizens like government land and loans to build homes.⁹ In addition, children must obtain residency permits to be able to stay in the country.

D. an affected Emirati mother says: "When my baby was born, I had to issue her a visa. It was probably the least favorite moment of my whole experience of being a mum for the first time."

⁹ Khaleej Times, Emirati mothers of foreign children hope that they will soon be embraced as UAE citizens, 10 Jul 2022, available at: <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/uae/emirati-mothers-of-foreign-children-hope-that-children-will-soon-be-accepted-as-uae-citizens>

RABIH

"My name is Rabih, born and raised in Lebanon, to a Lebanese mother and a foreign father. In Lebanon, patriarchal norms dominate. This often conflicts with universal human rights principles, as evidenced by laws that prevent women from passing citizenship to their children, leading to a cascade of socio-economic and political rights being withheld.

Despite the love story of my parents, our family faces the repercussions of restrictive laws, which curtail the rights we ought to have. We had dreams, crafted from our family's aspirations for success and happiness, but those dreams are now imprisoned by discrimination.

From a young age, I had many dreams. My father envisioned me as an engineer, a profession tightly regulated by unions which exclude foreigners. My mother wished for me to become a nurse, yet again, a career bound by union membership. I dreamed of becoming a tour guide, because I breathe history and antiquities. 'But you must join a union. Go to your father's country, as it is a tourist country,' the university registration officer replied. It is as if Lebanon is an island isolated from who I am, and not just my identity.

Despite these setbacks, I completed my university degree in political and administrative sciences, excelling with high grades.. Gradually, my graduate studies stopped [due to challenges resulting from a lack of Lebanese citizenship], and frustration began to compete with the urgent need for work, with the social and economic collapses. Of course, the dream turned into a fantasy.

Job hunting was torturous for my brothers and me. Despite ministerial decrees giving children of Lebanese women the right to work and free residency that does not require sponsorship by an employer, jobs are denied to noncitizen children. 'What convinces me that you won't be a problem?' 'I cannot employ you because you are a foreigner.' 'I employ Lebanese because they enjoy social security (a benefit denied to Lebanese women's children)'

Time marched on, the job search becoming ever more challenging. I encountered stereotypes and discrimination, even when finally finding employment, my lack of Lebanese nationality overshadowed my capabilities.

My mother is Lebanese and my grandparents are Lebanese.
Is it possible for me to be more Lebanese than that?

However, despite these obstacles, my resolve has only hardened. Since my teenage years, I've joined my mother in activism, campaigning for my right to citizenship with the My Nationality is a Right for me and My Family Campaign. This struggle has not only fortified our determination but also fostered our growth and resilience. In the face of injustice, we've expanded our campaign from local to regional advocacy for gender equality in citizenship laws.

The dreamer in me refuses to surrender,
but fights to reshape reality to align with my dreams."

INTERNATIONAL LAW AND REGIONAL GOALS

The Sustainable Development Goals reflect a clear understanding that sustainable development cannot be achieved in the absence of universal human rights. Removing discrimination against women in nationality laws not only support sustainable development but uphold States' commitments under International Law and align with standards and goals established by States in the Middle East-North Africa region.

All members of the League of Arab States ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which obliges States Parties to uphold every child's right to a nationality without discrimination (including on the basis of whether nationality would be conveyed by the mother/father). The Convention also enshrines the child's right to know and be cared for by each parent, a right that is compromised when women are denied the equal right to confer nationality on a noncitizen spouse. All but one MENA country has also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which obliges states parties to uphold women's right to acquire, change, or retain nationality and to confer nationality on a child or spouse on an equal basis with men.¹⁰ Though most MENA countries with nationality laws that discriminate against women have made a reservation to CEDAW Article 9 or 9.2, the CEDAW Committee has established that equal nationality rights are fundamental to the object and purpose of CEDAW, which equally obliges state to progressively address discrimination against women in CEDAW Article 2.¹¹

Several regional instruments and declarations support equality between men and women in nationality laws in the Middle East-North Africa region. The Arab Declaration on Belonging and Legal Identity calls on all League of Arab States members to uphold women and men's equal right to confer nationality on their children and spouse and to amend laws and declarations as needed to achieve this.

Article 8: Call upon Member States to end all forms of discrimination in the field of nationality and take concrete steps to amend laws and legislation at the national level related to equal nationality rights with the aim to reduce statelessness and protect the right of children to obtain a legal identity, including by strengthening laws that enable women to confer their nationality to their children and spouses in a way that conforms with international standards and does not contradict with national interests.¹²

¹⁰ The CEDAW Committee has clarified in General Recommendation 32 that states parties not only have an obligation to uphold women's right to confer nationality on their child on an equal basis with men, but that Article 9 extends to women's equal ability to confer nationality on a noncitizen spouse. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 'General recommendation No. 32 on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women', CEDAW/C/GC/32, available at:

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n14/627/90/pdf/n1462790.pdf?token=5xZsJgsPGoFqT9mzyf&fe=true>

¹¹ Of those states with nationality law provisions that discriminate against women, Iraq, Libya, Mauritania and Yemen do not have a reservation to CEDAW Article 9.

¹² See also: Article 2: Encourage advocacy to introduce legislation, review or enforcement of domestic nationality laws to ensure, without exception, that all children, including the unaccompanied, are registered at or after birth and are able to acquire the nationality of their parents, or another nationality if their fathers do not hold a nationality. In addition to

The Declaration also urges member states to remove reservations to CEDAW Article 9 pertaining to women's equal nationality rights.

Article 9: Consider lifting reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), with regard to articles related to the protection of equal rights between women and men to acquire, retain or change nationality and confer it to children, especially in cases of humanitarian crises, asylum, displacement, conflicts, and wars in order to ensure that all children are given a legal identity in a way that serves national interests.

The Marrakech Declaration on the Rights of the Child calls on all Arab League members to ensure every child's right to acquire a nationality.

"We declare our determination...to register every child at birth to preserve his right to an identity, a name, a nationality and to enforce laws and regulations to this effect..."

Additionally, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Specific Aspects of the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa established a legal standard for nationality rights in Africa, including enshrining women and men's equal right to confer nationality on their children and to acquire, change, and retain their nationality.

"A State Party shall grant women and men equal rights to acquire, transmit, change or retain their nationality, and with respect to the nationality of their children in accordance with national law."

The Time for Change Is Now

The SDGs are an expression of a universal commitment to upholding the equality and dignity of all human beings.

The Goals recognize the strong nexus between development and the realization of women's equal rights.

Social cohesion, sustainable development and economic growth will not be achievable without the eradication of discrimination against women and exclusion.

Women and men's equal nationality rights are essential to:

- Achieving equality between men and women.
- Building stronger societies and prosperous development
- Ensuring the well-being and human development of every man, woman and child

¹² (Continued) strengthening laws that enable women to transfer their nationality to their children, including in cases of asylum, displacement, conflicts and wars to ensure that all children obtain a legal identity, and in accordance with international conventions and covenants in this regard, and in a manner that does not contradict with national interests. Article 3: Support and effectively implement laws that protect the rights of children to enjoy a legal identity in the region, including their name, nationality, and family relations, while taking relevant measures, including awareness-raising, publicity, training, and capacity-building for those concerned and competent to consider the achievement of equality between men and women, including Judges, leaders, and relevant civil society.