

CHAPTER 1



Tracking Progress on Women's Legal Rights

Introduction

Gender equality is essential for ending poverty on a livable planet. By ensuring that gender-based discrimination does not hinder women's access to resources and opportunities, a gender-inclusive society can maximize its human capital and productivity. Inclusion starts with equal laws. Equal treatment of women under the law is associated with more women entering and remaining in the labor force and rising to managerial positions (Amin and Islam 2022; Islam, Muzi, and Amin 2019). Equal treatment also generates higher wages for women and facilitates business ownership by more women (Htun, Jensenius, and Nelson-Núñez 2019). And yet discriminatory laws persist in all regions, depriving women of their human rights and threatening their ability to contribute fully to their region's economy and overall global prosperity.

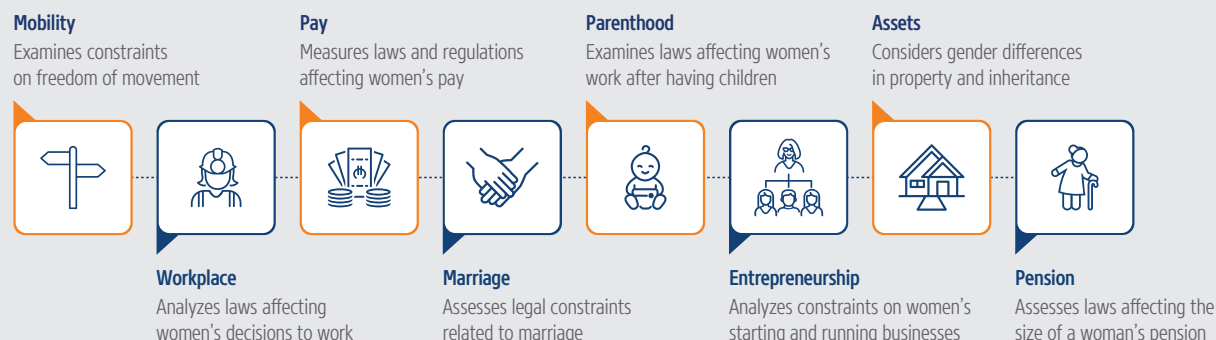
Women, Business and the Law 2024 identifies where in the world and in what areas legal inequalities still prevail. In doing so, it serves as an important resource for achieving women's economic empowerment. The 10th in a series, the 2024 edition updates the original eight-indicator data set and index—*Women, Business and the Law 1.0*—highlighting recent reforms and opportunities for the legal initiatives needed to achieve gender equality. *Women, Business and the Law 2024* also updates its measurements by presenting a new index, *Women, Business and the Law 2.0* (chapter 2) that will be refined in the 2025 edition of the report.

For nearly 15 years, *Women, Business and the Law* has served as a framework that governments and civil society alike can use to identify and remove the barriers to women's social and economic success and boost their economic empowerment. Since 2020, an index structured around a woman's working life has guided the analysis, celebrating the progress made while emphasizing the work still to be done (box 1.1).

BOX 1.1 ABOUT WOMEN, BUSINESS AND THE LAW

Women, Business and the Law identifies laws that restrict women's economic inclusion. Its index aligns different areas of the law with the economic decisions that women make throughout their lives and careers and identifies where and in what areas women continue to face hurdles (figure B1.1.1).

FIGURE B1.1.1 | THE EIGHT WOMEN, BUSINESS AND THE LAW 1.0 INDICATORS



Source: *Women, Business and the Law* team.

The eight *Women, Business and the Law* indicators are supported by evidence on their relevance to women's economic empowerment and reflect the international legal framework. The questions under each indicator were chosen based on evidence from the economic literature and on statistically significant associations with outcomes related to women's economic empowerment at the time of the creation of the index in 2019. The international legal framework on women's human rights, as set out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, also provides an underlying justification for each question.

The *Women, Business and the Law* index relies on a series of assumptions and scores 35 questions across the eight indicators. To make the data comparable, the indicators are designed to be a replicable measure of the legal environment for women as entrepreneurs and employees. For example, the woman in question is assumed to reside in the main business city of her economy and to be employed in the formal sector. Indicator-level scores are obtained by calculating the simple average of the answers to the four or five binary questions within each of the eight indicators and scaling the result by 100. Each economy's overall score is calculated by taking the average of the eight indicator scores. The highest possible score is 100, indicating equal rights and opportunities for men and women in all 35 areas of measurement (see the data notes in appendix A for details). This perfect score can be interpreted as a measure of the absence of legal inequality for a woman in the areas measured.

To construct the index, *Women, Business and the Law* surveys more than 2,400 experts in family, labor, and violence against women legislation. Questionnaires are administered to lawyers, judges, academics, and members of civil society organizations working locally on gender issues. *Women, Business and the Law* collects respondents' answers and validates them against codified sources of national law. To access the full data set used to construct the index, the data notes describing the methodology for each one of the questions, the economy snapshots, as well as more research and analysis, visit the *Women, Business and the Law* website (<https://wbl.worldbank.org>).

Women, Business and the Law's findings are an important tool for use in policy discussions about the state of women's empowerment and overall economic resilience. Indeed, research undertaken by the *Women, Business and the Law* team reveals that more equal laws are associated with more women working, higher wages, more women-owned businesses, and more women in managerial positions and parliaments (World Bank 2023). Nevertheless, multiple factors such as gender disparities in entrepreneurship and employment, domestic violence, sexual harassment, the persistent gender pay gap, as well as reduced female ownership of and control over assets and land continue to have a negative effect on women's empowerment, labor force participation, and capacity to escape poverty (Akter, Rahman, and Radicic 2022; Deininger and Goyal 2023; Doss et al. 2018; Duvvury et al. 2023; Heymann et al. 2023; Reshi and Sudha 2023; Vara-Horna, Asencios-Gonzalez, and McBride 2023). The unequal legal treatment of women constitutes a substantial impediment to women's economic participation, including for female entrepreneurs and those aspiring to launch an enterprise (Bayraktar 2022; Ibourk and Elouaourti 2023; Love, Nikolaev, and Dhakal 2023). Thus, addressing this impediment requires solid comprehensive legal frameworks that aim to achieve gender equality and compliance with women's rights in practice (Behr et al. 2023; Santagostino, Marekera, and Gnakra 2023). With mounting evidence of the crucial role played by legal and supportive frameworks, gender equality needs to become an international priority. In recognition of this pressing need, the World Bank's recently proposed 2024–30 Gender Strategy aims to respond to the global urgency, fundamentality, and complexity of achieving and accelerating gender equality (box 1.2).

BOX 1.2 HOW *WOMEN, BUSINESS AND THE LAW* INFORMS THE WORLD BANK'S 2024–30 GENDER STRATEGY: ACCELERATE GENDER EQUALITY TO END POVERTY ON A LIVABLE PLANET

Over the last 12 years, since the launch of *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*, the World Bank's commitment to gender equality has become broader and more ambitious (World Bank 2012). Published on the dawn of the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 2016–23 Gender Strategy recognized gender equality as a fundamental development objective (SDG 5). It set four core objectives for addressing gender disparities: improving human endowments, removing constraints to more and better jobs, removing barriers to women's ownership of and control over assets, and enhancing women's voice and agency and engaging men and boys (World Bank 2015). Since its adoption, the 2016–23 Gender Strategy has informed the World Bank's lending and investment operations, impact evaluations, and analytical products targeting gender inequality.

The World Bank is renewing its commitment to gender equality with its 2024–30 Gender Strategy. The new strategy aims to accelerate gender equality to end poverty on a livable planet in alignment with the World Bank's Evolution Roadmap. It focuses on innovation, financing, and collective action to achieve three strategic objectives: (1) ending gender-based violence and elevating human capital; (2) expanding and enabling economic opportunities through access to more and better jobs, assets, and services; and (3) engaging women as leaders. The strategy also recognizes the importance of gender analysis, including *Women, Business and the Law* data, to inform core analytics and country engagement priorities (World Bank, forthcoming). The product of an inclusive consultation and engagement process, the 2024–30 Gender Strategy builds on a solid

(Box continues next page)

BOX 1.2 HOW *WOMEN, BUSINESS AND THE LAW* INFORMS THE WORLD BANK'S 2024–30 GENDER STRATEGY: ACCELERATE GENDER EQUALITY TO END POVERTY ON A LIVABLE PLANET (*continued*)

analytical foundation, including a series of thematic policy notes summarizing global knowledge on key issues and presenting evidence on promising practices and areas for future engagement.

Women, Business and the Law contributed to informing the 2024–30 Gender Strategy with a thematic policy note, “Accelerating Gender Equality through Reforming Legal Frameworks” (Elefante et al. 2023). Drawing on *Women, Business and the Law* data and analysis, the note emphasizes the role that laws and regulations play in safeguarding women’s economic opportunities, explores the legal barriers that hinder women’s economic participation, and showcases examples of how World Bank projects have improved gender equality under the law. *Women, Business and the Law* data will also inform an indicator of the results matrix included in the 2024–30 Gender Strategy for tracking the outcomes and outputs of World Bank operations, investments, and overall country engagement.^a

a. The indicator measures the number of legal changes that advance gender equality.

Data update

Women, Business and the Law 2024 updates the *Women, Business and the Law* 1.0 index to account for legal reforms occurring from October 2, 2022, to October 1, 2023. The global average score has increased from 77.1 to 77.9 out of 100, a 0.8-point increase that marks the most significant annual improvement since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. As in the previous edition, only 14 economies grant a woman legal rights equal to those of a man across all of the areas measured: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden (table 1.1).

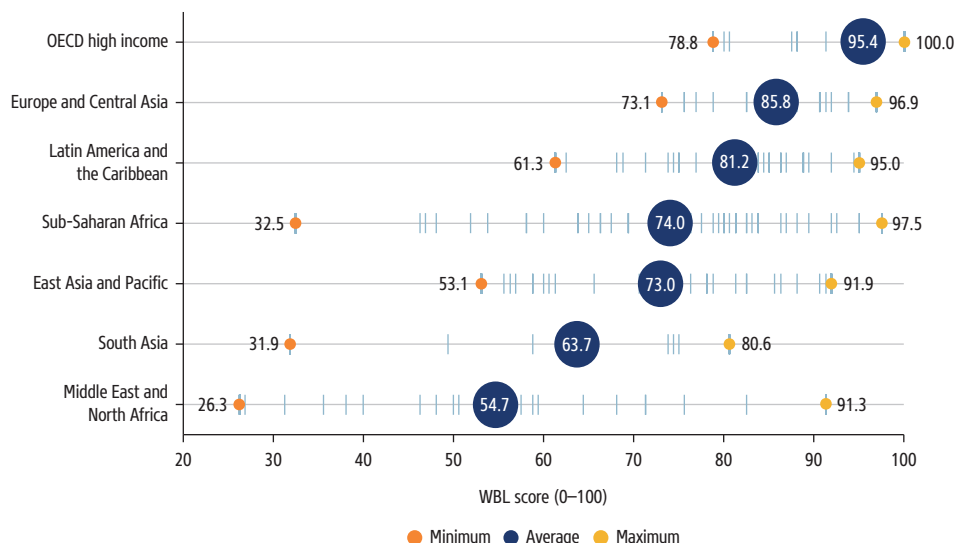
Globally, 49 economies across six regions have achieved scores exceeding 90. Notably, more than half of them are high-income economies in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), whereas no economy in South Asia has obtained a score above 90. In the past year, two economies in Europe and Central Asia—Armenia and Moldova—and three economies in Sub-Saharan Africa—Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Togo—scored above 90 for the first time.

A regional analysis of the *Women, Business and the Law* data showed, in the previous edition of the report, Sub-Saharan Africa surpassing the East Asia and Pacific region for the first time. In this year’s edition, this trend continues, with Sub-Saharan Africa making substantial progress and increasing its average score by 1.15 points, reaching 74.0, or 1 point higher than the East Asia and Pacific region. OECD high-income economies, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean remain the three regions with scores exceeding the global average of 77.9. Over the past year, the Middle East and North Africa region made the most progress, with an increase in 1.47 points, followed by Europe and Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, with 1.17, and 1.15 points, respectively (figure 1.1).

TABLE 1.1		WOMEN, BUSINESS AND THE LAW 2024 SCORE (WBL 1.0)							
Economy	Score	Economy	Score	Economy	Score	Economy	Score	Economy	Score
Belgium	100.0	Kosovo	91.9	Colombia	84.4	Central African Republic *	77.5	Botswana	63.8
Canada	100.0	Rwanda ✓	91.9	Benin	83.8	Kyrgyz Republic	76.9	Mali	63.8
Denmark	100.0	Albania	91.3	Kenya *	83.8	Suriname * ✓	76.9	Dominica	62.5
France	100.0	Malta	91.3	Puerto Rico (US)	83.8	Burundi	76.3	Haiti	61.3
Germany	100.0	Taiwan, China	91.3	St. Lucia	83.8	Kiribati	76.3	Micronesia, Fed. Sts.	61.3
Greece	100.0	United States	91.3	Uganda ✓	83.8	Seychelles	76.3	Malaysia ✓	60.6
Iceland	100.0	Armenia ✓	90.6	São Tomé and Príncipe	83.1	Belarus	75.6	Cameroon	60.0
Ireland	100.0	Bulgaria	90.6	Belize ✓	82.5	Kazakhstan	75.6	Papua New Guinea	60.0
Latvia	100.0	Moldova ✓	90.6	Burkina Faso	82.5	Morocco	75.6	Jordan ✓	59.4
Luxembourg	100.0	Mongolia	90.6	Fiji	82.5	Bhutan	75.0	Lebanon	58.8
Netherlands	100.0	Romania	90.6	Mozambique	82.5	Ghana	75.0	Myanmar	58.8
Portugal	100.0	Ecuador	89.4	Singapore	82.5	Honduras	75.0	Pakistan	58.8
Spain	100.0	Mauritius	89.4	Türkiye	82.5	Samoa	75.0	Tonga	58.8
Sweden	100.0	Bolivia	88.8	United Arab Emirates	82.5	Trinidad and Tobago	75.0	Congo, Rep.	58.1
Estonia	97.5	El Salvador	88.8	Uzbekistan ✓	82.5	India	74.4	Equatorial Guinea ✓	58.1
Finland	97.5	Mexico	88.8	Bahamas, The	81.3	Jamaica	74.4	Algeria	57.5
Italy	97.5	Uruguay	88.8	Cambodia	81.3	Guatemala	73.8	Solomon Islands	56.9
New Zealand	97.5	Georgia	88.1	Liberia	81.3	Guinea	73.8	Palau	56.3
Togo ✓	97.5	Korea, Rep. *	88.1	Tanzania	81.3	Maldives	73.8	Vanuatu	55.6
United Kingdom	97.5	South Africa	88.1	Zambia	81.3	Russian Federation	73.1	Niger *	53.8
Australia	96.9	Switzerland	88.1	Grenada	80.6	Senegal	72.5	Brunei Darussalam	53.1
Austria	96.9	Viet Nam	88.1	Israel	80.6	Djibouti	71.3	Guinea-Bissau *	51.9
Cyprus ✓	96.9	Slovak Republic ✓	87.5	Lesotho ✓	80.6	Saudi Arabia	71.3	Egypt, Arab Rep.	50.6
Norway	96.9	Guyana	86.9	Nepal	80.6	St. Kitts and Nevis	71.3	Libya	50.0
Slovenia	96.9	Zimbabwe	86.9	Barbados	80.0	Indonesia	70.6	Bangladesh	49.4
Côte d'Ivoire	95.0	Cabo Verde	86.3	Chile	80.0	Eritrea	69.4	Iraq	48.1
Gabon	95.0	Dominican Republic	86.3	Ethiopia *	80.0	Gambia, The	69.4	Mauritania	48.1
Peru	95.0	Nicaragua	86.3	Malawi	80.0	Madagascar	69.4	Somalia	46.9
Paraguay	94.4	Timor-Leste	86.3	Namibia *	80.0	Antigua and Barbuda *	68.8	Eswatini	46.3
Croatia	93.8	Lao PDR *	85.6	Angola	79.4	Bahrain	68.1	Oman * ✓	46.3
Czechia	93.8	Azerbaijan ✓	85.0	Argentina	79.4	St. Vincent and the Grenadines	68.1	Syrian Arab Republic	40.0
Hungary *	93.8	Bosnia and Herzegovina	85.0	Panama	79.4	South Sudan	67.5	Kuwait *	38.1
Lithuania	93.8	Brazil	85.0	Congo, Dem. Rep.	78.8	Chad	66.3	Qatar ✓	35.6
Poland	93.8	Montenegro	85.0	Japan	78.8	Nigeria	66.3	Sudan *	32.5
Serbia	93.8	North Macedonia	85.0	Philippines	78.8	Marshall Islands	65.6	Afghanistan	31.9
Sierra Leone ✓	92.5	San Marino *	85.0	Tajikistan	78.8	Sri Lanka	65.6	Iran, Islamic Rep.	31.3
Costa Rica	91.9	Ukraine	85.0	China	78.1	Comoros	65.0	Yemen, Rep.	26.9
Hong Kong SAR, China	91.9	Venezuela, RB	85.0	Thailand	78.1	Tunisia	64.4	West Bank and Gaza	26.3

Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024 database.

Note: Economies with a green check (✓) saw an improvement in score due to reforms in one or more areas. Economies with an asterisk (*) saw a change in their score due to revisions made as a result of new information and coding consistency.

FIGURE 1.1 | THE LARGEST LEGAL GAPS ARE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA*Dispersion of Women, Business and the Law 2024 average scores, by region*

Source: *Women, Business and the Law 2024* database.

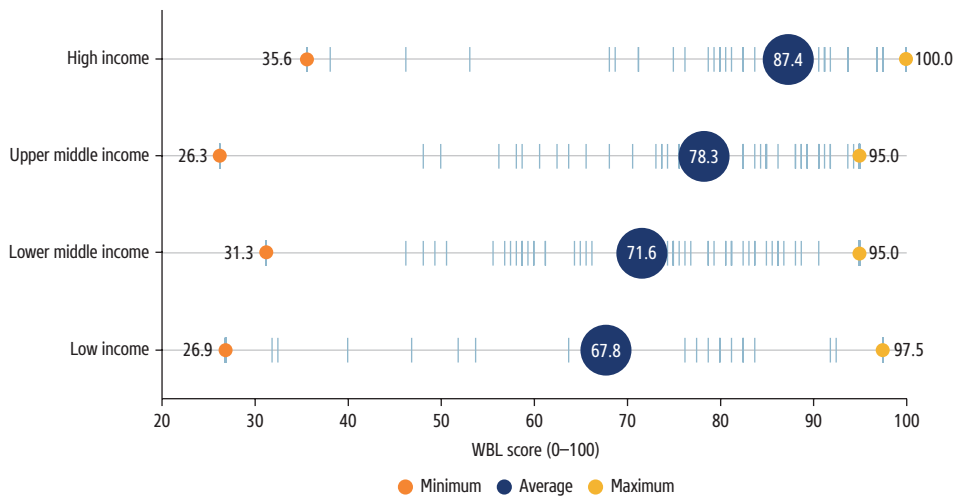
Note: Each vertical line represents the score of an economy in its region. Each blue circle indicates the average score of a region, and the minimum and maximum scores within each region are specified. OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; WBL = *Women, Business and the Law*.

High-income economies continue to have the highest average score (87.4), followed by upper-middle-income economies (78.3), lower-middle-income economies (71.6), and low-income economies (67.8). The gap between the average scores of high-income economies and low-income economies has shrunk to under 20 points thanks to the substantial progress of economies in the low-income group (figure 1.2). Within this group, four economies implemented 17 reforms, resulting in an increase of 1.9 points in the average score compared to last year. Seven economies in the upper-middle-income group implemented 13 reforms, leading to an increase of 0.9 point. Lower-middle-income and high-income economies also saw improvements of 0.5 and 0.4 point, respectively. Reform efforts continue, but the disparity between the highest- and lowest-scoring economies remains significant across all income groups and exceeds 70 points in the low-income group. This gap underscores the substantial variation in legal gender equality within regions at similar levels of economic development.

Over the last year, reforms were implemented across all eight indicators (annex 1A). As they were last year, Parenthood (58.1) and Pay (71.6) are still below the average index score, but they are catching up, recording the two highest numbers of economies reforming—seven and six, respectively. Specifically, the score for Parenthood increased by 1.6 points, followed by a 1.3-point increase for Pay.

FIGURE 1.2 | GAPS IN SCORES OF MORE THAN 60 POINTS ARE FOUND ACROSS ALL INCOME GROUPS

Dispersion of Women, Business and the Law 2024 average scores, by income level

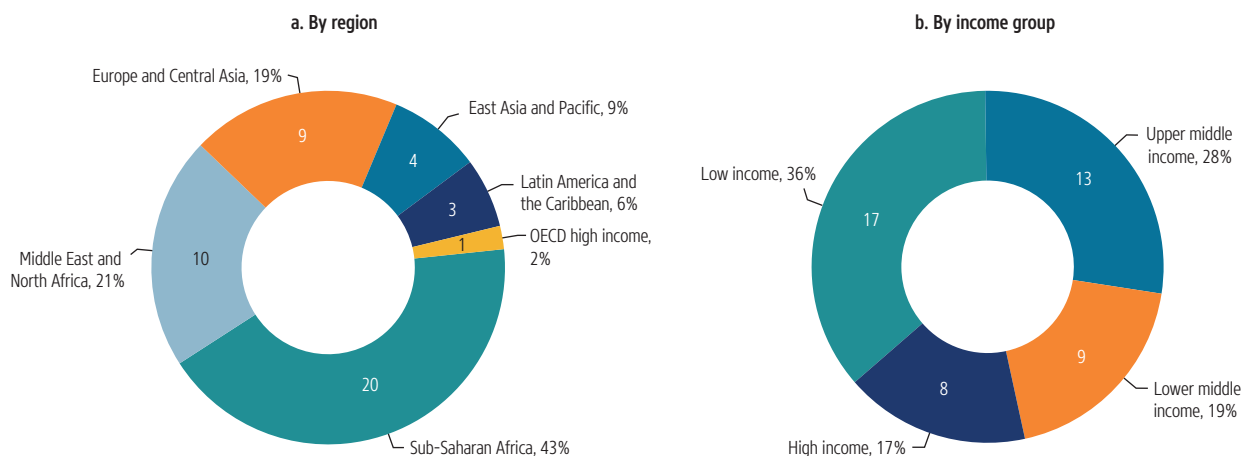


Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024 database.

Note: Each vertical line represents the score of an economy in its income group. In each blue circle is the average score of an income group, and the minimum and maximum scores within each group are specified. República Bolivariana de Venezuela, while scored, is excluded from the income group comparisons as it is currently not classified by the World Bank, owing to a lack of reliable data of adequate quality. WBL = Women, Business and the Law.

Which economies improved the most?

Over the last year, 18 economies enacted 47 reforms increasing legal gender equality. All regions except South Asia reformed in the past year. Sub-Saharan Africa led the reform efforts, with six economies enacting 20 legal changes that affected all of the areas measured, except for Mobility. These economies were Equatorial Guinea, Lesotho, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Togo, and Uganda. Notably, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Togo implemented multiple reforms that resulted in scores above 90. In Europe and Central Asia, five economies—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Moldova, and Uzbekistan—enacted nine reforms. In the Middle East and North Africa region, three economies—Jordan, Oman, and Qatar—introduced 10 reforms, followed by four reforms in the East Asia and Pacific region (Malaysia) and three in Latin America and the Caribbean (Belize and Suriname). The Slovak Republic is the only OECD high-income economy to undertake reform in 2023. For the first time since 2005, no reforms were observed in the South Asia region. Low-income economies enacted 17 reforms, the highest number, followed by upper-middle-income economies, with 13 reforms. Lower-middle- and high-income economies implemented nine and eight reforms, respectively (figure 1.3).

FIGURE 1.3 | MOST REFORMS WERE UNDERTAKEN IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND LOW-INCOME ECONOMIES*Number and share of reforms since October 2022, by region and income group*

Source: *Women, Business and the Law 2024* database.

Note: The percentages are calculated by dividing the number of reforms in each region or income group by the total number of reforms. The South Asia region did not enact any reforms after October 2, 2022, and is not included in panel a. The República Bolivariana de Venezuela, while scored, is excluded from income group comparisons in panel b as it is currently not classified by the World Bank, owing to a lack of reliable data of adequate quality. OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

By recording a change in score of between 10 and 20 points, the economies that improved the most were Jordan, Malaysia, Sierra Leone, Togo, and Uzbekistan, representing four regions. These economies enacted comprehensive reforms across all indicators except Mobility (table 1.2).

Each of the five top improvers adopted at least four reforms in one or more of the *Women, Business and the Law* indicators. Reforms in the Pay indicator were the most common, with four of the five top improvers implementing reforms in this area. However, among these, only Togo adopted a reform in the area of Assets, and, as noted, no economy introduced changes affecting the Mobility indicator.

Sierra Leone's score increased 20 points, from 72.5 to 92.5, in the *Women, Business and the Law* index as a result of new laws enacted to address women's rights in multiple areas—notably, Workplace, Pay, Parenthood, and Pension. At the end of 2022,

Economy	WBL 2024 score	Change in score	% increase in score	Mobility	Workplace	Pay	Marriage	Parenthood	Entrepreneurship	Assets	Pension
Sierra Leone	92.5	20.0	27.6		✓	✓		✓			✓
Togo	97.5	15.6	19.0				✓	✓	✓	✓	
Jordan	59.4	12.5	26.7		✓	✓					
Uzbekistan	82.5	11.9	16.9			✓	✓				
Malaysia	60.6	10.6	21.2			✓		✓			

Source: *Women, Business and the Law 2024* database.

Note: WBL = *Women, Business and the Law*.

the country passed the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022, which introduced important protections for a woman in the workplace, such as the prohibition of gender-based discrimination and pregnancy-related dismissal. It also established a woman's equal access to credit and financial services, complementing the nondiscrimination mandate established in 2021. In May 2023, Sierra Leone enacted the groundbreaking Employment Act 2023, which aims to improve labor and employment regulations, promote equal opportunity, and eliminate discrimination. The act prohibits discrimination in employment based on multiple grounds, including gender, and mandates the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value in alignment with International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 100. Furthermore, it expands the length of paid leave for a mother from 12 weeks to 14 weeks, with benefits equivalent to 100 percent of her average salary, in line with the recommendation set out by ILO Maternity Protection Convention No. 183. A father was also granted two weeks of paid leave for the birth of a child. The 2023 reform repealed the Employers and Employed Act of 1962, which restricted a woman's work in the mining, construction, factories, energy, water, and transportation industries. Finally, the Employment Act 2023 now accounts for periods of career interruption due to childcare responsibilities in the calculation of a woman's pension benefits.

Over the last year, **Togo** enacted a comprehensive set of reforms aimed at gender equality and affecting the Marriage, Parenthood, Entrepreneurship, and Assets indicators. The promulgation of a new set of laws resulted in an increase of 15.6 points in the *Women, Business and the Law* index for the country. Togo's score is now 97.5, the highest among Sub-Saharan African economies. Togo has demonstrated its commitment to legal gender equality. Since 1970, the country has been consistently enacting reforms that have affected all eight indicators measured by *Women, Business and the Law* (Affoum and Dry 2022), and more recently it has passed amendments to its labor code. The Labor Code of 2006 represented a remarkable step toward gender equality and greater women's labor participation because it prohibited the dismissal of pregnant workers, mandated equal remuneration for work of equal value, and prohibited gender discrimination in employment. A subsequent reform in 2021 removed the prohibition on dismissing pregnant workers, which set Togo back in terms of fully protecting working women. Nevertheless, Togo continued to pursue its goal of improving the lives of Togolese women, and in November 2022 its National Assembly approved a set of laws to amend the Personal and Family Code, the penal code, and the labor code. These amendments equalized a man's and a woman's rights to remarry by removing the 300-day waiting period for women, recognized nonmonetary contributions in marriage, made domestic violence a criminal offense punishable by up to five years of imprisonment, and prohibited the previous practice of "settling" domestic violence complaints. Finally, the amended labor code reiterated the prohibition against dismissing a woman during pregnancy, childbirth, maternity leave, and breastfeeding. In addition, it now mandates that a woman has the right to receive her full salary from the National Social Security Fund during maternity leave. Previously, the fund had paid only half of a woman's salary. The reform efforts by Togo are a reminder that, despite setbacks, all countries should commit to improving their laws to foster women's economic empowerment.

Jordan's score increased by 12.5 points in the *Women, Business and the Law* index, from 46.9 in 2023 to 59.4 in 2024. The rise is due to the adoption of Law No. 10 of 2023, which introduced multiple amendments to the labor code, resulting in four reforms

recorded under the Workplace and Pay indicators. In May 2023, Jordan enacted Law No. 10 of 2023, amending the labor code, which, for the first time, explicitly prohibited discrimination in employment based on gender under the law. Further, by abrogating the previous labor legislation, the new law removed all restrictions on women's work in different industries. Until then, the law gave the minister the right to determine the industries and jobs prohibited to women. Finally, the reform introduced in the labor code the prohibition of sexual harassment in employment as well as a monetary fine for the perpetrator.

Uzbekistan introduced important reforms that affected two indicators, Pay and Marriage, which increased its score by 11.9 points to 82.5. In 2019, Uzbekistan enacted its first gender equality law, Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men, demonstrating a strong commitment to combating gender-based discrimination. The same year, the government, trade unions, and the private sector came together and conducted debates on reform of the labor code. The resulting draft included provisions to protect women's rights, in alignment with international conventions such as ILO Equal Remuneration Convention No. 100. The reform was signed into law on October 28, 2022. The revised labor code mandates equal remuneration for work of equal value and allows a woman to work in the mining industry and in hazardous occupations. In April 2023, Uzbekistan introduced amendments to the criminal code and the administrative liability code to address domestic violence directly, including physical, psychological, and financial violence in family relationships, and specified criminal penalties for such offenses.

In 2022, **Malaysia** adopted a series of reforms affecting the Pay and Parenthood indicators, resulting in a score of 60.6 in the *Women, Business and the Law* index, which was 10.6 points higher than the score the previous year. On March 30, 2022, the Malaysian Parliament passed the Employment (Amendment) Act 2022, amending the Employment Act of 1955. It addressed maternity and paternity leave, dismissal of pregnant workers, and restrictions on a woman working at night in industrial undertakings. Although the act was originally to take effect on September 1, 2022, the Human Resources Ministry postponed implementation of the amendments until January 1, 2023. The long-overdue amendment aligns the legislation in Malaysia with internationally recognized labor standards, including several ILO conventions and international practices such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement. Notably, the reform extends paid maternity leave from 60 calendar days to 98 calendar days, aligning with ILO Maternity Protection Convention No. 183, and introduces seven consecutive days of paid paternity leave, a statutory provision previously missing. Furthermore, the revised law prohibits the dismissal of pregnant workers. The Employment (Amendment) Act 2022 removes the restriction on women's employment in night work across various industries and sectors and eliminates the minister's authority to restrict a woman's work.

In which indicators did economies reform the most?

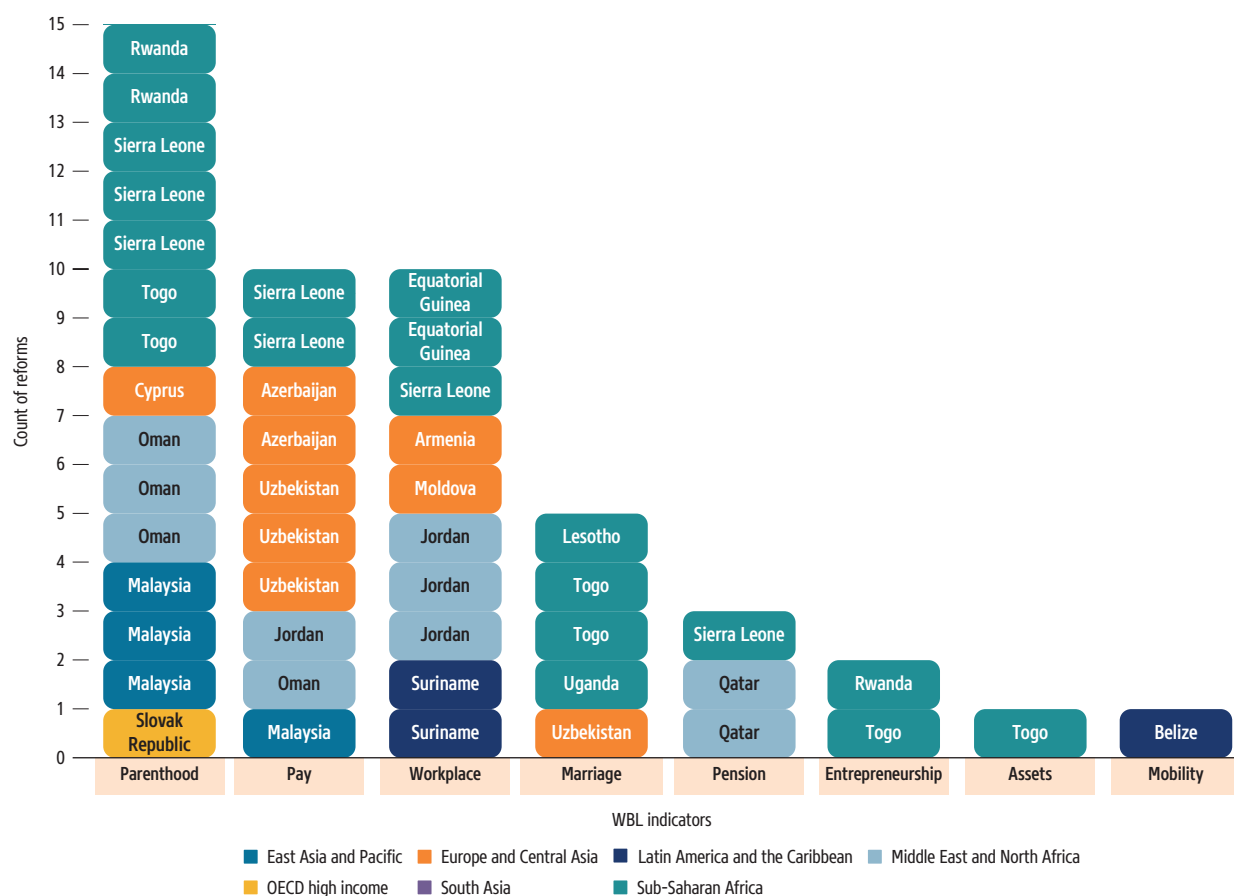
The Parenthood, Pay, and Workplace indicators recorded the highest number of reforms over the last year, continuing a trend observed in the last two editions of *Women, Business and the Law*. In the Parenthood indicator, seven economies across five regions introduced 15 legal changes. Four economies—Malaysia, Oman, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone—mandated at least 14 weeks of paid leave for mothers following childbirth;

four economies—Malaysia, Oman, Sierra Leone, and the Slovak Republic—introduced paid paternity leave for fathers; and Cyprus mandated paid parental leave. Furthermore, five economies—Malaysia, Oman, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Togo—enacted laws prohibiting the dismissal of a pregnant woman. Togo mandated its government to administer all maternity benefits (figure 1.4 and table 1.3).

In the Pay indicator, six economies across four regions implemented 10 changes, including mandating laws on equal remuneration for work of equal value and lifting restrictions on the ability of a woman to work in dangerous or industrial jobs (table 1.3). For example, with support from the World Bank, Azerbaijan reformed its laws to repeal restrictions on a woman working in industrial jobs and jobs deemed dangerous. Prior to this reform, the law restricted a woman from working in as many as 674 jobs, from transportation to agriculture to the energy sector. These job restrictions, inherited from the former Soviet Union, prevented women from working as train engineers, bus drivers,

FIGURE 1.4 | IN 2022–23, 18 ECONOMIES ENACTED REFORMS ACROSS ALL WOMEN, BUSINESS AND THE LAW 1.0 INDICATORS

Number of reforms since October 2022, by economy, indicator, and region



Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024 database.

Note: OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; WBL = Women, Business and the Law.

TABLE 1.3		IN 2022–23, ECONOMIES IMPLEMENTED THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF REFORMS TO IMPROVE GENDER EQUALITY IN THE PARENTHOOD INDICATOR	
Indicator	Number of reforms	Economies	Details of reform
Mobility	1	Belize	Belize allowed a woman to apply for a passport in the same way as a man.
Workplace	10	Armenia, Equatorial Guinea, Jordan, Moldova, Sierra Leone, Suriname	Armenia, Equatorial Guinea, Jordan, and Suriname enacted legislation on sexual harassment in employment. Equatorial Guinea, Jordan, Moldova, and Suriname established criminal penalties for such conduct. Jordan and Sierra Leone prohibited gender-based discrimination in employment.
Pay	10	Azerbaijan, Jordan, Malaysia, Oman, Sierra Leone, Uzbekistan	Azerbaijan, Oman, and Uzbekistan removed restrictions on a woman's employment in jobs deemed dangerous. Azerbaijan, Jordan, Malaysia, Sierra Leone, and Uzbekistan removed restrictions on a woman's employment in industrial jobs. Sierra Leone and Uzbekistan mandated equal remuneration for work of equal value.
Marriage	5	Lesotho, Togo, Uganda, Uzbekistan	Lesotho, Togo, and Uzbekistan enacted legislation protecting a woman from domestic violence. Togo granted a woman the same rights to remarry as a man. Uganda granted a woman the same rights to obtain a divorce as a man.
Parenthood	15	Cyprus, Malaysia, Oman, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Slovak Republic, Togo	Cyprus introduced paid parental leave. Malaysia, Oman, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone increased paid maternity leave to 98 days. Malaysia, Oman, Sierra Leone, and the Slovak Republic introduced paid paternity leave. Malaysia, Oman, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Togo prohibited the dismissal of pregnant workers. Togo mandated the government to administer 100 percent of maternity leave benefits.
Entrepreneurship	2	Rwanda, Togo	Rwanda and Togo prohibited gender-based discrimination in financial services.
Assets	1	Togo	Togo mandated the valuation of nonmonetary contributions in marriage.
Pension	3	Qatar, Sierra Leone	Qatar equalized the ages at which a woman and a man can retire with full and partial pension benefits. Sierra Leone accounted for periods of absence due to childcare in the calculation of a woman's pension benefits.

Source: *Women, Business and the Law 2024* database.

Note: "Number of reforms" refers to data points that changed because of the reforms implemented. For the full list of reforms, see annex 1A.

and other jobs considered potentially hazardous and strenuous. Jordan also removed restrictions on a woman working in industrial jobs and now expressly prohibits gender-based discrimination by employers that could hinder equal opportunities.

In the Workplace indicator, 10 reforms were introduced by six economies across four regions. Specifically, two economies—Jordan and Sierra Leone—established laws that prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender. Four economies—Armenia, Equatorial Guinea, Jordan, and Suriname—prohibited sexual harassment in employment. Furthermore, four economies—Equatorial Guinea, Jordan, Moldova, and Suriname—introduced criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment (table 1.3).

Other indicators registered fewer reforms, in part because a higher level of equality had been achieved in some of the areas measured, which may leave little room for

improvement, and in part because these indicators measure notoriously sticky areas of the law. The indicators with the lowest number of reforms are Entrepreneurship, with two reforms, and Assets and Mobility, with one reform each. Under Entrepreneurship, Rwanda and Togo prohibited discrimination in access to credit based on gender. This area is the only one that still has significant scope for reform under the Entrepreneurship indicator, with 96 economies still not prohibiting this form of gender-based discrimination. Only one reform was recorded under the Assets indicator—the area with the slowest pace of reform historically; Togo mandated the valuation of nonmonetary contributions in marriage. Similarly, only one economy—Belize—implemented a reform in Mobility by allowing a woman to apply for a passport in the same way as a man, leaving behind a group of 27 economies that, as of today, still have in effect different and more burdensome passport application procedures for women than for men.

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ANNEX 1A

Summaries of Reforms

From October 2, 2022, to October 1, 2023, *Women, Business and the Law* recorded 47 reforms aimed at improving gender equality in employment and entrepreneurial activity in 18 economies. Over the same period, no economy enacted changes widening the legal gender gap.

✓ Reform increasing gender parity

Armenia

✓ Workplace

Armenia enacted legislation protecting a woman from sexual harassment in employment.

Azerbaijan

✓ Pay

Azerbaijan removed restrictions on a woman's employment in industrial jobs and jobs deemed dangerous.

Belize

✓ Mobility

Belize enacted legislation allowing a woman to apply for a passport in the same way as a man.

Cyprus

✓ Parenthood

Cyprus introduced six weeks of parental leave as an individual and nontransferable right for each parent.

Equatorial Guinea

✓ Workplace

Equatorial Guinea enacted legislation protecting a woman from sexual harassment in employment, including criminal penalties for such conduct.

Jordan

✓ Workplace

Jordan prohibited gender-based discrimination in employment and enacted legislation protecting a woman from sexual harassment in employment, including criminal penalties for such conduct.

✓ Pay

Jordan removed restrictions on a woman's employment in industrial jobs.

Lesotho

✓ Marriage

Lesotho enacted legislation protecting a woman from domestic violence.

Malaysia

✓ Pay

Malaysia removed restrictions on a woman's employment in industrial jobs.

✓ Parenthood

Malaysia increased paid maternity leave from 60 days to 98 days, introduced seven days of paid paternity leave, and prohibited the dismissal of pregnant workers.

Moldova

✓ Workplace

Moldova established criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment.

Oman

✓ Pay

Oman removed restrictions on a woman's employment in jobs deemed dangerous.

✓ Parenthood

Oman increased paid maternity leave from 50 days to 98 days, introduced seven days of paid paternity leave, and prohibited the dismissal of pregnant workers.

Qatar

✓ Pension

Qatar equalized the ages at which a woman and a man can retire with full and partial pension benefits.

Rwanda

✓ Parenthood

Rwanda increased paid maternity leave from 84 days to 98 days and prohibited the dismissal of pregnant workers.

✓ Entrepreneurship

Rwanda prohibited gender-based discrimination in financial services.

Sierra Leone

✓ Workplace

Sierra Leone prohibited gender-based discrimination in employment.

✓ Pay

Sierra Leone mandated equal remuneration for work of equal value and removed restrictions on a woman's employment in industrial jobs.

✓ Parenthood

Sierra Leone increased paid maternity leave from 84 days to 98 days, introduced 14 calendar days of paid paternity leave, and prohibited the dismissal of pregnant workers.

✓ Pension

Sierra Leone enacted legislation accounting for periods of absence due to childcare in the calculation of a woman's pension benefits.

Slovak Republic

✓ Parenthood

The Slovak Republic introduced 28 weeks of paid paternity leave.

Suriname

✓ Workplace

Suriname enacted legislation protecting a woman from sexual harassment in employment, including criminal penalties for such conduct.

Togo

✓ Marriage

Togo enacted legislation protecting a woman from domestic violence and granted a woman the same rights to remarry as a man.

✓ Parenthood

Togo mandated the government to administer 100 percent of maternity leave benefits and prohibited the dismissal of pregnant workers.

✓ Entrepreneurship

Togo prohibited gender-based discrimination in financial services.

✓ Assets

Togo enacted legislation mandating the valuation of nonmonetary contributions in marriage.

Uganda

✓ Marriage

Uganda granted a woman the same rights to obtain a divorce as a man.

Uzbekistan

✓ Pay

Uzbekistan mandated equal remuneration for work of equal value and removed restrictions on a woman's employment in industrial jobs and jobs deemed dangerous.

✓ Marriage

Uzbekistan enacted legislation protecting a woman from domestic violence.