

## Oman

Population	2 599 552
Female population (as % of total population)	43.9
Women's life expectancy (in years)	77.5
Men's life expectancy (in years)	74.2
Fertility rate (average births per female)	3.0



The Constitution of Oman provides for the equal treatment of all its citizens, irrespective of sex. As the country has a predominantly Muslim population, Sharia is recognised as the source of all legislation. This can affect women's status in a negative manner. It should also be noted that any protection offered by the law does not apply to the large share of non-citizens residing and working in the country, many of whom are women.

Despite recent increases in women's level of education and participation in the labour force, their position in Omani society remains inferior to that of men.

### Family code

The level of protection for Omani women within the family context is quite low. Family matters are governed by a Personal Status Law. Although less common than in the past, the practice of early marriage still occurs. A 2004 UN report estimated that 16% of girls between 15 and 19 years of age in Oman were married, divorced or widowed.

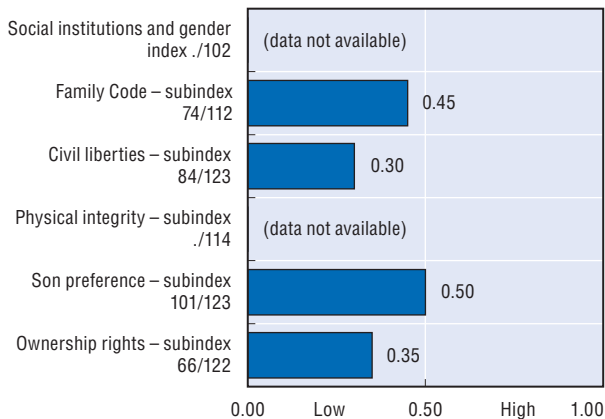
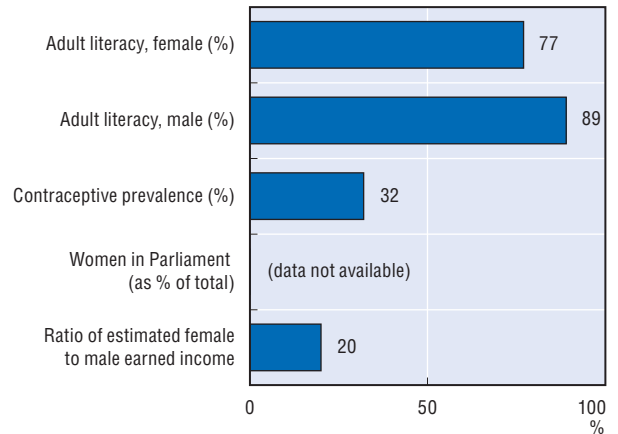
Islamic law supports polygamy, allowing Muslim men to take as many as four wives. According to a 2003 census carried out by the Oman Ministry for National Economy, almost 6% of all married men have more than one wife, with 5.5% having two wives and 0.4% having more than two.

In a study on Sharia in Islamic nations, Uhlman shows that women in Oman face discrimination in regard to parental authority. Islamic law views fathers as the natural guardians of children. Mothers are considered the physical custodians, but have no legal status. In the event of divorce, mothers are normally granted custody until children reach a certain age, at which time custody rights are transferred to fathers.

Islamic law provides for detailed and complex calculations of inheritance shares. Women may inherit from their father, mother, husband or children and, under certain conditions, from other family members. However, their share is generally smaller than that to which men are entitled.

### Physical integrity

The Constitution of Oman does not specifically address violence against women, as such abuse falls under more general legal provisions. Domestic violence is thought to be common, though incidents are rarely reported. The law does not recognise the concept of

**SIGI ranking****Select indicators of gender equality**

spousal rape. So-called honour crimes do occur. In fact, critics argue that the law to some extent justifies these crimes by allowing for lower penalties when a crime is committed in rage and/or in response to the victim's involvement in an "unlawful" act (such as adultery).

While female genital mutilation is not a common practice in the country, a report by Deeb shows that it does occur among some communities, notably in the Dhofar region. At present, there is no specific legislation against FGM, but the Ministry of Health prohibits doctors from performing the procedure in hospitals. This can be even more harmful for women as FGM is generally carried out by unskilled persons.

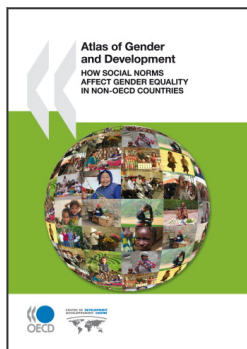
**Ownership rights**

Oman's legal frameworks support the financial independence of women to only a moderate degree. By law, women's access to land and access to property other than land is not restricted. But patriarchal traditions make female ownership difficult: a report by Cotula shows that women own as little as 0.4% of the land.

Women in Oman are legally entitled to access to bank loans and to enter into various forms of financial contracts but social practices dominate and limit their activity. A study by Deeb reports that government officials are known to deny women housing loans or land grants because they prefer to deal with applicants' male relatives.

**Civil liberties**

Women's freedom of movement is limited in the sense that they cannot travel outside the country without first acquiring permission from their husbands or other male relatives. Oman has no legal restrictions on women's freedom of dress, but virtually all Muslim women choose to wear a veil in public, covering at least their hair. Expatriate women in Oman are not subject to any dress restrictions, but are encouraged to respect local customs and wear modest clothing.



**From:**

## **Atlas of Gender and Development**

How Social Norms Affect Gender Equality in non-OECD Countries

**Access the complete publication at:**

<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264077478-en>

### **Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2010), "Oman", in *Atlas of Gender and Development: How Social Norms Affect Gender Equality in non-OECD Countries*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264077478-78-en>

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