

Introduction

- Qatar is a leader in the Middle East in women's rights and empowerment.
- Qatar has the highest female labor participation rate in the Arab world and women outnumber men in higher education in Qatar.
- Qatar has a uniquely empowering education and business environment for women, and the country has many examples of women in prominent positions of leadership.
- Domestic violence is illegal in Qatar, and the government provides free services to support victims of domestic violence, as well as broader family counseling.



Quick Facts

- Article 35 of the Qatari Constitution explicitly prohibits any legal discrimination on the basis of sex, as well as race, language, and religion
- Qatar has a 58% female labor participation rate – above the global average, and the highest in the Arab World
- Women outnumber men in higher education in Qatar
- Qatar's female participation in STEM fields is double that of the United States
- Qatar gave men and women the right to vote and run in municipal elections at the same time in 1999 – and deliberately held the first election on International Women's Day
- Four women are included in Qatar's Amir-appointed Shura Council, which advises on legislation and policy



Women can legally drive in Qatar, like Qatar-based artist Hadeer Omar filming her video blog "Carpooling for Arts."

History



In early Qatari Bedouin (inland) and 'Hadhri' (coastal) culture, women often needed to act as merchants and assume positions of leadership within their tribes while their husbands were gone for long periods of time for trade or pearl diving. This particular dynamic maintained the traditional Islamic gender roles while empowering women to act as leaders within their larger communities. Thus, Qatar has historically stood out from its neighbors in how its society views the role of women.

Qatar's culture shifted as it became a major petrochemical exporter. Younger Qatari women sought role models in their own country to understand how they should view their role in their rapidly changing society.

Examples of Female Qatari Leaders



HH Shiekha Moza Bint Nasser Al Misnad

Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser, mother of Qatar's Amir HH Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani and wife of the Father Amir HH Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, exemplifies female leadership in Qatar. When her husband became Amir, she became the most visible woman in the country and she embodied the question of how women could lead and live publicly in a changing, yet conservative society.

In 1995, the Amir's first year in power, the Amir and Sheikha Moza cofounded Qatar Foundation to bring higher education opportunities to Qatar and to develop a generation prepared for a knowledge-based, post-petrochemical economy.

Sheikha Moza continues to serve as Chairperson of Qatar Foundation and also chairs the Supreme Council of Health, the Supreme Education Council, and Sidra Medicine. She has also launched charitable international initiatives, including Education Above All and Silatech. Her work sends a clear message to Qatari girls: that they, too, can be leaders.

Sheikha Moza is an international icon of female empowerment, and has been described in *Vogue* as “[a]n authentic living legend, a strong example of emancipation, especially in a tight cultural and working environment.” She has become famous in the fashion industry for her designer clothes, custom-made to meet traditional customs without sacrificing elegance and style.



HE Sheikha Al Mayassa Bint Hamad Al Thani

Sheikha Al Mayassa, daughter of the Father Amir and Sheikha Moza, also plays a major role in Qatari civil society and foreign affairs. Sheikha Al Mayassa serves as Chairperson of Qatar Museums, the Doha Film Institute, and Reach Out to Asia, a nonprofit initiative dedicated to providing education to children in Asia through the framework of the Qatar Foundation.

Through Qatar Museums, Sheikha Al Mayassa elevates not just the work of Qataris, but of the whole Arab and Muslim world. Qatar Museums brings international artists to Qatar to showcase them and inspire the next generation of Qatari artists. The Doha Film Institute is the leading organization in Qatar dedicated to appreciation, financing, and education around the film industry.



HE Sheikha Hind Bint Hamad Al Thani

Sheikha Hind, also daughter of the Father Amir and Sheikha Moza, serves as Vice Chairperson and CEO of the Qatar Foundation, as well as in several other leadership positions in educational institutions in Qatar, such as the Founder and Chairperson of the Board of Directors of “Teach for Qatar,” an NGO which capitalizes on educated Qatari talent to transfer knowledge and their world-class education to younger students in Qatar’s primary school systems.



Dr. Hessa Al Jaber

Dr. Hessa Al Jaber is one of the first female cabinet ministers in Qatar, and was appointed as the first Minister of Information and Communications Technology (ICTs) in 2013. Her work has immensely impacted the telecommunications markets in Qatar, especially the government's modernization by introducing an online governmental portal, called 'Hukoomi,' that has helped streamline governmental processes and make communications swift and transparent. In addition to this, Dr. Hessa Al Jaber is also heavily involved in child protection and women empowerment programs.



Dr. Sheikha Abdulla Al Misnad

Shiekha Al Misnad served as the first female president of Qatar University from 2003 to 2015, having previously served in leadership positions in the university since the 1980s. She led the reforms in Qatar university, such as introducing new educational programs taught in the English language. Her mission to include programs taught in English language attracted faculty members, researchers, and students from all around the world which helped in the university's international recognition, ranking, and accreditation.



HE Sheikha Alya Bint Ahmed Al Thani

Sheikha Alya is the most prominent female diplomat from Qatar, serving as Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations. She has worked extensively with the United Nations, including the World Health Organization, the World Trade Organization, and the International Labor Organization. Her other foreign affairs experience includes General Consul of the State of Qatar to Switzerland and Counselor at the Permanent Mission of the State of Qatar to the UN in New York. She holds a bachelor's in economics from Qatar University and an MA in International Studies and Diplomacy from the University of London.

Dr. Hayat Khalil Nazar Heji

Dr. Hayat Heji is the director of Al Noor Institute for the Visually Impaired. Despite losing her sight at a young age, she pursued her education with great ambition in regular schools in Qatar before moving to the US for her higher education where she received her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Saint Joseph's University. She was one of the first women to receive the Women Day award in 2005 by H.H. Shiekha Moza. Since 2014, she has been a Consultant for Students with Special Needs Affairs in the Ministry of Education.

Young Leaders

The rapid cultural, educational, and generational shifts in Qatar have created a society where many of the most qualified candidates for positions of leadership in business and government are young women.

A woman born in Qatar in 1988, aged 30 today, would reach college age in 2006 at a time when she could pursue her education in a comprehensive variety of fields at Qatar University or at a

branch of an American university, whether in arts at Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar (est. 1998), in medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar (est. 2001), in engineering at Texas A&M University in Qatar (est. 2003), in business or computer science at Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar (est. 2004), or in foreign affairs at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar (est. 2005).

Their parents, by contrast, would remember a time before the first university in Qatar – Qatar University – was even founded in 1973. It is thus no wonder that Qatar is teeming with young women in leadership positions, examples include:

- **H.E. Lolwah Al Khater**, first female Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- **Dr. Huda Al Sulaiti**, scientist at the Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute whose work focuses on analysis of Qatar's various water resources, the associated health risk, and Qatar's water security goal .
- **Aysha Al-Mudahka**, CEO of Qatar Business Incubation Center (QBIC) which supports innovative start-ups, and co-founder of Roudha Centre for women's entrepreneurship and innovation
- **Nawal Akram**, comedian, model, athlete, and disability rights campaigner. She became wheelchair-bound at age of 12 due to Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD) disease. She has since founded Muscular Dystrophy Qatar to raise awareness of the condition, and was named one of BBC's 100 Women program in 2017.



H.E. Lolwah Al Khater

Creating Ecosystem for Success: Women's Protection at Home & Work

Article 57 of Qatar's Law No. 22 of 2006 broadly forbids domestic violence, and the Qatari government provides specific, free services to support victims of domestic violence, as well as broader family counseling, including:

- A confidential family helpline, ideal for individuals who may be unable to attend in-person sessions, with consultants trained on psychology and social, educational, behavioral, and domestic problems.
- In-person counseling and consultation for psychological, domestic, educational, and sharia-related issues.
- Social insurance for divorcees, families of missing persons, abandoned wives, widows, orphans, and more
- The Dar Al Aman shelter for victims of domestic violence, which confidentially provides accommodation, meals, healthcare, rehabilitation, legal counseling, and more
- An online form to submit a human rights complaint to the National Human Rights Committee

Yezenia Navarro, Orange the World, and Queens Without Scars



Yezenia Navarro, Mexican runner-up to Mrs. Universe 2014 and resident of Qatar, is collaborating with the UN campaign "Orange the World" with her own NGO, **Queens Without Scars**. Her NGO, based in Doha, has grown to include ambassadors from Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Australia, South Korea, Pakistan, and Ireland. Her goal is to raise awareness of and end violence against women.

Education

Qatari women outnumber men in Qatar's higher education system, and female participation in STEM fields in Qatar is double that of the United States. Qataris speculate women's high representation in academia in Qatar is due to the special opportunity that its universities offer to women from Muslim countries, who seek an advanced education but for familial or cultural regions would prefer to study in the region.



Labor Force



Qatar's female labor participation rate as of 2016 is 58.4% - above the global average (48.9%) and far surpassing the rest of the Arab World. Furthermore, Qatari women are more commonly employed in the fields of industry, construction, and information and technology than Qatari men are.

Qatar's female labor participation rate has risen markedly in the 21st century, from 40.9% in 2000, whereas the Arab World's average rate has remained stagnant at around 20% since 1990. The staggering rise of women in the workplace is a testament to how Qatar's small size enables swift societal shifts and how trailblazing female leaders have empowered a new generation of women and girls.

Sports

In two decades, Qatar has made rapid strides in women's participation in sports. In 1998, the Qatar Athletics Federation hosted its first women's sporting event – a women's track meet with the International Amateur Athletics Federation. Encouraging women's participation in sports quickly became a national priority, with Sheikha Moza establishing the [Qatar Women Sports Committee](#) (QWSC) in 2000. The following year, the Qatar Tennis Federation organized the first women's tennis championship in the Middle East.

In 2012, Qatar sent its first ever female competitors to the London Olympics, and made a bold statement about empowerment by having their female shooting competitor Bahiya Al Hamad carry Qatar's torch.

Female participation in sports is about more than athletics, as QWSC President Ahlam Al Mana said in 2013, "[QWSC's] work has enabled Qatari women to play a much bigger role in society and widen their opportunities."

