

LAND GOVERNANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES FOR
IMPROVED LAND ADMINISTRATION AND
ACCESS TO HOUSING



الاراضي العربية
Arab Land Initiative



GLTN
GLOBAL LAND TOOL NETWORK

LAND GOVERNANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST: REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES FOR IMPROVED LAND ADMINISTRATION AND ACCESS TO HOUSING

Copyright © United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2026

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part and in any form for educational or non-profit services without special permission from the copyright holder, provided acknowledgment of the source is made. No use of this report may be made for resale or any other commercial purpose whatsoever without prior permission in writing from the United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

PO Box 30030, Nairobi 00100, Kenya

Tel.: +254 20 762 3120

Fax: +254 20 762 3477

www.unhabitat.org

DISCLAIMER

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries, or regarding its economic system or degree of development. The analysis, conclusions and recommendations of this paper do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, its governing bodies or Member States.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Task Manager: Ombretta Temptra

Authors: Ali Abd El Raouf, Karim I. Abdrabo, Clarissa Augustinus, Safa Ashoub, Nicolò Bedino, Dina Dahood, Wael Alaghbari, Nihal El Megharbel, Hassan El Mouelhi, Doaa El Sherif, Heba Fekry, Mohamed Hamdy, Nada Jouni, Balsam Madi, Samer Radad, Elaf Raslan, Layla Raswol, Reham Reda, Eleonora Francesca Serpi, Ombretta Temptra

Reviewers and contributors: Deema Abuthiab, Ahmad Elatrash, Heather Elizabeth Elaydi, Ayman El-Hefnawi, Akram Homsy, Nanor Karageozian, Francesca La Monaca, Fernanda Lonardoni, Tarek Osseiran, Muslim Qazimi, Hussam Sulaiman, Samer Weber

Editing: Mary Ann Llanza, Paul Mundy, Wycliffe Omany, Olu Sarr and Nikola Stalevski

Layout: Francesca La Monaca

Strategic Partners: Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) of the Federal Republic of Germany, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development (SDC).

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The regional findings presented in this report are based on country-level land sector assessments conducted in 11 Middle Eastern countries between 2020 and 2022. The report assesses each country's land sector by examining performance across the core land administration functions - land tenure, land value, land use, land development, and land dispute resolution - and by mapping the region's existing land governance learning offer, including key institutions and available training courses. The national assessments were developed under the framework of the Arab Land Initiative and coordinated by the Urban Training and Studies Institute (UTI) of the Housing and Building National Research Center (HBRC), Egypt, under the leadership of UN-Habitat and the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN).

For more information visit www.unhabitat.org, www.gltn.net and www.arablandinitiative.gltn.net

LAND GOVERNANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES FOR IMPROVED
LAND ADMINISTRATION AND ACCESS TO
HOUSING



الاراضي العربية
مبادرة
Arab Land Initiative



GLTN
GLOBAL LAND TOOL NETWORK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of figures	6
List of tables	9
Abbreviations and acronyms	10
Definitions of key concepts	12
Executive summary	18

1 LAND GOVERNANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST 28

1.1	Objective and scope	28
1.2	Methodology	28
1.3	Context	34
1.4	Land governance: analysis, trends and emerging evidence	39

2 LAND SECTOR CAPACITIES IN LAND MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION 58

2.1	Land tenure	59
2.2	Land use	72
2.3	Land development	81
2.4	Land value	86
2.5	Land dispute resolution	92
2.6	Training and learning	99

3	NATIONAL LAND GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS	115
3.1	Kingdom of Bahrain	117
3.2	Republic of Iraq	131
3.3	Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan	143
3.4	Republic of Lebanon	157
3.5	Sultanate of Oman	170
3.6	State of Palestine	182
3.7	State of Qatar	192
3.8	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	200
3.9	Syrian Arab Republic	212
3.10	United Arab Emirates	225
3.11	Republic of Yemen	239
	References	248

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1	Land governance components and their interaction	30
FIGURE 2	Information collected in the mapping of the learning offer	32
FIGURE 3	Income distribution in the Middle East	35
FIGURE 4	Population (per region) living in slums and informal settlements	36
FIGURE 5	Increase of gender equality in property and inheritance laws.	38
FIGURE 6	Nine pathways for effective land administration	40
FIGURE 7	Comparison between the types of organizations in countries of the Mashreq, Gulf Cooperation Council & Yemen and North Africa	47
FIGURE 8	Web of critical land governance-related challenges in the Arab region Figure 13: Survey results on capacity assessment of land management and administration	53
FIGURE 9	Summarized results for all land administration system functions	58
FIGURE 10	Land tenure trends in in the Middle East	60
FIGURE 11	Land use trends in in the Middle East	73
FIGURE 12	Land development trends in in the Middle East	82
FIGURE 13	Land value trends in in the Middle East	87
FIGURE 14	Key elements of land value administration	88
FIGURE 15	Perceptions of corruption in the Middle East and North Africa	92
FIGURE 16	Land dispute resolution trends in in the Middle East	93
FIGURE 17	Number of courses offered by country (northern Middle East countries)	100
FIGURE 18	Number of courses by subject (northern Middle East countries)	100
FIGURE 19	Breakdown of available courses by country and by course subject (northern Middle East countries)	101
FIGURE 20	Type of course provider (northern Middle East countries)	101
FIGURE 21	Type of organization providing the learning offer (northern Middle East countries)	101
FIGURE 22	Duration of the learning offer – academic courses (northern Middle East countries)	102
FIGURE 23	Duration of the learning offer – short training courses (northern Middle East countries)	102
FIGURE 24	Type of learning offer (northern Middle East countries)	102
FIGURE 25	Education fees (northern Middle East countries)	102
FIGURE 26	Funding of the existing learning offers (northern Middle East countries)	103
FIGURE 27	Course subjects by land administration functions (northern Middle East countries)	103

FIGURE 28	Relationship between course subject material and land administration functions (northern Middle East countries)	103
FIGURE 29	Number of courses offered by country (southern Middle East countries)	104
FIGURE 30	Number of courses by subject (southern Middle East countries)	104
FIGURE 31	Breakdown of available courses by country and by course subject (southern Middle East countries)	105
FIGURE 32	Type of course provider (southern Middle East countries)	105
FIGURE 33	Duration of the learning offer (southern Middle East countries)	106
FIGURE 34	Grade/level of the existing learning offer (southern Middle East countries)	106
FIGURE 35	Type of learning offer (southern Middle East countries)	106
FIGURE 36	Education fees (southern Middle East countries)	106
FIGURE 37	Funding of the existing learning offers (southern Middle East countries)	106
FIGURE 38	Course subjects by land administration functions (southern Middle East countries)	107
FIGURE 39	Relation between course subject material and land administration functions (southern Middle East countries)	107
FIGURE 40	Number of courses offered by country (North Africa countries)	108
FIGURE 41	Number of courses by subject (North Africa countries)	108
FIGURE 42	Breakdown of available courses by country and by course subject (North Africa countries)	109
FIGURE 43	Type of course provider (North Africa countries)	109
FIGURE 44	Duration of the learning offer (North Africa countries)	109
FIGURE 45	Grade/level of the existing learning offers (North Africa countries)	109
FIGURE 46	Type of learning offer (North Africa countries)	110
FIGURE 47	Education fees (North Africa countries)	110
FIGURE 48	Funding of the existing learning offers (North Africa countries)	110
FIGURE 49	Course subjects, by land administration functions (North Africa countries)	110
FIGURE 50	Relation between course subject material and land administration functions (North Africa countries)	111
FIGURE 51	Number of offered courses by country in the Middle East, Gulf and North Africa	111
FIGURE 52	Analysis by course subject in relation to the land administration functions for the Middle East, Gulf and North Africa	112
FIGURE 53	Type of course provider of land-related courses in the Middle East, Gulf and North Africa	112
FIGURE 54	Type of organization offering land-related courses in the Middle East, Gulf and North Africa	113
FIGURE 55	Duration of the learning offers in the Middle East, Gulf and North Africa	113
FIGURE 56	Type of land-related learning offers in the Middle East, Gulf and North Africa	113

FIGURE 57	Grade/level of the existing learning offer in the Middle East, Gulf and North Africa	114
FIGURE 58	Funding of the existing learning offers in the Middle East, Gulf and North Africa	114
FIGURE 59	Historical timeline of land-related laws in Bahrain	118
FIGURE 60	Land administration trends in Bahrain	124
FIGURE 61	Land registration process in Bahrain	126
FIGURE 62	Historical timeline of land-related laws in Iraq	132
FIGURE 63	Population of concern in Iraq	133
FIGURE 64	Land administration trends in Iraq	136
FIGURE 65	Historical timeline of land-related laws in Jordan	144
FIGURE 66	Map of existing and estimated municipal populations in Jordan, 2019 and 2030	145
FIGURE 67	Urban encroachment in Irbid Governorate	146
FIGURE 68	Land administration trends in Jordan	150
FIGURE 69	Historical timeline of land-related laws in Lebanon	158
FIGURE 70	Map showing population density in Lebanon (2017)	159
FIGURE 71	Land administration trends in Lebanon	165
FIGURE 72	Historical timeline of land-related laws in Oman	171
FIGURE 73	Land administration trends in Oman	177
FIGURE 74	Historical timeline of land-related laws in Palestine	183
FIGURE 75	Map showing land control in the State of Palestine	185
FIGURE 76	Land administration trends in Palestine	188
FIGURE 77	Historical timeline of land-related laws in Qatar	193
FIGURE 78	Land administration trends in Qatar	198
FIGURE 79	Historical timeline of key land-related events in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	201
FIGURE 80	Land administration trends in Saudi Arabia	208
FIGURE 81	Historical timeline of land-related laws in Syria	213
FIGURE 82	Map of land use/land cover in Syria	215
FIGURE 83	Representation of the institutions dealing with land administration functions in Syria	217
FIGURE 84	Land administration trends in Syria	218
FIGURE 85	Schematic representation of the continuum of land rights in Syria	221
FIGURE 86	Historical timeline of key land-related events in United Arab Emirates	226
FIGURE 87	Organizational chart of the UAE Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure	232
FIGURE 88	Land administration trends in UAE	234
FIGURE 89	Historical timeline of key land-related events in Yemen	240
FIGURE 90	Land administration trends in Yemen	245

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1	Evaluation framework for land administration systems	31
TABLE 2	Land administration index ranking for the MENA region and other regions globally	44
TABLE 3	Share of agricultural land holders in the Middle East disaggregated by sex	63
TABLE 4	Results of the assessment on land governance and land use in the Middle East	75
TABLE 5	Results of the assessment on reasons for inefficient implementation of land use plans in the Middle East	76
TABLE 6	Overview of land administration functions in Bahrain	124
TABLE 7	Overview of land administration functions in Iraq	136
TABLE 8	Overview of land administration functions in Jordan	150
TABLE 9	Overview of land administration functions in Lebanon	165
TABLE 10	Overview of land administration functions in Oman	177
TABLE 11	Civil and security control of land in the West Bank and Gaza	184
TABLE 12	Overview of land administration functions in Palestine	188
TABLE 13	Overview of land administration functions in Qatar	198
TABLE 14	Types of legislation in the Saudi Arabia	202
TABLE 15	Governing bodies involved in the land sector in Saudi Arabia	205
TABLE 16	Overview of land administration functions in Saudi Arabia	208
TABLE 17	Overview of land administration functions in Syria	218
TABLE 18	Overview of land administration functions in United Arab Emirates	234
TABLE 19	Laws related to land and urban planning in Yemen	242
TABLE 20	Main land sector stakeholders in Yemen	243
TABLE 21	Overview of land administration functions in Yemen	245

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

A

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
AED	United Arab Emirates Dirham
AoR	Area of Responsibility
AQAP	Al Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula

C

CDR	Council for Development and Reconstruction, Lebanon
CSO	Civil Society Organization

D

DGU	Directorate General of Urbanism, Lebanon
DLD	Dubai Land Department
DLS	Department of Lands and Survey, Jordan
DRC	Danish Refugee Council

E

EREC	Emirates Real Estate Corporation
-------------	----------------------------------

F

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
------------	---

G

GALSUP	General Authority for Land, Surveying and Urban Planning, Yemen
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDCA	General Directorate of Cadastral Affairs, Syria
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German International Cooperation Agency)
GLTN	Global Land Tool Network

H

HLP	Housing, Land and Property
------------	----------------------------

I

IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ITC	Integrated Tourism Complexes, Oman

K

KSA Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

L

LBP Lebanese Pound

LRC Local Resettlement Committee, Yemen

LRD Land Registration Directorate, Jordan

M

MENA Middle East and North Africa

MoLA Ministry of Local Administration, Jordan

N

NA North Africa

NBSAP National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans

NDC National Determined Contribution

NELGA Network of Excellence on Land Governance in Africa

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

NLP National Land Policy

NRC Norwegian Refugee Council

O

ONSS Oman National Spatial Strategy, Oman

OPWR Office of Public Works and Roads, Yemen

Q

QNMP Qatar National Master Plan

R

RERA Real Estate Regulatory Authority, UAE

RERD Real Estate Registration Department, Iraq

S

SCP Supreme Council for Planning, Oman

SDG Sustainable Development Goal

U

UAE United Arab Emirates

UNCCD United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNRWA United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

USD United States of America Dollar

DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

"Affordable housing is generally defined as that which is adequate in quality and location and does not cost so much that it prohibits its occupants from meeting other basic living costs or threatens their enjoyment of basic human rights. Housing affordability is affected by many factors including capital variables such as land or infrastructure or building materials; and occupational variables such as land leases, service cost, interest rates, etc."¹

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) refers to the different ways people can resolve disputes without a trial. Common ADR processes include mediation, arbitration, and neutral evaluation. These processes are generally confidential, less formal, and less stressful than traditional court proceedings. ADR often saves money and speeds settlement. In mediation parties play a key role in resolving their own disputes. This often results in longer-lasting outcomes, greater satisfaction, and improved relationships.²

ASSESSMENT

Assessment in land use planning refers to the systematic evaluation of land or plans based on specified criteria. This includes evaluating land performance when used for specified purposes.³ In the context of land use plans, assessment examines whether plans exist (have been issued by the responsible governmental body), are adequate (good enough to be feasible to implement and fulfill the needs of inhabitants or development goals of the country) and are enforced (implemented according to the plan).

BUILDING PERMIT

An official authorization issued by a competent government authority (such as a municipal or local planning department) that grants permission to construct, modify, expand or demolish a building or structure on a specific plot of land in accordance with applicable laws, building codes and zoning regulations. It is a form of regulatory control that helps ensure that construction activities are safe, sustainable and aligned with public policy objectives such as urban planning, disaster resilience and environmental management.

COMPENSATION

"Compensation for any losses of and/or damage to personal, real or other property or goods, including rights or interests in property. Compensation can take many forms, including cash and/or in kind, providing they are adequate and fair. For example, cash may replace land and common property resources. Where land has been taken, those evicted should be compensated with land commensurate in quality, size and value, or better."⁴

1 UN-Habitat (2019). *The Global Housing Affordability Challenge: A more comprehensive understanding of the housing sector*. Urban Data Digest Version 2, May 2019 Edition.

2 New York State Unified Court System (2022). *Alternative Dispute resolution*.

3 Elsevier. (n.d.). *Land evaluation*. In *ScienceDirect Topics: Earth & Planetary Sciences*.

4 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2013). *Evictions, Acquisition, Expropriation and Compensation: Practices and selected case studie*.

CONTINUUM OF LAND RIGHTS

A conceptual framework that recognizes land tenure as a spectrum ranging from informal and customary arrangements to formal and legally registered ownership. It acknowledges that multiple tenure forms can coexist within a society and that each can provide varying degrees of security, legitimacy and recognition. Rather than treating tenure as a simple divide between formal and informal, the continuum approach supports the idea that rights can evolve or transform over time, and that improving tenure security can occur at any point along this spectrum. The framework promotes inclusive land governance systems that record, administer and protect all legitimate rights (individual, collective, customary or state held) based on local contexts.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Law, legislation and policies aimed at protecting land, conserving natural resources and safeguarding ecosystems to ensure a healthy environment for present and future generations. It involves preventing, reducing and mitigating environmental degradation caused by human activity, including pollution, deforestation and unsustainable land use.

FORCED EVICTIONS

“The permanent or temporary removal against their will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection.”⁵ Such evictions violate the right to adequate housing unless carried out in exceptional circumstances, in accordance with international human rights standards and following due process, consultation and provision of compensation and resettlement.

INFORMAL SETTLEMENT

A built environment that is not officially authorized or confirmed by the government, where housing has been constructed on land to which occupants have no legal claim or that does not comply with planning and building regulations. Such areas often lack basic infrastructure, services and tenure security. They are a manifestation of inadequate housing and urban poverty, typically arising from rapid urbanization and limited access to affordable formal land and housing markets.

JURISDICTION

The power, right or authority to interpret and apply the law, or the authority of a sovereign power to govern or legislate.⁶ In land use planning contexts, jurisdiction refers to the spatial area of legal and administrative authority.⁷ Jurisdiction determines the geographic scope of authority for planning and regulation. National level land use plans cover the whole country. Regional land use plans cover part of the country, such as a governorate or group of governorates. Local land use plans cover city or town scale. At the city level, land use plans cover main growing urban centers, a neighborhood or a number of neighborhoods.

5 OHCHR (1997). *The right to adequate housing (Art. 11.1): Forced evictions (General Comment No. 7)*. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

6 Anderson, J. E., & England, R. W. (2015). *Use-Value Assessment of rural lands: Time for reform?* Fair & Equitable. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.

7 Anderson et al. (2015)

LAND ACQUISITION

“Land acquisition refers to all methods of obtaining land for project purposes, which may include outright purchase, expropriation of property, and acquisition of access rights, such as easements or rights of way. Land acquisition may also include: (a) acquisition of unoccupied or unutilized land whether or not the landholder relies upon such land for income or livelihood purposes; (b) repossession of public land that is used or occupied by individuals or households; and (c) project impacts that result in land being submerged or otherwise rendered unusable or inaccessible. “Land” includes anything growing on or permanently affixed to land, such as crops, buildings and other improvements, and appurtenant water bodies.”⁸

LAND ADMINISTRATION

Land administration is the process of recording, managing, governing and disseminating information about the ownership, value and use of land when implementing land management policies.⁹ It includes systems and institutions responsible for land tenure, land use planning, land development, land valuation and land dispute resolution. Effective land administration supports equitable access to land, tenure security, sustainable land management and conflict resolution.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

“Land development is the application of resources to improve land and enable a different, better, or more efficient land use. These resources may include capital investments (e.g. constructing buildings, services, or infrastructure), labour (e.g. clearing or draining land for agriculture), or administrative processes (e.g. securing or revising planning permissions).”¹⁰ Land development includes the following land administration processes: building new physical infrastructure and utilities; planning constructions; acquiring land for public use; expropriating land; changing land use by granting planning permissions and building and land-use permits; and distributing development costs.¹¹

LAND DISPUTE

A land dispute arises from conflicting interests (real or perceived) over access to, use of and control over land and land-based resources by two or more parties. Such disputes may arise from overlapping claims, unclear boundaries, inheritance issues, expropriation or inconsistencies between customary and statutory systems. Disputes can occur at different scales: individual, family, community or society. They can be a root cause of a conflict, or part of a conflict that has other roots.¹²

8 World Bank (2016a). [Guidance Note for Borrowers. ESS5: Land Acquisition, Restrictions on Land Use and Involuntary Resettlement](#). Environmental & Social Framework for IPF Operations. p.1

9 Williamson, I., Enemark, S., Wallace, J. and Rajabifard, A. (2010). [Land Administration for Sustainable Development](#). ESRI Press Academic.

10 FAO (2003). [The Multilingual Land Tenure Thesaurus](#). p.67

11 Williamson et al.(2010).

12 USAID (2013). [USAID Issue Brief Land and Conflict. Land Disputes and Land Conflicts. Property Rights and Resource Governance](#). [Briefing Paper]

LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISM

Land dispute resolution mechanisms should “provide access to justice to deal with infringements of legitimate tenure rights. They should provide effective and accessible means to everyone, through juridical authorities, to resolve disputes over tenure rights; and to provide affordable and prompt enforcement of outcomes”.¹³ Some mechanisms deal with all kinds of land conflicts, others concentrate on one major type of land. Special land courts or tribunals can be put in place to deal with large numbers of similar cases, such as dealing with housing, land and property rights claims for compensation or restitution process in post-conflict situations.¹⁴

LAND EXPROPRIATION

A legal process by which a government or public authority acquires privately owned land for purposes deemed to be in the public interest (such as infrastructure, urban development or environmental protection). It grants the state the right to take possession of land even when the owner does not wish to sell. Expropriation must be carried out in accordance with the law and international standards, ensuring due process, fair and prompt compensation and appropriate procedural safeguards to protect the rights and livelihoods of affected persons. Land expropriation is also known as eminent domain or compulsory purchase.¹⁵

LAND GOVERNANCE

“Land governance concerns the rules, processes and structures through which decisions are made about access to land and its use, the manner in which the decisions are implemented and enforced, the way that competing interests are managed. Land governance encompasses statutory, customary and religious institutions, as well as informal institutions [...]. It covers the legal and policy framework for land, as well as traditional practices [...] it includes all relevant institutions from the state, civil society and private sector.”¹⁶

LAND TENURE

Land tenure is the relationship, whether legally or customarily defined, among people, as individuals or groups, with respect to land and associated natural resources. Rules of tenure define how property rights in land are to be allocated within societies, along with associated responsibilities and restraints. In simple terms, land tenure systems determine who can use what resources, for how long, and under what conditions.¹⁷

13 FAO (2012). *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and forests in the context of national food security*. (VGGT) p.11

14 Wehrmann, B. (2008). Land Conflicts. A practical guide to dealing with land disputes. *Land Conflicts. A practical guide to dealing with land disputes*. Gtz | Land Management

15 World Bank (2016b). *Urban Re-generation Decision Tool*; FAO (2012). *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and forests in the context of national food security*.

16 FAO and UN-Habitat (2009). *Towards improved land governance*. Land Tenure Working Paper 11. p.9

17 GLTN (2013, February 28). *Theme 1: Access to Land and Tenure Security*.

LAND USE	The ways land is employed or occupied by humans for different purposes and economic activities, such as agriculture, forestry, urban development, infrastructure and conservation. ¹⁸ As a function of land administration, land use refers to “the processes and institutions related to control of land use through adoption of planning policies and land use regulations at national, regional and local levels; the enforcement of land use regulations; and the management and adjudication of land use conflicts.” ¹⁹
LAND USE PLAN	A land-use plan (also known as spatial plan) is an instrument for managing, regulating and optimizing land development and the spatial organization of land uses. It documents current and future land uses, addressing: what land uses exist; who is responsible for them; what future land use should look like; what types of land should be used, by whom and for what; what should be protected; what rights exist for public, private or group interests; and where different land uses should be located. The land use planning process allocates land between competing uses through rules, regulations, government mechanisms, data collection and analysis, participatory planning, approvals and implementation. ²⁰
LAND USE REGULATION	Land use regulations include all ordinances, resolutions, codes, rules, regulations and official policies governing the development and use of land, including permitted use or zoning, density or intensity of use, maximum height and size of buildings, the provision for reservation or dedication of land for public purposes, the design, improvement and construction standards and the urban growth boundary. ²¹
LAND VALUE	The current International Valuation Standards Council definition of land market value is “The estimated amount for which an asset or liability should exchange on the valuation date between a willing buyer and a willing seller in an arm’s length transaction, after proper marketing and where the parties had each acted knowledgeably, prudently and without compulsion”. ²² Measuring land value is crucial for estimating the monetary value of a unit of land and technically valuing how much a plot of land is worth, which is in turn needed for calculating the revenues through land taxation.
LEGAL PLURALISM	Legal pluralism indicates that “a range of customary, statutory, [religious] and hybrid institutions [...] and regulations with legal or practical authority over land” ²³ coexist in the same country. Legal pluralism impacts the types of land disputes, the range of land dispute resolution mechanisms that exist, and can influence the way land dispute resolution takes place.

18 FAO (2021). [Land use statistics and indicators: Global, regional and country trends 1990–2019](#). (FAOSTAT Analytical Brief No. 28). FAO.

19 Enemark, S. (2009). [Land Administration Systems, managing rights, restrictions and responsibilities in land](#). Map World Forum, Hyderabad, India. p.3

20 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2021c). [Tenure Responsive Land Use Planning. A Practical Guide for Country Level Intervention](#).

21 Adapted from: Lawinsider (2022). [Land use regulations definition](#).

22 International Valuations Standards Council (2017). [International Valuation Standards 2017](#); UN-Habitat/GLTN (2018). [Valuation of unregistered lands: A policy guide](#)

23 NRCN, UN-Habitat and UNHCR (2008). [Land, Property and Housing in Somalia](#). p. 124

PROPERTY TAX

Tax on property is defined as recurrent and non-recurrent taxes on the use, ownership or transfer of property. These include taxes on immovable property or net wealth, taxes on the change of ownership of property through inheritance or gift and taxes on financial and capital transactions. This indicator relates to government as a whole (all government levels) and is measured in percentage both of GDP and of total taxation.²⁴

SOCIAL MARKET VALUE

When valuing unregistered land, social market values need to also be included, as value is a socially constructed phenomenon and cannot be divorced from the social context. Valuation systems should consider non-market values such as social, cultural, religious, spiritual and environmental values as appropriate. Combining conventional market valuation methods with non-market methods will enable the valuer to arrive at a fairer estimation of the value of land rights.²⁵

TEMPORARY DISPLACED POPULATION SETTLEMENT

A human settlement established to accommodate people who have been displaced due to conflict, disaster or other emergencies, but who are expected to return once conditions allow. Such settlements can take the form of planned sites established with formal government authorization, or spontaneous shelters. While government confirmation or coordination is preferred for legitimacy, safety and service provision, many temporary settlements emerge organically in response to urgent humanitarian needs before formal authorization can occur.

24 OECD (2022). [Tax on property as a per cent of GDP](#).

25 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2018). [Valuation of unregistered lands: A policy guide](#).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PART 1: LAND GOVERNANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

Advancing good land governance is essential to sustainable social, economic and environmental development in the Middle East and the broader Arab region and is crucial for fostering peace and stability. The urgency of this work is amplified by converging crises, including accelerating impacts of climate change, vulnerabilities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing waves of conflict and instability that affects millions of people across the region. Despite the recognized importance of addressing land governance issues, the Middle East suffers from a critical shortage of land-related information needed to systematically assess capacity needs and monitor progress. Land information is often fragmented across national or municipal institutions and is not digitized or sex disaggregated. Even among experts and practitioners from the various disciplines that make up the land governance ecosystem, the term “land governance” is understood in fragmented and inconsistent ways.

This report contributes to filling this information gap by establishing a broader analytical framework and identifying key regional and national trends in land governance. It further strengthens a shared understanding of land governance and highlights pathways to advance the good land governance agenda. This report is one of the first and more systematic efforts to create a common basis for dialogue on land governance in the region.

The report examines land governance in the Arab region through three interconnected parts. Part 1 analyses the context and the current trends and emerging evidence in land governance,

including land administration frameworks, regional challenges and their implications for tenure security, poverty reduction, women’s land rights, climate issues and displacement. Part 2 assesses land sector capacities across the five core functions of land administration: land tenure, land use, land development, land value and land dispute resolution mechanisms; it also assesses the land governance related learning offer available in the region. Part 3 presents national profiles for eleven Middle Eastern countries (Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen), covering their land-related legal and institutional frameworks, land sector stakeholders and land management and administration systems.

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis presented in this report draws on a rigorous multi-method approach to assessing land governance capacity across the Middle East. National background papers for eleven countries, as listed above and contained in Part 3 of this report, were developed by national consultants with extensive experience in the land sector, using comprehensive desk reviews, structured interviews with key informants and standardized questionnaires. These questionnaires, developed by UN-Habitat, the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (UTI) and made available in English and Arabic, were adapted to each national context to capture country-specific dynamics while maintaining comparability across the region.

Findings from the eleven national capacity assessments were complemented by five qualitative national reports (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria) produced by UN-

Habitat and GLTN for the Arab Land Initiative, as well as a regional mapping of education and training courses on land governance conducted across the broader Arab region by UN-Habitat and UTI to assess learning offers and capacity development needs.

CONTEXT

The Middle East is the most unequal region in the world: the richest 10 per cent of the population account for 65 per cent of total income, with the top 1 per cent alone capturing 30 per cent.²⁶

Such extreme levels of income concentration reduces economic growth and increases poverty.²⁷ While consolidated data on land inequality is scarce, global trends suggest significant land inequality exists in the region. Over a quarter of the population (25.6 per cent) live in slums,²⁸ and although small-scale family farms produce 80 per cent of the region's agricultural output, they control only 25 per cent of the arable land, with the remaining 75 per cent is concentrated in corporate operations.²⁹

Population growth and unregulated urbanization – The region is now predominantly urban, with over 60 per cent of its population living in cities.³⁰ 90 per cent of the population is concentrated on just 4 per cent of the region's total land area.³¹ By 2050, urbanization is expected to reach 70 per cent, with an

estimated 646 million inhabitants.³² Land prices have risen sharply over three decades, resulting in significant growth of informal settlements, and a chronic shortage of adequate, affordable housing.³³ Today, 30.9 per cent of the urban population lives in slums or inadequate housing conditions.³⁴

Land degradation and food security – Just 4 per cent of land in the Arab region is arable, with 73 per cent affected by land degradation and 92 per cent of the region classified as hyper-arid.³⁵ Economic costs of land degradation range between 2 and 7 per cent of the GDP,³⁶ contributing to a decline in agricultural productivity in a region that imports 50 per cent of the calories it consumes.³⁷

Women's land rights – The Arab region has the widest gender gap in the world at approximately 40 per cent.³⁸ Women account for less than 7 per cent of agricultural holders and control only 1–3 per cent of the region's land surface despite playing a significant role in agricultural production.³⁹ A recent study revealed that 58 per cent of women surveyed had land registered in the name of a male relative,⁴⁰ undermines their land tenure security, particularly in case of divorce or widowhood.

Displacement – There are 16.6 million forcibly displaced and stateless individuals in the Arab region, including 12.8 million internally displaced

26 Alvaredo, F., Assouad, L. and Piketty, T. (2018). *Measuring Inequality in the Middle East 1990–2016: The World's Most Unequal Region*.

27 Ncube, M., Anyanwu, J.C. and Hausken, K. (2013). *Inequality, Economic Growth, and Poverty in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)*. African Development Bank Group, Working Paper No. 195 December 2013.

28 UN-Habitat and UNDP (2020). *The State of Arab Cities 2020: Financing Sustainable Urbanization in the Arab Region*.

29 FAO (2017). *Family Farming in the Near East and North Africa*. Family Farming Knowledge Platform.

30 Arab Development Portal. Demography

31 UNDP (2010). *Population levels, trends and policies in the Arab Region: challenges and opportunities*. Arab Human Development Report Research Paper Series.

32 Ibid.

33 UNESCWA (2020). *Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020*.

34 Ibid.

35 UNESCWA (2016). *Land Degradation Neutrality in the Arab Region – Preparing for SDG Implementation Factsheet*.

36 UNESCWA and FAO (2017). *Arab Horizon 2030: Prospects for Enhancing Food Security in the Arab Region*.

37 UNESCWA and FAO (2021). *Arab Food Security: Vulnerabilities and Pathways*.

38 World Economic Forum (2021). *Global Gender Gap Index 2021*.

39 FAO (2024). *Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agrifood Systems in the Near East and North Africa region*. FAO Regional conference for the Near East, 37th session, Amman;

40 UN-HABITAT/GLTN and Union of Agricultural Work Committees (2022). *Women Empowerment and Socioeconomic Development in the Arab Region*. UN-Habitat.

persons (18 per cent of the global total) and 2.4 million refugees.⁴¹ Between 2010 and 2019, the region experienced 30.1 million new instances of displacement due to conflict or disaster.⁴²

LAND GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES

The countries examined in this report face significant land governance challenges that reflect broader trends across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. These include high population density and rapid urbanization, food insecurity, water scarcity, land degradation, land rights issues and large-scale land acquisition and displacement. This section outlines how these challenges manifest across the region.

- **Population density in the MENA region has doubled in the past 20 years.** The region comprises 21 countries, with a total area of 9.5 million km² and approximately 464 million people.⁴³ The urban population has doubled in recent decades, now accounting for 54 per cent of the total population.⁴⁴
- **The Middle East has high levels of income inequality.**⁴⁵ Fifty-six per cent of national income accrues to the top 10 per cent of earners, and only 12 per cent to the bottom 50 per cent. Gulf countries (excluding Yemen) record the highest levels of income inequality in the region.⁴⁶
- **The MENA region is the only region that experienced an increase in the proportion of undernourished people over the past decade.**⁴⁷ Only one-third of total land area is agricultural land, while just 5 per cent is arable.⁴⁸ Arable land has declined by about 20 per cent since 1994 due to unsustainable land and water management, weak land tenure, instability and displacement.⁴⁹
- **The MENA region follows a policy framework that enables state facilitation of large-scale land acquisitions by domestic and foreign investors.** The Land Matrix reports that, globally, 33 million hectares have been acquired through large scale land acquisitions. These deals often have dire consequences for affected local communities who lose access to ancestral lands while reaping little socio-economic benefit.⁵⁰
- **Property rights in 16 of 17 MENA countries are affected by corruption, political interference or cronyism.**⁵¹ The land sector suffers from one of the highest bribery rates globally, with 1 in 5 people who needed land services saying they had to pay a bribe to access them.⁵²
- **The MENA region is among the most water-stressed in the world, with water use exceeding the availability of renewable freshwater resources.** Fifteen out of the 17 MENA countries are considered water stressed, and 11 face extreme water scarcity.⁵³
- **Over half of all land and one-quarter of arable land in the MENA region is degraded.**

41 UNHCR (2025). *Middle East and North Africa*.

42 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021). *A decade of displacement in the Middle East and North Africa*.

43 World Bank Open Data. Accessed 1 June 2022.

44 UNESCWA (2020). *Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020*.

45 This includes and goes beyond MENA countries.

46 Moshirif, R. (2020). *Income Inequality in the Middle East*. World Inequality Lab.

47 World Bank (2025). *Post-pandemic poverty estimates for the MENA region*. World Bank Blogs.

48 OECD and FAO (2018). *OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2018-2027: Special Focus on the Middle East and North Africa*.

49 World Bank (2019). *Sustainable land management and restoration in the Middle East and North Africa region: Issues, challenges, and recommendations*. World Bank.

50 Land Matrix initiative (2021). *Analytical Report III: Taking stock of the global land rush*.

51 *Bertelsmann Transformation Index* (2022).

52 Transparency International (2013). *Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer*.

53 UNICEF (2021). *Running dry: The unprecedented scale and impact of water scarcity in the Middle East and North Africa*.

Desertification is influenced by population growth, increasing agricultural demands, resource-intensive technologies and climate change, while intensive management practices and natural hazards further exacerbate the process.⁵⁴

- **The MENA region is extremely vulnerable to climate change.** Precipitation is expected to decrease while temperatures and the magnitude and frequency of droughts are projected to rise. Drought conditions are expected to reduce agricultural productivity, and losses of ecosystem services from land degradation are estimated to be about four times the global average.⁵⁵
- **The MENA region is experiencing an increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and migrants.** The region hosts 16.6 million forcibly displaced and stateless people,⁵⁶ including 12.8 million internally displaced⁵⁷ and 2.4 million refugees.⁵⁸ Between 2010 and 2019, there were 30.1 million new instances of displacement due to conflict or disaster.⁵⁹
- **The MENA region experiences persistent gender inequality in land ownership.** While many countries have laws to protect women's rights to own and inherit land, customary practices and discriminatory legal frameworks often limit these rights through male-dominated inheritance traditions, limited access to legal support and societal resistance.
- **The MENA region faces persistent deficiencies in land management.** Weak land management and land administration

negatively impacts development objectives and prominently features among the key root causes of conflict ravaging the Arab states.

- **The MENA region faces a chronic shortage of adequate and affordable housing.** This is primarily driven by rising urban land costs and the private sector's focus on upper-middle-income families, while high youth unemployment and barriers to mortgage lending fuel the informal housing sector.⁶⁰
- **Property registration and titling processes in the MENA region are vague, obsolete and cumbersome.** These processes undercut the ability to afford housing, use land productively and secure ownership. The absence of clear records and complicated transfer processes especially impinge on women's ability to access property and financing services.
- **Municipal capacities in the MENA region vary greatly in delivering city planning and infrastructure.** There are great disparities among municipalities in terms of territorial extension, population and the financial and administrative resources available to deliver and sustain services.
- **Rapidly growing urban populations in the MENA region are challenging institutional capacities.** Growing populations challenge institutions to deal with overcrowding, housing shortages and inadequate infrastructure and services. Cities are encroaching onto agricultural land where unregulated outskirts grow faster than the cities themselves, with refugee influx further exacerbating these challenges.

54 World Bank (2019).

55 Ibid.

56 UNHCR (2025). *Middle East and North Africa*.

57 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2023). *GRID 2023: Internal displacement and food security*.

58 UNHCR (2023). *Global Report 2022*.

59 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021). *A decade of displacement in the Middle East and North Africa*.

60 World Bank. (2023). *Land matters: Can better governance and management of scarcity prevent a looming crisis in the Middle East and North Africa?* World Bank.

PART 2: LAND SECTOR CAPACITIES IN LAND MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS

Land management and administration involve five key functions of land that ensure effective use and regulation of land and land-related resources.

Land tenure involves securing access to land and its related resources, recording and protecting land rights, performing cadastral mapping and legal surveys to establish parcel boundaries, enabling the creation of new properties or changes to existing ones and managing land transfers.

Land value encompasses assessing the worth of land and properties, calculating and collecting revenue through taxation and handling disputes over valuation and taxation.

Land use involves setting and enforcing regulations and policies to control how land is utilized at various levels.

Land development covers planning and constructing infrastructure, acquiring land for public purposes, granting permits and allocating development costs.

Finally, **land dispute resolution** handles expropriation, settles land-use conflicts and resolves uncertainties over land rights and boundaries.

In the Middle East, the evolving institutional reforms and land governance practices are leading to discernible regional trends in how these land administration functions are operationalized and adapted. The study also identifies regional trends in training and learning opportunities around land governance in the region.

LAND TENURE

The land tenure research conducted for this study involved: identifying the common land tenure types found in the region; assessing the accessibility and usefulness of the land registration, cadastral and digital land data systems for ordinary citizens; analysing the functionality of the land and property markets for both local populations and refugees; and analysing the types and extent of evictions occurring in the region.

Regional trends can be found that cut across all the different types of countries in the Middle East, whether they are impacted by conflict, part of the Gulf States, have high or low citizen populations, or vary in income levels. The study identified the following regional trends for land tenure, cadastral systems and land markets:

- **Multiple tenure types can be found in the region:** private land tenure (mulk), public/state land tenure (miri), historical communal land tenure (mashaa) and religious land tenure (waqf).
- **The proportion of the population with secure land tenure, including citizens, foreigners, refugees and those on registered and unregistered land, remains unknown.** Similarly, consolidated data on women's security of tenure is unavailable.
- **Citizens with legal land documents enjoy secure land tenure rights and can use their land as collateral for loans.** However, the study provides no evidence that these same protections extend to non-citizens, refugees or women generally.
- **Rising urban land prices have made land ownership unaffordable.** Since land represents a major input in housing delivery, this has contributed to a shortage of affordable housing throughout the region.

- **It is easy to transfer registered land between sellers and buyers**, but the mechanisms for accessing land are not understood or only partially understood.
- **Forced evictions are not common in the region and only occur in a few countries.**

The study also identified numerous land governance challenges associated with tenure across the region, including weak land administration, inequality in land access and tenure security, land-related poverty, corruption and state capture of land by elites. Additionally, while large-scale evictions occur in only a few countries, massive displacement has had lasting impacts on land administration systems in conflict-affected countries and some neighboring states.

LAND USE

The research on land use undertaken for this study aimed to assess the status and capacity of the national, regional and local land use planning systems in the Middle East, with a particular focus on government land use planning systems.

This involved the identification of the common land use planning approaches, regulations, processes and land information systems found in the region, and an assessment of their adequacy and level of implementation and enforcement.

The study identified the following regional trends in land use:

- **Land use planning and implementation face governance challenges throughout the region**, with conflict-affected countries such as Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Jordan, Palestine and Syria experiencing more severe challenges.
- **While most countries have developed land use plans at the different levels**

of government, weak enforcement mechanisms undermine their effectiveness.

These plans are inadequate and not enforced, except for local level plans, mostly due to lack of coordination among land-related institutions, overlapping institutional roles and insufficient human resource capacity.

- **There are numerous land use regulations in the region** addressing various land issues. Regulations for rural land, building permits and environmental protection are common, but only building permit regulations are adequate and enforced.
- **Most countries in the region face significant human resource capacity gaps**, which is a key reason contributing to the inadequacy and lack of enforcement of land use plans.
- **Governments can easily acquire private land for public purposes**, however the procedures for this are not clear.
- **Rules governing public and state land management and use lack clarity.**
- **Land information systems for both land use and natural resources are common, but accessibility varies widely.** While most land use systems are digital, natural resource systems are predominantly not digitized.

Several land governance challenges associated with land use and planning emerged across the region, including: the influence of power dynamics and corruption on land use planning; inadequate vertical and horizontal coordination within governments; weak human resource and financial management capacity; insufficient public participation in planning processes; and the neglect of informal settlements and rural areas. Conflict-affected countries face these same challenges while also struggling to keep pace with rapidly changing ground conditions, compounded by weak rule of law and lack of strategic planning capacity necessary to manage large, displaced populations.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

The research on land development undertaken for this study aimed to assess the mechanisms and capacity for implementing development plans and strategies in the region. This involved examining government land expropriation mechanisms, cost-sharing arrangements between public and private actors, infrastructure delivery and the regulatory frameworks supporting land development. The study identified the following regional trends in land development:

- **Government land expropriation mechanisms enable authorities to acquire private land for public purposes relatively easily.** However, in most conflict-affected countries, these mechanisms are considered both unfair and cost-ineffective.
- **Most countries lack mechanisms to ensure equitable distribution of development costs between public and private actors.** This can result in private developers benefiting disproportionately from public investment.
- **New development projects across the region are commonly built without infrastructure or services, including in urban areas.** Projects are often built far from, or not connected to, existing cities.
- **City planning and the delivery of infrastructure is generally considered a municipal function in the region.** There are great disparities among municipalities in terms of territorial extension, population and the financial and administrative resources available to deliver and sustain services.

The study also identified a number of land development governance challenges throughout the region, including: land development initiatives influenced by the agendas of powerful political groups; inadequate government budgets preventing implementation of development plans; the private sector's important role in land development being hampered by absent laws

and regulations and inadequate mechanisms; and development plan implementation leading to land disputes due to insufficient consultation with local communities or unfair compensation. Geopolitical tensions and ongoing conflicts have also undermined investor confidence, further impeding the progress of development projects.

LAND VALUE

The land value research carried out for this study aimed at assessing the capacity of countries in estimating the value of land and buildings through a clear and institutionalized methodology. This also involved the assessment of the land/property taxation system, in terms of the tax rate, tax base, tax administration, including an accessible data system and the integration of the land tax system in decision-making. The study identified two key regional trends in land value:

- **Most countries have established urban valuation systems and land tax systems for urban areas.** Far fewer countries have implemented rural valuation and land tax systems.
- **Accessible and digital land value data is scarce across the region.** This data gap creates inefficient land markets and directly impacts housing prices and the supply of affordable housing.

Several land governance challenges associated with land value were identified, including: outdated regulations and the need for developer regulations; lack of transparency, which affects pricing and increases disputes; corruption; valuation systems that apply only to registered land rather than all land; state capture that sometimes limits governments' ability to recover taxes; and, in contexts of large population displacement, market volatility and non-transparency about land values that impair the ability of both host and refugee communities to find affordable housing.

LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The research on land dispute resolution undertaken for this study aimed at understanding whether countries in the region have affordable, unambiguous, transparent and unbiased mechanisms for resolving land disputes, and whether these mechanisms function effectively in practice. Accessible and functioning land dispute resolution mechanisms are crucial to enable a national land administration system to perform its functions, to maintain social and economic stability, and to avoid the escalation of land disputes into bigger land conflicts. This is important in all countries but even more so in fragile contexts and countries emerging from conflict. The study identified the following regional trends in land disputes and dispute resolution:

- **Many different types of land dispute resolution mechanisms co-exist in the Middle East**, including statutory, customary, religious and alternative dispute resolution systems, each with its own legitimacy and efficiency depending on the context.
- **Formal statutory dispute resolution systems exist in most countries across the region**, but often face challenges such as high costs, slow processing, geographic inaccessibility, corruption and limited public trust, particularly in conflict-affected contexts.
- **Customary and religious dispute resolution mechanisms operate outside of the statutory system**; customary mechanisms rely on tribal norms and community governance, while religious mechanisms, particularly Sharia courts, which are commonly used for inheritance-related land disputes.
- **Legal pluralism, widespread in the Mashriq countries (Syria, Yemen, Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan), presents risks and opportunities**, as forum shopping can lead to legal uncertainty and discrimination

against vulnerable groups, yet religious and customary dispute resolution mechanisms increase access to justice when formal mechanisms are inaccessible or perceived as too confrontational, particularly for women.

- **Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms such as negotiation, conciliation, mediation and arbitration are also used**, though they are not always well developed.

The study identified several regional land governance challenges associated with land dispute resolution, including: congestion in the judicial court system that forces people to seek alternative mechanisms for resolving land disputes; the complexity and bureaucracy of the court system, where people often lack the required legal or civil documents; discrimination against vulnerable groups, particularly in violent conflict settings; and legal pluralism that enables forum shopping.

TRAINING AND LEARNING

The research on training and learning undertaken for this study aimed to map the education and training courses related to land governance in the Arab region and assess the key elements of their curricula. This involved assessing the quantity and thematic coverage of the learning offered, identifying opportunities for engaging with existing education and training institutions to complement the existing learning offer and giving directions for establishing more comprehensive curricula on land governance across the region.

The regional assessment was carried out in the following countries: Middle East (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Syria) and North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia). North Africa is included because the learning offer for specific competences and higher education is not homogeneously distributed across the countries

and experts are often trained in neighbouring countries within the region, or outside the region. The study identified the following regional trends in training and learning:

- **Overall, the land-related learning offers are well spread out across the region,** with North Africa playing a leading role.
- **Land use and land development are the most taught land administration disciplines.** Most of the courses are on land use planning followed by geospatial studies.
- **The learning offer in the region is mostly dedicated to spatial and land use planning,** followed by geospatial sciences. Little attention is paid to developing the capacities of the land sector in other fields.
- **Very little offer is being provided by training institutes and professional bodies,** resulting in limited options for continuous professional learning.

Challenges in the training and learning landscape include: too few courses on land value and land dispute resolution, with virtually no expertise being developed in these fields; a strong focus on conventional land administration rather than on more modern, fit-for-purpose approaches; and offering courses that are often outdated with respect to current technologies and contemporary methods used in land governance.

PART 3: NATIONAL LAND GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

Part 3 of the report summarizes the results of the national land sector assessments conducted across countries in the Middle East. The study covers eleven countries: Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.⁶¹ The country profiles provide a structured overview of each country's land-related context and institutional arrangements.

The profiles outline the legal and institutional frameworks governing land, identify relevant stakeholders and assess land management and administration functions. Core components across countries include analyses of land tenure, land value, land use, and land development systems. Additionally, the profiles examine mechanisms for land dispute resolution and evaluate existing learning and capacity development initiatives related to land governance.

The national chapters do not attempt to include all available information or represent every expert perspective, particularly where views diverge. Rather, they aim to establish a baseline for discussion on improving land governance, fostering a shared understanding available information available and knowledge gaps on the subject, through peer-reviewed and validated summaries of the key land governance features and trends.

⁶¹ Unfortunately, it was not possible to undertake the assessment for Kuwait, so the country has not been included.

1

LAND GOVERNANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

LAND GOVERNANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

1.1 OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

Good land governance is key for the sustainable social, economic and environmental development of the Arab region. It significantly contributes to peace and stability. The centrality of land governance (or some aspects of it) is recognized by communities of experts of different disciplines as critical to achieving shared development and peace goals.

This is reflected in the Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020,⁶² which acknowledges the role of land governance for the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁶³ For example, to accelerate the implementation of SDG 11, the report states that “the improvement of governance, land and property management and administrative frameworks and access to affordable land and housing are all required in urban and rural areas”.⁶⁴ However, land information is limited and often fragmented across national or municipal institutions, and is often not digitized or gender disaggregated.

Experts and practitioners of different disciplines comprising the land governance ecosystem also have a fragmented understanding of the term “land governance”. The lack of data on land-related SDG indicators⁶⁵ reflects the still emerging interest and capacities of dedicated institutions to monitor the progress made.

This report contributes to filling this information gap by establishing a broader analytical framework and identifying key regional and national trends in land governance. It further strengthens a shared understanding of land governance and highlights pathways to advance the good land governance agenda in the Middle East and the wider Arab region. The report aims to enhance the understanding, interest and engagement of leaders and national land sector actors in land governance and its elements.

The breadth of the topic, the variety of professional stakeholders and perspectives on how progress should be defined, and the scarcity of consolidated and accessible data mean that different methods and steps were required to collect, compile, analyse and validate information (see methodology section below). This report is one of the first and more systematic efforts to create a common basis for dialogue on good land governance in the region.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

The research methodology was developed by the Arab Land Initiative, led by UN-Habitat and the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN), in close collaboration with the Urban Training and Studies Institute from Egypt. Experts, authors and editors were involved in preparing

62 UNESCWA (2020). *Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020*.

63 Land governance is closely related to SDGs 1, 2, 5, 11, 15 and 16.

64 UNESCWA (2020). p.150.

65 Indicator 1.4.2: Proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, (a) with legally recognized documentation, and (b) who perceive their rights to land as secure, by sex and type of tenure. Indicator 5.a.1 (a) Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure – or on 5.a.2 Proportion of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women’s equal rights to land ownership and/or control.

interim products and in the steps leading to the publication of this report.

The methodology development process benefitted from collaboration with the Institut Agronomique et Vétérinaire Hassan II in Morocco and insights from 'Land Tenure Systems in North Africa: A Scoping Study', recently released by the Network of Excellence on Land Governance in Africa (NELGA) North Africa Node, featuring Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco and Mauritania.⁶⁶

This report presents information collected, analysed and validated by international, regional and national experts over the 2019–2022 period. The countries included in the study are Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.⁶⁷ A mixed methods research approach was adopted to collect, analyse and validate the information.

CONCEPTUALIZATION AND CALL FOR PROPOSALS

The vision to undertake national capacity assessments of the land administration system of 11 countries in the Middle East, managed by a partner organization, was conceptualized in 2019. A call for proposals was then launched to identify suitable regional partners in the Arab region that could lead the research work. The Urban Training and Studies Institute from Egypt was awarded the contract.

The methodology for the production of the 11 background national reports (summarized

in Part 3 of this report) was co-developed by UN-Habitat, GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute.

FRAMEWORK

The land sector in this report is described in terms of five functions: land tenure, land use, land development, land value and land dispute resolution. The first four functions are adapted from the framework used by GLTN partners⁶⁸ (see Figure 1) to describe land management and land administration. Land dispute resolution has been added as a component that addresses each of the other four functions. Land disputes were researched and presented separately to simplify the data collection and analysis.

These five land management and administration functions, underpinned by land policies and legislation (including regulations), land institutions and land information infrastructure, compose the land governance ecosystem discussed in this report.

The GLTN methodology for assessing capacity in the land sector⁶⁹ was also used, along with the evaluation framework for land administration below (see Figure 1 and Table 1).⁷⁰ This integrated framework was used to undertake a status assessment of how national land sectors function in the Middle East. Each of the five functions of land administration includes a range of actions that ensure land is managed in a fair, efficient and sustainable manner.⁷¹ These actions are summarized in the next page.

66 NELGA (2022). *The Scoping Study Executive Report Land Tenure Systems in North Africa Consortium. Strengthening Advisory Capacities for Land Governance in Africa*. (SLGA) Programme, Addis Ababa

67 It was not possible to undertake the assessment for Kuwait and the country has not been included.

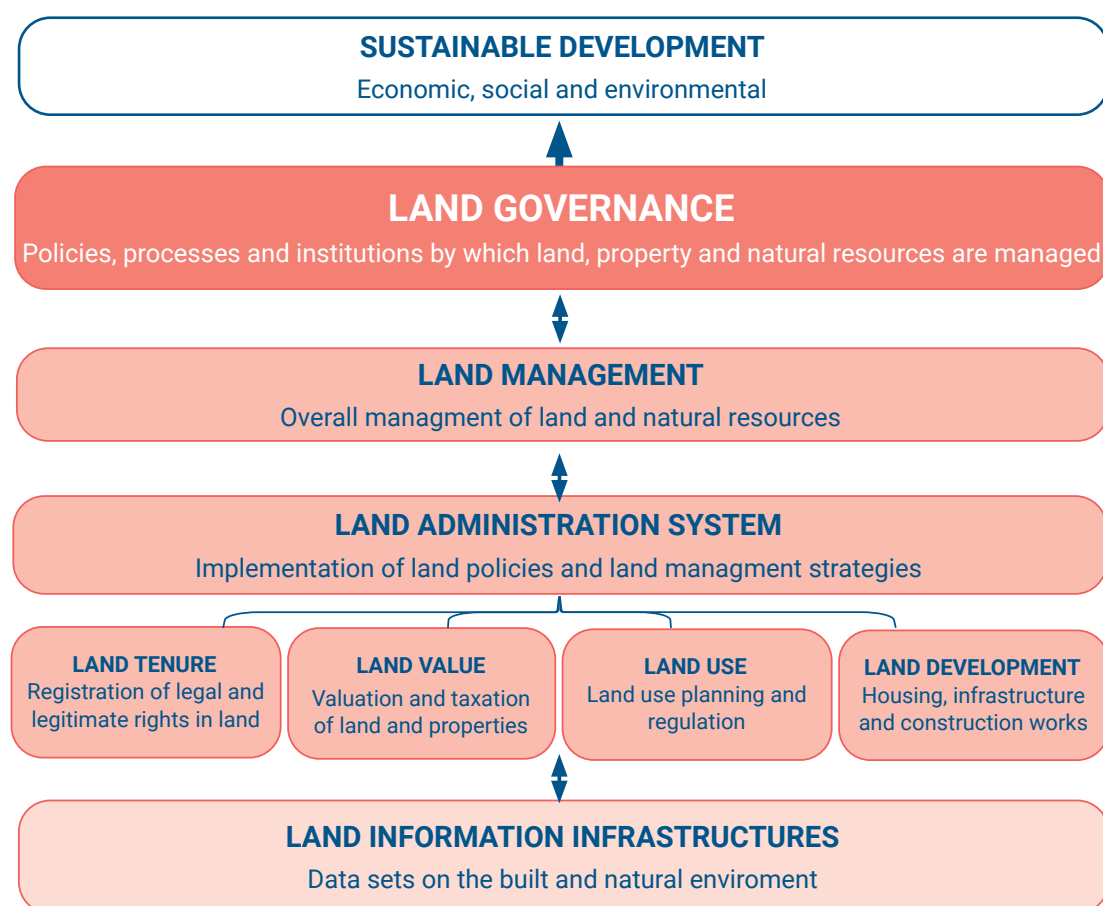
68 Williamson, I., Enemark, S., Wallace, J. and Rajabifard, A. (2010). *Land Administration for Sustainable Development*. ESRI Press Academic.

69 UN-Habitat (2021a). *Implementing land policies: A practical guide for assessing capacity*.

70 Steudler, D., Rajabifard, A., & Williamson, I. P. (2004). *Evaluation of land administration systems. Land Use Policy*. 21(4), 371–380.

71 Williamson, I., Enemark, S., Wallace, J. and Rajabifard, A. (2010)

FIGURE 1: LAND GOVERNANCE COMPONENTS AND THEIR INTERACTION



Source: Authors, based on Enemark, S. (2022). *Responsible Land Governance and Secure Land Rights in Support of the 2030 Global Agenda*.

Land Tenure

- Securing and recording access to land and land-related resources, and their allocation.
- Determining parcel boundaries through cadastral mapping and legal surveys.
- Creating new properties or altering existing ones.
- Transferring property ownership or use rights from one party to another through sale, lease or credit security.

Land value

- Assessing the value of land and properties.
- Calculating and gathering revenues through taxation.
- Managing and adjudicating land-valuation and taxation disputes.

Land use

- Controlling land use by adopting land

policies and land-use regulations at the national, regional and local levels.

- Enforcing land-use regulations.

Land development

- Building new physical infrastructure and utilities.
- Planning construction.
- Acquiring land for the public.
- Changing land use granting planning permissions and building and land-use permits.
- Distributing development costs.

Land dispute resolution

- Expropriating land.
- Managing and adjudicating land-use conflicts.
- Managing and adjudicating doubts and disputes regarding land rights and parcel boundaries.

TABLE 1: EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR LAND ADMINISTRATION SYSTEMS

POLICY LEVEL

LAND POLICY PRINCIPLES

- Whether a national policy on land administration exists
- Clear statements describing the function and purpose of the land administration system
- Presence of an autonomous land board or equivalent body

LAND TENURE PRINCIPLES

- Legal acknowledgement and definition of different tenure arrangements
- Degree of tenure security, including volume and resolution of disputes
- Consideration of social and economic inclusion, especially for marginalized groups

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL FACTORS

- Structure of fees, taxes and cost–benefit arrangements
- Indicators on land market activity (value, volume and trends)
- Sources and organization of financial support and investment

MANAGEMENT LEVEL

CADASTRAL AND LAND ADMINISTRATION PRINCIPLES

- Mechanisms ensuring the protection of land rights
- Systems that support a land market that is reliable, efficient, straightforward and affordable

INSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES

- Identification of ministries and agencies with responsibilities in land administration
- Degree of centralization or decentralization in the institutional setup
- Number and distribution of relevant offices and institutions
- Extent of private-sector engagement, including contract volume

SPATIAL DATA INFRASTRUCTURE PRINCIPLES

- Adoption of standards and identification of core datasets
- Accessibility and pricing of data networks
- Approaches to data modelling and definition

OPERATIONAL LEVEL

TECHNICAL PRINCIPLES

- Characteristics of data acquisition, including quality, accuracy and methods
- Timeliness and reliability of data updating and maintenance

EXTERNAL FACTORS

HUMAN RESOURCES

- Size of the workforce involved in land administration (public and private)
- Existence of professional bodies or associations

CAPACITY BUILDING

- Number of academic programs and enrolled students in relevant disciplines
- Availability of funding for training and skills development
- Ongoing training activities such as seminars and workshops

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

- Number of research organizations working in the land administration field

TECHNOLOGY

- Flexibility to adopt different systems, tools or methodologies

REVIEW PROCESS

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

- Measures of user satisfaction
- Evaluation of progress toward strategic goals and objectives
- Existence of a routine review or audit mechanism

Source: Authors, based on Steudler, D., Rajabifard, A., & Williamson, I. P. (2004). *Evaluation of land administration systems. Land Use Policy*.

QUESTIONNAIRE AND STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

To support the data collection, a standard questionnaire, available in English and Arabic, was developed by UN-Habitat, GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute. The questionnaire contained 26 main questions with quantitative follow-up questions and could also be used to guide structured interviews for qualitative data.

The questionnaires and structured interview questions were adapted, as necessary, to each of the national contexts and were used to guide the interviews conducted with key informants.

The consultants had extensive prior knowledge and experience in the land sector. They undertook data collection and analysis, at times individually and at times in pairs, drawing on questionnaire responses, interviews with key informants and desk reviews. In parallel with this study, five national reports (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria) on the land sector were produced by UN-Habitat and the Global Land Tool Network for the Arab Land Initiative. These published studies discuss some of the same research questions but were based only on qualitative data. The draft reports were made available to the authors to inform and complement the relevant national background papers.

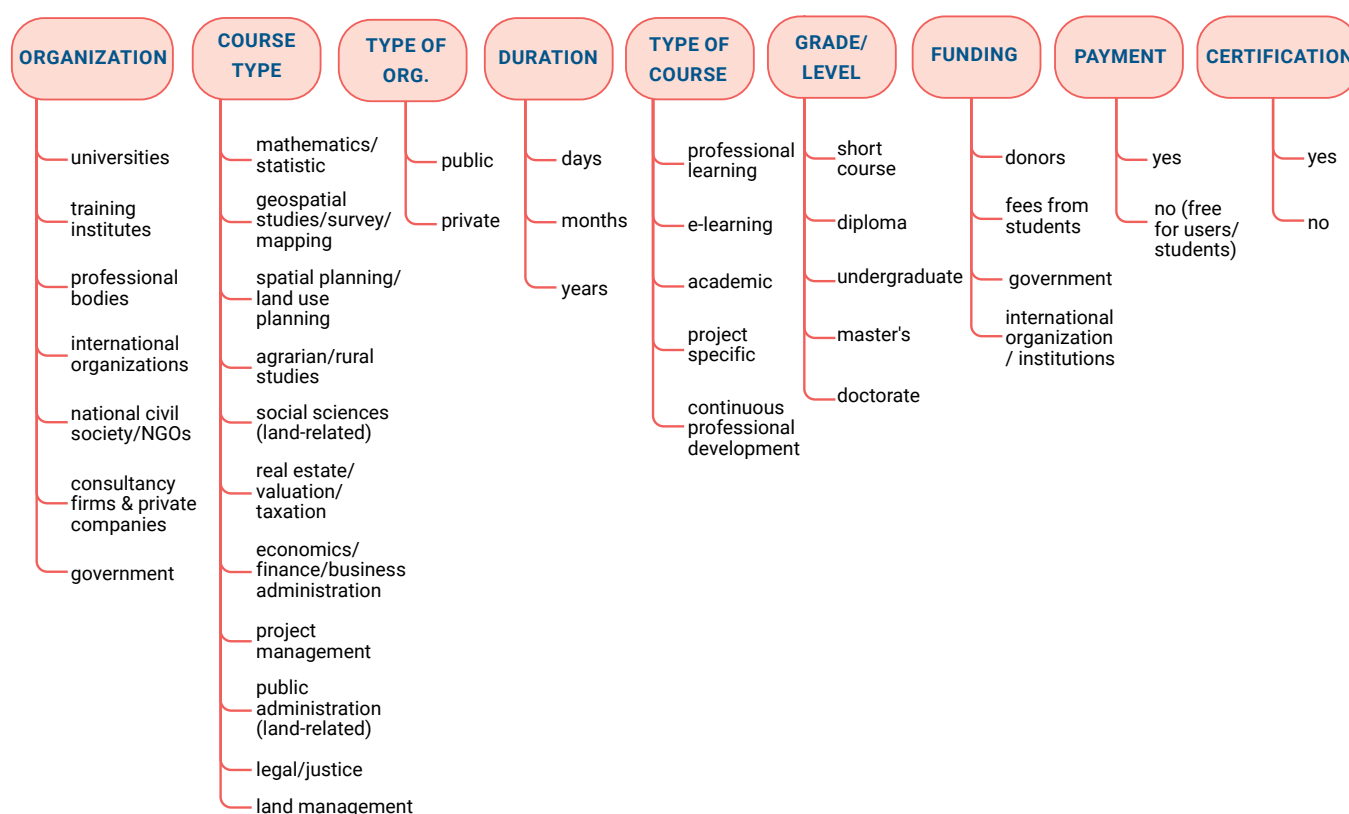
NATIONAL BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Urban Training and Studies Institute identified national consultants to develop country background papers, typically with one lead author per country.

MAPPING OF THE LEARNING OFFER

On a separate track, but as part of the land administration capacity assessment, a specific methodology was developed to identify educational and training courses on land

FIGURE 2: INFORMATION COLLECTED IN THE MAPPING OF THE LEARNING OFFER



Source: Authors, based on UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023). *Developing land governance capacities in the Arab region: Patterns, challenges and opportunities for improving the existing learning offer.*

governance – or aspects of land governance – and to review the curricula used. This mapping of the learning offer was conducted across the entire Arab region,⁷² not only in the 11 Middle East countries discussed in this report (Figure 2).

The rationale for this broader scope is that the learning offers for specific competences and higher education are not homogeneously distributed across countries, and experts are often trained in neighbouring countries within the region, or outside the region.

The mapping assesses the quantity and thematic coverage of the learning offers (Table 2) and identifies opportunities for engaging with existing education and training institutions to complement existing learning offers. It also provides guidance for establishing more comprehensive curricula on land governance across the region.

REVIEW AND VALIDATION OF NATIONAL BACKGROUND PAPERS

The national background papers were reviewed by selected experts and, once in their final draft stage, a workshop to present, enrich and validate the results took place. The workshop was held at the Urban Training and Studies Institute in Cairo, Egypt in November 2021. The national background papers were then finalized.

FINAL VALIDATION, ANALYSIS AND PREPARATION OF THE REGIONAL REPORT

The preparation of this report began in the first half of 2022, based on a wide range of information: (1) 11 national capacity assessment background papers developed from quantitative and qualitative data; (2) five reports (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria) developed from qualitative data; (3) specific information

generated and validated during a Writeshop⁷³ with authors and UN-Habitat experts; (4) UN-Habitat knowledge and experience in the region; and 5) desk studies.

This information was used to develop summarized country profiles (see Part 3) and to identify the major trends in the region (see Part 2). All material was then finalized and edited after the Writeshop by a group of editors.

The methodology adopted for this study aims to benchmark land administration systems by comparing different functions. This approach helps to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each system and identify priorities for improving the performance of property right systems, which can be linked to policy development. It also enables connections to be drawn with related sectors, including finance, governance, environment and society. In addition, the methodology provides a basis for comparison over time, facilitating cross-country comparisons in land administration performance and monitoring reforms in land and property, an area where progress is often challenged by powerful vested interests.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS REPORT

Limitations of the study include: (1) breadth of the topic, size and diversity of the region and differing country contexts; (2) lack of consolidated, comparable, accessible and gender disaggregated information on land in Middle East countries; (3) lack of standardization of the key informants from

72 Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Iraq.

73 Held in Ismailia, Egypt, in June 2022.

different professions in different countries, with some perspectives better captured than others; (4) limited literature available on the topic; (5) limited understanding of all aspects of the topic by some of those interviewed; (6) different backgrounds, expertise and emphasis of the researchers.

Regarding mapping of the learning offers, the main limitations include: (1) absence of a full list of available courses in some countries or universities as presented on their online platforms; (2) the identification of courses and the analysis may be partially affected by the specializations of the researchers and respondents; (3) courses with the same or similar names might offer different types of content in different learning institutions; (4) some courses might not have been included in the mapping, while others might be specific to some processes or projects and may not be administered routinely.

Nevertheless, the authors considered the information collected sufficient to identify key trends and patterns.

1.3 CONTEXT

Advancing social, economic and environmental sustainability in the Middle East is key to the future of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The effects of climate change are compounded by the fragilities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and by the waves of unrest and conflict that affect millions of people in many Arab countries. This section provides an overview of the key trends for the Middle East and MENA regions.

INCOME INEQUALITY

The Middle East is the most unequal region in the world. The income of the richest, approximately 10 per cent of the population, represents 65 per cent of the total, with the income of the top 1 per cent representing 30 per cent of the total (figure 3).⁷⁴ Such extreme levels of income concentration are associated with a reduction in economic growth and increased poverty.⁷⁵ Further, economic growth is not sufficient to lift people out of poverty because policies to distribute its benefits are either absent or ineffective.⁷⁶

LAND INEQUALITY

Global land inequality is growing in most countries and recent data shows that it is significantly higher than previously reported, directly threatening the livelihoods of 2.5 billion people and contributing to other forms of inequalities related to wealth, power, gender and health, affecting smallholder farmers and overall undermining stability and the development of sustainable societies.⁷⁷ While there is no consolidated data on land inequality in the Middle East, given global trends and the correlation between income inequality and land inequality trends, it is likely that land inequality is also present in the region.

Manifestations of this imbalance are: (a) over a quarter (25.6 per cent) of the population in the MENA region live in slums,⁷⁸ and (b) although small-scale family farmers account for 80 per cent of agricultural production, they control only 25 per cent of arable land, while the remaining 75 per cent is concentrated in corporate-type agriculture.⁷⁹

74 Alvaredo, F., Assouad, L. and Piketty, T. (2018). *Measuring Inequality in the Middle East 1990–2016: The World's Most Unequal Region?*. Review of Income and Wealth Series 0, Number 0, Month 2018. DOI: 10.1111/roiw.12385

75 Ncube, M., Anyanwu, J.C. and Hausken, K. (2013). *Inequality, Economic Growth, and Poverty in the Middle East and North*.

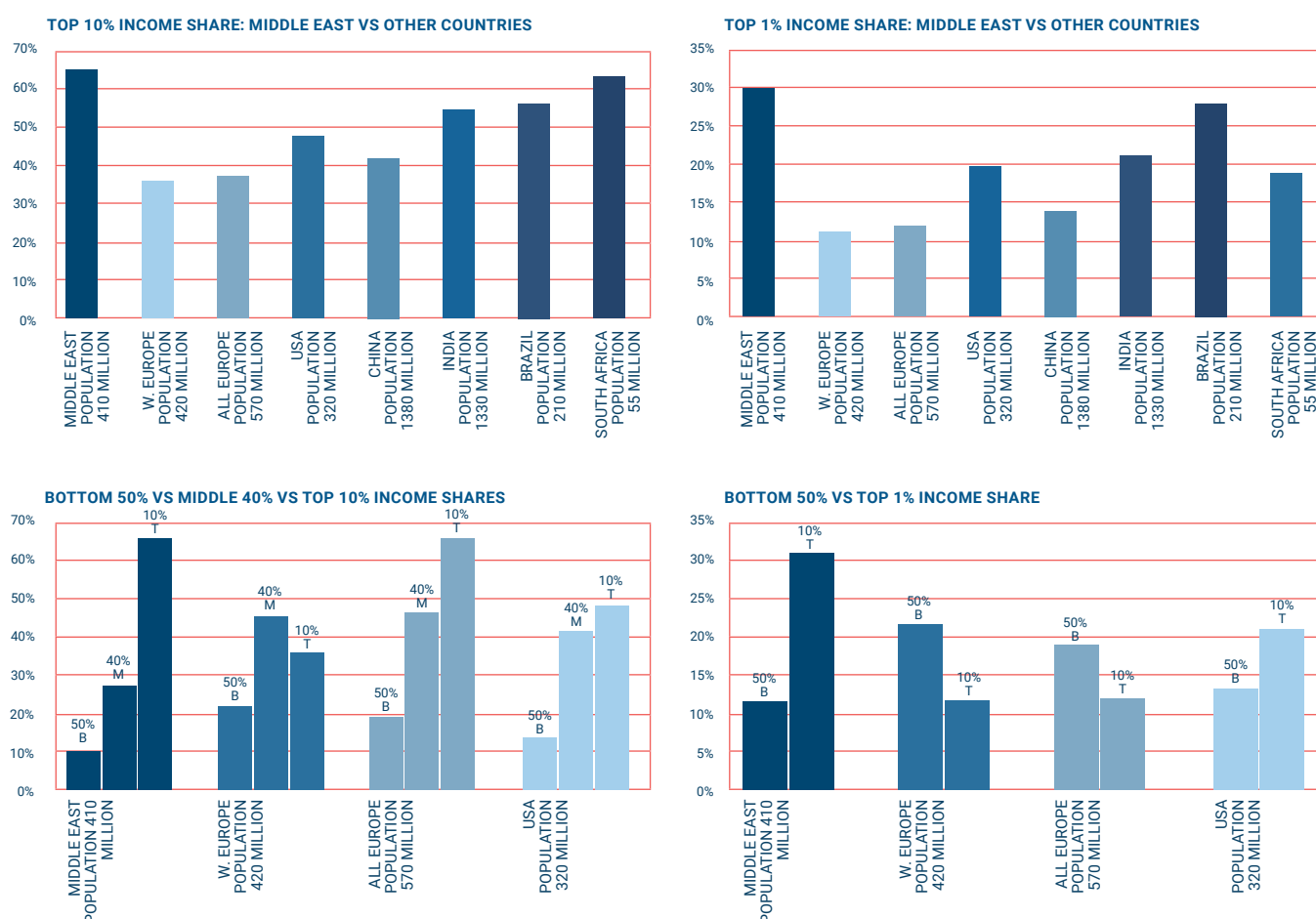
76 UNESCWA (2020).

77 Oxfam and International Land Coalition (2020). *Uneven Ground: Synthesis Report Land Inequality at the Heart of Unequal Societies*.

78 UNDP and UN-Habitat (2020). *State of Arab Cities Report 2020: Financing Sustainable Urban Development in the Arab Region (Executive Summary)*.

79 FAO (2017). *Family Farming in the Near East and North Africa*. Family Farming Knowledge Platform.

FIGURE 3: INCOME DISTRIBUTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST



Source: Authors, based on Alvaredo, F., Assouad, L. and Piketty, T. (2018).

POPULATION GROWTH AND POVERTY

Poverty has increased, rising from 2.1 per cent of the population in 2010 to 5.8 per cent in 2018.⁸⁰ Besides income inequality, several converging factors contribute to this rise in poverty. This includes rapid population growth, with the population of the MENA region increasing from 105 million in 1960 to over 464 million in 2020.⁸¹

These trends put immense pressure on the land and on land uses, especially considering that 90 per cent of the region's population live on just 4 per cent of the total land area.⁸² The population

is concentrated along coastal areas – which are the most affected by sea level rise and the salination of freshwater reserves – and along the fertile river plains, leading to heightened tensions between urban and rural land uses.

UNREGULATED URBANIZATION AND LACK OF ADEQUATE HOUSING

The region is predominantly urban, with over 60 per cent of the population living in urban areas.⁸³ The high urbanization rates – expected to reach 646 million inhabitants and 70 per cent of the population⁸⁴ by 2050 – presents both

80 World Bank, Poverty and Inequality Platform. *Poverty headcount ratio at \$1.90 a day (2011 PPP) (% of population) – World, Middle East & North Africa, Middle East & North Africa (excluding high income)*.

81 World Bank Open Data. Accessed 1 June 2022.

82 UNDP (2010). *Population levels, Trends and policies in The Arab Region: Challenges and Opportunities*. Arab Human Development Report Research Paper Series.

83 Arab Development Portal. *Demography*.

84 UNDP (2010). *Population levels, Trends and policies in The Arab Region: Challenges and Opportunities*. Arab Human

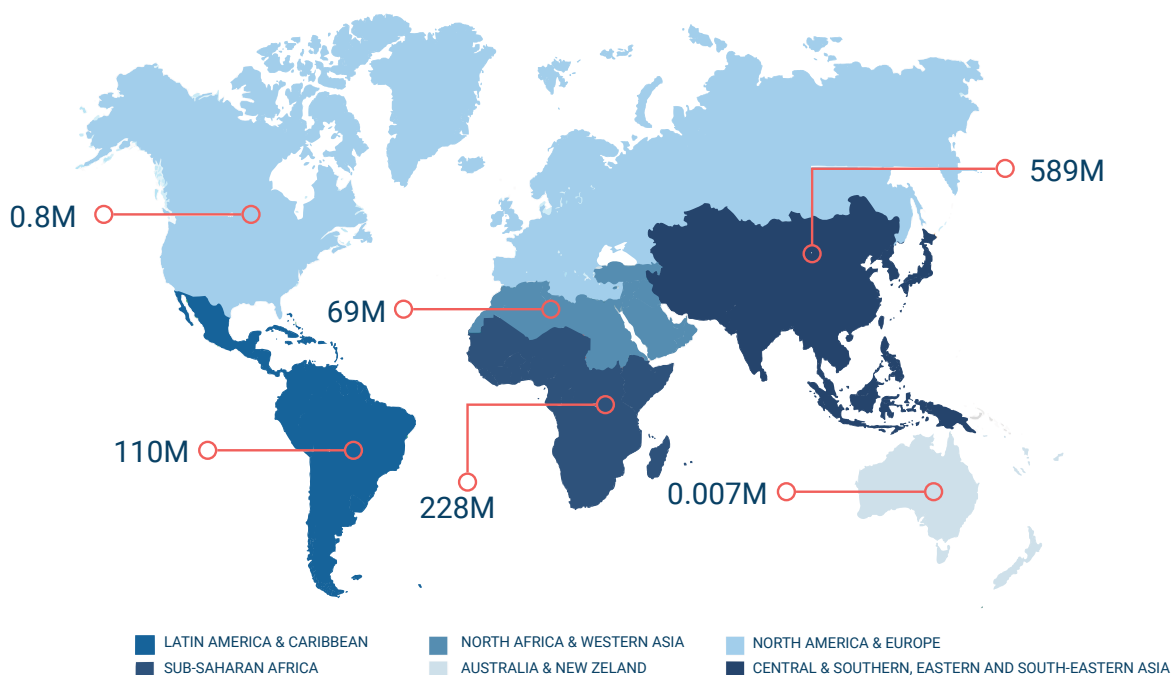
opportunities and challenges. While Arab cities are vibrant centres of economic, cultural and social activity, unregulated urbanization creates inefficient and unhealthy living environments that exacerbate vulnerability, exclusion and inequality in access to land, housing, services, infrastructure and public spaces.

Over the last three decades, the cost of land has soared to unaffordable levels, causing a chronic lack of adequate affordable housing, the spread of informal settlements and segmented land markets.⁸⁵ This has contributed to a high proportion of urban dwellers – 30.9 per cent – living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing (although significant variations exist among countries, from 8 per cent in Tunisia, to 47.2 per cent in Iraq and 91.6 per cent in Sudan).⁸⁶

SCARCITY OF ARABLE LANDS, LAND DEGRADATION AND FOOD SECURITY

Only 4 per cent of land in the Arab region is arable. Apart from Sudan and Tunisia, the amount of arable land held per person in the region is below the global average of 0.19 hectares – significantly so in some countries, such as Egypt (0.03) and Iraq (0.14). Desertification, land degradation, salinization, changes in land uses, pollution, agricultural intensification and unsustainable cropping systems further threaten arable land and pastures.⁸⁷ 92 per cent of land in the Arab region is hyper arid and 73 per cent of arable land is affected by land degradation.⁸⁸ The economic cost of land degradation is estimated to be between 2 per cent and 7 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of individual countries.⁸⁹

FIGURE 4: POPULATION (PER REGION) LIVING IN SLUMS AND INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS



Source: UN-Habitat (2019). *The Urban SDG Monitoring Series: Monitoring SDG indicator 11.1.1.*

Development Report Research Paper Series.

85 UNESCWA (2020).

86 *ibid.*

87 UNESCWA (2021). *Environmental sustainability and human development: perspectives from the Arab region.*

88 UNESCWA (2016). *Land Degradation Neutrality in the Arab Region – Preparing for SDG Implementation Factsheet.*

89 UNESCWA and FAO (2017). *Arab Horizon 2030: Prospects for Enhancing Food Security in the Arab Region.*

The combined effect of these factors has led to a decline in agricultural activity, which threatens food security, a key land-related problem in a region that imports 50 per cent of the calories it consumes. Of the total wheat consumed, 63 per cent is imported, and as high as 90 per cent in the Gulf countries.⁹⁰ Food insecurity is, however, compounded by socio-economic factors.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 116 million people in the Arab region experienced food insecurity, 43 million were undernourished – predominantly in the least developed countries and countries in conflict – and 115 million were obese, predominantly from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and middle-income countries. Food imports amount to 4 per cent of GDP, a high proportion even when compared to the 6.2 per cent of GDP spent on military expenditures.⁹¹

EXTREME LAND-BASED RESOURCE PATTERNS

Fresh water scarcity is a major issue in 19 of the 22 Arab countries, as the current water resource utilization rate is estimated at 76.6 per cent (compared to 7.5 per cent worldwide).⁹² 84 per cent of the population in the Arab region is affected by, or is at risk of, water scarcity.⁹³ Forest area as a proportion of total land area has declined by 25 per cent in the region since 1990, primarily due to large reductions in several of the least developed countries (Comoros, Somalia and Sudan).⁹⁴ Biodiversity is also declining.⁹⁵ On

the other hand, the region is rich in gas and oil reserves, which significantly contribute to the GDP but also heighten national and international competition over land. Five Arab countries – Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Qatar and Saudi Arabia – are ranked among the top 10 countries worldwide with the highest levels of air pollution in urban areas.⁹⁶

WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS

The MENA region has the highest gender gap⁹⁷ globally (approximately 40 per cent), with Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen listed among the least performing countries.⁹⁸ At the current pace, the World Bank estimates that it will take about 142 years to close this gap⁹⁹ and even longer to reach gender equality in property and inheritance laws which, according to the Assets Indicator,¹⁰⁰ have not improved in the last fifty years. Gender-based inequalities in the region find their roots in patriarchal cultural norms often disguised as religious principles. Such norms and practices impact many dimensions of women's life, including participation in the labour force, access to credit and ownership or access to housing, land and properties.

There is no consolidated data on women's ownership or access to land, housing and properties in the region. However, available estimates suggest figures in the single digits. Women's share among agricultural holders in the region is less than 7 per cent,¹⁰¹ despite women's

90 UNESCWA and FAO (2021). [Arab Food Security: Vulnerabilities and Pathways](#).

91 UNESCWA and FAO (2021). Calculations based on GDP data of the World Bank and SIPRI, 2018.

92 UN-Habitat (2021d). [World Cities Day Celebrations at Expo 2020 Dubai](#).

93 UNDP (2019). [Leaving No One Behind: Towards Inclusive Citizenship in Arab Countries. Arab Human Development Report Research Paper Series..](#)

94 UNESCWA (2023). [Her land. Her rights. Equal land rights: a pathway to combating desertification in the Arab region](#).

95 UNEP (2019). [Environmental Challenges in the MENA Region](#).

96 Indicator 11.6.2: Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (e.g. PM2.5 and PM10) in cities (population weighted), 2016. See: WHO (2018). [World health statistics 2018: monitoring health for the SDGs, sustainable development goals](#).

97 The gender gap is the difference between women and men as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural, or economic attainments or attitudes. The Global Gender Gap Index aims to measure this gap in four key areas: health, education, economics and politics.

98 World Economic Forum (2021). [Global Gender Gap Index 2021](#).

99 World Bank (2021a). [Women, Business and the Law](#).

100 "The Assets indicator examines gender differences in property and inheritance law, including instances in which legal systems are supported by customary law and judicial precedent. See: World Bank (2021a).

101 FAO (2024). [Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agrifood Systems in the Near East and North Africa region](#). FAO Regional conference for the Near East, 37th session, Amman.

major contribution to farming. Further, the total areas held by women are significantly smaller than the ones held by men, with women only holding 1 to 3 per cent of the land surface.¹⁰²

Overall, women are less likely than men to possess legal documents for housing, land and property rights or to have their names included on such documents,¹⁰³ which negatively impacts their land tenure security, especially in cases of divorce. A recent regional study found that 58 per cent of women interviewed had land registered in the name of a male family member,¹⁰⁴ and even when women had documents in their name, they often had limited control over how the land, and the related economic activities, were managed.¹⁰⁵ The same study reported that nearly one in two woman delegates management of the economic activities on their land to a relative (mostly a father or husband).

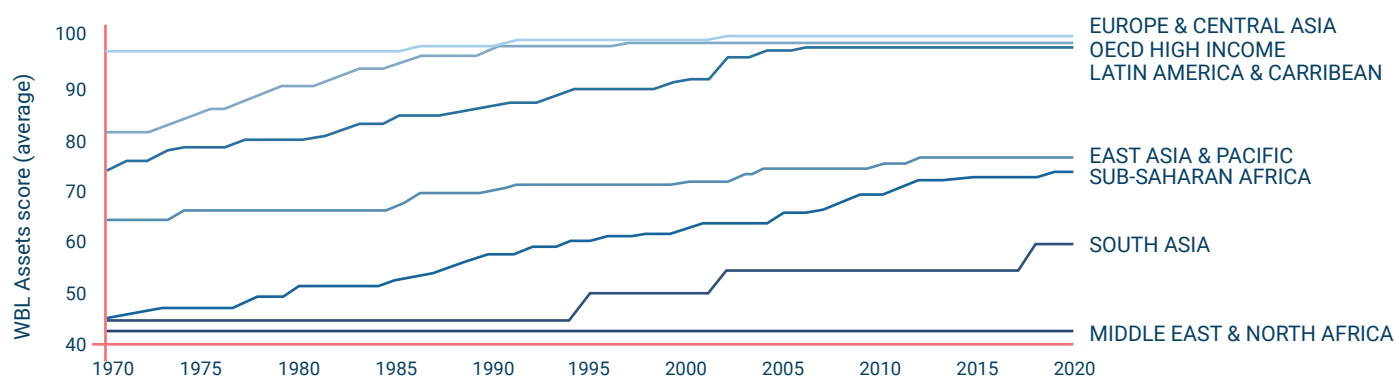
The exclusion of women from participating in land management and planning processes contributes to women's disempowerment and enhances their dependency on male partners

or family members, while the general lack of awareness about women's land rights¹⁰⁶ acts as a barrier to the enjoyment and exercise of these rights.

Inheritance is the primary mechanism for acquiring land for women (and men) in the region, followed by purchase.¹⁰⁷ Both mechanisms present obstacles for women: the interpretations of Sharia law influenced by local customs can result in the denial or renunciation of women's inheritance rights, while limited availability of and/or control over financial resources affects their purchasing power. This lack of purchasing power is exacerbated by the low employment rate of women in the labour market. The regional employment rate for women is 19 per cent¹⁰⁸ and varies across countries. In Iraq, for example, only 12 per cent of women are part of the labour force, 14 per cent in Oman and 8 per cent in Yemen.¹⁰⁹

Displaced and migrant women and those living in conflict-affected countries face additional compounded challenges in accessing and

FIGURE 5: INCREASE OF GENDER EQUALITY IN PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE LAWS



NOTE: OECD=ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Source: Authors, based on World Bank (2021a).

102 Ibid.

103 FAO (2018). *The gender gap in land rights*.

104 UN-HABITAT/GLTN and Union of Agricultural Work Committees (2022). *Land, Women Empowerment and Socioeconomic Development in the Arab Region*.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.

108 World Bank (2021a). *Indicators*.

109 Ibid.

enjoying land and property rights.¹¹⁰ Wars and conflicts have resulted in a disproportionate number of cases of internal displacement and dispossession for women compared to men in Yemen and Syria, and cases of occupation in Iraq and Palestine. The widespread lack or loss of civil, land and property documents further limit displaced women's ability to authenticate their relation to the land.¹¹¹

HOUSING, LAND AND PROPERTY RIGHTS OF VULNERABLE PEOPLE

The enforcement and protection of housing, land and property (HLP) rights for vulnerable groups is considered an area requiring urgent attention in the region,¹¹² particularly in conflict-affected countries. There are 16.6 million forcibly displaced and stateless individuals in the Arab region,¹¹³ many of whom have experienced a range of HLP violations, such as fraudulent and forced sales, destruction of land and houses, contamination of explosives and illegal secondary occupation. Further, the violent conflicts witnessed over the past decade often have causes rooted in land.¹¹⁴ Violations of HLP rights are routinely used as a weapon of war, to consolidate territory gained by warring groups and to reward national and international mercenaries fighting in the conflicts.¹¹⁵

1.4 LAND GOVERNANCE: ANALYSIS, TRENDS AND EMERGING EVIDENCE

The MENA region is experiencing accelerated urban population growth of 2.1 per cent annually.¹¹⁶ Over 300 million people live in cities –

approximately 66 per cent of the total population¹¹⁷ – with urban dwellers in Bahrain, Jordan and Qatar exceeding 90 per cent of the populations of those countries. Urban population growth along with economic and social development have increased the demand for land to cater for housing and other development needs, making sustainable urbanization a significant challenge.

This section begins by outlining frameworks and benchmarks for effective international land administration. It then identifies some of the key challenges in the region that can be addressed by a functioning land administration system (such as rapid population growth). Building on this, it analyses the land administration trends identified by the study, considering their implications for national capacity development needs, land administration system reform and governance, economic growth, equitable land access, poverty reduction, women's land rights and climate change mitigation. It also explores trends in HLP rights, the management of conflict-related displacement and displacement prevention in the region. Finally, it highlights emerging evidence of fit-for-purpose land administration approaches in the region.

LAND ADMINISTRATION FRAMEWORKS AND BENCHMARKS

National capacity development should aim to establish effective land administration systems that are fit-for-purpose, appropriate and adequate, interoperable and sustainable, flexible and inclusive and capable of accelerating efforts to document, record, recognize and monitor people-to-land relationships.

110 UN-Habitat (2021c). *Promoting and Protecting Housing, Land and Property Rights of Syrian Refugees Living in Lebanon: Towards an Integrated Response*.

111 Ibid.

112 UNESCWA (2020).

113 UNHCR (2025). *Middle East and North Africa*.

114 APN (n.d.). Report on land and conflict in the Arab Region.

115 Unruh, J. (2022). *Housing, Land and Property Rights as War-Financing Commodities: A Typology with Lessons from Darfur, Colombia and Syria*. *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 10(1):1, pp.1-19.

116 World Bank (2024p). *Urban population growth (annual %) – Middle East & North Africa*.

117 Ibid.

Such systems should also help address land-related root causes of conflict, and support the principle of leaving no one behind, in line with the commitment of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Agenda.¹¹⁸ According to the United Nations, effective fit-for-purpose land administration must:

- Develop confidence and trust, promote security, safety, peace and peace building.
- Increase the proportion of population with tenure security, with particular attention to the most vulnerable groups.
- Allow economic development by supporting land value capture revenue systems that are equitable and transparent.
- Strengthen multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral participation to achieve integrated geospatial information.
- Contribute to smart and resilient rural and urban societies, with equitable spatial/ land-use planning and land development.
- Ensure participatory and inclusive land use and land use planning.

FIGURE 6: NINE PATHWAYS FOR EFFECTIVE LAND ADMINISTRATION



Source: Authors based on UNGGIM (2020). [*Framework for Effective Land Administration: A reference for developing, reforming, renewing, strengthening, modernizing, and monitoring land administration*](#).

118 UNGGIM (2020). [*Framework for Effective Land Administration: A reference for developing, reforming, renewing, strengthening, modernizing, and monitoring land administration*](#).

- Promote the recognition of the inherent rights of Indigenous and vulnerable peoples to their lands, territories and resources, and recognize collective traditions, customs and customary tenures, consistent with existing obligations under national and international law.
- Encourage efficient, sustainable and fair land markets, where appropriate, that take into account land tenure, value, use and land development aspects.
- Cater to all circumstances, situations and people – in times of peace and prosperity, in times of stress and hardship (including disaster and conflict, forced migration and human displacement, poverty, food and water scarcity).
- Enable partnerships that bring together and build upon knowledge, skills and experiences on land tenure, land value, land use and land development.
- Promote preparedness and resilience on climate change issues and support biodiversity, conservation and ecosystem sustainability.¹¹⁹

Effective land administration system should contribute to ending poverty and hunger, ensuring dignity and equality, protecting the natural resources and climate for future generations, ensuring prosperity and the wellbeing of communities, fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies and implementing the 2030 Agenda through partnerships at all levels.

To achieve fit-for-purpose land administration, nine pathways or entry points have been identified, presented in the figure 6.¹²⁰

The frameworks and benchmarks for land administration described here and in the methodology section of this report (Figure 1 and Table 1) need to be adapted to the region, taking into consideration its current capacity, the strengths and weaknesses of national land administration systems and the specific country challenges outlined in Part 3 of this report.

CHALLENGES

National land administration systems in the countries examined need to be fit-for-purpose to address specific challenges, many with land governance implications. Key challenges in the MENA region relevant to the countries included in this study are population density and urbanization rates, food security, water scarcity, land degradation, land rights issues and large-scale land acquisition and displacement. Background facts and figures about the region are provided below.

- **Population density in the MENA region has doubled in the past 20 years.** The region comprises 21 countries with a total area of 9.5 million km², representing about 7 per cent of the world's land surface. The region's population rose from 105 million in 1960 to over 464 million in 2020,¹²¹ after recording the fastest population growth rate of any region in the world over the past century. In recent decades, the urban population has also doubled, now accounting for 58 per cent of the total population.¹²²
- **The Middle East has high levels of income inequality.**¹²³ 56 per cent of national income accrues to the top 10 per cent of earners, and only 12 per cent to the bottom 50 per cent. Gulf countries (excluding Yemen) record the highest levels of income inequality in the region. In 2019, the top 1 per cent accounted

119 UNGGIM (2020).

120 Ibid.

121 World Bank Open Data. Accessed 1 June 2022.

122 UNESWA (2020).

123 This includes and goes beyond MENA countries.

for 23 per cent of total income, almost double the share earned by the bottom 50 per cent. Moreover, the lack of reliable survey data, with significant gaps between survey years, likely leads to an underestimation of the share of national income captured by the top 10 per cent.¹²⁴

- **The MENA region is the only region that experienced an increase in the proportion of undernourished people over the past decade.**¹²⁵ Of the total land area only one-third is agricultural land (cropland and pasture), while only 5 per cent is arable.¹²⁶ Arable land has declined by about 20 per cent since 1994. Unsustainable land and water management to meet food demands for an increasing population coupled with weak land tenure and instability has led to land degradation. Millions of refugees and displaced people have been pushed to abandon their lands leading to a contraction in supply through a breakdown in production.¹²⁷
- **The MENA region follows a policy framework that enables state facilitation of large-scale land acquisitions by domestic and foreign investors.** Most land acquisitions have been pursued by corporations with the support of governments and banks from water-scarce, wealthy GCC countries with the largest dependence on food imports. Foreign land acquisition in the region is aimed at limiting exposure to world commodity markets and ensuring access to food and feed supply in the GCC countries.¹²⁸ The Land Matrix reports that, globally, 33 million hectares have been acquired through large scale land acquisition arrangements. While these investments often originate from high-income countries, investors from middle-income countries are also heavily involved in this global business. Irrespective of where the investors are based, these deals often have dire consequences for affected local communities. Too often they lose access to their ancestral lands and at the same time reap only little socio-economic benefits from the investments.¹²⁹
- **Property rights in 16 of 17 MENA countries are affected by corruption, political interference or cronyism.**¹³⁰ Among public services, the land sector suffers from one of the highest bribery rates globally, with 1 in 5 people who needed land services saying they had to pay a bribe to access them.¹³¹
- **The MENA region is the most water-stressed in the world, with water use exceeding the availability of renewable freshwater resources.** 15 out of the 17 MENA countries are considered water stressed, and 11 out of 17 countries face extreme water scarcity. Natural water resources are being rapidly depleted to meet the food demand.¹³²
- **Over half of all land and one-quarter of arable land in the MENA region is degraded.** Desertification is further influenced by a range of interrelated drivers, including population growth, increasing demands for agricultural and other production, resource-intensive technologies and climate change. Intensive management practices exacerbate the process, while existing natural hazards further contribute to land degradation and desertification.¹³³

124 World Inequality Database (2020). [Income inequality in the Middle East](#).

125 World Bank (2025). [Post-pandemic poverty estimates for the MENA region](#).

126 OECD and FAO (2018). [OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2018-2027: Special Focus on the Middle East and North Africa](#).

127 UNESWA (2020).

128 OECD and FAO (2018).

129 Land Matrix initiative (2021). [Analytical Report III: Taking stock of the global land rush](#).

130 Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2022). [Bertelsmann Transformation Index data](#).

131 Transparency International (2013). [Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer](#).

132 UNICEF (2021).

133 Ibid.

- **The MENA region is extremely vulnerable to climate change.** Over the coming decade, precipitation in the MENA region is expected to decrease, while temperatures, as well as the magnitude and frequency of droughts, are projected to rise. Rising temperatures are also contributing to sea-level rise, with the MENA region among the most vulnerable globally. Drought conditions are expected to reduce agricultural productivity, and losses of ecosystem services from land degradation are estimated to be about four times the global average.¹³⁴ Global warming, sea-level rise, droughts, floods, heatwaves, heavy rainfall and other climate-related phenomena are likely to have significant impacts on biodiversity in the region, placing increased pressure on land, natural resources and human settlements, thereby undermining sustainable development.¹³⁵
- **The MENA region faces persistent deficiencies in land management.** Weak land management and land administration are common features in the region, negatively impacting the realization of many development objectives, and ranking among the key root causes of conflict ravaging the Arab states.¹⁴⁰ The absence of integrated, people-centred strategies to manage land and resources¹⁴¹ stands as the primary barrier to the achieving SDG11 in this predominantly urban region.
- **The MENA region is experiencing an increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and migrants.** The region hosts 16.6 million forcibly displaced and stateless people,¹³⁶ including 12.8 million internally displaced (accounting for 18 per cent of the global total of IDPs)¹³⁷ and 2.4 million refugees.¹³⁸ Between 2010 and 2019, there were a total of 30.1 million new instances of displacement due to conflict or disaster in the region.¹³⁹
- **The MENA region experiences persistent gender inequality in land ownership.** Gender equality in land ownership is shaped by legal, cultural and social norms, and while many countries have laws to protect women's rights to own and inherit land, customary practices and discriminatory legal frameworks often limit these rights in practice. Barriers include male-dominated inheritance traditions, limited access to legal support and societal resistance to women owning and managing land.
- **The MENA region faces a chronic shortage of adequate and affordable housing.** This shortage is primarily driven by rising urban land costs and private sector focus on upper-middle-income families. High youth unemployment and barriers to mortgage lending further fuel the informal housing sector, which has stepped in to fill the gap.¹⁴²
- **Property registration and titling processes in the MENA region are vague, obsolete and cumbersome.** These processes undermine the ability to afford housing, use land productively and secure the use and ownership of land and homes. The absence of clear and proper records as well as complicated processes to transfer titles

134 Ibid.

135 The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and UN-Habitat/GLTN (2022). [Land and natural resources and climate change in the Arab](#).

136 UNHCR (2025). [Middle East and North Africa](#).

137 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2023). [GRID 2023: Internal displacement and food security](#).

138 UNHCR (2023). [Global Report 2022](#).

139 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021). [A decade of displacement in the Middle East and North Africa](#).

140 APN (n.d.). Report on land and conflict in the Arab Region.

141 UNESCWA (2020).

142 Ibid.

impinges on the ability to access property and financing services, especially among women. Countries experiencing conflict often have outdated or ill-maintained records, a situation rendered worse by displacement and the destruction of housing, land and property documents. The result is increased social fragmentation and worsened insecurity'.¹⁴³

- **Rapidly growing urban populations in the MENA region are challenging institutional capacities.** Municipal capacities vary greatly, with significant disparities in financial and administrative resources available to deliver city planning, infrastructure and essential services such as sanitation, health care and education. Urban-rural migration is widespread¹⁴⁴ and cities are encroaching onto agricultural land where unregulated outskirts grow faster than cities themselves. New development projects are often implemented without adequate

infrastructure or connectivity to existing urban centres. The influx of refugees has further exacerbated these challenges, contributing to overcrowding, informal settlements, housing shortages and agricultural land degradation.

The Doing Business Report's ranking is often used as a proxy to benchmark the land administration performance of countries, as it includes information on registering properties – albeit only those already registered and free of disputes. The most recent data, from 2019, is summarized in the table below.¹⁴⁵

ANALYSIS OF REGIONAL LAND ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM TRENDS

A number of land administration trends were identified from the 11 national land administration systems analysed in this report. While trends differ between high-and

TABLE 2: LAND ADMINISTRATION INDEX RANKING FOR THE MENA REGION AND OTHER REGIONS GLOBALLY

REGION	REGISTRATION PROPERTY SCORE	PROCEDURES (NUMBER)	TIME (DAYS)	COST (% OF PROPERTY VALUE)	QUALITY OF THE LAND ADMINISTRATION INDEX (0-30)	REGISTERING PROPERTY RANK
East Asia & Pacific	57.5	5.5	71.9	4.5	16.2	98
Europe & Central Asia	75.8	5.5	20.8	2.7	20.4	49
Latin America & Caribbean	54.9	7.4	63.7	5.9	12.0	122
Middle East & North Africa	63.4	5.4	26.6	5.6	14.6	89
OECD high income	77.0	4.7	23.6	4.2	23.2	45
South Asia	47.6	6.9	107.8	7.0	9.1	142
Sub-Saharan Africa	53.6	6.1	51.6	7.3	9.0	129

Source: World Bank (2019).

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Population Reference Bureau (2001).

¹⁴⁵ The World Bank (2019). [Doing Business Archive: Registering Property](#).

low-income countries, and from one sub-region to another, the regional trends cut across all countries, regardless of conflict impact, population size or income level. The regional trends in land tenure, land use, development, value, dispute resolution and learning and training opportunities are briefly described below and detailed in Part 2.

LAND TENURE TRENDS

The region shares similar kinds of land tenure types, namely private land tenure (*mulk*), public/state land tenure (*miri*), historical communal land tenure (*mashaa*) and religious (*waqf*) land tenure. The following regional trends for land tenure, cadastral and land markets were identified in the study:

- The proportion of the population – including citizens, foreigners and refugees, on both registered and unregistered land – that has security of tenure is unknown, as is the proportion of women who enjoy security of tenure.
- Citizens can access secure tenure rights with legal land documents and can obtain loans using their land as collateral, with both men and women able to obtain loans. However, the study does not demonstrate that this also applies to non-citizens, refugees or women.
- Urban land is not affordable, and since land is a major input into housing delivery, this contributes to the shortage of affordable housing across the region.

A number of land governance challenges associated with land tenure were identified across the region, such as weak land administration, inequality of access to land and security of tenure, land-related poverty, corruption and state capture of the land by elites.

While large scale evictions have occurred in only a few countries, the resulting mass

displacement has had long-term impacts on the land administration systems in both the conflict countries and some neighbouring states.

LAND USE TRENDS

The following regional land use trends were identified in the study:

- Land use planning and implementation challenges are found throughout the region. However, the study shows that countries affected by conflict experience a higher level of land governance challenges related to land use planning.
- Most countries have land use plans. However, weak enforcement mechanisms are a challenge. The lack of coordination and overlapping roles of land related institutions and the lack of human resource capacity are major challenge in implementing land use plans. These are key reasons why the land use planning systems are not enforced and are considered inadequate.
- The rules for public/state land management and use are unclear.

A number of land governance challenges associated with land use and planning were identified across the region. These include: the impact of power dynamics and corruption on land use planning; lack of vertical and horizontal coordination within governments; weak human resource and financial management capacity; lack of public participation in planning processes; and the neglect of informal settlements and rural areas.

Countries affected by conflict have the same challenges as other countries, but are additionally unable to keep pace with what is happening on the ground. They also have weak rule of law and lack the strategic planning capacity needed to deal with large numbers of displaced people.

LAND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

Regional trends for land development identified in the study are:

- There are government land expropriation mechanisms whereby governments can easily acquire private land for public purposes. In most of the countries affected by conflict these mechanisms are considered unfair and not cost effective.
- Most countries do not have mechanisms to ensure that development costs are distributed between public and private actors. This can mean for example that private developers benefit disproportionately from public investment.
- Across the region new development projects are commonly built without infrastructure or services, including land in urban areas.

A number of land development governance challenges were identified across the region. These include: land development is influenced by agendas of powerful (including political) groups; development plans are not implemented because government budgets for land development are insufficient; the role of the private sector is often hampered by an absence of laws and regulations and inadequate mechanisms; the implementation of development plans can lead to land disputes due to inadequate consultation with local communities or unfair compensation.

LAND VALUE TRENDS

Regional land value trends were identified in the study:

- Most countries have urban valuation systems and land tax systems for urban areas. Far fewer countries have rural valuation and land tax systems.

- There is a lack of accessible and digital data on land value across the region. A lack of data leads to inefficient land markets and can directly impact the price of houses and supply of affordable housing.

A number of land governance challenges associated with land value were identified including: out of date regulations and a need for regulations for developers; lack of transparency which impacts price and increases disputes; corruption; valuation systems that only apply to registered land and not all land; state capture sometimes limits the ability of governments to recover taxes; in displacement contexts, the volatility of markets and non-transparency of land value impacts the ability of host and refugee communities to access affordable housing.

LAND DISPUTE TRENDS

Regional trends on land disputes and land dispute resolution identified in the study are:

- A well-structured statutory system exists in most countries to resolve conflicts and disputes related to land rights. However, a regional trend has emerged where alternative mechanisms, such as tribal and religious systems, are also utilized, both in conflict and non-conflict impacted countries. Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, such as negotiation, conciliation, mediation and arbitration, are also used.

A number of land governance challenges associated with land dispute resolution were identified including: congestion of the juridical court system which forces people to seek other mechanisms; the complexity and bureaucracy of the court system where people often do not have the requisite legal or civil documents; discrimination against vulnerable groups, particularly in violent conflict settings; and legal pluralism which encourages forum shopping.

TRENDS IN LEARNING AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

A regional assessment for training and learning was carried out in the 11 Middle East countries reviewed for the land administration system study, in addition to Kuwait, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia. This is because many countries, including those from North Africa and Kuwait, often train people from neighbouring or other MENA region countries.

- Overall, the land-related learning offers are well spread out across the region, with North Africa playing a leading role.
- Land use and land development are the most taught land administration disciplines. Most of the courses are on land use planning followed by geospatial studies. Land-related courses are mostly at the undergraduate level.
- The public sector is the leading provider of land-related education, but the private sector, specifically private universities, play an important role in offering land-related courses.

A number of regional land governance challenges associated with the available training and learning opportunities were

identified including: there is a notable lack of courses focused on land valuation and land dispute resolution, which are important for efficient land markets, affordable housing delivery and conflict prevention; there is a focus on conventional land administration rather than fit-for-purpose land administration, the latter would increase national capacity to rapidly scale up and better address the challenges in the region such as climate, food security, informal settlement regularization and displacement; courses are often out of date in terms of current technology and approaches to land governance (see Part 2).

WHAT THESE TRENDS MEAN FOR GOOD LAND GOVERNANCE PRIORITIES

Valuable lessons can be drawn from fit-for-purpose land administration practices already being implemented both within the region and elsewhere. Priorities for land governance reform in the region are closely aligned with the following key areas, all underpinned by strong public participation, partnership, and national capacity development: tenure security for sustainable economic development, equality and poverty reduction; strengthening women's land rights; addressing land-related climate issues; and managing the housing, land and property displacement issues as a result of conflict.

FIGURE 7: COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS IN COUNTRIES OF THE MASHREQ, GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL & YEMEN AND NORTH AFRICA



Source: Original drawing based on UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023). [Developing land governance capacities in the Arab region: Patterns, challenges and opportunities for improving the existing learning offer.](#)

TENURE SECURITY FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, EQUALITY AND POVERTY REDUCTION

Tenure security is the foundation for sustainable economic development, equality and poverty reduction, yet millions across the region lack secure land rights. Effectively addressing tenure security requires action across the critical themes of land administration improvements, human rights commitments, scalable implementation approaches and collaborative partnerships among government, civil society and development actors.

Key land administration challenges to be addressed

The following challenges must be addressed to ensure tenure security, equitable land access and effective land governance across all levels of government and society:

- A significant portion of the population lacks security of tenure, including women, low-income, non-citizens, renters, refugees, IDPs, pastoralists and residents of informal settlements in both urban and rural areas. Many individuals are unaware of how to access land, and conventional land administration systems are unable to scale quickly enough to meet the growing demand driven by rapid urbanization and population growth. Land is a critical input for housing, yet there is a persistent shortage of affordable and adequate housing options.
- Land use planning across all levels of government, except the local level, is often inadequate, poorly implemented, weakly enforced and insufficiently or inequitably funded. A major challenge lies in the lack of effective coordination among government entities – vertically (across levels), horizontally (across jurisdictions) and sectorally (across departments) – in both planning and implementation processes.

- Land tax systems, which can increase the accountability and delivery of services by government to the people, are not efficient nor effective.
- The juridical court systems have a large backlog of land cases and people wait years to solve land disputes through the court system.
- The private sector has a major impact on the land administration systems in the region; its influence spans from state capture to land use planning and land allocation.
- Large-scale displacement and secondary occupation of land create long-term disruptions in land administration systems, often resulting in systemic shocks that persist for decades.

International human rights frameworks

Multiple international frameworks recognize secure land tenure as a fundamental component of human rights, sustainable development and poverty reduction:

- United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 1 'End poverty in all its forms everywhere': Target 1.4 'By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance'. Indicator 1.4.2 Proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, (a) with legally recognized documentation, and (b) who perceive their rights to land as secure, by sex and type of tenure.
- Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food

Security,¹⁴⁶ and specifically the statement that States should recognize and respect all legitimate tenure right holders and their rights, whether formally recorded or not.

- The New Urban Agenda,¹⁴⁷ and specifically the continuum of land and property rights through effective land administration.

Fit-for-purpose land administration: emerging evidence

- Fit-for-purpose land administration is proving effective in delivering tenure security across the region through innovations in digitization, responsive governance systems and diverse land management approaches, though significant opportunities remain to expand implementation and strengthen capacity:
- Fit-for-purpose land administration¹⁴⁸ is already being implemented at scale, even in countries in affected by conflict.¹⁴⁹ However, it needs to be scaled up further across countries in the region and within countries, by expanding successful pilot initiatives in high-demand areas. This approach has been used in a range of contexts in cities, towns and rural villages, for the regularization of informal settlements, to integrate legitimate land rights into the formal system, to support land taxation, to guide land use planning and land valuation and to facilitate conflict management and dispute resolution in development and transitional justice contexts.

- Local fit-for-purpose (digital) land information approaches¹⁵⁰ are being used to adjudicate land rights and build databases that serve as a foundation for integrating these rights into national land administration systems, either through formal land registries or administratively approved databases. These systems also support the issuance of land certificates within the national legal framework, generate legal land documentation, contribute to the development of tax cadastres and facilitate effective land use planning.
- In a few jurisdictions, interoperable digital land rights and land use information systems are used for sustainable land management. These systems enhance coordination across government agencies, improve the efficiency of land markets and strengthen land use management. Additionally, the availability of digital public land value data contributes to more transparent and robust land and property markets.
- In a few jurisdictions, agile land administration systems are being developed to respond to the demands of a rapidly growing and urbanizing populations through improved governance, advanced technology, enhanced transparency and both public-public and public-private partnerships. They also include strengthened regulatory frameworks and legal support for private sector developers, with a focus on effective risk management.

146 FAO (2012). *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and forests in the context of national food security*.

147 UN-Habitat (2016). *New Urban Agenda*. Habitat III United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development.

148 UN-Habitat/GLTN and Dutch Cadastre (2016). *Fit-for-Purpose Land Administration Guiding Principles for Country Implementation*; Enemark, S., McLaren, R. and Lemmen, C. (2022). *Fit-for-Purpose Land Administration: Providing Secure Land Rights at Scale*, Land (Special Issue), Vol 1 and 2.

149 Augustinus, C. and Tempra, O. (2021). *Fit-for-Purpose Land Administration: Providing Secure Land Rights at Scale*; UN-Habitat. (2019). *Land and conflict: Lessons from the field on conflict-sensitive land governance and peacebuilding*.

150 See for example the UN-Habitat/GLTN Social Tenure Domain Model (STDM).

- The region employs various land management such as land consolidation (rural and urban), land readjustment, informal settlement regularisation and land development.
- Regarding national and regional capacity development, there are numerous training courses across the region focusing on conventional land administration approaches. However, only a limited number of short courses are available on fit-for-purpose land administration, highlighting a gap in training aligned with emerging needs and practices.

Empowerment of partners and multiple stakeholders

Multiple stakeholders play complementary roles in advancing tenure security through monitoring violations, providing legal support and funding systemic improvements in land administration:

- National civil society organizations and human rights defenders play a vital role in monitoring land-related human rights violations and providing legal aid services to support claims and dispute resolution.
- Donors and development partners active in the land sector often work collaboratively to fund initiatives aimed at strengthening national land administration systems.

STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS

Strengthening women's land rights is essential for achieving gender equality, reducing poverty and building more resilient communities. Yet women continue to experience profound tenure insecurity due to discriminatory practices, limited access to justice and gaps in legal frameworks, challenges that intensify in conflict-affected contexts.

Key land administration challenges to be addressed

Systemic challenges within land administration systems disproportionately affect women, thereby resulting in significant disparities in land ownership, registration and access to justice:

- Women in the region have limited land tenure security.
- There is no consolidated data on women's ownership or access to land, housing and property.
- Women experience significant disparities in land ownership, land registration, land management and access to justice, resulting in less tenure security than their male family members.
- Most women acquire land only through inheritance.
- In conflict-affected contexts, women tend to be disproportionately impacted by tenure insecurity and face heightened challenges in claiming and protecting their land rights.

International human rights frameworks

International human rights frameworks establish clear obligations for states to ensure women's equal rights to land ownership, control and access without discrimination:

- United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls': Target 5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.

- International treaty bodies have emphasized women's equal right to own, use or control land; the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of land rights (or lack of thereof); and the right of women to own land without restrictions based on marital status or any other discriminatory grounds.¹⁵¹

Fit-for-purpose land administration: emerging evidence

Emerging evidence shows that fit-for-purpose land administration can effectively address gender disparities through targeted interventions including legal recognition along the continuum of land rights, women-focused service pathways and digitalized gender-disaggregated data systems:

- Women's tenure security increased by legally recognizing the legitimate land rights they hold along the continuum of land rights, without relying solely on formally registered titles.
- Women are being empowered by improving their knowledge and understanding of land administration system processes and procedures and on land rights within various legal frameworks, including statutory law, Sharia law (such as dower/*mahar* and inheritance/*mirath*) and customary norms.
- Gender-responsive assessments of the land administration system are being undertaken to identify barriers that hinder women's effective participation and access within these systems.
- In a few jurisdictions, women-only service pathways have been introduced to ensure

that women can navigate land administration systems more easily and confidently.

- Digitalization of the land administration, land ownership, land rights and land use information is being used to generate gender disaggregated data and to support monitoring efforts.

Empowerment of partners and multiple stakeholders

Civil society women's groups are actively engaged in raising awareness about the importance of including women in sustainable land management initiatives.

ADDRESSING LAND-RELATED CLIMATE ISSUES

According to the UNCCD, responsible land governance is a fundamental component of sustainable land management and an essential element in addressing desertification and drought – both major factors in the region – if supported by specific regulations and policies, many related to land use planning.¹⁵²

Good land governance contributes to the achievement of a wide range of development objectives that focus on climate-related challenges, including climate change mitigation and adaptation, environmental protection, minimizing land degradation, restoration of degraded land, post-disaster recovery, food security, poverty reduction, adequate housing, sustainable infrastructure, inclusive economic development, social stability, peace and security.¹⁵³ Water management and flood risk management can be added to this list, as well as management of rising sea levels.

151 UN (2019). *Guidance Note of the Secretary General 'The United Nations and Land and Conflict'*; ICESCR (Arts. 2(2),3,11); CEDAW (Arts.2(a), 14(2),15,16); ICCPR (Art. 23(4)); VGGT (3B(3,4), 4(4,6,7), 4(5), 5(3), 6(1), 7(1,4), 8(9,11),9(2,6,10), 10(1,3), 12(11), 13(5,6), 14(4), 15(3,5,6,10), 17(3), 20(3,5), 21(1), 25(3,4,5), 26(2)); Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, New Urban Agenda (34,35).

152 UNCCD (2017). *Global Land Outlook*. First Edition.

153 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2017b). *Land Governance: A Review and Analysis of Key International Frameworks*. Report 1/2017.

Key land administration challenges to be addressed

Land administration systems across the region are struggling to address the accelerating impacts of climate change, including land degradation, resource scarcity, natural disasters and displacement, which intensify competition over land and undermine livelihoods:

- Land degradation and desertification are increasing in the region, driven by conflict and competition over land and water. These trends displace populations from their land and hinder sustainable land management and land restoration efforts. Ensuring tenure security for local communities is essential to support such efforts.
- As productive land and natural resources, particularly water, become scarcer, pressures on land intensify. This is compounded by the large-scale land acquisitions that are common in the region, which significantly impact how small holder farmers and pastoralists use land. Effective land use planning, regulatory frameworks and land administration capacity to sustainably manage these challenges are lacking. Resource scarcity amplifies existing land-related inequalities and injustices, contributing to further conflict, declining livelihoods and increased poverty levels (Figure 8).¹⁵⁴
- Natural hazards such as droughts and floods displace populations, cause crop failures and result in abandoned land. Current land administration systems are not sufficiently strategic or responsive to prevent or mitigate these impacts through sustainable management practices.
- Poor urban land management, characterized by inadequate land use planning and the

absence of land readjustment or land sharing mechanisms, is contributing to urban sprawl into surrounding agricultural areas, threatening food security.

- In rural areas, land fragmentation resulting from inheritance patterns is reducing agricultural productivity. There is limited attention to rural land and the land consolidation mechanisms needed to address the issue.

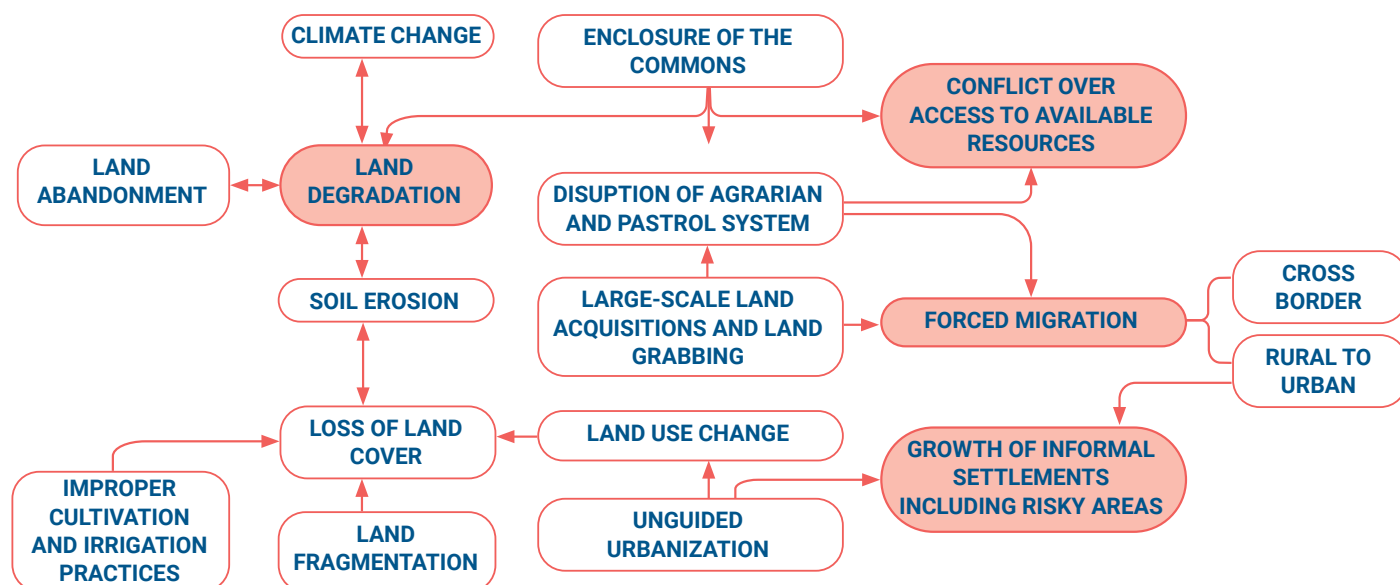
International human rights frameworks

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and multiple Arab regional frameworks recognize the critical links between land governance, climate action and sustainable resource management:

- United Nations SDG Goal 13 'Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts'; Goal 15 'Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss'; Goal 2 'End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture'; Goal 6 'Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all'.
- Arab countries have endorsed a number of regionally negotiated frameworks that focus on issues of land and climate. These include the Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development, the Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Many countries have also set land degradation neutrality targets and have National Determined Contribution (NDC) commitments on climate and National Biodiversity Strategies

¹⁵⁴ The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and UN-Habitat/GLTN (2022). [Land and natural resources and climate change in the Arab region](#).

FIGURE 8: WEB OF CRITICAL LAND GOVERNANCE-RELATED CHALLENGES IN THE ARAB REGION



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies (2022).

and Action Plans (NBSAP). Countries have committed to regional and sub-regional frameworks which, to varying extents, concentrate on climate change land-related impacts: namely, the Arab Water Security Strategy 2010–2030, the Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Arab Framework Action Plan on Climate Change (2010–2020).¹⁵⁵

Fit-for-purpose land administration: emerging evidence

Practical land administration interventions, including tenure security along the continuum of land rights, land readjustment and consolidation, water-sensitive planning and dispute resolution mechanisms, are demonstrating their capacity to support climate resilience:

- Improving tenure security along the continuum of land rights encourages people to invest in land restoration by helping avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation.
- Using national land administration capacity, particularly in land use planning, supports the implementation of the NDCs and NBSAPs.

- Land readjustment, supported by appropriate land use planning and implementation, and land valuation, helps to contain urban sprawl into surrounding agricultural land supporting food security.
- Land consolidation can help address land fragmentation and improve agricultural productivity.
- Land use planning and (customary) land dispute resolution approaches are effective tools to prevent and manage conflicts over natural resources and land.
- Water sensitive land use planning, including the integration of green and blue infrastructure delivery, supports sustainable resource management and climate resilience.
- Using national land administration capacity, particularly in land use planning, supports the implementation of the NDCs and NBSAPs.

155 The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and UN-Habitat/GLTN (2022).

Empowerment of partners and multiple stakeholders

Significant work is needed regionally (and globally) to develop effective land administration tools that support climate change mitigation and adaptation in the region. National partnerships among environmental, sustainable land use, land tenure and land administration stakeholders need to be strengthened.

MANAGING DISPLACEMENT AND CONFLICT SENSITIVE LAND ADMINISTRATION

Land-related issues are both drivers and consequences of conflict in the region, with displacement, property violations and weakened governance systems creating complex challenges for land administration. Restoring and strengthening conflict-sensitive land administration systems is essential for restitution, voluntary return, peacebuilding and long-term recovery.

Key land administration challenges to be addressed

Land administration systems across the region face severe pressures from conflict and displacement, including widespread housing, land and property violations, large-scale population movements, breakdown of rule of law, destruction of land records and volatile markets that undermine institutional capacity and complicate restitution and return processes:

- The Secretary General's Guidance Note on Land and Conflict¹⁵⁶ identifies multiple land-related root causes of conflict, most of which are present in the region. These include: weak land administration systems, politics of exclusion, scarce natural

resources, population pressure, capture of state instruments, competition over use rights, natural resource exploitation (both legal and illicit), state fragmentation, poverty, occupation of land by armed groups, plural legal systems, economic and political competition between power blocs, natural hazard-induced disasters and chaotic urbanization.¹⁵⁷ Each of these factors affects the land administration system in distinct and often overlapping ways.

- Violent disputes over land and territories can involve different jurisdictions, each with their own land administration systems.
- Housing, land and property violations, including forced evictions, secondary occupations, illegal acquisition of land and destruction of buildings and documentation (HLP and civil records), are widespread in the region. These violations complicate restitution processes and the voluntary return of displaced populations, and can result in overlapping claims to the same land.
- Large-scale displacement and migration create both immediate and long-term shocks to land administration systems, which struggle to keep pace with the demand for emergency shelter, housing and refugee camp management.
- Breakdown in the rule of (land) law, land grabbing by powerful groups, dysfunctional land administration systems and fluid institutional environments are common. Private registration by solicitors and dealings outside of the land administration system further undermine the functioning of land administration systems. The destruction of land records, registry buildings and loss of skilled personnel erodes the integrity and capacity of land administration institutions.

156 United Nations (2019). [Guidance Note of the Secretary General 'The United Nations and Land and Conflict'](#).

157 United Nations (2019); UN-Habitat/GLTN (2017b). [Land Governance: A Review and Analysis of Key International Frameworks](#). Report 1/2017.

- Volatile land, housing and rental markets add another layer of complexity.

International human rights frameworks

Multiple international instruments provide normative guidance for addressing land and property rights in conflict-affected settings:

- United Nations Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons (the Pinheiro Principles).¹⁵⁸
- Guidance Note of the Secretary General 'The United Nations and Land and Conflict'.¹⁵⁹
- United Nations Security Council Resolutions.
- Peace agreements.
- United Nations international human rights instruments.¹⁶⁰

Fit-for-purpose land administration: emerging evidence

Emerging evidence shows that fit-for-purpose approaches can support peacebuilding and recovery by documenting housing and property rights, recognizing diverse tenure systems including customary and women's rights, establishing fiscal cadastres for service financing and developing legal frameworks that facilitate restitution while preventing further violations:

- Knowledge development through the assessment of legal frameworks, topic

specific papers, translation into Arabic and other locally used languages and case study development help guide peace agreements, solve disputes, support restitution and inform land reforms. Assessments of land administration systems inform capacity to deliver at scale, from emergency to development.

- National capacity development is achieved by filling technical gaps, adapting the existing tools and systems and strengthening national land administration capacity. This approach prioritizes peacebuilding rather than purely technical goals while confronting historical injustices and the politics of exclusion, using land administration to support vulnerable groups such as minorities, women and displaced people.
- Land information systems are used to assess HLP issues and identify land administration priorities; collect HLP data; clarify and record HLP rights in preparation for planning of settlements; service provision; housing rehabilitation; returns and restitution; award of transitional justice land certificates.
- Alternative land rights approaches, beyond land ownership, are applied in transitional justice and post conflict settings. These focus on protecting HLP rights along the continuum of land rights, including group rights, customary tenure, village level ownership and women's land rights. Digital approaches are used to incrementally

158 UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (2005). [Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons](#) ("the Pinheiro Principles"). E/CN.4/Sub.2/2005/17, 28 June 2005.

159 United Nations (2019)

160 [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (1948); [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#) (1966); [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#) (1966); [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) (1979); [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#) (1989); [Convention Relating to Status of Refugees](#) (1951); [International Covenant on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination \(ICERD\)](#) (1969); [Hague Convention \(IV\) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land](#) (1907); [Geneva Convention \(IV\) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War](#) (1949); [General Comments](#): Human Rights Committee General Comment No.23, 28; Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General Comment No. 4,7,12,14,15,16,20,21; Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination General Comment No.23; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women General Comment No.21; Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No.11; [Convention C169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention](#) (1989) (No. 169).

reconstruct the land administration system by adjudicating land rights through local committees, creating digital databases of rights and claims, using this data for land use planning and service provision, converting it into evidence of (first) rights, upgrading it into the national system and issuing legal land documents. Women's land rights and claims are also identified, adjudicated and recorded in such land administration systems, and women participate in land use planning for conflict prevention and recovery. Pilot land administration initiatives are implemented in displacement-affected hotspots to test and develop innovative business practices.

- Developing a legal cadastral system that also functions as a fiscal cadastre enables the collection of land taxes to help finance basic services. This dual-purpose system strengthens governance and enhances government accountability to citizens by linking land records with public revenue generation.
- Peace agreements should recognize customary and traditional land rights systems, allowing for a broader range of evidence to support land claims. Territorial land use planning must also accommodate pastoralist communities to prevent conflicts with farmers.
- Land laws should promote justice, manage disputes over secondary occupations, facilitate reclamation/restitution, compensate displaced people and resolve disputes, through both statutory and non-statutory bodies, such as religious institutions and traditional authorities. Land laws should avoid privileging registered land rights in

matters related to valuation, compensation and dispute resolution during restitution and voluntary returns.

- For territories under the control of armed groups, it is essential to freeze registered property transactions in sub-national area.

Empowerment of partners and multiple stakeholders

Effective response to displacement and conflict demands engagement across a complex ecosystem of humanitarian actors, coordination mechanisms at global and country levels and partnerships that mobilize resources for land development and housing reconstruction:

- For humanitarian settings there are a range of international actors and coordination mechanisms linked to housing, land and property rights. International actors include UNHCR, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), UNDP, FAO, UN-Habitat, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) and UNRWA. Coordination mechanisms include the Humanitarian Cluster system – Protection and Shelter (global and country levels), the global HLP Area of Responsibility (AoR) of the Global Protection Cluster, the national HLP AoRs, sector coordination and HLP working groups, the UN Country Teams/ Humanitarian Country Teams.
- In conflict settings, public-private-donor-individual partnerships enable people to recover and rebuild their homes. The refugee diaspora can also be a major investor in land development, particularly at small and individual family scales.

2

LAND SECTOR CAPACITIES IN LAND MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS

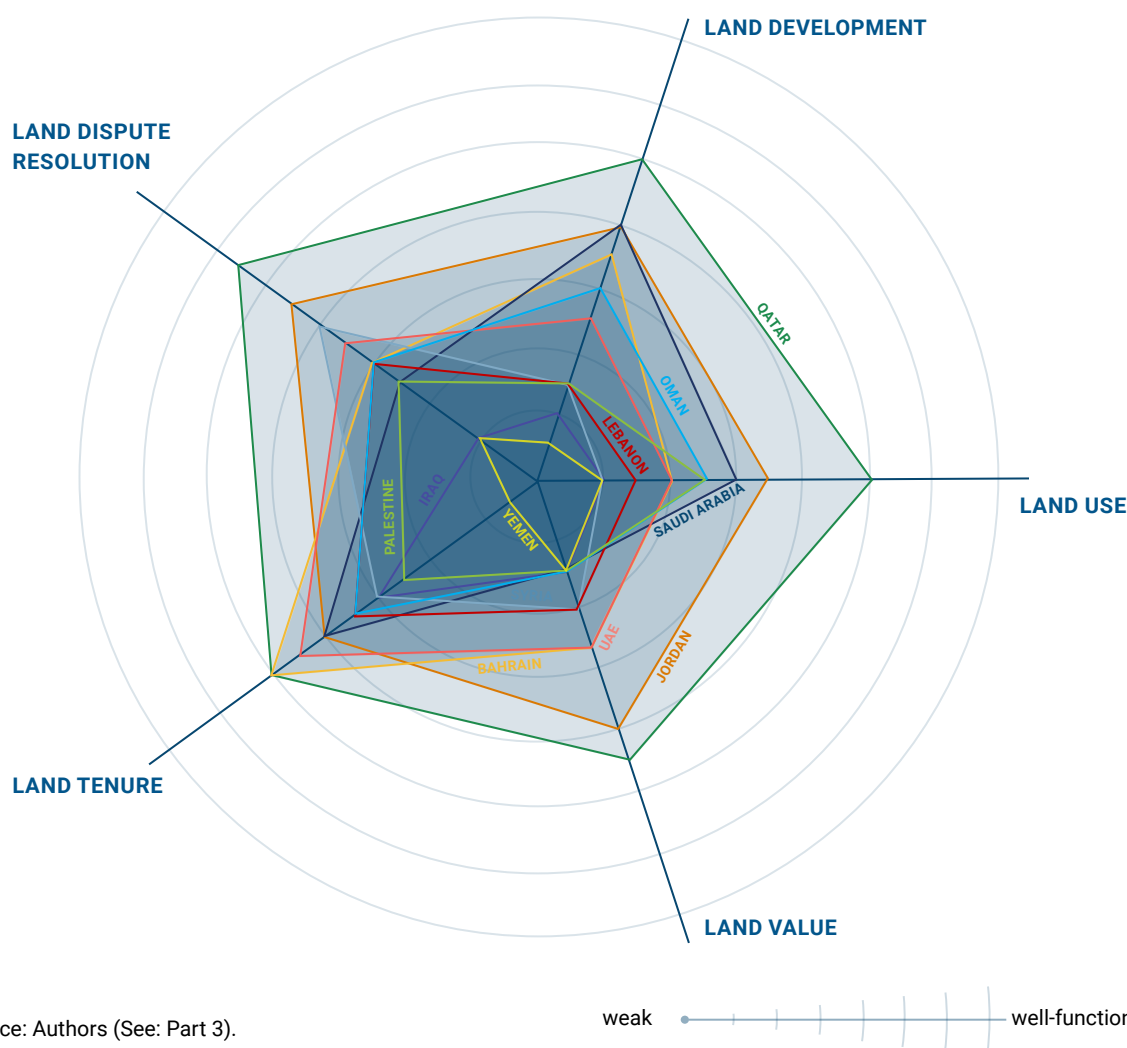
LAND SECTOR'S CAPACITIES IN LAND MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS

While Part 1 of the report provides an overview of land governance elements, Part 2 presents an analysis of the common trends and features across the five key land administration functions, as described in the framework

developed by GLTN partners.¹⁶¹ It builds on information collected at the country level, a review of additional available literature, comparison with global trends and expert analysis by the report's authors.¹⁶²

FIGURE 9: SUMMARIZED RESULTS FOR ALL LAND ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM FUNCTIONS

This graphic should be interpreted as an overview of regional trends rather than as definitive or fully comparable national-level findings. The results, based on country-level data outlined in Chapter 3, are indicative and, in some cases, may be non-conclusive. Variations across countries and contexts may therefore apply.



161 Enemark, S., McLaren, R., and Lemmen, C. (2021).

162 See methodology section for further information

This part of the report contributes to creating a shared understanding and common language around the building blocks of land administration and its topics and trends, and provides some emerging benchmarking for improvement.

Given the scarcity of consolidated knowledge and shared data on land administration and its components, additional information produced or made public on these topics will contribute to strengthening this knowledge base, regardless of whether it aligns with the emerging findings.

2.1 LAND TENURE

Land tenure is the relationship, whether legally or customarily defined, among people as individuals or groups, with respect to land and associated natural resources. Rules of tenure define how property rights in land are to be allocated within societies, along with associated responsibilities and restraints. In simple terms, land tenure systems determine who can use what resources, for how long and under what conditions.¹⁶³

The land tenure research for this study assesses the status and capacity of national land administration systems, with a particular focus on registered land rights and land markets. This involved identification of the common land tenure types found in the region, analysis of how useful the land registration, cadastral and digital land data systems are for ordinary people, analysis of how well the land and property markets operate for ordinary people and refugees and analysis of the types and extent of evictions found in the region. Information contained in this section draws on

national capacity assessment reports, surveys, desk studies, focus groups held at the Writeshop, expert knowledge and other dedicated reports produced for the Arab Land Initiative on Iraq,¹⁶⁴ Jordan,¹⁶⁵ Lebanon¹⁶⁶, Palestine¹⁶⁷ and Syria.¹⁶⁸

The study identified a number of key regional land tenure trends (see also section 2.1.2 for further land tenure trends):

- The proportion of the population (citizens, foreigners, refugees, on registered and unregistered land) that have security of tenure is unknown, as is the proportion of women that has security of tenure.
- Citizens with legal land documents are more likely to have secure tenure rights and can obtain loans using their land as collateral, with both men and women able to obtain loans.
- Urban land is not affordable.
- Transferring registered land between sellers and buyers is easy, but the mechanisms for accessing land are not understood or only partially understood.
- Forced evictions are not common in the region and only occur at scale in a few countries.

Certain regional trends are evident across all country types, regardless of whether they are impacted by conflict, are Gulf States, have high or low citizen populations or have high- or low-income economies. For example, across the region, citizens can obtain a loan using land as

163 GLTN (2013, February 28) [Theme 1: Access to Land and Tenure Security](#).

164 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024b). [Land, Housing, and Property in Iraq: A review of the legal, institutional and administrative frameworks](#).

165 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024c). [Land, Housing, and Property in Jordan: A review of the legal, institutional and administrative frameworks](#).

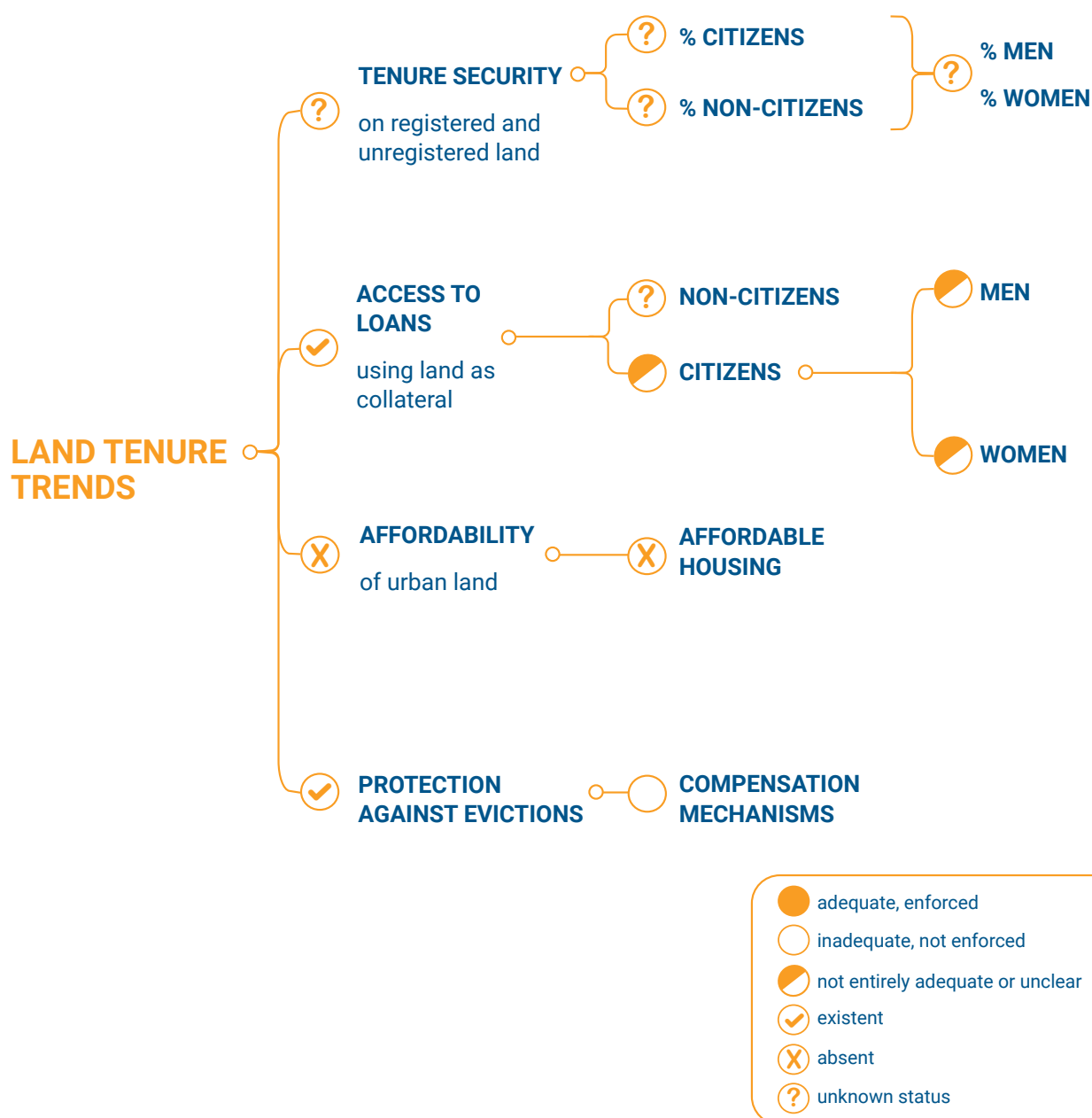
166 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024d). [Legislative and Administrative Land and Property Rights Framework – Lebanon](#).

167 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024a). [Land Governance and Land Rights in Palestine Analysis and Recommendations](#).

168 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2021a). [Land Administration System in Syria: Analysis and Recommendations](#).

FIGURE 10: LAND TENURE TRENDS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

This graphic should be interpreted as an overview of regional trends rather than as a definitive assessment of land tenure performance in the Middle East. The findings are indicative, and variations across countries and contexts may therefore apply.



Source: Authors.

collateral. While many of the Gulf States share similar characteristics, such as a functioning cadastre, their common characteristics are not uniformly present across all Gulf States. Moreover, some of these features, like a functioning cadastre, can also be found in countries affected by conflict, demonstrating that similarities can cut across diverse national contexts.

LAND TENURE TYPES

Land tenure systems in the Arab region have a common historical and cultural legacy for regulating access to land. Even though there are wide intra-regional variations in national land tenure systems, countries in the region have some notable similarities. This is primarily because their legislation has

four common foundations: Islamic law (*Sharia*), the Ottoman code of 1858 which attempted to codify Islamic law, regulations inspired by European legal systems and modern legislation enacted after World War II, such as for agrarian reform (e.g. Iraq, Palestine, Syria).¹⁶⁹

The Ottoman code classified five types of land: private land (*mulk*), state land (*miri*), endowment (*waqf*) land, uncultivated wasteland or dead land (*mawat*) that does not belong to anyone and lands dedicated for general communal use (*matruka*) such as lakes, roads, marketplaces, pasture lands, cemeteries, etc.¹⁷⁰

Most Arab countries' land tenure systems still bear resemblance to these types, with the four primary types being private land, state land, communal land and waqf (religious endowment) land. Each type has specific statutory tenure rights.¹⁷¹

STATUTORY TENURE

- **Private land tenure (*mulk*):** This type of tenure is held by individuals, groups of individuals or corporations. In addition to private land ownership, other recognized rights include usufruct and leasehold (*haq 'intifa'*) and easement (*'irtifaq*). All of these "can usually be acquired and transferred legally by deed, inheritance, will, gift, prescription or pre-emption".¹⁷² Private property (*mulk*) is inherited according to Islamic law where fractional shares of the

property are distributed among eligible heirs.¹⁷³

- **Public/State land tenure (*miri*):** The State owns the land either as public land or as private land (e.g. Iraq). It includes uncultivated "dead" land, or *mawat* (e.g. Jordan), and cultivated land. The State can grant this land or rent it under certain conditions.¹⁷⁴ State land also includes property for general public use such as roads (*matruk mahmi*) or property for use by a particular community such as marketplaces and cemeteries (*matruk murfaq*).¹⁷⁵ Customary practices often determine the right of possession and inheritance of State land, when it has been granted to individuals, and it can be equally inherited between men and women in some countries, such as Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. This is because *miri* land "is regarded traditionally as outside the domain of the compulsory succession rules of Sharia law".¹⁷⁶

- **Communal land tenure:** Historically, communal land (*mashaa*) was widespread and includes pastoral areas. While the community collectively 'owns' the land, its use is governed by established rules and rights. Individuals may hold usufruct rights, allowing them to use the land, but they do not have the authority to sell or transfer ownership. In some countries (e.g. Jordan) tribal land is held jointly by the group in a legal arrangement such as through a land grant. This type of land is disappearing in

169 Serageldin, M., Doebele, W. and Elaraby, K. (1980). Land tenure systems and development controls in the Arab countries of the Middle East. In Safran, L. (Ed.). *Housing: Process and physical form. Proceedings of the seminar held in Jakarta*. March 26-29, 1979 (pp. 75-88); The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and UN-Habitat/GLTN (2022).

170 El-Ayachi, M., Bouramdane, L. and Tine, M. (n.d.). *The Northern Africa land tenure: Challenges and opportunities of sustainable development*; The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and UN-Habitat/GLTN (2022).

171 Forni, N. (2003). *Land tenure policies in the Near East. In Land Reform Land Settlement and Cooperatives*. Issue 1; The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and UN-Habitat/GLTN (2022).

172 Serageldin, M., Doebele, W. and Elaraby, K. (1980), pp. 75-88; The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and UN-Habitat/GLTN (2022).

173 Sait, S. and Lim, H. (2006). *Land, Law and Islam: Property and human rights in the Muslim world*. Zed Books, p.110, quoted in The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and UN-Habitat/GLTN (2022).

174 Forni, N. (2003).

175 Sait, S. and Lim, H. (2006), quoted in The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and UN-Habitat/GLTN (2022).

176 Sait, S. and Lim, H. (2006), p. 110, quoted in The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and UN-Habitat/GLTN (2022), p.48.

most countries (e.g. Jordan) due to individualization and privatization.¹⁷⁷

- **Religious (waqf) land tenure:** *Waqf* (or *Habous*) is a form of Islamic charitable endowment structured as a trust. It includes two types: family waqf (reserved for the benefit of the family of waqf's founder) and religious waqf (reserved for the benefit of a religious institution). Family waqf was modernized in several countries in the past century and was often put under the control of the State (e.g. in Syria). This meant that Awaqf Ministries became holders of large amounts of prime land. *Waqf* land cannot be donated but can be temporarily leased and only sold under certain conditions. Inheritance is limited to usufruct rights, while easement rights may be applied. *Waqf* land can also be expropriated in the public interest.¹⁷⁸

CUSTOMARY TENURE

Customary tenure (*`urf*), usually undocumented, is prevalent across the region, making legal pluralism a defining feature of land governance. Parallel land systems are common despite efforts by national governments to reform their legal systems (e.g. Syria), particularly in large areas of agriculture, pasture and forest land. Contradictory statutory, customary and religious laws have led to many disputes over communal and individual land rights (e.g. Jordan, Yemen) and often take the form of boundary and inheritance disputes and the informal occupation of land.¹⁷⁹

The land rights of pastoralists are increasingly being restricted or nationalized (e.g. in Jordan, Oman, Syria). Customary decision-making processes are also being undermined in many countries due to State control, the impact of globalization and changing political and socio-economic conditions.

This is deepening inequalities in access to and control over land and increasing informal and illegal tenure. In rural areas, tenure regularization programmes have often led to the transfer of land from poorer rural populations to wealthier urban residents, thereby increasing inequalities in land ownership and access.¹⁸⁰

WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS

There is limited land tenure security for women in the region and no consolidated data on women's ownership of or access to land, housing and property is available.

In rural areas, agriculture is the main source of employment for women and in, for example, Jordan, Palestine and Syria, women represent more than 60 per cent of the work force.¹⁸¹ However, less than 7 per cent of agricultural land in the region is held by women¹⁸² and almost one in two women landholders delegates the management of the economic activities over their land to a relative (mostly her father or husband).¹⁸³

Women face disparities in terms of land ownership, land registration, land management

177 Forni, N. (2003).; The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and UN-Habitat/GLTN (2022).

178 Rae, J. (2002a). *An Overview of Land Tenure in the Near East Region*. Parts I & II. Rome: FAO; El-Ayachi, M., Bouramdane, L. and Tine, M. (n.d.); Serageldin, M., Doebele, W. and Elaraby, K. (1980).; The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and UN-Habitat/GLTN (2022).

179 Rae, J. (2002a).; The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and UN-Habitat/GLTN (2022).; Forni, N. (2003).; Rae, J. (2002b). *Tribes and Territory in Modern Day Syria*. in *The Arab World Geographer*, 5(2), pp.102–112.

180 Nori, M., Switzer, J. and Crawford, A. (2005). *Herding on the brink: Towards a global survey of pastoral communities and conflict*. International Institute for Sustainable Development; The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and UN-Habitat/GLTN (2022).

181 Najjar, D. and Badstue, L. (2020). *Four ways of strengthening gender equality in the agricultural sector in the MENA region*. CIMMYT.

182 FAO (2010). *World Census of Agriculture 2010 round (2006-2015)*.

183 UN-HABITAT/GLTN and Union of Agricultural Work Committees (2022). *Land, Women Empowerment and Socioeconomic Development in the Arab Region*.

and access to justice.¹⁸⁴ They have less tenure security compared to their male family members¹⁸⁵ and often rely on their relationship with male relatives for securing their land rights. A recent study in the region showed that, among women with registered land and property, 58 per cent of them had land registered in the name of a male family member, often their husband, father or brother.¹⁸⁶ This is linked to the pervasive misconception that land is male domain, and to general lack of awareness about women's land rights and joint property regimes.¹⁸⁷

Most women landholders in the region (approximately 71 per cent) acquire land through inheritance, followed by purchase (24 per cent).¹⁸⁸ Lack of financial resources limits women's purchasing power as well as their ability to register and invest in their land,¹⁸⁹ while the misinterpretation of Sharia inheritance laws,

together with gender-discriminatory customary practices, often lead to the denial or renunciation of their inheritance rights.¹⁹⁰

While there are common challenges affecting women's land rights in the region, there are also national differences, as identified in the national country summaries (see Part 3). Rural and urban areas often reflect different types of challenges and opportunities for securing women's land rights. The challenges women face are further compounded by discrimination based on socio-economic status, religious affiliation, belonging to minority groups and other factors.

In conflict-affected contexts women tend to be disproportionately impacted by tenure security challenges, as women and as IDPs or refugees. Women are already less likely to have land registered in their name, and displacement-related loss of HLP and civil documents makes

TABLE 3: SHARE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND HOLDERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST DISAGGREGATED BY SEX

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF MALE HOLDERS	TOTAL AREA HELD BY MALE HOLDERS (HA)	NUMBER OF FEMALE HOLDERS	AREA HELD BY FEMALE HOLDERS (HA)
Jordan (2017)	94%	97.6%	6%	2.4%
Lebanon (2010)	91.4%	N.A.	8.6%	N.A.
Oman (2012/2013)	92.3%	N.A.	7.7%	N.A.
Saudi Arabia (2015)	98.6%	99%	1.4%	1%

Source: Authors, based on FAO. [World Census of Agriculture 2010 round \(2006-2015\)](#).

184 Ibid.

185 Najjar, D., Baruah, B., Aw-Hassan, A., Bentaibi, A. and Kassie, G. T. (2018). [Women, work, and wage equity in agricultural labour in Saiss, Morocco. Development in Practice](#); Najjar, D. and Badstue, L. (2020).; UN-HABITAT/GLTN and Union of Agricultural Work Committees (2022).

186 UN-HABITAT/GLTN and Union of Agricultural Work Committees (2022).

187 Ibid.

188 Ibid.

189 Ibid.

190 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2018b). [Women and Land in the Muslim World. Pathways to increase access to land for the realization of development, peace and human rights](#).

women more vulnerable to losing their land and property, as they are not able to authenticate their relationship to the land and/or to family member owning the property.¹⁹¹

INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LAND TENURE

There are a range of informal and non-formal tenure types in the Middle East. The prevalence of informal and non-formal tenures described below is unknown in the region and in specific countries. In general, countries that are linked to conflict and displaced people, such as Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Yemen, tend to have the greatest range of informal and non-formal tenure types, based on the knowledge of the authors of this report. While Syria would be expected to have a similar profile, the Syrian study focused mostly on the government-controlled areas and did not identify non-formal or informal tenures.

The GCC countries tend to have the lowest levels of informal or non-formal tenures. Across the region the most common types of informal and non-formal tenures are illegal occupation of residential land, informal use of agricultural land and unauthorized building within apartments blocks.

- **Illegal occupation of residential land and informal occupation of agricultural land:** This is found in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Yemen. Illegal occupation of residential land is also found in the UAE, while informal use of public or state land is reported in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen and the UAE. Unregistered land is used for commercial or residential purposes in rural areas in Iraq, Jordan, Qatar and Yemen. In Iraq, Jordan and Yemen there are informal types of land documentation and the sale of customary land. Unauthorized subdivision of legally owned land is also observed in

Iraq and Yemen. In the absence of formal documentation, utility bills are often used as proof of possession in Iraq, Lebanon, Qatar and Yemen.

- **Informal use of religious land:** In Qatar and Yemen, land owned by religious institutions is allocated to tenants using a private land registry. In Iraq and Yemen, informal transfers of state land designated as waqf (religious endowment) also occur.
- **Illegal building:** Illegal construction is reported in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen. Additionally, unauthorized building practices, such as construction within set-back areas, adding extra floors, subdividing or consolidating apartments and unpermitted use of common spaces in residential buildings, are found in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, the UAE and Yemen.
- **Group arrangements:** In Lebanon, municipalities lease land to tenants using either written or verbal contracts, and patrons allocate abandoned land for squatting. This allocation of abandoned land by patrons also happens in Qatar. Informal settlement development by groups of people on state or protected land occurs in Iraq, Palestine, the UAE and Yemen, with both regularized and unregularized squatting reported in Yemen. Additionally, large developers use temporary long-term leases in Lebanon, Qatar and the UAE.
- **Refugee camps:** In Iraq and Lebanon, residents of refugee camps informally buy and sell their 'use' rights. In Palestine, refugee camps on state or private land are leased long-term to UNRWA. Additionally, private claims exist in Israeli settlements where privately owned Palestinian land has been unlawfully annexed to Israeli settlements.

191 UN-Habitat (2021c). [*Promoting and Protecting Housing, Land and Property Rights of Syrian Refugees Living in Lebanon: Towards an Integrated Response*](#).

STATUS OF TENURE SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

A number of regional trends were identified regarding security of tenure, land administration, the cadastre, the land registration system and the spatial data infrastructure.

CADASTRAL COVERAGE

The cadastral system covers most of the territory in Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria (in government-controlled areas), Qatar and the UAE. Functioning cadastral systems are reported in Bahrain, Jordan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In the rest of the region, respondents either lacked information on the extent of cadastral coverage or indicated that only a limited portion of the country is covered by a functioning system. Across the region, a variety of registration systems exist for documenting land ownership. These include national land registration systems, temporary public systems, private systems (including those managed by religious institutions) and fiscal cadastres for tax purposes.

Cadastral data is used for a range of purposes in the region, such as urban planning and city expansion (Iraq, Oman) and the development of housing projects (Iraq, UAE). In Oman, cadastral data informs decisions about land availability, infrastructure planning, land transactions and the issuance of building permits for extra floors. Iraq uses it for the development of desert land, land distribution and investment, property expropriation and to provide tenure security for informal settlements. Syria uses cadastral data for planning purposes, at different scales. Land information is accessible at governorate and municipal level in Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. There is no regional trend on the extent to which national cadastral data has been digitized. In Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, cadastral data is linked to other digital data, with urban areas being more likely to have digital data in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Qatar.

Many decision makers in the region use cadastral data, including Prime Minister's Offices, Ministries of Housing, Municipalities, Public Works, Finance, Taxes, Real Estate

CASE STUDY: ADVANCING LAND GOVERNANCE IN SUPPORT OF OMAN VISION 2040

The Sultanate of Oman is undergoing major institutional reforms, initiated with the launch of Oman Vision 2040 in 2019.¹ These reforms aim to address longstanding land-related challenges, including an outdated regulatory framework governing land allocation, development and financing; inadequate inter-agency coordination affecting tenure security, land use planning, finance and dispute resolution; the lack of land data; and insufficient human capacity in the sector.

To support the development of a more efficient and effective land management and administration system, Oman is implementing the National Spatial Strategy,² the 2021-2025 Development Plan³ and the Spatial Development Plans for 11 Governorates. A reformed land system will strengthen land management, support wealth and income distribution policies, promote economic diversification, empower local government and increase the resilience of Omani cities while, at the same time, creating smart cities. These efforts align closely with several strategic priorities identified in the Oman 2040 Vision. Notably, the rules and regulations governing land allocation for the housing sector were recently reformed to address the increasing demand for housing.

¹ Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Economy (2019). Oman Vision 2040.

² Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (2021). Oman National Spatial Strategy 2040.

³ Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Economy (2020). Tenth Five Year Development Plan 2021-2025.

Registration, Tourism and statistical authorities, investment authorities and utilities, including telecom, water and electricity. It is also used by planning authorities at different spatial scales and across all levels of government, as well as by master developers and real estate companies. In Lebanon it is used by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations, and by private and academic institutions.

PROPORTION OF POPULATION WITH SECURITY OF TENURE

Most citizens in Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar and the UAE have secure tenure rights with legally recognized documentation. In the rest of the region, respondents did not know what proportion of the population with land documents had security of tenure or reported that less than half of the population with land documents had security of tenure. Most of those interviewed were only knew about statutory (registered) rights and were not aware of other forms of land tenure rights, such as customary rights.

Across the region most people interviewed were unable to provide estimates on the proportion of the overall population with secure tenure, or on the proportion of women with secure tenure. In many cases, respondents noted that no data was available on women's tenure security. However, in Palestine, Syria, the UAE and Yemen, interviewees consistently reported that fewer women have tenure security than men.

Many of the countries in the region host large foreign populations, including migrant workers and refugees. While some countries have special arrangements to protect the tenure security of these groups (Lebanon, Qatar, UAE), the extent and effectiveness of these measures vary. Overall, it was not possible to identify a clear regional trend on the security of tenure for the total population, nor for women, refugees or foreign workers.

LAND REGISTRATION

In Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the UAE and Yemen, the procedures for registering new properties are considered difficult in comparison to Jordan, Oman and Palestine where they are considered easy. In many countries in the region the mechanisms for accessing land are not understood or only partially understood. Only in Bahrain, Jordan, Oman and Qatar are these mechanisms widely understood.

EASE AND COST OF PROPERTY TRANSFERS

The ease of transferring property from seller to buyer and registering it in the land registry is a key indicator of an effective land administration system. In most countries across the region, including Bahrain, Jordan, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Yemen property transfers are generally considered straightforward. Properties can easily be transferred in the Gulf countries, while in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria it is difficult to transfer properties. This trend is also reflected to some extent in the ease of registering property transfers for businesses. Most countries in the region take longer than 30 days to transfer a property; only in Jordan, Lebanon and Qatar does the transfer process take less than 30 days. There is no consistent trend regarding the affordability of property transfers across the region or within the Gulf States. The cost of transferring a property is considered affordable in Bahrain, Jordan, Palestine and Saudi Arabia, while it is considered unaffordable in Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, the UAE and Yemen.

The World Bank "Ease of Doing Business" index assesses how easy it is for businesses to register transactions when buying or selling real estate. Most Gulf States rank highly, with Qatar ranking first globally, followed by the UAE (10th), Bahrain (17th) and Saudi Arabia (19th). Most countries in conflict settings (national or sub-national conflict), have lower global rankings;

for example, Jordan ranked 78th, Yemen 86th, Palestine 91st, Lebanon 110th, Iraq 121st and Syria 162nd.¹⁹²

Additionally, the 2020 “Doing Business” report, based on 2018 data, assessed the quality of land administration (scored out of 30) and the number of property transfers in each country’s largest business city. Once again, Gulf States generally score higher in terms of land administration quality. In contrast, more densely populated countries tend to have lower scores and often lack available statistics on property transfers in their major cities.

LAND AND HOUSING MARKETS

A range of regional land and property market trends were identified, including on property loans and affordability. Most citizens in the region can obtain loans using their property as collateral. In Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, citizens can obtain loans using property as a collateral, with both men and women being eligible for such loans with the exception of Qatar. At the same time, obtaining such loans to purchase property is considered difficult to very difficult in Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen.

Urban land prices are generally unaffordable for the average citizen in most countries, with exceptions in Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. In Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Syria and Yemen, land is considered moderately to highly unaffordable. Rural land is also unaffordable for the average citizen in many countries including Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Syria, the UAE and Yemen. However, rural (agricultural) land is considered affordable in Jordan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria. In many cases, purchasing their current home would require several years of a citizen’s total income, ranging from 3–7 years in Palestine to up to 30 years in Yemen and Syria.

The housing market is further impacted by large migrant populations, which drive up demand for rental housing. This increased demand often leads to sharp rises in the price of land and housing, exceeding the financial capabilities of citizens and refugees. A mismatch between housing supply and demand, exacerbated by limited housing credit programmes and a shortage of small residential plots, makes home ownership increasingly difficult. Rising rent prices also affect access to affordable and adequate housing for both host communities and refugees, at times leading to tensions between the two groups (for example in Jordan and Lebanon).

EVICCTIONS

Evictions in the region occur under a range of circumstances, broadly categorized into those driven by development projects or housing-related issues, and those resulting from conflict and displacement. It is very unlikely that citizens are evicted or displaced in Bahrain, Jordan, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia or the UAE. Evictions are often associated with national development projects in Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria (government-controlled areas) and are generally accompanied by compensation at full market value. In Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, the UAE and Yemen, people are more commonly evicted because they are unable to pay the rent, because landlords want to increase the rent or, as in Lebanon, because of mortgage defaults during economic downturns. In Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine forced evictions are very common.

There are a number of reasons why forced evictions occur in the region. The prevalence of different types of evictions in the region and in specific countries described below is not known. In general, countries that are linked to conflict and displacement, such as Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen, tend to experience the greatest range of eviction types.

192 World Bank (2019). [Doing Business Archive: Registering Property](#).

Across the region the most common types of evictions are related to war, mass forced displacement, social, religious and political conflicts and the loss of land and civil documentation.

- **Large scale evictions** are linked to war in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen, and to terrorism in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Evictions are also linked to military actions in Iraq, Palestine and Syria. Several countries in the region – Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen – have experienced mass forced displacement, often accompanied by the reallocation of land to secondary occupants by local or external actors. In Syria, widespread destruction of housing stock has directly contributed to evictions. Social, religious and political conflicts have led to displacement in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Yemen. In Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen, the loss of land-related and civil documentation has also been a significant driver of evictions, particularly in conflict-affected areas.
- **Evictions resulting from local conflicts** are common in several countries. In Palestine and Syria, evictions come about when residential areas spread into agricultural land. The disastrous port explosion in Lebanon in 2020 also triggered evictions due to widespread damage. Conflict between refugees linked to tribal court decisions in Palestine causes displacement as people move from one area to another. In Lebanon and Yemen refugees living in rented accommodation are at the highest risk of eviction as many only have informal lease agreements leading to rental increases and disputes with landlords and subsequent evictions. In Iraq and Syria, refugees are forced to move because of inadequate and undignified accommodation such as tents, mud huts or caravans.

- **Limited access to dispute resolution mechanisms** has contributed to evictions in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Additionally, fraud and corruption have been identified as key drivers of evictions in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen.

REGIONAL LAND GOVERNANCE AND TENURE CHALLENGES

Available data and evidence suggest that, although land administration systems exist in the region, they are often inadequate, inaccessible to ordinary citizens and in some cases associated with corruption and elite capture.

These challenges are further exacerbated in conflict-affected areas, where land tenure and land market dynamics become even more complex. This analysis highlights a range of land governance implications stemming from the current state of land tenure and administration systems in the region.

WEAK GOVERNMENT LAND ADMINISTRATION SYSTEMS

- Land administration systems are undermined by weak institutional capacity, lack of agility, non-digital record-keeping, unclear state land ownership and a tendency to prioritize regularization for elites rather than addressing the needs of the entire population:
- Government institutions and officials often lack the capacity to effectively address the land administration needs of the entire population. In many cases, the limited capacity that does exist is used to prioritize the high end of the market.
- The land administration systems are not agile. Bureaucratic and slow governance procedures hinder efficient land delivery. Reliance on paper based rather than digital systems means that rapid changes on the ground are often not recorded. In some

instances, it is unclear which Ministry has rights over State land, which can delay or obstruct project development. Land administration systems are often put in place after people occupy the land. Areas prioritized for regularization are frequently those occupied by elites and powerful actors.

- Inefficient land administration systems cause dysfunctional land and housing markets and contribute to the high cost of housing and shortage of affordable housing.
- Weak land administration systems can be a root cause of conflict.

Land administration systems should be made fit-for-purpose to meet the needs of the whole population and support efficient land markets. This requires streamlining procedures, improving transparency, building capacity in government institutions and officials, transitioning to digital systems, clarifying land rights, including those on state land, and making the system more agile so that land delivery is more rapid. All of this should contribute to more affordable housing.

UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION AND ACCESS TO LAND

Poverty and inequality drive tenure insecurity across the region, with marginalized groups, including the poor, non-citizens, refugees and women, facing systemic barriers to land access, affordable housing and protection from eviction:

- Poverty in the region significantly contributes to inequalities and undermines people's security of tenure in multiple ways. It is linked to a lack of access to land, high costs of land procedures, unaffordable housing, informality, rent related evictions, undignified accommodation and land grabbing by the rich at the expense of the poor.

- Access to and control over land remains highly unequal across both urban and rural areas. In some countries, citizens face tenure insecurity, while in many others, non-citizens, such as migrant workers and refugees, experience even greater exclusion. Large urban informal settlements are found in many countries across the region. Legal pluralism, including overlapping statutory and customary systems, and the occupation of state land by customary groups and pastoralists, further complicate tenure arrangements. Refugees often live in undignified accommodation. Access to credit for land and housing remains unequal for citizens, non-citizens and women. A widespread lack of awareness about land rights further exacerbates these challenges.

- In some countries, the poor are pushed out of inner cities to peripheral areas. Affordable land is made available outside of the cities, in very remote areas with no access to services or jobs, and even social housing initiatives sometimes relocate squatters to these underserved zones.

- People are evicted to make way for development projects; however, individuals with formally registered land rights are generally compensated at market value. Rising rents also lead to evictions by landlords, further contributing to housing insecurity.

A regional goal should be to improve equitable access to and control over land for the majority of the population. This can be achieved through more equitable allocation of land, including through land regularization, affordable land administration procedures and the protection of renters from evictions.

Affordable land for the poor within urban areas close to job opportunities should be prioritized.

CORRUPTION AND STATE CAPTURE BY ELITES

Corruption remains a significant challenge in the land and property sector across the region. Sixteen out of 17 MENA countries reported corruption, political interference or cronyism affecting property rights.¹⁹³ Land-related corruption manifests in several forms:

- Lack of transparency in government procedures facilitates corrupt practices.
- State capture of land and planning institutions by powerful elites enables manipulation of land allocation and planning approvals.
- Illicit use of state land by wealthy and influential individuals.
- High-value inner city land is sold to developers while the poor are displaced to the urban fringe.

To address these issues, comprehensive measures to combat land-related corruption should be introduced. These include transparency and accountability within the land administration system, protecting it from political control and patronage. Public-private partnerships play a significant role in the region's economy and require stronger regulatory frameworks to ensure transparency, accountability and equitable outcomes.

BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVE LAND GOVERNANCE FOR WOMEN

Women face multiple, interconnected barriers to land rights across the region, including gender-neutral legal frameworks that fail to address their specific needs, misinterpretation of religious principles, lack of sex-disaggregated

data, limited access to registration and dispute resolution, exclusion from decision-making at all governance levels and widespread lack of awareness about women's rights:

- Legal frameworks recognize and protect women's land rights, but they remain gender-neutral and fail to address women's specific needs or the barriers they face in exercising these rights. Further, Islamic principles inform practices and permeate national laws. These are often misinterpreted by justice administrators and communities, leading to the enforcement of patriarchal gender discriminatory customary practices.
- The region lacks consolidated data on women's land tenure security and on the context specific challenges they face in accessing, claiming and enjoying their housing, land and property rights. This limits the ability to identify challenges and opportunities for advancing and protecting women's land rights and informing programming and policy reform. Further, it limits institutional accountability for the protection and enforcement of women's rights.
- Women are less likely than men to have registered HLP documents proving their relationship to the land and property, or to have their name included on those documents. This is the result of customary practices which consider land to be a male domain, as well as lack of financial resources to purchase or register their land and property, and difficulties in accessing land administration services. Additional barriers include complex and bureaucratic administrative procedures, lack of civil documents (especially in contexts of displacement) and limited access to gender-responsive land dispute

193 Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2022). [Bertelsmann Transformation Index data](#).

resolution mechanisms to claim and prove their rights.

- Gender-based discrimination limits women's participation in decision-making at all levels of land governance. At the household level, women have limited decision-making power over the use of land and the management of economic activities on that land. At the community level women have limited, if any, say in planning processes, and they have no representation in local dispute-resolution mechanisms which tend to be presided over by groups of men. At the institutional level, some efforts have been made to include gender quotas in land administration processes, however this is not yet sufficient to ensure women's grievances are taken into consideration and that their housing, land and property rights are protected.
- Lack of knowledge and awareness about women's land and property rights and about the means available to protect them is widespread among both women and men and generally among all stakeholders involved in land-related and inheritance processes, preventing women from realizing and enjoying their rights.

To strengthen women's land rights in the region, legal frameworks must be made gender-responsive, explicitly addressing the unique barriers women face in accessing, claiming and securing land.

This includes clarifying the interpretation of religious and customary laws to prevent discriminatory practices. Investments should be made in collecting sex-disaggregated data on women's land tenure security to inform evidence-based policies and programming. Simplifying land registration procedures, expanding access to civil documentation and ensuring affordable, gender-sensitive land administration services are essential. Women's participation in land governance must be actively promoted at all levels, including through

representation in dispute resolution bodies and planning processes. Finally, targeted awareness campaigns are needed to improve knowledge of women's land rights among both women and men, as well as among key stakeholders.

REFUGEES

Refugee movements often strain land administration systems, while refugees themselves experience systematic tenure insecurity, exclusion from formal systems, rental vulnerabilities and the ongoing legacy of mass evictions and displacement:

- A key lesson learned in the region is that large-scale refugee influxes can place significant strain on land administration systems, creating long-lasting disruptions. These shocks often result from the rapid introduction of new regulations, settlement layouts and land allocation procedures to accommodate displaced populations. In many cases, countries were unprepared to respond to these shocks and lacked risk management strategies, roadmaps or plans to guide the adaptation of land administration systems to the large numbers of displaced.
- Tenure insecurity is a characteristic vulnerability in refugees. Land administration systems are used systematically to ensure that (some) refugees are excluded from the formal land system. Refugees who rent are also vulnerable because of the use of informal rental agreements, rising rent prices and risk of evictions.
- The income and citizenship profile of refugees during large-scale movements impacts the land and property market and rental markets differently. High-income refugees, especially those permitted to purchase property, are more likely to influence the land market and land administration capacity, as they acquire property in the local market rather than live in refugee camps.

Refugees who are not given citizenship and who lack security of tenure and ease of access to the land administration system might not invest in the country.

- Plural legal land systems can be affected by refugees. Large refugee movements have increased the value of tribal land in some countries. Tension can increase between the state and the tribes when tribal land is sold to refugees informally without the consent of the state.
- While large scale evictions occur only in a few countries in the region, they have caused massive decades-long displacement across the region. Land administration systems continue to grapple with the legacy of these displacements, both in conflict-affected countries and their neighbors.

To address these challenges, conflict-sensitive, fit-for-purpose land administration systems are essential. These should support good land governance by protecting displaced populations from HLP rights violations; preventing evictions and illegal acquisition of land; safeguarding HLP evidence, including civil documentation; and facilitating the restitution of HLP rights and return.

The adoption of the humanitarian-peace-development approach will help build a land administration system that underpins social and economic recovery.

2.2 LAND USE

Land use refers to the various ways that land is employed or occupied for different purposes and economic activities, such as agriculture, forestry, urban development, infrastructure and conservation.¹⁹⁴ As a function of land administration, land use encompasses

“the processes and institutions related to control of land use through adoption of planning policies and land use regulations at national, regional and local levels; the enforcement of land use regulations; and the management and adjudication of land use conflicts.”¹⁹⁵

This study assessed the status and capacity of the national, regional and local land use planning systems in the Middle East, with a particular focus on government-led planning. This involved the identification of common land use planning approaches, regulations, processes and land information systems found in the region, and an assessment of their adequacy and level of implementation and enforcement.

Land use plans should articulate a vision for improving people’s quality of life. However, planning alone is insufficient for effective land use management; the quality of the plans, their implementation and coordination mechanisms across government are equally critical to sustainable outcomes. To achieve this, land use plans at different scales must be coherent with each other.

The study identified a number of key regional land use trends (also see section 2.2.1 for further land use trends):

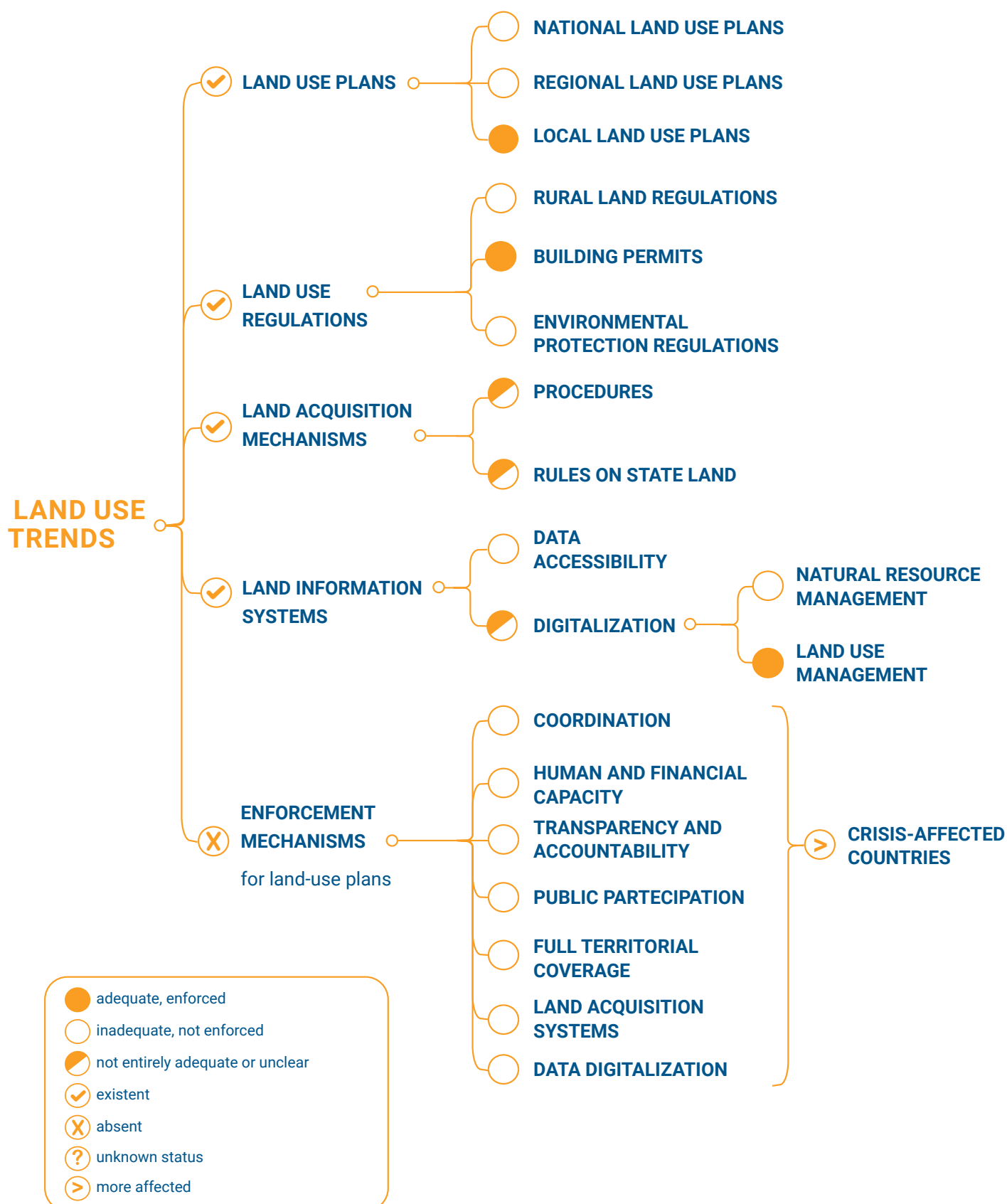
- Governance challenges in land use planning can be found throughout the region. However, countries affected by conflict, such as Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen, experience a higher level of governance challenges in land use.
- Most countries have land use plans at different levels of government, but they are generally inadequate and not enforced, with the exception of local level plans.

194 FAO (2021). *Land use statistics and indicators: Global, regional and country trends 1990–2019*. (FAOSTAT Analytical Brief No. 28).

195 Enemark, S. (2009). *Land Administration Systems, managing rights, restrictions and responsibilities in land*. Map World Forum, Hyderabad, India, p.3.

FIGURE 11: LAND USE TRENDS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

This graphic should be interpreted as an overview of regional trends rather than as a definitive assessment of land use performance in the Middle East. The findings are indicative, and variations across countries and contexts may therefore apply.



Source: Authors.

Weak enforcement mechanisms are a challenge across the region. The lack of coordination and overlapping roles of land related institutions are major obstacles to implementing land use plans.

- There are numerous land use regulations in the region that address various land issues. Regulations for rural land, building permits and environmental protection are common, but only building permit regulations are adequate and enforced.
- Most countries in the region lack human resource capacity; this is a key reason land use planning systems are considered inadequate and are not enforced.
- Governments can easily acquire private land for public purposes, however the procedures for doing so are not clear. Rules for managing land use on state land are also unclear.
- Land information systems with data on land and natural resources are common but not accessible. Land use management systems are often digital, whereas natural resource management systems lag behind in digitalization.

At the national level, land use plans are common across the region (Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE), though in Lebanon, Palestine and Saudi Arabia, these plans exist but remain inadequate and are not enforced.

Regional land use plans are also widespread (Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE). However, they are neither adequate nor enforced in Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Yemen, while In Jordan they are adequate but not enforced.

Local land use plans exist in Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. A significant regional trend emerges at this level: compared to national and regional plans, local plans are considered adequate in all countries except Syria; they are also enforced in most, including Bahrain, Jordan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, though not in Iraq and Syria.

Land use plans for major and growing urban centres are found in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the UAE and Yemen, with enforcement occurring in most of those countries (Jordan, Qatar, Syria, UAE, Yemen).

STATUS OF LAND USE PLANNING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

This section examines regional trends in land use planning from two perspectives: (a) government capacity to manage land use planning and land use change at different administrative levels (national, regional, local and major urban centres), and (b) coordination mechanisms and regulatory frameworks governing land use among different levels of government. The analysis identified regional trends in the existence, adequacy and enforcement of land use plans across these administrative tiers (Table 4). Similar challenges were evident in both conflict-affected and non-conflict-affected countries.

Land use plans are frequently inadequate or not enforced for multiple, often compounding reasons. The study identified a number of these reasons, particularly for countries affected by conflict (Table 5), though it does not indicate the prevalence of each across countries. Such reasons include:

- Conflicts of interest between government policies/plans and the interests of private land users, such as landowners and land developers, in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen. This points to a trend that in countries experiencing conflict, competing interests more frequently impact the land use planning process.

TABLE 4: RESULTS OF THE ASSESSMENT ON LAND GOVERNANCE AND LAND USE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

TRENDS	MIDDLE EAST	GULF	IRAQ	JORDAN	LEBANON	PALESTINE	SYRIA	BAHRAIN	OMAN	QATAR	SAUDI ARABIA	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	YEMEN
National land use plans are produced	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
National land use plans are perceived as adequate by the majority of respondents	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	NO DATA	✗
According to the majority of respondents, national land use plans are enforced	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	NO DATA	✓	✗	✓	✗
Regional land use plans are produced	✓	NO DATA	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
Regional land use plans are perceived as adequate by the majority of respondents	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	NO DATA	✓	✗	✗	✗
According to the majority of respondents, regional land use plans are enforced	✗	✗	✗	✗	NO DATA	✗	✗	✗	NO DATA	✓	✗	✗	✗
Local land use plans are produced	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
Local land use plans are perceived as adequate by the majority of respondents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	NO DATA	✓	✓	✓	✗
According to the majority of respondents, local land use plans are enforced	NO DATA	✓	✗	✓	NO DATA	✓	✗	✓	NO DATA	✓	✓	✓	✗
Land use plans exist for the main and growing urban centres	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	NO DATA	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Land use plans for the main and growing urban centres are perceived as adequate by the majority of respondents	✗	NO DATA	✗	✗	✗	✓	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	✓	✗	✓	NO DATA
According to the majority of respondents, land use plans for the main and growing urban centres are enforced	NO DATA	NO DATA	✗	✓	NO DATA	✗	✓	NO DATA	NO DATA	✓	NO DATA	✓	✓

Source: Authors.

TABLE 5: RESULTS OF THE ASSESSMENT ON REASONS FOR INEFFICIENT IMPLEMENTATION OF LAND USE PLANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

REASONS	IRAQ	JORDAN	LEBANON	PALESTINE	SYRIA	BAHRAIN	OMAN	QATAR	SAUDI ARABIA	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	YEMEN
Conflicts / conflicts of interest between government policies / plans and private land users (particular landowners and land developers)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	NO DATA	✓
Private sector has more power than government	✓	✗	✓	✓	NO DATA	✗	✗	✗	✗	NO DATA	✗
Land use decisions are influenced by corruption at the local level	✓	✓	✓	✓	NO DATA	NO DATA	✗	✗	NO DATA	NO DATA	✓
Land use decisions are influenced by corruption at the political / high level	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	NO DATA	✗	✗	NO DATA	NO DATA	✓
Local communities resistance to the implementation of the land use plans	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	NO DATA	✓
Land use changes on the ground are faster than the developed plans (reactive enforcement)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	NO DATA	✓
Land use plans are outdated	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	NO DATA	NO DATA	✓
Land use plans are not realistic	✓	✓	NO DATA	✓	NO DATA	✗	✗	✗	✗	NO DATA	✓
Lack of enforcement mechanisms	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	NO DATA	✓
Inter-agency fragmentation (lack of coordination) among the institutions with land-related functions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	NO DATA	✓
There are duplications in the land-related institutional roles	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	NO DATA	✓	✓	✓	NO DATA	✓
The enforcement of land use plans is constrained by clientelist relations between those in power and the communities that do not respect land use plans	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	NO DATA	✗	✗	NO DATA	NO DATA	✓
Land information is not digitized	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	NO DATA	✓
The access to land use data and information is restricted	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	NO DATA	✓
The changes in land uses are not recorded	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	NO DATA	✗	✗	NO DATA	NO DATA
Rural areas are not covered or not sufficiently covered by land use plans	✓	✗	✓	✓	NO DATA	✓	✓	✗	✓	NO DATA	✓
Lack of specialized human resources	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	NO DATA	✓
Lack of mechanisms to declass national land use plans	✓	✓	✓	✗	NO DATA	✗	✓	✗	✓	NO DATA	✓
Land use plans are not connected with the financing and allocation of budgets for implementation	✓	✓	✓	✓	NO DATA	✗	✓	✗	✓	NO DATA	✓
Lack of unified classification of land uses and land cover types	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	NO DATA	✗	✗	NO DATA	✓

Source: Authors.

- Power dynamics affect the enforcement of land use plans. In conflict affected countries, land use planning is shaped by clientelist relationships between those in power and local communities (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen). Land use decisions are influenced by corruption at both high/political levels and at the local level in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen – all countries affected by conflict. There is also a lack of enforcement mechanisms in Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen. In Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, which again are all conflict affected countries, the private sector has more power than the government in land use planning.
- Mechanisms to localize national land use plans are lacking in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Local communities in countries affected by conflict also often resist the implementation of land use plans (Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen) as they are perceived to potentially affect them adversely.
- Rural areas are not covered or insufficiently covered by land use plans in Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.¹⁹⁶
- Land use plans are outdated and fail to keep pace with rapid land use changes in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Syria and Yemen, resulting in enforcement that reacts to land use change rather than leads it.
- Land use implementation plans are insufficiently linked to financing and government budget allocation in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.
- All countries in the region lack human resources with adequate capacity.
- Land use plans are often unrealistic in conflict-affected contexts, such as Iraq, Jordan, Palestine and Yemen.
- Government institutions often have inadequate inter-agency coordination. Responsibility for land use planning is fragmented across numerous institutions in almost all countries of the region (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen).
- Access to land use information is restricted in most countries in the region (Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen) and digital land use information is not available, which hinders the improvement of coordinated land use planning (Iraq, Lebanon Oman, Palestine, Syria and Yemen).

LAND USE PLANNING REGULATIONS

The study examined land use planning regulations across four key areas: rural land, informal and temporary displaced population settlements, building permits and environmental protection. While most countries have adopted some form of regulation in these areas, significant gaps remain in their adequacy and enforcement.

Regulations associated with land use planning in rural areas are commonly found in Jordan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the UAE. However, no clear regional trend emerged regarding whether these regulations are adequate or effectively enforced.

Several countries (Iraq, Jordan, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Syria) have established legal frameworks or national strategies to govern informal settlements. These regulations are absent in Lebanon, Oman, Palestine and Yemen¹⁹⁷. Overall, the study found no consistent regional patterns

¹⁹⁶ It was not possible to assess this in the UAE due to lack of data.

¹⁹⁷ UN-HABITAT and Islamic Development Bank Group (2020). [*Informal Settlements in the Arab Region: Towards Arab Cities without informal areas- Analysis and prospects*](#).

in the existence, adequacy or enforcement of regulations for either informal settlements or temporary displaced population settlements.

All countries examined in the study have building permit regulations. In Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE these regulations are both adequate and enforced. Iraq enforces building permit regulations, though they are considered inadequate. Oman also enforces such regulations, but their adequacy is unknown.

Environmental regulations are common in the region, existing in Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the UAE. However, enforcement occurs only in Oman, Palestine, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. These regulations are perceived as adequate only in Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

LAND USE PLANNING PROCESSES

Land use planning processes refer to the rules, regulations and government mechanisms through which government allocates state or private land for different uses. These processes often involve competition and conflict between different actors over land allocation and use rights, requiring multiple planning approvals across various government levels, both vertically and horizontally, and coordination with non-state partners such as developers and landowners.

This report assessed whether land use planning processes for both state and private land, and their implementation, are transparent and accessible for citizens and land professionals. The analysis looked at: (a) governments' ability to acquire private land for public development purposes; (b) rules for managing state land. Mechanisms for governments to acquire private land for public purposes exist in Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Qatar and Syria. This indicates that governments can easily acquire private land for public purposes in both countries affected by conflict and other countries. There is no

regional trend as to whether or not the way governments do this is clear to people and land professionals.

In contrast, the rules governing state land management are often unclear in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen, showing a regional trend that is more (but not totally) associated with countries experiencing conflict. No regional trend on the adequacy of the rules for state land management was identified.

LAND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The assessment examined three key aspects of land information management systems: their existence, accessibility in terms of people being able to access the system and level of digitization. Two categories of land information were evaluated: land uses and natural resources.

Digital land use information systems are common in the region, operating in Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, while Oman maintains a non-digital system. Despite their prevalence, these systems remain largely inaccessible in most of the region, with the exceptions of Jordan and Qatar. Land information systems for natural resources exist throughout the region in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. However, digitization is limited, as only Palestine, Jordan and Qatar have implemented digital systems for natural resources. Accessibility is even more restricted, as Qatar is the sole country where these systems are readily accessible to citizens and land professionals.

REGIONAL LAND GOVERNANCE AND LAND USE CHALLENGES

While the region has established land use plans, regulations and planning processes, their effectiveness is undermined by several interconnected land governance issues:

Power dynamics

Land use planning should manage competition and conflict over land use allocation while supporting national, regional and local strategies, improved quality of life of the population and sustainable land management. However, implementation is frequently influenced by the agenda of powerful interests, including political groups, sectoral governmental departments and private developers, who prioritize capital gains over strategic national and local land use needs.

The region exhibits high levels of land-related corruption¹⁹⁸ at senior and local levels. Politicians and developers can distort national, regional and local land use plans, including for regularization of existing developments, as well as their implementation through selective prioritization of investments and financing. The approval process exacerbates the problem, requiring multiple permits from various government officials and departments, across different governmental levels, creating numerous rent-seeking opportunities.

Fragmented coordination

Implementation is complicated by overlapping and sometimes contradictory mandates among government entities. Land use planning functions are fragmented both vertically across government levels and horizontally across sectors, with agencies competing for implementation budgets. This fragmentation makes implementation at the local level complex, particularly for sectoral plans, as no central coordination function exists to create cohesive overall plans. The absence of integrated digital land use information systems further hampers coordination efforts. Consequently, even when plans exist it can remain unclear which ministry ultimately holds budget authority and the responsibility to implement those plans.

Capacity constraints

Many countries in the region face significant human capacity shortfalls in land use planning and its implementation. A critical gap exists in financial planning capacity, as governments struggle to link land use planning with budget allocations. Plans are frequently not implemented because the cost of doing so is not calculated or budgeted, and responsible entities lack knowledge of appropriate funding mechanisms or exhaust available budgets. Developers often wait for governments to invest before they themselves invest in implementing a land use plan.

The quality of land use plans is often a challenge. Plans may be outdated, non-existent, inconsistent with existing or planned infrastructure or not of a high enough quality to be implemented. Traditional methods used to prepare land use plans are too slow to keep pace with rapid urbanization in some countries, which results in infrastructure development lagging behind residential growth. Land use planning, budget allocation for infrastructure and regularization efforts are often prioritized for elite areas rather than addressing broader community needs.

Limited public participation

Regional planning processes lack transparency regarding procedures, regulations and the land use information systems. Participatory planning, even at the local level, is not common. This limits the ability of the public to engage with governments or large developers in negotiating community needs. Public engagement in the decision-making process is particularly insufficient when governments intervene to acquire private land or to allocate rights of use on state land to private interests.

198 Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2022).

Gaps in land governance

Informal settlements reflect urban inequalities, poverty and lack of access to adequate housing. Many countries in the region have large informal settlement populations, comprised of poor residents, low-income expatriate workers, people displaced by drought or conflict, refugees and internally displaced persons. Despite the prevalence of such settlements, the study shows that land use planning in the region gives insufficient attention to these communities.¹⁹⁹

Rural land use planning is severely lacking across the region, directly contributing to food insecurity. This is particularly critical given that many countries have limited crop and pasture land, with less than 5 per cent of regional land being arable.²⁰⁰

Urban sprawl often consumes arable land, which could be prevented by strategic land use planning. The absence of land use plans also results in a lack of services and infrastructure for rural populations, which in turn pushes people to urban areas, further impacting rural agricultural productivity.

Conflict-specific challenges

Conflict affected countries are more likely to have inadequate, unenforced, outdated and unrealistic national and regional land use plans, with weak links to financing and budgets. The plans are also more susceptible to corruption, power dynamics, conflicts of interest and resistance from local communities.

In such contexts, land use planning cannot keep pace with developments on the ground. Those in power frequently allocate state land for personal purposes and agendas through corrupt practices, while rules for state land management remain unclear.

The rule of law in land use planning and its implementation is weakened, transforming what should be used to prevent conflict into a source of conflict itself. Plans become arenas for political competition and patron-client relationships, intensifying fragmentation, institutional overlap and government coordination failures. In this setting government departments and officials operate without accountability, failing to support or enforce strategic plans that would benefit the broader population.

Strategic land use planning for human settlements is often absent when managing large displaced populations, creating long term challenges for the land use management system, such as environmental degradation, pollution, high population densities and severe traffic challenges as people commute to jobs. Quick-fix regulations, infrastructure developed to address rapid population influxes and designation of inadequate site sizes used to rapidly address these large influxes of people can persist in the land administration system for decades, with lasting negative impacts.

Conflict-sensitive planning

Conflict-sensitive land use planning, relevant for both conflict-affected and stable countries, can contribute to more equitable and sustainable economic growth in the region, as well as peace building and security. To achieve this, effective plans would need to (1) allocate land and resources, including government investments, equitably; (2) prevent rather than be a root cause of conflict; (3) respond effectively to rapid urban growth, including large scale population movements associated with displacement; (4) incorporate water sensitivity and risk management; (5) prevent and manage urban sprawl into agricultural land; and (6) drive reconstruction efforts for displaced populations.

199 UN-HABITAT and Islamic Development Bank Group (2020).

200 FAO (2022). [*The State of Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture in the Near East and North Africa region*](#).

2.3 LAND DEVELOPMENT

Land development involves the strategic use of financial, human and administrative resources to enhance land and support improved or more efficient land uses. This can include investments in buildings, infrastructure and utilities; labour to prepare land for productive use; and administrative actions such as securing or amending planning approvals.

Key land administration activities within land development include the construction of infrastructure and utilities, land acquisition and expropriation for public purposes, changes in land use through planning and permitting processes and the allocation of development costs.

Four main aspects of land development in the Arab region are discussed in this section, namely: (a) the process adopted by governments to acquire private owned land; (b) planning, construction, sub-division and consolidation regulations; (c) land use change and infrastructure for land development; and (d) the sharing of the urban development costs between public and the private actors.

The study identified a number of key regional land development trends (also see section 2.3.1 for further land development trends):

- Land acquisition and expropriation mechanisms exist widely across the region, but they are considered fair and cost-effective only in a minority of countries (Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia). In conflict-affected contexts (Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Yemen), these mechanisms are viewed as unfair and not cost-effective, and compensation is often inadequate or unpaid.
- Regulations for planning, construction, subdivision and consolidation exist

throughout the region but are only correctly implemented and considered cost-effective in some GCC countries (Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE). In many countries, awareness of subdivision regulations in rural areas is low.

- Mechanisms to change land use through planning permissions and building permits exist in most countries but are considered cost-effective and properly implemented only in Bahrain, Jordan, Palestine and Qatar.
- Property development processes are generally easier for landowners and developers in the Gulf States and Jordan, but more challenging in conflict-affected countries.
- Mechanisms to distribute development costs between public and private actors are largely absent or unknown across the region, with Qatar being a notable exception. Public-private partnerships exist in only six countries.
- Certain regional patterns emerge regardless of country income levels or conflict status. For example, the fairness and effectiveness of land acquisition mechanisms tend to correlate more strongly with governance capacity than with wealth alone, as evidenced by challenges in both low-income and middle-income contexts affected by fragility.

STATUS OF LAND DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

There is a legacy of central planning in the MENA region.²⁰¹ Development projects have been hampered by ongoing geopolitical tensions and conflict (Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Yemen) as these undermine investor confidence,²⁰² particularly in

201 George T. Abed and Hamid R. Davoodi (2003). *Challenges of Growth and Globalization in the Middle East and North Africa*.

202 Farrer & Co LLP (2018). Property Development in the Middle East.

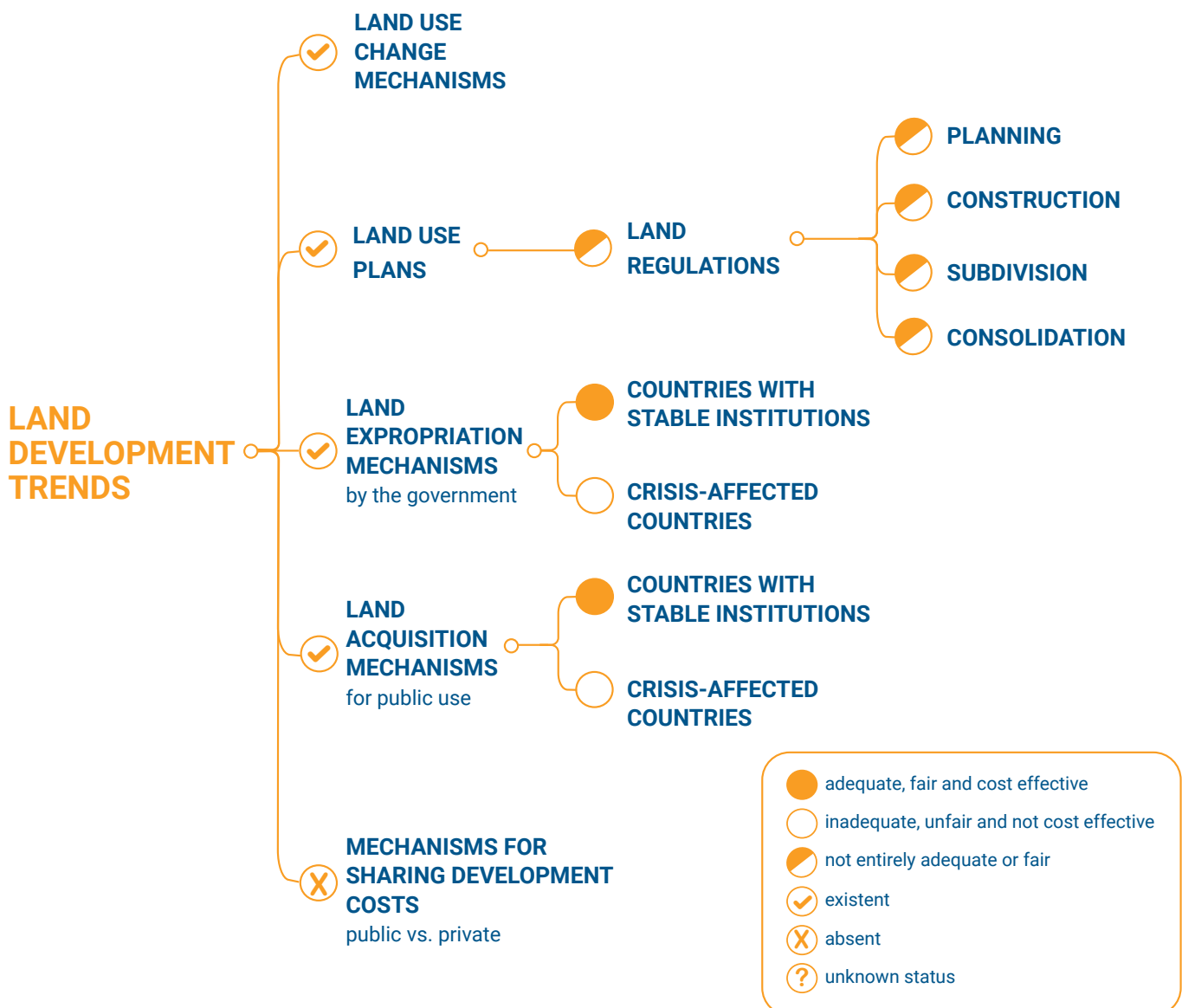
foreign direct investment. In the GCC countries, to attract foreign investment, incentives such as tax exemptions have been granted to foreign investors.²⁰³ Further, in countries that restrict foreign ownership of real estate, foreign investors may be granted exemptions. For example, Qatar allows foreigners (non-national and non-GCC nationals, individuals or companies) to hold

freehold title in certain select areas such as The Pearl, West Bay Lagoon and Al Khor resort projects.²⁰⁴

The rising cost of oil per barrel has increased the liquidity of sovereign wealth funds, driving nation-building programmes across the Middle East.²⁰⁵ In 2022, the Gulf countries witnessed

FIGURE 12: LAND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

This graphic should be interpreted as an overview of regional trends rather than as a definitive assessment of land development performance in the Middle East. The findings are indicative, and variations across countries and contexts may therefore apply.



Source: Authors.

203 Ibid.

204 Ibid

205 Illankoon, K. (1 July 2022). [Middle East construction gains momentum despite supply chain disruption and rising construction costs](#). Construction Business News.

a new wave of landmark projects, with Saudi Arabia leading the market with a number of new mega-projects, such as the Red Sea Resort, Neom, the Diriyah Gate, Amaala and King Salman Park, and seven new entertainment districts. In the UAE, Abu Dhabi is advancing its cultural and infrastructure development agenda while the residential and hospitality sectors remain central to Dubai's development projects. Qatar's focus is on government investment projects like Lusail, Qatar Rail and Free Zones post-FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Oman's focus is on multiple port developments and the Madinat Al Irfan Development.²⁰⁶

ACQUISITION OF PRIVATE LAND

Implementing land use plans often requires the acquisition and reallocation of land. Mechanisms to facilitate such land acquisition exist only in Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria. In Iraq, Palestine and Syria these mechanisms are neither considered fair nor cost-efficient, and are frequently misapplied.

National laws specify the purpose and compensation for land acquisition. Jordan's Real Estate Ownership Law no. 13 of 2019, for example, states the purpose for land acquisition as "fulfilling the public use or benefit."²⁰⁷ In Syria, when land is expropriated for social housing purposes, the original landowners receive priority for housing units proportionate to their needs.²⁰⁸

Land expropriation mechanisms exist across all eleven countries (Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, UAE, Yemen). However, they are deemed fair and cost-effective only in Jordan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Countries affected by conflict or fragility (Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Yemen) report unfair and inefficient expropriation mechanisms.

Compensation issues are particularly acute in conflict-affected regions, where payments are either inadequate or not made at all.

PLANNING, CONSTRUCTION, SUB-DIVISION AND CONSOLIDATION REGULATIONS

Physical development is usually regulated by country strategies, frameworks and plans developed at multiple scales, including regional, district, local and master plans. Development plans should be informed by community needs and designated land for specific uses: residential buildings, commercial zones, public services (hospitals, schools, mosques, parks) and areas requiring environmental and historical protection.²⁰⁹

While mechanisms to align construction with land use regulations exist across the region (with exception of Palestine), they are correctly implemented and considered cost-effective only in Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE.

Regulations governing land sub-division and consolidation exist in urban areas across all eleven countries. These regulations serve to prevent informal and illegal land divisions while ensuring government records accurately reflect ground conditions. This is a critical factor for financial institutions providing mortgages and loans to both large- and small-scale developers. However, these regulations are considered fair only in Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria, and cost-effective only in Jordan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Rural land sub-division regulations exist across the region (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Syria, UAE, Yemen), but public awareness of these regulations is limited in Bahrain, Iraq, Oman, Palestine and Yemen.

²⁰⁶ Ibid

²⁰⁷ Real Estate Ownership Law no. 13 of 2019, Article 179. Jordan.

²⁰⁸ UN-Habitat (2021b). [Land Administration System in Syria: Analysis and Recommendations](#).

²⁰⁹ UN (2005). [Land Administration in the UNECE Region: Development trends and main principles](#).

CHANGE OF LAND USE AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Urban development, re-development and sprawl drive significant socio-economic changes. As new towns are developed in accordance with resettlement schemes, land use changes become necessary to accommodate new development plans. Urban sprawl creates substantial demand for infrastructure and services, such as transport, water supply and waste disposal. Development (and re-development) projects attract real property investment and stimulate economic growth by creating employment opportunities.²¹⁰

Mechanisms for changing land use through planning permissions and building permits exist in all countries except Yemen. However, only Bahrain, Jordan, Palestine and Qatar report that these mechanisms are cost-effective and properly implemented.

Several countries face challenges implementing development plans. In Bahrain, Iraq and Lebanon, suitable vacant land for development projects is scarce. Iraq, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Yemen struggle with insufficient information about the location of state land. In Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, new development projects, including those far from urban centres, often lack adequate infrastructure and services.

LAND DEVELOPMENT AND COST-SHARING

The property development process varies in accessibility across stakeholder groups. Landowners find the process straightforward in Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the UAE. Professional developers report ease of development in Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Public authorities

experience accessible development processes in Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Land and property development involves different costs: direct costs, indirect costs, construction costs and development costs.²¹¹ Development costs, distinct from construction costs, include all expenses from property creation to operational status, covering land acquisition, legal fees, servicing and marketing. Mechanisms to distribute development costs between public and private actors are largely absent in the region. Such mechanisms do not exist in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, the UAE and Yemen. In Bahrain, Jordan, Oman and Saudi Arabia, stakeholders are unaware of any existing mechanisms. Only Qatar has established systems to ensure equitable cost distribution between public and private actors.

Private sector participation mechanisms remain inadequate for the implementation of plans and land delivery in many countries: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Public-private partnerships, which are critical for the private sector engagement, exist only in Bahrain, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar and the UAE.

REGIONAL LAND GOVERNANCE AND LAND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

Despite the existence of mechanisms for implementing development plans and strategies across the region, several land governance challenges significantly hinder their effectiveness.

POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND AGENDA MISALIGNMENT

Land development is frequently influenced by the agendas of powerful political groups rather

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

than sustainable urban development principles. In Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Yemen, there is often a gap between government agencies land use planning strategies and developer agendas. Land development is pursued for capital gains rather than sustainable development addressing the needs of rapidly growing cities.

The close ties between development projects and political agendas create additional complications. As political leadership changes within ministries, priorities shift accordingly, disrupting plan implementation across most countries in the region, such as Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen.

This political volatility results in plans and programmes being abandoned or left unimplemented.

INSUFFICIENT FUNDING AND FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

Government budgets for land development frequently fall short of the requirements outlined in land use plans. This funding gap is particularly pronounced in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen. High land prices compound this challenge across Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen.

In conflict-affected countries, such as Iraq, Palestine, Syria and Yemen, banks and financial institutions are reluctant to finance large-scale development projects, likely due to the sensitive nature of services and infrastructure in conflict settings.

The financing challenges extend to individuals and families in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen where securing loans and mortgages for small-scale development projects proves difficult. This credit constraint severely limits people's ability to improve and rebuild their homes and neighbourhoods in conflict contexts.

PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPATION CHALLENGES

While the private sector could play a vital role in land development and plan implementation, most countries in the region lack adequate support mechanisms. Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Yemen have either no or inadequate mechanisms to facilitate private sector involvement.

In Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen private sector participation is hampered by the lack of laws and regulations enabling public-private partnerships. Developers often face confusion about which land use plans to follow when contradictory plans exist for the same location.

In Jordan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen, the planning process typically terminates at the plan preparation stage without transitioning to the development phase, a problem affecting both conflict and non-conflict settings. Consequently, private sector land development may align more closely with individual corporate agendas than with master plans, particularly in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

LAND DISPUTES AND COMMUNITY OPPOSITION

The implementation of land development plans frequently triggers disputes. Contributing factors include inadequate or unfair compensation for land acquisition in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen, as well as insufficient consultation with local communities, particularly regarding boundary determinations.

Local communities that oppose development plans can significantly impede implementation. In Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen, community resistance has at times slowed project progress. In Iraq, Palestine and Yemen, opposition has sometimes completely halted plan implementation.

THE NEED FOR IMPROVED LAND GOVERNANCE MEASURES

Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive land governance reforms focused on several key areas:

- Government roles, accountability structures and budgeting processes must be strengthened to better regulate and facilitate private sector developers and private investment. This is critical for land development at the scale needed in the region and to support land development that facilitates equality.
- The coordination, monitoring and enforcement of land use plans during the development process needs to be strengthened for affordable housing delivery and sustainable urban development.
- Participatory land use planning and meaningful local community involvement in development processes are essential for successful land delivery, particularly in conflict settings, where trust and legitimacy are paramount.
- Land-based financing measures need to be strengthened, including improved mechanisms for land value capture and equitable burden and benefit sharing between public and private sectors.
- Land administration systems need to be strengthened, including by creating transparent and market-based mechanisms for valuation, land acquisition and expropriation and compensation.
- Conflict-affected settings require innovative partnership models to deliver land and affordable housing at scale. Public-private-donor-individual partnerships could enable people to recover and rebuild their homes.

The refugee diaspora represents a significant potential investor in land development, particularly at small and individual family scale. HLP issues are key for recovery and conflict reduction efforts across the region.

2.4 LAND VALUE

Land value refers to the estimated monetary worth of a parcel of land, representing the price it would achieve in a fair and open market between a willing buyer and seller, each acting knowledgeably and without pressure. Measuring land value is essential for determining the financial worth of land, supporting accurate valuation for purposes such as land taxation and public revenue generation. Transparent and accessible land value information is also critical for effective land administration, policy development and market efficiency.

Land valuation is necessary to improve control over land and property in a way that builds equitable access to financial services and mobilizes resources for economic growth and poverty reduction. Moreover, proper valuations are critical to achieve the SDGs and to address issues of food security, land degradation, women's land rights, poverty, urban and rural development, housing and displacement, among other things, in an equitable, efficient and effective manner.²¹²

Land valuation is also an important consideration within the framework of recognizing land as a human right. According to article 18.1 of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure, States should ensure that appropriate systems are used for the fair and timely valuation of tenure rights for specific purposes, such as the operation of markets, security for loans, tenure rights transactions resulting from investment, expropriation and taxation. Such systems should promote social, economic, environmental

212 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2018a). [Valuation of unregistered lands: A policy guide](#).

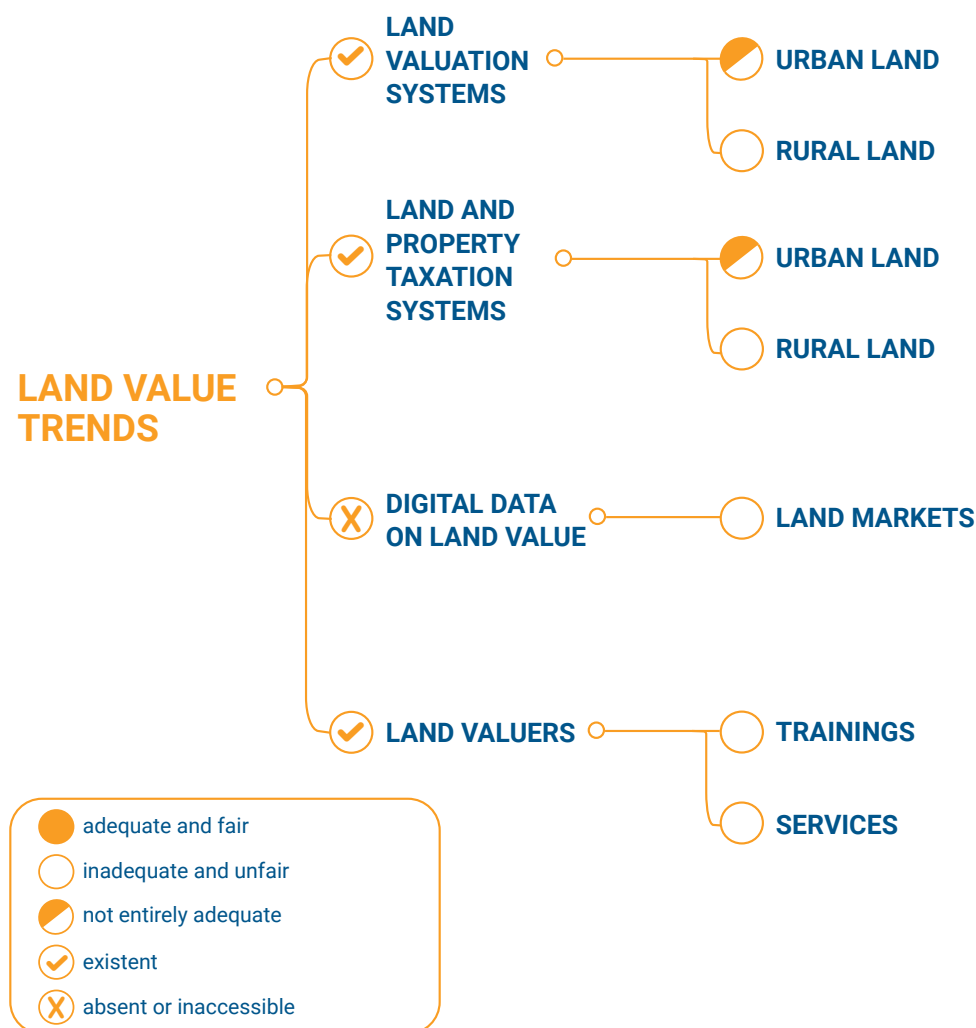
and sustainable development objectives.²¹³ Valuation is also needed in countries affected by conflict to establish fair compensation for those who have been displaced and for damaged housing, in line with Pinheiro Principle 21.

The study identified a number of key regional land value and property taxation trends (also see section 2.4.1 for further land value trends):

- Land valuation systems exist in most countries but are generally inadequate, particularly in rural areas.
- Land valuers are officially recognized in many countries but often lack adequate training, and their services are unaffordable for most.
- Digital data on land values is incomplete or inaccessible across most of the region.

FIGURE 13: LAND VALUE TRENDS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

This graphic should be interpreted as an overview of regional trends rather than as a definitive assessment of land value performance in the Middle East. The findings are indicative, and variations across countries and contexts may therefore apply.



Source: Authors.

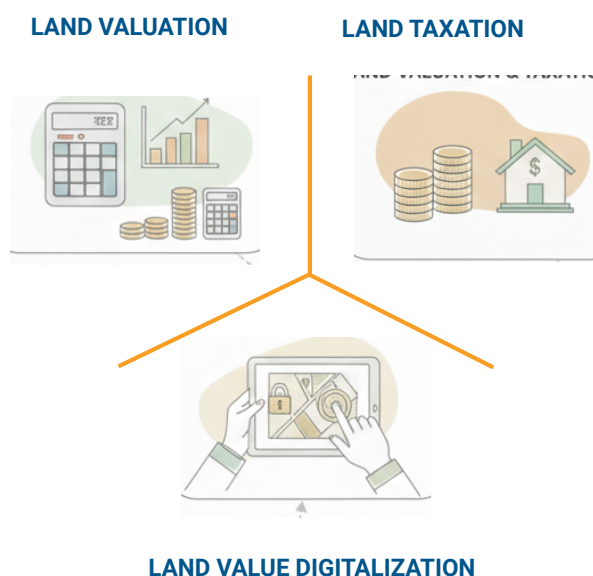
213 FAO (2012). *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and forests in the context of national food security*.

- Land and property tax systems exist in most countries but are not considered fair or consistently applied.
- Tax collection mechanisms and revenue allocation vary significantly across countries.

STATUS OF LAND VALUE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The land value research carried out for this study assessed country capacities to estimate the value of land and buildings. The study identified several regional trends on land valuation and land and property taxation. The research undertaken for this section assessed the land/property taxation system, specifically, the tax rate, tax base, tax administration, including an accessible data system and the integration of the land tax system in decision-making (Figure 14).

FIGURE 14: KEY ELEMENTS OF LAND VALUE



Source: Authors.

Land value functions include two key land administration processes: (1) the assessment of the value of land and properties, and (2) the calculation and gathering of revenues through taxation.²¹⁴

PURPOSES OF LAND VALUATION SYSTEMS

The land valuation system has a range of purposes in the region.²¹⁵ In Qatar, valuation is used to manage the real estate market, while in Saudi Arabia it is for the management of vacant land. Several countries use valuation to set property transfer fees when properties are bought and sold, including Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and the UAE.

Valuation also determines capital gains tax when properties are sold in Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, and inheritance tax in Lebanon, Palestine and Syria. In Jordan, land valuation plays a key role in adjudicating and managing disputes over land value and taxation. Iraq and Lebanon incorporate land valuation into expropriation and compensation processes.

The land valuation system facilitates land and property tax collection in Bahrain and Iraq, and enables land value capture in urban areas of Jordan and Lebanon.

In Lebanon, it serves multiple additional functions: rent control, increasing market transparency, reducing banking sector mortgage risk, enhancing property tax revenue and setting state property lease levels.

Palestine's valuation system supports the Land and Water Settlement Commission process, the development of waqf land and mortgage value estimation for financial

214 Williamson, I., Enemark, S., Wallace, J. and Rajabifard, A. (2010). *Land Administration for Sustainable Development*.

215 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024b). *Land, Housing, and Property in Iraq: A review of the legal, institutional and administrative frameworks*; UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024d). *Legislative and Administrative Land and Property Rights Framework – Lebanon*; UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024b). *Land, Housing, and Property in Jordan: A review of the legal, institutional and administrative frameworks*; UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024a) *Land Governance and Land Rights in Palestine Analysis and Recommendations*; UN-Habitat/GLTN (2021a). *Land Administration System in Syria: Analysis and Recommendations*.

PALESTINE'S VALUATION SYSTEM AND WAY FORWARD

Palestine operates under an outdated legislative framework for property taxation. The legal framework for the Palestinian Authority's valuation system is based on Jordanian and British laws, as well as Israeli military orders. Valuations are not standardized, and taxes are often levied arbitrarily or not levied on all taxable properties. Property tax revenue for the first two quarters of 2019 was (in Jordanian Dinar) 1.8 million in the first quarter and 21.4 million in the second quarter.¹

Property tax represents a significant revenue source for Local Government Units, yet it is collected in only 62 of 109 municipalities and not in villages at all. While property tax functions as a deconcentrated responsibility, the Ministry of Finance collects all taxes and late payment fines, then returns 90 per cent to municipalities while retaining a portion to offset so-called 'loans' to municipalities. In 2021 the Cabinet decided to pilot complete decentralization of tax and fee collection in four municipalities to enhance service delivery effectiveness and responsiveness.

Palestine's General Directorate of Property Tax is working to improve its valuation and collection capacity through reliable property tax valuation standards and staff capacity building.² The licensing of real estate appraisers was approved by Cabinet in 2019 and is pending Presidential approval. This would establish qualification requirements for property valuers and facilitate the formation of a professional community of property valuers.³ The government is also working to improve the valuation system to increase market transparency, reduce banking sector and mortgage risk and ultimately enable comprehensive valuation of all registered immovable properties.

1 Ministry of Finance (2021).

2 Palestine General Directorate of Property Tax, Ministry of Finance and Planning and Japan International Cooperation Agency (2016).

3 Palestine Land Authority (2019).

institutions. Syria uses its valuation system to support social and cooperative association housing.

ADEQUACY OF VALUATION SYSTEMS

While most countries maintain valuation systems, these are often inadequate. Ten of the eleven countries in the region operate land and property valuation systems for urban areas, with the sole exception of Yemen. Nine countries have systems for valuing buildings.

Rural area coverage is more limited. Only Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Syria and the UAE maintain land valuation systems for rural areas. Across the region, land valuation systems are generally considered inadequate, or their adequacy remains unknown. Building valuation systems are deemed adequate only in Bahrain, Jordan, Oman, Qatar and the UAE. In other countries, interviewees either considered these systems to be adequate or could not assess their adequacy.²¹⁶

216 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024a); Palestine General Directorate of Property Tax, Ministry of Finance and Planning and Japan International Cooperation Agency (2016). [Project for Improvement of Local Finance in Palestine: Project Completion Report](#). (2019); Palestine Land Authority (2019). [West Bank and Gaza Real Estate Registration Project \(RERP\): Terms of Reference for Property Valuation System Development](#).

PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY AND DATA ACCESSIBILITY

Land valuers are officially recognized and registered in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Syria and the UAE. However, professional training in land valuation is lacking in most of countries (or those interviewed were unaware of training programmes), except in Jordan, Qatar and Syria. Valuation services remain unaffordable throughout most of the region, with the exceptions of Oman and Qatar.

A significant challenge across the region is a lack of complete or accessible digital data on land value, with the exceptions of Jordan and Qatar. Furthermore, valuation systems do not cover all land tenure types in Iraq, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen. Complete tenure type coverage exists only in Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar and the UAE.

LAND AND PROPERTY TAX SYSTEMS

Most countries have land and property tax systems in place, although these are generally not perceived as fair or equitable. Urban land taxation is applied in the majority of countries, with Oman and Qatar being the main exceptions. Rural land taxation is far less common and is implemented only in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen. The majority of interviewees assessed their countries' land and property tax systems as unfair, or they could not determine fairness. Decision makers consider the impact of land tax systems on land markets in Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar and Yemen.

TAX APPLICATION AND REVENUE COLLECTION

Land and property taxes in the region are applied through different mechanisms. Saudi Arabia imposes a 2.5 per cent tax on vacant urban land based on land value. Iraq taxes privately owned

vacant land that is not economically exploited, while Jordan taxes vacant apartments.²¹⁷ Property transfer fees also vary widely: Syria charges 9.8 per cent, the UAE 4 per cent, and Iraq 3–6 per cent. Several countries—including Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine—tax rental income. In Jordan, property tax accounts for 1.3–2.6 per cent of total government tax revenue, while Palestine allocates 90 per cent of collected property tax to local authorities.

REGIONAL LAND GOVERNANCE AND LAND VALUATION CHALLENGES

While, in general, countries in the region have valuation systems in place, these systems are often inadequate and provide limited utility to ordinary people. Several critical land governance implications emerge from the analysis.

OUTDATED LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Land value legislation and regulations are frequently outdated across the region. Legal reform of these systems is essential for creating affordable housing markets and ensuring equity and justice. In several countries, legal reform of valuation systems is also important for the regulation of big developers through improved public-private partnerships.

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AND MARKET DISTORTIONS

The regional assessment shows that land value information is not readily available in most countries. Information may be confidential, nonexistent or limited to certain areas and accessible only to specific stakeholders. Additionally, valuation standards lack uniformity, introducing significant ambiguity.

The absence of transparency, common standards and credible public information renders land and

217 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024b); UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024d); UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024b); UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024a); UN-Habitat/GLTN (2021a).

property markets opaque. Market opacity drives up property prices and rental costs, making housing less affordable. These conditions can escalate into land-related disputes and conflicts as competition over land intensifies, potentially triggering political turmoil and even violent conflict.

Valuation information should be routinely created and shared, enabling government departments, the private sector, buyers and sellers, renters and civil society to use this information societal benefit.

COVERAGE GAPS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DISPLACED POPULATIONS

There are no consolidated figures on the amount of registered land in the region or the number of people holding registered private land rights. Following a common global trend, national valuation systems typically apply only to registered land, not unregistered land. This regional assessment shows that valuation systems in many countries do not cover all land tenure types (see section 2.1).

Valuations are particularly critical for displaced populations, as they form a key component of compensation packages for property, land and (damaged) buildings. Valuation systems need to be designed, and valuers trained, so that unregistered land can be valued at market value, and so that the homes and agricultural land of the displaced can be valued, so they can be fairly compensated. When valuing the unregistered land of the displaced, social market value should also be included.

IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON IMPLEMENTATION

In conflict-affected countries the breakdown of the rule of law undermines the implementation of land value and tax systems at national and sub-national levels. This creates uncertainty in institutional and regulatory frameworks, leading to contradictory interpretations of valuation

systems by different government entities. Such fragmentation facilitates corruption.

REFUGEE IMPACTS ON LOCAL MARKETS

Refugees can significantly affect local land and property markets, including housing rental markets. Rapid refugee movements can shock these markets. The income profile and legal status of refugees and their ability to buy or rent properties directly influences how local land and property markets respond to such shocks.

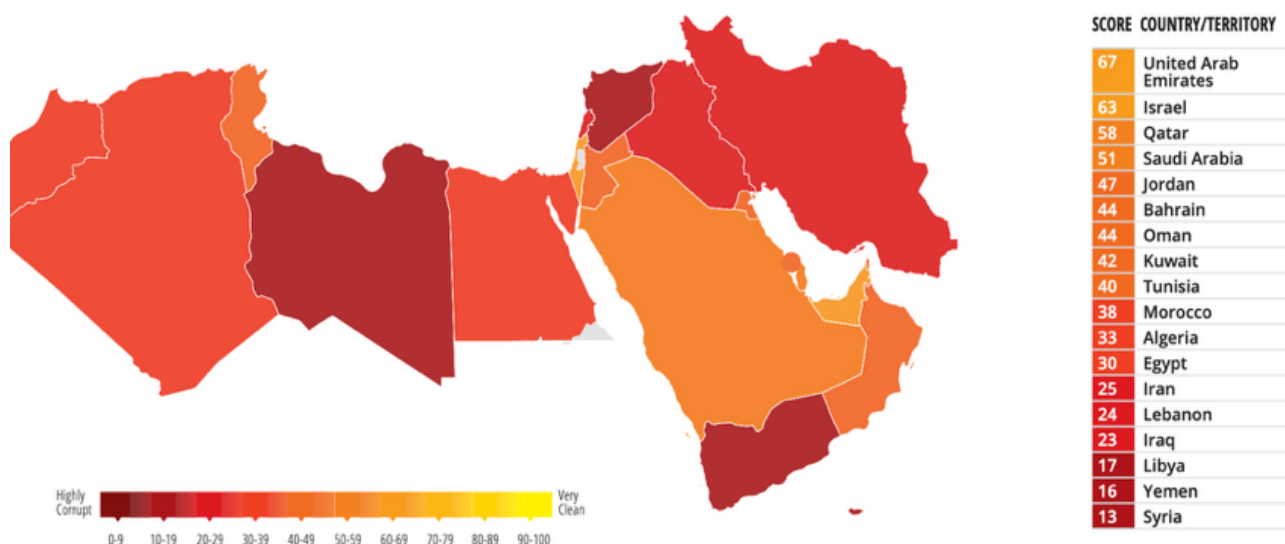
Market volatility and the lack of transparency regarding land and property values impairs the ability of both host and refugee communities to secure affordable housing, whether to purchase or rent. This situation also leads to evictions of refugees by landlords seeking higher rents as property values increase. Valuation systems, including their legal and institutional frameworks, must be resilient and transparent when confronted with such shocks. Valuers require specialized training to address these scenarios.

ENDEMIC CORRUPTION

Land-related corruption is endemic across many of the countries in the region (Figure 14), manifesting at both local and large scales. Within valuation systems, corruption affects the values assigned to properties, property tax amounts paid and both underpayment and overpayment of taxes.

Governments are sometimes unable to recover taxes due to state capture of taxation authorities by elites who evade payment. Alternatively, weak governments may lack the capacity to implement robust land valuation and land tax system. Corruption is further enabled when valuation methods are inadequate for determining fair value, when valuers and brokers operate without regulation and when industry oversight is absent. Creating a just and equitable valuation and property tax system

FIGURE 15: PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



Source: Transparency International (2022). [Corruption Perceptions Index 2022: Middle East & North Africa](#).

for all taxpayers is essential to ensure that the poor and vulnerable are not disadvantaged.

HIGH PROPERTY TRANSFER FEES

Many across the region identify high property transfer fees as problematic when buying, selling or inheriting land. Excessive costs may discourage people from registering their land, affecting their tenure security and rendering the land registry increasingly unreliable. This deterioration makes land markets more opaque and less affordable over time. Transfer and inheritance fees should be set to make housing and land affordable for the majority, rather than solely to increase government revenue or to manage overheated property markets.

2.5 LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISMS

Land dispute resolution mechanisms are the systems, institutions or processes established to address and resolve disputes over land and land-based resources. These mechanisms aim to provide fair, accessible and timely access to justice for all parties, ensuring the protection

of legitimate tenure rights. They may operate through judicial, administrative or customary channels and can include specialized courts, tribunals or community-based bodies. In some contexts, such as post-conflict settings, dedicated mechanisms may be established to handle specific types of claims, including compensation or restitution for HLP rights.

Accessible and functioning land dispute resolution mechanisms are crucial to enable a national land administration system to perform its functions, to maintain social and economic stability and to avoid the escalation of land disputes into bigger land conflicts. They are important in all countries, but even more so in fragile contexts and countries emerging from conflict.²¹⁸

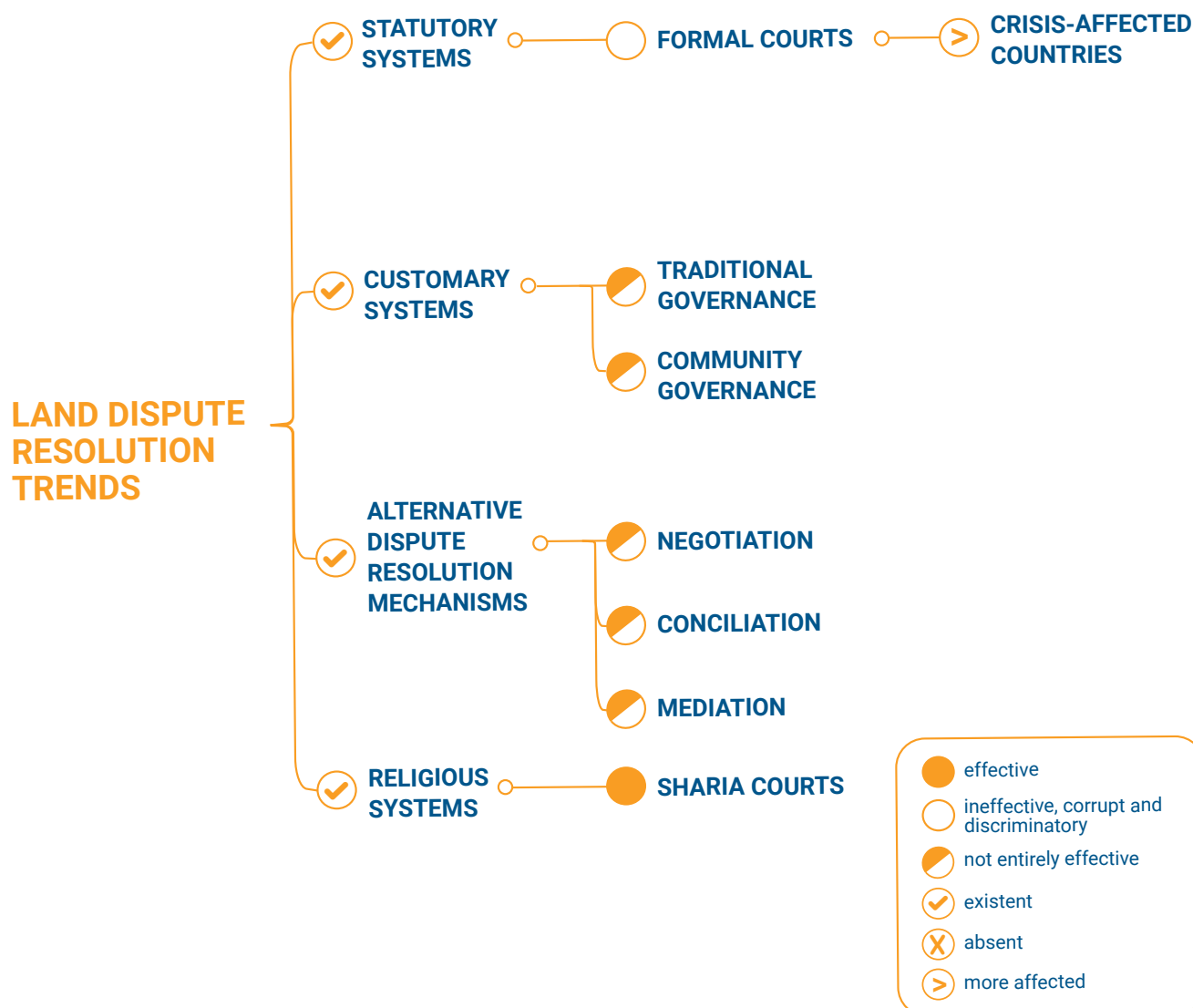
Where state and judicial institutions are weak and hindered by corruption, statutory land dispute mechanisms are more likely to be costly, lengthy and not easily accessible. In this situation people often use customary or religious dispute resolution mechanisms to protect their land rights and manage disputes.²¹⁹ Sharia courts and customary

²¹⁸ UN-Habitat/GLTN (2021a). [Land Administration System in Syria: Analysis and Recommendations](#).

²¹⁹ UN-Habitat/GLTN and International Institute for Rural Reconstruction (2018). [Land and Conflict: Lessons Learned](#)

FIGURE 16: LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION TRENDS IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

This graphic should be interpreted as an overview of regional trends rather than as a definitive assessment of land dispute resolution mechanisms performance in the Middle East. The findings are indicative, and variations across countries and contexts may therefore apply.



Source: Authors.

dispute resolution can provide accessible, quick and affordable avenues to protect housing, land and property rights, in the short to medium term, particularly for women²²⁰ and for people without formally recognized documents to their land and property.

This assessment of land dispute resolution mechanisms aims at understanding whether countries in the region have affordable, unambiguous, transparent and unbiased mechanisms for resolving land disputes, and whether these mechanisms function effectively

from the Field on Conflict Sensitive Land Governance and Peacebuilding.

220 Hallward-Driemeier, M. and Hasan, T. (2012). *Empowering Women: Legal Rights and Economic Opportunities in Africa. Africa Development Forum series.* World Bank.

in practice. The study identified a number of key regional land dispute resolution trends (also see section 'Types of land disputes' for further regional dispute resolution trends):

- Formal statutory dispute resolution systems exist in most countries across the region (Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, UAE, Yemen), but face significant challenges including high costs, slow processing, geographic inaccessibility, corruption and limited public trust, particularly in conflict-affected contexts.
- Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms are used across the region (Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon), though they are not always well developed (Iraq, Jordan)
- Customary land dispute resolution mechanisms exist in several countries (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Yemen), relying on tribal norms and community governance.
- Religious dispute resolution mechanisms, particularly Sharia courts, operate in most countries (Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen) and are commonly used for inheritance-related land disputes.
- Women face multiple barriers in accessing formal justice systems due to discriminatory traditions, social stigma, cost constraints and requirements for male guardianship in some contexts (Lebanon, Yemen). Women often choose customary or religious mechanisms to preserve social relationships, despite these mechanisms frequently being unfair regarding inheritance rights.

In countries with strong rule of law, well-functioning institutions and peace and security, statutory law represents the best

entry point for protecting land rights. However, the existence of parallel dispute resolution systems is a common feature across the region. Informal dispute resolution mechanisms have demonstrated resilience and gained community trust in fragile contexts, while formal systems face significant challenges including expense, slow processing, geographic inaccessibility and corruption that drives people to seek alternative mechanisms.

TYPES OF LAND DISPUTES

There is no comprehensive data on land disputes in the Middle East and the broader Arab region. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to map the frequency of the different types of land disputes. However, the study identifies the main causes of land dispute in the region:

- Claims of land tenure rights over state land (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Yemen)
- Disagreements over boundaries (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen)
- Inheritance disputes (Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria)
- Increase in value of customary land (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen)
- Conflicting land uses (Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen)
- Encroachment and occupation of private land/squatting (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Yemen)
- Discriminatory practices whereby the housing, land and property rights of vulnerable groups are not recognized (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen)

- Weak land administration (Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen)
- Weak law enforcement (Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen)
- Tribal conflicts (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen)
- Corruption (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Yemen)
- Forced evictions (Iraq, Palestine)

STATUS OF LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISMS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Well-structured formal systems to resolve conflicts and disputes related to land rights and parcel boundaries exists in most countries throughout the Middle East (Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, UAE, Yemen). Operating in parallel to these formal systems, other mechanisms for addressing and resolving land disputes also exist in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Oman, Syria and Yemen.

Customary land dispute resolution mechanisms that rely on tribal norms, traditions and community governance approaches exist in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar and Yemen. Religious dispute mechanisms operate across Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

A broad variety of land tenure documents can be used to solve disputes, varying according to country context and the specific dispute resolution mechanism employed. Proof of land tenure can range from title deeds registered in formal land registries to utility bills and oral testimonies.

LEGAL PLURALISM

Multiple types of land dispute resolution mechanisms coexist throughout the Middle East, including statutory, customary and religious systems, each with its own legitimacy and efficiency depending on the context. Legal pluralism is widespread in the Mashriq countries (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Yemen).

The application of law also varies by jurisdiction and land rights type. For example, Sharia law is usually applied in the field of family law or may be applicable only in specific geographic areas or to particular groups of people.²²¹

STATUTORY LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISMS

Statutory law refers to laws and regulations enacted by government legislatures. Housing, land and property rights usually encompass two categories of law: civil laws, relating to land, housing and property (both real and private), and family law, relating to inheritance and marital property.

In countries with strong rule of law, well-functioning institutions and peace and security, statutory law usually represents the best entry point for protecting people's rights to land registered in formal land registries. However, numerous challenges arise in settling disputes where judicial systems are weak or inaccessible, driving people to seek alternative land dispute resolution mechanisms.

CHALLENGES FACING FORMAL COURT SYSTEMS

Formal court systems across the region face significant barriers that limit their accessibility and effectiveness in resolving land disputes.

221 NRC (2014). [Life can change: Securing housing, land and property rights for displaced women](#).

Litigation costs in formal courts are expensive and not affordable for most people in Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, the UAE and Yemen. Processing delays compound these accessibility challenges, with formal courts processing cases slowly in Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen. Courts struggle to handle backlogs of cases in Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the UAE and Yemen.

Geographic barriers further restrict access, as the centralization of formal courts in Bahrain, Iraq, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen makes them inaccessible to people living outside urban centers in Iraq, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, particularly for the poor and women.

Legal uncertainty and corruption undermine the credibility of formal systems. The absence of judicial precedent mechanisms in Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen can lead to inconsistency in ruling, while corruption in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen leaves space for interpretation of the law and tends to favor the most powerful groups.

These challenges contribute to limited public trust in formal land dispute systems in Iraq, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen. This erosion of confidence is linked to widespread corruption in the formal systems in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen, as well as weak enforcement of court decisions in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen.

Finally, many people remain unfamiliar with state justice laws and the bureaucratic procedures required to protect their rights in formal courts in Iraq, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the UAE and Yemen, creating additional barriers to accessing formal dispute resolution mechanisms.

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR) MECHANISMS

Alternative land dispute resolution mechanisms are used throughout the region, including in Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan, although they are not always well developed, such as in Iraq and Jordan. These mechanisms are employed both formally and informally in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine.

A wide range of ADR mechanisms are used, with the most well-known being negotiation, conciliation (Yemen), mediation (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon) and arbitration (Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Yemen). Additional forms of alternative land dispute resolution mechanisms include early neutral evaluation, expert determination, mini trials and med-arbitration.²²²

Alternative land dispute resolution mechanisms have several advantages over judicial forms of dispute resolution, including affordability, procedural flexibility, efficiency and confidentiality. However, they also present clear disadvantages, especially regarding tribal justice, including lack of formality, lack of transparent procedures and lack of sensitivity towards age and gender-related dynamics.²²³

CUSTOMARY LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISMS

Customary law refers to the set of customs, rules and practices that regulate social behaviour, reflecting a community's beliefs, habits and values developed over time. In practice, however, these often reflect the interests of powerful groups.²²⁴ Customary laws are usually not codified and are based on oral traditions,²²⁵ leaving space for different interpretations in different contexts.

222 Equity Legal Group (2019). [ADR Assessment Report 2019](#).

223 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024a). [Land Governance and Land Rights in Palestine Analysis and Recommendations](#).

224 NRC (2014).

225 Ibid.

The administration of customary law depends on country context. In customary courts or councils of chiefs or traditional elders, the main objective in conflict resolution can be to reestablish peace and unity within the community. The arbitrators are usually men, which has negative implications for the gender-responsiveness of the mechanisms.²²⁶ The often discriminatory attitudes of arbitrators towards women can also apply to outsiders, who are perceived as external threats to local cultural identity.²²⁷

Customary land dispute resolution mechanisms also use alternative dispute resolution approaches such as negotiation (Iraq), mediation (Jordan, Lebanon), arbitration (Lebanon) and conciliation (Palestine) to settle disputes. Within customary settings, it is common for disputes to involve the whole community beyond the interests of the individuals directly involved.²²⁸

Customary conflict resolution is generally confined to rural communities, where customary leaders have more legitimacy and the capacity of state institutions is often more limited.

Informal dispute resolution mechanisms have shown resilience and often gained community trust and support in fragile contexts, such as in Iraq.

RELIGIOUS LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISMS

In most Middle East countries (Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen), Sharia law is considered “a

principal source” for legislation or “the principal source” for legislation.²²⁹ This means there is often an overlap between religious and statutory law. Islamic law is the principal source of family law and it is used to regulate marriage, divorce or inheritance in the region.²³⁰ Sharia courts are used to determine inheritance shares and resolve land conflicts arising from inheritance disputes within the framework of Sharia law in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria.

When Sharia law is used to solve disputes, it is usually perceived as less corrupt and less clan-biased than tribal and clan-based land dispute resolution mechanisms, albeit with some flexibility for local customs and a high degree of judicial interpretation. It is not a static legal code and allows for different interpretations in different contexts. Furthermore, it is considered more “family-friendly” and better suited to meet women’s needs to protect their relationship with the families, despite the general lack of women’s representation in these resolution mechanisms.²³¹

Sharia law also gives high priority to local legitimacy and testimony. Litigants themselves generally plead their own case without lawyers.²³²

WOMEN'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Overall, statutory law offers the strongest protection for women’s housing, land and property rights.²³³ However, in the Middle East, women resort to formal courts for claiming their legal rights only as a last resort due to the stigma

226 Ibid.

227 McCallin, B. (2012). *Restitution and Legal Pluralism in Contexts of Displacement, Case Studies on Transitional Justice and Displacement*.

228 Wehrmann, B. (2008). *Land Conflicts. A practical guide to dealing with land dispute*.

229 UNDP, ESCWA, UN Women and UNFPA (2019). *Gender Justice & Equality before the law Analysis of Progress and Challenges in the Arab States Region*.

230 Ibid.

231 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2018b). *Women and Land in the Muslim World. Pathways to increase access to land for the realization of development, peace and human rights*.

232 Wehrmann, B. (2008).

233 NRC (2014).

attached to this action in Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen.²³⁴

Women face multiple challenges in accessing formal dispute resolution approaches compared to men due to discriminatory traditions and norms in Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen. In Lebanon and Yemen, women face difficulty in claiming their land rights in formal courts without the representation by a male guardian. The cost of legal services is a major challenge particularly, but not exclusively, for poor women, as women generally have limited access to their families' financial resources.²³⁵

Women tend to choose land dispute resolution mechanisms that preserve social relationships. Statutory courts are perceived as too confrontational, thus women often choose customary and religious mechanisms using mediation approaches instead.²³⁶ However, these mechanisms are not fair to women in many cases, especially regarding inheritance issues,²³⁷ and women face additional challenges compared to men in Yemen, Palestine and Iraq. This can be linked to a lack of representation of women in customary systems that are usually presided over by men,²³⁸ as well as illiteracy, ignorance of laws and administrative processes, lack of financial resources and social pressures.²³⁹

Despite the gender asymmetry, Sharia law protects women's inheritance rights and is one of the most important ways for women in the Middle East to acquire ownership of land and property.²⁴⁰ Under Sharia law, women inherit less than men, or, under Sunni Sharia law, nothing at all if all siblings are female, as in Lebanon.

REGIONAL LAND GOVERNANCE AND LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION CHALLENGES

While the region has established dispute resolution mechanisms to address land disputes, these are hindered by several critical land governance issues.

CONGESTION OF THE JURIDICAL COURT SYSTEM

The backlog of land cases in formal court systems results in lengthy delays for settling disputes, forcing people to seek alternative solutions to protect their land rights and to resolve disputes. This backlog may stem from limited availability of trained judges, and becomes particularly acute in displacement contexts. When people return to their countries of origin, the surge in claims further exacerbates existing delays.

COMPLEXITY AND BUREAUCRACY OF THE JURIDICAL COURT SYSTEM

Court procedures are complex and bureaucratic, while public awareness of laws and legal procedures remain limited. These factors significantly restrict people's ability to access formal courts to protect their rights. Many lack the necessary documentation (whether land-related or civil) to support their claims in formal court proceedings.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST VULNERABLE GROUPS

Each type of land dispute resolution approach has shortcomings in protecting the rights of

234 UNDP, ESCWA, UN Women and UNFPA (2019).

235 UN-HABITAT/GLTN and Union of Agricultural Work Committees (2022). [Land, Women Empowerment and Socioeconomic Development in the Arab Region](#).

236 UNDP, ESCWA, UN Women and UNFPA (2019).

237 UN-Habitat/GLTN and International Institute for Rural Reconstruction (2018). [Land and Conflict: Lessons Learned from the Field on Conflict Sensitive Land Governance and Peacebuilding](#).

238 NRC (2014).

239 UN-HABITAT/GLTN and Union of Agricultural Work Committees (2022).

240 NRC (2014).

vulnerable groups, including women, the poor, minority groups, displaced people and migrants. These shortcomings manifest through various barriers that limit accessibility: costs, geographic location and complexity of laws and procedures.

Discriminatory practices linked to gender and cultural norms affect legal provisions, access to formal legal documentation and the influence of powerful groups. In violent conflict settings this discrimination can escalate beyond disputes to evictions of minority groups and individuals, as well as secondary occupation of their housing, land and property.

FORUM SHOPPING

Legal pluralism without coordination among the different institutions, including, where possible, a unified legal framework, creates the risk of forum shopping, where disputants seek the mechanism most likely to yield favourable outcomes or use multiple forums simultaneously to improve their chances of success. This practice contributes to legal uncertainty and creates space for discrimination and bias²⁴¹ against vulnerable populations. However, religious and customary land dispute resolution mechanisms also increase access to justice, which is particularly important when formal mechanisms are inaccessible due to legal or practical constraints, or when they are perceived as too confrontational, especially for women seeking justice.²⁴²

GOOD LAND GOVERNANCE FOR IMPROVED LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Good land governance requires that land dispute resolution provide access to justice for all types of infringements of legitimate tenure rights. These mechanisms should offer effective and accessible means to everyone, preferably

through juridical authorities, to resolve disputes over tenure rights and provide affordable, prompt enforcement of decisions.

Land dispute resolution mechanisms should promote the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice for all, as outlined in SDG Goal 16, Target 16.3, by building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

When formal systems are inaccessible, a wide range of alternative land dispute resolution mechanisms play vital roles, particularly for women. Customary and religious institutions, along with alternative land dispute resolution approaches, undertake dispute resolution close to local communities. These institutions should be coordinated with the formal system, and capacity development should be undertaken to support their role, especially in conflict contexts where they may be the only accessible institution.

In conflict settings, a root cause analysis of land disputes linked to conflict, including the creation of a typology of disputes, can support the development of appropriate land dispute resolution mechanisms for a range of targeted solutions. For example, addressing scenarios such as evicted owners returning to find their home occupied requires specific mechanisms.

Land dispute resolution mechanisms at different levels and scales are critical for preventing conflict initially and preventing a return to conflict in protracted conflict environments.

2.6 TRAINING AND LEARNING

This chapter summarizes the results of mapping education and training courses related to land governance in the Arab region and the key elements of their curricula. It assesses the quantity and thematic coverage of the learning offered, identifies opportunities for engaging

²⁴¹ UN-Habitat/GLTN (2018b).

²⁴² Ibid.

with existing education and training institutions to complement the current learning landscape and provides directions for establishing more comprehensive land governance curricula across the region.

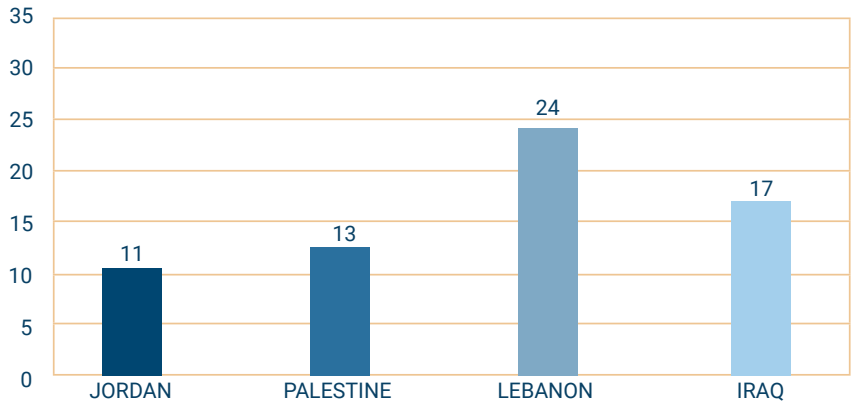
The regional assessment was carried out in countries of the Middle East (Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen) and North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia). North Africa is included here because the learning offer for specific competencies and higher education are not homogeneously distributed across countries, and professionals are often trained in neighbouring countries within the region, or outside the region.

STATUS OF THE LEARNING OFFER IN NORTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES

This section presents the analysis of the learning offer in the northern countries of the Middle East: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria. The learning offer in this sub-region focuses predominantly on spatial and land use planning, followed by geospatial sciences. Little attention is paid to developing land sector capacities in other fields. Virtually no expertise is being developed in land valuation and land dispute resolution. Training institutes and professional bodies provide limited offerings, resulting in few options for continuous professional learning. Detailed information is presented below.

FIGURE 17: NUMBER OF COURSES OFFERED BY COUNTRY (NORTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES).

A total of 65 learning offers were identified in the northern middle east countries.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023). *Developing land governance capacities in the Arab region: Patterns, challenges and opportunities for improving the existing learning offer.*

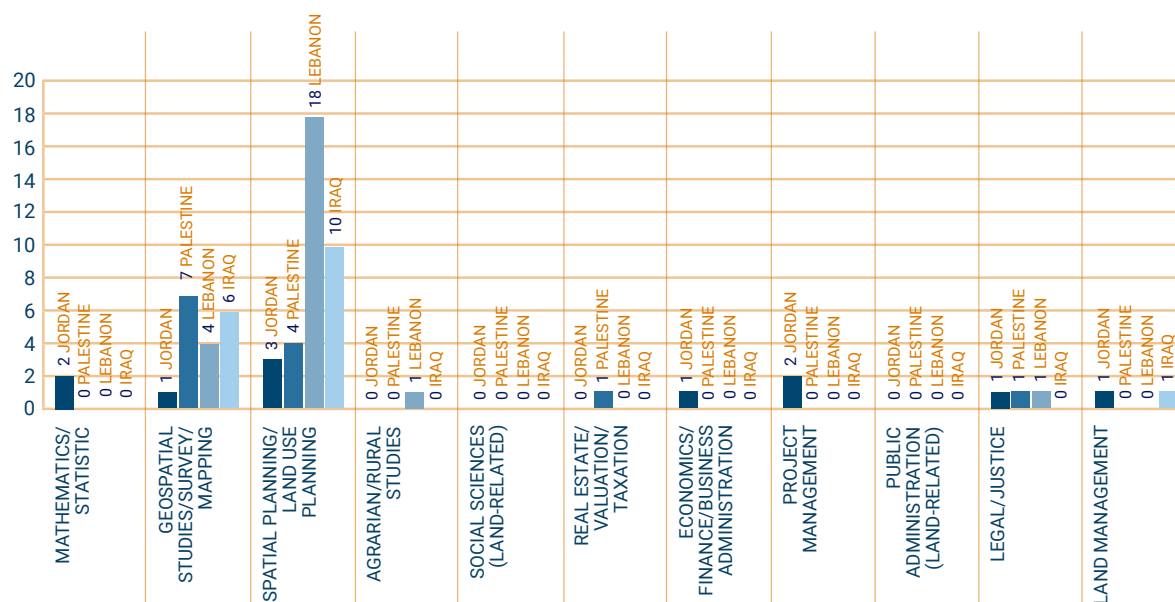
FIGURE 18: NUMBER OF COURSES BY SUBJECT (NORTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

Analysis of the learning offer by course subject shows that most courses fall under spatial planning and land use planning programmes, followed by geospatial studies. Notable gaps exist in land-related curricula across several disciplines: Social Science, Public Administration, Agrarian/Rural studies, Real Estate/Valuation/Taxation and Economics/Finance/Business Administration.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 19: BREAKDOWN OF AVAILABLE COURSES PER COUNTRY AND PER COURSE SUBJECT (NORTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 20: TYPE OF COURSE PROVIDER (NORTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

Analysis of course providers

Universities are the main providers of learning offers in this sub-region.

Government-provided courses are only available in Palestine.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 21: TYPE OF ORGANIZATION PROVIDING THE LEARNING OFFER (NORTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

Public and private sectors play a major role in providing learning offers in this sub-region.

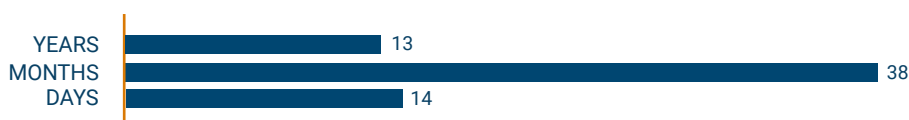


Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

Course duration and level

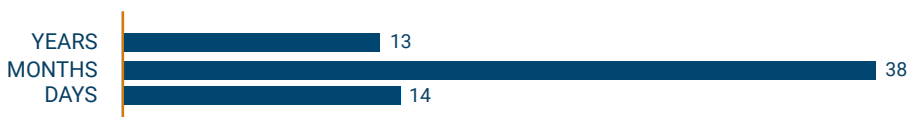
Most courses are academic in nature, requiring 3-4 months to complete with a load of 2-3 credits per semester. No specialized PhD programmes were identified. Short training courses have a maximum duration of five days.

FIGURE 22: DURATION OF THE LEARNING OFFER – ACADEMIC COURSES (NORTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

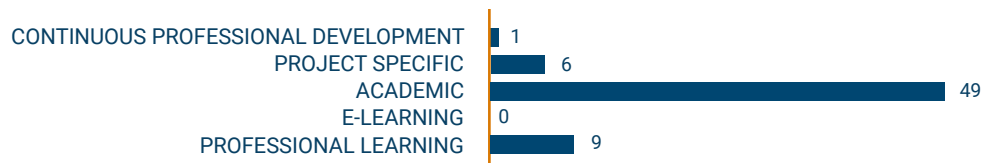
FIGURE 23: DURATION OF THE LEARNING OFFER – SHORT TRAINING COURSES (NORTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 24: TYPE OF LEARNING OFFER (NORTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

Most courses are delivered to undergraduates, with a notable lack of continuous professional development offerings. Project-based learning is primarily offered through short courses. The majority of courses offer certification (57 courses, corresponding to 88 per cent).



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 25: EDUCATION FEES (NORTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

Fees and funding options

Most courses require payment and funding through student fees.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 26: FUNDING OF THE EXISTING LEARNING OFFERS (NORTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

Public universities also offer free registration or provide scholarships to students.

In, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, donors and international organizations fund land-related project-based courses.

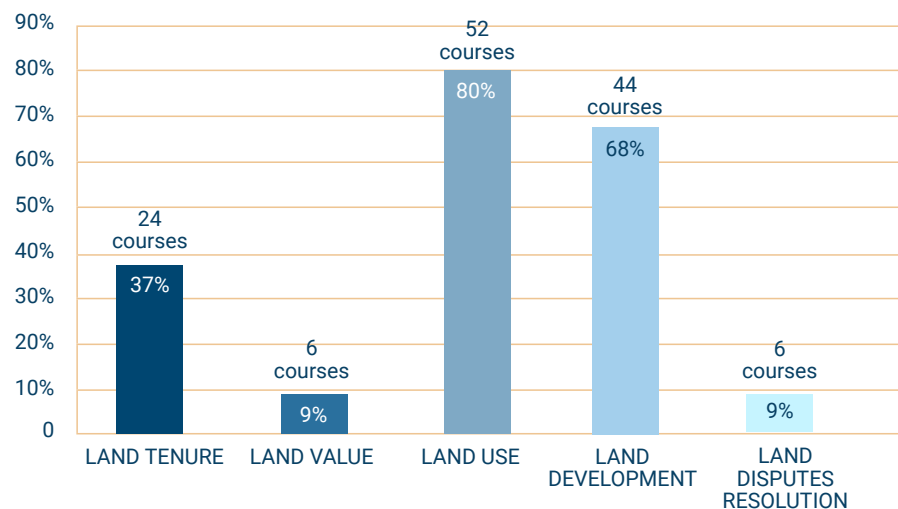


Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 27: COURSE SUBJECTS BY LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS (NORTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

Analysis of course subjects in relation to the land administration functions

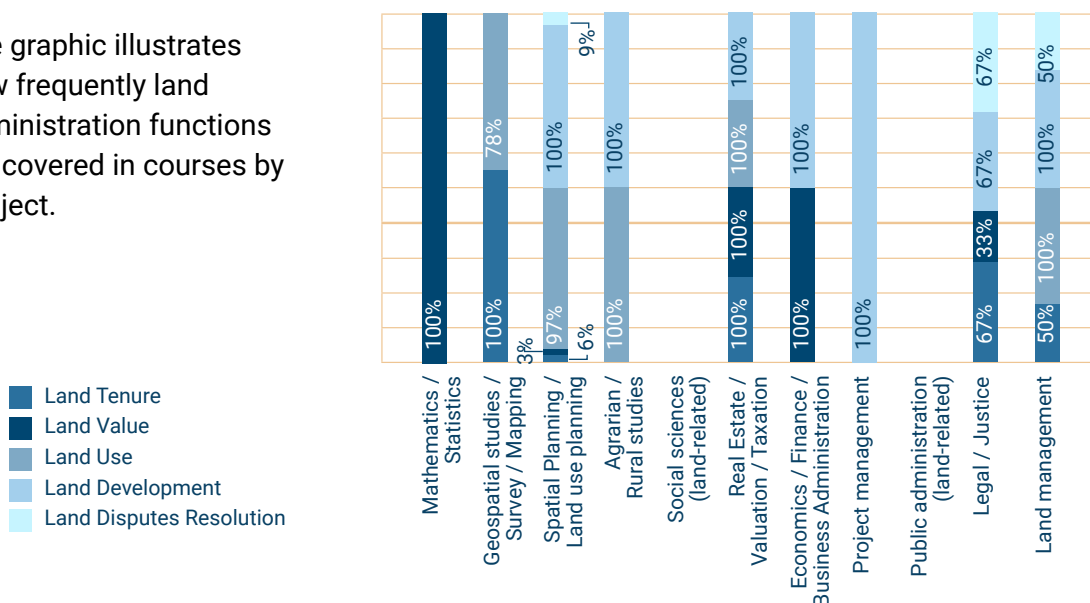
Land use and land development are the land administration functions best covered by available learning offers.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 28: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COURSE SUBJECT MATERIAL AND LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS

The graphic illustrates how frequently land administration functions are covered in courses by subject.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

STATUS OF THE LEARNING OFFER IN SOUTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES

This section presents the analysis of the learning offer in the southern countries of the Middle East: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Yemen (the GCC countries plus Yemen).

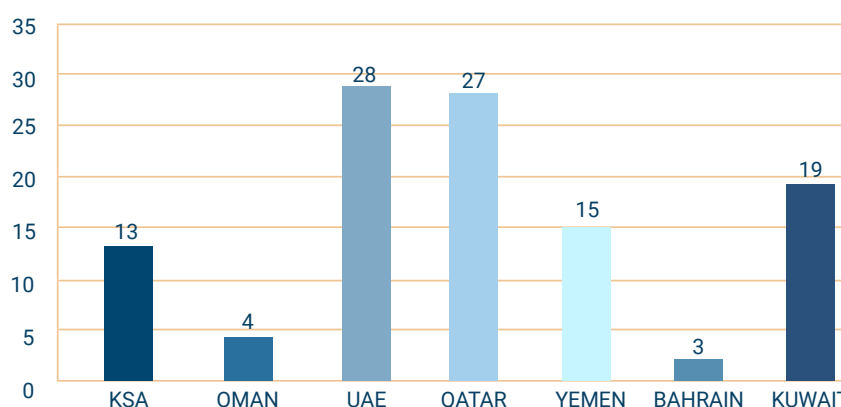
The land-related learning offer is unevenly distributed in the region. Spatial and land use

planning are the most taught land-related disciplines, followed by real estate valuation and taxation and geospatial studies. This focus on real estate valuation and taxation distinguishes this sub-region from others.

Short courses are more prevalent in this sub-region and appear to be better marketed and more accessible online. The United Arab Emirates stands out as a major course provider with readily identifiable online offerings.

FIGURE 29: NUMBER OF COURSES OFFERED BY COUNTRY (SOUTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

A total of 109 Learning offers were identified.

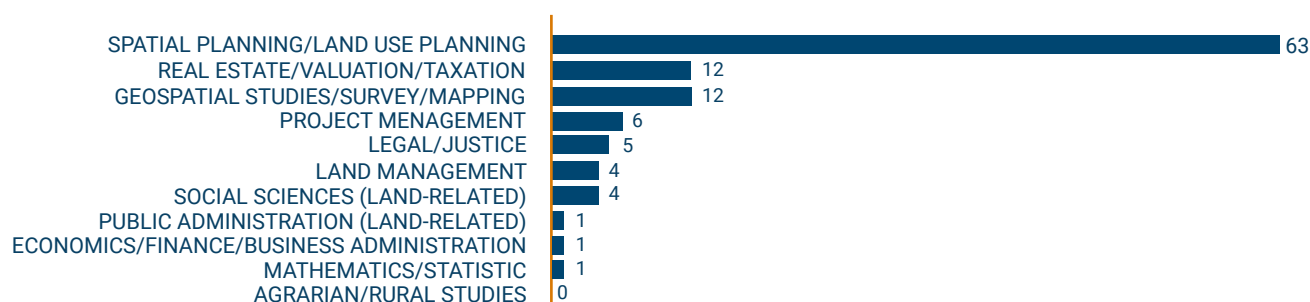


Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 30: NUMBER OF COURSES BY SUBJECT (SOUTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

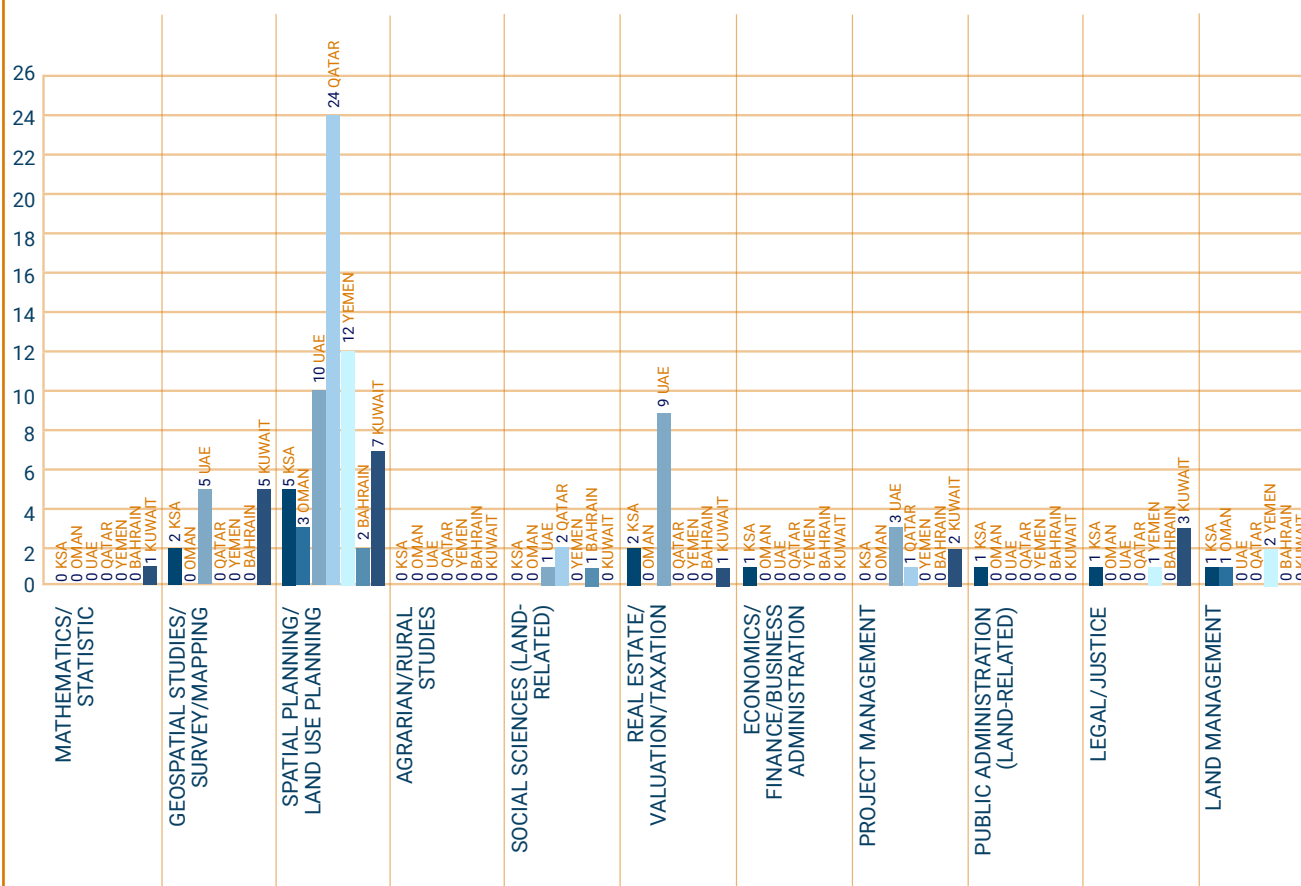
Learning offer by course subject

The most taught disciplines are spatial planning and land use planning, followed by real estate valuation and taxation and geospatial studies.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 31: BREAKDOWN OF AVAILABLE COURSES BY COUNTRY AND BY COURSE SUBJECT (SOUTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

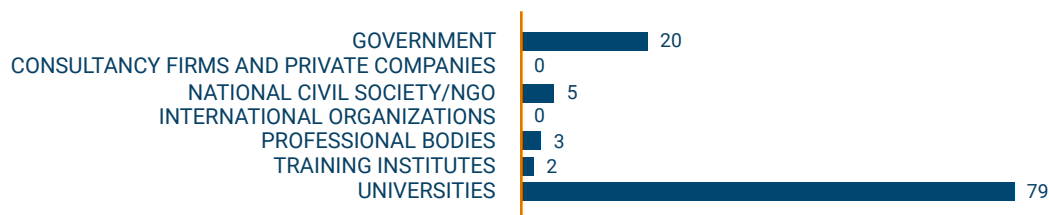


Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 32: TYPE OF COURSE PROVIDER (SOUTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

Universities are the main knowledge providers, followed by governments, particularly in Qatar (e.g. Ministry of Municipality and Environment) and the UAE (e.g. Dubai Land Department).

Public and private sectors play a major role in providing learning offers in Gulf, with the public sector providing three-quarters of the courses, while the private sector provides the remaining quarter.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

Duration and level of learning offer

Most courses are academic programmes requiring 3-4 months to complete with a load of 2-3 credits per semester.

B.Sc., Master's and PhD programmes were identified in Qatar.

Short courses are provided by both public and private sectors, including governmental authorities and universities in Qatar, Kuwait, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman.

FIGURE 33: DURATION OF THE LEARNING OFFER (SOUTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

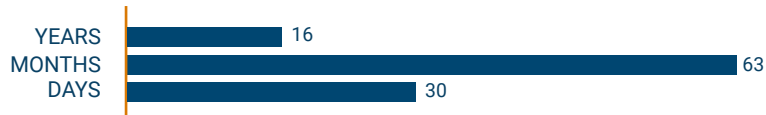
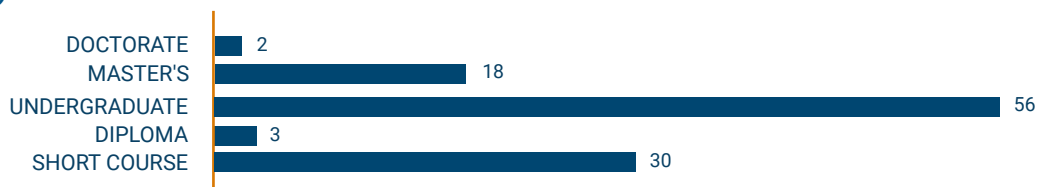


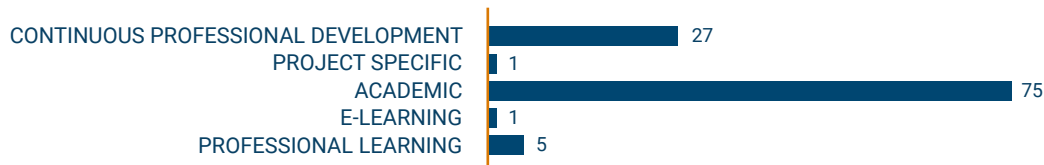
FIGURE 34: GRADE/LEVEL OF THE EXISTING LEARNING OFFER (SOUTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 35: TYPE OF LEARNING OFFER (SOUTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

Most courses are academic, with some continuous professional development offerings identified in Qatar and the UAE. Almost all courses provide certification.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

Duration and level of learning offer

Most courses require payment through student fees and government funding.

Public universities also offer free registration or provide scholarships to students.

FIGURE 36: EDUCATION FEES (SOUTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

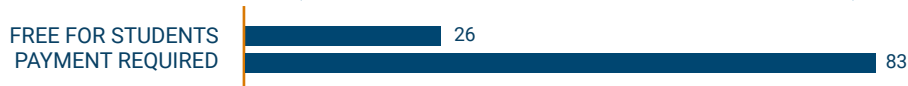
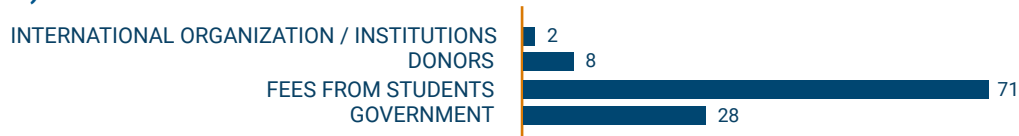


FIGURE 37: FUNDING OF THE EXISTING LEARNING OFFERS (SOUTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

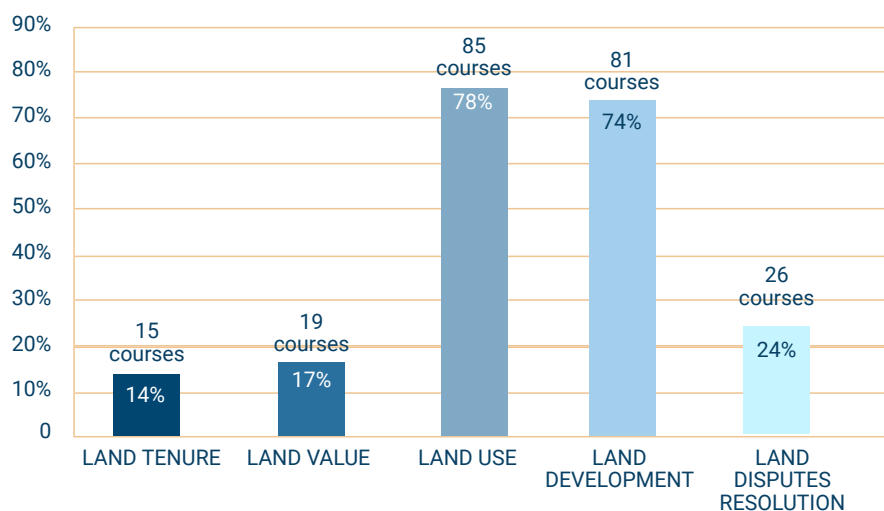


Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 38: COURSE SUBJECTS BY LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS (SOUTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

Analysis of course subjects in relation to the land administration functions

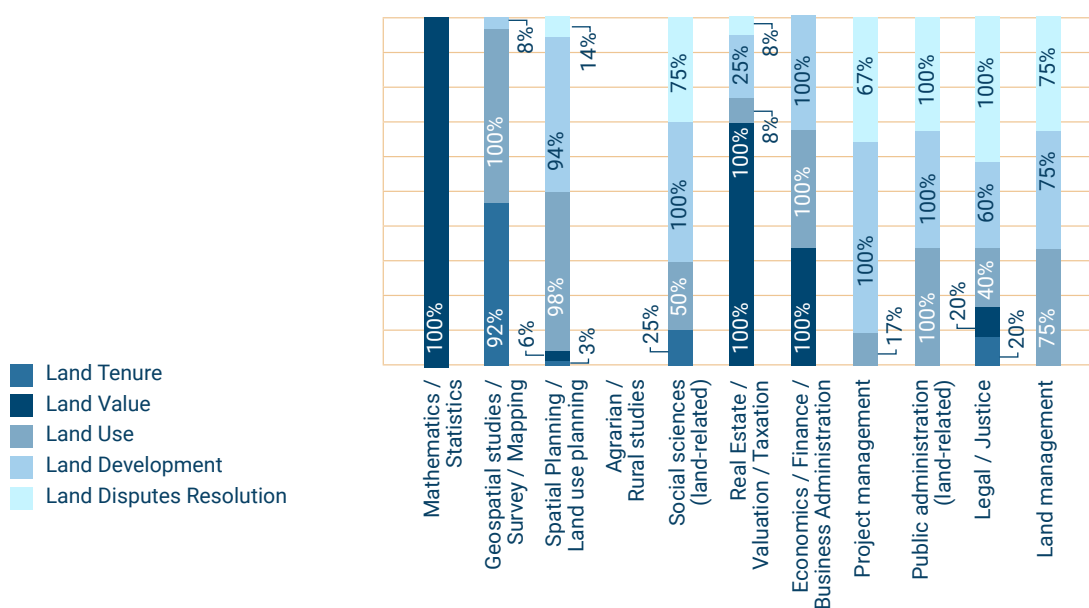
Land use and land development are the land administration functions best covered by available learning offers. This follows the same trend as in the northern Middle East countries.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 39: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COURSE SUBJECT MATERIAL AND LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS (SOUTHERN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES)

The graphic illustrates how frequently land administration functions are covered in courses by subject.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

STATUS OF THE LEARNING OFFER IN NORTH AFRICAN COUNTRIES

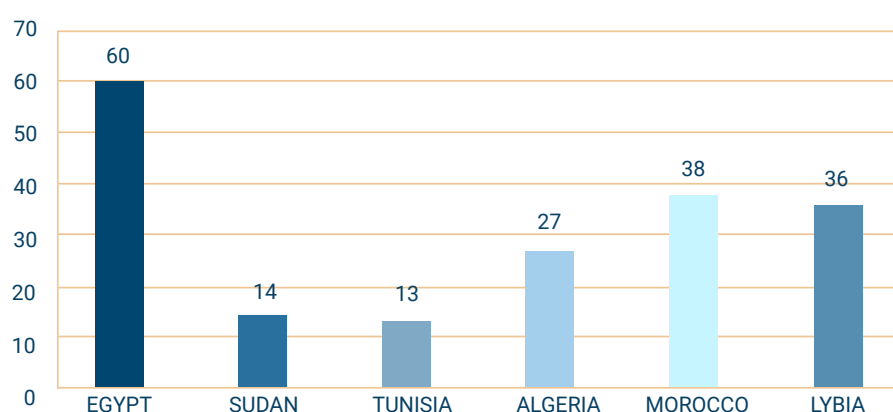
This section presents the analysis of the learning offer in North African countries: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia. The sub-region has a substantial learning offer. Spatial and land use planning, followed by geospatial studies, are the most taught disciplines, consistent with other sub-regions. The relatively high number of courses on land-related legal and justice aspects distinguishes this sub-region from others. Egypt is the leading provider, particularly in spatial and land use planning, while Libya plays a major role in geospatial

studies. 2.6.3 Status of the learning offer in North African countries.

This section presents the analysis of the learning offer in North African countries: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia. The sub-region has a substantial learning offer. Spatial and land use planning, followed by geospatial studies, are the most taught disciplines, consistent with other sub-regions. The relatively high number of courses on land-related legal and justice aspects distinguishes this sub-region from others. Egypt is the leading provider, particularly in spatial and land use planning, while Libya plays a major role in geospatial studies.

FIGURE 40: NUMBER OF COURSES OFFERED BY COUNTRY (NORTH AFRICA COUNTRIES)

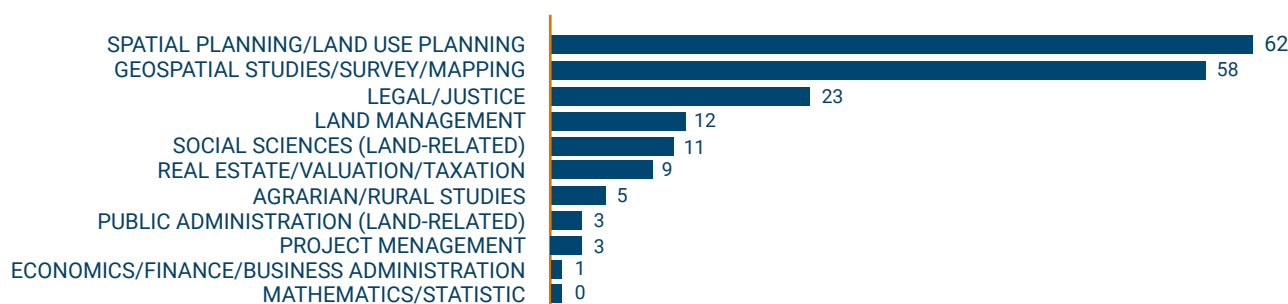
A total of 188 learning offers were identified.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

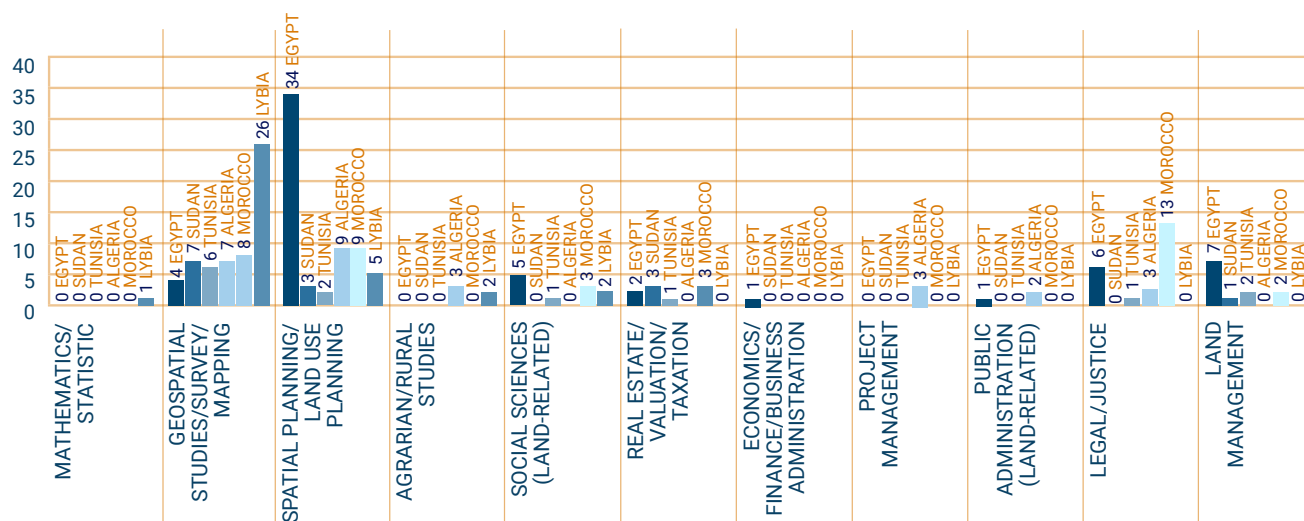
FIGURE 41: NUMBER OF COURSES BY SUBJECT (NORTH AFRICA COUNTRIES)

The most taught disciplines are spatial planning and land use planning, followed by geospatial studies, consistent with northern Middle East countries. The number of courses on land-related legal and justice aspects is relatively high in this sub-region compared to others.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 42: BREAKDOWN OF AVAILABLE COURSES BY COUNTRY AND BY COURSE SUBJECT (NORTH AFRICA COUNTRIES)

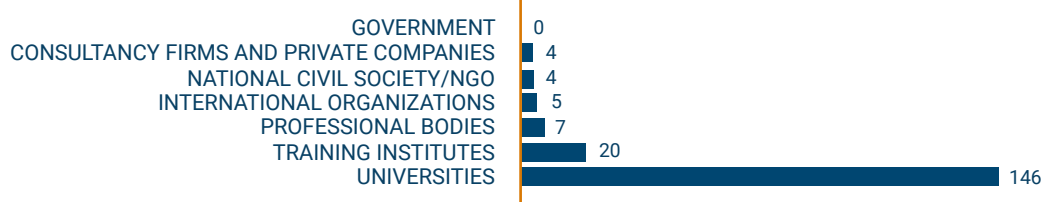


Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 43: TYPE OF COURSE PROVIDER (NORTH AFRICA COUNTRIES)

Universities are the main providers of the learning offer in North Africa.

Public institutions provide three-quarters of the offers, while private institutions provide the remaining quarter.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

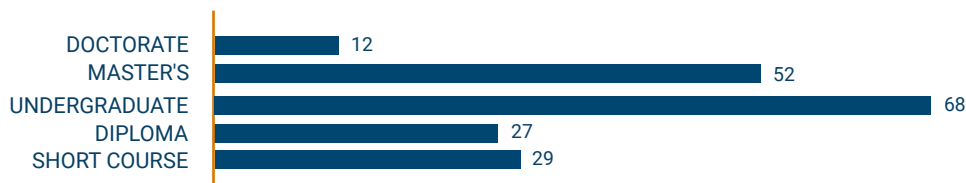
Duration and level of learning offer

Most of the learning offers are academic programmes for undergraduate B.Sc. and Master's degrees with durations of several years, implying longer study periods and greater specialization in content.

FIGURE 44: DURATION OF THE LEARNING OFFER (NORTH AFRICA COUNTRIES)



FIGURE 45: GRADE/LEVEL OF THE EXISTING LEARNING OFFERS (NORTH AFRICA COUNTRIES)



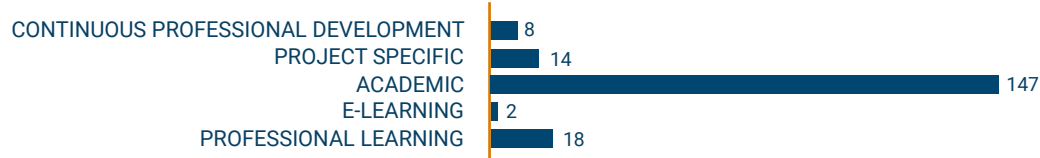
Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 46: TYPE OF LEARNING OFFER (NORTH AFRICA COUNTRIES)

Type of courses and certification

Most courses are academic, with some continuous professional development and project-specific courses also available.

The vast majority of courses (over 93 per cent) provide certification.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

Fees and funding options

Most courses require payment through student fees and government funding.

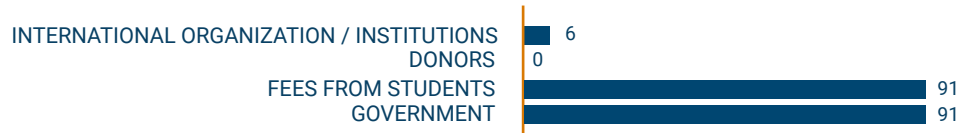
Public universities offer free registration or provide scholarships where government funding is available. When such funding is not available, students pay for their education.

FIGURE 47: EDUCATION FEES (NORTH AFRICA COUNTRIES)



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN 2023 (see Figure 15).

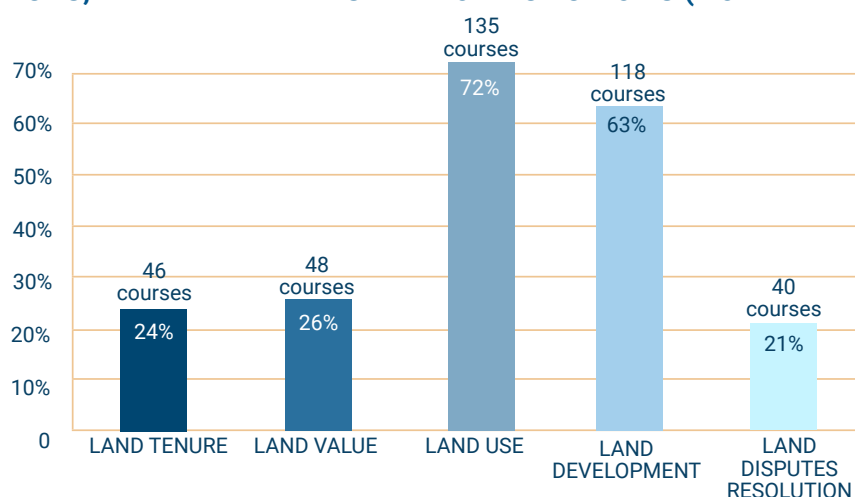
FIGURE 48: FUNDING OF THE EXISTING LEARNING OFFERS (NORTH AFRICA COUNTRIES)



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 49: COURSE SUBJECTS, BY LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS (NORTH AFRICA COUNTRIES)

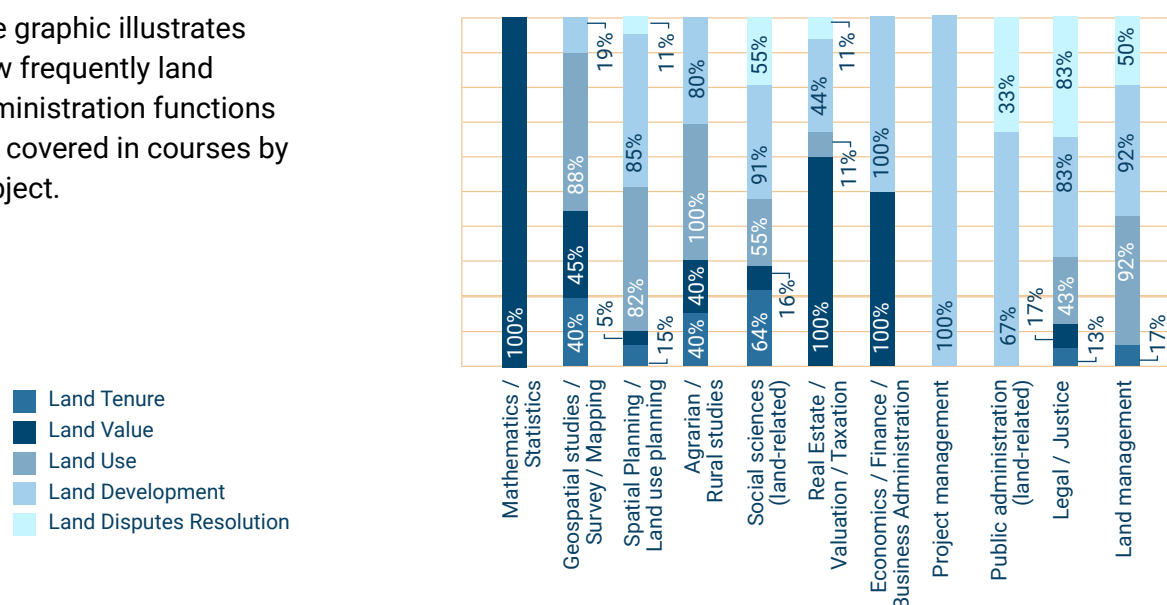
Land use and land development are the land administration functions best covered by available learning offers. This follows the same trend as in the northern Middle East countries.



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

FIGURE 50: RELATION BETWEEN COURSE SUBJECT MATERIAL AND LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS (NORTH AFRICA COUNTRIES)

The graphic illustrates how frequently land administration functions are covered in courses by subject.



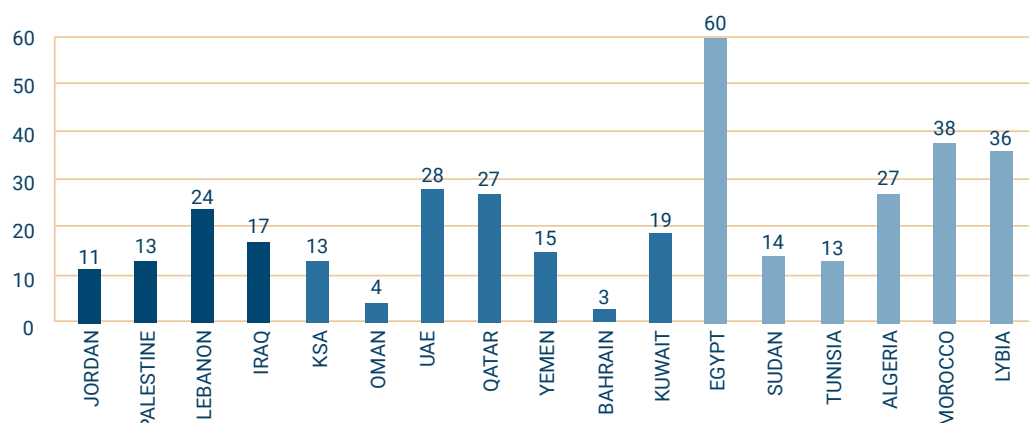
Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LEARNING OFFERS ACROSS SUB-REGIONS

QUANTITY OF THE LEARNING OFFER

The land-related learning offer is well distributed across the three sub regions, with North Africa playing a leading role. Several countries – including Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Qatar and the UAE – contribute significantly to developing land-related knowledge in the region. While data on student enrollment and countries of origin was not collected, it is estimated that some of these leading countries play, or historically played, an important regional role in capacity development, though current instabilities may have affected this function.

FIGURE 51: NUMBER OF OFFERED COURSES BY COUNTRY IN THE MIDDLE EAST, GULF AND NORTH AFRICA

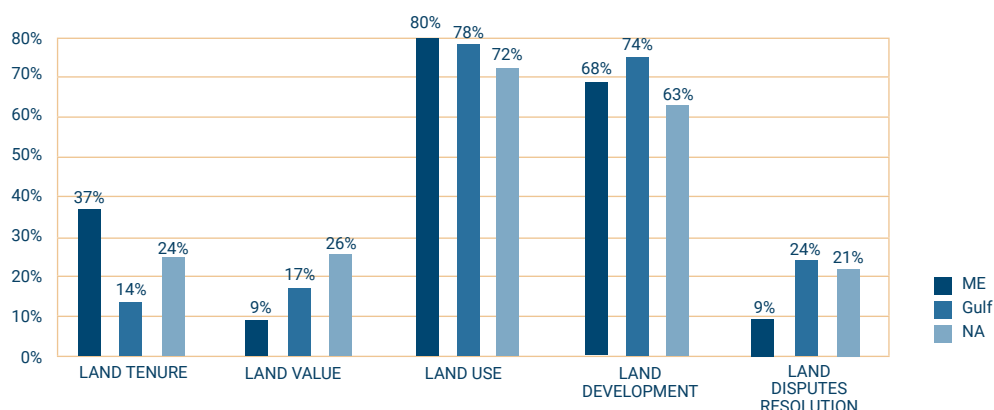


Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

TEACHING BY LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS

Land use, land development and geospatial studies dominate the curriculum, while land tenure, land value and land dispute resolution receive considerably less attention. In northern Middle Eastern countries, most courses focus on spatial planning and land use planning, followed by geospatial studies. Southern Middle Eastern countries emphasize spatial and land use planning, with secondary focus on real estate valuation and taxation, and geospatial studies. North African institutions concentrate primarily on land use and land development.

FIGURE 52: ANALYSIS BY COURSE SUBJECT IN RELATION TO THE LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST, GULF AND NORTH AFRICA

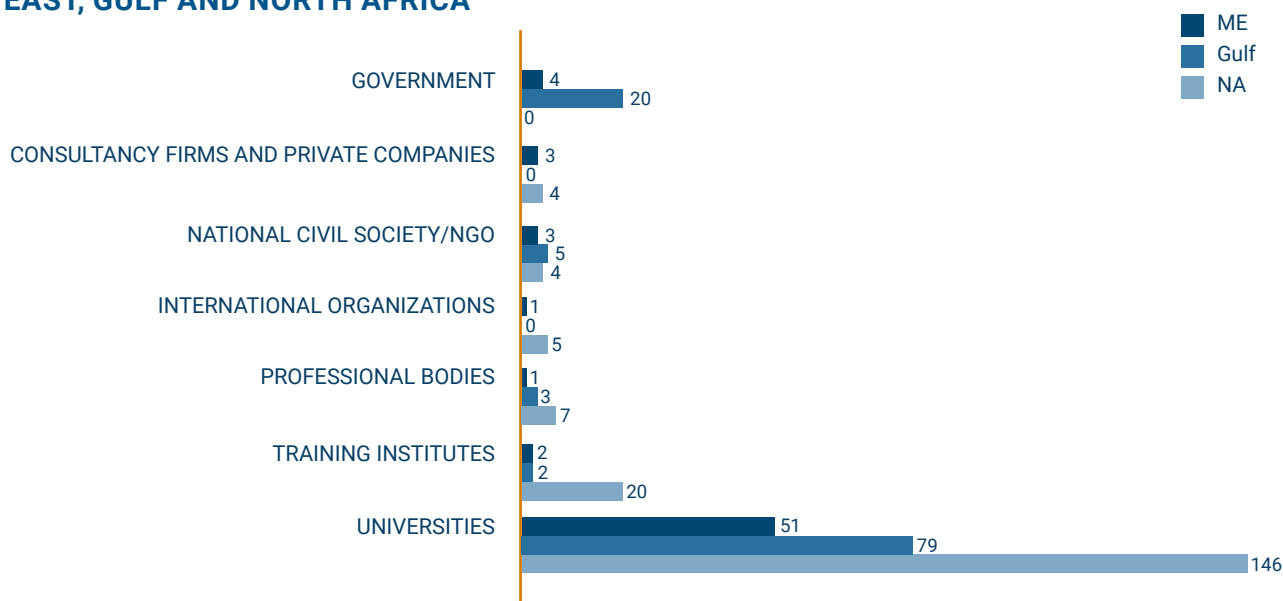


Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

PROVIDERS OF LAND-RELATED KNOWLEDGE

Universities are the primary providers of land education across the Arab region. North Africa hosts a notably higher number of training institutes, professional bodies, international organizations and private companies offering land-related courses compared to the other two sub-regions. Gulf governmental authorities (specifically in Qatar and the UAE) also provide land-related training.

FIGURE 53: TYPE OF COURSE PROVIDER OF LAND-RELATED COURSES IN THE MIDDLE EAST, GULF AND NORTH AFRICA

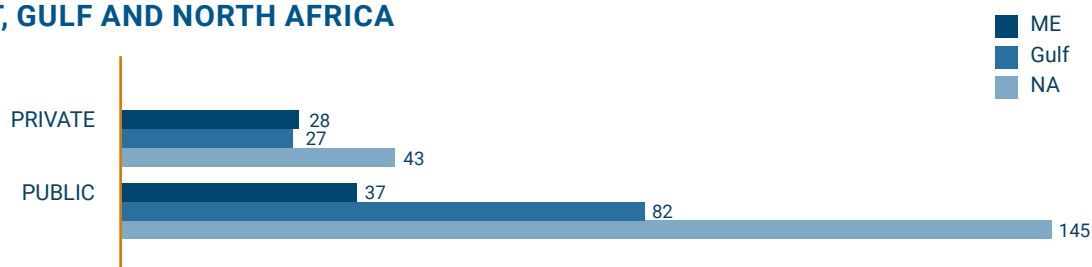


Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

THE LEADING ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The public sector leads in providing land-related education, though the private sector – specifically private universities – plays an important complementary role in offering land-related courses throughout the region.

FIGURE 54: TYPE OF ORGANIZATION OFFERING LAND-RELATED COURSES IN THE MIDDLE EAST, GULF AND NORTH AFRICA



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

COURSE DURATION

Course duration varies across the three sub-regions. Programmes lasting 3-4 months are most common in land curricula. North Africa offers the greater number of longer courses, including Bachelor's, Master's and PhD programmes. Southern Middle Eastern countries tend to offer shorter courses, ranging from days to months, and are the primary providers of continuing professional development courses, likely reflecting the prominence of real estate as a key sector of the economy.

FIGURE 55: DURATION OF THE LEARNING OFFERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, GULF AND NORTH AFRICA

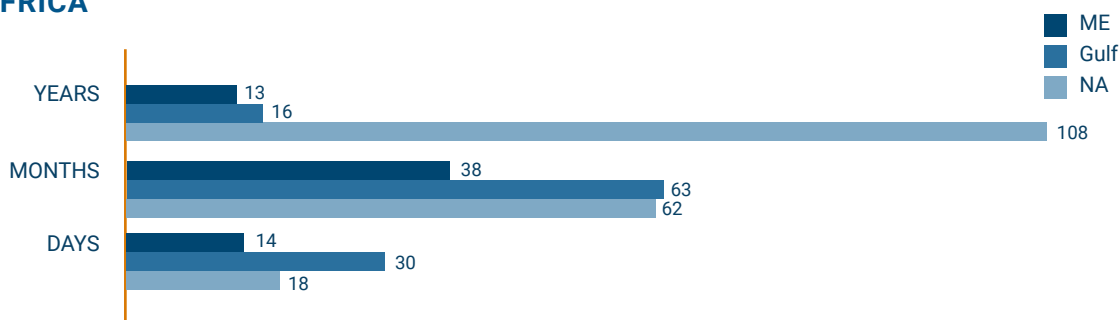
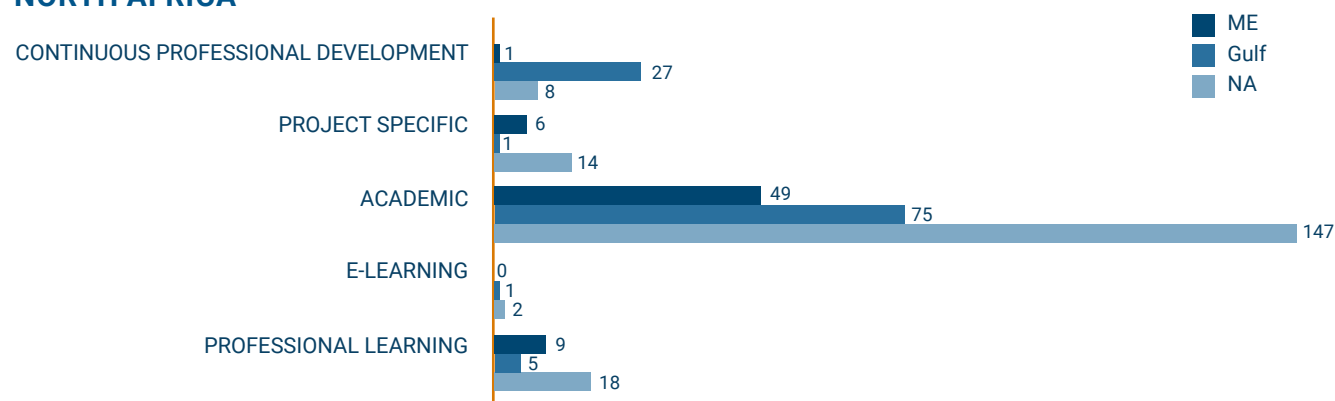


FIGURE 56: TYPE OF LAND-RELATED LEARNING OFFERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, GULF AND NORTH AFRICA

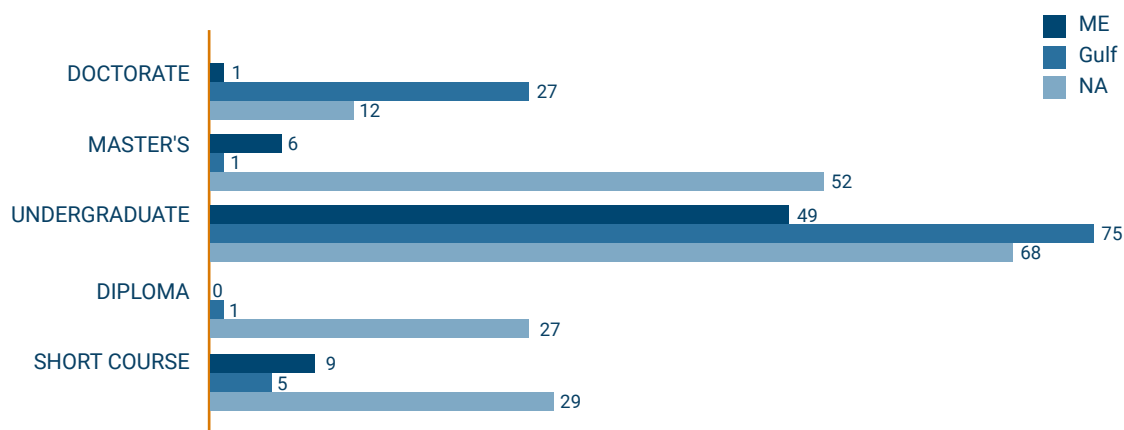


Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

PREDOMINANTLY UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES

Land-related content is taught primarily at the undergraduate level across the Arab region. Graduate programmes are limited in North Africa and southern Middle Eastern countries, forcing the region to rely on international courses for specialized training. This dependence makes advanced education expensive, largely inaccessible and inefficient for retaining land governance capacity within the region. Some diploma and short course options are available, particularly in North Africa.

FIGURE 57: GRADE/LEVEL OF THE EXISTING LEARNING OFFER IN THE MIDDLE EAST, GULF AND NORTH AFRICA

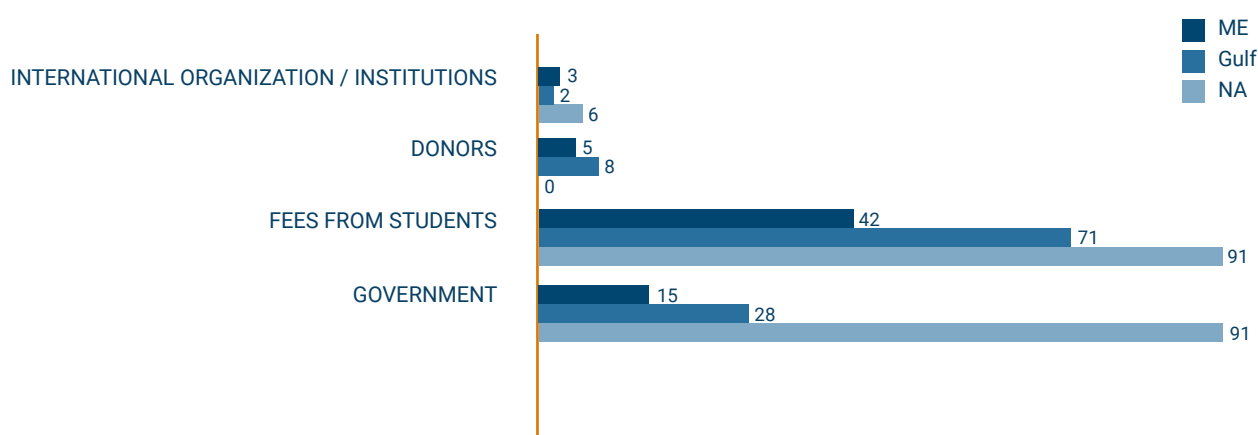


Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

Funding sources

Course fees are primarily borne by students and governments.

FIGURE 58: FUNDING OF THE EXISTING LEARNING OFFERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, GULF AND NORTH AFRICA



Source: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2023).

3

NATIONAL LAND GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

ABOUT THE NATIONAL LAND SECTOR ASSESSMENTS

Part 3 of this report summarizes the results of the national land sector assessments conducted across 11 countries in the Middle East: Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.²⁴³

The findings are based on background papers prepared for each country, which draw from the results of desk reviews, outcomes of questionnaires completed by national experts from different land-related disciplines and information provided through key informant interviews. Information presented in the background papers underwent a two-step validation process with international, regional and national land governance experts.

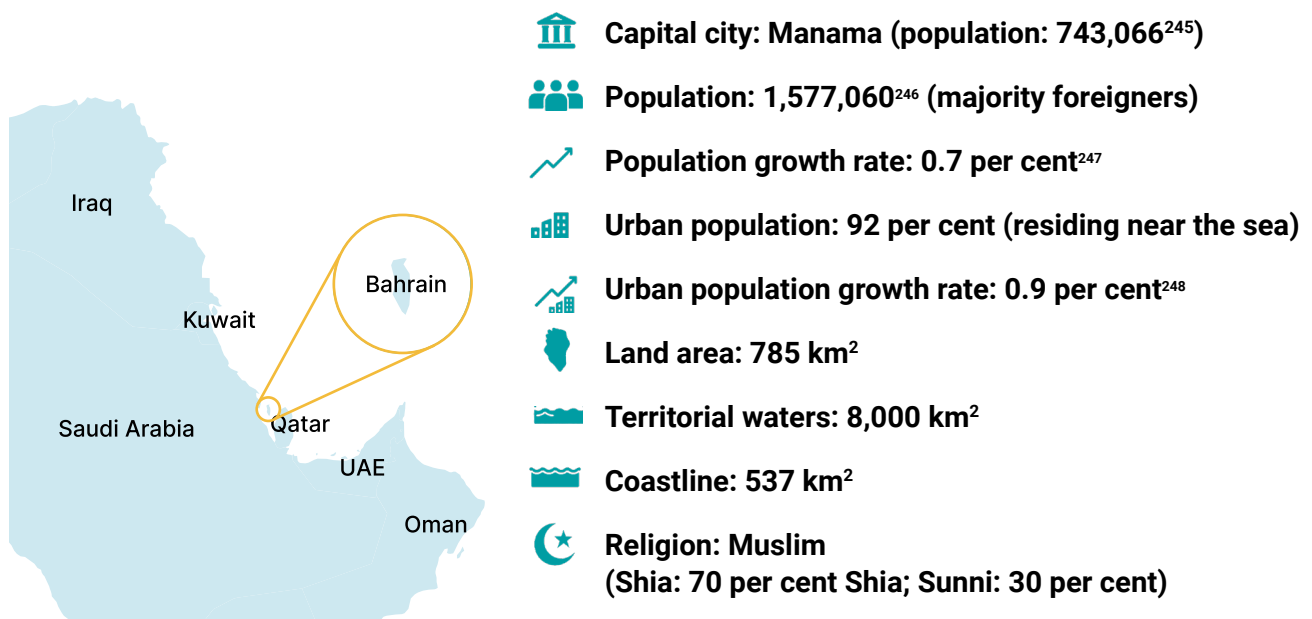
The breadth of the scope, combined with the scarcity of consolidated information, significant national variations in available data and expertise and differing understandings of what constitutes good land governance and functioning land administration made the exercise both complex and enriching.

The results presented in the national chapters do not attempt to include all available information or represent every expert perspective, particularly where views diverge. Rather, they aim to establish a baseline for discussion on improving land governance, fostering a shared understanding available information available and knowledge gaps on the subject, through peer-reviewed and validated summaries of the key land governance features and trends.

The national chapters also aim to stimulate interest and debate on land governance among national leaders and land sector stakeholders, based on national visions, priorities and specific contexts.

²⁴³ Unfortunately, it was not possible to undertake the assessment for Kuwait, so the country has not been included.

Kingdom of Bahrain²⁴⁴



²⁴⁴ This country profile summarizes the paper: UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2024). [Bahrain Land Sector Assessment: Background Paper](#).

²⁴⁵ World Population Review (2025). [Bahrain Cities by Population 2025](#).

²⁴⁶ World Bank (2022). [Urban population \(% of total population\) – Bahrain](#). World Bank Group.

²⁴⁷ World Bank (2024). [Population growth \(annual %\) – Bahrain](#).

²⁴⁸ World Bank (2024). [Urban population growth \(annual %\)](#).

OVERVIEW

The Kingdom of Bahrain consists of thirty-six small islands. The country's name is said to reflect the archipelago's position between two seas, though another theory is that the name refers to two water sources rising in numerous springs beneath the islands' surface and the offshore seabed. Bahrain's total land area was about 620 sq km before substantial reclamation

projects expanded its land mass along the shorelines.²⁴⁹

Bahrain's population is estimated at 1.57 million,²⁵⁰ more than half of whom are expatriates.²⁵¹ Seventy per cent of the population is Muslim (approximately 70 per cent Shia and 30 per cent Sunni). 92 per cent of the population resides in urban areas and close to the sea. Bahrain ranks 41st among countries worldwide

²⁴⁹ Al-Nabi, M. N. (2012). [Bahrain Land Use History 1968-2002](#). Information Affairs Authority.

²⁵⁰ World Bank (2024i). [Urban population \(% of total population\) – Bahrain](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

²⁵¹ Bahrain Ministry of Information Affairs (2010). [Population and demographic growth](#).

FIGURE 59: HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF LAND-RELATED LAWS IN BAHRAIN



Source: Authors

and the highest among Arab countries in the Human Development Index, indicating a rise in people's standard of living.

Bahrain has very limited land, and government policy thus concentrates on expanding the country's land area for development. Consequently, large coastal zones in some of the main islands, mainly the northern part, have been subjected to extensive dredging and infilling activities since the 1970s for developmental purposes. The country's land area is constantly increasing, currently totalling about 785 sq km.²⁵² The full coastal length is more than 537 km, with an additional 8,000 sq km of marine area. More than 7,210 sq km of this area is considered an aquatic ecosystem. The main islands are in two groups of unequal sizes. The larger, which includes Bahrain, Muharraq, Sitrah, Jiddah and Umm Nassan, sits between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The second group of small islands, Hawar and Sawad, is close to the Qatari coast.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Bahrain's legal system is based on civil law, customs and Sharia (Islamic jurisprudence). The system primarily derives from the legal system of Egypt, which is based on the legal system of France.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Bahrain's legal system is based on civil law, customs and Sharia (Islamic jurisprudence). The system primarily derives from the legal system of Egypt, which is based on the legal system of France.

Monarchy

The King of Bahrain holds the highest position in the state. His role is to ensure the integrity of the government and to uphold the primacy of

the constitution and the law. He is vested with the authority to appoint the prime minister, his council and the advisory body of the legislative branch, and is able to dissolve parliament through royal decree. The King possesses the exclusive power to ratify laws and international treaties and presides over matters of foreign policy. He is also the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and the chair of the Higher Judicial Council.

Legislative structures

Bahrain's legislative system comprises two chambers, each with 40 members: the Advisory Council and the Chamber of Deputies (Parliament). Together, these bodies constitute the National Council, endowed with specific responsibilities. Members of the Advisory Council are appointed directly by the King, while Parliamentary representatives are elected by their respective constituencies in general elections. Women and men have equal rights to vote, be appointed to government and run for election.

Legislative process

The government first submits draft laws to Parliament, which is able to amend, endorse or reject them. There are then two rounds of review by each the Advisory Council and Parliament. If disagreements arise between the two bodies during the review, the National Council convenes and the law passes based on majority approval. If the law passes, the Prime Minister then forwards it to the King for ratification, and it comes into force six months after ratification, so long as the King has not reconsidered.

Parliamentary oversight

Parliament can issue written directives to the government on matters of public concern; the government is obligated to respond within six months. Failure to comply necessitates

252 Bahrain Ministry of Information Affairs (2010). [Population and demographic growth](#).

an explanation of non-compliance, and any topic regarding government policy may result in interpellation (a formal request procedure) upon the petition of at least five members of Parliament.

Judicial framework

Bahrain's Constitution guarantees the autonomy of the judiciary, which comprises criminal, civil and Sharia courts. Criminal matters fall under the jurisdiction of criminal courts, while civil courts adjudicate civil, commercial, administrative and non-Muslim personal disputes. Sharia courts preside over family law and Islamic personal matters, including inheritance. Each judicial division is overseen by the Court of Cassation or Supreme Court, the highest appellate court.

There is no provision of immunity for ministries or public entities and any concerned party is able to challenge decisions or orders.

Constitutional oversight

The Constitutional Court, established following the enactment of the 2002 Constitution, ensures compliance with constitutional provisions and safeguards the rights enshrined therein. The Constitution provides military courts jurisdiction over the Bahrain Defence Force, National Guard and General Security Forces.

Judicial administration

The Higher Judicial Council administers Bahrain's courts, ensuring their efficient operation. The Council nominates judges whose appointment is then finalized through royal decree. Chaired by the King, the Council comprises the Chief Justice, the Attorney General and a minimum of five judicial appointees serving three-year terms.

Executive branch

The Council of Ministers, appointed by the King and led by the Prime Minister, comprises the executive branch. Ministers oversee their respective government departments, implement relevant policies and pass ministerial orders alongside legislation passed in the judicial branch. The Prime Minister ensures the effective functioning of the Council, overseeing performance and facilitating inter-ministerial coordination. The Council's proceedings are confidential, and the King may participate in and preside over its meetings. Additionally, ministers possess the authority to issue ministerial decrees alongside legislation passed by the legislative branch.²⁵³

Bahrain's legislative framework for urban planning was initially based on constitutional law, considered the general planning framework. However, constitutional law is supplemented by several other legislations that address a particular aspect of urban planning. The Urban Planning and Development Authority provides a robust legal and regulatory framework for businesses to grow, attract talent and innovate. Developing laws, regulations, decisions and other related legislation provides the legal and legislative information needed for businesses to feel secure.

Such legislation can be summarized as follows:²⁵⁴

- Code of Expropriation for the General Interest No. 8/1970 and its amendments in 2005
- Code of Construction No. 13 of 1977
- Code of Real Estate Selling Contracts No. 16 of 1979

253 Al-Doseri, A., and Jawahery, E. (2018). [The Legal System of the Kingdom of Bahrain](#). Web article, Hauser Global Law School Program, New York University School of Law.

254 Ibid.

- Decree No. 28/1999 Respecting the Establishment and Organization of Industrial Estate
 - Legislative Decree No. 3 of 1994 concerning the Division of Lands Intended for Construction and Development, as amended by Law No. 6 of 2005
 - Legislative Decree No. 1 and 2 of 1994 concerning the Law of Urban Planning
 - Civil Code (2001), primarily concerned with the Law of Obligations. It regulates rights to enter into agreements, the creation and dissolution of contracts, leases, mortgages and pledges
 - Municipalities Law, promulgated by Legislative Decree No. 35 of 2001, as amended
 - Legislative Decree No. 2 of 2001 on the Ownership by Non-Bahrainis of Built Properties and Land
 - The Constitution (2002) establishes the social, economic, civil and political rights of citizens and the powers of the state
 - Law No. 53 of 2006 designates Tubli Bay as a nature reserve
 - Ministerial Resolution No. 95 of 2011 amending the executive regulations of Decree-Law No. 3 of 1994 regarding the division of lands intended for reconstruction and development issued by Resolution No. 56 of 2009
 - Resolution No. 54 of 2012 regarding defining construction lines on main roads
 - Property Registration Law promulgated by Law No. 13 of 2013
 - Lease Law of 2014 on regulating landlord and tenant relationships and agreements
 - Legislative Decree No. 25 of 2015 concerning Recovering the Costs of the Establishment and Development of Infrastructure in Urbanized Areas
 - Resolution No. 4 of 2016 amends some provisions of the executive regulations of Decree No. 3 of 1994 regarding the division of lands intended for construction and development issued by Resolution No. 56 of 2009
 - Resolution No. 196 of 2016 amended some provisions of the executive regulations of Decree No. 3 of 1994 regarding the division of lands intended for construction and development, issued by Resolution No. 56 of 2009
 - Law No. 27 of 2017 promulgating the Real Estate Sector Regulation law
 - Resolution No. 11 of 2017 regarding defining categories and a mechanism for collecting the cost of establishing and developing infrastructure in existing construction areas with facilities
 - Decision No. 134 of 2018 regarding the controls and requirements for accrediting offices to review drawings, data, documents and maps necessary to issue building licences
- Zoning and Construction Regulations:
- Decree No. 28 of 2009 on the determination of zoning regulations for construction in various areas of the Kingdom
 - Decree No. 76 of 2018 on regulatory requirements that apply to housing projects

- Decree No. 55 of 2016 on amending some of the regulatory requirements for construction in various regions in the Kingdom issued by Resolution No. 28 for the year 2009
- Decree No. 15 of 2016 on the approval of classification maps for the Capital Governorate
- Decree No. 16 of 2017 on the approval of classification maps for the Northern Governorate
- Decree No. 17 of 2017 on the approval of classification maps for the Al-Mehraq Governorate
- Decree No. 18 of 2017 on the approval of classification maps for the Southern Governorate

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

In 2001, under the leadership of His Majesty King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa, the Kingdom of Bahrain introduced the National Action Charter, which is hailed as the foundational document for democratic transformation within the nation. This political reform initiative included election at the municipal and parliamentary levels, which notably marked the inclusion of women as both voters and candidates.²⁵⁵ In addition to creating an independent judiciary, a bicameral legislature was established with an appointed body (Shura Council) and an elected house (Consultative Council).

Bahrain is actively pursuing economic diversification and sustainable management of its natural resources. As an island nation, it faces significant challenges from climate change, particularly rising sea levels. To address these concerns, the Kingdom has implemented various initiatives under its national

framework for sustainable development. These efforts encompass a range of socioeconomic strategies such as the National Economic Strategy, the Economic Vision 2030 for Bahrain, Bahrain 2030 National Planning Development Strategies and Bahrain's Future Skills Strategy.

The Kingdom's environmental initiatives include the National Environment Strategy, the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, the National Desertification Plan and Strategy and Bahrain 2030 National Land Use Strategy. Some of these strategies are still in draft form while others are in their final stages. Progress has been made in implementing the Barbados Programme of Action, however the lack of financial resources and inadequate technical and technological capacities make achievements neither comprehensive nor substantial. In this context, capacity-building is of prime importance to enable national institutes in Bahrain to overcome difficulties and meet challenges.

Typically, land administration entities are created through legislative measures outlining their operational scope and necessary stakeholders. In Bahrain, the Survey and Land Registration Bureau was instituted under Land Registration Law No. 15, enacted in 1979 and subsequently revised by Law No. 13 in 2013. According to this law, the Survey and Land Registration Bureau "shall undertake surveying, registration and land valuation for lands in the Kingdom of Bahrain, following the provisions of this law, by-law and the resolutions issued in implementation thereof. It is the primary reference for all lands in Bahrain, including the maintenance and updating of the land information database". The law outlines the primary responsibilities of the bureau, which encompass surveying, registration and valuation, and designates departments to oversee these tasks.

²⁵⁵ Bahrain Public Commission for Protection of Marine Resources, the Environment and Wildlife (2009). [*Bahrain National Assessment Report on Implementation of The Mauritius Strategy of The Barbados Programme of Action \(BPOA\)*](#).

LAND SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS

Bahrain's land administration system began in 1924 when the state was established. Over time, it has undergone various phases of organizational development, adapting to different historical periods. At present, the primary organizations that oversee land administration are as follows:

The Survey and Land Registration Bureau is responsible for all surveys (including cadastral, topographic and hydrographic) as well as land registration, which covers land titles, land certificates, ownership information, land value, topographic maps and hydrographic charts. These are the main products and services provided by the Bureau. Cadastral and topographic maps full cover Bahrain's land mass. Lands in the country are registered as either state land (government) or private ownership. The Bureau maintains a land registry where each property, description and legal status is entered. Facts and information recorded in the land registry are considered final and conclusive proof of the matters they describe and information recorded in the registry is considered proof of ownership. Details in the register cannot be altered except by court order or upon receipt of a notarized declaration from a party approved by the Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs. The Bureau Director may correct material errors in the land register according to the appropriate legal instruments of ownership or disposal. Registered land cannot be acquired through adverse possession or prescription. The rights of others that encumber the land must be written on the title to that land, and failure to follow such registration renders the rights invalid. The King of Bahrain guarantees titles to lands registered in the registry, which cannot be annulled or overturned.

The Ministry of Works, Municipalities Affairs and Urban Planning is responsible for all planning, zoning and building activities. The Ministry's primary role is development of zoning plans, master plans and development permits; it also launched the National Planning Development

Strategy in 2007, Bahrain's land-use policy. The Real Estate Regulatory Authority is designed to deliver a transparent and sustainable regulatory environment for the real estate sector, promote investment and protect the rights of consumers. The Bahrain Chamber for Dispute Resolution was established by Bahrain Legislative Decree No. 30 of 2009.

Decree No. 47 and No. 48 of 2017, amending Decree No. 54 of 2007, established the Urban Planning and Development Authority. Decree No. 68 of 2012 reorganized the Ministry of Works, Municipalities Affairs and Urban Planning, which is responsible for land subdivision, merging, rezoning study, hydro-dynamic studies assessment, special nature projects review, traffic studies approval and land adjustment.

Based on existing legislation and institutional framework, there seems to be a lack of integration between higher and lower governmental bodies and overlapping powers and authorities in some instances. There is a need to follow specific local situations to improve the distribution of authority. Some concerns include the inability to sort conflicts of sectoral interests among various ministries and departments; the budgetary allocation struggle between quick-win development projects versus fundamental change with long-term impacts; and delays in implementing governance reforms and setting up new institutes to strengthen the planning system.

LAND MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS

Access to land is crucial for people as it provides shelter and a means of livelihood. The distribution and use of land are determined by land policies, defined as the rules governing access to land and the distribution of its benefits. Land policies comprise complex socioeconomic and legal prescriptions governing land and its related benefits. Land administration is a primary driver for achieving such objectives and provides a suite of tools for operationalizing land policy

FIGURE 60: LAND ADMINISTRATION TRENDS IN BAHRAIN

This graphic provides an indicative overview of national-level trends based on the data presented in the country profile. The findings are illustrative rather than definitive and, in some cases, may be non-conclusive, as contextual and institutional variations may apply. The graphics below present the performance of the five core land administration functions - from weak to well-functioning - together with performance across four complementary indicators: SDG 11.1.1, the Assets Indicator, the Registering Property Score, and the Corruption Perceptions Index. To ensure comparability, all indicators were proportionally adjusted.

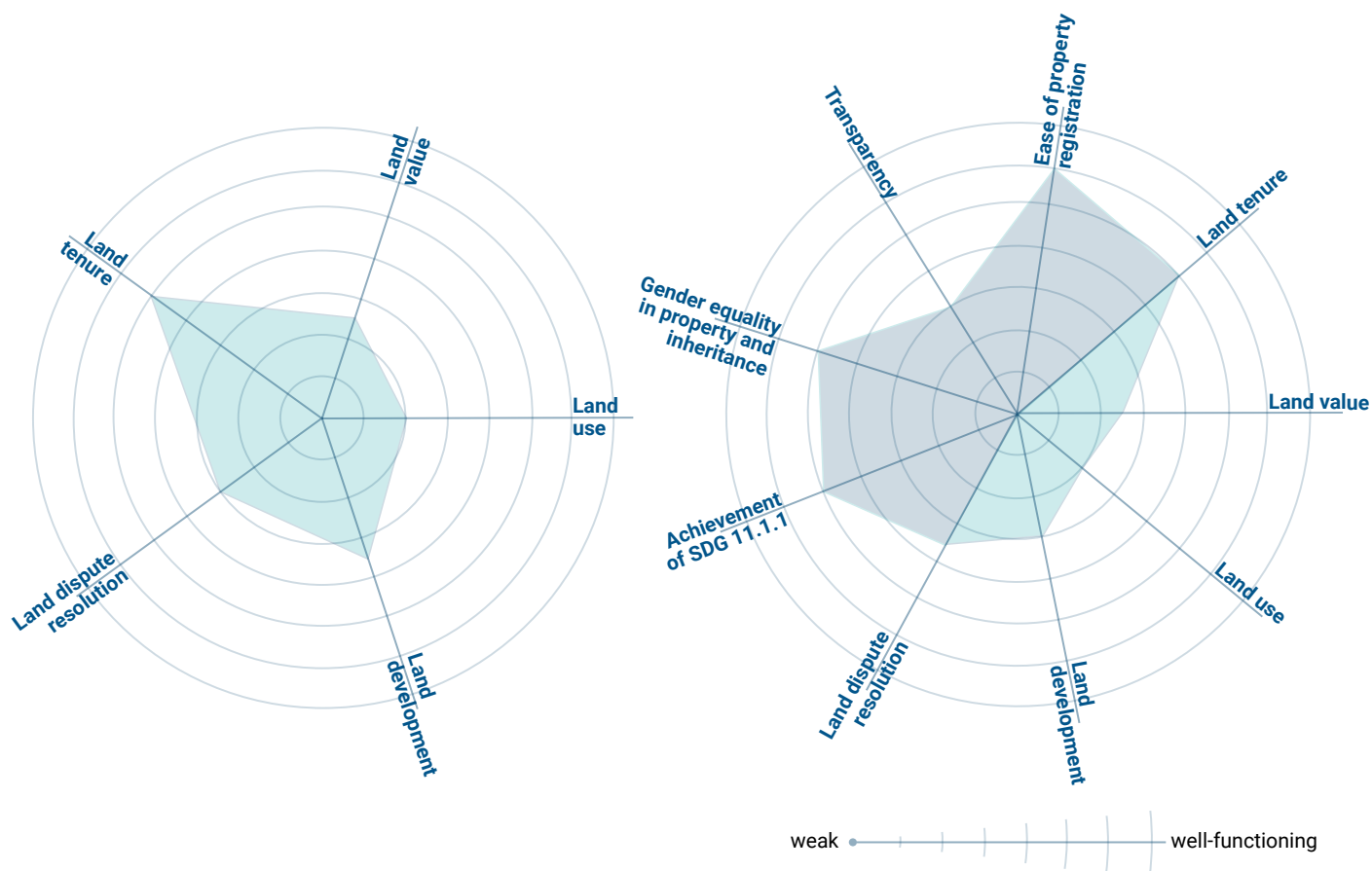


TABLE 6: OVERVIEW OF LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS IN BAHRAIN

CRITERIA	LAND TENURE	LAND VALUE	LAND USE	LAND DEVELOPMENT	LAND DISPUTES RESOLUTION
Existence / coverage of the system	●	●	●	●	●
Effectiveness	●	●	●	●	●
Procedural duration	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	●
Affordability	●	●	N/A	●	●
Accessibility	●	N/A	●	●	●
Data availability	●	●	●	N/A	N/A
Mandates clarity	N/A	●	●	●	●

● Significant challenge ● Moderate challenge ● No/ limited challenge

Source: Authors, United Nations Statistics Division. (n.d.). [SDG indicators database](#); World Bank (2021). [Women, business and the law 2021](#); World Bank (n.d.). [Registering property](#); Transparency International. (2022). [Corruption perceptions index 2022: Middle East and North Africa](#).

instruments. It has been defined as “the process of determining, recording, and disseminating information about landownership, value and use when implementing land management policies”.²⁵⁶

Three principles underpin the importance of land management and administration: (1) providing secure tenure to land can improve the welfare of the poor by enhancing the asset base of those, such as women, whose land rights are often neglected; this creates the incentives needed for investment, a key element underlying sustainable economic growth; (2) facilitating the exchange and distribution of land, whether as an asset or for current services, at low cost is central to expediting land access and enhancing the development of financial markets; and (3) promoting and contributing to socially desirable land allocation and utilization through government intervention.

There are five key functions of land management and administration, described separately in this report: tenure, value, use, development and dispute resolution. This chapter also looks at political objectives and institutional infrastructure, since it is related to and impacts the five main functions of the land administration system. The results reveal key strengths and weaknesses regarding Bahrain’s land administration system.

This section summarizes the results of an assessment of the capacity of Bahrain’s land administration system to perform the core land administration functions to support the achievement of the overarching goal of sustainable social and economic development. The study provides a preliminary assessment of the current learning offers and related curricula for land governance in the country.

The assessment was conducted through semi-structured interviews completed online

with targeted stakeholders to obtain a final assessment of the five functions of the land administration system. The interviews focused on the main challenges, problems and concerns, current performance, capacity gaps, who and what can bridge that gap and how fast. Respondents representing government or public institutions, the private sector, academia, international organizations, land users and civil society were included in the assessment.

Table 8 shows summarized results for all land administration system functions. Overall, the Bahrain land administration system functions well. There are moderate challenges regarding coverage, effectiveness, time, cost and accessibility for vulnerable groups. The significant challenges are in terms of data availability and clarity of mandate.

A summary of the results of the survey for each of the five functions of land administration are presented below.

LAND TENURE

The Bahrain Chamber for Dispute Resolution and the Supreme Judicial Council are the responsible agencies for land tenure. It is worth mentioning that non-citizens can own lands in Bahrain.

Most respondents believe that the adult population has secure land tenure rights with legally recognized documentation. An overwhelming majority of respondents believe it is “unlikely, to very unlikely” to be forcibly evicted or displaced, noting that the leading cause for eviction is development of national projects, which only occurs with the consent of landowners.

The housing sector is one of Bahrain’s most important economic sectors. The government

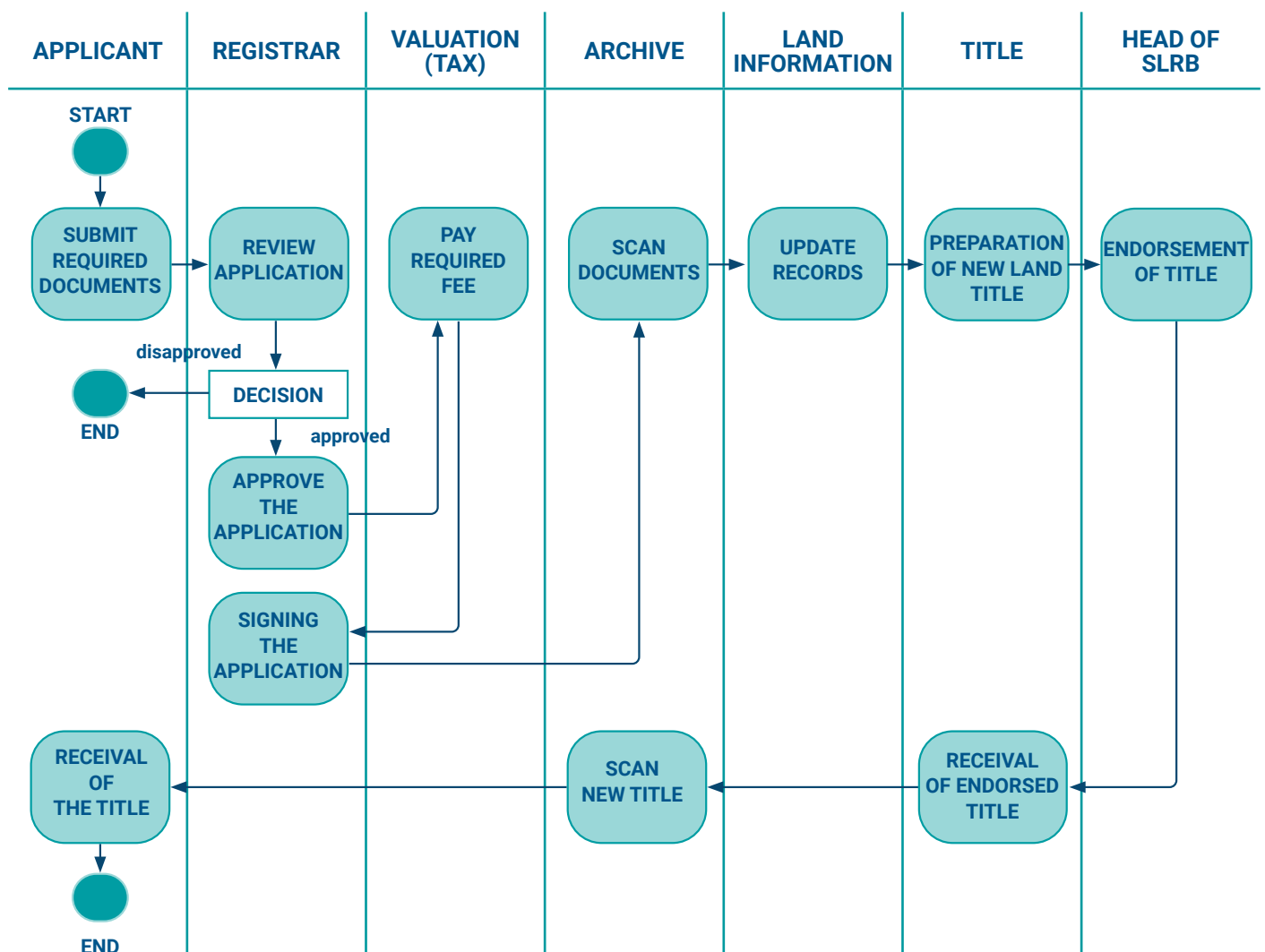
256 Burns, T., Grant, C., Nettle, K., Brits, A. M. and Dalrymple, K. (2006). [*Land Administration Reform: Indicators of Success and Future Challenges*](#). Report, UNECE.

has strongly supported housing throughout the past decades by financing private housing construction. Responses indicate that the cost of purchasing urban land and properties is moderately unaffordable. Urban land or private homes on average cost the equivalent of between 50 and 120 months of monthly income. While land in rural areas for agricultural land use is more affordable, most respondents are unsure if the cost of rural/agricultural land is affordable. Additionally, nearly all respondents believe that it is easy for citizens to obtain funds to purchase urban land and property, and none believes there is any difference between men and women in the ability to obtain these funds. These perceptions align with current practice in Bahrain, which makes obtaining funds to

purchase land or propriety relatively easy for average citizens, contributing to the stability of land tenure in Bahrain. All respondents believe that it is easy for ordinary citizens to use their land or property as collateral for loans.

The process of registering a new property is presented in Figure 59. Most respondents perceive the procedures for registering new properties as easy while only half perceive that altering existing properties is easy. The cost of registration in Bahrain is the equivalent of between two and five per cent of the property, and the processing time varies according to the parcel's status, from 14 days in typical cases to 360 days for complicated ones, such as if the land is in a non-planned area.

FIGURE 61: LAND REGISTRATION PROCESS IN BAHRAIN



Source: Authors.

Perception of the timeline to change an existing cadastral record varies from 30 to 720 days, and the cost is estimated at less than BHD 100 in most cases. Transferring properties from one party to another is perceived by most respondents as easy to very easy. The cost of transfer is also perceived as reasonable to very reasonable by almost all respondents.

To perform effectively, cadastral information should be linked and interoperable with other spatial data (e.g. natural resources maps, land-use plans). According to the questionnaire, most respondents believe that the information is already linked. Access to cadastral data is also needed for decision-making; most respondents believe this information to be accessible only to relevant authorities or projects but not to the public.

LAND USE

The Ministry of Works, Municipalities Affairs and Urban Planning and the Urban Planning and Development Authority are responsible for land use in Bahrain.

The 2007 National Structural Strategic Plan presents a long-term vision for Bahrain over the 2030 horizon. The plan reflects the desire of relevant authorities to balance economic, social and environmental sustainability to achieve sustainable development.²⁵⁷

Most farmland in Bahrain experiences some form of desertification. Salinity presents in cultivated lands due to groundwater depletion and seawater intrusion. The high demand for housing and recreational facilities has taken a toll on arable and rangelands. Most valuable agricultural lands and wild lands have been converted to residential areas, amid soaring land prices and demand, leading to the existence of virtually no rural areas in Bahrain. Land scarcity,

high population density and demand for housing and commercial compounds has forced authorities to review building codes and allow high-rise buildings.²⁵⁸

The cabinet officially approved the National Environmental Strategy through Edict No. 02-1902, released in 2006. It contains foresight and action points for several environmental issues, including air pollution and climate change, water conservation and pollution control, land resources and marine and coastal environment. Other sections deal with mainstreaming environmental concerns into sustainable development. Special attention is given to tourism, transport and waste management. In 2009, the action plan to implement the strategy was reviewed.²⁵⁹ All respondents agreed that there are updated local and national land-use plans and that these are considered adequate, while the vast majority confirmed that no regional plans exist. Local and national plans also have adequate levels of enforcement according to most respondents.

Respondents are overall unaware of the adequacy and enforcement of urban land-use plans. While most respondents confirm that regulations or schemes addressing informal, temporary and displaced population settlements exist, most are unaware of their adequacy and enforcement.

Most respondents believe that Bahrain's building permit regulations are enforced. Regardless, these and other existing standards intended to address suburban developments are not effective enough to control and manage land subdivisions in suburban areas and non-urban localities around the larger cities in Bahrain. Land grants and affordable housing projects are implemented by municipalities in remote areas where 'free' government land is available. Often such areas, especially the land grant areas, are

257 Bahrain Public Commission for Protection of Marine Resources, the Environment and Wildlife (2009).

258 Ibid.

259 Ibid

subdivided and allocated without infrastructure. This represents an urban management and investment problem for the future. Moreover, the social tradition of relying on land as investment leads to demands for residential allotment, which hampers progress in land management, as it far outstrips the requirement for actual housing allotments.²⁶⁰

Most respondents are not aware the existence, adequacy or enforcement of rural and agricultural land-use regulations. Less than half are aware of existing environmental protection land-use regulations; less than a third perceive them as adequate and enforced.

In assessing the clarity of the government's role in private land rights, less than one third of respondents find it clear. Similarly, only one third of respondents consider the management of state lands to be clear. A majority, however, consider the government's role in acquiring private land for public development to be clear.

All respondents are aware of the existence of land-use information in Bahrain, with the vast majority believing that at least 60 per cent of the country's land is covered and that it is moderately complete and accessible. Most do not believe that information on the country's natural resources exists, nor are most aware of how much of the country is covered by natural resource information or its degree of completeness or accessibility.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

The Ministry of Works, Municipalities Affairs and Urban Planning and the Urban Planning and Development Authority are responsible for land development.

Most people live along the coasts of the main islands (Bahrain, Muharraq, Sitra and

Nabih Saleh). Accelerated population growth and economic and social development have increased the demand for land to cater to housing and development needs. This has forced local authorities to resort to the reclamation of shallow-water coastal zones and to transform agricultural areas into urban and commercial spaces.

Bahrain's size grew from 670 sq km in 1936 to 785 sq km in 2020. However, reclamation in the sea could be impacted by rising sea levels, which by 2100 could submerge 27 to 56 per cent of Bahrain, already the smallest country in the Middle East.²⁶¹ Losing this land would devastate the island's economy, water supply and natural environment.

Bahrain's socioeconomic development has been marked by increased demand for land for urban development and a decline in agricultural areas. Dredging and reclamation operations expand Bahrain's coastal zones to accommodate new residential and commercial areas, artificial leisure islands, seaports and bridges and power generation and water desalination plants. The number of housing units, buildings and installations increased by nearly 30 per cent between 1991 and 2001, from 81,552 to 105,686, and is expected to exceed 231,000 in 2030, equivalent to approximately a 118 per cent increase.

Legislative Decree No. 8 of 1970 authorized the government or municipality in Bahrain to compulsorily acquire private land when it is in the public interest. However, in case number D/2/2005, the Constitutional Court issued a ruling in March 2007 that this decree is in violation of the Constitution. The judgment, which nullified Legislative Decree No. 8 of 1970, came into force on 12 April 2007, following its publication in the Official Gazette. Accordingly, it is currently no longer possible for the government to confiscate, condemn or compulsorily acquire

260 Bahrain Urban Planning and Development Authority (2021). [Subdivision Regulations Simulator](#).

261 Bodetti, A. (2019). [Will Bahrain Disappear Beneath the Waves?](#) Lobe Log.

land in Bahrain. It is now only possible with the landowner's consent.²⁶²

The study results demonstrate that most respondents are aware of mechanisms for acquiring land for public use; most believe the mechanism to be fair, but do not know if it is cost-effective. In urban areas, particularly in major cities, land acquisition for government land grants and public housing has become increasingly complicated as landowners are reluctant to release their land for public investment.

Regarding efficient regulations to control land subdivisions or consolidation in urban areas, most respondents believe that these exist but were not aware if they are fair or cost-effective. The vast majority were also not aware of the existence of regulations to control land subdivisions or consolidation in rural areas, nor of their fairness or cost-effectiveness.

All respondents are aware that mechanisms or regulations ensuring that construction is aligned with land-use regulations exist, and most believe they are cost-effective. Most believe the property development process is easy for landowners, professional developers and public authorities. All respondents are aware of the existence of effective mechanisms to change land use by granting planning permissions and building permits, however only 40 per cent believe these are cost-effective. In Bahrain, real estate property is either owned by public or private entities and individuals, but most respondents are not aware of any mechanism in place that ensures fair distribution of development costs between public and private, nor of their cost-effectiveness for public or for private actors.

LAND VALUE

In Bahrain, the Survey and Land Registration Bureau is responsible for land valuation. Most

respondents are aware that Bahrain uses institutionalized methodologies to assess urban and rural land value as well as the value of buildings and consider these methodologies to be accurate but are not aware if they cover all types of land tenure. Fewer than half of respondents believe that professional valuers are officially recognized, registered and trained, and the vast majority do not know the cost of professional valuers' services.

Respondents do not know the proportion of land and properties that are taxed, nor the amount of revenues collected from land and property taxes. Most are also not aware of the percentage of municipal expenditures paid through land and property taxes, nor whether decision makers have considered the impact of taxation on land use and land markets. Most respondents, however, believe that taxation rates are fair.

A major issue in Bahrain is the lack of a complete and accessible digital land information system to record land value; respondents are overall uncertain of its existence and completeness.

LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The Bahrain Chamber for Dispute Resolution and supreme judicial council. Is the responsible agency for land dispute resolution.

All respondents confirmed that a well-structured formal system to resolve conflicts and disputes related to land rights and parcel boundaries exists in Bahrain. However, the majority consider the resolution process to be rather slow, but relatively affordable for the poor and other vulnerable groups. Regarding familiarity with the procedures for accessing the formal dispute resolution system, most gave a rating of four or five (where five indicates that most people know how to access it). Level of trust in the land disputes system is also very high, according to an overwhelming majority of respondents who rate the system as reliable. Most respondents

262 Ambikapathy, B. (2021). *Real Estate Law. Global Corporate Real Estate Guide, Saudi Arabia*.

are not aware of the number of land-related cases in the formal courts or if mechanisms other than legal courts exist to solve land rights disputes.

LEARNING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The current learning offer and related curricula for land governance in Bahrain can help address issues and challenges to support land policy development and implementation. However, the learning offer on land governance in Bahrain is limited, producing land professionals who are not fully able to respond to the realities of the regions and the breadth and dimensions of land governance and administration.

Universities are the only learning providers of land management in Bahrain. Only academic courses are offered as a part of a whole programme for graduate and undergraduate students. These are limited to only three courses provided by public and private universities in Bahrain.

The courses partially cover urban planning, land use and land development. The curricula also tend to be too technical and lacking in the social, cultural, political, economic and environmental aspects crucial to land governance.

There is almost no contribution from the private sector to land governance learning efforts (only one university). Civil society and non-public institutions and stakeholders are not directly or

indirectly involved in land governance in Bahrain. Further, there is only a limited number of recent publications about Bahrain's land administration system.

- Results of the mapping survey show that the private land sector offers no land-related training. All learning offers are provided by public (University of Bahrain, Arabian Gulf University, etc.) and private (Kingdom University) universities. The main topics covered are land use, urban land development, planning law and administration, surveying, housing theories and economics and urban planning. Two courses are offered by public universities and one by a private university.
- **Grade/level of the existing learning offer:** One of three programmes is designed for graduate students, while the other two are for undergraduates. All learning offers are academic (graduate and undergraduate level) and offer certification as a part of the whole programme (not stand-alone courses).
- **Fees and funding options:** All undergraduate courses are free for students at the public university and have government support. Undergraduate and graduate students at private universities must pay fees.
- **Relation of available learning offers to the five functions of land administration:** Land disputes resolution and land tenure are not covered by the learning offers, while land use and land development are the most offered.

Republic of Iraq²⁶³



Capital city: Baghdad (population: 8,141,120)²⁶⁴



Population: 46,100,000²⁶⁵



Population growth rate: 2.3 per cent²⁶⁶



Urban population: 72 per cent²⁶⁷



Urban population growth rate: 2.5 per cent²⁶⁸



Land area: 434,130 km² ²⁶⁹



Forest: 1.9 per cent

²⁶³ This country profile summarizes the paper: UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2024). [Iraq Land Sector Assessment: Background Paper](#).

²⁶⁴ World Population Review (2025). [Baghdad](#).

²⁶⁵ Abdul-Zahra, Q. (2025). [46.1 million people were counted in Iraq's first census in nearly 40 years](#). Associated Press. 24 February 2025.

²⁶⁶ World Bank (2025). [Iraq: Overview](#).

²⁶⁷ World Bank (2025). [Urban population \(% of total population\)](#).

²⁶⁸ World Bank (2024). [Urban population growth \(annual %\)](#).

²⁶⁹ World Bank (2024). [Land area \(sq. km\) – Iraq](#).

OVERVIEW

According to the most recent census data published in 2025, the Republic of Iraq has a population of 46.1 million²⁷⁰ and an annual growth rate of 2.3 per cent.²⁷¹ In the same year, 72 per cent of Iraq's population lived in urban areas²⁷² including an estimated 8.14 million people living in the capital city, Baghdad.²⁷³ The State

owns 80–90 per cent of all land.²⁷⁴ The nation's geographical zones are categorized as highlands in the northeast, desert in the southwest and west, and plains in the south-central part. Only 1.9 per cent of the total land area is forest and woodland.

The Republic of Iraq is known as the birthplace of the ancient Babylonian and Assyrian empires.

²⁷⁰ Abdul-Zahra, Q. (2025). [46.1 million people were counted in Iraq's first census in nearly 40 years](#). Associated Press. 24 February 2025.

²⁷¹ World Bank (2025) Country profile: [Iraq](#).

²⁷² World Bank (2025). [Urban population \(% of total population\)](#).

²⁷³ World Population Review (2025). [Baghdad](#).

²⁷⁴ USAID (2005). [Land Registration and Property Rights in Iraq](#).

FIGURE 62: HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF LAND-RELATED LAWS IN IRAQ



Source: Authors.

The country was occupied by the Ottoman Empire in 1534, seized by the British in 1917, and remained under a British Mandate until becoming fully independent in 1958. The current land administration in Iraq, and most Middle Eastern countries, follows the rules and regulations introduced by the Ottoman Empire.²⁷⁵

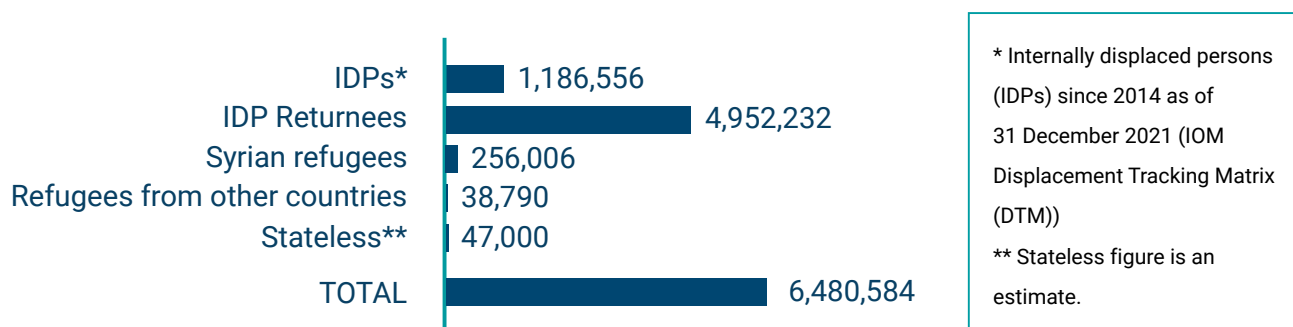
Prior to Ottoman occupation, landownership and registration in Iraq were determined by tribal

laws, which provided custody only to tribal lords operating under a feudal system. Land lots were registered to tribes, cities and villages as single plots under one deed.

The Ottoman rulers changed that. In principle, all land under Ottoman rule belonged to the state, which did not need to prove ownership. Communities or individuals who owned land, however, needed to present land titles.

275 Abdul-Zahra, Q. (2025).

FIGURE 63: POPULATION OF CONCERN IN IRAQ



Source: UNHCR (2022). Fact sheet/Iraq. January 2022

The Ottoman rulers introduced major land reforms. These included the main categories of land tenure guided by Sharia law: privately owned land (mulk), community land (musha), land endowment (waqf) and state land (miri). State land incorporated the element of heq tasarruf, which gave individuals the right to use such land. Moreover, the country's land administration system was governed by several codes: the Mecelle, Tapu law, the law of disposition of immovable property, and the law of succession to immovable property. Many others were enshrined in the Code of Civil Procedures, the Land Commercial Code and the Peace Judges' Law.

As the Ottoman occupation weakened, it could not pay its officers. In lieu of payment, the officers were registered as owners of amiri (state-owned) land with title deeds. Also, landownership shifted from the tribe to the family. They took these measures to weaken tribal groups.²⁷⁶

Under British control, people who had deeds for amiri land were considered mere tenants. The British also considered Tapu as just one of the main land deeds, which served as proof of ownership used for auditing purposes. These audits led to the creation of the Real Estate Registration Department. Realizing the

importance of tribes in Iraqi society, the British maintained the Ottoman land administration systems. This provided the British with legal and taxation power, while the land was transferred to feudal landlords.²⁷⁷

In 1932, the Land Rights Reconciliation Law, which amended land rights, came into being. This law stipulated three types of landownership: Tapu authorization or allocation of amiri land to selected individuals, pure amiri lands and rights gained through alezma or adverse possession.²⁷⁸

Following the end of British occupation and ten years after gaining full independence 1958, the Arab Baath Socialist Party became the ruling party in Iraq. The party abolished feudalism and tribalism and replaced Tapu with the Real Estate Registration Law. This new law limited the size of landholdings while encouraging collective ownership and agriculture production.²⁷⁹

With the fall of the Baathists in 2003, a new government formed a committee to deal with several complex issues, such as land confiscated by the Baathist regime, returning refugees and their tenure insecurity, title deed forgery, appropriation of public property and encroachment on public land.²⁸⁰

276 USAID (2005); Al-Ossmi, L. and Ahmed, V. (2015). *Land, property and user's rights according to Islamic-ottoman reforms in Iraq*. International Journal of Heritage Architecture: Studies, Repairs and Maintenance, 1(3), pp. 379–387; UN-Habitat (2018c). *State Land Inventory in Maysan Governorate: Local area development programme – EU*.

277 Al-Ossmi, L. and Ahmed, V. (2015); UN-Habitat (2018c).

278 USAID (2005).

279 Al-Ossmi, L. and Ahmed, V. (2015); UN-Habitat (2018c).

280 Ibid.

The Iraq Property Claims Commission was established in 2003. Its brief was to restore land and property confiscated between 1968 and 2003 by Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein. Other land issues included cancellations of agriculture contracts, problems of internally displaced persons and other returnees, occupation of public buildings and land, and informal settlements.²⁸¹

However, in 2013, conflict and displacement escalated with the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Da'esh. ISIS fighters stormed Anbar Governorate and Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, creating about 500,000 refugees in two days. Following this, ISIS stormed Sinjar, a Yazidi-majority town, killing hundreds, abducting and enslaving thousands of Yazidi women and forcing others to flee to the mountains. The Government of Iraq is still discovering mass graves in Sinjar. With the end of the ISIS occupation, the government must deal with the consequences of further displacement.²⁸² The social and political insecurity and multiple waves of forced displacement caused by decades of violence and occupation have created many land and property conflicts.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The statutory land administration system legally covers the entire country and remains highly centralized. Land administration and enforcement of rules governing land in more peripheral areas are difficult.²⁸³

In 1974, the Real Estate Registration Law replaced the old Ottoman permanent title document. Like the old, the new title document, a handwritten copy of the original official record-book document, is sufficient proof of ownership. The Real Estate Registration Department

(RERD) holds the original copy in its registry. The title document incorporates the following information:

- Complete name of the owner(s)
- Category of the property (residential, arable, commercial or industrial)
- Property type:
 - Private estate: owned by the person whose name appears on the title document with no other partner.
 - Public estates: belonging to the state, divided into two parts: (a) properties given by Alezma and (b) governmental estates entrusted to RERD. Both types of ownership affirm the state as part owner, with the individual accorded some ratio of land or period of use.
 - Endowment (inheritance): property is registered in the Endowment Department and under its protection.

There is an additional type of agreement called Musataha, whereby a landowner (most often of a public estate) makes an agreement with another person to build on the land. The two sides agree to make use of the property for a stipulated period of time. At the end of the period, property ownership reverts to the landowner, and the building should be registered at the RERD.²⁸⁴

LAND SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS²⁸⁵

The Land Administration Department of the Ministry of Justice and the local Real Estate

281 International Organization for Migration (2015). *A preliminary assessment of housing, land and property right issues caused by the current displacement crisis in Iraq*. Geneva, Switzerland: IOM.

282 Ibid.

283 UN-Habitat (2018c).

284 IOM (2015); UN-Habitat (2018c).

285 USAID (2005); Al-Ossmi, L. and Ahmed, V. (2015); UN-Habitat (2018c).

Registration Department are the government bodies responsible for land registration and titling. They are the only legal entities for registering different types of real estate ownership and for ensuring compliance with land-use and building construction standards.

The General Directorate of Real Estate is Iraq's head of all governorates' real estate directorates. Each governorate has one or more real estate directorates, depending on the area's size and population. For example, Baghdad has 10 directorates, which is the greatest number nationwide. Al-Mosul has two directorates: one for each part of the city. Districts and the subdistricts of each governorate have the Office of the Real Estate Superintendent. All these divisions are similar hierarchically in structure up to the Ministry of Justice.

The Ministry of Agriculture supervises the implementation of legislation for agriculture regarding farm ownership, transaction of farmland and patterns of agricultural land rights. Since the Agrarian Reform Law No. 30 of 1958, the ministry has held responsibility for ensuring that agricultural land is protected. Provincial agricultural directorates supervise all aspects of agricultural land at this administrative level.

The Ministry of Housing and Construction is the national housing authority. It works with local government units at the governorate level to set up housing schemes. A National Housing Office represents the Ministry of Housing and Construction in the private sector. The ministry is responsible for implementing national housing projects.

The Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works crafts national policy on municipal matters, including the implementation of public facilities for cities. Within this ministry, the General Directorate of Urban Planning deals with urban planning and development at the local level.

The Provincial Physical Planning Directorate is a local-level division of the General Directorate of Urban Planning. This provincial directorate is the regulatory board for urban land use, working through the local municipalities. The provincial directorate monitors and supervises implementation of local land-use regulations and development.

The Municipality Offices are the local government department of the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works. They implement development plans within cities and surrounding villages as designated by cities' master plans.

These different ministries have developed their own databases, some digitized others paper-based, but the lack of coordination among them prevents creation of a single inventory of public land. Such fragmentation opens the possibility for large-scale corruption in the public land sector.

LAND MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS

This section summarizes the results of an assessment of the five key land administration functions of Iraq's land sector. Data used in the research presented here was collected through two surveys carried out in preparation for this paper: a capacity assessment survey and a survey mapping educational courses related to land issues in Iraq.

The targeted survey respondents consisted of a variety of actors, including academics, government officials and practitioners. Their professional backgrounds are in architecture urban, regional, strategic and spatial planning; urban design; geographic information systems (GIS); civil, electrical and mechanical engineering. The participants represent Iraq's geographic north, central and south.

The first survey, a capacity assessment questionnaire, was conducted in April 2021; 26 people responded to the questionnaire.

FIGURE 64: LAND ADMINISTRATION TRENDS IN IRAQ

This graphic provides an indicative overview of national-level trends based on the data presented in the country profile. The findings are illustrative rather than definitive and, in some cases, may be non-conclusive, as contextual and institutional variations may apply. The graphics below present the performance of the five core land administration functions - from weak to well-functioning - together with performance across six complementary indicators: SDG 5.a.2, SDG 11.1.1, the Assets Indicator, the Registering Property Score, House price-to-income ratio, and the Corruption Perceptions Index. To ensure comparability, all indicators were proportionally adjusted.

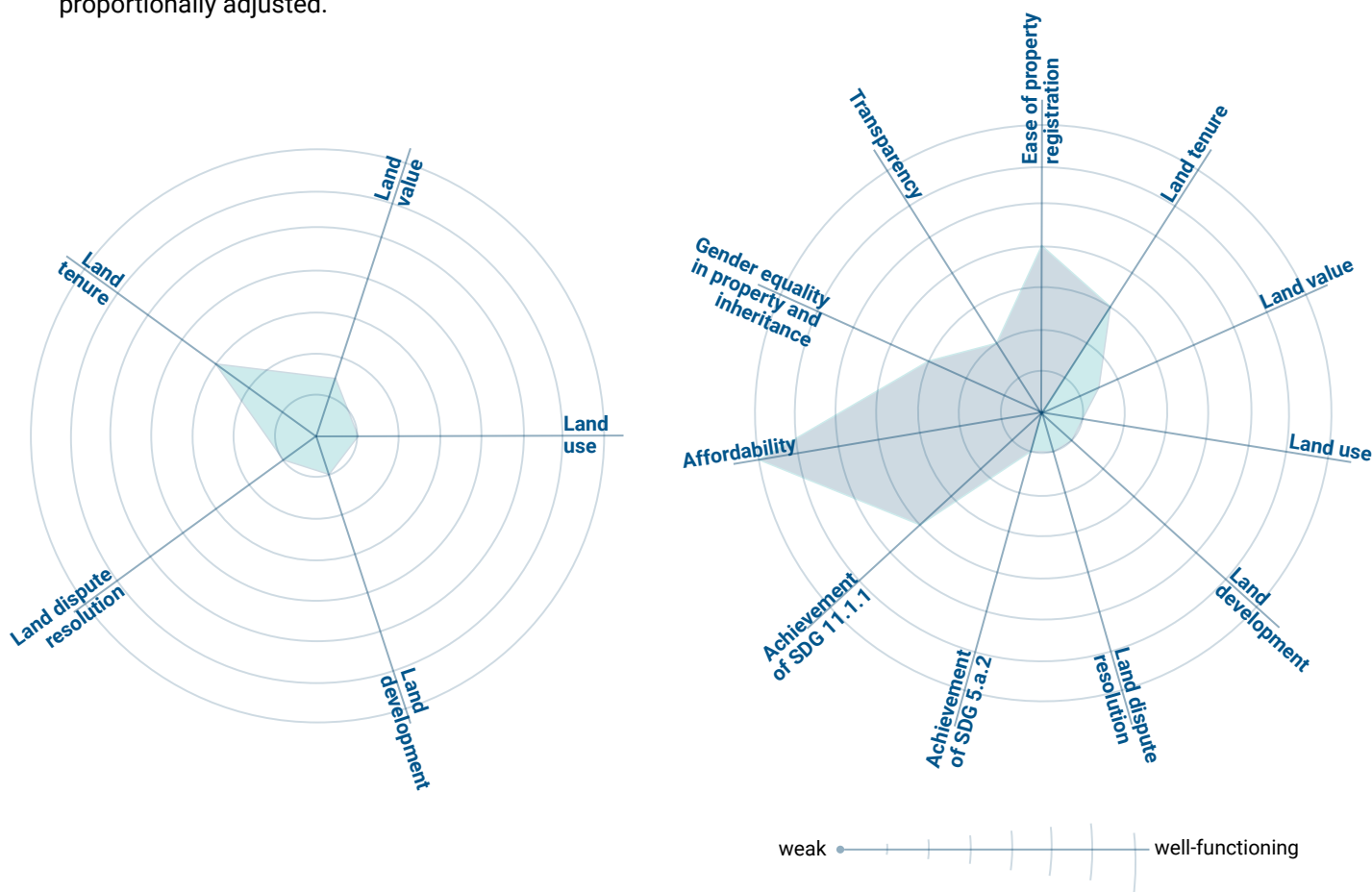


TABLE 7: OVERVIEW OF LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS IN IRAQ

CRITERIA	LAND TENURE	LAND VALUE	LAND USE	LAND DEVELOPMENT	LAND DISPUTES RESOLUTION
Existence / coverage of the system	●	●	●	●	●
Effectiveness	●	●	●	●	●
Procedural duration	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Affordability	●	●	N/A	●	●
Accessibility	●	N/A	●	●	●
Data availability	●	●	●	N/A	N/A
Mandates clarity	N/A	●	●	●	●

● Significant challenge
 ● Moderate challenge
 ● No/ limited challenge

Source: Authors, United Nations Statistics Division. (n.d.). [SDG indicators database](#); World Bank (2021). [Women, business and the law 2021](#); World Bank (n.d.). [Registering property](#); Transparency International. (2022). [Corruption perceptions index 2022: Middle East and North Africa](#).

The second survey was conducted in May 2021 and covered the mapping of the educational courses offered (also described as learning offers). Questionnaires were distributed among academia in different Iraqi learning institutions and research centres.

LAND TENURE

Land tenure in Iraq has traditionally been organized into categories that include *mulk*, *waqf* or *awqaf*, *matruka*, *mewat* and *miri*. Most land in Iraq is classified as *miri*, which is regulated by the state code. While this kind of land is technically state-owned, individuals can claim the right to *heq tasarruf* that allows them to use and transfer the land to others. Over time, the difference between absolute ownership rights and those of *tasarruf* has narrowed to the extent that they are now insignificant in ordinary business matters.²⁸⁶

The Iraqi Constitution guarantees ownership rights for citizens and limits the government's power to seize private property without the owner's consent. Asked about the proportion of the total adult population that has secure tenure rights to land, nearly half of survey respondents said yes. Most respondents were not able to provide sex-disaggregated information about the population with secure land rights, due to a lack of information. Some declared that they did not have this information because it did not exist, while others claimed that most probably some governmental entities have the statistics. Information on tenure documentation is scattered between different governorates and local land registries.

There is no common platform that presents the data combined from all sources regarding types of ownership and who can afford to own land. One respondent suggested that this type of information can be gathered from the Real Estate Registration Directorate.

Types of land tenure

Land tenure could be categorized into formal and informal. Formal land tenure includes private or public ownership, where individuals, groups or institutions have full ownership and formal rights of use over *amiri* land. Housing with formal ownership documents forms the majority, while informal housing is estimated to be about 15 per cent. While private ownership is generally considered the most secure type of tenure, this is not always the case, as evidenced by the forced displacement caused by recent conflicts in some Iraqi governorates. According to the law, displaced persons are eligible to receive assistance to rebuild their properties once they can prove ownership.

Forced eviction was deemed possible and likely or very likely by nearly half of the respondents. Forced evictions occur due to terrorism, anti-terrorism military operations, and tribal and sometimes social conflicts. For example, 140,000 people were forcibly evicted in Jurf Al-Sakhar and were not allowed to return, even though the area was liberated from Islamic State fighters. These displacements have contributed to land tenure insecurity and land-use conflicts.

Eviction is more common among people living on recently illegally occupied land than among other categories of people, but the destruction of informal settlements by government institutions is not common. Displacement and informality, however, put a strain on the already old and damaged infrastructure, leaving people without water, electricity and sometimes a sewage network.

Purchasing and affordability of land and properties

Responses to the questionnaire regarding the affordability of property show that the average

286 Wiss, M., and Anderson, M. (2009). The unique forms and rights of Iraqi real property law: a primer for those interested in transacting business in Iraq. International Bar Association.

Iraqi cannot afford the cost of buying urban land. Rural lands are also unaffordable for most people. Measures to control rising land prices should be introduced.

The survey showed a moderate public understanding regarding how to own or sell land. When asked about citizens' understanding of their land rights, more than half of the respondents said they had an average understanding. Awareness should be raised about land rights and land-related processes.

Recently, many countries have made it easier for their citizens to obtain loans and mortgages to buy land and other properties. The process in Iraq, however, is still fraught with difficulties. Most respondents stated that obtaining loans and financial support to purchase properties is either difficult or very difficult.

Official land regulations in Iraq make no gender distinction in the process for land acquisition. Men and women are provided equal buying opportunities under the law and are treated the same in their right to use lands or property as collateral.

Cadastral system

The cadastral system is paper-based, dysfunctional and not well known by the average Iraqi. Half of the respondents said that there is no properly functioning system for land registration and most of them were not able to estimate its coverage. Respondents said that while urban areas are relatively well documented and mapped by the responsible authorities, rural lands are neglected and should be considered more seriously.

Half of respondents said that the procedure for creating new properties is difficult, while 42.3 per cent replied that it is neither easy nor difficult. Almost half of respondents find the process of altering existing properties and of transferring a property or its use from one party to another

difficult. Over 70 per cent of respondents said that creating new properties, altering existing ones and transferring others from one party to another is expensive.

The process of land registration or change in a cadastral record takes 2 to 12 months. This time-consuming process leaves some landowners unable to complete their registration, and it is costly. The value of the added tax imposed for registration also varies according to the location of the land, the land area and the type of property (residential or commercial).

Some respondents indicated that corruption by officials who use their power for private gain while carrying out their duties on land management and registration also affects the time and cost of land transactions.

Each municipality has its own cadastral department. Iraq has 18 provinces, including three in the Kurdistan Region. Each province includes a main city and districts. Municipalities in the main cities have their own cadastral system. Most survey respondents did not know the number of cadastral officers in the country, while the rest mentioned a range of 15–150 professionals for each office, which might be true, depending on the office size in relation to that of the city.

Land tenure information and spatial data infrastructure

The cadastre handles a large quantity of land-related information: data about boundaries, owner's name, plot number, land address, ownership, area, value, type, land use (agricultural, residential or commercial), plot number, county, Real Estate Registration Department, plot boundaries, adjacent plots and geographical coordinates. Cadastral information is used in decision-making processes related to confiscation of properties, urban expansion plans, establishment of housing projects, land distribution and

investment, securing land tenure for slum dwellers and development in desert lands. Some of those who use cadastral information in decision-making include the Office of the Prime Minister; the Ministry of Housing, Municipalities, Public Works; the Ministry of Planning; the Ministry of Finance; real estate registration offices; tax offices; investment authorities; the private sector; community-based organizations; and non-governmental organizations.

Some land tenure rights are not included in the cadastre: informal, temporary, religious and tribal or customary rights. Respondents could not give indications on the proportion of population covered by such type of tenure arrangements. There is a great scope for improvement in land data availability and management in Iraq, including using new technologies.

LAND USE

Control and enforcement of land-use decisions

Land use defines how people use and exercise rights over land. Adequate and updated land-use plans do not exist at the national level, according to nearly 60 per cent of respondents. However, where they do exist at the regional or local level, they are inadequate and not enforced.

Land-use plans at regional level are deemed inadequate. The greatest challenges in land-use management are related to the lack of documentation and outdated plans, particularly in rural areas. The absence of state mechanisms to control and enforce land-use decisions is the result of the insecure social and political situation over the last three decades.

Respondents said that land-use plans at the local level are adequate and updated, but enforcement is ineffective. According to some respondents, land-use plans focus mainly on residential and commercial investment. Nearly half of respondents said that plans for the

main, fast-growing urban centres are available but are somehow inadequate and seldomly enforced.

The vast majority of respondents believes that Iraq has an adequate building permit regulation system, though it is not always enforced. Some said that, recently, the weak monitoring system encourages the circumvention of building regulations.

Nearly half of the respondents were not aware of rural and agricultural land-use regulations. However, those who were flagged the low enforcement rates of those regulations and claimed that rural areas are neglected, mainly due to strict tribal rule and the lack of adequate capacity to control rural areas.

Conversion of land use from residential, commercial and industrial inside the city or extension areas and its relation to environmental protection is a significant concern. On this issue, half of the respondents said there were not adequate environmental protection land-use regulations in place. They also described laws governing environmental protection as insufficient and in need of significant change.

Land-use information

The value of a digital database for facilitating all development processes and resolving land disputes cannot be overstated. More than half of respondents said that Iraq lacks a complete and accessible digital land information system recording land use. Respondents said it is difficult to access existing digital information libraries and to use them in development proposals and plans. There is a GIS database, but it is incomplete.

Natural resources are crucial to human survival, and there should therefore be a system in place to gather and distribute information about these resources. Responses to the questionnaire show a significant weakness in the provision of

such an information system. Information exists, but it is not geolocated and linked with Iraq's existing development plans. Non-governmental organizations and the government should collaborate to develop such an information system, as it is the first step needed in understanding the country's potentials and threats.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

Land development is the application of resources to improve land and enable a different and more efficient land-use solution. These resources may include capital investments (for example, constructing buildings, services or infrastructure), labour (for example, clearing or draining land for agriculture) or administrative processes (for example, securing or revising planning permissions).

Most respondents indicated that they are aware of the mechanism for the public to acquire land in Iraq. However, only 42 per cent felt that the land expropriation mechanism is adequate, while the majority felt that it is not cost effective, and is generally seldom used.

The survey sought opinions on the degree of efficient regulations to control land subdivision and consolidation in urban areas. Most respondents said regulations are efficient, but not always fair and not frequently used. There was no convergence of opinions regarding the process and the regulations for land consolidation in rural areas.

Results of the questionnaire indicate there are adequate mechanisms and regulations that ensure construction is aligned with land-use regulations (65 per cent agreed with this statement). Half of the respondents believe that mechanisms to change land use by granting planning permission and building permits are effective. However, most respondents do not believe that mechanisms to ensure that development costs are borne fairly between the public and private actors exist.

LAND VALUE

Regarding the adequacy of methodology in assessing urban and rural land value, most respondents thought the existing system is inadequate. Land value is based on market speculation, as there is no institutional mechanism for defining such value and no system for recording information related to land values. Iraq has an institutionalized methodology to assess the value of buildings. The public registry office values buildings, yet the existing valuation methods are outdated and heavily rely on the discretion and the competence of registry office employees. Manipulation of land values for the purpose of decreasing taxes can occur.

Most respondents are aware of the taxation system for land and properties. Taxation is most effectively applied to urban lands, while rural land taxation is less effective, in part due to the wide variety of rural land tenure forms and different needs. Respondents had mixed feelings about the fairness of land and property taxation in Iraq and about the rigorousness in calculating it. There is lack of transparency and understanding regarding land-based taxation and the use of such revenues by public institutions.

LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Several types of disputes can arise over access to, use of and control over land and its resources. Such disputes can take on different scales: individual, family, communities or whole societies. Some land-related disputes can lead to violent conflict, especially when the rule of law is weak and tribal societal norms prevail. Others lead to land tenure insecurity and constrain the effective use of land resources. The size of a country is an important factor in resolving land-related disputes efficiently and for successful land governance.

Over the last decades, Iraq has faced many waves of displacements. Moreover, the Central Government and the Kurdistan Regional

Government argue over the disputed territories, which are defined in Article 140 of the 2005 Iraqi Permanent Constitution. Particularly affected are the areas surrounding the provinces of Kirkuk and Ninewa, which were subjected to forced demographic change under the Arabization policy during the former Baath Party rule between 1968 and 2003. The question of landownership and governance in the disputed territories is contested and has become subject to strong politicization. This affects land security and rights and, consequently, leads to many land disputes between the Kurdistan and Central governments, which require high-level political negotiations to resolve.

Management and adjudication of land rights, parcel boundary disputes

According to survey results, 62 per cent of respondents said there is a well-structured formal system to resolve conflicts and disputes related to land rights and parcel boundaries in Iraq. However, 77 per cent said the speed at which disputes and conflicts are resolved is slow. The public has little familiarity with the procedure to access the formal dispute resolution system, and a widespread distrust of that system.

Although there is no gender discrimination in laws and procedures, women generally face different and additional challenges in accessing the formal dispute resolution system compared to men, given that Iraq is a male-dominated nation. While some respondents acknowledged that women play an important role in Iraqi society, others maintained that women's opinions and participation is irrelevant. Traditionally, the resolution of land-related disputes is a male affair. This is in part because disputes resolved through the court system require the disputant's presence, and women's exposure to such attention is negatively perceived.

Other mechanisms, outside of the formal court system, are also available to settle land rights disputes. One non-judicial land dispute resolution method is the community governance system that relies on tribal norms and traditions.

This system is run by powerful leaders, whether tribal or religious. Generally, the reasons the public shuns official channels are the high costs of the judicial process, the lack of technology, and the lengthy duration of the formal process. The proportion of land-related cases resolved through non-formal disputes resolution mechanisms is high, especially in rural areas. Usually, disputes are solved through personal negotiation, tribal law, or religious leaders and mukhtar (the municipal council). If these bodies fail to deliver a satisfactory settlement, then the cases are taken to court.

LEARNING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Based on the questionnaire and survey results, land-related studies have always existed in urban planning courses as part of the study course; there is not usually a special course dedicated to the topic.

The research finds that urban planning is part of the general bachelor's and master's degree programmes in architecture and is taught from an introductory perspective, apart from a few programmes and courses. In general, the courses at different universities cover the following related aspects. Currently, land-related training is available in some capacity at the University of Duhok, the University of Mosul, Nawroz University, the University of Baghdad's Centre of Urban and Regional Planning, Kufa University, Sulaimani Polytechnic University's College of City Planning Engineering and through ESRI, a private consultancy firm.

Efforts in researching land issues are not at the level needed. Some institutions do focus on research topics related to various land issues. Baghdad University's Center of Urban Planning is one good example, where researchers at the master's and PhD degree levels work on specific related topics.

In addition to the spatial planning programme at Dohuk University, it is clear that more programme

offerings are needed to enhance the number of well-capacitated and well-qualified graduates to act as professionals in the field. Universities can provide a strong potential partner in offering specific land governance programmes or courses for professionals and local government authorities.

Local municipalities can welcome trainings and capacity-building programmes that can

improve the quality of their services. There are capacity-building partnerships between local municipalities and international cooperation organizations. For example, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German International Cooperation Agency, or GIZ) is working with the Dohuk Governorate in Kurdistan and with Duhok University to provide GIS software and training to municipality staff.

Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan²⁸⁷



Capital city: Amman (population: 2,273,240)²⁸⁸



Population: 11,552,876²⁸⁹



Population growth rate: 1 per cent²⁹⁰



Urban population: 92 per cent²⁹¹



Urban population growth rate: 1.2 per cent²⁹²



Land area: 89,318 km²²⁹³



Number of districts: 12 governorates, 51 districts

287 This country profile summarizes the paper: UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2023).

[Jordan Land Sector Assessment: Background Paper.](#)

288 World Population Review (2025). [Amman.](#)

289 World Bank (2024). [Population, total – Jordan.](#)

290 World Bank (2024). [Population growth \(annual %\) – Jordan.](#)

291 World Bank (2024). [Urban population \(% of total population\) – Jordan.](#)

292 DLS (2021). General Information. Website, Department of Lands and Survey.

293 UNHCR (2018). [UNHCR Jordan Factsheet – October 2018.](#)

OVERVIEW

Strategically located at the heart of the Middle East, Jordan is constituted of 12 governorates with over 80 per cent urbanized land.²⁹⁴ The country faces geopolitical challenges that include the hosting of large waves of displaced populations. The population doubled between 2004 and 2015 because of the Iraq and Syria

crisis, which turned Jordan into the second-largest refugee host country (89 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants).²⁹⁵ These challenges severely impact the built environment and land-related issues.

Jordan is a small, semi-arid, almost landlocked country with a population of over 11 million people. The country enjoys high literacy rates

294 DLS (2021). [General Information.](#) Website, Department of Lands and Survey.

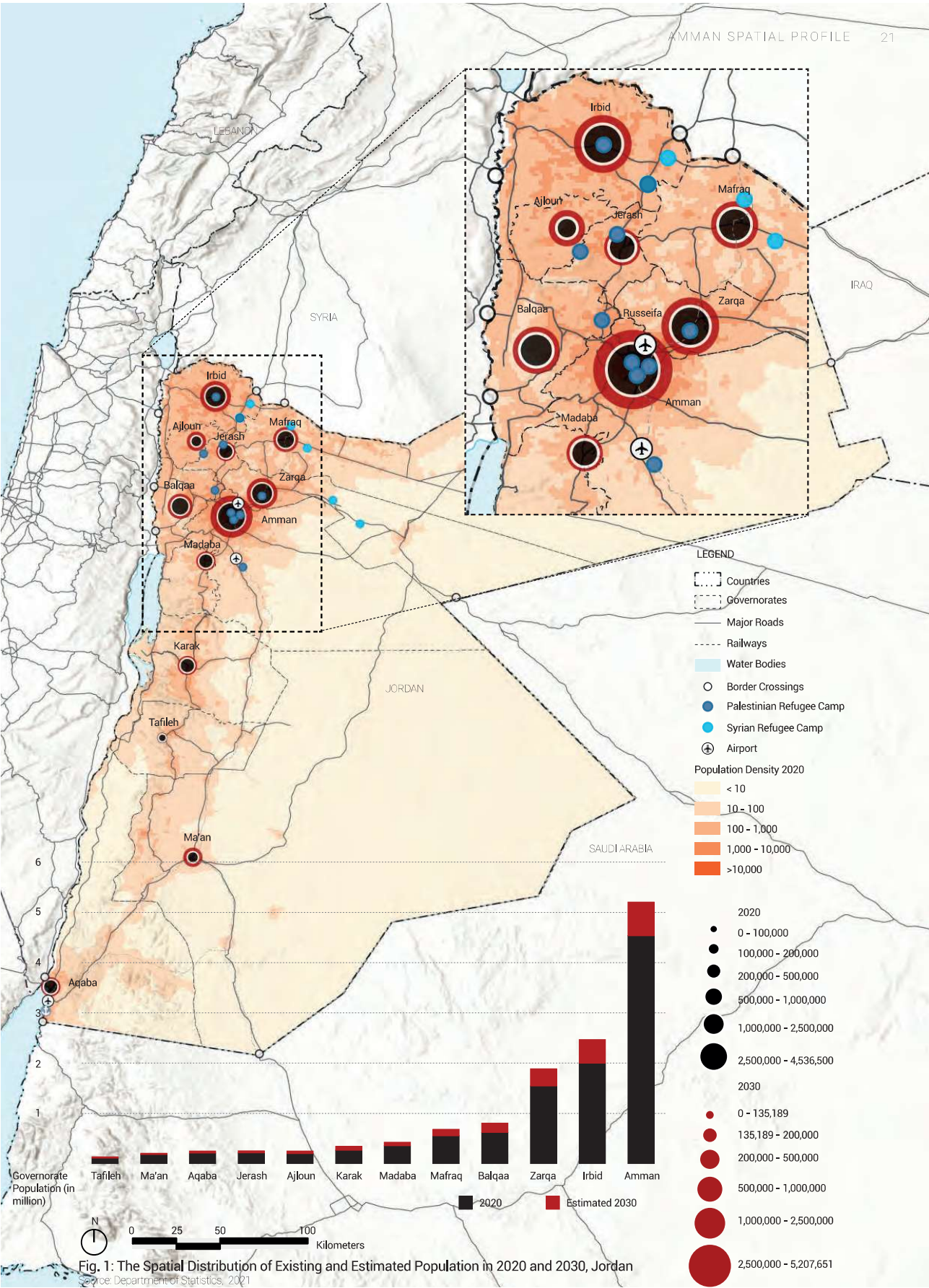
295 UNHCR (2018). [Fact sheet in UNHCR Jordan – October 2018.](#) UNHCR Operational Data Portal.

FIGURE 65: HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF LAND-RELATED LAWS IN JORDAN



Source: Authors.

FIGURE 66: MAP OF EXISTING AND ESTIMATED MUNICIPAL POPULATIONS IN JORDAN, 2019 AND 2030.



Source: UN-Habitat (2022). *Urban Planning & Infrastructure in Migration Contexts: Jordan – Amman Spatial Profile*.

FIGURE 67: URBAN ENCROACHMENT IN IRBID GOVERNORATE



Source: Wikimedia (2018).

and is considered to be among the most stable countries in the region. Established in 1946, the land administration system was built on the inherited Ottoman processes and customary tribal rules, firmly rooted in Islamic laws. Multiple parties and stakeholders are involved in the land administration processes in Jordan, interacting amid a complex dynamic.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Land-related policies encompass legal and regulatory frameworks that protect just access to land in urban and rural settings. Land policies define the legal rights and conditions of access and/or ownership and regulate its distribution among multiple stakeholders, reflecting the structure of power in society.

The land administration system in Jordan dates back to the late 19th century. It can be anchored

to the establishment of the Department of Lands and Survey (DLS) according to the Ottoman Land Code issued in 1857. Jordan was part of the Ottoman Empire until 6 August 1924.²⁹⁶ The Ottoman Land Code is still the source of law concerning property until today. Various departments were created under DLS to record land, called Land Registration Offices (Land Registry Departments – Tabu).

The legal system is a mix of civil, Sharia (Islamic) and customary law. Civil laws include the Lands and Water Settlement Law and its amendments (No. 40 of 1952) (enabling the DLS to develop “settlement areas”); the Disposition of Immovable Property Law (No. 49 of 1953); and the Management of State Property Law and its amendments (No. 17 of 1974). Promulgated to establish settlements in the West Bank, it mandates all lands to be registered with the DLS for transactions to be valid. The Disposition of Immovable Property Law also reinforces the

²⁹⁶ DLS (2021).

DLS giving lands registration departments the authority to oversee all transactions regarding public lands, dedicated lands, and private lands and to issue official bonds (titles) related to transactions (acknowledged by religious courts and authorities).²⁹⁷

Historically, under Article No. 139 of the Lausanne Treaty, signed on 24 July 1923, the Emirate of Transjordan obtained all the private and public property and real estate documents. The government then began to reorganize these documents. The Civil Law No. 43 of 1976 is the primary source that provides the legal framework for inheritance in Jordan, stating that all citizens, including non-Muslims, are subject to Islamic legal provisions regarding inheritance. However, the customary law is still implemented to a certain extent within pastoral customary property rights systems on Jordan's rangelands. Also, it is closely associated with tribal institutions. Customary law has been protecting the resources within those lands by providing use that promotes the conservation of rangeland. Therefore, it is noteworthy to mention that eliminating these systems and the declaration of rangelands as state-owned in the Agriculture Law (No. 20 of 1973) threatened the land that used to be administered under customary law by opening it up for new – often unsustainable – land uses.

Several legal instruments regulate land management: "Urban land and planning laws are found in the Villages Administration Law (No. 5 of 1954); the Municipalities Law (No. 29 of 1955), which introduced the concept of master planning; the City of Amman Planning Law (No. 60 of 1965); the Town and Village Planning Law (No. 79 of 1966), and its various amendments. The Leasing of Immovable Assets Law and the Sale to Non-Jordanian and Judicial Persons Law (No. 47 of 2006) governs foreign ownership of Jordanian residential and

commercial properties. It allows foreigners to purchase residential property in urban areas subject to approval by the Minister of Finance or the General Director of the Survey Department. Yet, ownership of residential and commercial properties remains relatively restricted.²⁹⁸ The basis for securing land rights in Jordan is land registration in the DLS. While the statistics claim that 95 per cent of land is registered private land, this remains partial since state land (80 per cent of all land) is poorly defined and documented".²⁹⁹

The Land Department title officially appeared on 30 September 1927. Several departments (Survey Department, State Property Department, Land Registry and Land Liberation Services) were unified into one – the Land Department. In 1951 and 1952, the Land and Survey Departments were unified in the two banks, whereby the Land and Survey Department in the East Bank became responsible for all 15 registration directorates in the Kingdom. Palestinian laws were applied at that time until the issuance of the Jordanian regulations, for example, the Land and Water Settlement Law (No. 40 of 1952), most of which were issued in 1952 and 1953 and applied in the two banks of the Jordan River.

Currently, the DLS carries out surveying works countrywide, settling rights and registration matters. The Department also expanded, opening 34 Land Registration Directorates (LRDs) in the Kingdom. The DLS is responsible for registering land property rights, conducting field survey work to delineate property boundaries, developing cadastral maps, and archiving all legal documents related to landownership, and settlement of landownership disputes. The DLS utilizes the Geographical Information System (GIS) to regulate and digitize land registries. However, the Department still faces several challenges to apply and operationalize the GIS tool in land registration and documentation. Root causes are related to poor monitoring and quality

297 USAID (2013). *USAID Issue Brief Land and Conflict. Land Disputes and Land Conflicts. Property Rights and Resource Governance*. Briefing Paper #12.

298 Ibid.

299 Ibid.

assurance, the absence of inter-departmental support and data sharing, and unresolved *musha* ownership (one plot registered under one name but owned by several individuals).

In summary, the critical pieces of legislation governing housing, land, building and planning in Jordan are the following:³⁰⁰

- The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (promulgated in 1952),
- Law No. 40 of 1952 (Lands and Water Settlement Law) and its amendments,
- Law No. 49 of 1953 (Disposition of Immovable Property Law),
- Law No. 17 of 1974 (Management of State Property Law) and its amendments,
- Law No. 43 of 1976 (Civil Code),
- Law No. 28 of 1991 (Housing and Urban Development Corporation Law) and its amendments,
- Law No. 47 of 2006 (Sale and Leasing of Immovable Assets to Non-Jordanian and Legal Persons),
- Law No. 11 of 1994 (Landlord-Tenant) as amended by Law No. 30 of 2000 and Law No. 22 of 2011,
- Ministry of Local Administration Law No. 22 law 2021.

LAND SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS

While land management and administration in Jordan are relatively centralized, there have been some recent efforts to decentralize the process. The Ministry of Local Administration Law No. 22 of 2021 aims to integrate the municipalities into

a general governance framework and increase accountability. Currently, all 104 municipalities of the Kingdom enjoy a legal presence with financial and administrative autonomy under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Local Administration (MoLA) with the exception of the Greater Amman Municipality, Jordan Valley Authority, Petra Development and Tourism Authority, Aqaba Special Economic Zone and the special zones.

Under the Ministry of Local Administration Law No. 22 of 2021, three types of councils were created: (1) the municipal council at the municipal level, (2) the executive council, and (3) the governorate council at the governorate level. Several entities are involved in land management and administration processes. MoLA is responsible for defining zoning and building regulations and preparing master plans for all municipalities. At the same time, the Higher Planning Council within MoLA has the authority to approve the master plans either totally or partially/temporarily. It adopts all zoning modifications in the country.

The primary entity governing land, building, and planning in Jordan is the DLS. The Department also governs and liaises with 34 LRDs and two land registration offices distributed across Jordan. The DLS is responsible for cadastral surveying, registering land properties and managing treasury or state lands, in addition to governing (with LRDs) all transactions related to the rights of settled or registered land. The DLS also regulates the leasing and accreditation of treasury lands, in addition to the expropriation and control of subdivision and boundary-fixing transactions nationwide. The Department also licenses surveyors, land valuers and brokers, and collects the government's sales taxes and registration fees.

Tribes play a significant role in the land administration dynamics in the country. There is

300 Jordan Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (2005). [Third tourism development project: Secondary cities revitalization study](#); Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. (1952). [The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan](#).

an ad hoc, historical conflict between the state and Bedouin tribes. The state claims, by law, control of all unregistered and/or desert lands (more than 70 per cent of Jordan's territory in 2000), while tribes claim control of their land frontiers (*Wajiha*) based on traditional legitimacy. The tribes' claim to their *Wajiha* is often used to seize political gains and opportunities. Despite the state implementing a balanced give-and-take strategy,³⁰¹ DLS is suspected of lower information communication to avoid fostering more claims.

While the Jordanian (formal) land system is centralized, the country still exhibits a classic case of legal pluralism. Several sources of legitimacy, such as Islamic, tribal and official means are simultaneously mobilized when dealing with land issues. Such pluralism sometimes triggered conflicts between stakeholders. For instance, rangelands and desert lands, formally under the ownership of the treasury, are claimed by some investors considering their "right" to revitalize/reclaim desert land under the Quranic principle of *ihya*, made possible by the 1977 Law on Tafwid, while local tribes consider them as part of their community *Dyrah* and dismiss state control over them.³⁰²

The geopolitical situation in the region has placed the country in the position of hosting large refugee populations. More than 600,000 displaced Syrians have registered as refugees with UNHCR in Jordan since 2012, of whom more than 80 per cent live in Jordanian host communities. Such an increase in population has intensified pre-existing challenges related to land tenure, public service delivery and resource allocation. However, these challenges have not been mitigated on a long-term basis, and many (including security of tenure) remain valid, requiring close humanitarian, albeit unsustainable, assistance.

Land administration in Jordan started with the establishment of the first institution under the Ottomans (Tapu or land registry offices). DLS built on this organization and today holds sole responsibility for cadastral surveying, the registration of land and property, and the management of treasury lands. DLS managed to digitalize all procedures and documents, including the land registers and cadastral plans.

The DLS authority covers all geographical areas in Jordan, including the Jordan Valley Authority and the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority. Despite the well-established land administration processes and institutions, some issues do remain. Most urban land is privatized, while most non-urban land is state land. This dichotomy has led to increasing prices of private land, jeopardizing its affordability, while state lands (which are outside the land market) remain underutilized. At the same time, the high transaction fees (5 to 10 per cent) have pushed more transactions into informal channels.³⁰³

LAND MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS

Jordan's land management system has evolved from historical Islamic and Ottoman foundations into a modern framework that addresses multiple dimensions of land governance. This section examines these five core functions of land administration in the Jordanian context. A survey covering these themes was conducted to complement the analysis and inform the findings presented throughout this section.

LAND TENURE

Historically, the state owns all abandoned land; existing land tenure patterns are intrinsically traditional and derived from the Islamic Sharia

301 Alon, Y. (2007). *The making of Jordan: Tribes, colonialism and the modern state*. I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd.

302 Al-Naber, M., and Molle, F. (2016). *The politics of accessing desert land in Jordan*. Land Use Policy, Vol. 59, pp. 492–503.

303 Madanat, H. J. (2010). *Land tenure in Jordan*; USAID (2013).

FIGURE 68: LAND ADMINISTRATION TRENDS IN JORDAN

This graphic provides an indicative overview of national-level trends based on the data presented in the country profile. The findings are illustrative rather than definitive and, in some cases, may be non-conclusive, as contextual and institutional variations may apply. The graphics below present the performance of the five core land administration functions - from weak to well-functioning - together with performance across five complementary indicators: SDG 5.a.2, SDG 11.1.1, the Assets Indicator, the Registering Property Score, and the Corruption Perceptions Index. To ensure comparability, all indicators were proportionally adjusted.

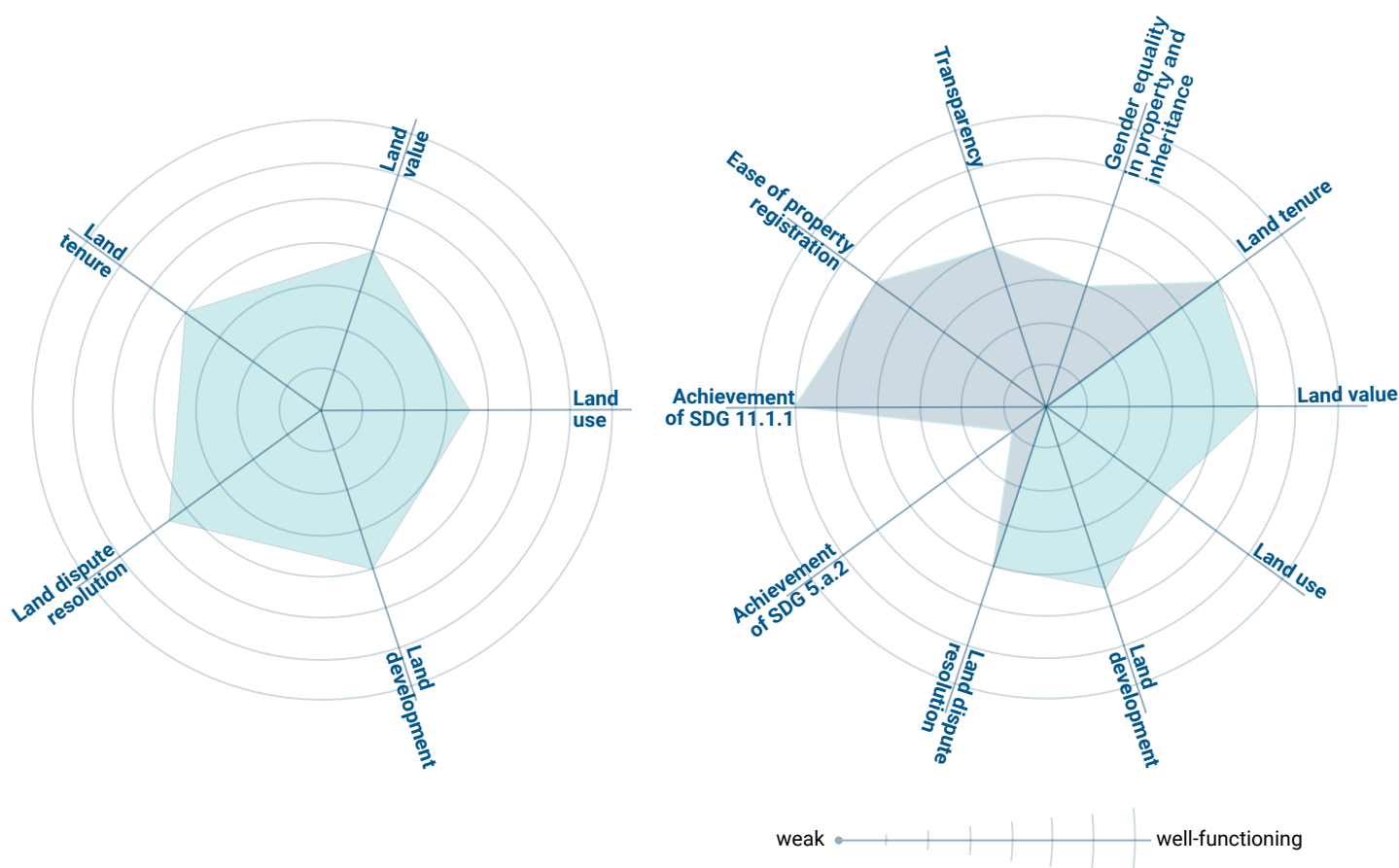


TABLE 8: OVERVIEW OF LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS IN JORDAN

CRITERIA	LAND TENURE	LAND VALUE	LAND USE	LAND DEVELOPMENT	LAND DISPUTES RESOLUTION
Existence / coverage of the system	●	●	●	●	●
Effectiveness	●	●	●	●	●
Procedural duration	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	●
Affordability	●	●	N/A	●	●
Accessibility	●	N/A	●	●	●
Data availability	●	●	●	N/A	N/A
Mandates clarity	N/A	●	●	●	●

● Significant challenge
 ● Moderate challenge
 ● No/ limited challenge

Source: Authors, United Nations Statistics Division. (n.d.). [SDG indicators database](#); World Bank (2021). [Women, business and the law 2021](#); World Bank (n.d.). [Registering property](#); Transparency International. (2022). [Corruption perceptions index 2022: Middle East and North Africa](#).

law and the Ottoman Code of 1858. Before the formation of the Kingdom, there were two ruling classes of land tenure:³⁰⁴

- *Amiri* land which belonged to the state and included arable and desert lands. The state exercised ultimate control over this land, imposed taxes on individuals for using it and regained full rights even when the land was freely sold or purchased.
- *Tafwid*, or unalienable lands, were initially of the *Amiri* type before full ownership rights were granted to individuals or tribal groups through the governor.

According to Article 1 of the Land Settlement Law of 1933, the present land categories comprise the following:³⁰⁵

- State domain includes lands owned by the public sector, such as the military, ministries and public enterprise. Most of the land in Jordan is owned by the state, particularly east of the Hejaz railway.
- *Miri* land is mainly arable and agricultural land located outside of municipal boundaries. The holder has the full right to use and invest in the land but does not have permanent ownership, which rests with the state.
- *Waqf* or endowed land cannot be transferred from the possession of an owner or his descendants. There are, however, two subcategories related to this pattern of tenure: land endowed to charitable or religious institutions, and land bequeathed solely for the heirs.
- Tribal land granted by the monarchy to various tribal groups. It is usually held in

joint tenure, where each member can be reallocated a share as needs arise.

- *Mulk* land is located within municipal boundaries and owned under full private ownership rights or freehold by an individual, by limited joint holdings or by collective shareholdings (i.e. *musha*). In current urban practice, *musha* also applies to any parcel of land that has more than one owner.

Although the Land Settlement Law of 1933 has contributed to determining titles to land, *musha* is still registered in the name of individual shareholders leading to a fragmented behaviour of landownership, which is consolidated by law. Traditional rules of inheritance further aggravate this problem.

It is noteworthy to mention that before the 1950s, Jordan's rangelands were characterized by effective land tenure systems associated with tribal institutions, which protected the resources of those lands. Upon the elimination of these systems and rights and the declaration of rangelands as state-owned areas that are open for everybody to use, new land uses emerged, which in many cases led to misuse and urban sprawl.³⁰⁶

Land tenure in urban areas in Jordan is well established, and the relationship between peasant producers and the state is regulated in ways that gradually evolved. On the other hand, rangeland has not been systematically embedded in the state's codified land tenure system due to its lower economic value and profitability.³⁰⁷

The Constitution protects citizens from eviction, explicitly stated under Article 9: "No Jordanian may be prevented from residing at any place or

304 Tewfik, M. (1989). *Urban land in Jordan*. Cities, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 119–135.

305 Madanat, H. J. (2010). *Land tenure in Jordan*. Land Tenure Journal, Vol. 1, No. 1; Tewfik, M. (1989).

306 Al-Oun (2008). *Land Tenure System within the Badia*, in *Remediation and restoration projects regarding the terrestrial ecosystems in Jordan*, roadmap (Overview and Phase I); IUCN (2010). *Securing rights and restoring range lands for improved livelihoods in the Badia of the Zarqa River Basin – Jordan*.

307 Rae, J. (2002). *An Overview of Land Tenure in the Near East Region*. Part I. Report, FAO.

be compelled to reside in any specified place, except in the circumstances prescribed by law”.³⁰⁸ Eviction circumstances are outlined in under the Civil Code under the Landlord-Tenant Law.

Jordan has gone far in developing beyond the 1857 Ottoman Land Code. Currently, land management and administration are regulated by an umbrella law for Jordanian citizens (and, in some, cases non-citizens). At the same, the DLS established a centralized yet accessible information hub to facilitate land-related processes.

Women’s rights to land are enshrined in the Constitution, and men and women are treated equally before the law. More laws have been issued to protect women’s rights to land, such as Article 142 of the Provisional Jordanian Personal Status Law (No. 36 of 2010), which guarantees the non-enforcement of contracts obtained through coercion. Yet, women still face various challenges to access their rights. Currently, women own and rent fewer properties than men, this is due to multiple reasons such as societal norms, economic power and acquired knowledge of legal rights. For instance, studies revealed that many women do not know their rights to inheritance and the details associated with the division of estate.³⁰⁹ At the same time, Jordanian women have weaker economic power relative to men as well as fewer financial assets. Non-Jordanian residents, such as refugees (especially Syrians), face aggravated challenges, specifically regarding tenure security and awareness of rights.

Refugees, particularly Syrian refugees, are the most tenure-insecure population in the country. Nearly 80 per cent of refugees living outside camps do not have secure tenure. Many households rent without basic rental agreements

and are vulnerable to potential forced eviction and displacement.³¹⁰

Approximately 70 per cent of survey respondents perceived that data related to tenure security is available; however, this data is outdated and needs a thorough updating. As for the perception among the population concerning the security of tenure rights, more than 70 per cent responded positively that they were aware of their tenure rights. Interestingly, men and women respondents perceive their tenure rights in a relatively similar way. However, while studies of women’s property rights evidence that Islamic courts have “upheld women’s rights to property,” women still own a minimal share of land (less than 5 per cent).³¹¹ On another topic, the threat of eviction was not a pressing issue. According to the responses, most threat cases are related to financial reasons or direct misuse of the property.

When it comes to the understating of the channels and mechanisms for accessing land tenure rights, despite the accessibility of data and secured tenure rights, more than half of the respondents agreed that such understanding is limited and needs to be mainstreamed in the population.

LAND USE

Driven by population growth, water scarcity and climate change, Jordan is witnessing rapid urbanization at the expense of agricultural land. Refugees have also tended to aggregate into Jordan’s larger urban areas which expanded the severity of encroachment over agricultural land. At the same time, the arid and semi-arid climate – less than 200 mm of annual rainfall – has added to the pressing demand for natural resources, economic opportunities, and housing.

308 Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. (1952). *The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*.

309 Nasarat, M., Abu-Zaiton, N., Abu-Tayeh, A., & Aljazi, A. (2017). *Jordanian citizens’ trends towards women’s social, economic, and political rights in Karak, Tafieleh and Maan governorates: A field study 2016*. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 7(4), 65–91.

310 NRC (2016). *Integrated Urban Shelter/ICLA Programme Evaluation in Jordan*.

311 Sonbol, A. E. (2020). *Women, the family and divorce laws in Islamic history*. Syracuse University Press.

Physical planning in Jordan is bound to the Law of Planning of Cities, Villages and Buildings (No. 79 of 1966). As a result, land administration and planning fall under three primary hierarchical levels (local, district, and regional), with three central official planning bodies: local planning committee, district planning committee and the Central City and Village Planning Department within MoLA. Driven by the implementation of the decentralization law, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs was renamed the Ministry of Local Administration, with a clear strategy to implement municipal, legislative, financial and administrative reforms. Under MoLA, the Higher Planning Council and the Cities and Villages Development Bank are considered the main official players in the planning processes. Nevertheless, planning protocols in Jordan remain centralized and substantial additional effort is needed to achieve a meaningful shift into decentralized land administration.

The preparation of local master plans (subject to the approval of the district planning committee) falls under the responsibility of the municipal councils, while regional plans are prepared by Central City and Village Planning Department.

The Higher Planning Council acts as an arbitrator, settling any differences or disagreements that may arise between the decisions of the local planning committees and the district planning committees before giving final approval of planning acts.³¹²

Among the various challenges to achieving sustainable urban development in Jordan, the gap between the three levels (local, regional and national) in terms of addressing root needs, resource management, ownership and applicability of the plans remain a top challenge. Bridging such gap promises the achievement of a comprehensive planning mechanism, better management of resources as well as just distribution of urban services and infrastructure.

Aiming to regulate overall urban development, MoLA developed the first National Land Use Master Plan in 2007, to control associated sprawl over rural and natural resources. At the same time, further cross-cutting issues related to climate change, the water-energy-food nexus gained momentum in land administration circles, especially with the launch of the Jordan 2025 National Vision and Strategy. The strategy aimed to chart a path for the future and determine the integrated economic and social framework that will govern the economic and social policies based on providing opportunities for all.³¹³

The former Ministry of Municipal Affairs also prepared a comprehensive plan (2006–2012) designating land use for the entire Kingdom, which was implemented over two phases. The first phase focused on setting a generic master plan for land use development. The second one involved the preparation of detailed development master plans for selected municipalities with certain competitive advantages. Recently in 2019, MoLA started to update the 2007 land use plan based on adopting cross-cutting considerations such as climate change mitigation measures.

A common challenge voiced among the survey respondents is the gap in integrating principles of sustainable development into urban management, including adopting comprehensive planning approaches and mindful resource management – sorely needed to break the vicious encroachment over the very limited agricultural land. Despite more than half of respondents finds that digital land information is accessible, they find that this is not the case regarding accessibility to data related to natural resources. These findings reflect a significant gap in considering natural resources in land-related processes.

Furthermore, the respondents viewed that land use planning and practice are more adequate at

312 Jordan Ministry of Local Administration. (2021). [Ministry of Local Administration](#).

313 Government of Jordan. (2014). [Jordan 2025: A National Vision and Strategy](#).

the local level than at the national and regional ones. Interestingly, more than 40 per cent of the participants did not view the regional land use plan as adequate, indicating a crucial disconnect in land administration, as well as disengaged levels of planning and implementation which inevitably hinder comprehensive and sustainable development countrywide. This outcome can also be linked to poor communication and coordination among stakeholders, including citizens and grassroots beneficiaries.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

The common practice of the current Planning and Building Code of 1979 takes for granted that all land inside municipal boundaries is accessible for urban development. New urban land can be zoned by the simple extension of the already approved municipal boundaries.³¹⁴ Therefore, land-related and urban planning laws and regulations remain outdated and need substantial updating.

Article 11 of the Constitution provides for a general right against expropriation: “No property of any person may be expropriated except for purposes of public utility and in consideration of a just compensation, as may be prescribed by law”.³¹⁵ Yet, this right is granted only to Jordanians, not foreigners. Moreover, the Investment Law states that “ownership of any economic activity may not be removed or be subjected to any procedures that would result in the same, unless it is expropriated for the public benefit on the condition that fair compensation is to be paid to the investor, in a currency, which may be exchanged without delay”.³¹⁶

In the Land Acquisition Law, Articles 3 and 9 state that land may be expropriated provided that (1) it is for public benefit; (2) there is fair and just compensation; and (3) there is direct negotiation

between the purchasers or public benefit project and the landowner until an agreement is reached. If no agreement is reached, cases are referred to the court and may be appealed to higher courts if necessary. The proper amount of compensation for expropriated land is detailed in Articles 11 to 26.

Interestingly, survey respondents seemed to positively evaluate the major land development processes. For instance, 52 per cent saw the land expropriation mechanism as appropriate, and even more found the regulations to control land subdivision and the effectiveness of mechanisms related to changing land use to be adequate.

However, respondents remained equally divided on the fairness of distribution mechanisms of development costs. This finding once again confirms the poor communication of land-related practices to the community as well as professionals.

LAND VALUE

Like other governments, Jordan aims to link the economic benefits of urbanization with public revenue by using upgraded land value capture mechanisms, which allow municipalities to finance infrastructure services that meet the needs of a growing urban population. Land value capture mechanisms bring territorial justice, linking economic growth with increased public revenues.

Several tools are utilized, such as the fixed asset tax (property tax), where capital gain taxes are charged at the time of sale. It is noteworthy to mention that in many cases, taxes are either undervalued or misvalued. The value of land, and consequently its tax, is associated only with market value (supply and demand), while other elements (e.g. the public good) are not

314 Tewfik, M. (1989).

315 Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (1952).

316 Ibid.

considered. Moreover, various non-registered properties are sold with parallel mechanisms such as *hujja* contracts, jeopardizing the formal taxation system.

Property tax on rented apartments is three times higher than on owner-occupied apartments, while the tax on vacant units is two times higher. At the same time, the tax collection rate is rather low. In 2010, the annual property tax accounted for approximately 2.6 per cent of total government taxes, decreasing to 1.3 per cent in 2015. Property tax revenue collections are heavily concentrated in the capital of Amman, while the remaining municipalities account for less than a quarter of property tax revenues. However, because registration is required at the building level and not for each apartment, not all the properties are included in the tax roll. Currently, the government is working to expand the connection of property taxation with other taxes, such as professional licensing.

The high urbanization and the deep reliance on administrative revenues justify the substantial taxation and valuing systems that have been developing in the Kingdom since Ottoman rule.

More than 70 per cent of survey respondents felt that the taxation systems of buildings and land in Jordan are adequate and that registered and trained valuers are accessible to average-income citizens. The respondents were also inclined to agree that most of the land is regulated and taxed, yet there were different perceptions regarding the fairness of the taxation rate. Moreover, they did not perceive the significant difference between the genders in terms of accessibility to mortgages and loans. On the contrary, some respondents indicated that women could access microloans more easily than men (which has backfired in several cases, increasing the number of women debtors facing prison sentences).

LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The process of proving the ownership of a property requires no more than issuing a registration bond by DLS. Such bonds can only be invalidated or corrected under Law No. 40 of 1952 (Lands and Water Settlement Law) and its amendments. This law is considered a source of power for DLS to settle property rights regarding land or water. In the case of non-registered properties, DLS accepts written proofs, evidence non-written or verbal transactions to complete the process.

In Jordan, particularly in the Badia region, tribes and communities occupy their territories on a customary basis for generations. *Dyrah* is considered where certain families and tribes use an area for grazing, pasture and cultivation. Over time, they become recognized as having a right to certain preferred grazing areas. Today, most of these tracks are state lands. Property transactions and processes are handled without reference to the DLS registration system, which lowers the degree of tenure security.³¹⁷ As the first stage of dispute resolution in land-related issues, the cases are referred to DLS (and recently to its sub-committees in the Department). If the dispute is not resolved there, the case is escalated up to the court. Customary or non-formal dispute resolutions still take place in Jordan, mainly outside of urban and tribal settings.

Even though many survey respondents viewed the disputes resolution system in Jordan as well structured, interestingly, they did not perceive that the communities had a satisfactory level of knowledge regarding the system. This highlights a pressing need for raising awareness about accessing formal channels to resolve conflicts. At the same time, the participants voiced some challenges for women to access formal channels of land disputes resolution due to

317 IUCN (2011). [Securing rights and restoring range lands for improved livelihoods in the Badia of the Zarqa River Basin – Jordan](#). Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.

societal barriers – but to a minor level. Some of the respondents believed that in some cases women have more access to informal channels instead.

LEARNING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The main findings from the desk review and interviews indicated several sources of land governance and land administration training and learning. The education system offered a diversified group of learning opportunities, both formal and informal. Yet, such courses remain sector-oriented, with limited cross-sectoral integration, such as linking land surveying to qualitative data analysis, urban governance and sustainable development. Most interviewees also emphasized that such learnings were confined to academic institutions, as part of graduate and undergraduate programmes, with minimal civil society involvement. Additionally, the study found that free-of-charge training opportunities were extremely rare, which has an adverse impact on the overall capacity of land professionals. The interviewees from different land-related sectors, such as DLS and the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDC), also indicated that international agencies funded the primary sources of staff training. Respondents agreed that there is a fundamental lack of qualitative research projects related to urban planning

and sustainable land use in Jordan. The weak analytical capacities to handle data related to environmental and urban development were also highlighted.

A few initiatives that aimed to tackle land-related practices from a more integrated point of view have been conducted. Prominent examples include – but are not limited to – “Monitoring Land Governance and Land Tenure Security in the Middle-East sub-region”, a German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and GLTN project,³¹⁸ and “Integrated Investment Framework for Sustainable Land Management in Jordan Initiative”.³¹⁹ These and similar initiatives provide a basis for building future trainings.

The leading learning offers for land management and administration are limited to formal and structured education (except for a few training opportunities provided by non-profit and civil society organizations such as Rasheed TI). The courses cover a broad spectrum of topics: mathematical statistics; principles of statistics; feasibility study; using ArcGIS for mining geoscience workflows; spatial socioeconomic development planning; environmental design; building regulations and professional practice; housing; strategic management; public finance and taxation; and monitoring land governance and land tenure security in the Arab region (the Middle East).

318 Al Deen, B. (2020). [Training held on land governance](#). The Jordan Times, 31 December 2020.

319 Jordan Ministry of Environment (2014). [Integrated Investment Framework for Sustainable Land Management in Jordan Initiative](#).

Republic of Lebanon³²⁰

FACT SHEET³²¹



Capital city: Beirut (population: 2,379,330)³²²



Population: 6,825,442



Population growth rate: 0.6 per cent³²³



Urban population: 89 per cent



Urban population growth rate: 0.8 per cent³²⁴



Land area: 10,230 km²



Urban area: 650 km² (6 per cent)



Agricultural area: 3,300 km² (32 per cent)



Forest: 2,600 km² (25 per cent)



Shrubs and vegetation: 3,200 km² (31 per cent)



Wetlands: 5 km² (0 per cent)



Open land and rocks: 500 km² (5 per cent)



Water bodies: 15 km² (0 per cent)

³²⁰ This country profile summarizes the paper: UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2022). Assessment of the Land Sector in Lebanon: Background Paper.

³²¹ FAO (2019). Lebanon; World Bank (2020). Data – Lebanon; National Council of Scientific Research (n.d.). Atlas du Liban.

³²² World Population Review (2025). Beirut.

³²³ World Bank (2024). World Development Indicators.

³²⁴ World Bank (2024). Urban population growth (annual %).

OVERVIEW

Lebanon is one of the countries most affected by both internal and external migration in the region. It has the largest number of refugees per capita in the world, with 12 Palestinian

Refugee camps and more than 100,000 Syrian refugees.³²⁵

Lebanon is a patchwork of 18 different religious communities with a history of collaboration and tension between them. After the civil war in

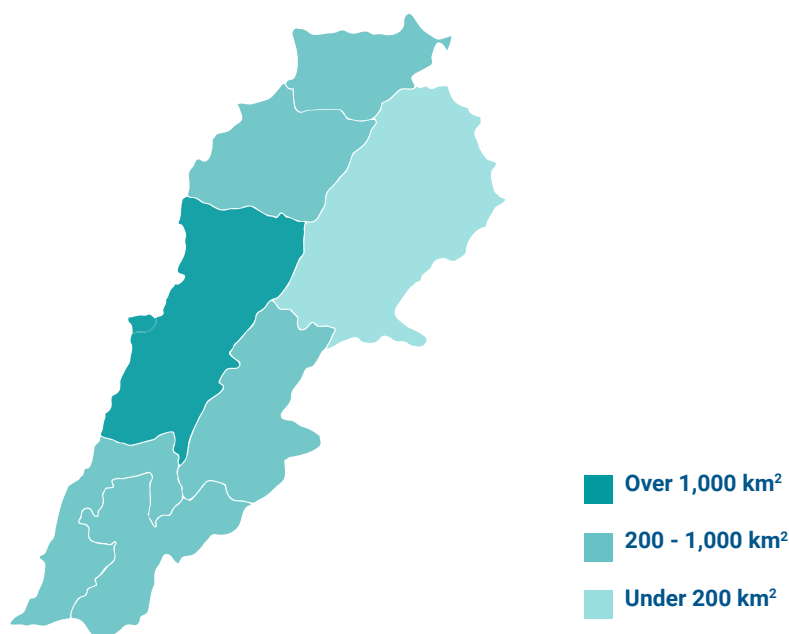
³²⁵ IOM (2019). [Refugee resettlement operations from Lebanon](#); UNRWA (2020). Lebanon.

FIGURE 69: HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF KEY LAND-RELATED EVENTS IN LEBANON



Source: Authors.

FIGURE 70: MAP SHOWING POPULATION DENSITY IN LEBANON (2017).



Source: Austiger (2022). Wikimedia Commons.

1975–90, an agreement was made to establish a government to balance the interests of each of the communities. This agreement still constrains the ability of the government to respond to the economic and political situation in the country.

The land governance system is heavily influenced by the historical changes that the country has experienced. The Defter Kahan cadastral system was established under Ottoman rule, which lasted until 1918. The French mandate introduced elements of the French legal system, including a land title registry to replace the Defter Khan system. Lebanon became independent in 1943, but the country still follows the land system established under the French. A series of conflicts with Israel, the influx of large numbers of Palestinian refugees in 1948 and 1967, the Civil War in 1975–1990, the Israeli invasion in 1978 and the civil war in Syria from 2011, have led to large numbers of refugees from Palestine and Syria to settle in Lebanon, as well as large numbers of people internally displaced within Lebanon itself.

In 2020, a major explosion in the Port of Beirut destroyed large numbers of properties in the centre of the city and resulted in large numbers of people being evicted from properties that were still standing. All this has put the land system under enormous stress. It has also stimulated the rebuilding of the city, as well as the creation of digital maps that will facilitate planning and development.

The current economic instability and high inflation is disrupting patterns of land tenure, use, value and development, and is causing disputes that will need to be resolved. Below are some of the key findings of this study:

- Tenure security depends on citizenship, the land or property type and location.
- Women face discrimination in land issues, especially in rural areas.
- Fragmented political structure and power relations have a major influence on how the rules on land are applied at local level.

- A series of invasions and influxes of refugees has disrupted all aspects of society.
- A major explosion in 2020 in Beirut destroyed large parts of the city center, and inflation is causing severe damage to the economy.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Lebanon's land-related legal framework has been changed by major events. War and conflict have severely affected and halted administrative functioning for long periods, which has resulted in its weak capacity today.

The country's colourful and often tragic history has led to a patchwork of institutions, laws and regulations relating to land, some of which date back to the Medjelle (Majallah el-Ahkam-i-Adliya) and Ottomans Empire laws, while others exist in the Civil Code introduced under the French administration. More recent laws, for example to protect the environment (Law 444 of 2002) are not part of the Civil Code. The legal rules on urban development overlap and are not contained in a single piece of legislation. Rules and regulations of the Multiplicity of Planning often hinder the planning process. Gaps also exist; for example, there is no formal regulation of unplanned land use, especially in rural areas.

The Constitution protects land rights, but does not provide for rights to water, adequate housing or protection from displacement, and does not explicitly prohibit gender discrimination.

The lack of land policy affects the relevance of land-related legislation. For instance, multiple laws on building violations were issued to maximize state revenues, but they fail to resolve citizens' housing problems – the original reason for issuing them. Special legislation exists to

protect the coastal environment, but this is ignored. Coastal land is especially attractive for developers, and property rights of existing residents are not respected.

Government institutions relating to land lack capacity in terms of skilled staff, equipment and procedures, and tend to focus on higher value properties. Corruption is a problem in processes such as acquiring land and obtaining planning approvals.

The National Physical Master Plan is a comprehensive land use strategy for achieving unity, rationalized expenditures and balanced development on the national level.³²⁶ It was made possible by two laws passed in 1977: the first maintained the role of the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) in creating a comprehensive master plan for Lebanon, and the second clarified the role of the Directorate General of Urbanism (DGU) in Lebanon's planning process. The master plan was approved in 2009. Although the plan aims to achieve balanced development, it is limited to determining general land use orientations without their procedural mechanisms. The administrative planning process is complicated, and goals are not being met because development guidelines are not binding and because non-public actors have not been formally informed of the plan. This situation provides greater leeway for non-public actors to experiment. The head of the CDR, Ibrahim Chahrour, has said that although there are no binding development guidelines, developmental and planning experiments are better than being without any development.³²⁷ The master plan has been criticized for following the logic of the reconstruction plan rather than urban planning regulation concepts.³²⁸

According to the urban planning code no. 69/1983, there are three types of urban

326 UN-Habitat (2013). *Reforming Urban Planning System in Lebanon. Findings of the Research Assessment*.

327 Chahrour, I. (2015). Processes behind regional planning in Lebanon's hinterland [Interview], 23 August 2015.

328 UN-Habitat (2013).

tools related to the three institutional scales of planning set by the DGU. They are as follows:

- **Territorial land use plan** aims to serve as the main framework for the other two plans.
- **Master plan** (Article 7) defines major land use orientations and key planning issues. The code indicates (1) urban extensions, (2) balancing between urban settlements and natural and agricultural domains, delimitation of historic centres and industrial zones and definition of traffic zones.
- **Detailed master plan** (Article 8) is conceived at the plot-scale and is legally binding on all citizens. It defines land use, zoning regulations, exploitation ratios and construction norms.

Limitations related to the above instruments:

- They are non-binding for public administrations, leading to independently approved and implemented infrastructure projects.
- Programming of public investment is based on projects already listed within sector ministries.
- Certain detailed plans are 40 years old; they ignore the territories' evolution and encouraging inappropriate building responses.
- There are conflicts between "master plans" and "detailed master plans", due to the lack of clarity on both articulations. Master plans can replace detailed master plans if they specify the precise scale. Likewise, there is no need for master plans to validate detailed master plans, leading to the redundancy of master plans and more planning processes confusions.

- Pressing issues, such as fragmentation and suitable sustainable strategies for social and economic development are ignored and restricted to technical, legal and aesthetic considerations.
- Master plans are used either to reinforce territorial identity or to legitimize local authorities' development agendas. They may be discarded and replaced to align with changing political priorities or the ideology of new local authorities.

Sector ministries and the Council of Ministers established the following institutions through laws and decrees:

- The Urban Planning Code of 1983, constituting three parts: (a) urban planning focusing on plans and regulations; (b) urban planning operations; and (c) planning permissions.
- Municipal and urban planning laws.
- The Environmental Code, which is increasingly being evoked during formulation of urban planning projects. Some provisions of the code concern many urban operations. Article 21 includes studies on nature's impact of any private or public project. Article 22 defines terms to control what should be environmentally assessed.

The limitations of these laws include the following:

- Legislative conflicts between municipal laws exist, resolved by court orders.³²⁹ Moreover, Article 11 of the code restrains the power of local authorities to that of a consultative role when implementing their urban policies.
- However, these articles have not yet been formulated into decrees, so the environmental aspect is hardly regarded.

³²⁹ UN-Habitat (2013).

LAND SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS

Lebanon is labelled a merchant economy, with embedded market-friendly policies and communitarianism within social, economic and political institutions and system. Communitarianism is a “social and political philosophy that emphasizes the importance of the community in the functioning of political life”.³³⁰ Therefore, one’s community identity is dominant over and almost replaces the national identity, as Lebanon is home to many ethnic and religious groups, creating territorial identities supported by sectarian logic, which is “the major local anxiety”.³³¹ Thus, the production of territories is guided by communitarian motives of self-preservation and development, which are subnational. This explains the prevailing fragmentation of Lebanese society since each community attaches to its own political or sectarian identity.

Underpinning the sectarian fragmentation is the political system based on the 1990 Taef Accords signed to end the civil war and returned Lebanon to political normalcy. The agreement defined a political system, structurally based on consensus and compromise between the 18 State-recognized sects, assuring their adequate political representation in a parliamentary democracy.³³² To understand planning governance across Lebanon’s hinterland territories, this analysis examines the roles and actions of public and private actors, institutions and agencies involved in planning processes. The key actors and their contextual roles are as follows:

Political patrons

The patron heads of political parties are in control. Each patron represents a confession

or political philosophy based on confessional logic. Some experts describe the need to maintain this governance mode as a function of the central State’s control declining control since 2005. These patrons present a challenge to governance by maintaining territorialization agendas – the effort to maintain sectarian group demographic presence and control in respective areas through monitoring boundaries. Caught in this divide are marginalized civilians who do not belong to a particular patron’s party but live in his territory. These communities are omitted from plans or surveys, which therefore often provide misleading results.

Municipalities

Lebanon is divided into 1,396 territorial localities representing cities, towns and villages;³³³ 1,080 of these have municipalities. A new municipal law legislated in 1998 states: “The municipality is a local administration exercising, within its territorial scope, the powers entrusted thereto by the law. The municipality shall hereby enjoy legal personality as well as financial and administrative independence”.³³⁴ The number of municipalities is relatively large compared to the country’s surface area and demography. This may be due to sectarian and communitarian affiliations varying in each village. Consequently, three adjacent villages would have three independent municipalities, each reflecting its culture or confession. When it comes to building permits in some cities, the DGU clashes with the municipalities. Municipality agendas are often those of their respective political patrons in parliament, resulting in extensions of fragmented central government in the localities. Equally, political pressures on the municipality to push the agendas of certain interests creates tensions in the DGU.

330 Encyclopaedia Britannica (n.d.). [Communitarianism: political and social philosophy](#).

331 Darwich, R. (2014). *Territorial marketing practices as a lens for analysing changes in governance, local development, and territorial building: The case of Lebanon: Union of municipalities* [Master’s thesis]. Department of Urban Planning, Lebanese University.

332 Sfeir, N. (2018). [Local economic development via urbanism lever: the case of Lebanon](#). Studies of Architecture, Urbanism and Environmental Sciences, Vol. 1(2), pp. 62-78.

333 UN-Habitat (2013).

334 Ibid.

Union of Municipalities

An intermediary administrative level exists as the Union of Municipalities, which has the same rights as individual municipalities. Despite the difference in institutional size, both are considered local administrations.³³⁵ The Union of Municipalities has a council and president whose responsibilities include sharing resources and organizing cooperation among towns, especially for wider scaled services such as water canalization and provision of irrigation. Administratively, these Union of municipalities are critical in terms of land governance since they carry out regional tasks and mediate between several municipalities when upgrading infrastructure and implementing environmental plans.

Non-governmental organizations

NGOs involved in Lebanon's planning processes have several roles, depending on the decentralized cooperation of the strategic planning process – for example, to be a key agency in the planning process or to be the outcome of planning process. A binding regulation under decentralized cooperation is the involvement of a competent local development NGO to mediate the planning process. The NGO's role is critical and often mandatory for funding municipal projects or land-related plans.

Order of Engineers and Architects

This body is a legal private institution that cooperates with deputies and ministries. It participates in preparing legislation that regulates the construction industry, infrastructure, urban planning, environment, citizens' public safety and communities. A representative from the Order sits on the Higher Council of Urban Planning, with an actively limited role.³³⁶ The Council's main

tasks are registering and approving construction permits, ensuring technical soundness and the calculation of taxes of projects.

Academics

The lack of a planning ministry and non-binding national development guidelines has enabled a multitude of non-state actors to get involved in planning processes. In terms of decision-making, academics have large control over shaping the future of territories. Development projects are initiated as a three-way partnership between an academic institution, an NGO and a municipality. These have been successful because young students offer fresh and innovative ideas while gaining access to relevant experience.

Mandated actor network

Pertaining to mandated functions, the DGU is expected to have greater authority over local planning power and strong relationships with local authorities in order to facilitate the exchange of ideas, take these ideas to the Higher Council of Urban Planning, and upgrade localities.³³⁷ Under the government of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) was established as a financially autonomous reconstruction entity directly connected to the Council of Ministers through the prime minister.

Customary Actor Network (pre-blast period)

Political patrons exert pressure on the DGU to change land zonings and divisions according to their territorialization agendas, creating tensions between the DGU and localities. Furthermore, the DGU's composition is static with little technical and planning experience of reconfiguring territories and coping with fragmentation. Yet

³³⁵ Darwich, R. (2014).

³³⁶ Chahrour, I. (2015).

³³⁷ Madi, B. (2015). *Processes behind regional planning in Lebanon's hinterland the cases of the Union of Municipalities of Jezzine and the Union of Municipalities of Tyr* [Master's thesis]. Stuttgart University and Ain Shams University.

the DGU is also the head of the Higher Council of Urban Planning, which confirms decisions.

This structural arrangement creates tensions between technical requirements and institutional capabilities. In addition, being a public agency under the Ministry of Public Works, the DGU is often overlooked when the ministry executes its road and infrastructure projects. Over time, the CDR has become proficient in planning and developing territories. Villages and towns have adopted their own urban strategic planning and implementation programmes thereby weakening the DGU. This has been more so because foreign organizations now prefer CDR as an implementation partner for projects because of its financial flexibility and ability to collect funds. Emerging players occupy a significant role in developing territories because of the absence of a planning ministry and a non-binding national development plan (by the CDR).

Customary Actor Network (post-blast period)

The army coordinated the allocation of different reconstruction NGOs after the Beirut Port blast, dividing them according to sectors. As an academic entity, the American University of Beirut completed the updated cadastral plan, work that should fall under the DGU and land registry.

The plan has been shared with the army to allocate reconstruction resources. In addition, UN-Habitat has created a geoportal and coordinates with different public planning agencies, supporting the municipality in developing a new law to mandate information flow and coordination mechanisms between agencies. Together with the American University of Beirut's engineering department, the Order of Engineers and Architects monitors the demolition of unsafe buildings and protects residents vulnerable to eviction, ensuring their interests are considered alongside municipal planning priorities.

LAND MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS

LAND TENURE

Various types of land tenure exist, including customary (not legally recognized), private freehold (the most secure form), rental, waqf (religious endowment) and public or government owned. Legally recognized tenures are those that are registered, whether bought, inherited, rented or leased. Tenures that are unregistered or without contracts are not legally recognized.

- *Mulk*, or private ownership lies within the administrative boundaries of built-up areas. It is the only category of land that can be sold and is the most secure form of tenure.
- *Amiri* is a type of land owned by the state, but individuals may have rights to use it (*tasarof*). Today, this type of land is treated like *mulk*.
- *Metrouke murfaka*, or “left out land”, is owned by municipalities and subject to collective use. It is usually governed by local customs or administrative regulations.
- *Metrouke mehmi*, or “protected land” belongs to a governorate or municipality and is part of the public domain. It includes streets, public squares, public gardens and public markets.
- *Masha'a* lands are communal lands, without a recognized owner. They are controlled by the municipality, which may allocate them for farming, development or other uses. Economic pressures are encouraging municipalities to allocate the land to outsiders or wealthy local individuals for development. Municipality administrations often do this without consulting the local population.
- *Khalie mubah*, is *amiri* land that has not been inventoried and delimited, and on

FIGURE 71: LAND ADMINISTRATION TRENDS IN LEBANON

This graphic provides an indicative overview of national-level trends based on the data presented in the country profile. The findings are illustrative rather than definitive and, in some cases, may be non-conclusive, as contextual and institutional variations may apply. The graphics below present the performance of the five core land administration functions - from weak to well-functioning - together with performance across five complementary indicators: SDG 5.a.2, SDG 11.1.1, the Assets Indicator, the Registering Property Score, and the Corruption Perceptions Index. To ensure comparability, all indicators were proportionally adjusted.

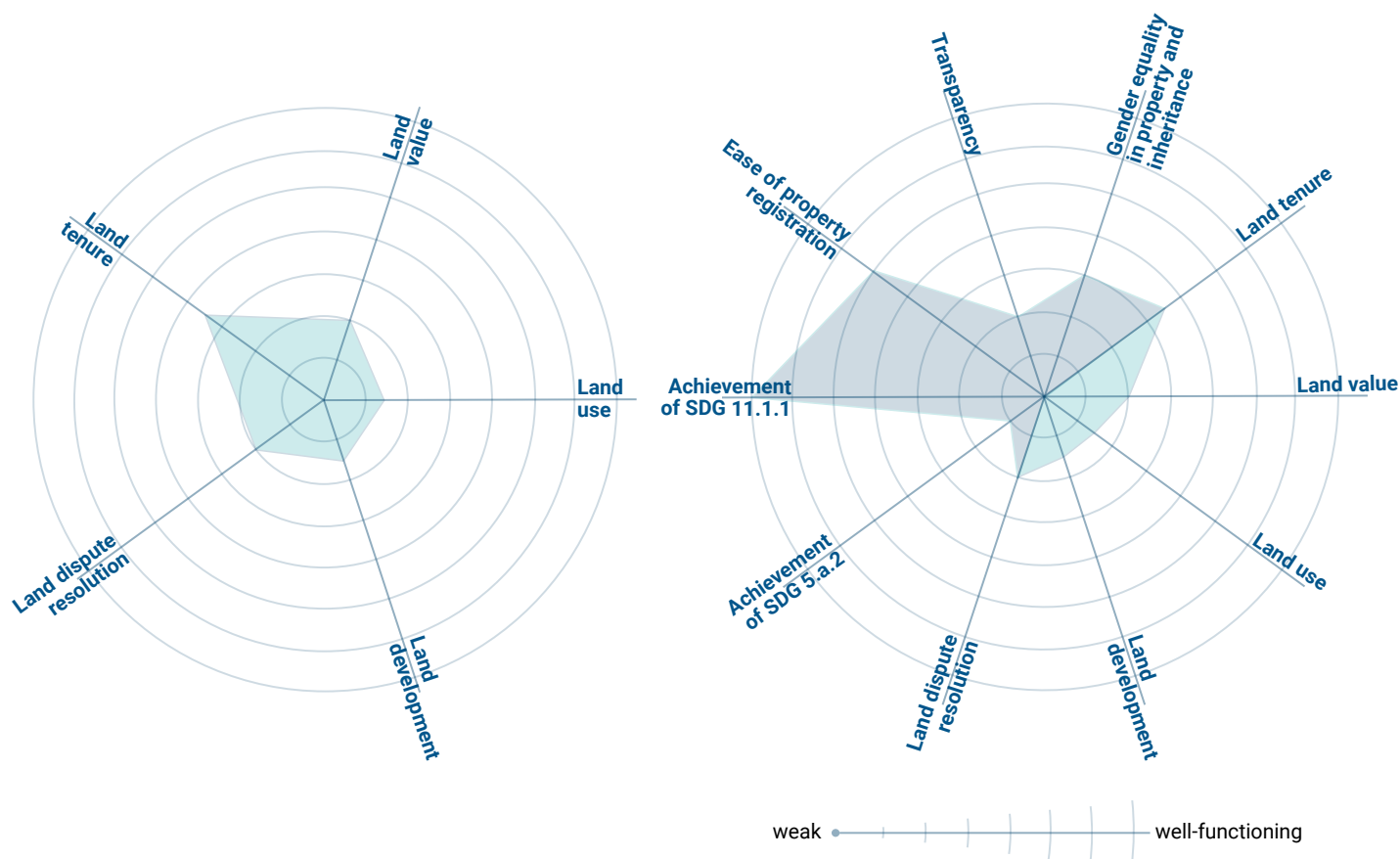


TABLE 9: OVERVIEW OF LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS IN LEBANON

CRITERIA	LAND TENURE	LAND VALUE	LAND USE	LAND DEVELOPMENT	LAND DISPUTES RESOLUTION
Existence / coverage of the system	●	●	●	●	●
Effectiveness	●	●	●	●	●
Procedural duration	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	●
Affordability	●	●	N/A	●	●
Accessibility	●	N/A	●	●	●
Data availability	●	●	●	N/A	N/A
Mandates clarity	N/A	●	●	●	●

● Significant challenge
 ● Moderate challenge
 ● No/ limited challenge

Source: Authors, United Nations Statistics Division. (n.d.). [SDG indicators database](#); World Bank (2021). [Women, business and the law 2021](#); World Bank (n.d.). [Registering property](#); Transparency International. (2022). [Corruption perceptions index 2022: Middle East and North Africa](#).

which the first occupant, with the state's permission, acquires a right of preference. It is considered to be state private property and includes empty lands, forests and mountains.

- *Waqf*, or religious endowment land, is land that has been entrusted to a religious organization, often for a specific social purpose (e.g. to build a school) or, more generally, for charitable purposes. Religious groups have used *waqf* land to settle Syrian refugees. It makes up about 30 per cent of the private land. The *waqf* institutions (Muslim and Christian) play an important role in the land market and have many opportunities for land concession and rental.

Land records

The General Directorate of Land Registration and Cadastre maintains land-related records (such as ownership) as well as a list of laws. However, this information is not available to the public. Interested parties can obtain the information from the municipality administrations.

Registering land parcels and boundaries is complicated, expensive and time-consuming, so many landholders avoid doing so. Registering land also exposes landholders to paying taxes, so to avoid this, they often either fail to register a change in ownership or report a lower price on the sale document to incur a lower level of tax. As a result, the land records are outdated, much land is held informally and the land value recorded is unrealistic.

Some buildings are constructed on this type of unregistered land, leading to problems with the provision of infrastructure (electricity, water, sewerage) and disputes over boundaries and land use. Much depends on the responsiveness of the municipal authorities to requests by landholders. These problems occur in both urban and rural areas but are particularly prevalent in rural areas. With current rapid inflation, the real cost (measured in US dollars) of registering land

is falling, and large numbers of people are using the opportunity to register their landholdings.

Tenure security

Mulk, or private ownership is the most secure form of tenure. The security of other tenure types is highly dependent on the relationship between the landholder and informal but influential stakeholders. Tribal customs also play a role, especially in rural areas.

Rapid urbanization, internal displacement and an influx of refugees have led to large-scale informal occupation (squatting), often on registered land in urban areas. Residents build houses and add storeys to existing buildings in violation of the planning rules; authorities periodically demolish such buildings. Authorities are often reluctant to enforce planning rules strictly because of fear of social unrest, due to the general shortage and unaffordability of housing. Powerful individuals are able to influence or ignore planning regulations. For example, they may purchase a historical building that is protected by law, demolish it and replace it with a new development that will generate more revenue. They are also often able prevent demolitions properties that are built illegally.

In a small, highly populated country like Lebanon, communal *masha'a* lands are under growing pressure from realty developers due to their exceptional landscapes with scenic value. Their contested land registry status becomes an added asset for developers, a legal loophole used to acquire prime landscapes for large-scale development. With rural economies failing, especially in villages, communities are often persuaded, or forced, to abandon their customary rights.

Foreigners in Lebanon can legally enjoy secure tenure to property, but not to land. This means they can rent a house, but not build one. Those who did not enter the country legally (which includes many refugees) do not enjoy security of tenure. Many rental agreements are informal.

Housing is expensive, so poorer people have few options. Various categories of refugees are subject to restrictions, for example on how they can use the land, how much land they may occupy, and their ability to build on land.

Foreign domestic workers must have a Lebanese sponsor, who takes on responsibility for them. This permits them to rent accommodation. If they lose this sponsorship, they also lose their legal residency in the country and are subject to deportation. Many end up on the street. Individual Syrian refugees find themselves in a similar position. Those with families find it easier to register with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the UN body responsible for refugees in the region. Refugees have fewer political patrons than Lebanese citizens, so are more vulnerable when it comes to evictions and demolitions. There have been cases where Syrian refugees have illegally built houses in an informal camp in the north of the country, but the government forced them to demolish the houses.

Women and inheritance

Lebanese culture and religious norms are patriarchal, especially in villages. Inheritance rights and tenure transfers favour men. It is normal for men to register property in their name and receive bank loans, and many men do this on behalf of their wives and daughters. This restricts the women's legal rights to land and their ability to use it. The number of women with secure tenure rights and legally recognized documentation is minimal.

According to inheritance rules, land is divided up among the heirs, with women getting a smaller share in some religious groups, or no share at all. Land is not divided up into smaller parcels, but is held jointly by all the heirs. This makes land transactions difficult, as all heirs must agree to a sale or to develop the land. Inheritance practices have in many areas created a situation in which large, saleable plots are co-owned by

many individuals, each of whom owns a number of shares in the plot rather than a defined parcel within in.

Problems relating to land tenure include:

- Problems in the validity of information: it may be missing, not be updated or not digitalized.
- Lack of clear administrative procedures.
- Rapid inflation of the Lebanese pound and the widespread circulation of US dollars. Taxes are paid in pounds, which are falling in value. Banks are refusing to give loans, so people cannot invest in land.
- Land and property are expensive and are unaffordable to the poor.

LAND USE

Lebanon is a highly urbanized country, with 89 per cent of the population living in urban areas. The process of urbanization was not accompanied by any state policies or plans, allowing many cities and towns to merge into single built-up area, especially along the coast. The result is a lack of basic services, transport problems, traffic congestion and a deterioration of the natural environment. Cities are expanding into the surrounding rural land and forests, endangering food production, the environment and water supply.

Municipalities may (but are not required to) submit updated land-use plans to the Directorate General of Urbanism for approval. Land that has limited value as agricultural land can be bought cheaply and then reclassified for another use and sold at a higher price. Legislation on land use, planning, protection and zoning needs to be updated and enforced to protect the country's natural resources. Large numbers of refugees in Lebanon live in camps with undignified accommodation such as tents, shacks and shipping containers. Corruption and political

power lead to the illegal use of state land by rich and powerful people.

Land-use regulations for planning and construction need to be updated to account for increasingly densifying regions. Enforcement is needed to ensure that development complies with land-use regulations. This is evident in the case of Mkales, a suburb of Beirut, which was designed to include both residential and industrial zones. Rapid urbanization has led to residential areas being intermingled with industrial zones, posing health and safety risks.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

The mechanisms for the government to acquire land for public use are not equitable. Problems include corruption, unused or poorly used public lands, projects that lack adequate funding and inappropriate projects that do more harm than good. Development of land is intimately tied to corruption and political influence. Powerful individuals enjoy connections to political figures who can influence the planning process, ensure access to suitable plots and facilitate the granting of permits. There are regulations to control the subdivision and consolidation of land parcels, but they are applied unevenly and often to the advantage of large-scale developers to consolidate property, and to buy out small landholders.

The legislation governing land subdivisions and municipal consolidation is similar for urban and rural areas. In villages, many areas are not surveyed, permitting a greater degree of exploitation and a dense urban fabric. This is also due to the lack of adequate infrastructural planning needed to support suitable development.

The Order of Engineers and Architects mandates that any construction of more than 5,000 m² must involve a contracting firm and cannot be done by individuals. This ensures that larger construction conforms to standards and is subject to taxation. The Directorate General of Urbanism allows large projects to bypass some

planning regulations when there are private developers. Smaller proposals are regarded as easy, while larger developments require political influence to be implemented.

LAND VALUE

Laws that govern land valuation include the Built Property Tax Law of 1962, the Expropriation Law no. 58 of 1991 and Rental Law no. 2 of 2017, which governs lease contracts for built premises concluded before 23 July 1992.

There is lack of public information on land and property values. This affects the market, as some actors have a better idea of the value of land and property than others, so are in a better position to negotiate prices. It also opens up opportunities for corruption. Buyers and sellers often report a lower (or higher) price for a sale in order to influence the amount of tax (transfer fees) paid to the land registry on transfer. This affects the state's income from the tax. Valuation specialists are not always drawn from the Syndicate of Real Estate Appraisers, so do not necessarily have the expertise needed to value the land and property accurately. Improving the valuation of the property would increase market transparency, reduce the banking sector's mortgage risks and boost tax income.

Property tax

Property taxation is governed by a law issued in 1962, which has been amended three times, by Law no.366/94 and Financial Laws nos. 107/99 and 173/2000. This applied the Built Property Tax, which is levied on rental income at a progressive rate. This rate ranges from 4 per cent (for rental income in the range of USD 500 to 800) to 14 per cent (for income over 100 million LBP).

Buildings owned by the government, hospitals, religious authorities, political parties, foreign governments, agricultural land and non-built property in urban areas are exempt from this tax on property.

Capital gains tax on sale of property is assessed based on the difference between the property's price at the time of ownership and its price at disposal or sale. The applicable tax rate is 15 per cent in accordance with the income tax law. Additionally, when the transfer of ownership of a property is registered, 6 per cent of the purchase price is levied as a property transfer tax along with other applicable fees and taxes (stamp duty).

The value of land and immovable property in each region is determined by the Ministry of Finance, which establishes the minimum threshold for the application of taxes and levies due at the time of transfer.

Tax on the transfer of property is applied on the net value of the share of heirs when the property is transferred through inheritance, wills, gifts or other methods. The tax is progressive, depending on the amount transferred. The rates also vary according to the degree of relationship between the inheritor and the person leaving the legacy.

LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

A *formal* system exists under the Ministry of Justice and the court system to resolve disputes related to land rights and parcel boundaries. The judicial process is regarded as opaque, lengthy, costly and politically tainted.

An informal system also exists, which people often prefer to use. It may involve religious or clan leaders, or informal meetings with municipality officials. This system often results in compromise agreements, but which do not carry any legal force.

Masha'a lands (communal lands, without a recognized owner and controlled by the municipality) occupy a large portion of the area outside the cities. The uncertain status of these lands results in a large number of disputes among landholders.

Land disputes may lead to violence, and informal mechanisms to resolve them are common.

Municipalities are often involved in finding compromises between the disputing parties. The disputing parties tend to avoid courts as they are costly, and the procedure is lengthy.

Under Sharia law, women may inherit less than men (or none at all). Women, especially those who are poor, single or widowed, are often not taken seriously in court. Women with connections to powerful men face fewer problems and less discrimination. Only a few women have the power to avoid patriarchal social and cultural norms.

LEARNING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Land-related studies do not exist as a separate programme in universities, but the topics are introduced as part of courses on urban planning. Most of these courses are embedded in bachelor's and master's programmes on architecture. Only a few master's programmes focus on urbanism or urban planning. One public and six private universities offer such courses; one also has an adult-education course. All these courses charge fees. They cover the following topics:

- Geospatial studies, surveying and mapping, mainly offered through GIS courses and training.
- Spatial planning and land-use planning, offered through urban planning courses and covering both theoretical and practical aspects
- Social sciences: some courses on law, sociology and economics relate to land.
- Agrarian and rural studies.

Some private providers offer courses on urban and land governance (es. Public Works Studio hosts tailor-made programmes). Unlike universities, many of these organizations are activist and are not perceived as neutral actors.

Sultanate of Oman³³⁸

FACT SHEET³³⁹



Capital city: Muscat (population: 1,702,510,340)



Population: 5,281,000³⁴¹



Population growth rate: 4.5 per cent³⁴²



Urban population: 89 per cent³⁴³



Urban population growth rate: 5.2 per cent³⁴⁴



Land area: 309,500 km²³⁴⁵



Forest: 0 km²



Protected areas: 1 per cent



Freshwater withdrawals: 116.7 per cent of internal resources (annual)



Population density: 16.5 people per sq km of land

338 This country profile summarizes the paper: UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2023).

[Oman Land Sector Assessment: Background Paper.](#)

339 World Bank (2020). [World Development Indicators database.](#)

340 World Population Review (2025). [Muscat.](#)

341 World Bank (2024). [Population, total – Oman.](#)

342 World Bank (2024). [Population growth \(annual %\) – Oman.](#)

343 World Bank (2024). [Urban population \(% of total population\).](#)

344 World Bank (2024). [Urban population growth \(annual %\).](#)

345 World Bank (2024). [Surface area \(sq. km\).](#)

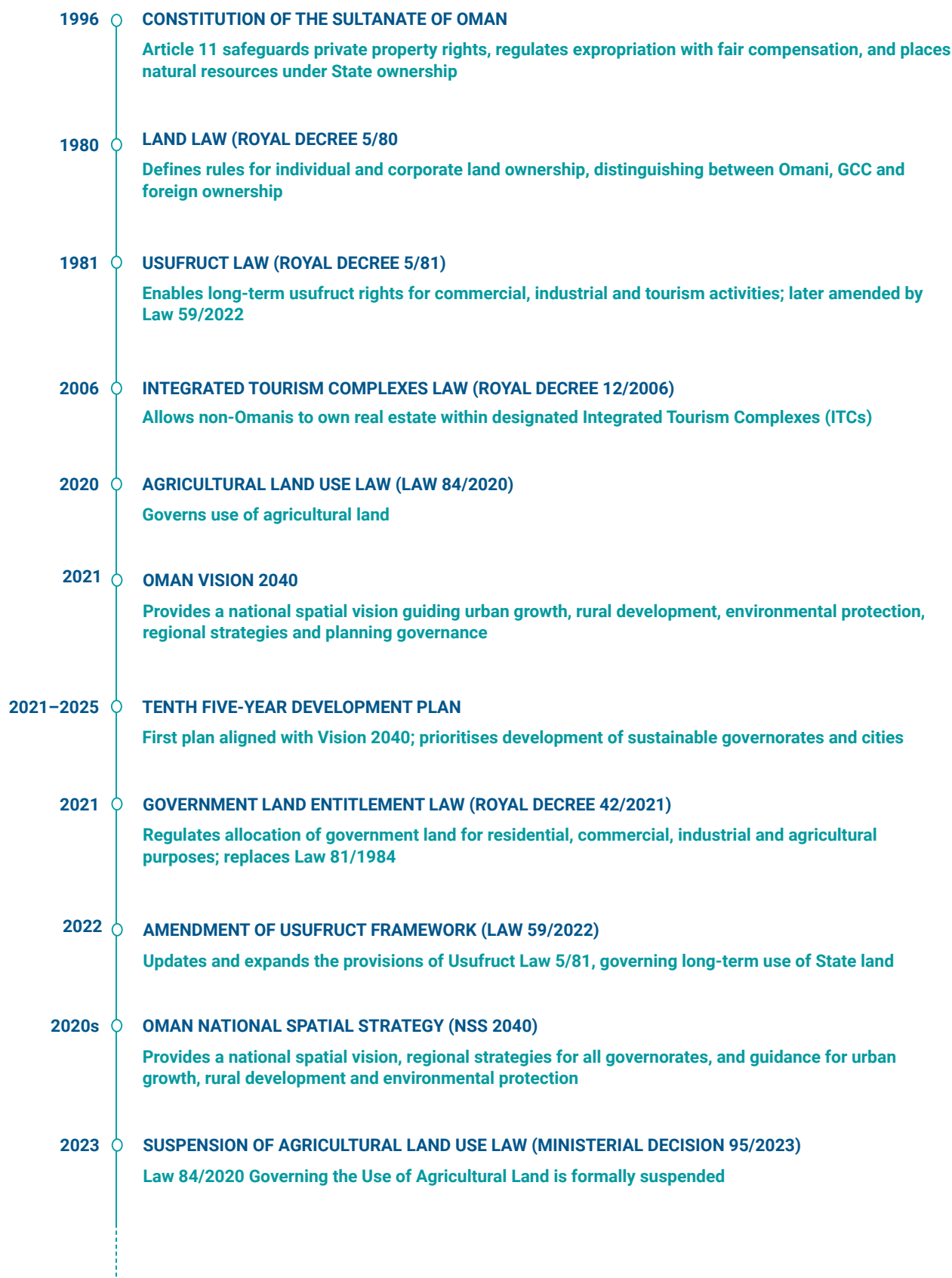
OVERVIEW

The Sultanate of Oman, located on the south-eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula, borders the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The country is 309,500 sq km in size, with a 2,092 km long coastline, and rugged mountains in the north and south. A vast gravel

desert plain covers most of the country, which experiences sandstorms and dust storms in summer, and periodic droughts, with average precipitation of 125 mm per year.

Oman has experienced exponential population growth since the early 2000s, climbing from 550,000 inhabitants in 1960 to over 5 million

FIGURE 72: HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF KEY LAND-RELATED EVENTS IN OMAN



Source: Authors, based on UN-Habitat (2013). *Reforming Urban Planning System in Lebanon. Findings of the Research Assessment.*

in 2023.³⁴⁶ With 87 per cent of Omanis living in urban areas, compared to roughly 15 per cent in 1960,³⁴⁷ the country shares the urbanization patterns of other countries in West Asia. Oman's population is concentrated in urban centres along its coast, including its capital city Muscat, which exposes it to vulnerabilities related to sea level rise.

Oman is considered a high-income country, with an economy centred mainly around the oil industry. The discovery of oil in commercial amounts in the 1960s significantly impacted the country's economy and shaped its land sector, as most of Oman's land is currently under usufruct use concessions to oil and gas companies.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Real estate in the Sultanate of Oman is regulated by the Land Law 5/80. The law broadly recognizes individual and corporate real estate ownership. This law categorizes corporate land ownership into Omani, non-Omani from Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC) and foreign ownership.

Corporate ownership of real estate is restricted under Omani law. Only limited liability companies which are Omani or GCC-owned, and joint stock companies with at least 30 per cent Omani shareholding may own real estate. Furthermore, corporate ownership of property is limited to holding real estate for use as a warehouse, staff accommodation, administrative offices or as a similar special purpose premise for achieving the company's objectives. An exception to this rule applies to real estate development companies that use land to construct and resell residential and commercial units.

While Omani-owned companies may hold freehold rights, there are varying degrees of

restrictions on other GCC and foreign entities with respect to property ownership. For instance, a GCC entity purchasing a vacant plot of land is legally obliged to develop it within four years of date of purchase. In addition, GCC-owned companies may only own real estate for investment purposes.

It is important to note the impact of certain amendments to Omani land law and its usage. Royal Decree 76/2010 enables both public and closed joint stock companies with a minimum of 30 per cent Omani shareholding to develop and own land in the Sultanate. In addition, the amendments to this decree allow these companies to engage in real estate development as a business.

Companies that are not entitled to own land can enjoy usufruct right, the closest thing to a freehold ownership right in the country. A usufruct right enables its holder to exploit and use the land for the purposes of the applicable project, in the capacity of an owner. Nevertheless, this right is subject to restrictions as per the usufruct contract and it entails the obligation to return the land to its owner upon the termination or expiry of the usufruct agreement.

A usufruct right on government land can be held for a maximum period of 50 years, which can be extended for similar additional terms. One of the most important features of the usufruct right is the possibility to mortgage usufruct land. The mortgagee's right with respect to the land is protected even where the usufruct right is terminated. However, entities that are not entitled to own land in Oman can be granted usufruct rights only for the purpose of carrying out a particular project which contributes to Oman's economy or social development.

The law of Integrated Tourism Complexes (Royal Decree 12/2006, as amended) was issued to

346 World Bank (2023). [Population, total – Oman](#).

347 World Bank (2023). [Urban population \(% of total population\) – Oman](#).

promote tourism in Oman. This law allows foreign companies to own land or build units for residential and investment purposes in areas designated by the government as “integrated tourism complexes” (“ITCs”). ITCs are typically required to comprise commercial, residential and tourism components. Foreign companies may purchase residential and non-residential units from a developer and register ownership title with the Ministry of Housing. Ministerial Decision 191/2007 set forth broad rules relating to the obligations and rights of developers and third-party purchasers, such as succession, transfer of freehold title and creation of security interest for financing ITC projects.

Other key laws are the Land Law or Usufruct Law (5/1981); the Royal Decree (82/88) for the Executive Regulation of the Law 5/81; and the Government Land Entitlement System Law (81/1984). The Law sets out the general conditions for the transfer of ownership of government lands to the Omani citizens according to their personal request. It also identifies land ownership rules and land use rights. The Law includes the conditions for granting residential lands, commercial and industrial lands, or agricultural lands to Omani citizens. The authorities of reference are the Ministry of Land Affairs and the municipalities.

This law was cancelled by the new Public Land Entitlement Law (42/2021), as mentioned below.

The Land Entitlement Law (42/2021)

The new Land Entitlement Law (42/2021) was issued in accordance with the institutional and organizational reform that Oman is undertaking in line with Oman Vision 2040. It replaces the Government Land Entitlement System Law (81/1984), and it states that the land allocated for commercial, industrial, and agricultural purposes will follow the rules and regulations, determined by the Law (5/1981), while land allocated for housing purposes will be governed by new rules and regulations.

The Land Entitlement Law (42/2021) states that the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning may grant a government residential plot of land according to the terms and conditions for granting residential governmental land, in the areas with approved detailed planning. To grant residential land, the following conditions must be met:

- If the applicant is a man, he must be twenty-three years, with a family consisting of himself and (a) a wife and child(ren), (b) either a wife or child(ren) or (c) at least one parent. He may also apply for himself alone, provided he is at least 40 years old. If he has a family, the land title deed is also issued in the spouse’s name.
- If the applicant is a woman, she must be at least 23 years old and be (q) the sole supporter for her family, (b) married to a non-Omani and residing in the Sultanate permanently or (c) divorced, widowed, deserted with no children. She may also apply for herself alone, provided she is at least 40 years old.

Priority in granting residential governmental land is given to families that do not own a house or residential land suitable for construction, and the granted land may not be sold until after the completion of construction. In accordance with the regulations issued by a decision of the Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

Residential governmental land may be granted to families provided that no family member previously received a residential land grant before the provisions of this decree came into effect. Residential governmental land is granted in the applicant’s village or in the village of his permanent work.

Some requests for granting residential governmental lands may be exempt from these terms and conditions, in accordance with the rules to be determined by a decision of the Minister of Housing, and Urban Planning after

the approval of the Council of Ministers. Social media posts revealed discontent regarding the new terms and conditions set by the new law, while, on the other hand, the demand for increasingly scarce land plots remain high.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The land governance, land management and land administration system contributes to the overall vision and goals of Oman in terms of the Oman 2030 Vision. The land-related legal and institutional framework, made up of public and private stakeholders, is intended to facilitate the achievement of this vision.

The Oman 2040 Vision

Oman has developed socio-economic development plans since the 1970s. In January 2019, Oman launched its “Oman Vision 2040” long-term strategy,³⁴⁸ which integrates the sustainable development dimensions of the national planning, finance and governance policies. The long-term vision is the overall arching framework for resource management, including land, natural, human and fiscal resources and will be implemented five-year phases. Oman Vision 2040 considers land as an input for the production process, not only as an asset exploited to generate income, but to generate added value and to create decent jobs.

The Vision aims at sourcing local management and leadership capable of applying the principles of decentralization to contribute to the comprehensive socio-economic development of governorates. Such local leadership should have capacity to plan and make decisions in line with future national directions and to ensure sustainable use and effective exploitation of land and natural resources. The Vision includes 12 priorities under 4 main pillars, with 75

objectives. The economic pillar, “Development of Governorates and Sustainable Cities”, relates to land management and administration. The Vision acknowledges that the current land management and administration system is inadequate and does not contribute to the structural transformation required to stimulate the economic diversification that Oman is pursuing.

The Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025)

Oman developed the tenth five-year development Plan, for the period (2021-2025), as the first executive plan of Oman long term vision.³⁴⁹ The three main pillars, all related to land governance, are: (1) economic diversification and fiscal sustainability, (2) governorate development and sustainable cities and (3) environment.

Oman National Spatial Strategy

As part of the Oman Vision 2040, the Supreme Council for Planning (SCP) prepared Oman National Spatial Strategy (ONSS), through a participatory approach.³⁵⁰ The ONSS contains a national strategy on the desired key spatial developments with elaborated regional strategies for all 11 governorates. It also includes implementation programmes and proposals for a legal planning framework, a new planning information system and capacity building programmes.

The ONSS will also provide a comprehensive spatial framework for directing, organizing and implementing sustainable high quality urban and rural development for the next 20 years. It is intended to provide incentives for enhancing socio-economic prosperity in combination with improving the environment for future generations. As part of the ONSS, regional spatial strategies for each governorate in the Sultanate will be elaborated. Each regional spatial strategy

348 Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Economy (2019). [Oman Vision 2040](#).

349 Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Economy (2020). [Tenth Five Year Development Plan 2021-2025](#).

350 Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (2021). [Oman National Spatial Strategy 2040](#).

shall comprise a single development plan with related regulatory instruments at the local level. The regional spatial strategies will be important building blocks of the ONSS, which aims to integrate them into one national strategy with one vision, regulatory instruments and tools for implementation.

The ONSS is also concerned with the future quality of the urban and rural environment. Many cities and villages do not have clear urban centers and lack good public space, like parks, squares, parking and walking space. After developing and implementing local spatial plans, based on the regional and national strategies, the urban environment will be more attractive for the residents.

GOVERNANCE AND LEGISLATION

The system of land management and land administration is centralized, with a limited role for local administration. Limited expertise at the central level is a key land governance issue in Oman, which could be indicative of a weaker capacity at the local level, preventing the effective preparation of comprehensive local development plans that stimulate the economy and optimize land use. The legal framework and institutional setup do not empower the local administration through fiscal and human resources, or through smart systems of information that would allow the local administration to play a major role in managing and optimizing the use of land at the local level.

Coordination between different stakeholders involved in land management and administration is lacking. The Supreme Council for Planning (now the Ministry of Economy) was responsible for both socioeconomic and spatial planning, which was supposed to create a more comprehensive development framework. The SCP was responsible for developing Oman Vision 2040 and the ONSS, as well as developing the

executive medium-term plans that will coordinate all efforts to achieve the objectives of the Vision, economically, social and spatially. After the institutional reform that the country undertook in August 2020, the SCP was abolished and replaced by the Ministry of Economy, responsible only for socio-economic planning, while the spatial planning function was transferred to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. The weak coordination between the two line-ministries can affect implementation of Oman Vision 2040, the ONSS, the tenth five-year development plan and, to a certain extent, the strategic development plans of the different Governorates.

There is unbalanced regional development in Oman, where Muscat is a major development center while the different governorates are less developed and do not enjoy the same level of public services, and more importantly these lack the means to stimulate the local economy and to provide decent and productive jobs. For this reason, and for the first time, in 2021, the Government allocated approximately USD 26 million³⁵¹ for each governorate to be used for local development activities over 5 years. In January 2022, the central transfers to the governorates were doubled.³⁵²

LAND SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS

Effective land governance in Oman requires coordination among multiple government ministries, local authorities, and non-governmental actors. The following stakeholders play distinct but interconnected roles in shaping land policies, implementing programmes, and managing resources.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning is responsible for determining housing policies. The urban planning function was transferred from the Supreme Council of Planning (canceled and replaced by the Ministry of Economy in August 2020), to the Ministry of Housing. The

351 Corresponding to OMR 10 million.

352 Oman Times (2022). [His Majesty's decision to increase funds for governorates praised by ministry](#). 5 January 2022.

Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning will be responsible for the implementation of the ONSS.

The Ministry of Economy (Formerly the Supreme Council for Planning) is responsible for designing policies to stimulate and diversify the economy, including preparation of long, medium and short-term plans. It is also responsible for monitoring the implementation of the plans, in collaboration with other entities. It also manages the annual investment budget and allocates investments to different Ministries, to finance the development projects, including those implemented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

The Ministry of Finance is responsible for supporting and stimulating economic development, through effective fiscal policies, and the efficient management of fiscal resources. Due to the economic crisis that Oman has faced for several years (since the decline of oil prices in 2014), the Ministry developed and is implementing the fiscal contraction programme (tawazon) aimed at reducing the share of fiscal deficit to GDP, and debt to GDP, while supporting economic activities.

The Ministry of Interior is responsible for the local administration units, and for empowering the local units, and moving towards administrative decentralization. Land governance is usually the responsibility of both the national and local levels.

Municipalities are responsible for the implementation of land governance policies and programmes.

Both the Shura and the State Councils in Parliament are responsible for developing a more efficient and effective legislative framework for land governance, and for monitoring and controlling the implementation of the land governance system by the different central and local administrative units.

The private sector could play a major role in creating demand for the reform of the land management and administration system in Oman, and for implementing the reform measures.

LAND MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS

This section presents the land administration system functions of land tenure, value, use, development and dispute settlements, as well as the land-related learning offer in the country. It draws largely on structured interviews and survey responses from government officials, the private sector, civil society and academia, at central and local levels. A total of 26 key respondents with 58 per cent female representation contributed to the study.

LAND TENURE

Land tenure is mainly the responsibility of the Ministry of Housing and Spatial Planning, in close collaboration with other ministries, including Ministry of Economy, responsible for allocating development funds, with the Ministry of Finance, which allocates both recurrent and development funds for all infrastructure, utilities and public services, and with other line ministries mandated with public services delivery.

The main forms of land tenure include privately and government owned land, usufruct, long term lease, land granted by the government to citizens, inherited land, individual forms of land tenure and group or corporate land tenure. Land tenure can be classified as residential, commercial, agricultural, industrial, touristic, religious, public spaces, educational, health and mixed use.

Finally, land can also be publicly owned, as in the case of the falaj water management systems. Other forms of land tenure, such as informal, temporary and customary, were not found in the

FIGURE 73: LAND ADMINISTRATION TRENDS IN OMAN

This graphic provides an indicative overview of national-level trends based on the data presented in the country profile. The findings are illustrative rather than definitive and, in some cases, may be non-conclusive, as contextual and institutional variations may apply. The graphics below present the performance of the five core land administration functions - from weak to well-functioning - together with performance across seven complementary indicators: SDG 5.a.1, SDG 5.a.2, SDG 11.1.1, the Assets Indicator, the Registering Property Score, the House price-to-income ratio and the Corruption Perceptions Index. To ensure comparability, all indicators were proportionally adjusted.

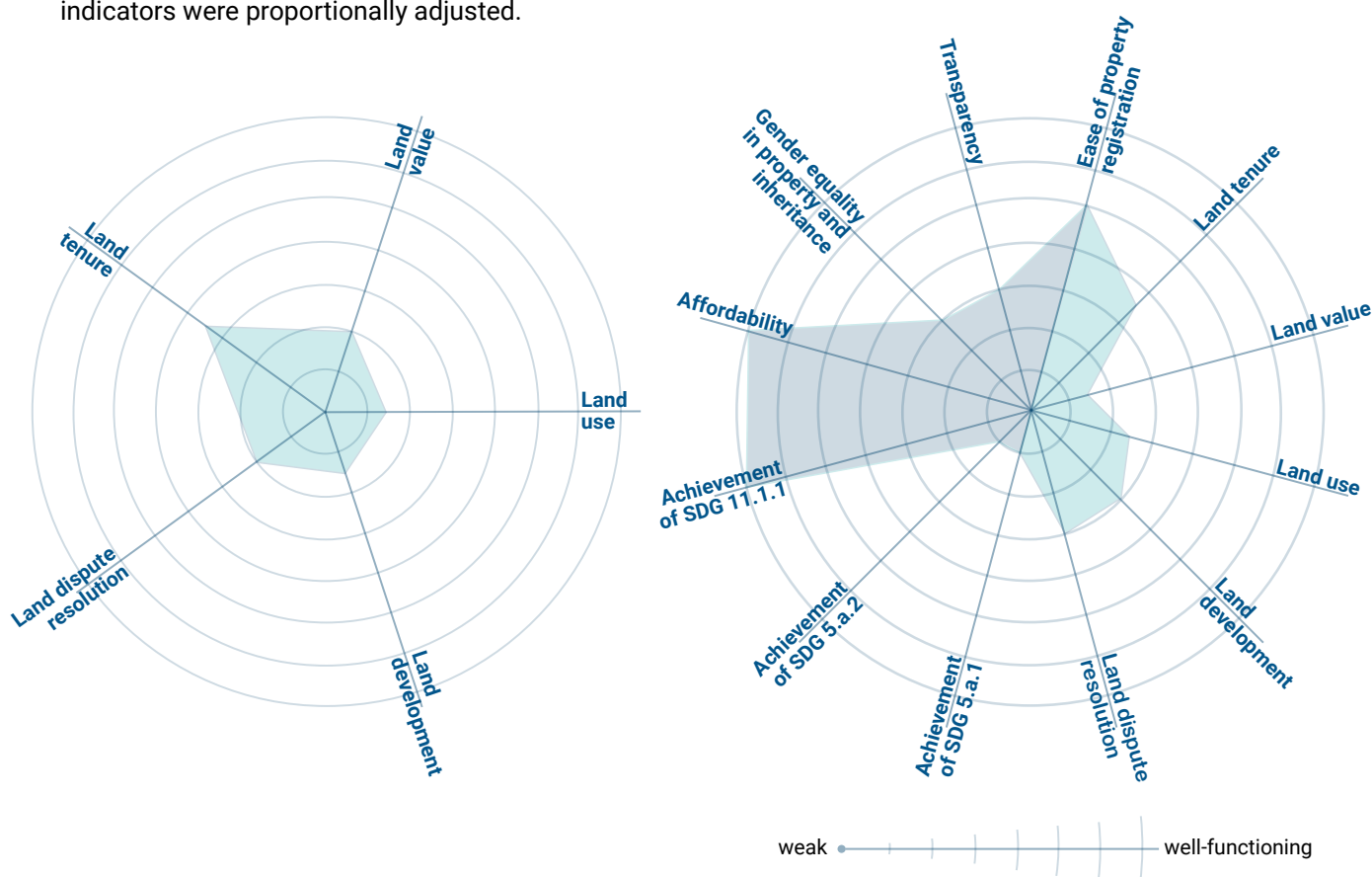


TABLE 10: OVERVIEW OF LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS IN OMAN

CRITERIA	LAND TENURE	LAND VALUE	LAND USE	LAND DEVELOPMENT	LAND DISPUTES RESOLUTION
Existence / coverage of the system	●	●	●	●	●
Effectiveness	●	●	●	●	●
Procedural duration	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	●
Affordability	●	●	N/A	●	●
Accessibility	●	N/A	●	●	●
Data availability	●	●	●	N/A	N/A
Mandates clarity	N/A	●	●	●	●

● Significant challenge
 ● Moderate challenge
 ● No/ limited challenge

Source: Authors, United Nations Statistics Division. (n.d.). [SDG indicators database](#); World Bank (2021). [Women, business and the law 2021](#); World Bank (n.d.). [Registering property](#); Transparency International. (2022). [Corruption perceptions index 2022: Middle East and North Africa](#).

study aside from the awqaf land. It is not known what proportion of the population has some form of formalized tenure rights, regarding either men or women.

Most respondents do not have accurate information on tenure rights or on percentage of the population with secure land tenure. Further, most respondents noted that such information is not available or publicly available.

Most of respondents do not perceive a difference between men and women regarding tenure security, as both can apply and be granted land. However, the application process differs by gender and marital status. Married men can apply for land with the title registered jointly in both spouses' names. Women can apply for a land and hold sole ownership rights only if they are married to a foreigner.

Respondents indicated that government cannot evict nationals from their legally owned property. However, evictions may take place due to the following reasons: (1) for public benefit, including when the land is needed for economic development, building bridges, roads, freezones or any national projects, in which case the citizen must agree and should be compensated, although a sufficiently robust, participatory or transparent process is at times missing; (2) natural hazards or disasters, such as floods, in which case people compensated with land elsewhere; (3) inability to pay rent; (4) mismanagement of the property; (5) in case of family disputes over land ownership, fraudulent documents of land lease and disputes in inheritance rights/claims; (6) If the buildings are not following the building code. Most respondents confirmed that it is easy to use land as collateral, and equally easy for women and men.

The land administration system currently centralized, but may be decentralized according

to new policies and regulations. The study could not ascertain the number of cadastral offices in the country or the number of employees. It is likely that there is one cadastral office per governorate or one per welaya.

The cadastre is considered efficient, but the extent of cadastral coverage of the country is not known. Digitalization in Oman is modest, and the extent to which the land administration system is digital is not known. This is despite the national programme entitled "Digital Transformation" that was adopted as part of the Oman Vision 2040, and the tenth five-year development plan. Up to the year 2017, research confirmed there is an "absence of seamless cadastral parcels data available at the national level in Oman. The available features of cadastral parcels are exclusively represented by points and lines and not structured according to a specific GIS data model".³⁵³ Transferring a property, altering an existing property or creating a new property costs about three per cent of the value of the property, which is considered fair and reasonable. Cadastral information is not used to support the decision-making process in Oman.

Survey respondents indicated that there are connections between different spatial data sets, such as the cadastre, utility services (electricity, water, internet) and land use, but the level of interoperability of such data and their use for decision making could not be determined.

Respondents identified the following areas of decision-making that make use of the cadastral information system: municipalities, utilities, telecommunication companies, water, electricity, building permits and approvals, land development, urban planning and land use changes. However, land information generally not available to private citizens.

353 Al Najashi, S. (2017). *The Development of a Prototype SDI Compliant 2D Cadastral Parcels Model to Produce a Cadastral Dataset for Oman*. FIG Working Week 2017.

LAND USE

This section covers the decisions related to the control and enforcement of land use and land use information. The Ministry of Housing and Spatial Planning is responsible for land use.

Respondents noted that land use guidance at national, regional and local level is provided by the ONSS and governorate development plans, recently prepared and ratified. The ONSS is a national framework to guide development policies, programmes and investments and provides guidance on residential, commercial and recreational areas.

The various elements of the ONSS include the overall framework, the institutional framework, settlement boundaries, employment areas, key resources areas, agricultural areas, special planning zones, conservation areas, utilities and transportation. Opinions on adequacy and enforcement of the land use plans at the national, regional and local levels, and for fast growing urban centers differed among respondents.

There are regulations governing rural and agricultural land use, but whether they are adequate or enforced was not shown by the study. There are nature and environmental protection land use regulations, but the level of adequacy or enforcement was also not shown. Clear and adequate rules exist for the management of state land by government, and for acquiring private land by the government for public development purposes.

There is no complete and accessible digital land information system showing land use. It is difficult to estimate what proportion of national land is in fact covered by the digital land use information system. This also applies to the land information system for natural resources. Oman's digital transformation program, still at a very early stage, did not target the establishment of a comprehensive digital land use information system.

Building permits' regulations exist and are enforced. There are very few informal settlements – either in terms of size or impact. Regulations concerning informal settlement are only applied regarding foreign workers or migrants if they do not follow the country's rules and regulations, or if a crime is committed. Generally, however, Oman is considered one of the safest countries in the Gulf area, where foreigners and migrants live and work peacefully.

Oman E-Government Services Portal includes all information related to the process of buying a property such as sale contracts, transfer of deed, deed of inheritance, loans, mortgages, sketches for real estate, security approvals and long-term lease for farming. The Portal indicates that lands in Oman are classified as residential, commercial, industrial and farming lands formally through documentation. Damaged or lost title of deed documents can be replaced with new ones. GCC residents are required to provide special security approvals for obtaining land ownership in Oman.

Detailed information about the following actions is available:

- Amend the planning requirements (height, the setbacks, or rate of construction)
- Apply for construction maps approval (general site)
- Cancel, reverse or compensate the impact on affected land
- Change the use of agricultural land
- Divide a land plot, extent a plot or integrate several plots
- Learn about the adoption of land division projects
- Register agreements for mortgage, exchange and assignment.

- Register for release of a seized property, title deed, sale contract or residential help
- Request land allocations (commercial, industrial, government, residential), property documentation (file documents, title replacements for damaged, lost titles) or house loan applications
- Subdivide a land plot and transfer the mortgage from one property to another

The Portal also includes information about targeted groups, requested documents, steps that should be followed, how to apply for services, estimated cost and expected time to finalize the service. Similar information is also available through the electronic website of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

The acquisition of private land for public development purposes is possible, but the government generally only uses it as a last resort. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning is quite reluctant to take over private lands for public use due to high cost of compensation and the need to avoid conflicts.

Regulations to control land subdivisions and to manage consolidation in urban or rural areas exist and their further development is planned under the ONSS project. Mechanisms to change land use by granting planning permissions and building permits also exist.

The mechanisms and regulations that ensure that construction is aligned with land use regulations exist and are often enforced. The property development process is considered easy for landowners and the public authorities. One respondent noted that it is more difficult for large projects, as they require thorough coordination.

Most respondents noted a lack of information about the mechanisms to ensure that development costs are fairly distributed between the public and the private actors, while two respondents reported that the private sector pays all development costs and pays a percentage of the cost of development in fees to public authorities.

Some stakeholders noted the challenges posed by low density urban sprawl and the high rate of unutilized or under-utilized plots of land, which increase land consumption and raised the costs of providing adequate services, public transport and infrastructure. According to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, 40 per cent of land in the capital city of Muscat is not developed and only 19 per cent of landowners in the city have developed their plots. In areas outside of Muscat, this rate is even lower (7 per cent).

LAND VALUE

Institutionalized methodologies to assess the value of land and buildings exist. Professional valuers also exist and are officially recognized and registered, but most respondents indicated that they are not adequately trained, and their services are not accessible to all. Most respondents confirmed that land and properties, both in rural and urban area, are not subject to taxation. However, municipal taxes apply to various services including property rents (3 per cent) and a stamp duty (3 per cent) is applicable to the transfer of land and property.

There are no land and property taxes in Oman, and thus municipalities do not enjoy any fiscal decentralization. However, Oman is moving towards empowering local administration and providing local units with fiscal resources to finance infrastructure projects in different governorates. These fiscal resources are government transfers from the central level and are not financed through land and property taxes.

A complete and accessible digital information system recording land value does not exist and most respondents confirmed that the impact of the taxation on the use of land and land markets is not considered by decision makers.

LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

A well-structured formal system to resolve conflicts and disputes related to land rights and parcel boundaries exists, but it is not very fast, and might not be affordable. In addition, people are not very familiar with the procedures to access the formal dispute resolution system. Respondents could not judge if people trust the formal dispute resolution system, or not.

The proportion of land-related cases in the formal courts, or non-formal disputes resolution mechanisms is not known. Two respondents claimed that local communities, and the governors can play an active role to solve land rights disputes. Further, according to respondents, women do not face different or additional challenges in accessing the formal dispute resolution system compared to men.

LEARNING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Overall, land governance as a discipline attracts limited attention and there is room for improvement to build sufficient capacities. The study revealed four main entities providing courses and capacity development opportunities in the field of land governance, land administration and related disciplines, namely two private universities, the Sultan Qaboos University and one civil society organization.

The two private universities are financed through the fees paid by students, while public one is supported through a mix of government funds, students' fees and international funding. The three universities offer undergraduate courses over a period of four years. The curriculum is adequate and covers almost all issues related to spatial planning and local development, but land governance is not addressed on its complementary and own modules or short courses could be developed.

State of Palestine³⁵⁴

FACT SHEET:³⁵⁵



Capital city: East Jerusalem (de facto administrative center: Ramallah)



Population: 5,289,152 million³⁵⁶ (West Bank 3.2 million; Gaza 2.1 million)



Population growth rate: 2.4 per cent³⁵⁷



Urban population: 78 per cent³⁵⁸



Urban population growth rate: 2.7 per cent³⁵⁹



Land area: 6,025 km²³⁶⁰ (West Bank 5,655 km²; Gaza 365 km²)



Number of districts: West Bank: 11; Gaza: 5



Number of local authorities: Over 400³⁶¹



Registered land: West Bank: 55 per cent (of total land area); Gaza: 98 per cent (of total land area)

354 This country profile summarizes the paper: UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2023). [Palestine Land Sector: Assessment Background Paper](#).

355 Ministry of Local Government (2016). [State of Palestine Cities Report 2016](#); Awad, A. (2021). [Brief on the Status of Palestinian People at the end of 2021](#). Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

356 World Bank (2024). [Population, total – West Bank and Gaza](#).

357 World Bank (2024). [Population growth \(annual %\) – West Bank and Gaza](#).

358 World Bank (2024). [Urban population \(% of total population\)](#).

359 World Bank (2024). [Urban population growth \(annual %\)](#).

360 World Bank (2024). [Surface area \(sq. km\)](#).

361 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2015).

OVERVIEW

Palestine, referring in this analysis to the West Bank and Gaza, covers just 6,020 square kilometers with a population of 4.8 million. Despite its size, Palestine has been and remains highly contested territory, profoundly affecting land tenure, use, valuation, development and

dispute resolution, resulting in an exceptionally complex land governance environment.

Palestinians have experienced extensive displacement from their land, a situation that persists due to ongoing political conflicts and wars. Israeli occupation and its geopolitical division of the West Bank into Areas A, B

FIGURE 74: HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF KEY LAND-RELATED EVENTS IN PALESTINE



Source: Authors.

TABLE 11: CIVIL AND SECURITY CONTROL OF LAND IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA

	AREA OF WEST BANK	CIVIL AUTHORITY	SECURITY
Area A	18%	Palestinian	Palestinian
Area B	22%	Palestinian	Joint Palestinian and Israeli
Area C	60%	Israeli	Israeli
Gaza		Palestinian (Hamas)	Palestinian (Hamas)

Source: Authors

and C significantly complicate the control and enforcement of land-use decisions. Despite these challenges, land-use plans exist at the national, regional and local levels. Most local planning occurs within Palestinian localities and cities, predominantly located in Areas A and B where Palestinians exercise full or partial administrative authority.

Historical Palestine, which includes present-day Israel as well as the West Bank and Gaza, was governed by the Ottoman Empire until the First World War, after which it came under British mandate. The arrival of large numbers of Jews before and after the Second World War led to the creation of Israel on 78 per cent of historical Palestinian territory and the displacement of large numbers of Palestinians, both within Palestine and to other Arab countries and beyond. The Arab–Israeli War of 1967 resulted in Israeli occupation of the remaining territory. Much of the West Bank remains under occupation by the Israeli military, and Israeli settlers have established settlements in many strategically desirable locations. Recurring periods of violence have led to property destruction and mass population displacement.

This occupation continues today. The Oslo Accords of 1993–95 facilitated the

establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1996, granting limited self-rule to Gaza in its entirety and portions of the West Bank. However, these accords also fragmented the West Bank into a patchwork of areas designated as A, B and C. Only Area A, comprising 22 per cent of the West Bank, is under full Palestinian control, yet it consists of an ‘archipelago’ of over a dozen distinct enclaves separated by corridors under Israeli control. Area B (18 per cent) operates under Palestinian civil authority with joint Israeli–Palestinian security arrangements. Area C (the remaining 60 per cent) remains under full Israeli control and contains numerous Israeli settlements, outposts, military bases, nature reserves, archaeological sites and bypass roads.

Many settlements are separated from adjacent Palestinian-controlled areas by a high concrete wall known as the Separation Barrier.³⁶² This fragmentation deprives Palestinians inhabiting these areas of access to their hinterlands and natural resources, significantly impacting land management and administration. Additionally, the Palestinian Authority exercises no control over water, oil or gas resources.

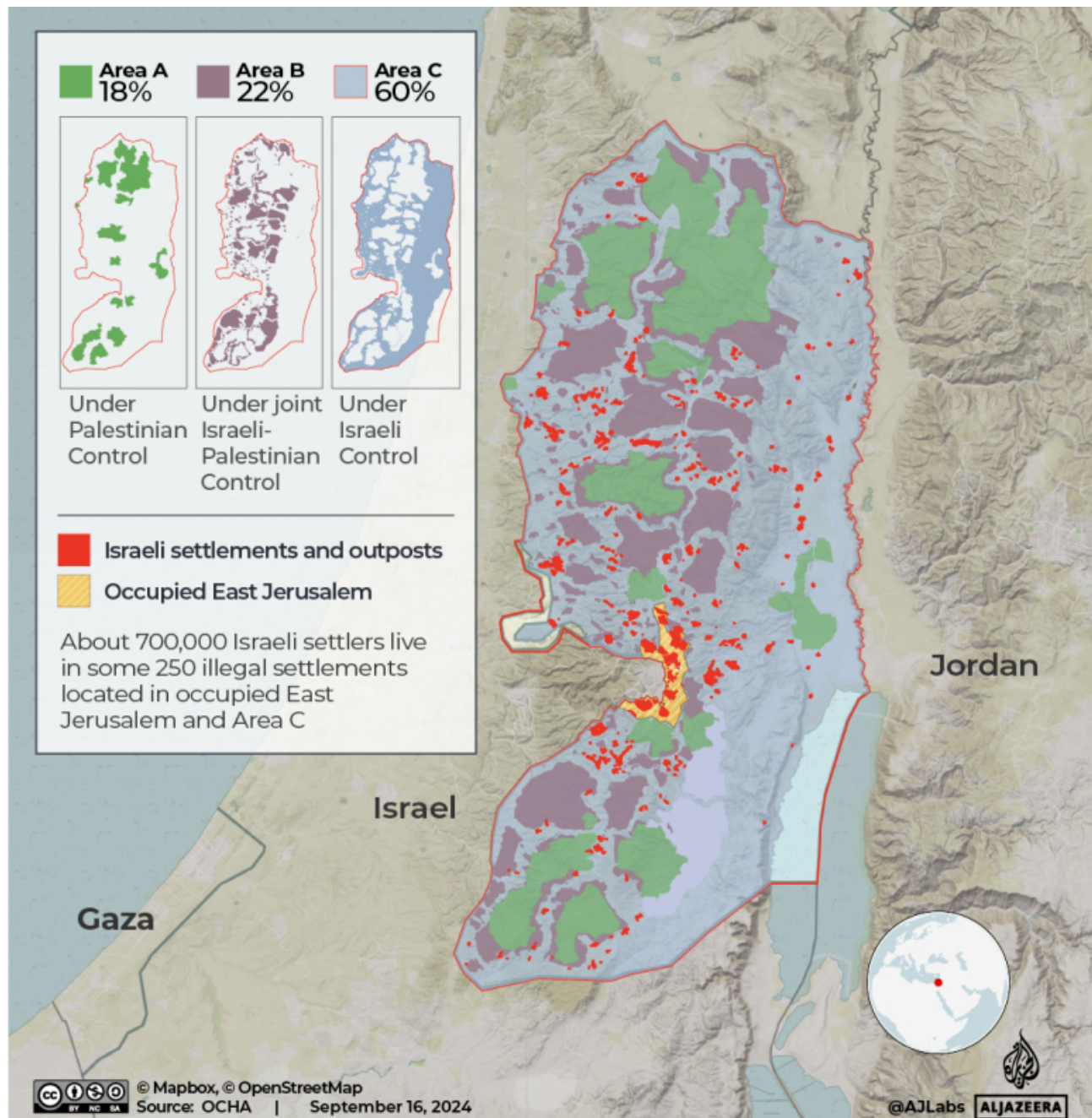
Gaza, meanwhile, is under full Palestinian control. Since 2007, it has been governed by Hamas, a radical group that rejects compromise

362 Applied Research Institute Jerusalem (2011). *Status of the Environment in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*.

with Israel and remains in disagreement with the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority governing Areas A and B of the West Bank. Gaza remains subject to a blockade by Israel and Egypt, severely hampering economic activity and reconstruction efforts. This also creates major challenges for land governance and the land administration system. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

(UNRWA) supervises refugee camps in Gaza, though it holds no formal governance authority regarding land administration. East Jerusalem, Palestine's capital, came under full Israeli rule (effectively an annexation) in 1967. The political and geographic division of the West Bank and Gaza has paralysed the Palestine Legislative Council (the national parliament) hindering the passage of legislation to regulate land rights.³⁶³

FIGURE 75: MAP SHOWING LAND CONTROL IN THE STATE OF PALESTINE



Source: OCHA, Mapbox, OpenStreetMap, AJLabs (2024). In Haddad, M. and Ali, M., (2024). [Ten maps to understand the occupied West Bank](#). Al Jazeera. 16 September 2024.

363 Arafat, J., Abed Al Aziz, M., Al Sharif, F. and Al Manama, Y. (2015). [A guide to housing, land and property law in the Gaza strip](#). Norwegian Refugee Council.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Throughout its history, Palestine has been governed by various authorities, resulting in a highly complex land legal system. The most important land legislation currently in force comprises over 25 laws and orders, including the Ottoman Land Code of 1858. Additionally, more than 70 military orders issued by Israeli occupation forces remain in effect.

At the end of Ottoman rule in 1917, the legal system was based primarily on Islamic Law principles but was also influenced by the Latin legal tradition of Europe. The British Mandate reformed the legal system by incorporating common law principles based on judicial precedents. In 1948, Jordan took control over the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and applied the Jordanian legal system – influenced by civil code law – to the territory. In Gaza, then controlled by Egypt, the common law system established during the British Mandate remained in effect. These different systems – common law and civil code – treat land ownership and rights fundamentally differently. Following the 1967 war, Israel imposed several Military Orders in the West Bank and Gaza. After annexing East Jerusalem in 1980, Israel imposed Israeli Domestic Law on the city.

In 1980, the Israeli government adopted a new approach to state lands, declaring uncultivated, unregistered land, including in the occupied Palestinian territories, as state land. All *mawat* and *miri* lands that had not been cultivated for 10 years became state lands subject to confiscation at any time. This judicial and administrative structure resulted in Israeli control of over 52 per cent of the West Bank by 1986,³⁶⁴ with 41 per cent under direct Israeli possession and the remaining 11 per cent subject to severe restrictions.

The Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995 created the Palestinian Authority and established the framework for Israeli-Palestinian agreements regulating its powers. In 1996, the Palestinian Authority took administrative control over West Bank Areas A and B, as well as Gaza.

Presidential Decree No. 10 of 2002 established the Palestine Land Authority, responsible for land registration through its Survey and Registration Departments. The surveying department examines maps and plans for land adjudication, partition, subdivision, first registration and other transactions. The land registration department registers all types of immovable property.

In 1967, only 30 per cent of land in the West Bank had been registered. The Land Authority continued to pursue land registration but made limited progress. This prompted the Palestinian Authority to establish the Palestinian Land and Water Settlement Commission in 2012 to register, record and resolve disputes, conflicts and issues related to ownership rights in land and water, protecting these rights from confiscation. In Gaza, the Legislative Council (known as the Reform and Change Bloc) has issued legislation regulating housing rights, ownership and land. These include the Palestinian Civil Law No. 4 of 2013 – which regulates property ownership and rental contracts for farming – and Law No. 5 of 2013 on the Lease and Rent of Real Estate. Because these laws were not enacted by the Palestinian Legislative Council, different land laws now apply in the West Bank and Gaza.

Other land-related initiatives in the Palestinian Legislative Council have stalled: a draft Land Law submitted to the Council in 2004 has not been passed,³⁶⁵ and a decision to establish a National Council of Lands has not been implemented.³⁶⁶

364 Benvenisti, M., Abu-Zayad, Z. and Rubenstein, D. (1986). *The West Bank Handbook: A Political Lexicon*, Westview Press.

365 Abu Daiya and Harb, J. (2007). Land management Sector in Palestine. Coalition for Integrity and Equality. *AMAN: Coalition for Equality and Integrity*.

366 Palestinian National Authority (2010). *Decree-Law (6) of 2010 regarding the Land Authority*. Al-Waqi 'a Palestinian

The roles and mandates of different institutions related to land administration and management frequently overlap and conflict, and monitoring of their work is weak. These institutions face financial constraints and shortages of qualified, specialized staff, relying heavily on grants and assistance from organizations such as the World Bank and UN-Habitat.

LAND SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS

The following are the main actors and stakeholders affecting the land system in Palestine.

Israel is the dominant actor, exercising direct control over Area C (60 per cent of the West Bank) through its government and military, while exerting significant influence over the functions of the Palestinian authorities in Gaza and Areas A and B.

Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority institutions governing the West Bank include the Land Authority, the Land and Water Settlement Commission, the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Finance. Other government institutions relevant to land include the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Works and Housing and the Ministry of Justice.

The Change and Reform Bloc is the Hamas-controlled parliamentary bloc within the Legislative Council that passes laws specific to Gaza.

International agencies such as UN-Habitat, GIZ, World Bank and UNDP provide financial and technical support to the Palestinian government and community organizations, playing a significant role in supporting the land administration sector. UNRWA administers 8 refugee camps in Gaza and 19 in the West Bank.³⁶⁷

Civil society organizations and research centres related to land management include the Land Research Center, Coalition for Integrity and Equality, Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem, Palestine Capital Market Authority, Association of Palestinian Local Authorities, Local Government Units, Municipal Development and Lending Fund and universities. These entities deliver services to government, international organizations and communities on issues such as capacity building, research and development projects. Most function closer to business enterprises than community organizations. Universities play an important role in conducting research and capacity-building projects for other stakeholders.

Private sector actors include landowners, survey offices, real estate valuation companies, contracting companies, individual valuers and property developers.

LAND MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS

LAND TENURE

Land tenure issues are managed by the Palestinian Land Authority, the Land and Water Settlement Commission, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Awqaf and Religion Affairs. Land tenure categories include:

- *Mamluk, mulk*: privately-owned
- *Amiri, miri*: state-owned
- *Waqf*: religious endowment
- *Matruk, metruke*: absentee or abandoned
- *Mawat, mewat*: barren or infertile land

magazine, No. 86.

367 UNRWA (2017). [Fields of operations](#).

FIGURE 76: LAND ADMINISTRATION TRENDS IN PALESTINE

This graphic provides an indicative overview of national-level trends based on the data presented in the country profile. The findings are illustrative rather than definitive and, in some cases, may be non-conclusive, as contextual and institutional variations may apply. The graphics below present the performance of the five core land administration functions - from weak to well-functioning - together with performance across four complementary indicators: the Registering Property Score, and the House price-to-income ratio. To ensure comparability, all indicators were proportionally adjusted.

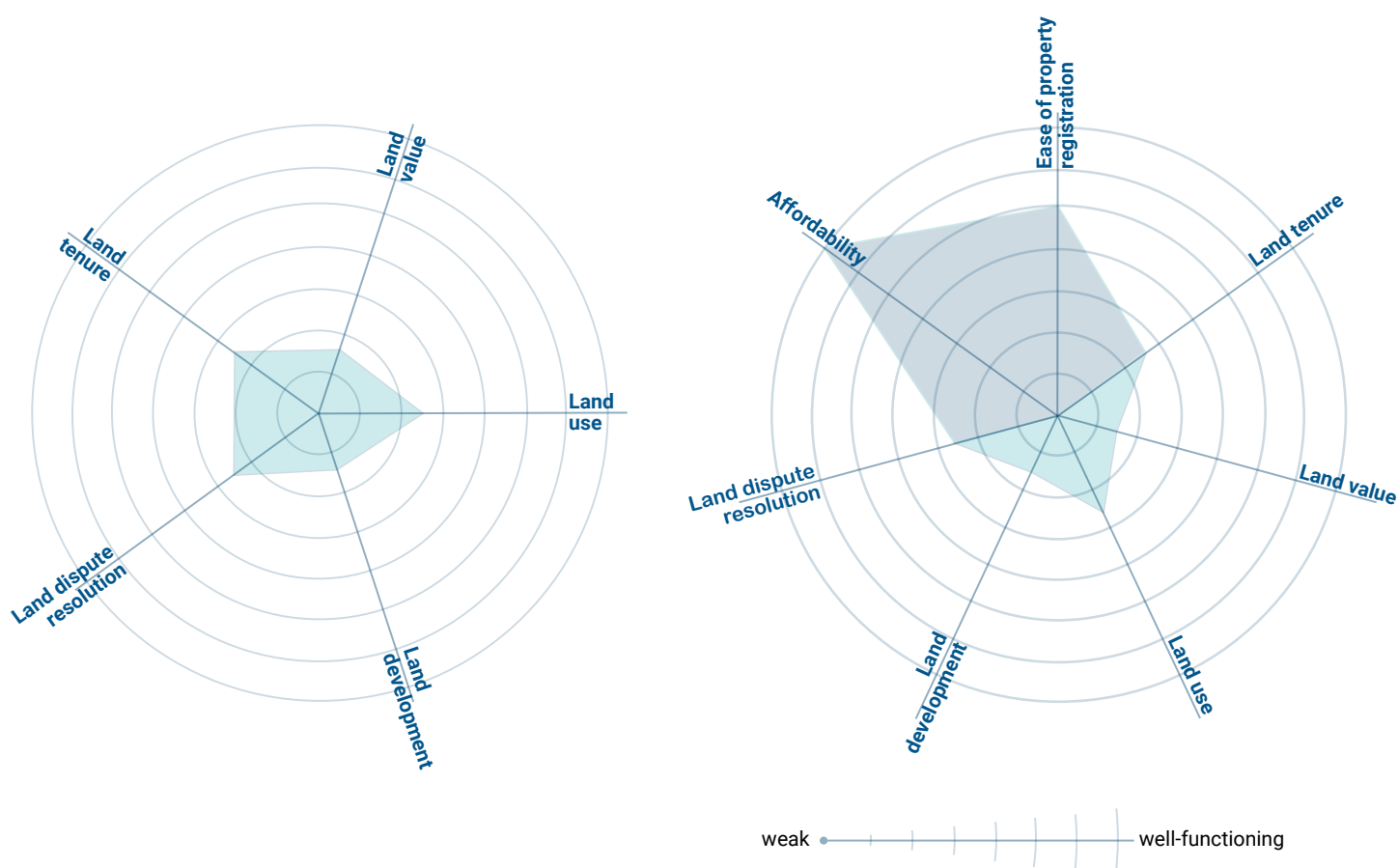


TABLE 12: OVERVIEW OF LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS IN PALESTINE

CRITERIA	LAND TENURE	LAND VALUE	LAND USE	LAND DEVELOPMENT	LAND DISPUTES RESOLUTION
Existence / coverage of the system	●	●	●	●	●
Effectiveness	●	●	●	●	●
Procedural duration	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	●
Affordability	●	●	N/A	●	●
Accessibility	●	N/A	●	●	●
Data availability	●	●	●	N/A	N/A
Mandates clarity	N/A	●	●	●	●

● Significant challenge
 ● Moderate challenge
 ● No/ limited challenge

Source: Authors, United Nations Statistics Division. (n.d.). [SDG indicators database](#); World Bank (2021). [Women, business and the law 2021](#); World Bank (n.d.). [Registering property](#); Transparency International. (2022). [Corruption perceptions index 2022: Middle East and North Africa](#).

Tenure security

Successive wars have led to the displacement of large numbers of people from their land. Displacements continue, especially in Area C and East Jerusalem, with the expansion of Israeli settlements on land that the Israeli administration has declared state land. Internal Palestinian conflicts, whether political or familial, have led to further displacement. Economic pressure also compels Palestinian residents to sell their land to Israeli settlers, altering the demographic composition of certain areas and fueling intercommunal tensions.

Limited information is available related to land tenure, especially concerning women's land tenure rights. However, the research indicates that obtaining loans to purchase land and property is not prohibitively difficult, though women face greater challenges than men.

Additionally, many people lack awareness of the procedures required to secure their land rights.

Land registration

The cadastral system does not cover all land in Palestine. In the West Bank, approximately 30 per cent land was registered before 1967, with another 25 per cent registered between 2006 and 2020. The Palestinian Land and Water Settlement Commission aimed to complete the "settlement" (registration) of the remaining 3,740 sq km by the end of 2023.³⁶⁸ By the end of 2020, it had successfully registered more than 55 per cent of the West Bank, with 45 per cent remaining unregistered.³⁶⁹ One-third (33 per cent) of registered land is registered in women's names.³⁷⁰ In Gaza, 98 per cent of land is registered.

The process of registering new lands and real estate and amending records is straightforward when necessary documents are available. However, costs are relatively high. Land registration fees average approximately USD 300, plus 2–3 per cent of the land value in the West Bank and 1–2 per cent in Gaza.

The land administration system contains cadastral maps, basin and border maps and land use and property maps in some, but not all, areas. These maps serve as the basis for decision-making regarding development projects and spatial planning. However, the digital land information system is neither comprehensive nor effective for all land tenure types.

LAND USE

Land use issues fall under the Ministry of Local Government's jurisdiction. Control and enforcement of land-use decisions are extremely difficult due to Israeli occupation, the separation of the West Bank and Gaza and the fragmentation of the West Bank into different administrative zones under varying forms of control.

Despite these challenges, a national spatial plan was prepared in 2015 linking spatial dimensions with development issues.³⁷¹ In the West Bank, planning is hampered because most land suitable for development is located in Area C under Israeli military control. At the local level, land use master plans exist and are operational, as most local planning concerns land in Areas A and B under full or partial Palestinian control. A digital land use information system exists but it is incomplete and not fully accessible.

Building permit regulations are adequate, though application and monitoring are stronger in cities

368 Palestinian Land and Water Settlement Commission (2018). Manual of standard procedures for settlement work; UN-Habitat (2020). Implementation of land settlement works in a participatory manner within the framework of the project to support the right to plan and lands in Area C, West Bank, Palestine.

369 Palestinian Land and Water Settlement Commission (2019). Annual Report 2019.

370 Palestinian Land and Water Settlement Commission (2020). Land Issues: Land Settlement in the West Bank.

371 State of Palestine (2015). *National Spatial Plan – Palestine 2025, Palestine 2050: Envisioning Palestine*. UNDP and UN Habitat.

than in rural areas. Environmental protection regulations are also adequate. Procedures regulating government acquisition of private land rights, however, are not clear or suitable.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

Land development issues fall under the responsibility the Ministry of Public Works and Housing and the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Palestinian government cannot acquire sufficient private land for public development purposes because it lacks the financial resources to compensate landowners. The geopolitical situation often further constrains the government's ability to acquire land. If the government acquires private land but fails to develop it within seven years, the land reverts to the original owner. Mechanisms exist for government land acquisition for public use, but they are not clear to the public.

Regulations to control the subdivision or consolidation of land are more effective in urban than in rural areas because urban areas fall within zones controlled by the Palestinian Authorities (A and B). Mechanisms and regulations ensuring construction aligns with land use regulations are adequate but are neither cost-effective nor properly implemented.

The private sector plays a greater role in property development than the government and manages the property development process more effectively. Mechanisms for changing land use through planning permissions and building permits, and for distributing development costs, are neither cost-effective nor properly implemented.

LAND VALUE

Land valuation issues are the responsibility of the Palestinian Land Authority, the Land and Water Settlement Commission and the Ministry of Finance.

A valuation system for land and properties exists but is neither uniform nor comprehensive across all geographic areas and land tenure types. It focuses on cities rather than rural areas and land outside urban centers. The system lacks clear and specific standards, instead relying on individual valuers' legal qualifications and experience. Uniform, comprehensive standards are needed for all areas, along with a digital land valuation system and database.

A system for collecting taxes on land and real estate exists, focusing on urban rather than rural areas. Municipalities lack the mandate to collect taxes directly; the central government collects property taxes and redistributes them to municipalities. This process is conducted in an opaque and inequitable manner, creating problems for municipalities in managing and developing their jurisdictions. Land and property taxation should be made more transparent and decentralized to increase (local) government accountability to residents. No effective, comprehensive or unified digital system exists for land and real estate valuation and tax collection, weakening government revenue collection.

Clear differences exist between rural and urban areas regarding the cost of purchasing land and property.

LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The Ministry of Justice is responsible for the resolution of land disputes.

A formal dispute resolution system exists, but procedures are extremely lengthy, sometimes taking many years. The system suffers from a shortage of judges and weak, overlapping laws. These deficiencies drive people to resort to informal systems such as tribal courts and family mediation.

Women do not face discrimination in the formal dispute resolution system, but discrimination occurs in informal systems.

LEARNING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

No academic programme specializes in land management. Several programmes relate to land planning and development, including geography, urban and regional planning, law and public administration. Courses cover geospatial studies, land use, geographical information systems, geomatics, surveying, mapping, spatial planning/land use planning, urban planning, real estate, valuation, taxation, legal issues and justice. Academic programmes in civil engineering, geomatics, surveying and geography last 4–5 years. Professional and orientation courses range from one to seven days.

Academic and scientific specializations related to the land sector are absent from Palestinian universities.

Missing topics include land laws and justice; land economics and development; real estate, valuation, and taxation development; social development and land management; popular advocacy and land management; environmental development and land management; global sustainability and land governance; rural land development; mapping, surveying and geomatics for land management; smart land-

use planning; geo-information technology and land management.

Current learning opportunities are weak in legal, economic (land evaluation), social, rural studies and comprehensive land administration aspects (land value and dispute resolution).

Palestinian universities lack specialized training centres in land management, though some training centres offer specialized courses in geographic information systems, surveying and positioning systems. Most of these are technical-vocational courses.

No research centres specialize in land management. Research centres interested in the sector include the Land Research Center and the Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem. Research is typically conducted by independent researchers or through master's theses in geography, engineering, planning, law and public administration. Much of this research deals with the impact of political and geopolitical factors on land use planning and development.

The government, universities and international and community institutions collaborate on land-related issues, but no systematic coordination framework exists.

State of Qatar³⁷²



FACT SHEET:



Capital city: Doha (population: 673,300³⁷³)



Population: 2,656,032³⁷⁴ (88 per cent foreigners³⁷⁵)



Population growth rate: 7.3 per cent³⁷⁶



Urban population: 99 per cent³⁷⁷



Urban population growth rate: 7.4 per cent³⁷⁸



Land area: 11,490 km²³⁷⁹



Administration levels: National, Municipalities (8), Districts, Blocks

372 This country profile summarizes the paper: UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2024). [Qatar Land Sector: A Snapshot](#).

373 World Population Review (2025). [Doha](#).

374 World Bank (2023). [Population, total – Qatar](#).

375 De Bel-Air, F. (2023). [Qataris Make Up Only a Quarter of All Births](#). GLMM Factsheet. Gulf Labour Markets, Migration, and Population Programme of the Gulf Research Centre.

376 World Bank (2024). [Population growth \(annual %\) – Qatar](#).

377 World Bank (2023). [Urban population, % of total population – Qatar](#).

378 World Bank (2024). [Urban population growth \(annual %\)](#).

379 World Bank (2024). [Surface area \(sq. km\)](#).

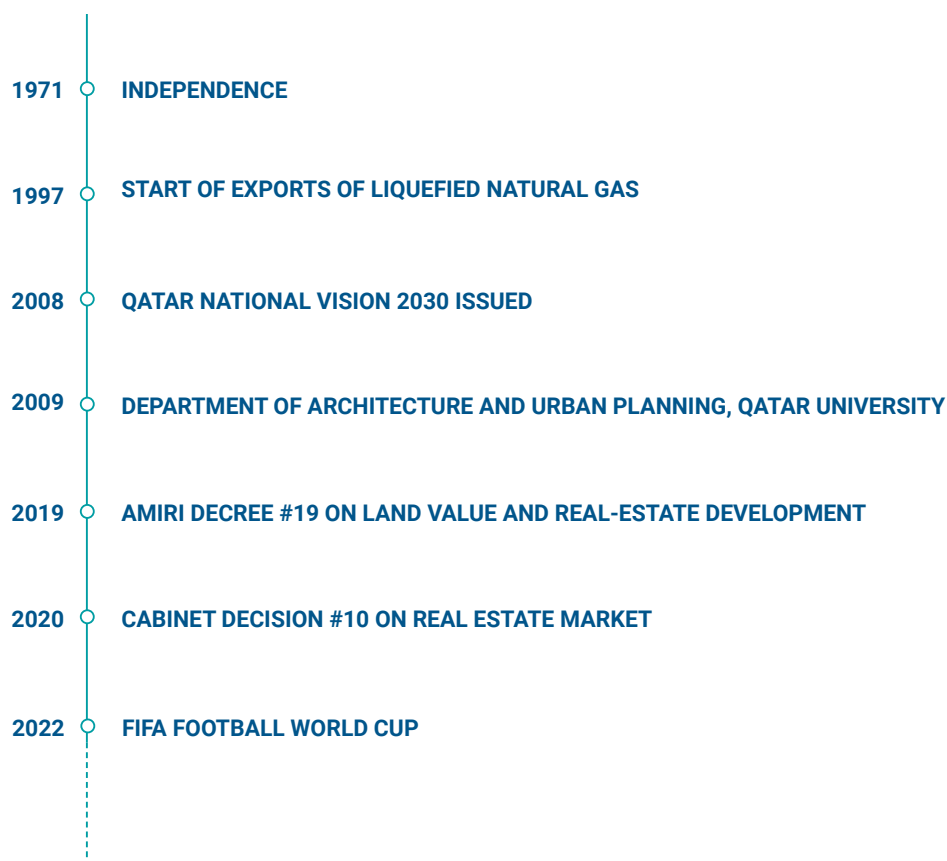
OVERVIEW

The Gulf states, including Qatar, face a unique set of challenges driven primarily by the unprecedented pace of urbanization, a result of the oil revenue boom during the second half of the 20th century. Today, Qatar is one of the world's wealthiest countries, possessing extensive oil and natural gas reserves that have driven its

remarkable growth over the past few decades. Over the last ten years in particular, Qatar has experienced a period of exceptional growth and development, which is expected to continue over the next 8 years as a result of an infrastructure programme to support the hosting of the 2022 football World Cup. As a result of this rapid change, the country now faces many challenges to its urban, rural and natural environments.³⁸⁰

380 Amiri Decree No. 16.

FIGURE 77: HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF KEY LAND-RELATED EVENTS IN QATAR



Source: Authors.

In the past decade, the national population has triples. The population in 2023 was 2.6 million,³⁸¹ with 2 million men and 800,000 women.³⁸² An estimated 88 per cent are foreigners, with large numbers of men of working age.³⁸³

Qatar is situated on the Qatari Peninsula, a portion of the Arabian Peninsula, measuring about 160 km north-south and 55 to 80 km east-west. The only land border – with Saudi Arabia – lies on Qatar’s southern end. Urban areas in the Doha region have grown at a rate of 5.45 per cent per year since 1987, increasing by 315 sq km, with the peak growth period occurring between 1998 and 2003.³⁸⁴

Rapid changes in land use associated with economic development, climate change, urbanization, growth in the demand for raw materials and the need to feed a rapidly growing population are competing for use and hence good governance of land.

The legal system is reliable, quick and effective. Institutional reforms required relate primarily to improving the coordination and communication between institutions responsible for planning and those that handle execution and implementation. Generous financial resources are available, but the human resources need to be enriched and diversified.

381 World Bank (2023). [Population, total – Qatar](#).

382 Qatar Statistics Authority (2021).

383 De Bel-Air, F. (2023). [Qataris Make Up Only a Quarter of All Births](#). GLMM Factsheet. Gulf Labour Markets, Migration, and Population Programme of the Gulf Research Centre.

384 Shandas, V., Makido, Y., & Ferwati, S. (2017). [Rapid urban growth and land use patterns in Doha, Qatar: Opportunities for sustainability](#). European Journal of Sustainable Development Research.

In particular, more local expertise and professionals are needed who can handle land-related tasks. Qatar faces a shortage of training and capacity building, and schools of architecture and planning should enhance their curriculum. Some courses exist at Qatar University and Hamad bin Khalifa University, but these are not able to satisfy needs.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Ministry of Municipality and Environment is responsible for land issues. The country's major planning guidelines are the Qatar National Vision 2030, the Second National Development Strategy 2018–2022 and the Qatar National Master Plan.

The Qatar National Vision 2030 is a working manual supported by guidance from the State's leadership. Launched in October 2008 and ratified under Emiri Decision No. 44, the Vision 2030 aims at transforming Qatar into an advanced country capable of sustaining its own development and ensuring high living standards for its people by developing a diversified economy, reducing dependence on hydrocarbons, moving towards a knowledge-based economy and a growing private sector.

The Vision 2030 provides a framework for national development strategies, aiming to strike a balance among economic growth, social and human development and environmental protection.³⁸⁵ It rests on four pillars:

- Human development: support and enable all Qataris to sustain a prosperous society.
- Social development: establish a just and caring society based on high moral standards, which is able to play a significant role in the global partnership for development.

- Economic development: foster a competitive and diversified economy capable of meeting the needs of and securing a high standard of living for all its people, now and in the future.
- Environmental development: manage the environment to ensure harmony between economic growth, social development and environmental protection.

The Vision 2030 was followed by cycles of strategic studies. The second National Development Strategy 2018–2022 continues a series of national strategies that aim to achieve the goals of the Vision 2030.

Each governmental authority or institution was invited to create its own vision to complement the Vision 2030. The Ministry of Municipality and Environment developed a national strategy for urban development titles, known as the Qatar National Development Framework. In view of the rapid pace of urbanization, the land management and administration were in dire need of such a governing mechanism. While a building law was issued to control the construction process, on a state and municipal level, the gap was clear. Hence, the first step to control land generated from the planning regulations compiled during the preparation of the municipal spatial development plans including master plans, planning zones, land uses and regulations.

The Qatar National Master Plan (QNMP) resulted in a clear set of plans for each of the Qatar's eight municipalities. Each set includes a vision, development strategy, land use plan, zoning and planning regulations for the municipality. The planning regulation of each municipality was attested by the Cabinet, and an Amiri decree legally activated it.

Qatar Planning Law is a recent piece of legislation that formalizes the development planning system in Qatar. Administered by

³⁸⁵ [Qatar National Vision 2030](#).

the Ministry of Municipality and Environment, it aims to institute a clear, efficient and transparent planning system that benefits the public and private sectors and encourages responsible and sustainable development. It establishes a legal basis for the development planning system and gives legal status to a range of planning processes, including plan making, planning assessment, decision making and the involvement of various stakeholders. It consolidates all these functions into a holistic and rational planning system.

LAND SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS

The Ministry of Municipality is principally responsible for land management and planning. Urban planning affairs fall under are the responsibility and the mandate of Assistant Undersecretary for Urban Planning Affairs.

The main technical departments are the following:

- Urban Planning Department
- Land Acquisition Department
- Lands and Survey Department
- Infrastructure Planning Department
- State Properties Department

The responsibilities and specialization of each department are designed to allow each department to complement the others. This allows them to achieve maximum oversight over land as a medium for development in a regulated, legitimate and sustainable manner.

The Urban Planning Department is tasked with the following competencies and responsibilities:

- Development of urban development strategy
- Preparation of planning studies and master plans

- Preparation of urban, structural and general plans related to cities, urban and rural communities and villages
- Preparation of detailed studies and projects for urban areas, neighbourhoods and communities
- Preparation of planning criteria and regulations for all planning patterns and land uses, in coordination with the concerned authorities
- Zoning to be acquired for the public interest, in line with the urban plans prepared by the Department of Land Acquisition
- Establishment of an integrated database to collect, store and update planning data and information
- Preparation of design rules, regulations and specifications for urban development projects
- Review of the major projects' applications and follow-up implementation procedures
- Participation in the preparation of building regulations and by-laws, and proposing revisions and modernisations of such regulations
- Monitoring and conducting field surveys on the urban structure of towns and urban communities
- Sorting, merging and subdivision of lands and defining sites required for services and public and utilities, in coordination with the concerned authorities

The Land Acquisition Department is tasked with the following competencies and responsibilities:

- Review of permanent or temporary land acquisition applications for the public

interest received by the Ministry, and proposing the necessary draft legislative tools, in coordination with the concerned authorities

- Implementation of permanent or temporary land acquisition applications for the public interest received by the Ministry, in coordination with the concerned authorities
- Valuation of acquired properties and estimating due compensation value
- Follow-up procedures for transferring ownership of acquired properties to the state

The Department of Lands and Survey is tasked with the following competencies and responsibilities:

- Provision of residential plots to eligible citizens, as per applicable rules and regulations
- Keeping of registers for applications for housing, special offerings and Emiri grants
- Payment of monetary allowance for acquisition of private lands to be integrated into the housing system
- Coordination with the concerned authorities for stipulation of conditions for acquiring private lands and for lifting the on-hold condition on government lands
- Establishment of a database comprising ownership particulars, land survey, update and management
- Provision of the necessary data and information to the concerned authorities of the country, conducting a survey of lands and properties in all parts of the state, and issuance of instructions

- Inclusion of property plans on the digital map of Qatar

- Inventory, survey and registration of licensed lands occupied by beneficiaries and the concerned authorities

- The Infrastructure Planning Department is tasked with the following competencies and responsibilities:

- Preparation of development plans for infrastructure, which includes water, electricity, storm water and sewage drainage, in direct coordination with the providers of these services

- Monitoring procedures related to requests for road corridors planning, infrastructure networks and planning sites

- Defining locations of service corridors and public utilities

- Review and follow up on applications for implementation of the approved plans in urban and rural areas, in coordination with the concerned authorities

- Preparation of plans, policies and development programmes for infrastructure, in coordination with the concerned authorities

- Development of strategies for establishing corridors for all infrastructure facilities of the country and its components at the national level

- Contributing to development of standards for the management, operation and maintenance of infrastructure services networks

- Proposing policies for development of infrastructure facilities at all levels of the country, in coordination with the concerned authorities

The State Properties Department is tasked with the following competencies and responsibilities:

- Maintenance of lands and state properties and the registration of all land and properties acquired for the public interest in the state properties registry
- Maintenance and regulation of registries of public and private state properties
- Ensuring provision of lands required for ministries, government agencies, authorities and public institutions, and recommending purchase of lands required for these authorities and housing projects
- Preparation of draft sales and leases of lands and properties and following up on implementation
- Safeguarding public and private state properties from encroachment and removal of the same in the event of its occurrence, in coordination with the concerned authorities
- Survey and inventory of all private state properties, and registration and record-keeping in the specified register
- Issuance of title deeds for non-registered government lands, as per the provisions of the real estate registration law and its executive by-laws
- Management of private state properties, excluding those officially granted to a specific authority
- Taking actions on non-agricultural lands, whether vacant, built or occupied with permanent or temporary structures of its occupants or others, in accordance with applicable laws.

LAND MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS

LAND TENURE

Many of the stakeholders interviewed noted the spatial segregation and fragmented development that resulted in part from housing policy. While most migrant workers rely on employer-provided or rented housing, Qatari citizens are entitled to land allocations and an interest-free loan to finance the construction of a home. Furthermore, land-use regulations limit the development of rental properties in neighbourhoods selected for Qatari low-density housing. This led, as some researchers argue, to separate geographies and housing types, with Qataris often enjoying low-density villas outside congested urban areas while many workers reside in cramped dormitories.³⁸⁶

LAND USE

After decades of ambiguity regarding land uses in Qatar, the efforts of the Urban Planning Authority, followed by the Ministry of Municipality and Environment, resulted in a major shift. This shift is the main product of the QNMP flagship project. The outcomes of the Master Plan are inclusive and holistic. A prime outcome is a land-use plan for each municipality in Qatar, where each lot is related to a planning zone and designated for a specific use. Furthermore, each lot has an identification number which can be entered into the Ministry website, meaning that investors, landowners, developers and consultants can obtain all necessary technical details about a specific lot, including land use and all planning and building regulations associated with it.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

A variety of different patterns of land development can be traced in Qatar. Such patterns range

386 Nagy, S. (2006). *Making room for migrants, making sense of difference: spatial and ideological expressions of social diversity in urban Qatar*. *Urban Studies* 43(1), pp. 119–137.

FIGURE 78: LAND ADMINISTRATION TRENDS IN QATAR

This graphic provides an indicative overview of national-level trends based on the data presented in the country profile. The findings are illustrative rather than definitive and, in some cases, may be non-conclusive, as contextual and institutional variations may apply. The graphics below present the performance of the five core land administration functions - from weak to well-functioning - together with performance across four complementary indicators: SDG 5.a.2, SDG 11.1.1, the Assets Indicator, the Registering Property Score, and the Corruption Perceptions Index. To ensure comparability, all indicators were proportionally adjusted.

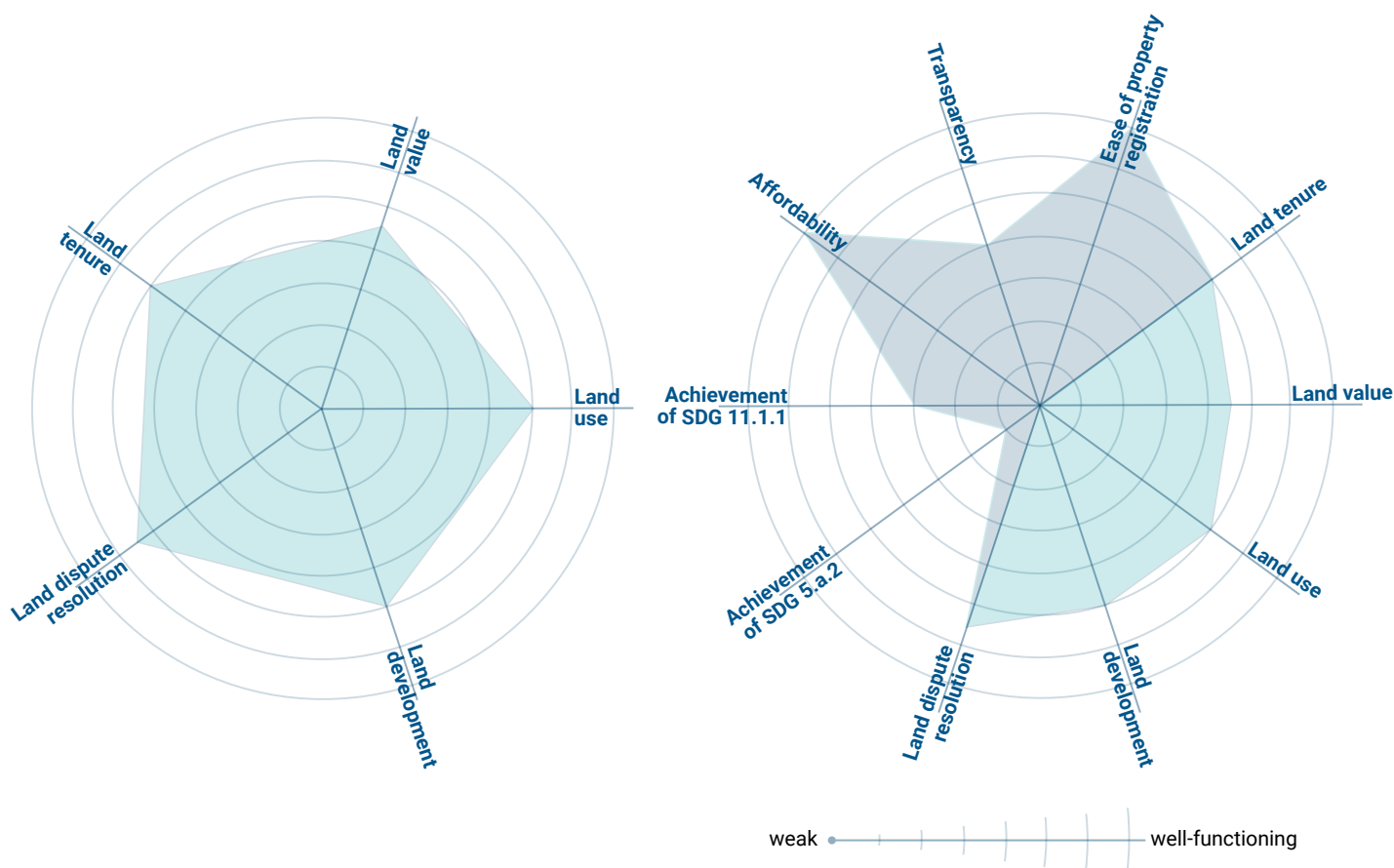


TABLE 13: OVERVIEW OF LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS IN QATAR

CRITERIA	LAND TENURE	LAND VALUE	LAND USE	LAND DEVELOPMENT	LAND DISPUTES RESOLUTION
Existence / coverage of the system	●	●	●	●	●
Effectiveness	●	●	●	●	●
Procedural duration	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	●
Affordability	●	●	N/A	●	●
Accessibility	●	N/A	●	●	●
Data availability	●	●	●	N/A	N/A
Mandates clarity	N/A	●	●	●	●

● Significant challenge
 ● Moderate challenge
 ● No/ limited challenge

Source: Authors, United Nations Statistics Division. (n.d.). [SDG indicators database](#); World Bank (2021). [Women, business and the law 2021](#); World Bank (n.d.). [Registering property](#); Transparency International. (2022). [Corruption perceptions index 2022: Middle East and North Africa](#).

from individuals developing privately owned properties to mega projects affecting the whole urbanity of the city.

LAND VALUE

Land value in Qatar is one of the highest in GCC countries and the entire Middle East. To coordinate the relationship between land value and real estate development, Emiri Decree No. 19 of 2019 was issued. The Cabinet of Ministers then established a committee for the real estate development strategy (Decision No. 10 of 2020). The objective is to create a strategy to promote and activate the real estate market. An essential part of the committee mandate is to conduct the needed analysis to assess the real estate promotion plan in light of the Cabinet of Ministers Decision No. 28 of 2020, which determines zones where non-Qataris can purchase and own real estate.

Additionally, the integrated urban mobility strategy, adopted in Qatar as a conclusion of the QNMP and the establishment of Qatar Rail (Q-Rail), resulted in an increase in land value for areas around metro stations, particularly within the city centre. More significantly, the move towards transit-oriented development in Qatar resulted in several opportunities to increase land value. As echoed in the stakeholder interviews, these include development adjacent to or integrated with the metro, mixed-use development, high-density areas, and optimizing the number of regular metro users.

LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The mechanism to deal with disputes over land was developed from an informal process conducted by tribal leaders in what is known as Majlis – a communal space where a tribal meeting is assembled to discuss and achieve an agreement on different matters. After Qatar's independence, a well-structured legal system was established, and several governing laws were issued to fully control land disputes.

LEARNING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Qatar has a well-established system of higher education that continues to grow. Qatar University is the flagship public research university. There are 27 other private and public colleges and universities, including branches of world-renowned higher education institutions, supported by the Qatar Foundation.

Three institutions currently provide learning offers in the domain of urban planning, urban and land governance and regulations and urban legislation: Qatar University (two programmes), Hamad Bin Khalifa University (one programme) and the Training Department at the Ministry of Municipality and Environment. In addition, the Society of Qatari Engineers, via its Architecture and Planning Unit provides some courses; however, they are not related to urban planning and urban and land governance.

The College of Arts and Science at Qatar University initially offered a programme titled "Urban Planning", provided through the geography section of the department of humanities. The programme was offered to both female and male students in separate facilities. Its graduates provide most of the local technical personnel working at the Urban Planning Department in the Ministry of Municipality and Environment and in the technical departments of the different municipalities. In 2009, however, the geography-based programme was closed due to Qatar University's decision to open a Department of Architecture and Urban Planning at the College of Engineering, taking the place of the initial programme. The Department was inaugurated in 2009 but was made available only to female students. More than ten years later, the department is still accepting only female students. This has resulted in a substantial gap in the number of needed graduates in the field of urban planning in a country witnessing one of the fastest growing urban development and urban sprawl in the world.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia³⁸⁷



FACT SHEET:



Capital city: Riyadh (population: 6,924,566³⁸⁸)



Population: 33,702,731³⁸⁹ (32.3 per cent foreigners)³⁹⁰



Population growth rate: 4.6 per cent³⁹¹



Urban population: 85 per cent³⁹²



Urban population growth rate: 4.9 per cent³⁹³



Land area: Approximately 2,149,690 km²³⁹⁴



Urban area: 85 per cent³⁹⁵



Administration levels: National, Regions (13), Amanat (17), Municipalities (285)

387 This country profile summarizes the paper: UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2024).

[Saudi Arabia Land Sector Assessment: Background Paper.](#)

388 City Population (2022). [Saudi Arabia: Riyadh Region.](#)

389 World Bank (2023). [Population total – Saudi Arabia.](#)

390 World Bank (2015). [International migrant stock \(% of population\) – Saudi Arabia.](#)

391 World Bank (2024). [Population growth \(annual %\) – Saudi Arabia.](#)

392 World Bank (2024). [Urban population \(% of total population\).](#)

393 World Bank (2024). [Urban population growth \(annual %\).](#)

394 World Bank (2024). [Surface area \(sq. km\).](#)

395 World Bank (2023). [Urban population \(% of total population\) – Saudi Arabia.](#)

OVERVIEW

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Saudi Arabia) spans the vast majority of the Arabian Peninsula. It is the largest country in the Middle East and the second-largest country in the Arab world, consisting of arid desert, lowland, steppe and mountains. The capital and largest city is Riyadh,

with Mecca and Medina serving as important cultural and religious centers.

Saudi Arabia is the world's second-largest oil producer (after the United States of America) and the world's largest oil exporter, controlling the world's second-largest oil reserves and the sixth-largest gas reserves.³⁹⁶ The Kingdom

396 United States Energy Information Administration (2017). [Saudi Arabia 2018 primary energy data.](#)

FIGURE 79: HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF KEY LAND-RELATED EVENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA



Source: Authors.

is categorized as a World Bank high-income economy with a very high Human Development Index.³⁹⁷ It is the only Arab country to be part of the G20 major economies.³⁹⁸

The main actor in land development in Saudi Arabia is the government. However, within the last two decades, Saudi Arabia has experienced a surge in private investment.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Legal framework

As an Arab Islamic country, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia bases its laws and constitution on Sharia law. Regulations and laws are issued through

royal decrees and must be in compliance with, and are subordinate to, Sharia principles.

Three early statutes form the basis of the spatial planning process in the country, namely the Roads and Building Statute in 1941, the Municipalities and Villages Law in 1976 and the Law of Provinces in 1992. The current spatial planning legislation is associated with multi-level spatial planning. Urban planning is governed by the National Spatial Development Strategy approved by Council of Ministers (Resolution No. 151 in 2001) and by the subsequent preparation of regional, structural, directive and local development plans. These constitute an integral part of spatial planning legislation.

Resolution No. 157 of 2007 is another important Council of Ministers resolution with a direct impact

TABLE 14: TYPES OF LEGISLATION IN THE SAUDI ARABIA

ROYAL ORDER	An official document bearing the King's signature, expressing his will without consultation or refer to the Council of Ministers or the Shura Council or any other entity.
ROYAL DECREE	An official document bearing the King's signature that has been subject to consultation and endorsement by the Shura Council and the Council of Ministers, and then signed by the King as approval.
SUPREME ORDER	An official document issued by the royal court and hold the signature of the King (Prime Minister) or Crown Prince (Deputy Prime Minister), expressing his will or his representative's will.
COUNCIL OF MINISTRIES RESOLUTION	An official document which reflects the will of the members of the Council of Ministers written in a specific form. Most of the regulations are issued pursuant to a resolution Council of Ministers.
MINISTERIAL RESOLUTION	A resolution issued by a Minister, such as issuing of regulations or circulars.

Source: Authors, based on Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs (2018). Updating the national spatial strategy and drafting the new planning act of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Review of current planning regulations and standards: National Spatial Strategy. No. 11; National Spatial Strategy Discussion Paper and Presentation for Public Consultation

397 UNDP (2014). *Sustaining human progress: Reducing vulnerabilities and building resilience*. United Nations Development Programme.

398 Wynbrandt, J. (2010). *A brief history of Saudi Arabia*. Infobase Publishing.

on spatial planning activities. It sets the rules for Urban Growth Boundaries called “Nitaq Omrani”. It rationalizes the growth of cities in Saudi Arabia by delineating the appropriate future boundaries for localizing urban activities, accommodate of urban development and infrastructure. Nitaq Omrani follows the directions of the national spatial development strategy.

Resolution No. 320 of 2012 calls for the establishment of standing committees in all regional municipalities, or Amanats, to consider all matters regarding the coordination and monitoring of projects and to manage and resolve emerging issues and conflict. As part of the decentralization of power and responsibility of mayors and heads of municipalities, in 2005, the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs issued an extensive library of planning guidelines and design standards that have a focus on urban planning and urban development control responsibilities. These are Urban Design Standards, Community Centres and Neighbourhood Manual, Street Fixture Manual, Regional Plans Preparation and Updating Manual, Architectural Heritage Manual, Public Facility Planning Standards and other such manuals. Some of these are being updated to keep pace with the countrywide urban transition. The main legislations concerning spatial planning and land management are:

- Basic Law of Governance, issued by Royal Order No. A/90 dated 1/3/1992, provides for the functions of the sovereign authorities of the state and sets out the legal tools for issuing laws and imposing taxes.
- The Law of Regions, issued by Royal Decree No. A/92 dated 2/9/1977, provides for the division of the Kingdom into regions under the supervision of rulers and governors. It also specifies their respective roles in regional and service development.
- The Municipal and Rural Areas Law, issued by Royal Decree No. M/5 dated 2/9/1977 as the System of Governance Resource

Constraints law, addresses the functions of municipalities and entrusts the latter with all activities relating to restoration, enhancement and safeguarding of health, security and safety.

- The Roads and Buildings Law, issued in 1941, regulates planning and sets out construction formalities and requirements, including zoning, licensing health and safety measures.
- The Municipal Property Law, issued by Royal Decree No. M/64 dated 20/12/1972, governs the preservation and use of public and private assets owned by municipalities and Amanats.
- The Law Governing the Distribution of Barren Lands, issued by Royal Decree No. M/26 dated 28/9/1968, provides conditions for lands to qualify as barren and distribution to eligible individuals and companies for operation and potential ownership.
- The Public Service Protection Law, issued by Royal Decree No. M/62 dated 5/9/1985, requires that plans and instructions be obtained from the competent authority. Before undertaking work that affects public service infrastructure, approval must be obtained and measures must be taken to protect infrastructure and maintain service continuity.
- The Implementing Regulations Setting out the Rules for Urban Until the Year 2029, issued by Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs resolution No. 66000 dated 14/10/2014, sets out the phases for urban development and the corresponding implementation measures.
- The General Environment Law, issued by Royal Decree No. M/34 dated 15/10/2001, aims to preserve, protect and develop the environment and safeguard it from pollution. It provides for the inclusion of environmental

planning as an integral part of overall development planning in all industrial, agricultural, urban and other areas.

- The Law Governing the Ownership and Allotment of Real Property Units, issued by Royal Decree No. M/5 dated 24/4/2002, provides the requirements and procedures for the allotment of real property units.
- The Law Governing the Registration of Real Property, issued by Royal Decree No. M/6 dated 24/4/2002, provides the requirements and procedures for registering real property rights at a public register.
- The Expropriation Law, issued by Royal Decree No. M/15 dated 12/5/2003, entitles ministries, governmental authorities and other entities with public standing to expropriate real estate property for public interest in return for fair compensation.
- The Law of Unpleasant, Health-Damaging and Hazardous Establishments, issued by Royal Decree No. M/14 dated 19/6/2002, subjects the establishment, operation or expansion to prior licensing from competent authorities.
- The Law Imposing Fees on Idle Lands, issued by Royal Decree No. M/4 dated 24/11/2015, imposes a fee on unused lands allocated for residential or commercial.
- Recently, the government has led the drafting of a Planning Act, which includes new laws on spatial planning and local governance. The Planning Act will provide legal background and clarification for the spatial planning system and improve and assure strategies, plans and policies' quality and effectiveness.

Institutional framework

The Ministry of Municipal, Rural Affairs and Housing is responsible for land issues in Saudi Arabia. The major planning guidelines in the country are the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia National Vision 2030, the National Transformation Program and the National Spatial Strategy.

Policies relating to spatial development addressing social, cultural and ecological principles were progressively articulated in the National Settlement Strategies and Development Plans between 1980 and 2000. The first National Spatial Strategy was adopted in 2001. The main body responsible for its implementation is the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs (national/regional level) in cooperation with the Ministries of Interior, Agriculture, Transportation, and Economic and planning for the national level and government bodies of a special nature at all levels.

LAND SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS

Many government ministries and authorities have issued royal decrees, circulars and ministerial decisions, regulations and standards that affect how planning functions outside of those from Ministry of Municipalities and Rural Affairs. Table 16 outlines the governing bodies and their roles. The Ministry of Economy and Planning is responsible for national development, while the Ministry of Interior is responsible for the rule of law, the order and oversight of regions and the development of governorates. The Ministry of Rural and Municipal Affairs, established in 1975 (1395 AH), is responsible for the administration of the municipalities throughout the Kingdom. Its primary functions include city and town planning and the development and maintenance of the basic infrastructures such as roads, town cleaning and sanitation.

TABLE 15: GOVERNING BODIES INVOLVED IN THE LAND SECTOR IN SAUDI ARABIA

TYPE	LEVEL	BODY	KEY/RELEVANT ROLES
SOVEREIGN ENTITIES	National	The King	• The reference of the State authorities • Supervises the implementation of the State policy • Issues Royal Decrees promulgating laws
		The Council of Ministers	• Designs and oversees the implementation of internal, international, financial, economic and all public policies • Follows on the performance of development plans
		The Shura Council	• Provides opinion on the general plan for economic and social development • Reviews international laws, regulations, treaties and agreements
		The Council of Economic Affairs and Development (CEDA)	• Determines the orientations, visions and objectives related to economic and development affairs • Reviews and approves the strategies, financial, and development plans, follow up on the implementation and coordinates the same
RELEVANT MINISTRIES	National and Local	Ministry of Municipalities and Rural Affairs (MoMRA)	• In charge of urban planning of the cities • Approves urban plans
	National	Ministry of Economy and Planning (MoEP)	• Prepares national development plans and follows up on their implementation • Participates in the preparation of national and sector strategies and plans and integrates their objectives and programmes into development plans • Supports public agencies in the preparation of their strategic and operational plans • Reviews the plans of the public agencies and ensures their consistency with national and sector strategic orientations
	National	Ministry of Finance (MoF)	• Proposes the public financial policy and financial plans • Prepares the State budget and its implementing rules • Supervises and safeguards State assets and property
	National	Ministry of Interior (MoI)	• Coordinates with the Emirs of the Regions • Responsible for enforcement/implementation
	National	Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture (MEWA)	• Supervises and develops the environmental, water and agricultural affairs in the kingdom • Prepares barren lands for agriculture and distributes the same to citizens

Source: Authors.

	National	Other ministries (Ministry of Transportation (MoT), Ministry of Housing (MoH), Ministry of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources (MoEIMP))	Planning, land allocation and management
COUNCILS	Local	Amanat	- Oversees and coordinates between municipalities - Review structural, organizational and residential plans
		Municipalities	- Reviews structural, organizational and residential plans - Organizes and harmonizes the town according to a plan duly approved by the competent authorities - Licenses and supervises the facilities, buildings, and all public and private extensions - Expropriates properties for public interest
SPECIAL STATUS ENTITIES	National, Regional and Local (Geographical boundaries)	Cities Development Authorities (Riyadh, Makkah, Hail, Eastern Province, Al-Madina Al-Mounawwara, Al-Dariah)	Planning and development within the city's boundaries
		Royal Commissions (Junail and Yanbu, Al-Oula)	Planning and development within set boundaries
SPECIAL STATUS ENTITIES	National, Regional and Local (sectorial boundaries)	The Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority	- Prepares State policies for the development and increase of investments (domestic and foreign) - Proposes implementation plans and rules to ensure the investment climate
		Economic Cities Authority	- Reviews and approves general plans of the economic cities, ensures their application, and approves amendments - Determines the specifications and international standards for all infrastructure works, conditions for the construction of buildings, roads, ports, industrial, commercial and residential areas and the provision of services of public benefit - Establishes necessary controls for the management, operation and safety of industrial zones within economic cities
		Saudi Organization for Industrial Estates and Technology Zones	- Implements the strategy for the development of industrial cities - Establishes rules and procedures related to the establishment, development, management, maintenance and operation of the industrial cities - Proposes the allocation of appropriate sites from the lands belonging to the state to establish industrial cities

Source: Authors.

LAND MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS

Table 13 shows a summary of the state of the land administration system in Saudi Arabia. The main actor in land development in Saudi Arabia is the government. However, within the last two decades, Saudi Arabia has experienced a surge in private investment.

The main advantage of the land administration system is the existence of the system itself. Moderate challenges regarding the coverage and effectiveness, time, cost and accessibility for vulnerable groups of these functions. Significant challenges regarding the data availability and mandates clarity.

Challenges

The land administration system in Saudi Arabia has some weaknesses, including, but not limited to: (1) Lack of needed to build a reliable database and share information for accountability, (2) Lack of awareness about the importance of such data, especially for women and its impact on the socio-economic development in the region, (3) many land-related legislations are obsolete, and there is overlap, contradiction and a lack of clarity regarding their use and application in some instances, (4) Land values are increasing and yet there is no official valuation system, (5) landowners register their land only upon construction.

Opportunities

Efforts to develop Saudi Arabia's land administration system can focus on three key areas: (1) reforming land registration processes and improving their transparency, accountability and sustainability; (2) establishing systems to insure the implementation of land use plans at the national and regional levels; and (3) clarifying the principles, rules and procedures governing land expropriation and improving institutional accountability.

LAND TENURE

The Ministry of Justice (land tenure, cadastral survey and registration regulations and standards) and the Ministry of Interior deal with land tenure aspects of the land administration system.

According to survey results, Saudi Arabia suffers from a lack of clear, published and accessible data regarding land tenure. Yet, most residents believe that their land tenure is secure. Most residents think that forcible eviction from homes is unlikely, except for reasons rarely occurring in the Saudi Arabia, such as wars, natural hazards (especially floods) or major projects.

Men and women citizens and non-citizens of Saudi can own land; however, in Makkah and El-medina, land can only be acquired through inheritance. Other than the different types of ownership, there are no laws to regulate land acquisition or ownership.

The proportion of the female adult population who have secure tenure is less than 20 per cent. The respondents' perceptions regarding the secure land tenure for women that they are more vulnerable to land tenure insecurity when compared to men in terms of the official (courts, loans, etc.) or non-official (land-related transactions).

The number of cadastral offices or employees across the country is unknown. The numbers of the cadastral offices and their employees across the country are also unknown.

More than half of respondents stated that it is moderately to very easy for ordinary citizens to obtain funds to purchase urban land and properties. Since the establishment of the Real Estate Development Fund in 1974, the government has provided no-interest loans for private housing construction. The government has provided housing throughout the past decades, particularly by financing private housing construction.

FIGURE 80: LAND ADMINISTRATION TRENDS IN SAUDI ARABIA

This graphic provides an indicative overview of national-level trends based on the data presented in the country profile. The findings are illustrative rather than definitive and, in some cases, may be non-conclusive, as contextual and institutional variations may apply. The graphics below present the performance of the five core land administration functions - from weak to well-functioning - together with performance across four complementary indicators: SDG 5.a.2, SDG 11.1.1, the Assets Indicator, the Registering Property Score, and the Corruption Perceptions Index. To ensure comparability, all indicators were proportionally adjusted.

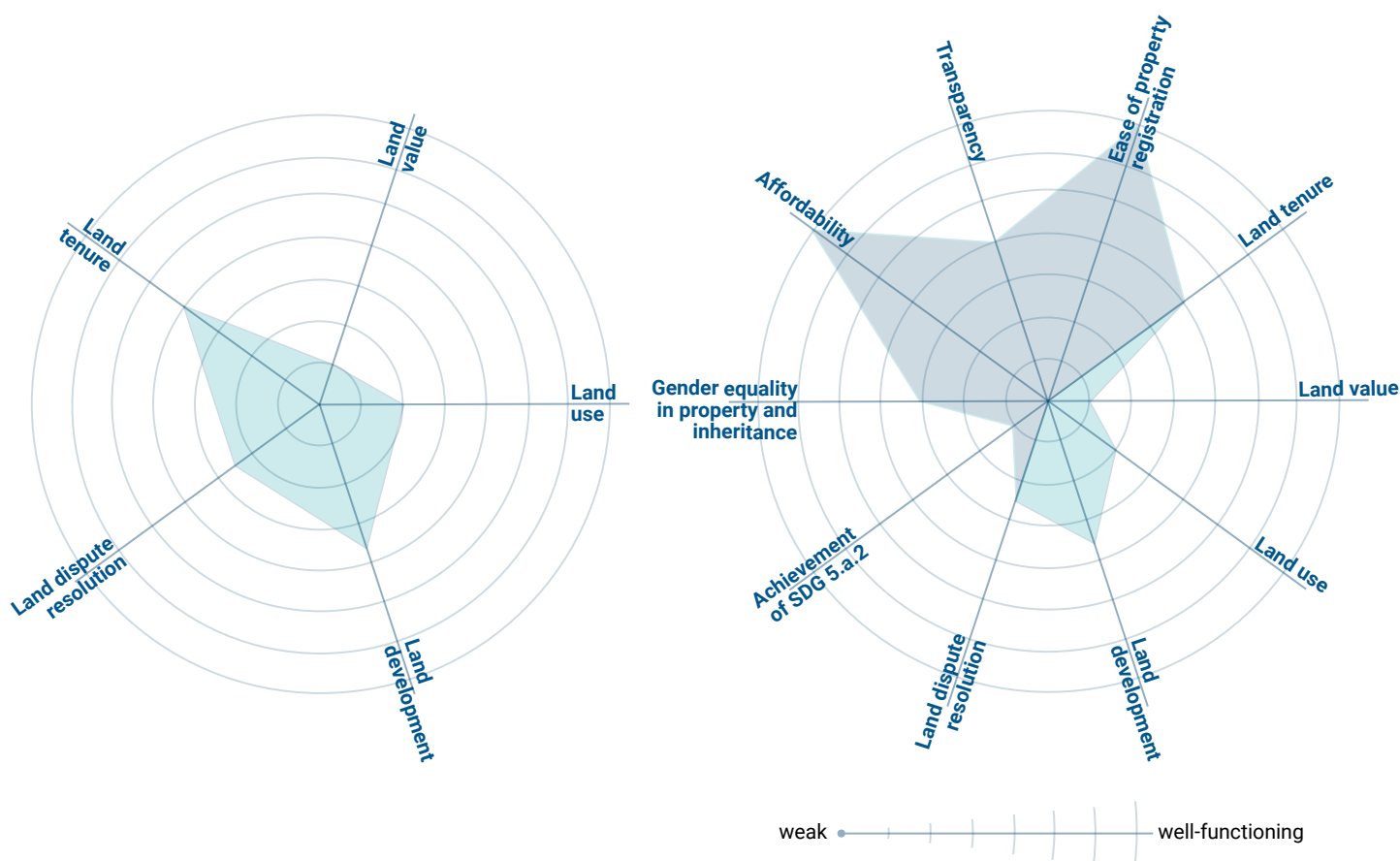


TABLE 16: OVERVIEW OF LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS IN SAUDI ARABIA

CRITERIA	LAND TENURE	LAND VALUE	LAND USE	LAND DEVELOPMENT	LAND DISPUTES RESOLUTION
Existence / coverage of the system	●	●	●	●	●
Effectiveness	●	●	●	●	●
Procedural duration	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	●
Affordability	●	●	N/A	●	●
Accessibility	●	N/A	●	●	●
Data availability	●	●	●	N/A	N/A
Mandates clarity	N/A	●	●	●	●

● Significant challenge
 ● Moderate challenge
 ● No/ limited challenge

Source: Authors, United Nations Statistics Division. (n.d.). [SDG indicators database](#); World Bank (2021). [Women, business and the law 2021](#); World Bank (n.d.). [Registering property](#); Transparency International. (2022). [Corruption perceptions index 2022: Middle East and North Africa](#).

LAND USE

The agencies responsible for dealing with land use issues in Saudi Arabia are, at the national level, the Ministry of Municipalities, Rural Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Economy and Planning, and at the local level, Amanat, municipalities and Cities Development Authorities (Riyadh, Makkah, Hail, Eastern Province, Al-Madina Al- Mounawwara, Al-Dariah).

Adequate and updated land use plans (national, regional, local levels) in urban centres for informal, temporary or displaced population settlements exist. However, the level of enforcement of plans varies among national, regional and local plans. Regional plans are mostly not enforced while local plans are enforced. As with most of the data in Saudi Arabia, the land use information is inaccessible and incomplete.

The existence of regulations addressing informal, temporary or displaced population settlements is assured, but it is inadequate and not strictly enforced. Although there are many plans and existing standards regulate suburban developments, they are not effective enough to control and manage land subdivision in suburban areas and non-urban localities around the larger cities.

The social tradition of having land as an investment increases land value. This leads Amanats to supply more lands and invest more in infrastructure in the very early stages of land development (prior to construction). However, this infrastructure has a limited lifespan and requires continuous maintenance, resulting in budget allocation that detracts from land development priorities.

Environmental protection land-use regulations are assured with reasonable level of adequacy and enforcement. Building permits are the most enforced type of regulation among the different regulations, more so in urban areas than rural areas.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

At the national level, agencies responsible for land development include the Ministry of Economy and Planning (sets the framework for sectoral plans and now develops regional plans), Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (establishes regulations for heritage protection, Economic Cities and industrial areas), Ministry of Interior (establishes Urban Development Committee, e.g. in Makkah). At the local level, Royal Commissions (Jubail and Yanbu, Al-Oula) are responsible for land development in their respective jurisdictions.

With the surge in private investments, land-based sectors offer the country an opportunity to diversify its economy.

Investment agreements with private developers are signed at all levels of government, irrespective of the size of the landholding. This is beneficial to developers as they do not have to apply at the higher level according to the size of the project. This is a result of the decentralization Programme and efforts to empower local bodies that the government of Saudi Arabia has been implementing in recent years. The process for developing property is easy for landowners, professional developers and public authorities.

Effective mechanisms exist to change land use (e.g. from agriculture to residential), but the process is costly, as applicants pay application fees and infrastructure service costs. They must also meet eligibility requirements, including demonstrating a valid reason for the change that aligns with existing plans. Changes that conflict with approved plans are not permitted. Land subdivision is governed by efficient regulatory frameworks.

Mechanisms exist for the state to expropriate land, including for public use, however the land acquisition process is poorly structured, and there is little clarity on the applicable procedures. Lack of defined policies concerning the use of state land or standards in terms of managing

the land. Small, pastoralist groups may be affected by mega projects constructed in Saudi Arabia such as in Neom. Affected communities are rarely consulted in any meaningful manner. Available information is asymmetrically distributed. Community landholders lack the information needed to properly assess investment proposals, while government institutions lack the necessary expertise to adequately evaluate projects.

LAND VALUE

Although a methodology for evaluating lands and buildings exists, it remains undisclosed, making valuation difficult. Real estate valuers are available, constitute a small professional category and their services are expensive. Despite these challenges, the majority of the respondents consider land taxation rates fair.

Comprehensive land price information is not consolidated in a single accessible database. Existing data remains largely undigitized, and digitized records are difficult to access for national projects. This information gap impacts individuals seeking to purchase plots, buildings or apartments, who lack published or reliable information about actual land values in their targeted areas.

The financing structure of municipalities may undermine effective land governance. Municipal expenditures are funded directly from the government budget, rendering income from land taxes an insignificant component of municipal revenue. This arrangement may lead municipalities to disregard land taxation as a viable revenue stream, potentially detracting from their governance responsibilities.

LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Land dispute resolution is the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice (land tenure, cadastral survey and registration regulations and standards) and the Ministry of Interior. Typical disputes in the country include allegations of land grabbing

by security sector personnel, competing claims over ownership, double allotment of plots to individuals during the formalization process, boundary dispute, inheritance and land acquisition for urban expansion including disputes involving minority groups.

The primary source of law is the Islamic Sharia, derived from the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the traditions of the Prophet). Saudi Arabia is unique among modern Muslim states in that Sharia is not codified. There is no system of judicial precedent, giving judges the power to use independent legal reasoning to decide. Saudi judges tend to follow the principles of the Hanbali school of jurisprudence and are noted for their literalist interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith.

A well-structured formal system exists to resolve conflicts and disputes related to land rights and parcel boundaries. The judicial system is considered affordable for all, however few citizens are aware of the procedures for the dispute resolution system. Most people trust the dispute resolution system.

The proportion of land-related cases in the formal courts and the existence of other mechanisms than legal courts to solve land rights disputes are unknown.

There are many challenges related to compensation value since there is no clear and transparent valuation methodology which makes the process relatively slow. There are some concerns about the extent to which women and children's property rights are protected in the current land dispute system.

LEARNING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The results of the review of existing learning offers and research efforts show that the private sector is not significantly involved in offering training on land-related topics. Public universities provide more than 75 per cent of current learning

offers as short courses for undergraduate students in engineering, architecture and urban planning faculties. These courses are certified and funded by the government. Although some provide learning efforts related to the curriculum for land governance, such as the Saudi Real Estate Institute and the Saudi Authority for Accredited Valuers, these are very limited compared to the offers of universities

There is almost no contribution from private academic institutes to land administration and management governance learning. There needs

to be more information regarding the content of the courses offered by learning providers. Civil society and non-public institutions and stakeholders are not involved in land governance learning in Saudi Arabia.

Numerous reports about Saudi Arabia have been published, especially during the preparation of the National Spatial Strategy (2001) and Saudi Vision 2030 (2016). The existing research offers operational documents and reports mainly for the international community or organizations (such as United Nations agencies).

Syrian Arab Republic³⁹⁹



-  **Capital city: Damascus (population: 2,799,960,400)**
-  **Population: 17,500,657⁴⁰¹**
-  **Population growth rate: 4.5 per cent⁴⁰²**
-  **Urban population: 56 per cent⁴⁰³**
-  **Urban population growth rate: 5.6 per cent⁴⁰⁴**
-  **Land area: 183,630 km²⁴⁰⁵**
-  **Agricultural area: 139,210 km² (75.8 per cent) (arable: 25.4 per cent; permanent crops: 5.8 per cent; permanent pasture: 44.6 per cent)⁴⁰⁶**
-  **Forest: 5,220.8 km² (2.8 per cent)⁴⁰⁷**
-  **Coastline: 193 km**
-  **Ethnic groups: Arab: 50 per cent; Alawite: 15 per cent; Kurd: 10 per cent; Levantine: 10 per cent; other: 15 per cent (includes Druze, Ismaili, Imami, Nusairi, Assyrian, Turkoman, Armenian)⁴⁰⁸**
-  **Religions: Muslim: 87 per cent (Sunni: 74 per cent; Alawi, Ismaili & Shia: 13 per cent), Christian (Orthodox, Uniate, Nestorian): 10 per cent,⁴⁰⁹ Druze: 3 per cent⁴¹⁰**
-  **People in need of humanitarian assistance: 14.6 million⁴¹¹**
-  **Internally displaced persons (IDPs): 6.9 million⁴¹²**
-  **Syrian refugees outside Syria: 5.6 million, including approximately:⁴¹³**
-  **People living in informal settlements and camps: 2 million⁴¹⁴**

399 This country profile summarizes the paper: UN-Habitat/GLTN (2021). [Land Administration System in Syria: Analysis and Recommendations](#).

400 World Population Review (2025). [Damascus](#).

401 World Bank (2020). [Data – Indicators](#).

402 World Bank (2024). [Population growth \(annual %\) – Syrian Arab Republic](#).

403 World Bank (2021). [Data – Indicators](#).

404 World Bank (2024). [Urban population growth \(annual %\)](#).

405 World Bank (2021). [Data – Indicators](#).

406 World Bank (2018). [Data – Indicators](#); United States Central Intelligence Agency (2022). [World Factbook – Syria](#).

407 World Bank (2020). [Data – Indicators](#).

408 United States Central Intelligence Agency (2022). [World Factbook – Syria](#).

409 The Christian population might be smaller than the figure provided as a result of Christians fleeing the country during the ongoing conflict.

410 United States Central Intelligence Agency (2022). [World Factbook – Syria](#).

411 OCHA (2022). [Humanitarian needs overview Syrian Arab Republic](#). February 2022.

412 OCHA (2022). [Humanitarian needs overview Syrian Arab Republic](#). February 2022.

413 UNHCR (2022). [Operational Data Portal – Syria Regional Refugee Response](#).

414 OCHA (2022). [Humanitarian needs overview Syrian Arab Republic](#). February 2022.

FIGURE 81: HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF KEY LAND-RELATED EVENTS IN SYRIA



Source: Authors.

OVERVIEW

The Syrian Arab Republic (hereinafter, Syria) is a country in Western Asia located on the eastern coastline of the Mediterranean Sea, with the central government residing the capital city, Damascus. Before the uprising in 2011, Syria was considered a middle-income country with steady economic growth despite already visible signs of weakening state institutions and increasing economic inequalities. Due to its strategic position, Syria's political and administrative decisions have been historically influenced by the local interests of subnational groups and the strategic interests of great foreign powers, dynamics which continue to influence the ongoing conflict.

According to the Syrian Constitution of 2012, the country has a republican system (Article 2) with Islamic jurisprudence as major source of legislation (Article 3). Syria consists of administrative units (Article 130) organized following the principle of decentralization of authorities and responsibilities (Article 131). These units comprise 14 governorates (muhafazat), divided into 107 districts (manatiq) and 2,480 subdistricts (nawahi), in turn divided in municipalities also referred as "local authorities".⁴¹⁵

Syria has a long land administration tradition which finds its origin in Ottoman Land Code (1858). However, in recent years, the slow adaptation and modernization of the land administration system has compromised the capacity of land-related institutions to implement legal frameworks, tools and processes that can adequately respond to the needs of Syrian society. Such inadequacy has hampered land management in both urban and rural areas; led to the spread of informal settlements in urban areas – estimates report

that 40 per cent of the population currently lives in informal settlements;⁴¹⁶ and further led to the poor management of agricultural resources and inadequate protection of land rights in rural areas.

The will of government institutions to exercise a very high level of control over all land-related processes resulted in over regulated, over bureaucratic and slow process which further contribute to the spreading of corruption and informality. Land administration functions remain affected by their own dysfunctionalities and operate in silos due to very limited interoperability of land-related information and the lack of cooperation among institutional stakeholders, leading to the duplication of efforts and increased costs.

The ongoing conflict heavily impacted the social and economic development of the country which is home to over 14.9 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and 6.9 million internally displaced persons,⁴¹⁷ and further weakened the Syrian land governance system.

The conflict increasingly reduced the availability of financial resources – the collection of land revenues and the value of the local currency dropped – and the availability of skilled human resources capable of delivering land administration functions. Part of the land administration infrastructure (offices, databases and land records) was also destroyed in the attacks together with the housing stock and other basic services.

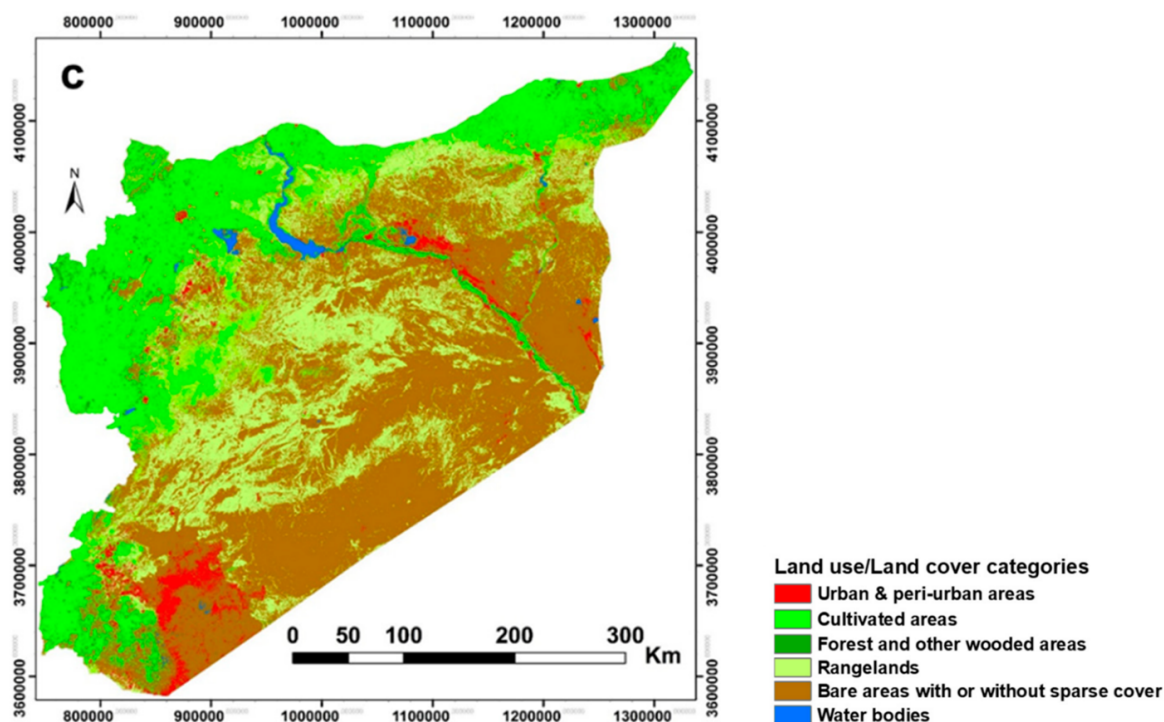
Other challenges include climate change and poor land use strategies leading to land degradation, water scarcity, encroachment of urban areas into agricultural land and the progressive voluntary return of displaced population, among others.

415 European Committee of the Regions (2022). [Divisions of Powers: Syria](#).

416 UN-Habitat (2021). [Land Administration System in Syria: Analysis and Recommendations](#).

417 UNHCR (2022). [Syria Regional Refugee Response](#). Operational Data Portal.

FIGURE 82: MAP OF LAND USE/LAND COVER IN SYRIA



Source: Mohamed, M. A., Anders, J, and Schneider, C. (2020). *Monitoring of changes in land use/land cover in Syria from 2010 to 2018 using multitemporal landsat imagery and GIS*. Land, 9(7), 226.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

A detailed legal framework and institutional framework regulate the land sector with land management and administration functions spread across multiple ministries and institutions. The on-going civil war divided the country in areas controlled by the central government, areas controlled by the Islamic State/Daesh, areas controlled by rebel factions and areas controlled by Kurdish groups.⁴¹⁸ The legal and institutional framework below describes the areas controlled by the central government.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The land-related legal framework originated in the Ottoman era and includes a large and rapidly evolving set of laws, decrees and resolutions, each regulating a specific aspect of the land management and administration. Laws,

decrees and resolutions follow different paths for issuance and approval: laws are discussed in parliament and then issued by presidency. Decrees are directly issued by presidency and then submitted to parliament for approval. Resolutions are issued by cabinet or ministers who retain the authority to amend them.

There is a rich body of laws, approximately 160 laws, regulating HLP issues which apply to both government-controlled and opposition-held areas – however the extent to which they are implemented in opposition-held areas is unknown. Since the start of the war, over 50 HLP-related laws and legislative decrees have been enacted or amended, most of which aim at confirming the sovereignty of the state, achieving specific war objectives, dealing with new land and HLP related challenges emerging during the war and boosting the financial revenues for the government.⁴¹⁹ However, some of the newly issued pieces of legislation (such

⁴¹⁸ European Committee of the Regions (2022). *Divisions of Powers: Syria*.

⁴¹⁹ UN-Habitat (2022). *Guidance Note on Land and Conflict for Syria*.

as legislative decree 11/2016 or legislative decree 66/2012) have been condemned by the international community for failing to comply with international standards and abetting those affiliated with the government to the disadvantage of other groups.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Land administration functions are administered by the different ministries, according to their mandates, at times in coordination, under the directions of the Council of Ministers. However, mandates are not sufficiently clear and well defined, negatively affecting the cooperation among such institutions and hindering the capacity of the overall land administration system to function well. Other factors impacting their capacity to deliver on their mandate include inadequate financial and human resources.

At the supervisory levels, some tasks are managed through the central institutions attached directly to ministries. The central government strengthened its centralized control after the start of the conflict and the powers exercised by the regional and local levels are overseen by the central government. Where the central government has lost its control, local administrations have started delivering on the responsibilities of the national government.⁴²⁰ At the operational level, the different functions, such as land registration functions, are performed through decentralized offices geographically distributed at governorate level.

LAND SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS

In the ever-changing contexts of Syria, a multitude of stakeholders can be identified, each with different role(s) and levels of engagement in the land sector. The list presented below is not meant to be an exhaustive summary but rather an overview of the main land-related stakeholders.

Government institutions

Multiple ministries are engaged in various land-related functions under the coordination and supervision of the Council of Ministers.

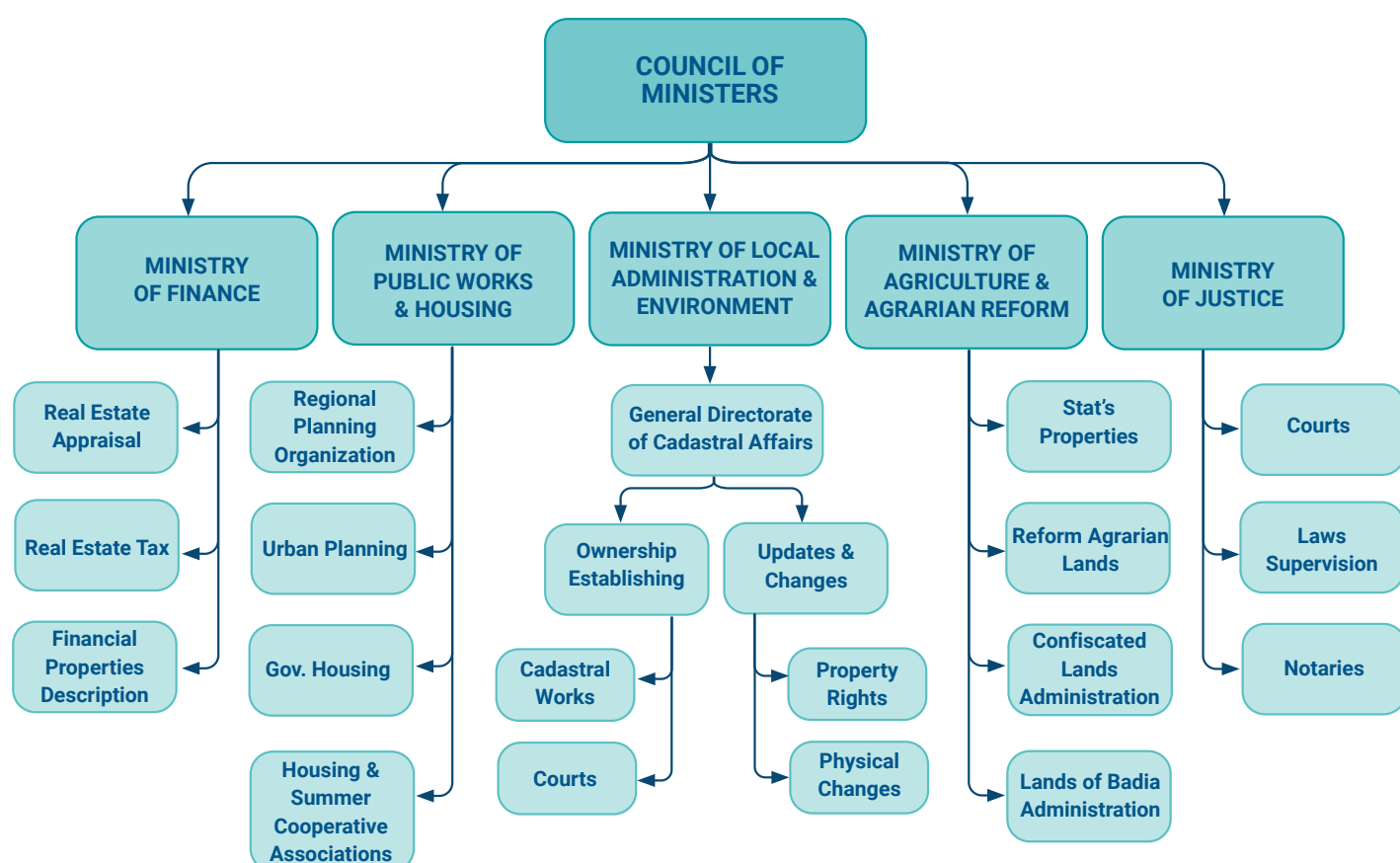
The main five ministries include:

- The Ministry of Local Administration and Environment oversees the General Directorate of Cadastral Affairs (GDCA) tasked with documenting property and any changes to its status.
- The Ministry of Public Works and Housing is responsible for urban planning, regional planning, governmental housing programmes, real estate development and investment, and general construction companies. It oversees the Regional Planning Commission and the Real Estate Development and Investment Commission.
- The Ministry of Finance keeps land taxation registries at the governorate and district levels. It oversees land appraisal and properties taxation, and it supervises real estate finance through the Real Estate Finance Oversight Commission.
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform manages state's properties through the Directorate of State's Land, and it grants usufruct rights to landless farmers under special contracts
- The Ministry of Justice is responsible for judicial affairs. Currently, it is working on repairing damaged judicial rulings registries.

Additional ministries with some land-related functions include the Ministry of Endowments, the Ministry of Water Resources, the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Oil and Mineral resources. Additional government agencies with land-related functions include the General

420 European Committee of the Regions (2022).

FIGURE 83: REPRESENTATION OF THE INSTITUTIONS DEALING WITH LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS IN SYRIA



Source: UN-Habitat (2021b). *Land Administration System in Syria: Analysis and Recommendations*.

Organization of Survey, in charge of preparing physical topographic plans for the benefit of governmental entities; and the General Housing Establishment, a state-owned real estate developer that focuses on providing low-cost housing for the Syrian market.

There are many other land sector stakeholders other than the government stakeholders that play a role in the Syrian land administration system. These include:

- Academia and training institutions, responsible for developing land professionals at different levels through formal education and continued professional courses
- The private sector, including private surveyors, notaries, lawyers, architects, engineers, real estate developers and geospatial companies

- Civil society organizations and associations of land users
- Non-governmental organizations
- Women and youth associations
- Humanitarian and development actors
- International land experts

LAND MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS

Over the years, the land administration system has undergone a development process which led to some remarkable achievements. Many efforts conveyed in improving the land registry, on which Syria largely relies for managing its land. Further, some of the sub sectors of the land administration system started digital

FIGURE 84: LAND ADMINISTRATION TRENDS IN SYRIA

This graphic provides an indicative overview of national-level trends based on the data presented in the country profile. The findings are illustrative rather than definitive and, in some cases, may be non-conclusive, as contextual and institutional variations may apply. The graphics below present the performance of the five core land administration functions - from weak to well-functioning - together with performance across five complementary indicators: SDG 11.1.1, the Assets Indicator, the Registering Property Score, the House price-to-income ratio, and the Corruption Perceptions Index. To ensure comparability, all indicators were proportionally adjusted.

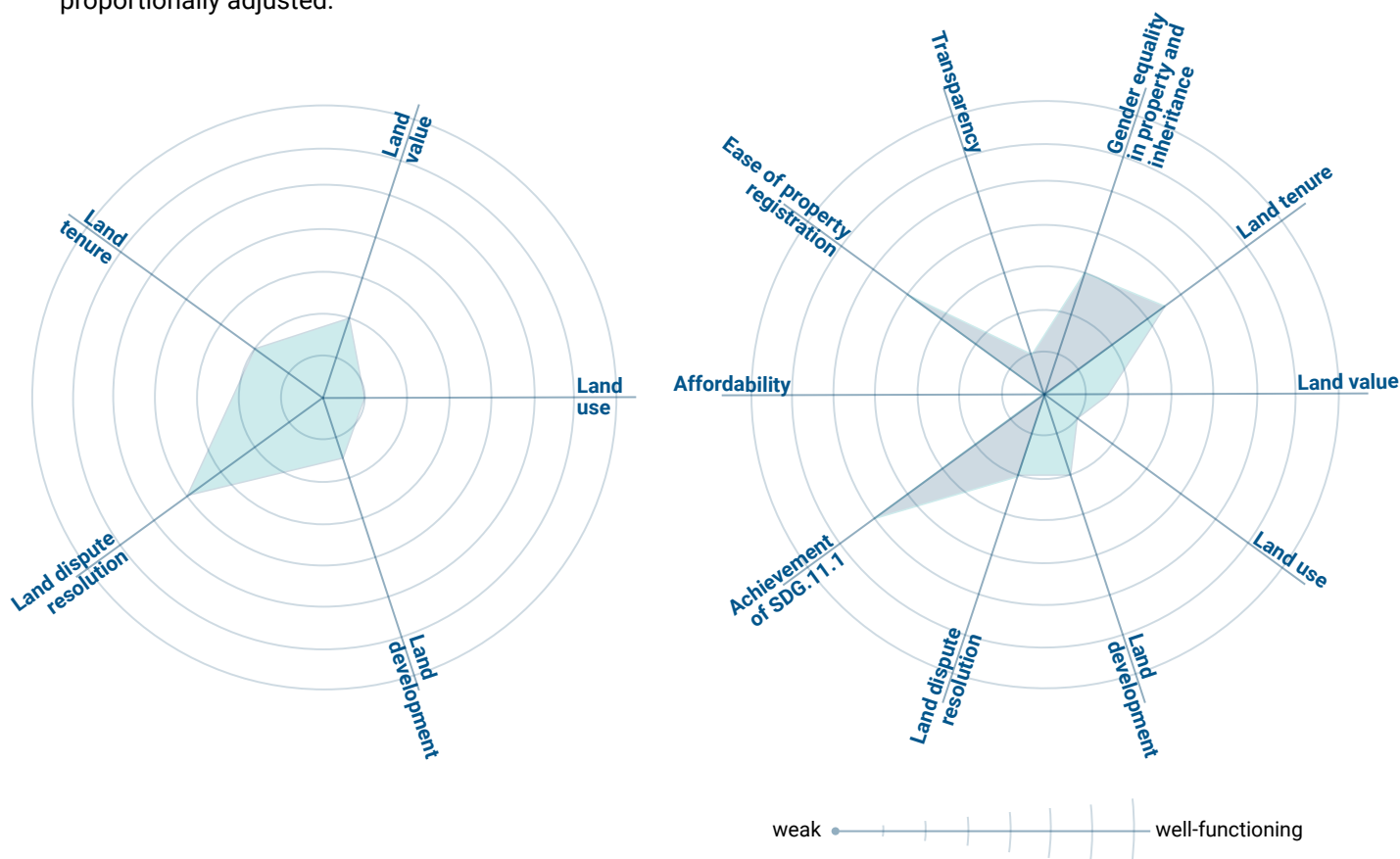


TABLE 17: OVERVIEW OF LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS IN SYRIA

CRITERIA	LAND TENURE	LAND VALUE	LAND USE	LAND DEVELOPMENT	LAND DISPUTES RESOLUTION
Existence / coverage of the system	●	●	●	●	●
Effectiveness	●	●	●	●	●
Procedural duration	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	●
Affordability	●	●	N/A	●	●
Accessibility	●	N/A	●	●	●
Data availability	●	●	●	N/A	N/A
Mandates clarity	N/A	●	●	●	●

● Significant challenge
 ● Moderate challenge
 ● No/ limited challenge

Source: Authors, United Nations Statistics Division. (n.d.). [SDG indicators database](#); World Bank (2021). [Women, business and the law 2021](#); World Bank (n.d.). [Registering property](#); Transparency International. (2022). [Corruption perceptions index 2022: Middle East and North Africa](#).

transition process although a better definition of the functionalities and scope of a digitalized land administration system are needed.

The functioning of the administration has been hampered by the growing informality within the land registry and the complexity of managing paper-based parallel systems which has been failing to provide updated and interconnected information for effective decision making. This burden has been compounded by the ongoing conflict which caused the damage or destruction of facilities and infrastructure, as well as land records. This drastically reduced the capacity of the land administration to deliver services to the Syrian population. Further, the fragmentation of the land administration system increased with parts of the Syrian territory falling outside government control.

In light of a possible future voluntary return, new suitable technical approaches that can handle land administration requests of unprecedented scale will need to be established. This will include supporting reconstruction efforts, issuing or re-issuing civil and HLP documents, register variations and changes in the land registry, and dealing with the large amount of land disputes arising from fraudulent sales, secondary occupations, inheritance disputes and more.

LAND TENURE

The Civil Code of 1949 identifies five legal categories of land:

- **Mulk:** Land owned by individuals or private legal persons within the boundaries of the built-up areas (or within the Master Plans).
- **Miri:** All lands that fall outside the boundaries of the built-up areas (or outside the boundaries of Master Plans). The land rights over miri lands are

twofold: 1) the ownership right belonging to the State; and 2) the use right that can be acquired by individuals or other legal persons. According to the law, use rights are returned entirely to the State if the beneficiary discontinues his/her use or exploitation of the land for longer than the period determined by law, or if he/she dies without heirs.

- **Metruka murfaka:** Lands owned by the State but subject to use rights by some groups. This type of land is converted into one of the previous two types if the beneficiary stops using them.
- **Metruka Mehmi:** Lands owned by the State or State administrative units of public domain such as roads, squares, public parks, etc.
- **Mewat:** Lands owned by the State without identified borders. Upon permission of the State, those occupying these lands can obtain a right of preference to use and exploit them.

In addition to the above, **Waqf** (endowment) land is land donated for charitable purpose or to a charitable entity.

Land registry

The land registry covers 98 per cent of the land designated for private ownership or long leases, corresponding to about three quarters of the Syrian territory.⁴²¹ The remaining lands (deserts, forests, mountains and water bodies) and most of the communal lands, range lands and waqf land is not registered. While the high level of precision and complexity of the land and property registration system has been providing over the years a good level of protection of HLP rights, this has made the system rigid and administratively complex to maintain and update which over time increased the discrepancy between what is

421 General Directorate of Cadastral Affairs (2017). *Syria, Annual report*.

in the land registry and the reality on the ground and the land registries are not updated routinely. Many transactions and land-related decisions remain informal, and the temporary land registry established to secure tenure rights for buildings still under construction with building permits has become a parallel land registry. Due to these challenges, people started using a wide range of evidence instead, in addition to land records, to strengthen their land tenure security. This further increased the burden on the land administration, across all its functions.

Cadastral system

A functioning paper-based cadastral system is in place with offices across the 14 governorates and about a hundred branches in the main urban centres. About three quarters of the country's land is covered by the cadastre but the cadastral information is not linked and interoperable with other spatial data, such as land use plans or natural resources maps.

Operations within the cadastre, such as creating, altering and transferring existing properties, are bureaucratic and can take between a few days to 90 days for the administratively more complex technical changes. Procedures are not commonly understood by people. Official costs for undertaking transactions in the system are low however, this is significantly increased by the rent seeking associated land administration employees.

Land rights

There is a wide range of land tenure rights found along the continuum of land rights. Registered land ownership rights are considered the most secure form of land rights and can be held individually or in a group. They are registered either in the land registry, proved through the tapoo (also commonly known as "the green tapoo"), or in the temporary registries meant to secure tenure rights for

buildings still under construction, with building permits. Long-term land rights on state land include a variety of rights (such as usufruct rights on private ownership land or group use rights over protected easement lands, etc.). These are all considered very secure and are proven through different formal documents. Short-term land use rights (such as residential rents and rental of agricultural lands) are temporary rights acquired through rental contracts between the owner and the tenant. Finally, unregistered land tenure rights (such as consent sale agreements or court rulings, etc.) are the least secure of all rights and they usually result from administrative or legal barriers preventing their formal registration in the land registry or because the properties fall in informal areas (land developed outside or non in compliance with masterplans and/or building codes). In the last decade, the tenure security of unregistered land rights in informal settlements has been significantly weakened by the damage and displacement caused by the war.

There is no reliable and consolidated data (nor sex-disaggregated data) on how many citizens have land rights documents nor on how many perceive their land tenure as secure. Estimates indicate that half of the population is tenure insecure,⁴²² a trend that reflects the mass displacement caused by the war. Mass displacement, however, is not the sole cause of tenure insecurity. Other causes include damage and destruction of the housing stock, the fragmentation of state institutions and new power dynamics brought about by the conflict, as well as the pre-existing dysfunctionalities and widespread corruption of the land sector. Specific land tenure issues further impact the land tenure security of the twelve million displaced Syrians; these include, among others, loss of land-related and civil documentation, limited access to land dispute resolution mechanisms, secondary occupation and fraudulent sales.

422 UN-Habitat (2021b). [Land Administration System in Syria: Analysis and Recommendations](#).

Women's land rights

Very few Syrian women have property titles in their name⁴²³ or own their property jointly with their husbands. The gender gap is not created by gender discriminatory laws, but rather by social norms and by the different purchasing power and the limited participation of women in the paid labor market that contains their access to credit and their ability to purchase properties.

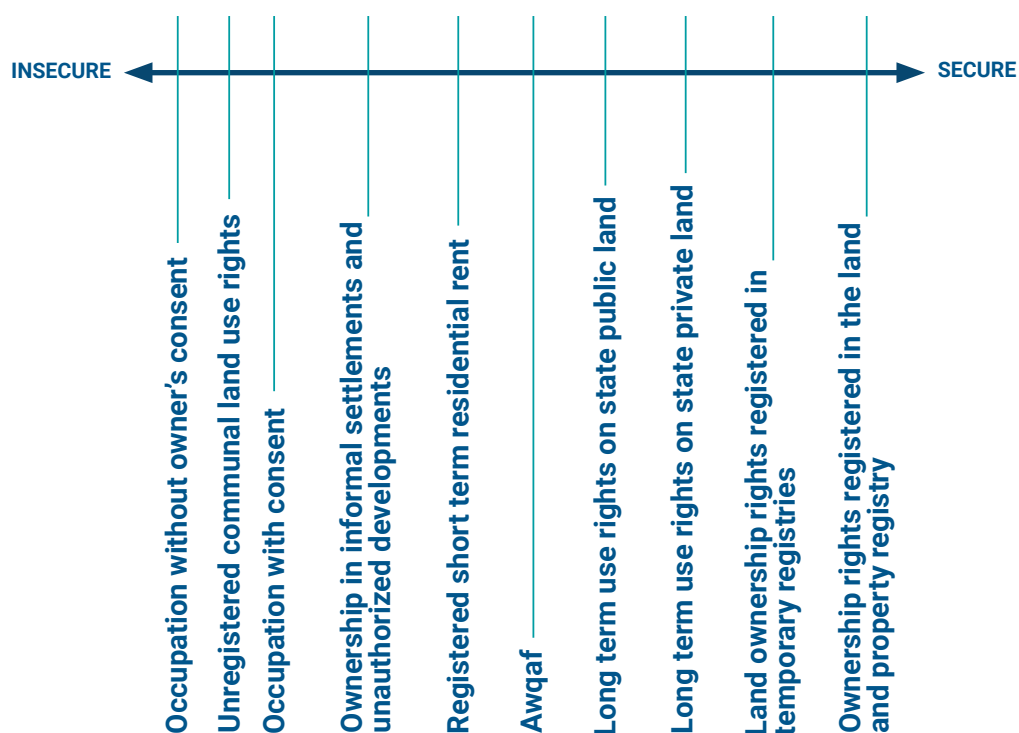
Inheritance is the primary avenue through which women acquire land and property. In principle, on mulk land, Islamic inheritance principles regulate inheritance shares while, on miri land, male and female should receive the same inheritance shares. In practice, however, women are often forced by social norms and fear of intimidation and violence to renounce their inheritance shares in favour of their male relatives. Renunciation

of land and property is at times compensated through a monetary payment of some form however, this rarely correspond to the real value of the property. Lack of civil documentation is an additional barrier limiting women's ability to inheriting what is theirs by law, particularly the lack of marriage and death certificates of their spouses. This barrier has been further exacerbated by the ongoing conflict which left many of the twelve million displaced with reduced access to HLP and civil documentation.

Forced evictions

Evictions across the country are concentrated in areas affected by the conflict and result mainly from politically, ethnically or religiously motivated violence and insecurity. In government-controlled areas, forced evictions of households are not common and they mostly result from urban redevelopment projects and land disputes.

FIGURE 85: SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE CONTINUUM OF LAND RIGHTS IN SYRIA



Source: UN-Habitat (2021b).

423 UN-Habitat/GLTN (2021c). *Promoting and Protecting Housing, Land and Property Rights of Syrian Refugees Living in Lebanon: Towards an Integrated Response*.

Affordability

Land and housing in both urban and rural areas is extremely unaffordable due to the high inflation rates caused by the devaluation of the national currency. Inflation led to an increase in land and housing prices not matched by an increase in salaries. Further, for individuals, obtaining loans and mortgages from banks, financing institutions and cooperatives to purchase land and housing is very difficult, and even more so for women.

LAND USE

Between 2005-2010 spatial and land use planning started to undergo a reform process, later stalled by the crisis, which led to the establishment of a Regional Planning Commission and a Real Estate Development and Investment Commission.

At national level, land use planning is considered inadequate and outdated, and existing land use plans are not enforced. At the regional level, land use plans have been developed only for some areas and they are mostly outdated. At the local level, land use plans exist but their adequacy and enforcement remain a problem. At city level, adequate and updated urban plans exist for the main and rapidly growing urban centres and, despite their level of enforcement being significantly higher than for other areas, it is still problematic. Currently, there is no complete and accessible or digital land information system recording land use nor natural resources.

Urban planning activities are carried out by the municipalities by developing planning proposals under the supervision of the Ministry of Public Works and Housing in charge of reviewing and approving the proposals, after consulting with the municipality. In general land use plans are of poor quality and disregard local characteristics, local cultural identity and sustainable development considerations. This has led, over time, to the elimination of the identity of rural

communities and pushed landowners to use their lands for more profitable activities than agriculture.

Outside urban areas, master planning tends to encroach on productive agricultural lands and land use plans are employed only to set the rules and restrictions on allowed land uses, demarcate protected lands and buffer zones where development is prohibited. So far, Syria does not have a specific methodology for rural planning and there is no legal or technical distinction between urban and rural planning.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

Land development takes place primarily through the implementation of master plans in accordance with Law 10 of 2018. The municipalities are in charge of issuing building permits, monitoring construction and building public infrastructure and facilities. The level of implementation of masterplans varies in the different municipalities and depends on the availability of capacities and financial resources – deriving mostly from municipal fees.

Since the beginning of the conflict, governmental programmes have come to a standstill or slowed down in most governorates, together with private sector investments. Currently, land development activities are carried out only where security conditions are relatively better, such as Damascus, Hama, Latakia, Tartous and Al-Sweida. In areas where government's capacity, or even presence, shrunk, local communities stepped up to deliver basic services to the population.

In recent years, attempts to implement the Urban Renewal Law (Law 10/2018) in areas that witnessed high level of destruction are being made and service restoration in cities that witnessed military operations is ongoing. Further, investors are being encouraged to resume real estate development projects that were licensed prior to the war and new urban development plans are being initiated to attract investments in areas affected by the

crisis such as Al-Qaboun area in Damascus, Daraya in Damascus countryside and Aba Amr in Homs.

Syria has a limited number of instruments for the public to acquire land for public use. Among them, land readjustment processes are very lengthy (they can last for years), bureaucratic and require technical skills beyond the current availability. Land expropriation has been the main land development tool, although not often used lately as it has proved to be unable to provide adequate solutions for development.

Land expropriation can be applied only in specific circumstances and only upon a compensation equivalent to its actual value. However, estimates show that, in the best scenario, compensation (calculated on the nominal value of the property) corresponds only to 20-25 per cent of its market value. Lack of fair and just compensation is one of the reasons that led over the years to the development of informal settlements as people preferred to use informal markets for selling their lands instead of being expropriated with little compensation. Informal settlements thrive especially in the outskirts of the main cities, on the main roadsides, in agricultural areas and in the vicinity of water bodies. Forty per cent of the population is estimated to live in informal settlements.

Regulations to control land subdivisions and land consolidation, to address the widespread issue of land fragmentation, exist both in urban and rural areas. These are perceived as fair but are rarely used due to the related bureaucratic procedures.

There are mechanisms and regulations that ensure the alignment of constructions with land use regulations. The property development process is considered quite difficult for landowners, developers and authorities due to bureaucratic constraints.

LAND VALUE

A land and property taxation system exists in both urban and rural areas. However, this is dysfunctional and largely evaded⁴²⁴. Only properties registered in land taxation records kept by the Ministry of Finance at the governorate and district levels are taxed. Taxation records cover built and non-built properties and include a detailed physical description, actual use and estimated value.

Land fees and taxes are usually calculated based on either the “estimated value” determined by the Ministry of Finance, which is very low and does not correspond to the real market value, or on the value stated in official documents (such as housing cooperatives’ records, sales agreements carried out by the religious judge on behalf of owners, sale agreements carried out by legal persons such as companies or associations, etc.). In May 2021, Law 15/2021 was issued to provide a new methodology to value properties for taxation, based on “Market Trend Value”. The Market Trend Value is estimated on the zone’s average price per square meter. The applicable tax, due upon sale of the property, corresponds to 1 and 3 per cent of this value.

There are different taxes and fees imposed on land and properties. Among them, the Annual Property Tax, calculated based on a percentage – between 14 and 60 per cent – of the estimated rent of property; the property sale (transfer) tax, payable when the property is sold by the seller to a buyer; and the property rights registration fee due before any registration can take place. In addition to real estate fees, the costs related to field surveys carried out by GDCA to capture any geometrical changes to the properties need to be paid. These include technical costs, the costs of certificates, copies of blueprints, statements given to owners regarding properties records and lease agreements fees. Land and property taxes collected belong to the central government and it is not clear what is the size of the share

424 UN-Habitat (2022).

that goes to local administrations. Tax revenues have declined over the past years, exacerbated by the conflict and the devaluation of the Syrian currency.

LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The Syrian legal system builds on civil law traditions as well as Islamic and Egyptian legal traditions. Syria has a dual judicial system composed of secular courts and religious courts. The first one hearing civil and criminal cases and the second issues related to family law. The Supreme Judicial Council oversees Courts of Peace or Conciliation (mahkim al-sulh), Courts of First Instance (mahakim albidaya), Juvenile Courts (mahakim al-ahdath) and the Customs Court (al mahkama al jumrukia). While the State Council (administrative courts) is independent from the other courts of general jurisdiction and from the Supreme Judicial Council.

The current civil court system is considered well-structured and fit to resolve conflicts and disputes over individuals' land rights and parcel boundaries. The system is not too expensive, looking at official fees, but processes are lengthy and people do not have adequate knowledge about the procedure to access it. Further, its functioning is hampered by limited digitalization of the court system, huge backlog of cases and weak enforcement of the court decisions.

Trust in the formal disputes resolution system to help Syrians recover their properties or obtain compensation is overall low, even more among displaced Syrian. The system is perceived as partial, corrupted and politically controlled. Further, the fragmentation of the territory is reflected in the fragmentation of the judicial system with separate courts for areas outside government control.

Syria is experiencing a shortage in the number of judges and particularly of judges skilled to deal with housing, land and property rights

claims in the context of displacement. This is likely to further increase the congestion of the court system, especially considering the scale of housing, land and property rights claims that the system might have to deal with in the coming years.

Sharia courts also carry out important functions related to land management, but their effectiveness is hindered by a lack of digital data. Among their most relevant functions, they determine inheritance shares of land and property in accordance with Islamic law and issue inheritance documents; they are in charge of assigning legal guardianship for missing persons and for minors, including granting the authorization for the selling and renting property belonging to a minor.

Women's access to justice is hampered by both social and practical barriers: women referring to court to claim their land and/or inheritance rights is perceived as shameful, and women therefore prefer less confrontational mechanism to preserve their family relationships and family support. Among the practical barriers, the fact that often women's name is not included in housing, land and property rights documents which coupled with hearing costs and the lack of civil documentation, particularly marriage and death certificates of their spouses prevent many women from claiming and inheriting what is theirs by law.

LEARNING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The land-related learning offer in Syria is mostly dedicated to geospatial studies, followed by spatial and land use planning. Most of the courses are 3-4 months academic courses embedded in other bachelor's and master's programmes (approximately 2-3 credits per semester). Little attention is paid to developing the capacities of the land sector in other fields, such as land value and land disputes' resolution.

United Arab Emirates⁴²⁵

FACT SHEET:



 **Capital city: Abu Dhabi (population: 4,135,985⁴²⁶)**

 **Population: 10,483,751⁴²⁷**

 **Population growth rate: 3.7 per cent⁴²⁸**

 **Urban population: 88 per cent⁴²⁹**

 **Urban population growth rate: 3.9 per cent⁴³⁰**

 **Land Area: 71,023 km²⁴³¹**

 **Territorial Waters: 27,625 km²⁴³²**

⁴²⁵ This country profile summarizes the paper: UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2024). [United Arab Emirates Land Sector A Snapshot](#).

⁴²⁶ UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs (n.d.). [Abu Dhabi](#). The Official Portal of the UAE Government.

⁴²⁷ World Bank (2023). [Population, total – United Arab Emirates](#).

⁴²⁸ World Bank (2024). [Population growth \(annual %\) – United Arab Emirates](#).

⁴²⁹ World Bank (2024). [Urban population \(% of total population\)](#).

⁴³⁰ World Bank (2024). [Urban population growth \(annual %\)](#).

⁴³¹ UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs (n.d.). [Facts and Figures](#). The Official Portal of the UAE Government.

⁴³² Ibid.

OVERVIEW

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is located at the eastern end of the Arabian Peninsula and is made up of seven federal emirates: Abu Dhabi (the capital), Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras Al-Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm Al-Quwain. Each emirate is ruled by a single sheikh, who together

make up the Supreme Council, which approves the appointment of the prime minister and the cabinet. The emirates also elect and appoint 40 members of the advisory National Council.⁴³³ The UAE's land territory spans 71,023 sq km, including several islands, in addition to 27,625 sq km of territorial waters.⁴³⁴ Abu Dhabi accounts for 84 per cent of the country's total landmass.⁴³⁵

⁴³³ Bugden, G. (2008). *An Overview of the Development Process and Regulatory System in Dubai*. (September), pp. 1–9.

⁴³⁴ UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs (n.d.). [Facts and Figures](#). The Official Portal of the UAE Government.

⁴³⁵ Ammar, K. A. (2013). [General framework for land use planning in the United Arab Emirates](#). In S. Shahid, F. Taha, & M. Abdelfattah (Eds.), *Developments in soil classification, land use planning and policy implications: Innovative thinking of soil inventory for land use planning and management of land resources*; UAE Government. (n.d.). [Fact sheet](#). The Official Portal of the UAE Government.

TABLE 86: HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF KEY LAND-RELATED EVENTS IN UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

1960	DUBAI LAND DEPARTMENT (DLD) ESTABLISHED
1962	FIRST OIL EXPORTS
1971	INDEPENDENCE FROM BRITAIN After independence from Britain, Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Sharjah and Umm al-Quwain come together as the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Sheikh Zayed Bin-Sultan Al Nahyan presides over the federation
	UAE JOINS THE ARAB LEAGUE
1972	FEDERAL NATIONAL COUNCIL (FNC) IS CREATED 40-member consultative body appointed by the seven rulers
	SHARJAH REAL ESTATE REGISTRATION OFFICE ESTABLISHED
1981	UAE BECOMES FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL its first summit is held in Abu Dhabi
1990	DUBAI MOURNS RULER'S DEATH Sheikh Rashid led the emirate through its founding and was responsible for a number of major projects, setting Dubai on the path to becoming the metropolis it is today
2001	CONSTRUCTION BEGINS ON PALM JUMEIRAH an ambitious project to create an artificial island off Dubai's coast
2004	UAE PRESIDENT SHEIKH ZAYED BIN-SULTAN AL NAHYAN DIES AND IS SUCCEDED BY HIS SON, SHEIKH KHALIFA
2005	ABU DHABI LAND REGISTRATION DEPARTMENT ESTABLISHED
2007	DUBAI REAL ESTATE REGULATORY AUTHORITY ESTABLISHED UAE UNVEILS A NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY aimed at making it a world leader
2008	AJMAN REAL ESTATE REGULATORY AUTHORITY ESTABLISHED
2010	BURJ KHALIFA TOWER OPENS IN DUBAI as the world's tallest building and man-made structure
2017	UAE STRATEGY FOR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE LAUNCHED aims to speed up government's performance, and create conducive creative environment with highly productivity. The strategy is part of the UAE Centennial 2071 objectives

Source: Authors.

The Constitution maintains that the welfare of the UAE is a top priority, highlighting the following goals for the Federation:

- Maintain the UAE's independence and sovereignty,
- Protect security and stability for the Federation and member states,
- Defend any aggression upon its existence or the existence of its member states,
- Protect the rights and freedoms of the people of the Federation,
- Achieve close cooperation between the emirates for the common benefit of the Federation,
- Promote the prosperity and progress of the Federation,
- Provide a better life for all citizens, and
- Respect the independence and sovereignty of the other emirates in their internal affairs within the framework of this Constitution.

The Supreme Council is the main federal authority with the power to pass federal laws. These laws have resulted in a number of regulations around real estate, the most relevant law being the Civil Transactions Law. However, the UAE is a federal state where each emirate can also pass local laws. Each local government has introduced laws regarding real estate, producing a distinct regulatory framework for each emirate. Emirates are also able to pass local laws establishing 'free zones', which have their own rules and regulations. If there is a conflict between emirate and federal law, the federal law shall prevail. This section focuses mainly on Abu Dhabi and Dubai, the UAE's two largest emirates.

The establishment and expansion of Abu Dhabi, the UAE's capital, focused on developing the city around formal plans and reducing informal planning and tenure types. The city's development began in 1962 with the establishment of the Municipality of Abu Dhabi, with the main aim of improving living conditions. The first master plan was developed by the British architect and planner John Harris, who recommended reconstruction and integrating the old city with the new. His plan, however, was not approved, and other planners and companies (notably Halcrow) subsequently submitted proposals. Upon the ruling of Sheikh Zayed, the UAE's first president and founder, widely regarded as responsible for unifying the seven emirates into a federal state in 1971, the urban development of Abu Dhabi commenced under Halcrow's modified plan which required eradication of the old city. To accelerate development, citizens from Abu Dhabi were granted three lots of land for residential, commercial and industrial development.⁴³⁶

Between the 1960s and 1980s, the city of Abu Dhabi developed without a comprehensive framework, and in 1988 the Executive Council decided to implement a master plan prepared by the city's Town Planning Department with the assistance of UNDP. The plan consisted of five stages and included plans to extend development towards several surrounding islands, establish wide grid-pattern roads and high-density residential buildings and distribute state-owned land to citizens for development. The latter was executed through the Khalifa Committee, which developed the land on behalf of the citizens. These centralized plans resulted in a lack of mixed-use developments. After 2004, under the UAE's new president and ruler of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Khalifa, development accelerated with the development of Plan Abu Dhabi 2030: Urban Structure Framework Plan focusing on identity and sustainability.⁴³⁷

436 Elsheshtawy, Y. (2013). [From Souqs to Emporiums: The Urban Transformation of Abu Dhabi](#). *Open House International*, Vol. 38, No. 4, pp. 58–69.

437 Ibid.

The transformation of Abu Dhabi's central market is an example of the intent to formalize the city. City officials and some residents viewed the old market as chaotic and not representative of the modern metropolis that the city officials wanted to portray.⁴³⁸ The redeveloped space is now a modern interpretation of traditional Gulf market style.

Regulation of the real estate market in Abu Dhabi began in 2005 with the establishment of the Land Registration Department and the issuance of a law that regulates real estate registration. All properties must be registered with the Department of Municipal Affairs, which grants the owner a land title certificate. As of 2005, several additional laws have been issued to regulate the transfer or releasing/cancelling of property rights, selling or purchasing real estate, landownership according to citizenship, creation of investment zones and land entitlement within these zones based on citizenship.⁴³⁹

As for Dubai, the city transformed from a simple fishing village and port into a global centre of commerce and finance. Prior to its urban development and expansion, Dubai consisted of three neighbourhoods: Deira, Bur Dubai and Shindagha. Deira represents the city's central business district, which was further developed into a transit hub. Originally, Deira (in particular, Baniya Square) served as a hub for traders from Somaliland, India, Pakistan and Iran. This "low-end" hub provided the base for Dubai's development. Between 1961 and 1970, the waterway within the city was deepened, docking areas were established, land was reclaimed and water features and landscaping elements were added. Later, the existing buildings surrounding the creek and Baniya Square were replaced with large complexes. The area further evolved with the construction of the Dubai Metro.⁴⁴⁰ In May

1960, the Dubai Land Department (DLD) was founded to promote the real estate sector at regional and international levels.

Given the need to diversify the economy of the emirate, in 2007 the Dubai Real Estate Regulatory Authority was created, which has played a crucial role in developing the regulatory framework (e.g. the escrow law). Escrow is a legal financial arrangement where a third party holds a large sum of money on behalf of both parties until the process is completed. In 2007, a law was issued in Dubai to regulate real estate developers and safeguard purchasers' money in case of off-plan developments. The law allows authorities to preserve the rights of purchasers; however, until now they have taken limited action against non-compliant developers. Property rights and long leases are registered in DLD, but short leases are registered in the Real Estate Regulatory Authority. The strata law, issued in 2010, encourages developers to act together in a consortium and to jointly manage a neighbourhood and the buildings within it. In the same year, legislation was issued to introduce a mechanism where the holders of industrial and commercial granted lands could convert their lease into a freehold land deed, where the owner has full rights to the property for an unlimited time. In 2011, DLD issued a law prohibiting foreign companies not registered in Jebel Ali Free Zone from owning property in Dubai.⁴⁴¹

Like Dubai, the city of Sharjah also started as a small fishing village and later developed into an urban settlement in the 19th century under British occupation. Sharjah became an important port with links to the Indian Ocean, as it formed part of a trade route that connected South and South-East Asia with the Middle East and Europe. This resulted in the development of

438 Ibid.

439 Marlow, T. (2012). *Real Estate within the UAE: A summary of legislative development*. Web article, Al-Tamimi & Company; Black, I., and Carrol, J. (2017). *United Arab Emirates*. In *The Real Estate Law Review* (6th ed.), Nevin, J. (ed.).

440 Elsheshtawy, Y. (2014).

441 Marlow, T. (2012); Black, I., and Carrol, J. (2017). *United Arab Emirates*. In *The Real Estate Law Review* (6th ed.), Nevin, J. (ed.); Banton, C. (2021). *How Escrow Protects Parties in Financial Transactions*. Web article, Investopedia.

Sharjah as a linear city along the coast, which later constructed its own fort.

British records from the 1820s document four interconnected spaces within the city: the linear port of Sahil, the linear market, the external market outside the fort and the residential area. In 1932, the British occupation established an airport, part of the main route between India and England, serving as a regional hub. It was intended to compensate for the fact that Dubai had become the main trading port. Later, in 1953, the first school was established, attracting students from all over the country. In 1971, Sharjah joined the UAE as a founding member, and the entire country embarked on massive urban development projects funded by oil revenues. In 1972, Sharjah established its Real Estate Registration Department after issuing a property registration law. The law permitted only UAE citizens to own land, and only the Governor/Sheikh could bestow the right of landownership on people or entities of other nationalities. In 1980, further laws were issued to regulate ownership of multi-storey buildings and to introduce strata ownership.⁴⁴² In the 1990s, following ad hoc developments and conversion of historic places into workers' housing, the Government of Sharjah intervened and procured the property rights to historical places, restoring and reconstructing old structures. In recognition, UNESCO nominated Sharjah as the cultural capital of the Arab world.⁴⁴³

For Ajman, the smallest emirate and a historical pearl trading post, its initial development focused on maritime services and activities. Up until 2014, the physical development of the city was concentrated along the main arterial road connecting Ajman to Sharjah. Current urban development within Ajman is monitored

by the government to ensure that settlements undergo structured development, aimed at tackling urban poverty and informal housing. Ajman University is considered the central hub for activities as it has ample infrastructure, which in turn attracts prospective developers to nearby locations.

Moreover, a spillover effect from Dubai and Sharjah spurs housing growth in Ajman.⁴⁴⁴ In 2008, the Ajman Real Estate Regulatory Authority was established, and a decree granted UAE and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) citizens or entities freehold right over land. Foreigners are permitted to own land if the Governor allows it. The decree also regulates jointly owned land and requires owners or developers to register with the Ajman Land Department. Furthermore, all developers must have their master plans and infrastructure plans approved.⁴⁴⁵

In 2005, the city of Ras Al-Khaimah permitted UAE citizens to own property, with limitations placed on non-GCC foreign entities. However, in 2007, a decree relaxed these limitations allowing non-UAE citizens and corporate bodies to own freehold title to property in projects owned by Ras Al-Khaimah Investment Authority, Al-Hamra and Rakeen real estate firms. In 2006, temporary mortgages were allowed for long leases (over 20 years) governed by the Ras Al-Khaimah Land Department. From 2008 onwards, developers who sell off planned properties need to register their names in the Real Estate Developers' Register with Ras Al-Khaimah Investment Authority to obtain permission/licence for the development.⁴⁴⁶

Finally in 2006, similarly to the other emirates, Umm Al-Quwain allowed UAE and GCC citizens (as well as public joint stock companies) to own

442 Marlow, T. (2012).

443 Rab Kirchner, S. (2011). *Sharjah: Seascape Urbanism in a Khaliji Port City*. Research Paper, Transnational Urbanism Project, pp. 791–800.

444 Wahid, J., Saleh, B., Shihadeh, M., Arar, A., Awad, J., and Shihadeh, M. (2020). *Urbanization in Ajman: Pushing by Housing Development*. In *International Transaction Journal of Engineering, Management, & Applied Sciences & Technologies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 1–11.

445 Marlow, T. (2012).

446 Ibid.

land within the emirate. However, foreigners are only allowed to own floors/flats and not land. By 2007, a law was issued that required developers to register in a Developers' Register at the Survey and Planning Department.⁴⁴⁷

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Sharia law is the basis of the UAE's fundamental legal principles, however most of the country's legislation comprises a blend of Islamic and European civil law concepts, originating from 19th and 20th century Egyptian legal code.⁴⁴⁸ While the legal system in the UAE is structured and comprehensive, it is also somewhat rigid and bureaucratic. The legal structure is complex, with both Sharia and civil courts, and with each emirate maintaining its own federal court of first instance. Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah, however, have completely separate judicial frameworks.⁴⁴⁹

The UAE's legal structure can be daunting for those unaccustomed to it, particularly for business endeavours, as it diverges significantly from Western legal frameworks. Despite these disparities, the foundational legal principles remain logical and adaptable, evolving over centuries to address contemporary societal needs. Recent amendments in commercial law have also fostered a more accessible environment for foreign enterprises and investors.⁴⁵⁰

Islam is designated as the state religion and Sharia or Quranic law is the primary legal source according to the Constitution. While Sharia principles influence criminal and civil laws, their direct impact is primarily observed in social laws such as family, divorce or

inheritance matters. Commercial disputes are predominantly adjudicated by civil courts or arbitration tribunals.⁴⁵¹

Several Sharia principles apply to business transactions, shaping the development of commercial codes in the UAE. While not directly mirrored in commercial legislation, these principles inform the drafting and interpretation of laws. These include the prohibition of usury or interest (Riba), the requirement for shared risk, the avoidance of uncertainty (Gharar) and clarity of contracts, the necessity for parties' legal capacity and consent and the prohibition of coercion or duress in contracts.⁴⁵²

In 2002, HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum announced that real estate in designated areas of Dubai would become available for ownership by foreigners on a freehold basis. At the time, there were virtually no specialized laws and regulations in place to accommodate Dubai's burgeoning real estate market. Following its creation in 2007, Dubai's Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) has played an increasingly public and crucial role in developing and supervising Dubai's real estate regulatory framework and development.⁴⁵³

The same can be said of Abu Dhabi after the enactment of Law No. 19 of 2005, which allowed property ownership for the first time.

The legislative framework in the northern emirates remains in part inconsistent but is slowly developing. The real estate market in Abu Dhabi started to develop in earnest in 2005, when Law No. 3 of 2005 introduced regulations regarding the registration of property, including the establishment of a Land

447 Ibid.

448 Khedr, A. (2018). [UPDATE: Overview of United Arab Emirates Legal System](#). Web publication, Hauser Global Law School Program, New York University.

449 Ibid.

450 Ibid.

451 Ibid.

452 Ibid.

453 Ibid.

Registration Department at Abu Dhabi and Al-Ain Municipalities.⁴⁵⁴

At the national level, the Emirates Real Estate Corporation (EREC) was established through federal law No. 7 in 2000, with capital of AED 500 million and the overall mission to design and construct properties to meet the real estate needs of the government. Clients include a variety of government entities, ranging from ministries to federal authorities (including ministries of education, foreign affairs, human resources and infrastructure and others). EREC is also involved in construction projects abroad, such as the embassies of the UAE in Germany, Turkmenistan and Canada, as well as head of mission and ambassador residences in several countries.

In general, the legislative system pertaining to land can be summarized in the following:

- Decision-making is highly centralized and tightly connected to the power structure of the country (the sheikh).
- The institutional framework of land management in the UAE is based on the laws of each emirate. Apart from the federal ministries, each emirate has full autonomy over its land and how it is distributed and managed.
- Only the Federal Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure (MoEI) has a near full mandate over lands at the federal level.⁴⁵⁵
- There is a mix between laws at federal and emirate levels, in addition to specific rulings issued by the sheikhs.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

As a federal country, each emirate has its own laws and regulations; however, some

federal ministries govern across the entire the UAE. For example, the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure has the mission to organize, develop and enhance competitiveness in energy, mining, water resources, land and sea transportation, roads, utilities, housing, building, construction and sustainability of investment; it is also responsible for the optimal use of partnerships, technology and advanced sciences and adopting innovative global solutions to improve quality of life.⁴⁵⁶ In general, the key stakeholders driving land policy in the UAE are the private sector, government bodies and the ruling family.

The UAE has defined several types of property rights: (1) freehold, where the owner has full rights over the property; (2) usufruct, where the property can be used for a limited time and the owner can derive income from the land; (3) Musataha, also where the property can be used for a limited time, and the owner can construct buildings on it; and (4) leasehold, where the property is used for a limited period of time based on a contractual agreement. In Abu Dhabi and Dubai, land acquisition is tightly linked to and dependent on nationality: UAE citizens have no restrictions, GCC citizens are subject to some restrictions, and other nationalities face much tighter limitations.⁴⁵⁷

At the federal level, the Sheikh Zayed Housing programme, established in 1999, provides interest-free housing loans repayable over a 25-year period to citizens with low incomes. Over 14,500 Emiratis received new houses from 2000 to 2012.

LAND SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS

Key land sector stakeholders within the Government of the UAE are illustrated in the organizational chart shown in Figure 78 on the following page.

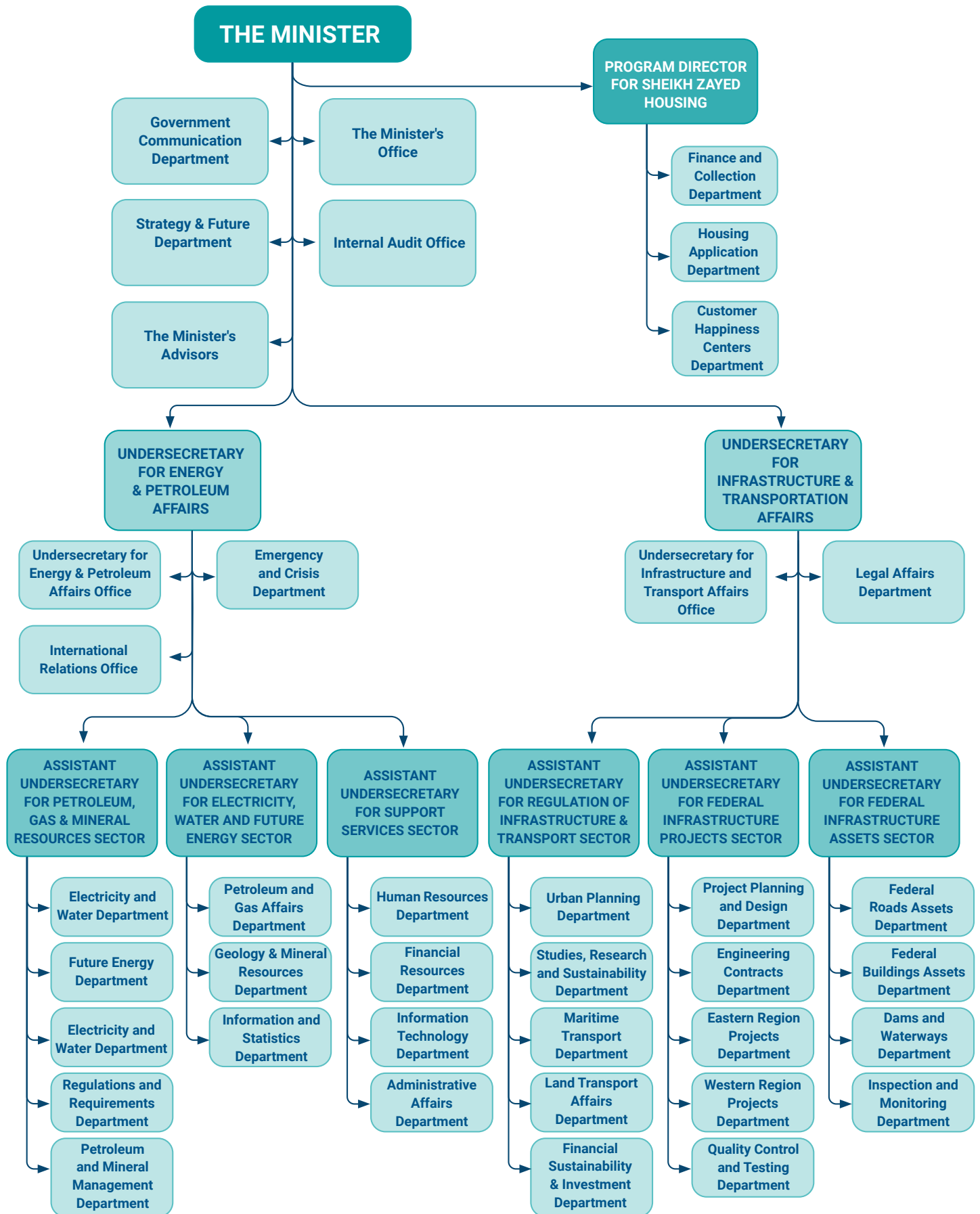
454 Ibid.

455 MoEI (2021). *Vision & Mission*. Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure in UAE.

456 Ibid.

457 Black, I., and Carrol, J. (2017).

FIGURE 87: ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF THE UAE MINISTRY OF ENERGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE



Source: Authors, based on UAE Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure (2021).

LAND MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

The land management and administration system in the UAE is highly institutional, with strict rules and regulations in place for most transactions. Nevertheless, the system is still undergoing changes and improvements in terms of digitization and ensuring faster and smoother processes. The following sections provide information on the five functions of tenure in the UAE, along with supplementary data gathered through the land assessment survey.

LAND TENURE

Land is a highly political topic in the UAE. While some information on land tenure is available for investors, there is still a great deal of ambiguity concerning how the system works. The main sources of information regarding tenure are legal texts and brochures made to attract foreign real estate investors in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Public data is not always clear or available and depends on the specifics of the emirate and the associated data owner.

All Emirati households are entitled to land or built properties in their emirate of origin, granted to them by the state. However, it is difficult to have a clear picture for the whole of the UAE about land tenure rights and ownership patterns and the process of allocating them to citizens. Different rules apply in different emirates, as the UAE has a federal regime in which each emirate has its own rules and regulations regarding land.

Landownership as a right belongs to Emirati nationals only, which accounts for only 13 per cent of the UAE's total population, and less than 10 per cent of the population in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. While there is now an option for foreign nationals residing in the UAE to buy residential property in the form of floors and apartments, they cannot purchase land.

In Abu Dhabi, usufruct agreements with the emirate give nationals the right to use but not own land, and *musataha* grants the right to own floors or buildings but not the land itself. Foreigners are allocated rights to residential units for 99 years in Abu Dhabi, *musataha* for 50 years, usufruct for 99 years or a long-term lease of 25 years or more. The Abu Dhabi Executive Council implemented a standard form to be used for all *musataha* agreements made in the emirate between two or more government entities or between government entities and third parties. The private sector follows the same rules with minor deviations.

In Dubai, foreigners may own property without restriction only in designated areas (including "free zones" such as Sports City, International City, Arabian Ranches, Palm Jumeirah, etc.). They also have usufruct and long-term lease options available to them. The Dubai Land Department is responsible for land tenure in coordination with municipalities and RERA (Real Estate Regulatory Authority). Foreign nationals cannot own property in Sharjah but do have an option of 99-year usufruct rights.

Tenure is typically granted to the head of the household, which in most cases is considered the husband. Respondents of the land assessment survey believe that forced eviction in the UAE is unlikely, and there is no forced displacement unless for the purpose of national security, while relocation (with compensation) is most often due to land development. This can include the creation of new developments, upgrading of informal settlements, urban regeneration, replanning and infrastructure requirements (such as constructing the metro). One example of displacement that occurs due to urban regeneration is that which took place at Pier I at Mina Zayed (the old harbour), where fishermen and craftsmen living in older warehouses were displaced when the entire pier was turned into a mixed-use entertainment area.

In Abu Dhabi, cadastral documents are kept in GIS format at the Department of Municipal

FIGURE 88: LAND ADMINISTRATION TRENDS IN UAE

This graphic provides an indicative overview of national-level trends based on the data presented in the country profile. The findings are illustrative rather than definitive and, in some cases, may be non-conclusive, as contextual and institutional variations may apply. The graphics below present the performance of the five core land administration functions - from weak to well-functioning - together with performance across four complementary indicators: SDG 11.1.1, the Assets Indicator, the Registering Property Score, and the Corruption Perceptions Index. To ensure comparability, all indicators were proportionally adjusted.

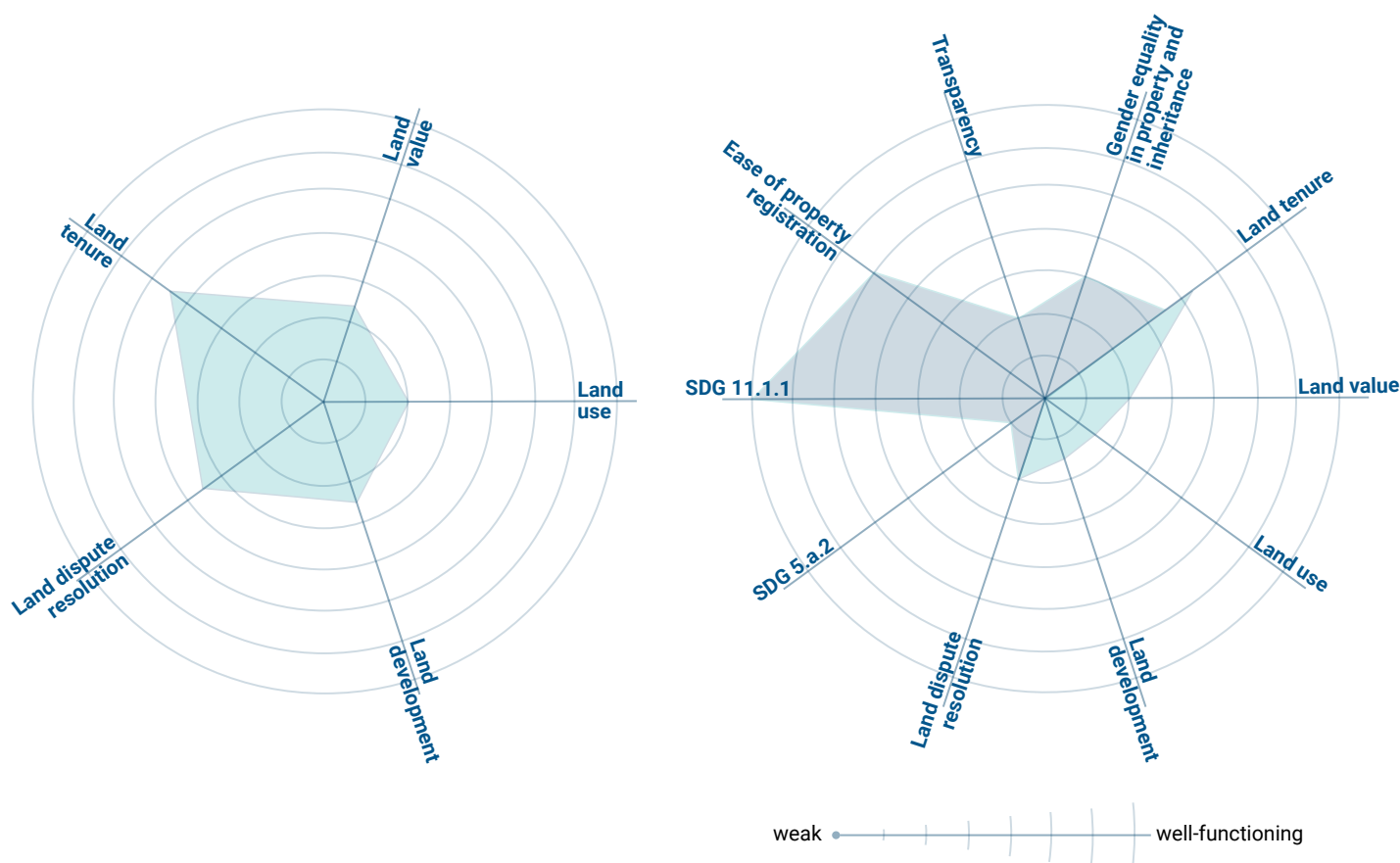


TABLE 18: OVERVIEW OF LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS IN UAE

CRITERIA	LAND TENURE	LAND VALUE	LAND USE	LAND DEVELOPMENT	LAND DISPUTES RESOLUTION
Existence / coverage of the system	●	●	●	●	●
Effectiveness	●	●	●	●	●
Procedural duration	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	●
Affordability	●	●	N/A	●	●
Accessibility	●	N/A	●	●	●
Data availability	●	●	●	N/A	N/A
Mandates clarity	N/A	●	●	●	●

● Significant challenge
 ● Moderate challenge
 ● No/ limited challenge

Source: Authors, United Nations Statistics Division. (n.d.). [SDG indicators database](#); World Bank (2021). [Women, business and the law 2021](#); World Bank (n.d.). [Registering property](#); Transparency International. (2022). [Corruption perceptions index 2022: Middle East and North Africa](#).

Affairs, along with land use and development plans. It is not likely that a single service that has access to all information, as the Statistical Centre of Abu Dhabi and the Abu Dhabi Housing Authority seem to have only partial access. In Dubai cadastral documents are also kept at the Municipality of Dubai.

The cadastre holds two main types of documents: (1) the title deed certificate, which includes the owner's name, value, area, plot number and any special conditions, and (2) a map that shows the plot boundaries and coordinates, area, owner name, community name and plot number. In addition, the cadastre holds information on type of land use, number of floors and rooms in a building, applicable development regulations, electricity and water authority approval, other infrastructure and underground services (not applicable in desert or undesignated lands) and civil defence approval if required. Urban services, however, may not be completely updated in cadastral maps, meaning that problems may arise during new construction projects.

LAND USE

Land use plans in the UAE are sometimes referred to as "national" economic plans; however, they are often published either by the government of Dubai or Abu Dhabi and tend to compete to some extent. Even at the local level, Dubai, for example, has developed multiple versions of land-use plans, not all of which are implemented.

There are plans at the scale of the emirate in Abu Dhabi and the northern emirates, as these include secondary cities and rural areas with some importance. They have been unequally applied and implemented throughout the years.

There are also local level plans, which are seen as adequate and well-enforced. Respondents gave further insights into local planning:

- Plans are often programmatic (over the next 10, 20 or 30 years) and do not include all private developments. Historically, these plans have rarely been implemented in full. There is often a discrepancy between centralized plans at the scale of emirate/municipality and developments initiated by members of the ruling family at a private or semi-public scale, which tend to trump the integrated public plans. More generally, an increasing part of these plans includes entrusting the development of large plots of land to private or semi-public developers, who then manage these areas entirely (e.g. many of the smaller islands in Abu Dhabi).
- Municipalities issue an annually updated plan; however, these are not always implemented.
- Despite land-use and land development regulations in place since 2007, developers are able to propose projects that do not fit these plans and they are often approved.

Respondents note that there is very little tolerance for illicit activities in the UAE, including illegal or informal settlements. Those without proper work permits are typically deported out of the country.

Recently, a large part of the building permit regulations process (such as government-related services) has moved online. For example, every tenancy contract now must be registered digitally on governmental websites. Building permits are not issued unless all approved drawings are inspected by the relevant municipality, civil defence, DLD and Roads and Transport Authority.

The UAE has environmental protection land-use regulations, but only roughly half of respondents find them adequate, though they are seen as tightly enforced. One respondent notes that such regulations ensure the sustainability of new buildings and improves the UAE's image

internationally. The current regulations include a rating system for building design called Estidama, which grants a number of “pearls” depending on the sustainability of the design and sets ground rules that each new building has to meet.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

Most respondents are aware of land expropriation mechanisms, with some noting that most expropriations involve tenants being removed from residential or commercial properties, but not land, as land expropriation is not common in the UAE. When it does occur, it is believed to involve generous compensation.

Regulations to control land subdivisions/consolidation in urban and rural areas are considered efficient by most respondents. There are mechanisms for ensuring that planning and construction align with land-use regulations, which are frequently used. One respondent added that everything is supervised by municipalities when granting permits for construction and registration.

The process for property development is considered easy for landowners, professional developers and public authorities. Some respondents added that since development is highly encouraged and is one of the major sectors for investment and economic development, the process is intentionally made quite fast and easy, even though it is expensive and has many regulations. One respondent notes that the process is very confusing in Abu Dhabi and more straightforward in Dubai.

A large majority of respondents confirm that mechanisms to change land use are in place and are carried out by the granting of planning permissions and building permits.

LAND VALUE

There is believed to be an institutionalized methodology for assessing the value of land

and properties, whether urban or rural. In free zones/designated areas, the value of land is determined by the private or semi-public developer. The Dubai Land Department (DLD) also has a separate evaluation criterion based on its own annual index for land values per square foot GFA, in addition to private market valuation.

While land is not taxed, other than land sales, fees and annual service charges are seen as very high. This is seen by some as a form of indirect taxation, though the fees are not transparent and are believed to go to semi-governmental developers. There is, however, a 5 per cent tax on tenancy contracts and 10 per cent of commercial properties, as well as an additional municipality tax, paid at the same time as water and electricity (in Abu Dhabi, this tax is also 5 per cent of the tenancy contract and is higher for foreigners than for nationals).

Land value information is accessible to everyone through submission of a request to the government.

LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

There is believed to be a well-structured formal system for resolving conflicts related to land and parcel boundaries. Most respondents do not believe that women face different or additional challenges than men in accessing the formal dispute resolution system, though opinions are more divided regarding women's access to non-formal land dispute resolution mechanisms.

In terms of land-related dispute cases, the proportion being settled in formal courts is unclear, as court records are near inaccessible in the UAE. Some respondents indicate that there are other mechanisms to solve land rights disputes. These include governmental entities (DLD, land authorities, municipal land departments), arbitration, community mechanisms (Diwan, majlis, etc.) and political mechanisms.

LEARNING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Learning offers on topics related to land are mainly provided by universities in a strictly academic format. There are very few independent research institutions or professional research bodies, such as think tanks.

The universities provide very high-quality programmes, mainly at the bachelor's and master's level. Most of the programmes focus on architecture, civil engineering and geospatial studies. Only the Université Paris-Sorbonne Abu Dhabi offers courses that cover environmental, social, economic and sometimes political issues in urban planning. In general, land issues are covered under the themes of housing, mobility, the real estate market and geospatial technologies. No specific attention is given to land management systems as a separate topic. Apart from courses provided by the DLD, which are geared towards real estate development, urban planning courses cover land issues in a very general way.

The key observations can be summarized as follows:

- There is room to establish specialized research institutes or initiatives for urban studies, including land topics, both for applied research and theoretical knowledge.
- There is a need to diversify the learning offers and create a platform for urban planners, practitioners, researchers and other professionals to meet and exchange on a regular basis.
- The private sector dominates the scene and will continue to do so as long as there is no civil society present in the urban landscape.

Research

Most research that is conducted on land-related topics is led by individual researchers pursuing

their degrees (master's, PhD or postdoctoral). Little research is known to have been initiated by government authorities or research centres. The DLD has conducted research on housing markets, residential sales and the real estate sector. Much of the existing research tackles issues related to climate change and sustainability in general or looks at market-based research on land value and investment. Several academics regularly publish on this topic.

Access to research and data in general at national bodies is another issue that needs to be addressed. It is possible that research on land management topics exists at the national level, however, if that is the case it is strictly kept for political decision-making and hence may not be publicly available.

Potential collaboration

This section identifies institutions that may be suitable for initiating urban or land-related cooperation projects. The list features key educational institutions that had some input during the study or those that were found to have a good record for other international cooperation activities. It should be noted that most private and public sector respondents did not indicate strong interest to participate in the study or beyond. Some outreach activities could be initiated to discuss common points of collaboration.

The following government entities have been identified as having the potential to collaborate on land-related projects, including capacity development and joint research. Joint workshops or events could be a good starting point to trigger interest and initiate long-term cooperation.

Government Entities:

- Emirates Real Estate Corporation
- General Secretariat of Municipalities

- Federal Environmental Agency- Abu Dhabi
- Sheikh Zayed Housing Programme
- Dubai Land Department
- Abu Dhabi Department of Municipal Affairs and Transport
- Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR)
- Ajman University of Science and Technology is a network of universities in the UAE with campuses in Ajman, Al-Ain and Fujairah.
- Zayed University offers bachelor's and master's programmes in business sciences, information technology and education, with campuses in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.
- Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research is an independent research institution dedicated to the promotion of professional research and educational excellence in the UAE and the Gulf.

Universities, Institutions and Research & Community Service Centres:

- United Arab Emirates University is based in Al-Ain and includes colleges of humanities and social sciences, education, business and economics, Sharia and law, information technology and engineering. It offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in chemical, civil, mechanical, architectural and petroleum engineering, as well as other engineering-related courses.
- Abu Dhabi University has colleges of arts and science, engineering and computer science and business administration.
- Dubai International Academic City is a purpose-built, free trade zone for tertiary academic institutions. It is home to a selection of globally recognized universities, training centres, e-learning centres, professional centres and research and development companies. Many of these institutions were previously part of the earlier-established Dubai Knowledge Village, also a dedicated education zone.
- CSEM-UAE Innovation Center works on technologies in environmental applications (energy and water), system engineering and mechatronics. It is a joint venture between the Government of Ras Al-Khaimah and the Swiss Research Center CSEM.
- Gulf Research Center in Dubai promotes studies on GCC countries and Gulf issues, conducts workshops, publishes data on GCC, offers consultancy services and provides training to students and employees.
- Center of Excellence for Applied Research and Training Higher Colleges of Technology, Abu Dhabi and the UAE provides online courses.
- Academia UAE is an academic institute offering education, vocational training and transfer of technology in the UAE.
- Lotus Educational Institute, the UAE is an educational institute located in Dubai Knowledge Village.

Republic of Yemen⁴⁵⁸



FACT SHEET:

-  **Capital city: Sanaa (population: 3,527,430)⁴⁵⁹**
-  **Population: 39,390,799⁴⁶⁰**
-  **Population growth rate: 3 per cent⁴⁶¹**
-  **Urban population: 40 per cent⁴⁶²**
-  **Urban population growth rate: 4.6 per cent⁴⁶³**
-  **Land area: 527,970 km²⁴⁶⁴**
-  **Coastline: 2,252 km⁴⁶⁵**

458 This country profile summarizes the paper: UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2023). [Yemen Land Sector Assessment: Background Paper](#).

459 World Population Review. [Sanaa](#).

460 World Bank (2023). [Population total – Yemen, Rep.](#)

461 World Bank (2024). [Population growth \(annual %\) – Yemen, Rep.](#)

462 World Bank (2024). [Urban population \(% of total population\)](#).

463 World Bank (2024). [Urban population growth \(annual %\)](#).

464 World Bank (2024). [Land area \(sq. km\)](#).

465 Nagi, H. M. H. (2021). [Delineating and calculating the length of Yemen's mainland shoreline](#). In *International Journal of Alternative Fuels and Energy*, 5(1), 1-9.

OVERVIEW

Yemen has a complex land tenure history. During the British colonial period, all lands in the city of Aden belonged to the State and were leased to tenants by the colonial authorities. Outside of the colonial territories and authority, the Sultanates issued deed ownership documents (hojjah) to landowners.⁴⁶⁶ In the former South Yemen (People's Democratic Republic of Yemen), lands were nationalized in 1970 by the

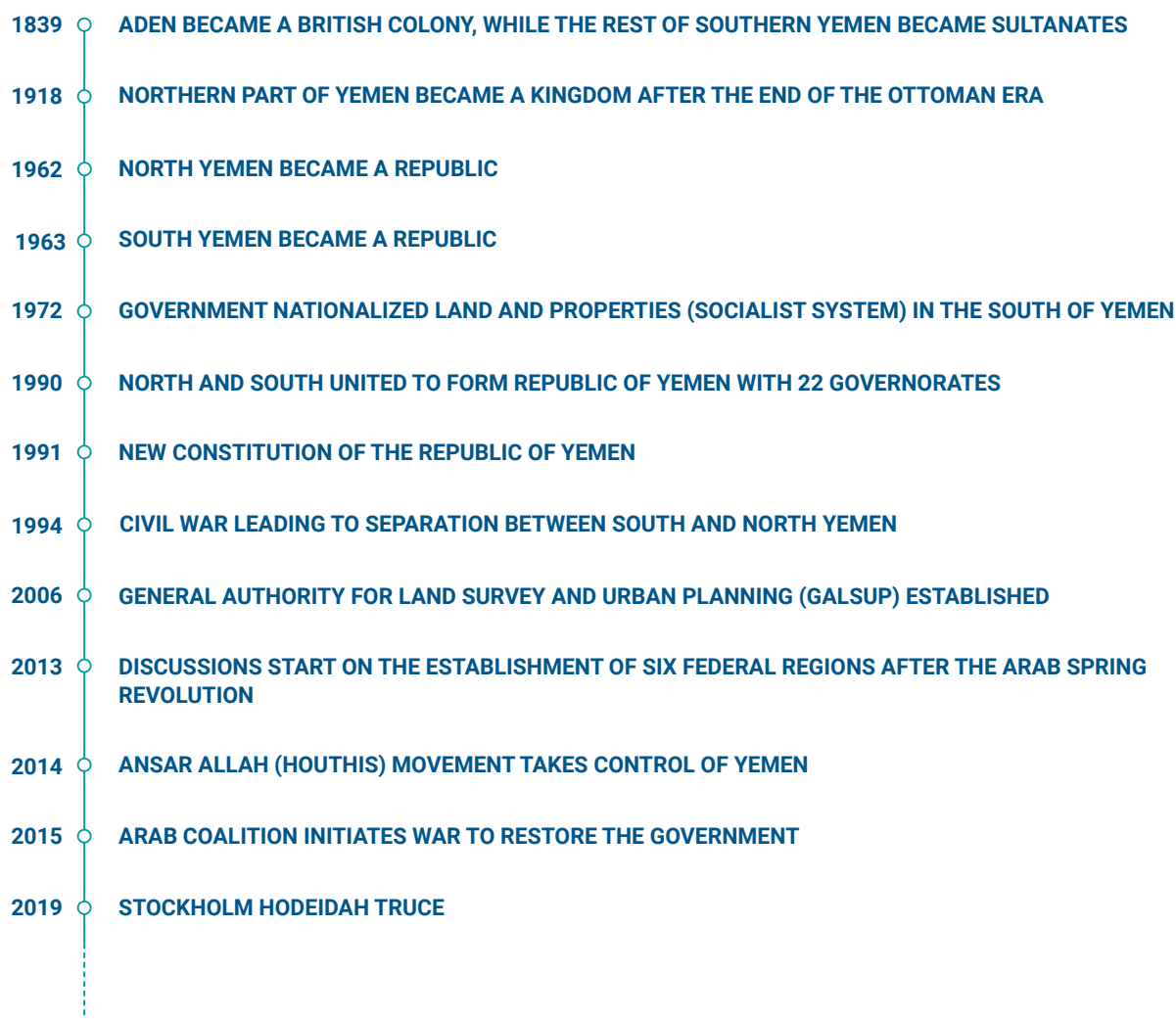
socialist government that were predominantly owned by Sultans who took power after the British withdrawal.⁴⁶⁷

Yemen was unified in 1990, but a civil war started between the north and south starting in 1994 led to a separation of north and south. Between 2003-2009 Houthis in the north fought six wars with forces from the south and one with Saudi Arabia. Following a 2011 Arab Spring uprising in the country, al Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula

466 Unruh, J. D. (2016). [Mass claims in land and property following the Arab Spring: Lessons from Yemen](#). *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 5(1), 6-6.

467 Yemen Armed Violence Assessment (2010). [Under pressure: Social violence over land and water in Yemen](#). Issue Brief 2.

FIGURE 89: HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF KEY LAND-RELATED EVENTS IN YEMEN



Source: Authors.

(AQAP) seized territory in the east. Starting in 2012 a national dialogue took place to draft a more inclusive, federal constitution. In 2014 AQAP attacked across the peninsula and in 2014 the Houthis attacked and took Sanaa. In 2015 Saudi Arabia and its allies intervened and secured Aden in south Yemen and Marib northeast of Sanaa. In 2016 Al Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula established a mini state around Mukalla in east Yemen. In 2018-19 the warring parties agreed on a ceasefire and troop withdrawal from Hodeidah; the Stockholm Hodeidah truce largely holds as of 2021, though violence continues in parts of Yemen outside Hodeidah. In 2019 Saudi Arabia brokered a power-sharing

arrangement between warring groups, but implementation only started in 2020 when COVID-19 triggered a temporary UN-backed truce, and no further progress was made. As of 2022 the warring factions continue to attack and fight for territory and natural resources such as oil, while different actors try to engineer a permanent truce.⁴⁶⁸

Yemen is one of the world's largest humanitarian crises with over 23 million people in need, including 4.3 million IDPs. 80 per cent of the population are currently below the poverty line. The country hosts 95,305 refugees and asylum seekers, mainly from Somalia and Ethiopia.⁴⁶⁹

468 Reuters (2022). [Yemen's slide into political crisis and war](#).

469 UNHCR (2022). [UNHCR Operational Portal for Yemen](#).

Recent reports show that close to one million displaced and vulnerable populations live in some 1,700 IDP sites across Yemen.⁴⁷⁰ Other causes of forced displacement are: war, political and tribal conflicts, revenge and water shortages. Poverty also causes displacement and internal migration to urban centres and cities in search of livelihood opportunities.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

All legislation is based on the principles of Islamic law, which respects and protects private property. However, the implementation of the law varies with individual interpretation and cultural preference. For example, women's right to land is not clearly defined. In addition, legislations, Sharia laws and regulations and tribal customs are applied differently in different regions or cities.

The existing legislation has contradicting sections regarding the mandate of different ministerial bodies, whether in relation to planning procedures or land administration. This makes it difficult to coordinate and integrate regulations and standards within the land sector. In addition to this lack of clarity, the legislation (see below) also creates overlap in tasks.

- Urban Planning Law no. (20) of (1995)
- Executive Regulations for Urban Planning Ministerial Resolution no. (260) of (1997)
- Local Authority Law no. (4) of (2000)
- Real Estate Registration Law (1991)
- States' Lands and Real Estates Law of the Year (1995)

- The Right to Own Property Act of (1995)
- Investment Law (2002)
- The Local Authorities Law in (2000) and the executive regulations no. (269) of (2000)

The lack of accurate information and poorly defined roles and responsibilities of land governance institutions in key policy documents affect optimal implementation of land administration and management functions.

Capacity gaps exist in the land registry system. It is not able to detect fraud or authenticate ownership of land or plots where two or more people lay claim. As a result, complainants are turning to the courts to formalize land ownership and address land disputes. It is estimated that 50 to 80 per cent of cases in primary courts relate to land and property rights.⁴⁷¹ As a result, the courts are overstretched, leading to protracted cases with some spanning over ten years. The increased concerns about widespread corruption undermines the legitimacy of the judiciary. The legitimacy of the court system varies significantly across Yemen. In the former North, customary law or 'urf predominates, while in the former South, the courts are much more frequently used to resolve land disputes.⁴⁷² Where both the formal State and customary mechanisms are unable to establish legitimacy of land tenure in a timely manner, claimants often resort to violence. Inheritance issues can complicate matters further, particularly in the highland areas where inheritance is the main avenue for acquiring land.⁴⁷³

The main challenges are: (a) ongoing war (security problems, displacement of people, etc.); (b) two ruling authorities controlling different parts of the country (the internationally

470 UNHCR (2020). *Refugees and asylum-seekers, May 2020*.

471 World Bank (2009). *Land tenure for social and economic inclusion in Yemen: Issues and opportunities*.

472 Yemen Armed Violence Assessment (2010). *Under pressure: Social violence over land and water in Yemen*, Issue Brief 2; Al-Zwaini, L. (2012). *The Rule of Law in Yemen: Prospects and Challenges*. HiIL Rule of Law Quick Scan Series.

473 World Bank (2006). *Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, Middle East and North Africa Region*.

recognized government and the Houthi government), which affects mechanisms for land law enforcement; (c) high population growth, which puts pressure on land use, with additional pressure on agricultural land from urban sprawl; and (d) lack of regional and national master plans.

In 2006, the government established the General Authority for Land Survey and Urban Planning (GALSUP) as an entity responsible for the

comprehensive management and administration of land. GALSUP is responsible for all land related tasks; planning, preparation, concession/ownership contracts and notarization. It also has a responsibility to develop a National Land Policy (NLP) within the cultural, religious, legal, political, and economic framework within which they function.⁴⁷⁴ GALSUP has 22 branches with the following departments in each governorate: land, planning, notary public, and control and inspection departments.

TABLE 19: LAWS RELATED TO LAND AND URBAN PLANNING IN YEMEN

PUBLIC OWNERSHIP	Constitution of Yemen (Art.18; Art.19) Civil law (Art.118; Art.119; Art.120)
PRIVATE PROPERTY	Constitution of Yemen (Art.7, para.C; Art.20) Civil law (Art.1154; Art.1159)
COMMON USE OF LAND	Law on State Lands and Real Estate, No. 21 of 1995 (Art.41; Art.43; Art.44; Art.46) Republican Decree, No. 170 of 1996 (Art.2; Art.163; Art.164; Art.165)
WAQF/ENDOWMENT LAND	Constitution of Yemen Waqf Law, No. 23 of 1992 Republican Decree, No. 99 of 199
AGRICULTURE LAND	Constitution of Yemen (Art.7, Para.C) Civil Law (Art.761; Art.765; Art.770; Art.1159)
NEIGHBOURHOOD RIGHTS	Civil Law (Art.1161; Art.1163; Art.1164)
SQUATTERS	Law on State Lands and Real Estate, No. 21 of 1995 (Art.58; Art.59)
LAND ACQUISITION ISSUES FOR THE PUBLIC INTEREST	Law No. 1 of 1995 (Art.1 & Art.2: defining projects for public interest; Art.4: administrative procedures for land acquisition; Art.6: mutually agreed procedures for land acquisition; Art.7: judicial procedures for land acquisition; Art.12, Art.13, Art.14, Art.15 & Art.16: temporary acquisition; Art.21& Art.27: general provisions on acquisition)
LAND AND URBAN PLANNING ACTIVITIES AND GALSUP	Presidential Decree, No. 35 of 2006: established the General Authority for Land, Surveying and Urban Planning (GALSUP) Law No. 82 of 2009: operationalized GALSUP
OTHER LAWS AND LEGISLATIONS RELATED TO LAND	Real Estate Registry Law, No. 39 of 1991 Urban Planning Law, No. 20 of 1995 Executive Regulations for Urban Planning Ministerial Resolution, No. 260 of 1997 Local Authority Law, No. 4 of 2000 Investment Law, No. 22 of 2002

Source: Authors, based on World Bank (2009). *Republic of Yemen - Rural Energy Access Project: resettlement plan (Vol. 1 of 2): Executive summary of the resettlement policy framework*.

474 Dabbas, S., Burns, S., and Burns, T. (2011). *Developing Effective Policy and Planning in Yemen*. FIG Working Week 2011: Bridging the Gap between Cultures. Marrakech, Morocco, 18-22 May 2011.

The Office of Public Works and Roads (OPWR) plays an important role in issuing building licenses. This includes building control and safety, non-violation and avoidance of demolition in case of its location in public roads or properties for others. Represented by the Governor, local councils control resettlement processes. Sub-committees exclusively responsible for documenting houses are formed on the level of each district and lane. Sub-committees' membership includes district member of the local council, lane natural leader and an engineer.

Local authorities in some governorates have initiated local resettlement committees (LRCs) comprising of representatives from the local authorities, owners' representatives and some

community leaders. The LRCs seek solutions for concluded and potential resettlement cases and focus on individuals with no legal documents, or squatters.

International organizations in the land sector provide technical and financial support, including research studies and special reports that help policy and decision makers in their work. They also contribute to building capacity of institutions and their employees.

LAND SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS

Additional stakeholders included 36 specialists (architects, engineers and other professionals) working in the land sector who are experienced in land conflicts.

TABLE 20: MAIN LAND SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS IN YEMEN

STAKEHOLDER	ROLE
1. General Authority of Land, Survey and Urban Planning (GALSUP) and its 22 branches	The central government of Yemen agency responsible for land registration
2. GALSUP clients include:	
A. Private sector (formal and informal, international and national):	
• Commercial investors (agriculture, forestry, mining, petroleum, etc.) • Real estate agents, formal and informal • Land developers and construction businesses, formal and informal • Bankers and money lenders • Corporations and contractors • Lawyers and notaries • Surveyors • Business advisors • Media (a powerful advocacy tool)	
B. Civil society (international and national)	All people who take part in land transactions
• Non-governmental organizations • Community based organizations • Civil society organizations • Associations of farmers and water-users • Religious organizations • Academia	
C. Citizens	
• Landowners as users of the land or as lessors • Lessees, sharecroppers and other users • Squatters • Refugees and internally displaced people • Investors	

Source: Authors.

LAND MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS

LAND TENURE

The land tenure system is complex and involves both formal and informal forms of tenure, including legal and customary. The law recognizes different forms of tenure, including state (public) land, private land, communal land, *waqf* land, rental land and informal land rights. However, many people do not know how to access land rights and the related processes. It is also difficult to obtain funds from banks, financing institutions such as cooperatives to purchase land or properties, especially for women. Although a functioning cadastral system exists, the procedures of registration for lands are expensive and time consuming. Other forms of land tenure allocation or registration (formal, informal, temporary, religious, customary) exist, however *Basira*, a customary and informal land ownership document, is popular and is widely used. Only a small percentage of Yemen's land (10 to 20 per cent) is registered and 80 to 90 per cent of land transactions occur through *Basira*.

In rural areas most landowners have documented rights to their (private) land, enforceable under customary law in the traditional and formal courts. Leases and crop-sharing contracts tend to be documented and long term (10-50 years). There are also short-term agreements for the use of land for one season, usually for rain-fed agricultural land. Traditional leaders (*Sheikh* or *Al-Amin*), prepare the documents of land ownership (*Basira*) and issue the documents for inheriting the land (*fasl*). These documents usually include a description of the land, its area, boundaries and the history of ownership.

No formal policies exist to govern the use of state land or standardize its management. Comprehensive land information is also largely lacking.

The majority of traditional Islamic legal materials and Yemeni laws supports women's right to own,

possess, use, manage and dispose of property. However, in reality, many customary practices prohibit women from inheriting land.

Data on the number of adults in the country, sex disaggregated data or the number of women with secure tenure rights does not exist and obtaining information about land tenure security is very difficult. Urban land and properties are costly and unaffordable for the average person, and even more so for women.

The main cadastral office is in Sana'a with an additional 22 offices in the capital cities of each of the governorates. The total number of employees in these offices is not known. A complete and functioning cadastral system does not exist, and cadastral information is not used for decision-making. The procedures for creating new properties are complicated and costly and take between 25 to 45 days, but it is fairly easy to transfer properties between parties.

The cadastral information is not linked to other spatial data such as natural resources maps and land use plans. It is estimated that the formal cadastral registration system covers less than 40 per cent of the country. The *Basira* land tenure system, however, covers between 61 to 80 per cent.

The many land tenure challenges in the country are the result of the non-functional cadastral system, a lack of capacity in GALSUP to conduct essential land administration and management services, the ongoing war and conflict between customary and Sharia law, particularly regarding women and land acquisition.

LAND USE

The country has not had master plans for more than 20 years. Land use plans exist but are inadequate, not updated and not enforced at the national and regional levels. At the local level, land use plans are adequate but are not enforced. Similarly, urban plans are not adequately enforced. Lack of optimal

FIGURE 90: LAND ADMINISTRATION TRENDS IN YEMEN

This graphic provides an indicative overview of national-level trends based on the data presented in the country profile. The findings are illustrative rather than definitive and, in some cases, may be non-conclusive, as contextual and institutional variations may apply. The graphics below present the performance of the five core land administration functions - from weak to well-functioning - together with performance across five complementary indicators: SDG 5.a.2, SDG 11.1.1, the Assets Indicator, the Registering Property Score, and the Corruption Perceptions Index. To ensure comparability, all indicators were proportionally adjusted.

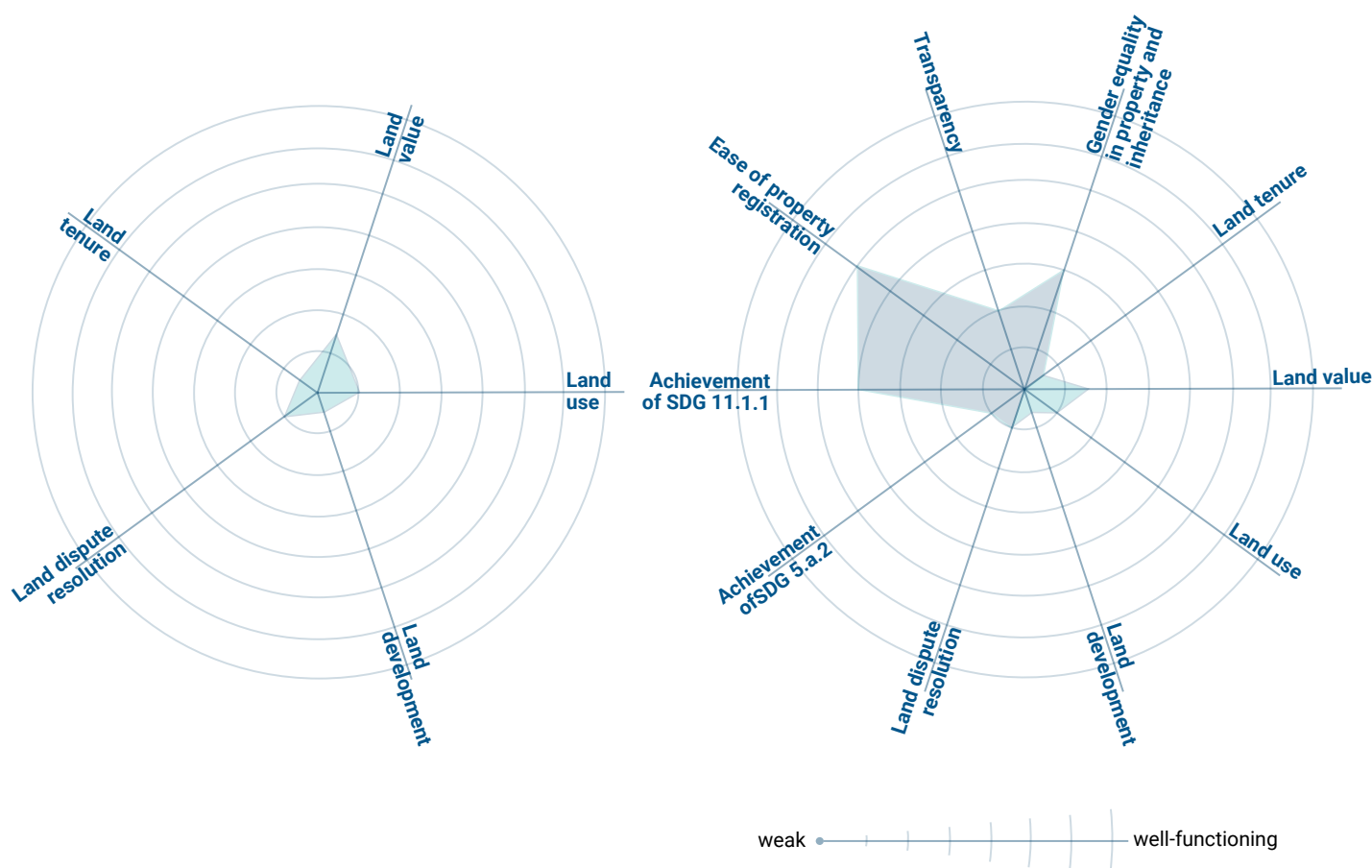


TABLE 21: OVERVIEW OF LAND ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS IN YEMEN

CRITERIA	LAND TENURE	LAND VALUE	LAND USE	LAND DEVELOPMENT	LAND DISPUTES RESOLUTION
Existence / coverage of the system	●	●	●	●	●
Effectiveness	●	●	●	●	●
Procedural duration	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	●
Affordability	●	●	N/A	●	●
Accessibility	●	N/A	●	●	●
Data availability	●	●	●	N/A	N/A
Mandates clarity	N/A	●	●	●	●

● Significant challenge ● Moderate challenge ● No/ limited challenge

Source: Authors, United Nations Statistics Division. (n.d.). [SDG indicators database](#); World Bank (2021). [Women, business and the law 2021](#); World Bank (n.d.). [Registering property](#); Transparency International. (2022). [Corruption perceptions index 2022: Middle East and North Africa](#).

enforcement affect the regulation or schemes that address informal, temporary and displaced population settlements, building permits and rural or agricultural land use. In addition, there are no allocated budgets for municipal plans and projects and community consultations are rare. There is an effective mechanism to change land use by granting planning permissions and building permits, however the mechanism is prone to abuse. While the property development process is easy for landowners, it is much easier for professional developers. The land sector lacks mechanisms to ensure that development costs are fairly distributed between public and private actors, and whether the development is cost-effective with the necessary safeguards against abuse. There is no complete and accessible digital land information system for land use and natural resources.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

The land acquisition process is poorly structured with little clarity on procedures. Mechanisms to acquire land for public use, land expropriation, efficient regulations to control land subdivisions or consolidation in urban areas and to change land use are not cost-effective and prone to abuse. However, in rural areas, the mechanisms and regulations that ensure construction are aligned with land use are cost-effective but are not optimally applied.

The property development process is considered simple for landowners, professional developers and public authorities. Mechanisms and regulations that ensure construction is aligned with land use regulations and are adequate and cost-effective but often applied incorrectly.

LAND VALUE

There is a taxation system for land and properties in urban and rural areas, but it is considered unfair. Land and real estate transactions are taxed at 3 per cent of the sale price when the new owner registers the plot. The seller further pays Zakat contribution of 2.5 per cent of the

profit on capital gains. When previous owners have not paid the taxes on the property, the new owner is compelled to pay all accrued taxes. This encourages people to avoid registering their property transfers. Increased taxes, high registration fees and corruption negatively impact the value of the land. Decision-makers do not take into account the impact of taxation on the use of land and land markets.

There is an institutionalized methodology to assess land value in both urban and rural areas, but it is inadequate and covers only some of the country's land tenure types. The professional valuers are officially recognized and available to cover most tenure types. However, they are not registered and not trained and there are no regulations regulating valuers of land and property. In addition, the institutionalized methodology to assess the value of urban and rural land and buildings is inadequate and not known to key stakeholders.

This causes a lack of clarity in the sector. As the land registries are incomplete and not in good order the land value records are also incomplete; there is also a lack of consolidated information. There is no complete and accessible digital land information system that records land value, which negatively impacts key stakeholders who struggle to access information.

LAND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

There is a well-structured formal system to resolve conflicts and disputes related to land rights and parcel boundaries but the system is slow and unaffordable for most people. Furthermore, people are not familiar with the procedures for formal dispute resolution, and thus do not trust the system. Other mechanisms for solving land rights disputes are official arbitration according to Yemeni law, tribal customary arbitration through tribal sheikhs and social figures and reconciliation (conciliation).

Overcrowding of court cases and lengthy periods of litigation leads to a preference for

customary mechanisms and other alternatives. Land disputes in courts represent more than 70 per cent of cases in commercial courts. Women face many challenges related to land and land disputes. Customs and traditions advanced by male relatives impose restrictions on women claiming their rights to land.

Land ownership and land tenure is the cause of many conflicts and problems. Difficulties in accessing land is a starting point for many land problems leading to land conflicts. Excessive bureaucracy, poor management and record keeping and corruption exacerbate conflicts. The official land conveyancing (legal registration and transfer of ownership) system itself is highly problematic. The prevailing war and the proliferation of arms and armed groups contributes to lawlessness including forceful land acquisition. The weakness of the central authority and the inability to enforce the law affects land management and administration functions.

LEARNING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Public or private institutions in Yemen do not offer academic programmes or training courses in land management. However, topics that are directly or indirectly related to land management are addressed in some courses taught in undergraduate and postgraduate certified programmes in the architectural departments.

They include building legislation, urban design, city planning, some architectural designs courses and a single course in the Faculty of Sharia and Law. According to the National Academic Reference Standards in Yemen, courses with land-related content are public administration, legal or justice, land management, geospatial studies/survey/mapping, spatial planning/land use planning and social sciences. These courses are available to all undergraduate architectural programmes in all public and private universities in Yemen.

REFERENCES

- Abdul-Zahra, Q. (2025). [46.1 million people were counted in Iraq's first census in nearly 40 years](#). Associated Press. 24 February 2025.
- Abu Daiya and Harb, J. (2007). Land management Sector in Palestine. Coalition for Integrity and Equality. [AMAN: Coalition for Equality and Integrity](#).
- Al Deen, B. (2020, December 31). [Training held on land governance](#). Jordan Times.
- Al Najashi, S. (2017). [The Development of a Prototype SDI Compliant 2D Cadastral Parcels Model to Produce a Cadastral Dataset for Oman](#). FIG Working Week 2017.
- Al-Doseri, A., and Jawahery, E. (2018). [The Legal System of the Kingdom of Bahrain](#). Web article, Hauser Global Law School Program, New York University School of Law.
- Al-Naber, M., and Molle, F. (2016). [The politics of accessing desert land in Jordan](#). Land Use Policy, Vol. 59, pp. 492–503.
- Al-Nabi, M. N. (2012). [Bahrain Land Use History 1968-2002](#). Information Affairs Authority.
- Al-Ossmi, L. and Ahmed, V. (2015). [Land, property and user's rights according to Islamic-ottoman reforms in Iraq](#). 12th International Post-Graduate Research Conference 2015 Proceedings, (May), pp. 1–13.
- Al-Oun (2008). [Land Tenure System within the Badia](#), in Remediation and Restoration Projects Regarding the Terrestrial Ecosystems in Jordan (Overview and Phase I). UNCC.
- Al-Zwaini, L. (2012). [The Rule of Law in Yemen: Prospects and Challenges](#). Hiil Rule of Law Quick Scan Series.
- Alon, Y. (2007). [The making of Jordan: Tribes, colonialism and the modern state](#). I.B. Tauris. ISBN: 9781848850132
- Alvaredo, F., Assouad, L. and Piketty, T. (2018). [Measuring Inequality in the Middle East 1990–2016: The World's Most Unequal Region?](#). Review of Income and Wealth Series 0, Number 0, Month 2018. DOI: 10.1111/roiw.12385
- Ambikapathy, B. (2021). [Real Estate Law. Global Corporate Real Estate Guide, Saudi Arabia](#)
- Amiri Diwan. (2025, April 14). [Rawda Award for Excellence in Social Work: Amiri Decision No. 16 of 2025](#). State of Qatar.
- Ammar, K. A. (2013). [General framework for land use planning in the United Arab Emirates](#). In S. Shahid, F. Taha, & M. Abdelfattah (Eds.), [Developments in soil classification, land use planning and policy implications: Innovative thinking of soil inventory for land use planning and management of land resources](#).
- Anseeuw, W., & Baldinelli, G. M. (2020). [Uneven ground: Land inequality at the heart of unequal societies. Research findings from the Land Inequality Initiative](#) (Synthesis report). International Land Coalition. Oxfam and International Land Coalition
- Anderson, J. E., & England, R. W. (2015). [Use-Value Assessment of rural lands: Time for reform?](#) Fair & Equitable. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.
- Salem, H. S., Hilal, J., & Ghattas, R. (2007). [Status of the environment in the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#). Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ).
- ADP (n.d.). [Demography – Data catalog](#). Retrieved November 27, 2025.
- APN (n.d.). Report on land and conflict in the Arab Region.

- Arfat J., Abed al aziz M., Al Sharif F., Al Manama Y. and Norwegian refugee council [المجلس النرويجي للاجئين. A guide to housing, land and property law in the Gaza strip. Norwegian refugee council](#) المجلس النرويجي للاجئين.
- Augustinus, C. and Tempra, O. (2021). [Fit-for-Purpose Land Administration in Violent Conflict Settings](#). Land 10(139). <https://doi.org/10.3390/land10020139>
- Awad, A. (2021). [Brief on the Status of Palestinian People at the end of 2021](#). Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.
- Bahrain Ministry of Information Affairs (2010). [Population and demographic growth](#).
- Bahrain Public Commission for Protection of Marine Resources, the Environment and Wildlife (2009). [Bahrain National Assessment Report on Implementation of The Mauritius Strategy of The Barbados Programme of Action \(BPOA\)](#).
- Bahrain Urban Planning and Development Authority (2021). [Regulations & Laws](#).
- Bahrain Urban Planning and Development Authority (2021). [Subdivision Regulations Simulator](#).
- Banton, C. (2021). [Understanding Escrow: Protecting Parties in Financial Transactions](#). Web article, Investopedia.
- Benvenisti, M., Abu-Zayad, Z., Rubinstein, D., & Rubenstein, D. (1987). The West Bank Handbook: A Political Lexicon. (1st ed.). Routledge <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367274498>
- Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2022). [Bertelsmann Transformation Index data](#).
- Black, I., and Carrol, J. (2017). United Arab Emirates. In [The Real Estate Law Review](#) (6th ed.), Nevin, J. (ed.).
- Bodetti, A. (2019). [Will Bahrain Disappear Beneath the Waves?](#) Lobe Log.
- Bugden, G. (2008). An Overview of the Development Process and Regulatory System in Dubai. (September), pp. 1–9.
- Burns, T., Grant, C., Nettle, K., Brits, A. M. and Dalrymple, K. (2006). [Land Administration Reform: Indicators of Success and Future Challenges](#). Report, UNECE.
- Chahrour, I. (2015). Processes behind regional planning in Lebanon's hinterland [Interview], 23 August 2015.
- CIA (2022). [World Factbook – Syria](#).
- City Population (2022). [Saudi Arabia: Riyadh Region](#).
- International Labour Organization. (1989). [Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 \(No. 169\)](#).
- Dabbas, S., Burns, S., and Burns, T. (2011). [Developing Effective Policy and Planning in Yemen](#). FIG Working Week 2011: Bridging the Gap between Cultures. Marrakech, Morocco, 18-22 May 2011.
- Darwich, R. (2014). Territorial marketing practices as a lens for analysing changes in governance, local development, and territorial building: The case of Lebanon: Union of municipalities [Master's thesis]. Department of Urban Planning, Lebanese University.
- De Bel-Air, F. (2023). [Qataris Make Up Only a Quarter of All Births](#). GLMM Factsheet. Gulf Labour Markets, Migration, and Population Programme of the Gulf Research Centre.
- DLS (2021). [General Information](#). Website, Department of Lands and Survey.
- El-Ayachi, M., Bouramdane, L., & Tine, M. (n.d.). [The Northern Africa land tenure: Challenges and opportunities of sustainable development](#).
- El-ayachi, Moha & Bouramdane, Lahcen & Tine, Moustapha. (2019). [The Land tenure in Northern Africa Challenges and opportunities](#). African Journal on Land Policy and Geospatial Sciences.

- Elsevier. (n.d.). [Land evaluation](#). In ScienceDirect Topics: Earth & Planetary Sciences.
- Elsheshtawy, Y. (2011). [Informal Encounters: Mapping Abu Dhabi's urban public spaces](#). Built Environment, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 92–113.
- Elsheshtawy, Yasser. (2013). [From Souqs to Emporiums: The Urban Transformation of Abu Dhabi](#). Open House International. 38. 58-69. DOI: 10.1108/OHI-04-2013-B0007.
- Elsheshtawy, Y. (2014). Searching for Nasser Square: An urban center in the heart of Dubai. City, 18(6), 746–759. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2014.962890>
- Enemark, S. (2009). [Land Administration Systems, managing rights, restrictions and responsibilities in land](#). Map World Forum, Hyderabad, India.
- Enemark, S., McLaren, R. and Lemmen, C. (2022). [Fit-for-Purpose Land Administration: Providing Secure Land Rights at Scale](#), Land (Special Issue), Vol 1 and 2. doi:10.3390/land10090972
- ELG (2019). An Assessment of Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms in Palestine.
- European Committee of the Regions (2022). [Divisions of Powers: Syria](#).
- FAO (2003). [The Multilingual Land Tenure Thesaurus](#).
- FAO (2010). [World Census of Agriculture 2010 round \(2006-2015\)](#).
- FAO (2012). [Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and forests in the context of national food security](#).(VGGT)
- FAO (2017). [Family Farming in the Near East and North Africa](#). Family Farming Knowledge Platform.
- FAO (2018). [The gender gap in land rights](#).
- FAO (2019). [Lebanon](#).
- FAO (2021). [Land use statistics and indicators: Global, regional and country trends 1990–2019](#). (FAOSTAT Analytical Brief No. 28). FAO.
- FAO (2022). [The State of Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture in the Near East and North Africa region](#).
- FAO (2024). [Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agrifood Systems in the Near East and North Africa region](#). FAO Regional conference for the Near East, 37th session, Amman;
- FAO and UN-Habitat (2009). [Towards improved land governance](#). Land Tenure Working Paper 11.
- Farrer & Co LLP (2018) Property Development in the Middle East.
- Forni, N. (2003). [Land tenure policies in the Near East. In Land Reform Land Settlement and Cooperatives](#). Issue 1.
- Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the [Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War](#). (1949, August 12). 75 U.N.T.S. 287.
- George T. Abed and Hamid R. Davoodi (2003). [Challenges of Growth and Globalization in the Middle East and North Africa](#).
- GLTN (2013, February 28) [Theme 1: Access to Land and Tenure Security](#).
- Government of Jordan. (2014). [Jordan 2025: A National Vision and Strategy](#)
- [Hague Convention \(IV\) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land](#). (1907, October 18).
- Hallward-Driemeier, M. and Hasan, T. (2012). [Empowering Women: Legal Rights and Economic Opportunities in Africa](#). Africa Development Forum series. World Bank.

- Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. (1952). [The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan](#).
- Illankoon, K. (2022,1 July). [Middle East construction gains momentum despite supply chain disruption and rising construction costs](#). Construction Business News.
- Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021). [A decade of displacement in the Middle East and North Africa](#).
- Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2023). [GRID 2023: Internal displacement and food security](#)
- International Labour Organization. (1989). [Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries \(ILO-C169\)](#).
- IOM (2015). [A preliminary assessment of housing, land and property right issues caused by the current displacement crisis in Iraq](#). Geneva, Switzerland: IOM.
- IOM (2019). Refugee resettlement [operations](#) from Lebanon. Geneva, Switzerland: IOM.
- International Valuations Standards Council (2017). [International Valuation Standards 2017 | Business Valuation Resources](#).
- IUCN (2011). [Securing rights and restoring range lands for improved livelihoods in the Badia of the Zarqa River Basin – Jordan](#). Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.
- Jordan. (2019). [Real Estate Ownership Law No. 13 of 2019](#), Art. 179.
- Jordan Ministry of Environment. (2014). Integrated investment framework for sustainable land management in Jordan initiative.
- Jordan Ministry of Local Administration. (2021). [Ministry of Local Administration](#).
- Jordan Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. (2005). [Third tourism development project: Secondary cities revitalization study](#).
- Khedr, A. (2018). UPDATE: [Overview of United Arab Emirates legal system](#). Hauser Global Law Insider. (n.d.). [Land use regulations](#) [Definition]. In Law Insider dictionary.
- Land Matrix initiative (2021). [Analytical Report III: Taking stock of the global land rush](#)
- Legislative and Administrative Land and Property Rights Framework – Lebanon (2024).
- Lemmen, C., Uitermark, H., & Global Land Tool Network. (2013). [The Social Tenure Domain Model: A pro-poor land tool](#). UN-Habitat / GLTN.
- Loayza, N., & Trumbic, T. (2021, February 23). [Women, business and law 2021: Women's economic empowerment is critical to resilient recovery efforts](#). [Web article]. World Bank.
- Madanat, H. J. (2010). [Land tenure in Jordan](#). Land Tenure Journal, Vol. 1, No. 1.
- Madi, B. (2015). Processes behind regional planning in Lebanon's hinterland the cases of the Union of Municipalities of Jezzine and the Union of Municipalities of Tyr [Master's thesis]. Stuttgart University and Ain Shams University.
- Marlow, T. (2012). [Real Estate within the UAE: A summary of legislative development](#). Web article, Al-Tamimi & Company.
- McCallin, B. (2012). [Restitution and Legal Pluralism in Contexts of Displacement, Case Studies on Transitional Justice and Displacement](#).
- McDowall, A., Barrington, L., & Ghantous, G. (2022, April 1). [Yemen's slide into political crisis and war](#) [Web article]. Reuters.
- Ministry of Local Government. (2016). [State of Palestine: Cities report 2016](#). UN-Habitat.
- MoEI (2021). [Vision & Mission](#). Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure in UAE.

- Mohamed, M. A., Anders, J, and Schneider, C. (2020). [Monitoring of changes in land use/land cover in Syria from 2010 to 2018 using multitemporal landsat imagery and GIS](#). Land, 9(7), 226.
- Moshrif, R. (2020). [Income Inequality in the Middle East](#). World Inequality Lab.
- Nagy, S. (2006). Making Room for Migrants, Making Sense of Difference: Spatial and Ideological Expressions of Social Diversity in Urban Qatar. Urban Studies, 43 (1), 119-137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980500409300>
- Najjar, D. and Badstue, L. (2020). [Four ways of strengthening gender equality in the agricultural sector in the MENA region](#). CIMMYT.
- Nasarat, M., Abu-Zaiton, N., Abu-Tayeh, A., & Aljazi, A. (2017). [Jordanian citizens' trends towards women's social, economic, and political rights in Karak, Tafieleh and Maan governorates: A field study 2016](#). International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 7(4), 65–91.
- Ncube, M., Anyanwu, J.C. and Hausken, K. (2013). [Inequality, Economic Growth, and Poverty in the Middle East and North Africa \(MENA\)](#). African Development Bank Group, Working Paper No. 195 December 2013.
- NELGA (2022). [The Scoping Study Executive Report Land Tenure Systems in North Africa Consortium. Strengthening Advisory Capacities for Land Governance in Africa](#). (SLGA) Programme, Addis Ababa.
- New York State Unified Court System (2022). [Alternative Dispute resolution](#).
- Nori, M., Switzer, J. and Crawford, A. (2005). [Herding on the brink: Towards a global survey of pastoral communities and conflict](#). International Institute for Sustainable Development
- NRC (2014). [Life can change: Securing housing, land and property rights for displaced women](#).
- NRC (2016). [Integrated Urban Shelter/ICLA Programme Evaluation in Jordan](#).
- NRCN, UN-Habitat and UNHCR (2008). [Land, Property and Housing in Somalia](#).
- OCHA (2022). [Humanitarian needs overview Syrian Arab Republic. February 2022](#).
- OECD (2022). [Tax on property as a per cent of GDP](#).
- OECD and FAO (2018). [OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2018-2027: Special Focus on the Middle East and North Africa](#).
- OHCHR (1997). [The right to adequate housing \(Art. 11.1\): Forced evictions \(General Comment No. 7\)](#). Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- Pagliani, Paola & Abdellatif, Adel & Hsu, Ellen. (2019) [Leaving No One Behind Towards Inclusive Citizenship in Arab Countries Arab Human Development](#) Arab Human Development Report Research Paper. UNDP
- Palestine General Directorate of Property Tax, Ministry of Finance and Planning and Japan International Cooperation Agency (2016). [Project for Improvement of Local Finance in Palestine: Project Completion Report](#).
- Palestine Land Authority (2019). [West Bank and Gaza Real Estate Registration Project \(RERP\): Terms of Reference for Property Valuation System Development](#). Reference No. GZ-PLA-246729-CS-QCBS.
- PCBS Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2015). pcbs.gov.ps/pcbs_2012/Publications.aspx
- Palestinian Land and Water Settlement Commission (2018). Manual of standard procedures for settlement work.
- Palestinian Land and Water Settlement Commission (2019). Annual Report 2019.
- Palestinian Land and Water Settlement Commission (2020). Land Issues: Land Settlement in the West Bank.

- Palestinian National Authority (2010). Decree-Law (6) of 2010 regarding the Land Authority. Al-Waqi 'a Palestinian magazine, No. 86.
- Peregrine Global Services. (2024). [A guide to assessment management & planning](#).
- Rab Kirchner, S. (2011). [Sharjah: Seascape Urbanism in a Khaliji Port City](#). Research Paper, Transnational Urbanism Project.
- Rae, J. (2002). [An Overview of Land Tenure in the Near East Region](#). Parts I & II. Rome: FAO.
- Rae, J. 2002b. [Tribes and Territory in Modern Day Syria](#), The Arab World Geographer, 5(2).
- Sait, S., & Lim, H. (2006). [Land, Law and Islam: Property and human rights in the Muslim world](#). Zed Books / Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Serageldin, M., Doebele, W., & Elaraby, K. (1980). Land tenure systems and development controls in the Arab countries of the Middle East. In L. Safran (Ed.), [Housing: Process and physical form. Proceedings of the seminar held in Jakarta](#). March 26–29, 1979
- Sfeir, N. (2018). Local economic development via urbanism lever: The case of Lebanon. Studies of Architecture, Urbanism and Environmental Sciences Journal (SAUES), 1(2), 62–78. <https://doi.org/10.22034/saues.2018.02.01>
- Shandas, V., Makido, Y., & Ferwati, S. (2017). Rapid urban growth and land use patterns in Doha, Qatar: Opportunities for sustainability. European Journal of Sustainable Development Research. <https://doi.org/10.20897/ejosdr.201711>
- Sonbol, A. E. (2020). [Women, the family and divorce laws in Islamic history](#). Syracuse University Press.
- State of Palestine. (2015). [National Spatial Plan – Palestine 2025, Palestine 2050: Envisioning Palestine](#). UNDP & UN-Habitat.
- Steudler, D., Rajabifard, A., & Williamson, I. P. (2004). Evaluation of land administration systems. Land Use Policy, 21(4), 371–380. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2003.05.001>
- Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Economy (2019). [Oman Vision 2040](#).
- Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Economy (2020). [Tenth Five Year Development Plan 2021-2025](#).
- Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (2021). [Oman National Spatial Strategy 2040](#).
- Tewfik, M. (1989). [Urban land in Jordan](#). Cities, 6(2), 119–135.
- The Hague. (1907). [Hague Convention \(IV\) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land](#)
- The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and UN-Habitat/GLTN (2022). [Land and natural resources and climate change in the Arab region](#).
- Times of Oman (2022, January 5). [His Majesty's decision to increase funds for governorates praised by ministry](#). Times of Oman.
- Transparency International (2013). [Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer](#).
- UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs (n.d.). [Facts and Figures](#). The Official Portal of the UAE Government.
- UN (1949, August 12). [Geneva Convention \(IV\) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War](#).
- UN (1966a, December 16). [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#). (United Nations Treaty Series, 999 U.N.T.S. 171)
- UN (1966b, December 16). [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#) (United Nations Treaty Series, 993 U.N.T.S. 3)

- UN (1969, December 21). International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination ICERD (United Nations Treaty Series, 660 U.N.T.S. 195).
- UN (1979, December 18). [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) (United Nations Treaty Series, 1249 U.N.T.S. 13).
- UN (1989, November 20). [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#).
- UN (2005). [Land Administration in the UNECE Region: Development trends and main principles](#).
- UN (2016). [New Urban Agenda](#). (paras. 34–35).
- UN (2019). [Guidance Note of the Secretary General 'The United Nations and Land and Conflict'](#).
- UNSC (2000). Resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325). [UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women and peace and security](#) (2000)
- UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (2005). [Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons](#) ("the Pinheiro Principles"), E/CN.4/Sub.2/2005/17, 28 June 2005.
- UN-Habitat (2013). [Reforming Urban Planning System in Lebanon. Findings of the Research Assessment](#).
- UN-Habitat (2018). State Land inventory in Maysan Governorate. Local area development programme – EU.
- UN-Habitat (2019). [The Global Housing Affordability Challenge: A more comprehensive understanding of the housing sector](#). Urban Data Digest Version 2, May 2019 Edition.
- UN-Habitat (2020). Implementation of land settlement works in a participatory manner within the framework of the project to support the right to plan and lands in Area C, West Bank, Palestine.
- UN-Habitat (2021a). [Implementing land policies: A practical guide for assessing capacity](#).
- UN-Habitat (2021b). [Land Administration System in Syria: Analysis and Recommendations](#).
- UN-Habitat (2021c). [Promoting and Protecting Housing, Land and Property Rights of Syrian Refugees Living in Lebanon: Towards an Integrated Response](#).
- UN-Habitat (2021d). [World Cities Day Celebrations at Expo 2020 Dubai](#).
- UN-Habitat (2022). [Guidance Note on Land and Conflict for Syria](#).
- UN-Habitat (2023, June 13). [Protecting the housing, land and property rights of Syrians: A roundtable discussion on the future of partners' engagement in a fast-evolving context](#). [Event].
- UN-HABITAT and Islamic Development Bank Group (2020). [Informal Settlements in the Arab Region: Towards Arab Cities without informal areas- Analysis and prospects](#).
- UN-Habitat/GLTN (2013). [Evictions, Acquisition, Expropriation and Compensation: Practices and selected case studies](#).
- UN-Habitat/GLTN (2017a). [How to do a Root Cause Analysis of Land and Conflict for Peace Building](#).
- UN-Habitat/GLTN (2017b). [Land Governance: A Review and Analysis of Key International Frameworks](#). Report 1/2017.
- UN-Habitat/GLTN (2018a). [Valuation of unregistered lands: A policy guide](#).
- UN-Habitat/GLTN (2018b). [Women and Land in the Muslim World. Pathways to increase access to land for the realization of development, peace and human rights](#).
- UN-Habitat/GLTN (2021a). [Land Administration System in Syria: Analysis and Recommendations](#).

- UN-Habitat/GLTN (2021b). [Promoting and Protecting Housing, Land and Property Rights of Syrian Refugees Living in Lebanon: Towards an Integrated Response.](#)
- UN-Habitat/GLTN (2021c). [Tenure Responsive Land Use Planning. A Practical Guide for Country Level Intervention.](#)
- UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024a). [Land Governance and Land Rights in Palestine Analysis and Recommendations.](#)
- UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024b). [Land, Housing, and Property in Iraq: A review of the legal, institutional and administrative frameworks.](#)
- UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024c). [Land, Housing, and Property in Jordan: A review of the legal, institutional and administrative frameworks.](#)
- UN-Habitat/GLTN (2024d). [Legislative and Administrative Land and Property Rights Framework – Lebanon.](#)
- UN-Habitat/GLTN and Dutch Cadastre (2016). [Fit-for-Purpose Land Administration Guiding Principles for Country Implementation.](#)
- UN-Habitat/GLTN and International Institute for Rural Reconstruction (2018). [Land and Conflict: Lessons Learned from the Field on Conflict Sensitive Land Governance and Peacebuilding.](#)
- UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2022). [Assessment of the Land Sector in Lebanon: Background Paper.](#)
- UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2023a). [Jordan Land Sector Assessment: Background Paper.](#)
- UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2023b). [Palestine Land Sector: Assessment Background Paper.](#)
- UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2024a). [Bahrain land sector assessment: Background paper.](#)
- UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2024b). [Iraq Land Sector Assessment: Background Paper.](#)
- UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2024c). [Qatar Land Sector: A Snapshot.](#)
- UN-Habitat/GLTN and the Urban Training and Studies Institute (2024d). [Saudi Arabia Land Sector Assessment: Background Paper.](#)
- UN-HABITAT/GLTN and Union of Agricultural Work Committees (2022). [Land, Women Empowerment and Socioeconomic Development in the Arab Region.](#) UN-Habitat.
- UN-Habitat/UNDP (2020). [State of Arab Cities Report 2020: Financing Sustainable Urban Development in the Arab Region \[Executive Summary\].](#) UN-Habitat.
- UNCCD (2017). [Global Land Outlook, First Edition.](#)
- UNCEDAW (1997). [General Recommendation No. 21: Equality in Marriage and Family Relations under CEDAW.](#)
- UNCERD (1997). [General Comment No. 23: Article 5 \(e\) \(iv\) of the Convention – The Right to Equality in Political Participation under ICERD.](#)
- UNCESCR (1991). [General Comment No. 4: The Right to Adequate Housing \(Article 11 \(1\)\) under the ICESCR.](#)
- UNCESCR (1997). [General Comment No. 7: The Right to Adequate Housing: Forced Evictions \(Article 11 \(1\)\) under the ICESCR.](#)

UNCESCR (1999). [General Comment No. 12: The Right to Adequate Food \(Article 11\) under the ICESCR.](#)

UNCESCR (2000). [General Comment No. 14: The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health \(Article 12\) under the ICESCR.](#)

UNCESCR (2002). [General Comment No. 15: The Right to Water \(Article 11 and 12\) under the ICESCR.](#)

UNCESCR (2005a). [General Comment No. 16: The Equal Right of Men and Women to the Enjoyment of All Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(Article 3\) under the ICESCR.](#)

UNCESCR (2005b). [General Comment No. 20: Non-Discrimination in Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(Article 2, paragraph 2\) under the ICESCR.](#)

UNCESCR (2009). [General Comment No. 21: Right of Everyone to Take Part in Cultural Life \(Article 15, Paragraph 1 \(a\)\) under the ICESCR.](#)

UNCRC (2009). [General Comment No. 11: Indigenous Children and Their Rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

UNDP (2010). [Population levels, trends and policies in the Arab Region: challenges and opportunities.](#) Arab Human Development Report Research Paper Series.

UNDP (2014). [Human development report 2014: Sustaining human progress: Reducing vulnerabilities and building resilience.](#) United Nations Development Programme.

UNDP and UN-Habitat (2020). [State of Arab Cities Report 2020: Financing Sustainable Urban Development in the Arab Region \(Executive Summary\) | UN-Habitat](#)

NDP, ESCWA, UN Women and UNFPA (2019). [Gender Justice & Equality before the law Analysis of Progress and Challenges in the Arab States Region.](#)

UNEP (2019). [Environmental Challenges in the MENA Region.](#)

UNESCWA (2016). [Land Degradation Neutrality in the Arab Region – Preparing for SDG Implementation Factsheet.](#)

UNESCWA (2020). [Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020.](#)

UNESCWA (2021). [Environmental sustainability and human development: perspectives from the Arab region.](#)

UNESCWA (2023). [Her land. Her rights. Equal land rights: a pathway to combating desertification in the Arab region.](#)

UNESCWA and FAO (2017). [Arab Horizon 2030: Prospects for Enhancing Food Security in the Arab Region.](#)

UNESCWA and FAO (2021). [Arab Food Security: Vulnerabilities and Pathways.](#)

UNGA (1948). [Universal Declaration of Human Rights.](#)

UNGGIM (2020). [Framework for Effective Land Administration: A reference for developing, reforming, renewing, strengthening, modernizing, and monitoring land administration.](#)

UNHRC (1994). [General Comment No. 23: The Rights of Minorities \(Article 27\)](#)

UNHRC (1999). [General Comment No. 28: Equality of Rights between Men and Women \(Article 3\).](#)

UNHCR (2018, October 30). [Fact sheet in UNHCR Jordan – October 2018.](#) UNHCR Operational Data Portal.

UNHCR (2020, May 18). [Refugees and asylum-seekers, May 202.](#) UNHCR Operational Data Portal.

UNHCR (2022a). [Syria regional refugee response.](#) UNHCR Operational Data Portal.

- UNHCR (2022b). [Yemen](#). UNHCR Operational Data Portal.
- UNHCR (2023). [Global Report 2022](#).
- UNHCR (2025). [Middle East and North Africa](#).
- United States Energy Information Administration (2017). [Saudi Arabia 2018 primary energy data](#).
- Unruh, J. (2022). [Housing, Land and Property Rights as War-Financing Commodities: A Typology with Lessons from Darfur, Colombia and Syria](#). *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 10(1):1
- Unruh, J. D. (2016). Mass claims in land and property following the Arab Spring: Lessons from Yemen. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 5(1), 6. <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.469>
- UNRWA (2017). [Fields of operations](#).
- UNRWA (2020). [Lebanon](#).
- UNSC (2000). [Resolution 1325 \(2000\) on women and peace and security](#).
- U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). (2017). [Saudi Arabia 2018 primary energy data](#). U.S. Department of Energy.
- USAID (2005). [Land Registration and Property Rights in Iraq](#).
- USAID (2010). [Property rights and resource governance country profile: Yemen](#). United States Agency for International Development.
- USAID (2013). [USAID Issue Brief Land and Conflict. Land Disputes and Land Conflicts. Property Rights and Resource Governance](#). Briefing Paper #12.
- Van Eerd, Maartje & Banerjee, Banashree. (2013). [Evictions, Acquisition, Expropriation and Compensation: Practices and selected case studies](#) [Working Paper], UN-Habitat/GLTN.
- Wahid, J., Saleh, B., Arar, M. S. A., & Awad, J. (2020). Urbanisation in Ajman pushing by housing development. *International Transaction Journal of Engineering, Management, & Applied Sciences & Technologies*, 11(7), Paper ID 11A07I. <https://doi.org/10.14456/ITJEMAST.2020.129>
- Wehrmann, B. (2008). Land Conflicts. A practical guide to dealing with land disputes. [Land Conflicts. A practical guide to dealing with land disputes](#). Gtz | Land Menagment
- WHO (2018). [World health statistics 2018: monitoring health for the SDGs, sustainable development goals](#)
- Williamson, I., Enemark, S., Wallace, J. and Rajabifard, A. (2010). [Land Administration for Sustainable Development](#). ESRI Press Academic.
- Wiss, M., and Anderson, M. (2009). The unique forms and rights of Iraqi real property law: a primer for those interested in transacting business in Iraq. International Bar Association.
- World Bank (n.d.a). Country profile: [Bahrain](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.
- World Bank (n.d.b). Country profile: [Iraq](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.
- World Bank (n.d.c). Country profile: [Lebanon](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.
- World Bank (n.d.d). [Poverty headcount ratio at \\$1.90 a day \(2011 PPP\) \(% of population\). Poverty and Inequality Platform- World, Middle East & North Africa, and Middle East & North Africa \(excluding high income\)](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.
- World Bank (n.d.e). [World Development Indicators](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2009). [Land tenure for social and economic inclusion in Yemen: Issues and opportunities \(Report No. 54923-YE\)](#). World Bank.

World Bank (2016a). [Guidance Note for Borrowers. ESS5: Land Acquisition, Restrictions on Land Use and Involuntary Resettlement. Environmental & Social Framework for IPF Operations.](#)

World Bank (2016b). [Urban Re-generation Decision Tool](#).

World Bank (2019). [Doing Business Archive: Registering Property](#).

World Bank (2021). [Living with debt: How institutions can chart a path to recovery in the Middle East and North Africa](#). MENA Economic Update April 2021

World Bank (2023). [Land area \(sq. km\) – Iraq](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024a). [International migrant stock \(% of population\) – Saudi Arabia](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024b). [Population, total – Saudi Arabia](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024c). [Population, total – Jordan](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024d). [Population, total – Oman](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024e). [Population, total – Qatar](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024f). [Population, total – West Bank and Gaza](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024g). [Surface area \(sq. km\)](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024h). [Urban population \(% of total population\)](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024i). [Urban population \(% of total population\) – Bahrain](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024j). [Urban population \(% of total population\) – Jordan](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024k). [Urban population \(% of total population\) – Oman](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024l). [Urban population \(% of total population\) – Saudi Arabia](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024m). [Urban population \(% of total population\) – Qatar](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024n). [Urban population \(% of total population\)](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024o). [Urban population growth \(annual %\)](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024p). [Urban population growth \(annual %\) – Middle East & North Africa](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024q). [Population growth \(annual %\) – Bahrain](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024r). [Population growth \(annual %\) – Jordan](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024s). [Population growth \(annual %\) – Oman](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024t). [Population growth \(annual %\) – Qatar](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024u). [Population growth \(annual %\) – Saudi Arabia](#) World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024v). [Population growth \(annual %\) – Syrian Arab Republic](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Bank (2024w). [Population growth \(annual %\) – West Bank and Gaza](#). World Bank. DataBank: World Development Indicators.

World Economic Forum (2021). [Global Gender Gap Index 2021](#).

World Inequality Database (2020). [Income inequality in the Middle East](#).

World Population Review (2025a). [Amman](#).

World Population Review (2025b). [Baghdad](#).

World Population Review (2025c). [Bahrain Cities by Population 2025](#).

World Population Review (2025d). [Beirut](#).

World Population Review (2025e). [Damascus](#).

World Population Review (2025f). [Doha](#).

World Population Review (2025g). [Muscat](#).

Wynbrandt, J. (2010). [A brief history of Saudi Arabia](#). Infobase Publishing.

Yemen Armed Violence Assessment (2010). [Under pressure: Social violence over land and water in Yemen](#). Issue Brief 2. Small Arms Survey.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

The report establishes a baseline for dialogue and action on land governance in the Middle East and represents one of the first systematic efforts to develop a common analytical framework for the Arab region. It examines the regional context, emerging trends, and available evidence on land governance, including land administration frameworks and their implications for tenure security, poverty reduction, women's land rights, climate challenges, and displacement. The report assesses land sector capacities across the five core land administration functions - land tenure, land use, land development, land value, and land dispute resolution- and reviews the current learning and training offerings related to land governance in the region. In addition, it presents national land governance profiles for eleven Middle Eastern countries: Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME

UN-Habitat

P.O. 30030, Nairobi, 00100, Kenya

Tel: +254 20 762 3120

Fax: +254 20 762 4266

www.unhabitat.org



الاراضي العربية
مبادرة
Arab Land Initiative

