

## Social Institutions and Gender Index

# Lao PDR

## SIGI Country Profile

19 of March 2024

SIGI Country Profiles are produced by the OECD Development Centre

The information and analysis contained in this profile are based on data from the fifth edition of the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) published in March 2023. The cut-off date for legal data is 31 August 2022; the cut-off date for quantitative data is 1 January 2023.

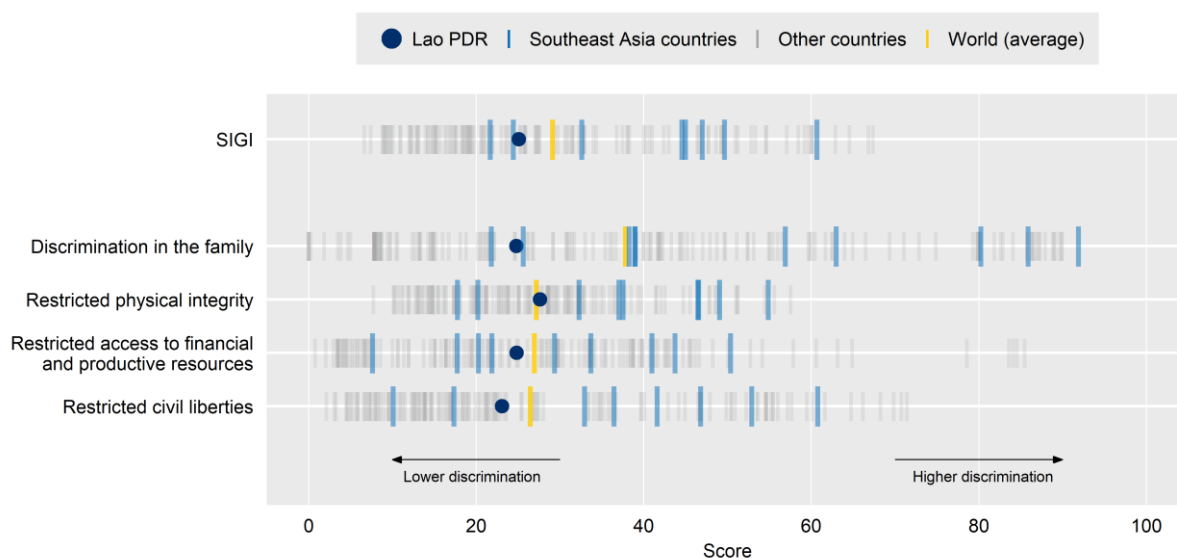
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# Social institutions in Lao PDR

## The state of gender equality in Lao PDR

The SIGI 2023 profile for Lao PDR provides a comprehensive overview of the state of gender equality in the country, as measured by the OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI). The fifth edition of the SIGI, released in 2023, assesses 140 countries based on the level of gender-based discrimination in their social institutions. These discriminatory social institutions encompass both formal and informal laws, as well as social norms and practices that restrict women's and girls' access to rights, justice, empowerment opportunities and resources, thereby undermining their agency and authority.

**Figure 1. SIGI and dimension scores for Lao PDR, 2023**



Note: Scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination. The Southeast Asia region covers Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.

Source: OECD (2023), "Social Institutions and Gender Index (Edition 2023)", *OECD International Development Statistics* (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/33beb96e-en>.

In 2023, Lao PDR obtained a SIGI score of 25 denoting low levels of discrimination, compared to an average score of 39 in Southeast Asia, denoting medium levels of discrimination, and a world average score of 29 (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The country obtained a score of 28 in the "Restricted physical integrity" dimension,

<sup>1</sup> Levels of discrimination in the SIGI and its dimensions are assessed based on scores as follow: very low [0-20]; low [20-30]; medium [30-40]; high [40-50]; and very high [50-100].

followed by “Restricted access to productive and financial resources” (25), “Discrimination in the family” (25) and “Restricted civil liberties” (23).

## Legislative framework in Lao PDR

The legal system in Lao PDR is based on civil law, with influence from the socialist legal system and traditions of the country’s ethnic groups.<sup>2</sup> The Constitution of Lao PDR, as amended, recognises the existence of indigenous customary law in the country. Article 8 of the Constitution<sup>3</sup> specifies that “the State pursues the policy of promoting unity and equality among all ethnic groups. All ethnic groups have the right to protect, preserve and promote the fine customs and cultures of their own tribes and of the nation. All acts creating division and discrimination among ethnic groups are prohibited. The State implements every measure to gradually develop and upgrade the socio-economic levels of all ethnic groups.” Yet, Article 10 of the Constitution stipulates that “the State governs the society through the provisions of the Constitution and the laws. Party and state organisations, the Lao Front for National Construction, mass organisations, social organisations and all citizens must function within the bounds of the Constitution and the laws”.

Articles 8, 9 and 35 of the Constitution,<sup>4</sup> as amended, and Article 8 of the Law on Gender Equality<sup>5</sup> recognise and prohibit multiple and intersectional discrimination – which constitutes an essential element to enhance gender equality. Lao PDR ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)<sup>6</sup> in 1981, without any reservations.<sup>7</sup>

Gender-disaggregated, gender-relevant and intersectional data and indicators are essential to better identify policy areas that have strong linkages with gender. In Lao PDR, there are no applicable legal provisions regulating the production and dissemination of gender statistics.

## Positive highlights and significant challenges since the fourth edition of the SIGI

### Positive highlights

Laws in Lao PDR grant women and men equal rights in most aspect of their lives. In the private sphere, the legal framework guarantee women’s rights in the household, including in terms of divorce and inheritance, and protects girls from child marriage. However, the presence of deeply rooted customary and informal laws, notably among ethnic minority groups, weakens the protection offered by the law and threaten women’s rights. In the economic sphere, the law also grants women and men equal rights to own and use key assets such as land or financial instruments. On the practice side, 59% of employees in a managerial position are women, which is more than twice the global average (25%). Finally, in the public and civil sphere, the law also protects women’s rights, despite the absence of gender political quotas.

<sup>2</sup> Council of ASEAN Chief Justices (n.d.), *Laos*, <https://cacj-ajp.org/laos/> (accessed on 1 October 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Lao People’s Democratic Republic (1991), “Constitution of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic”.

<sup>4</sup> Lao People’s Democratic Republic (1991), “Constitution of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic”.

<sup>5</sup> Lao People’s Democratic Republic (2019), “Law on Gender Equality”.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations (1979), “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women”, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1249, United Nations, New York, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations (2023), “Status of Treaties: Chapter IV - 8. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women”, *Treaty Collection*, United Nations, New York, [https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg\\_no=IV-8&chapter=4](https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4).

## ! Significant challenges

Despite the protection offered by the law, girl child marriage remains a severe issue in Lao PDR, with 23% of girls aged 15-19 who were or are still married, and 33% of women aged 20-24 who were married or in a union before the age of 18. Moreover, laws insufficiently protect women's physical integrity and contains specific loopholes. For example, the law on rape, although based on the notion of lack of consent, requires proof of physical force. Likewise, abortion is authorised under most circumstances, but not if the pregnancy results from an incest. Finally, in the economic sphere, the law fails to mandate the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value and does not provide for a paid paternity leave.

## Summary of results for Lao PDR

<b>Discrimination in the family</b>	Unit	Value
Laws on child marriage	Score	25
Girl child marriage rate <sup>1</sup>	%	23.5
Boy child marriage rate <sup>1</sup>	%	5.9
Laws on household responsibilities	Score	25
Share of the population that agrees or strongly agrees that “if a woman earns more than her husband, it is a problem”	%	-
Share of the population that agrees or strongly agrees that “when a mother works for pay, the children will suffer”	%	-
Female-to-male ratio of time spent on unpaid care and domestic work	Ratio	1.4
Number of hours spent by men on unpaid care and domestic work in a 24-hour period	Hours	2.4
Number of hours spent by women on unpaid care and domestic work in a 24-hour period	Hours	3.3
Laws on divorce	Score	25
Laws on inheritance	Score	25
<b>Restricted physical integrity</b>	Unit	Value
Laws on violence against women	Score	50
Share of women who consider a husband to be justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances	%	30
Lifetime intimate-partner violence rate <sup>2</sup>	%	19
12-month intimate-partner violence rate <sup>2</sup>	%	6.7
Laws on female genital mutilation	%	25
Share of the female population who has heard about female genital mutilation and think the practice should continue	%	-
Prevalence of female genital mutilation (% of women aged 15-49 years who have undergone FGM)	%	-
Boy-to-girl ratio at birth (natural = 105) <sup>3</sup>	Ratio	104.4
Laws on reproductive autonomy	Score	75
Unmet needs for family planning <sup>4</sup>	%	13.7
<b>Restricted access to productive and financial resources</b>	Unit	Value
Laws on land assets	Score	25
Share of women among landowners	%	-
Laws on non-land assets	Score	25
Share of women among house owners	%	-
Laws on financial assets	Score	0
Share of women among bank account owners	%	50.6
Laws on workplace rights	Score	75
Share of the population declaring that “when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women”	%	-
Share of the population declaring that “men make better business executives than women do”	%	-
Share of women among managers	%	59
Share of firms with a woman as top manager	%	43.1
<b>Restricted civil liberties</b>	Unit	Value
Laws on citizenship rights	Score	0
Laws on political voice	Score	50
Share of the population declaring that “men make better political leaders than women do”	%	-
Share of women in Parliament (lower chamber)	%	22
Laws on freedom of movement	Score	0
Share of women among those who declare not feeling safe walking alone at night in the city or area where they live	%	66.6
Laws on access to justice	Score	25
Share of women among those who declare not having confidence in the judicial system and courts of their country	%	35.2

Note: Scores of legal variables range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination.

<sup>1</sup> % of girls/boys aged 15-19 years who have been or are still married, divorced, widowed or in an informal union.

<sup>2</sup> % of ever-partnered women and girls who have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner during their lifetime/over the previous 12 months. Population base for lifetime IPV: 15-49 years. Population base for 12-month IPV: 15 years and older.

<sup>3</sup> A natural boy-to-girl sex ratio at birth is generally estimated to be below 105. A ratio exceeding 105 implies the existence of more boys aged 0-4 than one would expect, indicating a potential phenomenon of son preference resulting in the systemic elimination of new-born girls.

<sup>4</sup> % of married or in-union women of reproductive age who want to either stop or delay childbearing but are not using any contraception method.

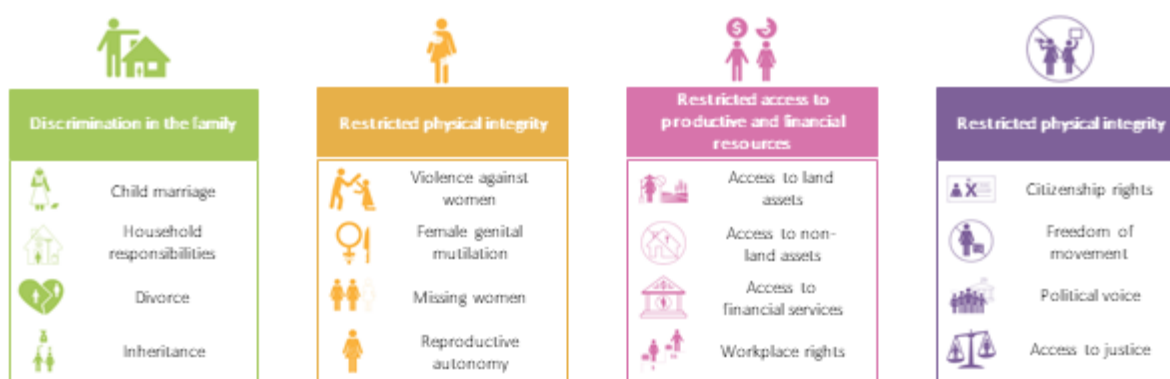
Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), “Gender, Institutions and Development Database”, <https://doi.org/10.1787/7b0af638-en>.

# Results across the SIGI's four dimensions

The SIGI measures gender-based discrimination across four dimensions covering the major socio-economic areas that affect women and girls throughout their lifetime:



- The **“Discrimination in the family”** dimension captures social institutions that limit women’s decision-making power and weaken their status in the household and the family.
- The **“Restricted physical integrity”** dimension captures social institutions that increase women’s and girls’ vulnerability to multiple forms of violence and limit their control over their reproductive autonomy.
- The **“Restricted access to productive and financial resources”** dimension captures social institutions that limit women’s economic opportunities and rights.
- The **“Restricted civil liberties”** dimension captures social institutions restricting women’s access to, and participation and voice in, the public and political spheres.

Figure 2. Conceptual framework of the fifth edition of the SIGI



Each dimension builds on four indicators which, in turn, build on one to three variables depending on data availability (Figure 2). This section features the results by dimension, examining the pertinent social norms, practices and legal frameworks for each indicator.

The legal information collected through the *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey* covers both formal and codified laws, as well as informal laws. The information is assessed based on whether the law protects women’s rights or not, and is icon-coded as follows:

-  : The legal framework protects women’s rights.
-  : The legal framework does not fully protect women’s rights.

There is no universal agreement on what informal laws refer to, given contextual differences across time and place, as well as distinct disciplinary or theoretical approaches. In the context of the SIGI, informal laws (customary, traditional or religious laws/rules) describe mechanisms that operate outside the formal legal system of state-based laws. Informal laws vary from one community to another and are generally uncodified and unwritten. In some cases, informal laws may reflect unequal power dynamics within a given community and discriminatory social norms, with adverse consequences on women and girls and other vulnerable groups. Informal laws are unsteady and have been adapted over time in response to external factors.

For example, customary laws are laws that are embodied in customs, rules or traditions and accepted by members of the community as binding but remain adaptable, dynamic and flexible.<sup>8</sup> The CEDAW General Recommendation No. 33 also recognises indigenous laws.<sup>9</sup> These are similar to customary laws but are often given a distinct identity in recognition of the specific international standards related to the rights and protections of indigenous peoples and their justice systems. Informal religious laws may refer to norms that are derived from interpretations of codified religious texts and/or longstanding traditions.

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations (2018), "Module 1: The Theory and Practice of Women's Access to Justice Programming", *A Practitioner's Toolkit on Women's Access to Justice Programming*, UN Women, UNDP, UNDOC and OHCHR, New York, Vienna and Geneva, [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/PractitionerToolkit/WA2J\\_Module1.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/PractitionerToolkit/WA2J_Module1.pdf).

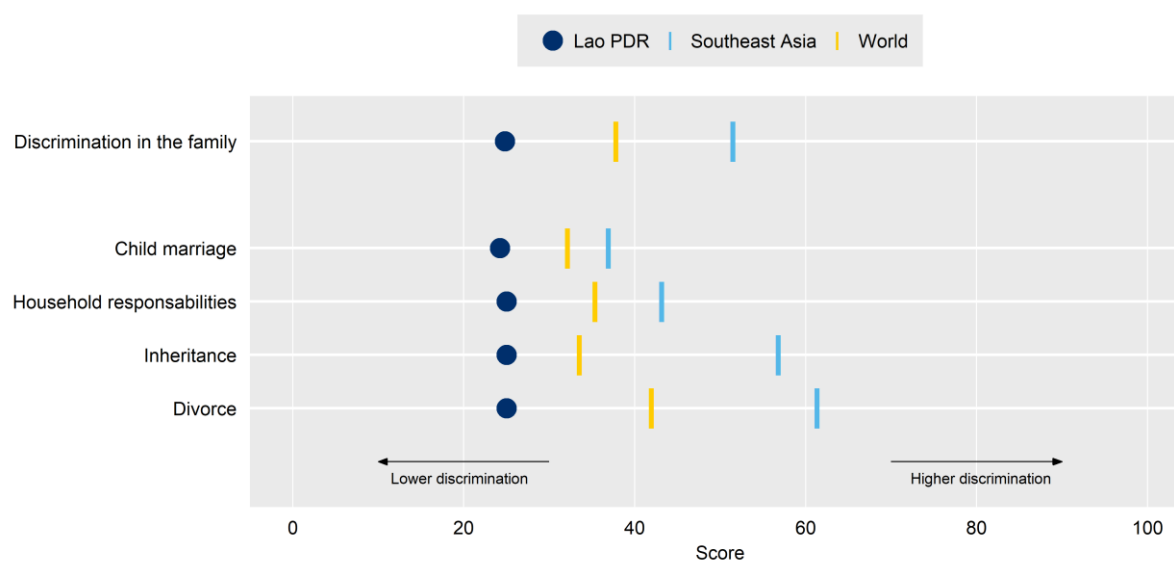
<sup>9</sup> UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2015), "General recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice", *CEDAW/C/GC/33*, United Nations, New York, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/807253>.

## Discrimination in the family

Lao PDR exhibits low levels of discrimination within the family with a score of 25, compared to a world average of 38 and an average score of 52 in Southeast Asia – based on countries for which scores could be calculated.

In this dimension, women and girls in Lao PDR experience low levels of discrimination across all of the dimensions, with scores of 25 in the “Household responsibilities”, “Inheritance” and “Divorce” indicators, followed by the “Child marriage” indicator, with a score of 24.

**Figure 3. Discrimination in the family scores for Lao PDR, 2023**



Note: Scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination. The Southeast Asia region covers Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.

Source: OECD (2023), “Social Institutions and Gender Index (Edition 2023)”, *OECD International Development Statistics (database)*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/33beb96e-en>.

## Child marriage

### Practices related to child marriage

Child marriage remains a major concern in Lao PDR, primarily affecting girls. In 2023, 23% of girls aged 15-19 were or are still married, divorced, widowed or in an informal union, compared to 6% of boys. In addition, 33% of women aged 20-24 were married or in a union before the age of 18,<sup>10</sup> compared to a world average of 26% and an average of 17% in Southeast Asia – based on countries for which data are available.

### Legal frameworks concerning child marriage

Question	Answer	Assessment
What is the legal age of marriage for men?	18	✓

<sup>10</sup> This indicator corresponds to SDG indicator 5.3.1



Question	Answer	Assessment
What is the legal age of marriage for women?	18	✓
Are there legal exceptions to the legal age of marriage that allow women and men under the legal age of marriage to marry with the consent of parent and/or legal guardian?	No	✓
Are there legal exceptions to the legal age of marriage that allow women and men under the legal age of marriage to marry with the consent of judge or court?	No	✓
Are there legal exceptions to the legal age of marriage that allow women and men under the legal age of marriage to marry with the consent of another person or institution?	No	✓
Does the legal age of marriage apply to all groups of women?	Yes	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, traditional or religious laws/rules) that allow or encourage the early marriage of girls?	Yes	!

Note: Cut-off date for the legal data is 31 August 2022.

Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi-dashboard>.

## Household responsibilities

### Practices and social norms related to household responsibilities

In Lao PDR, domestic responsibilities disproportionately fall on women's shoulders. On average, women dedicate 3.3 hours per day to unpaid care and domestic tasks – such as caring for household members, preparing food and cleaning – compared to 2.4 hour for men. This translates into women dedicating 1.4 times more time on unpaid care and domestic work than men.<sup>11</sup> In comparison, the world average ratio is 2.6 and the average ratio for Southeast Asia is 3.1 – based on countries for which data are available.

There are no available data in Lao PDR that are comparable to other countries on attitudes related to the division of household responsibilities. In 2023, 56% of the world's population and 35% of the population of Southeast Asia believes that when women work, the children will suffer – based on countries for which data are available.

### Legal frameworks concerning household responsibilities

Question	Answer	Assessment
Does the law provide women with the same rights as men to be “head of household” or “head of family”?	n.a.	n.a.
Does the law provide women with the same rights as men to be the legal guardians of their children during marriage?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide women with the same rights as men to be legal guardians of their children in informal unions?	Yes	✓
Regarding women's legal rights to be recognised as head of household or head of family, does the law apply to all groups of women?	Yes	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, traditional or religious laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to being recognised as the head of household?	Yes	!
Are there informal laws (customary, traditional or religious laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to being the legal guardians of their children?	No	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, traditional or religious laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to the choice of where to live?	Yes	!

Note: Cut-off date for the legal data is 31 August 2022. The law in Lao PDR does not refer to the “head of household” or “head of family”.

Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi-dashboard>.

## Divorce

### Legal frameworks concerning divorce

<sup>11</sup> This indicator corresponds to SDG indicator 5.4.1

Question	Answer	Assessment
Do women and men have the same rights to initiate/file for a divorce?	Yes	✓
Can women and men finalise a divorce or annulment with the same requirements?	Yes	✓
Do women and men have the same rights to child custody following a divorce?	Yes	✓
Regarding divorce, does the law apply to all groups of women?	Yes	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, traditional or religious laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to initiating divorce?	Yes	!
Are there informal laws (customary, traditional or religious laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to being the legal guardians of their children after divorce?	Yes	!

Note: Cut-off date for the legal data is 31 August 2022.

Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi-dashboard>.

## Inheritance

### Legal frameworks concerning inheritance rights

Question	Answer	Assessment
Do daughters and sons have the same rights to inherit?	Yes	✓
Do female and male surviving spouses have the same rights to inherit?	Yes	✓
Regarding inheritance rights of daughters, does the law apply to all groups of women?	Yes	✓
Regarding inheritance rights of female surviving spouses, does the law apply to all groups of women?	Yes	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, traditional or religious laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between sons and daughters when it comes to inheritance?	Yes	!
Are there informal laws (customary, traditional or religious laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between male and female surviving spouses when it comes to inheritance?	Yes	!

Note: Cut-off date for the legal data is 31 August 2022.

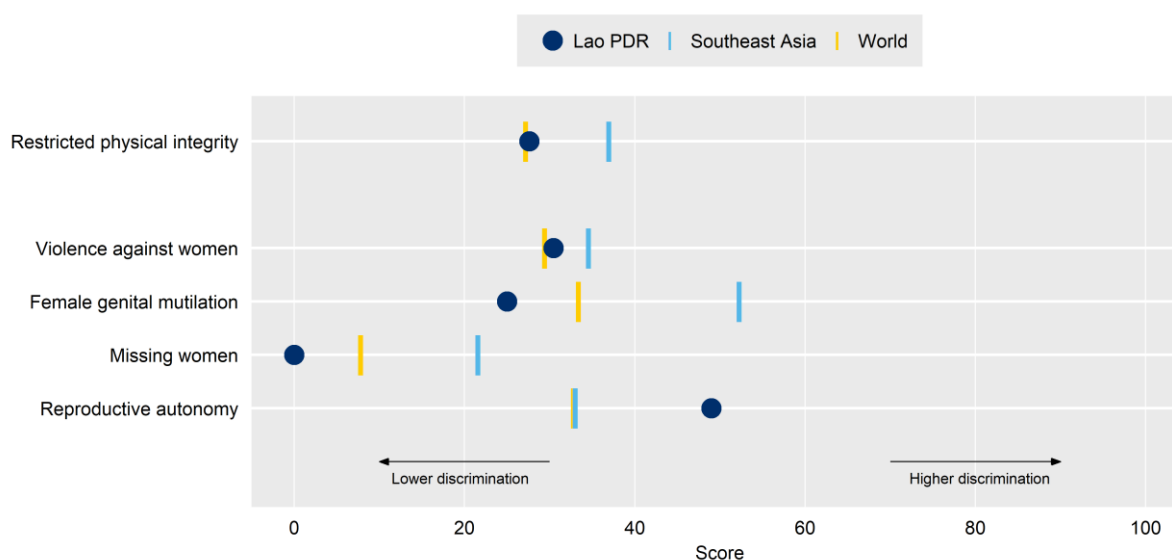
Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi-dashboard>.

## Restricted physical integrity

Lao PDR exhibits low levels of discrimination within the family with a score of 28, compared to a world average of 27 and an average score of 37 in Southeast Asia – based on countries for which scores could be calculated.

In this dimension, women and girls in Lao PDR experience the highest levels of discrimination in the “Reproductive autonomy” indicator, with a score of 49, followed by “Violence against women” and “Female genital mutilation” with scores of 30 and 25, respectively. No discrimination is found in the “Missing women” indicator, with a score of 0.

**Figure 4. Restricted physical integrity scores for Lao PDR, 2023**



Note: Scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination. The Southeast Asia region covers Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.

Source: OECD (2023), “Social Institutions and Gender Index (Edition 2023)”, *OECD International Development Statistics* (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/33beb96e-en>.

## Violence against women

### Practices and social norms related to violence against women

Violence against women remains a concern in Lao PDR. In 2023, 19% of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former partner at least once during their lifetime, and 7% of women aged more than 15 have experienced such violence at least once over the last 12 months.<sup>12</sup>

These levels of intimate-partner violence are rooted in its widespread social acceptance. In 2023, 30% of women aged 15-49 think that it is justified for a husband to hit or beat his wife under certain circumstances, such as burning the food, arguing with the spouse, going out without telling him, neglecting the children,

<sup>12</sup> This indicator corresponds to SDG indicator 5.2.1

or refusing to have sex. Likewise, 30% of women holds these discriminatory attitudes worldwide, and 33% in Southeast Asia – based on countries for which data are available.

## Legal frameworks concerning violence against women

Although Article 248 of the Penal Code<sup>13</sup> criminalises rape and grounds its definition on the notion of consent, it requires proof of physical force. Article 252 also explicitly criminalises marital rape. Finally, Article 259 of the Penal Code criminalises acts assimilated to sexual harassment but does not specifically mention in which places or contexts. Article 83(4) of the Labour Law,<sup>14</sup> extends the protection against sexual harassment to the workplace, with the right for the employee to claim compensation.

Question	Answer	Assessment
Is there a law specifically addressing violence against women?	Yes	✓
If there is a specific law addressing violence against women, are there specific provisions for investigation, prosecution and punishment of the perpetrator?	Yes	✓
If there is a specific law addressing violence against women, are there specific provisions for protection and support services for victims/survivors?	Yes	✓
Does the law include reduced penalties in case of so-called “honour crimes”?	No	✓
<b>Domestic violence</b>		
Is domestic violence a criminal offence?	Yes	✓
Does domestic violence legislation cover physical abuse?	Yes	✓
Does domestic violence legislation cover sexual abuse?	Yes	✓
Does domestic violence legislation cover psychological abuse?	Yes	✓
Does domestic violence legislation cover economic abuse?	Yes	✓
Are there any exceptions included in informal laws (traditional, religious, and/or customary rules/laws) that reduce penalties for domestic violence?	Yes	!
<b>Rape</b>		
Is rape a criminal offence?	Yes	✓
Is the legal definition of rape based on lack of consent?	Yes	✓
If the legal definition of rape is based on lack of consent, does this require proof of physical force?	Yes	!
If the legal definition of rape is based on lack of consent, does this require proof of penetration?	No	✓
Does the legal definition of rape include marital rape?	Yes	✓
Does the law permit the reduction or removal of legal punishment if the perpetrator marries the victim?	No	✓
<b>Sexual harassment</b>		
Does the law prohibit sexual harassment?	Yes	✓
Does the law on sexual harassment include criminal penalties?	Yes	✓
Do legal protections from sexual harassment apply in the workplace?	Yes	✓
Do legal protections from sexual harassment apply in educational establishments?	No	!
Do legal protections from sexual harassment apply in public spaces?	Yes	✓
Do legal protections from sexual harassment apply online / on the internet?	No	!

Note: Cut-off date for the legal data is 31 August 2022.

Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi-dashboard>.

## Female genital mutilation

### Practices and social norms related to female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C)

Female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C) is traditionally concentrated in a limited number of countries that have been well-identified and documented by international organisations at the forefront of the fight against this harmful practice. Yet, evidence highlights that FGM/C takes place across all regions, among

<sup>13</sup> Lao People’s Democratic Republic (2017), “Penal Code No. 26/NA”.

<sup>14</sup> Lao People’s Democratic Republic (2013), “Labour Law No. 43/NA”.

indigenous and/or diaspora communities originating from countries where FGM/C is known to be common. In some contexts, girls are taken across national borders to undergo FGM/C in a country where the legislation against the practice is either non-existent or less strict.<sup>15</sup>

There are no available data in Lao PDR that are comparable to other countries on practices and social norms related to female genital mutilation and cutting.

### Legal frameworks concerning female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C)

Article 194 of the Penal Code<sup>16</sup> allows for the prosecution of FGM/C acts on broad grounds, as it criminalises physical injuries caused to another person. However, the law does not criminalise FGM/C on narrow grounds.

Question	Answer	Assessment
Does the law criminalise FGM/C on broad or narrow grounds?	Yes	✓
Does the law criminalise FGM/C on narrow grounds only?	No	!
Are there informal laws (customary, traditional or religious laws) that allow or encourage FGM/C?	No	✓
Does the law take precedence over informal laws (customary, traditional or religious laws) that allow, condone or prescribe FGM?	n.a.	n.a.

Note: The SIGI methodology assesses laws on FGM/C according to two scenarios: (1) criminalisation on narrow grounds includes laws that contain criminal penalties for acts of “female genital mutilation”, “permanent altering/removal of external genitalia”, “female circumcision”, “excision”, “infibulation” and “genital mutilation”; (2) criminalisation on broad grounds includes “mutilation”, “harming of a person’s organs”, “serious bodily injury” and “bodily injury/hurt/assault.” The presence of informal laws that allow or encourage FGM/C is proxied by the existence of nationally representative data on FGM/C or the existence of indirect estimates (usually used in countries where FGM/C is mainly practiced by diaspora communities), small-scale studies, or anecdotal evidence and media reports as reported by Equality Now, the End FGM European Network and the US End FGM/C Network in 2020.

Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi-dashboard>, and Equality Now, End FGM European Network and US End FGM/C Network (2020), *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Call For A Global Response*, <https://www.equalitynow.org/resource/female-genital-mutilation-cutting-a-call-for-a-global-response/>.

### Missing women

#### Practices related to missing women

The “Missing women” indicator captures whether there are any existing imbalances in the natural sex ratio between girls and boys aged 0-4 due to pre- and postnatal gender-biased sex selection. These imbalances can result from sex-selective abortions, female infanticide, and/or inadequate healthcare and nutrition for girls. A natural boy-to-girl sex ratio at birth is generally estimated to be below 105. A ratio exceeding 105 implies the existence of more boys aged 0-4 than one would expect, indicating a potential phenomenon of son preference resulting in the systemic elimination of new-born girls.

In Lao PDR, the “missing women” phenomenon is not an issue. The boy-to-girl sex ratio for children aged 0-4 is estimated at 104.4, which means that there are approximately 104.4 boys aged 0-4 for 100 girls of the same age, which is in line with a natural sex ratio at birth.

### Reproductive autonomy

#### Practices related to women’s reproductive autonomy

<sup>15</sup> Equality Now, End FGM European Network and US End FGM/C Network (2020), *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Call For A Global Response*, <https://www.equalitynow.org/resource/female-genital-mutilation-cutting-a-call-for-a-global-response/>.

<sup>16</sup> Lao People’s Democratic Republic (2017), “Penal Code No. 26/NA”.

Unmet needs for family planning are calculated as the proportion of women of reproductive age (15-49 years), married or in union, who wish to interrupt or delay childbearing but do not use any method of contraception.

In Lao PDR, the gap between women's reproductive intentions and their contraceptive behaviour exists, with 14% of women aged 15-49 who declare having an unmet need for family planning, compared to a world average of 12% and an average of 11% in Southeast Asia – based on countries for which data are available.

### Legal frameworks concerning women's reproductive autonomy

Women's reproductive autonomy can be restricted by laws that prohibit the access to safe and legal abortion under essential circumstances (in cases of rape, incest, threats to the life or health of the pregnant woman and severe foetal impairment).<sup>17</sup> Evidence shows that the share of unsafe abortions is higher in countries with restrictive abortion laws. Unsafe abortions are a leading but preventable cause of maternal mortality and millions of girls and women are hospitalised every year following complications of unsafe abortion procedures.<sup>18</sup>

Article 3 of the Penal Code<sup>19</sup> defines unlawful abortion as any abortion not authorised by a medical doctor commission, with Article 201 prohibiting and criminalising such unlawful abortion. Pursuant to Item 12 of the Decision on Management of Surrogacy and Spontaneous Abortion,<sup>20</sup> abortion can be authorised by a medical doctor commission under several circumstances, including to save the mother's life or to preserve her physical or mental health, as well as in cases of rape or foetal impairment.

Question	Answer	Assessment
Is abortion illegal under any circumstances?	No	✓
Is abortion legally permitted in cases where: it is essential to save the woman's life?	Yes	✓
Is abortion legally permitted in cases where: it is essential to preserve the physical health of the woman?	Yes	✓
Is abortion legally permitted in cases where: it is essential to preserve the mental health of the woman?	Yes	✓
Is abortion legally permitted in cases where: pregnancy is the result of rape or statutory rape?	Yes	✓
Is abortion legally permitted in cases where: pregnancy is the result of incest?	No	!
Is abortion legally permitted in cases where: social and economic reasons do not allow the mother to sustain a pregnancy?	Yes	✓
Is abortion legally permitted in cases where: foetal impairment?	Yes	✓
Does a woman require the approval of a medical practitioner to seek a legal abortion?	Yes	!
Does the law require the approval of the father of the foetus to seek a legal abortion?	No	✓
Is there any national plan or policy that provide universal access to family planning services?	No	!
Is there any law or national policy that provide free or subsidised access to contraception?	No	!
Does the national school curricula include mandatory and comprehensive sexuality education?	No	!

Note: Cut-off date for the legal data is 31 August 2022.

Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi-dashboard>.

<sup>17</sup> CEDAW (2022), *Access to safe and legal abortion: Urgent call for United States to adhere to women's rights convention*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/07/access-safe-and-legal-abortion-urgent-call-united-states-adhere-womens-rights>.

<sup>18</sup> UNFPA (2022), *State of World Population 2022: Seeing the Unseen - The Case for Action in the Neglected Crisis of Unintended Pregnancy*, UNFPA, Geneva, <https://doi.org/10.18356/9789210015004>.

<sup>19</sup> Lao People's Democratic Republic (2017), "Penal Code No. 26/NA".

<sup>20</sup> Lao People's Democratic Republic (2021), "Decision on Management of Surrogacy and Spontaneous Abortion".

## Restricted access to productive and financial resources

Lao PDR exhibits low levels of discrimination within the family with a score of 25, compared to a world average of 27 and an average score of 29 in Southeast Asia – based on countries for which scores could be calculated.

In this dimension, women and girls in Lao PDR experience the highest levels of discrimination in the “Workplace rights” indicator, with a SIGI score of 44, followed by the “Access to land” and “Access to non-land assets” indicators, with a score of 25 for both. No discrimination is found in the “Access to financial services” indicator, with a score of 0.

**Figure 5. Restricted access to productive and financial resources scores for Lao PDR, 2023**



Note: Scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination. The Southeast Asia region covers Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.

Source: OECD (2023), “Social Institutions and Gender Index (Edition 2023)”, *OECD International Development Statistics* (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/33beb96e-en>.

### Access to land assets

#### Practices related to women’s access to secure land assets

In Lao PDR, there are no available data that are comparable to other countries on practices related to access to land assets.

#### Legal frameworks concerning women’s access to land assets

Question	Answer	Assessment
Does the law provide married women with the same rights as married men to own land?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide married women with the same rights as married men to use land?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide unmarried women with the same rights as unmarried men to own land?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide unmarried women with the same rights as unmarried men to use land?	Yes	✓
Regarding land, does the law apply to all groups of women?	Yes	✓

Question	Answer	Assessment
Are there informal laws (customary, religious or traditional laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to the ownership or use of land assets?	Yes	!

Note: Cut-off date for the legal data is 31 August 2022.

Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi-dashboard>.

## Access to non-land assets

### Practices related to women's secure access to non-land assets

In Lao PDR, there are no available data that are comparable to other countries on practices related to access to non-land assets.

### Legal frameworks concerning women's access to non-land assets

Question	Answer	Assessment
Does the law provide married women with the same rights as married men to own property and other non-land assets?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide married women with the same rights as married men to use property and other non-land assets?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide unmarried women with the same rights as unmarried men to own property and other non-land assets?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide unmarried women with the same rights as unmarried men to use property and other non-land assets?	Yes	✓
Regarding property and other non-land assets, does the law apply to all groups of women?	Yes	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, religious or traditional laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to the ownership or use of non-land assets?	Yes	!

Note: Cut-off date for the legal data is 31 August 2022.

Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi-dashboard>.

## Access to financial services

### Practices related to women's access to formal financial services

Gender imbalances in terms of access to financial services are limited in Lao PDR, but the overall access of the population is relatively low. In 2023, 38% of women have a bank account at a financial institution, compared to 37% of men. This translates into women accounting for 51% of bank account holders. In comparison, at the global level, 67% of women have a bank account, compared to 72% of men. Across Southeast Asia, on average, 52% of women have a bank account, compared to 54% of men.

### Legal frameworks concerning women's access to financial services

Question	Answer	Assessment
Does the law provide women with the same rights as men to open a bank account at a formal financial institution?	Yes	✓
Does the law require married women to obtain the signature and authority of their husband to open a bank account at a formal financial institution?	No	✓
Does the law provide women with the same rights as men to obtain credit?	Yes	✓
Regarding access to formal financial services, does the law apply to all groups of women (regardless of race, ethnicity caste, etc.)?	Yes	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, religious, or traditional laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to opening a bank account?	No	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, religious, or traditional laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to obtaining credit?	No	✓

Note: Cut-off date for the legal data is 31 August 2022.



Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi-dashboard>.

## Workplace rights

### Practices and social norms related to women's workplace rights

Women's representation in decision-making power positions in the economic sphere is not an issue in Lao PDR. Women account for 59% of employees in a managerial position,<sup>21</sup> compared to a world average of 25% and an average of 36% in Southeast Asia – based on countries for which data are available. At the same time, 43% of companies in the country are headed by women.

There are no available data in Lao PDR that are comparable to other countries on attitudes related to women's ability to be business executives or to men's priority to have a job compared to women. In 2023, 45% of the world's population agrees that when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women. In Southeast Asia this percentage reaches 64% – based on countries for which data are available.

### Legal frameworks concerning women's workplace rights

The law does not mandate equal pay for work of equal value. However, Article 15 of the Law on the Development and Protection of Women<sup>22</sup> mandates equal pay for equal work.

Question	Answer	Assessment
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment on the basis of sex?	Yes	✓
Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	No	!
Does the law prohibit women from entering certain professions?	No	✓
Does the law allow women to work the same night hours as men?	Yes	✓
Does the law mandate paid maternity leave?	Yes	✓
Does the law mandate paid paternity leave?	No	!
Does the law mandate paid parental leave?	No	!
Does the law require women to have permission from their husband or legal guardian to take a paid job?	No	✓
Does the law require women to have permission from their husband or legal guardian to register a business?	No	✓
Regarding women's legal right to take a paid job or work and/or register a business, does the law apply to all groups of women (regardless of race, ethnicity caste, etc.)?	Yes	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, religious, or traditional laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to entering certain professions?	No	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, religious, or traditional laws/rules) that require women to have the permission from their husband or legal guardian to take a paid job?	No	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, religious, or traditional laws/rules) that require women to have the permission from their husband or legal guardian to register a business?	No	✓

Note: Cut-off date for the legal data is 31 August 2022.

Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi-dashboard>.

<sup>21</sup> This indicator corresponds to SDG indicator 5.2.2

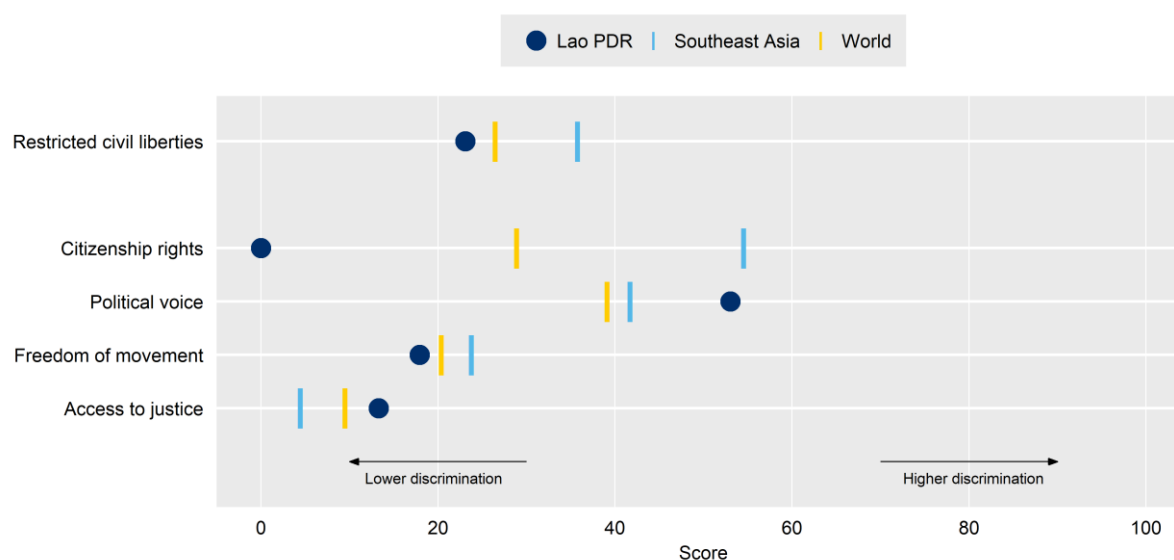
<sup>22</sup> Lao People's Democratic Republic (2004), "Law No. 08/NA on the Development and Protection of Women".

## Restricted civil liberties

Lao PDR exhibits low levels of discrimination within the family with a score of 23, compared to a world average of 26 and an average score of 36 in Southeast Asia – based on countries for which scores could be calculated.

In this dimension, women and girls in Lao PDR experience the highest levels of discrimination in the “Political voice” indicator with a score of 53, followed by the “Freedom of movement” and “Access to justice” indicators with scores of 18 and 13, respectively. No discrimination is found in the “Citizenship rights” indicator, with a score of 0.

Figure 6. Restricted civil liberties scores for Lao PDR, 2023



Note: Scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination. The Southeast Asia region covers Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.

Source: OECD (2023), “Social Institutions and Gender Index (Edition 2023)”, *OECD International Development Statistics* (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/33beb96e-en>.

## Citizenship rights

### Legal frameworks concerning women’s citizenship rights

Question	Answer	Assessment
Does the law provide married women with the same rights as married men to acquire nationality?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide unmarried women with the same rights as unmarried men to acquire nationality?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide married women with the same rights as married men to change their nationality?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide unmarried women with the same rights as unmarried men to change their nationality?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide married women with the same rights as married men to retain their nationality?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide unmarried women with the same rights as unmarried men to retain their nationality?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide married women with the same rights as married men to confer nationality to their spouse?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide married women with the same rights as married men to confer nationality to their children?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide unmarried women with the same rights as unmarried men to confer nationality to their children?	Yes	✓
Regarding women’s nationality rights, does the law apply to all groups of women (regardless of race, caste, ethnicity, etc.)?	Yes	✓

Question	Answer	Assessment
Are there informal laws (customary, traditional, or religious laws) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to acquiring, changing, or retaining their nationality?	No	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, traditional, or religious laws) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to conferring nationality to their spouse and/or children?	No	✓

Note: Cut-off date for the legal data is 31 August 2022.

Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi-dashboard>.

## Freedom of movement

### Practices related to women's freedom of movement

Freedom of movement is recognised as a human right and mobility is essential in everyday life, for instance to reach the workplace or healthcare facilities. In Lao PDR, women feel more unsafe than men, and a large part of the overall population, especially women, feels that way. Across the country, 48% of women declare not feeling safe walking alone at night in the city or in the area where they live, compared to 26% of men. This translates into women accounting for 67% of those who do not feel safe walking alone at night.

### Legal frameworks concerning women's freedom of movement

Beyond the challenge of ensuring that everyone feels safe enough to move around in public spaces, laws must guarantee women and men the same rights to obtain identification documents and to travel by themselves within and outside of their country.

Question	Answer	Assessment
Does the government provide national identity cards?	Yes	✓
Can a married woman apply for a national identity card in the same way as a married man? (in terms of rights and procedures)	Yes	✓
Can an unmarried woman apply for a national identity card in the same way as an unmarried man? (in terms of rights and procedures)	Yes	✓
Can a married woman apply for a passport in the same way as a married man (in terms of rights and procedures)?	Yes	✓
Can an unmarried woman apply for a passport in the same way as an unmarried man (in terms of rights and procedures)?	Yes	✓
Regarding identity cards and/or passports, does the law apply to all groups of women (regardless of race, caste, ethnicity, etc.)?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide married women with the same rights as married men to travel outside the country?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide married women with the same rights as married men to travel outside their homes?	Yes	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, religious, or traditional laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to applying for identity cards or passports?	No	✓

Note: Cut-off date for the legal data is 31 August 2022.

Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi-dashboard>.

## Political voice

### Practices and social norms related to women's political voice

Women's political representation in the country is low, with women accounting for only 22% of the members of parliament in 2023, compared to a world average of 27% and an average of 22% in Southeast Asia.

Regarding attitudes on women's ability to be political leaders, there are no available data in Lao PDR that are comparable to other countries. In 2023, 48% of the world's population thinks that men make better political leaders than women. In Southeast Asia, this percentage reaches 62% – based on countries for which data are available.

## Legal frameworks concerning women's political voice

Question	Answer	Assessment
Does the law provide women with the same rights as men to vote?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide women with the same rights as men to hold public and political office in the legislative branch?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide women with the same rights as men to hold public and political office in the executive branch?	Yes	✓
Does the law provide women with the same rights as men to hold public office in the judiciary branch?	Yes	✓
Do constitutional/legislated gender quotas exist to promote women's political representation at the national level?	No	!
Do constitutional/legislated gender quotas exist to promote women's political representation at the local level?	No	!
Does the law provide for special measures other than quotas to promote women's political representation at the national level?	No	!
Does the law provide for special measures other than quotas to promote women's political representation at the local level?	No	!
Are there informal laws (customary, religious or traditional laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to voting?	No	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, religious or traditional laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to holding public office?	No	✓

Note: Cut-off date for the legal data is 31 August 2022.

Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi-dashboard>.

## Access to justice

### Practices related to women's access to justice

In Lao PDR, 5% of women do not trust the judicial system and courts, compared to 9% of men. This translates into women accounting for 35% of those who do not trust the country's judicial system.

### Legal frameworks concerning women's access to justice

Question	Answer	Assessment
Does the law provide women with the same rights as men to sue?	Yes	✓
Does a woman's testimony carry the same evidentiary weight as a man's in the civil courts?	Yes	✓
Does a woman's testimony carry the same evidentiary weight as a man's in the criminal courts?	Yes	✓
Does a woman's testimony carry the same evidentiary weight as a man's in the family courts?	Yes	✓
Does a woman's testimony carry the same evidentiary weight as a man's in the tribunals?	Yes	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, religious or traditional laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes suing someone?	Yes	!
Are there informal laws (customary, religious or traditional laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to providing testimony in court?	No	✓
Are there informal laws (customary, religious or traditional laws/rules) that create different rights or abilities between men and women when it comes to being judges, advocates or other court officers?	No	✓

Note: Cut-off date for the legal data is 31 August 2022.

Source: OECD Development Centre/OECD (2023), *SIGI 2023 Legal Survey*, <https://oe.cd/sigi-dashboard>.