

**UN WOMEN'S APPROACHES IN ADDRESSING GENDER
INEQUALITY IN KUWAIT (2021–2022)
UNDERGRADUATE THESIS**



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Proposed to the Department of International Relations

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As a partial fulfillment of requirement to earn

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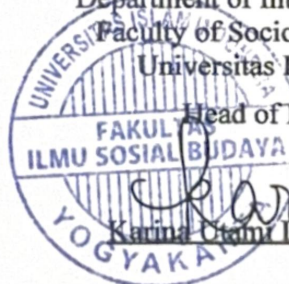
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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

ADHRB	: Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain
CEDAW	: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
ESCWA	: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
GBV	: Gender-Based Violence
GCC	: Gulf Cooperation Council
GIWPS	: Georgetown Institute Women, Peace and Security
IMAGES	: International Men and Gender Equality Survey
MENA	: Middle East and North Africa
SDG(s)	: Sustainable Development Goal(s)
UNDP,	: United Nations Development Programme
UN Women	: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WEPs	: Women's Empowerment Principles
WRSC	: Women's Research and Studies Center

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines UN Women's strategies in Kuwait during 2021–2022, focusing on how these initiatives addressed structural barriers in legal, cultural, and economic domains. Using Joachim's (2008) framework, the study emphasizes the interplay between normative and managerial approaches in promoting gender equality, without relying on coercive enforcement mechanisms. Normative strategies included public advocacy, engagement with religious leaders, and campaigns to shift social attitudes, legitimizing women's participation in leadership and public life. Managerial strategies operationalized these norms by strengthening institutional capacity through judicial training, gender-responsive budgeting, gender-disaggregated data systems, and private-sector partnerships via the Women's Empowerment Principles. These combined efforts contributed to measurable outcomes, including a reduction in dismissed gender-based violence cases from 42% to 18%, enhanced reporting rates, increased adoption of workplace equality policies, and greater female representation in leadership positions. The findings demonstrate that sustainable progress in Kuwait depends on context-sensitive normative measures and robust managerial interventions that translate international commitments, such as CEDAW and SDG 5, into practical institutional change.

Keywords: *Gender Inequality, Kuwait, Normative Approach, Managerial Approach, and UN Women.*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Kuwait is frequently described as one of the more progressive countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region when it comes to women's access to higher education. However, even though female students now outnumber their male counterparts in universities and dominate professional careers in sectors such as healthcare, teaching, and administrative services, the country still struggles with entrenched gender disparities that extend into political participation, economic opportunities, and wider social life (Trading Economics, 2021). It also does not translate into equal access to leadership roles. Fewer than 15% of senior positions in ministries and under 20% of leadership posts in the private sector are held by women (UN Women Data Hub, 2025). This situation reflects a deeper structural imbalance, as women's participation in the workforce tends to remain concentrated in middle-level positions. Advancement to senior or decision-making roles is often hindered by a combination of cultural expectations, institutional practices, and organizational barriers that continue to limit upward mobility and leadership opportunities (Al-Salem, 2017).

Gender inequality refers to structural and institutional disparities between men and women in access to rights, resources, opportunities, and decision-making power. Rather than arising from individual choice, it is embedded in legal systems, economic arrangements, and social norms that systematically disadvantage women (UNDP, 2020). Kabeer (1999) conceptualizes gender inequality as constraints on women's agency produced by unequal power relations

within institutions, emphasizing its structural and relational nature. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), gender inequality is marked by a gap between formal commitments and substantive outcomes. Despite improvements in women's education and labor-force participation, discriminatory laws, limited political representation, and patriarchal norms continue to restrict women's authority and leadership (Moghadam, 2019). This condition is often described as symbolic inclusion, where equality is normatively acknowledged but weakly implemented.

Kuwait reflects this pattern. Although women attain high educational levels and participate in public employment, they remain underrepresented in senior decision-making positions, experience persistent wage gaps, and face legal disadvantages under family and nationality laws (Human Rights Watch, 2017; UN Women, 2022). Legal frameworks governing personal status and citizenship institutionalize male authority, while cultural norms surrounding family and gender roles reinforce these inequalities. Consequently, gender inequality in Kuwait is best understood as a multidimensional and institutional phenomenon, making it a relevant case for analyzing international efforts to implement gender-equality norms. Economic inequality continues to strengthen existing gender barriers in Kuwait. In 2022, the average salary for women was recorded at 1,327 Kuwaiti dinars, while men earned approximately 1,895. This difference of nearly one-third illustrates a persistent wage gap, reflecting structural imbalances that disadvantage women in the labor market (Arab Times, 2023). This inequality extends beyond wages to promotions, benefits, and allowances, reflecting

organizational cultures that prioritize men's careers and insufficient enforcement of equal pay policies (ESCWA, n.d.).

Consequently, even highly educated women face long-term economic disadvantages. Legal structures also sustain inequality. Article 153 of the Penal Code, until its repeal in 2025, permitted reduced penalties for men committing so-called "honor" killings (Arab Times Kuwait, 2025). Women also continue to face restrictions under family and nationality law, which privilege male authority and limit women's autonomy (Human Right Watch, 2017). Although women were granted voting rights in 2005, their parliamentary representation remains negligible, showing that symbolic reforms have not fully transformed structures of power (Christoffersen and Siow, 2025). Despite these challenges, Kuwait has endorsed international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Vision 2035, both of which emphasize gender equality (Kuwait Times, 2023).

UN Women has acted as a key driver of change in Kuwait by working closely with the Women's Research and Studies Center (WRSC) and with government institutions, such as the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (GSSCPD), the Ministry of Justice, and the Central Statistical Bureau. UN Women has also introduced a range of initiatives aimed at strengthening gender equality. These include programs to prepare women for leadership roles, technical support for gender-responsive budgeting in government planning, and the launch of the first International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in the region, which generated valuable data on social attitudes. Parallel efforts in the private sector have also gained momentum, with

44 companies endorsing the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) by 2022, advancing workplace diversity and female leadership (Dexter and Almutawa 2022; Arab Times 2024). In spite of the numerous initiatives introduced, entrenched structural obstacles remain. Much of the existing scholarship has concentrated on reporting visible outputs, for instance, the total number of women who received training, the proportion of companies signing the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), or changes in female labor force participation. However, these accounts rarely examine in depth the underlying mechanisms that either enable or hinder progress toward equality. The literature often takes a descriptive angle, emphasizing either legal reform or cultural practices in isolation. This limitation became more pronounced after 2021, when Kuwait pursued leadership programs, legislative debates, and corporate diversity campaigns simultaneously (UN Women, 2024).

To analyze these dynamics, this study applies Jutta Joachim's (2008) framework of **normative, and managerial approaches**. The normative approach seeks to change attitudes through campaigns, partnerships with WRSC, and WEP's commitments. The managerial approach emphasizes cooperation and capacity-building, including gender-responsive budgeting, judicial training, and leadership development (Joachim, 2008). Mapping Kuwait's gender equality efforts through Joachim's three approaches reveals both progress and limitations. Managerial programs have improved women's mid-level leadership but lack enforcement to secure promotions and fair wages. Normative campaigns have raised awareness, yet without accompanying legal reform, their impact remains symbolic. Together, these approaches, with both their progresses and limitations,

explain why progress has been incremental and uneven. This present analysis is timely in light of Kuwait's Vision 2035 and the global momentum of the SDGs, both of which center gender equality in national and international agendas. The post-pandemic period widened gender disparities in employment and unpaid care work but also created opportunities for reform, as governments reassessed social contracts and international organizations amplified calls for inclusive recovery. Evaluating Kuwait through Joachim's framework therefore not only advances academic understanding of gender policy in semi-conservative contexts, but also provides actionable insights for policymakers, donors, and civil society actors seeking to accelerate substantive equality (Joachim, 2008).

Kuwait has been chosen as a case study not only because it ranks 130th out of 146 countries in the 2022 Global Gender Gap Report, but also due to its paradox: women make up over 60% of university graduates and dominate fields like medicine and education, yet lack political and senior economic leadership. Unlike lower-ranked countries with fragile institutions, Kuwait is a high-income, stable state with ambitious reforms under Vision 2035 and active UN Women partnerships, making it ideal for the study of how global gender norms are implemented in resource-rich, semi-conservative contexts (Kuwait Times, 2023).

The 2021–2022 period has been selected to capture the post-pandemic recovery when women faced job losses, increased care duties, and more gender-based violence, while UN Women ramped up leadership programs, gender budgeting, and legislative advocacy. This overlap provides a key window for assessing UN Women's impact. Its effectiveness in Kuwait rests not on a single approach, but on the interaction of all three. Normative strategies build legitimacy,

managerial reforms strengthen institutions, and enforcement mechanisms secure accountability. Together, they shape the extent to which formal commitments can translate into meaningful progress in Kuwait's socio-political context. This collaboration was officially recognized in Kuwait's 2021 Voluntary National Review (VNR) on SDGs, reinforcing UN Women's legitimacy within national planning frameworks.

1.2 Research Question

How did UN Women implement normative, managerial, and enforcement approaches to address gender inequality in Kuwait during 2021–2022?

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research include:

1. To analyze how UN Women, as an international organization, implemented normative, managerial, and enforcement approaches to address gender inequality in Kuwait during 2021–2022.
2. To examine the effectiveness of UN Women's initiatives, such as leadership training, gender-responsive budgeting, advocacy for legal reform, and private-sector engagement, in advancing gender equality.
3. To assess the interaction between normative, managerial, and enforcement strategies in shaping social attitudes, strengthening institutional capacity, and influencing legal reforms in Kuwait.
4. To evaluate the extent to which UN Women's approaches align with Kuwait's Vision 2035 and Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) on gender equality.

1.4 Research Scope

Kuwait was chosen because it represents an analytically significant, though not unique, paradox of gender inequality. While similar patterns exist across the Gulf and MENA regions, Kuwait combines high female educational attainment with persistent legal and structural barriers in a relatively open political environment and ongoing engagement with international mechanisms such as CEDAW, making it an appropriate case for examining norm implementation (Moghadam 2019). UN Women was chosen because among the various international and domestic organizations dealing with women's issues in Kuwait, UN Women has unique legitimacy due to its UN mandate, its role as custodian of CEDAW, and formal cooperation with state institutions. The 2021–2022 period encompassed intensive engagement prior to major legal reforms, highlighting structural constraints rather than post-reform outcomes (UN Women 2022).

1.5 Literature Review

Studies of gender inequality in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region consistently highlight the persistence of structural, legal, and cultural barriers that constrain women's empowerment. Scholars emphasize that despite women's progress in education and labor force participation, disadvantages remain in political representation, wage equality, and legal protection (Daibes 2022). Kuwait exemplifies this paradox. Women surpass men in higher education enrollment and hold visible positions in medicine, education, and administration, yet remain underrepresented in parliament and senior government posts (Toukan 2023).

Several studies underscore the interplay between culture and law in perpetuating inequality. Nasruddin argues that progress in gender policy in Kuwait has been uneven, highlighting how security concerns and conservative politics often override commitments to women's empowerment (Nasruddin 2024). Similarly, he documents discriminatory legal frameworks, such as Article 153 of the Penal Code, which, until its repeal in 2025, legitimized reduced sentencing for honor killings, and Kuwait's Citizenship law, which prevents women from passing citizenship to their children if they are married to foreign nationals. These findings emphasize that legal reform alone is insufficient without addressing broader social and institutional resistance.

International perspectives have also contributed to the analysis of women's rights in Kuwait. Studies by the World Bank and UNDP show that while Kuwait has adopted international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there remains a significant gap between formal pledges and implementation. This gap reflects what Moghadam (2019) terms "symbolic inclusion," where women are granted rights in principle but denied substantive empowerment in practice. Scholarship on norm diffusion and international organizations supports this observation, stressing that compliance with international commitments often depends on the interaction of normative persuasion, managerial support, and enforcement mechanisms (Acharya 2004).

Despite these contributions, a critical gap persists. Much of the literature on Kuwait emphasizes outcomes, such as participation rates, legal amendments, or representation, without analyzing the mechanisms that produce these results. For instance, Daibes highlights U.S. support for gender initiatives in Kuwait as

part of national security strategy, but does not assess how international organizations translate global norms into local practice (Daibes 2022). The literature tends to identify the persistence of patriarchal resistance but stops short of categorizing the strategies used by international actors to navigate these obstacles. This omission leaves the question of how different approaches, normative, managerial, and enforcement, are mobilized in practice, and with what effectiveness unanswered (Toukan 2023).

Joachim's tripartite framework provides a useful lens to address this gap. Normative approaches emphasize persuasion, discourse, and value internalization, evident in Kuwait through campaigns like UNiTE Orange and partnerships with religious leaders, to frame gender equality as consistent with Islamic principles (UN Women 2022). Managerial approaches stress technical assistance and capacity building, such as leadership programs, gender-responsive budgeting, and judicial training (World Bank 2022). Enforcement approaches emphasize legal obligations and compliance mechanisms, including advocacy for repealing Article 153, establishing gender-based violence units, and adopting institutional performance scorecards (UNDP 2022). Together, these strategies demonstrate the multilayered nature of international intervention in semi-conservative contexts.

This study stands at the intersection of gender inequality research in Kuwait and international relations theory. Unlike previous descriptive works, it applies Joachim's framework to analyze how UN Women used normative, managerial, and enforcement strategies during 2021–2022. In doing so, it fills a gap by explaining not just the outcomes, but also the mechanisms through which

international organizations have pursued gender equality in Kuwait's complex context.

1.6 Research Framework

This study applies the implementation framework developed by Joachim, Reinalda, and Verbeek (2008) to analyze how international gender-equality norms are implemented in Kuwait through the work of UN Women during 2021–2022. The framework conceptualizes implementation as a process shaped by three approaches: normative, managerial, and enforcement. Rather than viewing implementation solely through coercion, this framework emphasizes legitimacy-building and institutional capacity as key mechanisms through which international organizations influence state behavior. Kuwait constitutes a relevant case because it has formally accepted major international gender norms while facing persistent challenges in domestic implementation. Kuwait acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1994 and committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality (United Nations, 1994; United Nations, 2015). These commitments create binding normative obligations in areas such as protection from gender-based violence, women's political participation, and equality before the law. The continued existence of gender inequality despite these commitments makes Kuwait suitable for analyzing norm implementation rather than norm adoption.

Table. 1 Joachim's Approaches and UN Women in Kuwait

	<i>Enforcement approach</i>	<i>Management approach</i>	<i>Normative approach</i>
<i>Resources</i>	• Naming and Shaming, i.e, judging on the basis of state reporting, expert committees, inspections or NGO reports. • Sanctions, e.g. economic or military sanctions, adjudication financial penalties, or naming and shaming.	• Monitoring the basis of state reporting, expert committees, inspections, or NGO reports • <i>Capacity building</i> and problem solving through expert advice, rule interpretation, financial or technical assistance.	• Authority and Legitimacy

Source: (Joachim, 2008).

Table 1 summarizes Joachim's three implementation approaches and their core instruments. It distinguishes normative mechanisms based on authority and legitimacy, managerial mechanisms based on monitoring and capacity building, and enforcement mechanisms relying on coercive or reputational pressure (Joachim, Reinalda, & Verbeek, 2008). The table functions as an analytical reference to clarify which mechanisms are theoretically available and which are empirically applicable in Kuwait. Although enforcement is included in Joachim's framework, this study does not treat it as an operative approach in the Kuwaiti case. Enforcement relies on sanctions or formal naming-and-shaming mechanisms, tools that UN Women does not possess. Moreover, Kuwait's sensitivity to sovereignty, religion, and domestic political opposition limits the

feasibility of coercive enforcement. Enforcement is therefore acknowledged only as a theoretical category, not as an empirical strategy used by UN Women.

The analysis instead focuses on normative and managerial approaches. The normative approach explains how UN Women generates legitimacy by aligning gender equality with Islamic values, national development priorities, and Kuwait Vision 2035. The managerial approach addresses implementation gaps through technical cooperation, monitoring, gender-disaggregated data systems, judicial training, and gender-responsive budgeting. These strategies reflect Joachim's assumption that states may be willing to comply with international norms but lack sufficient administrative capacity. UN Women's legitimacy in Kuwait derives from its UN mandate, recognized expertise, and formal partnerships with state institutions, making normative persuasion and managerial capacity-building the most relevant modes of influence in this case.

1.7 Provisional Argument

This research argues that UN Women's effectiveness in addressing gender inequality in Kuwait during 2021–2022 is primarily driven by the interaction of normative and managerial approaches, rather than enforcement. Normative initiatives established legitimacy by aligning gender equality with Islamic principles and national development priorities, thereby reducing political and societal resistance. Building on this legitimacy, managerial interventions translated norms into practice through judicial training, gender-responsive budgeting, and gender-disaggregated monitoring systems that addressed concrete implementation gaps. The absence of an enforcement approach reflects both UN Women's non-coercive institutional mandate and Kuwait's sensitivity to

sovereignty in gender-related reforms. Consequently, progress emerged through institutional capacity-building, expert guidance, and reputational accountability, allowing incremental compliance without provoking political backlash or undermining domestic legitimacy.

1.8 Research Method

1.8.1 Type of the Research

This research employed a qualitative-descriptive approach, focusing on the analysis of international organization strategies through Jutta Joachim's (2008) framework of normative, and managerial.

1.8.2 Subject and Object of the Research

The subject of this research is UN Women as an international organization, while the object is its approaches to addressing gender inequality in Kuwait during 2021–2022, a period when its key interventions were actively implemented.

1.8.3 Method of Data Collection

The data were collected primarily from secondary sources, including UN Women reports, government publications, World Bank and UNDP studies, Human Rights Watch documentation, and relevant scholarly works. These sources provided comprehensive insights into policies, initiatives, and outcomes related to gender equality.

1.8.4 Process of the Research

The study employed content and thematic analysis, organizing data through Joachim's two approaches to assess the application of normative, and managerial, strategies in Kuwait. Thematic coding maintained coherence with the

research objectives. A key limitation is the exclusive use of secondary sources without field interviews, which may have narrowed contextual insight.

1.9 Thesis Outline

1. The first chapter details the problem formulation, title selection, research scope, objectives, literature review, theoretical framework, and writing methodology, followed by a literature review and theoretical basis.
2. Chapter two addresses the persistence of gender inequality in Kuwait despite legal reforms. Challenges have arisen in legal, economic, and political rights, which have been compounded by cultural norms and pandemics. It also describes the role of UN Women in promoting equality through advocacy, community engagement, and partnerships within the CEDAW framework.
3. Chapter three analyzes gender inequality in Kuwait in detail using the Normative, and Managerial approaches.
4. The fourth chapter is the closing chapter containing the essential points presented as a conclusion along with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

GENDER INEQUALITY IN KUWAIT: CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

This chapter examines the existing body of literature on gender inequality in Kuwait, situating the issue within broader social, legal, economic, and political contexts. The purpose of this is not only to describe the conditions, but also to critically analyze the structural barriers that continue to limit women's empowerment despite Kuwait's constitutional guarantees and international commitments. This chapter also elaborates the obligation of the UN Women in Kuwait.

2.1. Gender Inequality in Kuwait: Historical and Structural Roots Shaping the 2021–2022 Context

Gender inequality in Kuwait has deep roots in long-standing legal, cultural, and political structures, which have shaped women's roles and opportunities over time. These structural conditions have created a gap between the rights women formally hold and the level of influence they actually have, a pattern often described as symbolic inclusion. This broader background is essential because the situation in 2021–2022 did not emerge in isolation; it was directly shaped by these enduring foundations. As Kuwait entered this period with ambitious goals under Vision 2035 and increasingly educated women, the same entrenched norms and legal limitations continued to influence how gender inequality played out, making the 2021–2022 context a continuation rather than a break from its longstanding challenges (Alzuabi 2016). One major area of inequality lies in Kuwait's legal framework. The Personal Status Law No. 51 of 1984 institutionalizes male guardianship, requiring women to obtain male consent

for marriage and granting men superior rights in divorce, custody, and inheritance. These provisions legally codify women's subordinate position and constrain their autonomy (Human Right Watch 2017).

The Citizenship Law further entrenches inequality by preventing Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaiti men from passing citizenship to their children, a restriction not applied to men, which leaves many families legally and socially marginalized (Gulf University for Science & Technology n.d.). This restriction is rooted in state concerns over demographic control, national identity, and welfare distribution, where women's marriage choices are treated as a site of state regulation, reflecting the gendered assumption that citizenship lineage and national loyalty flow through men rather than women (CEDAW Committee 2011; Human Rights Watch 2017). While Kuwaiti men can transmit nationality regardless of their spouse's nationality, women are denied this right, reinforcing women's subordinate legal status within both the family and the state (Human Rights Watch 2017; CEDAW Committee 2011). The implications extend beyond legal status, as children of Kuwaiti women face barriers in accessing education, healthcare, and public employment, increasing women's economic dependency and vulnerability to coercion within marriage. This demonstrates that nationality law functions as a structural mechanism sustaining gendered power asymmetries rather than a neutral administrative policy.

From a theoretical perspective, these legal differences constitute gender inequality because they institutionalize unequal rights and outcomes based solely on gender. Feminist legal scholars argue that discrimination embedded in family and citizenship laws constitutes structural violence, as it produces long-term

social, economic, and legal disadvantages without addressing the actual physical violence (Kabeer 1999; CEDAW Committee 2011). In Kuwait, these legal asymmetries limit women's autonomy, reinforce dependence on male relatives, and reduce women's bargaining power within marriage and the state. Thus, gender inequality in Kuwait operates not only through social attitudes but also through formal legal mechanisms that explicitly privilege men over women. These discriminatory legal structures highlight why UN Women employed both normative and enforcement approaches in Kuwait. Normatively, UN Women collaborated with religious and community leaders to reframe women's rights as consistent with Islamic principles, while through enforcement strategies, the organization advocated for reforms aligned with CEDAW obligations. Thus, the persistence of family and nationality laws became a focal point for UN Women's interventions. International monitoring bodies such as CEDAW have repeatedly urged Kuwait to reform these discriminatory provisions, yet little progress occurred during the study period (Kuwait Times 2025a).

In the framework of international law and policy, gender-based violence is understood not only as acts of physical or sexual violence, but also as structural and institutional practices that expose women to systematic risks, exclusion, and unequal legal protection (WHO 2013; UN General Assembly 2014). This broader definition is particularly important in the Kuwaiti context, where violence against women is often normalized through legal loopholes, weak law enforcement, and social stigma, rather than simply through overt criminal acts. Gender Based Violence (GBV) is one of the most visible and severe consequences of these structural inequalities. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines GBV as

any act of physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence directed against an individual on the basis of their sex, with women disproportionately affected due to unequal power relations embedded in the legal and social systems. The relevance of gender-based violence in this study lies in its function as an indicator of unequal protection and institutional failure. Violence against women in Kuwait is not incidental but reflects gender-specific harm that is tolerated, underreported, and insufficiently sanctioned, making GBV a core manifestation of gender inequality rather than an isolated criminal issue (WHO 2013; Human Rights Watch 2017).

In Kuwait, women experience multiple forms of GBV, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, psychological abuse, and honor-related violence. Human Rights Watch reports that domestic violence is widespread and often goes unreported due to social stigma and the prioritization of family honor over women's safety. Sexual harassment in public places and the workplace also remains prevalent, reinforced by weak reporting mechanisms and limited institutional accountability (Human Rights Watch 2017). Until its repeal in 2025, Article 153 of the Criminal Code further reflected institutional tolerance of extreme forms of violence by allowing reduced sentences for so-called “honor” killings, thereby weakening women’s legal protections during the 2021–2022 period (UN Women 2022). The existence of Article 153 demonstrates how legal weaknesses contribute to the normalization of gender-based violence by signaling that women's lives are "conditionally" protected. This legal tolerance reinforces the classification of honor-related crimes as gender-based violence, as these harms are targeted at women and structurally enabled.

The classification of honor crimes and domestic violence as gender-based violence is based on the fact that these harms are disproportionately directed at women and legitimized by gender norms surrounding family honor and male authority. International bodies, including the CEDAW Committee, explicitly recognize legal provisions that reduce penalties for violence against women as a form of institutionalized gender-based violence, as they signal a disparate valuation of women's lives under the law (CEDAW Committee 2019). Available data indicate that domestic violence remains significantly underreported in Kuwait, with civil society and international reports estimating that fewer than one in four cases are formally reported due to stigma, fear of retaliation, and weak protection mechanisms (Human Rights Watch 2017; US Department of State 2020). Taken together, patterns of gender-based violence in Kuwait, including high dismissal rates, legal leniency, underreporting, and weak enforcement-demonstrate gender inequality not merely as social prejudice, but as unequal legal protection and institutional failure, thereby substantiating GBV data as empirical evidence of structural gender inequality

Legal protections against violence also remained limited. The Domestic Violence Law of 2020, though a step forward, lacked strong enforcement mechanisms such as adequate shelters and specialized police training (US Department of State 2020). The limited application of international gender norms in Kuwait can be explained by legal pluralism (the existence of different legal mechanisms within a society), political conservatism, and concerns about cultural and religious legitimacy. Although Kuwait has ratified CEDAW, objections to family and nationality laws reflect resistance to reforms perceived as threatening

traditional authority structures, resulting in selective compliance rather than full implementation (CEDAW Committee, 2011).

Kuwait's limited application of international gender norms does not reflect a rejection of those norms, but rather selective adherence shaped by legal pluralism, political conservatism, and concerns about cultural and religious legitimacy. Scholars note that states may ratify international conventions such as CEDAW while simultaneously maintaining domestic reservations or laws that weaken their substantive impact, particularly in areas perceived as threatening traditional authority structures (Merry 2006; CEDAW Committee 2011). Scholars note that such laws not only excuse violence but also reflect deeper cultural norms that link women's behavior to family honor (Ajwad et al 2023). Its repeal in 2025 was a milestone, but during 2021–2022 it stood as a stark reminder of the tolerance for violence embedded in Kuwaiti law (Al Amir 2025). Cultural attitudes further reinforced these inequalities. Surveys show that 62 percent of respondents believed a woman's role should remain in the household, reflecting persistent patriarchal expectations despite women's educational gains (Ajwad et al 2023).

The concept of *sharaf* (honor) continues to shape women's public behavior, often discouraging victims of abuse from seeking justice for fear of stigma and retaliation. Scholars emphasize that the interaction between conservative interpretations of Islam, tribal traditions, and political interests sustains this cultural environment (Al-Kuwari 2025). While modernization narratives promote women's public participation, conservative discourse often

reasserts the primacy of family honor and male authority, creating tension between competing value systems (Rahman 2025).

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these structural inequalities. Women were disproportionately affected by job losses in sectors such as retail and hospitality, where female employment is concentrated, while also assuming greater unpaid care responsibilities at home (UN Women 2022). The pandemic highlighted how economic crises magnify gender roles and reduce women's ability to participate equally in the labor force. Yet, policy responses in 2021–2022 largely neglected these gendered impacts, reflecting institutional inertia and limited political will. Economically, women continued to face structural disadvantages. Female labor force participation was 48.9 percent in 2022 compared to 88.6 percent for men, with women earning on average 14.1 percent less than their male counterparts (ADHRB 2024). Women were concentrated in lower-paying sectors such as education and healthcare, while men dominated higher-paying, prestigious fields like oil and finance (ADHRB 2025). Barriers such as limited childcare and inadequate public transportation further restricted women's economic mobility. Scholars argue that such disparities are not accidental but the result of institutionalized undervaluation of women's work and systemic prioritization of male employment (Alfahad and Adeel 2020).

In politics, progress remained fragile. Following the 2020 elections, only 10 of 50 parliamentary seats were held by women, and conservative blocs actively opposed gender reforms (Holleis 2020). While symbolic appointments of female judges and ministers signaled progress, scholars note that such inclusion often masks structural exclusion in legislative power. Women's political participation

thus reflects the paradox of visibility without influence, as their presence in leadership roles does not necessarily translate into broader policy reforms (Maktabi 2017). Data limitations also obscure the true scope of inequality. Gender-disaggregated statistics on domestic violence, wage gaps, and unpaid care work remain scarce, while underreporting of violence persists due to stigma and weak enforcement (Aizer 2014). The lack of reliable data not only hampers policy design but also perpetuates a narrative that minimizes the scale of gender inequality. This absence of accountability mechanisms allows structural barriers to remain unchallenged.

Intersectional factors exacerbate the vulnerability of marginalized groups. Migrant domestic workers, governed by the 2015 Domestic Workers Law rather than general labor protections, continue until today to face exploitation under the *kafala* system, with reports of wage theft, excessive hours, and abuse (Migrant Right 2025). Stateless women from the Bidun community also suffer compounded discrimination, with limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities (Amnesty International 2023). These groups illustrate how gender inequality intersects with class, ethnicity, and legal status, producing layered disadvantages that go beyond the experiences of Kuwaiti women alone.

Overall, gender inequality in Kuwait during 2021–2022 can be characterized as persistent yet fragmented in its progress. Legal reforms, such as the introduction of domestic violence legislation, represented important but partial steps. Cultural resistance, structural economic disparities, and political conservatism undermined implementation and slowed momentum. Scholars consistently highlight the tension between Kuwait's formal commitments to

international norms, such as CEDAW and the Sustainable Development Goals, and the persistence of local practices that reassert patriarchal control. The paradox of modernization without full empowerment defines this period, leaving women simultaneously more visible in public life yet constrained by enduring structures of inequality (George 2020). These patterns demonstrate that GBV in Kuwait is not incidental but structurally embedded within legal, cultural, and institutional frameworks

Building on this analysis, the next chapter presents the theoretical framework employed in the evaluation of these challenges. Overall, the limited application of international gender norms in Kuwait stems not from outright rejection, but rather due to structural legal constraints, political conservatism, legal pluralism, and concerns about cultural legitimacy. These factors result in selective compliance, where international commitments such as CEDAW are formally accepted but only partially implemented in practice.

Chapter 3 outlines Joachim's normative, and managerial approaches as tools for understanding how international organizations operate in contexts like Kuwait. Linking the gender inequality overview in Chapter 2 with this framework ensures coherence between the problem identified and the analytical method used. These barriers to implementation are not only rooted in legal and political structures, but are also reinforced by societal norms and conflicting interpretations of gender roles, which will be discussed further in Chapter 2.2. Taken together, these factors explain why international gender norms in Kuwait are applied selectively and not fully enforced.

2.2. UN Women's Mission in Promoting Inclusive Equality

UN Women, officially established in 2010 through a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, was created to consolidate and strengthen the UN's efforts in advancing gender equality. The mission of UN Women is to serve as the leading UN organization that works with governments, civil society, and international partners to promote gender equality as both a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for sustainable development. Its functions extend across multiple levels: it provides guidance to member states in drafting gender-responsive laws and policies, assists in implementing international agreements, and advocates for the integration of gender perspectives into all areas of global development. This makes UN Women not only a catalyst for change but also a central actor in ensuring that the international community remains accountable to the commitments it has made (UN Women 2021).

UN Women formally entered Kuwait through its cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (GSSCPD), which began partnering with the organization in the mid-2010s to integrate gender considerations into national development planning (UN Women 2020). This institutional presence expanded through joint initiatives with the Women's Research and Studies Center (WRSC), enabling UN Women to support data systems, leadership programmes, and broader capacity-building within Kuwait's governance structures (UN Women 2020). Building on these partnerships, UN Women's mission in Kuwait has focused on advancing inclusive equality by supporting legal reform, strengthening gender-responsive governance, and promoting women's leadership across public and private sectors (UN Women

2019). Its work aligns with global commitments under the 2030 Agenda, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 5, which positions gender equality as a prerequisite for sustainable development (United Nations 2015).

UN Women's role is closely linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which calls for achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Gender equality, however, is not confined to SDG 5 alone, it cuts across all the SDGs, from reducing poverty and promoting health to fostering inclusive economic growth and peacebuilding. In this sense, UN Women functions as both a specialized agency and a cross-cutting partner, ensuring that the principle of gender equality is embedded in every aspect of global development (UN Women 2021).

At the level of international law, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979, stands as the primary treaty framework on women's rights. Often described as an international bill of rights for women, it obligates state parties to remove discrimination in political, economic, social, cultural, and family life. The convention requires countries to submit periodic reports to the CEDAW Committee, which monitors compliance and provides recommendations. Although CEDAW does not carry binding punitive enforcement mechanisms, it has been instrumental in shaping legal reforms and normative standards worldwide, offering both a benchmark and a source of pressure for states to improve women's rights protections. Beyond global treaties, the significance of domestic legislation can also be observed in how different countries have taken

measures to integrate gender equality into their political and legal systems (ADHRB 2023).

As a specialized UN entity, UN Women plays a central role in helping countries fulfill their CEDAW obligations and SDG 5. Its mandate includes providing policy advice, technical assistance, and capacity-building to strengthen gender equality institutions, as well as serving as a coordinator and advocate for gender mainstreaming within the UN system. UN Women also supports governments in preparing and following up on CEDAW reports, ensuring data and analysis align with the Convention's standards. The findings and recommendations from these CEDAW reports serve as a foundation for UN Women's programmatic interventions, guiding initiatives such as leadership training, gender-responsive budgeting, and the IMAGES (International Men and Gender Equality Survey). Through these efforts, UN Women bridges global commitments and national implementation, translating CEDAW principles into practical strategies for advancing women's rights in Kuwait (Kuwait Times 2025b).

Within this global landscape, UN Women plays a critical role as both a facilitator and advocate. It supports intergovernmental processes such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which is responsible for monitoring and reviewing progress on gender equality, and it contributes to the establishment of global standards and action plans. By acting as a bridge between international commitments and national implementation, UN Women helps ensure that principles of gender equality are not only articulated in treaties and policies but also integrated into the broader agenda of global development and human rights

(UN Women 2021). Although UN Women does not maintain a formal Country Office in Kuwait, its operations are facilitated through the Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS) and formalized by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (GSSCPD). The GSSCPD serves as the principal liaison for UN organizations, ensuring UN Women's activities align with Kuwait's national development agenda, specifically the Kuwait Vision 2035 and its commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 5 (GSSCPD 2021).

In the Gulf region, UN Women established its presence in Kuwait in 2018 through the Liaison Office for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which serves as a regional platform for cooperation on gender equality and women's empowerment (UN Women GCC 2018). The office works closely with the Government of Kuwait, particularly with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development and the Women's Research and Studies Center (WRSC) at Kuwait University, to align national policies with international gender equality frameworks (WRSC 2022). During 2021–2022, this partnership was strengthened through several joint initiatives. UN Women and GSSCPD organized gender-responsive budgeting workshops for government officials, partnered with the Ministry of Justice on judicial training to handle gender-based violence (GBV) cases, and worked with the Central Statistical Bureau to improve gender data collection. The government acknowledged these collaborations in its 2021 Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting UN Women's technical support in advancing SDG 5 (GSSCPD 2021).

These institutionalized partnerships demonstrate UN Women's legitimacy and authority in Kuwait, derived not only from its UN mandate but also from formal recognition and collaboration with national institutions. This dual legitimacy anchors UN Women's initiatives within Kuwait's policy framework, ensuring cultural resonance and governmental ownership (UN Women GCC, 2022). This collaboration focuses on policy dialogue, data collection, and the implementation of gender-responsive programs. Local organizations such as the WRSC function as intermediaries, facilitating coordination between UN Women and governmental bodies, ensuring that global norms are adapted to local contexts, and promoting evidence-based policymaking. Through this tripartite partnership, UN Women's initiatives in Kuwait have gained both governmental legitimacy and social resonance, reinforcing the country's commitment to its CEDAW obligations and the Sustainable Development Goals (UN Women 2023).

In its implementation in Kuwait, UN Women adopts a pragmatic and context-sensitive strategy that prioritizes gradual norm diffusion over direct normative confrontation. Although its mandate is rooted in universal frameworks such as CEDAW and SDG 5, UN Women frames gender equality initiatives in alignment with Kuwait's national development agenda and culturally legitimate discourses, including references to social cohesion and institutional capacity-building (UN Women, 2021; GSSCPD, 2021). This approach reflects the political reality in Kuwait, where reforms related to family law, citizenship rights, and gender-based violence face resistance from conservative parliamentary actors and entrenched legal norms, limiting the immediate implementation of international standards. Rather than promoting gender equality as an external or

Western imposition, UN Women emphasizes technical cooperation, data systems, and institutional reform, illustrating a combination of normative commitment and managerial adaptation. This implementation posture demonstrates how international organizations navigate domestic constraints through mediated norm diffusion, a dynamic that is analytically developed in Chapter 3 through Joachim's framework on normative and managerial approaches (CEDAW Committee 2019).

2.3 UN Women's Perspective on Implementation: Compromise or Promotion of Western Values

UN Women's approach to implementing gender equality norms in Kuwait reflects a strategy of contextual adaptation rather than the imposition of Western values. Rather than promoting gender equality as a universal model detached from local realities, UN Women frames its interventions through Islamic principles, national development priorities, and existing legal structures. This approach indicates a deliberate compromise-oriented strategy, in which global norms such as CEDAW and SDG 5 are translated into locally acceptable practices to reduce resistance and enhance legitimacy. UN Women's engagement with religious institutions, state planning bodies, and national development frameworks demonstrates that the organization prioritizes norm localization over value transplantation. In line with Joachim's framework, this strategy reflects an understanding that compliance is more likely when international norms are perceived as compatible with domestic values, rather than as externally imposed Western agendas (Joachim 2008; UN Women 2022; Moghadam 2019).

CHAPTER 3

THE ANALYSIS OF NORMATIVE, MANAGERIAL, AND ENFORCEMENT APPROACHES

Chapter 3 analyzes UN Women's role in addressing gender inequality in Kuwait during 2021–2022 using Joachim's framework of normative and managerial approaches. While Joachim identifies enforcement as one possible implementation mechanism, this study demonstrates that UN Women's influence in Kuwait operates primarily through legitimacy-building and institutional capacity development rather than coercive enforcement. Kuwait has ratified the CEDAW, committing to eliminating gender-based discrimination. UN Women operationalizes this commitment through a combination of normative, managerial and soft enforcement approaches, in line with Joachim's framework.

3.1. Authority and Legitimacy in UN Women's Normative Approach in Kuwait

According to Joachim (2008), international organizations derive their influence not merely from formal mandates, but from two complementary sources: authority and legitimacy. *Authority* refers to the recognition of an organization's expertise, technical competence, and capacity to provide credible guidance to states. *Legitimacy*, on the other hand, arises when states and societal actors perceive the organization's goals and norms as appropriate, acceptable, and aligned with their own values. Kuwait has formally ratified the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*, an international treaty that requires state parties to pursue the elimination of discrimination against women and promote gender equality in all areas of life.

Kuwait acceded to CEDAW through *Amiri Decree No. 24 in 1994*, and under the Kuwaiti Constitution, treaties ratified by the State become an integral part of national law that government bodies and courts are obligated to uphold.

In Kuwait, UN Women's normative authority is strengthened through its role in supporting the implementation of Kuwait's CEDAW commitments, including advising on gender-responsive policies, integrating gender perspectives into national planning, and monitoring progress toward international obligations. Its formal partnership with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (GSSCPD) positions the organization as a trusted advisor within national development planning and in fulfilling Kuwait's international obligations under CEDAW and other normative frameworks (UN Women GCC 2022).

Authority allows an organization to influence states through expertise and policy guidance, while legitimacy enables an organization to persuade local actors through shared values and norms. Within Joachim's framework, this positioning places UN Women firmly within the normative approach, as its influence derives from recognized expertise and perceived appropriateness rather than from formal enforcement powers or binding authority (Joachim, 2008). This reflects Joachim's (2008) notion that international organizations act as norm entrepreneurs, relying on persuasion and social legitimacy rather than coercion. To strengthen this process of normative adaptation, religious educators, imams, and community leaders were actively engaged in reframing women's rights as consistent with Islamic principles and national identity, thereby fostering greater societal acceptance of gender equality initiatives (UN Women 2022). This engagement is a

normative strategy because it seeks to reshape the social meaning and moral legitimacy of gender equality by aligning it with locally accepted religious values, rather than changing legal rules or administrative procedures (Joachim, 2008; UN Women, 2022).

During this period, UN Women shifted from general advocacy to a multi-layered cultural strategy targeting the roots of resistance to traditional values, religious interpretations, and skepticism toward external reforms. A key element was integrating gender equality into Islamic ethics and Kuwaiti heritage. UN Women worked with the Women's Research and Studies Center (WRSC), the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, and local religious scholars to frame gender justice within Islamic teachings. Sermons, teaching materials, and workshop content were revised to emphasize that gender equality reflects principles of justice and dignity already embedded in Islam (WRSC 2022). These initiatives such as the *Orange the World* campaign and the *Ring the Bell* event at Boursa Kuwait represented normative approaches rather than managerial ones. They tried to shape public attitudes and cultural acceptance of gender equality through visibility, symbolism, and moral persuasion, rather than through institutional restructuring or technical capacity building.

This illustrates the essence of the normative approach: influencing beliefs and social values to prepare the ground for subsequent managerial and institutional reforms. The correlation between these initiatives and later programs lies in how the early normative phase built social legitimacy that made later managerial efforts, such as leadership training and data collection, more sustainable and acceptable (UN Women 2022). According to Joachim (2008),

such initiatives are normative in nature because they aim to influence behavior through persuasion, symbolism, and visibility, preparing for social acceptance rather than directly implementing institutional change.

Image 1. Raising Awareness & Combating Violence Through the “Orange Campaign”.



Source: *UN Women Kuwait 2022.*

Image (1), shows that the campaign therefore exemplifies normative diffusion, where repeated public exposure and collective participation normalize anti-violence norms without relying on formal policy instruments (Joachim 2008; UN Women 2022).

The outcomes of these normative strategies became visible not only through increased public engagement, but also through measurable institutional progress. According to the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS), Kuwait's ranking improved significantly from 123rd in 2021 to 61st in 2022, reflecting gains in women's inclusion, safety, and access to justice. These improvements were also supported by sectoral changes within government

institutions. For instance, female representation in senior public roles increased steadily, including within the Central Bank of Kuwait, where women held 41 percent of board seats by 2022 (Kuwait Report 2022).

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This situation illustrates why the normative approach, as described by Joachim, relies primarily on persuasion and shared values rather than coercive mechanisms. While Joachim does not discuss Kuwaiti citizenship or guardianship laws specifically, her framework highlights that normative strategies tend to be less effective when resistance is rooted in institutional structures or political interests. In Kuwait, discriminatory citizenship policies, guardianship norms, and opposition from conservative parliamentary blocs represent forms of structural resistance that cannot be addressed through normative persuasion alone. This

limitation reinforces Joachim's distinction that normative approaches are effective in shaping legitimacy and discourse, but are insufficient to overcome entrenched legal and political resistance without complementary managerial or law enforcement mechanisms (Joachim 2008).

What distinguishes UN Women's normative approach in Kuwait is its integration with broader national and regional development agendas. By aligning gender equality with Kuwait Vision 2035 and portraying women's empowerment as essential for modernization and economic diversification, UN Women reduced the perception of gender reform as a Western import. Campaigns often linked women's leadership to financial resilience, innovation, and global competitiveness. For example, partnerships with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development and the WRSC provided training for over 60 women in leadership and electoral participation, while also conducting gender-responsive budgeting workshops for government agencies (Kuwait Times 2025).

This integration created a dual incentive: it positioned gender equality as a moral and pragmatic necessity for Kuwait's long-term prosperity. Such framing resonates with Joachim's insight that normative influence is most decisive when it aligns with a state's self-interest, transforming compliance into voluntary commitment. Another strength of this approach was its reliance on feedback mechanisms. UN Women collected data through local surveys such as the IMAGES (International Men and Gender Equality Survey), monitored public sentiment, and adjusted campaigns in response to resistance or shifting political conditions. This adaptive strategy enabled campaigns to remain relevant even in

conservative regions where direct advocacy might have provoked backlash (UNDP Project Plan 2021). By embedding gender equality in the national development narrative, UN Women exerts normative influence by redefining gender reform as a shared national interest, rather than as an externally imposed obligation (Joachim 2008; Kuwait Times 2025). These efforts illustrate how UN Women exercised both authority and legitimacy as defined by Joachim (2008). Its authority emerged from its policy expertise and institutional capacity to advise on national gender strategies, while its legitimacy was derived from cultural alignment and trust built through collaboration with religious scholars and local institutions.

Leveraging religious legitimacy to reframe women's rights within Islamic ethics, UN Women worked with WRSC and other governmental and religious actors in Kuwait to contextualize gender equality within Islamic ethics; while specific public documents naming the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs in 2021–2022 are limited in public sources, UN agency reports confirm multi-stakeholder engagement with government and religious partners in related programmes. UN Women, in collaboration with the Women's Research and Studies Center (WRSC), the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, and faculty members from the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Kuwait University, organized dialogues and training sessions aimed at demonstrating the compatibility of gender equality with Islamic values and Kuwait's national identity. These initiatives helped reduce resistance from conservative actors and encouraged broader acceptance of women's empowerment within religious discourse, as local imams and community preachers began incorporating

messages of gender justice and mutual respect into sermons and public discussions (WRSC 2022).

A notable innovation in UN Women's normative approach was the strategic use of social proof to transform gender equality from a perceived external agenda into a socially endorsed national value. Rather than relying solely on policy lobbying, UN Women partnered with the WRSC (Women's Research and Studies Center), community leaders, and corporate actors to generate visible examples of gender-inclusive practices that could be emulated by others. This began with campaigns like *Orange the World*, which used highly symbolic acts such as lighting national landmarks in orange to link gender equality with Kuwait's national pride and Islamic ethics (World Bank Blogs 2022).

Building on this visibility, UN Women deepened its approach by securing public endorsements from influential institutions. In October 2018, under a UN-led initiative with WRSC and UNDP, CEOs of leading Kuwaiti firms, including EQUATE, Alghanim Industries, Gulf Bank, and Zain signed the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) in the presence of government officials and media (UNDP 2018). This high-profile event did not merely represent symbolic support, but demonstrated that gender equality could coexist with Kuwait's Vision 2035 and Islamic social values. By 2022, forty-four Kuwaiti companies had adopted the WEPs, supported by UN Women and the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, reflecting a measurable diffusion of gender norms within the private sector (UN Women 2022).

Through these actions, UN Women effectively leveraged social proof to normalize gender-inclusive behavior across both public and corporate institutions. The visibility of respected leaders endorsing equality created competitive legitimacy, motivating other organizations to adopt gender-sensitive policies, leadership quotas, and equal-pay commitments to maintain credibility and public trust. As Joachim (2008) argues, norm diffusion often operates through emulation and persuasion rather than coercion. This process, thus, exemplified how normative authority and legitimacy can reshape social attitudes, turning gender equality from an external reform agenda into a shared societal aspiration that aligned with Kuwait's modernization and development goals.

Integrating gender equality into national development agendas and aligning reforms with economic modernization, the partnership between UN Women and the Kuwaiti government led to the incorporation of gender perspectives into *Kuwait Vision 2035* and related national strategies. Through initiatives such as the GRB (Gender-Responsive Budgeting) Pilot Programme, the "Women's Leadership and Participation" capacity-building series, and the IMAGES survey implemented with the GSSCPD (General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development), UN Women promoted institutional mechanisms to mainstream gender into policymaking. These programs conducted workshops with ministries, including Finance, Social Affairs, and Planning to integrate gender indicators into budgeting processes and public-sector leadership development, aligning reforms with both CEDAW commitments and Kuwait's modernization agenda (GSSCPD 2022).

Through continuous monitoring and the use of the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), UN Women and WRSC generated data that allowed for the assessment of public attitudes and policy impacts. These findings informed subsequent program adjustments and policy recommendations, ensuring that gender initiatives remained culturally sensitive and evidence-based (WRSC 2022). While normative change shifted public discourse and increased the visibility of women's achievements, it has yet to fully dismantle systemic barriers, particularly in family law, citizenship rights, and wage parity. The Kuwaiti case demonstrates that normative strategies are most potent when used as an entry point, preparing society and institutions for more robust structural reforms rather than as a standalone solution (UNDP Project Plan 2021).

The results of the various efforts made through these many paths are not only evident from the numbers, such as the growing number of women working in the public sphere or running for leadership positions, even in more conservative cities, but also from the profound changes in the way people speak and think together. According to the Women's Research and Studies Center (2022), women's labor force participation increased from 51 percent in 2020 to 54 percent in 2022, while female representation in leadership roles within public institutions grew by nearly 10 percent during the same period. The issue of gender equality, which used to be discussed only among activists, is now beginning to appear in family chats, mosque discussions, and office meetings. Ultimately, UN Women's influence in Kuwait can be explained through Joachim's (2008) framework of authority and legitimacy. By leveraging its institutional authority and aligning with local religious and national values, UN Women successfully advanced global

gender norms through persuasion rather than coercion. This balance of expertise and cultural legitimacy was essential in embedding gender equality within Kuwait's social and institutional fabric (UN Women 2022).

Indicator	2020	2022	Source
Female labor force participation	51%	54%	WRSC, 2022
Women in public leadership positions	—	+10%increase	UN Women, 2022

(UNDP and Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau 2022).

These campaigns not only shifted discourse but also laid the foundation for managerial initiatives by legitimizing gender equality in public dialogue. Overall, these integrated approaches produced measurable outcomes across social, institutional, and policy levels. According to the 2022 *Georgetown Institute Women, Peace and Security Index*, Kuwait's score increased from 0.671 in 2021 to 0.695, reflecting modest but consistent progress in inclusion and justice indicators (GIWPS 2022). Although data collection supports subsequent managerial actions, its initial function here is still normative by still requiring evidence that legitimizes gender equality discourse and weakens cultural resistance (Joachim 2008).

The initiatives discussed above fall within Joachim's normative approach because their primary goal is not to modify institutional procedures or enforce compliance, but to reshape beliefs, values, and perceptions around gender equality. Campaigns such as Orange the World, engagement with religious leaders, and the reframing of women's rights within Islamic ethics aim to redefine what is socially acceptable and morally legitimate in Kuwaiti society. Within

Joachim's framework, these efforts are classified as normative because they seek to effect behavioral change through persuasion, moral authority, and social legitimacy rather than administrative rules or sanctions (Joachim 2008). UN Women's authority in this normative process is recognized by the Kuwaiti state through formal collaboration with institutions such as the GSSCPD, inclusion in the SDG reporting mechanism, and recognition in national development planning under Vision 2035. At the societal level, legitimacy is reflected in collaboration with the Center for Research and Women's Studies, religious scholars, and private sector actors, who voluntarily participate in norm-building initiatives. This dual recognition by state and social actors confirms that UN Women is seen not as an externally imposed value-enforcing entity, but as a credible and legitimate norm-enforcer operating within Kuwaiti cultural and institutional boundaries (UN Women 2022; Joachim 2008).

This improvement aligns with UN Women's managerial initiatives, such as gender-responsive budgeting workshops and leadership training for female public officials, which strengthened institutional capacity to mainstream gender in policymaking. Similarly, judicial training reflected normative change as judges increasingly recognized gender bias as a legal issue rather than a social taboo. The judicial training program also resulted in the appointment of twenty-one female judges in 2022, while private-sector participation in the Women's Empowerment Principles expanded to over thirty companies (UN Women GCC 2022). These indicators demonstrate that normative efforts to reframe gender equality, when reinforced by managerial and enforcement mechanisms, can yield tangible structural change, precisely as Joachim (2008) theorizes.

Building on the normative legitimacy established through religious engagement and social proof, UN Women transitioned toward managerial strategies to operationalize these values within Kuwait's institutional frameworks. Thus, UN Women's normative approach in Kuwait served primarily as an entry point, building social legitimacy and moral acceptance that enabled subsequent managerial interventions, precisely as theorized in Joachim's authority-legitimacy framework (Joachim 2008; UN Women 2022).

3.2. Institutionalizing Gender Equality: UN Women's Managerial Approaches in Kuwait's Development Agenda

According to Joachim (2008), the managerial approach emphasizes cooperation, capacity building, and problem-solving rather than coercion. It assumes states generally intend to comply with international norms but may lack the institutional or technical capacity to do so. International organizations therefore act as facilitators by providing monitoring, training, data support, and policy coordination. Implementation centers on administrative reforms, such as strengthening gender statistics, improving reporting systems, and enhancing the performance of agencies responsible for international commitments. While normative strategies helped legitimize gender equality within Kuwait's cultural and religious context, managerial approaches operationalized these values by building institutional capacity and embedding gender norms into governance. Unlike the persuasion-focused normative phase, the managerial phase concentrated on implementation, training, and system-building to sustain reforms and translate public acceptance into practice.

The programs analyzed in this section constitute a managerial approach because they directly target implementation gaps rather than redefining values or imposing sanctions. Judicial training, gender-responsive budgeting workshops, IMAGES surveys, and gender-disaggregated data systems are designed to enhance institutional capacity, improve monitoring, and clarify policy execution. In Joachim's framework, these interventions are managerial because they assume a willingness to comply on the part of the state, while identifying technical, administrative, and informational deficiencies as the main obstacles to effective implementation (Joachim, 2008). UN Women's monitoring role operates through data collection, reporting mechanisms, and advisory support rather than supervision or punishment.

UN Women's monitoring function operates through structured data collection, periodic reporting, and advisory feedback loops rather than supervision or punishment. By working with the Central Statistical Bureau, the Ministry of Justice, and the GSSCPD, UN Women supports the production of gender-disaggregated indicators, integrates these findings into SDG and CEDAW reporting processes, and uses the results to identify institutional gaps and policy inconsistencies (UN Women 2022). Monitoring in this context functions as a managerial tool because it enables learning, adjustment, and administrative coordination, rather than enforcing compliance through sanctions (Joachim 2008).

The absence of an enforcement approach reflects the lack of coercive authority and the political sensitivity of gender reform in Kuwait, where sovereignty concerns and conservative objections limit the feasibility of sanctions. Therefore, normative persuasion and increasing managerial capacity represent the

most theoretically consistent and empirically observable means of influence in this case (UN Women, 2022; Joachim, 2008).

3.2.1 Capacity Building and Judicial Reform

In the managerial phase, the same programs were expanded into formal institutional frameworks through structured training, data systems, and leadership quotas that ensured sustainability and accountability. Capacity building in this context refers to the provision of expert knowledge and technical guidance to actors responsible for implementing existing laws, rather than the creation of new legal norms (Joachim, 2008).

Through managerial support, UN Women strengthened judicial capacity by institutionalizing gender-sensitive procedures and data systems. Expert advisors were central to this process, as judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement officers required specialized guidance to interpret gender-based violence (GBV) cases in line with international standards such as CEDAW and SDG 5 (UN Women, 2022). UN Women also introduced judicial training for judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement to reduce case dismissals in gender-based violence (GBV) cases. Between 2021 and 2022, the judicial training helped reduce dismissal rates of gender-based violence cases from 42% to 18%, indicating improved institutional responsiveness (World Bank Blogs 2022).

Managerial strategies also emphasized gender-disaggregated data collection. Working with Kuwait's Central Bureau of Statistics, UN Women developed monitoring systems that revealed wage disparities-men earned 43% more in the public sector and 57% more in the private sector-despite high female participation rates (UN Women Data Hub 2022). This transparency facilitated

evidence-based policymaking and raised awareness of structural inequalities. The private sector was a key focus of UN Women's managerial strategy, as the organization served as the main facilitator of the WEPs (Women's Empowerment Principles) in Kuwait. Through advocacy, training, and partnership initiatives, UN Women encouraged local corporations to adopt gender-inclusive policies and align with global standards of equality. As a result, by 2022, forty-four companies, including major firms such as EQUATE and Alghanim Industries had signed the WEPs.

Although adherence remains voluntary, the initiative generated reputational incentives for compliance and fostered greater corporate accountability toward women's empowerment (Dexter 2022). By combining data, training, and partnerships, the managerial approach bridged the gap between formal law and implementation, though it remained limited by reliance on voluntary corporate participation and persistent wage inequality. According to Joachim's framework, managerial mechanisms are particularly effective when non-compliance with international norms stems not from resistance but from lack of clarity, weak institutional mechanisms, or inadequate resources. In the Kuwaiti context, where gender-related laws often existed but were inconsistently enforced or poorly operationalized, the managerial approach was essential for bridging the gap between legislative commitments and practical outcomes (World Bank 2021).

This intervention illustrates the core strength of the managerial approach: Legal norms remain ineffective without trained personnel, clear operational guidelines, and institutional coordination. Rather than relying on legislative reform, UN Women focused on enhancing the capacity of implementing actors,

which aligns with Joachim's argument that managerial strategies are most effective when non-compliance stems from weak institutional mechanisms rather than norm rejection (Joachim, 2008). The program was also aligned with SDG 5 and integrated into Kuwait Vision 2035, embedding gender sensitivity within broader judicial modernization efforts (Dexter, 2022).

Image 2. Celebrates International Women's Day with the Kuwait Public Sector



Kuwait rings the bell for women's empowerment on International Women's Day



Boursa Kuwait

Published Mar 8, 2022

+ Follow

Source: Boursa 2022.

Image 2 shows that the collaboration with Boursa Kuwait reflected managerial alignment with state-linked economic institutions, strengthening legitimacy through public-private partnerships.

3.2.2 Gender-Disaggregated Data and Monitoring Systems

A second cornerstone of the managerial strategy was enhancing gender-disaggregated data collection. UN Women partnered with the Central

Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Social Affairs to strengthen data systems that track gender disparities in employment, wages, leadership, and access to public services. These data systems functioned as monitoring tools by enabling the state to track compliance with international commitments, identify policy gaps, and evaluate implementation outcomes over time (UN Women Data Hub, 2022). Prior to this initiative, many gender-related policies in Kuwait were hindered by a lack of reliable and disaggregated data, leading to reactive- rather than evidence-based interventions (Kuwait Times 2022).

The improved data infrastructure enabled the government to design more targeted programs, such as financial incentives for companies adopting gender-inclusive hiring policies, and to monitor the wage gap more accurately. For instance, data collected in early 2022 revealed persistent wage disparities: men earned, on average, 43% more than women in the public sector and 57% more in the private sector, despite women comprising 48% of private sector employment and 60% of the public sector workforce. This transparency informed policy design and increased public awareness of structural inequalities that might otherwise remain obscured (UN Women Data Hub 2022).

3.2.3 Private-Sector Engagement through the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)

The private sector was a key focus of UN Women's managerial strategy, particularly through the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs). By 2022, participation had grown to 44 companies, including major firms such as EQUATE and Alghanim Industries. These companies committed to implementing policies

addressing gender inequalities in recruitment, promotion, pay, and workplace safety (Dexter 2022).

The WEPs represent a managerial mechanism because they rely on expert guidance, standardized benchmarks, and voluntary reporting to improve corporate practices, rather than coercive enforcement. UN Women provided technical assistance and monitoring tools to help companies operationalize these commitments, generating reputational incentives and peer accountability (UN Women 2022).

3.2.4 Integration of Managerial Reforms with Normative Change

The managerial reforms were most effective because they operated in tandem with normative transformations already underway. For instance, as societal attitudes began to shift toward greater acceptance of women in leadership and public roles, thanks in part to normative campaigns involving religious leaders and national media, the managerial measures found a more receptive environment for implementation. Programs such as leadership training for women and gender-responsive budgeting workshops gained traction because the cultural resistance that once hindered their acceptance was being gradually eroded (UN Women 2022). This interaction reflects Joachim's insight that managerial approaches enhance compliance by translating normative acceptance into administrative routines and policy mechanisms (Joachim 2008).

Although public campaigns like the *16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence* are often associated with normative strategies, in Kuwait they also functioned as managerial tools to strengthen institutional accountability. By illuminating public buildings in orange and facilitating public dialogues, UN

Women created visible signals of commitment that encouraged government agencies and private actors to align their practices with public expectations. These initiatives opened space for dialogue between policymakers, civil society, and survivors, ensuring that managerial reforms were connected to lived experiences rather than remaining isolated bureaucratic measures (Kuwait Times 2022). To summarize, UN Women's managerial approach generated clear institutional improvements in Kuwait during 2021–2022. Judicial training helped reduce GBV case dismissals, women's leadership increased across government institutions, and stronger gender-disaggregated data revealed wage disparities that guided policy responses.

The expansion of WEPs participation also showed progress, although its voluntary nature limited enforcement. Through cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, the WRSC, and the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, UN Women supported more effective legal procedures, national data systems, and gender-responsive budgeting, forming a foundation for long-term reforms aligned with SDG 5 and Vision 2035. While these managerial efforts strengthened institutional capacity, their long-term impact still depends on more consistent accountability mechanisms to address wage gaps, underrepresentation, and weak corporate compliance. This reliance on continued oversight demonstrates why UN Women gradually complemented managerial reforms with encouragement-based and reputational strategies that function as soft enforcement tools. The absence of a formal enforcement approach is theoretically consistent with Joachim's framework and UN Women's mandate, as compliance challenges in Kuwait are

caused by institutional and technical constraints rather than a deliberate rejection of norms (Joachim 2008; UN Women 2022).

Overall, Chapter 3 demonstrates that UN Women's effectiveness in Kuwait during 2021–2022 derives from the interaction of normative and managerial approaches. Normative strategies generated social and political legitimacy by aligning gender equality with Islamic values and national development priorities, while managerial interventions translated this legitimacy into institutional capacity through data systems, judicial training, and policy coordination. The absence of an enforcement approach reflects both UN Women's non-coercive mandate and the political sensitivity of gender reforms in Kuwait. Consequently, normative (persuasion) and managerial (capacity-building) emerge as the most empirically observable and theoretically consistent modes of influence, consistent with Joachim's framework. Together, these integrated strategies demonstrate how UN Women leveraged authority and legitimacy to translate Kuwait's CEDAW commitments into tangible social and institutional change, exemplifying Joachim's interplay between normative influence, managerial capacity, and enforcement potential.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

4.1. Conclusion

This thesis argues that UN Women’s impact in Kuwait (2021–2022) emerged primarily through the interaction of normative and managerial approaches rather than enforcement. Normative strategies built legitimacy by aligning gender equality with Islamic and national frameworks, while managerial interventions translated these norms into institutional capacity through training, data systems, and policy coordination, enabling incremental progress within political and sovereignty constraints.

Table 2. Implementation of the Three Approaches

Approaches	Activities Implementation
Normative	UN Women advanced public acceptance of gender equality through HeForShe and nationwide awareness campaigns. These initiatives used Islamic and cultural framing to reduce community resistance and connected gender equality with Kuwait Vision 2035 to strengthen national relevance. University outreach and media engagements further expanded visibility, resulting in broader public support and greater normalization of gender equality discourse.
Managerial	Institutional capacity was strengthened through gender-responsive budgeting workshops that improved

	planning alignment with gender priorities. Judicial and police training enhanced survivor-centered GBV procedures, while upgraded gender data systems improved evidence-based policymaking. Leadership programs helped increase women's participation in key sectors, leading to better coordination, improved case handling, and more reliable gender-disaggregated data for monitoring.
Enforcement	UN Women supported legal advocacy efforts, including momentum toward revising Article 153, and assisted in strengthening GBV units and reporting channels such as hotlines and shelter coordination. Scorecards and CEDAW-based reviews were used to highlight gaps and encourage compliance, producing greater transparency, higher institutional accountability, and sustained pressure for legal and policy reform.

4.2 Recommendation

Achieving gender equality in Kuwait requires an integrated strategy that combines legal, normative, managerial and law enforcement reforms. Legally, revising family and citizenship laws is critical, as these frameworks maintain structural discrimination and undermine CEDAW's commitments. But legal change must be supported by managerial tools that institutionalize reform, such as gender-responsive budgeting, judicial training on GBV, and regular production of

gender-disaggregated data, to ensure sustainability beyond temporary programs. Law enforcement mechanisms should also be strengthened by expanding special police and court units, improving shelter and support services, and implementing clear monitoring systems. Performance scorecards and compliance reviews can apply reputational pressure to maintain progress.

These institutional measures must be strengthened with normative engagement that frames gender equality within Islamic and national values, building public legitimacy and reducing social resistance. Addressing intersectional vulnerabilities, particularly among migrant domestic workers and Bidun women, is equally important to ensure reforms benefit all women. Kuwait can further consolidate progress by sharing its best practices regionally, thereby enhancing its international standing and domestic accountability. Overall, lasting gender equality depends on the harmonization of legal reforms, institutional capacity building, normative engagement, and inclusive protection into a coherent and sustainable strategy.

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