Saudi Arabia finally allows women to have passports, travel without a man's permission

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By [Adrianna Rodriguez](http://www.usatoday.com/staff/54985/adrianna-rodriguez/)

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Women in Saudi Arabia will finally be allowed to apply for a passport and travel freely without having to secure permission from a male relative, ending a long-standing guardianship policy that gave men control over women.

The new regulation, issued Wednesday and approved Thursday by the Saudi Cabinet, won’t only just allow Saudi women to apply for passports, but also for women over the age of 21 to travel alone.

The decrees were announced early Friday morning in the kingdom’s official weekly Um al-Qura gazette. It’s not clear when the new rules will go into effect.

Other changes allow women to register a marriage, divorce or child's birth and to be issued official family documents. It also stipulates that a father or mother can be legal guardians of children.

However, still in place are rules that require male consent for a woman to leave prison, exit a domestic abuse shelter or marry. Women still cannot pass on citizenship to their children and cannot provide consent for their children to marry.

This is the latest addition to sweeping changes the government has made to conservative laws in the country in recent years. In June 2018, the country lifted the ban on women driving with the full support of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

He also supported loosening rules on gender segregation and bringing concerts and movie theaters to the country.

The changes are important to Saudi women's rights in the kingdom. The legal system has long required women to have a male guardian to do simple tasks in every day life. Often a woman's male guardian is her father or husband, and in some cases a woman's own son.

However, the crown prince continues to face widespread international criticism over the killing of Washington Post columnist and Saudi critic Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul last year. Saudi Arabia has denied any involvement by the prince, while the kingdom's own investigation acknowledged the operation was planned by two of the prince's top aides.