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Fact Sheet

Challenges Facing Women in the Palestinian Job Market

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Introduction:

Working women are considered a key pillar of economic growth and social development, yet they face several challenges and difficulties in the workplace. These challenges include gender discrimination, the difficulty of balancing work and personal life, lack of social support, domestic violence, and lack of economic empowerment. Addressing these challenges requires collective efforts from governments, local communities, and private institutions through promoting supportive laws and policies for women and providing necessary support to achieve economic and social equality. Working women are essential in achieving sustainable development and positive social change in society. Women are integral members of the human community, playing a crucial role in its development and progress. Issues related to women's work, sustainable development, and their status and position have gained significant attention. Independent women's organizations and movements have emerged with the aim of revitalizing and enhancing women's role in development, adopting empowerment discourse to promote women's participation in development, work, independence, and self-reliance. However, women still face a range of obstacles that hinder their role and participation. It is important to identify these challenges and dimensions to effectively address the unhealthy work environment for women.

Firstly: Women in the labor market - Facts and Figures

- The labor force participation rate in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 2022 was approximately 45.0%, with 70.7% for males and 18.6% for females¹.
- The unemployment rate for individuals aged 15 and above in Palestine was 24.4% in 2022, with a rate of 20.3% for males and 40.4% for females².
- The full employment rate in 2022 among the participating workforce was 74.1%, with 78.2% for males and 58.4% for females³.
- The unemployment rate in the West Bank was 10.6% among male participants in the labor force and 23.7% among female participants in the labor force. In Gaza Strip, the unemployment rate was 39.1% among male participants in the labor force and 67.4% among female participants in the labor force in 2022⁴.
- The results indicated that the percentage of women working as technicians, specialists, assistants, and clerks reached 62.9% compared to 20.0% for males. This represents the highest proportion of female workers. On the other hand,

¹ The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics: Labor Force Survey Report for the year 2022: <https://2u.pw/0SAY5v>

² The previous reference.

³ Labor Force Data in Palestine for the year 2020, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, available at <https://bit.ly/3PBR0Q2>.

⁴ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics: Approximately a quarter of the participants in the labor force in Palestine were unemployed in the fourth quarter of 2022. Link: <https://2u.pw/J710b8>

23.3% of male workers are employed in crafts and related professions, compared to 5.3% of females⁵.

- The services sector is the largest employer of female wage earners in the private sector, with a participation rate of 70.6% in 2022. It is followed by the activities of restaurants, hotels, and commerce with a rate of 12.3% and the industrial sector with a rate of 8%. The unemployment rate for young graduates in the West Bank was 28.6%, compared to 73.9% in the Gaza Strip. The remaining wage-earning women are distributed among activities such as construction, agriculture, transportation, and storage⁶.
- The unemployment rate for young graduates in the West Bank was 28.6%, compared to 73.9% in the Gaza Strip. Among them, the unemployment rate for females was 61.3% compared to 34.3% for males⁷.
- Approximately 7 out of 10 males participate in the labor force, while only around 2 out of 10 females do so. The female participation rate in the labor force reached 18.6% compared to 70.7% for males⁸.
- The data indicates that the enrollment rate in formal education in Palestine reached 63.8% in 2020, with a rate of 59.0% for males and 68.6% for females⁹.
- The participation rate of women in formal and non-formal education and training reached 17.2% compared to 18.0% for men in 2020¹⁰.
- According to the data from the General Personnel Council until February 2022, women's contribution to the civil sector reached 47% of the total employees. However, a notable gap emerges in the percentage of women holding positions of Director-General or higher, which stood at 14% for women compared to 86% for men¹¹.

⁵ The previous reference is from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. It states that approximately a quarter of the participants in the labor force in Palestine were unemployed in the fourth quarter of 2022. You can find more information at the following link: <https://2u.pw/J710b8>

⁶ Report: "Men and Women in Palestine: Issues and Statistics," Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Ramallah, Palestine 2022, p. 65.

⁷ The previous reference is Report: "Men and Women in Palestine: Issues and Statistics," Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Ramallah, Palestine 2022.

⁸ The previous reference is Report: "Men and Women in Palestine: Issues and Statistics," Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Ramallah, Palestine 2022, p. 65.

⁹ The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Dr. Awad, reviews the conditions of Palestinian women on the eve of International Women's Day, 08/03/2022, under the title "Gender Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow": <https://pcbs.gov.ps/postar.aspx?lang=ar&ItemID=4187>

¹⁰ The previous reference: "Gender Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow": <https://pcbs.gov.ps/postar.aspx?lang=ar&ItemID=4187>

¹¹ Report: Men and Women in Palestine: Issues and Statistics, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Ramallah, Palestine 2022, p. 58.

Secondly: Challenges faced by women in the workplace

Working women in the labor market face a set of challenging and complex obstacles that hinder their ability to compete in the job market and pose a threat to the economic and social security of Palestinian women. These challenges include:

✓ Social Challenges:

These challenges may include the social upbringing that teaches young boys that they are stronger, while girls are weaker and should always be dependent on them. It instills the idea that girls should rely on boys throughout different stages of their lives. This demeaning mindset, resulting from social upbringing, contributes to creating a generation that tolerates the humiliation of women and continues to demean them. This affects their performance and increases their sense of shame in front of colleagues, customers, and workers present in the workplace. Consequently, it prevents them from defending themselves when confronted with any form of targeted mistreatment from any party. Additionally, male dominance and patriarchal systems legitimize diminishing the value of women and disapprove of them being competent competitors in the workplace. Despite the existence of various agreements aimed at protecting women and calling for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against them, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1979, including its General Recommendations 12 and 19, which were signed by the Palestinian National Authority, they have not been fully implemented or widely disseminated. The convention affirms the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and ensures their right to equality with men. It is worth mentioning the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, specifically paragraph 18, which was a decision of the United Nations General Assembly in 1993, known as the "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action," addressing violence against women¹².

✓ Economic Challenges:

According to statistics from the Central Bureau of Statistics, women's contribution to economic activity (labor force) in Palestine for individuals aged 15 and above was reported as follows: The participation rate of women in the labor force increased by 1.1 percentage points compared to the previous year, reaching 4.43% in 2021, while men's participation was about four times higher than women's during the same year. The percentage of women employed in the informal sector was 8.25%, while in the West Bank, the percentage of employed women in the informal sector was higher compared to Gaza, reaching 5.28% and 1.17%, respectively. Furthermore, approximately three-quarters of

¹² Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women: United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. You can find more information at this link: <https://2u.pw/5QFT91>

employed women work in the service sector, while the remaining quarter is distributed among other economic activities. Two-thirds of women aged 15 and above work as technicians, specialists, assistants, and clerks, while the remaining third are engaged in various other professions. These data highlight the gender gap in various sectors¹³. In the third quarter of 2022, the female labor force participation rate reached 19% compared to 18% in the second quarter of the same period. On the other hand, the unemployment rate among women in the labor force was around 40% compared to 20% among men in 2022. These statistics reveal that the unemployment rate among women is more than double that of men. They also indicate that most private sector economic sectors are reluctant to employ women due to concerns about higher absenteeism rates resulting from their social responsibilities. As a result, the inevitable consequence, as stated in the Central Bureau of Statistics report, is that the percentage of women employed in the informal sector is 25%¹⁴. This means that a significant proportion of women work without any legal protection. Undoubtedly, this fragile economic situation for working women has a negative impact on their participation¹⁵.

✓ **Cultural Challenges:**

Working women may face societal expectations that make it difficult for them to balance their work with other social roles such as motherhood and family life. Gender discrimination is considered one of the prominent cultural challenges faced by working women. This includes limited job opportunities, lower salaries compared to men in the same position, difficulty in career advancement, and the gender wage gap. Additionally, women's income tends to be lower than men's, meaning that working women face challenges in terms of achieving equal pay and improving their financial lives. The average daily wage for women is 32.8 compared to 44.0 for men, indicating a wage gap between men and women in the Palestinian labor market¹⁶.

✓ **Legal Challenges:**

There is no doubt that inequality casts its shadow on labor legislation, as it remains discriminatory and does not sufficiently protect working women in terms of maternity leave, family allowances, retirement age, and social security. However, the Palestinian Labor Law treats Palestinian women based on the principle of equality between them and men, taking into account their specific circumstances. It appears that there is no significant differentiation of the Palestinian Labor Law from other Arab laws, but it is considered progressive in terms of the principle of non-discrimination in the conditions

¹³ The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics has published the "Labor Force Survey Report for the year 2022." You can access the report at this link: <https://2u.pw/Pux7EN>.

¹⁴ The current status of women in the Palestinian formal and informal labor market can be found in the following report: "The Current Status of Women in the Palestinian Labor Market - Official and Non-Official Sectors." You can access the report at this link: <https://2u.pw/29f0ex>.

¹⁶ The Palestinian Statistical Office presents the results of the Labor Force Survey in Palestine for the year 2022. You can access the report at the following link: <https://2u.pw/zhMgV>.

and terms of work. Article 100 of the law explicitly prohibits discrimination between men and women, stating: "According to the provisions of this law and the issued regulations, discrimination between men and women is prohibited."¹⁷ However, I believe that the Palestinian Labor Law, established in 2000, is a law that is not responsive to the gender perspective and does not guarantee a safe and fair working environment for women. There are no clear provisions related to gender pay equality, and the Palestinian Labor Law is not aligned with international conventions, particularly those related to women's employment and protection from violence and discrimination¹⁸.

✓ Challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Palestinian working women have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The end of 2019 witnessed a significant decrease in the number of women working in the private sector, from 109,000 women to approximately 98,000 women in 2020¹⁹. The participation rate of women in the labor force reached 16% of the total working-age women in 2020, compared to 18% in 2019²⁰. Meanwhile, the number of women working in the informal sector was 37,000, compared to 373,000 male workers²¹. The average daily wage for women was 98 shekels, compared to 102 shekels for men, following a decrease in the participation rate of both women and men in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic²². Furthermore, the participation rate of women in the labor force was 16% of the total working-age women in 2020, down from 18% in 2019. About 48% of women employed in the private sector earn less than 2,000 shekels per month, with a concentration in the education sector (including nurseries, kindergartens, and private schools) at a rate of 34%²³. Only about 60% of employed women receive paid maternity leave, according to data from 2020²⁴. The latest data revealed that 23% of employed

¹⁷ The Palestinian News and Information Agency addresses women's rights in Palestine and the law. You can find more information at the following link: <https://2u.pw/M7RMjS>.

¹⁸ Bayan Center for Studies and Planning: The Status of Women in the Work Environment: Challenges and Opportunities for the year 2021. You can find the report at the following link: <https://www.bayancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/9uyrgv1.pdf>

¹⁹ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics: Dr. Ola Awad, President of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, reviews the labor situation in Palestine for the year 2020 on the occasion of International Workers' Day (May 1st). You can find more information at the following link: <https://2u.pw/Hjng78>

²⁰ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics: Dr. Ola Awad reviews the conditions of Palestinian women on the eve of International Women's Day, March 8, 2021. You can find more information at the following link: <https://2u.pw/Hjng78>

²² The previous source is the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, where Dr. Ola Awad reviews the conditions of Palestinian women on the eve of International Women's Day.

²³ The Women's Affairs Center discusses a study on the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on small and micro-projects led by women in the Gaza Strip. The event took place on October 7, 2020. Here is the link: <http://bit.ly/36VbFtZ>.

²⁴ The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics: Dr. Ola Awad, President of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, reviews the labor situation in Palestine for the year 2020 on the occasion of International Workers' Day (May 1st). Here is the link: <https://2u.pw/Hjng78>.

women in the private sector work without a contract, and 62% receive contributions towards retirement and end-of-service benefits. On the other hand, more than half of employed women in the private sector receive wages²⁵. Turning to the latest data regarding women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, more than a tenth of Palestinian households are headed by women, according to the 2020 Labor Force Survey²⁶. The percentage of disabled women, compared to total disabled men, stood at 24%²⁷.

Conclusion:

This paper addressed the challenges facing working women in the workplace, where women's participation rates are very low due to various reasons and factors, including gender bias, male-dominated culture, unequal wages, lack of social support, and low representation of women in leadership positions, among others. Based on this, the paper arrived at a set of the following recommendations:

1. Establish programs to support working women: Employers should create programs to support working women, provide flexible workspaces, offer paid family leave, and support childcare and assistance in covering nursery costs.
2. Achieve equality in employment opportunities and wages: Employers and governments should work towards providing equal employment opportunities for men and women, ensuring that women receive equal salaries and promotion opportunities as men.

²⁵ The previous source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS): Dr. Ola Awad, President of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, reviews the labor situation in Palestine for the year 2020.

²⁶ Palestinian Statistics announces the results of the Labor Force Survey, Second Quarter (April - June 2020), Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, September 9, 2020: <http://bit.ly/3nSnasq>.

²⁷ The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Dr. Ola Awad, reviews the status of Palestinian women on the eve of International Women's Day, March 8, 2020: <https://2u.pw/vZpnfe>.