

Towards gender equality and women's empowerment

in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

A summary
of the ILO's interventions
2013 - 2016



International
Labour
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Gender equality in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

The labour market in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) has some gender characteristics that are similar to those in practically all other regions of the world. Fewer women work than men, they tend to work in different jobs than men, in lower positions and for less pay.



Women's median daily wage is approximately

84% of men's

Women's labour force

19%

Women's labour force participation rate in the OPT is remarkably low (19 per cent) and has remained at around one-quarter of the rate for men (72.5 per cent), albeit rising slightly over the past 15 years.



A gender pay gap also persists in the OPT despite significant gains women have made in terms of education and work experience. Women's median daily wage is approximately 84 percent of men's.



Improving women's access to decent work in the OPT needs to take into account the ramifications ensuing from continued Israeli occupation, the limited employment opportunities generated by the Palestinian economy, the inadequate provision of social protection, as well as social norms prevailing in Palestinian society. Efforts are needed to address these challenges through a participatory approach that focuses on promoting economic opportunities and empowering women to organize and enter the workplace.

ILO's approach

In line with the ultimate Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 8 (Gender Equality and Decent Work and Economic Growth, respectively), the International Labour Organization (ILO) has been active in promoting women's legal, social and economic empowerment in the OPT through a series of tripartite interventions that involve government, employers and workers at the policy and institutional levels, as well as the grassroots levels.

Implemented in Gaza and the West Bank between 2013 and 2016, these interventions together comprise the gender component of ILO's work in OPT and fall broadly under two thematic areas: Non-discrimination in the workplace and strengthening of cooperatives.

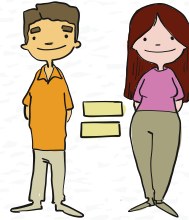
Activity highlights

Accordingly, the aims of the ILO's interventions have been to:



Improve the capacity of national institutions to address structural barriers impeding female labour force participation;

1



Promote non-discrimination in the workplace

2



Enhance women's economic empowerment through the creation of more jobs of higher quality at the grassroots and community levels by strengthening viable member-controlled cooperatives to work as social and economic enterprises.

3

1. Launch of the national campaign on the “Rights of Palestinian Women at Work” (2016)

The National Committee for Women's Employment (NCWE), with the support of the ILO, has developed practical guidelines to inform various stakeholders on the labour rights of Palestinian women and non-discrimination in the workplace. The user-friendly booklets contain information on the Palestinian labour law, with a focus on provisions that apply specifically to women workers. A summary of relevant international conventions and instruments, with a focus on provisions that apply specifically to women workers is also provided.

Seven thousand copies of the booklets have been printed and distributed by the NCWE and the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU). Alongside the booklets, campaign messages have been disseminated via posters, LED Screens, social media, radio, and special events. To date, the PGFTU has delivered 12 workshops on the booklets and their contents, attended by over 200 representatives from professional unions, government institutions, and women's organizations. The campaign will reach out to even more women towards the end of 2016 and during 2017.

Two formal launchings of the booklet were held in September with the participation of members from NCWE, unionists, women activists and women machinery.

Furthermore, and in close collaboration with PGFTU, the ILO is supporting dialogue and consultation on the main gaps in the Palestinian Labour Law and legislation and in accordance to ILS and global best practices. The results of such dialogue will be the development of a position paper on the key gender equality gaps in the labour legislation which will eventually support the labour law reform efforts currently taking place through tripartite social dialogue and with technical supervision and guidance from ILO.

2. Piloting ILO's Participatory Gender Audit tool to identify and address institutional gender gaps (2015 - 2016)

Through a joint initiative with UN Women and the ILO, two companies in the private sector were selected for piloting the Participatory Gender Audit (PGA) tool. The pilot studies were beneficial in demonstrating that the PGA is useful for promoting and encouraging institutions to enact transformational changes that lead to gender equitable work environments.

The Bank of Palestine has undergone a full ILO Participatory Gender Audit process. It is currently looking into making substantive changes to increase the number of female employees and promote more women to managerial positions. As less than 10 per cent of women in OPT currently have a bank account, the Bank of Palestine is also looking at increasing its number of female clients.

The ILO has also provided training to staff from the Institute of Women Studies at Birzeit University, West Bank, on how to effectively carry out a Participatory Gender Audit. By using the PGA methodology, the Institute was able to assess the extent that internal university policies, regulations and practices enhance or inhibit gender equality, and identify the ways in which they impact on women's participation, representation and career advancement. The exercise led to the establishment of a 'Gender Monitor', tasked to measure progress on gender equality in the university and act as a complaint-receiving mechanism.

3) Research on the value of women in the Palestinian economy (2015 - 2016)

In 2016, the ILO commissioned an independent consultant to undertake a comparative research study on the effects of gender inequality on employment and wages in the OPT, Lebanon and Jordan. The findings point to substantive macroeconomic benefits that would be likely to arise if the proportion of women participating in the labour markets of these three countries were to increase. As even the male labour force participation in the OPT remains very low, the value added for the economy of increased female labour participation is consequential. The potential GDP gain from equal labour force participation in OPT is an estimated 17 per cent¹, which in real terms amounts to US\$ 2.2 billion. Estimates further show that the potential benefits for GDP growth is even higher if the entrepreneurship gap were to be closed, amounting to a total of 24 per cent of undeveloped GDP growth potential – an astounding US\$ 3.1 billion in total.

¹ Tzannatos, Zafiris (2016) 'Effects of Gender Inequality in Employment and Pay in Jordan, Lebanon and OPT: Three Questions Answered', p.17.

4) Exploring the gender pay gap in the Palestinian education sector (2014 - 2016)

The gender pay gap

The gender pay gap refers to the difference between male and female average remuneration. Remuneration includes basic salary, allowances, severance pay, bonuses and other forms of financial rewards given to workers.

The principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value is enshrined in the ILO's Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100). Also known as 'pay equity', it signifies the rates of remuneration established without discrimination based on sex.

The ILO commissioned an independent consultant to carry out a qualitative research study of the education sector in late 2015, which explored the factors causing the gender pay gap and proposed a set of recommendations to improve women's legal rights, increase their wages and remuneration, and enhance women's representation in managerial and decision-making positions. The research provided insights on patterns of gender based discrimination in the private school and university systems. To allow for a holistic understanding of gender pay gaps within the sector, additional research is needed on the public education sector, preschool sector, and community and university colleges.



5) Supporting the development and strengthening of cooperatives in the West Bank (2013 - 2016)

Since its establishment, the Palestinian General Directorate of Cooperatives at the Ministry of Labour has been working to revitalise the cooperative sector as a potential avenue for economic development and the creation of decent employment opportunities for men and women in the West Bank.

Most recently, the ILO commissioned an independent consultant to undertake two industry-specific assessments. In 2013, the first study was carried out on agricultural cooperatives, including animal husbandry, crop production, olive and olive oil production and pressing cooperatives. Lessons learned from the agriculture assessment proved to be invaluable and it was decided in 2016 to expand the scope to service, consumer and handicraft cooperatives. The ILO in 2016 and in collaboration with the Directorate General of Cooperatives has also launched an analytical study on the performance of cooperatives in the service, consumer and handicraft sectors.

Both assessments have identified key challenges and potential opportunities for future development, with a particular focus on women's roles in mixed-gender cooperatives and women-only cooperatives. In general, a number of cooperatives were found to be inoperable, whereas others were considered to have great potential for scale-up. The findings highlighted areas where women's participation should be enhanced and ways in which women-only cooperatives would benefit from further guidance and management training. Furthermore, the assessments underlined the need for a national strategy on the cooperative sector which is currently under discussion.

6) Livelihood interventions for women in Gaza (2015)

In July 2014, Israel launched a seven-week military operation in the Gaza Strip, which resulted in hefty job losses in the private sector and exacerbated already critical unemployment and poverty rates. In response to the devastating situation in Gaza, the ILO implemented a response program in 2015 to support the most vulnerable communities suffering from extreme poverty and food insecurity due to the loss of income sources and livelihoods.

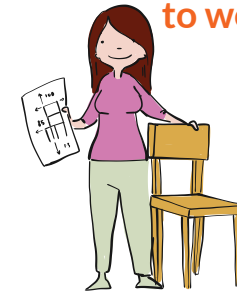
The aim of ILO's intervention was to provide immediate access to private sector employment opportunities, income support and skills training, with a particular focus on women, youth and people with disabilities. To ensure the intervention responded appropriately to people's needs, a series of small-scale pilot initiatives were designed and implemented in close consultation with communities and with the strong involvement of civil society organisations. Five main livelihood projects comprised the gender component of the ILO's response program in Gaza.

1. Skills and on-the-job training for unemployed female graduates



Through partnership with the Women's Affairs Centre, female university graduates from low-income households were connected to training opportunities in technical, professional and personal skills development, followed by a three-month temporary job placement in the private sector or with a community-based organisation. After completing the course, around 25 -30% of the graduates found long-term paid work at the same place they had received job training or at new organisations or companies. The majority of the graduates indicated that their participation in the program had increased their hope of finding longer-term employment.

2. Upgrading skills of female architects to work in the area of furniture design



With support from the ILO, the Islamic University of Gaza delivered furniture design training to young female architects experiencing difficulty in finding employment in the architecture sector. The training enhanced their technical, practical and entrepreneurial competencies required to work in furniture manufacturing firms or to start and promote their own small businesses through online platforms. By the end of the course, participants were able to demonstrate a sound understanding of core business concepts and had developed a viable plan for their proposed furniture design business start-ups.

3. Skills training and cash-for-work program for women sheep breeders

Women sheep breeders living in rural areas of Gaza received intensive technical and farm management skills training from the Ahaliya Association for Development of Palm and Dates. In addition to training, these women received agricultural inputs including manufactured sheep fodder, equipment and seeds to grow fresh green feed, veterinary services, and medication bags. Their family members also received 500 days of cash-for-work payments to rehabilitate destroyed animal shelters and grow and manufacture the fodder.

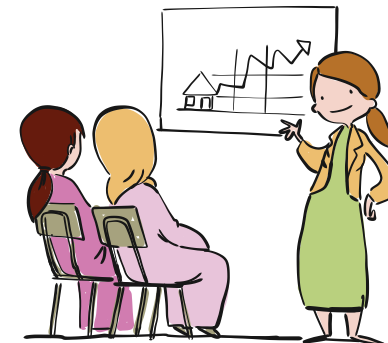
85% of the beneficiaries expressed a high level of satisfaction with the project, reporting improved productivity and capacity to manage their farms, improved health of their livestock, and reduced operational costs. Efforts are now underway to establish the first women-only cooperative for sheep breeders in Gaza.



85%

Of the beneficiaries expressed a high level of satisfaction

4. Training workshops on the principles and values of cooperatives



The ILO delivered a range of training sessions with the aim of improving the overall performance of cooperatives in the Gaza Strip. Representatives from a diverse range of organizations attended the workshops, including the Ministry of Agriculture and the General Directorate of Cooperatives at the Ministry of Labour, as well as various civil society groups and organisations, several which have a specific focus on organising women and youth.

On the basis of discussions with the organisations involved in the workshops, a series of recommendations and an Action Plan were formulated to map out the direction of ILO's future support to cooperatives in Gaza that will mainly target women and youth.

5. Inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in vocational training programs



The IRADA program at the Islamic University of Gaza is a dedicated service that connects students with disabilities to technical training opportunities. The program identified the need to include persons with intellectual disabilities, girls and women in particular, as a priority of its vocational programs and requested support from the ILO to build its capacity in this area. In light of this request, the ILO commissioned a consultant to prepare and deliver a training package for IRADA management and technical teams. The consultant then engaged in a participatory process with stakeholders to develop a strategy and implementation plan with the view to effectively include students with intellectual disabilities in IRADA's programs and services.

The way forward: ILO's Strategy for Gender Equality in OPT 2016 - 2017

Assessing the domestic worker sector

The Ministry of Labour has recently included domestic workers under the coverage of the Labour Law. However, the domestic work sector in the OPT is largely informal and difficult to monitor. There is a particular lack of information regarding conditions such as recruitment practices, nature of work and occupational hazards. In order to bridge the existing knowledge gap and understand the potentials of the sector, the ILO has commissioned a study for the fall of 2016 to undertake a qualitative assessment of the domestic worker sector in the West Bank Governorates using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The assessment will pay particular attention to the employment relationship between the domestic workers, the majority women, and their employers, especially demand and supply related issues, employment practices and working conditions. The aim of this study is to reveal opportunities and challenges for improving the employment relationships, as well as to identify the potential for organizing and formalizing the sector through cooperatives. Depending on the study findings, the ILO will engage more on the domestic work sector in 2017.

Technical support to cooperatives

A cooperative is defined as an “autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise”

- ILO, *Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation, 2002 (No. 193)*

Following an official request by the Ministry of Labour, the ILO will continue its support on cooperatives in OPT through an independent consultancy-based revision of the progress made by the Directorate of Cooperatives as well as holding a national cooperation workshop in 2017. The particular focus will be on how to increase the productivity and over-all performance of cooperatives in Gaza and the West Bank and supporting a National cooperative strategy and plan. The ILO supported capacity building and business plan development for two cooperatives: the Gaza Saving and Credit Cooperative, which is made up of 1,470 female members and aims to empower women through the provision of financial capital; and the Cooperative Association for Beekeepers, consisting of 25 beekeepers from the Gaza Strip. The ILO will also support efforts of transitioning the Gazian Sheep Breeder's Women Business Group and Civil Association for Palm Development in Deir Al-Balah into a cooperative.

Mapping the occurrence of violence at work

Building on previous research which shows that 22.8% of working women in the OPT had experienced some type of gender-based violence at work during the last 12 months, the ILO together with the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) will launch a new survey to capture the occurrence of violence at work in OPT. This project will run in line with current work in the field of violence at work at the global level, using new methodology which encompasses ILO's new definition of work-related violence.

Support efforts to integrate gender equality in the Labour Law Reform

In line with current national efforts to reform the Labour Law in OPT, the ILO is supporting the National Committee for Women's Employment to ensure that gender equality becomes an integral part of the reform process. A series of capacity building initiatives will be delivered to the Committee with the aim to ensure that the consultation and drafting processes mainstream gender concerns.

Revitalizing the Participatory Gender Audit National Strategy

In partnership with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the ILO will support national efforts to revitalize an initiative on Participatory Gender Audits aimed at mainstreaming gender equality at governmental and private sector levels.

Selected outputs

1. 'Rights of Women in OPT'. Booklet, ILO, Beirut, 2016.
2. 'Toward gender justice in higher education institutions: Piloting ILO's participatory gender audit tool at Birzeit University'. Policy brief, ILO, Beirut, 2016.
3. Tzannotos, Z. 'Effects of gender inequality in employment and pay in Jordan, Lebanon and the OPT: Three questions answered'. Final report, ILO, Beirut, 2016.
4. 'Understanding the gender pay gap in Occupied Palestinian Territory: A qualitative study of the education sector'. Policy brief, ILO, Beirut, 2016.
5. 'Findings of the assessment of agricultural cooperatives in the West Bank: Challenges and opportunities'. Policy brief, ILO, Beirut, 2014.
6. 'Findings of the assessment of service, consumer and handicraft cooperatives in the West Bank: Challenges and opportunities'. Policy brief, ILO, Beirut, 2016.
7. 'ILO's 2015 response program to Israeli military operations: Livelihood interventions for women in Gaza'. Policy brief, ILO, Beirut, 2016.

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