

Gender Equality at Work: ILO Regional Office for Arab States

ILO vision

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is devoted to advancing opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.

The ILO brings together representatives of governments, employers, and workers to jointly shape policies and programmes. It is the global body responsible for drawing up and overseeing international labour standards.

The ILO and its constituents pursue a wide range of activities that use gender mainstreaming as a strategy to achieve gender equality, an essential feature of decent work. Such activities take place within ILO’s strategic objectives.

The four strategic objectives of the ILO are to promote fundamental principles and rights at work; create greater employment and income opportunities for women and men; enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection; and strengthen social dialogue and tripartism.



In promoting social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights, the organization continues to pursue its founding mission that labour peace is essential to prosperity.

Employment outcomes in Arab States

"The ILO Regional Office for Arab States (RO-Beirut) covers eleven countries: Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen and the Occupied Palestinian Territory."

Trends, 1997-2007	Indicators, 2007
7.7% rise in women’s labour force participation (highest in the world)	33.3% women’s labour force participation (2nd lowest in the world)
50% rise in women’s unemployment	15.6% women’s and 10.3% men’s unemployment
4.4% fall in unemployment among young women (sharpest fall in the world)	Higher unemployment for young women (29.5%) than young men (21.1%)
ILO: Global Employment Trends for Women, Geneva, 2008.	

Arab States have experienced some of the most rapid improvements in labour market indicators for women. But the positive change has not been sufficient to bring the countries of the region in par with those at similar levels of economic development.

More and more women in Arab States are seeking paid work. But good jobs are hard to find. The options are limited: either to work in poor conditions without benefits or without pay, or remain unemployed.

There is little variance in women’s economic activity rates within the region despite wide differences between high-income oil-producing countries of the Gulf, countries in post conflict situations (Lebanon, Iraq and West Bank and Gaza Strip) and countries with widespread poverty like Yemen.

Highlights of activities

1. Promoting fundamental principles and rights at work

There continues to be a gap between the rights set out in international labour standards and their realization. For instance, two thirds of Arab States have ratified the ILO convention on promoting “equal pay for equal value of work”. But this principle is understood as “equal pay for the same work” in national legislations. This interpretation does not address pay inequities that women face working in significantly underpaid jobs identified as ‘women’s work’. The ILO has initiated national pay equity assessments in Jordan and Egypt. Gender-neutral job evaluations have been launched to correct for pay inequities in select sectors using social dialogue platforms.

2. Creating greater employment opportunities for women and men

Promoting Women’s Enterprise Development and Gender Equality in Arab States

The programme focuses on rural women producers in three post-conflict settings: Iraq, Lebanon, and West Bank and Gaza Strip. The two key activities are: training of low-income women entrepreneurs on business development using the "ILO Get Ahead for Women in Enterprise package" and capacity building with microenterprise development intermediaries in designing, implementing, and monitoring gender-responsive programmes, using "the ILO's" Women’s Entrepreneurship Development Capacity Building Guide¹.

3. Enhancing the coverage and effectiveness of social protection

A regional initiative launched by the ILO and the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research on ILO on Gender Equality and Workers’ Rights in the Informal Economies of Arab States aims to develop a better understanding of informality of employment in the region using a gender equality and



workers’ rights perspective; contribute to a more favourable policy and institutional environment in providing better legal and social coverage for the working poor, especially women; mainstream Arab States into the global discussion on informal employment; and establish sex-disaggregated data and gender-responsive indicators in household and labour force surveys to capture women’s informal work especially work from home².

4. Strengthening social dialogue and tripartism

ILO Workers’ Training on Decent Work & Gender Equality in Yemen through Social Dialogue Institutions

In Yemen, 18,000 women and men workers in the public and private sectors have been trained by trainers from the government, workers’ and employers’ organizations on their rights. The workers’ rights booklet used in the training has become a key reference for Yemeni workers across the country and reprinted in tens of thousands of copies several times. Media, civil society organizations and the national women’s machinery have also contributed to the effective implementation of this training programme, hailed as a good practice in social dialogue.

ILO approaches and strategies

Advisory services

ILO Policy Advice on Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon

The number of women migrant domestic workers in Lebanon ranges between 130,000 and 220,000 in an overall population of 4 million. There is growing evidence that a substantial number of domestic workers endure labour rights abuses, such as extremely low wages, non-payment of salaries, excessive work hours, restrictions on rest times and movement, withholding of passports, lack of privacy, unhealthy or unsafe working and living conditions, and lack of social protection, in addition to instances of verbal, psychological or physical abuse. In 2006, a National Steering Committee was established under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour to serve as a participatory policy dialogue platform with line ministries, the syndicate of placement agencies, NGOs, the ILO, and the High Commissioner for the Human Rights. The Committee formed three working groups focusing on: a) a draft proposal for changing pertinent articles in relevant laws; b) a draft of a comprehensive unified rights-based standard contract; and c) an information guide for women migrant domestic workers in nine languages. The ILO is supporting this initiative with technical assistance, awareness raising and policy advisory services³.

Capacity building

Training and capacity-building aimed at integrating gender equality into analysis, planning and practice are fundamental to the work of the ILO. A wide range of gender specific training courses and materials are developed by the ILO, which are then adapted to specific contexts as needed. The ILO also conducts a range of training courses at national, regional, and global levels through its International Training Centre in Turin in English, French, Spanish and Arabic. Over 100 trainees from ILO constituents in Arab States receive training on gender-related issues each year.



Knowledge creation & information-dissemination

As part of ILO's knowledge sharing strategy all findings and outputs of activities are disseminated to the constituents in English and Arabic through various channels including research workshops, training programmes, and policy round-tables. The information is presented using user-friendly reports and policy briefs, multimedia and electronic channels. The knowledge generated through the regional research initiatives is also distributed through regional academic journals, and integrated as reading materials in relevant higher education curricula.



Selected outputs


- 1 GET Ahead for Women in Enterprise Training Package and Resource Kit; Women’s Entrepreneurship Development (WED) Capacity Building Guide, ILO-RO-Beirut. 2008. (English and Arabic).

2 Gender Equality and Workers’ Rights in the Informal Economies of Arab States: Regional Overview; Unprotected Employment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: A Gender Equality and Workers’ Rights Perspective; Glossary of Terms: Gender, Employment and Informal Economy, ILO RO-Beirut. 2008. (English and Arabic).
- 3 Maid in Lebanon, II: Voices from Home. Documentary film; Promoting the rights of women migrant domestic workers in Arab States: The case of Lebanon. Arab States Issue Brief 1; Social Care needs and services in Arab States: Bringing care work into focus in Lebanon. Arab States Issue Brief 2; Social Care needs and services provisions in Arab States: Bringing care work into focus in Lebanon. Arab States Policy Brief 1; An information guide for Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon, (Amharic, Arabic, English, French, Nepali, Sinhalese, Tagalog, Tamil and Vietnamese). ILO RO-Beirut. 2008.

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GENDER EQUALITY AT THE **HEART** OF DECENT WORK

