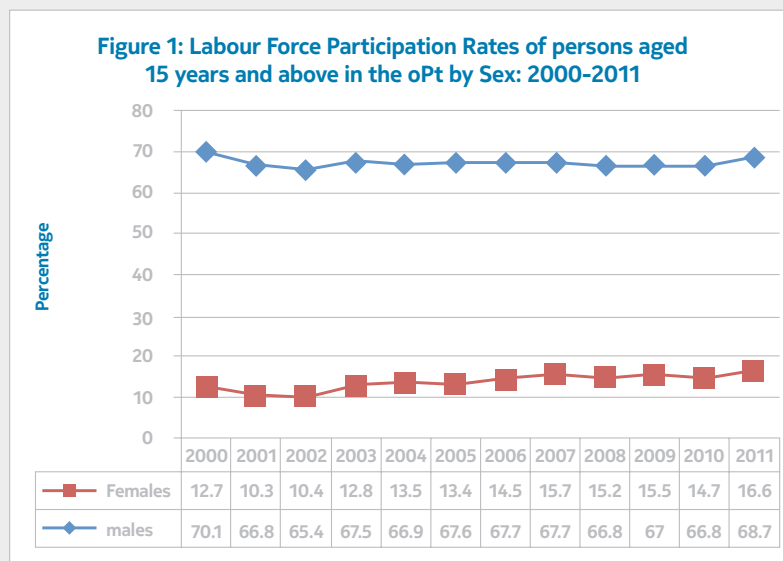


WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PALESTINIAN LABOUR FORCE: 2010-2011

This fact sheet⁽¹⁾ presents an overview of women's employment status in terms of labour force participation, unemployment and terms and conditions of employment in the occupied Palestinian territory. A cursory look at statistical trends in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the past decade indicates the significance and persistence of the gender gap in labour force participation (Figure 1). While men's labour force participation rate has remained steady since 2000, registering 69 per cent in 2011, **women's labour force participation rate has remained at less than a quarter of men's rate, albeit rising from 13 per cent in 2000 to 17 per cent in 2011**⁽²⁾.

At first sight the persistence of this gap could be attributed to traditional gender norms, but further analysis of available evidence reveals that more



complex issues are at play. Indeed, it is impossible to discuss women's employment status in the West Bank and Gaza Strip without taking into account the unique socio-economic context of the territories under

Israeli occupation. Insufficient income earning opportunities, restricted access to land and natural resources, as well as movement restrictions exacerbate people's participation in the labour market, this is even more so for women.

The rise in women's labour force participation mainly reflects the increasing participation rate of women who have more than 12 years of schooling. This is particularly true for young women aged 18-29 whose participation rate has increased from 32 to 47 per cent in the course of the last decade. In comparison, the participation rate of women with no more than 11 years of schooling remained low at about 10 per cent during the same period. **The number of more educated women in the labour force increased by 150 percent between 2000 and 2011, as compared with 18 percent for women with less educational qualifications** (Figure 2).

(1) Major contributors Saleh Al-Kafri and Mansour Omeira.

(2) This fact sheet mainly covers the period between 2000 and 2011, since 2000 represents the most stable year on the eve of the second Intifada (uprising), while 2011 is the year with the most recent data available from PCBS. All data presented in the graphs is provided by PCBS.

Education is therefore a key determinant of women’s increased participation in the labour force. Support for women’s labour force participation starts early on, in the decision to invest in girls’ education to improve their employment prospects, not just for a traditional education. In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, access to education has improved dramatically over the past few decades, and this trend is expected to improve the prospects of women’s labour force participation. The percentage of women graduates in 2011 was the same as that of men (34 percent), whereas the gap between them was high in 2000 (23 percent for women against 30 percent for men). The school enrollment of girls (aged 10 years and above) exceeds that of boys, with 104 girls for every 100 boys (2011).

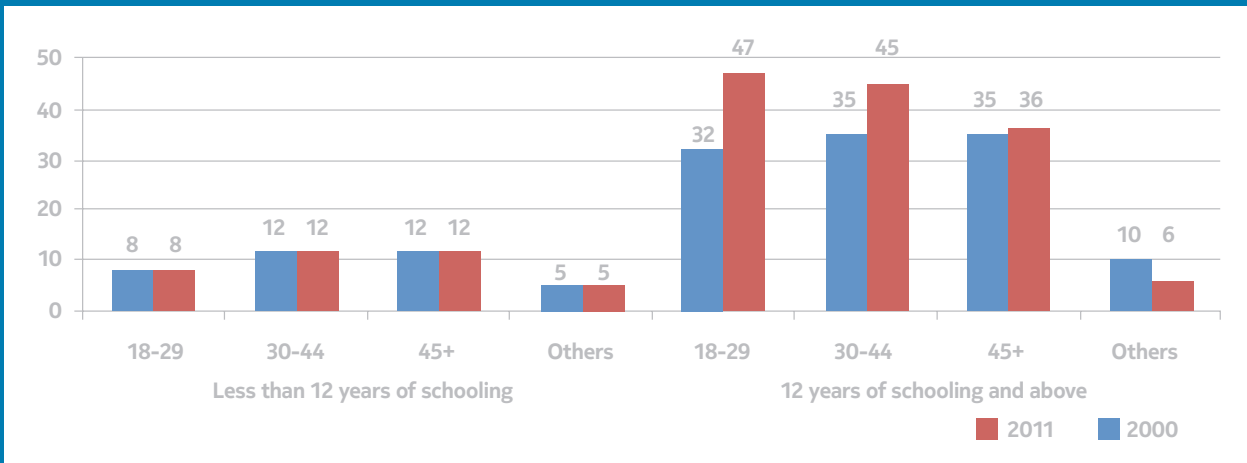
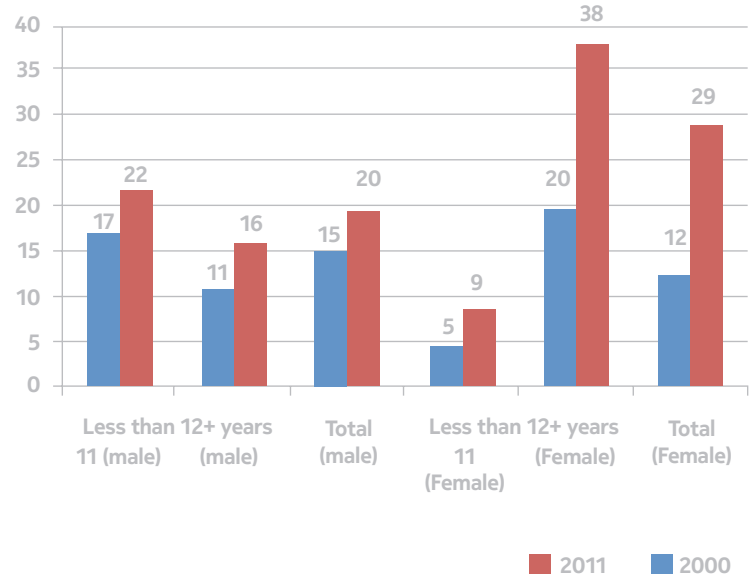


Figure 2: Labour Force Participation Rate for Females by age and years of schooling: 2000 & 2011

However, education is not sufficient for women to secure employment, as women’s unemployment rate increases with their educational attainment, in contrast with men. Both Palestinian women and men have faced double-digit unemployment rates in the past decade, but the dynamics are very different. In 2000, women’s unemployment rate was 12 percent, slightly lower than men’s, which stood at 15 percent. The Israeli response to the outbreak of the second intifada (2000-2005) had dramatic impacts on Palestinians’ access to employment. Men’s unemployment rate reached a peak of 34 percent in 2002, and has since dropped to 20 per cent in 2011. Meanwhile, women’s unemployment rate has risen steadily and surpassed men’s, registering a record of 29 percent in 2011, or more than double the rate in 2000 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Unemployment Rate of women and men (15 years and above) currently not attending school by years of schooling - 2000 & 2011



Unemployment among young graduates, women in particular, is a major issue. The rate of unemployed women graduates has increased from 20 percent in 2000 to 38 percent in 2011, against an increase from 5 percent to 9 percent among non-graduate women. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate of men graduates was 15 percent in 2011, as compared with 22 percent among non-graduate men. While clearly there are more women graduating than before, they still tend to specialize in fields like humanities which offer less employment prospects. More women are now graduating in scientific fields but yet they still find it difficult to find jobs. Education choices only partially explain the high unemployment rate of women graduates. More factors which are discussed below need to be brought into light.

Women account for a quarter of the unemployed population with regional differences. Geographically, 42 percent of unemployed women were in the Gaza Strip. Women's unemployment rate reached 38 percent in refugee camps, 30 percent in urban areas and 20 percent in rural areas. The governorates of West Bank, Tulkarm, Qalqiliya, Hebron and Nablus witnessed the highest unemployment respectively (ranging from 25 per cent to 29 per cent), (Figure 4). The overwhelming majority (91 percent) of unemployed women were graduates, three-quarters were young adults aged 18-29, and half of unemployed women were married. The over-representation of women graduates among the unemployed is a result of their unmet search for decent jobs and social protection. Unemployed women graduates were largely seeking permanent regular jobs (80 percent), and a significant minority (13 percent) was looking for regular part-time jobs. The combination of weak legal and policy frameworks on job creation and social protection coupled with the private sector's inability to generate decent jobs with adequate social protection coverage are among key impediments for women's access to decent work. This explains persistently high unemployment rates among women including the young graduates and their limited presence in the labour force.

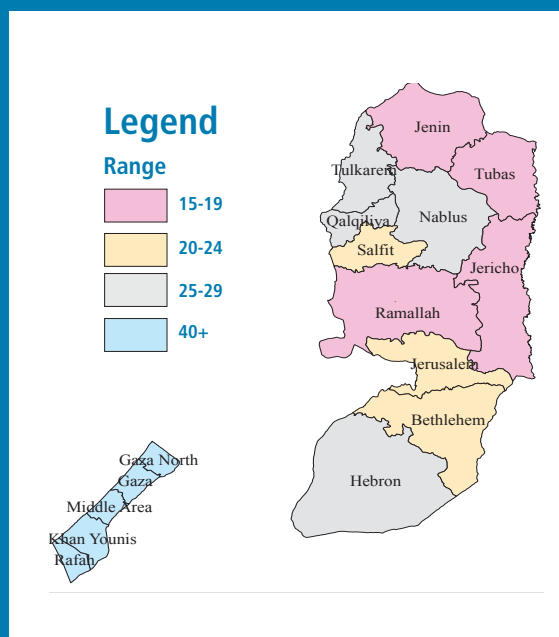


Figure 4: Regional differences in women's unemployment rate 2011

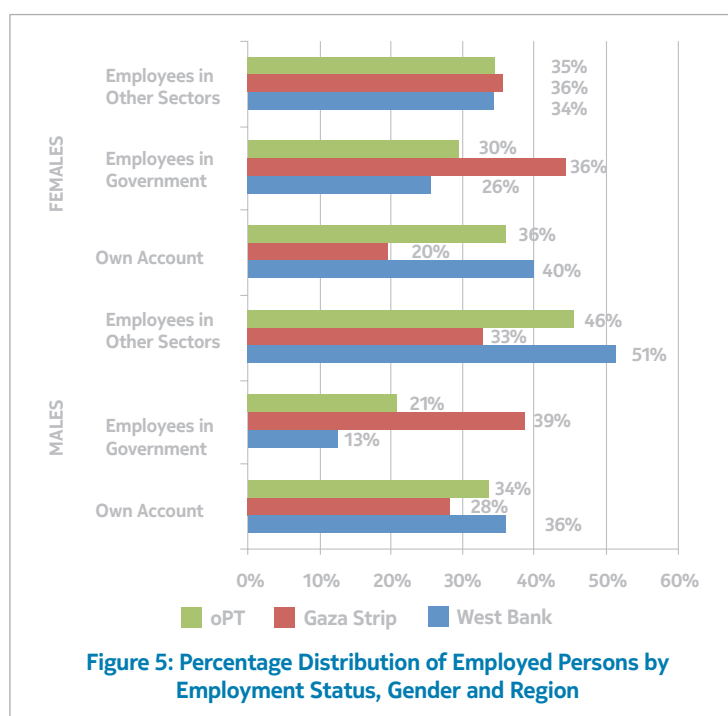


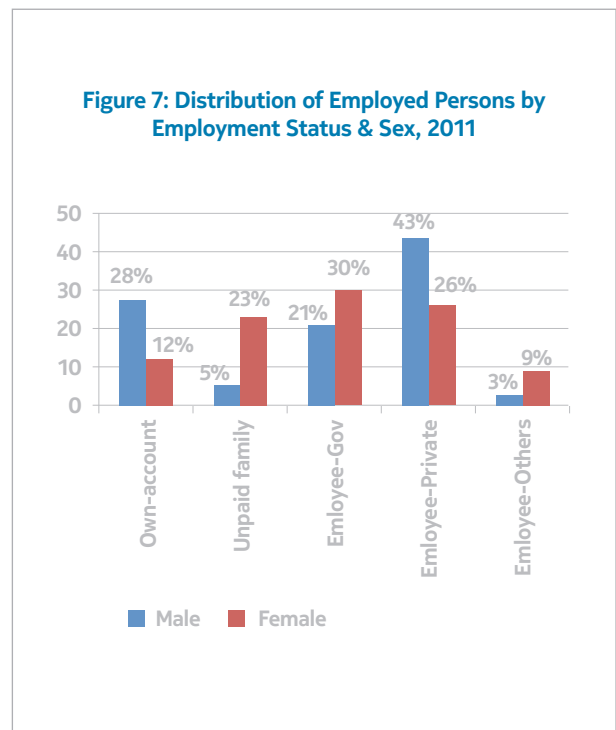
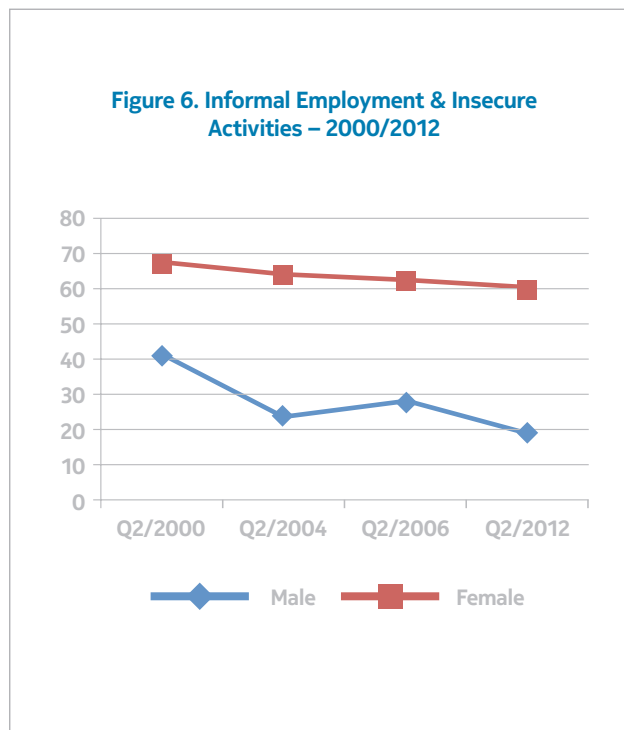
Figure 5: Percentage Distribution of Employed Persons by Employment Status, Gender and Region

Majority of working women are employees with significant numbers as self-employed.

Women were mainly employees in either the public (30 per cent) or private (26 per cent) sectors, while self-employed women were largely contributing family workers (23 per cent). Meanwhile, men were mainly private sector employees (43 per cent), own-account workers (28 per cent), or public sector employees (21 per cent).

For those women who work, there is significant gender segregation by economic sector and occupation. 60 percent of employed women in 2011 were concentrated in services such as education, health, and public administration, while 22 percent were employed in the agricultural sector. For men, the three main sectors of employment were services and other branches (31 percent), commerce and hotels (23 percent) and construction (17 percent).⁽³⁾

It is worth mentioning here that women’s role in the **informal economy in the oPt may seem small**, but it is very significant, as it includes those who can be qualified as self-employed, having unsecure employment statuses (irregular employment), or unpaid family members. In 2000, 5.5 percent of women in the labour force were employed in the informal sector while 63 percent were vulnerable and insecure workers. In 2012, not much change was seen, as 4.9 percent were employed in the informal sector, while 60.2 percent were vulnerable and insecure workers (Figure 6).



(3) Women were classified as professionals, technicians, associates, or clerks (52 percent), while 21 percent were classified as skilled agricultural and fishery workers. Men were more evenly spread across service, shop and market workers (22 percent), elementary occupations (21 percent), professionals, technicians, associates and clerks (18 percent), and craft and related trade workers (18 percent).

Formal sector wage employment, particularly in the public sector, represents a higher share of women's employment than men's.

As shown in figures 5 and 7, women are also more likely than men to engage in informal agricultural employment as contributing family workers, whereas men are more likely to work in informal sector enterprises, which constitute the bulk of the private sector. In 2011, 96 percent of the women employees worked in formal sector establishments (defined as having tax records) in spite of their scarcity. The percentage of women employees in medium and large establishments (with more than five employees) reached 87 percent. Moreover, 97

percent of them were employed full-time, and 15 percent did not have an employment contract. About 68 percent of women employees received job benefits, compared with only 46 percent of men employees. Nonetheless, a significant number of women are still in unpaid household services as there is no advantage for them in joining the labour market unless they receive adequate wages and benefits to be able to cover transport and child-care and general household costs. **Thus, the provision of basic social security guarantees is among key determinants of women's choice to enter the world of work.**

GENDER PAY GAP AND MINIMUM WAGE

There is significant gender pay gap in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as women's median daily wage is 84 percent men's. The gap is even wider in the manufacturing sector where women receive only 57 percent of the median wage of men. The prevalence and persistence pay discrimination against women is reflected in the 20 percent gender pay gap among recent graduates in their first private sector job.

The gender pay gap is driven less by women's lower pay for same work than by their lower pay for work of equal value, which underlines the importance of gender-neutral job evaluations.

Occupations more frequently filled by women, such as clerks, administrative assistants, nurses, and teachers, generally receive lower remuneration, but for the same occupation men and women access same wage. This phenomenon is also prevalent in the public sector. The low wages for occupations that are usually filled by women negatively impacts women's labour force participation, particularly if they have children in need of day-care, given the prevailing perception that children are the responsibility of women. In a 2009 survey, 58 percent of Palestinians considered that women employees with small children essentially spent their wages on day-care centers.⁽⁴⁾

(4) Alpha International, 2009, A Public Opinion Survey on Palestinians' Attitudes towards Women's Labor Force Participation.

The recent introduction of a minimum wage in the private sector (at the rate of NIS 1,450) is anticipated to have significant positive effects on low-paid workers, particularly women. The level of the minimum wage has been criticized by trade unions as too low in absolute terms in light of a relative poverty line of NIS 2,293, and in relative terms as compared with the wages that Palestinian workers receive in Israeli settlements and abroad.

Nevertheless, given prevailing private sector wages, it is estimated that at this level the minimum wage would increase the wages of 55 percent of women employees and 34 percent of men employees. If enforced, its impact would be greater in the Gaza Strip, where it would benefit 84 percent of men employees and 78 percent of women, than in the West Bank, where it would still benefit the more than half of women employees and 20 percent of men employees.

Nevertheless, there are matters of concern regarding the effectiveness of the implementation and enforcement of the new minimum wage law. If effectively implemented, it would raise women's average monthly wage in the West Bank from NIS 1,722 to NIS 2,034, and men's from NIS 2,795 to NIS 2,868. In the Gaza Strip, women's average monthly wage would rise from NIS 1,067 to NIS 1,659, and men's from NIS 1,103 to NIS 1,651. Thus the minimum wage would contribute to decreasing the private sector's gender pay gap in the West Bank, and to closing it in the Gaza Strip although at very low wage levels. Its effective implementation would thus contribute to lifting the well-being of Palestinian families, notably those with women employees in the private sector. Its overall positive effects may also increase the incentives for women to join the labour force, particularly less educated women, whose unemployment rate may also rise in the absence of sufficient employment opportunities.

FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

The human security challenges facing Palestinian women and men are multiple and cannot be resolved through a piece-meal approach. Improving women's access to decent work in the West Bank and Gaza Strip 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, in addition to social norms prevailing in Palestinian society. As noted in the ILO 2012 report ⁽⁵⁾, the participation of women in the labour market is positively growing and the call for women's empowerment is getting stronger. Women workers' voices and representation is increasing in the unions' movement with an average of 17 percent of women joining the unions ⁽⁶⁾. For working women and men and their families, it is of the utmost importance that this process should encompass institutions and policies for job creation, social dialogue, gender equality, social security and fair incomes. The solutions have to be realistic and pragmatic. Coordinated efforts will be required for strengthening Palestinian institutions towards sovereignty, economic viability, social justice, and gender equality. Policy coherence around the target of full employment and decent work for all will be key, as will be the introduction of special measures to ensure that women and men workers enjoy equal opportunities and treatment.

A comprehensive approach towards gender equality in the world of work will continue to need attention to strengthening capacities of institutions to recalibrate wages and conduct regular gender-neutral job evaluation; and investing in diversifying career opportunities for young girls and encouraging women to enter the labour force by securing necessary services, including provision of accessible and affordable quality child care. To this extent introducing a basic social protection floor that comprising of basic social security guarantees, including maternity protection, would significantly improve the wellbeing of Palestinian households, including the majority of men, who are in informal employment, and the majority of women, who are in unpaid household service. Such an approach can be achieved through social dialogue, and institutional frameworks that have a leading role to play in that regards. Promising in this context is the role of the National Committee for Women's Employment (NCWE) established in 2010 with support from the ILO. The Committee seeks to contribute to the elaboration and adoption of a conceptual policy framework to promote and increase the participation of women economically and remove discrimination and inequality in the labour market. ⁽⁷⁾

(5) ILO, 2012. Report of the Director General: The situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories. Geneva

(6) PGFTU data, 2013.

(7) The Committee operates through a wide network of relations among social partners aimed at providing advice and guidance on issues related to gender equality in the workplace at macro level. The Committee has elaborated a strategy with 4 key priority areas that include, creation of decent jobs, increase of market driven skills, strengthening of cooperatives for women and improvement in working conditions.

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