

**Position Paper**

**The Economic Participation of Women in Jordan**

**Broken Promises, Uncertain Roles**

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**In cooperation with**

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Over the past seven years, in celebration of the International Women's Day (March 8) the Phenix Center's Jordan Labor Watch has issued annual position papers on the economic participation of women in Jordan and the realities they face in the national labor market. These papers have aimed to determine the relationship between women and the labor force, both legally and in practice, and to assess how this relationship has changed over the years and how it's impacted on the advancement of women's rights in Jordan.

The following paper will consist of an overview of how the economic participation of women in Jordan has evolved over the past 10 years (2007-2016).

## Key findings

1. Economic participation rates among women aged 15 and older are on the decline in Jordan, having gone from 14.7% in 2007 to 13.4% in 2016, and decreasing particularly rapidly from 2011 onward. Among males, economic participation rates dropped from 64.4% to 57.7% within the same period. Accordingly, recent figures have shown that women account for only 27.2% of contributors registered with the Social Security Corporation. At the same time, unemployment rates among women are now once again on the rise. After having decreased somewhat steadily between 2007 and 2013, decreasing from 25.6% to 19.9% within that period, during the fourth quarter of 2016 they again rose sharply, reaching 24.8%. Meanwhile, unemployment rates among males mostly oscillated between 10% and 11% over the same period, before rising to 13.8% in 2016.

2. The limited participation of women in the Jordanian market represents one of the main issues the country's economy now faces, as it shows the extent of its untapped potential. This is all the more meaningful if one considers how women in Jordan surpass their male peers in terms of both educational levels and academic success – meaning that not only are they more likely to attain higher levels of education, they also commonly score higher than males in examinations. In addition, low activity rates among females lead to high levels of economic dependency. As of the fourth quarter of 2016, only about one-fourth (24.5%) of people living in the country were capable of supporting themselves, while the remaining three-fourths fell under the category of “dependents.” In light of this, Jordan has one of the highest dependency rates in the world, which severely hampers the financial security of the country's families.

3. Indicators such as the ones mentioned above point to the fact that the efforts made to promote the integration of women into the Jordanian economy remain insufficient. While programs and policies have been developed and implemented with the goal of promoting the economic inclusion of women, these have been largely restricted to advocacy and discourses on solidarity. Ultimately, these efforts have failed to bring about tangible, long-lasting change in regards to the role of women in the Jordanian economy, as females still remain underrepresented in the labor market at large, and in certain key sectors in particular.

4. In terms of wages, males continue to earn more than females. As per the 2015 annual Statistical Yearbook, released by the Jordanian Department of Statistics, average monthly wages stood at 472 JOD/month among males and 437/month JOD among females – a 35 JOD gap. Similarly, a 2015 report issued by the Social Security Corporation concluded that average wages among male and female workers stood at 512 and 442 JOD, respectively, representing a 70 JOD gap in favor of males. In part, this is owed to the limitations women in Jordan face when choosing career paths, which prevents them from benefiting from the same vertical socioeconomic mobility as their male peers, thus also preventing them from improving their working and living conditions – e.g., their monthly income – over time. Coupled with a lack of access to professional training, and the widespread belief that working women will eventually withdraw from the labor market, this severely hinders women's ability to secure better incomes and a greater degree of independence.

5. Progress has been slow in regards to the improvement of working conditions in Jordan. Though this affects men and women alike, women are commonly more vulnerable than their male counterparts to exploitation and other rights violations. These challenges are also amplified by the lack of affordable and effective transportation systems, and by the fact that most companies fail to provide nurseries. According to Jordanian Labor Code Article No. 72, “the employer who hires at least twenty married female labor shall provide a suitable place under the custody of a baby sitter qualified for looking after

the children of the working women whose ages are less than four years old provided the number of the same shall not be less than ten children.”

6. Jordan’s inability to foster employment and promote better job opportunities which abide by international principles on decent work has led to a steep rise in employment informality. As the country’s ability to keep up its increasing numbers of yearly labor market entrants has waned, more and more workers have turned to the informal economy in search of jobs. However, as employees in the informal economy are not commonly offered decent wages and working conditions, women, to whom simply entering the labor market is a challenge in and of itself, are thus further discouraged from engaging in economic activity altogether. Meanwhile, those women who do secure jobs in the informal sector – mostly in agriculture, education, small businesses, and the like – are commonly offered substandard conditions and are vulnerable to exploitation. Furthermore, according to recent figures released by the Social Security Corporation, insurance evasion rates in the informal sector can be as high as 90%.

7. Numerous reports, including those released by Jordan Labor Watch, suggest that the majority of women working in the informal economy, and in small businesses, are routinely subject to violations of their rights as enshrined in both Jordanian law and international standards. Many work over 8 hours a day, and are deprived of such benefits as social security and the enjoyment of public holidays. Many also earn below-minimum wages, lack job stability – e.g., for lack of a written contract – and regularly suffer various forms of verbal, physical, and emotional harassment. Evidence suggests that a lack of socioeconomic integration is at the source of these obstacles.

8. Women with disabilities face more challenges still, even when compared to men who are similarly disabled. They are often unable to find suitable employment, and feel that the common conception is that their livelihoods are a matter of “charity,” as opposed to an issue which concerns their strengths, weaknesses, and dignity. Like many other women, they are also subject to harassment – especially in the private sector – which, coupled with some of their families’ disapproval of their choice to work, further discourages these women from becoming economically active.

## **Recommendations**

In light of the issues laid out above, it is recommended that Jordan increase its efforts in assuring that all workers – men and women – are capable of securing employment, and are offered fair and decent working conditions.

In regards to women, specifically, it is encouraged that more programs and policies be implemented with the goal of improving their economic activity rates, as well as the level of protection they enjoy, in accordance with national and international labor standards.

Additionally, the liberalization of union activities – including the conditions under which workers are permitted to form and join such organizations – would contribute to the overall improvement of working conditions in Jordan, thus promoting independence and democratic practices within the labor market, as well as the reinvigoration of the national economy.

## Statistical figures

