

# The life of a Jordanian working mother under Covid-19

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By Shara Jazzar

What we can describe as an iron woman has a name; Etaf Roudan. She is the manager of Al-Balad radio, one of Hivos' partners in Jordan, in charge of projects. She is a mother of five, 2 girls aged 9 and 12; and 3 boys aged 6, 14 and 16.

## Daily routine

Etaf wakes up between 5.30 am and 6.00 am;

"I have to catch up on work and on things I didn't get the chance to do at home the previous night," she explains. Before Covid-19 "I would then prepare breakfast and snacks for my children and husband, a lawyer, would drive the kids to school." Before heading to the office around 10.00 am, this mother makes sure to cook lunch. She returns home around 6.00 pm to assist her children with homework, baths and ensure that all chores have been done. After dinner and tucking her children to bed, this working woman has to continue with her gender roles ensuring that the dishes and kitchen are clean before she can go to bed around 11.30 pm.

With the pandemic and the confinement, life has become more complex for this active mom. First of all, given the nature of her work as a journalist, Etaf is required to go to the office on a daily basis whereas the majority of the population is working from home. She is also expected to stay updated on the latest news when she is at home. Second, schools are closed and children are now homeschooling, this only increases the burden on her as she has to attend to their schooling. "My husband is involved in all of the household chores, except for supervising the kids' studies," she says. Her children, especially the youngest ones, consider themselves on holidays and are not very motivated to study.



Etaf is an example of how far off from achieving a true exchange of gender roles in household tasks we are because men still have the luxury to choose when and how to contribute.

With not much external support, Etaf copes because she has trained her children on being independent and doing household chores, regardless of their gender. Their father is a good example for them as well. The older children take care of their younger siblings in her absence and are able to study with minimal supervision. Etaf also highlighted that her secret to success is in the support system she has created for herself, which grows depending on her needs.

In the situation at hand, her husband, who is currently not working as courts are closed, and children take care of most of the household's requirements when she is away. Still, this active mom has to make the meals and tidy up after dinner, and work on weekends, despite the fact that she is the only one currently required to work full-time.

If Etaf were a man, she would probably spend her evenings and weekends watching television and relaxing. However, in conservative societies Jordan, men's 'support' at home has a ceiling even for the most open minded of them and women are expected to be involved in all chores when they are at home.

## Working at the office during country's confinement

"My workload at the office has increased on account of the pandemic because Radio Al-Balad is considered a platform for social work by its partners and various actors as we are the only media that covers the social and psychological aspect of the crisis, rather than just sharing information and statistics like most other media outlets do," she explains. Thus, many organizations get in touch with them, bearing in mind that the radio is working with minimum staff. "What I miss the most is being able to work in the field," she states.

## Me-time

"With all the tasks I have, both at work and at home, I don't have much time to spend on hobbies," she highlights with a laughter. However, "I enjoy taking care of my plants. This is what really relaxes and soothes me," she underlines. At home, she has a small place where she grows whatever she feels like and this haven helps her blow some steam.

# What keeps her going?

“Before I met vulnerable women who needed support, I just wanted to excel at what I did,” she says. However, “marginalized women or victims of violence have become what keeps me going”.

Etaf feels that she can support them either directly through the projects she supervises, or indirectly by supporting women to reach leadership positions and become examples for others. She herself comes from a conservative background and if it were not for the support of her husband she might not have been able to make it. This again highlights the role men have in our societies in making or breaking a woman leaders.

Nonetheless, Etaf is critical of the way Jordan is handling the crisis in terms of gender. “It is always men who are addressing Jordanians, rarely women and I think that the government should continue to show its engagement towards supporting women in decision-making positions, especially in times of crisis,” she underscores.

## **Women always have to do more**

Despite the fact that Etaf is a Jordanian working mother with support from her husband, this scenario is unusual as men are solely bread-winners and women have multiple roles that include but are not limited to providing an income, cooking, cleaning, nurturing, caring, teaching and raising good citizens.

If things are to change, it is through examples like Etaf, strong and engaged women who are not afraid to choose their path in life and succeed.