



ADVOCATING GENDER EQUALITY IN ZARQAA'S FACTORIES

JORDAN

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Zarqaa Governorate is considered one of the most important industrial hubs in Jordan. Women working in its factories are enduring hard working conditions. Additionally, female workers lack training and professional development opportunities, which reduces their chances of having access to senior positions or even promotion. Based on field visits and interviews, this diagnosis explores the working environment of female workers in Zarqaa. It also provides several recommendations for improving their situation.



It appeared that the female workers who were consulted are not enough aware of their labour rights and in many cases are subjected to verbal and physical abuse.
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The Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation (EMWF) is a non-profit independent organisation launched in 2014. It is structured as a Network of networks bringing different kinds of gender equality actors in the Euro-Mediterranean area with the aim of:

- Advancing in the common fight for equal rights of women and men to participate in political, economic, civil and social life;
- Eradicating all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls;
- Encouraging a change in attitude and behaviour for gender equality.

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Field diagnosis: Promoting gender equality in the factories of Zarqaa

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Local clusters of gender equality actors© mobilized since 2017



- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| A Souss-Massa Region (Morocco) | D Luxor Governorate (Egypt) | F Zarqaa Governorate (Jordan) |
| B Wilaya of Algiers (Algeria) | E Ramallah and Al Bireh Governorate (Palestine) | G Eastern suburbs of Beirut (Lebanon) |
| C Douar Hicher Delegation (Tunisia) | | |

The Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation sets up local clusters of gender equality actors coordinated by associations every year, in the following countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia (1 per country).

Each local cluster of gender equality actors© chooses a target territory that can be a region or a province or a metropolitan area of a large city. Subsequently, the local cluster's members define a topic of interest related to gender equality that they consider a priority in this target territory.

Each local cluster is made up of 5 actors working in favour of gender equality in the target territory: associations; research or education institutions; local or regional authorities or ministerial departments in charge of advocating for women's rights; media; enterprises and trade unions. Their mission is to mobilize the gender equality actors through data collection, consultations and exchange of experiences. Thus, they analyse the situation related to the target topic and they follow-up the effectiveness of public policies in this area with a collective and participatory approach.

This bottom-up approach leads to produce a diagnosis of the situation that highlights the main obstacles to achieve gender equality, and to design a collaborative and replicable field project to address those obstacles. To date, local clusters were set in Algiers and Oran (Algeria); Giza and Luxor (Egypt); Irbid and Zarqaa (Jordan); the eastern suburbs of Beirut and Mount Lebanon (Lebanon); Marrakesh-Safi and Souss-Massa (Morocco); Ramallah-Al Bireh, Bethlehem and El Khalil/Hebron Governorates (Palestine); and Douar Hicher, Monastir and Sousse (Tunisia). These clusters focus on women's access to political decision-making and high-level positions, women's economic empowerment and professional inequalities and violence against women. This document presents the diagnosis which was conducted in Zarqaa.

A. INTRODUCTION

This diagnosis was conducted by the Jordan Forum for Business and Professional Women – JFBPW. Established in 1976, the JFBPW is considered one of Jordan's most active non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It focuses on business and professional women to motivate them towards active change. Its activities cover different socio-economic sectors and target women in general, starting from preliminary collective steps, to developing trainings, and providing services to its members in terms of information, projects implementation, technical assistance, resources and legal guidance. The JFBPW also advocates for more gender-friendly and effective laws and regulations in favour of Jordan's society and women-led business.

The JFBPW's vision is for Jordanian business and professional women to have equal opportunities, rights and leadership roles in the business sector and contribute effectively to the economic development of Jordan. It is also worth mentioning that the JFBPW received King Abdullah II Award for Excellence "Best Practices" respectively in 2006 and 2009 since the launch of the award.

The present diagnosis is one of the results of the pilot mobilization action of gender equality actors which was implemented by JFBPW in Zarqaa in 2017.

1. Target Region

Jordan – officially The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan – is an Arab country located in south-west Asia. Jordan is located in the southern part of the Levant and the north of the Arabian Peninsula. It has common borders with Syria to the north, with historic Palestine (West Bank) to the west, with Iraq to the east, with Saudi Arabia to the east and south, and it is overlooking the Gulf of Aqaba (Red Sea) in the south-west, which is the only maritime seafront of Jordan.

Zarqaa is located in the north-east Jordan, around 20 km away from Amman. It covers an area of approximately 4797 km², or 4.6%



Map of Jordan © Wikipedia Commons

of the total area of the Kingdom. The desert land occupies a large part of the area to the east.

Zarqaa has a particularly competitive advantage in the industrial and investment sectors in comparison with other Jordan regions. It comprises more than half of the national industry in terms of invested capital, labour and production volume. It is located near the power plants of Jordan Petroleum Refinery and Al Hussein Thermal Station, and Ad-Dulayl Industrial Park which includes many factories. It is also considered an important passage to a number of border posts. The population of Zarqaa Governorate is estimated, by 2016 population census, at 1.316.000.

2. General situation of women's employment in Jordan

Jordan displays one of the lowest female labour force participation rates in the world¹. According to the World Bank, Jordan has the fifth lowest female participation rate among 185 countries and territories that report such data (World Development Indicators). The only countries with lower reported labour market participation rates are Syria, Iraq, Algeria and Palestine, suggesting a pattern specific to the MENA region.²

According to the Jordanian Strategy Forum³, female working force in the official economy in Jordan (including females aged 15 or over) constitute 10.3% of the entire Jordanian labour force. In the 2015 "Labour and Employment" Survey of the Department of Statistics in Jordan⁴, Zarqaa Governorate was ranked as the governorate with less female workers in the kingdom with 6.4%.

The gender gap in market participation is considerably higher for the most vulnerable women (i.e. those with low education or from the poorest demographic groups). For each woman with at most a primary education level, six men with the same education background are working. On the other hand, the ratio among men and women with tertiary education is three to four: unemployment rates are 45% for women and only 15% for men.

1 WORLD BANK. Economic Participation, Agency and Access to Justice in Jordan, 2013 (available on <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/16706/ACS51580WP0P130ox0379850B00PUBLIC0.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>)

2 UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME. Socio-Economic inequalities in Jordan, 2014 (available on <http://www.jo.undp.org/content/jordan/en/home/library/poverty/socio-economic-inequality-in-jordan-report.html>)

3 <http://www.jsf.org/en/content/infographs-0>

4 <http://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/population/poverty/>

Further, Jordanian legislation and regulations partially reflect social customs and are constantly inconsistent with the principle of equality under the law. Although the constitution governs Jordanians on an equal footing, a number of laws and legislations show disparity in dealing with women and men. Such legislations generally cover broad areas of economic and social life, such as working conditions: women are prohibited from working in certain sectors or during the night hours; they are entitled to early retirement in both public and private sectors; and they have access to employment and related retirement benefits (however male employees receive family allowances in addition to salaries and pensions and women do not get these benefits).

Article 23 of the Jordanian Constitution stipulates the right to work, and the 2nd paragraph of this article guarantees the protection of the state or workers' rights and legislations. Meanwhile, the Jordanian Labour Law No. 8 of 1996 and its amendments contain a set of principles and provisions for employment. The 2nd article of the law defines the worker as "Every person, whether a male or female who performs a remunerated work under the command of his/her employer".

It is also worth mentioning that the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has also signed several treaties and conventions in this regard, including the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention, the Arab Labour Convention of 1966, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on Arab Working Women of 1976, which deals with the conditions of women's employment and the necessity for employers to respect women's particularities, as well as to provide them with social and health care.⁵

The objective of this diagnosis is to explore and understand the conditions of female workers in factories in Zarqaa Governorate and promote gender equality by:

- Identifying the working conditions of the target group.
- Measuring the gap between males and females in terms of salaries and job titles.
- Analysing the difficulties faced by women during their work in factories.
- Suggesting solutions in coordination with the concerned authorities and the factory owners of factories.
- Educating women and men on the importance of gender equality.

⁵ THE JORDANIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR FAMILY AFFAIRS & FREEDOM HOUSE. Study on the state of Jordanian working women's Rights – Field Study on Jordanian Female workers in Industrial Zones. Available on <http://bit.ly/2rXB5Bo>

The diagnosis was elaborated in collaboration with the members of the local cluster of gender equality actors©:

- Federation of Trade Unions
- Zarqaa Governorate
- Zarqaa Chamber of Industry
- Ministry of Labour
- Al-Rai Newspaper
- Jordanian National Forum For Women
- Women's Studies Center.

B. METHODOLOGY

The diagnosis is the result of several activities conducted between February and May 2017.

1. First phase

- Collecting data from Zarqaa Governorate and Zarqaa Chamber of Industry about the factories in Zarqaa Governorate and the conditions of female and male workers therein.



Some of the workers who were interviewed during the pilot mobilization of gender equality actors in Zarqaa.

- Meeting with partners to exchange ideas and information about factory visits, interviewing female workers, and identifying questions and topics to be discussed with female workers and factory owners.

2. Second phase

In April, visits to 5 factories have been organized to interview 82 female workers:

- Reha Electronics Factory (20 workers)
- Hiba Nature Factory for Vinegar (20 workers)
- Zai Garment Factory (15 workers)
- Factory for the manufacture of chips (17 workers)
- Bota Tobacco Factory (10 workers).

The workers' ages range between 18 and 35, and 60% of them are single (actually factory owners fear that married women may be more absent than other employees if they get pregnant). Only 30% of the interviewees have completed their higher education. They have worked in the factory for 5 months up to two years.

The meeting aimed at talking with the workers about their working environment, and with factory owners about women's employment.

The most important points which were raised throughout the meetings:

- Lack of commitment by women to working hours and tardiness.
- Continuous absence from work due to family matters.
- Women productivity is less than that of men for several reasons: Lack of training and skills, irresponsibility...
- Many women were forced to work at factories given their difficult living conditions.
- Some solutions and pieces of advice were recommended to employers to encourage women to commit and increase their productivity at work. (e.g. economic incentives, training, etc.)

3. Third phase

Meeting with the female workers in the factories and talking with them, in order to better analyse the problems that they face. Several aspects have been pointed:

- Negative social perception of women working in factories

- Difficulty of transportation and the geographical location of factories far from their homes.
- The environment is unfriendly and inappropriate
- Salaries are low compared to men's salaries (female workers receive approximately 80% of what their male peers receive).
- Lack of access to senior positions.

4. Fourth phase

The obstacles faced by women while working in factories were again debated:

- Lack of secured transportation, which hinders work or generates delays at work.
- Deduction of monthly salary by the employer due to said delays.
- An unsuitable work environment such as lack of ventilation and non-use of work clothes.
- Lack of nurseries for children in the work area.
- Pressure from officials.
- The presence of cheaper labour.
- Lack of clear instructions by employers.
- There are differences between factories, some of them provide a work environment that is friendly to women, and some do not.

Problems faced by migrant women related to labour emerged:

- Low wages.
- The mixed working environment and the presence of foreign workers who do not mind working 16 hours a day and have no family obligations, unlike Jordanian workers.⁶
- Long working hours.
- Female workers are often subjected to sexual harassment in the industrial zone.
- In addition, they suffer because the factories are located in an isolated area and in industrial zones that are far from city centres. Consequently, some of them have to live in buildings adjacent to factories.

In addition to that, many women find it difficult to reconcile their working and social life. Taking into account these different obstacles, many women quit their jobs and abandon their career.

⁶ UN WOMEN & REACH. Women working: Jordanian and Syrian refugee women's labour force participation and attitudes towards employment, 2016 http://www.reachresourcecentre.info/system/files/resource-documents/reach_jor_report_working_women_jordan_and_syrian_refugee_womens_labour_force_participation_and_attitude_towards_work_august_2016.pdf



The JFBPW involved Zarqaa Governorate and Zarqaa Chamber of Industry in order to obtain their support for conducting the diagnosis and arranging the visits to the factories.

5. Fifth phase: solutions and recommendations

A workshop was held with 20 partners and relevant authorities on the 6th of May 2017 in order to issues recommendations to improve the conditions of female workers. The workshop gathered:

- 10 representatives of the JFBPW
- 2 representatives of the Women's Caucus, a civil society organization (CSO) that has been involved in the project and is based in Zarqaa and works to empower women.
- 1 representative of the Amman Chamber of Industry
- 2 representatives of Zarqaa Governorate
- 2 representatives of the General Federation of Trade Unions
- 1 representative of Al-Rai Newspaper
- 2 representatives of the private sector (employers).

C. RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE GENDER INEQUALITY IN FACTORIES

- Raising awareness and guidance for women on their rights and duties at work.
- Training and qualification for working women to increase their skills and knowledge.
- Carrying out periodic inspection of the Ministry of Labour at the factories to ascertain

the place of work as well as gender equality in terms of salary, working time and health insurance.

- Activating the role of CSOs and institutions to support the working conditions of women.
- Activating the role of media to highlight the situation of female workers in factories.
- Working to improve the situation of female workers in factories by raising factory owners' awareness regarding providing simple measures to be taken, such as providing work uniforms to workers.
- Conducting further in-depth studies and analysis of violence against female workers.

1. Recommendations addressed to the Ministry of Labour

The number of women and girls working in factories is very high, especially in unregistered factories.

- The labour law should be more favourable to women, so that it grants them the right to a fair profession with a fair salary and suitable paid leave so that they can rest or take care of their children because the allowed leave is currently insufficient.
- Providing appropriate health care for all workers, especially in small factories or businesses.
- Promoting the prohibition of forced labour and the prohibition of discrimination in the workplace, including harassment of female workers.
- Eliminating the discrimination between men and women in wages, health care and the condition of facilities (safe transport) and food.

2. Recommendations addressed to CSOs, Trade Unions and other partners

The role of CSOs and institutions is crucial to support women's rights and development:

- Trade unions should play a major role in activating issues of discrimination against women, particularly in employment issues.
- Trade unions should work to end the inequality that female workers face in factories, by ensuring that workers' work contracts and labour rights are compatible to Labour law and legal Jordanian provisions. They should also make sure that female workers are registered in social security.
- Engaging in favour of the application of the minimum wage, especially for women, and the adequacy of wages to meet the basic needs of the worker, including the remuneration of extra hours.
- Fighting more efficiently against physical and verbal abuse at work.

Some women suffer psychological damage as a result of their presence in a working environment where there is a high psychological pressure and a discomforting atmosphere.

The workers cannot complain or demand their rights because they risk being fired by their employer.

D. CONCLUSION

According to the consultations which were held during the diagnosis in Zarqaa, it has been observed that female workers in the targeted factories, whether local or foreign, are exposed to inappropriate circumstances. What is happening could be qualified as a new form of slavery as women are denied the right to have access to gender-equal labour market, and receive lesser salaries than men. Furthermore, the concerned ministries, human rights organisations and civil society are not paying enough attention to what is happening.

As activists and CSOs and institutions, our commitment is to stress the importance of women's work as an inherent right, and a fundamental component of citizenship, which cannot be compromised or deferred. Women have the right to work in a suitable labour environment. Other lessons learnt are that empowering women and integrating them as active participants in the economy is essential to promoting Jordan's economic growth. On the other hand, educational reforms are still needed in order to reduce the gender enrolment gap at all levels of education, as it is a constraint to women's economic participation.

Building upon this diagnosis, a field project will be implemented in 2018 by the JFPPW together with the Ministry of Labour and the unions in order to enhance female workers' awareness in the field of rights and duties at work and advocate for better working conditions.

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مؤسسة نساء الأورو-متوسط
Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation
Fondation des Femmes de l'Euro-Méditerranée

According to its mandate, the **Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation (FFEM)** analyses women's local realities and public policies through consultations and dialogues at a grass-roots level. Concretely, the Foundation sets up **local clusters of gender equality actors**© every year, in the following countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia (1 per country).

Each local cluster of gender equality actors© is coordinated by an association as the Foundation recognises that civil society is the real motor of change in our societies to improve women's conditions.

The local clusters' approach is an innovative and participatory process, which supports networking and sharing of good practices in favour of gender equality at a decentralized level and promotes the emergence of projects rooted in the territory.

The Foundation systematizes the results obtained through the local clusters and transfers them to the policy-makers in the Region's countries and at the Euro-Mediterranean level. All the information related to the local clusters' results is available on the Foundation's website (**www.euromedwomen.foundation**) and widely disseminated across the Region among key stakeholders, policy-makers and international organisations.

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