

Position Paper

WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION IN ECONOMIC LIFE AND LABOR MARKET

By:

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FORWARD:

For the fourth year in a row, Labor-Watch, Jordan issues a "position paper" on the occasion of the International Women's Day, aiming to shed light on the real status of Jordanian women in the labor market, as well as to detect any alterations in the reality of women's conditions in the labor market or at the level of legislations.

The International Women's day which is being celebrated every year on the 8th of March provides an occasion to commemorate women's struggle to achieve equality and justice, and in recognition and appreciation of their efforts to bring about human prosperity in all social, economic and political aspects; it also is a chance to reconsider women's status and the levels of their advancement in the society. In this context, we will endeavor to review, in this paper what has been accomplished in Jordan in the direction of integrating women in the labor market and to identify the main obstacles they face.

The history of the International Women's day started by the "Empty Pots March" carried out in New York on the 8th of March 1857 by female workers of spinning and weaving demanding women's equality and improvement of working conditions, as well as protesting against the inhuman conditions in which they were forced to work. Despite the brutal intervention of the police to disperse the protesters, the march succeeded to push the political elite to consider the working women issue in their agenda; two years after that protest march, the first female trade union was established for the female workers in the textile industry.

On the 8th of March, 1908, thousands of textile workers returned to protest again at the streets of New York, but this time, they carried dry pieces of bread and bouquets of roses in a significance symbolic move,

taking a slogan for their march "bread and roses". Their march demanded lowering working hours, stopping child labor, and granting women the right to vote in elections. In 1977, the United Nations issued a resolution calling upon all states to adopt a day of the year to celebrate women; most countries choose the eighth of March which became a symbol of women's struggle on which women across the world carry out demonstrations demanding their rights.

WOMEN STATUS IN THE JORDANIAN LABOR MARKET:

Through a quick reading of a number of the basic indicators related to the women economic status, especially in the labor market, we fail, for the fourth consecutive year, to notice any significant improvements of women status in this field, which indicates that the efforts made earlier and

which are still being made in order to increase the integration of women in the Jordanian economic life were not effective, and are still below expectations; these efforts and programs, at best, contributed to the creation and spreading of a word of solidarity with women to realize their economic rights, but never contributed to increase their economic participation and, consequently, increase their share in the various aspects of the development sectors.

Official figures still show that the revised average of economic participation of the Jordanian women by the end of 2012 (female work force in relation to the number of female population of 15 years old and older) is still too low reaching 14.1%, compared with 60.6% among the males; this percentage not only remained constant for many years but retreated since 2012 when it reached 14.9% which is too low, however, if compared

with figures of other Arab countries and countries of the third world, where women participation is close to 30%, and with that of the advanced countries where it reaches 50%. Accordingly, we can figure out that the efforts made to increase women participation in the economic life are inefficient. It may be useful here to point out that Jordan was placed last among 139 countries in the women economic participation indicator according to the Global Competitiveness Index for 2010.

In addition, the most recent figures released by the Social Security Corporation covering the year 2012 point that the percentage of registered women in the social security system reach approximately 25% of the total registered workers. In addition, Unemployment rates are still higher among the Jordanian women than men, which reached 19.9% against 10.8% among men by the end of 2012, marking an increase than the percentage of 18.3 by the end of 2011, and exceeding the world female unemployment rate of 6.4 by the end of 2012.

Moreover, the vast majority of working women in Jordan (95%) are contained in three economic sectors out of thirteen; these three sectors are the public management, education, health and social work accommodating 95% of the working women.

We, at "Labor Watch Jordan" consider that the lack of tangible progress in the women economic role leading to increase their participation in the development efforts is mainly due to the repellent (unfriendly) working conditions prevalent in the Jordanian labor market; affecting both men and women; taking into consideration that women are more subjected to violations of their basic rights than men.

Wage rates in Jordan are still too low; according to indicators released by the Jordanian Department of Statistics, the average monthly salary of workers in the public sector reached JD (412), and in the private sector JD (338) with a gap of JD (63) and (69) respectively in favor of males.

Furthermore, many labor and human rights reports point that women working in the private sector are subjected to many violations and abuses in breach of the provisions of the Jordanian Labor Law. Many of them work for longer daily hours than eight, and are deprived of any form of social

protection or social security; many of them as well, receive wages which are far below the minimum wage rate and do not enjoy job stability or any of the other decent work benefits.

Given the fact that women in Jordan make up 51% of the undergraduate students in the various universities according to the figures of 2012, the weak role of women in the Jordanian economic life may be considered one of the fundamental problems facing the national economy, as it, on the one hand, prevents large energies to participate in building up and developing the national economy, and on the other hand, increases the rate of dependency in the Jordanian society, whereby each citizen supports four others, which is one of the highest dependency rates in the world.

Moreover, there is a set of other factors which contribute to lowering the rate of women participation in the economic life. On the one hand, there is the indecent working conditions suffered by the Jordanian labor market in general, and especially in the private sector medium and small size establishments, as well as the informal sector representing an unfriendly and repellent atmosphere for women interested to work, and never encourage them to join or continue working. On the other hand, women face disproportionate challenges with men in the labor market which affect negatively their entrance to the labor market. They are never given equal opportunity to hold senior positions, promotions and access to training opportunities inside and outside Jordan. In conclusion, it is required that working conditions in Jordan are generally to be improved, and especially for women to make it more attractive; in addition to reconsidering the various strategies and programs adopted by both the concerned Government institutions and the civil society organizations aiming to strengthen the role of women in economic life and the labor market, not only for the sake of regulating and protecting the women's rights, but also to ensure the realization of these rights.

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