

**POSITION PAPER**

ON THE OCCASION OF INTERNATIONAL  
WOMEN'S DAY - 8 MARCH

**BUILDING A MORE EMPOWERING WORKING  
ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN IN JORDAN**



POSITION PAPER

**PREPARED BY:**

JORDAN LABOR WATCH / / PHENIX CENTER  
FOR ECONOMIC AND INFORMATICS STUDIES

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لدراسات الاقتصادية والمعلوماتية  
ECONOMIC & INFORMATICS STUDIES

### Studies Informatics and Economic for Center Phenix

The Phenix Center for Economic & Informatics Studies is a non-governmental organization dedicated to independent policy research and measuring public opinions on impactful current and emerging issues in areas of economics, society, and its legislative environment in Jordan. The Center was founded in Amman, Jordan in 2003 under the registration number 142203. It works to promote a sustainable developmental paradigm in Jordan, rooted in human rights and the principles of democratic governance by focusing on reforming the labor policies, lifting of restrictions on freedom of association, and strengthening of social protection policies. The Center specializes in promoting inclusivity in development processes. It compiles databases of relevant actors and stakeholders, develops research, studies, papers and reports, conducts conferences and advocacy campaigns, and empowers several actors to take part in steering development through capacity building.

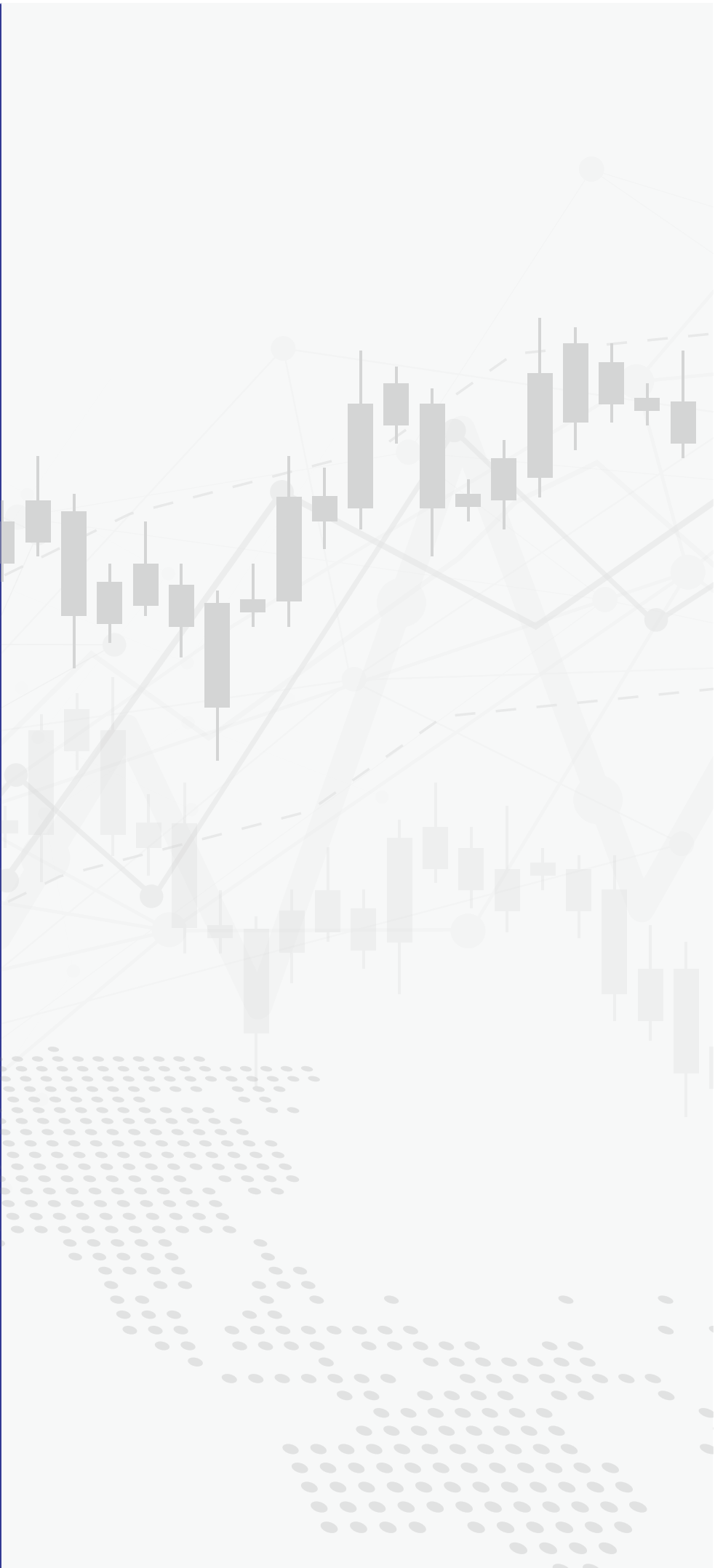
### Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Is a German non-profit political foundation based on the principles of social democracy. FES was founded in 1925, it promotes international cooperation, education and research in Germany and abroad. The foundation opened its office in Amman in 1986 to support and enhance efforts of civil society organizations to become accepted partners of public bodies, enhancing further political dialogue between decision-makers from Jordan, Iraq, Germany and the region, and strengthening the participation of youth in the political process.

### Jordan Labor Watch

Jordan Labor Watch contributes to improving work conditions for all workers in Jordan in accordance with international labor standards. This is done through developing studies and reports covering various aspects of labor issues related to workers, uncovering violations and abuses to which workers are exposed in the work place. The program provides a comprehensive database covering various indicators related to the labor market, trade unions, labor organizations, laws and regulations, as well as governing performance. Furthermore, the program strives to present alternative policies that tackle challenges facing the Arabian and Jordanian labor market as well as conducting training programs that support upgrading skills and capabilities of advocates in the labor movement.

Disclaimer: Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung are not responsible for the statements of workers and union officials cited in this report.



# INTRODUCTION:



Jordan has become the fifth in the Middle East in terms of classification of gender gaps.

This year, the world celebrates the occasion of International Women’s Day under the theme “Gender Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow.” This celebration comes two years after the onset of the Coronavirus Pandemic, during which women and other vulnerable groups disproportionately paid the price of the health crisis and its socioeconomic effects, which are continuing today.

In 2021, Jordan advanced seven ranks in the global classification of gender gaps, becoming 131st out of 156 countries in the world and fifth in the Middle East<sup>1</sup>. Despite this, women were the first to have to give up their jobs during the pandemic, largely due to social norms which impose the majority of household responsibilities and care services onto women, while considering women as having less need for work than men. As the re-entry into the labor market is more difficult for women than their male counterparts, women continue to suffer from high unemployment rates, which reached 30.8% in the third quarter of 2021<sup>2</sup>.

At a time when social protection networks weakened and economic conditions deteriorated, it became clear that most of the measures taken to limit the effects of the pandemic did not take into account gender differences, as most of these measures -which Jordanian women had no role in designing- negatively affected the economic situation of women. Women, who were in a weak position prior to the pandemic, became even more vulnerable.

This year on the Occasion of International Women's Day, Jordan Labor Watch and the Phenix Center for Economic Studies, in Cooperation with the German Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, are issuing a position paper exploring the economic reality of women and the challenges they face, both within policy and practice, which limit their effective participation in the labor market. The following is a brief summary of the most prominent economic challenges which Jordanian women have faced during the past year:

1. The average economic participation of women within the Middle East / North Africa region is 31%, with seven countries (Jordan, Egypt, Algeria, Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen) having a participation rate of less than 20%<sup>3</sup>. These represent the lowest levels in the world, which has an average female labor force participation rate of 47.9%.<sup>4</sup>
2. After the unusual economic conditions imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic, Jordan's unemployment rate in general amongst both males and females decreased during the past year. The unemployment rate for males during the third quarter of 2021 reached 21.2%, compared to 30.8% for females. It is clear that the rates. Furthermore, it is clear that the male rate during the third quarter remained stable,

while the female rate decreased by 2.8% relative to the third quarter of 2020. The adjusted economic participation rate for females also decreased from 14.9% in 2020 to 14.5% in the third quarter of 2021,<sup>5</sup> indicating that women who withdrew from the labor market during the Corona period did not return, unlike their male counterparts. The scarcity of job opportunities and the narrowing of options for women, in conjunction with weak representation of women in trade unions, weak inclusion within social protection structures, and a policy environment which is insensitive to gender justice, has led to the so-called "feminization of poverty." According to Jordan's Department of Statistics, the percentage of female-headed households reached approximately 14% in December 2019<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Global Gender Gap Report, World economic forum, 2021, [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2021.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> World Bank, Jordan Improving Women Economic Opportunities, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/429441581525262376/pdf/Jordan-Improving-Women-Economic-Opportunities-Select-Entry-Points-for-Policy-Dialogue-and-Operational-Interventions.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Department of General Statistics, Third Quarterly Report of Unemployment in Jordan 2021 //dos.gov.jo/dos\_home\_a/main/archive/unemp/2021/Emp\_Q32021.pdf \

<sup>6</sup> Department of Statistics, Statistical Tables, 2019.

3. The International Labor Organization estimates that by increasing the female labor force participation rate by only 25%, annual GDP growth will increase by 1%<sup>7</sup>. Enabling women to attain paid work will reduce poverty and expand the middle class through providing households with additional income sources and greater economic empowerment<sup>8</sup>.
4. Women face a number several of obstacles and restrictions that lead to inequality in the workplace, including both social and legislative barriers which prevent women's effective economic participation. This includes social customs, lack of job opportunities, lack of childcare support for working mothers, and discriminatory laws and policies which lack gender mainstreaming. As a result, women may turn to the informal sector, which offers greater flexibility in working from home, but excludes social protection benefits. Other women may leave the labor force altogether, as happened during the pandemic.
5. Following the coronavirus pandemic, the rise in remote working has meant that the home has become a place to work in addition to a place to live. Because burdens of caring for children and the elderly falls disproportionately on women, many women are restricted to part-time jobs with low wages. Temporary and informal work may encourage labor force participation, but does not necessarily lead to better quality, higher paying jobs<sup>9</sup>. As such, all obstacles that women face when setting up self-employment projects must be eliminated, the work-from-home sector should be supported and organized in partnership with the private sector, and the procedures for registering and licensing home-based businesses should be streamlined in order to facilitate formalization<sup>10</sup>.
6. Providing quality jobs which are stable, decent, secure, and productive, is critical from a gender equality perspective, as women are more likely than men to engage in informal, part-time, low-paid, and low-productivity jobs. Women tend to run businesses in less productive sectors, and are more likely to work in temporary positions with less potential for career advancement.
7. The gender wage gap in Jordan is widening, standing at 13.6% in the public sector and 14.2% in the private sector. Furthermore, this gap tends to be even higher in sectors in which women are concentrated, such as the health sector (31.8%) and the private education sector (30.2%)<sup>11</sup>. Additionally, while half of all female workers are classified as specialists (163,328 workers), they receive wages less than that of specialized men, with a gap of approximately 19.1%<sup>12</sup>. In face of these unfair circumstances, women withdraw or are reluctant to enter the labor market.

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<sup>7</sup> ILO, How much would the economy grow by closing the gender gap?, [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/multimedia/maps-and-charts/enhanced/WCMS\\_556526/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/multimedia/maps-and-charts/enhanced/WCMS_556526/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>8</sup> World Bank, Jordan Improving Women Economic Opportunities, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/429441581525262376/pdf/Jordan-Improving-Women-Economic-Opportunities-Select-Entry-Points-for-Policy-Dialogue-and-Operational-Interventions.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> World Bank, Women in the Changing World of Work: What is needed is not just more jobs for women, but better quality jobs <https://bit.ly/3MdNEK5>

<sup>10</sup> Phenix Center for Studies, a panel discussion entitled Women Working from Home: Business for Women during the Corona Pandemic, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/PhenixCenter/videos/3138488233090383>

<sup>11</sup> Jordanian Commission for Pay Equity, 2018

<sup>12</sup> Department of General Statistics. Statistical data on wages, job title and gender, 2018

8. The economic participation gap between men and women is also influenced by the disproportionate gender representation in certain university specializations and majors, with more women choosing education and health majors than men. Due to the lack of professional and career guidance for young people by the Ministries of Education and Labor, women continue to select over-saturated specializations within the labor market, contributing to cycles of unemployment.
9. Lack of progress towards increasing women's economic participation in Jordan is largely due to the exclusionary and unfriendly conditions experienced by the majority most workers in Jordan, both men and women, in particular low wage levels. Women are more likely than men to be exposed to violations of their basic rights due to the fact that women work predominantly within the informal economy. Additionally, both male and female workers face challenges securing affordable and safe transportation to and from their place of work, with the weakness of public transportation networks consuming a large portion of both wages and time, with many workers spending long periods transporting to and from work each day. However, while these challenges affect both men and women, women's experience engaging in public transportation differs from that of men, particularly in regard to safety and personal protection, as well as difficulty in accessing the public transportation network. This can be directly translated into the reality of women's engagement in the labor market, as 80% of women indicated that transportation is an issue interconnected with their economic participation. Furthermore, 47% of the women surveyed have turned down job opportunities due to the current state of the public transportation system, highlighting the prevalence of sexual harassment on public transit as well as inability to afford the high costs of safe transportation, and the need to use more than one form of transit to reach the workplace<sup>13</sup>. These generate push factors for women's engagement within the labor market.
10. Female inspectors constitute only 20% of the total labor inspection force, and there are no gender-based labor inspection programs which specifically take into account the forms of violence and discrimination that women often face within the labor market<sup>14</sup>. According to a study conducted last year, the majority of legal violations of the labor rights of women were reflected in their failure to be included in social protection schemes, with non-participation in health insurance at a rate of 50.5%, non-participation in social security at a rate of 36.3%, and exclusion from the Provident Fund and Housing Loans, which is a right of all workers, at a rate of 26.3%<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Gender in Public Transportation: A perspective of women users of public transportation; Sadaqa and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, October 2018. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/amman/15221.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Phenix Center for Economic Studies, Structural Imbalances in the Structure of the Jordanian Labor Inspectors System, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Phenix Center for Economic Studies, Women's safety in the work environment, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3MjrOvv>

11. Some individuals, both men and women, continue to deny the phenomenon of harassment in the workplace, claiming that focusing on such challenges is exaggerative and tarnishes the reputation of Jordanian society. However, research on women's economic participation shows that harassment is a real challenge in Jordan. Furthermore, public discussion of this phenomenon may encourage women to report cases of workplace harassment against them. As sexual harassment in the workplace continues to be a major obstacle to women's access to job opportunities, open discussion of the phenomenon can break the social taboos that have weakened women's ability to participate in public life.
12. Jordan has not yet ratified the International Labour Organization's Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190) and Recommendation No. 206. Furthermore, Article 29 of the Labor Law, which deals with cases of harassment of abuse, only protects employees from abuse perpetuated by the employer despite the fact that sexual harassment can also be perpetuated by colleagues or clients. A recent study<sup>16</sup> has shown that "37% of violence experienced by working women (including sexual harassment) is perpetuated by clients or customers, and 13% is perpetuated by coworkers." The Labor Law does not explicitly include provisions on combating harassment in the workplace, even though a recent nationwide study shows that 42.3% of workers experience or have experienced a form of harassment within the workplace<sup>17</sup>.
13. Women in Jordan are prohibited from being employed in several sectors by law, under the pretext of protecting them from danger. Additionally, employers are prohibited from hiring women in jobs that require them to work the night shift (between 10:00 PM and 6:00 AM) with a few exceptions, such as work in hospitals and hotels. In reality, this law does not protect women but instead places restrictions on their ability to participate in the labor market. As such, Article 69 of the Labor Law must be amended to remove these restrictions and provide alternative protections for both men and women who work in hazardous sectors and/or work the night shift. Additionally, Article 72 of the Labour Law creates provisions for childcare facilities for companies, yet the majority of companies are in violation of this article and do not provide childcare facilities to its employees.

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<sup>16</sup> The previous reference

<sup>17</sup> The Jordanian National Committee for Women's Affairs, a study of the phenomenon of harassment in Jordan, Amman, 2017 <https://women.jo/ar/node/7291>



14. Despite demands to amend Article 70 of the Labor Law in favor of increasing maternity leave in the private sector to 90 days instead of 70 days, which is the law for the public sector, the disparity in maternity leave between the private and public sector remains. These unjust policies are one factor impacting women's tendency to choose to work in the public sector instead of the private sector.
15. Agricultural Workers Bylaw No. 19 of 2021, which was promulgated in May 2021, is not yet being enforced. Thus, in practice, the agricultural sector is not being covered by the social protection system provided by the Social Security Corporation. The Minister of Labor has announced that the amended Social Security Law allows agricultural landlords to only cover their workers for workplace injury insurance until 2024. Because women are more likely to work in informal sectors, such as agriculture, they are the ones most exposed to these right violations<sup>18</sup>.
16. Women with disabilities face intersecting challenges in the Jordanian labor market. Many employers use discriminatory hiring practices to avoid employing workers with disabilities. Many women with disabilities in Jordan suffer from challenging working conditions, such as low wage rates, lack of job security, having their skills be undermined, and a lack of accessible infrastructure within the workplace. Women with disabilities should be granted more support and empowerment to become entrepreneurs and take on new income-generating initiatives. National economic policies should prioritize the development of women's economic participation as an added value, rather than viewing it as an economic burden.
17. To achieve the objective of improving women's economic participation in Jordan by allowing them to establish enterprises and generate income, some financial institutions provide gender-specific loans to women. However, several small financial institutions provide these loans for personal and consumption purposes, rather than productive purposes. Instead of lifting women from poverty, predatory loans have drowned them in debt. Many women have been imprisoned because of their failure to pay off their loans. As such, many financial institutions lost confidence in the ability of women to repay loans, which made them require guarantors. As such, additional restrictions have been imposed on women's ability to obtain credit.

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<sup>18</sup> Kotkot, Murad, Jordan labor watch, experts: Postponing the inclusion of agricultural workers in the rest of the social security insurances is a derogation of their rights, 2022, <http://labor-watch.net/ar/read-news/152940>

# RECOMMENDATIONS:

The current situation requires exceptional practices that can facilitate the creation of a safer workplace environment for women, especially considering that women are more vulnerable to the effects of economic, social, and health crises. Therefore, this paper presents a number of recommendations that would enhance women's economic participation and protection:

1. Reconsidering the economic policies that have been applied during the past decades and creating more progressive tax policies to motivate various economic sectors to overcome the repercussions of the Coronavirus pandemic and create decent work opportunities.
2. Enhancing domestic consumer demand by increasing wage levels, which would promote economic growth more effectively.
3. Various strategies and programmes aimed at strengthening the role of women in the labor market set by governmental institutions and/or civil society organizations, with a focus towards implementation and enforcement of existing protections for women's economic rights.
4. Improving work conditions in Jordan in general and for women in particular, both at a policy level and on the ground. This will enable workers in Jordan to enjoy their essential labor rights in line with decent work principles.
5. Organizing and supporting women's work from home by creating a comprehensive entity that would be tasked with regulating at-home businesses established by women, that would also provide them with support and training opportunities in order to stimulate their economic participation.
6. Amending labor and social security laws to improve working conditions and strengthen and expand the social protection framework in Jordan.
7. Abolishing all forms of discrimination in labor legislation and policies, which have created gaps between the public and private sectors. This will make work within the private sector becomes more attractive to workers, especially women.
8. Enforcing existing labor laws through labor inspectors and adopting more effective policies in inspection mechanisms based on gender justice considerations.
9. Conducting a periodic review of labor-related legislation and laws to ensure their sensitivity to gender.
10. Provide adequate protection for female workers under Article 29 of the Labor Law to prevent various forms of violence and harassment in the workplace.
11. Amending Article 69 of the Labor Law, granting women full freedom and equality in economic opportunities, while creating protections for both male and female workers who work during the night shift.

12. Amending Article 70 of the Labor Law, increasing maternity leave in the private sector to 90 days instead of 70 days, and increasing paternity leave in both the private and public sector.
13. Amending Article 45 of the Labor Law, obligating the employer to apply the principle of equal pay without discrimination between male and female workers for all work of equal value.
14. The government should ratify all ILO conventions, especially those that comprise basic rights and principles at work and decent work, in addition to ILO Convention No. 190 on violence and harassment in the workplace.
15. Enforce the Bylaw for Agricultural Workers without delay.
16. Strengthening the public transport system and means of transportation so that it meets the needs of women to go to their places of work easily and safely, and the financing of the cost of the public transport system must be reconsidered so that it is commensurate with the wages of female workers, which are mostly less than the minimum wage.
17. Prepare a general code of conduct that contains clear definitions of occupational violence against women, its forms, and penalties for perpetrators, which inclusive of cyber sexual harassment.
18. Increasing interest in addressing women's issues related to working in the media, addressing their issues in greater depth.
19. Establishing partnerships between civil society organizations and women's rights activists to gain access to some workplaces for female workers, especially in the informal sector.



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