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The Jordanian National Commission for Women



# Activating Women Participation in the Labor Market

## Policy Brief



2014

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# **Activating Women Participation in the Labor Market**

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## Executive Summary

Despite the remarkable government investment in the health and education sectors, and the great efforts made in the field of legislation and policies supporting the economic participation of women, the rates of women's economic participation (women work force related to the population of women who are aged 15 years and above) remained low during the last decade. It even declined significantly during 2013.

Also, women's participation in the labor force stayed the lowest among many countries and even Arab countries. Internationally, Jordan was ranked 139 among 142 countries. This has raised concerns at the Higher Population Council-Jordan, the Jordanian National Commission for Women and other relevant organizations. This comes in light of expectations of rising numbers of women who are at the age of work and also at a time when Jordan is preparing to enter the demographic opportunity.

This policy brief suggests three alternatives to policies addressing obstacles hindering women participation in the labor market. These are: (1) expansion in patterns of flexible work; (2) expansion in a women friendly work environment; and (3) activation of the positive role played by religious, educational and media institutions in relation to women's work and gender equality.

The first alternative, i.e. expansion in patterns of flexible work (part-time work, work from home, and flexible working hours) was selected as the top priority. This alternative was chosen on the basis that it deals with most obstacles hindering women's participation in the labor market. Adopting this alternative can facilitate the activation of the third alternative concerned with spreading awareness about women's participation in the labor market.

The National Employment Strategy for the years 2011-2020 and the National Strategy for Jordanian Women for the years 2013-2017 support the first alternative.

It is worth mentioning here that most European countries have adopted this policy towards activating the participation of women in labor market. Moreover, some Arab Gulf countries are working in this direction.

Adopting this alternative requires the formation of a National Committee by the H.E the Prime Minister representing all concerned public and private sectors together with NGOs.

The task of such Committee would be to develop schemes and mechanisms of flexible work to be implemented in the Kingdom as part of a strategic plan for this purpose.

## Introduction

This policy brief comes as a response to the requirements imposed by the current situation in Jordan. It comes as the country is entering a demographic transition bringing a demographic opportunity in the form of a big population increase within the work age population (individuals aged 15-64).

This happens as a result of the change in the age structure of the population due to the expected decline in the rates of fertility.

This age group of the population is the major provider of the work force for which the economy should prepare an appropriate climate of policies in order to benefit from this increase in pushing economic growth so that this increase in the work force does not turn into a burden in the form of rising unemployment rates with possible consequences on the political, socio-economic stability.

Despite the fact that women make up half of the Jordanian society and half of its productive capacity (49.4% out of total manpower), it is noted that 86.8% of this capacity is unemployed<sup>1</sup>.

This would lead, if it continues, to negative impact in the productive capacity of the Jordanian economy and delay in the development efforts with distortions of its tracks and outcomes. The most salient indicator of this is the decline in the revenue of investment in the education of women on the family and society.

A study conducted by the International Monetary Fund IMF<sup>2</sup> indicated that when women are able to develop their full potential in the labor market, it will be possible to achieve big macroeconomic gains. In addition, raising the percentage of women participating in the work force to levels equal to men's participation would increase the Gross Domestic Product GDP in a country like Egypt by 34%.

On the other hand, empowering women economically would render them an independent income, which would positively impact their social status in their family and society. This in turn would enhance their contribution to the well-being of the family and make them less dependent on others. Therefore, woman's participation in the society and their role in the decision making process would be enhanced whether inside or outside the house<sup>3</sup>. What adds to the importance of dealing with the weakness of women's participation in the economic activity is the fact that the Jordanian women are heads of 12.9% of Jordanian households<sup>4</sup>.

This requires developing effective policies aiming at increasing the participation of women in the labor market to ensure a better investment in the population opportunity, and thus would lead to higher rates of people who are economically active and that is the prime purpose of this brief.

This brief was prepared by Higher Population Council in cooperation with the Jordanian National Commission for Women, Ministry of Labor, Social Security Corporation, Department of Statistics, Family Development Association, and the United Nations Population Fund. This brief presents an analysis of the situation of women's economic participation and the obstacles that face women in the labor market. It also provides policies to deal and solve such challenges.



## The Current Situation of Women Economic Participation

### Decline in the Rate of Women's Economic Participation:

The rate of women's participation in the economy (women's work force in relation to number of women population aged 15 and above) stayed low during the last decade. It reached from 14.7% to 14.1% during the period 2007–2012. Not only this, but it decreased noticeably in the year 2013 and reached 13.2% as shown in the table. This is considered an indicator of the ineffectiveness of the efforts made to increase the participation of women in the economic life.

### Increase of the Gender gap of Economic Participation of Women Compared to Men:

Despite the significant improvement estimated as 5% compared with the years 2007 and 2013 as shown in the table below. An analytical study showed that the gender gap costs in the labor market<sup>5</sup> caused losses in the individual's share of the of the GDP. This loss was estimated at a rate of 27% in the MENA region.

1. Department of Statistics: Employment and Unemployment Survey, 2013.

2. International Monetary Fund (IMF), Strategy and Policy Management and Review, Management of Public Financial Affairs, Women, Work and the Economy, gains of the Macro Economy and Equality between the Sexes, 2013.

3. The Jordanian National Commission for Women: (Second National Report), The Progress of Jordanian Women towards Prevention, Protection, and Empowerment in legal, economic, social and cultural fields, 2012-2013.

4. Department of Statistics. Population and Family Health Survey, 2012

5. Marc Teignier and David Cuberes, Aggregate Costs of Gender Gaps in the Labor Market: A Quantitative Estimate, Universitat de Barcelona, 2014

### The Decrease of Jordan's Position in the Global Ranking in relation to Women's Participation in Work Force:

The rate of women's participation in the work force (women's work force related to total work force) was 18.16% in the year 2011. It appears as the lowest compared to country groups in the world according to the latest Human Development Report<sup>6</sup>. The general average of world's women's participation in the labor force in the year 2011 was 51.3%, in Arab countries 22.8%, in east Asia 65.2%, and in south Asia 31.3%. According to the World Economic Forum: Global gender gap report 2014<sup>7</sup>, Jordan occupied number 139 out of 142 countries on the Index of women's participation in the work force.

### Decrease of the percentage of working women out of the total number of women at work age;

this percentage ranged from 10.3% to 11.6% in the period of 2007-2013 as shown in the mentioned table.

### Increase of young women's unemployment:

The percentage of unemployed women among the age group 20-24 reached 44.8% out of the total percentage of unemployed women.

### Working women are concentrated in the age group 30-39 with a percentage of 40.2%<sup>8</sup>.

### Working women are exceeding working men in terms of post-secondary/ higher education:

As shown in Figure 1, the percentage of working women with a Bachelor degree and above was 56.7% as compared to 20.8% of working men. On the other hand, the percentage of working women with an intermediate diploma was 21.9 % as compared to 8.7% at working men with the same qualification.

**Table: Indicators of Jordanian Women's Economic Participation for the period ( 2007 - 2013 )**

	2007	2009	2011	2013
Average of revised female's economic participation rate %	14.7	14.9	14.7	13.2
Gender gap of economic participation%	49.7	49.9	48.1	47.2
Average of female's participation rate in the work force%	18.3	18.4	18.6	17.5
Average of female's (age 15 and above) unemployment rate%	25.6	24.4	21.2	22.2
Average of women's (15-24) unemployment rate %	47.8	45.9	47	55
Percentage of working women (age 15 and above) to total population%	10.9	11.3	11.6	10.3
Percentage of economically inactive women to total population (age 15 and above)%	85.3	85.1	85.3	86.8

Department of Statistics: Employment and Unemployment Survey ( 2007 - 2013 )

6.UNDP Human Development Report. Renaissance of the South: Human Development in A Diversified World: 2013.

7.World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2014

8.Department of Statistics: Employment and Unemployment Survey, 2013.

**Increase in the rate of unemployed women as the level of education increases:**

The percentage of unemployed women with a Bachelor degree and above reached 72.2% whereas the percentage of unemployed women with an intermediate diploma was 19.5% while the percentage of unemployed women with a secondary education certificate qualification and below was 8.3%<sup>8</sup>.

**Economically inactive women are concentrated as housekeepers (78.4%):**

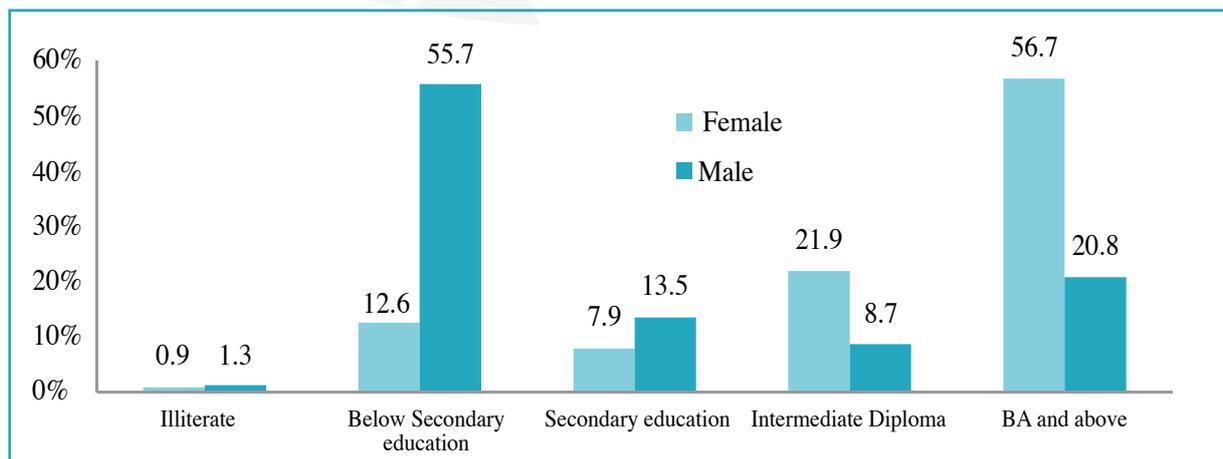
A percentage of 19.5% are students, 0.4% have income, 1.7% unable to work (handicapped). The level

of education for 54.8% of housekeepers is found to be less than secondary education certificate<sup>8</sup>.

**41.9% of inactive women attributed the reason for their status of not seeking jobs was due to “no hope of finding a job opportunity.”**

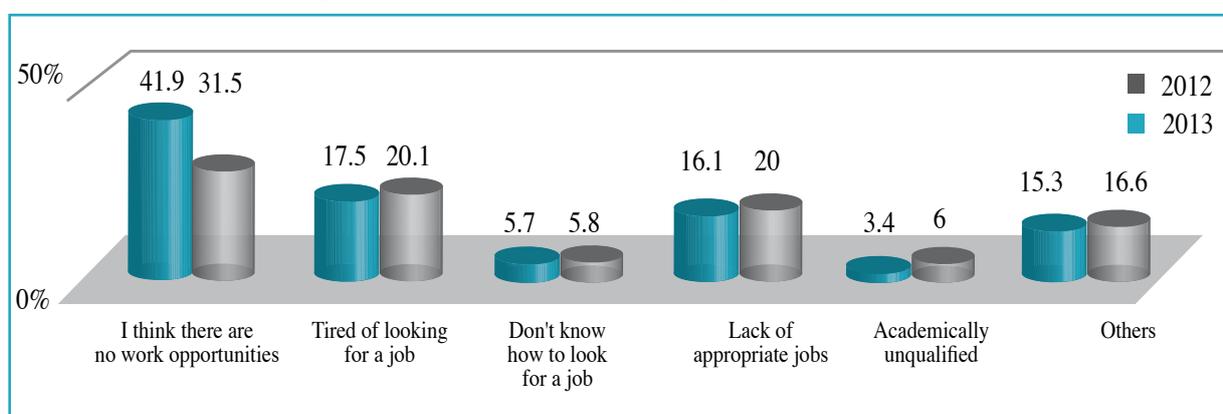
16.1% of inactive women blamed “lack of appropriate jobs.” Another 17.5% of inactive women said that “getting tired of searching for jobs” was the reason for not seeking jobs as shown in Figure (2).

**Figure (1): Proportionate Distribution of working Jordanians of the age 15 and above according to sex and educational level**



Department of Statistics: Employment and Unemployment Survey. ( 2013 ).

**Figure (2): Distribution of Jordanian economically inactive women of the age group 15 and above according to reasons for not seeking a job in the years ( 2012, 2013 ).**



Department of Statistics: Employment and Unemployment Survey. ( 2013 ).

8.Department of Statistics: Employment and Unemployment Survey. 2013.

## Limitations of Women Participation in the Labor Market:

The continuing rise in unemployment levels has frustrated Jordanian women and caused them to withdraw from the work force. Among the most common indicators for this are:

- The periods of economic recovery in Jordan did not reflect positively on the work force. On the contrary, these periods were associated with unemployment. 42.2% of newly created job opportunities through the period 2004-2008 went to non-Jordanian work force<sup>9</sup>.
- Levels of unemployment among women aged 15 and above continued to increase. The percentage was 22.2% in 2013 as shown in the above mentioned table. This percentage exceeded 20% during the period 2007-2013.

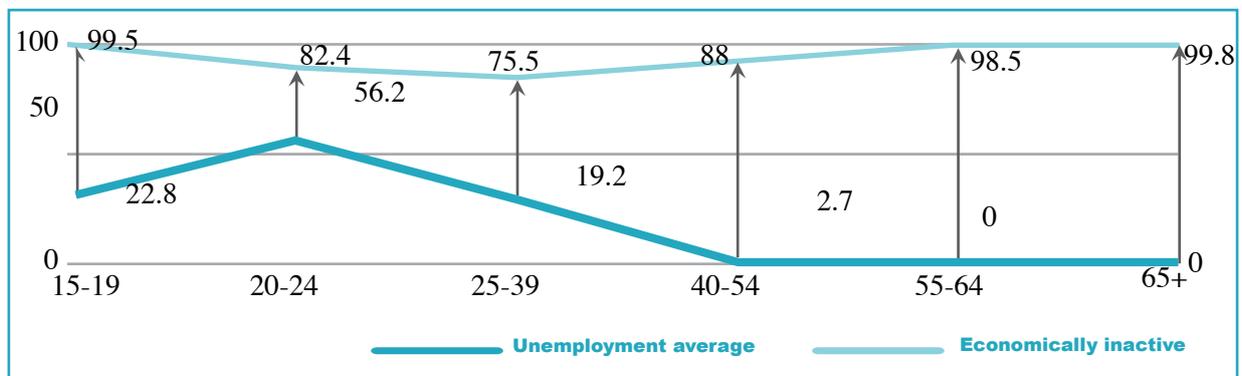
due to the fact that employers prefer men for work rather than women.

- The low averages of unemployment according to age groups are accompanied by a rise in the averages of economically inactive women as shown in Figure (3).

### Jobs for working women are restricted to sectors of low growth and productivity:

Working women in Jordan are concentrated in very limited sectors such as education 41.7%, health and social services 14.6% and public administration and compulsory social security 14.1% out of the total number of working women according to Employment and Unemployment Survey (2013). A study by the

**Figure (3): Unemployment rates and averages of Jordanian economically inactive women of the age group 15 and above according to age groups**



Department of Statistics: Employment and Unemployment Survey. ( 2013 ).

- If the percentage of women frustrated from not finding a job opportunity was added to the percentage of unemployed women, the average of unemployed women would rise to 29.7% in 2013.
- The continuation of the gap in the unemployment averages between males and females indicates that the job opportunities available are not fairly distributed

World Bank<sup>10</sup> considered this as an indicator showing the overall work trends of Jordanian women that are restricted within sectors of low growth and productivity. These also indicate the existence of barriers limiting women's mobility that hinder women from moving to other sectors with higher incomes.

9.Ministry of Labor: National Strategy for Work (Employment): 2011-2020.

10.World Bank: Country Evaluation of Equality between the Sexes: A Study on Economic participation and the ability to choose and reach justice in Jordan, 2013.

### **The wage gap between men and women:**

The study entitled Men and Women<sup>11</sup> : A Statistical Picture based on Employment Survey revealed that the average monthly income of men in 2010 was 403 Jordan Dinars whereas for women it was 359 Jordan dinars. This shows that women receive a wage that is 44 Jordan dinars lower representing 12.3% of the average monthly wage. This gap in wages is more apparent in the private sector as it reached 17% between men and women whereas this gap did not exceed 11% in the public sector. A woman holding a qualification of a Bachelor's degree and above receives 58% of a man's monthly wage in the private sector and 78% in the public sector. This gap in wages between men and women and lower wages prevents women from entering the labor market.

### **Effect of Social Traditions on the Labor Market:**

Women participation in the labor force reflects an interaction between formal rules of the labor market such as laws and regulations on the one hand and social habits and traditions which does not favor women's work outside the house. These in turn creates a barrier limiting her ability to join the labor market. This is generally attributed to the prevalent traditional type of social gender that is based on three considerations:

- Centrality of the family being the major social unit instead of the individual. The man and the woman both play complementary roles in the family but these roles are not equal.
- Recognition of the man's role in the family as a financial provider and the woman's role in caring for other family matters.
- Conservative attitude posing limits on the mix between sexes.

Although some change has happened to this model such as the increase of rates of literacy among women, increase of rates of women's participation in the labor market, decrease of fertility rates, relative delay in age

of marriage, yet still the elements of this model are influencing the role of women in society. This shows that these indicators are not sufficient in changing this model. A study of women's participation in informal sector<sup>12</sup> showed that social habits and family traditions were behind the disapproval for woman's work. 56.4% of men and 31.1% of women responded that women's work is not compatible with social habits and family traditions.

### **Social Position, Motherhood, Child Care, and House Responsibilities**

A woman's obligations and responsibilities such as child care and the rising costs of facilities such as nurseries lead to a family view that the economic benefit of women's work is inefficient. This in fact creates a discouraging factor limiting chances of women wanting to join the labor force. A study on women's participation in informal sector<sup>13</sup> revealed that 25.6% of women and 15.7% of men did not favor women's work because it influences their ability to provide child care. It is true that the Labor Law in Jordan entitles working women for a ten week maternity leave paid by the employer but the reality is that employers in the private sector are evading that obligation. Employers refrain from employing married women, and when they do get jobs they are fired or encouraged to resign before giving birth. Therefore, even when women do enter the labor market, they do not stay for long.

According to the Social Security Corporation, statistics show that women stay in the labor market for an average of four years, and that 77% of women who retire do not qualify for a retirement salary. Instead, they get a lump sum benefits when they retire. However, it is expected that the Motherhood Benefits plan within the Social Security Law would motivate the private sector to increase job opportunities for women. In addition, Article (72) of the Labor Law states that: "An employer shall provide a safe place for child care in the institution in the case of twenty women workers with ten children whose ages are less than four years."

11.Department of Public Statistics: Men and Women: A Statistics Profile: Volume 2. 2012

12.Department of Statistics: Survey of Women participation in the sector of unorganized work. 2011.

13.Previous Reference

However, many organizations do not implement this law. Some employers make sure that they do not employ more than 19 women in their organizations.

### **The Gap between the Public and the Private Sectors in recruitment and benefits and the inability of the Public Sector to absorb the increasing numbers of working women.**

The National Strategy for Employment<sup>14</sup> showed significant differences between the public and private sectors that made a job in the public sector or even waiting for it for several years the logical option for Jordanian women. Working women in the public sector forming half of the working women<sup>15</sup> due to the benefits and job security in comparison with the private sector.

Because governments cannot meet the growth in labor force with new jobs in the public sector due to rising financial deficits and the attitude of governments to rely on the Private sector, unemployment of women is expected to increase. This is coupled with long waiting time for employment in the public sector leading to frustration and stopping work search.

A World Bank study<sup>16</sup> indicated that the perceptions of employers about women productivity limits to their participation in the labor market especially in small companies. The reasons these companies gave for preferring men over women were limitations of women's to perform jobs requiring muscular effort. Other reasons were that women could not stay longer at work and that women have problems with their families preventing them from work.

### **Limitations on Women's Mobility, Difficulties in Transportation, and High Costs of Transportation Limit Job Opportunities for Women:**

Women mobility is still limited, unlike men, women do not prefer to commute to reach their jobs and when they do it is only for a shorter time. A study by the World Bank has shown that the percentage of women

who commute for more than 60 minutes does not exceed 5%. This means their job locations are close to their place of living. The study indicated that 11% of women (compared to 27% of men) worked in governorates other than those in which they live. Also, one in three women (compared to 50% of men) worked in vicinity other than that in which they live in. As transportation is becoming more expensive and more difficult especially in remote areas, the problem of transportation remains a limiting factor in women's options for work. A survey of women's participation in the sector of informal work sector conducted in 2008 by the Department of Statistics in cooperation with the Jordanian National Commission for Women showed that 63.9% of married women preferred to work from home because of problems of transport. Also, 83.3% of married women preferred to work from home because of the lower running costs.

### **Difficulties Facing Jordanian Women Entering Small and Micro Businesses**

Although small and micro businesses create job opportunities for women and enable them to align their family obligations with job requirements, statistics show a low percentage of women who work as entrepreneurs or are self-employed. 1.6% women worked as entrepreneurs and 2.1% were self-employed according to the survey of Employment and Unemployment in (2013). A study of the World Bank<sup>17</sup> attributes this low percentage to difficulty in obtaining loans. This result has been corroborated in a study by the Jordanian National Commission for Women<sup>18</sup> which showed that the small size, of awarded loans, inability to choose feasible projects lack of necessary skills in project development and management, in addition to low self-esteem and lack of entrepreneurship thinking among women of which are limitations facing women entering small and micro business projects and thus increasing their economic participation.

14. Ministry of Labor: National Strategy for Work (Employment): 2011-2020.

15. Department of Statistics: Employment and Unemployment Survey, 2013.

16. World Bank: Country Evaluation of Equality between the Sexes: A Study on Economic participation and the ability to choose and reach justice in Jordan, 2013.

17. Previous Reference

18. The Jordanian National Commission for Women. Women Entrepreneurship in small and micro enterprises. 2012

### Limitations in legislations related to women's work

Although Jordanian laws addressed several issues related to women such as maternity leave, breast feeding hour, providing a suitable place for children less than four years, prohibiting the termination of jobs for women who are 6 months pregnant and above or during maternity leave, prohibiting assigning tasks that are dangerous or threatening to women's health and equal treatment of men and women, with no discrimination. Yet this was not sufficient for improving the participation of women in the economy. In reality, there are violations against these rights and there are no explicit statements in Labor Law that state equal pay for men and women. There are also unfair gaps in some of the present laws in terms of women's rights and there are no legislation that governs work from home, part-time work and flexible work<sup>19</sup>.

### Education and Type of Specialization

Jordanian women have made significant achievement in the field of education enough to challenge the view that their low participation in the work force is due to lack of knowledge and skills. However, the biggest challenge in this field is in the alignment of educational outcomes with job requirements. There is virtually no gap in the average of females' enrollment rates at all stages<sup>20</sup>. The average of girls joining basic compulsory education was 100% in 2012-2013 compared to 97.6% boys for the same category. In secondary education, the average of females for the same year was 87% compared to 74.3% for males.

Yet, there are still major gaps based on gender that influence the percentage of females entering vocational education. The percentage of female students in vocational education streams was 34% out of the total number of students entering this field in the year 2012-2013. In particular, the percentage of female students entering the Agricultural Stream was 14%, in industrial stream it was less than 2.1%, and in Hotel Catering

the percentage was 2.6% only out of the total number of students entering that field. The figures show that female students are concentrated in the vocational specializations that are favored by society such as clothes production (93.4%), whereas the percentage is 100% in child education, beauticians, and home production specialization.

Jordanian women have also achieved significantly in higher education. The percentage of female students graduating from Jordanian universities in the year 2011-2012 was 53.7% of the total number of graduate students<sup>21</sup>. Although the highest percentage of female graduates were in the fields of education, teacher preparation (73.8%) and social sciences (84.75%), female representation in other fields was still acceptable. The percentage of female in the fields of architecture and urban planning (68.8%), agriculture (62.9%), paramedical sciences (64.5%), pharmacy (66.3%), dentistry (62.6%), math and computer science (52%), natural sciences (68.6), mass media (62.8%) and social sciences (60.5%), exceeded their natural representation of women in Jordanian society.

The percentage was also 25% higher in the fields of fine arts, law, commerce, physical education, medicine, veterinary medicine, and engineering.

Therefore, Jordanian women do not lack qualifications to enter the labor market but it is the social considerations and the inability of the market to absorb the skills that women have gained, are the major barriers facing their economic participation.

19. Jordan Hashemite Fund for Human Development. Violation of Women's Right to Choose Type of Work. 2012..

20. Ministry of Education. MIS Department. Statistical form for the Academic year 2012/2013

21. Department of Statistics: Jordan Annual Statistics Book: 2012

In light of what has been said earlier, we propose alternative policies that may assist in confronting the obstacles facing women and in turn motivate women to participate in the labor market while emphasizing the importance of allocating resources to implement the National Strategy for Jordanian Women (2013-2017). These alternatives encourage the adoption of policies that take into account the gender considerations and implementing them within the national plans and government action plans and procedures.

Bearing in mind the general situation the region has been witnessing since 2011, and the influx of refugees to Jordan, has created pressure on the infrastructure and resources of the country; yet these factors should not be a barrier to women empowerment agenda within development and crisis response plans. This is to ensure that real reform which responds to the needs of all citizens and achieve sustainable development is reached.

### First Option: Expansion in patterns of non-traditional work

In light of the socio-economic conditions surrounding women's work it is essential to reconsider the labor market structure or its nature. This should be through expanding in types of flexible work (part time work, work from home, flexible working hours).

Work from home was defined by International Labor Organization (ILO)<sup>22</sup> as "work done by a person referred to as a worker from home, working from home or chosen places, other than the work place of the employer for pay leading to a product or service according to the specifications of the employer regardless of the party that provides equipment or materials or other used inputs."

ILO also defined part time worker<sup>23</sup> as: "an employed person whose normal working hours are less than the normal working hours of similar full time workers." On the other hand, flexible working hour system was defined as follows<sup>24</sup>: "a system that allows individuals to choose their working times outside the traditional concept of working."

Types of flexible work allow a degree of flexibility that is compatible with a woman's circumstances and her roles in family<sup>25</sup>. This will encourage increased participation in the work force. Women could work at home in jobs like preparation and design of software, design and development of websites, preparation of architectural drawings, financial and accounting tasks, data entry and analysis, consultancy jobs and research work.

The National Strategy for Employment suggested a revision of laws and regulations that influence the availability of suitable jobs for women. It also suggested providing flexible work and part time jobs<sup>26</sup>. Also, the National Strategy for Women (2013-2017) called for the endorsement of flexible working hours<sup>27</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that many countries have adopted this solution. Holland has become the leading example of European countries in adopting part time work. Part time working women constituted nearly 75% of the total working women in 2009<sup>28</sup>. In the next place come countries like Germany, Australia, Britain, and Sweden.

The United States is the first country which has laws and regulations for distance work. Women working from home constituted 15% of the total number of working women in 2004<sup>29</sup>. This option is seen as a solution to the problem of aligning women's work with their social life.

22.[http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C177](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_ILO_CODE:C177)

23.[http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C175](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C175)

24.Ghanem et al. The desire of workers to benefit from flexible working hours.2010

25.Executive office of the president of the United State, Work-life balance and the economics of workplace flexibility, March 2010

26.Ministry of Labor: National Strategy for Work (Employment): 2011-2020.

27.The Jordanian National Commission for Women: national Strategy for Jordanian Women. 2013-2017. General Trends: 2013.

28.<http://www.cbs.nl/en-GB/menu/themas/arbeid-sociale-zekerheid/publicaties/artikelen/archief/2009/2009-2821-wm.htm>

29.<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/homeyr.nr0.htm>.

### Advantages of this Alternative:

- This option allows high flexibility in terms of time of work or place of work at home. For example, working from home and sending the work through electronic means enables women to follow up with family matters and work at the same time.
- This option solves unemployment among women. It motivates a sector of economically inactive women to enter the labor market.
- This option contributes to the solution of traffic jams, air pollution and Fuel use.
- This option opens new work fields and encourages creativity. A woman could work part time or flexible hours and this enables her to enter the world of entrepreneurship and free self-employment. This will lead to more mobility and efficiency in developing small and medium enterprises. In turn, this will contribute positively to the overall national economy<sup>30</sup>.
- This option reduces costs of transport and reduces loss of time and effort or child care costs. It also reduces the costs of the employers in terms of saving in office space, electricity, and transportation.
- This option reduces the probability of women leaving the labor market upon marriage due to the flexibility of work.
- This option increases productivity and reduces work stress.

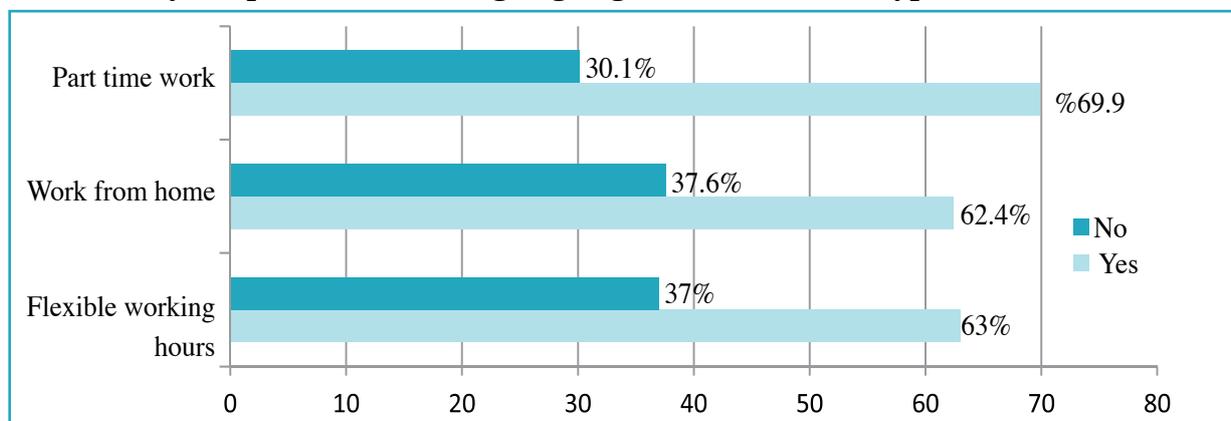
### Limitations of this option:

- This option requires change in social thinking. It may not work in all specializations or sectors. Therefore, detailed studies and new or creative ideas are needed such as establishing work incubator companies to act as mediators between working women and employers.
- This option does not provide social security benefits and some women may not like to work under this kind of model.
- This option may find resistance from some vocational establishments who are used to having women workers at the worksite.
- Weak relationships, lack of direct practical and intellectual contact and competition in performance and productivity among working team<sup>31</sup>.

### Field testing of this alternative:

A study by the Higher Population Council of a sample of women who withdrew from the labor market, based on data from Social Security Corporation and in response to a question (If you had a choice among flexible work types, would you reconsider withdrawing from the labor market?), the results showed that 69.9% of the sample said they were willing to come back to work if there were opportunities for part time work.

**Figure 4: Distribution of women withdrawing from labor market based on data from Social Security Corporation according to going back to work and types of flexible work**



HPC: Women Withdrawing from Labor Market Survey based on data from Social Security Corporation. ( 2014 )

30. <http://alroya.om/ar/citizen-gournalist/265-writers/writer021/92147-92147.htm>

31. AbdulAziz Al Zuman and others: Work from Distance Internationally and its applications in Saudi Arabia. King Saud University

Also, 62.4% of the sample said that they will go back to work if there were arrangements to work from home. In addition, 63% of the sample said they would go back to work if there were opportunities for flexible working hours.

These results show that this option contributes efficiently to the enhancement of women's participation in the labor market. It is worth mentioning here that there is a percentage of women (estimated as a third) who withdrew from work said that they will not go back to work even if opportunities for flexible work were made available.

### **Second Alternative: Expanding in providing working women-friendly environment**

Social status, motherhood, child care, house responsibilities, and the legislative environment are considered the main obstacles facing women's participation in the labor market. In addition to the rising costs of support services, lack of active participation from the man or husband in particular, and the society's view that such duties are essentially women's jobs that cannot be dispensed with.

This requires the need to provide supportive social services and bridging the legislative gaps i.e. providing an environment that is friendly to working women. In this context, there should be serious consideration to provision of nurseries and kindergartens at reasonable fees in the work place. Article (72) of the Labor Law should be amended to make it compulsory for each establishment that hires employees (regardless of their gender) to provide a nursery if there are ten children aged less than four. These services are important and emphasize that it is not enough to provide job opportunities but the working conditions and the legislative environment must also be aligned to become more conducive to women's participation.

#### **Advantages of this alternative:**

- This option has relatively quick results. Its outcome is short term and it helps the employees to maintain their job.
- This option can be presented to companies and the

private sector as an alternative if it is viewed as part of their social responsibility.

- This option helps to increase the productivity of the working woman. It helps remove many of her burdens. It will also motivate other women especially those outside the work force.
- This option provides additional job opportunities for women in such support services such as nurseries and kindergartens.
- This option reduces periods of being away from work.

#### **Limitations of this alternative:**

It is difficult to convince the private sector in many cases to provide this environment. Experience proved that the private sector tends to evade this obligation.

### **Third alternative: Activating the positive role of religious, educational, and media institutions with the aim of long term change of the prevalent culture of women's work and equality between sexes.**

It was concluded in the previous section that the prevalent social culture prescribes rigid and predetermined roles for both sexes. Therefore, this situation cannot change without a collaborative effort by religious, educational and media institutions. These institutions can play a big role in changing the social culture in relation to the role of women and women's work in addition to equality between sexes and the attitudes to technical and vocational jobs. This alternative is considered essential for the adoption of the other alternatives.

#### **Advantages of this Alternative:**

- The results of this option can reflect positively on the future generations as it increases the individual's share from the family income.
- It reinforces a woman's belief in herself and her right to be empowered for participation.
- It encourages women to consider vocational and technical education.
- This option is considered to be relatively cheap.
- This option contributes to the change in the social view to women's work and their role in society.
- This option reinforces the principle of equality between sexes.

### Limitations of this Alternative:

- Changing society culture is difficult. Therefore, this alternative should be assigned to only those who have a firm belief in it.
- This alternative requires collaboration among many institutions most important of which are education, media and religious institutions.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Reviewing the afore mentioned three policy alternatives, we realize that they are all important to increase the participation of women in the labor market. Although it is accepted that all three options are complementing each other serving the ultimate goal of enhancing the participation of women in the labor market, there are limitations in these alternatives.

For example, the second alternative is expensive in the short term. Furthermore, the third alternative is a long term but it requires sustainability in order to become beneficial. The third alternative is also essential for adopting the other two options.

Priority should be given to the first alternative, i.e expanding in non- traditional work types, because this alternative is achievable in the short term with relatively quick benefits. In addition, this alternative addresses most of the obstacles facing the participation of women. This alternative has been adopted in most of the European countries. Some Gulf countries are also considering taking this alternative<sup>32</sup>.

Adopting this alternative requires activating the third alternative related to spreading awareness of women's participation so that the two alternatives can work in a balanced manner.

### Adopting this alternative requires the following procedures:

**First:** Formation of a national committee by the

Prime Minister. This committee is formed from all relevant bodies from the public and private sectors and voluntary sectors. This includes Ministry of Labor, Bureau of Civil Service, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Ministry of Industry and Trade, telecommunications companies, Social Security Corporation, NGOs, etc. The Committee would be assigned the following tasks:

1. Evaluating international experiences that applied flexible work systems and identifying the ones that are appropriate to the Jordanian labor market.
2. Reviewing labor laws and regulations and suggesting possible amendments to allow flexible work.
3. Developing flexible work mechanisms and systems to put them in place in the Kingdom.
4. Testing (piloting) these systems and mechanisms in selected institutions in the private and public sectors.
5. Developing media campaign to raise awareness of the concept of flexible work and the importance of its economic and social applications.
6. Building a national strategic plan to implement flexible work (laws) systems through the following:

- Linking all future national development plans with strategies of flexible work.
- Identifying sectors, occupations and fields that are suitable for the application of flexible work systems in the public and private sectors.
- Building a balanced interim plan to implement flexible work systems on different levels in the Jordanian labor market.
- Identifying factors and procedures required for the application of flexible work systems.
- Follow up with mechanisms of applying flexible work systems and evaluating implementation to improve performance indicators.

**Second:** Inviting universities and research centers in the kingdom to conduct scientific studies and surveys on flexible work.

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