



# Exploratory Study

**on the rights, arrangements and benefits of workers  
with family responsibilities in the Palestinian labor market**

Research team: Carine Metz Abu Hmeid, Maryam Al-Tibi

Survey data collection: Howeida Ahmad Amneh Omari,  
Mona Rostom, Aziza Salem Abu Amra, Ibda' Hani Abdel Hay

**August – 2021**

# **The Democracy and Workers' Rights Center in Palestine**

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## Executive summary

Workers with family responsibilities are defined by the ILO Convention No. 156 as “men and women workers with responsibilities in relation to their dependent children” and/or “in relation to other members of their immediate family, who clearly need their care or support, where such responsibilities restrict their possibilities of preparing for, entering, participating in or advancing in economic activity”. Palestine has a young population, and thus conciliating the necessity of caring for young children with an economic activity is a major challenge, especially for women since most of the unpaid care work is performed by them.

Workers with family responsibilities have a right to non-discrimination, i.e. they have the right to equality of opportunity and treatment. States “should make it an aim of national policy to enable persons with family responsibilities who are engaged or wish to engage in employment to exercise their right to do so without being subject to discrimination and, to the extent possible, without conflict between their employment and family responsibilities”. To create effective equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers, states should take measures to:

- Enable workers with family responsibilities to exercise their right to free choice of employment
- Take account of their needs in terms and conditions of employment and in social security.
- Take account of the needs of workers with family responsibilities in community planning
- Develop or promote community services, public or private, such as child-care and family services and facilities.

Reaching a good balance between work and family responsibilities is also essential for children’s welfare and wellbeing. Thus, UNICEF promotes family-friendly policies and defines them as “the measures and arrangements that have a positive impact on workers’ abilities to reconcile work and family responsibilities – and advance the development and well-being of their children”. It further indicates that the “potential constructive impacts of family-friendly policies include reducing child mortality and low birthweight, decreasing instances of child abuse, increasing rates of breastfeeding and immunization, and enhancing children’s cognitive development and school performance”<sup>1</sup>.

As a country under settler-colonial occupation, facing severe challenges and obstacles to development, not least of them high unemployment and poverty driven by political factors, and deep gender inequalities, Palestine needs to do everything in its power to invest in its human capital and prepare a better future for its young population. In the world of work, this also entails ensuring that workers with family responsibilities have an enabling environment and adequate protection from discriminations. Promoting and adopting family-friendly policies is not solely an obligation for governmental institutions, businesses, communities and unions also have important roles to play.

The aim of this exploratory study is to gain a better understanding of existing rights, arrangements and benefits, which directly or indirectly benefit workers with family responsibilities in the Palestinian labor market. It seeks to identify gaps as well as positive practices in order to disseminate information about them, and inform the formulation of public policies that support workers with family responsibilities.

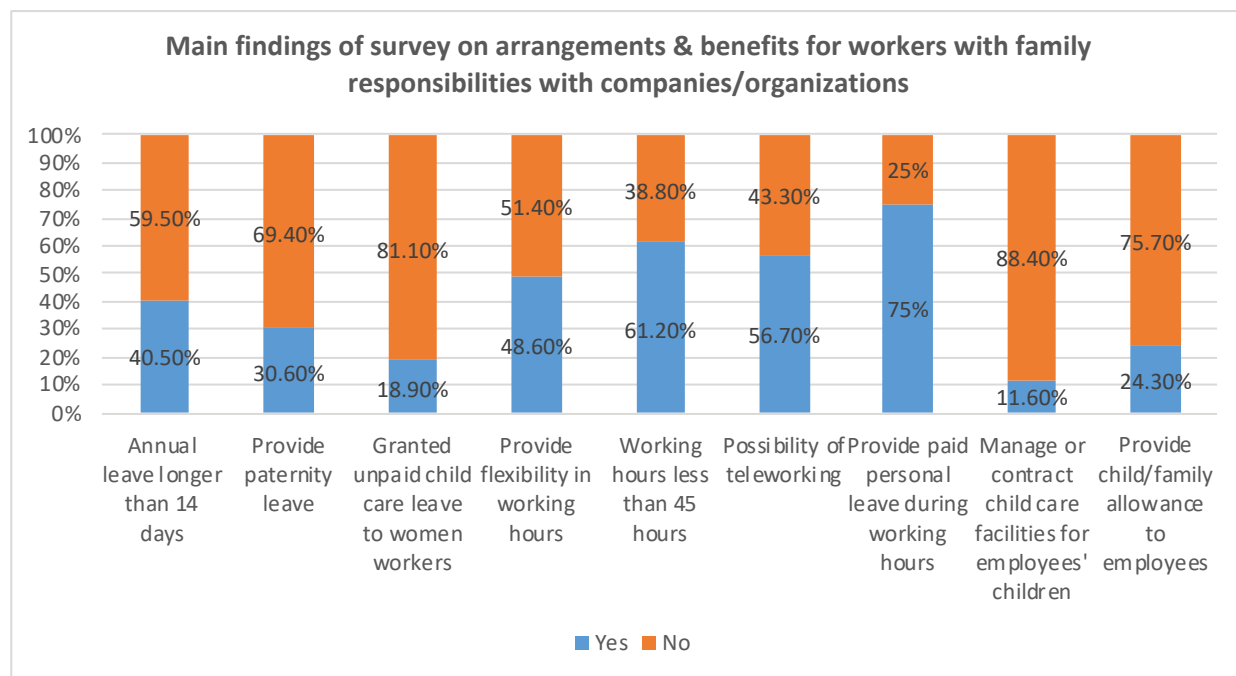
The study provides a short description of the economic, social and demographic context in Palestine, and outlines related challenges. It reviews dispositions in current labor legislation and the extent to which they guarantee rights beneficial to workers with family responsibilities, as well as other areas where measures should be taken to facilitate reconciliation of work and family responsibilities.

In order to gain a better understanding of the type of measures, benefits and arrangements that the private sector and non-governmental sector have adopted, DWRC conducted an electronic survey among companies/ organizations, completed by field visits to get the questionnaire filled, between September 2020 and July 2021. Questionnaires were disseminated to 444 companies/establishments, but only 110 companies/organizations responded. Thus the study sample is not representative of the situation in the private sector as a whole. However, it provides data about which types of measures have been taken, and their prevalence.

The survey indicated that companies/organizations have adopted a variety of measures, which are beneficial to workers with family responsibilities, with the most prevalent being provision of paid personal leave during working hours (in 75% of establishments), less weekly working hours than the legal maximum (in 61.20% of establishments), possibility of teleworking (in 56.70% of establishments), flexibility in working hours (in

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, Family Friendly Policies Handbook for Business, June 2020

48.60% of establishments) and annual leaves longer than 14 days for all employees regardless of length of employment period (in 40.50% of establishments). Noticeably, 30.6% of the survey respondents provide paid paternity leave, although the majority provide less than 4 days. 11.60% of surveyed establishments manage or contract child care facilities for employees' children.



The recommendations of the study are manifold. At the legislative level, both the Palestinian Labor Law and the Civil Service Law should be amended in order to be responsive to the needs of workers with family responsibilities, noting that the Civil Service Law provides a better framework in terms of lower working hours and longer annual leaves than the Labor Law. Both laws require improvements in relation to maternity leave duration, and introductions of dispositions concerning paternity leave, provision of child care facilities and regulation of teleworking and flexitime. At the policy level, the government should work on the elaboration of a national policy to promote equality of opportunity and treatment for male and female workers, which should include measures to prevent discrimination against workers with family responsibilities and facilitate reconciliation of employment and family responsibilities. It should also stimulate public and private investment in the care economy, and encourage employers, including through incentives, to develop arrangements and benefits for workers with family responsibilities. Trade unions should promote a just distribution of unpaid care work and its reduction, and include demands related to arrangements and benefits for workers with family responsibilities in collective bargaining. Employers' organizations should promote understanding among their members of the advantage of family-friendly business policies, organize trainings for human resource managers, and support amendments to the Palestinian Labor Law that are responsive to the needs of workers with family responsibilities.

Since this is an exploratory study, there is a need to conduct more extensive surveys and in-depth studies, including on a sectorial basis, on this topic, in order to guide interventions by social partners and civil society.

## Economic, social and demographic characteristics and related challenges

The Palestinian population is a young population, and child care needs are important. More than a third of the population (38%) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was younger than 15 years old in mid-2021, of whom 36% in the West Bank and 41% in the Gaza Strip. The elderly population only constituted 3% of the total population. The average household size consisted of 5.1 individuals in 2020, 4.7 in the West Bank and 5.7 in the Gaza Strip<sup>2</sup>. The estimated number of children in the age group 0-4 years old is 718,923, 653,266 children are 5 to 9 years old, and 609,272 children are 10 to 14 years old<sup>3</sup>.

This entails great challenges for parents to care for younger children, while pursuing an economic activity. Women are most affected by the situation, due to the deep imbalance in the distribution of unpaid care work between men and women. In fact, women do seven times more unpaid care work than men in Palestine. Furthermore, employed, married women spend more total hours working (paid and unpaid) than employed, married men<sup>4</sup>.



The Palestinian society is a patriarchal conservative society, and prevailing perceptions continue to be that women's primary responsibilities are caring for their homes and families, while men are responsible for ensuring the financial well-being of families.

Women's participation rate in the labor market remains one of the lowest in the world. It decreased to 16% in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, compared to 65% for men. The percentage of women outside the labor force due to housekeeping was 62.9% in 2020, compared to 0% for men. 66.8% of men and 56.8% of women, who are labor force participants, are currently married. The percentage is 64.6% for men and 58.9% for women among the age group 25-34 years, where it is most likely that couples would also have to care for young children<sup>5</sup>.

The average number of hours worked per week was 40.6 hours, 42.7 hours for employees working in the West Bank and 35.1 hours for those working in the Gaza Strip, and this in the context of the pandemic. A majority of wage employees in the private sector also remain deprived of their annual holidays, as only 35.4% obtained this right in 2020, with marked differences between the West Bank and Gaza Strip at 41.3% and 19.2% respectively. The absence of a social security system for private sector workers continues to affect women's employment and their access to a paid maternity leave, with only 59.9% of women wage workers benefiting from a paid maternity leave.

In 2020, 27.9% of wage employees in the private sector were paid less than the minimum wage (1,450 shekels), 81.1% in the Gaza Strip and 7.4% in the West Bank. In the West Bank, where the minimum wage is applied since 2013, the number of women earning less than the minimum wage was still 4.5 times than the number of men. Low wages may be an incentive for both parents to seek employment in order to provide household needs, but it is also a deterrent if a significant amount has to be paid for child care services. In such cases, women may be pressured to give up their job to take care of the children or not to seek employment. Moreover, women face much higher unemployment rates than men, 22.5% for men and 40.1% for women in 2020. In the Gaza Strip, women's unemployment rate reached 63.3% compared to 27% in the West Bank.

Due to the overall socio-economic context, and a constant severe fiscal crisis, governmental support for workers with family responsibilities is almost inexistent. There are no governmental early childhood care services. Day-care services (nurseries) are still entirely provided by the private and non-governmental sectors, and have to be paid for by parents. Some private sector enterprises are contributing in providing this service for their employees. In 2009, as per the PCBS social responsibility survey, 9.5% of private sector establishments with 30 employees and more in the West Bank and 1.1% in the Gaza Strip provided nurseries for their employees' children<sup>6</sup>. While compulsory education is free in governmental schools, the opening of kindergarten classrooms is a fairly recent development. Most parents have to pay for enrolling their children in private/non-governmental kindergartens, and likewise for after-school programs, which are still very marginal. Furthermore, school hours are shorter than average daily working hours.

This all contributes to keeping women outside the labor force, and makes it more difficult for them to obtain and retain paid employment, as they are exposed to discrimination in employment and occupation due to their family responsibilities.

2 Press release issued by Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics «PCBS» & the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on the Occasion of the International Population Day, 11/07/2021

3 Press release issued by Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics «PCBS» highlights the Palestinian children's situation on the Occasion of the Palestinian Child Day, 05/04/2021

4 UN Women, Policy Brief No. 4, The Care Economy in Palestine: Towards Recognizing, Reducing and Redistributing Unpaid Care Work

5 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021. Palestinian Labour Force Survey: Annual Report: 2020. Ramallah - Palestine

6 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011, Social Responsibility of the Private Sector in the Palestinian Territories Survey, 2009. Main Findings. Ramallah-Palestine.

## Analysis of availability and adequacy of measures in Palestinian labor legislation and public policies that facilitate reconciliation of work and family responsibilities.

Legislation and policies can facilitate reconciliation of work and family responsibilities, or hinder it if relevant dispositions and measures are insufficient or absent. The following analysis focuses on leave policies, social security benefits, working time and organization, care services and reducing unpaid care work in the Palestinian context.

### • Leave policies

Leave policies are important for enabling workers with family responsibilities in establishing a workable routine, coping with major family events/needs and emergencies. Palestinian labor legislation guarantees various types of paid and unpaid leaves covering all economic sectors.

The ILO's Holidays with Pay Convention (Revised), 1970 (No. 132) stipulates a minimum annual paid vacation of three weeks per year of service. The Palestinian Labor Law No. 7 of the Year 2000 only guarantees a two-weeks paid annual vacation for workers, who have spent less than five years with the same employer. The leave increases to three weeks after five years of service with the same employer. Workers in occupations that are hazardous and harmful to health are also guaranteed three weeks of annual paid vacation.



In governmental institutions, the Circular on Leaves issued on 31/12/2005 by the General Personnel Council of the Palestinian National Authority guarantees a 15 days paid annual vacation in the first year of service. After completing one year of service, public employees are entitled to a 30-day annual leave, which increases to 35 days for employees aged more than 50 years old and with at least 10 years of service.

Palestinian labor legislation does not stipulate any leave for health risks during pregnancy and breastfeeding, or extra leave for multiple births, complications or maternal death, nor does it stipulate any right to paternity or paternal leave. Parents adopting children are not entitled to any leave either. The Palestinian Labor Law, as well as the Civil Service Law, only guarantee a 10-week paid maternity leave, while employers have to pay women's wages during this period. While women governmental employees have faced no issues in obtaining this leave, the situation is different in the private sector, where it renders them more vulnerable to discrimination in employment. In the private sector, about 40% women wage employees are still denied their right to a paid maternity leave, and the obligation for employers to pay wages during the 10-week maternity leave renders women's employment more "costly" than men's. For many women, especially those in informal employment, obtaining this paid leave is very difficult. Women are still exposed to dismissal due to maternity or maternity leave, although it is prohibited by the law. In such cases, the Labor Law does not foresee a right to reinstatement.

The Palestinian Labor Law stipulates that women workers have the right to request a one-year unpaid leave to care for a child. Male workers are not granted this right. According to the Circular on Leaves of 2005, public employees have the right to request a one-year leave without pay, which can be extended to up to four years. A further leave without pay can be granted only after a year of service has been completed by the employee since his/her last leave, except if the leave is requested by a female employee to care for a newborn child or accompany her husband abroad.

Palestinian legislation guarantees the right to paid sick leave, but it cannot be used for family emergencies. It does however guarantee the right to emergency leave and compassionate (bereavement) leave. The Palestinian Labor Law stipulates in article 78 that employees can request an emergency leave of a maximum of 10 days per year, and three consecutive days at a time, which is to be deducted from annual vacation days. The Circular on Leaves for public employees guarantees their right to 10 days of paid emergency leave per year after all their annual vacation days have been taken. Public employees cannot take more than three days of emergency leave each time.

While there are no specific parental leave days or sick leave days that can be used to care for a sick dependent child or other family member, or attend to issues that concern them (accompanying them to doctors or school appointments for example), the emergency leave provides some flexibility for workers with family responsibilities to attend to these obligations, although it has not been specifically introduced to support them, and all employees regardless of their family status can avail themselves of this right.

Palestinian labor legislation also guarantees a right to compassionate (bereavement) leave. The Palestinian Labor Law stipulates in article 78 that workers are entitled to a paid leave of three days in the event of the death of a relative up to the second degree. This leave shall not be considered or calculated as part of an employee's annual leave.

- **Social security benefits**

The Law by Decree on Social Security No. 19 of the Year 2016, which established a social security system for private sector workers, was suspended in January 2019, and consultations have not resumed yet to amend the law. This law had foreseen the creation of a maternity fund that would have paid out maternity leave benefits for a period of 12 weeks to women, financed through minimal contributions from workers and employers. This would have been a significant improvement on the current framework, considering that maternity benefits would have been available for women workers that paid at least three contributions during the preceding year.



The Palestinian social protection scheme does not include any family/child allowances. Governmental employees are entitled to a social allowance, but male employees are more advantaged than female employees by the criteria for obtaining this allowance. Male employees are entitled to an allowance of 60 shekels for their first wife, if she is not an employee, and 20 shekels for each child until they reach 18 years of age, with this allowance being maintained in certain cases (students until age 25, sons with disabilities unable to work, unmarried, divorced or widowed daughters, who are not employees). As for women employees, they can only obtain the allowance for their children if they are divorced or widowed and their husband is not an employee, or if the husband has a disability and is unable to work. If a husband and wife are employees, only one is entitled to the allowance and they have to decide between them who will receive it.

- **Working time and organization**

The Palestinian Labor Law No. 7 of the Year 2000 set the maximal number of actual working hours at 45 hours per week, which is much higher than the working hours in governmental institutions and local authorities. In addition, overtime hours should not exceed 12 hours per week. Beyond that, how working time is organized is entirely up to the employer and the internal regulation of the workplace.



Flexitime and/or teleworking are not addressed in Palestinian labor legislation. As a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, many workplaces had to rearrange working times and schedules, and/or introduce teleworking when possible, to maintain activities during periods of lockdown and to respect the Ministry of Health's protocols for various economic activities.

Paid breastfeeding breaks are stipulated in Palestinian legislation for one year after giving birth, but their duration is only one hour per day. Furthermore, many women in the private sector are denied this leave or the employer decides of the timing of the leave regardless of women's wishes.

- **Care services**

Access to affordable, appropriate care services for dependents is essential for workers with family responsibilities, and for enabling more women to enter the labor market. Governmental services or subsidized private services for dependents have yet to be developed. There are no clear policies on future governmental interventions in the field, except in terms of improving licensing and quality of nurseries (see below). For home help and home care services, families have to seek services from the private sector and private operators. Before/after-school programs are not well developed and not part of public interventions.



- **Reducing unpaid work**

Several factors can have a positive effect on reducing unpaid work, among them infrastructure, transportation, schools, health and day-care centers, family planning, labor-saving technology, services, integrated school and working hours, school canteens, opening hours of government, medical services.

Infrastructure: good infrastructure is important for reducing the time that workers with family responsibilities have to spend on commuting and doing household chores, and enabling them to allocate more time for caring for family members, personal care, recreation and social activities. In the Palestinian territories, after having been neglected for decades, the development of proper infrastructure (roads, water, energy, sanitation) has been hampered by the Israeli occupying power's measures and policies since the Palestinian Authority has been established in 1994. The 15 years blockade on the Gaza Strip has had a debilitating impact on the situation of the infrastructure. Electricity provision in Gaza is sporadic and sometimes as low as 4-8 hours per day, causing additional household burdens as electrical appliances can only be used at certain times or may breakdown more frequently due to power outages. Moreover, almost the entire population in the Gaza Strip is deprived of access to piped drinking water, due to the pollution and depletion of the ground aquifer. Other infrastructure such as roads are regularly severely damaged during Israel's military attacks on the Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, Israel's network of by-pass roads, settler only roads, and Israeli military checkpoints often force Palestinian commuters to take longer routes or delay them on their way from and to work. Palestinian road networks are still in much need for rehabilitation in some areas. Power outages are also an issue in some governorates, as the energy supply overwhelmingly depends on amounts that the Israeli power company is ready to allocate. As for the water supply, Israel restricts the amount of water that reaches Palestinian communities, and sometimes even cuts water supply to some communities in an attempt to force them to leave their lands. For households, this means additional costs for purchasing water tanks and/or scheduling some household tasks when running water is available, which constitutes an additional burden.



Transportation and mobility: there is no collective transportation system managed and/or subsidized by the government or local authorities. Collective transportation (buses, collective taxis) is fully privatized. This means an easy access to collective transportation on roads and itineraries that are frequently used and have a lot of traffic, and sporadic availability of collective transportation between rural areas and cities, or from certain neighborhoods to city centers. Finding collective transportation from more isolated areas is very difficult, because the itineraries must remain profitable for private operators. Women are more dependent than men on collective transportation, and are thus more affected by this system.

Schools and day-care centers, schools and working hours: education is compulsory until 16 years old, and the Palestinian Authority provides free elementary and secondary education through a network of governmental schools located all over the Palestinian territories. Palestinian refugees have access to free education in UNRWA schools. However, these schools are often crowded, and some have to adopt a two shifts system, with children studying either in the morning shift or afternoon shift. The Ministry of Education started to introduce a one-year kindergarten program as part of the formal education system and opened a number of kindergarten classes in public schools in marginalized areas and communities in Area C since 2012. By the end of 2015/2016 school year, there were 78 such kindergarten classes<sup>7</sup>. As of the school year 2018/2019, the Ministry of Education indicated that there were 221 governmental kindergartens in the West Bank and

<sup>7</sup> State of Palestine, National Strategy for Early Childhood Development and Intervention, 2017-2022

13 in the Gaza Strip. There were 4759 children enrolled in governmental kindergarten in the West Bank and 333 in the Gaza Strip, representing respectively 5.8% and 0.5% of all children enrolled in kindergartens in the school year 2018/2019<sup>8</sup>. Access to free education at governmental kindergartens remains marginal and only covers one year, compared to two years in private and non-governmental kindergartens. However, the Early Childhood Development and Intervention Strategy set targets of significantly increasing the percentage of children enrolled in kindergartens and the number of kindergartens, including those in governmental schools. It also set targets for ensuring that kindergartens are inclusive and accessible to children with disabilities. Finally, it included among interventions to “Identify poor population groups who are on the list of MOSD social assistance to subsidize kindergarten registration fees as part of the social assistance package”, although it is not clear if this has been implemented.

There are no governmental day-care centers (nurseries), and there is no policy of subsidizing day-care centers. The Early Childhood Development and Intervention Strategy focused on increasing the number of nurseries licensed, oversight and quality of services.

School and working hours are not integrated. Whereas daily school hours do not exceed 6 hours per day in most cases, daily working hours can reach 8 hours or more in the private sector.

School hours	Private sector working hours	Governmental institutions working hours	Local authorities working hours
About 6 hours per day for 5 days per week	8 hours per day for 5 or 6 day a week, for a maximum of 45 hours per week	7:30 hours per day for 5 days per week	6 hours per day for 6 days per week

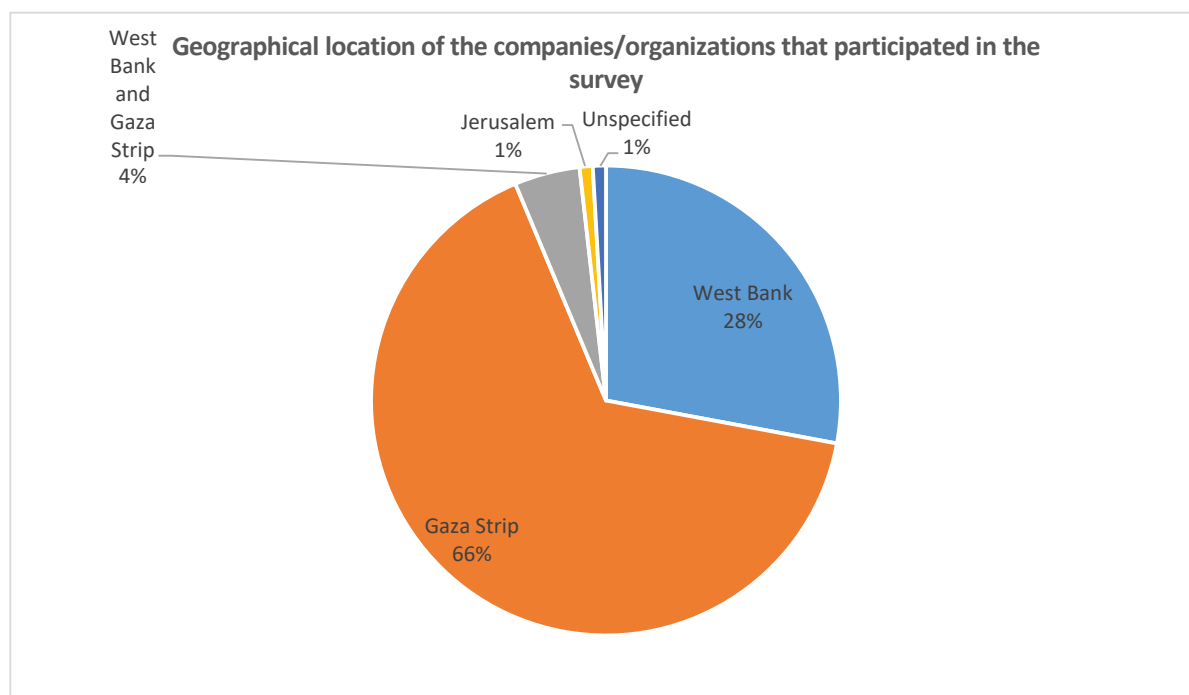
Opening hours of government, medical services: opening hours of governmental services are not adapted for working people, except for local authorities' services that can be accessed in general on Saturday by those who have two days off a week, which is not the case of many private sector employees. Private sector medical services are accessible outside normal working hours.

8 State of Palestine, Ministry of Education, Education Statistical Yearbook 2018-2019 (Schools and Kindergartens Statistics), 2020

## Findings regarding arrangements and benefits provided by employers to workers with family responsibilities

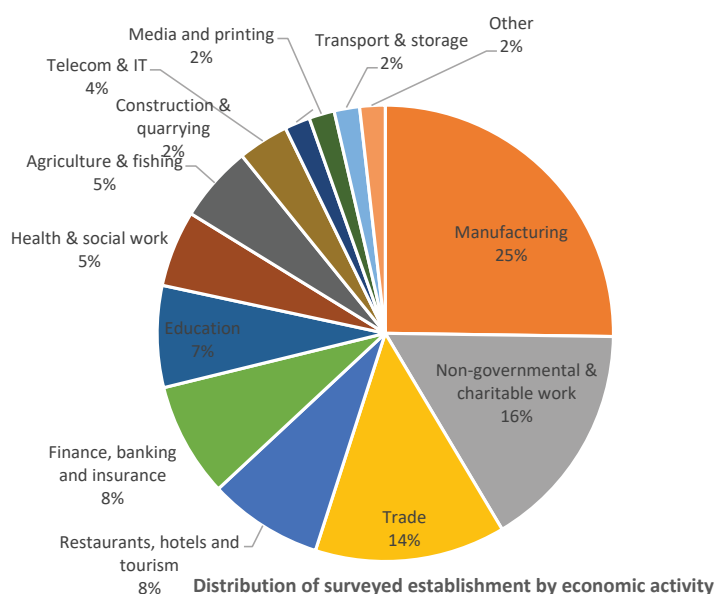
### 3.1. Characteristics of the companies/organizations that participated in the study's survey

110 companies/organizations participated in the study's survey. 66% are located in the Gaza Strip, 28% in the West Bank, 4% in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 1% in Jerusalem and 1% did not specify location.



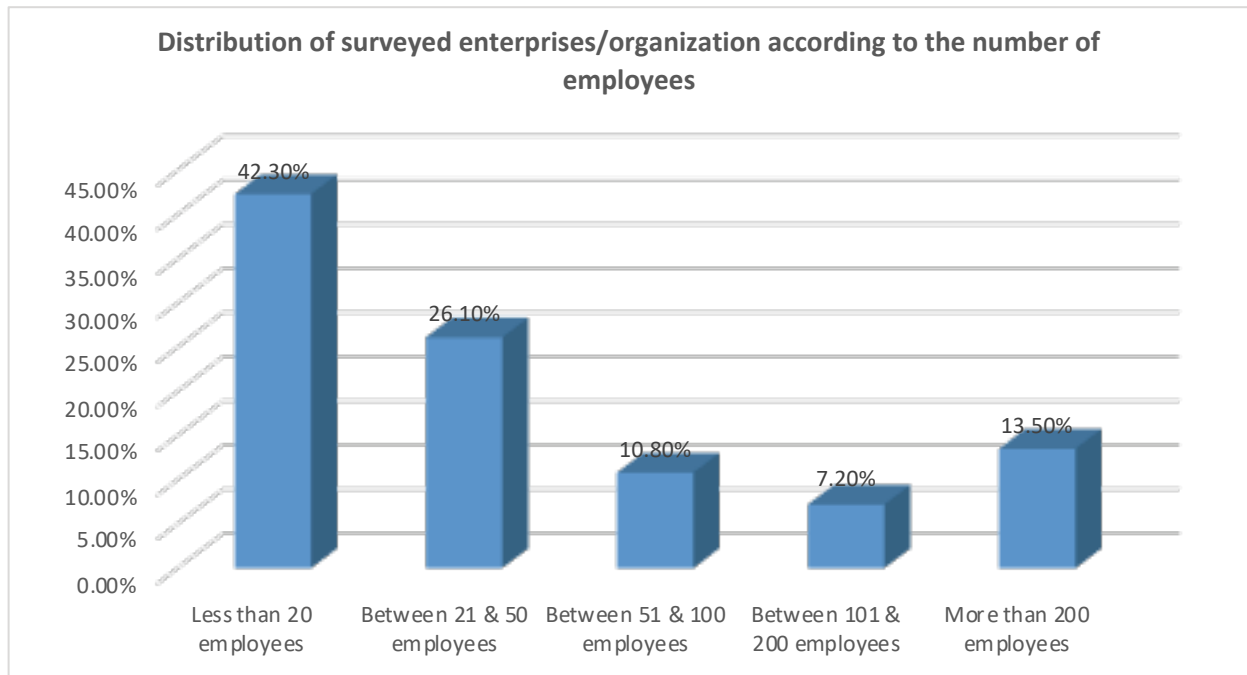
#### • Economic activity

Establishments from a wide range of sectors participated in the survey. The sectors most represented among the survey respondents are manufacturing, particularly food industries (accounting for 25% of responding establishments), and non-governmental and charitable work (16% of establishments), followed by trade (14%), finance, insurance and banking (8%), restaurants, hotels and tourism (8%), and education (7%). Health and social work accounted for 5% of the establishments, agriculture and fishing for 5%, telecom & IT for 4%, construction and quarrying for 2%, media and printing for 2%, transport and storage for 2%, and other miscellaneous sectors for 2%.



- **Number of employees**

42.3% of the establishments, who participated in this study, have less than 20 employees, 26.1% have between 21 and 50 employees, 10.8% have between 51 and 100 employees, 7.2% have between 101 and 200 employees and 13.5% have more than 200 employees.

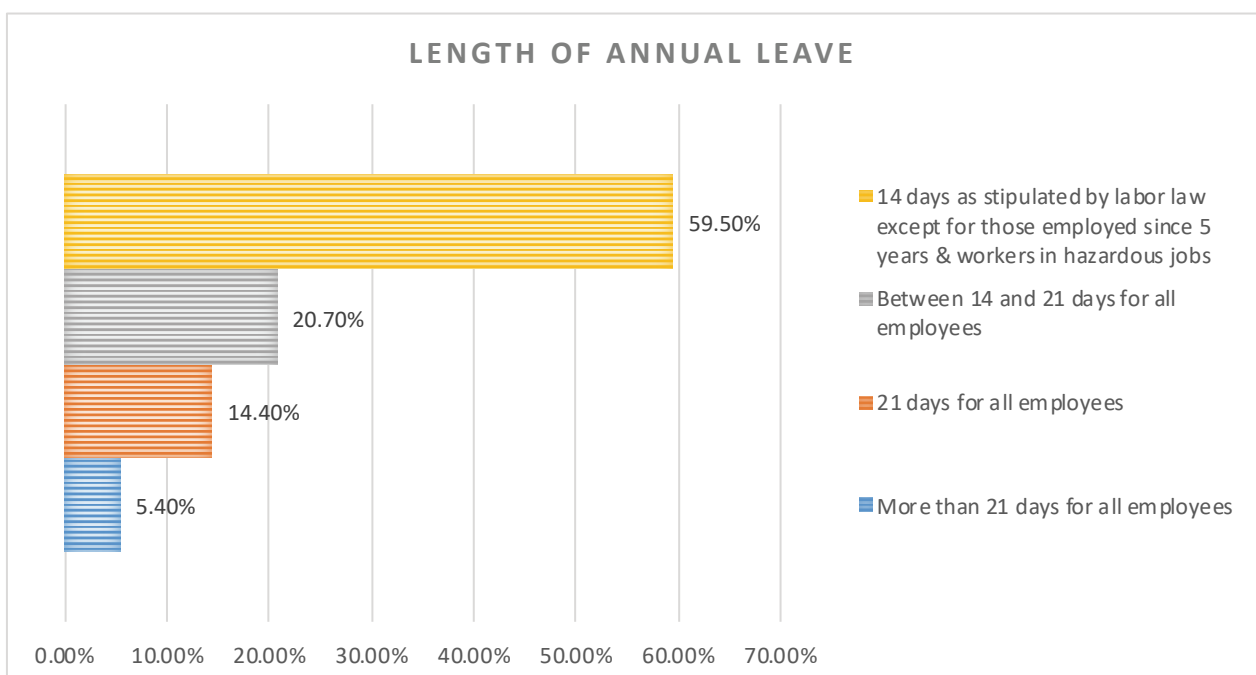


The percentage of women employees among all employees vary widely, from none at all to 90%.

### 3.2. Arrangements related to leaves

#### Length of the paid annual leave

Paid annual leaves are essential to enable employees to spend time with their families, particularly considering that the summer school breaks are of an average of three months in Palestine. It is noticeable that 40.5% of enterprises/organizations provide leaves that are longer than the 14 days guaranteed by the Labor Law for all employees, regardless of years of service or nature of the job. 19.8% provide leaves of 21 days or more.



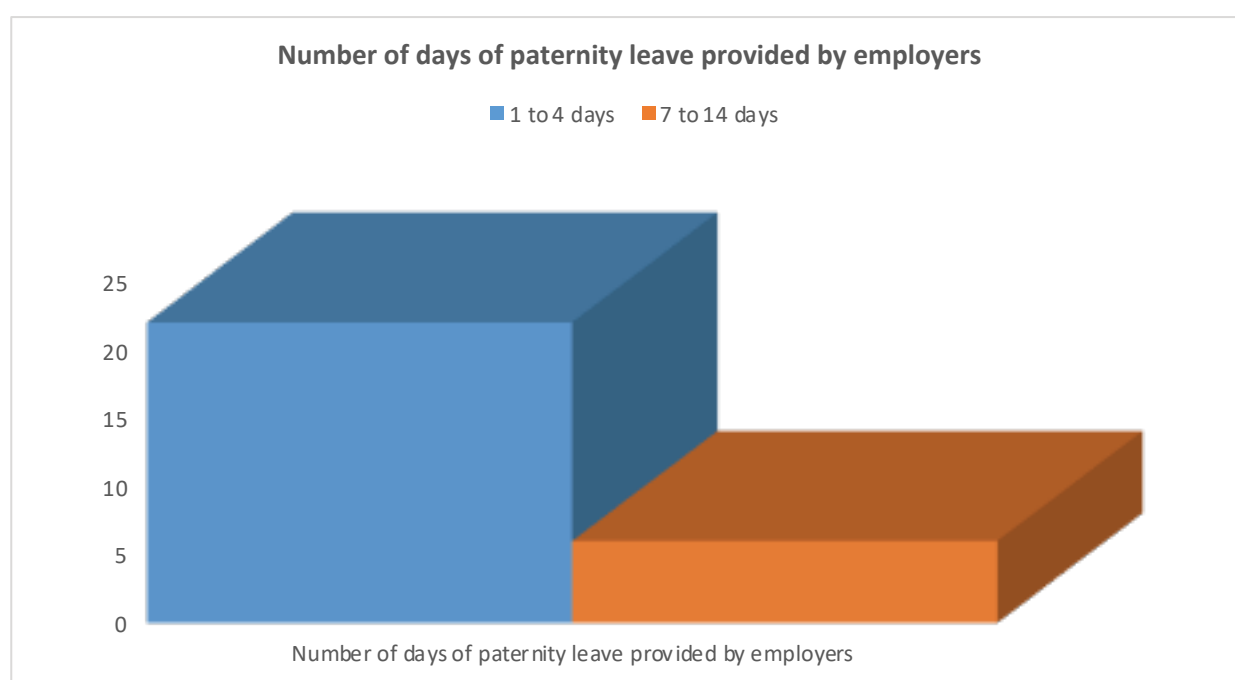
## Provision of additional benefits to women workers during maternity period, such as reducing working hours before giving birth or a longer maternity leave

44.1% of surveyed enterprises/organizations answered that they provide additional benefits to women workers in relation to their maternity, and 55.9% do not. For most of those who answered positively, the benefits are actually already foreseen in the Labor Law, such as maternity leave and breastfeeding breaks.

One respondent answered that they provide flexibility to women regarding the start of their working day, and another answered that employees with newborn children can bring them to work and that they provide paid leave hours.

## Provision of paternity leave

The Palestinian labor law does not guarantee the right to a paternity leave, but 30.6% of surveyed enterprises/organizations indicated that they provide a paid paternity leave to their employees. The length of the paternity leave they provide ranges from one day to 14 days. 78.5% of them provide less than one week, and 21.5% provide from one week to 14 days. Almost a third of them provided a three-day paid leave.



## Provision of unpaid leave for child care

The Palestinian labor law guarantees the right to a one-year unpaid leave for child care or accompanying a husband, but only to female workers. In 18.9% of surveyed enterprises/organizations, female workers asked to benefit from this right and obtained the requested leave, while 0.9% of surveyed enterprises/organizations refused to grant an unpaid leave.

## 3.3. Arrangements and benefits related to working hours

### Flexibility in working hours

Among the establishments that participated in the study, about half (48.6%) provide flexibility in working hours for all female and male employees. 23.4% provide flexibility for some female and male employees. In 27.9% of the establishments, employees have to abide with official working hours, which are set. For 15.3%, their work does not allow for flexibility, while for 12.6% the nature of their work does allow for it.

Flexibility in working hours can assist workers with family responsibilities in reconciling family related obligations with work duties. When working hours are set, this may be problematic.

### Number of working hours and their reduction

38.7% of the surveyed establishment answered that they have not reduced working hours in the past five

years, and that employees must work for 45 hours per week, as stipulated by the Labor Law which limits regular working hours to 45 hours per week.

33.3% answered that they reduced working hours, and 27.9% that they did not reduce working hours in the past 5 years, but that they are lower than 45 hours. In summary, for 61.2% of these establishments, working hours are less than 45 hours per week.

### **Possibility of teleworking**

47.7% of surveyed companies/organizations responded that their regulations or organizational culture allows for distance working (teleworking) on some days upon request, and 9% answered that the nature of work allows for it. However, for 43.2% of them, the nature of their work does not allow for such arrangements.

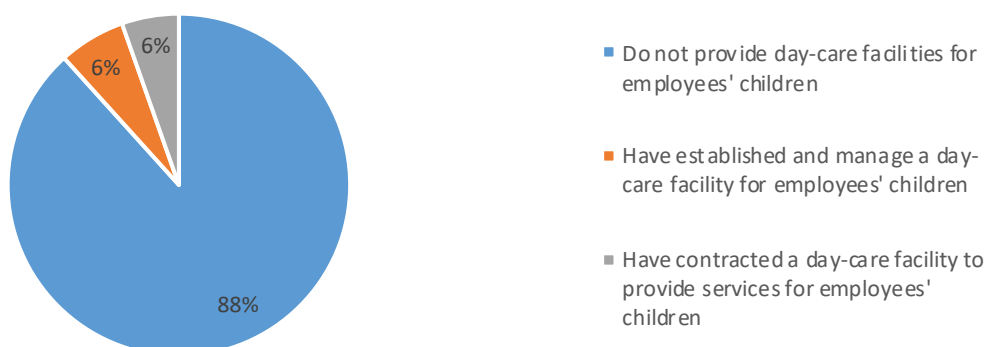
### **Possibility to take a personal leave of absence during working hours**

A majority of surveyed companies/organizations (75%) grant their employees the right to take a paid personal leave during working hours, while 18% grant them the right to take an unpaid personal leave. Only a minority, 6.3%, do not allow employee to take a personal leave of absence during work.

### **Provision of child care facilities for employee's children**

While a vast majority of surveyed companies/organizations do not provide or support child care facilities for employees' children, it is encouraging that 11.7% of the surveyed enterprises/organizations do so. 6.3% have established and manage day-care facilities for employees' children, while 5.4% have contracted such services from external day-care facilities.

**Provision of day-care facilities by employers**



13.5% of the enterprises/organizations that provide day-care facilities for employees have done so in consultation with male and female workers, and 3.6% in consultation with the workers' committee or employees' union.

### **Provision of family/child allowances**

About a quarter of surveyed enterprises/organizations give a family/child allowance to their employees. 12.6% give such an allowance to both male and female employees, 10.8% provide this allowance only to male workers and 0.9% provide it to female workers only. 75.7% do not provide a family/child allowance.

### **Provision of health insurance coverage to employees and their families**

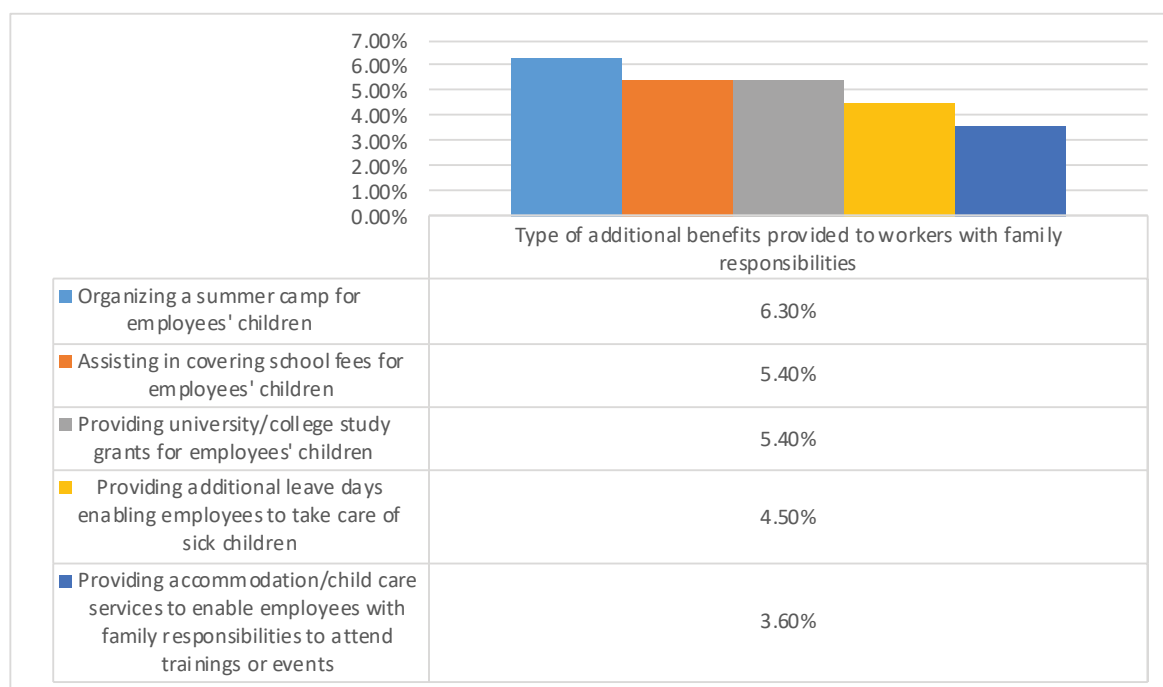
In the absence of a universal health insurance scheme, obtaining health insurance coverage through their employers is an important additional benefit for workers, particularly if the insurance also covers other family members. 25.2% of surveyed enterprises/organizations provide health insurance coverage to female and male workers and their families, while 54.1% do not provide any health insurance to employees, and 13.5% only provide health insurance coverage to female and male employees themselves without including families. A minority of employers provide health insurance to male employees only (4.5%) or female employees only (1.8%), or male employees and their families only (0.9%).

As for the type of coverage, 24.3% answered that they provide partial coverage, and 19.8% that they provide

full coverage.

### Additional benefits provided by enterprises/organizations to workers with family responsibilities

32.4% of surveyed enterprises and organizations provide additional benefits, represented by the following: organizing summer camps for employees' children (6.3%), assisting in covering school fees for employees' children (5.4%), providing university/college study grants for employees' children (4.5%), providing accommodation/child care services to enable employees with family responsibilities to attend trainings and events (3.6%).



Surveyed enterprises/organizations also mentioned some other benefits, which are: providing accommodation to employees from another area (3.6%), providing assistance from organizations and merchants (1.8%), providing soft loans to employees (1.8%), providing recreational trips and meals to employees (0.9%), providing paid leaves to employees completing their studies and reducing working hours during family occasions (birthdays) (0.9%).

### Work arrangements in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of flexible work arrangements and taking into account the family situation of employees, particularly during the periods of lockdowns and longer periods during which children attended school from home or in alternance (some days at home, other days at school).

The Palestinian government only called for flexible work arrangements for working mothers with young children, without taking into account the role and contribution of working fathers. We asked enterprises/organizations how they dealt with managing human resources during the crisis. Among the surveyed enterprises/organizations, a non-negligible percentage appear to have been more progressive than the government, as 20.6% responded that they allowed employees from both sexes to work from home (teleworking) and 17.1% responded that they allowed working mothers and working fathers to work from home. 19.8% also reduced working hours of working mothers and fathers.

On the other hand, 23.4% allowed only working mothers to work from home to enable them to take care of young children, and 12.6% reduced the working hours of working mothers.

Finally, 50.5% of enterprises/organizations made changes to employees' attendance (such as freezing the organization's activities and entirely suspending work, or working with a minimum number of employees and allowing others to be absent).

As for financial aspects, 37.8% of surveyed enterprises/organizations paid wages of employees in full as they did not stop working, and 27.9% said they paid wages in full although the enterprise/organization's work had to be stopped. 26.1% were unable to pay employees' wages while the organization's work was halted, while 8.1% indicated paying 50% of employees' wages during that period.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The Palestinian society is a young society, with strong family values. Yet this is not reflected in a positive and progressive manner in labor legislation and public policies. Palestinian women are marginalized in the labor market and face discrimination due to their family responsibilities. At the same time, men's role in caring for their families and assuming more responsibilities is not recognized.

Despite severe gaps in legislation and policies, the survey demonstrated that family-friendly measures are not absent from Palestinian workplaces, and that many provide benefits or arrangements that are more progressive than the current legislation. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, arrangements related to flexible working hours and teleworking have become more widespread, and much more common in enterprise/organizational culture than previously. This forced development needs to be utilized to serve the needs of workers with family responsibilities, so they may be able to request and benefit from such arrangements beyond the context of the pandemic. In general, average weekly working hours are lower in Palestine than the upper limit stipulated by the Labor Law, and a majority of enterprises/organizations in the survey sample also adopted lower working hours. As for the accompaniment of parenthood, a small yet significant percentage of surveyed enterprises/organizations provide paternity leave.

Recommendations in order to move forward in facilitating conciliation of work and family responsibilities, promoting women's integration in the labor market, and elimination of discrimination against workers with family responsibilities, are as follows:

- Palestinian labor legislation requires amendments in order to be responsive to the needs of workers with family responsibilities. Proposed amendments to the Palestinian Labor Law in relation to the increase of paid annual leave, decrease of weekly working hours, increase of paid maternity leave, introduction of paternity leave, child care facilities (open to young children of both male and female workers), and introduction of dispositions regulating teleworking, as well as flextime, are essential to provide a better legal framework. With the exception of annual leave and working time reduction, similar amendments are required in the Civil Service Law.
- The Palestinian government should work with social partners and civil society to formulate and adopt a national policy to promote equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers. Such a policy should include measures aiming "to enable persons with family responsibilities who are engaged or wish to engage in employment to exercise their right to do so without being subject to discrimination and, to the extent possible, without conflict between their employment and family responsibilities" as preconized by ILO Convention No. 156 and Recommendation No. 165 on Workers with Family Responsibilities.
- The government should stimulate public and private investment in the care economy, particularly in the area of early childhood care, and personal services, as part of a strategy to reduce unpaid care work and render these services more affordable and accessible.
- Employers should be encouraged and given incentives to develop arrangements and benefits for workers with family responsibilities. Employers' engagement is essential to achieve concrete progress in the short term. Family-friendly policies are beneficial for businesses, they are "helping to increase employee morale, job satisfaction and productivity while reducing absenteeism and disengagement"<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, employees going through parenthood enhance their soft skills, such as prioritization and empathy, which are needed in today's business environment. Thus, employers should seek to provide adequate maternity leave and offer paternity leave, in order to retain these employees and benefit from their enhanced skills.
- Trade unions should become more involved in promoting a just distribution of unpaid care work and its reduction, as well as adopt demands related to arrangements and benefits for workers with family responsibilities in their negotiations with employers for improving work conditions and circumstances.
- Employers' organizations should promote understanding among their members of the advantages of family-friendly policies, and organize specialized trainings for human resource managers, who can play a key role in developing such policies within companies. They should reconsider their positions regarding the Palestinian Labor Law reform, and support amendments that are responsive to the needs of workers with family responsibilities of both sexes, and which seek to eliminate current forms of discrimination.

<sup>9</sup> Support Your Employees by Creating a Family-Friendly Workplace, Paula Fernandes, <https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/9614-family-friendly-workplace.html>

The participants in the workshops held in Ramallah and Gaza to discuss the study findings emitted further recommendations:

- A comprehensive societal dialogue needs to be opened on the amendment of legislation and policies.
- Interventions are also required to strengthen labor law implementation, as women are particularly vulnerable to violations of their labor rights
- Women's organizations should organize pressure campaigns in partnership with trade unions for the amendment of the Palestinian labor law
- Providing child-care facilities (day-care centers/nurseries) in workplaces or close nearby is essential for women with young children
- A community awareness campaign targeting women and men with family responsibilities should be launched to encourage men to assume their share of the care work arising from their family responsibilities
- An awareness program should be launched targeting workers and employers on the importance of the rights of workers with family responsibilities
- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has clearly shown the importance of providing social safety nets for marginalized groups
- Further research and studies should be conducted on the topic, including by academic institutions, in order to produce broader and more specialized information to guide interventions, taking into account specificities of various economic sectors and geographical differences.

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