



Special Report

The Impact of the **Covid-19** Pandemic and Containment Measures on Palestinian Women Workers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip

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Executive Summary

For the past two decades, women wage workers in the private sector have faced numerous violations of their most basic labor rights guaranteed by the Palestinian Labor Law No. 7 of the Year 2000. Palestinian women workers face marginalization and discrimination in the labor market, and the Covid-19 pandemic has amplified gender disparities. Although the Palestinian government has adopted commitments in its national policy agenda and national strategies towards strengthening women's integration in the world of work and addressing gender equality gaps, there has been no noticeable progress in the past five years.

The Palestinian economy's subservience and annexation to the economy of the Israeli occupying Power constitutes a contributing and aggravating factor. It has many repercussions on female and male Palestinian workers, especially in light of the current situation, the division between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the blockade on the Gaza Strip imposed for over 13 years.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the jobs and income of an estimated 453,000 Palestinian workers. More than 45% of male and female workers with an estimated 1,850,000 dependents – children, spouses and elderly parents – were left without income¹.

Women workers are among the groups most affected by the pandemic, as it has exacerbated pre-existing violations of rights. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the unemployment rate among women during the first quarter of 2020 was 40% compared to 21% among men, and this as the State of Emergency was declared. Women's rights to maternity leave and breastfeeding hour guaranteed by Palestinian Labor Law continue to be subject to widespread violations by employers. 47% of women wage workers in the private sector do not obtain paid maternity leave. Labor legislation in its current form is not gender responsive and does not provide adequate and sufficient protection to women workers from violations of their rights by employers and gender-based discrimination.

The Democracy and Workers' Rights Center launched a survey on "The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Working Women in Palestine" to assess the impact of this crisis on working women in Palestine, how their needs were dealt with during the State of Emergency and whether these needs were met. The survey questionnaire targeted Palestinian women working in the Palestinian labor market and the Israeli labor market, who are residents of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. A total of 332 female workers participated in the survey during June 2020. The majority are residents of the West Bank (48.8%), 28.3% are residents of East Jerusalem, and 22.9% of the Gaza Strip. Over half of them stated that they are married and have children.

It should be mentioned that many women workers employed in the private sector or civil society (70.2% of the survey participants) lack job security. 31.6% of the survey participants have a fixed-term contract, which may or may not be renewed. As numerous women workers ignore the fact that the Labor Law considers any employment contract that exceeds two years as open-ended, employers may lead them to believe that their employment remains precarious, when in fact they have been employed for over two years and are entitled to greater protection. 0.6% of the survey participants are businesswomen, which reflects the low opportunities available to

¹ Wafa, Palestine News & Info Agency, "Statistics: more than 453 thousand Palestinian Workers have been affected by the Corona Crisis", 13/04/2020, http://www.wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=uj4J6Fa873812043324auj4J6F

women for starting and developing their own businesses. In fact, as per official statistics, only 4% of women employed in the private sector are business owners.

Women workers have great uncertainties about their future after the pandemic and/or the State of Emergency ends. 22.3% of the survey participants indicated that they expect to be able to return to their jobs, but with worse terms and conditions of work, such as lower wages. 18.1% need to search for work or a new job. 17.8% do not know if they will be able to go back to their former work or job.

The prevalence of stereotypes about the roles of men and women compel many women to choose traditional professions, among them working in the education sector. According to national statistics, 40% of working women are concentrated in the education sector. Nearly half of those surveyed work in this sector, which was severely affected during this crisis. Thousands of female workers in kindergartens, day care centers and private schools have been left without any source of income after the closure of educational institutions as part of the precautionary measures imposed by the Palestinian National Authority to contain the spread of the pandemic.

Many women workers in various sectors did not receive their wages during the period that followed the declaration of the State of Emergency. A number of private sector employers ignored the tripartite agreement signed on 16/03/2020, which stipulates that workers will be paid at least 50% of their wages, while they are unable to work due to emergency measures, provided that the remaining 50% shall be paid when they return to work and production resumes. **Most of the survey participants reported that they stopped working and their salary was not paid at all.** Women workers in the private sector already faced issues in obtaining the minimum wage before the pandemic, and were paid lower wages than men. According to the PCBS, women working in the private sector obtained 71.9% of men's wages (based on the average daily wage) during the year 2019.

The responsibility of completing household chores and taking care of children often rests solely on women. **The survey revealed that 42.5% of the women participants feel that the burdens of household work and /or childcare have increased, while no one provided them with any assistance.** Through its time use surveys, PCBS has indicated that women in the workforce spend thrice the time spent by men on housework and twice the time spent by men on care work. The closure of educational institutions and children's presence at home made the situation even more difficult. Women workers have been confronted with the dilemma of how to reconcile the need to take care of their children, while at the same time fulfilling their job responsibilities. The government's response was to request employers to provide work arrangements for working mothers with young children at charge, taking into account women's situation and work requirements. Many employers in the private sector ignored directive No. 50 of the Year 2020 issued by the Minister of Labor in this regard. One employer even forced female employees to work during the lockdown, requiring them to reach their workplace in another governorate without providing any means of transportation.

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the economic crisis in Palestine, especially in the absence of social protection systems. In response to the situation, the Palestinian government took a number of measures and developed assistance programs to mitigate the social and economic impacts during the first wave of the pandemic. However, many female workers did not obtain any kind of assistance, particularly in the Gaza Strip. **31.6% of the survey participants said that they registered for aid, but did not receive anything so far, and 22.5% said that they did not register for assistance, but that they need it.**

Regarding violations of women workers' right from the beginning of the pandemic until the end of June 2020, most complaints and requests for advice monitored by the general directorate for labor inspection and DWRC's Legal Aid Unit were related to wages. In total, the labor inspection department at the Ministry of Labor received

588 complaints, 132 from women workers, 75.7% of them about wages. A majority of the cases handled by DWRC's Legal Unit also concerned non-payment of wages, deductions from wages or attempts by employers to deduct cash assistance obtained by workers from wages due to them.

In light of the deterioration of the socio-economic situation and women's employment situation, which the pandemic has exacerbated, rapid interventions are required. DWRC calls upon the government, competent ministries, and the Fund for Employment and Social Protection to assist women in various economic sectors in overcoming the impact of the pandemic, by increasing women's opportunities to benefit from employment programs, and providing support to self-employed women, women business owners and women cooperatives.

On the other hand, the pandemic has highlighted the importance of tackling the issue of unequal distribution of unpaid care work between men and women. The government should engage in discussions and negotiations with unions and employers' organizations to promote flexible work arrangements for both male and female workers, who have young children at charge, and adopt a national policy to promote equality of opportunity and treatment for male and female workers.

The absence of a comprehensive social protection system, and particularly the absence of a social security system and unemployment benefits for private sector workers, coupled with a chronic budget deficit amplified by political factors, have severely limited the Palestinian government's capacity to provide financial support for workers, who temporarily lost their income or have lost their jobs due to the pandemic. Although the government provided some assistance programs, the overall number of workers selected was limited and many workers have not received any assistance. Thus, DWRC recommends reconsidering the assistance programs provided to male and female workers, and involving women's committees in unions when defining needs.

The situation created by the pandemic and containment measures have placed additional stress on women's coping mechanisms, amplified pre-existing problems and generated additional ones. To address this situation, DWRC recommends providing psychosocial support to women workers, putting pressure for equal treatment of male and female workers in workplaces, highlighting situations of economic violence against women in the media, and raising women's awareness of their rights. The labor inspection department should strengthen its monitoring of law implementation in workplaces employing women, to ensure that women workers obtain all their basic rights. Finally, the government should resume consultations on the labor reform process from a gender perspective as soon as possible.

1. The situation of women's employment prior to the Covid-19 pandemic

The Palestinian economy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is not an independent economy. It can be best described as an economy annexed by and subservient to the economy of the occupying Power, Israel. There are several fragmented labor markets. The labor markets in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip are separated from each other geographically and due to political factors (Israel has restricted movement of people and goods between both areas since the 90s, and these restrictions have been reinforced by the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip for the past thirteen years). After its occupation of the Palestinian territories in 1967, Israel opened its labor market to Palestinian unskilled laborers, and the Israeli labor market continues to be a major outlet for male workers of the West Bank, who cannot find jobs in the local labor market. Palestinians living in the areas of the Jerusalem governorate illegally and unilaterally annexed by Israel (i.e. East Jerusalem) are subjected to Israeli law in all its aspects. This has many consequences for workers in general, and women workers in particular. Women in the Gaza Strip have no opportunities to find employment elsewhere, except if they manage to emigrate or engage in teleworking, in the ICT sector for example. Women in the West Bank are mostly relying on the local labor market for employment, only about 0.6% of Palestinian women are employed in the Israeli labor market². East Jerusalem is off-limits for them, except if they obtain Israeli work or trade permits. Women in East Jerusalem are considered part of the Israeli labor market, but opportunities for employment are scarce, and many seek work in the West Bank.

Although the Palestinian government has adopted commitments in its national policy agenda and national strategies towards strengthening women's integration in the world of work and addressing gender equality gaps, there has been no noticeable progress in the past five years in reducing women's unemployment, and their participation in the labor force has remained extremely low.

2/10
Women participating
in the labor force



7/10
Men participating
in the labor force



According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), in the first quarter of 2020, i.e. before the full effects of the declaration of the State of Emergency and containment measures were felt, the gap regarding Palestinian men and women's participation in the labor market remained extremely high, with only 17.4% of women (aged 15 years and above) participating in the labor force, compared to 68.2% for men. Women's unemployment rate was still double men's unemployment rate (40% among women compared to 21% among men³).

In the Gaza Strip, women's participation in the labor market decreased from 26% in 2018 to 19% in 2019⁴, reaching only 18% in the first quarter of 2020⁵. In the West Bank, there has been no improvement concerning women's labor market participation rate. It reached 17% in the first quarter of 2020. Women's labor force

² Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Press Release on the occasion of the International Workers' Day, 30/04/2020

³ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020. Labour Force Survey: (January- March, 2020) Round, (Q1/2020). "Press Report "Preliminary Results" Labour Force Survey. Ramallah - Palestine.

⁴ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019 & 2020, Palestinian Labour Force Survey: Annual Reports: 2018 & 2019. Ramallah - Palestine.

⁵ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020. Labour Force Survey: January- March, 2020) Round, (Q1/2020).

participation has in fact been higher in the Gaza Strip, as well as their unemployment rate. Among youth aged 19-29 years with an intermediate diploma and higher, the unemployment rate reached 68% among young women compared to 35% among young men. This indicates a lack of equal opportunities due to horizontal segregation in the labor market (i.e. women's employment is concentrated in a more limited number of sectors compared to men's, and in highly feminized sectors) and more restricted study fields of young women. Vertical segregation is very clear in the governmental sector, where women constituted 44% of civilian employees, but occupied only 13% of highest positions (general directors and above)⁶.

Over three quarters of women workers in Palestine are wage employees (77%), while 11.8% are self-employed, 8.3% are unpaid family members and only 2.7% are employers. The vast majority are employed in services and other branches (73.1%), followed by commerce, hotels and restaurants (11.1%), manufacturing (6.9%), agriculture and fishing (6.7%), transport, storage and communication (1.7%) and construction (0.5%)⁷.

68% of women in employment work in the private sector (109,000). Among women employed in the private sector, about 59% are wage employees (72,000). More than half are involved in the care economy activities. 4% are business owners, a third of them concentrated in the education activity. 17% are self-employed, concentrated in the activity of trade, restaurants and hotels by 27%⁸.



Discrimination also affects women's right to equal wages for work of equal value. In 2019, women employed in the private sector earned 71.9% of men's wages (based on average daily wage). Moreover, 35% of female wage workers in the private sector were paid less than the minimum wage, compared to 29% of men⁹.

Women employed in the private sector continue to face widespread violations of their rights to maternity and breastfeeding leave guaranteed by the Palestinian Labor Law No. 7 of the Year 2000. As per PCBS, 47% of women working in the private sector did not obtain a paid maternity leave in the first quarter of 2020.



⁶ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Press Release on the occasion of International Women's Day, 5/03/2020

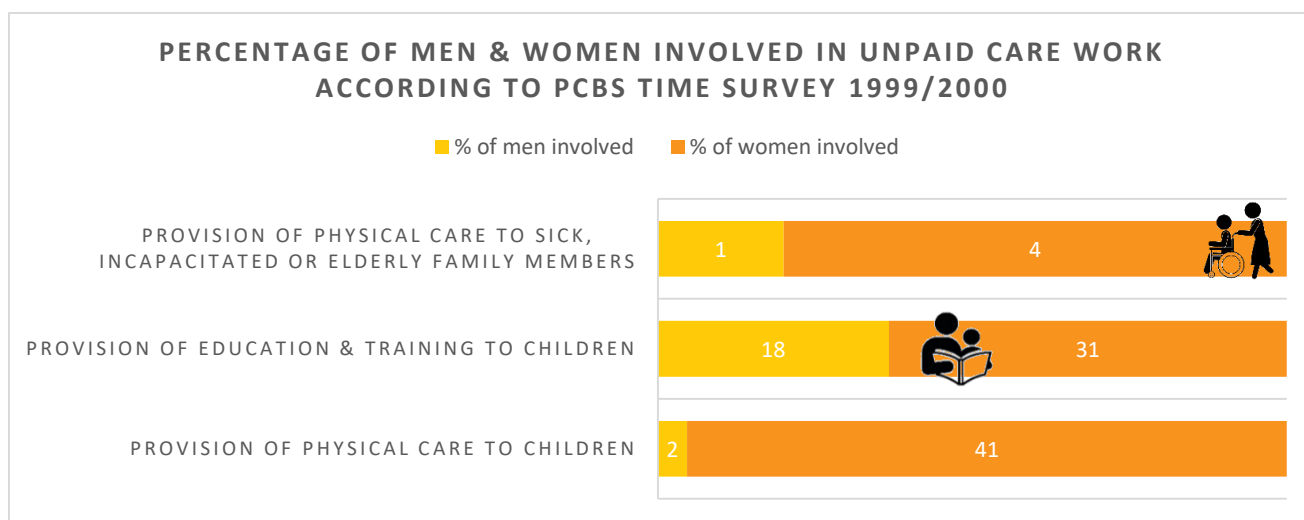
⁷ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020, Palestinian Labour Force Survey: Annual Report: 2019. Ramallah - Palestine.

⁸ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Press Release on the occasion of International Workers' Day, 30/04/2020, http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_30-4-2020-LF-en.pdf

⁹ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020, Palestinian Labour Force Survey: Annual Report: 2019. Ramallah - Palestine.

Palestinian labor legislation fails to adequately address gender equality issues. In its current form, the Labor Law does not provide effective protection from discrimination, and it lacks provisions to protect workers from violence and harassment in the workplace, including gender-based violence. It lacks deterrent penalties, and the maternity protection system requires improvements. The law thus contributes to violations of working women’s rights by employers. Amendments to the Labor Law from a gender perspective have been under discussion for a while, but have not been adopted yet. As long as the law is not modified, it will continue hindering the achievement of equity in workplaces, and the incidence of violations against working women will likely increase.

When describing women’s situation in Palestine, particularly that of women workers, it is necessary to consider the burdens imposed on women by society and families in relation to unpaid housework and providing care for children, the elderly, sick and incapacitated family members. These activities are traditionally assigned to women, while men do not consider them among their priorities. Statistics indicated that 42.5% of men participate in these activities, while 94.8% of women do. A national study indicated that women in the labor force do not perform less housework than those that remained outside the labor force. In fact, they spend 11 minutes more, with an average of 3 hours and 51 minutes, in comparison with 3 hours and 40 minutes for women outside the labor market. Women outside the labor market spend slightly more time on caring for family members. Women inside the labor market spent thrice the time spent by men on housework (3:51 hours for women compared to 1:17 hours for men) and twice the time spent by men on care work (2:02 hours compared to 0.58 hours)¹⁰.



Regarding childcare, the data from the time use survey of 1999/2000 showed that only 2% of men compared to 41% of women are involved in providing physical care to children, whereas 18% of men compared to 31% of women provide education, training and guidance to children. In addition, only 1% of men compared to 4% of women provide physical care to sick, elderly and incapacitated family members. Regarding household work, less than 10% of men participate in time-consuming activities, such as cooking and cleaning, whereas more than three thirds of women undertake

**Less than 10% of men undertake
cooking or cleaning activities**

¹⁰ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016. Analytical Report from Time Use Survey Data 2012/2013: Final Findings. Ramallah – Palestine

these activities. At the same time, men participate to a greater degree in purchasing household commodities and making errands related to household management, as about one quarter of men are involved in such activities¹¹.


¹¹ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001. Time Use in Housework, Child Care and Community Service (Indicators derived from the Time Use Survey in the Palestinian Territories (1999/2000)). Ramallah – Palestine.

2. The State of Emergency, specific measures concerning women workers, and governmental assistance programs to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

The State of Emergency and specific measures concerning women workers

On 5/03/2020, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas issued a presidential decree declaring a State of Emergency “to confront the threat of the Coronavirus and prevent its spread” for a period of 30 days¹², which has been renewed several times thereafter and was still in force as of August 2020. The decree conferred the powers and competences necessary to achieve the goals of this declaration to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister immediately announced the closure of all educational institutions (schools, kindergartens, universities, colleges, and others) as well as day-care centers from 6/03/2020. Thereafter, further restrictions were imposed, leading to a lockdown in the West Bank for a period of two months, from 22/03/2020 until 26/05/2020. In the Gaza Strip, all educational institutions and day-care facilities were closed simultaneously with the West Bank, as well as the restaurants, cafes and wedding halls from 22/03/2020. Restaurants were allowed to reopen for in-house customers at the end of April¹³. Other sectors continued operating.

During the 46th session of the Council of Ministers, held on 9/03/2020, the Prime Minister “authorized ministers to deal with female employees in governmental institutions in a positive spirit and on an individual basis regarding daily attendance, taking into account the situation of female employees, who have children in schools, kindergartens and day-care centers and have no one to take care of them in their absence”. On 10/03/2020, Minister of Labor Nasri Abu Jaish issued directive No. 50 of the Year 2020, which stipulates that the provision applicable to governmental employees, who are mothers, shall also apply to female workers in the private sector. He requested employers to organize working hours and days of female workers according to their situation and interests of work. The tripartite agreement during the State of Emergency, signed on 16/03/2020 between the Ministry of Labor, the coordinating committee for the private sector and trade unions, stipulated in its first point that “the private sector abides with the decision of the Minister of Labor concerning the attendance of female employees, who are mothers”.



None of these decisions made any provisions for recognizing the role of fathers in caring for children, while schools and day-care facilities are closed. Male workers have been excluded from benefiting from work arrangements to take care of young children, except if their employer should decide otherwise

¹² Palestinian News & Info Agency Wafa, “The Prime Minister announces the beginning of the implementation of the State of Emergency in Palestine, 5/03/2020, http://www.wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=LV4qu3a871532594889aLV4qu3

¹³ Safa Palestinian Press Agency, “Reopening of Gaza restaurants quenches the thirst of their workers”, 30/04/2020, <https://safa.news/post/282266/>

Governmental measures and assistance programs to mitigate the socio-economic effects of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic and containment measures.

The strict containment measures implemented by the Palestinian government during the period March to May 2020, had significant negative consequences for the jobs and livelihoods of Palestinian workers employed in the Palestinian private sector, including women workers, as well as for the self-employed and businesses, particularly small businesses. The sectors most affected were tourism, hotel and restaurants, and the education sector (particularly kindergartens & day-care centers) as they faced longer closure periods than other sectors, as well as those working in the transport of persons. The salaries of governmental employees were paid in full during the lockdown. In the absence of social insurance funds in the private sector, and particularly a fund for unemployment benefits, the Palestinian government attempted to mitigate the temporary closure of workplaces by signing a tripartite agreement with employers and trade unions. The agreement signed on 16/03/2020 stipulated that during a period of two months (March & April), enterprises would continue paying workers' salaries. Enterprises affected by the State of Emergency and containment measures would have to pay at least 50% of workers' salaries of March & April 2020, for an amount of no less than a 1000 shekels. The Ministry of Labor, unions and human rights organizations dealt with thousands of complaints regarding employers' non-abidance with the agreement. An attempt to negotiate a renewal or amendment of this agreement after it had expired failed.

The government also implemented cash assistance programs to help workers, who had lost their income. The Hamas de-facto authorities in Gaza distributed a one-time cash assistance installment of a 100 US\$ to 10,000 workers in the Gaza Strip in April 2020. No details have been released about its beneficiaries, thus it is unknown how many women benefited from it. In the West Bank, the Ministry of Labor and the General Federation of Palestinian Trade Unions (PGFTU) managed a mechanism for cash assistance to workers in the Palestinian labor market. A single installment of up to 700 shekels (about 214 US\$) was made to 40,202 workers starting May 19, 2020. The Wakfet Izz fund contributed 28 million shekels, while the remainder came from the Labor Ministry & PGFTU.

The Ministry of Labor stated that day-wage workers had been prioritized, as well as married workers with at least two children. The Ministry also indicated that they had decided to give priority to female workers over male workers if spouses had both applied to benefit from the one-time cash assistance. The Ministry further stated that only correctly filled online applications had been processed, which means that all those who had been unaware of the necessity to fill the online application or unable to do so were de-facto excluded from obtaining assistance. According to the Ministry, the distribution of beneficiaries by sectors was as follows: 25.1% in the construction sector (about 10,051 workers), 21.1% in the tourism, hotels & restaurant sector (about 8040 workers), 17.1% in the services sector (6,868 workers), 12.9% in the transport sector (5,186 workers), 6.7% in the kindergarten sector (2,694 workers), 5.9% in the trade sector (2,372 workers), 5.7% in the manufacturing & crafts sector (2,292 workers), 3.6% in the agricultural sector (1,447 workers), 1.4% in the stone quarries sector (563 workers), 1% in the garment sector (402 workers) and 0.5% in the health sector (161 workers). 18.5% of the beneficiaries were women.¹⁴ Despite the measures announced by the Ministry to check the eligibility of applicants, which included checks with the databases of the Ministries of Finance, Economy &

¹⁴ Aliqtisadi, "Distribution of assistance to more than 40,000 workers affected by the Coronavirus [pandemic]", 16/05/2020, <https://www.aliqtisadi.ps/article/75336/>

Social Development, Transportation, Local Authorities, Labor and Interior¹⁵, there were many complaints from workers, who did not obtain the one-time payment.

The Ministry of Social Development, which runs the social assistance programs funded by governmental funds and donor contributions, continued to run its cash assistance program to the poorest families and expanded the number of beneficiaries to include additional families that had been on the waiting list for assistance and those affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Ministry coordinated the distribution of food baskets and hygiene products to poor families. It also disbursed a one-time financial aid of 500 shekels to 1,245 employees of day-care centers and 3,700 kindergarten employees through the Wakfet Izz fund.

In parallel, financing mechanisms were put in place to support SMEs and micro-enterprises in overcoming the effects of the crisis. Among them, the Palestinian Monetary Fund launched the “sustainability” program, which is a 300 million US\$ package of low interest loans provided by banks for urgent financing of productive activities to support the recovery of SMEs and micro-projects affected by the forced cessation or reduction of their activities due to the pandemic.

Finally, the government announced donor-funded job creation (cash for work) and vocational rehabilitation programs to support economic recovery. Considering the pre-existing unemployment crisis, particularly among youth, such programs had already been planned or approved, and were reoriented or upped to address the additional challenges faced due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Cash for work programs, which provide equal opportunities for men and women to access jobs created, provide a good opportunity for women to integrate the labor market, particularly in the Gaza Strip.

Social insurances for male and female workers in the Israeli labor market with Jerusalem ID during the Covid-19 pandemic

From the start of the crisis related to the Covid-19 pandemic and the declaration of the State of Emergency by the Israeli government, the Israel National Insurance adopted temporary measures to facilitate workers’ access to unemployment benefits for those under 67 years of age. These measures covered the period 1/03/2020 until 16/08/2020. Thus, Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, who were dismissed or given an unpaid leave from 1/03 and for a period of 30 days or more, including week-ends and holidays, qualified to receive unemployed benefits if they had worked for the period of time required to be eligible for such benefits (having worked for 6 months for the same employer) and national insurance fees had been paid¹⁶. Those who were able to return to their jobs or found another job, while obtaining unemployment benefits, and did not notify the National Insurance Institution, are required to reimburse the paid amounts to the National Insurance for their period of work. On 12/04/2020, the National Insurance Institution also allocated an amount of 500 shekels to every family with a child younger than 18 years of age, and for up to four children, i.e. those with more than four children received no more than 2000 shekels. There was also additional assistance to the elderly, those receiving disability benefits, divorcee benefits and wage security benefits¹⁷.

¹⁵ Palestinian News and Info Agency Wafa, “Minister of Labor: distribution of entitlements to more than 40,000 workers affected by the Coronavirus [pandemic] begins”, http://wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=fDzWN9a876287552877afDzWN9

¹⁶ Kul Al-Haq, “Facilities in eligibility to obtain unemployment benefits during the period of the Corona crisis” <https://www.kolzhut.org.il/ar/%D8%AA%D8%B3%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%B5%D9%91%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A9%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%85%D8%A9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7>

¹⁷ Israeli National Insurance Institution “All guidelines from the National Insurance following Covid-19”: shorturl.at/fIBGJ

3. Findings of the online questionnaire about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on working women in Palestine and women's testimonies

"I hope for a job opportunity that will preserve my dignity and my family, and alleviate our family's burdens ... we are crippled by debts and are unable to repay them." – Ashwaq, 27-year-old journalism and media graduate from the Gaza Strip.

Ashwaq is married and the only breadwinner for her two children. She found work at a governmental school through a temporary job creation project, but the project stopped when the State of Emergency was declared and schools closed. She lives with her family in a small room in the house of one of her husband's relatives, and is unable to provide for the needs of her children, particularly since her husband is unable to work and they do not benefit from any external assistance.

Like Ashwaq, many Palestinian women lost their jobs and income, or were confronted with an interruption of their work for an unknown period. They face great uncertainty about their future employment status. 41.5% of the respondents to DWRC's questionnaire about the "Impact of Covid-19 on working women in Palestine" indicated that they stopped working and were not paid their wages, or lost their jobs.



Zeina lost her job at a beauty salon in the Gaza Strip. As part of the measures to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, wedding celebrations were banned, which caused the beauty salon's work to stop. This situation led the salon's management to dismiss her, and she lost her only source of income. Many in her sector faced the same fate.

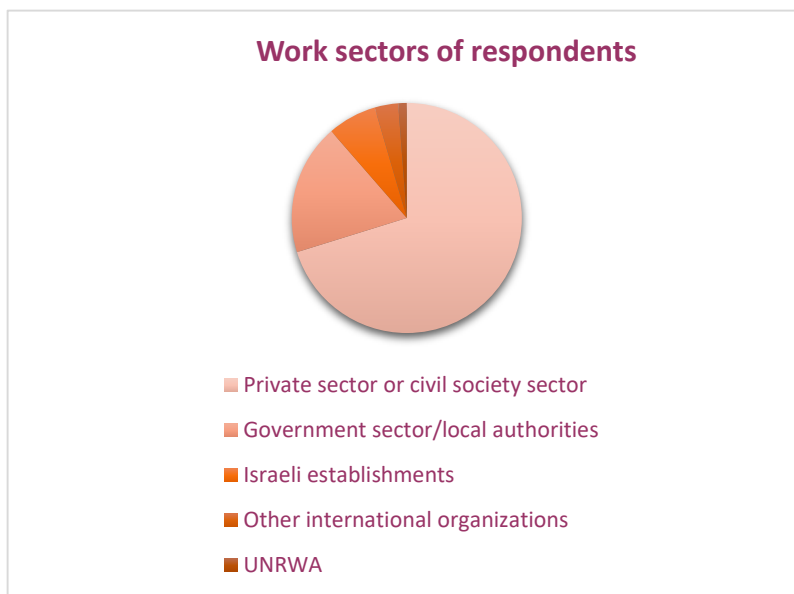
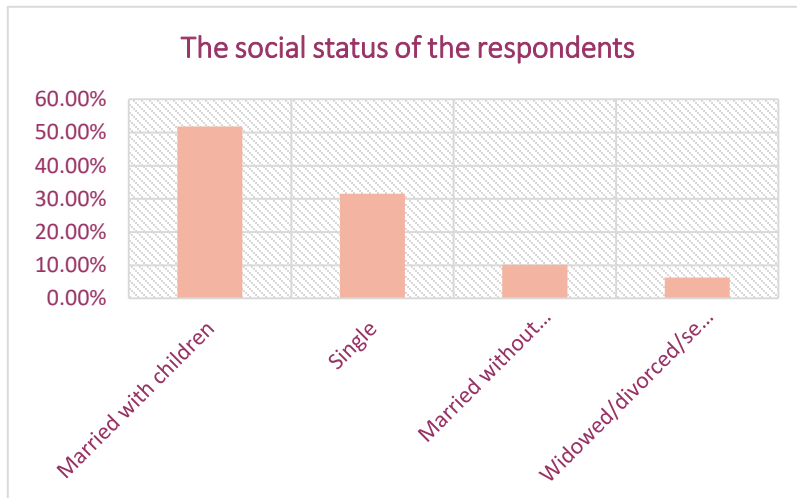
W. works for a store that rents dresses for weddings and other occasions. She says she has not worked since March, adding: ***"the Covid-19 pandemic has affected all of us. Our wages are tied to our work, if we do not work, we do not get paid"***.

DWRC undertook this survey to assess the impact of Covid-19 on working women in Palestine, and how their needs have been addressed during the State of Emergency. The questionnaire targeted women workers from the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, and who are working in the Palestinian and Israeli labor markets. In total, 332 women filled the questionnaire in June 2020, the majority of them from the West Bank (48.8%), 28.3% from East Jerusalem and 22.9% from the Gaza Strip.

Regarding social status, about 51.8% of the survey participants indicated that they are married and have children, 31.6% are single, 10.2% are married but have no children, and 6.3% are widowed, divorced or separated and do not have children.

Regarding their work/employment situation before the start of emergency procedures due to Covid-19, most of the survey participants (40.1%) have a permanent work contract, 31.6% have a fixed-term work contract, 12% work as day-wage workers, seasonal workers or per piece, 9.3% are self-employed, 6.3% work with a productive cooperative or organization that has productive activities, 3.3% are unpaid workers in the family business, 0.6% are business owners. According to the survey, the majority (70.2%) work in the private sector or civil society sector, 18.4% work in the governmental sector or local authorities, 6.9% work in Israeli establishments, 1.2% work for UNRWA and 3.3% work for other international organizations.

Regarding the nature of the economic activity of survey participants', the highest percentage work in the education sector (46.9%), followed by 15.9% working in the charitable and social sector (civil society and charitable institutions, care homes, etc.), 6.9% in the health sector, 5.7% in small services sector, 3.9% in agriculture / fishing, 3.9% in public administration (municipalities, ministries, local councils), 3.3% in the trade sector, 3% in the catering, hotel, tourism and entertainment services sector, 2.7% in the press, media and printing sectors, 2.4% in the industrial sector, 0.9% in crafts, 0.9% in the engineering sector 0.6% for the sports sector, 0.3% in the construction sector, 0.3% for gas provision.



Raja, 48 years old, has been working at a day-care center in Ramallah for the past 15 years. Even before the pandemic, the owner of the day-care center did not pay her salary in a timely manner, alleging that she could not provide workers' wages. When the State of Emergency was declared, her work at the day-care center stopped, and she has not obtained her wages for over 5 months. *"I face a very difficult economic situation, as my husband has also lost his job. He used to work for an Israel employer, but he has no work permit, so when the crossings [between*

the West Bank and Israel] were closed, he did not go back to his workplace.” Raja and her husband have five children, and they found themselves without any source of income, which led to increased financial burdens and unpaid bills. It has become very difficult for them to get food and other essential goods. Their deteriorated economic situation has affected family relations, causing increased tensions and daily altercations.

Female workers in the education sector, especially in kindergartens, have been especially affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Thousands of kindergarten workers lost their source of income after the Palestinian Authority imposed a closure of all educational institutions, as a preventive measure to contain the spread of the virus. Many workers did not obtain their wages, although they continued working from home through online education tools. In the Gaza Strip, where workers’ wages are much lower than in the West Bank in normal circumstances, female kindergarten workers did not obtain their wages since the State of Emergency started.

Suheila and Noura from Al-Mawassi in the Gaza Strip are 45 and 40 years old, and used to earn 5 shekels per hour by sorting potatoes for an agricultural cooperative. They used to make a daily wage of 25 shekels. In March 2020, work stopped due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and they are now both unemployed. Suheila has been a widow for the past 4 years, and has no other source of income. After her husband died, she used to support her four family members through her work, because even her sons could not find any job. Now she lives with the hope of obtaining social assistance. Noura has been divorced for 20 years, and is supporting her 20-year-old son, who has a disability. He was unable to complete his high school education due to the bad economic situation, and has no job. Suheila and Noura both expressed the need for support to start their own small income-generating project.

Many female workers in various economic sectors did not obtain their wages during the State of Emergency. A significant number of employers in the private sector did not abide with the tripartite agreement that stipulated payment of 50% of workers’ wages, while they were unable to work due to the measures adopted as part of the State of Emergency, and the remaining 50% upon returning to work. Most respondents to the questionnaire indicated that they stopped working; 29.2% were not paid their wages at all, and 15.4% obtained part of their wages. 13.6% started working from home for the same employer and 13.6% continued working in their workplace. 12.3% lost their jobs. Only 10.2% stopped working and obtained their full wages.



Sheima, who works as a wedding planner at a wedding hall in Gaza says: *“Although the PGFTU signed an agreement with the coordinating committee for the private sector regarding the payment of 50% of workers’ wages, while they are unable to work, and the remainder after they get back to work, it has all remained ink on paper.”*

Suhad has owned a day-care center for the past 10 years. The Covid-19 pandemic caused the loss of many pupils due to fear of contracting the virus. From the closure of the day-care center due to emergency measures, workers' salaries, bills and rent have accumulated. Suhad also indicated that when the day-care center was allowed to open again, no more than 10 children came back. The fees paid by their parents do not cover the financial commitments of the day-care center in terms of wages and bills.

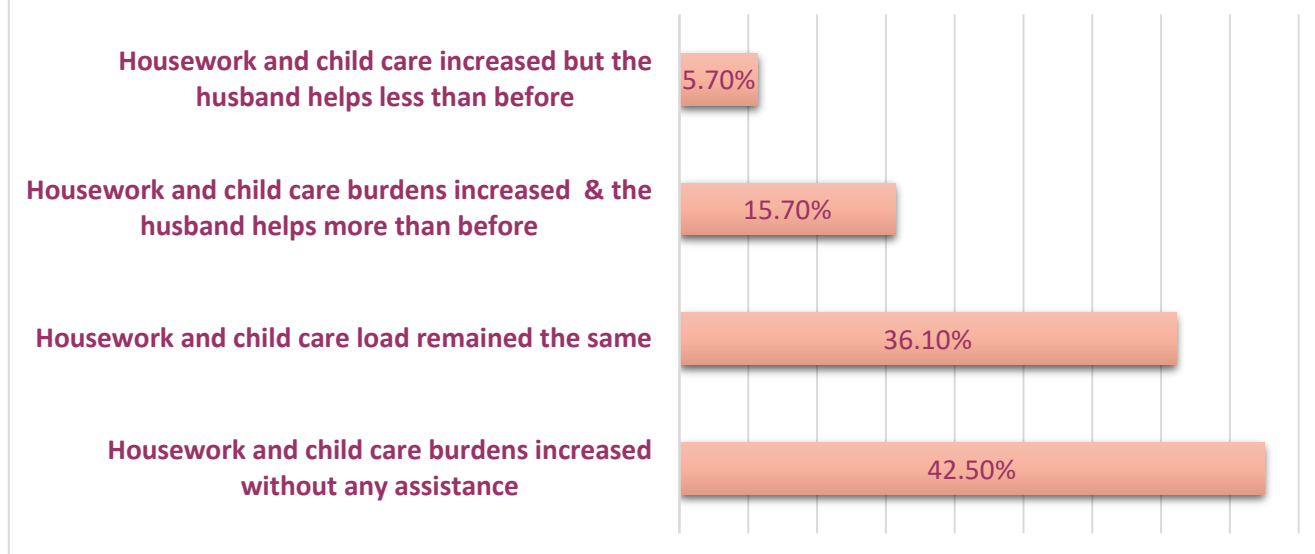
As the Covid-19 pandemic and preventive measures to contain its spread continue, DWRC asked Palestinian women workers about their expectations regarding their work/employment situation in the future. 41.9% of respondents expected to return to their work under the same conditions and circumstances, 22.3% expect to return to their work but perhaps under worse conditions and circumstances, such as lower wages or income, 18.1% need to search for new work or a new job opportunity, 17.8% do not know if it will be possible for them to resume their former work or job.

As the emergency situation continues, and families are required to stay in their homes leaving many without source of income for periods of times, it is expected that the financial and family burdens will increase further. **75.3% of the respondents indicated that they contribute in supporting their families, whereas 24.7% indicated that they are the sole providers for their families.**

“My husband was injured at work three years ago, and he did not obtain any compensations for his injury. Thus, I was working as a janitor before the State of Emergency was declared, for 50 shekels per month.” said Ulfat, a 26 years old resident of the Gaza Strip. She lives in a small house with her husband's siblings and his parents. Despite the extremely low wage she was paid and which does not allow any family to subsist on it, Ulfat lost her job in an association, and is unable to bear the costs for her two children and her injured husband. She has not received any assistance since the Covid-19 pandemic started.

In most cases, the responsibility for unpaid housework and childcare falls on women alone. 42.5% of respondents indicated that the load of housework/child care increase and they received no assistance from anyone, 36.1% indicated that their housework/child care work load remained the same, 15.7% indicated that the burden of housework/child care increased, but that their husband provides more assistance than before, and 5.7% indicated that their housework/child care work has increased, but that their husband helps less than before.

Impact on unpaid housework & child care



In terms of requesting financial/material assistance due to the difficult economic situation for many Palestinian families, 36.1% of survey participants indicated that they are not in need for any assistance, 31.6% indicated that they registered to receive assistance but did not obtain any until now, 22.5% indicated that they did not register to obtain assistance but need it, 4.2% indicated that their husband or another family member obtained assistance and 1.2% indicated that they are in need of other forms of assistance.



“My colleagues and I submitted applications to obtain assistance from Wakfet Izz fund and to the Ministry of Labor, but only one of us obtained a 100 US\$ out of 13 female workers.” says Ala. For the past 5 years, she has been working as a secretary at a kindergarten in Gaza for a low wage, reaching about 400 shekels per month. Now with the Covid-19 crisis, she has not been paid since March 2020, as her employer claims that he has other financial obligations, and that parents have not paid the fees.

Amina, a teacher at the same kindergarten, added: *“We registered on all the links published by the Ministry of Labor and many organizations for assessing the damages caused by Covid-19 in order to reduce our burdens. Regrettably, we have not obtained any assistance although our wages are very low to start with.”*

4.2% survey participants indicated that they obtained assistance, as follows: 5 female workers from East Jerusalem obtained unemployment benefits from the Israel National Insurance (as East Jerusalem residents), one said she obtained a little assistance without specifying the source, 4 workers obtained assistance from Wakfet Izz Fund, 2

obtained assistance from their village or individuals, 1 obtained 500 shekels from the Social Development Ministry and one obtained assistance from PGFTU.

Fareeda is 30-years old, she is single and supports her ill mother and four siblings in the Gaza Strip. She says: *“I have been working at a kindergarten from 2012, for a monthly wage of only 300 shekels. When the State of Emergency was declared, the kindergarten stopped operating. I have not been paid my wages since November 2019, because the economic situation in the Gaza Strip is bad, and parents have not been paying the fees they owe.”* Her family registered online to benefit from the assistance programs that were announced, but they did not obtain any assistance from anyone. Their economic situation is very difficult, and they cannot cover their most basic needs.

30.7% of survey participants indicated that they need to look for a new job opportunity, 26.8% need assistance and aid, 24.4% need psychosocial support, 17.8% need legal aid and knowledge about their rights, and 13.6% need support for their economic project.

4. Violations of women's labor rights in the private sector during the Covid-19 pandemic

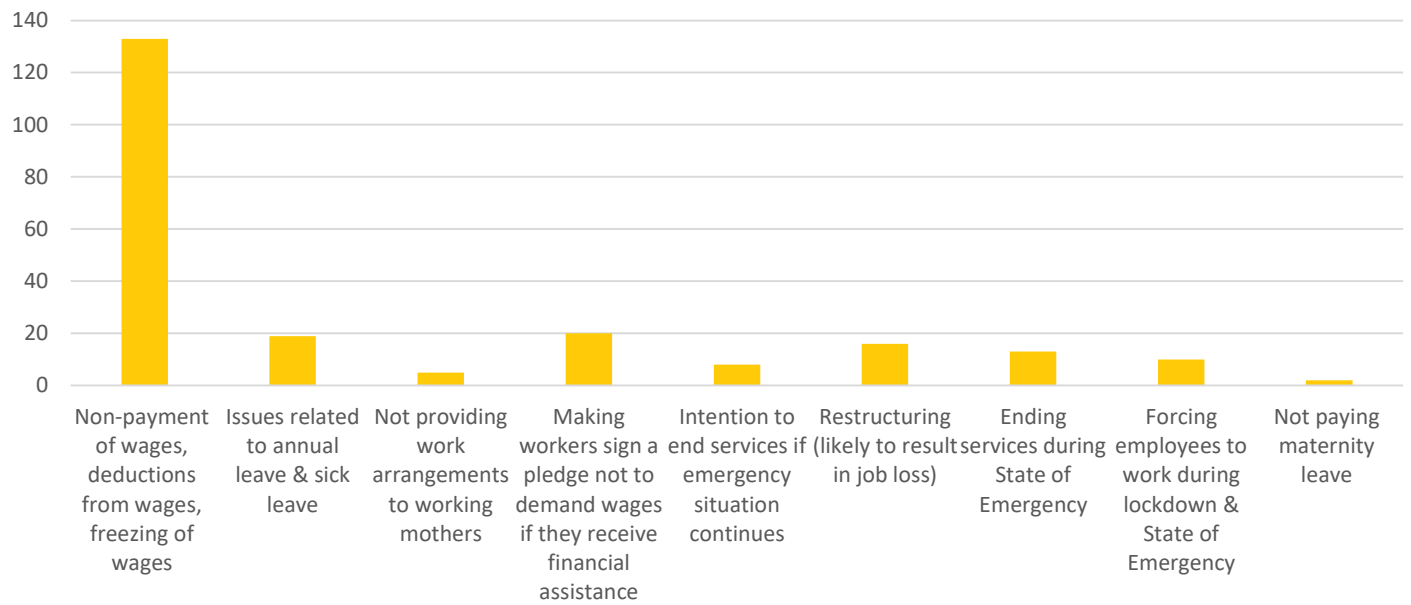
For the past two decades, women wage workers in the private sector have faced numerous violations of their most basic labor rights guaranteed by the Palestinian Labor Law No. 7 of the Year 2000. Women in informal employment in the formal and informal economy (i.e. those in precarious employment situations and/or whose basic rights are not respected in normal circumstances) have been most affected by employers' measures since the Covid-19 pandemic has started.

From the beginning of the crisis related to the pandemic in Palestine until the end of June 2020, the inspection department at the Labor Ministry in the West Bank received 588 complaints from workers, 132 of them from female workers (i.e. 22.5% of complaints). 75.7% of the complaints from male & female workers concerned wages, 12% concerned termination of services, 3.6% concerned working hours, 2.9% concerned leaves and vacations, 0.8% work injuries and occupational diseases, and 4% other issues. The Ministry also provided 5164 consultations during this period, 1099 of them to female workers (21.3%). 60% of the consultations concerned wages, 13% concerned working hours, 7% concerned leaves and vacations, 3% concerned termination of services, and 17% concerned other issues (labor rights, work contracts, safety and health)¹⁸.

The complaints and requests for legal advice submitted by women workers to DWRC also concerned in their overwhelming majority issues related to wages (non-payment of wages, deductions from wages, freezing the payment of wages). Other issues faced by women workers included the deduction of unworked days from leaves, non-respect of the requirement to provide work arrangements for working mothers, attempts to deduct financial assistance to workers from wages due to them, not obtaining paid maternity leave, dismissal, restructuring and notification of end of services if State of Emergency continues to be enforced.

¹⁸ Ministry of Labor, General Directorate for Labor Inspection and Protection, unpublished report about labor inspection from 22/03 until 30/06/2020

Violations of rights faced by women workers due to Covid-19 pandemic in the West Bank based on DWRC legal consultations



- **Non-payment of wages**

According to the tripartite agreement signed on 16/03/2020, wages for March and April 2020 should have been paid in full in non-affected sectors, or partially in affected sectors for a minimum amount of a 1000 shekels. Both male and female workers have been affected by non-payment of wages, but in certain sectors, such as early childhood care, kindergartens and some private schools, we noted that women workers have been affected massively in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Employers invoked the non-payment of fees by parents of pupils/children in their care, on which they rely to pay workers' wages, in order to justify non-payment of salaries. In some cases, unpaid wages also concerned the month prior to the start of the pandemic in Palestine, or even longer periods. Women's unions denounced the situation and called on decision-makers to ensure that their members and workers in their sector have access to financial assistance, in addition to requesting the implementation of the tripartite agreement.

Samia Kamal, president of the Bethlehem branch of the Kindergarten, Private Schools and Day-Care Centers Workers' Union, says: *"During the Covid-19 pandemic, kindergarten and private school teachers have not been paid their wages. They were left without income, while they are main supporters of their families. Heads of our branch unions in various locations (in Bethlehem, Nablus, Tulkarem and the other governorates) intervened promptly. As the Bethlehem branch union president, I tried to help members through contacting the governor, who provided some assistance (food baskets) to some of the teachers, but it was not sufficient to reach all those affected by the pandemic. After internal consultations on how to address the situation, we submitted lists of our members to the Prime Minister asking for assistance, particularly through the Wakfet Ezz fund. Some teachers*

did indeed obtain assistance from this fund". In subsequent meetings with the governor and Ministry of Labor representatives, Samia and other union representatives continued advocating for ensuring that workers in their sector, most of them teachers, obtain assistance, as well as raising the issue of the low wages paid to female teachers in their sector, which do not constitute fair wages by any standards.

- **Deducting unworked days from annual vacations & non-respect of the obligation to provide work arrangements for working mothers**

Since the beginning of the pandemic, male and female workers have faced the issue of deduction of unworked days from their annual vacations. The closure of schools and day-care facilities even before imposition of lockdowns in the West Bank, has exposed women workers to longer periods of work interruption due to the necessity to care for young children. After the lockdown was lifted, only day-care centers and kindergartens were gradually allowed to resume operating, if they follow strict guidelines and preventive measures imposed by the Ministry of Health. This issue is likely to continue affecting women's work, as schools are only scheduled to reopen at the beginning of September, and the Ministry of Education announced that there would be a combination of online learning and classroom teaching.

On the other hand, women workers employed by companies faced issues in obtaining work arrangements, such as being able to work from home (teleworking). Even in the financial sector, which continued operating during the lockdown, the Banking and Insurance Companies Union denounced violations of the rights of employees, including non-respect of government directives regarding work arrangements for working mothers, and in one case, forcing a female employee to resign¹⁹.

One employer in an essential sector obliged female employees to work during lockdowns, and get to their workplaces in another governorate without providing any means of transportation, while public transportation was not operational. Unworked days were deducted from leave days or wages in the absence of remaining leaves, in violation of the directive of the Minister of Labor No. 136 of the Year 2020, which stipulates in its article 2 that: *"Periods of absence from work during the months of March and April due to the procedures of mandatory confinement and the State of Emergency directives issued by official bodies shall be considered as working days. They may not be deducted from annual leaves. The only exception concerns workers, who had already been on annual leave before the State of Emergency was declared and the confinement procedures were announced, and this until the end of their leave."*²⁰

- **Attempts to deduct financial assistance from wages due to workers**

Several workers have reported that their employers tried to oblige them to sign a pledge stating that they would not request their unpaid wages if they obtain cash assistance.

¹⁹ Wattan News Agency, 16/06/2020, The Banking and Insurance Companies Employees' Union: If banks and insurance companies that violated their employees' rights during the state of emergency do not retract these violations, we will disclose their names", <https://www.wattan.net/ar/video/312026.html>

²⁰ Directive of the Minister of Labor No. 136 of the Year 2020 regarding the implementation of collective tripartite agreement signed on 16/03/2020

On 18/06/2020, the Ministry of Social Development issued a statement clarifying that the purpose of the cash assistance disbursed by the Wakfet Izz fund to workers, particularly to day-care workers and kindergarten teachers, was to assist workers and teachers, not day-care centers and kindergartens. The Ministry asked day-care and kindergarten owners to take into account that this assistance is female workers' right, and has no connection to their wages.²¹

²¹ Shms News Agency "Social Development [Ministry] provides clarifications regarding the assistance from Wakfet Izz fund to female workers in day-care centers and kindergartens, 18/06/2020, <https://shms.ps/post/101443/>

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The Covid-19 pandemic has amplified gender disparities, and is likely to deepen gender-based discrimination and marginalization faced by Palestinian women in the labor market, if decision-makers do not adopt adequate policy responses.

As has been the case worldwide, the Covid-19 pandemic has negatively affected the livelihoods and jobs of men and women in Palestine, including in the Gaza Strip, which already faced a pre-existing economic crisis due to the blockade imposed for the past 13 years. Women employed in the governmental sector and local authorities, where formal employment prevails, have been less affected by the immediate consequences of the pandemic, as salaries continued to be paid in full during the months of March, April and May 2020, and they have greater job security than in other sectors. The situation in the private sector is most preoccupying.

In normal circumstances, the unemployment rate among women is much higher than men's, as is the percentage of women facing long-term unemployment (12 months and above). In 2019, 60.4% of female youth were in a situation of long-term unemployment compared to 40.9% of male youth. Among persons aged 15 years and above, 63.1% of women were in long-term unemployment compared to 38.4% of men²². In the context of economic recession, it is likely that women, including young women, will face even more difficulties and obstacles to access employment. Among the survey sample, 30.7% of respondents indicated that they need to look for a new job opportunity, and 13.6% need support for their economic project. This calls for several concomitant interventions, which should be closely monitored and supervised by the government, competent Ministries, and the Fund for Employment and Social Protection:

- Increasing unemployed women's access to short-term job creation programs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in various professional fields and sectors
- The Ministry of Labor should develop professional guidance and counseling services to women, and encourage women to avail themselves of these services and register with employment offices. At the same time, there should be greater focus on channeling available job opportunities through these offices, ensuring that they are open to men and women (i.e. making sure that the job advertisements are not discriminatory, that they use gender-sensitive language, that employers are ready to consider applicants from both sexes and undertake a fair selection process based on professional qualifications)
- Competent ministries (Ministries of Labor, Economy, and Women's Affairs), Chambers of Commerce, and CSOs active in this field should ensure that self-employed women and women business owners have access to technical assistance, training and funding to overcome the impact of the crisis through upgrading and expanding existing programs and mechanisms that specifically aim at fostering women entrepreneurship. These should also apply to programs those targeting women, who want to start their own business, whether such a project pre-existed the pandemic or became a necessity in view of the loss of paid employment during the pandemic.
- Similar assistance and support should also be made available to women cooperatives to strengthen their resilience and capacity to create jobs and generate income for members, as well as to women's centers and organizations that manage income-generating activities

²² Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020, Palestinian Labour Force Survey: Annual Report: 2019. Ramallah - Palestine.

- In view of the disruptions to global markets caused by the pandemic, and chronic issues faced in Palestine in reaching such markets, further efforts should be made to develop the share of women's products in the local market and strengthen local consumers' basis

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of tackling the issue of unequal distribution of unpaid care work between men and women. The Palestinian government's decision regarding work arrangements to palliate the closure of schools and child care facilities has not been progressive in this regard; it took act of the existing situation (in practice and in society's predominant views, women are responsible for child care), without seizing the opportunity to promote a more equitable model, recognize the importance of men's role in child care and give them the opportunity to step up during the crisis by making work arrangements available to them as well. 63.9% of the women, who participated in the survey, have reported an increase of the burdens of unpaid care work during the pandemic. Almost half indicated that they received no assistance from their spouse or less assistance than before the pandemic in shouldering these burdens. For women, the existence of safe and affordable child care services are essential to enable them to enter and remain in the labor market. During the pandemic, these services have been halted, and testimonies from those working in the sector indicate that even after the reopening of day-care centers, less families have registered their children in them. Schools have remained closed from the beginning of March and will only reopen at the beginning of September under a mixed education regime, meaning that part of the teaching should be provided face-to-face, and part online. Practically, this means that families will have to adapt to the new system and will have to find alternative care-arrangements for the hours, days or periods their young children will not be attending school. In the private sector, working women have faced difficulties in obtaining work arrangements to care for young children, or this has resulted in wage deductions and may have jeopardized their positions. As the pandemic will continue for an undetermined period, solutions must be found to address the outlined issues and prevent discrimination against working mothers. Thus, our recommendations are that:

- The government should engage in discussions and negotiations with unions and employers' organizations to promote flexible work arrangements for both male and female workers, who have young children at charge; this should result in a unified policy applicable to the public and private sectors for the duration of the State of Emergency and the pandemic, taking into account the constraints faced in various economic sectors.
- The 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, and develop policies and measures that ensure decent work conditions for care economy workers
- The government, unions, civil society organizations and the media should promote a more equitable distribution of unpaid care work between men and women through education and awareness-raising campaigns

The absence of a comprehensive social protection system, and particularly the absence of a social security system and unemployment benefits for private sector workers, coupled with a chronic budget deficit amplified

by political factors, have severely limited the Palestinian government's capacity to provide financial support for workers, who temporarily lost their income or have lost their jobs due to the pandemic. While data released by competent Ministries in the West Bank indicated that women workers have benefited from the one-time financial assistance disbursed during the first wave of the pandemic, the overall number of workers selected was limited and many workers have not received any assistance, either because they were not able to register for assistance, they were not aware that they should have done, or they did not fulfill priority criteria to receive assistance. Furthermore, the selection process was complicated by the fact that there is no comprehensive and up-to-date database about the employment situation of workers, and the political split between West Bank and Gaza, which resulted in lack of coordination. Such a data-base could have greatly helped in reducing the error margins, and ensuring that the financial assistance benefits all those most in need, among them women workers. Moving forward, there is a need for:

- Reconsidering the assistance programs provided to male and female workers in the Gaza Strip, and involving women's committees in unions when defining needs and adopting databases about workers²³
- Women's departments in unions should work to establish accurate databases for workers, who were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, issue reports on the extent of the harm and violations they suffered, and submit these reports to human rights organizations and official bodies to address them.²⁴
- The government should reactivate discussions on the social security law, taking into account the substantive comments that were submitted about the law, particularly those concerning working women and their rights²⁵

The situation created by the pandemic and containment measures have placed additional stress on women's coping mechanisms, amplified pre-existing problems and generated additional ones, whether they concern women's physical and psychosocial well-being, or their rights at work. A quarter of the women, who participated in the survey, indicated that they need psychosocial support, and 17.8% said they need legal aid and knowledge about their rights. Recommendations to address this situation are as follows:

- Providing psychosocial support programs to women workers, which have to bear additional family responsibilities during the pandemic²⁶
- Putting pressure for coordination between social partners to achieve equality between male and female workers in workplaces, so that women do not bear the impact of the pandemic alone²⁷
- Activating the media's role in addressing issues faced by women, especially regarding economic and gender-based violence²⁸
- Providing awareness programs for working women in workplaces about all rights-based issues faced by women²⁹

²³ This forms part of the recommendations that resulted from the workshop held by DWRC with women unionists and rights activists in the Gaza Strip on 20/07/2020

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid footnote 23

²⁶ Ibid footnote 23

²⁷ Ibid footnote 23

²⁸ Ibid footnote 23

²⁹ Ibid footnote 23

- The labor inspection department should strengthen its monitoring of law implementation in workplaces employing women, to ensure that women workers obtain all the basic rights guaranteed by the Labor Law, and are not compelled to agree to less favorable work conditions and circumstances that will affect their employment situation and rights in the long-term, if such measures are not warranted by compelling grounds
- The government should resume consultations on the labor reform process as soon as possible, prioritizing the conclusion of an agreement on proposed amendments to the law from a gender perspective, which have already been extensively discussed with all key stakeholders

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