

# Empowerment and Participation of Woman in Arab Workforce Market

DR ATEF SLAEH ALADWAN  
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT  
AMMAN COLLEGE FOR ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCE SCIENCES  
ALBALQAA APPLIED UNIVERSITY  
P O BOX 8899 AMMAN 11121 JORDAN  
TEL NO 00962-79-5180-977

## Abstract

This article aims to highlight focus on the Arab woman empowerment and participation in the workforce, the study is descriptive study focusing on the case of woman which is considered as the half and more of Arab society. There are several methods for analyzing and reporting the situation of women in the Arab region. One method involves the Gender Inequality Index (GII), which is one of the Human Development Indicators that is used with different indicators for a comparative measure as life expectancy, literacy, education, standards of living and quality of life. Moreover, it can be used to measure the impact of economic policies on the quality of life which reflects gender-based inequalities, is a composite measure that captures the loss of achievement within a country due to gender inequality, and uses three dimensions to do so namely reproductive health, empowerment and labor market participation.

The study recommended many wealthy aspects to overcome and success of empowerment of woman in Arab countries as regulations and legal and social and management policies.

**Keyword:** Empowerment, inequality, labor market, gender, economic Development.

## INTRODUCTION

Several business owners in Arab countries still perceive women as less productive and more expensive to hire; these constraints lead to reducing their opportunity to join the workforce market and studies in a number of Arab countries have shown that many women voluntarily choose not to participate in the labor market, while others find it difficult to find work.

The participation of women in the labor force has increased at rates that merely exceed 1 per cent. If growth continues at this weak pace, according to the World Development Report 2012, it would take Arab women some 150 years to catch up with their counterparts in the West in terms of rights. The gap between men and women in many countries has been steadily narrowing; not in Arab countries, however due to several legal, structural and cultural factors. The low participation of women in the labor market and the discrepancies between countries in the region reflect the complexity of the legislative, economic, culture and social norms that are faced by women in the region, thereby creating many pressures that limit and narrow down further the choices for women. In addition, most of the women entering the market prefer the public sector, especially education and health jobs. In the informal sector, mainly agriculture, the majority of workers and laborers are women. Cultural factors, in addition to unemployment and the mismatch between educational attainment and market need.

The low participation of women in the labor market and the discrepancies between countries in the region reflect the complexity of the legislative, economic, culture and social norms that are faced by women in the region, thereby creating many pressures that limit and narrow down further the choices for women. In addition, several business owners in Arab countries still perceive women as less productive and more expensive to hire; these constraints lead to reducing their opportunities to move and choose their working positions, and make them less attractive to employers.

The labor nationalization policy of GCC countries has long been in operation to create employment opportunities for each country's nationals, particularly in the private sector dependency on foreign workers in the private sector had increased in most GCC countries and while the idea of a more stringent labor nationalization policy had been discussed, it had not been effectively implemented in the past. In 2013, however, Saudi Arabia shifted to a stricter policy regime to promote the employment of Saudi nationals. The government granted an amnesty period for foreign expatriates to rectify their sponsorship status or voluntarily leave the country. Until November 2013, a significant number of foreign workers left voluntarily. The economic impacts of the new labor policy of Saudi Arabia are yet to be assessed; however, this policy change has enhanced female employment indirectly. Indeed, in parallel with the exit of illegal foreign workers, Saudi female workers in the areas of administration, education and retail. The role of the government in employment creation, skill-matching and knowledge-sharing to tackle unemployment issues remains crucial.

The Arab region scored a GII value of 0.546, ranking fifth or before last of six world region, with Europe and Central Asia having the highest rank and Sub-Saharan Africa having the lowest. According to World Bank data, the representation of Arab women in the labor market did not exceed 27 per cent.

### **Unemployment**

Unemployment rates for women in the Arab region vary from one country to another. And there was an increase in the female unemployment rate in 2013 in Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon. And in the United Arab Emirates, from 10.8 per cent to 11.6 per cent. The highest male to female unemployment gap was found in Saudi Arabia. A decrease in the female unemployment rate was recorded in Jordan

In Jordan, there has been a significant decrease in female unemployment since 2009, tightening the male to female unemployment gap. The Government has taken several measures to lessen unemployment, particularly the National Employment Campaign in collaboration with the private sector, aimed at providing job opportunities to jobseekers in different sectors of the economy. Under the slogan "we are all partners", the campaign involves more than 200 enterprises enabling the Ministry of Labor to establish and maintain a database of more than 18,000 job vacancies that can be matched with jobseeker profiles. In addition, The Ministry took a decision to suspend the recruitment of foreign workers in order to focus on solving the unemployment problem for nationals, particularly with the current situation of more than two million Syrian refugee staying and working in the country, mostly without legal work permits.

Tunisia, were created 27,000 jobs in the fourth quarter of 2013, with 17,200 jobs created for women. Unemployment increased particularly for women during the political transition, to over 25.0 per cent, and remains high and around 21.4 per cent compared to the rate in 2009.

In Saudi Arabia, the unemployment rate for national women started to come down in 2011. Saudi Arabia has taken radical measures to face the increasing unemployment rates for both men and women, such as introducing an allowance for job seeker strengthening "Nitaqat" which is a quota system to increase the employment of nationals.

Gulf countries have achieved little in their objective to substitute foreigners with national workers in their domestic labor markets. It remains very difficult for these countries to increase the participation of nationals in the private labor market, owing to the domination of cheap foreign labor and the deeply rooted social and cultural norms. Female expatriates from various nationalities are still dominating a great part of service sector in GCC countries, particularly sales. Business owners in general prefer to hire expatriates, given that these are paid half as much as national women conditions and schedules is perceived as much higher compared to that of national women. This is particularly the case where service businesses are apt to suffer from the higher labor cost upon the reinforcement of nationalization laws, especially those related to wages and benefits of local labor force.

in Egypt, 69 per cent of unemployed males and females are aged between 15 and 29, and more than 82 per cent of them hold university degrees or diplomas. The political disorder and economic shocks that Egypt has undergone since the uprising of January 2011 contributed greatly to increasing unemployment. Women are playing the highest price; the female unemployment rate increased from 23 per cent in 2009 to 25 per cent in 2013, and most of unemployed women are university graduates

It remains imperative for Arab countries in general to adapt and enforce fiscal and social policies and to provide adequate labor and social protection laws that support working Arab women and mothers in particular, including child support or maternity leave entitlements, especially in the private sector. In addition, given that women across the region play a key role in nationalization the workforce, particularly in GCC countries, and given their integral role in the development of the economy, labor policies should address the needs of working women and offer the motivational perks that match international standards; encourage women to enter the labor force; and lessen the burdens of household responsibilities within the framework of existing and evolving traditions and social values. Such reforms and laws include educational reforms and promoting vocational training, more flexible working hours, improved maternity and family leaves and allowances, and deploying nurseries and feeding rooms in work premises. In addition, there is need for a "protective umbrella" that shields workers in the informal sector, especially women in agriculture and rural areas. It is also important to promote awareness of women's rights and make provisions to combat gender-based discrimination in the labor market, in addition, to designing a legal framework for pursuing discrimination and harassment claims.

### **Mythology of the study**

There are several methods for analyzing and reporting the situation of women in the Arab region. One method involves the Gender Inequality Index (GII), which is one of the Human Development Indicators that are reported annually by the United Nation Development Index is a comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy,

education, standards of living and quality of life that ranks countries worldwide in terms of human development. Moreover, it can be used to measure the impact of economic policies on the quality of life. GII, which reflects gender-based inequalities, is a composite measure that captures the loss of achievement within a country due to gender inequality, and uses three dimensions to do so namely reproductive health, empowerment and labor market participation.

The present study is using a qualitative methodology to review secondary data encompassing reports and studies, Government data on women's economic participation and studies conducted by choirs working in the field. secondary data cover the historical and current status of women's economic participation and the main factors that hinder their full participation in the labor market.

### **Finding**

Studies in a number of Arab countries have shown that many women voluntarily choose not to participate in the labor market, while others find it difficult to find work. In addition, most of the women entering the market prefer the public sector, especially education and health jobs. In the informal sector, mainly agriculture, the majority of workers and laborers are women. Economic studies on Saudi Arabia show that more than 76 per cent of total unemployment women are university graduates, and this reflects the pressures faced by Government. In a country that has around 8 million foreign employees the government hopes to shift part of these positions that will vacate thousands of opportunities for women. However the programmer is facing problem in the application phase given that 90 per cent of these jobs are low-income and may not be appealing to locals while the remaining others require experiences and skills that may not be available in Saudi Arabia.

In Egypt the labor force participation rate among women reached 22.1 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2013, dropping from 22.6 per cent for the same quarter in 2010. According to recent data released by the ILO office for North Africa working women represent 23 per cent of the labor market however the unemployment rate among women is up to four times than of men.

In Jordan 60.6 per cent of the total female labor force has a qualification at a bachelor level or higher compared to 21.2 per cent for women, compared with 37.7 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2012 at 60.6 per cent for men and 14.1 per cent for women. Given the different economic activities it was noted that more than half of Jordanian women workers were concentrated in education health and social work with education being the highest and social work sectors attracted 14.6 per cent of total female workers. Despite all efforts to support women's economic participation in Jordan there are still many challenges that adversely affect their ability to participate effectively in economic life. One of the major challenges is the high unemployment rate among women which reached 22.2 per cent in 2013. In addition there was a reduction in the proportion of the contribution of married women to the labor force of up to 7.4 per cent of total women in the labor market in 2008.

The Global Gender Gap Index is another global index that provides different indicators for inequality, and its rating confirms the lagging status of Arab women in terms of gender equality. That Index which was introduced by the world Economic Forum measures gender gaps in four fundamental categories, namely health, education, economy and politics. It measures these gaps in 136 countries, representing 90 per cent of the world's population and offers country ranking to allow comparisons among regions and different income groups. Three approaches are used in calculating the gaps: (a) gaps in access to resources are measured versus the level of available resources; (b) countries are evaluated based on outcomes rather than inputs; and (c) countries are ranked according to their proximity to gender equality rather than women empowerment. the Middle East and North Africa came last in the overall index scores shown in table number (1), having closed 59 per cent of their gender gap compared to North America which occupied the highest rank and had closed 47 per cent of its gender gap. The Middle North Africa was also ranked lowest in terms of closing the political gender gap 97 per cent as well as the economic gender gap (39 per cent). The Middle East and North Africa had shown improvement in closing the education gender gap with the United Arab Emirates being the only country that fully closed its educational attainment gap. Similar progress was also indicated in closing the health gender gap.

**Table no 1.** Rank and value of GII for Arab countries, 2013

Country	2013 GII rank	2013 GII value
Libya	40	0.215
United Arab Emirates	41	0.244
Bahrain	46	0.253
Tunisia	48	0.265
Kuwait	50	0.288
Saudi Arabia	56	0.321
Oman	64	0.348
Lebanon	80	0.506
Morocco	92	0.46
Jordan	101	0.488
Qatar	113	0.524
Iraq	120	0.542
Syrian Arab Republic	125	0.556
Egypt	130	0.58
Sudan	138	0.628
Yemen	152	0.733
Palestine	..	..
Arab region		0.546

The female illiteracy rate dropped from 85.4 per cent in 1961 to 10.1 per cent in 2013, with an increase in the percentage of female bachelor degrees or higher from 5.7 per cent in 2000 to 14.2 per cent in 2013 based on data from the Department of Statistics in Jordan. While there are no acute legal or professional obstacles preventing women from establishing or managing companies, working women face obstacles due to the social dimension of religious customs and traditions that make them take subordinate position in a community that still gives men a priority in the workplace. Such obstacles are compounded with difficult economic conditions and a lack of projects that provide adequate employment opportunities. As for female participation in the diplomatic and judicial spheres an increase in women's participation in diplomatic corps from 3.8 per cent to 17.9 per cent was registered in the same period. The proportion of female judges increased as well, from 1.2 per cent in 2000 to 15.5 per cent in 2012.

The Arab region still faces significant challenges in adapting policies that can improve the economic participation of women. Serious policy measures should be taken, including encouraging the private sector to create more job opportunities through the provision of investment environments and appropriate incentives to enhance its ability to compete.

Supporting and encouraging small enterprise by facilities access to the needed to improve workers productivity by investing in human capital; increasing spending on education, especially higher education and vocation training and matching the skills to the labor marker. It is also important to focus on the development of knowledge capitalsuch as innovation and technological development and leadership. Moreovermore Arab women could be encouraged to engage activity in the labor market by enhancing the workforce legislations and laws related to maternity leave as per ILO internationally agreed standardsestablishing more convenient transportation system providing care places for children in the workplace and enacting laws to criminalize sexual harassment at the workplace.

Lack participation of women in the labor market and the discrepancies between countries in the region reflect the complexity of the legislative, economic, culture and social norms that are faced by women in the region, thereby creating many pressures that limit and narrow down further the choices for women. In additionseveral business owners in Arab countries still perceive women as less productive and more expensive to hirethese constraints lead to reducing their opportunities to move and choose their working positions, and make them less attractive to employers. Studies in a number of Arab countries have shown that many women voluntarily choose not to participate in the labor market, while others find it difficult to find work. In addition, most of the women

entering the market prefer the public sector, especially education and health jobs. In the informal sector, mainly agriculture the majority of workers and laborers are women.

The urge to increase the participation of nationals in the workforce has worked well for the benefit of women and has enhanced their chances of employment in GCC countries. Nationalization has proved to be an effective approach towards an increased participation of women on workforce, although it is not the only measure taken by GCC countries. In turn the participation of female nationals in the workforce could become fundamental to the success of labor nationalization policies. However there should be further enhancement to the policies and their implementation mechanisms and institutions should adopt more gender-focused approaches. There was modest progress in female unemployment across the Arab region in 2013, with an average rate of 17.1 per cent compared to 20.0 per cent in 2012. However, the rate is significantly higher than the male unemployment rate, which stood at 8.5 per cent in 2013.

### **Conclusion**

In the Arab region, the younger generation is increasingly excluded from employment while political representation is still dominated by the older generation. Political and labor relations, which are major channels for social change, are still remote for young women who are potentially the largest social group that can become a catalyst for change. The stagnation in the developments in the social sphere shadows the structural stagnation in the economic performance of the region. Region witnessed several signs of progress, such as increasing female participation in labor markets and declining female unemployment rates in a few Arab countries. However, female unemployment rates remained significantly higher than male unemployment rate.

Barriers to women's economic participation can be attributed to many interlinked factors. The main factor is the degree of empowerment women in the Arab region have achieved over time. The overall objective of empowerment is to bring qualitative change into women's lives and enhance their potential to enjoy a decent living. Statistics alone do not offer a complete picture of the contribution of women to the world of work.

Women are more attracted to employment in the public sector rather than the private sector, but with the rapid process of globalization, public job opportunities are expected to diminish. Women must prepare for that challenge and become equally active in the private sector.

Women will have to compete very fiercely to secure a job in a society that still assumes that the role of men is to provide for the family. Today, women in all countries of the region have higher unemployment rates than men, and the situation is worse when it comes to youth unemployment rates. Political condition in the region is another important threat to both men and women. Reinforces women's image of themselves. Sound planning is needed to diversify women's employment across all sectors. Economic empowerment cannot be achieved in isolation from other pending issues that affect the overall empowerment of women. Women in the region still have much to do to become independent from various social controls, make their own decisions and take the lead in their lives. Increasing living costs over the past few years, which have had a negative impact. This trend will lead to greater demand for financial resources, which will make women's employment even more relevant in the future.

### **Recommendations**

Move beyond a restricted policy focus on economic participation by adopting the broader consideration of participation in productive activities including all forms of work, whether paid or unpaid formal or informal; Support research on the gender dimension of macroeconomic policies including taxation, investment, finance and trade, to better understand the impacts of policies already in place and the potential effects of alternative policies;

Adopt tools that enable gender-responsive policies, such as gender budgeting and participatory gender audits, and support them through the allocation of adequate material resources and the recognition of related efforts; Endorse a gender perspective in designing, implementing and monitoring coherent economic and employment policies and programmers to increase women's participation in the labor force; Integrate the objective of full employment and decent work into policy-coherent national development strategies, and ratify and implement related international labor standards, particularly the Employment Policy Convention, Strengthen statistical capabilities of governments collecting important data on wage gaps to aid policy formulation efforts; Promote synergy within and across related individual policies ( social, educational and economic) with the overall objective of increasing the level of women's participation in the labor force; Increase women's representation in economic decision-making bodies and facilitate their access to unions and syndicates.

Reform obsolete and archaic education systems and biased teaching methodologies to provide quality education based on gender equality that is in turn with the challenges of the twenty-first century. Invest in early years education with the aim of shaping positive and equally valued gender identity among boys and girls and increase the role of the State in providing public and affordable day care centers to facilitate support mechanisms for

working mothers; Redouble efforts to remove gender biases from textbooks, curricula and programmed offerings that are blatantly gender biased and penalize harassment and other forms of violence against girls and women in schools.

Institutionalize advisory programmers to facilitate young women's. Promote partnerships with the private sector to provide mentorship and business incubators for recent female graduates; Encourage women to diversify their fields of study, and encourage men to venture into new fields of learning, such as education, that are currently dominated by women; Address the academic interests and needs of women through providing relevant specialization with the aim of encouraging women to pursue career paths after completing their education; Encourage media to promote positive images of women's economic role in society.

Review social security frameworks, particularly their underlying assumptions concerning the economic roles of women and men, and promote the extension of social security for all through such measures as national social protection floors; Increase the role of the State in financing paid maternity leave with the aim of presenting the private sector with incentives to support and facilitate women's employment; Endorse anti-discrimination legislation to hold employers in the private and public sector liable for any act of employment discrimination against women; Develop forums for the exchange of knowledge and experience on gender equality and the economy between Governments of the Arab region, with participation from women's national machineries, representatives of membership-based organizations such as trade unions, business association's cooperative organizations and other non-governmental organizations.

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