



Palestinian Businesswomen's Association
الجمعية الفلسطينية لصاحبات الأعمال

Policy paper:

The Impact of the COVID- Pandemic on Working Women in the West Bank and Gaza: Compound Marginalization and Gap between Groups

**December
2021**

**Prepared by
Abdalaziz Al-Salehi**

Executive Summary

This study comes within the framework of the work of the Palestinian Businesswomen's Association - Asala in the production of knowledge and research in line with the reality of Palestinian women in the labor market. This study was carried out between June and October 2021. The study entitled "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Working Women in the West Bank and Gaza: *Compound Marginalization and Gap between Groups*" clearly highlights that working women were the most affected by the impact of the Corona pandemic at the labor level, but within this damage, there is compound marginalization and gaps between female working groups.

After the pandemic and the state of emergency affected the movement of global production and trade, there had been a significant impact on workers in micro and small enterprises, accompanied by an impact on food security, the depletion of medical capacities, and the interruption of education. All these placed great burdens on governments, specifically in "developing countries" and societies most vulnerable to exposure. This, in turn, has led to an increase in the cases of exploitation and the suppression of labor rights in light of the increase in unemployment rates and the spread of poverty associated with it, especially in developing countries, and specifically among the most marginalized groups, such as women.

The global context is reflected in the Palestinian context, especially in light of the colonial context as official statistics recorded that at the end of April 2021, the number of women working in the private sector decreased from 109,000 in 2019 to about 98,000 in 2020.¹ Workers in the informal sector were also among the most vulnerable, amounting to about 410,000 workers, of whom 373,000 were males compared to about 37,000 were females.² A clear gap was seen in the labor force participation rate and daily wage between women and men, where the average daily wage for women was NIS 98

الجهاز المركزي للإحصاء الفلسطيني. "د. علا عوض، رئيسة الجهاز المركزي للإحصاء الفلسطيني تستعرض الواقع العمالي في 1
<https://bit.ly/3xLsv9z> فلسطين لعام 2020 بمناسبة اليوم العالمي للعمل". نشر في تاريخ 49 نيسان 2021. انظر/ي الرابط التالي:

² Ibid

compared to NIS 102 for men.³ The participation rate of both women and men decreased in 2020, with the participation rate of women in the labor force reaching 16% of all women of working age in 2020 after it was 18% in 2019.⁴ Official data also show that 60% of women workers in the private sector received paid maternity leave for the year 2020.⁵

Through field interviews conducted with specialists in the trade union field and activists in institutions, associations, and the feminist movement, it was found that there is a high lack of information about working women affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the biggest problems in addressing crises is the absence of data and clear figures on the numbers of those affected. The interviews, in addition to data from the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions' statements, indicate some numbers, but they are not accurate (80 to 90 thousand workers from different sectors were impacted by being dismissed from work or changing the work's nature). Interviews also revealed that working women who lead or support their families are among the most affected working women. In terms of sectors, the highest percentages of affected women were found to be in the textile sector, kindergarten sector, private schools, and public services (women working in clinics, shops, offices... etc). Interviews show that the most affected women are those working in the informal sector, and small and micro enterprises.

In terms of violating laws, field interviews showed that there was a breach of the Abolition of Forced Labor Agreement (No. 105), and the wages of some women had shifted to 10-15 NIS per day, and this had not previously existed in the Palestinian market (there were very few cases before COVID-19 in the most marginalized areas). A clear evasion of the application of the labor law and exploitation of the articles of the law such as article 41, article 32, and article 38 of the labor law, was noticed by employers in the field interviews. The West Bank and Gaza Strip did not have a remote production pattern, which is not

³ الجهاز المركزي للإحصاء الفلسطيني. "د. عوض، تستعرض أوضاع المرأة الفلسطينية عشية يوم المرأة العالمي، 2021/03/08".
انظر/ي الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/3ByLAfZ>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ الجهاز المركزي للإحصاء الفلسطيني. "د. علا عوض، رئيسة الجهاز المركزي للإحصاء الفلسطيني تستعرض الواقع العمالي في فلسطين لعام 2020 بمناسبة اليوم العالمي للعمال". نشر في تاريخ 49 نيسان 2021. انظر/ي الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/3xLsv9z>

included in laws and regulations, especially the labor law or international and local conventions. This led to violations and abuses of workers' rights, that workers could not legally deal with. In addition to this, during the period of emergency, the government, being the judicial officer, was inactive due to the stopping of work and movement.

Asala distributed an electronic questionnaire that targeted a random sample, and in the respondents' response to the questionnaire, 90.6% of them answered knowing about one or more women who had been affected in their work after the pandemic. 54.7% of the respondents expressed that they personally have been economically affected, while 23.3% reported that they knew relatives who were affected, and 17.2% said that their friends had been negatively affected in their work as a result of the pandemic.

The study presents a set of future recommendations that focus on the importance of having a unified national portal for different sectors (governmental, trade union, and private) inclusive of all data related to working women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This means data that reflects the quality of variables and not the quantity of phenomena. The study also recommends the importance of activating trade unions to attract working women to their bases. The civil sector should share its own data regarding working women. It is necessary to delve deeper into the reality of women working in the Gaza Strip and in the Zionist settlements.