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## Gender Based Violence Prevention in the Work Place

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# **Gender Based Violence Prevention in the Work Place**

## Introduction

Arab countries continue to occupy some of the lowest ranks of women participation in public life among both developing and developed nations<sup>1</sup>, translating into unimpressive low shares in work place demographics. Palestine, Jordan, Tunisia and Gulf countries contradictory positive figures on female education<sup>2</sup>, and other MENA region's impressive women and girl's enrolment in both secondary and higher education poses the unavoidable question on how and what is keeping a large segment of our populations out of the public<sup>3</sup> economic cycle?

It is important to start by acknowledging that Arab societies are not a homogeneous group, and that significant variances within regions and sub-cultures do exist. The class divide, the urban-rural gap and geography are just some of the factors that should lead us to more in-depth and complex analysis of the situation on gender equality in workplaces across the MENA region. However, what most Arab countries share in low rankings of gender indexes on labor participation, and the existence of common MENA and Arab specific institutions, such as

ATUC, provide a reasonable argument to a "common themes" analysis and recommendations.

The relationship between gender injustice, gender based violence, and women's participation in public life is apparent in numerous studies and reports. An OECD report on Women in Public Life in the MENA region elaborates on the relationship between law, policy, practice and the prevalence of gender inequality<sup>4</sup>. The literature shows barriers to employment, healthy work environments and workplace safety closely related to patriarchy and toxic masculinities.

We can also identify distinct correlation between this patriarchal culture of the region and legal frameworks and institutional cultures that impact women's advocacy in the labor market. According to a recent study, only one quarter of Arab men support gender equality<sup>5</sup>. However, such statement can easily be construed as an excuse for decision and policy-makers to do nothing. Cultural norms and traditions are held dearly in Arab cultures, and those in places of power might not have the faith in, desire, or ability to change them. The short term "benefits" of patriarchy for men.

<sup>1</sup> According to the 2016 Global Gender Gap Report from the World Bank estimates Arab countries occupy 15 of the bottom 25 countries with the lowest rates of women participating in their labor force. The other 7 Arab countries are not included in the report. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report2016-/performance-by-region-and-country/>

<sup>2</sup> "Despite high education levels, Arab women still don't have jobs", Maha El-Swais (2016)

<sup>3</sup> While not overlooking women's productive and economic roles within households and in families, for the purposes of this paper, we are looking at gender roles and equality of access and opportunity in the public work sphere.

<sup>4</sup> WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE Gender, law and policy in the Middle East and North Africa, OECD (2016)

<sup>5</sup> Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa. Promundo and UN Women, Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon and Palestine (2017)

over-rides the longer-term profits of gender equality, both socially and economically.

In this paper we look at how to translate those figures on gender equality in Arab workplaces into policy and practical recommendations for trade unions and decision makers. We are going to explore the nuances of culture and how they transform into institutional practices, legal frameworks and structural barriers to women's participation in public life.

## Background

The World Bank 2016 Global Gender Gap Report shows the fifteen Arab countries featured in the -144country list as ranking lower than the top 118. In Qatar, ranking at 119 globally and highest among Arab states, %53 of women participate in labor force (% of female population ages +15) , while only %26 of women in Yemen that holds the 144th and last spot on that list participate in the labor force<sup>7</sup>.

*"Nothing undermines as many fundamental human rights as violence. Violence in the world of work comes in many forms including harassment, bullying and mobbing, human trafficking, forced prostitution, and assault. Violence has a high cost for workers, employers and society generally. It can lead to high levels of stress, loss of motivation, increased accidents, disability, and even death.*

*Wherever the violence takes place, it has negative repercussions in the world of work: it leads to lower productivity, increased absenteeism, and higher turnover. In some cultures, the threat of violence has been a reason for limiting women to the home sphere"*

Furthermore, women occupy very few leadership and decision-making positions in Arab countries. Only %9.1 of Arab parliamentarians are women<sup>8</sup> . Some Arab countries have only allowed women to vote and run for office in recent years. This also reflects in positions in boards of both corporate and none governmental institutions as well as the judiciary and the executive branches of government. Labour laws that limit women's retirement age below that of men's, as well as unfavorable work conditions and a culture that does not celebrate or appreciate female leadership, hinders

<sup>6</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>

<sup>7</sup> The Gender Gap Report rankings do not reflect rankings of percentages of women participating in the labor force. While Yemen holds the last spot on the Gender Gap Report, it shows higher participation of women, for example than Jordan, holding the 134th spot with only %14 women participation.

<sup>8</sup> Women and Decision-making in the Arab World, Fact Sheet, el-karama.org

women's career evolvement into higher places of decision making and authority. International Labor Organization (ILO) reports that women in Arab countries face discrimination, harassment and violence in the workplace to levels that significantly affect productivity. Women in garment factories in Jordan expressed anxiety over sexual harassment that impacted profit and market output, while in Egypt sexual harassment is wide spread in public. In Palestine, %29 of females between 25 and 29 said they experienced some form of gender-based violence<sup>9</sup>.

*"In Morocco, women garment workers reported being physically and verbally abused, prevented from going to the lavatory, pinched, slapped or beaten with the clothing they're making if their work speed is deemed not fast enough. Unions are fighting back, writing to labour inspectorates and employers, and complaining to the police."*

The perception of the unsafe workplace is often used by men and women to justify their resistance to women working in public, and less women at work might mean less drive for advocacy and pressure on employers and governments to make positive change towards a safer work environment. The push towards gender justice might find fuel in the economic argument.

The fight against gender-based violence in the workplace and in societies at large must be centered in a strong belief in the basic right of every woman, man and child to live and work without the fear of violence and discrimination. This requires a commitment from all levels, especially employers and institutions to provide violence-free workplaces.

<sup>9</sup> ILO Presentation, Beirut 2017

## *Barriers to Safe Workplaces for Women*

Women face numerous challenges at the workplace in Arab countries that subject them to potential violence and/or discrimination, which often affects their ability to participate in the work force and gain financial independence. Such barriers can be identified on a number of structural, and social levels:

### **On the Social Level:**

Women's role is still seen by many as only reproductive and family based, a woman's desire or need to participate in public life, including work is still considered taboo or at best undesirable. The fact that workplaces might not be equipped to provide safety and dignified conditions exacerbate the stigma and creates barriers to change in values and social norms.

A women's role as a provider/breadwinner in the family, especially when she is not the head of household is only seen as a fulfillment of a financial necessity and takes away from her dignified status at home. Work as a mean of self actualization is a foreign idea for many in traditional Arab societies<sup>10</sup>.

Such social stigmas impact the way women are regarded at the workplace and the levels of protections provided to them. Women are seen as transient in labour market, not an essential and integral part of it, and investing in their protection and safety becomes a secondary concern.

### **On Legal Framework and Legislative Levels:**

In most Arab countries, Labour and personal status law are areas in the legal framework that create particular limitations to women's rights and access to justice and resources. Labour laws are often seen to be discriminatory as women are not allowed to work in certain sectors, or at certain hours of night<sup>11</sup>.

Other legislations limiting women's mobility or control over resources still exist in some Arab countries and impacts women's access to safe employment. Labor laws indirectly contributes to unsafe and gender-blind workplaces by failing to mandate child care, safe transportation or flexible work hours.

<sup>10</sup> OXFAM Gender Analysis Report, a Jordanian Context, Abualsameed (2016)

<sup>11</sup> OXFAM Gender Analysis Report, a Jordanian Context, Abualsameed (2016)

Many Arab countries still hold reservations on CEDAW that directly affect the legislation of women's freedom of mobility, full citizenship rights and access to employment.

### On Institutional and Structural Level:

Employers institutional structure and practices can significantly impact work conditions for women through:

- Having a gender-blind strategic objectives, policies, programs and budget.
- Not involving women in decision making processes.
- Lack of accountability, evaluating and monitoring of gender related practices.
- Lack of commitment to national and international standards, recommendations and trends on gender equality at the work place.
- Unfair and unequal pay between men and women.
- Lack affordable transportation for employees and especially women to and from work.
- Rigid work arrangements that does not provide alternative solutions to access to work and family commitments for women.
- Lack of consideration for women's needs and safety when planning and designing the physical work spaces.
- Lack of safe and confidential reporting and complaint mechanism.
- Gender blind, insensitive or abusive language in communications.
- Gender is not considered when planning overtime work and out of hours training schedules and activities.
- Lack of clear policy, awareness and education on sexual harassment.

## *Recommendations and Action Planning*

Employers can significantly improve work conditions for women through ensuring and/or making changes to both their structural practices and institutional cultures. Policy, Review and Decision Making:

1. Performing periodic participatory gender audits that considers whether internal practices and related support systems for gender mainstreaming are effective and support each other. The audit also identifies gaps and challenges to achieving gender justice, and recommends ways to address such gaps<sup>13</sup>. Gender audits are performed on regular bases within a number of years that responds to the size and nature of the organization. It is reasonable to engage in gender audit every 5-3 years.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations-country.htm>

<sup>13</sup> A Manual for Gender Audit Facilitators, The ILO Participatory Gender Audit Methodology, 2nd Edition.

2. Establishing a gender mainstreaming plan in the institution's strategic objectives, policies, programs and budget. As an outcome of the participatory gender audit, gender responsive policies, budgets, programming and practices can be set in place through a gender mainstreaming plan.

3. An annual rapid review process providing a system of accountability, through rigorous evaluating and monitoring of gender related practices at the organization. With particular attention to safety and prevention of violence and harassment, and using clearly identified performance indicators on gender equality and safety.

4. Appointing gender focal points who would liaise between employees and management and act as resources on gender equity information, tools and best practices. Gender focal points would also coordinate gender trainings, and promote gender mainstreaming in policy and institutional culture.

5. Engaging women in decision making processes. Making sure that women are represented in all levels of the organization, especially boards of directors, management and decision-making positions

6. Fair and equal pay. Employers should ensure equal pay for equal work for all employees regardless of gender.

7. Establish a clear and accessible reporting mechanism on sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination.

8. Clear and easy to understand code of conduct agreement that all staff sign on to at induction.

### Accessibility to Work:

Transportation cost and safety, distance to workplace and family commitments are some of the main barriers towards women's employment and the feeling of security and autonomy. Employers can set up an accessibility action plan that could include some or all the following:

9. Provide safe and affordable transportation for employees, especially women to and from work at night time.

10. Develop alternative work arrangements, such as work from home and flexible hours



### Capacity Building and Knowledge Exchange:

11. Mandate regular (annual a minimum) gender sensitivity and awareness training to all employees including all levels of management.
12. Include gender sensitivity as a component in new employee induction/orientation.
13. Promote participation in public and global celebrations and activities relating to women and gender, such as 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence, and international Women's Day.

### Structural:

14. Physical work spaces should be safe for all workers taking into consideration female employees safety needs. Steps could include:
  - safe pick-up and drop-off points for female workers.
  - Accessible, safe sanitary facilities / bathrooms
  - Using of signs and visual material promoting safe work environment and anti harassment and violence.
  - Installation of CCTV (close circuit TV cameras), in a way that does not compromise women's privacy.
  - Well lit work areas and hallways, stairs and bathrooms
15. Provide child care facilities
16. Ensure compliance with national labor laws on maternity leaves and introduce a post-leave back to work plan.
17. Investing in capacity building of external security personnel / hiring the right security company.

# Workplace Gender-Based Violence Prevention Checklist

<b>Policy, Review and Decision Making:</b>	
<b>1. Company/Institution Performed Gender Audit:</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> More than 5 years ago <input type="checkbox"/> In the last 5-3 years <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>2. Company/Institution Has a Gender Mainstreaming Plan</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but not implemented <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Implemented (or under implementation) <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>3. Company/ Institution Conducts Periodic Rapid Review on Gender Issues</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but not annual <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Annually <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>4. Company/ Institution Has Gender Focal Points Among Staff</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes / Not standard <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>5. Board and Upper Management has female representation</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, less than %30 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, %30 or more <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>6. Company/Institution achieves equal pay for women and men</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but not at all levels of the company <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, across the board <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>7. Company/Institution has clear and accessible reporting mechanism on sexual harassment</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but no follow up mechanism <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>8. Company/Institution has a code of conduct agreement</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but not gender responsive <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, gender responsive <input type="checkbox"/>	

Accessibility to Work	
9. Provides safe and affordable transportation for female employees	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but not enough <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	
10. Company has work from home guidelines	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but not gender responsive <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, gender responsive <input type="checkbox"/>	
11. Company allows for flexible hours to accommodate female employees	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but not gender responsive <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, gender responsive <input type="checkbox"/>	
Capacity Building and Knowledge Exchange:	
12. Company offers gender sensitivity and awareness training	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but not consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	
13. Gender sensitivity integrated in new employee induction/orientation	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but not enough <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	
14. Company participates in public and global celebrations and activities relating to women and gender	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but not enough <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	
Structural:	
15. Provides safe pick-up and drop-off points for female workers	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, across the board <input type="checkbox"/>	
16. Bathrooms and sanitary facilities are safe and accessible	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	
17. Messages and visual materials on safe work environment for women	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	
18. CCTV cameras installed in a sensitive way	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	
19. Well lit work areas and hallways, stairs and bathrooms	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	

20. Company has child care facilities / day care	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but for a fee <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, free <input type="checkbox"/>	
21. Company follows national laws on maternity leave	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Exceeds legal mandate <input type="checkbox"/>	
22. Company has a back-to-work support program/practice	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	
23. Company ensures External contractors (security, drivers, etc.) are trained on gender sensitivity and anti harassment.	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	

