

Palestinian Women

in the Workforce:

Rights, Challenges and Demands



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A group of people, including a woman in a headscarf, looking at a document together.

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COSPE is an Italian NGO established in 1983, and operating in 26 countries. COSPE has been working in Palestine since 1995, mainly collaborating with youth and women's organizations.

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In partnership with the Democracy and Workers' Rights Center in Palestine (DWRC), the Palestinian Working Women Society for Development (PWWSD), EducAid NGO.

In the framework of the project "Gender Equality in the Economic Sphere: Our Right, Our Priority". The project is supported by the European Union, and aims at enhancing Palestinian CSOs engagement and contribution to advance gender equality in Palestine, in particular the economic rights of women and women with disabilities.

What is the “Right to work”?

Every individual has the right to choose a job where he/she can earn a living to lead a dignified social and economic life in society.

This includes all types of work, whether it be freelancing or employment, which fall within and under the rule of law.

The right to work is a prerequisite to achieving other human rights, as it is an integral part of human dignity. International human rights frameworks¹ all endorse the right to work.

Women’s Right to Work

Despite the social tendencies in Palestine to perceive women’s right to work and their contributions to the workforce as an auxiliary matter, women are entitled to the full enjoyment to the right to work and all of its associated rights and benefits. It is one of the most significant economic rights stipulated in international² and Palestinian legal frameworks, and guaranteed to women equally alongside men.

The Palestinian Basic Law prohibits inequality between men and women in the workforce. It also states that work is a right for every citizen, a duty and an honor that the Palestinian Authority attempts to provide for every person³.

The Basic Law also stipulates a principle that manages work relations in a manner that ensures equality and provides social and health care for employees among other rights.

The Labor Law in Palestine also prohibits discrimination among employees in the workplace⁴, and endorses equal opportunity to training and coaching.

What are the Main Challenges that Women Face in Exercising their Right to Work?

Although the Basic Law and Labor Law both prohibit inequality among men and women in the workplace, national by-laws, regulations and local policies lack the proper and effective mechanisms to ensure equal access to rights for men and women in the workforce. This makes women’s right to work more vulnerable to systematic discrimination in Palestine. This violation of women’s right to work is more pronounced in rural areas and in the Gaza Strip. The most significant of these challenges and obstacles are as follows:

Discrimination in Employment Vacancy Announcements

The first signs of discrimination against women in equal work opportunities can be monitored in the employment vacancy ads, where the ads are phrased in a way that is addressed to men in general. Generally, the ads for senior management positions are addressed to men, whereas junior positions that are executive in nature are addressed to women.

This is an obvious discrimination against working women; which also emphasizes the stereotype of jobs that are associated with women.

Women are pushed to dismiss the idea of applying to such jobs, regardless of their academic qualifications or professional expertise and achievements that they might have.

1- Such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and ILO agreements

2- Such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and ILO agreements

3- Articles No. 9 and 25 of the Palestinian Basic Law

4- Articles 2 and 13 of the Palestinian Labor Law no. 7 / 2000.

Our Demands:

■ **Amending the Labor Law** to effectively guarantee gender equality by defining discrimination and imposing directives for employers to ensure non-discrimination in all aspects of work. This would also include the equal rights to job opportunities, starting with the job announcements and setting instructions to employers to properly phrase job advertisements in a non-discriminatory way.

■ **Phrasing job ads** in a gender-sensitive way that guarantees women's right to apply for any job equally with men, and even encourages them to apply for the advertised jobs, particularly in male-dominated sectors and occupations, or those still perceived as such.

Unequal Pay

One of the most significant types of discrimination against women in the workforce is unequal pay for equal work or work of equal value. Even after managing to overcome every obstacle in joining the workforce, women do not get equal pay with men for performing the same work or work for equal value. Statistically, women wage employees earn only 70.4% of what men are paid (on the basis of the average daily wage), a percentage that decreases to 52.3% in the mining, quarrying & manufacturing sector. The percentage of women, who are paid less than the minimum wage, was 5.5 times that of men in 2021⁵.

22.8% of women
faced gender-based violence
in the workplace.⁶

Our Demands

■ **Amending the Labor Law** to effectively guarantee gender equality in perceptible measures; which encourage entering the workforce and getting equal opportunities and equal pay, including benefits, treatment and evaluation which reflects on wages.

■ **Promoting equal pay for equal value** through defining it legally and developing job classifications systems.

■ **Imposing penal measures** to prohibit unequal pay for equal work between men and women.

■ **Enforcing the wage scale system** on all sectors to successfully guarantee protection against gender discrimination in wages.

Harassment in the Workplace

Violence and harassment in the workplace are considered among the risks of work. This is one of the most widespread forms of discrimination, which women need protection from. Women in their workplace are subject to gender-based violence and different types of harassment, including verbal and physical harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion from colleagues or customers.

Our Demands

■ **Stating a clear, comprehensive definition of violence and harassment** of all types in the Palestinian Labor Law, that should include penal measures to reduce abuse and discrimination.

■ **Establishing and activate a safe, effective and confidential complaint system with penalties to protect women from harassment** in the workplace; giving work inspectors the power to inspect these violations and take the necessary measures against employers, who do not provide appropriate safeguards to protect employees from violence and harassment in the work place.

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

6- International Labor Organization, Regional Office for Arab States, Policy Brief on Gender-Based Violence in the Workplace: an overview from the occupied Palestinian territory, 2014

When I started working 25 years ago, I was the breadwinner for 6 children. I worked at a nearby tailor shop, because of my familial responsibilities, although the wages were very low and I did not have any of my labor rights.

I did not have paid leaves, and I never got a raise. I did not even get an end-of-service benefit. However, I stayed there, because it was close to my family home, so that I could manage between taking care of my children and working.”

H. A.

A retired worker at a tailor shop – Anabta

Marginalizing Women with Family Responsibilities

Women often carry the majority of the responsibility of taking care of the family and the household, since the Palestinian society is a young, yet a conservative and patriarchal society. This stereotype limits women into the primary “caretaker” roles for their homes and the families. Given the hefty workload of house chores and taking care of children, which is unpaid, such responsibilities often force women to quit their jobs to be able to take care of their familial responsibilities, or forgo entering the labor market altogether. The rate of women outside the workforce, because of family responsibilities, is 64.9% whereas men’s percentage is zero. Married women in the labor force compose 57.2%⁷ of

working women; which means that these women are spending a larger number of hours working at home and at their jobs, between paid and unpaid work. The absence of a social protection system for working women, who also have family responsibilities, negatively affects women’s right to work. It also contributes directly to keeping women outside the workforce. It affects women’s right to choose their jobs, and increases discrimination against them at the workplace, because of their family responsibilities.

Our Demands

■ **Implementing a national policy to reinforce equal opportunity**, which would include measures to prohibit discrimination against workers with family responsibilities.

■ **Providing government childcare subsidies and support for all sectors**; profit, non-governmental and public sectors, which is essential for working women in order to enable to conciliate their job and family responsibilities.

■ **Providing women with a maternity leave** that meets international standards of no less than 14 weeks for women employed in the private sector, especially since the Cabinet adopted an increase of the maternity leave duration for governmental workers to 14 weeks in March 2022.

Also, men should be provided with a paternity leave that would enable them to share responsibilities for their families alongside the women.

■ **Issuing governmental allowances for workers** with family responsibilities, especially the working poor, such as family benefits and child benefits.

■ **Adopting flexibility measures by all sectors**, such as allowing remote work, flexible arrangements regarding working hours, aligning working hours with school hours, and allowing paid personal hour leaves.

7- Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022: Palestinian Labor Force Survey, Annual Report 2021

“After graduating from University, I started to look for a job in my field of studies. I applied to many governmental and private jobs. Whenever I went to interviews, I would be asked many questions that insinuated at my inability to work or belittled my capabilities, because of my disability. The jobs I applied for were in my field of studies and experience and I was sure I would be able to do them perfectly. While searching for a job, I tried to get more skills by joining different workshops and trainings. This added value to my experience and to my resume, but it did not change anything in terms of the difficulties I faced when applying for jobs”

Qalqilya

D. S. – 31 years-old woman with disability

Discrimination against Women with Disabilities

Women with disabilities face double discrimination in their right to work. On the one hand, they are discriminated against for being women, and on the other hand for being persons with disabilities. The societal stigma against

persons with disabilities is still very much present in the Palestinian society. Thus, women with disabilities face more obstacles than working women without disabilities in joining the workforce. Accordingly, only 2% of women with disabilities were in the workforce in 2020⁸. Some key challenges that hinder women with disabilities from exercising their right to work include the lack of accessible infrastructure, and public transportation for them to be able to get to their workplace.

Our Demands

■ **Activating the articles of legislation on employing persons with disabilities** in the public and private sectors, which require that at least 5% of workers at the workplace must be persons with disabilities, and ensure attention in this regard to the employment of women with disabilities.

■ **Amending the article of the Labor Law that concerns the employment of persons with disabilities**, so that persons with disabilities have access to jobs that correspond to their desires, capacities, and qualifications, and ensure that employers provide them with an adequate work environment and take the necessary steps to provide an inclusive workplace.

■ **Imposing penalties and fines** against employers, who violate these mandatory employment provisions for persons with disabilities.

■ **Setting laws and policies that obligate all sectors to secure easy access to persons with disabilities** in a dignified, safe manner, including accessible public transportation, infrastructure, and movement within the work environment in line with international standards of accessibility.

⁸- Press release of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics highlighting the situation of the Palestinian women on the eve of the International Women's Day, 08/03/2021



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