

POLICY PAPER

# STATUS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN JORDAN'S TRADE UNIONS AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

MEASURES AND STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE



WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT  
AND LEADERSHIP



اللجنة الوطنية الأردنية لشؤون المرأة  
The Jordanian National Commission for Women



Spring Forward for Women Programme

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February 2016



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# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CEDAW:</b>	The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>FITU-J:</b>	Federation of Independent Trade Unions in Jordan
<b>GDP:</b>	Gross domestic product
<b>GFJTU:</b>	General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions
<b>ILO:</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>ITUC:</b>	International Trade Union Confederation
<b>JOD:</b>	Jordanian Dinar
<b>NGO:</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>SC:</b>	Solidarity Center-Non Profit Aligned with the American Federation of Labour
<b>UN Women:</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy paper has been produced within the context of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women), *Spring Forward: Regional Programme for the Economic and Political Empowerment of Women in the southern Mediterranean Region Programme*, generously funded by the European Union. The programme seeks to promote women's active participation in political and economic life. To this end trade unions and political associations have been identified as key forums for political and economic engagement, dialogue and decision-making.

The purpose of this policy paper is to understand the current status of women's representation and participation in trade unions and professional associations in Jordan, and to identify challenges and opportunities for their engagement, particularly in decision-making positions.

The findings of the paper demonstrate that **women are under-represented across Jordan's trade unions and professional associations, which affects their ability to influence the conditions under which they work (e.g. their negotiating power within their place of employment) and their ability to engage in the national debate on economic and labour market policy.**

There are two trade unions governing bodies in Jordan – the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU) and Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Jordan (FITU-J). The study finds that in almost half of the sector unions belonging to the GFJTU there are no female members, and that women make up between 0 and 14 per cent of the members of decision making bodies. Specifically, there are no female members in 40 per cent of the sector unions that make up the GFJTU<sup>1</sup>, and women account for only for 14 per cent of the members of the General Conference of the GFJTU, which is its highest elected decision-making body. Within the Executive Committee of the GFJTU, which is limited to the presidents and general secretaries of the member sector unions, there are no female members. Across the general membership of the GFJTU, women account for 32 per cent of members; however this relatively high percentage of female participation is due to the large number of women within the textile union (a member union of the GFJTU).

Within the FITU-J, women's representation does not exceed 12 per cent, varying between 0 to 15 per cent within the different sector member unions. Women's representation in the General Conference of the FITU-J is 16 per cent (20 women delegates out of a total of 126 delegates), and 13 per cent in the Executive Committee.

Women make up 28 per cent of members within professional associations and are absent in the overall governing body of professional associations—the Council of the Professional Associations. Moreover, their representation in committees within this body does not exceed one to two women per committee.

The low participation of women in trade unions and professional associations is reflective of the low participation of women in the Jordanian labour market, as only working people are entitled to join these bodies. However, this should not be used as a justification for the lack of women within these structures. Unions, professional associations and civil society organizations should encourage larger numbers of working women into their structures, while lobbying for public policies that increase the participation of women in the formal economy.

Within trade unions and professional associations, the main obstacles that hinder women in accessing decision-making positions are the following:

- Most unions and associations do not have policies in place or plans to increase women's representation as leaders within their structures. There is also a lack of effective programmes to support women to develop the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to become leaders within these organisations.

- Trade unions and professional associations tend to not tackle women's priorities, such as, equal pay between men and women and day care for children. Therefore women tend to be less interested in engaging with them, as they do not see them as representing their interests and needs.

Engagement in union/association organising, decision-making and management (e.g. supporting the functioning of unions/associations) demands significant time and dedication, which creates an obstacle for women with competing responsibilities – particularly domestic responsibilities. Trade unions and professional associations tend not to provide services – such as day care or flexible working hours, to help women balance these effectively. Twenty-seven per cent of women in Jordan are working in the informal economy<sup>2</sup>, many of them in hazardous working conditions. Unions, professional associations and the Government of Jordan should therefore work on formalizing the informal economy, or to extend collective bargaining to the informal economy – both to promote better working conditions and to enhance the level of women's representation.

Given this, this paper puts forward a number of **key recommendations that unions and associations should implement to increase women's membership and representation in leadership positions across their structures:**

- The leaders of trade unions and professional association should establish policies to increase women's participation and leadership within their bodies and structures. This should include policies that ensure appointment of women to decision-making positions and bodies, and women's participation in all committees. The application of quotas is one policy tool for this, as called for by Article 4 of the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)<sup>3</sup>.
- Trade unions and professional associations should provide high quality childcare services to their members and develop family-friendly policies, such as family leave, to support male and

female leaders to both fulfill their union-related functions and engage in family responsibilities.

- Trade unions and professional associations should collectively bargain on issues important to both women and men, including family issues and issues of equal pay.
- Mentorship programmes should be supported to build alliances between female union/ members/leaders and rights advocates and allies. This could be linked to advanced leadership trainings for women, with a focus on mobilizing skills such as campaigning, communication and collective bargaining.
- Structures such as women's departments and committees should be created and/or strengthened within unions and associations to address the specific concerns of women members and foster leadership skills and networking among female actors. These committees should play meaningful roles in union and association structures, and their workstreams should be integrated into the discussion and decision-making of other union bodies.
- Trade unions and professional associations should collect gender-disaggregated data and use this to monitor progress against specific equality-related indicators. This is vital to measuring progress and change.

There is also a pressing to work within the current labour market to create an attractive and decent work environment for women in Jordan. This can be achieved in several ways - firstly, through applying and lifting reservations on some articles of ratified international conventions, such as the 1951 International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration, 1958 Convention 111 on Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation<sup>4</sup> and CEDAW (1979). Linked to this national policies and practices should be developed and implemented that make the working environment more accessible to women, such as the expansion of social protection for women and their families (including poor working women), equal pay, the promotion of flexible working arrangement policies, and zero tolerance for sexual harassment and gender discrimination in the workplace.

# INTRODUCTION

Globally women are discriminated against on the basis of sex and gender within many sectors of the labour market. Labour markets are often structured in ways that assume natural differences between men and women, and these are seen to pre-determine their work preferences and patterns. Women's role in the economy is therefore often "fixed"— and this marginalizes them to certain sectors and economies. Compounding this, a gender wage gap exists in most countries in the world, further entrenching gender discrimination in the economy. In addition, women tend to be more susceptible than men to violence and sexual harassment within the work place.

Across the world, trade unions and professional associations have enormous potential to support and drive gender equality and women's empowerment. They provide a space where women can gather to collectively bargain with employers for the basic rights and benefits needed to facilitate their long-term engagement in the economy and workforce, while also providing a convening space for engagement and networking with their peers. Moreover, trade unions and professional associations tend to be well placed to influence national labour policy, due to their size and (often) financial wealth. To ensure that unions/associations promote gender equality and that women are able to leverage the power of unions/associations

equally to men, there is a need for a critical mass of women engaged in their membership and leadership positions. Therefore, the purpose of this policy paper is to:

- Assess the situation of women's representation in trade unions and professional associations in Jordan,
- Gauge the most prominent challenges impeding women in reaching decision-making levels, and
- Propose concrete recommendations that can boost and support women's representation in trade unions and professional associations.

# WOMEN IN JORDAN: ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Jordan is a resource-poor, middle income country with phosphate and potash as its only sizeable natural resources. The Jordanian economy is considered to be service-oriented, with the services sector contributing approximately 66 per cent to gross domestic product (GDP) and providing more than 80.1 per cent of jobs in the Kingdom. Industry contributes 31 per cent to GDP and provides 18.2 per cent of jobs. This is followed by agriculture, which contributes 3.8 per cent of GDP and provides 2 per cent of jobs, as of 2014.<sup>5</sup>

The Jordanian Constitution states that all citizens<sup>5</sup> are equal under the law and prohibits discrimination based on race, language and religion. However, it does not prohibit discrimination based on gender.<sup>6</sup> Although literacy among Jordanian women has reached 99 per cent<sup>7</sup> - the highest in the region - women are vastly under-represented in the economy – as highlighted by the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index report, which ranks Jordan as 142 out of 145 countries.<sup>8</sup> Jordan is one of the Arab countries with the lowest labour force participation rates for women, at 12.1 per cent compared to 60.3 per cent for men.<sup>9</sup> Unemployment rates for women are high and increasing; women's unemployment rates exceeded men's by 12 per cent (10.6 per cent compared to 22.1 per cent) in 2013.<sup>10</sup> Women are also disproportionately represented in the informal sector, with 27 per cent of women in the labour market working informally. This work environment is associated with inferior earnings and wage inequality—with women making 88.3 piasters for every one Jordanian Dinar (JOD) a man earns<sup>11</sup>—coupled with lower rates of access to social security and social protection.<sup>12</sup>

Women's political participation remains low, although the application of legal quotas has resulted in some slow progress. There is a 15 seat quota for women in the lower house of parliament (10 per cent) and a 25 per cent (243 seats) quota for women in municipal

councils. In the 2013 parliamentary elections, voters elected 18 women to the lower house, 3 of whom won by outright competition. These transformations have been supported by the Government of Jordan, both as a response to the many calls to ensure women's representation in decision-making structures, and also in recognition of the fact that women's active presence in the public sphere is essential for community and societal development.

Official bodies such as the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) and the National Council on Family Affairs, as well as various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), are addressing these issues and are making continuing efforts to amend and abolish laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination against women in the private and public spheres.

Trade unions and professional associations are forums for collective bargaining with employers on issues of labour rights and working standards, and so have been a major historical force in humanizing and democratizing the economies of nations. They play a crucial role in the fight to extend democracy within the workplace, promoting economic equality and social rights for working men and women. They use various forms of political action and coalitions with others to press for better social, economic and environmental policies.

The World Bank confirmed this in its 2002 report entitled, *Unions and Collective Bargaining Economic Effects in a Global Environment*<sup>13</sup>. The report found that high rates of unionization lead to lower inequality of earnings, lower unemployment and inflation, higher productivity and speedier adjustments to economic shocks.

Freedom of association and recognition of the right to collective bargaining are protected in International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions No. 87, “Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize” (1948) and No. 154 “Collective Bargaining” (1981)<sup>14</sup>, neither of which have been ratified by the Government of Jordan. Nonetheless, the Government of Jordan is obligated to uphold the principles of collective bargaining as a member state of the ILO. Moreover, ILO Convention No. 98, “Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention” (1949), was ratified by Jordan in 1963 and upholds the right to collective bargaining.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, large occupational sectors in Jordan are devoid of union or association representation, in particular within the public sector. The situation is slowly improving - several independent trade unions have been established in recent years, including in the phosphate, agriculture, and electricity sectors. It is worth noting, however, that these are not officially recognized.<sup>16</sup>

The Labour Law No. 8 (1996), its amendments, and administrative regulation No. 38 (1994) mandate the Ministry of Labour as the executive authority for the administration and implementation of national policy in the fields of employment, labour remuneration, working conditions, industrial relations and labour migration. The Labour Law mediates the relationship between employees, employers and trade unions and professional associations in Jordan. It governs, amongst other issues, leave entitlements, wages, termination of employment, health and safety, unfair dismissal, working hours, dispute resolution and collective bargaining.

The expansion of the Labour Law’s remit has been a gradual process. For example, a 2002 amendment to Article 3 of the Labour Law incorporated certain sectors of agricultural workers for the first time. An additional 2008 amendment to the same article

further broadened its scope, to include all agricultural workers, domestic workers, gardeners and cooks. However, the amendment did stipulate that these particular groups of workers are subject to specific legislation on certain labour issues, such as hours of work and rest periods, annual paid leaves and labour inspection. Regulation No. 90 on Domestic Workers, Cooks, Gardeners and Similar Categories was passed in 2009 to further legislate on these issues.

## 2.1 The General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU)

Six labour trade unions established the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU) in 1954. They aimed to strengthen the framework of the Jordanian labour movement, unify its efforts for greater self-protection, and encourage workers to enlist in member unions. The GFJTU’s membership has expanded since then, reaching 29 unions in 1967 (out of the 40 which then existed). This dropped to 17 unions in 1976 – and remains at this number today, as a result of both the 1967 Six-Day War and the re-organization of trade unions, where some unions were merged and others were abolished.

GFJTU is a part of the Board of Directors for many public institutions which interact with the formal economy, such as the Social Security Corporation and the Vocational Training Corporation. GFJTU is also represented in the Economic Consultative Committee, which consists of the Council of Ministers and includes representatives from the government, private sector and labour movement. In addition to being an important partner for bargaining labour standards with employers, it is also therefore a political power in Jordan’s legislative and decision-making processes.

### The organizational structure of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU)

As a governing body, the GFJTU consists of three main organizations. These are: the General Conference, which is the highest elected authority of the federation and meets once every four years to pass legislation and discuss union issues<sup>17</sup>; the Central

Council, which serves as the working level decision making group and meets every three months; and the Executive Committee, which is made up of union presidents and serves as the real locus of power of the Federation.

As of December 2015, the total membership of the GFJTU was roughly 110,580 people, of which 32 per cent are female. The textiles sector union has the largest percentage of female members of all of the GFJTU member unions, at 70 per cent. This is a significant factor in the overall level of female membership across the GFJTU, as the average percentage of female members across all other member unions does not exceed 12 to 14 per cent. In some of

the unions which represent sectors where women's employment is high—such as health and banking—women's membership and representation remains very low. Additionally, in seven of the 17 unions, there is no female membership at all (see Table 1). As evident in Table 1, women's high representation is observed in 3 out of 17 unions only, namely textiles, private education and public services.

At the decision-making level, women are not represented in the GFJTU's Executive Board, as all of the heads of sector unions are male. Moreover, of the representatives making up the General Conference of GFJTU, only 14 per cent are women.

#### CASE STUDY:

### The General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing

The General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing was founded in 1954. The union has the highest membership in Jordan, with a total of 23,000 members. 16,000 of these are women.

The Union protects the interests of workers in the weaving and garment sector: it defends their rights, provides medical and social services for members, creates clinics, social care services and commercial facilities for them, and enhances the social, cultural and economic level of workers in the sector. The work of their members is concentrated in qualified industrial zones, which are special areas that manufacture goods for sale in foreign markets. There are 14 qualified industrial zones in the country, which employ 40,358 workers (30,326 of whom are migrant workers).

The majority of workers in this sector are women, as tailoring tends to be seen a women's work. They are - more systematically than men - paid less than the minimum wage, exposed to hazardous work conditions such as a lack of health and safety measures in factories and work long hours without health and annual leave. Workers in qualified

industrial zones have held numerous strikes during recent years to protest against these violations of labour rights, low wages, and poor working and living conditions.

In response to this, two apparel employers' associations signed a collective bargaining agreement with the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing in May 2013. The agreement was widely viewed as an unprecedented step forward in the enhancement of social dialogue and industrial relations within the sector.

The last Congress of the Union was held in October 2015. The Executive Board consists of nine members, of which seven are women. The high representation of women in the membership and in the Executive Board is due to the high representation of women workers in the sector. The Union also has approximately 30 workers' committees in different factories and workplaces. The majority of these committees are headed by women, as they have closer relationships with their fellow female employees. These relationships have enabled female heads of committees to run for and win the Executive Board elections.

**TABLE 1. OFFICIAL SECTOR TRADE UNIONS**

Trade union	Est. year	Last election	Election period in years	No. of Executive Committee members	No. of women in Executive Committee	Number of members	Number of women members (percentage)
General Trade Union of Railway Employees	1955	2015	5	11	0	800	30 (4%)
General Trade Union of Land Transport Employees and Mechanics	1954	2015	5	9	0	10,000	0 (0%)
Trade Union of Workers in Banks, Accounting and Insurance	1961	2015	5	9	0	7,000	4,000 (57%)
General Trade Union for Public Services and Free Vocations	1954	2015	5	11	7	4,230	1,600 (37%)
Trade Union of Workers in Typing and Photocopying	1954	2015	5	9	0	3,000	0 (0%)
General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing	1954	2015	5	9	7	23,000	16,000 (70%)
Trade Union of Workers in Municipalities	1965	2015	5	9	0	17,000	7,000 (41%)
Trade Union of Workers in Air Transportation and Tourism Union	1970	2015	5	11	2	5,000	2,500 (50%)
General Trade Union of Workers in Seaports	1956	2015	5	9	0	1,000	0 (0%)
General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity	1960	2015	5	11	0	8,500	1,700 (20%)
General Trade Union of Workers in Health Services	1962	2015	5	9	2	4,000	800 (20%)
General Trade Union of Workers in Petrochemicals	1960	2015	5	9	0	7,200	0 (0%)
General Trade Union of Workers in Private Education	1969	2015	5	9	5	3,000	2,100 (70%)
General Trade Union of Workers in Mining and Metal Industries	1970	2015	5	15	0	8,500	0 (0%)
General Trade Union of Workers in Construction	1953	2015	5	11	0	4,000	0 (0%)
General Trade Union of Workers in Food Industries	1955	2015	5	9	1	3,500	250 (7%)
Trade Union of Workers in Commercial Stores	1955	2015	5	9	0	850	0 (0%)

#### CASE STUDY:

### Wafa Majali, President of Agriculture Union and Vice President of FITU-J

Wafa started as a clerk for the Agriculture Resource Project in the Ministry of Agriculture. Wafa's work environment was very difficult – she was one of 1,500 clerks throughout the Kingdom who worked as a daily wage worker, with no benefits or job security. To address this, she worked with other wage workers in agriculture to establish a workers' committee and organize meetings to push for work contracts. In 2013, the Minister of Agriculture and the Director of Civil Services agreed to meet with

the committee. Following intensive negotiations, all the wage workers who are members of the Independent Union of Agriculture now have work contracts.

In August 2015 Wafa was elected as the President of the Agriculture Union in August 2015. She was also elected as the Vice President of the FITU-J in December 2015. Wafa is now working on campaigns and training programmes to promote women in unions.

## 2.2.

### The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Jordan (FITU-J)

The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Jordan (FITU-J) announced their Congress in April 2013, although they are not recognised by the Government of Jordan. The organizational structure of FITU-J consists of a General Conference, a Central Conference and an Executive Committee. It contains nine unions which represent approximately 7,000 workers, and women make up roughly 25 per cent of the membership. The union with the largest membership in the FITU-J is the road transport/drivers' union, which has 4,500 members – none of which are women. The phosphates industry union is made up of 1,455 members, with female members representing less than five per cent. Women are concentrated in the agriculture union of FITU-J, where they account for 60 per cent of its 900 members.

The General Conference consists of 126 delegates, of which 15 per cent (20) are women. The Executive Committee consists of 13 members of which 13 per cent (2) are women, 1 of whom is the Vice President of the FITU-J.

## 2.3

### Professional associations in Jordan

Professional associations were established in Jordan in the 1950's. The Bar Association was the first to be established in 1950, followed by several associations

such as the engineers and medical associations. Today there are 15 associations in Jordan covering the following professions: medics, lawyers, engineers, agricultural engineers, dental workers, nurses and midwives, press, geologists, pharmacists, veterans, artists, writers, contractors, certified public accountants and educators.

Each professional association has a council, which consists of a president and its members. All 15 associations coordinate with each other through one governing body, the Council of the Professional Associations. The Council is managed by 15 members, each representing one association – usually the president of the association. The head of the council is assigned by the representatives and this post rotates every six months.

Each professional association has several committees, which include:

- **The Freedoms Committee**, which monitors public freedom and human rights. The committee receives complaints and reports them to specialized government units.
- **The Anti-Normalization Committee**, which works on limiting agreements with Israel.
- **The Palestine Committee**, which supports the struggle of the Palestinians against the Israeli Occupation.
- **The Cultural Committee**, which works on cultural activities and supports the needy.
- **The Women Committee**, which covers activities related to women's matters.

World Bank statistics show that the rate of women's participation has been growing steadily within these associations.<sup>18</sup> However, female members remain clustered in areas deemed as socially acceptable for women and are under-represented in governing bodies. The overall percentage of women in professional associations is almost 28 per cent, an increase from 19 per cent in 1997.<sup>19</sup> The associations with the highest percentages of women are those which represent nurses (56 per cent), geologists (56 per cent), pharmacists (54 per cent), and dental workers (40 per cent). Those with the lowest are contractors (0 per cent),

certified accountants (2 per cent), and artists (13 per cent). Overall, women account for only 12 per cent of members of governing councils, and their representation in associations' committees does not exceed one or two women per committee.

*"We are not represented in crucial committees, like the rights committee, which negotiates labour rights, for example. How do we guarantee that women's issues at work are negotiated with the Ministry of Labour if we are not at the negotiations table?"*

—Female interviewee

**TABLE 2. PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS IN JORDAN**

Professional Association	Est. year	Last Election	Election Period in years	No. of executive committee members	No. of women in Executive committee
Jordan Medial Association	1955	2015	2	13	1
Jordan Pharmacists Association	1957	2014	2	11	2
Jordan Engineers Association	1958	2015	3	11	1
Jordan Agriculture Engineers Association	1966	2015	3	9	2
Jordan Veterinary Association	1972	2014	3	9	0
Jordan Nurses and Midwives Council	1959	2013	3	11	1
Jordan Construction Contractors Association	1972	2014	2	10	0
Jordan Artists Association	1997	2014	2	11	1
Jordan Geologists Association	1972	2014	3	9	0
Jordan Writers Association	1974	2015	2	11	0
Jordanian Association for Certified Public Accountants	1962	2015	2	11	0
Jordan Bar Association	1950	2015	2	11	0
Jordan Press Association	1953	2015	2	9	5
Jordan Dental Association	1952	2013	3	11	3
Jordan Education Association	2012	2014	2	11	2

#### CASE STUDY:

### Jordan Dental Association

The Jordan Dental Association was first established in 1952. It has a membership of approximately 7,000 members, of which 40 per cent are women. The association aims at enhancing the status of the profession, protecting it and regulating it. It cooperates with ministries and institutions concerned with developing health services, works in uniting dentists, defending their right, keeping the profession's ethics, providing decent lives for dentists and their families in cases of physical disability, elderly or death, providing work opportunities for the association's members, providing dental services to citizens who cannot afford them, and networking with Jordanian dentists and dental associations outside the country.

The Dental Association is governed by a council of 10 representatives and a president. In 2013 women were elected to the council for the first time in 21 years. 3 of the 11 members are women, which makes it the association with the highest representation of women among all professional associations' councils.

The election of the three women was an unexpected surprise. When asked about the factors that supported them, all three answered that they had worked hard to reach these positions. The three dentists had all been involved in the association activities for years, and had held lower positions in different committees. They said that they also had family support through sharing family and childcare responsibilities, which facilitated and encouraged their activism.

*“The experience of our winning in the Dental Association Council will determine the future of women unionists and in the Professional Associations Complex. The lessons learned from this experience are going to be very important for voters; our performance won't only be reflected on the Dental Association, but will also affect the views and opinions and future elections for the unions and associations.”*

—Dr. Aya Al Asmar

# OBSTACLES FACING WOMEN IN TRADE UNIONS AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND IN LEADERSHIP

Women's leadership within unions and professional associations remains low. Moreover, they are either absent or significantly under-represented in decision-making forums within these organisations. This affects their bargaining power within union and association structures, and in turn, their working conditions. It also affects their ability to serve as representatives and leaders within their communities.

The key challenges facing women's representation and leadership in trade unions and professional associations are outlined below, derived from the research and interviews conducted for this paper.

## 3.1

### Few women in leadership positions

Placing women in leadership positions is extremely important in order to promote a sense of women's value in unions and associations. Women's low representation in leadership suggests that unions and associations do not value women's voice or engagement. It also means that there are limited opportunities for women to serve as role-models or to mentor others into leadership positions. Trade unions and professional associations are perceived to be "men's clubs" and there is a **lack of commitment and policies from them to promote women's representation in leadership positions.**

**There is also a lack of effective training programmes, support and mentoring networks** to help women develop the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to become leaders.

Many unions and associations have established women's committees, in order to satisfy domestic and international calls for greater equality. However, when representatives interviewed for this paper were asked about the role of the committees, the answers suggest that these committees are not generally deemed to be important. It was noted that these committees are responsible for activities such as "organizing activities for women's day" or "organizing workshops on women's related issues". The members of women committees do not have an equal say in union and association policy and procedures, and they are not part of decision-making structures – formal or informal. Furthermore, the women's committees do not have budget allocations. Two women interviewed said, "Women's committees are formalities, and when the men feel that those women are strong, they immediately dismiss them from the committee." This idea of strong women being dismissed from unions and associations was a trend throughout interviews with male and female actors; they said that whenever they find strong women in unions, it only takes few months for them to resign or leave from the union/association.

### 3.2

## Discomfort and fear of trade unions and professional associations' activities and lack of awareness on what they do

Many women stated being uncomfortable with trade unions and professional associations' activities and a fear of responsibility, decision-making, public speaking and leadership – all deemed to be male traits and not in line with culturally appropriate female characteristics. Linked to this, women voiced discomfort in talking about their political and union activities. A few organizers noted that women's hesitations sometimes come from their relationships with their families, particularly their husbands: *"They need to discuss their union activism with their spouses before agreeing to it,"* said one of the lead organizers in the textile unions.

In addition, workers—both men and women—are afraid of being fired or subject to other negative consequences in the workplace because of engagement in union and association activities. Women are usually more vulnerable than men to this as they are seen as both subverting gender norms and breaching the trust of employers when they engage in union activities.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, there seems to be a **lack information on the administration and governance** of unions and associations among female members. This puts them at a disadvantage when it comes to elections and voting.

### 3.3

## Unions don't address women's priorities

Unions and associations in Jordan are not generally attractive to women. They display a lack of commitment towards women's rights and priorities, including issues of work-life balance, gender discrimination, sexual harassment and equal pay. In particular, child-care, transportation, health care, and policies that give women family leave and flexibility are among the major issues that concern working women. For the most

part these concerns are not recognised by unions and associations as their responsibility. According to some activists and women who were interviewed, unions and associations are disinterested or unable to address their priorities. One woman asserted: *"It's an assumption that it's only a woman's issue, but it should be a man's issue too."*

One of the reasons that these issues are ignored is the **lack of women's representation in collective bargaining agreements**. The collective bargaining process is based on majority rule. This works against the women as they are rarely the majority. Moreover, *"even when women are on the table of negotiations, they are still not trained and strong enough to negotiate with male employers or unionists"*, said Fatahallah Imarani, President of the Textiles Union.

### 3.4

## The time required to participate in trade unions and professional associations

**The lack of work and family programmes in unions and associations** is a barrier constraining women from becoming more active and serving as leaders. All union and association activists face the challenge of combining paid work, union/association activism, household responsibilities and social engagement. These multiple roles and responsibilities place extra pressure on women leaders in their day-to-day life – where women are seen as the carers of the domestic sphere, especially for those with young children.<sup>21</sup>

*"A potential leader in one of the unions did not run for the elections of the executive board of one of the unions because of her family responsibilities"*, explained one of the organizers in a factory.

Compounding this, women's careers are often interrupted due to child care responsibilities, with women taking a break from the workforce when their children are young. This also means they miss out on attaining lower-level union and association positions at a young age. This lack of early experience can be a disadvantage for women in reaching leadership positions within these bodies.

## 4

# RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS FOR ENCOURAGING WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN TRADE UNIONS AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Trade unions and professional associations have enormous potential to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. The following policy recommendations aim to combat the challenges facing women in joining trade unions and professional associations, and to promote women into leadership positions.

### 4.1

#### Enable women's labour-force participation

Women's equal participation in economic and working life contributes to the sustainable development of a country, as shown through data across the globe<sup>22</sup>. The legal and social hurdles that constrain women's economic participation must therefore be eliminated.

Trade unions, professional associations and civil society organizations should advocate for public policies that promote women's participation in the formal labour market. These might include expanding social protection for female workers and their families, promoting

work-life balance, and greater consideration for working women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. This can be done through applying the conventions that Jordan has ratified on gender equality, such as 1951 ILO C100 on Equal Remuneration, 1958 ILO C111 on Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation, and 1979 CEDAW. Ratifying and applying other important conventions that pave the road to women's participation in the labour market—such as 2000 ILO C183 on Maternity Protection and 1981 C156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities—is important. Unions should also campaign for the organization of the informal sector, where women's work environments are especially harsh.

## 4.2

### Commitment from leaders to support women in union and professional association leadership structures

Trade unions and professional associations need to reach out to and mentor women, so that they can take on leadership roles within unions and professional associations. This can be done through changing policies and bylaws, such as expanding executive boards, councils and committees in unions to include more women. A quota system should be established to guarantee women's participation in the executive boards in trade unions and in the electoral lists of professional associations.

It is also crucial for women to be part of the collective bargaining teams. They must be present in negotiations and agreements, as they are the ones who will put women's demands on the table.

Union leaders should also guarantee women's participation in all trade unions and professional associations' events, not just women's events. For example, it is important to monitor lists of national and international conference attendees, speakers and panelists to ensure that women are represented. "We are only involved if the international organizations specify that the participant is a woman", said one of the interviewees. To achieve this, trade unions and professional associations should invest in and develop effective leadership and capacity building training. The training seminars should cover mobilizing, organizing in unions, campaigning for women's rights, bargaining, public speaking and political participation for women.

Union leaders need to include women in core union activities and economic research for objectives and missions as a whole and not for issues related to women only. They should also hire female staff in all levels of administration. "Guaranteeing timely and accessible information to female members is essential in order to ensure maximum flexibility for women's participation in unions and professional associations' activities and decision making processes", Said Dr. Salma Al Nims, Secretary General of JNCW.

It is also very essential to let women strategize and address their obstacles and challenges. This can be done through creating or activating structures (if they already exist) such as women's departments and committees, while ensuring that these are not the only forums in which women are represented or women's issues are discussed.

## 4.3

### Unions should seek to understand and address women's priorities in order to attract them into their membership structures

One of the ways to encourage women's union activism is to focus on the issues that are important to women workers – and to discuss these through the primary union decision-making bodies (rather than only in women's committees). These tend to be traditional women's economic issues such as equal pay, work and family balance, and work hours. Encouraging debate and discussion on these issues within unions reflects a willingness of union leaders to listen and respond to the diverse interests of their membership.

## 4.4

### Develop family-friendly work programmes and policies

Interviewees indicated that once women is married and has children, they stop their union and voluntary activities. To increase women's participation as leaders and activists, trade unions and professional associations need to provide childcare and to hold meetings at times when women can attend. They should also hold them in environments which are safe for children, so women can bring their children with them.

Some women also complained that union leaders inform them of meetings and opportunities at the last minute, which makes it difficult to manage family issues or childcare. Therefore, union leaders ensure advanced notice

## 4.5

### Establish gender-specific data and indicators

Trade unions and professional associations do not collect sex-disaggregated data on union membership, nor do they document incidents of gender-based violence and abuse in the workplace. Sex-disaggregated data is important to enable a clear analysis of a current context, in order to institute effective measures to combat gender imbalances. A requirement to collect, gather and evaluate sex-disaggregated data in all policy areas, in all fields of action, and on all levels of responsibility is enshrined in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action.

## 4.6

### Build networks and alliances

Trade union and professional association in many regions of the world are increasingly partnering with civil society organizations and NGOs in order to lobby for better rights for workers. Civil society organisations are growing globally, with their number and influence on the rise and many are integrating issues of labour and economic rights into their frameworks and programming priorities. They provide a wide variety of indispensable resources: analysis of gender inequality, policy recommendations for alleviating it, and strategy suggestions for promoting women's perspectives. In addition, they are increasingly recognizing the crucial role of democratic trade unions and professional associations in furthering those rights.

Civil society organizations have come together in Jordan to promote women economic and political participations; for example, The Jordanian National Steering Committee for Pay Equity was established in 2011 with the mandate to promote effective means to close the gender pay gap in Jordan. The Committee

is co-chaired by the Jordanian National Commission for Women and the Ministry of Labour. It comprises of representatives from trade unions, professional associations, civil society, government bodies, the Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Industry, other private sector representatives and the media. Such essential initiative need to be revitalized and strengthened.

Jordanian trade unions and professional associations should build a leadership that better reflects the gender composition of their membership and of the global workforce, and this can be done in part through reaching out to new partners. Women's voices are also needed to enhance the representativeness of trade unions and professional associations.

The measures outlined in this policy paper are essential to help women claim a voice of authority in a sphere that is traditionally dominated by men. There are many ways for trade unions and professional associations to provide support, networks, and other resources that can engender a sense of empowerment among women—within unions and beyond. Simply put, if trade unions and professional associations more visibly and genuinely listen to women's concerns and consistently address them, they are more likely to inspire involvement and commitment.

Boosting women's participation in decision-making and leadership positions can enhance union and professional association membership and outreach. It can stimulate women's engagement in these bodies at the local level, extending their reach in informal, marginalized and unprotected employment sectors where women often make up the majority of workers.

It is important for women's organizations to support women's union activism by cultivating stronger local ties at the grassroots level. These relationships can benefit both union women and women's organizing in general.

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# ANNEXES

## Annex 1.

### International Labour Organization Convention on Gender Equality

Tackling gender discrimination enables society as a whole to develop its economy and to progress socially. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has developed four main international standards to fight discrimination at the workplace and promote gender equality. The instruments have been agreed by ILO member states as well as employers' and workers' organizations.

#### ILO Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration, 1951

The Equal Remuneration Convention establishes the principle of equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value. The term remuneration includes the ordinary or basic salary but also all other additional emoluments arising out of the worker's employment. Under the terms of the Convention, states have an obligation to promote and ensure the application of that principle to all workers. States parties may apply the principle through legislation, systems for wage determination and collective bargaining agreements. The Convention encourages government to work with social partners to promote objective appraisal of jobs in order to implement the provisions contained in the Convention.

Jordan ratified C 100 in 1966.

#### Convention 111 on Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation, 1958

The Convention on Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation has the fundamental aim of promoting equality of opportunity and treatment by declaring and pursuing a national policy aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination in respect to employment and occupation.

Discrimination is defined as any distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin (or any other motive determined by the state concerned) that has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality

of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation. The scope of the Convention covers access to vocational training, access to employment and to particular occupations, and terms and conditions of employment. Member states who ratified this Convention undertake to repeal any statutory provisions and modify any administrative instructions or practices that are inconsistent with this policy. They are also required to declare and pursue a national policy designed to promote—by methods appropriate to national conditions and practice—equality opportunity and treatment in respect to employment and occupation. The goal is to eliminate any discrimination and to promote educational programmes that favour acceptance and implementation in cooperation with employers' and workers' organizations. This policy shall be pursued and observed in respect to employment under direct control of a national authority, and via vocational guidance and training and placement services under the direction of such authority.

Jordan ratified C111 in 1963.

#### Convention 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities, 1981

Convention 156 defines equal opportunities and conditions for men and women workers. It acknowledges the special needs and problems that workers with family responsibilities face, defining these as men and women responsible for dependent children and other family members who clearly need their care or support "where such responsibilities restrict their possibilities of preparing for, entering, participating in or advancing in economic activity".

This Convention establishes each member state's obligation to include among its national policy aims the goal of enabling people with family responsibilities to exercise their right to work, without being subject to discrimination and, to the extent possible, without conflict between their employment and family

responsibilities. Moreover, it requires measures that guarantee free choice of employment and access to training, allowing these workers to enter and remain in the labour force, and to re-enter it after leave taken to assume family responsibilities. It establishes the need for local and regional planning measures that consider the needs of this group of workers and community services (both public and private) to assist infants and their families. Finally, it clearly states that family responsibilities do not constitute cause for termination of employment. This especially favours women, since they usually face greater work-related difficulties and insecurity due to the burden of domestic work and family responsibilities.

All measures compatible with national conditions and possibilities shall further take into account the needs of workers with family responsibilities in community planning, and develop and promote community services (public or private) such as childcare and family services and facilities.

The competent authorities and bodies in each country shall take appropriate measures to promote information and education that engender broader public understanding of the principle of equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers and of the problems of workers with family responsibilities, as well as a climate of opinion conducive to overcoming these problems.

### **Convention 183 on Maternity Protection, 2000**

Convention 183 on Maternity Protection includes a set of international provisions to ensure equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers. It considers protecting pregnancy a responsibility to be shared by government and society and includes five main components: maternity leave, employment protection, cash and medical benefits, health protection (from work that could be bad for a mother or child's health) and breastfeeding. The convention establishes that maternity leave should last at least 14 weeks and calls for 6 weeks of postnatal leave. It also establishes the right to additional leave in the event of illness or complications as a consequence of pregnancy or childbirth. Furthermore, it states that financial benefits during the leave shall not be less than two-thirds of the woman's previous earnings and should be financed through obligatory social security arrangements or through public funds. The Convention prohibits the dismissal of pregnant women, those on maternity leave, or those returning to work, except for reasons unrelated to pregnancy. It further guarantees the right to return to the same position or an equivalent position with the same pay. Furthermore, it prohibits discrimination due to maternity, including any attempt to require pregnancy tests as part of employment. The right to breaks for breastfeeding or a reduction in total daily hours of work must be guaranteed.

# ENDNOTES

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- 14 The Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (1948) No 87 is an International Labour Organization Convention, and one of the conventions that form the core of international labour law, as interpreted by the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.
- 15 "Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining" constitutes one of four areas of fundamental rights, as adopted in 1998 in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.
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22 In 2010 UNDP found that the lack of “women’s participation in the workforce across Asia-Pacific costs the region an estimated USD \$89 billion every year. Another estimate, using data from 1960 to 2000, suggests that a combination of gender gaps in education and employment accounts annually for a significant difference of up to 1.6 percentage points in per capita growth rates between South Asia and East Asia”. The same UNDP study noted that, “over the last 10 years the increase of women workers in developed countries is estimated to have contributed more to global growth than has China’s remarkable economic record. Reaching the same level of women’s labour market participation in the United States—over 70 per cent—would boost GDP in countries, for example, by 4.2 per cent a year in India, 2.9 per cent in Malaysia and 1.4 per cent in Indonesia”. <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/HDR/Asia%20and%20Pacific%20HDR/APHumanDevelopmentReport2010-en.pdf> Moreover, a recent study detailed in the Economist magazine highlighted that eliminating gender discrimination in Saudi Arabia could raise its GDP per person on par with the United States of

America. The Economist, ‘Free Exchange: A Proper Reckoning’ March 16, 2016. Reinforcing these finds, a paper on the MENA region notably finds that the ‘employment gap’ in has been accountable for a 0.9-1.7% reduction in the annual growth rates since the 1960s, a non-negligible amount.. Klasen, Stephen and Francesca Lamanna, “The Impact of Gender Inequality in Education and Employment on Economic Growth”, *Feminist Economics*, 15:3, 2009. Another study finds that if women are entirely excluded from the labour force, income per capita would fall by 40% and that the current loss in income due to gender gaps in the MENA region is an astounding 38%, by far the highest rate in the world. Cuberes, David and Marc Teignier, “Aggregate Effects of Gender Gaps in the Labour Market: A quantitative estimate”, unpublished working paper, 2015. Finally, a recent study in Norway found that, “if the level of female participation in Norway were to be reduced to the OECD average, Norway’s net national wealth would, all other factors being equal, fall by a value equivalent to our total petroleum wealth, including the value of assets held in the Government Pension Fund-Global (GPG, formerly the petroleum fund).”



The Regional Programme for the Economic and Political Empowerment of Women in the Southern Mediterranean Region (“Spring Forward for Women”) provides a mechanism to advance the economic and political empowerment of women in the Southern Mediterranean region. The programme (2012-2016) supports women across the region, focusing on priority countries undergoing unrest, transition and reform, such as such as Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Palestine and Tunisia, to have greater influence in shaping the future of their countries while protecting their previous gains. It connects stakeholders to ensure that marginalised women in these countries receive capacity building, advocacy, information and partnerships that address the barriers that have impeded their access and engagement in economic and public lives. The programme is financed through a contribution of €7 million from the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and of €1.2 million from the UN Women core budget.

# UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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