



PALESTINIAN



WOMEN

INTRODUCTION

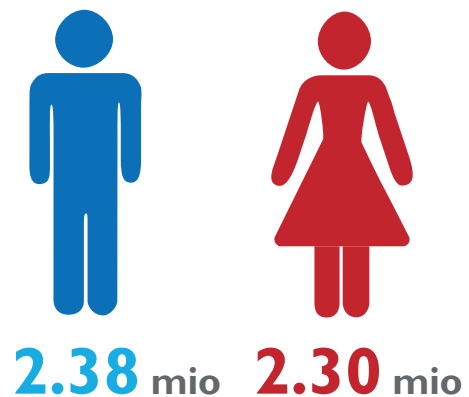
August 2015

Women make up almost half of the Palestinian population - 2.30 million or 49.2% of the total estimated 4.68 million Palestinians living in the occupied territories (as of mid-2015).¹ Their status in society has altered considerably during the past decades due to socioeconomic changes, increased female education and participation in social and political movements as well as the national struggle to liberate Palestine. Women in Palestine are a symbol of resilience, resistance and steadfastness, but also of suffering - and this two-fold: first, from the ongoing decades-old Israeli military occupation, where they bear most of the collective burdens that emanate from it: death and injury, forced displacement from homes, denial of basic human rights, arrests and detentions, and discrimination in almost every aspect of daily life, and secondly from within Palestinian society, where they still lack full rights and protection and are subjected to obstacles such as patriarchy, traditional social norms and a gender-based distribution of roles.

While Palestinian women have made remarkable achievements, sometimes even spearheading change in their communities, and their participation in society has significantly increased in the past years, their representation and role in decision-making remains low and the need for women's empowerment high. This bulletin aims at providing a detailed overview over the status, statistics and situation of women in present-day Palestine.

¹ PCBS, *Press Release on the Eve of international Population Day 2015*, 9 July 2015.

Palestinian Population, 2015



CONTENTS

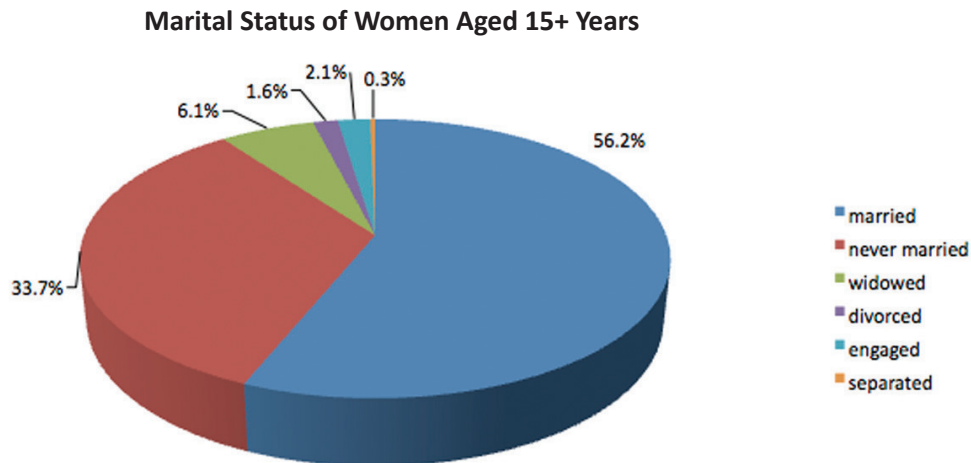
Introduction	1
Family & Social Life	2
Education	5
Economy	7
Public Life	10
Political Situation	13
Outlook	14
Selected Reading	14
Palestinian Women at a Glance	15

FAMILY & SOCIAL LIFE

Palestinian society is characterized by strong patriarchal structures, traditional norms and the teachings of the Quran, which to a large extent determine the role and life of Palestinian women along with the family structure - not only in the sense of its own nuclear unit, but also within the extended family and even the *hamula* ("clan").

Marriage

Within Palestinian society, over half (56.2%) of the women aged 15 years and above are married.

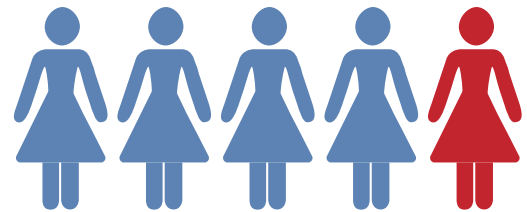


Source: PCBS, *Press Release on International Women's Day 2015*, 5 March 2015.

Child marriage

Even though the legal age of maturity is fixed at 18 years old, child marriages are still practiced. According to the applicable laws² the age of legal capacity for marriage in the West Bank is 15 for girls and 16 for boys, and in Gaza 17 years for girls and 18 for boys. In 2014, one out of five women aged 20-49 year married before the age of 18 (28.6% in the Gaza Strip compared to 21.4% in the West Bank).³ In 2013, the median age at first marriage was 20.2 years for women (and 24.7 years for men).⁴

Married before the age of 18



Of the women aged 15-19 years

9.3% were married - **6.8%** in the West Bank, **4.3%** in Gaza⁵

Of the women aged 15-49 years

2.1% were first married before age 15 - **1.8%** in the West Bank, **2.6%** in Gaza⁶

² PCBS, *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014 - Key Findings*, February 2015.

³ PCBS, *Press Release on International Women's Day 2015*, 5 March 2015.

⁴ PCBS, *Women and Men in Palestine, Issues and Statistics*, 2013.

⁵ PCBS, *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014 - Key Findings*, February 2015.

⁶ PCBS, *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014 - Key Findings*, February 2015.

Polygamy

Of the women aged 15-49 years

4.3% were in a polygamous marriage - **3.2%** in the West Bank, **5.8%** in Gaza⁷

Fertility

Total **fertility rate** among Palestinian women in reproductive age (15-49 years) is 4.1 births per woman⁸ (down from 5.1 in 2000 and 4.6 in 2007⁹).

Family Planning

Some 57.2% of married women aged 15-49 used some form of family planning method (contraceptive) in 2014 (WB: 59.8%, GS: 53.4%)¹⁰, 94% received ante-natal health care during pregnancy and about 98% gave birth under medical supervision, but only 50% received all the tests recommended during pregnancy and post-natal services remain limited.¹¹



Personal Status Law

Palestinian women, both Christian and Muslim, are discriminated against in matters of personal status,¹² especially when it comes to issues such as marriage, divorce, and child custody, or their freedom of movement (a situation aggravated by Israel's separation barrier and checkpoints). In addition, women's protection by the penal code is weak: violence against them is not outlawed and goes, along with honor crimes, widely unpunished.

Although the Palestinian Authority (PA) cancelled Article 340 of the Civil Code (which granted extenua for murderers¹³), the killing of women continue to be a matter of concern. It is difficult to obtain reliable figures, partially due to the problem of underreporting. In 2013, the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling recorded, for instance, 27 cases, the Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights only three cases plus 16 others in which women were killed in "mysterious circumstances" (e.g., were found shot, stabbed to death, had "fallen" from high floors or balconies).¹⁴ In the first half of 2014, some 16 cases of murdered women were reported.¹⁵

⁷ PCBS, *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014 - Key Findings*, February 2015.

⁸ PCBS, *Press Release on International Women's Day 2015*, 5 March 2015.

⁹ PCBS.

¹⁰ PCBS & MOH, *Press Release on International Health Day*, 7 April 2014. This was not a significant change over 2004, when the total stood at 50.6%, see PCBS, *Demographic and Health Survey – 2004, 2006*.

¹¹ PCBS, *Women and Men in Palestine, Issues and Statistics*, 2013.

¹² While the Basic Law stipulates that Palestinians are "equal before the law and the judiciary, without distinction based upon race, sex, color, religion, political views or disability" (Article 9) it also recognizes Shari'a as a main source of legislation (Article 4), which gives way for conservative interpretations of Islamic principles and is thus responsible for many discriminatory provisions.

¹³ For example, a OHCHR-commissioned study that analyzed 37 court rulings between 1993 and 2013 on cases involving the killing of women concluded that the broad use of mitigating circumstances led to impunity for such crimes: in 29 cases, the judges reduced the perpetrator's penalty on the basis of extenuating circumstances (e.g., waiving of personal rights, "fit of rage" justification, and defense of "honor") established in Articles 98 and 99 of the Penal Code 16 of 1960. See Judge Ahmad Al-Ashqar, "Murder of Women in Palestine under the pretext of Honour," OHCHR, April 2014; http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/Executive_summary_study_called_honour_killings_Palestine.pdf.

¹⁴ UN, *Implementation of Human Rights Council resolutions S-9/1 and S-12/1, A/HRC/28/80*, 2 March 2015; <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/3E5AEDBEA729798585257E06005250F2>

¹⁵ Women Center for Legal Aid and Counseling.

While women's organizations have successfully lobbied to end some of the discrimination de jure, for instance the requirement of a male "guardian's" permission to obtain a passport¹⁶, the practices often remain in place *de facto*,¹⁷ or law enforcement is half-hearted¹⁸. What makes matters worse is the absence of a unified law that applies: in the West Bank it is the – unaltered – Jordanian Personal Status Law of 1976, in the Gaza Strip the Egyptian Family Law of 1954.¹⁹

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is not prohibited by law per se. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), some 37% of married women have been subjected to some form of domestic violence by their husbands (29.9% in the West Bank compared to 51.1% in Gaza Strip), mainly psychologically (58.6%), economically (55.1%) or socially (54.8%), but also physically (23.5%) and sexually (11.8%). Of the never married women aged 18-64 years, 30.1% had been physically and 25.6% psychologically abused.²⁰



Violence against women is on a rise, inter alia, due to Palestinian men's frustration which stems from the loss of their ability to provide and protect resulting from the dire economic conditions²¹ as well as a "combination of decades of Israeli occupation, the use of force against Palestinians by Israel, the different forms of resistance used by Palestinians against such use of force and the patriarchy prevailing in Palestinian society."²² Women often refrain from pressing charges due to social norms, the lack of support, the lack of an "alternative" place to go, or for the sake of their children. Furthermore, they rarely use societal or legal support as the prevailing belief in society is that this is a private matter between spouses and that the 'honor' of a family is largely judged by the actions (or even clothes) of the women. As a result, most cases of violence against women go unreported.

Female-headed households

Women often rise to the challenge of coping with harsh changes and exceptionally tough situations, including taking charge of the family and all its matters in a male-dominated society in the absence of a husband or father due to detention, deportation, divorce or death. As of 2014, 10,6% of all Palestinian households were headed by females (11.7% in the West Bank, 8.4% in Gaza),²³ with an average size of 3 persons (compared to 5.8 persons for male-headed households).²⁴



¹⁶ Which was officially abolished in 1996.

¹⁷ See for details Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC), *The Legal and Social Status of Palestinian Women: A Gap Analysis Report Using CEDAW as Reference*, Ramallah, 2005, available at http://www.mediterraneas.org/article.php3?id_article=278.

¹⁸ In May 2014, President Abbas issued, for example, a Decree Law amending Article 98 of the Penal Code, which allowed for mitigation in sentencing of perpetrators of "honor" crimes, but left untouched Article 99, which gives broad discretionary power to judges in the application of mitigating factors.

¹⁹ Jordan and Egypt have made progressive changes to their personal status laws in recent decades, but these do not apply in Palestine.

²⁰ PCBS, *Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society*, 2011.

²¹ Buyukgul, Ebru, "The women of Palestine: caught between the occupation and patriarchy," *Informed Comment*, 26 April 2015, <http://www.juancole.com/2015/04/palestine-occupation-patriarchy.html>.

²² Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Implementation of Human Rights Council Resolutions S-9/1 and S-12/1, 13 January 2014.

²³ PCBS, *Palestinian Population Status in Palestine 2014*, July 2014.

²⁴ PCBS, *Press Release on the Eve of international Population Day 2015*, 9 July 2015.

Social media use

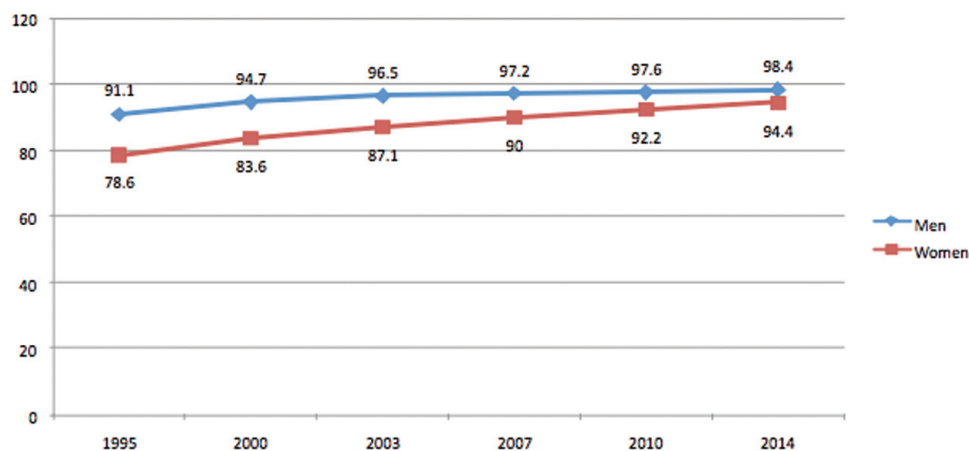
In 2014, some 67.4% of women aged 10 years and above were using social media networks; of these, 68.2% of them were using it for “acquaintance”, 74.4% for games and entertainment, 61.1% to make phone calls, 21.0% for debate and dialogue on political issues, and 33.5% for debate and dialogue on cultural and literary topics.



EDUCATION

Since the 1970s there was a gradual change in the attitudes regarding female education mainly due to increased demand for women on the labor market and the notion that an unmarried daughter, if educated, can financially support herself and her parents. As a result, literacy rates among females have risen constantly and considerably, especially over the last decade, and reached 94.4% in 2014 - one of the highest rates in the Middle East. While it is still 4.0% lower than the men’s rate (98.4%),²⁵ the highest percentage of illiterate women are those above 60 years of age.

Literacy Rate of Palestinian Men and Women (15+ Years), 1995-2014

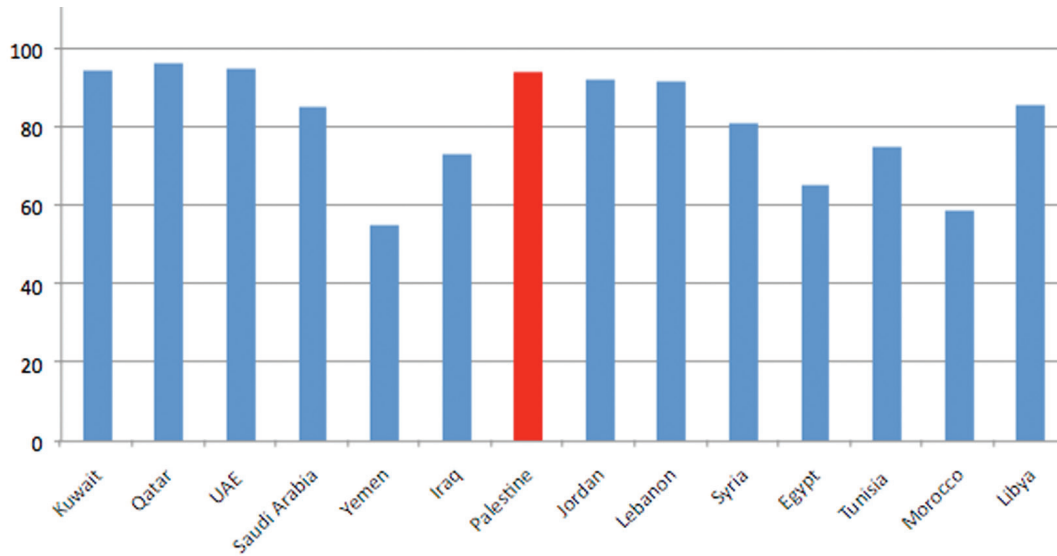


Source: PCBS, Press Release on International Women’s Day 2015, 5 March 2015.



²⁵ PCBS, Press Release on International Women’s Day 2015, 5 March 2015.

Female Adult Literacy in MENA Countries (UNESCO projections), 2015



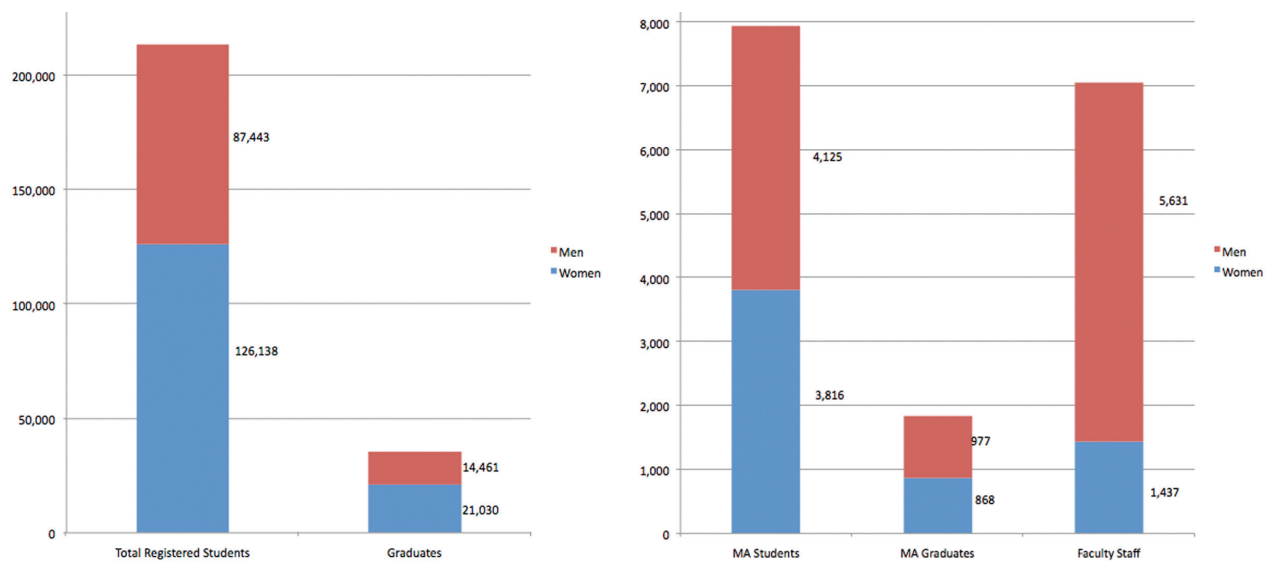
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *Adult and Youth Literacy - National, Regional and Global Trends, 1985-2015*, May 2013 (Table 6).

Unlike in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa, Palestinian girls and young women enjoy equal access to education as their male counterparts and even account for over half of all enrolled pupils. Of those aged 15-29, 3.0% of males – compared to 1.5% of females - had not completed any educational stage.²⁶ In higher education, women also form a clear majority, both in terms of enrollment and graduation. In 2013, more women (12.2%) than men (8.9%) aged 15-29 years held a university degree.²⁷

In 2012/13, females constituted:

- 50.2% of all school students
- 59.1% of all students at higher education institutes
- 59.3% of all graduates

Palestinian Women in Higher Education



Source: Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2013 Statistics.

²⁶ PCBS, *Press Release on International Youth Day*, August 2014.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

This female educational attainment is particularly remarkable taking into consideration that young women are much more likely to be forced to leave school than men because of the daily harassment to which they are subjected at Israeli checkpoints and due to the separation barrier.

However, despite the successful secondary school enrolment of women, which generally correlates positively with female work, Palestinian women’s labor force participation (15+ years) remains low, even by regional comparison, and does not necessarily seem to translate into women’s improved social status.

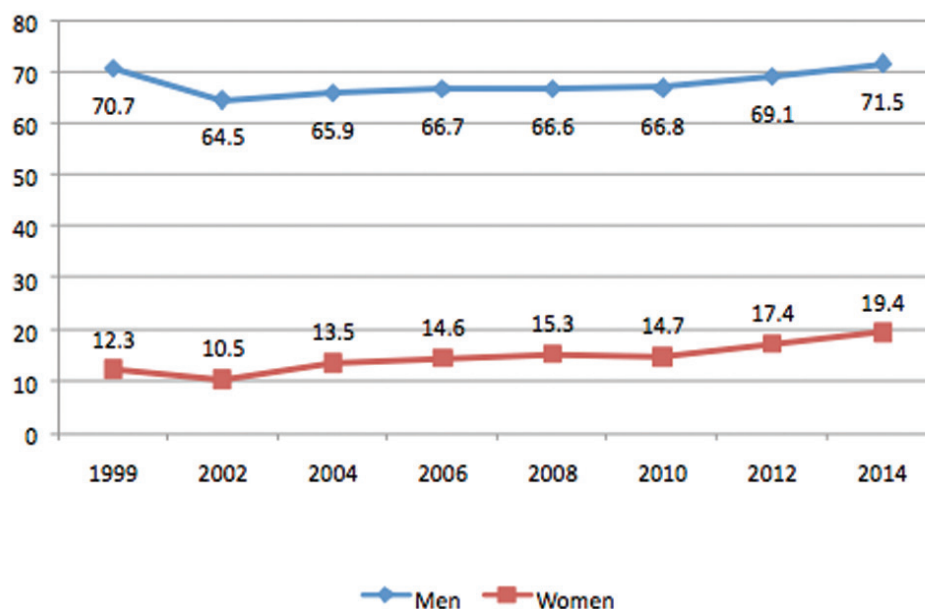
Data and analyses - from the World Bank and World Economic Forum to the UNDP and OECD - have shown that real integration of women in the labor market contributes to a better functioning and more prosperous society. Despite the fact that Palestinian women are among the most educated ones in the Arab world they face the biggest problems in the transition from education to the labor market and career advancement due to gender stereotypes. In addition, there is still a great gender gap in the workplace, and this is where greater attention is needed.

ECONOMY

Israel’s policies have always been destructive when it comes to Palestinian development, economy and livelihoods, but with the construction of the separation barrier the situation has gone from bad to worse with severe impacts on the health and living conditions of Palestinians throughout the Palestinian territories, affecting women in particular.

Low female participation in the labor market is common in the MENA (Middle East/North Africa) region compared to other parts of the world - resulting in a great loss of economic potential. The rate of Palestinian women is among the lowest in the region, despite being the most educated: in 2014, their labor force participation rate was 19.4% (compared to 71.5% of the male participation rate). The largest share – 47.6% - was among those with 13 years and more of schooling. While the female rate has significantly increased over the last 15 years, it is still low by regional comparison.²⁸

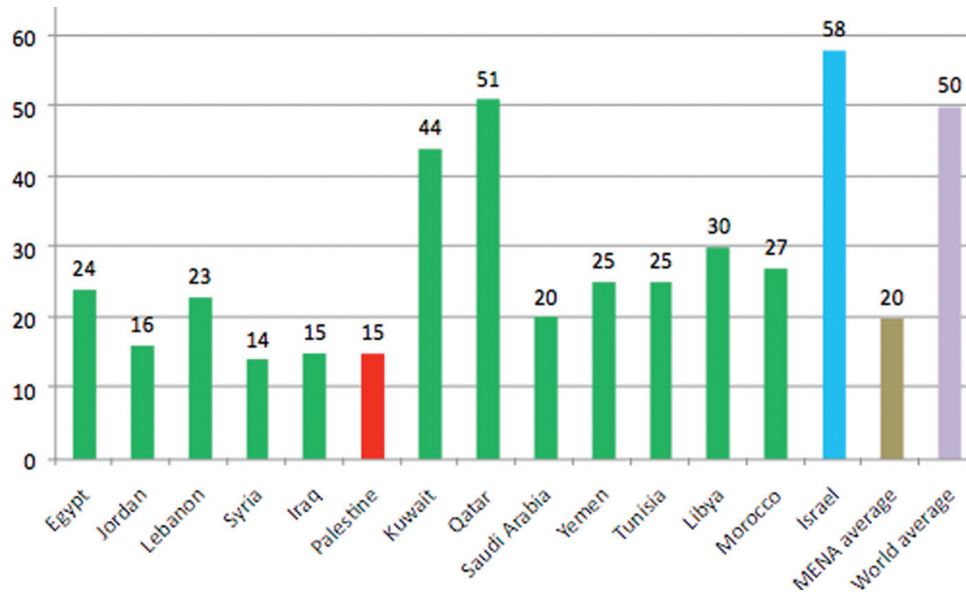
Palestinian Labor Force Participation Rate (15+ years), 2001-2014



Source: PCBS, Labor Force Survey, Annual Report 2014, April 2015.

²⁸ PCBS, Press Release on International Women's Day 2015, 5 March 2015.

Female Labor Force Participation Rate (%) in Selected MENA Countries, 2013 (modeled ILO estimate)

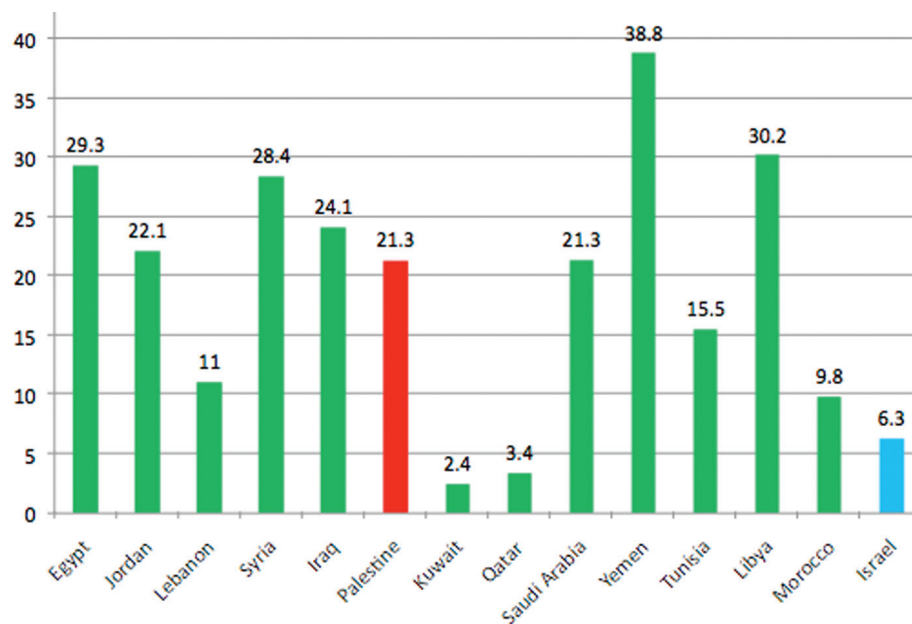


Source: World Bank Data, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>

The causes of women’s weak economic participation include, *inter alia*, the prevailing male culture (requiring, for example, the father’s or husband’s permission to work; hurdles in accessing commercial credit), the overall bad employment situation, high reproductive rates, obstacles to movement (caused by Israel’s closure policy) as well as other hindrances posed by the occupation, including the systematic destruction of Palestinian productive sectors. In the regular PCBS Labor Force Survey Reports, the main reason given for being outside the labor force is house-keeping (68.5%), followed by studying/training (26.4%) and age/illness (4.2%).²⁹

Moreover, while education is usually seen as key to women’s economic participation and a society’s well-being, this does not apply to the case of Palestine. In 2014, unemployment rates among women were with 38.4% much higher than that of men (23.9%), and - paradoxically - highest among women with 13+ years of schooling, where it reached 50.6%. Unemployment among women is with 56.8% significantly higher in Gaza than in the West Bank (27.4%).³⁰ In regional comparison, female unemployment is on average, as adapted World Bank data suggest:

Female Unemployment (%) in Selected MENA Countries, 2013 (modeled ILO estimate)



Source: World Bank Data, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.FE.ZS>

²⁹ PCBS, *Labor Force Survey Report Series, Q4-2014*.

³⁰ PCBS, *Labor Force Survey Report Series*; PCBS, *Press Release on International Women's Day 2015*, 5 March 2015.

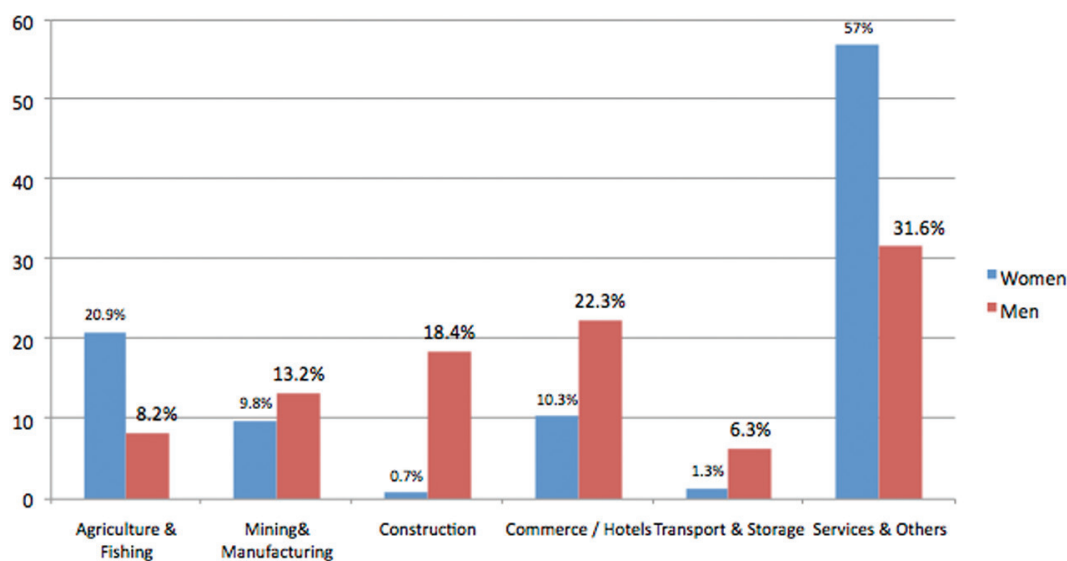
**In 2014,
Palestinian female
unemployment
stood at 38.4%**

According to a recent ILO study, most working women (47%) are 18-29 years old and have over 12 years of schooling, while the rate of women with less than 12 years of schooling is 10%. The number of more educated women in the labor force increased by 150% between 2000 and 2011, as compared with 18% for women with less educational qualifications. However, the rate of unemployed women graduates has also increased: from 20% in 2000 to 38% in 2011 (in non-graduate women from 5% to 9%), partially because they enroll in fields which offer less employment prospects.³¹

The vast majority of the female labor force are wage employees (in mid-2014: 59.8%), followed by unpaid family members (20.4%), those self-employed (18.2%) and employers (1.6%)³².

Employment of women is concentrated in services (57%, mostly in public administration, but also education and health sectors) and in agriculture (20.9% often as unpaid family helpers).³³

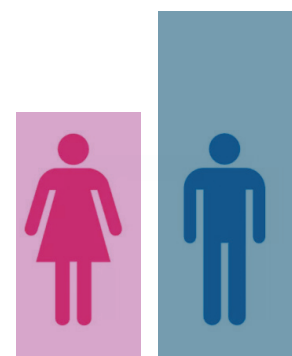
Distribution (%) of Employed Persons (15+ years) by Sex and Sector, 2014



Source: PCBS, *Press Release on International Women's Day 2015*, 5 March 2015.

Gender Wage Gap

In addition, there is wage discrimination between the sexes: in 2014, the average daily wage for females was NIS 80.9 compared to NIS 105.8 for males.³⁴ According to the ILO, the average daily wage earned by women in the West Bank private sector amounted to only 76% of that earned by their male counterparts³⁵.



³¹ ILO, *Women's Participation in the Palestinian Labor Force: 2010-2011*, Factsheet, 2013.

³² PCBS, *Labor Force Survey Report Series, Q2-2014*.

³³ PCBS, *Press Release on International Women's Day 2015*, 5 March 2015.

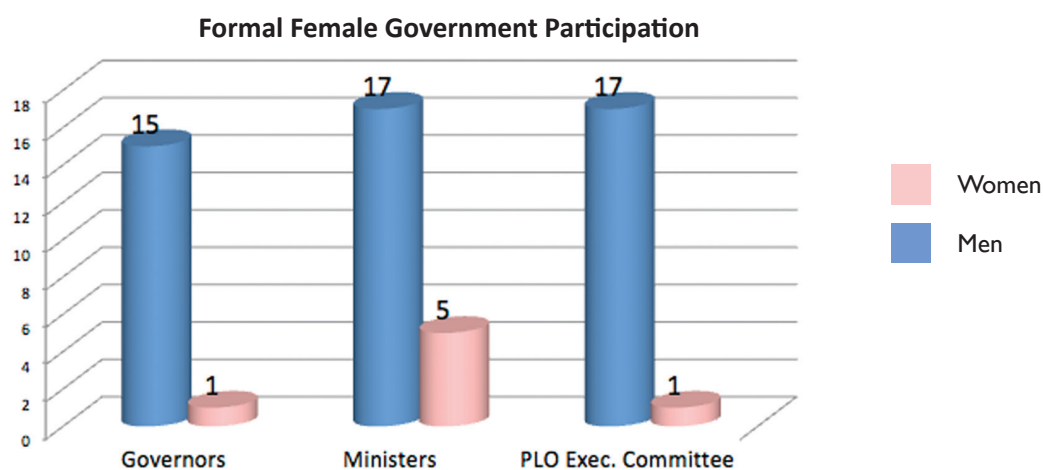
³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ ILO, *The Situation of Workers of the Occupied Arab Territories*, 2014.

PUBLIC LIFE

In the OPT and neighboring Arab states, Palestinian women have a long history of involvement in women's and resistance movements: they not only established numerous feminist-nationalist and charitable organizations, but also fought side by side with men against the occupation. Especially the first Intifada (1987-1991) changed the role and perception of many women (and some men), who increasingly began to question the restrictive norms of their own society. However, despite this growing consciousness of their rights as women traditional norms and values are still prevailing. While this can be blamed to a certain extent on the geographic fragmentation and political divide in Palestine-as well as the PA's limited jurisdiction and a legislation that is based on various, partially conflicting legal frameworks, a large portion of women's low participation in public life can be attributed to social, economic, and cultural restraints inherent in traditional Palestinian society and its rather conservative view on women's political and civic engagement and rights, which is often labeled as "un-Islamic and unbecoming of the Muslim woman."³⁶

As a result, women remain underrepresented in decision-making bodies as well as with regard to public roles or senior administrative and political posts.³⁷ This is clearly evident in their limited formal government participation: only one of 18 PLO Executive Committee members, 5 of 22 ministers and only one of 16 governors (Ramallah/Al-Bireh) are female. In 2013, females represented 40.6% of total employees in the public sector, but only about 4% occupy assistant undersecretary positions in PA ministries.³⁸



Sources: PCBS, *Press Release on International Women's Day*, 2011 and 2014.

Moreover, women comprise, also thanks to the quota system used, 12.9% of the PLC members³⁹ and 21% of the total local authority members.⁴⁰ (In comparison, the average proportion of women in MENA parliaments was 16% in 2013⁴¹). It must be said, however, that the 2005 Local Elections Law includes a women's quota requiring a minimum level of female representation of 20%.⁴² Furthermore, an increase in voting/participating in elections among women does not necessary mean they voted freely, as they are often constrained to vote according to a family decision.⁴³

³⁶ Buyukgul, Ebru, "The women of Palestine: caught between the occupation and patriarchy," *op.cit.*.

³⁷ <http://palestine.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation#sthash.7w3WMMMe5.dpuf>.

³⁸ PCBS, *Press Release on International Women's Day*, March 2011 and 2014. The situation is not better in political parties: in the most recent Fatah elections in August 2009, not one woman was elected to the main governing body (Central Council), while in the legislative body (Revolutionary Council) only 11 of 120 members are female. Azzouni, Suheir, "Palestine - Palestinian Authority and Israeli-Occupied Territories," in *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*, ed. by S. Kelly and J. Breslin, New York, NY: Freedom House, 2010, [https://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/Palestine%20\(Palestinian%20Authority%20and%20Israeli%20Occupied%20Territories\).pdf](https://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/Palestine%20(Palestinian%20Authority%20and%20Israeli%20Occupied%20Territories).pdf).

³⁹ However, there is a retrogressive trend: in the first PLC (elected in 1996) women held only 5.7% of the seats but it enacted far more gender-sensitive legislation than the second PLC (2006). *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ PCBS, *Press Release on International Women's Day 2015*, 5 March 2015.

⁴¹ World Bank data on Social Development, <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/1.5>.

⁴² In comparison: in 2000, the percentage of appointed women in local government bodies did not exceed 1.4%. See Mi *Women Participation in Local Government Units Elections of 2012-2013 – Fact Sheet*, http://www.miftah.org/Publications/Books/Women_Participation_in_Local_Government_Units_Elections2012_2013.pdf.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

The percentage of women running in the latest local government elections in 2012/13 remained low with less than one quarter of females – 24.8% - among the total number of candidates (5,809). Although this was still an increase over the 2004-05 elections, where women accounted for less than a fifth (19.8%) of the candidates, the number of registered female voters and the actual voter turnout among women was lower in the 2012/13 elections than in the previous round, as was the resulting numbers of female mayor: there is currently only one female mayor (Bethlehem) compared to three in 2004/05.⁴⁴

That women’s representation across all sectors remains low is evident from the following table:

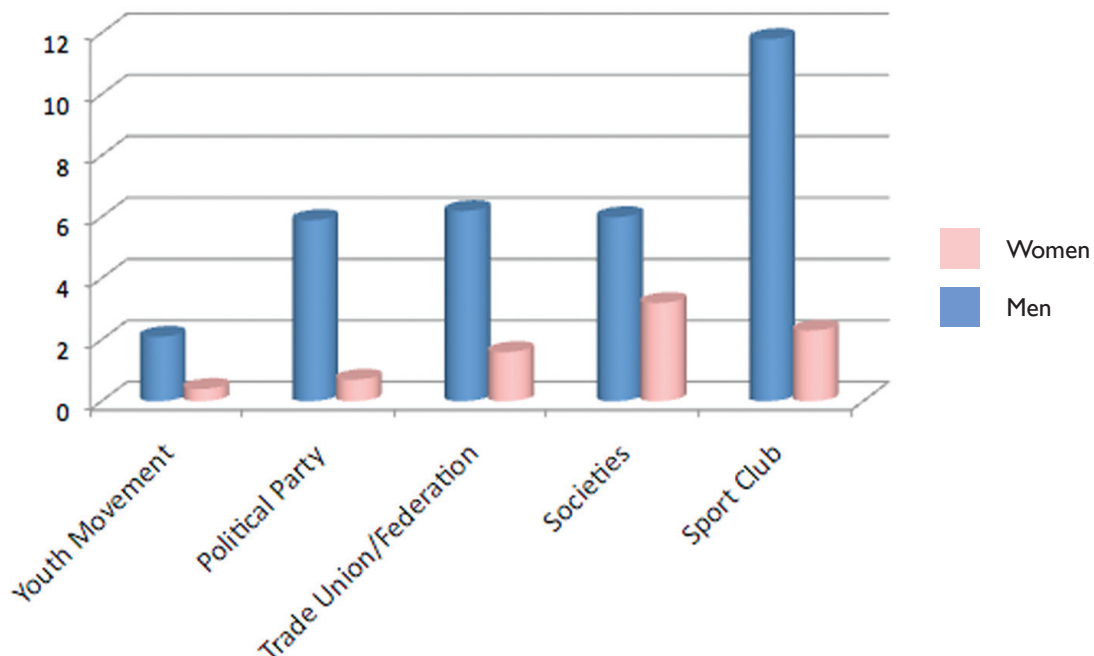
Percentage of Women Represented in Various Sectors

	Total		
Registered physicians	14.3%	Diplomatic staff (PLO Ambassador)	5.1%
Registered dentists	27.2%	Public Sector/civil servants	41.2%
Registered nurses	52.0%	Legal judges	15.5%
Registered pharmacists	53.0%	Shari’a court judges	7.2%
Medical Association member	13.6%	Public prosecutors	15.6%
Dental Association member	27.3%	Civil Police personnel	3.3%
Student council members	26.8%	Military justice system personnel	2%
Engineers	17.9	PLC members	12.9%
Journalists	20%	Local Council members	21%

Sources: PCBS, *Women and Men in Palestine: Issues and Statistics*, 2012; PCBS, *Press Release on International Women’s Day*, 2015; PCBS, *A Review of Palestinian Justice and Security Sector Data*, Aug. 2013.

Data also shows a significant difference between males and females from the age of 10 and above when it comes to memberships in institutions:

Memberships in Institutions



Source: PCBS, *Press Release on Palestinian Culture Day 2015*, 12 March 2015.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Moreover, an entire women-only list in Hebron even failed to obtain the threshold necessary to run in the elections.

Women Organizations

The roots of women's formal organization go back to 1921, when the first Palestinian women union was founded, although mainly as a welfare society run by elite women. By the late 1930s, many women's organizations had formed with an increasingly politicized agenda,⁴⁵ although only a tiny percentage of women actually participated actively. After the 1948 *Nakba* and the dispersal of the Palestinians, women's organizations were transferred to the Diaspora, mainly the refugee camps in the neighboring Arab states, assuming a number of vital roles, including "substituting for state services".⁴⁶ The rise of the resistance in the mid-1960s and the forming of the PLO and its women's wing - the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) in 1964-65 was a turning point for the women movement,⁴⁷ although its activities were mostly traditional, i.e., charitable, and "encouraged the participation of women in political life as active housewives rather than on equal terms with men."⁴⁸



In the aftermath of the Israeli 1967 occupation, despair grew but also led to a "sharp rise in women's participation in all kinds of resistance, from demonstrations and sit-ins to sabotage"⁴⁹, and in the 1970s and 1980s a number of strong women's organizations emerged that went beyond charitable work to build a politicized united women's movement. However, women's issues were seen as conflicting with nationalist concerns and by the time of the first Intifada, national liberation was widely considered the central issue for all. During the first Intifada (1987-1992) women played an essential role as community leaders and organizers⁵⁰, participated in demonstrations, confronted the army, facing death, injury, and arrest. All of this developed their political consciousness and built up a core of female leaders with a broad communal support base, but disappointingly the new female "image" was rejected by traditional society and old structures remained firmly in place, partially also inspired by newly emerged Islamic movements.⁵¹ By the time of the Oslo process, the few rights women had achieved were under threat.

After Oslo and the advent of the PA, women shifted the focus to the NGO sector to advocate for the equal rights of women, work towards gender-empowerment strategies, and contribute to Palestinian state-building. While there were some significant achievements made⁵², the political situation on the ground, especially the deadlock in the negotiations as well as the internal divide (which created a dichotomy between liberal feminism - anticipating a secular democratic state that respects women's rights - and Islamism - preferring a Shari'a-based state), has somewhat distracted the women's rights movement from their issues of real concern.

Despite all efforts of women to organize and fight for democracy and women's rights they have failed so far due to two main factors:

- the predominantly patriarchal structures and corresponding social norms which leave Palestinian women leaders outside the male-dominated political and decision-making circles, and
- the decision to opt "for an elitist and bourgeoisie feminist struggle when in reality the majority of Arab women do not belong to this class and were thus left alienated."⁵³

⁴⁵ See for example Fleischman, Ellen, *Jerusalem Women's Organizations During the British Mandate: 1920s-1930s*, Jerusalem: PASSIA, 1995.

⁴⁶ Giacaman, Rita/Muna Odeh, "Palestinian Women's Movement in the Israeli-Occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip", in Toubia, ed., *Women of the Arab World: The Coming Challenge*, London: Zed Books, 1988.

⁴⁷ Peteet, Julie, *Gender in Crisis, Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

⁴⁸ Warnock, Kitty, *Land Before Honour, Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories*, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1990.

⁴⁹ Sayigh, R., "Introduction", in Orayb Aref Najjar, *Portraits of Palestinian Women*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992.

⁵⁰ Organizing sewing and literacy classes, child-care, relief and emergency services, and locally-produced food and clothing. See, for example, Hiltermann, Joost, "The Women's Movement during the Uprising", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XX, No. 3, Spring 1991.

⁵¹ Holt suggests, for example, that "notably the mother of the (male) martyr, the uncomplaining wife of the fighter or hero, and the band of women providing emergency relief and medical care to the needy - still tended to be more favourably regarded. Many parents, while not openly condemning the political - and occasionally aggressive - behaviour of their daughters, resorted to more subtle tactics, such as early marriage or the termination of education, in order to remove young women from temptation." Holt, Maria, *Women in Contemporary Palestine - Between Old Conflicts and New Realities*, Jerusalem: PASSIA, 1996.

⁵² E.g., equal voting rights, women's quota.

⁵³ Buyukgul, Ebru, "The women of Palestine: caught between the occupation and patriarchy," *op.cit.*.

POLITICAL SITUATION

A recent report issued by a number of Palestinian human rights organizations⁵⁴ confirmed that women carry the heaviest load of the effects of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian lives, especially with regard to house demolitions (including post-demolition social burdens), the separation wall (inability to access basic services, including medical treatment, and abuse and suffering at Israeli checkpoints where scores of women have been forced to give birth), family displacement (due to the Nakba, the annexation of East Jerusalem, Israel's 2003 Citizenship Law, the separation barrier and the permit regime), and the frustration (and resulting aggressiveness) of mainly male relatives (born out of the lack of perspectives, unemployment, and thus the inability to take on the role of the breadwinner and provider of the household), and arrest and imprisonment (of family members or themselves).



According to statistics revealed by the Palestine Information Center in March 2015, over 15,000 Palestinian women, including minors and mothers, have been arrested and/or detained by Israel since 1967, some 1,200 of them since the second Intifada in 2000.⁵⁵ According to the Palestinian Prisoners Centre for Studies (PPCS), 78 Palestinian women were arrested for varying periods in the first quarter of 2015 alone, many of the inside Al-Aqsa Mosque compound.⁵⁶ Sometimes Palestinian women are arrested to force male relatives to surrender themselves to the Israeli occupation army or to force imprisoned relatives into confessing what they didn't do.



Imprisoned Palestinian women are usually held in HaSharon (Tel Mond) prison under harsh conditions and degrading, humiliating treatment, which includes torture, psychological and physical abuse, sexual harassment, refusal of family visits, medical neglect, cell raids at day and night, and solitary confinement.⁵⁷ According to the Women's Organization for Political Prisoners (WOFPP)⁵⁸ there were – as of June 2015 - 24 women political prisoners in Israeli jails (23 in HaSharon Prison, one in Neve Tirza Prison near Ramle), one of them PLC member Khalida Jarrar.

The currently longest serving Palestinian woman prisoner is Lina Al-Jarbuni, 40, from Arraba Al-Batuf near Acre in 1948 Palestine, who is serving a 17-year sentence since 2002 for “aiding the enemy” – Palestinian resistance. The youngest female detainee is Dima Sawahra, 17, from the Jerusalem neighborhood of Jabal Al-Mukabber, arrested on 1 March 2014 and sentenced to 18 months.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights, Al-Haq, the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, the Women's Centre for Legal Counselling and the Society for Culture and Free Thought.

⁵⁵ <http://english.palinfo.com/site/pages/details.aspx?itemid=70546>.

⁵⁶ PPCS, see, for example, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/17917-israel-arrests-close-to-100-palestinian-women-in-2015>.

⁵⁷ Addameer, “Violations continue against Palestinian Women and Girls on International Women's Day”, published on International Women's Day March 8th, 2015, http://www.addameer.org/sites/default/files/publications/womens_day_factsheet.pdf.

⁵⁸ WOFPP, *Newsletter June 2015*, <http://www.wofpp.org/english/home.html>.

⁵⁹ At the beginning of the year 14-year old Malak Al-Khatib from Beitin village, Ramallah, was held in custody for two months, 22 consecutive days of which without contact with her parents. See <http://euromid.org/en/article/698>.

OUTLOOK

The lives of Palestinian women are complex and diverse – some are defying stereotypes, while others are taken up in their traditional roles – and all still face social customs and constraining laws which keep them from fully participating in society. Restrictive personal status laws are still in place and govern women lives with regard to marriage, divorce, inheritance, alimony, and child custody. Similar discriminatory provisions apply in terms of employment and career and make women vulnerable to poverty and dependent on (male) support but turn them - despite impressive academic accomplishments - into a marginalized, under-utilized source of human capital, resulting in a severe loss also for Palestinian state-building efforts. While women have been visible and effective in politics for decades, their representation remains low within official bodies, and their activism is mainly geared towards organizations working for and advocating women’s rights, women’s empowerment and gender mainstreaming from within the civil society.



The tasks ahead to improve the status and situation of women in Palestinian society require a legislation that eradicates gender-based discrimination in all aspects and domains (including working/hiring, wages, family violence, marriage, etc.) and allows for the effective enforcement of gender quotas (including in government ranks and other realms of the public sector). At the civil society level, there must be more awareness raising and advocacy efforts with regard to both the laws and practices discriminating against females, and of the lost potential that non-participating women pose for social and economic improvement.

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PALESTINIAN WOMEN AT A GLANCE:

Female Population: 2.30 million (49.2%)	Female labor force participation rate: 19.4%
Life Expectancy at Birth: 74.4 (men: 71.5)	Female unemployment: 38.4%
Sex ratio: 103.3 (103 males for each 100 females)	Median age at first marriage: 20.2 years
Fertility rate (15-49 years): 4.1 births/woman	First married before age 15: 2.1%
Literacy rate: 94.4%	In polygamous marriage (15-49 years): 4.3%
Percentage of all school students: 50.2%	Percentage of female headed households: 10.6%
Percentage of all higher education students: 59.1%	Percentage of PLC members: 12.9%
Percentage of all higher education graduates: 59.3%	Political prisoners: 24



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