

Women in the Libyan Job Market

Reality and Challenges

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By

Hala Bugaigis

Executive director

Jusoor Center for Studies and Development

Mohamed Tantoush

Researcher

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Introduction

This study is the result of cooperation between the Friedrich Ebert Foundation's Libya Office and the Jusoor Center for Studies and Development, in the field of gender equality and women's empowerment in sustainable economic development. We have tried to shed light on the most important factors concerning women in the Libyan job market despite a lack of information and data, especially in relation to the private sector. Notwithstanding the difficulty and ambiguity of the situation, we recommend various mechanisms to improve the situation of women. We hope that this study will encourage the trade union movement, civil society organizations and other concerned parties to conduct detailed and comprehensive studies that contribute to improving the conditions of working women in Libya and reinforcing women's role in economic activity.

The study aims to understand the current situation of women in the Libyan job market and the most important challenges they face. It also aims to identify obstacles to women's effective involvement in the job market and the factors behind these, including various forms of discrimination that hinder women's professional advancement. These obstacles conflict with measures that for economic and social reasons have sought to encouragement and support women to enter the job market.

Since independence in the 1950s the Libyan state has encouraged women's employment by enacting various supportive legislative measures and policies. However, these efforts have not translated into improvements in women's actual position in the labor force. Similarly, huge progress in female access to education has not led to corresponding progress in women's overall employment status. Most women are either unemployed or forced to accept lower quality jobs in administrative or service roles not compatible with their skills and levels of education.

Providing a suitable environment and opportunities for women in the job market is not a luxury or impracticality. It is a necessary precondition to achieving economic prosperity and comprehensive sustainable development. When considering women's realities and working women's rights, it is important to take into account the general significance of women's engagement in societies and their economies, and its positive impacts on economic growth, limiting poverty and improving the overall quality of life. The importance of women's economic empowerment is not limited to women making up half of society or being a sector of the population at risk of economic recession unless supported to rise, but is a natural outcome of woman's role throughout history as a partner to man in all his activities. Libyan women, with their prominent presence in areas such as traditional handcrafts and farming, have fought for their rights to be exercised as stipulated in law.

In the Green Mountain, for instance, it used to be common to address women, mothers and wives

by the term 'Naffaga' [spender], indicating their principal role in managing households' economic affairs. Women not only worked at home and in textiles, they farmed alongside men, as noted in many Libyan folk tales in which the heroines tended sheep and fought evil in the fields.

In the west of the country, in addition to working in the fields women participated in the textile industry. A study published on the Tawalt website about the textile industry in the Nafusa Mountain, which relied mainly on women and girls, estimates that at one point in time female textile workers in the region numbered around 30,000. Although the textile industry was not the mainstay of the local economy, many women depended on it in cases where the male head of the household and breadwinner had passed away. The study also mentions three kinds of textile work in the area:

- 1- Private business: In which women depend on resources available within the family such as wool and tools. This is the most common form in the Mountain.
- 2- Working on commission: A working woman makes an agreement with the owner of the wool to pay a certain rate of commission on her income, typically from a quarter to a third and perhaps reaching half if the wool owner also provides production tools.
- 3- Salaried Work: Women work for an agreed salary, typically an in-kind payment such as a quantity of oil, olives, barley or other food products.

The Libyan constitution, ratified in 1951, was a quantum leap in the history of Libyan women. It imposed compulsory education, granting women more opportunities for educational attainment and hence access to different fields of employment, and provided equality for women at work. Consequently, it was followed by noticeable advances in the status of women in the Libyan job market.

Also relevant is the impact on women's engagement in economic life of the economic crises the country has experienced. For example, during Libya's economic crisis in the 1980s, society became more encouraging of women undertaking education and taking salaried work in various jobs in order to alleviate their families' financial burdens. Women therefore actively participated in these stages of the country's development through education, cultural and civic work, and in the job market alongside men as employees, workers and business owners, despite circumstances that limited their full involvement in national development.

Despite this, women's participation in the job market has been less than satisfactory. According to the World Bank's 2006 report on Libya, at that time the country had 1.8 million active workers, with unemployment estimated at approximately 25 per cent. Women comprised about half the national population (and still do), but according to Libya's Statistics Book of 2006 their contribution to development efforts does not exceed thirty per cent.

Women formed a numerical majority (over half) in only one field of employment, education. In other professions such as management, agriculture, services, industry and trade, women's representation ranged from 3.5 to 21 per cent.

Although since 2011 the country has been in an important transitional period, the situation of working women has not improved in the intervening years. This might be attributed to the lack of any strategy or general movement towards improving women's position in the economy. Political division and lack of security have negatively affected the job market overall. The economic crisis and lack of investment projects have led to an increase in unemployment rates, as we describe later in the study. This has affected women's work particularly strongly, and for several reasons. As one example, a lack of security has made it difficult for women to commute freely. The absence of monitoring bodies in the private sector is an additional deterrent to women's involvement in an unfair working environment. This has forced women, at best, to work at home or in unregistered companies where they lack either protection or legal safeguards.

Study Methodology

A descriptive method was used to examine the data, and an analytical method was used to assess both original findings (results of focal group sessions and interviews) and existing literature relevant to the topic. Primary research conducted in the study employed qualitative methods: six focus group sessions and 15 in-depth interviews with working women from various fields, including a member of parliament, a former undersecretary, and several department heads at banks and public and private bodies. Additional interviews were conducted with project owners and workers in the private sector in order to understand the low level of women's participation in the Libyan workforce.

Section One. A General Overview of the Work Environment in Libya

A general overview of the work environment in Libya

A consideration of the work environment in Libya requires taking into account the general economic situation, particularly the country's heavy dependence on petroleum resources. Between 2001 and 2011 the Gaddafi regime implemented minor economic reforms to reduce dependency on public sector employment. However, these were not enough for young people who were looking for 'better and fairer economic outcomes'. As in neighbouring Tunisia and Egypt, young people's dissatisfaction with their living conditions was among the root causes of the demonstrations that broke out in Libya in mid-February 2011.

Towards the end of the phase of political upheaval, in October 2011, there were attempts to restore oil production to its previous levels. However, according to the World Bank review of 2016 various challenges, against a background of prolonged political struggle, internal conflicts in various parts of the country and an inability to export oil adequately drove the economy into recession.

According to UN estimates, in 2014 Gross Domestic Product grew by 24 per cent and unemployment had dropped to 20 per cent. Reports attribute this decline in unemployment to a rise in the number of public sector employees in the three governments (the House of Representatives, the General National Congress and the Government of National Accord) to a peak of 1.6 million individuals, paid through various parliaments, ministries, departments, militias and other branches of government. At the same time, the parallel or informal economy in Libya is widely considered essential, with some estimates claiming that it currently makes up forty per cent of economic activity. The World Bank noted that in 2016 per capita income in Libya decreased by more than 65 per cent, while increases in food prices meant that inflation rose to more than 9 per cent.

Continued political, tribal and security conflicts have greatly affected political, social and economic conditions in the country. Libyan women face an especially great burden because of exclusion, especially from areas such as peace building and the economy, even though they have already suffered many losses. Despite this, women's access to public office has continued to decrease, and more restrictions have been put on their political, economic and social contributions to the country.

An overview of women's situation in Libya

■ Women in political and economic contexts

For cultural and social reasons there has been no effective participation of women in Libyan politics since independence. Despite regime change and the political atmosphere in recent decades, very few women have been appointed to ministerial positions, and all of these in non-sovereign ministries with the single exception in which a woman was appointed Head of the Administrative Control Authority.

Women's mobilisation rose following February 2011, with women participating in all subsequent transitional action despite the many challenges that still face them in a highly patriarchal society and given the deteriorating security situation in the country. Women have led relief organisations and civil society organizations, helped establish and became members of political parties, contributed to decision-making processes in many areas and participated in national dialogues and reconciliation committees. Participation rates remain unsatisfactory, but this is expected under the adverse circumstances described. It is remarkable that since 2011 women have not only become active on women's issues but also gone beyond that to demand human rights, national reconciliation and state building.

Accurate figures do not exist for the number and size of businesses owned and managed by women in the private sector in Libya. However, casual observation suggests a conspicuous rise in recent years in the number of women managing small and medium-size enterprises in different fields. The majority of female business owners operate within the informal economy, most conducting their business from home, and are therefore not accounted for in official economic statistics.

Women also have the right to own and manage land and other assets. However, social customs often hinder women from exercising this right. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data estimate the proportion of women who are landowners at 12 per cent. Women also have the right to access financial service, including bank loans, and to enter into financial contracts. Despite this, according to a 2013 survey by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the proportion of women with personal savings was 34 per cent, compared with 59 per cent without.

Lack of official data, since 2015, on women's participation in the workforce is a major challenge in understanding the factors affecting their position under the current exceptional circumstances. The efforts of certain local civil society organizations have shed some light on the state of the parallel economy during the ongoing crisis. Various reports exist about Libyan women and their contributions to the informal economy, created via projects and through small and medium-sized organisations

■ Overview of working women's rights in Libyan legislation

The Libyan constitution is considered to be a progressive document, with many features that encourage advancement of women's position in society. The constitution articles state that education must be compulsory and free, and it allows both genders to conduct commercial activities. Women's participation in education has increased, and women have supervised important charitable and cultural initiatives.

The period following 1969 was marked by the influence of nationalism, which swept the region, over the majority of Libyan legislation. This led to enactment of much legislation in favor of women, resulting in increased female participation in education, production and work. The most important gain for women in this period was the Promotion of Freedom Act of 1991, which emphasized equality between men and women and the right of women to work, and granted women the right to defend their motherland and to equality in financial matters in accordance with the articles of the Civil Service Act No.15.

In the period since 17th February 2011, important gains have been limited to political participation and representation, along with an increase in the number of women engaging in trade union activity that has accompanied growth in number of trade unions. Despite these efforts, so far there have been no legislations regarding improvement of female workers' conditions.

■ Women and labor legislation

Labor legislation has been enacted on the basis of equality and equal opportunities. Article 2 of the Libyan Labor Code states that equality between men and women is one of the foundations of the code. Article 3 states that employment is based on competence and merit without discrimination. Article 21 states that there should be no gender-based discrimination in levels of pay for equivalent jobs.

The code granted women the right to paid maternity leave, breastfeeding hours and other rights as detailed below:

Maternity leave: Article 25 states that working women have the right to a 14-week paid period of maternity leave as long as they provide a medical certificate proving the birth date. It covers the period before and after birth. The same article states that the first six weeks following childbirth is a period of compulsory leave during which women may not be required to work.

The employer has no right to terminate a woman's employment during pregnancy or maternity leave.

Breastfeeding period: Working women who are breastfeeding have the right to breaks that total no less than one hour during working hours, and a guarantee that this shall not result in a decrease in pay.

Unpaid care leave: Working women have the right to unpaid leave of up to a year to care for parents, children, or their husbands.

Nursery facilities: Employers must provide nurseries if they employ a sufficient number of female workers (not specified in the code). Workplaces in a single location may collaborate to achieve the stated commitment.

Freedom from sexual harassment: Workers are banned from pursuing or promoting acts of sexual harassment. If sexual harassment or indecent behaviour is proven, the penalty for the employee can be dismissal from work.

There is no doubt that Libyan legislation is largely fair to working women. It should be mentioned that after Libya signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the committee's 43rd session report stated the following: 'it is worth mentioning that most current legislations are in accordance with the articles of this convention. In case of disagreement, the convention must be implemented, which is what is stated in Article 23 of the civic law'. This means that all laws promote equality and the right to equal opportunities, granting women essential benefits and important incentives.

Despite this, unemployment rates among women remain high. Women are virtually absent from leading positions in departments and other public and private institutions. The general stereotype and common cultural attitude is that women are unable to lead decision-making processes.

Section Two: Quantitative Data Analysis: the Situation Regarding Women's Contributions in the Job Market

Quantitative reports are important documents as they provide clear and realistic information on the areas they cover. For this reason, international institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, OPEC, UN and others publish periodic quantitative reports about their respective fields of specialization. They do this in detailed and comprehensive fashion, covering all member states.

Libya suffers from a lack of periodic/annual quantitative reports, especially in vital economic areas such as national economic performance and employment situation. More importantly, such statistics as are available are not backed up by sufficient scientific and logical explanatory analysis.

In this section we aim to explain the latest official quantitative data available from local and international bodies regarding the job market and employment situation, with particular focus on what these data reveal about the position of women. The appendix includes a detailed list of all official statistics and data used in this study.

Assessment of data from the general census of 2006

The General Information Authority's report on the final results of the general population census of 2006 is considered to be the most recent official, comprehensive and accurate information available. By comprehensive we mean that the indicators of employment and unemployment used in the report took detailed account of vital factors such as population, geographical distribution and numbers of foreign workers. Table 1 in the appendix reviews the main findings of this census. Based on the data and statistics presented in the report, the situation of women in 2006 can be summarized as follows:

- 1- Demographic statistics show close gender parity, with a difference between the national populations of males and females of no more than 0.6 per cent. The same is true for the working age population (people aged 15 and above), with women comprising 49.4 per cent of the total potential workforce
- 2- The rate of female enrolment in secondary and higher education (mostly representing enrolment of individuals of working age, i.e. 15 years and above) exceeds that among males.

- 3- This is also true of enrolment in graduate and postgraduate education, as shown in Table 2. This suggests that the general educational level among females is higher than that among males.

Despite the close gender balance in both the overall and working age population, , and despite

- 4- higher overall levels of female education, numerous discrepancies are evident in relation to the situation of women in the job market. These are shown in Table 3, which shows the distribution of the workforce, and can be summarized as follows:

A- The proportion of economically active individuals is only 45.89 per cent of the total working age population. The figure for women is less than 26.4 per cent.

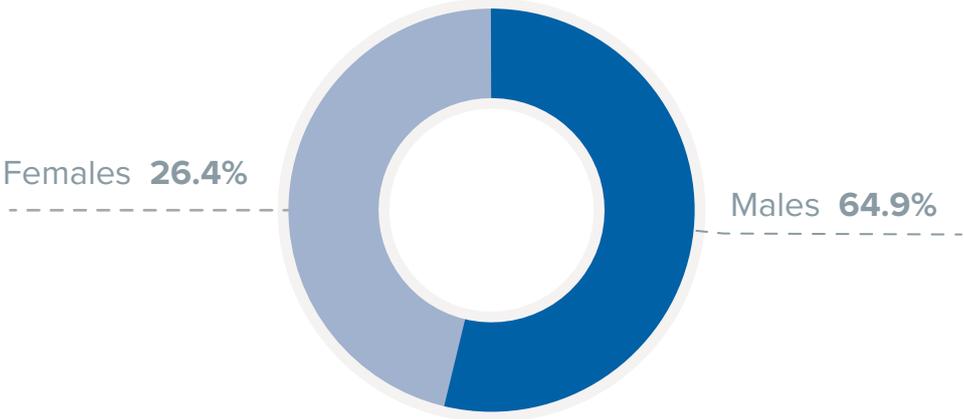


Chart 1

B- The total number of women in the workforce is barely a third of that of men. This means that the majority of females are neither economically active nor looking for work. Examination of these figures suggest close parity in levels of economic inactivity in relation to students, the retired and other groups. The biggest difference is in the number of housewives, who comprise 42 per cent of economically inactive people and 23 per cent of the total potential human resource, as shown in Chart 2.

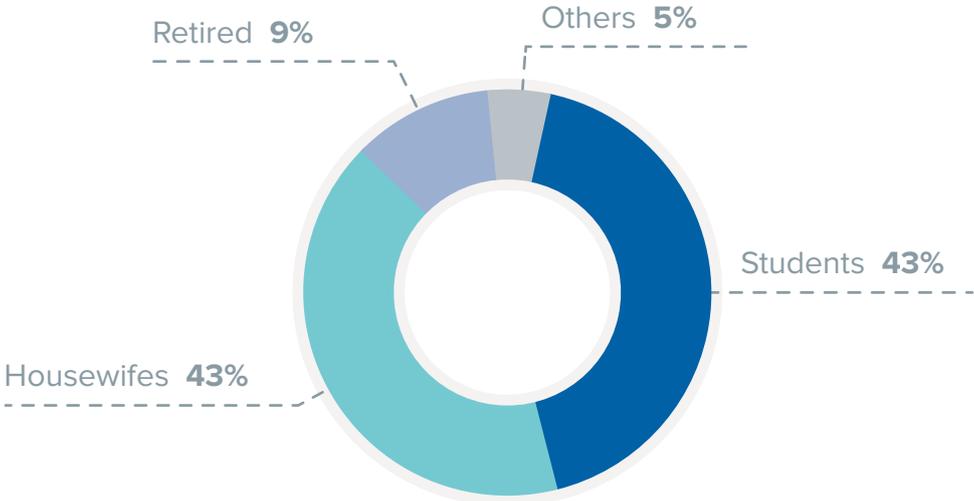


Chart 2

- C- Figures for human resources overall, levels of enrolment in education and the distribution of economically inactive working age people clearly show a huge waste of labor power. 23 per cent of the potential workforce is comprised of housewives, meaning that a high percentage of women do not enter the job market despite relatively high levels of education

This is also reflected in the number of women seeking work, which is 25 per cent of the total number of jobseekers. This significantly impacts upon contributions of potential human resources to economic activity. If only half of current housewives became economically active, then the number of people contributing to economic activity would experience a significant rise, estimated at around 11.5 per cent. It is also worth taking into account that this represents a waste not only of human resources but also of the country's financial resources.

The fact that many women with high levels of education do not use it to enter the job market is a significant flaw in state policy relating to employment, since educational expenditure is creating housewives rather than economically active workers. We are not of course suggesting female exclusion from educational processes, or that educated women should not become housewives if they so choose. Our point is that social customs, low diversity in the economy and a lack of suitable jobs all affect women's integration in the workplace and discourage educated women from entering the labor market, with the result that many women never reach their full potential.

- 4- Table 4 in the appendix shows the percentages of Libyan workers and those unemployed after previously having worked, distributed according to the type of economic activity and gender. From these data we can notice the following:
 - A- The largest numbers of employees in the general population are in education and public administration, which together comprise 56 per cent of the total workforce.
 - B- Most of the female workforce is limited to four main employment sectors: public administration, education, healthcare and social security, and agriculture. Women working in other sectors make up less than one per cent of the entire economically active workforce, as shown in Chart 3.

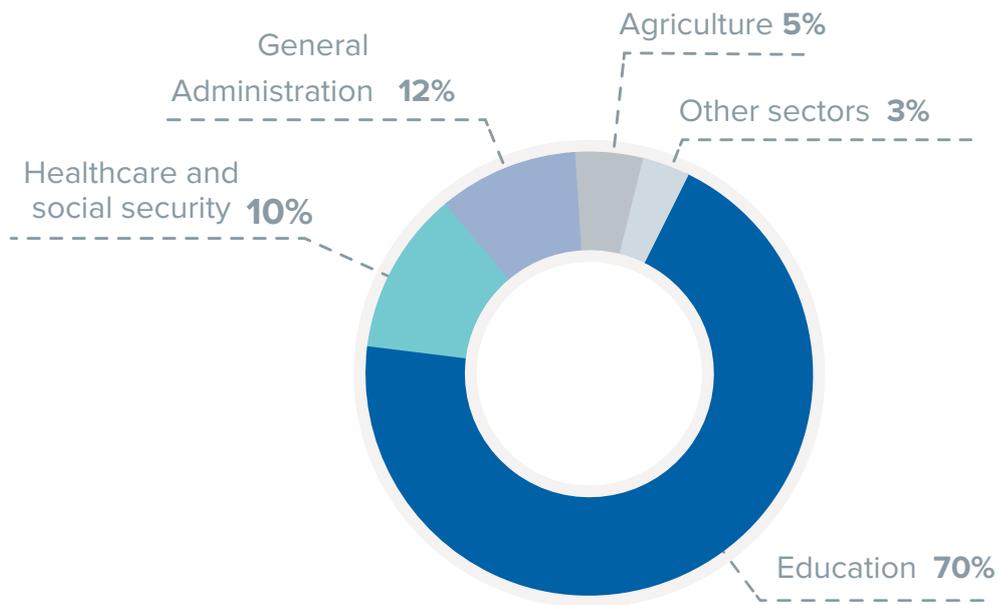


Chart 3

On the basis of the above points, the situation of women according to the 2006 Census can be summarized as follows:

- 1- There is huge waste of female human resources, with a large percentage of women being housewives despite high levels of education.
- 2- Economically active females are concentrated in a small number of sectors, meaning there would be few alternative opportunities for them to enter the job market if jobs were not available in those sectors. This impacts negatively on rates of women's participation in the job market and economic activity, demonstrated by previous data on how human resources contribute to economic activity.
- 3- The concentration of the female workforce in certain sectors suggests that the culture of Libyan officials, whether in the Ministry of Work, Education or elsewhere, encourages employment of women only in certain sectors, even in the face of surplus availability of female staff resulting from not encouraging women to work in other fields or offering them suitable opportunities to do so. This was the case in 2007, when the General People's Committee issued its decision concerning 'surplus/extra staff', the majority of them women working in the public sector. This surplus was concentrated predominantly in education, healthcare, and public administration, the sectors that employ the highest proportions of women. Data from the Information and Documentation Centre in the Ministry of Work, shown in Table 5 of the appendix, show there to be a more women than men in the staff surplus.

- 4- Both the low presence of women in the active workforce and their high representation within the staff surplus reflect policies concerning management of the female workforce in the country. They also reflect the culture of the society, which considers men as the main breadwinners and sees women as bearing fewer financial responsibilities and being provided for by men. This makes it permissible for women to remain jobless even when they are better qualified than men.

Many women are not in fact supported by a male breadwinner, whether because of divorce or the death of parents or husbands (as shown in Table 6) or as a result of economic or social problems that leave the supposed guardian in a poor financial situation. This can result in a low quality of life for women. However, policies concerning female employment have and continue to be made according to the same sexist principles, which evaluate women according to their social status rather than their professional competence.

Assessment of data and statistics from the 2013 Work Survey

. Further insights into the situation of women are provided by the results of the Work Survey conducted by the Bureau of Statistics and Census in 2013

General statistics and participation in the job market

Similar to the detailed statistics from 2006, the 2013 data show nearly equal numbers of males and females, both overall and in terms of human resources (citizens aged 15 and above). This consistency might reflect the real situation, or it might simply reflect a lack of subsequent population surveys similar to the 2006 census. The population estimates and other statistics from after 2006 are approximate and not necessarily reliable, but are based on data received by the Department of Civil Status and the General Information Authority and so might be close to the real figures.

Despite approximately even numbers of men and women in the overall human resource, the 2013 statistics show that women's participation in economic activity and the job market remains weak. The proportion of women in the workforce was estimated to be 30.4 per cent of the total, compared with 26.4 per cent in 2006. It should also be mentioned that there are some worrying data regarding general contributions to economic activity. The 2013 figures estimate the overall (combined male and female) rate of contribution to economic activity at 43.1 per cent, compared with 45.89 per cent in 2006. They also show a sharp decrease in men's participation in economic activity, from an estimated rate of 64.9 per cent in 2006 to 55.2 per cent in 2013.

What this suggests is that the percentage of women participating in economic activity could have risen more if there had been an increase in rates of participation in economic activity for the population overall. This should have happened in the seven years following the 2006 Census, but was not the case. As a result, the percentage of women participating in economic activity increased only slightly, by less than four per cent.

Contributions of different sectors

The Public Sector

Continuing to analyze data by sector, we find that women working in public institutions comprise 3.5 per cent of female workers. Apart from that, women in the rest of the private sector, whether employed by Libyan or foreign companies, represent less than one per cent of the female workforce.

The Private Sector

The situation remained similar to that shown by the 2006 statistics. Women's participation in the job market continued to be limited to the public sector, which employed 93 per cent of women in the labor market.

The 2012 and 2013 statistics are very similar because they are so close in time. Our use and interpretation of these statistics can be generalized to cover both .years

Entrepreneurship

According to the 2013 data, the percentage of women working for themselves, whether individually or within partnerships, is less than 0.6 per cent of the total female workforce. This means that women's contribution to entrepreneurship is very weak. We do not expect the situation in 2017 to have changed significantly from that shown by the 2013 statistics. Women's participation in both the private sector and entrepreneurship needs to be improved through a set of general economic reforms aiming to increase women's contributions to the national economy. The increase has not happened due to economic collapse since 2014, the year following the 2013 statistics.

Unemployment and jobseeker statistics

Figures on general unemployment rates for Libya as a whole during 2012, and detailed statistics from cities and municipalities from 2013, can be seen in Tables 9.a, 9.b and 10 in the appendix. The figures are unsurprising in the light of general policy and officials' attitudes regarding the Libyan job market. Unemployment rates are higher among women than among men, confirming the findings previously cited regarding women's participation in the national economy, the concentration of the vast majority of female workers in the public sector, and weak participation in the private sector and entrepreneurship.

Unemployment and jobseekers statistics for 2012 also reveal an important contradiction. Despite higher unemployment rates amongst women, there are 30,000 more male than female jobseekers, with women accounting for 45 per cent of the total number. This discrepancy between women's unemployment rates and numbers of female jobseekers may indicate that many women are content with being housewives after graduation. This does not mean we object to female graduates choosing to become housewives if they so wish. However, this is not only the result of women's personal choices: it also reflects the society's culture, economic policies affecting women, lack of suitable job opportunities, and lack of economic programs encouraging women to start their own businesses, even from home, or conducting other forms of professional activity that remain socially unwelcome.

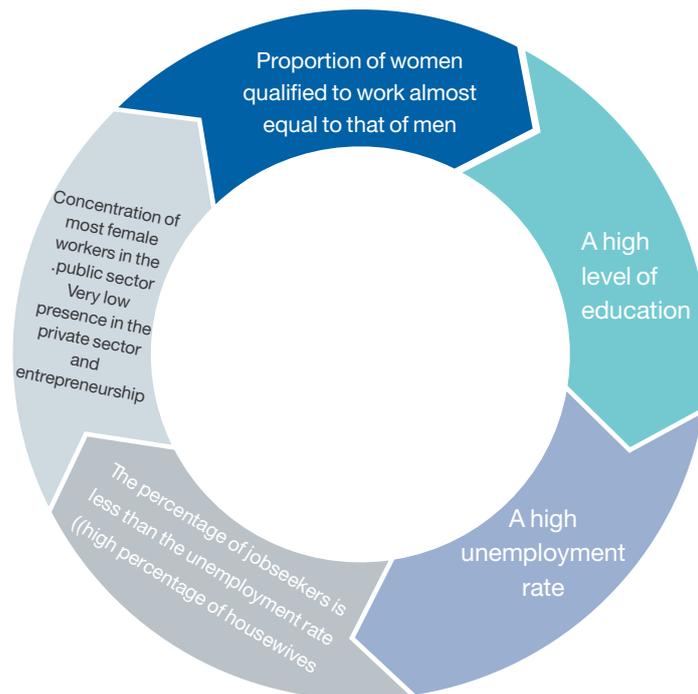
According to the detailed statistics from 2006, the number of housewives was over 800 thousand. In other words, the proportion of housewives among the inactive human resource reached 43 per cent, or 23 per cent of the total human resource. This is in spite of the fact that the average level of educational attainment among women was and still is higher than that of men, according to the 2006 statistics and data from the Ministry of General and Compulsory Education.

To conclude, we can say that waste of a large proportion of human resources continues. Large numbers of women become housewives after graduating from higher education, whether for cultural or social reasons or because of economic policies and conditions in the Libyan job market.

Another reason for the difference between the percentage of male and female jobseekers is that more men than women in the 15 - 25 age group leave .education. Another factor is women not entering the job market after graduation, being content with marriage and becoming housewives

Summary of the general situation of women in the job market as indicated by the 2006 statistics and 2013 data

The general situation of women in the job market, as indicated by the statistics and data in these reports, can be summarized as follows:



It should be noted that we faced difficulties in obtaining certain information and in the quality of available information. There are no official statistics after 2013, and there has been no comprehensive or accurate census since that of 2006. Therefore, we recommend that concerned parties in the Ministry of Work, the Bureau of Statistics and Census, the General Information Authority and other bodies prepare accurate and robust annual data about the Libyan job market and publish it in such a way as to be available to specialists and others interested in the field via open channels without administrative barriers. This information will be invaluable to experts, civil society organizations, universities and others seeking to conduct studies regarding the Libyan job market in order to help decision-makers do their jobs, of which this report is an example.

Section Three: Qualitative Analysis of Barriers to Women's Employment in Libya

Analysis of obstacles to women's entry into the job market

Young people (from 18 to 35 years old) form the largest age group in Libya. According to official statistics, this age group makes up around 63 per cent of the national population. Scarcity of jobs and difficulty of employment were among the most important factors contributing to the uprising of the Libyan people in February 2011. Several years after the uprising, there is no sign of improvement of the situation regarding job opportunities for youth of either gender. Through focus group discussions with a group of female jobseekers, we identified three main factors around which key issues can be summarized:

1- Lack of employment mechanisms for female jobseekers

Most female jobseekers use unofficial channels, either employment websites or personal connections. We do not find many going through official channels, applying to or registering with the Ministry of Labor and its Job Seekers Bureau.

Focus group participants confirmed unanimously that they did not know that the Ministry of Work offers a mechanism to support job seekers. None had used this government service, and several doubted that it could be of any benefit. All confirmed that their employment was the result of personal initiative, either using personal connections or responding to job advertisements. We concluded that participants are neither interested in using this facility nor in learning how to use it because they have doubts about its usefulness and do not see it as a solution to the employment issue

2- Scarcity of job opportunities

Salaries have been the main burden on the state's budget in recent years, compounded by widespread lack of discipline and productivity among public sector employees. Increased corruption, absence of monitoring bodies, overlap in ministries' remits resulting from political divisions and duplication of executive bodies due to the existence of more than one government, have all conspired to lead to more bureaucratic manipulation, registering male and female workers without them actually doing any work. Under current circumstances, this has significantly affected the economy and led to a general trend of lowering spending on salaries while encouraging the private sector to create more positions for jobseekers. It is worth mentioning that most female jobseekers would like to be permanently employed in the public sector because of benefits such as social security, job stability, shorter working hours and duties that are socially appropriate for women, in addition to the existence of systems and regulations that govern administrative work in the public sector and protect workers - unlike the private sector, which mostly operates without specific laws and regulations or monitoring.

Aside: the issue of working in the private sector

Although most policies operate on the assumption that encouraging private sector employment is a major potential solution to the unemployment problem, there are no efforts to improve policies regarding the situation of employees in this sector.

Marginalization of the private sector in previous decades led to its stagnation in many commercial fields, with negative impacts on its role in job creation. In addition, most female jobseekers would prefer not to work in the private sector, especially in small and medium-sized Libyan companies. Reasons for this include gender pay gaps, instability and lack of job security, long working hours, lack of benefits and incentives, and absence of monitoring by appropriate authorities

3- :Incompatibility of education with job market requirements

The Libyan education system does not keep up with latest developments and current needs. Curricula and teaching methods still follow traditional formats and do not encourage creativity or improvement of personal skills that would provide graduates with job opportunities compatible with both their needs and those of society. A study of barriers to matching educational outputs with requirements of the job market concluded that educational development programs were created on the basis of theory rather than practical experience and mostly followed traditional patterns rather than being planned scientifically based on systematic study of problems and identification of possible solutions.

During one discussion, a group of female jobseekers expressed their frustration, following graduation, at the gap between curricula and the knowledge acquired within them and the demands of the job market, especially in the private sector in which competition has risen and which requires high skills. Some participants indicated that educational outputs do not even meet basic public sector job requirements.

The most prominent form of discrimination is a preference for employing men because of specific privileges offered to female employees, such as maternity leave, along with fear that young women will marry and productivity therefore decrease. This is in addition to men's ability to work longer hours. The pay gap in the private sector is huge because of lack of monitoring by the Ministry of Work and by unions to enforce women's right to equal pay in accordance with current legislation. Young people are undoubtedly an additional resource for the country if their energies can be well deployed. Indicators show huge imbalance in the job market, with female unemployment rates reaching almost 25 per cent, mostly young women. Providing training opportunities and access to qualifications for young people, especially women, is a crucial factor in developing the job market and creating balance, with wider benefits for general processes of development.

Analysis of factors behind low participation of women in the workforce in Libya

■ Political and security factors

Even though the period following 17th February 2011 was marked by slow but visible progress in women's representation in legislative institutions and municipalities, the impact of this remained weak. This was widely considered to reflect negatively on the presence of women in political office. At the moment, political division and crisis divert attention from women's issues in favour of concerns such as dialogue, reconciliation, and peace building. Low rates of representation of women politically and in decision-making positions since the revolution have made it difficult to give any momentum to laws relating to the situation of women. In an interview with a female member of parliament, she confirmed that political tensions have become more important than enacting and amending legislation. She mentioned that women's representation is considered symbolic and insignificant, and that women are ignored in and excluded from important issues and topics.

Another important political factor is the role of civil society organizations. Despite international support for women's issues, the women's movement needs guidance and clarification of its roles. While interest has increased in the years since the February Revolution, the movement is still dispersed and lacks any unified view. It is consequently unable to fulfil one of its most important roles: pressuring and monitoring decision-makers to enforce women's rights.

The deteriorating security situation has led many women to become reluctant to work. The biggest obstacles are restrictions on movement, women's unwillingness to work in distant locations that might expose them to security threats and endanger their safety, and being forbidden from working in nearby locations. Absence of the rule of law has become another obstacle. High rates of kidnapping and harassment have made women reluctant to work in the private sector, or to prefer to work from home.

■ Social and cultural factors

Despite women's success in the fields of education and scientific research and their contributions in the job market, the percentage of women in work remains low because of social and cultural barriers. These barriers include, but are not limited to, gender discrimination and reinforcement of negative stereotypes about women's ability to work. The current security situation forms another significant barrier that limits women's ability to join the job market, for example because it makes it difficult for women to commute.

Undoubtedly the social system, with its customs and traditions, forms another barrier to women's employment. In the course of this research we examined prevalent stereotypes and confirmed that social prejudices against women result from images that do not necessarily reflect real life situations. In an attempt to understand these socially pervasive stereotypes of Libyan women at work, and to understand the generalizations that limit women's progress in the work place, we discussed the most significant stereotypes in a session with a group of women. They agreed that the most frequent stereotypes are:

- In the work place, unmarried women look for opportunities to meet potential spouses
- Working women cannot balance work and household chores.
- Women do not support each other. One woman is another woman's enemy.
- Administrative work is suitable for women.

Participants agreed unanimously that they have suffered prejudice in the workplace resulting from stereotypes about women and from ignoring their personal abilities. It is worth mentioning that this prejudice came from both men and women.

Considering another challenge in the lives of working women, participants discussed 'social chores', and how they represent a huge barrier to women of any social status. All participants confirmed that it is difficult for working women to find a balance between their work and family and social commitments. Some participants noted the importance of creating suitable work environments for women, for example by providing services such as nurseries.

When examining social and cultural barriers, we should take into account the barriers that women either create by themselves or accept because of social pressure and influences during their upbringing. Undoubtedly, the social system and prevalent customary attitudes are among the most crucial factors that impede women's progress.

Despite the increase in the number of working women, women's participation in the job market remains low and does not reflect either educational achievement or the legal framework that supports women as an active force in the labor market. Stronger efforts are necessary to change this social system, and to break barriers of fear and hesitation that keep women from receiving promotions and reaching leadership positions. Trade unions and civil society organizations can exert pressure to improve the economic situation of women and change gender stereotypes by creating opportunities for success and emergence of a new generation of female entrepreneurs in all fields

■ Legal factors

The Libyan legislative framework is fairly comprehensive concerning the protection of women and guaranteeing women's rights. Labor laws are based on principles of equality and parity, and grant important privileges to women. The issue lies not with the laws and legislation, but in deficiencies in their implementation and enforcement. These deficiencies result from a lack of monitoring by appropriate bodies, especially in the private sector, which is a key reason for the gender pay gap. In addition to salaries being below legal limits, working hours exceed legal limits without corresponding financial compensation: another illustration of how, in reality, laws are not enforced.

For example, the Labour Code explicitly states that employers should provide nurseries, allowing the possibility that several employers collaborate to deliver this. Failure to implement this law is one of the main reasons for the lack of women competing for leadership positions. It is also one of the main factors behind the imbalance between work and personal life experienced by many working women, leading them to favor simple administrative work easier to reconcile with their family commitments.

The law states that women can work part time, and specifies certain hours and times for women's work. It also guarantees paid maternity leave, entirely paid for by the employer. Although part of efforts to improve the situation of women, this measure has not served its objective. On the contrary, it has led to employers favouring men for job opportunities, especially in the private sector, with women often employed unofficially and hence deprived of the insurance and legal protection required by social security laws.

There are some contradictions in the law. Some articles limit women's ability to work in what are referred to as physically demanding jobs, along with other, unspecified, jobs described as not suitable for women. These laws are ambiguous and their exact scope open to interpretation. This has led to marginalization of women in engineering and field-based work, and so increased the tendency to limit them to office-based and administrative jobs.

Based on the above, we can conclude that the inclusion of clear articles on equality, competence and justice at work are not enough to convert these principles into practical solutions that change women's situation in the work place. This needs unified efforts and partnerships among unions, civil society organizations and other concerned bodies, in order to create a suitable work environment for all regardless of gender.

Women and social security

The social security fund commits, according to Law 13 of 1980 and its regulations, to provide benefits to all those registered in the social security system, of both genders, who have committed to pay the stipulated fees.

Social security laws in Libya give comprehensive legal protection to men and women equally. The law provides insurance for industrial injuries and occupational diseases, pensions, disability conditions, protection of employees during illness, pregnancy and birth, and support for female workers' families in the event of their death.

Among the biggest issues regarding the social security system are the retirement age and the position of women in the parallel economy.

The issue of retirement age

The law differentiates women's and men's retirement age as follows:

- 1- The retirement age is 60 for all female workers and for men in hazardous jobs such as drivers of heavy goods vehicles and coaches
- 2- The retirement age is 65 for all men working in companies, as partners in production, contract employment, and self-employment.

This is another example of failure to implement principles of gender equality and equal opportunity as stated in Libyan legislation. The social security law forces women to retire at a younger age than men, without considering their health or ability to continue working. Participants in the discussion on women and social security confirmed that women's work in administrative jobs is not physically tiring or demanding, in contrast to many men's jobs. This makes discrimination in relation to retirement age unjustifiable and not based on sound reasoning.

Women in the informal private sector

Although the social security fund covers workers and employees in the public and private sectors, its privileges do not extend to workers in informal employment in small companies and home-based work. The increase in the size of the shadow economy in the last six years means that more women are working informally. Women working in the private sector have no way to pay social security fees and hence are excluded from the social security system and deprived of their basic rights.

Some women prefer working in the informal economy and private sector despite low salaries and lack of privileges and incentives. Among the many reasons for this are not requiring educational certificates, compatibility of working hours with women's family and social responsibilities, and most importantly its greater social acceptability. A large proportion of women therefore work for many years without either pensions or health insurance that would support them in cases of disability or illness.

The situation of women in the private and informal sector is both sensitive and difficult. However, improved monitoring of registered private sector companies can help ensure the protection of women. The biggest challenge remains creating a system that ensures access to at least the minimum level of social security to which women are entitled by right.

Conclusion

Through what has been discussed in this study, we can clearly see that Libyan women experience adverse circumstances in the job market. Most indicators, such as unemployment, participation in commercial activity, and contributions to entrepreneurship, offer a negative picture of the situation of working women. Some of these indicators are similar for other social groups in the Libyan job market due to a general and basic lack of organizational mechanisms. However, data on public sector employment show that women are concentrated in two or three sectors only, with very few women in senior positions in the public sector as a whole.

Women's concentration in certain parts of the public sector, and the large general surplus of public sector employees in Libya, renders women vulnerable to future changes in employment policies. A case in point is the 2006 decision on surplus staff, who were stopped from working despite the government continuing to pay their salaries. This highlights an important issue. The high percentage of women in the public sector could be seen as a positive indicator, reflecting a lack of discrimination against women. However, other indicators, such as the fact that 70 per cent of working women are employed in the public sector, contradict this. The apparently positive indicator is misleading, because the high percentage of women in the public sector reflects a general tendency to employ people on the basis of favoritism and nepotism. As a consequence, a large number of women experience underemployment within the public sector, limiting both their professional contribution and progress in the quality and status of their work.

Within the private sector, which does not submit to labor protection and consumer protection laws, the percentage of women is low, as shown by the statistics referred to above. Women working in the private sector are in addition subject to many forms of discrimination, exploitation, and violation of rights. Employers in the private sector are able to exploit female employees due to the lack of comprehensive legal protection for workers, and because the absence of government monitoring bodies means current laws are not implemented.

The issues in public sector and official private sector employment lead many women to work in the informal sector, for example in home-based manufacture of handicrafts marketed through various channels. Women working in the informal economy sacrifice certain privileges that were available in the official sector before the political division crisis of 2014, such as social security and banking privileges. This trend is hence not beneficial to women in the long run, nor to the Libyan economy, which does not benefit from these activities through either tax collection or stimulation of the wider economy.

Finally, it is significant that women's experiences in the job market, whether official or informal, are inconsistent with their high educational levels. Although women are in general more educated than men, unemployment is higher among women than men.

The current situation of women in the Libyan job market is detrimental to all parties. It fosters poor economic, social, and even cultural conditions for Libyan women and hence Libyan families. It also reflects huge issues within the Libyan economy, and demonstrates a need for radical and comprehensive reform that reconsiders the roles of various societal groups in the future of the Libyan job market in a positive manner, in line with the law and principles of competence, justice, and the protection of all parties involved in the economy, whether as employers, employees, or consumers. It also shows the need for an integrated and sustainable economic plan that guarantees utilizing natural, geographic, and human resources in a positive, sustainable, and effective manner.

Recommendations

Recommendations for decision makers

- 1- There is a need to develop databases categorized by gender, aggregating data from many fields. It is also necessary to ensure the security of the Bureau of Statistics and Census, perhaps supported by international partners such as the United Nations Development Program or World Bank, and hence its ability to update the country's official statistics reliably and to gather up-to-date data on population, development, the economy and other key areas. This information will help monitor economic conditions in ways that can support efforts to improve the circumstances of Libyan women.
- 2- Since Libyan women form approximately fifty per cent of the population, they should be placed at the heart of the economic growth process. It is the responsibility of governments and international bodies to ensure women's strong participation by putting in place a national strategy to empower women and reinforce their ability to contribute to the economy. Economic priorities should be set in line with a long-term vision inclusive of women and which can strengthen growth and development in the country in the short and medium terms.
- 3- Create a national vision for economic development within which to implement projects for general economic reform. Such reform needs to increase overall levels of participation in the national economy, and in doing so elevate women's contributions
- 4- Activate and amend labor laws. Most Libyan laws and regulations do not discriminate between male and female employees and work on solidifying the principle of competence. Despite this, most cannot be implemented in practice unless governed by executive legal regulations that do not offer scope for interpretation in ways that reinforce predominant prejudices.
- 5- Direct some economic reform policies specifically towards women, recognizing that unemployment and low contributions to national economic activity are particularly widespread among women. Improving women's participation rates in the national economy will improve the general contribution of the population as a whole.

- 6- Ensure that the private sector implements a hiring policy based on competence when choosing between male and female employees. This is in addition to policies that encourage hiring women so the gender gap in the private sector can be bridged and numbers of male and female employees become more balanced. Guarantees should be put in place of improved monitoring of the private sector to guarantee the rights of workers of both genders, and to ensure the work environment is appropriate and healthy, especially for women
- 7- Integrate gender perspectives into policy formation and general budget setting, and into later stages of policy and budgetary review and implementation, in order to work towards realizing the principle of equal opportunity for both genders
- 8- Improve balance in the distribution among sectors of women in the labor market, so that women are neither restricted to specific sectors nor recruited to sectors where they are not needed in order to exclude them from other sectors. This is necessary in order to avoid moving large numbers of employees, the majority of them women, to the staff surplus because they are not needed, as actually happened as a result of the staffing surplus decision of 2007. Continuation of this policy leads to the accumulation of women in sectors where they are able neither to develop professionally and improve technically, nor to improve their living conditions

Recommendations for society as a whole

- 1- There is a need to work effectively on cultural attitudes and social awareness of gender issues in Libyan society through media campaigns (via TV and the internet), and similar initiatives (for example lectures in mosques to promote women's contribution to the economy)
- 2- There should be more support for Libyan women involved in the parallel or informal economy, based on needs assessed and articulated by them and by Libyan civil society organizations actively engaged on the ground. Financial and other kinds of support can help women to move from the informal to formal sector and hence contributes to shaping a stronger and more inclusive economy
- 3- Create channels for communication among working women that offer platforms to discuss issues relevant to improving the conditions of working women in all sectors, and that provide mutual and peer support
- 4- Establish a comprehensive national program involving the public and private sectors, trade unions, civil society organizations and international organizations, to encourage women to initiate their own projects to help balance their financial and social needs. This can be supplemented with advice as to effective mechanisms to help find this balance, offering an alternative to abandoning economic activity in favor of becoming housewives (with all due respect to housewives' family responsibilities and other social roles)
- 5- Trade unions, civil society organizations and other concerned parties should unite, combine efforts and cooperate to change the unsupportive common culture, stereotypes and prejudice that hinder women from achieving their ambitions

Appendix

Statistics and Data

Table 1: General Statistics

Indicator	2006
Libyan Population (thousands)	5298
Number of Libyan families (thousands)	887
Total population (thousands)	5658
Number of families (Libyan and non-Libyan) (thousands)	981
Population density (people per km ²)	3.4
(%) Population growth	1.8 (%)
Percentage of population below 15 years	31.3 (%)
64-Percentage of population aged 15	64.7(%)
Percentage of population over 65	4.2 (%)
Population over 15 (human workforce)	3652319
Males	1846485
Females	1805834
Percentage of population in urban areas	88.2 (%)
Percentage of population in suburban areas	11.8 (%)
Average size of Libyan families (persons)	6.0
Total fertility rate (for women aged 15-49)	2.7
Median age of the Libyan population	24
Average age	26
Average age at first marriage (years)	32.6
Males	33.9
Females	31.2
Percentage of people never married	53.6 (%)

Rates of enrollment in compulsory education (%)	97.1 (%)
Males	97.1
Females	97.0
Percentage of economically activity people	45.9(%)
Males	64.9
Females	26.4
Percentage of workers in the administrative system	50.6 (%)
Percentage of workers in public and social services	63.5 (%)
Illiteracy rate among people aged over 10	11.5 (%)

Table 2 : Rates of Enrolment in Education

Educational level	Percentage of total	Number
Secondary education and equivalent	24.54	441927
Males	524.6	221665
Females	24.78	220262
Above secondary education and below graduate level	5.61	100541
Males	5.68	51322
Females	5.54	49219
Graduate and postgraduate	11.6	208227
Males	10.37	93761
Females	12.88	114466
Percentage of total	100	720695
Males	100	366748
Females	100	383947

Table 3 : Distribution of Working Age Population by Employment Status and Gender (2006)

Distribution of human resources		Number of people		
		Males	Females	Total
Economically active	Working	940133	388153	1328286
	Jobseeker who has previously worked	6060	748	6808
	Seeking first job	25225	88571	340786
	Total jobseekers	258275	89319	347594
Total economically active population		1198408	477472	1675880
Economically inactive	Students	430362	428019	858381
	Housewives	-	845552	845552
	Retired	164371	15071	179442
	Others	53344	39720	93064
Total economically inactive population		648077	1328362	1976439
Total human resources		1846485	1805834	3652319
Rate of contribution of human resources to economic activity		64.90%	26.44%	45.89%
Rate of unemployment amongst the economically active		21.55%	18.71%	20.74%

Table 4 : Distribution of Libyan workers (Employed and Unemployed) by Sector and Gender

Type of economic activity	Percentage of total workforce		
	Men	Women	Total
Agriculture and hunting	10.79	4.87	8.85
Fishing	0.12	0.01	0.09
Mining and quarrying	3.48	0.55	2.55
Manufacturing	4.71	1	3.53
Electricity, gas and water	4.08	0.54	2.97
Building and constructions	0.41	0.39	2.41
Wholesale, retail and related services	10.59	0.91	7.56
Hospitality	0.46	0.19	0.37
Transport, storage and driving	6.65	0.87	4.83
Financial intermediation	1.56	0.91	1.34
Real estate	1.04	0.54	0.87
General administration	32.87	10.94	25.82
Education	16.42	66.99	30.82
Healthcare and social security	3.40	9.57	5.13
Public services, social and personal services	2.28	0.82	1.81
Housekeeping and home services and embassies	0.05	0.01	0.04
Undeclared or working in international organizations and embassies	1.09	0.90	
Total	100	100	100

Table 5: Number of Employees Categorized as Surplus Staff

	Percentage	Number
Females	54%	218109
Males	46%	183775
Total	100%	401884

Table 6: Women's Marital Status

Category	Number
Divorced	27738
Widowed	131194
Total	158932
Percentage of divorcees and widows among female human resources	8%

Table 7: Summary of Population and Workforce Indicators (in thousands)

Category	Males	Females	Total
Total Libyan population	3,087.8	2,914.0	6,001.8
Working age population	2,009	1,905	3,914
Activity rate	64.5	39.2	52.2
(Workforce (thousands	1,297,000	747	2,043
(Number of workers (thousands	1,109	579	1,688
Percentage of total working age population in employment	55.2	30.4	43.1
(Number of unemployed (thousands	187,900	167.4	355.3
Unemployment rate	14.5	22.4	17.4

(Table 8-a : Distribution of Libyan Workers by Employment Status and Gender (thousands

Employment Status	Men	Women	Total
Government work	1,325.5	538.8	786.6
Work in corporations owned by the community	100.8	20.0	80.7
Work in public shareholding companies	48.8	3.3	45.5
Work in public co-owned companies	21.7	2.6	19.1
Work in foreign companies	8.7	1.0	7.7
Work in private co-owned companies	10.7	1.9	8.8
Work for others	35.4	4.7	30.7
Self-employed with others	26.5	0.7	25.8
Self-employed	92.6	2.9	89.7
Family work	15.7	2.3	13.3
Undeclared	1.8	1.0	0.8
Total	1,688.0	579.2	1,108.8

(Table 8-b : Distribution of Libyan workers by Employment status and Gender (percentages

Employment Status	Males	Females	Total
Government work	71.0	93.0	78.5
Work in corporations owned by the community	7.3	3.5	6.0
Work in public shareholding companies	4.1	0.6	2.9
Work in public co-owned companies	1.7	0.5	1.3
Work in foreign companies	0.7	0.2	0.5
Work in private co-owned companies	0.8	0.3	0.6
Work for others	2.8	0.8	2.1
Self-employed with others	2.3	0.1	1.6
Self-employed	8.1	0.5	5.5
Family work	1.2	0.4	0.9
Undeclared	0.1	0.2	0.1
Total	100	100	100

Table 9-a: Unemployment Rates by Gender and Age Group

Age group	Women	Men	Total
24-25	67.9	40.9	48.7
34-25	32.8	23.8	27.3
44-35	11.5	8.2	9.5
54-45	9.5	3.5	5.2
64-55	12.6	1.4	2.8
65+	51.7	2,1	4.8
Total	25.1	15.9	19.0

Table 9-b: Number of Jobseekers by Age Group and Gender (thousands)

Age group	Males	Females	Total
24-25	56.7	38.4	95.2
34-25	100.4	87.9	188.3
44-35	30.1	25.8	55.8
54-45	7.7	8.3	16.0
64-55	1.1	1.4	2.6
65+	0.2	0.2	0.4
Total	196.2	162.1	358.3

Table 10: Unemployment Rates by Gender and Region

Region	Males	Females	Total
Tobruk	13.2	32.8	21.0
Darnah	7.0	9.8	8.3
Green Mountain	8.8	10.2	9.4
Al-Maraj	17.1	35.7	25.0
Benghazi	14.3	24.4	17.4
Al-wahat	9.6	45.7	21.3
Al-kufrah	11.4	12.2	11.7
Sirte	18.0	20.9	19.0
Al-jufrah	12.0	9.4	10.7
Misrata	15.2	25.4	18.0
Al-mirghib	18.7	31.7	22.5
Tripoli	15.2	28.1	19.3
Al-jafarah	20.5	18.3	19.7
Al-zawyah	9.6	19.9	13.7
Zouara	9.6	10.3	9.9
Western Mountain	17.5	21.4	19.1
Nalut	5.9	13.7	9.4
Sebha	11.3	22.7	15.5
Wadi Al-shati	7.8	13.4	10.3
Murzuq	12.8	24.9	18.3
Wadi Al-hayah	14.5	27.2	20.1
Ghat	14.9	28.7	20.6
Ajdabiya	16.3	30.0	21.9
Total	14.5	22.4	17.4

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Hala Bugaighis:

Legal expert and executive director of the Jusoor Center for Studies and Development, Libyan Think and Do Tank that focus on economic development in general and women's empowerment in particular. Jusoor's work is based on encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation, designing job creation programs and working on policies for economic reform in Libya.

Mohamed Tantoush:

Researcher in the field of social sciences. He worked on several reports and assessment on different Libyan public entities in Libya.

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