



# Country Brief 3



International Labour Organization  
Regional Office for Arab States

## Promoting Decent Work and Gender Equality in Yemen

This Country Brief is part of a series that looks at the current and ongoing research and policy advocacy activities of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on gender equality in the world of work in Arab States. It highlights the overall employment context, the underlining concerns, the results achieved, and future plans.

### 1. The mandate of the ILO

The ILO is devoted to advancing opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. It brings together representatives of governments, employers and workers to jointly shape policies and programmes. It is the global body responsible for drawing up and overseeing international labour standards. The four strategic objectives of the ILO are to promote fundamental principles and rights at work; create greater employment and income opportunities for women and men; enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection; and strengthen social dialogue and tripartism.



#### Box 1.

#### Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work in Arab countries

The ILO promotes equal opportunity and treatment for all women and men to obtain decent and productive work that delivers a fair income, security in the workplace, social protections for families, prospects for personal advancement and freedom of expression and assembly. The ILO works with governments, employers' and workers' organizations for constructing consensus on social and economic policies.

Gender equality is at the heart of decent work for all women and men. For many women, however, access to rights, employment, social protection and social dialogue despite significant achievements, remains elusive. The ILO works to mainstream gender equality considerations in relevant laws, policies and practices, by addressing the specific and often different concerns of women and men across the life cycle. It also develops and implements targeted interventions that enable women and men to participate and benefit equally from development efforts.

**Source:**

[www.ilo.org/gender/Events/Campaign2008-2009/lang—en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/gender/Events/Campaign2008-2009/lang—en/index.htm)





## 2. ILO in action

ILO has had long standing development experience in Yemen, mainly through technical advisory work and technical cooperation projects in partnership with its core constituents: the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL), the Yemen General Federation of Workers' Trade Union and the Federation of the Yemeni Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Two main programmatic frameworks regulate the work of the ILO in Yemen: the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2007-2011) and the Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) agreed upon by the ILO and the Yemeni constituents in September 2008. The DWCP is a strategic and operational framework for ILO interventions and expresses the common commitment of the government, workers and employers' organizations to collaborate with the technical assistance of the ILO on specific outcomes aimed at ensuring opportunities for women and men to obtain decent work. It responds to current national priorities and supports the existing policy framework.

## 3. ILO's work promoting gender equality in the world of work

In 1998, MOSAL established a Directorate General of Women Workers (DGWW) with support from the ILO to promote gender equality in the world of work. ILO and DGWW

### Box 2. The story of two pioneer women nurses

Through its policy advocacy network initiative in the health sector, the project has brought the attention of national policy makers, the media and the public to the plight of women workers in the health sector. Stories of the struggles of pioneer women nurses were used to highlight progress to date. Documentation of ongoing constraints faced and training of local women health care workers as policy advocates allowed to further improving terms and conditions of their work.

Atika was among the first 15 women who received training in nursing prior to the revolution of Yemen in 1962. She started volunteering as a nurse. Initially her work was not well received by the authorities. On one occasion, she was forced to wear shackles around her ankles to walk from the clinic to downtown Sana'a as people watched. Atika is now the Director of the Nursing Sector Workers in Yemen. She believes that her struggles to have her work accepted and reach highest level in her field are indicative of the long way that women health care workers have come in Yemen.

Studying nursing was Zainab's dream. But in 1955, being a nurse was unimaginable for a woman. Through her father's support Zainab registered in a nursery course. Graduating in 1958 she started to working as a nurse and loved her work. A scholarship opportunity allowed her to study in London. Back in Yemen, Zainab became a teacher in Ameen Nashir Institute for health sciences and trained hundreds of midwives before retiring in 1996.

**Source:** Nabil Subeya

in MOSAL joined efforts to implement a technical cooperation project entitled **“Promoting Decent Work and Gender Equality in Yemen”** (2004-2008) with financial support from the the government of the Netherlands. The project adopted its mandate from the National Woman Employment Strategy (2001-2011), and focused on enhancing the capacities of MOSAL and partners including the national women’s machinery in coordinating the implementation of the national strategy on women’s employment. The initiative encouraged positive perceptions on women workers among policy makers, employers, workers, media and other stakeholders. Important stepping stones of the project include:

- Policy Advocacy Networks for Women Workers in the Health, Education and Agriculture sectors to advocate for policy and legislative changes reaching 3,000 workers both women and men through sharing of information and knowledge and policy dialogue.
- An information management and knowledge sharing desk to address negative stereotypes and attitudes towards women workers and to encourage positive public and media perceptions.
- Training of 18,000 women and men workers in the public and private sector on their right to decent terms and conditions of work.
- Conducting participatory gender audits in two ministries for gender mainstreaming in national policies and programs.

Today, the DGWW plays a central role in shaping the national agenda on gender equality in the world of work in Yemen. Its work under the ILO/MOSAL project on “Promoting Decent Work and Gender Equality” has helped build commitment to compliance to international labour standards; achievement of gender equality and strengthening of tripartism and social dialogue. DGWW and the project have also facilitated several ILO initiatives in Yemen

### Box 3. Elimination of Child Labour in Yemen

Majority of working children in Yemen (87 percent) are in family enterprises working in agriculture where they are confronted with hazardous conditions, including the use of pesticides and heavy equipment, prolonged exposure to extreme temperatures, and carrying heavy loads. Children also work under hazardous conditions as street vendors, beggars, and domestic workers, as well as in fishing, construction, textile, and car repair. Children employed in domestic service and restaurants are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation. The International Programme on Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) is ILO’s specialized unit addressing child labour issues worldwide. Between 2000 and 2008, IPEC Yemen has contributed to the establishment of three rehabilitation centers for working children in Sana’a, Aden and Sayyun reaching close to 2,000 working children.

The project on “Promoting Decent Work and Gender Equality in Yemen” and IPEC Yemen have coordinated the development of a Rapid Assessment on Girl Child Labour. The study addressed looked into girl child labour in agriculture, entertainment and street work in three governorates. Following the rapid assessment, the ILO/NPP and IPEC projects have developed three policy briefs based on the Rapid Assessment.

They also jointly held a Policy Round Table to discuss the findings and recommendations emerging from the studies. Bringing together key national stakeholders, including representatives from the governorates as well as international organizations and the donor community in Yemen, the study allowed for dialogue with constituents on emerging forms of girl child labour in Yemen. While there was extensive debate around girl child labour in the entertainment sector during the policy round table, an action plan to address the worst forms of girl child labour resulted from it.

**Source:** Nabila Zubeiri. 2007. Rapid Assessment on Girl Child Labour in Yemen. [Arabic].





on employment policy, informal employment and social protection.

#### **a) Compliance with international labour standards**

Yemen has ratified 30 international labour conventions including the 8 core conventions that promote fundamental rights and principles at work. Yemen is also the only Arab country that has signed three out of four key international labour standards on gender equality including Convention 156 on workers with family responsibilities. However, despite tangible efforts and progress, the government of Yemen continues to need support in improving governance and the legislative environment for compliance of national laws with international labour standards.

#### **b) Employment opportunities**

The labour force in Yemen increases annually by 3.3 per cent, and the unemployment rate has increased over time and has done so consistently and significantly from 9 per cent in 1994, to 11 per cent in 1998 to 16 per cent in 2005. Educated Yemenis have the highest unemployment rates: 44 per cent among those with intermediate level of education and 54 per cent among university graduates. The fast

growth of the work force is mainly a reflection of the effect of past high birth rates.

The relatively slow growth of labour demand, on the other hand, reflects the limited job opportunities in the private sector and the saturation of the public sector as an employer of the last resort.

**According to ILO estimates in 2005, the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector was 6.1 per cent. The bulk of women's employment, 88.1 per cent, was in the agricultural sector mainly as contributing family workers.**

With the support of ILO, a National Employment Strategy and associated Action Plan were developed in 2007. The recommendations of the Action Plan focus on the need to put employment at the centre of economic and social policies and to ensure the promotion of women labour force participation in the labour-market. The DWCP addresses these recommendations through a set of concrete interventions in the areas of:

- Effective labour market information system for better production and analysis of data related to employment;
- More dynamic entrepreneurial environment ;
- Better access to income generating activities for women.

#### **c) Extension of social protection coverage**

According to the WHO, in Yemen 50% per cent of the total population and 75 per cent of the rural population lacks access to health care. Social security systems and social health insurance programs are essential to provide for basic income in cases of unemployment, illness and injury, old age and retirement, invalidity, family responsibilities such as pregnancy and childcare, and loss of the family breadwinner. Recently, the Yemeni government has promoted a national social security plan that extends social

insurance coverage to small enterprises. It is also looking at introducing a social health insurance program aimed at improving access to health protection for larger groups of the population.

The ILO has been supporting the government of Yemen in this process of upgrading and extending national social security schemes reaching out a larger number of people. By sharing good practices and lessons learnt with the government and the workers' and employers' organizations, the ILO continues to provide technical advice in respect to social



#### **Box 4.** **Training on Decent Work & Gender Equality in Yemen Through Social Dialogue**

In Yemen, 18,000 women and men workers in the public and private sectors have been trained by trainers from the government, workers' and employers' organizations on their rights as workers. The workers' rights booklet used in the training has become a key reference for Yemeni workers across the country and reprinted in tens of thousands of copies several times. Media, civil society organizations and the national women's machinery have also contributed to the effective implementation of this training programme, hailed as a regional good practice in social dialogue.

**Source:** <http://mosaldgww.org/>

insurance legislation and social security policy informed by international labour standards and international best practices and capacity building with concerned national partners to support long-term and short-term training measures which include topics identified as priority such as social security principles, international labour standards or social security governance.

#### **d) Promoting social dialogue**

The principle of social dialogue and working through tripartite institutional frameworks is ILO's main strategy to promote and operationalize the Decent Work Agenda for improved governance in Yemen. Realizing the potential for social dialogue requires strong, representative and democratic employers' and workers' organizations with the capacity for full and effective participation. In Yemen the ILO is engaged on promoting social dialogue, freedom of association and institutions for dialogue and collective bargaining with the aim of promoting decent work.

#### **4. Steps forward in advancing women's employment in Yemen**

In line with the DWCP, the ILO is launching a set of initiatives targeting young unemployed women and rural women producers. Efforts under this initiative include:

- Development of demand-oriented training programmes in non-traditional skills areas and promotion of a dynamic entrepreneurial culture among young women;
- Modernization of Vocational and Technical Education and Training (VTET) systems that take into account gender roles and stereotypes and that look at matching the

skills of both women and men with the innovative sectors in demand.

- Support for women's cooperatives and self-employment initiatives through gender sensitive Business Development Services training for women enterprises and microfinance covering both the practical and strategic needs of rural low-income women involved in enterprise activities.

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Photo credits: Aden workshop, nursing pioneer, girl child portrait and rural women (Lara Uhlenhaut).