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## **Women in the Palestinian Political System 2023**

### **Obstacles and Aspirations**

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# Women in the Palestinian Political System 2023 Obstacles and Aspirations

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## Introduction

Palestinian women are an important pillar in building a cohesive Palestinian society, playing an important role at the political, social, economic, and cultural levels. Women are no less important than men. They are complementary to each other, and here lies the importance of women's political participation. Their prominent role in the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation dates back to 1929 when Palestinian women began to participate in political work.<sup>1</sup> Since that time, women have been participating in political work, entering the political competition arena in the 1996 and subsequent elections, and participating in unions. This situation analysis paper seeks to examine the situation of Palestinian women in 2023, monitoring their progress and regress politically, economically, and socially. The paper also aims to discuss relevant legislation that is supposed to enhance the status of Palestinian women.

## Palestinian Women 2023: Facts and Figures

The number of females in Palestine has reached 2.70 million out of the total estimated population in mid-2023, with a percentage of 49.2% with the sex ratio reaching 103.3, meaning that there are 103 males per 100 females.

### Women's representation in public political life

#### *Municipalities*

The percentage of women who were elected and appointed in the 2021/2022 local elections was about 21% compared to 79% for men. Moreover, women in the presidency of local bodies do not represent more than 1%.

#### *Government Institutions*

- The percentage of women in the eighteenth government is 12.5%
- One woman holds the position of governor out of 15 governors
- There are 11 female ambassadors in 104 embassies
- The percentage of women in administrative or senior positions (A4 general manager and above) in Palestine is 13.7% in 2022.<sup>2</sup>
- 32% of women work in government bodies in the West Bank, and 37% in Gaza

## *Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)*

According to statistics and data for the year 2021, the percentage of women in

- the Central Council is 25%<sup>3</sup>
- the National Council is 19%
- the Central Committee is 0%

## *Unions and syndicates*

- The management of the Council of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture amounted to only 1% of women.
- Only 19% of judges are females.
- The percentage of female prosecutors was 18%.

## *Economic representation: Women's participation in the labor force*

- The labor force participation rate for 2022 was about 19% of all working-age women in 2022, up from 17% in 2021.
- Women headed about 12% of households in Palestine in 2022, 12% in the West Bank and 11% in Gaza Strip.

## *Unemployment*

- The unemployment rate among women participating in the labor force was about 40% compared to 20% among men in 2022. The unemployment rate reached 48% among young people (19-29 years) with an intermediate diploma and above. 61% are females compared to 34% for males.<sup>4</sup>

## *Educational and cultural representation*

- 63% of students graduating from Palestinian higher education institutions are female, and 30% of them are graduates in business, management, and law.<sup>5</sup>

## **Women in public life**

Several political, legal, social and other obstacles constitute an obstacle to the advancement of women and even affect their participation in the political arena and their assumption of senior positions in decision-making. These obstacles can be classified as follows:

## **Women in Palestinian laws and legislation**

Not all Palestinian laws have been harmonized with the international conventions and covenants that Palestine has signed, which constituted a major obstacle to women's political participation. The disruption of the Legislative Council in Palestine since 2007 and the absence of women's representation in the drafting of the law constituted a weakness in the legal system. Implementation mechanisms of Palestinian laws related to women's participation in the political system remain hazy. The lack of awareness of legal affairs has caused a misconception of many legal texts and unfair interpretations.

### **Women in political life**

Despite the efforts made to improve the situation of women within Palestinian society, their political participation is still modest, compared to the size of the sacrifices made, and the daily demands of various civil and human rights bodies and institutions to take their role in governmental and non-governmental institutions and organizations.<sup>6</sup>

There are three main challenges to the advancement of women in public political life in Palestine. The Israeli occupation represents the first challenge, as it hinders the development of Palestinian society. As part of the Palestinian society, women are among the social forces fighting against the occupation. The second challenge is the division, which has harmed the priorities of the Palestinian struggle and has become a scourge that disrupts energies and efforts. Third, the dispute over women's rights and equality, which is one of the main obstacles to the development of the role of women, their participation, and mobilization in the main battle to defend the rights of the people.<sup>7</sup>

### **Women and social culture**

Women's political participation is governed by a societal culture governed by the values of patriarchy, tribalism, and structural problems rampant in decision-making positions. Despite the existence of a legal system that incubates and supports women, there is a gap between what is imposed by societal culture and what is stipulated by Palestinian law or what international agreements signed by the State of Palestine dictate.<sup>8</sup>

## **The economic situation of Palestinian women**

The rate of female workers in the civil sector was about 48% of the total employees, but the entitlement they received from a manager or higher showed the size of the gap between females and males by 14% to 86% in favor of males. There is an increase in the rate of women's participation in the labor force for the year 2022 compared to 2021, as it reached about 19%, after the percentage was 17% in 2021. It is worth mentioning that the labor force participation rate of men reached 71% and 69% for the years 2021 and 2022, respectively.<sup>9</sup>

The unemployment rate among women participating in the labor force was approximately 40%, compared to 20% among males during the year 2022, while the unemployment rate among young people reached about 48%, 61% for females, and about 34% for males. There are 50% of wage workers in the private sector who receive a monthly wage less than the minimum prescribed by law, which is 1,880 shekels, and many of them work without a contract, and 46% of them do not receive paid maternity leave.

At the level of household dependency, women headed 8.8% of households in 2007, but this percentage increased to about 11% in 2021 (about 12% in the West Bank compared to 11% in Gaza Strip). The poverty rate in female-headed households is higher by 54.0% of the total households in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank, which reaches about 18.6% of male-headed households.<sup>10</sup>

## **Proposed policies and recommendations**

### **At the political and governmental level**

- Activating the role of women and increasing their participation in political life is an ongoing collective struggle process that requires reforming the political system first and activating the role entrusted to it.
- Reconsider and develop all Palestinian legislation in line with the requirements of the CEDAW and Security Council Resolution 1325.

- A strategy and a timely national plan should be developed to approve the Family Protection from Violence Law, the Personal Status Law, and its amendments.
- It is important that curricula in global and university education are developed to promote gender issues.
- Increase women's participation in the workforce by removing barriers to women's full and equitable access to the labor market.

### At the partisan level

- Palestinian parties and factions are required to realize their slogans and enhance the role of women and youth within their electoral lists and leadership.

### At the institutional level

- The need to organize and unite the feminist movement so that it is able to face the challenges that beset it, and to exert pressure and advocacy to extract the basic rights of women guaranteed by local and international law.

## Resources

<sup>1</sup> Aseel Al-Akhras, Palestinian Women Are Present But, 26/10/2021

<sup>2</sup> Percentage of Women in Government, Administration or Senior Positions in Palestine, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 4 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3rRajx7>

<sup>3</sup> Central Council Witnesses Widest Representation of Women in PLO History, Ma'an News Agency, February 6, 2022, <https://bit.ly/47bSRTX>

<sup>4</sup> The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Dr. Awad, reviews the situation of Palestinian women on the eve of International Women's Day, 8 March 2023, <https://bit.ly/3Z1TLOi>

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see:

- Women and Men in Palestine: Issues and Statistics 2022, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, October 2021, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Abu al-Ghayb, Ola, Iyad Krunz, The reality of Palestinian women's political participation, Women's Affairs Team under Security Council Resolution 1325, 2015, p. 15

<sup>7</sup> Previous reference, Rima Nazzal, The Reality of Palestinian Women: A Step Forward Steps Back.

<sup>8</sup> Alaa Mellitat Palestinian women's access to decision-making positions between law and societal culture <https://2u.pw/5GkBh78>

<sup>9</sup> The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Dr. Awad, reviews the situation of Palestinian women on the eve of International Women's Day, 8 March 2023, <https://bit.ly/3Z1TLOi>

<sup>10</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics: Palestinian Labor Force Survey Annual Report 2021, Ramallah, 2022, PHAR105.