

**SEMINAR: *Women in labor law
and work-family life balance
in the MENA region***



Labor law and work-family life balance: Proposals to improve. Immigration, integration and labor market: the role of education

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Women in Lebanon

The status of women in Lebanon (focus on education)

The living conditions of immigrants in Lebanon

Public and political life

Discrete political role

Basic Lebanese law (Constitution) establishes the political equality of the Lebanese. Equality in access to political office, voting rights and eligibility, separation of property (the Constitution does not explicitly mention women).

- Little participation in state power (in the legislative branch, 1st woman in Parliament in 1963, in 1991 in the executive branch).
- Very little participation in political parties, more in unions and schools, but low in decision-making positions. Important participation in association activities*.

- Adoption of international conventions with some reservations, mainly related to the issue of nationality ** (A woman cannot transmit her nationality to her non Lebanese husband and their children).

Opinion of men and women

Percentage per country of people answering who agree with the statement	Women should be able to become judges	Women should have equal rights and have political movements	Women should be able to become ministers	Women should be able to become prime ministers	Women should be able to become heads of state
Egypt	50	61	68	48	28
Jordan	55	76	68	52	38
Lebanon	90	95	92	90	80
Morocco	75	82	80	75	55
Total	66	79	76	55	51
Agree					
Disagree	32	19	22	44	47

The reality in the Middle East and North Africa

Women in national parliaments, MENA region					
Lower house/Chamber of Deputies					
???	State	Elections	Seats	Number of women	Percentage of women
29	Iraq	12 2005	275	70	25.5
39	Tunisia	10 2004	189	43	22.8
41	UAE	12 2006	40	9	22.5
86	Syria	04 2007	250	30	12
92	Morocco	09 2002	325	35	10.8
100	Turkey	07 2007	549	50	9.1
108	Libya	03 2006	468	36	7.7
111	Algeria	05 2007	389	28	7.2
120	Jordan	06 2003	110	6	5.5
122	Lebanon	05 2005	128	6	4.7
123	Iran	02 2004	290	12	4.1
126	Kuwait	06 2006	65	2	3.1
129	Bahrain	11 2006	40	1	2.5
130	Oman	10 2003	83	2	2.4
131	Egypt	11 2005	442	9	2
133	Yemen	04 2003	301	1	0.3
134	Saudi Arabia	04 2005	150	0	0

Home life, domestic violence

There is still a long way to go

Lebanese women in their society are good mothers and excellent housewives.

- The age of marriage for women is delayed for the benefit of schooling and work
- Personal status is governed by religious communities and not by civil status.
- Domestic violence is not taken seriously by the authorities.
- The crime of adultery is not punished fairly between the two genders.
- Pressure groups try to amend discriminatory laws and to make international laws prevail over local laws.

The suburbs, a nightmare for housewives

According to a study by KAFA in 2010 (funded by OXFAM), women (sample of 18 or over) are raped by:

- Their husband (74.5%)
- Their father (10.9%)
- Their brother (7.3%)
- Their mother (3.6%)
- A relative (1.8%)
- An "outsider" (1.8%)

* 96% of violence against women is committed by men

Geographical location:

- Beirut: 12.7%.
- Beirut Suburbs: 38.2%.
- Mount-Lebanon: 20%.
- North: 20%.
- Bekaa: 3.6%.
- South: 1.8%.
- Other regions: 3.6%.

The world of work

The law versus practice

In Lebanon, the economic participation of women in the workforce was only 27.8% in 1997.

- Their participation in National Income is no more than 21.8%, i.e. less than their participation in the workforce.
- The law is not blatantly discriminatory with respect to gender, but it does not require or ensure a move to higher levels. (There is no clear and binding legal text).
- This leaves the way open to discrimination in the private sector:
 - Participation in the decision making process is revealed as one of the areas that is most resistant to gender equality.
 - Wage inequality (although in the public sector the law enforces equal pay).

Successful in agriculture

Occupation	Women	Men
Managers	874	1179
Scientists	605	832
Teachers	464	702
Health professionals	440	454
Sales and marketing	430	535
Services	347	438
Agriculture	568	493

Unemployment Rate	11%	7.5%
Illiteracy Rate (+15)	16.1%	6.7%

- Source: National Commission for Lebanese Women

Education, culture

History

In Lebanon, as in the Middle East, women confined in their roles as mothers and wives have had virtually no cultural, artistic or literary role.

- The few documents signed by women always included the phrase "oum .. " or mother of her eldest son, referring to the masculine world.
- It is from the eighteenth century when work written by women appears.
- The first school for girls in Beirut was created in 1834.

Famous names

- Some famous women put their talents at the service of their female colleagues. We can mention for example:
- Julia Tohme, who created the first women's magazine *Femme nouvelle*.
- May Ziade with her masterpiece on equality ***Les ténèbres et la lumière (darkness and light)***
- Nazira Zein Eddine el Halabi, journalist, famous for her writings on women's liberation with, among others, **Le voile et le dévoilement (putting on and taking off the veil)**
- Émilie Farés Ibrahim published a book of poems and some books on the feminine condition.

Promising figures

- Women's culture, a privileged means to emancipate and strengthen their rights.
- Culture, a long process that begins with education.
- During the past two decades, the level of illiteracy has decreased from 31.8% in 1970 to 11.6% in 1997.
- However, the model remains the same: illiterate women are twice as numerous as men, with greater concentration in older age groups and rural areas.

- Since 1998, it is estimated (ESCWA) that 8% of Lebanese women have a university degree, compared to 5% in the whole Arab region.
- In addition, the percentage of women graduates has increased over the past four years.

Teachers, female educators

	Academic year					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Non spec.	Total
Women	90,5	82	76.9	43,2	61.1	75.6
Men	9.5	18	23.1	56.8	38.9	24.4

* Percentage of women and men **Head Teachers and Heads of Department at Universities**

Year	% of women working at the Lebanese University	% of women working at Private Universities
94/95	33.4	32.7
95/96	32.9	35.2
96/97	33.7	31.8

Press, television and books

- 75% of newspaper readers were men compared to 25% women. In contrast, women buy more magazines, so women's magazines are more numerous and varied.
- Women in Lebanon are the most loyal and regular viewers. Hundreds of women benefit from this openness to the world, and it is sometimes the only chance they have to hear about an event, a play, a movie or an artist.
- The Lebanese read few books and they prefer magazines, except for some individuals (elite). However, women buy more books than men. They mostly buy popular novels, while men buy more specialist books.

Fine Arts

- There is no Lebanese pictorial tradition, but there are numerous experienced and contemporary artists (Marie Haddad is known for her work entitled *Montagnards Libanais* (Lebanese highlanders) on display at the Jeu de Paume Museum in Paris,...).
- Sculpture, ancient tradition (Salwa Rawda Choucair, Yolla Kassab, Rita Aoun....).
- Lebanese music acquired its letters of nobility with Fayrouz and the Rahbani from the fifties.
- The theatre is relatively recent (Carmen Loubos, Julia Kassar, ...).
- The cinema retains an intellectual touch after its reappearance in the post-war period.
- Dance, of a collective and folk nature, belly dancing. (Caracalla, Georgette Gebara...).

Male and female immigrants in Lebanon

The situation in figures

- More than 200,000 foreign workers are employed as domestic workers, labourers or piece workers in Lebanon. Filipinos, Sri Lankans, Bengalis, Egyptians, Eritreans, Ghanaians, Somalis,.... there are also some 900,000 Iraqis and 50,000 Syrians.
- Women work in domestic service, care for children at home and sometimes care for the elderly (90,000 according to the Ministry of Labour).
- Approximately \$ 2 billion a year are transferred out of Lebanon.
- A quarter of the working population would be formed by migrant workers of all nationalities.
- Women represent over 80% of the immigrants, not including Arab nationals.

Mediocre quality of life

- Although the law prohibits any discrimination, many women are mistreated, victims of physical abuse, unjustified reduction of their salaries and confinement in the homes of their employers, sometimes throughout their stay.
- In the absence of rights that state institutions should ensure, many reports from Lebanese NGOs denounce the working conditions suffered by migrant workers.
- The few lawyers who are active in the defence of women face the greatest difficulties in making their voices heard. The testimony of domestic workers compared with that of their employers has little weight in court.

Mediocre quality of life

- Upon arrival at Beirut airport, the situation of domestic workers is similar to real slavery. As soon as they get off the plane, they are placed in a room. Their passports are confiscated. They are supplied imperatively to their employers.
- Taking away their passport "is the best way to ensure they do not escape".
- "The Sri Lankans are a bit stupid, but can easily reproduce the gestures they are taught, and the best way to protect our investment is to kidnap them".

Some vivid examples

- In Ethiopia, a woman who had formerly been in Lebanon opened an agency for immigrants whose mission was to assist and protect women against human trafficking and violence during their stay abroad.
- Eyewitnesses have reported seeing a domestic worker fall.
- Kholoud, a native of Sudan, has lived in Lebanon for 18 years ... Now, she cannot prove she is Sudanese to obtain a new passport ... "I am a prisoner here," she says
- Some 80 Ethiopian women have been imprisoned for more a year in the women's jail at Tripoli accused of not having passports...