

Mainstreaming Gender Equality Concerns in Palestinian TVET System

Summary

This policy brief presents the summary of an assessment¹ by the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGS). It highlights the overall socio-cultural context by underlining challenges to young women's participation in the TVET system and recommends strategies to further promote their integration in both the TVET system and the labour market.

Women's Labour Market Integration

The Israeli occupation of the WBGS has had significant negative repercussions on economic and socio-cultural development. A crisis in unemployment has affected both men and women workers alike. Women's participation rate in the Palestinian labour force is very low at: 15.4 percent in West Bank and 11.7 percent in the Gaza Strip. While the employment situation has always been precarious, it deteriorated rapidly in 2000 with the outbreak of the Al Aqsa Intifada and the numerous restrictions imposed on Palestinians that followed. Prior to the onset of the Intifada, over 40 percent of the Palestinian workforce was employed in Israel, or 125,000 workers. In only a few months, the number fell to around 7500.

These restrictions on the movement of all Palestinians are compounded by social mobility constraints for women. Familial reservations



regarding women working outside of their homes or beyond immediate surroundings have added to challenges in accessing the educational system and the labour market.

Women are largely concentrated in the sectors of agriculture and services, often as informalized familial workers. What little positions are available in these fields are largely taken by women with low levels of education. An important thing to remember in the WBGS, and a primary concern of the projects implemented, is that educated women's unemployment rates remain very high,

¹ The "Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Palestinian VET Centre: Needs Assessment – Labour Market Demand Main Findings and Recommendations Presented to ILO-MOL" was conducted by Optimum consulting company in 2009, under the MDG-F programme's outcome on "Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in the oPt" funded by the Spanish Government.

especially among young women aged 20-24. Many women with lower levels of education who are not employed do not declare themselves as unemployed. These discouraged workers, are left unprotected and particularly vulnerable. More than three fourth of unemployed women, went through over 13 years of schooling; in comparison, 85 per cent of unemployed men have completed less than 13 years of schooling (ILO study, 2008).

Women make up the majority of university students; however they remain a small part of the workforce. What this suggests is that traditional formal educational institutions and curricula are not preparing women for the demands of the labour market.

The TVET System in the WBGs

Strengthening the TVET system's effectiveness and relevancy is among the top priorities of the labour sector strategy and an important component of the larger national plan of the 13th Palestinian Authority.

The 1996 TVET National Strategy aimed to create a TVET system that was relevant, flexible, effective, efficient, accessible, and sustainable and which fulfils its general obligations vis-a-vis the Palestinian Labour market. However, since the development of the strategy until quite recently, most of the envisioned initiatives have not been launched. Only since the emergence of the 12th government in late 2007, and the development of the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (2008-2010), has TVET returned to the centre of the national policy making dialogue.

Today, there are a total of 53 vocational training centres, most of them focused on women and the youth. Among them, only 11 are being administered by the Palestinian Ministry of Labour (MoL). The remainder are provided by a number of governmental and nongovernmental agencies organizations, as well as a number of private companies.

This highlights why the TVET system continues to suffer from fragmentation, a lack of coordination and comprehensive national framework with a clear qualifications structure. The absence of such coordination severely reduces efficiency and synergy among the many TVET stakeholders.

An additional problem of the system is not policy based, but special. The vast majority of TVET institutions are concentrated in the city centres of the governorates, making it difficult for women in rural areas and refugee camps to access them. In addition, many TVET centres only accept women with high academic credentials or pre-training qualifications, excluding large portions of the population. Such a selection bias is reinforced by the high student demand in many TVET institutions for specific curricula.

Finally, an important component of TVET is results. More than 3/4th of the women students attending TVET courses rely on the system to help them find employment or venture into self-employment upon the completion of their studies. However, such aspirations are constrained by the common perception that work is not a basic right for women, but instead only as a potential source of complimentary income for the family or a means of reducing expenses through home-based economic activities. While the participation of young women in TVET today is higher than ten years ago, this has not reflected into substantial changes for women in



ILO TVET Workshop, March 2010

terms of employment opportunities. In fact, today only 6 percent of women graduates from TVET centres find jobs in the following year, compared to 1/3rd of male graduates.

Challenges to Women's Participation in TVET and Integration into the Labour Market

1. Lack of Resources in the TVET sector

The current TVET infrastructure in WBGs is obsolete in terms of buildings, equipment, and consumables. Curricula are also often outdated and irrelevant to the labour market needs. Despite the MoL's strategic development plan for the TVET system, adequate facilities, employment-oriented curricula and learning materials, as well as competent teachers are still needed.

Rehabilitating TVET's physical infrastructure and re-skilling trainers remains crucial to enabling

TVET centres to offer higher quality of training (including upgrading and retraining activities) to attract more trainees and investors. Currently, the majority of infrastructure and development expenses for the TEVT sector are being covered by the donor community.

2. Negative Perceptions of TVET

Women's participation in TVET is constrained by negative perceptions concerning the quality, relevance and benefits of such programmes. TVET is often referred to as "second-class education", perceived as only preparing students for menial tasks in traditionally male-dominated fields. Many families are concerned about 'mixed' classes in the TVET system and the suitability of the training courses with regards to cultural norms.

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3. Socio-Economic Challenges to Women's Integration into TVET

Patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes regarding the role of women continue to restrict their participation in TVET and the labour market. The assumption that women are only secondary income earners, with their husbands, fathers and brothers as the main breadwinners, is also common among employers who opt for hiring young men rather than young women even when both graduates have similar levels of skills and know-how. The perception is that men often 'need' the job more.

This bias is exacerbated by the politically induced economic recession, displacement of labourers from the Israeli labour market and high unemployment levels among both women and men. Many Palestinian Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the WBGs have limited access to inputs or markets for their goods and services. This has created a "crisis" context economically, where high levels of turnover are prevalent. In this context, employers show a preference for men over women comparable education, skills and experience, often due to the higher perceived risks and costs of women workers.

Finally, the types of training offered to women in



TVET have also been largely limited and restricted to a few “feminine” areas deemed socially acceptable (and already saturated). As a result, some “male” training curricula available in TVET institutions are not open to women.

In this scenario, if a young woman expresses interest in pursuing skills that are nontraditional and perhaps more labour market oriented, she is likely to be discouraged and pushed back towards the traditional fields of specialization, such as secretarial work, social assistants, teachers, seamstresses, hairdressers, beauticians - all extensions of their perceived roles as caregivers and homemakers. Gender segregation in the household division of labour and in the education system translates into similar segmentation in the Palestinian labour market.

4. New Professions and Entrepreneurship for Women

Economic activities such as trade, event organizing, graphic design and photography are socially acceptable for women. These are also areas where there is some growth potential and labour market demand and efforts are needed to launch such curricula in TVET centres in the WBGS.

There is also a need to introduce “basic business” skills in project management, marketing, planning and time management in order to familiarize graduates with basic entrepreneurship skills.

Women who choose to become beauticians, hairdressers or seamstresses show interest in starting their enterprises while also voicing concern regarding competition and ways to succeed in difficult environments. “Life skills” on communication, leadership, negotiation and conflict resolution have also been pointed to as necessary additions to the TVET curricula. The latter is of special relevance for young women in order to break into the labour market and negotiate safe and secure terms and conditions of work in the WBGS.

5. Lack of Gender Mainstreaming Strategies for TVET

Male-dominated institutions and programmes as well as laws perpetuating gender inequities remain as constraints. Young women’s education and training concerns are not fully addressed by

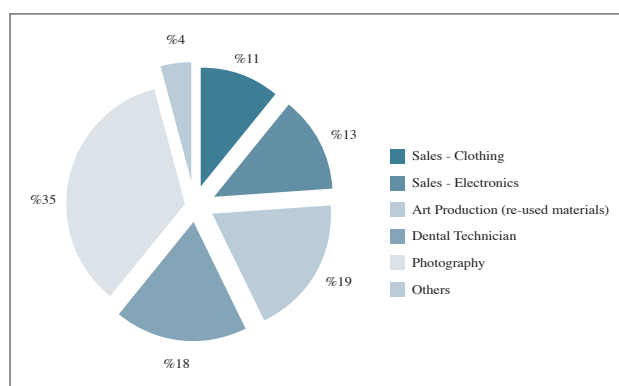


ILO GET Ahead TOT workshop - Ramallah, May 2010

the relevant Palestinian ministries, such as the Ministry of Education and MoL. Neither have staff, task forces nor units that address young women’s training needs.

In addition, activities of many international donor agencies do not seem to have gender mainstreaming as a priority. Promoting young women’s participation in TVET is of strategic relevance to the larger agendas of the international community, aimed at gender equality and poverty reduction.

Figure 1: Women’s Preferences for TVET Curriculum (2009-%)



Source: ILO TVET Assessment, 2009

According to the results of focus groups discussions conducted in 2009 with graduates and their families, there was a preference for sales in general, but not for electronics specifically. Photography was also considered a welcome occupation for young women. Art production that would allow women to

work from home had the largest acceptance from families of the graduates. The primary concerns that families expressed were of their daughter/sister being delayed at work or being engaged in unfavourable work environments

Recommendations

Improving geographical access for women to the TVET system

Currently, most TVET institutions, governmental or nongovernmental, are concentrated in urban areas. Due to the specific movement restrictions imposed on Palestinians by the Israeli military occupation, and the “cultural” mobility constraints mentioned previously, access to TVET institutions might be difficult for many young women living in rural areas and camps.

TVET providers need to rebalance the distribution of their centers in the territory, including their presence in remote municipalities and camps. Surveys are needed among the concerned marginalized populations to determine the appropriate curricula in these regions. The ILO’s School-to-Work Transition Survey could be a relevant tool for identifying young women’s perceptions and aspirations in terms of employment as well as their preferences regarding wage or self-employment.

Customizing TVET curricula for diverse needs

The lack of flexibility in current TVET curricula does not meet the needs of a diverse set of students from different academic backgrounds. In particular, women students in traditional fields might need to upgrade and broaden the scope of their skills to fully master a trade through languages course in English or Hebrew or technologies, such as Microsoft Office or Internet Explorer, administrative courses or advanced design courses for those introduced in handicrafts. The MoL has already identified some of these skills gaps and initiated skills upgrade orientation courses through ILO funding.

On the other hand, graduates from the higher education system who are unable to enter the labour market need additional practical training at TVET institutions. Short-term courses are needed to complement and strengthen their market relevant

skills. In all cases, livelihood and entrepreneurship skills courses are valuable add-ons that could be made available.

There also exists a strong need for mainstreaming more technology in all TVET curricula to allow for simulation exercises. For example, hairdressing software to show new haircut designs or 3-D computer programmes for architectural drawing. Finally, new curricula could be designed and implemented based on the existing social demand in particular areas, such as photography in Hebron, art production in Beit-Jala and trade and sales in Nablus and Jenin.

Strengthening gender mainstreaming capacities of TVET providers

The TVET trainers’ performances are key to strengthening the TVET system. Staff development programmes for trainers and managers of TVET centres are needed. More specifically, trainers need to have knowledge and experience of labour market relevant skills to teach and develop communication strategies for building relations with market actors; and career guidance and counselling methodologies. The Women’s Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality (WEDGE) Programme tools, such as training sessions in business group formation could be adapted to the Palestinian context.

While the current MoL employment strategy has mainly focused on TVET, gender-related concerns have not yet been mainstreamed into policies to address women’s education and labour market needs. Building on previous good practices in other





Arab states, young women's education departments, task forces or technical committees should be created in relevant ministries to help mainstream gender concerns and policies of TVET providers, including at the MoL (regulating Vocational Training Institutions), the Ministry of Education (regulating Vocational Education institutions) and nonprofit and private organizations running similar programmes.

This gender mainstreaming strategy for TVET and other employment policies could include the implementation of specific affirmative action initiatives for increasing women's participation in the TVET system such as reduced fees, classroom quotas for young women as well as incentives for companies to hire women trainees in apprenticeships or wage-cash subsidies programmes.

Enhancing the links between the TVET and the labour market

Various strategies could be envisioned to better link TVET job seekers to private sector employers. First, the TVET system, through the mediation of TVET administrators and trainers, could integrate employers' in-class interventions by organizing occasional seminars and interview practice

exercises along with field visits and job-shadowing days with successful businessmen and women.

In the same vein, case studies and longer training periods in enterprises and industries could be encouraged in order to enhance young women's practical knowledge and links with employers. Palestinian employers' interest and willingness to lend their support to these initiatives can also be encouraged through the involvement of employers' organizations, such as the Federation of Palestinian Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture.

Similarly, TVET students should be able to seek guidance from employment counsellors, as it is already the case at MoL vocational training centres. TVET administrators and trainers could be trained to provide such guidance. However, this guidance is only fruitful when coupled with other complementary measures, such as the introduction of TVET courses on job-search engines and CV writing seminars, as well as national and local authorities' interventions to strengthen market intermediaries and employment agencies.

Coordination between the TVET system and the employment offices is needed. It is also necessary among labour market governance institutions to

allow for systematic tracking of TVET graduates. An evaluation system to collect and monitor sex-disaggregated data on TVET graduates in different sectors is crucial to education and employment policy planning in general, and gender mainstreaming in policy formulation in particular.

Improving qualitative and quantitative data on young Palestinian women's participation in TVET system would help policy makers and educators to analyze the skills gaps to be addressed through the implementation of new gender-responsive TVET programmes. Data is also needed on potential sectors of employment to orient postgraduate women and men toward labour market demands and self-employment.

Implementing a public awareness raising campaign for increasing women's participation in TVET

Quick-impact and targeted public awareness campaigns could be conducted in close partnership with national women's organizations to promote young women's participation in TVET and untraditional working roles through culturally accepted messaging across WBGS. Such an

initiative could collaborate with media agencies to produce cost-effective TV and radio spots.

Campaign materials could focus on moving away from the image of TVET system leading to menial jobs for men only; and instead, they could also focus on show images of active and successful young women in fields such as graphic design, photography, and ICT. These tools could be further disseminated through CDs/DVDs in secondary schools and for use at open/orientation days at the TVET institutions across the territory. Finally, for such a public awareness raising campaign strategy to work effectively, media products could target different segments of the Palestinian population including: students, families, community/religious leaders, and other potentially influential stakeholders.



ILO Response

Women gain employable skills through photography training course

With the aim of improving the economic participation of women in the West Bank, the ILO, in partnership with GIZ and UNRWA, signed a Memorandum of Understanding to implement and run a photography training course. The course is managed and implemented under the UNRWA education program. The ILO provides UNRWA with expertise and funding through the joint UN MDG-F Gender project. The GIZ, the PA's primary partner for the National TVET strategy, has contributed with supervision of trainers, expertise in curricula development and teaching. GIZ's methods of teaching and curricula will be employed in the course.

Women gain employable skills through other planned vocational training courses

Following the ILO assessment findings and recommendations, and Within the context of ILO activities under MDG-F Gender Programme to assess needs and provide vocational educational training module for young fresh graduates using tools, techniques and strategies for better mainstreaming and up streaming gender equality considerations for women, ILO is working on developing a well-developed Technical and Vocational Educational Training (TVET) that can easily adapt and respond to changes in demand in the labour market. The ILO will implement the project through academic/vocational centers specialized in skills training for women in construction sectors in Gaza strip, as well as office equipment maintenance for young women in Bethlehem

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