



INCLUSION OR FURTHER EXCLUSION: LIBYAN WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE



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1 INTRODUCTION

Women in many developing countries face significant obstacles in participating in public life and influencing political and economic policies and decision-making. These obstacles are more severe in countries where institutions are fragile and/or corrupt and informal discriminatory structures are often more powerful. In these fragile contexts, women's rights and opportunities are limited.

Women played an iconic role during the Libyan uprising in 2011, and the year following the uprising saw greater engagement of women in public life, primarily in politics and civil society. The appointment of five women as ministers in the Government of National Unity formed in March of 2021, including the key ministries of foreign affairs and justice, was perceived as a major success for women's empowerment in Libya. In the economic sphere, there has been greater women's engagement in business and investment activities, although women continue to be completely absent from the economic decision-making and are rarely found in leadership positions of economic institutions.

Despite Libya being committed by its own laws and international obligations to promote and protect the right of every person to participate in public life, regardless of their race or gender, achieving the effective participation and engagement of women still poses a significant challenge in practice. Despite improvement in the status of women, achieving equality is far from becoming a reality.

Women face different types of barriers to their full and effective participation in public life; these barriers are mainly structural and institutional. These challenges are magnified by the harmful and toxic environment in both the political and economic spheres, as well as by the consecutive conflicts and fragility of the situation in Libya.

This report aims to provide a better understanding of women's participation not only in the political and economic spheres specifically, but also in public life in general. It also seeks to shed light on the impact of conflict on women. The study will enable key stakeholders, including the government, state institutions and civil society organisations (CSOs), to better understand the reality on the ground and design effective measures to address the identified challenges.



Research Questions and Objectives

The main objective of this study is to assess to what extent, how and through which means women engage in political, economic and social life in Libya. The overall research question of this study is: **What are the opportunities for and barriers to women's engagement in political and economic life in Libya?**

This report aims, therefore, to provide an analysis of women's engagement in the political and economic spheres, and to provide an in-depth analysis of the existing barriers to and challenges for their public engagement.

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The research team collected data January to February 2021, including one week for a desk review and the development of data collection protocols. The field research period also included two weeks for data analysis.

Methodological approach

Desk Research	Focus Groups	Follow on In-depth Interview
Prior to the collection of data on women's lived experiences, as well as opinions and feedback from other stakeholders through interviews and webinars, the assessment began with desk research, focusing on other studies, publications and reports on women's engagement and participation in Libyan public life.	Five online focus groups were conducted, with the participation of a total of 50 Libyan women leaders in the political and economic fields and 50 who are active in CSOs from across the country. During these online focus groups, the participants were encouraged to engage with the topic and propose root causes of issues, as well as opportunities and possible recommendations for change. This allowed for the "cross-pollination" of information and ideas among participants.	Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with 20 women experts. These in-depth interviews allowed the research team to dig deeper into the trends that emerged in the online focus groups, as well as to tackle other issues that were deemed essential for the assessment.



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LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Due to movement restrictions imposed by the authorities to combat the Coronavirus pandemic, direct access to the communities relevant to this study was not possible. Data collection had to be done through telephone calls and over the internet via Zoom, which limited interactions with respondents.

The lack of a recent official census and associated data also affected the analysis of the research.

2 THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF LIBYAN WOMEN

Libyan women obtained the right to vote in 1964.¹ Despite this, they have remained far from achieving equal political participation. No woman held a political leadership position during the Kingdom era, which ended in 1969, and women's participation was limited to activity in civil society institutions and charities.²

In the period from 1969 to 2011, the state continued to encourage the education of women and their joining the workforce,³ and a package of legislation was introduced to guarantee women's rights in public life. Laws guaranteed equal citizenship rights, and legislation criminalised discrimination based on sex. Some women assumed political leadership positions, most of which were in positions associated with women's traditional roles, such as in the ministries of social affairs, women's affairs and education.

Women played a key role in the 2011 uprising. Libyan women were icons of the revolution and members of "The February 17th Coalition" in Benghazi, at the National Transitional Council and of the Interim Executive Government. Several laws related to women's political participation were passed, starting with the Constitutional Declaration that guarantees political rights to all Libyans, without any discrimination. The Election Law No. 4 of 2012 adopted a horizontal and vertical lists system that led to women taking 33 seats in the General National Congress – 16.5 per cent of the total.⁴ The House of

¹ Article no 2 from Law No. (6) of 1964 on the election law

² Dr Amal Al-Obaidy, "The Evolution of the Women's Movement in Libyan Society: Between Empowerment and Activation. Documentary Study, June 2006 (in Arabic).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Megan Doherty, "Libyan Women in the 2012 National Elections", National Democratic Institute – Libya, October 2012.



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Representatives Elections Law of 2014 established a quota, reserving 16 per cent of the body's 188 seats for women – 30 seats.⁵

Despite this slight progress in women's representation in public life, women's presence in governmental positions remained limited to traditional roles, with limited decision-making influence. The Women Empowerment Unit in the Presidential Council, established by the UN-brokered political agreement in 2015, with the objective of increasing the presence of women in leadership positions in governmental entities, faced significant challenges in playing this role, a situation that was further exacerbated by the return of conflict and the split of governments.

The United Nations Mission in Libya (UNSMiL) has ensured that women from different backgrounds have a place at the main table of negotiations in the current peace process. For more inclusion, UNSMIL ran several consultative sessions with Libyan women⁶ from various political and ideological backgrounds, and consolidated all of the recommendations produced in these sessions in one document, which was presented to the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF).

The women in the LPDF created a bloc that influenced and directed many decisions, one of which committed the next government to include a quota for 30 per cent women's membership in the cabinet and made all candidates sign a written statement that they would fulfil this commitment.⁷ Ultimately, however, as mentioned above, these efforts resulted in the appointment of only five women to the Government of National Unity, although two were given key portfolios, as ministers of justice and foreign affairs, respectively.⁸

Challenges and Barriers to Women's Political Participation

Institutional barriers can contribute to disparities between women and men, and may influence women's participation in public life. This section will examine three forms of such structural and institutional barriers.

⁵ Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), "[Gender Quotas Database – Libya](#)", IDEA website.

⁶ United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), "The United Nations Support Mission in Libya Publishes the Recommendations of Four Consultative Sessions within the Course of the Libyan Political Forum with Libyan Women's Groups", 2 November 2020 (in Arabic).

⁷ United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), "[Statement of the Libyan Women Participating in the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum](#)", UNSMIL website, 15 November 2020.

⁸ France 24, "[Libyan Women Reach High Office but Activists Say Long Road Ahead](#)", France 24 website, 19 March 2021.

Women's Quota Dilemma

A quota of sorts for women's representation was introduced in Election Law No. 4 of 2012, which adopted a "zipper" system, requiring that places on parties' candidate lists alternate between men and women, in order to secure equal representation in candidacy and potentially elected members. This leading to women winning 33 seats, representing 16.5 per cent of the parliament. A second law – Election Law No. 10 of 2014 – included an explicit quota, reserving 16 per cent of the seats for women. In the election for the Constitutional Drafting Assembly, a quota of ten per cent was set for women and, consequently, six women were elected to join the Assembly.

In reaction to the 30 per cent gender quota introduced in the roadmap in the recent peace negotiations brokered by UNSMIL, participants surveyed in the research had diverse opinions on the quota's existence and effectiveness. Some participants stated that having a quota system is necessary to ensure women's representation. Twenty-three per cent of participants were critical of the fact that the quota was not expanded to other domains, such as economic institutions and political parties. At the same time, a few participants – nine per cent – raised concerns about the quota, stating that it does not ensure that women's interests are served by those elected or appointed to decision-making positions.

Representation Is Not Enough

Over the past ten years, women working in the legislative and executive entities have not been able to push for a meaningful positive change to improve the situation of women in the country. According to 21 per cent of participants, women in power in Libya are not substantively representing women's interests. One of the participants explained that "[w]omen could not

" In the days of the National Congress in 2012, women were always speaking up, but they had no impact because of men overpowering them."

even pass one law, because most of them may not know what they have to do and do not know the importance of their presence and advocating for women's issues." In addition, 32 per cent of participants said that, even where women were present in political positions, they had limited decision-making impact. The lack of gender issue champions among women leaders has led to the sidelining of women and the neglect of their needs in policymaking and in planning and budgeting.

Tokenism

Although the participation of women in public life has increased over the last decade, numbers alone are not enough. In Libya, where social structures are deeply rooted in tribal and family loyalties and there is a lack of women's influence in public life, women will likely be tokenised and used to increase the leverage of the tribe or the political party.



Some participants (27 per cent) said that tribes and political parties exploited women's seats, stating that they expect that women will be selected by a tribe or political party to occupy these positions only to officially serve tribal or party interests. This practice of controlling these seats and expanding the leverage of the tribe/community is common in tribal and rural communities, where the selection of women is likely to be based on loyalty rather than their qualifications as candidates or their commitment to a gender-inclusion agenda.

The same number of participants (27 per cent) stated that women's inclusion tends to be merely tokenistic. They said that they considered this inclusion as only symbolic of the appearance of inclusivity, without any genuine investment in empowering women. Twenty-five per cent of participants explained that tokenism in women's participation is not limited to the political sphere, as the same practices are used in selecting members of boards and management in businesses, and in committees and project teams. The selection criteria for those appointed are not necessarily based on qualifications, and continue to tend only to include privileged women, based on political and tribal affiliations.

Social and Cultural Barriers

Cultural and social norms disproportionately limit Libyan women from diverse backgrounds. This limitation's differential nature and effects are often compounded by various forms of marginalisation, for example, for women from certain geographical regions, educational levels or social classes. Women from rural or tribal areas have to adhere to strict social norms. While this may not be the case in the major cities, all of these limits can affect women's participation in public life.

A majority of the participants in the research (54.5 per cent) highlighted that social and cultural norms are crucial factors limiting and oppressing women and their opportunities in Libya. Specifically, a majority (52 per cent) consistently stressed that the main, root cause of women's barriers goes back to a patriarchal culture that limits women to traditional gender roles, excludes them from decision-making positions, and limits their presence in the public sphere to positions that are considered "suitable for women's nature", such as nursing, teaching and basic administrative roles.

Just over one-fifth (20.5 per cent) of participants stated that such attitudes depend on where women live within a geographical region; those who live in big cities are likely to be more accepted in "non-traditional" roles than those living in suburbs and small towns. It is important to note that, even in major cities, the acceptance of women's presence in public life and decision-making varies from one place to another, depending on the social structure in those areas. For example, in areas where tribal influence is strong, limitations on women's presence are generally stricter. Still, some tribes, like the Toubou, have more



acceptance of such public roles for women, and women play significant roles in their communities.

Forty-one per cent of all participants highlighted pervasive negative gender stereotypes and biases about women's abilities as factors that impede women's engagement in public life. These negative stereotypes tend to see women as less able to understand the complexities of political work and to deal with problems, or assume that women are incapable of making decisions due to their "fragile and emotional nature". In general, these conservative norms assume that "respectable" women stay at home or remain in certain traditionally accepted roles.

Safety and Security

There is a link between the decline in women's participation in the political sphere and the dire security situation in the country; women in Libya face different forms of physical and cyber violence that hinder their public engagement.

In recent years, there has been an increase in cyber violence against women, including in hate speech and disinformation campaigns. In a recent survey, 81 per cent of participants stated that online violence is a severe form of violence against women, harming their reputations, safety and wellbeing.⁹ In addition, the physical violence against political figures has continued; the abduction of the elected member of the House of Representatives Siham Sergiwa in 2019 is one such incident.¹⁰ Her fate remains unknown, despite all the international efforts to determine her location.¹¹ In November 2020, a political activist and lawyer, Hanan al-Barassi, was assassinated in Benghazi by armed men just a few minutes after posting a video on Facebook making allegations of corruption against armed groups in the city.¹² The targeting of vocal women has led many to step back and avoid being on the frontlines, fearing for their safety.¹³

This was confirmed by the majority (59 per cent) of the participants, who emphasised that the political instability has also meant continuing safety and security threats, particularly against women. These security threats have caused women be less willing to enter the public sphere. Twenty-five percent of participants highlighted that violence against

⁹ Lawyers for Justice in Libya, "[Urgent Action Needed to Address Shocking Levels of Online Violence against Libyan Women](#)", 10 March 2021.

¹⁰ CNN, "[She's One of the Most Prominent Female Politicians in Her Country. A Few Days Ago She Was Abducted from Her House](#)," CNN website, 20 July 2019.

¹¹ Amnesty International, "[Libya: Abducted Politician's Fate Remains Unknown a Year on](#),"

[amid Ongoing Disappearances](#)", Amnesty International website, 17 July 2020.

¹² Human Rights Watch, "[Libya: Outspoken Benghazi Lawyer Murdered](#)", Human Rights Watch website, 11 November 2020.

¹³ Bel Trew, "[Libya's Women Face Many Dangers for Speaking Out – They Need Protection So They Can Help Rebuild Their Country](#)", The Independent website, 19 November 2020.

activists and political figures has, naturally, served as a form of intimidation that leaves women reluctant to be politically engaged.

The impact of the continued conflict is significant. It affects the whole society but, with the absence of the rule of law and proper protection mechanisms, the conflict will impact women in particular. This will be more significant in smaller and more conservative communities, where great pressure will be brought to bear on women, who may fear for their safety and eventually be forced to refrain from public participation.

Family Honour

Many families have discouraged women's participation in public life in order to "protect family honour". It is a common belief that women who engage in public life and community activities have fewer prospects for marriage. Forty-one percent of participants confirmed that the social shaming of those interested in participating politically or

" Women are putting themselves on a big adventure when they enter the political turf, and they must obtain great support in order to enter the political process."

economically discourages families from allowing women to engage more in public life. Some participants (25 per cent) explained that this shaming and defamation is often centred around notions of maintaining the woman's honour, respectability and reputation, and that consider these, above all else, should be a woman's priority.

The growth of social media and increase in cyber violence have brought hate speech campaigns and the defamation of women in the public sphere. A majority of participants (59 per cent) said that those cyber-attacks on women, in the form of bullying, libel and other kinds of online violence, discourage and intimidate families, who tend to prioritise the protection of family honour, into preventing women from playing active public roles.

Women who do not conform to these rules commonly face becoming outcasts from society for their failure to meet social expectations; for this reason, many women avoid being engaged in public affairs.



3 ECONOMIC AND LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

The lack of official and reliable data on women’s participation in the workforce and in business is a major challenge in trying to understand the factors affecting their engagement in the sector.

Libyan legislation related to the economy and workforce has been passed on the basis of equality and equal opportunities. The Libyan Labour Code states that equality between men and women is one of its foundations. The legislation prohibits all forms of gender-based discrimination in the workforce and states that all laws related to commercial activities, land ownership, banking and financial products should not discriminate between men and women. Women, however, have only limited access to decision-making positions; men hold all of the top management positions of Libya’s economic institutions. Women largely work in business support functions, and rarely reach even middle management positions. In banking and investment, women are marginalised and sidelined.

The current peace process is following three “tracks” – political, security and economic. The economic track is based on an understanding of the economic nature of the conflict in Libya. The UNSMIL economic track started with a low percentage of women’s participation, 8 per cent, and this percentage was recently increased to reach 20 per cent. The road map produced by the economic track working group and Libyan experts did not, however, consider women’s needs, for example, in its COVID-19 response plans, in designing gendered budgets and in promoting their participation in the private sector. Greater efforts to mainstream gender into the economic track are needed to ensure that women are included in future economic plans.

Economically, the war and conflicts have had a more nuanced and layered impact on women.¹⁴ According to 20.5 per cent of the participants in the study, women’s freedom of movement has been significantly restricted, and this has affected their ability to attend school or report to workplaces in some areas. These restrictions on movement have also affected women’s ability to travel across borders, further limiting their opportunities by denying them the chance to take part in advanced training programmes or professional

¹⁴ Ulf Laessing, “Selling Sketches and Clothes, Libyan Women Set Up Businesses against the Odds”, Reuters website, 25 June 2019.



conferences and meeting outside of the country. This limits their professional development and ability to expand their business and investment networks.

The conflicts and associated economic hardship have forced more women to enter both the formal and informal job markets. According to 31 per cent of the participants, the reasons for this vary, including the absence of men during the conflicts, displacement and the economic crisis. They noted that many women who started small businesses in order to survive have become the primary breadwinners in their households.

“ During the conflict period, the economy in Libya was greatly destroyed. At this stage, I discovered that from the womb of suffering, ideas are born. We saw women who were creative in their work with small projects, and they had an excellent income and returns from them.”

Many participants in the interviews and focus groups pointed out that, even though these new roles meant more pressure on women as they balanced work and household care, this was a positive example of Libyan women proving their adaptability and creativity in times of economic uncertainty.

To sum up, women have encountered many challenges to their economic participation, and the war and conflicts have had a further negative impact women's engagement in the economic sphere, including due to the dire security situation and increased safety concerns. At the same time, women have managed to navigate their way through the economic crisis¹⁵ and have led many private businesses. This has increased the visibility of women's economic engagement and shed greater light on the important role women play in economy.

Challenges and Barriers

The aim of this chapter is to examine and provide a better understanding of the challenges and barriers that impede women's full participation in the economy.

The Inclusion Gap and Glass Ceiling

There is significant evidence that points to the importance of greater meaningful participation of women in public life, and that this positively impacts nations' social, economic and political development. This has been endorsed in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, where support for women's full and effective participation and equal

¹⁵ Al-Fanar Media, “Libyan Women Push for a Bigger Role in Rebuilding Their Country”, 8 March 2020.



opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in public life is one of the targets of the Gender Equality goal.¹⁶

All of the participants in the research agreed in the importance of women's representation and participation both politically and economically. This is not only a measure of the success for the women's movement in the country, but has also inevitably contributed to social progress.

Notably, 52 per cent of the participants explicitly pointed out that the lack of women's representation in the economic sphere weakened their role in the economy in general and did not allow them to meet their financial needs. One participant explained that *"The lack of women in economic positions hinders and delays women in the economy in general"*.

The lack of women's representation in public and private economic institutions remains an important challenge for women in Libya. This systematic exclusion of women means that the potential of highly qualified and needed human resources remains untapped. This was confirmed by 21 per cent of the study's participants, who stated that greater women's structural and institutional inclusion at the economic decision-making level would better address women's needs, as women, assumingly, would be supporting women and, consequentially, this would lead to women's substantive representation.

The advancement of Libyan women's experience in economic leadership positions has also been challenging – the glass ceiling in Libya is thick. Women face immense obstacles to reaching and maintaining leadership positions. Such leadership positions for women are often limited to stereotypically feminine domains and positions, such as in the Ministry of Social Affairs. Although, statistically, women make up of the majority of employees in the education and health sectors, the leadership of these sectors has historically been dominated by men.¹⁷

Another issue in the workplace is that qualified women are pushed to perform functions that do not lead to managerial positions. These glass walls hinder women in the economic sphere and help to explain the absence of women from economic decision-making processes. Half of all participants emphasised that women are notably excluded from decision-making spaces and leadership within economic institutions and the private sector:

¹⁶ UN Sustainable Development Goals, "[Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls](#)".

¹⁷ Bugaighis, Hala & Tantoush, Mohamed, "[Women in the Libyan Job Market, Reality and Challenges](#)", Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2017.



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“ Unfortunately, the participation of women in economic institutions is almost non-existent. Also, the gender perspective is clearly absent, and the roles of women in parallel institutions and organisations for entrepreneurship and the proposals for policymaking are unclear and inconspicuous.”

Institutionalised Discrimination

The lack of institutionalised support policies and access to opportunities is another structural barrier that impedes women's inclusion and engagement in workplaces. Some respondents (32 per cent) stressed that the lack of supportive legislation, whether in the form of laws and regulations that directly affect and support women or other legislation relevant to the activities of and for women, is a barrier. Some participants (20.5 per cent) noted that, even where there is no restrictive legislation or inclusive legislation exists, there are often problems regarding implementation.

“ The sexist society does not want to implement [the laws] and hinders everything — for example, the right [for Libyan women] to pass down citizenship to their children. The law exists. But due to the lack of implementing regulation and because of the male reluctance to issue it, the children of Libyan women and their Libyan mothers suffer to this day from many challenges, despite there being a law permitting [this].”

In the economic sphere, the laws and regulations related to banking and financial management do not discriminate based on gender. Most banking products and services, however, are not designed to support the micro and small businesses typically owned by women.¹⁸ A majority of participants (73 per cent) cited the limited number of funding opportunities that are specifically targeted at women as a barrier. This includes financing or funding both publicly, by the government, and privately, through banks.

While women and men legally have equal access to bank credits and loans, a number (13.6 per cent) of participants noted challenges for women in accessing bank credit to finance their projects and businesses. This might be due to the fact that women rarely own land or property in Libya and, therefore, do not have the required collateral to take out loans for their businesses.

Another issue identified by study participants in the economic sphere is the lack or ineffectiveness of women-focused bodies and entities to enable and empower women, supporting their businesses and widening their marketing and sales networks. Entities

¹⁸ USAID, "[Libya Gender Analysis: Identification of Constraints, Opportunities & Best Practices in USAID/Libya](#)", June 2020.



like the businesswomen councils, women's business incubators and business centres can play a vital role in supporting women in business, but their activities are limited and ineffective.

Toxic Culture and Environment

Another institutional barrier identified in the study pertains to institutionalised toxic and hateful cultures and norms that disadvantage and marginalise women.

Men's dominance in political and economic decision-making institutions is a major obstacle to women's equality. Some participants (20.5 per cent) explained that men continue to dominate and control the political and economic sectors, either in tribal settings or within the political parties. Men design the decision-making process, and they hold power over women in these domains.

They also retain control through informal, inaccessible decision-making spaces, in the form of "men's clubs", as highlighted by 18 per cent of study participants. Many decisions are made in informal settings between men, typically at times and in locations where women are excluded due to social norms. Inevitably, therefore, women are excluded from any meaningful participation and engagement in the workplace, whether economically or politically.

" In many decisions involving the mayor of the municipality [where my colleagues used to be representatives], the men used to make decisions at night-time while playing cards and drinking coffee at home, and women could not attend [these informal meetings]."

When it comes to women's job performance, some participants (11 per cent) said that if and when a woman makes a mistake or fails in some way, this will be blamed on her gender and used to legitimise biases and stereotypes asserting that women are unqualified for certain roles.

Workplace Attitudes and Biases

Cultural and social norms place different limitations on Libyan women from different backgrounds. Women have different experiences in workplaces depending on their geographical regions, educational levels or social classes. For example, women in rural or tribal areas face greater pressure to adhere to strict social norms relevant to work and

" [One of the main challenges of women's participation in political life] is the stereotype that women are not able to understand the complexities of work and deal with problems."



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employment, while this pressure may not be as strong in cities. This can affect women's participation and engagement in public life.¹⁹

As already mentioned, negative stereotypes are a challenge women face in public life. A significant number of participants (41 per cent) highlighted pervasive gender stereotypes and biases regarding what women can and should do. According to the participants, the most frequent stereotypes are related to women's supposed inability to balance work and household chores, to them supposedly being too emotional to make decisions and being too easily influenced by others, and that women are only suitable for administrative and business support work. Those stereotypes undermine women's abilities and qualifications and play a pivotal role in hindering women's ability to progress in their careers.

Another form of toxic attitude in workplaces was identified by a majority of participants (59 per cent) – that of attacks on women in the forms of bullying, harassment and hate campaigns that discourage and intimidate them, and against which there is a lack of effective disciplinary policies and workplace protection mechanisms.²⁰ Participants also reported a common practice in workplaces, where men appropriate ideas or solutions proposed by women, and then take credit for them without mentioning their source. Another is to assign men to business trips and missions, while avoiding doing so for women, which negatively affects women's opportunities for career development and promotions in the workplace.

Family and Gender Division of Labour

Globally, the debate on the importance of unpaid care work is leading to greater recognition of this as an economic activity and an important factor for the individual and social wellbeing.²¹ This unpaid work remains overlooked, however, in the policies and national plans in many countries, including in Libya.

Throughout history, Libyan women have played an essential role in household economies and management in both urban and rural areas.²² Traditionally, Libyan women spend more time on unpaid care than men, on activities like cooking, shopping, cleaning and caring for children, the ill and the elderly, all of which are common responsibilities expected of women, according to social norms.

¹⁹ Bugaighis, Hala & Tantoush, Mohamed, "Women in the Libyan Job Market", *op. cit.*, note 17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Joseph E. Stiglitz, Amartya Sen & Jean-Paul Fitoussi, "Report by the Commission on the

Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress", CMEPSP, January 2009.

²² Bugaighis, Hala & Tantoush, Mohamed, "Women in the Libyan Job Market", *op. cit.*, note 17.



This was also reflected in the research results, as the unpaid work and labour division was not mentioned in most of the discussions. Only (29.6 per cent) participants, themselves women, identified gender roles and the gender division of labour as obstacles for women in reaching decision-making positions. An even smaller number of participants (13.6 per cent) underscored that women's household duties impede their opportunities to access and control independent funds or assets to support them in gaining loans or pursuing investment opportunities.

In the years following the conflicts, more pressure was put on women to generate income as families faced increasing financial strains.²³ This has created a double burden for women. Notably, this has been an extra burden on internally displaced women, who, due to security concerns, have had better opportunities than men to find jobs in low-paid private businesses or starting home-based businesses. This has not been accompanied by changes in gender roles at work or in the household.

²³ World Bank Group, *Libya Economic Monitor, Spring 2021* (Washington, D.C.: International Bank

for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank 2021).

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report reaffirms that women's participation in all spheres of Libyan public life is essential for fostering the recovery and rebuilding of the country. The recommendations below seek to highlight ways to address the challenges impeding the meaningful participation of Libyan women in public life, and aim to provide guidance to all actors in designing effective policies and interventions to remove these impediments.

Recommendations for Legislative and Executive Bodies

- Review and provide analysis of all legislation, regulations and public policies, and assess the effectiveness of these laws to protect women from any discriminatory acts, and particularly ensure there are measures to ensure women's representation in elected public bodies at all levels, coupled with effective enforcement measures.
- Allocate financial and technical resources to develop a national gender strategy to support women in all sectors.
- Seek to achieve gender parity in all decision-making bodies, by establishing time-bound targets to increase women's representation. This includes implementing mechanisms for the monitoring and evaluation of political parties' gender policies and practices.
- Develop mechanisms or special measures to increase the number of women in party leadership, as well as electoral laws and regulations that ensure effective gender quotas are included for elected positions.
- Develop better quantitative and qualitative indicators to allow the measurement of changes and development in gender equality at the institutional and community levels, including in performance indicators for staff in both the private and public sectors.
- Introduce measures to include a gender quota system for the boards of public and private companies of a certain size. Adopting the Netherlands' approach could be good practice.²⁴ This approach began with the introduction of a requirement for at least 30 per cent representation for each sex among board members in large companies, combined with a "comply or explain" mechanism. This approach was

²⁴ Government of the Netherlands, "[New Legislation Will Improve Gender Diversity on](#)

[Corporate Boards](#)", Netherlands Government website, 29 September 2021.



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recently replaced with a law that imposes a penalty on companies failing to comply with this obligation.

- Develop a set of innovative policies to improve access to childcare and maternity benefits, including flexible working hours or a promotion system that takes maternity benefits into consideration. Policymakers should consider introducing parental leave policies, including for men, to increase men's participation in childcare, and introducing working father-friendly nurseries at the workplace.

Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations

- Develop innovative monitoring plans to evaluate and assess the implementation of commitments related to gender equality by the government, legislatures and other relevant actors, and ensure these are held accountable for progress in increasing women's participation and representation in public life.
- Build and/or strengthen existing alliances with men's and other women's organisations to advocate for and promote women's participation in public life.
- Place a special focus on education and media awareness to promote a violence-free culture and principles of respect towards women in public life, with an emphasis on changing harmful norms and combating discriminatory behaviour in public places and workplaces.
- Design a long-term strategy for changing negative societal norms related to women's role in public life by highlighting economically and politically successful women and their impacts/contributions.
- Create a Libyan Businesswomen's Council, with the aim of intervening and advising on economic policies and a focus on the interests of women and educating women economically, as well as advocating for an inclusive business ecosystem.

Recommendations for the United Nations Bodies and Multilateral/Bilateral Donors

- Make gender a core element in the design and implementation of development and economic recovery programmes in Libya.
- Provide technical support aligned with the local context to facilitate women's engagement in public life and build their capacity to play effective roles at the political and economic decision-making levels.
- Continue promoting women's meaningful participation and interests in peace and political negotiations, and at the highest levels of power. Establish long-term



media campaigns and awareness-raising programmes to normalise the notion of women in decision-making and leadership roles.

Recommendations for All Actors

- Design projects to build awareness among women leaders and politicians on their role in representing the interests of women and women's causes.
- Take serious action to address the gaps in gender and equality data, and ensure that data is sufficiently disaggregated to allow for meaningful equality analysis and public policy development.
- Carry out further research on the cost of gender inequality, the impact made by current female leaders on women's engagement in public life, and on men's perspectives on topics related to gender equality.
- Give more emphasis in development programmes to the existing women-focused bodies and entities to ensure their effectiveness in supporting women. Existing bodies such as the Women's Empowerment Unit, Ministry of Women and the Women's Bloc in parliament should have a more active role in proposing and implementing reform policies to support women in public life.
- Adopt necessary mechanisms and measures to protect women politicians, candidates and women activists. This protection should extend to measures to prevent cybercrime and online hate speech against women.



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