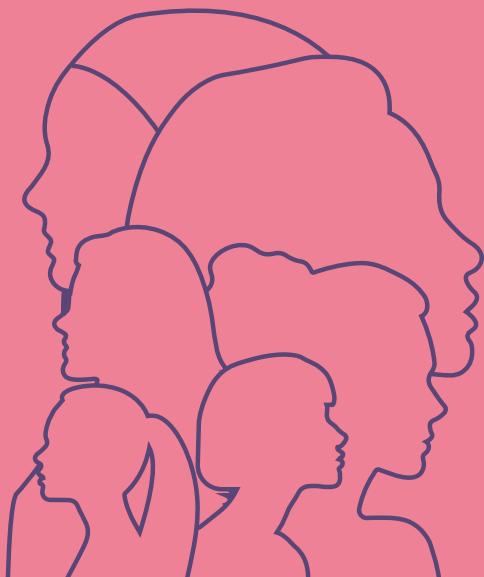




**Women's Economic Empowerment in the
Private Sector:
Women's Representation and Participation in
Decision-Making Positions as a Necessary Tool**

**Policy Paper (2):
Enhancing women's participation in decision-making
positions at the level of private sector establishments
to enhance women's economic empowerment within
these establishments**



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Publications of the Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development

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Explanatory Introduction

Over the past five months, the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) has prepared a detailed study for the Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development (PWWS), titled “Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Private Sector: Women’s Representation and Participation in Decision-Making Positions as a Necessary Tool.”

In its six chapters, the study covers a wide range of topics related to women’s empowerment, such as women’s participation in the Palestinian labor market, their work in the informal sector and unpaid care work, in addition to their participation in decision-making positions. The study also included a descriptive and diagnostic analysis of women’s participation in the labor market, a qualitative analysis of women’s entrepreneurship and a quantitative analysis on economic violence, in addition to other topics related to women’s empowerment.

One of the study’s chapters contains a detailed and comprehensive presentation of the research findings, and each policy summary will focus on one of the study’s main themes and present key recommendations that would enhance women’s economic empowerment.

Brief Background

Women rarely occupy senior positions in private sector institutions and companies, including those engaged in women’s entrepreneurship. Women are also absent from boards of directors and executive management. The importance of women’s representation in the private sector is heightened when considering the impact of this lack of representation on the rights of working women, especially in light of the Palestinian social and cultural context characterized by patriarchy, which in turn impacts the decision-making process within these institutions.

Given the importance of women’s presence on boards of directors, as it plays a vital role in creating an encouraging and economically stimulating work environment that contributes to women’s empowerment, it is imperative to address the non-material causes underlying women’s underrepresentation.

This underrepresentation is not related to a lack of skills, but rather to the prevailing social culture that relegates women's roles to the lower levels of the career hierarchy.

Guiding companies to translate the principles of women's economic empowerment from theoretical framework to practical application, through the adoption of effective internal procedures, is essential to ensuring equality and fairness in the distribution of roles and positions within these companies, and to enhancing women's participation at the policy and administrative decision-making levels. This requires adopting comprehensive strategies based on providing equal opportunities and encouraging companies to integrate the concepts of equality into their corporate culture. Although Palestinian laws, regulations, and directives related to the private sector emphasize the need to achieve gender equality, which means that the regulatory environment for this principle has been established theoretically and legally, implementation on the ground remains weak.

In order to strengthen this concept and translate it into practical practices on the ground, a starting point is necessary. This starting point begins with the Palestinian private sector, through the adoption of mechanisms that enhance the participation and empowerment of women in decision-making positions at the institutional level within private sector establishments. However, these mechanisms still face numerous challenges. Therefore, policies and interventions must be adopted at all levels to overcome these challenges. These policies and interventions apply to the vast majority of private sector establishments across various sectors.

Key Findings and Challenges

The analysis of findings revealed that academic achievement has a significant impact on women's economic activity. It showed that women are predominantly employed in technical and specialized positions, followed by legislative positions, senior positions, and decision-making positions. On the other hand, women are less represented in specialized, technical, and senior positions within the informal sector, where their participation is more concentrated in primary occupations, crafts, industrial and agricultural jobs, and machinery operation, to a greater extent than in the formal sector. These

results highlight the importance of education in empowering women to reach leadership, legislative, and decision-making positions, particularly within formal sector institutions. This makes education a catalyst for economic empowerment, leading to women's financial independence.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that education is not a single factor in achieving women's economic empowerment. Rather, it is intertwined with an array of other influential factors, such as actual participation in the labor market, the prevailing patriarchal culture and economic violence against women by family or society. Despite high levels of education among women, their presence in board of directors and decision-making positions remains weak. This is reflected in the phenomenon known as the "glass ceiling," which indicates the presence of hidden obstacles that hinder women's advancement. Women believe that their presence in these positions does not bring about a radical change in the nature of the work of these institutions with regard to empowerment, but rather is limited to superficial changes regarding women's empowerment. This is due to the persistence of a social culture that hinders actual empowerment. Interviews also revealed women's lack of confidence in themselves and their ability to be present in decision-making or leadership positions like men.

Proposed policy recommendations and interventions:

- 1. Addressing cultural determinants** that hinder women's representation to enhance women's economic empowerment. This can be achieved by designing awareness campaigns targeting men on the importance of women's participation in decision-making positions, and enhancing confidence in the competencies that women need to assume leadership positions in governmental establishments and institutions.
- 2. Continuing campaigns to encourage women's higher education** in order to enhance women's presence in senior positions within the institutional hierarchy.
- 3. Promoting the concept of gender inclusivity** in the decision-making process through launching awareness campaigns and developing a

regulatory framework and internal regulations that consolidate this concept within institutions.

4. **Implementing legal amendments** through the Ministry of National Economy to obligate boards of directors and executive management in private sector establishments, especially those currently registered, to adopt a quota system requiring women to comprise 40% of the members of the board of directors and executive management.
5. **Developing a legal framework** that includes comprehensive strategies and instructions to consolidate the concept of gender equality with regard to representation in decision-making positions, as well as with regard to internal policies concerning employee rights and benefits.
6. **Urging the Ministry of National Economy** to encourage the registered establishments to review their internal regulations and laws in order to ensure and enhance the positions of women working at various organizational levels within the institutional structure and promote gender inclusivity in administrative and senior professional positions within the establishments. Additionally, it has to direct them to adopt the principles of economic empowerment, specifically those related to the effective participation of women in institutional decision-making positions.
7. **Establishing a unified body** comprising all female private sector workers from various unions and conduct awareness campaigns in cooperation with relevant entities, such as the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Women, under the leadership of the Private Sector Coordination Council.
8. **Launching specialized training programs** in leadership and management by unions, in cooperation with partner entities, with the aim of enabling women to acquire the skills required to assume leadership positions within establishments. Moreover, providing financial support for targeted training and development programs to enhance women's leadership skills.

9. **Launching awareness campaigns** aimed at encouraging establishments to employ and promote women to leadership positions, in addition to creating incentive programs and appreciation awards for outstanding women. Promoting the nomination of women to boards of directors by general assemblies, as well.
10. **Providing advisory services to establishments** to help them develop recruitment and promotion policies that encourage women to hold leadership positions. Organizing events and providing communication platforms for women in leadership positions to discuss the challenges facing women in leadership fields, exchange experiences, provide support and motivation, and promote transparent communication about available opportunities and review progress made in enhancing women's presence in decision-making positions. This is in addition to developing clear plans for promoting women in the establishment and enhancing opportunities for career advancement, as well as providing flexible work options, such as remote work or flexible working hours, to meet the needs of women working in the establishments, encouraging individual agreements for flexible work and providing the necessary support.
11. **Developing specialized technical and vocational training programs** targeting women, with a focus on practical skills such as marketing, understanding local and international market requirements as well as safety and environmental standards. It is also recommended to offer specialized programs in various fields, which enhances knowledge and facilitates women's active participation in the decision-making process.

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