



# THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN LIBYA

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THE JUSOOR CENTER FOR STUDIES AND  
DEVELOPMENT IS A LIBYAN NON-GOVERNMENTAL  
ORGANIZATION COMMITTED TO INDEPENDENT POLICY  
RESEARCH AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT ON ECONOMIC  
AND SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT PROJECTS WITH A  
SPECIAL FOCUS ON WOMEN.

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### **Dedication**

We dedicate this report to all the Libyan human rights activists, who supported and understood women's issues and fought for greater inclusion and tolerance. To Salwa Bugaighis, Fariha Al Barqawy, Tarik Bensaoud, and the many courageous Libyans who sacrificed their lives for a better future for Libya.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a broad summary of the challenges currently facing Libyan women. Jusoor has focused the report on five major areas: structural exclusion from politics and decision-making roles, the impact of arbitrary rule on violations of a woman's dignity especially through sexual violence, the effect of war on public health maternity centers, the impact of civil war on the Libyan economy as well as the systematic exclusion of women from the labor market and finally, certain challenges faced by women with the international community's support for development in Libya. While we accept that the deteriorating situation in Libya affects women and men alike, this argument obfuscates the lived experiences of many Libyan women who face discrimination, abuse and gender-based violence in silence. Jusoor aims to work against this by shedding light on the lived experiences through the power of advocacy and research.

In the backdrop of an ongoing military conflict, this report argues for more open dialogue about the challenges facing Libyan women. These gender issues and challenges are supported by evidence from Jusoor online journal reports, secondary sources and contributions made by anonymous activists working on the ground in Libya. It is important to keep the names of such activists anonymous for their own security. Although the security threat is high, this report on Libyan women underlines the crucial need to speak about the challenges even in the face of adversity.

Although evidence in this report is mainly sourced from Libya's two largest cities of Tripoli and Benghazi, we would like to state that every region, city and village has its own unique challenges and problems. Jusoor has tried to expose projects in Fezzan, such as the bazaar peacebuilding initiative, and will continue to welcome submissions from remote areas of Libya to ensure greater inclusivity.

On International Women's Day, we launch this report as a gesture of our commitment to seeing a Libyan society built on respect for rule of law, equality of opportunity and intolerant to all forms of gender-based violence.

## **WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE**

### **Structural Exclusion of Libyan Women**

In Libyan history, 2011 marked an important shift in the political paradigm of the country. Many Libyan women led this wave of change through their active engagement in protests across several major cities in the country. Their presence was apparent in protests, outside courts and on social media. While the end of 42 years of Gaddafi rule was achieved, the structural exclusion of women from positions of authority continued. For instance, Libyan women were not represented considerably in the first interim governmental authority, the National Transitional Council (NTC) and in city councils. The percentage of Libyan women in the NTC was a mere 4%, and 0% in the city councils. These percentages reflect the structural exclusion of Libyan women from positions of political authority and decision-making.

However 7 July 2012 marked a turning point in Libyan women's political representation in the public sphere. Over six hundred women put their names forward as candidates for the second interim governmental authority, the General National Congress (GNC). Out of 200 seats, thirty-three women won a seat in the election, which meant woman presence in the GNC stood at nearly 17%. In 2014, the percentage of Libyan women elected to parliament was 16%. Even with these promising percentages, woman representation in successive governments remained low, and no women were appointed to decision-making ministerial roles.

Despite calls from the United Nations to adopt a quota of 30% to attain greater women representation, women represent a mere 6% in the current Government of National Accord (GNA). In addition to this, each city council has a woman representative out of its six members with the exception of the city councils of Zintan and Jadou, who have excluded women from representation.

Jusoor aims to conduct more research to examine why Libyan women remain structurally excluded from the political sphere, and how this can be overcome. We welcome more work on the efficacy of women in politics in terms of dealing with corruption and money laundering in government. More work also needs to be done to underline the benefits to greater society of having more women in politics and decision-making positions.

## **Women's Empowerment Unit**

On 15 December 2015, the Women's Empowerment Unit (WEU) was created as a major element of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) signed in Skhirat, Morocco. Article 11 of the LPA stipulated that "the Government of National Accord shall commit itself to the formation of a Women Support and Empowerment Unit under the Presidency of the Council of Ministers." Soon after the appointment of the Presidential Council, there was a call for fair representation of women in the GNA. However during a speech to the House of Representatives, Dr. Fathi Majbri, a member of the Presidential Council, stated that these demands were not possible.<sup>1</sup> He argued that 25% is a large percentage for a developing country like Libya, and that even developed countries have not achieved this level of representation. He added that empowerment should start with a bottom-up approach and not a top-down approach.

A year after signing the agreement, a long-awaited decree, 201-2016, was issued by the Presidential Council to establish the Women's Empowerment Unit after pressure from many actors but it did not meet expectations due to its vagueness. Nevertheless, UNSMIL welcomed the decree, with the special representative Mr. Kobler stating: "I congratulate Libyan women on this development [because it is] a key step to giving women a stronger role in political life. Women and men should work hand in hand to build a peaceful and prosperous future for Libya."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Libya Channel, Dr. Fathi Majbri's speech, February 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-UkpIOA6lJs>

<sup>2</sup>UNSMIL Press Release, September 2016. Retrieved from: <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=5662&ctl=Details&mid=6187&ItemID=2099708&language=en-US>.

Apart from the signing of the decree and UNSMIL's message above, there has been little progress to date on this issue. In our view, this is due to two main reasons. First, members of the Presidential Council clearly do not consider women's empowerment to be a priority for the country. Second, several women groups are backing the appointment of certain directors for political reasons, which has created conflicts between political and non-political actors, and delayed the process.

## **Ministry of Women and Community Development**

Besides attending selected events inside and outside the country, and meeting with international delegates, there is no news or reports from the Ministry of Women and Community Development. Since the appointment of the GNA, the ministry has not presented any strategy or plans, carried out any activities, issued any press releases and does not even have social media accounts. This vacuum emphasizes the need for civil society organizations, like Jusoor, to advocate for human development initiatives, and the specific gendered problems affecting Libyan women.

## **Policy recommendations:**

1. The government, the international community and other actors must reaffirm their intent and work proactively to fulfil their commitment to women under the Libyan Political Agreement.
2. Consider adopting the quota of 30% to attain greater women's representation in the Libyan government and ensure that more women are considered for leadership positions.

## **RULE OF LAW**

In the security vacuum left by the fall of the Gaddafi regime, many parts of Libya are now under the control of armed militia groups. The institutions that fell with the demise of the Gaddafi regime were difficult to rebuild due to the circulation of weapons and lack of national consensus. Civil society organizations and activists however believe in the urgent need for a return to law and order to begin the reconstruction of the country. Amongst many factors, it is a culture of impunity in Libya that is preventing the establishment of rule of law on a national level. These include the arbitrary laws set by militia groups or by the patriarch in a family, which determine the rights of the people residing under the system. This culture of impunity vis-à-vis human rights violations has existed in Libya for a long time. But, we argue that it is structurally ingrained when it comes to discussions over the position and rights of women in Libyan society. This is because there are laws/cultural customs, which are inherently gendered, discriminating against Libyan women and depriving them of many freedoms that are accorded naturally to Libyan men.

## **Discrimination against Libyan Women married to non-Libyans**

Currently, Libyan women married to non-Libyan citizens are denied the right to a national number, and therefore to a Libyan passport. This has prevented them from voting in the 2012 and 2014 national elections, and denies them and their Libyan-born children access to citizenship rights. Libyan-born children of Libyan mothers and non-Libyan fathers are also denied access to citizenship, while children of Libyan fathers and non-Libyan mothers are offered citizenship. Although a law was passed in 2010 to allow Libyan women to pass down their nationality, it has remained ineffective due to an escalation of events. Since 2011, there have been some protests in favor of naturalizing children with a Libyan mothers. Many Libyan women speak of the racism, stigma and discrimination that they face from family and society

after marrying a non-Libyan.<sup>3</sup> Greater support for this cause is required, to raise awareness about the injustice of a citizenship system that punishes the major transmitter of Libyan culture and customs: the Libyan woman.

## **Civil Rights Discrimination**

Although Libyan women played a crucial role in the revolution, the spirit of equality and respect was stripped away with male political figures ensuring the continuation of female subjugation. For instance, on Liberation day (23 October, 2011), the Chairman of the NTC, Mustafa Abdul Jalil, announced that the practice of polygamy in Libya would be restored without the requirement of a spouse or court's permission. The announcement was a violation of Libyan Law 22, which stipulates that a man must obtain permission from his wife before remarrying. This was a major setback and sent a strong warning signal to Libyan women about attitudes towards their participation in the public sphere.

This speech set a precedent for what was to come in Libya. More and more women and men in civil society as well as human and women's rights sphere faced criticism, cyber-bullying and death threats. With the spread of weapons and lack of rule of law, many of these cyber-threats turned into actions. The threats escalated with the murder of human rights activists like Salwa Bugaighis. On 25 June 2014, Salwa Bugaighis was assassinated in her home shortly after casting her vote in the second post-revolution parliamentary election in Benghazi. She believed that dialogue was the only way to solve Libyan disputes and advocated for this as the Deputy Chair of the National Dialogue Initiative. The destruction of her family home and the kidnapping of her husband Essam el-Gheraini were clearly carried out to spread fear in the country, and further silence the voices of advocates for dialogue and democracy.

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<sup>3</sup> France24 Arabic, News video "Libyan Women Married to Non-Libyans Pay a High Price", May 2014. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LISF6zomNmM>.

Another advocate for peace and dialogue, Fariha Al Barqawy was also assassinated three weeks later on a street in the eastern city of Derna. Like in the case of Salwa Bugaighis, this assassination was not investigated. Yet there is no doubt that these assassinations have inculcated fear in many (potential) advocates for a fairer Libyan society. We remember these courageous Libyan women, as well as many others for their determination to fight for their vision of a more just society.

## **Gender-based Violence against Libyan Women**

In the Maghreb, Libya is often thought of as having a very conservative society and culture. While it is true that Libya remains more conservative than its democratic neighbor Tunisia, this cultural conservatism allows acts of gender-based violence (GBV) like rape, domestic beating and molestation to be silenced. Cultural misogyny blames the woman for misbehaving, wearing “tight” clothes or being unaccompanied in a public space, which may have provoked the attacks. These comments exist on a mass scale via social media channels like Facebook and Twitter where any debate over dealing with sexual harassment is shut down by comments laying blame on Libyan women. Many incidents have been reported of militiamen kidnapping girls for revenge against an enemy tribe.

In Tripoli, a video of a young girl raped by militiamen went viral, causing the hashtag *Sandak wilaya* to circulate online, raising awareness about the heinous nature of gender-based violence.<sup>4</sup> A few days later, another video of a rape was released; this time, it was militia from/in Al Marj (a city in the east of the country). In Benghazi, displaced families living in schools reported intoxicated men stalking young girls at night and outside public bathrooms. But due to the firmly ingrained cultural misogyny espoused by society, women are blamed for this sexual violence, causing a rise in suicide attempts by girls who have been impregnated by their rapists. This information was recorded through a personal communication with an activist working on the

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<sup>4</sup> The New Arab, “Outrage in Libya after girl gang-raped by militiamen”, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2016/12/12/outrage-in-libya-after-woman-gang-raped-by-militiamen>.

ground in Libya. Unfortunately, most acts of GBV remain undocumented due to the stigma, fear of militia reprisals and the lack of solidarity amongst civil society organizations to record data on these gender-based violations.

## **Gender-based Violence against Migrants and Refugees**

Libya has become the main active coast for migration to Europe. The continuous deterioration of security has encouraged human trafficking from Africa to Europe. A recent survey released by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) revealed that nearly half of migrant women and children interviewed reported their exposure to frequent sexual abuses during their journey and in Libya.<sup>5</sup> The survey highlighted that 256,000 migrants were documented in Libya out of which 30,803 were women and 23,102 children although UNICEF estimated that the numbers were likely three times more.

Human Rights Watch found that the detention centers in Libya lack basic requirements such as sanitation, food, ventilation and health services.<sup>6</sup> Terrifying stories of rape, looting, unpaid labor, GBV, physical and mental abuses are widely documented via reports and video clips. The 2017 UNICEF report on migrant experiences in Libya underlines GBV committed against women and children like rape and forced prostitution.<sup>7</sup> The sexual violence against migrants in Libya emphasizes that GBV is real and is being recorded by INGOs for the migrant category. The recorded cases of sexual violence emphasizes a major problem hidden due to social stigma.

## **Restrictions against Libyan Women's Mobility**

On 16 February 2017, the Chief of Staff for the Libyan National Army and Military Governor of Eastern Libya issued a decree banning women 18-60 years old from travelling without a chaperon/guardian. The order violates Article 3 and

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<sup>5</sup> UNICEF press release, 'A deadly journey for children: The migration route from North Africa to Europe' February 2017. Retrieved from: [https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_94941.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_94941.html).

<sup>6</sup> Human Right Watch, 'Libya, events of 2015' 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/libya>.

<sup>7</sup> Reuters on the 2017 UNICEF Report on Migrant Women and Children, February 2017. Retrieved from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/28/women-child-migrants-raped-beaten-detained-libyan-hellholes/>.

12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CEDAW), Article 12 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, Article 6 and 14 of the Temporary Constitutional Declaration, and Article 31 of the LPA. The order was based on claims that travelling women constitute a national security risk to Libya. Individual Libyan women's mobility (without a male guardian) is not widely accepted especially in the smaller towns and villages of Libya. The declining security status, increased harassment incidents as well as the widespread presence of irresponsible militia personnel has had a negative impact on women's freedom and led society to support the travel ban. Due to public and civil society mobilization, the decree was frozen and another gender-neutral decree was announced banning both men and women (18-45 years) from travelling without security approval.

### **Policy recommendations:**

1. The various governments and militias must ensure security across Libya.
2. The voices of women in reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives should be promoted throughout Libya.
3. A women's coalition needs to be formed to research and record GBV crimes against Libyan and migrant women, highlighting that rape continues to be used as a weapon of war.
4. To begin helping Libyan women that are married to non-Libyans and ensure their rights as citizens are protected by strengthening the support network in Libya.

## GENDER AND PUBLIC HEALTH

The World Health Organization (WHO) briefing report on Benghazi (Libya) argues that the health system has nearly collapsed.<sup>8</sup> For example, in October 2017, five major hospitals went out of service in Benghazi due to the armed conflict within the city. This essentially meant the collapse of maternal and psychiatric health care facilities. Since then, women's health care services have continued to deteriorate.<sup>9</sup> Jomhuriya Hospital was also the largest maternal hospital in Benghazi and the most complicated cases were transferred to the hospital to obtain "advanced management". However, this hospital was destroyed and women are now required to seek medical care at private clinics, which are costly for the average Libyan family. The only other option is Benghazi Medical Center (BMC), which is mainly a military hospital with sparse medical resources. Women are required to get all disposable medical equipment including gloves and gauze for delivery or surgical procedures. More crucially, the BMC hospital is not a safe environment for women (staff and patients) especially at night since sexual harassment has become a daily occurrence. At night, there have been reports of attempted rapes targeting female personnel and patients. It was also reported that a 10-year-old girl was raped by one of the guards at the hospital. Yet due to a lack of security and widespread corruption, it is difficult to obtain a transparent and full investigation of this rape.

### Drug Addiction

In Libya, drug consumption has always existed despite the social stigma. During the 2011 revolution, Gaddafi accused opposition of being under the influence of drugs while simultaneously his regime was reported to have distributed drugs among youth. In Libyan society, drug consumption and the image of a drug addict is highly gendered with Libyan men being considered

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<sup>8</sup> World Health Organisation, 'A briefing on the health situation in Libya' June 2016. Retrieved from:  
[https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/libya\\_presentation\\_for\\_iasc\\_briefing\\_health\\_needs\\_22\\_june\\_2016\\_am\\_0.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/libya_presentation_for_iasc_briefing_health_needs_22_june_2016_am_0.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> World Health Organisation, 'Human crisis in Libya' May 2015. Retrieved from:  
<file:///C:/Users/NADawa25Feb14/Documents/Women/Hala/Libya%20health%20sit.pdf>

the usual culprits. Through personal communications with activists, reports of drug addiction amongst women are emerging across Libyan cities. Families struggle to recognize the symptoms of drug addiction, and have little faith in openly speaking about drug consumption. Of course, the dearth of specialists in this field means that there is a lack of support for families and drug addicts. More needs to be done to break the silence, and to record the numbers of drug users to deal with the public health problem more effectively.

### **Policy recommendations:**

1. Safe and affordable health care services must be provided to women in a timely manner.
2. Confidential psychological and health support services need to be established for women and girls affected by gender-based violence.
3. Consider an awareness campaign on the risks of drug addiction and ways of spotting the signs of addiction.

## WOMEN IN THE ECONOMY

### Labor Market participation before the 2011 Revolution

The Libyan economy is heavily dependent on oil exports. Between 2001 and 2011, the Gaddafi regime carried out minimal economic reforms to reduce pressure and demand on the public sector.<sup>10</sup> However, the reforms were considered insufficient by young people in Libya who were looking for “better and fairer economic outcomes,” and greater political freedom.<sup>11</sup>

According to the World Bank’s 2006 report on Libya, the country had a 1.8 million active workforce but its unemployment rate was an estimated 25%.<sup>12</sup> Women make up nearly 50% of the Libyan population, but their labor force participation rate was a mere 30% as per Libya’s 2009 Statistic Book.<sup>13</sup> Libyan women’s workforce participation was over 50% in only scientific professions. For the remaining professions, including management, agriculture, services, manufacturing and trade, their representation in the workforce ranged from 3.5% to 21%.<sup>14</sup>

The question is how can the loss in Libyan women’s lack of participation in the labor force be quantified? To begin, it is important to highlight that Libya’s gross domestic product (GDP) in 2007, which is a broad indicator for a country’s economic well-being, was US\$ 67.5 billion.<sup>15</sup> Of this amount, oil rents consisted of nearly 58% of the GDP (or US\$ 39.15 billion).<sup>16</sup> Oil rents, which are Libya’s earnings from extracting this natural resource, can substantially inflate GDP. If removed, it could provide a better indicator of

<sup>10</sup> OpenOil UG, *The Libyan Oil Almanac*, OpenOil Reference Guide, Germany, 2012, p. 18.

Retrieved from: <http://openoil.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Libya-PDF-v-2.0.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Martinez, L. ‘Countries at the Crossroads 2011: Libya’, Freedom House, USA, November 2011.

<sup>12</sup> World Bank, ‘Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya Country Economic Report’, from the Social and Economic Development Group, Middle East and North Africa Region, The World Bank, Washington DC (USA), July 2006, pp.17-18.

<sup>13</sup> Great Social People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, ‘Statistic Book 2009’, undertaken by the General Authority for Information and UNDP, Tripoli (Libya).

<sup>14</sup> Great Social People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, ‘Statistic Book 2009’, undertaken by the General Authority for Information and UNDP, Tripoli (Libya).

<sup>15</sup> World Bank, ‘Oil Rents (% of GDP) from 1990 to 2011: Libya’, 2017: Retrieved from:

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PETR.RT.ZS?locations=LY>.

<sup>16</sup> World Bank, ‘Population from 1960 to 2015: Libya’, 2017: Retrieved from:

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=LY>.

people's real contribution to GDP, which in this case would be 42% (or US\$ 28.35 billion).

In 2007, Libya had a population of around 6 million people. According to Dr. Ali Mirza's book entitled "Libya: Lost Opportunities and Renewed Hope", Libya's labor force was 63% of the population (namely, those aged from 15 to 59) or some 3.7 million people.<sup>17</sup> The labor force includes those actively participating in the economy as well as retirees, housewives, students, individuals with medical illnesses and individuals living with disabilities. Of the 3.7 million labor force, it is estimated that 50% (or 1.85 million) were men and 50% (or 1.85 million) were women as per the previous paragraph's population breakdown. Of the 3.7 million labor force, the actual labor participation rate was some 46% or 1.7 million people (consisting of 1.5 million who work and approximately 230,000 unemployed); note, this labor participation rate slightly differs from the figure above of 1.8 million. Of these, only 500,000 women (or nearly 30%, as highlighted in the paragraph above) are part of the active workforce. The remaining 1.2 million (or 70%) are men and they form the bulk of the active workforce. In terms of the total proportion of the labor force, 65% of men and 27% of women are in employment.

Of the 3.7 million labor force, 2 million do not form part of the active workforce and although they consist of retirees, housewives, students, individuals with medical illnesses and individuals living with disabilities, the above calculations make it quite clear that the clear majority of the labor force tranche that does not actively participate are women of working age (an estimated 1.3 million). Not only is Libyan women's labor force participation low but it is also one of the main reasons that Libya's labor participation rate is lower than other countries (note the global average in 2007 was 64%).<sup>18</sup> The

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<sup>17</sup> Mirza, A., *Libya: Lost Opportunities and Renewed Hope*, The Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, Lebanon, 2012, p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> World Bank, 'Labor force participation rate, total from 1990 to 2014, 2017: Retrieved from: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.ZS>.

other issue is as compared to other countries, Libyan women's labor force participation rate of 30% fell short of the global average of 51%.<sup>19</sup>

Essentially, Libyans that actively participated in the workforce should have been some 2.4 million (64%) instead of 1.7 million (46%). Libyan women that actively participated in the workforce should be at least 943,500 (51%) instead of 500,000 (30%) of the women's total labor force of 1.85 million. **The loss in Libya's GDP (net of oil rent) is nearly US\$ 12 billion with US\$ 7.6 billion (or some 63%) directly attributed to losses due to reduced labor participation rates amongst women.**<sup>20</sup>

### **Labor Market participation after the 2011 Revolution**

Attempts were made at the end of the revolution in October 2011 to restore oil production in Libya, but unfortunately a combination of challenges including the protracted political disagreements, internal strife in different parts of the country and the inability to adequately export oil has ensured that the economy "remained in recession" according to the World Bank's 2016 overview.<sup>21</sup> GDP was -24% according to estimates by the UN in 2014 and the unemployment rate decreased to approximately 20%.<sup>22</sup> It is worth highlighting that the reduction in unemployment rate is reportedly masked by the number of people working in various arms of the different public sectors across the three governments (namely the House of Representatives (HoR), the General National Congress (GNC) and the Government of National Accord (GNA)), which has apparently reached a peak of 1.6 million employees (that is, remunerated individuals in governmental parliaments,

<sup>19</sup> World Bank, 'Labor force participation rate, female (%) from 1990 to 2014, 2017: Retrieved from: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?end=2014&start=1990&view=chart>.

<sup>20</sup> The calculation is based on the following formula: Gap in the active workforce is 2.4 million minus 1.7 million, which is 700,000. The gap in women's labor force participation rates is 943,500 minus 500,000, which is 443,500. When considering the percentage gap in female labor force participation as part of the total active workforce gap, it equals 63.36% (or US\$ 7.6 billion) of the US\$ 12 billion loss.

<sup>21</sup> World Bank, 'Country Overview: Libya', The World Bank, Washington DC (USA), March 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/libya/overview>.

<sup>22</sup> UN Data, 'World Statistics Pocketbook: Libya', 2017. Retrieved from: <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=libya>.

ministries, departments, militias and other branches).<sup>23</sup> At the same time, Libya's informal/shadow economy is considered substantial with experts estimating that up to 40% of economic activity is now carried out unofficially. The World Bank's 2016 Overview also highlighted that per capita income in Libya had declined by over 65% and inflation had risen to more than 9% due to "high food prices."

A major issue on Libyan women's contribution to the economy is that official figures – that is, beyond 2015 - on women's participation in the workforce cannot be found possibly due to challenges gathering reliable data. Further, the ongoing political, tribal and security conflict has deeply impacted the political, social and economic situation of the country. Libyan women face an added burden of exclusion, particularly in the areas of peace-building and the economy. As highlighted in an article written by Jusoor for Research and Development, Libyan women have witnessed their access to public space shrink compounded with "increasing limitations in their political, economic and social contributions to the country."<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, there are varied reports on Libyan women and their contribution to the informal economy through entrepreneurial activities as well as setting up small and medium enterprises (SMEs). National Libyan civil society organizations that focus on the empowerment of Libyan women, like Jusoor for Research and Development and Project Silphium, have highlighted women's increasingly important role in the shadow economy to economically empower themselves.<sup>25</sup> Jusoor conducted an interview with a peacebuilding group in Fezzan, which explained the ways in which start-up businesses were empowering Libyan women to succeed despite the security struggles. The project manager Ms. Tumadar El-Hodeiri argued that "the

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<sup>23</sup> World Bank, 'Country Overview: Libya', The World Bank, Washington DC (USA), March 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/libya/overview>.

<sup>24</sup> Jusoor's Op-ed article on Libya Herald, Libya cannot afford to forget its women, July 2016. Retrieved from: <https://wwkkw.libyaherald.com/2016/07/04/op-ed-libya-cannot-afford-to-forget-its-women/>.

<sup>25</sup> Project Silphium, *Libyan Women Entrepreneurs, force to be reckoned*, July 2016. Retrieved from: <https://medium.com/project-silphium/libyan-women-entrepreneurs-force-to-be-reckoned-e36b91ff0327#.t1otcpqq1>.

start-up business programs and bazaars were appreciated by many people in the city of Sebha, and it certainly contributed to returning life to the city.”<sup>26</sup>

The above progress aside, it is worth quantifying the loss in Libyan women’s lack of participation in the labor force after the 2011 revolution. Libya’s GDP in 2015 dropped dramatically to US\$ 39. 4 billion.<sup>27</sup> Of this amount, oil rents consisted of an estimated 33% of the GDP (or US\$ 13 billion)<sup>28</sup> and so, people’s real contribution to GDP has been calculated to be 67% (or US\$ 26.4 billion).

Insecurity has prevented any type of formal population or workforce census to take place in 2016 but assuming all things equal (that is, no considerations for better or more efficient utilization of resources are taken into account) and based on Libya’s average population growth rate of 1.8%, it is estimated that the population increased in 2015 to nearly 6.3 million people according to the World Bank.<sup>29</sup> Approximately 2.3 million, of the population is the current estimated active workforce. <sup>30</sup> Based on the previous section’s assumption that, Libya’s labor force was 63% of the population (namely, those aged from 15 to 59), which would equate to almost 4 million people of which it is estimated that 50% (or 2 million) were men and 50% (or 2 million) were women. Of the 4 million labor force, the actual participation rate was some 52.8% or 2.1 million people<sup>31</sup> (slight differs from the figure above of 2.3 million). Of these, only 30% according to the World Bank<sup>32</sup> (or an estimated 630,000) of women were part of the active workforce. The remaining 1.47

<sup>26</sup> Jusoor’s Al Mufaqira Journal, *Peacebuilding in Fezzan, Libya*, January 2017.

Retrieved from: <https://jusoorly.wordpress.com/2017/01/08/peacebuilding-in-fezzan-libya/>

<sup>27</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, ‘CIA World Factbook, 2015: Retrieved from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ly.html>.

<sup>28</sup> IndexMundi, ‘Libya Oil Rents (% of GDP) 2014’, 2017: Retrieved from: <http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/libya/indicator/NY.GDP.PETR.RT.ZS>.

<sup>29</sup> World Bank, ‘Population from 1960 to 2015: Libya’, 2017: Retrieved from: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=LY>.

<sup>30</sup> World Bank, ‘Total Labor Force: Libya’, 2017: Retrieved from: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.IN?end=2014&locations=LY&start=2014&view=bar>.

<sup>31</sup> World Bank, ‘Labor force participate rate, Libya, 2017: Retrieved from: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.ZS?locations=LY>.

<sup>32</sup> World Bank, ‘Labor force participate rate, Libya’, 2017: Retrieved from: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?end=2014&locations=LY&start=2014&vi>

million (or 70%) are men and they form the bulk of the active workforce. In terms of the total proportion of the labor force, 80.5% of men and 34.5% of women are working; these figures have increased as compared to the pre-revolution figures.

Of the 4 million labor force, 1.9 million do not form part of the active workforce and again, it is clear that the majority of the labor force that does not actively participate consists of women of working age (an estimated 1.4 million). To reiterate, Libyan women's labor force participation is low ensuring that Libya's labor participation rate also remains low when compared to other countries (NB. The global average in 2014, according to the World Bank, was 63.5%).<sup>33</sup> The other issue is as compared to other countries, Libyan women's labor force participation rate of 30% fell short of the global average of 50.3%.<sup>34</sup>

Essentially, Libyans that actively participated as part of the workforce should have been some 2.54 million (63.5%) instead of 2.1 million (52.8%). Libyan women that actively participated in the workforce should be at least 1 million (50.3%) instead of 630,000 (30%) of the women's total labor force of 2 million. **The loss in Libya's GDP (net of oil rent) is US\$ 5.5 billion<sup>35</sup> with US\$ 4.6 billion (or some 81%) directly attributed to losses due to reduced labor participation rates amongst women.**<sup>36</sup>

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ew=bar.

<sup>33</sup> World Bank, 'Labor force participation rate, total from 1990 to 2014, 2017: Retrieved from: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.ZS>.

<sup>34</sup> World Bank, 'Labor force participation rate, female (%) from 1990 to 2014, 2017: Retrieved from: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?end=2014&start=1990&view=chart>.

<sup>35</sup> The calculation is based on the following basic formula: GDP (net of oil rents) is US\$ 26.4 billion divided by the active labor force of 2.1 million provides a per capita GDP (net of oil rents) of US\$ 12,571.43). Had the workforce of 2.54 million been active, the estimated GDP (net of oil rents) would have been US\$ 31.93 billion (US\$ 12,571.43 multiplied by 2.54 million). The difference between US\$ 31.93 billion and US\$ 26.4 billion is US\$ 5.53 billion (or US\$ 5.5 billion).

<sup>36</sup> The calculation is based on the following formula: Gap in the active workforce is 2.54 million minus 2.1 million, which is 440,000. The gap in women's labor force participation rates is 1 million minus 630,000, which is 370,000. When considering the percentage gap in female labor force participation as part of the total active workforce gap, it equals 84.1% (or US\$ 4.6 billion) of the US\$ 5.5 billion loss.

## **Rising Widowhood and Financial Precarity**

While there are still no official casualty numbers for the Libyan civil war(s), the number of widows has reportedly increased in both Benghazi and Misurata. Following the demise of the primary breadwinner, women are faced with economic responsibilities over the family. The situation is especially worse for families who have lost their homes and migrated from cities, leaving them in a situation of greater financial precarity. Most widows are young (approximately 25 years old) and were dependent on a male guardian throughout most of their lives. The absence of the breadwinner devastates their financial security, which means that they find themselves in poverty due to the absence of government support. Considering these changes, it seems that programs focusing on women's economic empowerment are needed more than ever in Libya.

## **Policy recommendations**

1. There is a greater need for up-to-date information on population size, development and economic issues so data can be monitored accurately and effectively through time.
2. Libyan women make up almost 50% of the population, and must be at the heart of economic development.
3. Libyan women must contribute to strategic planning and the long-term vision for the country.
4. Economic diversification is essential to strengthen the non-oil sectors and offer better opportunities to women.
5. More support for women in the informal economy by assisting in entrepreneurship as well as the job market.
6. Active efforts in social and cultural sensitization to accept and encourage women in the economy.

## **INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT**

### **International Community and Development Projects in Libya**

Since 2011, different international organizations have provided capacity building support and implemented many programs to develop the civil society movement in Libya. Notwithstanding these efforts from different international actors in the area of women empowerment, the situation could be improved at the many levels.

There is a lack of communication between local civil society actors and international donor agencies. This might be due to the fact that most of the donor agencies are based in Tunisia, and there is no clear guidance on the best way to communicate with these agencies.

International donor agencies and INGOs are also often criticised for the lack of transparency in their selection process. It has been noted that in the different workshops and conferences many INGOs invite the same activists to their events without thoroughly considering their real impact, newly created and active actors, and the evolution on the ground.

Many international donors still mainly fund women's programs focused on political empowerment, in spite of the dire need to help Libyan women in the economic sector during the current crisis. Other international agencies similarly focus on capacity building of local councils and municipalities, with no initiatives in place to fund local economic development or women's economic empowerment at the local level.

In conclusion, local Libyan organizations that work on women's empowerment would welcome the technical and financial resources to fulfil their full potential. International organizations should assist in providing an enabling environment to fully empower women at the local and national level.

## CONCLUSION

In the report, Jusoor has shed light on the numerous challenges facing Libyan women structurally as well as on issues that have arisen due to the military conflict. Our series of policy recommendations set out potential ways of tackling some of the healthcare, economic, legal, social and development problems and ensuring greater inclusion of women in the national debate. They equally show that lobbying for women's access to greater resources and decision-making roles is a strong investment in the next generation, which in the long-run will benefit collective society. This is because gender and development research has shown that women tend to spend more on the education and nourishment of their children. At a time where children are suffering more than ever, equipping Libyan women with access to more resources is an investment that could prevent the country from losing out on the talents of tomorrow's leaders.

In lieu of arguing that an emphasis on women seeks to separate them from dialogue, we are shifting the outlook by arguing for more constructive exchanges between women, men and children to foster greater understanding of gender struggles in Libya. We welcome this, and hope for greater exchanges between Libyan civil society organisations from across the country.

Amidst all the reported challenges facing Libyan women, emerging non-politicized women and civil society organisations are uniting engaging with men and women to work towards a better future. These initiatives are determined to make a difference to the community and spread messages of dialogue and tolerance.

We are proud of Jusoor's vision and performance in capacity building, which is helping to empower women economically. We would like to end this report by giving an example of the competence of Libyan women in defying the bleak reality in the country to achieve a remarkable outcome. Recently, it has been published that a group of valiant Libyan archaeologists accomplished the excavation of the Haua Fteah cave in Cyrenaica (Libya's eastern province),

which is one of the most significant prehistoric locations in Africa.<sup>37</sup> The team of archaeologists included two women and seven men who worked in a very dangerous atmosphere where Da'esh militia were at their heels. This story is inspirational to us, and truly demonstrates that

When there is a will, there is a way!

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<sup>37</sup> Giulio Lucarini, The Monuments of Men of Libya, 2017. Retrieved from: [http://www.archeostoriejpa.eu/2017\\_7e/](http://www.archeostoriejpa.eu/2017_7e/).