

Trade and Development in the State of Palestine

Through a Gender Lens

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) (i.e. the West Bank and Gaza Strip territories) has significantly different political and economic characteristics than other Arab countries because it has experienced the longest occupation in modern history. Direct and indirect control of the economy, land, resources (particularly water), borders, urban planning, movement of persons, and commodities by an occupying power has implied a different set of social relations and networks in the OPT (Marrar, 2009). Occupation leads to restrictions on movement and inequitable access to land and resources. Hence, it adversely influences growth and labour market trends (ILO, 2018).

The Paris Protocol of 1994 ingrained the Palestinian economy's dependence on Israel via a customs union that leaves no room for independent Palestinian economic policies.¹ The customs union ties the OPT to Israel through the latter's trade policies, tariff structures, and value-added tax rate. Trade tax revenues are administered by Israel, allowing it to control two-thirds of Palestinian tax revenue, estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars per year. Moreover, there has been a sharp decline in donor budget support over the last decade.² These factors, combined with unpredictability and fluctuations, have become a major source of fiscal uncertainty in the OPT (UNCTAD, 2020). In addition to the leakage of fiscal revenue, the international competitiveness of Palestinian producers is held back by the destruction of the productive base due to conflicts, geographic and economic fragmentation, technological regression, restrictions on imported inputs and technology, loss of land and natural resources, expansion of Israeli settlements, the OPT being a source of cheap labour for Israel, and the near collapse of the economy of the Gaza Strip (UNCTAD, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated already existing challenges, which also have gendered dimensions, as discussed later in this study.

Women in the OPT have high levels of education, but unlike in other developing countries this does not translate into women's increased labour force participation in the OPT. The highly gender-segmented labour markets leave women with opportunities in only a few sectors in non-growth areas of the economy, since the labour market is not able to absorb many new entrants. The decline of agriculture due to the loss of land and water has also adversely affected women's employment. Moreover, the decline of agriculture has not been accompanied by a corresponding rise in manufacturing, which tends to be female-intensive, especially in low-skilled segments, unlike in other developing countries. As a result, economic activity and employment are concentrated in the less-dynamic and low-productive services sector (UNCTAD, 2020).

Additionally, women face limited access to resources and economic opportunities and experience gender-based violence, factors that constrain their employment. Employment opportunities in Israel and its settlements, as well as in other Arab countries, are also mostly available to Palestinian men, as such employment is concentrated in the construction sector and because commutes are difficult (UNCTAD, 2020).³ Although such employment improves the living conditions of Palestinians, it perpetuates low female labour force participation by strengthening the male breadwinner model. Especially since the start of the 2000s, the Palestinian economy has changed from a private-sector-driven structure to one sustained by government spending and donor aid. In addition, massive joblessness among men has further worsened the job prospects for women and created disincentives to join the labour market (Marrar, 2009).

Compared to their situation in economic life, women's participation in political life has improved over time, and the OPT government has worked during the past 20 years toward getting the State to conform to international standards concerning gender equality and women's empowerment, as presented in this study.

¹ The Paris Protocol refers to the Protocol on Economic Relations between the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, representing the Palestinian people, which was signed on 24 April 1994. It was followed by the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, commonly known as the Oslo II agreement, which was signed on 28 September 1995 and was abandoned by the 2002 Roadmap for Peace.

² That support fell from 32 per cent of GDP in 2009 to 3.5 per cent in 2019.

³ Palestinians who work in Israel and the Israeli settlements are almost all men; 63.9 per cent of them work in construction, 12.8 per cent in industry, and 11.2 per cent in commerce, hotels and restaurants (PCBS, 2022).

Women and men play different roles in society and in the economy, and they enjoy different opportunities. Moreover, women are not a homogenous group and, therefore, they are differently impacted by economic policies, including trade policies, depending on their income, position in the labour market, education level, etc. The political and economic context further shapes how trade and development policies interact with gender equality and women's economic empowerment. The occupation makes the OPT unique and requires a case-by-case gender analysis, which also reflects the approach of this study.

This study looks at the socioeconomic structure of the OPT through a gender lens and investigates the interaction between trade and gender. It distinguishes between women's different economic roles as workers and entrepreneurs/business owners, and between different economic sectors such as agriculture,

industry, and services. Specifically, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) carried out a qualitative analysis of women's participation in the economy and in trade in selected subsectors of the OPT during April-May 2022.⁴ The olive oil sector was selected from agriculture due to its major role in Palestinian society and women's significant participation in this sector. The food products sector was selected from industry because it is traditionally a major sector in which women are highly involved. Finally, the information and communications technology (ICT) sector was selected from services due to its significant potential for future growth prospects and women's employment in the OPT. The study proposes several policy recommendations to increase Palestinian women's participation in the economy and to advance work on trade that strengthens women's economic empowerment and gender equality in the society.

⁴ The qualitative techniques used primarily included case studies, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews. In total, there were five focus groups comprised of women business owners/producers, workers and representatives of stakeholders relevant to each value chain in various locations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, 10 interviews with governmental and nongovernmental organizations relevant to trade and gender issues in the OPT, and five featured cases in the three sectors. The full details and findings of the field study are available in Uwaidat (2022).

2. SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE

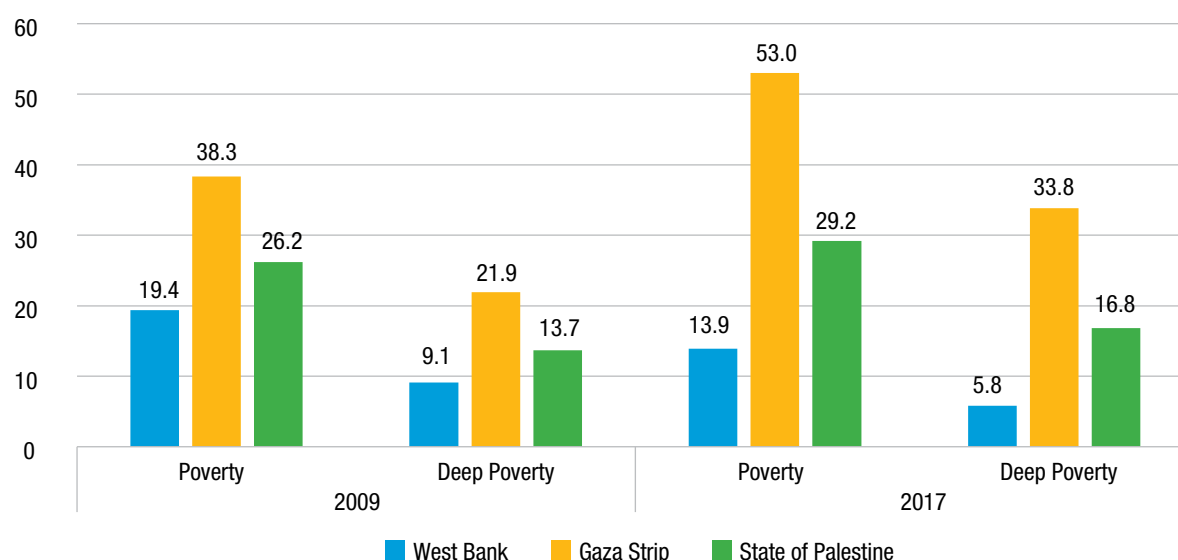
This section examines the situation in the OPT with respect to poverty and inequality, education and health, and the structure of the economy. The population of OPT was estimated at 5.23 million in 2021, with 3.12 million in the West Bank and 2.11 million in the Gaza Strip. OPT has a young population, with those under 18 years old constituting 44.1 per cent of the total in 2021. Female-headed households account for 11 per cent of total households (PCBS, 2021a). Both the total fertility rate (4 births per woman in 2017–2019) and average household size (five persons per household in 2019) have declined over time (PCBS, 2021c).

In 2019, the OPT ranked 115th out of 189 countries and territories on the Human Development Index (HDI), which marked an 8.8 per cent improvement in its HDI score between 2004 and 2019 and positioning it in the high human development category. However, in terms of its score on the Gender Development Index (GDI),⁵ the OPT is in the group of countries with low equality in HDI achievements (i.e. knowledge, health and living standards) between women and men (UNDP, 2020).

2.1. POVERTY, INEQUALITY, AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Poverty remains a serious economic and social issue in the OPT, where 29.2 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line (figure 1). Poverty has worsened in the Gaza Strip, with a poverty rate of 53 per cent in 2017 reflecting the influence of closures, and has slightly improved in the West Bank (13.9 per cent) over time. The multi-dimensional poverty rate, which includes economic dimensions (i.e. income) and social dimensions (i.e., education, health, employment, housing, assets, and personal freedom), is also much higher in the Gaza Strip (45 per cent) than in the West Bank (11 per cent). Among these different dimensions, monetary poverty is the largest, followed by employment deprivation, education, and housing conditions. Assets, personal freedom, and health have relatively low shares of multi-dimensional deprivation (PCBS, 2020a). The poverty rate according to monthly consumption patterns is slightly higher among women than men in both the West Bank (14.4 vs. 13.3 per cent) and the Gaza Strip (53.8 vs. 52.3) (PCBS, 2021a).

Figure 1. Poverty rate according to monthly consumption patterns by region, 2009 and 2017 (per cent)



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

Note: Deep poverty is defined based on household spending on food, clothing, and housing. The poverty line also includes other necessities such as healthcare, education, transportation, personal care, and housekeeping supplies (PCBS, 2020a).

⁵ GDI measures gender gaps in achievements in three basic dimensions of human development. The group of countries on the index with low equality is Group 5.

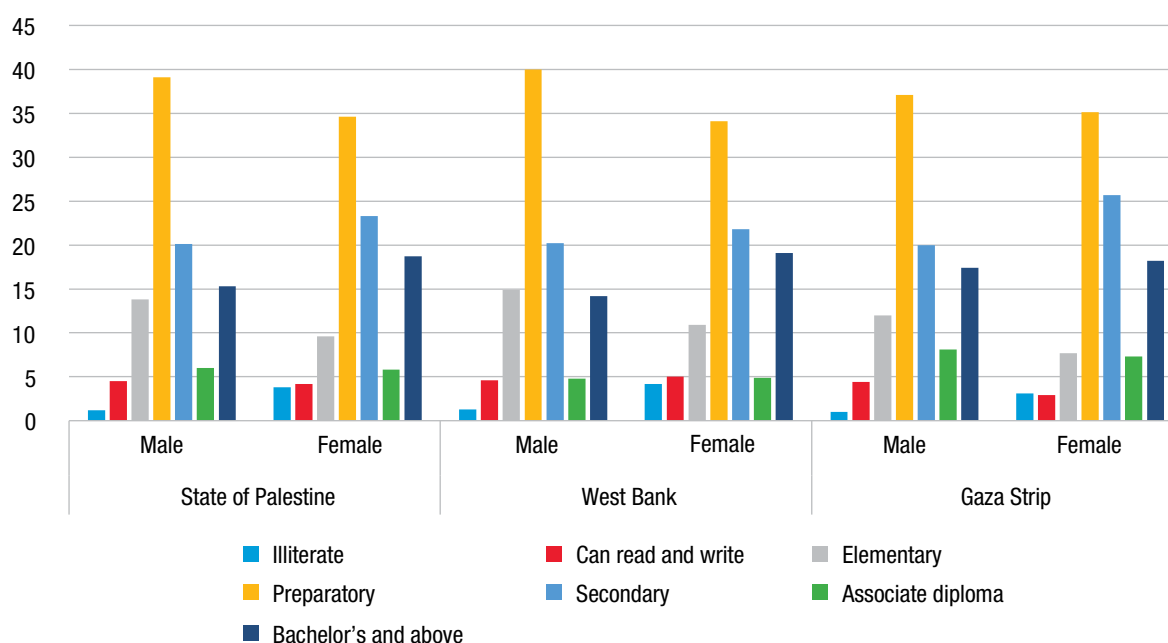
The overall poverty rate was projected to have reached 31.9 per cent in 2020 due to both a lack of economic growth and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the welfare loss due to the pandemic fell more on wealthier households, poverty is more widespread among households with more members, limited economic activity, lower education levels, and in rural and refugee camp settings (ILO, 2021).

There are several policies to tackle poverty in the OPT, with social protection a priority policy area under the National Policy Agenda (2017–2022) and the Social Development Sector Strategy (SDSS). Social assistance has high coverage but is inadequate to reduce poverty. Its fragmentation between government programmes and international humanitarian efforts limits its effectiveness. The use of active labour market policies that complement cash assistance is also limited. The lack of a contributory social insurance scheme for the private sector keeps demand for social assistance among working individuals high. Finally, almost all government programmes are financed through highly volatile tax revenues, and in the presence of fewer international donors (ILO, 2021).

2.2. EDUCATION

The gender gap in the adult literacy rate has closed over time in the OPT. The literacy rate among women increased from 88 per cent in 2004 to 96.2 per cent in 2020—close to the literacy rate of 98.8 per cent among men (PCBS, 2021a). Girls consistently have higher educational enrolment rates than boys in the OPT. The gender gap in favour of girls in enrolment rates is particularly notable in secondary education (91.8 per cent for girls and 72.5 per cent for boys in 2019–2020).⁶ This gender difference mainly reflects the economic pressure for males to work and their high dropout rates due to finding employment at earlier ages. It is also an outcome of societal gender norms that confine women to fields related to their reproductive roles (e.g. education and health), which lead girls to stay longer in education in order to be eligible for job positions in those fields (PCBS, 2021d). Figure 2 shows the percentage distribution of the male and female adult population (age 15 and above) by educational attainment in 2020. A relatively higher share of women than men hold secondary degrees and bachelor's degrees or above.

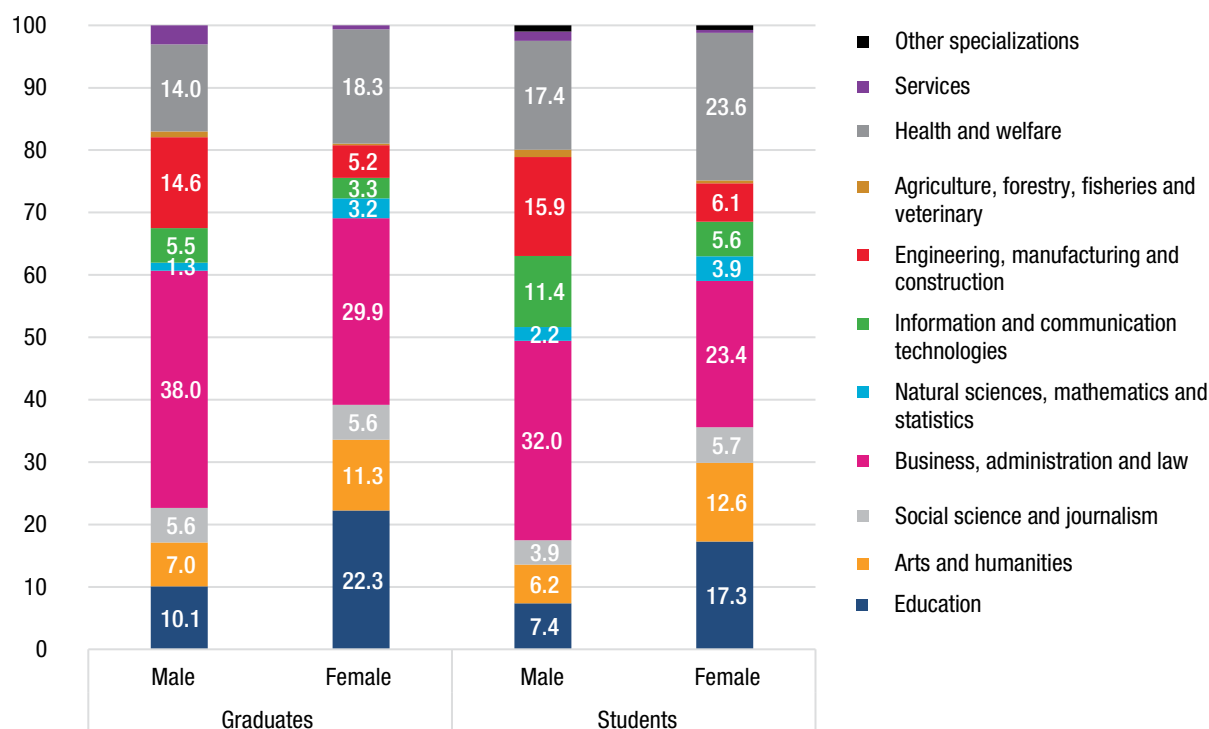
Figure 2. Composition of the population by sex and educational attainment, 2020 (per cent)



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

⁶ Based on gender summary statistics from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, available at https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/statisticsIndicatorsTables.aspx?lang=en&table_id=1359 (accessed on 1 March 2022).

Figure 3. Occupied Palestinian Territory: Composition of higher education graduates and students by field of specialization, 2019–2020 (per cent)



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

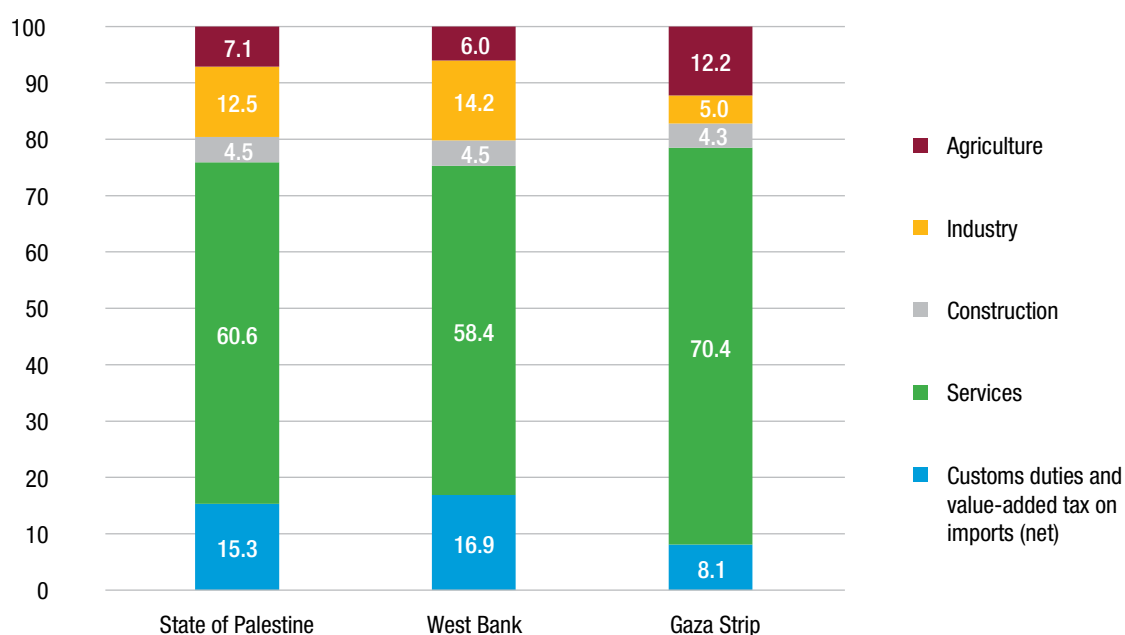
The field of study in higher education is not evenly distributed for men and women. Business, administration and law is the top field for graduates and students among both men and women (figure 3). It is followed by education, and health and welfare for female graduates, and by engineering, manufacturing, and construction, and health and welfare for male graduates.

2.3. STRUCTURE OF THE ECONOMY

There has been a substantial deterioration in the economic structure in the OPT since the 1990s, characterized by a clear diversion of investment towards nontradable sectors, mainly services and residential construction, at the expense of agriculture and manufacturing (ILO, 2018). Two factors played a key role in the decline of agriculture in GDP over time. First, development and reconstruction programmes implemented by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) since its establishment in 1994 gave priority to

financial services, trade, and tourism. Second, Israel's policies of expanded settlements and the confiscation of Palestinian natural resources led to a disabling environment for agricultural development (UNCTAD, 2017). Israeli policies leading to physical barriers and controls also affected the manufacturing sector due to controls on imported capital goods and raw materials as well as restrictions on access to outside markets. In contrast, services and construction, which are less affected by physical controls and movement restrictions, fared relatively well (ILO, 2018).

These trends resulted in a very high share of services in total economic activity, which is considered unhealthy due to the limited room for further expansion (ILO, 2018). In 2020, services constituted 61 per cent of GDP, followed by industry (12.5 per cent) and agriculture (7.1 per cent). The Gaza Strip has a substantially higher share of services and agriculture and a lower share of industry than the West Bank (figure 4).

Figure 4. Percentage contribution to GDP by economic activity and region, 2020

Source: UNCTAD secretariat calculations based on data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

In terms of the subsectors that are significant within each broad sector,⁷ manufacturing dominates the industrial sector, with a much higher share in the West Bank (13 per cent) than in the Gaza Strip (2.2 per cent). The services sector is led by wholesale and retail trade (19.3 per cent), public administration and defence (9.8 per cent), education (6.7 per cent), finance and insurance (4.4 per cent), health and social work (4.3 per cent), and information and communications technology

(ICT) (3.4 per cent). Hence, low value-added services in the private sector such as wholesale and retail trade as well as public sector services dominate services in the OPT. In contrast, higher-value-added services such as finance and ICT have relatively low shares, though they have expanded over time. Due to heightened conflict, the Gaza Strip has a significantly higher share of public administration and defence and lower shares of finance and ICT than the West Bank.

⁷ These figures are based on data from the PCBS. They are not presented in figure 4 for the sake of brevity.

3. TRADE AND TRADE POLICIES

3.1. TRADE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

The Israeli occupation has been controlling trade policy and trade relationships in the OPT since 1967. The Protocol on Economic Relations (the so called Paris Protocol) sets the framework for the Palestinian foreign trade regime. It was incorporated into the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (the so-called Oslo II Accord) in 1995. Hence, the foreign trade regime of the OPT is inherently linked to the foreign trade regime of Israel and thus to its rights and obligations under the World Trade Organization (UNCTAD, 2020). The Paris Protocol is based on the free internal flow of goods between Israel and the OPT except for six agricultural products, and externally it applies Israeli import policies, except for a limited list of strategic goods in which the PNA has some flexibility. Indirect imports to the OPT via Israel are treated as if they were produced in Israel, and this skews trade relations between the OPT and Israel. Even though the protocol allows for the signing of free trade agreements with other parties by the PNA, Israel continues to be the OPT's main trading partner.⁸

Besides governing the OPT's trade regime, the Israeli occupation has implications for the OPT's export capacity. Almost all Palestinian imports and exports go through Israeli ports and crossing points. It is estimated that delays and security measures can increase trade costs by an average of US\$538 per shipment.⁹ The dual-use system bans the importation of technology and critical inputs, and requires special approval for many items.¹⁰ These restrictions undermine the development of the Palestinian export sectors,

especially in the Gaza Strip, which has experienced prolonged closures and severe restrictions (UNCTAD, 2020). It is estimated that Palestinian exports could be twice their current levels if the restrictions implemented by Israel were not in place, given the OPT's proximity to large regional markets (World Bank, 2019).

There are also issues with competitiveness due to fragmentation and restrictions on movement. For example, in the stone and marble industry, quarrying sites under the control of the PNA are largely exhausted, and reserves in Area C, which forms most of the West Bank and is under Israeli military control, are not accessible by Palestinian firms. Similarly, in the Gaza Strip, Israeli restrictions on access to the sea, fish exports, and importation of equipment all adversely affect the fishing sector. Shortage of skilled labour is also an issue—for example in the furniture sector, an important source of exports and employment,—due to outmigration of skilled labour to Israel (UNCTAD, 2020).

3.2. TRADE PROFILE

The trade policies and practices briefly summarized above have adversely affected the production of exports and importable goods by the Palestinian economy, resulting in a very high trade deficit of 32.2 per cent as a share of GDP in 2020 (table 1). This is much higher than the regional average for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (excluding high-income countries), which was 3.9 per cent of GDP in 2020.¹¹ Exports mainly originate from the West Bank given the more severe degree of restrictions and conflict in the Gaza Strip.

⁸ International Trade Center's State of Palestine website.

⁹ UNCTAD field study findings show that some Palestinian traders deal with Israeli importers to bypass complex Israeli trade procedures, even though it is more costly.

¹⁰ The dual system refers to goods, software, and technology that can be used for both civilian and military applications.

¹¹ World Bank, World Development Indicators database, available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators> (accessed on 10 February 2022).

Table 1. Occupied Palestinian Territory: Key trade indicators, 2020

	Millions of United States dollars	Share of GDP (per cent)
Total exports in goods	1,054.6	6.8
Total imports in goods	6,063.4	39.0
Net trade balance in goods	-5,008.8	-32.2
Total exports from West Bank ^a	1,040.5	6.7
Total exports from Gaza Strip	14.1	0.1
Total imports from Israel	3,342.7	21.5
Total exports to Israel	886.1	5.7
Total exports of services to Israel	205.1	1.3
Total imports of services from Israel	180	1.2
Net trade balance in services	25.1	0.2
GDP	15,531.7	

Source: UNCTAD secretariat calculations based on data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

^a Data exclude those parts of Jerusalem that were annexed by Israel in 1967.

The top export product groups in the OPT are non-metallic mineral manufactures (18.4 per cent of total exports), furniture (11.7 per cent), miscellaneous manufactured articles (7.6 per cent), and vegetables and fruits (6.7 per cent).¹² Table 2 lists the top 10 registered commodities at a detailed level of disaggregation (8-digit HS code) exported from the OPT. Building stones, sacks and bags, and virgin olive oil are the top export products.¹³

Table 2. Occupied Palestinian Territory: Top 10 export products, 2019

	Thousands of United States dollars	Share in total exports
Building stone	143,846	13.0
Sacks and bags	55,626	5.0
Virgin olive oil	52,827	4.8
Upholstered seats	38,266	3.5
Dates	37,570	3.4
Scrap of iron	36,355	3.3
Marble and travertine	30,061	2.7
Gravel	29,670	2.7
Wooden furniture for bedrooms	25,984	2.4
Footwear leather	25,674	2.3

Source: PCBS (2020b).

Israel is the destination market for 84 per cent of Palestinian goods exports and the origin of 55 per cent of goods imports to the OPT. Primary and low-valued-added manufactured goods constitute the main Palestinian exports to Israel, while final consumer goods and durables dominate imports from Israel (UNCTAD, 2020). Asian Arab countries have a 10 per cent share in Palestinian exports, while in terms of imports, other Asian countries (20 per cent) and European Union countries (11 per cent) follow Israel.¹⁴ Total trade figures are presented due to a lack of gender-disaggregated data on trade in the OPT (as is the case for most countries). Only a few national surveys assess women's access to resources in the context of women-owned enterprises. This forms the main motivation to carry out a field study on women's participation in the economy, and specifically in trade, in the OPT.

¹² Average for 2016–2020 according to UNCTAD secretariat calculations based on data from the PCBS.

¹³ UNCTAD field study findings show that exports of sacks are relatively high, since a significant volume of sacks are exported to Israeli markets especially by large Palestinian producers (directly or through subcontracting arrangements). This is because this sector has low profit margins, making it not lucrative for Israeli producers.

¹⁴ UNCTAD secretariat calculations based on data from the PCBS.

4. WOMEN IN SOCIETY AND IN THE ECONOMY

Women have exceptionally low participation rates in the wider economy and specifically in trade in the OPT. This could be attributed to a wide range of interrelated factors, including discriminatory policy and legal frameworks, limited access to and control of resources (e.g. land, finance, other assets), limited access to business services and skill development programmes, predominance of poor working conditions (including low wages), and discriminatory social and cultural norms. Women's participation in the economy and in trade is critical from both a developmental and a human rights perspective, so gender inequalities in economic and social life need to be addressed toward this end.

4.1. GENDER-RELATED POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONS

Gender equality and women's empowerment are acknowledged as important goals in the OPT's National Policy Agenda for the 2017–2022 period. Specifically, the agenda recognizes the need to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls and to remove barriers that prevent the full participation of women in community and economic development and public life under the national priority of social justice and the rule of law. The need to institutionalize gender mainstreaming in policymaking, planning, and budgeting is stated in the context of policy measures to strengthen accountability and transparency (State of Palestine, 2016). Similarly, the National Development Strategy for 2021–2023 recognizes gender equality and women's empowerment as one of the national policy targets (State of Palestine, 2021a). However, there is a lack of formal mechanisms in the OPT for gender-sensitive assessment, follow-up, and monitoring of economic policies, as reported by governmental representatives interviewed during the UNCTAD field study. Economic and social empowerment programmes that target gender disparities are typically discussed in isolation, as opposed to a systematic approach.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs was established in 2003 at the national level with several functions to strengthen women's empowerment in the OPT. First, it oversees the development of frameworks and policies to support gender equality. Second, it is responsible for implementing the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women, carrying out the Women,

Peace, and Security agenda, promoting women's economic empowerment and political participation, and mainstreaming gender in government institutions. Third, the ministry is the lead institution for implementing the Cross-Sectoral National Gender Strategy for the 2017–2022 period, which envisions a "Palestinian society in which men, women, girls and boys enjoy equal rights and opportunities in both public and private spheres." The strategy includes five strategic objectives, 30 policies, and 300 policy interventions. However, the ministry lacks the human and financial resources necessary for effective implementation and coordination of policies and strategies, including those related to the 2030 Agenda (UNESCWA, 2021).

In 2005, 35 women's units (changed to "gender units" in 2008) were established in all ministries to mainstream gender in different sectors and areas through ministerial policies, plans, and programmes. However, these units have not functioned as effectively as they could, and mostly became separate entities and not cross-cutting units within ministries. In the case of agriculture, a gender focal point was appointed in 2016 to review all strategies, policies, studies, and projects from a gender perspective (FAO, 2021). There is also a lack of effort at the senior level, dominated by men, to create a gender-sensitive culture within these entities. Instead, the focus tends to be on technical and administrative aspects of gender mainstreaming in policymaking, as observed during the UNCTAD field study.

Other ministries also assist in women's empowerment. For example, the Ministry of Social Development provides psychological, social, and legal counselling, protection, vocational rehabilitation, and training for women survivors of gender-based violence. It also supports the socioeconomic integration of marginalized women and girls (e.g. those with disabilities, and those living in refugee camps or communities where Israeli restrictions are most visible such as East Jerusalem) (UNESCWA, 2021).

The Palestinian Labour and Workers Law falls short of adequately supporting women's participation in the labour market. It excludes many groups such as seasonal workers, self-employed individuals, and unpaid family workers (PCBS, 2021d).

In terms of international frameworks on gender equality, the OPT signed the Convention on the Elimination of

All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) without reservations in 2014, and endorsed United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 as well as other international conventions related to gender issues, such as those on human rights. The CEDAW Committee recommended harmonising legislation in line with CEDAW and repealing discriminatory laws that allow for the continued violation of women's rights in areas such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Progress areas include the establishment of the National Referral System for women victims of violence, a planned national observatory to monitor violence cases against women, and a planned study on the economic impact of marital violence (UNESCWA, 2021).

The OPT embraced the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and has committed to realizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in line with its national development priorities. It submitted its first Voluntary National Review on implementation of the 2030 Agenda to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum in 2018, and released a summary report in 2021 on the progress made across all SDGs since 2015, and also in the context of the policy measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic (State of Palestine, 2021b). Overall, progress has been made in terms of legal protections for gender equality and in education and health outcomes. Early marriages have been reduced over time and are expected to decline further as a result of the Presidential Decree that went into effect in early 2020 prohibiting males and females from getting married before they reach the age of 18 (PCBS, 2021a). However, gender-based violence continues to be a critical issue.

4.2. WOMEN'S AGENCY AND PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

Palestinian women have been more active in daily politics compared to other countries given the country's conflict situation. However, they still lag men in terms of active participation in decision-making positions. Among the cabinet members in the 18th government, only 3 of 24 ministers (12.5 per cent) were women.¹⁵ Similarly, only one of 16 governors is a woman. The share of women in management and senior positions is 13.7 per cent in 2022, only a slight increase from 12.3 per cent in 2011.¹⁶ Women hold relatively higher shares as members of councils and high-ranking professions (e.g. medical practitioners, lawyers) compared to their shares in leadership roles. The situation for women in this regard is consistently worse in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank (table 3).

The OPT has introduced its second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, which was adopted on 31 October 2000. The National Committee for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 was established in 2012, and the National Strategic Framework was introduced in 2016 as an actionable framework. These initiatives aim to advance women's participation in international peace processes and local peacebuilding as well as at all decision-making levels (State of Palestine, 2020). However, women are largely excluded from formal dialogue efforts to end conflict, and their voices have not been heard or included in the various reconciliation talks held and agreements reached since 2005 (UN Women, 2019a).

¹⁵ This information is from https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/statisticsIndicatorsTables.aspx?lang=en&table_id=1359 (accessed on 1 May 2022). This ratio was as high as 22.7 per cent in 2009 according to PCBS gender summary statistics, available at https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/statisticsIndicatorsTables.aspx?lang=en&table_id=1317 (accessed on 1 May 2022).

¹⁶ PCBS gender summary statistics, available at https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/statisticsIndicatorsTables.aspx?lang=en&table_id=1317 (accessed on 1 May 2022).

Table 3. Women's participation in professional and decision-making positions (per cent), 2020

	Female share of total		
	State of Palestine	West Bank	Gaza Strip
Members of National Council	10.9		
Members of Central Council	5.7		
Members of Local Councils	20	20.4	12.6
Heads of Local Councils	1.8	1.6	0
Heads of Student Councils at universities	4.3		
Members of Student Councils at universities	31.8		
Directors or heads of companies listed on the Palestinian Capital Market Authority	2.2		
Members of boards of companies registered in the Palestinian Capital Market Authority	8.1		
Ambassadors	10.8		
Persons working in missions abroad, including diplomats and administrators	30.6		
Lawyers practicing the profession	27.1	30.1	16.9
Judges	19.2	20.3	12.1
Public prosecution staff	20.4	21.1	17.6
Medical practitioners	18.9	21.8	17.9
Engineers registered in the Engineering Association	24.6	27.1	18.7
Members of the Chambers of Commerce of Industry and Agriculture	4.3	5	2.3
Board of Directors of the Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture	1	1.3	0
Individuals who have accounts in the Palestinian Capital Market Authority	43	44.1	37.2

Sources: Gender statistics from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and PCBS (2021a).

Note: Regional statistics are not relevant and hence not available for nationwide figures.

4.3. WOMEN IN THE ECONOMY AND EMPLOYMENT

This section first presents key labour market indicators for men and women in the OPT and then presents UNCTAD field study findings based on the case studies, focus group discussions, and individual interviews with the stakeholders, institutions, and professionals involved in each of the target sectors selected from agriculture, industry, and services. The section examines how women participate and what challenges they face in each target sector in order to derive policy recommendations accordingly.

4.3.1. WOMEN'S STATUS IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Women in the OPT had a very low labour force participation rate in 2021 (17.2 per cent) compared to men (68.9 per cent) (table 4). Housekeeping is the main reason for not participating in the labour force for most women, reflecting the traditional gender division of labour in the household, while study/training is the second reason for not joining the labour market (PCBS, 2022). Among youth, not being in employment, education, or training is widespread among both men and women (PCBS, 2022), hence there is a need for further efforts to encourage active participation of youth in the economy and society.

Table 4. Key labour market indicators, 2015 and 2021 (per cent)

		State of Palestine		West Bank		Gaza Strip	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Labour force participation rate	2021	68.9	17.2	73.6	17.2	61.2	17.3
	2015	69.6	17.7	72.5	18.7	70.3	20.0
Unemployment rate	2021	22.4	42.9	12.4	28.9	41.9	65.0
	2015	20.2	34.3	14.5	25.1	30.7	51.1

Source: PCBS (2022).

There are large discrepancies in labour force participation by education level for women.¹⁷ Indeed, women with 13 or more years of schooling constitute 82.4 per cent of all women in the labour force (PCBS, 2022). This is mainly attributed to the fact that most working women join the health and education sectors, which require a bachelor's degree. In contrast, women with low education levels have employment opportunities under precarious conditions mainly in low-wage and low-value-added sectors. Hence, developing policies to support women's participation in the labour market—especially women with lower levels of education—is a prerequisite for any initiative to support women's economic empowerment in the OPT. For example, generating decent job opportunities, especially for low-educated women, would create an incentive for them to join the labour force.

Among those who participate in the labour market, the unemployment rate is much higher for women than for men, and it has increased over the last six years mainly as a reflection of the heightening conflict in the Gaza Strip over this period. Employment is concentrated in the West Bank (60.8 per cent of total).¹⁸ In 2021, public sector employment constituted 15 per cent of total employment in the West Bank and 35.1 per cent in the Gaza Strip. Women held a larger share of public sector employment in their total employment than men in 2020 (33.6 per cent and 18.6 per cent, respectively), though fewer women held managerial positions (PCBS,

2021a). Educated women are increasingly confined to public sector employment, which has limited growth prospects. Moreover, women are forced to help in informal economic activities as unpaid family workers to compensate for the decline in household incomes (ILO, 2018).¹⁹

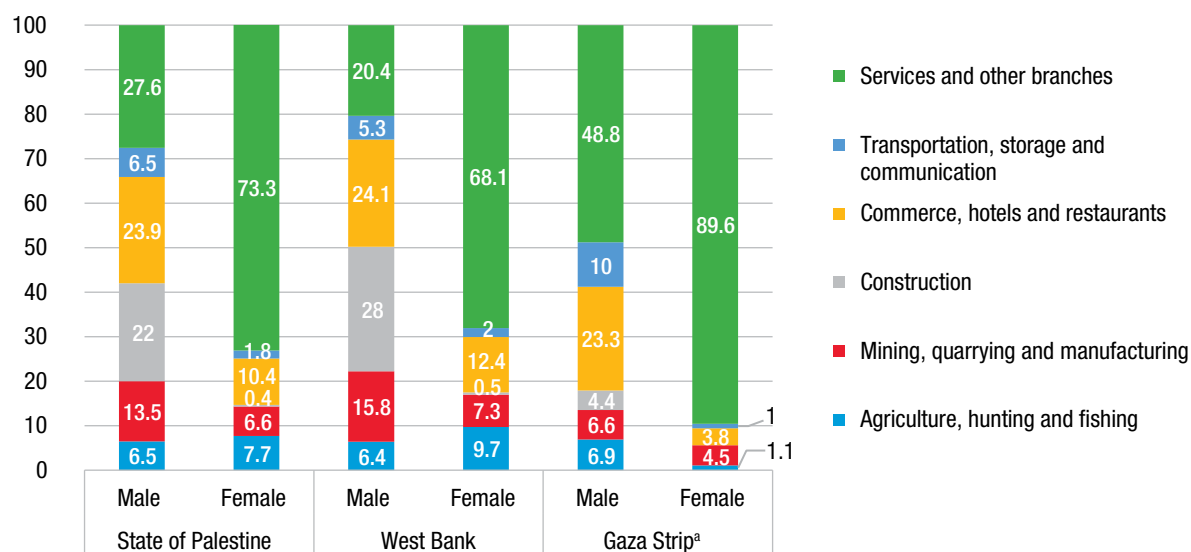
Employed women are mostly concentrated in services and other branches (more pronouncedly in the Gaza Strip), while men show a more equal distribution of employment across different sectors of the economy (figure 5). Women's concentration in a narrow range of economic sectors reflects horizontal gender segregation in the labour market. There are several barriers to breaking this horizontal segregation in the OPT, including economic factors (e.g. lack of access to credit, and import competition from Israeli and Chinese products, for example in handicrafts or foodstuffs), political factors (e.g. restrictions on movement and access), and cultural factors (e.g. patriarchy and the resulting weak demand for women's labour) (ILO, 2018). There are also institutional factors. For example, higher education choices are limited and therefore channel women into a narrow range of jobs. Labour laws do not cover domestic, seasonal, part-time, or other workers in jobs where women hold high shares of employment. Additionally, policymakers focus on boosting women's participation in traditional sectors while devoting very little effort to creating cross-sectoral integration or upgrading female employment (ILO, 2018).

¹⁷ In 2021, only 6.4 per cent of women with 1-6 years of schooling, 4.2 per cent of those with 7-9 years, and 4.6 per cent of those with 10-12 years of schooling participated in the labour force. In contrast, 40.9 per cent of women with 13 or more years of schooling participated in the labour force in the same year (PCBS, 2022).

¹⁸ In contrast, 25.1 per cent of employed individuals were in the Gaza Strip and 14.1 per cent in Israel and Israeli settlements (PCBS, 2022). Women's employment is concentrated in the Ramallah and Al-Bireh governorates in the West Bank, as government institutions and several large establishments are more present there; women's employment is concentrated in Gaza City in the Gaza Strip (PCBS, 2021d).

¹⁹ Indeed, in the non-agricultural sector, women hold only 17 per cent of paid jobs in the West Bank and 16.2 per cent in the Gaza Strip according to figures for 2021 (PCBS, 2022).

Figure 5. Employment distribution by sex and economic activity, 2021 (per cent)



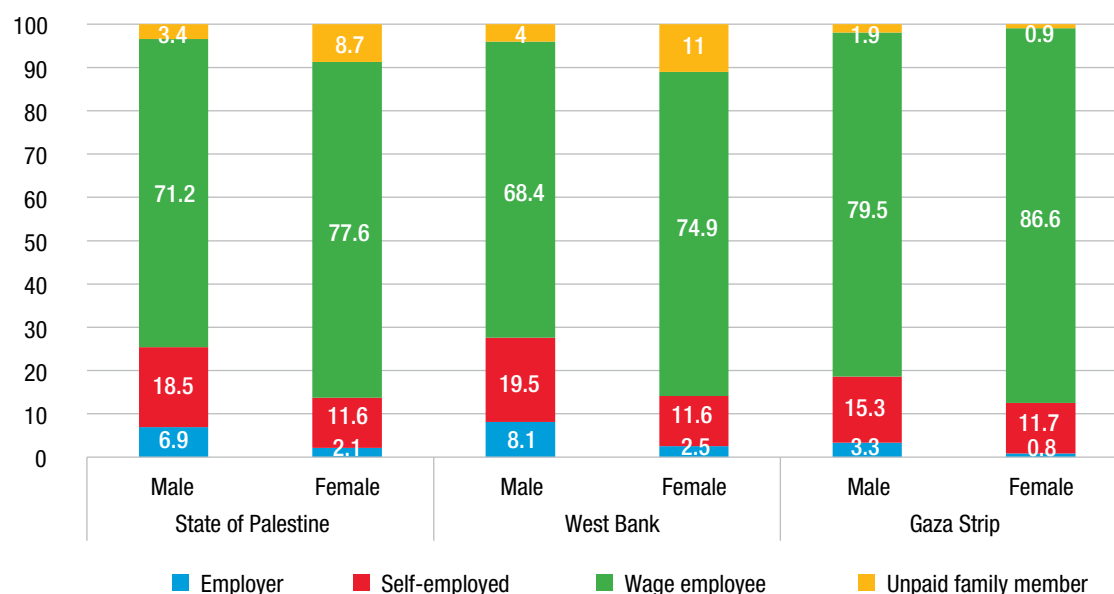
Source: PCBS (2022).

^a Data for Gaza Strip are for 2020.

Wage employment is the dominant form of employment status for both men and women in the OPT. Unpaid family work is more common among women, while relatively more men are self-employees and employers (figure 6). Two-thirds of wage employees worked without a written contract in 2021; hence, informal employment is

widespread, and is more severe in the Gaza Strip (PCBS, 2022). Informal employment is also more prevalent among men (PCBS, 2021d). Many women work as unpaid workers in household/family businesses or projects such as cheese and dairy production at home, pastries, and sewing and embroidery (PCBS, 2021d).

Figure 6. Employment distribution by sex and employment status, 2021 (per cent)

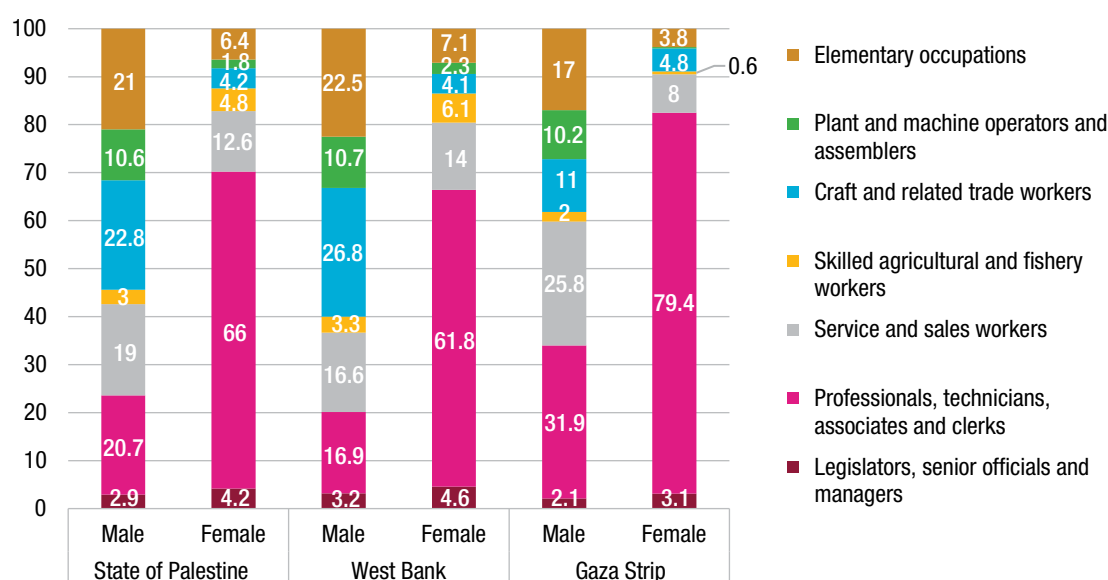


Source: PCBS (2022).

In terms of occupational categories, women are concentrated mostly among professionals, technicians, associates, and clerks (66 per cent), likely reflecting the role of women in public employment and

in services that involve women in reproductive and caring roles. Men have a more balanced distribution across occupation categories (figure 7).

Figure 7. Employment distribution by sex and occupation, 2021 (per cent)



Source: PCBS (2022).

In terms of wages, women earn 75 per cent of what men earn on average in the total economy. The raw gender gap is largest in the industrial sector, and is smaller in the West Bank than in the entire territory (table 5). Overall, 28.7 per cent of wage employees

earned less than the monthly minimum wage (NIS 1,450– approximately US\$450) in the private sector in 2021. Earning less than the minimum wage was slightly more prevalent among women than among men (PCBS, 2022).

Table 5. Occupied Palestinian Territory: Average daily wage by sex and economic activity, 2021 (In new Israeli shekels)

	State of Palestine		West Bank		Gaza Strip	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female ^a
Agriculture, hunting, and fishing	96.6	102.7	93.2	88	20.9	
Mining, quarrying, and manufacturing	126.7	66.3	112.2	68.2	30.8	
Construction	217.6		130.6	154.7	39.9	
Commerce, hotels, and restaurants	102.7	79.2	113.3	84.4	26.4	
Transportation, storage, and communication	88.5	105.8	157.7	111.2	31.3	
Services and other branches	123.7	110.5	141.6	119.6	88.5	
Total	142.1	106.1	127.2	113.2	56.6	

Source: PCBS (2022).

^a The female statistics for the Gaza Strip were not included in the publication because the number of observations were too small at the level of each activity.

There is no gender wage gap in the public sector in the OPT. In the private sector, the gender wage gap is not explained by differences in qualifications between men and women. Women in fact should be earning more than men based on their qualifications, given their high education levels (Hammoudeh, 2020).

4.3.2. EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURE

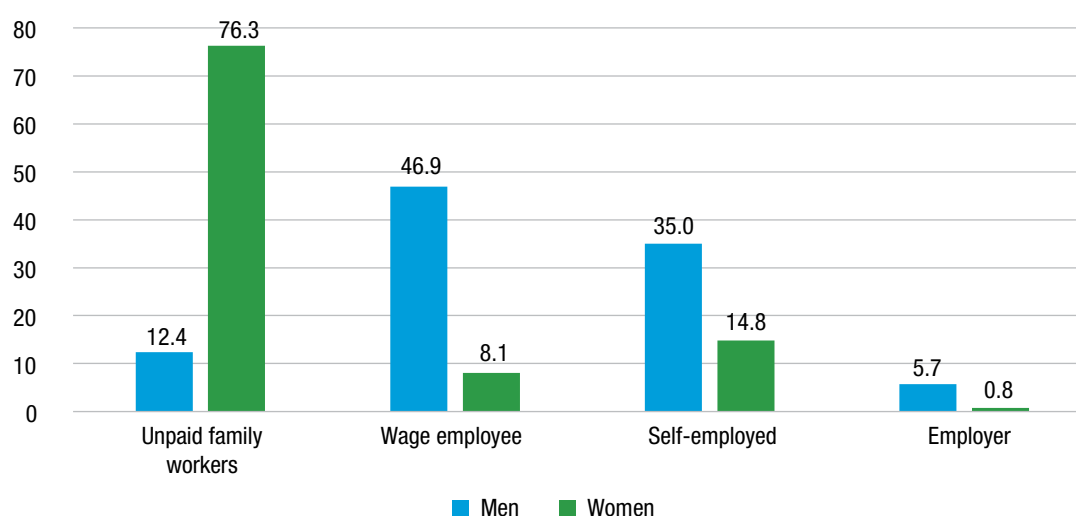
The OPT has a diverse range of climate zones and rich biodiversity despite its small geographic size. Crop cultivation is the main agricultural activity and is dominated by olives.²⁰ The share of agriculture in employment has fallen more sharply for women than for men in the OPT over time.²¹ Women are mainly unpaid family workers, while most men are wage employees and self-employed in agriculture (figure 8).²²

Around a third of Palestinian women work informally in agriculture, and women hold only 6.7 per cent of

agricultural holdings, according to the latest figures from 2011.²³ Despite the declining share of agriculture in women's employment, however, a feminization of agriculture is taking place in the OPT,²⁴ mainly because of the migration of men to Israel for better paid employment. That said, agriculture's contribution to women's economic empowerment is limited for several reasons. First, a large share of women in agriculture are unpaid family workers, as indicated above.

Second, women are mostly involved in lower-end activities in agricultural value chains (e.g. harvesting, collecting, and sorting of crops), while men control lucrative activities such as maintaining equipment, transporting, sales, and marketing. On top of that, women carry out unpaid domestic and care work in the household, and often have mobility restrictions in terms of engaging in agricultural activities outside the family farm.

Figure 8. Occupied Palestinian Territory: Composition of agricultural labour by sex and work status, 2019 (per cent)



Source: Based on agricultural labour statistics from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

²⁰ Olives represent 54 per cent, fruit trees 10 per cent, field crops 24 per cent, and vegetables 10 per cent of the cultivated area in the OPT (PalTrade, 2014, cited in FAO, 2021).

²¹ The share fell from 34.7 per cent in 2000 to 7.7 per cent in 2021 for women and from 10.3 per cent in 2000 to 6.5 per cent in 2021 for men, according to PCBS statistics.

²² Based on PCBS statistics.

²³ Based on PCBS agricultural labour statistics.

²⁴ Palestinian women provide most of the labour required for livestock production (87 per cent) and crop production (54 per cent) (FAO, 2021).

Third, women have limited access to land and natural resources, which adversely affects their access to loans due to a lack of collateral, or results in much higher interest rates for them (FAO, 2021). According to a field study in 2020, only 44.4 per cent of households own agricultural land, and 76.3 per cent of agricultural land is owned by men, 7.3 per cent jointly, 15 per cent by the wife alone, and 1.3 per cent by another female family member. There is also gender inequality in the ownership of agricultural tools: 70 per cent of non-mechanized farm equipment and 93.2 per cent of mechanized farm equipment is solely owned by men. However, women have a higher degree of access to land and productive resources than what would be commensurate with their levels of land ownership (PWWSD, 2020).

Women lack financing opportunities and marketing facilities for their products (crops and livestock). The Israeli occupation also limits movement of Palestinian men and women and access to their fertile lands and water resources in Area C. Women often shoulder the burden of transporting water to cultivated lands. Agricultural extension services are weak and often lack female agents, which limit women farmers' participation in them because of cultural barriers (FAO, 2021).

In terms of paid jobs, small and medium-sized companies in agriculture struggle to survive due to the adverse effects of the occupation and the resulting economic stagnation. This leads to high dependency on daily wage labourers and part-time and seasonal workers, most of whom are informally employed and earn below the minimum wage. Most companies source agricultural raw materials from large suppliers, which are predominantly owned by men and are more able to meet the required quantity and quality of needed raw materials (Abumezied and Rahhal, 2021).

Cooperative and producer associations are popular in the OPT. Women's involvement in such entities improves their bargaining power, enables them to form business and marketing links, helps them share costs of inputs, transportation, marketing, and other agricultural activities that can be done collectively, and promotes a sense of belonging to a community. All of these contribute towards women's economic empowerment in agriculture. Despite these positive benefits, however, many of these entities have limited

ability to access financing for their members due to inadequate skills and limited access to technology and information. Furthermore, women have limited participation in mixed-gender agricultural cooperatives due to cultural barriers (FAO, 2021).

4.3.2.1. The olive and olive oil sector

The analysis of the olive and the olive oil sector in the context of agriculture is based on primary data collected through the UNCTAD field study. Olives are both economically and culturally important for Palestinian society. Most participants in UNCTAD's interviews and focus group discussions emphasized that olive cultivation and the preservation of olive trees continue to be culturally and traditionally important in the Palestinian countryside, as part of a generational heritage, and as a familial product. Olives are the top horticulture tree in the OPT. Most of the olive harvest is used for olive oil and what is left is used for table olives (e.g. pickled/stuffed olives, olive paste) and soap. Total olive oil production exceeds 35,000 tons annually in a high-yield year (PCBS, 2019). The total volume of exported Palestinian olive oil represents about 10 per cent of total annual production, with Arabian Gulf countries being a major destination.²⁵ There are several companies that export olive oil sourced from local markets. There is also informal trade in olive oil, whereby middlemen transfer small quantities across borders in exchange for a commission.

Olives provide employment and income for around 100,000 families that either run their own small family businesses or work for others (Oxfam, 2015). In terms of olive oil production, in 2019 there were 285 operating presses in the olive oil sector (250 in the West Bank and 35 in the Gaza Strip) and 1,859 individuals employed in olive presses (1,300 in the West Bank and 559 in the Gaza Strip), 18.5 per cent of whom were unpaid workers, with the rest being wage employees.²⁶

Several factors constrain the development of the olive sector in the OPT (Oxfam, 2015). The Palestinian Olive Oil Council—which was established by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2009 as a public-private agency to develop the olive sector through policy, advocacy, and technical advice, and to regulate the sector—lacks the financial and human resources to carry out its functions adequately. Many subsistence and small-

²⁵ This volume does not include olive oil that is taken as gifts (to relatives or friends), which is estimated to be significant.

²⁶ According to PCBS olive statistics.

scale olive oil farmers, including many women, are not members of registered cooperatives, depriving them of the economic benefits of collective action. Low and unstable olive oil productivity is another issue facing the sector. Most olive oil traders are traditional wholesalers who focus on the local market and have limited experience in marketing products to external markets. Several nongovernmental organizations focusing on agriculture lack adequate capacity.

All participants in UNCTAD's field study, both individual and institutional, alluded to the exceptional susceptibility of agriculture in general, and the olive sector in particular, to the measures of the occupation and settlements. Farmers in the West Bank countryside, which falls under the command of the Israeli military, often face harassment or hostility. Such transgressions include illegal land seizures, destruction/burning of produce, disruption of harvest and land maintenance, and settler assaults and harassment. These realities, in addition to the fluctuating economic conditions, constitute the two major threats to olive and olive oil production and sale in the OPT. One participant in the Jenin Focus Group discussion emphasized the deterioration of the sector in the face of these threats. He added that there must be a concerted effort by authorities to support farmers in this sector before further deterioration occurs.²⁷

Women's participation in the olive and olive oil sector

Women play an active role in olive cultivation and olive oil production especially in weeding, harvesting, grading/sorting of olives, and storing stages. However, it is often men who market and sell olives and olive oil in local markets or to traders and exporters. Women, except for those in female-headed households who have broader responsibilities as the only adult in the household, sell in small quantities through informal networks within their communities. Women are completely absent as exporters in this sector, as stated by the Palestinian Olive and Olive Oil Council (Al Markaz for Development and Marketing Consultancies, 2018).

Most individuals or institutions in UNCTAD's field study agreed that social and cultural norms mainly determine the possibilities for women's participation, access to resources, and the assumption of decision-making positions in conducting business and trade. However, they had different perceptions of what women's role

should be in the sector. The participants in the Gaza Focus Group discussion stated that women's role in the sector should be limited to non-physically strenuous activities, mainly harvesting pressing, and marketing. In contrast, participants in the West Bank Focus Group discussion believed that women could perform all the tasks in the production processes comparably with men. Moreover, they emphasized that olive and olive oil production is in large part familial and even communal, whereby all family members contribute to it. As one participant stated:

Olive and olive oil production remains a traditional affair. It has not changed in terms of gender roles over the years; women have always made major contributions to olive production. Currently, there are more possibilities and uses for olive production, such as improved varieties of traditional soap.²⁸

However, the participants still disagreed on women's efficiency in performing the olive pressing, marketing, and sale of the end products. In some of the focus group discussions, many men expressed their apprehension about the growing role of women in olive farming, and also feared that, with the current move towards greater involvement of women, women may replace men working in the marketing of olives and olive oil who they think are more capable of doing so.

Major challenges faced by women in the olive and olive oil sector

Despite women significantly contributing to the production cycle of olive and olive oil—from cultivation to harvesting, processing, and marketing—those contributions still do not assure women ownership, control, or stakes in the returns to these resources, as indicated by a former board member of the Palestinian Olive and Olive Oil Council:

Women's ownership of olive lands does not surpass 10 per cent of total areas cultivated with olive. The major underlying reason for this phenomenon is the nonformal application of inheritance laws, where it is not uncommon for men to arbitrarily decide on the inheritance shares. In turn, the share of women-owned agricultural land cultivated with olives remains limited. That is despite the significant contribution of women in the olive harvest and olive oil production cycles. From my experience, it is not uncommon for women's work to be of higher quality in this sector—this is especially the case after receiving training on the production process.

²⁷ Olive Oil Focus Group, Jenin, the West Bank.

²⁸ Ibid.

Women also typically participate in the decision-making regarding the olive picking dates and tools used, the production schedule, storage, and the monitoring of quality.²⁹

According to the UNCTAD field study, women in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip face the same degree of social scrutiny when it comes to pressing and marketing of olive products. The participants in the Gaza group also pointed out that the social pressures prevent them from dedicating their efforts to developing their businesses and end products. This constitutes, in their view, a major impediment to improving their livelihoods and returns from their businesses. As one participant noted:

Among the challenges we face in this sector, the negative social perception of women who handle the pressing of as well as the marketing of olives is among the most difficult. In this, there are differences between one locality and another in terms of the acceptance of women's participation in all aspects of olive oil production.³⁰

A former member of the Palestinian Olive and Olive Oil Council also pointed to the differences across localities in terms of perceptions about women's participation in the sector:

The olive and olive oil sector is one of the few sectors that is actually more open to women's participation without any social pressures given the traditional nature of the sector. I agree that some localities/villages may still exert social pressure on women if they participate in the sector, but other localities have total acceptance of women's participation.³¹

Men dominate cooperatives and producer organizations in the olive sector because women have low levels of land ownership—a precondition for membership—and cannot afford high membership fees, which is a barrier they face in addition to traditional gender norms and stereotypes. Moreover, women have low levels of participation in training programmes on agricultural practices. In this regard, holding women-only sessions and/or arranging the time and place of such sessions suited to women's time schedules could help increase their participation (Oxfam, 2010). It is also the case that the olive sector is considered as men's trade even though women

are highly involved in processing at the household level. Women also have poor communication and coordination with other market actors, including retailers and providers of extension and training services (Oxfam, 2019).

With regard to exporting, various participants in focus group discussions in the West Bank pointed to a general deficiency in their capacities to apply the product quality standards required for exporting goods. Most of the producers asserted that they often struggle to meet the quality standards demanded by foreign importers, and that they address these demands on an ad hoc basis rather than embedding these standards as part of their business processes. This problem is more severe for women producers who face higher barriers in accessing the resources necessary to stay abreast of the latest developments in the sector, whether relating to the production process, product quality, or marketing.

Field survey respondents indicated that women face a more difficult marketplace in the olive sector for two main reasons. First, traders tend to impose unfair pricing on women producers due to multiple factors, most prominently the socially vulnerable position of women traders in the market, and other social restrictions (e.g. limitations on mobility). Second, because of such pressures, women producers often must be overly resolute in their business dealings such that they are not intimidated by their male counterparts. As one participant in the Jenin Focus Group discussion explained:

I have faced the scrutiny of my family since I started marketing my products, where I had to obtain their approval for my activities after long deliberations. I gained more independence as I accumulated experience in the market. However, there are still certain things that remain untenable for women producers, such as acquiring and registering agricultural lands, as well as business trips abroad or even within the West Bank. For all these reasons, I conduct all aspects of my business from my residence. I do not have to physically move to do so. Overall, the social pressures faced by women producers also afford them meagre market shares in this sector. Lastly, I remained resilient and adamant to continue developing my business even in the face of such social pressures.³²

²⁹ Interview with Faris Al-Jabi, former member of the Palestinian Olive and Olive Oil Council, on 21 April 2022.

³⁰ Olive Oil Focus Group, Gaza.

³¹ Interview with Faris Al-Jabi on 21 April 2022.

³² Olive Oil Focus Group, Jenin, the West Bank.

An expert from the Olive and Olive Oil Council echoed that sentiment, stating that the trade environment, especially in olive oil markets, is more demanding for women producers. He added that women who market their products directly in the olive oil markets are often forced to do so as the main breadwinners for their families.³³

With respect to training and skill development opportunities, most participants in the focus group discussions expressed the view that women across all levels have access to fewer skill development opportunities. As the sector is male-dominated, such opportunities are thus oriented to men more than women business owners and/or workers. Moreover, the participants noted the added burden for women to attend such programmes or workshops while balancing their available time between family care, business, or work. In addition, attending these activities often requires the approval of male family members (e.g. husband, father, etc.). One participant reported some success along these lines:

I used to attend seminars and workshops organized by various agricultural institutions such as the Union of Agricultural Committees. This prompted me to convince my parents and husband to continue farming, and now my son and his children help me with my farming.³⁴

One of the trainers in the focus group discussion reflected on his experience in delivering agricultural training:

In some villages, women are severely restricted in their work because of the prevalent culture. In one instance, I had been assigned to deliver training to a group of women farmers in a village. I was surprised to find that male relatives attended the session instead of women. They wanted to go through the training, after which they would parlay it to the women farmers. In some villages, they prevent women from undertaking training with male trainers.³⁵

Time-use surveys show that Palestinian women spend on average six hours a day on housework and family care (PCBS, 2017). For men, this burden is typically absent. Moreover, these added burdens on women

are often considered invisible labour, rarely accounted for, and often overlooked. Some of the participants in the focus groups reflected on their household responsibilities:

Female farmers work tirelessly inside and outside the home. They take care of all household chores, such as food preparation, childcare, children's schoolwork, and other chores, and then must work on their crops. These arrangements are deeply rooted in our culture. It seems impossible to change. Women never have the time to rest.³⁶

As an unmarried woman, my family prohibits me from moving freely outside the home. My time is devoted to farming and housework. I believe there should be more equitable distribution of responsibilities, including domestic chores.³⁷

Finally, gender roles in the olive and olive oil sector are strongly influenced by seasonality. The olive season runs from October to December. Over a period of 1 to 12 weeks, depending on the area of cultivated groves, olive farmers pick and bag olive fruits for further processing. As previously mentioned, this is usually familial work, whereby extended family members participate in the process. The working days are usually long, extending up to 12 hours daily. During this season, therefore, women have mounting responsibilities and need to combine extended working hours with household duties.

4.3.3. EMPLOYMENT IN INDUSTRY

In 2020, 109,640 people were employed in industrial activities in the OPT producing gross value-added equivalent to around 14 per cent of GDP.³⁸ There has been a decline in the share of industry in total employment over time.³⁹ Women's employment share in industry has also declined over the last two decades: while 16.2 per cent of employed women were in industry in 1995, this share declined to 11.1 per cent in 2000 and to 6.6 per cent in 2021. These downward trends reflect greater controls on imported capital goods and raw materials, as well as constrained revenue resulting from restrictions on access to outside markets (ILO, 2018).

³³ Interview with Faris Al-Jabi on 21 April 2022.

³⁴ Olive Oil Focus Group, Jenin, the West Bank.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ PCBS industry statistics.

³⁹ The share fell from 21.3 per cent in 1994 to 14.2 per cent in 2000 and 13.5 per cent in 2021.

Table 6. Share of subsectors in total industrial employment by region and sex, 2019 (per cent)

	State of Palestine			West Bank			Gaza Strip		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Mining and quarrying	3.3	3.7	0.2	4.1	4.7	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.0
Manufacturing	91.3	90.9	95.2	92.1	91.3	97.1	88.2	89.1	66.0
Food products	21.5	20.1	32.6	21.7	19.9	33.7	20.5	20.7	16.1
Wearing apparel	10.1	6.6	36.5	8.7	4.4	36.5	15.9	15.1	36.9
Other non-metallic mineral products	19.7	22.0	2.1	19.7	22.4	2.2	19.6	20.3	1.7
Fabricated metal products	6.9	7.6	1.6	7.1	8.0	1.6	5.9	6.1	1.7
Furniture	9.4	10.4	2.0	9.1	10.2	2.1	10.8	11.2	1.2
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supplies	4.3	4.4	4.3	2.9	3.0	2.3	10.6	9.7	34.0
Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	1.0	1.1	0.3	1.0	1.1	0.3	1.1	1.1	0.0

Source: PCBS (2020b).

Manufacturing enterprises are concentrated, in descending order, in non-metallic mineral products, food products, furniture, wearing apparel, and fabricated metal products (except machinery and equipment) (PCBS, 2020b). Industrial employment is also concentrated in these subsectors, with a clear gender segregation (table 6). Wearing apparel and food products dominate women's employment in industry. Other mineral products and food products are the top sectors for men in industrial employment.

Export activity is still not common among industrial enterprises in the OPT. In 2019, enterprises with at least 2 per cent or more of total sales to the rest of the world were in the following sectors (PCBS, 2020b): remediation and waste management (50 per cent), waste collection and treatment (15 per cent), wood and products of wood and cork (11 per cent), basic pharmaceutical products (8.6 per cent), chemicals (4.4 per cent), leather (4 per cent), other manufacturing (2.7 per cent), and beverages (2.1 per cent). Similarly, in 2019, industrial enterprises with the highest share of total sales to Israel were in remediation and waste management (50 per cent), wearing apparel (48.6 per cent), leather (38.5 per cent), textiles (37.1 per cent), furniture (24.6 per cent), basic metals (23.3 per cent), rubber and plastics (18.8 per cent), tobacco (14 per cent), fabricated metal products (13.1 per cent),

and machinery and equipment n.e.c. (12.7 per cent) (PCBS, 2020b).

Most owners/managers of industrial enterprises cited the following as obstacles that hinder expanding their productive activity, in descending order: the low income of Palestinians, political difficulties, high costs of electricity and fuel, small size of the Palestinian market, lack of infrastructure, restriction of Palestinian trade with Israel, lack of skilled workers, and unclear tax systems (PCBS, 2020b).

4.3.3.1 The food products sector

The analysis of the food products sector in the context of industry is based on primary data collected through the UNCTAD field study. Enterprises active in the food products sector in the State of Palestine make up 19.6 per cent of all enterprises operating in the industrial sector (PCBS, 2020b). The sector includes food manufacturing and processing at all industrial scales. As explained by survey respondents, women's presence as producers/traders in this sector is largely limited to micro- and small-scale businesses and vendors, whether as owners or workers. The larger enterprises in the sector, including large factories and production facilities, are mostly owned or managed by men. Women-led businesses featured in UNCTAD's

field study are thus concentrated in local markets as cooperatives or as small-scale food production, preparation, or catering businesses. Women-led or women-dominated businesses, therefore, operate both formally and informally. Women-led informal businesses in this sector tend to be micro or small-scale businesses in local areas. Women cooperatives, on the other hand, operate formally given their extended reach in local markets as well as to foreign markets through contractual agreements with marketing companies. The varieties of products made by these businesses include homemade cooking/food preparation of such products as jams, mulukhiyah (mallow), sauces, and pickled products (including olives), among others.

Women's participation in the foods products sector

As indicated in the focus group discussions, the food products sector is a convenient alternative for many women. Working from home, women can both lead their business and carry out care responsibilities. As pointed out by one participant, women often are not allowed to leave their residences, and so this sector becomes a viable option, and it enables women to save on such costs as child day care services or certain business costs.⁴⁰

Several participants in the Gaza and West Bank Focus Group discussions pointed out the comparative advantage that women have in the food products sector in terms of product quality:

Women are much better in food preparation given their experience due to social norms. It is also often easy for us to innovate in our products because of this experience. Men's role in this sector should be limited to physical tasks such as transportation of products or inputs, changing cooking gas, marketing of products, etc.⁴¹

Despite women's high productivity and their products' high quality, field study participants noted that women's participation in this sector does not seem to change prevailing social pressures on women's social and economic inclusion. Men often dominate decision-making in women's businesses and family lives.

Major challenges faced by women in the food products sector

UNCTAD field study participants reported harsh working conditions for women workers in the food products sector, mainly due to an absence of adequate enforcement of labour laws in the formal sector and a complete absence of protections in the informal sector. The participants added that access to jobs in this sector is subject to aspects related to gender, age, class, marital status, and socially imposed roles. Despite the numerous examples of women running successful businesses in the sector, for example, women still face gender stereotypes related to their role as women in business. Even after obtaining approval of their male relatives, women's activity in the sector remains subject to the will and changing conditions and expectations of their male relatives. For instance, one participant in the focus group in Ramallah recounted:

I was forced by my sons to abandon a falafel stand that I was running. The stand was an addition to my work in food preparation. My sons objected to the falafel stand given that it requires me to serve food to male customers outside my home. They considered it an embarrassment to them.⁴²

Hala Abdel Fattah, Executive Director of the Palestinian Union for the Marketing of Cooperative Products, emphasized that the often-observed male guardians' control over women's business activities also extends to access to resources and business development. She cites access to loans as one example, whereby a male guardian is often needed to guarantee bank loans—especially for Islamic banks. Women can also be restricted to certain working hours and be forced to avoid late hours during the workday. Finally, she alluded to the mental and psychological burden that women shoulder because of their extended responsibilities beyond the conduct of their businesses, as mentioned previously.⁴³

Gender relations and roles strongly influence economic activities within the sector, including ownership, division of labour, decision-making, marketing, and access to markets. In this regard, Amal Shehadeh, Director of Social Integration in the Economy at the MoNE, asserted that:

⁴⁰ Focus Groups in Gaza and the West Bank.

⁴¹ Food Products Focus Group, Gaza.

⁴² Food Products Focus Group, Ramallah, the West Bank.

⁴³ Interview with Hala Abdel Fattah, Executive Director of the Palestinian Union for the Marketing of Cooperative Products, on 19 April 2022.

Women are often excluded from decision-making processes within their businesses, even if they are the business owners. It is possible for women to be registered as the business owner and perform various business activities, but for a male relative or spouse to control decision-making related to business development and marketing of their products.⁴⁴

Another participant described the business environment for women in this sector as follows:

Women often face harsh working conditions and constricted access to financial and other resources. In my opinion, this is due to a lack of alternatives for women. Women's work in food products, whether as a small-scale owner or worker, is often the only viable income-generating activity. For this reason, women are forced to accept harsh working conditions, or meagre profit margins. Moreover, because of this lack of options, women find it extremely difficult to pursue debt financing because they cannot resort to other activities if their incomes do not cover their obligations. In contrast, men have access to wider options to meet their obligations or find more suitable working conditions.⁴⁵

Men can switch to jobs in other sectors much more easily than women. Moreover, men have wider access to other avenues, for example lending services, and have unhindered physical access to markets and exporters, as noted by one participant:

Women are often forced to resort to such income-generating projects out of necessity. Some examples include widows or divorcees who cannot rely on male counterparts to undertake these responsibilities.⁴⁶

Indeed, most participants in both Gaza and the West Bank cited necessity as the major reason for women to pursue food product businesses. Working in the food products sector is one of the most viable traditional options for women, especially in the absence of male breadwinners, or if women live in poverty. In this respect, the rate to which women turn to the food products sector is a general reflection of the state of the wider economy in the OPT. On the other hand, other participants highlighted that women also pursue their independent businesses in this sector as a vehicle

for empowerment by securing the necessary resources to be independent in their decision-making, whether socially or in their businesses:

In my business, I feel a sense of fulfilment from leading my business. Generating income, even if partially sufficient, can gradually improve women's social and economic conditions.⁴⁷

There was a consensus among participants that the marketing of food products is the most severe challenge facing women-led businesses in this sector. This aspect relates to the promotion of products to end users or resellers, but also to the fulfilment of product standards in local or foreign markets. This challenge is further aggravated by difficulties in accessing the financial resources required for product development and marketing, as well as social pressures and inequalities faced by women in the conduct of business and beyond. In this regard, Ayman al-Mimi, Head of the Leadership Department of the Ramallah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, noted:

There is a critical deficiency in the marketing skills and avenues available for women business owners in this sector. Most women owners rely on trade exhibitions and online advertising (mainly through Facebook) for marketing their products.⁴⁸

One of the business owners in Gaza explained some of the problems that small-scale enterprises face in this sector as follows:

The informal nature of many of these businesses also poses some challenges for women-led businesses. For instance, in my experience, I often cannot issue invoices that are required by some larger clients to obtain my services.⁴⁹

Hala Abdel Fattah detailed the gaps that typically prevent women-led businesses from establishing a foothold in export markets or large markets:

These businesses lack the professional marketing aspects for their products such as branding, packaging standards, barcodes, and serial numbers. Most prohibitively, most of these businesses lack the cash flow necessary for exporting, which requires the

⁴⁴ Interview with Amal Shehadeh, Director of Social Integration in the Gender Unit, MoNE, on 25 April 2022.

⁴⁵ Food Products Focus Group, Ramallah, the West Bank.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Interview with Ayman Al-Mimi, Head of the Leadership Department, the Ramallah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, on 25 April 2022.

⁴⁹ Food Products Focus Group, Gaza.

flexibility to deal with payment delays (up to 6 months or more) and upfront costs.⁵⁰

The Ministry of National Economy (MoNE) offered a comparable analysis of the deficiencies attributed to women-led businesses. In an interview, Amal Shehadeh and Serine Al-Shanti of the MoNE Gender Department expanded on a recent gap assessment commissioned by the ministry to pinpoint the weaknesses facing Palestinian businesses regarding a wide array of small-scale handmade products, including food products:

The assessment confirmed the shortfall in the marketing capabilities of Palestinian businesses at the small to medium scale. Moreover, the study highlighted the overwhelming competition with cheaper imported goods, as well as the obstructed adoption of upgraded technological infrastructure for these businesses. Lastly, the assessment sheds light on inaccessibility to and unaffordability of financial services for business owners.⁵¹

Focus group participants highlighted that their male counterparts have more direct opportunities to market their products and reach markets. In general, the participants identified two main reasons underlying this discrepancy. First, men in general have more freedom of movement than women to access markets, sellers, exporters, and other avenues. This affords men more ample opportunities to accrue experience in marketing and business dealings. Second, most institutions are male-dominated in both economic and social terms. Hence, women face overbearing cultural prejudice in the conduct of their businesses, and in their social lives beyond that.

One of the business owners in the Gaza group isolated the restrictions on women's physical movement as the main detriment to the marketing and development of their products, noting that she would benefit if she could deal with sellers directly. However, other business owners expressed their preference to leave some of these tasks to their male counterparts or associates. As one participant stated:

I prefer leaving the marketing functions to male relatives precisely due to their experience in these tasks, and their

freedom in dealing with male and female customers and sellers.⁵²

Another participant in the same group lamented the absence of support services for marketing of women-led businesses in this sector, and at the typical scale of these businesses:

Business owners such as me do not possess the know-how to use (online) tech-focused marketing tools.⁵³

One business owner asserted that there are unrealized opportunities in promoting women's physical access to the markets:

Women can capitalize on skills in the domain of food products to market their products. As an example, marketing products on the bases of the quality of ingredients and dietary characteristics such as using low-fat alternatives and the like are good selling points, especially in today's market.⁵⁴

Women active in the food products sector are inexperienced in other critical business skills as well. For example, women face difficulties in feasibility analysis, financial management, and marketing of their products. These skills, and others, are critical for their business to succeed locally, but doubly so if they plan to link to exporters and foreign markets. On the reasons underlying women's difficulties in acquiring such skills, the participants alluded to their inexperience with these business skills given that they are often performed by men.

The participants also reported that available skill development programmes tend to be ineffective, and that women face numerous barriers that prevent them from benefiting from these programmes, including unavailability of time due to household responsibilities as well as social pressures or male guardians' disapproval of their attending such programmes. One participant even noted that these programmes are occasionally opposed in religious sermons in local mosques with the claim that they incite against men.⁵⁵

The interviewees at the MoNE Gender Department agreed that women suffer from deficiencies in business management in the food products sector, including the

⁵⁰ Interview with Hala Abdel Fattah on 19 April 2022.

⁵¹ Interview with Amal Shehadeh and Serine Al-Shanti, MoNE Gender Department, on 25 April 2022.

⁵² Food Products Focus Group, Gaza.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Food Products Focus Group, Ramallah, the West Bank.

technical, financial, and general management of their businesses:⁵⁶

These deficiencies are reflected in women's inability to fulfil market entry requirements—such as lab tests, classification, licensing, etc.—whether for local or foreign markets. Just as importantly, this inexperience in all of these aspects also culminates in the adoption of traditional or basic food preparation methods. Developing women's businesses in this sector requires the adoption of more technical and systematic production methods that also satisfy certain quality and safety standards.⁵⁷

In this regard, despite the continual emphasis in government strategies on the promotion of women's economic participation and empowerment, there does not seem to be any measurable impact in this regard in the food products sector. As mentioned earlier, due to the significant informal market in this sector, especially when it comes to women business owners, many of these businesses lack access to available resources and interventions. Commenting on this, Sami Sahweil, Director of the Policy and Planning Department for the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), stated that the policies introduced to promote women businesses remain ineffective.

Most of the study participants asserted their belief that women should continue to bear all household and childcare burdens, and that their work in this sector should adhere to societal expectations, the most important of which are restrictions on the freedom of movement, time control, and household and family care. On the other hand, other participants, such as one in the Gaza Focus Group, pointed to some changing trends in this regard:

Women's roles are slightly changing over time. In modern families, men are starting to contribute more to household responsibilities and family care. In my opinion, this is due to the mounting responsibilities in work and social life for the modern family.⁵⁸

Unequal division of domestic chores between men and women hinders women's opportunities to contribute to decision-making related to the family or business. Some participants reported that women resort to circumventing these difficulties by participating in

cooperatives and women's associations related to food processing. Within these organizations, women work collectively to overcome social difficulties and challenges. This also extends to economic challenges—that is, cooperatives and local bodies enable women to overcome the challenges and constraints of market access, and may help women overcome obstacles related to transportation, storage, and other financial logistic. As one participant explained:

Cooperatives enable women to work at a larger scale, for example, by working with institutional clients. Because cooperatives are legally registered entities, members can issue the requisite documents such as the invoices required by some institutions to procure their services. Moreover, cooperatives usually do not impose dues or membership on their members. For all these reasons, I established a new cooperative in the village of Aboud with other working women.⁵⁹

Another participant added:

Our cooperative is a member in the Union for the Marketing of Products of Cooperatives in Palestine. The union aids the cooperatives in marketing their products. The member cooperatives have regular meetings on the internal organization of the union, without imposing any policies on their members.⁶⁰

However, some women in the food products sector do not have the opportunity or capacity to become members of local cooperatives and bodies specializing in the manufacture and marketing of food products. Some participants in the focus groups reported that they are not members of any of these bodies. They either do not have the opportunity (i.e. they were not invited to join a cooperative), or they do not have the capacity (i.e. they cannot adhere to certain production schedules/quotas). These women therefore continue to shoulder the burden of their work, remain subject to market volatility, and face familial and social restrictions.

4.3.4. EMPLOYMENT IN SERVICES

The nontradable goods, construction, and services sectors have predictably been the sectors least vulnerable to physical controls and mobility restrictions resulting from the Israeli occupation (ILO, 2018). As a result, along with the declining shares of agriculture

⁵⁶ Interview with Amal Shehadeh and Serine Al-Shanti on 25 April 2022.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Food Products Focus Group, Gaza.

⁵⁹ Food Products Focus Group, Ramallah, the West Bank.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

and industry, services and construction have expanded their shares in total employment in the OPT. There were 153,580 people employed in services activities in 2020.⁶¹ Over time, services employment has expanded more sharply for women (from 53.9 per cent in 2000 to 85.4 per cent in 2021) than it has for men (from 52 per cent in 2000 to 58 per cent in 2021).

4.3.4.1. The information and communications technology sector

The analysis of the ICT sector in the context of services is based on primary data collected through the UNCTAD field study. Among various services, the ICT sector stands out as one of the pillars of the Palestinian economy due to its growth prospects and high employment-generation potential (especially for women and youth), its flexible hours and workdays, and the secondary jobs it generates.⁶² In the broadest sense, ICT involves the deployment of digital processing and wired and wireless telecommunications in collecting, creating, analysing, storing, processing, and transmitting information. The State of Palestine ranked 123rd out of 174 countries globally and 14th out of 19 countries regionally on the International Telecommunication Union's ICT Development Index for 2017, far behind Lebanon (64th) and Jordan (70th). According to the PCBS, in 2021 the Palestinian ICT sector registered 677 companies (an increase from 446 in 2010) with 12,800 employees (18 per cent females vs. 82 per cent males), representing about 1.2 per cent of the workforce and 4 per cent of GDP.

Most of these enterprises were in telecommunications (320 of 677) and computer programming, and in consultancy and related activities (144). In terms of employment generation, 55 per cent of the total employed were in telecommunications, followed by computer programming, consultancy and related activities (19 per cent), and programming and broadcasting activities (12 per cent). Telecommunications is also the sector that offers the highest wages among various ICT activities.⁶³

George Yerusis, an expert on the Palestinian ICT sector and Director of the Innovation & Entrepreneurship Unit

at Birzeit University, provided an analytical overview of the sector. According to Yerusis, given the landscape of the ICT sector as explained above, Palestinian companies are forced to adopt the business models of their counterparts in foreign countries and adapt them to the regional and local contexts of the Middle East. In fact, Palestinian companies typically enter working relationships with regional or international companies to facilitate the conduct of their businesses in the face of Israeli restrictions on mobility, exports and imports, and technological infrastructure.⁶⁴

Yerusis pointed to the restrictions confronted by Palestinian companies for the import and export of goods and services. He gave the example of hardware companies that often forgo the option of dealing with foreign providers to circumvent the extended delays and associated costs for Palestinian imports that come through Israeli-controlled ports. Instead, many of these companies resort to dealing with Israeli providers. These dealings require constant communication between the two parties, often location visits, and physical meetings. Aside from the uncertainty of the granting of permits to access Israeli markets, the prospect of traveling to the locations of Israeli companies is relatively more daunting for women business owners and workers than for their male counterparts.⁶⁵

Women's participation in the ICT sector

With respect ICT usage, men have more access than women to modern technological tools (e.g. cellular lines, computers, PC tablets, and the most advanced TV screens) and better access to the Internet. Similarly, a higher share of men than women uses text messages, emails, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, etc. On a positive note, there has been a relative increase in the share of female students specializing in fields traditionally considered men's domain, including ICT (PCBS, 2021d).

The participants in the Focus Group discussions agreed that despite women's participation in the ICT sector, their roles remain concentrated on administrative support, and to a limited extent on technical support. The existence of this "digital" gap between men and

⁶¹ See PCBS, "Main economic activities for services activities in Palestine," available at https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/statistic-IndicatorsTables.aspx?lang=en&table_id=1056 (accessed on 4 October 2022)

⁶² Each new job opening in the ICT sector creates another three jobs in other sectors (PCBS, 2021d)

⁶³ Based on PCBS information and communications statistics.

⁶⁴ Interview with George Yerusis, Director of the Innovation & Entrepreneurship Unit at Birzeit University.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

women can be considered partially a result of, and a contributor to, societal prejudices pertaining to gender roles and stereotypes. A participant in the ICT Focus Group in Gaza pointed to a gender division of labour in the ICT sector:

Women are more suited for tasks involving visual designs and aids, as well as networking between local and international companies through online platforms. Men, on the other hand, are more suited for more technical or hands-on tasks such as software development, content writing, and networking due to men's unrestricted movement out of the household.⁶⁶

This is further exemplified in the absence of women in leadership positions in the Palestinian ICT sector. According to the Palestinian Information Technology Association of Companies (PITA)—which enlists the biggest ICT companies in the State of Palestine—only 2 of its 190 member companies are headed by women. Furthermore, not only are none of the companies owned by women, none of the board members at PITA are women either.⁶⁷ This gender segregation in ICT employment prevents women from accruing the necessary expertise and financial leverage that would constitute catalysts for progressively wider inclusion of women in the ICT sector.

One participant pointed out that the real hindrance to women's participation in this sector is women's exclusion from decision-making positions in companies or associations and organizations in the sector, even though there is equal representation between women and men as employees.⁶⁸ Another participant noted that while women represent most employees in software companies, as well as in telecommunications companies in administrative, sales, and support positions, hardware companies hire mainly men.⁶⁹

This dynamic is further exacerbated by social restrictions on women's mobility, women's limited participation in decision-making positions, women's modest enrolment in trade and specialized associations and organizations, and an absence of supportive policies. Additionally, one participant in Ramallah pointed out that one of the major considerations driving employers in this sector away from women workers

is the additional off-time women require, such as for maternity leave, family care, etc. She added that online work can limit the effect of this given that women can fulfil their responsibilities from home.⁷⁰

In contrast, the Focus Group in Gaza noted that women hold a comparative advantage over men as employees because women demonstrate higher commitment and reliability in adhering to deadlines. Women also face relatively less burdensome occupation-imposed travel restrictions than their male counterparts, and therefore they are better able to conduct business with fewer interruptions and uncertainties.

There are also differences between urban and rural areas. Women from rural areas generally face more social pressure not to pursue careers in ICT or continual questioning about it from their families or male guardians. This is because women from rural areas have to commute to their work, since most ICT companies are in cities, and the alternative of women moving to the city to work would be totally unacceptable to women's families or male guardians, except in a few cases. While remote work remains a viable option, and indeed has been on the rise in recent years, it has not completely replaced in-office work. One of the business owners in Ramallah recounted that they had tried to recruit several talented female graduates, but their families denied them the prospect of moving to and working in the city of Ramallah.⁷¹

Major challenges faced by women in the ICT sector

As in other sectors, social pressures and families' authority exert significant influence on women's participation in the ICT sector as employees, but especially so as business owners participating in trade and market exchange. The drawn-out process of getting women into the ICT sector forgoes the accumulated experience that could invigorate women's participation in the sector. That is, successive inclusion in the sector could follow an incremental trajectory, building on an increasing number of success stories and accrued experience for women.

⁶⁶ IT Focus Group, Gaza.

⁶⁷ Interview with Megan Tanous, Programs Manager, PITA, on 16 May 2022.

⁶⁸ IT Focus Group, Ramallah, the West Bank.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

One participant in the Ramallah Focus Group lamented the familial pressure in pursuing her own project:

Women working in the ICT sector face familial pressure not to leave stable positions. Because of my current good pay of US\$2,000 to US\$3,000 per month, my family is preventing me from pursuing risky endeavours.⁷²

Another indicative case highlighted more positive attitudes towards ICT as a career path for women. One of the participants in the Gaza group explained:

I received strong support from my family and husband in pursuing an ICT career. Throughout my working experience, I even sensed noticeable progress in the social perception of my work. However, I still receive modest support from organizations active in the promotion of this sector for women.⁷³

One business owner in the ICT Focus Group elaborated on her trajectory as a business owner in ICT. Currently, her company provides online technical and soft skills training for students and young graduates. The company aims to provide the needed skills for young graduates to jumpstart their careers or their own enterprises. Aside from this focus, the company also offers online marketing services. On her success in establishing a foothold in this market, she stated:

I relied on my determination in the initial phases of the project as the main factor behind my later success. After trying to offer various services, I believe I found an unmet need with real potential in what my company currently provides.⁷⁴

The discussion indicated that the ICT sector has huge potential for wider participation of women given the possibility of them working from home, though this potential can only be viewed in conjunction with the added burdens on women that accompany in this context, since women typically bear the household and family care responsibilities. Online work might also expand women's access to skill development programmes and modalities. There are several cases of women providing online services ranging from e-commerce to e-marketing. This trend became

especially prominent during the closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is a discrepancy between the skill development opportunities available for women and men in the ICT sector. The prevailing view among participants is that the skill development opportunities available for men concentrate on software development and more technical tracks, while opportunities for women focus on e-marketing and visual design specialties. The participants attributed this split to the socially perceived roles for women and men in ICT imposed by employers and families. One of the informative cases was provided by Majd Khalifeh, CEO of Flow Accelerator, who explained that she often encounters cases of young female students or graduates who put a stop to their careers in ICT:

It is typical for these students to participate in such training programmes as extracurricular activities without pursuing careers in ICT any further. In one of the cases, the student was accompanied by her brother to the workshop, not allowing her to travel on her own. Such cases demonstrate the restrictions women face in pursuing the fields of software development. Despite the attention given to providing female trainees with a safe and productive environment to reassure their families, the trainees still face high scrutiny from their families.⁷⁵

In terms of institutional initiatives to address this discrepancy in skill development programmes, the participants asserted that current policies remain scarce and ineffective. In this regard, Sami Sahweil, Director of the Policy and Planning Department for the MoWA, explained that the ministry is currently in the process of assembling a database of ICT products provided by women-led businesses, complemented with e-marketing to promote these products.⁷⁶

Another challenge highlighted by business owners in the ICT sector is the intense competition they face locally, regionally, and internationally, and the burden of the need to constantly adapt to the changing marketplace and be responsive to this intense competition. One of the business owners in Gaza shared her experience in this regard:

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ IT Focus Group, Gaza.

⁷⁴ IT Focus Group, Ramallah, the West Bank.

⁷⁵ Interview with Majd Khalifeh, CEO of Flow Accelerator, Ramallah ICT Focus Group, on 10 April 2022.

⁷⁶ Interview with Sami Sahweil on 21 April 2022.

In my business, I face intense competition in dealing with a limited number of suppliers and trademarks. Like many other Palestinian companies, I often lack experienced personnel, in contrast with foreign competitors.⁷⁷

The participants also addressed the unique set of challenges the ICT sector in Gaza confronts in terms of severe travel restrictions and tight blockades on imports and exports due to the occupation. This has been the prevailing situation for more than 15 years, exacerbating the problems over time. The participants alluded to infrastructure damaged by recurring conflict as one of the most limiting problems they face. Residents in the Gaza Strip still face rationed electric supply, and as a result, irregular Internet connection that is also limited in terms of the connection speeds offered.

The lack of a conducive business environment in terms of the processes and procedures related to the registration and conduct of business is another challenge to business owners in the Palestinian ICT sector. Most participants expressed dissatisfaction with the prolonged and complicated registration processes required for start-up businesses. Moreover, the owners of women-led companies said that they also have to deal with a sluggish bureaucracy when it comes to their marketing activities. To address these issues, the participants called for streamlined and clear processes, especially for the registration of new businesses and trademarks. One of the business owners even mentioned that these procedures sometimes require a male guardian's signature.⁷⁸ Another business owner pointed to the lengthy and complicated registration procedures that she faced in her business:

I even had to obtain legal representation to go through the process, even though that is not the norm. My male counterparts do not face the same inefficiencies I do, and neither would men require legal representation.⁷⁹

As previously mentioned, the ICT sector is particularly demanding given its fast pace and frequent innovations. Some participants indicated that many women business owners are forced to cease their businesses because they are unable to devote the necessary time to them. They emphasized that this is especially the

case for budding businesses, which demand even greater workloads. Majd Khalifeh, of PITA and Flow Accelerator, commented:

Men can devote 100 per cent of their time to their businesses, which is sometimes not enough. Women could devote only part of that time to their businesses, bogged down by her domestic and social responsibilities.⁸⁰

Further, one business owner in Ramallah recounted that she had encountered cases where women workers faced much scrutiny from their spouses, leading to separation. These workers, according to the owner, worked as support technicians with flexible hours, which drew contempt from their spouses. Such cases, the owner explained, drive many women away from ICT to pursue more regular jobs such as teaching. Online work in ICT offers a way for women to circumvent some of these social pressures inhibiting their participation in the sector by allowing work from home, as also discussed in the food products sector. Nonetheless, this potential can only be viewed in conjunction with the added domestic work and care burden that women face while working from home. Online work might also influence women's access to skill development programmes and modalities. One of the participants in the Ramallah Focus Group emphasized the positive impact of online work on women's participation:

During the pandemic, employers were not considering gender in the hiring process, opening the competition for men and women. The restriction on women's movement prevents them from accepting job offers in different localities or cities, due again to family pressures. Also, female graduates of ICT majors often pursue teaching positions, precisely for the reasons of having a stable and socially accepted job that is close to home with limited working hours.⁸¹

4.3.5. ENTREPRENEURSHIP

There were 166,486 business establishments in the OPT in 2017 (69 per cent of them in the West Bank) according to the latest survey (PCBS, 2018a).⁸² Most of them were in trade activities (51 per cent) followed by services (35 per cent), industry (13 per cent) and

⁷⁷ IT Focus Group, Gaza.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Interview with Majd Khalifeh on 10 April 2022.

⁸¹ IT Focus Group, Ramallah, the West Bank.

⁸² This number includes the headquarters of government institutions, as well as stalled and under-equipped establishments.

construction (0.5 per cent), and 91 per cent of the total operated in the private sector. Most establishments operated on a micro scale employing less than 5 persons (89 per cent of the total) or between 5 and 10 persons (7 per cent).

The MoNE's annual statistical report for 2021 indicated that 2,156 new companies were registered. About 9.6 per cent of the total number of persons registered were women. A large share of these enterprises is active in groceries, clothing stores, and similar activities. In addition, of 300 members of the Palestine Trade Center (PalTrade),⁸³ only five are female-owned enterprises.⁸⁴

Self-employed and employer work status categories could be broadly considered as a proxy for entrepreneurial activity. In the OPT, only 13.7 per cent of all employed women corresponded to these two categories (as opposed to 25.4 per cent of men) in 2021 (PCBS, 2022). A relatively higher share of men and women are entrepreneurs in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip. Contrary to this low level of entrepreneurial activity among women, 65 per cent of women want to start a business but cannot do so due to various gender barriers (Al-Botmeh, 2015), as discussed further below.

According to the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute's latest Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report in 2012, 9.8 per cent of the adult Palestinian population (ages 18–64) had started a business in the past 42 months—higher than the average of the six MENA countries included in the study (6 per cent) but lower than the average for low-income countries (13 per cent). Forty-two per cent of all those surveyed and two-thirds of women and youth were driven by necessity. Hence, the relatively higher rate of entrepreneurship compared to the MENA region reflects the limited availability of opportunities in other areas and the fact that entrepreneurship becomes a last employment resort. Additionally, cultural factors play a role. Traditional careers with greater stability and social prestige are preferred to entrepreneurial activity by the parents of young people. Women are mostly involved in informal home-based enterprises, and are viewed as helping the family rather than operating a legitimate business venture (ILO, 2018).

The OPT ranked 57th out of 67 studied countries in early-stage entrepreneurial activity (i.e. in operation for less than 42 months) and second from the bottom in the number of established-business female owners (in operation for more than 42 months) in 2012. Only 3.4 per cent of the female adult population engaged in early-stage entrepreneurial activity, as opposed to 16 per cent of the male adult population. Female early-stage entrepreneurial activity was concentrated among young women (ages 18–34), and all female entrepreneurial activity was dominated by those with a diploma or bachelor's degree. Female entrepreneurs were driven by necessity while male entrepreneurs were driven mainly by opportunity. Female entrepreneurs participated mostly in consumer-oriented activities (e.g. retail, social services, education and health), followed by manufacturing activities, and they impressively employed 5.6 per cent of all employed persons in 2012 (Abdullah and Hattawy, 2014).

Several factors discourage Palestinian women from starting their own businesses, including a lack of market-based business skills training and learning opportunities, inadequate alternative sources of financing, social and cultural factors, and a lack of a supportive environment for women's entrepreneurship (UN Women, 2019b). Access to finance is a key constraint for female entrepreneurship in the OPT, as elsewhere. Women state that they need a male guarantor or more collateral to borrow from a bank, and are not taken seriously when trying to borrow from family. However, they find micro credit institutions helpful due to their more flexible conditions compared to banks. A cumbersome and complicated business environment also constrains the growth of women's ventures. Other inhibiting factors include political instability and threats of war, lack of skilled and dedicated labour, limited opportunities for market expansion, poor infrastructure, and lack of access to technology and innovation (Sultan, 2016).

Finally, the Israeli occupation adversely affects the growth of entrepreneurial activity by restricting access to low-cost, efficient, and modern technology (e.g. 4G telecom technology, electronic payment systems, satellite and sensing equipment), as well as basic services (e.g. water, electricity, and freight) (ILO, 2018).

⁸³ PalTrade is the biggest trade promotion organization in the State of Palestine, founded with the mission of leading the development of exports as a driving force for sustainable economic growth.

⁸⁴ Interview with Yousef Al-Laham, Director of Promotion Department, PalTrade, on 18 April 2022.

4.4. THE GENDERED IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The global economic recession induced by the COVID-19 pandemic took its toll in the OPT as in other countries. Due to the measures to combat the spread of the disease, the Palestinian economy suffered extended periods of stagnation across sectors. The pandemic coincided with an already strained Palestinian economy in a fiscal crisis as well as heightened occupation-imposed restrictions. Palestinian governmental agencies did not have adequate capacity for meaningful interventions to alleviate the toll of the pandemic. One participant said that she participated in voluntary community fundraising and the collection of food rations for refugee camps in the absence of government interventions.⁸⁵

The pandemic exacerbated pre-existing socioeconomic inequalities mainly through a steep decline in domestic economic activity and a rapid rise in unemployment. Many workers lost their jobs, especially in sectors most affected by social distancing measures, such as tourism and construction. Women were already more disadvantaged than men in the labour market, with higher unemployment rates and lower wages, and facing gender segregation in employment, and the pandemic only exacerbated these vulnerabilities. As in other countries, women were at the front line of the crisis as they are predominantly employed in the healthcare sector. Many female workers could not telework given their domestic work and care responsibilities. Those who worked from home faced the double burden of paid and unpaid work (ILO, 2020). Women lost jobs particularly in the personal services, accommodation, and trade sectors. However, for most sectors except trade, job losses were concentrated among low-paid and informal workers, leading to a decline in the gender pay gap. Women entrepreneurs in critical and high-contracting sectors experienced job losses likely associated with the closure of their businesses, most of which operated in the informal sector (UN Women, 2021).

The PCBS carried out a business survey on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in two cycles during March-May 2020 and March-May 2021

(PCBS, 2020c, 2021b). In the respective cycles, the surveys found that 75 per cent and 78 per cent of institutions reported facing closures due to lockdown measures imposed by the government. In both cycles, small businesses and businesses in the services sector faced the highest degree of closures. In 2021, 83 per cent of establishments faced demand shocks and 49 per cent faced difficulties in the supply of inputs, raw materials, or finished goods and materials purchased. Trade was the sector most affected by supply shocks (PCBS, 2021b).

The PCBS also carried out a household survey on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in two cycles during March-May 2020 and June-December 2020. According to the findings, one household main income earner out of six stopped working, and more than half of household main income earners were absent from work during the lockdown period. Among those who stopped working, 51 per cent were in industry, 42 per cent in services, and 7 per cent in agriculture. Among those who managed to keep their jobs, 80 per cent faced a reduction in work hours (similar for men and women), 52 per cent did not receive any wages, 25 per cent received only partial wages, and 23 per cent received their regular pay. The share of female main income earners who did not receive wages (26 per cent) was less than the share for male main income earners (52 per cent). However, during June-December 2020, relatively fewer female main income earners worked compared to male ones. In terms of food security, 35.8 per cent of female main income earners and 42.4 per cent of male main income earners worried about not having enough food due to a lack of cash or other sources (PCBS, 2021a).

The UNCTAD field study also revealed some facts about the gender impact of the pandemic. The participants generally indicated that women assumed excess burdens during the pandemic, whether as business owners, workers, or in household and family care. As business owners, women faced the burdens of adapting to the changing economic realities resulting from the pandemic. The owner of a catering business in Ramallah mentioned the slump in demand, as well as the difficulties in marketing her products during pandemic-related closures.⁸⁶ As workers, women also had to anticipate the

⁸⁵ Food Products Focus Group, Ramallah, the West Bank.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

uncertainty pervading the economy. In terms of household responsibilities, the participants stated that their domestic work and care responsibilities multiplied, especially during lockdowns.

The pandemic also affected the total paid and unpaid workload of men and women differently. Some of the participants stated that many of their male relatives were forced to stay home during lockdowns or were laid off from their jobs because of the economic downturn. As mentioned previously, working from home is a viable option for women's employment in the OPT to circumvent social pressures. As a result, women as business owners and workers shouldered increased burdens inside and outside work and experienced psychological pressures and fatigue during the lockdowns. In contrast, some participants in the ICT Focus Group also indicated that the interruptions during the pandemic represented an opportunity to innovate and market

electronic products for women working in ICT. This is because working from home gave them the flexibility to combine paid and unpaid work and to save the time that had been used for travelling. One of the workers in the ICT Focus Group stated that working online during the pandemic had helped her improve her performance.⁸⁷

Palestinian authorities introduced economic measures to combat the adverse effects of the pandemic and to protect the livelihoods of workers, including those informally employed (social aid programmes), self-employed (funds for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises), and those who lost jobs during the pandemic. While the response was timely and strongly donor-supported, various stakeholders said that it was not sufficient, which is likely related to fiscal strain. There is a need for further fiscal support to revitalize the economy and expand social aid (UN Women, 2021).

⁸⁷ IT Focus Group, Ramallah, the West Bank.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has investigated women's participation in the economy and trade in the OPT through both desk research and a field study involving focus group discussions, cases studies, and interviews, providing a qualitative and contextual analysis of the three targeted sectors examined (olives and olive oil, food products, and ICT). It should be noted that data on women's participation in trade are lacking, as is common in many other countries.⁸⁸ In many cases, the focus on the gender perspective remains only a secondary feature in the formulation of policy and is often treated as a stand-alone intervention instead of as an essential hallmark of all trade policies.

The study has revealed that communication with strangers is a key determinant of gender roles in the economic sphere. Across the three sectors, women participated in, if not completely performed, all production activities. However, activities related to dealing with persons outside the familial or local sphere, such as marketing and physical access to suppliers and vendors, were delegated to men. Many of the women study participants, it should be noted, expressed agreement with these gender roles. While these might be conscious choices, this brings to the fore the impact of a lack of awareness of rights, resources, and opportunities to change attitudes. This is also one of the main factors underlying the slow advancement towards gender equality.

The economic participation of women, even on a small scale, has direct effects on their wellbeing, sense of independence, and ability to make decisions, even though many women, especially entrepreneurs, entered the labour market out of necessity and not opportunity.

All the factors inhibiting women's economic and social participation discussed in this report must be viewed within the framework of Israeli occupation. Israeli's hold of the economy of the State of Palestine leaves businesses exposed to unpredictable measures. These measures exacerbate the constraints faced by

women, such as restrictions on movement and access to markets.

Women-led businesses in the olive farming and food product sectors tend to be home-based, mainly due to the suitability of these sectors for working from home to circumvent social pressures faced by women. As a result, Palestinian women have traditionally prominent roles, especially in rural areas, in these sectors. The findings of the study also reveal the significant number of women who provide online services, ranging from e-commerce to e-marketing and others, as such work allows for working from home. This trend became especially prominent during the pandemic-related closures.

Cooperatives proved to be an effective approach for women to tackle the challenges that they face with respect to production and marketing stages. As the experiences of members of several cooperatives interviewed during the study illustrate, cooperatives can be highly successful in marketing members' products to exporters.

Of the three sectors, ICT has proven to be unique in terms of the economic opportunities it offers to women as business owners and workers. First and foremost, the ICT sector remains one of the relatively emergent markets in the OPT and has the potential for exponential growth in the coming years. Second, the sector on average offers higher earnings than other sectors. Third, despite ICT featuring intense competition, the sector is not saturated from a market point of view, in contrast to the olive oil and food products sectors.

The study presents several policy recommendations to address the gender issues identified in the three sectors, with a focus on trade and on promoting women's economic and social empowerment in the wider Palestinian economy. Policy recommendations are classified from general to more specific and listed in table 7 at the end of this section. The subsections that follow present an overview of these recommendations by category.

⁸⁸ This point was highlighted during the UNCTAD field study by the directors of the Policy Trade Development Departments at the MoNE and by the director of the Customs Department.

Female employment

Women have very low labour force participation rate in the OPT, even compared to the Middle East region. A major impediment to women joining the labour force is societal gender norms that impose an unequal distribution of unpaid labour within the household and restrict the physical mobility of women and girls and their participation in various economic opportunities. As presented in this study, household responsibilities emerge as the top reason for women not joining the labour force. Therefore, any transformative policy intervention to promote women's participation in the economy and trade needs to aim at shifting these gender norms towards a more equal setting for women and men. Specific policy recommendations in this regard are presented in the awareness raising, labour market policy, and care domains in the female employment section of table 7.

Entrepreneurship

Addressing gender inequalities in access to resources, business services, and infrastructure is essential for any policy instrument designed to support women's participation in trade as producers and entrepreneurs, as identified in the UNCTAD field study. Property ownership and inheritance laws as well as land tenure programmes need to aim at achieving gender equality as a core goal. ICT could be used to enhance the access of women traders and entrepreneurs to market information. Initiatives to ease access to finance also need to be developed. Specific policy recommendations in this regard are presented in the entrepreneurship section of table 7.

Gender mainstreaming in trade policy

There is a need for effective, coordinated, and systematic gender mainstreaming in trade activities by governmental and nongovernmental trade agencies. Although those agencies already mainstream gender in their implementation agenda, the recorded impact over an extended period has been insufficient. The need arises, therefore, for a realignment and prioritization of gender mainstreaming policies as a cross-cutting issue to get the most impact. Collection of gender-disaggregated data on trade is also important for mainstreaming gender in trade policy.⁸⁹

The related section in table 7 introduces specific policy recommendations in this regard.

Public procurement

Public procurement programmes that favour micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises or, more directly, women-led/owned enterprises, could play a significant role in expanding women's participation in new business opportunities. This is an easy and effective policy instrument that could be used widely by the Palestinian government.

There are certain barriers faced by women-owned business when competing for public tenders, including inadequate national legislation and policies, misfit tender designs, excessive requirements, poor government practices, lack of information, and limited capability (ITC, 2020). It should be highlighted that no one size fits all and that each country should develop an approach to public procurement that fits its national context. In the OPT, the Ministry of National Economy has reviewed the public procurement system to respond to the needs of small project holders. Further policy measures recommended toward this end are listed in the public procurement section of table 7.

Cooperatives in traditional sectors

In traditional sectors, there is a need to augment the role of cooperatives and collective entities to pool the resources of small-scale producers. Cooperatives have a significant impact in terms of realizing efficiencies stemming from their collective bargaining power as buyers and sellers. Moreover, these entities crucially fulfil the marketing and branding functions for individual or small businesses, in which women are concentrated. As demonstrated by the various examples discussed in this study, established cooperatives have a tangible effect in promoting women-led businesses and changing social attitudes towards women workers. Established Palestinian marketing and exporting companies (e.g. Al Reef and Canaan) proved to be successful intermediaries in marketing the products of Palestinian producers through their accumulated valuable exporting experience (e.g. meeting product standards, branding and labelling requirements). These companies can be incentivized to deal with more cooperatives and small-scale producers. Further policy

⁸⁹ UNCTAD has a work programme on gender and trade statistics from which member states can benefit. As an example, the details of an ongoing project of this work programme can be found at <https://unctad.org/project/data-and-statistics-more-gender-responsive-trade-policies-africa-caucasus-and-central-asia>

recommendations to expand the role of cooperatives in traditional sectors are listed in table 7. It should also be noted that cooperatives involve formal businesses and hence informal microenterprises, in which women are concentrated, and therefore may not benefit from training and other opportunities such as incentive or rescue packages. Therefore, the facilitation of business formalization processes is also critical to involve more small producers in cooperatives.

New niche sectors for women

Future initiatives directed towards supporting women-led businesses in trade should consider laying the groundwork for women to expand into more niche sectors that face less competition. Such sectors could also involve more sophisticated production and business management processes. As shown by the analysis of the three sectors, women-led businesses tend to be concentrated in traditional, saturated sectors such as olive farming and food processing. While these sectors afford women viable employment opportunities, they pose significant challenges

due to intense competition. Expanding into new sectors, therefore, could be a viable opportunity. Business forums play an important role as hubs for governmental and nongovernmental organizations, financial institutions, and other entities to facilitate synergies, the flow of information, networking, and the extension of support services to small-scale businesses, among which women-owned businesses are concentrated. Further policy recommendations are listed in the relevant part of table 7.

The potential of the ICT sector for women's empowerment

The ICT sector provides a high-value and accessible environment for women's economic integration. It affords women the potential for flexible and remote work, which is highly valuable for working women, as demonstrated by various sector cases in this study. There is a need to advance skill development programmes for women business owners and workers in ICT. Policy recommendations to this end are listed in the last part of table 7.

Table 7. Policy recommendations and implementation framework

	Targets	Stakeholders	Possible actions and activities	Monitoring indicators
Female employment	- Higher participation rate of women in the labour market and in trade - More equal gender division of labour - Increased female employment	<i>Government:</i> Ministries of Women's Affairs, National Economy, Education, Labour, Social Development <i>Civil society:</i> Nongovernmental organizations in related areas	<i>Awareness-raising:</i> - Increasing the share of components on gender equality in the education curriculum at all levels - Expanding educational campaigns for adults <i>Labour market:</i> - Increasing legal protection against gender-based discrimination - Introducing public incentive programmes for enterprises to increase the employment share of underrepresented groups, including women, in targeted sectors and in supervisory positions - Developing the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Equality Seal Programme for private enterprises^a - Introducing and expanding employment offices - Introducing talent pools to increase the visibility of women candidates - Designing training programmes according to the time schedules of women - Hiring female trainers - Providing on-site childcare services at training sites <i>Care domain:</i> - Expanding public childcare facilities - Providing subsidies to low-income families to enrol their children in private childcare facilities - Incorporating gender equality in paid maternity leave policies	- Number and reach of awareness-raising programmes - Independent evaluation of curricula - Female labour force participation rate - Women's employment share by sector - Share of women attending training programmes - Enrolment rate in childcare facilities - Minutes per day spent by men and women on unpaid care and domestic work - Oversight of legal measures on a regular basis

	Targets	Stakeholders	Possible actions and activities	Monitoring indicators
Entrepreneurship	- More women's entrepreneurship - Higher participation of women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in trade - Shift of women-owned SMEs to higher-value-added sectors	<i>Government:</i> Ministries of Women's Affairs, National Economy, Agriculture, Transport and Communications, Finance <i>Civil society:</i> Nongovernmental organizations in related areas	<i>Access to resources:</i> - Expanding targeted input subsidy programmes - Implementing legislation on non-discriminatory access to land and land tenure and to ensure the primacy of civil law over customary law - Removing discriminatory rules and conditions related to access to financial institutions - Enhancing national credit programmes targeting women with preferential terms <i>Infrastructure and services:</i> - Increasing technological investments to support a shift to higher-value-added sectors - Providing financial support to ease access to such technologies - Developing tailored extension and advisory services for women-owned SMEs - Expanding incentive programmes for exporting and for international certification of SMEs - Enhancing SMEs' access to market information through online sources - Expanding supplier diversity initiatives (e.g. WEConnect International^{1b}) and voluntary certification programmes	- Incidence of land ownership (agricultural and non-agricultural) by gender - Rate of access to credit by gender - Independent evaluation of banking and credit application procedures - Share of women benefiting from such services - Employment share of women in targeted high-value-added tradable sectors

	Targets	Stakeholders	Possible actions and activities	Monitoring indicators
Gender mainstreaming in trade policy	- Increased gender mainstreaming in trade policy and documents - Improved capacity of women to participate in expanding sectors under trade reforms	<i>Government:</i> Ministries of Women's Affairs, National Economy, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) <i>Civil society:</i> Nongovernmental organizations in related areas	- Introducing gender chapters in future free trade agreements in the region - Conducting ex ante gender impact assessments of trade reforms under consideration - Promoting participation by women's organizations in trade policy processes - Enhancing trade-focused capacity-building programmes targeting women (i.e. credit, business services, market information) - Gender-sensitive value-chain analyses to identify export sectors for skill development and technological investments to support women's shift to higher-value-added segments - Gender-sensitive implementation of development assistance projects (such as Aid for Trade) - Work programme on gender and trade statistics by the Ministry of National Economy and PCBS	- Independent oversight of trade agreement processes with a gender lens - Number and reach of trade-focused capacity-building programmes and other stated programmes in export sectors
Public procurement	- Increased participation of women-owned businesses in public procurement	<i>Government:</i> Ministries of Women's Affairs, National Economy, Finance <i>Civil society:</i> Nongovernmental organizations in related areas	- Further developing the public procurement system to make it gender-sensitive - Committing a portion of public procurement projects for women-led enterprises - Forming consortiums of various cooperatives or women-led businesses to pool their resources and provide the goods and services on the requisite price and quality terms required by these projects	- Share of women-owned businesses in public procurement projects - Monetary value of projects assigned to women-owned businesses as a share of total

	Targets	Stakeholders	Possible actions and activities	Monitoring indicators
Cooperatives in traditional markets	- Higher rates of women active in cooperatives	<i>Government:</i> Ministries of Women's Affairs, National Economy, Finance <i>Civil society:</i> Nongovernmental organizations in related areas	- Tax subsidies to intermediary businesses serving women producers - Dedicated mapping and organizational assessments of women cooperatives in key economic sectors (e.g. with respect to market penetration and production modes) - Devising specific interventions to bolster the role of women cooperatives in traditional sectors for women producers	- Share of women who are members of cooperatives - Number and content of services provided by cooperatives to women producers
New niche export sectors	- Reduced gender segregation of women in the labour market - Increased share of women in new export sectors	<i>Government:</i> Ministries of Women's Affairs, National Economy, Education, Labour <i>Civil society:</i> Nongovernmental organizations in related areas	- Initial assessments to identify niche export sectors - Expanding incentive and support programmes (e.g. targeted input subsidies, tax exemptions and deductions, technological investments, extension and advisory services) to promote their growth - Further developing joint public/private training programmes to improve women's skills to join these sectors - Expanding training certification programmes to make such skills more recognizable - Designing formal education curricula (e.g. secondary and tertiary) according to the needs of such sectors - Expanding programmes for on-location coaching services to women-led businesses	- Share of women employed in new niche sectors - Number and content of certification, business service, platforms, and other programmes

	Targets	Stakeholders	Possible actions and activities	Monitoring indicators
			- Contracting local experts, preferably women, to provide counselling to women-led enterprises in each niche sector - Enhancing the reach and scope of business forums - Establishing platforms to exchange good practices and peer learning among women entrepreneurs, and to introduce role models	
Information and communications technology	- Developing women's digital skills - Increasing the share of women employed in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector	<i>Government:</i> Ministries of Women's Affairs, National Economy, Education, Telecommunications, and Information Technology, <i>Civil society:</i> Nongovernmental organizations in related areas	- Expanding programmes targeting women to develop basic digital literacy skills and applied skills demanded in ICT - Awareness-raising and educational campaigns on ICT-enabled business opportunities - Enhancing the reach of small businesses to ICT infrastructure (e.g. broadband coverage, electronic payment systems) - Easing women's access to ICT jobs through online platforms and intermediary recruiters between companies and workers	- Share of women employed in the ICT sector - Share of women with basic digital literacy skills - Share of women with advanced technical digital skills

Source: UNCTAD secretariat

^a The UNDP's Gender Equality Seal Programme engages the private sector to achieve standards of excellence to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the business world, and to contribute towards the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (in particular, SDGs 5, 8, 10 and 17).

^b WEConnect International is a global network that connects women-owned businesses to qualified buyers around the world.

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