

Israel Women's Network – Individual UPR submission – Israel – October 2022

A. LABOR MARKET

1. Women in the work force

Today, women make up about half of the work force in Israel (48.9% women and 51% men). 60.7% of all women are employed and 66.6% of all men are employed¹. 15% of employed men are self-employed compared to 9.6% of self-employed women². 27.7% of all employed women and 16.5% of all employed men work part-time³. In Israel, two significant minority groups are ultra-orthodox Jews and Arabs, which suffer from low income and access to jobs.

In the pre-pandemic period, 76% of women participated in the labor force in Israel, which is a high rate relative to other OECD countries⁴. The Covid-19 pandemic increased gender disparities and adversely affected women more than men in many fields: unemployment rates were significantly higher among women, ranging from 58% to 69%, and in most households, care for children and the home fell on women.

Following the economy's recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic, the percentage of women working for pay is equal to or exceeds pre-pandemic levels: At end 2021, 81% of ultra-orthodox Jewish women (Haredi), 83% of non-ultra-orthodox Jewish women, and 40% of Arab women were employed, compared to 76%, 84%, and 39%, respectively, in early 2019. Arab and ultra-orthodox Jewish women earned the lowest wages and most held part-time positions. In 2021, only 37% of Jewish ultra-orthodox women, 59% of non-ultra-orthodox Jewish women, and 26% of Arab women held a full-time position⁵.

2. Women managers

Women encounter multiple glass ceilings in the labor market: Women hold a mere 34% of all executive positions in Israel and female executives earn only 70% of the wages of their male counterparts⁶. Despite public companies' legal obligation to appoint at least one women director (Companies Law, Section 239[d]), women hold only 24% of directorships in public companies⁷. The situation in government companies is more favorable: Following a 2007 government decision (No. 1369) providing for equal representation of men and women in the boards of government companies, women constitute 46% of directors in government companies⁸. Recent progress in women's appointment as CBOD in government companies has been significant yet remains low: Today, only 6 women in this position (25.7%), up from 1 in 2021.

3. Post-pandemic changes in work patterns

In the post-pandemic period, 17% of all workers work remotely or have transitioned to hybrid work patterns. Remote work is more characteristic of workers in higher-paying positions, and the types of jobs held by low-earning women generally offer little opportunity for such flexibility. 20% of Jewish women (ultra-orthodox and non-religious) work remotely, in contrast to 2% of working Arab women, which implies that Arab women have not participated in these changing work patterns. This disparity stems from Arab women's lack of means for remote work such as access to internet infrastructure, lower digital literacy, and employment in occupations that are not amenable to remote work⁹.

¹ Central Bureau of Statistics (2022). [Labor Force Survey Data, August 2022/8](#).

² Central Bureau of Statistics (2022). [Labor Force Survey Data, Table 2.8](#).

³ Central Bureau of Statistics. (2022). [Labor Force Survey Data, August 2022/8](#).

⁴ Labor Arm, Ministry of Economics (2022, March 7). [Labor Arm Publishes Statistics on Women's Employment](#). [Press Release.]

⁵ Fuchs, H. (2022). [The Labor Market in Israel 2021](#). Ministry of Economics, Labor Arm.

⁶ Alfandari, Y. (2021). [Gender pay gap among managers](#). Working paper series no.116. Central Bureau of Statistics.

⁷ Svirski-Sofer, N., Fisher Lalo, E., & Zinger, G. (2022). [Remarks on call for proposal for encouraging Corporate Responsibility reports to enhance women's representation in board of directors](#). IWN and Directors Lead Change.

⁸ Shwartz, R. (2002). [Women's representation in government companies' directors](#). Research and Information Center. Knesset.

⁹ Fuchs, H. (2022). [The Labor Market in Israel 2021](#). Ministry of Economics, Labor Arm.

4. Rights of pregnant women and maternity leave

The Employment of Women Law 5714-1954 contains special provisions that apply to women's work, including protection of women from dismissal during fertility treatments, pregnancy, maternity leave, and the 60-day period following return to work from maternity leave. However, employers who seek a woman's dismissal or place a woman on leave without pay during these periods may apply for an exemption to the governmental Commissioner of Women's Work. In 2021, 5,396 applications were filed: 307 applications to reduce wages or scope of employment, 3,855 applications to place a woman on leave without pay during pregnancy, and 1,234 applications for dismissal during a protected period. The vast majority (91.2%) of these applications was approved¹⁰. These high figures show that the government fails to protect women's rights in the labor market in practice. Moreover, this raises the question of whether the governmental Commissioner on Women's Work has sufficient authority and means of enforcement to protect women's rights under labor laws.

Mothers are eligible for 15 weeks of paid (100%) maternity leave, of which the first 6 weeks are non-transferable. Employers must retain a mother's position for one year from the date of the infant's birth. Fathers are not eligible for a separate parental leave but can share the remaining 9 weeks. However, only 1% of all fathers exercise their right for maternity leave,¹¹ primarily because it is still not socially acceptable for men to function as the main caregivers. In special cases (distance from place of employment, shift work, etc.), women are eligible for an extended maternity.

5. Gender wage gap

Although the Male and Female Workers Equal Pay Law 5756-1996 provides that employers must pay an equal wage to female and male workers for the same or substantially the same work, gender wage gaps remain significant in Israel.

In 2019 the average monthly wage was NIS 8,308 for women and NIS 12,193 for men, reflecting a gender wage gap of 32%. In the past 30 years, the gender wage gap in Israel decreased by a mere 10 percentage points, from 43% in 1990 to 32% in 2019¹². In the civil service in 2021, women earned 83% of men's wages, reflecting a difference of NIS 3,271 per month¹³.

Amendment 6 to the Male and Female Workers Equal Pay Law, passed in 2020, adds transparency to wage practices in the private sector, requires companies with 518 employees or more to make their gender wage gaps public. Although this is an important amendment designed to reduce gender wage gaps in the private sector, it currently applies to fewer than 200 privately owned companies and lacks means of control or enforcement. An analysis of the companies' reports indicates that the companies interpreted the reporting requirements differently. It is therefore crucial to clarify the official reporting criteria and establish a governmental review mechanism that includes sanctions¹⁴.

5.1 The "motherhood penalty"

The gender wage gap in Israel is explained by several factors, including a motherhood penalty, which has a strong effect in Israel because of the country's high rates of birthrate (2.90 compared to OECD's average of 1.61)¹⁵. Figures on the effect of the birth of the first child in dual-earner families shows that mothers' wages drop by 30% in the first year after the birth of their first child and remains at this level for at least one decade, while the birth of the first child has little effect on fathers' wages. In Arab society, women also experience a marriage penalty, which creates disparities in pay between married women and married men, and this gap also remains for at least a decade¹⁶.

¹⁰ Fuchs, H. (2022). *The Labor Market in Israel 2021*. Ministry of Economics, Labor Arm.

¹¹ Government and Society Division, Prime Minister's Office. (2019). *Parental Leave Policy for Fathers in Israel*. [Powerpoint presentation]

¹² Central Bureau of Statistics. *International Women's Day 2022*. [Press Release.]

¹³ Cohen, I., & Rotem, A. (2022). *The 21st Report of Wage Expenses in Government Ministries for the Years 2020-2021*. Ministry of Finance.

¹⁴ Hasson, Y., Ben-Eliyahu, H. (2022). *More to it than meets the eye*. Adva center, van leer institute and IWN.

¹⁵ Central Bureau of Statistics. *International Women's Day 2022*.

¹⁶ Chief Economist Division (2021). *The Motherhood Penalty in Israel's Labor Market*. Ministry of Finance.

5.2 Legal status of housewives

According to the National Security Law 5744-1995, a housewife is defined as a married woman who is not employed or self-employed and whose husband is employed. The law, which does not include a corresponding term for married males who are not employed outside the home, reflects a discriminatory perspective on gender roles in the family. In 2018, 470,000 women were defined as housewives. Although housewives are exempt from national insurance and national healthcare payments (174 NIS per month), they experience significant economic discrimination throughout their lifetime as they are not eligible, or have limited eligibility, for several basic social rights granted by the National Insurance Institute: old-age benefits, survivors' benefits, and disability benefits. Even if a woman wishes to, she does not have the right to pay national insurance fees regularly to accrue full eligibility. The gendered definition of a housewife, a legal status that serves as the basis for social security benefits, is outdated and therefore should be cancelled: National insurance and national healthcare payments should be imposed, and their corresponding benefits should be granted to all adults irrespective of gender or marital status.

5.3 Unpaid care-work

Women remain the primary caregivers of the home, dependent young children and relatives. In dual-earner families, 59% of women perform housework, compared to 41% of men. 63% of women in contrast to 37% of men are responsible for caring for children and family members, this transparent work is unpaid and typically unrecognized and continues to constitute a significant barrier to women's full integration in the labor market¹⁷.

6. Retirement age

In 2022, an amendment to the Retirement Age Law 5764-2004 imposed a gradual raise in the retirement age of women, from 62 to 65, over a period of 10 years (Israel is one of the few OECD countries with a gap between the retirement age of men [67] and women). This amendment defers pension and old-age benefits to women and is accompanied by a series of measures to mitigate the adverse implications on women in the transition period.

The group of women most significantly harmed by the raise in retirement age includes women employed in low-paying jobs in the following occupations whose challenges and potential burnout increase with age: nursing (19.6% of women currently close to retirement age), child minders (13.5%), sales personnel (12.7%), and hair stylists and beauticians (4.1%)¹⁸, who will be required to work at an older age before becoming eligible for a pension. Also adversely affected by the raise in retirement age are women who became unemployed close to retirement. This group comprises mainly women with low educational attainment who find it difficult to re-enter the labor market.

B. REPRESENTATION

The current (36th) government comprises 35 ministers and deputy ministers, nine (25.7%) of whom are women. Of the 25 government ministries, 10 general directors are women, a figure that is significantly higher than the previous administrations. Of 120 members of the current Knesset (Israeli parliament), 35 are women, which reflects a steady rise in women's representation in the past two decades (from 17 in 2020-2021). Two (religious) political parties, which typically win 15 seats in the Knesset, have no female candidates on their list, as a matter of principle. Nonetheless, according to a global comparison by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Israel is ranked 62 of 193 parliaments worldwide in women's representation, reflecting a sharp drop from its ranking of 51 in Israel's 20th Knesset (2015-2019)¹⁹. Furthermore, to date, Israel has had only one woman prime minister and one woman Knesset Chair.

¹⁷ Herzog-Drucker, A, Yaish, A., & Kristl, T. (2020). *Family and Employment During a Crisis: Israel Under the Covid Pandemic*. University of Haifa.

¹⁸ Fuchs, H. (2022). *The Labor Market in Israel 2021*. Ministry of Economics, Labor Arm.

¹⁹ IPU Parline. [Monthly ranking of Women in National Parliaments](#).

Following local government elections in 2018 and a legislative amendment that incentivizes local parties to incorporate women in their lists, Israel has 14 (6%) city mayors. Representation by women in local authorities increased by 3% since the previous elections in 2013 yet women only constitute 16.2% of all local government offices. The vast majority (96%) of local governments with no female representation are either in Arab or ultra-orthodox localities. In 2022, women were appointed as heads of local religious councils for the first time: 10 local religious councils are currently headed by women.

The IWN believes that only purposeful legislation will create gender equality in the Knesset and guarantee women's representation.

C. HEALTH AND PERSONAL SAFETY

7. Reproductive Health

In contrast to the growing recognition of women's basic rights, Israeli statute does not recognize women's right to make autonomous decisions about their body and fertility at any stage in a pregnancy. The Penal Law 5737-1977 defines a procedure that requires women to obtain the approval of a committee for an abortion, denying women's right of free choice. The committee, comprised of two physicians and one social worker, has the authority to approve an abortion only if: (a) the woman is under 18 or over 40; (b) the pregnancy is the result of extramarital relations; (c) the fetus has a physical or mental defect; or (d) the continued pregnancy will cause physical/mental injury to the woman (mental risk is based on a psychiatric assessment).

In 2019, the majority of applicants to the abortion committee were married women. Of the 18,816 applications to the abortion committee in 2019, 99% approved, and of these, 17,355 abortions were performed. While the number of abortions in the country has remained steady over three decades, the annual rate per population shows a constant decline. These statistics, however, ignore the illegal abortions that are performed each year, a route selected by women who can afford to avoid the procedure of sitting before the abortion committee²⁰.

Access to an abortion is even more limited for women living in Israel without formal status, who are typically burdened by language and cultural differences as well as poverty and fears of deportation. Even if their abortion is approved they are not entitled to coverage of medical costs under the National Insurance Law.

In 2022, several important amendments were made to health regulations, including:

- Women are no longer required to apply to the abortion committee in person and may submit applications online;
- Medical abortions may also be performed in local health clinics, in addition to hospitals;
- Intrusive and humiliating questions (e.g., "Why didn't you use any contraception?") were removed from the application form.

The amendments will take effect in October 2022. Although these amendments have a significant impact on women in Israel, women's fundamental lack of autonomy over their body and future remains in place. Sections 312-321 of the Penal Code, which limit the right of abortion, should be removed from the Penal Code and replaced by legislation that establishes women's choice to perform an abortion taking into care medical concerns.

8. Violence against women

An average of 20 cases of femicide are committed in Israel each year. The majority of the 18 women murdered between January and September 2022, were killed by a family member. In 2020, 5,903 cases of sexual offenses and sexual harassment were recorded by the police; In these, 81.5% of the victims were women²¹.

²⁰ OECD (2019). *Social Institutions and Gender Index, SIGI 2019 Global Report: Transforming Challenges into Opportunities*.

²¹ The Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel. (2021). *Annual report*.

There is no single government agency that collects information on violence against women and maintains a database that includes incidence rates, complaints filed prosecution rates, indictments, profiles of women killed by men, cases of attempted homicide, etc., and makes this information public. Moreover, information from women themselves is lacking because the most recent official national survey on domestic violence was conducted in 2001, forcing policy makers and NGOs to use data that is almost 19 years old.

Several recent legislation and policy changes have an effect on the number of women victims of violence:

- In a governmental decision no. 4439, adopted in 2019, the government expanded programs to reduce domestic violence. In 2022, in response to demands by NGOs, the budget was largely transferred to the Ministry of Welfare and many programs were implemented. However, no official governmental data exist on the exact sums transferred and the target programs.
- A December 2020 amendment to the Legal Capacity and Guardianship Law 5776-2016 provides that a parent charged with murder, attempted murder, rape or sodomy of a family member cannot temporarily serve as their child's guardian. If the parent is convicted, their guardianship rights are revoked permanently.
- In government decision no. 1821, adopted in August 2022, the government extended the mandate of the inter-ministerial committee on the examination of women murdered by their domestic partners, which was established by government decision no. 1820 in 2002. The committee examines the treatment and interventions performed by the various authorities, and focuses on the interfaces between government ministries and services. The committee draws conclusions and drafts recommendations for the relevant government ministries, with the aim of reducing femicide and preventing similar cases in the future by improving future procedures, treatment, and interventions. According to the statistics, of all the cases in which women are killed as a result of domestic violence, women are killed by their intimate partner in one half of the cases, and are killed by a family member in the remaining cases. Statistics also show that in homicides in which the perpetrator is not known, the victim was previously involved in domestic violence and there are indications that point to the possible involvement of a third party who committed the murder on behalf of the intimate partner²².
- A new law passed in March 2022 provides that samples taken from victims of sexual assault will be preserved for 50 years, so that the victims can file a complaint even after a long period of time. Samples were previously destroyed after several months even though the law allowed for a 10-year statute of limitations on sexual violence complaints.

However, recent amendments to the strict criteria imposed on civilian possession of firearms in Israel are expected to encourage the possession of civilian firearms and have the reverse effect on violence against women. License requirements no longer include information on place of employment or place of residence; security guards are no longer required to deposit their firearm at the end of each shift; any person who completed combat military service with rifleman 07 certification may request a license to carry a firearm without stating a specific reason; and a person who held a license to possess a firearm for 10 years or more to could renew their license even if they do not meet the criteria.

²² Capital, J.A. (2021). [The International Day for the Struggle Against Violence Against Women – Summary of Data](#). Knesset Center for Research and Information.