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WOMEN LEADERS IN CIVIC SPACES:

BREAKING BARRIERS TOWARDS GRANDER VISION

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This study was implemented by the Lebanese Observatory for Workers & Employees Rights, in partnership with UN Women and UNDP with support from the Government of Canada.

FOREWORD

This report is part of a joint project between UN Women and the Lebanese Observatory for Workers and Employees Rights, intended to empower women leadership in unions and syndicates in Lebanon. The project's objective is to help implementing community interventions and targeted mobilization campaigns aiming at raising awareness on the important role of women leadership and participation in unions decision-making bodies[1]. Therefore, our study delves into the structural inequities and barriers that impede women's effective participation in decision-making bodies of trade unions in Lebanon, in order to understand how the regulatory framework, combined with the current political and economic stagnation are currently affecting, and to some extent, hindering women's participation within the Lebanese labor movement and labor unions and syndicates.

The data collection was conducted through 10 focus groups discussions (FGDs), including 4 in the Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools in Lebanon , 3 in the Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security Fund, 2 in the Unions of Workers in Unions of Workers in Public Hospitals in Beirut & in South Lebanon and 1 in the Syndicate of Workers in the American University of Beirut. The 10 FGDs were organized between the 22/01/2024 and 01/03/2024 and they gathered contributions from 90 participants, 85 women and 5 men.

1 Thus, the project will enhance women knowledge and legal literacy on decent work, Lebanese labor law and legislation and democratic trade union standards, building the capacity of women potential candidates on networking and building a supportive base, developing the demands program and carrying out an election and media campaigns.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the 2019 financial collapse, Lebanon has faced profound economic challenges, disproportionately affecting women in the workforce. Unemployment rates surged from 11% to over 29% by 2022, with women experiencing a higher rate of 32.7% (CAS & ILO, 2022). Concurrently, poverty rates rose significantly. Despite these hardships, the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (CGTL) has been notably absent, exacerbating the struggles faced by workers (Dirani et al., 2019). Numerous empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that diverse leadership enhances the promotion of democratic principles within unions (Cobble, 2011). Consequently, unions democracy could not be achieved by separating labor struggles and feminist struggles (Acker 1998, 1990). When women hold representation at various levels of union governance, unions not only become more committed to advancing their feminist agenda but also become empowered to confront traditional hegemonic structures. Thus, the exclusion of women from union leadership has consequences that extend beyond economic gender equality. Women leaders within unions are uniquely positioned to address critical issues such as pay equity, workplace harassment, and the implementation of family-friendly policies(Folbre, 2001). Their presence at decision-making tables ensures that the diverse needs and concerns of the entire workforce are acknowledged and considered, leading to more inclusive and equitable policy initiatives.

Sampling strategy

For our study, we selected 4 unions and we conducted 10 focus groups discussions (FGDs) distributed as follow: 4 in the Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools, 3 in the Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security Fund, 2 in the Unions of Workers in Public Hospitals in Beirut & in South Lebanon and 1 in the Syndicate of Workers in the American University of Beirut. This distribution was intended to reflect the size and the geographical representation of those 4 unions.

Moreover, we selected those 4 unions because of the importance of their activism and their future potential for women's leadership. Indeed, those sectors are characterized by a notably high female labor force participation rate, with women representing the majority of the workforce,ranging between 55% and 80%.Their membership can reach as high as 80% (such as in the Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools), yet women are represented by only one or two members on the executive board, as confirmed by our data collection.

Methodological approach

Given the intricacies of gender dynamics in Lebanon, a feminist participatory methodology is needed in order to offer a nuanced exploration of women's experiences within trade unions. Participatory research approach is widely used as an essential component of feminist research(Elsberg & Heise, 2005), ensuring that women and girls play an active role in both asking and answering questions. The participatory approach also ensures that feminist activists and major stakeholders are included in the research data collection as well as in the interpretation and discussion of the findings. Indeed, traditional and gender insensitive qualitative approaches may overlook contextual subtleties that play a pivotal role in hindering or facilitating women's participation. To address this, 10 focus group discussions (FGDs) were organized between the 22/01/2024 and 01/03/2024 and they gathered contributions from 90 participants—85 women and 5 men.

Major Findings

1-The subordinate position of women in trade unions stands in stark contrast to the discourse and narratives highlighting the importance of women in labor struggles. Despite efforts to promote inclusivity and diversity in union politics, female participation levels remains below what is considered equitable. The Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools comprises approximately 12,000 members, representing between 24 % and 30% of the educational workers, with women constituting 82% of the membership. In the 2022 elections, around 2,400 individuals participated as voters yet only 2 women were elected out of the 12 members on the list. In the Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security Fund there are 820 permanent employees and 104 temporary ones (daily workers), with women comprising 60% of the total membership. The participation rate in the 2023 election surpassed the 60%, and women participated in equal measure to men. Within the union council, one woman holds a seat, having been elected for the third consecutive term. The combined workforce of the Syndicate of Workers in the American University of Beirut and its medical center totals approximately 3,500 employees, with women comprising about 55% of the workforce. The union council consists of 12 members, with only 1 woman among them. Finally, the workers at public hospitals are currently without a licensed union, but they have two active founding committees determined to secure recognition and legalization. The first committee is for the establishment of

a union at Rafic Hariri Hospital, while the second is for the creation of a union in government hospitals overall. The total number of employees across all public hospitals—including those at Rafic Hariri Hospital—is approximately 6,000, with women making up 79% of the workforce. Yet, only 3 out of the 11 members in the founding committee are women.

2- Following the economic collapse in 2019, women in the workforce have grappled with pervasive pressure to exit their jobs due to perceived financial strain and inadequate compensation. This pressure is often exacerbated by societal expectations, placing a disproportionate burden on women to prioritize familial responsibilities over career pursuits. In contrast, male colleagues do not experience the same level of pressure to leave their jobs, and if they do, it rarely accompanied by the same gendered and discriminatory arguments.

3- Time constraints and family obligations compound the challenges faced by women in the workforce. Unionized women report being time-poor, with limited support from their spouses—further complicating their ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities effectively. Nevertheless, the inequality faced by working women is not yet translated by the need for a more balanced participation by both spouses in the education and upbringing of children but rather by a tendency for female FGDs participants tend to internalize the responsibility, feeling that it is their sole responsibility to balance workforce participation with domestic labor.

4- Participants experience a lack of childcare support in the workplace, with many employers applying pressure regarding maternity leave — effectively pushing women out of essential time off for childbirth and childcare.

5- Despite comparatively lower wages, employment in the public sector is preferred by some women due to what they perceive as more favorable working conditions, including flexible schedules and reduced instances of gender-based discrimination. For instance, the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) has experienced a feminization of its workforce because its schedules accommodate women, a victory resulting from the union's prolonged advocacy efforts. In contrast, women in other sectors view public sector jobs as more appealing because of the perception of lower levels of gender discrimination. The fact that the public sector is perceived as offering more favorable conditions for women's participation underscores the need for reform in the private sector to ensure equal employment opportunities for all.

6- Women frequently cited "domestic responsibilities" and "family obligations" as significant obstacles to their active participation in union activities, reflecting the pervasive influence of hegemonic masculinity in the domestic division of labor. However, few participants explicitly addressed how this dynamic perpetuates male dominance over female labor.

7- Participants unanimously recognized that women's underrepresentation in the labor force, as well as in union membership and leadership, stems from the perception of their "traditional roles as caregivers and homemakers." However, few participants attributed this phenomenon to a lack of interest or the apparent detachment of labor unions from addressing these issues comprehensively.

8- Although unions have made attempts to implement measures aimed at achieving gender equality (e.g.feminist quotas), the core strategies of many unions continue to prioritize male-oriented agendas, often neglecting gender-specific issues and relegating feminist concerns to women's leagues, which are considered specialized yet separate departments within the unions (e.g. the dichotomy does not lead to the adoption of a feminist agenda by the labor unions).

9- One of the most important obstacles to women's participation in unions identified in the FGDs is the influence of political parties and their interference in union affairs, coupled with patriarchal hierarchies within political parties. In this context, participants expressed concerns over the pervasive support for male representatives within union structures, highlighting the need for greater gender diversity and inclusivity in leadership positions. According to the participants, political parties rarely support women's candidacies for union leadership positions.

10- Participants in the FGDs have also highlighted the pressure and retaliation measures imposed by employers against any individual participating in union activities. They also voiced the need for additional legal protections, as the current legislative framework is insufficient to prevent such retaliation.

11- Many women participants refer to unions as external bodies, distancing themselves from union activities which in turn reflects a lack of involvement in union activities and a perception that the unions are detached from their role in representing workers and employees.

12- Similar to what is found in traditional political parties, and in the place granted, or even neglected, to women within their patriarchal structures, we observe that unions in Lebanon

have also defined a role for women, circumscribed by a heteronormative vision that reproduces traditionalist and stereotyped representations of gendered divisions of roles. For example, they are often seen in communication roles, event organization, or the organization of internal meetings, or they are relegated to the women's sections of the union, in a "women's committee," which reveals how union struggles and feminist struggles are compartmentalized as two dichotomous spheres that should not integrate.

13- When asked about their perception of the feminist NGOs, participants highlighted the importance of their work and achievements but also considered themselves unconcerned with the struggles they lead. Feminist NGOs were associated with struggles related to achieving equality within personal status and nationality laws, but not as involved in labor struggles.

In light of these findings, it is imperative that labor unions take proactive measures to address gender disparities within their ranks and prioritize the inclusion and representation of women in decision-making processes. The recommendations stemming from the findings of this report emphasize several key strategies to enhance women's participation and representation in labor unions and promote gender equality in the workplace. Firstly, comprehensive training programs should be provided for union members, focusing on legal knowledge and leadership skills essential for effective activism. Additionally, internal bylaws should be amended to include a female quota—building on successful implementations in some unions—to ensure adequate representation of women in decision-making positions. Utilizing alternative communication methods, such as online platforms, can facilitate broader participation in union activities, particularly for members facing financial constraints. Moreover, developing and advocating for gender equality-related claims and demands in the workplace is crucial to addressing systemic discrimination and promoting inclusivity. Finally, establishing legal support mechanisms within unions can provide essential assistance to members facing workplace-related legal challenges. Concurrently, feminist organizations should align their advocacy efforts with those of labor unions, fostering collaborations and strategic alliances to amplify their collective voices and advance gender equality in the workforce.

I- INTRODUCTION

Since the financial collapse of 2019, the multiple economic and social crises gripping Lebanon have inflicted profound suffering on its workforce, with women bearing a disproportionate burden of the hardship. Recent data paints a grim picture, with unemployment rates soaring to unprecedented levels, escalating from 11% before 2019 to over 29% by 2022, as reported in the latest labor force surveys. While the unemployment rate for men stands at 28.4%, it has surged to 32.7% for women, accompanied by a staggering decline in the employment-to-population ratio, plummeting to 14.9% for women compared to 47.4% for men (CAS & ILO, 2022). Simultaneously, poverty rates have soared to alarming heights, with 3 out of 4 residents classified as poor or very poor, and a recent study estimating multidimensional poverty rates at around 84% for the entire population (ESCWA, 2021). Against this backdrop of economic turmoil, the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (CGTL) has been conspicuously absent, leaving workers without essential representation and assistance. This absence is particularly concerning given the severe challenges confronting Lebanon's workforce, including layoffs, wage reductions, and unpaid salaries(Dirani et al., 2019).

The foundational premise posited herein is that women's participation in union decision-making processes contributes to the democratization of these organizations, fostering greater representation, diversity, and inclusivity (Acker, 1988). Empirical studies have consistently shown that diverse leadership promotes democratic principles within unions(Cobble, 2011). Increased representation of women across various levels of union governance introduces a variety of perspectives, breaking away from traditional hegemonic structures (Acker, 1990). Moreover, the exclusion of women from union leadership has repercussions beyond gender equality. Inclusive leadership fosters a diversity of thought, enriching the decision-making process and ensuring that policies and actions align with the varied needs of the entire workforce. Women leaders bcontribute unique insights that support more comprehensive, innovative, and equitable solutions. Their presence is particularly vital in addressing issues such as pay equity, workplace harassment, and family-friendly policies (Folbre, 2001). Their presence at the decision-making table ensures that the diverse needs and concerns of the entire workforce are taken into account, leading to more comprehensive and equitable policy initiatives (Smith, 1987).

The significance of women's participation in trade unions cannot be overstated, as it goes beyond mere representation to shaping the very fabric of inclusive and effective labor movements. However, women face multifaceted challenges that impede their full and meaningful participation in union activities, hindering the realization of diverse perspectives and perpetuating gender disparities within these vital organizations. Lebanese women face specific challenges within the union landscape due to entrenched societal norms. The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles not only perpetuates gender inequality but also hampers the effectiveness of these unions in addressing diverse labor concerns. Emphasizing the importance of this subject is paramount for fostering equitable workplace environments and empowering women to contribute meaningfully to policy and decision-making processes. Therefore, this research underscores the imperative of examining women's participation in Lebanese trade unions within the cultural and structural context of the nation.

For our study, we selected 4 unions and we conducted 10 focus groups discussions (FGDs) distributed as follow: 4 in the Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools, 3 in the Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security Fund 2 in the Unions of Workers in Public Hospitals in Beirut & in South Lebanon and 1 in the Syndicate of Workers in the American University of Beirut. This distribution was intended to reflect the size and the geographical representation the selected unions.

Moreover, we selected these 4 unions based on the significance of their importance of their activism and their future potential for women's leadership. Indeed, these sectors are characterized by a notably high female labor force participation rate, with women representing the majority of the workforce, raging between 55% and 80%, and their membership can reach up to 80% (as is the case in the Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools) yet they are only represented by 1 or 2 women in the executive board, as confirmed by our data collection.

Building on a qualitative methodology, our research draws an assessment aiming to inform evidence-based interventions for enhancing women's participation in union decision-making bodies, with a view on how to consolidate the skills and the engagement of potential women candidates through networking, capacity-building and other supportive actions.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology is essential to capture the nuanced experiences and perspectives of women within trade unions. Triangulation methods are employed to enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings. Thus, we relied on a qualitative approach combining 1) a critical review of secondary data —including the review of existing documentation and analysis of existing quantitative information from the literature—and 2) the collection of primary data through 10 focus groups discussions.

Focus groups provide a rich platform for open discussions and in-depth exploration of participants' views. The FGDs relied on a situational analysis, with questions geared toward mapping the major strengths and weaknesses of women's participation in union decision-making and assessing the (in) adequacies of the current legal and institutional framework. In this sense, "situation analyses can serve as a sort of community "diagnostic" that provides insights into needed areas of reform", as stated by Elsberg and Heise (2005, p. 75).

Understanding the contextual nuances of women's participation in Lebanese trade unions through this innovative qualitative methodology was instrumental in developing concrete recommendations aiming to improve women's representation and leadership. Moreover, a feminist lens embraces intersectionality, recognizing the layered impact of various identities on women's experiences. Gender- sensitive focus groups facilitate a nuanced exploration of how factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and age intersect with gender, informing recommendations that are intersectionally sensitive and tailored to diverse needs.

Given the intricacies of gender dynamics in Lebanon, a feminist participatory methodology is needed to offer a nuanced exploration of women's experiences within trade unions. The participatory research approach is widely used as an essential component of feminist research (Elsberg & Heise, 2005), ensuring women and girls have an active role in asking and answering questions. The participatory approach takes the knowledge and experience of community members as a point of reference. It also ensures that feminist activists and major stakeholders are included in the research data collection and in the interpretation and discussion of the findings. Indeed, traditional and gender- insensitive qualitative approaches may overlook contextual subtleties that play a pivotal role either hindering or facilitating women's participation. Considering that this research seeks to empower women within unions, fostering a more inclusive and effective labor movement in Lebanon, applying an innovative gender-sensitive qualitative methodology is not merely a research strategy but a deliberate choice to yield outcomes that resonate with the intricacies of Lebanon's sociocultural landscape.

By organizing 10 focus groups across diverse unions (namely, 4 FGDs with the Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools, 3 FGDs with the Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security Fund, 2 FGDs with Unions of Workers in Public Hospitals in Beirut & in South Lebanon and 1 FGDs with the Union of Syndicate of Workers in the American University of Beirut workers), we aimed to create a space for women members in decision-making bodies to share their unique experiences, aspirations, and challenges. By spotlighting these experiences, the research seeks to dismantle systemic barriers and provide actionable insights that can catalyze tangible change. It positions women not merely as beneficiaries but as integral contributors to shaping the future of union dynamics in Lebanon.

Therefore, the 10 FGDs were organized between the 22/01/2024 and 01/03/2024 and they gathered contributions from 90 participants, 85 women and 5 men. As shown in Table 1 below, half of the FGDs only involved women, thus ensuring that women were sometimes free to speak without any male presence. Meanwhile, 5 out of 10 FGDs involved one male participant, in order to diversify the conditions of the discussion. Finally, the 10 FGDs were organized in various regions, to ensure national representativity, except for the Union of Syndicate of Workers in the American University of Beirut workers, which is only located in Beirut.

TABLE 1- REGIONAL AND GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF THE 10 FGDs

Number of FGD	Unions	Region	Number of Participants	Number of Women	Number of Men
1	Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools	Beirut	9	8	1
2	Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools	Mont-Leb	9	8	1
3	Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools	North	14	14	0
4	Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools	Bekaa	9	8	1
5	Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security Fund	Beirut+South	8	7	1
6	Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security Fund	Mont-Leb	9	9	0
7	Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security Fund	North	4	4	0
8	Unions of Workers in Public Hospitals	Beirut	9	8	1
9	Unions of Workers in Public Hospitals	South	7	7	0
10	Syndicate of Workers in the American University of Beirut	Beirut	12	12	0
Total 10			90	85	5

The choice of the unions and the sampling strategy

The sample privileged sectors that are considered important in the current employment landscape in Lebanon, where unions have played, and continue to play an effective role in protecting the rights of their workers. For instance, the education sector represented 9.3% of the labor force in 2022, with an overrepresentation of women (68.1% compared to 31.9% for men). Similarly, the health sector represented 5.3% of the labor force, with a highly feminized workforce, women representing 61.8% compared to 38.2% for men (CAS & ILO, 2022). According to a recent UN Women study, women make up 50% of registered healthcare professionals, 58% of pharmacists, and 81% of healthcare providers. Women have played a significant role in mobilizing employees at Rafic Hariri public hospital over the last decade, especially in 2013 and 2014, when they constituted 79% of the public sector care workforce (Salti & Mezher, 2020).

Within these sectors, the sample selection deliberately aimed to include only genuine and robust unions, as well as those encouraging active involvement from female activists, given the prevalence of pseudo and weak unions within the CGTL. In this context, unions representing public sector employees (such as Social Security, Electricity, Régie, Water) stand out for their effectiveness in mobilization and organization, despite the influence of sectarian and doctrinal factions. The Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security Fund was chosen based on these criteria, also taking into account its relatively significant female representation and membership compared to other workers' organizations and trade unions. The decision to include the Private Schools' Teachers' Union was influenced by its historical reputation as a large, authentic, and influential union, as well as its currently active and effective leadership. The Unions of Workers in Public Hospitals represents a novel experience in unionization with its large, dynamic staff, and the founding committees are committed to enhancing their organizational capabilities. Similarly, the Syndicate of Workers in the American University offers a stable and consistent union platform, with a track record of activism and advocacy aimed at improving working conditions.

Additionally, the education and health sectors were among the most impacted by the 2019 financial crisis. In 2020, in the aftermath of the Beirut port explosion on August 4, approximately 4,000 teachers were laid off, according to figures from the private school teachers' union, while additional 4,000 teachers lost their jobs after school destruction and students' displacements or regrouping (Dirani, 2021). This was accompanied by salary reductions in most private schools, leading to a shift towards public education as tuition fees became increasingly unaffordable. Similarly, the American University of Beirut laid off more than 1,300

workers, both male and female, in two batches without obtaining approval from the Ministry of Labor, with an estimated number of additional 800 daily workers who lost their jobs at the university facilities (Dirani, 2021).

It is worth noting that one of the earliest and most significant mobilizations of school teachers in Lebanon took place during the winter of 1972-1973 with public schools' teachers advocating for higher salaries and the right to unionize. At that time, public primary school teachers had the right to organize under leagues (decree 335 dating back to 1972). However, these cultural leagues weren't satisfying for teachers, since there was no mention of workers' rights or unions in the ministry decision (Bou Khater, 2019).As a backlash, the Minister of Education initiated mass layoffs targeting some of the main activists, igniting waves of demonstration across the country, even though the teachers' demand remained unheard.

Today, the Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools in Lebanon is considered among the most active organizations, yet it suffers from a legitimacy crisis. Undoubtedly, the underrepresentation of women in its leadership is at the heart of this democratic deficiency. On one hand, it lacks a broad representation of teachers, due to low membership rates and significantly low voter turnout. On the other hand, women are underrepresented in leadership positions, as female representation in the syndicate's council barely reaches 15%, while the percentage of female teachers is close to 80%. Moreover, the union relies on the will of the branch councils in the regions more than its General Assembly[2].

Unlike the Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools in Lebanon, the Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security Fund boast a notably high level of representativeness. Regarding the governance structure of the Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security Fund, although internal regulations outline the management by two councils—the Executive Council and the Delegate Council—the latter has been rendered inactive and incapacitated. Consequently, a crucial pillar of executive authority, vested with supervisory powers over the Executive Council, is absent. Furthermore, the Executive Council convenes irregularly, with decision-making power largely concentrated in the hands of the president and a select few members. The General Assembly remains unattended, ex acerbating the deficit of democratic governance in the absence of the Delegate Council.

2 Since the convening of the General Assembly, according to the internal regulations, is conducted through separate assemblies of branch councils in all regions, the influence of the branch councils remains predominant even in the general assemblies.

II- WOMEN IN LABOR UNIONS: A FEMINIST PRESPECTIVE

Historically, in Lebanon like elsewhere in the world, unions have been male-dominated spaces, reflecting broader societal norms, with both workplaces and unions' structures are tailored to accommodate male workers and male union activists not constrained by care activities and domestic works (Wright, 2014). Indeed, cultural expectations and societal norms have dictated traditional gender roles within male-dominated workplaces and labor unions. Surely, gender equality was repeatedly considered as a symbolic value and a noble target for the Lebanese labor movement. However, like elsewhere in the world, those narratives didn't translate into gender proportionality in unions membership or leadership (Ledwith, 2012). Moreover, even though many labor unions have undertaken structural reforms to ensure better representativity for women, unions' strategies and tactics remained gender blind. For instance, reducing occupational gender segregation or challenging the gendered structure of wage labor were never at the heart of the unions' struggles, and many feminist scholars and activists expressed "ambivalence and distrust of male-dominated unions, which have historically discriminated against women and remain insensitive to many concerns of women" (Crain, 1990). This dichotomy between the feminist agenda and unions' struggles remains one of the major issues in contemporary labor movements.

Even though many female activists have played major roles in the history of the Lebanese labor movement, women often encounter resistance, stereotypes, and biases that undermine their ascent to leadership roles within unions. Most importantly, women's contributions within unions are frequently overlooked or undervalued. This lack of visibility perpetuates a cycle of underrepresentation and reinforces the notion that women's perspectives are secondary within the union framework.

A- Trade unionism in Lebanon before the Labor Code in 1946

The labor movement in Lebanon has deep historical roots, dating back to the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries when workers began organizing through unions, professional associations, and guilds to assert their rights. The roots of the Lebanese trade union movement trace back to the late 19th century, with labor activism and guilds laying the groundwork. However, its formal inception took shape in the early 20th century, particularly during the French Mandate era, when the burgeoning Communist Party played a pivotal role in organizing workers. This momentum led to the establishment of the General Union of Tobacco Workers in Lebanon in 1924, followed by the formation of the Commission for Union Organization in 1925, spearheaded by tobacco activists and the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon (Couland, 1970). These organizational efforts aimed to articulate common goals such as advocating for a minimum wage and social protection, yet, outside communist activism, various professional associations emerged in this same period, albeit with differing agendas — some adopting corporatist-paternalistic structures, while others mirrored clientelist schemes, safeguarding traditional leaders.

By the 1930s, several unions had gained legal recognition, and in 1937, many of these newly licensed unions federated under the Committee for Unions' Unity. This collective pressure culminated in the adoption of a minimum wage in 1941, preceding the enactment of the labor law in 1946, which formally recognized the right to unionize. Concurrently, the Federation of Unions of Workers and Employees in Lebanon was established in 1945, with Mustapha Al-Ariss serving as general secretary, alongside the formation of the Labor Front, a right-wing state-sponsored federation aimed at undermining labor law efforts (Tufaro, 2018).

Documentation from these historical moments reveals the active involvement of women in organizing strikes, participating in negotiations, and voicing demands for improved labor conditions. Evidence abounds of women breaking barriers, advocating for labor rights, and reshaping the labor unions landscape. Notably, references to 19th-century labor activism by women in the silk factories of Mount Lebanon and the 1940s tobacco industry strikes against the Régie are scant in historical accounts (Kobaissy, 2015; Kaedbey, 2014).

The contribution of women activists to the Lebanese labor movement can be traced back to pivotal moments, starting with the iconic Warde Boutros and the French Tobacco Monopoly (Régie des Tabacs et Tombacs) commonly called as "Régie" in Lebanon[3].

During this period, women played a significant role in advocating for the improvement of labor conditions and the rights of all workers, with a particular focus on women workers. As shown by the seminal work of Abisaab (2010), examining the working conditions and experiences of female workers (operating machines, packing cigarettes, or handling administrative jobs, etc.), alongside their activism demonstrated through strikes, protests, and labor unrest, it becomes evident that the role of women in labor has been unparalleled in shaping the modern Lebanese state. Their active involvement in union strikes, notably culminating in the adoption of the Labor code in 1946, underscores their pivotal contribution. The death of Warde Boutros, a female worker among the Tobacco's Régie strikers, heightened pressure on parliament to address labor concerns and adopt the Labor code in 1946. Indeed, the death of Warde Boutros and the subsequent protests in the country can be viewed as a significant catalyst that exerted pressure on the parliament to adopt the labor code, as well as a victory for this historically specific wave of Lebanese feminism, as the law directly addressed issues such as female and child labor, as well as maternity rights.

The struggle of male and female workers within the Régie exemplifies the significant role women played in the nascent labor movement of Lebanon. However, while women played pivotal roles in labor activism, their contributions have often been reduced to symbolic gestures within the narratives of the union movement. Figures like Warde Boutros, revered as iconic martyrs, tend to overshadow the collective efforts of women. This gender-blind narrative within the labor movement obscures the intricate connections between gender, class, and the formation of the national state. As Abisaab (2010) states, "when Lebanese Tobacco women worked with unionists and socialists, they often subordinated gender identities to class identity. At times, they rejected protective male paternalism, but at other times they manipulated it to enhance their roles as women and workers who were navigating their way strategically within the confines of a tribal-ethnic system and its wider-oppressive capitalist orbit" (Abisaab, 2010, p. xxii).

Despite these advancements, challenges persisted within union democracy, characterized by power struggles between right-wing and left-wing factions, and state retaining the power to revoke union licenses[4], hampering further union proliferation and autonomy, especially for left-wing unions and federations. Moreover, the labor code excluded many economic sectors that have important female participation from its scope of application, such as domestic work and agriculture.

B- The unrecognized role of women in labor class victories in the pre-war era (1946-1975)

The co-optation of the union movement by state initiatives aimed at creating dissent and divisions within the labor movement has been a recurring theme in Lebanon's history, as already shown by the experience of the creation of the State-supported Labor Front in 1945 to counterbalance the influence of leftist claims in the process of drafting the Labor Code (Tufaro, 2018). Similarly, the League of Unions was a state-sponsored effort established in 1948 to counterbalance the influence of the communist party and left-wing federations by encouraging the formation of various new right-wing unions and federations. Under Camille Chamoun's presidency, many federations were created with state patronage, while leftist federations were co-opted from within, in order to initiate dissidence or divides (Tufaro, 2018).

In 1958, the General Confederation of Workers' and Employees of Lebanon (CGTL) was officially licensed as the country's first union confederation. While trade union mobilization partially influenced the adoption of laws such as the NSSF and amendments to labor laws—like Article 50 on dismissals, these legal developments were also shaped by the economic model redefined under President Fouad Chehab. However, despite efforts to unify the union movement, discontent persisted, with many nascent unions and federations aligning themselves with the state or traditional leaders rather than reflecting the interests and struggles of the labor class. In the early 1970s, expressions of labor activism sometimes bypassed organized unions through illegal unions or mobilizations outside their structures (Bou Khater, 2019).

Similar to what was observed in the period preceding the adoption of the Labor code, women made significant to the labor movement during the pre-war period; however, their role has remained neglected in labor movements historiography and underrecognized in the narratives of labor unions (Abisaab, 2010; Kobaissy, 2015). Nevertheless,

3 Warde Boutros left an indelible mark by organizing women workers and challenging oppressive labor conditions in the Régie, a company that used to count 40% of women in its workforce (Abisaab 2010). Boutros' courageous activism exemplifies the early role women played in initiating crucial labor movements.

4 Decree 7993, 3 April, 1952.

women constituted an important proportion of the industrial workforce before the beginning of the civil war, yet they were kept in more precarious conditions compared to men. For instance, women were still paid at least a third less than the men for the same jobs and work effort. As stated by Tuffaro (2018), "female industrial employment remained in average much younger and unqualified that the male one. Looking at the eastern banlieue, 40% of female working women was under twenty years old. If male unqualified workers represented 58% of the total, among the female workers it represented instead 75%. It must be noted that female workforce was highly concentrated in specific industrial branches. To give some examples, 82,6% of female working woman were employed in the clothing sector. A high percentage of women was also employed in the agri-food sector, where female workers nearly equaled the number of their male counterparts— a concentration, which will make them actors of primary importance in the struggles which will inflame Lebanese industrial environment on the eve of the Civil War" (Tufaro, 2018, p. 166-167).

For instance, the strikes at Al-Ghandour—a biscuit and candy factory employing a high percentage of women workers—highlighted the importance of women in labor struggles that unfolded outside the framework of organized unions. On November 11, 1972, the strikes were met with violent repression by the police, resulting in numerous casualties and the deaths of two: Yusif El-Atar and Fatima Al-Khawaja (Tufaro 2018; Cessra 2022).

However, women's contribution to this nascent labor movement was significant, yet often underrecognized in the literature. This scholarly tendency has paralleled the political marginalization of women in Labor unions and their underrepresentation in union leadership, within a predominantly male-dominated culture (Kobeissy ,2015).

Finally, in this context, the participation of women to

union movement was mostly perceived as temporary, and discontinuous, with high turn overs. "This turned them into a particularly precious reserve of docile, easy exploitable and naturally "expiring" workforce for the industrial employers which, especially for those sectors requiring – precisely as for the textile one – low skills and physical force, did not hesitate to prefer them to their male counterparts" (Tufaro 2018, p. 171).

C- The CGTL between union co-optation and neo-liberal reforms (1990-2019)

The Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) had a dual impact: it marginalized women's participation in the labor force and, by extension, in the union movement. At the same time, it weakened leftist federations and unions, while elevating the General Confederation of Workers in Lebanon (CGTL) as a major player within a state apparatus dominated by militias and confessional political parties. By the end of the war, post-war reconstruction efforts relied heavily on Syrian workers, coinciding with a sharp decline in Lebanon's agricultural and industrial workforce. During the early 1990s, Lebanon initiated the employment of hundreds of thousands of female migrant workers in domestic roles, operating under the newly introduced Kafala system (Picard, 2014). Over time, their numbers steadily increased, eventually reaching approximately 250,000 workers, constituting roughly 16% of the labor force before the financial collapse of 2019[5]. The paradox lies in the fact that while the workforce saw a significant increase in female representation, this trend relied on precarious migrant workers which right to unionize is considerably limited. Meanwhile, an increasing number of Lebanese women found themselves excluded from the labor force. As stated by many scholars, this historical period illustrates a model of labor struggles founded on the double contradiction of unions-without-workers and workers-without-unions (Scala 2015; Tufar,o 2018). Despite these challenges, the CGTL maintained its reputation capital and engaged in large-scale protests, such as the teachers' battle in 1996. During this period, the CGTL led the battle for the increase of the minimum wage, and its demand was satisfied three time in the early 1990s (in 1994, 1995, 1996) (Bou Khater, 2019).

However, during the 1990s, the CGTL faced co-optation attempts by successive labor ministers (Abdallah al-Amin, Assad Hardane, etc.). In this battle establishing a domesticated pro-regime confederation, all the illegal moves were tolerated, from reviving inactive federation, to licensing new shadow federations, to physical threats and detentions on delegates to forbid them from voting on election day in 1997, or even to the arbitrary arrests, several times, of Elias Abu Rizk, the general secretary, following those events. Despite Abu Rizk's short comeback (in 1998 for instance) amidst power struggles between political factions, the CGTL was weakened by the April 1997 elections. By 1999, there was a significant increase in the number of licensed federations, which grew from 14 to

5 For a labor force estimated around 1.5 million (CAS & ILO 2018-2019).

37. Similarly, the number of unions expanded to 210, with an estimate suggesting that around two-thirds of these were functioning as fronts or shadow unions (Tufaro, 2021).

Post-war reconstruction, with its neoliberal orientations, succeeded in reproducing sectarian clientelism within the union movement, thus gradually transforming the CGTL a tool wielded by the establishment. Thus, the post-war labor policies undermined trade union independence with repressive measures: "they banned street demonstrations, called in the army, split the confederation of trade unions in its 1997 election, and created pseudo-unions tied to their own interests", [...] and also by declaring a "semi-state of emergency", which formally transferred responsibility for security to the army for three months and allowed for trials by military courts under martial law (Baumann, 2016, p. 634 & p. 643).

From that date, the CGTL is not only working against the interests of the labor class but also aligning itself with the State apparatus and sectarian leaders to suppress labor mobilization that occurred outside the framework of organized unions (Scala, 2015; Dirani & al., 2019).

Thus, the Union Coordination Committee (UCC), regrouping various organizations including the League of Public Sector Workers, the associations of primary and secondary public schools' teachers, and the Association of private schools' teacher, was the major catalyzer for labor struggles in the early 2000s. Yet, the same tactics employed by the ruling sectarian elite against the CGTL in the 1990 were also duplicated in 2015 in the election of the Union Coordination Committee, in order to beat its leader Hanna Gharib, and in 2017 against Nehme Mahfoud, head of the private sector teachers union (Bou Khater, 2019).

Despite the weakening and the cooptation of the CGTL, the pre-crisis era witnessed many labor mobilizations outside the realm of organized labor, as exemplified by the mobilizations of Spinneys workers in their attempt to create a union (Scala, 2015) or the strikes of the daily workers of Electricté du Liban, carrying out the longest workers' uprising in Lebanon's modern history (Picard, 2014). On the other hand, what was drastically noticeable in that period was the growing divorce between the feminist movement and the labor movement. A noticeable exception is the mobilization of female domestic workers, and their attempt to create a union under FENASOL, as it will be discussed in the following sections.

D- The Great Absence of CGTL amid an unprecedented economic and social crisis (2019-)

Today, women continue to play a major role in Lebanon's labor movement. Evidence from recent protests in the awake of the 2019 uprising highlights their involvement and commitment to reshaping social movements as well as the labor landscape.

Nevertheless, during the 2019 uprising in Lebanon, a notable absence was observed in the public sphere: the General Confederation of Workers in Lebanon (CGTL) remained conspicuously silent. This absence reflects a complex interplay of factors that have shaped the role of the CGTL over the years, such as the process of cooptation that occurred during the 1990s, which significantly weakened the CGTL's influence and autonomy. On one hand, the current weaknesses of the CGTL could be seen as mirroring the global trend of diminishing power of organized labor. On the other hand, in various historical contexts, organized labor in Lebanon has been intertwined with sectarian and confessional affiliations, serving as a platform for traditional political parties to exert control over the labor movement. In the local context of the severe economic crisis, following the 2019 financial collapse, the CGTL by its absence was complicit in actions against the interests of the working classes (Dirani, 2020).

Consequently, one of the most prominent results of the Lebanese social movement in 2019 was the delegitimization of the state-centered and other authoritarian institutions, including the CGTL that emerged from this uprising as an illegitimate organization that usurps the representation of workers (Dirani & al., 2019; Dirani, 2020). In parallel, alternative workers organizations emerged during the uprising, some of them were temporary, formed by workers in medium and large enterprises in response to layoffs and violations they faced[6], and other were organized under various labels (such as independent unions or alternative unions, etc.) with the most active among them working on bylaws and founding documents,

6 One of the most notable examples is the case of workers from Aïshti group, who were seeking support from the Lebanese Observatory for

such as the Alternative Press Syndicate and the Workers' Union in Non-Governmental Organizations[7].

Following the 2019 uprising, and the notable absence of the CGTL, the Lebanese civil society became more sensitive to the need of revitalizing the labor movement and the women's participation to labor unions. Thus, women participation and representation in labor union is a topic gaining interest in Lebanon today[8]. This heightened attention stems from numerous civil society organizations advocating for the eradication of all types of discrimination, particularly gender-based discrimination. Additionally, there is increasing recognition of the significance of advancing the objectives outlined in ILO Convention No. 190, which addresses the elimination of violence and harassment in the workplace.

Nevertheless, the issue of women's underrepresentation in Lebanese unions remain a complex phenomenon that warrants an in-depth exploration. Despite early women-led movements, societal expectations currently relegate women to supportive roles within unions. The phenomenon of NGOization (Daou, 2015) has further contributed to the existing detachment with the feminist movements as women struggles within the labor movement are not yet being sufficiently addressed by the existing NGO's. The dissociation between women's organizations and the union movement has hindered mass mobilization efforts in advocating for labor rights.

Finally, persistent stereotypes and expectations about women's roles also contribute to their underrepresentation today. The historical absence of robust inclusive policies within unions may have perpetuated an environment that does not actively encourage women's participation. A lack of gender-sensitive practices and policies can serve as a deterrent for women seeking involvement in decision-making bodies. Undoubtedly, numerous unions have created women's leagues and embraced a political discourse and agenda that consistently emphasizes the significance of gender equality. However, the goal of revitalizing female participation in unions cannot be attained solely through the establishment of separate women's leagues and symbolic quotas. In fact, the experiences of a minority of women members or leaders invited to participate in predominantly male-dominated union meetings may reveal contrasting outcomes, shedding light on the detrimental effects of the entrenched practices of "exclusionary masculinity" (Ledwith, 2012). In these contexts, women are consistently subjected to a culture of exclusion, and contempt, condescension, that is particularly pervasive within traditional unions and among their conventional male leaderships. By perpetuating the divide between union struggles and feminist objectives, these practices could be counterproductive, perpetuating male dominance within female labor and impeding the feminization of labor unions to a certain degree.

Workers and Employees Rights, in response to layoffs and right violations, and who dissolved their collective initiative after reaching an agreement with their employer (Key informant interview with A. Dirani, Executive Director of the Lebanese Observatory for Workers and Employees Rights).

7 The Lebanese Observatory for Workers' and Employees' Rights and the Legal Agenda played a supportive role in these endeavors, and the activity of these labor frameworks was closely tied to the momentum of the uprising, experiencing ups and downs (Dirani 2021).

8 This is evident through a series of workshops conducted by Fenasol and the Warde Boutros Association in collaboration with the Ministry of Labor. These workshops, held under the banner "Securing Gender Equality in Lebanon" in 2021 and 2022," underscore the heightened attention and discussions surrounding women's participation in labor unions within the Lebanese context. Cf. the official report of the National News Agency, https://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA/522019

III- STRUCTURAL BARRIERS HINDERING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LABOR MOVEMENTS IN LEBANON

In Lebanon, the legal and institutional framework falls short in effectively combating all forms of gender discrimination in the workplace. Despite numerous legal reforms, Lebanese women still encounter significant barriers to accessing decent and well-compensated employment opportunities. Moreover, mere legal recognition of the need to eliminate gender-based discrimination is not sufficient to achieve gender justice unless accompanied by a shift towards proactive labor policies aiming at sanctioning all forms of discrimination.

For example, Law No. 207, enacted on 26/5/2000, prohibits all forms of gender discrimination concerning "the type of work, wages, employment, promotion, elevation, professional qualification, and clothing". However, the law 207 does not specify monitoring mechanisms, does not recognize gender-based discrimination, and does not clarify the obligations of employers to combat this discrimination. In the absence of such provisions, laws prohibiting gender-based discrimination remain incapable of narrowing gender gaps. Since the law lacks provisions for penalizing employers or companies engaging in discrimination between male and female workers, gender equality in the workplace depends on internal regulations and voluntary practices left to the discretion of the employers, and that might vary significantly from one work setting to another. Without a doubt, only a limited number of organizations in Lebanon are known to have internal regulations and procedures aimed at ensuring gender equality in the workplace.

Consequently, working women in Lebanon encounter a myriad of challenges and obstacles within their professional spheres, reflective of systemic legal and societal discrimination. One of the most glaring issues is the persistence of various forms of discrimination against women in the workplace, ranging from unequal working conditions to the allocation of specific job types and activities based on gender. This discrimination extends to the realm of benefits and social privileges, where women often

find themselves at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts. Despite legislative provisions prohibiting such discrimination, the implementation of these laws often falls short, perpetuating gender disparities in the labor market.

A- Structural foundations of gender inequalities in Lebanon: economic and legal discriminations

Legal barriers have immediate impact on labor market outcomes. Hence, they are mirrored by the substantial gaps between male and female participation rates to the labor force. Lebanon ranks among the worst globally in terms of women's participation in the workforce. While women comprised 52.6% of the resident population of working age (individuals aged 15 and above) in 2019, less than 30% of them were actively participating in the labor market, which encompasses both employed and unemployed individuals. Indeed, the female labor force participation rate was 29.3% at the beginning of 2019 compared to 70.4% for men (CAS & ILO 2018-2019), placing Lebanon among the worst 15 countries worldwide from this perspective[9].

It is noteworthy that male participation rates in the labor force have remained relatively stable over the past three decades, whereas female participation rates have been more variable and sensitive to cyclical changes. Following the 2019 financial crisis, the female participation rate declined from 29.3% in 2019 to 22% in 2022 (CAS & ILO, 2022). Furthermore, female activity rates exhibit significant fluctuations throughout women's life cycles, with studies indicating that the gender pay gap peaks in Lebanon among women aged between 30 and 49, highlighting the inadequacy of protective measures for women during the childbearing years (Kanounji & Hariri, 2019). Similarly, while women constitute only 25.4% of the employed population in Lebanon in 2022 (compared to 74.6% for men), their representation in the employed population decreases with age. They make up more than 30% of the employed population in the age group between 20 and 29 years old, yet less than 20% in the age group between 35 and 39 (CAS & ILO, 2022). This trend suggests that women tend to exit the labor force around the age of childbirth, and that having a paid job is still considered as a transitory phase between education and marriage. Moreover, it indicates that men are more consistently active in the labor force throughout their entire lifecycle, including after retirement age. For instance,

9 Lebanon is ranked worse than all Arab gulf countries to the exception of Yemen. https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/female_labor_force_participation/#:~:text=Female%20labor%20force%20participation%20rate,available%20from%201990%20to%202021.

men represented 87.5% of the employed population aged between 65 and 69, while women accounted for only 12.5% of the employed population in the same age group (CAS & ILO, 2022).

Moreover, women are overrepresented in the services sectors[10], underrepresented in industrial jobs[11], and their contribution to the agriculture is under-recognized, due to the high prevalence of informality in the primary sector and since the family work in domestic settings is excluded from the labor law[12]. Indeed, women represented in 2022 41.9% of this population of family workers employed without a wage, compared to 58.1% for men, which is the lowest gender gap in the employment status, while the highest are for the employers (8% for women compared to 92% for men), and for the own-account workers (13.8% for women compared to 86.2% for men) (CAS & ILO, 2022). Finally, gender inequalities could also be retraced in the occupational distribution, when 81% of managers are men compared to 18.9% for women, while women are overrepresented in clerical support work (51.1% compared to 48.9% for men) (CAS & ILO, 2022). As stated in the gender statistical report "available data confirms an existing influence of gender stereotyping on women's sectoral and occupational choices [...] and the distribution of women and men across the occupational categories reflects gender-specific processes of (self)selection in the labor market" (CAS & UNDP, 2021).

The inadequacies[13] and the high segmentation of the labor law in Lebanon's further exacerbate these challenges. While article 26 of the Labor code prevents gender-based discrimination, there is a noticeable absence of proactive measures aimed at promoting gender equality in employment practices. For instance, it is worth noting that Lebanon has not yet ratified International Labor

Organization Convention No. 103 concerning maternity leave. Though article 28 of the Labor Law as amended by Law number 267/2014 has specified maternity leave for female employees for a period of ten weeks and article 38 of Legislative Decree No. 112, as amended by Law number 266/2015, has specified maternity leave for female officials for a similar period, the duration of maternity leave still does not comply with international norms. Furthermore, the legislative current framework does not provide for breastfeeding breaks nor for children daycares in the workplace. Working conditions related to the protection against sexual harassment at work are still insufficient. Though law number 205 dated 21 December 2020 on the criminalization of sexual harassment and rehabilitation of its victims has been adopted, the law does not provide for specific obligations for the employer to abide by to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace.

Furthermore, certain categories of women are excluded from the protection that is supposed to be achieved through the Labor code. Indeed, according to article 7 of the Labor code, domestic workers in private houses, workers for non-commercial and non-industrial agriculture corporations as well as family workers employed in a solely family establishment under the management of the father, the mother or the guardian are excluded from the scope of application of the labor law.

In addition to the above, until the legislative amendments recently introduced by virtue of law number 323 dated 22 December 2023, women faced important discrimination related to the social security protection. Article 14 of Decree No. 13955 of 26 September 1963 on Social Security limited the circle of "family members" of an insured woman to her "husband who has reached the age of 60 years or who, because of a physical or mental infirmity, is unable to earn a living" while the "family members" of the insured man eligible for social protection included "the legitimate wife of the insured and, in the case of multiple wives, the first wife". In the same context, article 46 of Decree No. 13955 of 26 September 1963 on social security granted family allowances only to employees "for a legitimate wife living at home, when she has no remunerated occupation" without providing for such an allowance to the employee for a spouse with no remunerated occupation. The

10 Women are overrepresented in the education sector which accounted for 9.3% of the labor force in 2022, with women representing 68.1% compared to 31.9% for men, and in the health sector, which employed 5.3% of the labor force, with women representing 61.8% compared to 38.2% for men. While the financial and insurance activities didn't show significant gender disparities, all other sectors are predominately composed of male workers (CAS & ILO, 2022).

11 Women are underrepresented in the manufacturing sector which accounted for 12.1% of the labor force in 2022, with women representing 20.1% compared to 79.1% for men (CAS & ILO, 2022).

12 Women constituted the majority of the persons employed in the "activities of households as employers producing undifferentiated goods- and services or producing activities of households for own use ", representing 76.5% compared to 23.5% for men (CAS & ILO, 2022).

13 For instance, article 27 of the Labor Law prohibits the employment of women in industries and occupations that adversely affect their health.

recent law number 323/2023 has abolished this difference in treatment.

Finally, the law (No. 293) enacted by the Parliament in 2014, titled "Protection of Women and All Family Members from Domestic Violence" still need to be improved to become a deterrent against gender-based violence (GBV).

B- From economic discrimination to political under-representation of women

The percentage of women in the resident population experienced a slight rise from around 50.2% in 2004 to 51.6% in 2018-19 (CAS & ILO, 2018-2019). The ratio of both genders attending educational institutions is nearly equal. However, within the age group of 25-29 years, there is a notable increase in the number of females with secondary or university education compared to males (CAS & UNDP, 2021). These statistics suggest that over the past three decades, the educational attainment of females has been advancing at a significantly faster rate than that of males.

Despite advancements in educational attainment among women, their economic activity rates remain disproportionately low compared to men, highlighting persistent structural barriers to women's full participation in the workforce.

Furthermore, women in Lebanon continue to be marginalized in decision-making processes, particularly in economic policy formulation and implementation. This lack of representation not only hinders the development of inclusive and equitable policies but also perpetuates existing gender inequalities in the labor market.

In Lebanon, as in every other country globally, women consistently experience a time deficit compared to men, primarily due to the disproportionate burden of care work and the gendered division of household tasks. Women are universally considered time poorer than men, since the majority of care work worldwide is carried out by unpaid female caregivers. A recent study indicated that women undertake three-quarters of unpaid care work across the globe, and they dedicate, on average, 3.2 times more time to unpaid care work than men. This gender disparity persists in every region around the globe, without any exception, ranging from 1.7 times more in the Americas to 4.7 times more in the Arab States (Addati et al., 2018).

Specifically focusing on childcare, a recent Gallup World Poll, drawing data from 46 countries, highlights that women continue to bear the primary responsibility, performing three times more childcare tasks than men on average. Within this pool of 46 countries, Lebanon and Qatar were ranked as the second worst, following Syria, in terms of the gender gap in childcare responsibilities (Hunt, 2016).

Moreover, paid domestic work and care jobs are performed in Lebanon by migrant female workers, mainly girls and women from underprivileged social groups. Before the 2019 financial crisis, they represented at least 16.7% of the labor force. On December 29, 2014, 6 Lebanese female workers applied to the Ministry of Labor to form a union, with support from the International Labor Organization, the International Federation of Trade Unions, and the National Federation of Workers and Employees' Unions in Lebanon. Nearly 350 domestic workers of various nationalities gathered to attend the inaugural conference of the union on January 25, 2015. Nevertheless, until today, the union is still not recognized by the Lebanese State (Tufaro, 2018).

C- Union democracy: From "unions-without-workers" to "unions-without-women-workers"

From its inception, the CGTL has grappled with inherent structural deficiencies that hindered its internal democratic functioning. These flaws in the confederation's democratic processes were evident from the outset and did not arise gradually over time. Primarily, the CGTL was established on a confederal basis, where union bodies were composed irrespective of their membership size, with each union appointing four members—two to the Delegate Council and two to the Executive Council. Consequently, the Executive Council was not elected through the Delegate Council, leading to an absence of proportional representation. This setup, where each union had four delegates regardless of its membership, facilitated the dominance of smaller and peripheral unions, which were more susceptible to state control. Additionally, it heightened the significance of numerous shadow and pseudo-unions. For instance, at the conclusion of the war in 1990, the number of unions affiliated with the federation did not surpass. In the post-war period, however, this figure has tripled, with the primary objective being to enhance control over election results, rather than to ensure genuine representation of the workforce. It is also worth noting that the increase in the number of federations does not correspond to a similar increase in the number of unions due to the phenomenon of dual membership, where the same union is affiliated

with more than one federation, sometimes up to 3 federations. Today, the CGTL encompasses 64 federations, regrouping more than 600 unions licensed by the Ministry of Labor, and it is composed of 3 bodies:

a) The Delegate Council, consisting of 4 delegates from each member union, regardless of its size or membership count. Some unions may have around 150 to 200 members, while others may have over 8,000 members, yet they each appoint four delegates.

b) The Executive Council of the CGTL, comprised of 2 delegates from each union (two out of the 4 aforementioned delegates).

c) The Bureau of the Council, consisting of 12 members elected by the Executive Council.

This structure endows the confederal nature of the General Federation of Trade Unions: on one hand, unions are represented in unproportionable manners; on the other hand, the whole structure lack representativity and legitimacy due to the low levels of unionization, the number of members affiliated in unions not exceeding 5% of the total workforce[14]. Yet, one of the major barriers to union democracy in Lebanon is the historical exclusion of large parts of the workforce in the union movements, namely workers employed in informal jobs or informal sectors[15], as well as those employed in sectors excluded from the labor code. Yet, as we will show in the next sections, findings from the FGDs highlight that one of the most important legitimacy crises in union democracy is the divorce between unionization and the feminist agenda, translating into low women participation rates and weak female representation in its leadership.

14 It is estimated that 60,000 persons are affiliated with those unions, in a country where the labor force was estimated at 1.5 million persons before the 2019 financial collapse (CAS & ILO, 2018-2019).

15 It is estimated that 64% of the jobs in Lebanon are informal, with an important part of informality in the formal sectors, when 36% of workers are estimated to be informally employed in formal sectors, even in public administration. Indeed, 30-35% of jobs in the public sector are occupied by contractual workers, including at least 10% who are "daily workers", excluded from the labor code (Article 7). However, the proportion of daily workers rises to 50% at the port of Beirut, 60% at EDL, and 80% in water companies and certain public hospitals. (Hariri, Dirani, Scala, 2021)

IV- MAJOR FINDINGS

The subordinate position of women in trade unions stands in stark contrast to the discourse and narratives highlighting the importance of women in labor struggles. Despite efforts to promote inclusivity and diversity in union politics, female participation levels remain below what is considered equitable.

Although the percentage of women's participation in professional unions is increasing, it still falls short of aspirations and remains uneven across regions, particularly in areas that are most reluctant to endorse gender equality principles and values.

In a previous study by Saada Allaw and Ghassan Slaybi (2014), conducted on a sample of eight unions[16], it was found that 6 of these unions had women's membership ranging from 40% to 75%. As for the remaining 2 unions—the Water Workers Syndicate and Ogero—the percentage of women's membership was 11% and 35%, respectively. The study also noted an almost complete absence of women on the union executive boards, where their representation did not exceed 2%. This gender disparity reflects the exclusion of women from leadership positions within the CGTL, which does not include a single woman on its boards (Allaw & Slaybi, 2014).

The same research revealed that the Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security Fund had a nearly balanced gender distribution in 2014, with men comprising 50.9% and women 49.1% of the membership. However, the executive board showed a disparity, with women holding only 25% of the seats—3 out of 12 members. Currently, while membership remains gender-balanced, the executive board is predominantly male, with only one woman out of 12 members (compared to 3 out of 12 in 2014). Moreover, the board is considered ineffective today, as no elections have been held since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Similarly, the Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools has a predominantly female membership, with women comprising 75% and men 25%, reflecting their significant presence in the educational sector[17]. Surprisingly, however, the executive board includes no female representation and is composed entirely of 12 men.

At the Syndicate of Workers in the American University of Beirut, although women make up 55% of the workforce, only one woman holds a seat on the executive board.

1- Union democracy from the gender perspective

This initial section provides an outline of union democracy concerning women's membership and involvement in decision-making processes, as evidenced by the focus groups. Additionally, it presents general insights into female representation and their respective significance within the four studied unions.

a- Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools

The Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools comprises approximately 12,000 members, representing between 24 % and 30% of the educational workers[18], with women constituting 82% of the membership[19]. In the 2022 elections, around 2,400 individuals participated as voters. Unfortunately, specific data on female participation in these recent elections are unavailable. However, it's noteworthy that the opposing list predominantly consisted of women, although it was incomplete with only 8 female members, and it did not achieve success in its entirety. These elections, originally scheduled for the end of 2022, experienced a delay of several months due to objections from a faction within the union, who was contesting the internal regulations of the election process. Eventually, the elections were upheld. The electoral competition involved 2 lists, and one of them emerged victorious with a significant margin, securing all its positions, with only 2 elected women out of the 12 list members. Participants in the FGDs considered that the election process was fair without any suspicion of fraud, yet they also agreed that the election could not be deemed as "democratic". Some participants talked about a "discriminatory democracy" against women, where female representa-

16 Namely: Union of Bank employees in Beirut, Union of Bank employees in the North, Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security Fund, Middle East Airlines Workers Union, Union of private schools teachers, Water workers syndicate, OGERO Union, Régie.

17 As stated before, women represented around 68% of the workforce in the education sector (CAS & ILO, 2022).

18 According to latest update of the Ministry of education, there is around 51,215 teachers in private schools, compared to around 40,000 in public schools. https://education-profiles.org/northern-africa-and-western-asia/lebanon/~non-state-actors-in-education

19 As reflected in the FGDs.

tion on the union council in around 16%, while the proportion of women among teachers is around 82%. This phenomenon has persisted within the union over time and is not exclusive to the recent elections, as evidenced by a study conducted a decade ago (Allaw & Slaybi, 2014).

b- Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security Fund

Among the union's ranks, there are 820 permanent employees and 104 temporary ones (daily workers), with women comprising 60% of the total membership. In the February 2023 elections, one of the two candidate lists withdrew their candidacy with the exception of one female candidate. The participation rate in the election surpassed the 60%, and women participated in equal measure to men. Within the union council, one woman holds a seat, having been elected for the third successive term.

Members of the Executive Council were elected as a single list. Notably, the Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security stands out among its counterparts for enshrining in its internal regulations the election of a Delegate Council endowed with extensive authority. This council serves as the embodiment of the union's General Assembly and wields significant powers in reporting, direction, oversight, and accountability. It is entrusted with making crucial decisions pertaining to the union's operations within the framework of applicable laws and regulations. Its rulings hold sway over both the Executive Council and all members, who are obliged to comply with and execute them if they garner the requisite majority as prescribed by law. However, since its inception, the council has been incapacitated in forming its leadership structure due to political discord. Within the limited interactions of the Delegate Council members, it was underscored that they convened only once since their election, during which they failed to elect their leadership cadre.

c- Syndicate of Workers in the American University of Beirut

The combined workforce of the Syndicate of Workers in the American University of Beirut and its medical center totals approximately 3500 employees, with women making up about 55% of this workforce. The union council consists of 12 members, with only 1 being a woman. Despite representing employees from both university and hospital, there is no Delegate Council established. Unfortunately, there is no available data regarding the participation rate of women in the recent elections held at the end of 2022.

d- Unions of Workers in Public Hospitals in Beirut & in South Lebanon

The workers at public hospitals are currently without a licensed union, but they have two active founding committees determined to secure recognition and legalization. The first committee is for the establishment of a union at Rafic Hariri Hospital, while the second is for the creation of a union in government hospitals overall.

Regarding the founding committee for the union of workers at Rafic Hariri Hospital, composed of 11 members, with 3 out of them were women, their request for establishment dates back to April 6, 2014. Despite this, the request is still pending at the Ministry of Interior, and no license has been granted by the Ministry of Labor thus far. The committee, consisting of 11 members, including 3 women, submitted their request to the Ministry of Labor during Minister Sejaan Azzi's tenure. After completing the necessary paperwork, the file was forwarded to the Ministry of Interior for review. However, the Ministry of Interior halted the process[20].

20 The Lebanese Observatory for Workers and Employees Rights has aimed to strengthen independent and democratic labor unions since 2022. As part of this initiative, agreements have been reached with several regional public hospitals in Sidon, Hasbaya, Baabda, Baawarta, and Shahrour Al-Gharbi-Qabrchmoun to pursue independent union status separate from Rafik Hariri Hospital. Subsequently, efforts will be made to establish a union federation for public hospital employees. Administrative preparations are currently underway to submit applications for both unions. It's important to note that a similar union exists in the North Governorate. The total number of employees across all public hospitals is approximately 6000, including those at Rafik Hariri Hospital, with 79% of them being women (Salti & Mezher, 2020).

TABLE 2- WOMEN'S MEMBERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION TO THE UNIONS' LEADERSHIP

Union	Number of Workers and percentage of women in the workforce	Number or Percentage Members of Union members	Number or Percentage Women Membership	Number of Women Executive Board
Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools	51,000 68% are women	12,000 Representing 24%	Women represents 82% of the members	2 out of 12
Syndicate of Employees of the National Social Security Fund	820 permanent and 104 temporary, 60% are women	All the workers are members 100%	Women represents 60% of the members	1 out of 12
Syndicate of Workers in the American University	3,500 workers, with 55% of them are women	-	-	1 out of 12
Unions of Workers in Public Hospitals	6,000 workers, 79% of the workers are women	No union yet but founding committees	-	3 members out 11 in the founding committee were women

2- DISCRIMINATION FACED BY WOMEN WITHIN THE WORKFORCE AND THE IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

During the FGDs, women highlighted the challenges they face in the labor market, which, in turn, translate into obstacles to greater representation within unions. Following the economic collapse in 2019, women in the workforce have grappled with pervasive pressure to leave their jobs due to perceived financial strain and a lack of adequate rewards. This pressure is often exacerbated by societal expectations that place a disproportionate burden on women to prioritize family responsibilities over career pursuits. As a result, many women feel compelled to resign, as their work is perceived to entail high costs and offer limited benefits. This manifests as an implicit suggestion to stay at home, seen as a less costly option for the household. In contrast, male colleagues do not face the same degree of pressure to leave their jobs—and when they do, it is rarely accompanied by similarly gendered or discriminatory reasoning.

The discrimination women face within the workforce also translated in the economic crisis disproportionately affecting women, resulting in a decline in the percentage of female workers registered with the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) comparatively to men[21]. This decline underscores the heightened vulnerability of women to economic shocks and emphasizes the urgent need for targeted interventions to mitigate their impact. The economic crisis also impacted women's involvement in union activities as stated by participants in the FGDs which highlighted the high costs for transportation and financial burden in order to participate in unions assemblies as well as the need to prioritize additional work to be able to ensure a minimum for the cost of living.

Furthermore, time constraints and family obligations compound the challenges faced by women in the workforce. Despite assuming primary care giving roles, women report limited support from spouses, further complicating their ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities effectively. The issue of time and family responsibilities poses a significant challenge, as women often perceive these responsibilities as solely their own, rather than shared with their husbands. Instead of expressing frustration with the lack of support from their spouses, they tend to internalize the responsibility, feeling that if they don't attend to it, no one else will. Consequently, they experience a lack of childcare support in the workplace, and employers often place pressure on them regarding maternity leave, squeezing them out of necessary time off for childbirth and childcare responsibilities.

21 In the FGDs, women reported that 34% of registered employees were women before the crisis, while the current percentage has dropped to 28% today.

Participants also highlighted shortcomings in existing maternity leave policies and compensation packages, citing instances of disparaging remarks from employers. This lack of support exacerbates feelings of vulnerability and underscores the need for comprehensive workplace policies that address the unique needs of female employees.

Despite comparatively lower wages, employment within the public sector is preferred by many women due to more favorable working conditions, including flexible schedules and reduced instances of gender-based discrimination. This preference underscores the importance of creating inclusive work environments that prioritize gender equity and employee well-being. Although wages in the public sector are generally lower than in the private sector, many women perceive public sector employment as preferable due to better work schedules. They prioritize favorable work conditions over higher salaries, recognizing the value of stable hours and predictable routines. For instance, the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) has seen a feminization of its workforce because its schedules accommodate women, a victory resulting from the union's prolonged advocacy efforts. In contrast, women in other sectors view public sector jobs as more appealing due to perceived lower levels of gender discrimination. Additionally, the option to take unpaid leave while retaining job security is a significant factor for women, leading them to choose public sector employment multiple times throughout their careers.

3- Cultural norms and values

Traditional gender division of labor in the household, influenced by heteronormative representations of the family, contributes to unequal burden of family responsibility between women and men, translating into higher contribution in unpaid domestic work for women, and less participation in paid economic activity and in female representation in unions. In focus group discussions (FGDs), numerous women participants highlighted that family responsibilities and the challenge of balancing family and professional life serve as significant limitations. Their extensive familial roles impede their involvement in union activism. Furthermore, participants mentioned that community and family settings influenced by male-oriented mindsets pose an additional obstacle, as they introduce moral prejudice alongside the already existing constraints of time and resources.

Women frequently cited domestic responsibilities and family obligations as significant obstacles to their active participation in union activities, reflecting the pervasive influence of hegemonic masculinity in the domestic division of labor. However, few participants explicitly addressed how this dynamic perpetuates male dominance over female labor.

A critical examination of the Lebanese labor movement's lack of engagement in domestic affairs reveals underlying patriarchal attitudes toward labor and wage labor. Participants unanimously recognized that women's underrepresentation in the labor force and in union membership or leadership stems from their traditional roles as caregivers and homemakers. However, few participants attributed this phenomenon to a lack of interest or the apparent detachment of labor unions from addressing these issues comprehensively.

4- Patriarchal hierarchy in the Lebanese labor unions and syndicates and in the Lebanese political parties

Undoubtedly, women's participation in unions varies between membership and candidacy for suitable leadership positions. In most unions, the rate of women's membership is relatively high compared to their presence in union councils and decision-making positions, which remains very modest.

Moreover, women's representation in labor movements, unions, and political spheres remains insufficient, reflecting broader societal barriers to women's participation in decision-making roles. Traditional gender norms and societal expectations continue to hinder women's access to leadership positions within unions and associations, despite some progress in recent years. Women continue to be excluded from appointment to public positions and senior positions in official institutions, ministries, and in international representation. While the labor unions law does not differentiate between men and women in terms of providing opportunities to join these unions, either at the level of membership or leadership, the reality indicates that despite the relative increase in women's participation in union work in recent years, their presence in the leadership bodies of some unions and associations remains weak, especially in the absence of gender quota in the 4 unions selected in our study.

As an exception, we could mention that women played leading roles on some rare occasions in professional orders representing middle and upper classes[22], and not in workers' unions perse.

While some participants acknowledged that labor unions recognize the significance of women's involvement and ac-

knowledge gender disparities within their internal structures, they lamented the lack of women in union leadership roles and their limited engagement in collective bargaining. Although unions have made attempts to implement measures aimed at achieving gender equality, the core strategies of many unions continue to prioritize male-oriented agendas, often neglecting gender-specific issues.

However, it should be noted that one of the most significant obstacles to women's participation in unions, as highlighted during the FGDs, is the influence of political parties and their interference in union affairs, compounded by the patriarchal hierarchies embedded within these parties. In that context, participants voiced concerns over the pervasive support for male representatives within union structures, highlighting the need for greater gender diversity and inclusivity in leadership positions. According to the participants, political parties rarely support women's candidacies for union leadership positions.

5- Loss of faith in unions' effectiveness, lack of protection of union activists and lack of commitment to union activities

Occasionally, labor unions may surpass religious or confessional constraints, particularly when the movement successfully establishes a shared platform, as demonstrated by the endeavors of the Coordination Committee for Unions advocating for revised salary and wage structures.

For instance, female participants from the Syndicate of Workers in the American University of Beirut acknowledged the union's role in protecting many jobs during the 2019 financial crisis, despite significant layoffs. However, those who remained faced challenges such as declining real wages and purchasing power due to deteriorating exchange rates. While they appreciated the union's efforts in preventing further deterioration and worse layoffs, the layoff of 500 employees, out of a planned 1300, shattered their sense of security within the institution. Although the union managed to reduce the number of layoffs, it couldn't fully restore their confidence in its effectiveness.

Similar observations were made by members of the Teachers' Syndicate of Private Schools which recognize the importance of passed victories achieved by the union but voice the loss of confidence in its effectiveness and the existence of a state of frustration and defeat. It should also be noted in that context that the high-rate rotation existing among employees due to the crisis and the employers resorting to employing individuals who perceive their employment in certain sectors as temporary (such as the education and/or nursing sector), the level of engagement and commitment to unions has decreased – translating into more unfavorable lasting conditions for other employees rooted in the sector.

Participants in the FGDs have also highlighted the pressure and the existence of retaliation measures taken by the employer against any individual participating in union activities. They also voiced the need for additional legal protection against such retaliation measures as the current legislative framework is insufficient.

Finally, many women participants refer to unions as external bodies, distancing themselves from the unions which in turn demonstrates the lack of involvement in union activities and the perception of the unions as detached from their roles in terms of representation of workers and employees.

6- Women are assigned a traditional role in syndicates and unions mirroring the traditional gendered norms outside the workplace

The union of private school teachers exemplifies a trend where, despite a high rate of women's unionization, their representation diminishes as 1 ascends the bureaucratic hierarchy. Participants expressed that unions often appear as exclusive and inflexible domains dominated by male leaders, which they see as a deterrent for potential female members, particularly among younger workers. While efforts have been made to establish women's committees and organize workshops or conferences, union agendas generally lack a focus on gender equality or are, at best, insufficiently centered around it.

Similar to what is found in traditional political parties, and in the place granted, or even neglected, to women within their patriarchal structures, we observe that unions in Lebanon have also clearly defined a predefined role for women, circumscribed by a heteronormative vision that reproduces traditionalist and stereotyped representations of gendered divisions of roles.Paradoxically, union structures that claim to

22 For instance, the lawyer Amal Haddad won the Beirut Bar Association elections in 2009 and again in 2017. In 2017, Dr. Roula Dib won the position of head of the Dentists Syndicate in Tripoli and the North.

break with discriminatory practices against women in the labor market often reproduce the very gendered divisions they seek to challenge. Within their own organizational frameworks, women are frequently assigned stereotypical roles and functions, reflecting the traditional division of labor. For example, they are often seen in communication roles, in event organization, or in the organization of internal meetings, or, they are relegated to the women's sections of the union, in a "women's committee," which reveals how the union struggles and the feminist struggles are compartmentalized as two dichotomous spheres that should not integrate.

The gender dynamics within the union movement are heavily influenced by traditional notions of masculinity, as highlighted by many female participants who emphasized that some members exclude women from union leadership positions based on their views of unionization as demanding qualities that they wrongly associate with masculinity, such as dedication, effort, sacrifice, and high levels of workplace involvement. Consequently, women are confined and viewed as more suited for recruitment, outreach, negotiation, and conflict resolution, traits stereotypically attributed to femininity.

This allocation of roles and the stereotypical portrayal of skills and attributes illustrate how unions, across the globe, remain confined by historical depictions of masculinity linked to manual labor, which played a significant role in the early labor movement (Acker 1990). As shown in the Lebanese case, the "rough distributive criteria walked also along marked gender binaries. Whereas women were generally destined to those tasks requiring precision and a law degree of physical force, such as garments assemblage or consumers' products' retail packaging, 'heavy' tasks such as loading or big distribution packaging were on the contrary in the preserve of men. Along marked gender binaries

walked also the distribution of the supervising functions. Even in those cases where the bulk of the workforce was made by working women, it was in facts pretty rare that the latter could be promoted to the rank of wakil[23]" (Tufaro 2018, p. 181).

7- The dissociation between the feminist NGOs and the unions

When asked about their perception of the feminist NGOs, participants highlighted their importance and their achievements, but they also mentioned that they are not directly involved in their struggle. Some participants highlighted that the Lebanese civil society is mainly concerned by achieving equality within personal status and nationality laws, but not as involved in labor struggles.

This dissociation between feminist NGOs and unions in Lebanon strongly hinders the capacity for mass mobilization in order to improve women working conditions and participation in the labor force which is essential for achieving equality and developing women participation in leadership positions within unions.

8- Feminist struggle and labor struggles are kept in dichotomy: lack of integration within and outside the labor movement

Examining the limited participation and representation of women in labor unions provides an opportunity for contemplation regarding the diminishing role of unions overall and the crisis within the labor movement in Lebanon and other Arab nations.

When analyzing challenges to female representation and leadership in unions, a traditional gender-blind discourse would usually confound, under the same arguments, factors derived from women's reluctance to engage in union activism and structural barriers that translate into women exclusion. Thus, a feminist reading of those challenges would consist in using a gender lens to unpack those predominant discourses, distinguishing between the cultural barriers leading to the underrepresentation of women and the structures of the masculine domination that generate an asymmetrical distribution of power.

This prompts the central question regarding the role of unions themselves, and the erosion of their active role in shaping the economic, political and social landscape. This overall fragility results in fewer incentives for women to participate in labor unions and amplifies the dearth of women's involvement in leadership roles within these unions. This, in turn, heightens the scrutiny on the declining effectiveness of these entities in shaping the political and social landscape. Building a mitigation/procedural plan for both labor and professional unions, with the aim of increasing and enhancing the representation

23 Arabic term that means supervisor.

of women in decision-making positions within the unions, should also take into account the structural challenges that hinder the effectiveness of the labor movement as a whole. As such, corrective measures such as creating or increasing the representations of female departments within the existing ineffective unions would most probably lead to a stalemate. For instance, if the CGTL could be envisioned as a "lifeless entity", the establishment of women's leagues or feminist departments under its auspices would be akin to reviving an organ within a dead body.

Hence, augmenting the presence of women in union leadership would yield a dual positive impact, addressing both gender equality concerns and bolstering the strength of the labor movement: This initiative not only aims to promote gender equality by fostering greater representation of women in leadership positions within union movements but also seeks to improve the overall efficiency and performance of unions. This is achieved through the incorporation of gender considerations into their organizational structures and strategies, aligning them with international standards and best practices.

V- RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations outlined in this report are grounded in the major findings, which shed light on critical issues facing women's involvement with labor unions. These recommendations are designed to tackle the structural, legal, and organizational obstacles hindering women's participation in the workforce and their meaningful engagement in labor union initiatives. Consequently, they are categorized into four distinct sets of recommendations aimed at the Lebanese Parliament, the Ministry of Labor, labor unions, and feminist organizations.

To the Lebanese Parliament:

- Abrogation article 7 of the Labor Code, exempting (i) domestic workers employed in private houses (ii) agricultural corporations which have no connection from trade or industry and (iii) enterprises employing solely members of the family under the management either of the father, the mother or the guardian from all the provisions of the Labor code.
- Amending article 86 of the Labor Code by the abrogation of the condition related to the authorization to be issued by the Ministry of Labor after consultation of the Ministry of interior for the establishment of unions.
- Amending the Labor code by establishing criminal sanctions against any individual pressuring or practicing retaliation measures against union members or employees related to their union activities.
- Amending article 92 of the Labor Code to allow foreigners to join a union without any conditions and recognizing their eligibility to vote and to be elected within the syndicate administrative bodies.
- Amending article 83 of the Labor code to recognize the union standing in defending its members' interests.
- Amending the Labor code to include paternity leave and breastfeed breaks.
- Amending the Labor code to include provisions for the protection against discrimination, sexual harassment and violence at work.
- Amending the Labor code to include provisions for child day cares to be established by the employer at the workplace.
- Ratify the ILO conventions C087 related to Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise (1948) and C190 related to Violence and Harassment (2019).

To the Ministry of Labor:

- Impose on employers the inclusion in their internal policies for clear provisions related to the protection against discrimination, sexual harassment and violence at work.
- Impose on employers the inclusion in their internal policies for clear provisions related to paternity leaves and breastfeeding breaks.
- Enabling the ministry inspection and putting in place inspection measures to control the absence of discrimination in the workplace.
- Enabling the ministry inspection and putting in place inspection measures to control the absence of retaliation measures against union members.

To the Unions:

- Provide various training which have been identified by participants in both legal and leadership domains. Legal training should encompass comprehensive knowledge of sector-specific laws, NSSF regulations, labor laws, and union laws and regulations. Leadership training should focus on enhancing communication skills, effective reporting mechanisms, collaborative decision-making, and strategic management practices within union activism.
- Amend the internal bylaws and adopt the female quota. The female quota was the major strategy to increase women's representation and participation in unions democracy. In the Ogero union for instance, an initiative to endorse quotas was introduced but faced failure due to opposition from political parties. Meanwhile, in the Tobacco and Tombacs administration Union, quotas were adopted within the internal bylaws (1/3 at least of the executive board) (Allaw & Slaybi, 2014).
- Adopt alternative means of communication via internet in order to allow for additional participation in union activities given the transportation costs and financial burden for participating in union activities.
- Develop claims, revindications and strategies related to gender equality in the workplace.
- Develop legal action and ensure legal representation for

members of the union.

To the feminist Organizations:

- Develop claims and revindications related to gender equality in the workplace.
- Develop collaborations and strategic alliances with unions and participating in union activities.

VI - CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this report sheds light on the profound challenges facing women in the Lebanese workforce and their limited representation within labor unions. Despite comprising a significant portion of union membership, women remain underrepresented in union councils and decision-making positions, highlighting a persistent gender disparity within these organizations.

One key finding of this study underscores that Lebanese women face time poverty due to their extensive engagement in unpaid caregiving and undervalued domestic labor, which not only limits their involvement in paid employment but also in union activism. Since the 2019 financial collapse, women have grappled with pervasive pressure to leave their jobs, driven by perceived financial strain and inadequate rewards, unlike their male counterparts who do not face the same pressure. This pressure is compounded by societal expectations, disproportionately burdening women to prioritize familial responsibilities over career advancement and union participation. Consequently, even unionized women often feel implicitly encouraged to stay at home, an option perceived as a less burdensome for the household. Moreover, participants noted that community and family settings influenced by male-oriented perspectives present an additional barrier, introducing moral biases alongside existing constraints of time and resources.

Moreover, societal expectations and financial pressures contribute to a pervasive sense of insecurity among women in the workforce, leading many to prioritize favorable working conditions over higher salaries. The pressure to resign from jobs due to perceived high costs and lack of rewards is further compounded by traditional gender roles and expectations, which disproportionately burden women with familial responsibilities.

Additionally, the findings reveal a disconnect between female workers and labor unions, with many women perceiving unions as external bodies that are detached from their roles in representing workers and employees. This lack of involvement in union activities reflects a broader trend of women's marginalization within labor movements.

Furthermore, while unions profess to combat discriminatory practices against women in the labor market, their internal structures often perpetuate traditional gender divisions, relegating women to stereotypical roles and functions. This compartmentalization of union and feminist struggles reinforces the need for greater integration and collaboration to effectively address gender inequality within both spheres.

In light of these findings, it is imperative that labor unions take proactive measures to address gender disparities within their ranks and prioritize the inclusion and representation of women in decision-making processes. The recommendations stemming from the findings of this report emphasize several key strategies to enhance women's participation and representation in labor unions and promote gender equality in the workplace. Firstly, there is a need to provide comprehensive training programs for union members, focusing on legal knowledge and leadership skills essential for effective activism. Additionally, internal bylaws should be amended to include a female quota, as evidenced by successful implementation in some unions, ensuring adequate representation of women in decision-making positions. Utilizing alternative communication methods, such as online platforms, can facilitate broader participation in union activities, particularly for members facing financial constraints. Moreover, developing and advocating for gender equality-related claims and demands in the workplace is crucial to addressing systemic discrimination and promoting inclusivity. Finally, establishing legal support mechanisms within unions can provide essential assistance to members facing workplace-related legal challenges. Concurrently, feminist organizations should align their advocacy efforts with those of labor unions, fostering collaborations and strategic alliances to amplify their collective voices and advance gender equality in the workforce.

Finally, the Lebanese government must amend the labor law or adopt a new law to protect the rights of domestic workers and abolish the sponsorship system, as stated by organizations. The new law to protect domestic workers should, at a minimum, ensure their equality with other workers covered by labor law. These measures should also guarantee the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining without

discrimination for all workers. Lebanon voted in June 2011 in favor of adopting International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 189 concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers, which protects domestic workers. However, it has not taken any steps to ratify or comply with it yet. The ILO Convention aims to establish the first global standards for an estimated 50-100 million domestic workers worldwide. Under Article 3, the right to freedom of association for domestic workers is guaranteed. Hence, Lebanon is still required to ratify ILO Convention No. 189 and implement its provisions. It is also required to ratify ILO Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize.

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