

GENDER

Economic Equity in the arab region

Introduction:

Economic equality between genders is one of the basic pillars for applying the concept of citizenship, as the concept of citizenship refers to a set of rights and responsibilities for individuals, a concept in its simplest meaning that means equality for all, but the traditional social roles of women reduced their economic opportunities compared to men, which led to poverty and political marginalization.

There is a need to reconsider the economic role of women in order to achieve citizenship by applying strategies for the economic, social and political empowerment of women; through the development of women's capabilities to expand work options, increase their participation in the labor force, and achieve equal opportunities for women's employment in all sectors, including the private sector and entrepreneurship business; as well as occupying key positions in general authorities and companies by creating opportunities for greater social participation.

Based on the above, this article will address the importance of women's economic empowerment, and how their role can be increased to effectively participate in society, bearing in mind that women, especially the breadwinners, are among the most vulnerable groups and most vulnerable to political and economic risks.

First: - Citizenship and women's economic rights.

It's possible here to refer to a more detailed definition of citizenship, which means "enabling citizens to obtain economic, social, political and cultural rights within the framework of production and resource distribution processes, in addition to participating in decision-making and holding all positions without discrimination and equality before the law", that's what can be summed up in the process of the national integration in building a modern national state. Citizenship is based on the two concepts of equality in rights and duties, and active participation in all political, economic, social and cultural aspects ⁽¹⁾.

(1) Gender, Citizenship and the Role of NGOs in Selected Arab Countries: A Case Study of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Published 2005, Accessed 5 August 2022, Available at: <https://shorturl.at/sJT17>

Citizenship means giving people a right from the fact that they are part of society and regardless of individual achievements and monetary resources to access certain levels of social welfare, and citizenship must be comprehensive, which includes the interests and needs of all citizens and affirm the rights of women and men to equal treatment, and this is proven in constitutions and laws. The concept of citizenship goes beyond the relationship between the citizen and the country and extends to a range of other social institutions such as the family, traditional systems, civil society organizations, and the economic institutions⁽²⁾ .

Citizenship and the equal opportunities for both genders' principle highlight the importance of the principle of equal opportunities emerging from the relationship between the concept of citizenship and gender equality in rights and duties, and the impact of inequality on economic growth, especially the inequality in education and employment. As inequality in education, for example, leads to the exclusion of qualified girls from the educational path and thus not benefiting from their competence and giving opportunities to boys even with less efficiency, which leads to a decrease in the average human capital and a decline in the economic activity's performance, as well as gender equality affects the economic growth through the fact that women's employment means additional income and thus higher savings, more investments and more productivity; in addition to better use of credit⁽³⁾ .

The problem of inequality in remuneration for women in the private sector, and the skipping of some in promotions to higher positions, regardless of efficiency, as well as problems associated with socialization and gender discrimination, appears especially in rural and slum areas characterized by poor social services. Moreover, unpaid childcare work causes women to spend nearly five times more hours than men in unpaid childcare work.

Second: - Efforts to empower women.

The participation rate of Arab women in the labor force is 18.4%, which is the lowest in the world compared to the global average of 48%. By contrast, male labor force participation rates exceed 77%, which is higher than the global average of 75%. The unemployment rate for women in Arab countries is 15.6%, which is three times the global average.

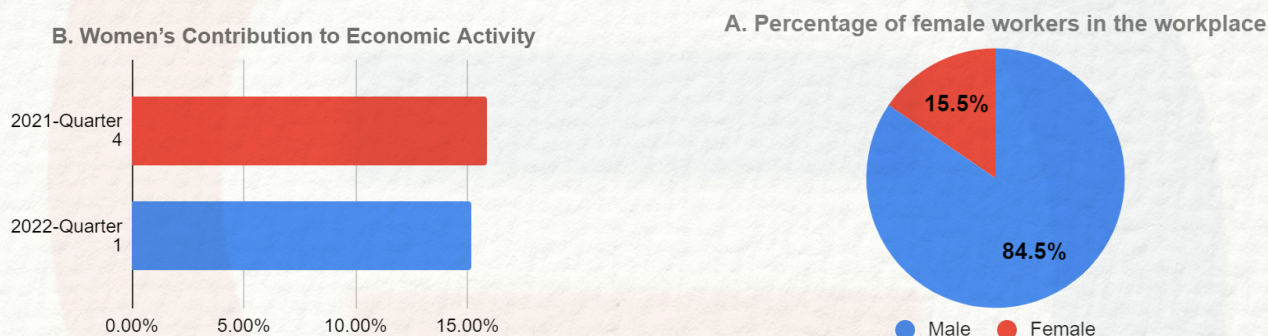
(2) Sum, B. (1987). The Scandinavian welfare states—towards sexual equality or a new kind of male domination?. *Acta Sociologica*, 30(3–4), 255–270 at: https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/16527/1/S1000328_en.pdf

(3) AUGUSTO LOPEZ-CLAROS, Equality of opportunity as an engine of prosperity, JULY 29, 2015, World Bank Blog, at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/equality-opportunity-engine-prosperity>

Equal opportunities include the concept of women's political empowerment. According to the 2014 constitution, the proportion of women in local councils was about 25%, as the 2019 constitutional amendments also included an amendment to Article 102 regarding the allocation of 25% of parliament seats to women. As well as promoting the economic empowerment's concept, which included the criminalization of deprivation of inheritance, and the issuance of a decision to represent women on the boards of directors of non-bank financial companies.

Despite Egypt's benefits, there is a modest percentage of female workers in the workplace, as the percentage of females reached about 15.5% of the labor force in 2021, while the percentage of males reached 84.5%. Women's contribution to economic activity also declined, according to recent data issued by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, reaching about 15.2% in the first quarter of 2022, compared to 15.9% in the fourth quarter of 2021.

Figure No. (1)



Source: Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, and the Labor Force Bulletin.

Regarding the presence of women in administrative positions, it is low in the Arab region, as only 11% of them occupy managerial positions compared to the global average of 27.1%.

As for the situation in Egypt, the decision-making positions for women has been increased, as they occupy 28% of the Parliament's seats, and 14% of the representation of women in the Senate, 44% of the National Council for Human Rights, and 31% of female deputy governors⁽⁴⁾.

(4) The National Council for Women, Empowering Women in Egypt 2014 - May 2021, available at: https://www.ilo.org/beirut/areasofwork/equality-discrimination/WCMS_733256/lang--ar/index.htm

Third: The Egyptian-European Partnership for Women Empowerment.

Egypt has signed the “European Union Program for Rights, Equality and Citizenship” with the European side. The Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Program aims to contribute to the further development of areas in which equality and the rights of persons are promoted, as stipulated in the European Union treaties, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and international conventions on human rights, which was implemented effectively. Its specific objectives include the promotion of non-discrimination, the rights of persons with disabilities, equality between women and men, and the rights of the child.

With a budget of 62 million euros allocated in 2018, the REC program financed actions developed by public authorities, universities, NGOs and other organizations. The actions consist of: mutual learning and exchange of good practices, information and awareness campaigns, training activities, analytical activities, studies, researches, surveys and evaluations⁽⁵⁾.

Fourth: - Egypt’s initiatives and partnerships to enhance women’s economic and political role.

The Egyptian Constitution 2014 included nearly 20 articles of citizenship and equality between citizens, which is directly reflected on the status of women. For example, Article 11 stipulates that the country guarantees the achievement of equality between women and men in all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights in accordance with the provisions of the constitution. The country is also committed to protect women against all forms of violence and ensure that women are empowered to reconcile family duties with work requirements. In addition, the state is working to take measures to ensure that women are adequately represented in parliament and have the right to assume public and senior management positions.

As the country’s efforts represented by the National Council for Women also included the allocation of approximately 2.9 billion pounds for women in the family development plan, and about 75% of the women who benefited from the conditional cash support programs (solidarity and dignity), and within the framework of financial inclusion, savings and lending, and the first application in Egypt (Tahweesha) was launched for savings for groups of women and linked to banking systems to facilitate access for women in different villages.

(5) Rights, E. (2015). Citizenship Programme 2014–2020. European Commission, 28(4). at: https://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/programmes-2014-2020/rec/index_en.htm

Furthermore, there is the Women's Citizenship Initiative; it's one of the initiatives through which the United Nations provides support in Egypt for the political empowerment of Egyptian woman, this initiative is implemented in partnership with the National Council for Women (NCW), and the United Nations Women in Egypt continues to provide technical support for the Women's Citizenship Initiative since 2011, which aims to issue women's national identity cards to enable them to access financial and non-financial services, as well as to exercise their political and social rights. To support the implementation of the National Strategy for Women Empowerment 2030, UN Women in Egypt played an important role in providing technical assistance, quality assurance, process documentation and success stories for the Women's Citizenship Initiative (WCI), under which strategic partnerships were established with the government institutions and their local branches, as well as community organizations local civil. The program is considered one of the most politically recognized and nationally owned development programs in Egypt due to its major contributions to the advancement of women at the political, social and economic levels.

In line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Egypt's Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS), the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030, the program responds to the fifth goal of the Sustainable Development Goals "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." Because it allows women access to enjoy their social, political and economic rights, as a step to ensure their protection from all forms of violence. WCI also addresses SDG 16 to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies to achieve sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels" given that providing legal identity to all, including birth registration, is a target to be achieved by 2030⁽⁶⁾.

Fifth: Towards adopting more flexible policies to enhance citizenship and empower women economically.

Egypt adopts a clear approach to empowering Egyptian women in all fields as stipulated in the 2014 Egyptian constitution, but this has not yet yielded results. Empowering women in cooperation with international institutions, however, there are great social complications that are being stripped of their rights besides the popular traditions, the social injustice that rural women are subjected to, and the spread of underage marriage even in the presence of legislation that prevents this. This paper recommends the following proposals that would enhance the economic empowerment of women.

(6) UN women Egypt, Achievements Report 2018, at: <https://egypt.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/8/achievements-report-2018>

- Despite the existence of a general framework as well as laws and legislation to enhance the status and role of women, this requires law enforcement, especially in inheritance issues, for example, women in Egypt own only 5% of private ownership of agricultural land, in addition to minors' marriage. With the need to include gender sensitivity in policies, employment opportunities and skills development, and review and amend laws to promote gender equality in the workplace.
- Capacity building and expansion of girls' education, to increase opportunities for obtaining decent jobs, which contributes to increasing the national product and achieving economic well-being for all, taking into account raising the capabilities of women and girls and meeting the needs and experiences of women in order to increase their opportunities in the labor market. In addition to promoting formal and informal provision of technical and vocational education and training, and ensuring that the design and implementation of these programs are gender sensitive.
- Gender equality practices in the workplace in the public and private sectors to design policies and practices that promote gender equality in the workplace such as maternity protection, provision of childcare for parents, mechanisms to prevent and respond to workplace harassment, leave policies, and work arrangements that support workers with responsibilities where the ILO works with trade unions to increase membership and advance women by implementing capacity building and awareness-raising work on gender equality in the workplace and women's rights at work⁽⁷⁾.

Finally; changing global systems requires the application of the principles of equality and citizenship, raising the rate of women's participation, and effective participation, in addition to the need to direct policies towards reconciling work and family life, and that countries and society in general promote initiatives for women to overcome obstacles that prevent greater mobility and better career prospects without discrimination, and thus obtain full citizenship.

(7) International Labor Organization Gender Equality in the Arab Countries, Reference previously mentioned