Under Curfew: 5
The Impact of the Corona Virus on Women’s work
The latest period- starting from March 18 – 26- has left its impact on numerous workers in various sectors as a result of the current crisis as Jordan continues its efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19. Generally, workers are usually affected in such crises as they are deprived of their basic labour rights, while others lose their jobs and their wages. Such conditions are even worse for Informal Workers, as they are also deprived from any labour or social protections as well.

One of the most affected categories by the current crisis are women. Therefore, this report monitored a number of sectors where women tend to work, whether regularly or irregularly. The report covers the period between 18 and 16 of March, which is the same period where Jordan took successive decisions to curtail the spread of the Corona Virus, the last of which was the Kingdom-wide imposed curfew.

The report includes a look at the status of women who receive daily wages; others who work for their own and women who work in formal sectors and receive monthly wages. As for those who receive a daily wage or work for their own account, it was noted that they are not provided with any protection. Thus, they cannot request unemployment compensations from the Social Security Corporation. Women who work for their own account reported that due the crisis that there is no longer demand for their products, as people now tend to only buy the essentials.
Therefore, and as part of Tamkeen's ongoing series of reports, this report will shed light on the most frequent complaints that the Field Team has received from female workers. These workers are employed in several sectors that include: Private Schools; Productive Kitchens; Agriculture; Textile; Beauty Salons; Home-Based Businesses; and Online Work. The report is a compilation of several sources that include the data collection by Tamkeen Field Team of Community Facilitators, as well as the comments and messages that Tamkeen receives through its Social Media Platforms.

Private Schools:

Workers on Private Schools and Teaching Institutions have reported being subjected to numerous types of violations. It was noted that these workers were afraid to submit their complaints due to their fears of losing their jobs, or other concerns that include:

- The loss of their current jobs, which would lead to the loss of the year as part of their accumulated experience total. The years’ total is extremely important for teachers as it affects their advancement both in their career and in their wage.
- Fear of employers finding out that they have lodged their complaint, as most of the employers and workers come from the same close-knit communities.
- The economic and social need to keep their jobs.

Since the onset of the crisis and the subsequent procedures taken by the government to stop the spread of the virus, the sector has witnessed an upick in violations. The most noted violations that were noted by Tamkeen include:

1. There are schools that did not abide by the paid holiday decision that was announced by the Ministry of Labour. These schools claimed that since the students did not pay their monthly tuitions, then they cannot pay the workers’ wages; even though teachers continue to provide online lessons.
2. There are schools that forced teachers to sign resignation letters, after promising them that they will be reinstated once the Corona Virus ends.
3. Schools that terminated the services of both its workers and teachers without providing them with wages or their other labour rights.
4. Schools that told its workers and teachers that it will not be paying their wages and that payments are postponed till after the crisis.
5. Schools that informed that the holiday will be paid till the end of March. However, if it was extended any further then it will be unpaid.
"I am a teacher in a private school. I love my work and I studied my major because I am passionate about children. I am always creative in my job, and I organise competitions and award good students. I never ask for vacations. Now, we have this holiday and the headmaster told us that he will delay our salary till after the crisis, as the situation is difficult and the parents are not paying the tuitions. The teachers and I agreed so that we will not lose our jobs. I love my work and do not want to lose it."

"We know that the school depends on the tuition to pay our wages. But we have not even received the wages for the month of February, which means that we probably won’t receive the wages for this month or the one before. We really cannot submit a complaint though as ultimately; the crisis will end and we will return to work. Of course, the school’s owner who is its headmistress will not accept that her employees filed a complaint against her and she will thus react accordingly towards the worker.

In an interview with a teacher who works in the valleys that is under the jurisdiction of Irbid, she said that since she will not be receiving any wages throughout the holiday, she was forced to accept another job in a factory, where she previously worked even though she was subjected to numerous violations in that period including delays in wages. However, she was forced to accept as she needed to find a way to secure her livelihood. She finished by saying that she is currently waiting till the factory issues her a permit so she could travel to and from work.

In regards to Private Educational Institutions, one teacher reported that she and her colleagues have been given a paid leave in accordance with the decision announced by the Ministry of Labour. However, she then received a text from her employer informing her that all workers have to sign a no-leave vacation starting from the beginning of March and till the crisis is over and they resume working. She had this to say about her sense of job security:

"I am really uncomfortable with the current situation but in the same time I do not want to lose my job, as it took me a long time till I found my current job. I also do not want to harm the employer. Due to the current crisis, I do not have a sense of job security, but in the same time work is not always available anyway."
Productive Kitchen workers were negatively affected by the crisis, as their work is dependent on orders. In light of the closure of economic institutions, these orders have stopped, which meant the loss of the workers' income, even though the majority of them are the main providers for their families.

The women also suffered great financial losses as some of them bought the basic materials that they were expected to use in their Mothers' Day orders, without receiving any compensations for these losses.

The worker works in the sector as she is passionate about it. She continues to work in despite her limited resources and even delivers the order to the customers herself. The infrequent income is enough to secure her basic needs. However, and due to the crisis, she has lost her income and she says:

"I hope Allah will make this period passes, as I do not have an alternative source of income and no one will bear these losses besides me."
The majority of Agricultural Workers work on a daily basis, as they receive their wages on a daily or weekly basis or once the season ends. In light of the current circumstances and even though the Agricultural sector was excluded from Defence Order No.1, the majority of the workers in Deir Alla, Irbid, Mafraq, Azraq as well as Lubban district in Amman reported that they were unable to reach their working places. Their inability meant that these workers would be unable to receive their daily wages. Meanwhile, workers who reside inside the farms or in areas near it reported that they are still working. As for the provision of occupational safety tools specifically for COVID-19 or even in general, the workers reported that they have to provide it on their account for themselves.

One of the workers retold a story of her colleague who was beaten by a snake before announcements regarding virus infections began. After hospitals began receiving virus cases, she was hesitant to return to the hospital after her first visit, even though she is still struggling with the effects of the bite. Regarding the impact of the crisis on their livelihoods, the female workers all agreed that the curfew has led to their inability to secure their livelihoods, especially their basic needs and those of babies. These conditions are further complicated by the special status of work in the Agriculture sector. The majority of these workers are daily workers who receive low wages. Thus, they are unable to save any money for days when they do not have work.
The Shaweesh is the interlink between farm owners and workers. S/he is the one who assigns tasks to the workers and regulate their working hours, as well as other supervisory tasks. S/he is also responsible to pay the wages of the workers after deducting an amount from their wage for their own salary. The shaweesh is thus affected as well by the crisis as they receive their wages on a daily or weekly basis. One shaweesh in Azraq, who is responsible for a group of agricultural workers, said the follow:

“"We are all in trouble, whether the workers or myself. Our situation is deteriorating as we are completely dependent on our daily wages".”

“I am not the only impacted by this crisis. Agricultural workers and I are all struggling”.

“I am now really suffering. I had to send my wife and our children to her parents' house. I do not even have 1 JOD with me”.

As for asking for his and the workers' wages from the employer, the employer replied:

“I have not sold my vegetables; from where should I bring the money from?”
Both workers and employers in hair salons are struggling with the impact of the complete stoppage to all of their activities. The cessation is not just the result of the issuance of Defence Order No. 2 as the sector was not included in the excluded sectors, but also due to the possibility of the spread of the virus through the tools used in salons, as it has direct contacts with both the worker and the customer.

Workers in the sector have confirmed that they are unable to provide for their basic livelihoods, like the other sectors. The most important of these needs are the rents to their shops and houses; as well as their loans instalments; their electricity and water bills; and the basic needs of their houses from food and drinks.

Workers, whether those employed formally registered salons or those working for home, have been affected. In East Amman for example, a Syrian shared her experience as she is now with neither work nor wage, as she was informed by her employer. The worker is not fearful about not receiving her wages for the current 14 days official holiday. Indeed, her main concern is related to the possibility of this holiday being extended as she will also not receive wages for that period either.

As for employers, they have expressed real concerns about their livelihoods as they were forced to close their salons to comply with the provision of Defence Order No.2. These women said that the curfew is affecting their financial capabilities, as they are obliged to pay the rent of their salons to their landlord. Others shared their fears that their makeup will expire in case this curfew lasts for too long, as well as their fears related to the
possible loss of customers and the resulting financial losses. In Azraq, the situation related to salon rents differ. One salon owner shares her story by comparing her situation pre and during the crisis. She is the owner of a salon and she does not have to pay rent. It is close from her home, which provides her with the flexibility to maintain a balance between her work and her familial and social duties. Before the crisis, the salon's income used to cover all her financial needs, without the need for her to borrow money from anyone, except the suppliers of the cosmetics and salon equipment. She relied on microfinance loans, which she used to pay periodically. Before the crisis, she had several reservations for a number of weddings. As a result, the women bought cosmetics at a cost of 350 JOD. Then, the banning of gathering decision came, which stopped weddings and even funeral homes and all of her reservations were cancelled. Now, she has to bear the losses related to the cosmetics she bought, and she is unable to pay her microfinance loan as she has no income.

As for those who work with her, she said that she did not pay them anything. She added that she thought what she did was legal, as they have verbal contracts with each other that provides that these workers receive a daily wage. Regarding her living conditions during the crisis, she said:

“\[quote\]
I prioritize my children over anything else. Currently, I am just looking for enough money to secure their basic needs from milk and food. Even those who work with me, I used to pay their wages on a daily basis. So now, they do not want anything from me. We have all been hurt. I do not know what I will do if this continues. My work used to be stable. But now even when the Virus Crisis is over, Ramadan is about to start and there will not be much work. So, I will remain in debt. I do not know if I should borrow some money, or take another loan to pay my debts, or just go and buy my house needs.”
[quote]

The general expectations of Salon owners in Azraq is that they will be struggling as their debts accumulate, whether those related to their rents, electricity and water bills, or other monthly expenses. They also fear losing their customers who usually come from other areas. Therefore, they requested through Tamkeen for the government to issue decisions that will postpone loan payments, especially for sectors which depend on their daily wages for a period not less than one year so that they will have time to review the budget and arrange their financial matters for the period directly after the crisis.
The impact of the crisis was felt by workers in the Textile sector on two fronts: the first of which was due to the stop of requests by customers to workers, whether those working at home or in factories; while the second relates to the inability of workers to reach their working place. Thus, the impact was felt by workers whose income was stopped; or were not paid their wages by the employers as factories are usually committed to producing a certain number of clothes. In cases where these factories cannot meet their numbers and deliver their products on time, they will not pay the wages of their workers.

“I am a Syrian working in a Textile factory in Jordan. The crisis affects us as our work is connected to both Turkey and Syria, but the factories have been closed in both countries. We, the female workers, received our wages yesterday but the males did not. We now have two main fears: either they ask us to go back to work, or that the factory will close.”
In this particular sector, two categories of workers have been monitored: Domestic Workers who do general cleaning services, and others who are entrusted with care of the elderly. Because of the trends related to spread of the virus, women who work in the houses are clearly affected by the fears shared by them and their employers. Another aspect to the fear relates to its economic impacts as some of them have lost their main source of income, as shared by one Jordanian worker:

"My work used to help me a lot, and now I lost it and have no other income. In this situation, I have no money."

Another worker shared her story by saying that her income was cut from all directions. She used to work for various ladies on a weekly basis. Due to the crisis though, she has not received any calls from them and even if she did, she will not be able to leave her house under these circumstances, which also resulted in her husband being unemployed.

"This holiday has negatively affected me. We do not even receive aid from the Ministry of Social Development. I had 70 JODs saved and we are using them now. But once I spend them all, I will not be able to buy even the most basic of needs.

"I started working for an elderly lady who is unable to move. I care for her and give her the medications on time. There were even times when I slept at her house to care for her during the night. I used to receive 30 JODs a week, and some incentives sometimes. The wage was enough to support me. Work for people who are struggling economically like my family and I is inevitable, it is not a luxury. I am the only provider for my two children after my divorce and I never finished my education. Since the onset of the crisis, I cannot go to work for her because I need keep her and myself safe."
In addition to the abovementioned jobs that workers did from their homes, like productive kitchens, sewing and salons, other Home-Based Business owners were affected by the current crisis. These include those who ran a kindergarten from their homes as mothers stopped sending their children since they did not have to work either. As a result, these owners do not except to receive the usual monthly sum from these mothers, and it is expected that even in the upcoming months their work will be affected, especially if some of these mothers lost their jobs as a result of this crisis.

As for institutions where they are allowed to work, a number of translators expressed their disapproval as their working conditions have differed in the current crisis in several ways that include:

- Long working hours, as some employer think that flexible working hours mean that employees should respond to the demands at any hours, whether during the day or even late at night.

- Additional demands assigned to workers outside their job description and usual assignments.

- Weak communication channels between workers and employers, as they tend to communicate through social media platforms instead of direct communication. These methods of communication have an impact on work as required tasks are performed in a different way compared to what is actually required.

One of the community-based organisations in Mafraq informed a worker, who works in Community Awareness that she is expected to continue her work from home, even though this goes against the governmental decisions. Yet, she was informed that otherwise this period will be calculated as part of her annual vacation days. Other workers in the same organisations who work in supportive services were informed that the wages for this period will be deducted from their salaries.
• Weakness in internet connections due to the huge pressure currently on it, which could result in delays in terms of delivering the required tasks. Employers though do not show any understanding towards these issues as some workers have to work overtime, which is not calculated within their working hours and they are not given any compensations for it.

Regarding Freelance Workers, like programmers or graphic designers, they expressed fears that their contractors will be unable to pay them their wages, as some of them do not have electronic wallets and in light of the closure of banks and the curfew that is imposed.
Other sectors:

“I work in a Food Factory in Irbid. We are currently in a paid vacation, but we were told that if the vacation is extended then we will only receive half of our wages.”

As other sectors were monitored as well, workers in various sectors across the Central and Northern governorates of the Kingdom, reported that they did not receive any wages during this period. Some of these workers are employed in an energy company, while others work in food companies. As for supportive services in a hospital in Jerash, workers reported that they were asked to work 10 hours a day instead of 8 hours. These workers were told that they will later be given vacations instead of overtime wages. Other supportive service workers who work in a university in the North reported that they were given unpaid vacations.

Recommendations

1. Postponing the payments of all small and micro loans.

2. Supporting small business owners and farmers by providing loans with low interest rates not exceeding 1%.

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For legal aid and human rights