



# THE REPERCUSSIONS OF WAR ON WOMEN IN THE YEMENI WORKFORCE

Dr. Fawziah Al-Ammar and Hannah Patchett

## INTRODUCTION

Yemen has one of the lowest female labor force participation rates in the world. The conflict-driven economic collapse has devastated Yemen's labor market, and available data suggest that working women were initially harder hit by the conflict than their male counterparts; proportionally, more women lost their jobs while women-owned businesses were more vulnerable to closing down. Subsequently, however, the prolonged war has pushed more women into the workforce, often through financial necessity due to the economic crisis and the loss of male breadwinners rather than any planned economic empowerment for women.

During the conflict, women have started new enterprises, often home-based businesses, or entered professions like waitressing or retail which were previously dominated by men. The humanitarian response in Yemen has created new employment for women, while some women have been employed in security forces for parties to the conflict. Yemeni women have been pushed into poorly paid, informal physical labor like domestic work, while others have been forced into negative coping mechanisms such as begging. ▶

This policy brief was prepared by the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, in coordination with the project partners DeepRoot Consulting and CARPO – Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief sheds light on how the ongoing conflict in Yemen has affected women's participation in the workforce. It finds that the protracted conflict has, on the one hand, pushed more women into the workforce and new labor markets, in some cases into professions previously dominated by men. While some women have established new enterprises, often home-based businesses, others have engaged in poorly paid physical work in response to the economic crisis and the loss of male breadwinners. On the other hand, the war has imposed new constraints on an already low women's participation rate.

This policy brief recommends that micro-economic initiatives to bring women into the workforce must be accompanied by long-term efforts to address socio-economic structures that have historically constrained women's access to the workforce. Interventions must be guided by local consultations with women and men from all demographics, and must promote work that is fairly paid and provides security and social protection. Quota systems could ensure that women play an active role in recovery and reconstruction efforts; women must also be engaged at all decision-making levels in peace building efforts and in post-conflict Yemen.



This policy brief surveys these emerging trends and introduces principles to guide efforts to sustain potential gains in women’s labor force participation and to improve access to decent work for all women in post-conflict Yemen.

## OVERVIEW OF THE LABOR FORCE IN YEMEN

Yemen’s labor force is largely uneducated and informal, with a low labor force participation rate.<sup>(1)</sup> It is characterized by a mismatch between workers’ qualifications and their roles, and high unemployment.<sup>(2)</sup> While definitive statistics are unavailable, prior to the conflict estimates suggested that between a quarter and an eighth of the Yemeni workforce were unemployed, with these numbers substantially higher for youth and women.<sup>(3)</sup> Some 42.4 percent of the workforce was self-employed or worked in family businesses.

Most of Yemen’s workforce is male. Current quantitative data on women’s labor force participation is not available. Prior to the conflict, estimates for female labor force participation varied widely;<sup>(4)</sup> measuring women’s work is a difficult task with methodological challenges, such as whether to include unpaid work like fetching water as economic activities.<sup>(5)</sup>

According to an ILO labor force survey conducted in 2013-2014, only 6 percent of women participated in the labor force prior to the conflict, while just 7 percent of jobs were held by women. In 2013, higher education levels were linked to greater workforce participation for women. Some 62.1 percent of women with a university education were part of the workforce in Yemen, compared with just 4.5 percent of those with a primary education or lower. The ILO survey found that of the 293,000 women employed

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1) The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that less than one third of Yemen’s workforce had secondary or tertiary education, while 73.2 percent of jobs were in the informal sector. The labor force participation rate was 36.3 percent. See: “Yemen Labor Force Survey 2013-2014,” International Labor Organization (ILO), 2015, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_419016.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_419016.pdf). Accessed March 19, 2019.

2) The ILO estimated that 83 percent of Yemenis were either overqualified or underqualified for their jobs. See: ILO, Yemen Labor, 5.

3) The ILO estimated total unemployment at 13.5 percent, while the unemployment rate among women stood at 26.1 percent and among youth at 24.5 percent. See: ILO, Yemen Labor, 5. Estimates from the International Monetary Fund differ, with total unemployment estimated in 2014 to be roughly 26 percent. See: Republic of Yemen IMF Country Report No. 14/276, International Monetary Fund, September 24, 2014, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2016/12/31/Republic-of-Yemen-2014-Article-IV-Consultation-and-Request-for-a-Three-Year-Arrangement-41901>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

4) According to data presented by the World Bank, the female labor force participation rate declined from 23 percent of women in 1999 to 6 percent in 2014. However, Yemen’s Central Statistical Organization recorded a 36.5 percent rise in the number of women participating in the labor force between 2004 and 2010 - partly explained by a 29.4 percent rise in the female working age population over this period. While this suggested a greater willingness among women to enter the workforce, the 88.9 percent rise in the number of unemployed women between 2004 and 2010 reflected insufficient demand for their labor. In absolute terms, 172,000 women entered the labor force between 2004 and 2010, but the number of employed women increased by just 7,000. See: “Labor force participation rate, female,” World Bank Open Data, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.ACTI.FE.ZS?contextual=default&end=2018&locations=YE&start=1990&view=chart>. Accessed March 19, 2019; Michele Bruni, Andrea Salvini, and Lara Uhlenhaut, “Demographic and Labor Market Trends In Yemen,” ILO, 2014, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_358144.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_358144.pdf). Accessed March 19, 2019.

5) Mansour Omeira, “From informality to decent work in Yemen,” ILO, March 2013, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_218216.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_218216.pdf). Accessed March 19, 2019.

before the conflict, around half worked in agriculture, either as dairy and livestock producers or field crop and vegetable growers, while around one third were employed in the service industry. More than one-third of women worked in family businesses, compared with less than one-tenth of men.

Data assessing upward or downward trends in female labor force participation is lacking and often inconsistent when it does exist. However, by all metrics, women's labor force participation in Yemen remained low, even for a region in which low female participation is a feature of labor markets. This is despite legal provisions to protect women in the workforce. Labor Law No.5 of 1995,<sup>(6)</sup> which governs labor issues in Yemen, recognizes that women are entitled to equal pay, promotion, opportunities, training and duties and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex. It also provides for shorter working hours for pregnant or breastfeeding employees and maternity leave for 60 days with full pay.

Yemen's constitution guarantees that all citizens have the right to participate in the economic life of the country.<sup>(7)</sup> Yemen has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),<sup>(8)</sup> although many aspects of Yemen's national legislation are not in compliance with the treaty.<sup>(9)</sup> The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which monitors implementation of the CEDAW treaty, noted in its last review of Yemen that women's opportunities to work in the private and public sector were limited; most working women were engaged in the agricultural sector, doing unpaid work.<sup>(10)</sup>

Multiple factors have hindered women's entry into the workforce. Yemen has placed last in the Global Gender Gap report every year for the last decade, signalling the country's significant gender-based disparities.<sup>(11)</sup> Yemen's tribal and patriarchal social norms are a key factor contributing to low female labor force participation. Female access to paid employment has been challenged by widely-held beliefs that women's roles are primarily domestic, entailing reproductive and extensive household responsibilities, as well as a prevalent negative stigma around women who work outside the home.<sup>(12)</sup>

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6) Labor Code, Act No. 5 of 1995, Republic of Yemen, <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/WEBTEXT/44043/65001/E95YEM01.htm#a42>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

7) Constitution of the Republic of Yemen art. 41, 42 <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3fc4c1e94.pdf>. Accessed March 19, 2019. While Article 41 states that citizens are all equal in rights and duties, some have said that Article 31, which states that women are "the sisters of men," discriminates against women as culturally, the status of a sister is worth less than that of a brother. see: See: Elham Manea, "Yemen," in *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*, ed. Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin (New York, NY: Freedom House; Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010). [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline\\_images/Yemen.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/Yemen.pdf). Accessed March 19, 2019.

8) The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) ratified CEDAW in 1984, and this treaty obligation was transferred to the unified Republic of Yemen in 1990. See: Manea, "Yemen," 6.

9) "Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Yemen," Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, July 9, 2008, <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/co/cedaw-c-yem-co-6.pdf>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

10) CEDAW, "Concluding Observations," 6.

11) "The Global Gender Gap Report 2018," World Economic Forum, December 17, 2018, [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2018.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf). Accessed March 19, 2019.

12) Bruni, Salvini, and Uhlenhaut, "Demographic and Labor Market Trends," 38.

When surveyed by the ILO, most women said they did not participate in the labor force for personal reasons, like family responsibilities or resistance from families, rather than due to the lack of available jobs. A 2010 study found that 76.9 percent of Yemeni women outside the labor force were economically inactive because they were engaged in household chores.<sup>(13)</sup>

Cultural values limiting women's interaction with men outside the family have limited the types of work that women could perform, and women's employment options have been largely restricted to "feminine" jobs such as clerks, secretaries, teachers and nurses.<sup>(14)</sup> Many jobs are recruited through personal networking in Yemen, disadvantaging women who are restricted to the private sphere.<sup>(15)</sup> The segregation of genders has also affected girls' education, particularly in rural areas where female teachers may not be available.<sup>(16)</sup> The enrollment of girls in education in rural areas has also been limited by factors like the remote locations of schools and the lack of sanitation facilities.<sup>(17)</sup> In addition, girls are more likely to be expected to perform household labor than boys. Fewer girls are enrolled in school than boys, and this is compounded by a higher dropout rate among girls.<sup>(18)</sup> The resulting low literacy levels among women restrict women's employment opportunities; 55 percent of Yemeni women are literate, compared to 85 percent of Yemeni men.<sup>(19)</sup>

Early marriage and high fertility rates have also limited women's educational opportunities and their ability to join the workforce.<sup>(20)</sup> High rates of childbearing can lead to discriminatory practices by employers who are deterred from employing women due to the costs associated with recruiting replacements and investing in new employees.<sup>(21)</sup> Poor transport options and lack of childcare have also constrained women's employment options.<sup>(22)</sup>

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13) Bruni, Salvini, and Uhlenhaut, "Demographic and Labor Market Trends," 53.

14) ILO, "Technical and Vocational Education," 1.

15) ILO, "Technical and Vocational Education," 4-5.

16) Bruni, Salvini, and Uhlenhaut, "Demographic and Labor Market Trends," 27.

17) "Conflict and Gender Relations in Yemen," Care International, Oxfam, and GenCap, November 2016, <https://www.care-international.org/files/files/YemenGenderReport171116.pdf>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

18) Data from 2007-2008 showed the enrolment rate for grades 1-6 was 94.5 percent for boys and 76 percent for girls; for secondary education, the enrolment rate dropped to 43.3 percent for boys and 22.9 percent for girls. See: Bruni, Salvini, and Uhlenhaut, "Demographic and Labor Market Trends," 27.

19) "Adult and Youth Literacy National, Regional and Global Trends, 1985-2015," UNESCO, June 2013, [http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/adult-and-youth-literacy-national-regional-and-global-trends-1985-2015-en\\_0.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/adult-and-youth-literacy-national-regional-and-global-trends-1985-2015-en_0.pdf). Accessed March 19, 2019.

20) In 2013, 31.9 percent of women aged 20-24 years were married before 18 years of age and 9.4 per cent were married before age 15. See: "Child Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa – Yemen Country Brief," UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office in collaboration with the International Center for Research on Women, 2017, <https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/1821/file>. Accessed March 19, 2019; Fertility rates have declined in Yemen, from 8.86 births per woman in 1985 to 3.99 in 2015, however they remain above the global average of 2.4 births per woman. See: "Fertility rate, total (births per woman) - Yemen," World Bank Open Data, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=YE>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

21) Bruni, Salvini, and Uhlenhaut, "Demographic and Labor Market Trends," 46.

22) Fawzia Bamrahoul, "Legislation and laws related to the work of Yemeni Women," Yemeni Parliament Observatory, <http://www.yppwatch.org/page.php?id=960>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

## THE IMPACT OF WAR ON WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

The current conflict has devastated Yemen's economy, leaving millions of Yemenis unable to afford basic necessities; the economic collapse has driven the humanitarian catastrophe. Yemen's economy has contracted by an estimated 50 percent<sup>(23)</sup> amid reductions to oil exports, the depreciation of the Yemeni rial, the Saudi-led military coalition's blockade of Houthi-held ports, and physical damage to businesses and infrastructure.<sup>(24)</sup> The conflict has significantly diminished employment opportunities, while most public sector workers have not been paid regularly or in full since August 2016.<sup>(25)</sup> Approximately 55 percent of private sector workers lost their jobs, while the agricultural and fishing sectors — key employers of the rural workforce — have been severely curtailed.<sup>(26)</sup>

The conflict-driven challenges to the labor market have had multifaceted impacts on women. Research suggests that initially, the war affected a larger proportion of women in the labor force than men. In 2015, male employment had declined by 11 percent, while female employment had fallen by 28 percent.<sup>(27)</sup> These figures varied nationally; 43 percent of the employment decline for women occurred in Sana'a, due to the heavily-hit private sector, while in Aden the number of women in employment actually rose by 11 percent.

In 2015, women-owned businesses were harder hit than male-owned businesses, although in actual terms far fewer were affected as they accounted for just 4 percent of all businesses prior to the conflict.<sup>(28)</sup> While 26 percent of businesses in the trade, services and industrial sectors had closed by 2015, this rate rose to 42 percent among female-owned businesses, usually due to physical damage, as well as loss of capital and shortages of electricity and fuel.<sup>(29)</sup> Female business owners found it more difficult than their male counterparts to access dollar bank accounts, according to a study by the UN Development Program (UNDP).<sup>(30)</sup>

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23) "Yemen's Economic Outlook - October 2018," World Bank, October 3, 2018, <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/547461538076992798/mpo-am18-yemen-yem-9-14-kc-new.pdf>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

24) "Generating New Employment Opportunities in Yemen," Development Champions, October 10, 2018, <https://devchampions.org/publications/policy-brief/Generating-new-employment-opportunities>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

25) World Bank, "Outlook 2018," 1.

26) "Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018," UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, December 2017, [https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/dms/yemen\\_humanitarian\\_needs\\_overview\\_hno\\_2018\\_20171204.pdf](https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/dms/yemen_humanitarian_needs_overview_hno_2018_20171204.pdf). Accessed March 19, 2019.

27) "Yemen Damage and Needs Assessment - Crisis Impact on Employment and Labour Market" ILO, January 2016, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_501929.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_501929.pdf). Accessed March 19, 2019.

28) "Rapid Business Survey: Impact of the Crisis on Private Sector Activity," UN Development Program and Small and Microenterprise Promotion Service, November 16, 2015, <http://www.ye.undp.org/content/dam/yemen/PovRed/Docs/UNDP%20SMEPS%20Rapid%20Business%20Survey.pdf>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

29) "Yemen Socio-Economic Update Issue 25 - Costs of War in Yemen," Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation Economic Studies and Forecasting Sector, July 2017, [https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/yseu25\\_english\\_final.pdf](https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/yseu25_english_final.pdf). Accessed March 19, 2019.

30) UNDP and SMEPS, "Rapid Business Survey," 8.

As the war has progressed, however, the prolonged conflict has led to some increases in women's employment. Fighting has caused a sharp rise in female-headed households; many men have lost their incomes due to the conflict, and in some cases women have become the breadwinner.<sup>(31)</sup> Financial necessity has led a growing number of women to start new enterprises, often home-based businesses like producing food for sale or selling clothes and accessories online through social media.<sup>(32)</sup> Those who have established successful businesses have been able to support extended families with their income. Some widows have taken over businesses once owned by their deceased husbands.<sup>(33)</sup>

The war has opened new professions to women. The influx of humanitarian funding to Yemen has driven employment in the aid sector. According to a study conducted in 2018, women are more likely to work for national NGOs than men.<sup>(34)</sup> Women have been involved in distributing humanitarian assistance, facilitating access to services and managing projects on gender-based violence and hygiene promotion, as well as providing psychiatric support, livelihood-oriented training and awareness-raising on health and education.<sup>(35)</sup> During the conflict, women have entered professions previously closed to them by cultural restrictions, like waitressing and retail, although this has varied regionally, and even within governorates.<sup>(36)</sup> In Taiz, while some women reported entering the workforce for the first time during the conflict, the presence of Islamist groups has restricted women's mobility and led to women losing their jobs.<sup>(37)</sup> Some women have been employed in security forces for parties to the conflict. Women have been enlisted into the Popular Resistance forces in Taiz, where they have manned checkpoints and participated in home raids,<sup>(38)</sup> and have joined the *zainabiat*, a militia of the armed Houthi movement.<sup>(39)</sup>

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31) Brigitte Rohwerder, "Conflict and Gender Dynamics in Yemen," Institute of Development Studies, March 30, 2017, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/068-Conflict%20and%20Gender%20dynamics%20in%20Yemen.pdf>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

32) Author interviews with Yemeni women in Sana'a, Taiz, Hadramawt and Aden, December 2018.

33) Ibid.

34) Tom Lambert and Afar Consulting, "Yemen Multi-Sector Early Recovery Assessment," UNDP and The Global Cluster for Early Recovery, August 18, 2018, <http://earlyrecovery.global/sites/default/files/yemen-multisector-earlyrecoveryassessment.pdf>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

35) Care, Oxfam and Gencap, "Gender Relations," 3.

36) Author interviews with Yemeni women in Sana'a, Taiz, Hadramawt and Aden, December 2018.

37) Author interviews with Yemeni women in Sana'a, Taiz, Hadramawt and Aden, December 2018; Marie-Christine Heinze and Sophie Stevens, "Women as Peacebuilders in Yemen," Social Development Direct and Yemen Polling Center, June 2018, [http://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1571/sdd\\_yemenreport\\_full\\_v5.pdf](http://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1571/sdd_yemenreport_full_v5.pdf). Accessed April 9, 2019.

38) Nasser al-Sakkaf, "Yemen War: Women Play Growing Role for Anti-Houthi Forces," Middle East Eye, December 21, 2016, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/yemen-war-women-play-growing-role-anti-houthi-forces>. Accessed March 19, 2019; "Yemeni Women: Armed and Dangerous," The New Arab, December 21, 2015. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2015/12/21/yemeni-women-armed-and-dangerous>. Accessed March 19, 2019; "From the Ground Up: Gender and Conflict Analysis in Yemen," Care International, Oxfam and GenCap, October 2016, <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620112/rr-yemen-gender-conflict-analysis-201016-en.pdf;jsessionid=AF2BB237F802AC644E6EE-A451B567741?sequence=1>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

39) Samia Al-Aghbari, "Houthis 'Zainabia' - Soft Hands for Dirty Work," Al Masdar, November 22, 2018, <https://www.almasdaronline.com/articles/161296>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

The suspension of civil service salaries in September 2016 affected the livelihoods of civil servants as well as millions of Yemenis dependent on them as breadwinners. While some civil servants continued to work, but without regular payment, others were pushed into different professions. Yemeni women reported cases of female nurses and teachers now working as seamstresses and hairdressers.

While the conflict may have created new opportunities for some women, fighting has also driven women to negative coping mechanisms, including debt, begging and prostitution.<sup>(40)</sup> Child marriage has soared during the conflict, as families have resorted to marrying their daughters early to secure dowry payments and to be relieved of the costs of caring for them.<sup>(41)</sup> The rate of gender-based violence has also risen by an estimated 63 percent.<sup>(42)</sup> In some areas, fighting has left women less able to leave the house due to security concerns.<sup>(43)</sup> Some women have been forced into poorly-paid, informal physical work, like house cleaning, collecting firewood and washing clothes.<sup>(44)</sup>

Some research suggests that women's growing participation in the labor force has had positive impacts, for example by increasing women's decision-making power in the family.<sup>(45)</sup> Women have reported that in some families, where women have started earning income and managing the household, men have taken on traditionally female responsibilities like cooking, childcare and collecting water, leading to a reassessment of gender roles.<sup>(46)</sup> While this suggests a significant change in a strongly patriarchal society, it has also led to increased domestic conflict, including verbal and physical abuse of women and children.<sup>(47)</sup> Further, women and men have reported that the conflict has negatively affected relations between husbands and wives, in some cases due to men's frustration over losing their role as breadwinner, and in other cases because women have been confined to the home due to the deteriorating security situation, leaving them more dependent on their husbands.<sup>(48)</sup> Preserving positive changes to women's participation in the labor market post-conflict will require sustained efforts to support women's employment and enable women's engagement in decision-making roles.<sup>(49)</sup>

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40) Author interviews with Yemeni women in Sana'a, Taiz, Hadramawt and Aden, December 2018.

41) "Falling Through the Cracks: The Children of Yemen," UNICEF, March 2017, [https://www.unicef.org/videoaudio/PDFs/Yemen\\_2\\_Years\\_-\\_children\\_falling\\_through\\_the\\_cracks\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/videoaudio/PDFs/Yemen_2_Years_-_children_falling_through_the_cracks_FINAL.pdf). Accessed March 19, 2019.

42) "UNFPA Humanitarian Response in Yemen - 2017," UN Population Fund, October 2017, [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/2017\\_Yemen\\_Humanitarian\\_Response\\_brochure\\_-\\_Oct\\_2017\\_final\\_f\\_email\\_version.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/2017_Yemen_Humanitarian_Response_brochure_-_Oct_2017_final_f_email_version.pdf). Accessed March 19, 2019.

43) Shared Tandon, "Quantifying the Impact of Capturing Territory from the Government in the Republic of Yemen," World Bank, May 2018, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/834521527693205252/pdf/WPS8458.pdf>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

44) Author interviews with Yemeni women in Sana'a, Taiz, Hadramawt and Aden, December 2018.

45) Brigitte Rohwerder, "Gender Dynamics," 8; Care, Oxfam and Gencap, "From the Ground Up," 47.

46) Care, Oxfam and Gencap, "Gender Relations," 14.

47) Care, Oxfam and Gencap, "Gender Relations," 14.

48) Author interviews with Yemeni women in Sana'a, Taiz, Hadramawt and Aden, December 2018; Marie-Christine Heinze and Sophie Stevens, "Peacebuilders," 27.

49) Marie-Christine Heinze and Sophie Stevens, "Peacebuilders," 26.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Yemen's socio-economic development will continue to be stifled without rebalancing the entrenched gender-based inequity in the country's labor force. Yemen's immediate, urgent priority is a political settlement to end to the conflict. Post-conflict, all efforts must be made to sustain and expand any positive gains in women's employment rates the war has allowed for. Long term gains, however, will require widespread socio-economic and cultural transformation to ensure that all Yemeni women have the opportunity to be economically active and to participate in work that is productive and delivers a fair income.

The following principles are presented to guide efforts to boost women's employment opportunities in Yemen:

- 1) A general economic recovery and the reconstruction of infrastructure are prerequisites for improving women's participation in the labor force. The success of initiatives classically employed to increase women's labor force participation – such as engaging women in entrepreneurial activities, increasing access to microfinance or promoting home-based businesses – will be dependent on ensuring there is a market to absorb their output.
- 2) Micro-economic initiatives to bring women into the workforce must be accompanied by long-term efforts to address socio-economic structures and cultural stigmas that have constrained women's labor force participation.
- 3) The role of women as humanitarian providers should not be used solely as a means to an end, but as an opportunity to further train and empower women. All donors providing humanitarian support should oblige implementing organizations to build such programmes into their work.
- 4) Further study is needed to ascertain the extent of conflict-driven changes to the women's workforce, and to quantify new dynamics in women's labor force participation in different governorates and among different demographics and education levels. The impact of the conflict on women's employment has been very different in Aden than in Sana'a, for example.
- 5) Interventions to boost women's labor force participation must be guided by further study to improve understanding of the factors hindering women's entry to the workforce. This must include consultations with Yemeni women and men from all demographics and parts of Yemen.
- 6) Women must play an active role at the decision-making level in peacebuilding efforts and at the political level in post-conflict Yemen to enable women to shape a society that is receptive to the full participation of women, including in the labor force, and to formulate and implement gender-sensitive policies that foster women's employment.



- 7) Quota systems could be an effective way to ensure that women play an active role in recovery and reconstruction efforts.
- 8) Post-conflict efforts to rebuild Yemen's education system must prioritize the participation of girls, particularly in rural areas, in order to improve women's literacy rates. Schools must have female teachers and facilities suitable for girls. Curriculums should not reinforce gender stereotypes.
- 9) Quality technical and vocational education could increase opportunities for women to enter the workforce. This training must be relevant to labor market demands. Women in technical and vocational education have historically been trained in low paid, traditionally female occupations such as handicrafts. Instead, training should focus on skills for which there is market demand, and which offer higher returns and thus better prospects of economic independence.
- 10) All efforts to increase women's labor force participation must consider Yemen's unique social and cultural context, particularly if they are to be inclusive of all Yemeni women.

*Dr Fawziah al-Ammar is Director of Gender at the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies.*

*Hannah Patchett is an Editor at the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies.*

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\*Note: This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Yemen. The recommendations expressed within this document are the personal opinions of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, DeepRoot Consulting, CARPO - Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient, or any other persons or organizations with whom the authors may be otherwise affiliated. The contents of this document can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union or the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Yemen.

## ABOUT THE “RETHINKING YEMEN’S ECONOMY” INITIATIVE

This two-year project, which was launched in March 2017, is an initiative to identify Yemen’s economic, humanitarian, social and developmental priorities in light of the ongoing conflict in Yemen and to prepare for the post-conflict recovery period. The project aims to build consensus in crucial policy areas through engaging and promoting informed Yemeni voices in the public discourse, and to positively influence local, regional and international development agendas.

The project has four components: (1) in the Development Champions Forums, Yemeni experts and professionals in social and economic development will identify key issues for intervention and provide recommendations towards tackling these issues; (2) in the Research

Hive, the project consortium will – based on the issues and recommendations of the Development Champions – conduct research and identify best practices and lessons learned from international experiences to create knowledge capital for the Rethinking Yemen’s Economy initiative; (3) in the public outreach component, the consortium will implement consultation workshops with local stakeholders, including the private sector, youth and civil society organizations; moreover, campaigns through both traditional and social media outlets will be conducted to engage the wider Yemeni public; (4) and through regional and international engagement the consortium will inform stakeholders of project outcomes and aim to motivate and guide the international community’s policy interventions to the greatest benefit of the people of Yemen.

For more information and previous publications: [www.devchampions.org](http://www.devchampions.org)

### Implementing Partners

The project is implemented by a consortium of the following three partners:



**The Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies** is an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region. The Center’s publications and programs, offered in both Arabic and English, cover political, social, economic and security related developments, aiming to impact policy locally, regionally, and internationally.  
[www.sanaacenter.org](http://www.sanaacenter.org)



**DeepRoot Consulting** is a dynamic social enterprise passionate about Yemen’s development. DeepRoot aims to help international development actors, the private sector, local civil society organizations and the Yemeni Government anchor their interventions in a deep understanding of Yemen’s national and local contexts, and international best practices. Our leadership team and advisory board has decades of combined experience working in Yemen and internationally in the public, private and nonprofit sectors.  
[www.deeproot.consulting](http://www.deeproot.consulting)



**The Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient (CARPO)** is a Germany-based organization whose work is situated at the nexus of research, consultancy and exchange with a focus on implementing projects in close cooperation and partnership with stakeholders in the Middle East. The CARPO team has long-standing experience in the implementation of projects in cooperation with partners from the region and a deep understanding of the Yemeni context.  
[www.carpo-bonn.org](http://www.carpo-bonn.org)

Co-funded by: the European Union and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Yemen