

كسر القوالب Breaking the mold

#Breaking_The_Mold Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making

Case Study #12

Country Jordan

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AMENDING THE JORDANIAN LABOR LAW | Karim Merhej |

BACKGROUND AND TIMELINE

Despite being relatively progressive on certain fronts, the Jordanian Labor Law has many flaws: Certain articles are not in compliance with minimum international labor standards set by the International Labour Organization (ILO), and are in contradiction with the Jordanian constitution (Jordan Labor Watch, 2018). For example, Article 98 of the labor law bars Jordanian workers from forming independent trade unions, and leaves them with no choice but to be represented by the government-approved-and-supported trade unions, most of which have a reputation of being ineffective and void of all forms of internal democratic mechanisms, monopolized by a small number of individuals to ensure leadership of the trade unions for their own benefits (Phenix Center & Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2012). As for the workers who have formed independent trade unions, they struggle on many fronts: Lacking official recognition, they are not allowed to collect membership dues, which results in a reliance on voluntary contributions; nor do they have the right to settle labor disputes, and their activities are sometimes forcibly repressed¹. It is thus unsurprising to see that out of the 203 labor protests that occurred in 2018, 86 were carried out by workers from outside any union framework (be it official unions or independent unions), and that around 81 percent of the protests' demands were not met (Phenix Center, 2019).

These labor-related struggles and the calls for amending the Jordanian Labor Law are better understood in the context of the prevailing economic system in Jordan, described as neoliberal.

While neoliberalism proposes the advancement of human well-being by "liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade" (Harvey, 2007, p.2), the Jordanian reality is far from that appealing rhetoric: Holders of large capital and major corporations take advantage of the state's laissez-faire approach to the economy to further entrench their dominance in pursuit of profit, while neglecting or actively dismantling workers' rights. Networks of oligarchic financial interests operating in virtually all sectors of the economy have long dominated the state apparatus (Hourani & Kanna, 2014).

The post-1989 liberalization of the Jordanian economy did not produce the promised prosperity, with unemployment and poverty rates remaining chronically high (Milton-Edwards & Hinchcliffe, 2009). Instead, it further "exacerbated class divisions" within Jordanian society, enlarging the gap between the rich western part of Amman and the poorer eastern part to such an extent that the poor, upon entering western Amman, feel that they are entering a different country (Sukarieh, 2016, p.1209). The gerrymandered electoral laws ensured the constant ineffectiveness of successive parliaments which are dominated by entrenched interests, be they tribal, commercial or independent regime loyalists (Alissa, 2007). Labor activists in Jordan are thus faced by the employers' unwillingness to meet their demands, as well as by the inherent opposition of the politico-economic system to any slight dent over the privileges and interests of the dominant sociopolitical and economic classes.

In this context, this case study will examine two distinct attempts undertaken by civil society organizations (CSOs) to pressure policy-makers and lawmakers to amend the Labor Law.

¹Interview held on December 5, 2018 with Ahmad Meri, founder and former president of the Independent Trade Union of JEPCO's Workers, and vice-president of the Federation of Jordanian Independent Trade Unions.

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS' ROLE AND INVOLVEMENT

Since 2007, the Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies, an independent non-governmental think tank, has advocated for the adoption of evidence-based alternative socioeconomic policies through the prism of human rights². The Jordan Labor Watch Program (JLW), an affiliate of the center which was established in conjunction with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, documents labor-related issues in Jordan – such as labor protests and disputes – and advocates for workers' rights and better working conditions³. One month after releasing a position paper in February 2018 outlining the problems inherent in the Labor Law and containing a set of recommendations, the Phenix Center and the JLW launched the 'Towards a Fair Labor Law' campaign in an attempt to pressure the parliament to amend the Labor Law as per their recommendations (Al Rai, 2018). However, the campaign was unsuccessful, and its media coverage did not manage to reach a wide audience⁴.

In parallel, a separate coalition was being formed to advocate for amending certain articles in the Labor Law dealing with women-related labor issues. The coalition, Tahalof Haqq⁵, was launched in April 2018 with the objective of lobbying the Lower House of the Parliament to amend several articles of the Labor Law so as to remove "barriers standing in the way of women entering the labor market", such as the gender wage gap and the improper implementation of Article 72⁶, which deals with workplace daycare facilities⁷ (Husseini, 2018). After months of sustained advocacy and lobbying efforts, the coalition managed to pressure the Lower House to heed most of its demands and make significant amendments to the Labor Law⁸ (Husseini, 2019).

Concomitantly with the coalition's amendments approved by the Lower House, the law contained amendments that run counter to the provisions of the Jordanian constitution and several international treaties that Jordan has ratified⁹ (JLW, 2019), further constraining workers from forming their own unions and collectively bargaining with employers. After the amended Labor Law was referred to the Senate, a Phenix Center-led unstructured informal coalition, Tanzim Naqabi Horr, sprung to action for pressure the Upper House of the Parliament to avoid passing these amendments. However, their efforts failed, and the new Labor Law No.14 (2019), containing the problematic amendments that Tanzim Naqabi Horr sought to block, was eventually passed by both houses of parliament, received royal confirmation, and was published in the Official Gazette on May 16, 2019¹⁰.



The following sections will detail the strategies and tactics used by both Tahalof Haqq and Tanzim Naqabi Horr to reach their objectives, as well as the factors that have led to the present outcomes.

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Efforts to achieve incremental changes in the labor law: Tahalof Haqq

Tahalof Haqq emerged from the National Committee for Pay Equity (NCPE), which was established in 2010, and consisted of numerous governmental and non-governmental stakeholders – such as the Ministry of Labor (MOL), the ILO, the Jordan National Commission for Women (JNCW), CSOs, academics and private sector representatives – who strove to sensitize and convince lawmakers and the government to amend the Labor Law to facilitate access to work for women¹¹. From 2010 to 2014, the NCPE conducted extensive research and consultations regarding the amendment of certain articles in the Labor Law, and released a study in 2013 which thoroughly reviewed Jordan's legal system regarding women-related labor issues and included numerous recommendations to amend the Labor Law¹². The NCPE served as a gateway for CSOs to conduct dialogues with key governmental stakeholders – such as the MOL and both houses of the parliament – and to bring to their attention the need to amend certain articles that are discriminatory against women in the labor market¹³. When the Labor Law was to be discussed in parliament again in early 2018, CSOs used all the momentum achieved in the preceding years and decided to seize upon this opportunity to establish a structured coalition – Tahalof Haqq¹⁴ – to coordinate efforts and lobby the parliament directly to amend a specific set of articles.

²Interview held on October 16, 2018 with Ahmad Awad, Director of the Phenix Center.

³Information retrieved from <http://www.labor-watch.net/ar/about-canter>

⁴When one searches on Twitter for the hashtag used by the campaign (#نحو_قانون_عمل_عادِل), it becomes apparent that the hashtag was shared only a very limited number of times and by a limited number of individuals during the month of March 2018 (see here: <https://bit.ly/2S26MWR>). In addition, leading daily newspapers, such as Al Rai and Al Ghad only published one article each on the campaign (see here, respectively: <https://bit.ly/2Uoq5Ny> and <https://bit.ly/2VmmgWc>), while Addustour did not cover it.

⁵According to the Jordan National Commission for Women's website, Tahalof Haqq comprised 10 CSOs, grassroots-led movements and semi-governmental entities: The Jordan National Commission for Women; the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions; Bayt Al 'Ummal; 'Jinsiyati Haqq li 'ailati' coalition; Qum ma' al mu'allim campaign; the North for Sustainable Development; Tamkeen; Tadamon; the Arab Women Organization; Sadaqa. Retrieved from <https://www.women.jo/ar/node/141>

⁶Article 72 of the Labor Law No.8 (1996) stipulates that employers who employ at least twenty married female employees, and who have in total no less than 10 children, need to provide workplace daycare facilities. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2DF4WGh>

⁷For the full list of the coalition's demands, see the website of the Jordan National Commission for Women: <https://www.women.jo/ar/node/141>

⁸According to the referenced article, several of the amendments (especially those dealing with flexible working hours, pay equity, workplace daycare facilities and the right for children of Jordanian mothers to be able to work without the need of a work permit) were met with praise from the coalition.

⁹The referenced statement by JLW states that the amendments (especially those dealing with Articles 2, 44 and 98 of the Labor Law) are in contradiction with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (<https://bit.ly/2MOWMwA>), ILO Convention 98 (<https://bit.ly/2WKlanz>) and Articles 16 (ii), 23 (ii) and 128 of the Jordanian Constitution (<https://bit.ly/2FQG8Kv>)

¹⁰The Official Gazette No. 5573 containing the new Labor Law can be accessed here: <http://pm.gov.jo/newspaperSubjects/5573/5573.html>

¹¹Interview with Reem Aslan, consultant at the ILO and co-founder of Sadaqa, held on February 24, 2019.

¹²Interview with Dr. Salma Nims, secretary general of the Jordan National Commission for Women and longtime political activist, held on February 14, 2019.

¹³Interview with Randa Naffa, co-founder of Sadaqa, held on March 12, 2019.

For several months, Tahalof Haqq exerted considerable pressure, lobbying and sensitization on lawmakers to have them support the coalition's demands. The coalition itself was very well organized and structured, with clear guidelines for systematic meetings, as well as transparent processes of decision-making and accountability¹⁵. Key stakeholders interviewed stated the coalition's members showed full dedication and enthusiasm to their cause, and gladly volunteered their time, effort and energy. A proper 'division of labor' between the members was very clearly established, and all members were fully equipped with potential arguments and counter-arguments for lobbying and for speaking in one voice¹⁶. They attended many meetings with the Parliamentary Committee on Labor to sensitize the MPs, and worked in tandem with supportive allies in parliament to get their voice heard. Even prior to the amendments being referred to the Senate, the coalition had met with relevant Senate committees¹⁷ to make them aware about their demands¹⁸. While all this advocacy effort was ongoing, the coalition strove to ensure the tacit backing of the MOL. Eventually, in January 2019, many of the amendments that Tahalof Haqq was calling for – namely those dealing with pay equity, flexible working arrangements, workplace daycare facilities and the right for the children of Jordanian women to work without needing a permit – were approved (Husseini, 2019).

Efforts to achieve an overhaul of the Labor Law: Tanzim Naqabi Horr

When the amended Labor Law reached the Senate in mid-January 2019, the Phenix Center contacted the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) to express its dismay at the amendments which further constrained workers' freedom to unionize¹⁹. The ITUC promptly sent an open letter to the prime minister highlighting how the amendments run counter to the ILO Conventions and called for their withdrawal²⁰. This was followed, on February 15, 2019, by an online petition organized by the ITUC and the Solidarity Center, a US-based organization that defends workers' "right to freedom of association"²¹, addressed to the prime minister, the head of the Senate Committee on Labor and Social Development, as well as other key stakeholders, with the aim of pressuring both the government and the legislative branch not to pass the unconstitutional amendments²².

In this context, Tanzim Naqabi Horr was formed as a loose and unstructured coalition comprising around 50 CSOs and independent trade unions led by the Phenix Center, and released a statement calling for significant amendments to the Labor Law so as to allow workers to collectively bargain and unionize freely (Sarayah, 2019). The loose coalition then launched an 'electronic storm' on February 18, 2019, and according to the JLW (2019), messages containing the 'تنظيم نقابي حر' hashtag were seen by 1.3 million people on Twitter alone²³ (JLW, 2019). The prime minister contacted Ahmad Awad from the Phenix Center for clarifications²⁴, and a few weeks later, the Labor Law was referred back to a joint-Senate committee comprising the Legal Committee and the Labor and Social Development Committee for further discussions – a step which Tanzim Naqabi Horr praised and viewed with optimism²⁵ (Phenix Center, 2019).

To sum up, Tanzim Naqabi Horr's lobbying efforts consisted of seeking support from international stakeholders (namely the ITUC and Solidarity Center), and building a large and loose coalition to make sufficient noise so as to prevent the Senate from passing the amendments that further restrict workers' rights. However, despite these efforts, towards the end of March 2019, the joint-committee did not make any changes to the problematic amendments (Sarayah, 2019), referred the law as is to the Lower House (JLW, 2019), and it was agreed upon by the Parliamentary Committee on Labor, Social Development and Population on April 1, 2019 (Jordanian Parliament, 2019).

INFLUENCING FACTORS

Tahalof Haqq

Several factors explain the success of Tahalof Haqq in lobbying the parliament to amend specific articles. Firstly, the composition of the coalition is worth examining: It comprised several CSOs which had already worked together under the NCPE and had garnered considerable experience in advocacy work²⁶, in addition to the GFTJU (i.e., the government-supported workers' federation) as well as the JNCW and Bayt Al Umal, a research institute headed by a former secretary general of the MOL²⁷. It was further discreetly backed by the MOL²⁸. Thus, the coalition's demands reflected governmental directions, which was a factor that contributed to its success, and did not pose in any way a security threat.

¹⁴See footnote 5 for the list of members

¹⁵Interview with Randa Naffa on March 12, 2019.

¹⁶Interview with Reem Aslan on February 24, 2019.

¹⁷Namely the Legal Committee, the Labor and Social Development Committee and the Women's Committee.

¹⁸Interview with Randa Naffa on March 12, 2019.

¹⁹Interview with Ahmad Awad, Director of the Phenix Center, held on March 25 2019.

²⁰The open letter addressed by Sharan Burrow, the ITUC general secretary, to Prime Minister Omar Al Razzaz can be accessed here: <https://www.solidaritycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Jordan.ITUC-letter-to-the-G-of-Jordan.2.19.pdf>

²¹Retrieved from the Solidarity Center's website: <https://www.solidaritycenter.org/what-we-do/>

²²At its closure, the petition reached 5,472 signatures. The website is no longer online."

²³When compared with the 'Towards a Fair Labor Law' campaign (see footnote 4 on p.3), the Tanzim Naqabi Horr hashtag (#تنظيم نقابي حر) shared on Twitter attracted significantly more attention, as evidenced here: <https://bit.ly/2WNVzKD>

²⁴Interview with Ahmad Awad on March 25, 2019.

²⁵The statement released by the loose coalition explicitly praised the Senate for taking such a step, expressed its deep gratitude to activists who took part in the campaign (both locally and internationally) and further reiterated the campaign's demands. It can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/2FG7DX6>

²⁶Interview with Dr. Salma Nims on February 14, 2019.



Governmental support for this campaign was another factor: When making their case to the MOL, the CSOs had used arguments that were in line with what the government has been seeking to achieve – namely to increase women's labor force participation. Given that Jordan has one of the lowest rates of female participation in the workforce in the world and that the government has sought to increase it^{29,30}, the coalition skillfully framed their arguments, highlighting the importance of the coalition's demands in facilitating access to the labor market for women³¹. It is also possible that the government's support reflected its desire to improve Jordan's standing in the eyes of donor countries and international financial institution³².

Third, organizational factors played a significant role in ensuring the success of the coalition's strategy, as reflected in the members' perseverance and willingness to put in their time, effort and energy into continuous lobbying and advocacy activities.

Fourth, the presence in the coalition of teachers from the 'Stand up with the Teacher' campaign³³ served as an influencing factor as well: Teachers forcefully voiced their demands and showcased to MPs and senators how these amendments will positively affect their lives³⁴.

Tanzim Naqabi Horr

Several factors have contributed to Tanzim Naqabi Horr's inability to exert effective pressure on the senators to halt them from referring the problematic amendments back to the Lower House. The first factor is the late timing at which the lobbying activity started³⁵ – i.e., when the labor law had already been referred to the Senate. The division within civil society, as advocacy efforts towards amending the Labor Law were starting to materialize in 2018, is a second factor: On one hand, Tahalof Haqq's strategy was to work within the confines of the state and advocate for a select number of amendments mainly dealing with women-related labor issues; on the other hand, Tanzim Naqabi Horr disagreed on Tahalof Haqq's approach, believing that achieving such incremental gains is not the correct way forward, as opposed to seeking a major overhaul of the Labor Law that would guarantee workers' right to freely unionize and collectively bargain³⁶.

Despite these disagreements, Tahalof Haqq moved forwards with its lobbying and advocacy efforts in 2018, while Tanzim Naqabi Horr made limited efforts in this regard.

The third factor has to do with the campaign's communication strategy: It is not clear to what extent the methods used (i.e., the partnership with international organizations and the electronic storm) were effective. The head of the Senate Committee for Labor and Social Development (who was a target of the ITUC-Solidarity petition) stated that the petition launched did not have an impact on her colleagues in the Senate, and that the CSOs in the campaign should have exerted more efforts to reach out to the senators in person and use different methods to communicate with them. In addition, in the few meetings between activists from Tanzim Naqabi Horr and the senators, repercussions of Jordan breaching international labor agreements were not properly explained³⁷.

The fourth factor concerns the sensitive nature of the campaign demands: Giving workers the right to form their own union is a very sensitive demand which is bound to be met with resistance by the politico-economic system in Jordan, where the balance of power is far too tilted against workers. As previously mentioned, the 'neoliberalization' of Jordan has cemented and entrenched the oligarchic networks' control of the political system, a protectionist elite who are "anxious to preserve their privileged position enshrined in the status quo" and who are "instinctively averse to any serious overhaul of the economy that balances equity of wealth within the Kingdom" (Milton-Edwards & Hinchcliffe, 2009, p.127). Most MPs are in favor of maintaining the sociopolitical and economic status quo in Jordan which provides them with patronage powers over their constituents³⁸, similarly to senators who are generally more inclined towards listening to the viewpoints of business leaders³⁹. As for the heads of the majority of the official government-funded trade unions, they are averse to any forms of internal democracy and will fight tooth and nail to maintain their privileged lavishly-paid positions⁴⁰. The GFTJU in particular views any calls for the right to form trade unions with intense suspicion and actively combats it⁴¹.

²⁷While Bayt Al Umal is categorized as a CSO on its official Facebook page, it is plausible to assume that it has close ties to the government as it is headed by a former high-ranking official of the MOL. Retrieved from Bayt Al Umal's Facebook page: <https://bit.ly/2VnmVGT>

²⁸Interview with Randa Naffa on March 12, 2019.

²⁹The Jordan Vision 2025, a national strategy launched in 2015 which seeks to outline a general socioeconomic framework that Jordanian governments must abide by and objectives that must be met by the year 2025, highlights this challenge in the Jordanian labor market and sets the objective of a 27 percent female labor force participation by the year 2025. The strategy can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/2FF8Dcu> (p.28).

³⁰The MOL's website mentions that the ministry has sought to combat discrimination against women in the workplace by promoting pay equity and by properly implementing Article 72 of the Labor Law, which deals with workplace daycare facilities. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2UewN9B>

³¹Interview with Dr. Salma Nims on February 14, 2019.

³²For instance, a study on female employment outcomes in Jordan carried out by the World Bank and published in June 2018 provides explanations as to why the female labor force participation rate is so low in Jordan and provides a set of recommendations to the Jordanian government to remedy this issue, such as "complying with Article 72 in the Labor Law" and "support[ing] the work of local organizations such as Sadaqa in achieving this goal" (p.3). The study also recommends the implementation of flexible work arrangements. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2woXVo7>

³³The 'Stand Up with the Teacher' campaign was formed jointly by the NCEP and the ILO to empower female teachers in private schools who are often paid below minimum wage salaries to call for and demand their rights. The teachers and their campaign were supported and mentored by Ahel, an organization that builds civil society activists' capacities via the value-based community organizing framework developed by Marshall Ganz. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2CRotBU>

³⁴Interview with Reem Aslan on February 24, 2019. Aslan highly commended the teachers' performance, stating that their presence and their voice resonated strongly with lawmakers as they are the direct victims of discrimination in terms of pay.

³⁵Interview with Hala Ahed, lawyer and human rights defender who participated in the Tanzim Naqabi Horr coalition, and legal advisor to the Jordanian Women's Union, held on March 20, 2019.

³⁶Interview with Hala Ahed on March 20, 2019; interview with Ahmad Awad on March 25, 2019.

³⁷Interview with Dr. Sawzan Al Majali, senator in the Jordanian Senate and head of the Senate Committee on Labor and Social Development, held on March 31, 2019.

³⁸When one looks at the brief biographies of the MPs on the parliament's website, it becomes apparent that a non-negligible number of them have a background working in the private sector. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2l224Gr>. When interviewed, Randa Naffa mentioned that one of the challenges Tahalof Haqq faced when attempting to lobby MPs was in regards to 'paternity leave', as MPs saw paternity leave less as a value added to society and to male employees, and more as 'paid days off' that employees would have (2019/03/12).

³⁹Senates (whose members are all royally appointed) tend to be comprised of former high-ranking governmental officials, representatives from the private sector, retired high-ranking army veterans and members from civil society, as can be seen in the composition of the current Senate, retrieved here: <https://bit.ly/2K2PA2Y>. This was confirmed by Dr. Sawzan Al Majali on March 2019, 31.

⁴⁰Interview with MP Khaled Ramadan representing the Third District of Amman, held on October 2018, 15.

⁴¹The joint-submission by CIVICUS, the Phenix Center and the Arab Network for NGO Development to the 31st Session of the UN Universal Periodic Review Working Group documents efforts by the GFTJU to limit the activities of independent trade unions, such as an official letter sent to the MOL asking the ministry to halt the activities of the Phenix Center and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung due to their support of independent trade unions. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2l8uwWd> (p.6). Such pressure was confirmed by Ahmad Awad when interviewed on March 2019, 25.

A fifth non-negligible hindrance concerns the role played by the state security apparatus: The “security paradigm” is heavily prevalent in the body politic, and any worker-led efforts at collective mobilization are viewed with suspicion⁴². Workers in the independent trade unions are subject to all sorts of harassment and violations – such as arbitrary dismissal – simply for calling for better working conditions⁴³. The political establishment would be wary of giving workers the right to form their own unions, as they fear that countless strikes would follow, which will paralyze the Jordanian economy, scare away investors, and lead to businesses closing down or cutting down on expenses⁴⁴.

POLICY OUTCOME AND CONCLUSION

After being referred to the Senate without any changes made to the articles dealing with workers’ right to freely unionize, the Labor Law was agreed upon by the Parliamentary Committee on Labor, Social Development and Population (Jordanian Parliament, 2019). Eventually, the new Labor Law No.14 (2019) reached the final stages of the legislative process and was published in the Official Gazette on May 16, 2019⁴⁵. The new Labor Law contains much of Tahalof Haqq’s demands: proper definitions of ‘flexible work’, ‘part-time work’ and ‘wage discrimination’ are now included (Article 2); the article dealing with workplace daycare facilities has been modified to make it easier for working mothers to have access to them (Article 72); fines are now to be imposed on employers who discriminate on the basis of gender against their employees when it comes to wages (Article 53); and the children of Jordanian mothers and non-Jordanian fathers can now work legally without the need of an official work permit (Article 12)⁴⁶. However, the new Labor Law equally contains the problematic amendments regarding unionizing which Tanzim Naqabi Horr had lobbied against and failed to block. For instance, the minister of labor now has the authority to dismiss the administrative bodies of unions, whereas this authority was previously in the hands of the courts, and unions now need to have their internal functioning mechanism approved by MOL, whereas they previously only needed to submit a copy to MOL (Dassouki, 2019).

These two case studies have shown that lobbying to effect changes in the Labor Law is not an impossible task: Tahalof Haqq, built on the years-long experience of the NCPE and composed of dedicated CSOs and semi-governmental organizations, managed to work within the confines of the state to achieve concrete legislative changes. However, their demands were not of the same sensitive character as those advocated by Tanzim Naqabi Horr who, in addition to a weak communication strategy and the late timing of the spring to action, were confronted by different, more challenging obstacles.



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⁴²Interview with Hala Ahed on March 2019, 20.

⁴³Interview with Ahmad Awad on March 2019, 25.

⁴⁴Interview with Dr. Sawzan Al Majali on March 2019, 31.

⁴⁵The Official Gazette No. 5573 containing the new Labor Law can be accessed here: <http://pm.gov.jo/newspaperSubjects/5573/5573.html>

⁴⁶The new Labor Law can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/2HGjTcm>

BREAKING THE MOLD PROJECT

In mid- 2018, the “Civil Society Actors and Policymaking in the Arab World” program at IFI, with the support of Open Society Foundations, launched the second round of its extended research project “Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making”. This project mapped and analyzed the attempts of Arab civil society, in all its orientations, structures, and differences, to influence public policy across a variety of domains. This research produced 92 case studies outlining the role of civil society in impacting political, social, economic, gender, educational, health-related, and environmental policies in ten Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, and the Arab Gulf.

Over two dozen researchers and research groups from the above countries participated in this project, which was conducted over a year and a half. The results were reviewed by an advisory committee for methodology to ensure alignment with the project’s goals, and were presented by the researchers in various themed sessions over the course of the two days.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND POLICY-MAKING PROGRAM

at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB, examines the role that civil society actors play in shaping and making policy. Specifically, the program focuses on the following aspects: how civil society actors organize themselves into advocacy coalitions; how policy networks are formed to influence policy processes and outcomes; and how policy research institutes contribute their research into policy. The program also explores the media’s expanding role, which some claim has catalyzed the Uprisings throughout the region.

THE ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) is an independent, research-based, policy oriented institute. It aims to initiate and develop policy-relevant research in and about the Arab region. The Institute is committed to expanding and deepening knowledge production and to creating a space for the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among researchers, civil society actors, and policy makers.

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