

# Protection and Working Conditions of Civil Society Workers in MENA: Research and Mapping

Case studies from Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia



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# Executive Summary

Across the MENA region, civil society organizations (CSOs) are often at the forefront of defending human rights, social justice, and democratic values. However, as civic space continues to shrink due to restrictions imposed by both state and non-state actors, whether through legal measures, rollback on positive policy change through democratically elected institutions, or grassroots anti-rights mobilization, CSOs must intensify their advocacy efforts to safeguard decades of achieved and accumulated progress. Yet, paradoxically, while these organizations champion rights and dignity, many find themselves compelled by financial and structural constraints to rely on precarious employment, creating a sometimes “unintended” contradiction between their values, missions, and internal labor practices.

This research defines precarity as a fundamental barrier to a dignified life, leaving individuals vulnerable to exploitation due to insecure labor markets and insufficient protections. Precarious employment is marked by job instability, low wages, lack of social protections, and restricted collective bargaining rights. These conditions disproportionately affect marginalized groups, including women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and migrants, deepening systemic inequities in labor rights and economic security.

This study examines the precarious working conditions of CSO employees in Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco, using a multidisciplinary approach grounded in labor market research and feminist analysis. It employs desk research, literature reviews, surveys, focus group discussions with activists and experts, and key informant interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding. The research is framed by two key theoretical approaches: Fernandes’ Multidimensional Construct of Precarious Work and the ILO’s C190 Convention on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, which offer a structural lens to analyze employment insecurity within the nonprofit sector.

Findings reveal that many CSO workers in the four countries face temporary contracts, consultancy roles, and multiple job commitments due to the sector’s heavy reliance on short-term donor funding. This lack of job security significantly impacts financial stability, mental well-being, and career progression. Salaries are often low, irregular, and insufficient to cover basic living expenses, and stark pay disparities between local and international staff often exist and exacerbate financial inequality and workplace tensions. Furthermore, workers in the sector often lack adequate labor rights and social protections, with inconsistent access to benefits, weak safety regulations, and the absence of formal grievance mechanisms, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination. The absence of strong union representation further weakens employees’ ability to advocate for better working conditions, particularly for marginalized groups.

The broader political and economic environment in Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco further exacerbates these challenges. CSOs operate within restrictive legal frameworks, bureaucratic hurdles, and donor dependency, all of which create significant financial and operational instability. Economic crises, government-imposed limitations, and shrinking civic space make it increasingly difficult for organizations to sustain their work without compromising staff well-being. Despite these constraints, CSOs continue to play a critical role in advocacy, often at the cost of worker protection and organizational stability.

To address these issues, this research presents both country-specific and general recommendations. Key measures include adopting fair employment practices, ensuring social protection mechanisms are in place, and promoting sustainable funding models that reduce reliance on short-term contracts. Strengthening legal frameworks and advocating for labor rights are also crucial, particularly for marginalized groups disproportionately affected by job insecurity. Aligning internal labor policies with CSOs' broader mission is essential to sustaining advocacy efforts while ensuring dignified working conditions.

This study underscores the urgent need to reconcile the values that CSOs advocate for with the labor conditions they create within their structures. Without addressing precarious employment in the sector, the sustainability of civil society in the MENA region remains at risk, as does its ability to push forward a vision of justice, equality, and dignity for all.

# Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

## Introduction

The non-profit sector in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region is witnessing an increase in precarious employment conditions for social workers, non-profit sector employees, and civil society workers. In parallel, over the past decade, the region has seen a reduction in civic space, which impacts the internal dynamics of civil society organizations (CSOs). Variations in the extent of civic space constraints among different countries indicate that additional factors such as economic instability, regulatory environments, and organizational capacity also contribute to the precarious working conditions prevalent in the sector<sup>1</sup>.

The environment in the MENA region has been challenging for civil society organizations to operate effectively, achieve their goals, and demonstrate decent working conditions for their staff and workers. Donor modalities and the reliance on external funding have been major obstacles, making it difficult for organizations to retain staff and maintain high standards of operations; nevertheless, limited access to resources due to shifting regional and global needs forces organizations to constantly adapt and compete for scarce funding.

Additionally, political instability disrupts organizational activities and erodes the trust and engagement of communities. Wars and conflicts divert attention and resources away from developmental and humanitarian initiatives, causing interruptions and limiting access to affected areas. Restrictive legal frameworks, including cumbersome registration processes and regulatory compliance, hinder the smooth operation and growth of civil society organizations. The lack of institutional support from governments and international bodies leaves these organizations vulnerable and under-resourced. Socio-economic pressures, such as high unemployment rates and economic instability, add to the challenges by affecting staff morale and retention. Lastly, security concerns, including threats to personal safety and organizational assets, further complicate the ability to sustain impactful initiatives and ensure fair working conditions, making the overall environment highly complex and demanding.

Nevertheless, feminist and human rights organizations face additional challenges in environments that restrict their activities. These organizations, often at the forefront of advocacy for social change, encounter unique obstacles such as increased restrictions and crackdowns. This dual burden further marginalizes feminist voices and undermines efforts towards gender equality and social justice in the region. These conditions also impact the working environment and sustainability of these organizations. Thus, addressing the working conditions of CSO workers is inherently tied to the shrinking civic space in the MENA region. This has profound implications for the operational environment, internal governance, and working conditions of civil society organizations in various countries.

This research aims to fill the knowledge gap regarding unstable employment in the non-profit sector by mapping and analyzing the existing working conditions of civil society workers in four countries: Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco. The study examines how precarious work is manifesting in the world of work, in addition to the factors that are leading to the burgeoning of unstable employment in the sector. By comparing practices and experiences across these contexts, the study will elucidate variations and commonalities in

<sup>1</sup> FHI360, & ICNL. (2022). (publication). 2021 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA. FHI360.

CSO working conditions, providing insights into the enabling environments and barriers for civil society operations, particularly those involved in advocacy and activism. The research investigates the impact of many factors on working conditions within CSOs, highlighting the inequitable implications on women and marginalized groups<sup>2</sup> in the sector. It explores how these groups are more vulnerable to precarious working conditions, such as job insecurity, low wages, and lack of benefits. This investigation is essential for developing strategies to support and enhance the resilience of CSOs in the region. It ensures they can continue their crucial work despite their increasingly complex and multifaceted challenges. The analysis highlights that these precarious working conditions undermine the sustainability, efficiency, and credibility of these organizations, perpetuating a cycle of marginalization and inequality.

For this research, the focus will be on non-governmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs operate independently from the government and have humanitarian or development objectives<sup>3</sup>. They operate at national or international levels with a broader focus, addressing a wide range of issues such as human rights, environmental protection, and development. They tend to have more formal and complex organizational structures, employing professional staff and often maintaining multiple branches or offices. NGOs usually secure diverse funding from international donors, governments, and privates, allowing them to engage in activities such as advocacy, policymaking, research, and large-scale projects.

While acknowledging that the broader landscape of civil society includes informal groups, collectives, community-based organizations, and other unregistered entities, this study will initially concentrate on registered NGOs to maintain a transparent and manageable scope. This refined focus will enable a more thorough and detailed analysis of the roles, functions, and impacts of these established entities within civil society.

This research addresses several essential questions: **“What factors contribute to precarious working conditions in CSOs in the MENA region, and how do these conditions manifest within these organizations?”**

It will also seek to answer the following sub-questions: (1) What are the critical characteristics of precarious work within civil society organizations in the MENA region? (2) How do different factors affect and fuel the emergence of precarious work within CSOs in the MENA region? (3) How do civil society organizations in the MENA region adapt their strategies and operations in response to factors like shrinking civic space and other disabling environmental factors, and what are the implications for workers' rights and responsibilities? (4) What recommendations are needed to address the emergence of precarious work in the sector, considering the shrinking civic space in the region?

In terms of structure, this chapter will delve into the conceptual definitions of precarity and precarious employment. It then lays out the concept of an enabling and disabling environment for civil society, outlining the essential conditions that must be met to ensure its existence. This exploration is focused on the specific context of the MENA region, examining the pillars of its environment such as (1) restrictions on freedom of association and assembly, (2) donor funding modalities, (3) distortions in the labor market, (4) systemic discrimination against marginalized groups, and (5) the reliance of the non-profit sector on informal work and volunteering.

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical frameworks used for this research, focusing on the multidimensional construct of precarious work and Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work developed by the International Labour Organization. This chapter establishes the theoretical groundwork for understanding the intricate dynamics of civil society within the context of precarious work and its gendered implications on vulnerable groups.

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<sup>2</sup> Including and not limited to migrant workers, refugees, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI++ community, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures (UNDP).

Chapter 3 explores the secondary literature on the enabling environment in Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco. Through comparative analysis, we identify the unique elements shaping the enabling environment in each country, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of the civil society worker landscape. This chapter demonstrates the disproportionate impact of the enabling environment in different contexts. By comparing the four countries, we illustrate that the shrinking civic space is also a significant factor contributing to the emergence of precarious work in the sector. This is especially evident in advocacy, feminist, and gender organizations, where the restricted civic space has intensified challenges. These constraints limit the ability of organizations to operate effectively and sustainably, undermining their capacity to ensure decent working conditions.

## Conceptual Definitions

This section defines key concepts, such as precarity and precarious work, and examines the diverse interpretations attributed to them by scholars through various lenses. Exploring the multiple definitions of these concepts plays an integral role in laying the theoretical foundation of this research. It also defines the civil society groups concerned in this study.

### Defining Precarity

Precarity has been defined as a central obstacle for human beings to live a dignified life, free from suffering<sup>4</sup>. From the perspective of social marginalization, precarity has been described as a politically induced condition where individuals are unable to access social and economic networks and opportunities, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse<sup>5</sup>.

Walsh, on the other hand, explains precarity as a condition originating from flawed employment systems in which labor markets incentivize and encourage insecure professional opportunities with meager protection and social security schemes, compromising the ability to plan a future<sup>6</sup>. The concept of precarity has become a significant topic in labor market research and has also gained importance in political discussions. Precarity is not only associated with new forms of employment, such as temporary, part-time, and project-based work, but it also includes specific demographic groups often considered vulnerable. These groups include women, ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and others<sup>7</sup>.

Indeed, the concept of precarity has been directly linked to gender norms as persons who are more likely to work in precarious conditions, are not offered equitable opportunities, and may bear disproportionate burdens and face further vulnerabilities<sup>8</sup>. Precarity is also described as a historical condition resulting from the informal economy, which leaves vulnerable individuals subject to “intermittent” casual forms of employment. Precarity, in this sense, mirrors politics and the state and how they address the challenge of unstable employment and loss of state provisioning<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, it is perceived as a “socially and politically distributed condition” connected to labor circumstances of uncertainty<sup>10</sup>.

4 Shaw, J., & Byler, D. (2016). *Precarity*. *Precarity | Cultural Anthropology*.

5 Judith, Butler. (2009). *Performativity, Precarity, And Sexual Politics*. *AIBR: Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana*. 4.10.11156/aibr.040305

6 Paul Walsh, *Precarity*, *ELT Journal*, Volume 73, Issue 4, October 2019, Pages 459–462. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccz029>

7 Symeonaki, M., Stamatopoulou, C. & Parsanoglou, D. *Measuring the unmeasurable: defining and rating precarity with the aid of EU-LFS data*. *SN Soc Sci* 3, 67 (2023). <https://doi-org.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/10.1007/s43545-023-00651-5>

8 Judith, Butler. (2009). *Performativity, Precarity, And Sexual Politics*. *AIBR: Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana*. 4.10.11156/aibr.040305

9 *Precarity, Precariousness, and Vulnerability*. Clara Han. *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 2018. 47:1, 331–343

10 Pascucci, E. (2019). *The local labour building the international community: Precarious work within humanitarian spaces*. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 51(3), 743–760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X18803366>

Given the different definitions of precarity by scholars and in literature, this chapter will focus on precarity as it relates to job insecurity and employment instability. Hence, it is imperative to explore the notion of precarious employment and work with precarity.

## Defining Precarious Employment

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), precarious work is defined as *“work performed in the formal and informal economy and is characterized by variable levels and degrees of objective (legal status) and subjective (feeling) characteristics of uncertainty and insecurity. [...] precarious work is usually defined by uncertainty regarding the duration of employment, multiple possible employers or ambiguous employment relationships, a lack of access to social protection and benefits, low pay, and substantial legal and practical obstacles to joining trade unions and bargaining collectively”*<sup>11</sup>.

Precarious employment (PE) has been used to describe insecure, vulnerable, and temporary employment. This type of work has generated a new social class, the “precariat,” which englobes unprotected and temporary workers due to the erosion of the labor market about capital<sup>12</sup>. Another definition gives precarious work the characteristics of unpredictability and uncertainty, with very poor wages, hazardous and challenging working conditions, and limited opportunities for professional development<sup>13</sup>.

Precarious employment (PE) is often characterized by flexible labor relations, with a strong emergence of job insecurity and instability and the erosion of working conditions<sup>14</sup>. Although some scholars linked precarious work with the instability in securing a sufficient income or the risk of job loss only<sup>15</sup>, other literature attributed the definition to the lack of control and employee rights and limited training and employability opportunities for staff<sup>16</sup>. The definition of a precarious job was developed further to also include the types of contracts in a precarious work environment, including both indefinite and fixed terms and the kind of working day (primarily part-time work)<sup>17</sup>. In a new multidimensional approach to precarious employment, authors add disempowerment as a critical tenet to precarious work, demonstrated through unpaid overtime work<sup>18</sup>.

11 International Labour Organization (ILO). *From precarious work to decent work: outcome document to the worker's symposium on policies and regulations to combat precarious employment*. Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2012.

12 Paweł Mikołajczak, 2021. «Do Nonprofit Organizations Experience Precarious Employment? The Impact of NGO Commercialization.» *Public Organization Review*, Springer, vol. 21(3), pages 595-609, September.

13 Martin, N. (2012). “There Is Abuse Everywhere”: Migrant Nonprofit Organizations and the Problem of Precarious Work. *Urban Affairs Review*, 48(3), 389–416. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087411428799>

14 Fernandes, R. de C. P. (2023). *The multidimensional construct of precarious work, the future of work, and Workers' Health*. *Cadernos de saude publica*.

15 Olsthoorn, M. (2013, October 23). *Measuring precarious employment: A proposal for two indicators of precarious employment based on set-theory and tested with Dutch labor market-data - Social Indicators Research*. SpringerLink.

16 Jenni Ervasti and Marianna Virtanen. *Research Strategies for Precarious Employment*. (2019). *Scandinavian J Work Environ Health*. 45(5): 425-427.

17 García-Pérez, C., Prieto-Alaiz, M., & Simón, H. (2016, January 1). *A New Multidimensional Approach to Measuring Precarious Employment*. *Social Indicators Research: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal for Quality-of-Life Measurement*.

18 Orfao, G., del Rey, A., & Malo, M. (2021). *A multidimensional approach to precarious employment among young workers in EU-28 countries*. *Social Indicators Research*, 158(3), 1153–1178. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-021-02734-3>

According to Stefanick et. al, PE in practice includes full-time employees with meager salaries, part-time workers, employees on a contract basis, temporary agency workers, and self-employed individuals who enjoy minimal labor rights and social security. Stefanick et. al also add outsourcing, using interns, and, most recently, volunteers<sup>19</sup>. In addition to low compensation and lack of social security, et. al linked precarious employment to the absence of unions that limit representation, working full-time without benefits, having variable working hours, and short-term contracts that are often unlikely to be renewed<sup>20</sup>.

Mikołajczak also builds a nexus between precarious employment and the intersectionality of gender. Entry-level proficiency, nationality, gender, and socially marginalized groups (less educated, migrants, refugees, queer persons) are considered significant factors to push individuals to accept precarious work<sup>21</sup>. Nevertheless, its implications are far more meaningful in sectors often considered in the literature, such as the non-profit and humanitarian sectors. Considering the gendered nature of these fields, precarity is more likely to be prevalent, and its implications are more detrimental. For example, gender norms significantly prompt women to adopt flexible employment due to care work expectations. In addition to its weakening features, precarious work subtly coerces individuals to undertake extra unpaid labor to retain their employment and to have their candidacy considered in a potential future full-time vacancy due to the absence of job security mechanisms<sup>22, 23</sup>. This type of work is characterized by many “unacknowledged performances of care and affective labor,” which can be politically and socioeconomically inequitably distributed, thus affecting persons more than others<sup>24</sup>.

A primary purpose behind these arrangements is to increase employee flexibility and reduce social spending that burdens employers, which results in the redistribution of the burden from the state and employers onto the workers<sup>16</sup>. Others have linked this transition in employment practices to austerity measures in the wake of the Great Depression of 2008, which sought to curtail government social spending on social and non-profit services<sup>25</sup>.

Considering the various definitions of precarious employment, the conceptualization adopted for this research was developed by Fernandes in a study on the multidimensional construct of precarious employment, the future of work, and worker's health<sup>26</sup>. Fernandes defines precarious employment as work characterized by (1) unstable employment relationships caused by insecure hiring practices, temporary contracts, involuntary part-time work, and outsourcing; (2) inadequate and unstable income; and (3) limited rights and protections for workers, leading to decreased collective representation and unionization, which in turn hampers the ability to address deteriorating working conditions, lack of social security, and weakened regulatory support for labor safety. This is a comprehensive conceptual and pragmatic definition.

19 Lorna Stefanick, Rebecca Best-Bertwistle & Lynsey S. Race (2020) *Retaining Volunteers in the Age of Precarious Work*, *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 32:2, 124-146, DOI: 10.1080/10495142.2018.1526747

20 Baines, D., Cunningham, I., & Shields, J. (2017). *Filling the gaps: Unpaid (and precarious) work in the nonprofit social services*. *Critical Social Policy*, 37(4), 625-645. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018317693128>

21 Paweł Mikołajczak, 2021. «Do Nonprofit Organizations Experience Precarious Employment? The Impact of NGO Commercialization.» *Public Organization Review*, Springer, vol. 21(3), pages 595-609, September.

22 Baines, D., Cunningham, I., & Shields, J. (2017). *Filling the gaps: Unpaid (and precarious) work in the nonprofit social services*. *Critical Social Policy*, 37(4), 625-645. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018317693128>

23 Donna Baines, Innocentia Kgaphola, *Precarious care: International comparisons of nonprofit social service work*, *Women's Studies International Forum*, Volume 74, 2019, Pages 210-217, ISSN 0277-5395, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2019.05.001>

24 Pascucci, E. (2019). *The local labour building the international community: Precarious work within humanitarian spaces*. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 51(3), 743-760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X18803366>

25 Donna Baines, Innocentia Kgaphola, *Precarious care: International comparisons of nonprofit social service work*, *Women's Studies International Forum*, Volume 74, 2019, Pages 210-217, ISSN 0277-5395, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2019.05.001>

26 Fernandes, R. de C. P. (2023). *The multidimensional construct of precarious work, the future of work, and Workers' Health*. *Cadernos de saude publica*.

## Enabling and Disabling Environment and Precarious Work

This section examines the enabling environment for civil society organizations (CSOs) in the MENA region, focusing on the legal, financial, political, and cultural factors that impact their operations. It highlights the crucial role of CSOs in advocating for social change and human rights, especially where governments fall short. Through this overview, the section aims to illuminate the complex features of an enabling environment in the region.

According to CIVICUS, an enabling environment is defined by the conditions surrounding civil society's existence, registration, and activities, encompassing factors that influence and impact its size, scope, and operations<sup>27</sup>. The Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) attributes to the concept a more gender-nuanced definition by describing it as an environment *“in which women’s rights groups may be established and freely conduct their programs and activities, and refrain from any act of reprisal against human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders”*<sup>28</sup>.

An enabling environment mainly includes interconnected conditions affecting the capacity of civil society organizations to engage effectively and serve their communities. These conditions, which cover legal, organizational/governance, financial, political, and cultural realms, impact internal organizational dynamics, including working conditions and external interactions with governments and other entities<sup>29</sup>. These conditions also impact the ability of citizens, whether individually or collectively, to engage voluntarily in civil society<sup>30</sup>.

## MENA Region

Civil society organizations<sup>31</sup> concerned with development, human rights, the feminist movement, and environmental groups concerned with climate change in the MENA region play a critical role in advocating for social change, human rights, gender equality, the environment, and sustainable development. In many instances, civil society has taken on a larger role in specific sectors due to the absence of national governments and authorities in fulfilling their responsibilities.

27 CIVICUS. (2020). *Enabling Environment*. [civicus.org](http://civicus.org).

28 OHCHR. (2021). *Freedom of association in the Middle East and North Africa: An overview of trends, challenges and good practices*. [romena.ohchr.org](http://romena.ohchr.org).

29 Arab NGO Network for Development. (2016). (rep.). *Enabling Environment for Civil Society in the Arab Region* (pp. 8–92). Beirut: Arab NGO Network for Development.

30 Balkan Civil Society Development Network. (2014). *What is ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT?*

31 For the purposes of this discussion, the term “civil society in the MENA region” does not encompass conservative and traditional groups or anti-rights organizations. This focus specifically addresses those organizations that advocate for human rights, social justice, and democratic principles, thereby excluding entities whose missions and values do not align with these goals.

In the last few decades, the number of civil society organizations (CSOs) increased visibly in the region in light of the Arab Uprisings in several Arab countries and primarily due to the lack of national governments' support in key sectors and fields, such as social services, human rights and freedoms, combatting corruption, and preserving justice and the rule of law. In other contexts, the mushrooming of CSOs was linked to raising awareness and vocalizing concerns about the authoritarian regimes governing the countries<sup>32, 33</sup>.

In parallel to this expansion and proliferation, concerns about the enabling environment and the shrinking of civic space, coupled with changing funding priorities of donors and scarcity of funds, undermined the principles of free assembly and expression in the region.

CIVICUS, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), ARTICLE 19, and The Civic Space Initiative (CSI) offer a widely accepted definition of civic space commonly embraced by practitioners: ***“Civic space encompasses the conditions enabling civil society and individuals to organize, participate, and communicate freely and without bias. In doing so, they can influence their communities’ political and social frameworks”***<sup>34</sup>. In their definitions, these institutions emphasize the significance of civic space, highlighting how individuals utilize it to address public issues, voice concerns, convene both online and offline, and engage in decision-making processes. Consequently, a well-established and safeguarded civic space is fundamental to accountable and responsive democratic governance and fostering stability within societies<sup>35</sup>.

The ability of civil society to operate freely and consistently in the MENA region largely depends on the enabling environment in each respective country and the extent to which restrictions have curbed the activities of non-governmental groups. Nevertheless, due to the diversity of civil society and varying political, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts in different MENA countries, the enabling environment differs from state to state, as will be addressed in Chapter 3 of this research. For example, in 2013, the global alliance of civil society organizations and activists (CIVICUS) developed the Enabling Environment Index (EEI). This tool measures and ranks the enabling environment in countries, strengthening citizen action and reinforcing the civic space worldwide. Even though data is unavailable for all countries, Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco ranked respectively 91, 94, and 90 out of 109 countries, all with a similar score of 0.4 compared to the global average of 0.55<sup>36</sup>. These rankings demonstrate how conditions for civil society in the MENA region are enabling compared to the global experience.

Many Arab states are currently grappling with tensions, conflicts, and wars, which impede the development of citizenship values and human rights – foundational elements for fostering positive engagement in political and civil spheres. Additionally, the environments in which civil society organizations operate are often challenging, marked by oppressive authorities and ongoing conflicts, which further hinder their effectiveness and growth<sup>37</sup>.

Over ten years after the 2011 Arab Uprising, the long-awaited and widespread transition to democracy in the region has yet to materialize. Although some positive changes were achieved in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen (in 2011), and more recently in Algeria (in 2018) and Sudan (in 2020), authoritarian governance remains prevalent in the region. The majority of the population in the MENA region continues to lack democratic freedoms and social protections, with the region retaining its status as the world’s most authoritarian according to global democracy indices<sup>38</sup>. In addition to the compounding

32 Lebanon has 11,676 registered associations, according to the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities.

33 In Egypt, Minister of Social Solidarity announced that 35,653 NGOs had registered under the 2019 NGO Law, according to Amnesty International.

34 Keutgen, J., & Dodsworth, S. (2020). (publication). *Addressing the global emergency of shrinking civic space and how to reclaim it: a programming guide* (pp. 4–40). London: Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

35 CIVICUS. (n.d.). (rep.). *GUIDE TO REPORTING ON CIVIC SPACE MEDIA TOOLKIT* (pp. 3–21). CIVICUS.

36 <https://www.civicus.org/eai/>

37 Arab NGO Network for Development. (2016). (rep.). *Enabling Environment for Civil Society in the Arab Region* (pp. 8–92). Beirut: Arab NGO Network for Development.

38 Saliba, I. (2023). (issue brief). *Shrinking Spaces in the Middle East and North Africa: Supporting Civil Society Resilience*. German Institute for Sustainability and Development (IDOS).

challenges of political unrest and financial instability, the difficulties were exacerbated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2022<sup>39</sup>.

Despite the challenges encountered by civil society in the region, including mobility restrictions, funding constraints, political pressures, and restricted civic space, a sense of resilience exists within the non-profit sector regarding social change. In many instances, civil society organizations proceed to fill in the gaps of government absence, which end up working with insufficient budgets earned through donor grants.

The enabling environment has manifested through different ways, which will be explored below at the level of (1) restrictions of freedoms of association and assembly, (2) donor funding modalities, (3) distortions in the labor market, (4) systemic and societal discrimination against vulnerable groups in the sector; (5) and a deeply rooted history of the non-profit sector relying on volunteer work fueling precarity in the sector.

## Restrictions on Freedom of Association and Assembly

An essential pillar of enabling environments is legal conditions, including laws that protect individual freedoms such as association, expression, and assembly. These legal protections create an environment where civil society can operate freely, enabling the exchange of ideas and the formation of associations and organizations without fear of censorship or repression.

According to the Open Government Partnership, the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, and expression, alongside human rights protection and civic participation in governance, lie at the core of civic space rights<sup>40</sup>. Despite being enshrined in robust international and regional human rights instruments and frameworks, incorporating these rights into domestic legislation and regulations remains challenging in many regions worldwide.

Various strategies to constrict civic space exist, targeting fundamental rights such as freedom of association, assembly, and expression. For instance, restrictions on freedom of association include bureaucratic hurdles for CSOs, such as requesting excessive reporting and supervision and labeling CSOs with pejorative terms like ‘foreign agent’ to discredit their legitimacy. This also includes laws targeted at CSOs, such as NGO registration laws. Similarly, limitations on freedom of assembly involve imposing restrictions on the size of gatherings and responding excessively to unpermitted assemblies, often resulting in instances of police violence or failure to protect assemblies from violence<sup>41</sup>.

Governments may also erode freedom of expression through bans on criticizing authorities or institutions, censorship of media, and online discrimination, such as blocking political content or surveilling activists’ online activities. Additionally, human rights protections are undermined through harassment of individuals and organizations by state actors, as well as the failure to prevent or prosecute attacks on activists<sup>42</sup>. Weak or antagonistic state-civil society relations further exacerbate the narrowing of civic space, often resulting in limited consultation with civil society on policy matters<sup>43</sup>. As a result, their essential efforts to promote human rights, good governance, and inclusive human development are increasingly suppressed and subjected to criminalization<sup>44</sup>.

39 FHI360, & ICNL. (2022). (publication). *2021 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA*. FHI360.

40 Open Government Partnership. (2022). *Civic Space*.

41 Keutgen, J., & Dodsworth, S. (2020). (publication). *Addressing the global emergency of shrinking civic space and how to reclaim it: a programming guide* (pp. 4–40). London: Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

42 CIVICUS. (2020b). *Middle East & North Africa. Middle East & North Africa - Civicus Monitor 2020*.

43 Keutgen, J., & Dodsworth, S. (2020). (publication). *Addressing the global emergency of shrinking civic space and how to reclaim it: a programming guide* (pp. 4–40). London: Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

44 Saliba, I. (2023). (issue brief). *Shrinking Spaces in the Middle East and North Africa: Supporting Civil Society Resilience*. German Institute for Sustainability and Development (IDOS).

Another severe restriction that CSOs face regarding registration is the inability to register in their home country due to security concerns, primarily if they advocate for issues that are frowned upon by their government. Additionally, inefficiencies in governmental bureaucracy, such as those seen in Lebanon, further hinder their ability to register domestically. Lebanon's bureaucratic hurdles make it very complicated for CSOs to register locally under law 1909, which pushed hundreds of organizations to register outside the country or under a different status. Although this process brings many advantages, such as greater operational freedom, financial stability, and access to international funding, there are limitations in return. The most important of which are related to safeguarding and grievances to which employees are most vulnerable. Foreign registration can complicate workplace grievance mechanisms, as these organizations must navigate foreign regulations or corporate frameworks, potentially disconnecting from local labor laws and affecting the effectiveness and fairness of conflict resolution processes.

## Donor Funding Modalities

Financial conditions encompass the ability to adequately access funding and resource opportunities for civil society to allow organizations to carry out their missions, support their staff, ensure decent work standards, and implement programs.

The OHCHR's report on *Freedom of Association in the Middle East and North Africa Region highlighted additional forms of restrictions, the first of which are restrictions on foreign funding. The other two forms are state control of internal operations and dissolution and discriminatory practices*<sup>45</sup>. Numerous countries in the region restrict associations' access to foreign funding by mandating pre-approval for receiving funds from abroad. These limitations can pose significant challenges for grassroots associations, disproportionately impacting women's rights activists frequently concentrated locally. These restrictions are often justified under the pretext of safeguarding national security and public order, including money laundering or terrorism<sup>46</sup>.

On the other hand, the expansion of neoliberal governance, austerity measures, and the rightsizing of "social state to minimalist provision" have shrunk funding for non-profit services dramatically; nevertheless, it is believed that precarity is fueled by the lack of accountability and the neoliberal political system upon which it rests<sup>47</sup>.

In addition, organizations dependent on public aid must adhere to complicated procedures and requirements to be eligible for financial assistance. Applying for funds becomes more strenuous due to complex application documentation, restrictive financial planning, institutional procedures, intricate regulations, exaggerated bureaucracy, political climate towards CSO work, limited capacity of NGOs in human and financial resources – aggravated by precarity – coupled with demotivation by persons working in the CSO that is struggling with instability and under constant threat of suspending its activities<sup>48</sup>. This donor dependency phenomenon raises concerns about the continuity of CSO work, particularly for small organizations with limited budgets. Short-term projects fail to provide long-term job security for workers, leading to regularly unfilled critical positions within organizations due to the absence of long-term institutional grants<sup>49</sup>.

45 OHCHR. (2021). *Freedom of association in the Middle East and North Africa: An overview of trends, challenges and good practices*. [romena.ohchr.org](https://www.romena.ohchr.org).

46 FHI360, & ICNL. (2022). (publication). *2021 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA*. FHI360.

47 Baines, D., Cunningham, I., Campey, J., & Shields, J. (2014). *Not Profiting from Precarity: The Work of Nonprofit Service Delivery and the Creation of Precariousness*. *Just Labour*, 22. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1705-1436.6>

48 Mikołajczak, P. (2021). *What affects employment by NGOs? counteraction to precarious employment in the Polish non-profit sector in the perspective of COVID-19 pandemic crises*. *Oeconomia Copernicana*, 12(3), 761-788. doi: <https://doi.org/10.24136/oc.2021.025>

49 Vervloet, P. (2020). *Challenges for csos linked to financial dependency on ... - gupea: Home*. Göteborgs Universitet.

Another prevalent challenge in terms of funding is seen in the shift from core and base funding to project-based contract funding<sup>50</sup>. First, project funding is an unstable short-term funding built on competitive bidding to “marketize caring services” and decrease costs on donor entities to get the highest value for money. Second, flexibility in spending is significantly reduced in project-based funding, which compromises the organization’s financial stability, especially in managing ongoing operation costs. Third, accountability mechanisms have ceased to be reciprocal between the two partners. Instead, reporting takes a top-down approach in project-based funding and is primarily linked to market-based efficiency measures<sup>51</sup>.

## Distortions in the Labor Market

The divide between international and local staff in the non-profit and aid sectors exacerbates precarity, especially in conflict-affected regions like the Global South<sup>52</sup>.

In the wake of the Arab Uprising in 2011, for example, many international aid organizations and humanitarian bodies relocated to war-affected areas to provide support and assistance to local communities. These spaces created a new precarious workforce: locally recruited workers.

Scholars have frequently brought up a conversation on international staff in the non-profit and aid sectors who are “doing well out of poverty” and are benefiting from the system to lead comfortable lifestyles<sup>53</sup>.

Salary discrepancy between local and international staff is widely highlighted in the literature, which some explain has a serious detrimental impact on the non-profit and aid sectors and creates a sense of demotivation among national staff who feel are not adequately compensated for the labor they undertake<sup>54</sup>.

Despite having similar or higher qualifications in terms of education and professional experience, national workers are compensated times less than expats, creating disproportionate power dynamics between the two groups. It is assumed that such relations are intrinsically linked to colonial and racist legacies that presume that international workers (usually Western) deserve higher pay for working in administration in contrast to locals working on the ground in direct contact with communities<sup>55</sup>. Disparities also emerge with benefits received as part of a job package, which also raises the basic remuneration<sup>56</sup>. For example, international staff enjoyed prerogatives such as high per diem when operating in remote areas, high housing allowances, use of organizational vehicles, hardship allowances, cost-of-living allowances, and education stipends accounting for thousands of dollars per child to be enrolled in international schools<sup>57</sup>.

50 Kilby, P. (2012, October 12). *NGO dependency not the real issue: a response to Joanne Spratt*.

51 Baines, D., Cunningham, I., Campey, J., & Shields, J. (2014). *Not Profiting from Precarity: The Work of Nonprofit Service Delivery and the Creation of Precariousness*. *Just Labour*, 22. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1705-1436.6>

52 Fechter, A.-M. (2012). “Living Well” while “Doing Good”? (Missing) debates on altruism and professionalism in aid work. *Third World Quarterly*, 33(8), 1475–1491.

53 *Ibid.*

54 Stuart C. Carr, Ishbel McWha, Malcolm MacLachlan & Adrian Furnham (2010) *International-local remuneration differences across six countries: Do they undermine poverty reduction work?*, *International Journal of Psychology*, 45:5, 321-340, DOI: 10.1080/00207594.2010.491990

55 Holden, S., Blackley, I., Said-Wardell, Z., Mills, A., & Sato, M. (2019). (2018–9) *Disparities in pay amongst foreign and local aid workers*. *Anthropology of aid*.

56 Canavera, M. (2017, February 17). *The local/international divide: Reflection of a deeper problem in humanitarian aid?*. *HuffPost*.

57 *Ibid.*

Such a wage gap creates deeper frustration when national and local workers – recruited with local contracts – shoulder the heavy labor, implement the fieldwork operations, and are exposed to greater risks, for lower pay and insurance, while “international experts” are positioned in remote areas far from the field and occupying managerial positions<sup>58</sup>. Such hierarchies pushed scholars to conceptualize locals’ work as “general services” and expats’ work as “professional services”, despite the former being classified as more valuable in terms of practical skill set<sup>59, 60</sup>. It is presumed that local staff are recruited for their knowledge and acquaintance with the local context, their familiarity with the community, their connections to the local networks, and their ability to blend in, yet still, are in subordinate positions to expatriate management<sup>61</sup>.

In addition, being front liners of operations has also created severe security risks for nationals, for which they also receive unequal protection compared to internationals; in fact, many national staff would express that their security is underprioritized. In addition to higher pay scales and benefits, internationals acquired emergency evacuation in seriously threatening circumstances as a result of “a perception of heightened security risks for internationals as compared to national staff”<sup>62</sup>. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, many expatriates were seen receiving better medical treatment, which may reflect structural and systemic inequalities at the NPS organizational level<sup>63</sup>.

## Systemic and Societal Discrimination of Vulnerable Groups

Systemic and societal discrimination against vulnerable groups manifests prominently within the civil society sector, where these groups are consistently undervalued and marginalized. Governments exert extensive control over CSOs by monitoring their operations, activities, and financial accounts, often attending their general assembly meetings as a form of oversight. This level of scrutiny can be misused to target associations advocating for marginalized communities, such as LGBTQI individuals, by delaying or denying their legal registrations—a direct consequence of discriminatory practices hindering their exercise of freedom of association.

In certain countries, specific groups encounter obstacles in exercising their right to freedom of association. In Lebanon, the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MoIM) has faced criticism for delaying the issuance of receipts to associations advocating for LGBTQI rights despite their timely submission of notifications<sup>64</sup>. Moreover, freedom of association has a significant gender dimension globally and regionally. Women human rights defenders often face stigma for their activism, leading to disincentives for establishing or participating in civil society organizations. Similar discrimination patterns are observed across the MENA region, where women’s efforts to engage in public and civic affairs are met with stigmatization, hostility, and gender-based violence. Further, there are concerns about the need for a robust civil society in some countries and insufficient information regarding the legal requirements for the registration and operation of NGOs in certain states.

58 Pascucci, E. (2019). *The local labour building the international community: Precarious work within humanitarian spaces*. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 51(3), 743–760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X18803366>

59 Canavera, M. (2017, February 17). *The local/international divide: Reflection of a deeper problem in humanitarian aid?*. *HuffPost*.

60 Holden, S., Blackley, I., Said-Wardell, Z., Mills, A., & Sato, M. (2019). (2018–9) *Disparities in pay amongst foreign and local aid workers*. *Anthropology of aid*.

61 Pascucci, E. (2019). *The local labour building the international community: Precarious work within humanitarian spaces*. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 51(3), 743–760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X18803366>

62 Brooks, J. (2015). *Humanitarians Under Attack: Tensions, Disparities, and Legal Gaps in Protection*. *Harvard Humanitarian Initiative*.

63 Green, A. (2020, April 28). *Are local and international aid worker disparities worsening under COVID-19?*. *Devex*.

64 OHCHR. (2021b). *Freedom of Association in the MENA Region*.

Nevertheless, the non-profit sector's foundation lies in the "ethos of care," with care work being central to its mission<sup>65</sup>. However, this philosophy often leads to meager compensation and benefits, hindering sustainable employee retention and perpetuating precarity within the sector primarily borne by marginalized groups. In humanitarian spaces, care labor, including physical and emotional support, is predominant, with workers often sacrificing their well-being<sup>66, 67</sup>. Gender dynamics play a significant role in this context, with women and vulnerable groups predominantly filling low-paid care roles or volunteering<sup>68</sup>.

Societal discrimination against vulnerable groups often intersects with their involvement in civil society, creating a complex dynamic that impacts both individuals and the broader community. Vulnerable groups face systemic barriers that hinder their full participation in civil society initiatives. These barriers can manifest through unequal access to resources, limited opportunities for leadership roles, and pervasive stereotypes undermining their contributions. Their involvement in civil society, where they often champion causes related to their rights, can challenge existing power structures and norms, further exacerbating societal tensions.

This adds a lot of emotional pressure on them as they advocate for their causes within civil society organizations (CSOs). On one hand, they are fighting for rights and representation that directly affect their lives, which can be emotionally taxing. On the other hand, the already precarious and stressful environment within CSOs, characterized by limited resources, high expectations, and often intense competition for funding and visibility, adds another layer of precarity. For groups facing structural discrimination, navigating these challenges while advocating for change can amplify feelings of frustration, fatigue, and burnout.

## History of the Non-Profit Sector As a Voluntary Sector

The nonprofit sector has historically relied heavily on volunteerism, stemming from early philanthropic, faith-based, and charitable efforts. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, organizations addressing social needs often operated with the dedicated efforts of volunteers passionate about community welfare and social change. This volunteer-driven model extended to various social movements, where grassroots organizations advocated for civil rights, women's suffrage, and labor rights. Volunteers provided essential services, organized protests, offered education, and supported marginalized groups<sup>69</sup>.

However, this historical reliance on volunteer labor has posed challenges regarding decent pay and working conditions within the nonprofit sector. Nonprofits typically operate with limited financial resources compared to for-profit entities, making it difficult to offer competitive salaries or comprehensive benefits to paid staff. The ethos of volunteerism has also contributed to a cultural norm where working for a nonprofit is often viewed as a form of service or calling rather than a conventional career path deserving of equitable compensation.

65 Baines, D., Cunningham, I., Campey, J., & Shields, J. (2014). *Not Profiting from Precarity: The Work of Nonprofit Service Delivery and the Creation of Precariousness*. *Just Labour*, 22. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1705-1436.6>

66 Pascucci, E. (2019). *The local labour building the international community: Precarious work within humanitarian spaces*. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 51(3), 743-760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X18803366>

67 *Ibid.*

68 Donna Baines, Innocentia Kgaphola, *Precarious care: International comparisons of nonprofit social service work*, *Women's Studies International Forum*, Volume 74, 2019, Pages 210-217, ISSN 0277-5395, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2019.05.001>

69 Robbins, K. C. (2006b). *The non-profit sector in historical perspective: Traditions of philanthropy in the West*. *ProQuest*.

## Precarious Work, Civic Space, and Enabling Environment

The various dynamics of an enabling environment may leave implications on the internal governance of civil society organizations and their ability to maintain decent employment standards, especially vis-à-vis vulnerable groups often employed in the non-profit realm.

Legal restrictions imposed on freedom of association, expression, and assembly and heightened government scrutiny may pose significant challenges to CSOs in the MENA region. These constraints may lead to internal tension and fear among staff, exacerbating resource constraints and financial instability due to government crackdowns on funding sources. Moreover, increased bureaucratic hurdles and surveillance erode transparency and accountability within CSOs, diminishing trust among staff and fostering potential conflicts over decision-making processes. Negative societal attitudes towards civil society and activism further contribute to a hostile environment for CSO employees, impacting morale and job satisfaction. Additionally, civic space restrictions hinder collaboration and partnership opportunities, limiting CSOs' capacity to address societal challenges and isolating employees from broader support networks. Restrictions on civic space may also impede CSOs' ability to engage in collective action and unionization efforts, limiting workers' capacity to advocate for their rights collectively and negotiate better working conditions.

In addition, conflict and insecurity are pervasive issues that reinforce the policing role of the state, creating a climate of heightened surveillance and control over civil society organizations. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact, as states in the region leveraged the crisis to impose further restrictions on CSOs. This dual pressure from ongoing conflicts and the pandemic has significantly curtailed the space for free assembly and expression, further challenging the operational capacities of civil society in the MENA region.

The existing literature on the MENA region must thoroughly investigate how the enabling environment and the shrinking of civic space affect the internal working conditions and governance of civil society organizations or contribute to the emergence of precarious work within the sector. Hence, this paper seeks to map, research, and present the factors contributing to the emergence of precarious work in the sector and how precarity manifests in the world of work.

## Conclusion

This chapter has provided a foundational understanding of the overall background on civil society in the MENA region. It laid out key concepts such as precarity and precarious employment, to analyze the challenges faced by CSO workers. It also explored the enabling and disabling factors influencing precarious work, particularly within the unique context of the MENA region.

The chapter highlighted several critical issues, including restrictions on freedom of association and assembly, the impact of donor funding modalities, distortions in the labor market, and systemic and societal discrimination against vulnerable groups. Additionally, the historical perspective on the non-profit sector as a voluntary sector has been discussed, shedding light on the evolution of civil society work and its implications on current working conditions.

Understanding these elements is crucial for addressing the precarious nature of employment in the sector and for fostering an enabling environment that supports civil society workers. This comprehensive overview sets the stage for the subsequent chapters, which will delve deeper into specific aspects and case studies, further illuminating the complex landscape of civil society work in the MENA region.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In this section, two theoretical frameworks that guide the research are outlined, the “multidimensional construct of precarious work” developed by Rita de Cássia Pereira Fernandes in 2023 and the framework on “violence and harassment in the world of work” a guide developed by the ILO in 2019 to address the gaps in international labor standards<sup>70</sup>. While the former presents the various dimensions of precarious work with employment relations, protection, and rights, the latter accentuates the intersectional gender lens in this research, highlighting the disproportional cost of precarious employment on different groups such as migrant workers, refugees, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ persons, etc. The integration of these two frameworks provides a comprehensive understanding of precarious work by combining detailed structural analysis with critical insights into intersectionality and systemic inequalities.

### Multidimensional Construct of Precarious Work

Although many theoretical models approach precarious work and precarity in the workplace, such as the “work precarity framework” developed by Allan et. al<sup>71</sup>, they do not emphasize many dimensions related to employment dynamics such as collective action and representation, and intersectional vulnerabilities. Nevertheless, the adopted framework acknowledges the contribution of political powers of the market (e.g. trade unions), the role of the government and society at large including social movements and non-governmental organizations, and most importantly, does not touch on the precarious working conditions found in the same job (remuneration, non-monetary benefits, representation, and employment agreements)<sup>72</sup>.

Fernandes introduces a new theoretical perspective on precarious work called “the multidimensional construct of precarious work,” which takes an interdisciplinary approach and revolves around three main dimensions, each with its sub-dimensions, which were based on qualitative and quantitative studies<sup>73</sup>.

The first dimension, characterized by unstable and insecure employment relations, encompasses four sub-dimensions: insecure contractual relationships, temporary agreements, underemployment, and multiple contracts with different employers. Various types of employment agreements, including direct agreements with employers, outsourcing contracts, agency employment, and self-employment, exist within this dimension. However, agreements through third parties are often not a matter of choice but the only option available. Outsourcing is particularly linked to negative experiences and health issues for workers, as it may weaken protections and surveillance of working conditions. Temporary work, compared to permanent agreements, introduces insecurity due to uncertainties about contract duration and renewal, while part-time work’s impact depends on voluntariness, with involuntary part-time work often resulting in degraded conditions. Multiple contracts also contribute to precarious work situations and increased risks, especially regarding occupational accidents.

70 International Labour Organization. (2021). (publication). *Violence and harassment in the world of work: A guide on Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206*. ILO.

71 Allan et. al. (2021). *Precarious work in the 21st century: A psychological perspective*. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. 126. 103491. [10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103491](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103491).

72 Fernandes, R. de C. P. (2023). *The multidimensional construct of precarious work, the future of work, and Workers' Health*. *Cadernos de saude publica*.

73 Kreshpaj, B., Orellana, C., Burström, B., Davis, L., Hemmingsson, T., Johansson, G., Kjellberg, K., Jonsson, J., Wegman, D., & Bodin, T. (2020). *What is precarious employment? A systematic review of definitions and operationalizations from quantitative and qualitative studies*. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*, 46(3), 235–247. <https://doi.org/10.5271/sjweh.3875>

The second dimension, inadequate income, has been defined in various ways but consistently involves unstable or inconsistent income, which can lead to health issues and poor living conditions for workers and their families. The centrality of income inadequacy highlights its significance in defining social and work vulnerability.

The third dimension of precarious work involves insufficient rights and protections in the workplace, which can be broken down into four sub-dimensions identified in the literature. The first sub-dimension concerns the absence of collective representation for workers, making non-union workers vulnerable to arbitrary dismissals and other disadvantages. The second sub-dimension is the lack of social security, meaning workers do not receive benefits from their work or the government. The third sub-dimension relates to inadequate or absent regulations, standards, and policies for workplace safety. Lastly, the fourth sub-dimension highlights the limited power of workers to assert their rights and refuse unacceptable conditions, as well as to demand improved working conditions<sup>74</sup>. These inadequacies are particularly pronounced among informal workers due to their under-representation in unions<sup>75</sup>.

There is a general agreement in the literature that studying precarious work requires interdisciplinary collaboration and international cooperation. This is because the complexity of precarious work cannot be adequately addressed by narrow, uni-dimensional approaches that fail to consider the socioeconomic and cultural contexts. To fully understand precarious work, there is a need to adopt methods that are linked with broader studies of socioeconomic and cultural factors, necessitating collaboration across disciplines and borders.

Therefore, employing the multidisciplinary framework of precarious work is essential for comprehensively understanding the precarious working conditions experienced by civil society workers in the MENA region, especially in light of the challenges impacting their enabling environment. This approach involves not only examining the internal governance of organizations but also considering the broader political context and the effects of shrinking civic spaces on organizations' ability to uphold their legitimacy and credibility within their ecosystem.

## Ilo Convention on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work (C190)

The ILO Convention No. 190, known as the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019, is a recent international convention that seeks to address violence and harassment in the world of work. It aims to comprehensively address behaviors, practices, or threats that result in physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm. The Convention adheres to inclusive principles, applying to all workers regardless of contractual status, including employees, trainees, apprentices, interns, volunteers, job seekers, and those exercising employer authority. It encompasses all sectors, both public and private, including the informal economy, and recognizes that violence and harassment can occur in various work-related settings such as workplaces, work-related trips or events, communications, and employer-provided accommodations.

74 Fernandes, R. de C. P. (2023). *The multidimensional construct of precarious work, the future of work, and Workers' Health*. *Cadernos de saude publica*.

75 Kreshpaj, B., Orellana, C., Burström, B., Davis, L., Hemmingsson, T., Johansson, G., Kjellberg, K., Jonsson, J., Wegman, D., & Bodin, T. (2020). *What is precarious employment? A systematic review of definitions and operationalizations from quantitative and qualitative studies*. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*, 46(3), 235–247. <https://doi.org/10.5271/sjweh.3875>

76 International Labour Organization. (2021). (publication). *Violence and harassment in the world of work: A guide on Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206*. ILO.

The framework builds on five pillars to prevent and eliminate gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace.

### **Rights-based framework to prevent and eliminate violence and harassment in the world of work**

Convention No. 190 is the first international instrument explicitly recognizing everyone's right to a workplace free from violence and harassment. Along with Recommendation No. 206, it complements other international instruments on labor standards, equality, and non-discrimination. The Convention emphasizes that freedom from violence and harassment is integral to fundamental work principles and decent work, highlighting how violence, harassment, and decent work deficits are interconnected. Nevertheless, it underscores the importance of freedom of association and collective bargaining in preventing and addressing these issues. The Convention calls for the elimination of forced labor and child labor, which are inherently linked to violence and harassment. Additionally, it stresses the need for equality and non-discrimination, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women and migrant workers, advocating for comprehensive laws and policies to ensure their protection. By recognizing the specific vulnerabilities of these groups and urging states to adopt inclusive measures, the Convention and Recommendation aims to create safer, more respectful, and inclusive workplaces globally.

### **The obligation to ensure protection from and prevention of violence and harassment in the world of work**

Convention No. 190 mandates that States adopt laws and regulations to define and prohibit violence and harassment, including gender-based violence, ensuring these behaviors are recognized and curtailed. It calls for a comprehensive strategy to prevent and combat violence and harassment across all work-related contexts, including commuting and online environments. Recommendation No. 206 supports these efforts by advising resources and assistance for informal economy workers and promoting an integrated policy framework for transitioning to the formal economy, focusing on equality and the elimination of discrimination and violence. The Convention allows flexibility for countries to implement measures suitable to their national circumstances and encourages collective agreements for effective sector-specific protections.

### **The role of employers in the prevention of and protection from violence and harassment**

Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 require ratifying countries to enact laws and regulations mandating employers to take appropriate steps to prevent violence and harassment in the workplace, including gender-based incidents. These measures should correspond to the employers' degree of control and be implemented to the extent reasonably practicable. Employers are urged to adopt workplace policies on violence and harassment in consultation with workers and their representatives, outlining definitions, prohibited behaviors, and disciplinary actions. These policies should encourage reporting mechanisms while ensuring privacy and confidentiality. Workers should play a critical role in policy design and implementation. Furthermore, employers should assess workplace risks, including psychosocial hazards, and implement appropriate preventive measures, such as security protocols and training programs. Training initiatives should focus on awareness, conflict management, challenging harmful social norms, and promoting workplace civility and respect.

### **The obligation to ensure effective enforcement and remedies**

The C190 Framework outlines principles and guidance for states to establish robust reporting and dispute resolution mechanisms to address violence and harassment in the workplace, emphasizing the under-reporting of such incidents due to various reasons, including fear of reprisal and lack of trust in the system's efficiency. These mechanisms, whether internal

or external, should be accessible, safe, fair, and effective, with support services tailored to survivors, particularly in cases of gender-based violence and harassment. Additionally, measures to protect complainants from retaliation, ensure privacy and confidentiality, and provide appropriate remedies, including reinstatement and compensation, are highlighted. Sanctions for perpetrators are also recommended, along with gender-responsive training for relevant authorities. Furthermore, Convention No. 190 mandates states to establish or strengthen monitoring mechanisms, including labor inspectorates, to enforce compliance with legislation regarding violence and harassment, ensuring a safe and secure working environment for all.

### **The promotion of policies and tools to accelerate social change**

Convention No. 190 emphasizes the importance of addressing violence and harassment in the workplace through various measures to foster socio-cultural change and ensure respect, safety, and security for all employees. Articles 4(2) and 11 urge ratifying countries to integrate violence and harassment into relevant national policies, including those concerning occupational safety and health, equality, non-discrimination, and migration. Moreover, the convention calls for providing guidance, training, and resources to relevant authorities, employers, workers, and their organizations to prevent and eliminate such behavior, emphasizing the need for accessible formats. Additionally, awareness-raising initiatives are highlighted as crucial components of broader strategies, stressing the importance of an inclusive, integrated, and gender-responsive approach to fully realize their potential impact.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the theoretical groundwork laid in this chapter not only defines precarity and precarious work but also establishes a multidimensional framework for understanding these concepts in the context of civil society organizations (CSOs).

By integrating Convention No. 190's framework, which emphasizes the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the workplace, with the multidimensional framework of precarious work, this research gains a comprehensive feminist and gender lens through which we can examine the experiences of CSO workers in Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco.

The Convention provides a normative foundation for addressing workplace challenges, including those faced by CSOs, while the multidimensional framework offers a nuanced understanding of the diverse factors contributing to precarity within this sector. By combining these frameworks, the upcoming chapter can delve into the specific challenges and opportunities encountered by CSO actors in each country, shedding light on the complex dynamics shaping their operations and impact.

This integrated approach enables a deeper exploration of the intersections between precarious work and civil society, facilitating a more informed analysis and discussion of the issues. By mapping and researching precarious work within the CSO sector across these four countries, this study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of labor dynamics and inform strategies for promoting decent work and worker well-being.

# Chapter 3:

## Country Literature Review

In this chapter, we explore the enabling environments in the countries under study: Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan, and Tunisia. Previous sections have highlighted similarities among Arab countries facing restrictions on civic space. It is important to highlight that the MENA region scored the highest levels of repression compared to Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas, with a score of the lowest in CSO participation in government decision-making<sup>77</sup>. However, each country has its unique challenges that impact the internal dynamics of its civil society ecosystem. As mentioned earlier, the enabling environment encompasses conditions that either facilitate or hinder the operations of civil society, particularly those addressing critical issues related to human rights, gender equality, and human development.

Therefore, this chapter will examine the currently available secondary literature on each country based on parameters such as legal regulations (on freedom of association, expression, and assembly), organizational and governance conditions, access to funding, political landscape, and cultural factors promoting civic engagement.

### Lebanon

Civil society in Lebanon is relatively large compared to other Arab countries and the number of non-profit organizations increased as public institutions withdrew from their responsibilities, creating a void that civil society organizations are filling<sup>78</sup>. According to the Ministry of Interior, there are an estimated 11,676 registered associations in Lebanon<sup>79</sup>.

### Legal Framework

CSOs in Lebanon are governed by the 1325/1909 Ottoman Law on Associations and its 2006 amendments<sup>80</sup>, which have been in force for more than 100 years. Even though this law is considered liberal, “it notably diverges from the French Law on Associations—from which it is derived—by requiring that newly formed associations notify the government immediately after they are created”<sup>81</sup>. The law is considered to be outdated because it still references institutions in the Ottoman Empire era, which no longer exist. Yet, it remains one of the best practices in the Arab region considering that the Lebanese government follows a “laissez-faire” approach by enforcing the law with the exclusion of some provisions<sup>82</sup>. However, not all types of non-profit associations are regulated under this law. Other associations such as sports, youth clubs, unions, and cooperatives are governed by different special laws and require a special permit from relevant government entities<sup>83</sup>. The right to assembly is governed by a series of laws and decrees, including the Public Assemblies Law of 1911, Decree 4082 of 200 (issued by the Ministry of Interior), and the Penal Code. Prior notification is mandatory for organizing any assembly. Authorities reserve the right to prohibit assemblies if they are deemed to pose threats to security, public order, morality, or

77 Saliba, I. (2023). (issue brief). *Shrinking Spaces in the Middle East and North Africa: Supporting Civil Society Resilience*. German Institute for Sustainability and Development (IDOS).

78 Arab NGO Network for Development. (2016a). (rep.). *Enabling Environment for Civil Society in the Arab Region* (pp. 8–92). Beirut: Arab NGO Network for Development.

79 ICNL. (2024, January 12). Lebanon.

80 Emam, E., Gouhar, O., Abdel Rahman, S., & Samea Abdualh, A. (2019). (rep.). *Closing civic and political spaces: Exploring opportunities for CSOs in the MENA region to advocate for claiming spaces* (pp. 7–106). *Innovation for Change*.

81 ICNL. (2024, January 12). Lebanon.

82 Haddad, T. (2023) *Governance of the nonprofit sector in Lebanon between theory and practice*, *Journal of Civil Society*, 19:3, 330–345, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2023.2239383>

83 *Ibid.*

interests<sup>84</sup>. Additionally, in the wake of declining public services and institutions, particularly since October 2019, a significant rise in unregistered organizations and collectives has been observed. One contributing factor to this surge is the fragile, complicated, and clientelist bureaucracy in registering organizations with the relevant ministry<sup>85</sup>.

Recently, Lebanon has experienced many challenges since 2019: an ongoing economic crisis due to decades of weak public financial management and corruption, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Beirut Port Explosion in August 2020. None of these have been adequately addressed by the relevant authorities yet.

## Access to Resources

In terms of access to financing, civil society organizations (CSOs) face a mixed landscape regarding access to financial resources. While the legal framework does not explicitly limit their capacity to access funds, bureaucratic hurdles and corruption can impede their ability to secure funding from various sources<sup>86</sup>. Self-funding through donations and membership fees provides limited resources, while governmental funding, primarily allocated for welfare and charity associations, is often insufficient for human rights and developmental organizations. External funding from international donors is a significant source but comes with challenges, including donor agendas and redirection of funds to support specific causes like the relief of Syrian refugees. CSOs also encounter procedural difficulties in managing bank accounts due to complex regulations aimed at combating money laundering and terrorism financing, creating obstacles for new and existing organizations in opening accounts and conducting transactions transparently.

Another problem that exists in the ecosystem is the decreased collaboration among CSOs that often leads to deterioration in the sector's infrastructure and in numerous instances, this limited collaboration fosters competitive dynamics among CSOs, resulting in resource waste and duplicated efforts. As a consequence, the effectiveness of activities is curtailed, and opportunities for accumulating valuable experiences are constrained<sup>87</sup>.

## Organizational Capacity and Sustainability

The persisting social, political, and economic crises in Lebanon prompted both CSOs and donors to prioritize humanitarian assistance and relief efforts. Consequently, CSOs diverted their attention away from building their constituencies, instead focusing on urgent community needs and adhering to funding priorities. However, this shift led to challenges in coordinating with other CSOs, resulting in some communities being underserved and lack of internal sustainability, lacking clear long-term plans, and creating inadequate work conditions. Disparities in organizational capacities, particularly in internal governance structures, became evident, with larger organizations typically possessing well-defined structures and active governance boards, while smaller ones struggle due to limited resources and capacity<sup>88</sup>.

The overall sustainability of Lebanon's civil society organizations (CSOs) experienced a slight decline between 2019 and 2021. Shrinking civic space contributed to a worsening legal environment, while smear campaigns negatively impacted CSOs' public perception. Advocacy initiatives suffered due to a slowdown in policymaking and a shift in focus

84 Emam, E., Gouhar, O., Abdel Rahman, S., & Samea Abdualh, A. (2019). (rep.). *Closing civic and political spaces: Exploring opportunities for CSOs in the MENA region to advocate for claiming spaces* (pp. 7–106). *Innovation for Change*.

85 AbiYaghi, M. N. (2016). *The basic guidebook for emerging collectives, cooperatives and NGOs in Lebanon*. Al Daleel Madani.

86 Arab NGO Network for Development. (2016a). (rep.). *Enabling Environment for Civil Society in the Arab Region* (pp. 8–92). Beirut: Arab NGO Network for Development.

87 Abou Assi, K. (2006b). (rep.). *LEBANESE CIVIL SOCIETY: A LONG HISTORY OF ACHIEVEMENTS FACING DECISIVE CHALLENGES AHEAD OF AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE* (pp. 4–176). *CIVICUS CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX*.

88 FHI360, & ICNL. (2022). (publication). *2021 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA*. FHI360.

toward addressing basic needs and ensuring service provision for communities rather than advocacy work<sup>89</sup>.

During several movements led by the public and civil society (such as the You Stink movement in 2015 or the October 2019 demonstrations), the more the protests emphasized government deficiencies, the heavier the crackdown was imposed by security bodies. Other forms of shrinking civic space included activists facing arbitrary detentions and protests advocating for a unified identity were countered by elite narratives emphasizing sectarian divisions and criminalizing demonstrators. Rather than introducing formal restrictions, authorities relied on the arbitrary enforcement of existing laws, leading to the prosecution of several protesters for “rioting” during the garbage demonstrations under the pretext of violating the “regular and normal course of public interests” as stipulated by the Lebanese Public Assemblies Law<sup>90</sup>. Groups among the feminist movement and organizations working on gender equality regularly emphasize the narrowing civic space, which persistently poses severe threats to refugees, LGBTQ individuals, migrants, and activists<sup>91</sup>.

## Emergence of Precarious Work in the Sector

Despite these pitfalls, civil society demonstrated remarkable resilience, mitigating the implications of the different crises. However, this resilience did not prevent precarious work practices from occurring within the sector.

For example, according to the Lebanese Labor Law of 1947 and the National Social Security Law of 1963, all employers must register their employees in the National Social Security Fund (NSSF)<sup>92</sup>. Hence, all local CSOs operating or represented on Lebanese territories must provide their employees with social security by registering the employee within 15 days after their first day in the NSSF. The employee’s subscription is the NGO’s responsibility, and the coverage should include a health plan, family allowance, and end-of-service indemnity<sup>93</sup>. Discrepancies in work packages and access to benefits in the sector exist due to power dynamics, work approaches, and availability of resources<sup>94</sup>. Other work states that “some NGOs prefer contracting staff on a project-by-project basis to avoid paying the required social security allowances. For example, out of 373 respondents, 49 percent were formally registered with the NSSF; yet only 65.7 percent of those received access to the fund through the employer; while consultants, volunteers, and informal workers were excluded. Many expressed concern that CSOs only register a small number of employees, which creates inequity among workers in the same organization<sup>95</sup>.”

Unstable employment relationships and informality also characterize the sector, especially due to the strong reliance on the availability of projects and funding. It is argued that even full-time contracts advertised are unstable and insecure. In addition to short-term employment, there exists a reliance on a significant number of volunteers and interns working as full-timers. Even though such opportunities have the training and job preparation as a purpose for fresh graduates and young individuals, they have become “a form of hidden labor”<sup>96</sup>.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Vértés, S., van der Borgh, C., & Buyse, A. (2021). *Negotiating civic space in Lebanon: The potential of non-sectarian movements*. *Journal of Civil Society*, 17(3–4), 256–276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2021.1994202>

<sup>91</sup> *Plan International*. (2020). (rep.). *Assessing Civil Society, Gender Politics, and Youth Movements in Lebanon* (pp. 1–9). *Plan International*.

<sup>92</sup> ILO. *Lebanese Labour Law*.

<sup>93</sup> Kanaan, N., Mukhayber, C., & Farah, S. (2006). *Internal governance for NGOs in Lebanon*. UNDP.

<sup>94</sup> AbiYaghi, M.-N., & Yammine, L. (2021, February 19). *Understanding the social protection needs of civil society workers in Lebanon*. *Civil Society Knowledge Centre*.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

Finally, it is also contended that representation, collective action, and inclusion among civil society organizations are not generally practiced. Many participants in the Civil Society Center study noted limited solidarity and collective decision-making among employees in the sector. Instances of preferential treatment and privileged relationships within organizations were observed, often attributed to factors such as friendship, kinship, or religion. Moreover, a lack of awareness of workers' rights, power imbalances, and the inability to negotiate with upper management, either collectively or individually, were commonly reported. Another form of exclusion is normalizing the lack of knowledge of workers' rights, emphasizing power dynamics, and the inability to negotiate with upper management –either collectively or individually.

## Tunisia

During the Presidency of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, before 2011, the creation of civil society organizations required a request for authorization from the government under Law 154 of 1959 (no longer in force) subject to approval by the Ministry of Interior. Such limitation made CSOs very few, barely reaching eight in number. During this period, the state closely monitored civil society organizations, often infiltrating and pressuring them to conform to the state's "unifying" narrative<sup>97</sup>.

### Legal Regulatory Framework

Following the shift in the regime in 2011, a new Decree Law 2011-88 (DL-88) was established on freedom of association, which codifies a significant overhaul of the previous legal framework and allows organizations to formally declare their existence. This implied that as long as their statutes avoid advocating "incitement for violence, hatred, fanaticism, or discrimination on religious, racial, or regional grounds," the state should recognize and uphold the organizations' autonomy<sup>98</sup>.

This legislation mandates that organizations submit a notification containing comprehensive details for registration, which is published in the Gazette and forwarded to the Prime Minister's office in Tunisia, somewhat centralizing the registration process. A response is expected within 30 days, and if no response is received, the association is deemed legally registered as of the date of the notification letter<sup>99</sup>.

Tunisia's Constitution guarantees freedom to establish political parties, trade unions, and associations, requiring upholding law, financial transparency, and violence-rejecting policies. Articles 1 through 49 ensure democratic associative action governed by organic laws. The right to freedom of association cannot be restricted without majority consent, unlike regular laws, which can be adopted with a one-third vote<sup>100</sup>.

Following the restriction of civic space, Decree 88 saw violations as CSOs were compelled to register in the National Register of Institutions, which encompasses civil society organizations as well as public and private enterprises, aiming to combat money laundering and terrorism financing. This entity retains the authority to approve or reject registrations without legal justification, and failure to register may result in imprisonment penalties and prison sentences for the CSO<sup>101</sup>. Additionally, in 2021, CSOs encountered ongoing challenges with the registration process, mainly stemming from bureaucratic hurdles and delays. Before registration, the General Direction of Associations, operating under the Presidency of the

97 Henneberg, S. (2023, January 23). *Civil society in Tunisia: Resetting expectations*. The Washington Institute.

98 *Ibid.*

99 Emam, E., Gouhar, O., Abdel Rahman, S., & Samea Abdualh, A. (2019). (rep.). *Closing civic and political spaces: Exploring opportunities for CSOs in the MENA region to advocate for claiming spaces* (pp. 7–106). *Innovation for Change*.

100 Mansri, P. A. (2016, September). *Enabling Environment National Assessment of Civil Society in Tunisia*. *Civicus*.

101 ICNL. (2024, March 7). *Tunisia*.

Government, must provide its assessment of the organization's constitution. Instances have been reported where registration was denied due to non-Arabic organization names, while in other cases, organizations were requested to alter their stated objectives. Critics contend that this process gives the government excessive power to curb freedom of association<sup>102</sup>.

The freedom of expression right was achieved through the revolution and has been enshrined in the Constitution (Article 31 of 2014 Constitution). However, existing laws that contradict constitutional provisions remain in effect. Additionally, concerns have arisen regarding threats to free speech in the context of counterterrorism efforts. While guaranteed by the Constitution without limitations, the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly requires regulatory frameworks. Despite its constitutionalization, there has been a lack of legislation regulating this freedom in line with international norms. Instead, outdated laws from 1969 are utilized, which violate the right to peaceful assembly. Urgent reforms are needed to repeal these laws and establish new legislation consistent with constitutional principles<sup>103</sup>.

These protections are currently at risk after ten Tunisian parliamentarians submitted a new law on associations in October 2023 to replace Decree-law 2011-88. If adopted, ***“the draft law would grant the government pervasive control and oversight over the establishment, activities, operations, and funding of independent groups, which are one of the last remaining counterweights to President Kais Saied’s autocratic rule,”*** states the Avocats Sans Frontieres press release<sup>104</sup>.

## Access to Resources

Shrinking of civic space also translates into financial constraints, whether at the level of funding or the level of financial institutions (e.g. banks).

CSOs in Tunisia face challenges accessing government public funding due to a complex and opaque allocation process, which particularly disadvantages smaller organizations. Well-connected or informed CSOs tend to have a higher chance of securing government funding. Even when awarded, public funding often falls short of covering project expenses, necessitating additional fundraising efforts. Foreign aid programs remain a significant source of funding, with a slight increase in opportunities observed in 2021<sup>105</sup>. However, this source of funding was also at risk when President Saied announced his intention to “prevent foreign funding to associations”<sup>106</sup>.

The Tunisian legislative framework grants associations considerable freedom in choosing their funders<sup>107</sup>. External financing constraints have been lifted, allowing associations to receive grants from various sources, including countries with diplomatic relations with Tunisia and organizations aligned with their interests. However, concerns about suspicious foreign funding, especially from the Gulf States and Europe, have emerged, with suspicions of illegal financing linked to terrorism, partisan activities, and electoral manipulation.

There are calls to revise Decree No. 88 to address gaps in regulating associations and enhance control mechanisms over funding sources and expenditures, particularly concerning transparency and disclosure. Non-profit associations, based on volunteerism, do not require minimum capital formation. The new Decree-Law on associations shields founders from financial obligations and mandates associations to publish data on foreign

102 EuroMed Rights. (2018, August 1). Draft law no. 30/2018 calling for the creation of a National Register of Institutions, which threatens the freedom of associations in Tunisia. EuroMed Rights.

103 Mansri, P. A. (2016, September). Enabling Environment National Assessment of Civil Society in Tunisia. Civicus.

104 Avocats sans Frontieres. (2023, November 7). Tunisia: Reject Bill Dismantling Civil Society Arbitrary restrictions and excessive government control. Avocats sans frontieres.

105 FHI360, & ICNL. (2022). (publication). 2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index: For The Middle East And North Africa. FHI360.

106 Avocats sans Frontieres. (2023, November 7). Tunisia: Reject Bill Dismantling Civil Society Arbitrary restrictions and excessive government control. Avocats sans frontieres.

107 Decree 2011-88 specifies four types of financial resources accessible to associations: membership fees; public funding; donations and legacies from Tunisian or foreign sources; and income from property, activities, and projects.

aid, gifts, and donations within one month of solicitation or receipt, promoting transparency in their work, especially regarding foreign funding<sup>108</sup>. However, some associations have failed to submit financial reports, leading to controversies and stricter control mechanisms by government entities like the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank of Tunisia<sup>109</sup>.

CSOs also face ongoing challenges in opening bank accounts, a process known for its time-consuming nature. In past years, government directives instructed banks to refrain from opening accounts for CSOs due to concerns over the potential facilitation of money laundering<sup>110</sup>.

## Shrinking Civic Space

In 2021, the government demonstrated a hostile stance towards CSOs, particularly activists and organizations advocating for gender and sexual minorities and migrants. An instance highlighted in a Human Rights Watch report from late February 2021 revealed targeted harassment by police towards activists supporting the LGBTQ+ community during public demonstrations, including homophobic chants, threats of violence, physical abuse, and arbitrary detention. Additionally, several associations faced dissolution through court decisions, a process lacking transparency and explanation<sup>111</sup>. In addition, feminist activists and organizations are subject to online and offline harassment and smear campaigns: some were even accused of dismantling religious norms “in the service of a foreign agenda”<sup>112</sup>.

As the country experiences increasing polarization and shrinking of civic space, a division among CSOs exists along political and ideological lines. Many organizations are found to have ties with major political parties, exacerbating mistrust among the public. The credibility and perception of Tunisian NGOs are further impacted by the activities of certain associations. Following the 2011 revolution and the surge in the creation of associations, a significant portion of organizations failed to adhere to their stated objectives<sup>113</sup>. In addition, internal conflicts and divisions within the feminist movement persist, a problem similar to that in Lebanon. Divisions within the women’s movement hinder efforts to combat radicalization and result in competition for resources. This fragmentation undermines the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at preventing extremism<sup>114</sup>.

## Organizational Capacity and Sustainability

The organizational capacity and strategic planning of civil society organizations in Tunisia remain largely tied to their size and access to donor support. However, despite these resources, CSOs continued to grapple with internal management challenges, often lacking the necessary training and resources to enhance their governance and leadership structures. This struggle was compounded by difficulties in retaining trained and competent staff, with many young professionals opting to leave small CSOs in favor of positions offering better salaries and job security, such as those in public service or larger organizations. Consequently, the sector witnessed the emergence of precarious working conditions, further exacerbating the challenges faced by CSOs in fulfilling their missions<sup>115</sup>.

108 Mansri, P. A. (2016, September). *Enabling Environment National Assessment of Civil Society in Tunisia*. *Civicus*.

109 Arab NGO Network for Development. (2016a). (rep.). *Enabling Environment for Civil Society in the Arab Region* (pp. 8–92). Beirut: Arab NGO Network for Development.

110 FHI360, & ICNL. (2022). (publication). *2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index: For The Middle East And North Africa*. FHI360.

111 *Ibid.*

112 Ben Said, I. (2023). *Women and democracy under threat in Tunisia - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

113 Arab, E. B. (2023, October 4). In *Tunisia, civil society is back in the Trenches*. ISPI.

114 Youssef, M., & Mighri, H. (2019). *Women's groups take on radicalization in Tunisia - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

115 FHI360, & ICNL. (2022). (publication). *2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index: For The Middle East And North Africa*. FHI360.

## Jordan

Jordan's legal framework heavily restricts civil society organizations through stringent registration, funding, and operational requirements, undermining the principle of freedom of association. These constraints, coupled with financial struggles, limited government engagement, and public skepticism, have weakened CSO sustainability, transparency, and influence, particularly for smaller organizations and those working on human rights and gender issues.

### Legal Regulatory Framework

Under Article 16(ii), Jordanians have “the right to establish societies and political parties provided that their objectives are lawful, their methods peaceful, and that they have by-laws that are not contrary to the provisions of the Constitution<sup>116</sup>.” However, the Jordanian government has many restrictions on NGOs with the seeming objective to have control over CSOs, which contradicts international law's principle of freedom of association<sup>117</sup>.

For example, CSOs are obligated to seek government approval before establishing associations and trade unions, unlike non-profit companies. According to Article 11 of the Societies Law (law 51 of 2008, amended to Law 22 of 2009)<sup>118</sup>, obtaining prior authorization for associations is mandatory, contravening Article 22 of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Similarly, Article 98 of the Labour Law mandates prior authorization for trade unions, which also infringes upon Article 22 of the ICCPR and Article 2 of the ILO Convention on the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize<sup>119</sup>.

Many more repressive laws have been proposed since 2004. For example, any association or organization that did not obtain its license from the Ministry of Social Development is considered illegal. The process of obtaining a license could at any time be modified without any constraints or formal approval needed. It could also take up to 3 months and the relevant Ministry can at any time halt the process to obtain more information about the organization. It is argued that many NGOs are hesitant to communicate to the press or other organizations their struggles to avoid risking negative consequences they might face from the government such as intimidation and involvement<sup>120</sup>.

Despite the amendment to the Public Gatherings Law (Law 7 of 2004) in March 2011, Jordan did not mandate government permission for organizing public meetings or demonstrations. However, authorities persisted in demanding that organizations and venues seek approval from the Interior Ministry or General Intelligence Department to host events<sup>121</sup>. Failure to notify the government may result in penalties such as imprisonment and fines. Nevertheless, various laws exist to curtail freedom of expression. These include Penal Code articles that criminalize defamation and the disparagement of the government, as well as amendments to the Press and Publications Law in 2012. These amendments mandate the registration of websites with the government and hold website owners liable for their content<sup>122</sup>.

116 Human Rights Watch. (2007, December). *Right to Association. Shutting Out the Critics: Restrictive Laws Used to Repress Civil Society in Jordan: Right to Association*.

117 According to international law, restrictions have to be “necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

118 In 2008, the Law on Societies (Law 51 of 2008) was enacted; although an improvement, the new law was criticized for not going far enough to remove restrictions on civic space in Jordan. As a partial response to these criticisms, the 2008 Law on Societies

119 Awad, A. M., & Sarayra, R. (2016). (rep.). *Enabling Environment National Assessment Country report: Jordan (pp. 4-52)*. Amman: CIVICUS.

120 Human Rights Watch. (2007, December). *Right to Association. Shutting Out the Critics: Restrictive Laws Used to Repress Civil Society in Jordan: Right to Association*.

121 Human Rights Watch. (2023, January 20). *World Report 2023: Rights trends in Jordan*.

122 Emam, E., Gouhar, O., Abdel Rahman, S., & Samea Abduallh, A. (2019). (rep.). *Closing civic and political spaces: Exploring opportunities for CSOs in the MENA region to advocate for claiming spaces (pp. 7-106)*. Innovation for Change.

## Access to Resources

In 2021, the financial viability of the Civil Society Organization (CSO) sector showed little improvement, with foreign funding remaining scarce compared to pre-COVID-19 levels and local funding experiencing a downturn due to the pandemic's impact on both private and public sectors. This scarcity forced CSOs into a challenging position, struggling to diversify funding sources and often resorting to mergers, suspensions of projects, or even closures. Particularly affected were projects aiding refugees, compounding the strain on resources. Larger organizations and Registered Non-Governmental Organizations (RNGOs) dominated the limited local support available, leaving smaller organizations and charities fighting for partnerships to secure funding. Concurrently, foreign funding requests faced restrictions, with only 192 approved in 2021, leading to significant delays in their interventions or achieving their activities, especially for CSOs engaged in human rights and gender-based violence initiatives. These financial hurdles not only jeopardized the sustainability of CSOs but also impacted job opportunities within the sector, further exacerbating the challenges faced by both organizations and their employees<sup>123</sup>. It was also noted that Jordanian authorities enforce strict pre-approval rules for CSOs receiving foreign funding. Despite the establishment of a centralized committee in late 2019 under the Prime Minister's Office to review funding requests, little progress has been made in easing these restrictions<sup>124</sup>.

## Organizational Capacity and Sustainability

In Jordan, state-civil society relations were described as “a relationship of control” due to the absence of clear public policies regulating participatory engagement. Moreover, the government fails to acknowledge and trust the partnership role of civil society, resulting in a lack of regular engagement between the two sectors. While there has been a slight increase in dialogue recently, there remains skepticism within civil society regarding the quality of this engagement. The effectiveness of these relations heavily relies on personal connections between government representatives and civil society actors<sup>125</sup>. Otherwise, leaders of CSOs and human rights activists face surveillance risks<sup>126</sup>. In a nutshell, where public policy-making processes lack standardization, NGOs continue to face challenges in identifying avenues to influence policies across various levels of governance<sup>127</sup>.

The above has affected the public image and the credibility of the sector. In fact, few CSOs received public support in 2020, with suspicions persisting among some members of the public and government about their use of foreign funding and agendas. The increase in CSOs addressing the Syrian refugee crisis exacerbated these concerns. While rural communities maintain positive relationships with organizations, urban areas lack familiarity with CSOs. Government agencies prioritize relationships with large CSOs and RNGOs, sidelining community-based organizations and small charities focused on women and youth. Despite most CSOs publishing annual reports, proactive dissemination of their work is limited, which has raised in some instances concerns about the accountability and transparency of the organization<sup>128</sup>.

123 FHI360, & ICNL. (2022). (publication). *2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index: For The Middle East And North Africa*. FHI360.

124 Human Rights Watch. (2023, January 20). *World Report 2023: Rights trends in Jordan*.

125 Awad, A. M., & Sarayra, R. (2016). (rep.). *Enabling Environment National Assessment Country report: Jordan* (pp. 4–52). Amman: CIVICUS.

126 Phenix Center for Economics & Informatics Studies. (2023). (rep.). *Civic Space Monitor: National Reports on Civic Space 2023* (pp. 4–10). Amman: Phenix Center for Economics & Informatics Studies.

127 Emam, E., Gouhar, O., Abdel Rahman, S., & Samea Abdualh, A. (2019). (rep.). *Closing civic and political spaces: Exploring opportunities for CSOs in the MENA region to advocate for claiming spaces* (pp. 7–106). *Innovation for Change*.

128 FHI360, & ICNL. (2022). (publication). *2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index: For The Middle East And North Africa*. FHI360.

At the level of internal organizational governance, there exists a significant disparity among organizations in Jordan regarding their ability to define roles, responsibilities, and job titles. Many CSOs, especially those focused on charitable purposes, are often family-run and struggle to engage youth in their administration. These organizations frequently lack institutional capacity and clear legal structures in their bylaws. Additionally, most CSOs, including larger ones, lack internal policies to address issues like preventing violence and harassment in the workplace. The COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020 also halted operations for many CSOs, leading to project suspensions and funding cuts that persisted into 2021. Consequently, some organizations were forced to lay off employees and merge branches. While Defense Order No. 6, passed in April 2020, protected workers from dismissal during the pandemic, pressure from international NGOs and foreign ambassadors in 2021 led to exemptions, allowing some organizations to dismiss local staff, further straining the already fragile economy<sup>129</sup>.

## Morocco

Any organization has the legal right to apply to register itself as a “utilité publique” (translated as public utility). The procedure involves the organization disclosing important information such as its name, type, management, and assets<sup>130</sup>.

### Legal Regulatory Framework

“Associations and foundations are regulated by the Dahir (royal decree) on the Right to establish Associations (No. 1-58-376 of 1958) and by the Application Decree (No. 2-04-969 of 2005) on the Implementation of Decree No. 1-58-376 governing the formation of CSOs. Cooperatives are governed by Law No. 112-12, while the Dahir of July 16, 1957, governs professional unions. The Ministry of Interior oversees all CSOs”<sup>131</sup>.

These organizations are required to adopt a format that encourages participation and democracy, contribute to public policies in various ways, and create occasions where other social actors can contribute to public policies. These requirements are listed in the fifth article of the Moroccan constitution<sup>132</sup> and apply at the national level. In addition, CSOs must maintain transparency, abide by the laws of society, and remain impartial, according to Regulatory Law No. 111-14, Article 243<sup>133</sup>. After meeting the criteria and receiving approval, the applicants will receive a receipt that will allow them to begin their operations<sup>134</sup>. By registering, the organization is no longer required to pay taxes on its revenue and can begin fundraising to cover operational costs.

Although the registration process may seem simple, it is believed that the government may attempt to maintain its authority by disallowing any organization that conflicts with the agenda of the government<sup>135</sup>. In many cases, even if the organization meets all the requirements, the government could refuse to issue a provisional license<sup>136</sup>. Authorities often conduct police investigations of associations during the initial stages of their registration process to see if its purpose is unlawful, contrary to the law or morality, or if it aims to

129 FHI360, & ICNL. (2022). (publication). 2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index: For The Middle East And North Africa. FHI360.

130 Naciri, R. (2009). *Civil society organizations in North Africa: Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia*. Trust Africa, African Giving Knowledge Base.

131 FHI360, & ICNL. (2022). (publication). 2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index: For The Middle East And North Africa. FHI360.

132 ICNL. (2017). *Guidelines on government and CSO cooperation in Morocco* - ICNL. The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law.

133 Ibid.

134 A. Ghazali, *Legal and Practical Guide of Moroccan Associations*, F Ebert, 1996, (French).

135 Wuerth, O. (2005). *The reform of the Moudawana: The role of women's civil society organizations in changing the Personal Status Code in Morocco*. *Hawwa*, 3(3), 309–333. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156920805774910042>

136 Naciri, R. (2009). *Civil society organizations in North Africa: Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia*. Trust Africa, African Giving Knowledge Base.

undermine the Islamic religion, the integrity of the national territory, the monarchical regime, or promotes discrimination. In particular, associations focusing on advocacy and human rights faced challenges with registration. The Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH), the country's largest human rights group, which was particularly targeted by state authorities, who actively hindered its operations. According to AMDH, as of September 15, 2021, authorities had denied approval for eighty-four out of its ninety-nine local branches, affecting essential functions such as opening bank accounts or renting facilities<sup>137</sup>.

## Shrinking Civic Space

Throughout 2021, CSOs and activists faced increasing harassment from state authorities, particularly those advocating for human rights. According to AMDH, there were 170 instances of imprisonment or government lawsuits targeting journalists, bloggers, and social activists during the year. The crackdown on civic space further worsened with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 restrictions continued to impact freedom of assembly in 2021, with numerous sit-ins and marches, totaling approximately 140 demonstrations according to AMDH, being prohibited throughout the year<sup>138</sup>.

In recent years, feminist civil society organizations in Morocco have faced a notable crackdown, characterized by legal restrictions such as bureaucratic hurdles for registration and denial of permits for events, alongside harassment, intimidation, and surveillance by state security forces and conservative groups. Censorship of media outlets and online content produced by feminist organizations, as well as marginalization from government decision-making processes, further hinder their advocacy efforts. Additionally, feminist activists and leaders may face legal prosecution or arbitrary detention as a means of silencing dissent<sup>139</sup>.

## Access to Resources

Dahir No. 1-58-376 outlines the sources of income available to civil society organizations (CSOs), which include public subsidies, membership fees, annual contributions from members, and assistance from the private sector or foreign donors. It mandates that any funds received from foreign sources must be declared to the General Secretariat of the Government (GSG) within thirty days. Failure to comply with this requirement could result in the dissolution of the CSO. The Dahir also allows CSOs to apply for public benefit status, which enables them to receive tax benefits and potentially qualify for government funding.

However, the application process is complex and necessitates the submission of various certified documents. Authorities typically exercise discretion when granting this status, leading to only a few CSOs, often those with political connections, successfully obtaining it. According to a list published by the GSG in March 2022, 236 associations (including five foreign ones) have public benefit status. However, only three CSOs were granted this status in 2021, representing a marginal increase from the previous year's figure of two<sup>140</sup>.

Most CSOs rely primarily on state funding (with the National Initiative for Human Development being the primary funding source), with limited diversification of funding sources. The majority of CSOs indicated that they received funding from no more than two sources.

137 FHI360, & ICNL. (2022). (publication). 2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index: For The Middle East And North Africa. FHI360.

138 FHI360, & ICNL. (2022). (publication). 2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index: For The Middle East And North Africa. FHI360.

139 Human Rights Watch. (2024, January 11). World Report 2024: Rights trends in Morocco and Western Sahara.

140 Ministry of Justice. (1958). Dahir n° 1-58-376 du 3 jourmada I 1378 (15 novembre 1958) réglementant le droit d'association. Bulletin Officiel n° : 2404-bis du 27/11/1958 - Page : 1909.

## Organizational Capacity and Sustainability

CSOs in Morocco continue to face challenges in maintaining clear strategic visions and expertise in their fields. Many prioritize donor-funded projects over their strategic plans and may diverge from their original missions to secure funding. Weak internal governance and management, coupled with limited technical skills and resources, hamper their effectiveness. High turnover rates among staff, driven by low salaries and resource constraints, exacerbate these challenges. Although the Finance Act introduced income tax exemptions for first-time workers, its impact remains to be seen. CSOs heavily depend on volunteers, but training needs and the absence of social protections pose additional obstacles. Despite hopes for draft law 18.06 to encourage civic engagement, concerns persist about its slow legislative progress<sup>141</sup>.

Finally, CSOs in Morocco still lack transparency and most of them do not hold general assembly meetings and are not held accountable by their members or the general public. The lack of training, capacity building and awareness on the significance of promoting activities and their mission aggravate this problem<sup>142</sup>.

## Comparisons and Identifying Gaps

The previous section outlined the main challenges that civil society organizations (CSOs) encounter in Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan, and Morocco due to a shrinking civic space. While many trends are common across all these countries, each nation also exhibits its unique challenges.

Despite a relatively liberal legal framework in Lebanon, the volatile political and economic landscape poses significant challenges to CSOs in the MENA region. The shrinking civic space limits their ability to advocate for change and engage in critical dialogue with authorities. This, coupled with bureaucratic hurdles and corruption, hampers the effectiveness of CSOs and undermines their internal governance structures. In such an environment, CSOs struggle to attract and retain skilled staff, leading to high turnover rates and reliance on volunteers. Limited access to diverse funding sources further exacerbates these challenges, forcing organizations to prioritize donor-funded projects over their strategic plans, ultimately impacting their long-term sustainability.

While Tunisia has made strides in legal recognition and autonomy for CSOs post-2011 revolution, ongoing restrictions on foreign funding and government control hinder their ability to operate freely. The crackdown on civic space restricts CSOs' advocacy efforts and public engagement, affecting their internal governance structures and ability to fulfill their missions. Bureaucratic hurdles in the registration process and government interference contribute to a challenging operating environment, impacting job opportunities and organizational sustainability. Limited access to diverse funding sources further strains CSOs, leading to project suspensions, mergers, or closures.

CSOs in Jordan face stringent regulations and government control, severely limiting their ability to operate independently. The restrictive legal framework and prior authorization requirements for establishing CSOs curtail freedom of association and expression, impacting CSOs' internal governance structures and decision-making processes. The closure of civic space further undermines their advocacy efforts and public engagement, perpetuating a cycle of government scrutiny and interference. Financial constraints, exacerbated by limited access to diverse funding sources and government restrictions on foreign funding, pose additional challenges to organizational sustainability and staff retention.

141 FHI360, & ICNL. (2022). (publication). 2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index: For The Middle East And North Africa. FHI360.

142 FHI360, & ICNL. (2022). (publication). 2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index: For The Middle East And North Africa. FHI360.

Despite legal provisions enabling CSO establishment and operation, government scrutiny and interference impede organizational autonomy and sustainability in Morocco. The complex registration process, bureaucratic obstacles, and restrictions on foreign funding limit CSOs' ability to operate freely. The restrictions on civic space constrain their advocacy efforts and public engagement, affecting internal governance structures and decision-making processes. High turnover rates, limited resources, and reliance on volunteers further compound precarious working conditions within the sector, impacting CSOs' ability to survive and fulfill their missions effectively.

The literature on civil society in the four countries under examination reveals significant gaps, particularly concerning the impact of the enabling environment and the consequences of the shrinking civic space on the internal working conditions of civil society workers. Data scarcity has hindered a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics, leaving important aspects unexplored.

One crucial area is the emergence of multidimensional precarious work, characterized by unstable employment relations, insecure income, and inadequate rights and protections, with women and vulnerable groups like persons with disabilities, refugees, migrant workers, and LGBTQI+ persons, often disproportionately affected. Internal safeguarding policies addressing harassment and discrimination, particularly gender-based, as well as issues related to collective action and unionization within civil society organizations, remain poorly mapped.

Thus, there is an urgent need to develop strategies that not only enhance cooperation and collaboration but also prioritize the well-being and rights of civil society workers. Such strategies should aim to foster a supportive and inclusive environment that empowers workers and strengthens their capacity to address internal challenges effectively.

# Chapter 4: Methodology

Given the intricate landscape of civil society in the MENA region, coupled with the scarcity of comprehensive data on the working conditions of non-profit sector workers, this research is a concerted endeavor to highlight the realities of precarious employment in civil society organizations in Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. Through this study, we aim to provide a profound understanding of the myriad challenges faced by civil society workers in these countries and, in turn, propose a strategic roadmap of recommendations to enhance their working environment.

This investigation was spurred by gaps identified in the literature, particularly concerning internal organizational policies. These gaps include issues related to grievance mechanisms, sexual harassment policies, labor law violations, and the representation and inclusion of workers within organizations. By addressing these areas, this research presents a mapping of the prevailing working conditions, informed by input from civil society organizations and experts across the four case studies. The ultimate objective is to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discourse on labor rights in the non-profit sector and to cultivate a more robust and sustainable civil society ecosystem in the MENA region.

## Secondary Data Collection

The secondary data component comprises two vital stages: the literature review and the desk review. These serve as the backbone of the research, providing both theoretical and contextual frameworks.

The literature review is an exhaustive examination of academic publications, research reports, and relevant grey literature. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the existing body of knowledge on working conditions in the non-profit sector across the MENA region. By synthesizing the available data, the review not only consolidates what is known but also pinpoints critical knowledge gaps. These gaps guided the research design, ensuring that the primary data collection addresses underexplored areas. This phase lays a strong scholarly foundation that informs and contextualizes the experiences and narratives of civil society workers.

The desk review complements the literature review by focusing on organizational reports, government documents, and statistical data specific to Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco. This step is crucial for grounding the research within the socio-political and economic environments of each country, thereby allowing for a nuanced understanding of how broader contextual factors influence the working conditions of civil society workers. The desk review bridges the theoretical insights gained from academic research with the lived realities in the field, ensuring that the analysis is both comprehensive and contextually informed.

## Primary Data Collection

The primary data collection consists of interviews, focus group discussions, and anonymous surveys. These methods were chosen to capture both individual experiences and collective perspectives within the non-profit sector.

The interviews are designed to delve deeply into the lived experiences of civil society workers. Participants were carefully selected to represent a broad range of roles and positions within the non-profit sector, ensuring diverse perspectives. The semi-structured format of the interviews allows for the organic flow of narratives, moving beyond surface-level descriptions to uncover the complexities of the working conditions in their respective organizations. These interviews are vital in identifying both the systemic challenges and the innovative strategies that workers employ to navigate these obstacles.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) serve as dynamic spaces where organizational representatives can share and reflect on common experiences. The diversity of participants within each group adds depth to the discussions, illuminating the collective challenges faced by civil society workers. FGDs provide a platform for participants to interact with one another, challenge preconceived notions, and brainstorm potential solutions. This collaborative environment fosters a more holistic understanding of the issues at hand and encourages a collective envisioning of a more supportive and resilient non-profit sector.

Recognizing the challenges encountered during the primary data collection, especially the low response rate in some countries for focus groups and key informant interviews, an additional method was introduced: anonymous surveys. These surveys were distributed across the four countries and garnered 78 responses. This tool proved invaluable in collecting data from a broader pool of respondents who might have been unable to participate in interviews or focus groups. The anonymity of the surveys encouraged more candid responses, shedding light on issues that participants might have hesitated to disclose in other formats. Despite the modest response rate, this method enriched the dataset by providing quantitative insights to complement the qualitative findings from interviews and FGDs.

## Sample

The sample comprises 118 participants distributed across Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan, and Tunisia, reflecting a balanced representation from each country. The largest number of participants is from Lebanon, with 46 individuals contributing their insights, while Morocco saw the lowest participation, with 18 respondents. Tunisia followed closely with 21 participants, and Jordan contributed 31 participants. This distribution ensures a broad spectrum of perspectives, encompassing CSO workers, experts, representatives from the International Labour Organization (ILO), and members of the donor community.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are at the forefront of this research and are treated not as a procedural formality but as a fundamental commitment to the integrity of the study. Obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was an essential step to guarantee that the research adheres to ethical standards, particularly the principle of “do no harm.” The rights, dignity, and safety of participants are paramount. Informed consent was sought from all participants, ensuring that they were fully aware of the research objectives and their right to withdraw at any stage without repercussions. Confidentiality and anonymity are strictly maintained to protect participants from any potential repercussions from employers or others within the sector. These measures, reflective of the values upheld by both the American University of Beirut, underscore the commitment to conducting research that respects and protects its subjects.

## Limitations

Despite the comprehensive aims of this research, certain limitations emerged that require attention.

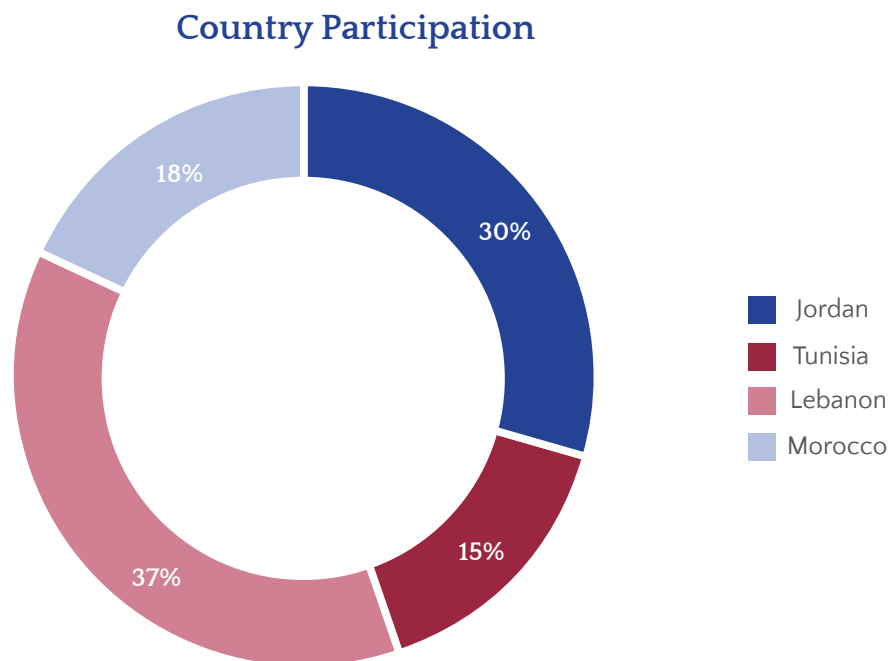
Although the project was conceived as a broad mapping exercise, we were unable to mobilize equal responses from all countries, leading to a significant discrepancy in participation between Lebanon and other contexts, particularly Morocco. The challenges in response rates and show-up consistency in both Tunisia and Morocco are recurrent issues when collecting data in these regions—a pattern that deserves further investigation. This discrepancy raises concerns about the representativeness of the data, particularly for Tunisia and Morocco, where the smaller sample size limits the extent to which findings can be generalized.

As such, there remain significant gaps that could only be addressed through greater future participation. Notably, many individuals who hesitated to participate in interviews or focus group discussions opted instead for the anonymous survey. This shift underscores two important insights: first, the sense of unease or perceived risk associated with openly discussing working conditions in the workplace, and second, the extent to which civic space is increasingly constrained for activists and civil society workers. These factors highlight the complexities of conducting research in such environments and point to the need for safer and more inclusive data collection methods in future studies.

# Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter presents the primary findings from the interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys across the four countries targeted in this research: Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan (**Figure 1**). The graphs presented in this chapter are based on data collected from anonymous surveys disseminated to individuals working in the civil society sector across the four countries. These surveys were designed to capture the experiences and working conditions of CSO workers, providing a broad overview of key trends within the sector. The data represented in the graphs does not include insights from interviews or focus group discussions, which were conducted separately to complement the survey findings.

The chapter is divided thematically into four sections, each including the respective findings from the four countries. The first three sections represent the findings based on the three dimensions of the “multidimensional construct of precarious work” framework that was adopted for this research. These dimensions include (1) Unstable and insecure work relations, (2) inadequate income, and (3) insufficient rights and work protections. In addition to these dimensions, one dimension was added on the enabling environment, highlighting the implications of external factors on civil society workers’ working conditions and tailoring the study under the overarching civic space in the MENA region.



**Figure 1:** Participation of CSOs per country: Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan

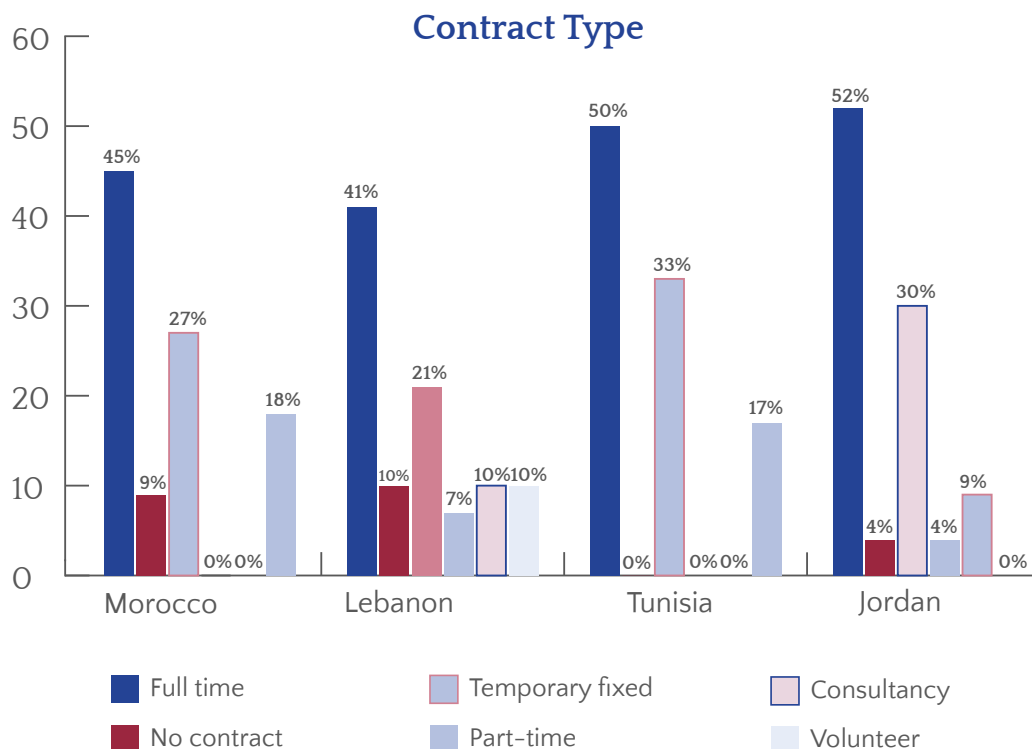
## Dimension 1: Unstable and Insecure Work Relations

The first dimension of the framework addresses the instability and insecurity of work relationships, where employees and workers lack stable contractual ties with their employers. This is evident in the prevalence of insecure contractual agreements, temporary and consultancy contracts, underemployment within organizations, and the necessity for individuals to juggle multiple contracts with different organizations to make ends meet.

### Insecure Contractual Relationship

The most common reason for insecure contractual relationships, mentioned by participants from all four countries, was the dependence on donor funding, which has been in the form of project-based funding rather than core funding.

In Lebanon, the nonprofit sector's reliance on inconsistent and unpredictable donor funding worsens job instability, making it difficult for employees to secure long-term employment (L1). The nature of nonprofit work, which is project-based, results in cyclical periods of employment and unemployment, making financial planning for workers more complex (L1). Organizations rely heavily on external funding, contributing to job insecurity, as staff often work on annual contracts due to the uncertainty of funding. According to the surveys, no less than 20 percent of workers in organizations are temporarily contracted across all countries in the study (Figure 2). This requires employees to continually secure new funding through proposals and bids to maintain their jobs (L8).



**Figure 2:** Distribution of Employment Contract Types Across CSOs in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Jordan

Global crises have also affected the funding landscape; for example, the Syrian crisis initially led to an influx of funding, but recent global events, such as the Ukraine crisis, have diverted resources away from Lebanon (L10). This reduction in funding has significantly impacted the civil society sector, affecting the ability to retain human resources in CSOs (L10). The reliance on grants and short-term funding results in short-term contracts, making it difficult to establish secure employment (L17). Additionally, the lack of core funding for CSOs complicates the stabilization of employee contracts, as project-based salaries further contribute to the complexity and precariousness of the work environment (L15).

Inconsistent and often insufficient funding in Jordan also hinders CSOs' ability to plan long-term and offer secure employment to their staff (J1). This unpredictability makes it difficult for nonprofits to recruit skilled workers, as low pay and job insecurity are significant deterrents. Employees often work on short-term projects with no guarantee of renewal, leading to stress and uncertainty (J1). The dependency on short-term projects and grants further impacts job security and the nature of employment in CSOs (J2). Additionally, CSOs rely heavily on international donors and require government approval for the donor regarding the purpose of spending and activities, which also influences their operations (J5). A large share of the work in civil society organizations is based on volunteering rather than formal employment, resulting in a lack of job security for those working in small CSOs (J4, J6). Despite relying on donor funding, which can be unstable, some organizations have managed to avoid layoffs by reallocating staff between projects and establishing income-generating activities (J4).

In Tunisia, similarly to Lebanon and Jordan, job insecurity in the nonprofit sector is closely tied to dependence on donor funding. Employment is often linked to the duration of specific projects, leading to the risk of job loss when funding is cut, or projects conclude. Fixed-term contracts can be common, particularly for program officers whose employment is tied to project timelines, and while these contracts can sometimes become indefinite after several renewals, this is not guaranteed (T1). As showcased in Figure 3, almost half of the participants in Tunisia and Jordan (33 percent and 39 percent respectively) claimed that their contract was never renewed and half of the participants' contracts in Lebanon and Morocco were never renewed (55 percent). High turnover is frequent, as many positions are tied to short-term projects (T3). Budget constraints further contribute to the reliance on short-term contracts and consultancy roles (T2). The heavy dependence on donors significantly shapes the work environment, with the pressure of maintaining donor relationships adding stress, especially for those responsible for ensuring the salaries of others, often at the expense of their own (T5).

In contrast to the employment patterns observed in the other countries within the study, Morocco presents a slightly different scenario in its civil society sector. Here, volunteer work is particularly prevalent, with researchers often contributing on a voluntary basis and no permanent employees in place (M2). For example, some important donors value this volunteer work at €4 per hour, a rate that may undervalue the true expertise and time invested by these volunteers (M1). Employment within Moroccan civil society organizations tends to be more flexible and adaptable to individual needs, offering a contrast to the more rigid and routine work environments commonly found in private companies (M4).

## Labor Laws

Across the four countries, concerns have been raised about how labor laws fail to adequately support workers employed under temporary, part-time, or project-based contracts.

A factor contributing to insecure contractual relations in Lebanon is not adhering to Lebanese labor law. Employment types within CSOs generally fall into two categories: permanent and program-based, which may be part-time or short-term (L7).

For example, (L5) explains that contracts are frequently renewed at the last minute before their expiration date, creating uncertainty for employees. And despite adherence to the Lebanese National Labor Law, organizations face challenges due to gaps in the law, particularly concerning job security and project-based employment. In other words, considering the labor law is outdated, it is not tailored and amended to include short-term employment (or project-based) and flexible work arrangements. Hence, organizations may not have a solid legal foundation to rely on to address certain workplace or contract-related issues. Moreover, many contracts include clauses that allow termination if funding becomes unavailable, exacerbating job instability (L12). The law also fails to adequately protect workers, especially marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ individuals. The inconsistent application of these laws by CSOs, coupled with outdated regulations and poor enforcement mechanisms, leaves workers vulnerable to exploitation. Moreover, neoliberal policies<sup>143</sup> contribute to unstable contracts, lack of social protection, and deregulation, further exacerbating precarious work conditions (L9, L11, L15-16).

Living conditions for many workers in Lebanon's civil society are poor, largely due to the lack of social protection. The Lebanese labor law covers social protection, working hours, and conditions, but there is a significant gap in coverage for the informal sector, which comprises over 65 percent of the workforce. These workers lack legal protection and decent working conditions, making them particularly vulnerable (L7).

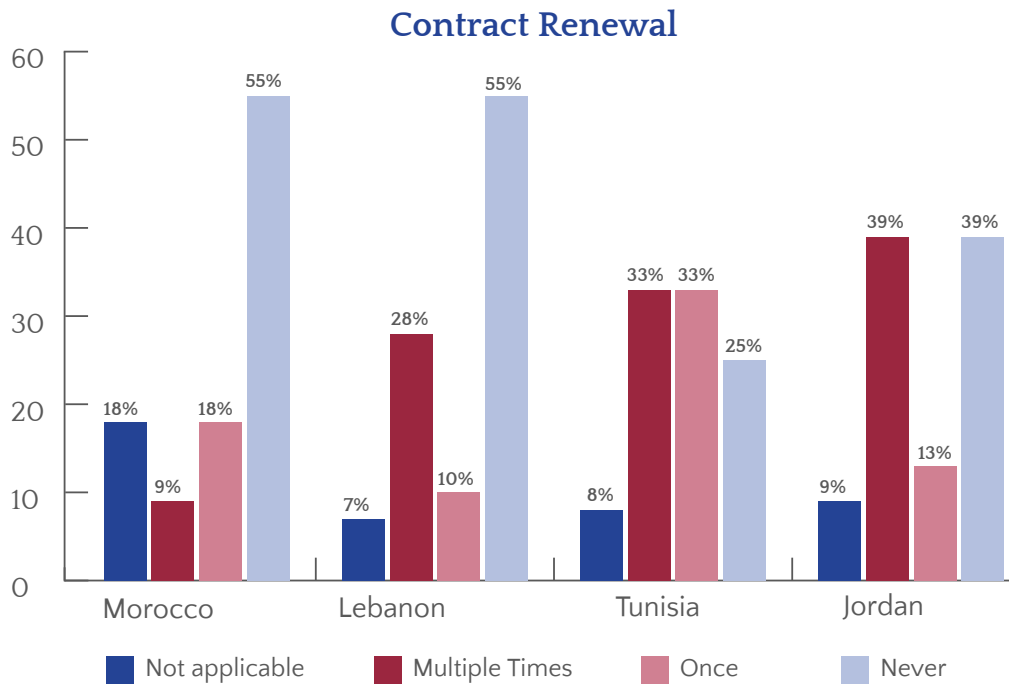
The regulatory framework in Tunisia lacks clarity and specific guidelines, creating challenges for CSOs in managing social security, fiscal matters, and donations (T3). The current legal framework impacts the quality of work conditions and the ability of organizations to address gender-specific needs, although enforcement of labor law, which mandates social security and retirement coverage, is insufficient (T4, T5).

In Jordan, despite the relatively comprehensive labor laws<sup>144</sup>, these laws often fail to align with international best practices, particularly in addressing the nonprofit sector's unique challenges (J5).

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<sup>143</sup> Neoliberal policies, characterized by the promotion of free markets, deregulation, privatization and reduction of government spending and intervention, significantly contribute to the instability of work contracts and the erosion of social protection. These policies fuel the labor liberalization of markets, which prioritize flexibility over job stability.

<sup>144</sup> Jordan Labor Law No. 8 of (1996) and its Amendments



**Figure 3:** Frequency of contract renewal of staff employed on temporary fixed-term contracts in CSOs across Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Jordan

## Temporary Agreements and Consultancy Contracts

What differentiates temporary contracts from insecure contractual relationships is that the former refers explicitly to agreements with a defined, short-term duration, often tied to specific projects or consultancies. In contrast, insecure contractual relationships involve uncertainty due to vague or incomplete contracts that fail to clearly outline work conditions, job expectations, or renewal terms. This uncertainty may also stem from frequent changes in employment terms or the risk of sudden layoffs, leaving workers in a precarious position without the stability provided even by short-term, fixed-duration contracts.

In Lebanese CSOs, reliance on part-time and project-based employment is common, leading to significant job insecurity, as argued by L2. Many workers are tied to specific contracts and projects rather than having permanent employment due to sudden budget cuts and project terminations by donors (L2, L5, L6). Temporary positions are frequently linked to specific projects or funding cycles, making them inherently less stable than permanent roles (L7). This donor dependency drives organizations to focus on achieving specific project outcomes, often at the expense of job security for program-based staff (L7). Even internship contracts are common, offering no long-term job security or stability and driving anxiety for the future (L1, L5, L12).

The increasing reliance on consultancy contracts adds another layer of precariousness. Consultants face instability and lack the same rights as full-time employees (L9). Some organizations treat consultants as long-term collaborators, involving them in strategic discussions, while other organizations –according to participant (L9)–, like the World Bank, employ consultants on a more precarious basis. Unlike permanent employment contracts, consultancy contracts are primarily focused on specific tasks with deliverables (L12). For example, one interviewed organization differentiates between full-time, part-time, and external consultants. Full-time and part-time consultants, often referred to as “in-house experts,” are treated similarly to full-time staff regarding internal rights and benefits but do not have formal labor law protections (L8). Their daily rates vary based on their positions. External consultants are hired based on specific deliverables and focus on output rather than ongoing roles, lacking the rights and stability of permanent employees (L8, L12).

In Jordan, the nonprofit sector is also characterized by a heavy dependence on short-term contracts, part-time work, and freelance arrangements (J1). Many CSOs in the country are project-dependent, resulting in short-term contracts and a lack of stable employment (J2). The sector's dependence on small, project-based initiatives for income generation further undermines the financial stability of workers (J6), leading to high turnover rates, and negatively impacting nonprofit programs' continuity and effectiveness (J1, J2, G1). Moreover, short-term project funding fosters less loyalty among workers, exacerbating the instability (J2).

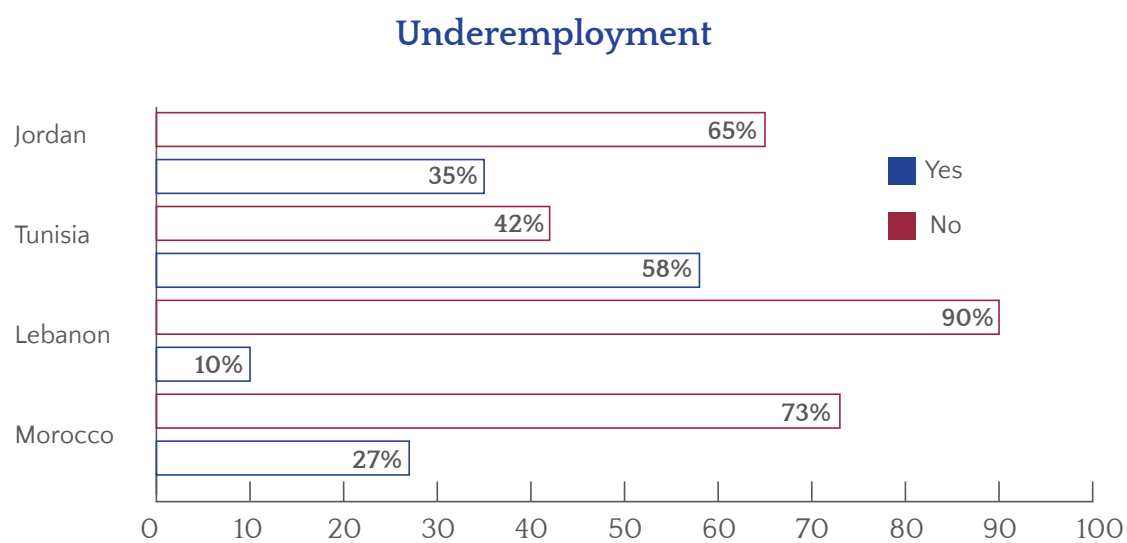
Additionally, CSOs in Jordan sometimes hire refugees for short-term projects (40 to 60 days) under temporary work permits, framed as humanitarian aid. This practice results in inconsistent employment and inadequate wages for the refugees employed (J5).

In Tunisia, administrative roles within organizations are often governed by fixed-period contracts, while program officers are typically hired for the duration of specific projects, such as two-year terms (T1, T6). These fixed-term contracts are frequently renewed, with the possibility of eventually converting to indefinite contracts. However, this practice creates a lack of stability as employees move from one project to another (T1). Employment contracts are generally tied to the lifespan of specific projects, which can range from two to four years. Staff may be hired on full-time contracts for the duration of a project or on contracts for specific services as needed. Organizations often attempt to retain skilled staff for future projects to maintain continuity and capitalize on their experience (T3). Additionally, both fixed-term and open-ended contracts are used alongside service providers or consultants. While consultants do not receive the same benefits as permanent staff, all employees, regardless of contract type, have access to legal support through lawyers, which includes access to legal counsel or advice in cases of work-related issues, such as contract disputes, wrongful termination, harassment, or any other legal matter arising from their employment (T5).

In Morocco's civil society sector, volunteerism, temporary contracts and short-term consultancies are widespread, with few to no permanent employees. This prevalence of temporary arrangements makes it challenging to compare the rights and benefits of workers across different roles (M2). The sector is recognized for its adaptability, which is especially beneficial for women who may need to take breaks between work periods due to family and care responsibilities (M3). However, this flexibility comes with significant challenges, as the precarious nature of civil society work often leads to a lack of job stability and financial security. While these roles can be personally fulfilling and provide valuable social incentives, such as contributing to meaningful causes and building networks, they often do not offer the long-term security or consistent benefits that are typical in more traditional forms of employment. As a result, workers in this sector may face uncertainty about their future, limited career progression opportunities, and inadequate social protections, which can affect their overall well-being and job satisfaction (M3). An additional issue is that employees are often unaware of their rights, are not affiliated with unions or organizations that advocate for private-sector workers, and therefore rarely seek legal recourse. To avoid contracts becoming indefinite, some NGOs choose not to renew them beyond 12 months. Additionally, a growing practice over the past five years involves hiring employees under a "self-employed" status. This arrangement benefits organizations by framing the relationship as a consultancy rather than employment, but it leaves workers without essential protections such as medical coverage, retirement benefits, work injury compensation, and job security.

## Underemployment

In Lebanon, the nonprofit sector faces significant challenges related to underemployment and skill mismatches, exacerbated by the economic collapse in 2019<sup>145</sup>. The economic crisis has led to high overqualification, with many individuals settling for positions below their qualifications out of necessity and limited opportunities (L13). This situation is more common in local CSOs than in international ones, negatively impacting workers' self-worth and mental health (L9, L10, L12). The economic downturn since 2019 has also driven unqualified individuals to apply for CSO positions, sometimes more for financial reasons than for a commitment to the cause itself (L13). In many instances, existing staff often continue working on new projects after a project ends, despite the shifts in job roles and descriptions that may be necessary to meet immediate needs (L2).



**Figure 4:** Rate of underemployment across CSOs in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Jordan

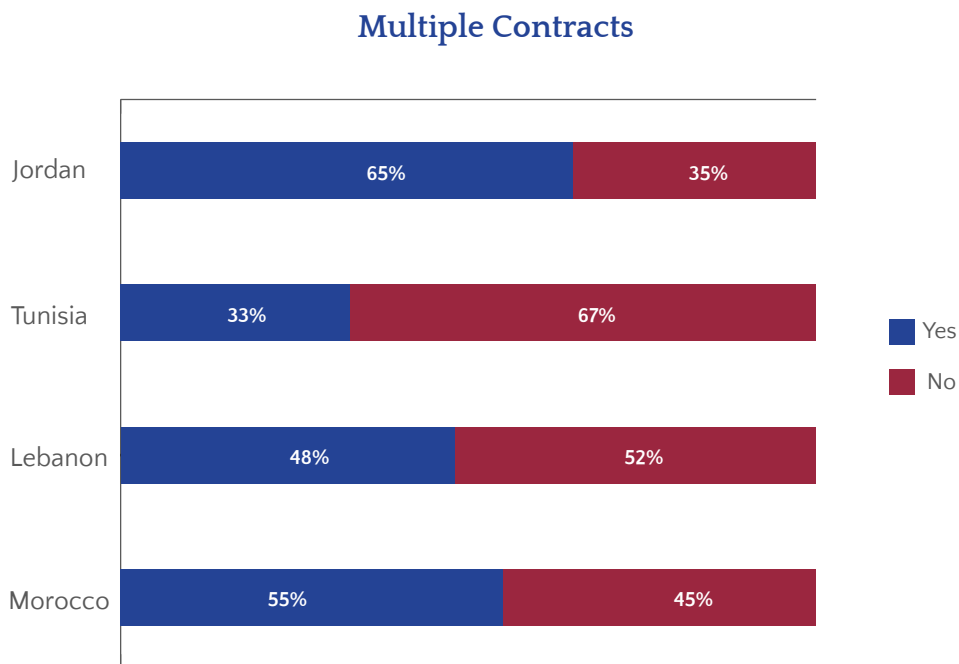
While underemployment has not emerged as a significant issue in Jordan, however, there are instances where overqualified candidates apply for positions. In these cases, an organization, as argued by (J4), explained that it strives to align roles with qualifications and provides growth opportunities as much as possible to avoid skill mismatch.

In Tunisia, many associations strive to retain staff across different projects, but this effort is not always successful (T1). To ensure optimal job performance and satisfaction, qualifications are carefully matched to roles, supported by rigorous internal management processes to avoid mismatches (T3). However, a common issue in the country is the widespread skill mismatch, where many individuals work in jobs that do not align with their studies (T5). For example, in a Tunisian organization, some employees' roles match their educational backgrounds, while others, like the head of communication and artistic projects who is trained as a doctor, work in fields unrelated to their education (T5). This practice was also apparent in surveys where underemployment rises as a common challenge faced by CSO workers in Tunisia, with 58 percent of participants having experienced underemployment in the sector as demonstrated in Figure 4.

<sup>145</sup> Khalife, D., Elia, R., & Yammine, C. (2023). What are the Financial Causes of the Lebanese Economic Crisis and How Can it be Resolved or Avoided in the Future? *Journal of Law and Sustainable Development*, 11(6), e1221. <https://doi.org/10.55908/sdgs.v11i6.1221>

## Multiple Contracts

The experience of workers committing to multiple contracts to make ends meet was a significant challenge observed in both Lebanon and Jordan, reflecting the precarious nature of employment in the nonprofit sector within these countries. In Jordan, various sources of income were necessary for some workers to sustain their livelihoods. Many found themselves in situations where they had to take on multiple jobs simultaneously with more than one employer. This balancing act often involved working in different capacities or roles across various organizations, which could lead to significant strain as individuals tried to manage the demands of each position while maintaining financial stability (J1).



**Figure 5:** Percentage of CSO staff across Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan committing to multiple contracts to make ends meet

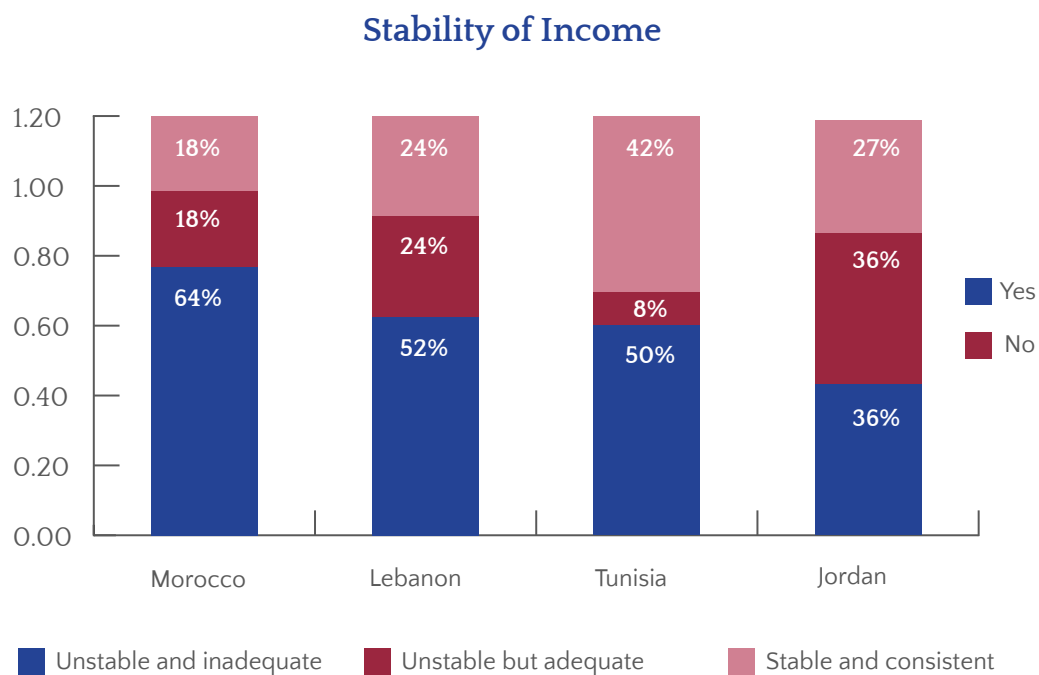
The reliance on multiple contracts was also pronounced in Lebanon, exacerbated by the country's ongoing economic crisis. The need to secure additional income streams became a common strategy for workers attempting to cope with financial uncertainty. For example, some employees reported taking on external training jobs to supplement their primary income from nonprofit work (L2). This situation often resulted in fragmented employment experiences, where individuals had to juggle roles across different organizations, sometimes within the same sector. The constant shifting between roles added to their workload and made it difficult to achieve job stability or professional growth within any single organization (L5).

Figure 5 highlights the widespread prevalence of multiple contracts within the CSO sector, particularly in Jordan (65 percent), Morocco (64 percent), and Lebanon (48 percent). In these countries, many workers rely on multiple income streams to meet their financial needs, reflecting the sector's instability and economic pressures.

## Dimension 2: Inadequate Income

The second dimension of the framework focuses on the adequacy of income, which represents a key aspect of the construct, often manifested as unstable or inconsistent and insufficient income. This dimension is closely linked to negative outcomes, such as damage to workers' health and poor living conditions for them and their vulnerable families.

Unstable and inconsistent income is a significant issue in Lebanon's nonprofit sector, largely due to fluctuations in donor funding. Many organizations have seen a decrease in funding, which has directly impacted salary stability. For example, salaries at some organizations are reviewed only every two years, and even then, the increases are minimal, often failing to keep up with inflation or the rising cost of living (L2). CSOs heavily dependent on donor funds often find it challenging to cover all expenses, including salaries, which leads to a reliance on result-based evaluations that further jeopardizes job security (L7). Although international CSOs face income instability due to global crises and funding cuts, which necessitate restructuring and budget adjustments, this instability is even more pronounced for local CSOs, which often operate with smaller funding (L10). Despite some organizations striving to maintain equitable pay practices, such as eliminating gender pay gaps and basing salaries on experience and skills, the overarching issue of funding instability persists (L12, L14). Irregular payment of salaries is another concern, as delays or inconsistencies in salary disbursements disrupt workers' financial stability (L1, L5) (as seen in Figure 6).



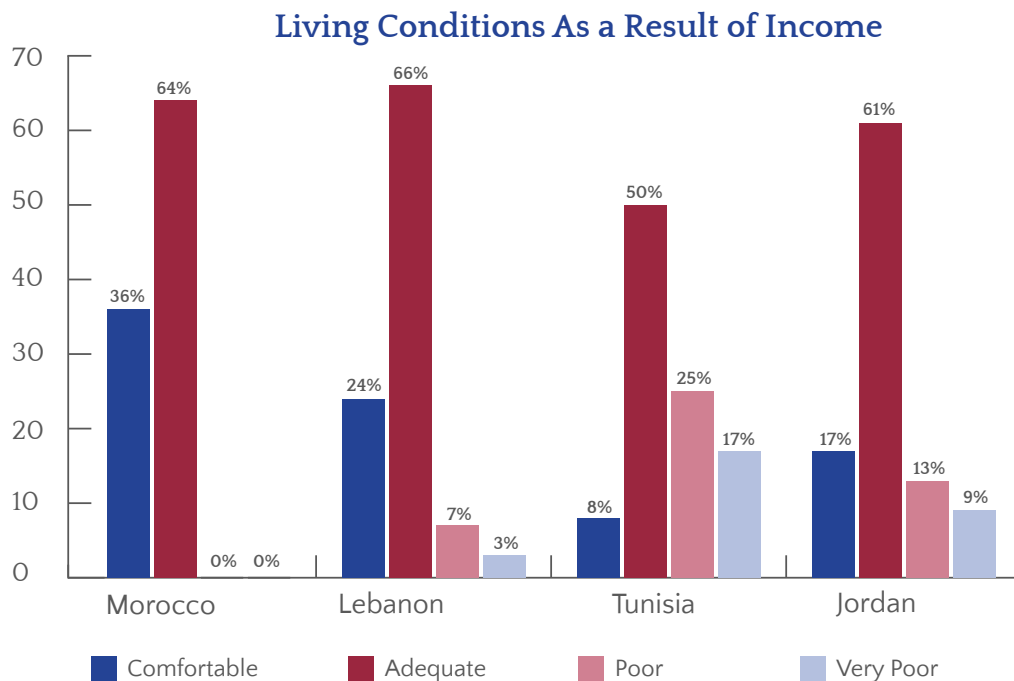
**Figure 6:** Stability of income across CSOs in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan

In addition, freelancers and consultants, who are believed to make up a significant portion of the CSO sector workforce, face severe income instability. Many are forced to lower their rates due to competition and budget cuts (L9).

Moreover, there are notable disparities in compensation between local and international staff. While some organizations apply a standardized salary scale equally to all staff, others exhibit stark differences, often rooted in colonial legacies and donor-imposed financial guidelines that are exhibited through economic hierarchies and structures. International

staff frequently receive better compensation packages, including additional allowances such as flight tickets, education, and better health insurance, even when their qualifications are like those of local staff (L4, L6, L7, L8, L12). This discrepancy contributes to power imbalances within organizations and exacerbates income inequality, particularly for local staff (L17). While some organizations strive to eliminate these disparities and offer equal treatment to all employees, the underlying power dynamics and financial inequalities remain a challenge (L12, L13, L17). In rare instances, the instability extends to expatriates as well, who, despite receiving additional allowances, often face similar uncertainties with annual renewable contracts that offer little long-term security (L12). For example, Figure 7 showcases that across all countries, most workers are incapable of leading a comfortable lifestyle and adequately meeting their basic needs.

The inadequacy of income in Lebanon's nonprofit sector has severe implications for workers' health. The constant stress and pressure to meet project deadlines in an uncertain environment with meager compensation leads to high levels of stress and anxiety, significantly impacting workers' mental health (L1, L2, L4). Workers often face overwork, with expectations to be available even on weekends with multiple and tight deadlines, which disrupts their work-life balance and contributes to burnout (L5, L11). This demanding nature of work, coupled with inadequate support and compensation, often results in workers leaving their jobs due to burnout and anxiety; some even emigrate in search of more stable employment opportunities (L11).



**Figure 7:** Living conditions as a result of income in CSOs in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan

Moreover, the poor working conditions in many organizations, such as long hours, lack of leave, absence of social security, and inadequate medical insurance, exacerbate the health risks faced by employees (L6). Burnout is a prevalent issue, driven by the high demands placed on workers and the insufficient support systems available to them (L3). The ongoing stress from work instability affects workers' mental and physical health, strains their personal relationships, and diminishes their overall quality of life (L1).

The economic crisis in Lebanon has severely impacted salaries, especially those paid in local currency, highlighting the need to consider payments in foreign currency (L7).

In Jordan, low salaries and inconsistent income are prevalent issues within the nonprofit sector. Many organizations face budget constraints, making it difficult to offer competitive salaries and benefits (J1). This has led to employees being underpaid and overworked, especially in local CSOs, sometimes not receiving full compensation as outlined in their contracts. They may also work extra hours without additional pay and lack essential benefits such as healthcare and transportation support (J5). Although some organizations have managed to provide stable income and support for their staff, these cases are exceptions rather than the rule (J4). In some instances, workers receive minimal salaries, such as 100 Jordanian Dinars (JD)<sup>146</sup>, which are often insufficient to cover basic needs. These are primarily derived from small, externally funded projects, leading to financial instability as these projects are neither consistent nor guaranteed (J6). Consequently, salaries are often unstable, with workers potentially going without pay for months if the organization fails to secure sufficient revenue (J6).

The stress and uncertainty associated with working in the nonprofit sector in Jordan significantly impact employees' mental health. Short-term projects with no guarantee of renewal lead to high levels of stress and anxiety due to the precarious nature of their employment (J1). The constant fear of job loss and the pressure to meet project deadlines exacerbates the mental strain on employees, contributing to a detrimental work environment.

Disparities between international and local staff are also pronounced in Jordan, particularly regarding salary and living conditions. International staff receive significantly higher salaries and better safety conditions than their local counterparts (J2). International organizations tend to enforce higher standards for health and safety and offer more robust oversight, which benefits their international staff. On the other hand, local CSO staff often start with salaries as low as 450 JD<sup>147</sup>, while international staff can start at 2,500 JD<sup>148</sup> and earn up to 5,000 JD<sup>149</sup> (J5). A participant argued that these disparities are further exacerbated by the practice of hiring international staff to appeal to international donors and align with governmental recommendations, creating an environment of inequality and poor living conditions for local staff in the nonprofit sector (J5).

In Tunisia, salary levels within civil society organizations often surpass those in the private and public sectors, yet income stability remains precarious due to the reliance on project-based funding. This instability can result in job loss when funding is cut, leading to periods where employees receive no income (T1, T4). While some organizations strive to offer competitive salaries—paying more than the average Tunisian wage—they still fall short of international CSO standards. In very rare circumstances, gender pay equality is emphasized, with salaries being equal for men and women, and temporary staff, such as interns, receive stipends and fair treatment regardless of gender (T3). However, salary disparities, particularly in cases where less experienced staff are paid more due to donor-imposed salary scales, have caused internal issues within some organizations (T5).

Discrepancies between international and local staff are less pronounced in smaller CSOs but are significant in larger organizations with bigger budgets. International staff often receive higher salaries, are paid in foreign currencies, and enjoy tax advantages, while local staff performing similar work receive lower compensation and fewer benefits (T2). Additionally, expatriates may be given preferential treatment regarding retention and accountability, and discriminatory practices, including racism and sexism from foreign workers in leadership roles, have been reported (T2). In some cases, adjustments are made for international workers who do not benefit from the Tunisian social plan, allowing them to be paid according to contract systems that reflect their home country's benefits (T3).

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<sup>146</sup> Equivalent to 141.13 United States Dollars (USD) at the time of writing this report.

<sup>147</sup> Equivalent to 635.06 United States Dollars (USD) at the time of writing this report.

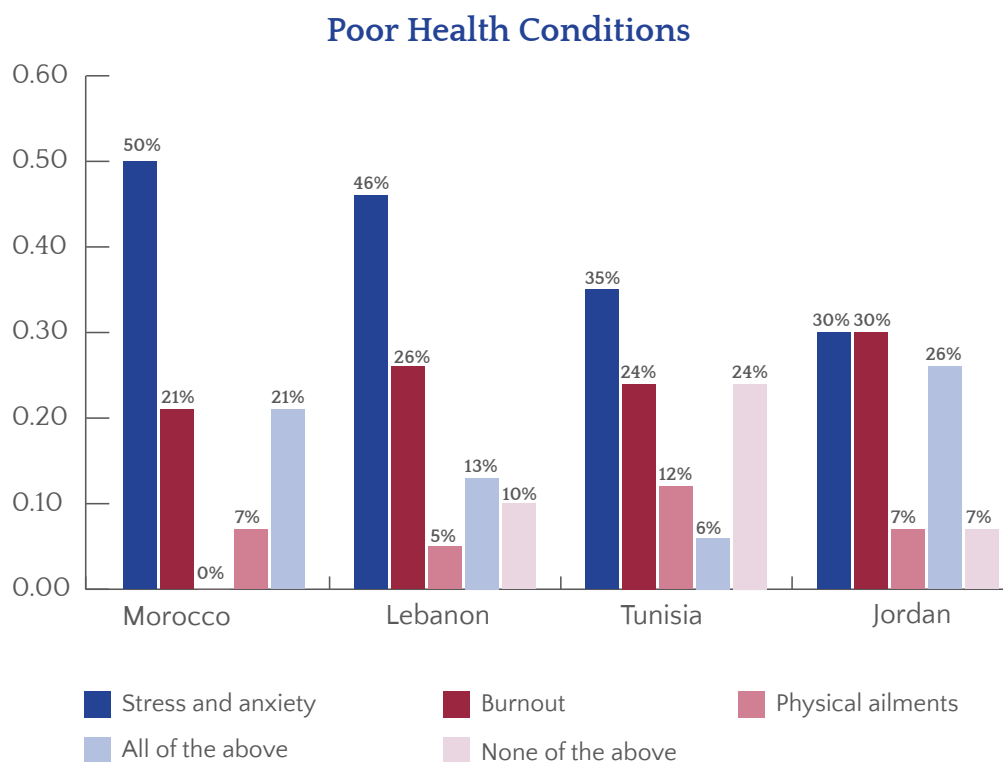
<sup>148</sup> Equivalent to 3528.13 United States Dollars (USD) at the time of writing this report.

<sup>149</sup> Equivalent to 7056.26 United States Dollars (USD) at the time of writing this report.

Participants reported that project demands in Tunisia frequently require employees to work beyond standard hours, which can lead to stress and potential health issues, though specific mention of health damage is often implied rather than explicitly stated (T1, T2, T3).

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the vulnerabilities of marginalized groups in Tunisia, particularly in terms of inadequate salaries, insurance, and social security. Marginalized employees, including refugees and undocumented individuals, often lack access to both public and private healthcare, which exacerbates their precarious living conditions (T2). These communities face significant barriers in obtaining adequate coverage, leaving them particularly vulnerable during times of crisis.

It was registered, that burnout, stress and anxiety were among the most common poor living conditions experienced by workers in the civil society sector across the four countries (Figure 8).



**Figure 8:** Poor health conditions as a result of income instability in CSOs across Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan

In Morocco, the absence of permanent local or international employees in some civil society organizations results in workers' lack of stable income. Employees, particularly researchers, are hired on a project basis, leaving them without permanent income strategies or job security (M2). Even though some organizations strive to treat men and women equally in their employment practices, the income instability persists.

While some larger or well-funded associations are able to offer better working conditions and remuneration, others employ workers irregularly, often without providing social security contributions, leaving many in precarious situations (M1). The physical demands of social and care work, especially in fieldwork across Morocco's diverse geographical regions, are significant. These challenges can be particularly taxing for individuals with disabilities, underscoring the need for tailored approaches and support systems to assist such workers (M3).

Similarly, disparities between international and local staff are notable in Morocco. International employees often enjoy higher salaries and additional benefits, such as paid housing and other expatriate perks (education allowance, stipends, etc.) not extended to local staff. Local workers employed by foreign CSOs typically receive less favorable terms under local contracts, while their international counterparts benefit from more advantageous conditions (M1). Furthermore, some foreign CSOs operate through local partners or bypass formal authorization processes, exacerbating the disparities in contract types and compensation between local and international employees (M1). These disparities contribute to a complex and often inequitable working environment for local staff.

## Dimension 3: Insufficient Rights and Protections

The third dimension of precarious work—insufficient rights and work protection—includes four key aspects: lack of collective representation, absence of social security benefits, insufficient work safety regulations, and workers' limited power to assert their rights and demand better conditions. These issues are particularly severe for informal workers, who are often underrepresented in unions and, therefore, more vulnerable to exploitation.

### Social Security

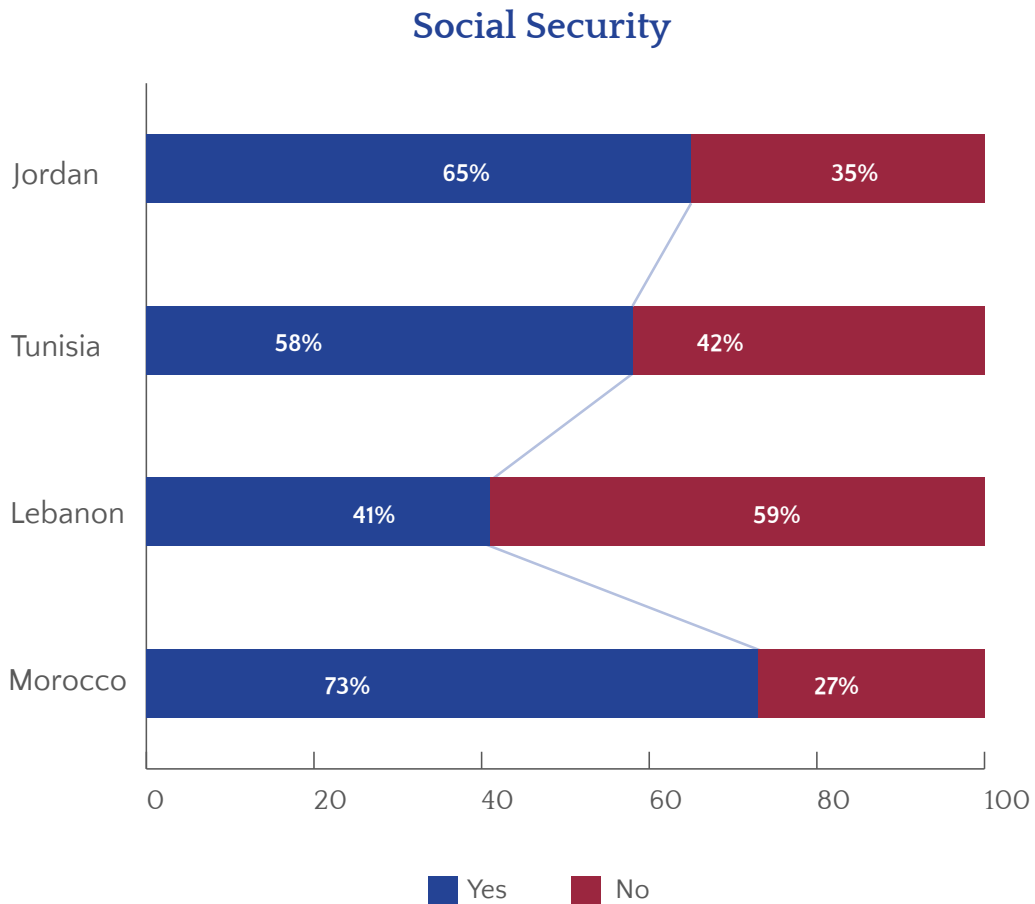
In Lebanon, the issue of social security coverage within CSOs is marked by inconsistencies and challenges. Lebanese labor law mandates that all employees, whether part-time or full-time, must be registered with the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), ensuring access to benefits such as health insurance, family allowances, and end-of-service indemnities (L14). Despite this requirement, many CSOs fail to register part-time employees due to administrative burdens and evasions, often leading to non-compliance (L2). While one organization (L14) reported adhering to the law by registering all employees under various contract types—permanent, temporary, part-time, and consulting—other CSOs mistakenly believe they are exempt from NSSF registration for temporary or part-time workers, resulting in widespread violations of employee rights. The ability to provide benefits like social security may also depend on whether donors agree to cover these costs. If donors refuse, the organization struggles to offer these protections (L4).

Some organizations offer limited and incomplete benefits, such as no health insurance (L5), and the extent of these benefits can vary widely depending on the size and revenue of the organization (L9). Some organizations provide comprehensive benefits, including health insurance, mental health support, and coverage for doctor visits and medications (L3). More than half (59 percent) of surveyed participants claimed not to be registered in the NSSF in Lebanon as shown in Figure 9.

Gender-specific and inclusive benefits are rare; however, there are exceptions; for example, a feminist organization provides health insurance to all employees, ensuring access to necessary medical care (L11). Despite lacking NSSF benefits, consultants may receive other forms of support, such as contributions towards private insurance in some organizations (L8). Some organizations comply with labor laws and offer additional benefits like extended annual leave, even for consultants, including those facing legal constraints like Palestinian staff<sup>150</sup> (L10). Despite these efforts, many CSOs fail to register their employees with social security as required by law from the first day of employment, with delays sometimes exceeding three months (L14).

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<sup>150</sup> Palestinian workers in Lebanon face significant legal and social constraints due to their status as refugees. They are barred from working in many professions and are often restricted to low-paying, informal jobs. Additionally, they have limited access to social services and benefits, such as the NSSF, and cannot own property. These restrictions contribute to their economic vulnerability and job insecurity.



**Figure 9:** Organizations providing social security across Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan

In Tunisia, CSOs often utilize consultancy contracts instead of long-term contracts to avoid bureaucracy, taxes, and responsibilities, including the bureaucratic processes and costs of registering workers in the social security fund. This practice can lead to situations where employees work full-time without receiving full-time benefits, insurance, or legal protections (T2, T4, T6). Social security compliance is mandatory for all workers, and failure to comply results in sanctions. Some associations face legal consequences due to non-compliance, while others have established distinct fiscal and social security arrangements depending on the type of contract. Full-time staff are fully registered, with taxes and social security contributions made on their behalf. Employees on service delivery contracts face a 15 percent tax deduction applied to their earnings. Some organizations that initially faced instability have since regularized their status, ensuring that all staff are now covered by social security, retirement benefits, and private insurance, which covers 100 percent of medical costs (T1, T3, T5).

In Jordan, social security coverage and work safety regulations within CSOs are perceived as weak, with notable gaps in protection and consistency. Many CSOs use probationary periods as a strategy to avoid registering employees for social security, thereby circumventing labor laws (J5). This practice leaves workers, particularly those in the gig economy and daily paid positions such as cleaners or drivers, without access to essential health insurance benefits. While sometimes on long-term contracts, consultants often lack social security benefits, and health insurance is provided only when possible (J4).

In Morocco, associations may offer social benefits that meet or exceed the minimum required by labor laws, but these are not uniformly applied across all organizations and

is dependent on the size and type of the organization, the field in which it operates and the funding it receives. For example, high-position members or staff have social security coverage, but gender-specific benefits or protections are generally not applicable (M2). Civil society organizations sometimes offer better social incentives than private companies, though these jobs may lack long-term stability (M3).

## Work Safety Regulations, Standards, and Policies

The safety and well-being policies in CSOs in Lebanon show a combination of strengths and significant gaps. Some organizations, such as the institute mentioned by L2, have policies addressing discrimination, sexual harassment, and whistleblowing, with employees informed of these before signing contracts. Some feminist CSOs offer mental health leave, menstruation leave, and flexible work-from-home policies to support work-life balance (L11) and benefits like a 600USD annual fund for personal health needs, including gym memberships (L3).

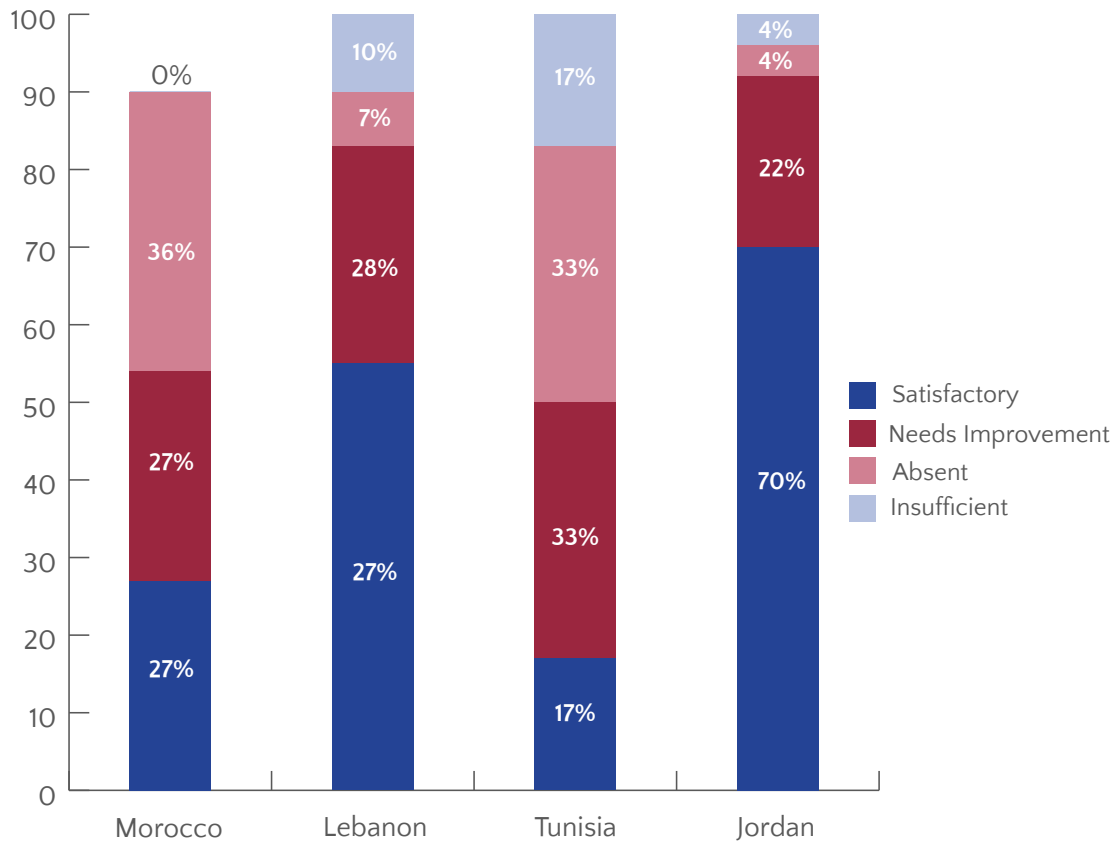
Other organizations strive for gender equality regarding wages, positions, and decision-making, and maintain a code of conduct covering sexual harassment, anti-discrimination, and anti-corruption. In terms of inclusivity, a feminist organization extends benefits to employees' partners without requiring legal marriage, recognizing the challenges queer couples face in obtaining legal recognition (L11).

While some CSOs have robust policies for addressing workplace violations and safeguarding, others fail to invest adequately in their employees' training, development, and support systems (L1, L14). This inconsistency, particularly in the treatment of vulnerable and marginalized groups, highlights the gap in comprehensive and consistently applied policies across the sector to ensure the safety, well-being, and equitable treatment of all employees. These organizations lack clear, written policies for grievance mechanisms or safeguarding, and formal work safety and health policies are often absent (L5). For example, the absence of maternity leave remains a significant issue, particularly affecting women. Some organizations fail to provide the legally required 70 days of maternity leave, which falls short of international standards (L8). Marginalized groups, including refugees and LGBTQI individuals, often face exploitation due to informal employment arrangements, and gender biases persist in hiring practices (L6, L7, L13). Challenges persist in hiring non-Lebanese staff with a refugee status or migrant workers due to restrictive labor laws (L11), and the inconsistency in applying them, particularly and disproportionately disadvantaging women and vulnerable groups (L14).

Additionally, while some organizations strive to support gender-specific needs by providing maternity leave and ensuring equal salaries based on experience and capacity, they often lack paternity leave and adequate health insurance for males, especially as they age out of their parent's coverage (J4) (as seen in Figure 10).

Workplace discrimination and abuse are also prevalent issues, particularly affecting minority and non-Jordanian groups. Despite Jordan's legal framework that claims to protect equality, the practical application of these laws is often inconsistent. Some groups are treated differently than others due to historical and political reasons. For example, while some Palestinians have held Jordanian citizenship since 1947, their status varies depending on the national identity card they hold. Nevertheless, many Palestinians in Jordan are not Jordanian citizens, which reflects different legal and social realities for them (J2). In fact, non-Jordanians, especially refugees, are frequently limited to working in specific sectors like agriculture, construction, and certain services. These individuals are often exploited through volunteer opportunities, performing skilled work for low or symbolic wages, and lacking essential labor rights (J5).

### Satisfaction with Safeguarding Policies



**Figure 10:** Satisfaction with safeguarding policies across CSOs in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Jordan

Some organizations have established internal safeguarding and human resource policies that align with Jordanian law, ensuring equal treatment in salaries and providing orientation for all staff and volunteers on these policies (J4). However, the broader context remains challenging, particularly for refugees and other vulnerable groups who face significant barriers to fair treatment and adequate protection in the workplace. The exploitation of refugees as volunteers in full-time roles with minimal compensation is a widespread issue, reflecting broader societal and systemic challenges in addressing labor rights and social security in Jordan's civil society sector.

However, the sector struggles with insufficient or absent work safety regulations, standards, and policies. There is no systematic support for addressing sexual, moral and racial harassment, and the lack of preventive protocols and regular training on harassment issues leaves employees vulnerable. Additionally, there are no platforms specifically for civil society workers to report harassment and discrimination (T1, T6). For example, maternity leave in Tunisia is notably short (30 days), and any extension results in the loss of bonuses or part of the salary. Moreover, trans women in Tunisia experience severe workplace discrimination, reflecting broader societal challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community (T5). This was also highlighted in surveys distributed among workers in the civil society sector in both Tunisia and Morocco (Figure 10). According to T7, many civil society organizations, including feminist groups, struggle with unhealthy work environments where issues such as sexual harassment and internal sabotage are common. In many cases, these organizations do not implement adequate safeguarding policies, leaving workers without proper protection or fair treatment. This lack of internal safety mechanisms creates a challenging

environment for employees. T7 highlights a significant disparity between the values these organizations publicly advocate—such as human rights and feminist principles—and their internal practices. This inconsistency undermines their credibility and contributes to worker burnout.

In Morocco, policies related to workplace safety, sexual harassment, and other protections are often non-existent or not applicable in most organizations, creating significant gaps in worker protection (M2). In large, well-funded organizations, safeguarding policies may be more robust; however, their implementation often remains weak, as they primarily serve to fulfill donor requirements rather than ensure meaningful protection. Despite legal prohibitions, employment discrimination based on nationality, personal criteria, or bias persists, particularly affecting women, migrants, LGBTQ individuals, and people with disabilities (M1).

Vulnerable groups in Morocco, including women, migrants, refugees, LGBTQ individuals, and people with disabilities, face considerable challenges in the workplace. Women often struggle to balance professional and family responsibilities (M1)<sup>151</sup>. Migrants and refugees may have restricted employment access depending on their legal status, with limited opportunities available even for those holding specific United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) cards. Although the latter gives refugees in Morocco legal recognition and protection, access to services, and humanitarian assistance for refugees and asylum seekers, employment abuse towards the community is still prevalent (M1). LGBTQ individuals frequently face legal and social discrimination, leading them to conceal their identities to avoid bias (M1). People with disabilities encounter significant barriers, such as physical accessibility issues and prejudice, making their integration into organizations difficult (M1). Despite these challenges, some civil society organizations are actively working to protect the rights of these individuals, advocating for their inclusion (M4).

## Power to Exercise Rights and Request Better Working Conditions

In Lebanon, CSOs exhibit varying degrees of effectiveness in empowering workers to exercise their rights and request better working conditions. Some organizations have established grievance mechanisms that allow employees to report issues such as sexual harassment and unethical behaviour to management or anonymously to an independent Advisory Board (L2, L3). These organizations also encourage feedback through regular HR check-ins and exit interviews to address concerns and maintain good relations with employees (L8, L10, L12, L13). However, many CSOs lack formal, effective grievance processes, leading to inadequate follow-up on reported issues and uncertainty about the existence and effectiveness of such mechanisms (L5, L7).

The ability of employees to influence decision-making within these organizations varies. Sometimes, decisions are made arbitrarily or based on individual managers' discretion, limiting workers' influence (L5). Conversely, other organizations support collective action and encourage staff to coordinate and address workplace concerns together. For example, some have a complaint mechanism and regularly conduct staff surveys to gather feedback, promoting an environment where issues are often resolved through direct communication rather than formal complaints (L11, L13).

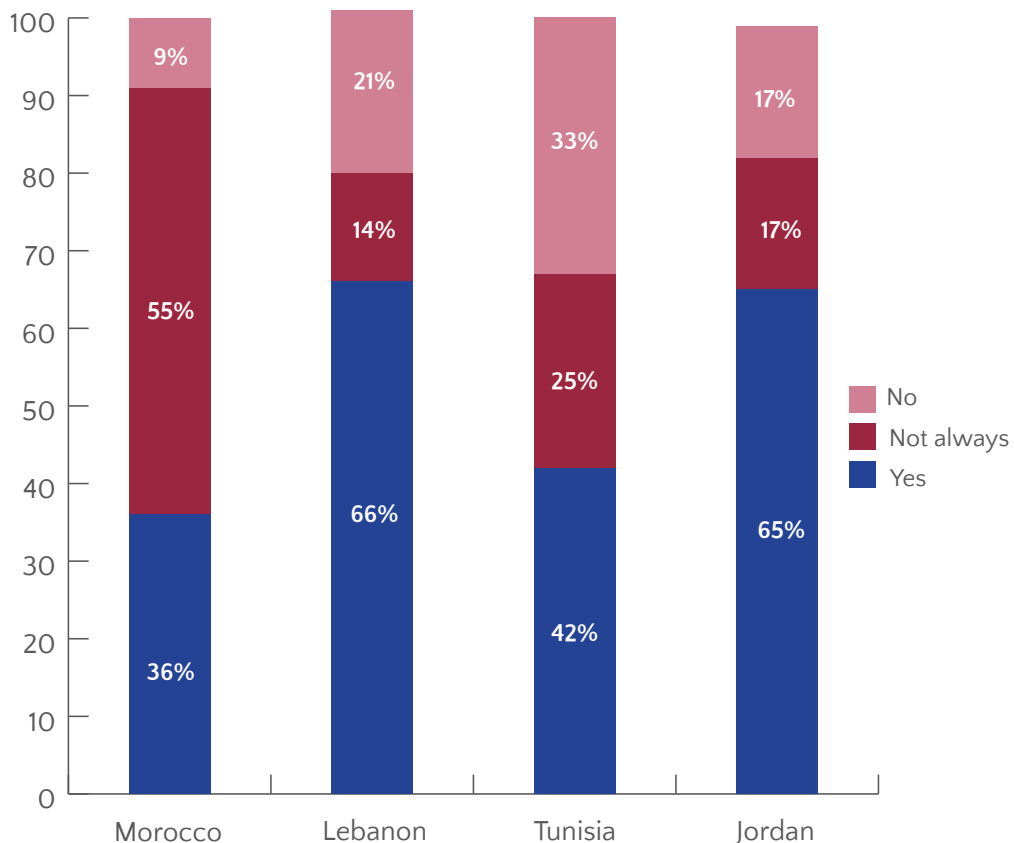
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<sup>151</sup> In Morocco, refugee status granted by the UNHCR is not recognized by national authorities and does not confer the right to a residence permit, legal protection, or access to formal employment. Consequently, the UNHCR facilitates the resettlement of refugees to third countries after granting them status. However, migrants—regardless of their legal status (asylum seeker, refugee, or irregular migrant)—are entitled to access health services. That said, disparities in healthcare provision exist across different cities, health centers, and regions. Regarding humanitarian aid, public authorities do not provide such assistance; instead, it is delivered by Moroccan and/or international NGOs.

Overall, while some CSOs in Lebanon are making strides in addressing worker grievances and fostering a supportive work environment, there remains a significant gap in the consistency and effectiveness of these mechanisms across the sector, especially in empowering employees to advocate for better working conditions (L11, L15).

In Jordan, workers' ability to exercise their rights and request better working conditions is hampered by fear of retaliation and insufficient grievance mechanisms. Many CSO employees are reluctant to report harassment or abuse due to concerns about losing their jobs, highlighting a significant lack of accountability and support for victims (J5). While general labor laws exist, their inconsistent application within civil society organizations leaves workers vulnerable, particularly in cases of discrimination, racism, and sexual harassment. The absence of effective and specific grievance mechanisms within these CSOs further exacerbates the power imbalance and job precarity, leading to widespread issues of workplace harassment and discrimination, with many workers feeling powerless to seek justice (J2, J5).

### Power to Request Better Working Conditions



**Figure 11:** Ability of workers to request better working conditions in CSOs in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan

In Tunisia, workers in civil society organizations often face significant challenges in exercising their rights and requesting better working conditions. Many activists feel insecure due to campaigns against civil society, which, coupled with safety concerns and harassment, deters them from asserting their rights (T1). Nevertheless, vulnerable communities with limited job opportunities tend to be more accepting of these conditions, further exacerbating the power imbalance (T2).

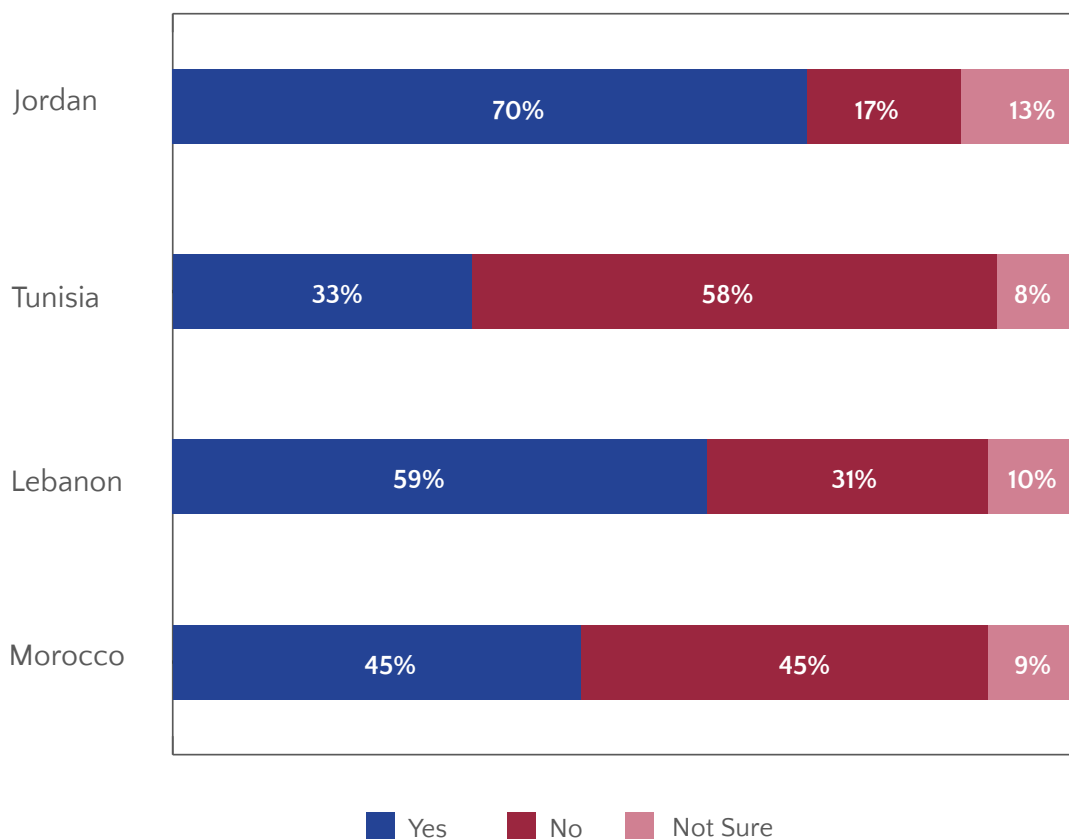
Grievance mechanisms are generally insufficient, particularly in smaller CSOs that lack clear human resources processes. This leads to informal and inconsistent handling of complaints, where a close-knit, informal atmosphere prioritizes friendliness over professionalism, discouraging employees from filing grievances (T2). Larger, more institutionalized CSOs may have formal grievance mechanisms but are often inefficient or biased. This may be characterized by the lack of clear management roles and policies, making it difficult for vulnerable employees to redress (T2). In some cases, organizations may provide access to legal advice, but the absence of specific internal procedures for handling grievances leaves employees without a clear path to address issues like harassment or discrimination (T3).

In Morocco, the precarious working conditions in civil society organizations significantly undermine workers' ability to exercise their rights and request better working conditions. M4 highlighted that when organizations fail to adequately support and protect the rights of their employees, particularly those in precarious situations, it often leads to dissatisfaction and high turnover rates. This lack of support leaves workers feeling vulnerable and powerless to advocate for their rights effectively.

As demonstrated in Figure 13, around half of participants in surveys expressed having the power to request better working conditions in their respective organizations, while the other half either completely cannot or cannot always call for better conditions.

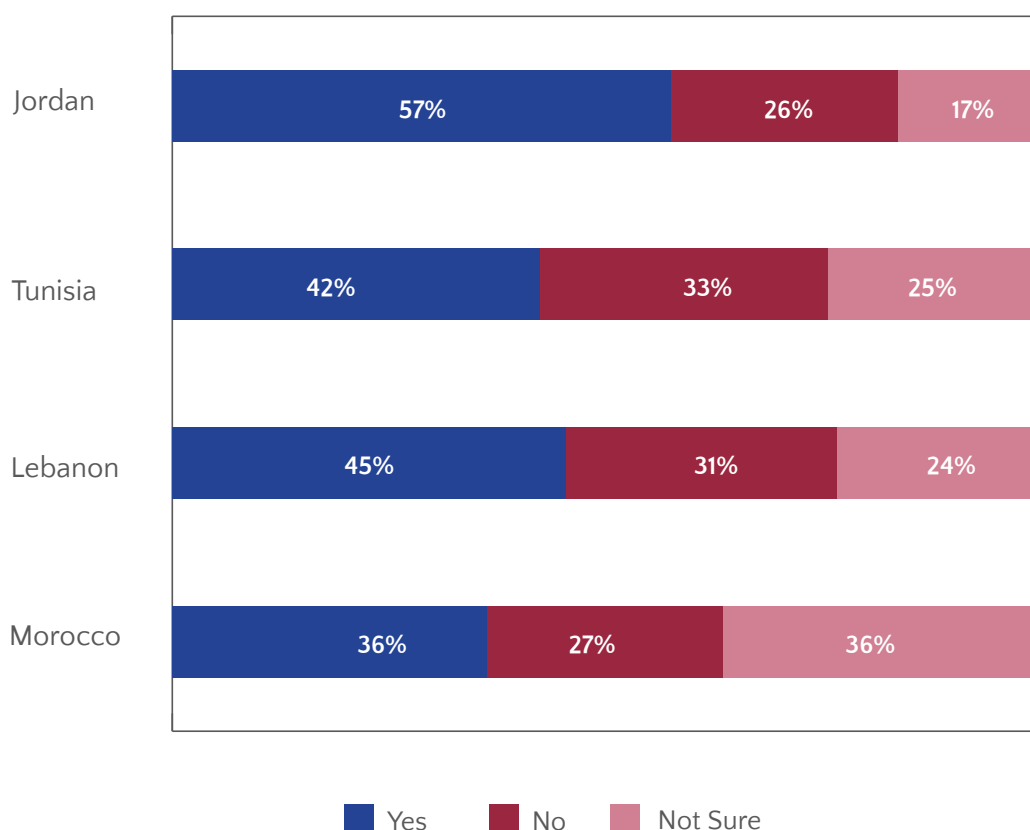
The existence of grievance mechanisms in CSOs varies across countries as seen in Figure 11. Despite their existence, almost half of participants do not feel completely or partially safe to go through these channels to raise concerns or file complaints, as seen in Figure 12.

### Existence of Grievance Mechanisms



**Figure 12:** Existence of grievance mechanisms in CSOs in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan

## Safety of Grievance Mechanisms



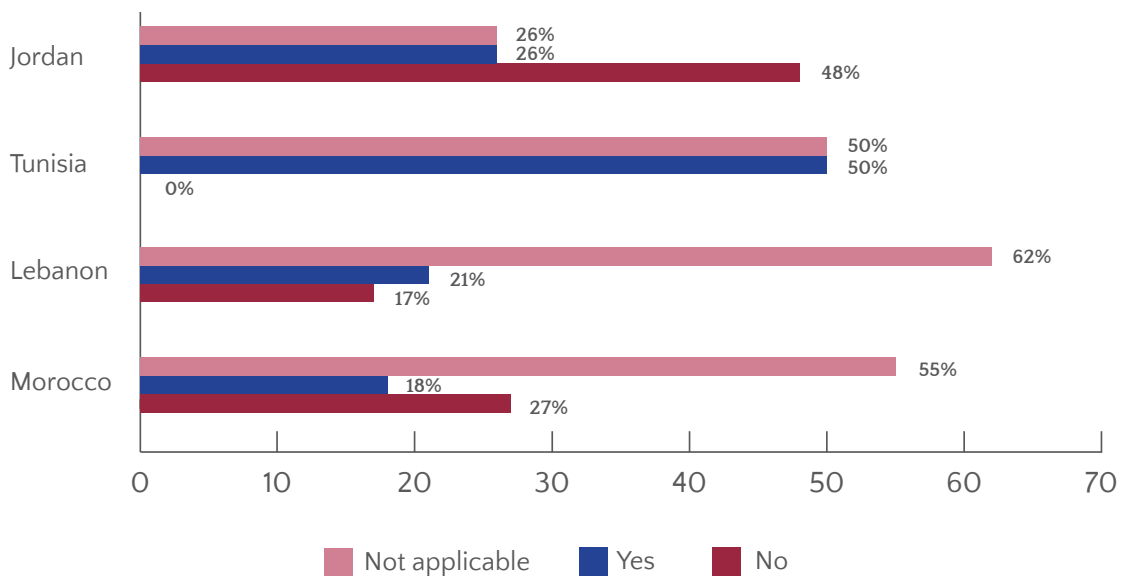
*Figure 13: Safety of grievance mechanisms across CSOs in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan*

## Collective Representation and Under-Representation In Unions

In Lebanon, the landscape of collective representation and unionization within CSOs presents both opportunities and challenges. L2 highlights that some organizations, such as the institute mentioned, practice participatory decision-making, involving employees significantly in planning and executing tasks. Similarly, L11 notes that their board is inclusive of diverse gender identities, including women, nonbinary, and trans individuals, ensuring varied perspectives are represented in leadership roles and the board's lack of cisgender men is a deliberate choice to prioritize marginalized voices, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity and representation.

Despite these efforts, L5 and L6 reveal a broader challenge: the absence of formal unions or collective bargaining mechanisms within many CSOs. Workers face difficulties in organizing trade unions and voicing their concerns effectively. L12 further notes that while international staff at some international organizations have union representation at the headquarters level abroad, national staff often lack similar support (Figure 14). There is limited awareness or encouragement of unionization within CSOs, and collective action is not actively promoted. L11 mentions an initiative that aimed to establish a union for CSOs and although it was supported by some organizations, the attempt did not materialize. L4 argues that unions and COOPs in Lebanon are heavily politicized, making them ineffective for genuine labor organizations and sees this as a barrier to collective action for workers' rights. This underscores the ongoing need for effective collective representation and support for unionization to advocate for and protect employee rights.

## Difficulty in Unionization



**Figure 14:** CSOs workers in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan facing difficulty in unionization

In Tunisia, the dynamics of collective representation and unionization within civil society organizations highlight several critical issues. T1 points out to tensions between volunteers and salaried staff, often stemming from perceptions of unequal recognition and work value. These tensions can affect overall team cohesion and effectiveness and the representation of both groups in the organization's decision-making.

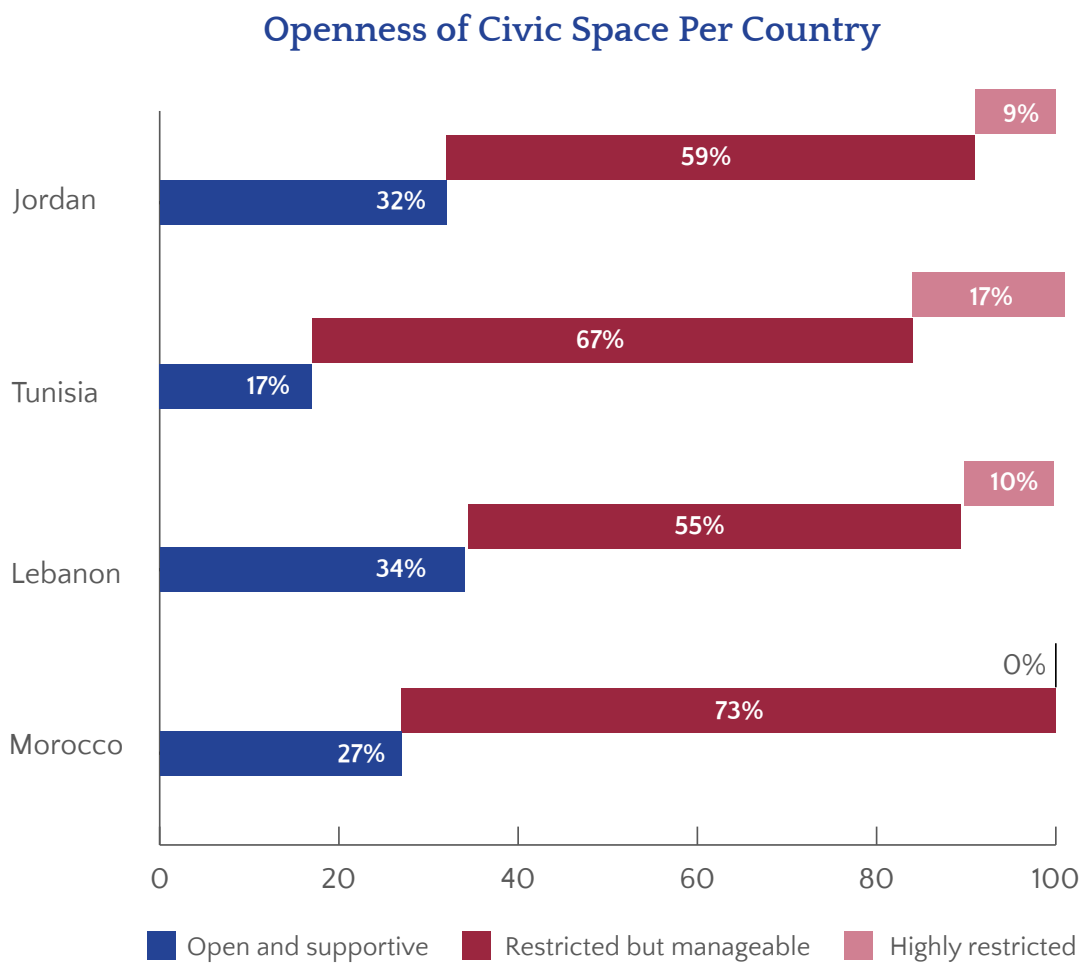
As for unionization, T1 and T5 indicate that activists and employees face threats and harassment, which hampers effective protection and limits union representation. There is no explicit mention of active union representation within these organizations, but political and funding pressures contribute to under-representation. Unionization efforts are very minimal and insignificant according to T4 and T6. Despite employees' freedom to join unions, as noted in T3, none currently exercise this option. T3 also highlights the organization's encouragement of community involvement in local governance and decision-making processes, but this does not extend to formal unionization efforts.

For example, T5 reveals that while some organizations do not actively promote union membership or collective action, they might allow employees the freedom to make their own choices regarding unions. The presence of a pool of lawyers available for legal advice further supports employees.

Under Moroccan law, NGOs are classified as private sector entities, making it mandatory for their employees to adhere to regulations on union representation. In organizations with ten or more employees, the law requires the election of an employee representative based on specific criteria and procedures. However, awareness of these rights among NGO workers remains low, and labor inspectors do not consistently oversee compliance within the sector (M1).

## Dimension 4: Enabling Environment and Shrinking Civic Space

The operating environment for civil society organizations across Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco is characterized by various external factors that significantly affect their working conditions and effectiveness. These factors include legal and regulatory constraints, economic pressures, and challenges related to civic space. Each country presents a unique set of circumstances that influence the operational capabilities of CSOs and their ability to advocate for change and support communities. Figure 15 demonstrates the differences in the shrinking of civic space across the four countries. What is common among Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Jordan is that all surveyed CSOs can manage, under restricted circumstances.



**Figure 15:** Openness of civic space in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan

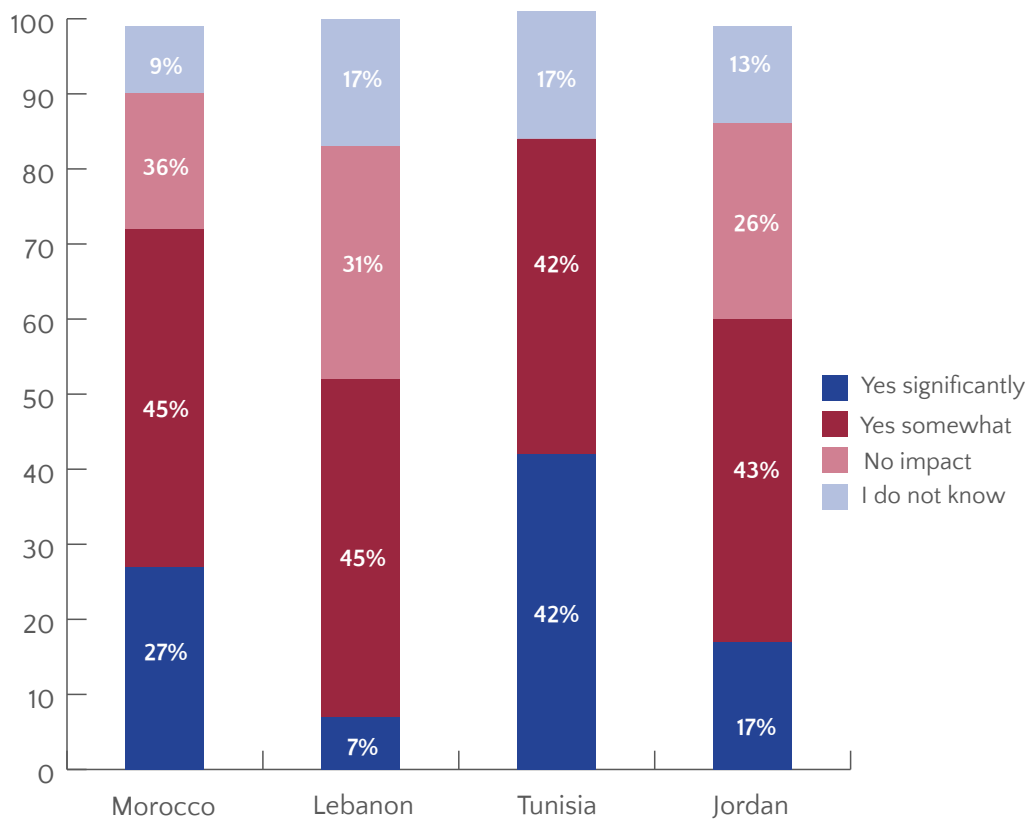
## Enabling Environment

In Lebanon, various complex factors shape the enabling environment for CSOs, impacting their operations and working conditions.

The first factor is corruption and inefficiency. According to participants, several CSOs exhibit nepotism, favoritism, and a lack of merit-based decision-making. These problems contribute to fund management and resource allocation inefficiencies, resulting in increased workloads and unrealistic targets without adequate support. Additionally, the proliferation of non-serious CSOs undermines the sector's credibility and reputation (L5).

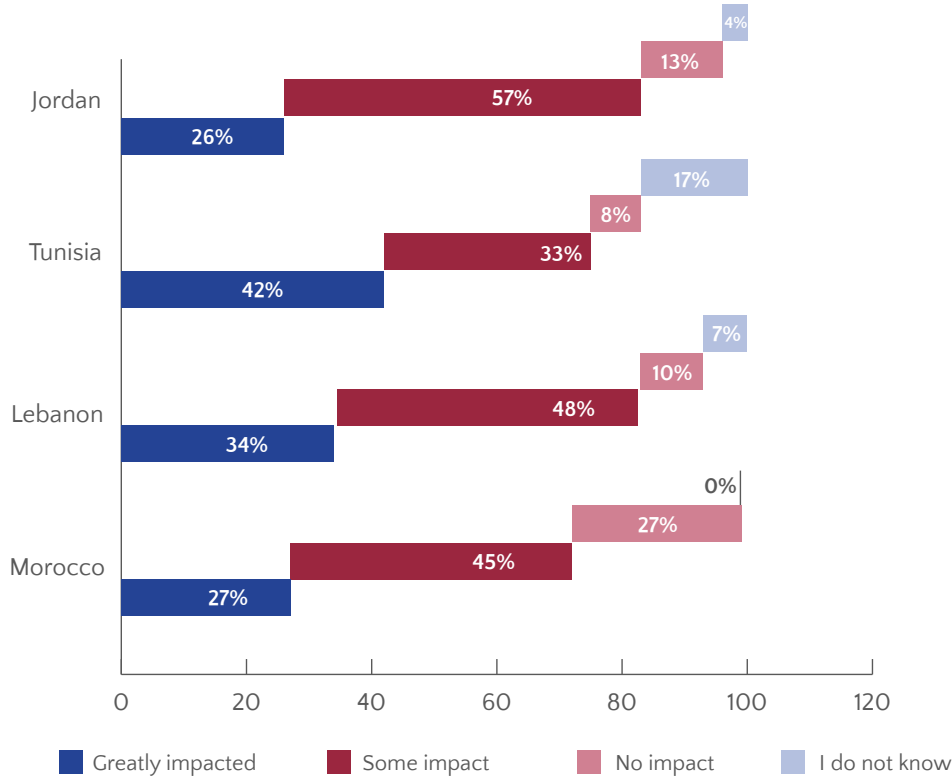
Second, the sector is challenged by budget cuts, particularly following conflicts, which lead to layoffs and impact working conditions and the ability of organizations to provide adequate social protections for employees. For example, CSOs working with local communities or Syrian refugees face substantial operational limitations (L6, L10, L13, L14). International trends of donor funding often dictate projects and strategies of local CSOs, leading to a focus on short-term projects rather than long-term planning. Donor priorities may also clash with organizational values, and maintaining positive relationships with donors is crucial for ongoing support (L9, L11, L13, L14, L16, L17) (as confirmed through surveys in Figure 16, 17).

### Impact of Restrictions on CSO Staff Morale/Productivity



**Figure 16:** Impact of CSO restrictions on staff morale in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan

### Impact of Enabling Environment on Job Security and Employment



**Figure 17:** Impact of CSO restrictions on job security and employment in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan

Third, the ongoing economic crisis exacerbates precarious working conditions within CSOs. The currency crisis has shifted perceptions of the nonprofit sector, making CSOs both desirable and precarious due to their role as providers of foreign currency salaries. Salary disparities between local and international staff further highlight the unstable nature of work in the sector (L7, L13, L17).

Fourth, political and social realities in Lebanon, including ongoing conflicts and economic instability, heavily influence CSO operations. These factors create toxic work environments and increase stress levels, while regional and global influences add complexity to advocacy efforts.

Fifth, the lack of solidarity within the civil society movement and the competitive atmosphere among CSOs contribute to instability and exploitation (L9, L11, L16).

Sixth, due to the government's failure to provide basic services, CSOs are expected to fill these gaps, resulting in high expectations from communities and added stress on organizations. This expectation diverts attention from primary advocacy work to service provision. Additionally, regional conflicts and global social trends, such as the rise of far-right movements, threaten the safety of members and complicate advocacy efforts, particularly for LGBTQ+ rights (L11).

Finally, the process of registering a CSO in Lebanon is marked by bureaucratic obstacles, including delays and inefficiencies. Due to these hurdles, many organizations operate under consultancy contracts, impacting their ability to provide social benefits like maternity and sick leave. The chaotic economic environment and discrepancies between international and local staff conditions further complicate the situation (L8, L10, L14, L15). Political and bureaucratic obstacles, including hidden criteria and political influences, can delay the

registration process, although some organizations manage to operate with minimal disruptions despite facing threats (L6, L10, L13, L14).

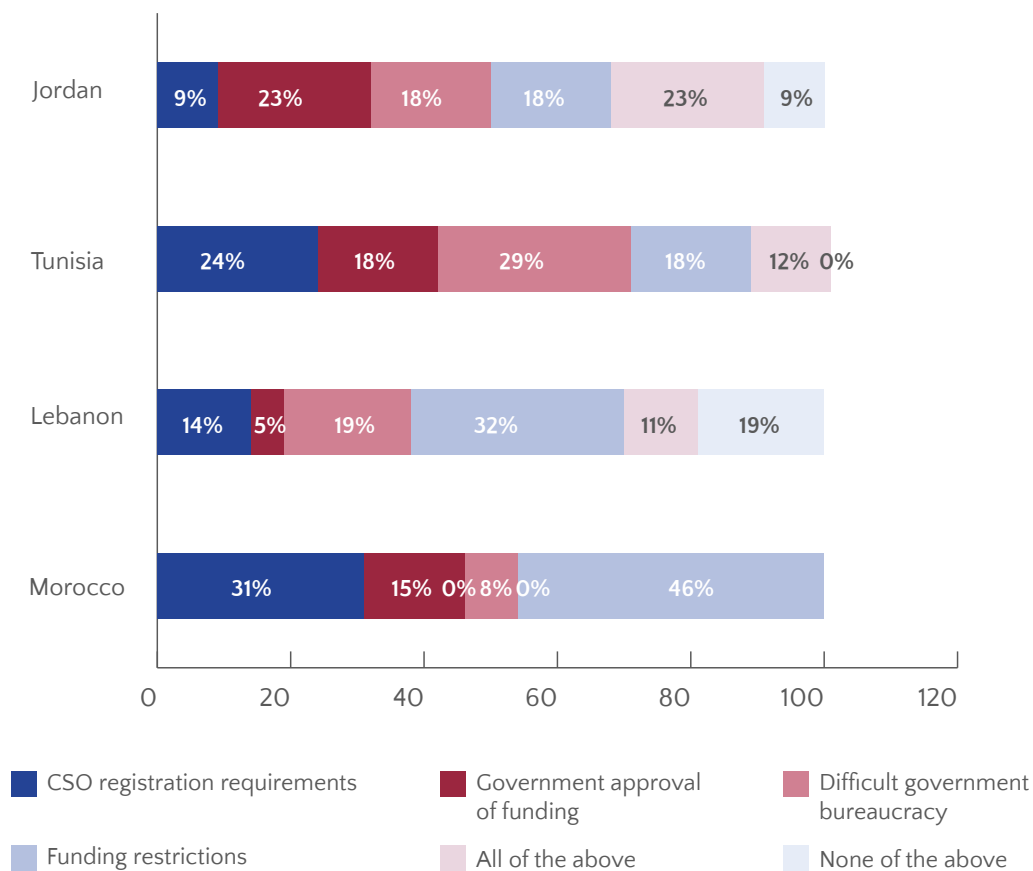
In Jordan, the enabling environment for civil society organizations is affected by different and often similar factors.

While designed to protect workers, Jordan's labor laws often present challenges for nonprofits (J1, J5). These laws include regulations on minimum wages, working hours, and social security contributions. However, implementing these laws is frequently flawed, leading to various forms of exploitation and abuse within the sector (J5).

In addition, CSOs in Jordan face significant bureaucratic hurdles, including lengthy registration processes and stringent reporting requirements imposed by the Ministry of Social Development (J1, J5). These challenges can delay project implementation and divert resources away from programmatic work. Many CSOs navigate this complex regulatory environment by registering as social enterprises or non-profit companies to avoid operational and funding limitations (J5).

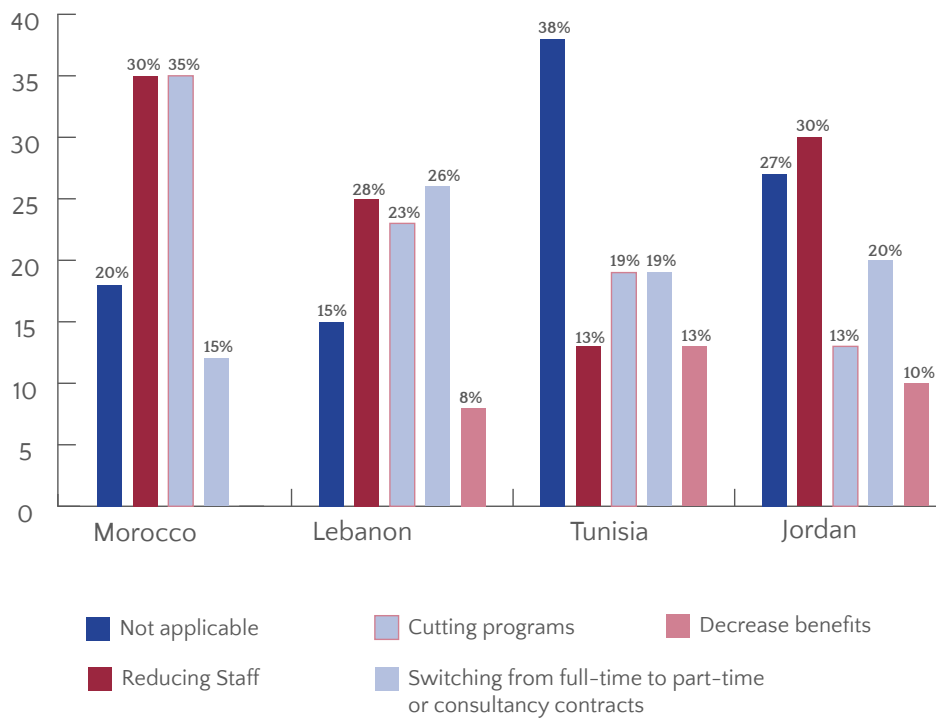
Figure 18 presents the most common external factors that have affected decent work standards across the four countries: CSO registration requirements, government approval of funding, difficult government bureaucracy, and funding restrictions.

### Organizational Factors Affecting Decent Work Standards



**Figure 18:** Organizational factors affecting working conditions of CSO workers in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan

### Modifying Operations Due to Challenges



**Figure 19:** Changing employment practices due to challenges in CSOs in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan

The economic crisis also exacerbates the difficulties faced by CSOs. The rise in prices for basic materials, such as building supplies, threatens the sustainability of projects and makes it increasingly difficult for organizations to maintain and expand their activities. Even workers with regular contracts are at risk of dismissal due to economic reasons (J2). The economic downturn and rising costs, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, severely impacted operations, leading to a decline in project revenues and increasing financial instability, compounded by rising costs and shortages in essential supplies (J6).

Similarly to Lebanon, shifting donor priorities further impacts the sustainability of CSOs (J2). The relationship between local CSOs and international donors is often compared to a form of colonialism, with local entities heavily dependent on foreign funding and adhering to donor agendas (J2).

Government-CSO-donor relations add another layer of complexity (J2). Funding from international organizations often goes through the government, which poses additional challenges (J2). Some CSOs are closely affiliated with the government, affecting their independence and operations but gracing them with resources and privileges (J2). The restrictive laws governing civil society organizations, especially those affiliated with the Ministry of Social Development, impose strict regulations that hinder effective operation and legal protections for workers (J5). Nevertheless, any foreign funding requires protracted and tedious government approval, adding another layer of difficulty and delay in securing financial support (J6). Poor accountability also impacts the sector; for example, the Audit Bureau in Jordan only addresses complaints against government bodies, not private or civil sectors, leaving a gap in oversight for CSOs (J5).

In Tunisia, the environment for CSOs is shaped by a complex and evolving legal and regulatory environment that significantly impacts their functioning and sustainability.

The legal status of associations in Tunisia is not well-organized regarding social security and workers' rights (T1). Regulations focus primarily on creating and operating associations,

including elected officials' roles and responsibilities. Legal reinforcement is particularly challenging for grassroots or informal organizations (T2). Concerns have been raised about new legislation potentially restricting the operational freedom of CSOs, which were granted under decree law No. 88, which was introduced by the 2011 presidential decision<sup>152</sup> (T3, T7, T8). These changes include increased government restrictions on the activities of CSOs such as more stringent reporting requirements that limit the free operations of organizations. Another example is restrictions and tighter control on foreign funding, which also limit the financial independence of CSOs in Tunisia<sup>153</sup>.

Donor influence on CSOs remains a complex issue in Tunisia (T3) as different perspectives exist. While some organizations believe that donors dictate organizational agendas and affect the internal governance and operations of CSOs by imposing certain conditions, others believe that donors typically support initiatives proposed by the organizations themselves (T3, T8). One of the feminist organizations explained how it maintains strong principles and values and has returned funds when it felt its values were compromised and that some challenges do occasionally arise when donor criteria do not align with the local context (T5).

In Morocco, many components impact the effectiveness and reach of CSOs and their ability to maintain decent work standards.

The diverse nature of the civil society sector is a key external factor affecting working conditions. Organizations differ greatly in terms of budget, working conditions, and social benefits (M1). While Human Rights and Women's Rights organizations often have structured executive offices and more professional staff, other associations vary widely in financial resources and organizational practices. The national regulatory framework impacts all associations, leading to disparities in working conditions and wages. Larger, well-funded organizations generally provide better working conditions and benefits, whereas smaller or less-funded entities may not offer the same advantages. Ongoing efforts to professionalize roles within associations, such as proposed legislation for social workers, highlight these variations (M1).

Nevertheless, in Morocco, associations face significant challenges in registration and governance renewal. While the law mandates a provisional receipt upon submission and a final receipt within 60 days, after which silence implies approval, authorities often delay or withhold these documents without clear justification.

This bureaucratic obstruction prevents associations from opening bank accounts, securing funding, or holding events, particularly affecting those working on sensitive issues. The resulting financial and legal instability threatens both organizational sustainability and employee job security, with risks of salary suspensions or job losses if accounts are frozen or associations are dissolved.

The strengthening of civil society in Morocco has had a substantial socio-economic and political impact (M4). CSOs have become crucial in addressing societal needs and have started to mitigate unemployment by providing job opportunities, especially for university graduates. This engagement often involves direct community interaction and fieldwork, further shaping the working conditions within the sector (M4).

Figure 19 confirms that CSOs in the four countries have opted for many measures to deal with the disabling environment, most of these negatively impacting workers and employees in the organizations.

152 Amnesty International. (2023, October 19). Tunisia: Repressive NGO draft law threatens Independent Civil Society. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/tunisia-repressive-ngo-draft-law-threatens-independent-civil-society/>

153 Article 19. (2022, March 29). Tunisia: Overhaul of associations law will jeopardise safe civic space. ARTICLE 19. <https://www.article19.org/resources/tunisia-overhaul-of-associations-law-will-jeopardise-safe-civic-space/>

## Impact of Shrinking Civic Space

In Lebanon, political and security repression and decreased funding have significantly impacted staff expansion and program implementation, with local CSOs facing more severe constraints compared to regional institutions with greater funding capabilities (L2).

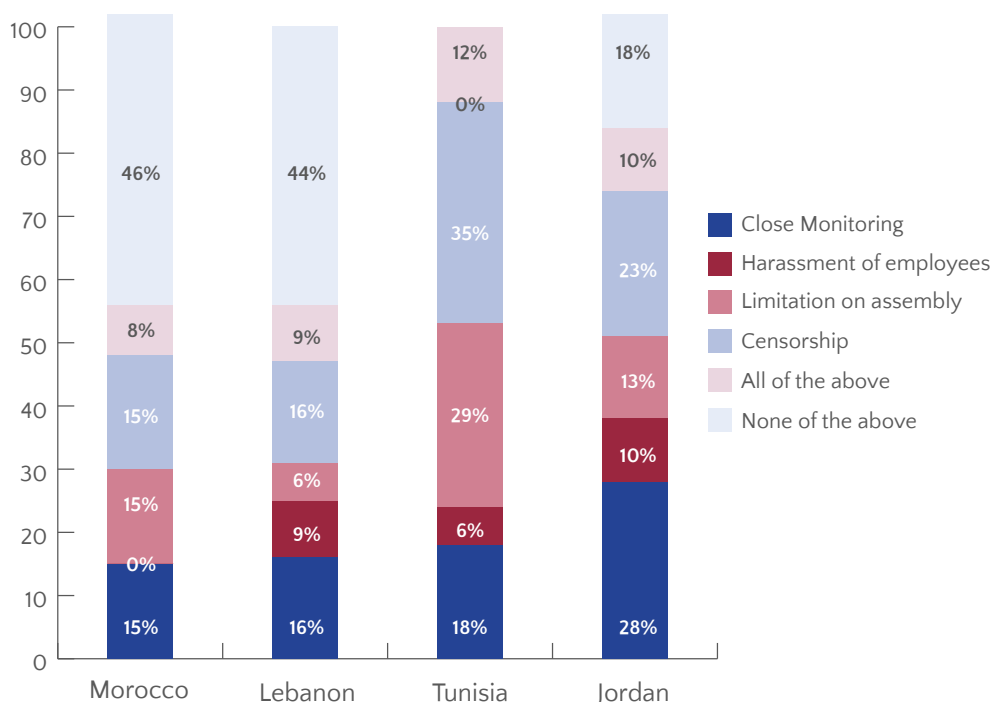
The crackdown on civil society has intensified risks and challenges, leading to reduced visibility and heightened scrutiny, especially vis-à-vis feminist, LGBTQ, and human rights organizations and organizations working with refugees and migrant workers. This has resulted in negative perceptions of civil society work due to political and social backlash (L5). The shrinking civic space has increased fear and anxiety among employees, particularly those from vulnerable groups such as the LGBTQ community. Threats and attacks from both state and non-state actors have created a hostile working environment, directly affected personal and family security and making it challenging to maintain a safe workplace (L9, L11).

Security concerns further complicate the situation, as the restrictive environment and ongoing crises hinder accurate assessment of their specific impact on civil society (L6). Hate speech, constant attacks, and raids targeting intersectional organizations severely affect morale and create a sense of insecurity, discouraging creativity and public engagement due to the pervasive feeling of vulnerability (L11).

In Jordan, the shrinking civic space also presents several challenges for civil society organizations. Despite facing difficulties, some organizations have successfully navigated these by adopting cautious and “politically correct” communication strategies (J4). This approach has allowed them to operate effectively within the constraints of the civic environment (forms of shrinking civic space demonstrated in Figure 20).

Additionally, these organizations offer valuable support to youth, particularly women and vulnerable groups, providing programs that help them thrive despite the broader restrictions on civic space (J4).

### Restrictions on CSOs and CSO Staff



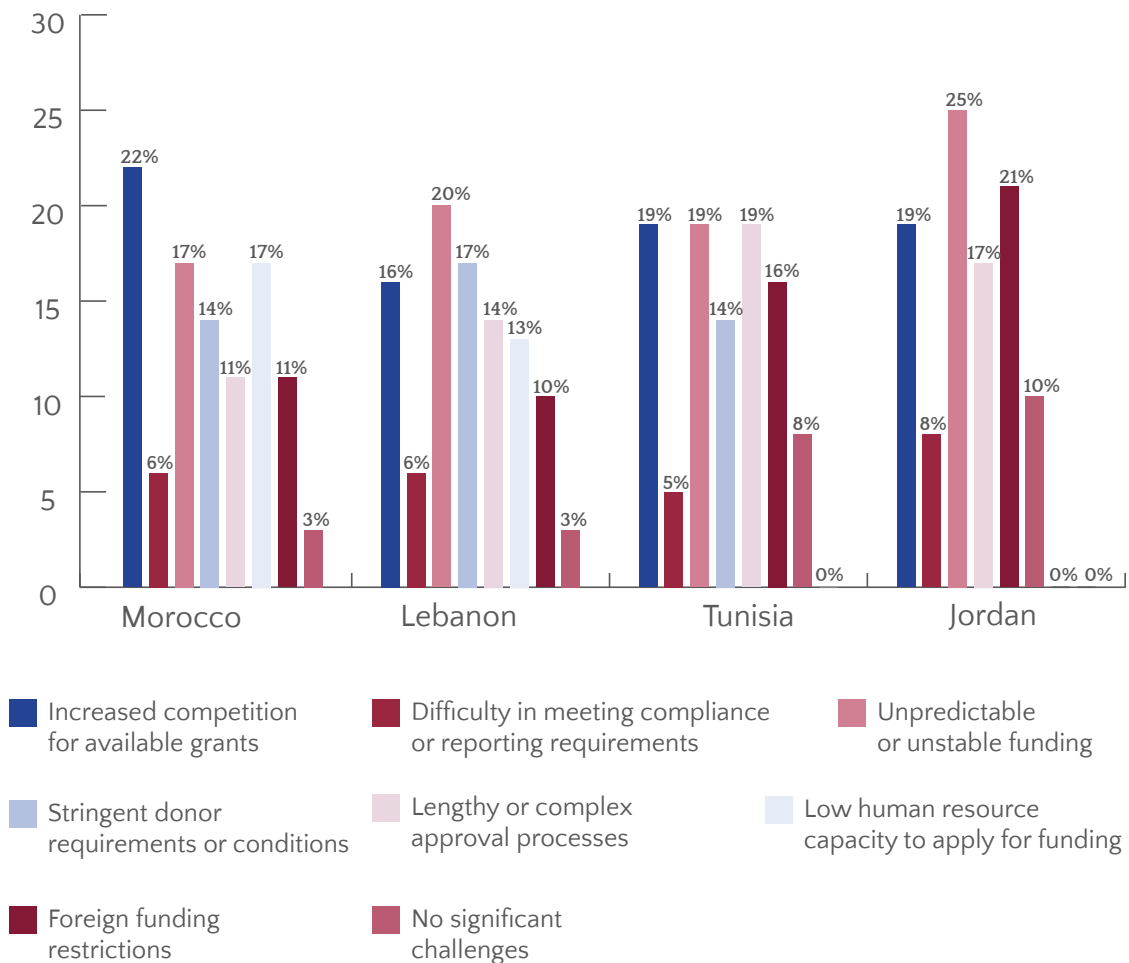
**Figure 20:** Restrictions on CSO employees and CSOs in Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan

In Tunisia, state control and the political climate have severely affected civic space, significantly impacting civil society organizations' functioning. The government maintains strict oversight over foreign funds entering the country whilst maintaining that this is to prevent misuse for activities such as election interference, terrorism, or money laundering (T3). The Central Bank is crucial in regulating and authorizing these funds, requiring thorough reporting and compliance from CSOs (T3). Despite implementing various security measures, such as physical safety training and surveillance, organizations still face significant external pressures from authorities, which complicates their sense of safety (T5).

Activists in Tunisia encounter harassment and threats, which often lead them to either leave the country or avoid public visibility to protect themselves (T1). The political climate and security environment influence the role and effectiveness of organizations, particularly affecting their engagement with municipalities and projects related to participative democracy (T3). The Tunisian president's dissolution of elected councils has further disrupted these efforts, highlighting the broader challenges faced by CSOs in navigating a restrictive and fluctuating political landscape (T3).

In Morocco, restrictions on civic space have notably impacted the autonomy, morale, and operational flexibility of CSOs (M1). These constraints, coupled with financial instability and bureaucratic challenges, have diminished the effectiveness of these organizations (M1) (factors affecting access to funding demonstrated in Figure 21).

### Challenges to Access Funding



**Figure 21:** Challenges facing organizations in guaranteeing decent work standards and funding

The limitations on civic space also influence the perception of civil society, shifting public attention towards basic needs and reducing the perceived value of advocacy and human rights work (M1). This shift can undermine the legitimacy and credibility of organizations, particularly if their impact is not clearly visible or if they encounter significant bureaucratic obstacles (M1).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has presented detailed findings on the working conditions of civil society organizations across the four countries under study: Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco. We have explored the dimensions of unstable and insecure work relations, inadequate income, insufficient rights and protections, and the impact of the enabling environment and shrinking civic space. These findings offer a critical snapshot of the challenges CSOs and their employees face.

The next chapter will build on this foundation by delving into a thorough data analysis, providing deeper insights into the implications of these findings. This analysis will not only enhance our understanding of the current landscape but also inform future research directions and recommendations to improve working conditions and strengthen the overall effectiveness of civil society organizations in the region.

# Chapter 6:

## Data Analysis

In recent years, the landscape of civil society organizations in the MENA region has been significantly shaped by a combination of instability and the overall precarious nature of employment contracts. This analysis chapter delves into the dynamics of these factors, focusing on the pervasive power imbalances and financial insecurity that characterize the working conditions of CSO workers.

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of precarious working conditions in the civil society sector across four MENA countries: Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco. Drawing on data from interviews, surveys, and desk research, the analysis focuses on five key drivers that underpin precarious work in these contexts: funding instability, government restrictions, shrinking civic space, socio-economic factors, and the intersectional gender lens. Each of these drivers interacts in complex ways, producing unique challenges and vulnerabilities for CSO workers, particularly those belonging to marginalized groups. The chapter explores how these factors materialize within the specific political, social, and economic landscapes of each country, leading to the emergence of unstable employment, inadequate rights, and exploitative working conditions. By comparing these drivers across the four countries, the analysis aims to highlight both common trends and country-specific dynamics, providing insights into the broader context of civil society work in the region.

### Comparative Analysis

The analysis across all four countries reveals key themes that contribute to the rise of precarious working conditions for civil society organization staff. While each country exhibits unique factors shaped by its political and economic context, common themes emerge, though they may not be pronounced in the same way across all four countries. The factors contributing to precarious work materialize differently depending on the local context, creating varied experiences for CSO workers.

A central theme is the disabling environment, shaped by government restrictions and bureaucratic hurdles, which severely impede the operational capacities of CSOs. These obstacles not only weaken organizational effectiveness but also increase the vulnerability of workers, who face job insecurity and inadequate protections in their roles.

Another significant theme is the reliance on project-based external funding. This dependency forces many organizations to prioritize short-term survival, often at the expense of long-term worker security and protection. As CSOs navigate the challenges of securing external funds, the employment of their staff becomes increasingly precarious, as funding cycles and donor priorities shift frequently.

Nevertheless, the precarious working conditions in the civil society sector across Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan, and Morocco are deeply rooted in broader socio-economic and political dynamics. Weak labor markets, reliance on external donor funding, governance challenges, and external shocks, such as economic crises, natural disasters, and shifting geopolitical priorities, limit the sector's ability to provide stable employment. These systemic pressures not only destabilize workers but also undermine the sector's sustainability and effectiveness.

The shrinking civic space, driven by political repression, restrictive laws, and heightened security concerns, further exacerbates these challenges. Advocacy work, particularly on sensitive issues such as LGBTQ+ rights, human rights, and refugee support, becomes increasingly difficult in this

environment. The climate of fear and insecurity forces many organizations into survival mode, compromising both their mission and the stability of their workforce.

Finally, an intersectional gender lens reveals that marginalized groups including women, LGBTQ+ individuals, refugees, and other vulnerable populations, are disproportionately impacted by these precarious conditions. Systemic discrimination and limited access to resources compound the difficulties these workers face, making their employment more precarious. This combination of a disabling environment, shrinking civic space, foreign funding reliance, and gendered inequalities highlights the urgent need to address these structural issues to ensure the sustainability of CSOs and the protection of their workers.

## Government Bureaucracy and Restrictions

Labor laws across the region fall short in providing adequate protections for workers. These gaps reflect a broader issue: labor frameworks in these countries have not evolved to address the unique employment conditions in CSOs, leaving many workers without social security, insurance, or severance protections, particularly those on short-term contracts. For example, in Lebanon, the problem is compounded by outdated laws that fail to accommodate the rise of project-based work. Hence, temporary workers are often excluded from formal labor protections that would apply to full-time employees, making it difficult for them to access benefits such as health insurance, or pensions.

This heavy reliance on temporary roles points to a larger systemic issue: many CSOs may prefer consultancy contracts to circumvent the legal obligations of offering permanent employment, reflecting a broader trend toward the casualization of labor. This model, while financially convenient for organizations, undermines the stability and well-being of their workforce, fostering high turnover rates and thus reducing institutional memory.

For example, many CSOs in Lebanon fail to register part-time employees with social security, reflecting the struggle between legal compliance and operational challenges. While Lebanese labor law mandates employee registration for benefits, financial constraints and bureaucratic hurdles often lead organizations to sidestep this obligation. This non-compliance raises critical questions about the government accountability mechanisms that should ensure enforcement. Although many feminist CSOs comply and offer full benefits, but many only partially adhere. This disparity highlights a two-tiered system where workers' access to social protection is contingent not on rights but on the financial and administrative capacity and willingness of their employer.

The widespread use of consultancy contracts in CSOs highlights a deliberate effort to avoid the bureaucratic costs and processes tied to employee registration in social security systems. This strategy not only deepens the precarity of work by denying long-term benefits but also exposes the broader weakness in enforcing accountability, transparency, and legal mandates. For example, many organizations resort to informal employment or probationary periods to bypass obligations (mainly seen in Jordan and Tunisia), which undermines legal requirements and leaves workers, especially gig and daily laborers, without critical protections like health insurance.

Nevertheless, the bureaucratic hurdles CSOs face, especially in terms of registration and reporting, waste resources and time that could be better utilized for programmatic work.

This highlights a deeply rooted failure in the application of labor laws within the nonprofit sector and the absence or "selective hearing" of governments in curbing casualization, where bureaucratic barriers force CSOs to operate in informal or semi-legal ways, often prioritizing flexibility and survival over worker welfare. The result is a fragmented system that perpetuates unequal and precarious working conditions, especially for the most vulnerable.

In addition to legal and regulatory barriers, the history of limited engagement and –at times– adversarial relationships have led to a lack of trust between administrations and CSOs. This is coupled with weak and sometimes lack of technical expertise and institutional frameworks needed for effective collaboration between public institutions and CSOs.

## Shortcomings of Funding

Across all countries, the reliance on project-based funding rather than core or long-term financing is a key factor driving income instability of both CSOs and CSO workers. Many CSOs operate with budgets that are heavily, if not totally, dependent on external donors, and when funding dries up or shifts, it directly affects the salaries and job security of their employees. This project-based structure also means that when a project ends, workers may face months of unemployment or inconsistent income flows. This system places pressure on organizations to meet deliverables to secure future funding, but it often leads to job precarity for staff.

Salaries are tied not only to the project timeline but also to meeting specific results, causing uncertainty about income stability. By focusing on temporary funding cycles, donors may inadvertently contribute to an environment where CSO workers face barriers to secure long-term employment, as their roles are contingent on periodic funding renewals. This undermines the sustainability of civil society work, affecting both individual livelihoods and organizational capacity. This was evident through widespread use of temporary contracts and consultancy roles, which exacerbate job precariousness across the four countries under study. Since these contracts are tied to specific deliverables or short-term projects, they prevent workers from building stable, long-term careers within CSOs.

It is important to also note that in many cases, benefits are often tied to inconsistent donor priorities, adding further precariousness to workers' lives. This donor-CSO dynamic plays a crucial role in shaping labor protections in the civil society sector.

In addition, the dependence of CSOs on foreign funding might create a dynamic that is often seen as neo-colonial. Local organizations are compelled to align their priorities with donor agendas, further eroding their autonomy. In some cases, government affiliation with certain CSOs grants them privileges, such as easier access to funding, but this also compromises their independence.

The analysis also points out the tension between CSOs and donors, with some organizations resisting donor conditions that compromise their core values, while others feel that donors have too much influence over internal governance. This tension highlights the delicate balance CSOs must maintain between securing funding and preserving their independence, a dynamic that is particularly crucial in a shrinking civic space.

## Socio-Economic and Political Context

The precarious employment conditions in the civil society sector in the four countries are also a consequence of broader socio-economic and political environments that shape labor markets.

At the heart of the issue is the inability of these markets to absorb highly qualified professionals, particularly in countries like Lebanon and Tunisia. This mismatch between available skills and job roles reflects deeper structural imbalances, where the reliance on external donor funding constrains the sector's capacity to offer stable and meaningful employment. External economic pressures, such as Lebanon's economic collapse in

2019, exacerbate these challenges by pushing workers into precarious, underpaid roles, undermining both individual livelihoods and the effectiveness of CSOs.

Corruption, nepotism, and inefficiencies within governments are also recurring issues, reflecting broader governance challenges in the country (as seen in Lebanon). This has led to the proliferation of “non-serious” CSOs, which diminish the credibility of the entire sector, adding another layer of difficulty for legitimate organizations to establish trust with the public and donors. It is recorded that some CSOs in Lebanon face allegations of corruption and lack of serious operational commitment, evidenced by poor financial management practices<sup>154</sup>.

What emerges from this analysis is that the economic and political instability in these countries does more than disrupt labor markets—it reshapes the very foundation on which civil society operates. In Lebanon, for instance, the economic crisis has not only forced workers into accepting multiple contracts for survival but it has also created a two-tier employment system where foreign currency earners are privileged over local staff, fostering resentment and weakening organizational cohesion. This points to the systemic failure of the sector to shield its workforce from external shocks, leaving workers vulnerable to financial insecurity and burnout.

The broader implication is that civil society, in its current form, cannot function sustainably in such an environment, as its workforce is constantly destabilized by external socio-economic crises. External political factors undermine the CSO sector’s effectiveness. Global crises, such as the Syrian refugee influx, or natural disasters such as Morocco’s earthquake, or the Ukraine war, have shifted donor priorities, weakening local CSO infrastructures. The widespread reliance on consultants and freelancers across the region is another manifestation of these external pressures, as it reflects a shift away from secure, long-term employment to more precarious forms of work.

Ultimately, the precarious working conditions in the civil society sector are not just the result of internal inefficiencies but a reflection of broader economic and political dynamics. These external forces—ranging from economic crises to shifting geopolitical priorities—directly affect the sector’s ability to provide stable, meaningful work. Without addressing the external socio-economic and political environments that fuel these conditions, efforts to improve the sustainability and impact of CSOs will remain limited.

## Shrinking of Civic Space

The shrinking civic space in countries like Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, and Morocco is another driver of the precarious conditions within civil society organizations, creating a structural environment in which both advocacy and labor conditions deteriorate. The analysis suggests that this is not just a matter of reduced freedom but rather a systemic narrowing of operational scope that forces CSOs to adapt to political repression at the cost of their core missions. This repression weakens their advocacy capacity and creates a snowball effect on their ability to provide stable, fairly compensated employment, leading to a sector dominated by short-term contracts, insufficient protections, and constant financial instability.

In this context, CSOs are not only restricted in their ability to pursue sensitive or politically challenging agendas but are also trapped in a reactive stance, responding to external threats instead of advancing their goals. This forced passivity reshapes the way CSOs function: rather than challenging systemic injustices, they increasingly shift their focus toward less controversial areas, limiting their societal impact. The implications are clear:

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<sup>154</sup> Abouassi, Khaldoun. (2015). *The Third Wheel in Public Policy: An Overview of NGOs in Lebanon*. 10.1007/978-1-4939-1553-8\_12

when civic space shrinks, it does not just interrupt advocacy; it also hinders CSOs' internal development, making it difficult to provide fair working conditions for their employees. This is primarily evident among the feminist movement (LGBTQI+, refugees, migrant domestic workers, persons with disabilities) and women's rights organizations in the region.

For example, Tunisia's tightening regulatory framework post-2011 is emblematic of this broader trend. What initially appeared to be a more liberal environment for CSOs has devolved into one of greater governmental control and scrutiny, particularly around foreign funding. This increased regulation not only challenges the financial viability of CSOs but also places burdens on smaller organizations that lack the administrative capacity to navigate these constraints. As a result, many CSOs in Tunisia operate under constant financial precarity, diverting resources from their core missions to compliance and survival.

In Morocco, the situation is compounded by systemic inequalities within the civil society sector itself. While larger organizations are better positioned to navigate restrictive legal frameworks and provide decent work conditions, smaller and less-resourced CSOs are particularly vulnerable. The unequal distribution of resources within the sector reinforces broader societal inequalities, as only a select few organizations can afford to maintain stable working conditions and deliver on their advocacy missions. This reinforces a hierarchical structure within civil society, where well-funded organizations become the exception rather than the rule, and grassroots efforts struggle to survive.

What becomes clear through this analysis is that shrinking civic space directly undermines the potential for CSOs to act as agents of social change. It not only limits their ability to address critical social issues but also fosters an environment where labor rights within the sector are sacrificed in the name of political survival.

In Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan, and Morocco, CSOs are caught between the need to maintain operations and the constant pressure of political repression, creating a precarious labor market characterized by job insecurity, underpayment, and burnout. This fundamentally weakens the civil society sector, limiting its ability to offer sustainable work and its capacity to drive impactful advocacy.

## Intersectional Gender Lens

The analysis finally reckoned that precarious working conditions within civil society organizations in Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Morocco are deeply tied to intersecting forms of inequality, driven largely by the shrinking civic space and structural power imbalances. Organizations that are meant to champion human rights and social justice often fall short of practicing these values internally, particularly when it comes to addressing the needs of marginalized workers, such as women, refugees, persons with disabilities and LGBTQI+ individuals.

The intersectional challenges faced by these groups are rooted in a broader systemic failure to institutionalize gender-sensitive policies and equitable labor practices. In Jordan, for example, the analysis points to the deliberate exploitation of refugees, who are hired on precarious contracts, further deepening their vulnerability. This exploitation is not an isolated issue; rather, it is reflective of a larger pattern where marginalized identities intersect with economic inequalities to reinforce power asymmetries within CSOs. Refugees and women, already marginalized by virtue of their socio-political status, are further disadvantaged by organizational structures that fail to provide adequate protection, compensation, or recognition.

Similarly, the wage disparity between local and international staff exposes the enduring influence of colonial hierarchies, where international staff are deemed “experts” and local workers, despite having equal or greater qualifications, are systematically underpaid. This two-tiered system reflects the embedded inequalities within the sector, where financial instability disproportionately impacts local staff and further undermines any sense of equity or solidarity within these organizations. This disparity is not merely about paychecks; it speaks to a broader issue of who holds power, who gets to make decisions, and whose labor is truly valued in the nonprofit sector.

The role of gender in this analysis is crucial. Across these contexts, vulnerable groups face structural barriers that are exacerbated by weak or nonexistent workplace protections. In Tunisia, short maternity leave (30 calendar days) and the absence of policies addressing workplace harassment highlight the inadequate response to gender-specific needs. In Lebanon and Jordan, the lack of standardized safety regulations, including the failure to provide maternity benefits or protections against harassment, reveals a disconnect between the public advocacy for gender equality and the internal practices of these organizations. This lack of institutional accountability suggests that gender inequality is being perpetuated within spaces that claim to advocate for social justice.

Furthermore, the informal working environments found in many smaller CSOs (particularly in Tunisia) mask deeper issues of professionalism and power dynamics. While these settings may appear collaborative or familial, they ultimately prevent workers, especially women and LGBTQI+ employees, from asserting their rights or lodging formal complaints due to fear of retaliation or ostracism. This informal structure not only discourages the reporting of abuses but also reflects a broader disregard for workers’ rights and well-being, especially those belonging to marginalized communities.

In Morocco, the systemic exclusion of marginalized groups such as migrants, LGBTQI+ individuals, and, to a lesser extent, women, underscores the failure of legal frameworks to protect vulnerable workers. While migrants –particularly those with irregular status– and LGBTQI+ individuals face significant discrimination, women’s exclusion is more nuanced. The civil society sector, for example, is highly feminized across various roles, including management, finance, project coordination, and fieldwork. However, disparities persist based on geography, with lower female participation in small, local associations. Despite legal protections against discrimination, marginalized groups often endure bias, conceal aspects of their identities, or navigate hostile work environments. This highlights that legal protections, without enforcement or cultural shifts within organizations, remain insufficient to address the structural inequities that keep these workers in precarious positions.

The overarching issue here is that the precariousness experienced by workers within CSOs is not just the result of external pressures like limited funding or political repression, but also of internal organizational practices that replicate societal inequalities.

## Conclusion

The comparative analysis of precarious working conditions in Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco reveals that while the drivers of precariousness: funding instability, government restrictions, shrinking civic space, socio-economic pressures, and intersectional gender disparities are prevalent across all four countries, their impact and intensity vary based on national context. The interplay of these drivers has created an environment where CSO workers face significant challenges, including financial insecurity, limited access to rights and protections, and persistent vulnerabilities for marginalized groups.

In all four countries, the shrinking civic space and increasing government restrictions intensify the precariousness of CSO work, particularly in advocacy areas deemed sensitive or controversial. Meanwhile, intersectional gender dynamics exacerbate inequalities, making women, LGBTQI+ individuals, and refugees more vulnerable to exploitation and marginalization. Ultimately, these drivers coalesce to perpetuate a cycle of precarious work in the CSO sector, undermining both the labor conditions of workers and the capacity of CSOs to advocate effectively for social justice. The findings highlight the urgent need for structural reforms within the sector to mitigate the precarity experienced by its workforce and to align internal practices with the values of equality and human rights that CSOs promote.

# Chapter 7:

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter provides a series of strategic recommendations aimed at addressing the multifaceted challenges facing civil society organizations and their workers in the MENA region. Drawing from an in-depth analysis of precarious labor conditions in Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, this chapter outlines actionable steps for CSOs, policymakers, donors, and other stakeholders to promote fair labor practices, improve job security, and foster a more resilient and inclusive nonprofit sector. The recommendations address both organizational and structural reforms, emphasizing the importance of financial sustainability, transparent governance, equitable employment practices, and advocacy for labor rights within CSOs.

### General Recommendations for MENA Civil Society Organizations

- 1. Strengthening workplace flexibility and fair compensation in CSOs**

To create resilient and inclusive workplaces, CSOs in the MENA region should adopt a dual approach that combines workplace flexibility with equitable compensation. Flexible work arrangements, including adaptable hours and remote options, allow employees—especially women, caregivers, and marginalized groups—to balance their professional and personal responsibilities more effectively. Transitioning to performance-oriented evaluation systems, rather than relying on strict attendance tracking, enhances job satisfaction and reduces stress, which is crucial for maintaining productivity. At the same time, fair compensation should be standard across the sector, with a focus on providing living wages and addressing any gender pay disparities. Transparent, role-based salary scales and regular financial security measures, such as predictable pay schedules and basic benefits, can reduce the financial precarity many CSO workers face. Integrating these policies with mental health support, team-building initiatives, and comprehensive leave options fosters a supportive work environment, which is essential for employee well-being and retention. This comprehensive approach strengthens organizational resilience, enabling CSOs to operate effectively in challenging socioeconomic environments across the region.
- 2. Addressing internal power hierarchies within CSOs to promote equity and inclusivity**

Internal power dynamics within CSOs, particularly in international and larger regional organizations, can limit inclusivity and restrict opportunities for women, junior employees, and marginalized staff. CSOs across the MENA region should critically examine their hierarchical structures to identify and address barriers to equitable participation and upward mobility. Creating a culture where all employees feel empowered to contribute to decision-making processes can improve job satisfaction and effectiveness across the organization. Promoting transparent career progression paths and implementing mentorship programs for junior and female staff can help build a more equitable and accountable environment. This approach not only promotes a fairer distribution of power within CSOs but also fosters a more diverse leadership pipeline, allowing a broader range of voices to influence the organization's direction and impact.

### **3. Implementing the Istanbul Principles for Improved Accountability and Governance**

The adoption of the Istanbul Principles—which emphasize human rights, accountability, transparency, and inclusivity—offers CSOs in the MENA region a clear ethical framework for their operations. These principles are particularly relevant for organizations addressing sensitive issues like gender equality, human rights, and social justice, as they guide CSOs in operating with integrity and building trust with both communities and stakeholders. By integrating the Istanbul Principles into their governance structures, CSOs can enhance accountability, improve public trust, and ensure they are truly representing the interests of marginalized groups. This approach not only strengthens the credibility of CSOs in the region but also helps them align more closely with global best practices, making it easier to secure support from international partners and donors.

### **4. Fostering research-driven advocacy to strengthen policy influence and labor conditions in CSOs**

MENA region CSOs should prioritize building their research capacities to create evidence-based advocacy campaigns that influence policy and public opinion effectively. Given the scarcity of reliable data in many MENA countries, CSOs may need to collaborate with academic institutions or international organizations to gather robust data on issues like economic inequality, gender disparities, and labor conditions. Strengthening research capacity allows CSOs to advocate more effectively for improved labor practices within their sector, shedding light on common issues such as job insecurity, low wages, and limited benefits for CSO workers. By presenting data-driven insights to policymakers and the public, CSOs can push for structural reforms that address both societal inequities and the precarious conditions affecting their workforce. This approach is particularly crucial for advancing labor protections that benefit women and marginalized groups who often face disproportionate employment challenges in the sector.

### **5. Supporting worker organizations and unions within the CSO sector**

The establishment of worker organizations or unions within the MENA CSO sector can provide a structured way for employees to advocate collectively for fair working conditions, job security, and adequate compensation. Such organizations empower workers, especially those in precarious roles, by giving them a collective voice to address issues like fair wages, social security, and benefits such as maternity leave. These worker organizations can also serve as a platform for addressing gender-related workplace challenges, allowing female employees to collectively push for equitable treatment and access to resources. Investing in capacity-building programs to support these unions or worker organizations can enhance their effectiveness, helping to ensure they are inclusive and capable of representing diverse staff needs. This focus on collective advocacy helps build a stronger, more resilient CSO workforce that can sustain the sector's social impact.

### **6. Promoting workplace diversity and inclusive professional development**

CSOs across the MENA region should prioritize diversity in hiring and professional development, making concerted efforts to include women, young professionals, and marginalized groups at all levels of the organization. By offering gender-sensitive training programs and mentorship opportunities, CSOs can ensure that all employees have the support they need to thrive and advance within the sector. Providing equitable access to professional development is essential in addressing gender disparities in leadership and enhancing overall organizational effectiveness. When CSOs cultivate diverse talent, they strengthen their ability to respond to a wide range of community needs and perspectives, making their advocacy efforts more inclusive and impactful.

### 7. Engaging in ongoing dialogue with policymakers for labor reform

CSOs in the MENA region should foster ongoing dialogue with policymakers to address labor reform needs that are specific to the sector, advocating for fair employment conditions that support freedom of expression and association. Regular discussions around labor rights, social protections, and fair compensation are essential for tackling the unique challenges that CSO employees face, including job insecurity and limited benefits. Through this engagement, CSOs can highlight the specific needs of female employees, young workers, and other marginalized groups within their workforce, advocating for inclusive labor reforms that promote a safe and supportive work environment. Such reforms are fundamental to building a CSO sector that is capable of sustaining its workforce, particularly in politically and economically unstable contexts.

## Country-Specific Recommendations: Lebanon

### 1. Donor-Recommendation: Embed social protection schemes, financial safety nets, and gender-sensitive labor protections in funding agreements.

Lebanon's CSO sector must strategically push for the establishment of comprehensive social protection schemes that secure the well-being of its workforce, particularly those in precarious, short-term, or project-based roles. To ensure lasting impact, CSOs should collaborate with donors to embed these protections as fundamental aspects of funding agreements, creating a shared commitment to workforce security. These protections should include financial safety nets, stable income policies, and gender-sensitive measures to address the unique challenges faced by women and marginalized groups who are often disproportionately affected by job insecurity. Donors and CSOs can work together to design frameworks that include emergency funds, crisis support, and robust contractual protections as part of funded projects. This collaborative approach enables CSOs to build a more resilient and stable workforce by attracting and retaining skilled staff dedicated to social change. By integrating these social protection measures into funding structures, Lebanon's civil society sector can create a sustainable, supportive environment that empowers CSO workers and strengthens their capacity to drive long-term, impactful change.

### 2. CSO-Recommendation: Collaborate to address shared challenges, pool resources, and expertise, and advocate collectively for better labor conditions to enhance social impact and workforce stability among Lebanese CSOs.

Given Lebanon's limited resources, especially in instances of shifting donor priorities in the region, collaboration among CSOs focused on human rights, gender equality, and development can amplify their impact and provide a more stable work environment for their employees and staff. By pooling resources, organizations can better address complex social challenges such as economic hardship, refugee rights, and gender-based violence, while also fostering greater job security and improved working conditions for CSO workers who often face precarious employment. Networking and alliances among CSOs enhance their capacity to drive meaningful, long-term change, allowing them to address issues more effectively than they could individually, and simultaneously supporting their workforce, who are essential to achieving these outcomes. This collaborative approach is especially critical in areas where marginalized communities, such as women and refugees, face unique obstacles, and where the well-being and stability of CSO workers contribute directly to the impact and sustainability of these initiatives.

### **3. CSO-Recommendation: Balance professionalism and volunteerism with inclusive engagement for women and youth**

CSOs in Lebanon can enhance their impact by balancing professionalism with a commitment to volunteerism, ensuring that organizational structure and accountability coexist with inclusivity and community service. This balance should actively support women and youth, who are often drawn to volunteer work as a form of civic engagement. Professionalized roles bring structure, while recognizing the contributions of volunteers fosters a mission-driven environment. Encouraging inclusive volunteer participation leverages diverse perspectives and reinforces the sector's people-centered values, enhancing CSO's capacity to serve communities in ways that reflect Lebanon's rich civil society heritage.

## **Country-Specific Recommendations: Tunisia**

### **1. Government-recommendation: Enhance legal protections for civil society workers to ensure fair treatment, job security, and improved working conditions.**

There is a pressing need for stronger legal protections for civil society workers in Tunisia, especially given the precarious nature of employment in the sector. Current labor laws provide minimal job security, leaving many workers, particularly women and marginalized individuals, vulnerable to short-term contracts, low wages, and limited career development. To address this, the sector should advocate for comprehensive legal reforms that enforce longer-term contracts, such as three-year agreements, as a standard practice within CSOs. These reforms would promote job stability, reduce turnover, and encourage a more committed and skilled workforce. Additionally, integrating gender-sensitive provisions, such as parental leave and anti-harassment and discrimination policies, into these protections can support the professional growth of women within CSOs, fostering a more inclusive and resilient sector.

### **2. Government and CSO Recommendation: Building and maintaining cooperative relationships between CSOs and local administrations**

For Tunisian CSOs to continue operating effectively and independently, maintaining cooperative, non-intrusive relationships with local administrations is essential. This approach allows CSOs to work on sensitive social issues, such as women's rights and social justice, without restrictive government oversight, which can compromise their work and threaten their independence. Strategically, CSOs should engage in ongoing dialogue with local authorities to build trust, ensuring transparency in their activities and aligning their goals with broader community needs. At the same time, they should advocate for regulatory frameworks that prevent excessive interference and protect organizational autonomy. Given the precarious status of many CSO employees, particularly in roles advocating for contentious issues, these cooperative frameworks can provide a level of stability and protection against arbitrary shutdowns or legal harassment, allowing staff to work in a less volatile environment.

### **3. CSO-Recommendation: Address internal contradictions within progressive CSOs to strengthen unity, effectiveness, and alignment with their core values.**

To authentically uphold the progressive values they champion, Tunisian CSOs must address internal inconsistencies, particularly concerning gender equality and labor practices. While many organizations advocate for gender equity publicly, their internal structures sometimes lack representation and inclusivity, especially in leadership roles. CSOs should implement equitable hiring and promotion practices,

ensuring women and other marginalized groups have access to leadership opportunities. This could include establishing quotas, creating mentorship programs for female employees, and ensuring transparency in hiring practices. Addressing internal labor issues, such as fair wages, job security, and clear paths for career progression, will also be critical. By treating their workers equitably, CSOs not only align their operations with their advocacy goals but also strengthen their credibility and resilience as organizations. This alignment ensures they attract and retain skilled workers who are invested in the organization's mission, fostering a workplace culture that reflects the social values they promote.

**4. CSO-Donor Recommendation: Recognize the positive contributions of civil society organizations despite sector challenges to encourage continued impact and motivate stakeholders.**

Despite internal and external challenges, Tunisian CSOs have played a pivotal role in advancing social and political reform, particularly in promoting human rights, gender equality, and democratic values. Acknowledging these contributions without generalizing sector-wide issues is crucial for empowering CSOs to continue their impactful work. CSOs should engage in transparent reporting and impact assessments to showcase their achievements and differentiate themselves from any negative perceptions of the sector. At the same time, they should proactively address internal challenges, such as improving labor practices and ensuring gender-equitable policies, to avoid potential reputational risks. Recognizing the precarious nature of CSO employment, organizations should emphasize their positive impact on workers' lives through initiatives that enhance job stability and support career development. This strategic approach not only builds public trust but also secures the backing of stakeholders, including donors and local communities, enabling CSOs to continue driving meaningful change while improving labor conditions within their ranks.

**5. CSO-Donor Recommendation: Strengthen CSOs in response to increasing repression post-25 July to ensure their resilience, effectiveness, and ability to advocate for change.**

The restrictive measures implemented in Tunisia post-25 July have created significant operational barriers for CSOs, particularly those focused on human rights and gender equality. In this challenging environment, it is crucial for CSOs to adopt adaptive strategies to sustain their operations. CSOs should strengthen advocacy networks, both domestically and internationally, to amplify their voices and gain support from global allies who can apply diplomatic pressure for greater civil society freedoms. Seeking partnerships with international human rights bodies and donors can also provide resources and protection for CSOs, especially for those addressing gender specific. Additionally, CSOs should consider establishing emergency labor funds to support their workers who may face financial strain or threats due to the political environment, particularly those on short-term contracts or project-based roles. Adopting these strategies enables CSOs to continue their advocacy while supporting the labor rights and job security of their employees, allowing them to navigate repression without compromising their mission or workforce stability.

## Country-Specific Recommendations: Morocco

### 1. CSO-Recommendation: Specialize and adopt a strategic focus to build credibility and strengthen the effectiveness of CSOs.

To enhance their impact and credibility, Moroccan CSOs should strategically focus on specialized areas, establishing themselves as authoritative voices in fields like women's rights, youth empowerment, or economic development. Specialization enables CSOs to deepen their expertise, build community trust, and secure more stable, long-term funding. By concentrating resources on a core mission, organizations can avoid the pitfalls of over-diversification, which can dilute their effectiveness. In practice, CSOs could establish specialized teams or departments within the organization, creating structured career paths that support long-term employment and professional growth. This approach also addresses labor precariousness by reducing short-term, project-based roles and promoting stable, specialized positions. A gender-sensitive lens can guide CSOs to prioritize areas that disproportionately affect women and marginalized groups, such as gender-based violence, access to education, and economic empowerment. Specialization in these areas not only bolsters credibility but also ensures that the organization's efforts are inclusive and responsive to the needs of vulnerable populations.

### 2. CSO-Donor Recommendation: Ensure compliance with legal and financial obligations to uphold accountability, transparency, and organizational integrity.

Maintaining strict compliance with legal and financial obligations is crucial for Moroccan CSOs to strengthen credibility and secure long-term operational stability. For organizations working in sensitive areas, like women's rights or youth empowerment, legal compliance and transparent financial management reduce the risk of dissolution or government interference, enabling them to focus on their missions without fear of shutdown. Strategically, CSOs should invest in training and capacity-building for their staff on regulatory compliance and financial accountability, ensuring all levels of the organization understand and adhere to these standards. This would include hiring skilled professionals to handle financial management and compliance, ideally in stable, long-term roles rather than temporary contracts, to build institutional knowledge and continuity. For female employees and those in precarious roles, compliance efforts should also prioritize fair labor practices, such as adhering to labor laws on wages, benefits, and workplace protections. Given the lack of substantial public and private funding for CSOs, donors should also prioritize medium-term (3 to 5 years) operational support (core funding) over short-term project-based funding. This approach would provide CSOs with greater financial stability, enabling them to ensure job security and decent working conditions for their employees. In doing so, CSOs not only bolster their credibility with stakeholders but also create a secure work environment that respects workers' rights, reinforcing their commitment to the values they advocate.

### 3. Government Recommendation: Ensure compliance with legal and financial obligations to promote transparency, accountability, and trust in CSOs.

The contributions of Moroccan CSOs are often undervalued, as the sector is still seen primarily as volunteer-driven rather than professional. Morocco should formally recognize the professional role of CSO workers, implementing measures like tax benefits or subsidized social security for employees. This recognition would legitimize CSO work, reduce financial burdens on organizations, and allow them to allocate more resources to impactful projects. Strategically, this professionalization would allow CSOs to attract and retain skilled workers, particularly women and young professionals, who are often deterred by the sector's perceived lack of

stability and career progression. CSOs could advocate for policies that support long-term contracts, fair wages, and career development programs within the sector, helping to address precarious labor conditions. For female workers, recognition and professionalization should include gender-sensitive benefits such as maternity leave, childcare support, and protections against workplace discrimination. Nevertheless, administrative support that limits delays regarding legal documents which endanger the existence of CSOs is necessary. By positioning associative work as a viable, professional career path, Morocco can strengthen its civil society sector and ensure that skilled labor contributes to sustained social change.

**4. CSO-Recommendation: Develop inclusive training programs for vulnerable groups to empower marginalized communities and promote equitable opportunities.**

Inclusive training and rehabilitation programs are essential for Moroccan CSOs to enhance the employability of vulnerable groups, particularly women and individuals with disabilities, enabling them to participate more actively in development initiatives. Development projects often require specialized skills that marginalized groups may lack due to social and economic barriers. By providing accessible, tailored training programs, CSOs can bridge this gap, equipping these populations with the skills necessary to thrive in the workforce and contribute to community projects. CSOs should develop training modules that include both technical skills and soft skills, with a focus on practical applications to ensure employability. Training programs should also address gender-specific needs, such as flexible schedules for women with caregiving responsibilities or accessibility accommodations for people with disabilities. Additionally, creating job placement partnerships with local businesses and government agencies can provide pathways for stable employment, helping to reduce labor precarity among participants. For CSO employees, inclusive training initiatives can also improve job security by allowing them to develop specialized skills and grow within the organization. By ensuring that training programs are inclusive, gender-sensitive, and accessible, Moroccan CSOs can empower a diverse array of individuals to participate in—and benefit from—development projects, fostering a more equitable and skilled workforce across the country.

## Country-Specific Recommendations: Jordan

**1. CSO-Recommendation: Foster gender-inclusive financial and professional development opportunities.**

Jordanian CSOs should actively pursue training, capacity-building, and professional development programs to enhance the skills, stability, and job security of their workforce. These initiatives are critical for creating a resilient workforce and reducing turnover within the sector, especially for employees in precarious, temporary positions. Incorporating a gender lens, CSOs should ensure training opportunities are accessible to women, who often face additional barriers to career advancement, and design programs that support their leadership development. Professional growth initiatives also help marginalized groups gain skills and confidence, increasing their long-term job security. CSOs that invest in employee development can build a more capable, committed team prepared to tackle complex social issues while reducing dependency on external expertise.

**2. CSO-Donor Recommendation: Encouraging donor accountability for fair employment practices in CSOs.**

Donors supporting Jordanian CSOs should uphold fair employment standards by requiring recipient organizations to provide stable working conditions, including social security coverage, health benefits, and policies to encourage employee retention. Establishing such accountability measures promotes sector-wide improvements in job stability, moving CSOs away from reliance on temporary, project-based roles. For women and young workers, who are often in more precarious positions with limited benefits, these donor-driven standards can improve job security, access to benefits, and opportunities for advancement. Donors could also allocate funds to cover core administrative costs, enabling CSOs to institutionalize these labor practices rather than constantly relying on project funds for operational expenses. This shift would encourage a healthier, more supportive work environment across the sector, fostering both individual career growth and organizational stability.

**3. CSO-Donor Recommendation: Advocate for long-term capacity-building and core funding support from donors.**

Jordanian CSOs can benefit from shifting donor priorities towards long-term capacity-building and core funding. When donors fund core operational needs and institutional growth rather than only project-specific expenses, CSOs are better equipped to offer stable employment, invest in their staff, and operate effectively over the long term. By advocating for these funding structures, Jordanian CSOs can support fairer employment practices, such as offering competitive wages, regular training, and career progression opportunities for staff. This approach is particularly important for women and young employees, who may otherwise face limitations due to insecure, project-based employment. Core funding also allows CSOs to address local issues with greater consistency and autonomy, building a stronger foundation for sustainable social impact.

**4. CSO-Government Recommendation: Maintain CSO independence from government influence to preserve credibility, autonomy, and the integrity of their mission.**

It is essential for Jordanian CSOs to safeguard their autonomy from government influence to maintain public trust and uphold independent advocacy, especially in areas such as human rights and gender equality. Clear legal protections that ensure CSO independence enable organizations to address social issues without fear of political pressure or repercussion. This independence is particularly crucial for CSOs working on sensitive issues, as it allows them to advocate for change and represent marginalized groups, including women and youth, without compromising their values or credibility. By working collectively to advocate for legal frameworks that protect their autonomy, CSOs in Jordan can create an environment where they can openly pursue their missions, empowering them to act as effective agents of social change.

## Conclusion: Towards a Sustainable and Equitable Future for Civil Society Work in the MENA Region

The findings and discussions presented in this study underscore the urgent need for structural reforms to address the precarious labor conditions that continue to undermine the nonprofit sector in the MENA region. By examining the working conditions of civil society workers in Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, we have highlighted the systemic issues that contribute to job insecurity, limited social protections, and inadequate support for CSO workers, especially those involved in advocacy efforts. Through the lenses of the multidimensional construct of precarious work and the C190 ILO framework, we have delved into the nuanced ways that precariousness manifests in the nonprofit sector, affecting not only workers' livelihoods but also the capacity of CSOs to fulfill their social missions.

The multidimensional construct of precarious work, with its focus on various aspects of labor insecurity, has allowed us to understand the unique vulnerabilities of civil society workers. Many CSO employees face temporary contracts, poor occupational health, and an absence of career development opportunities, resulting in a workforce that is constantly at risk of turnover and burnout. This framework has revealed the ways in which casualization, defined by unstable and short-term contracts, prevents workers from committing fully to their roles and hampers the sector's effectiveness. Moreover, the C190 ILO framework has highlighted the pervasive issues of workplace violence and harassment that CSO workers, especially women and marginalized groups, often experience. By framing these issues as matters of labor rights and human dignity, the C190 framework underscores the need for comprehensive protections that go beyond mere policy; it calls for a transformation in workplace culture that prioritizes safety, respect, and equity.

Our research has demonstrated that without significant reforms, the CSO sector in the MENA region will continue to struggle with high turnover rates, a loss of skilled labor, and limited impact. The casualization of labor remains a major barrier, one that is exacerbated by financial instability, reliance on short-term donor funding, and the lack of support mechanisms. For civil society to thrive in an environment of shrinking civic space, CSOs must be able to attract and retain committed employees who feel secure in their positions and valued in their roles. This requires moving beyond stopgap measures and towards structural reforms that secure fair wages, social protections, and meaningful career paths for CSO workers.

The recommendations outlined in this chapter represent a crucial first step toward building a more sustainable and equitable future for civil society work in the MENA region. However, realizing these recommendations will require a concerted effort from a range of stakeholders, including governments, international donors, private sector partners, and CSOs themselves. Policymakers must prioritize labor reform and create enabling environments for CSOs to operate independently and sustainably. Donors must recognize the importance of long-term, flexible funding that allows organizations to invest in their workforce and build institutional resilience. Furthermore, the nonprofit sector must advocate for its own rights as a legitimate part of the labor market, demanding the same protections and standards afforded to other sectors.

As we look to the future, it is essential to take bold steps to curb the casualization of labor in the nonprofit sector. This shift is not merely a matter of economic necessity; it is fundamental to ensuring that civil society can continue to serve as a pillar of democracy, human rights, and social justice in the MENA region. At a time when civic space is shrinking and authoritarian pressures are rising, the role of CSOs in advocating for the rights and freedoms of marginalized communities is more critical than ever. However, without secure, stable working conditions, CSO employees cannot be expected to fully engage in or sustain these advocacy efforts.

In conclusion, the path forward requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both the immediate labor needs of CSO workers and the long-term sustainability of the sector. By adopting fair labor practices, securing funding that supports organizational stability, and advocating for legal protections, CSOs in the MENA region can foster a more equitable and supportive work environment. This transformation will empower CSO employees to bring their full potential to their roles, enabling civil society organizations to continue their essential work in promoting social change, defending human rights, and preserving civic space.

While these recommendations chart a roadmap for immediate and actionable reforms, future research should expand this work by examining other countries in the region to capture a broader spectrum of labor issues across various contexts. Additionally, in-depth studies on specific challenges, such as the mental health impacts of job insecurity or the deeper intersection of gender and labor precariousness, would offer further insight into targeted strategies for support.

To ensure these findings and recommendations reach a wide audience, dissemination should include collaborative forums with stakeholders, policy briefs shared with regional governments, and interactive workshops with CSOs to discuss best practices and potential implementation challenges. These steps will foster shared understanding, create actionable momentum, and reinforce the importance of a strong, sustainable civil society sector that can withstand future challenges and continue its essential work in the MENA region.

# Appendix: Labor Laws in Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan: A Comparative Lens

## Introduction

The labor laws in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are crucial in shaping the employment landscape, addressing worker rights, and ensuring social justice. Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan, though diverse in their socioeconomic contexts, share common challenges in their labor markets, such as high unemployment, informal employment, and fluctuating economic conditions. This paper explores the labor laws in these four countries, focusing on key areas including contractual relationships, wages, labor protections, social security, safeguarding policies, and grievance mechanisms. Through comparative analysis, the paper aims to highlight differences and similarities, identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

## Contractual Relationships

Employment contracts are a cornerstone of labor laws in all four countries, as they define the nature of the relationship between employers and employees. In Lebanon, the Labor Law of 1946 governs contractual agreements, requiring that contracts be in writing or oral, for fixed-term and indefinite contracts. However, many workers, especially in the informal sector, lack formal contracts, which leads to vulnerabilities in employment security. In Morocco, the **Moroccan Labor Code** (2004) mandates that employment contracts be in writing and clearly outline the terms of employment, including wages, job responsibilities, and termination conditions. Moroccan law also allows for both fixed-term and indefinite contracts but emphasizes the need for documentation to ensure legal protection.

Tunisia's **Labor Code** (1966, with amendments) prioritizes employment stability, especially for full-time employees. The code requires that contracts must specify the nature of the work and the duration of employment if applicable. Tunisia places a strong emphasis on avoiding precarious employment situations by encouraging indefinite contracts over temporary ones. Jordan's **Labor Law** (1996) provides for both written and oral contracts, although written contracts are strongly encouraged to avoid disputes. It also mandates a probationary period of up to three months, after which the contract becomes binding if both parties agree to continue. Jordan's laws have specific provisions for terminating contracts, ensuring that both employer and employee are protected from arbitrary dismissals.

**Comparison:** All four countries mandate written contracts, but Lebanon and Jordan show significant gaps in enforcement, particularly in the informal sector. Tunisia stands out for its emphasis on employment stability, while Morocco has a more flexible approach that adapts to different employment types.

## Wages

Wage regulations in these countries are designed to ensure minimum living standards for workers. In Lebanon, the National Minimum Wage Decree sets the minimum wage, but due to the country's ongoing economic crisis, the actual purchasing power of wages has drastically declined. As of April 2024, the minimum wage in Lebanon is LBP 18,000,000 (around \$200 per month), far below the cost of living.

Morocco's labor law regulates wages through the Smig (Salaire Minimum Interprofessionnel Garanti), which sets a national minimum wage that varies slightly between urban and rural areas. As of 2023, the minimum wage in Morocco was around MAD 3,000 per month (\$300), though it varies across sectors. Tunisia follows a similar system, with the Guaranteed Minimum Wage (SMIG) being revised periodically to account for inflation. The current minimum wage stands at TND 450 (\$145) for a 48-hour workweek.

Jordan's Labor Law sets a minimum wage of JD 260 (\$370) as of 2023, but the law also allows for sector-specific adjustments, particularly in industries such as textiles. Jordan also has special provisions for young workers and foreign labor, where minimum wages may differ based on the type of work and worker category.

**Comparison:** Lebanon is experiencing a severe wage crisis, significantly reducing the value of its minimum wage. Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan, on the other hand, have more stable wage regulations, although Tunisia's wages are lower in comparison to Jordan. Morocco and Tunisia update wages regularly in response to inflation, but gaps in enforcement exist, particularly for informal workers.

## Labor Protections

Labor protections are vital in safeguarding workers from exploitation and unfair practices. In Lebanon, workers are entitled to protection from unfair dismissal, but this protection is often undermined by poor enforcement, particularly for informal workers. Lebanese labor law also regulates working hours (48 hours per week) and mandates paid leave, including maternity leave, though the economic crisis has strained many of these protections.

In Morocco, the Labor Code sets a 44-hour workweek and provides protections against unfair dismissal, though severance pay, and dismissal procedures must be followed. Morocco has relatively strong labor protections in terms of maternity leave and occupational health and safety. Tunisia provides some of the most comprehensive labor protections in the region, including a 48-hour workweek, paid annual leave, and strong regulations around dismissal, which must follow due process.

Jordan provides protection against arbitrary dismissal, but workers in certain sectors, particularly migrant workers, often face abuse due to poor enforcement. Jordanian labor law mandates 48 working hours per week and provides for maternity leave and paid vacation, but compliance varies across sectors, especially in agriculture and domestic work.

**Comparison:** Tunisia and Morocco provide the most robust labor protections, particularly in terms of leave entitlements and protections from unfair dismissal. Lebanon's protections have been weakened by the economic crisis, while Jordan has strong legal frameworks but struggles with enforcement, particularly in sectors employing migrant labor.

## Social Security Systems

Social security systems in these countries aim to provide a safety net for workers, though the level of coverage and efficiency varies. Lebanon's National Social Security Fund (NSSF) provides health insurance, family allowances, and end-of-service indemnities, but its coverage is limited, and the ongoing financial crisis has led to severe delays in benefit payments.

Morocco's Caisse Nationale de Sécurité Sociale (CNSS) is mandatory for all employees and provides pensions, health insurance, and family allowances. However, coverage gaps remain, particularly for informal sector workers. Tunisia's social security system is well-structured, providing pensions, health coverage, and unemployment insurance, although it faces financial sustainability challenges.

Jordan's Social Security Corporation (SSC) provides comprehensive coverage, including pensions, health insurance, and work injury compensation. The SSC has expanded to cover informal workers, although enforcement remains an issue in rural areas.

**Comparison:** Tunisia and Jordan have the most comprehensive social security systems, with both countries striving for broader coverage, including informal workers. Morocco's system is expanding but still faces significant gaps. Lebanon's social security is the most vulnerable due to the country's financial instability.

## Safeguarding Policies

Safeguarding policies, including protections against workplace harassment and discrimination, are key to ensuring a fair and inclusive work environment. In Lebanon, harassment laws exist but are poorly enforced, and many workers, especially women and migrants, face significant abuse. Morocco's labor laws include provisions against discrimination and harassment, but cultural and structural barriers limit their effectiveness in practice.

Tunisia has made significant strides in safeguarding workers, particularly through legislation that addresses workplace discrimination and harassment. These laws are enforced relatively effectively compared to other countries in the region. Jordan has also implemented safeguarding policies, but enforcement remains inconsistent, particularly for women and migrant workers in sectors like domestic work and agriculture.

**Comparison:** Tunisia has the most effective safeguarding policies, with relatively strong enforcement. Morocco and Jordan have implemented laws but face challenges in enforcement, while Lebanon's crisis has weakened its ability to safeguard vulnerable workers.

## Grievance Mechanisms

Grievance mechanisms are essential for resolving labor disputes and ensuring worker rights. In Lebanon, the labor dispute resolution system is inefficient, and many workers are unable to access formal grievance mechanisms due to corruption and bureaucracy. Morocco has established labor courts to handle disputes, and workers can also file grievances through trade unions, although informal workers often lack access to these systems.

Tunisia provides formal grievance mechanisms through labor courts and collective bargaining agreements, and the country has a strong tradition of labor union involvement in dispute resolution. Jordan's grievance mechanisms are less formalized, particularly in sectors with high levels of migrant labor, though labor unions and NGOs play a role in resolving disputes.

**Comparison:** Tunisia has the most structured and accessible grievance mechanisms, with strong union involvement. Morocco's system is functional but less accessible for informal workers. Lebanon and Jordan face significant challenges, particularly in terms of accessibility and enforcement.

## Conclusion

This comparative paper reveals significant variations in labor laws across Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan. While Tunisia stands out for its comprehensive labor protections, social security, and grievance mechanisms, Lebanon's economic crisis has severely weakened its labor standards. Morocco and Jordan have made strides in updating their labor laws, but gaps remain, particularly in the enforcement of safeguards for vulnerable workers, including those in the informal sector. Future reforms in these countries should focus on improving enforcement, expanding social security coverage, and strengthening grievance mechanisms to ensure fair treatment for all workers.

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