

**AMAN**  
Transparency Palestine



Study on  
**Preventive measures against the  
Risks of Gender-Based Corruption  
in Social Services Provision**

**2021**

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Coalition for Integrity and Accountability – AMAN

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**Preventive measures against the  
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## Introduction:

Corruption is a major obstacle facing the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It is considered to be one of the reasons that obstruct the delivery of services necessary to eradicate poverty and hunger. Goal 16 in the Sustainable Development Plan acknowledges the need for building peaceful and inclusive societies that ensure access to justice for all based on respect for human rights and good governance at all levels. It focuses on the importance to build institutions that are effective, accountable and inclusive at all levels, including all institutions that provide public services such as health and social protection services.

Many studies and reports have indicated that corruption affects society in general. Corrupt practices reduce budgets allocated for development, which hence necessitate the reduction of basic services budgets. This may lead to the possible obstruction of the effective enforcement of human rights, especially for women and the more vulnerable groups of society, or for those suffering from the failure of development efforts and social protection services. Corruption also gradually leads to cutbacks in resources earmarked for the enforcement of economic, social, and cultural rights. The existence of corruption-free transparent institutions is considered as a guarantee for the provision of quality services to women and vulnerable groups such as the poor, persons with disabilities, and is a step forward towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Several social and psychological studies demonstrated that corruption impacts women and children at a greater level due to them being the bearer of family responsibilities in terms of services and care. In cases where corruption exists, basic sustainability and survival services such as health and educational services, and access to food, are bound to be affected. Corruption also contributes to the reduced effectiveness and quality of such services and the access of poor segments to these services. Corruption also impacts budgets related to social and protection services aimed at the poorer segments, which women, who suffer compounded marginalization, constitute the majority of. The more the state of vulnerability increases, the more women and children are exposed to poverty and gender-based Violence, ultimately impacting the sustainability of societies. At the same time, limited women's participation in public and political life reduces their impact on the system of governance. Additionally, corruption hinders women's empowerment and their political and economic engagement and restricts their ability to face violations of their rights, thereby plunging society into a cycle of corruption risks. This phenomenon which exists in various countries around the world also applies to the Palestinian context, where women's participation in the formal work market is nominal and is almost non-existent in public life and political and economic activity.

Studies in Palestine that examine the link between corruption and gender are very limited, and primarily focus on the role of women in combating corruption, and lost opportunities due to poor women participation in centers of decision making, given that women are less corrupt and less capable to endure the risks that corruption demand<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> AMAN, 2014, the Role of Women in Corruption and Anti-Corruption Efforts.



Despite the importance of these angles, the fact remains that very few studies attempted to examine whether women and men had different experiences with corruption and whether gender has an impact on differences in the exposure to the risks of corruption.

It is from this outlook that this study comes to examine the preventive measures to stave off gender-based corruption in the provision of social services in particular, as women in this area are more vulnerable and prone to risk due to their poverty or disability, or because of being divorced or widowed, which are all conditions that increase the chances of them being exposed to the risks of corruption.

The study aims at the following:

- To examine and analyze the preventive measures against gender-based corruption in procedures, policies, and mechanisms of social services provision.
- Identify challenges that impede receiving social services, and identify weaknesses and strengths in such services.
- To make specific recommendations for the development of mechanisms for the management of gender-based corruption in the social development sector.

### **Work methodology:**

The study relied on a descriptive-analytical approach to reach its expected targets. It reviewed some local and international literature in this field, in addition to interviews with the Ministry of Social Development in the West Bank and Gaza, and a variety of civil society institutions that are in direct contact with social protection issues to examine their relationship with the Ministry of Social Development in terms of its leadership of the social protection sector, including institutions that care for the elderly and martyrs' families, and families with members with disabilities, women's protection against violence institutions, and an interview with the Independent Commission for Human Rights, and a telephone call with the Anti-Corruption Commission. Additionally, AMAN surveyed the views of women beneficiaries of social services in 2020. This survey formed the basic key background for this study. It was relied on in analyzing similarities and differences with the results of the focus groups, noting that this was an impression survey, but it gains its importance from being conducted on women benefiting from services of the Ministry of Social Development.

The study focused on the **opportunities and risks of corruption from a gender perspective**. It did not aim to expose corruption cases or to verify some claims that surfaced during the fieldwork, as this issue requires a different set of work tools and mechanisms. Some cases referred to here are well-known cases that have already been exposed, and the Ministry did take some action in this respect. However, we refer to them here as a means of drawing attention to pursuant opportunities and risks, and to suggest mechanisms for addressing similar incidents before they occur.

To arrive at the above-mentioned goals of the study, three different levels were dealt with to evaluate the impact of corruption from a gender perspective. These levels are:

1. Existence of systems, policies, and procedures, and the extent of their adequacy for raising awareness, prevention and protection, and intervention from a gender-based perspective in the case of the existence of corruption opportunities. Local and international published literature and studies were reviewed, in addition to the National Policies' Agenda and social development sectoral plan among others.
2. The study of the extent of knowledge the staff of the Ministry of Social Development and other partner institutions have on the existence of these systems, policies, and procedures, and the extent to which they implement them, including reporting policies and the degree of willingness to implement them. Interviews were conducted with staff and supervisors from various administrative levels who were identified as being in contact with beneficiaries by reviewing the administrative structure. 22 in-depth interviews were made (13 men and 9 women) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. 13 interviews were conducted in the Gaza Strip, and 9 in the West Bank.
3. Ascertain the extent of knowledge beneficiaries from services possess on procedures, and their evaluation of the degree of their implementation through focus work-groups in the West Bank and Gaza Strip attended by nearly 40 women from various age and needs groups.
4. In addition to the aforementioned, the study drew upon the survey conducted by AMAN with Ministry of Social Development services female beneficiaries to confirm or refute some issues that arose during the interviews or focus groups.

## **Social protection in the Palestinian reality:**

There is an increasing and urgent need for social protection in Palestine as it suffers from a decades-long colonial occupation that has worked to impoverish the Palestinian people and deprived them of its most basic needs. Long years of poverty, siege, and political division have contributed to the impoverishment of the Gaza Strip in particular. Pockets of poverty have increased in Gaza and area (C) in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The poverty rate in Palestine for 2021 is estimated at 36% for the West Bank including East Jerusalem, and 64% for the Gaza Strip<sup>2</sup>. 2 million Palestinians suffer from poor food security, 600.000 of which are in the West Bank, and 1.4 million in the Gaza Strip<sup>3</sup>.

Data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics indicates that the poverty rate among females in the Gaza Strip is four times higher than the rate of their counterparts in the West Bank. And poverty rates increase among households that are headed by females compared to those headed by males in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip<sup>4</sup>.

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2 UN OCHA "Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt) Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021" Dec 2020

3 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2021

4 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Men and Women in Palestine, 2018. (in Arabic).



These facts not only underscore the importance of the existence of an integrated social protection program but also the amount of pressure protection institutions are under. In the past few years, the demand for social protection needs to be exacerbated as a result of the political situation and division between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the onslaught of covid-19, and the lack of sufficient financial resources to cover all needs due to Israeli arbitrary measures such as withholding of clearing funds and the deductions from these funds, and also due to the shortage in external assistance to the Palestinian Authority and civil society institutions alike.

The Ministry of Social Development provides numerous protection services. And despite the responsibilities the Ministry shoulders in terms of oversight, protection, and holding other service providers accountable, such as civic institutions and private sector institutions that have social responsibility programs, and UN and international agencies that provide relief services and emergency assistance, this role, however, is virtually non-existent. Hence there is no oversight and protection over the vast majority of service providers. This renders marginalized groups, particularly women, even more, vulnerable to all sorts of violations and the risk of falling prey to corruption.

There is no comprehensive picture of protection programs in Palestine due to the various bodies that provide protection, including local and international institutions, and family institutions (such as Diwans), mosques, individual donors. Some programs proved difficult to get information and details on, for example, UNRWA, which provides various forms of humanitarian assistance and other forms of protection, in addition to international organizations working in the field of providing relief and emergency assistance. This reflects poor transparency and a semi-absence of accountability, whether with regards to justice and gender equality in providing relief and emergency assistance or in terms of quality or even duplicity of such services.

The issues of eradicating the risks of corruption in the provision of protection services by international humanitarian organizations are of paramount importance, particularly after the onslaught of accusations of sexual abuse of women all over the world since 2018, that indicate that several humanitarian organizations fell into the trap of these violations in some of the world's poorest regions, including some established cases in Palestine<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://alternatives-humanitaires.org/en/2021/03/24/sexual-abuse-perpetrated-by-humanitarian-workers-from-moral-relativism-to-competitive-victimhood/>

Gender and risks of corruption in the field of social protection:

Gender is defined as the characteristics of women and men that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviors, and roles associated with being a woman or man. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. Gender generally defines the division of work in the family and society within clear traditions and social norms in many societies and often assigns the reproductive role and care of the family and the elderly and the disabled to women. Gender roles also determine who controls resources and makes decisions in society, starting at home up to the highest levels of government<sup>6</sup>.

Gender carries within it specific interpretations that make it very important to understand and analyze and act on in all spheres of life. Of these characteristics, the most important are the differences in social roles, where the societal belief is that the role of women is centered within the home in reproductive and caring roles and that men's primary role is to earn a living and support the family. And though these roles have changed in recent years, they still govern many policies, laws, and regulations that rely on an understanding of the traditional role and societal view of both men and women. For example, women still suffer more if social protection, education, or health services are reduced, they are forced to play an additional role in supporting their families, children, and disabled/elderly family members which is a role that should be played by the state. But when any economic or social shakeup that weakens the role of the state occurs, women take over. On the other hand, if women go out to work outside the household, they do not receive all their rights as men do, such as equal pay, family health insurance, and increments for additional children, or the right to bequest their pensions. Not only this but even when women are deserving of social assistance, this assistance is dispensed in the name of the man in the family. Several social norms and prejudices are associated with the roles' distribution, all these determine how women and men behave in the public sphere.

The second area is related to the ability to access sources and resources, including material and informational sources and resources, and social relations that occur in the public sphere where mainly men control these resources. This makes men more able to make decisions, define policies, access parliaments, and have political representation in governments and parties. The concept of distribution of power and authority is linked to access to sources and resources. Those who have no power cannot influence the way things work. There are intersections and similarities between corruption and other forms of gender-based violence, where the power and authority of a natural or a legal person are used against a weaker party. This similarity in the roots and causes of the problem means that women are the most vulnerable to risks of corruption due to the current balances of power in the Palestinian society, which generally tend to assign men the greater role in public life and decision making and control over resources. Globally, there are three waves of various gender research in the field of corruption. The first wave addresses three areas:

1. Access to public services and financial resources.
2. Application of the rule of law in the promotion of rights and protection against gender-based violence.
3. Access to decision-making, including political participation as citizens and as legislators and civil servants.

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<sup>6</sup> Conference of Member States of the United Nations' Convention against Corruption, 2019, Corruption and Gender, eighth session, Abu Dhabi. (in Arabic).



Corruption affects certain groups of individuals, and marginalized groups more than other more privileged groups. One of the reasons for the disproportionately negative impact of corruption on women is that they constitute the majority of the world's poor which rely disproportionately on public services when corruption exhausts the resources available to such services<sup>7</sup> in contexts where bribery, nepotism, or patronage are a prerequisite for access to services, rights, and resources, resulting in relatively poor access for women too, and control over, personal resources, repeatedly denying them access to such services<sup>8</sup>. The statistically low literacy rates of women in many countries, which often result in a relative lack of knowledge of rights and entitlements in public services and programs, make them more vulnerable to extortion and abuse of laws<sup>9</sup>.

There was no evidence throughout all interviews conducted for this study that social protection services providers were aware of the strong relationship between gender and corruption in general, particularly in the area of social protection. This is due to several reasons such as:

**First:** The true understanding of the risks of corruption which was used in the past few years in the Palestinian context as a stigma or as an accusation with political dimensions that is denied without truly understanding what this means. Corruption in the area of social protection is confused with the possible access to the limited services to start with and to the rights and obligations rather than being associated with political disputes and accusations.

**Second:** The lack of understanding of the meaning of gender as a concept and tool for analysis. All those interviewed, either knew nothing about gender (Gender Blind) or assumed that policies and procedures in place are applied equally to men and women and that social services do not discriminate between men and women. This is a flawed concept that has been proved as false in all programs related to development, human rights, and combating corruption (Gender Neutral). In order to achieve true change and an in-depth understanding of gender issues, there is need for a gender analysis for all programs, projects, services, and laws and policies. Additionally, it is important to encourage conducting of a gender audit which would help to identify vulnerabilities in the organizational structure so that services providers can become more sensitive and responsive to gender issues.

**Third:** Lack of continuous training to raise awareness on concepts and on procedures and policies. Services providers should be included in the feedback loop on concepts and criteria applied, and on experiences they encounter. Training must be conducted periodically, and the assumption should not be made that experiences can be transferred from old employees to new ones as there is no renewed though in this method. Training on the risks of corruption must include gender issues and the use of case studies from reality on the differences in types of corruption that women and men are exposed to.

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7 See Gender and Corruption, Brief <https://cdn.sida.se/publications/files/-gender-and-corruption.pdf>

8 see Nyamu-Musembi, C. (2007). Gender and corruption in administration of justice: Global Corruption Report

9 See UNDP, UNIFEM (2010). Corruption, Accountability and Gender: Understanding the Connections. Last visited 20.8.2021.

## **First: Risks of gender-based corruption in social services provision procedures, policies, and mechanisms:**

The current government has adopted a new development plan 2021-2023. Contained in this plan is that “a democratic Palestine must be free of all forms of discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, and gender, with a competent civil service branch that is accountable and free of favoritism and corruption”<sup>10</sup>.

Generally speaking, the government has general regulations such as the Public Procurement Law and the Civil Service Law and other laws and regulations, and codes of conduct that govern public and official institutional work. However, these general provisions are not gender sensitive, and do not recognize the various experiences of men and women in dealing with the government sector on the grounds that laws, policies and regulations are applied to all equally. This has been proven to be inaccurate in many experiences around the world.

The lack of gender sensitive and responsive regulations and laws in the protection sector can be cause for corruption. In some cases, even when policies do exist, the lack of implementation and absence of an oversight body over their implementation, or laxness in implementation lead to increasing corruption opportunities.

numerous manuals exist in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as result of the political split between the two geographical entities. The Ministry of Social Development in the Gaza Strip has several manuals and procedures and policies for dealing with the risks of corruption, such as a manual that was developed by the Ministry’s staff there. Additionally, there is a separate procedural manual for each general directorate in Gaza where citizens can review them to access their services or needs. These manuals are very general and do not address gender issues and women’s experiences.

The Ministry of Social Development in the West Bank and Gaza Strip operates under the Amended Complaints Regulation No. 8 for the year 2016 and its procedures manual. Staff at the Ministry of Social Development insist that there is no discrimination or restriction in the procedures, and that they apply to males and females alike, and that the Ministry’s team operates as one working group, all of whom are qualified to deal with people in accordance with the rules of professional conduct, and that there are transparent, impartial and confidential procedures governing the information provided. There is also a complaints unit in the Gaza Strip. For example, the complaints unit’s Office is located at the Ministry’s entrance near the reception area, and complaint boxes are available in all directorates, governorates, and district offices, however, their effectiveness needs verification.

There is a prevalent belief at the Ministry of Social Development that the gradual shift to electronic platforms can contribute to counter corruption opportunities, as gaps and entry points to corruption and asking for mediation through relatives and acquaintances are reduced.

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<sup>10</sup> The National Development Plan for Palestine - Resilience, resistance, disassociation and development by clusters towards independence 2021-2023.

On the other hand, there is no declared safeguarding policy for protection against sexual abuse and exploitation available at the Ministry of Social Development. And this protection policy does not only include complaints mechanisms and means for addressing them, but also include awareness raising, prevention, and swift intervention. The policy needs to be applicable to services providers and contractors too, and any natural or legal person in direct contact with the most vulnerable segments including women, children, the elderly and the disabled and individuals with other sexual identities. The policy of protection against sexual exploitation and abuse constitutes, should it exist, a means for protection and prevention against corruption and violations before they can happen, and not only focuses on dealing with an issue after it occurs as is the current general trend in Palestine.

In a survey by the AMAN Coalition on the views of women beneficiaries of social development services on the effects of corruption in the provision of services, the level of services provided by the Ministry of Social Development and its directorates received the satisfaction of 58% of the beneficiaries, while 42% responded with dissatisfaction with the level of services provided by the Ministry. And the level of satisfaction in the West Bank was higher than that in Gaza<sup>11</sup>.

Oversight by the competent body (Ministry of Social Development) over the provision of protection services by other entities such as civil society organizations remains very limited. It is restricted to the Ministry of Interior's State Audit Administrative Control Bureau. Primary oversight is that of boards of directors, which vary from one board to the other depending on their capacities and capabilities. Sadly, many institutions that provide social protection services, or in-kind or cash assistance do not have clear criteria and have no multi-level oversight. This leaves room for various types of corruption and abuse. Additionally, oversight tools of the Palestinian Authority still rely on written communication, and have no electronic follow-up means that would facilitate monitoring and evaluation.

It is the view of some women that the criteria that exist at the Ministry of Social Development for the provision of aid are unclear and not responsive to gender and are not updated periodically. There exists no monitoring and evaluation of the social protection system's capacity to meet needs, or to their ability to evolve from the perspective of beneficiaries. This lack of clarity in criteria and monitoring and evaluation can create gaps that increase the opportunities for corruption. The availability of clear publicized criteria, a no-exceptions policy, and publishing information on aid and how to access it would greatly help in changing these impressions, and hence restore and enhance confidence in the Ministry of Social Development.

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11 Coalition for Integrity and Accountability (AMAN), "Survey on Views of Women Beneficiaries of Social Development Services on the Effects of Corruption in the Provision of Services". 2021. Ramallah – Palestine. (In Arabic).

## **Second: Corruption risks that women are exposed to in the process of receiving social protection services:**

Globally, the most prominent forms of corruption are: nepotism, patronage, bribery, money-laundering, under the table illegal payment of funds for services and exploitation of influence, pressure from persons of influence, exploitation of the job for personal interests, payment of funds to speed up access to documents and services that require time due to bureaucratic procedures, and embezzlement and compromising public funds.

**However, interviews and focus groups did not reveal the spread of these forms of corruption, nor did they express concern of their existence. During the interviews, staff of the Ministry of Social Development have stressed that procedures in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip generally do not allow for forms of corruption, because the decision to provide assistance is taken based on a clear structure that does not allow for one person to monopolize the decision on whether to give assistance or not.**

This is confirmed by what is stated in AMAN's survey on the views of female beneficiaries of social development services on the effects of corruption on service provision. The vast majority of respondents (88%) did not state that they had encountered any problems/forms of corruption, as opposed to (12%) who stated they had encountered problems/forms of corruption while requesting services from the Ministry of Social Development, or from one of its directorates. However, when we raised the question of problems or forms of corruption they possibly encountered, the percentage of beneficiaries that stated that they had encountered such issues in the process of requesting aid from the Ministry or its directorates rose to (23%), while the percentage for those stating they had faced no such issues dropped to (77%).

This does not negate the possibility of corruption "opportunities", especially since women beneficiaries are more prone to exposure to corruption risks. This fact may be exploited if no protection mechanisms exist, especially when dealing with segments that are generally vulnerable such as divorcees, widows, and women suffering unstable psychological conditions due to the loss of their breadwinner, whether through death or divorce.

When asked about the types of corruption that women in particular are exposed to, the following forms were indicated:

### **Discrimination in providing services**

One of the female participants in the focus groups said that allowing parents/family members of women with disabilities deserving social welfare aid to receive this aid on their behalf, and then failing to deliver it to them is a violation and form of corruption<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> The focus group in the West Bank.



And though this definition does not completely apply to the definition of corruption, the failure to engage female beneficiaries in determining criteria and mechanisms for disbursement, and the dominance of an entity with influence over another can be considered a flagrant violation to women's rights, and reflects the differences between women and men in terms of their experiences with corruption. Another participant saw that the lack of clarity and transparency of criteria as another form of discrimination.

There is a common belief that women receive better and faster treatment by services providers. Society in general does not accept, within its prevailing social norms, insulting or raising the voice to women, and tends to sympathize with women with disabilities, and this prevailing mentality also affects service providers. On the other hand, some household heads exploit this sympathy by sending women to request services and follow-up on applications. But as soon as the request for aid is approved, the check is made out to the man's name in a clear dedication of the prevalent pattern of gender roles.

### **Procrastination in providing services**

Participants viewed procrastination in provision of services as one of the most serious risks of corruption. Participants expressed concern that procrastination may lead some to resort to nepotism. Procrastination may constitute a risk that can increase the greater the poverty and need for humanitarian assistance is. Procrastination is linked to the lack of clarity of criteria and the specific time expected to respond to requests for assistance, as well as to the availability of resources to the Palestinian Authority, where the Authority's agencies suffer from unsustainable and irregular resources, in addition to the Israeli occupation's measures of withholding clearing funds, and the shift in donors' trends among other reasons. Procrastination gives the female beneficiaries the impression that they need to pay bribes or resort to nepotism to receive their delayed service. In a survey conducted by AMAN, 20% of respondents (in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) indicated that they had been neglected or experienced delays in providing services to them.

### **Inferiority attitude towards women**

Some women referred to the existence of an inferiority attitude in dealing with women receiving services, particularly women with disabilities. They also indicated to the pity looks they receive and the lack of recognition of the right of women with disabilities to receive services. Also referred to was the absence of clear and publicized laws and procedures for all groups. They also viewed withholding of information from marginalized groups as potential corruption<sup>13</sup>. The inferiority attitude is linked to stereotypes and social norms of roles and expectations of women, and therefore warrant an analysis of gender roles in services, and analyzing and changing the impression of service providers about these roles.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with an organization dealing in the rights of the disabled in the West Bank.

## Suspicious of nepotism and favoritism

The most prominent form of corruption women have come to know is nepotism and favoritism. There is a belief among participants in focal groups that there is an imbalance in the distribution of assistance, and that this imbalance is caused by the belief of aid distributors that “charity begins at home” and that they (the distributors) should have a share of this aid based on the rule of [those employed to administer it], which is a phrase excerpted from a Quranic verse that talks about who may be eligible to receive Zakat (alms) money, and is sometimes used out of its original context to justify corruption. The verse translates as follows:

“Charity expenditures are only for the poor and for the needy and for [those employed to administer it]”.

The Ministry of Social Development is trying to prevent nepotism and favoritism with measures taken at more than one level of decision-making. However, the Palestinian society relies heavily on the use of connections, particularly family and partisan connections to expedite procedures and cut through bureaucracy. In a survey conducted by AMAN, 6% indicated that they had to use a connection. And though this percentage is low, it is likely to increase with the rise in poverty and human need.

## Material or intangible benefit from service provision

Some cases were recorded during interviews which gave examples of direct material benefit from service providers through applying pressure on women. In one case at least, it was found upon investigation into a complaint lodged by a beneficiary that the social worker exploited her and took out a loan in her (the beneficiary) name, and coerced her into signing demand drafts to secure her silent. The Ministry took serious measures and an investigation committee was formed and the demand drafts were withdrawn<sup>14</sup>. This may be an isolated incident, however, the use by a staff member of the authority vested in him/her to gain personal benefit is considered a potential risk. According to the results of the survey conducted by the AMAN, only 0.5% of the respondents indicated that they had been blackmailed by a service provider for material or intangible benefits.

Procedures related to social assistance provision at some civil society organizations are vague. Beneficiaries do not know the reason behind asking them to make some contributions. One participant in the focus groups said “some civil society organizations request money in exchange for services. For example: to receive a voucher, I pay 20 shekels to get it, sometimes even 30 or 200 Shekels, if I refuse, my name will not be put on a beneficiaries’ lists anymore. Another example, I cannot receive sponsorship unless I pay 200 Shekels”<sup>15</sup>.

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14 Interview with a staff member at the Ministry of Social Development in the Gaza Strip.

15 Focus group for northern Gaza Strip.

## **Sexual exploitation:**

participants in focal groups in the Gaza Strip denied that they had been asked for any sexual bribery, or experienced sexual harassment or extortion. They commended the good treatment of the Ministry of Social Development's staff. While one of the employees interviewed in the Gaza Strip mentioned one case: "There is a social worker who wanted to give aid to a woman and asked her for a sexual bribe. The woman reported him, and the employee was caught in the act. He was referred to prosecution and his name no longer exists on staff lists of the Ministry of Social Development".

Results of the survey conducted by the AMAN showed that only 0.5% of female respondents in the Gaza Strip reported hearing about cases of females seeking services being blackmailed, or harassed by staff of the Ministry or its directorates. While 64% of respondents said they had heard of the use of personal information (phone number, social-media addresses) by employees of the Ministry of Social Development to forge a relationship outside the Ministry's scope of work with a female seeking services. The same percentage said that they heard of cases where beneficiaries had to ask for the help of a mediator or official to receive services.

88% of respondents reported that they were willing to file a complaint if they were sexually exploited and blackmailed by Ministry employees (officials/social workers), and 57% said they would resort to the complaints' unit at the Ministry of Social Development. As for the reasons why 12% of the respondents said they would not file a complaint, 32% of those said it was out of fear that people would know about it, and 31% said it is for the lack of responsiveness to such complaints, and 24% said there are no guarantees for accountability, and 19% said they did not file a complaint in order to continue receiving services, and the same percentage said it is for the lack of confidentiality guarantees.

## conclusions:

There has been increased awareness in recent years on the importance of understanding the risks of corruption and the need to address them. There has been increased attention to issues of corruption, both socially and institutionally, and the Ministry of Social Development is one of the ministries that works hard to enhance integrity and accountability, including community accountability and combating corruption. It is also a leading institution in the application of the citizen's budget. At the same time, the Ministry is considered to be one of the most ministries concerned with gender issues and challenges, and is in daily contact with issues of gender-based violence, and on providing services to women victims of violence. The study showed that there are serious attempts to reduce the risks of corruption in all its forms, but there is still a need to raise awareness and enhance the knowledge on gender-based corruption, and to recognize the possibility of its existence, and to develop policies to mitigate such risks with the participation of women and women's rights and feminist institutions, and to train Ministry of Social Development's staff on these issues annually, and not to content with one training in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip.

Research on the intersection of gender and corruption in general remains limited, and oversight and legal bodies and institutions working in human rights issues and in counter corruption and are not interested in the intersection between corruption and gender issues. It does not give sufficient attention to the differences between men and women's experiences in terms of exposure to corruption and dealing with it. This study provides an opportunity to raise the subject and to deepen the understanding of the intersection of corruption and gender. Gender issues relate not only to women's issues, but to gender gaps as well. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out periodic gender analyses and to use results from the design of different policies, procedures and interventions.

The Ministry of Social Development has policies and procedures to deal with the risks of corruption. However, there are issues that have been addressed throughout the study, such as updating procedures periodically in periods that do not exceed five years, learning from experiences and corruption and gender-based violence cases that have been uncovered in order to develop more gender-sensitive policies. At the same time, it is imperative to build on experiences of workers in the field. And more importantly, to build on actual experiences of men and women who were exposed to corruption. Without learning from these practical experiences from the community, the matter remains limited to theoretical knowledge. Prevention against the risks of corruption is much more beneficial than working to develop a modern or electronic complaints system, or the use of social media to report violations. This prevention can be achieved through publishing procedures and criteria in a clear understandable way to all, and to update procedures and criteria periodically to respond to the needs of the various segments.

Results also showed clear differences in the experience of women with corruption due to the fact that they are responsible for care in the family, disabled children, and the elderly, and due to their absence from public life and political participation, and due to the existence of specific social norms and prejudices regarding roles, needs, and expectations of both men and women. Some experiences of women are difficult to report due to society's expectations of women to behave in a specific way, such as to turn a blind eye to unacceptable practices in order to avoid stigmatization in society.

## **Recommendations:**

Staving off potential risks of corruption from gender-based perspective, and provision of a protective environment against the possibility of emergence of forms of corruption that cause women to pay an additional price, requires parties concerned with social protection to take a set of pre-emptive precautions and measures as follows:

### **Ministry of Social Development in the West Bank and Gaza Strip**

- The Ministry needs to develop its capacities as leader and coordinator of social protection efforts in Palestine, including a supervisory role over all types of aid provided by other civil society organizations, governmental and para-governmental institutions, including assistance related to social responsibility in the private sector that also needs to subscribe to the same level of transparency and accountability.
- Conduct an analysis of all programs, projects, services, laws and policies from a gender perspective prior to their adoption and with the participation of all concerned groups, and with participation of women beneficiaries of these services.
- Conduct a gender audit. This will contribute to identifying shortcomings in the institutional and organizational structure so that service providers become more sensitive and responsive to gender.
- Develop annual training plans for the Ministry's staff on gender and the risks of corruption, particularly for those working in the fields of social welfare and at complaints units.
- Gender mainstreaming and the fight against corruption must be the task of all those working in the Ministry of Social Development.
- Develop a special policy for the Ministry to prevent the risks of gender-based corruption, including harassment, extortion and sexual abuse.
- Take additional measures at complaints units to ensure confidentiality and privacy in dealing with complaints submitted by women, and to develop the working mechanisms of complaints' units in terms of speed in which cases are processed.
- Conducting awareness campaigns targeting marginalized groups, particularly beneficiaries from social welfare programs and to raise public awareness on complaints' units work mechanisms and means of accessing them.
- All anti-corruption programs and initiatives must include gender mainstreaming in all activities and ensure that activities are designed to benefit men and women equally.

### **Civil society institutions**

- Adopt preventive policies against gender-based corruption.
- Provide mechanisms and safe spaces for submission of complaints by women on the work of civic institutions and their social welfare programs that ensure privacy and confidentiality.
- Conduct in-depth studies on the risks of corruption in their work with the use of gender analysis and indicators.
- Contribute to raise awareness on mechanisms for submission and follow up on complaints focusing on marginalized segments and their ability to access such mechanisms.



## Recommendations for additional research

- We recommend conducting specialized research on institutions providing social protection services and humanitarian aid, for example UNRWA, World Food Program, international and local civil society institutions, and governmental institutions such as Office of the President.
- We also encourage professional investigative reports in this field.

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