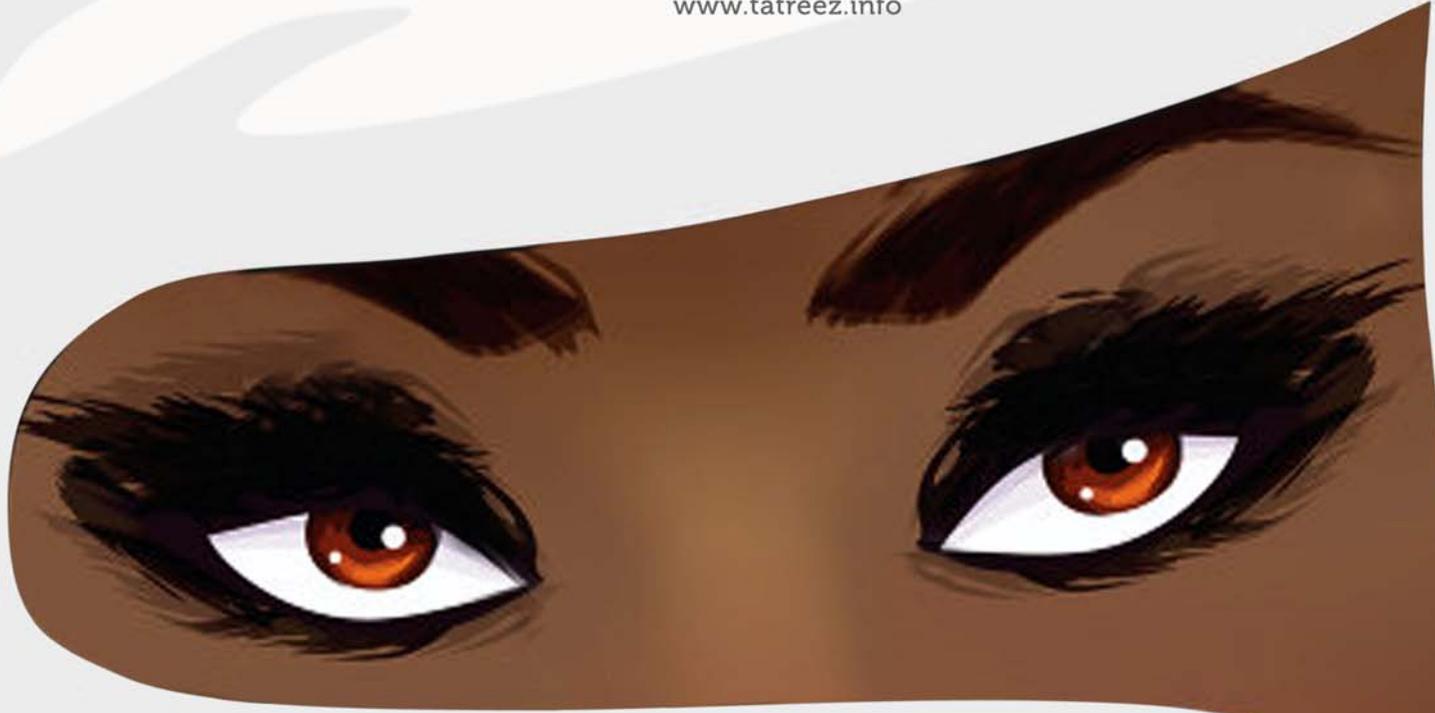


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Good Practices Guide

**Socio-economic Empowerment of
Divorced/Widowed Women**

Tatreez project

A project implemented by Spanish NGO



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INTRODUCTION.

In order to improve the socio-economic situation of divorced/widowed women, it is essential that their needs are addressed in an integrated way, with consideration given to complementary interventions in education, health, social and cultural participation, as well as efforts to combat legal and social discrimination. It requires the coordinated work of multiple actors across various areas of intervention. Below we outline 12 good practice recommendations, intended to help practitioners revise their current programs and projects and devise new, effective, and unified approaches to the empowerment of divorced/widowed women in Palestinian refugee camps.

GOOD PRACTICE 1: FACILITATING EMPLOYMENT.

It is one thing for a woman to be qualified to work, and another to be able to find a job given the limited opportunities and likely restrictions on her movement and interaction with the wider society.

Therefore, efforts to enhance the employability of divorced/widowed women can be approached in a two-fold manner:

1- Skills-Focused

Firstly, interventions can focus on developing the target group's skills in a manner that corresponds to the realities of the market. It is recommended that stakeholders reach out and collaborate with market research agencies, which can provide their services at an acceptable cost or pro bono as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility programs. A study on the informal economy and formal opportunities available for the demographic of divorced/widowed women could be used to draw better employability and income generation intervention strategies.

Trainers, vocational institutes, schools, NGOs and other actors engaged in women's professional development should adopt an orientation and guidance system to encourage women to specialize in vocations that correspond to the needs of the economy and available opportunities. Short term trainings and workshops for divorced/widowed women are recommended, to be implemented in a manner that suits their time constraints and family responsibilities.

Stakeholders should also consider moving beyond 'hard' skills such vocation or core competencies, and integrate continuous training on 'soft skills' like time management, interview skills, communication etc.

Divorced/widowed women can also stand to benefit from more personal development trainings that aim to increase self-confidence and help the women find their interests and aspirations.

All training and vocational institutes are encouraged to provide a child day care service for trainees with children, and consider employing divorced/widowed women as caretakers.

2- Access-Focused

Small companies and opportunities for unskilled, low paid, or informal work are not advertised so women have to have strong social network. Whereas kinship network are normally instrumental in this regard, in the case of divorced/widowed women, family members could potentially be opposed and refrain from helping, or alternatively the woman could be too embarrassed to request assistance. Therefore, the provision of advice and services from a neutral party would be beneficial

The kinds of relations one has and the types of people one knows, also referred to as social capital, is immensely important in today's market structure and particularly in the informal sector. Therefore, we recommend providing opportunities for women to network and meet people beyond their immediate social circle in order to enhance their employability.

Stakeholders should consider providing divorced/widowed women with opportunities to network and expand their interaction with employer community. Short trainings or workshops that would introduce prospective employees to the process of networking, engaging with employers etc. is beneficial. (See previous section about 'soft skills')

Divorced/widowed women, especially those who have never worked before, have little knowledge of job seeking and application process. Therefore, UNRWA and/or NGOs could assign a staff member the task of "special recruitment and career advice", to impart knowledge of the job seeking process and assist in facilitating links with women-friendly employers and workplaces. This staff member or focal point would also be an integral link for a referral network among NGOs and UNRWA, as well as an advocate for positive discrimination measures among employers and NGOs. Within UNRWA, the staff member would be linked to Special Hardship Cases program as well as the 8 women's centers.

GOOD PRACTICE 2: RECRUITMENT POLICIES.

The components of a recruitment policy that is favourable to divorced/widowed women should include a feasible degree of positive discrimination.

Competition from refugees of other nationalities over unskilled or low paid work was identified as an obstacle for divorced/widowed women.

With sensitivity to the plight of all disadvantage groups, consider applying a quota for Palestinian refugee women, particularly when it comes to manual/clerical jobs.

Furthermore, sensitize recruiters and employers to prioritize divorced and widowed women in the recruitment process for certain positions..

GOOD PRACTICE 3: WORK CONDITIONS.

Work health and safety are crucial components of sound management policies from both a legal and ethical perspective. Divorced/widowed women are especially prone to health and safety hazards when working in tedious, manual jobs. We therefore recommend that employers and NGOs that work with employees adopt the following policies at the workplace:

Prevent exposure to illness and occupational hazards, particularly in agricultural labour
Conduct awareness raising sessions with agricultural labourers on biochemical hazards, exposure to adverse weather conditions, and related work place strain
Assess existing employment policies as well as workplace regulations to ensure that no policy puts a woman in harm's way.
For work that requires physical effort, ensure that women are not obliged to carry heavy equipment
Provide regular rest breaks and access to private rest facilities where possible
Provide cooperative work spaces with good illumination to avoid sight problems, especially for women that work in factories, with embroidery or vocations that require intricate tasks and close up alertness for prolonged periods of time.
Provide trainings for employees and prospective employees on healthy work postures and positions in order to avoid back and limb problems
Insure coverage of physiotherapy services where possible, or mediate reduced costs in health centers for employees.
Train personnel and/or the NGO staff on safety and health guidance during working hours, such as how to implement individual and group activities like stretching with employees in order to avoid health damages.

GOOD PRACTICE 4: TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT.

The main impediment for women's employment, especially divorced/widowed women, are the long hours and lack of alternative child care options. Employers and stakeholders engaged in the promotion of women's employment should take into account the intrinsic importance of the work/family balance for any woman, and tailor their employment policies accordingly.

We therefore recommend considering the introduction of flexible working hours or shift rotation that allows women to leave work early
Make available more part-time opportunities and prioritize the employment of divorced/widowed women
Consider introducing work from home arrangements that allow women to attend to their child care and households needs simultaneously
Employers are encouraged to revise pay scales where feasible to guarantee fair pay.
Employers are urged to provide health insurance in one form or another, or when not possible (informal work), to maintain a list of service providers and NGOs for referral.
Employers are encouraged to provide women with daily, weekly, or monthly transportation costs
Here, we also recommend to all NGOs working in Palestinian camps to meet periodically and to draft an agreement on the minimum conditions agreed with regards to the above mentioned procedures including a standard policy for minimum wage, hours of work, etc.

GOOD PRACTICE 5: STAFF AND MANAGEMENT CODE OF CONDUCT.

In many instances, there tends to be blurred boundaries between local civil society organisations and the community they serve, which is a double-edged sword. On one hand, our fieldwork showed that assistance programs are most effective when they emerge organically rather than in response to funding and are entrenched in the community. On the other, local associations tend to reflect and reproduce many of the social dynamics that contributed to the social exclusion of widowed/divorced women in the first place.

Therefore, we emphasize the need for service providers and stakeholders in direct contact with the beneficiaries to be exemplary in their behaviour and attitudes towards divorced and widowed women's employment and financial autonomy.

To guarantee this, we recommend each organization draft a code of conduct, which specifies the general policy towards such issues.

This code of conduct can be the outcome a consultative and participatory process that involves a range of employees, management, as well as representatives of beneficiaries.

We also recommend running trainings for frontline staff of major NGOs, UN agencies, and service-providers on the dimensions of social exclusion and women's work.

Employers are urged to provide health insurance in one form or another, or when not possible (informal work), to maintain a list of service providers and NGOs for referral.

In our interaction with divorced/widowed women, we found that the most effective interventions were those that provided women with income generating and personal development opportunities. Some NGOs act as both service providers and direct employers. We recommend that NGOs and service providers ensure the separation of mandates in order to provide a safe working environment for women, as well as a recourse for complaints or personal and health problems without risking their job security.

GOOD PRACTICE 6: GETTING TO THE BOTTOM OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT.

The fear from sexual harassment seems to be the main reason for preventing women from going out in public alone, or being employed under a male employer. It is the reason why brothers, fathers, and sons feel the need to overprotect and shelter. But it is also a subject that barely any women are comfortable talking about.

To what extent sexual harassment exists in the camps should be investigated closely. Employers should take measures to ensure that sexual harassment and any other form of gender-based violence is not tolerated at the workplace.
Make sure that women do not work late and alone on work premises.
Ensure that women do not work alone with a single employer if he is a male in order to respect protection standards and cultural sensitivities
Collaborate with specialist NGOs on a referral system or emergency hotline for abuse cases or complaints, to be disseminated to employees upon employment along with standard work information. Seek the professional advice of specialized NGOs on how to establish and operate a confidential complaints and follow up mechanism.
To avoid safety risks as well as risks of harassment whilst a woman is travelling from and to work, endorse transportation modes for employees, such as a small bus or van, especially when the place of work is outside the camp.

GOOD PRACTICE 7: INTER-ORGANISATIONAL COOPERATION.

The challenges faced by divorced and widowed women with regards to work are multi-faceted and cannot be solved from only one angle. Challenges relate to health, safety, culture and religion, and the political, economic, and legal structures that govern the refugee camps and beyond.

<p>We recommend the establishment of multidisciplinary teams of support to improve the case management approach and meet diverse needs of individuals and families. These teams can have a central hub in one of the camps, and team members spread across the other camps.</p>
<p>Individually tailored case management along with community and family-wide interventions is ultimately more effective even if more resource consuming in the short run.</p>
<p>NGOs, donors, service providers and other stakeholders should also forge multi-stakeholder, action-based alliances that would allow for exchange of information and experience, referrals, and the formation and implementation of integrated solutions</p>
<p>An exchange of experience and expertise via a conference or series of workshops would allow all stakeholders to devise a joint approach to tailoring their programs and services to the specific needs of divorced/widowed women.</p>
<p>Complementarities is a key goal here. It is thus recommended that stakeholders capitalize on each other's respective strengths. On the one end, local service providers possess better and more rapid detection capacity due to their proximity to the society and the field, while UNRWA has experience in case management, documentation, and systematic programming.</p>

GOOD PRACTICE 8: TARGETED SERVICES.

Provide services that are tailored to divorced women and widowed women respectively, acknowledging that their disadvantage is not the same.
Within the “women-headed household” approach, include a track for divorced/widowed specifically. Approaching the issue of divorced/widowed women from the “women-headed households” approach is problematic as most women who are divorced or widowed end up living with their families and are thus not registered as women-headed households.
Older divorced/widowed women may be more vulnerable to economic dependence because they no longer have the opportunity to pursue educational goals. Furthermore, they are at a higher risk of health problems when they resort to tedious/manual work like house cleaning.
Utilize the gender focal point system and existing infrastructure instead of establishing new ones.
Infuse gender analysis with indicators related to divorced/widowed women with the strategic objective of assisting these women in overcoming their socio-economic exclusion
Devise new vulnerability assessment criteria that take into account the hidden nature of divorced/widowed women’s plight, and the unique attributes of each case of vulnerability is called for.
We identified a clear gap in mental health services to divorced/widowed women who contend with the pressures of loss, stigma, exclusion, and poverty.
Integrate within existing services a detection and referral mechanism for women that have been abused based on a thorough understanding of the types of abuse that divorce and widowhood commonly entail

GOOD PRACTICE 9: LABOUR LAW ADVOCACY.

Divorced/widowed women cannot fully attain their rights and opportunities if the structural conditions that disadvantage the refugee population are not addressed.

We recommend enhancing Lebanese-Palestinian cooperation to create an effective lobby for social protection and health insurance of Palestinian refugees and specifically, women's entitlements to benefits.

Furthermore, stakeholders who are engaged in the employment of women directly, or in advocacy against socio-economic exclusion, are advised to join forces with Lebanese NGOs and advocates with regards to the issue of minimum wage and fair incomes.

GOOD PRACTICE 10: AWARENESS, TRUST, AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT.

Divorced/widowed women experience multiple barriers to entry and more complex form of social exclusion than their fellow women and Palestinian refugee compatriots in general.

Therefore, we recommend engaging directly with the women when devising solutions for their predicament.

Through direct consultation, improve understanding of divorced/widowed women's exclusion and build trust

Through relationship building you can develop a needs-based practice and actively involve divorced/widowed women in design and delivery of interventions to help them.

GOOD PRACTICE 11: FOLLOW UP RESEARCH.

In order to tailor programs to the target group, we need to first define and understand the target group. Our study found that there are no official registries for divorced/widowed women in Palestinian refugee camps. This gap needs to be addressed by UNRWA as the most capable and mandated agency.

Improve research, monitoring, and data collection to better understand the scope and requirements of the issue

Considering that local NGOs either do not run an M&E process or do not make this information publically available, we would recommend teaming with a selected sample of local NGOs who would grant the researcher access to their divorced/widowed beneficiaries to understand their concerns and needs. In order to achieve this, sensitivities related to international donors and local NGOs must be overcome.

GOOD PRACTICE 12: CULTURAL VALUES.

Stakeholders must lead by example, and recognize the importance of the economic management role played by women in the household. The issue is at core a cultural one, and so a large degree of intervention will involve awareness raising on the benefits of female labour for the family and society. Efforts to change social attitudes towards divorced/widowed women and women's work in general need to be sustained in the long run.

Cooperate and network with local media to raise awareness on women and increase the amount of publishing on this issue in Arabic and English

Develop cultural awareness activities to promote positive contribution of women at work and in the household

When planning for awareness raising sessions, attempt to give guest sessions or seminars at organisations that already organize 'family well-being' workshops and events. This way, local influentials can begin to take part in the discourse and conversation that shapes women's livelihood outside marriage.

Taking care of the family and household is a culturally valued aspect of women’s lives. Women themselves prefer not to allow work impinge on their commitment to their families and households. Women also recognize that the financial burden needs to be shared between husband and wife, and they value a man who is responsible with an equal sense of responsibility as a partner.

Education and career are not more important than marriage in Palestinian refugee society, therefore, we recommend that we distance ourselves from a discourse that tries to prioritize one of the other and emphasize the fact that they are not mutually exclusive.
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Avoid discourse that is Western-centric or emerging from societies that are more individualist when it comes to promoting ‘the right to work’. Instead, emphasize the complementarity of women’s work to care taking for the household, and the importance of both women and men being responsible for the economic well being of their families.

It seems that there is a public misconception with regards to employment and the risk it poses in taking women away from their household work. Therefore, any intervention on a cultural and social level should begin from the following thoughts:

Housework is not a duty
Housework is not a duty specific to women
Housework is a responsibility, and sometimes a vocation, but not an obligation
Employment is financially rewarding
Employment can be socially rewarding because it engenders a sense of confidence and independence
A woman’s financial independence does not contradict her family value and commitment to children
A woman’s financial and personal independence is beneficial to the entire household