



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF NATIONAL ECONOMY
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TECHNICAL OFFICE
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Omani Women in Labour Market:

Facts And Challenges

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The achievements of the Omani woman during the last forty years of the Renaissance era are worth noting. The transformation from a feminine illiterate society to a strong presence as ambassadors, ministerial and business positions is remarkable. The economic participation rate of the Omani Women has substantially increased, surpassing those prevailing in some Arab countries which preceded the Sultanate in development and progress by several years. It was only natural for Omani women to face challenges in the labour market as is the case with Arab women in the Arab labour market. This study sheds light on a number of challenges as depicted by the Manpower Survey 2008.

Introduction

The labour market issues embrace diverse social, economic and political dimensions, among them securing employment opportunities is considered one of the most important issues occupying the centre spot in the development thought and efforts of the different countries of the world. And despite the differences between nations and countries in terms of their culture, civilization and ideologies, the labour market issues remain similar and repetitive, though different in details. Hence, absorbing the labour force by securing employment opportunities, compatibility between the graduates of the education system and labour market requirements, wages and salaries issues and incentives, the role of the public and private sector in employment, the pension systems and other issues continued to attract the concern of politicians, business and economic community, planners and, in fact the concern of all community individuals for their interrelation with the daily life of individuals and families alike.

The Sultanate of Oman, like other countries of the world, has accorded high priority to the labour market issues and for absorbing the national cadres in the labour market, since the early years of its Renaissance in 1970. During the first two decades of the Renaissance, it was clear that the development process which has started from an extremely low stage was in need of all cadres to build the development pillars to achieve progress. The main concern of the government at that time was concentrated in securing the deficit in the qualified labour force, resulting from the small population size on the one hand, and the deficiency in the qualified labour force, which led to resorting to expatriate labour force from the Arab and foreign countries. The private sector played at that time a major role in providing employment to the national labour force, especially in the services sectors such as education and health.

With the development of the society and the rolling of the development process, came the advancement in the institutional structure related to the issue of the providing employment opportunities, and legislations and laws pertinent to these issues began to crystallise. Consequently, the Ministry of Civil Service assumed the role of employment in the public sector units governed by the Civil Service Law, while an independent ministry –Ministry of Manpower- was established to tackle the labour issues in the private sector, most important among these issues the provision of employment opportunities for citizens in accordance with the Labour Law issued by the Royal Decree No. 35/2003 and its amendments issued by the Royal Decrees No. 74/2006, 112/2006 and 63/2009¹. And with the increasing numbers of Omani graduates of the education system from the different levels, qualifications and specializations during the 1990's and the first decade of the current century, the rise in

¹ http://www.manpower.gov.om/ar/toc_arabic.pdf

expatriate labour force in the private sector to top one million as of the end of March 2011 according to Ministry of manpower's statistics² in a country with a population of less than three million ,different labour market problems have emerged, most important among them the increase in the numbers of citizens looking for work, during a period of noticeable economic boom. This was accompanied by inflow of foreign investment in trade and tourism and other sectors of the economy. The exacerbation of this problem resulted in a social movement by the youth in 2011 which expressed itself in political, social and economic demands which emerged concurrently with the political upheavals witnessed by the different Arab countries. Acknowledging the fairness of these demands, on one hand, and their relationship with social development, on the other, the government of the Sultanate's response was very fast and prompt by implementing a number of policies which included the provision of jobs for the youth who are searching for employment in the different sector of the economy together with improving the standard of living for the citizens, through raising salaries and pensions given to employees and pensioners.

Based on the importance of the role of women in accelerating the process of development and progress, the government accorded female education and employment great importance. Labour legislations were issued taking into consideration the special nature of women and their diversified social roles, accordingly specific working hours, paid leave during maternity and (IDDA) for widowed females have been spelled out in these legislations.

This working paper aims at highlighting the situation of women in the labour market and identifying the challenges faced by them. The paper depends on the available results from the Census of Population of 2010 and the results of manpower survey of 2008 to shed light on the issues which have not been dealt with in the population census in addition to the administrative data on employment in the public and private sectors in 2009, for the purpose of presenting a picture about Omanis and particularly women in the labour market and the challenges facing them. The Paper consists of two parts. The first part presents a statistical glimpse of the Sultanate's population and the characteristics of the national labour force based on available administrative data, while the second part focuses on the Omani women in particular and reviews the characteristics of employed women and those searching for work together with challenges facing them.

² <http://www.manpower.gov.om/ar/statistics.asp>

First: Characteristic of the Labour Force in the Sultanate

Population of the Sultanate

The Sultanate consists of nine administrative divisions comprising four governorates and five regions. The total population of the Sultanate reached 2,770,329 in 2010, 70.5% were Omanis. Females constituted two-fifth of the total population (41.9%) and around half of the Omani Population (49.4%). The sex ratio of the Omani population was 102 males for every 100 females, compared to 320 among expatriates (Figure No. (1) & (2)).

The results of the 2010 Population Census has also revealed that around 61% of the Omani population were in the age group (15–64) years with children under 15 years of age accounting for 35%. The age distribution for the total population differ due to the effect of the expatriate labour force, where children below the age of fifteen years constituted 28% in comparison to 70% in the working age group (15–64) years.

Population density reached around 9 persons/km², while it increased to 198.8 persons/km² in Muscat Governorate (Capital City) with a population reaching 28% of the total.

Figure No. (1): Population Pyramid of Omanis, 2010

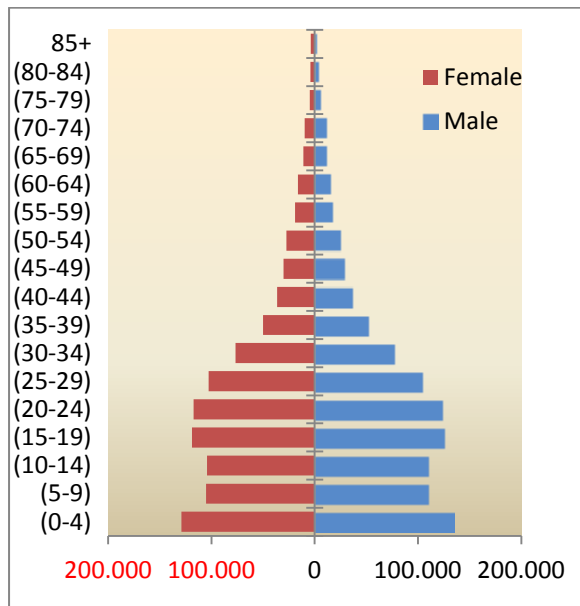
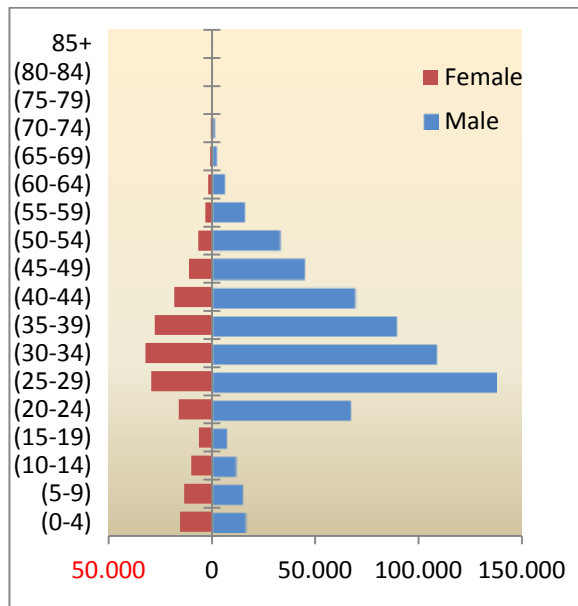


Figure No. (2): Population Pyramid of Expatriates, 2010



Source: Ministry of National Economy, Census 2010

Labour Market Situation in 2009

The Government and Private sectors represent the main sectors for the employment of the Labour force in the Sultanate in addition to the security and military authorities. The government sector consists of government ministries and units, where employment is under the auspices of the Ministry of Civil Service (referred to later as the civil service sector) and other organizations which fall outside the civil service system namely the Diwan of Royal Court, Royal Court Affairs in addition to a number of public enterprises, while employment in the private sector is handled by the Ministry of Manpower.

The Civil Service Sector is the main employer of Omani Labour force in the government sector absorbing around 82% of Omanis working in the government sector in 2009³. Therefore characteristics of the employees in the government sector will be presented through the concentration on the civil service sector.

A. Characteristics of the Civil Service Employees

Statistics show that the Omanization percentage has risen in the Civil Service Sector in 2009 reaching 89%, with women accounting for more than two fifth of Omanis in this sector (42.3%), around 35.5% were below the age of 30 years and only 5% were in the age of fifty or above. As with regard to the educational level it was found that 47.4% of Omani employees were university graduates with 71% of them in the Ministries of education and health.

Expatriates in this sector were concentrated in education, health services and support services in addition to occupying the post of consultants, experts and senior technical and specialized posts in the majority of government institutions. These are the jobs which need long working experience, especially in the field of planning and scientific analysis, or they are posts for which no sufficient national cadre is readily available. This has led to the engagement of expatriate labour force for longer periods.

The civil service sector also resorts to appointing employees on the basis of temporary contracts which extend for several years. Implementation of some projects may require the recruitment of employees for a specific period which may exceed one year. The statistics of Ministry of Civil Service indicate that the number of Omanis recruited under these temporary contracts is small. The actual situation contradicts these statistics. This discrepancy may have been caused by the fact that most of these temporary contract employees were recruited by the Ministry of Manpower and not by the Ministry of Civil Service due to the rapid and easy procedures by the former in addition to the absence of employment examinations. However, no comprehensive statistical data about these contracts is available.

³ The most up to date data available at the time of preparing this report.

B. Private Sector

The private sector is considered the main employer of national labour force in the Sultanate with total Omanis working in the sector of 311, 423 employees. Three fifth of them were in paid employment in 2009 (Figure No. 3). Females on paid employment stood at 19% only of total Omani nationals.

Figure No. 3: Number of Omanis Working in the Private Sector during (2005-2009)



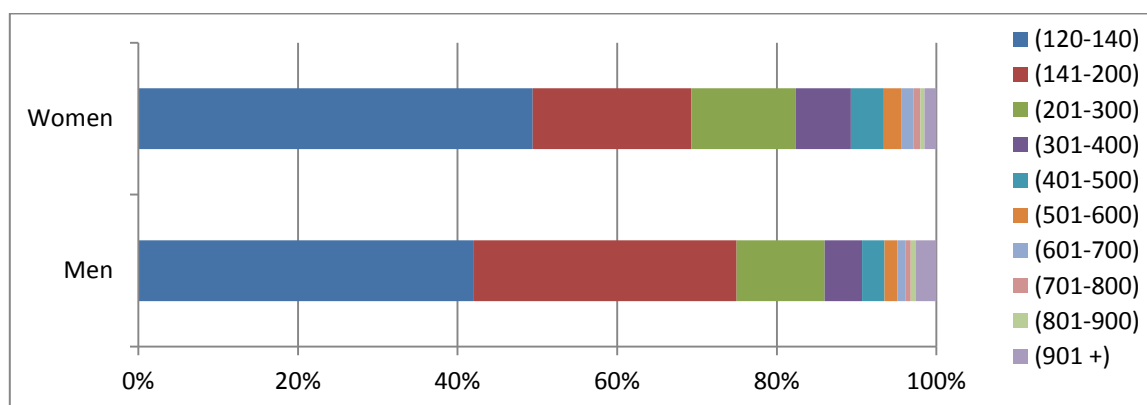
Source: Ministry of Manpower, 2010, Annual Report 2009, Muscat, p.17

The age composition of the national work force on paid employment indicated that around three quarters of them (75.3%) were below the age of thirty five, more than half of them (52.8%) have not completed general education and 4.8% only held university qualifications or higher. This was the reason that more than one thirds of these on paid employment (37.7%) were classified as limited skills workers and 17.3% were skilled workers. This also justifies the low Omanization achieved so far in terms of skill levels. These skill levels stood at 15% for specialists, 17% for technicians. Moreover, this situation also explains the low level of monthly wages where more than two fifth of those on paid employment who are registered at the Public Authority for Social Insurance (around 43%) receive less or equal to the official minimum wage in the private sector endorsed since march 2009 upto February 2011 amounting to 140 Omani Rials⁴.

Figure No. (4) shows that nearly half of the females working in the private sector and registered in the Social Insurance Authority receive a monthly wage of at most 140 Omani Rials, compared to 41% for their male counterparts. However, the other female half receives better wages than their male counterparts in the income brackets higher than 200 Omani Rials. Generally, about 55.3% who receive monthly wages of 140 Omani Rials or less were youth.

⁴ The Omani Rial is equivalent to 2.54 US \$. The minimum wage in the private sector was raised to RO 200 in 2011

Figure No. 4: Omanis working in the private sector registered with Public Authority for social Insurance by gender and wages Group, 2009



Source: Ministry of National Economy, 2010, Statistical Year Book

Despite the efforts directed towards providing citizens employment opportunities in the private sector, the percentage of Omanis in the total workers on paid employment in the trade sector was below 19% during the period (2005 – 2010) as shown by Table No. (1).

Table No. 1: Distribution of Employment in Trade Category in the Private Sector during (2005 – 2010)

| Year | Total No. of Employees | Percentage of | |
|------|------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| | | Omanis | Expatriates |
| 2005 | 555,352 | 17.7 | 82.3 |
| 2006 | 602,625 | 19.0 | 81.0 |
| 2007 | 752,099 | 18.0 | 82.0 |
| 2008 | 922,721 | 17.4 | 82.6 |
| 2009 | 1,018,118 | 17.9 | 82.1 |
| 2010 | 1,129,956 | 18.3 | 81.7 |

Source: 1- Ministry of Manpower, 2010, Annual Report for 2009

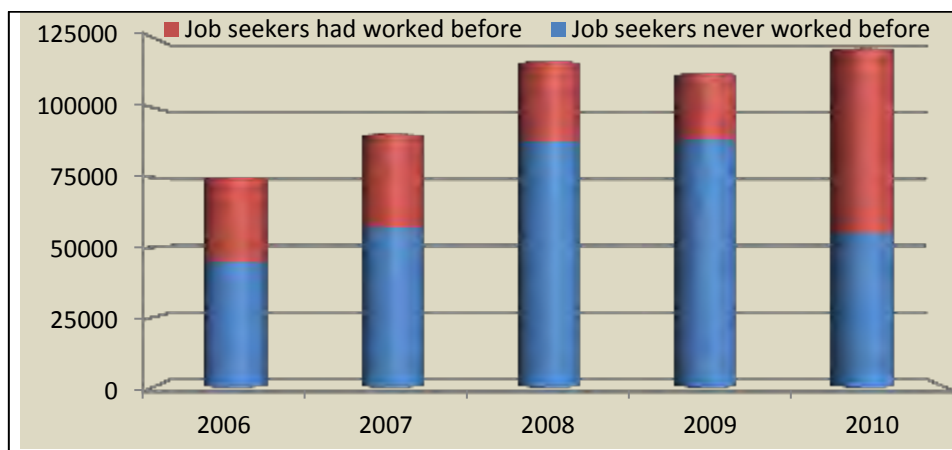
2- http://www.manpower.gov.om/ar/statistics/A4_MOMP_Statistic_December10.pdf

Omanis on paid employment in 2009 were concentrated in principal and auxiliary engineering occupations, though Omanization in these occupations does not exceed 12.3%, but indicating the existence of a large number of jobs for citizens in these occupations. In addition, services and clerical occupations attract around 22% and 20% of the total national labour on paid employment; through the Omanization percentage in the clerical occupations is considered the highest among the occupation groups.

At the economic sectors level, the construction sector is the main employer of the labour force in the Sultanate, especially expatriates. According to the available statistics 44.6% of the on paid labour force were employed by the construction sector and 88% of them were expatriates. Regarding the Omani employees in the private sector, 28% were involved in construction activities and 20% in wholesale and retail trade activities.

The national labour force faces a number of challenges in the labour market, most important of which is the increase in the number of people searching for job, the high rate of jobs circulation and the low levels of monthly wages discussed in preceding pages. The numbers of those searching for job especially among youth with no previous work experience are constantly increasing as a result of the population growth during the past forty years of the Renaissance era. The numbers of those registered in the Ministry of Manpower exceeded one hundred and twenty thousand persons. Over half of them have worked before and their services have been terminated either upon the completion of the projects in which they were working, or by resignation as depicted by Figure No. (5). Those who were sacked or resigned represent additional pressures on the labour market since they compete for the limited jobs with those searching for work for the first time. The problem stemming from the instability of the Labour Market can be best seen if one knows that the private labour market provides 25 thousand jobs annually, while the total number of Omanis on paid employment who have left their jobs in 2009 by resignation or by firing reached 24580 employees⁵.

Figure No. 5: Distribution of Job Seekers registered at the Ministry of Manpower by previous work experience during (2006-2010)



Source: 1- Ministry of Manpower, 2010, Annual Report for 2009

2- http://www.manpower.gov.om/ar/statistics/A4_MOMP_Statistic_December10.pdf

Furthermore, a large percentage of them were below the age of 25 years, a similar percentage in the age group (25–39) and most of them were not holding the general education diploma. Added to this is that around 44% of those who resigned were technicians and 47% of those who were sacked were Labourers with limited skills⁶.

The instability in work would lead to negative psychological, social and economic impacts on the individuals and their social security and on the labour market as well.

⁵ Ministry of Manpower, 2010, Annual Report 2009, Muscat p. 42

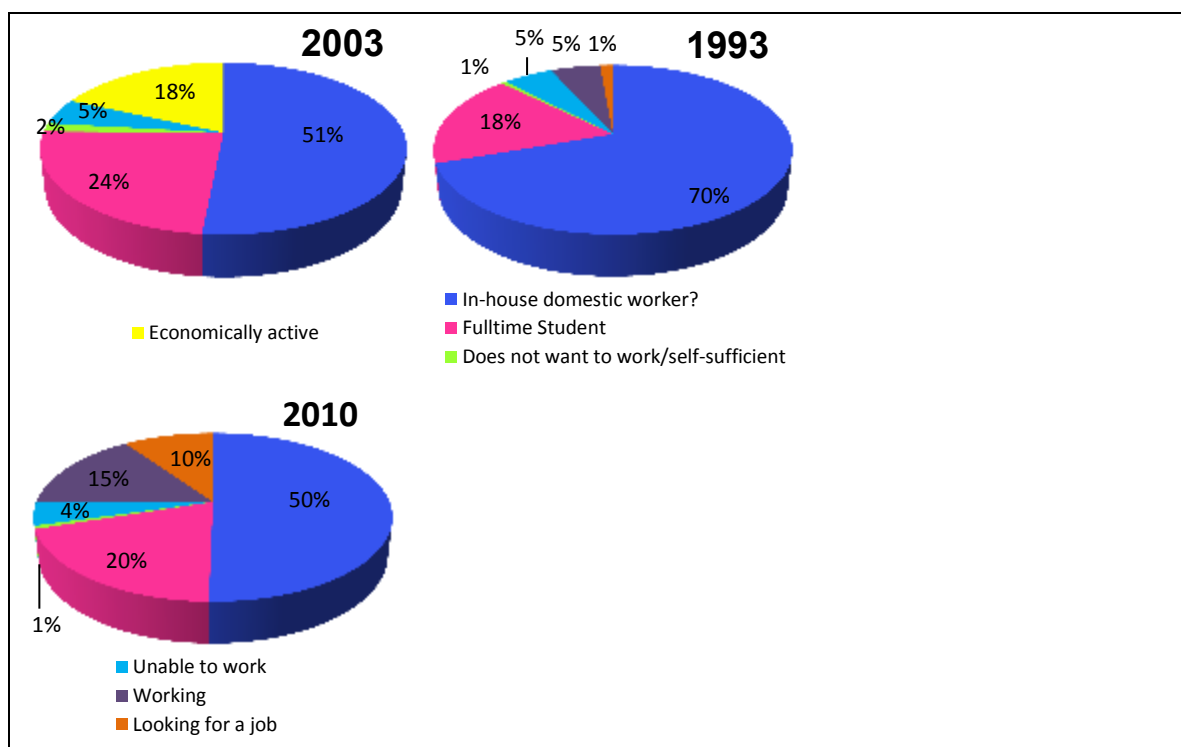
⁶ Ibid

Table No. 2: Economic Participation Rates for Omanis by Age-Groups and Sex in 1993, 2003, 2010

| Age - Group | 1993 | | | 2003 | | | 2010 | | |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total |
| 15-19 | 22.40 | 3.13 | 13.06 | 17.23 | 9.15 | 13.28 | 20.23 | 10.71 | 15.59 |
| 20-24 | 84.50 | 16.53 | 52.19 | 75.44 | 34.58 | 55.08 | 74.54 | 36.82 | 56.14 |
| 25-29 | 96.32 | 11.89 | 54.37 | 95.90 | 35.43 | 65.63 | 95.56 | 46.11 | 70.93 |
| 30-34 | 96.01 | 7.38 | 50.94 | 95.29 | 22.20 | 59.62 | 97.04 | 37.91 | 67.35 |
| 35-39 | 95.31 | 5.09 | 47.15 | 94.39 | 12.82 | 52.71 | 95.34 | 27.59 | 61.90 |
| 40-44 | 93.11 | 4.61 | 48.62 | 89.83 | 8.55 | 47.80 | 91.38 | 17.06 | 54.26 |
| 45-49 | 89.63 | 4.12 | 47.25 | 84.54 | 6.26 | 42.98 | 80.70 | 9.84 | 44.76 |
| 50-54 | 81.39 | 3.19 | 43.79 | 62.34 | 4.01 | 31.86 | 68.34 | 6.15 | 35.48 |
| 55-59 | 75.36 | 2.50 | 42.56 | 50.15 | 3.18 | 27.22 | 53.30 | 4.28 | 27.57 |
| 60-64 | 52.54 | 1.74 | 29.79 | 32.27 | 1.67 | 18.13 | 32.17 | 2.58 | 17.48 |
| Total | 70.49 | 7.04 | 39.38 | 65.01 | 19.13 | 42.14 | 70.80 | 26.61 | 48.86 |

Source: Ministry of National Economy, Census 1993, 2003, 2010

Figure No. 6: Percentage Distribution of Omani Women (15 years & above) by Economic Status in 1993, 2003, 2010

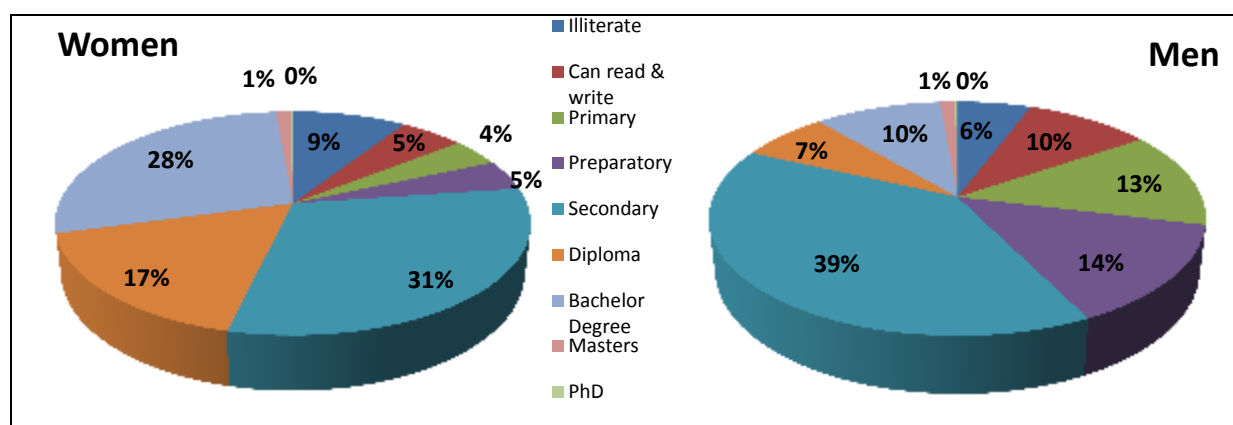


Source: Ministry of National Economy, Census 1993, 2003, 2010

▪ **Education level**

The total number of employed Omani women reached 97,603 representing 28% of total employed Omanis in the age group (15 and above) in 2010. The Manpower Survey 2008 has shown that the education level of Omani women in the labour market was better than that of their male counterpart (figure No. 7), where 43% of Omani male in the labour market hold qualification below the General Diploma (Secondary School Diploma), or have no qualifications, While 11% only hold university qualification or higher. By contrast the number of Omani working women with qualification below the General Diploma or no qualification reached 23% and the university graduates accounted for 29%. This would pose a question about the impact of education on the type of job and the work responsibilities performed by Omani women in addition to the level of wage paid to women compared to those paid to males.

Figure No. 7: Distribution of Omani Employees by Education Level and Gender, 2008



Source: Ministry of National economy, Manpower survey 2008.

▪ Labour Sector

Although the public sector has been the main employer for Omani women up to 2010, employing 58.2% of them, the household sector has started to play an important role in employing Omani women, especially the uneducated or those holding qualification below the General Diploma (Secondary School Diploma). In 2010, for instance, the percentage of women working in this sector reached 8.8% from the total Omani women in the labour market, while in 2008 the percentage of Omani women employed by this sector constituted half of all those working in the sector compared to a percentage that did not exceed 17% in 2003 and 7% in 1993. Generally, the wages of women in this sector were low, with 91.5% receiving a monthly wage not exceeding 100 Omani Rials in 2008. This low wage level was attributed to the low education level of employed women where 72% of them hold no qualification or qualification below the secondary school level. This low level of education has led to 63.5% Omani women to work in the food industry which is classified among the Industrial, Chemical and Food sector companies.

▪ Economic Activities and Occupations

The 2010 population census has shown that the Omani Woman is inclined towards working in traditional employment sectors, Omani women working in the Public Administration, Defence and Compulsory Social Insurance sectors reached 29.4% from total employed women, 26.6% working in the education activities, 10.9% in wholesale, retail and vehicle repair activities while around 9% are working in health and social work sector. In terms of occupation divisions, it was found that the education level of employed Omani women played a role in the rise of the percentages of women in the specialized and technical occupations which reached half of the working women. The percentage of specialized women in scientific, technical and social jobs reached 30% while the percentage of women working as technicians in scientific, technical and humanitarian subjects reached around 27%.

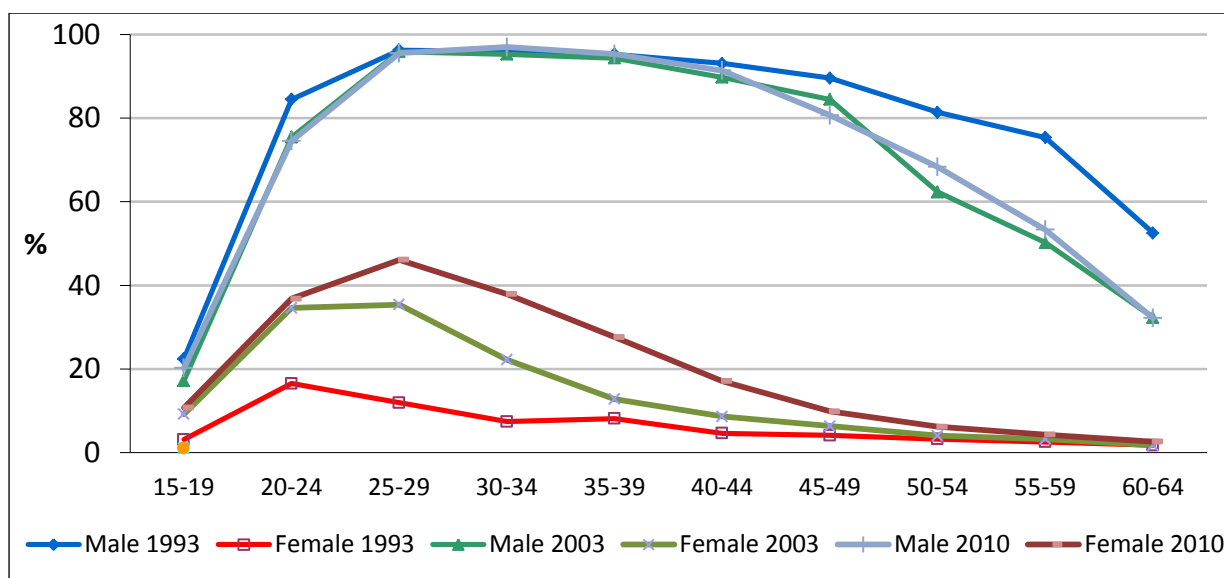
Challenges Facing Omani Women in the Labour Market

1. Early withdrawal of Omani women from the labour market

Table No (2) showed the increase in the women participation rate in economic activity at all age groups, especially among the generation of the renaissance who are in the age group (20-34) years, but it can also be observed that women withdrawal from the labour market at a fast rate after the age of 29 years (figure No. 8). Although article No (22) of the Pension and After Service Gratuity Law (which was in force up to February 2011) grants Omani civil service employees who have completed 15 years of service a percentage of their basic salary as a monthly pension⁹, the percentage of women who are self-sufficient or not willing to work of the total Omani women in the age group (15 and above) ranged between 1-2% in the three censuses, which lessens the impact of the legislation on early withdrawal from the labour market.

Figure No. 8: Economic participation rates for Omanis by sex and Age Groups in 1993, 2003 and 2010.

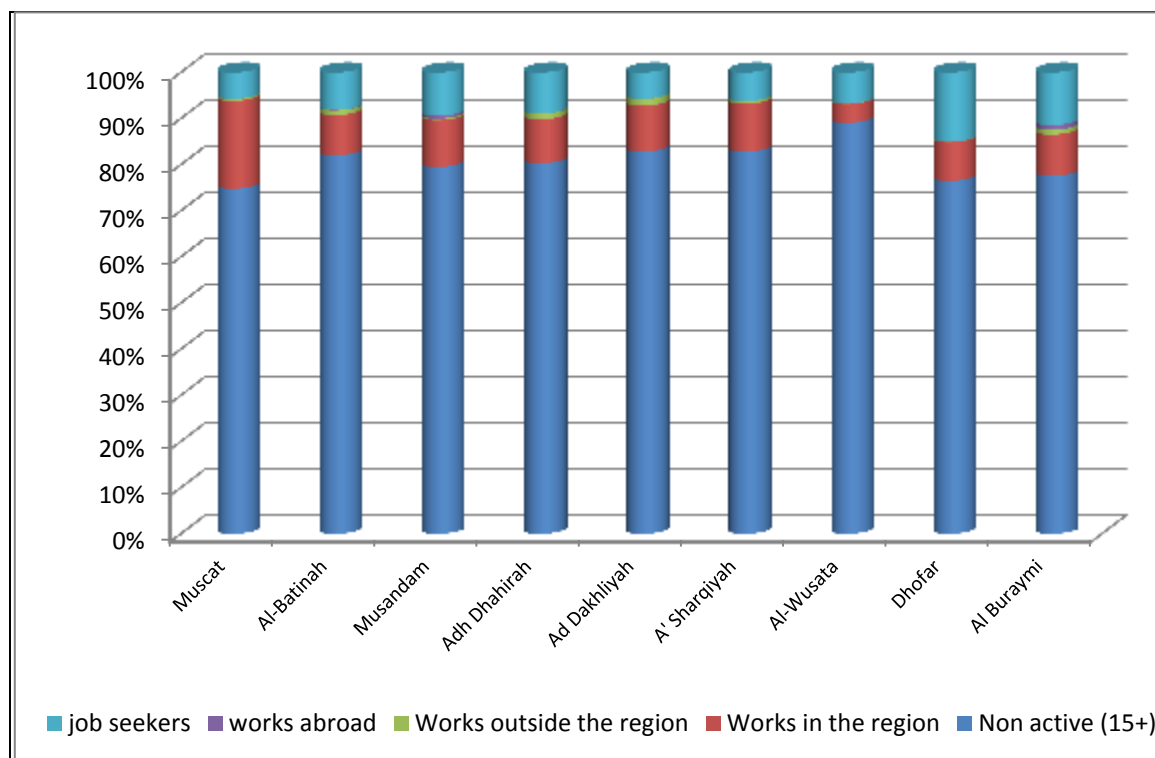
⁹ In March 2011, the minimum years of service for receiving a pension increased to 20 years if the employee ended his/her service by resignation before reaching the age of 50 and to 15 years if he/she reached the age of 50.



Source: Ministry of National Economy, Census 1993, 2003, 2010

Some attribute the early withdrawal of Omani women from the labour market to the depression stemming from the long period of searching for work which leads her to withdraw from the state of economic activity. Other reasons may be attributed to the family responsibilities related to giving birth and maintaining the family especially with the increase of age at the first marriage for both sexes, which reached 26 for females and 28 for males as revealed by Population Census 2010. Consequently, when a woman reaches the age of thirty she might be compelled to withdraw from the labour market to perform the tasks of caring for her family. Moreover, traditions and social norms may have an impact on the employment of women such as the preference to work in a female friendly environment. The only sector which can avail women this opportunity is the education sector, where the Omanisation percentage is higher, which makes the absorption of women somewhat limited. Other reasons may also be the concentration of public and private sector in Muscat Governorate, hence the limitation of employment opportunities for women in other regions and governorates. This is the reason behind the increase in female employment in Muscat Governorate compared to other administrative divisions as shown in figure No 9. However, these remain assumptions that require studies for their verification or otherwise. Future surveys should focus on finding the reasons behind this early withdrawal of Omani working women from the labour market.

Figure No. 9: Distribution of Omani women (15 years and above) by Governorates/regions and economic status. 2010



Source: Ministry of National Economy, Census 2010

2. Increase in The Number of Those Searching For Work

Data from the manpower survey 2008 shows that searching for work has become a phenomenon affecting Omani youth especially those in the age group (20-29) years¹⁰, where 65% of Omani job seekers are in this age group. This percentage increased to 79% for Omani women compared to 70% for Males. It is worth noting that the percentage of searching for work among Omani women was always higher than among Omani Males. It reached 44% and 20.5% respectively during 2003 and 2008 for Omani women and 22% and 11% for Omani Males (Table No 3). This means that males have better chances than females in getting employment, which led to the Ministry of Civil Service to recruit more females in the six thousand jobs earmarked for the ministries affiliated to it except the Ministry of Education, during the first six months of 2011. The total number of females who were employed by the ministry reached 4409 compared to 2083 males. Despite this situation the percentage of the employed females reached 34% of the total female applicants, whereas males who were employed represented 39% from the total male applicants.

Table No. 3: Percentage of Omanis searching for job from the total economically active Omanis in the age group (15-64) years by sex and age groups in 1993, 2003 and 2008

| Age | 1993 | 2003 | 2008 |
|-----|------|------|------|
|-----|------|------|------|

¹⁰ Youth are defined internationally as the population in the age group (15-24) years but the Arab League decided to increase the age to 29 years of age.

| Groups | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 15-19 | 44.71 | 74.11 | 48.13 | 75.94 | 93.54 | 81.87 | 52.42 | 70.38 | 56.03 |
| 20-24 | 13.14 | 27.53 | 15.31 | 44.64 | 61.76 | 49.99 | 25.60 | 38.01 | 28.99 |
| 25-29 | 5.69 | 7.27 | 5.87 | 14.70 | 28.54 | 18.44 | 8.93 | 19.17 | 11.91 |
| 30-34 | 4.65 | 3.80 | 4.58 | 5.63 | 3.90 | 5.32 | 4.67 | 8.80 | 5.70 |
| 35-39 | 5.22 | 3.15 | 5.10 | 6.44 | 6.43 | 6.44 | 2.00 | 1.51 | 1.91 |
| 40-44 | 5.33 | 1.84 | 5.17 | 8.46 | 5.86 | 8.22 | 84.00 | 2.54 | 1.12 |
| 45-49 | 6.01 | 2.66 | 5.86 | 11.52 | 6.31 | 11.11 | 1.49 | 1.10 | 1.44 |
| 50-54 | 7.82 | 2.73 | 7.64 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 67.00 | 1.26 | 75.00 |
| 55-59 | 9.40 | 4.73 | 9.28 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.03 | 0 | 88.00 |
| 60-64 | 13.52 | 4.74 | 13.29 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 62.00 | 4.01 | 1.03 |
| Total | 10.83 | 21.20 | 11.74 | 22.36 | 43.93 | 27.24 | 11.20 | 20.55 | 13.43 |

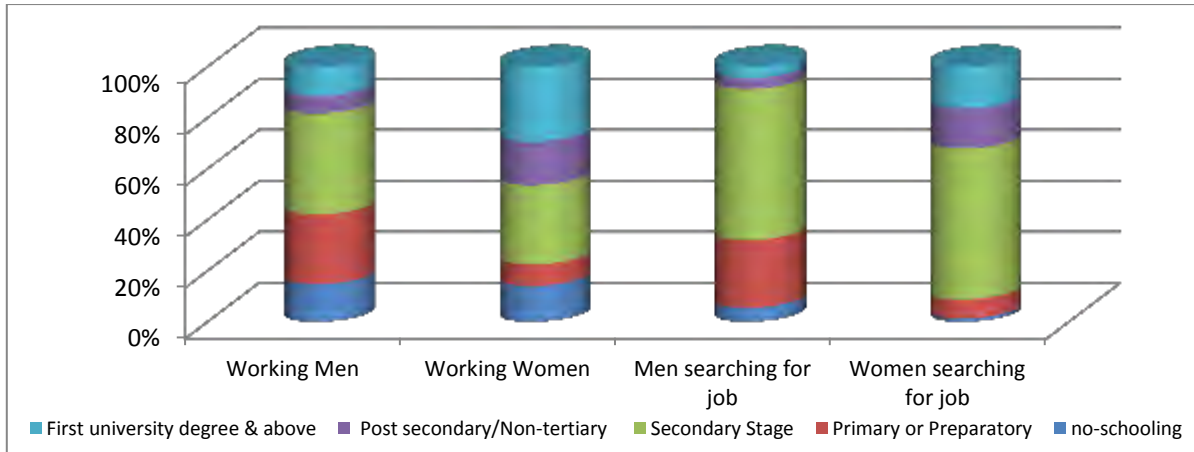
Source: Ministry of National Economy, Census 1993 & 2003 and Manpower survey 2008

It was observed from the advertisement in the daily newspaper that a large number of jobs were allocated for males, some coincided with the society's traditions and social norms as suitable jobs for males, such as truck drivers, security guards...etc, but a number of other advertised technical, specialised and clerical jobs can be filled with females but not availed to them.

Manpower survey data also revealed that Omani women searching for jobs were better qualified than their male counterpart, and more qualified than females already employed. For instance, around 91% of females searching for jobs hold General Diploma or higher, compared to 68% of males searching for jobs and around 58% of males already employed and 77.5% of women already employed (figure No 10). It has also been observed that the average school years for Omani women searching for work reached around 14 years compared to 12.5 years for males¹¹.

Figure No. 10: Distribution of economically active Omanis (15-64) years by educational status, 2008

¹¹ Ministry of National Economy, 2011 characteristics of the labour force in the Sultanate, unpublished study

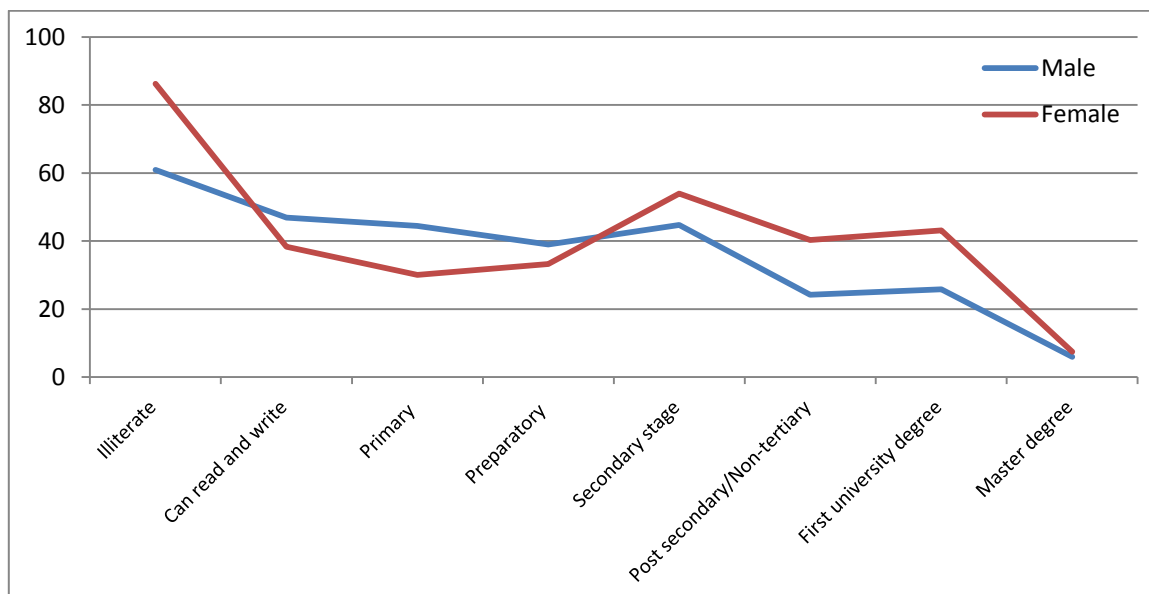


Source: Ministry of National Economy, Manpower survey 2008

Furthermore, data also shows that around 89% of Omani women searching for job have never worked before, 32% of them are resident of Al Batinah region and 24% reside in Muscat Governorate. As with regard to women searching for work who have worked before, more than half of them (51.7%) live in Muscat Governorate and 17.7% in Al Batinah region. This is another indicator showing that more employment opportunities are found in Muscat Governorate compared to other regions.

In spite of the fact that the average periods of searching for work are close for both sexes in 2008 (41 months for males and 43 months for females), yet there is some differences in the length of time spend searching for work if gender is compared with the level of education. Data shows that female holding General Diploma and higher spend longer periods searching for work than their male counterpart. This higher level of education does not speed up their chances in finding work (figure No 11), which confirm the preference of the different establishments for employing males.

Figure No. 11: Average length of period for searching for jobs by sex and educational status, 2008



Source: Ministry of National Economy, Manpower survey 2008

Taking into account that 47% of females searching for work (15 years and above) in 2008 had joined short vocational training courses to improve their employment chances, compared to 30% males. Furthermore, 73% of females and 63% of male who joined these courses said that the training provided them with qualification suitable for the available jobs. Comparing these data with the actual situation it was revealed that these courses have not been sufficient for a fast employment for females than males which confirms the importance of further improving these training courses to provide females better skills and arming them with self promoting skills, confidence and helping them to overcome shyness which may have affected their employment opportunities.

3. Nature of Work

Other challenges that face Omani women in the labour market is the pattern and nature of available jobs, and the work environment, where 26% of females searching for work expressed their un-wiliness to work in the private sector as against 10% of males searching for work. The only justification for this un-wiliness among males was the low wages, While the justification among females were varied including low wages, unsuitability of employment in the private sector with the social status, this connected with the communities stance, traditions and social norms, together with other reasons linked to the long working hours, timing of work which extended to two periods as shown in (table No 3). An added reason was that Omani women searching for work prefer office work (58%) as compared to other jobs, compared to 27.5% males.

Table No. 3: Percentage of Omanis searching for work by the main reasons for un-willing to work in private sector and sex, 2008

| Main Reasons | Male | Female | Total |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Not matching with qualification | 4.85 | 10.94 | 8.49 |
| Low wages | 55.91 | 24.99 | 37.46 |
| Language | 2.35 | 2.81 | 2.62 |
| Social Status | 7.04 | 25.45 | 18.03 |
| Working hours | 10.29 | 16.26 | 13.86 |
| Timings of work | 4.92 | 10.56 | 8.28 |
| Working days | 5.73 | 5.42 | 5.54 |
| Working place is far from home | 1.76 | 1.89 | 1.84 |
| Unsecure | 6.55 | 1.24 | 3.38 |
| Other | 0.59 | 0.44 | 0.50 |
| Total | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Source: Ministry of National Economy, Manpower survey 2008

Conclusion

Omani women have achieved remarkable development in social and economic indicators during the forty years of the blessed renaissance, represented by the noticeable increase in education level which enabled them to raise the family income level and become active members in different fields of development, and despite the increase in female participation rate in economic activities it is still low compared to the participation levels of their male counterpart and that of the expatriate labour force. Omani women can play a more prominent role in the economic process and in meeting the requirement of the labour market cadre, if given the chance to replace the expatriate labour force in the professions and jobs which can be Omanized.

Nevertheless, there are a number of challenges facing the Omani women in the labour market most noticeably was the failure to retain her for a longer period. Omani women withdrawal from the labour market at an early age and her education qualification failed to retain her. The reasons for this withdrawal are numerous, the working conditions and environment may be unsuitable or discouraging, employment incentives may be insufficient to sustain employment or there may be different reasons connected to the women other social roles most importantly caring for her family. All these reasons require specialised studies and surveys to establish their effect and to formulate appropriate policies and programmes.

One of the challenges facing Omani women in the labour market is the prolonged period of searching for work, despite being superior (in terms of education level) than her male counterpart and Omani women already employed. This prolonged period of searching for work can lead to her withdrawal from the labour force and being classified as economically inactive individual. This may also imply the existence of discrimination against women in the private sector recruitment process. However, available evidence are insufficient to confirm this, it could be attributed to the upbringing manner which enforce timidity and prevent women from proving themselves and compete in the labour market. Tradition and social norms also play a role in impeding Omani women from work. The justification put forward by 26% of females not willing to work in the private sector was the social status, which means that neither working in the private sector nor the types of jobs available in the market were considered suitable with their social status in society. Other challenges facing Omani women in the labour market, where the pattern and nature of work available for them and the work environment.

Administrative statistics reveal that the percentage of total employed women receives monthly wages ranging between (201-900 Omani Rials) is higher than the percentage of males out of total employed males. However, wages paid by the private sector are considerably lower than wages paid by the public sector. This is one reason which makes Omani (males and females) refrain from joining the private sector. An added reason is that most of Omani women searching for work prefer office work (58%), compared to around 27.5% of males.

Most of these challenges require intensive awareness effort to be directed at women with regard to the importance of work in all fronts. Other efforts should also be directed at the employment procedures pertinent to employment of women in the different jobs available in the private sector establishments, without discrimination on the basis of gender.