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Master Thesis

What are the barriers to women's economic empowerment in Libya, and which changes are likely to ease the constraints on women's labor market opportunities?

A mixed-methods study of the Libyan labor market

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Abstract

Only 25.8% of Libyan women participate in the labor force (ILO, 2017a). For men, the participation rate is 79% (Ibid.). Hence, a gender gap of 53.2 percentage points (Ibid.). This puzzle sets out the starting point of this thesis. The objective of this thesis is to understand why this puzzle arises and what barriers women face in the Libyan labor market. Furthermore, this thesis aims to formulate suggestions for ways forward. The research methodology consists of a mixed-methods approach that utilizes content analysis as well as descriptive statistical analysis. Kabeer's theoretical framework (1999, 2001) on women's empowerment forms the theoretical foundation for the thesis. The evidence has been collected for the Mennonite Economic Development Associates to inform their Libya Economic Empowerment project, the purpose of which is to help youth and women's employment opportunities. Processing of the data was conducted, and pieces deemed relevant for women's economic empowerment is used to answer the research question.

This thesis explores the validity of differing human resources as well as structural barriers as the causes of Libyan women's low labor participation rate. Both women's access to education and cognitive as well as non-cognitive skills resemble those of men's human resources. The findings thus supported that there are other barriers to women's economic empowerment opportunities in Libya than the human resources they possess.

The research indicates that structural barriers pose significant challenges to women's economic empowerment. There are three areas of structural barriers that this thesis looks assess. The evidence suggests that structural barriers persist in areas such as justice and security, while there were no substantial barriers identified to women's inclusion in the educational system. The structural barriers women face in Libya around justice is an above-average level of discriminatory laws limiting women's rights. Besides, evidence showed that women also face discriminatory social norms around the obtainment of equal rights to freely choose employment. More than half of men in Libya do not consider it acceptable for women to have a paid job outside the home. In terms of security-related structural barriers, the protracted conflict in Libya disproportionately affects women's freedom of mobility. In short, justice and security pose apparent inhibiting factors for women to obtain agency and decision-making power over how to employ their human resources in the labor market. The awareness of structural barriers seemed to differ widely among women both across and within regions. This finding followed along the lines of Kabeer's (1999, 2001) conceptualization of unquestioning the current social order.

The structural barriers cut across the eleven examined sectors with clear evidence of social norms shaping a gender-segregated set of labor market opportunities for men and women. The evidence revealed inhibiting factors such as lack of freedom of mobility and unpaid care responsibilities. Despite the obstacles cutting across sectors, there were some sectors with more opportunities for women's economic empowerment than others. The Transportation and Hospitality sectors showed promising new initiatives attempting to break down barriers. Interestingly, the Oil and Gas and Financial Services sectors seemed more gender-inclusive than expected. Lastly, the data

on the Retail and Wholesale sector showed conflicting findings on women's economic empowerment opportunities.

A focus on education, skills, and training; the regulatory environment; women's free mobility; and women's care responsibilities is necessary to ease the constraints on women's labor market opportunities. What cuts across the suggested ways forward to address barriers to women's economic empowerment was addressing social norms within the regulatory environment, the labor market, and the family.

Acknowledgments

I would like to particularly thank Voluntas and Mennonite Economic Development Associates for kindly granting me the use of their carefully collected dataset, without which this research would not have been able to take place.

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Abbreviations

CBL	Central Bank of Libya
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GIWPS	Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security
GNA	Government of National Accord
HoR	House of Representatives
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICT	Information Communication Technology
ICRW	International Center for Research on Women
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organization
KII	Key Informant Interview
LEE	Libya Economic Empowerment
MEDA	Mennonite Economic Development Associates
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MIGA	Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NOC	National Oil Corporation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSMIL	United Nations Support Mission in Libya
WTO	World Trade Organization

1 Introduction

The degree to which both men and women are included in the labor market varies greatly. Globally almost 49% of women participate in the labor force, while this number increases to 75% for men (ILO, 2017a). The labor force participation rate expresses the labor force as a percentage of the working-age population (Ibid.). The global gender gap is thus about 26 percentage points, which reflects fewer opportunities for women to apply and develop their potential. In some regions, this gap increases to over 50 percentage points. Women's labor force participation rates in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are some of the lowest in the world, together with South Asia (Ibid.). The MENA regional women's labor force participation rate is 21.2% and 20%, respectively. These represent the lowest in the world, leaving the vast majority of women in the region outside of the labor market and economically disadvantaged (ILO, 2017b).

The freedom to choose to work and the types of employment opportunities to pursue is integral to women's welfare (Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999; Kabeer, 2001). However, this choice is often denied. Women's labor force participation rates in the MENA region are some of the lowest in the world. Comparing women's labor force participation across North Africa – Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt – the gender gap in Libya is largest with 53.2 percentage points (ILO, 2017a). Only 25.8% of Libyan women participate in the labor force, while 79% of Libyan men do. (Ibid.). The economic advantages of closing the gender gap have been proven significant. Merely in North Africa, a 9.5% increase in the gross domestic product would be possible if the labor force participation gap between men and women decreases with 25% (ILO, 2017a). The low participation of women in the labor force is, therefore both a problem regarding gender equality and a missed opportunity for growth and development. What are the reasons for such a significant gender gap in Libya, and what are the potential barriers to women's labor market opportunities in Libya?

The gender gap in the MENA region is also known as gender paradox (Barsoum, 2019). The gender paradox refers to the continued lack of labor market inclusion of women despite an increase in educational attainment. (Moghadam and Karshenas, 2006; Littrell and Bertsch, 2013; Barsoum, 2019). The gender paradox also prevails in Libya (Bugaigis and Tantoush, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2017). Despite this, no published literature addresses women's labor market opportunities in Libya.

One important reason for this is the political division and crisis with protracting conflict since 2011, which has diverted the academics' and practitioners' attention towards peace processes rather than women's issues (Bugaigis and Tantoush, 2017). However, women's economic empowerment in conflict contexts is particularly important as it provides an opportunity to break with discriminatory gender roles of the past and embark on a new era, where women's economic empowerment is enshrined in society (Abril, 2009) Therefore, this thesis will address not only the causes of the gender paradox in Libya but also the potential solutions.

2 Research Question and Delimitations

Due to the stated importance of women's labor market participation for economic and social development in Libya, this thesis will address the following question:

What are the barriers to women's economic empowerment in Libya, and which changes are likely to ease the constraints on women's labor market opportunities?

Instrumental to women's economic empowerment is the freedom to choose between economic opportunities (Kabeer, 1999, 2001). It is a process of change going from access to resources and transforming resources into strategic choices. Examining possible labor market opportunities for women across sectors is therefore deemed necessary to understand the barriers to women's economic empowerment fully. Hence, the thesis also addresses the following sub-research question:

Do Libyan women face different barriers to economic empowerment across sectors?

This sub-research question addresses differences in barriers across sectors to understand if Libyan women face different obstacles in different industries. This sub-research question will also inform what changes are likely to ease the constraints on women's labor market options and drive change through potential best practices.

2.1 Delimitations

This research only includes an investigation of Libyan women's economic empowerment. The sole purpose and focus are thus equal opportunities for employment for Libyan women. Hence, it only includes social and educational empowerment when it has a direct impact on economic empowerment. It does not address Libyan women's empowerment within political or psychological spheres.

The data that represents the foundation of this study has been collected for Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) to inform their Libya Economic Empowerment (LEE) project. The purpose of the LEE project is to help women and youth make informed decisions about career paths and skill enhancements, based on knowledge about the demand for skills in growth industries in Libya. Due to the data collection process for the LEE project, the researcher has not designed the data collection instruments. The data utilized to answer the research questions have been deemed appropriate for the objectives of the study. However, the data collection instruments were not designed for this thesis and posed a limitation to the findings possible. Due to the protracted conflict and language barriers, the researcher has not collected primary data for this research. However, the researcher has done the cleaning of data and analysis of findings.

This research confines the scope of women's economic empowerment to formal wage employment since data on the informal employment sector is non-existent and proved difficult to collect with necessary reliability. Hence, the data limitations did not allow for the opportunity to analyze how entrepreneurship or the informal sector could provide Libyan women with economic empowerment opportunities, therefore, this research will only be able to show the tip of the iceberg of women's economic empowerment in Libya.

The thesis is structured as follows. Following the introduction and research question, the thesis will dive into the research design accounting for the research philosophy stance and the methodological choices made. Hereafter, a review of the current literature on the topic before an outline of the decisions regarding the theoretical framework. Hereafter, the analysis and discussion of the empirical findings will be done, which is followed by a conclusion that will include limitations and areas for further research.

3 Research Philosophy

A philosophical perspective of critical realism guides this study. As such, it adopts the ontological view of the world, where there is a real-world existing independently of our perceptions, constructs, and conceptualizations of it (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2010). However, it also shares the constructivist epistemology highlighting that the world is unavoidably a construct of our perceptions of it, thus enabling several layers of truth (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2010; Moses and Knutsen, 2012). Hence, critical realism recognizes the strength and weaknesses of naturalism and constructivism in its approach to research philosophy by not claiming any universal truths and allowing a critical stance on the neutrality of the researcher (Ibid.).

The strength of the critical realism philosophical approach to research is amongst others the pragmatism in allowing mixed-methods research, that can facilitate effective collaboration between qualitative and quantitative research (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2010). Thus, it will enable the researcher a range of methodological options, but it also emphasizes that; *"the particular choices should depend on the nature of the object of study and what one wants to learn about it"* (Sayer, 2000, p. 19). Quantitative and qualitative methodologies stem from two fundamentally different ontological views of the world; naturalism, and constructivism, which made researchers consider mixed-methods research impossible. The ability to combine methods in a research design follows a research philosophy of pragmatism, where practical application forms the basis for the combination of methods (Biesta, 2010). Moses and Knutsen argue that *"social science is better served by researchers who master several methods and methodologies, who can self-consciously choose among concepts and theories, and who command many basic principles of reasoning"* (Moses and Knutsen, 2012, p. 6). Critical realism allows the researcher to balance ontological and epistemological challenges by approaching research from a pragmatic philosophy of science that allows a broader range of questions to be asked and answered.

The research question addressed in this research is what the barriers to women's economic empowerment in Libya are, and what changes are likely to ease the constraints on women's labor market options. Women's empowerment is not a new topic within the literature, and hence a rich body of literature does exist on the subject, which allows for a deductive research design as the most appropriate (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Therefore, this research will take a deductive approach, where existing theory is the basis for the research question and research design. Previous research has outlined several barriers to women's economic empowerment globally as well as in the MENA region. Nevertheless, women's empowerment in Libya has not been subject to study due to the difficulties of reliable data from the recurring civil war-affected country. Hence, this research sets out to understand the barriers specific to Libyan women's economic empowerment and how to ensure that Libyan women will have the resources and agency needed to reach more prosperous economic outcomes and inclusivity into the economy in a post-conflict future.

"Researchers will only be able to understand what is going on in the social world if we understand the social structures that have given rise to the phenomena that we are trying to understand"

(Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, p. 115) — their argument highlight the position of this study. The purpose is thus not to make universal claims from my findings, but rather understand the specific empirical data at hand from a theory-driven approach. This study will not formulate hypotheses to test but instead refers back to findings of barriers to women's economic empowerment that previous literature has highlighted to help conceptualize women's economic empowerment in Libya. Triangulation of the descriptive statistics and content analysis with relevant academic and grey literature will serve to create the most reliable picture of women's economic empowerment in Libya.

4 Methodology

The objective of this section is to provide an account of the methodological choices made. Firstly, the research design is outlined to explain the structure of the research and the reasoning behind the chosen data collection and analysis methods. Secondly, the data collection process is described. Lastly, the data analysis methods will be explained, and the limitations of these choices will be discussed.

4.1 Research Design

4.1.1 Case study

The research design is a single-case study mixed-methods design examining barriers to women's economic empowerment in Libya. Yin (2014) argues that the use of the case study method is appropriate when there is a real-life phenomenon one wants to investigate. The purpose of a single case study is a way to gain an in-depth and deep understanding of a particular phenomenon, while an investigation of multiple case studies for comparison, in contrast, provides a better foundation for theory building (Eisenhardt and Grabner, 2007; Yin, 2014). An interest in understanding why Libyan women face the largest gender gap in labor market participation in North Africa was determining. Libya is a case that has been inaccessible to do research on for the past many years due to the protracted conflict (UNSMIL, 2019). According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009), a single case may be chosen for the particular reason that it poses an opportunity to observe a phenomenon that few have studied previously. The otherwise inaccessibility of studying Libyan women's barriers to economic empowerment makes it a highly interesting case to contribute with research on.

4.1.2 Mixed-Methods Research Design

I have chosen to use a mixed-method design to maximize the benefits obtained from both the qualitative and quantitative methods as both complement each other as well as offering wider and a more in-depth understanding of an issue (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2009). The mixed-methods design thus contains both data collection methods and analysis procedures that are quantitative and qualitative in nature. A mixed-methods research design allows for the use of descriptive statistics, evaluating the surveyed employers' assessment of Libyan women and men's cognitive and non-cognitive skills, while also addressing the inherently more socially constructed part of the research question regarding the barriers. Following a critical realist epistemology, it is necessary to understand the social structures that underlined the object of study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Henceforth, to understand the gap between the resources Libyan women possess and the economic outcomes these lead to, it is necessary to understand the social structures creating the barriers to women's agency.

Furthermore, mixed-methods research design increase the validity of a research study as the phenomenon can be addressed through multiple different types of sources (Morse and Maddox, 2014). The use of a mixed-methods design approach also provides for the triangulation of data

collection techniques within the study to ensure the data are either supporting or countering the argument put forward. Triangulation is necessary when using a single case study research strategy to ensure the validity of findings (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Bryman (2006) highlights that the reasoning provided for doing mixed-methods studies often does not correspond to the use of mixed-methods in practice. Hence, highlighting the importance of considerations of the fit between research strategy and research design.

4.2 Data Collection

As highlighted in the delimitations, the data used for this research was initially collected to inform MEDA's LEE project. Its purpose is to help women and youth make informed decisions about career paths and skill enhancements, based on knowledge about the demand for skills in growth industries in Libya. The researcher has not been a part of the instrument design process as it was developed before the research partnership was formed. Voluntas has, in collaboration with the local data collection company Diwan collected the data in July, August and September 2019. Since I as the researcher, have neither been part of the instrument development or the data collection, the thesis will treat this data as secondary data.

Voluntas identified sectors with the highest potential for employment through desk-based research and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The choice was made to focus program activity on the sectors in Libya with the best opportunities for creating job opportunities for youth and women. The relevant key informants were identified through MEDA's network that has been built through their six years' presence in Libya as well as snowballing through Diwan's local network in Libya. A Libyan Arabic speaker led each interview, and the interviewer followed a detailed interview guide with questions and probing instructions (see annex 2). Transcripts were then produced in Arabic and translated into English for analysis. Informants from the following organizations interviewed are used in this thesis to answer the research questions:

- Assil Company
- Central Bank of Libya
- Haroon Hotel
- Housing and Infrastructure Board
- Libya Telecom & Technology
- Libyan Cement Company
- Libyan Elite Technology Solutions
- National Oil Corporation
- Ministry of Economy
- Ministry of Finance
- Tripoli Chamber of Commerce

Furthermore, two KIIs with LEE project staff were conducted as MEDA has been present in Libya with the LEE project for six years, and their team thus would have a good idea of the perceptions and barriers experienced by youth and women. These interviews followed the same data collection process as the KIIs.

In addition to the KIIs, 10 focus group discussions (FGDs) were carried out across Libya. The FGDs were conducted in Benghazi, Sabha, Tripoli, Ubari, and Yefren. Each FGD consisted of 7 to 10 participants led by a moderator and a note-taker that were of the same gender as the participants. The FGDs were stratified according to gender so that 5 FGDs were with female participants and 5 FGDs were with male participants. The 5 FGDs with female participants are the ones that have been used to answer the research question. The FGD moderators followed a detailed discussion guide with questions and probing instructions (see annex 1). The FGDs are particularly useful when perceptions and experiences of social norms and sensitive topics such as barriers for women are pursued (Krueger and Casey, 2000).

As with the key informants, sampling was conducted using MEDA's network as well as snowballing to identify participants. In order to guarantee a high participation rate, excess recruitment of participants was done to compensate for potential non-show participants. Moreover, all FGD participants were between the ages of 18 and 35, as that is the LEE target population. Transcripts were produced in Arabic and then translated into English. The FGDs were based on informed and freely given consent. Either written or verbal consent from the participants was ensured to use the information they shared. Verbal consent was used when necessary due to the literacy skills of the participants.

Illustration 1: Demographics of FGD Participants

City	Number of Participants	Gender	Average age
Benghazi	10	Female	25
Sabha	10	Female	32
Tripoli	7	Female	N/A
Ubari	10	Female	N/A
Yefren	7	Female	26

In addition to the qualitative data, the data collection also included a quantitative side. A survey with 400 employers across the identified high potential growth sectors was conducted. The objective of the survey was to assess growth potentials and retrieve knowledge of the skills needed to succeed as an employee within each sector. Moreover, the employer survey intended to assess the current demand for skills among companies and an estimation of the jobs available within the near future. The target population of the employer survey was owners of smaller companies and managers, general managers, and unit managers in larger companies within each of the defined sectors. The survey had a nationwide geographical scope with a focus on urban areas with high employment rates (see illustration 3). The survey was conducted by phone using a structured interview guide (see annex 4).

The sample for the employer survey was a combination of the 2013 Tripoli directory, a web-scraping of several new online directories including the Irish Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Libya Business Directory, eArabic Market, LY-Biz.biz, and independent lists of companies with information from previous clients of Voluntas. For Tripoli, the 2013 company directory was used as a starting point. As a default option, the local data collection company Diwan conducted

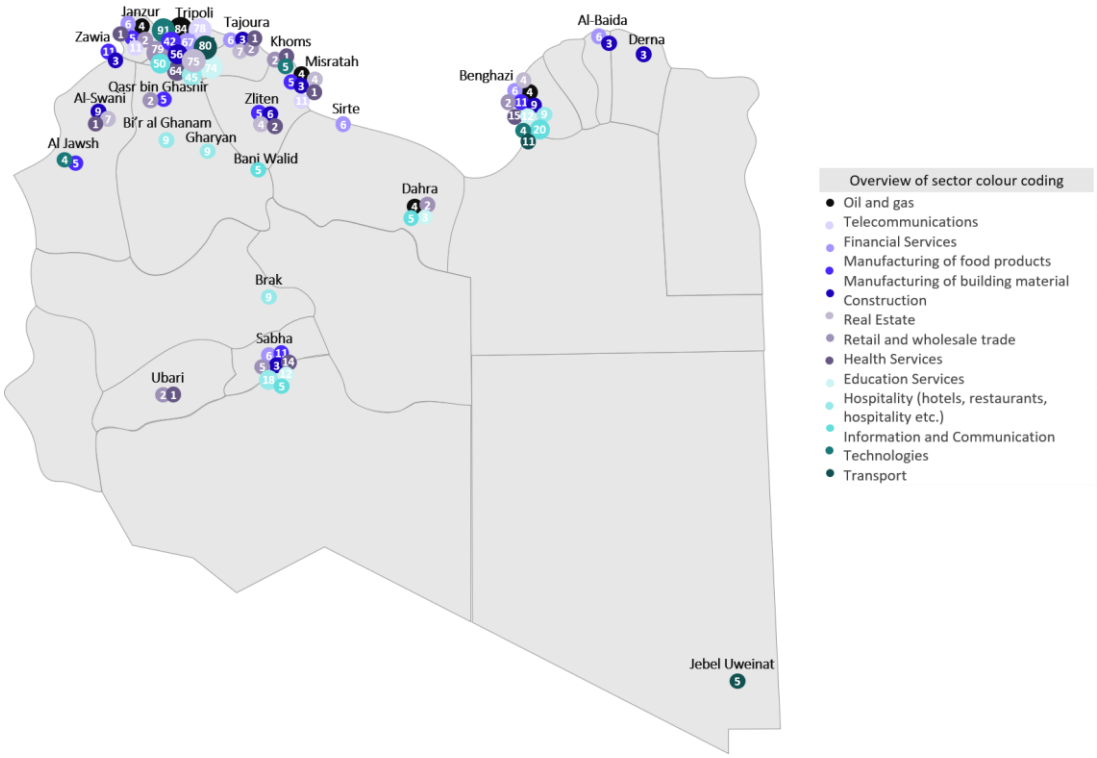
random calls with screening questions. Hence, this thesis will be using a sample that combines probability and non-probability sampling techniques. Therefore, this thesis will also not make any generalization about the population on statistical grounds. The combination of probability sampling and non-probability sampling is suitable for this research as neither of the research questions or objectives requires statistical generalization (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

The quantitative data collection was time-consuming as access to companies proved difficult. Diwan did the data collection in August and September 2019. Stratifying, according to the various sectors, proved difficult. The illustration below shows the number of respondents per sector for the survey. As illustration 2 shows, data scarcity is an issue for the Telecommunication sector in particular as well as small samples for the Financial Services, Food and Beverage Manufacturing, Hospitality and Transport sector. The issues of validity of the findings within the Telecommunication sector is addressed by combining the findings of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Telecommunication sector in the analysis. The sectors are compatible to address together due to their similar characteristics. The small sample size of the Financial Services, Food and Beverage Manufacturing, Hospitality and Transport sectors is acknowledged as a limitation to the reliability of the findings within these sectors. The challenges to the generalization of the findings within these sectors to the whole population are fully acknowledged. Triangulation of the findings and more weight will be put on the findings from the FGDs and KIIs in the evaluation of women's barriers to economic empowerment within these sectors to ensure the validity of the findings (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

Illustration 2: Overview of Respondents per Sector

Sector	Number of Surveyed Employers
Oil and Gas	29
Telecommunication	10
Information and Communication Technology	25
Financial Services	18
Food and Beverage Manufacturing	19
Building Material Manufacturing	33
Hospitality	20
Construction and Real Estate	73
Retail and Wholesale Trade	105
Private Health and Education	46
Transport	22
Total	**400**

Illustration 3: Map of Respondents per Sector in %



4.3 Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative analysis of the research design comprises of descriptive statistics. The statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software. The quantitative data analysis conducted contributed to the findings on resources and achievements across sectors. The quantitative data analysis contributes to two aspects of the research question. Firstly, the findings on women's and men's human resources help to understand if there is a skills gap causing the more than 50 percentage point gender gap in the labor force participation rate. Secondly, the findings on achievements contribute to an understanding of the growth prospects of the sectors, and therefore potential employment opportunities. It also helps to the knowledge of whether these employment opportunities translate into employment opportunities for women.

In the section on resources, the survey of employers focuses on skill assessments. The 400 surveyed employers evaluated women's and men's cognitive (computer literacy, literacy, English, and numeracy) and non-cognitive (behavioral, communication, management, computer literacy) skills:

- What basic hard skills are needed in your company to be successful? By basic hard skills, I mean skills acquired during primary and/or secondary education.
- What soft skills are needed to be successful in your company? By soft skills I mean personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people.

- You have mentioned [skill] as an important skill. Please specify the level you need employees with a primary or secondary degree to be on.
- When you receive applications for employment from [gender] for positions needing a primary or secondary degree, do job seekers usually have the right level of [skill], too high or too low?

The findings hereof are portrayed in a bar chart, and Libyan women's skillset is compared to the sample of men. This part of the quantitative data analysis provides a basis for discussing the gender gap in the Libyan labor market.

In the achievements section, the quantitative data analysis consists of the economic outlook and gender inclusivity. The 400 surveyed employers were asked on economic growth outlook:

- In your opinion, what is the outlook for growth in your sector over the coming year?;
    - No growth potential (0% or below)
    - Little growth potential (< 5%)
    - Moderate growth potential (5-10%)
    - Large growth potential (> 10%)

and on gender inclusivity:

- How many women do you employ at your organization?;
- [if 0] Why do you not have any women employed?
    - We have a formal or informal policy not to hire women
    - Our work is not suitable for women
    - We cannot find skilled women to hire
    - We do not receive job applications from women

The findings hereof are portrayed in a bar chart and used in text with percentage account of growth potential. This part of the quantitative data directly contributes to answering the sub-research question on whether Libyan women face a different set of barriers across sectors. The descriptive statistics provide a numerical insight and quantifiable variables across sectors but needs further support of women's perception of general and sectoral barriers to fully give an account of women's economic barriers in Libya.

4.4 Qualitative Data Analysis

The content analysis is used to understand the barriers to women's economic barriers in Libya. The content analysis is used as a research technique to make valid as well as replicable accounts from the FGDs to the context of Libyan women's account of barriers to economic empowerment, thus quantification of text through a set of pre-determined categories (Krippendorff, 2004). Content analysis can take two forms; quantitative and qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is most frequently used to provide an in-depth account of a phenomenon under study and often involves building the coding frame in a data-driven way. In contrast, the quantitative content analysis seeks to test hypotheses. The coding frame is in this case, often built from the theoretical framework or on the basis of already existing literature to test hypotheses derived from these theories (Schreier, 2014). This research adopts a qualitative content analysis

approach, where the coding framework was built on general and specific challenges within different sectors as perceived by FGD participants. The analysis followed a process of saturation, where the strategy of “subsumption” were used for generating subcategories (Schreier, 2014). This is done by going through the transcripts until relevant concepts were identified, subsuming sub-categories and if new sub-categories or concepts were detected they were added to the coding frame (Schreier, 2014).

The computer software NVivo was used to do the analysis, as it allows for connecting the underlying concepts of theories and patterns reflected in the data (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2011). The KIIs and FGDs were analyzed by classical qualitative content analysis where coded categories discovered in the transcripts were inductively developed. Consistency in coding has been highlighted in the methodological literature as one important issue with content analysis as well as the validity of the concepts that form the coding frame (Flick, 2014). As Kripppendorff stated, “*content analysis is valid if the inferences drawn from the available texts withstand the test of independently available evidence, of new observations, of competing theories or interpretations, or of being able to inform successful actions”* (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 313). The content analysis will therefore not stand alone, but reference back to peer-reviewed articles of theory will be done whenever possible to triangulate the findings of the content analysis.

5 Literature Review

Barriers, constraints, and challenges to women's labor market participation and economic empowerment are highly contextual. Yet, there is some overarching literature by feminist economists that do offer some insights, which can be extended to other contexts as well (Kabeer, 2012). The following section will thus review both overarching pieces of literature as well as contextually rooted aspects relevant to Libyan women's labor market participation and suggestions that are likely to ease the constraints on women's labor market options. The first part conceptualizes empowerment and the emergence of specific concerns with women's economic development. What follows is a contextualizing of the concept of empowerment and labor market discrimination. Hereafter, the section reviews theories on women's labor market gender inequalities following specific literature in the MENA region. Lastly, the section includes an account of potential policies and programs from other contexts and learning outcomes that could contribute to economic empowerment.

5.1 Conceptualizing Empowerment

The concept of women's empowerment has its origin in grassroots mobilization (Kabeer, 2012). Since the 1990s, women's empowerment has been a part of gender and development debates through feminist economists (see Sen and Grown (1988); Moser (1989); Kabeer (1994); Rowlands (1997) and Agarwal (1994) among others). There is, however no universal definition of empowerment, and different conceptualizations exist with various terminology and definitions (Hennink *et al.*, 2012). Many build on the definition of women's empowerment from Kabeer (1999); *"the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability"* (Kabeer, 1999, p. 435). Moreover, the recent Nobel prize winner in economics, Esther Duflo, definition of women's empowerment is widely used in the literature; *"improving the ability of women to access the constituents of development—in particular health, education, earning opportunities, rights, and political participation"* (Duflo, 2012, p. 1052).

The different definitions and lack of consensus can be viewed as a useful element, where practitioners can apply the concept in different contexts with a large amount of freedom (Kabeer, 1999). In contrast, critiques highlight that the lack of a defining frame of empowerment and the lack of coming to a definition over the past thirty years weakens its meaning (Cornwall and Brock, 2005; Batliwala, 2007). Despite the broad interpretation of the concept authors have found that within feminist grounded empowerment literature, there is a distinct set of concepts used in tandem with women empowerment to define and conceptualize empowerment; choice, power, and inner transformation, and the impact of these on the ability of women to live their lives as they want (Golla *et al.*, 2018).

This thesis applies Kabeer's (1999, 2001) definition of empowerment. Her definition primarily builds on the early literature on human capital and human development, precisely Sen's human development and capability approach (Sen, 1985). The interlinkages stem from Kabeer's definition of individuals exercises of choice as three dimensions, namely, "resources" (a pre-

condition), “agency” (the process), and “achievements” (the outcomes). Thus, access to resources is only the first step in the direction of women’s empowerment and the ability to obtain formal wage employment. Resources can be i.e., education, health-related services, whereas agency concerns individuals’ goals, aspirations and the continues acting according to them, whereas achievement is the end goal and the desired outcome, for example, better employment due to access to higher education (Kabeer, 2001).

Economic empowerment and specifically the interest in women’s economic empowerment can seem to be directly encompassed in the general term of women’s empowerment. Yet, it is only within the last decade that a definition of women’s economic empowerment has been attempted. Defining women’s economic empowerment leads one to entails stumbling across the same types of challenges as defining women's empowerment. SIDA’s research paper on women’s economic empowerment defines it as:

“The process which increases women’s real power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in society. Women’s economic empowerment can be achieved through equal access to and control over critical economic resources and opportunities, and the elimination of structural gender inequalities in the labor market including a better sharing of unpaid care work” (Törnqvist and Schmitz, 2009).

Kabeer (2012) compares SIDA’s definition of economic empowerment with that of the World Bank, the OECD, UNDP and ICRW and highlight specifically SIDA’s definition as encompassing more fair competition and as *“including, but going beyond, the focus on markets to considering the structural causes of gender inequalities in access to, and control over, key economic resources and in the distribution of unpaid, as well as paid work”* (Kabeer, 2012, p. 8). Therefore, this research will be using SIDA’s definition for economic empowerment to include more than merely women’s empowerment in purely economic terms, where market forces are considered playing a large role (Eyben, Kabeer and Cornwall, 2008).

5.2 Contextualizing Empowerment

Empowerment cannot stand alone as a concept, but ought to be contextualized to do justice to the concept. Such contextualization includes an understanding of the cultural environment with the family norms and values that describe the context of barriers to women’s economic empowerment (Kabeer, 2012; Golla *et al.*, 2018). As this thesis uses the most widely acknowledged definition of empowerment, Kabeer’s (1999, 2001) definition, it will also highlight a useful aspect within her framework to contextualize the concept. Kabeer (1999, 2001) draws on Bourdieu (1977) as she explains the context: *“The aspects of tradition and culture which are so taken for granted that they have become naturalized”* (Kabeer, 1999, p. 441). It is important to understand the context where women’s empowerment is studied, as the individual choice is constrained within the material and social contexts perceived by the individual (Kabeer, 1999). Considering the patriarchal context of the MENA region and women’s economic empowerment within such contexts is a necessary clarification. Specifically, the patriarchal society with the oldest male as senior authority that holds authority over both younger men and women in the household, and where the property descent through the male line defines many countries in the MENA region (Moghadam, 1992).

5.2.1 Conflict's Effect on Women's Decisions to Engage in Employment

As this study is conducted amid a civil war with protracted conflict, it is necessary to include the theoretical understanding of how conflict affects specifically women's ability to obtain formal wage employment and participate in the labor market. Firstly, it is essential to understand the definition of conflict as it otherwise remains an ambiguous concept that can have different meanings across contexts. The conflict in Libya is considered a protracted conflict on the World Bank's (2019b) list of fragile states. The conflict is therefore defined as a conflict that is both complex, severe, and enduring (Lutfy and Toffolo, 2019). As in other conflict contexts, this means that there are challenges to promote women's economic empowerment that are specific to conflict countries. Gender issues, in general, might not figure on the political priority list and the resources available to address gender issues are extremely limited, often leading women's economic empowerment to be a focus area that civil society alone has to muster (Abril, 2009). Hence, limited state capacity in conflict-affected settings leaves little budgeting for gender-sensitive and -responsive social protection and ability to address, for example, gender discriminatory laws (Holmes and Jones, 2013).

Studies that specifically focus on the impact of conflict on women's employment opportunities do not come to any unanimous correlations, but that conflict affects women's employment opportunities differently depending on the context (Menon and van der Meulen Rodgers, 2015). However, some characteristics are specific to women's economic empowerment in conflict and post-conflict settings. Access to land, property, and similar economic resources becomes either complicated or even impossible in conflict settings, access to education and skills training is worse than in non-conflict settings, which hampers access to the labor market (Abril, 2009; Ni Aolain *et al.*, 2017). Women's participation in the informal labor market also increases, which opens up new, yet unstable employment opportunities. This also relates to the break down of particularly the private sector in conflict areas making anything but informal employment close to impossible (Ibid.).

In addition, women also face gender-related obstacles during the conflict. They have an increased level of care responsibilities, are subject to increased gender-based violence and low psychosocial wellbeing (Abril, 2009). Especially the acknowledgment of gender-based violence by spouses and family members as well as the higher level of harassment and broader pattern of differences in vulnerability of the genders is important. In addition to the severest cases of gender-based violence of mass rape by combatants in conflict settings (Hossain, Zimmerman and Watts, 2014). Factors that all highlight the adverse effects conflict has on women and their equal access to formal wage employment.

5.3 Labor Market Gender Inequalities

Individual choice and structural constraints are the two strands of theoretical approaches to labor market gender inequalities in the literature (Kabeer, 2012). The individual choice strand of the literature originates from neo-classical economic theory, where researchers have a naturalist approach to research and rely on econometric and quantitative methods to labor market analysis (Ibid.). Their contributions to the understanding of gendered inequalities in the labor market have

contributed to the quantification of gender discrimination, but not to understand the specific processes that give rise to such differences (Ibid.).

In contrast, feminist economists pointed towards that individual choice of men and women was insufficient to explain labor market inequality processes as it excludes labor market discrimination by employers (Kabeer, 2012). To clarify, this does not mean that the theoretical approach to labor market inequalities do not account for or believe in the exertion of choice and agency of individuals. However, they believe that agency is exercised within the constraints of rules, norms, and values within a specific labor market context and that these structural constraints produce the gender disadvantage in the labor market (Folbre, 1994). Feminist economists such as Figart (1997) and Redmount (1995) highlighted that neo-classical economist theory only use gender as a simple binary indicator, a so-called dummy variable, which does not do justice to the role of gender in the labor market and understanding the barriers women face at the labor market. Kabeer (1999, 2001), as well as Duflo (2012), are two examples of feminists economists that point towards women's empowerment as the individual's choice within structural constraints.

Kabeer (2012) has divided structural constraints into two categories that are useful for understanding the barriers and blockages to women's labor market participation and economic empowerment. One echoes the idea of gender-specific constraints, which refer to customary norms, beliefs, and values that characterize family or kinship relationships, also defined as relationships that are "intrinsically gendered" (Whitehead, 1979). Social labor market policy literature also highlights structural barriers as critical to address to change gender segregation in the labor market (Abraham and Hinz, 2005). Intrinsically gendered structural constraints contribute to the labor market discrimination in many parts of the world, in which the higher labor force participation of men relative to women also clearly mirror, and reflecting the breadwinning responsibilities of men (Kabeer, 2012). Thus, the constraints is defined based on gender and the virtue of your gender determines the norms, beliefs and values allocated to your role and responsibility (Ibid.). The other type of structural constraint is categorized as "imposed gender" constraints. These constraints are associated with the state and markets such as legal differences between men and women that formalize gender discrimination and women's opportunity for economic empowerment (Ibid.). These contributions, thus highlight the gender inequalities viewed in many labor markets, where, for example, gender segregation of jobs is persistent due to both intrinsic and imposed gender-related constraints (Ibid.). In conclusion, the economic empowerment of women, thus requires researchers and practitioners alike to understand these types of socio-economic limitations to provide solutions that increase women's access to economic citizenship (Ibid.).

5.4 Gender and Labor Markets in the MENA Region

There is a vast amount of literature on gender equality in an Islamic context. However, there is a limited amount of research on equal employment opportunities in Islamic countries (Syed, 2008). Lattouf (2004) has reflected on the concept of women's empowerment and the disconnect between access to resources, agency, and outcomes. Her study of Lebanese women's employment and social status found that despite the women's improved educational attainment, there is a lack of advancement in their social status stemming from gender discrimination in

legislation (Lattouf, 2004). Shavarini's (2006) study of Iranian women come to the same findings of an increase in women's tertiary education attainment with a lack of correlation to increased job opportunities and participation in the labor market. Haghighat (2013) collate findings across the MENA region and point to the conclusion that the social status of women can be increased with education and provide better marital opportunities. But, the unemployment rate will continue to be higher than men's with similar educational backgrounds due to patriarchal societies' traditions (Haghighat, 2013).

Social policy authors such as Moghadam and Karshenas (2006) specifically underline the role of gender in MENA labor markets, thus adding to a sparse amount of literature addressing women's social rights of employment and economic citizenship within the region. The international standards of social rights of working women stem from the United Nation's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It stipulates the main framework for economic citizenship. Discriminatory practices that go against these rights of economic citizenship are inherent in labor market withs low female participation despite high levels of tertiary school enrolment (Moghadam and Karshenas, 2006). In the 1960s and 1970s, many MENA countries included access to education in their social labor market policies without similar access to the labor market (Moghadam, 2005). It has been described as the "developmentalist approach" following neopatriarchal ideas of women's role in society (Ibid.).

The neopatriarchal approach or label to the MENA states stems from Hisham Sharabi (1988), which describes an ideal family structure and objective of traditional local communities with the male breadwinner and female as caretaker of the house and children. This idea of the male as the ideal breadwinner within household structures reflects intrinsic gender-related constraints (Kabeer, 2012). In stark contrast, arguments from scholars such as Barsoum (2019) that dissociate from authors such as Moghadam (1992, 2002, 2005; 2006; 2015). The debate around what explains the low employment rate in the MENA region is argued to be based primarily on pragmatic choices made around women's work and family, that separates itself from the neopatriarchal argument of other scholars (Barsoum, 2019).

The Islamic norms, as inscribed in Muslim family law, do allow a woman to keep the earnings she makes to herself and not share with her husband (Moghadam, 2005). Despite this, otherwise non-gendered legal aspects studies have shown that intrinsic gender discrimination persists. Cairoli (2002) has, for example, demonstrated that in Morocco, this aspect of the Muslim family law only has resulted in working-class men sending their daughters to work and keeping their wives from working. The literature reflect the difference between de-jure and -facto equality of women in the labor market across the MENA region.

5.5 Human Capital and Capabilities Approach to Employment

In addition to gendered structural barriers, women can also face constraints regarding the resources available to them and the ability to utilize them to improve their access to formal wage employment. Nobel Prize winner in economics Amartya Sen (1999) developed the capabilities approach, which has been widely used within the literature on human development. The capabilities approach can be a useful tool to analyze potential inhibiting factors relating to skills. Human development is defined as the development of human capabilities, which enable

individuals to make choices of their own life (Sen, 1989). Sen's (1999) capabilities approach can thus provide a lens through which inhibiting factors to formal wage employment can be understood.

As such, Sen's (1999) capabilities approach to human development provides an alternative to traditional econometric models to address labor markets. Previous models such as resource-based approaches neglect the difference between an individual's ability to activate and use resources. Resource-based approaches to human development do not consider structural barriers, for example, patriarchal societies where family norms and traditions hinder young women's ability to utilize resources (Kabeer, 2012). Thus, if men and women should be able to obtain similar skillset and the same degree of recognition of these skills, it should not require more hoops to go through for women (Bianchi, 2001). Along the same lines, preference-based approaches lack the acknowledgment of individuals' interest and preference of i.e. work in a specific sector is not determined exogenously from economic or social conditions but rather constructed within structural constraints (Ibid.).

One core aspect of the capabilities approach is the ability of individuals to be empowered through agency (Sen, 1985). This process has to happen through two elements; provision of sufficient resources as well as the ability to convert these resources into capabilities. From a labor market perspective, an individual can only be empowered through enhancing capabilities if; they have the information of skillset demanded, they can supply this skillset, and the legal and political environment allows such objectives (Lindsay and McQuaid, 2010).

5.5.1 Education

Within the literature on female participation in the labor market, there is a vast amount of literature on post-primary educations ability to increase labor market participation and job opportunities. Yet, there is a lack of policy focus on higher education's effects on women's employment opportunities as well as a lack of focus on the quality of education (Kabeer, 2012).

A number of authors have highlighted the education system as one of the primary causes of unemployment in the MENA region (Salehi-Isfahani, 2012; Assaad, 2014; Assaad, Krafft and Salehi-Isfahani, 2018). Salehi-Isfahani (2012) argues that the history of the authoritarian government of the region has succeeded in increasing formal schooling by tying together formal education with government jobs.

Desai et al. (2009) highlight this as the "authoritarian bargain" in their study of 45 non-democratic states between 1984 and 1999, where citizens allow political acquiescence, specifically political rights to gain economic rights. A top-down approach to modernization, where authoritarian governments have provided free education and direct access to public sector jobs as a way to buy political stability. A lack of focus on productive skills, but rather a focus on educational attainment in the form of formal credentials, highlights the lack of quality education within the MENA region (Assaad, 2014). Thus, the scarce quality of education and subsequent lack of investment in human capital demanded by the private labor market hamper women's participation in the labor market in the MENA region and available positions. Assaad (2014) highlights how the increase in educational attainment for both men and women with a falling gender gap in education, should

theoretically increase the labor market participation of women. Yet, female labor market participation has not increased in the region but instead stagnated.

The lack of quality education stems from industrial policy decisions, where an authoritarian bargain of oil rentier states use oil revenues to provide formal certificate education and subsequent employment in the public sector (Assaad, Krafft and Salehi-Isfahani, 2018). As such, the typical industrial policy in the MENA region has constituted a strategic effort by the state to develop the public sector (Desai, Olofsgård and Yousef, 2009). It has only been possible in oil-rich countries, where oil export earnings have been able to sustain and uphold a disproportionately large public sector (Heydemann, 2002).

5.5.2 Skills and Training

A noteworthy gap in the literature seems to be the vocational and technical training of women to increase both employability and productivity (Kabeer, 2012). The literature available on the topic highlights discrimination within the training and educational programs that are supposed to ease the constraints of women's labor market options. Ariga and Brunello (2002) find that employers discriminate against women when they provide training. Seguino (1997) and Kabeer et al. (2007) have found evidence of the reproduction of gender bias in training provided by public training institutes. Ibarran and Shady (2008) revealed that women's employment opportunities increased when the design of the training was carefully designed to the audience. A striking finding was also that the job training programs were able to move women from unpaid domestic work to wage employment (Ibarran and Shady, 2008). Feminist economist theory can thus add to an analysis of what types of changes are likely to ease the constraints of women's labor market options by asserting a focus on skills gap training, vocational education or other tools to address labor market discrimination actively. Hence, ensuring that providers of such training do not contribute to reinforcing the gender stereotypes already embedded in the labor market context.

5.6 Addressing Women's Barriers to the Labor Market

Kabeer's (2012) research paper highlights both individual and structural barriers to women's economic empowerment as well as seven policy options for how women's barriers to the labor market can be addressed based on successful research findings of other authors. The first policy option suggested is to address the regulatory environment to make sure that women have the agency to take advantage of existing employment opportunities. She draws on other scholars' examples from around the world. She highlights Hallward-Driemeier and Gajigo's (2010) study in Ethiopia, where a change in the family law in Ethiopia that amongst others, allows women to work outside the home without the permission of the husband. De-jure change that led to de-facto change for women's economic empowerment in Ethiopia with higher-paid positions, jobs outside the home as well as jobs that require higher education (Hallward-Driemeier and Gajigo, 2010). In Latin America, changes in inheritance law have also been proven to contribute towards an improvement in women's ownership of land (Deere and Leon, 2001).

Secondly, Kabeer (2012) highlight the research advancements to ease women's barriers to access labor market opportunities have successfully been addressed in contexts with weak enforcement of labor laws through voluntary regulation such as codes. For example, in Bangladesh, the

Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety emerged as global labor governance mechanisms to ensure a safe working environment for the thousands of female workers in the export-oriented ready-made garment sector as a response to the collapse of the factory building Rana Plaza (Anner, Bair and Blasi, 2013; Donaghey and Reinecke, 2018). Thus, allowing women's labor market opportunities to be a process of empowerment and not a shift from one disempowered environment of the home to a disempowered labor market without any rights as a worker (Kabeer, Haq and Sulaiman, 2019).

The third area of research is access to education, skills, and training, which have been unfolded earlier in the review of the literature. Fourthly, infrastructure and technology are suggested as a response to women's lack of freedom of mobility which poses a significant barrier to women's labor market opportunities (Kabeer, 2012). In Bangladesh, a road development project had a higher positive impact on the female than male labor supply (Khandker and Koolwal, 2006). While in Ghana, correlations between household electrification led to the reduced time allocated for women to domestic responsibilities, which freed up time for participation in the labor market (Dinkelman, 2010). The technological studies highlighted to ease the constraints of women's labor market opportunities include the expansion of mobile phone coverage that has been proven to increase women's employment in rural labor markets in South Africa as it reduced the costs of job search (Klonner and Nolen, 2008).

Gender aware social protection is mentioned as the fifth focus area, which specifically focuses on the negative side of new labor market opportunities that have come with globalization (Kabeer, 2012). Cash transfer programs serve as a social program that extends social protection as well as a rather unexpected way to ease some of the constraints to women's economic agency. For example, in Brazil, cash transfer programs lead to a better opportunity to access credit when first in a cash transfer program, which with new credit opportunities, opened up for returning to education (Kabeer, 2012).

The sixth focus area for addressing women's constraints on women's labor market opportunities are women's care responsibilities (Kabeer, 2012). *"Women's care responsibilities are one of the most pervasive of the constraints that curtail women's ability to participate in the labor market – as well as their ability to participate in the public life of their community more generally"* (Kabeer, 2012, p. 47). Freeing up time for women to participate in the formal wage labor market can be done by reducing their unpaid care work. Dreze and Goyal (2003) studied the effect of providing school lunches in India, which freed up time for women working outside the home as they did not need only to take up part-time work or leave early to feed their children in the afternoon. In Argentina, the construction of the pre-primary school was another way to increase the likelihood of employment of women with children in the age group 3-5 (Berlinski and Galliani, 2008).

The seventh and final way for addressing constraints that manifest in women's marginalized economic empowerment opportunities are increased organization and voice. Women's organizational capacity was discussed as a way to transform women's access to paid work into economic empowerment. Kabeer (2012) highlights how collective action has both enabled the design of affordable child care to provision of training and skills development to changes in codes of conduct such that they include women workers' interests and concerns at the workplace.

6 Theoretical Framework

This section of the research will outline the theoretical framework, which forms the framework for the analysis and discussion of the findings. The definition of women's empowerment applied in this research is that of Kabeer (1999, 2001):

"The processes through which women gained the capacity for exercising strategic forms of agency in relation to their own lives as well as in relation to the larger structures of constraint that positioned them as subordinate to men" (Kabeer, 2012, p. 6).

It is conceptualized within the specific concern with Libyan women's economic empowerment following SIDA's definition of women's economic empowerment:

"The process which increases women's real power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in society. Women's economic empowerment can be achieved through equal access to and control over critical economic resources and opportunities, and the elimination of structural gender inequalities in the labor market including a better sharing of unpaid care work" (Törnqvist and Schmitz, 2009).

The domain examined is thus that of labor markets and Libyan women's ability to apply their resources to the Libyan labor market. The emphasis on the process of change women go through both include the consideration that this process can be positive and negative. Thus, the process of change for Libyan women can both be harmful, hence disempowering, for example, through the denial of choice, and be positive and empowering through a process of additional options and decision-making power.

The theoretical framework used to analyze and discuss the findings of this study is the conceptual framework of Kabeer (1999, 2001) which conceptualizes empowerment based on three interrelated aspects: resources, agency, and achievements. Considerations to the impact of the protracted conflict situation in Libya are included in the theoretical framework, hence ensuring the contextualizing the concept of empowerment (Kabeer, 2012).

6.1 Resources

Resources can either be material, social, or human resources (Kabeer, 2001). Material resources can be access to land, economic resources, equipment, finance, working capital and the like, where social resources cover relationships, networks and the personal connections that individuals have (Ibid.). While human resources are the cognitive and non-cognitive skills of an individual i.e. education, skills, entrepreneurial skills, etc. In this research, resources focus on Libyan women's human resources and the ability of women to exercise decision-making power over these resources to obtain employment opportunities. Human resources are conceptualized as Libyan women's educational level as well as cognitive and non-cognitive skills as perceived by employers.

6.2 Agency

Agency is defined as; *"the ability to define one's goals and act upon them"* (Kabeer, 2001, p. 438). As the process for empowerment, the agency can take both a negative and positive form as agency cover decision-making power. The power to choose and exercise decision-making power over one's opportunities to participate in the Libyan labor market can be positive when women have the options to choose, while power over agency can be exercised negatively when it is power over that is exercised. Thus, when Libyan women are deprived of choice on the Libyan labor market. The ability to choose and have the power over one owns decision-making can both be expressed through agency and choice, however, it can also be measured through the kinds of choices people make (Kabeer, 2001). The lack of agency and the power over can be found in societies, where women are discriminated against or are considered the sub-ordinate group to men as the dominant group (Kabeer, 1999, 2001). Thus, choices that discriminate against women in the Libyan labor market do not reflect agency and choice, however *"power and dominance can operate through consent and complicity as well as through coercion and conflict"* (Kabeer, 2001, p. 25). Understanding agency and the positive process of decision-making entail a core concept of choosing on the basis of alternatives and the individual woman's understanding of a potential employment opportunity being within the realm of possibility: *"The availability of alternatives at the discursive level, of being able to at least imagine the possibility of having chosen differently, is thus crucial to the emergence of a critical consciousness, the process by which people move from a position of unquestioning acceptance of social order to a critical perspective on it"* (Kabeer, 2001, p. 25).

Libyan women's agency and decision-making power over their human resources are operationalized through an evaluation of the structural barriers present in Libya hindering women's agency and decision-making power.

6.3 Achievements

Achievements are the outcomes of the resources that people exercise power over and are able to materialize (Kabeer, 1999, 2001). The conceptualization of achievements builds on Sen's (1999) capability approach, where Kabeer's (1999, 2001) empowerment process with individuals' agency over resources and sub-sequent opportunities for achievements refers to the actual capabilities that create the potential for people to live their lives according to their goals (Kabeer, 1999). Achievements or the outcomes of resources and decision-making power over these resources are described as the third dimension of power in Kabeer's theoretical framework (Kabeer, 1999). Qualifying choice is necessary to ensure when looking at achievements, that it reflects inequalities and not only difference in choice: *"As far as empowerment is concerned, we are interested in possible inequalities in people's capacity to make choices rather than in differences in the choices they make"* (Kabeer, 1999, p. 439)

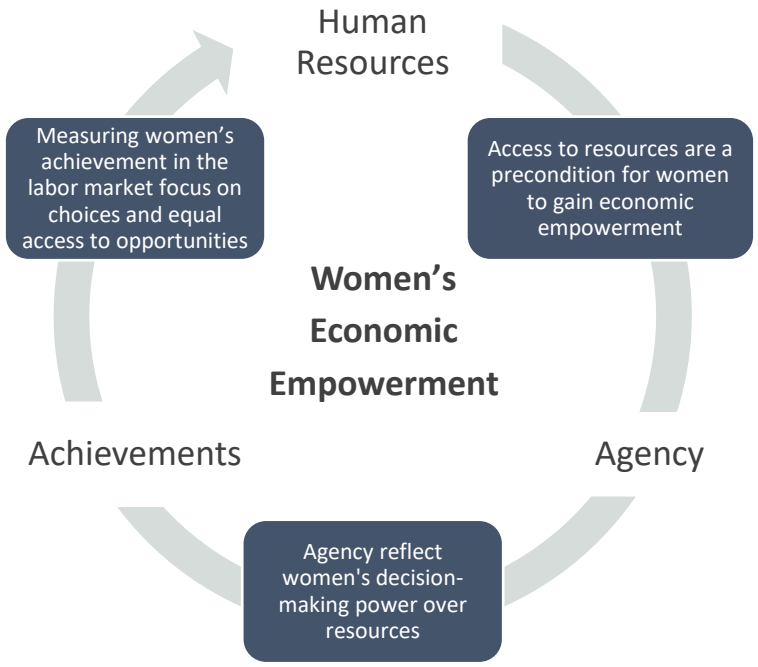
Achievements are analyzed and discussed within the high potential growth sectors in Libya to address the sub-research question of whether Libyan women face different barriers for economic empowerment in Libya within different sectors.

6.4 Context

The context that women's empowerment takes place in is highly important to understand the process of empowerment as the ability to make choice consist of one part of the choice, while social norms shape the context for the ability to choose (Kabeer, 1999). Two aspects of the Libyan context affect the choices that Libyan women have; the Libyan protracted conflict context and the social norms and values in the Libyan society. Kabeer (1999) draws on Bourdieu (1977) and his concept of 'Doxa': *"the aspects of tradition and culture which are so taken-for-granted that they have become naturalized"* (Kabeer, 1999, p. 441). This implies that the social norms and values present in a society can be so entrenched in society that individuals might not even challenge it and will perhaps even be likely to reproduce these norms and expectations of what it means to be a woman. Thus, women might be accepting and internalize the status quo of the subordinate role of women in society and the social norms, that women's economic empowerment should be limited (Kabeer, 1999, 2001).

The context in this research is confined to the current Libyan protracted conflict context examining the current barriers to Libyan women's economic empowerment opportunities without any attempt to try and project ideas to how these barriers will change in the future as the high levels of uncertainty and instability in the country will influence how such developments will unfold.

Illustration 4: Theoretical Framework



Source: Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and change*, 30(3), 435-464.

7 The Libyan Labor Market

Libya experiences high unemployment rates compared to other MENA middle-income countries. Unemployment has increased from an estimated 14% in 2010 to 16% in 2018 with an even higher unemployment rate for youth and women, as 43% and 25% respectively are unemployed (The World Bank, 2015). Moreover, underemployment and informal employment are estimated to account for between 40% and 60% of total employment (European Training Foundation, 2014).

The high unemployment level is rooted in several features of the Libyan economy. Libya has been historically characterized by an inflated public sector and an over-reliance on its oil exports. A World Bank estimate from 2015 shows that 85% of Libyans work in the public sector, a rate that reaches 93% among women (The World Bank, 2015). While it is estimated that 77% of household income is derived from government salaries in 2018 (REACH, 2019).

Low diversification of the economy poses as one of the main challenges of the Libyan labor market. It has resulted in sizeable productive sectors such as agriculture, construction, and manufacturing largely to be underserved. For instance, while the overall service industry employs 69% of workers, trade and agriculture only account for respectively 6% and 1% of total employment (The World Bank, 2015).

Furthermore, the country experiences very low levels of self-employment, as private entrepreneurial activities remain limited after decades of the state interfering in business decisions, poor regulatory efficiency and inconsistent and non-transparent application of existing regulations. Access to private financial services is very limited, exacerbated by the difficulty of proving private ownership of land, leaving the large demand for micro, small and medium enterprise (SME) financing mostly unmet. In addition to this, the introduction of legislation prohibiting interest-based transactions in 2013 – without adequate foundations of Islamic finance in place – has further squeezed lending from private banks, and reduced the potential of the private sector to create employment (The World Bank, 2015). The challenge in accessing capital contributes to Libya’s ranking of 186 out of 190 economies in the World Bank's ease of doing business index (The World Bank, 2019a).

Aside from the lack of enabling factors, the labor market is also characterized by a structural mismatch between demand and supply. Inefficient school-to-work transition and job queuing for public sector jobs contribute to the inefficiency of the job market. Survey data from 2012 shows that the public sector continues to be the preferred employer among the Libyan population, with 67% of job seekers in pursuit of public sector jobs and only 2% seeking employment in the private sector (The World Bank, 2015). This preference is potentially linked to the fact that the public sector generally provides better job security and social insurance (The World Bank, 2015).

Further, only 15–30% of Libya’s labor force is relatively skilled, while the bulk of the Libyan workforce is semi-skilled. Studies have shown that about 30% of firms report difficulties in recruiting qualified Libyan nationals and often resort to recruiting Libyan staff to meet labor regulation quotas while hiring foreign workers to fill their actual needs (The World Bank, 2015).

8 Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This part of the research presents and analyses the findings from the desk-based research, the content analysis of the 5 FGDs, the 13 KIIs, and the descriptive statistics of the employer survey (n=400). The analysis will answer the question of what barriers there are to women's economic empowerment in Libya and if these differ across sectors. On this basis, potential ways to address the barriers will be discussed. This analysis will include a discussion of the findings continuously throughout the analysis, comparing findings with the literature.

The analysis is divided into four parts. Firstly, Libyan women's human resources are first assessed with a look into education and training opportunities, followed by a comparison of the cognitive and non-cognitive skills of women and men. Secondly, the barriers to women's agency in Libya are gauged. This component includes looking at the structural barriers that persist in Libyan society, as well as a look into the decision-making power of Libyan women. Thirdly, a deep dive into what Kabeer (1999, 2001) conceptualizes as achievements will be analyzed and discussed across eleven public and private sectors to find barriers and best practice scenarios where women will have obtained economic empowerment despite persistent barriers. Finally, what changes are likely to ease the constraints on women's labor market opportunities will be discussed.

8.1 Resources

Kabeer (1999, 2001) highlights that the resources that women can draw on to succeed economically or to exercise power and agency are either material, financial, human, or social resources. This research will consider Libyan women's human resources by focusing on education, training, and skills due to the importance of these resources to gain successful access to formal labor market opportunities.

8.1.1 Education and Training

Kabeer (1999, 2001) stresses how education can contribute to women's economic empowerment, but she also emphasizes that merely addressing equal access to education is not synonymous with women's economic empowerment. Education is only the precondition for social change if women can also exercise decision-making power over these resources. They are not empowering unto themselves, yet they can create a vantage point for alternatives and allow for more transformative change (Kabeer, 1999).

Women's equal access to education either in the form of access to primary, secondary, or tertiary education or opportunities for training is a social right, which does not appear to be contested in Libya. The 2019 Arab Barometer found that the majority of Libyans consider university education important for both women and men (Arab Barometer, 2019b). Nevertheless, 15% of Libyans

either strongly agrees or agree with the statement that men's university education is more important than women's. Men are twice as likely as women to either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement that men's university education is more important. This trend is a general characteristic of the MENA region (Ibid.). However, Libya differs from most other MENA countries in that a higher percentage of youth (defined as 18 to 29) than 30+ either 'strongly agrees' or 'agrees' that men's university education is more important than women's (Ibid.). The findings on women's equal access to higher education show a generally positive picture, with 85% of Libyans believing that there should be equal social rights within education. Nevertheless, it is concerning that Libyan youth are more likely to agree that men's university education is more important than women's. It reflects a potential negative trend in the long-term for women's equal access to education.

In Libya, the majority of youth (both men and women) have a secondary or tertiary education, thus making it rare for young women to have only finished primary education (LEE staff 1, July 22nd, 2019; LEE staff 2, July 22nd, 2019). The average woman has completed secondary education, but most cannot find work (LEE staff 1, July 22nd, 2019). The average number of years of education women ages 25 and older have in Libya is 7.7 (GIWPS, 2019b). The same picture is reflected in the FGDs, with only two of the female FGD participants having completed secondary education. The remaining 42 female FGD participants have a tertiary education, leaving none of them with only primary education. When considered along with the fact that the majority believes in women's equal rights to higher education, one would believe that the high educational level of women in Libya would be able to transform into employment opportunities. Despite the increase in education, there is a continuous low participation of women in the labor market. A characteristic that is a general future of the MENA region known as the gender paradox (Littrell and Bertsch, 2013; The World Bank, 2013; Assaad, 2014; UNICEF, 2019).

There is a broad consensus that a minimum of secondary education is associated with higher participation in the labor market and subsequent contribution to household income and national income (Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam, 2015). Nonetheless, this does not seem to be the case in Libya. There does not seem to be a barrier related to women's access to equal social rights regarding human resources such as education. Hence, women's economic empowerment in Libya is not hindered by a lack of access to education, but rather by other factors, which result in women not being able to exercise power over these resources and apply them to reach economic empowerment.

A number of scholars have argued as such that the quality of education across MENA is worrying and does not match the expectations and demands of the private labor market (Salehi-Isfahani, 2012; Assaad, 2014; Assaad, Krafft and Salehi-Isfahani, 2018). This dissonance is a barrier to women's economic empowerment 93% of Libyan women work in the public sector, and the Libyan economy in the long-term will be forced to shift away from heavy reliance on the public sector to provide jobs for the majority of the Libyan people (The World Bank, 2015). Thus, the education available to women in Libya leaves them ill-equipped to enter successfully into the private labor market in Libya. Their education is, however, of the same poor quality that men receive.

8.1.2 Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills

Skills are at the core of improving employment outcomes and increasing productivity and growth (The World Bank, 2018a). Unemployment and low productivity employment can often be the result of workers not having the right skills to match the requirements in available job openings or limited opportunities to access skill-upgrading training programs. In many countries, education and training systems often lack quality and labor market relevance, leaving workers ill-prepared for the labor market (OECD, 2012, 2018a; The World Bank, 2018a). This section will, therefore, go through the skills employers evaluate among female and male applicants.

The 400 surveyed employers were asked what basic hard and soft skills are needed in their companies to be successful. Hereafter, they were asked to specify the minimum level that applicants' hard and soft skills should be at. Lastly, they were asked if female applicants had a sufficient skill level (see annex 3). Only employers that had female employees were asked about women's skillset. Thus, it became clear from the number of responses from surveyed employers that only 38.5% of them employ women. This finding will be further explored according to sectors in section 8.3 Achievements. Here, it is confined to influence the size of the sample that can provide an insight into women's cognitive and non-cognitive skills in the Libyan formal labor market. Illustration 5 shows the number of employers that have highlighted a specific cognitive and non-cognitive set of skills as important to succeed in their sector and the skill level of female applicants.

Measuring women's human resources through surveyed employers is an attempt to consider resources in a non-generic way. Kabeer (2001) states that measuring resources most often comes across as the easiest aspect of women's empowerment in comparison to measuring *agency* or achievements. However, she emphasizes that it is important when determining the means of measuring resources to take into account that access to resources does not automatically specify the choices possible (Kabeer, 2001). Thus, measuring Libyan women's resources through an understanding of employer's perceptions of female applicants' skills to positions in their organization account for the subjective perceptions that women are met with on the formal labor market. This circumstance means that Libyan women might have a higher skill level than perceived by employers, but the perceptions of employers provide a criterion for evaluating the validity of measuring women's resources in Libya. Hence, the measurement of human resources includes the consideration of what Kabeer (2001) conceptualizes as actualized choice rather than potential choice.

Illustration 5: Employers' Perception of Women's Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills

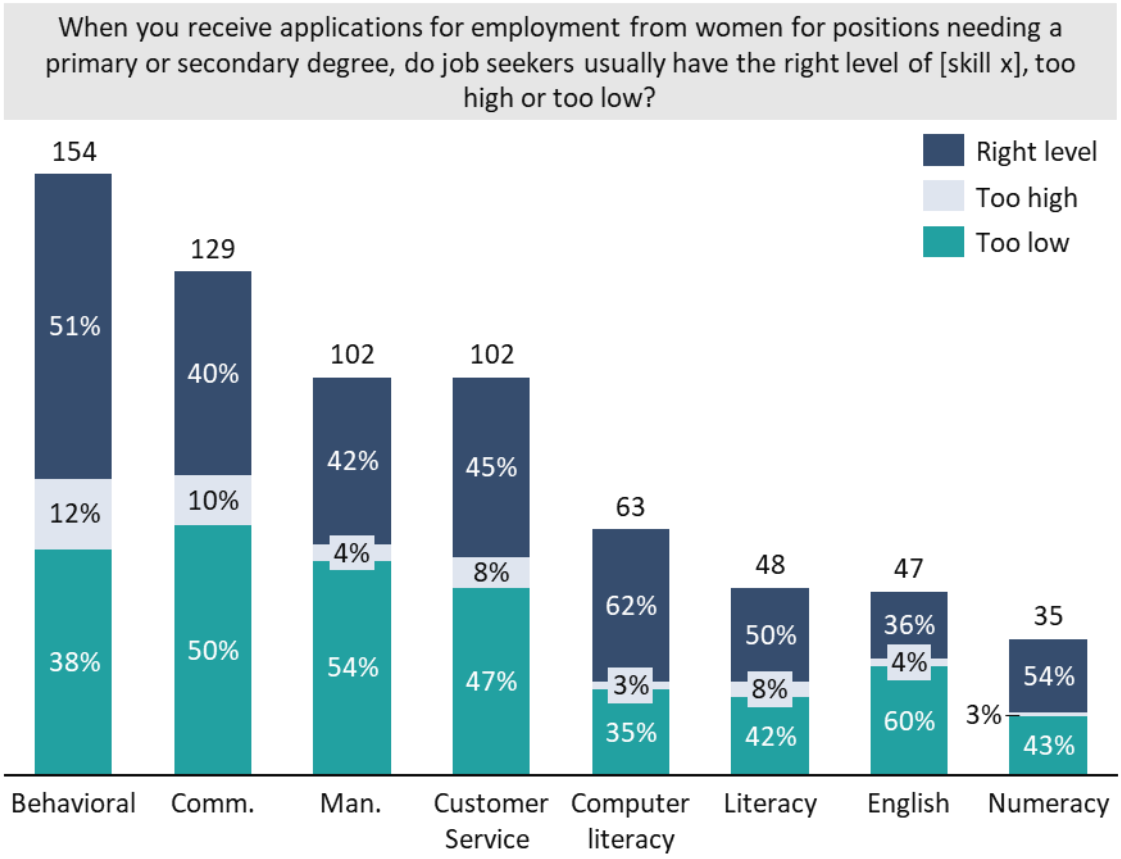


Illustration 5 and 6 show Libyan employers' assessment in the survey to respective women and men's cognitive (computer literacy, literacy, English, and numeracy) and non-cognitive (behavioral, communication, management, computer literacy) skills. Overall, the majority of women *do* meet the expectations of employers when it comes to skillset, aside from management skills and English literacy skills. 54% of surveyed employers that consider management skills important do not consider women to have the necessary skill level. In contrast, 42% of employers that consider management skills important find female applicants to have the appropriate skill level, while 4% claim that women have too high a level of management skills.

Among soft skills, the surveyed employers that consider behavioral skills important (i.e., following instructions, respecting deadlines, and adapting to different work environments) highlight that the skills gap of women is less than for the other soft skills. Only 38% do not consider women to have the right level of behavioral skills. Of the employers that found communication skills important, 50% do not consider women to meet the expected skill level. However, 40% found women's communication skill level to be at the right level, and 10% found their skill level to be too high. In comparison, 47% of surveyed companies that consider customer service skills important do not consider women's customer service skills to meet the expected skill level. On the other hand, 45% of employers that consider customer service skills important do find women's customer service skills level to be at the right level, and 8% consider women's customer service skills to be above the expected level.

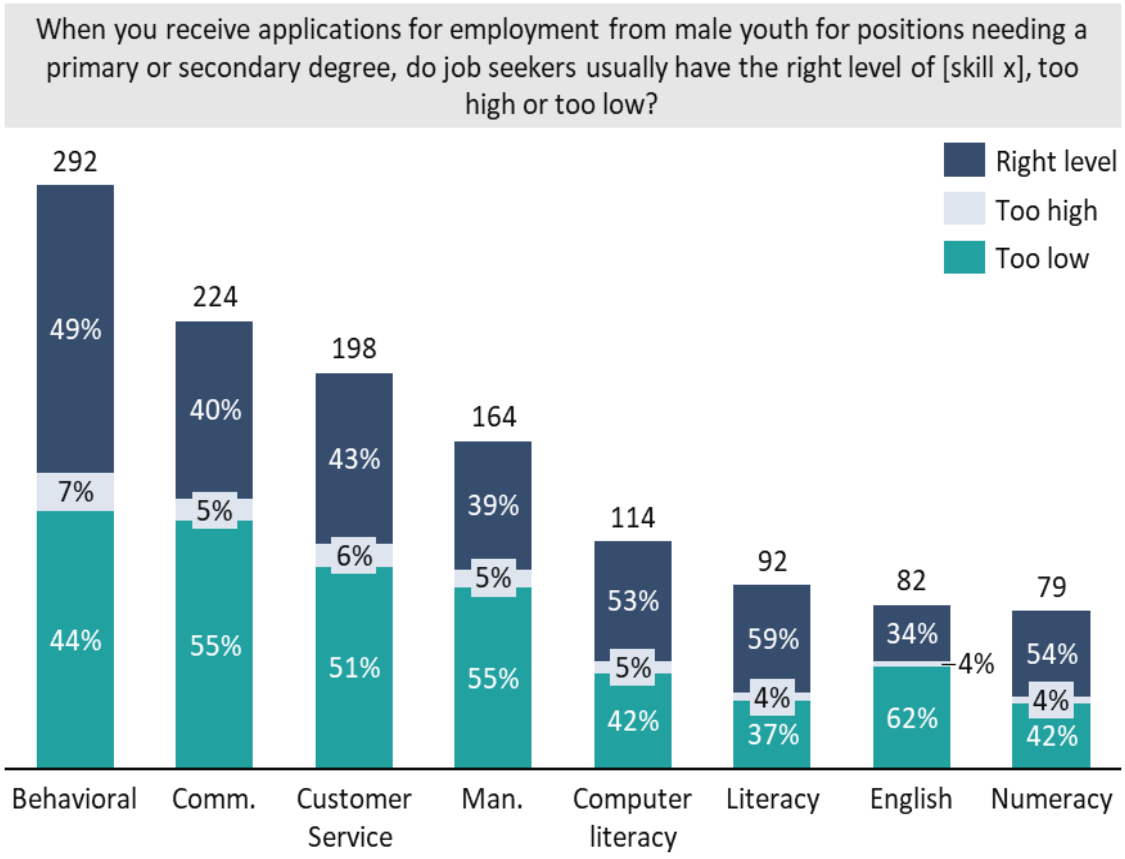
In comparison, the skills gap of women's cognitive or basic hard skills is smaller than the non-cognitive skills gap, according to the surveyed employers that find these skills important. It is also important to note here that the number of surveyed employers that find cognitive skills important are fewer than the employers that find non-cognitive skills important. Thus, there is a smaller data scope for evaluating Libyan women's cognitive human resources.

Computer literacy is considered the most important cognitive skill by surveyed employers. 62% consider women's computer literacy skills to be at the right level, while 3% consider women's computer literacy skills to be too high. As such, only 35% of the surveyed employers that consider computer literacy important evaluate women's computer literacy skills as too low. Among surveyed employers that consider numeracy important, 54% consider women's numeracy skills to be at the right level, and 3% mention women's numeracy skills to be too high for what they demand of employees. Conversely, 43% of the surveyed employers consider women's numeracy skills to be too low. Looking at literacy, 50% of the surveyed companies that consider literacy an important skill to succeed within the sector evaluate women to have the appropriate skills demanded. Additionally, 8% of employers that consider literacy an important skill say that women have too high a literacy level compared to demanded levels. Thus, 42% mention women's literacy skills to be too low.

In contrast to other cognitive skills, the majority of the 47 employers that mention English as an important skill also find women's skills level to be too low. 60% hereof say that women do not meet the necessary skill level, leaving only 36% to say that women have a sufficient skill level and 4% mentioning women's English proficiency to be too high.

What is just as interesting is to understand if women's cognitive and non-cognitive skillset is different than that of their male counterparts, applying for the same positions at the surveyed employers. If men and women possess the same skillset but do not have the same labor market opportunities, the employers' answers may help highlight that there are other barriers limiting Libyan women's economic empowerment. This consideration may suggest that women's human resources do not directly lead to labor market opportunities. Seeing as only 25.8% of Libyan women participate in the labor market, while 79% of Libyan men participate (ILO, 2017a), Libyan women's skills gap should be significantly larger than men's if women's human resources should be able to explain women's low labor market participation rate.

Illustration 6: Employers' Perception of Men's Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills



Comparing illustrations 5 and 6 does not seem to reflect any significant differences in Libyan women's and men's skills gaps. On the contrary, the percentage of employers that consider men's non-cognitive or soft skills too low is higher than the percentage of employers that consider the same skills for women to be too low. Among cognitive skills, the percentage of employers that consider men's computer literacy and English skills to be too low is larger than the percentage of employers that consider these skills too low among women. Yet, the skills gap is not substantial. Despite the small gap, there is room for improvement among women's non-cognitive skills to position them better within the formal labor market.

What further stands out from the comparison of illustration 5 and 6 is the number of employers that have evaluated men's and women's skills. The sample of employers that have evaluated the male skills gap is almost three times the size of the employers that have evaluated female job applicants' skills level. Only employers that have women employed were asked to answer the survey question of women's skills. Thus, the difference in the size of the sample again reflects this difference in employment opportunities with a clear difference despite relatively similar skill levels. Hence, the findings do not provide any evidence for women's skillsets to be disproportionately insufficient for the positions they apply for compared to male applicants. Instead, the findings highlight that the barriers to women's economic empowerment in Libya do not seem to be within human resources if compared to their male counterparts.

8.2 Barriers to Agency

Access to resources is not enough for women to be economically empowered; women must also have power over the given resource, as well as decision-making authority over these resources—also defined as 'agency' (Kabeer, 1999, 2001). In this research, the barriers to women's economic empowerment are measured through the barriers that hinder their decision-making and agency over the skills identified. Identifying and measuring these socio-economic barriers that keep women out of the workforce is necessary in order to develop strategies and policies to address them. This part of the research will be two-fold. The first part addresses structural barriers in Libyan society that impact Libyan women's decision-making power. The second part addresses the female FGD participants' critical consciousness of the structural barriers and social norms influencing their decision-making power.

8.2.1 Structural Barriers

There is an inherent need to address structural constraints to women's economic empowerment as the correlation between new employment opportunities in the Libyan labor market does not directly 'trickle-down' or result in women having access to these opportunities. Even within empowerment literature, there is an issue with such assumptions: *"There is a widespread tendency in the empowerment literature to talk about 'access to resources' in a generic way as if indicating some relationship between women and resources automatically specifies the choices it makes possible"* (Kabeer, 2001, p. 28). The main point of departure for this analysis is the acknowledgment that a resource such as de jure equal access for women to the labor market must be defined in a way that addresses the potential for human agency, or the women's ability to access economic empowerment. Norms and institutions within a society shape the types of activities possible for women to participate in, as well as their use of resources (Golla *et al.*, 2018).

Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) has developed an index to score countries according to their performance on inclusion, justice, and security. Libya's performance provides it with a ranking of 158 out of 167 countries, with its index value at 0.546 (GIWPS, 2019b). This ranking is based on: inclusion, or women's mean years of schooling, employment, cell phone use, financial inclusion, and share of parliament seats; justice, or discriminatory norms, son bias (male to female birth ratio), and legal discrimination against women; and security, or organized violence (battle deaths per 100,000), women's perception of community safety, and current intimate partner violence. It is the first year Libya is included in the index and the indicators include available data from 2017 and 2019. Inclusion, justice, and security are all aspects that mirror to what extent women will be able to exercise decision-making power over economic empowerment opportunities. The indicators where there are reliable data from Libya that are relevant to women's economic empowerment are used to indicate the structural barriers.

Inclusion

Two out of the four indicators on GIWPS' Index meet the indicators for evaluating the barriers to women's economic empowerment: women's mean years of schooling and the percentage of women above 25 who are employed. In 2019, women's mean years of schooling were 7.7 (GIWPS, 2019b). The indicator captures the average number of years of education for women above the

age of 25 (Ibid.). Women's access to education has been discussed in more length as a part of women's human resources earlier in this research.

The other inclusion indicator that reflects structural barriers in Libya is the employment rate for women above 25. In Libya, the employment rate is 22.7% for women (GIWPS, 2019b). Using the labor force participation rate of women and men, one finds the gender gap in Libya to be the highest in North Africa, as highlighted earlier. In Libya, 79% of men participate in the labor force, while this number falls to 25.8% for women (ILO, 2017a). The labor force participation rate expresses the labor force as a percentage of the working-age population, while the employment rate excludes unemployment (ILO, 2017a; GIWPS, 2019b). This fact reflects that women, despite educational attainment and a similar skillset to men, do not have access to equal employment opportunities. Employment outcomes are a central indicator as they reflect women's economic opportunities, which forms the basis for realizing women's human resources (GIWPS, 2019b).

Justice

Two of the three indicators in the GIWPS index under justice address structural barriers to women's economic empowerment: discriminatory norms and legal discrimination against women. The discriminatory norms indicator captures the percentage of men aged 15 years or above who disagreed with the proposition, "It is perfectly acceptable for any women in your family to have a paid job outside the home if she wants one" (GIWPS, 2019b). In 2017 and 2019, 52% of Libyan men above the age of 15 supported discriminatory social norms by disagreeing with the above statement of equal economic opportunities for men and women. It is worth noting that the worst in the group for the MENA region on the GIWPS index is Iraq with 53% of men above the age of 15 that disagree with the proposition (Ibid.).

Similar ideas of socially discriminatory norms were found by the ILO and Gallup. They asked women and men in Libya whether they preferred for women to work paid jobs, care for their families and homes, or do both. 46% of men preferred women to stay home, do housework, and care for families. However, only 23% of women prefer this arrangement (ILO, 2017a). 43% of men prefer women to do both, and 71% of Libyan women say they prefer to do both. It is only 9% of men and 6% of women that prefer women to work paid jobs (Ibid.). The neopatriarchal idea of the male as the breadwinner and women's responsibility to attend to housework and caretaking becomes very clear in these statistics.

The interview with the local LEE staff also confirmed these discriminatory norms. It became evident through the interview that the main obstacle for women's economic empowerment in Libya is social barriers. In fact, family norms and values result in male family members preventing women from working (LEE staff 2, July 22nd, 2019). This evidence only corroborates the literature on neopatriarchal norms where women's work outside the home is yet to be the norm (Cairoli, 2002; Chamlou, Muzi and Ahmed, 2015). Women's agency is measured through either negative or positive indicators, where women's mobility in the public domain is defined as a positive indicator that reflects decision-making agency (Kabeer, 2001). Restricting women's economic mobility within society through restrictions to employment provides a clear barrier for women's control over resources and restraint on their decision-making agency.

The effect of legal discrimination against women on women's economic empowerment opportunities is outlined clearly by the GIWPS indicator. *"Discriminatory laws have adverse repercussions, making it harder for women to own property, open bank accounts, start a business, or take a job and enter professions restricted to men. Our Index captures the aggregate score for laws and regulations that limit women's ability to participate in society and the economy or that differentiate between men and women"* (GIWPS, 2019b). In 2017, there were 37 discriminatory laws against women in Libya (GIWPS, 2018, 2019b). Despite the high level of discriminatory laws, Libya is also one of the two countries in the MENA region that does have laws prohibiting gender discrimination in hiring and requiring equal pay for equal work (GIWPS, 2019c). Structural barriers within the law are one aspect of barriers that Libyan women face, however, if the room for enforcement is weak, the barriers will persist. The capacity for implementation and legislation monitoring is very weak in Libya, and the barriers persist as discriminatory norms (GIWPS, 2018, 2019b). Therefore, the removal of de jure structural barriers within the law is only one step in the right direction; it does not transcend into direct de facto equal treatment. An example hereof is the removal of the discriminatory law prohibiting women in Libya to work at night (The World Bank, 2019c). The removal of this formal discriminatory law does not mean that women legally can safely take up or be considered for a position that requires night shifts, as the security level does not allow for such an outcome (United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), 2019; Executive Director of Haroon Hotel, July 2019).

Security

High levels of insecurity limit economic activities (The World Bank, 2018b; GIWPS, 2019c). Libya is on the World Bank (2019b) list of fragile countries. The list itself consists of 6 fragile countries and 30 conflict-affected countries, listing Libya as one of the 15 countries with protracted conflict (Ibid.). The focus of this research is on how this fragile context affects Libyan women's economic opportunities.

Fragility is complex, and Libya is no exception with armed conflict, political instability, and violent extremism (GIWPS, 2019c). The classification of Libya as a country going through a protracted conflict is determined based on the number of battle deaths per calendar year (Ibid.). It is reflected in the GIWPS indicator on organized violence with the insecurity that follows armed conflict. In 2019, there were 21.81 battle-deaths per 100,000, compared to 8.09 in 2017 (GIWPS, 2019b). The protracted conflict status thus addresses the conflict in Libya since the Arab Spring in 2011, the second civil war in Libya's history as a state, as well as the advances of Haftar in the South and West since April 2019 (Achilli *et al.*, 2018; UNSMIL, 2019).

It is widely acknowledged that women are disproportionally affected by violence (Abril, 2009; Menon and van der Meulen Rodgers, 2015; GIWPS, 2019a). Libya is no exception, with women's status has worsened considerably in recent years, particularly as conservatism and violent extremism have taken over in the political void left after 2011 (Achilli *et al.*, 2018; UNSMIL, 2019). Conflict often limits the freedom of mobility of women, as women's ability to leave their homes safely is reduced (GIWPS, 2019c). Thus, the level of safety influences the ability to access work opportunities. Women's perception of community safety reflects the security and safety in the local community, which directly affects women's mobility and opportunities outside the home

(GIWPS, 2019b). The GIWPS gets its data from the Gallup World Poll 2019 and is based on the percentage of women age 15 or above who report that they "feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where [they] live" (GIWPS, 2019b). In 2017 and 2019, 42.5% of women either agreed or strongly agreed with the aforementioned statement (Ibid.). Libya scores as the lowest in the MENA region group by this GIWPS measure (Ibid.). Libyan women's freedom of movement is a precondition to be able to successfully participate in the labor market. Without the human right of freedom of movement, traveling can only be done when accompanied by a spouse, brother, or father – also known as 'haram' – reducing women's opportunities to participate in economic activities (Bugaigis and Tantoush, 2017).

The female human rights defenders that try to change conditions for women in Libya face both intimidation and threats by armed groups due to their gender (UNSMIL and OHCHR, 2015). The documented cases of female human rights defenders advocating against gender-based discrimination have resulted in those defenders having to flee Libya for being outspoken about women's rights (Ibid.). In conclusion, the protracted conflict in Libya adversely affects women's economic empowerment opportunities and makes it even more dangerous for civil society activists to fight for women's rights.

8.2.2 Decision-Making Power

The impact of the above types of structural barriers to women's economic empowerment can be reflected in the decision-making power that female FGD participants can exercise as well as the emergence of critical consciousness. Kabeer describes it as *"the process by which people move from a position of unquestioning acceptance of social order to a critical perspective on it"* (Kabeer, 2001, p. 25). This assessment reflects on the content analysis of the female FGD participants' answers to the questions: *"To what extent is it easier or more difficult for women to find jobs? Why do you think so?"* and "*What type of employment positions do women generally look for? How do these differ from the employment positions men look for?"* Thus, this section addresses the difference in the awareness or critical consciousness of the structural barriers among the female FGD participants.

The awareness of structural barriers such as discriminatory social norms in society and at the labor market differ among FGD participants and across cities. In Tripoli, the critical consciousness of the structural barriers faced by women to be economically empowered differs among FGD participants. One female FGD participant highlights that gender discrimination is a problem in the public sector, while another does not fully agree and says that it depends on which area of the public sector (Female FGD Participant 5, Tripoli, 2019; Female FGD Participant 3, Tripoli, 2019). In stark contrast, does another participant express that there are no barriers for women to enter the labor market in Libya (Female FGD Participant 6, Tripoli, 2019). A similar pattern of disagreement occurred for the participants in Benghazi. One participant expresses that it is easier for women to find work than men since employers prefer female employees. Contrary, another participant highlight that more women take up office work as a result of discriminatory norms in society, elaborating that various types of positions are considered unsuitable for women. The critical consciousness of the structural barriers present in Libya clearly differs between the participants in Tripoli and Benghazi.

Female FGD participants express a higher level of critical consciousness of the discriminatory social norms present in Libya in Sabha and Ubari. The female FGD participants in Sabha widely acknowledge their lack of decision-making power. The vast majority of the female FGD participants highlight that the community, as well as one's family, determine if a woman can work outside the household and, if, what types of work she is allowed to do (see annex 1). The female FGD participants in Sabha highlight issues of social control from family members, discriminatory norms within their community, higher care responsibilities for women as well as lack of freedom of movement (see annex 1). A participant highlighted some of these issues around gender segregation in employment and discriminatory social norms in the following way:

"It depends on the type of job you want to find; this is what makes the difference. The community also plays a role here, so do the suppression of rights." (Female FGD Participant 6, Sabha, 2019).

In line with FGD participants in Sabha, two of the participants in Ubari express the same high critical consciousness of barriers to economic empowerment. The female FGD participants in Ubari that highlight barriers to women's economic empowerment stress some of the same issues as in Sabha. They mention family support and community acceptance as being detrimental to women's decision-making power over employment opportunities. However, the remaining seven express an unquestioning acceptance of the social norms. They highlight the experience and skills of women to be the 'entry card' for employment opportunities (see annex 1). On the discussion of the difficulty for women to find employment, the following contribution reflects unquestioning acceptance of gender segregation in employment and internalization of the perception that women hold a subordinate position in society:

"It is more difficult because of the type of jobs they're looking for and the lack of jobs that fit women in general." (Female FGD Participant 1, Ubari, 2019).

Interestingly, the reality of the female FGD participants varies across cities as well as within the groups. A number of female FGD participants do not voice any concern over reduced decision-making power or any acknowledgment of structural barriers proven to be present in the Libyan society. While others are very aware of the barriers they re facing due to their gender. These findings thus highlight the scope of these women's decision-making power. The choice you make is only meaningful and only embodies economic empowerment if it is based on your own preferences and values without interference from social normative restrictions (Kabeer, 1999). In order for women to address the barriers that keep them out of the labor market, it is necessary to question the status quo.

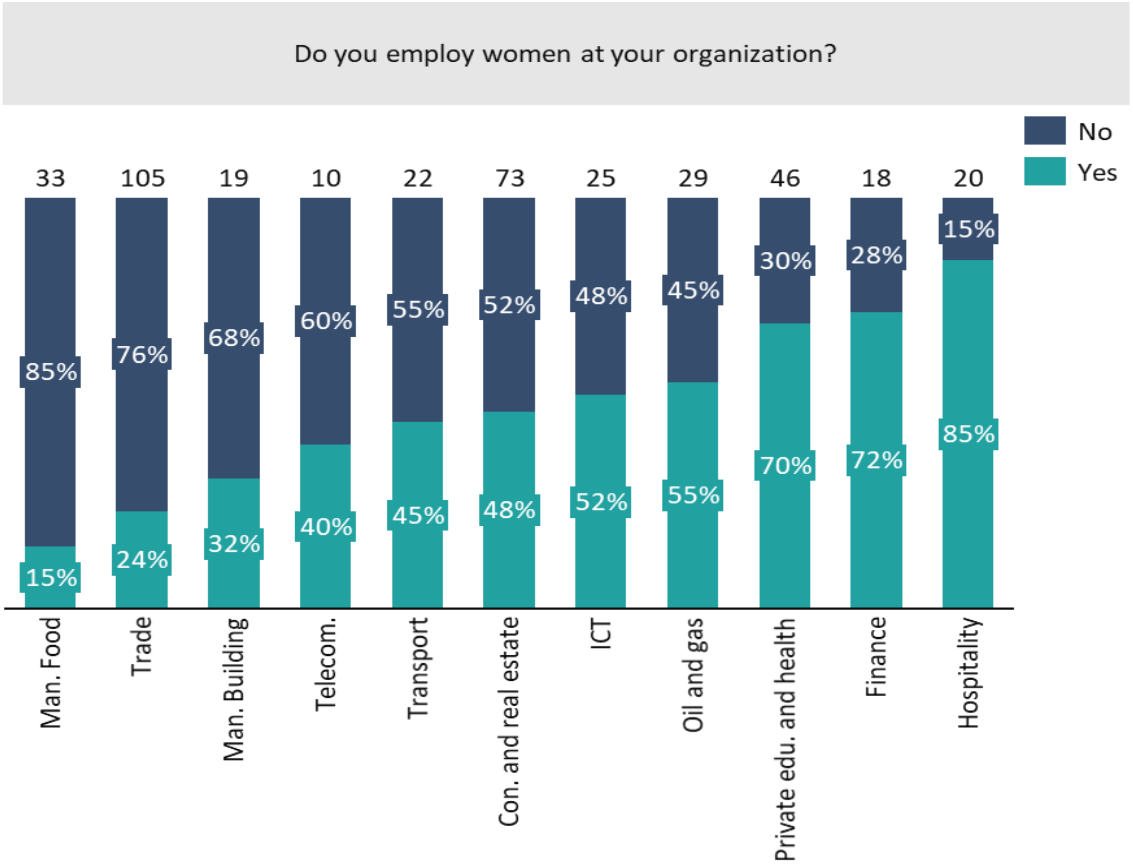
8.3 Achievements

Gender roles and responsibilities are reflected in the type of work that women perform in the labor market; for example, in the event that there is gender segregation of male and female work. Gender segregation is reflected in sex-disaggregated employment rates per sector and communities' attitudes on what work is appropriate for women (Gallup and ILO, 2017; Golla *et al.*, 2018). Measuring achievements within the labor market for women are traditionally done via the labor market participation rate (Dreze and Sen, 1995).

This part of the analysis address what Kabeer (1999, 2001) conceptualizes as "qualifying choice." Qualifying choice covers the discursive level of power and whether women choose a formal employment opportunity based on the freedom to choose among alternatives or based on the lack of alternatives. Hence, it differentiates between the difference in genders' preferences for sectors and inequality in access to labor market opportunities.

Illustration 7 highlight the number of surveyed employers that hire women. These findings set the starting point for the analysis and discussion on whether Libyan women face different barriers to economic empowerment across sectors. It is followed by an account of the growth prospects within each sector, hence the employment opportunities expected within the sector. This is evaluated up against the reason for employers not to hire women. Thus, assessing if these employment opportunities are accessible to women and if the reasoning differs across sectors. The quantitative analysis is supplemented with KIIs understanding of the barriers to women's employment in specific sectors. The interest in the sectors and the perceived gender inclusivity according to the FGD participants, is held up against the employers' view of the sector.

Illustration 7: Gender Gap in Employment Rate Across Sectors



8.3.1 Manufacturing of Food and Beverages

In the Food and Beverage Manufacturing sector, 85% of surveyed employers mention that they do not have any female employees. Hereof, 82% say they do not have women employed because the work is unsuitable for women (see annex 3). The key informant in Assil Company confirms the discriminatory social norms against the employment of women in the sector. He expresses that:

"I don't think society allows women to work in this industry [manufacturing of food and beverage], but it's possible to work in the administration" (Key Informant, Assil Company, July 23, 2019).

These findings are also consistent with the findings of the World Bank's Simplified Enterprise Survey that emphasizes that the number of women working in the sector is less than 10% and that the jobs available are restricted to administrative work (The World Bank, 2015).

The food and beverage manufacturing sector are expected to have growth potential in the short-, medium- and long-term. Short-term is to describe the coming years, where ongoing conflict is still prevalent. Medium-term is used to describe the period of post-conflict Libya, where Libya will have a new government, and the economy will start to be restructured towards larger private-sector responsibility for employment. Lastly, the long-term is used to describe the period where the Libyan economy has fully restructured and functions as a small open economy in the global market. 30% of the surveyed employers mentioning they expect a large growth potential (>10%) for the sector over the coming year, while 28% expect a moderate growth potential (5-10%). The sector seems to have a growth potential in the medium to long-term as the sector has remained resilient to the conflict and has experienced consistent growth levels since the revolution in 2011 (The World Bank, 2015). The food and beverage manufacturing sector thus provide a clear opportunity in terms of job openings in Libya.

Discussing the employment opportunities within food manufacturing in the FGDs the majority of the conversation focusses on pastry making, preparing food for events, and training of women on cooking and selling home-made food (see annex 1). Hence, when asked on types of work available within the food and beverage manufacturing the FGD participants also consider the scope of possible employment opportunities to be entrepreneurial or confined to cooking and selling their products rather than formal employment opportunities within the sector. Increased access to the manufacturing sector is proven to have a positive effect on women's bargaining power within the household (OECD and WTO, 2019), thus contributing to the overall level of decision-making power of Libyan women. Nevertheless, the food and beverage manufacturing sector do not seem to be gender inclusive. Gender segregation within the sector is present and seems to be caused by gender discriminatory norms on the type of work suitable for Libyan women.

8.3.2 Retail and Wholesale Trade

The expectations for the short-term growth prospects of the sector differ between the surveyed employers. 52% expect a moderate (5-10%) to large growth potential (> 10%), while 48% expect a little (< 5%) to no growth potential within the sector. The new employment opportunities in the coming years are thus not clear.

The findings on women's economic empowerment within the Retail and Wholesale Trade sector in Libya show conflicting results. The quantitative data suggests that women face barriers to access employment opportunities within the retail and wholesale trade, while the qualitative data suggest that the sector is gender inclusive. 76% of the surveyed employers do not have any female employees. Most employers mention that the reason therefor is that the work is not suitable for

women (see annex 3). This conflicts with the findings from the KIIs and the FGD participants' perceptions of the sectors' opportunities and inclusivity of women.

According to the key informant interviewed at the Ministry of Economy, women play an important role in the Retail and Wholesale Trade sector and are very active in local trade (Key Informant, The Ministry of Economy, July 28, 2019). 80% of the FGD participants are interested in working in the sector (see annex 1). In addition, FGD participants also mention their own trading businesses within cosmetics and jewelry. An FGD participant stresses the gender inclusivity of the retail and wholesale trade sector as she expresses that:

"All types of business are now available in Libya, and most of them are run by women, particularly the trade market, which is dominated by women of all ages, given that they trade in clothes, cosmetics, electronics, and many other things. For this reason, trade-in Libya is now the source of income of most Libyan families." (Female FGD Participant 1, Tripoli, 2019).

It becomes clear from the FGDs that Libyan women do succeed and advance economically in the retail and wholesale trade sector. They both have the power and agency to benefit from economic activities within the sector. Hence, the women the FGD participant refers to will obtain economic empowerment in the sector despite potential barriers identified in the quantitative data. Specifically, women's work in export-oriented sectors has been proven by scholars to also lead to more decision-making power over how resources are used within the household (Korinek, 2005). The conflicting findings between the quantitative and qualitative data have not been possible to triangulate with other sources for further clarity of potential barriers to women's economic empowerment within the sector. This is due to the lack of publicly available research on women's role within the sector in Libya. Further research on how come the data show these conflicting findings would have to be conducted.

8.3.3 Manufacturing of Building Materials

Together with the food and beverage manufacturing industry, the manufacturing of building materials constitutes one of the largest sub-sectors of the Libyan private economy (The World Bank, 2015). The sector is, therefore, a large employer within the otherwise small private economy in Libya. Ensuring women's access to these labor market opportunities are therefore highly important as the Libyan economy transition away from the state as the main employer (Ibid.).

In the short-term, 23% of the surveyed employers expect a high growth potential (>10%), while 30% expect a moderate growth potential between 5-10% (see annex 3). The KIIs support this finding and emphasize a range of favorable conditions to cause the growth prospects (Key Informant, Libyan Local Development and Investment Fund, July 30, 2019; Key Informant, The Libyan Privatization and Investment Board, July 29, 2019; Key Informant, Chamber of Commerce in Tripoli, July 29, 2019; Key Informant, The Libyan Cement Company, July 28, 2019). In the medium term, as the conflict in Libya stabilizes, further growth is expected as construction works increases. In the long term, as domestic demand subsides, Libya is well placed for the international market given the favorable conditions of the sector (Key Informant, The Libyan

Cement Company, July 28, 2019; Key Informant, The Chamber of Commerce in Tripoli, July 29, 2019; Key Informant, The Libyan Privatization and Investment Board, July 29, 2019).

68% of the surveyed employers do not employ any women. Hereof, the majority state it's due to the work not being suitable for women (see annex 3). Manufacturing of building materials is a sector that is widely known also outside Libya to be male-dominated, and researchers have acknowledged the lack of female employees within the sector as a worldwide phenomenon (Liyana Othman and Jaafar, 2013). When asked about what type of work the FGD participants think is available within the sector and whether they generally would be interested, one FGD participant highlights the following opportunities for achievements and barriers to these achievements:

"There are some activities that women can do in the building sector, such as being a map designer, a contractor and a decorator, but in our community, a woman cannot open a building material store. She could be the owner of the project, but her name is not mentioned, and she can't monitor the project in a direct manner because most of these projects are meant for men, not for women." (Female FGD Participant 5, Tripoli, 2019).

The difficulties for women to obtain equal access to achievements within the Building Material Manufacturing sector is evident from her emphasis on the prevalence of gender discriminatory social norms. While when asked about what type of employment positions women generally look for and how these differ from the employment position men look for, one FGD participant mentions:

"Women tend to seek jobs in beauty salons and offices, but women in our community can't possibly work in car mechanics, carpentry, or metalworking because they are meant for men." (Female FGD Participant 1, Sabha, 2019).

Gender segregation within the Libyan labor market is clear, and the perceptions of opportunities within the sector are clearly expressed as differing between men and women. This also leads female FGD participants to highlight the lack of interest in the sector on the basis that it is a men's specialty. The FGD participants in Yefren also highlight that there is no manufacturing of building materials in Yefren or building material stores, which leaves there to be no opportunities for economic empowerment within the sector in Yefren (see annex 1).

8.3.4 Telecommunication and ICT

The Telecommunication and ICT sectors are two separate sectors. However, due to the small sample size of the Telecommunication sector, they are addressed together. This is possible due to their similar characteristics. 60% of the surveyed telecommunication employers and 48% of surveyed ICT employers do not have any women employed in their organization (see annex 3).

The ICT sector is considered to provide growth and employment opportunities in the short-term, with 34% of surveyed ICT employers expecting a large growth potential (>10%) and 24% expecting a moderate growth potential (5-10%). The growth prospects of the Telecommunication sector seem to be even larger with 23% of surveyed telecommunication employers expecting a large growth potential (>10%) and 46% expecting a moderate growth potential. There are therefore

clearly potential employment opportunities, but the level of gender inclusivity of the sectors is contested.

"All jobs that you mentioned are available for women, but I believe women should break into other areas monopolized by men, such as telecommunication engineering, car-driving, and car-repair as well as fieldwork." (Female FGD Participant 5, Benghazi, 2019).

The FGD participant in Benghazi clearly highlights difficulties for women to obtain equal employment opportunities within the telecommunication sector. The perceptions of opportunities for women within telecommunication and ICT differ between the FGD participants and the key informants. According to the key informant from Libyan Elite Technology Solutions, women can have the same positions as men with no differentiation between them (Key Informant, Libyan Elite Technology Solutions, March 25th, 2019).

The perceptions of the sectors' gender inclusivity also differ among FGD participants depending on which city the FGD was conducted in. The FGD participants in Yefren highlight the sectors as a sector only suitable for men, while female FGD participants from Benghazi and Tripoli highlight that women, in general, are very successful in the sectors and that they provide good employment opportunities for women (see annex 1). In Benghazi and Tripoli, the female FGD participants highlight achievements of women such as a Libyan channel that is run by a woman as well as employment opportunities within reporting either as a TV reporter or columnist within ICT. 88% of female FGD participants expressing an interest in working within the sector.

The FGD participants agree that employment opportunities for women in the Telecommunication sector are limited. Job opportunities within the telecommunication sector are mentioned as hard for women to work in by female FGD participants in Benghazi. They argue that companies often hire men instead of women based on possible hours available to work (see annex 1). Here the FGD participants reference the larger burden of unpaid care responsibilities that Libyan women face as a general barrier to economic empowerment. Female FGD participants in Tripoli highlights that women cannot work within telecommunication due to the current protracted conflict. They mention that the security situation has an adverse impact on their freedom of movement as it is dangerous for women to travel alone. In Ubari, one female FGD participant provided the insight that there are job opportunities for women and that there are female telecommunication engineers that are employed in the telecommunication sector within computer programming (Female FGD Participant 7, Sabha, 2019). She also stresses that women are excluded from fieldwork due to discriminatory social norms in the local community. Despite the barriers within the Telecommunication sector, 85% of the FGD participants express their interest in the sector (see annex 1).

8.3.5 Transport

The Transport sector in Libya encompass companies transporting cargo and passenger. The short-term growth prospects of the sector and hence employment opportunities over the coming year seem relatively low. Among the surveyed employers, 59% expect a little (<5%) to no growth, while 41% expect a moderate (5-10%) to large (>10%) growth potential. 55% of surveyed employers do not have any female employees in their organization (see annex 3). Hereof, 67% state the work is

unsuitable for women. The FGD participants stress that the barriers they face within the Transport sector include limits to freedom of mobility and discriminatory social norms concerning the work to be unsuitable for women.

There is a broad consensus across the FGDs that employment within the Transport sector is challenging for women (see annex 1). The possible achievements within the transportation sector are inherently restricted by women's limited mobility in society, confining their opportunities within the sectors to office positions. The FGD participants in Sabha mention the transport sector as one they would take a job in, however only if it is office work for a transport company (annex 1). They also mention that they would face skills barriers compared to men as well as discriminatory social norms since the community would not accept that women working in similar jobs as men (see annex 1).

Despite the daunting prospect of Libyan women's economic empowerment within the Transport sector in Libya, there are some success stories of women breaking down barriers. The FGD participants mentioned an application for female costumers, where it is only female staff as drivers, but that only covers Tripoli.

"The transport sector is a little difficult for women mainly because of the unstable security situation in town. However, some women work in transport and delivery services, and now, there are some special taxis for women and that women can drive, which is something good and something that makes us be confident that a woman can work in all sectors." (Female FGD Participant 6, Tripoli, 2019).

In Tripoli and Benghazi, some of the FGD participants are optimistic for the future and mention the Transport sector as important for women to enter despite the barriers and that it currently is male-dominated (Female FGD Participant 3, 6, and 7, Tripoli, 2019; Female FGD Participant 5, Benghazi, 2019).

8.3.6 Construction and Real Estate

52% of the surveyed construction and real estate employers do not employ women (see annex 3). Hereof, 76% consider the work not to be suitable for women (see annex 3). It thus lies as the median for the gender inclusivity of the sectors. Despite this, the quantitative data do not reflect the sector to be particularly inclusive. The shortage of women in construction is not specific to Libya, but a global problem of gender stereotypes (Gurjao, 2006; Liyana Othman and Jaafar, 2013).

The surveyed employers expect somewhat short-term growth potential. 29% expect a high growth potential (>10%), and 27% expecting a moderate growth potential (5-10%). However, the KIIs are more skeptical of the short- and medium-term growth potential of the sector due to dependency on international companies that withdrew from Libya post-2011 as the security situation deteriorated (Key Informant, The Housing and Infrastructure Board, July 24, 2019; Key Informant, The Chamber of Commerce in Tripoli, July 29, 2019; Key Informant, The Ministry of Economy, July 28, 2019; Key Informant, The Central Bank of Libya, July 27, 2019). In the long-term, the Construction and Real Estate sector has a growth potential due to the high demand for new

housing and reconstruction in a Libyan post-conflict environment (Key Informant, The Libyan Cement Company, July 28, 2019; The World Bank, 2015).

The FGD participants across the five cities agreed that the Construction and Real Estate sector do not provide any job opportunities for women. Two FGD participants specify that it is only a few positions that are possible for women to gain access to such as working as an engineer, a building advisor, do architectural drawings or office work (Female FGD Participants 1 and 8, Ubari, 2019). The barriers highlighted in the FGDs include gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms against women working in the sector and limits to freedom of mobility. One FGD participant in Tripoli express the unfamiliarity of women within the sector as such:

"Some women are interested in the building sector, but this sector is mainly dominated by men with zero presence of women. Because frankly, we're not used to seeing a woman doing construction work, in addition to many other reasons, although I encourage the employment of women in all sectors." (Female FGD Participant 3, Tripoli, 2019).

While another FGD participant indirectly highlights some of the structural barriers and discriminatory norms prevalent in the Libyan society as she participates in the discussion on employment opportunities within the sector:

"I have never seen anything like that, but nothing is impossible. If working in the construction sector is like kitchen work to women, they would be glad to do it, but I've never heard of any similar positions for women in Libya." (Female FGD Participant 10, Sabha, 2019).

Considering possible employment opportunities and pockets of possible achievements for Libyan women within the construction sector, it can be helpful to find the different categorizations of employment opportunities. Three categories can be identified: administrative positions, professional/technical positions, and construction labor working at sites (Ahuja and Kumari, 2015). The opportunities for women to be at construction sites either encompass physical demanding or management positions, where management skills are necessary as the primary responsibilities are oversight of projects. Women's access to such fieldwork is highlighted as difficult in the FGDs. The misguided consideration that a key informant expresses only support the discriminatory gender norms the FGDs emphasize:

"We prefer hiring young men for fieldwork only because we want our women to be comfortable." (Key Informant, The Housing and Infrastructure Board, July 24th, 2019).

This finding also again highlights the difficulties for women to access the construction sector both because they will not be able to safely conduct fieldwork during the current security situation due to the lack of women's free mobility. Yet, it is also necessary to address the consideration of the discriminatory hiring policy. It becomes clear from the interview that there is a consensus within the industry of an informal hiring policy not to hire women.

The acknowledgment from employers and FGD participants alike on the lack of opportunities for women to work in administrative, professional/technical or management oversight positions on the construction sites pose an obstacle for women to apply their skillset within the sector. These are otherwise pockets of possible economic empowerment opportunities for women in Libya. The surveyed employers highlight employment opportunities for Libyans with a tertiary education

such as civil engineering, architecture, construction contracting law, and accountant skills as needed (see annex 3). All require educational backgrounds that women are capable of obtaining or possess and would provide pockets of opportunities within the sector. This is only possible if norms and values about women working in the sector are addressed. This is, however, acknowledged in the KII with Libyan Local Development and Investment Fund as the interviewee link the growth potentials of the sector with different opportunities for men and women:

"These activities [construction] are necessary to rebuild the nation and fix what can be fixed in order to provide employment opportunities for young men and women as there will be different positions and jobs available; administration, office work, engineering, and fieldwork." (Studies and Research Department Employee at the Libyan Local Development and Investment Fund, July 30, 2019).

8.3.7 Oil and Gas

The Oil and Gas sector in Libya differs substantially in importance for the national economy compared to the rest of the high potential growth sectors and is considered key for the future growth of Libya (Key Informant, The National Oil Corporation, July 25, 2019; Key Informant, The Ministry of Finance, July 25, 2019). In 2019, the oil production in Libya has remained uninterrupted to a large extent with a production level at approximately 1.2 million barrels a day (UNSMIL, 2019). However, the sector never recovered to more than one-third of the average pre-revolution production rate (Islamic Development Bank, 2018). 62% of the surveyed employers remain optimistic and expect a moderate (5-10%) to large (>10%) growth prospect for the sector (see annex 3). While the key informants only expect opportunities for growth and employment in the medium to long-term, once the political situation stabilizes (Key Informant, The Chamber of Commerce in Tripoli, July 29, 2019; Key Informant, The Central Bank of Libya, July 27, 2019). Despite this, it is worth to note that the oil and gas sector only employs a small number of the total workforce; 6% (Korea Institute for Development Strategy, 2013). Thus, growth will not result in a significant amount of new employment opportunities.

It is the main contributor to the Libyan economy with crude oil, gold, and gas exports accounting for 66% of Libya's GDP, 90% of government revenue and more than 92% of Libya's budget in 2019 (Libya Herald, 2019b). The sector's earnings have also been key in industrial policy as the source of revenue to uphold the disproportionately large public sector and support welfare employment (Heydemann, 2002; Desai, Olofsgård and Yousef, 2009; Vandewalle, 2012). As such, Libya resembles a rentier state. A rentier state is an economy that relies on "*substantial external rent in the form of the sale of oil, transit charges, or other state-owned economic activities." (Moghadam, 2005, p. 24)*. The rentier state has a direct influence on how societies are build and particularly an effect on women's economic empowerment (Moghadam, 2005). Social welfare provision in rentier states is built on the oil economy and reflects and reinforces the patriarchal gender contract (Sharabi, 1988; Moghadam, 2005). The sector both challenge women's economic empowerment within the sector and has a broader influence on societal structures reinforcing discriminatory norms and regulations.

55% of the surveyed oil and gas employers hire women (see annex 3). The surveyed employers include the National Oil Corporation (NOC), the affiliated Sirte Oil Company, and the NOC joint

venture, Nafusa Oil Operations. The NOC has a monopoly over the Libyan market with ten affiliated companies and eight joint ventures (The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, 2019). 91% of Libyan women work in the public sector, which includes the Oil and Gas sector (Islamic Development Bank, 2018). It is therefore not surprising that a higher percentage of the surveyed employers have female employees compared to many of the private sectors.

75% of the FGD participants indicated their interest in working in the sector. Yet, the FGD participants also highlight barriers to entry specific to their gender. The barriers include discriminatory hiring policies, lack of access to fieldwork employment possibilities due to the security situation, and limitation to the freedom of movement and discriminatory norms in the community of the work being unsuitable for women.

The FGD participants in Ubari do not agree about the employment possibilities in the sector. Some mention an informal policy not to hire women in the oil fields, while others believe administrative positions could provide economic empowerment opportunities, and some consider there to be equal job opportunities for men and women within the sector (see annex 1). A similar disagreement is present between FGD participants in Benghazi. The majority consider it difficult for women to work in the sector as it requires fieldwork, which is difficult for women due to the lack of free mobility. Other participants highlight that their community does not consider it a socially acceptable sector for women to work in (see annex 1). Similarly to the FGD in Ubari, a participant in Benghazi stress the administrative positions open to women. The majority of FGD participants in Sabha did not have any insight into employment opportunities for women in the sector, which inherently limits the possibility of women seeking out potential opportunities in the sector. One FGD participant in Sabha express her interest in the sector and the following opportunities to pursue:

"I believe petroleum engineering and working in the desert for the extraction of oil. If I ever hear about a job offer in this sector, I'd take it particularly if it is in oil companies, and this is based on my specialization in computer engineering and programming as well as printing." (Female FGD Participant 8, Sabha, 2019).

She thus pushes the perceptions of what types of employment opportunities that are possible within the sector, particularly as she highlights doing fieldwork. In Tripoli, similar perceptions of opportunities for achievements seem to be evident. One FGD participant puts it in the following way, which the rest of the participants echoes:

"There are available positions for women in the gas and oil sector, and many women already work in this area, whether in international companies in Libya or in private Libyan companies. Besides, many girls are specialized in petroleum engineering now." (Female FGD Participant 4, Tripoli, 2019).

As of 2018, five foreign companies operate in the Libyan Oil and Gas sector, including German Wintershall, Austrian OMV, Italian Eni, Norwegian Equinor, and French Total (The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, 2019). In late the Fall of 2019, American Halliburton also chose to resume activities in Libya as a result of stability in the security situation in the oil field (Libya Herald, 2019a). These developments could contribute to the opportunities for women within the sector as international oil companies are more likely to be gender inclusive according to FGD

participants. Hence, they can be the role models for more gender inclusivity within the sector and potentially help break down some of the barriers that persist within the sector.

8.3.8 Private Health and Education

The short-term growth prospects in the Private Education sector is considered large by the surveyed employer as 52% expect more than 10% growth potential. However, in the Private Health sector, the short-term growth potential is considered weak as 45% of surveyed employers expect no or little growth potential (see annex 3).

70% of the surveyed employers within the Private Health and Education sector employ women. To measure if the employment opportunities within the sector reflect economic empowerment for women, it has to be compared to what Kabeer (1999, 2001) conceptualizes as "qualifying choice." Hence, it is important to distinguish if the high employment level of women in the Private Health and Education sector in Libya stems from a vantage point of alternative employment opportunities or reflects the absence of other choices. The findings suggest that the high employment rate of women in the surveyed companies is due to the neopatriarchal Libyan society, where caretaking roles and responsibilities are considered suitable for women (Moghadam, 2005). The choice to work in the Private Health and Education sector, thus, does not pose any transformative significance as the choice made does not have any potential of either challenging or destabilizing social inequalities but might rather only reflect the reproduction of those inequalities.

The gender-segregation and the naturalization of the idea that women and men prefer different sectors of employment is evident when discussing employment in the Private Health and Education sector. The FGD participants highlight that it is the sector that is easiest to find employment in (see annex 1). In Benghazi, the FGD participants express that the sector allows them to work more freely in comparison to other sectors. One FGD participant in Benghazi and the majority in Ubari stress that being a teacher is the most socially acceptable position for women (Female FGD Participant 1, Benghazi, 2019; Female FGD Participants 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, Ubari, 2019). An FGD participant highlights the gender-segregation and discriminatory norms prevalent:

"Teaching, because it is a woman's job. Men don't like restrictions and routine so they can work in different sectors, unlike women who can't work in any sector." (Female FGD Participant 6, Ubari, 2019).

Women's high employment rate within private health and education is attributed to the lack of other choices with structural barriers hindering other employment opportunities. Traditional gender norms in the Libyan society prevail and influence the employment choices of women. To what extent that the female FGD participants are aware of the constraints to their economic empowerment differs. Some FGD participants do highlight teaching as "*the best job for women"* without further consideration as to why that is or how that perception has come about while other FGD participants are vigilant and highly aware of the prevalence and internalization of women's subordinate position in the Libyan society. This manifest itself in the following quote:

"Job opportunities for women are easier particularly in the education and health sectors and also to work as receptionists in clinics because they have fewer responsibilities, which is why they're confined to subordinate positions meant specifically for them such as nursing and positions in kindergartens." (Female FGD Participant 10, Benghazi, 2019).

These observations the Libyan women participating in the FGDs add to the evidence of barriers to economic empowerment as their testimonies speak to limits to own decision-making power and hence agency to make strategic life choices. Employment in the Private Education and Health sector in Libya does not reflect economic empowerment opportunities as it does not contribute to transforming current inequalities in the labor market but instead reinforces them.

8.3.9 Financial Services

The financial services sector in Libya is severely under pressure. Since 2011, the Central Bank of Libya (CBL) has struggled to fulfill its core responsibilities of managing the currency, money supply, and interest rates and overseeing commercial banking. Besides, the competing central banks of Tripoli and Beyda have weakened the effectiveness of the CBL (IBRD, IFC and MIGA, 2019). The regulations of the financial sector remain unclear as the number of laws passed to regulate the sector since the revolution is very few and the committees responsible for the development of these policies were still in the process of developing them in 2015 (The World Bank, 2015). The current security situation has meant that there has been no room for further developments within the sector (UNSMIL, 2019). Hence, there is no short-term growth or employment opportunities within the sector. The medium to long-term growth prospects of the sector is though more optimistic with the potential of a more politically stable environment (Key Informant, The Libyan Privatization and Investment Board, July 29, 2019; Key Informant, The Chamber of Commerce in Tripoli, July 29, 2019).

The desk-based research stresses that the employment opportunities for women within the industry are confined to administrative or clerical work (European Training Foundation, 2014; The World Bank, 2015). However, the FGDs and KIIs reflect positive perceptions of gender inclusivity and opportunities for economic empowerment in the Financial Service sector. In the KII, an employee at the Central Bank of Libya stresses equal access to job opportunities for both genders as soon as the political situation stabilizes and the work conditions for the sector improves (Key Informant, The Central Bank of Libya, July 27, 2019).

83% of the FGD participants are interested in working in the sector. In Benghazi, FGD participants highlight that working in the sector is allowed by the community and that the working hours within the sector are possible to balance with domestic obligations compared to other jobs (see annex 1). In Ubari, FGD participants stress that there are better job opportunities for women than men in the financial sector on the basis of women's better computer literacy and non-cognitive skills. The FGD participants in Yefren emphasize that there are no private banks in Yefren, hence no employment opportunities in the medium to long-term when the sector stabilizes.

"Women do all types of financial activities including banking services, and there are several services; private offices for women such as legal offices, where women can work as a financial accountant." (Female FGD Participant 2, Tripoli, 2019).

In Tripoli, it appears that the sector also, in the short-term provides employment opportunities for women. The findings from the KII and FGDs support that there are employment opportunities for women within the sector. The sector thus appears to be better than in other sectors and offering opportunities for economic empowerment for women in the medium- to long-term.

8.3.10 Hospitality

The Hospitality sector consists of hotels, restaurants, and cafés. Hereof, it is worth noting that 60% of hotels are public, while the remaining are private (The World Bank, 2015). Restaurants, cafés, and catering businesses have experienced rapid growth since the revolution (Ibid.), which seems to continue into the coming year. In the short-term, 46% of surveyed employers expect a large growth potential (>10%), and 24% expect a moderate growth potential (5-10%). The sector also seemed resilient and was only slightly impacted by the political turmoil in 2019 compared to other sectors (Key Informant, Haroon Hotel, July 2019; Key Informant, The Libyan Cement Company, July 28th, 2019).

Coffee shops and catering businesses are popular ventures for young entrepreneurs, and women catering projects are currently the most successful entrepreneurship activities (LEE staff 1, July 22nd, 2019). One entrepreneurial initiative by two Libyan women is the food app Yummy, which connects women with verified drivers by the app to deliver the women's homemade food to costumers in Sabha, Tripoli, and Benghazi (Mannion, 2018; UNDP, 2019). The women that do not have any decision-making power over their participation in the labor market due to the lack of freedom of mobility will gain an opportunity to earn an income by being connected with the world outside the household. This can enhance these women's economic empowerment, despite it being a decision-making power that is bound to the lack of other options. It still opens an employment opportunity that these women did not have previously.

The hospitality sector comes across as one of the most gender-inclusive with employment opportunities for women as 85% of surveyed employers hire women. The KII and FGD participants, though, highlight some barriers to women's employment in the sector. Some positions are too exposed and possibly dangerous to women, for example, working at the reception desk at night, thus meaning that women will not be employed for these positions (Key Informant, Haroon Hotel, July 2019). The FGD participants in Sabha echo this sentiment. They highlight that the security situation poses a barrier to employment in the Hospitality sector. It makes employment in cafés and restaurants difficult since employers prefer male employees due to the lack of security (see annex 1).

Despite the challenges for employment due to the current security situation, 83% of female FGD participants indicates their interest in the Hospitality sector. The FGD participants in Benghazi consider the sector easier than other sectors for women to enter. They mention employment opportunities at banquet halls, where women are preferred over men. They explain the preference for women in these positions to be due to non-cognitive skills such as organizational skills. An FGD participant in Sabha mentions her interest in the sector despite the challenges encountered:

"The south lacks hospitality services because there are no hotels here but there is coordination in other events such as wedding ceremonies. If I ever hear about a job offer in this sector, I'd say yes because I have always wanted to open a coffee shop for women in my city despite the objection of community members to this project." (Female FGD Participant 9, Sabha, 2019).

In Yefren, female FGD participants highlight that there are only three hotels in the city and that there has been a project the Summer of 2018, where participant 5 underscores that she was one of the volunteers on the project contributing to try and give the city a new look and improve tourism (see annex 1). The size of the sector does, therefore not provide significant opportunities for women in Yefren.

8.4 Addressing Barriers to Women's Economic Empowerment

In the literature, there have been highlighted ways to ease the constraints on women's labor market opportunities, while some of them would be possible to apply in the Libyan context. This section of the research will answer the second part of the research question on what changes are likely to ease the constraints on women's labor market opportunities.

8.4.1 Education, Skills, and Training

Education beyond primary education leads to an increase in women's labor market opportunities (Kabeer, 2012). However, education such as vocational and technical education to increase women's labor market opportunities have not been as widely studied. It became apparent in the first part of the analysis of the barriers to women's economic empowerment in Libya that women do have equal access to tertiary education (GIWPS, 2019b). It was also highlighted that the majority of Libyans consider women and men's access to higher education equally important (Arab Barometer, 2019a). The KIIs and LEE project staff echo these findings. Hence, access to higher education does not appear to be a barrier and an area where initiatives will ease the constraints on women's labor market opportunities.

Targeted vocational or technical education could potentially help Libyan women access the Libyan labor market in the non-gendered sectors. It could help with the skills mismatch highlighted by employers between the skills that women applying for positions with them have and the needed level of skills. This is one aspect suggested in the literature; vocational and technical education as it can serve to ease the constraints on women's labor market options. It is, however, important to acknowledge that this will not be enough in the sectors where employers perceive the work to be unsuitable for women.

It is important that the vocational or technical training designed to help ease Libyan women's access to the labor market does not reproduce the gender stereotypes already embedded in the labor market or neglect to acknowledge the barriers that women face to obtain employment opportunities. However, there was some evidence of that among the KIIs. LEE staff 1 mentioned that: *"I don't see anything preventing women from getting job opportunities if they have the necessary skills"* (LEE staff 1, July 22nd, 2019). The KII showcase an example of risk to replicate gendered training and skills programs in Libya as the structural barriers to women's economic empowerment and low participation rate are widely acknowledged as a problem across the

MENA region (see i.e. Syed, 2008; Haghighat, 2013; Littrell and Bertsch, 2013; Assaad, 2014; Assaad, Krafft, and Salehi-Isfahani, 2018).

The problem of training providers reinforcing the gender stereotypes already embedded in the labor market context has been identified in other contexts (Seguino, 1997; Kabeer, 2012). When asked about the most promising industries for the employment of LEE beneficiaries, LEE staff 1 responds: *"In general, women have more chances than men to have a job in the future"* (LEE staff 1, July 22nd, 2019). Hence, there is an apparent lack of acknowledgment of the fact that only 25.8% of Libyan women participate in the labor force, while it is 79% of Libyan men (ILO, 2017a). A gap magnitude above 50%, which reflects the same pattern as with other MENA countries (Ibid.). The similar gender gap in labor market participation in Libya and other MENA region countries highlight similar patterns of barriers that inhibit women's economic empowerment. It does not reflect as LEE staff 1 express, that women have better opportunities than men for employment in the future. These findings highlight the importance of addressing gender bias within training modules and in the design face. If not addressed skill trainings will not be successful tools to address barriers to women's economic empowerment.

Turning back to the aspects of women's economic empowerment that vocational or technical training cannot tackle – the entry into sectors where the employers consider the work unsuitable for women. To avoid gender segregation in sectors for the future and start breaking down some of the ideas of jobs being bearers of gender, an active effort has to be made. In other contexts, mentorships and job training exposure programs have been successful. They are specifically designed to challenge stereotypes and encourage both young women and men to go into sectors that are usually considered stereotypical for the other gender (ILO, 2016). In Denmark, one university has initiated to host IT camps for high school girls in order to attract more female talent into a male-dominated sector (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019a). In Croatia, Microsoft has started similar initiatives to break some of the gender stereotypical barriers within ICT. They facilitate a day that introduces high school girls to what a career within technology can look like and provide role models for young women (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019c).

Considering economic empowerment opportunities for women within ICT would potentially be to include women in online training such that they could work from home. This would be particularly relevant for the women, where their right to take up paid work outside the home is contested (ILO, 2017a; GIWPS, 2019b). Training of women from their home on ICT skills has been done by entrepreneur Abeer Abu Ghaith in Palestine equipping women from their home with new skills to enter the ICT labor market (ILO, 2017a). This type of breaking barriers for women that have otherwise been completely outside of the labor market have also been done with the Yummy app in Libya started by two female entrepreneurs. These kinds of training could serve as an initial step to wider acceptance of women taking up paid jobs.

The idea of using education and role models to help build confidence within a male-dominated field is not new in Libya. The inspiration to use role models in Libya for progressive social change is seen in Nahiza Arebbi's documentation Freedom Fields, which follow three Libyan women closely in their battle to play football for their nation at an international level. One of the female

football players, Fadwa, started a non-governmental organization (NGO) to develop girl's football in Libya to inspire and empower girls (Solomons, 2018). Role models that showcase women in untraditional positions can help push gender norms and gender segregation across the Libyan society and hopefully inspire change.

8.4.2 The Regulatory Environment

Libya's 37 discriminatory laws against women are well above the world average of 23 (GIWPS, 2018) and serve as a clear structural barrier to women's economic empowerment. Formal discriminatory laws reproduce and reinforce *"the resilience of gender-related constraints on women's labor market choices"* (Kabeer, 2012, p. 39). Changes to the regulatory environment in Libya will thus be a step in the right direction for the state to enable Libyan women's labor market opportunities rather than reinforce the restrictions of socially gendered barriers. However, due to the current two-fold governments of Libya: Government of National Accord (GNA) and The House of Representatives (HoR), are without a legitimate mandate to pass new laws (Eaton, 2018), this process will be stalled until a post-conflict setting where one political authority will be able to draft and pass laws. Changing laws will have a particular effect on Libyan working in formal wage employment as the enforcement will be more likely to be ensured in the formal sector (Kabeer, 2012).

Until then, it could be beneficial for the officials at the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Justice to go through gender sensitivity training. It would prepare and provide them with the tools necessary to draft gender-sensitive legislation that will ensure less discriminatory practices in Libya. Gender sensitivity covers policies, training, and programs that seek to address the inequalities of men and women, and promote gender equality (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019b). This would be a first step within the regulatory environment for Libya to obtain gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming is a particular strategy towards realizing gender equality (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019d). Gender mainstreaming thus *"involves the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programs, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination"* (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017, p. 5). Gender mainstreaming within, for example, education would include looking into gender stereotypes and how they affect educational choice, which without being addressed lead to gender-segregated labor markets and hence opportunities (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017). This is one of the areas that development aid, in particular, can help drive change in Libya with facilitation and financing gender mainstreaming and gender sensitivity training. This could be done through use of best practices in other contexts and a consideration of how such success stories can be adapted and fitted to the Libyan context.

8.4.3 Women's Free Mobility

The constraint of women's mobility is one of the most far-reaching barriers to women's access to the labor market (Kabeer, 2012). A significant barrier to women's economic empowerment in Libya is the security situation and the reduced freedom of movement. Addressing women's limits to the fundamental right of freedom of movement in the public sphere will thus be one of the changes that will ease the constraints on Libyan women's labor market options. The Women's

Economic Linkages and Employment Development project in Jordan has attempted to identify safe and affordable transportation to ensure women's access to the labor market (OECD, 2018b). Some of the study's recommendations include gender-inclusive policies, working with taxi apps to ensure safer travels for women, and collaboration with local community leaders to identify realistic solutions tailored to different communities (Moghli, MacIsaac and Wiseman, 2018). Spurring initiatives such as apps, where women drive women, were mentioned by one female FGD participant in Tripoli, which could serve as one way of starting to address the issues of security and social stigma around women's free movement in Libya.

Notably, the lack of Libyan women's free mobility contributes to the significant disparities between economic empowerment opportunities across sectors in Libya. In 2011, Libyan women were at the forefront of the non-violent actions of the uprising that led to the overthrown of Qaddafi. However, the resulting conflict, chaos, and insecurity of militias in post-revolution Libya led to a backslide in women's empowerment as it increased the war-related insecurity which reduces women's freedom of movement. It is in particular seen with the traditional religious ideas of "mahram," where a woman must be escorted by a male guardian usually a husband, brother or father across checkpoints to avoid harassment (Burchfield, 2019). Promotion of free mobility with examples of female oil engineers send to the desert with international oil corporations and coming back safely with a mandate to conduct their work effectively are some of the success stories (Bugaigis and Tantoush, 2017). These can serve as the cases of women's economic empowerment despite the barriers and obstacles, which can inspire others and show how "mahram" is not the way forward to protect women in Libya.

8.4.4 Women's Care Responsibilities

Women's care responsibilities are one of the major barriers to women's economic empowerment (Törnqvist and Schmitz, 2009; Kabeer, 2012). The Libyan society's neopatriarchal characteristics assign the roles of men as breadwinners and women as responsible for domestic care responsibilities. The unpaid care responsibilities of the household are considered the appropriate role for Libyan women. In the findings, it became even more evident that women's ability to reach job opportunities within the labor market was highly confined to private health and education positions, which were the most socially accepted positions for women to uptake. These positions also closely coincide with the same positions that are held in the home as the caretaker. Functioning policy instruments such as childcare services for women employed in the private Libyan labor market are needed in order to ease some of the barriers to women's economic empowerment in Libya and ensure that the economic empowerment on the labor market not only leads to a double burden of responsibility. Investment in affordable child care is one way to increase women's intake in the labor market (Sultana, Gammage and Kes, 2019). This is particularly important to tackle the current perceptions, that women cannot balance work and care responsibilities (Bugaigis and Tantoush, 2017).

Breaking down the discriminatory social institutions and practices that create the unequal stereotypes of genders are core to change the unequal distribution of care responsibilities in Libya. One way to do this would be to include men more in the unpaid care responsibilities of the family. In order to get closer to such an optimum would be to look at best practices in other

contexts and adapt it to the Libyan formal labor market to ensure that there is a policy framework that enables Libyan men to share the care burdens (Fälth and Blackden, 2009). Men participating in sharing the care responsibilities are a way to acknowledge their ability as caregivers. This could have a dual effect as role models for future generations in breaking down the entrenched gender norms and stereotypes and increase the uptake of men in the Health and Education sectors in Libya. Thus, both tackling the redistribution of responsibilities for unpaid care work between Libyan men and women, but also stipulate an example in the formal labor market that women are not confined to solely health and education, it can also be a man's job.

Currently, the Libyan labor law stipulates 14 weeks of paid maternity leave for mothers, while men do not have any right to parental leave in the Libyan labor law (Bugaigis and Tantoush, 2017). Advocating and making a change in the legislation would also set an example of male care responsibilities by facilitating and enabling an environment for fathers to take part in the early care responsibilities shifting some of the gender norms, such that it is not only women that are confined to traditional roles associated with femininity and motherhood (Ferrant, Pesando and Nowacka, 2014).

9 Conclusion

Studies of the Libyan labor market are rare, and studies of women's economic empowerment in the Libyan labor market are non-existent. The aim of this research is to answer why the gender gap in the Libyan labor force participation is more than 50 percentage points through understanding the barriers to women's economic empowerment in Libya. This understanding then served to address pathways forward asking what can be done to ease the constraints Libyan women face in their pursuit of labor market opportunities. Access to data and research came through a partnership with the Danish policy advisory Voluntas in early 2019 with granted access by MEDA to the data collected during the Summer and Fall of 2019. This data was initially intended to inform MEDA's next phase of the LEE project. While reviewing existing literature, Kabeer's (1999;2001) theoretical framework for women's empowerment is the most widely acknowledged framework for this type of analysis and a useful tool to understand the barriers Libyan women face to obtain economic empowerment in Libya. The aim of this research has been to understand the barriers to Libyan women's economic empowerment through an in-depth case study and suggest how these barriers can be eased. While acknowledging that economic empowerment is not separate from women's empowerment in society at large, the scope of this research was limited to economic empowerment due to data and feasibility constraints.

Resources

According to Kabeer's (1999, 2001) theoretical framework that was applied to this research, resources can consist of either material, financial, human, and/or social resources. In order to evaluate the resources available for women to achieve economic empowerment, a focus on Libyan women's human resources was chosen. Reliable data on Libyan women's human resources focusing on education, training, and skills were obtained for the analysis. A focus on human resources was selected as some of the most important for criteria successful access to the labor market and economic empowerment (Kabeer, 2012). In this section, I will, therefore, conclude the findings related to different kinds of human resources.

One main finding was that the gender paradox is present in Libya. In the theoretical literature, the gender paradox is considered present in the MENA region with women's increased access to educational attainment without the equivalent intake on the labor market (Littrell and Bertsch, 2013; The World Bank, 2013; Assaad, 2014; UNICEF, 2019). The desk-based research, KIIs, and FGDs all corroborated the literature. Libyan women have equal access to education, with the majority of Libyan's finding men and women's access to higher education important (Arab Barometer, 2019b). Libyan women aged 25 and above have completed on average 7.7 years of education (GIWPS, 2019b). This finding was confirmed by the KIIs with LEE staff (LEE staff 1, July 22nd, 2019; LEE staff 2, July 22nd, 2019). Furthermore, the demographics of the FGDs reflected a representative sample with 95.45% with a tertiary degree and 4.15% with secondary education completed.

Education and training systems that lack quality and/or labor market relevance leave workers ill-prepared for the labor market (OECD, 2012, 2018a; The World Bank, 2018a). A number of scholars have raised the concern of the quality of educational systems across the MENA region including Libya. Without the necessary skills obtained within the education system, youth will not be equipped with the skills demanded by the private sector (Salehi-Isfahani, 2012; Assaad, 2014; Assaad, Krafft and Salehi-Isfahani, 2018).

Beyond the education level, human resources also include cognitive and non-cognitive skills as tools to access labor market opportunities. When looking at the findings of the survey with 400 employers across Libya, the education and training system prepares men as well as women poorly for the labor market. The 400 employers surveyed were asked; when you receive applications from [gender] for positions needing a primary or secondary degree, do job seekers usually have the right level of skill *x*, too high or too low. The main findings from the comparison of the employers' answers provided for male and female job applicants skillset were rather insignificant. The percentage of employers that consider men's non-cognitive skills too low is higher than the percentage of employers that consider women's soft skills to be too low. While among cognitive skills, the main finding was a slightly higher percentage of employers responding that women's computer literacy and English skills were too low compared to men's skillset. However, the skills gap was not substantial. This supports the argument that there are other barriers to women's economic empowerment in Libya than their access to education and skills training, as their obtainment of both seems to equal that of their male counterparts.

In conclusion, women's educational attainment and cognitive as well as non-cognitive skills were matching Libyan men's. Hence, this supports the theory that the barriers to women's economic empowerment in Libya do not lie with equal access to education or the skillset they can apply to a job position. The barriers to women's economic empowerment and the reasons for the high gender gap in the labor market participation rate in Libya should be found elsewhere.

Barriers to Agency

In order to understand the barriers to Libyan women's economic empowerment, a two-fold approach was adopted. In Kabeer's theoretical framework an important emphasis is on the structural barriers and the decision-making power over the human resources that women possess in the pursuit of measuring economic empowerment (Kabeer, 1999, 2001). The structural barriers to agency in which findings will be concluded on cover inclusion, justice, and security.

Firstly, the structural barriers depicted in the literature were highlighted through GIWPS as it measures relevant indicators such as inclusion, justice, and security – factors that all affect the barriers to women's economic empowerment. The two factors for the indicator inclusion that are relevant are mean years of schooling and women's employment rate. Women's inclusion in the Libyan society is thus both considered within the assessment of resources as well as within the framework for potential barriers to agency and decision-making power over these resources. The main finding is the same as found within the wider analysis of resources supporting the argument that women in Libya do not face any barriers to inclusion in the educational system. Yet, they face barriers to exercise decision-making power over these human resources as there are structural barriers around inclusion into the labor market as seen with the large gender gap in labor market

participation (ILO, 2017a). Furthermore, LEE staff 2 could provide an insight into these barriers highlighting social barriers around patriarchal family norms and values with husbands, fathers, or brothers preventing women from participating in the labor market (LEE staff 2, July 22nd, 2019).

Secondly, among the justice indicator measurements of discriminatory norms and legal discrimination against women in Libya are relevant indicators of barriers to economic empowerment. In both 2017 and 2019, 52% of men aged 15 years or older disagreed with the proposition: *"It is perfectly acceptable for any women in your family to have a paid job outside the home if she wants one"* (GIWPS, 2019b). In 2017, 37 discriminatory laws were limiting women in Libya, which positioned them in the middle of the group compared to other MENA region countries (Ibid.). Despite this, some discriminatory laws have been removed in Libya. These findings seem to support the argument that there is a high level of structural barriers for women in Libya. They highlight discriminatory legislation against women's decision-making power. In addition, they reveal social discriminatory barriers further challenge women's decision-making power over their own employment opportunities.

Thirdly, it was highlighted that the protracted conflict in Libya has a high impact on the security that women feel in their daily lives. 57.5% of Libyan women do not feel safe walking alone at night, which is the worst score of women's perception of community safety across the MENA region (GIWPS, 2019b). The freedom of movement is a basic human right that has a large effect on women's economic empowerment (Syed, 2008). Hence, confirming that conflict has adverse effects on women's economic empowerment opportunities (Abril, 2009; Menon and van der Meulen Rodgers, 2015).

It became evident in the analysis that there is a difference among FGD participants in their level of awareness around decision-making power and structural barriers. These different levels of awareness of structural barriers in the Libyan society among female FGD participants align with Kabeer's (1999, 2001) conceptualization of unquestioning acceptance of social norms. In Tripoli, Benghazi, and Ubari it differs within the groups to what extent the FGD participants showed evidence of critical consciousness about structural barriers. While in Sabha, the role of the family, environment, and community in deciding the employment opportunities of the women were highlighted by the majority. In conclusion, these findings can either be due to regional differences not being captured in the Georgetown University Women, Peace and Security Index for some of the indicators of structural barriers or due to a difference in a critical awareness of decision-making power of Libyan women. Hence, women's barriers to economic empowerment in Libya can differentiate according to geography or be perceived differently among Libyan women.

Achievements

In this research, I investigated eleven sectors across the public and the private formal labor market in Libya in order to gain a larger insight into women's barriers to economic empowerment. The research intended to understand if the gender segregation prevailed and made women face barriers to economic empowerment in some sectors rather than others. This section will briefly highlight the main findings of these sectors and the different roles and opportunities of women within them.

85% of employers said they do not have any women employed in the manufacturing of the food and beverages sector (see annex 3). It became clear from the KIIs and desk-based research that social norms hindered women's labor market opportunities within the manufacturing of food and beverages leaving only a small room for employment opportunities within the administration. The sector is expected to have both short- and long-term growth prospects with job opportunities (see annex 3; The World Bank, 2015). Addressing social barriers for women to enter the sector is therefore highly important to ensure new labor market opportunities for women in the short- and long-run.

The quantitative and qualitative data sources on women's labor market opportunities for the retail and wholesale trade sector showed conflicting results. While 76% of the employers did not employ any female employees both the answers from the KIIs and FGDs painted a picture of an inclusive industry for women to work in. Hence, the findings on achievements and labor market opportunities were proven to be inconclusive. The findings were, therefore, not able to confirm or dismiss any argument on the sector's ability to provide economically empowering opportunities for women.

68% of employers in the manufacturing of building materials sector do not employ women. Together with the manufacturing of food and beverages, it is one of the largest sectors in the Libyan formal labor market where many employers do not employ women. Gender hostile norms and traditional gender segregation within the sector were highlighted by FGD participants. Findings support the argument that the sector follows traditional gender roles as in many other places in the world.

60% of telecommunication employers do not employ women, while this number drops to 48% for ICT employers (see annex 3). It became evident that women across Libya view their opportunities for achievements within telecommunication and ICT differently. Female FGD participants in Tripoli and Benghazi do believe they have employment opportunities, while female FGD participants in Yefren and Ubari say opportunities are limited. The barriers mentioned across FGDs are the limits to freedom of mobility for women to do fieldwork and women's care responsibilities, limiting the hours available to participate in the labor market. The findings of the survey and FGDs supported that women's lack of freedom of movement in Libya and unpaid care responsibilities are obstacles to their economic empowerment.

55% of the employers within transportation do not employ women (see annex 3). In the FGDs the lack of freedom of mobility was highlighted as a barrier to employment in the sector (see annex 1). However, new initiatives providing employment opportunities for women within the transportation sector despite barriers were also highlighted, such as ride-sharing and delivery services for and by women. These opportunities are currently seemingly only available for women in Tripoli.

52% of the construction and real estate employers do not employ women (see annex 3). The FGDs highlighted the following barriers for women's economic empowerment within the sector: lack of free mobility to do site management visits, the lack of female role models within the sector, stark social norms around it being a male profession (see annex 1). The KIIs revealed an informal

discriminatory hiring policy. The findings supported the argument that there are strong barriers to women's economic empowerment within the construction and real estate sector.

55% of oil and gas employers do not employ women (see annex 3). The FGDs showed differences across Libya to what extent women believed there to be employment opportunities within the sector (see annex 1). While the KIIs expressed equal employment opportunities for men as well as women within the sector (see annex 2).

70% of private health and education employers have women employed in their organization. The findings around large inclusion of female staff in the sector from all data sources confirmed the argument of patriarchal social norms in the Libyan labor market, with women taking up the majority of care responsibilities also in the formal labor market.

28% of financial services employers do not have women hired in their organization. Both the survey, KIIs, FGDs as well as desk-based research showed evidence of the inclusivity of female staff in the financial services industry in Libya. Findings that were not expected in an otherwise male-dominated industry. The inclusivity was highlighted to still be confined to mostly support functions in the desk-based research (European Training Foundation, 2014; The World Bank, 2015). The findings, thus, to some extent, challenged the ideas of the patriarchal social norms infiltrating all sectors of the Libyan formal labor market.

85% of hospitality employers have women hired in their organization. Notably, the app Yummy was highlighted to try and increase the formal labor market opportunities for women that otherwise are not able to enjoy the right of freedom of mobility outside their homes. Notably, security barriers were mentioned in the KII and by FGD participants in Sabha to women's employment opportunities.

In conclusion, most of the sectors showed evidence of being gender segregated according to patriarchal traditions, some either due to the regulatory environment or social norms. Barriers from lack of freedom of mobility and unpaid care responsibilities were also evident. However, sectors such as transportation and hospitality showed promising new initiatives that attempt to break down some of these barriers and provide economic empowerment opportunities for women despite the hardship. Also, the wholesale and retail sector seemed to provide opportunities for women according to the KIIs, FGDs and desk-based research. Despite barriers to economic empowerment, the oil and gas sector did also seem to provide opportunities for achievements thus challenging the argument of patriarchal gender norms being exerted in all sectors. Even, the findings of the financial services sector were surprising with more gender inclusivity than expected.

Addressing Barriers to Women's Economic Empowerment

Throughout the analysis, barriers to women's economic empowerment were identified, and as a result, four areas for potential areas to ease these constraints on women's labor market opportunities have been suggested. These four areas are as follows: education, skills and training; the regulatory environment; women's free mobility, and women's care responsibilities. Access to education was not identified as a barrier to women's economic empowerment. However, there is room for improvement in women's skillset, particularly soft skills. Closing the skills gap between

the supply and demand of skills mentioned by employers will equip women for employment opportunities in the formal labor market in the non-gendered sectors. This will nevertheless not be enough in the sectors where employers find the work unsuitable for women. To address gender-based exclusion in sectors, mentorships and job training exposure programs designed to challenge stereotypes and encourage both women and men to break with social norms could provide the necessary changes to social norms needed in Libya. The exposure of young girls to female role models within otherwise male-dominated sectors to encourage and inspire young girls and women to break into new territories was also suggested as a best practice to apply.

Gender mainstreaming with gender sensitivity training of officials within the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Justice was also highlighted as necessary initiatives to tackle some of the discriminatory legislation in Libya. The conflict's impact on resources dedicated to women's economic empowerment and the low position on the political agenda means that other actors must drive forward these suggestions for ways forward. Aid agencies and international stakeholders need to drive forward the agenda as resources in conflict situations will often be directed elsewhere (Abril, 2009).

Women's free mobility was highlighted as one of the main structural barriers in the analysis. It is one of the barriers that can fundamentally limit women's economic empowerment (Kabeer, 2012). Best practices from the region were suggested to be applied with entrepreneurial ideas such as taxi services with drivers and customers being exclusively women. Furthermore, working with local community leaders to establish solutions tailored to different areas of Libya were suggested as paths forward (Moghli, MacIsaac and Wiseman, 2018). The role of firms particularly to lead the way and ensure that there are role models that can showcase that *mahram* is not best practice was also highlighted as essential. International oil and gas companies ensuring female engineering employees' access to work in the field were highlighted as an example.

Lastly, ways to address women's care responsibilities were discussed. Ways to ensure the inclusion of men into unpaid care work were discussed with suggestions of ensuring fathers' access to parental leave within the legislation in Libya. A potential way to nudge social norms towards more shared unpaid care responsibilities (Bugaigis and Tantoush, 2017).

Suggestions for Further Research

Throughout the literature review and desk-based research, gaps in current research on women's economic empowerment across the MENA region became apparent. The research on women's economic empowerment in the MENA region often dates prior to the Arab Spring in 2011. These accounts of women's labor market opportunities in the region thus do not account for the changes to women's situation that the Arab Spring has caused across the region, which ranges from flourishing democracies in Tunisia, to protracted conflict and militias in Libya to a fall back into authoritarian regimes in Egypt. Either study into other countries in the MENA region progress or setback in women's economic empowerment after the Arab Spring or comparative cases would contribute to the sparse literature on the topic. It would provide an opportunity for scholars as well as practitioners to learn from best case examples within the regional context, which could benefit progress elsewhere.

Further exploration of the dynamics of women's empowerment in Libya would also be relevant. Investigating the impact of women's empowerment within social and political spheres and its effect on women's economic empowerment could yield some highly interesting findings. Further research could contribute with deeper insights into how different areas of women's empowerment in Libya either hinder or enable the possibilities for women's empowerment in other areas.

As indicated earlier, this research was only concerned with the formal labor market and the economic empowerment opportunities that lie here for women in Libya. However, this is only the tip of the iceberg. Both economic empowerment opportunities for women within self-employment or entrepreneurship, as well as the informal labor market, remain underresearched. Self-employment and entrepreneurship can be a way for women to access the gendered segregated sectors where surveyed employers do not find the work appropriate for women. Specifically, women's economic empowerment and labor market opportunities within entrepreneurial activities would be a relevant field for further studies. Looking into barriers of access to material and financial resources would be particularly relevant for women's economic empowerment opportunities within entrepreneurship (The World Bank, 2015). Examining the topic of women's economic empowerment within the informal labor market is particularly relevant due to its large size in Libya (European Training Foundation, 2014).

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11 Annexes

Annex 1: Focus Group Discussion Transcripts English

Please find Annex 1 submitted on USB and online as PDF.

Annex 2: Key Informant Interview Transcripts English

Please find Annex 2 submitted on USB and online as PDF.

Annex 3: Employer Survey

Please find Annex 3 submitted on USB and online in the original format.

Annex 4: Interview Guide for the Employer Survey

Please find Annex 4 submitted on USB and online as PDF.