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## Gender Discrimination in the Tunisian labor market: the youth crisis

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### Résumé / Summary

Tunisia has made large efforts to provide 'gender equality' in education, employment, as well as political and cultural representation. The enrolment of girls was accelerated and the literacy rate of youth female (ages 15-24) has increased from 63% to 96% between 1984 and 2011. In 2010, 63% of the graduates from higher education institutions were women against only 37% for men. Tunisia was also one of the first Arab countries that ratified the Convention of the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1985. And in January 2014, the new constitution recognizes officially the equality between men and women in its article 21, which reads "All male and female citizens have the same rights and duties. They are equal before the law without discrimination". These advantages in the area of gender equality and women's rights have made Tunisia a pioneering experiment in the Arab-Muslim world for a long time.

Paradoxically, these admirable progresses in women's rights and human capital have not yet been matched by increases in female's economic participation. Compared to men, women are less likely to be in paid jobs and much more likely to be engaged in precarious and informal employment and paid substantially less than male counterparts. Labor Force Survey data indicate that female labor force participation rates have increased between 2005 and 2011, to reach 27 percent. According to the 2014 National Population and Housing census, the female labor force participation reached 28.2 percent compared to 65.47 percent for males, but continues to be below the international levels and it would still take about 150 years to attain the current world average (World Bank 2014b). Low participation rates can be explained by both economic and social factors. For instance, the number of babies in the household and the low access to child care coupled with low market wages and low employment quality could be important economic factors that affect a

woman's decision to participate in the labor force. Also, women's low educational attainment, social norms and cultural attitudes could influence female labor force participation (World Bank 2014b). Furthermore, contextual factors such as regional unemployment rate among women and that among men can amplify or weaken the effects of these determinants (Cipollone et al 2014, Elhorst 1996, Ward and Dale 1992). Female labor market participation rates also differ substantially between urban and rural areas and across regions. Data from the 2014 census reveal that the majority of interior regions (such as Tataouine, Kasserine, and Kairouan) displayed low levels of female labor participation (18.51%, 19.65% and 19.69% respectively), while coastal regions experienced the greatest levels (Sousse (33.99%) and Ariana (37.08%)). Finding a job becomes more and more difficult for rural women. Less than one in five women in rural Tunisia (18.5 percent) and less than two in five women in urban Tunisia (39.8 percent) have a job (Word Bank 2014b). While most previous studies focus on the effects of individuals' and households' characteristics on the gender inequality in Tunisian labor market (World Bank 2014b) by using individual data and static model, this study has two main contributions. First, male-female differences in Tunisian labor market (especially in female participation and quality of employment) are examined using the first wave of the Tunisian Labor Market Panel Survey (TLMPS) collected in partnership between the Economic Research Forum (ERF) and the Tunisian National Institute of Statistics in 2014. The TLMPS 2014 includes retrospective information on education trajectories, residential mobility patterns, migration history, and marital and fertility history (Assaad et al 2016), which allows us to capture the change in work preferences and employment dynamics and their impacts on gender discrimination in labor market. Second, we combine the micro-level (individual and household characteristics) and macro-level (regional and institutional factors) approaches into a unified empirical design to understand whether the impact of individual characteristics on market labor participation and employment varies across regions characterized by different institutional structures and cultural attitudes. By considering contextual factors, we try to answer the following questions: Could regional specific factors influence the women's participation in labor force and the quality of women's employment? If so, what would be the implications for thinking through the territorially specific and gendered effects of national employment policies? In terms of modeling framework, we use a multilevel propensity score matching analysis in order to combine micro and macro factors as well as to reduce selection bias by accounting for the random effects across areas in a hierarchical data structure (Thoemmes and West 2011). Additionally, we try to identify factors that shape the informality decision amongst self-employment men and women. As women are particularly active in this sector, and they participate mainly to supplement family income, alleviating gender disparities can potentially boost their ability to improve household income.

Labor force participation, Gender Gap, Multilevel propensity score, Tunisia

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