

Labor Reforms: Adopting a Part-Time Work Scheme in Government Entities

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In response to rapid growth, diversification, and advances in its economy, the State of Qatar is continuing to develop crucial policies designed to build an efficient, highly motivated, and engaged national workforce. In September 2021, the Qatari Government approved a draft decision to introduce a part-time work system in Qatar's public sector. Reliable data is needed to properly assess public attitudes towards a part-time work model and ultimately gauge the substantive impact of current and future labor policy interventions on employees. The Social and Economic Survey Research Institute completed the first-ever effort to measure public attitudes toward a part-time model, and its results were made available to local and international scholars, stakeholders, and policymakers.

Labor Reform Attempts: Part-time Work Scheme Model

The Qatari government has been promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and good-quality work for all. In September 2021, it approved a draft decision regarding a part-time system in government agencies, allowing Qatari employees to apply for part-time work instead of full-time. The system aims to reduce the number of working hours per week by half and the number of working hours per day by at least half. This decision aligns within the framework of the government's plans to improve job efficiency in Qatar and is in line with modern working practices, including those promoting the work–family balance policies that the government has adopted in the labor system.

The Labor Market Sector Strategy 2017–2022 focuses on rebalancing the labor market structure, increasing work efficiency across sectors, developing labor legislation, and improving the labor

market's information system¹. Subsequently, the establishment of part-time work scheme in government agencies could effectively provide more flexibility and options for Qatari employees, enabling them to support their lifestyle, create their own schedule, and provide female employees in particular with better family-work balance opportunities.

Due to the lack of research on the impact of introducing part-time work, there are no mechanisms in place to track the results of the part-time system's introduction in Qatar's labor market.

This policy brief, therefore, focuses on providing a public-opinion assessment of the part-time work scheme. The Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) of Qatar University surveyed 744 Qatari citizens via a national representative telephone survey about their awareness, perceptions, and interest in part-time employment in Qatar's government entities. The survey evaluated several aspects of public attitudes toward the impact of the part-

time work scheme on improving employees' productivity and efficiency, achieving work–family balance, and increasing female labor force participation (FLFP).

Qatar's Labor Market: Public and Private Sectors

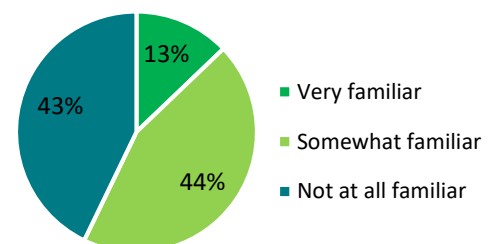
Qatar's labor market has achieved high male and female labor market participation rates compared to other countries in the Arab region². The male economic participation rate for Qataris was 66% in 2020, while the female rate was 37%³. The public sector seems to be the preferred choice of work for Qataris, especially married women, as it provides the possibility to adequately reconcile one's familial and professional spheres⁴. The Civil Human Resources Law No. 15 of 2016 includes Qataris working in the government sector, while workers in the private sector are covered by the Labor Law of 2004. The above-mentioned legislation has established workplace nurseries and kindergartens, family-friendly job procedures such as flexible work schedules, part-time jobs, special leaves (including 60 days of paid maternity leave), and counseling centers to raise awareness about the responsibilities shared by spouses⁵.

Public Awareness of the Part-Time System

According to the Qatari government's draft plan, Qatari employees working in government entities can apply to work part-time instead of full-time. To obtain an objective and reliable overview of public's perspectives toward part-time work in Qatar's labor market, respondents were

asked to rate their familiarity with the work-time system draft decision in the public sector on a scale of 1–4. Overall, 44% of Qataris reported being somewhat familiar with the draft decision, 43% reported not being familiar at all, and 13% reported being very familiar with it.

Figure 1. Familiarity with Part-Time Work Scheme in Government Agencies



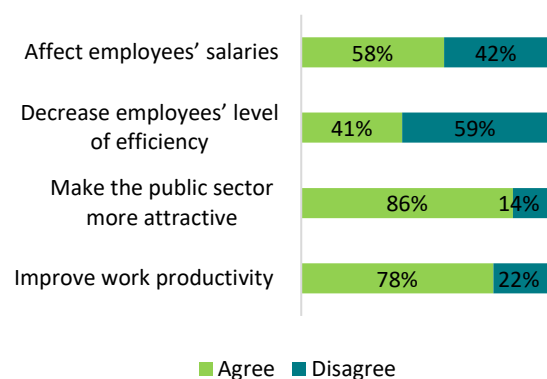
Attitudes toward Performance and Productivity

Studies designed to determine the performance and productivity of part-time employees have reported varying results. The standard part-time work structure (which involves fewer work hours per day than full-time work), has been found to increase motivation and reduces absenteeism⁶. In contrast, some studies on the productivity function concluded that part-time and full-time workers are equally productive during their work hours⁷. Other studies, based on the hypothesis that wages reflect productivity, have found part-time workers to be less productive than full-time workers⁸.

In our study, the respondents were asked to rate their attitudes toward employees' performance and productivity if they work on a part-time basis using a scale of 1–4. The majority of the respondents (78%)

agreed that part-time work schemes would improve work productivity in government entities. As for whether the part-time work scheme will make the public sector more attractive than the private sector, 86% of the respondents agreed that it would. More than half the respondents (59%) disagreed that the part-time scheme would decrease employees' level of efficiency. Respondents were also asked whether they thought the part-time scheme would affect employees' salaries, and the majority (58%) agreed that it would.

Figure 2. Part-time Work and Employees' Work Productivity

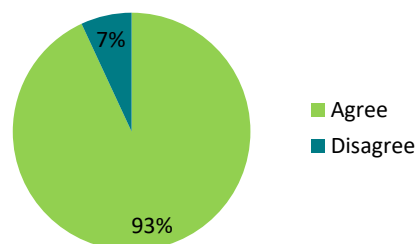


Part-Time Employment and Work-Family Balance

While progress has been made in redefining the assignment of gender roles, women still face immense pressure to fulfill their familial responsibilities as primary caregivers at home. Difficulty balancing domestic and work responsibilities has been shown to contribute to work-family conflicts, especially given that current maternity leave legislation in both public (60 days) and private (50 days) organizations is not generous. To simultaneously assess

issues associated with family stability, it is essential to provide insights into the implementation of part-time work in Qatar's labor laws and its benefits in improving work-family balance. The respondents were asked to rate their attitudes toward employees achieving work-family balance if they work on a part-time basis using a scale of 1–4. The majority of respondents agreed that the part-time scheme will allow for better work-family balance for employees (93%) and allow them to care for their children for a longer period (93%).

Figure 3. Part-time Work and Employees' Work-Family Balance



Part-Time Employment and FLFP

Long working hours can be a challenge for female employees, as they may have less time to spend with their families. Therefore, women may not be willing to take jobs with long working hours. There are several non-economic factors that influence employees' preferences for part-time work, such as childcare issues and family or personal obligations. In our study, the respondents were asked to report their attitudes toward part-time work encouraging women to join the workforce through a scale of 1–4. In total, 91% of respondents agreed that part-time employment would encourage women to join the workforce, which would increase FLFP.

References

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Policy Recommendations

1. Provide pilot programs, tools and resources, along with evidence-based sample specific case studies, to identify the positive and negative aspects of part time work.
2. Review HR polices to provide options for mobility between full-time and part-time work, and provide promotions in part-time positions in leadership positions, along with the provision of fixed wages and pensions.
3. Raise Awareness about part-time work terms and conditions by encouraging organizations to conduct awareness sessions about the types of jobs that have the option to work on a part-time basis.
4. Provide a part-time work option that maintains employee efficiency levels, reduces stress, has productivity-enhancing effects, reduces absenteeism and retains qualified employees.
5. Improving working conditions in terms of flexibility of time and working hours is a positive step towards encouraging women to join or remain in the workforce, to avoid their resignation due to long working hours that affect their family obligations.