

## **Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG)**

Letter to the editor, 17 August 2015

### **Stop mixing-up stats – Women do not outnumber men in labour force**

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We refer to the Bernama news article titled [“Women's Participation In Malaysian Labour Force Increased To 53.6 Per Cent”](#) published on 13 August 2015. The article regrettably quotes inaccurate information, which is extremely misleading.

#### **Inaccurate information**

The article quotes Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nancy Shukri as stating that "women made up 53.6% of the country's labour force in 2013". This gives the impression that more women than men work (in the formal economy) in Malaysia. This is inaccurate.

According to the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, in its 2014 publication “Statistics on Women, Family and Community Malaysia” women made up *just* 37.8% of the labour force in Malaysia in 2013. This means that for every 100 people with employment in Malaysia, only 38 are women – 62 are men.

#### **Actual numbers**

Where did the “53.6%” figure come from? Basically, the Bernama article mixes up *labour force participation rate (LFPR)* with *percentage of the labour force*. These are two very different figures.

According to the [Department of Statistics](#), the LFPR of women was 53.6% *in 2014*. This means that of working age women in Malaysia, only 53.6% are employed or looking for employment (it does *not* mean that 53.6 out of 100 workers in Malaysia are women as suggested in the Bernama article). In contrast, the LFPR of men was 80.4% in 2014.

## **Women's economic rights**

The Bernama article paints a falsely rosy picture of the condition of women's economic rights in Malaysia. It suggests that more women work compared to men in Malaysia, when in fact the opposite is true.

The contrast between the LFPR of women and men is extremely large. The 2014 Global Gender Gap Report 2014 ranked Malaysia at 117 (out of 142 countries) on this measure – meaning 116 countries (out of 142 countries) had more equal LFPRs between women and men.

Progress has been made in recent years to increase the labour force participation rate for women. Yet, as we are starting off from a dismal level, efforts must continue and intensify.

Rigid gender roles that pressure women to do more (informal) work at home must be challenged so that women can freely pursue the work of their choice. The work environment must be made conducive for women: the government can do more to have childcare centres set up in communities, enact a comprehensive sexual harassment law, and tackle wage discrimination, to name a few.

Putting out accurate information would also help.

### ***The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG)***

*Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)*

*All Women's Action Society (AWAM)*

*Association of Women Lawyers (AWL)*

*Perak Women for Women Society (PWW)*

*Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)*

*Sabah Women's Action-Resources Group (SAWO)*

*Sisters in Islam (SIS)*

*Tenaganita*

*Women's Centre for Change, Penang (WCC)*

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