



## The Missing Link in Oman's Employment Policy Design and The Effectiveness of its Tools

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### Definitions and Concepts

- **The Shura Council** is a council elected by the people, enjoying legal recognition and financial and administrative independence. It represents one of the two wings of the Council of Oman, which exercises legislative powers and exercises its jurisdiction using investigative tools: urgent statements, requests for briefings, expressions of interest, questions, requests for discussion, discussion of ministerial statements, and interpellations. The provisions of these powers are enshrined in Chapter V of the Basic Law of the State issued by Royal Decree No. 6/2021, and under the Council of Oman Law issued by Royal Decree No. 7/2021.
- **The Community Summary** simplifies the results of the State Financial and Administrative Control Authority's annual report of the using clear language, graphics, and statistics. It aims to enhance transparency and accountability and teach the community about the Authority's most important achievements and its recommendations for protecting public funds and improving government performance.
- **Omanization**, which is increasing the proportion of Omani workers and prohibiting the recruitment of foreign workers in specific sectors
- **Unemployment** is defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as any person of working age who: was not in paid employment or self-employment; was available for work; was actively seeking work or had confirmed arrangements to start a job within a short period (usually three months) but was not yet working; or those participating in training related to a forthcoming job offer. **The Sultanate of Oman uses the term "job seekers" as a positive alternative to the "unemployed"**. As such, the term "job seekers", consistent with the definition of the ILO and reviewed and approved by it, will be used in this research paper.

## Introduction

This paper presents a critical analysis of employment policy design and tools in the Sultanate of Oman based on the analytical framework developed by Michael Howlett and colleagues to understand the dynamics of policy design and implementation and the challenges involved in aligning them with political and institutional contexts. This analytical framework is based on the premise that the design process is not limited to central policies and their literal application but is shaped by continuous interaction between multiple levels of bureaucracy, all of which play a design role to varying degrees. Howlett proposes a three-level approach that allows for the diagnosis of structural imbalances in policies, starting with the legislative framework and ending with the mechanisms of implementation on the ground.

This paper therefore employs the analytical model in a practical manner. At the macro level, it analyzes the legal and regulatory framework that shapes the structure of the Omani labor market, including labor law and the job security system. At the mid level, the paper examines how operational policy objectives are formulated and tools selected, such as wage support initiatives, training programs linked to employment, and other job creation incentive programs. At the third level – the micro level – the paper analyzes how these tools are actually implemented by practitioners or employees, including interpretations and practical efforts that sometimes lead to an actual reshaping of policies during implementation and application. By tracing elements of inconsistency between these three levels, the paper seeks to reveal the missing link that hinders the effectiveness of employment policies in Oman.

This analytical approach is important given the scarcity of Omani studies that address employment policies as a separate field within public policy; most studies focus on the social and cultural dimensions associated with job seekers, while overlooking policy design and tools. This analysis comes in a context where the issue of job seekers tops the agenda of Oman Vision 2040; the issue has received significant societal attention since the social unrest of 2011, even though such attention wanes and waxes. A preliminary examination of the results and their implications reveals gaps in implementation and weaknesses in coordination between the legislative and executive levels, which may explain the continued rise in the number of job seekers despite the various initiatives that have emerged, particularly over the past five years.

This paper's approach therefore deconstructs the rigidity of design, the suitability of tools, and the conditions for implementation, leading to an answer to its main questions: **What is the missing link in Oman's employment policies and tools? What lessons can be learned to create more coherent approaches for the next phase?**

## Victimhood and the Conflict of Narratives

On 8 August 2012, the Court of First Instance in Muscat issued verdicts against 11 human rights defenders and reform advocates, The sentences included one year in prison and a fine of 200 Omani rials (about US\$520), with the right to appeal on bail of 1,000 Omani rials, (about US\$2,600).<sup>1</sup> This ruling was issued as one of the consequences of the social

movement in 2011 when – for the first time since the end of the Dhofar War in the late 1970s – peaceful protests broke out, focusing on issues such as low wages, high unemployment, and the lack of legislative authority of the elected Shura Council.<sup>2</sup>

In response to the escalating rhetoric of grievance, the regime adopted a conciliatory tone toward the protesters and offered a package of measures, most notably: a monthly allowance for job seekers estimated at 150 Omani rials (about US\$390); the creation of 50,000 new jobs for Omanis in the public sector, primarily in the defense and security sectors; doubling the monthly social security allowance for eligible families; increasing student allowances; and an expansion of the Shura Council's powers.<sup>3</sup>

Following these decisions, the cabinet issued a statement urging government agencies to complete the procedures for employment decisions in various sectors. It was also decided to extend the monthly grant for job seekers who have been approved for employment and are simply waiting until intake procedures are completed and they can start work. The statement also called for a study of the conditions of new batches of job seekers expected to enter the labor market in the coming period, either directly or after training or qualification. It should be noted here that the previous regulations had set the maximum duration of the grant at six months, with three job opportunities offered during that period, provided that the person was registered with the Omani Manpower Register.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the official narrative regarding the “situation of job seekers” took shape in a report issued by the Shura Council in 2012, which indicated that the effects of previous decisions had led to:

*The absence of effective implementation mechanisms that maximize benefits and achieve the desired objectives, in addition to the obsolescence and inconsistency of job seekers' data, as well as the absence of a clear definition of a job seeker. This has led to large numbers of people in low-level and low-paying jobs in the private sector resigning and registering as job seekers in the hope of finding government employment. This has represented a real decline in employment policies and Emiratisation rates in the private sector.*<sup>5</sup>

What draws our attention is that after the peaceful protests of 2011, Royal Decree No. 96/2011 was issued to amend certain provisions of the Omani Penal Code and Procedures, such as Article 135 relating to undermining the status of the state, Article 136 relating to assembly, and Article 137 bis relating to blocking public roads and thereby preventing their passage or making it difficult to travel on them.<sup>6</sup> The legal amendments have raised concerns among a number of international organizations, as they constitute potential restrictions on freedom of expression as reflected in the 2012 arrests of 31 prisoners of conscience in the “gathering and defamation” cases.<sup>7</sup>

## **The Revival of Oppression**

Despite some improvements – the issuance of employment policy measures and tightening Penal Law provisions related to gatherings as issued by Royal Decree No. 7/2018, particularly Articles 121-124 – and the record low unemployment rate of 1.80% in 2018, the controversy over injustice and its motives has not ended.<sup>8</sup> Seven years on, protests by thousands of new

graduates and job seekers have been resurging in several states, including Muscat, Sohar, Sur, and Salalah. The discourse focuses on addressing high unemployment rates and rejecting the austerity measures that the government approved in January 2017 to compensate for the decline in oil prices and to finance spending that was aimed at containing the 2011 protests.<sup>9</sup> As the second wave of protests continued, Omani police prevented media coverage of peaceful gatherings and confiscated the equipment of Hala FM broadcasters. Al Wassal broadcasters were asked to delete photos taken of the protests and leave the scene.<sup>10</sup>

In late 2018, the protest hashtag “#job\_seekers\_cry\_for\_help” trended on social media platforms, particularly X, as Omanis continued to demand that government agencies provide direct employment opportunities for citizens. Activists on social media also called for the implementation of job replacement, which prioritizes employing Omanis over expatriates in certain sectors. The protesters also demanded that government agencies publish accurate and transparent statistics on the number of job seekers.<sup>11</sup>

In line with previous government rhetoric aimed at calming the situation and addressing the job seekers’ complaints, representatives of government agencies promoting economic diversification stated at a press conference that the sultanate would seek to provide 800,000 job opportunities by 2040.<sup>12</sup> This statement drew criticism from Omanis (Twitter users launched the hashtag #800,000\_jobs\_in\_2040) who expressed skepticism and suggested that this was merely an attempt to postpone solutions.

In early 2019, Royal Decree No. 22/2019 was issued to establish the National Employment Center, a center with broad responsibilities affiliated with the Council of Ministers.<sup>13</sup> Its tasks include providing career guidance to job seekers, preparing programs to prioritize employment of Omanis over non-nationals, and supporting groups facing difficulties in finding employment. It also coordinates with training and qualification bodies to enroll job seekers in appropriate training programs, supervises the establishment of private sector employment offices, and was charged with developing an integrated plan to align outputs and labor market needs. The center also reviewed the legislation governing professions and activities.<sup>14</sup> However, after approximately one year, this institutional entity was abolished as part of a package to restructure the state’s administrative apparatus in accordance with Royal Decree No. 89/2020; all of its allocations, assets, rights, and obligations were transferred to the Ministry of Labor.<sup>15</sup>

## **Mobilization for the Third Time**

Following the repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic, the decline in oil prices, and the transfer of power in Oman to Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, demands were renewed in May 2021. The scope of these demands broadened to include the voices of those laid off in the private sector within the Sultanate and Omani expatriates from Gulf Cooperation Council countries, as well as recent graduates and job seekers. This expansion made the definition of “job seekers” more ambiguous and complex. Omanis organized peaceful protests in the provinces of Sohar and Salalah, chanting “The people want to bring down corruption!” and demanding that government agencies speed up the process of addressing their situation.<sup>16</sup>

The government reacted quickly to limit the spread of peaceful protests to other provinces, issuing a statement focusing on the achievements of recent employment policies. The Omani News Agency reported that efforts were continuing to provide job opportunities through training and qualification programs and to replace jobs occupied by expatriate workers in the public sector, as well as through employment in various areas of the private sector. Among the announcements was the completion of procedures to appoint 2,364 teachers for the 2021-2022 academic year. The Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy announced that it would be recruiting and the Ministry of Labor issued a variety of job advertisements for the public and private sectors. The Job Security Fund also began disbursing benefits to citizens whose employment ended in November 2020, with 6,413 citizens benefiting from the job security system by the end of April 2021. The system also provided social protection for citizens who had lost their jobs for reasons beyond their control through a temporary benefit equivalent to a portion of their last salary; these funds helped bridge the transitional gap between jobs and supported job seekers as they looked for new opportunities.<sup>17</sup> The government confirmed that supporting job seekers was a priority that is of great concern to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.<sup>18</sup>

However, the protesters did not escape clashes with Omani security forces, who used tear gas to disperse them. Many main streets were closed and a campaign of sporadic arrests began, targeting those who organized or participated in the peaceful protests.<sup>19</sup> While some people were released the same day, others remained in detention for several days.<sup>20</sup>

These events were followed by Royal Decree No. 68/2022, which amended certain provisions of the Omani Penal Code. Article 97 stipulates that anyone who publicly or through publication defames or insults the rights and authority of the sultan shall be imprisoned for three to seven years; this also applies to attacks on or defamation against the sultan's wife, heir apparent, and children.<sup>21</sup> The Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor has expressed concern about the imposition of prison sentences for publishing material relating to the sultan and the ruling regime. It warns that the nonspecific wording and lack of definition of "publishing an attack" or "insulting [the sultan] personally", based on previous experience, means the imposition of elastic restrictions on any criticism including of the ruling regime, which is a clear violation of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.<sup>22</sup>

### **Exploring the Core of the Problem: Michael Howlett's Approach**

At the time of writing, the issue of job seekers remains a central social problem in Oman that is officially recognized with its centrality to the political agenda. The issue has been included in an integrated public policy cycle, starting with its designation as a national priority in Oman Vision 2040, and continuing through to the review and adjustment of implementation methods. In this context, on 13 December 2023 the Shura Council decided to form a temporary specialized committee to follow the issue of job seekers. In one of its reports, the committee recommended the urgent implementation of benefits for job seekers and housewives "registered as job seekers", which contributed to further confusion and complexity in defining the term.<sup>23</sup>

The Ministry of Labor also received government directives to urgently take measures that would: end companies' violations and evasion of employment policies; replace expatriate

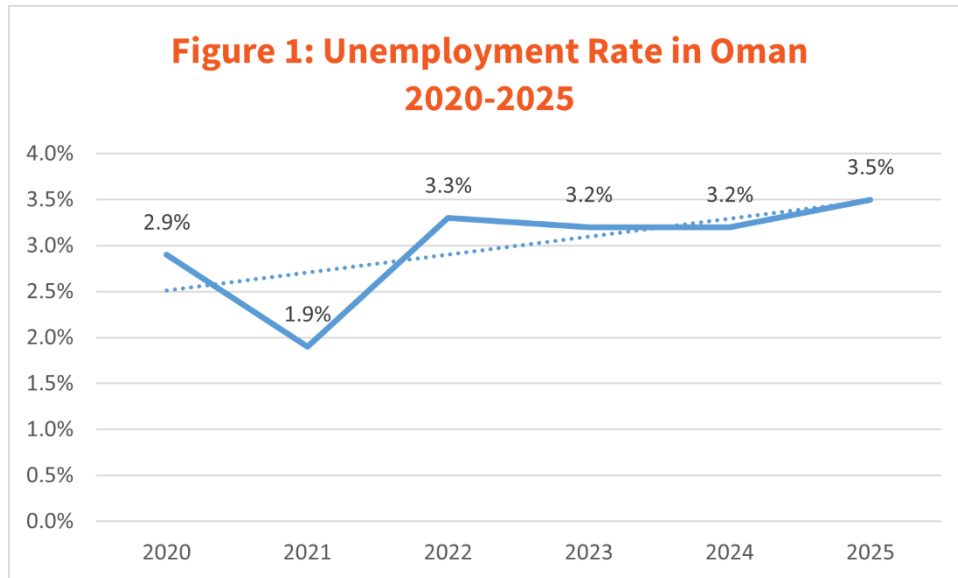
workers with Omani citizens; and work to correct the situation in government and private sector companies in accordance with the proposals of the State Financial and Administrative Control Authority, which explained in its Community Summary that there are problems in the design of policies and tools at the Ministry of Labor.<sup>24</sup> Some of these problems stem from the absence of a policy for classifying data in accordance with Royal Decree No. 118/2011 and clauses 2-8 on information classification; another issue is the granting of powers to employees for tasks unrelated to their departments, which leads to the use and exploitation of those powers or the approval of transactions by the wrong employees. The Community Summary also revealed problems with the central employment system: position filling was conducted in a manner contrary to the official vacancy announcements; unqualified candidates were allowed to test for a job; and applicants were able to access job tests from more than one computer using their civil ID number. Additionally, the feature that tracked changes in the system's spreadsheets was disabled; random specializations were added to candidates that did not match their actual specializations; and applicants' requests were repeatedly rejected on the grounds that their qualifications did not match the required specialization, even though they did in fact match.<sup>25</sup>

These results point to the urgent need for a systematic approach and analytical review of the design of employment policies and tools and their realignment with the stages of implementation in order to ensure the proper control and governance, and to increase the efficiency of systems for job seekers in the employment process.

### **The Missing Link in the Design of Employment Policies and Tools**

Researchers Howlett and Giliberto Capano believe that public policy design is a complex process where success or failure depends on the accuracy of the design at its various levels, especially the micro level where public policies become reality.<sup>26</sup> Based on this hypothesis, the reality of the Omani labor market and its operating mechanisms can be understood within the context of the global economy and cross-border labor dynamics; this poses a challenge to any approach that treats it as an independent structural system. The increasing influence of global market mechanisms on the management and regulation of local labor tests their effectiveness.<sup>27</sup>

Data from the ILO indicate fluctuations in the unemployment rate over 2020-2024 in the Sultanate of Oman, although the rate (less than 4%) remains low by international standards.<sup>28</sup> However, the continuation of this upward trend is a cause for concern, reinforcing some people's predictions that the unemployment rate will continue to rise unless the structure of employment policies is reviewed and its tools are redesigned in a more integrated and consistent manner. Figure 1 below shows the unemployment rate for the last five years in the Sultanate of Oman:



Data from the World Bank Group and the National Center for Statistics and Information.<sup>29</sup>

Statistics released by the Ministry of Labor in 2022-2024 also show the actual numbers of job seekers and the number of Omanis employed, as shown in Table 1 below.<sup>30</sup>

**Table 1: Numbers of job seekers and people hired, 2022-2024**

Year	Job seekers	% of total (all years)	People hired on a contract basis	% of job seekers (per year)	People not hired	% of job seekers (per year)
2022	85,444	27.96%	57,092	66.82%	28,352	33.10%
2023	101,629	33.25%	50,968	50.15%	50,661	49.85%
2024	118,527	38.79%	64,383	54.32%	54,144	45.68%
<b>Total</b>	<b>305,600</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>172,443</b>	<b>56.43%</b>	<b>133,157</b>	<b>43.57%</b>

Table 1 reflects the ratio of total job seekers to those who found employment over the last three years, with the number of job seekers in Oman rising against the slower growth in the number of those who found jobs. There was a decline in hirings in 2023 followed by a partial recovery in 2024, indicating that the growth in the number of job seekers exceeds the absorption capacity of the Omani labor market. The data also shows a cumulative deficit of 43.57%, meaning that 5.64 out of every 10 job seekers have been absorbed by the Omani labor market over the last three years.<sup>31</sup>

In light of this data, this research paper will explore the tools for designing and implementing employment policies. It first addresses the regulatory, legislative, and financial tools represented by the job security system and the new Omani labor law. It continues by presenting employment initiatives, including the wage support initiative, the *Sahem* (contribute) initiative, and the One Million Hours initiative. In addition, it addresses training initiatives, foremost of which are the “on-the-job training” initiative and the “training coupled with employment” initiative. It also touches on digital platforms that

support Oman's employment policy system, including the *Tajneid*, *Tawteen*, *Khutay*, and *Maak* platforms.

## **Regulatory, Legislative, and Financial Tools**

In policy design studies, the “first generation” envisions that public policy tools are selected in a neutral, rational, practical, and technological manner, assuming that the tool is chosen based on efficiency, effectiveness, or minimum cost and that the actors are nothing more than technicians who make decisions based on abstract scientific logic.<sup>32</sup> Looking at Oman's employment policies, we find that first-generation policies are the most prominent in the policy design, including a very notable job security system as one of the financial regulatory policy tools.<sup>33</sup> This is a social insurance program that covers the risks of termination of service for reasons beyond the control of the insured and provides temporary income during the period of searching for alternative employment.<sup>34</sup> However, this system was not without its problems: the Shura Council hosted a discussion on the Social Protection Fund to discuss extending the job security allowance to one year for all beneficiaries who had received six months, with a gradual reduction in the allowance. The council stressed the need to accelerate and prioritize the employment of those laid off in order to ease the financial burden on the fund, alongside strengthening cooperation with the relevant authorities to develop a mechanism to radically address the issue of job seekers.<sup>35</sup>

In early August 2025, social media platforms were abuzz with the plight of the unemployed after job security benefits – which were financed by a monthly deduction of 1% from the salaries of citizens in the public and private sectors – were suspended, leading to demands for the continuation of the benefit to protect individuals, families, and society while providing job opportunities.<sup>36</sup> His Excellency Younis Al-Manzari, chairman of the Youth and Human Resources Committee of the Shura Council, pointed out that some of those laid off between 2019 and 2021 had not yet been offered jobs, while other job offers were unsuitable for reasons including: the proposed wages were a significant salary decrease for the individual, or the location was too distant and the resulting transportation and other costs reduced the value of the salaries offered.<sup>37</sup>

The new Omani labor law is a political, regulatory, and legislative tool.<sup>38</sup> Article 18 states that “[e]mployment is a right for Omanis, and others shall not perform work inside the Sultanate of Oman except in accordance with the conditions and circumstances stipulated in this law and the decisions issued implementing it.” Article 20 also stipulates that “[t]he minister shall issue a regulation for the training of Omanis, and the regulation must include the percentage of contribution by the establishment to training programmes, in coordination with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and each economic sector.” Article 22 obliges “An employer who employs 25 (twenty-five) workers or more shall take the following measures” most notably: “...2. Adhering to the occupational classification approved by the ministry in a manner that facilitates the procedures of the establishment to achieve Omanisation. 3. Determining the wages, employment benefits, and working conditions... 7. Preparing a plan to appoint and train Omanis to occupy

leadership occupations and following up on its implementation. 8. Developing practical strategies to retain Omani manpower."

Despite the clarity of government decisions as regulatory and legislative policy tools, implementation and enforcement issues in the public and private sectors remain, in accordance with Michael Howlett's approach to policy design. After the Ministry of Labor announced a decision to appoint at least one Omani citizen in institutions and companies that have been established for one year (due to the significant disparity in Omanization rates among institutions), a number of small and medium-sized business owners expressed their dissatisfaction with the sudden requirement for them to hire Omanis; they argued that the decision – despite its importance – was far removed from the reality of the market and the capabilities of small and medium-sized companies.<sup>39</sup> They said it represented an additional burden that threatened the continuity of their projects and hindered their growth, pointing out that ignoring their advice before issuing the decision was a serious mistake in an era that is supposed to be based on participation and transparency.<sup>40</sup>

Abdullah Al Sheikh, chairman of the Trade Committee at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Dhofar Governorate, warned that applying the Omanization decision to all institutions without taking into account their different financial capacities could seriously disrupt the market and lead to adverse results.<sup>41</sup> Ayman Al Shanfari, director of the Oman Securities Association concurred, saying that job recruitment companies have had a clear, negative impact on the labor market and have directed a large number of job opportunities to expatriates instead of citizens. This is due to the lack of a clear regulatory or supervisory framework for the work this type of company does.<sup>42</sup>

These conclusions are supported by data released by the National Center for Statistics and Information, which indicated that the total number of Omani workers reached 862,410, while the total number of expatriate workers was 1,808,451 in May 2025, reflecting a structural dependence on expatriate labor that is more than double the number of national workers. Despite slight growth in the employment of Omanis in the private sector, expatriate labor continues to dominate, highlighting the limited impact of public policies – such as Omanization – in addressing structural imbalances in the Omani labor market and employment, whether in the private or public sector.<sup>43</sup> Field indicators also reveal a clear gap between the design of employment policies and their actual results. Omani youth suffer from marginalization in terms of opportunities to participate in the private sector, resulting in a sense of economic alienation and a lack of belonging. This has a negative impact on their career and life choices and affects the nature of the dynamic relationship between the state and society.<sup>44</sup>

Howlett and Ishani Mukherjee also emphasize that many policies are not designed in a logical, rational manner, but rather take shape within what they call “no-design” policies.<sup>45</sup> These policies may arise due to cognitive or institutional constraints and accumulate through the legacy of old policies, with conflicts over the definition of objectives and the translation of their tools into practical application, leading to additional implementation dilemmas.<sup>46</sup> Based on Howlett and Mukherjee's thesis, the case of employment policies in Oman's military and security agencies can be read as an accumulation of legacy

employment policies that sought to absorb job seekers as an additional regulatory tool. This tool was activated in a remarkable way after the directives of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said to employ 50,000 job seekers during the social unrest in 2011; various entities, including the military, began immediately to hire 35,000 job seekers. Employment in the military and security agencies has continued to be a key tool for rapidly hiring job seekers at the time of writing.<sup>47</sup> The Ministry of Labor has continued to provide job opportunities in the military and security agencies in the Sultanate for various jobs and professions and for all educational levels through the *Tajneid* platform. The system also provides the ability to view test and interview dates through text messaging services associated with the website.<sup>48</sup>

However, relying on recruitment as a quick solution to absorb the number of job seekers reproduces the problem of employment policies in the Omani labor market rather than addressing it structurally. This is due to the limited capacity of the state, as the pressure eases only temporarily until the problem of high numbers of job seekers returns. Furthermore, recruitment does not provide sustainable productive opportunities that contribute to the growth or expansion of economic and productive sectors. The root causes of the structural problem remain unaddressed. Furthermore, Howlett and Mukherjee argue that the complexity of policy design is exacerbated by an excessive focus on the use of individual tools, rather than the development of integrated toolkits. Accordingly, the effectiveness of public policies is not determined solely by the selection of the “most appropriate tool”, but rather by how they are coordinated and integrated with objectives and temporal, political, and institutional contexts. This makes the design process more complex, as it requires the harmonization of multiple elements within interconnected and constantly changing arrangements.<sup>49</sup>

## **Training and Employment Initiatives**

Over the past five years, a mix of instruments have been adopted within a package of direct and indirect operational initiatives. This included a wage subsidy initiative of 200 Omani rials per month (about US\$520) for two years to encourage the hiring of new graduates in the private sector. The initiative included temporary two-year government employment contracts with a monthly salary ranging from OMR 400 to OMR 500 (about US\$1,040 to US\$1,300) depending on educational qualifications. The Ministry of Labor also launched the One Million Hours initiative for part-time employment in government agencies: job durations ranged from three months to two years and beneficiaries retaining the right to apply for other jobs.

As for training and employment initiatives, they have focused on two main initiatives. The first is the on-the-job training initiative, which provides training opportunities in private sector institutions with a commitment to hire the trainee after a training period (often 12 months); the Ministry of Labor covers agreed training costs. The second is the training employment initiative, which offers an administrative or technical training program at qualified private training institutes coupled with subsequent employment under the supervision of the Ministry of Labor; monthly grants are given to trainees of 150, 200, or 250 Omani rials (about US\$390, US\$520, or US\$650) based on academic qualifications.

In parallel with the above, digital platforms have emerged to support the employment policy system. The *Tawteen* platform has facilitated the process of searching for and filling vacant jobs in the Sultanate of Oman in an easy and effective manner. The *Khatwa* platform provides career guidance and counseling, targeting students in school and higher education, job seekers, employees, self-employed individuals, entrepreneurs, parents, teachers, and academics. Meanwhile, the *Maak* platform brings together the services of the Ministry of Labor to facilitate and simplify employment and workforce services for both job seekers and employers.<sup>50</sup>

It is worth noting that members of the Shura Council discussed with Minister of Labor Dr. Mahad Ba'awin the need to stabilize the beneficiaries of temporary employment initiatives in coordination with the Ministry of Finance, giving them priority in government agencies when job vacancies open. The members also proposed classifying job priorities based on criteria such as age and marital status, with priority given to married couples. The members proposed extending the duration of the *Sahem* initiative to five years instead of two, in addition to conducting a comprehensive field study to assess the success of these initiatives. They also pointed out the importance of taking wage deductions during official holidays into account under the One Million Hours initiative, and called for the creation of a database of the national workforce, which would contribute to assessing impacts and operational initiatives, including their implications for job seekers and society in general.<sup>51</sup> The Minister of Labor noted that these initiatives represent efforts to promote employment opportunities for job seekers and contribute to empowering Omani youth, increasing their readiness for and competitiveness in the labor market.<sup>52</sup>

When transferring Howlett's theoretical framework to the reality of Omani employment policies and tools, we find that the macro level is reflected in national legislation such as royal decrees creating the job security system, the Omani labor law, and the ninth (2016-2020) and tenth (2021-2025) five-year plans emphasizing Omanization. The adoption of rigid legal tools in this context reflects what Howlett calls a strict bureaucratic approach that limits policy flexibility when it comes to practical implementation.

At the meso level, efforts were reflected in operational and training initiatives and digital platforms managed by the Ministry of Labor and other relevant entities, which nevertheless resulted in a gap in translating objectives into results. According to Howlett, failure to adapt tools to implementation contexts leads to a deviation from the path, causing implementation to unexpectedly reshape policy.<sup>53</sup>

At the micro level, government policies face clear challenges in implementing Omanization objectives in some sectors with a lack of interim evaluation and weak flexibility in adjusting tools according to the realities of the Omani labor market. In addition, some policies, such as replacement and employment of Omanis, lack realistic feasibility studies that would take into account market conditions and private sector constraints; in addition, the temporary reliance on emergency solutions – such as absorbing large numbers of job seekers into the military and security sectors – contributes to temporary calm but is not a sustainable structural solution.<sup>54</sup> In the absence of integrated strategies to stimulate the private sector

and develop an attractive business environment, operational results remain below expectations; hidden unemployment is one direct result of the design imbalance at the three levels mentioned.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

The results of this paper's analysis of employment policies show that the missing link is not a lack of tools or initiatives, but rather a lack of consistency between the three levels of design referred to by Howlett and his colleagues. By tracing the macro-level implications in legislation, the mid level in the formulation of programs and initiatives, and the micro level in implementation and enforcement mechanisms, it appears that the consistency gap between these levels is what reproduces the challenges. Decision-makers can be guided toward more coherent and effective development by the following lessons.

**First**, addressing the issue of job seekers cannot be achieved through temporary and short-term solutions, but rather should be pursued through integrated policies that reconnect legislation (macro) with economic incentives and skills development programs (mid) and evidence-based labor market policies and flexible implementation mechanisms (micro).

**Second**, data transparency and equitable opportunities based on fairness are fundamental to rebuilding trust between individuals and institutions. The absence of clear grievance and follow-up mechanisms deepens feelings of injustice and undermines the effectiveness of reforms, weakening the link between the three levels.

**Third**, the analysis highlights the need for institutional governance of partnerships between the Ministry of Labor and stakeholders from the public and private sectors to ensure consistency between policy objectives (mid) and labor market requirements (micro).

**Fourth**, a shift toward results-based management would link the legislative level (macro) to the practice level (micro) through clear impact measurement and accountability, which may enhance the ability of policies to achieve actual objectives and guide continuous correction of the implementation path.

**Finally**, the adoption of an indicator tracking system would bridge the gap between policy design and implementation, providing a continuous mechanism for evaluating and linking efforts to Oman Vision 2040.

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<sup>1</sup> Arab Network for Human Rights, "Oman sentences activists to prison for solidarity with detainees", 10 August 2012, available at <https://ifex.org/omani-court-hands-down-additional-sentences-against-activists/>

<sup>2</sup> Mark Valery, "Escalating Unrest and Succession Challenges in Oman", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 28 January 2015, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2015/01/simmering-unrest-and-succession-challenges-in-oman> (Valery, "Escalating Unrest").

<sup>3</sup> Valery, "Escalating Unrest".

<sup>4</sup> الجزيرة، "عمان تمدد منحة الباحثين عن عمل"، 28 آب / أغسطس 2011، متاح على <https://aja.me/9gth9>

<sup>5</sup> مجلس الشورى بشأن أوضاع الباحثين عن العمل. حزيران/يونيو 2012، ص. 2، الفقرة 2، متاح على

<https://www.shura.om/Laws-Legislations/Legislation/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84>

<sup>6</sup> "Royal Decree No. 96/2011 Amending Some Provisions of the Omani Penal Law and the Criminal Law Procedure", Sultanate of Oman, available at <https://decree.om/2011/rd20110096/>

<sup>7</sup> Omani Center for Human Rights and Democracy, "Annual Report on the Human Rights Situation in Oman" (Arabic), December 2013, available at <https://ochrdoman.org/annual-report-2014/>

<sup>8</sup> "Royal Decree No. 7/2018 Issuing the Penal Law", Sultanate of Oman, available at <https://decree.om/2018/rd20180007/>; "Economics of Trade on the Unemployment Rate in the Sultanate of Oman", available at <https://tradingeconomics.com/oman/unemployment-rate>

<sup>9</sup> Yasmina Abu Al-Zuhur, "Oman 10 Years After the Arab Spring: The Evolution of State-Society Relations", Arab Reform Initiative, February 2021, available at <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/oman-ten-years-after-the-arab-spring-the-evolution-of-state-society-relations/>

<sup>10</sup> Wahda Shams, "Developments in Oman 2019: Sustainability in the Gulf", Center for Arab Unity Studies in collaboration with the Gulf Center for Development Policy.

<sup>11</sup> X, #JobSeekers\_Crying\_Out\_for\_Help.

<sup>12</sup> صحيفة الشبيبة، "هكذا يمكن تأمين 800 ألف وظيفة منتظرة في 2040"، 19 كانون الأول/ديسمبر 2018، متاح على

[-https://shabiba.com/article/113889](https://shabiba.com/article/113889)

<sup>13</sup> "Royal Decree No. 22/2019 establishing the National Center for Recruitment and Issuing Its System", Sultanate of Oman, available at <https://decree.om/2019/rd20190022/>

<sup>14</sup> التواصل الحكومي، "الفرق بين أدوار المركز وأدوار الهيئة العامة لسجل القوى العاملة"، 2 آذار/مارس 2019، متاح على

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<sup>15</sup> "Royal Decree No. 89/2020 Establishing the Ministry of Labor, Determining Its Consequences, and Adopting Its Organisational Structure", Sultanate of Oman, available at <https://decree.om/2020/rd20200089/>

<sup>16</sup> الخليج أون لاين، "بعد تدخل سلطاني... هل تنتهي مشكلة الوظائف في عُمان؟" (تقرير خاص)، 18 أيار/مايو 2021، متاح على

<https://alkhaleejonline.net/>

<sup>17</sup> The benefit system offers financial support provided to certain groups in Omani society, such as the elderly, children, persons with disabilities, and persons whose employment has ended for reasons beyond their control. It is paid directly to these groups by the state, and no contribution from the group is required for eligibility.

<sup>18</sup> وكالة الأنباء العُمانية، قام عدد من الباحثين عن العمل والمنهية خدماتهم بالتوجه إلى المديرية التابعة لوزارة العمل للتسريع في

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مايو 2021، متاح على <https://x.com/OmanNewsAgency/status/1396798281557098503>

<sup>19</sup> See the Omani Center for Human Rights and Democracy, "Annual Report on the State of Human Rights in Oman", December 2021, available at <https://ochrdoman.org/annual-report-2022/>

<sup>20</sup> See Amnesty International, "Amnesty International Report 2021: The State of Human Rights in the World", 2021, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/4870/2022/en/>

<sup>21</sup> "Royal Decree No. 68/2022 Amending Some Provisions of the Penal Law", Sultanate of Oman, available at <https://decree.om/2022/rd20220068/>

<sup>22</sup> Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, "Oman: Amending Penal Law will restrict free speech, human rights", 28 October 2022, available at <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/5393/>

<sup>23</sup> شؤون عُمانية، "الشورى يقر مشروع قانونين ويناقش تقرير اللجنة المؤقتة المعنية بملف الباحثين عن العمل"، 26 حزيران/

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<sup>24</sup> المرصد @almarsd\_new، "جلالة السلطان -حفظه الله وأبقاه- يوجه وزارة العمل باتخاذ الإجراءات اللازمة وبشكل عاجل لوضع

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<sup>25</sup> See State Financial and Administrative Control Authority, "Community Summary 2023", October 2024, available at [https://www.saj.gov.om/annual\\_report](https://www.saj.gov.om/annual_report)

<sup>26</sup> Gilberto Capano and Michael Howlett, "Calibration and specification in policy practice: Micro-dimensions of policy design", *Policy Design and Practice*, Vol.7 No.2, 2024, pp. 115-128, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/25741292.2024.2353929>

<sup>27</sup> Crystal A. Ennis, "Making Global Labor Markets and National Dreams", in *Millennial Dreams in Oil Economies*, Cambridge University Press, 2024, pp. 34-86, available at <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009499422.004>

<sup>28</sup> The unemployment rate for 2025 came from the June 2025 monthly statistical bulletin issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information to cover the last five years; "ILO Modelled Estimates database", International Labour Organization – ILOSTAT, available at: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/bulk>

<sup>29</sup> "Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate) – Oman", World Bank Group, available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=OM>; National Center for Statistics and Information, available at <https://www.ncsi.gov.om/>

<sup>30</sup> The statistics are unpublished and were obtained through official correspondence from the Omani Ministry of Labor to support this research paper. Request reference number: MOL/2025/101544, dated 7 August 2025.

<sup>31</sup> The total absorption rate is the number of people who found employment divided by the total number of job seekers; in this case,  $172,443 \div 305,600 = 0.5643$ , or 56.43%.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Howlett, "Beyond Good and Evil in Policy Implementation: Instrument Mixes, Implementation Styles, and Second-Generation Theories of Policy Instrument Choice", *Policy and Society*, Vol.23, No.2, 2004, pp. 1-17.

<sup>33</sup> "Royal Decree No. 82/2020 issuing the Employment Security System (Repealed)" (Arabic), Sultanate of Oman, available at <https://decree.om/2020/rd20200082/>

<sup>34</sup> See Social Protection Fund, "Employment Security Scheme", available at [https://www.spf.gov.om/en/insurance\\_programs/employment-security-scheme/](https://www.spf.gov.om/en/insurance_programs/employment-security-scheme/)

<sup>35</sup> See Shura Council, "Shura Council's Youth and Human Resources Committee Hosts Social Protection Fund Officials", 19 September 2024, available at <https://www.shura.om/News/>

<sup>36</sup> "أزمة المسرحيين عن العمل ومطالبتنا بشكل عاجل لأهميتها بإعادة صرف منفعة الأمان الوظيفي"، Oman careers <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DNEJsk9K-6>

<sup>37</sup> Atheeroman, "بعض المسرحيين من العمل في عامي 2019 و2021 لم تعرض عليهم وظائف حتى الآن"، متاح على [https://www.instagram.com/reel/DNDmiRtL\\_h](https://www.instagram.com/reel/DNDmiRtL_h)

<sup>38</sup> "Royal Decree No. 53/2023 issuing the Labor Law", Sultanate of Oman, available at <https://decree.om/2023/rd20230053/>

<sup>39</sup> وكالة الأنباء العُمانية، "وزارة العمل: أكثر من 245 ألف منشأة لا تضم أي مواطن عُماني ضمن قواها العاملة بنسبة تعمين صفر بالمائة مقابل 1,1 مليون وافد"، متاح على <https://omannews.gov.om/topics/ar/3/show/450090>

<sup>40</sup> عادل اليافعي ومي الغدانية، "إلزامية توظيف العُمانيين"، جريدة عُمان، 19 أيار/ مايو 2025، متاح على <https://www.omandaily.com> (عادل اليافعي ومي الغدانية، "إلزامية توظيف العُمانيين، مرجع سابق").

<sup>41</sup> عادل اليافعي ومي الغدانية، "إلزامية توظيف العُمانيين، مرجع سابق".

<sup>42</sup> جريدة عُمان، "التعمين يصطدم بالتحايل واستغلال الثغرات في القوانين"، 8 حزيران/ مايو 2021، متاح على <https://www.omandaily.com>

<sup>43</sup> See National Centre for Statistics and Information, "Monthly Statistical Bulletin", June 2025, available at: <https://www.ncsi.gov.om/event-details/4>

<sup>44</sup> Crystal A. Ennis, "Citizenship without Belonging? Contesting Economic Space in Oman", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.52 No.4, 2020, pp. 759-764, available at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743820001063>.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Howlett and Ishani Mukherjee, "Policy design and non-design: A continuum of formulation modalities", in Michael Howlett and Ishani Mukherjee (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Policy Design*, Routledge, London, 2018, pp. 305-315.

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<sup>48</sup> انظر إلى وزارة العمل، **منصة تجديد**. تاريخ الزيارة 26 آب/أغسطس 2025، متاح على [/https://taj.mol.gov.om/taj](https://taj.mol.gov.om/taj)

<sup>49</sup> Michael Howlett, Ishani Mukherjee, and J. J. Woo, "From tools to toolkits in policy design studies: The new design orientation towards policy formulation research", *Policy and Politics*, Vol.43 No.2, 2015, pp. 291-311, available at <https://doi.org/10.1332/147084414X13992869118596>

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<sup>51</sup> مي الغدانية، "مجلس الشورى يناقش وزير العمل في "مبادرات التوظيف المؤقتة"، جريدة عُمان، 15 كانون الأول / ديسمبر

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<sup>52</sup> شؤون عمانية، "تساؤلات حول مستقبل "مبادرات التوظيف المؤقتة".." هذه تفاصيل مناقشة وزير العمل في مجلس الشورى"،

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<sup>53</sup> Michael Howlett and R. P. Lejano, "Tales from the crypt: The rise and fall (and rebirth?) of policy design", *Administration & Society*, Vol.45 No.3, 2013, pp. 357-381, available at

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<sup>54</sup> زكريا الهميمي، "قضية الباحثين عن عمل في سلطنة عمان (قراءة في الأسباب والنتائج نحو حلول عملية مستدامة)"، صحيفة

شؤون عُمانية، 20 شباط / فبراير 2022، متاح على <https://shuoon.com/?p=120283>

<sup>55</sup> Hidden unemployment, as defined by researcher Ali bin Abdul Hussein Al-Luwati, is an economic situation in which individuals are overqualified for their current jobs; it can be considered a type of unemployment.