



Programme

Women in the private sector in the Middle East and North Africa

Monday 24 – Thursday 27 March 2014 | WP1321

UN Women's annual report 2011-2012 highlights gender discrimination as a vast economic burden. Almost one billion women worldwide fall short of their potential economic contribution due to gender based barriers in decision making and leadership, labour markets, financial services and education and training. Evidence shows that countries with greater equality are more competitive and grow faster. In 2012, the World Bank projected that elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in the workplace could increase productivity per worker by up to 40 per cent.

For countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), investments in human capital, increased levels of female educational attainment and indications of delayed age of marriage have not yet translated substantially into increases in women's participation in economic life.

In the private sector, the OECD estimates that by further enabling and fostering women the region could increase its GDP growth per capita by as much as 25%. Only 1.2% of managers in the MENA region are female, compared to an 18.6% average worldwide, and one in eight women in the region lead their own business, compared to one in three men. At present, women's level of employment is much higher in the public sector across the MENA, which ESCWA reports is related to educated urban women's preference for the better opportunities the public sector offers for a work-life balance.

Countries undergoing transition in the region also face additional challenges of rebuilding economies and infrastructure, revitalising industry and finding jobs for the growing mass of unemployed. The development of strong economies that enable all citizens to enhance their livelihoods is crucial.

Focusing on Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Iraq and the Palestinian Occupied Territories, the conference aims to:

- identify the opportunities and constraints in women's economic involvement, particularly in private sector employment in the Middle East;
- examine pathways to women's economic empowerment and share lessons learned – examples include widows or lone women breadwinning for their families, and women's entrepreneurship;
- gain greater understanding of the needs and perspectives of local activists, religious and secular, for promoting greater gender equality in the economy;
- and identify potential areas of co-operation between government, business and civil society, and best practice in economic engagement in the private sector and promotion of inclusivity.

Held at Casa Árabe, Cordoba, Spain

By invitation only

In partnership with:

With support from:



Casa Árabe
البيت العربي



Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
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la Ciencia y la Cultura



Cátedra UNESCO de Resolución de Conflictos
UNIVERSIDAD DE CORDOBA



BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

Monday 24 March

1700	Participants arrive
1900	Buffet Dinner at Hotel El Conquistador

Tuesday 25 March

	Breakfast
0900-0915	Welcome and introduction Eduardo López Busquets Director General, Casa Árabe, Cordoba Isabelle Jaques Programme Director, Wilton Park, Steyning Birgitta Holst Alani Director, Swedish Institute in Alexandria; Co-Chair of the OECD-MENA Women's Business Forum
0915-1045	1. Economic challenges and opportunities for women in the Middle East and North Africa Heba Handoussa Managing Director, Egypt Network for Integrated Development (ENID), Cairo Maya Morsy Gender Practice Team Leader, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Regional Centre, Cairo
1045-1115	Tea/coffee
1115-1245	2. Patterns of economic exclusion: a question of equality What are the barriers to women accessing private labour markets? What are the trends of women's exclusion from the workplace? What are the everyday challenges for women at grassroots level to gain access to economic power? How can women's participation in the 'informal economy' be combined with economic policies which produce jobs? What incentives/disincentives are there to working in the private sector? Emanuela Pozzan Senior Regional Gender Specialist Arab States, International Labour Organisation, (ILO), Beirut Yomna El Sheridy President, Business Women of Egypt 21 (BWE21); Founder, Managing Director, Special Foods Industry International (SFII), Cairo
1300-1500	Photograph and Lunch
1500-1630	3. Legal frameworks on gender in labour markets: what are the constraints to private sector employment? What works best in promoting gender sensitive legislation? What is the potential for regulatory intervention to ensure women's inclusion in businesses? What are the legislative enabling environments for women in identified countries? What are the trends in laws relating to gender and employment in the region? How can social and cultural hindrances to equality be countered? Nora Alim Legal Consultant, MENA-OECD Investment Programme's project 'Supporting women during the transition period', Cairo

Nicola Ehlermann-Cache

Acting Head, MENA-OECD Investment Programme, Global Relations Secretariat, OECD, Paris

1630-1700

Tea/coffee

1700-1830

4. Islam and women's role in the economy

How are perceptions towards women's role in the economy changing?

Hoda El Saadi

Assistant Professor, Department of Arabic and Islamic Civilizations, American University, Cairo

Amany Asfour

President, Egyptian Women's Business Association and Egyptian Federation of Business and Professional Women, Cairo

1915

Assemble for walk to restaurant Bodegas Campas

1930

Dinner

Wednesday 26 March

Breakfast

0840

Assemble to walk to conference venue

0900-1030

5. Education and skills development for employment in the private sector

What are the constraints on access to quality education? How better to focus on leadership development in the context of the working environment in today's Middle East? What are the differences in education in rural and urban environments?

Magda H Zaki

Minister Plenipotentiary; Director, Department of Education and Scientific Research, League of Arab States, Cairo

Maha El Shinnawy

Professor of Management, School of Business, The American University; Director of Goldman Sachs Women's Entrepreneurship and Leadership Program (WEL), Cairo

1030-1100

Tea/coffee

1100-1230

6. Self-employment and entrepreneurship: What more can be done to promote a constructive environment?

What are women's experiences of starting and growing businesses? How are schemes for economic empowerment fostered? What capacity building measures are needed? What is best practice? What role can civil society, and organisations of businesswomen, play?

Shaikha Al Maskari

Chairperson, Al Maskari Holding, Abu Dhabi

Essma Ben-Hamida

Co-Founder and Executive Director, Enda Inter-Arabe; President, Sanabel Microfinance Network of Arab Countries, Tunis

1230-1430

Lunch

1430-1600

7. Pathways to women's economic independence and economic security

This session consists of three parallel small group discussions, focussing on case studies or best practice exemplifying the respective issues

Discussion to focus on:

- What are the obstacles or challenges associated with this issue?
- What are the opportunities, or contextual considerations to take in to account
- What are the examples of best practice, or practical recommendations, for advancing the issue, either short or long-term?

Group 1 – Access to Financing

Estelle Brack

Senior Economist, Groupe BPCE, Paris

Group 2 – Use of information and communication technologies

Samia Totah

Chief Operating Officer, Bisan Systems Ltd, Ramallah

Group 3 – Cooperation between civil society, private sector and government

Susan Maroof

Director, Women Empowerment Organisation (WEO), Erbil

1600-1630

Tea/coffee

1630-1800

8. Conclusions and formulation of next steps

To include reports from discussion groups

Lahcen Achy

Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Beirut

1915

Assemble to walk to restaurant Casa Pepe la Juderia

1930

Dinner

Thursday 27 March

0800

Breakfast

0900

Participants depart