

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Gender mainstreaming in the MENA-OECD Competitiveness Programme**November 2018, Tunis, Tunisia**

This draft document is to trigger an exchange on the most appropriate ways to support gender equality and promote gender mainstreaming in the different regional working groups and fora of the MENA-OECD Competitiveness Programme during the implementation period 2019-2020.

The document shall be revised in light of the discussions at both the MENA-OECD Competitiveness Programme Steering Group and the MENA-OECD Women's Economic Empowerment Forum, to be held in November 2018 in Tunis, Tunisia.

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Background

Despite the achievements in recent years, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region still faces economic, social, political, humanitarian and security challenges. To regain stability and promote more rapid and fairer economic growth, the (MENA) economies committed in the 2016 MENA-OECD Ministerial Declaration to implement ambitious reforms in a number of policy areas. The overall objective of these reforms is to create economic opportunities for all, including marginalised youth and women, by fostering enterprise and private sector development in support of inclusive growth.

In response to MENA economies' call for more competitive business environments, the MENA-OECD Competitiveness Programme has been reflecting on how to achieve this objective by enriching the different policy areas with new and complementary angles of reflection. One key element that the Programme has been considering is, on the one hand, the extent to which and how to support gender and youth sensitive policies in all its core work areas and, on the other hand, how to connect the work in the different policy areas on this topic and strengthen linkages with other activities in the region specifically dedicated to promoting women's economic empowerment.

Gender equality and gender mainstreaming

The reflection on ways to further women and youth inclusion in the economy or ways in which to ensure gender equality and mainstream gender consideration is key for all economies.

Gender equality is not a natural outcome of the development process and there is a need to proactively promote gender equality policies (Dr. Kituyi, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development UNCTAD).

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.

Source: UN Women, [OSAGI Gender Mainstreaming - Concepts and definitions](#)

Gender mainstreaming is different from, and complementary to, specifically designed policies, which aim at redressing situations, which result from gender inequality. Gender mainstreaming relates to the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action to ensure that the gender perspective becomes an integral dimension in the design, implementation and monitoring of any policies, programmes and institutions. It encompasses the anticipation of potential differential impacts of policy actions on women and men and the possibility to design and implement gender-sensitive policy actions in order to maximise opportunities for all and avoid the adoption of measures which increase gender disparities. It is the process that affects the ability to understand the specific challenges and opportunities that defined policies present for women and men.

The wide-ranging United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promise to increase the prioritisation of gender equality and women's

empowerment within national and global development agendas. Indicators relating to women's economic empowerment appear in the gender specific SDG5 on "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" but they are also linked to the realisation of other SDGs which fall under the MENA-OECD Competitiveness Programme. In particular, ending poverty in all forms (SDG 1), promoting decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), fostering industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), reducing inequality (SDG 10), promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16) and developing a global partnership for sustainable development (SDG 17).

Competitiveness considerations guiding gender mainstreaming in the MENA region

Research, including by the MENA-OECD Women's Economic Empowerment Forum and the earlier OECD-MENA Women Business Forum, shows that significant achievements in women and girls education have not yet fully translated into the economic participation of women. Despite support measures and progress in recent years, different elements still affect women as producers and workers, including for instance women's limited resources and a significant gender gap in access to information, trainings and markets, ownership of land, property and finance. Women are also impacted by regulations that affect their access to the labour market such as obligations to take care of the family and engaging in unpaid care work. They are also facing constraints that affect their mobility and thus their opportunity to engage in work such as the availability of quality transportation and infrastructure.

Women's economic empowerment and their active participation in public life is critical for the future of the MENA region and the establishment of gender equality policies as well as mainstreaming is particularly topical. And indeed, in the Cairo Declaration on the Post-2015 Development Agenda for Women "Opportunities and Challenges"¹ by the League of Arab States, Arab countries reached consensus on the need for gender mainstreaming in all aspects and goals of the post-2015 development agenda. Specific reference in the Declaration is also made to women's economic empowerment and ensuring that women have access to equal opportunities and control over productive assets.

The MENA economies undeniably have an immense potential for development with a young and educated population. Closely located to the major European markets, the region is endowed with a large sized and young and female labour force. The median age in the MENA region is 25 years (ranging from less than 20 years in Iraq, the Palestinian Authority and Yemen to just over 30 in the GCC countries of Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE). This represents a younger median age than in other emerging regions except Sub Saharan Africa. Indeed, almost half of the total population in the MENA region is under 25 and the only countries where the ratio is lower than 40% are the labour importing Gulf countries of Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE. Yet, unemployment among young people remains stubbornly high in most countries (it is 42% in Egypt, 32% in Tunisia, 29% in Jordan and 20% in Morocco). Young women are particularly vulnerable with unemployment rates of women significantly higher than that of men, with on average 41% of young women unemployed against 23% of young men. In Jordan 62% of women are unemployed, 46% in Saudi Arabia and 44% in Egypt. If women are now highly educated in the MENA region (41.6% of women are enrolled in tertiary school), their potential remains unexploited as the MENA region records the lowest women labour force participation rates, of approximately 28% against 77% for men. (for more details see annex 1).

The female talent pool of the MENA region can be further trained and retained and may be a strong asset for businesses that are seeking to tap into the talent markets of emerging countries for knowledge intensive core business function. Yet, impediments for women to join and stay in the labour markets may

¹ <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/58/CSW58-declaration-cairo-en%20pdf.pdf/>

be a significant disadvantage for the region's economic development. It is thus desirable to consider whether and how higher levels of efficiency and productivity can be achieved through wider social inclusion and equity in the labour market, including through specific gender policies as well as gender mainstreaming considerations.

Unlocking women's considerable potential and capacities to contribute to political and economic life is estimated to provide \$600 billion in potential annual impact. Closing the gender gap in labour force participation rates would increase GDP by 47% in 2025 in MENA². It is therefore a key priority for the MENA-OECD Competitiveness Programme which wishes to ensure that all the different policy areas give full consideration to women's observations and concerns and that policy recommendations pay due attention to women economic empowerment.

The next section provides a preliminary review on the gender equality and mainstreaming considerations by the Programme's different regional fora.

Gender concerns in the MENA-OECD Competitiveness Programme: progress and way forward

The OECD champions gender equality in all areas of its work and for the past several years has been carrying out important work. The OECD has also been working in close partnership with the MENA economies to improve gender equality and women's empowerment through the MENA-OECD Initiative on Governance and Competitiveness for Development.

1. The MENA-OECD Steering Group

The OECD-MENA Initiative on Governance and Competitiveness includes gender components in both its Governance and Competitiveness Programmes.

The Women in Government Platform of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme exchanges good practices and lessons learnt to advance gender equality in public life and supports building gender-sensitive parliaments among OECD and MENA countries. That platform is complementary to the MENA-OECD Women's Economic Empowerment Forum (WEEF) launched by the Competitiveness Programme in 2017 to support women's economic empowerment and gender equality. Indeed, promoting women's political empowerment goes hand in hand with women's economic empowerment.

During the March 2018 Steering Group meeting the session on "Building inclusive governance" participants welcomed the consultation on creating synergies between the Programmes on women's empowerment in economic and public life in the MENA region. To support the discussion, a note was developed with the aim of engaging in consultations support linkages between good governance, protection and access to economic and political rights and justice. The OECD Secretariat was also invited to continue its alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to support the MENA region in the implementation of these goals. In particular in the fields of reducing inequality and promoting gender equality, promoting decent work and economic growth, promoting peace, justice, providing access

² The power of parity: how advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth, McKinsey Global Institute, 2015

to justice and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions and strong and strengthening means of implementation and global partnerships.

Building thereon and in light with the Competitiveness Programme's commitment, the Programme's November 2018 Steering Group seeks to further define gender mainstreaming within the different regional fora and work streams. Whereas the WEEF specifically aims at enhancing gender equality, including by giving consideration to the notion of gender mainstreaming, the other regional fora are dedicated to investment and trade, SME and entrepreneurship development, improved business climate through integrity and good corporate principles, improving networking capacity and involvement in private business organisation in a context of fragility.

2. MENA-OECD Women's Economic Empowerment Forum (WEEF)

The Programme has engaged for over a decade in supporting women's economic empowerment. With a view to establishing an action plan to promote entrepreneurship and women's employment in the MENA region, a summit of women entrepreneurs was held in the context of the MENA-OECD Ministerial meeting (Marrakech, 2009). As a follow up, the OECD-MENA Women's Business Forum, a unique regional platform that brought together some 700 representatives of the private sector, civil society and governments from the MENA region and the OECD, engaged in innovative analytical discussions to make recommendations to address policy gaps in support of women entrepreneurs. Main work on women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship has notably been captured in four OECD publications³ and the 2017 updated Directory of Initiatives Supporting Women's Economic Empowerment⁴. These publications provide an overview of existing support mechanisms for women entrepreneurs in the 18 countries of the region, inform on women's access to support services and financing for entrepreneurship. They also bring to light needs for enhanced gender data collection as well as the fact that although impact of different legal provisions on women autonomy and agency.

As the OECD-MENA Women's Business Forum inspired the creation of the regional platform "Khadija", launched in 2016 by the League of Arab States with the support of UN Women, the Competitiveness Programme launched a new platform in 2017.

Activities in 2017-2018:

The new MENA-OECD Women's Economic Empowerment Forum was launched in 2017 under the aegis of its co-chairs H. E. Dr. Sahar Nasr, Minister of International Cooperation and Investment of Egypt and H. E. Marie-Claire Swärd Capra, Ambassador of Sweden to Algeria. The WEEF brings together representatives from governments, business, civil society and academia from OECD and MENA economies, to exchange experiences and good practices to boost women's economic empowerment. It will monitor and raise the visibility of reforms countries are taking to support women's equality and counter

³ "The Inventory of Policies, Institutions and Programs Supporting Women's Enterprise Development" (OECD, 2012); "Women in Business: Policies to Support Women's Entrepreneurship Development in the MENA Region" (OECD 2012) ; "Women in Business 2014: Accelerating the Development of Entrepreneurship in the MENA Region" (OECD, 2014) ; "Women's Economic Empowerment in the MENA Region: The Impact of Legal Frameworks in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia" (OECD, 2017)

⁴ <http://www.oecd.org/mena/competitiveness/mena-weef-directory.htm>

discrimination. The Forum also advances reflection on both gender mainstreaming and will monitor countries' actions ensuring the integration of a gender perspective in the critical policy areas of the MENA-OECD Competitiveness Programme. Furthermore, it will identify the regions strategic gender data development and collection as well as the data collection needs with a view to developing and reinforcing domestic capacity and skills to support informed policy reforms.

Indeed, during the 2018 November WEEF meeting in Tunisia, discussions and working sessions will take place around three themes:

- Good practices in legal reform and enforcement
- Gender sensitive data gathering
- Gender mainstreaming across policy areas and programmes

Future work in 2019 and beyond:

In 2019, the WEEF will continue advocating for legal, institutional and policy reforms in support of gender equality and non-discrimination to enhance women's participation at all levels of the economy. The WEEF will work at regional level and continue the national consultations and advisory missions to promote reforms. The priorities of the year will be:

- Documenting, and analysing good practices on legal reforms and enforcement to enhance women's economic empowerment.
- Advancing in the implementation of strategies for gender disaggregated data.
- Enhancing mainstreaming of gender considerations across the MENA-OECD Competitiveness Programme, and in particular supporting the framework conditions to promote women's employment and entrepreneurship.

3. Working Group on Investment and Trade

Trade and investment strategies, policies and agreements rarely include a gender dimension and measure their impact on women's economic empowerment. There are however, policy measures that could be considered to foster gender equality, empowerment and employment in the areas of trade and investment.

Activities in 2017-2018:

The Programme started to reflect on the issue by collecting existing research work on the impact of trade and investment policies on women. Given the scarcity of data and policy discussions in the area, it was decided to explore the topic during the 2018 MENA-OECD Working Group on Investment and Trade.

The forthcoming meeting of the MENA-OECD Working Group on Investment and Trade entitled "Making trade and investment policies work for all" will take place in Jordan on 27-28 November 2018. One session will be devoted to "Promoting inclusive trade and investment policies in the MENA region" and will focus on the social impact and sustainability of trade and investment policies in the MENA region. The session will notably discuss how trade and investment policies can create opportunities for all segments of the population, including women, and will address the issue of supporting gender equality in investment and trade strategies and agreements.

This session will build on on-going work in the OECD related to GVCs impact on gender and FDI qualities indicators.

Future work in 2019:

This discussion in the Working Group will pave the way for more work, notably the conduct of further research and the development of adapted policy recommendations – to the extent possible – to support gender equality in investment and trade policies, enhance women’s access and participation in GVCs, and on indicators on gender inclusiveness in FDI, reflecting on-going OECD analytical and statistical work.

4. Working Group on SMEs and Entrepreneurship

Women’s entrepreneurship and economic empowerment is at the core of the activities of the Working Group, which includes gender elements in each of its activities (dialogue, analysis and technical support) and priority themes. The SME and entrepreneurship activities include a special focus on the promotion of women’s entrepreneurship, in collaboration with the WEEF.

Activities in 2017-2018:

The July 2017 meeting of the Working Group on SMEs and Entrepreneurship “Boosting SMEs for diversification and inclusion in the MENA region” in Rome included a session on “materialising the economic potential of women through enterprise policy”. This session presented the key findings of the publication ‘Women’s economic empowerment in selected MENA countries: The impact of legal frameworks in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia’ which was officially launched together with the WEEF later in October 2017 in Egypt.

The July 2018 meeting of the SME Working Group “Building inclusive, resilient and competitive economies through effective SME policies” took place in Tunis and included a session on “legal and policy reforms to empower women entrepreneurs”. The meeting notably focused on how to mainstream the SME Working Group’s priorities towards the economic empowerment of women in the MENA region. Those priorities include improving business environments, fostering entrepreneurship and SME growth, facilitating access to finance, and enhancing SME policymaking.

Future work in 2019:

During 2019, one of the priorities of the MENA-OECD Working Group on SMEs and Entrepreneurship will be to develop analytical work on improving and promoting SME policy-making with a gender lens.

5. Working Group on Corporate Governance

Improving women’s participation in corporate leadership is a top priority for the Working Group on Corporate Governance.

Activities in 2017-2018:

The 2017 Working Group on Corporate Governance included a session on “Improving gender balance in corporate leadership and enhancing board diversity”.

A focus group comprising of key regional experts was formed to drive the identification of good practices and policy recommendations in the area of gender balance in corporate leadership for MENA countries.

The 2018 Working Group on Corporate Governance took place in Lisbon in July. One of the key topics in this meeting was ‘Opportunities to improve gender balance in corporate leadership’. This session aimed to identify challenges and ways to overcome barriers, so that by the end of 2019, more policy-makers, relevant institutions and the corporate sector be aware of good practices on gender balance in the boardrooms and in senior management.

Future work in 2019:

A paper will be finalized in 2018 on Gender Balance in Corporate Leadership in the MENA region. It will be published in 2019. The ambitions of the Working Group for 2019 include building a knowledge portal on women on boards and in senior management in MENA, supporting data collection and information gathering to better understand the obstacles in the region, and developing policy advice as well as actively engage with institutions to promote gender balance in senior management.

Box 1. The importance of gender mainstreaming in Corporate Governance

As recognised in the G20/OECD Principles on Corporate Governance, diversity in the boardroom is integral to sound corporate governance. Therefore, gender balance on boards and corporate leadership is key to avoid ‘groupthink’ and helps to ensure that the board is able to exercise objective and independent judgements on corporate matters. MENA countries have increasingly embraced corporate governance mechanisms to stimulate growth, investment and employment; however, closing the gender gap in corporate decision-making roles is still a challenge. Therefore the MENA-OECD Working Group on Corporate Governance has placed this at the centre of its work.

The 2017 Working Group on Corporate Governance was productive and including examples from Norway and France as well as Jordan and Morocco, both from a company point of view (LafargeMaroc) and from a women’s forum perspective (Club des Femmes Administrateurs, Morocco). The main take-away was that MENA countries need to be more active, providing transparency on board composition and board nomination practices to promote gender balance in the corporate sector and especially in corporate leadership. There was also consensus on the necessity of creating more networks for women that can be used as a platform to share experiences, to find mentorships and sponsorships opportunities and role models in the region. Also, male champions should play a critical role in making change happen. Moreover, work conducted throughout 2017 highlighted that data on women in corporate leadership is scarce. Therefore the 2017 Working Group meeting was used as a platform to build consensus on the need for MENA countries to engage in this work.

6. MENA-OECD Business Advisory Board

All the analytical work in the framework of the MENA-OECD Business Advisory Board (BAB) pays special attention to the needs and concerns of female entrepreneurs. Gender is also included as a core theme in the events organised under the BAB.

Activities in 2017-2018:

The BAB was launched in September 2018 in Madrid. It put a special emphasis on the inclusion of female representatives of the private sector throughout all policy debates by dedicating a full session to “Promoting gender balance in top management and business organisations”. One of the issues of the discussion was how to promote the participation of business women and raise their voice in business organisations and public private dialogue initiatives. This session also presented the findings of a recent OECD report to improve gender balance in corporate leadership, including main challenges and ongoing initiatives to support women.

In addition to this, specific efforts were made in terms of reaching out to organisations related to women’s economic empowerment, based on a mapping exercise of private sector organizations in the MENA region and a database built within the framework of the Programme’s component on Women Economic Empowerment. This allowed identifying organizations devoted to promote gender specific concerns.

Future work in 2019:

Regarding the BAB, the next steps include linking the BAB and the MENA-OECD Competitiveness Programme through the creation of focus groups to channel the views of the private sector into the MENA-OECD Competitiveness Programme Working Groups and to participate in the respective meetings. One of the focus groups will be specifically dedicated to women’s economic empowerment, and some of its members will attend the WEEF in order to bring the views of the private sector to the reflection on women’s economic empowerment in the MENA region.

7. MENA-OECD Business Integrity Network

Integrity and fighting corruption is a challenging issue in itself and has become more discussable only recently. Therefore, mainstreaming gender in this topic is not an evident undertaking. Women are fully associated to this work, including through the invitation of representatives of women business associations but also women law enforcement experts or representatives of anti-corruption agencies in the region.

Activities in 2017-2018:

The MENA Competitiveness Programme’s Secretariat supported the “Conference on gender equality in business” on 8 March 2018 at the OECD in organising a session on “Women in compliance” with the view to exploring to what extent this policy area warrants further exploration and could be also addressed in the context of a forthcoming meeting of the MOBIN meeting.

Future work in 2019:

An exploratory session of an hour and a half will be scheduled in March 2019, in which the issues related to women and business integrity will be explored, for future discussion in 2020. The main topics that could be addressed are presented in the box below.

Box 2. Gender considerations in business integrity

Debates pertaining to the involvement of women in corruption are not scientifically very advanced. Some argue that women are more frequently victims of corruption by public administrations in business related activities such as the registration of their business, and therefore remain in part in the informal sector. On an anecdotal basis it is also said that SMEs are more subject to extortion than MNEs; we know in the region

that a very limited number of SMEs are women owned or managed. Corruption is also said to harm women more than men as women are more exposed to extortion in their daily lives. For instance it is argued that women are victims of corruption when facing other public services such as health or education.

At international level some argue that women bribe less than men. The reasons put forward are notably because they may be more ethical. But others support the idea that it is because women are not empowered and do not reach managerial and executive positions as the gender work is showing.

Some reflection have been initiated on whether women in compliance functions can adequately ensure and enforce compliance principle in men dominated environments (ie many women lawyers in charge of compliance in MNEs where business and transactions are dominantly executed by men.

8. *The Economic Resilience Task Force*

There is ample evidence that some groups in society, including women, are more affected by situations of fragility. One of the objectives of the MENA-OECD Economic Resilience Task Force is to identify women's specific economic needs in fragile state situations. On the one hand, women are disproportionately affected by conflict. At the same time, supporting women can have exponential benefits. For instance, women play a critical role in post-conflict rebuilding efforts since they are often the only breadwinners left. Women tend to be more trusted in society since they tend to participate less in violent acts during war. Supporting female entrepreneurship has positive impacts at the wider household level, promotes women economic and political participation.

Activities in 2017-2018:

The launch of the Economic Resilience Task Force in May 2017 in Beirut included a session on the economic impact of the refugee crisis on women and on the legal barriers hindering their livelihood opportunities. During the session, the critical role that women can play in post-conflict rebuilding was discussed.

The 2018 regional meeting of the Economic Resilience Task Force taking place in Jeddah in December, will include a high level panel session on "promoting economic empowerment of women in fragile and conflict-affected situations". This session will be chaired by Ambassador Sward-Capra, co-chair of the WEEF, which will enable to better link the discussions from both platforms.

Future work in 2019:

Several background notes are being drafted on for the Economic Resilience Task Force including on FDI trends, SME initiatives, the role of the private sector and country case studies. These notes will be reviewed through a gender lens. Additionally, a case study will focus on women refugees in Jordan –as part of the research work for the WEEF but also presented to the participants of the Task Force– and will be finalized in 2019.

Conclusions

The gender work by the Competitiveness Programme has been impacted in the former years by the wider engagement of the OECD in this area. Indeed, the organisation advocates gender equality in all areas and over the last decade has been carrying out important work on women's economic empowerment in OECD Member countries and non-members. Following the launch of the OECD horizontal Gender Initiative in 2010 and the 2013 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Education,

Employment and Entrepreneurship, the OECD set up the OECD Gender Data Portal in 2013. Updated annually, the portal has grown to include about 85 indicators on Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Health and Development, and Public Life (see: <http://www.oecd.org/gender/data/>).

With the 2015 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Public Life, OECD members and adhering non-members are invited to take action on the significant gender disparities and biases affecting women's participation in economic and public life. The OECD 2017 publication "The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle" provides a detailed assessment on whether and/or how countries are making progress towards gender equality. The Competitiveness Programme will enhance collaboration with the variety of directorates that engage in regular research and publications on a multiplicity of subjects.

The work by the Competitiveness Programme has also been guided and complemented by the endeavours of other international or regional organisations. For instance, the League of Arab states, the Cawtar, UNWomen or the Union for the Mediterranean, which over the last five years were increasingly concerned by gender mainstreaming.

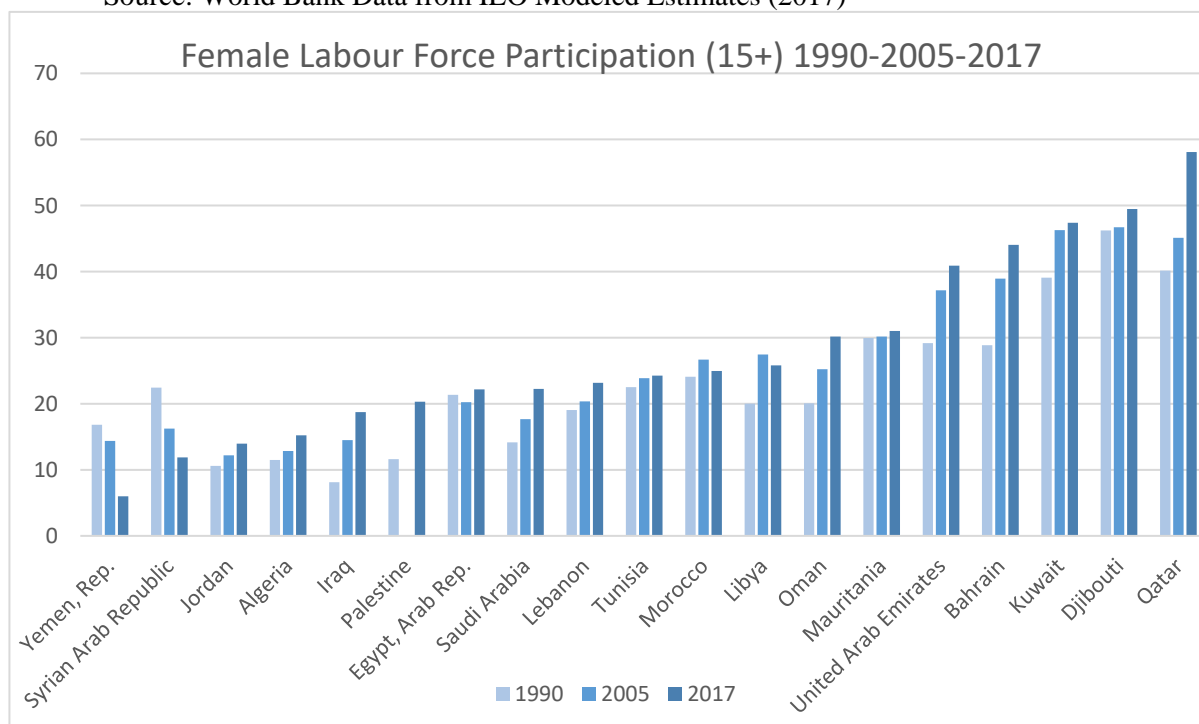
In the years to come the different working group will integrate gender in their projects and analytical work, and special attention should be given to data collection and analysis. However, it remains uncertain whether every working group will be able to have access to gender-disaggregated data due to the significant lack of available statistics in the region. It is important to remind that mainstreaming gender throughout the Programme does not mean having one session dedicated to gender in each annual meeting, but requires including the gender aspect in the foundation of the work. Also, in the context of the Programme's effort to add a gender lenses to the different regional fora, the relation with the different OECD divisions as well as the regional and international organisations shall be reinforced. Indeed, different divisions will report on progress in the OECD context in different policy areas. Furthermore, different organisations will attend the 2018 WEEF to share their views and experience on the way in which they engage in mainstreaming.

Annex 1: Female Education and Labour Force Participation in the MENA region

In the MENA region, women educational participation and performance has increased significantly in recent decades. In most countries of the region, the gender gap in secondary education has narrowed, 77.2% of women are enrolled in secondary school against 82% of men. Women's literacy rates increased as well, from 45% in 1990, to 58% in 2000 and reached 72% in 2017, still lower than men's literacy rates of 86%. Tertiary school enrolment rates for women in the MENA region have increased significantly since 2005, up from 23.7% to 41.6%⁵ in 2016, exceeding men's enrolment rates of 39%, as well as the world average of 38.9%.

Yet, this significant progress has not translated into equal participation in or access to opportunities in employment, entrepreneurship or public life. While women represent 48% of total population, across the region, the regional average female labour force participation rate in 2017 remains the lowest in the world at 28%, compared to 77% for men. Qatar has the highest women labour force participation rate (58%) in the region, and Yemen the lowest, with only 5% of women participating to the labour force⁶.

Source: World Bank Data from ILO Modeled Estimates (2017)

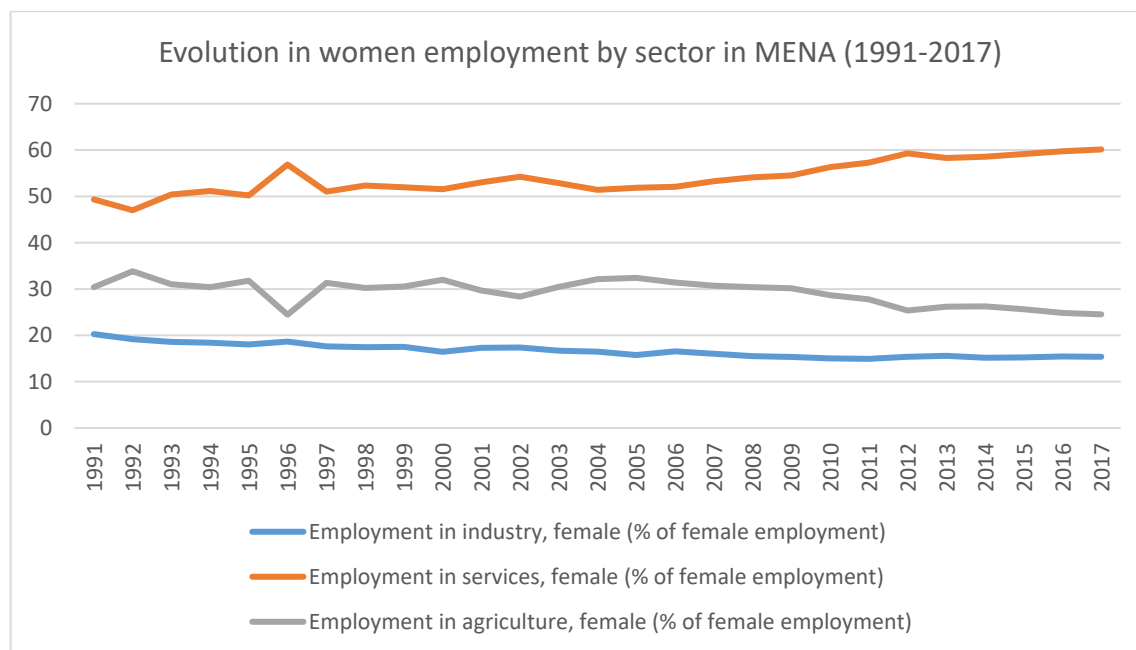


When MENA women do work, they tend to be concentrated in a more restricted range of professions than men, occupy lower paying jobs, with women under-represented in high-level managerial positions. In the MENA region, 15.3% of employed women work in the industry sector, 24% in agriculture and 60% in services. The percentage of women working

⁵ World Bank DataBank, UNESCO Institute of Statistics

⁶ Modeled ILO estimates, 2018

in the service sector has increased continuously since the beginning of the 1990s. In the region, 31% of working women hold vulnerable employment. 23% of the firms in MENA have female participation in ownership, and only 5% of the MENA firms have women as top manager.⁷ According to the GEM MENA Report 2017, the MENA region as a whole exhibits the widest gender gap in terms of early-stage entrepreneurial activity as women in this region were only half as likely to be engaged in TEA as their male counterparts⁸



Source: World Bank Data from ILO Modeled Estimates (2017)

Moreover, the MENA region faces a remarkably high gender gap in unemployment rates with 18% of women unemployed against 8% of men.⁹ Among the young population (15-24 years old), this gender gap is even higher: 41% of young women were unemployed against 23% of young men, while the labour force participation rate for ages 15-24 are respectively 14% and 44% for men and women. Therefore, additionally to young women's participation to the labour market is the lowest, their unemployment rates are almost 50% higher than young men's are. The share of young women who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is particularly high in the MENA region. For example, in 2015, 35% of young women were NEETs in Algeria and Egypt, 65% in Iraq, and 25% in Saudi Arabia¹⁰.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ GEM MENA Regional Report 2017

⁹ Modeled ILO estimates, 2018

¹⁰ Ibid



THE ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The OECD is a unique forum where the governments of 35 democracies work together to address the economic, social and environmental challenges of globalisation. The OECD is at the forefront of efforts to understand and to help governments respond to new developments and concerns, such as inclusive growth, the information economy and the challenges of an ageing population. The Organisation provides a setting where governments can compare policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, identify good practice and work to co-ordinate domestic and international policies.

<http://www.oecd.org>

The MENA-OECD Competitiveness Programme supports reforms to mobilise investment, private sector development and entrepreneurship as driving forces for inclusive growth and employment in the MENA region, building also on the need to mainstream the region's increasingly well trained youth and women. Launched in 2005 at the request of the MENA governments, the Programme addresses regional and national challenges through innovative policy dialogue, peer-learning and capacity building. It has grown to become a dynamic initiative that continuously adapts its focus to the changing realities of the region.

Participating economies include Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

www.oecd.org/mena/competitiveness

The MENA-OECD Women's Economic Empowerment Forum (WEEF), launched in 2017, addresses critical issues such as: equal access to economic opportunities, challenges in implementing legal reforms, gendered data collection, and achieving Sustainable Development Goals. It benefits from the inputs of reputed national experts as well as experts from other regional and international organisations.

[MENA-OECD Women's Economic Empowerment Forum](#)



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