

In cooperation with

Towards More Inclusive Economies: Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment in the Mediterranean Region

20 and 21 September 2023

Palau de Pedralbes, Barcelona

Background information

Policies empowering women strengthen the economy and are critical for lasting progress in development. Slowing global growth, the rising risks of climate change, conflict, and the lingering effects of COVID-19 have dealt a major setback to this progress in recent years—with disproportionate effects on the lives and livelihoods of Women.

Women in this region face significant barriers to full economic participation, including unequal access to education, finance, and employment opportunities, as well as legal and cultural obstacles that limit their ability to start and grow businesses, enter executive positions, and reach their full potential.

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the importance of markets and private enterprise in driving economic growth cannot be overstated. This is especially true in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region where there has been a significant increase in entrepreneurial activity in recent years, notable in a region that has traditionally leaned towards public sector employment. This increase in entrepreneurship is especially promising when combined with the high levels of educational attainment in many parts of the region. However, the glaring weakness continues to be the substantial barriers women face in pursuing their entrepreneurial dreams. Globally, 34 percent of small and medium businesses are woman owned. However, in the MENA region only 23 percent of businesses are woman-owned, ranging from 7 percent in Yemen to 49 percent in Tunisia. Further, MENA on average suffers the lowest female business participation rate in the world (19 percent). It is a multifaceted problem that stems from a combination of factors, including the lack of quality 'work ready' focused education, structural discrimination within the legal environment, and broad socio-cultural biases and attitudes.

Moreover, while the industry 4.0 revolution - which is currently transforming our societies and systems - is creating opportunities for new and greener productive models, women entrepreneurs in the Mediterranean region seem to be little aware of those offering new technologies. Yet, access to technology tends to foster entrepreneurship and economic participation. Education is critical as well for empowering women economic empowerment. More women involved in the labour markets and in leadership positions would represent a win-win situation for them and for the society as well, since it boosts economic growth for everyone.

The 43 UfM Member States in the last UfM Ministerial Declaration on Women committed to promote the transition to formal employment for women employed in the shadow economy, home-based work, care activities and in micro-small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as work in the agricultural sector and own-account and part-time work. They agreed on supporting women's entrepreneurship, through incubation programmes for the early, seed and growth stages, on boosting investments on entrepreneurship education and targeted gender-sensitive financial services as well as on stimulating the financial institutions to adopt a gender-smart lens in their investment, especially for the Venture and Equity funds.

Objective of the conference

This conference will bring together experts, policymakers, and entrepreneurs to explore strategies for overcoming these barriers and promoting women's economic empowerment in the Mediterranean region. Through a series of panel discussions, it will examine key challenges and opportunities in the areas of education and workforce participation, entrepreneurship, access to finance, legal and regulatory reform, and gender equality in the work environment.

The different stakeholders will have the opportunity to share good practices and lessons learned to foster women's economic empowerment in different sectors and levels within the Euro-Mediterranean region. The distinguished speakers will discuss ways to bridge the gap in women economic participation, to facilitate female entrepreneurship, to enhance the legal systems and make them more inclusive, and to increase the percentage of women in leadership positions.

DRAFT PROGRAMME**20 September 2023****15.00 – 16.30****Opening Session**

Senén Florensa, President, Mediterranean Commission of the European League of Economic Cooperation (ELEC). Executive President, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) – Barcelona

Francesc Homs, President, Spanish Committee of the European League of Economic Cooperation (ELEC) – Barcelona

John Paul Grech Deputy Secretary General Union for the Mediterranean (UFM) - Barcelona

Dialogue:

Natalia Bayona, Executive Director of UNWTO

Petra Mateos, Professor of Financial Economics, Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Leila Belkhiria Jaber, President, Chambre Nationale des Femmes Cheffes d'Entreprises (CNFCE)

Moderated by: Andrea Tinagli, EIB Representative at the Union for the Mediterranean

16.30 – 17.30h**Session 1: Bridging the Gap in Women Economic Participation: Education, Labour Market and Digital Skills**

Moderated by: Soukaina Bouraoui, Executive Director, CAWTAR and President of the Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation

Speakers:

Gaëlle Ferrant*, Economist and Gender Specialist, OECD, Global Relations and Cooperation, Middle East and Africa

Carmen Geha, Co-principal investigator, Support and Accelerate Women's inclusion (SAWI) project; and Founder of Soltara Consulting

Victoria Tur Gómez*, Head of the Department of Cooperation with the Arab World and Asia, Directorate for Cooperation with Africa and Asia, AECID

Rym Ayadi, President and Founder of EMEA

17.30 – 18.30

Session 2: Breaking the Mold: Legal and Regulatory Reforms for Women's Economic Empowerment

Moderated by: Anna Estrada, Economist, LECE Board Member

Speakers:

Enrico Giordano, Secretary General, LECE Italy

Leila Rhiwi*, Representative for Morocco, UN Women

Miriam Izquierdo, President, Fundación Woman Forward. LECE Board Members

Fairouz Habache*, President, Women in Business of Algeria (WIBA)

Carme Hortalà Vallvé*, Manager at GVCGaesco Valores & Member Economic Commission at FC Barcelona, LECE Board Member

21st September 2023

9.30 – 11.00 **Session 3: Women as main contributors to the economic growth: Entrepreneurs to Challenge the Status Quo**

Moderated by: Anna Dorangricchia, Project Manager Gender Equality, Social and Civil Affairs Division, UfM

Speakers:

Anne France Wittman, DG NEAR Women Economic Inclusion Gender Expert

Lilia Hachem Naas, Chief Office for the Middle East and North Africa (OMENA), International Trade Centre

María Helena de Felipe Lehtonen*, President, Association of Organisations of Mediterranean Businesswomen (AFAEMME), President FEPIIME, Member of the European Economic and Social Committee

Giorgio Mosangini*, Team Leader – Green Entrepreneurship & Civil Society

11.00 – 11.30 **Coffee Break**

11.30 – 13.00 **Session 4: Women on Board(s): Addressing the Lack of Women in Executive and Managing Positions in the MENA Region**

Moderated by: Gemma Aubarelli, Director of the Culture, Gender and Civil Society Department, European Institute of the Mediterranean

Speakers:

Raghda Kurdi, Arab International Women's Forum

Maria Teixidor, President of the Women and Enterprise Committee (PIMEC)

Noha El-Mikawy*, Dean, School of Global Affairs and Public Policy (GAPP), American University in Cairo (AUC)

13.00 – 13:15 **Closing Session**

Javier Arias, President ELECI