

# Promoting Productive Employment and Decent Work for Women

in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine



تعزيز العمل الإنتاجي  
و العمل اللائق للمرأة  
في مصر والأردن وفلسطين



## Context

Difficult political transitions, security challenges, declining oil prices and protracted regional conflicts continue to weigh on the economic prospects of the region. The rate of extreme poverty in the MENA region rose from 3.8% in 2015 to 7.2% in 2018, it is estimated that the current poverty level in the MENA region is up to 7.9% in 2020, as the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic compounds the forces of conflict and climate change. As the pandemic intensifies the rise in poverty in the region, it threatens to push at least an additional 3 million people into extreme poverty (World bank).

Despite having achieved near equal rates of primary school enrolment and a dramatic drop in illiteracy rates for both women and men, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has struggled to translate this into participation in all aspects of political, social and economic life. The Global Gender Gap Report of 2021 ranks the last globally in the overall index and second-to-last, ahead of only South Asia, on Economic Participation. The region has the world's lowest female labour force participation rates, the overall labour force participation rate in the region in 2020 is 47.9%. For women it stands at around 20% The lowest compared to other regions (ILO STAT).

There is a need for further progress in a number of interconnected areas to increase the economic participation of women. These areas include improvements required in the legal regulatory frameworks, enhanced access to skills training, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work (reduce the high cost of child and elderly care, household chores), improved access to decent working conditions, ensure social security coverage (maternity and pension), enhance access to resources (land, property, finances), to mention a few.

Recent studies by ILO and UN Women reveal that although traditional attitudes about gender equality dominate, at least one quarter of men hold more open and equitable views, supporting women's economic, social, and political equality. Men's more equitable behaviours are associated with involved fatherhood and women's work outside the home.

## The Focus on Decent Work for Women

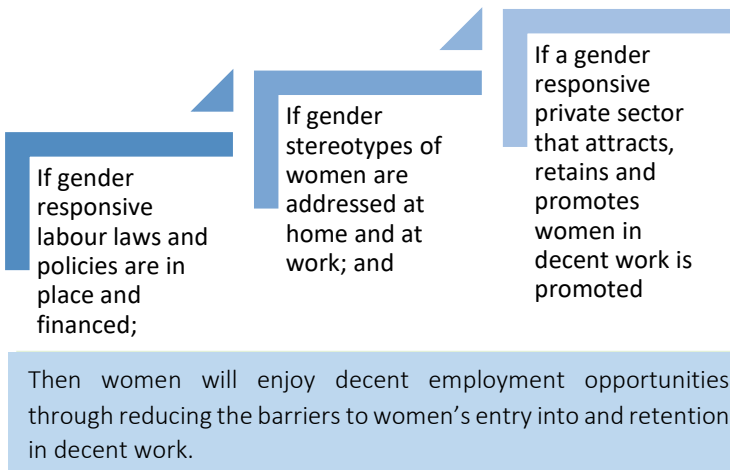
Economic security is critical to women's overall well-being and contributes to educational attainment, health, agency, family stability, and community engagement. To achieve economic empowerment, **efforts to expand the scale, type and quality of job opportunities are necessary, as well as facilitating conducive policies and legislations, and ensuring compatibility with family life in terms of maternity, child and elder care provisions and facilities.**

Ensuring equal access to decent work is one of the cornerstones of ILO and UN Women's work. This is evidenced by UN Women's strategic plan, under Impact Area 2: "Women, especially the poorest and most excluded, are economically empowered and benefit from development," and in ILO's Centenary Initiative on Women at Work. Women's lack of access to decent employment opportunities in one of the main drivers of their marginalization, high predisposition to poverty and overall economic exclusion.

It is against this background that **UN Women and ILO are implementing a multi-country programme to promote decent employment opportunities for women in Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine by addressing the structural causes of inequalities that women face in the region.** While this programme aims to tackle common issues across countries, it does so by taking into consideration country context specificities.

This programme will contribute to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, namely to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". Moreover, women's right to access decent work and equal pay are enshrined in the Agenda 2030 through Goal 8: regarding "full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value" (Target 8.5). Also notable in the SDGs is the aim to, "protect labour rights and promote the safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment" (Target 8.8).

## Theory of Change



The multi-country programme seeks to address barriers through a comprehensive approach that works both at the macro, meso and micro levels, aiming to **enhance productive employment and decent work for women in the region by promoting equitable laws and policies, engaging public, private and community actors, and reducing the uneven burden of unpaid care work**. The program is locally adapted by programme partners and builds on global strategies and lessons learned. These lessons include:

- Improving legal frameworks and fostering a gender-responsive policy environment is essential to accelerating women's economic empowerment. Advocacy for equitable legislation and policies that are family-friendly and gender responsive, both at the government and corporate levels, has proven to be successful strategy for enabling equal participation of women in the workforce;
- Promoting adequate employment conditions for women is a win-win situation for employers and employees alike, bringing benefits to businesses, women, men and communities;
- Engagement at the community, government, and corporate levels is key to promoting a better understanding of the importance of women's economic empowerment at home and at work. This entails the engagement of gatekeepers – traditional and religious leaders, as well as men and boys – in the dialogue on pre-existing gender stereotypes regarding women's roles and careers.

The programme contributes to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development & principles of leaving no one behind, particularly Goals 5 and 8, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951, (No. 100) and ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), 1958, (No. 111) as well as national development plans (Sustainable Development Strategy: Egypt Vision 2030, Jordan 2025 – A National Vision and Strategy and the Palestinian National Policy Agenda 2017-2022).

UN Women and ILO have joined efforts through a participatory approach with workers and employers' organizations, civil society and public and private institutions to create an enabling environment to promote decent and productive job opportunities for women in Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine.

This requires community-level mobilization, coordination and capacity-building for a broad range of stakeholders, including governments. Multi-stakeholder partnerships with UN Women's country offices and ILO presences will be key in ensuring a successful programme.

### Outcome I: Gender responsive labour laws and related policies in place and effective

UN Women and the ILO are supporting the process of reviewing and engendering labour laws and policies and strengthening the capacities of civil society actors and labour market institutions to lobby for changes in labour laws and policies to ensure gender responsiveness and the government's readiness to implement and budget for the changes.

### Outcome II: A gender-responsive private sector that attracts, retains, and promotes women is supported

UN Women and ILO are engaging the private sector in the region through making the business case for promoting women's employment in the private sector, promoting a conducive private sector environment through gender responsive policies, and encouraging investment in training and professional development of women to facilitate their access to leadership positions.

### Outcome III: 3. Gender stereotypes about women and men's responsibilities concerning unpaid care and household work are challenged

There is a correlation between the traditional views on female labour force participation and the number of women employed in the formal sector, the types of jobs they are employed in, as well as the gender wage gap. In the region, many women cannot get a job without getting permission from their husband or guardian. Moreover, women are overburdened by responsibilities at home. Therefore, UN Women and ILO will engage in community mobilization to target the general public (men, women, boys and girls), and stakeholders, including traditional and religious leaders, to discuss gender roles and unpaid care.

<b>Location</b>	Egypt, Jordan, Palestine
<b>Implementing Agencies</b>	UN Women, ILO
<b>Duration</b>	Jan 2019 - Dec 2023 (60 months)
<b>Budget</b>	115,000,000 SEK (equivalent to c. 13 million USD)
<b>Donor</b>	SIDA
<b>Partners</b>	Governments, private sector, NGOs, employers' and workers' organizations, international

**Lemonia Fokaidou**  
 Joint Programme Manager  
 Arab State Regional Office  
 UNWOMEN  
[lemonia.fokaidou@unwomen.org](mailto:lemonia.fokaidou@unwomen.org)

**Reem Aslan**  
 Gender Technical Specialist,  
 Arab States Regional Office  
 ILO  
[aslan@ilo.org](mailto:aslan@ilo.org)