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IN BRIEF

UN Women and ILO Joint Programme “Work for Women in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine” (2018 – 2023)



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Companion Brief to the Regional Learning Document

The identification and documentation of good practices play a crucial role in knowledge sharing, learning, as well as improving interventions and policies related to decent work and productive employment. In recognition, the purpose of the Regional Learning Document is to capture the good practices, lessons, and scalable approaches implemented by UN-Women and ILO Joint Programme (JP) Work for Women in Arab States, with focus on examples from Egypt, Jordan and Palestine. This brief provides summaries of selected good practices that promote gender equality and women's empowerment, highlighting their effectiveness, challenges, and potential for replication and scalability.

The Regional Approach Promoting Decent Work and Productive Employment for Women in the Arab States:

I. Investing in and promoting Care Economy as fundamental for increased women's labour force participation:

Policymakers, academia, women's machineries, and civil society organizations have access to evidence, analysis and tools to promote care economy.

The findings and the implications of the report "Progress of Women in the Arab States 2020: The Role of the Care Economy in Promoting Gender Equality" were discussed at the regional and national level policy dialogues organised with support from the JP where the significance of investing in the care economy was highlighted. These activities led to the adaptation and implementation of a global policy support tool for estimating care deficits, investment costs, and economic returns. This

tool was adopted in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, and Morocco, where country-specific initiatives were launched to address care-related challenges and promote gender equality in the labour market. These initiatives ranged from enhancing quality care services and developing employer-supported childcare models to conducting research on the economic returns of childcare investments and implementing legislative reforms such as paternity leave and subsidized care services. Through this regional approach, national institutions were empowered to take targeted action based on the evidence and analytical studies provided, fostering progress towards gender equality and inclusive economic growth in the region.

II. Gender Equal Private Sector:

The number of business leaders joining the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) global initiative tripled from 174 in 2018 to 571¹ in 2023, exceeding the JP targets. The Regional WEPs Strategy and Roadmap developed by the JP, in consultation with the private sector, ensured standardized and quality services and increased outreach to companies. The various training packages and tools facilitated the implementation of gender-responsive policies and practices in various companies. A number of policy dialogues on the role of private sector were organised bringing the attention of decisionmakers to critical issues and growth opportunities from women's equal participation in the economy. This regional approach yielded tangible outcomes at the country level, with actions taken by companies in Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine, such as investing in the professional development of women employees, adopting policies that promote the safety and security of workers, adopting family-friendly workplace policies etc. Additionally, collaborations with employers' and workers' organizations further contributed to promoting gender equality and better working conditions for women in the private sector.

III. Against violence and harassment at workplace:

Representatives from governments, trade unions, employers' associations, and women's organizations have been certified to advocate more effectively against workplace violence and harassment. Awareness-raising and capacity-building activities centred on Convention 190 (C190) have been implemented. At the regional level, several collaborative products have been developed (i.e., capacity-building packages, a toolkit for the private sector, tools for labour inspection etc), drawing on insights gained from country-level implementation to ensure comprehensive resources reflective of

diverse sectors and national contexts. These regional efforts have translated into national interventions, resulting in policy changes at the central government level, and improved policies and practices at the local level within regulatory bodies and private sector enterprises, aiming to enhance working conditions for women. Notable achievements include the introduction of an Ethical Code in Egypt to prevent workplace harassment, the development of a National Strategy in Jordan, and capacity-building initiatives led by the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) to assist companies in understanding C190 and to establish codes of conduct.

IV. Multi-stakeholder partnership to promote Equal Pay in Arab States Region:

Countries in the region promote equal pay and contributed to the symposium organised to mark the launching of the global Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) in the Arab States in December 2019. Led by the ILO, UN Women, and the OECD, EPIC aimed to combat gender-based pay disparities, with members including governments, employers' and workers' organizations, the private sector, civil society, and UN entities. The symposium, held under the patronage of the Prime Minister of Jordan, urged countries in the region to join the coalition, resulting in Egypt and Tunisia becoming members alongside Jordan, while Palestine pledged its commitment to equal pay at the event. The JP facilitated policy dialogues on pay equity, ensured access to the EPIC platform and expertise, and facilitated knowledge sharing. A number of country-specific actions were taken, such as conducting a study to understand the current status of the Equal Pay Gap in Egypt, amending the equal pay article in the Jordan's labour law and supporting the establishment of a National Committee on Pay Equity in Palestine. The expansion of EPIC membership underscores the region's growing recognition of and collective effort to address pay equity issues.

¹ According to weps.org accessed in December 2023; the number can be as high as 622 according to UN Women internal database

Selected Good Practices from Egypt, Jordan and Palestine

1. Guaranteeing Women's Rights to Work in Egypt:

Two new provisions (regarding equal pay and childcare) were recommended to the labour law promoting gender equality and non-discrimination in the workplace. The JP focused on capacity-building for policymakers and social partners, advocating for gender-sensitive labor laws, and created tools for gender mainstreaming such as the work done with the labor inspection. A technical platform promoting decent work for women was established, facilitating dialogue between the government, the private sector, and civil society. This dialogue led to the issuance of decrees lifting restrictions on women's ability to work at night as well as in specific industries. Despite the challenges raised by the pandemic, the project succeeded due to government commitment, systematic and hands on capacity-building, evidence-based approaches, and public-private partnerships - all key elements for the replicability and scalability of good practices. The JP has effectively influenced legislative changes and institutionalized gender equality measures within government structures promoting sustainability. Lessons learned worth highlighting are the importance of sustained multiple stakeholder dialogue on decent work for women, including members from the academia, federation of industries, the private sector and civil society. The recommendations include critically assessing the impact of the policy reform to adapt and ensure sustained results.

2. Policy reform to secure quality affordable care services for working mothers in Jordan:

Above 5 percent of the total employed women in Jordan in 2022² benefited from increased access to care services and the preservation of jobs, either directly through subsidies or indirectly via the continued operation of nurseries and

kindergartens. Recognizing the crucial role of childcare in facilitating women's engagement in the workforce, the JP contributed to a policy reform that resulted in the allocation of a portion of maternity insurance funds towards childcare subsidies and the establishment of the Ri'aya program to support working mothers. A National Committee for Kindergartens to represent this sector's interests was formed. The sector was also technically and financially supported through the Business Clinic established by the JP together with the Association of Banks in Jordan. Challenges remain, such as the ongoing hesitance from employers and workers to participate in the program and enhancing the quality of private kindergartens. But the JP's innovative approach and sustainable partnerships pave the way for replicability and scalability. Key recommendations include further refining eligibility criteria for subsidy programs, advocating for regular budget allocation for childcare services, and exploring technology-driven solutions to streamline program processes.

3. Institutionalizing gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) in Jordan:

the Ministry of Labour (MoL) developed its first internal Gender Mainstreaming Policy and the first road map for institutionalizing gender-responsive budgeting. MoL serves as the lead exemplary institution, whose experience was replicated with the Social Security Corporation (SSC) and is expanding to other institutions in Jordan. These significant strides to integrate gender considerations into policy development and budgeting processes have also been recognized globally as promising starts.³ The approach involved creating an institutional capacity development framework on gender mainstreaming within MoL, founding a GRB-specific institutional platform for the hands on practical training of key personnel from relevant entities and developing internal policies and applying them in practice through integrating gender indicators into the

² Own calculations using Gender data portal, WB 2022 <https://genderdata.worldbank.org>,

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Strengthening-public-finance-management-systems-for-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-en.pdf>

National Employment Programme. Establishing a specialized working group with a clear roadmap to follow towards GRB and facilitating knowledge exchange with countries in the region and beyond were also among the success factors. As a temporary strategy to tackle the challenge of securing higher budget allocations for gender equality, it is advisable to reconsider and redistribute existing government budgets, prioritizing public investments with a focus on promoting gender equality.

4. Gender responsive stimulus packages (in support to micro and small enterprises) in Palestine:

selected government institutions have for the first-time developed gender sensitive plans, policies and budgets. In particular, the JP adopted a strategic approach, leveraging a global policy tool to assess the gender responsiveness of fiscal measures. Collaborating closely with national partners, particularly the Ministry of National Economy (MoNE) and Ministry of Finance (MoF), the JP facilitated the creation of gender teams within these ministries. These teams, equipped with enhanced capacity, formulated and tested gender-sensitive policy tools aimed at supporting women-led micro and small enterprises (MSEs) through various avenues such as public procurement and business registration procedures. Notable successes include reductions in registration fees and the development of a collaborative Joint Services Policy Tool, signalling tangible progress towards women's economic empowerment. Challenges such as unclear procedures for businesses and limited financial resources were acknowledged, urging a focused and sustainable approach towards gender-responsive policymaking. Through institutionalization efforts and integration into national strategies, these initiatives mark a significant stride towards fostering an inclusive economic recovery and women's empowerment in Palestine.

5. Women in C-suites drive diversity in Egypt:

The Women on Boards' indicator improved from 10 percent in 2019 to 19.7 percent in 2022⁴. With an incremental annual increase of 3 percent, participating categories of companies would achieve the 2030 strategy goal of 30 percent women on boards by 2026. This is also a result of the new decrees issued by the Financial Regulatory Authority (FRA) in mid-2021 mandating EGX-listed and regulated companies to have a minimum of 25 percent women representation on their boards. The initiative contributed to these policy changes by focusing on promoting gender diversity in corporate leadership, recognizing its positive correlation with company performance. Through partnerships with academia, regulators, and business representatives, the program offers accredited training opportunities for women in mid-to-senior management positions, preparing them for board roles. Data collection and analysis of women's representation on boards are conducted annually, informing policy changes and awareness-raising efforts. Despite challenges such as a lack of awareness of the importance and benefits of gender equality in the world of work, to overall economic downturns, the initiative has led to significant results. The collaboration between academia and stakeholders ensured sustainability, while efforts are underway to replicate the model regionally through the Establishment of a Consortium of Arab Women on Boards Observatories proposed to be established. The use of technology and the involvement of male advocates for change further enhanced the initiative's impact, marking substantial strides towards gender-inclusive corporate governance in Egypt and beyond. Capitalizing on the partnership with WEPs private sector companies to promote investing in the professional development of women employees has proven to be a creative approach with potential to scale.

⁴ The 2022 annual monitoring report covers the gender data and information of almost 1000 companies and banks, with 236 EGX listed companies, 34 banks, 676 NBFS companies, and 82 public sector enterprise companies (holding and affiliate companies).

⁵ <https://www.fe.org.eg/index.php/en/about-fei>

⁶ Approximated, using the share of women employees in WEPs signatory private companies in Egypt (c. 29percent)

6. Corporate policy reform in favour of gender equality and women's empowerment in Egypt:

Investing in the HR and Gender Academy hosted by the Federation of Egyptian Industries (FEI) could translate into 90,000 companies⁵ offering better workplaces for more than approximately 585,000 women employees⁶ and many more thousands of women workers who would benefit from gender responsive recruitment and professional development policies. The HR and Gender Academy offers training for human resources personnel in member companies, focusing on gender-responsive HR policies. The JP supported standardizing the training material and facilitated the capacity-building of the trainers. The trainees, as part of their graduation project, reviewed real life company policies through a gender lens. Despite challenges, such as resistance from private sector companies, the initiative has successfully supported 40 companies in implementing gender-responsive policies, exceeding the original target. Sustainability is ensured through the transfer of knowledge and expertise to FEI, although financial sustainability remains a concern, especially for smaller enterprises. With the potential to scale nationally and beyond, the initiative presents a promising model for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace.

7. Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) Private Sector National Network in Jordan:

The number of companies publicly committing to act towards gender equality increased from 9 to 128⁷ companies in four years. Through strategic partnerships with influential chambers of industry and business associations, the JP successfully promoted uptake of WEPs as a framework to engage the private sector in advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment. Establishing the WEPs Jordan Network provided a platform for knowledge sharing, advocacy, and collaboration

among like-minded companies, driving forward the gender equality agenda. Annual surveys and capacity-building initiatives ensured progress tracking and implementation of gender-responsive policies, resulting in tangible outcomes such as increased hiring of women, policy amendments, and capacity development. Challenges included economic constraints and limited interest among companies, which were overcome through trust building and clearly emphasizing the business case for gender equality. The approach proved effective, cost-efficient, and scalable, with potential for national and regional replication, ensuring sustainability through integration of WEPs in the government-led initiatives like the National Gender Seal program. Close collaboration with government institutions and civil society, standardization of progress measurement, and allocation of sufficient resources are recommended for sustained success and scalability of the initiative.

8. Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) in depth in Palestine:

The number of companies promoting gender equality and women's empowerment was doubled. Leveraging the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), the initiative took a sectoral approach, targeting services, ICT, and finance sectors. Diverse gender teams were established within firms and CEOs were engaged from the outset to secure their public support and commitment. Technical support, capacity-building, and access to gender gap assessment tools were provided to translate gender commitments into tangible actions. Testimonials and case studies were widely disseminated recognizing companies' efforts to empower women. Key factors contributing to success included dedicated human and financial resources, public-private sector collaboration, and access to contextualized tools and resources. Challenges included economic constraints, data collection issues, the need to change business

⁷169 signatories in Jordan as of December 2023 based on JP data

conduct and ultimately the escalation of the war. Specific recommendations include introducing standardized indicators, promoting work through gender teams, targeting export-oriented companies, and focusing efforts on specific service lines to expand the WEPs network effectively. The plans to establish the WEPs Network in Palestine will further ensure sustainability, transfer of knowledge and ownership to national entities as part of the exit strategy.

9. Private sector adopts code of conduct against violence at workplace in Palestine:

Better working conditions and greater protection against violence and harassment at workplaces for 3062 male and 1516 female workers as a result of 22 entities adopting the code of conduct⁸. The Joint Programme (JP) partnered with the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) to address violence against women in the workplace, recognizing its detrimental impact on productivity and sustainability. Through a well-structured approach, including a pilot phase with the Northern Electricity Distribution Company (NEDC), capacity building, and legal support, the initiative succeeded in surpassing its targets. Subsequently, applying the skills and experience gained, PGFTU facilitated the adoption of the code of conduct by an additional 21 companies. Challenges included addressing narrow perceptions of violence and harassment, but the approach proved effective, sustainable, and replicable, with recommendations for further impact assessment, evidence dissemination, and scaling up with adequate resources. Scaling up the approach with adequate resources could mean safer and harassment-free workplaces for approximately 290,000 women and men workers represented by PGFTU⁹.

10. Improving working conditions for women in the education sector in Palestine:

Above 8,500 women and men teachers¹⁰ in the private education sector enjoy better working

conditions. Leveraging data and evidence, extensive social dialogue, and the engagement of key stakeholders, including the government, workers' and employers' organizations, the JP contributed to concluding a unified national working contract for private schools, including kindergartens. The Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) and its Gender Unit played a crucial role, capitalizing on their knowledge and experience gained through the JP, political leaders' support and the ongoing labour law reform process also contributed to the positive outcome. The intervention is nationally led by a tripartite committee established to sustain the dialogue, oversee the implementation of the unified contract, and manage sector-related activities. The approach demonstrated effectiveness, scalability, and innovation. Key recommendations included continued results monitoring, awareness-raising on the social and economic benefits from better workplaces, and continued collaboration between stakeholders to ensure the long-term sustainability and expansion of these initiatives.

11. Challenging discriminatory norms over women and occupations in Egypt:

One-third of women internship graduates gained employment as electricity technicians¹¹. This is a result of a partnership between the Ministry of Education, Technical Vocational Education and Training Schools, international organisations and private sector entities, supported by the JP. The initiative focused on raising awareness about gender issues, equipping women students with soft skills and technical training, and facilitating partnerships with private companies to provide internship opportunities. The initiative challenged gender stereotypes including the perception of women's competency in non-traditional professions through interactive activities organised for men and women students, teachers and families. The model capitalized on existing partnerships, leveraging

⁸ JP W4W Annual Report 2022

⁹ <https://projects.ituc-csi.org/pgftu>

¹⁰ <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1654633#:~:text=While%20the%20number%20of%20teachers,thousand%20teachers%20in%20private%20schools>

¹¹ PMF 2022, KII

networks like the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), demonstrated the effectiveness of involving multiple stakeholders, and adapting interventions based on evidence. The model is replicable and has potential to scale with adequate resources. The sustainability of the intervention is ensured through institutionalizing gender awareness in vocational education curricula, expanding collaboration with government bodies and the private sector at the local level and advocating for policy changes to promote gender equality in non-traditional sectors for women.

12. Women in sports – a traditionally male-dominated sector in Jordan:

About 85 percent of women graduates found employment upon completion of their internships¹². In response to the challenges faced by women university graduates in finding employment in the sports sector, the private sports centre, Mudarib, in partnership with the Ministry of Youth and supported by a Joint Program (JP), launched the "Goal for Life" program. This initiative provided training to unemployed female graduates with physical education degrees and equipped them with the skills needed for employment in the sports industry. Through a rigorous selection process and tailored training, the program successfully placed women in internships at gyms, schools, and sports facilities, where the majority accessed employment. The program's success stemmed from increased demand, partnerships with gyms, and the publicizing of women's career paths as inspiring examples. Challenges such as: societal stigma, family resistance, and logistical hurdles were overcome through effective collaboration and creative approaches. These approaches are replicable and can be scaled to other governorates and sectors. Sustainability is ensured through curriculum integration, accreditation, and ongoing support from governmental and international entities,

with recommendations including engagement with public employment services, technology utilization, and community involvement to sustain long-term impact and change societal perceptions.

Key Strategic Recommendations:

Firstly, there's a call to assess and rigorously enforce reformed policies and programs for enhanced impact and efficiency. Secondly, adhering to existing fiscal constraints while reallocating resources to prioritize gender equality initiatives is advised, with an emphasis on sectors with high returns on investments. Thirdly, integrating gender-responsive measures and performance indicators into all government programs is crucial. Additionally, extending proven models of multidisciplinary, specialized committees and gender teams to various government ministries is recommended, along with establishing regional and national multi-stakeholder platforms to facilitate collaboration. Strengthening partnerships with the private sector, promoting women's employability, engaging families and communities, prioritizing the development of the care economy, and championing safe and secure workplaces are also necessary. Lastly, leveraging the region's potential for influential policy dialogue, targeted advocacy, and heightened visibility to drive gender equality goals is emphasized, encouraging collaborative engagement across country offices to maximize impact.

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¹² KII Meeting, JP Annual Report