

WOMEN IN BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT



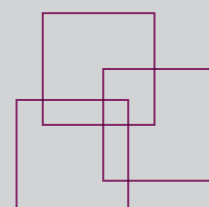
International
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GAINING MOMENTUM IN THE MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA



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WOMEN IN BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

GAINING MOMENTUM IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Regional Report

International Labour Organization
Regional Office for Arab States

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FOREWORD

There is no doubt that women have made important gains in the global economy. Today, a third of the world's enterprises are run by women and their management skills are increasingly recognized. There is increased evidence and recognition that gender balanced and diverse management teams at all levels of hierarchies produce positive business outcomes. Improved labour market participation rates of women is increasingly correlated with higher levels of growth and gross domestic product. Yet, gender stereotypes across all social and cultural contexts limit women's economic contribution and benefits. Thus, the enormous talent pool that women represent with their ever-higher levels of education goes largely untapped.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) launched a global report in 2015 "Women in Business and Management: Gaining Momentum" providing an overview of the situation of women in business and management globally and highlighting their important contribution in private sector management. A conference was held in London in April 2015 to further explore the topics. A regional report "Women in Business and Management: Gaining Momentum in Asia and the Pacific" was also published in 2015 and a conference on the same topic was held in Singapore in July 2015. This current regional report adds a geographical lens and sheds light on the particularities of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with regard to the same gender issues.

Women in the MENA region have been progressing in the economy, following similar global trends, and have been positioning themselves at more prominent business and management levels. Still their full potential remains underutilized, resulting in significant missed opportunities for economic development in the region.

This report is a contribution to the ILO Women at Work Centenary Initiative by the ILO Regional Office for Arab States with the support of the ILO Gender, Equality and Diversity Branch and the ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities. It aims to inspire constructive discussions in the region and motivate actors in the world of work to achieve gender equality at all levels.

The main authors of this report are Sawzan Masri and Zeina Abla with extensive support from Emanuela Pozzan and contributions from Linda Wirth. Many thanks are due to Aya Jaafar, Fida Afiouni, Ilka Schoellmann, Lama Oueijan, Rania Bikhazi, Reham Rached and Susan Maybud.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BWF	Business Women's Forum
CAWTAR	Center of Arab Woman for Training and Research
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
FPCCIA	Federation of Palestinian Chambers of Commerce, Industry & Agriculture
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEME	Gender Equality Model Egypt
GMI	Governance Metrics International
GPCA	Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
KILM	Key Indicators of the Labour Market
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
LA	Latin America
LFPR	Labour Force Participation Rate
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
oPt	occupied Palestinian territory
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research from around the world concludes that women's advancement in management is challenging. Almost insurmountable obstacles block their access to top leadership positions in companies and organizations; the so-called "glass ceiling". Women start facing barriers at lower management levels generated from structural factors within corporations as well as from social and cultural constraints. At times it can be women themselves who are reluctant to pursue higher-level responsibilities. These factors hamper their career progression as compared to their male counterparts; this is referred to as the "sticky floor". When women are able to attain higher-level management positions they often find themselves in management support functions that do not lead to the highest-level management jobs. This phenomenon is also known as the "glass walls". Yet, increasingly global research is also finding that there are gender dividends to be gained by including more women in decision-making and increasing the labour participation of women. Studies show that by tapping into women's skills and talent, business outcomes are enhanced and economic growth is accelerated.

So where is the blockage to women's advancement in management in the MENA region? The MENA region has the lowest representation globally for women in management and leadership positions. Like other regions there is the "glass ceiling", "sticky floors" and "glass walls" types of obstacles. However, low management figures are also a result of the low labour force participation rates of women in the region. Even when women do enter the labour force, their participation rates drop significantly with age, which is the time when women are experienced enough to assume higher positions and more responsibilities at work. This attrition or exit of qualified women at higher career levels from companies and organizations is often referred to as the "leaking pipeline". It leads also to a shortage of women in senior management posts to serve as role models.

Data on women in management positions exclusively in the private sector is scarce globally and in the MENA region in particular. However, the ILO indicator on legislators, senior officials and managers, combining the public and private sectors in a single occupational category, gives an idea of the status of women in management in many MENA countries. The top ranking countries in the region (the occupied Palestinian territory and Tunisia) registered a 15 per cent share of women legislators, senior officials and managers, compared to an average of more than 30 per cent for countries in other regions where more data is available. Going further up the ladder, women in the region also report a weak presence as executives. Women executives accounted for 23 per cent in Morocco out of all executives, 17 per cent in the UAE, 16 per cent in Egypt and 7 per cent in Qatar¹. As for women Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), the MENA region reported a share of 13 per cent women CEOs out of the total, versus a 21 per cent similar share in all developing countries' regions².

In the GCC countries, the share of women represented on company boards does not exceed 2 per cent³, with some countries showing progress. For example, in Bahrain companies with female board members increased from 12 per cent in 2010 to 14 per cent in 2014⁴. In other parts of the region, there are some countries where women are more present on boards. A 2013 survey in Morocco covering a diverse group of companies reported that among the 76 companies listed in the Stock Exchange, 11 per cent had women holding board seats. In Tunisia, the percentage of women on the boards of listed companies was close to 8 per cent at the end of 2013 and in Egypt, it was almost 7 per cent in 2011⁵. Women as chairpersons or presidents of boards are an even smaller minority across all regions. According to the ILO, no more than 7 per cent of companies surveyed had women as board presidents in the MENA region⁶.

In general, women in the MENA region are just starting to climb the corporate ladder. And, while very few are breaking through the glass ceiling to top managerial posts in the private sector, entrepreneurship is gaining importance as an alternative avenue for their economic empowerment⁷ even though it is still lower than in other regions. Detailed information on women entrepreneurs in terms of formality/informality, business and enterprise size is scarce. In the region a larger proportion of self-employed women are own account workers rather than employers, except for some GCC countries such as the UAE and Qatar. In all countries, however, the share of women out of all own account workers (men and women) remains small. Out of all employers, the share of women remains small in much of the region with the highest being almost one third in Bahrain (28 per cent) but less than 3 per cent in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Syria, according to the latest available data⁸. Nevertheless, some of the Gulf countries are reporting progress in the share of women as employers, with several more than doubling in the last decade: to 28 per cent in Bahrain, to 11 per cent in Oman and to 17 per cent in Qatar. Despite their low numbers as employers, women's representation

1 ILO, 2015. Women in business and management: Gaining Momentum, Global Report, (Geneva).

2 Ibid.

3 McKinsey & Company, 2014. GCC Women in Leadership – from the first to the norm.

4 Supreme Council for Women, 2015. "The Bahraini woman in numbers 2015" "المرأة البحرينية في أرقام 2015", (Bahrain).

5 ILO, 2015. Women in business and management: Gaining Momentum, Global Report, (Geneva).

6 Ibid

7 Hawkamah, 2013. UAE Women Board Directors Careers, Board Experiences and Recommendations for Change, (UAE).

8 ILO, 2015. KILM.

in chambers of commerce is increasing, especially as many chambers have set up women's business committees (as in the GCC countries, as well as in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, occupied Palestinian territory and Yemen). Their aim is to support women entrepreneurs and respond to their needs.

Women in the MENA region face similar barriers as other women in the world to reach top positions in business and management. One of the key challenges, is that women face the double burden of work and family care responsibilities. A research study in the GCC countries indicated that women considered balancing work and family/life as the single most important obstacle to their career aspirations⁹. Cultural stereotyping and inadequate self-perception also hamper women's career advancement. Gender biased legislation, as well as limited access to finance and networking can act as disincentives for women to enter or exit the labour market and to pursue careers.

Amidst the multiple challenges constraining women's representation in the business world, responses are also gaining ground in the MENA region. Governments have introduced reforms at macro levels starting with legislation. Most reforms do not necessarily target women in business and management directly. However, as they aim to ensure greater equality of opportunities generally, they can ultimately influence women's economic choices and outcomes. At the meso level, emerging alliances to support women in business are increasing in both number and outreach. The majority of MENA countries now have more than one businesswomen's association to support female leadership and entrepreneurship. The employers' organizations are also more active in supporting women to grow and sustain their businesses and increase their representation. At the micro level, more companies are introducing human resources measures to support women in their careers, as there is greater awareness of the added value of gender equality in the workplace and in management. As a result, programmes and initiatives are starting to take shape, including the promotion of measures supporting women's career advancement.

It is undeniable that the MENA region is undergoing significant changes. Despite the turmoil in many countries, long-term stability and growth in the region will largely depend on the creation of decent work for all. On-going developments may also improve prospects for women to enter labour force and reach top positions in management and business leadership. Demographic, economic, and technological trends together with changes in national employment policies across the region represent opportunities for more equality between men and women. In addition, the growing talent and capabilities of women with their increased levels of education can be of tremendous benefit to companies and organizations. It is, nevertheless, important to stress that capitalising on these opportunities for greater gender dividends hinges upon gender sensitive legislative and social and economic policy frameworks.

Companies can play a major role in promoting women's participation in the labour force by focusing on the gains that this would bring to their businesses and to social and economic development. Practicing equity, building gender-sensitive human resources management systems, creating enabling environments for women in the corporate world, establishing an accommodating social infrastructure and endorsing work – life balance arrangements for both women and men are all vital elements for successfully advancing women's careers.

Meanwhile, employers' organizations, business associations, trade associations, chambers of commerce and women's organizations can also make a difference by empowering women to flourish in business and management in the region. Through their organizations, they are in a position to increase women's presence in their own membership base, widen network and inter association/organization building, conduct research on the impact of a greater representation of women in business and management in the private sector, advocate for legal amendments and provide multi-faceted support to women entrepreneurs. Thus, the MENA region will reap increased economic and social benefits from one of its greatest resources, its women.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, the world of work has changed dramatically over the past decades. Falling fertility rates in many regions, increasing migration to fill labour gaps, search for opportunities and security from conflict, improved access to education, technological innovation and varying degrees of economic development have all contributed to shifting economic landscapes. These trends have generally contributed to women's empowerment across all regions of the world. In some countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)¹⁰ region, women have considerably improved their capabilities and are gradually increasing their participation in economic activities and asserting their presence in the world of business. It is, however, a region experiencing turmoil with significant political, economic and social changes underway; a situation already influencing gender roles. Within this context, women are striving to balance their social and economic contributions and build careers in highly competitive private sectors. Few are able to climb the ladder and break through the “glass ceiling” in business leadership. Many exit the corporate world mid-career as the obstacles compound, leading to what has been identified as a “leaking pipeline” of female talent. While these gender trends in business reflect global realities encompassing both developed and developing countries, they are very visible in the MENA region.

This report describes the position of women in the labour market and their economic activities, specifically in business management in the MENA region. It discusses the challenges, opportunities, and developments for more women to enter the labour market and to advance as business owners and corporate managers.

Chapters two, three and four review the most recently available indicators on women's participation in the labour market, as managers, employers and own account workers. These sections rely on ILO statistical databases, as well as drawing on surveys such as the ILO Company Survey conducted in 2013 and studies conducted by renowned institutions and official data sources in order to sketch a general picture. The scarcity of data limits comparability and aggregation and thus examples from the region are used to highlight key features of MENA with respect to women in business. The fifth chapter provides a business rationale for augmenting the representation of women in management and leadership in the private sector. As little research is available to make a business case based on studies conducted in the region, global research findings are presented. The sixth chapter discusses the main challenges for women to break through the glass ceiling and to avoid the leaking pipeline in the MENA region. The seventh and eighth chapters present initiatives and emerging opportunities worth pursuing especially targeting the private sector at large. Finally, the last chapter offers avenues for action, specifically for the private sector and for business and employers' organizations.

Box 1: What is the glass ceiling for women?

Invisible barriers within organizational structures and corporate culture hindering the access of women to higher-level positions.

Source: ILO, 2015. Women in business and management: Gaining Momentum, Global Report, (Geneva).

Box 2: What is the leaking pipeline?

The attrition or exit of qualified women at higher career levels from companies and organizations is often referred to as the leaking pipeline. Most studies show that women exit by freezing their career, by completely leaving the workforce (economically inactive) or by becoming self-employed. The “leaking pipeline” also leads to a shortage of women in senior management posts to serve as role models, which in turn makes it harder to tackle prejudice and stereotyping. In developed countries one study of the leaking pipeline showed that women are two to three times more prone to terminate their careers once they have attained the experienced, mid-career levels. The barriers are not only socio-cultural but also relate to economic disincentives such as unequal pay¹¹. In the region, a 2015 survey showed that two thirds of women in GCC countries believed that gender bias has negatively impacted their career progression and 80 per cent of women felt that being women put them at a disadvantage as their sex hampered their career progression. Three quarters believed they did not advance as quickly as men¹².

10 This report identifies the Middle East and North Africa region as consisting of 18 countries classified in three sub-regions: 1) the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE); 2) North Africa including Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia; and 3) The Middle East including Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and Yemen.

11 PwC, Gender Advisory Council, 2008. The leaking pipeline: Where are our female leaders? 79 Women share their stories.

12 Pearl Initiative, 2015. Women's career in the GCC: The CEO agenda.

2. OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

The MENA region includes countries that share similarities but also have structural differences; some have special conditions with ongoing violence, conflict, and foreign occupation. More recently, a number of countries have undergone political transformations. The MENA countries have followed divergent development paths and, consequently, economic activity and labour market participation rates reflect certain national workforces more heavily involved in agriculture while others are more engaged in services. The GCC's reliance on hydrocarbons is another path. These conditions have shaped the labour market and its related gender gaps¹³.

2.1. LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

It is well established that women's labour force participation rate (LFPR) in the region is very low (27 per cent versus men at 77 per cent in 2015). Women's LFPR has been increasing over the last two decades (from 21 per cent in 1990 to 27 per cent in 2015). Strides have been made in women's attainment of higher education and in some cases there have been changes in social attitudes and policies that have supported women's employment. In some countries of the region, the recruitment of domestic workers has freed up women's time previously allocated to family responsibilities. Women have also ventured into a wider variety of educational disciplines and professional specializations such as sciences and technology. However, many economically active women remain unemployed with high rates in the Middle East (24 per cent) and North Africa (20 per cent) and much lower rates in GCC countries (9 per cent)¹⁴ where women's employment rates have been increasing rapidly during the past two decades.

The World Economic Forum Gender Global Gap Report that is based on an aggregate index measuring the magnitude of and variations in gender-based disparities (in education, health, economic and political empowerment) reported that countries in the region still have a significant gap to bridge in terms of economic participation. Nevertheless, the region remained in a low overall ranking, mainly due to its weaker performance in bridging the economic participation and opportunity gender gaps measured as a sub-index of the aggregate index¹⁵. While no country has closed the economic participation and opportunity gender gap, Bahrain was reported as best climber of the world on the economic participation and opportunity sub-index. The MENA region as defined in the Report¹⁶ has closed 40 per cent of the gap according to the index. This is nevertheless the lowest for any region, the highest being 82 per cent in North America, and is due to women's limited integration in the economy and in decision-making¹⁷.

2.2. EMPLOYMENT SECTORS

Working women in MENA countries often prefer to be employed in the public sector, especially as most Middle Eastern and GCC countries have quite a developed public sector, with the exception of Lebanon. The public sector often provides employment terms that are "friendlier" for women with family care responsibilities. For example, in Egypt around three quarters of employees in the public sector are women (2014)¹⁸ and in Saudi Arabia, almost half the employees of the public sector are women (2014). In Morocco, the share of employment of men and women in the public sector is equal (2010)¹⁹. In Bahrain, women account for around half of the public sector employees, whereas they are less than a third in the private sector (2013)²⁰. In Qatar, women are considered to be more reluctant to work in the private sector, mainly due to cultural and working-environment factors. They express preference for public sector employment, due to flexibility and as it is a closer fit with gender-related social values. University-educated Qatari women mainly work in the public sector²¹. Another study from Egypt and Jordan indicated that the majority of women in the private sector quit after marriage while those working in the public sector do not²².

¹³ For details on the structural impediments to women's economic activity refer to ILO, 2016 (forthcoming). Women at Work in Arab States: Addressing the structural barriers, (Beirut).

¹⁴ ILO, 2015. KILM.

¹⁵ The Economic Participation and Opportunity Gender Gaps is a sub-index of the overall index and covers three concepts: the participation gap, the remuneration gap and the advancement gap. Each of these is measured with a number of indicators.

¹⁶ World Economic Forum, 2015. The Gender Global Gap Report 2015. It includes in the MENA region: Israel, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Tunisia, Bahrain, Algeria, Oman, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.

¹⁷ <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/>

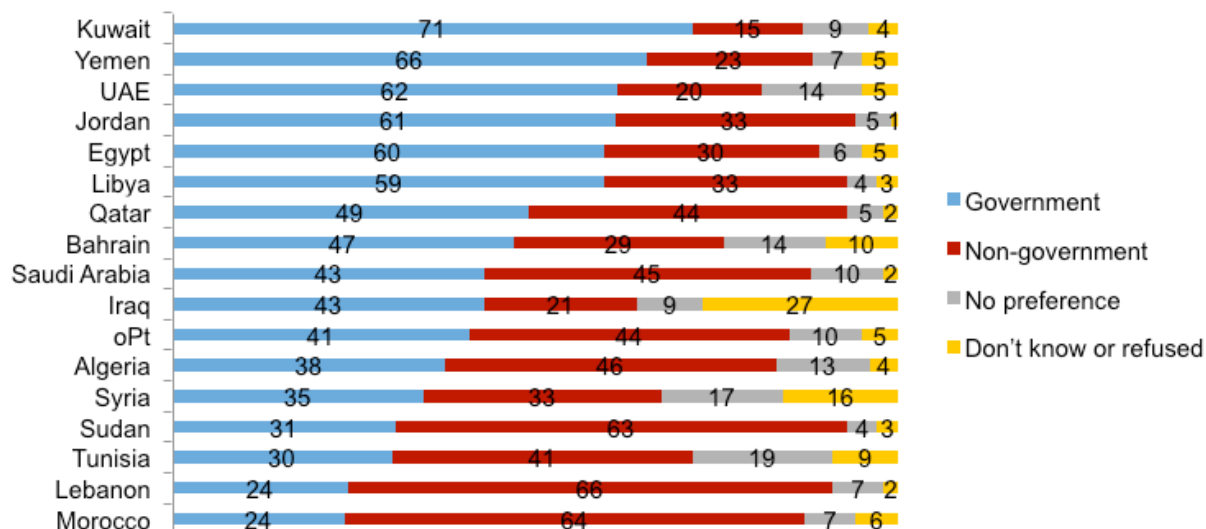
¹⁸ ILO STAT <http://www.ilo.org/ilostat/> [Accessed 11 December 2015].

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ National Report of the Kingdom of Bahrain on Progress Made in the Implementation of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action +20, 2014.

²¹ Qatar National Development Strategy 2011-2016.

²² Mccloughlin, C. 2013. Women's economic role in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, University of Birmingham, (Birmingham, UK).

Figure 1: Women's preferences for public sector versus private sector work in MENA countries (2012)

Source: OECD/CAWTAR, 2014. Women in Public Life, Gender, Law and Policy in the Middle East and North Africa MENA.

As for women working in the private sector, they are often concentrated in certain specific “women-friendly” sectors that are generally care services sectors. Women account for the largest share of employment in education across the vast majority of MENA countries. In Bahrain, they also make up more than half those employed in health services and social work. In Iraq, sectors that account for the largest share of women employed relative to men after education are agriculture and financial services, health and social services. In Jordan, Kuwait, occupied Palestinian territory, Oman, Syria, the UAE and Yemen the same non-agricultural sectors score highest in terms of the share of women’s employment²³.

In conclusion, an overview of available indicators on the status of women in economic activity reveals that women’s LFPR is improving in the region; women’s preference for public sector employment is high; and women are concentrated in specific private sector industries. An important feature of women’s role in the labour market is their marked presence in informal and vulnerable employment in certain countries, which is beyond the scope of this report. Within this context, the following section will examine more closely women in the private sector and their role in management and leadership positions.

3. WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT: BETWEEN A THICK GLASS CEILING AND A STICKY FLOOR

Research globally has considered that women's advancement in management is challenging with almost insurmountable obstacles blocking their access to the top leadership positions in a company or organization; what is known as the "glass ceiling". Other research has focused on barriers at lower management levels generated from structural factors within corporations, from social and cultural constraints, or created by women themselves that prevent them from progressing in their careers like their male counterparts. This has been commonly referred to as the "sticky floor". When women are able to attain higher-level management positions they are often in areas such as human resources, finance and administration and communications. These are management support functions that most often do not lead to the highest-level management jobs as they do not provide experience across the operations of a company, as compared to research and product development, sales and general management. This situation is described as the "glass walls" blocking women's access to higher levels of strategic management.

So where is the blockage to women's advancement in management in the MENA region?

Data on women in management positions exclusively in the private sector is scarce, both globally and in the MENA region in particular. ILO data is available on legislators, senior officials and managers, combining the public and private sectors in a single occupational category. This statistical indicator reports clear progress over the years in favour of women in management in many MENA countries. However, the latest figures available show that MENA countries are still the lowest in the world, mirroring their overall situation in the labour market. The top ranking countries in the MENA region (the occupied Palestinian territory and Tunisia) registered 15 per cent, according to this indicator. In contrast, globally, more than half the countries for which data is available reported that women accounted for more than 30 per cent of all managers²⁴.

Table 1: Women as a percentage of all managers (legislators, senior officials and managers)

Country	Earliest Year	Women Managers (%)	Latest Year	Women Managers (%)
Algeria	2001	5.2	2013	10.6
Bahrain	2001	12.3	n/a	-
Egypt	2000	10.1	2013	7.1
Iraq	n/a	-	n/a	-
Jordan	2004	5.1	n/a	-
Kuwait	2005	13.1	n/a	-
Lebanon	2004	11.8	2007	8.4
Morocco	2004	10.8	2008	12.8
occupied Palestinian territory	2000	12.8	2013	15.0
Oman	2000	9.3	n/a	-
Qatar	2001	4.7	2013	12.2
Saudi Arabia	2006	9.0	2013	6.8
Syrian Arab Republic	2007	10.2	2010	9.0
Tunisia	2011	13.9	2012	14.8
United Arab Emirates	2000	7.8	2012	10.0

Sources: ILO STAT, 2015.

Going further up the ladder²⁵, women in the Middle East and GCC countries also report a weak presence as executives, according to the latest available data. Mercer, a global consulting company, conducted a survey²⁶ in 2010 and reported a low proportion of women executives internationally, but more so in the MENA countries. Women executives accounted for 23 per cent in Morocco out of all executives, 17 per cent in the UAE, 16 per cent in Egypt and 7 per cent in Qatar. The highest rate reported globally was 33 per cent²⁷.

According to the 2013 ILO company survey, Women Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in the MENA region have the lowest representation globally. The MENA region reported a share of 13 per cent as women CEOs out of the total, versus a 21 per cent similar share in all developing countries regions²⁸. This is in line with the World Bank enterprise surveys' results that are based on the latest available data for the years 2009-2015. The latter surveys showed that 5 per cent of the firms covered have women as top managers in the MENA region. This percentage is also the lowest globally and compares, for example, to 29 per cent in East Asia and Pacific countries and 19 per cent in Eastern Europe & Central Asia countries²⁹.

Table 2: Number and percentage share of women and men as CEOs (2013)

	LA and Caribbean	Asia and Pacific	Africa	CEE	MENA	Total	Total excluding 3 CEE countries*
Men	18	314	74	150	124	680	593
Women	12	62	26	121	18	239	158
No. of responses	30	376	100	271	142	919	751
Men CEO (per cent)	60	84	74	55	87	74	79
Women CEO (per cent)	40	16	26	45	13	26	21

* Survey covered only women enterprises in 3 CEE countries.

Source: ILO, 2013. Company Survey.

Women's representation on company boards while increasing in a handful of countries is generally very low around the world. In Latin America and Asia it is around 5-6 per cent while in the GCC countries, the share of women on boards does not exceed 2 per cent³⁰. In some MENA countries the situation is slightly better. In Bahrain companies with female board members increased from 12 per cent in 2010 to 14 per cent in 2014³¹. A 2013 survey in Morocco covering a diverse group of companies reported that among the 76 companies listed in the Stock Exchange, 11 per cent had women holding board seats. In Tunisia, the percentage of women on the boards of listed companies was close to 8 per cent at the end of 2013. In Egypt, the percentage of women on corporate boards was almost 7 per cent in 2011³². In contrast, in other non-Arab African countries the representation of women ranges between 10 and 20 per cent³³.



25 A global survey conducted by the ILO in 2013 showed that 56 per cent of companies surveyed in the MENA countries have 25 per cent or less of their senior positions held by women and another 25 per cent have 76 to 100 per cent of those positions held by women. However, the findings of this survey carry a limitation due to a low response rate in the region. The surveyors considered "any conclusions drawn from the interpretation of the survey data are not representative of the region". Further augmenting the need to exercise caution is the fact that almost three quarters of the surveyed companies were either women-owned, majority-owned by women, or had their daily business operations managed by women.

26 Mercer, 2010. Women's Leadership Development Survey, based on more than 1,800 human resource, talent management and diversity leaders worldwide on their leadership development practices for women.

27 ILO, 2015. Women in business and management: Gaining Momentum, Global Report, (Geneva).

28 Ibid.

29 <http://www.enterprisesurveys.org/data/exploretopics/gender> [Accessed December 2015].

30 McKinsey & Company, 2014. GCC Women in Leadership – from the first to the norm.

31 Supreme Council for Women, 2015. "The Bahraini woman in numbers 2015" 2015 "المرأة البحرينية في أرقام 2015", (Bahrain).

32 ILO, 2015. Women in business and management: Gaining Momentum, Global Report, (Geneva).

33 African Development Bank, 2015. Where are the Women: Inclusive Boardrooms in Africa's top listed companies.

Table 3: Percentage of women board members by country in Africa (2013)

Country	Percentage of board members who are women	Country	Percentage of board members who are women
Kenya	19.8	Uganda	12.9
South Africa	17.4	Nigeria	11.5
Botswana	16.9	Egypt	8.2
Zambia	15.9	Tunisia	7.9
Ghana	15.7	Morocco	5.9
Tanzania	14.3	Cote D'Ivoire	5.1

Source: African Development Bank, 2015.

Women as chairpersons or presidents of boards are an even smaller minority across all regions. According to the ILO company survey (2013), no more than 7 per cent of companies surveyed had women as board presidents in the MENA region. This was 26 per cent in Latin America, 13 per cent in Asia and Pacific, 11 per cent in Africa, and 19 per cent in Central and East Europe.

Table 4: Number of respondent companies where the board president is a man or woman (2013)

	LA and Caribbean	Asia and Pacific	Africa	CEE	MENA	Total	Percentage of Total
Men	25	176	20	60	110	391	87
Woman	9	26	3	14	8	60	13
No responses	34	202	23	74	118	451	

Source: ILO, 2013. Company Survey.

Box 3: The gender wage gap

A measure of inequality at the workplace, the gender pay or wage gap, is the difference between male and female average earnings as a percentage of the male earnings. Globally, the gender pay gap is estimated to be at 23 per cent³⁴. In the MENA region, there is little comprehensive information on the gender wage gap but the available information shows that it exists. In Qatar and the UAE, the gender wage gap has been assessed for management positions. In the case of Qatar, the pay gap for managerial posts was slightly higher than the overall gap. On the other hand, in the UAE the pay gap at managerial level was half that of the overall gender wage gap. The ILO company survey in 2013 also showed that more than two thirds of the companies responding claimed to provide women and men managers in the same posts and levels equal salaries. This is particularly the case for companies operating in the finance and insurance sectors.

Table 5: Percentage gender wage gap by occupation

	Managers (ISCO-08)	Professionals (ISCO-08)	Legislators, senior officials & managers (ISCO-88)	Total Gender Wage Gap
Egypt (2013)		27.1		7.2
Jordan (2010)				17.0
Qatar (2012-2013)	16.1	7.8	22.8	15.5
Saudi Arabia (2014)	0.3			0.4
UAE (2009)	15.8	15.8		29.9

Source: Gender wage gap by occupation, ILO statistical database, October 2015, and Jordanian National Commission Report submitted under article 18 to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women June 2015.

4. BUSINESSWOMEN: OWN ACCOUNT WORKERS OR EMPLOYERS?

While very few women are breaking through the glass ceiling to top managerial posts in the private sector, entrepreneurship is gaining importance as an alternative avenue for their economic empowerment³⁵. Entrepreneurs are self-employed as owners of businesses, and create their own economic opportunities and start a process to provide a product and/or service. These businesses have the potential to employ others. Despite scarce data and the broad definition of entrepreneurship, it has been estimated that the rate of entrepreneurship among women in MENA is lower than in other similar regions and remains lower than men's entrepreneurial initiatives within the region.

Two international sources³⁶ of information, monitoring entrepreneurship, confirm this view. The Global Entrepreneur Monitor tracks the individual characteristics of the activity, regardless of size and legal status of enterprises. The World Bank studies the performance of registered companies with more than five employees. In the MENA economies, combining both these approaches, the proportion of adult women who engage in entrepreneurial ventures would still be less than half that of men and relatively lower than other developing countries' regions. However, comparing those seeking entrepreneurship to those seeking employment, the gender gap in MENA is smaller in entrepreneurship than in employment as noted in a 2013 OECD report: "men are between two and a half and three and a half times more likely than women to enter the labour force, but only twice as likely as women to be involved in business³⁷".

Entrepreneurship, however, begs the question as to whether it is an avenue for women in MENA to grow a business with increased value and employment potential or whether it is a form of own account work in micro enterprises with little upside prospects. According to the ILO's Women's Entrepreneurship Development Programme, the vast majority of women working in the formal economy globally are managing small and micro-enterprises with little potential for growth³⁸.

Detailed information in the MENA region on women entrepreneurs in terms of formality/informality, business and employment sizes is scarce. What is available is ILO's classification by employment, differentiating between the paid employment jobs (salaried with contract) and the self-employed³⁹ whose remuneration directly depends on their profits. The self-employed includes amongst others 1) employers that engage on a continuous basis one or more persons to work for them as 'employee' and, 2) own-account workers that do not engage 'employees' on a continuous basis⁴⁰.

The latest data available for the region shows that a larger proportion of women self-employed consist of own account workers rather than employers, except for some GCC countries like the UAE and Qatar. In all countries, however, the share of women out of all own account workers (men and women) remains also small, when compared to men in line with their low LFPR versus men's. Oman has the highest share of women in own account workers (25 per cent in 2010) according to the latest data⁴¹. However, the proportion of women of all own account workers more than doubled in Oman over the last decade as well as in Bahrain to reach 11 per cent.

In addition, women employers are few in comparison to men employers in the region. The share of men employers out of all self-employed men is more than double the same share of women's. For example while the share of men who are employers is 15 per cent in Egypt, 12 per cent in Lebanon, 7 per cent in the occupied Palestinian territory, the corresponding indicator for women does not exceed 2 per cent in these countries according to the latest available statistics (2013)⁴².

³⁵ Hawkamah, 2013. UAE Women Board Directors Careers, Board Experiences and Recommendations for Change, (UAE).

³⁶ One is the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor by the Economist Intelligence Unit that looks into adults who are entrepreneurially active (managing any kind of venture, nascent, new or established) and the second is the World Bank's Enterprise Surveys that follow registered (incorporated) companies with 5 or more employees.

³⁷ OECD, 2013. Gender inequality and entrepreneurship in the Middle East and North Africa: A statistical portrait. MENA-OECD Discussion Paper.

³⁸ ILO, 2014. Women's Entrepreneurship Development - The ILO approach to Women's Entrepreneurship Development - Sustainable Enterprises.

³⁹ According to the ILO, self-employment jobs are distinguished according to the type of authority they will have over the productive unit which they represent or for which they work:

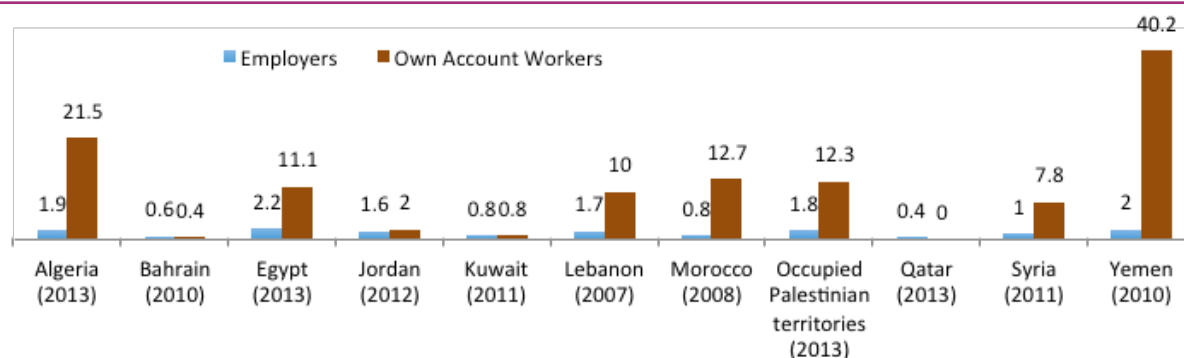
Employers engage on a continuous basis one or more persons to work for them as 'employee'. Own-account workers have the same authority over the economic unit as the 'employers', but do not engage 'employees' on a continuous basis. Members of producer cooperatives take part on equal footing with other members in determining the organization of production etc. Contributing family workers cannot be regarded as partners in the operation of the productive unit because of their degree of commitment to the operation of the unit, in terms of working time or other factors, is not at a level comparable to that of the head of the enterprise.

⁴⁰ <http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/statistics-overview-and-topics/status-in-employment/current-guidelines/lang-en/index.htm>

⁴¹ ILO, 2015. KILM.

⁴² Ibid

Figure 2: Per cent share of women employers and own account workers out of total employment (latest years)



Source: ILO, 2015. KILM.

Out of all employers, the share of women remains small in much of the region with the highest being almost one third in Bahrain (28 per cent) but less than 3 per cent in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Syria, according to the latest available data⁴³. Nevertheless, the share of women as employers has greatly increased in some of the Gulf countries, with more than doubling in the last decade to 28 per cent in Bahrain, to 11 per cent in Oman and to 17 per cent in Qatar⁴⁴.

The proportion of registered enterprises owned and managed by women is estimated to be much lower than that of men. Based on latest available data (2000s), almost 70 per cent of men engaging in early stage entrepreneurial activity own and manage an established business. In contrast, this proportion falls to around 40 per cent for women⁴⁵. The MENA region has among the lowest rates of women's business ownership in emerging regions according to the World Bank's most recent figures (2011-2013). Less than 4 per cent of businesses have a majority of women's participation in their ownership and less than 23 per cent of firms have women participating in their ownership.

Table 6: Women business ownership (per cent of latest available year)

Latest available	Percentage of firms with women participation in ownership	Percentage of firms with majority women ownership
All Countries	35.4	10.6
East Asia & Pacific	55.2	20.9
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	30.9	12.2
Latin America and Caribbean	40.2	...
Middle East and North Africa	22.7	3.7
South Asia	18.4	9.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	33.4	10.4

Source: World Bank Enterprise Surveys, [Accessed October 2015].

Despite their low numbers as employers, women's representation in chambers of commerce is increasing, especially as many chambers have set up women's business committees (as in the GCC countries, as well as in Egypt, Iraq, occupied Palestinian territory, Syria, Jordan and Yemen). One case of women's representation within employers' organisations is the Dubai Business Women Council as part of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry initiative as well as the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Likewise, the Saudi Federation of Chambers of Commerce established women's sections in its different chambers around the country and provided extensive training and support for the promotion of women entrepreneurs such as access to business development services. In Bahrain, the chamber of commerce elected its first female board member in 2001 and by 2014, it had four women elected to its board of 18 members. In some countries the women's business committees have been showing positive results in terms of women's economic empowerment.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 OECD, 2014, Women in Business 2014: Accelerating entrepreneurship in the Middle East and North Africa Region.

Box 4: Experiences from employers' organizations: occupied Palestinian territory

The gender unit in the Federation of Palestinian Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (FPCCIA) was recently established to reach out to businesswomen in the informal economy and to provide them with the opportunity to become full members of the Chambers and benefit from tailor-made services. In order to do so, the FPCCIA amended their internal regulations to allow the registration of all businesses regardless of their capital size. Consequently the new regulations gave voting rights to all enterprises and permitted their representatives to stand for election to the FPCCIA Board of Directors. The Federation also signed two collaboration agreements with Asala (Palestinian Businesswomen's Association) and the Business Women Forum in order to promote and economically enable small and medium-sized female business entrepreneurs.

The FPCCIA faced a number of challenges in implementing its gender plan, including resistance caused by social perceptions and prevailing cultural norms that limited women's participation in the public sphere. Logistical challenges had to be overcome as well, since most female entrepreneurs and small business owners operated in remote villages and camps. The impact of regular closures by the Israeli occupation also hindered movements from one area to another.

The Federation was able to establish eight gender units within the various Chambers with clear job descriptions for their leaders and detailed annual plans. The gender units facilitated and standardized the processes which allowed women to join the Chambers within the Federation. Furthermore, these units are currently working on creating databases to assess women's representation in the Chambers, and to publish regularly other important and relevant information on gender issues.

To date, the Federation, in partnership with the Ministry of National Economy, has delivered more than 70 awareness raising meetings targeting businesswomen with the aims of identifying their business needs and promoting the institutionalization of the gender units within the Chambers. Since many small businesses operate in rural and remote areas, the Federation organized field visits to Ramallah, Jenin, Bethlehem, Hebron, and North of Hebron to meet these women, learn about their business issues and provide them with the needed support to develop and grow their businesses.

As a result, 60 per cent of the female registered members within the Chambers of Commerce benefited from awareness raising efforts and 30 per cent of the female registered members benefited from the Chambers' consulting services. Currently the Chambers of Commerce in the West Bank have 2,800 business women registered.

Based on an interview with Mr. Mousa Salameh, Gender Unit Coordinator FPCCIA – December 2015.

In short, the statistics on women's achievements in business entrepreneurship so far clearly indicate that the journey in overcoming the obstacles to reach leadership positions is just at the beginning. Women in the region are well aware of their conditions in line with the realities of the region. They are aligning their expectations somewhere on a spectrum of full gender equality in business leadership on one end and the other extreme of no avenues at all for women's economic progress, as reflected in the findings of the World Economic Forum Executive Opinion Survey summarized below (Box 5)⁴⁶.

Box 5: How do women perceive their situation in terms of business leadership?

Women in the MENA region were asked: "In your country, to what extent do businesses provide women the same opportunities as men to rise to positions of leadership?" They rated their situation slightly above mid-level with an average of 4.5 on a score of one to seven⁴⁷.

One = "not at all, women have no opportunities to rise to positions of leadership"

Seven = "extensive, women have equal opportunities of leadership"

Source: World Economic Forum's Executive Opinion Survey reported in the Gender Global Gap report 2015.

5. THE GENDER DIVIDEND

Increasing women's representation from entry to senior management positions stands not only to benefit women themselves, but the world around them as well. Research on assessing this impact globally has found that women's economic empowerment improves economic growth, financial performance, and organizational effectiveness through diversity.

With the lowest women's economic activity rates in the world and a gender gap in leadership positions almost three times wider than the gap in their labour force participation, the MENA region would stand to gain by increasing women's economic empowerment.

5.1. ECONOMIC GROWTH, ENHANCED CORPORATE OUTCOMES, AND GREATER ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

A recent study by McKinsey & Company (2015) estimated that if women participate identically to men in the economy, by 2025, the world's economy (annual GDP) would expand by US\$ 28 trillion, or 26 per cent, compared to "a business-as-usual scenario". The expansion is the size of the current US and Chinese economy combined⁴⁸.

A study by Strategy& pointed out that, in terms of emerging market size, women represent the "third billion" of the world after the first and second billion in China and India. The study goes further to establish statistically that this "third billion" economic participation will benefit general economic growth and every country's well-being⁴⁹.

Other global studies focus more specifically on the positive effect on financial performance of the company resulting from having women managers. McKinsey & Company established a positive relation between companies' stock prices and profitability and the number of women managers over 2005-2007. Likewise, a research, done in 2011 by Catalyst, found that a group of Fortune 500 companies with a higher number of women board directors did better in terms of return on sales than those with less women. Another research by Credit Suisse (2012) that covered a wide geographic scope of companies with women on boards during the second half of 2000s showed that the stock performances of those with one woman on board or more was also much better⁵⁰.

In addition, because of their attributes and talents women are increasingly being considered as an asset to a company contributing to a diverse workforce. Thus, more women in decision-making can improve organizational outcomes by bringing in the added value of women's perspective in problem solving, strategizing and management⁵¹.

The global research findings are also relevant to the MENA countries, especially given that the gender gaps in education and health have been almost bridged.

5.2. MENA COUNTRIES TOO CAN REAP THE GENDER DIVIDEND

Little empirical research has been done on the impact of women's economic empowerment and leadership in business in the region. The recent McKinsey & Company study (2015) calculated that if women in the region enjoyed the same economic opportunities as men "the full potential scenario", the region would gain US\$ 2.7 trillion by 2025, and boost GDP by 47 per cent by 2025 over a "business as usual" scenario. It is estimated that women currently contribute to less than a fifth of GDP, which is the lowest contribution worldwide after India. Increasing the very low labour force participation of women in the MENA region would be a major driver for such an impact, contributing to 80-90 per cent of economic expansion.

The study also looked into a "best-in-region" scenario whereby all countries of the region would match the rate of improvement of the best-performing country in their region. It was estimated that the MENA countries could potentially add on US\$ 0.6 trillion in 2025, if the scenario materializes. After South Asia and India, MENA is the region that stands to benefit most from bridging the gender gap⁵². Studies, recently conducted by the ILO for Jordan, estimate that if employment occupations were reshuffled between women and men to have a more equal distribution and women were to be fairly paid; accordingly, the economy of Jordan could increase its GDP by 5 per cent, the equivalent of almost US\$ 2 billion. In other words, economic efficiency could increase because of better utilization of women's economic power and this in turn would create more wealth that can be shared more equally between women and men⁵³.

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

49 Strategy&, Formerly Booz & Company, 2012. Empowering the Third Billion Women and the world of work in 2012.

50 ILO, 2015. Women in business and management: Gaining Momentum, Global Report, (Geneva).

51 Ibid.

52 McKinsey and Company, September 2015. The Power of Parity: how advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth.

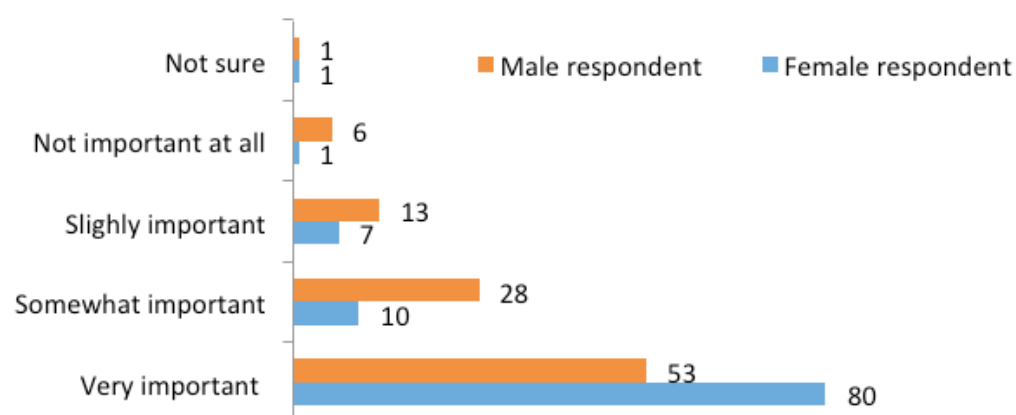
53 ILO, (Forthcoming 2016), Effects of gender inequality in employment and pay in Jordan and occupied Palestinian territory: Three Questions Answered, (Beirut).

Table 7: Global opportunity in two scenarios for increase GDP by 2025 in percentage growth in US\$

	Full potential scenario (%)	2014 \$ trillion	Best in region scenario (%)	2014 \$ trillion
India	60	2.9	16	0.7
South Asia (excluding India)	48	0.4	11	0.1
MENA	47	2.7	11	0.6
Latin America	34	2.6	14	1.1
East and Southeast Asia (excluding China)	30	3.3	8	0.9
Sub Saharan Africa	27	0.7	12	0.3
World	26	28.4	11	11.8
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	23	1.1	9	0.4
Western Europe	23	5.1	9	2.1
China	20	4.2	12	2.5
North America and Oceania	19	5.3	11	3.1

Source: McKinsey & Company McKinsey Global Institute, 2015. The power of parity.

Likewise, a survey of GCC's middle and senior managers, including women and men - of whom more than half were nationals - across a diverse range of sectors revealed that the majority found that more involvement of women in leadership positions is a "very important" driver of organizational effectiveness. This was the opinion of more than half the men and around 80 per cent of the women managers. In addition, women managers in GCC countries displayed leadership approaches that have a positive effect on organizational effectiveness at least as often as men managers⁵⁴.

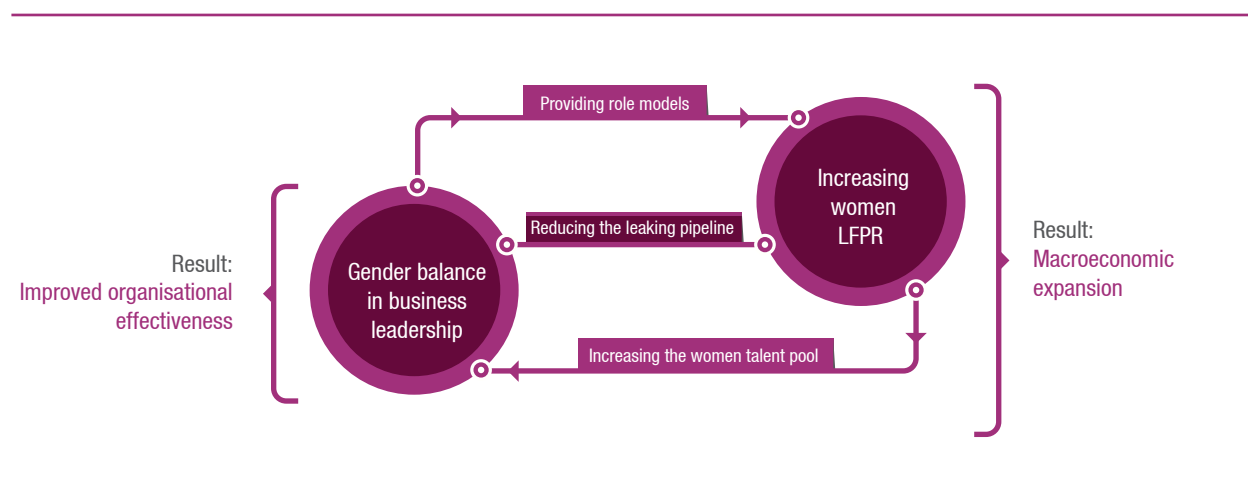
Figure 3: Women in leadership positions as a driver of organizational effectiveness, rated by sex

Source: McKinsey & Company, 2014. Women Matter.

The association between having women in high-level management positions and the above-mentioned economic and organizational gains presumes that a substantial talent pool of women is economically active. At the same time, having a wider female representation in business leadership could be a driver for the expansion of the female labour force via two channels:

1. Levelling the playing field at work and supporting women to climb the ladder can be expected to reduce the exit of mid-career women - the “leaking pipeline” phenomenon - and thus maintain a pool of female managerial talent at work;
2. Setting role models for talented women outside the labour force could inspire and motivate them to join the labour force and aim for quality jobs and high productivity sectors. In almost all surveys of the region, the limited availability of role models was identified as a limitation in changing cultural stereotypes and prejudice and thus adding to the barriers that influence women’s economic activity at large. Nevertheless, there are a growing number of businesswomen and senior women managers who are showing the way throughout the region.

Figure 4: Linkages between gender balance in business leadership and female labour force participation



Box 6: A CEO and executive board member highlights the lack of role models while offering inspiration to others

Tamara Abdel Jaber, the CEO and co-founder of a company in business consulting has been co-managing a growing company over the past 13 years. She described her journey as a woman in the corporate world as a positive one. Based on her experience, she asserted that women are generally challenged on the basis of gender, yet she was more adamant in concluding that the situation could actually be brighter, explaining: “As a woman, people were more interested and intrigued to learn about my project and ended up opening doors for me”. However, Ms. Abdel Jaber highlighted the importance of showcasing more female role models to whom young women can reach out or be inspired by at the onset of their careers, noting that many qualified young women still lack inspiration.

Tamara Abdel Jaber, CMC

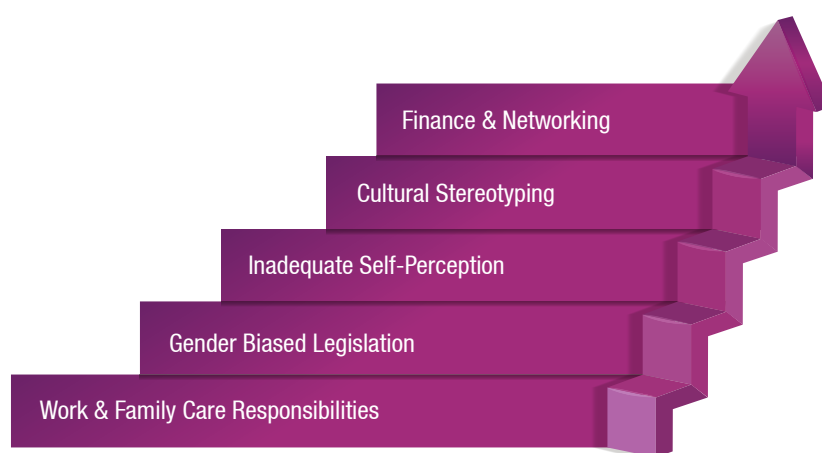
Executive Board Member - Palma Consulting -Jordan

6. BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Women in the MENA region face similar barriers as women in other parts of the world to reach top positions in business and management. The “glass ceiling” is a metaphor used to define the invisible obstacles women encounter to reach top positions. Similarly the “labyrinth”, another term for the more complex channels and paths women need to go through compared to their male counterparts to climb the ladder is also very present in MENA countries. Women in the region face additional challenges of cultural stereotyping, and inadequate self-perception. Compounded with the double burden of work and family care responsibilities, gender biased legislation, as well as limited access to finance and networking, the barriers are daunting indeed. Furthermore, the MENA countries' economic and labour market specificities have positioned women in a weak starting point for catching up with men in terms of representation in business leadership.

These obstacles have different degrees of importance in the MENA region due to the dissimilar development trajectories of the countries and their prevailing political, economic and social features. However, what is rather common across the region is that, even if the barriers are identified and classified separately, they are often interlinked. Each type of barrier intersects and influences and reinforces the other, limiting the potential to unleash the talent of women on the labour market. For example, family responsibilities are affected by the prevailing social norms, culture and stereotyping on the one hand and by the absence of supportive legislation on social policies, or masculine corporate structures on the other.

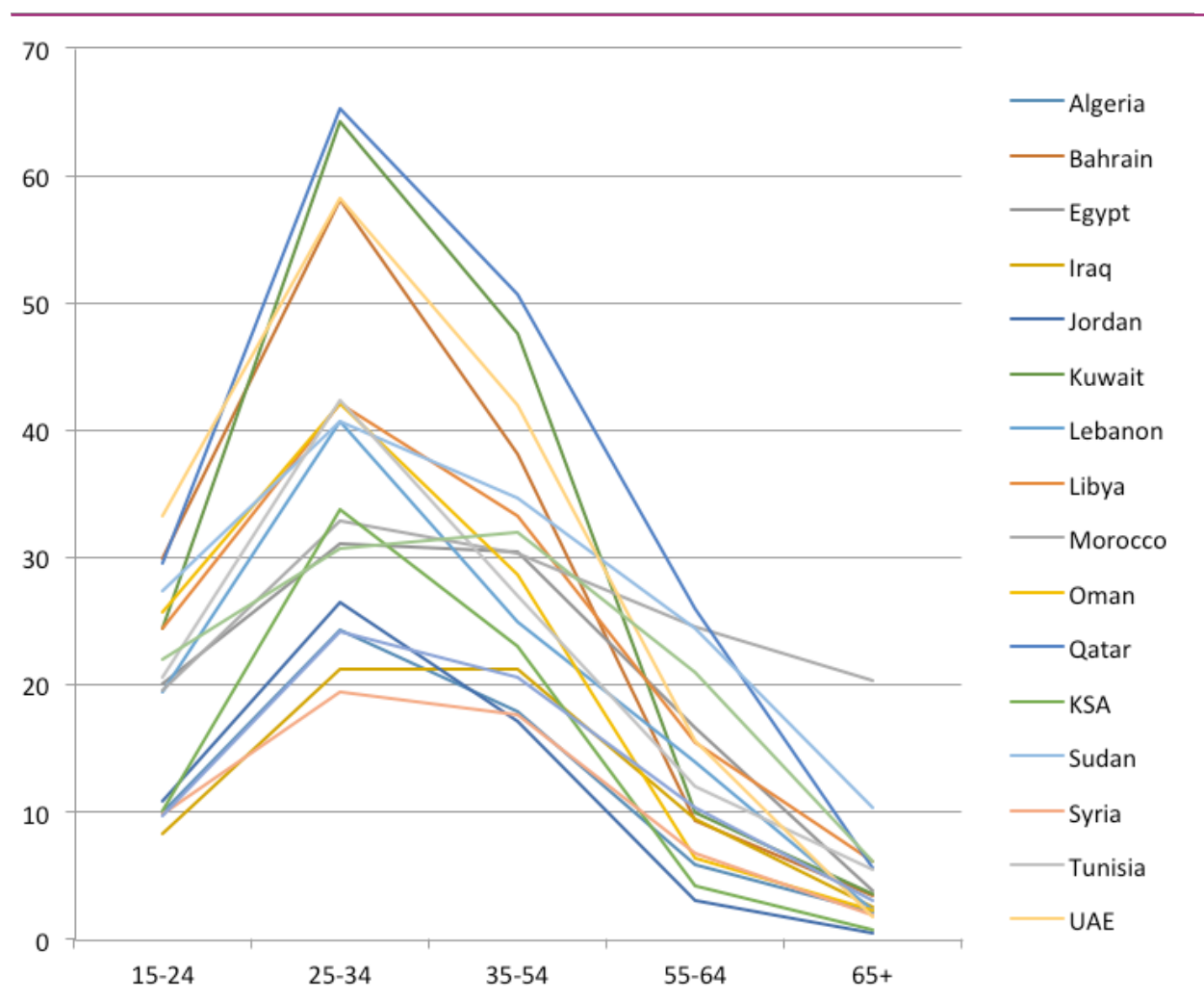
Moreover, many of the barriers that render women economically inactive also haunt working women in their careers and slow down their progression. In other words, what hinders women from entering the labour force in the first place also naturally hinders their growth into business and management leadership positions.



6.1. A WEAK STARTING POINT

The characteristics of the labour markets and the features of national economies of some countries in the region place women in weak starting positions. As mentioned earlier, women in the region register the lowest labour force participation in the world. The rates drop significantly with age, which is the time when women are experienced enough to assume higher positions and more responsibilities at work. For example in Lebanon, women's labour force participation peaks at 40 per cent between the ages of 25 and 34 years old and falls to less than 25 per cent within the age range of 35-44 years when career achievements usually become more visible. Nevertheless, in most countries of the region the last decade has seen less women dropping out at critical promotion points. For example, in Qatar with 68 per cent of women active between ages 25-29, 58 per cent of these women remained active between ages 40-44, compared to 52 per cent a decade ago in the same age bracket. In the occupied Palestinian territory more women are currently economically active and more stayed active than a decade ago. Between ages 25-29, 31 per cent of women were active compared to 15 per cent a decade ago and between ages 40-44, 24 per cent were active compared to 15 per cent previously⁵⁵.

Figure 5: Female labour force participation by age bands



Source: ILO, 2015. KILM

The employment profile of women in terms of vertical occupational distribution also reduces their chances of reaching business leadership. Within the corporate world, women tend to manage mainly the support functions such as human resources, public relations or other similar functions. Women in these functions may climb up the ladder, yet such experience rarely allows them to move along the central pathways that lead to the very top of corporations⁵⁶.

The horizontal sectoral distribution of employment and economic structure in a country can be another impediment. The predominance of some sectors in the economy that are gender-segregating in terms of employment also limit women's potential to grow. In some economies, the prevalence of male dominated sectors, such as the hydrocarbon industry, provide little opportunities for women. As previously mentioned, women tend to prefer working in the public sector and in social and care-related sectors in most MENA countries.

Box 7: Women and working in an oil based economy

A number of countries in the region rely mainly on oil as a key source of finance for the economy. Despite diversification efforts, this sector remains the main source of export and fiscal revenues and accounts for a substantial share of domestic production, especially in the GCC countries.

Looking at the oil economy in relation to gender dynamics and its impact on working women, many studies attribute the low rates of female participation in the labour force to oil and related industries. This is due mainly to the fact that the oil sector is male intensive and capital intensive employing few workers. It provides high wages at the household level and thus does not create a need for women to work. Given the high revenues oil brings to economies, it softens the state's need to diversify into other non-oil sectors that could employ women and reduce the need for having second breadwinners within households.

Research comparing Iran and Algeria with Tunisia and Morocco showed that countries with large oil sectors and big oil revenues had lower rates of female participation, including in the professional or manufacturing sectors than the non-oil economies⁵⁷.

Another study, the "Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Women in Supply Chain" by GPCA and Accenture (2015) further confirms that the petrochemical sector has limited female representation in its supply chain functions, especially in leadership positions. The study considered companies in the UAE and Kuwait as relatively more open to employing women in supply chain roles. Companies from other GCC countries were comparatively less in favour of having women in such functions. In some cases, this was attributed to the geographic location of the supply chain functions and overall cultural perceptions and practices. In addition, the report highlighted that more than half of the women in the region did not have access to supply chain engineering degrees in their home country, thereby limiting their ability to gain suitable qualifications in these disciplines⁵⁸.

6.2. COMBINING WORK WITH FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

In the MENA countries, the prevailing social norms consider women as the primary carers, in charge of rearing children, caring for the elderly and disabled, alongside everyday family responsibilities (unpaid care work). Thus, the most prevalent family model in the region remains the "male breadwinner - female carer" followed by "the male breadwinner - female part time earner". The dual earner model is still less common in the region⁵⁹. Time-use surveys reflect this division of labour. For example, a time use survey in Iraq revealed that women spend six times more time than men on housework and childcare; a study in Egypt confirms this showing that Egyptian women aged between 22 and 29 spend a median of three hours per day on housework, compared with 30 minutes by their male counterparts.

In the absence of well-developed structural social support services offering quality domestic and family care, women struggle to find a balance between two demanding roles, which, given the requirements of work in an increasingly competitive corporate world, can limit their career advancement.

A research study in GCC countries indicated that women considered balancing work and family/life as the single most important obstacle to their career aspirations. This was also given as the main reason for rejecting promotions since the risk that new professional roles would involve sacrifices, explaining that they did not want their families and care responsibilities to be negatively impacted by their careers. The research also shows that more than half of the respondents considered that a good work/life balance was not achievable, despite the fact that the vast majority were supported by their families to embark on careers⁶⁰. This concern is universal among working women; the same barriers for women's leadership were echoed in other countries, according to most qualitative surveys, including the ILO company survey in 2013⁶¹.

In the GCC countries and many affluent households in upper middle-income MENA countries, families rely on domestic workers (mainly migrant labour) or what can be called "marketized careers". Almost 90 per cent of respondents to a qualitative survey covering the GCC considered the availability of domestic help as having facilitated pursuing careers⁶². This has allowed women the time and choice to become economically active and to advance at work.

Furthermore, the care burden is coupled with inadequate and/or unaffordable social services reinforcing the traditional gendered distribution of the family care responsibilities in many countries in the region. An indicator from Egypt reveals that only around 15 per cent of pre-school children attend childcare⁶³ as traditionally in the region children were cared for in the home and the provision of childcare facilities is usually inadequate or unaffordable. Furthermore, in the MENA region, only a few countries reported cases of employers providing childcare facilities (Egypt and Jordan) or subsidies for childcare (Morocco and Egypt)⁶⁴.

57 Moghadam V M., 2013. Women, work and family in the Arab region: Toward economic citizenship, Special issue on Protecting the Arab Family from Poverty: Employment, Social Integration and Intergenerational Solidarity, DIFI Family Research and Proceedings.

58 <https://newsroom.accenture.com/industries/energy/gcc-petrochemical-and-chemical-companies-not-yet-reaping-full-benefits-of-gender-diversity-gpca-and-accenture-report-finds.htm>

59 Moghadam V M., 2013. Women, work and family in the Arab region: Toward economic citizenship. Special issue on Protecting the Arab Family from Poverty: Employment, Social Integration and Intergenerational Solidarity, DIFI Family Research and Proceedings.

60 Pearl Initiative, 2015. Women's career in the GCC: The CEO agenda, (UAE).

61 McKinsey & Company, 2014. GCC Women in Leadership- from the first to the norm.

62 Pearl Initiative, 2015. Women's career in the GCC: The CEO agenda, (UAE).

63 Ibid.

64 OECD – CAWTAR, 2015. WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE Gender, law and policy in the Middle East and North Africa, (Paris).

Within this context, family responsibilities ascribed to women do not only weigh on them, but also create disincentives for some private sector employers in the recruitment process who fear that women would make ‘less committed’ employees⁶⁵.

Box 8: An Egyptian software services’ company experiments with family-friendly measures

A leading software services’ company that was founded in 2014 and now has around 800 employees with local and international offices, promotes a unique family-friendly culture among its employees. It has adopted a flexible working hours scheme to suit different time zones for customers as well as accommodating employees whenever the need arises. Due to this accommodating culture, the company provides equal opportunities for skilled men and women to join the company, maintaining an equal ratio between them.

A recently appointed executive director and head of a core function at this company, further introduced additional employment arrangements within her department: working from home (remotely) based on employee merit, tailored capacity building/training, connectivity through internet/phone with the team, and free-lance working arrangements (part-time work or percentage of hours suiting an employee’s needs). These measures attracted a highly skilled caliber of employees, mostly women who were looking for flexible employment that was not generally available in the labour market. Single mothers (divorced or widowed) or the care-givers in the families were among those who took advantage of these measures. The head of department, a woman who had experienced the challenge of managing the dual work-family care burden, aimed at leveling the playing field for other women with family responsibilities, and saw in this initiative a win-win situation for both the company and employees. She presented the arrangements as an opportunity for the company to obtain the best people, regardless of their personal situation, and at the same time to reduce operational costs and increase employee motivation and retention.

Initially, other departments resisted the introduction of further flexible working arrangements given the prevailing traditional mind-set of controlling and evaluating working time and office presence. However, the resistance of other department heads decreased once the flexible arrangements were implemented in a number of projects, demonstrating that these did not jeopardize job effectiveness or quality.

No formal evaluation within the company on the impact of these measures is available, yet qualitative indicators point to more engaged employees and improved performance. According to the head of the department, women who have benefited from these measures showed “greater appreciation and worked harder to meet and exceed expectations than others”. While other departments within the company are currently looking to follow the same approach given its effectiveness, there is still no standardized policy and flexible arrangements are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

The company has currently only one woman in its executive team, yet in middle management there are almost equal numbers of men and women.

Sherine Elkadi, CMQ/OE
Executive Director – Quality It Work

Box 9: The realities of maternity leave in the MENA region

Only three countries in the MENA region have ratified one of ILO Maternity Protection conventions. Morocco, has ratified in 2011 the ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) which provides for 14 weeks of maternity leave. Libya has ratified in 1975 the ILO Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952 (No. 103) which provided for 12 weeks of maternity leave, although Libya in 2010 increased the maternity leave to 14 weeks and Algeria ratified in 1962 the first Maternity Protection Convention, 1919 (No. 3) and now applies the 14 weeks provision. However, all other countries in the region have a maternity leave of less than the 14 weeks and only a few countries offer up to six days of paternity leave.

Maternity and childcare are considered a women’s issue rather than a social responsibility. As a result, short leaves are given only to mothers, with almost no leave for fathers and very limited parental benefits. Parental leave and innovative childcare policies that help preserve women’s economic rights and advancement opportunities at work are limited and consist usually of unpaid leave. Especially in the case of countries in the Middle East and GCC, the main constraint is structural as maternity leave is a cost to be paid entirely by the employer, thus discouraging employers to employ female workers⁶⁶. In addition, of the 12 countries for which information is available, only four guarantee women an equivalent position after maternity leave.

Recently, few companies have managed to provide longer maternity leaves and better maternity benefits. These are mainly multinational companies that are introducing their global policies to the region.

⁶⁵ McLoughlin, C., 2013. Women’s economic role in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report), Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, University of Birmingham, (Birmingham, UK).

⁶⁶ For more information on the topic of maternity protection, refer to ILO, 2014. Maternity and Paternity at Work: Law and Practice across the World, (Geneva).

6.3. CULTURE, STEREOTYPING AND WOMEN'S SELF-PERCEPTIONS

The traditional cultural norms that assign roles and responsibilities of men and women within the MENA societies also shape patterns of thought and influence perceptions and attitudes in the corporate world. These can hamper women's career advancement, especially if echoed in media and educational programmes.

In the workplace, gender stereotypes influence two perceptions: one is the perception of women's capacities by others – whether women or men – and the second is working women's self-image and their own perception of their leadership abilities.

Gender stereotyping by others forms an additional obstacle for women who want to climb up the ladder as they need to overcome predetermined ideas that are not based on real performance. Simply put, women are not provided equal opportunities to men. For example, a research study on women executives in Tunisia, Kuwait and Sudan revealed that their success in leadership positions caused them to endure others' negative feelings, cognitive distortion and a lack of sympathy, rendering their place of work a "hostile environment"⁶⁷. One Tunisian woman executive stated that, "if you are a man you can fail, if you are a woman you are not allowed to"⁶⁸.

The bias against women in the workplace often starts by classifying women as "risky employees" – especially women with children. According to a focus group in Bahrain, men considered working women as not capable of handling the responsibilities of marriage and taking care of children. Indeed based on research in GCC countries, 48 per cent of women believed they suffered from conscious gender bias and 62 per cent from unconscious gender bias at their work⁶⁹. One Kuwaiti working woman with children clearly expressed that "though reaching a senior level has come at the high price of pushing myself to the limit, I feel that women have to constantly keep proving themselves; that we would not quit all responsibilities all of a sudden for family and children. Men are taken on as risk-free without any effort"⁷⁰.

In terms of self-image, many women still do not perceive themselves on equal footing with men in the work place. A research study that entailed interviewing around 1,000 women, – based on the report Women Leaders - Stepping out of the Shadows revealed that women were keen to make more of an impact at work. For example, while they wanted presence in meetings, they did not want to be considered aggressive or self-important. As a result they were often quiet and unseen and consequently overlooked for managerial roles. Statements like "I don't feel I can stand in front of people and get my message across" or "I don't want to seem boastful if I put myself forward" or "can you be recognized professionally but still be seen as a modest woman?" reflected women's perception about themselves⁷¹.

6.4. LEGISLATION

Legal frameworks underpin women's participation in national labour forces and consequently impact their development and progress. The legal frameworks also influence human resources policies and motivational schemes in corporations. They can form incentives or disincentives for women to enter or exit labour markets and to pursue careers.

Even though many national constitutions in the MENA region confirm equality between men and women, implementing mechanisms and translation of this principle into laws are often missing. For example, personal status laws (covering family relations, marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc.) in many countries are based on patriarchal and traditional family roles that do not treat men and women equally. Furthermore, it is argued that gender discrimination is accentuated by the interaction between societal and cultural norms and practices prevailing in many Arab societies and that are mainly based on personal status codes. In fact, laws that support legal gender equality in the region are considered to have little value in practical terms because the family and personal laws have an over-riding effect even when they contradict constitutional provisions (such as non-discrimination or equality)⁷².

Laws can be particular hindrances to women with entrepreneurial aspirations who seek autonomy and influence. In a 2015 global study⁷³ on laws relating to six areas crucial to setting up a business (accessing institutions, using property, getting a job, providing incentives to work, building credit and going to court), the MENA countries were among those countries that had at least ten legal gender discriminatory laws that imposed restrictions on women in their economic choices. For example, only in one country in the region (Morocco) is discrimination in access to credit clearly prohibited.

67 Abdalla, I., 2015. Career Facilitators and Barriers of Arab Women Senior Executives International Journal of Business and Management; Vol. 10, No. 8.

68 Dubai Women Establishment, 2009. Arab Women Leadership Outlook 2009-2011, (Dubai).

69 Pearl Initiative, 2015. Women's career in the GCC: The CEO agenda, (UAE).

70 Ibid.

71 Northern Lights, Women Leader Stepping out of the Shadow <http://www.northernlightspr.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Women-Leaders-Stepping-out-of-the-shadows-FINAL.pdf> [Accessed December 2015].

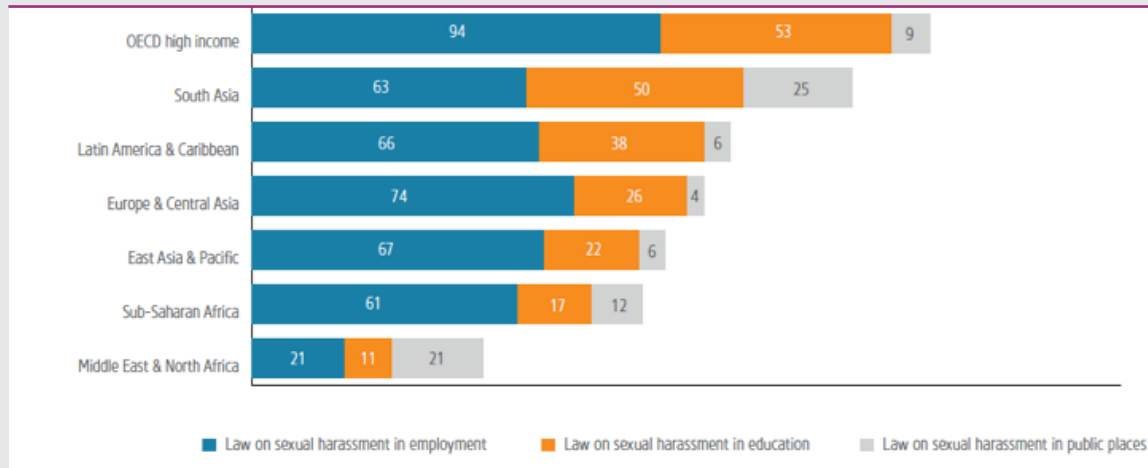
72 Abdalla, I., 2015. Career Facilitators and Barriers of Arab Women Senior Executives International Journal of Business and Management; Vol. 10, No. 8.

73 World Bank, 2015. Women, Business and the Law 2016 - Getting to Equal, (Washington DC).

Box 10: Sexual harassment laws in the MENA region

While there is significant knowledge on gender-based violence in the region and many countries have introduced laws on sexual harassment in public places, less has been done in terms of protection from violence against women at the work place. Only one-fifth of the MENA economies have laws on sexual harassment at work and in public places. There is even less protection from sexual harassment in educational institutions⁷⁴.

Figure 6: Sexual harassment laws (percentage of countries per region)



Source: World Bank, 2015. Women, Business and the Law 2016 – Getting to Equal.

According to a youth survey in Egypt in 2009, around 31 per cent of young women (aged 15–29 years) stated that they faced the risk of sexual harassment on the streets in addition to theft, crowding and pushing while commuting on public transport. As a result, many resorted to walking – as their preferred means of reaching their destinations – and were thus restricted to working close to home or in places with safe public transportation⁷⁵. In addition, the political events of recent years in Egypt exposed a significant increase in gender-based violence incidents in public places amidst the demonstrations by young people that began in 2011. As a result and following the efforts of women-rights organisations, a new law that criminalizes sexual harassment in employment, education and public spaces was introduced⁷⁶.

6.5. ACCESS TO FINANCE

A key issue supporting or obstructing women entrepreneurs specifically in starting and growing their businesses is access to resources, mainly financial resources and property as collaterals for credit. In many cases around the world, it is not a purely gender discriminatory issue, but rather an entrepreneurial challenge for nascent enterprises. Access to credit tends, however, to become more complex when combined with gender-related factors, such as lack of assets, discriminatory property rights, as well as legislation and customs that hamper securing collateral. Social norms can also place the control of any financing or other resources with the male head of household, regardless of who is the economically active party. In Egypt, for example, most rejections of business loan applications are due to lack of acceptable collateral for both men and women. However, women running their own business are twice as likely as men to complain about these collateral requirements⁷⁷.

MENA countries typically face these challenges because of conservative lending, complicated application processes, high interest rates and collateral requirements⁷⁸. Although little data is available on gender differences in access to finance, the latest available figures from the International Finance Corporation (IFC) on the share of loans granted to formal women-owned small and medium enterprises showed that in the MENA region women received less than a six per cent share, the lowest among more than 2,200 enterprises receiving small and medium-size enterprise (SME) loans from 34 IFC financial institutions' clients in 25 countries⁷⁹.

In parallel, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) has constructed an index on access to finance based on conditions that facilitate women's access to financial services, given that no comprehensive sex-disaggregated data relating to financial services is available. The key conditions that form the composite index are: credit histories; women's access to finance programmes through either government initiatives or private lenders; delivering financial services; and private sector credit as a percentage of GDP⁸⁰. The index scores between zero and a hundred as the highest value. The best performing MENA country scored 56.2 (Morocco in 2012) among 113 rated countries from around the globe. Of note is that of the 12 MENA countries covered by the index, all, except for one, Egypt, saw considerable improvement in women's access to finance from 2010 to 2012.

74 Ibid.

75 World Bank, 2010. Bridging the Gap: Improving Capabilities and Expanding Opportunities for Women in the Middle East and North Africa Region, (Washington DC).

76 World Bank, 2015. Women, Business and the Law 2016. (Washington DC).

77 World Bank (2010), Bridging the Gap: Improving Capabilities and Expanding Opportunities for Women in the Middle East and North Africa Region.

78 Center of Arab Women for Training and Research and International Finance Corporation (2007), Women Entrepreneurs in the Middle East and North Africa: Characteristics, Contributions, and Challenges. Washington DC.

79 International Finance Corporation (2014), Women owned SMEs: A Business Opportunity for Financial Institutions. Washington DC.

80 ILO (2015), Women in business and management: Gaining Momentum, Global Report, Geneva.

Table 8: Women's Access to Finance Score for 2010 and 2012 (Score 100-0 with 100 as highest value)

Global Rank	Country	Score 2012	Score 2010
41	Morocco	56.2	52.9
48	Bahrain	50.3	41.9
52	Lebanon	47.3	38.9
55	Jordan	46.1	37.7
61	Tunisia	44.4	29.2
62	Oman	44.1	27.1
66	UAE	42.5	33.4
73	Saudi Arabia	37.1	35
75	Egypt	35.5	45.5
91	Syria	23.1	6.3
96	Algeria	20.9	6.3

Source: ILO, 2015. Women in Business and Management Gaining Momentum Global Report.

The World Bank's Global Financial Inclusion Index (Global Findex) also measures the percentage of women and men with accounts at formal financial institutions (a bank, credit union, another financial institution) and indicates a significant gender gap across all MENA countries for which data is available. In some countries, as Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, the percentage reported by men could be double that of women⁸¹.

Table 9: Percentage of women and men with an account at a formal financial institution

	Women	Men
Algeria	40	61
Bahrain	67	90
Egypt	9	18
Jordan	16	33
Kuwait	64	79
Lebanon	33	62
Saudi Arabia	61	75
Tunisia	21	34
United Arab Emirates	66	90
Yemen	2	11

Source: World Economic Forum, 2015. The Global Gender Gap Report 2015.

Box 11: A Lebanese commercial bank provides women tailored products

A medium sized commercial bank in Lebanon, BLC Bank, introduced in 2012 a programme specifically targeting women, with the aim of "becoming the Bank of choice and the employer of choice for Lebanese women". The Bank followed the UNWomen/ UN Global Compact Women's Empowerment Principles, with the support of the international Finance Corporation (IFC), and is a member of the Global Banking Alliance for Women. The programme entitled "We Initiative", presents a holistic value-added approach fully dedicated to women and serving their specific needs with relevant and innovative financial products while supporting them through networking and capacity building. Within two years, the programme began generating financial results accounting for more than 18 per cent of the bank's profits. A goal of the bank is to raise the share of women in its senior management to equal that of men by 2020. Women currently comprise around 43 per cent of senior management.

Source: <http://www.gbaforwomen.org/my-members/>

6.6. LIMITED NETWORKING

Networking contributes to social as well as professional relations within companies, and facilitates information exchange, mentoring, and lobbying. Networking is usually considered an important channel for aspiring leaders. However, the nature of networks that women build in the region tend to be less effective than men's networks and provide limited access to influential connections. "Old boys" networks are the dominant form of networking in enterprises and are usually difficult for women to penetrate. Men are often not prone to welcoming female colleagues, and those who are in senior positions are more inclined to channel developmental opportunities to other men, believing they will be more likely than women to succeed⁸². Women might not feel comfortable networking in the social contexts of these settings and may also be unable to interact outside work, due to family commitments or cultural factors and traditions. As one Omani woman put it, "the presence of old boy's networks makes it difficult for women to network" Almost half the respondents to a qualitative survey in GCC countries said it is difficult for women to network throughout the organization to the same extent as men⁸³.

A respondent from another survey also covering Kuwaiti, Emirati and Qatari female managers explained that "...because of the concern about ones' reputation, they [female managers] are often not part of the casual network of relationships formed at work and they find themselves on the edge rather than in the middle of the professional, socialization process"⁸⁴.

The weak extent of networking is more of a barrier to women's progression when combined with "wasta". "Wasta" is commonly understood as a form of personal connection that relies on various forms of influence and power for career advancement regardless of merit. This reliance on social clout is prevalent in the region and can influence against women who are not well connected. In the study of GCC countries, women at different levels of management confirmed that the absence of "wasta" in their favour impeded their growth. "Wasta" is highly associated with family status and wealth. Accordingly, chances for promotion become even less for women coming from less affluent backgrounds or families that are not well connected⁸⁵.



Box 12: Restricted mobility of women in the region and gender based violence

Different studies in the MENA region note the lack of safe and reliable transportation as an important constraint to women's ability to work. These mobility barriers threaten women's safety and dignity in the public sphere. In addition to the threat of harassment and violence in a number of countries of the region, they limit women's participation in the economic lives of their communities and hamper their opportunities for development.

Case studies from Yemen and the occupied Palestinian territory reveal that limited mobility restricts women's access to resources, markets, training and employment. As a result women are confined to work in home based, informal and traditional arrangements.

In many countries, security concerns dominate women's ability to work outside the house. In West Bank and Gaza for example, the widespread use of checkpoints and barriers are serious constraints to work for women, and thus around one fifth work at home. The same experience is lived by Iraqi women whereby the incidence of violence has driven women out of their jobs into their homes⁸⁶.

82 Ibara H., Ely R., Kolb M., 2013. Women Rising: The Unseen Barriers. Harvard Business Review.

83 Pearl Initiative, 2015. Women's career in the GCC: The CEO agenda, (UAE).

84 Abdalla, I., 2015. Being and Becoming a Leader: Arabian Gulf Women Managers' Perspectives International Journal of Business and Management; Vol. 10, No. 1.

85 Wolf A., 2015. Business Women in the Middle East and North Africa Barriers and Opportunities.

86 McLoughlin, C., 2013. Women's economic role in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, University of Birmingham, (Birmingham, UK).

7. MEASURES AND INITIATIVES TO ADVANCE WOMEN

Amidst the multiple challenges constraining women's representation in the business world, responses are also gaining ground in the MENA region. Governments have been introducing reforms at macro levels starting with legislation. At the meso level, emerging alliances to support women in business are increasing in both number and outreach. And, at the micro level, some companies are introducing human resources measures to support women in their careers. The following are examples of changes that have been underway.



7.1. LEGAL REFORMS

Legal reforms have been introduced, albeit to different degrees across the region. Most reforms do not necessarily target women in business and management directly, but aim to ensure greater equality of opportunities that can ultimately influence women's economic choices and outcomes.

According to the World Bank⁸⁷, a number of gender positive legal reforms were introduced recently (mid-2013-mid 2015). Examples include specifying a gender non-discrimination clause in the new constitutions of Egypt and Tunisia. More specifically, Lebanon increased the length of paid maternity leave from 49 to 70 days. In Bahrain, the social allowance policy was amended (resolution No. (77) of 2013) to grant married women employees the same allowance as married men employees, and ensure gender equality in allowances at the time of marriage. In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Labour has supported the entry of women into a number of retail jobs. In Jordan, tripartite efforts are in place under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour and the Jordanian National Commission for Women to eliminate gender wage imbalances with the support of the ILO⁸⁸.

Along with such legal reforms, governments have set up institutions to support women's economic empowerment. These consist of full-fledged ministries specifically dedicated to women related issues, such as in the occupied Palestinian territory, or other ministries that combine gender issues with another portfolio, as in Morocco and Tunisia. Other more recent initiatives are semi-governmental entities such as the Gender Balance Council in the UAE, established early in 2015 to promote equality and opportunities for women at work.

7.2. COMPANY MEASURES

At company levels, there is greater awareness of the importance of gender balance in management. As a result, programmes and initiatives are starting to take shape. The 2013 ILO survey on companies in the MENA reported that the most commonly implemented measure supporting women's career advancement are executive trainings. Other measures identified as priorities included: assigning women managers visible and challenging tasks, exposing women to all company operations and functions, providing top management support for a gender equality strategy, and making promotion paths and career advancement

⁸⁷ World Bank, 2015. Women, Business and the Law 2016 – Getting to Equal.
⁸⁸ For more information: http://www.ilo.org/declaration/follow-up/tcprojects/eliminationofdiscrimination/WCMS_164947/lang-en/index.htm

prospects clear for women. Nevertheless, no more than 12 per cent of the companies' representatives interviewed prioritized the implementation of retention and re-entry schemes for women and allowing for flexible working arrangements.

Few companies are institutionalizing gender sensitive measures and especially family-friendly measures. Under the Gender Equality Model Egypt (GEME) initiative launched by the government in partnership with the United Nations and other international organizations, ten companies in Egypt implemented gender equality training, developed gender-sensitive human resources policies and codes of conduct, and advertised their commitment to the programme on their websites and in other marketing materials⁸⁹. One of them, a leading Egyptian company producing pharmaceutical products made gender equality a priority and followed up with actions including subsidized day care, an emphasis on equal pay for women and men, employee training on gender equality, and fairer recruitment standards⁹⁰.

Such programmes are more developed in large companies and multinational regional offices that have global policies promoting better gender representation and diversity. However, little information is available about the impact of the programmes on the careers of women in the MENA region.

As to smaller local companies, women's advancement programmes are less established and, when offered, they are based on informal arrangements. A qualitative survey conducted in 2015 on recruitment in Lebanon indicated that most employers expressed a preference to hire women in management for certain qualities they perceive women to possess, yet did not have well-developed gender sensitive human resources programmes to support their ascension to top positions. Instead a few supported grooming female managers on a case-by-case basis⁹¹.

Alternatively, new business solutions are emerging in response to women's needs and ambitions to advance in the business world. For example, in the GCC, women-exclusive employment e-portals have been created to help guarantee career options across the GCC countries targeted exclusively for this specific group⁹². Another business established by two women in the same sub-region offered guidance specifically to high-net-worth women to build professional networks and invest in start-ups⁹³.

Box 13: A multinational's regional office implements a policy on gender balance in management

Based on its published report "Nestlé in Society", "Nestlé", a well-known multinational in nutrition and wellness consumer products, is aiming to become a gender-balanced company and to achieve yearly growth in the number of its women senior managers by 2018. It signed up to the United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles in 2013. To apply this objective in the Middle East, a survey of the workforce in the region was conducted to better understand the drivers that can push forward the gender balance objective. The company also implemented family-friendly measures such as a maternity leave of up to six months (half of which is paid and the other optional and unpaid). It also provided flexible working hours and part-time work arrangements. In addition, the company carried out comprehensive management training and awareness raising on the added value of gender balanced leadership. It launched a mentoring programme for men and women to nurture talent. In 2014, women held 23 per cent of the company's management positions in the Middle East, up from 16 per cent in 2011, with two women serving as part of senior top management.

Source: Nestlé in Society: Creating Shared Value and meeting our commitments 2014 Middle East.

7.3. FURTHER INITIATIVES

Within this context, women in businesses are increasingly organizing and networking, with the majority of MENA countries having now more than one businesswomen association to support female leadership and entrepreneurship. Some examples are the registration of the MENA Businesswomen's Network Association in Bahrain, the occupied Palestinian territory Business Women's Forum (BWF) and the National Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Tunisia. These associations provide training, research, networking, and other business development services. They have also been coordinating and networking internationally under entities such as the Council of Arab Businesswomen and MENA Businesswomen's Network.

More recently, business leaders from the GCC countries launched a regional chapter of the 30 per cent Club, which was founded in the UK in 2010 and has become a global business-led voluntary initiative committed to achieving better gender representation in senior leadership positions of organisations. The initiative is based on the increasing conviction that gender balance on boards not only encourages better leadership and governance, but also further contributes to improved board performance⁹⁴.

Universities and non-governmental organisations are also increasingly addressing women in business either through conducting research on the topic or by offering training programmes targeting women entrepreneurs. For instance, in Egypt, the American University in Cairo developed initiatives aimed at improving the gender balance of corporate boards in the MENA region, by improving the qualifications of women to be appointed to corporate boards, sensitising male board members to gender issues, and advocating for policy and legislative changes that institutionalise gender diversity on corporate boards⁹⁵.

89 ILO, 2015. Women in business and management: Gaining Momentum, Global Report, (Geneva).

90 World Bank, 2013. Gender at Work: A Companion to the World Development Report on Jobs.

91 ILO, 2015. Qualitative Research on Recruitment Processes in Lebanon, unpublished.

92 <http://www.glowork.net/>

93 <http://www.womena.co>

94 <http://www.bi-me.com/main.php?id=69941&t=1&c=34&cg=4&mset=1011> [Accessed December 2015].

95 <http://www.aucegypt.edu/Business/Pages/search.aspx?q=women%20corporate> [Accessed December 2015].

8. OPPORTUNITIES

The MENA region is undergoing significant changes. Despite the turmoil in many countries, long-term stability and growth in the region will largely depend on the creation of decent work for all. On-going developments may also improve prospects for women to enter labour forces and reach top positions in management and business leadership. Demographic, economic, and technological trends together with changes in national employment policies across the region represent opportunities for more equality between men and women. In addition, the growing talent and capabilities of women with increasing education can be of tremendous benefit to companies and organizations. It is, nevertheless, important to stress that capitalising on these opportunities for greater gender dividends hinges upon gender sensitive legislative and social and economic policy frameworks.



8.1. A READY TALENT POOL

The MENA region is characterised by a young population that is improving its educational achievements over time, especially amongst women. The average years of education for women in MENA increased 16 times between 1950, when it was the lowest in the world, and 2010, versus an increase of seven times for men in the region⁹⁶. The pool of graduates is expected to boost the number of women who work in MENA. When asked whether they would prefer to hold a job for which they are qualified outside home, the vast majority of women agreed with this statement. The 2012 Gallup poll, reported that 92 per cent of women in Bahrain, 89 per cent in Egypt, 89 per cent in Tunisia, 87 per cent in Yemen, 66 per cent in Libya, and 58 per cent in Syria agreed with this statement⁹⁷. Such figures suggest that there is a wave of women ready to enter the labour force. They could also indicate that a pool of female talent is emerging and providing the potential for women to climb the ladder to lead businesses, if unrestrained.

8.2. NATIONALIZATION POLICIES AND WOMEN IN GCC COUNTRIES

In the GCC countries, the progress in women's education is taking place within the context of specific demographic and political conditions that have compelled governments to introduce employment nationalisation policies to reduce dependence on migrant workers and provide more jobs for nationals. As a result, women nationals of GCC countries stand a strong chance of benefitting from these policy shifts.

In complying with employment nationalisation policies, private companies can turn to a wider internal talent pool that includes qualified women. However, this needs to be coupled with complementary measures to support and encourage women to work in paid employment. For example, in Saudi Arabia, after the implementation of the nationalisation policy "Nitaqat" in 2011, the number of Saudi women employed in the private sector more than doubled by 2012. The increase was partly attributed to the policy of nationalisation targeting women. However, the government also provided a set of financial incentives for employers to hire women accompanied by legislative reforms allowing women to undertake certain economic activities and an increased

⁹⁶ UN Women, 2015. Progress of The World's Women 2015-2016 Transforming Economies Realizing Rights.
⁹⁷ Solutions, 2015. Changes on the Horizon for Women's Economic Equality in MENA.

willingness of women to accept jobs. Other GCC countries are following suit, given the demographic pressures. Amongst others, Kuwait is putting constraints on expatriates' residency conditions to reduce this population, while Qatar aims ambitiously to have half of its workforce comprised of nationals in all sectors⁹⁸.

8.3. CHANGING EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS

Amidst global trends shifting away from waged employment and the traditional employer-employee arrangement⁹⁹, self-employment and entrepreneurship are gaining momentum in the region. While these changing patterns of employment entail high social and economic risks, they are also offering different prospects for women bound by social and cultural constraints, yet wanting to be economically active.

Entrepreneurship and the establishment of SMEs could present valid options for women and can provide them opportunities for personal growth and leadership, while setting their own rules. SMEs that provide business incubator services are becoming especially more available in the region¹⁰⁰. Governments are also lending a hand. For example, in Saudi Arabia, entrepreneurship education was rolled out nationally and the girls' section at the Technical Vocational Training Corporation was the first to incorporate such courses in its curricula. In Yemen, four national training institutes provide business management training for start-ups and women owned enterprises, subsidized by the Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion Service. In 2014, approximately 2,000 women were trained and reported as benefitting from improved business knowledge and self-confidence. An additional 5,000 women are further targeted to benefit from start-up micro-finance opportunities once the political situation in the country improves.

8.4. EVOLVING TECHNOLOGY

Technological developments along with women's improved education and entry into technology-driven fields are drivers behind new work arrangements that could support women's economic participation and empowerment, such as telecommuting and flexible work hours. For example, emerging digital platforms allow women to bypass mobility constraints and connect with businesses. A typical case underscoring this new trend is Handasiyat.net, an online hub for contract engineers based in Jordan that witnessed an increasing number of women engineers wanting to work from home. Other digital platforms in the GCC countries are attracting women.

Women are also appreciating the potential of employment in technology, especially in the GCC countries. Many are specializing in such fields. For example, according to a 2014 survey from *The Economist*, the UAE government universities have more women studying science, technology, engineering and mathematics than men¹⁰¹. While this could be due to more men opting to study abroad; a less socially accepted option for women, it still indicates that women are choosing technology and related fields. The UAE government has been pushing in this direction by providing schemes to support women choosing these specializations.

⁹⁸ Booz & Company, 2011. Educated, Ambitious, Essential Women Will Drive the GCC's Future.

⁹⁹ ILO, 2015. World Economic and Social Outlook.

¹⁰⁰ UBI Global, Insights on MENA: The Middle East and North Africa Business Incubator Landscape, Available at: <http://ubi-global.com/insights-on-mena-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-business-incubation-landscape/> [Accessed January 2015].

¹⁰¹ The Economist, 2014. UAE Economic Vision: Women in Science, Technology and Engineering.

9. SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Women's career advancement in the private sector is not only a personal choice but also very much a policy choice, and a business imperative that will increase economic and social value.

Women themselves have to “walk the talk” and demonstrate their competencies and capabilities. Key personal elements identified as “career facilitators” include self-efficacy and hard work. Yet, no matter what capabilities women have, without significant effort from governments, companies, employers, women's organizations and workers' organizations to deal with the structural and institutional barriers, little can be achieved.

Multidimensional interventions are required to address the interrelated barriers that need to be adapted to fit the different political, cultural, social and economic conditions of each country in the region. Notwithstanding the necessity of an integrated approach with policy level solutions being the priority¹⁰², below are a few suggested actions. These are highlighted with no particular ranking, and are targeted primarily to private sector. Recommendations for employers and business membership organizations are provided to carry forward the support for women in business.

9.1. COMPANY SPECIFIC ACTIONS

The following actions would allow companies to reap the gender dividend, which evidence has shown as benefitting many companies around the world.

- **Change attitudes.** Tackle cultural barriers within companies. Train men on diversity and on breaking gender stereotypes. Show that investing in women brings higher returns at all levels; use research and evidence including historical precedents of women playing powerful and successful roles. Engage senior female figures to change attitudes. Promote positive female role models. Share success stories of women business leaders and male champions. Shape attitudes in the wider communities through public relations, marketing and corporate social responsibility and by raising awareness on the contribution capable women can make.
- **Practice equity and build gender-sensitive human resources management systems.** Adopt human resources procedures that ensure equity at work. Focus only on the qualifications and skills that meet the requirements for recruitment, pay and promotion and not on the sex of the person. Set up clear rules and criteria for monitoring and reporting in order to eliminate gender biases. This would also increase accountability and transparency. Adopt policies that do not penalize flexibility and part-time work arrangements. Emphasize that performance appraisal systems are based on achievements rather than time spent in the office. Establish targets for increased numbers of women at different managerial levels. Ensure that women have the same opportunities as men to work across the various operational areas and managerial functions of companies or organizations.
- **Empower and build capacities.** Create enabling environments for women at corporate levels. Implement mentoring plans including advice, guidance and visibility for high potential women to move forward in their careers. Put in place training programmes for future leaders and ensure that women take part in such trainings. Facilitate networking events for women and support building relationships within and outside organizations.
- **Advocate for the importance and impact of women's economic activity and business leadership** by focusing on the gains that they would bring to businesses and social and economic development.
- **Establish an accommodating social infrastructure and endorse work – life balance arrangements**, offering flexible working options for both men and women. Consider telecommuting and work from home arrangements. Provide adequate paternity and maternity family leaves. Set up childcare facilities and review the effectiveness of the 24/7 culture that especially harm women. Governments need to lead with national policies encompassing such measures.

9.2. ROLE OF BUSINESS MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

Employer's organizations, business associations, trade associations, chambers of commerce and women's organizations have varied roles and circles of influence in the region. Through their institutions they can play a powerful role in making a difference so that women can flourish in business and management in the region. They are in positions to assist their member companies on the rationale and "how to" of advancing women in business and management. They all carry out common functions that can be geared towards supporting women in business, namely information sharing, personal development, and networking. In particular, these entities can consider taking the following actions:

- **Increase women's presence** in their membership base and ensure an effective and balanced gender representation from the bottom (their members) to the top of the associations/organizations. These entities need to be a model themselves for companies to follow suit. While some associations may use quotas for female representation to improve their images, there are also other effective means to attract women members and ensure they have a say. For example, chambers of commerce and employers organizations can reach out to women's businesses to recruit them as members.
- **Widen network and inter association/organization building**, as the weak presence of women in top positions is a region-wide problem. Regional efforts and networking can be fruitful by sharing good practices and strategies, as well as giving visibility to the various issues. In addition, connecting with other stakeholders such as policymakers and research institutes are necessary to use existing and generate new networks for advocacy.
- **Research more on the impact of a greater representation of women in business on operations, performance and management in the private sector.** Such research is critical for advocacy and for attracting support for the capacity building of women in the talent pipeline. It is also needed for establishing the business case that is specific to the region, especially in male dominated sectors.
- **Advocate for legal amendments.** Advocate for changing legal systems, especially the personal status laws that place women in a subordinate position. Promoting legal reform needs to go hand in hand with supporting cultural change. Business membership organizations have an influencing power as businesses are the engines of economies. As such they can influence policymakers and legislators to introduce more gender equity in business related laws, given that such gender positive developments would increase profitability and organizational performance.
- **Provide multilevel and multidimensional support to women entrepreneurs.** While interventions rightfully focus on providing women entrepreneurs with financial and technical assistance for start-ups, more effort needs to be made towards supporting the sustainability and growth of women's businesses. Business membership organizations can advocate for the access of women entrepreneurs to business development services and to credit. As well as promoting public policy in this regard, greater visibility needs to be given to the challenges and economic benefits to families and societies of women growing their businesses.

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