



Union for the Mediterranean
Union pour la Méditerranée
الاتحاد من أجل المتوسط

IWD 2021 Webinar

Report

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY WEBINAR

5 March 2021 at 11:00 CET

**Women in
Leadership:**
towards an
equal region in
a COVID-19 world



Union for the Mediterranean
Union pour la Méditerranée
الاتحاد من أجل المتوسط



The UfM Secretariat
is co-funded by the
EUROPEAN UNION

5 GENDER
EQUALITY



IWD 2021 Webinar

Report



Union for the Mediterranean
Union pour la Méditerranée
الاتحاد من أجل المتوسط



© Union for the Mediterranean 2021

Social & Civil Affairs

www.ufmsecretariat.org
Palau de Pedralbes | Pere Duran Farell, 11
08034 Barcelona, Spain
Phone: 00 34 93 521 4100
Fax: 00 34 93 521 4102

In collaboration with



Contents

FOREWORD.....	4
PRESENTING GAP III - TOWARDS A GENDER EQUAL WORLD.....	5
SESSION 1: WOMEN IN BUSINESS.....	6
SESSION 2: WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE.....	8
SESSION 3: WOMEN AND THE HEALTH CARE SECTOR.....	9
UFM LABELLED PROJECTS	10
THE CONFERENCE IN NUMBERS.....	11

Foreword

We chose to hold the webinar, among other objectives, to commemorate the International Women's Day. Over 100 years ago, women across the world began to protest and march to claim their right to suffrage, their right to equal pay and better working conditions; in other words, to claim equal rights to men. The hardships that women around the globe experience are not by chance or a coincidence but rather based on structural inequalities. We note that the situation for women empowerment has improved, but progress has been too little and too slow. Many challenges remain ahead to achieve gender parity, and all of them have now been exacerbated by the current Covid-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has taken a great toll on our societies, our lives and economy. Evidence shows that the impacts of crisis are never gender neutral, and Covid-19 is no exception. The milestone strides made in the past decades are now at risk of being rolled back. In the midst of a global pandemic, this webinar serves as a reminder to assess the progress made in advancing gender equality and women's leadership in the region, but also of all the work that still needs to be done. As health care and agricultural workers, nurses or caregivers, women and girls have worked relentlessly not only to fight COVID-19 but also to shape a more equal and inclusive future and pandemic recovery. However, we are noticing that while women have been in the frontline of the fight

against the pandemic, their voices remain ignored and left out of the decision-making bodies. Faced with this unacceptable reality, and in line with the UN Women's theme for this year's International Women's Day "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a Covid-19 world", aims to highlight the multifaceted challenges that women continue to face to reach an equal future. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but an indication of prosperity in our societies. Women empowerment is the precondition for sustainable societies and strong economies.

The UfM has always put gender equality and women's empowerment at the heart of its agenda. This agenda was notably endorsed by the 4th Ministerial Cairo Declaration on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, 2017, which identified four priority areas, one of which is "strengthening women's access to leadership and decision-making positions".

Our region is weakened by the exclusion of women's talent and knowledge. In order to achieve the SDGs in 2030, a transformative gender agenda that places women at the same level with men is needed. It is important not to compromise gender equality in the midst of a global crisis. Doing so will have devastating consequences for women and girls. Gender equality must remain a priority and also high on national and regional agendas.



Ambassador Marisa
Farrugia, Deputy Secretary-
General, Social and Civil
Affairs (UfM)

Presenting GAP III - Towards a gender-equal world

The EU's new Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III) was presented. Very ambitious in its scope and objectives, this agenda for gender equality has been informed by consultations with member states, civil society, and EU delegations working in partner countries and the lessons learned from GAP I and GAP II.

One of the main pillars of the plan is the engagement for gender equality and women's empowerment for more effective gender mainstreaming. GAP III introduces stringent rules for applying and monitoring gender mainstreaming across sectors. The key principles to tackling the root causes of inequality are: adopting a gender transformative approach to shift gender power relations, considering intersectionality (race, age, religion, disability) and using a rights-based approach that builds on the human rights framework. It is a joint strategic EU engagement at multilateral,

regional and country levels, based on gender analysis, dialogue with national government and consultations with women's organisations, identifying the main areas of work for the next five years and objectives to be reached.

The plan includes six key areas of engagement: ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence, promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights, strengthening economic social rights & empowering girls and women, promoting equal participation and leadership, integrating the women, peace and security agenda and addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by the green transition and digitalization. The strategy will be funded within the framework of the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) for the 2021-2027 period.

[View the EU GAP III presentation.](#)



Olga Martín Gonzalez
Gender Equality
Coordinator, DG NEAR
European Commission

Pillar 3: key thematic areas of engagement

Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence



Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights



Strengthening economic social rights & empowering girls and women



Advancing equal participation and leadership



Integrating the women, peace and security agenda



Challenges and opportunities of green transition and digitalization



Session 1: Women in Business, Entrepreneurship and Digital Economy

The pandemic has had a profound impact across the global economy, with disrupted markets and supply chains, businesses having to close and many jobs lost. Women will be affected disproportionately. In the MENA region, the impact of Covid-19 has been particularly serious on the informal economy and informal workers and on those sectors where women are highly represented, such as tourism.

Women's economic participation in the MENA region is very low (19.77% in 2019, which was the lowest in the world). Although the tendency is to grow, it is growing at an unsustainably slow pace. Female entrepreneurship numbers are also low. There are structural conditions to take into account when analysing the lack of female representation in the private sector.

Legal discrimination is an issue which requires important attention. Legal equality is not a reality in all countries. In some countries legal discrimination can entail the need of a man's co-signature to sign a contract, difficult conditions to access credit as well as unequal access to family assets. Uneven distribution of unpaid work also hinders the advancement of women and the lack of family friendly policies to support work-life balance.

Experts highlighted the struggle of the private sector to deliver enough jobs, which affects both men and women. Public sector employment is very prominent and the preferred sector for women. Participating of women in the formal sector is very low. They pointed to the need for social dialogue between business organisations and unions, supported by policies and strategies to enhance the private sector. By fostering public private partnerships, governments can support SMEs who have a key role in increasing female economic participation. In order to increase female entrepreneurship, there is a need to remove barriers in access to information, to financial services and more investment promotion policies and tools to foster women's participation, through quotas.

Panellists discussed the increase in teleworking, which can have both positive and challenging implications for women. This working method can mean missing out on formal and informal support structures making women more isolated and vulnerable to violence and harassment. Decreased personal contacts with colleagues can also translate into less access to information, training and promotion opportunities which can help women advance. Helena de Felipe Lehtonen pointed out that "teleworking provides opportunities such as increased flexibility to combine unpaid care activities with paid work activities and a better match between labour supply and demand", as workers do not need to relocate.

When addressing the effects digitalisation can have on women's participation, Jihen Boutiba pointed to the increased use of technology and the "changes in ways of doing business in the digital economy, which can help bridge the gender divide". The panellists referred to a regional paradox in MENA countries: while the region has the highest rate of women engineers in the world and STEM graduates, as well as a high number of start-ups founded by women, these numbers do not translate into high workforce participation -women disappear in the work place and are underrepresented in management positions. In Tunisia, 60% tech graduates are women, and women are outperforming men in their studies, but when we look at management positions in the sector, they only represent 5%. Beyond these facts, there is also a large digital divide which especially affects women.

Changes brought by Covid-19 and the digital transformation have potential for the redistribution of power, such as the opportunity to re-design work places, which have traditionally been tailored for men, to make them more inclusive: networks can become more accessible and women should be encouraged to be more present on digital networks. In the digital era, the rules of organisation have changed as companies transition towards more horizontal structures more suited to female leadership styles. Amel Saidane, from Tunisia Start-ups, called to "leverage the communities'



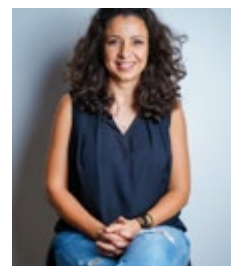
Jihen Boutiba, General Secretary of BUSINESSMED



Dr. Carlos Conde, Head of the Middle East and Africa Division, OECD



M^o Helena de Felipe, President of Afaemme



Amel Saidane, Digital Arab Network, President of TunisianStartUps

effect digitalization provides, giving women a voice is just one click away”. Additionally, she discussed how mobility restrictions due to the pandemic have also limited the brain drain in the region in terms of engineers and tech resources and pointed to the opportunity to tap into women’s talents in IT to deliver services in new markets. Panellists highlighted that there is momentum for change, and there are progressive reforms taking place in several countries. Many responses to the economic impact of the pandemic have had a gendered angle. Carlos Conde stressed the importance of a gendered approach to Covid-19 recovery stating that “reactivation packages to build back better are an opportunity to strongly advance in gender equality”. He also underscored the significance of gender budgeting as well as

gathering gender disaggregated data which for evidence based policy making.

The experts agreed that we should not get trapped, nor use Covid-19 and an excuse for inequality, but rather accelerate action, to make sure women are an active part of the digital transition and also play a role in leadership.

Jihen Boutiba presented the [Business Country Desk](#), led by BusinessMed, which provides access to reliable data shaping the business climate of Southern Mediterranean countries, promotes synergies and connects economic operators in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and initiate and develop North-South and/or South-South business partnerships. [Read more here.](#)

-
1. Speakers from Session 1
 2. Business Country Desk



The EuroMed Business Matching Tool

An event-driven tool managing Business Meetings



Its objective is to foster fruitful exchanges and contacts in order to create or strengthen business partnerships.

It offers a series of functionalities to simplify the organisation and management of B2B meetings.

Session 2: Women in Agriculture

Women in the Mediterranean region ensure food security, and have been at the heart of the communities' and families' resilience of Covid-19. The region is not uniform, so the crisis itself resulted in a wide range of impacts. It stressed pre-existing political tensions, exacerbated fragile situations, and deepened inequalities.

Country-wide lockdowns were introduced and businesses were closed, which led to a crushing of formal and informal economy. During the pandemic, the burden of unpaid care and domestic work has increased, especially for women. According to a recent study conducted in the region, 70% of women surveyed reported an increase in household chores and childcare care duties compared to 59% of men. In rural areas, women reported that 60% of their time (14 hours of their day) is dedicated to household chores or unpaid work, compared to 12% of the time for the male counterparts, which does not leave much time for women to generate income. The disruption in public transport affected women involved in off farm working because most of them rely on public transportation to get to work. Agricultural activities in the informal economy, where 96% of women are engaged, were severely hit leaving women particularly vulnerable as they are not protected by social protection services. Women entrepreneurs in microbusinesses have been hit very hard in sectors such as accommodation services, agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

“women can secure food and build more sustainable and inclusive systems: we need to invest in women to help them deploy their potential”

Panellists were of converging views that in order to tackle these effects, social policies should be revised to prioritise services to address women's needs, including those of victims of gender based

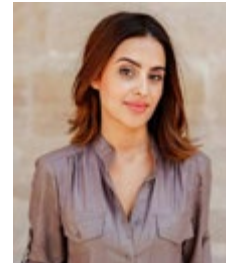


violence. In flow economies it is important to ensure that assets and relief packages are provided to make sure the agricultural calendar is not missed and to avoid further compromising food security in the communities. Other social packages to compensate for the loss of income are needed. Support to financial services is also important so that both families and businesses can renegotiate some of the payment terms and the micro financial institution can receive additional liquidity and avoid additional stress to the already endured measures. It is also crucial for women to have access to finance on equal footing as men.

“indicator systems are very useful to design and test the situation's evolution, in times of crisis the analyses are even more important to help public institutions in decision making processes.”

More generally, women need to be represented at all different stages of the decision making process so that they can respond to the specific needs of rural women in the different contribution to the economy. Myriam Fournier Kacimi underlined the important role women have played in leadership during the crisis. She pointed out how countries and local communities led by women have been more successful than men in responding to the pandemic and how important it is for women in agriculture to also be represented in leadership. As rural areas present diverse traits and a high degree of complexity, there is a need for more detailed studies in order to obtain data. Margarita Rico, explained that “indicator systems are very useful to design and test the situation's evolution, in times of crisis the analyses are even more important to help public institutions in decision making processes.” The importance of education and training for rural women was also highlighted, as it correlates positively to the development of rural areas. However, having qualified women to do the job does not suffice. Ndaya Beltchika stressed the need for “gender transformative approaches for food systems, meaning approaches that challenge the social norms”. The situation calls for clear action plans and sex disaggregated data to measure results and track progress.

Yasmine Seghirate, the moderator of the panel, closed the session by underlining that “women can secure food and build more sustainable and inclusive systems, we need to invest in women to help them deploy their potential.”



Yasmine Seghirate, Policy and Communications Manager, CIHEAM



Ndaya Beltchika, Lead Technical Specialist for Gender and Social Inclusion, IFAD



Dr. Margarita Rico, Professor, University of Valladolid



Myriam Fournier Kacimi, CEO, Sungy Sas

Session 3: Women and the Health Care Sector

Covid-19 has shed a light on gender inequality in the health care sector, especially in the senior and decision-making positions that are mostly occupied by men. The need for public policies is urgent to address the unequal distribution of care work as well as cultural and gender stereotypes. This will help build more resilient health-care systems and universal healthcare coverage.

Anna Rita Ronzoni, the moderator of the panel, set the scene by claiming that “Since day one, women have been at the forefront of the pandemic, making the centrality of women’s contribution very clear. So, women leaders need to be at the decision-making table.” Experts discussed the main barriers that explain the underrepresentation of women in leadership in the health care sector and called for a gender transformative approach to tackle the root causes for power imbalances. They underlined the need to fix workplaces, systems and culture rather than women. Roopa Dhatt stressed that “we talk about fixing women, and about things that women must do, but often women already have talent and expertise, they just don’t have the right environment”. Panellists highlighted the need for public policies to reinforce health care human resources, which should be built in tandem with communities. Legal reform for parental leave was highlighted as a key factor contributing to imbalance on the workplace.

Investing in women is key, and has multiple positive effects. Data shows that for every job in the health sector, two to three other jobs are created in health related sectors, including education and transportation. Additionally, investing in women in the health care sector enhances women’s economic empowerment, increasing their income and their decision making power. Experts also pointed to the multiplier effect that investing in women has on welfare for children and families, and finally highlighted that it can also contribute to the goal of universal health care for all.

The panellists discussed the need to attract talent and have targeted campaigns to include underrepresented groups which also means bringing men into fields like nursing, midwifery and community health work so it does not remain a feminised place. Experts also stressed the need to refuse tokenism as there is a risk of pushing for gender parity by bringing always the same voices to the table and often it only includes an elite

group of women. Maryam Bigdeli: “More should be done to bring diverse voices to contribute to the debate.” She also pointed to the importance of encouraging women in decision-making positions to facilitate other women’s access to leadership, improve their working conditions and use their voices to push for a more progressive agenda.

Agnes Buzyn focused on the “need to change the narrative about women. Women aren’t just care consumers, they’re not just service providers, they are also a vector for change”. Women are often seen as vulnerable populations instead of experts and valuable agents in decision-making. Women are leaders in their homes and their communities, and in the health sector, they really need to be seen as the experts, especially in this pandemic. The WHO has declared 2021 the [International Year of Health and Care Workers](#), putting the spotlight on the need to invest in health workers for shared dividends in health, jobs, economic opportunity and equity. Thus this panel came at the right moment to highlight the role of women in this sector; it is time for us to improve their visibility.

“We talk about fixing women, and about things that women must do, but often women already have talent and expertise, they just don’t have the right environment”

Roopa Dhatt introduced a toolkit on leadership: a four-point framework on the basic road map for governments, civil society and private sector. The toolkit aims at being a model for legal frameworks for women, which can be contextualized at country level to adapt to each context. It also includes a checklist and policy action framework for men. Dr. Dhatt stressed that “men’s health suffers as much as women’s does when patriarchal norms serve an elite minority”, referring to suicide and homicide rates due to harmful masculinities which impact men in particular, not just during Covid-19.

Experts expressed their deep concerns that some countries will roll back decades in progress made in gender equality due to the pandemic’s effects on the balance of households. The recovery responses to the pandemic are an occasion to drive the foundations for equality.



Anna Rita Ronzoni,
Technical Officer for Gender-
Based Violence, WHO



Dr. Agnès Buzyn, Director
General's Envoy for
Multilateral Affairs, WHO



Dr. Roopa Dhatt, Executive
Director, Women in Global
Health



Maryam Bigdeli, WHO
representative for Morocco

UfM Labelled Projects

Anna Dorangricchia introduced the section and referred to the project [InnovAgroWoMed. Social Innovation in the Agri-food sector for Women's Empowerment in the Mediterranean Sea basin. Read more here.](#)

During crisis times, SMEs and self-employed women take high risks so it is important to help them navigate this crisis, absorb the shocks and bounce back. CEED's "We Inspire" programme worked to enable women entrepreneurs to create jobs opportunities and contribute positively to the development of their country, help them overcome the COVID-19 crisis and keep their businesses afloat, while networking with like-minded entrepreneurs from the various countries to learn about different ways to overcome challenges as well as business opportunities on the international level. [Read more here.](#)

["Promoting the empowerment of women for inclusive and sustainable industrial development in Tunisia"](#), UNIDO's pilot programme, started

in Tunisia in January 2021. The project supports women entrepreneurs who invest in cosmetics and parapharmaceuticals based on natural products. The initiative aims to contribute to the overall effort to facilitate women's micro, small and medium-sized enterprises' access to finance, markets, technology and business networks. The project has a regional dimension, which is currently under development. This is a holistic program that aims at strengthening capacities, building synergies and challenging gender stereotypes. [Read more here.](#)

This session tackled how the initiatives have navigated the crisis, and how digitalization is an opportunity in the region that needs to be properly seized. Due to its centrality and timely relevance, digitalization will be the theme for this year's UfM Women Business Forum which will take place in July. More information about the event will be shared shortly.



Anna Dorangricchia, Project Manager, Social and Civil Affairs, UfM



Fatima Zahra Oukacha, CEED MENA Director



Neila Amara, International Program Management Specialist, UNIDO



+860
Participants
60
Countries



56% NorthMed
40% South & East Med
4% Other

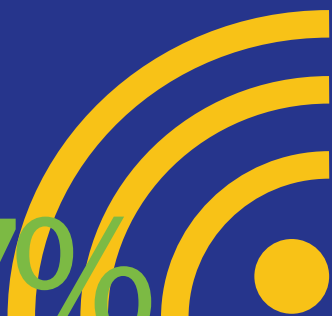
+700 Views on Facebook
 **LIVE**
42 social media posts

+15 experts
+10 interviews




24 news articles reaching a potential **29M** audience

57% Southern Med Media coverage
43% Northern Med





Union for the Mediterranean
Union pour la Méditerranée
الاتحاد من أجل المتوسط



The UfM Secretariat
is co-funded by the
EUROPEAN UNION