

WEBINAR Innovation and technological change for Gender Equality

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

7 March 2023 — 11:00 13:00 CET



International Women's Day



Union for the Mediterranean
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REPORT

WEBINAR **Innovation and technological
change for Gender Equality**

**INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN’S DAY**

7 March 2023 — 11:00 13:00 CET

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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

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FOREWORD



In line with the theme chosen for UN International Women's Day, 8 March 2023, "DigitalTALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality", the UfM held a **Webinar on Innovation and technological change for Gender Equality** on 7th March 2023 from 11h to 13h.

While the digital revolution carries with it huge potential to improve social and economic outcomes for women, it also poses the risk of perpetuating existing patterns of gender inequality. Despite recent improvements, a large gender gap continues in technology and innovation. Women and girls are under-represented in industries, academia, and the broader technology sector. As the UN Women's Gender Snapshot 2022¹ report reveals, globally, women hold only 2 in every 10 science, engineering and information and communication technology jobs. At the 20 largest global technology companies, women are 33 per cent of the workforce in 2022 but hold only one in four leadership positions. Women inventors make up only 16.5 per cent of inventors listed on international patent applications globally.

¹ UN Women, *PROGRESS ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS THE GENDER SNAPSHOT 2022*

Narrowing the gender gap in digital skills could contribute to narrowing the gender wage gap by providing access for women to higher skilled ICT-related roles.

Within this context, the aim of the event was to raise awareness on the gendered impacts of innovation and technology, as well as on the interventions that are needed to address them. Representatives of European Commission, international (UNIDO) and regional organizations and networks (EMA), as well as successful women entrepreneurs working on the field of digital platforms AI and Tech in the MENA Region (Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia), shared good practices and discussed solutions for an inclusive digital ecosystem. In particular, panelists shared their experiences and recommendations on how to ensure that no-one is left behind; on how to create a gender-transformative innovation ecosystem; and on how to ensure that technology and innovation responses to the needs of women and girls are inclusive and accessible.

OPENING REMARKS



John Paul Grech, Deputy Secretary General at the Social and Civil Affairs Division, UfM

Amb. John Paul Grech, Deputy Secretary General at the Social and Civil Affairs Division, UfM in his opening remarks highlighted how innovation and digital tools provide opportunities for greater access to information, education and skills and open possibilities for increased employment and business opportunities. Amb. Grech referred to the **5th UfM Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society** adopted last year in October. In the Declaration, the 43 UfM MS acknowledged that, among others, innovation and digital tools provide women with opportunities for greater access to information, education and skills, while also opening avenues for increased employment and business opportunities. He highlighted the key commitments emerging from the Ministerial Declaration, namely: 1) the promotion of gender equality and inclusive models of leadership in all fields, including STEMs education and skills; 2) investment in programmes meant to increase digital and financial literacy of women, tackling the digital skills gap, the digital gender divide as well as the digital accessibility gap for women with disabilities;

3) the development of pathways for accelerating digital transformation as a vehicle for the creation of more decent jobs, economic growth and an important vector of innovation and creativity; 4) the creation of business networks for women in the technology sector. Amb. Grech observed that while the Industry 4.0 revolution is creating opportunities for new and greener productive models, women entrepreneurs in the MENA region still suffer from lack of sufficient awareness of technological possibilities. Within this context, Amb. Grech referred to the UfM Women Business Forum - a regional business platform which takes place annually - and which this year will focus on role, leaderships and challenges of women in industry and Innovation. The Forum - co-organized by the UfM and UNIDO - will take place in Tunis, 6-7 June.

KEYNOTE SPEECH



Neila Amara, International Project Manager on Gender at UNIDO

Ms Neila Amara, International Project Manager on Gender at UNIDO presented the infographics of the **"Promoting Women Empowerment for inclusive and sustainable industrial development in the Mena region" (PWE)** Project's surveys on access to, and use of, ICT and digital technologies by female entrepreneurs in the manufacturing sector and manufacturing-related services in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, State of Palestine, and Tunisia. The project, funded by Italy and the Principality of Monaco, was labelled by UfM in 2015. Ms Amara provided an overview of the survey which aimed at mapping female entrepreneurs' exposure to ICT & digital technologies, characterizing the uses female entrepreneurs are making of ICT & digital technologies and identifying the challenges they face, the gaps to be filled and the ways to do it. For this purpose, 1418

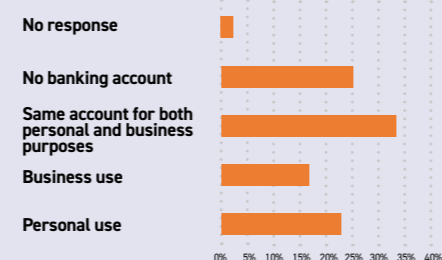
women entrepreneurs were surveyed across the seven MENA countries. Ms. Amara highlighted the appetite the surveyed women entrepreneurs have for the use of ICT and digital technologies. However, the opportunities offered by digital technologies are only partially exploited. The cost of buying an ICT device (41% of surveyed women), poor internet and network coverage (28%) and not having enough time (20%) are the barriers they commonly experienced. Moreover, it was observed that while there is high awareness of the importance of ICT for business, few respondents have received training on using ICT devices and software. In this regard, improving skills, raising awareness and facilitating access to finance are part of the solution to accelerate the digitization of women-led businesses.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION OF SURVEYED BUSINESSES

Source: UNIDO

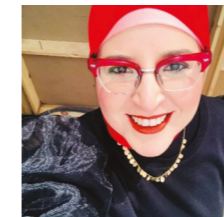
- **25% of respondents do not have a bank account and only 17% have a bank account for business purposes only**
- **76% of respondents have never received a loan towards their business**
- **Microfinance funds main source of credit for one third of those who received loans**

Ownership of bank account (%)



ROUND TABLE

POTENTIAL SYNERGIES AMONG GOOD PRACTICES AND UPCOMING INITIATIVES IN THE EURO-MED REGION – 1ST ROUND



Ayah EL-Arief, K12 Edtech Entrepreneur | MENA WBC Ambassador, Egypt

Ms Ayah EL-Arief, K12 Edtech Entrepreneur | MENA WBC Ambassador, Egypt, highlighted her personal and professional challenges in accessing the animation labour market because of gender stereotypes. She started her first start-up on her own when she was very young as there was no space for women in this field. She also taught a course for graphics through STEM, otherwise topics which were still relatively unknown some years ago. Training experience to integrate technology with art and education in this sense is essential. In the view of Ms EL-Arief, this can change female entrepreneurs' lives and can increase the possibility to success within the labour market.



Zohra Slim, Co-Founder Instadeep, Tunisia

Ms Zohra Slim, Co-Founder Instadeep, Tunisia, explained how AI, besides being trendy nowadays, is becoming increasingly democratized and available. She argued that AI has always been a community-driven field. She explained that AI is one of the fields where information is shared everywhere and which could open more possibilities to start entrepreneurship within this field. Ms. Slim stated that Instadeep provides trainings quite often, as well as other companies. She confessed that the European Union (EU), and not only, started focusing on Open Data initiatives, while the Covid-19 pandemic was an accelerator in this sense. She remains convinced that the field of AI is pushing for more opening of data and sharing of information.



Clara Gruitrooy, Secretary-General, Euro-Mediterranean-Arab Association

Ms Clara Gruitrooy, Secretary-General, Euro-Mediterranean-Arab Association, stated that until today, women in Germany have worked for free, when compared with men in the same position. Ms Gruitrooy highlighted the impact of two strong women present in the German Federal Government, namely: Ms. Svenja Schulze, Minister of Economic Development Cooperation and Ms Annalena Baerbock, first female Minister of Foreign Affairs in Germany, who released a strategy for a common feminist foreign policy. Within this framework, until 2025, 85% of the funding of Ministries shall be spent for women and marginalized groups. Ms Gruitrooy introduced the **German-Arab Ouissal Programme**, which provides mentoring to female entrepreneurs. She confirmed that women are well educated in STEM, but they do not reach the higher positions, as men, within the labour market. She remarked that mentoring in this sense can be a powerful tool with high-skilled mentors that can show female entrepreneurs the path to follow as well as by creating a great booster for confidence and future job opportunities.

Ms Chiraz Bensemmane, Entrepreneur Founder, coachtribe.co, Algeria, observed that technology itself holds no bias as it is society which perpetuates it. She stated that if the companies itself is not inclusive, to some extent, the product they will deliver will be biased. She called for more inclusivity and diversity in the companies as well as for clear



Chiraz Bensemmane,
Entrepreneur Founder,
coachtribe.co, Algeria



Anastasia Zabaniotou,
President RMEI, Network of
Mediterranean Engineering
Schools



Anne-France Wittmann,
Policy Officer, DG NEAR



Christophe Malherbe,
Team leader EU-funded
MED MSMEs Regional
Programme



Joumana Sweiss,
Programme Officer for ENI
CBC MED Programme

policies against discrimination. She stated that one needs to work on an algorithm to ensure that they are inclusive of all the types of diversity and to be more gender inclusive.

Ms Anastasia Zabaniotou, President RMEI, Network of Mediterranean Engineering Schools, presented the methodology of RMEI for a transformative gender equality approach in the network of Engineering universities (around 90 universities within the Mediterranean region). She stressed that networking and collaboration in this sense remains essential. She explained how the Network, by working through education and collaboration on research and innovation on sustainability, has set-up a living hub for capacity building, a community of practice as well as national workshops for knowledge sharing. She highlighted that the Network is committed to embed the gender dimension in all aspects of innovation, projects and design of digital technology and tools.

Ms Anne-France Wittmann, Policy Officer, DG NEAR presented some actions that DG NEAR is taking to support women in the Southern Neighbourhood and focused on the regional programme dedicated to women economic empowerment in the region. She explained that the programme, adopted in late 2022 in line with the **EU Gender Action Plan**, emerged through numerous exchanges with the stakeholders in the southern region and it's focused on the nexus between access to finance and digitalization. She described the two complementary approaches for the programme implementation: (i) partnership with OECD to support policy and regulatory reform to enhance access to finance for women entrepreneurs, notably engaging public authorities, financial sector, and Women Business Association (ii) development of concrete tools and provide digital skills and capacities that will help women entrepreneurs access finance and information on the existing opportunities. She referred to the recently launched call for proposals available [here](#). She pointed out that inclusivity and innovation aspects are taken highly into consideration, as they aim at engaging with women also in the rural and further areas. Last but not least, she mentioned the programme is embedded in the regional **Team Europe initiative** on Jobs through Trade and Investment, notably focusing on inclusive entrepreneurship.

Mr Christophe Malherbe, Team leader EU-funded MED MSMEs Regional Programme, spoke about the regional programme funded by DG NEAR which aims at

improving the environment for MSMEs in the region, with focus on two pillars: (i) internationalization and (ii) access to finance. He observed that (i) Fintech might be a factor of dis-inclusion if one does not curate the way fintech is developing.; (ii) Fintech is a field which is steadily developing and there are risks involved in fintech unless the industry is not considered through a gender lens. Among these risks he stressed the ones of replicating the existing limitations, reinforcing and widening the gap as well as losing control of algorithms. He called for a gender transformative approach, starting from the policies and regulatory framework. He explained that their action plan focuses on (i) mobilization and sensibilization of regulators (using ECB as role model) and (ii) Building up women-representative organizations to take part in the policy and regulatory dialogue in order to avoid gender inequality within the fintech industry.

Ms Joumana Sweiss, Programme Officer for ENI CBC MED Programme, explained that the programme which is EU funded, works on cross-border cooperation in the Mediterranean (South Europe, North Africa and Middle East). Ms Sweiss presented the example of the **INTERNISA project** (Increasing digital skills of women in the Mediterranean region) to better match the skills and the labour market and described their focus on trainings on four different sectors, namely tourism, agro-food, textile, and finance. She explained that, following the trainings, the project focuses on the offline spots where women have access to training material, networking, exchanging with other women, entrepreneurs etc. She referred also to job fairs have been organized already in Lebanon and Spain and to the launch of a dedicated web platform to share information and job opportunities, with thousands of users joining in. As example of good practice, she also mentioned the project **YEP MED** for training in the port sector, which is a male-dominated sector as well as the project **MoreThanAJob**, meant to train women in Palestine on digital marketing.

ROUND TABLE

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE DIGITAL FUTURE IN THE EURO-MED REGION – 2ND ROUND

Ms Ayah EL-Arief, K12 Edtech Entrepreneur | MENA WBC Ambassador, Egypt, highlighted the need for women to get trainings and guidance to know how to use the digital tools within the labour market. She observed that peer-to-peer mentoring is essential to make them feel confident even in the more male-dominated sectors.

Ms Zohra Slim, Co-Founder Instadeep, Tunisia, referred to the cultural pressure and biases that exist in all the STEM sector. She explained that girls are brought up to be perfect and not brave. She said this makes them apply for jobs just when they have all the requirements, differently from men. She highlighted the need for the companies to (1) provide regular trainings and (ii) to give women time to upskill during worktime, since they are usually the caretakers and do not have enough time to improve their skills during extra working hours.

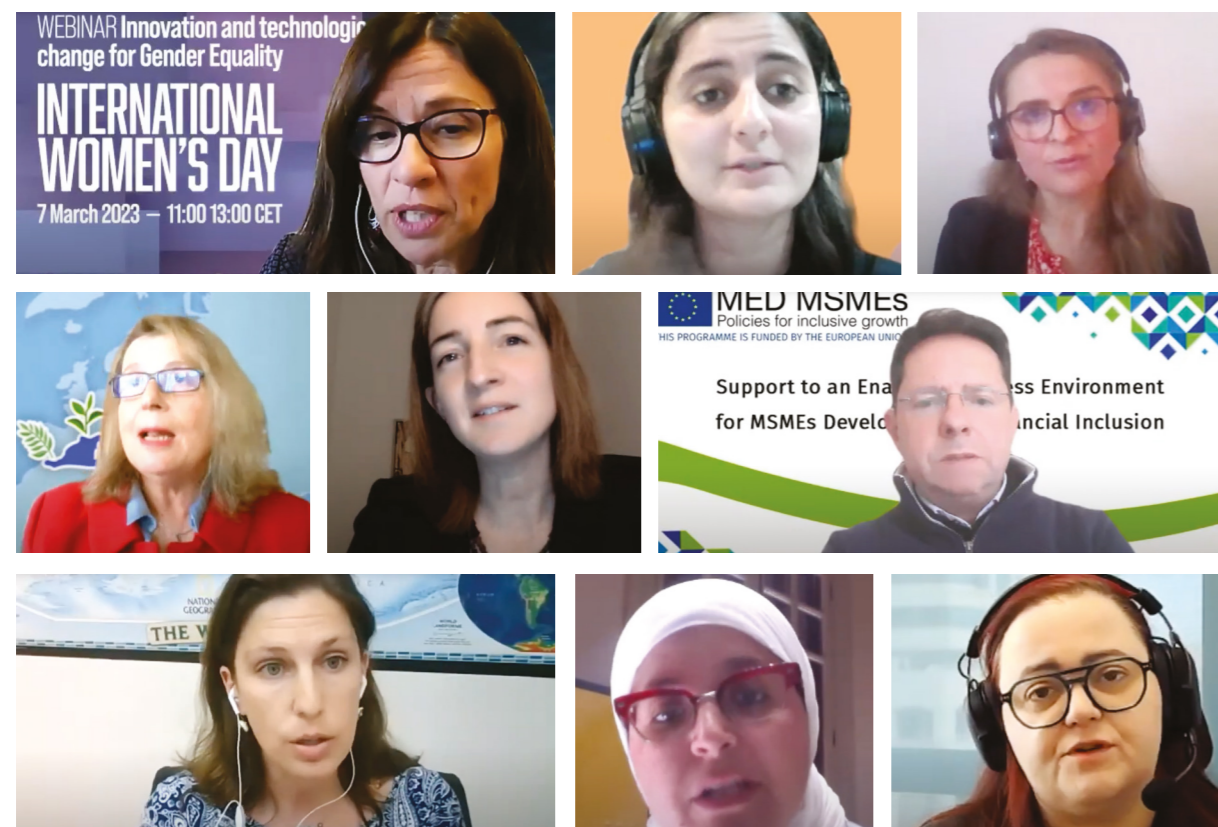
Ms Clara Gruitrooy, Secretary General Euro-Mediterranean-Arab Association, stated that mentoring is only part of the solution as it creates a safe space for women. Unconscious bias exist and mentoring can help with confidence. Ms Gruitrooy mentioned the **UN initiative HeforShe**, as a good practice to raise awareness on how important it is that men

stand up for sustainable and digital innovation. She underscored the importance of investing time into networking for women.

Ms Chiraz Bensemmane, Entrepreneur Founder, coachtribe.co, Algeria, highlighted that governments, business entities and all ecosystems shall ensure access to information and to digital tools for women. She called for schools providing computer centres for girls, ensuring they have access to it and making the smartphones affordable in order to guarantee access to basic digital tools at all levels.

Ms Anastasia Zabaniotou, President RMEI, Network of Mediterranean Engineering Schools, stated that leaders should be able to draft strategies to ensure that everyone is able to use digital tools. Inspiration from female leaders is very important because it is a formative experience, as well as mentorship. She stressed that skills development is important also in terms of soft skills: communication, confidence, ethics and values must be integrated in technology.

Ms Anne-France Wittmann, Policy Officer, DG NEAR highlighted the importance of engaging policy makers and raising awareness as a key element to have policy and



regulatory responses. She emphasized that there remains a need to have multiple perspectives, highlighting the added-value of regional exchanges and multi-stakeholders dialogue, and the importance of gender transformative approaches.

Mr Christophe Malherbe, Team leader EU-funded MED MSMEs Regional Programme, observed that achieving policy levels remains key. Regulation, in terms of fintech, is in the making. He further observed that, at present, there are more banks governed by women than before. He confirmed that it remains essential to build capacity of women in business associations. He invited Dr. Amira Kaddour to provide additional insights on the study they conducted.

Dr. Amira Kaddour, Member of the executive board of the African women in FinTech and payment chez African Women in FinTech & Payments (AWFP), explained that, in their study, they focused largely on digital gaps in the study and on women in innovation. She remarked that only 16.5% of international applications are implemented by women. She explained that they value the networking and peer learning and are currently working on capacity-building and networking, adding that Fintech can be an important value of technology.

Ms Joumana Sweiss, Programme Officer for ENI CBC MED Programme, explained that in the new **2021-2027 Interreg Euro-med programme** they will support SMEs and focus on vulnerable people in rural areas and NEETs. A second key priority will be that of having a greener Mediterranean. She highlighted that one of the pillars will be focused on social inclusion, where, within this framework, there will be a specific focus laid on increasing equal access to lifelong learning. She explained that the intention is to launch a second call, for which they are looking forward to engage with Algerian and Turkish partners.



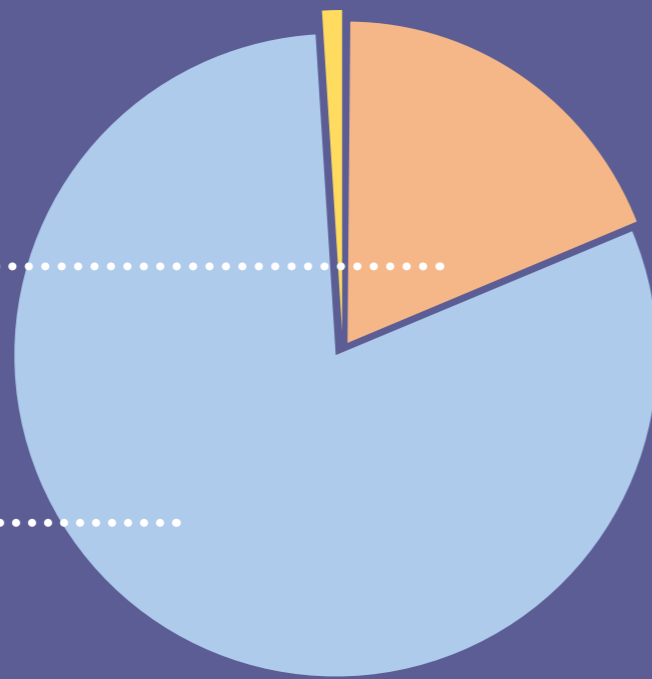
THE WEBINAR IN NUMBERS

GENDER

MALE 19%

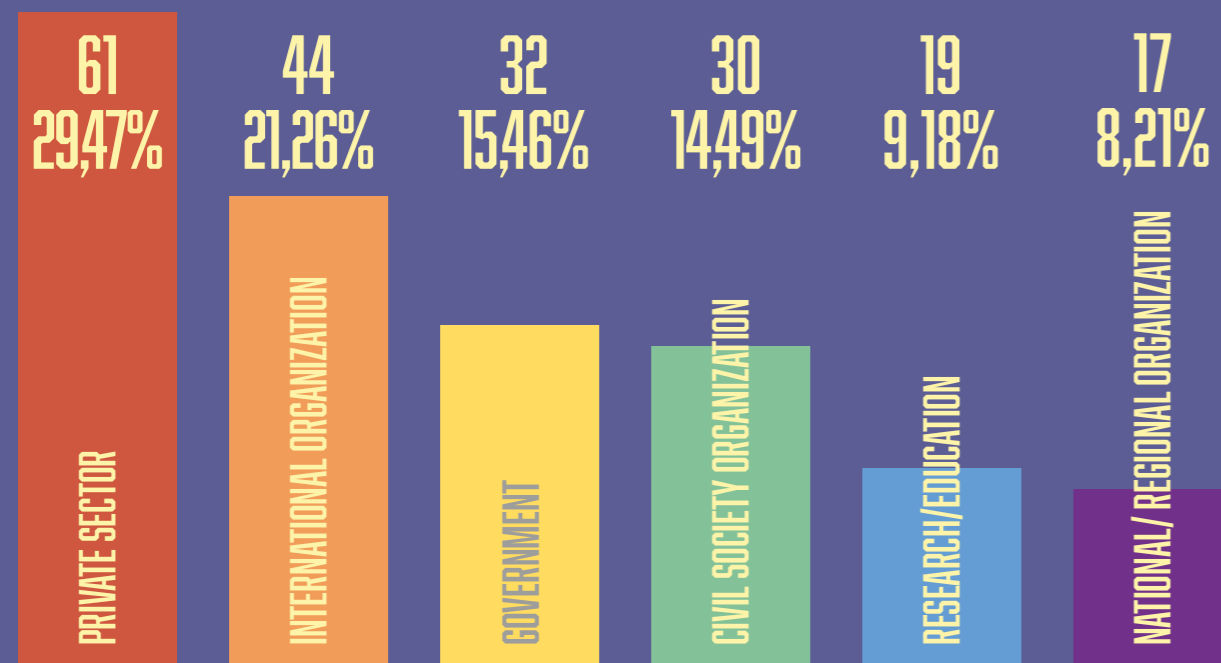
FEMALE 80%

Prefer not to say: 1%



TYPE OF INSTITUTION

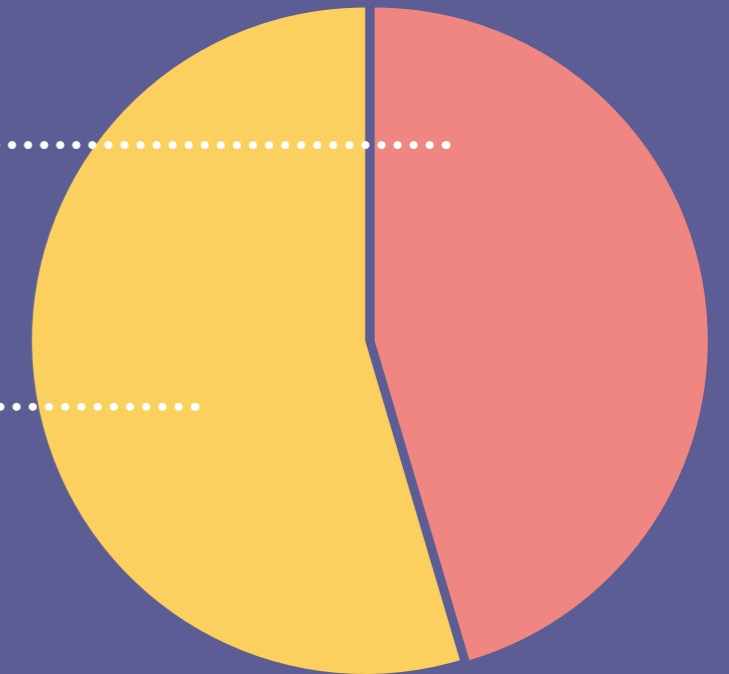
NA: 4 (1,93%)



REGION

NORTH 45,41%

SOUTH 54,59%



MEDIA

Interviews with UfM representatives and speakers by **Il Sole 24 Ore (Italy)**, **Al Akhbar (Egypt)**, **France Bleu (France)** and **RTCI (Tunisia)**

The webinar was also covered by other tier-1 media outlets from across the region such as **ANSA**, **COPE**, **MAP**, **MENA**, **Al Ahram**, **Diario de Información**, **Al Dostor** or **The Jordan Times**



SOCIAL MEDIA

21

posts on social media in FB, LK, TW and IG, including one **Instagram reel** of UfM staff joining the International campaign “**Embrace Equity**” and the UfM webinar.

1

dedicated newsletter in 3 languages featuring UfM staff joining the International campaign “**Embrace Equity**” and the UfM webinar.

179

views on YouTube of Webinar on Innovation and technological change for **Gender Equality**.

OVER 1000

visits to dedicated pages in UfM website.





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With the financial support of:



ufmsecretariat.org/event/webinar-international-womens-day-digitall



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