



Women in the Blue and Green Economies

Opportunities in the MENA Region

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Overview of presentation

1. Regional context
2. Defining key concepts
3. Opportunities for women (UN Women's Work)
4. Discussion of policy actions

Context



Global

Persistent poverty and growing inequality

Frequent and interconnected polycrisis

Megatrends are shaping the world- most notably, they are **shifting global economic power, climate change, and 4IR.**

Public policy discourse postulates that a “just transition will address the dual crises of climate change and inequality”

But radically transform labour markets, “quality and quantity of jobs”

Crucially– “winners & losers”

Middle East & North Africa

Diversity in close proximity. Stark political, economic, and social contrasts coexist closely.
But some common threads exist

Overdue economic structural transformation.

Some growth and recovery in the post-COVID-19 period.

Uncertain economic outlook with significant risks looming (security, geopolitical and climate change)

Growing policy focus on ensuring private sector-led growth and innovation to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth across the region.

Women's Economic Empowerment

WEE has improved, but gaps remain. Some of the notable progress has been in:

- Policy and legal reforms (although some gaps remain)
- Female STEM graduates outnumber males but their employment rates remain strikingly low

In addition

- female labour force participation has largely stagnated at around 20% (global 48%)
- less than 5% of businesses in the region are women-led, (global average of 23-26%).
- Only five MENA countries offer paid maternity leave through the social security or social insurance system



Gender inequality *interconnected* with climate change

Arab States face significant risks

Climate change devastates people, communities, and incomes – all risking security and stability.

11 Arab States are estimated to need \$570 billion until 2030 to adapt and mitigate. An ESCWA report found:

- Parts of the region facing temperature increases of 5°C by the end of this century
- The Arab region also has the most water scarcity globally; 90% of the population faces water stress. Significant levels of desertification.
- increasing the intensity and frequency of water-related crises such as floods and droughts
- Data gaps persist

Climate crisis is not gender neutral

Women have less control but greater reliance on natural resources

Experience greater impact amplifying existing inequalities and risks

Climate change is a “threat multiplier”, escalating social, political and economic tensions in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

Extreme heat increases the incidence of stillbirth and greater spread of illnesses linked to worse maternal and neonatal outcomes.

Climate change intensifies the work of caring for people, animals, plants, and places.

*a place where two key public policy concerns intersect
climate change + economic inclusion (jobs and incomes) is*

Jobs in the blue and green economy

In the MENA region these economies provide great opportunity to also advance gender equality and women's economic participation

Just transition

Green economy

Economic concepts encouraging an adaptation or transformation towards sustainability. Usually associated with cleaner production, energy efficiency and environmental conservation/restoration.

UNEP - green economy [is] one that results in improved human well-being and social equity while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities

6 million jobs will be lost, including in petroleum extraction and refinery, coal mining and producing electricity from coal.

A shift to a greener economy could create 24 million new jobs globally by 2030 if the right policies are implemented.

Blue economy

A range of economic activities* that promote the "sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of ocean ecosystem" (World Bank, 2017)

Blue economy sectors include **traditional maritime** industries like fisheries, tourism, and maritime transport. **Emerging sectors** like ocean renewable energy, marine biotechnology, and offshore renewable energy.

Globally, 1 in 10 livelihoods depends on fisheries. The ocean economy will double to \$3 trillion by 2030. 80% of all goods traded internationally are shipped across oceans and Oceans are the largest carbon sink (World Bank, FAO and OECD)



Transitioning to new patterns of production and consumption can provide decent work.

In sectors like agriculture, waste and tourism, where women have greater access (most jobs)

However, women are underrepresented in key sectors of the green economy that will offer the best jobs (energy, transportation and construction).

Policies can position women to benefit from the best jobs. Tackling old barriers and new potential one.

- barriers to women's and women-led businesses' access to land, finance and technology
- gender segregation in the education system and labour market;
- laws that limit women's access to certain tasks and jobs;
- social norms that deem sectors (construction, waste and tourism) inappropriate for women.
- structural inequalities reflecting social norms dictating that women should shoulder unpaid care work, effectively depriving them of opportunities for other jobs

*a deliberate approach is required to ensure women can benefit
from the potential of the green and blue economies*

Challenges and policy actions

Some policy actions

- A seat at the table, voice in decision making, recognise diversity of interests and forms of representation (participatory approaches that recognise tacit knowledge and agency)
- Affirmative action to integrate gender targets and objectives into development frameworks, policy instruments and strategies. Specific women empowerment targets with gender responsive financing mechanisms.
- Deploy a combination of taxes, subsidies, incentives and other economic instruments – ensure availability of sustainable finance for private sector structured and with terms responsive to the specific realities for women
- **Remove legal barriers** – access to and control of key resources. Support labour laws that promote equality of opportunity and treatment. As well as business environment reforms to encourage investments (start-ups and growth of firms).
- Innovative business models supported – reimagining entrepreneurship and how to start green and blue enterprises
- Affirmative action in different formation – public sector could adopt affirmative green and sustainable public procurement initiatives. While private sector encouraged to intergrate sustainable start-ups in supply chains and adopt fair recruitment in emerging occupations.

Some policy actions

- **Social norms:** Changing perceptions about acceptable male and female jobs, and eroding strong patterns of horizontal gender segregation in the labour market. Many jobs in the green economy will be in new occupations, not yet socially assigned to men or women. that deem sectors (construction, waste and tourism) inappropriate for women.
- Provide responsive **care services** (in the home and community) but also assign economic value to women's **unpaid work** on behalf of the environment, contributing to environmental sustainability. Upgrading and formalising women's current waste management activities in the informal economy. Balance men's and women's responsibilities. Invest in role modelling to change stereotypes.
- Appropriate public policies and programmes are needed to ensure that women get an equitable share of green jobs. Ensure that conditions are in place for women and girls to leapfrog to high-productivity green jobs
- Reskill and upskill – supporting skills development to support transition(current and future labour market needs). This should be coupled with efforts to stimulate innovation, research and development. Vocational training and digital skills particularly effective.
- Improve availability of data and statistics to improve quality of policy dialogue and design

In line with these considerations UN Women is finalising a regional programme that seeks to support Arab States to surge women's employment by 2030

Surging Women's Employment in Arab States

*UN Women will deepen its work with governments, LAS, regional institutions, women's groups, civil society and the private sector to mitigate the disproportionated impact of climate change on women and girls, to support women's in taking a central role in climate change action, and to **ensure that women share in the opportunities created by the transition***



An integrated programme

Implement actions simultaneously and seek to achieve scale rapidly. The programme seeks to

- Support an enabling environment by engaging to ensure high-level political support and sustainable finance to drive investments in these sectors.
- Policy and legal reforms (nation and economy specific)
- Contribute to the shifting of social norms (homes, community and workplaces) , e.g. on unpaid care work and violence and harassment
- Strategic messages and communication
- Support private sector development (corporates adopting cleaner production and fairer recruitment) and support for MSME's start-ups and growth.
- Investments targeting the green and blue economies. But also investing in other economies that complement (jobs in STEM and Care economy)

Thank you