



# PROMOTING WOMEN

## ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FOR INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE MENA REGION



### CONTEXT

The MENA region exhibits the world's highest unemployment rate, with youth unemployment at approximately 25% and women unemployment of up to 40%. In international comparison, women entrepreneurship in the MENA region is extremely low – only approx. 12% of formal SMEs in the MENA region are female-owned. This low participation of women to the entrepreneurial activity of the region can be explained to a great extent by difficulties in accessing business support services and networks, by the very limited access to finance to start new businesses, the lack of education and training opportunities and by gender related constraints lying in the regulatory and legal framework. Yet, women's entrepreneurship represents an untapped potential of growth. It is estimated that raising female employment to male levels could result in a 34% increase in GDP in some countries and that productivity could increase by 25% if discriminatory barriers against women were removed. Investing in women's economic empowerment will help to sustain not only economic growth which is a driver of poverty reduction, but will enhance women social inclusion and integration to reduce gender inequalities, gaps and strengthen, as a consequence, women's confidence, leadership and voice in the private and business sector.

### PROJECT OBJECTIVES & APPROACH

The objective of the project is to harness the great potential of women entrepreneurship in the MENA region and thus create the conditions for sustainable and inclusive growth. The project approach is holistic and comprises three levels of intervention:

1. Facilitating the policy dialogue between key stakeholders with the objective to produce a set of recommendations for policy reforms promoting women entrepreneurship
2. Strengthening the capacities of national business women's associations in providing better quality and demand-driven services to women entrepreneurs to create their own businesses
3. Directly promoting about 200 promising women-led investments in the target countries through trainings and facilitation of business partnerships and access to finance

### PROJECT PARTNERS

Within the scope of the project, activities are conducted by **UNIDO** in collaboration with:

- The MENA National Women's Business Associations of the selected countries
- The respective Ministries of Industry
- No Peace Without Justice, an Italian NGO
- The Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR)
- Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini, an independent research and policy orientation center.
- PROMOS, part of the Milan Chamber of Commerce
- Further supporting organizations are Women for Expo and Union for the Mediterranean (UFM)

### PROJECT BENEFICIARIES

The counterparts and direct beneficiaries of the project are the MENA National Women's Business Associations in the target countries:

- Egypt: Association for Women's Total Advancement and Development (AWTAD)
- Jordan: Business & Professional Women – Amman (BPW-A)
- Lebanon: Al Majmoua – Lebanese association for development
- Morocco: Association des Femmes Chefs d'Entreprises du Maroc (AFEM)
- Palestine: Business Women Forum (BWF-P)
- Tunisia: Femme and Leadership (F&L)



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## EXPECTED PROJECT OUTCOMES

The project reaches for the three main outcomes which results indicators are as follows:

- **Public key actors initiate targeted policy reforms based on an inclusive dialogue with national and regional women associations, to promote a more conducive environment for women entrepreneurship:**
  - at least 3 policy initiatives to promote women entrepreneurship are under development at regional level
  - an updated report on Women Entrepreneurship in the MENA region is validated by the concerned governments
  - National Public-Private working groups are established to prepare the implementation of the project's recommendations for a more conducive environment for women entrepreneurship.
- **The National Business Women's Associations offer more efficient demand-driven services to support female entrepreneurs:** 150 members have received coaching services and access to COMFAR online by June 2016, 20 % average increase in members requesting non-financial services, 20 % average increase of overall membership. The women national associations have formulated their network strategic plan to promote female entrepreneurship in the region for the coming years.
- **More sustainable women-led businesses are created in the MENA region:** 60 % of assisted women entrepreneurs have created their business of which at least 50 % in the agro-food and green economy sectors, 10 % of assisted women entrepreneurs have invested in new technologies, 40 % of assisted entrepreneurs developed new business partnerships, 50 % of women assisted in their negotiations with banks obtained a loan.

