

Key recommendations

Greater participation by women in the labour force, particularly as entrepreneurs, could help develop the private sector and stimulate innovation and growth in the MENA region. One recent study suggests that closing the gender gap in the labour market could increase GDP by more than 25% per head in MENA economies¹.

This report offers recommendations for action by various stakeholders with a view to boosting women's employment and entrepreneurship in the region by improving statistics collection and analysis regarding women entrepreneurs, improving business development services (BDS) for women, improving access to credit and financial services and making women more aware of the possibilities available to them.

These recommendations were developed by the OECD-MENA Women's Business Forum. They take account not only of the studies and surveys included in this publication, but also the principles agreed upon by MENA Ministers in the *Declaration on Fostering Women's Entrepreneurship in the MENA Region* at the 2007 MENA-OECD Ministerial Meeting as well as the Ministers' 2009 "Action Plan on Fostering Women's Entrepreneurship and Employment in the MENA Region". They cover all 18 economies of the MENA region: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, the UAE and Yemen.

Data collection

National statistical agencies

- Develop more comprehensive datasets on women's education and economic activity in the MENA region, and develop a data collection strategy to gather greater information in this area.
- Harmonise definitions of key concepts, such as micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises as well as women-led businesses.
- Ensure that gender is taken into consideration in the design of Establishment Census and/or SME sample surveys carried out by national statistical offices and that gender-disaggregated data is systematically reported.
- Develop systems for providing gender-disaggregated data on the beneficiaries of SME support programmes offered by national SME agencies.

International stakeholders, including the WBF

- Carry out in-depth case studies of women-owned enterprise growth with a view to identifying key obstacles to their growth as well as key success factors.
- Conduct further research and analysis of the economic consequences of laws which may impact women's ability to engage in entrepreneurial, business, and international trade activity.

- Create a clearing house for gathering studies related to women’s entrepreneurship in the MENA region. The clearing house could monitor research developments and ensure broad dissemination of research findings, good practices and models that could be replicated in the region.

Business development services and information

BDS organisations

- Create more awareness of the availability and value of BDS services among women entrepreneurs by:
 - making presentations at universities and meetings of women entrepreneurs’ associations
 - building partnerships with micro-credit organisations (which tend to have a larger share of women in their client bases, but do not provide any BDS services)
 - using social media to promote BDS services
 - conducting awareness workshops (featuring successful women entrepreneurs who can share their enterprise development strategies).
- Make the provision of BDS services more accessible to women by tailoring training and BDS services to fit the needs of women entrepreneurs and adopting more flexible approaches to BDS interventions by:
 - developing responsive custom-tailored training plans
 - modularising training so it can be delivered to women entrepreneurs over shorter durations and at a lower cost
 - integrating gender-sensitivity considerations in training materials
 - developing training to improve women’s business management know-how in running a business, developing products and services and integrating technology in business operations
 - leveraging technology and social media to provide support to women who wish to more effectively manage work schedules and family commitments by starting a home-based business
 - providing trainers with training and experience in the promotion and support of small businesses and women entrepreneurs, including gender-sensitivity training
 - reaching out to women in rural areas.
- Provide networking opportunities to women for their improved access to information and increased exchanges of experiences by:
 - creating platforms for women entrepreneurs to network, exchange ideas and foster commercial business relationships
 - using those platforms as a vehicle for pooling means and resources.
- Assist with linkages to financing in BDS information and assistance by:

- providing information on the various types and sources of financing as part of BDS
- assisting women in identifying the appropriate sources of financing to transform their ideas into actual businesses
- supporting women in their loan requests (e.g. connecting them to financing opportunities, helping them prepare their financing proposal, accompanying them to the bank).
- developing a system for reporting on the percentage of women in the client base of different BDS organisations as a baseline for improving performance.

Business incubators

- Adopt a more proactive approach to promoting incubator services to women by making presentations to women’s groups and associations and in local communities.
- Strengthen linkages with BDS organisations that serve the needs of women's enterprises with a view to identifying a pipeline of incubator-ready and high-growth potential women’s projects that are able to meet the incubators’ entry criteria.
- Encourage publicly-funded incubators to participate in infoDev training on gender issues for incubator managers and more broadly in the infoDev Women’s Entrepreneurship Programme to incorporate a gender-sensitive approach to incubation and business support, including reporting on gender-disaggregated data on clients.

Women-specific business incubators (WBIs)

- Explore the funding needs of existing WBIs to enable their expansion, and establish new WBIs in other parts of the region (with the support of governments and donors).
- Include a pre-incubation component in incubator services, based on the good practice of the AFEM incubators in Morocco to develop a pipeline of incubator-ready projects.
- Promote the sharing of existing regional good practices in the provision of incubator services to women entrepreneurs by:
 - convening a regional workshop to discuss experiences in the development and operation of incubators for women
 - using examples such as those of Egypt and Morocco
 - inviting other international experts with the goal of stimulating greater interest in the expansion of the WBI concept more broadly across the MENA region.
- Form a network of MENA-based WBIs and foster linkages with the infoDev programme with the objective of sharing global good practices and perhaps seeking grant funding for regional WBI programmes.

Governments, international organisations, donors

- Promote the sharing of existing regional good practices in the provision of BDS and incubator services to women entrepreneurs.
- Improve the sustainability and funding of BDS programmes, including possibly by creating a MENA “Women Entrepreneurs’ Fund” that would invest in the development of women’s enterprises and projects.
- Create more exposure opportunities for women entrepreneurs by:
 - fostering opportunities for women entrepreneurs to network with and learn from regionally and internationally successful women entrepreneurs
 - creating and/or reinforcing women entrepreneurs’ forums that include women from all parts of the economy, including women with microenterprises, to coordinate, link and bring together women entrepreneurs so that they can share their experiences, build business coalitions and advocate for laws and regulations in support of entrepreneurship in general and of women’s access to the necessary support services and resources, in particular.
- Implement public policies and actions in support of an environment conducive to women’s entrepreneurship by:
 - developing clear public policies in support of women’s entrepreneurship
 - implementing a national dialogue and workshops on the issue of female entrepreneurship involving public, private and civil society sectors
 - implementing laws and regulations to more effectively integrate women entrepreneurs in the market system and provide incentives for women to undertake entrepreneurial activity
 - ensuring a stronger representation of women in decision-making positions and policy dialogue
 - providing entrepreneurship education in schools and universities
 - implementing a system for collecting data and statistics on women in MSMEs and for monitoring public policies in support of female entrepreneurship
 - creating dedicated funds to support the development of women’s entrepreneurship and their enterprises.

*Access to credit and financial services**Banks and specialised agencies*

- Improve information flows directed towards women-led businesses and talented entrepreneurs to raise awareness of the range of bank financing options and the conditions under which they may be secured. The emphasis should be placed on the key criteria for obtaining a successful loan.
- Establish innovative “bank-ready” loan packages tailored to the specificities of women-led businesses that would include credit and non-credit options (advisory services with the objective of promoting awareness of bank lending requirements).

- Explore and develop creative collateral regimes, such as collateral registries and credit guarantee schemes.
- Adopt strategies, such as “gamification”, which can contribute to developing a longer term relationship between banks and women entrepreneurs, by rewarding diligent banking on the part of clients and creating incentives for longer-term partnerships.
- Participate in “bank ready” pitching events, competitions and training programmes where bankers can partake in interactive “role playing” sessions with SMEs.

Union of Arab Banks (UAB), MENA governments

- Sponsor the development, capacity building and training for “bank readiness”, in co-operation with UAB members and partner financial institutions.
- Strengthen women entrepreneurs’ access to financing by:
 - developing special financing products/instruments for women entrepreneurs
 - strengthening all existing financial services to enable enhanced access by women (e.g. loan guarantees, venture capital, financial training, and mentoring and coaching geared to facilitating improved access to financing).
- Enhance data collection to enable banks to design and implement strategies to attract and target women entrepreneurs in the SME sector.
- Promote international good practices in extending access to financial products and services to meet the financing needs of women entrepreneurs and the growth strategy of banks.
- Explore the viability of guarantee schemes with banks and women's business associations as a means of facilitating women entrepreneurs’ access to finance.
- Develop gender-sensitivity training programmes to be delivered to banks and financial literacy training to women entrepreneurs.
- Raise awareness of the importance of risk calculations in bank decision making processes and the understanding that business plans should include detailed financial statements with projections over the short to medium term with key benchmarks.

OECD-MENA Women's Business Forum

- Elaborate a Financial Toolkit addressed to women entrepreneurs and women’s business associations, adapted to their needs and classified by size of enterprise, geographical location and/or phase of enterprise development.
- Compile similar guides existing in the MENA region on a common platform to facilitate information sharing and identify best practices addressing different segments of women entrepreneurs.

Next steps for the WBF

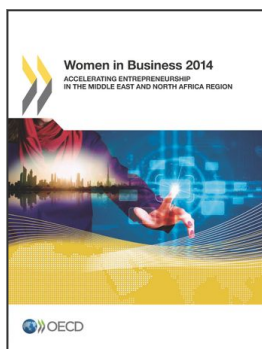
Based on the information collected for this publication, and on those recommendations from *Women in Business 2012* not yet implemented, the OECD-MENA WBF has identified further priorities for its future work, including:

- The development of a financial toolkit to help women become “bank-ready”
- Analytical work on women's leadership in the corporate sector and, possibly
- Analytical work on the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on women's employment and entrepreneurship.

This work will be carried out with WBF members, in particular with the support of its national task forces, which will assist in collecting information and helping raise awareness. The OECD will continue to support the WBF in its efforts to reinforce the dialogue between representatives of governments, the private sector and other stakeholders in the MENA region and member countries.

Notes

- ¹ Empowering the Third Billion: Women and the World of Work in 2012, Booz, Allen Hamilton



From:

Women in Business 2014

Accelerating Entrepreneurship in the Middle East and North Africa Region

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264213944-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2014), "Key recommendations", in *Women in Business 2014: Accelerating Entrepreneurship in the Middle East and North Africa Region*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264213944-4-en>

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