

Inventory of Policies, Institutions and Programmes Supporting Women's Enterprise in the Middle East and North Africa: Guidance Note



This Guidance Note on the “Inventory of Policies, Institutions and Programmes Supporting Women’s Enterprise in the Middle East and North Africa” is intended to guide OECD-MENA Women’s Business Forum country task force members in conducting a systematic mapping of the support framework for women’s enterprise development in the Middle East and North Africa.

It was presented for review and validation to participants of the Fall 2010 OECD-MENA Women’s Business Forum Conference on “[Enhancing the Business Enabling Environment for Women in Arab Economies](#)”, along with eight pilot reports based on the proposed methodology. If you are interested in joining a country task force and contributing to the pilot report for your country, please send an email to mena.oecd@investment.org.

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INTRODUCTION

1. **A systematic mapping of the support framework for women's enterprise development has yet to be pursued in countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.** In March 2010, the OECD-MENA Women's Business Forum—an inter-regional initiative of the MENA-OECD Investment Programme—sought to redress this gap by calling for the development of an *Inventory of Policies, Institutions and Programmes Supporting Women's Enterprise in the Middle East and North Africa*.

2. **The purpose of the inventory is to showcase innovative approaches to support private enterprise development in the MENA region,** and to identify good practices for improving the operational conditions specifically for women-led enterprises. It also intends to serve as a guide for women entrepreneurs by providing the contact information of agencies through which they can access information, financing, business support services, networks and training. Ultimately, it will lay the groundwork for identifying gaps in the support framework for women's enterprise development and formulating policy recommendations based on international best practice at a later stage. The results will feed the business climate reform efforts which take place in the broader framework of the MENA-OECD Investment Programme, thereby contributing to the mainstreaming of women's issues in the policy dialogue.

STRUCTURE OF THE INVENTORY

3. The inventory is structured around the following five dimensions:

- 1) Policy Leadership
- 2) Institutional Support for Businesswomen
- 3) Access to Credit and Financial Services
- 4) Business Support Services and Information
- 5) Data Collection and Research

4. These are further divided into subdimensions, all of which are explained in greater detail in the below section "Terms Used in the Inventory". It is important to note that the dimensions are inter-related and that many sub-dimensions could be categorised under several dimensions. Where possible, all agencies mentioned in the inventory include key contact

information (postal address, telephone number, fax, email address and website) along with a brief description of their activities.

METHODOLOGY

5. **The inventory was requested by members of the OECD-MENA Women's Business Forum** at its March 2010 meeting on "Supporting the Integration of Women in MENA Economies". It builds on the MENA-OECD Investment Programme's 2010 *Stocktaking Report on Women's Entrepreneurship and Employment in the MENA Region*, which identified key gender-related barriers to entrepreneurship. WBF members suggested that the inventory build on this work by identifying concrete solutions for women entrepreneurs in the region. Responding to this request, the MENA-OECD Investment Programme Secretariat developed a structure for the inventory around the five dimensions outlined above.

6. **The choice of dimensions is based on OECD-MENA Women's Business Forum members' suggestions** during the March 2010 meeting. It is important to note that several suggestions were based on previous work done by the OECD and other international organisations, notably the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs and Local Development (LEED Programme) and the International Labour Organization (*Assessing the Enabling Environment for Women in Growth Enterprises: An AfDB/ILO Integrated Framework Assessment Guide*). The MENA-OECD Investment Programme seeks to ensure that the inventory leverages existing knowledge and expertise and avoids duplication. It will therefore continually seek to promote partnerships and synergies with other organisations.

7. **Seven pilot reports based on the proposed structure were prepared from July-September 2010.** These seven reports (not included in present note) apply to Bahrain, Jordan, Palestinian Authority, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates and were initially prepared by the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) and complemented by the MENA-OECD Investment Programme Secretariat. An eighth pilot report for Lebanon was prepared by the International Labour Organization. The pilot reports are based on desktop and online research as well as national sources such as published national development plans, SME policies and government websites. The choice of economies included in the pilot reports reflects the availability of existing research and data as well as resource constraints. The ultimate intent is to apply the proposed methodology, by Spring 2011, to all 18 economies participating in the MENA-OECD Investment Programme¹.

8. **Country task forces** are currently being put in place, and remain open for membership. Their role will be to validate country reports and ensure continual updating. Country reports can be accessed through country contact points (to be designated) or through the WBF's secure online platform (<https://community.oecd.org/community/psdwbn>).

¹ Governments participating in the MENA-OECD Investment Programme are: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

BACKGROUND

9. **In recent years, MENA governments have made notable progress to improve policy frameworks and support measures for private enterprise development,** a key driver for economic growth in the region. Of note are efforts to simplify company registration procedures, for example through the creation of one-stop-shops in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon (EC/OECD, 2008). Several countries have improved access to finance through the establishment of credit guarantee schemes and the development of microfinance institutions. Others have implemented programmes to increase the provision of business support services to start-up and established companies, often with the support of international organisations.

10. **Targeted initiatives have been put in place to support women-led firms.** For example, national women's councils have been established in several economies of the region to ensure that women's perspectives are taken into account in the policy making process. Businesswomen's associations play an increasingly important role in the provision of support services and networking opportunities to women entrepreneurs. Financial facilities such as microfinance institutions often benefit a majority of female entrepreneurs. With the support of international organisations and donor countries, mentoring programmes have been implemented to build women entrepreneurs' capacity. However, more could be done to ensure that women benefit from mainstream business support services.

11. **There has also been an increase in survey-based research on women entrepreneurs in the MENA region.** This has no doubt contributed to an improved understanding of their characteristics and challenges, and has served as a tool to promote women's achievements as entrepreneurs. However, this research could play a more central role in the policy dialogue and could be complemented by improved data on the enterprise sector—especially gender-disaggregated data. Improved research and data collection on the characteristics of women-led enterprises would help inform effective policy making and programme implementation.

12. **Improving the business enabling environment for women entrepreneurs can contribute to increased competitiveness and private sector development in the region.** Indeed, research suggests that although women's entrepreneurship levels in the MENA region are among the lowest in the world, women-led firms are often large, well established and contributing to international trade and job creation (World Bank, 2007). The proposed inventory represents a first step towards identifying and sharing good practices for supporting women's enterprise development in the region.

TERMS USED IN THE INVENTORY

13. The following section defines the terms used in the inventory. It is intended to guide country task force members in conducting a systematic mapping of the support framework for women's enterprise development.

1. Policy Leadership

1.1. Policies Supporting Women Entrepreneurs

14. This subdimension identifies policies supporting women entrepreneurs. As with all policies, such a policy can take many forms but is generally **a strategic document—endorsed by the government—which conveys a commitment to improve the operational environment for women-led businesses.** It need not be a separate document focusing only on women's enterprise development, but may instead involve the inclusion of women as a target group in national development plans or enterprise policy frameworks. It may also take the form of a national gender strategy. These various options are described below, but should not be considered exhaustive.

National Development Plan

15. A national development plan outlines the government's priorities and strategies regarding economic development. This section identifies whether a national development plan exists, and whether it makes reference to women as a target group. It also identifies whether the plan puts in place mechanisms to ensure implementation.

Enterprise Policy Framework

16. This section identifies whether there is a policy framework for enterprise development, and whether it makes reference to women as a target group. The policy framework could take the form of a government-endorsed document which defines medium-term targets for the proportion of enterprises owned and led by women.

National Gender Strategy

17. A national gender strategy (can also be called a gender action plan or policy, or a national women's strategy) is a document which outlines the government's strategy for improving women's status—within political, social and economic spheres. **This section identifies whether a national gender strategy exists, and briefly summarises the policy implications with relation to women's entrepreneurship or economic status.**

1.2. Government Promotion of Women Entrepreneurs

18. Promoting women as entrepreneurs can serve two purposes: 1) it can contribute to a positive shift in societal perceptions about the role of women in the economy, and 2) by providing role models, it can encourage women to consider entrepreneurship as an option. **This sub-dimension identifies government actions to showcase the accomplishments of**

women as entrepreneurs. These can take many forms. Some examples include published “success stories”, conferences on women entrepreneurs and lifetime achievement awards.

1.3. Mainstreaming of Issues Affecting Businesswomen in the Public/Private Policy Dialogue

19. Public/private policy dialogue is important to ensure that policies take into account the needs of the private sector. Female members of the private sector may face different legal, regulatory and other constraints in the business environment. It is therefore important that representatives of women entrepreneurs regularly meet with policymakers to ensure that women’s perspectives are taken into account at the design stage of strategies and policies. **This sub-dimension seeks to capture the extent to which the issues affecting women in business are raised in a dialogue between government and the business community.** It identifies the number and frequency of meetings and a qualitative account of their effectiveness in shaping policy.

2. Institutional Support for Businesswomen

2.1. Institutional Body Responsible for Co-ordinating Women’s Enterprise Development

20. To support coherent policy implementation, it is useful to designate a single body responsible for co-ordinating and streamlining efforts related to women’s enterprise development. **This sub-dimension determines whether such an institutional body is in place.** This body can be a federal agency (such as a National Council for Women) or can be a bureau located within an SME development agency.

2.2. Business advisory, registration and licensing bodies

21. It is important that policymakers work towards reducing barriers to entry linked to complicated administrative procedures for business establishment. Complex registration and licensing procedures can place undue burdens on entrepreneurs, especially those in small- and medium-sized enterprises. **This sub-dimension identifies the body or bodies responsible for business registration and licensing and assesses the mechanisms in place to reach out to women entrepreneurs.** These mechanisms may involve, for example, the establishment of a dedicated women’s bureau within the body or the conduction of targeted advertising campaigns.

2.3. SME Support Agency

22. **This sub-dimension first identifies the SME promotion agency in a given country and then examines whether it provides targeted support to women entrepreneurs.** “Targeted support” can signify that the agency has publicly announced its intention to reach out to women entrepreneurs. It can also mean that the agency has a dedicated bureau for women entrepreneurs.

2.4. Business Associations

23. Strong private sector associations are important for ensuring that policymakers take into account the effects of proposed policies and regulations on private enterprise. Where business associations play a strong advocacy role, it is important that women entrepreneurs are

adequately represented within their membership to ensure their voice is heard in the public/private policy dialogue. **This sub-dimension identifies business associations and examines whether they are open to women entrepreneurs.** Where possible, it also measures the proportion of members that are women.

2.5. Businesswomen's Associations

24. Businesswomen's associations (also called "women entrepreneurs associations") have an important role to play in policy advocacy—influencing policy-makers to take into account the effects of new policies, laws, regulations etc. on target groups such as women. They also provide networking opportunities to women entrepreneurs and can offer mentoring, counselling and training services in addition to broader business support services. **This sub-dimension identifies businesswomen's association(s) present in the country. It also identifies their age, extent of membership, and the key services they provide.**

3. Access to Credit and Financial Services

3.1. Financial Initiatives or Facilities Supporting Women Entrepreneurs

25. Targeted financing initiatives can address supply side issues (encouraging financial institutions to diversify their product offering and reach out to female clientele) and demand-side issues (improving the financial literacy of entrepreneurs through training). **This sub-dimension identifies financial initiatives or facilities which seek to improve the provision of financing specifically to women entrepreneurs.** These may include commercial banks, credit guarantee schemes, venture capital funds, business angel networks, micro-finance institutions, and others.

3.2. Credit Bureaus Collecting Information on the Microfinance Sector

26. Credit bureaus are key to reducing information asymmetries between creditors and lenders, thereby making it possible for start-up and established entrepreneurs to obtain financing. Credit bureaus with low minimum loan thresholds allow micro-finance beneficiaries (of which a large proportion are women) to build their credit histories and access larger loans later. **This sub-dimension identifies credit bureaus (private credit bureaus or public credit registries) which actively seek out client credit histories from micro-finance facilities.**

4. Business Support Services and Information

4.1. Public and Private Business Support Service Providers

27. Business support services "can range from common facilities (photocopying, reception and telephone services) to more technical services (bookkeeping, IT support), skills development (training and coaching) and strategic assistance (advice and consulting)". (EC/OECD, 2008) They may also include legal and accounting services. **This sub-dimension identifies providers of business support services and examines targeted measures put in place to improve women's access to and use of these services.** Business support services can be provided by governmental, non-governmental and private sector actors, or a mix thereof. Consideration in this subdimension may also be given to whether mainstream business support services track the number of women clients they serve.

4.2. Access to Business-Related Information

28. Access to business-related information—economic, legislative and regulatory—is of vital importance for entrepreneurs. Business-related information may involve issues such as tax regulations, export regulations, licensing procedures, etc. **This subdimension identifies mechanisms in place or actions to disseminate business-related information to entrepreneurs, specifically women entrepreneurs.** These mechanisms or actions may involve traditional channels such as business development centres, women’s enterprise centres, businesswomen’s associations and chambers of commerce. They may also involve the use of up-to-date internet portals which bring together practical information for enterprises.

4.3. Access to Markets Through Participation by Women in Promotion Programmes (e.g. Trade Fairs)

29. Access to markets—local, national and international—is essential to allow women entrepreneurs to scale up their enterprises. **This subdimension identifies efforts to increase women’s access to market opportunities.** It may include initiatives to improve women’s access to information on market opportunities or public procurement opportunities. It may also include initiatives to increase women’s participation in trade fairs.

4.4. Entrepreneurship and Management Training

30. Entrepreneurship and management training can be very effective in building women’s capacity to create and grow their own businesses. In addition to basic entrepreneurial training, more targeted business training can teach women how to grow their businesses, to export to new markets, and to effectively use new technologies to reach out to a wider client base. **This subdimension identifies key initiatives in place which provide entrepreneurship and management training to nascent and established women entrepreneurs.**

5. Data Collection and Research

31. Data collection and research are fundamental for ensuring that policies and programmes adequately respond to the needs of private enterprises. Baseline data—for example on the birth and death rates of enterprises—also provides a means to monitor the impact of support measures over time. Survey-based research can both compensate for the lack of detailed statistics and provide a qualitative picture of the needs of private enterprises. Beyond this, data collection and research specific to women entrepreneurs allows a better understanding of their specific challenges and needs, where they exist.

5.1. State of Gender-Disaggregated Data Collection

32. A solid understanding of the characteristics of women-owned and -led enterprises (size, sector, age, growth rate, etc.) is essential to ensuring that policy and programme measures address the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. They can also form the intellectual basis for improvement to the regulatory, legislative and business support environment, by showcasing the contributions of women entrepreneurs to job creation and economic growth. It is important that policies be systematically informed by adequate, gender-disaggregated enterprise data. **This subdimension identifies and lists national statistics offices and determines whether they collect gender-disaggregated baseline data** on the following:

- Educational attainment rates, type of studies
- Labour force participation rates (by private/public sector)
- Number of women-owned and -led businesses
- Size and sector of women-owned and -led businesses
- Data on Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (MSME) sector
- Data differentiating between pre-start-up, start-up and post-start-up enterprises

5.2. State of Research on Women Entrepreneurs

33. Survey-based research on the barriers that women entrepreneurs face informs policy makers on the specific needs of women business owners and provides a basis for appropriate policy and programme measures. It can also help to raise awareness about the economic contributions of women-owned and -led businesses, which is vital to creating a favourable environment for women's enterprise. Research can be carried out and financed by a variety of public or private actors or NGOs. **This subdimension identifies key research literature on women entrepreneurs in the country concerned** (a bibliography with a brief description).

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