OECD workshop urges governments to aid women entrepreneurs in Middle East, North Africa

A two-day OECD Workshop in Istanbul on women’s entrepreneurship in the Middle East and North Africa ended with a call for governments to actively support women in setting up and running businesses as part of a strategy for job creation and investment.

The workshop, organised by the OECD’s Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs and Local Development at the OECD’s Istanbul Centre for Private Sector Development on 11 and 12 July, was designed to help raise awareness among decision-makers in both government and the private sector of the importance of women entrepreneurs for economic growth.

It brought together 90 participants from the MENA region and from OECD and other countries as part of a broader MENA-OECD Initiative on Investment and Governance for Development which also covers such areas as public administration and the role of civil society.

In particular, participants in the workshop called for measures to help in providing loans for women entrepreneurs and for the development of statistical data bases that would underpin specific policy strategies in favour of women-owned businesses.

They also urged governments to devote resources to promoting and encouraging women’s entrepreneurship, for example through publicity campaigns.

“Women represent an important economic resource that is under-utilised in MENA countries,” Saloua Karkri-Belkeziz, Chair of the Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Morocco, told participants in the workshop. “Our message to governments is that we are there to be utilised and that we want support.”

Earlier, Turkey’s Minister of State in charge of Women’s Affairs, Nimet Çubukçu, had noted how many women in Mediterranean-rim nations hold back from setting up businesses because of social and other pressures. In Turkey, she noted, only 10% of employers are women, and 66% of enterprises founded by women have only one employee.

If the energy and initiative of women in setting up their own firms can be unleashed, she told the opening session of the workshop, they can be a powerful force for prosperity. “Women are the key to development in the region,” she said. “Supporting them as entrepreneurs will provide an impetus to social and economic development.”

JT00187665
Specifically, participants in the workshop called on governments to:

- Improve the regulatory and legislative framework relating to women, and in particular property rights and the freedom to be entrepreneurial.
- Integrate gender issues into programme design and government policies in their initial planning stages.
- Promote awareness of women's role in economic development and acknowledge the positive impact of their work in improving living conditions for their families.
- Bring more women into positions of economic influence by giving them the mandates and tools that they need to take decisions.
- Develop the infrastructure and services needed for women to coordinate their family and professional lives, including nurseries and school bus systems and access to communications technology.
- Introduce or enforce legislation against gender discrimination in the public and private sectors.
- Create a collective strategy so that stakeholders deem it important for women to take a more active part in society and the economy.

As a next step, these and other conclusions from the workshop will be included in a series of draft recommendations to be submitted in the form of policy proposals to a Ministerial Meeting of the MENA-OECD Investment Programme in Amman in November 2005.

For further information, journalists are invited to contact the OECD’s Media Relations Division (tel. +33 1 4524 9700 or news.contact@oecd.org).