



## THE MENA-OECD WOMEN'S BUSINESS NETWORK

*What is the MENA-OECD Women's Business Network?*

The MENA-OECD Women's Business Network (WBN) aims to further the economic empowerment of women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and provide MENA governments with concrete recommendations for policy reform and targeted action to support women's employment and entrepreneurship in the region. The Network brings together over 120 women leaders, entrepreneurs and managers from government, business, international organisations and civil society.

The Network was launched by the MENA-OECD Investment Programme, which works to enhance economic growth and sustainable development in the MENA region by accelerating business climate reform and capacity building.

Much remains to be done to integrate women in business in the MENA region. Only 28% of working age women participate in the work force in the MENA region, compared to 65% in OECD countries. An estimated 20% of firms in the MENA region have female participation in ownership, compared to 32% in OECD countries.

*The landmark "Declaration on Fostering Women's Entrepreneurship in the MENA Region".*

MENA governments recognise that their countries' competitiveness in the global marketplace depends on fully engaging their human capital. Countries need to make supporting women's entrepreneurship and employment a priority. At the 2007 MENA-OECD Ministerial, MENA ministers committed to the **Declaration on Fostering Women's Entrepreneurship in the MENA Region** and supported the creation of the **MENA-OECD Women's Business Network** (WBN).

To implement the Declaration and to set a clear roadmap to economically empowering women, the 2009 MENA-OECD Women's Leadership Summit endorsed **The Action Plan on Fostering Women's Entrepreneurship in the MENA Region**. It outlines four pillars for action:

1. Encourage women's entrepreneurship and employment by creating a business enabling environment;
2. Facilitate business registration and growth through enhanced access to finance, in particular for women-owned businesses;
3. Improve economic policy through better gender-disaggregated statistics and indicators;
4. Facilitate participation in the MENA-OECD Women's Business Network and ensure increased contacts between business networks.

*How will the Women's Business Network contribute?*

The Women's Business Network, supported by the OECD, will spearhead the implementation of the Action Plan.

The 2009 Progress Report on *Support and Challenges for Women Entrepreneurs in the MENA Region* points to a number of persistent barriers to women's entrepreneurship and employment. In particular, there is a lack of well-defined and comprehensive strategies to generate business environments that foster entrepreneurship, especially by women. The Women's Business Network will identify policy recommendations to support women's integration in business. These recommendations will be part of a 2010 flagship publication on women's entrepreneurship.

The publication will:

- ✓ Provide an analytical framework of measures and means to enhance women's entrepreneurship and employment in the region;
- ✓ Evaluate individual MENA countries against this framework;
- ✓ Provide case studies of initiatives, both from within the region and elsewhere, that have enhanced women's involvement in the economy;
- ✓ Present recommendations to governments and the private sector to shape reform.

The Network will subsequently monitor the implementation of these recommendations and develop indicators to assess progress.

Another important feature of the WBN will be its role in building capacity within the region. Through its web-based platform, members will be able to share information and resources, build relationships, create new opportunities and brainstorm on new and innovative ways to tackle challenges women face in the region.

#### *Upcoming in 2010...*

- **29 March (Tunis):** The WBN will hold its first meeting to agree on a governance structure, appoint co-Chairs (one from the MENA region and one from an OECD country), and consider candidates for its Executive Committee, to be made up of 6-8 leaders from business and government. The meeting will lay out a critical path for the preparation and delivery of the flagship publication.
- **4 May tbc (Paris):** With the support of the WBN, the MENA-OECD Initiative is considering holding a conference on gender equality at OECD headquarters, back-to-back with the MENA-OECD Investment Programme Steering Group meetings.
- **26-28 October (Marrakech):** In the context of the World Economic Forum on the Middle East and North Africa, the WBN will launch its flagship publication.
- **November (Kuwait tbc):** Annual meeting of the Women's Business Network

#### **Contacts:**

Mr. Anthony O'Sullivan, Ms. Nicola Ehlermann-Cache

Private Sector Development Division

Directorate for Financial and Enterprise Affairs

[anthony.osullivan@oecd.org](mailto:anthony.osullivan@oecd.org), [nicola.ehlermann-cache@oecd.org](mailto:nicola.ehlermann-cache@oecd.org)

Tel : +33 (0)1 45 24 97 01

[www.oecd.org/daf/psd](http://www.oecd.org/daf/psd)