



EL-HIWAR EURO-ARAB POLICY DIALOGUE ON CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN TIMES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Online, 24 March 2022

Summary of findings and takeaways

On 24 March 2022, the El-Hiwar II project organised an online Euro-Arab Policy Dialogue on Challenges and Opportunities for women economic empowerment in times of climate change.

This policy dialogue consisted of a series of online roundtable discussions amongst a group of **36 participants representing a variety of stakeholders from the Arab region and Europe**: officials from the EU and League of Arab States and their respective specialised institutions; researchers; civil society organisations; regional and international organisations.

The background:

Both the Arab region and Europe are committed to increase gender empowerment, to create quality jobs and professional opportunities and to successfully transit towards greener economies. These are endeavours that would benefit from greater cooperation within and among regions. In the intersection between these challenges, **women economic empowerment** (including women entrepreneurship) emerges as an area with **great potential for transformative impact** in their respective societies and also for international cooperation.

The magnitude of the impact of climate change calls for revisiting support to women economic empowerment both in the Arab world and in Europe. Climate change is deeply affecting the economy yet is also opening new **economic opportunities with the growing importance of the green economy**. However, the deep-seated crossroads of gender inequality and climate change as key links to achieving the SDGs are not yet robustly understood. While some evidence exists on the intersecting nature of SDG 5 and 13, more work is required to **leverage the co-benefits between climate action and gender equality** in order to effectively implement any approach. Across societies the impacts of climate change affect women and men differently. In developing countries, specific challenges include that women are often responsible for gathering and producing food, collecting water and sourcing fuel for heating and cooking. With climate change, these tasks are becoming more difficult. Extreme weather events such as droughts and floods have a greater impact on the poor and most vulnerable – 70% of the world's poor are women. **Despite women being disproportionately affected by climate change, they play a crucial role in climate change adaptation and mitigation. But they are still a largely untapped resource.** Restricted land rights, lack of access to financial resources, training and technology, and limited access to political decision-making circles often prevent them from playing a full role in tackling climate change and other environmental challenges. Allowing women participation in decision making represents an important opportunity for contributing to effective climate change solutions for the benefit of all.



Key takeaways:

LAS initiatives to support inclusive economic empowerment of women

- The LAS had taken steps to empower gender equality following the **Cairo Declaration of 2017**, a reference document for gender issues in the region. A new pillar of the Declaration will be created to include **gender, environment and climate change**.
- A key initiative that the LAS has supported is the **Khadija Network** which brings prominent businesswomen and other stakeholders together since 2015. It the first network in the Arab region for women economic empowerment. Its vision is to act as a platform to promote gender balance in the regional economy and to advocate for women participation at policy-level. The Covid-19 pandemic had posed a serious threat to women's engagement in economic activities and their participation in the labour market, and while the membership of the Network had been updated, restructuring would be needed. A revival of the Network is underway and the LAS and UN are in the process of hiring experts to prepare a strategical framework and action plan that includes monitoring, communication and advocacy. The Network also has a future vision for women's participation in addressing climate change, such as green construction, natural tourism and the circular economy.
- Regarding the interconnection with climate action, pioneering work of LAS member states on included **the Middle East Green Initiative Summit** which was held in Riyadh in 2021.
- LAS is also working with its member states to set and develop **policies to achieve decent jobs for women and parity**.

EU's efforts to promote women's economic empowerment

- Gender equality and women rights are central to EU policy and this is why it is featuring in the **regional cooperation with southern partners**:
 - The EU is framing its actions around its [Gender Action Plan \(GAP\) III](#).
 - Furthermore, the EU's [new agenda for the Mediterranean](#), launched in February 2021 puts women at the centre of its actions.
 - At a technical level, the [Global Europe financing instrument for EU cooperation](#) is creating a framework where 85% of its external action will have a gender objective.
 - Regarding the inclusion of women in the financial realm, the EU's future plans foresee a 'two-plus pronged' approach: 1) it is working on promoting regional dialogue, to reduce 'bottlenecks' in dialogue and 2) it is supporting the banking and non-banking tools that could contribute to financial inclusion, including in particular, the digital aspect. The 'plus' part of the approach was that the EU has been working with financial institutions in the hope that it can design programmes for women in order to enhance their inclusion.
 - European Commission DG Employment is currently working with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) on monitoring **data on gender equality in the Euro-Mediterranean region** and in its [March 2022 publication](#), it showed how Covid-19 affected women.
- Internally, the EU has also been stepping up efforts to achieve equality for women: the [EU's Gender Equality Strategy 2020 – 2025](#) aims to increase women's participation in society by supporting them in their professional career and implementing minimum work standards to protect them at work. Achieving equal pay is also part of the strategy.



Mapping of other initiatives

A number of initiatives from other stakeholders were presented during the event including:

- The **Tunisian strategy** to support WEE in rural areas.
- Support from the **Qatari** Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs, for women's small and micro projects.
- **Sudan's** national programme for the economic development of rural women.
- **Bahrain's** initiatives such as a high level women and fintech committee, in order to promote gender balance in economic participation. The Bahrain Women's Development Centre (Riyadat) to help women enter the field of entrepreneurship as well as the Women's Development Fund for Trade, which encourages women to work in small and medium enterprises (SME's). Other initiatives included supporting women to work in micro-businesses and the Women's Export Programme to encourage domestic exports.
- **Care International Egypt** spoke about the organisation's use of the Village Savings and Loan Associations methodology, in its work with poor women from rural areas. Here, women saved money together and then took loans from their own accumulated savings. Due to its success, it had been adopted by the government as a national programme.
- **OECD's** work, notably its next WEE regional dialogue meeting which will centre on Climate Change and a recent [report](#) on Gender and the Environment.
- The **UfM's** regional dialogue on women empowerment (LAS is a member) has two objectives this year: prioritising access to finance for women entrepreneurs and prioritising the nexus between gender equality and climate finance. In March of this year, the UfM started working on WEE and climate change with its event on the resilience of women in the agri-food sectors. They held discussions with the Arab Water Council, the previous Agriculture Minister of Lebanon and the UN about how climate change is affecting women.
- The **Gender Energy Compact initiative** – led by a coalition bringing together governments, private sector, academia, civil society, youth, and international organizations to catalyze action towards gender equality and women's empowerment to accelerate a just, inclusive and sustainable energy transition.

Identification of the challenges related to leveraging the co-benefits of gender economic equality and climate action

- The group identified the critical issues of **access to natural resources and access to finance**.
- Given that the **agri-food sector** is one of the main sources of the green economy, it is important to think about how to better finance the women working in agri-food production.
- Further efforts are needed to **mainstream gender in climate action**: the latest IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) report identified that only two countries in the MENA region had made a specific mention about gender perspectives in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- A shift is needed: **women should not only be seen as vulnerable entities** (due to being most impacted by climate change) but also as stakeholders and **agents for change**. This is how Lebanon approached the matter in its gender perspective for its NDC.
- **Increasing the role of women** in the development, implementation and monitoring of climate policies is another issue that was identified by the group.
- Participants also pointed out that very **few green climate projects have a gender approach**.





- During November's COP26 there had been many panels dedicated to women, but women were largely absent from the final agreement (and this can be seen in the related photos when the final agreement was announced).
- Another matter is the **lack of availability of data**, which would be critical to improve evidence based decision making. Data gaps mean that it is not possible to identify (and address) key gender issues.

Seizing the moment: a favourable political climate and the upcoming COP27 and COP28 hosted in the Arab region

- It is becoming largely understood that the fight against climate change and women economic empowerment are two crucial and mutually reinforcing objectives for the next decades. It is thus necessary to seize this momentum to **create a common agenda**.
- **The COP27 and the COP28** that will be organised respectively in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, offer an unparalleled opportunity to raise the subject in the Euro-Arab region. For the two Conferences:
 - **gender perspective** should be properly applied to all the objectives of the conferences.
 - **women's presence** should be guaranteed in all panels; and, the goal should be to ensure a gender balance within the panels with 40%-60% of women as speakers in as many panels as possible.
 - **specific sessions** tackling directly the subject of gender equality, WEE and climate change should be organized.

What could be done in the long run?

- **Reinforce networks and cooperation:** multi-stakeholder cooperation and solid Euro-Arab networks (with international institutions, national focal points, researchers, NGOs and companies from private and public sectors) to promote the exchange of information, best practices, lessons learnt, etc.
- **Mainstream gender in climate change policies and programmes:** Both the EU and the LAS should encourage and support their respective Member States in mainstreaming gender in their environmental and economic policies and programmes and follow-up on the implementation process. This should also apply climate finance funds and programmes. Gender should be mainstreamed in all phases of the project cycle – their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- **Build capacities** of stakeholders from the Euro-Arab region working in all areas connected to climate change and economy to increase their knowledge and awareness to gender equality and support specific technical capacities such as developing and implementing **gender responsive budgeting**.
- **Understand in-depth existing issues in order to create more effective responses.** Despite the growing interest in WEE and climate change, the question needs further research and understanding. Data are urgently needed.
- **Empower through communication:** to inform, highlight and convince about the importance of analysing climate change challenges and opportunities from a gender perspective:
 - Demonstrate when speaking about the climate crisis that women often face different challenges.





- At the same time, a more empowering discourse should be created. It should be clearly highlighted that women are true agents of change.
- **Reinforce women's role in the fight against the climate change:**
 - **Education and trainings:** quality education for girls and women in the first step to achieve women's economic empowerment. A special focus should be put on girls and women in rural areas, whose work is traditionally tied to availability of natural resources and who will be particularly hit by the consequences of climate change.
 - Moreover, special programmes on business skills and financial education for women in the green and blue economy should be created to enhance their true economic potential.
- **Reinforcement of women's leadership:** women's expertise and perspective should be recognised and they should be invited to the table. Their presence in decision-making processes should be monitored in order to ensure that progress is made and detect possible gaps. Moreover, with the objective of recognising their contribution and highlight their achievements, it is recommended to give more visibility to women involved in the fight against the climate change.
- **Financial support:** while micro-credit programmes should be further developed, it is crucial to expand women's access to further financial services. It is further important to work with private and public financial institutions to fight against gender-based barriers that limit women's access to funds.

Next steps

- El Hiwar team will circulate this summary among participants to keep a record on the points raised during this first meeting.
- Participants may ask El Hiwar to put them in contact with other participants to establish or consolidate opportunities for cooperation.





Compilation of relevant publications and sources of information

During the event, participants shared a number of relevant documents and sources of information:

- **Adaptation Fund** (climate adaptation projects with a strong gender focus)
<https://www.adaptation-fund.org/projects-programmes/>
- **Climate Investment Funds -**
https://www.climateinvestmentfunds.org/sites/cif_enc/files/knowledge-documents/wedo_final_report_7april2020.pdf
- **EU Gender Action Plan for external action** (GAP III):
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2184
- **EU Gender Equality Strategy:**
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_358
- European Environmental Bureau report – **Why the European Green Deal needs ecofeminism**
<https://eeb.org/library/why-the-european-green-deal-needs-ecofeminism/>
- **Horizon Europe guidance on gender equality plans:** <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ffc06c3-200a-11ec-bd8e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-232129669>
- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), **Climate Change Gender Action Plans:**
<https://genderandenvironment.org/es/agent/agent-tech-support/ccgaps/>
- IUCN, **Gender and national climate planning: Gender integration in the revised Nationally Determined Contributions -** <https://genderandenvironment.org/es/gender-and-ndcs-2021/>
- NDC Partnership, **Gender Mainstreaming in Mitigation and Technology Development and Transfer Interventions: Capacity Building Package -**
<https://ndcpartnership.org/toolbox/gender-mainstreaming-mitigation-and-technology-development-and-transfer-interventions>
- OECD, Conclusions from the Women’s Economic Empowerment Forum and UNIDO regional dialogue of 18 November 2021 “**How to foster women’s entrepreneurship in the MENA digital sector? Barriers and success factors**”:
 - Arabic version: https://www.oecd.org/mena/competitiveness/WEEF-UNIDO_Webinar_Conclusions_18_November_2021_Entrepreneurship_AR.pdf
 - English version: https://www.oecd.org/mena/competitiveness/WEEF-UNIDO_Webinar_Conclusions_18_November_2021_Entrepreneurship.pdf
- OECD, Conclusions from the Women’s Economic Empowerment Forum regional dialogue of 5 July 2021 “**Gender-sensitive education and skills development policies in the MENA region: Developing girls’ digital skills in the post-COVID-19 world**”
<https://www.oecd.org/mena/competitiveness/WEEF-Webinar-Conclusions-5-July-2021-Digital-skills.pdf>



- OECD Report - Gender and the Environment - **Building Evidence and Policies to Achieve the SDGs** <https://www.oecd.org/env/gender-and-the-environment-3d32ca39-en.htm>
- OECD report - **Man Enough? Measuring Masculine Norms to Promote Women's Empowerment** https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/man-enough-measuring-masculine-norms-to-promote-women-s-empowerment_80868812-en
- **OECD webpage on gender equality in the MENA region:** [Gender equality - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(oecd.org\)](https://www.oecd.org/mena/gender-equality/)
- **The Gender and Energy Compact initiative** - focusing on catalysing action towards gender equality, sustainability and energy transition <https://genderenergycompact.org/>
- The Gender Climate Tracker which **scanned NDCs in relation to references to gender:** <https://genderclimatetracker.org/gender-ndc/quick-analysis>
- **UfM Regional Progress Report on Gender Equality 2022** <https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/UfM-GenderReport2022.pdf>
- UfM report on the 7 March 2022 webinar - **Agrifood systems facing climate change in the MENA region: gender equality for better resilience** <https://ufmsecretariat.org/publication-speech/iwd2022-agrifood-systems-report/>

