



The UN system in the Arab/MENA Region kicks off International Women’s Day with an eye on Planet 50-50 by 2030

Joint press release by UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, UN Women, ESCWA, FAO, OCHA, UNHCR, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNRWA, WFP, OHCHR, ILO, UNOPS, UN Habitat, and UNESCO.

Cairo, 07 March 2017- Despite progress in advancing gender equality globally, women in the Arab region remain underrepresented across all spheres of life, including in the workforce. Thus, UN agencies are putting the gender gap in equal employment at the center of their efforts in connection with International Women’s Day on 8 March, at a critical time when the humanitarian situation and fragile contexts are mushrooming across the region with grave impact on women and girls.

This year, the #womensday theme focuses on “Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030” and seeks to build momentum for the effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. The world of work has been undergoing great and rapid changes largely due to the forces of globalization and the digital revolution.

Women in the Arab world are marginalized across the board and gender-based discrimination persists within and across countries. Within the world of work, the participation rate of women in any labor force is three times lower than that of men. Economic inequalities include gender gaps in the labor force, pay and work entitlements. According to the 2015 Global Gender Gap Report, 13 of the 15 countries with the lowest rates of women participating in the labor force are in the Arab/MENA region.

The growing portion of women engaged in informal labor in almost all markets, including women’s work in agriculture, engenders unstable livelihoods and incomes. Issues including occupational segregation, unequal working conditions, gender power relations in the household, the burden of unpaid domestic and child care work, as well as lack of social protection, and diverse occupational health issues restrict women’s economic empowerment. Furthermore, violence against women in the world of work exacerbates gender inequalities, stifles women workers’ voices and agency, and results in high costs to the state in lost earnings and wellbeing. Additionally, many girls are forced into early marriages, drop out of school, and are unable to live up to their full earning potential.

We should anticipate and address all these issues in order to ensure that women are fully equipped with the necessary education, training, vocational and entrepreneurial skills to achieve equal engagement in the labor force. Attention must be paid to rural women in food systems, ensuring women’s peace and security, that women exercise their reproductive health rights, and that legislative and structural barriers are removed to achieve equal employment outcomes as these are key elements to fight hunger, malnutrition, and rural poverty.

The economic empowerment of women starts with providing working women with greater access to social protection and income security, and recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work. In parallel, the employment of women in both the public and private sectors should increase, with women taking up more leadership positions. Improved governance at national, regional and international levels, and enhancing women’s business and marketing skills will provide the adequate framework for the economic empowerment of women.



Only with women’s economic empowerment can the global economy be inclusive and equitable, one that generates decent work for all, reduces poverty and hunger, improves wellbeing and livelihoods and decreases vulnerability to diseases, so that prosperity is shared and no one is left behind. This will only be possible through the inclusion of women in all contexts, including livelihoods issues in conflict and post-conflict situations, refugee and internally displaced women, and migrant women, as well as marginalized women like women with disabilities, and women living with HIV/AIDS, who face a double stigma in accessing employment.

On IWD, the UN system in the Arab/MENA region call upon all actors and agents of change to step it up for gender equality. Societies with higher levels of gender equality have higher economic growth and returns. There has not been another point in time in which women’s empowerment has been so crucial, working together to empower nations, build stronger economies and healthier societies. It is the key to making Agenda 2030 transformative and inclusive – UN Arab/MENA.

Around the region, many events have been organized to mark International Women’s Day. UN Women is launching the “#HeForShe for Gender Equality” campaign for Arab men to speak out and be agents of change to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment. UNRWA is launching the Gender Champion Award to recognize men and women staff who have contributed to advancing gender equality, as well as a publication and a film titled ‘In Their Own Words’, to appreciate the extraordinary resilience in the everyday lives of Palestinian women. Gallup and the ILO will launch the results of a global survey on, “Towards a better future for women and work: Voices of women and men.” UNOPS is joining the “[Global Careers for women](#)” campaign #BeBoldForChange to improve the gender balance in international organizations.

For more information, please contact:

UNESCO Cairo Office at <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/cairo/about-this-office/contact-us/>