

# The future of work and impacts on gender equality – motherhood, work, and the care economy in Arab States

Wednesday, 10 April 2019 | 11.15 - 13.00 | Committee Room 1 | UN House, Beirut

## Background

There is an opportune convergence of factors in the Arab states which could propel women into the workforce and break the stagnation the region has faced in terms of female labour force participation. The region has achieved nearly equal rates of primary school enrolment and in some countries female tertiary enrolment and achievement exceeds that of men, including in STEM subjects.

However, more will have to be done to remove the barriers they face when it comes to finding jobs, and staying in them. One of the most commonly encountered barriers is the disproportionate burden of care work they carry. We must find ways of shifting this responsibility to a more shared distribution, including through public investment in care services.

## Discussion Themes

The session aims at exploring how the world of work is changing and how that impacts women's participation and gender equality at work. It will look at the emerging opportunities for women, as well as the threats, and focus on the importance of investing in the care economy to enable women to benefit from the transformative potential of these changes, especially in relation to the Arab region.

### The Future of Work and Impacts on Gender Equality in the Arab Region

The world of work is changing under the impact of automation, greening, technology, and shifting demographics. In some Arab States the impact of conflict has also influenced labour markets and the opportunities for men and women to find decent work. What will the world of work look like for women, and how can we ensure they are able to mitigate such threats yet benefit from emerging opportunities to fulfil their needs, expectations and ambitions from work?

### The Care Economy – an enabler of work and provider of jobs

One of the main obstacles to women's participation in work is the disproportionate responsibility of providing unpaid care. A strong professional structure of care work would both be an enabler of women's economic participation, allowing them to redistribute care work and enter the labour market, and a source of jobs in the care economy, more likely to be taken up by women. What is the potential of the care economy in terms of jobs and GDP in the Arab States? How can the State be an enabler of women's economic participation and why should it?

### State Investment in Childcare: Examples from middle-income economies

Childcare is often seen as a private responsibility – rather than a social one - usually falling on the mother, or one to be met either by employers or through private, market-based facilities. Private childcare can be costly, and not an affordable option for many families, and shifting the responsibility to employers can act as a disincentive to employ women. At the same time, many countries claim not to have the fiscal space to devote state resources to childcare provision. Are there models where states, within constrained resources, can invest in childcare provision?

## Facilitator:

- Ms. Frida Khan, Senior Specialist, Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination, International Labour Organization, Regional Office for the Arab States

## Welcoming remarks:

- Ms. Mehrinaz El Awady, Director, ESCWA Center for Women

## Opening Remarks:

- Ms. Yilka Gerdovci, Regional Programme and Policy Specialist on Women's Economic Empowerment, UN Women

## Panelists:

- H.E. Ms. Violette Safadi, Minister of State for Social and Economic Empowerment for Youth and Women
- Mr. Maged Osman, Professor of Statistics, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University and CEO and Managing Director of the Egyptian Center for Public Opinion Research (Baseera)
- Ms. Irum Bukhari, Secretary to the Government of Punjab, Women's Development Department
- Ms. Rana Musleh, Head of the Gender and Social Studies Department at the Social Security Corporation, Jordan

## Closing Remarks:

- Mr. Greg Vines, Deputy Director General, ILO

This Special Session will be live-streamed

