This Newsletter presents highlights of the progress made under the Mashreq Gender Facility (MGF) through the three country work programs – Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon - and the regional work program. It also reports on budget. The period for this quarterly Newsletter is March to May 2020. Next issue will be circulated early September 2020.

**IRAQ**

The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to adaptations and some programmatic delays. This has affected, among other, the mobility within and between cities; work hours for government employees thereby limiting discussions and access to documentation; and some shifts in priorities to address the immediate health crisis.

- Training content development on gender sensitization of incubators and accelerators, and another on investment readiness for female-led startups and SMEs underway.
- Initial proposals for the peer learning platforms shared with Chambers of Commerce in Baghdad and Erbil modified to include trainings in response to the pandemic and its impact on women’s employment. Delivery model of trainings has shifted from face-to-face to virtual.
- Diagnostic review for women’s agricultural training underway to identify challenges and priorities of current training programs.
- Draft pilot intervention design for content and teacher training to promote young women’s economic empowerment, under review by the MOE in Iraq and KRI.

The MGF team, under the National Coordinator, is also in continuous engagement with the new Secretary General of the High Council for Women’s Affairs.

**JORDAN**

- Methodology for assessing the socio-economic impact of micro-lending on women in Jordan, considering impact of COVID19 on payment defaults, under validation with relevant government stakeholders to ensure alignment with GoJ response to the pandemic.
- Kickoff meeting for developing a national plan for digital payments for wage protection held with MoDEE, CBJ and JOPACC. Approach considers relevant GoJ response to COVID-19, namely through requiring salary transfers via e-wallets to workers in private sector. Barriers to opening and use of e-wallets, especially by female workers, will be examined.
- Kickoff meeting held with Ministry of Transport to discuss the inception report and plan for operationalizing the Code of Conduct in public transport, including the development of a user mobile app.
- MOU signed between IFC and Int@j – the ICT Business Association – and is exploring partnership with JNCW to launch a peer learning platform for raising capacity of private sector companies in increasing workforce gender diversity through a series of demand-driven webinars.
- MGF is supporting JNCW in the design of behavioral-science informed communication campaigns addressing norms associated with low female labor force participation. Part of coordination efforts to streamline GoJ commitments to women’s economic empowerment.
- Private sector focused knowledge products underway: Identification of economic impact of gender diversity on corporate boards of publicly listed companies (in partnership with Amman Stock Exchange); Studies on business case for (i) addressing violence and sexual harassment in the workplace; (ii) family friendly policies; and (iii) women in non-traditional jobs.

**LEBANON**

To address the structural difficulties facing women’s economic empowerment exacerbated by the challenges the dual crises Lebanon is going through (COVID-19 lockdown and the economic crisis), some activities have been revised.

- Crisis Management Training for Women Led Entrepreneurs and Training of Trainers is commissioned and will include training to women-led businesses on managing the impact of the dual crises. Virtual delivery.
- The development of communication strategy and action plan to support positive social norms related to women’s the Government’s WEEAP initiatives has been initiated.
- Signed memorandum of understanding with The Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture for Beirut and Mount Lebanon and the IFC for a partnership for peer learning platform with the private sector to raise their capacity to recruit, retain and promote more women in their workforce. Webinar training series will cover workforce gender diversity.
- Revision of legal outputs with a lens of the challenges women face with COVID-19, such as the Labor Code and the National Security Social Fund (NSSF) Law amendments, with NCLW, Ministry of Labor.
- Recommendations provided to support women’s economic empowerment related to financial regulations, micro-finance, legislation (consumer protection and insolvency law) of the reform through the GoL Recovery Plan, April 2020.
The Mashreq Gender Facility (MGF) is a 5-year Facility (2019-2024) that provides technical assistance to Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon to enhance women’s economic empowerment and opportunities as a catalyst towards more inclusive, sustainable, and peaceful societies, where economic growth benefits all. Working with the private sector, civil society organizations and development partners, the MGF supports government-led efforts, country level priorities and strategic regional activities that: (i) Strengthen the enabling environment for women’s economic participation; and, (ii) Improve women’s access to economic opportunities.

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