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 June to August 2021. Next issue will be circulated early December 2021.

Implementation of the MGF work has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic which has caused some adaptations and delays.

**IRAQ**

- Findings and preliminary analysis of the gender-responsive public procurement law and the draft legal framework of public procurement were completed and presented in a high-level discussion with stakeholders from MOP. Based on the discussion, the GOI, represented by MOP, will form a taskforce with key stakeholders for the gender/public procurement nexus with the view to develop a policy on sustainable procurement and action plans to continue facilitating WLBs in public procurement.

- Childcare Landscape data collection tools have been developed. The employer supply side survey covering 100 private sector companies in Iraq is underway in collaboration with the World Bank’s Enterprise Survey team.

- In September 2021, a national conference officially launched the GoI plan on women’s economic empowerment, directly linked to the priorities identified for the MGF. The Minister of Planning along with the National Coordinator confirmed the importance of the agenda and highlighted the need to focus on vulnerable segments of the population in liberated areas to strengthen women’s vocational training skills and access to income generating activities.

**JORDAN**

- The report on the socio-economic impact of micro-lending on women micro-entrepreneurs was presented to national partners. Findings revealed that micro-loans are mostly used for expenditures rather than for entrepreneurship. A task force including CBI, MOPIC, MOF, MODS, JNCW and Tanmeyah will be formed to develop recommendations and to identify actions to improve the sector’s impact on women.

- An instructions manual on licensing requirements of home-based businesses was finalized and to be issued online by GoJ. Related training material was developed, and next steps to train municipal staff representatives are being coordinated with Ministry of Local Administration.

- The MGF Childcare Assessment draft report shows that despite the legal mandate, only 1% of employers surveyed (n=106) provide some form of childcare support and most are not sufficiently aware of the compulsory labor law policies. 80% of them are not planning to provide childcare support.

In both Jordan and Lebanon, the “Leaders4Equality” (L4E) peer learning cohorts were established with 10 leading, large private sector firms signed up in each country to deepen their capacity to hire, retain and promote more women in their workforce and to enhance the pipeline of aspiring female leaders.

**LEBANON**

- A joint WB-UN Women report on the Status of Women in Lebanon was published, presenting a comprehensive data-driven analysis of women’s access to economic opportunities, human capital accumulation & agency. It identifies the need for action across policies & programs; collaboration; and the knowledge agenda.

- The report was launched as part of a joint EU-UN-WB high-level event to elevate the dialogue on gender equality. Participants underscored the importance of putting women at the forefront of humanitarian and development policies. The Deputy Prime Minister noted that the absence of women in the labor market is a significant untapped resource, and that the government is committed to an agenda that will empower women.

- Female labor force participation is higher in coastal areas in Lebanon, and preliminary findings from the Childcare Assessment show that this is where childcare providers are concentrated. Of surveyed firms (n=100), only 5% have current childcare solutions in place whereas 80% do not even plan to consider providing such solutions. There is currently no legislation requiring the private sector to provide childcare services to employees.
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