

Gender Equality Newsletter

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This is the tenth newsletter from the Gender Equality Programme of the ILO Regional Office for Arab States providing highlights of select activities and products from January to March 2012.

Staff Note

Senior Regional Gender Specialist Simel Esim transferring to ILO, Geneva to head the Cooperatives Branch: Much has changed in the Arab region since I joined the ILO Regional Office in 2004, including wars, political shake-ups, and popular uprisings. The nature of women's rights activism in the region has evolved, shifting from being concentrated mainly on civil and political rights to engaging more on social and economic rights. Mobilizing around labour issues beyond the more traditional approaches will be critical in the coming years.

The ILO's Gender Equality programme has sown some seeds toward that end by advocating for a gender equality and workers' rights perspective. In doing so it has brought attention to a wide range of issues, many of which had been typically disregarded or inadequately tackled in policy and programmes: from highlighting the value of unpaid and paid care work to advancing pay equity in formal wage employment and from promoting the employability of national women in urban and rural areas to protecting the rights of migrant women.

The ILO interventions have ranged from supporting gender audits in formal labour governance institutions to seeking social protection to workers in the informal economy, from strengthening women's role in business associations, trade unions, and cooperatives to promoting research on gender and labour issues, and from improving the quality and availability of gender-responsive labour statistics to breaking the silence on gender based violence in the world of work.

Anchoring the ILO's work in regional knowledge networks, national institutions, task forces and other social dialogue platforms has made a real difference to ensuring sustainability beyond the life of ILO programmes. Local actors have been increasingly referring to international labour standards and to the ILO supervisory system to advance gender equality. They have been using a number of ILO tools that are now available in Arabic and adapted to the local contexts in the countries of the region.

There is no doubt that gender equality and social justice need to be at the top of the transitional agendas in follow up to Arab people's uprisings. Yet the gender implications of these developments are complex and indeterminate in advance, as the momentum from women's rights groups can be undermined by actors who feel their power is being challenged in the process or continue to consider advancing gender equality a 'luxury' when facing 'more pressing priorities'. It has been a transforming experience to work toward supporting the realization of the aspirations of women and men in the region for a life in freedom, dignity and equality.



Associate Expert Gudrun Jevne transferring to Gender Bureau, ILO Geneva: The last two years on the gender team at the ILO Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS) has taught me a great deal. Gender equality is an issue that inspires passion and determination and a main

feature I have noted of the work in the Arab States region is the vast scope (and need) for gender equality work. It has been a great chance to work across all sectors of the ILO - from international labour standards and labour legislation, as was the case on protection of domestic workers in Lebanon and the pay equity initiative in Jordan, to working with direct beneficiaries on enterprise skills, as was the case with women entrepreneurs in Palestinian camps in Lebanon. My main contribution has been to launch and shape the Palestinian Women's Economic Empowerment Project and to realize some components hitherto new to ROAS' work, such as product standards training in food production, work towards the development of a product line, and contributing to increased project visibility through relatively untraditional knowledge-sharing tools and events.

Activities

Jordan Pay Equity website being launched in Arabic: An activity under the Advocacy and Media Subcommittee of the National Steering Committee on Pay Equity, the website includes a glossary of terms, an annotated bibliography, case studies, and questions and answers. The Jordan pay equity initiative is being supported by DECLARATION and Regional Office for Arab States under the Decent Work Country Programme in Jordan. www.jordanpayequity.org

Palestinian Lunch at Tawlet: “Palestinian Women’s Economic Empowerment Project in Lebanon” beneficiaries and food producers were guest chefs at the Tawlet Restaurant in Beirut. Four chefs from two camps were remunerated for their work. Palestinian chefs from the project will regularly feature at Tawlet contributing to breaking down stereotypes.

Documentaries

“Palestinian Women’s Economic Empowerment Project in Lebanon”: This film was shot on location in Beirut and in Ein el-Helweh refugee camp in Lebanon. The film shows Business Group Formation Training of Trainers and product standards training. It also interviews women entrepreneurs in Palestinian camps about their life and businesses: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zG5-ernPs-k

“Women Engineers – A Reality and A Challenge”: This documentary was prepared for the "Skills Development Training Program for Female Civil Engineers in the Gaza Strip". This initiative was implemented through the Community Service and Continuing Education Deanship at the Islamic University of Gaza under the ILO activities within the Joint MDG-F Programme: "Gender Equality & Women Empowerment in the oPt" funded by the Spanish Government: www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=sgCyr3SykE

Publications

ILO supported research on gender equality in the world of work was showcased in an issue of the Al Raida Magazine of the Lebanese American University on Family Responsibilities and Women’s Employability. <http://www.lau.edu.lb/centers-institutes/iwsaw/publications/al-raida/raida128/main.php>

Interviews with Palestinian Women Entrepreneurs available in Arabic: The 12 entrepreneur interviews highlight issues such as gender and care responsibilities, market access and saturation and economic and political insecurity showing the complexities of working as a woman entrepreneur in Palestinian camps in Lebanon (English version coming soon).

Action Briefs

Promoting Women’s Participation in Cooperatives in oPt: This action brief describes ILO activities in strengthening the participation of women in cooperatives in oPt undertaken in collaboration with the Union of Cooperative Associations for Savings and Credit. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/arpro/beirut/downloads/areas/equality/actionbrief/opt1.pdf>

Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Yemen: This action brief describes ILO activities undertaken with the Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training in Yemen targeting young unemployed women. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/arpro/beirut/downloads/areas/equality/actionbrief/yemen.pdf>

Training with Palestinian Women Engineers in Gaza: This action brief describes ILO skills training and on the job training activities undertaken with the Islamic University for unemployed Palestinian women engineers in the construction sector. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/arpro/beirut/downloads/areas/equality/actionbrief/gaza.pdf>

Training on Photography with Palestinian Women in oPt: This action brief describes ILO’s skills training and on the job training activities undertaken with UNRWA for unemployed Palestinian women in photography. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/arpro/beirut/downloads/areas/equality/actionbrief/opt.pdf>

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