

Women at the heart of the just green transition in the MENA region: Unlocking potential for inclusive growth

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Contents

Acknowledgements 1

Introduction 3

Key challenges 6

Unlocking missed opportunities 10

The solution: Toward an inclusive green economy 13

Recommendations 15

References..... 18



Introduction

The United Nations defines ‘green economy’ as “one that improves human wellbeing and builds social equity while reducing environmental risks and scarcities”.¹ Although experts and researchers continue to debate the precise scope and definition of this concept, there is broad agreement that transitioning to a just green economy is essential. It offers a more sustainable alternative to the current dominant economic model. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, transitioning to a greener economy is essential to address the challenges of aridity and water scarcity. With temperatures projected to rise by 1.5 to 3 degrees Celsius by 2050, the region faces an increased risk of drought, which will further threaten food production and water security.² Likewise, climate change threatens economic growth, labour productivity and the overall safety and health of workers.³

The green economy transition is often narrowly associated with the expansion of the renewable energy sector. This sector has been increasingly recognized as a major global source of employment. Investments in renewable energy create significantly more jobs than those in fossil fuels, with projections estimating tens of millions of new green jobs by 2050.⁴ In the MENA region, transitioning to a green economy model that focuses on renewable energy poses both unique

challenges and opportunities. While concerns have been raised about reduced revenues for oil-producing countries, the region’s acute vulnerability to climate change, especially extreme heat and water scarcity, creates a strong imperative for action. Economies in the region are characterized by high energy intensity and strong dependence on fossil fuel subsidies, which have historically served as a mechanism of social stability. These subsidies hinder the development of renewable energy by distorting energy markets and making fossil fuels artificially cheap.⁵ Despite these structural barriers, several countries in the region have begun to adopt strategies to reduce their carbon footprint and expand renewable energy.

A green transition is not only an environmental and economic imperative, but also a social one involving profound changes in labour markets, equity and governance. A recent report found that up to 10 million jobs could be generated across multiple economic sectors in the MENA region if countries integrate climate action into their development agendas and scale up investments in climate resilience, green water desalination, reforestation and waste management.⁶ A just and inclusive green economy transition goes beyond simply decarbonizing economies. It seeks to ensure that the shift toward sustainability also promotes

1 UN Environment Programme UNEP, “Why Does Green Economy Matter?,” November 14, 2017, <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/green-economy/why-does-green-economy-matter>.

2 Rabea Hussein Mohammed Qasem and Miklas Scholz, “Climate Change Impact on Resources in the MENA Region: A Systematic and Critical Review,” *Physics and Chemistry of the Earth, Parts A/B/C* 139 (September 2025): 103936, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pce.2025.103936>.

3 International Labour Organization ILO, *Ensuring Safety and Health at Work in a Changing Climate*, Global report (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2024), <https://www.ilo.org/publications/ensuring-safety-and-health-work-changing-climate>. even if conditions are dangerous. Global occupational safety and health (OSH)

4 Atif Kubursi and Hala Abou-Ali, *Employment Generation Capacity of Renewable Energy in MENA*, Policy Brief no. 131 (Economic Research Forum, 2024).

5 Ali Al-Saffar et al., *The Political Economy of Energy Transitions in MENA*, Policy Research Report PRR 60 (Economic Research Forum, 2025).

6 International Labour Organization ILO and Islamic Development Bank IsDB, *The Social, Economic and Employment Impacts of Decarbonization and Green Industrial Growth Scenarios for the Middle East and North Africa Region* (International Labour Organization and Islamic Development Bank, 2023), <https://www.ilo.org/publications/social-economic-and-employment-impacts-decarbonization-and-green-industrial>.

equality, generates decent work opportunities and protects the most vulnerable populations. Women and men will be impacted differently, and groups in situations of vulnerability or exclusion and disadvantage are likely to be hit the hardest by the impacts of climate change. Without deliberate gender-responsive and inclusive measures, climate impacts could exacerbate existing inequalities and decent work deficits and become an additional driver of growing societal and economic injustice. For this reason, gender equality must be a guiding principle of just transition planning. This is particularly important given that the MENA region has the lowest rate of women's participation in the labour market globally and that sustained economic growth and green job creation are essential to increase women's access to employment opportunities. Yet, in practice, this remains a missed opportunity. Women, for instance, represent only 32 percent of the global renewable energy workforce⁷ and just 7-9 percent in the MENA region,⁸ indicating persistent gender gaps in emerging green industries. Moreover, because men currently dominate employment in the energy sector, more men than women are expected to lose jobs in fossil fuel industries, but also to benefit disproportionately from new opportunities in renewables. Unless gender considerations are made explicit in green transition policies, existing inequalities and occupational stereotypes risk being reproduced in the jobs of the future.⁹ At the same time, the shift to a just green economy offers opportunities to reimagine growth models across sectors such as sustainable agriculture, water and waste management, circular economy, green

infrastructure and nature-based solutions. These sectors hold significant potential to generate inclusive, locally driven pathways toward resilience and shared prosperity, if gender equity is placed at their core.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines green jobs as decent work that preserves or restores the environment, combining fair income, social protection and safe working conditions with environmental sustainability.¹⁰ These jobs hold particular appeal for women, as they align economic inclusion with broader social and environmental goals. Within this context, the concept of ecofeminism underscores the deep interconnection between ecological sustainability and social justice, particularly in advancing women's rights. Promoting women's participation in the green economy not only fosters gender equality but also drives ecological renewal. This reflects the ecofeminist perspective that caring for the planet is inseparable from caring for people.¹¹

The transition to a just and inclusive green economy is central to achieving global commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 13 (Climate Action). By linking environmental sustainability with employment and social inclusion, this agenda provides a concrete pathway for aligning national development strategies with international climate and labour objectives. In the MENA region, where youth unemployment, informality and climate vulnerability intersect, this agenda serves

7 IRENA, *Renewable Energy: A Gender Perspective* (IRENA, 2019), <https://www.irena.org/publications/2019/Jan/Renewable-Energy-A-Gender-Perspective>.

8 Elisabeth Maier et al., *Toward More and Better Jobs for Women in Energy: An Assessment Undertaken to Guide the New Regional Network in Energy for Women—RENEW* (World Bank, 2022), <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/09981130622220953/pdf/IDU0864241720fd0f04d5a094d009ba1a46de97d.pdf>.

9 International Renewable Energy Agency IRENA and International Labour Organization ILO, *Renewable Energy and Jobs: Annual Review 2024* (International Renewable Energy Agency; International Labour Organization, 2024), https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2024/Oct/IRENA_Renewable_energy_and_jobs_2024.pdf.

10 International Labour Organization ILO, *Guidelines for a Just Transition towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All* (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2016), 4, <https://www.ilo.org/publications/guidelines-just-transition-towards-environmentally-sustainable-economies>.

11 Mary Mellor, *Feminism & Ecology*, with Internet Archive (New York University Press, 1997), <http://archive.org/details/feminismecology0000mell>.

as a pragmatic strategy to foster resilient economies and equitable growth. It offers governments an opportunity to integrate job creation, gender equality and environmental stewardship into a coherent policy framework, thus turning climate action into an engine for social justice and economic transformation.

Integrating gender perspectives into the green transition presents not only a matter of fairness but also a strategic opportunity for more effective and sustainable outcomes. Studies indicate that women-led businesses and institutions tend to perform better on environmental and social governance metrics and are more likely to adopt sustainable practices.¹² Increasing women's participation in leadership, business and the labour force can therefore enhance the environmental effectiveness of the just green economy transition in the MENA region, while also promoting social equity. Supporting women's entrepreneurship is a critical component of this agenda. Women-led micro, small and medium-sized enterprises represent a powerful but often underutilized driver of inclusive green growth.¹³ Strengthening their role is essential not only to address systemic socio-economic barriers but also to enable

women to act as innovators and agents of change in advancing climate solutions.

In response to these pressing challenges, in September 2025, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)'s Middle East and North Africa Regional Office convened a regional conference to examine the intersection of women's employment, climate change and entrepreneurship. These three areas are central to addressing key issues: reducing gender disparities, strengthening resilience to climate risks and fostering inclusive economic opportunities. Entrepreneurship in particular, especially in green sectors, holds significant promise as a catalyst for both women's inclusion and sustainable development. The conference brought together experts, entrepreneurs, policymakers and partners to share insights, highlight persistent barriers and identify practical solutions to advance women-led innovation in the context of a changing climate. This white paper distills the main lessons and perspectives emerging from these discussions, reflecting the shared commitment of the panelists to drive meaningful change and offer evidence-based pathways toward lasting solutions.



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¹² Barbara Balke and Thomas Östros, "Business Case for Women's Leadership," European Investment Bank, 2023, <https://www.eib.org/en/stories/climate-women-profits>.

¹³ International Labour Organization ILO, *Fostering Women's Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality for a Just Transition in Egypt*, Factsheet (2024), <https://www.ilo.org/publications/fostering-women%E2%80%99s-entrepreneurship-development-and-gender-equality-just>.

Key challenges

Although the green economy transition is often portrayed as a pathway to achieving both environmental sustainability and social inclusion, the experience of many women in the MENA region suggests that this potential remains largely unfulfilled. Structural barriers continue to shape women's access to, and benefits from, the green economy. These barriers endure in part because current green economy strategies are frequently developed without meaningful social dialogue or mechanisms for labour inclusion. The challenge, therefore, is not only one of access but also of governance. Advancing a truly just transition requires institutional reforms that embed women's economic participation at the core of the green transition, rather than treating it as a parallel or secondary objective.

Informal sector

One persistent gap is the invisibility of the informal economy. A majority of people in many countries, globally estimated at over two billion or 60 percent of workers worldwide,¹⁴ earn their livelihoods outside the formal sector. In the MENA region, women are often concentrated in these informal activities, whether in small-scale farming, recycling or home-based businesses. Their work has the potential to contribute directly to mitigating climate change and sustaining local economies, depending on the types of businesses. For example, in waste management, the recycling and recovery of materials is predominantly carried out by informal workers. Yet, their contribution is often disregarded or even undermined by policies that prioritize large-scale, formal-sector actors. Policies aiming to “formalize” informal workers often bring important benefits, such as access to social protection, pensions



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and labour rights. However, when implemented through top-down approaches that subsume workers under large contractors, these policies can inadvertently erode the autonomy and flexibility that previously allowed many to sustain their livelihoods. Additionally, the current system often fails to recognize informal innovations that contribute to the green economy. For example, one panelist at the conference gave the example of initiatives to upcycle discarded materials into high-quality functional fashion or homeware products for local and international markets, as well as efforts to repurpose waste collected from dumping sites, such as the Nile in Egypt. When governments close informal dump sites to comply with environmental regulations without assessing the broader social and economic implications, they can unintentionally disrupt the livelihoods of thousands of waste pickers, many of whom are women, by eliminating their income sources without providing alternative employment options. The informal sector is certainly not a substitute for decent, secure employment: it is often characterized by child labour, unsafe and unstable

¹⁴ International Labour Organization ILO, “Statistics on the Informal Economy,” *ILOSTAT*, 2024, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/informality/>.

working conditions and low incomes. Nonetheless, it holds potential as an entry point for inclusive green transition strategies, if supported through targeted policies that protect workers' rights, recognize their contributions and build bridges toward formalization that is fair, gradual and inclusive.

From learning to earning challenges

Another striking challenge is the paradox between women's educational achievements and their limited participation in the labour market. In many Arab states, women's enrolment and graduation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) surpass the global average, with between a third and half of STEM graduates being female.¹⁵ These are precisely the fields critical to the just green transition, including renewable energy, solar power and climate-smart agriculture. Yet, women's participation in the labour force has stagnated around 15-21 percent for three decades.¹⁶ This gap reflects systemic obstacles such as discriminatory labour regulations, persistent gender stereotypes that cast certain jobs as inappropriate for women, lack of child care and the absence of reliable transport or safe working conditions. Social norms and belief systems often limit women's participation in the (green) economy. The perception that work may interfere with caregiving responsibilities, the discomfort associated with mixed-gender workplaces and expectations around long hours or time spent away from home all act as significant barriers. In many contexts, restrictions on women's mobility and presence in public spaces further constrain their ability to engage fully in economic life. However, local knowledge, particularly that held by rural women who have long practised frugal and climate-adapted agricultural and recycling activities, is similarly undervalued and overlooked. To advance a genuinely

inclusive green transition, it is essential to look beyond the symptoms and address the deeper structural and cultural factors that prevent women from entering and thriving in green sectors. This requires questioning the disconnect between education systems and labour market needs, as well as addressing the lack of targeted programs that help STEM-educated women transition into green jobs. The absence of mentorship opportunities, internships and clear career pathways in green industries further limits women's participation and advancement.



Lack of access to resources

Patriarchal norms and inequitable legal frameworks reinforce these structural barriers. Women often have less access to productive resources such as land, which is crucial for securing loans to invest in improved agricultural techniques or renewable-energy ventures. Reforms in inheritance laws, such as the recent requirement in Jordan for a waiting period before a woman can be pressured into relinquishing her inherited land, have begun to address these inequalities. However, the gap in land ownership remains wide. Discriminatory labour laws have also played a role in constraining women's economic participation. For instance, restrictions on

15 Samira I. Islam, "Arab Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Fields: The Way Forward," *World Journal of Education* 7, no. 6 (2017): 12–20; Sumaya bint El Hassan, "Arab Women in Science," *Science* 368, no. 6487 (2020): 113–113, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abc0631>.

16 World Bank, "Labor Force, Female (% of Total Labor Force)- Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan & Pakistan," World Bank Open Data, World Bank Open Data, 2025, <https://data.worldbank.org>.

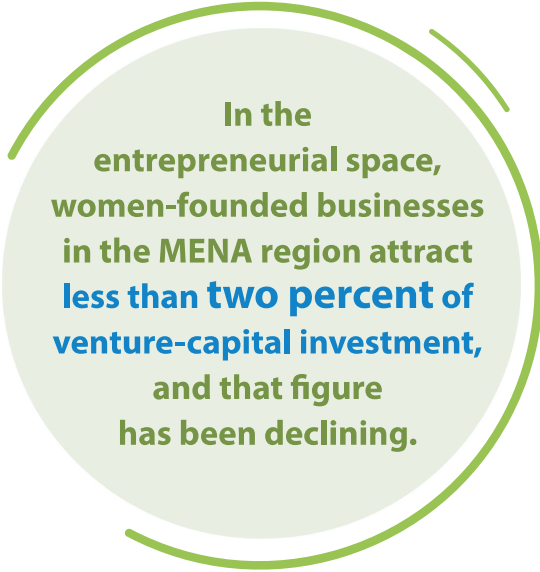
women's working hours and prohibitions on certain types of employment have limited their access to jobs in sectors such as hospitality. Experiences from Aqaba in Jordan illustrate how legal reforms can catalyze social change: once regulations were amended, women entered hotel work, including night-shift positions that had previously been off-limits. Many women reported preferring these shifts, as they offered greater flexibility and a lighter workload compared to daytime hours when guest check-ins are most frequent. Such reforms demonstrate the potential of legal change to unlock new economic opportunities for women. However, they must be accompanied by broader efforts to shift societal attitudes and ensure effective enforcement, so that equality on paper translates into equality in practice.

Representation

The underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions compounds these problems. At international climate negotiations such as the meetings of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, women constitute less than a third of delegates and fewer than one in 10 heads of delegations. In the entrepreneurial space, women-founded businesses in the MENA region attract less than two percent of venture-capital investment, and that figure has been declining.¹⁷ Without women's voices shaping policy and investment decisions, programs often fail to address their specific needs or harness their potential contributions.

These dynamics are exacerbated by fragmented policies and poor data. Moreover, gender-disaggregated data, particularly at local and rural levels, remain sparse. As a result, policymakers lack the evidence needed to design interventions that recognize and build on the work of women in both formal and informal sectors. Additionally, environmental, employment and gender

policies often operate in silos, missing opportunities to reinforce one another.



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Conflict

The MENA region is characterized by recurrent crises and protracted conflicts, which further complicate the prospects for a just and inclusive green transition. Evidence increasingly shows indirect pathways between climate change and violent conflict, as environmental degradation and resource scarcity exacerbate existing political, economic and social tensions.¹⁸ In such fragile contexts, women often play a crucial yet underrecognized role in sustaining livelihoods and ensuring community resilience. For instance, in Palestine and Lebanon, women-led agrifood initiatives have been vital in maintaining food production and saving lives during conflict and blockade. Despite their importance, these informal efforts remain largely invisible within the formal economy and are rarely integrated into official crisis-response mechanisms. Recognizing and supporting such grassroots, women-led initiatives is therefore essential, not only for advancing gender equality, but also for strengthening climate and conflict resilience across the region.

¹⁷ Naala Oleynikova, "Women Entrepreneurs Are Reshaping MENA's Business Scene," World Economic Forum, May 28, 2025, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/05/how-women-entrepreneurs-are-reshaping-the-middle-east-s-business-landscape/>.

¹⁸ Kyungmee Kim and Tània Ferré Garcia, "Climate Change and Violent Conflict in the Middle East and North Africa," *International Studies Review* 25, no. 4 (2023): viad053, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viad053>.

Bridging research and policy: From evidence to action

One of the strongest messages emerging from the conference convened by IDRC's regional office was the need to close the gap between research and policymaking to accelerate women's participation in the green economy. Policymakers often need to weigh complex data points on education, labour markets, energy systems and social norms before acting. Yet, the evidence they receive is often fragmented, overly technical or disconnected from local realities. As one panellist stressed, to influence policy, research must be relevant, contextualized and presented in a form that policymakers can understand and use.

A concrete example came from efforts to promote sustainability in education in Qatar, led by Earthna of Qatar Foundation. The initiative began not by lobbying ministries directly but by working with private schools, introducing a practical tool, the Eco-Schools framework, to help teachers and students green their curricula and school operations. This approach revealed not only what changes were possible but also what was needed in terms of teacher training, learning materials and student engagement. Importantly, the materials were designed to resonate with the local context, highlighting, for instance, Qatar's marine and desert ecosystems rather than relying on imported examples that felt distant and abstract.

The program built credibility by accompanying schools throughout the process and generating evidence of its impact. This included both quantitative indicators, such as the number of schools with greener infrastructure, and qualitative insights into how students' behaviours, attitudes and sense of connection to their environment were changing. By the time Qatar's Ministry of Education committed to joining the Greening Education Partnership with UNESCO and set the target of greening 50 percent of schools by 2030, the initiative was ready to offer a tested model backed by data. Its alignment with the ministry's own priorities created political will for scaling up. The research team also partnered with the United Kingdom's University College London to rigorously measure outcomes during the pilot phase involving 50 public schools in Qatar, further strengthening the evidence base.

This experience illustrates that bridging research and policy is not just about producing more data but about delivering the right kind of knowledge in the right way. Success depended on showing proof of concept, responding to a concrete policy need and presenting evidence in clear, accessible formats, such as infographics, that busy decision-makers could digest quickly. It also required combining quantitative and qualitative evidence to capture changes in attitudes and practices, which are as critical as technical upgrades in advancing sustainability.

However, it is not always feasible to pilot projects to prove a concept. In such cases, research tools and models can be used to analyze and demonstrate potential changes in system scenarios and transition pathways against a baseline or existing condition. The assessment of these scenarios should also account for the social and environmental return of investment, alongside the economic return to provide decision-makers with a comprehensive understanding of the impact of change.

While evidence and technical expertise are essential, it is important to recognize that decision-making is never purely technical. It is primarily a political process, shaped by competing interests. Decision-makers often navigate a mix of personal, group or institutional influences. Moreover, the siloed nature of environmental, gender and employment policies remains a major barrier to inclusive and sustainable development. Promoting integrated, cross-sectoral approaches — including gender-responsive budgeting and coordinated policy planning — would help ensure that decisions better reflect collective priorities and deliver more equitable results.

Finally, effective policy uptake depends not only on the availability of data but also on inclusive and participatory decision-making processes. Emphasizing the co-production of knowledge with local actors and strengthening dialogue mechanisms between environmental, labour and gender institutions can make policy recommendations more actionable and grounded in governance practice.



Unlocking missed opportunities

Mobilizing existing assets for inclusive green growth

To build a just transition, it is necessary to connect existing assets and emerging opportunities. The region's need to accelerate its renewable-energy production and other green sectors is acute. This challenge coincides with an untapped asset: a large cohort of educated women with degrees in relevant fields, as well as rural and Indigenous women with practical knowledge of adaptation and sustainable resource use. Matching these human resources with market demands offers one of the clearest opportunities for inclusive growth. Making this connection requires more than education. It also demands continuous re-skilling and lifelong learning so

that women can adapt to changing technologies and market needs, as well as active labour market policies. Such measures can prevent skilled women from falling behind as the green economy evolves. Conference participants stressed that the traditional focus on the transition from school to work is no longer sufficient; life now involves multiple transitions and women in particular need support to navigate these shifts. It also requires the development of skills anticipation systems, lifelong learning pathways and continuous re-skilling mechanisms that allow women to adapt to evolving technologies and shifting market demands. Without these systems, even highly educated women risk being locked out of emerging sectors simply because their skills are not aligned with the pace of the transition.

Power, representation and the politics of the green transition

However, advancing women's participation in the green transition is not only a matter of training programs or expanding employment opportunities. At its core, inclusion in the green economy is fundamentally about power asymmetries. Women remain largely excluded from decision-making spaces where priorities for the green economy are defined, and their perspectives, particularly those of rural and Indigenous women, are often marginalized or treated as secondary. Without confronting these power dynamics, efforts to promote women's inclusion will remain superficial and risk reinforcing existing inequalities, which renders any green transition unjust. The challenge, therefore, is to institutionalize diverse forms of knowledge and leadership, including Indigenous and community-based practices, as integral components of the green transition to make sure that no one is left behind. Ensuring a just transition requires equitable participation in governance, where women play a meaningful role in shaping the direction, design and implementation of green policies.



Applying an intersectional lens to women's participation

It is also essential to adopt an intersectional lens when addressing women's participation in the green economy. Women are not a homogenous group. Their experiences

and opportunities vary widely depending on factors such as geographic location (urban or rural), education, age, refugee or migration status and disability. Recognizing these intersecting identities is crucial to designing policies and programs that are truly inclusive and responsive to the diverse realities of women across the region.

Recognizing and integrating the informal economy

The potential contribution of the informal sector should also be recognized rather than erased. In waste management, for example, informal workers have played a key role in recycling long before formal businesses entered the field. Rather than displacing informal workers, policies could aim to improve their working conditions, extend social protection and integrate their efforts into national green strategies. Ultimately, a transition from the informal to the formal economy is essential for an inclusive green transition. Such formalization should strengthen, not undermine, existing livelihoods: it should expand social protection, secure labour rights and preserve the economic activities and community networks that already sustain millions of people, particularly women, at the margins of the green economy.

Shifting social norms and reforming restrictive structures

Shifting social norms is another part of the puzzle. Because women are still widely viewed as primary caregivers, it is essential to build systems that support this role without jeopardizing their employment. Ensuring that care responsibilities do not come at the expense of women's career opportunities is a fundamental component of an inclusive green transition. Yet, attitudes towards women's role as primary caregiver are slowly changing. For instance, a recent survey in Jordan shows that an increasing number of men explicitly express their wish to be able to spend more

time with their children.¹⁹ These evolving perceptions, driven partly by economic necessity as most families can no longer survive on a single income, create a window of opportunity for policies and programs that normalize women's participation in all sectors of the economy. There are also legal and economic structures that must be addressed in parallel, such as unequal inheritance laws, limited access to credit and rigid labour market regulations, all of which constrain women's participation in the economy and, by extension, in green sectors.

Creating an enabling environment: State leadership and the private sector

A just and inclusive green transition requires not only new programs but also the scaling of proven solutions, moving beyond isolated pilots to institutionalized and system-wide approaches. State actors also have a critical role to play in creating an enabling environment that supports the inclusion of women in the green economy. This involves adopting policies and incentives that remove structural barriers, promote equal access to opportunities and ensure that women can actively participate in and benefit from the just green transition. Across the region, numerous successful initiatives already exist. Yet, their impact remains limited because they are not taken to scale. Building and using robust evidence is essential to inform this scale-up, ensuring that policies and investments are grounded in what works. To enable such a transition, countries need a dedicated set of green transition enablers. These include accessible and accredited upskilling, re-skilling and professional certification systems that can match workers' capabilities to evolving market needs; innovative financing instruments such as micro-green Islamic finance, gender or social bonds and climate-aligned credit schemes that can unlock resources for green entrepreneurship and mentorship, global exposure and market-driven



Evidence from companies in the region that have embraced merit-based recruitment and promoted gender-balanced workforces shows not only increased women's employment but also gains in financial performance and innovation.

awareness programs that connect talent, including women and youth, to emerging opportunities. Together, these enablers help transform successful pilots into scalable solutions and ensure that the green transition generates broad-based and lasting impact.

Finally, the private sector can serve as a driver of inclusive change. Evidence from companies in the region that have embraced merit-based recruitment and promoted gender-balanced workforces shows not only increased women's employment but also gains in financial performance and innovation. These experiences provide a compelling business case for others to follow, demonstrating that gender equality is not merely a social good but also an economic advantage. Strengthening this momentum requires clear incentives. Gender and sustainability seals, corporate social responsibility certifications and recognition programs tied to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) standards can encourage firms to integrate gender equality and climate goals into their core operations. Such mechanisms help shift private-sector behaviour from ad hoc initiatives to sustained commitments, rewarding companies that lead the way in building a just and inclusive green transition.

¹⁹ UN Women, *Understanding Masculinities: International Men and Gender Equality Survey - Jordan* (UN Women, 2022), <https://jordan.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/01/understanding-masculinities-international-men-and-gender-equality-survey-images-jordan-0>.



The solution: Toward an inclusive green economy

Conference participants converged on the idea that the transition to a green economy must redefine who leads, who benefits and who innovates, and that these roles should reinforce rather than exclude one another. This transformation requires action on several fronts at once.

Advancing policy coherence for a just and inclusive transition


First, policy coherence is essential. Climate, employment and economic strategies need to be aligned with gender-equality goals and supported by social dialogue and social-protection systems that make the transition fair and sustainable for all, across both urban centres and

rural peripheries. A practical starting point is ensuring that every government has a clear plan for women's economic inclusion; without such integration, progress in one area is easily undermined by gaps in another. Incentivizing the private sector through certification programs and tax cuts is another factor that can increase women's participation in green sectors.

Strengthening the enabling environment for women's economic empowerment

Second, as green jobs are considered decent jobs, the enabling environment for women's economic empowerment must be strengthened. Legal reforms can

remove discriminatory restrictions on women's work, protect them from harassment and secure their rights to own and inherit land. Financial systems must also become more inclusive, but only when designed with care. Gender-responsive lending practices and efforts to reduce biases in venture-capital funding are important steps. Yet, experience in some MENA countries shows that small loans targeted at women can be risky when not accompanied by adequate training or market support. To ensure these mechanisms contribute to women's empowerment rather than financial vulnerability, they should be paired with capacity-building, mentorship and incubation programs that strengthen women's ability to manage and grow green enterprises. This balanced approach helps women innovators, including researchers and engineers working in renewable energy, participate more fully and safely in the green transition. Yet, when women researchers and engineers in renewable energy or climate-smart agriculture have the skills and ambition to start businesses but cannot access capital, the region loses not only potential leaders but also essential innovations.



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Broadening the definition and scope of green jobs

Third, although the international community has defined what constitutes a green job,²⁰ the concept is still often understood too narrowly in practice, frequently reduced



The green transition affects all sectors of society: teachers who shape future workers, policymakers who design enabling regulations, bankers who allocate credit, community leaders who mobilize local adaptation initiatives and even home-based producers who provide low-carbon goods and services.

to technical or engineering roles. In reality, green jobs span a much wider range of occupations and sectors. The green transition affects all sectors of society: teachers who shape future workers, policymakers who design enabling regulations, bankers who allocate credit, community leaders who mobilize local adaptation initiatives and even home-based producers who provide low-carbon goods and services. Farmers who are supported to shift to climate-smart agri-businesses are also an integral part of the green transition. Recognizing this diversity can open space for women across the spectrum of skills and professions.

Closing the data gap for gender-responsive green transitions

Finally, data must be improved. Gender-disaggregated statistics on employment, entrepreneurship and local climate initiatives are indispensable for designing responsive policies and monitoring progress. Without such evidence, women's contributions remain invisible and accountability for inclusion is weak.

²⁰ International Labour Organization ILO, "Guidelines Concerning a Statistical Definition of Employment in the Environmental Sector," November 27, 2013, <https://www.ilo.org/resource/guidelines-concerning-statistical-definition-employment-environmental-0>.

Recommendations



Reform legal frameworks and align policies for women's inclusion

Building on these insights, this white paper emphasizes that a just transition to a green economy in the MENA region depends on reshaping both systems and mindsets. Governments can play a decisive role by reforming laws that restrict women's participation in the workforce, by enforcing protection against workplace discrimination and harassment and by harmonizing policies across climate, employment and gender agendas. Experiences such as the reform of inheritance rules in Jordan, which curbed practices that stripped women of their land rights, demonstrate that even targeted legal changes can unlock significant economic participation.



Strengthen skills systems to match education with green labour demand

The green economy is evolving rapidly and countries in the MENA region need forward-looking, market-driven strategies that anticipate emerging opportunities, rather than only react to present needs. Future green growth will be increasingly shaped by technological transformation, especially the convergence of information and communications technology, innovation and environmental sustainability. From Internet of Things applications that optimize water and energy use, to early-warning systems driven by artificial intelligence, precision agriculture and smart mobility, the next wave of green jobs and enterprises will sit at the intersection of digital and ecological transitions. Building the skills, institutions and innovation ecosystems needed to capture these opportunities is essential if the region is to keep pace with global markets and ensure that women and youth are not left behind in this shift. Investment from both the private and public sectors in skills development must be ongoing and inclusive. Programs in technical and vocational institutions as well as in universities should recognize both advanced STEM competencies and the adaptive knowledge held by rural and Indigenous women and men. Training should not be confined to the early career stage but extend throughout life, supporting women as they adapt to new technologies and market demands.



Advance women's entrepreneurship through inclusive finance and supportive ecosystems

Entrepreneurship requires particular attention. Women in the region continue to receive only a fraction of available venture capital and often face additional barriers in accessing loans from commercial banks due to collateral requirements. Governments and development partners can promote gender-responsive lending and blended-finance mechanisms that lower these barriers, while also encouraging women's participation in investment decision-making. At the same time, regulatory frameworks can be adjusted to make it easier to establish and scale social and green enterprises, enabling women to commercialize their research and innovations in renewable energy and climate-smart agriculture.



Mobilize the private sector through incentives, ESG standards and accountability

The private sector, too, has a vital role to play. Evidence that gender-diverse companies outperform their peers in innovation and profits²¹ makes a strong case for inclusive hiring and promotion practices. Public procurement policies that prioritize sourcing from women-led green enterprises can further stimulate demand and visibility for such businesses. Additionally, incentives, both financial and non-financial, can play a powerful role in motivating the private sector to support an inclusive green transition. Alongside tax incentives or green financing schemes, non-financial measures such as public recognition, awards and platforms that showcase companies' achievements can reinforce positive competition and signal the value of gender-responsive and sustainable practices. Tools like ESG frameworks and sustainability reporting are increasingly essential in this regard. Encouraging companies to adopt, publish and publicly disclose ESG and sustainability reports strengthens transparency and accountability, while also positioning firms to meet global market expectations. Together, these incentives help create an enabling environment where businesses are rewarded for economic performance as well as for advancing social inclusion and environmental responsibility.



Elevate women's leadership in climate and green governance

Building an inclusive green economy starts with transforming governance systems to ensure that women have a seat at the decision-making table. This means integrating gender equity into climate governance bodies, energy planning committees and innovation councils, where strategic priorities and resource allocations are determined. Meaningful participation enables women to influence the direction of a just green transition and ensures that their knowledge and perspectives shape sustainable policies.



Recognize and support women in the informal green economy

Women in the informal economy are key actors in the green transition, yet they often lack legal protection and access to resources. Governments and partners should extend social protection, legal recognition and tailored entrepreneurship programs to informal workers, especially women engaged in recycling, upcycling and sustainable small-scale production, including in areas affected by conflict. Doing so will not only improve livelihoods but also unlock the potential of grassroots innovation that already drives local sustainability and save lives in conflict- and crisis-affected areas.



Strengthen advocacy, outreach and public awareness for inclusive transitions

Advocacy, outreach and public awareness are equally crucial components of an inclusive green transition. Governments should communicate their green transition plans clearly and widely, through diverse channels and platforms, to build public understanding, generate interest in emerging green sectors and signal where future

²¹ Heidi R. Andersen, *The Impact of *DEI on Business Performance and Profitability* (Living Institute, 2024), <https://livinginstitute.com/news/resources/dei-business-case/>.

opportunities lie. Such transparency not only mobilizes societal support but also helps women anticipate and prepare for shifts in labour markets. When women are informed about new policies, incentives and system changes designed to support their engagement, they are better positioned to access training, pursue green jobs and participate in decision-making spaces.



Apply an intersectional lens to ensure no woman is left behind

Inclusive green policies must recognize that women are not a homogenous group. Intersectional approaches should guide all interventions, taking into account differences in geography, education, class, age, disability and displacement status. By understanding and responding to these intersecting inequalities, policymakers can design programs that meet the needs of rural women farmers, urban entrepreneurs, refugees and women with disabilities, ensuring that no one is left behind in the just green transition.



Lead by example: Embed gender-responsive practices within public institutions

Public institutions have a responsibility to model inclusion by integrating gender-responsive budgeting, inclusive procurement and community engagement into their operations. These practices can redirect resources toward women-led and community-driven initiatives, strengthening accountability and setting a precedent for the private sector to follow.



Establish participatory and data-driven accountability mechanisms

Achieving measurable and lasting progress requires robust accountability mechanisms supported by disaggregated data and participatory monitoring. Collecting and analyzing gender- and region-specific data will enable evidence-based decision-making and transparent evaluation of outcomes. Involving communities and women's organizations in monitoring processes ensures that progress toward inclusivity remains grounded, credible and responsive to local realities.



Close the gender data gap to inform evidence-based green policies

Finally, closing the gender data gap is critical. Countries need mechanisms to collect and use gender-disaggregated data at both national and local levels, capturing the full range of women's work and entrepreneurship. Such data can inform targeted policies, reveal where progress is being made and highlight where additional support is required.

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