The VIII "Mediterranean Women Entrepreneurs Forum" was co-organized by AFAEMME (Association of Organisations of Mediterranean Businesswomen), the EBWA (Egyptian Business Women Association) and ASCAME (Association of Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry).

This Forum's edition took place under the theme "Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship Promotion for Women and Youth" in the framework of the 11th African Congress for Women Entrepreneurs & 4th Cairo Women Empowerment Summit.

The MEDA Forum consisted of three main panels: 1) The institutional opening panel, with Ms. de Felipe, AFAEMME's President; Dr. Asfour, EBWA's President; Dr. Ezz, Executive Board Member of ASCAME; Amb. Mona Omar, Former Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs; and Amb. Delphine Borione, Deputy Secretary General for Social and Civil Affairs at the Union for the Mediterranean. 2) A second session on how to better support the Mediterranean youth through entrepreneurship promotion. 3) And a final panel about the situation of women owned companies in the MEDA region, with the speeches of some of the representatives of AFAEMMEs member associations (namely Ms. Shahrazad Maghrabi, President of the Libyan Womens Forum; Dr. Amany Asfour, President of the Egyptian Business Women Association; Ms. Taghrid Nafeisi, President of the Jordan Forum for Business and Professional Women; and Ms. Nalan Karakaç, Vice-President of the Business Women Association from Izmir).
Women Entrepreneurship Data

Female Entrepreneurship Index 2015 Ranks and Scores
GEDI “The 2015 Female Entrepreneurship Index”

A number of individual and institutional factors impact the ability to start and grow firms, particularly attitudes, norms, values, legal environments that help women to access resources, accept women in leadership positions, and gain work experience in all sectors.

Specificities – MENA region (UNIDO Data)

- Women register an unemployment rate which is approximately the double than men and that rises to almost 40 percent in female youth labor force.
- Limited development of entrepreneurship in the region because of: (1) High barriers to doing business, particularly for smaller firms (e.g., complex licenses, rigid labor laws, high taxes, unfair competition, access to finance, shifting policies, etc); (2) Cultural norms in which entrepreneurial activity is seen by young graduates as second-best compared with employment in the public sector, which offers more job security (although the leading role in job creation can’t be assumed anymore by the public sector); (3) Very low participation of women in entrepreneurial activity.
- Other challenges for women entrepreneurs in the MENA region are lack of education and training opportunities, difficulties in accessing business support services, and networks.

Specificities – Europe (European Parliament Data)

- Also a significant gender gap in entrepreneurial activity.
- Women are more likely to be sole traders, operate businesses in traditionally female-dominated sectors which are of lower value-added, lower turnover and have lower growth potential.
- Women entrepreneurs tend to self-assess the level of innovation of their own business lower than male counterparts. They tend to start off with less capital, borrow less and use family, rather than debt or equity finance. Domestic circumstances often force women into periods of intermission; this hinders their ability to accumulate capital. Women entrepreneurs are more reluctant to assume a position of debt compared to men. This is down largely to lower levels of self-confidence in their business. Women entrepreneurs generally have less powerful professional networks, compared to men.
Entrepreneurship Promotion

- During the Forum’s opening session, it was highlighted how important it is to promote and empower both women and youth for achieving the region’s economic development and inclusive growth.
- Women’s Economic Empowerment is crucial and the basis for achieving other Sustainable Development Goals, according to Dr. Asfour, President of EBWA.
- Dr. Asfour also highlighted the value of alliances and networks for promoting women entrepreneurship in the region. She also mentioned the power of financial independence which gives women “the power of choice and voice”.
- Dr. Ezz, Executive Board member of ASCAME and Secretary General of the Confederation of Egyptian European Business Associations, praised the “Public-Private-Civil Society Partnerships” as new way of better achieving change in the region.
- Participating business women associations highlighted the opportunity of training migrant women for entrepreneurship in the countries of destination, so that if/when they return to their countries of origin they are well prepared to have the chance of achieving financial independence and rebuild their lives.

The good practice of the Young Women as Job Creators project

AFAEMME’s “Young Women as Job Creators” project experience was shared as an example of good practice of entrepreneurship promotion for youth. The project, labeled by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Government of Monaco, was implemented during 2014-2016 in Albania, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, Spain and Tunisia and motivated and trained more than 1.500 young women university students for entrepreneurship.

Representatives from the participating universities and partnering businesswomen associations, as well as some of the young project beneficiaries, shared their experience. Some of the main conclusions of this session were:

- It is crucial and necessary to introduce an entrepreneurial culture in the universities. Young women need to be aware of the potential of entrepreneurship and be encouraged to overcome the obstacles of an entrepreneurial path.
- Real and near role models have an important role in terms of motivating for entrepreneurship. Direct meetings with other young successful women entrepreneurs are touching and encouraging much more than role models in the media.
- The family context of the young women is directly influencing their choices. A supportive familiar environment is key for young women entering business.
- Especially where the quality of education is low, the access to specific training to provide the young women with some fundamental skills for entrepreneurship has to be provided.
- It has to be taken into account that not every young woman is an entrepreneur or should become one. Entrepreneurship can be taught but not enforced.

Participants and beneficiaries of AFAEMME’s “Young Women as Job Creators II” Project in Cairo