



First Jobs for Young Women in the Middle East & North Africa:

Expectations and Reality



2015

Education For Employment (www.efe.org)
Bayt.com (www.bayt.com)
YouGov (www.research.mena.yougov.com)

For additional information, contact:

Mariel Davis
Communications & Partnerships Manager
Education For Employment
mdavis@efe.org

Antonia Stockwell
Marketing Manager
YouGov
antonia.stockwell@yougov.com

Roba Al-Assi
Communication Manager
Bayt.com
roba@bayt.com

Acknowledgments

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(Youth quotes featured in this white paper were collected through a database of young women participants in Education For Employment training programs. They are included to provide example individual perspectives on the aggregate data featured in this white paper.)

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Foreward

Few issues in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) have proven as intractable as youth unemployment. Over a quarter of the region's youth are locked out of the workforce, and the situation is particularly sobering for young women. In some MENA countries, over 40% are unemployed.¹

Why does it matter?

Young women's absence from the workplace in the MENA region creates a profound impact. On a personal level, women's employment can foster the dignity and financial independence that transform individuals and families.

The potential economic benefit of increased women's employment is equally striking. According to recent estimates, if women's participation in labor markets in MENA equaled that of men's, regional GDP could rise as much by 47% over the next decade.²

For these positive changes to take hold, it is crucial that more young women enter and remain in the workforce. To ascertain the obstacles they face, and to identify potential ways to surmount them, we undertook the joint research initiative "First Jobs for Young Women in the Middle East & North Africa: Expectations and Reality."

With a specific focus on young women, we sought to understand where their expectations around recruitment and workplace benefits might diverge from those of employers, and how the attitudes of each group might influence women's participation in the workforce.

Four promising areas for reducing barriers to work emerged: enhancing young women's pathways to a job; equipping job seekers with the right skills and expectations; focusing workplace benefits and policies on what really matters to young women; and increasing the demand for women employees in the workplace.

The findings suggest that there are tangible steps that governments, NGOs, employers and young women themselves can undertake to increase women's participation in the workforce. We are pleased to share insights from "First Jobs for Young Women in the Middle East & North Africa: Expectations and Reality" to advance progress towards this goal.

Jamie McAuliffe
President & CEO
Education For Employment - Global

Lama Ataya
Chief Marketing Officer
Bayt.com

Kailash Nagdev
Regional Managing Director - MENA
YouGov

1. World Bank (2014) 2. McKinsey & Company (2015)

Overview

First Jobs for Young Women in the Middle East & North Africa: Expectations and Reality is a research initiative from Education For Employment (EFE), Bayt.com and YouGov that provides insight into factors that inhibit or discourage young women from securing a first job. The recommendations below, based on a survey of over 2,300 young women and employers across the region undertaken in 2015, complement existing research on women's labor force participation in the region. Research findings point to approaches that employers, NGOs, donors and young women themselves may adopt to reduce barriers to work through four approaches:

1 Focusing on what matters to young women



Many employers are not offering desired benefits like nursery or daycare facilities that young female employees say would most encourage young women to enter the workforce.



In seeking to increase women's employment, some employers are investing in policies that are not high priorities in the eyes of young women employees, such as provision of female supervisors.



Negotiating and adjusting salaries may be an effective method for attracting young women employees, as inadequate salaries are a top obstacle for women seeking employment.



Access to suitable and affordable transportation may be a decisive obstacle or enabler of young women's employment.



A benefits information gap exists between young women and employers: young women are significantly less likely than employers to be aware of the existence of policies and benefits that encourage women's employment in their company.

2 Enhancing pathways to a job



Few employers or young women believe that NGOs and government initiatives are the most effective method for supporting the entry of young women into the workplace. There is a significant opportunity for enhancing the reach and visibility of NGO and government initiatives among employers and young women.



Although internships are a common pathway to employment in many parts of the world, strikingly few young employed women in MENA believe that internships were the most effective method for securing a job. Enhancing the internship-to-employment pathway could improve young women's employment outlook.



Personal connections to current company employees may be particularly important for young female job seekers; young employed women named personal connections as the single most helpful factor to securing a job – by a wide margin.



The gender of the employer may contribute to gender bias in the hiring process. While female employers were more likely than their male counterparts to feel that gender is not an important consideration, for employers who would choose one gender over the other when young candidates had equal qualifications, employers favored applicants of their own gender.

3 Equipping young women job-seekers with the right skills and expectations



Soft skills deficits are recognized as barriers to employment by young female job seekers and employers alike. Young women job seekers are more likely than employers to cite work ethic as a top challenge, and conversely, employers are more prone to view lack of confidence as a top challenge.



Although SMEs are expected to comprise a significant portion of MENA's job growth, only 7% of young women job seekers indicated that they would most like to work in a small or medium local private company, as compared to 35% for multinationals and 26% for government.

4 Publicizing and increasing the demand for women employees in the workplace



Employers tend to consider the potential social impact of women's employment, but only a small minority view the potential business or economic gains as a primary impact. The young women surveyed appear to be unaware of the influence of women's employment on the economy.

Introduction

“First Jobs for Young Women in the Middle East & North Africa: Expectations and Reality” analyzes the results of a Middle East and North Africa (MENA)-wide survey of young women and employers that explored the expectations and assumptions of young female job seekers and employees, as well as of employers who make hiring decisions. The survey and analysis provide insight into factors that inhibit or discourage young women from securing their first job. The analysis seeks to complement the existing research on women’s labor force participation in the region; point to promising approaches that could reduce or eliminate barriers to work for young women in MENA; and serve as a foundation for future research on the barriers that young women face when trying to enter the workforce in the region.



Context

With one in four young people unable to secure a job, youth unemployment is widely regarded as a defining challenge of the MENA region. Young women are particularly affected: in many countries in MENA female youth unemployment rates exceed 40%.¹

Despite decades of regional advancements that have improved gender equality in education,² less than one in three women in MENA is in the labor force. The figure is half the global average for female labor force participation, which has reached nearly 50%.³

In the next decades, an estimated 50 million women will come of working age in the MENA region. Beyond providing dignity and financial independence, raising the Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP) rate to country-specific male levels could produce dramatic economic gains. Estimates suggest that full equality in labor markets in MENA could boost regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 47% over the next ten years, and MENA could realize \$600 billion in economic impact annually, or \$2.7 trillion by 2025 (in 2014 dollars).⁴

Although a diverse set of nations comprise the MENA region, high rates of unemployment among young women reflect the convergence of two shared, pressing issues: the youth unemployment challenge, and low rates of FLFP.

Many issues that young women jobseekers face are shared by their male peers in the region. Coming of working age amid the “youth bulge,” today, young women and men alike confront lackluster economic growth and job creation rates. While education systems graduate larger number of students than ever before, quality remains a persistent problem and students struggle to reconcile the rote learning of their academic studies with the practical skills and workplace etiquette required to secure and retain a job. Many MENA youth of both genders face deeply-entrenched systems of nepotism or *wasta* that restrict access to employment opportunities. Powerful family expectations and a legacy of public sector employment disincentivize many youth from pursuing entrepreneurship or opportunities in the private sector, while those young people who do seek private sector employment commonly contend with a business community resistant to hiring young candidates with limited work experience.

Although both young women and their male counterparts face these challenges, it is widely accepted that some of these factors are experienced more acutely by young women, and that young women confront additional barriers as they transition into the labor market. For instance, the female youth unemployment rate is almost three times the male youth unemployment rate in Egypt, Yemen and Jordan, with a 65% female youth unemployment rate in Egypt, and a 50% female youth unemployment rate in Yemen and Jordan.⁵

For decades, national governments, multilateral agencies and the international development community have examined the elements that contribute to the region’s low FLFP rates. Such studies point to a constellation of factors that prevent or discourage women from entering and remaining in the workforce. Low rates of legal and political gender equality; discriminatory hiring and compensation practices and inhospitable work environments; and scarcity of female role models in professional leadership positions are frequently cited culprits.⁶ Research has also suggested that socio-cultural norms and sensitivities are an important factor, with traditional gender roles reinforced in some environments at an early stage in a manner that may influence a women’s decisions around work as she matures.⁷

Notably, much of the existing research is generalized across working-age women, and does not address special circumstances and factors that relate to young women in particular. It is unclear the extent to which factors that influence the preferences of middle-aged or older women are a reliable indication of those that influence younger women. This is particularly salient given significant and relatively recent shifts in access to education, technological innovation, globalization, regional instability and demographics.

These transformations, some of them dramatic, situate young female job seekers in a unique context. When they consider entering the job market, what expectations and assumptions shape their transition? How do these compare with the expectations and assumptions of young women who are already in the labor force, and to those – both female and male – who are in a position to hire them?



I wanted to apply for jobs but to be honest I was afraid to even interview – I felt I didn’t have the strength or the courage. I was not prepared for the job market and I didn’t even know what skills were needed to do any job. I didn’t know how to do an interview, how to be professional, and most importantly, I didn’t have any self-confidence.
Mayada, Egypt

1. World Bank (2014) 2. WEF (2014) 3. OECD (2014) 4. McKinsey & Company (2015) 5. World Bank (2014) 6. World Bank (2015); McKinsey & Company (2015) 7. Abu Jaber (2014)

Guiding Questions

In June 2015, Education For Employment (EFE), YouGov, and Bayt.com administered a survey to young female job seekers, young women early in their careers, and professionals (both male and female) who make hiring decisions at their organizations.

In comparing the perceptions and expectations of these groups, the survey addressed key questions such as:

Job Searching and Recruiting:

- What are the perceived main challenges to employing women?
- What is the relative effectiveness of various job search and recruitment methods, including NGO and government initiatives?
- What attributes are desirable to employers in new hires, and what role do gender associations play?
- Does *wasta* or personal connections play an important role in securing a job in MENA? If so, does this work for or against young women?
- When looking for a job, are young women focusing on the most promising types of organizations in terms of job opportunities?
- How interested are young women in self-employment as an alternative to more traditional employment?

Attitudes Related to Women in the Workforce:

- Are there differences in opinion among young women and employers regarding the value that young women's employment brings to businesses?

- Do employers express interest and willingness in increasing the employment of young women?
- How may male-dominated environments affect young women's professional opportunities?

Benefits and Policies that Encourage Women's Employment:

- What is the prevalence of policies intended to encourage the employment of young women, and are young women and employers aware of such policies?
- Are the benefits that companies offer in line with the benefits that are most in demand among young women?
- Do young women appear to be taking advantage of policies where they exist?
- Who do young women and employers believe should take the lead in funding initiatives to support young women in employment?

The purpose of this white paper is to address these questions and related issues. It aims to provide insight that complements the existing research on FLFP in the region, point to promising approaches that could reduce or eliminate barriers to work for young women in MENA, and lay a foundation for future research.



Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative online survey to collect the opinions and experiences of 2,319 individuals from the MENA region. Of these individuals, 282 were young employed women, 797 were young women currently seeking employment, and 1,240 were individuals involved in making hiring decisions at their companies. The survey was administered to YouGov panel participants and individuals in the Bayt.com and EFE databases from June 7-30, 2015.

Data was analyzed comparatively across respondent groups comprised of employers, employed young women and young women seeking employment, accounting for margins of error (95% confidence interval) to produce statistically sound conclusions. In order to be considered employed, young women had to be employed in full- or part-time positions. Women seeking employment were those planning to look for a job within the next 12 months. A portion of the women in this group were working in internships (paid or unpaid) or seasonal or temporary jobs. Employers were individuals who were involved in making hiring or human resource-related decisions at their companies.

Respondent Profiles & Sample Breakdown

Given this study's focus on young women's opportunities in the workforce, the samples of employed youth and youth seeking employment were restricted to females aged 18-30. The employer sample was not restricted by gender or age in order to collect a representative view of employer perspectives on hiring young women. Of employer survey respondents, 64% were male and 36% were female. At least 25 different industries were represented in the sample of employers and employed young women, including construction/engineering, education/academia, information technology, banking/finance, medical/health services/pharmaceuticals, and other fields.

The samples of employed women (282), young women seeking employment (797), and individuals involved in hiring decisions (1,240) were representative of the MENA region, with participation from residents of 18 countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia the UAE, and Yemen. 33% of all respondents resided in North Africa,⁸ 36% in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries,⁹ and 13% in the Levant.¹⁰ An additional 18% resided in other countries.¹¹

Data was aggregated by region for geographically based analyses to allow for statistically valid comparisons across all three respondent groups.

The most prevalent nationalities represented across the three respondent groups were those of North Africa. Despite the large proportion of respondents residing in GCC countries, the percentage of individuals within the sample who identified

themselves as GCC nationals was relatively low. For example, although 42% of employer respondents currently reside in GCC countries, only 9% of employer respondents were GCC nationals. Similarly, although 29% of employed young women respondents reside in GCC countries, only 11% of them identified themselves as GCC nationals. This is not surprising given the significant expatriate presence in GCC countries.

Employment status, age and education

Within the sample of employed young women, 89% worked full-time and 11% worked part-time. Of the women seeking employment, 61% were unemployed, 14% were full-time students, 13% were working in temporary or seasonal jobs, and 11% were working in paid or unpaid internships.

Employed women tended to be older on average than women seeking employment, with 73% of employed women falling in the 25-30 age range versus only 53% of women seeking employment.

It is well-documented that in many MENA countries youth unemployment is highest among the most educated.¹² Although this was not reflected in the survey, unemployment rates among young women with tertiary-level qualifications were high nonetheless, with 48% of young women with bachelor's degrees and 40% of young women with higher university or professional degrees identifying themselves as unemployed and looking for a job (Figure 1).

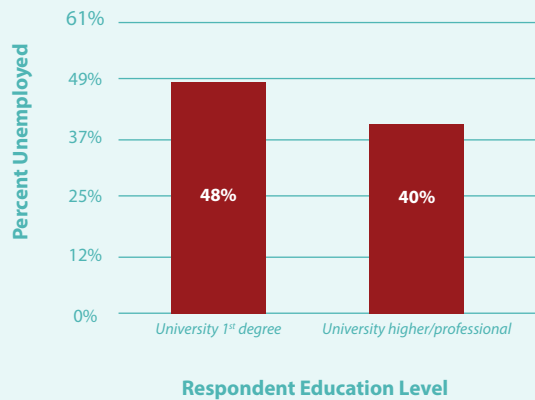
Among young women employed in full- or part-time positions, those holding advanced university or professional degrees were most likely to be working in professional or higher technical positions, such as doctors, lawyers, or similar (41%). However, holding a higher university or professional degree did not guarantee that young women would work in technical or other high-ranking positions. 9% of women who had earned higher university or professional degrees worked in sales or services and 7% worked in clerical positions.



I feel that my education and high GPA should matter when it comes to getting a job, not to whom I am related. I didn't want to become employed through using "connections." But if I did have connections, I wouldn't have spent nine months unemployed and looking for a job.
Rawan, Palestine

⁸. For the purposes of this study, the North Africa subgroup included the following countries: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia. ⁹. The GCC subgroup included the following countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. ¹⁰. The Levant subgroup included Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. ¹¹. The Other subgroup included Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, and other countries not specifically identified by respondents. Iraq, Palestine, and Yemen were included in this group due to the economic challenges that they share. ¹². World Bank (2014)

Figure 1
Percent of women with a tertiary-level education who self-identified as unemployed and looking for work



Advanced university studies may serve as an enabling factor allowing women to work in particular types of professions, especially higher technical professions, and thus these studies are likely an important factor affecting women's career opportunities. However, the survey results suggest that there are additional factors aside from educational attainment that affect access to employment and the type of occupations in which women work.

Job Searching & Recruiting

When young women in the MENA region initiate a job search, the experience they go through is shaped by external factors, such as job availability, salary, and ease of access. The perceptions of young women and those in a position to hire them also mediate and influence how job searches and recruiting are approached.

Main challenges to employing young women

The study revealed that a general awareness exists among young women and employers that there are specific challenges facing young women in their efforts to join the workforce. 96% of the young women and 92% of the employers surveyed believe there are challenges to young women entering their field. This awareness may serve as an enabling condition for changes that accelerate the inclusion of young women in the workforce.

It is notable that the top challenges mentioned by young women tended to be practical in nature, as opposed to more abstract constraints. The top challenges included the following: employer expectations that women will stop working when they start a family, the need for flexible working hours to care for a family, transportation and commute difficulties, and inadequate salaries (Figure 2). These issues may warrant attention from employers who seek to increase the employment of young women in their fields.

Employer expectations that women will stop working when they start a family was most concerning to employed young women, a majority of whom (59%) cited it as a main challenge. Employers and young women seeking employment were slightly less concerned, with 46% of both groups citing this as a challenge.

Young employed women and employers cited the need for flexible working hours to care for family as a top challenge (55% and 57%, respectively). Women seeking employment were less concerned about this challenge, with 45% citing it as a main challenge.

Transportation and commute difficulties were more of a concern for women seeking employment than for employed women, with 59% of women seeking employment versus 43% of employed women citing it as a top challenge. This difference likely signals that access to suitable and affordable transportation is a factor that prevents some women from securing employment.

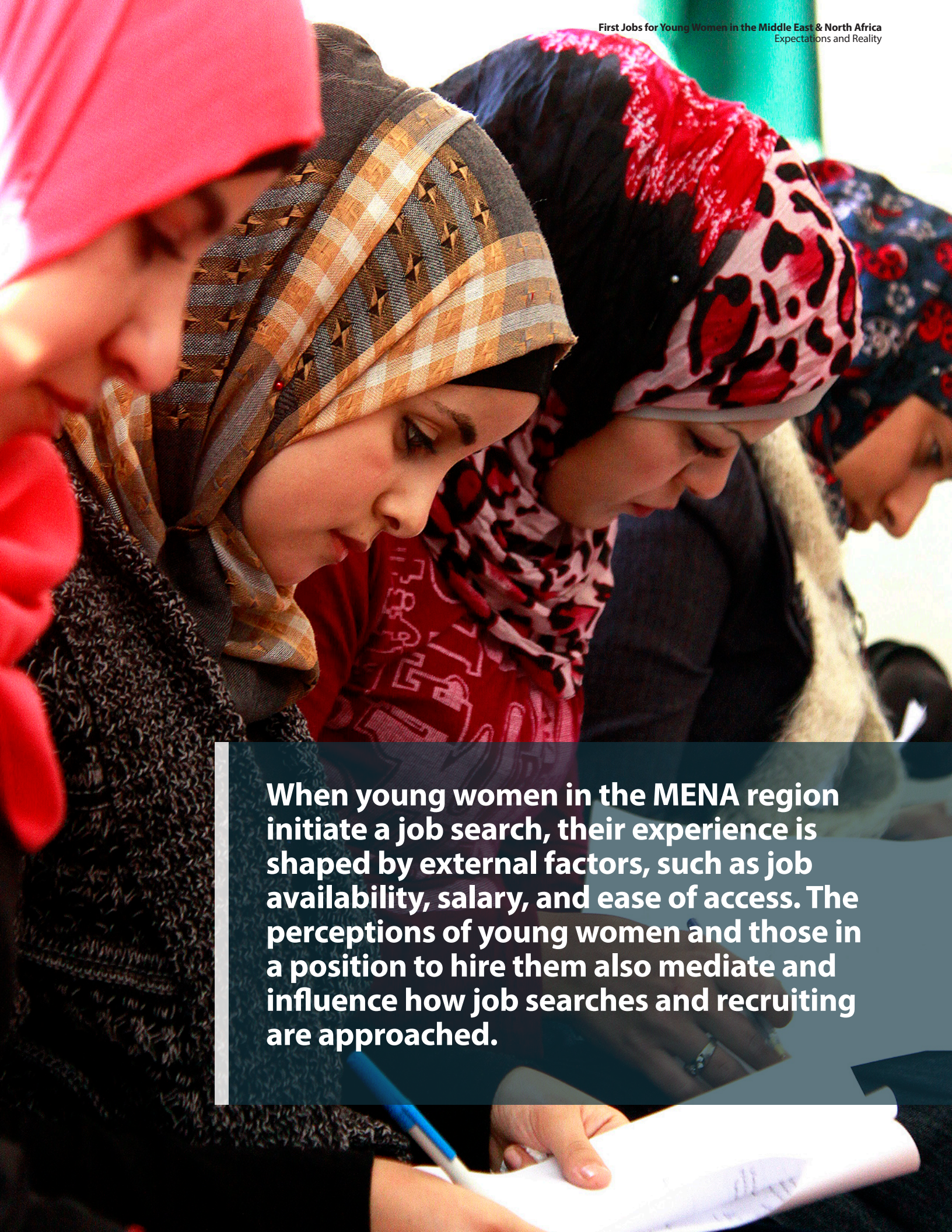
Inadequate salaries were mentioned by 42% of both employed women and women seeking employment. However, only 17% of employers felt that unrealistic salary expectations were a main challenge for young women trying to enter their field. This gap may suggest that raising starting salaries could attract more young women, and that employers may be more open to doing so than might have been expected.

Women seeking employment viewed poor work ethic as more of a challenge than employers did (39% versus 23%). The recognition from young women that work ethic is a challenge may point to the need for soft skills training in areas such as commitment, goal-setting, focus, and time management.

Additionally, study findings suggest that the skills gap, or lack of employees with necessary skills, is driven primarily by a need for soft skills rather than hard skills. Less than a quarter of employers (21%) cited lack of suitable qualifications among young women as a main challenge to hiring them, and even smaller percentages of women seeking employment and employed women viewed it as a challenge (16% versus 10%, respectively).

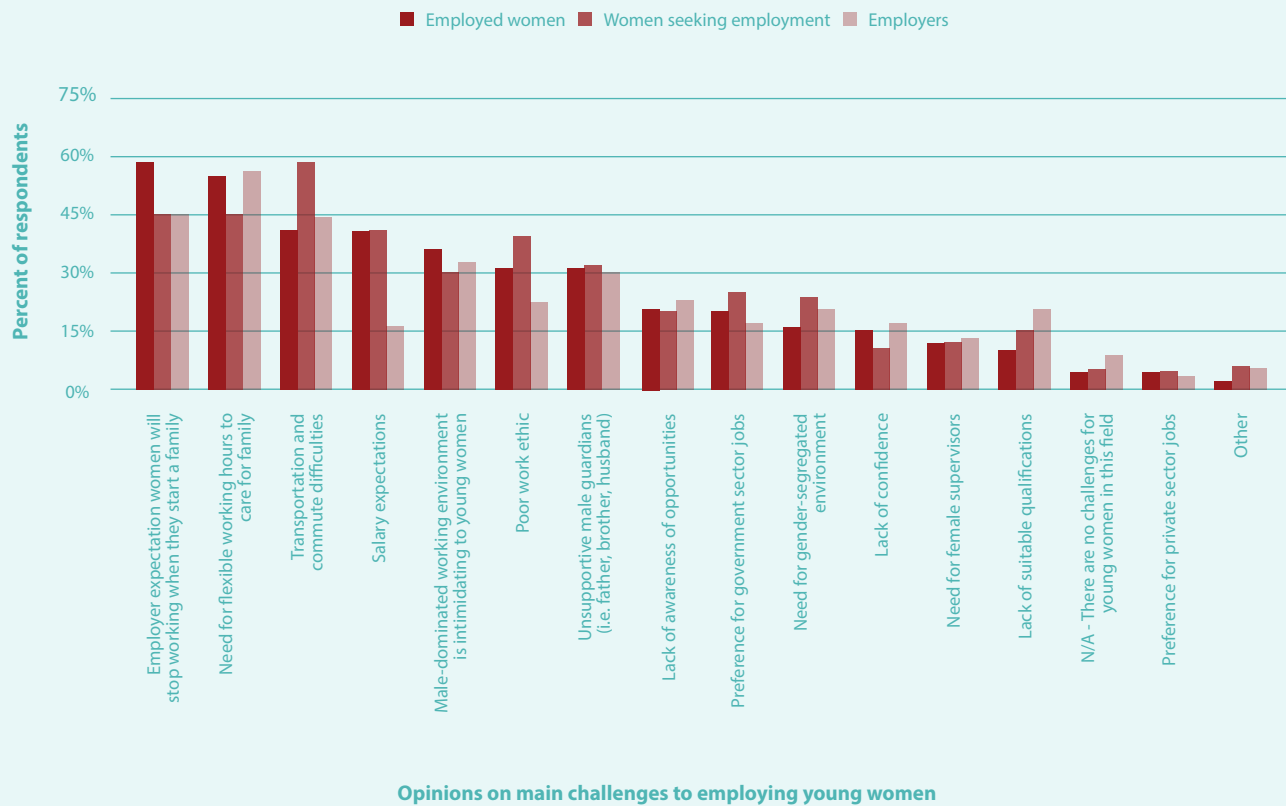
Employers were more likely than young women seeking employment to see a lack of confidence among women as a challenge facing their entry into the field. 18% of employers

96% of the young women and 92% of the employers surveyed believe there are challenges to young women entering their field. This awareness may serve as an enabling condition for changes that accelerate young women's inclusion in the workforce.

A photograph showing a group of young women, likely in the MENA region, looking down at a document or book. They are wearing various styles of headscarves, including a red one, a brown and gold patterned one, and a black one with a red leopard print. The image is used as a background for a text overlay.

When young women in the MENA region initiate a job search, their experience is shaped by external factors, such as job availability, salary, and ease of access. The perceptions of young women and those in a position to hire them also mediate and influence how job searches and recruiting are approached.

Figure 2
Opinions of young women and employers regarding top challenges facing young women in securing employment



mentioned lack of confidence as a main barrier, compared to only 11% of young women seeking employment. Young employed women did not vary significantly from either group in their opinion (15%).

Women's preference for government sector jobs was cited by 26% of women seeking employment, compared to 18% of employers. The proportion of young employed women citing this reason did not vary significantly from young women seeking employment or employers (21%).

It should be noted that unsupportive male guardians (i.e. father, brother, husband), the need for a gender-segregated environment, and the need for female supervisors, while cited by young women as challenges, were not the top concerns. Unsupportive male guardians were mentioned by 31% of employed women. However, employed women were significantly more likely to mention employer expectations that women will stop working when they have a family and the need for flexible working hours to care for family (59% and 55%) as main challenges. Women seeking employment demonstrated a similar pattern, with 33% mentioning unsupportive male guardians. But a significantly higher proportion cited transportation and commute difficulties and employer expectations that women will stop working

when they start a family as main challenges (59% and 46%, respectively).

Interestingly, a lack of female supervisors was cited by an even lower percentage of young women, with only 12% of employed women and 13% of women seeking employment citing this as a main challenge. Similarly, a lack of gender-segregated environments was cited by only 16% of employed women and 23% of women seeking employment as a main challenge.

“

Being at home all day makes me very depressed. As unemployment is a reality for so many young people, I never expected to find a job quickly after graduation.
Ghada, Morocco

Figure 3

Comparison of methods that employers deem effective for recruiting young women vs. methods that young women view as most effective for securing their first jobs



These figures suggest that, although such issues are significant for some women, they do not represent the main barriers preventing young women from securing employment in MENA. Rather, issues relating to transportation, employer fears that women will stop working once they start a family, need for flexible working hours to care for family, and inadequate salaries may warrant increased attention from employers who are interested in increasing employment of young women at their firms.

Effectiveness of varying job search and recruitment methods

The role of personal connections or *wasta* in securing a job was clear in the survey results. 32% of young employed women cited knowing someone who worked at the company as the most helpful factor in securing their first job, with the second most cited method being word of mouth (Figure 3). 25% of women seeking jobs indicated that they believed knowing someone at the company would be the most effective method for them to secure their first full-time paid job. These survey findings support the conclusions of previous studies regarding the significant role that *wasta* plays in securing jobs in MENA.

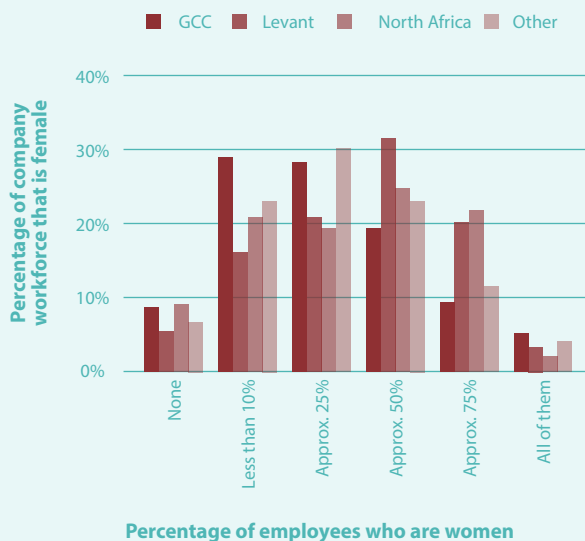
Furthermore, the significant difference in the proportion of young employed women versus employers who cited word of mouth as the most effective recruitment method (17% versus 8%, respectively) indicates that employers may be underestimating the role that personal relationships play in recruiting young women. The large percentage of young women citing personal connections as the top method for securing a job suggests that companies seeking to boost

gender diversity within their workforce may find that tapping the networks of their current employees is a particularly fruitful approach for recruiting young women. It also suggests that a lack of personal connections could exclude young women from marginalized or disconnected groups from their first jobs.

Given that in many parts of the world internships are often viewed as pathways to a job, the low percentage of employed women who found internships to be the most helpful factor in finding their first jobs (6%) is noteworthy. This result may point to the absence of sufficient internship opportunities in

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I was very motivated after receiving my engineering degree. But after facing the reality of joblessness, depression began to overwhelm me and I asked myself: why did I spend such a long and hard time at studies to become an engineer if now I cannot find a job?
Merieme, Morocco

Figure 4
Regional variation in workplace gender makeup



MENA, or to needed changes in the structure and purpose of internship programs there.

The survey revealed significant potential for NGO and government initiatives to increase their efficacy and reach among businesses and young women seeking employment. Only 6% of employers cited supporting or coordinating with government initiatives as the most effective method when trying to recruit young women and 5% of young employed women cited such initiatives as having been most effective in helping them secure their first job. Only 2% of employers and 1% of young employed women cited supporting or coordinating with NGO initiatives as being most effective. The survey points to a clear opportunity for the range of NGOs working on youth employment challenges in the MENA to expand their reach and enhance the value of their offerings as viewed by employers and young women alike.

Workplace gender makeup

The survey results underscored the variability found within workplaces across the region, such as in office gender makeup (Figure 4). The GCC region tended to have lower proportions of female employees, with 66% of respondents indicating that their offices are made up of approximately 25% or less women. As for Iraq, Palestine, Yemen and other countries not specifically identified by respondents – labelled “Other” – the proportion of female employees was moderate to low on average, with 84% of workplaces having approximately 50% or less women. The Levant registered higher proportions of female representation on average, with 75% of companies made up of between 25% and 75% female employees. North Africa was heterogeneous, with similar percentages of offices (between 20% – 26%) including less than 10% women, approximately 25% women, approximately 50% women, and approximately 75% women employees. Differences in gender makeup in the workplace may impact young women’s professional opportunities and thus warrant consideration when demand-driven youth employment organizations are working in different countries within the region.

Workplace preferences

Survey results suggest that the preferences of young women job seekers to work at certain types of organizations may be misaligned with what is available in the job market, and not necessarily in the ways that past research has suggested (Figure 5). Among young women seeking employment, 35% indicated that they would most like to work in a multinational company, but only 22% of employed young women were currently employed by multinational companies. Similarly, 29% of women seeking employment indicated that they would most prefer to work in the public or government sector, but only 17% of employed young women worked in that sector. It is notable that a higher percentage of young women stated a preference for employment in a multinational, as this challenges a commonly-held belief that women have a strong preference for government positions over other alternatives.¹³

Figure 5
Comparison of organization types employing young women versus preferred employer types for young women job seekers

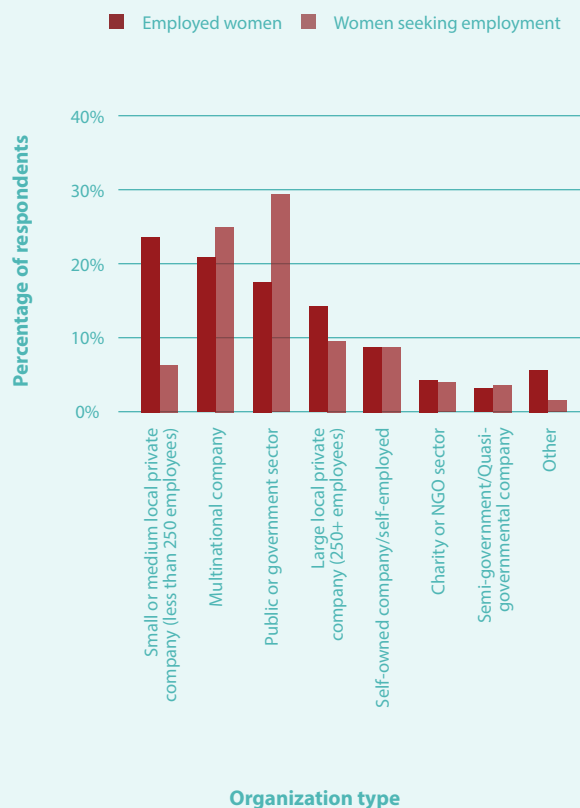
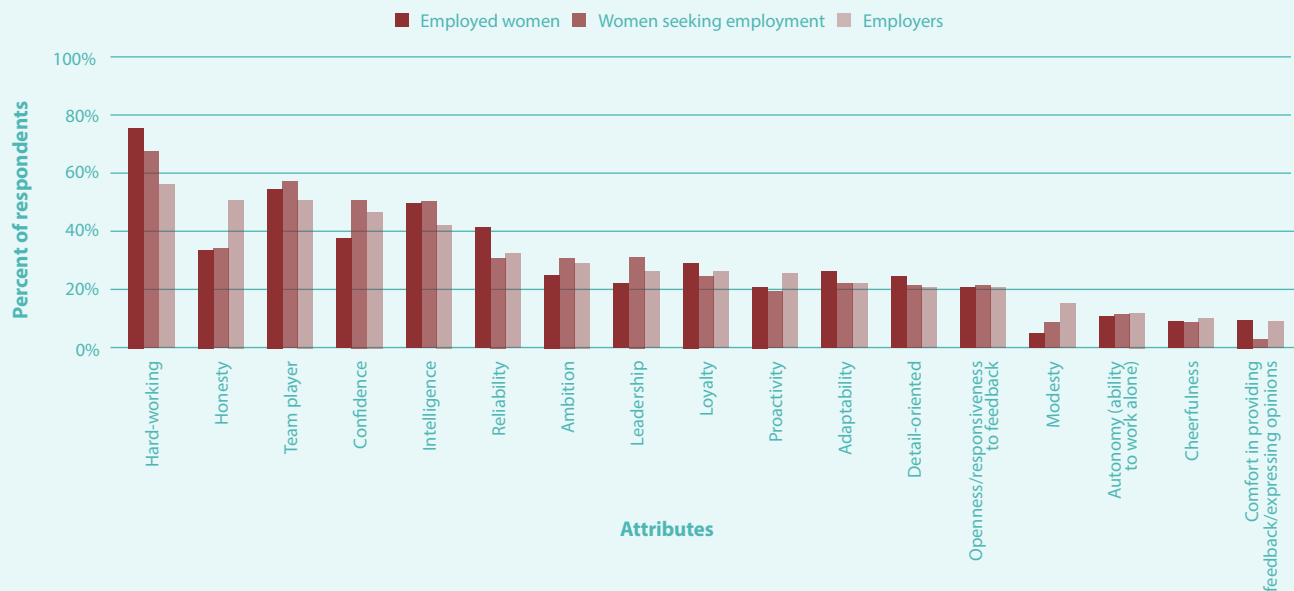


Figure 6

Comparison of attributes that employers most seek in young talent versus attributes that young women believe employers value most



Significantly, only 7% of young women job seekers indicated that they would most like to work in a small or medium local private company, but 23% of young employed women work at these companies. SMEs are expected to comprise a significant portion of MENA's job growth in the coming decades, making this low level of interest concerning. This apparent misalignment between preferences of female job seekers and availability of employment within certain types of organizations may contribute to high unemployment rates among young women if they are not sufficiently flexible in adjusting their preferences.

The survey revealed rather low interest among young women in being self-employed or owning their own businesses. Interest was low among young women job seekers, reaching only 9%. The percentage of young employed women who are self-employed or own their own businesses was also 9%. This point is salient, given the recent influx of resources and activities aimed at building entrepreneurship ecosystems in the MENA region. It suggests that it may be particularly difficult for entrepreneurship programs directed at young women to gain traction and underscores the importance of carefully selecting beneficiaries for such programs, given that interest in this career path appears to be relatively low among young women in the region. Overall, it also points to a potential need to stimulate interest among young women in entrepreneurial opportunities.

Desired attributes for hiring

Aside from the right qualifications, the top attributes that employer respondents indicated they look for most when hiring young talent were hard-working, honesty, team player, confidence and intelligence (Figure 6). Employed young women who are not involved in hiring or making HR decisions

and young women seeking employment put a greater emphasis on hard-working as an attribute than did employers. 77% of young employed women and 68% of women seeking employment indicated that being hard-working is one of the most important attributes that they believe employers look for when hiring young talent. However, 55% of employers indicated that being hard-working is one of the attributes that is most important to them when hiring young talent. Employers as a group put a stronger emphasis on honesty as an important attribute than did young employed women and women seeking employment. 51% of employers indicated that honesty is an attribute of top importance when hiring talent, compared to only 34% of employed young women and 35% of young women seeking employment.



Anyone who has the connections, they are hired immediately and the rest of us are awaiting their chance in this life.

Samya, Palestine



Gender associations with professional attributes

On average, the majority of employer respondents associated the top five attributes – hard-working, honesty, team player, confidence, and intelligence – with both genders. Among all top attributes, employers associated intelligence with both genders to the greatest extent. However, differences in attitudes toward males and females appeared within each attribute, especially between male and female employers.

The large percentage of overall employers who associate top attributes with both genders is encouraging. However, among employers who did associate top attributes with one gender more strongly than another, young women fared worse than men in three out of the five areas, to varying degrees: team player, confidence, and intelligence. Employers associated “hard-working” with both men and women equally, but associated women more than men with honesty.

In a job interview and within the workplace, young women may find particular support in female employers, who associated female employees with hard-working, honesty, and intelligence to a greater extent than did male employers. Female employers were almost twice as likely as male employers to associate hard-working most strongly with women (29% versus 15%) and were 43% more likely than male employers to associate honesty most strongly with women (30% versus 21%). Female employers were slightly more likely than male employers to associate intelligence most strongly with females (15% versus 9%). Confidence was the only top attribute for which significantly more female employers associated the trait with male employees over female employees (22% versus 12%). This finding may indicate that young women might benefit from learning to project confidence in the workplace.

Aside from the right qualifications, the top attributes that employers indicated they look for most when hiring young talent were hard-working, honesty, team player, confidence and intelligence.

In the next decades, an estimated **50 million** women will come of working age in the MENA region. Beyond providing dignity and financial independence, raising the Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP) rate to country-specific male levels could produce dramatic economic gains.



Attitudes Related to Young Women in the Workforce

Survey results indicate that although there is significant support among young women and employers for young women's participation in the workforce, challenges remain in employer attitudes. Likewise, young women and employers alike lack awareness of the broader economic impact of women's employment. In addition, the prevalence of male-dominated workplaces in the MENA region could create challenges for young women's entry into the workforce due to the continued preference of some male employers to hire male employees over female employees who are equally qualified. These issues need to be addressed to enable continued progress towards young women's inclusion in the workforce.

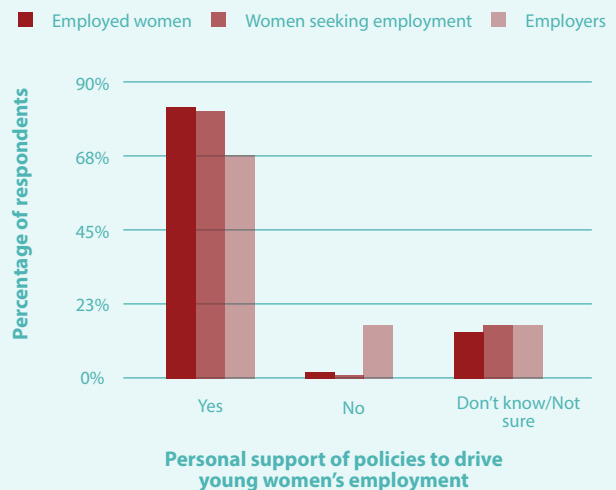
Attitudes towards young women's employment

The vast majority of young women and employers indicated that they personally support policies to drive the employment of young women, with more than 80% of young women and nearly 70% of employers indicating support (Figure 7). Among employers, support for such policies was higher among females than males (82% versus 61%, respectively). Male employers were almost three times as likely as female employers to indicate that they do not support such policies (20% versus 7%, respectively) and almost twice as likely as female employers to indicate that they were not sure (18% versus 10%, respectively), indicating a need to address the role of male employer perceptions in potentially limiting young women's employment opportunities.

Interestingly, respondents believed that business should play a financial role in increasing young women's employment, as opposed to assigning funding responsibility to the government or NGOs only. The majority of respondents from all groups

Figure 7

Personal support among young women and employers of policies to drive young women's employment



believed that the government, charities/NGOs, and private companies had an equal responsibility to fund such efforts.

Despite significant research around the broad economic benefits of women's employment, employers and young women themselves appear unaware of the impact of women's employment on their nation's economies. Only 4% of employers cited benefits to the economy as a main impact of more women entering the workforce. Likewise, a small minority of young women cited benefits to the economy as a positive impact of women entering the workforce (6% of young women seeking employment and 3% of employed young women).

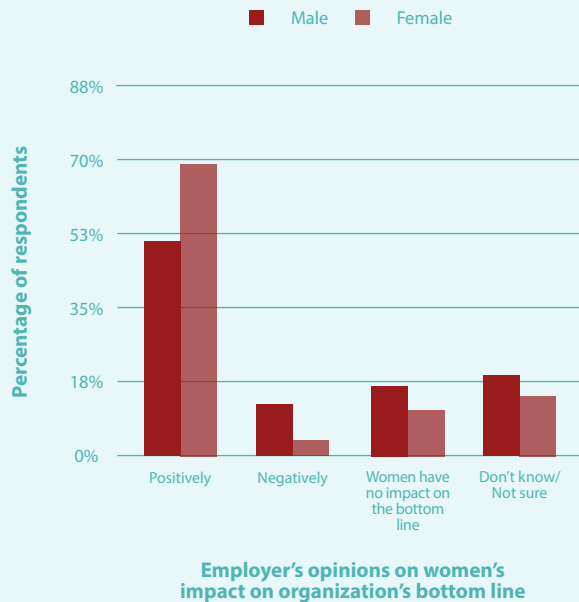
Studies have shown that raising the FLFP rate to country-specific male levels would produce dramatic economic gains, with estimates suggesting a GDP gain of 34% in Egypt and 12% in the United Arab Emirates, for example.¹⁴ The low percentage of employers and young women who cite benefits to the economy as a positive impact of women entering the workforce is notable, and raises the question of whether greater awareness of their role in economic development could motivate young women to seek entry into the workforce, and could encourage more employers to hire them.

Employer attitudes towards women's impact on the bottom line

When asked how increasing the number of women in the workforce impacts an organization's bottom line, the majority of employers (57%) believed that an increase in women in the workforce has a positive impact. This result is encouraging for the employment prospects of young women in the MENA region. However, male employers were 38% less likely than female employers to believe that women's inclusion creates a positive impact (50% versus 69%, respectively) (Figure 8). Male employers were three times as likely as female employers to



Figure 8
Employer opinions on how increasing women in the workforce impacts an organization's bottom line, disaggregated by employer gender

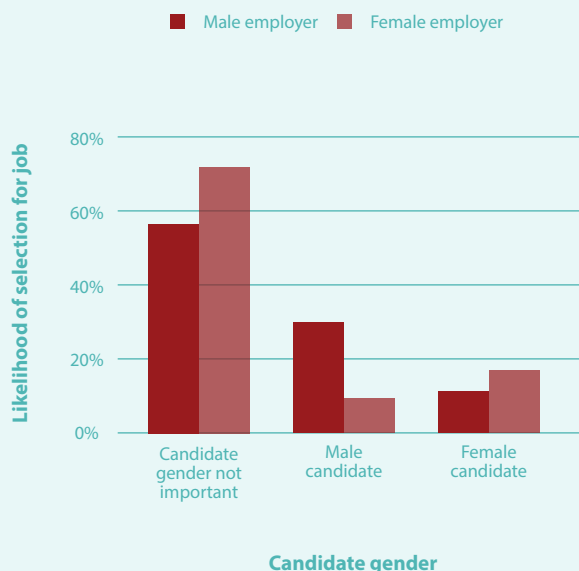


Despite significant research around the broad economic benefits of women's employment, employers and young women themselves appear unaware of the impact of women's employment on their nation's economies.

express that women's inclusion in the workforce has a negative impact on the bottom line. Male employers were also more likely than female employers to express that women have no impact on the bottom line. However, when asked if they would like to have more young women working in their companies than they currently have, 51% of female employers and 49% of male employers responded affirmatively, indicating that approximately half of employers of both genders want to see more young women in the workplace.

Top reasons that employers cited for the perceived positive impact of women's employment on the bottom line were women's attributes or skills, such as leadership and loyalty (18%) and enhanced productivity (11%). Top reasons cited for the perceived negative impact of women's employment on the bottom line were the belief that men are more capable (21%), and that women have a need for more holidays and leave (15%). These results indicate that, although some employers hold negative views of women's inclusion in the workforce, there is at least a small proportion of employers who believe that there are productivity-related outcomes associated with women's employment.

Figure 9
Employer gender preference in hiring candidates with identical qualifications and backgrounds

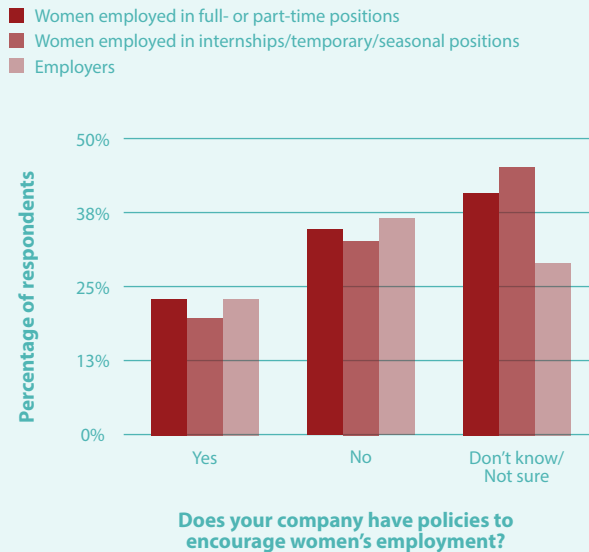


The survey indicates that among employers who take gender into consideration in making hiring decisions, candidates of the same gender as the employer may stand to benefit. Employers were posed the question, "Imagine you come across two young candidates with exactly the same qualifications and background looking for their first job. One is a man and the other a woman – which one would most likely get the job?" 73% of female employers indicated that candidate gender was not important, compared to only 57% of male employers (Figure 9). Male employers were twice as likely to indicate that a man, rather than a woman, would get the position (30% versus 13%, respectively) and female employers were twice as likely to indicate that a woman, rather than a man, would get the position (18% versus 9%, respectively).

Benefits and Policies that Encourage Women's Employment

The survey revealed a need to increase young women's awareness of policies offered by their companies that are designed to increase the employment of young women. It also revealed differences between the benefits demanded by young women who are employed and those seeking

Figure 10
Percentage of respondents whose companies currently have policies encouraging women's employment



employment. Furthermore, the results signaled a misalignment between policies implemented by employers to encourage young women's employment, and the policies or benefits most desired by young employed women.

Awareness of policies encouraging young women's employment

When asked whether their companies currently have policies in place to encourage the employment of young women, young women were significantly more likely than employers to indicate that they were not sure if their companies had such policies (42% of women employed in full- or part-time positions and 45% of women in internships or temporary/seasonal positions versus only 29% of employers) (Figure 10).

The high percentage of young women who are unaware of whether their companies have policies in place designed to encourage the employment of young women is concerning given that they are the target beneficiaries of such policies. This indicates a significant information gap that employers may want to proactively address. Likewise, the high percentage of employers who are not sure if their companies have policies in place indicates a need for increased efforts at the management level to communicate the importance of such policies and ensure that leadership is aware of them where they exist.

Survey results indicated that some policies or benefits may not be available to employees at all organizational levels. Employers were almost 60% more likely than young women employed in full- and part-time positions to indicate that their companies offer flexible working hours (51% versus 32%, respectively). This may point to a lack of knowledge

among young women regarding available benefits. Another explanation may be that flexible working hours tend to be available to more senior staff only, such as those involved in hiring and HR decisions, and therefore cannot be expected to successfully increase employment of young women in all cases.

Benefits sought by employed women versus women seeking employment


In some cases, the benefits or policies that young women seeking employment demand differed from those that young employed women demand. These gaps may be decisive obstacles or enablers of young women's employment, such as access to suitable transportation and gender segregated environments (Figure 11).

Statistically significant differences between young women in full- or part-time employment versus young women seeking employment were found in four areas: flexible working hours, provision of buses or other transportation for women, extended paid maternity leave, and availability of gender-segregated environments. 52% of employed women and 39% of women seeking employment indicated that flexible working hours was a top policy of interest. It is notable that employed young women were 33% more likely than women seeking employment to indicate that flexible work schedules are of top importance. This may be explained by a gap in professional experience between the two groups. Women seeking employment may not yet have a complete view of the rigors of a daily structured work schedule.

Women seeking employment were 52% more likely than employed women to indicate that the provision of buses or other transportation for women was of top importance (41% versus 27%). This gap may indicate that access to acceptable transportation options is a key differentiating factor between employed young women and young women seeking employment.

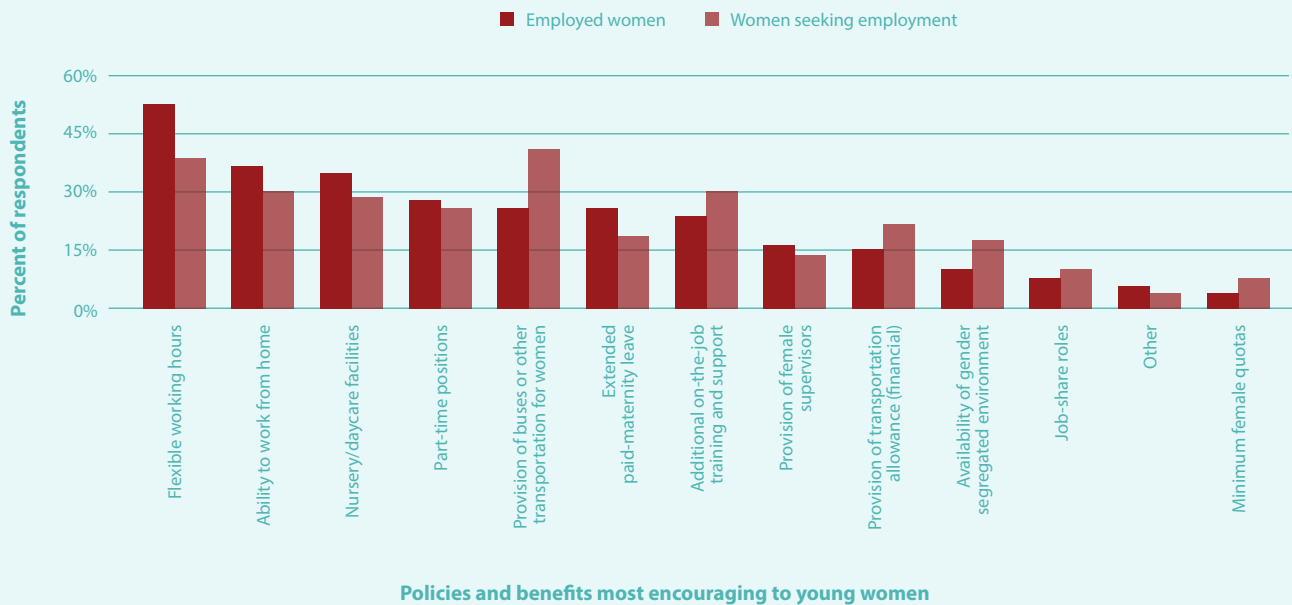
The demand for extended paid maternity leave was 50% higher among employed women than women seeking employment (27% versus 18%, respectively). This difference may be explained by the fact that 73% of employed women

The high percentage of young women who are unaware of whether their companies have policies in place designed to encourage the employment of young women is concerning given that they are the target beneficiaries of such policies. This indicates a significant information gap that employers may want to proactively address.



The survey signaled a misalignment between policies implemented by employers to encourage young women's employment, and the policies or benefits most desired by young employed women.

Figure 11
Policies young women believe will most encourage women to enter the workforce



were between the ages of 25-30, compared to only 53% of women seeking employment.

Women seeking employment were 70% more likely than employed women to cite availability of gender segregated environment as a critical benefit (17% versus 10%). This gap may indicate that family and personal values are a possible key differentiating factor between employed women and women seeking employment, and may serve as a barrier for some women trying to enter the workforce.

Top benefits mentioned by the two respondent groups were the ability to work from home (36% of employed women and 30% of women seeking employment), nursery/daycare facilities (34% of employed women and 29% of women seeking employment), and availability of part-time positions (28% of employed women and 26% of women seeking employment).

It is important to note that the survey revealed differences in opinions among young women residing in different regions in MENA regarding policies that would most encourage women to join the workforce. Among respondents residing in the GCC, the top five benefits cited were flexible working hours (42%), provision of buses or other transportation for women (40%), nursery/daycare facilities (35%), provision of a financial transportation allowance (27%), and additional on-the-job training and support (26%). Among respondents residing in the Levant, the top five benefits cited were flexible working hours (57%), ability to work from home (41%), nursery/daycare facilities (38%), part-time positions (29%) and extended paid maternity leave (25%). Among respondents residing in North

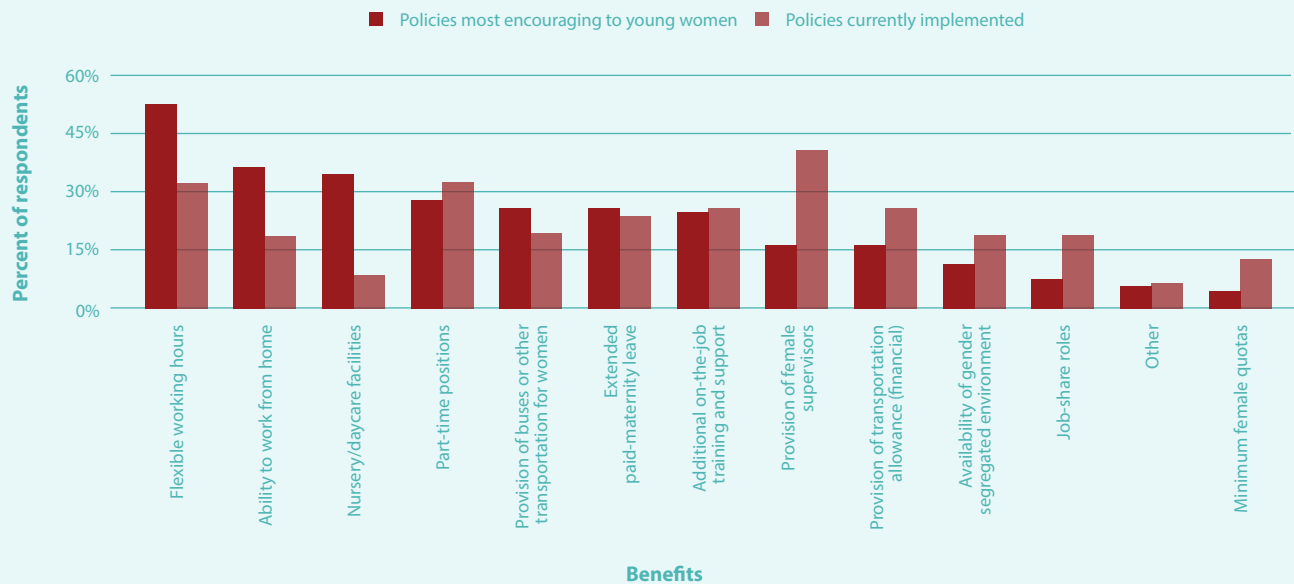
Africa, the top five benefits cited were provision of buses or other transportation for women (46%), flexible working hours (39%), ability to work from home (35%), part-time positions (27%) and additional on-the-job training and support (27%). Among respondents in Other, the top five benefits cited were flexible working hours (42%), additional on-the-job training and support (40%), ability to work from home (33%), provision of buses or other transportation for women (30%) and nursery/daycare facilities (29%). These regional differences underscore the importance of adopting policy solutions to young women's employment that are context-specific in order to maximize impact.

Benefits offered to employed women versus benefits in demand

The survey results revealed mismatches in a few critical areas related to the benefits that young employed women believe to be most important, and what their employers are currently offering them (Figure 12). Statistically significant, and sometimes surprising, gaps exist in the following areas: flexible working hours, ability to work from home, provision of nursery/daycare facilities, and provision of female supervisors. These mismatches may be creating barriers for young women seeking to join or remain in the workforce.

The most significant gap exists in the provision of nursery or daycare facilities on site. 34% of employed women indicated that nursery/daycare facilities is a policy that would most encourage young women to join the workforce but only 9% of employed women indicated that their companies currently

Figure 12
Gap analysis between benefits offered to and benefits desired by young employed women



offer it. Of employers who work at companies that offer female-friendly policies, 17% indicated that their companies would be willing to implement nursery/daycare facilities in addition to the benefits already offered to women. 15% of employers who work at companies that offer female-friendly policies employers indicated that their companies already provide this benefit. Of employers who do not have female-friendly policies in place or who are not sure, 16% indicated that their companies would be willing to implement nursery/daycare facilities. This indicates that at least some employers may be in a position to offer this benefit, although the demand may not be fully met.

Despite the high demand among young employed women for flexible schedules (52% of respondents), only 32% of their employers offer this as a policy to encourage young women to join the workforce. More employers may want to consider offering flexible working hours to young female employees if

they want to increase employment among young women. This is particularly true of employers in the Levant, as 57% of young women – higher than any other region – indicated that this was a critical policy for encouraging women to join the workforce.

Of employers whose companies do not currently have policies aimed at encouraging women to join the workforce, 38% indicated that their companies would be willing to implement flexible scheduling. Only 16% of employers whose companies have already adopted some form of female-friendly policies said their companies would be willing to implement flexible working hours.

However, given that flexible working hours was the most common female-friendly policy offered at employer respondent companies, with 51% of companies with female-friendly policies offering the benefit, it is not surprising that the percentage of companies willing to add this benefit is relatively small. It may be that the remaining companies operate within an industry that does not allow them to offer flexible working hours. Given that young women report having much lower access to this benefit than employer respondents (32% versus 51%), employers may consider ensuring that access to this benefit is available to young women, and not only to more senior staff.

The ability to work from home was another benefit in high demand, with 36% of employed women indicating that it would encourage young women to join the workforce. However, only 18% of employed young women indicated that their companies currently offer it. Of employers who have policies in place to encourage young women to enter the workforce, 14% indicated that their companies would be willing to implement this policy. 23% of employers whose

In some cases, the benefits or policies that young women seeking employment demand differ from those that young employed women demand. These gaps may point to decisive obstacles or enablers of young women's employment.

companies have adopted female-friendly policies indicated that their companies already offer this benefit. Of employers whose companies do not currently have policies in place to encourage the employment of young women, 21% indicated that their companies would be willing to implement a work-at-home policy.

The gap in the provision of and demand for female supervisors among young employed women was the opposite of what might be expected. 40% of young employed women's

companies provide female supervisors to encourage women to join the workforce, but only 16% of employed women indicated that such a policy would most encourage young women to join the workforce.





Despite decades of regional advancements that have improved gender equality in education,¹ **less than one in three** women in MENA is in the labor force. The figure is half the global average for female labor force participation, which has reached nearly **50%.**²

1. WEF (2014) 2. OECD (2014)

Conclusion

The study points to approaches that employers, donors, NGOs and young women themselves may adopt to reduce barriers to work in key areas such as enhancing pathways to a job, equipping young women job seekers with the right skills and expectations, focusing on what matters to young women and publicizing and increasing the demand for women employees in the workplace.

To create more and better pathways to a job for young women, employers could consider partnering with or advising NGOs and governments to shape effective interventions. A particularly promising area for joint efforts may be launching or expanding internship programs that link to tangible job opportunities, with NGOs advising young women on ways to leverage internships as on-the-job training and helping employers to structure effective programs. Employers may want to encourage current employees to reach out to or mentor young women job-seekers, perhaps through NGO-administered programs, or involve more women decision-makers in the hiring process.

Equipping young women job-seekers with the right skills and expectations is crucial to facilitating their entry into the workplace. NGOs can provide soft skills training with a focus on motivation, goal-setting and confidence-building, and employers can coach or mentor young women employees to

help build confidence. To link more women to careers in SMEs, NGOs can communicate to SMEs the unique value of female employees and their desired benefits. Among job seekers, NGOs can raise awareness of the professional opportunities within SMEs and equip job seekers with the skills that are important to smaller workplace environments. Likewise, SMEs themselves can focus resources on adopting high-priority policies such as flexible schedules or childcare, and on leveraging the networks of current employees for recruitment.

If policies and benefits are to produce tangible results for young female job-seekers, they must address what really matters to the young women themselves. Employers can consider offering nursery/day care facilities and flexible schedules, along with a clear and transparent process for when and how employees can earn such benefits. Adjusting compensation packages to incentivize women applicants, and providing transportation solutions that are well-suited for the specific context, may prove particularly effective. Crucially, employers should ensure that existing policies are presented during employee onboarding and establish an access point for ongoing information.

NGOs have an important role to play in helping young women develop realistic expectations for workplace benefits and how they are earned. They can create platforms with which young



women and employers can discuss priorities and desired policies, and serve as a source of information on labor rights, maternity benefits and work-life balance. NGOs are also well-positioned to help young women to develop realistic salary expectations, and to provide training in how to negotiate salaries and benefits with employers.

For large-scale, sustainable change to occur, it is vital that companies recognize the business and economic value to employing young women. To aid in this process, NGOs can develop a “women’s employment value proposition” to demonstrate the broader economic impact to employers. Data on the contributions of women employees, shared with NGOs and with other employers by forward-thinking companies, is important to helping the private sector understand the potential impact of young women employees on the bottom line.

In producing insights and short-term recommendations for enhancing the employment of young women in MENA, this study also surfaced a number of areas for further study.

For instance, are employer expectations that young women will leave the workforce upon starting a family supported by the behavior of young women? At what rate do young women actually leave the workforce upon starting families? How does the role of *wasta* or personal connections in securing employment impact young women of different socioeconomic backgrounds? What are the most effective methods for NGO and government initiatives to engage employers in hiring youth? How can these initiatives occupy a more prominent role in company recruitment efforts and young women’s efforts to secure their first job? How does workplace gender makeup affect young women’s retention and advancement once they have secured their first job? What factors are driving young women’s reluctance to be self-employed or to work at SMEs? How can young women’s attitudes be changed to help promote job creation? In what ways can internships be improved to serve as a more effective method for a larger percentage of young women to secure employment? Why are internships currently viewed as having limited efficacy in helping young women secure jobs?

Furthermore, the potential socioeconomic differences between young employed women and women seeking employment, including persistently unemployed women, should be studied in more depth. Further study may reveal additional factors that help explain why some young women have success in securing jobs while others do not. Socioeconomic factors, which were not addressed in this study, could help explain why certain benefits, such as provision of transportation for female employees or the availability of gender segregated environments, are important to a larger proportion of women seeking employment than to women currently employed.

“First Jobs for Young Women in MENA: Expectations and Reality” illuminates areas where immediate action is possible to enhance the employment outlook of young women in

the region. It is hoped that additional resources and efforts may be directed to addressing these and other questions that emerged from the study, so that young women, as well as business and society, may benefit from their increased economic engagement.

For large-scale, sustainable change to occur, it is vital that companies recognize the business and economic value to employing young women. To aid in this process, NGOs can develop a “women’s employment value proposition” to demonstrate the broader economic impact to employers.

Research Partners



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unemployed youth in MENA by providing world-class training that leads directly to jobs, startup support and pathways to employment.

Since 2006, EFE has pioneered a demand-driven approach to helping over 8,300 unemployed, high potential youth get their first job while supporting more than 1,820 businesses to obtain the entry-level talent they need to grow. 53% of our graduates are young women, reflecting EFE's special focus on supporting women's entry into the workforce. Distinct in measuring success by the job placement rate of its graduates, EFE also implements self-employment, entrepreneurship and employability programs as complementary pathways to economic opportunity.

The EFE Network is comprised of locally-run EFE affiliates in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, Yemen and Saudi Arabia (2015/2016) with a global support presence in Europe (Madrid), the USA (New York City and Washington, DC), and the UAE (Dubai). Named Global Social Entrepreneur of the Year by the Schwab Foundation at the World Economic Forum 2012 Meeting of New Champions, EFE is at the forefront of a growing movement to create on-the-ground impact and place youth employment at the top of the agenda for governments, multinationals, and multilateral institutions.



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From the very beginning, we have been driven by a simple idea: The more people are able to participate in the decisions made by the businesses that serve them, the better those decisions will be. At the heart of our company is a global online community, where millions of people and thousands of commercial and cultural organizations engage in a continuous conversation about their beliefs, behaviors and brands.

We combine this continuous stream of data with our deep research expertise and broad industry experience, to develop the technologies and methodologies that will enable more collaborative decision-making.

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Bayt.com is firmly committed to the region and has an excellent and thorough understanding of the Middle East and North Africa recruitment market and business landscape. This evidenced by Bayt.com's fully trilingual recruitment platform, which is the first and only such platform in the region, as well as its 12 regional offices in Abu Dhabi, Al Kuwait, Amman, Beirut, Cairo, Casablanca, Doha, Dubai, Eastern Province, Jeddah, Manama and Riyadh. It is also evidenced by Bayt.com's leading track record of continued success serving the region's jobseekers and employers in finding top jobs and top talent respectively. With over 22,000,000 professionals and over 40,000 leading organizations using Bayt.com's recruitment platform across all industry categories and career levels, Bayt.com is today the single largest marketplace of professionals and companies in the region.

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Additional Resources

Education and Employment Among Women in the UAE (p. 9-10)

International Higher Education

https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cihe/pdf/IHEpdfs/ihe45.pdf

Empowering women, developing society: Female education in the Middle East and North Africa

Population Reference Bureau

<http://www.prb.org/pdf/empoweringwomeninmena.pdf>

Gender and Development in the Middle East and North Africa Women in the Public Sphere

The World Bank

<http://web.worldbank.org/archive/website01418/WEB/IMAGES/281150PA.PDF>

Five Gender Gaps in the Labour Market

United Nations Development Fund

http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/measuring_human_progress_-_moazam_mahmood.pptx

Women's economic role in the Middle East and North Africa

Governance and Social Development Resource Center, University of Birmingham

<http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/HDQ889.pdf>

Females Labor Force Participation and Job Opportunities in the Middle East

American Economic Association

<https://www.aeaweb.org/aea/2015conference/program/retrieve.php?pdfid=847><https://www.aeaweb.org/aea/2015conference/program/retrieve.php?pdfid=847>

Understanding the Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in the Middle East and North Africa Region: The Role of Education and Social Norms in Amman

AlmaLaurea Inter-University Consortium

<http://www2.almaalaura.it/universita/pubblicazioni/wp/pdf/wp31.pdf>

Female Labor Force Participation in the Middle East and North Africa

Wharton Research Scholars Journal, University of Pennsylvania

http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1027&context=wharton_research_scholars

Women Entrepreneurs in the Middle East and North Africa: Characteristics, Contributions and Challenges

International Finance Corporation, Center of Arab Women for Training and Research

http://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/e3a45180488553abaff4ff6a6515bb18/MENA_Women_Entrepreneurs_ExecSum_English.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=e3a45180488553abaff4ff6a6515bb18

If policies and benefits are to produce tangible results for young female job-seekers, they must address what really matters to the young women themselves.

