

► Fostering women's entrepreneurship development and gender equality for a just transition in Egypt

December 2024

► Introduction

A just transition to environmentally sustainable economies and societies means greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind (ILO, 2023). Gender equality and inclusion are a core principle for delivering a transition that is just.

Investing in climate actions and advancing gender equality in the green economy are essential steps to address systemic inequalities and foster innovation and resilience for a just transition.

The international community in Egypt can make a lasting impact by investing in gender-responsive policies and tools to empower women, enhance the resilience of women-led business, and promote a more inclusive and sustainable economy. Women entrepreneurs face unique economic, social, and environmental challenges in participating in a just transition. A gender-responsive just transition involves the design and implementation of inclusive policies and targeted measures to enhance the enabling environment for women entrepreneurs and address structural deficits that limit their access to support services and opportunities¹.

► Global context on gender-responsive just transition

There is a growing global commitment to a just transition that aligns environmental sustainability with social and economic development goals and promotes decent work and social justice. The ILO's [Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all](#) underline the importance of

gender-responsive approaches and support women entrepreneurs as key contributors to green economies. There is growing momentum around the gender dimensions of just transition, as evidenced by the [resolution and conclusions](#) of the 2023 International Labour Conference's general discussion on just transition. The Paris Agreement on climate change also recognizes the importance of a just transition in its preamble, and the COP27 [decision on the intermediate review of the implementation of the gender action plan](#) to focus on the linkages between gender-responsive climate action and just transition further highlights this issue.

► The opportunity for a gender responsive just transition in Egypt

Context in Egypt: Climate change and gender inequalities in the labour market

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has identified the Nile Delta as one of the three most vulnerable deltas in the world to sea-level rise.² Egypt's dependence on the Nile River for agriculture, which employs around 25 per cent of the workforce, makes climate change a critical issue.³ Women are among the first to be affected by these changes, with 57 per cent of women working in agriculture, including roles as entrepreneurs, workers, and contributing family members.⁴

Significant gender inequalities remain in the labour market. According to the 2023 Annual Estimates of Labour & Unemployment Rates by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), Egypt's labour force comprises 31.1 million people,

¹ Rapid Situational Analysis of the employment- environment- gender equality nexus | International Labour Organization

² IPCC — Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

³ unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-07/Egypt_Updated_NDC.pdf

⁴ Rapid Situational Analysis of the employment- environment- gender equality nexus | International Labour Organization

with 25.5 million men and only 5.5 million women. The proportion of women in the labour force has declined from 24.2 per cent in 2016 to just 17 per cent in 2022.⁵ Wage inequality also remains a critical issue, with women earning significantly less than men in sectors such as agriculture (60 per cent wage gap), construction (36 per cent), and waste management (37 per cent).⁶

Challenges and opportunities for women's entrepreneurship in Egypt

Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) are crucial for economic growth, job creation, and innovation in Egypt. However, they are particularly vulnerable to climate change and environmental challenges. Women-led MSMEs face greater challenges, including limited access to resources, financial services, and decision-making power due to structural inequities. They are also more at risk of economic marginalization and gender-based violence.⁷

Despite these challenges, women-led MSMEs make significant contributions by creating jobs, introducing diverse perspectives, and inspiring female entrepreneurship. In 2021, 17% of all business owners in Egypt, were females.⁸ Supporting these enterprises is essential for addressing systemic socio-economic issues and empowering women in the green economy. A just transition requires policies that strengthen the resilience of MSMEs, promote gender equality and remove barriers that limit women's full participation in the labour market.

Supporting women's entrepreneurship development (WED) as a part of a just transition can address systemic socio-economic challenges and empower women to become innovators in the green economy and agents of change in tackling climate change. Just transition policies must include measures to enhance the resilience of MSMEs, be gender-responsive and transformative by empowering women and promoting gender equality, while removing barriers to their full participation in the labour market.

As new market opportunities emerge in the green economy, women are less likely than men to be able to take advantage of them. It is therefore crucial to address the needs of women entrepreneurs. This includes improving women's access to resources and decision-making processes, enhancing skills development, especially in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and mainstreaming gender into aspects of national

development policies and strategies that support entrepreneurship and MSMEs. By addressing the intersecting challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and empowering them to be part of a just transition, Egypt can build a more inclusive and resilient society as it transitions to a greener economy.⁹

Leveraging national frameworks to promote women's role in climate change

A gender-responsive just transition is strategically aligned with Egypt's national policy priorities. Under **Egypt's COP27** presidency, progress has been made in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in climate and environmental action. This progress is reflected in national and regional climate change policies and programmes aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Egypt, Africa, and the Arab States¹⁰. Promoting environmentally sustainable economies in an **inclusive and gender-responsive** manner is a key component of these efforts.

Several national policy documents adopt a **gender-responsive** planning approach, as defined by the Egyptian Ministry of Planning and Economic Development. This comprehensive approach integrates the social dimension into development plans, and ensures that programmes, projects, and activities developed by all government agencies under sustainable development plans promote equality and equal opportunities among different social groups and address priority issues for women, children, and people with disabilities.

For example, Egypt's Vision 2030 prioritizes inclusive growth and the creation of decent jobs, recognizing the importance of women's economic and social empowerment. The National Climate Change Strategy includes gender-specific directives to introduce flexible financing mechanisms that address women's specific needs related to climate change adaptation and mitigation, and to provide equal access to credit and training programmes¹¹.

The National Initiative for Smart Green Projects (NISGP), led by the Ministry of Planning, Economic Development, and International Cooperation, plays a pivotal role in Egypt's transition to a green economy and building a sustainable future.¹² The ILO Cairo Office has supported eight projects, including four women-led projects, to participate in COP28 and COP29. These projects contribute to the national initiative while engaging in inclusive discussions and enhancing their knowledge and skills.

⁵ CAPMAS

⁶ Rapid Situational Analysis of the employment- environment- gender equality nexus | International Labour Organization

⁷ Rapid Situational Analysis of the employment- environment- gender equality nexus | International Labour Organization

⁸ GEM 2020/21 Women's Entrepreneurship Report: Thriving through Crisis GEM Global Entrepreneurship Monitor

⁹ Rapid Situational Analysis of the employment- environment- gender equality nexus | International Labour Organization

¹⁰ Women Accelerating Climate Action-FINAL_0.pdf

¹¹ ILO Rapid Situational Analysis (RSA) of the employment-environment-gender equality nexus, 2024

¹² mped.gov.eg/Highlights?id=3&lang=en&Launching-the-smart-green-initiative

Policy entry points for a gender-responsive just transition

In July 2024, the ILO's efforts to promote a gender-responsive just transition, organized a workshop with 50 participants from 25 entities, including government agencies, employers and workers' organizations, women's entrepreneurship networks, academia and development agencies. The workshop aimed to validate the following policy recommendations, derived from a rapid situational analysis (RSA) on gender-responsive just transition:

- Include just transition considerations in Egypt's next Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), with attention to gender equality and women's entrepreneurship, to foster coherence between climate, employment, and enterprise policies, and to leverage climate action as a vehicle for job creation and gender equality.
- Integrate just transition priorities into the national employment strategy to align employment promotion with other sustainable development goals, with a focus on supporting women entrepreneurs and MSMEs in leveraging opportunities in a green economy and adapting to climate change impacts.
- Strengthen access to finance through establishing robust partnerships with financial institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community-based organizations in Egypt, to provide financial education/ financial literacy programmes and workshops for women entrepreneurs in green sectors.
- Invest in information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and internet access, particularly in rural areas, to improve the connectivity of women-led MSMEs, facilitate access to markets and information, and overall enhance their business performance while capitalizing on digital transformation.
- Improve social dialogue mechanisms by actively involving MSMEs and workers in policy development, with a particular focus on women, who are currently under-represented in industrial management.
- Conduct market system assessments to identify high-potential value chains for generating economic opportunities and promoting gender equality in strategic sectors.
- Encourage women to pursue education and careers in STEM fields by raising awareness of the various job and business opportunities, especially in green sectors, and the requirements to achieve them. This will help women, both as entrepreneurs and workers, to gain a stronger position in emerging green sectors and contribute to the advancement of technical fields needed for a just transition.

► The ILO's approach

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is uniquely structured to represent governments, employers, and workers equally in shaping global labour standards and policies. Its core vision is to promote decent work for all, aligned with SDG Goal 8 on sustainable and inclusive economic growth. A key focus of the ILO is WED, with a tripartite strategy adopted in 2008. This approach addresses the challenges faced by women in business through an enabling environment, capacity building and innovative tools to support sustainable enterprises. The ILO Guidelines for a Just Transition towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All, adopted in 2015, provide a policy framework and operational tool to address environmental change while advancing social justice and the creation of decent work that were endorsed by 187 ILO Member States.

The Enterprise Department drives efforts on WED through extensive research, training and enterprise development projects, fostering gender equality and sustainable growth. Between 2018 and 2022, more than 70 ILO projects around the world supported WED by improving access to finance, skills, and markets. WED-focused support is complemented by research, policy advice and capacity development across a range of policy areas for a just transition, ranging from gender equality, employment promotion, skills development, social protection and social dialogue, and delivered through a collaboration across departments and offices. The recently launched *Gender, equality and inclusion for a just transition in climate action: a policy guide* provides the basis for the ILO's approach to supporting governments, social partners and other stakeholders in advancing a gender-responsive just transition. It outlines entry points in policies, programmes and practical solutions that address the structural barriers and promote an enabling environment for women to thrive in the economy and in climate action.

RSA and gender-sensitive value chain assessments, the ILO addresses systemic inequalities. The ILO has supported national partners in implementing programmes to promote women's entrepreneurship in more than 30 countries in Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Central Asia, and Latin America. In addition, the ILO has also developed several tools, such as the Greening Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) tool, that support skills development for a green transition.

By integrating just transition priorities into national policies, the ILO ensures that women entrepreneurs play a vital role in fostering innovation, inclusive economic growth, and environmental sustainability.

► ILO contributions to gender-responsive just transition in Egypt

► 212

Number of women entrepreneurs within green sectors supported by the ILO.

► 151

Number of government and social partners' staff trained on gender-responsive just transition.

► 50

Number of studies produced by the ILO worldwide to promote the green economy. Access the studies [here](#).

► ILO Rapid Situational Analysis of the employment-environment-gender equality nexus

The RSA was produced under the ILO project Advancing the Decent Work Agenda in North Africa (ADWA'). The study examines the current socio-economic and environmental realities in Egypt, assesses the existing policy framework's support for a just transition, and identifies opportunities to strengthen it, particularly for women entrepreneurs.

The overall objective of the study is to provide the Egyptian government and its national partners with key insights on how to adapt and leverage the national policy framework to achieve a just transition.

Using a participatory approach, the RSA incorporated the views and recommendations of 26 women from various government and development agencies in Egypt.

Representatives from the Ministry of Labour, the Egypt Entrepreneurship and Innovation Centre at the Ministry of Planning, the Women Skills Development Department at the National Council for Women and other organizations contributed to the study, ensuring reflective findings and actionable recommendations.



ILO RSA QR code,
scan to access.

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