

LET'S TALK

INCLUSION: North African Employers Have Taken Action!



Dr. Manal El Abboubi
Professor, University Mohamed V,
Rabat
Research Affiliate, ECONOMIA-HEM
Research Center
Morocco

Moderator



Mr. Kamel Sellaoui,
CEO, APBS Avicenne Business School
Tunisia

Speaker



Fatima Zahrae Chayat
Regional Human Resources
Organizational Development Advisor
SOS Children's Villages International
Morocco

Speaker



Mr. Hakim Soufi
CEO, Macir Vie
Algeria

Speaker



Yes, now is the time to talk inclusion! There has been much discussion about inclusion in the workplace and how it can unlock the potential of the workforce, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which continues to face protracted conflict and socioeconomic challenges. How can workplace inclusion boost organizational growth and socioeconomic development while also improving women's well-being? What steps can MENA employers take to foster more inclusive workplaces? What are the best practices for inclusive employers, as well as the challenges they may face?

To tackle these questions, the SAWI's team at the Center for Inclusive Business and Leadership (CIBL) for Women hosted a webinar, on July 27, titled '**Let's Talk Inclusion - North-African Employers have taken Action!**' This webinar is part of the outreach and partnership that SAWI is establishing with employers across the region. [CIBL for Women](#) is partnering with employers, government agencies, and civil society organizations to develop and implement inclusive policies and practices. Through [SAWI](#), CIBL for Women is advancing a roadmap for inclusive workplaces with country partners from eight countries (Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia) and four sectors (banking, healthcare, higher education, and STEM), on inclusive policies and practices for better recruitment, retention, and promotion of women.

The webinar, which focused on the experience of North African employers who are advancing inclusion in their organizations. The webinar was organized in collaboration with three of SAWI's country partners: [Apotheox](#) in Algeria, [Democracy for All](#) in Tunisia, and [Economia HEM](#) in Morocco.

Ms. Rima Esho, Deputy Director of SAWI Project, began the webinar by pointing out how COVID19 has disproportionately impacted women, who bear the majority of the burden of unpaid care work and how this fact should push us to change HR policies and practices; now is really the time! Ms. Nada Soudi, Associate Professor at ISCAE Casablanca and Research Affiliate at Economia HEM research center, then presented findings from a documentary study on recruitment, retention, and promotion (RRP) practices in Morocco,

Our Country Partners





Lessons learned from the documentary study on RRP practices in Morocco in favor of inclusion

The apparent neutrality of rules and laws hides biases and generates discrimination.

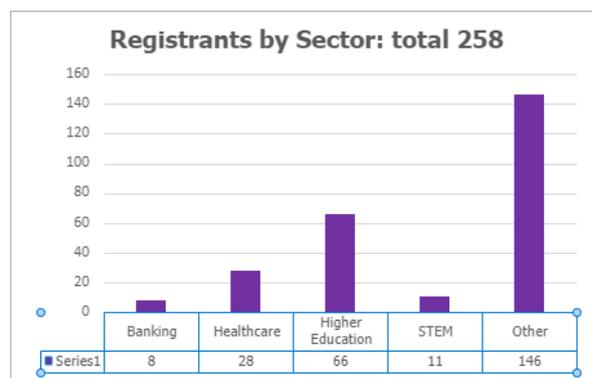
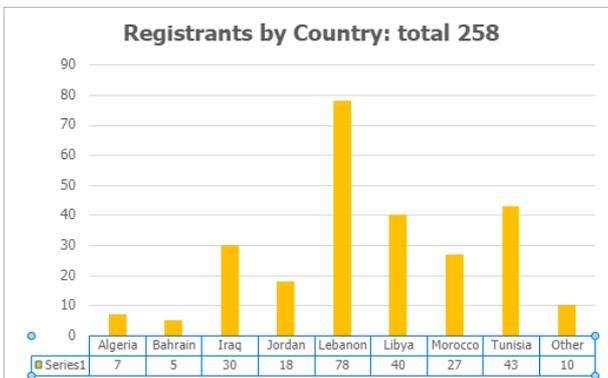
Equal opportunity mechanisms are better developed at the level of retention policies and particularly within the STEM sector.

The modest presence of equal treatment mechanism that aim to question practices through the prism of gender.

The purpose of the study carried out with 40 organizations in the 4 sectors including STEM, banking, higher education, and healthcare is to explore trends in inclusive practices of Moroccan companies at the level of recruitment, retention, and promotion.

- The main implications of this study show that in terms of equal rights mechanisms, women and men are on the same footing of equality with respect to laws and regulations. However, the apparent neutrality of the rules and laws conceals biases and generates discrimination.
- Overall, equal opportunity mechanisms are better developed at the level of retention policies and particularly within the STEM sector.
- From the findings, it appears that the higher education sector is lagging, which may be the corollary of the low penetration of women in this sector.
- Some organizations are making headway with new practices on equal treatment of men and women. These practices are exclusively concentrated in the banking sector including the bonus system, allowing women on maternity leave eligible for promotion, and also policies to allow an extension of leave for breastfeeding women with the maintenance of half the salary.
- Almost all the organizations surveyed in this study did not have sufficient HR policies for equality and women's inclusion.

The North African [panelists](#) then took the floor to share their experiences and expertise, as well as to exchange best practices with participants from eight countries (Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia) and various sectors (banking, healthcare, higher education, STEM, NGOs, consulting, communication, and others...).



HIWAR IN ACTION

Our Country Partners





El Abboubi How was the topic of inclusion initiated and welcomed in your organization?

Sellaoui Women’s inclusion and leadership are built into the school's ecosystem. Having a female founder since the early 1990s has instilled inclusion values at the heart of the school. The path to inclusion has been facilitated by the fact that the education sector itself provides a privileged position for female workers, as well as the Tunisian government's commitment to a modernist approach to women.

El Abboubi You work with an NGO committed to ensuring the rights of children, in compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, how did the subject of inclusion emerge in such a delicate environment?

Chayat We work with recruiters to integrate the concept of inclusion, but we also have the mission of training and educating young girls and boys who will be the generation of tomorrow and will be actors in the gender inclusion movement. We implemented an equality policy in 2014 to integrate gender equity values into the daily lives of both the employees and the children of our NGO.

El Abboubi You are CEO of a family business founded by men, a business in the health insurance industry, which is also dominated by men, yet you are a fierce advocate for gender equality. What is the impulse behind this advocacy?

Soufi Women have always played an important role in decisions made by men in North African families in the Maghreb. Women have always been actively involved in all revolutionary processes; they are at the heart of all forms of fight against discrimination and, in particular, the promotion of inclusive and sustainable economic growth. In developing countries, salaried women's work is the exception rather than the norm, and we wanted to change that.

El Abboubi Despite all of the compelling arguments for equality, we frequently see discrimination against women at work. Why do you think that is?

Soufi According to our region's traditions and culture, it is believed that a woman cannot consistently provide high-quality work because she must care for her children. In my opinion, managing their professional and personal lives actually enables women to multitask and be more productive than men. Investing in women has a high Return on Investment (ROI).

El Abboubi Collaborative work is one of the SAWI’s project objectives, which is to bring employers together to discuss and share expertise; we are curious to know how have you interacted with other sectors to work collaboratively on the subject of inclusion?

Sellaoui As a Business School, natural continuity meant forging relationships with the entrepreneurial ecosystem, which has made a significant contribution to female inclusion. We launched initiatives to spread the culture of female entrepreneurship within the APBS, [#AhnaEnsa](#) [#WeWomen](#). These relationships had a two-way effect because we encouraged our teachers and students to participate in entrepreneurship competitions, entrepreneurship training and coaching courses, and we also created a dynamic that allowed for the sharing and feedback of these experiences. We discovered that the participation of women and having mixed teams allow for greater performance, more innovation, and different leadership styles; this type of interaction unquestionably improves performance. We have also embraced digital innovation to promote inclusion, and we have established an online recruitment and selection platform where we have eliminated the bias of inclusion in the recruitment process. And when we removed the bias through this platform, we found more women competing for executive positions.





Soufi The most significant barriers to women's organizational advancement are stereotypes and prejudices about women's roles and capacities, a lack of role models of women with high responsibilities and visible success, a lack of professional experience in higher management, family responsibilities, and a lack of sponsorship. We have implemented company policies to promote women's advancement in the workplace. Coaching, networking, and fair organizational policies are the three key pillars to career advancement. Women's inclusion is now politically correct and part of the hype surrounding ethical business. Men and women complement each other, allowing for greater creativity. Professional equality allows for legislative advancements as well as sociological evolution.

El Abboubi Can you share with us the operationalizing steps of inclusion in your organizations?

Chayat Let me begin by saying that challenging the status quo and being an inclusive employer takes a lot of courage, but the results are well worth it.

At SOS village, we began with an 1) audit of our systems to evaluate all activities, then 2) formed a multidisciplinary team to discuss the audit results, and finally 3) developed an action plan with SMART objectives (rapidly executed and long lasting)

El Abboubi We must note that the three employers who joined us today agreed on one critical point: change begins with 1) writing clear inclusive HR policies then 2) communicating them to the team in order to begin 3) implementing HR practices that promote equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Q&A

In the current economic and health crises, coupled with political upheaval, how can we convince employers to support such initiatives?

Soufi Gender is no longer an issue with post-covid digitalization. Both men and women want to live for their families, not for work, and they want their work to benefit their families. As a result, the issue of digitalization will eliminate some barriers women face. The key is to eliminate all aspects of gender and focus on individual capabilities and job satisfaction. The key is to act as a regulator, providing incentives rather than forcing inclusion.

Sellaoui I think everyone agrees that inclusion leads to improved performance. We move from a subject of imposing inclusion to one that is more rational, economic, and pragmatic. We will move toward greater inclusion and participation of women at the top of the pyramid because the company benefits. Inclusive businesses are more agile, make better decisions, and perform better.

How can we inspire other employers to start the journey of inclusion?

Chayat The inclusion debate must be normalized and we must focus on business; men and women must have equal and fair access. However, I believe that in our societies, or at least in Morocco, we have not yet reached the level of awareness to do so automatically. We require laws to guide us. For example, In the same industry, you can find an employer who is very inclusive and takes initiative, while another employer does nothing for women. To reach that level of maturity, we still require a push from the employer, organization, and even the society.

➔ To encourage other employers to join the journey of inclusion, we can share positive results we are achieving for both organizational growth and employee fulfillment.

Our Country Partners





What are the biggest mistakes that an HR manager can make when trying to promoted women's equity in the North African Workplace?

Chayat

- 1- Not taking into account the country's culture
- 2- Doing it solely to fill in the indicators so that we can claim to be inclusive employers.
- 3- Not including everyone in the action plan; if everyone is not included in the inclusion process, they will not be on board with the changes.
- 4- Not having the leadership commitment, which will make success in this inclusion adventure difficult.

Soufi There is no shortage of historical evidence to support women's abilities. Women, in fact, do not need to prove themselves; if you want to discuss equal opportunities between men and women, focus on competences and capacities. The legislator's role is to hasten the transition to female executives and female entrepreneurship. If you want to enlighten a society, you must undoubtedly include women in the economic development process.

What tools should be put in place to maximize the return on investment when it comes to inclusion?

Chayat The journey to inclusion is worthwhile; you will gain personal and professional fulfillment as a result. In my opinion, education is the key to success, but in order to raise a generation that promotes equality, we must first pass through laws and a will that extends beyond the borders of the region.

Key words: Conviction and education

Sellaoui I think that women's inclusion will be boosted by entrepreneurship and digitalization will allow for greater access equity. We will also gain access to a world of opportunities as a result of our exchange and networking within the SAWI project.

Key words: entrepreneurship and digitalization

Soufi

Key words: autonomy of women

El Abboubi, concluded the webinar by stating that we no longer need to find justifications for women's inclusion; instead, we must take action! This is why, as part of the Sawi project, we have all agreed to join the movement, collaborate and take action!