



Inclusive HR Strategies Amidst MENA's Unresolved Crises

SAWI "HIWAR" - Webinar



Employers across the MENA region can navigate crises successfully and emerge stronger while supporting inclusion. Adopting a crisis-informed perspective in recruitment, retention, and promotion (RRP) policies enables employers to protect their businesses. This approach is essential to ensuring continuity and maintaining productivity amidst the overlapping unresolved crises in the MENA.

To dive into this approach, SAWI (Support and Accelerate Women's Inclusion) held a 90-minutes webinar, on **Inclusive HR Strategies amidst MENA's Unresolved Crises**, on October 4th, 2023, featuring globally renowned experts from Lebanon, Jordan, and Spain.



- Yasmeen Makarem Ph.D. – Co-Principal Investigator, Assistant Professor of Human Resource Development, S. Olayan School of Business, American University of Beirut
- Carmen Geha Ph.D. – Co-Principal Investigator, Senior Researcher in Migration and Gender, Pompeu Fabra University; Founder and Managing Director, Soltara Consulting
- Reem Aslan – Gender Technical Specialist, Decent work for Women Programmes, Regional Office for Arab States, International Labour Organization (ILO)-Amman, Jordan

The experts discussed the significance of a crisis-informed perspective on RRP as an effective HR strategy to alleviate the impact of unresolved crises on employees and women specifically. They also shared their insights on the unique challenges that women face in their work amidst unresolved crises in the MENA region, and how these can be mitigated through crisis-informed RRP policies.

"The more flexible and adaptable our HR systems become, the more agile our workforce will be, enabling us to better withstand crises. This underscores the crucial role of HR practitioners in the context of crises!" **Yasmeen Makarem**

"Women are not only hit by the loss of jobs but also by expenditure cuts that contract public service provision, in particular care services. ILO therefore introduced some programs in some countries to ensure women voices,

as workers and employers, were heard. This helped include highly feminized sectors in some governmental programs." Reem Aslan

"The intersectional nature of disasters and employment affects women in the region, leading to compounded challenges, especially in the absence of national strategies and good governance." Carmen Geha

The webinar, attended by 100+ participants across eight countries (Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia) and four sectors (banking, healthcare, higher education, and STEM) covered many important points. Here are the main takeaways from the questions that were posed to the experts:

1. Why is it important to have crisis informed RRP policies as part of our HR strategy?

With crises' inevitable nature and their significant impact on employees, organizations and economies, there is an urgent need for action. "Some remain unresolved and might become the new norm, hence necessitating the adoption of dynamic and agile HR systems," emphasized Dr. Makarem. In this context, the role of HR managers has never been more crucial. Establishing, implementing and regularly updating crisis-informed policies has become imperative for both employees and employers. On one hand, a crisis-informed perspective helps employers navigate a crisis successfully, ensuring operational and financial continuity, protecting the workforce from unnecessary layoffs and pay cuts, reducing turnover, restoring normalcy, maintaining productivity, and boosting morale and engagement. On the other hand, such perspective is vital for employees' RRP, offering psychological and mental support, flexibility in work arrangement, fair and equitable treatment, and transparent communication.

2. What could be examples of such RRP policies?

Amidst crises, especially during COVID-19 pandemic, organizations have primarily focused on retention when reshaping and implementing crisis-informed policies and practices. Regarding recruitment, the crisis-informed policies have included measures such as gender diversity and equity policies, pre-recruitment trainings, reshaping job descriptions to suit the crises conditions, and digital transformations in the recruitment process. In terms of retention, the crisis-informed policies have targeted flexibility and family-friendly arrangements, employee support, as well as measures against discrimination and harassment. However, there have been limited crisis-informed policies related to promotion, with a very few skill-development and technological trainings offered in some countries.

3. How would intersectional biases worsen the challenges imposed by crises?

"Women who are also migrants tend to suffer from de-skilling as they leave their homelands and are forced to have new informal and unstable forms of work," stated Dr. Carmen Geha. Women are among the vulnerable populations disproportionately affected by the crises with their rights often de-prioritized. Among women themselves, certain groups bear additional burdens. Intersecting identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, disability, age, and socioeconomic background, overlap with crises, exacerbating challenges, discriminations, and disadvantages. Therefore, employers and HR managers are urged to recognize the unique challenges faced by marginalized or underrepresented groups due to the intersection of identities and crises.

4. What proactive role can we play as decision-makers, HR professionals and humanitarian activists in creating a more inclusive work environment for all?

The inclusion of women in the workplace is no longer an option; it has become integral to the overall growth of businesses and economies. Uniting the efforts of workers, employers, and governments is necessary to ensure the implementation of inclusive conventions and policies. Creating inclusive environments requires a proactive approach. The first step is understanding the specific crises faced by the region, countries, and organizations, along with their unique impact on different groups. The second step involves active participation in influencing the RRP policies implemented by organizations across different sectors to align with the needs of the employees and the organizations during times of crises.

5. Why is it important to have women on the decision-making table?

“Bringing women to the decision-making table, regardless of the nature of the decision, is key to ensure that any decision, practice or policy does not have a negative effect or privilege some groups over others,” emphasized Dr. Fida Afiouni, Co-Principal Investigator, Associate Provost, and Assistant Professor of HRM at S. Olayan School of Business at the American University of Beirut. Ms. Aslan further affirmed this point this with ILO studies, demonstrating that the active participation of at least 30 percent of women in decision-making processes or committees has a significant impact. Their involvement not only improves women’s employment opportunities but also fosters a more inclusive work environment and decent work conditions. Therefore, in times of crises, supporting the inclusion of women in the workforce begins with amplifying women’s voices in decision-making and action planning.

Whether you are an HR manager, decision maker, a human rights defender or in a different role (teacher, lawyer, student), we rely on you to join our efforts! TOGETHER WE SAWI! You can re-watch the webinar here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ok0GRzQWQew&t=2652s>

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