

## ECA Dialogue Series

### **FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN NORTH AFRICA: THE ROLE OF FINANCE AND DIGITAL SKILLS**

Tuesday 7 March, from 14:00 to 16:00 pm CET / GMT+1

#### **Presentation note**

##### **Context**

The lack of female economic participation has been one of the longstanding challenges in North Africa. With the ongoing crises, female unemployment rate has been gradually increasing in all North African countries since 2019 and is above 20% in Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya. It is no doubt that women's paid labor and businesses were hit the hardest by the current shocks as most women hold informal employment or run small and medium size enterprises that are highly vulnerable to shocks. At the same time, women represent the huge human capital needed for sustainable economic development of nations. Therefore, supporting women as entrepreneurs will help to alleviate economic challenges of region related to job creation and inequalities.

In North Africa, access to capital and financial support is a key challenge that female entrepreneurs are facing. At 18%, the gender gap for access to finance is the largest in the world and at least partly driven by women entrepreneurs' selecting themselves out of the credit market. Most women rely on savings as their primary and often only source of capital. Success of female entrepreneurs thus entail (i) changing cultural beliefs and norms about gender roles and (ii) support from institutions with skills trainings and special SME loan fund for women.

In North Africa, digitalization has been creating opportunities for female entrepreneurship and female access to financial markets, by reducing the collateral requirements and replacing them with reliance on big data and automation. When combined with digital skills, women's typically strong social and communication skills could prove to be a strength for recognizing and seizing new business opportunities and developing start-ups. To make the most of digitalization, women need not only to possess digital skills, but also apply them to business rather than social issues and overcome barriers in accessing digital technology. Digital skills will also help women entrepreneurs to cross-over to male-dominated and more profitable sectors.

It is against this background that ECA is organizing in partnership with the Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Morocco (AFEM) the webinar "Female entrepreneurship in North Africa: the role of finance and digital skills," on the occasion of the International Women's Day (IWD) and in preparation for the 55th Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development of the Economic Commission for Africa (COM2023) taking place in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) on 15-21 March 2023 under the theme "Fostering recovery and transformation in Africa to reduce inequalities and vulnerabilities."

## Objectives

In addition to discussing the experience of Morocco in this field, the webinar will be an opportunity to shed light on:

- Financing challenges female entrepreneurs are faced with in North Africa and the alternatives successful female owned enterprises have resorted to so far.
- How governments and stakeholders can help change cultural beliefs and norms that hinder female entrepreneurship
- What skills and funding types are best suited to foster the development of female entrepreneurship in North-Africa
- How digitization is creating opportunities for female entrepreneurship and female access to financial markets

**Event format:** [https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_2CMXAy4uRiebbypVVzCgTg](https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_2CMXAy4uRiebbypVVzCgTg)

**Date and time:** Tuesday 7 March at 14:00 pm Rabat time GMT+1)

**Languages:** Discussions will be simultaneously translated into English, French and Arabic

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