

## Women of the Middle East and Tourism in 60 minutes

Thursday 9 September – 13:00-14:00 (Madrid Time)

### Panelists:

- Ms. Basmah Al-Mayman, Regional Director for the Middle East in UNWTO.
- Ms. Ghada Jiha, Gender Expert in the Middle East and the UNWTO Expert.
- Dr. Nashwa Talaat, Advisor to The Minister of Tourism and Antiquities for Sustainable Tourism Affairs in the Arab Republic of Egypt.
- Ms. Ansam Malkawi, Advisor to the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.
- Ms. Abir Abu Sulayman, Tour guide in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

**The Regional Director** started the webinar with a welcoming note to the panelists and participants from the Ministries, embassies, private sector, international and regional organizations and especially H.E Mr. Azzam Al-Qain, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia in Madrid who also honored the webinar with his attendance.

The introductory remarks of the Regional Director, Ms. Basmah Al-Mayman highlighted the following:

- The World Tourism Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations with a mandate to promote tourism as a driver of economic growth, inclusive development, and environmental sustainability.
- Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5 or Global Goal 5) concerns achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls and is the fifth of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations in 2015. It refers to the state of equal ease of access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation and decision-making; and the state of valuing different behaviors, aspirations and needs equally, regardless of gender.

- Working towards gender equality and promoting opportunities for women's empowerment in the sector is key to that mandate and UNWTO is pleased to see so many participants connected to this webinar.
- The webinar follows the research and work for the UNWTO Regional Report on Women in Tourism which was published in 2020 in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism of Saudi Arabia to mark the Saudi 2020 G20 presidency.
- The Regional Report is a complementary report to the second edition of the Global Report on Women in Tourism which UNWTO published in 2019 in collaboration with UN Women, GIZ, the World Bank and Amadeus.
- The Middle East report examines the specific opportunities and challenges that exist for women in the region across five thematic areas which are considered key for women's empowerment:
  - Employment
  - Entrepreneurship
  - Education and Training
  - Leadership, decision and policymaking
  - Community
- The Report highlights that the proportion of women engaged with the tourism sector is low, at 8% of the workforce, compared to 54% at a global level, and finds that women's employment is constrained by the sector's:
  - poor image
  - working conditions
  - relatively low pay
  - perceived lack of career prospects
  - laws that restrict women's mobility
  - and the disproportionately high burden of domestic un-paid care work, with women doing 4 -6 times more than men, higher than any other world region.
- **The Regional Director mentioned** that now the current percentage is above the 8% and there is hope that it will improve, especially that some progress towards gender equality in the sector has been observed, particularly in the public sector where concrete policy actions have begun to bear fruit and the representation of women in leadership roles has increased towards similar levels seen globally, for example in 2019, 21% of the region's tourism Ministers were women compared to 23% around the world.
- In addition, rates of women in tertiary education in the region are relatively high with UNESCO data showing that between 47% – 71% of new students are women at a national level across the different member states. However, as the report notes, these successes in education have not translated to overall increases in women's participation in the tourism sector.

- Considering the challenges faced by women in the Middle East, UNWTO is committed to working with its Member States to implement of the Report's recommendations and facilitate an increase in women's participation in tourism.
- In particular, UNWTO is currently preparing a pilot program that aims to boost opportunities for women's empowerment during the sector's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in partnership with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and UN Women.
- Under the programme, one National Tourism Administration, 10 businesses and 4 NGO's will work hand in hand with UNWTO to implement an individual Action Plan for gender equality over the coming year.
- These individual Action Plans will be rooted in the recommendations of the report and provide direct training for women affected by the pandemic, increase the visibility of tourism as an attractive career choice for women and implement gender-sensitive governance systems in the sector.
- In the Middle East, the UNWTO is delighted to be piloting the programme with the Kingdom of Jordan and the future plan is to expand to other countries in the region.
- Special thanks was given to Ms. Marina Diotallevi the head of Ethics, Culture & Social Responsibility Department in UNWTO and her team for their support and continuous coordination to publish the report on Women in Tourism in the Middle East and in organizing this webinar. Unfortunately, she was not able to attend due to other work commitments.

During the webinar, the UNWTO team shared some useful links in the chat section related to the UNWTO Report on women in Tourism.

[Regional Report on Women in Tourism in the Middle East EN](#)

[Regional Report on Women in Tourism in the Middle East AR](#)

[UNWTO Action Plan on Women in Tourism EN](#)

[UNWTO Action Plan on Women in Tourism AR](#)

[Global Report on Women in Tourism II EN](#)

### **Introduction and moderation by Ms. Ghada Jiha, Lead Expert for the Regional Report on Women in Tourism in the Middle East.**

- After welcoming the panelists and participants, she gave a brief about why tourism matters for gender equality and women's empowerment, not only in the Middle East, but globally. Tourism has long been viewed as an engine of women's economic empowerment more than other sectors in the economy. Tourism can provide more

opportunities for women's participation in the labour force, in entrepreneurship and in women's leadership. As such, the tourism sector can make important contributions to achievement of SDG5 on gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as to the gender related targets and other sustainable pool areas.

- The webinar main focus is to highlight some of the key factors that have or can contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment in tourism in the Middle East. It also focuses at some of the key challenges to gender equality and women's empowerment.
- The panelists will be sharing some of the concrete measures that governments and other partners, public or private, have or can put in place to drive women's employment on entrepreneurship and leadership.

## **1. Key factors contributing to gender equality and women's empowerment in the tourism sector in the Middle East**

**Dr. Nahswa Talaat** highlighted the following :

- Actually, there are some factors that support gender equality in the Egyptian tourism sector. The Egyptian Government pays an exceptional attention to women empowerment in all fields. In 2017, the government launched the national strategy for Women Empowerment 2030. The vision of this strategy states that by 2030 the Egyptian women will become a major player in achieving sustainable development in the country. That guarantees all the rights included in the Constitution without any discrimination. The 1st pillar of this strategy is the political empowerment and leadership promotion, economic empowerment, social empowerment and protection. For the first time in Egypt 25% of the Ministers in the government were women. Eight ministers and vice-ministers.
- -Accordingly, there are number of laws that guarantee women rights at work, women's family life and maternity that do not affect her right to keep their job. Females have an equal right to obtain university and postgraduate education and an equal right to get loans that enable them to start tourism business without any discrimination.
- -in 2018, the Ministry of Tourism launched a programme called *Structural Reform Programme* for the development of tourismsector, a national project that includes women's economic empowerment by increasing female workforce in tourism sector. Women work in tourism has become more acceptable by society, not to the extent that we wish for, but it reached a good level of acceptance.

**Ms. Ansam Malkawi** added that gender equality and women's empowerment are one of the most issues we need to deal with and find how to develop them.

- Globally, as we are all aware, the majority of tourism workers 54% are females. However, the proportion of women engaged in tourism in the Middle East is significantly lower compared to the world.

- In Jordan, only 9% of the employees in tourism are women. This might be explained by social and cultural norms, gender stereotypes and recognised and unpaid care and domestic work, limited access to resources and the control over them.
- As we are also aware that tourism sector offers a diverse range of direct and indirect jobs for people seeking employment. Tourism is an important economic sector, and it contributes with 13% of the country GDP.
- During the peak season in Jordan, tourism was experiencing a large amount of growth, meaning more jobs opening and an expansion of opportunities for women and youth to join the tourism workforce.
- There is hope that this trend will continue as the sector reopens and recovers in the coming year. Statistics – however they are not sufficient or complete – shows that women affected by COVID-19 are more than men.
- Women in Jordan enjoy high educational level. Jordan has one of the highest literacies left rate for women and enjoy high secondary and higher education attainment. This strong access to education can support their access to employment, especially in the tourism sector. Now, a Project for women Business incubators is being prepared in the Jordanian governorates.
- She also refereed to the recent Project with UNWTO, UN women and GIZ. Focusing on women empowerment all over the countru.

**Ms. Abir Abu Sulayman** from her side mentioned the following:

- The valuable efforts done by the government and the UNWTO have contributed to the positive development of the situation of women.
- According to the UNWTO Regional Report on Women in tourism in the Middle East, there are five focus areas that contribute to gender equality and women empowerment, which are: employment, entrepreneurship, leadership, education, communities. The Government of Saudi Arabia is really focusing on these five areas and is keen to provide decent work for women. The number of women in tourism business have increased really in big numbers since 2019.
- In Saudi Arabia, the numbers are not modest comparing to a country that just started in 2019 to really open to tourism. Before that, tourism was mainly for religious purposes, but not tourism as we see it now. With this new approach, the government is ensuring that women are represented and contributing to the growth of the country.
- In 2018, women were able to have licence as a tourist guide. The Saudi Tour Guides Association is the biggest partner in this. Following this, 189 ladies have been accredited and licenced to be tour guides in the different regions of the Kingdom not only the big cities.

- It has trained women to conduct Training of Trainers courses (she also became one). The Saudi Tour Guide Association in partnership with the University of Princess Noura Bint Abdul Rahman University, organized courses to support tour guides to acquire essential language skills for the job.
- The Association is also looking to create links with regional and international network for women to enable tour guides to share their experiences and knowledge. The Association values women greater involvement in decision making: three ladies were elected for the board out of 10 to ensure that decisions are reflecting the priorities and issues for Saudi women tour guides.
- In 2018, The Saudi women were able to organize tours across the Kingdom, not only being tour guides.
- According to the Saudi human capital development programme, in 2021 H1, there were 126k tourism trainees, 46% of them were females.

## **2. Key challenges to gender equality and women's empowerment in the tourism sector in the Middle East**

**Ms. Ansam Malkawi** pointed out that:

- The first challenge is that the labor force in tourism is amongst the lowest in the region. Women who are employed in tourism and hospitality sector tend to be employed in lower paying and even perform a large amount of informal or unpaid work in family tourism business.
- Women in tourism sector make up a majority of informal and casual roles. They are the first to lose their job because of the pandemic.
- Women in tourism are seldom employed in decision making positioned despite of high levels of experience and education attainment including at the university levels.
- This means that there are few women in decision- making positions in the sector. We are all aware of the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic imposed on the tourism sector as a whole; especially restrictions on mobility that have made tourism almost impossible for the better part of the last three years. Lots of businesses working in tourism laid off their employees.
- Evidence from around the world has proven that women's economic and productive lives were significantly affected more than men.
- Women had shown a bigger responsibility in the household compared to men, this can be more challenging for women to enter the workforce post COVID-19.
- The same challenges that can hinder women workforce participation can be applied to tourism and hospitality sector, this can include the need of safe, affordable, and

accessible transportation infrastructure for women to seek employment outside the household, as well as the need for affordable childcare service for women working outside home.

- In Jordan, this can also include legal or social cultural barriers that may prohibit women from seeking employment in specific sectors like the civil sectors.
- To summarize, challenges are a global and a regional issue; but mainly in Jordan, the challenge is in the number of women employed in tourism: for the last ten years Jordan had five women Ministers of Tourism. However, in the private sector, most of the women are working in a family business in tourism without paid salary and it can't be considered as specific or organised business.

**Dr. Nashwa" Talaat** spoke about the challenges in Egypt mentioning that:

- The main challenge is a community awareness. Despite the level of Community awareness, many men still refuse to let their wives or daughters work in tourism sector, mainly because of inflexible work hours, dealing with people from different cultures and also because most of the Egyptian tourist destinations are located in distant governorates, which requires workers to move and live there. It is difficult for females to adapt to this situation, especially those who are married or raising children.
- It is also worth to mention that, although there are successful models in the private sector that seek to empower women in the field of tourism, (like for example Marriott who has the first Lady General Manager) many hotels and tourism companies still don't prefer to hire women because of their family responsibilities and some rights during their childcare.
- There are no entrepreneurial tendencies and desire to work in tourism sector among female students in faculties of tourism and hotels because of the lack of confidence or maybe for social reasons.
- Also, the lack of capital and the ability to take risks may prevent many women from initiating their own business.

**Ms. Abir Abu Sulayman** spoke about the barriers that women are facing in the tourism sector as follows:

- Being a mother is certainly the biggest challenge for women. The case is different in Saudi Arabia because being a tour guide was a male domain, although it was not stated by law. It was not common to see a lady Tour guide in KSA. Ms. Abir herself started at the beginning in helping in the registration of the historical city of Jeddah as a UNESCO site.
- Saudi Arabia has addressed gender equality and women's empowerment. through a comprehensive policy approach to help diminishing and decreasing. The Country

had barriers to women's employment, including family work conciliation and transportation issues. Before 2018, the country had a problem in the transportation which doesn't exist anymore.

- The number of women employed in Saudi Arabia was modest compared to men. This number has increased between 2016 to 2019 by 5%. The 2030 vision of the Kingdom aims to increase women employment to 30% and we are on that track.
- It is time to implement greater and smarter policies backed by initiatives that addresses women limitation to entering and succeeding in the workforce. Affordable childcare services are needed everywhere, and the initiatives for the women owning SMEs need to be increased. These factors will considerably help to increase women empowerment and to decrease women gender equality.

### **3. Concrete measures that have been taken or are needed, whether they are policies, programme, actions or partnerships to respond to gender inequality:**

In this regard, **Ms. Abir Sulayman** replied:

- The Saudi 2030 vision focuses on having other resources than the oil. The most important factor in this regard is tourism. So when we say that the vision depends on tourism, men and women have to work together in order to achieve this target.
- The Report entitled "*Women, Business and Law in 2020*" mentioned that Saudi Arabia was ranked first among economies that have made the most progress in the field of gender equality since 2017.
- According to the General Authority of statistics, the unemployment of Saudi women has decreased by 6% which is a very good indicator. In this regard the country must support the empowerment of women to start to run their own businesses. Laws must be established to prevent discrimination in jobs based on gender and to access financial services.
- In Saudi Arabia, it is prohibited to specify the gender while making a job announcement. A very good step towards gender equality.
- There are laws to protect female employees from dismissal. As other panelists mentioned, the COVID-19 had a strong impact, but there is no dismissal for female employees during pregnancy and maternity leave.
- Recently in KSA, Women can vote and run municipal elections.
- It is necessary to continue developing Training programmes for women in the industry and we must maybe redefine tourism, gender balance. This redefinition can help to put both genders on equal basis in the industry.

- Saudi Arabia have to really define a gender balance to improve gender-based data collection for better measurement. The country has to provide equal opportunities on the level of the UNWTO 5 areas of focus: Employment, Leadership, Entrepreneurship, Community and education.
- There is hope that in coming events or webinars, we will be talking about better opportunities and better future for women in the Middle East in the tourism sector.

**Ms. Ansam Malkawi** added that:

- Research and data are a problem that Jordan faces, strengthening national capacity to research and report on gender distribution in tourism data and using that to promote gender equality and women empowerment is crucial to achieve gender equality .
- The Ministry is working on creating a database to collect information and creates dashboard not only for tourism, as they have a special portfolio for gender research and entrepreneurship.
- Entrepreneurship is one big opportunity to strengthening women participation in workforce, including the tourism and hospitality sector. Micro, small and medium sized entrepreneurs are the major job creators within the tourism sector. There are opportunities for women to be entrepreneurs in this sector in traditional domains, such as the handicraft and food.
- Legislation in Jordan has made it easier for individuals to register home based businesses, which is considered as a step toward fostering an equal Ecosystem, inclusive for women entrepreneurs and those interested in entering the workforce.
- Women can play a leading role in the digital transformation of the tourism and hospitality sector, especially in digital platforms and technologies which can be considered as the future of tourism. One of the projects that we already started after the COVID-19 pandemic is creating a handicraft platform to market products from handicraft shops and those produced at home. In fact, the majority of the people producing products from home are ladies.
- It is important that women have access to the skills and competencies that they need in order not only to enter the economic cycle, but to enter digital spaces as well to achieve economic inclusion. Strengthening women access to technology can create new opportunities for women innovation and empowerment. It can also create jobs for women in hotel and tourism sector.
- The public private partnership, which is crucial to support the overall recovery of the sector and helps its growth.

**Ms. Ghada Jiha** confirmed that indeed a better workplace policy, removing or amending any laws or policies that discriminate, however, directly, or inadvertently against women are concrete measure. The digitalization and moving forward in education and training are also key factors: the workforce also needs to have the skills for their future to not be left behind.

**Dr. Nashwa Talaat** mentioned that concrete measures that have been taken by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities regarding gender inequality. The Ministry works closely with the National Council for Women.

- An Equal Opportunities Unit has been established by a ministerial decree, aiming to achieve the sub-goals of the Egyptian Women Strategy 2030 in the field of tourism. The unit operates and coordinates with the National Council for Women and other ministries to ensure the implementation of the long-term goals of the strategy.
- A workshop entitled *“Creating a safe work environment free from all forms of violence for women in the tourism sector”* is being organized. It targets females working in the Tourism sector as well as male and female employees working at the Ministry of Tourism and all tourism associations.
- Members of the Equal Opportunities Unit have been encouraged to participate in the electronic training for gender statistics held by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and one of the members of the certificate. Ten female employees were selected to participate in the training programme for *Women Leaders* to obtain the International Business Driving Licence which is organised by the National Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development.
- A hotline is dedicated to receive women’s complaints.
- A gender seal initiative was launched in cooperation with the Egyptian Tourism Federation, UNDP and National Council for Women. The company or the hotel will be committed to implement a gender equality action plan to obtain official governmental recognition and gender seal certificate.
- MOTA started a two-year project financed by the Spanish Agency for International Development and Cooperation, aiming to create a state equal work environment for women in the tourism sector in Egypt. This project aims to increase the percentage of women working in the Egyptian tourism sector. It also enables women to confront gender inequality, increases women income from tourism sector, reduces women abandonment traits of work, improve the image of women work in the sector.
- Building partnerships with private sector is also crucial to achieve the goal of women empowerment and raising awareness in the society.

**Ms. Ghada Jiha** reiterated that partnerships with private sector are very important since the private sector is a big player in the tourism space. ----- -Partnerships even within government, especially the partnership with the National Council of Women. Of course,

the tourism sector alone cannot address gender equality on its own; partnerships are very crucial for that.

- She thanked the panelists for sharing their expertise and experiences during this insightful discussion.

### **Q and A session:**

**As tourism recovers, what policies are being implemented to ensure women are an integral part of the recovery from pandemic in tourism and to combat gender-based violence in sector?**

**Dr, Nashwa Talaat:** one of the actions is the creation of the hotline dedicated to receiving women's complaints regarding violence or any unsafe work environment. It was an added value for the actions that have been done.

- Supporting women within the project MOTA have launched lately for the creation of safe and equal a work environment. It aims to train the students of faculties of tourism and hotels and women and men working in the field of tourism. Training and awareness initiatives are not only targeting women but both genders.
- During the pandemic, actions were taken to support the industry including men and women. Therefore, equal opportunities were available for women to take advantage from the policies that have been approved during this period.

**Ms. Ansam Malkawi** talked about tourism policies after the pandemic. MOTA is now preparing the Jordan Tourism Strategy to be launched soon, one of its main pillars is Women inclusion and empowerment.

- After being affected by the pandemic, MOTA looked for solutions and one of them was domestic tourism. Jordan has a national programme called: "Our Jordan is Heaven" addressed to domestic tourism in all governorates. While choosing the service providers and the destinations to be visited, the Ministry takes into consideration women inclusion on equal basis with men.
- After the pandemic, many actions were taken financially and economically. The Government was keen to make women and men benefit from these initiatives on equal basis.

**Ms. Abir Abu Sulayman** confirmed that actions were taken by Saudi Government to alleviate the impact of the pandemic. Financial initiatives and help were offered to business owners.

- The Saudi Government created an initiative called 100,000 jobs, most of them are in the tourism sector for female and male. The number of females applying for these jobs was bigger than the male number.

**Q. How did the panellists see the involvement of civil society organisations in the development of tourism, specifically with a focus on the protection of women working in the sector or coming as tourists.**

**Ms. Ansam Malkawi** mentioned that the involvement of the women in Agritourism is a good example. Majority of women are trained and empowered by the civil organisations which offers help and trainings in all Jordanian governorates. A good partnership is established between MOTA and these NGOs.

**Dr. Nashwa Talaat** agreed with Ms. Ansam mentioning that there is an important role for the civil organisations in supporting women in tourism, specially that they can reach women in a very simple way through their channels and network and provide capacity building programmes for women in local communities.

**Ms. Abir Abu Sulayman** mentioned that the civil society is a very important partner with the government. During and after pandemic, the Ministry of Tourism provided free online courses specially in the tourism sector. The Saudi Tour Guide Association and **MISK foundation** offered as well professional free online courses. Some of the trainees ended up by having a job opportunity.

**Q. Are there any follow-up steps or any plan for joint cooperation in the future?**

**Ms. Ansam** talked about the joint project Jordan is having with UNWTO, UN-Women and GIZ aiming to empower women and provide a TOT training in collaboration with 10 businesses to provide entrepreneurship skills.

- An awareness workshop will also be provided including many trainees from different governorates because MOTA believe that most of the small and medium projects run by women are mainly in the governorates.

**Ms. Ghada Jiha finally** mentioned that the recording of the webinar and other useful links will be available on the UNWTO website.

- She concluded that women in tourism in the Middle East is a subject that holds a great potential and is a key factor to drive sustainable inclusive development forward.

**Closure remarks by the Regional Director:**

**Ms. Basmah Al-Mayman** concluded the webinar by thanking the panelists and the participants for these 60 minutes focused on women's participation in tourism in the Middle East.

- Boosting women's participation in tourism in the Middle East will rely on greater and smarter policy, and resource incentives and investments to catalyze direct and indirect opportunities for women's employment, entrepreneurship, education

and training, leadership and decision-making, and community development. The presence and visibility of women in leadership positions is vital to helping motivate women to advance in their careers.

- the Regional Director encouraged participants to download and read the UNWTO Regional Report on Women in Tourism and other previous reports available for free on UNWTO e-library.
- She also invited participants to share and send their success stories after implementing the recommendations mentioned in the Report in the framework of our joint mission to empower women.