

PANEL SESSIONS

➤ **Women in Open Economies and Inclusive Societies: women's economic participation in the region.**

Cherie Blair QC noted the challenges that entrepreneurs and enterprises face all over the world, and which are particularly acute for women. Women are frustrated at the barriers they face, especially given the increases in education in recent years that have seen a growing number of qualified and motivated women eager to enter the workplace. Obstacles can be grouped as formal (e.g. requiring legal changes) and informal (e.g. barriers to support networks). The latter are harder to identify and tackle. However, technology is facilitating change by removing geographical and cultural barriers.

➤ **Promoting Women's Entrepreneurship and Leadership: experiences of starting and growing businesses, including the challenges faced and ways of overcoming barriers.**

Tara Vishwanath, Lead Economist on the Middle East North Africa at the World Bank, explained that educational segregation has played a role with many women choosing, or being channelled into, courses that do not prepare them for work in the private sector. As well as this, Tara argued that companies need to be encouraged to take greater risks by e.g. increasing paternity leave (to shift stereotypes of gender roles within the family) and use quota systems where necessary. She also noted that low rates of female business ownership do negatively impact on efforts to encourage greater female economic participation as women tend to be more open to recruiting more women.

➤ **Arab Businesswomen in Global Supply Chains: how supply chains in the MENA region connect with global markets and how these partnerships can better support women from the region.** Laila Iskander, CID Consulting and Winner of Skoll Prize for Social Entrepreneurship.

➤ **Financing Business Growth in MENA: what new and existing sources of financing are available to women in the region.** Francesca McDonough, Head of Retail Banking and Wealth Management for HSBC in the Middle East and North Africa.

➤ **Gateways for Women into Trade and Investment: how women can engage in trade policy negotiations.**

➤ **Creating a Workplace Where Women Can Thrive: An Agenda for Action: the policy changes required to overcome legal, social and structural challenges to create a fairer workplace for women.**

Fiona Wolf, CMS Cameron McKenna, who is an energy lawyer in over 40 countries, proposed three recommendations: 1) Inspiration and aspiration – getting girls to stay in school and equipping them with the business support networks from a young age to learn what a career feels like. This includes overcoming gender stereotypes that make “women's work” less valued and that keep women out of “men's work” (eg science-related careers). 2) Address the attrition rate after maternity leave by providing flexible working, tax breaks, improving equalities legislation to change culture. 3. Staying on-encouraging more women to become CEOs since currently only 4.2% of FTSE 100 board members are women.

CASESTUDY: MATCHMAKING WORKSHOP ON CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

The workshop brought together a truly inspiring group of female entrepreneurs, from a diverse range of business specialisms within the field of creative industries ranging from production, clothing manufacturing, marketing and design. One of the central topics of discussion was about how to take a local or national business to the international market. Many examples were shared of potential partnerships that could be taken forward by entrepreneurs. A group has been established on linked in to enable further networking and conversations to come as a result of the workshop.