

General into to both Challenges

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Despite significant advances in equality in the Euro-Mediterranean region over the last 25 years, we are still far from achieving gender parity in many areas. Conflicts, crises, social upheaval and emergencies all hinder progress and have a disproportionate impact on women and girls. The Covid-19 pandemic is no exception, deepening existing inequalities, threatening economic stability and putting a strain on essential services, all of which amplifies gender-based impacts.

At the same time, women play a key role in pandemic response as they provide vital services in education, health and social care, retail and supply chain, among other sectors. In health and social care alone, women account for 70% of the workforce and deliver care to around 5 billion people.

Now more than ever we must identify practical solutions to the unique challenges facing women and girls at home and at work during the Covid-19 crisis.

With this in mind, our Challenge Labs are a space for participants to contribute project ideas or good practices in advance of the 2020 Women4Mediterranean Conference. The aim is to provide food for thought, stimulate debate, share inspiration and ensure the Conference gives rise to actionable solutions to drive real change.

Submit your proposal using the Challenge Questionnaire from November 2-8.

Log in to the Conference platform to vote for your preferred solutions from November 9-12.

Submissions will be reviewed by experts and selected proposals will be presented during the Conference in the relevant Challenge Labs sessions on November 18 and 19. The most voted solutions will also feature in the UfM press release and be published on the UfM website.

Proposals must:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the specific Challenge and the needs of its beneficiaries in the region, as well as incorporate their inputs and any relevant supporting evidence or research.
- Clearly explain how the project idea or good practice will positively impact women and girls in the region affected by the Covid-19 pandemic within the specific Challenge context.
- Be innovative, or propose a new way to use an existing approach.
- Be sustainable over time, scalable and with high impact potential.
- Be considered desirable by experts.

We look forward to receiving your solutions.

General intro, short for mailing

Do you have a practical solution to the unique challenges facing women and girls during the Covid-19 pandemic? Submit it to the **Women4Mediterranean Conference 2020 Challenge Labs**.

Open to all registered participants, Challenge Labs are a space to get inspired and share project ideas or good practices in advance of the Conference. The aim is to provide food for thought and generate actionable solutions that can drive real change.

Submit your project idea or good practice using the Challenge Questionnaire from November 2-8.

Log in to the Conference platform to vote for your preferred solutions from November 9-12.

Submissions will be reviewed by experts and selected proposals will be presented during the Conference in the relevant Challenge Labs sessions on November 18 and 19. The best solutions will also feature in the UfM press release and be published on the UfM website.

We look forward to receiving your solutions.

See the Guidelines for submission **here**.

Find out the results of the Challenge Labs **here**.

CHALLENGE 1: Violence Against Women during the COVID-19 pandemic

Live Session: 19 November 2020 at 09:30-10:00 (CET)

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Across UfM member states, lockdowns and other measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 have trapped many women and girls at home with their abusers and limited their access to support networks. Several countries have seen a rise in domestic violence reports during the pandemic, while others have seen a decrease, suggesting women face greater barriers to seeking help.

At the same time, access to support and essential services is compromised when the authorities, security forces and health and social services are overburdened. Or when the delivery of these services is altered, for example, to comply with physical distancing measures. All this places women and girls in greater danger and allows perpetrators to act with impunity. The digital divide affecting women and girls without personal or safe access to cell phones, computers or the Internet only exacerbates the problem.

Challenge 1 therefore poses the question:

How do we ensure access to support services for women and girls who are victims of violence during the Covid-19 crisis when their freedom of movement and association or access to support services are limited?

Short for mailing

CHALLENGE 1: Violence Against Women during the COVID-19 pandemic

Live Session: 19 November 2020 at 09:30-10:00 (CET)

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to an increase in violence against women and girls while simultaneously limiting their freedom of movement and access to support services. Essential services are overstretched and their ability to respond quickly is affected, placing many victims at greater risk.

Challenge 1 therefore poses the question:

How do we ensure access to support services for women and girls who are victims of violence during the Covid-19 crisis when their freedom of movement and association or access to support services are limited?

CHALLENGE 2: The Economic impact of COVID-19 for women entrepreneurs in MENA

Session: 18 November at 14:30-15:00 (CET)

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Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) account for over 90% of enterprises in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and are a major source of job creation. At the same time, women in MENA have lower rates of financial inclusion. Only 38% have a bank account, compared to 57% of men, and fewer women have bank loans--which may be channelled into their husbands' businesses rather than their own when they do receive them.

The negative impacts of the Covid-19 crisis are already being felt by SMEs. While the majority of MENA entrepreneurs are men, women-owned businesses are likely to be particularly vulnerable to long, enforced closures and lost income. Some countries are already reporting a high proportion of women-run SMEs closed down due to the crisis.

The pandemic does, however, represent an opportunity for women entrepreneurs, if they know how to pivot and take advantage of it. Finding themselves unemployed, some women in MENA have set up businesses in the social and solidarity economy, or responded to demand for products like masks. Other women-led domestic businesses have continued trading thanks to e-commerce. Most

interestingly, a unique opportunity now exists for women-led SMEs to take the lead in the information technology sector, and for the region to leverage its large number of successful STEM women.

Challenge 2 therefore poses the question:

How can women entrepreneurs in MENA become more resilient and adapt and diversify their businesses to meet the new challenges and opportunities resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic? And how can public institutions and the public sector support them?

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Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) account for over 90% of enterprises in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and are a major source of job creation. The negative impacts of the Covid-19 crisis are already being felt by all, but it is likely that women-led SMEs will bear a greater burden in a region where the financial parity gap remains wide.

However, the pandemic does represent a unique opportunity for women to pivot, respond to new demands and markets and take advantage of e-commerce. The shift to remote working could also allow them to take the lead in IT, and be an opportunity for MENA to leverage its many successful STEM women.

Challenge 2 therefore poses the question:

How can women entrepreneurs in MENA become more resilient and adapt and diversify their businesses to meet the new challenges and opportunities resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic? And how can public institutions and the public sector support them?