# Digital Jobs and Women in the MENA Region - Exploring challenges, opportunities, and best practices.

**RQ: How can digital jobs in different private sectors create employment for youth and women in the MENA Region?**

## Introduction

The Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE) is a 7-year and €134 million programme funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that aims to create a prosperous future for 230,000 young women and men[1] in the Middle East, North Africa, Sahel & West Africa, and Horn of Africa regions. The Fund supports initiatives in 11 focus countries offering youth, in particular young women, opportunities for work that is demand-driven and productive, with a stable income and safe working conditions, contributing to their personal development and social protection. The CFYE is managed by a consortium consisting of Palladium, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), and Randstad.

The portfolio of projects is selected from business cases that were submitted by private sector, civil society, and knowledge institutions. Each business case has outlined scalable solutions for creating, matching, and improving jobs and income generating opportunities for youth. Solutions in particular focus on an integrated approach that addresses the shortcomings on the demand side (jobs) and supply side (skills) by bridging the gap between them in the labour market.

## Assignment Overview & Research Objectives:

This study aims to discuss the significance of empowering women succeeding in Africa's digital economy by exploring gender-related challenges and opportunities within MENA's digital economy, and strategies to foster dialogue on gender diversity and for cultivating inclusivity within this sector. The study will specifically focus on Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco.

The assignment has the objective of:

- Further strengthening the evidence base around creating, matching, and improving digitally enabled jobs for women in MENA.
- Identifying (systematic) barriers and opportunities for decent digital employment creation for women in MENA region.
- Synthesising and displaying these best practices and actionable lessons learned from the CFYE portfolio (and others) to further support the employment creation for women in digital jobs.

## The Future of Work

Digitalisation and globalisation have sparked radical shifts in how we live and work. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated these trends even further spurring the fourth industrial revolution (4iR) and

increasing the need for rethinking the world of work. In this revolution, some jobs will be lost, many others created and almost all will change.

Recognising digitisation as a major trend in the job market, CFYE identified digital jobs as one of the key strategic priorities within the portfolio that also feeds into the themes underscoring the learning agenda. This focus aligns with the evolving landscape of work as the Future of Work is likely to be digital. Therefore, CFYE categorises IPs and jobs as 'digital' (or digitally enabled) according to their use of a digital platform to achieve job outcomes.

Digital jobs offer significant benefits for young people. By emphasizing skill development and providing flexible work arrangements, they allow individuals to choose their working hours and locations and enable them to combine work with other duties. Additionally, digital jobs often allow for remote work, providing flexibility and access beyond geographical constraints. By encouraging innovation and self-employment, digital platforms also stimulate entrepreneurial opportunities. However, due to the flexible, remote, and self-employed nature of digital jobs it is harder to track their quality and the wellbeing of the youth.

## Background

The ongoing shift towards digital transformation opens up possibilities for advancing the economic empowerment of women and fostering increased gender equality. The internet, digital platforms, mobile devices, and digital financial services present innovative opportunities for everyone, serving as a means to narrow the gap by enabling women to generate extra income, enhance employment prospects and access knowledge and general information (OECD, 2018).

However, this transformation does not come without challenges: currently approximately 327 million fewer women than men possess smartphones and can connect to the mobile internet. Women are not proportionally represented in information and communication technology (ICT) roles, and startups owned by women receive 23% less funding and face a 30% lower likelihood of achieving a successful exit compared to businesses owned by men (OECD, 2018).

However, jobs in the digital economy can bring many advantages to women. Women see and experience the digital economy as offering opportunities for more income (JobTech, 2023). Another driver behind women's participation in the digital economy is the option of flexibility. The enhanced participation of women in the digital economy and the promotion of greater diversity yields valuable benefits, both socially and economically. For example, interventions arising out of mixed teams hold greater economic value and have higher impact compared to those driven solely by men (OECD, 2018).

## Knowledge questions

**Main questions:**

1. **How can digital jobs in different private sectors create employment for women in the MENA Region?**

2. **What are the opportunities for women to access and benefit from these digital employment opportunities and how do gender dynamics influence their experiences?**

- How can digital jobs (including different types and sectors) enable employment creation for women in the MENA region?
- How do digital jobs contribute to the income generation and career progression of women?
- How can digital jobs bridge the gender gap, enabling women to work and earn an income?
- How does gender affect the experience of working in digital jobs?
- How can the enabling environment for women be improved to support their prospects for jobs in the digital economy?
- What are barriers to attract and select youth and women in the digital economy? And how to retain women in the digital economy?
- How do women engage with and benefit from jobs in the digital economy that are created for various skill levels and at various locations?
- What are the challenges faced by women, in accessing and participating in the digital economy?
- What are challenges and systematic barriers for the private sector (CFYE-IPs) affecting the creation of digital jobs for women?
- What are the best practices from private sector to ensure that women in Africa are not left behind in the process of digitalization?

*The research should acknowledge that youth (15-35 years) is a diverse and heterogeneous group, comprising individuals of various backgrounds, individuals with various levels of education, and those residing in both rural and urban areas.*

### Deliverables:

#### A. Inception Report

A detailed report outing desk review, the methodology, data gathering tools for interviews, and focus group discussions, and initial stakeholder list. The report also includes:

- **Literature review and secondary data analysis:** Conduct a thorough review of existing research, reports, and case studies on digitally enabled job creation and women's employment in the MENA region.
- **CFYE portfolio analysis:** Review the CFYE portfolio of projects focused on digital job creation for women in the four countries. Identify key successes, challenges, and lessons learned from these interventions.

#### B. Data Collection Tools and Field Visits
- Design and develop data collection tools including but not limited to semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and field observation and case study documentation.
- Key Informant interviews and/or small focus group discussions will involve key informants among young women.
- Conduct field visits to selected successful digital job creation CFYE projects for women in the three countries.
- Develop in-depth case studies to showcase best practices and lessons learned.

#### C. Draft and Final Study Report:

- Analyze the findings from the various research activities to identify challenges, opportunities, trends, and actionable insights.
- Develop a comprehensive set of recommendations for stakeholders to address the systematic barriers and leverage the opportunities for women's employment in digital jobs.
- Prepare the final report, including the synthesis of best practices and lessons learned.

### Timeline:

- Phase 1 (August - September): Literature review, secondary data analysis, and CFYE portfolio analysis.
- Phase 2 (October): Data collection and Field visits: Stakeholder interviews, focus group discussions, and field visits.
- Phase 3 (November- December): Data analysis, synthesis, and report writing. Finalization and dissemination of the report.

### Core Competencies

The selected organisation/consultant should demonstrate that it can mobilize a team that has the following core competencies:

- Expertise in labor market research and analysis, particularly in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco.
- Strong understanding of the employment landscape, skills trends, and barriers to women's participation in the workforce.
- Ability to conduct comprehensive landscape analyses and identify systemic challenges.
- Knowledge of the digital economy and emerging job opportunities:
- Familiarity with the growth of digital sectors and the skills required for various digitally enabled jobs.
- Understanding of the opportunities and challenges in creating and sustaining digital job opportunities, especially for women.
- Qualitative research and stakeholder engagement capabilities:
- Proven track record in conducting in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations.
- Experience in documenting and analyzing successful initiatives and interventions in the area of digital job creation for women.
- Capacity to extract and present actionable lessons learned and replicable models.
- Ability to formulate evidence-based, context-specific recommendations for policymakers, employers, and other stakeholders.

### Minimum Requirements:

The selected organisation/consultant should demonstrate at least the following:

- Professional experience: Proven years of relevant experience in labor market research, employment programs, and/or digital economy initiatives.
- Proven track record of conducting similar studies or assessments in the MENA region.
- Language proficiency: Fluency in English and at least one local language (e.g., Arabic) in the MENA region.
- The organisation and consultant need to be based in the MENA region.

### Level of Effort and Reporting

CFYE expects that the assignment will start in **August 2024** and be concluded before the end of 2024. During the assignment the organisation/consultant will have periodic check-ins and progress updates with the CFYE team. For this assignment, the amount will be disbursed in tranches based on three milestones:

- 30% upon completion of the methodology
- 20% upon completion of the first draft of the final report
- 50% upon completion of the assignment

The consultant/organisation will report to CFYE Technical Team.

## How to Apply

Interested organisations/consultants are requested to provide a high-level proposal of a maximum of 10 pages all together before July, 31st 2024 where they elaborate on:

1) Their suggested approach/methodology to the proposed activities
2) Relevant track record
3) High level workplan (can be a Gantt chart)
4) Break-down of proposed budget for the assignment (breakdown of proposed fee structure and any other expected costs).