



The Regional Joint Programme (JP)

Promoting Productive Employment and Decent Work for Women in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine



Showcasing results through

Voices from the field



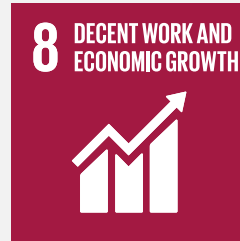
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The Regional Joint Programme (JP)

**Promoting Productive Employment
and Decent Work for Women**
in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine



Under the UN Women-International Labour Organization's (ILO) Regional Joint Programme "Promoting Productive Employment and Decent Work for Women in Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine," a number of actions were carried out in Egypt to advance women's access to decent work from 2019-2024. In Egypt, the Regional Joint programme has been implemented in partnership with the National Council for Women and the Ministry of Labour, working closely with civil society and private sector.

The joint programme worked on three main pillars:

Outcome 1: Gender responsive labour laws and related policies are in place and effective.

Outcome 2: A gender responsive private sector that attracts, retains and promotes women is supported.

Outcome 3: Gender stereotypes about women and men's responsibilities concerning unpaid care and household work are challenged including encouraging women to enter all different occupations, provided that jobs are decent.

This booklet highlights the experiences of the programme's beneficiaries in Egypt in the TVET sector, in the Creative industries, in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), and the leadership and employability skills development supported.

Participants' stories showcase how the joint programme has helped provide women with learning opportunities as well as a strong network to facilitate their career development. The programme has aimed to do this while simultaneously investing in reducing the proportion of young women not in employment, education or training. These stories also capture women's efforts to break into non-traditional, male-dominated sectors of the Egyptian labour market.

The UN Women/ILO Joint Programme directly contributes to achieving **Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5):** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, and **SDG 8:** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.



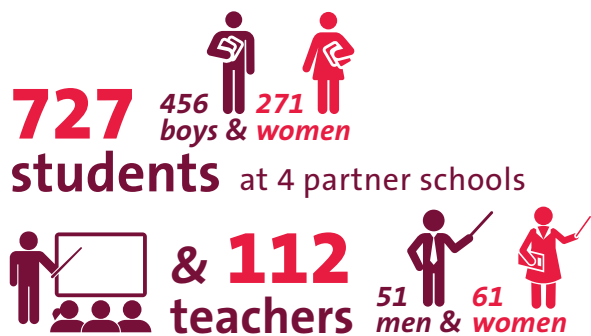
Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

Electricity technicians of Electromisir school while applying the techniques provided by Schneider Electric, Cairo, Egypt. 2019



In Egypt, under the UN Women and ILO regional joint programme (JP), several activities and trainings targeted the TVET sector, delivered with the Institute of European Cooperation and Development (IECD)

Through this work, four applied technological and technical schools were supported to promote inclusive learning, with a total of:



engaged in gender awareness activities

using different tools, including interactive performances, sports, in-class trainings, gamification boards, peer-to-peer learning sessions, and animated videos).



received employability skills,



26 received scholarships to learn English. 120 accessed internships,

31 women electricians


were employed

(23 at the job fair, and 8 pursuant internships).




42 ²³ men & ¹⁹ women
teachers 
received training to
boost their IT skills 
during the pandemic.

1 job fair organized for women blue collars

attended by **913** ⁶⁵³ men & ²⁶⁰ women TVET graduates 
and 26 companies. 800 graduates (580M/220F) met companies' criteria for vacancies, **out of which 80 got jobs** (57M/23F). 

2 
videos 
produced on communication
and problem-solving skills. 

1 
labour market study
produced on
“Opportunities to hire
women technicians”.

1 
documentary
on women in the
electric field.

Voices from the field

Quotes from TVET Staff



Right after the trainings we received on gender norms, we (teachers) started to imitate the examples we had learned in the school's activities. In one of my classes, I had to choose a leader for each group of students. So, I decided this round to have a girl instead of a boy, to break the taboo. At first, the boys were against the idea. But over time, the girls proved their competence and the boys accepted this and coexisted. To be honest, this should have started a long time ago. And I am glad to have played this role before it's too late.

Mohamed Hassan, Teacher, Electromisr School, Cairo, Egypt.



One day, a boy came to school without his uniform. The reason, he said, was that his mom didn't do the laundry. Previously, this kind of behaviour would have gone without any reaction from the school. But this time, I found myself intrigued and I spoke to him about the gender roles at home. I believe that the training was an eye-opener that challenged my own beliefs. This is now reflected in how I communicate with the students.

Samia Shoueb, Principal, Electromisr School, Cairo, Egypt.





The training was a true learning experience that reflected on my day-to-day interactions, not only at school, but also at home. I admit that we have been raised based on mistaken conceptions about masculinity. I now try to lead by example, with my wife first. I want to lead by example with my daughters and son. I believe that my role as a father and a teacher has improved tremendously.

Sami Mahanna, Teacher, Al Wardian School, Alexandria, Egypt.



I took it for granted that girls are shy to speak in front of others, so, whenever I asked for a presentation, I would always choose a boy. Boys always got excited about this, but girls didn't. After the training, I decided to take a different approach. I encouraged the girls to speak up and not to fear any judgemental views from their peers. One girl decided to step up, and since then, all the girls have become enthusiastic about presenting in front of the class.

Nadia Elarabawy, Teacher, Electromisr School, Cairo, Egypt.



Quotes from TVET Students



I feel more confident in my abilities now, after receiving the soft skills training, which included a session on self-awareness. I am looking forward excitedly to applying the skills I learned in my professional life. It was a relief to meet a group of girls and boys who are facing similar challenges as myself in their professional fields.

Shahd Makram, El-Wardian School, Alexandria, Egypt.



I learned how to express my ideas in an innovative and artistic way, which will help me [counteract] the societal stigma faced by TVET graduates. The activities the team used to address gender misconceptions used the right approach, which spoke to my age and experiences. I am grateful to have taken part in an interactive performance (improvised) on gender inequality at home and on freedom of choice. It was eye-opening to listen to our (female) classmates. Thank you for [allowing us to] mingle in a respectful manner that is mindful of our personal space.

Mo'men Khamis, senior student at El-Ras El-Soda school, Alexandria, Egypt.





Through the internship we received, we had the chance to learn much more than [we did at] school. For me, this has been an opportunity to explore the corporate life and gain real work experience.

Rahma Gamil, student at Electromisr School, Internship at Cargil, Cairo, Egypt.



In the beginning, the Health and Safety Specialist told us (interns) about the causes of accidents and how to deal with them, and how to respond to emergencies. After being divided into groups, I noticed that they assigned all the girls to the Design Department, as it would be easier than the Warehouse Department. I tried to join, but the engineer in charge seemed not to welcome my presence at first. He started distributing simple work to us, such as counting and collecting. When he saw that we were doing it efficiently, he started assigning us tasks similar to those assigned to the boys. I noticed the same pattern of behaviour in various departments. The engineer in charge at the beginning usually showed a disinclination to include girls in the training; however, we became more accepted over time.

Passainte Mohamed, student at Electromisr School and intern at Schneider Electric, Cairo, Egypt.





From day one, when I started my internship at Top Selection Company, I was surprised by how men technicians looked at us with respect. They were willingly supporting us to learn, which was a turning point for me. I gained more knowledge and acquired new practical skills in electricity – the field of my study. I was even challenged during the training to fix a coffee machine all on my own and to install its operating system. I am so eager to have similar internships in the future to prepare me to join the labour market fully equipped with the required technical skills.

Fatma Abdelrazik, student at El Wardian Industrial School and intern at Top Selection Company, Alexandria, Egypt.



I was never good in English, so I disliked it. However, once I started the internship programme, I found employers asking that electricity technicians be able to converse in English. I applied for [and obtained] the English scholarship, which helped me [improve my level]. I can now read properly and understand the basic grammar rules of English. I am now ready to go back to the hotel where I did my internship confidently. I feel that I am distinguished in my field with this learning ability.

Omnia Ahmed, student at Electromisr School, Cairo, Egypt.





I am usually a confident girl, but when I started the internship at Schneider Electric, I was a bit worried at first. One day, I had a discussion with one of the engineers responsible for our internships at the factory, and he was very impressed by my knowledge and communication style, despite being young. Ever since, they have been calling me 'Belya' (technicians' skilled assistant), which I am so proud of. When I graduate, I am sure that I will excel in my job and impress everyone wherever I go. I wish I could tell every girl who is worried about joining a male-dominated industry: 'do not be afraid! You can do whatever you want; just work hard and you will prove your worth!

Amira Salem, student at Electromisr School and intern at Schneider Electric, Cairo, Egypt.





Menna, a participant of UN Women's TVET upskilling training at the electricity lab at Al Wardian School in 2019, Alexandria. Photo: Courtesy of IECD.

In the words of Menna Ramadan:
“I will prove to everyone and to myself that I will not just handle the job, I will excel.”

Menna Ramadan, 18, is a third-year student at El-Wardian Industrial School for Girls in Alexandria and one of the future electricians and teachers who are benefiting from the Technical and Vocational Education and Training for Girls Initiative.

“When I knew that I was admitted to the electrical maintenance department [of the industrial high school], I cried like a baby because it wasn't my first choice. I was also bullied by my extended family because they perceive the students in industrial schools as unintelligent. I would often hear things like ‘your education is useless’, and that I should just get married and stay at home. The mocking would also increase when someone learned that I am in the electrical maintenance department. They would immediately say: ‘we will call you to fix our lamps.’ I am sure they did not mean to hurt me and that they were joking, but it was not funny. I was frustrated and I wished I could change my department. But that feeling did not last long.

When the programme team (JP) came to our class for the first time, it was a turning point for me. I went home that day and proudly told my parents that I was going to have a bright future and find a decent job. My family did not take me seriously, but I started to fall in love with electricity and I became very eager to learn about this invisible energy. Through the programme, I got an internship opportunity at the Dakhliya Port, where I was trained in the maintenance department of a reputable trading company that operates in the port.

At first, my father refused. He did not want me to go and work with men in the port. However, I did not give up easily. I succeeded in convincing him, and I had the honour of being one of the first girls to be trained at the port. Every day I would tell my parents what I had done, and I finally started to see the pride in their eyes. My parents started to encourage and push me to be an excellent technician, especially my mother who always stood by my side and supported me whenever I used to get negative comments from anyone. She is always proud of me. I am certain that God's choice is always the best and that trusting myself is more important than listening to people's opinions.

This year, I got accepted into the entrepreneurship training. It has been one of my best experiences since I joined the initiative. It allowed me to improve my public speaking and analytical skills and I had an opportunity to present my business idea with my team at the French Chamber of Commerce in front of a panel of experts. That day, I was very proud of myself and the team. When I graduate, I want to continue to do what I love. I will prove to everyone and to myself that I will not just handle the job, I will excel.”



Wafaa, a participant of UN Women's TVET upskilling training at the electricity lab at Al Wardian School in 2020, Alexandria. Photo: Courtesy of IECD.

In the words of Wafaa Ahmed:
“I am a proud technician and will push my luck up the ladder”

Wafaa Ahmed, 22, is a graduate of the El Wardian Industrial School, Electrical Maintenance Department, in Alexandria, Egypt.

“Despite my high grades for my preparatory education, which could have enabled me to enrol in general mainstream secondary education, I chose the technical field instead. Honestly, at the time, I didn’t have a dream to achieve. However, when I learned that I was accepted in the electricity department, I was worried about it being tough for a girl like me. My family [didn’t worry] about the field of my specialization. For them, and for me as well, we assumed that after graduating, I would just accept the first job offer I received, regardless of its relevance to my education.

To tell you the truth, from day one at school, this field of study was completely different. It has so many practical lessons, with a learning environment that welcomes all questions. I started to love my specialization and was eager to learn more techniques and skills.

The internship programme with some renowned companies was a game-changer for my whole life. I must admit that I was a bit afraid of this opportunity – of being rejected by the companies or of being subjected to any abuse, which I would not accept. However, learning about my classmates’ experiences motivated me to take this step and face my fears.

My internship at Groupe SEB was a turning point for the ‘old me’. I was surprised that all the employees were so professional and weren’t looking down on us. I felt that I had a place and a role in society. I felt that I could do a lot and I also learned to appreciate being a girl who has the freedom to make choices. My positive experience doubled over the course of the internship. I was thrilled when I heard the positive feedback of the HR Manager of Groupe SEB, who said that ‘I would be a model for my peers in the field’ and that ‘she wouldn’t hesitate to offer me a job once I graduate’. This was a moment of success that will always resonate with me.

Looking back over the past three years, along with the training and skills that I’ve gained, I feel that I have grown so much. I am now aware of my abilities, and I have a dream and a vision to fulfil. Today, I am glad to work at Groupe SEB as an electrical technician. It’s something that I couldn’t be prouder of. My family has become supportive and enthusiastic about my specialization. They encourage me to push myself harder.

To all the girls who might underestimate their abilities and to those who might not have a dream for themselves, I would say: ‘I was one of you, but I learned to make use of all the opportunities that cross my path. I am a proud technician and will push my luck up the ladder’.”

Women in the Cinema Industry



In Egypt, under the UN Women and ILO regional joint programme (JP), several activities and trainings targeted the cinema industry, delivered with Arascope, in cooperation with Media-Arts for Development (MADEV).

Participants of the various cohorts of creative industries' training celebrate their first place win in the Short Documentaries' Competition, in 2023, in Cairo, Egypt.

Through this work,



100

women in the cinema industry



accessed a set of trainings on

photography, videography, direction, art direction/copywriting, scriptwriting, editing and colouring.



81 women

received one-month internship

with media and advertising companies.

17 women



were subsequently employed

as freelancers and **60** women are upskilled with the required tools for their professional development.



3 women-led documentaries



were produced by teams of 30 selected trainees

for a documentary competition and are submitted for participation at **Aswan International Women Film Festival**.

Around

230,000 people



were reached over social media through this activity.

Voices from the field



I do not have previous experience in the field of directing, but I have many ideas that I want to bring to light, and this course was the opportunity to find my passion. Every moment in the course was beneficial for a beginner like me in the field. During the course, we were introduced to the basics of directing, learning step-by-step, until we were able to direct a full movie. The results were mind-blowing. I'm grateful to find organizations that care about empowering women in such fields.

Nada Nabil, directing participant, Cairo, Egypt.



As a fresh graduate of Mass Communication, with a major in marketing and advertising, I choose this field because I am passionate about pursuing a career in the creative industry. This course gave me the opportunity to start my professional life off right and to think creatively. The course built my practical skills, [and I feel that I am] benefiting far more than from traditional theoretical studies. It has allowed me to challenge myself and push my boundaries until I reach an appealing marketing idea.

Nardine Nader, copywrite participant, Cairo, Egypt.





I had worked for seven years in the telecommunications industry before becoming a team leader. However, I made a career shift, joining a team working on content writing, which is a dream come true for me. This course gave me the chance to learn how to organize my ideas, structure my thoughts and write them down in a professional manner. The course has put me on the right track – one that will help me use my passion as a source of income, not just a hobby for my own pleasure. It's never too late for a career shift.

Nourhan ElQerm, copywrite participant, Cairo, Egypt.



I graduated from Mass Communication, with a major in radio. I have been working at delivering workshops to children to improve their poetry skills. I have been writing content for eight years and have published several books. However, I've always had a growing interest in learning about the field of advertising, which is somewhat related to my studies. More importantly, learning this skill will open new doors of income as well as enhance my content writing skills through creative thinking.

Eman El Mehy, art direction participant, Cairo, Egypt.





I graduated from Fine Arts, but ended up working in my father's business, which lacks the creative and artistic aspect. When I heard about this course, I chose the art direction cohort right away. However, through the course, I discovered that writing advertisements is not an easy job. It requires an open-minded person with creative thinking skills to excel. I am currently challenging my family to pursue a career shift to something that I love – while at the same time proving to them that I have an opportunity to earn money from it. It's not only a hobby.

Lilianne Rady, art direction participant, Cairo, Egypt.



This course has enhanced my skills in the field such that my chances won't be limited to the content creation for social media posts and short videos I'm currently doing – but will open new income opportunities. Having a course dedicated for women in this field made me feel special and valued. Women are more detail-oriented, so having more women in creative industries definitely benefits all. Men and women are created to complete one another. No gender is outranked here.

Youstina Michelle, scriptwriting participant, Cairo, Egypt.





Despite being a content marketing instructor, I never really had the courage to learn scriptwriting. When I came across the announcement for this course, I decided to face my fears and step outside my comfort zone. Besides the skills I learned in the course, the most interesting part was when we (participants) came together in groups of five to develop a full script as a graduation project. I have to say that despite the myth of women not supporting one another – what I witnessed is that women working together in scriptwriting produce rich scenarios.

Shimaa Afifi, scriptwriting participant, Cairo, Egypt.



For me, this course links two important Sustainable Development Goals; namely, gender equality and quality education. I have to admit that the course has made a real difference to me and will positively change my career path, moving forward.

Yousra Diwan, photography participant, Cairo, Egypt.





The opportunity for an internship after the course [helped fill] a missing piece, and this is what makes the course so special. The course provided me with practical skills, which will definitely help me be in the field of my passion and enable me to find more (freelance) jobs that I can do, besides my regular job.

Mariam Hisham, editing and colouring participant, Cairo, Egypt.




I see that girls are creative by nature, so having them in the editing and colouring field of the cinema industry is a plus. I personally benefited greatly from being one of the participants in this cohort. I gained various skills, which have not only helped give me a boost professionally but have also built up my self-confidence. The structure of the course, having an internship period in particular, was definitely an exquisite experience that helped me build connections with the labour market.

Mona Mamdouh, editing and coloring participant, Cairo, Egypt.



Snapshots of Egypt, *Through her lens*



Doaa, one of the participants in the photography training organized in 2022, takes photos in Cairo's Al-Hattaba area during one of her photography tours in January 2023. Photo: Courtesy of Doaa Adel.


With her camera in-hand, 36-year-old Doaa Adel sets out on the streets of Egypt with a passion to photograph life, as she sees it.

“Taking photos helps us capture the moment we’re living in and really see through it. It documents history for future generations,” says Doaa, about why she picked up photography as a hobby.

After graduating with a bachelor’s degree in journalism, Doaa worked in several media jobs, including as a news editor, social media manager and news photographer. As her colleagues and friends started noticing her talent and eye for photography, they strongly encouraged her to pursue her passion.

“I bought my first camera and started doing street photography. This helped me meet so many amazing people and learn about their lives and stories. Each time I would set out for another shoot, I would end the day with so much positive energy,” adds Doaa. “But although I loved my hobby, I was hesitant to become a professional photographer. I would refuse freelancing opportunities for fear of not performing well and disappointing the client.”

However, once UN Women Egypt announced on social media that they were offering photography training, Doaa found many people sharing the announcement with her and encouraging her to join.



Doaa in a photography shoot with female farmers in Qalubiya governorate during the strawberry harvest season in August 2023. Photo Credit: Courtesy of Doaa Adel.

“During the training, I found an enormous amount of support and motivation from the instructors, unlike any other workshop I had ever attended. They are still supporting me now, even after the training has ended,” says Doaa.

During the training, Doaa learned different photography styles, such as indoor photography and product shooting. Equipped with her newfound skills and confidence, she has now started freelancing as a professional photographer, specializing in capturing large-scale events and conferences. Doaa also plans to collaborate with companies on product shoots.



Doaa participating in an activity explaining the principals of photography during the UN Women training. Photo: Courtesy of Doaa Adel.



Doaa at a photo shoot for a young girl in Dahan Island, Cairo, in October 2022. Photo: Courtesy of Doaa Adel.

“Through the training, I learned the most important lesson, and that is that it is okay to make mistakes because it’s the only way to learn and develop. I gained confidence in myself and in my work,” Doaa highlights.

“My experience with the training didn’t just stop with photography, but I also took part in the production of a documentary. This has widened my horizons and provided me with a great experience that has enriched my résumé and helped me expand my client network.”

Doaa dreams of becoming successful in photography and using it to document Egypt’s history.

“I hope that one day I can have my own photo gallery where I showcase pictures of Egypt to document the era we live in, for future generations,” Doaa concludes.



Doaa photographing an elderly man during Moulid El-Hussein in Cairo, in November 2021. Photo: Courtesy of Doaa Adel.



Asmaa Mohamed, a participant in the scriptwriting training organized under the JP, which took place in 2022. Photo: Courtesy of Asmaa Mohamed

In the words of Asmaa Mohamed:

“When our documentary won second place, it gave me hope and reassurance that my passion could truly become my career.”

With her passion for filmmaking, 26-year-old Asmaa Mohamed wanted to enrol in the High Cinema Institute, but unfortunately, she did not pass the entry exam. Still, she didn't let that stop her from pursuing her dream. Asmaa sought out freelance projects for video and documentary production alongside her full-time job at a marketing agency. In addition, Asmaa worked on developing her skills through self-learning and by enrolling in different training courses and workshops related to the field of her passion, one of which was UN Women's scriptwriting training, which she came across through a social media announcement.

“I'm always keen to learn different aspects of cinematography. I took many training courses, such as photography, videography and content creation. Although such courses were very expensive, I did not benefit much, as they were mainly focused on theoretical content and lacked practical training that would walk us through real-life applications.

However, when I enrolled in UN Women's scriptwriting training, free of charge, I was happy to learn that the training offered hands-on experience, which I was eagerly seeking to develop professionally in this field. I believe this is why I've outdone myself and succeeded at the end of the training in developing two very well-structured scripts. Following this, I was over the moon to learn that I was among the few distinguished participants selected to take part in a documentary competition organized within the training programme, through which I immensely enriched my experience.

Through participating in the competition, I learned various aspects related to the filmmaking industry [beyond scriptwriting], such as the pre-production process, including setting budgets, issuing shooting permits and casting, in addition to learning more about camera set-up, lighting, directing and editing.

It was such a great moment when our documentary won second place. I was extremely proud that even with limited experience and equipment, we were able to produce an impressive documentary. It gave me hope and reassurance that my passion could truly become my career. I can confidently say that I am now more competent at handling video productions, and I am fully aware of the process and requirements.

One of the most important things I gained through this training is a strong network of professionals and supportive instructors and fellow trainees. We all share training and employment opportunities, and we encourage each other to develop our portfolios and experiment in producing different pieces of content, including films and documentaries. Whenever I face a technical difficulty, I can easily contact any of my peer trainees and she will provide heartfelt advice.

I will continue to create films and documentaries, enhance my writing and filmmaking skills, and learn more about the cinema industry. My dream is to make history in Egyptian cinema and produce a musical film.”



Mona edits videos in her office at the media company where she has been employed since completing UN Women's editing and colouring training in 2022. Photo: Ahmad Safwat

In the words of Mona Mamdouh:
“I always say that everything I have professionally achieved today in my career - and will achieve in the future - started out with this training.”

Mona Mamdouh, 35, dreamed of having a career in media. She was always reading and learning about this field and exploring her chances for a full-time job. However, she faced challenges and difficulties in securing a job in the career she loved – that is, until she got accepted into UN Women’s training on video editing and colouring.

“As soon as I graduated from [the faculty of] Fine Arts, I was eager to keep learning about the media field. I joined many workshops in photography, scriptwriting, and video editing. However, that didn’t help me find my dream job.

The chances were even slimmer after moving with my husband to Saudi Arabia and staying there for six years. I could barely land a few freelance jobs in Saudi Arabia, and a stable job was out of the question, particularly with my limited professional experience abroad.

Then I came across UN Women’s video editing and colouring training opportunity on social media, which turned out to be a turning point in my life. I returned to Egypt just to attend the training and I was very excited and hopeful. I was soaking up all the information I was learning, not wanting to miss one single point.

The training was different than any other workshop I’d previously attended. The instructors invested in every participant, and we were taught by professionals in the field. We were also offered internships that opened the horizons for us even more. I felt as if my life was properly falling into place, finally. By the time I finished the training, I was invited to an interview for a job vacancy as a video editor in one of the major media companies in Egypt. I felt as if this training was meant to prepare and equip me with the right tools and skills for this job. So, I went to the interview, feeling confident and hopeful that I would excel.

I cannot describe how proud and delighted I feel now whenever I watch my work broadcasted on TV. It’s an indescribable feeling. I’m even more proud that I’m one of only four women in the entire media company. From my standpoint, I’m certain that women can deliver what is needed for such a demanding job.

The most important thing is that [at the age of 35] for the first time in my life, I am financially independent. I earn my own income [from a job I love] and I am in control of how to spend it. One thing I am particularly excited for is being able to buy my husband gifts with my own money. He has always been incredibly supportive, and this is my chance to show him how much I am grateful for all his support and efforts.

Now that I’m working in a large company, I feel that more opportunities will come my way. I want to climb the ladder and work in an international company. I want to delve more into the movie and film industry and become specialized in colouring and grading. As a complimentary step, I’m also interested in discovering and learning more about art direction, to one day hopefully lead entire projects and teams.

I always say that everything I have professionally achieved today in my career – and will achieve in the future – started out with this training.”



Vivian receiving her training certificate from UN Women after completing the copywriting training in 2022. Photo: Courtesy of Vivian Makram

In the words of Vivian Makram:
“My children feel excited to watch their mommy working, and they are very supportive.”

Vivian Makram, 32, a mother of two, put her career on hold for several years to focus on raising her children. As her son and daughter grew older and became more independent, she began rediscovering herself and her passion to revive her career.

“As a mother, having a successful career is essential and critical. It not only provides me with a sense of accomplishment, but it helps me become a role model for my children. I did not want my kids, especially my daughter, to believe that it is the norm for women to play only the roles of wives and mothers. I wanted them to look up to me as the best mother and also as a successful professional. They must learn that they need to find what they love to do, and to exert effort to succeed at it.

That’s why I began rediscovering myself and my passion to find out what I would enjoy doing [for a professional career]. Although I was working as a teacher before becoming a mother, I wasn’t interested in returning to this same job. Therefore, I began taking courses in digital marketing and user-experience design. However, most of the courses were too general and didn’t give me the required tools to join the field confidently.

I came across UN Women’s announcement for the copywriting training, and I was interested in joining, as it was a branch of digital marketing, which I was already interested in and I had already taken several courses. For me, I considered it an important component linked to digital marketing, which would be a value-added to pursue a career in the marketing field. I was surprised to find that the training was very detailed and not only provided theoretical content, but also hands-on work in real-life situations. The training was one of the best experiences of my life mainly because, first and foremost, it helped me discover my talent for copywriting.

After the training, I had two internship opportunities at a couple of marketing agencies, which helped me gain invaluable experience and exposure. Once I completed the two internships, I received my first freelance project and that was a personal moment of pride. I am excited now that finally, after one year of work experience, I will have the first piece of content in my name and my first income earned through a career that I love. Every day I am more confident that my choice of a career change was the right move.

Now, my children feel excited to watch their mommy working, and they are very supportive. Although they are still very young, they keep asking me about my work and my progress. I believe that I have succeeded in setting a positive example for my children.

I would have not been able to achieve all of this without the tremendous support from my husband. He would often rearrange his schedule in order to take care of our children when I was busy with the training, internships or any freelance work. My mother also played a great role in my success as she would always support me in taking positive steps in my career and would encourage me to try new things. I would like to thank both of them greatly because it is only with their support that I managed to succeed.”



Amany, one of UN Women's trainees in the scriptwriting cohort, signs one of her co-authored published books during a collaborative book-signing in October 2022 in Cairo. Photo: Courtesy of Amany Zayed.

In the words of Amany Zayed:
“I found myself being pulled back to my pen and paper and decided to shift my career.”

With several articles and books published in her name, 28-year-old writer Amany Zayed was starting on her newest book but facing writer's block. When she came across UN Women's scriptwriting training, she joined in the hopes of refuelling her creativity, and gained so much more.

“I've loved writing from a young age. It was a hobby I was passionate about and always returned to. Even after studying engineering and working as an engineer for four years, I never forgot my passion. After becoming a mother, I stopped working for several years. When I was able to start working again, I found myself being pulled back to my pen and paper and decided to shift my career.

I began writing professionally and published articles in several magazines and websites. I even published my very first book and collaborated with other authors on another book. As I was planning to start writing my newest book, I faced writer's block and was struggling to get anything down on paper. That's when I learned about UN Women's scriptwriting training. Since I also love writing and cinema, I thought it would be an excellent opportunity for me to learn something new and get my creative juices flowing again.

During the training, I learned everything about scriptwriting from scratch, starting with brainstorming for new ideas, developing characters, structuring scripts and the entire writing process. I was dazzled by the diverse background of the other trainees and their tremendous skills. Each participant was unique, and each had her own story. There were young trainees who'd just graduated from college, mothers and even women from different professions, such as pharmacists, engineers and writers – career-shifters, like me. Through this unique group of women, I started seeing things from different perspectives that I hadn't considered before. I even began exploring new topics that had never crossed my mind, such as the experiences and stories of the elderly, as well as animal rights.

My experience was enriched tremendously by joining the documentary competition, where I was the scriptwriter and also took on the role of director, due to an unexpected challenge during the shooting phase. I hadn't contributed to a video production before, so I felt that such an experience added a new technical skill to my portfolio. I was very proud of our team's effort, and I was even more thrilled when we won second place and witnessed the audience's positive reaction while watching our documentary. After this experience, I received a job offer to work on a documentary about sports.

Although I was already a published writer, I learned a lot from the training and it helped me develop new skills while giving me the boost of creativity and exposure to new ideas I needed to move forward in my career as an author, and now scriptwriter as well.

Currently, my plan is to focus on utilizing all the new skills and ideas I learned to start writing my new book, and I'm hoping to get it published soon. As the sky should be our limit, I'm also working on developing the script for a children's movie that highlights our Egyptian identity. Currently, I'm brainstorming ideas for my movie, and whenever there is a chance, I pitch my ideas to production companies. I'm sure that one day, my dream will come true.”



Lamees, one of the participants in the film directing training organized in 2022, works on a video production for one of her clients in 2020 in Cairo. Photo: Courtesy of Lamees El-Shamy.

In the words of Lamees El-Shamy:
“It helped me overcome the fear of failure I suffered from for so long, and I realized that you only fail when you stop trying.”

Lamees El-Shamy, a 25-year-old woman who has suffered from anxiety since childhood, found solace in watching online videos and movies. She fell in love with the film industry and tried using many different online tools to learn everything she could about the field, even trying to produce her own short film, but she found the road more difficult than expected, until she applied for UN Women’s film-directing training.

“As a young girl – around 13 years old – I was diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder. It was an extremely difficult time for me. I felt alone and like my life was in chaos and no one understood what I was going through.

I started watching online videos of people diagnosed with anxiety, like me, which comforted me. I learned that others have gone through what I am experiencing. It gave me hope because if others managed to overcome their anxiety, I could too. This is when my passion for filmmaking started.

After studying mass communication, I went on to work for a short while in marketing. However, I was continuously thinking of filmmaking and trying to find a way to delve into the industry.

Over the years, I explored the art of filmmaking on my own, through online tutorials, courses and self-experimenting. I worked as a freelance video producer on documentaries for several clients. However, I was more interested in producing my own movies. I once ventured to produce my own short film, but after several major setbacks, I was discouraged to continue. I tried to seize any opportunity to join shooting locations, but unfortunately it never worked out for several reasons that include being a woman with no network in the field, among others.

Then I was accepted in UN Women’s film directing training and was able to join a film production team on set for the first time. The hands-on work was invaluable and such an eye-opening experience. I acquired the know-how about the tools and process for film production and pre-production management.

During the training, I led a team of five co-trainees in shooting a short film on domestic violence, which received very good feedback from the instructor. I also joined a film set as a clapper operator. After various evaluations, I was successfully selected, among other 29 trainees, to join the documentary competition that was organized at the end of the training programme.

Each team was composed of 10 members from different fields to produce a total of three documentaries. I still remember the long brainstorming hours we invested to come up with the most appealing idea for our documentary and to plan the subsequent production process. They say 'no pain, no gain'. I am extremely delighted and proud that after this long process, my team won first place in the competition.

This step boosted my confidence and encouraged me to produce my own short movie, which I have currently submitted to a number of film festivals, including the Gouna Film Festival, Cairo Film Festival and Red Sea Film Festival, among others.

I would not have reached this point in my career without joining UN Women's film directing training. It helped me overcome the fear of failure I suffered from for so long, and I realized that you only fail when you stop trying.

I dream of establishing my own production company one day to produce socially impactful movies and documentaries with a focus on the issue of mental illness and its impact, not only on patients, but on the people around them. One day, I will produce inspirational content that will bring comfort to people and make them feel that they are not alone."



Then I was accepted in UN Women's film directing training and was able to join a film production team on set for the first time.



Lilianne was a participant in UN Women's copywriting training. Photo: Courtesy of Lilianne Rando.

In the words of Lilianne Rando:
“To anyone thinking of shifting their career to pursue their passion, I tell them: ‘do it; it is definitely worth the ride’.”

After graduating from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Lilianne Rando got sidetracked from her creative passion when she joined her family business. However, even after four years, Lilianne, now 28, still wants to return to the creative field. She took her first step towards this by joining UN Women's copywriting training.

“Working with my father at our family business (import field) was an invaluable experience that I learned a lot from and one that helped me mature. Although I was successful and helped my family achieve important milestones, I longed for the stroke of my brush against the canvas.

I decided to quit and refocus my energy and time towards my passion for art, once again. At the time, I came across UN Women's copywriting training and decided to join. Although the training was not exactly related to the path I had envisioned, I thought it would be good to try something new and I was excited to learn anything related to the creative field. It turned out to be the best decision I ever made.

I learned everything about copywriting from scratch and the training was extremely informative and engaging. We reviewed many advertisements and analysed their strengths and weaknesses, which helped us connect theoretical concepts with real-life examples. I learned the importance of brainstorming as the basis of copywriting. I understood how to differentiate between marketable and non-marketable ideas and, most importantly, I learned how to use the appropriate language for different target audiences.

The training included 19 other participants, and it was a privilege to get to know them. As many of them have experience in the field of creative industries, I gained a significant amount of knowledge, insight and advice that I am sure I could not have received anywhere else. We created a supportive community and a lasting bond of sisterhood.

In addition, after sharing some of my previous artwork with my colleagues, I was surprised by the amount of support I received. They encouraged me to also start exploring graphic design, along with copywriting skills, since I had an ‘artistic eye’, as they said. With this boost of confidence and the positive experience I had in the training, I was encouraged to expand my horizons even more and I enrolled in more online courses to master the computer programs needed for graphic design and began working on my portfolio. So now, I am not only working on my copywriting portfolio, but my graphic design portfolio as well.

I believe that this training has defined my career path, moving forward. After quitting my job, I was only thinking of returning to drawing and painting, which – to be honest – would not have helped support me financially. Now, I'm working in two directions and developing my skills in both copywriting and graphic design. Although I hadn't considered these two paths before, I surprisingly turned out to have a passion and talent for them.

To anyone thinking of shifting their career to pursue their passion, I tell them: ‘do it; it is definitely worth the ride, and you will love every step you take.’”



Shimaa, a participant in UN Women's photography trainings, at one of her photo shoots in Cairo in 2023. Photo: Courtesy of Shimaa Moneer.

In the words of Shimaa Moneer:
“I believe in the potential and power of female photographers.”

Despite having 12 years of experience as a professional photographer, 32-year-old photographer Shimaa Moneer wanted to learn more about the field and continue to develop her skills. She also had big dreams of empowering Egyptian female photographers and believed that joining UN Women's photography training would help her do just that.

“With a bachelor's degree in journalism, I began my career as a professional photographer and videographer. I practised journalism and was proud to see my work featured by many prominent national news agencies.

However, in time, I found that journalistic photography was not providing me with the stability and financial income I needed. Therefore, I established my own freelance photography business providing photo sessions, wedding photography and fashion shoots.

Although I've been in the field for so many years, I believe that I can always learn new things and enrich my portfolio. That's why I was extremely interested to apply for UN Women's photography training.

I had just started to explore the field of food photography as I was interested in photographing objects instead of people, so the training came to me at the perfect time to help me take my first steps in the right direction.

During the training, I learned the specific technical skills needed for food photography and I now understand its intricate work. In addition, with the help of the instructors, I created an entire mobile studio with all the needed equipment, which I can set up in any restaurant for a shoot. The training not only helped me become a food photographer, but a food stylist as well, as I learned that this would enhance my skills and help me in creating impressive shoots.

My graduation project for the training was a food photography session with a fish restaurant in Egypt. It was my first time with such an experience, which I found very insightful. I am now connecting with marketing agencies to reach more clients. I even launched my own online blog, where I post my photos to expand my reach. I'm proud to see some financial returns from my work on food photography and I'm sure that this will increase in time.


In addition to learning a new type of photography, the training was also a great opportunity for me to get a refresher on all the rules and guidelines of photography, especially in terms of setting up lighting equipment and the correct angles to use.

Although I had only applied to the photography training, I was nominated and selected to receive film-directing training, and to be among the team to join the documentary competition that was organized at the end of the training programme. This experience broadened my horizons significantly as it was my first time directing a documentary and working with a crew on the ground. I learned the crucial importance of planning and preparing everything for a shoot. I was very happy and proud to see a film that I had worked on being viewed and enjoyed by an audience.

I also got a one-month internship opportunity in directing with a film-production house, which was a great experience as I had access to on-the-ground film shoots. I learned more about filmmaking, the role of a director, and I also had the opportunity to work on film editing, which was a new experience for me and was extremely insightful.

Throughout the years, I've often needed technical and professional support and have not always found it. However, thanks to this training, I now have a support system that I can revert to whenever I need any help. I've seen many other women in my profession experience the same thing. And because I believe in the potential and power of female photographers, I've started an online network, through social media, of female photographers and videographers in Egypt, where we can support each other and have a platform for professional networking.

I dream of one day growing this network until I can establish an international broadcasting agency. I want this agency to gather all Egyptian female photographers and videographers under one institution where they can find the technical and professional support they need to excel. Through this agency, we would work together to produce content focusing on different topics, including social issues, the economy, current news, and so much more. I have a vision that we would start producing this content on social media and grow until one day we can cover all communication channels, including the web, TV, radio and more. Who knows, maybe we could even grow enough to compete with some of the biggest international news agencies one day.”



This experience broadened my horizons significantly as it was my first time directing a documentary and working with a crew on the ground.

Women in Leadership

In Egypt, under the UN Women and ILO regional joint programme (JP), several activities engaged the private sector to promote gender equality and women in leadership and on corporate boards positions. Trainings were delivered with the American University in Cairo, School of Business and the Women on Boards Observatory.



Participants of the Advanced Management Program, AUC-School of Business in 2022. Photo credit: AUC

Through this activity,



22 out of **106**
companies



trained and committed to implement gender equality policies

through the adoption of the **Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)** and are connected to the Ministry of International Cooperation and the National Council for Women "**Closing the Gender Gap Accelerator**".



88
employees

were supported to promote gender equality policies in the workplace.

In addition,

273
women employees



received a 50% scholarship certification

on various courses, around **27.47%** were financially supported by their companies.



Certifications includes:

- ✓ Advanced Management,
- ✓ Executive Leadership,
- ✓ Corporate Directors' certificate,
- ✓ Digital Marketing Certificate,
- ✓ Digital transformation,
- ✓ Human Capital Certificate,
- ✓ Logistics and Transformation Certificate,
- ✓ Finance for Non-Finance,
- ✓ Organizational Culture & Diversity Program,
- ✓ Professional Certificate in Sales and Marketing,
- ✓ Real Estate Development and Management Certificate,
- ✓ Real Estate Finance and Investment Certificate, and
- ✓ Supply Chain Certificate.



4 annual national data

produced in collaboration with the Financial Regulatory Authority on the percentage of **women on boards**.

Voices from the field



The CDCP training equipped me with corporate governance, for which I was recognized right after the training. I am also glad to have been recently promoted to a senior managerial position within my organization due to this expertise in governance.

Dina Al-Mahdy, Chief Operating Officer, Women of Egypt Network; Graduate, CDCP 2021, Cairo, Egypt.



The knowledge I acquired through the CDCP training boosted my career and day-to-day managerial skills tremendously. I learned valuable in-depth business and strategic techniques in an evolving environment. I was also pleased to win the 2023 Egypt Women in Leadership for EGYPS Global Equality in Energy Awards {by the Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources Tarek El Molla}. I believe that the CDCP certification contributed a lot to this achievement.

Shahira Osman, Regional Branded Workshops Channel Manager, International Products—Asia, Europe, Middle East & Africa at Cheuron; Graduate, CDCP 2021, Cairo, Egypt.





Right after completing the CDCP programme, I was nominated as the Germany Chapter Ambassador at Women in Tech – Global Movement. Following that, I organized six events on women in STEM, in collaboration with renowned corporations like AWS and Oracle. I believe that the skills we gained through this training are exceptionally professional and will help women excel in the corporate world.

Noha Salama, Cloud Sales Leaders at NetApp; Graduate, CDCP 2021, Cairo, Egypt.



The CDCP training gave me a fresh outlook on the principles and best practices of corporate governance. It equipped me with the tools needed to be an effective board member and to promote proper governance in any organization. It has also been a great enabler that has opened new opportunities for me to join new boards.

Nermine Faltas, Chief of People & Corporate Development Officer at Solid Construction; Advisory Board Member for Kayan Automotive Group & GoBus Holding; Member of the Board of Trustees at Wellspring Foundation; and Graduate of the CDCP 2021, Cairo, Egypt.



The CDCP was a unique learning experience that helped me understand how boards work. I frequently engage with boards, and this programme was a pivotal bridge of knowledge that prepared me for my first board service. Besides the knowledge I gained, I have developed a network of exceptional fellows who are ready to provide support as we grow in our professional journeys.

Mai El-Kinawi, Corporate Communications Strategist, Founder & Managing Partner, True North Consulting FZ-LLC, Graduate, CDCP 2021, Cairo, Egypt.



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Right after completion of the CDCP training, I created a women's mentorship programme that I personally lead to help women in executive and leadership roles. As a result, I contributed to the advancement of the UN SDGs, and I was recognized globally in 2023, as a finalist for the WE Empower UN SDG Challenge's Top 25.

Rania Abdalla, Executive Board Member, Kestria, Founder & Managing Director, Kestria UAE, Founder & Managing Director, Aspire HR Consultants Egypt, Graduate, CDCP 2021, Cairo, Egypt.



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The Executive Leadership Programme was an eye-opening and thought-provoking in terms of new leadership and management theories. I strongly recommend this for business leaders.

Salma ElKadeem, Manager, Business Development and Consultancy Service, ECOVIS ElKadeem & Cos; Graduate, Executive Leadership Programme 2022, Cairo, Egypt.

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The Executive Leadership Programme had rich content that helped me assess the impact of leadership behaviour and styles on achieving success. I gained a comprehensive understanding of the organizational culture and ways of managing change while ensuring team cohesion. I was trained on critical thinking and strategic communication through the application of different tools, analysis and case studies, which broadened my understanding and comprehension of corporate and team management.

Dina Naguib, Data & Land Governance Consultant at the Land Portal Foundation; Graduate, Executive Leadership Programme 2022. Cairo, Egypt.



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The Digital Marketing Certificate Programme was a game-changer for me. It gave me the skills and knowledge needed to excel in my current role, reinforced my academic studies, and helped me work more efficiently.

Yasmine Haitham, Client Growth Manager at ArabyAds; Graduate, Digital Marketing Programme 2022 Cairo, Egypt.

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*Heba, participant of UN Women's CDCP training, 2021.
Photo: Courtesy of Heba Elrify*

In the words of Heba Elrify:
“Nothing should stop you from aspiring to, and achieving, your goals”

Heba Elrify, a wife and mother of three daughters, is the Corporate Credit Director at Sarwa Capital Investments Holding; a member of the Executive Committee and Senior Credit Committee; a part-time instructor and lecturer in the School of Continued Education at the American University in Cairo (AUC); and subject matter expert in executive education in the field of banking and finance. Elrify spoke to UN Women about her professional journey as a successful corporate leader and the impact the Corporate Directors Certified Programme (CDCP) training has had on her personal and professional life.

“It all began in grade one, when I was doing my homework with the help of my dad. I still remember this day as if it was yesterday. I was learning how to write the Arabic alphabet when the electricity went out. I was about to leave my chair because of the darkness when my father said, ‘Where are you going?’ I said, ‘It is dark, I can’t finish my homework’, so he replied: ‘No, just give me a minute’. A minute later, he came back smiling with a candle in his hand, saying, ‘Don’t let anything stop you from doing what you want to do’. That life lesson continues to guide me through every hurdle I encounter in my personal and professional life. Nothing should stop you from aspiring to, and achieving, your goals.

It wasn’t until I was in my mid 40’s that I was appointed as an Executive Director at Sarwa Capital Investments Holding. I take the formation of junior teammates as a social responsibility, and I perceive my mentoring and coaching activities as a way of giving back to my society. I am proud to have had many of my previous teammates promoted to higher positions and now managing other companies.


Married women are normally asked to take extended childcare leaves, resulting in their promotions being delayed or possibly even losing their job altogether. When children start going to school, mothers are the ones who have to help them with their homework. Therefore, women are often reluctant to stay at work after hours so they can attend to their family duties, which is perceived as a lack of interest [in work] by their seniors. It is no secret that trying to succeed at both the professional and personal levels puts a huge burden on most aspiring women in my society. Stories of highly educated women who prefer to become housewives just to avoid the endless disputes with their spouses are countless. I have seen professional women keener to succeed than their male peers, perhaps because of their will to show that they are capable and competent and to defeat the stereotypical and long-standing perception that women are only qualified to be housewives.

In my experience, one of the strategies that is commonly used by women professionals is to totally ignore the social barriers that result from gender discrimination. Gender inequality is deeply rooted in Middle Eastern societies. That's why women often work hard to find other ways to stand out, prove themselves and demand their rights, instead of just calling for equal rights with their male peers.

As a loving mother and a dedicated professional, I have faced lots of challenges. The prejudice of a male-dominated society at both social and professional levels continues to be one of the greatest challenges. However, I see great opportunity for development and creating positive change in Egypt. That is why I regard the efforts exerted by the School of Business at AUC in collaboration with both UN Women Egypt and the Financial Regulatory Authority (FRA) as truly uplifting and inspiring.

The training has had a great positive impact on my personal and professional life. From the beginning of the training, I found that I share many of the same challenges as my fellow participants. This was such a huge relief and it made me realize that I am not alone in my experiences and aspirations. Also, it was my first-ever experience participating in a training programme that is dedicated solely to women, grouping some amazing women altogether, thus enriching my professional network.

After the training, I find myself proudly looking forward to the board experience, an aspiration I would have shied away from, were it not for the training I received. I hope that these efforts demonstrate the huge untapped possibilities for the Egyptian economy and society when the principal of gender equality is adopted at various levels.”



The prejudice of a male-dominated society at both social and professional levels continues to be one of the greatest challenges.



*Nagham, participant of UN Women's Organizational Culture training, 2021.
Photo: Courtesy of Nagham Aly.*

In the words of Nagham Aly:
“I wouldn't have excelled without a healthy and supportive environment at home and at work.”

Nagham Aly is Human Resources (HR) Director at Raya Information Technology. Over her 22 years of work experience, she has been recognized as a top performer at Raya and earned membership in the Raya Achievers Club. She was also recently appointed as a legacy board member. Nagham initiated a health and wellness programme at Raya that focuses on employees' physical and mental health and nutrition. After graduating from business school, she pursued a diploma in Executive Management and then an Executive MBA from AUC before completing her post-graduate studies abroad. Nagham shares her professional journey and the impact of the Organizational Culture: Diversity & Inclusion Certificate she received through UN Women.


“I lead the HR team at one of the largest and fastest-growing system integrators, data centres and ERP-solution-providers across multiple countries, with more than 1,000 employees under my guidance. In addition, as a certified executive coach, I've had the privilege of supporting and empowering the C-suite team to unlock their full potential and become a better version of themselves. I believe I wouldn't have excelled without a healthy and supportive environment at home and at work.

Being a female executive leader in a male-dominated and highly demanding industry presents its own set of challenges. Not only do I have to stay abreast of market dynamics and adapt to the significant rapid changes in this field, but I also have to deal with gender bias and stereotyping. I have also had to find the right balance between my work and my personal life. Throughout the journey, I have discovered the importance of prioritizing my mental and physical well-being and the power of delegation and empowerment of all team members. It is for this reason that I have taken on the role of championing diversity, inclusion and equity initiatives in the workplace.

I was surprised to learn that Raya Holding had been a signatory of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) since 2016; however, concrete actions weren't in place. So, I started to work on implementing effective gender diversity mechanisms in the workplace, following the WEPs gender gap analysis tool and an action plan that addresses gender imbalances. This comes hand-in-hand with raising awareness among management about issues such as stereotyping, the gender pay gap, glass ceiling and unconscious bias.

Seeing the gap in recruitment, I set a target of increasing the number of women in the IT line of business. Together with the team, we initiated a targeted radio ad campaign to encourage women to apply for IT jobs and created a 360° virtual tour to showcase the organization's business model to attract women students in engineering. In addition, I got approval to financially support four of Raya's employees (men and women) to receive the Organizational Culture course at the AUC. I was amazed by men's comments and insights about that they learned during the course by listening to the challenges that their women co-workers face due to gender gaps and stereotypes while struggling to maintain their household chores, including their care roles. Following that, we designed and organized gender diversity training for all our managers and leaders, to foster awareness and understanding at all levels. Finally, we supported the provision of comprehensive technical and soft skills training, and development opportunities to disabled engineering and computer science graduates, in collaboration with Helm Academy. With those actions in place, I have seen a 4 per cent increase in the number of women in the IT business.

I believe that demotivation might arise along the way that discredits one's abilities. Therefore, it is essential to trust yourself, be resilient, have faith, practice self-care and celebrate the smallest victories”.



It is essential to trust yourself, be resilient, have faith, practice self-care and celebrate the smallest victories

Women in STEM



In Egypt, under the UN Women and ILO regional joint programme (JP), several activities and trainings targeted women studying and graduating from science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields to acquire the necessary skills for employability within an initiative called “FEMpower”. These were delivered by a consortium of consultancy and training firms (iSpark and iCareer).

Women in STEM fields attend “FEMpower Career Discovery Day” 2022, in Cairo, Egypt.

Through FEMpower,

400
women



accessed 30 hours of trainings

on **career readiness** (career-planning, market awareness, CV writing, interview preparation), **employability skills** (IT skills for business, presentation, communication, personal skills) and **group coaching**:



2 networking events attended by
1,368 women
participants

were organized with employers and
subject matter experts

for group coaching, peer-to-peer learning and employment opportunities.



172
women

were employed and an additional 200 accessed one-month internships.



Women in ICT

415
women



trained on IT coding for 3-4 months

including **23 women with disabilities**, which enabled them to **develop web designs and mobile applications**.

19

women



received internships and 23 got employed

on a task-based assignment (freelancers).

These trainings were delivered by the **Egyptian Council for Training and Development**.

Voices from the field



FEMpower was the perfect start for my professional journey. The structure of the training in a blended manner was the right fit that accommodated my schedule at the university. I had never been engaged in extra-curricular students' activities. I discovered, through this training, that I had missed a lot. I shouldn't go into the labour market bare-handed. This training encouraged me to participate in similar sessions in the future to be prepared to the world of business.

*Samar Ehab, Faculty of Commerce Student,
FEMpower participant, 2023, Alexandria, Egypt.*



I benefited a lot from the knowledge I gained about employability and labour market skills throughout the workshops. The sessions were well-planned and thoughtfully conducted. We all felt like we were working together. Overall, I can't describe how grateful I am to have participated in the FEMpower training.

*Nour Ehab, Faculty of Engineering Student,
FEMpower participant, 2023, Cairo, Egypt.*





Joining the FEMpower journey was such a pleasant experience. I was hesitant in the beginning, but the training proved to be worth every effort I put into it. Through the training, I was able to develop a professional CV, go through a mock interview and gain knowledge of the labour market and available vacancies. In addition, the internship opportunity I had at Paragons Co. added a lot to my experience. I now know which avenues I should pursue for a career. I am grateful for every step and all the knowledge I gained through this training programme.

Nourhan Ibrahim, Faculty of Arts Graduate, FEMpower participant, 2023, Cairo, Egypt.



I've graduated in 2020, and since then, I haven't been able to find a decent job. When I learned of the FEMpower journey, I got excited to join and learn where I should develop. I admit that the training intrigued me to get out of my comfort zone -especially with the internship opportunity I received at iCareer working in a field that is so demanding outside my field of studies. During the training, I worked on what I was missing for a professional CV, improved my interview skills and most importantly, I learned how to look for a decent well-paid job. I am in a much better astute now and I feel prepared to excel in my future interviews.

Rahma Khaled, Faculty of Education Graduate; FEMpower trainee 2023, Cairo, Egypt





I graduated from the Faculty of Engineering in 2019 with great dreams, but I was shocked to see the sad reality of the labour market, which has very limited job opportunities for women – especially in Upper Egypt. I was depressed and hopeless for years, until I came across the IT coding training on UN Women’s Facebook page, which changed my life 180 degrees and has rebuilt my hopes. I am now looking forward to joining the freelance market using the front-end development skills that I am grateful to have learned..

Alaa Tarek, IT coding participant, 2023, Luxor, Egypt



“I was worried in the beginning about the structure of the IT coding sessions: a commitment to five hours a day for up to four months could be boring, and I thought I might quit in the middle. However, I discovered that every single hour was worth the effort. It’s all practical and applicable in the world of coding. Having an assignment to assess our level of understanding at the end of the training was invaluable. I made use of every detail I learned to develop my own website, where I will market my handmade products.

Hend Hossam, Faculty of Engineering, IT coding participant, 2023, Cairo, Egypt





I had to quit my job and stay home to look after my four children. Now, at 46 years of age, I've started to pursue my passion, which I have never abandoned. Unfortunately, employers don't easily open up to someone like me. But this IT coding training was a chance for me to bridge the gap with the labour market. I am eager to join the freelance market in coding, where employers will only consider my skills, and not my age. I am honestly grateful for the opportunity.

Mahitab Zakaria, Faculty of Engineering, IT coding participant, 2023, Cairo, Egypt



"I am from a poor village with few learning opportunities – especially for girls. Given my rare specialization {Masters of Geographic IT}, I was looking for a scholarship in IT coding to help me find a suitable job. This online opportunity was like a dream come true. I am super grateful to finally have an open window for freelancing.

Safnaz Ahmed, IT coding participant, 2023, Beheira, Egypt





*Sondos, participant of UN Women's FEMpower training, 2023.
Photo: Courtesy of Sondos Gaber*

In the words of Sondos Gaber:
“Don’t dream of big leaps; take one single step at a time, and slowly but surely, you will attain your dream.”

Sondos Gaber, 25, quit her dream job after getting pregnant. However, she didn't let that stop her from building new skills through self-learning and different training courses, with the aspiration of finding a job that would match her new role as a mother. That's when Sondos learned about the UN Women FEMpower training through a social media announcement.

“I've always dreamed of holding the title of Engineer, following in my late mother's footsteps. Biochemistry was my gateway for this title. To my surprise, six months after my graduation in 2019, I applied with zero experience to a vacancy for the post of Lab Chemist at one of the renowned agro-food companies in Alexandria and I was accepted. At the entry level, I was paid EGP 2,750 (USD 89) a month, plus incentives. For me, it was more than perfect, especially as the company provided us with coffee and tea, social and medical insurance, and free transportation. However, a year later, I learned about my pregnancy, and I was afraid to continue with my job that was so demanding while having to take care of myself and my baby. So, sadly, I had to quit.

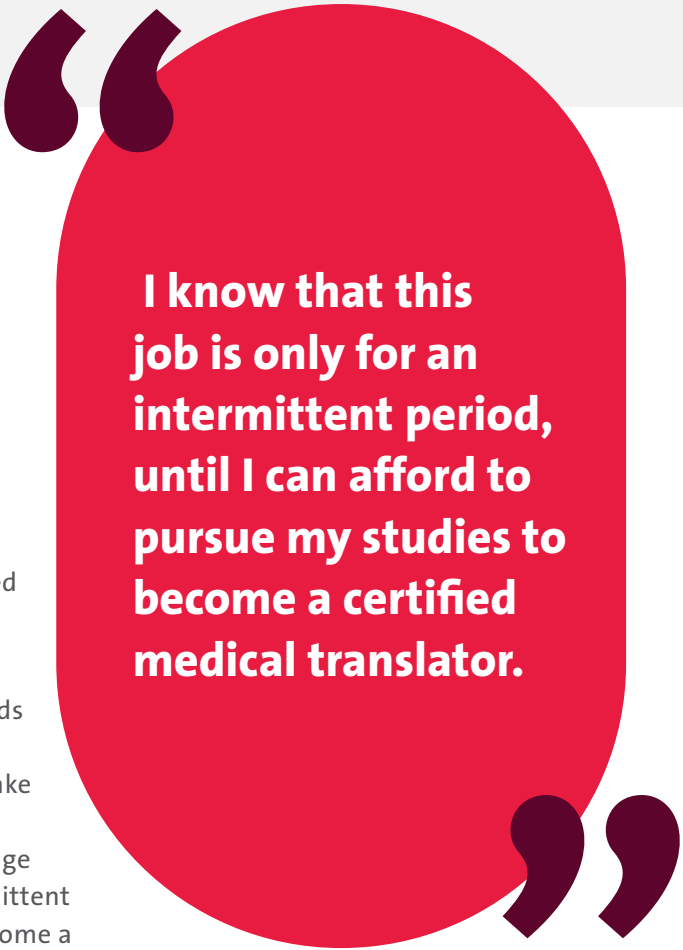
As my husband works outside of Alexandria five days a week, I found myself taking care of my child almost entirely alone. So, I spent the first year after giving birth educating myself on the world of newborns. At the time, I couldn't afford or accept to put my child into a nursery at such a young age. However, when my daughter turned 2, I started to look for a job that would allow me to work from home, so I could take care of her and be able to support myself financially at the same time. I listed all the jobs that had freelance opportunities: content creator, marketer, medical translator and work at a call centre for English accounts.

However, I found myself falling short on English language skills. So, I took online courses for three months. I then applied for a call centre online job at Vodafone UK, but I failed the online interview due to my fears regarding this type of interview. Honestly, this wasn't the first time I'd failed. I'd applied several times, and every time I had failed. That's when I learned about the FEMpower training. I got excited and eager to learn and work on my flaws. Following the training, I reworked my CV, which had one year of experience in a field that I am not pursuing now. I also started to train myself on the skills required for interviews, following the tips and personal branding sessions I received in the training. Right after the

fourth training session, I applied for a call centre job at Sutherland, which is a global company. This time, I went confidently into the interview and replied slowly, using the techniques I'd learned through FEMpower. A week after, I learned that I was accepted for the job and was called in for a three-month training.

Although it's a major career shift, it satisfies my needs for now. Plus, it's a better-paying job with a good remuneration package and it will also allow me to take care of my child – who I enrolled at a nearby nursery during my working hours, which I comfortably manage from home. I know that this job is only for an intermittent period, until I can afford to pursue my studies to become a certified medical translator.

If I would wish for something, I wish that my daughter will look up to me as I do to my mother. If I can leave a message to her and any other woman passing through the same situation as me, I would say: 'don't dream of big leaps; take one single step at a time, and slowly but surely, you will attain your dream'."



I know that this job is only for an intermittent period, until I can afford to pursue my studies to become a certified medical translator.



*Nourhan, participant of UN Women's FEMpower training, 2023.
Photo: Courtesy of Nourhan Ahmed.*

In the words of Nourhan Ahmed:
“Hard work definitely pays off”

Nourhan Ahmed, 23, is an only child who lost her father when she was 10 years old. Despite being raised in a house where both parents were journalists, Nourhan found herself compelled to study at the School of Law.

“I graduated from the American Diploma with a very high score, and I chose to study at the School of Law to fulfil my passion of learning about my civil rights and duties. I’ve always seen my parents discussing the country’s political issues and laws. I believe this is why I developed a visionary dream of getting to know more about these issues, especially after I lost my father during the uprising of 25 January 2011. Enrolling in a field that I’ve always admired was a motive to excel at my studies in university, where I graduated with honours. And I’m currently working on my master’s degree.

Throughout my college years, I always pursued at least two internship opportunities during summer vacations with law firms, hoping that once I graduated, I wouldn’t have zero experience on my CV and would have a winning ticket into the labour market. However, this unfortunately didn’t secure me a job at any of the law firms or banks after I graduated. I applied for different jobs, but sadly failed. The available vacancies were either low paid and/or had high risks or wouldn’t help me build or grow in my professional career. Getting a well-paid job as a lawyer is a tough task for a woman who doesn’t have any support in the field. Many fresh graduates struggle to find a space for themselves in the courts, which are a big maze for me.

Refusing to stay inactive, I accepted several internships after graduation that lasted up to six months without pay. During one of my breaks, I came across an announcement for UN Women’s FEMpower programme on social media. I attended the FEMpower Career Discovery Day, where I met many fresh graduates as well as recruitment and employment experts and accessed coaching circles. I still remember this day and the tips I received from mentors. This was followed by 30 hours of employability skills training.

The first thing I learned and applied was how to rework my CV and my LinkedIn profile. Once I did, I was thrilled to see the increased reach of my profile, and I received many requests from HR people. In addition,

my CV successfully passed the screening phase for job vacancies, which had never happened before, and I started to be invited for interviews. FEMpower also trained us on tips and tricks for interviews. I remember the mock interviews we had during group coaching at the end of the training. I personally have seen a tremendous impact on my communication style and attitude during interviews.

Right after completing the FEMpower training, I was called in for an interview at an insurance company. I passed the technical exam and two-layer interviews on the same day. The interviewers commended me on my outstanding communication skills, and I got the job. However, the job offer wasn't appealing to me. I landed another interview for a bank vacancy. But the offer also wasn't appealing. I was then invited for another interview with the Head of the International Relations Department at the National Council for Women (NCW). I successfully passed the interview and applied for a vacancy with the NCW's project on irregular migration. After a three-month probation period, I now hold a contract with a rewarding entry-level salary and I work on development and economic empowerment for women, which for me is so interesting. I've also made use of my law studies, becoming closely involved with the NCW's Women Complaints' Office, which deals with personal status laws and cases of domestic violence. Hard work definitely pays off".

FEMpower also trained us on tips and tricks for interviews. I remember the mock interviews we had during group coaching at the end of the training.



*Juliana, distributing products for her growing wholesale business after attending FEMpower training
Photo: Courtesy of of Juliana Atef.*

In the words of Juliana Atef:
“I believe that a critical part of my success goes back to the vital skills acquired through FEMpower training”

From a young graduate of the Faculty of Commerce to a wholesale distributor of snacks and candy, Juliana Atef’s story is one of determination and hard work. At the tender age of 21, Juliana is now managing her own private business, exhibiting remarkable growth. Juliana credits FEMpower training as a critical part of her success.

“As a graduating university student with no work experience, I felt unprepared for the professional world. However, I noticed that several of my friends were landing job offers and launching their career quickly. After seeking their advice, they strongly encouraged me to join FEMpower training, highlighting that this programme had prepared them for the job-hunting experience.

I quickly applied to FEMpower training, excited at the new opportunities that I was about to unlock. After starting the training, I was surprised to see a large number of young girls and women enrolled. However, despite the sizable class, I found that our instructor skillfully gave each participant personal attention and detailed answers to our questions.

With no prior experience in CV writing, I embarked on the task with enthusiasm. Under the expert guidance of the trainers, I successfully produced a professional and impressive CV that would equip me to begin applying to jobs. The training also provided me with invaluable knowledge of interview etiquette and preparation strategies, fostering a sense of confidence for future job interviews.

After completing the FEMpower training, I came across a sales position at a snack company. Eager to apply my newfound skills, I successfully secured the role. Driven by a thirst for knowledge, I diligently observed colleagues and sought their guidance, quickly soaking up their know-how. I soon began receiving many orders for our products and started building connections in the market.

I believe that a critical part of my success goes back to the vital skills acquired through FEMpower. The training empowered me, as a young woman, to navigate the workplace with confidence and professionalism, while effectively establishing a commanding presence. I also learned the indispensable value of perseverance, understanding that setbacks are merely steppingstones to big accomplishments.

Empowered by my strong skill set, I decided to invest my first salary to branch out on my own and start my small business as wholesale distributor for the snacks I was working on. Transitioning from sales representative to distributor, I placed large orders independently. The entrepreneurial journey was gruelling, especially as a young woman often underestimated by male supermarket and kiosk owners. However, persistent sales calls proved my gradual success, with each new client expanding my customer base.

I learned the true meaning of hard work as I carried the heavy boxes of snacks on my shoulders and drove around Cairo to deliver orders myself. I also found immense support from family and friends as they helped me in both the physical work of the job and in managing my small business with bookkeeping and other administrative tasks.

I am beyond proud of the business I've built and the success I've accomplished. Every time the phone rings with a new order, it is a testament to my capabilities and a validation of the trust placed in me by my clients. Additionally, achieving complete financial independence has been incredibly empowering. I am now capable of efficiently managing my finances, allowing me to allocate my income strategically for operational expenses and business growth.

The most crucial advice I can offer to fresh graduates, especially young women, is to never be intimidated and always carry yourself with confidence. You must be well-prepared with skills, knowledge and a plan, utilizing all resources available. This is the only way that a young woman like me has now become an up-and-coming businesswoman.”



I am now capable of efficiently managing my finances, allowing me to allocate my income strategically for operational expenses and business growth.



*Yomna Ismail at her banking job after she completed UN Women's FEMpower training in 2023.
Photo: Courtesy of Yomna Ismail*

In the words of Yomna Ismail:
“I successfully managed to land the job, which proved to be a turning point in my career”

Isolated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Yomna Ismail's university experience was confined to virtual classrooms and limited social interactions. Determined to break through her limited comfort zone, the 23-year-old graduate recognized the need to enhance her communication skills to succeed in the competitive job market. FEMpower training offered a promising opportunity to expand her horizons and unlock her potential.

“I imagined my university years as an exciting phase full of new friendships and on-campus experiences. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly shifted my plans, confining me to the online world to complete my English Language and Literature degree. Upon graduating, I noticed a significant gap between my strong technical abilities and my underdeveloped interpersonal skills.

I soon began my first job as an English instructor. But instead of feeling excited to start my professional journey, I felt dissatisfied and uncertain about my career path. I decided to shift my career but needed support and guidance, and that is when I came across FEMpower training.

The training introduced me to a diverse group of young women and girls, a refreshing change from my usual environment. I found myself surrounded by a supportive community that shared insightful experiences, advice and opportunities. It was through this exposure that I began to step outside my comfort zone and explore new possibilities.

FEMpower advisors provided invaluable assistance in revamping my CV, clearly outlining areas for improvement. Their detailed feedback on content and format helped me understand why previous job applications had been unsuccessful. The training also emphasized the critical role of interpersonal skills in the job-search process. Through tailored coaching, I learned how to effectively highlight my qualifications, project confidence and build connections with potential employers. By developing a strong personal brand, I was equipped to not only answer interview questions but also proactively highlight my competencies.

Armed with these newly acquired skills, I embarked on a job search, exploring various industries in the hopes of discovering a fulfilling career path. A promising opportunity arose when I was invited to interview for a customer support position at a leading Egyptian bank. While my lack of technical expertise in the banking and customer support sector posed a challenge, I successfully leveraged my branding skills, emphasizing my ability to connect with people from different walks of life, as evident during my brief teaching experience.

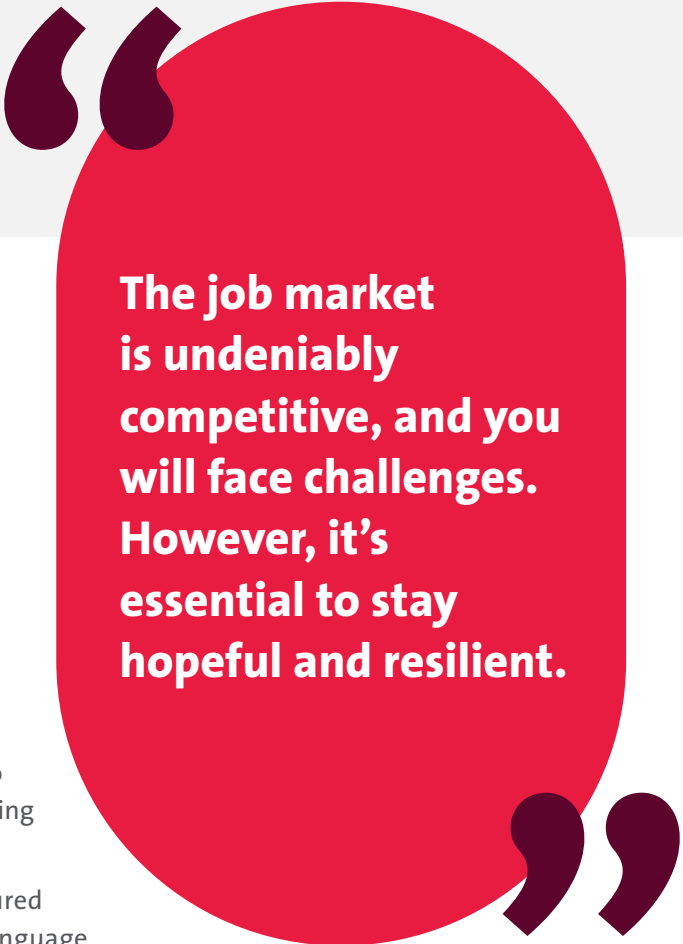
I successfully managed to land the job, which proved to be a turning point in my career. This role has offered invaluable opportunities for personal and professional growth. Interacting with a diverse clientele, spanning various age groups and backgrounds, has significantly enhanced my people skills. I've developed the ability to navigate challenging situations, including those involving angry customers, with composure and effectiveness.

Along with my full-time position at the bank, I ventured into freelance translation services to maintain my language proficiency and stay connected to my academic studies. After graduation, I used to turn down such opportunities, hesitant to try out anything new. But now my growing confidence and soft skills have empowered me to embrace new challenges.

With my full-time job and the freelance work, I can now proudly say that I am financially independent of my family. While I'm grateful for my parents' unwavering support, the satisfaction of earning my own income and managing my finances is unparalleled. This newfound independence has been immensely empowering.

I am eager to continue expanding my skill set and taking on new challenges. I am also thrilled to have recently been accepted for an administrative position with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and look forward to starting soon. Working for the United Nations has been a long-held dream, and this opportunity brings me one step closer to it. I am optimistic that this role will provide a platform to pursue a career as a certified UN translator, ultimately allowing me to leverage my language skills.

To any fresh graduates, I tell you this: the job market is undeniably competitive, and you will face challenges. However, it's essential to stay hopeful and resilient. Even if your career path does not align with your initial expectations, that is perfectly normal. Adaptability and persistence are key. Trust in your abilities and stay determined to find your place."



The job market is undeniably competitive, and you will face challenges. However, it's essential to stay hopeful and resilient.



Yosra Khaled at the World Youth Forum 2024 in Russia, to which she was accepted after completing FEMpower training. Photo: Courtesy of Yosra Khaled.

In the words of Yosra Khaled:
“My current success would not have been possible without my adopting a proactive mindset”

Given that she has been moving between different governorates her entire life, Yosra Khaled struggled with significant limitations in accessing educational and professional opportunities. As she approached her late twenties, an intense desire to expand her horizons and achieve personal and professional growth emerged. Upon discovering FEMpower training, Yosra recognized its potential to broaden her exposure and enhance her skill set.

“As I was born and raised in different governorates, my life trajectory was a bit constrained by limited educational and professional opportunities. My childhood, spent in the coastal town of Hurghada, offered basic school education so I was not well-prepared for the challenges ahead. A following move to Alexandria for my university studies in anthropology ignited hopes of a brighter future. However, the illusion of a promising career swiftly faded following a year of unemployment after graduation, revealing the city’s own economic constraints.

Disappointed by Alexandria’s job market, I returned to Hurghada to live with my family. Two more years of unemployment followed, forcing me to accept a call centre position out of desperation. The monotony of the role was quite different to my aspirations, leaving me unfulfilled and questioning my career path.

I saw myself exploring the world and leading a successful career, an aspiration I hoped FEMpower training would support me in fulfilling. Soon after joining the training, I began understanding the critical errors that were hindering my job search. I realized the increasing reliance on artificial intelligence in recruitment processes and the need to submit a strategic CV with key messages that would help me get selected. Afterwards, research and preparation played a critical role in my performance during interviews and how I presented myself.

FEMpower training helped me realize the futility of blaming external factors and the need to focus on my own self-development to achieve my goals. I changed my perspective on life and began to view every experience, even my call centre job, as an opportunity and a steppingstone. It dawned on me that significant accomplishments are often built from small, consistent steps.

That is why when a vacancy for call centre quality control opened in my company, I took the initiative and applied immediately. Armed with my polished CV and strengthened interviewing skills, I was quickly accepted. As I read my acceptance email, I was filled with joy and pride I had never felt before, especially considering that I was previously rejected for two other roles within my company. My meticulous research on the company and the specific position proved invaluable in boosting my confidence and helping me deliver an impressive performance during the interview.



Embracing risk and stepping outside of one's comfort zone are essential ingredients for achieving extraordinary results

I thrived in my new role, enjoying the daily opportunities to learn and grow. The substantial salary increase was a game-changer as well. For the first time, I was financially independent and was even able to save money.

I decided to take another big step and apply to be part of the mission representing Egypt at the World Youth Forum 2024 in Russia in the hopes of finally achieving my goal of exploring the world. I spent hours preparing for the interview, focusing on positioning myself and creating my own personal brand that would help me stand out – and I was accepted!

While the trip itself was sponsored, I was required to purchase my own plane ticket to Russia – something I would not have been able to do without the savings from my new job. The investment proved invaluable as the experience was one-of-a-kind and transformative. I found myself surrounded by a global tapestry of cultures, science, art and cuisine. I was building connections with people from diverse backgrounds, cultivating my skills in networking, cooperation and partnership.

It was also an honour to be recognized and awarded among the top 50 delegates by the Ministry of Youth and Sports for my dedication and representation of Egypt during the forum.

My solo trip to Russia was a journey of personal exploration as it was my first time travelling alone. Navigating the journey independently instilled in me a sense of autonomy and responsibility. From meticulous logistical planning to financial management, every aspect of the trip was my decision. This newfound self-reliance was both challenging and empowering.

Through the global network I created at the World Youth Forum, I was introduced to numerous scholarship opportunities for master's programmes worldwide. I am diligently applying to these scholarships, actively pursuing a master's in management or digital transformation, to further my professional development.

I believe that my current success would not have been possible without my adopting a proactive mindset. Rather than passively waiting for opportunities to fall in my lap, I actively pursued possibilities for growth. Success, I have learned, is not merely a matter of luck but a result of pursuing every passing prospective. Embracing risk and stepping outside of one's comfort zone are essential ingredients for achieving extraordinary results.”



*Alaa Elsayed practising her programming skills after completing the IT coding training in 2024.
Photo: Courtesy of Alaa Elsayed*

In the words of Alaa Elsayed:
“I now feel valued and respected as a woman in the programming field”

Alaa Elsayed, a 29-year-old Educational Technology graduate from the Port Said governorate, found herself trapped in career limbo for over seven years. The shortage of job opportunities in her hometown had left her feeling hopeless. Disappointed by the ineffectiveness of past programming trainings,

Alaa took a leap of faith and enrolled in UN Women’s IT coding training, delivered by the Egyptian Council, desperate to change the course of her stagnant career.

“Seven years after graduating with an Educational Technology degree, I found myself still struggling to find job opportunities or quality training in Port Said. I even tried quenching my thirst for knowledge by enrolling in various training programmes, but I found them disappointing. Content was weak and instructors were unengaging, leaving me feeling frustrated and demotivated to continue.

I opted to work on a freelance basis but found it to be even more challenging for a beginner with no experience like me. Additionally, the widespread gender bias in the tech industry proved to be a significant barrier to securing projects. Clients preferred hiring male programmers, reinforcing the stereotype that coding is a man’s domain. Even when I managed to break through this bias and land a client, I encountered challenges in establishing trust and securing fair financial compensation. I was frustrated to find the freelance journey, particularly for a woman in a male-dominated field, was filled with setbacks.

This is why when I came across UN Women’s IT coding training announcement online, I immediately applied, recognizing it as a long-awaited opportunity. I was eager to join a community that would champion the role of women in programming and provide valuable training and support.

The training community was exceptional, bringing together women from diverse backgrounds across Egypt’s governorates. With participants ranging from beginners to advanced programmers, we had the opportunity to learn from and support one another, fostering a collaborative and enriching environment.

We delved into the technical intricacies of programming and IT coding, mastering everything from basic coding languages to the advanced skills of building interactive websites. The training was highly effective as we learned through hands-on implementation and experimentation on over six project websites. This first-hand experience exposed us to various challenges and taught us how to resolve them. Our trainer emphasized the importance of independent research, encouraging us to seek solutions rather than relying solely on spoon-fed information. This skill proved invaluable as I mastered finding the most beneficial tutorials and online resources.

Upon completing the training and demonstrating my exceptional skills, I was proud to be nominated by my trainers for a remote internship opportunity at a cutting-edge start-up programming company. After weeks



I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to participate in UN Women's IT coding training. It has completely transformed my career and positively impacted my personality.

of working at the company, I can confidently say that the training has fully prepared me for the real-world programming field and that I now have the necessary skills to professionally handle any task assigned to me. My colleagues at the company are impressed by my abilities, exceeding their expectations for an intern. This positive impression has led to me being assigned more complex and demanding tasks, just like my senior colleagues.

I now feel valued and respected as a woman in the programming field. I am treated equally to my male colleagues, receiving the same level of professionalism and being entrusted with equally challenging tasks. I work in a respectful and safe environment that upholds high standards of professionalism and conduct. After years of struggling with unemployment, I have finally found my dream opportunity in the field I am most passionate about. With full enthusiasm and confidence in my ability to excel in this role, I am working towards securing a full-time position with this company upon completion of my internship.

While my family has always supported me financially, earning my own income and achieving independence feels incredibly empowering. During my years of unemployment, I felt that my talents were being wasted. Now, I finally feel valued and appreciated for my work. With my first paycheck from the internship, I invested in new hardware for my laptop and a larger Internet bundle to enhance my productivity and quality of work. These upgrades will also provide me with stronger tools to continue developing my skills and expanding my knowledge.

While I recognize that I still have a long way to go, I am determined to continue learning and growing until I reach the highest levels in my field. I aspire to become a manager, sharing my skills and knowledge with younger and less-experienced programmers.

Ultimately, I aim to utilize my programming skills to improve our local communities by introducing automated systems that can develop various sectors nationally, including education, health and the environment. For instance, I dream of developing a software system that allows patients to schedule medical appointments online, making the health-care system more efficient and providing greater comfort for patients who no longer have to spend hours in hospital waiting rooms.

I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to participate in UN Women's IT coding training. It has completely transformed my career and positively impacted my personality. While it's natural to feel intimidated, once you discover your true passion, the journey will be worthwhile. I have learned that with the right support and tools, perseverance can overcome any obstacle."



*Susana Sameh practising her computer programming skills after completing the IT coding training in 2024.
Photo: Courtesy of Susana Sameh.*

In the words of Susana Sameh:
“I believe it is crucial for any mother who chooses to stay at home – like me – to prioritize personal growth and continue developing her skills”

Susana Sameh, a versatile and inquisitive mind from the heart of Upper Egypt, was intrigued by the complexity of computer programming. As she delved into the digital realm, a spark ignited within her while unraveling the mysteries of code. However, the limited resources in her hometown of Minya posed a formidable challenge to her aspirations. Undeterred and eager to harness the power of technology and shape her own future, Susana, 32, sought the guidance and support of UN Women’s IT coding training programme, organized and delivered by The Egyptian Council.

“A lifelong learner at heart, I’ve always sought to expand my horizons and continually acquire new skills. While my formal education specialized in microbiology and I spent several years working in labs, I’ve embraced a diverse range of interests. Following my decision to stay at home after starting a family, I resolved to always keep my door open for creative pursuits. I dabbled in different fields until I stumbled upon the captivating world of IT coding through chance research. Intrigued by the possibilities, I began delving in, eager to discover the intricacies of this fascinating field.

I soon discovered that most available online resources were far too advanced for someone with no prior experience in coding. Unfortunately, local training and development opportunities were non-existent in my hometown Minya. With a stroke of luck, I stumbled upon the announcement for UN Women’s IT coding training, which I immediately applied for. From the very first day, I was captivated by the informative and interactive nature of our sessions, allowing us to immediately apply our newfound knowledge and solidify our skills. The fact that the training was conducted in Arabic, our mother tongue, was a significant advantage, as it eliminated the language barrier often encountered when learning new concepts online, where most content is predominantly in English.

The training delved deep into the world of IT coding, specializing in website back-end development. I mastered various coding languages and their applications, learning how to construct websites from the ground up. This included complex back-end programming to effectively present information and collect user data.

It was exhilarating to realize that I could create something tangible from absolutely nothing with just a few lines of code. During the first level of the training, I worked on developing a website for a café, incorporating information, a menu and an online ordering system. After successfully completing the first level, I progressed to the more advanced second level, where I delved into more intricate technical coding skills and applied them to another website for a car rental company.

Beyond the technical skills, the training emphasized the importance of soft skills in the IT industry. We received comprehensive sessions on creating professional portfolios and CVs to effectively attract clients for freelance or full-time work. Given the prominence of freelancing in this field, we also gained valuable insights into freelance opportunities, approaching clients, calculating project costs and maintaining effective communication throughout the project life cycle.

Upon completing the training with flying colours, I was thrilled to be recommended for an internship opportunity at a renowned programming company along with a few of my colleagues. This invaluable experience allowed me to work first-hand in the field and gain a genuine understanding of the profession. Collaborating with a talented team, I learned how to effectively coordinate the intricate tasks involved in programming and work seamlessly with others. I gained a clear understanding of the current market demands, motivating me to develop the necessary skills.

The internship was pivotal for me in entering the market, as the initial step is always the hardest and the most intimidating. It provided me with the necessary push, confidence and courage to prove myself in the field. A moment of immense pride came when the company CEO dedicated a meeting to express his admiration for our technical and professional skills. He was particularly impressed by the talented young women who demonstrated such exceptional abilities. The internship being paid was an additional source of satisfaction, as it validated my hard work and expertise.

I am currently excited to step into the next phase of my career, actively seeking freelance work or a full-time job opportunity. To bolster my confidence and enhance my skillset, I am diligently improving my abilities and expanding my portfolio by assisting family and friends with their website needs. I am convinced that the field of IT coding is an ideal fit for me, as it offers the flexibility of remote work and allows me to seamlessly balance my professional and personal commitments.

I am grateful to have embarked on this journey of self-discovery. I believe it is crucial for any mother who chooses to stay at home – like me – to prioritize personal growth and continue developing her skills. This not only fosters a sense of accomplishment but also opens opportunities for continued work, even on a freelance or part-time basis. In the long run, this can significantly impact a mother's sense of self-fulfilment and achievement, as seen through my journey.”



I am currently excited to step into the next phase of my career, actively seeking freelance work or a full-time job opportunity.

Vocational Training for Employment

In Egypt, under the UN Women and ILO regional joint programme (JP), a set of vocational trainings built the skills of jobless women to help them access the labour market by running their own businesses or finding paid employment. Vocational skills acquired include making handmade leather products, jewelry and accessories, hairdressing and makeup, fashion design, mobile maintenance, hospitality and catering, recycling and upcycling. These trainings were delivered in collaboration with Qodra for Development and Technological Solutions for Education.



Participants during technical training on jewelry-making, using copper, in 2023 in Beni Suef, Egypt.

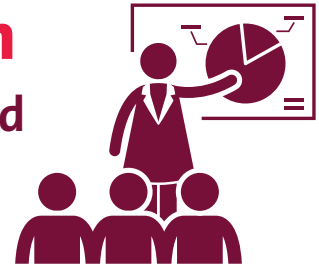
Through this activity,

253
women received



One month training on soft skills, digital marketing, and branding strategies,

along with technical vocational trainings.





Following this training,

199
women



received 15-30 day paid internships and



79
women



received production toolkits that helped them start their businesses through wage and/or self-employment.



Voices from the field



To find a training course that you consider beneficial for upskilling your talents is a tough task. I have a beauty salon, but I often failed to pay the rent or the loan I had for the tools I use. Looking into UN Women's hairdressing and makeup artist course, I was intrigued to apply to learn skills I haven't used before, with the goal to broaden the scope of the services I provide at my salon. I was lucky enough to be able to apply everything that I learned immediately. I started to announce new services for my clients. Since then, my income has doubled, and I have been able to pay my rent in advance.

Iman Mahmoud, hairdressing and makeup artist training, BeniSuef, Egypt. 2023



Being jobless and with no kids to take care of was the reason for me joining the UN Women training at the age of 42. Through this training, I have been completely transformed. I no longer feel lonely or helpless. On the contrary, I've started to be cheerful, working on my personal and professional skills, and am even earning my own income for the first time in my life. I believe every woman has the right to feel pretty, and this has become my aim and my job.

Shaimaa Morsi, hairdressing and makeup artist training 2023, Beni Suef, Egypt





I worked in a beauty salon for a long time, but I never had access to the tips and tricks of the profession. My employer kept it all to himself. This of course affected my salary scale and my professional growth. Now, with this UN Women training, I've been able to see it all and practice it. I can't be grateful enough for this opportunity to uplift my skills in a profession that I have always admired.

Naglaa Osman, hairdressing and makeup artist training 2023, Beni Suef, Egypt



I have a passion for handmade products, but I didn't have the required skills to make marketable products that were both appealing and profitable. So, I joined UN Women's training on handmade jewelry and accessories. What made it unique is that it was the first time in Beni Suef that women got to work with copper to produce a product that, after polishing, could be gold-plated and sold for a good price. With the economic downturn, I believe that such products will be so appealing and will secure a good income for me. My parents are so encouraging after seeing the quality of my products. I am now working on a marketing plan for the products I make with one of my friends.

Doha Saad, handmade accessories training 2023, Beni Suef, Egypt





I'm still living with my parents, who I look after. I used to work with different employers, but I was poorly paid and exposed to abuses of power. So, I decided to work on my own, channelling my passion for handmade products. I only had some skills in crochet, which I learned from my mother and grandmother. The UN Women training not only taught me new skills in crochet work, but also added copper and accessories to my repertoire. I now produce crochet products with copper work or accessories added, and I'm starting to market them online via my Facebook account and other platforms for handmade products. I've also started to teach my nieces and nephews this skill, to make them happy. I'm grateful that I'm now financially independent and running my own business.

*Shymaa Hazem, handmade accessories training
2023, Beni Suef, Egypt*





*Nagwan, participant of UN Women's Vocational training, 2023.
Photo: Courtesy of Nagwan Refaat.*

In the words of Nagwan Refaat:
“I wanted to excel in a field of my own choice and to prove myself despite the ordeals I’ve endured.”

Nagwan Refaat, 43, is a divorced single mother of four. To provide for her family, she took out loans that she had to repay at a high rate, which was a significant burden for her to manage alongside running her own retail business – especially given the recent surge in prices. So she stopped working and was forced to rely on her older sons. Then, three months after she stopped working, she came across a UN Women announcement for the vocational training over social media.

“Being one of seven siblings in a poor village, I was only allowed to complete my intermediate education and was forced to get married at the age 16 to someone who was 24 years older than me. It was normal, I believe, that we didn’t get along. He also wasn’t providing for his kids, so we got divorced. I was 28 with two children to provide for. But my parents didn’t accept me staying without being married, so I got remarried to a teacher who was only two years older than me.

As my second husband wasn’t obliged to provide for my kids, I started taking out loans, at a 28 per cent interest rate, to help me buy some home accessories to sell via my Facebook account and WhatsApp groups. But with the economic downturn, people started asking to pay in instalments, which I couldn’t afford, so I quit the business.

[I had two more children with my new husband] and with the increased financial burden of four children to care for, my husband accepted a job abroad. Then he suddenly divorced me after 15 years of marriage, at the age of 43, when our kids were only 13 and 10. I felt lost, especially after receiving rejection letters whenever I applied for a job, mainly because of my age. The alimony wasn’t enough, and I felt sorry that my older kids had to quit their studies at an intermediate level, to work and help me with the finances. With my share of my father’s pension, I received a total of EGP 5,000 (USD 162)/month to cover my household expenses and pay for my younger kids’ schooling, as well as my utility bills and rent. I was at this point when I came across the UN Women vocational training announcement on social media.

I was hesitant to fill out the application, lest I be rejected due to my age. Yet, I was thrilled to be accepted for the hairdressing and makeup artist training. Although I had zero experience in this field and my sister was urging me to apply for the fashion design module – promising a good salary of EGP 4,000 if I worked with my nephew at his factory in Cairo, I found myself choosing the beautician field to avoid any possible family conflicts, and to save face from any embarrassment or feeling helpless if I worked with my nephew. I wanted to excel in a field of my own choice and to prove myself despite the ordeals I’ve endured.

For the first time in my life, I feel that I am not [that old]. I can do wonders and I can still learn and excel.

I came to the training with an open mind. I was a bit shy in the beginning to share my story with any of the participants. However, the environment was so welcoming, and I found many others struggling like me as well. The training was so structured and rich, providing 21 practical training days and an additional 15 days of paid internships. I outperformed during the practical training, so the instructor – the owner of a beauty salon herself – recommended me to support other hairdressers, including herself. So, I started working on a task-by-task basis and got paid around 500 (USD 16) EGP for five working hours.

I started to become well-known in my area. Many of my neighbours started asking me to do their hair and one of my male neighbours even offered to let me start my own beauty salon in one of his shops. I am eager to move on with running my business after receiving the professional tools from the programme. For the first time in my life, I feel that I am not [that old]. I can do wonders and I can still learn and excel.”



*Mai, participant of UN Women's Vocational training, 2023.
Photo: Courtesy of Mai Atta.*

In the words of Mai Atta:
“Now, my life is much easier. I accept where I am and am looking forward to growing professionally.”

Mai Atta, 33, lost her parents at the age of 15. As the eldest daughter, she dedicated her life to raising her four siblings. She went on to study but later had a hard time finding decently paid work that her older brothers also approved of. She was alone, jobless, and desperate, when she heard about the UN Women vocational training through one of her friends and signed up – a decision she credits for making her life easier.

“I have to admit that I was very close to depression many times. It’s so painful to feel lonely after spending your whole life taking care of your siblings while you are only a child of 15. I lost my parents in one month, and as an elder daughter, I refused to get married for the sake of my younger sisters.

I graduated with an upper intermediate certificate in computers and at the same time, I am a certified Islamic preacher. However, in Beni Suef, and in Upper Egypt in general, men preachers are the only ones who get paid for this job.

Given the limited job opportunities in my hometown, I worked once as a data-entry clerk with the Ministry of Social Solidarity. My contract was for three years, and I earned EGP 900 (USD 29) a month. Although it was a small amount, it was enough – together with my father’s pension – to cover my household expenses. When my contract ended, I searched for other vacancies, however, all the available jobs were as sales assistant at supermarkets or pharmacies, but my brothers refused that I work there, fearing possible abuse for me on the streets. So, I was alone and jobless.

I joined the hairdressing and makeup artist training with UN Women at a time when I was hopeless. This training was a turning point for me. It not only built my skills in a profession that my brothers didn’t mind me doing, but it also helped me build my network and mingle with other participants whose stories I could relate to. With each training I took, I would go and practise on my sisters and neighbours. I would take photos of my work and post them online, and I received many positive comments from my followers.

Now, my life is much easier. I accept where I am and am looking forward to growing professionally. I have the skills and the network required to start working on my own as a hairdresser and makeup artist. Hopefully, one day I would become a famous makeup artist.

I would say to any woman: ‘don’t stay at home waiting for others to help you out. Find your talent and build your skills around it. Move on with your life and build your support system. Don’t stay too much in your seeming comfort zone, lest you fall into the trap of depression’”



Stitching Dreams: Where Leather Meets Empowerment

*(From left to right) Hanan Yehia, Sherine Abdel Aziz, and Rehab Kamal, participants of UN Women's training for handmade leather products showcase the products they produced during the training.
Photo Credit: UN Women/Nada Ismail*

A rich, earthy scent hung in the air, an exciting mix of tanned leather and possibilities. It was in this vibrant training space that Rehab, Hanan, and Sherine, three women with hearts brimming with creative fire, formed an unexpected connection. UN Women's training on handmade leather products sparked their shared journey in the world of leather, strong and supple like the very material they were learning to master.

The training took the three women and their colleagues into the rich world of leathercraft. Textures bombarded their senses: smooth cowhide, rugged buffalo, delicate goatskin. They translated their visionary designs into precise measurements, creating wallets, bags, and belts with flawless

finishes. Empowered by this skillset, Rehab, Hanan, Sherine, and their colleagues can now start their own businesses built on creativity and passion.

Rehab Kamal, a 46-year-old woman with a lifelong love for handcrafted treasures, held a burning desire to work with leather. Despite her initiative to apply to numerous leatherwork training courses, high fees or age-related restrictions repeatedly crushed her dreams.

"I was ecstatic when I was accepted in UN Women's leather training and it turned out to be a treasure trove of knowledge," Rehab beamed.

"We delved into every aspect of the different types of leather – be it cow, goat, or even snake!

*Rehab Kamal, a participant of UN Women's training for handmade leather products holds one of the purses she and her colleagues produced during the training.
Photo Credit: UN Women/Nada Ismail*



We learned to determine the perfect material for different designs and product types. Just by touch, we could distinguish natural from treated leather, or genuine color from clever dyes,” added Rehab.

Similarly to Rehab, Hanan Yehia, 40, held a deep love for handcrafted creations. Her fingers, familiar with years of sewing and clothing design, craved a new challenge. When UN Women’s leatherwork training crossed her path, it felt like a perfect chance to expand her creative horizons in the fashion industry.

“Leatherwork was a complete new territory for me,” Hanan stated, “ but I instantly fell in love with it during the training. We began with the basics – how to translate a vision into a design, then meticulously cut the leather to the right size. We mastered working the needle, transforming separate pieces of leather into finished products, and with each piece we could see our skills developing more and more.”

The training had the women start off small with working on wallets, and as their confidence and dexterity grew, their projects developed into purses, bags, and belts, each a testament to their evolving mastery.

“It was a special moment of pride for me when I held my first completed bag,” Rehab recalled. “It wasn’t just leather anymore; it was an extension of myself. The color, the stitching, the very design – it all reflected my personality in a way I hadn’t anticipated. It might not have been a masterpiece, but it was undeniably unique.”

Unlike Rehab and Hanan, Sherine Abdel Aziz, 31, did not know much about fashion, but would always jump at any opportunity to learn something new. UN Women’s training was Sherine’s chance to explore the world of leatherwork.

“The training did not only provide us with the necessary knowledge and guidance to enhance our skills,” Sherine said. “It also created a dynamic workspace and a vibrant team spirit where we all exchanged experience and benefited from each other. Surely the trainer was our knowledge expert, but we were also learning from everyone around us and through all the creative ideas in the room.”

Empowered by their newfound expertise, Rehab, Hanan, Sherine and all their colleagues have gained



*Sherine Abdel Aziz, a participant of UN Women’s training for handmade leather products wears one of the bags she and her colleagues produced during the training.
Photo Credit: UN Women/Nada Ismail*

a new level of confidence in their ability to create beautiful pieces worth selling. They collectively work on marketing their products through family, friends and online groups, working together on producing the highest quality finished products. Each woman is also working individually on improving her skills further, hoping one day to launch her own business and increase her income.

“Never stop feeding your curiosity and learning something new!” Sherine concluded. “We’re surrounded by incredible opportunities – these amazing programmes like the one UN Women provided, and a universe of unlimited resources. We must use them to unlock our full potential and ignite the passions that truly set our souls on fire.”

*Sherine Abdel Aziz, a participant of UN Women’s training for handmade leather products wears one of the bags she and her colleagues produced during the training.
Photo Credit: UN Women/Nada Ismail*





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