Mediterranean woman, vector for change and recovery

Barcelona, March 4, 2021 – By Anwar Zibaoui, General Coordinator at ASCAME –

Women in the Mediterranean region have faced the pandemic in particularly harsh conditions. They have led the healthcare front with 79% nurses. Despite their multiple responsibilities, women in the region show the lowest rates of participation in the world's economy and labour force.

In the post-COVID-19 era, women can make a difference in the recovery process and bet on a new development model. Now is the time for them to take their rightful place in the economy, in leadership positions in the region, and act as a vector for change and recovery.

Integration of women into Mediterranean economy region remains a pending issue, despite progress in some countries. Unfortunately, per capita income continues to be one of the lowest, poverty continues to affect large parts of this region, and the international situation is no longer as favourable as it used to be.

Half of the world population of working age are women, being 50% of them in business sectors compared to 80% of men. A loss of wealth of 10% of GDP in advanced economies and more than 30% in the Mediterranean region is estimated due to the gender gap.

The figures are staggering: only 49.2% of the population in the southern and eastern parts of the Mediterranean participate in the labour market compared to 63.5% globally. Of these figures, only 30% are women, reaching 41% of female unemployment in young women. Unemployment among female graduates reaches 45% and, although there is now greater access to education, they are still excluded. In reality, increasing the participation of women would add 47% to GDP in the next decade.

This is a low participation rate in the southern Mediterranean economy, with only 16%, while the world average is 33%. This implies a triple loss in human capital, growth and social equality. With the participation of women in work, the middle class increases and social and gender inequalities are reduced.

Incorporating women is a necessity that determines the success or failure of the economic and social development of the entire region. In the Mediterranean integration process, it is necessary to achieve gender balance and equal opportunities. Long-term strategies with specific programmes must be in place, as support for women could add $12 billion to global GDP by 2025.
Encouraging women to become entrepreneurs, as well as increasing the number of female entrepreneurs, guarantee economic gains and accelerates equality. It's about diversity and inclusion, not about women versus men. It is a balance that contributes to a better and informed decision making. Women have the potential to be a contributor to economic growth.

The stakes are high. Many difficulties could be avoided by facilitating the conditions to promote their role in the economy, by removing the real obstacles for women to move up the corporate ladder, by offering equal opportunities in salary and promotion, and by not pigeonholing women in specific positions.

Inequalities affecting women in the business sector have, among other causes, cultural norms, insufficient support for women-led businesses, the lack of policy frameworks that address the gender gap, and the challenge of balancing family responsibilities with work ones.

But women entrepreneurs constitute an increasingly consolidated and present reality in the Mediterranean, and their role is key to achieving regional integration objectives. Women share a tradition of cooperation, as they can use their strength to create new scenarios, share their experiences and establish business relationships.

The creativity and potential of women must be harnessed. They must be given the support, the opportunities and the freedom to make their contribution. Holding on to outdated traditions is comfortable, but it can kill the genius of innovation. Change is inevitable and it can be enriching if everyone participates and opens up to the ideas and points of view of others.

The participation of women in the economy is a priority and an imperative due to its positive impact in driving economic growth. With their contribution we can reduce social inequalities because prosperity is interdependent on inclusion. Also the fact that no undertaking is sustainable if it does not incorporate and reflect its society.

It is impossible to advance in the region without building together a society based on equal opportunities or without ensuring the participation of women in economic and business development. Women are important actors in the creation of companies and have a competitive advantage: they are innovators who create new solutions to improve people's lives. Their impact on society can be decisive and key for development and recovery in this post-COVID-19 stage. Without them it is impossible to advance, since they are partners in evolutions and revolutions, as they are in society.