



First Jobs for Young Women in the Middle East & North Africa: Expectations and Reality



Overview

First Jobs for Young Women in the Middle East & North Africa: Expectations and Reality is a research initiative from Education For Employment (EFE), Bayt.com and YouGov that provides insight into factors that inhibit or discourage young women from securing a first job. The recommendations below, based on a survey of over 2,300 young women and employers across the region undertaken in 2015, complement existing research on women's labor force participation in the region. Research findings point to approaches that employers, NGOs, donors and young women themselves may adopt to reduce barriers to work through four approaches:

1 Focusing on what matters to young women



Many employers are not offering desired benefits like nursery or daycare facilities that young female employees say would most encourage young women to enter the workforce.



In seeking to increase women's employment, some employers are investing in policies that are not high priorities in the eyes of young women employees, such as provision of female supervisors.



Negotiating and adjusting salaries may be an effective method for attracting young women employees, as inadequate salaries are a top obstacle for women seeking employment.



Access to suitable and affordable transportation may be a decisive obstacle or enabler of young women's employment.



A benefits information gap exists between young women and employers: young women are significantly less likely than employers to be aware of the existence of policies and benefits that encourage women's employment in their company.

2 Enhancing pathways to a job



Few employers or young women believe that NGOs and government initiatives are the most effective method for supporting the entry of young women into the workplace. There is a significant opportunity for enhancing the reach and visibility of NGO and government initiatives among employers and young women.



Although internships are a common pathway to employment in many parts of the world, strikingly few young employed women in MENA believe that internships were the most effective method for securing a job. Enhancing the internship-to-employment pathway could improve young women's employment outlook.



Personal connections to current company employees may be particularly important for young female job seekers; young employed women named personal connections as the single most helpful factor to securing a job – by a wide margin.



The gender of the employer may contribute to gender bias in the hiring process. While female employers were more likely than their male counterparts to feel that gender is not an important consideration, for employers who would choose one gender over the other when young candidates had equal qualifications, employers favored applicants of their own gender.

3 Equipping young women job-seekers with the right skills and expectations



Soft skills deficits are recognized as barriers to employment by young female job seekers and employers alike. Young women job seekers are more likely than employers to cite work ethic as a top challenge, and conversely, employers are more prone to view lack of confidence as a top challenge.



Although SMEs are expected to comprise a significant portion of MENA's job growth, only 7% of young women job seekers indicated that they would most like to work in a small or medium local private company, as compared to 35% for multinationals and 26% for government.

4 Publicizing and increasing the demand for women employees in the workplace



Employers tend to consider the potential social impact of women's employment, but only a small minority view the potential business or economic gains as a primary impact. The young women surveyed appear to be unaware of the influence of women's employment on the economy.