

Work for progress

Labour Market Case Stories 2020 - Middle East and North Africa

Danish Trade Union Development Agency - DTDA

Confederation of Danish Industry - DI

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ULANDSSEKRETARIATET - DTDA
DANISH TRADE UNION DEVELOPMENT AGENCY



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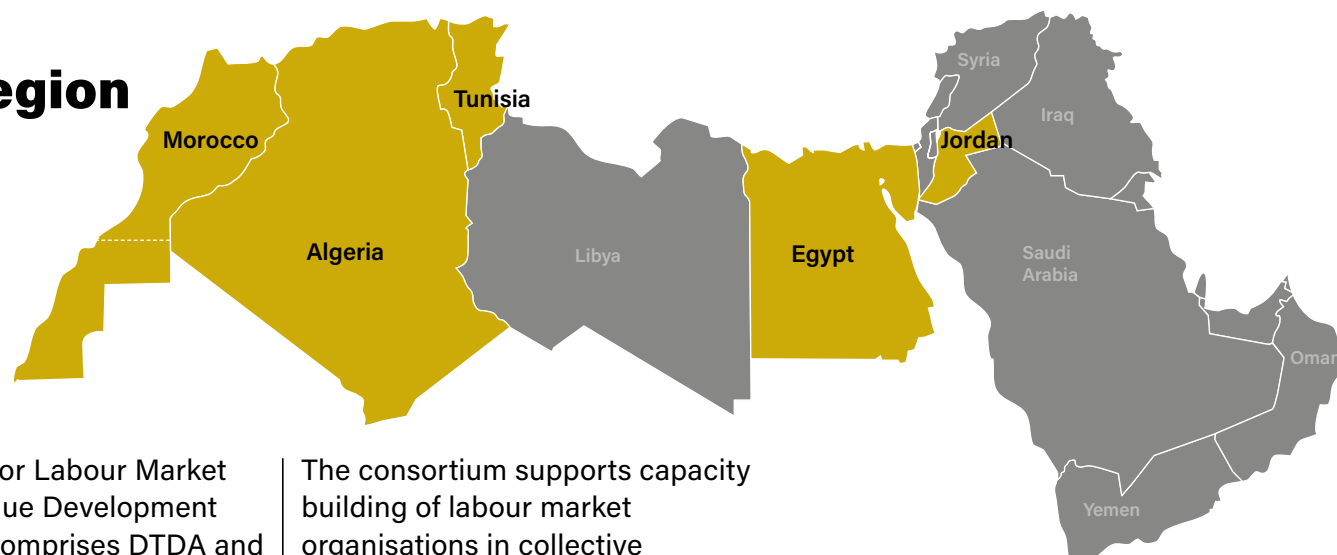


MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
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The Consortium for Labour Market and Social Dialogue Development Engagement 2.1 comprises DTDA and DI with DRC as a sub-contractor. The consortium supports trade unions and employers' organisations in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan to promote social dialogue and to work for protection of workers' rights, promote creation of decent jobs, a productive labour market, and sustainable growth, thereby creating economic opportunities for young men and women.

The consortium supports capacity building of labour market organisations in collective bargaining, social dialogue, dispute resolution, and advocacy for improved legislation and enforcement of legislation, awareness raising for workers' rights, gender equality, and occupational health and safety.

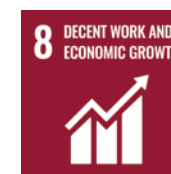
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Social dialogue is the technical term for negotiation, consultation or simply exchange of information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers, and workers.

The Sustainable Development Goals

The consortium's main SDG focus is goal number 8 (Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all).

While all goals must be reached to achieve the UN 2030 objectives, the consortium considers the SDG8 as a prerequisite to fulfil all Sustainable Development Goals.



Securing safety in the waste sector

As a shop steward in the Tunisian waste company ECOTI's landfill in Gabes, Ahmad Dhib wants to address the problems of work-related accidents. It's a challenging issue, but with training in collective bargaining agreements (CBA) and trade union work, supported by the DTDA, he acquired the skills to start a dialogue at his workplace.

"The training helped me with negotiation, knowledge, and training of other workers. I learned how to choose the best time to negotiate and how to play the role of a mediator between the workers and the management to settle any disputes."

The skills came into play. In the light of COVID-19 he saw an opportunity to organise a training in Occupational Health and Safety (OHS). The company management agreed, and 50 people were trained by an inspector from the national OHS institute. According to Ahmad, who also is a coordinator of the waste sector in the UGTT Federation of Municipalities and Waste, it made a big difference.

"Before, there was a lack of knowledge concerning the how-tos of handling heatstroke, fire accidents and use of personal protective equipment. After such training with rich content, the workers now recognise the risks and dangers, especially in relation to COVID-19. They became more cautious and concerned with social distancing and use of masks."

The OHS committees were also activated. Ahmad explains how there were no actions before because the landfills are operated by companies after tenders on contracts for mostly three years, which makes the formation of the committees difficult.

"But the needs emerging from the critical health situation due to COVID-19 were a good opportunity to activate the committees. Now they convene frequently to study the health and safety situation at the workplace, the commitment to OHS procedures, and to identify and try to obtain missing OHS equipment."



PHOTO: MOHAMED HASSAN

Research by the International Social Security Association shows that improving OHS is a good business. For each dollar invested in OHS, companies can expect productivity increases of 2.2 dollars. That is because a safe working environment reduces the time spent on disruptions and makes it easier to keep skilled employees and to attract new talent.

Workers in the ECOTI landfill will soon benefit from mandatory OHS training. This is part of a new CBA for the waste disposal sector. The agreement is currently awaiting approval by the government.

Addressing violence and harassment against women through social dialogue

Some workplaces in Jordan are facing challenges with violence and harassment against women. Last year the company Nestlé chose to address these issues by including it in the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) signed by the General Trade Union of Workers in Food Industries and Nestlé. The CBA now states that a safe working atmosphere free of violence, harassment, and discrimination must be provided.

According to Bushra Al-Salman, who was the labour representative negotiating with the company, it was a bit challenging at first to raise awareness about the issues. But with more knowledge and a constructive social dialogue it ended up as a success.

“The term sexual harassment was considered as a new employee demand and it was unacceptable to discuss such a topic, but when the company noticed the number of

harassments happening at their premises, they started to be more flexible talking about it.”

For Nestlé it was important to send a clear signal to all employees that such behaviour is not acceptable.

“Now the employees, especially the females, can feel more secure and if something happens, they know that they can declare it and shouldn’t feel ashamed,” says Randa Al-Bably, the HR-manager at Nestlé who negotiated the agreement.

As head of the Women Committee in the union, Bushra Al-Salman sees several problems with inequality and harassment, and often women are afraid to speak up about it.

“The situation for women is very weak despite that the Jordanian women are very well educated, but their participation in the union work and in the Jordanian labour market is very poor because of unequal wages, low salaries, long working hours, culture, and lack of transportation.”



PHOTO: EMAN HELAL

“Women are afraid of speaking up, but now they know that they should not feel ashamed,” Bushra Al-Salman says.

By addressing the problems in the CBA, Bushra Al-Salman believes it can bring changes to the table.

“It’s a warning to all employees who might think of doing something to a female colleague.”

Both the employer and the workers have good reasons to be content, when a CBA is concluded in a company. Collective agreements typically raise the wages of the workers. For the employer, the extra cost is offset by an increased productivity, a result of more motivated workers and improved communication between workers and employers.



Training helps young girls strive towards entrepreneurial dreams

A busy hum from sewing machines fills a warehouse in Egypt's third-largest city, Alexandria. Samar Asser is one among 71 girls aged between 15 and 18 learning how to become sewing machinists at the Pink Cotton School.

For Samar, the school has shown her a way to have a career: "I felt that my life stopped after elementary school. Now I have found a growing working field."

The school is run by the Pink Cotton Factory. The factory has been so successful with its line of t-shirts, dresses, and baby clothing that it has

difficulty in finding skilled labour. So the two founders started their own vocational training program.

The program is especially attractive for poorer families because the students apply their new theoretical knowledge at the factory and receive a salary for the work.

In 2020, Pink Cotton School was expanded through a new partnership with the employers' organisation FEI. Training in issues like occupational health and safety, gender equality, and entrepreneurship help achieve two goals, explains Sustainable Development Engineer at the FEI, Noha Elbalky, who teaches at the school.

The first goal is to improve the Egyptian industry by teaching future employees how to engage in dialogue to ensure a working environment that is safe for both men and women. The second is to help more young women start their own projects and businesses and stay in employment after marriage.



PHOTO: ECO SD-FEI

"We want to empower youth and create opportunities for them. We don't just teach them, we also offer them support to become entrepreneurs and start up projects," says Noha Elbalky.

For Salma Asser, the vocational degree and the training from the FEI have given her a new perspective on her own possibilities. Now

she is considering becoming an entrepreneur when she graduates in 2021:

"I know how to draw, so I used that talent to design a special pattern that I can use on anything. I would like to open my own atelier, where I can design my own clothes".

The Pink Cotton School was started in 2015 with support from USAID. More than 600 girls have benefitted from the vocational training. After graduation, 75% of the students take up a job at the factory. The others have in-demand skills that can help them find a job elsewhere.



Equipped with tools, empowered with knowledge

Fleeing Syria, 52-year-old Emad Mubarak Terkawi not only had to leave behind his home, he also had to leave his most precious belongings and his source of living as an electrician – his tools.

Under tough economic conditions and a high unemployment rate in Jordan, reaching around 23 per cent in 2020, it has become more difficult for refugees to access job opportunities.

As the sole breadwinner for his family of five, Emad had struggled to find a job to support his family since his arrival to Jordan in 2013. Additionally, working in his specialty required tools that are expensive to buy or even rent.

After being introduced to the Danish Refugee Council's (DRC) Sanad Centre in East Amman and the referral system Masar-E, Emad was directed to receive a vocational training in cooling and conditioning at the Yaghi Academy.

After taking the training, Emad was well-equipped to enter the labour market. With the help of DRC, he started preparing his papers to apply for a construction work permit. In addition, Emad got the opportunity to apply for a self-employment grant that allows construction workers to buy their own tools and become self-employed.

As Emad now has his own set of tools, he is eagerly waiting to obtain a work construction permit. This will allow him to finally earn an income that can support his family and the education of his four children.



PHOTO: DRC

Beneficiaries receive technical training in electrical installation.

Masar-E is an online platform that contains information, initiatives, and offers related to the users' relation to the labour market. It may be legal advice, employment services, training and employment programmes from both public authorities, NGOs, and private sector actors. Funded by the DAPP, it allows to map the proper service with individual beneficiaries, e.g. Syrian refugees or vulnerable Jordanians. To date, a total of 953, the majority of which are women, have been referred to livelihoods related services.

New mediation system will help tackle labour conflicts

One of the major challenges in Tunisia is to tackle the rise of labour conflicts and strikes due to failure of conflict resolution and social dialogue. Now, a new step in the right direction will be to implement mediation systems between employers and workers.

The inspiration arose when the trade union confederation UGTT was introduced to the Danish model in mediation and conflict resolution. Now the UGTT will use it to promote social dialogue in the hope of achieving better conflict resolution mechanisms at enterprise level.

"The culture of social dialogue at enterprise level is almost non-

existent. Through mediation we hope to motivate the workers and trade union committees to think about how important it is to preserve workers' rights and improve the working conditions, so there will be fewer conflicts and more constructive social dialogue," says Mr. Hedi Dahmane, who is the DTDA-UGTT programme coordinator and expert of international cooperation at the UGTT Department of Studies and Documentation.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the UGTT has seen examples of a lack of support for workers who are dismissed and experiences unemployment.

"The response from the trade union committee at central level is that they call for strikes trying to protect their co-workers, but it's not helpful. We need more involvement at enterprise level to tackle the problems, and this is where I hope a mediation system can bring more dialogue to the table," says Hedi Dahmane.

One of the first steps to activate the trade union committees is to raise awareness about mediation systems and implement training, so they are skilled to be more involved in negotiation and conflict resolution. UGTT have selected the metallurgical, textile, garment, and waste sectors as well as municipalities for a pilot project.



PHOTO: MOHAMED HASSAN

"There is a threat to social peace, so I hope the trade union communities and trading instructors will be able to regain more power and have a more effective role in the process to prevent conflicts," says Hedi Dahmane.

An efficient conflict mediation system is extremely valuable to society as it defuses conflicts and finds solutions. An analysis paid for by Denmark's largest trade union, 3F, shows that only 2 per cent of the labour conflicts in sectors organised by 3F are solved in court. Efficient mediation by 3F and the employers' organisations saves the Danish society between 100 million and 142 million euros in litigation and lawyer costs.



Stop violence and harassment

Female trade unionists from six countries in the Middle East and North Africa are launching a cross-country, joint campaign to stop violence and harassment in the workplace.

"It is hard to come forward and tell about violence and harassment. Often, it is the victim who is shamed and looked down on," says Meryem Bouallal, a board member of the trade union UMT.

She is one of 19 women from Jordan, Tunisia, Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, Palestine and Denmark, who in 2020 participated in an online workshop to find common solutions on how the trade union movement can help reduce violence and harassment in workplaces. They are basing their work on the C190, a convention adopted by the ILO in 2019, which guarantees the right to a working life free from violence and harassment.

The workshop is part of the DTDA's Danish-Arab Equality Network which meets twice a year to exchange experiences.

For Fatiha Khourtal, who is active in the trade union UGMT, the network meetings offers a room where women can share experiences and solutions.

"We might have problems in Morocco, for which Jordan can have a good solution and the other way around. It has given me inspiration to think out of the box and create new partnerships.

The C190 campaign will inform workers about their rights and equity, and provide them with information about how to seek help if they experience violence and harassment." The challenges vary from country to country, and so does the campaign.

"Tunisia is at the forefront of dealing with the legal part when it comes to violence in the workplace," says Wassila Dridi, Regional Coordinator of the Women's Committee in the trade union UGTT.

The Jordanian participants in the gender equality network have decided to target their campaign to the workers in the country's garment industry.



The Danish-Arab Equality Network meets at an online workshop on C190 in November.

PHOTO: JULIE HIERL HANSEN

In Egypt, the focus will be on the public sector, and in Morocco on the private sector.

The campaign kicks off on International Women's Day, 8 March 2021.

What is violence and harassment in the workplace according to the ILO? The International Labour Organization defines in Convention 190 "violence and harassment" in the world of work as a series of unacceptable behaviours and practices or threats, whether it is a single event or repeated events that result in physical, psychological, sexual or financial damage against people because of gender.



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New rules for fixed-term contracts are a game changer

After a lobbying campaign by the CGEM, the Moroccan government has made it possible to use fixed-term contracts in a wider array of sectors and situations.

Mr. Toufik is the CEO of the building company Raja Binaa and president of the regional office of the National Federation for the Construction Sector. He sees the new rules for fixed-term contracts as a game changer:

"The absence has been a major obstacle to the development of the construction business."

In the construction sector, workers are hired for a concrete project. With the old rules, employers had to give workers a permanent contract,

making it very difficult to dismiss workers at the end of a project.

"Most companies in the sector have experienced lawsuits for wrongful dismissal and heavy severance payments," says Toufik Cherradi.

"Many companies got around this by resorting to subcontracting and hiring workers from the informal sector. Today, the construction sector is dominated by precarious jobs. More than 70% of the workers are trained on the job."

The construction sector employed more than 1,15 million workers in 2019, making it the second-largest employer in Morocco. It is dominated by small and medium-sized companies that are more likely to be part of the informal sector.

If you work informally, you do not have a contract. You don't pay taxes, but you also do not have access to health insurance, and your work does not contribute towards a pension.

Therefore, the changes in the labour law makes social security attainable for a large number of construction workers.

For Toufik Cherradi, the new rules will affect not only the sector he represents but also his own company, Raja Binaa: "COVID-19 has caused delays at most of our construction sites, but when the recovery comes, we will have an easier time hiring people with contracts and thereby reduce the use of subcontracting."



PHOTO: MOHAMMED TOUZANI

"The key word is flexibility," says Toufik Cherradi, who thinks that the new rules will benefit both workers and employers."

On the 16th July 2020, the Moroccan Government validated the implementing decree set forth in Article 16 of the Moroccan Labour Code (Law 65.99). The decree establishes a range of sectors and situations, where short-term contracts from now on can be used for projects of a limited duration. Among the sectors are industry, agriculture, and construction.

Helping employers and employees through the pandemic

Trade unions and employer organisations have played a crucial role during the pandemic. Acting alone or together, they have helped stop the spread of COVID-19 and minimize the financial repercussions for companies and individuals.

As COVID-19 hit the MENA region, trade unions and employer organisations were overwhelmed with tasks.

They had to help minimize the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace, handle the economic repercussions for companies and individuals alike, and work together with the authorities to ensure that the governments took the right measures to help preserve as many jobs as possible.

At the same time, lockdowns and travel restrictions meant that they had to embrace digital tools.

In Morocco, labour market organisations used the DAPP support to ensure safe workplaces. For the first time, the employers' organisation CGEM and the trade union UMT created an e-learning programme together. Here managers and worker representatives work in pairs to improve the safety in their companies. At the same time, CGEM organised webinars and created a website with COVID-19 information, while the trade union UMT embraced digital tools to conduct online learning, coordinate with local and regional trade union leaders and activists and serve their members.

One of the primary functions of labour market organisations is to assist members. During the pandemic, organisations have fought to help companies and workers make it through lockdowns, layoffs and trade disruptions.

In Jordan, the trade union GTUWTGCS, the business association JGATE and the employers' organisation AOFWG signed an agreement to ensure that migrant



PHOTO: SIMON L'ESSENE/DAPP.DK

"JCI has been in much closer contact with our members than normally," says Dr. Kamal, CEO of the employers' organisation: "We have worked closely with thousands of companies to help them create safe workplaces and raise enough money to keep on the light, for example by boosting e-commerce and export and using government aid packages."

workers, whose contract had finished but who couldn't leave Jordan because of COVID-19 restrictions, either had their contract prolonged on the same terms and conditions or were supported with food and accommodation by the employer until they were able to leave Jordan.

The employers' organisation JCI fought to help companies remain solvent. With DAPP support, they embraced mobile apps and online surveys to get in much closer contact with their members and helped them embrace e-business technologies.



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Tripartite agreement secures wages amid COVID-19

The situation was bleak in Tunisia during the country's COVID-19 shutdown in early 2020. Many workers were left wondering how to put food on the table, when they were not allowed to work. But the social partners showed a way through the crisis.

Together with the government, the employers' association UTICA and the trade union confederation UGTT successfully negotiated an agreement that secured 1.5 million workers' wages in April.

The Tunisian state agreed to guarantee the first 200 dinars (61 euro) of the monthly salary, while the individual companies had to top up and pay the remaining amount.

As part of the tripartite agreement, which included, among others, fishermen and metalworkers, the parties also agreed that employers would not dismiss employees because of the closure.

Thus, Tunisia can boast of being one of the few developing countries that succeeded in reaching a tripartite agreement which compensated workers and businesses. However, issues and demands still remain to be discussed, and new ones will occur moving forward throughout the pandemic. For instance, should workers be required to use their holiday when sanitary measures prevent them from working, or how do labour market organisations ensure that the agreement will be properly implemented at all workplaces?

Reaching an agreement was only possible because of a constant dialogue between UTICA, UGTT and the Tunisian government. In this way, the trade unions and employers' organisations showed the key role they play in society.

Through its members, UTICA has the best available knowledge about the financial situation of the Tunisian private sector. This knowledge helps the government design the



PHOTO: AHMED HAYMAN

right responses to help as many companies and jobs as possible withstand the economic crisis. UGTT, meanwhile, has direct access to information about how ordinary Tunisian workers are coping with the pandemic, and what kind of measures are needed to make sure that they can work safely.

By engaging actively with governments and members, labour market organisations across the world have played an important role in mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic.



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